Post-War Migration from the Netherlands

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1 Introduction

Before the Second World War, the Netherlands had no real emigration tradition. Between 1840 and 1940, the population of the Netherlands grew from a little over five million to almost nine million, but throughout this period, only around 250,000 Dutch inhabitants emigrated (Broeze 1988). During the same period, eighteen million people emigrated from the British Isles (Ireland included) and ten million from Italy (Hofstede 1964). Pre-war Dutch emigration consisted mainly of the emigration of farmers. Studies were done to find a solution to the structural unemployment in agriculture and agricultural emigration seemed to be the best option (Hartland 1959). However, due to the global economic depression in the 1930s, the emigration of farmers was not very successful. It was only after the Second World War that the emigration situation in the Netherlands changed for the brief period of a decade. This large scale desire to emigrate, which reached its peak in 1948 when over 30% of the Dutch population was found favourably disposed to emigration, was in many ways unique, and emigration then became a policy issue in the Netherlands (Hofstede 1964; Duiker 1987). After the Second World War, the pre-war problems were still evident in the agrarian sector. But not only farmers wanted to emigrate in the post-war years. Thousands of Dutch citizens expressed a desire to go to such countries as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Brazil, and in 1952, more than 48,000 emigrants left the Netherlands.

In this paper, an overview is given of the origins and development of Dutch emigration policy and of emigration from the Netherlands in the decades following the Second World War (see also Smits 1989 and Elferink 1994).

2 Post-war problems

After the Second World War the Netherlands was recuperating from the effects of five years of occupation. One of the most significant consequences of the wartime experiences was that many Dutch people suffered severe economic and social dislocation (Nieuwenhuysen 1995). The country was among the most badly hit, with many industries devastated, most means of transportation lost, energy supplies far below pre-war levels, and food shortages due to the inundation of arable land and livestock depletion. As a consequence, many Dutch people very much wished to improve their lot in life. Because of the serious economic

situation, the Dutch government, however, decided to focus its attention on industrialization and on the repair of the substantial damage done by the war. In order to acquire the necessary currency to implement this policy, export was strongly emphasized and the recovery of the domestic market progressed at an extremely slow pace.

One in four houses in the Netherlands had been damaged during the war while very few new houses had been built. In the post-war years, many young couples experienced great difficulties in finding a house and in 1946 and 1947, some 36% of the Dutch population was facing housing problems. Many of these individuals, most of whom were between seventeen and twenty-seven years old during the war, were to become the majority of the post-war Dutch emigrants in the fifties and sixties.

In the agrarian sector, possibilities for young farmers to start their own business were almost non-existent. Owing to mechanisation and a shortage of farm land there was a great deal of (hidden) unemployment and many agricultural families considered emigration a useful alternative for their children.

With the Dutch East Indies becoming independent in 1949, more than 120,000 people had to be repatriated to the Netherlands and some 127,000 soldiers were demobilized (Messing 1981). Because of the growing population, most Dutchmen felt that the Netherlands were becoming overpopulated and more than 10% of the former soldiers emigrated. The acknowledgement that emigration was one of the key solutions to the population problem was expressed at the highest political level by Queen Juliana, who said in her Speech from the Throne in 1950: 'The rapid growth of the population and the limited amount of land available continue to demand the vigorous promotion of emigration'.

Not only did the future of the Netherlands seem grim and unpredictable at that time but also that of the rest of Europe. The Iron Curtain had rapidly encircled over Eastern Europe and many people feared a new war or even Russian occupation. In 1948, during the Berlin Crisis and the communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, over 70% of the Dutch people thought a new war was imminent (Hofstede 1964) and all over Europe there was a growing desire to escape this threat by emigration (Hornix 1952).

As a consequence, many Dutchmen wanted to leave the country. Opinion polls held in the second half of the 1940s showed a high level of emigration mindedness. In 1948, 32.5% of the population wanted to emigrate. Due to limited transportation possibilities and a restrictive emigration policy, it took until 1952 for emigration to actually reach its peak (see Table 1).

Year	Emigration mindedness (percentages)	Number of emigrants
1946	22	504
1947	32	6,818
1948	32.5	13,837
1949	29	13,963
1950	25	21,330
1951	26	37,605
1952	-	48,690
1953	21	38,049
1954	-	34,676
1955	-	29,631
1956	-	31,788
1957	-	30,421
1958	-	23,117
1959	-	22,489
1960	27	24,355
1961	20	14,155
1962	12	11,546
1963	-	6,786
1964	-	8,152
1965	-	8,683
1966	11	9,106
1967	-	10,189
1968	-	9,445
1969	-	8,592
1970	-	7,023
1971	16	5,476
Total		476,426

Table 1: Emigration and emigration mindedness in the Netherlands 1946-1971 (Source for 'emigration mindedness', Heeren (1985:30) and for 'number of emigrants', the annual reports of the Directie voor Emigratie; no research on emigration mindedness was conducted in the Netherlands in the years for which no data is reported)

3 Post-war emigration policy

Confronted with the widespread desire for emigration and the fear of structural unemployment and overpopulation, the government became gradually more and more involved with emigration between 1948 and 1952. The Dutch government embraced a dual policy of stimulating emigration, on the one hand, and industrialization, on the other. The prevailing view was that it would not be possible to provide a sufficient increase in opportunities for employment in industry alone.

