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‘British Capital, Industry and Perseverance’ versus Dutch ‘Old School’?

The Dutch Atlantic and the Takeover of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, 1750-1815[1]

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Recent historiography has reconsidered the idea that the Dutch role in the early modern Atlantic was of little significance, particularly in comparison to the accomplishments of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Asia. Revisionist studies have emphasised that in spite of the limited and fragmented nature of the Dutch Atlantic ‘empire’, the Atlantic contribution to the Dutch economy was significant and possibly even greater than the VOC’s share. Moreover, this scholarship stresses the vital role of Dutch Atlantic colonies (Curaçao and St Eustatius), (partly Jewish) networks and individuals in connecting the various sub-empires of the Atlantic. While Oostindie subscribes to many of these conclusions, he argues against excessive revisionism. His analysis of the development of the lesser Dutch Guianas, adjacent to Suriname, is used as a counter-weight to this revisionist impulse. He demonstrates that the spectacular economic and demographic development of these colonies was due mainly to British and (British) American involvement culminating in the eventual British takeover of ‘Guiana’.

It was long thought that for the Dutch Republic the Atlantic played a secondary role compared to that of Asia. Recent scholarship has altered this view. If one looks beyond the ongoing collapse of the West India Company (WIC) and the failure to build an extensive Dutch Atlantic empire, one finds

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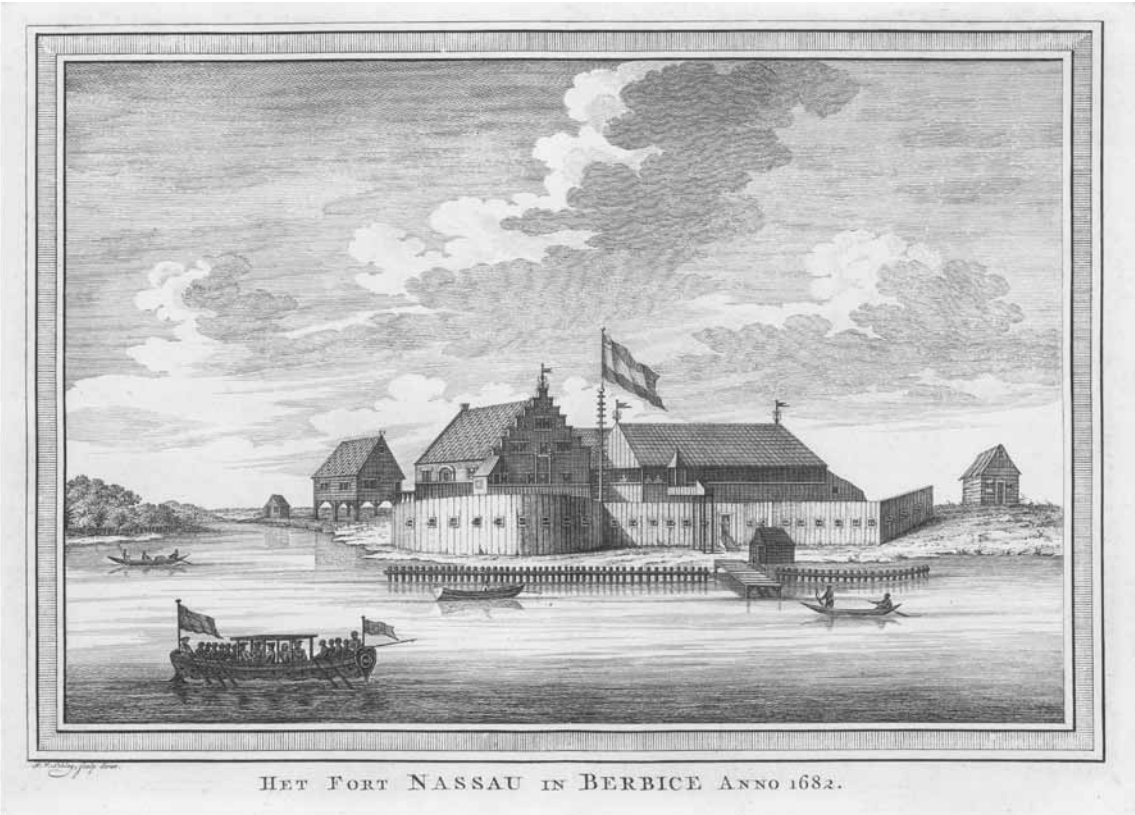
solid evidence of vibrant growth in trade in the Dutch Atlantic throughout most of the eighteenth century. Geographic contraction after the loss of Dutch Brazil and New Netherland did not inhibit economic expansion. As Jan de Vries, among others, has demonstrated this expansion eventually made the Atlantic as important to the Republic as the Dutch Asian circuit, and possibly even more so. However there are limits to this revisionism. The growth of Dutch Atlantic trade was not remarkable vis-à-vis the other Atlantic players and the Dutch remained a minor player in comparison to Portugal, England and France and particularly Spain.[2]

In this revisionist historiography much emphasis is laid upon the hitherto underestimated Dutch intermediary role in a wider Atlantic world. 'Dutch' players – whether Dutch by birth, acquired citizenship or simply as settlers in one of the Dutch colonies – were disproportionally active as brokers connecting the various parts of the Atlantic across national colonial boundaries. An obvious case is Curaçao. The island acted as a commercial hub with connections to western Africa, the Spanish Main and the Spanish and French Caribbean islands, North America and of course, the Dutch Republic. Producing scarcely anything itself, Curaçao was crucial in transhipping enslaved Africans as well as European and tropical produce, much of this traded illicitly. With this broad commercial orientation came a rather cosmopolitan local merchant community as well as a free Afro-Curaçaoan population engaged in maritime endeavours throughout the Caribbean. The Dutch island of St. Eustatius, located in the northern Caribbean, had a similar function, with a stronger orientation towards the North American colonies than had Curaçao. Even Danish St. Thomas long functioned primarily as a Dutch nodal point in the Atlantic. Conquest was unnecessary, but also unfeasible – by the early eighteenth century, the Republic no longer had the means or the ambition for an extension of empire.

1 I gratefully acknowledge the comments made on a previous draft of this paper in the 'Dutch Atlantic Connections' seminar (Leiden, 23-24 August 2012), and particularly the useful suggestions made by Jessica Roitman and the two anonymous reviewers for *BMCN - LCHR*. This paper is based on contemporary published writings, the limited body of subsequent scholarly literature, and a preliminary exploration of archival sources available in the National Archive of the Netherlands. All translations from Dutch into English are mine. Some of the archival references in this paper are the result of a research seminar in 2012 for students of History at Leiden University, for which I thank Tessa Agterhuis, Frank van de Kreeke, Jörg Moldenhauer, Robbert Mos, Jantien Prins, Chris Schult and Sander Tetteroo.

2 Jan de Vries, 'The Dutch Atlantic Economies', in: Peter A. Coclanis (ed.), *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel* (Columbia 2005) 1-29. The relevant historiography is discussed at length in Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman, 'Repositioning the Dutch in the Atlantic', *Itinerario* 36 (2012) 129-160.



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Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust in Zuid-America* [...] (Amsterdam 1770) opposite page 298.
National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

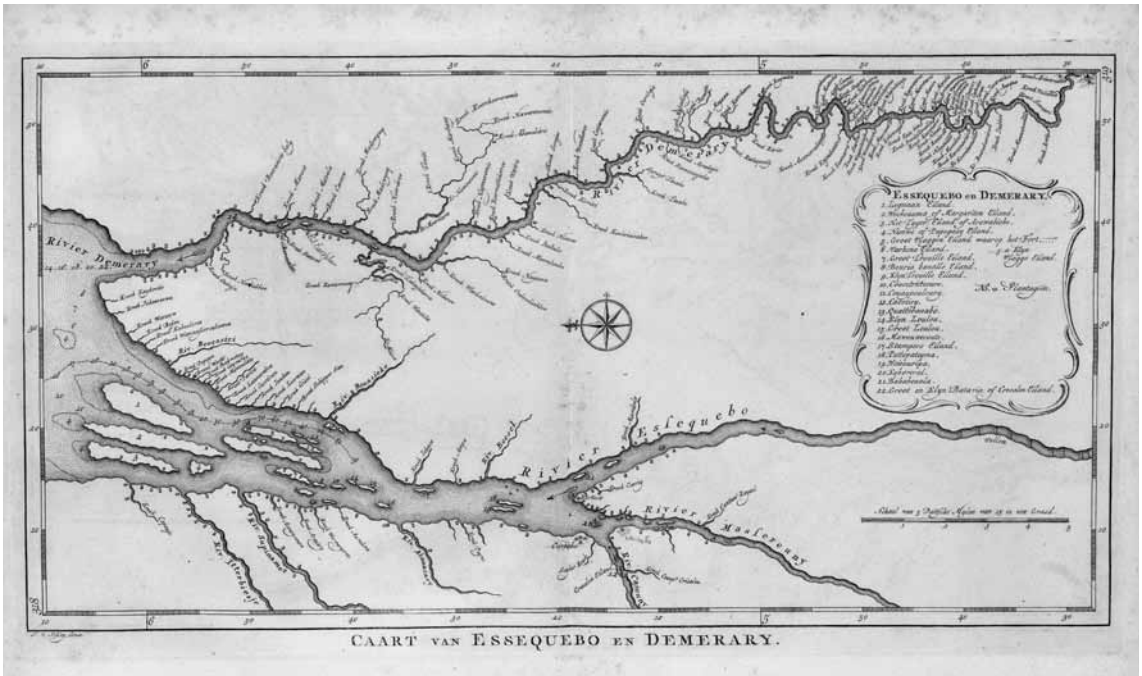
In the same revisionist vein Suriname, the major Dutch plantation colony in the wider Caribbean, is now studied in a broader Atlantic framework beyond its bilateral relationship with the Dutch Republic. The colony's main connections in finance, governance and European migration were with the Netherlands and the major demographic link was with western Africa, but its commercial network was more diverse than that. Research pioneered by Johannes Postma points to strong trade connections with the North American colonies and to a lesser extent, the British and Dutch Caribbean islands.[3]