This would only be possible if a sufficient number of Dutch workers emigrated. Fearing both structural unemployment and the threat of losing irreplaceable skilled workers, the Dutch government at first tried to influence the composition of the emigrating population. On the one hand, people from professions threatened by unemployment, such as office staff, drivers, and bakers, and unskilled and elderly workers were stimulated and subsidized to leave. On the other hand, the emigration policy favoured regions with structural unemployment (Verslag 1950). This selective emigration policy, however, which was experienced as discriminatory by many potential emigrants, had little or no effect on migration which by its very nature is the result of a decision based on individual motives rather than just economic circumstances. Another complicating factor turned out to be the fact that the immigration countries, generally speaking, were not necessarily willing to accept primarily those categories of immigrants.

For a few years, this dual approach of industrialization and the promotion of emigration dominated the policy and planning of the Dutch government. Due to the government's lack of experience with active emigration policy, however, emigration from the Netherlands proceeded slowly. Because of the absence of a good emigration structure, the Dutch government had to build up contacts in the immigration countries and had to negotiate for emigration quotas. It also had to provide for suitable means of transportation for the emigrants. The after-effects of the Second World War made transportation both expensive and scarce. Many troopships were still being used in the Dutch East Indies to transport troops or move refugees (Krol 1950). The first emigrant ship to Canada did not depart until 1947. In the first post-war years, emigration opportunities were in fact very limited.

Emigration was a relatively new and unexplored policy issue for the Dutch government in the 1940s. After all, it was only in the agricultural field that even a limited emigration tradition had existed in the twenties and thirties. As soon as it became clear after the war that large numbers of Dutch citizens wanted to emigrate, the government had to develop an emigration policy. Lack of expertise and a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of emigration hampered the government's approach and seems to be responsible for the rather naive way in which the emigration apparatus was developed.

Before the war, the *Stichting Landverhuizing Nederland* (Netherlands Emigration Foundation) functioned as the official authority which coordinated emigration issues. Potential emigrants could apply to employment offices. After the war, this emigration apparatus was not sufficiently equipped to give information to emigrants and to process their applications. In reaction, other organizations took new initiatives in order to help potential emigrants. In 1946, the farmers' organizations founded the *Centrale Stichting Landbouw Emigratie* (Central Foundation for Agricultural Emigration) in order to investigate possibilities for settlement in immigration countries. The farmers' organizations engaged emigration specialists to provide information to agricultural emigrants. Their initiative was the starting

point for the activities of private emigration organizations of Catholic, Protestant, and non-denominational origin.

The Dutch government and these private emigration organizations, however, had a profound difference of opinion about the nature of emigration. The government saw emigration as a form of international labour mediation. The situation on the national labour market was the starting point for its emigration policy. As a consequence, employment offices gave information to potential emigrants in line with the government's policy to subsidize only emigrants with bad employment perspectives. The ideologically-based private emigration organizations, on the other hand, were mainly interested in the emigrant as a person. They wanted to provide information to the emigrants themselves. In their point of view, employment offices should only give general information. Both views collided within a commission which the government installed in 1949 to frame new emigration laws (Smits 1989).

4 Emigration policy after 1949

After 1949, the Dutch emigration policy started to change. In order to implement the difficult post-war reconstruction, the government opted for a far-reaching industrialization of the Netherlands and an active emigration policy. In 1951, the outlines of this new emigration policy became visible. Both the employment offices and the ideologically-based private emigration organizations were now licensed to provide information to emigrants and process their applications. The government and the emigration organizations coordinated the emigration policy within the newly installed *Emigratiebestuur* (Emigration Board). The board also controlled the emigration offices. In 1952, the new emigration law came into operation. Within a short time, many 'emigration specialists' were recruited and trained to inform prospective emigrants about the various immigration countries. By 1952, over 300 emigration offices, either instituted by the Government Employment Offices or by emigration organizations such as the *Algemene Emigratiecentrale* (General Emigration Board), the *Christelijke Emigratie Centrale* (Protestant Emigration Board) and the *Katholieke Centrale Emigratiestichting* (Catholic Central Emigration Foundation) had been founded. There were emigration centres in almost every city (Handelingen 1951) and the government set up elaborate subsidy schemes to finance transportation and to give emigrants financial support.