The same may be said for Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, three smaller plantation colonies west of Suriname, which were Dutch territories prior to the Napoleonic Wars and British thereafter. Before the British takeover, these colonies functioned in much the same geopolitical and economic space as Suriname, but the thesis of this article is that the idea of a remarkable Dutch cross-imperial role in the wider Atlantic should be turned on its head in this particular case. In the second half of the eighteenth century the significant entrepreneurs in these 'lesser Guianas' were increasingly British West Indian and American rather than Dutch. This explains the sudden economic and demographic development in these plantation frontiers, as well as successive and finally, definitive British imperial takeovers. Hence, this article questions the uniqueness of the Dutch as agents connecting the various parts of the Atlantic – transgressing national colonial borders cannot be understood as an exclusively Dutch prerogative.

Colonisation, governance and demography

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Berbice and Essequibo – Demerara was only developed in the 1760s – remained in the shadow of Suriname. The subsequent decades of growth ushered in the transfer to British rule, temporarily during the Napoleonic Wars and formally at the Peace of Vienna in 1815. This transition had an impact on historiography. Much of Guyana's early Dutch history remains to be written, though there is some scholarly literature available as well as descriptions by contemporary officials, notably governor Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande, and accounts written by

3 Johannes Postma, 'A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade', in: Victor Enthoven and Johannes Postma (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Leiden 2003) 115-138, and database 'Dutch Atlantic Connections' archived at DANS (www.dans.knaw.nl).



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Map of Essequibo and Demerara.

Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust in Zuid-America* [...] (Amsterdam 1770) opposite page 257.

National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

visitors.[4] Modern scholarship on the Dutch period is limited in scope, partly because most archival sources are in Dutch.[5] For the present article no British archives could be consulted but hopefully future historians will add a British Atlantic perspective to the themes discussed here.

From a demographic and economic point of view the history of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo was of little significance prior to the 1770s. The only episode attracting wider scholarly attention has been the massive 1763-1764 slave revolt in Berbice.[6] As was the case in Suriname, plantations were laid out as polders and enslaved Africans performed most of the work. Amerindians were more populous than in Suriname and were successfully deployed to

4 C.A. Harris and J.A.J. de Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande: The Rise of British Guiana Compiled from his Dispatches* (London 1911); J.A.J. de Villiers, *Storm van 's Gravesande. Zijn werk en zijn leven uit zijne brieven opgebouwd* (The Hague 1920); Edward Bankroft, *Beschryving van Guiana, en een bericht van de rivieren Berbice, Essequebo en Demerary; In brieven. Uit het Engelsch vertaald en verrykt met de Aanmerkingen van den Hoogduitschen, en enige van den Nederduitschen Vertaaler* (Amsterdam 1794); George Pinckard, *Letters from Guiana: Extracted from Notes on the West Indies [...] and the Coast of Guiana*, Vincent Roth (ed.) ([Georgetown] 1942); Henry Bolingbroke, *A Voyage to the Demerary, Containing a Statistical Account of the Settlements There, and of Those on the Essequebo, the Berbice, and Other Contiguous Rivers of Guyana* (London 1807); J.G. Swaving, *Swaving's reizen en lotgevallen. Door hemzelve beschreven* (2 volumes; Dordrecht 1827); Robert A. Schomburgk, *A Description of British Guiana [...]* (London 1840).

5 See however Alvin Thompson, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Guyana 1580-1803* (Bridgetown 1987) and Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guiana's 1680-1791* (Assen 1985). It did not help matters that many relevant archival sources were transferred to Great Britain in the 1818, where they have been collecting dust ever since. See M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz, 'Documents in the Public Record Office of London Concerning the Former Dutch Colonies of Essequebo, Demerary and Berbice', in: M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofsz (ed.), *Dutch Authors on West Indian History: A Historiographical Selection* (The Hague 1982) 238-252.

6 J.J. Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust, in Zuid-America [...]* (Amsterdam 1770) I, 368-517; James Rodway, *History of British Guiana from the Year 1668 to the Present Time* (Georgetown 1891) 171-214; Goslinga, *Dutch in the Caribbean 1680-1791*, 461-494; Thompson, *Colonialism*, 153-174; Marjolijn Kars, 'Policing and Transgressing Borders: Soldiers, Slave Rebels, and the Early Modern Atlantic', *New West Indian Guide* 83 (2009) 191-217. Self-criticism on the harshness of Dutch slavery is expressed in *Extract uit de Resolutiën van de Heeren Staten van Hollandt ende West-Vrieslandt [...]. 9 July 1784* (S.l. 1784).

counter slave revolts and marronage.[7] As for the white population, attracting competent European men to the West Indies was notoriously difficult and this was certainly the case for the Guianas.[8] As in all Dutch colonies, Dutch citizens were supplemented by large contingents of Germans and smaller groups of Scandinavians, British, French and Swiss.[9]

Dutch Atlantic governance was not uniform. Whereas the VOC had an unequivocal state-like authority, as well as a trade monopoly, stretching eastward from (and including) the Cape Colony, the prerogatives of the WIC were blurred. Its trade monopoly was undermined by interlopers, and by the 1730s the company was forced to surrender this prerogative entirely. The WIC had ruled the early colonies of Dutch Brazil and New Netherland, centred in Manhattan, and would retain full responsibility for the six Antilles and Elmina in present-day Ghana. Suriname in contrast was governed by a mixed public-private institution, the 'Sociëteit van Suriname', in which the WIC was but one partner. In the lesser Guianas, governance was even more complicated. After some trial and error the Amsterdam-based 'Sociëteit van Berbice' was founded in 1720. Essequibo, including Demerara, became a colony of the WIC, with the

7 De Villiers, *Storm*, 390 (29-8-1772). 'Rapport aan zyn Doorlugtigste Hoogheid den Heere Prince van Orange & Nassau […] naar de Colonien van den Staat in de West-Indien', by W.A. van Sirtema van Grovestins and W.C. Boeij', 27-7-1790, ff. 67-72, 78-86 (Nationaal Archief (NL-HaNA), 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915). Governor Storm van 's Gravesande wrote frequently about Amerindians, see De Villiers, *Storm*, 45-49. The Amerindian support in 1763 was 'much to the advantage of the colony', wrote the revolt's first historian, J.J. Hartsinck, in 1770; *Beschryving* I, 488; See also Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 191, 195; Swaving, *Swaving's reizen*, 199. On 'red slaves', e.g., De Villiers, *Storm*, 230, 309. Cf. Neil L. Whitehead, *Lords of the Tiger Spirit: A History of the Caribs in Colonial Venezuela and Guyana, 1498-1820* (Dordrecht 1988) 151-171, and Thompson, *Colonialism*, 191-213; Hartsinck, *Beschryving* I, 258-259 mentions maritime marronage.

8 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 47-49, 52). On European migration to all Dutch colonies, see Gijs Kruijtzer, 'European Migration in the Dutch Sphere', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden 2008) 97-154.

9 Unlike the other Dutch Caribbean colonies, Jewish settlement was actively and successfully thwarted in Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo. Rodway, *History*, 165, 248; Zvi Loker, *Jews in the Caribbean: Evidence on the History of the Jews in the Caribbean Zone in Colonial Times* (Jerusalem 1991) 140-163.

Zeeland Chamber retaining preferential status. Neither form of governance would be a financial success for the shareholders in the Republic.[10]

Up to the 1780s the demographic and hence economic significance of the lesser Dutch Guianas paled in comparison to Suriname.[11] In 1780 the colonial population of Suriname, excluding Amerindians and Maroons, was some 60,000 inhabitants, twice the number of the lesser Guianas. The population of Suriname decreased to 53,000 by 1795 and 50,000 fifteen years later, while Berbice grew from 7,500 (1782) to over 26,000 (1812) and Essequibo and Demerara from 24,000 to 76,000. This growth was the result of massive imports of enslaved Africans, particularly once British slave traders had taken over – between 1796 and 1808, when the colony was in British hands (except for 1802-1803) British slavers unloaded over 72,000 enslaved Africans in the colony, more than 6,000 per year on average.[12]

British ascendance

The start of the informal British takeover coincided with the appointment in 1737 of Laurens Storm van 's Gravesande (1704-1775) as secretary to Essequibo. In 1743 he was promoted to the rank of governor, a position he would hold until 1772. Throughout his amazingly long period in office Storm found Dutch military support and investment in the colony insufficient – indeed judging by the growth figures of Suriname and data on loans from the Republic, by far the largest part of Dutch capital invested in the Guianas went to Suriname.[13] Much to Storm's frustration the military problem was never solved – the archives are full of references to the sorry state of defences, which,

10 Fred. Oudschans Dentz, 'De gouverneursfamilie De la Sablonière in Berbice (1768-1773)', *West-Indische Gids* 26 (1944-1945) 34; Bram Hoonhout, *Subprime Plantation Mortgages in Suriname, Essequibo and Demerara, 1750-1800. On Manias, Ponzi Processes and Illegal Trade in the Dutch Negotiate System* (MA thesis Leiden University 2012) 46-48; Ruud Paesie, 'De "Societeyt ter Navigatie op Essequebo en annexe Rivieren". Op- en ondergang van een Zeeuwse rederij', in: Maurits Ebben, Henk den Heijer and Joost Schokkenbroek (eds.), *Alle streken van het kompas [...]* (Zutphen 2010) 304; see also Eric Willem van der Oest, 'The Forgotten Colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, 1700-1814', in: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.), *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Leiden, Boston 2003) 343-346.

11 Hanneke Lommerse, 'Population Figures', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden 2008) 325-326; Thompson, *Colonialism*, 93; P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources, of the British Empire [...]* (London 1814) 380; Irene Buffart and Erik de Jong, *Naar de Barbiesjes? Migranten en migratie naar de kolonie Berbice, 1720-1795* (MA thesis Utrecht University 1984) 68.

12 Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TASTD), visited 6-5-2012. On the slave trade, see Thompson, *Colonialism*, 90-106.

13 J.P. van de Voort, 'Dutch Capital in the West Indies during the Eighteenth Century', *The Low Countries History Yearbook* 14 (1981) 101.

in effect, consisted of less than 200 (mainly non-Dutch) men for the three colonies combined, poorly equipped and hardly capable of facing domestic slave unrest and even less foreign intrusions. As governor L'Espinasse wryly remarked in 1785, 'our fortresses amount to nothing & even if they did, we have no men for their defence and no gunpowder to give them'.[14] A couple of years later the Dutch government commissioners Boeij and Van Grovestins concluded that the 'defence in this colony is not worth mentioning' to the point that all whites were at the mercy of their slaves as 'there is no power to suppress them' – but equally there was no way to protect the colony against foreign intrusion. Their proposal to increase the total of military men to 600 was never carried out, not surprisingly as the commissioners also calculated that the annual deficit in the upkeep of the colonies was already enormous.[15]

Storm's solution to the lack of economic vitality was to draw foreign capital and entrepreneurs. Thus he arranged with the Zeeland Chamber of the WIC for a new policy for attracting British planters to his colony by offering them land for free, with ten years' exemption from land tax. Why the British? Of course his policy reflected a lack of confidence in a new impetus coming from the Republic itself or from the local Dutch planters, but why not investors from other European nationalities? This is not clear from his writings. We may assume that his hopes for British investors and resident planters indicate that he was aware of a strong British interest in opening new frontiers in the Caribbean – perhaps he had already learned of this before he first set foot in the colony because he travelled from the Republic to Dutch St. Eustatius and thereafter on a British barque on to Essequibo.[16] Indeed by the mid-eighteenth century British individuals from the metropolis and even more from the colonies, were ubiquitous in the Atlantic, much more than any other nation's citizens, Dutch included.

In 1743 Storm wrote to his superiors in Zeeland that his colony had seven British plantations and many more would follow. He hoped, 'this Colony with the blessings of the Almighty will flourish within a few years'. One year later he praised the British planters, who had left their 'utterly depleted' fields in Barbados and Antigua to enjoy the 'exceptional fertility' of his colony, for 'sparing effort nor zeal nor investments' in starting plantations.[17] Meanwhile in Barbados, Governor Thomas Robertson (1742-1747) reported to the English Board of Trade his concern about the departure of rich planters with their slaves to such new pastures.[18]

14 Jan L'Espinasse, 30-7-1785 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 537, ff. 745-746). Cf. *Brieven over het bestuur der colonien Essequebo en Demerary, gewisseld tusschen de heeren Aristodemus en Sincerus [...]* (Amsterdam 1785-1788) IX, 33.

15 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 24-29, 67 (quote), 71, 75).

16 Harris and De Villiers, *Storm*, 13 (12-8-1738).

17 De Villiers, *Storm*, 88 (2-10-1743), 92-93 (1-4-1774). Later he also mentioned planters immigrating from Dutch St. Eustatius, British Nevis and Danish St. Croix, but these were clearly minorities: De Villiers, *Storm*, 138, 141.

18 Van de Voort, 'Dutch Capital', 88.

With Zeeland's support Storm van 's Gravesande succeeded in enticing more planters, predominantly from Barbados, to start new plantations in Essequibo and increasingly in Demerara. In 1760 he welcomed a group of British investors, reporting back to his superiors in the Republic that all these gentlemen, including the captain of the British warship that had brought them, were eager to start plantations.[19] There is abundant evidence of British ascendance. Hartsinck mentioned that the prime British investment area, Demerara, had its first plantation in 1746 and 130 in 1769, far more that Essequibo, with only 60 plantations, and even more than Berbice, with just over 100. Storm reported that by 1760 British planters (owners or overseers) formed the majority in Demerara. In Essequibo in contrast, Dutch planters retained a clear majority over the following decades.[20]

After visiting the three colonies in the mid-1760s Edward Bankroft observed that many British planters had plantations in Barbados as well as in Demerara and Essequibo. He thought much of the possibilities offered by the Guianas and added, somewhat surprisingly, that the Dutch neglected these settlements because they were mainly interested in the East Indies. In any case the lack of Dutch protectionism facilitated the influx of British planters and also of smaller pockets of French, Swiss and German planters, all arriving with modest means, but some ultimately returning to their own country in prosperity.[21] By 1800 another British visitor, Henry Bolingbroke, wrote that Barbados planters invested as much in the Guianas – 'such a boundless track of country to cultivate' – as they did in their home island. The British were already thought to be roughly equal to the Dutch in terms of landed interests, and outnumbered the Dutch 'as a mercantile interest'.[22]

With the rapid growth in the number of plantations along the Demerara River the balance shifted to the disadvantage of Essequibo and even more of Berbice. In the mid-1770s a new town was founded in Demerara and given the name of Stabroek. It seems though, that many, if not most, of the new investors retained their properties in Barbados and continued living on the island. In the absence of a real city in the new colony, prosperous planters preferred to appoint overseers rather than living on the plantations themselves. Nor did they generally choose to live as absentee owners in the as yet meagre urban setting of Stabroek, which was certainly not a place with the standing of Bridgetown or Paramaribo.[23]

19 Harris and De Villiers, *Storm*, 379 (17-12-1760).

20 NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 531, Nieuw Naam-Register 1779, ff. 847-854; Hartsinck, *Beschryving* I, 267-269, 288, De Villiers, *Storm*, 40; compare Harris and De Villiers, *Storm*, 398-399.

21 Bankroft, *Beschryving*, 291, 295, 297, 298.

22 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 178, 223.

23 J.C. van Langen, *De Britse overname van de Nederlandse koloniën Demerary, Essequebo en Berbice (Guyana). Van economische overvleugeling naar politieke overheersing (1740-1814)* (MA thesis, University of Amsterdam 2004) 60.

Around 1800 two-thirds of the white population of Demerara was estimated to be British while the rest were a cosmopolitan mix including, in addition to the Dutch, many other European nationalities.[24] The three colonies, even Berbice, experienced a rapid growth of their slave populations, 'principally owing to the importations of the English merchants and planters'. Some of these slaves were not first-generation enslaved Africans, but Creole slaves from the British West Indies and occasionally Curaçao and St. Eustatius – a great advantage because they worked so much better than Africans, according to Bolingbroke, who advocated the transfer of many more slaves from the islands to the Guianas. Dutch state commissioners Boeij and Van Grovestins had also argued that immigration of 'planters from Barbados, Grenada and other isles, leaving their depleted lands' would make this colony flourish to the benefit of the Dutch metropolis.[25]

By 1800, immigrants from all over the British West Indies were arriving – not only whites but also 'free people of colour'.[26] Planters were attracted by the offer of fertile and unexploited lands, and merchants by the promise of yet another sugar revolution and the commercial opportunities this would afford. The so-called 'British' interest in the Guianas was truly an Atlantic affair, involving Britons from the metropolis, but even more so from the British colonies in North America and the West Indies. This is best illustrated by the career of the foremost agent of British settlement, Gedney Clarke, himself a prominent Barbados planter and government official.