5 Emigration in the fifties and sixties

Stimulated by the government in the post-war years, numerous Dutchmen took the most unpredictable step a person can take, that is, they decided to emigrate. They were assisted in their departure by 'private' organizations that received

financial grants from the government after 1950. These organizations tried to prepare the emigrants for their new environment by providing language instruction and general information about the immigration country. They also offered spiritual guidance and mental preparation in order to help the emigrants adapt to their new homeland. The Catholic emigration organization even had priests on the spot to assist Dutch emigrants and provide them with spiritual guidance (Smits 1989; Van der Meel 1994).

In 1952, the government set a target for the next five years of 60,000 emigrants a year, in order to compensate for the enormous population growth. The departure of these emigrants would diminish the increase of the economically active population by half (Hofstede 1964).

Between the spontaneous eruption of emigration mindedness and an effective emigration structure, there was a time lag of almost four years. In 1952, a record year for Dutch emigration and the year the law on emigration organizations was passed, people's interest in emigration was already declining. An overview of overseas emigration figures for the period 1946-1969 is given in Table 2.

	1946-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64	1965-69
Australia	2,604	54,309	47,075	18,720	13,113
Brazil	722	1,961	1,399	968	976
Canada	16,302	82,244	38,646	13,389	15,686
New Zealand	204	11,608	6,737	4,737	2,731
South Africa	5,439	14,625	9,527	2,850	6,512
USA	9,013	13,330	31,383	24,318	6,470
Other nations	1,015	2,273	2,566	960	527
Total	35,299	180,350	137,333	65,942	46,015

Table 2: Dutch emigration 1946-1969 (Source: Directie voor Emigratie in SER 1985)

Table 2 very clearly shows the peak in emigration numbers in the period 1950-1954 as compared to the years before: most immigration countries show a sharp increase in Dutch immigration. Canada and the United States, the main immigration countries in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, were likewise popular in the first post-war years. In the fifties, they were joined by Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. After 1955, emigration figures steadily fell with the exception of the United States. Thanks to special immigration acts like the Refugee Relief Act (1953) and the Walter-Pastore Acts I and II (1958 and 1960), more Dutchmen could emigrate to the United States. In the early sixties, the United States was the most important immigration country. Owing to race riots (in particular the riots of Sharpeville), emigration to South Africa dropped dramatically from 1,689 in 1959 to 482 in 1960. In later years, emigration figures recovered the lost ground.

Dutch citizens who went to France and Israel did not emigrate through the agency of emigration offices. Figures from the Dutch Bureau of Statistics show

relatively stable numbers[1]. Between 200 and 300 people per annum went to Israel for long-term and permanent settlement. About 1,200 people a year went to France. In the 1960s, this figure showed a modest increase. Statistics also indicate that Dutch emigration to Indonesia declined rapidly in the post-war years, from 81,467 in 1945-1949 to 3,869 in 1965-1969; this is not surprising in view of political developments that lead to Indonesian independence.

In the early post-war years, emigration was much more of an adventure than it is nowadays. An impression of emigration experiences of Dutch emigrants in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and France is given in Elferink (1994). Firstly, most emigrants had never been out of the country before, they did not speak the language, and they did not have a realistic view of what to expect, as is nicely illustrated by the following quotation about the experiences of Dutch immigrants in New Zealand:

> John Vink of Seatoun left Utrecht in 1951 thinking he would encounter Maoris in their aboriginal state. Much worse, the Netherlands emigration authorities described New Zealand as sub-tropical, so he had sold all his winter clothes. Vink lasted one night on the bare mountain of Seatoun in a raging southerly trying to deliver milk - only the darkness saved this lad from a flat metropolis of a country, for the next day he saw the heights he had scaled and nearly keeled over. Another Dutch had lasted a week on a milk run and got pneumonia. (...) Nobody had told these lads that farms were not within bicycling distance from a city, but were 30 to 40 miles over rough roads in the back of beyond. Such conditions were not their glass of schnapps, these sophisticated city lads whose idea of the countryside was a field of tulips and a windmill beside a canal. (McGill 1982:30)

Conditions in the immigration countries were often harsh and difficult for most Dutch newcomers and the level of success varied. Furthermore, transportation was expensive and scarce. A ticket was a one-way ticket only and many emigrants did not set foot on Dutch soil again for many years, if they ever returned at all. Still, according to some sources, over 40% of the Dutch emigrants in Australia had remigrated to the Netherlands by 1971 (Hellman 1988a; 1988b).