S.D. Smith has provided us with a fascinating analysis of the careers of 'gentry capitalists' Gedney Clarke, father and son. Both embodied transatlantic entrepreneurship. Gedney Clarke sr. was born into a wealthy New England merchant family in 1711 and moved to Barbados in 1733. Here he continued to steer an economic network which included the Northern Atlantic world, but he also built a fortune as a planter and merchant, keeping intensive contacts with the North American colonies, Great Britain, the West Indies and eventually, the Dutch Guianas. He also secured his family's key position in the governance of Barbados. In 1742 Clarke visited London and soon after with the support of members of the metropolitan trade community, he started investing in the Dutch Guianas, engaging in (illicit) trade with Suriname and developing plantations of his own in Demerara, the first being 'Nieuw Walcheren', purchased in 1746. This in turn, led him to step up his involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.[27]

24 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 50.

25 *Ibid*., 176-177, 209-210, 370; 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, fol. 96).

26 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 127-130.

27 S.D. Smith, 'Gedney Clarke of Salem and Barbados: Transatlantic Super-Merchant', *The New England Quarterly* 76 (2003) 510-512, 515-516; Van Langen, 'Britse overname', 59.

Clarke must have been close to Governor Storm van 's Gravesande, who described him in 1752 as a real entrepreneur, one of the first to build a modern ('top of the bill in all of the Americas') water-powered sugar mill in Demerara, 'a man of sound judgement and fortune with truly a good heart for the prosperity of this colony'.[28] Clarke apparently acted as the informal leader of the British planters, advocating their interests where applicable. Thus he pleaded for an administrative separation of Essequibo and its quickly expanding offshoot Demerara, where the British contingent was particularly strong, but was equally in favour of the financing and building of an English church.[29] In the mid-1750s, Clarke convinced Storm to sail to the Republic at the expense of the settlers in Demerara to speak to his superiors in Middelburg in favour of the colony. By then Storm had learned to speak English, which he thought indispensable in the governance of Demerara. Gedney Clarke jnr. had also settled in the colony as a planter and around 1760 was making handsome profits. His father moved on to settle in London.[30]

In 1765 Clarke jnr. travelled to the Republic once more – at his father's insistence, he had settled in the Republic in 1755 to learn Dutch and become a citizen of Middelburg, remaining there for some years – with the same objectives as Storm had had before. Dutch citizenship, one may surmise, was attractive to him as it facilitated his commercial contacts with the Republic and enhanced his political position in the colony at the same time.[31] Echoing his father – who had died that year – he assured the metropolitan polity that he would 'do all that lies in my power for the welfare of Demerary; since my heart is full, nay as warm as ever in its service'. In the same breath, he complained about the 'lethargy' and negligence of the WIC.[32]

In 1774, ten years after the death of his father, Clarke jnr. was bankrupt, 'the greatest failure that ever happened here', a Barbados merchant wrote.[33] The explanation for this failure is mainly to be sought elsewhere, but his decision around 1770 to sell the family's plantations and leave the Dutch Guianas had probably not been his wisest move from an economic point of view. Many British investors would make their fortunes in these colonies in the next decades. Nevertheless the endeavours of Clarke sr. and jnr. in the preceding decades – investing, lobbying, settling, attracting compatriots – demonstrate the centrality of British Atlantic entrepreneurs in the transformation of the lesser Guianas to new West Indian frontiers.

28 De Villiers, *Storm*, 137-138 (4-8-1752), 138 (31-8-1752), 172 (31-5-1755).

29 *Ibidem*, 40, 199 (20-11-1760); Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 530, 536.

30 De Villiers, *Storm*, 40, 207 (28-8-1761); Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 523.

31 Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 522-523.

32 De Villiers, *Storm*, 172 (31-5-1755), 259 (3-2-1765, Storm), 17-9-1765 (Clarke jnr.).

33 Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 499.

Shared and conflicting interests

This does not mean that there was no Dutch interest in the colonies. Between 1766 and 1775 Dutch financial institutions provided some 58 million guilders in loans for West Indian plantations.[34] While half of the money went to Suriname, Essequibo/Demerara received 18.4 per cent, in contrast to a mere 2.8 per cent for Berbice. Amsterdam provided the lion's share of all West Indian loans (81 per cent), while Middelburg provided only 6.3 per cent. In the case of Essequibo and Demerara specifically, Middelburg contributed one-third of all loans, but even there Amsterdam's share was higher, roughly half of the total. In the next two decades the extension of credit diminished and then collapsed after the credit crisis of 1772-1773. In total, the number of Dutch plantation loans extended to the West Indies in the second half of the eighteenth century amounted to some 80 million guilders, Suriname receiving 51 per cent and Essequibo, Demerara and (marginally) Berbice just over 22 per cent. Apparently in the two decades after 1775 the share of the latter colonies had increased: Dutch financiers too, had high hopes.[35]

With these investments, coupled with the advent of the British settlers, came massive slave imports, both legal and illegal, and with the growing number of slaves and settlers, the number of plantations and the production of sugar, coffee and cotton increased. In Berbice sugar production actually decreased between the 1750s and 1770s but, just as in Suriname, coffee production rose spectacularly, mainly through new Dutch investment.[36] In Essequibo and particularly in Demerara, production volume and growth were far more spectacular both in sugar and coffee and to a much lesser degree, cacao and cotton.[37]

The trade figures for Essequibo and Demerara calculated by Van der Oest (Table 1) are telling, even if they might not be complete and of necessity, are partly based on assumptions and extrapolation.[38] There was spectacular growth after mid-century and particularly after 1770, but limited Dutch significance – the more so as some illegal non-Dutch shipping is not included in these approximations. Throughout the entire period from 1700 to 1820

34 These plantation loans were extended through Dutch merchant houses as mortgages on extant plantations and implied that trade from and to such plantations was commissioned by these houses, a process that would result in the *de facto* expropriation of many of these plantations (Van de Voort, 'Dutch Capital', 85-86).

35 Van de Voort, 'Dutch Capital', 93, 101, 104-105. The rest went to the Danish West Indies (22.5 per cent), and the British West Indies (5.4 per cent).

36 Klaas Kramer, 'Plantation Development in Berbice from 1753 to 1779: The Shift from the Interior to the Coast', *New West Indian Guide* 65 (1991) 62.

37 Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 350-351.

38 Contemporary figures diverge from those provided by Van der Oest, but show a similar trend. Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 397; J. de Hullu, 'Memorie van den Amerikaanschen Raad over de Hollandsche bezittingen in juli 1806', *West-Indische Gids* 4 (1922-1923) 394.

Dutch shipping amounted to less than 10 per cent of the total number of ships (though not tonnage, as the transatlantic ships were usually bigger) and this imbalance was not redressed by the massive Dutch plantation loans beginning in the 1760s. In the realm of Dutch shipping, Zeeland lost its position to Amsterdam after 1770, primarily because the loans extended from Amsterdam meant that plantation produce was to be shipped to the creditor. Moreover, Zeeland had only one sugar refinery compared to a large number in Amsterdam.[39]

During Dutch rule sugar, coffee and cotton were shipped primarily to the metropolis but clearly much more trade was going on: with Africa, with the British West Indies (primarily Barbados), St. Eustatius and Curaçao, to a lesser extent also with the French and Spanish colonies, and most of all with North America. Part of this commerce was illegal and therefore undocumented. We do know that throughout the eighteenth century even from Suriname, a colony with much closer ties to the Republic, the number of non-Dutch ships heading primarily to North America and the West Indies exceeded ships bound for the Netherlands by a large margin. The proportion of Dutch ships was even lower in the other Dutch Guianas (Table 1). North Americans supplied horses for the sugar mills as well as provisions (acting as the colony's 'pantry' as two observers had it), and took back molasses and an inferior type of rum called 'killdevil', and lumber. Even during the process of informal British takeover in the last decades of the eighteenth century the North American trade link remained critical.[40]

There is ample anecdotal evidence that illicit British Atlantic trade thrived – inevitably so, as even Governor Storm openly complained that the Dutch supply of all necessities, enslaved Africans included, was hopelessly insufficient. In the mid-1750s Storm pleaded in vain with his superiors in Zeeland to open up the slave trade to North American traders, as did many other interested Dutch individuals. Legal imports of enslaved Africans remained low until the British takeover in the mid-1790s, and therefore prices were much higher than in Suriname. The Clarke family too was involved in

39 Up to 1770 there was only one ship from Amsterdam. Henceforth, the annual average of Zeeland ships was 7.0 in the 1770s, 8.2 in the 1780s, 1.6 in the 1790s and nil after. In contrast, the Amsterdam averages were 6.6 (1770s), 12.3 (1780s), 9.0 (1790s), 1.1 (1800s) and 2.4 (1810s); Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 342.

40 See for Suriname: Postma, 'Reassessment', 295; 'Dutch Atlantic Connections Database'. For Demerara and Essequibo: Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 333, 354-357. He calculates that in 1781-1791, of the nearly 2,000 non-Dutch vessels arriving, 368 hailed from Curaçao, 598 from St. Eustatius, 581 from North America, and 193 from Essequibo. Shipping lists for individual years confirm the Anglophone dominance in trade, e.g., NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 530, ff. 156-159 (1770-1776), no. 537, ff. 676-680, 899-902 (1785), no. 539, fol. 2390 (1786), no. 540, ff. 153-154 (1788), no. 541, ff. 770-778 (1789). Cf. 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 42 ('spyskamer'), 43-44).

Table 1. Shipping to Essequibo and Demerara, 1700-1819, annual averages

	Total number of ships	Dutch bilateral ships	Dutch slave ships	American and West Indian ships
1700s	4.8	1.3	0.5	3.0
1710s	7.9	1.5	0.4	6.0
1720s	12.3	2.0	0.3	10.0
1730s	16.4	1.9	0.5	14.0
1740s	24.8	3.1	0.5	21.0
1750s	47.0	4.2	0.3	43.0
1760s	77.1	7.1	1.7	68.0
1770s	141.2	14.6	2.4	124.0
1780s	138.9	21.0	1.8	116.0
1790s	228.6	16.0	0.5	212.0
1800s	169.7	1.7	–	168.0
1810s	119.6	3.6	–	116.0
average	82.4	6.6	0.7	75

Source: Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 334.

illegal slave trade to Demerara.[41] In their 1790 report to the States-General and the Stadtholder, the Dutch state commissioners Boeij and Van Grovestins remarked on massive illegal British slave trading to Demerara, indicating that these slaves were paid for by plantation produce – and that this trade was indispensable in view of the low volume of the Dutch slave trade that met less than ten per cent of what the colonies needed.[42]

Most of the archives of this period are untapped but the sources studied thus far do not evince major conflicts of interest between British and Dutch planters. The abundance of virgin land made competition unnecessary and in requests to the colonial government lists of plantations and plantation owners, tax payers and the like we find Dutch, British and other European names scattered without any hierarchical order.[43] British settlers were allowed to

41 Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 339 (on Storms request). Likewise, *Brieven over het bestuur*, IX, 206-215, C 92-93, and 'Request van planters en ingezeetenen van Essequebo en Demerary', 1769, reproduced in *Brieven over het bestuur*, IX, H 20-28. On illegal trade, e.g., De Villiers, *Storm*, 19, 25, 33, 63, 69-71, 93, 110, 146-147, 192, 266-267, 314, 316, 339, 364-365, 370-372, 374, 377; Pinckard, *Letters*, 207; Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 284, 311; Hoonhout, 'Subprime Plantation Loans', 49-50, 53; Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 337, 358-360; Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 514.

42 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 38-41).

43 Van Langen, 'Britse overname', 103.

have their own Anglophone religious services, but they also served in the local, hence Dutch, governing bodies, or if they did not speak Dutch, they could at least vote for these councils.[44] Occasionally a Dutch official complained of the 'silly excuses' put forward by British planters not to contribute to the cost of colonial rule.[45] There was some dissatisfaction in Essequibo at the rapid development of Demerara, and it is not unlikely that there was a national dimension to this rivalry as the British were disproportionally active in Demerara where, according to Storm, the majority of Europeans was Anglophone by 1760 – likely an exaggerated statement, as in 1785 the share of Dutch and British planters was approximately the same.[46] Perhaps there was uneven competition and hence jealousy and rivalry in the field of trade, particularly access to the illegal British supply of enslaved Africans or to provisions for the plantations, but more archival research needs to be done before we can draw firm conclusions here – and it is evident that much of this illegal business will not be uncovered in a superficial survey.

We do know that it was this British protagonist, Gedney Clarke sr., who soon came to think of the stability of the colonies as a shared concern.[47] At the time of the 1763 slave revolt Dutch settlers in Essequibo and Demerara worried about the consequences of 'the fatal, ruinous, and terrible case of Berbice', hoping 'that the Lord God will protect us', but the British community was worried, as well.[48] Governor Storm urgently requested military help from both the British governor, Pinfold, of Barbados and from Clarke, in Demerara – a decision for which he would later have to answer to his superiors in the Republic. Clarke did indeed organise and finance the dispatch of several ships with some 300 military men from Barbados to help quell the revolt and prevent it from spreading to Essequibo and Demerara. Storm wrote later that this British support, 'next to God' had secured the survival of the colony while Clarke wrote to his son that without this help the colony 'would have been lost'.[49] In the end, Clarke sr. calculated that the expedition had cost him over 40,000 Dutch guilders and in the following years Clarke jnr. petitioned in

44 De Villiers, *Storm*, 19, 364; Bankroft, *Beschryving*, 291; 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 18-19).

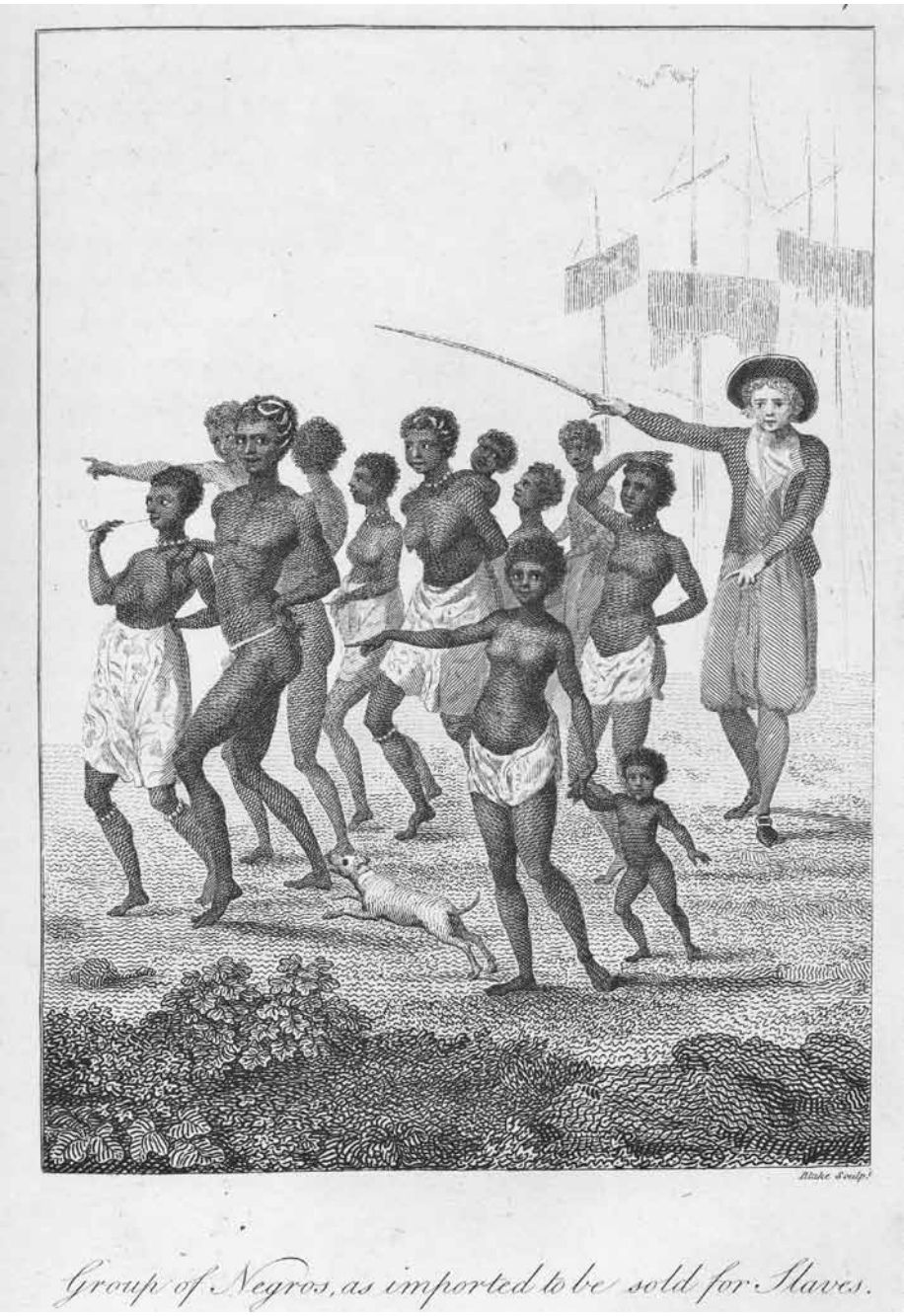
45 Captain Van den Heuvel, 8-1-1778 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 528, fol. 1423).

46 De Villiers, *Storm*, 171 (31-5-1755), 211 (9-2-1762). In 1785 roughly one-third of the 112 planters were Dutch, an equal part British, the rest of a variety of origins including French (17), German (8), Creole (7), Swiss (2) and lone individuals from Italy, Malta and Russia (List of plantation owners Demerara, 1785; NL-HaNA, Verspreide West-Indische stukken 1.05.06, no. 59).