In 1952, emigration reached its peak when 48,690 people emigrated through the agency of recognized emigration offices, primarily to Anglo-Saxon countries like the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. After 1952, the numbers dropped slowly and diminished to the current average of two to three thousand people a year. Over half a million people emigrated between 1947 and 1962. As industrialization gradually bore fruit and flourished beyond expectations between 1950 and 1960, emigration became less and less relevant and the goals set by the government in 1952 were never reached. After 1955, the boom in the industrial market even led to a shortage on the labour market. There was a general discussion on the desirability of continuing the emigration policy. In the modern industrial country which the Netherlands had become, facing

labour shortages as it was, many pressure groups found the emigration policy, composed in the early fifties when poverty and insecurity were threatening society, increasingly difficult to accept (Geldens 1961). From the beginning of the 1960s, the economic situation in the Netherlands began to improve markedly. After 1960, the government revised its active emigration policy as the doubts about industrialization disappeared and criticism of the emigration policy grew. Due to quick economic growth, the fears of unemployment and overpopulation were replaced by a great need for labour in the sixties. As a result of this new policy, the weekly radio broadcasts and other forms of advertisements promoting emigration stopped. Emigration numbers were already declining and seemed to have lost their topical significance anyway. Industrialization had taken root in the Netherlands and within a few years had become a forest of activity. Emigration, which had flourished at first, had since withered away into nothing but thin scrub (Hofstede 1964), and, after 1960, labour migration *to* the Netherlands steadily began to develop as a 'new' political and social issue (cf. Lucassen & Penninx 1985).

5 Emigration now

As the government's interest in emigration diminished in the 1960s, emigration organizations with a religious affiliation filled the gap for many years. Government subsidies on emigration tickets, however, continued to exist until 1989. In 1993, government involvement with emigration was completely abolished.

Although Dutch emigration numbers dropped dramatically, emigration, of course, never ceased to exist. Generally speaking, emigration numbers dropped from between 8,000 and 10,000 emigrants each year to between 3,000 and 5,000 in the 1970s and 1980s. Emigration figures for the period 1970-1992 are given in Table 3. Emigration to Australia, Brazil, Canada, and South Africa, which had already decreased in the 1960s, continued to do so. Dutch emigration to the United States seems to be relatively stable. In the early eighties, emigration figures peaked slightly. Australia and New Zealand were especially popular. According to CBS statistics, emigration to Indonesia, Israel, and France was rather steady in the seventies, eighties and early nineties. An average of some 4,500 emigrants per five years is reported for Indonesia; this number is 2,500 for Israel and 10,500 for France.

	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-92
Australia	8,357	3,726	7,618	2,229	566
Brazil	776	1,010	769	421	85
Canada	7,545	6,137	6,639	3,394	867
New Zealand	2,818	2,694	4,533	2,252	1,062
South Africa	4,995	1,447	-	-	-
USA	2,275	1,120	1,838	1,573	515
Other nations	527	125	338	328	24
Total	27,293	16,259	21,735	10,197	3,119

Table 3: Dutch emigration 1970-1992 (Source: Directie voor Emigratie; mediation for South Africa stopped in 1978)

Not only the figures but the very nature of emigration changed in the 1970s and 1980s. This was mainly due to the development of affordable air transportation and the introduction of television in the 1960s. Likewise, the backgrounds of the emigrants have changed: only about 10% is now from the agrarian sector. Dutch emigrants have become more self-reliant and are more inclined to emigrate for environmental reasons, such as the increasingly crowded living conditions in the Netherlands, a decline in the quality of the environment, and industrial pollution, rather than for strictly economic improvement (Elich & Blauw 1983). The changed preference for immigration countries probably coincides with this philosophy. New Zealand, for example, has become more popular. Most countries, however, have maintained immigration quotas since the 1970s.

As in the 1950s, when large families tended to emigrate without any intention to return, most current emigrants are well-educated young couples or singles who intend to return to the Netherlands. According to Elich (1983), research shows that about 25% of Dutch emigrants to Australia, New Zealand, and Canada return after five years of emigration; after ten years, this percentage is 28% or 30% depending on the immigration country. Transportation is relatively cheap and the devices of modern communication technology, such as television, telephone, fax and computer networks, enable emigrants to keep in touch with their relatives and friends in the Netherlands on a regular basis, possibilities only dreamt of by the early emigrants of the 1950s and 1960s.

Note

1 These figures were provided by the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Hoofdafdeling Bevolkingsstatistieken*. It should be noted here that CBS emigration statistics include all Dutch citizens who left the Netherlands for an 'indefinite' period or a period 'longer than 360 days' (Elich 1983:14). Generally speaking, CBS

emigration statistics are, therefore, considerably higher than the figures provided by the *Directie voor Emigratie* (Direction for Emigration).

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