47 Bankroft, *Beschryving*, 290-291; Hartsinck, *Beschryving* I, 255, 274-275; Smith, 'Gedney Clarke', 519-520.

48 Local representative Adriaan Spoors to the directors of the MCC, 30-4-1763; Zeeuws Archief, Middelburgse Commercie Compagnie (20), 58.1; see also his letters of 6, 14 and 24-6-1763, 12-7-1763, 29-9-1763 and 10-2-1764.

49 De Villiers, *Storm*, 21, 225 (Storm, 2-5-1763; Clarke, 6-6-1763), 238 (28-2-1764); Bankroft, *Beschryving*, 290-291.



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Enslaved Africans shortly after their arrival in the Guianas.

John Gabriël Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America, from the Year 1772 to 1777* (London 1796).

National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

vain for a full refund of these expenses.[50] This episode foreshadowed things to come: without asking for Dutch metropolitan support, let alone receiving consent, a British citizen had deployed British troops in Dutch territory for the survival of a promising plantation colony.

One might assume that this explains why towards the end of his period as governor, the strongly pro-Zeeland but disillusioned Storm van 's Gravesande stated that Dutch and Germans together would do just as well as British settlers, or even better, as they would not engage in smuggling as did the British. Half a year before he had still agonised over Clarke jnr.'s intention to sell his Demerara plantations and leave the colony. In the same breath he had described Gedney Clarke jnr., as well as his compatriot W. Croyden, as 'honest people of great use and advantage to the colony'. However Clarke jnr. had sold off most of his family's plantations by 1769 and got rid of the rest in the next few years, leaving for Tobago, no doubt to Storm's chagrin.[51]

Wars and conquest

Wars were catalysts in the British takeover and the first was the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War of 1780-1784. The British were selective in which colonies they chose to occupy. St. Eustatius was taken and ransacked because of its strategic value to the American rebels during the American Revolution (February 1781), but Curaçao was left alone after one failed attack, as was Suriname but the other Dutch Guianas were taken (February 1781). Only two months later as the tides in the war temporarily shifted, the British ceded these colonies to the French. With the Treaty of Paris (May 1784), the colonies were returned to the Dutch Republic.

This episode could have resulted in economic and demographic stagnation but clearly not in the demise of the British presence. On the contrary, the brief British occupation might have alerted the Crown to this new frontier. At the time of the British occupation a group of 76 British planters addressed the King in a letter about these 'colonies [that] have been little known in Great Britain', whereas 'we apprehend their value'. The supplicants argued how useful it would be to not return these colonies to the Dutch as they provided great opportunities for trade, for ship repairs and as suppliers of lumber for Barbados. '[As] part of your Majesty's dominions', so the planters assured their King, these colonies 'would be equal to or rather exceed your Majesty's most flourishing settlements in the West Indies'.[52]

50 De Villiers, *Storm*, 261 (11-2-1765); Van Langen, 'Britse overname', 72.

51 De Villiers, *Storm*, 19, 310 (6-9-1767), 331 (9-4-1768), 343 (21-2-1769), 386 (14-7-1772).

52 Letter of 76 British settlers in Essequibo and Demerara to George III [early 1781] (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 533, ff. 441-449).

With the re-establishment of Dutch rule came further growth of the plantation economy and probably also of the British presence, because the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had not only exposed the military weakness of the Republic but also left it in dire economic straits and without means for colonial investments. In the Republic the fiasco of the war contributed to the rise of a 'Patriot' movement aiming at a change of regime at the expense of the ancien regime 'Republic' in which patricians and successive stadtholders of the semi-monarchical House of Orange had dominated government. The conflict between Patriots and the so-called Orangists, who supported the status quo, would soon be transplanted to the colonies.

In 1795, the Dutch Republic collapsed and the Netherlands were centralised as the Batavian Republic, a satellite of the revolutionary French Republic. That same year Great Britain started occupying the Dutch colonies. A British proposal conferred by the officers of a fleet of 600 military men to take the lesser Guianas in 'protective custody' against France was politely refused by the local Dutch Council. The Orangist (and aristocratic) governor Willem August van Sirtema van Grovestins – the same man referred to above in the Boeij-Van Grovestins commission, appointed as governor in 1793 – secretly sided with the British and left the colony on a British ship. He was succeeded by Antony Beaujon, who one year later would turn over the colony to the British anyway.[53] The British troops did not return the colonies to the Dutch until March 1802, in accordance with the stipulations of the Peace of Amiens. The return of Dutch governance was not to last long. In September 1803, soon after the Napoleonic Wars resumed, Great Britain again occupied the three colonies. The formal transition from Dutch to British sovereignty was sealed by the consecutive war treaties in Paris and Vienna, 1814-1815.

Throughout the 1795-1815 period, successive Dutch governments had little influence on the governance of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo.[54] The Batavian Republic (1795-1806) was militarily frail and therefore at the mercy of the big players, Great Britain and France, as the 1802-1803 interregnum indicated all too clearly. In 1806, Napoleon dissolved the Batavian Republic and replaced it with the Kingdom of Holland, placing his brother Louis Bonaparte at the throne. In 1810, the Netherlands was simply annexed by France, to be reconstituted between 1813 and 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon, as the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The fact that the United

53 Jan Wagenaar et al., *Vaderlandsche historie vervattende de geschiedenissen der Verenigde Nederlanden [...]* (Amsterdam 1804) volume 33, 220-228.

54 Thompson, *Colonialism*, 58-68; Winston F. McGowan, 'The French Revolutionary Period in Demerara-Essequibo, 1793-1802', *History Gazette* 55 (1983) 2-18.

Kingdom could pursue its own interests in returning some but retaining other occupied Dutch colonies, only underscores the second-rate status of the Netherlands, once a 'world hegemonic' player.[55]

British Atlantic investors in both the metropolis and the Guianas welcomed a colonial transfer. In 1796 local residents had sent a delegation to the government in Barbados with the request for intervention – one assumes these were primarily British. With the British fleet came 'a great number of speculators' ready to invest their capital in this new frontier, so many that is was 'more like a country resumed, than ceded, to England'.[56] What of the loyalties of the local Dutch population in Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo? In all Dutch colonies there were serious tensions between pro-French Patriots and pro-British Orangists. In fin de siècle Curaçao this resulted in open conflicts, pro-French regime change and eventually British intervention in 1800.[57] In Suriname the dominance of Orangists translated to a more serious defence against British troops, causing at least postponement of the British takeover until 1799.[58]

The contrast with the lesser Dutch Guianas, easily taken over by the British in 1796, is evident. There was some internal dissent. The Orangist and hence anti-French Governor Beaujon had secretly sent a dispatch to Barbados requesting a pre-emptive British intervention; his reward was being given permission to remain governor.[59] An account given by a former local official, the Patriot Jan Bom, is telling. He blamed not only the vile British for the 1796 takeover but equally the 'egoism' of some local Dutch. His Patriot faction had tried in vain to protect the colony from the British 'vile and cowardly means of treachery and bribery'. They had failed partly because of the 'perfidious' performance of the Dutch governors and other 'corrupt' Dutch settlers. Bom particularly blamed the Dutch Governor Beaujon ('an Oriental despot') and his patron Van Grovestins ('a first-class intriguer') for siding with the British. These Orangists and their rank and file had joined in 'the triumph of the English settlers' who made up the majority of the planter class. The Patriot flag was lowered and soon one heard pro-Orange singing, but Bom himself, like the great majority of Patriots definitely not an abolitionist, nurtured no

55 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York 1980) 36-71.

56 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 277-278, 312-313; cf. McGowan, 'French Revolutionary Period', 8.

57 Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie (eds.), *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800* (Leiden 2011).

58 Cornelis Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam 1791/5-1942* (Assen 1990) 164-166.

59 McGowan, 'French Revolutionary Period', 10.

illusions: the British would not return the colony: they had had their eyes on this prize since the early 1780s.[60]

Between 1796 and 1802 much property ended up in British hands. Bolingbroke happily reported that 'the face of everything began to wear the appearance of English. Their manners, customs and language were adopted; indeed every thing was so visibly changed for the better'.[61] Not surprisingly, the 1802-1803 Dutch interregnum provoked misgivings among the British settlers, wary of the prospect of endangering their recent investments and seemingly confident that British rule would ensure the continuation of massive slave imports and hence economic growth. The losses incurred because of the Peace of Amiens were calculated to be over one million pounds. By then it was estimated that British credit to planters in the colony amounted to 10 million pounds.[62]

However there are also indications of Dutch planters and merchants shifting their loyalties. This might have had to do with sheer opportunism, including an apprehension that local conflicts might spark slave rebellions following 'the terrible example of the French islands', as one planter wrote.[63] There was also the fact that Dutch planters were massively in debt to Dutch investors. Two decades earlier a contemporary Dutch periodical, *De Post van den Neder-Rhijn,* had already suggested that the quick surrender of Demerara to the British in 1781 was not primarily due to weak defences but rather to the hopes of indebted Dutch planters of severing links with their metropolitan creditors. This seems not unlikely – we do know that by 1815, only 15 per cent of all Dutch plantation loans extended to these colonies since the 1760s were redeemed, and we may assume that few payments were made afterwards.[64]

Upon their return in 1803, the British initially dealt cautiously with the territories, re-appointing the pro-British Dutch governors, Antony Beaujon and Abraham van Imbyze van Batenburg as lieutenant-governors under Governor Robert Nicolson (1803-1807).[65] Both were old hands in Dutch Caribbean governance. Born in the Netherlands, Van Imbyze van Batenburg

60 Jan Bom, *Verslag van Mr. Jan Bom, voorheen secretaris van 't Gouvernement der Colonie Essequebo en Demerary, enz. […]* (Amsterdam 1799) 1, 5, 7-10, 17-18, 22-23, 46-48. See also the indignant account of another settler, of French origins: J.C. Delacoste, *Geschiedkundig en waar verhaal der gebeurtenissen, welke in de Colonie Demerary bij en zedert het vertrek van den baron van Grovestins hebben plaats gehad* (The Hague 1798). On the absence of Patriot abolitionism, see G.J. Schutte, *De Nederlandse Patriotten en de koloniën. Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden, 1770-1800* (Groningen 1974) 146-149.

61 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 279.

62 *Ibidem*, 326, 334; McGowan, 'French Revolutionary Period', 12.

63 Delacoste, *Geschiedkundig en waar verhaal*, 91-93.

64 Van der Oest, 'Forgotten Colonies', 339; Van de Voort, 'Dutch Capital', 102.

65 P.M. Netscher, *Geschiedenis van de koloniën Essequebo, Demerary en Berbice* (The Hague 1888) 285-287.

had settled in Berbice in the early 1780s and acted as governor to Berbice from 1789 to 1802 and again from 1804 to 1806. Up to 1803 he had been held in high esteem by both Dutch and British planters in the colony: on the eve of a visit to Europe in 1803, he was given a set of silver tableware with an inscription expressing gratitude worth, as the generous givers unashamedly stated, 18,000 guilders.[66]

Born in St. Eustatius, Beaujon (governor in 1795-1802 and 1804-1805, the latter being the year of his death in Stabroek) came from a family of merchants settled in both Curaçao and Statia and was an example of family interconnectedness within the Dutch West Indies. He too was accused, as one opponent put it, of having 'no heart for Patria' and being interested only in riches as a reward for this lack of loyalty and in addition of being 'a Foreigner, intruding in the Colony without the least interest in the public cause'.[67] Their new British superiors did not worry too much about such allegations and indeed both men helped to smooth the transition to indefinite British rule. This may be interpreted as sheer opportunism but then again 'national' loyalties were much less fixed around 1800 than they were to be a century later.

By 1807 the British resolve was clear. A strong British mercantile lobby had convinced the British cabinet that the colonies should not be returned to the Dutch. Foreign secretary Earl Grey wrote in 1806 that the cabinet, in view of the 'quantity of British capital at present embarked in the settlements of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice' – note the order – had led the cabinet to the conclusion that these 'cannot be abandoned'.[68] In 1807 it was ruled that all government regulations henceforth would be bilingual, there was to be but one British governor without Dutch lieutenants; government positions were to be given preferably to British citizens, British immigration was explicitly stimulated and Stabroek was renamed Georgetown. The bilingual *Demerara Gazette,* founded in 1796, was increasingly Anglophone 'as the new settlers all bring that dialect'.[69] The London Missionary Society was invited to start its work in the colonies in 1808. Property was transferred from Dutch into British

66 In his last term in office, now under Nicholson, he lost the confidence of the local elite because of authoritarian conduct, alleged corruption and infringement on traditional rights. *Kort historisch verhaal van den eersten aanleg, lotgevallen en voortgang der particuliere colonie Berbice [...]* (Amsterdam 1807) 193, xiii-xvi, and *passim*.

67 Delacoste, *Geschiedkundig en waar verhaal*, v, 41.

68 Quoted in Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh 1977) 102.

69 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 64; see also Pinckard, *Letters*, 212.

hands and a staggering 72,371 enslaved Africans were imported, mainly by British slavers between 1796 and 1808.[70] British investors thought of the Guianas, the largest single recipient of enslaved Africans, as a dreamed-of opportunity while in contrast British abolitionists viewed these territories as a nightmare.[71]

The influx of enslaved Africans was brought to a halt with the Abolition Act, to the great dismay of the Guiana planters. Subsequent imports of enslaved Africans resulted from the intraregional West Indian trade and lasted until 1830.[72] By 1812 the three colonies combined had over 100,000 inhabitants, the great majority of these being slaves. The number of captives would remain roughly stable until Emancipation in 1834.[73] After 1800, British Guiana, along with (and even surpassing) Trinidad, had become the new frontier in the British West Indies – and hence would be the major recipient of indentured East Indian labour after Emancipation.

The demise of the Dutch Atlantic

Looking back at the entire period from 1780 to 1815 one is struck not only by the passivity and ultimately the military and economic helplessness of the Dutch metropolitan and colonial state, but equally by a certain naïveté when it came to facing this weakness. By the 1770s the province of Zeeland was investing a great deal of energy in securing its traditional prerogatives in Essequibo and thereby Demerara, against the growing interest from the province of Holland and particularly Amsterdam. Endless disputes were fought about this issue in the States-General, eventually leading up to a half-hearted arbitration by stadtholder Willem V, as well as the establishment of the

70 Only one Dutch ship arrived, disembarking 279 in 1803, and two American ships, selling 346 (1803) and 215 (1805) enslaved Africans. All other slave ships were British except for one Brazilian ship bringing in 314 Africans in 1842 (TASTD, visited 6-5-2012); Henry G. Dalton, *The History of British Guiana* (London 1855) 375; cf. Van Langen, 'Britse overname', 112-113; Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York 1994) 46.

71 Drescher, *Econocide*, 94-96.

72 Hilary McD. Beckles, '"An Unfeeling Traffick": The Intercolonial Movement of Slaves in the British Caribbean, 1807-1833', in: Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven 2004) 263.

73 Bernard Moitt and Horace L. Henriques, 'Social Stratification and Agency in a Sugar Plantation Society: Enslaved Africans, Free Blacks, and the White Planter Class in the Guiana Colonies and British Guiana, 1700-1850', in: Bernard Moitt (ed.), *Sugar, Slavery, and Society: Perspectives on the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States* (Gainesville 2004) 94; Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 48.

new 'Sociëteit ter Navigatie op Essequibo' in 1771.[74] These were but rearguard struggles in view of the geopolitical changes occurring within the Caribbean with Great Britain trying to make up for the loss of the North American colonies and the 'depletion' of the older West Indies by the acquisition of French and Dutch colonies during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

In the preceding decades endless complaints were voiced about the lack of an entrepreneurial spirit in the WIC and arguments were made in favour of free trade for all Dutch merchants trading with the Guianas. Criticism was voiced about the passivity of the WIC, an institution 'absolutely incapable of managing a plantation colony' according to Dutch planters. No time was to be lost, so ran a 'patriotic' admonition in the mid-1780s, 'the house is ablaze'.[75] At the same time officials were complaining about the fragility of governance and the disobedience of the local planters, the Dutch included, resulting in tax evasion, lawlessness and numerous quarrels. The governor and his council had little real power according to Essequibo's governor George Hendrik Trotz (1772-1781), 'as everyone does as he pleases, and none cares about orders'.[76] Likewise there were many pleas for colonial reform and more free trade, particularly in slaves, all pleas being very critical of the WIC and its local representatives, leading at times to a 'state of anarchy', as state commissioners Boeij and Grovestins remarked in 1790.[77]

On reading these accounts one is particularly surprised to find so little foresight about the changing of the guard within the Caribbean – although of course some of the British planters joining the Dutch complaints about the passive WIC and metropolitan state may have discussed the alternatives with their Dutch colleagues.[78]

All hopes for a Dutch comeback were not abandoned however. In 1795 parliamentarians of the 'revolutionary' Batavian Republic were of the opinion that their state could survive only with the support of its colonies, 'in particular those in America'.[79] Even though almost all Dutch colonies

74 *Extract uit het Register der Resolutien van den Hoog Mog. Heeren Staaten Generaal der Vereenigde Nederlanden. Lunae den 19 Maart 1787* [The Hague 1787]; Rodway, *History*, 265-269; Goslinga, *Dutch in the Caribbean 1680-1791*, 448-453; Paesie, 'Sociëteit'. See also 'Request van de Planters en Ingezetenen van Essequebo en Demeraray, 2-2-1788', in Zeeuws Archief [Provincial Archive Zeeland], Staten van Zeeland, 3175.2.

75 *Brieven over het bestuur* I, 'Voorreden' 60 and 80 (citation), V, 24-25, 136, VII, 'Veertiende brief', 32, 38, and *passim*.

76 G.H. Trotz, 10-3-1775 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 527, fol. 307).

77 *Brieven over het bestuur, passim*; cf. Schutte, *Nederlandse patriotten*, 54-59; 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL- HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, fol. 5).

78 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 311.

79 Quoted in Theo P.M. de Jong, *De krimpende horizon van de Hollandse kooplieden. Hollands welvaren in het Caribisch Zeegebied (1780-1830)* (Assen 1966) 124.

had been 'temporarily' taken over by the British there was still expectation of their recovery. Thus, in a report of 1806 to the recently appointed King Louis Napoleon the Dutch Department of Colonies informed him that the Atlantic properties, including Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo – 'among the most prominent colonies world-wide'– were crucial for the recovery of the country.[80]

By 1820, King William I still nurtured high hopes of his American possessions, in spite of the loss of much of the Guianas, for which, incidentally, Amsterdam merchants blamed him.[81] Within a decade these hopes were shattered. The Dutch East Indies were on their way to becoming the only part of the empire that really mattered. The loss of most of the American possessions and the disappointing results of the two remaining Caribbean colonies not only led to their neglect but also to the later myopia regarding the significance of the 'Dutch' Atlantic to the Republic in Early Modern history.

Great Britain's interest in the conquest of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo illustrated her continued confidence in the potential of the West Indies and slave plantations. Contemporary British writings expressed optimism about this new frontier, developed as a dependency of Barbados, 'the London of the West Indies'.[82] Optimism about the new frontier was often coupled with denigrating remarks about the quality of Dutch governance, plantation management and mentality. Reporting on his residence in the colony from 1799 to 1805, Henry Bolingbroke described Dutch planters as 'clear and strict accountants [...] slow but sure', literarily 'old school' in the way they managed their plantations. They were no match for British ambition and efficiency. Indeed, 'British capital, industry, and perseverance, had accomplished in eight years, what would not have been done by any other means in half a century', Bolingbroke affirmed – and other Britons such as Dalton (1855) and Rodway (1891) would echo this triumphant note; Rodway roundly concluding that 'the Dutch people have not the genius for colonisation'.[83] It can be left to the reader to judge whether such culturalist explanations of Dutch colonial failure provide a reasonable assessment – but certainly Bolingbrook *cum suis* neglected to mention the obvious fact that the British ascendance had been possible only due to hard geopolitical factors

80 De Hullu, 'Memorie', 388, 394.

81 De Jong, *De krimpende horizon van de Hollandse kooplieden*, 129.

82 Pinckard, *Letters*, 21; Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 63, 216.

83 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 37-38, 183, 217, 222, 303; Dalton, *History*, 275; Rodway, *History*, 91, also 155-156. On British feelings of superiority, see Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 24-26, 40-43. British authors also commented critically about the harshness of slavery under Dutch rule – presumably the British treated their captives much better; see Bankroft, *Beschryving*, 290, 299-304; Pinckard, *Letters*, 18-19, 30-34, 43-44, 50-54, 180-185; Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 38, 195. Of course, Dutch observers were inclined to paint a rosier picture of Dutch slavery, e.g. 'Rapport', 27-7-1790 (NL-HaNA, 2e WIC 1.05.01.02, no. 915, ff. 57-61).

– British dominance in global finance and the African slave trade and her maritime and military hegemony in the Atlantic waters and colonies.

Within a few decades the Dutch presence waned, even if up to the present day the polder system, toponyms and the like still echo early Dutch history. By 1810 a Dutch visitor observed the Dutch settlers had only second-class status. A register made in 1815 of the over 800 plantations in British Guiana indicated that fewer than 100 were Dutch owned, while the number with a Dutch mortgage was 176.[84] In 1840, a British visitor remarked that most Europeans in the colony were English, 'very few of the former Dutch settlers having remained in the colony'.[85]

The British were in charge now. The 'overvalued' British West Indian islands no longer mattered so much, wrote Bolingbroke: 'They have ceased to be of use: they have performed their appointed task in the civilisation of the world'.[86] Yet problems with indebtedness remained and planters looked in vain for metropolitan protection and higher prices.[87] In the short and even mid-term this would not prohibit further growth. In spite of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the ascendance of free trade, plantation production continued to expand, mainly due to Caribbean and later Asian labour migration as well as technical innovation. However by the later nineteenth century things were changing once again. The sugar industry had become truly a globalised industry and the British competitive edge had waned with new producers around the globe replacing the British West Indies, including Guiana; but this was not in anyone's mind in 1815 when the transfer of sovereignty was confirmed.

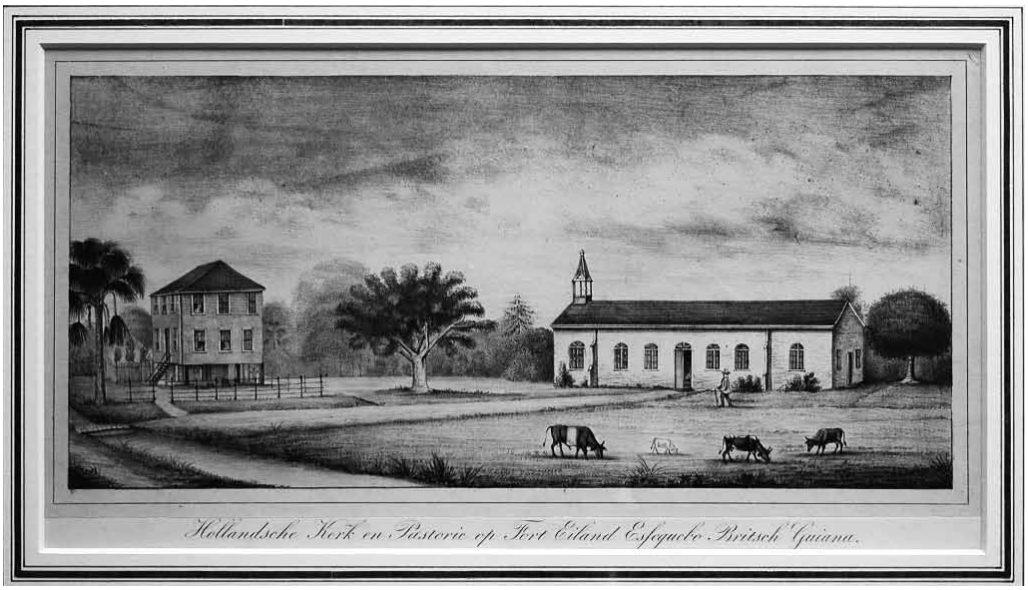
Looking back to the 1750-1815 period in Berbice, Essequibo and particularly Demerara, some conclusions can be drawn regarding the place of the Dutch in the wider Atlantic. First, no matter how much one might want to emphasise the role of the Dutch as middlemen, the case of the lesser Guianas patently illustrates that subverting national colonial borders was not an exclusively Dutch activity in the early modern Atlantic. There were many more 'middlemen'. British informal and then formal takeover of the Guianas is a case in point, but so is the crucial significance of North American shipping to these Dutch colonies, both before and after the American Revolution. In

84 Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 19; Van Langen, 'Britse overname', 128-129.

85 Swaving, *Swaving's reizen*, 191-193; Schomburk, *Description*, 42.

86 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 369.

87 Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory*, 29-40.



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Artist unknown, Dutch Reformed Church and presbytery, 'Fort Eiland' a.k.a. 'Groot-Vlaggeneiland', Essequebo. Litho, probably made after 1831 (the year Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo were united as British Guiana). The church served the remaining settlers of Dutch origins.
Collection Edwin van Drecht, Amsterdam.

the course of the nineteenth century the British themselves would lose their hegemony in Caribbean waters to their erstwhile colonies to the North. The beginnings of this transition had been visible much earlier, also in the Guianas.

Next, scale and geopolitics and hence also maritime power mattered more than ever. It was not primarily Dutch entrepreneurial backwardness ('old school') that succumbed to British genius, as Henry Bolingbroke would have it.[88] Geopolitics were far more important; basically the fact was that the British had become hegemonic among the European powers in Atlantic waters and no longer felt the need to respect Dutch neutrality as they had done for a century since the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674). The transfer of sovereignty of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo underlined the omnipotence of Great Britain and the demise of the Republic – exactly as had the 1781 ransacking of Statia by Admiral Walter Rodney.

This analysis therefore can serve as a warning against excessive revisionism of the role of Dutch cross-imperial vigour in the early modern wider Atlantic. Indeed, there had been a time when Dutch individuals, firms and even colonies were disproportionally active in connecting various parts of the wider Atlantic, skillfully ignoring the obstacles placed by competing mercantilist European powers, but they had never been the only ones, and by the later eighteenth century this period was coming to an end. After the Napoleonic Wars the days of mercantilism were over and there was no longer use for the free trade zones pioneered by the Dutch. Thus the Caribbean islands lost their usefulness, as did Elmina with the abolition of the slave trade. Suriname, the one remaining plantation colony, could not compete with British Guiana and other new frontiers. The Dutch Atlantic was coming to a grinding halt. It is somewhat ironical that the British did return the Dutch East Indies in 1815, thus providing the Netherlands with the opportunity to arrange for what would turn out to be the largest economic success in Dutch colonial history. ◀

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88 Bolingbroke, *Voyage*, 183.