Saint Martin

Communal Identities on a Divided Caribbean Island

Ank Klomp

The Caribbean island St Martin, with a land area of about 90 km², is divided by an international border.[1] The northern part forms an integral part of the French Republic, the southern area belongs to the Netherlands Antilles, an autonomous constituent of the Dutch Kingdom. Despite the partition which exists already for 350 years, St Martiners conceive themselves as one people. A people which shares a language (English), an national anthem, and many interests. In my paper I will describe St Martin as a special borderland case. Special because in this small demarcated space, centre and periphery overlap. The whole of St Martin may be conceived as a borderland. On the other hand St Martin does not stand on its own, each of the two sections of the island forms part of a larger country. In this respect St Martin is like other borderlands, which are the peripheries of larger entities. I will indicate what makes St Martin a unity, and I will indicate that differences between the French and the Dutch part. It will become clear that the impact of the attachment to the centres, the two European states, forms a threat to the unity of the island. This impact increased concomitantly with the move towards unification in Europe. Luckily there are countervailing forces of which the awareness of the local population forms one of the elements.

Dr Ank Klomp, Department of Cultural Anthropology, POB 80 140, NL-3508 TC Utrecht, the Netherlands. E-mail: A.Klomp@FSS.UU.NL

'It's Dutch, it's French, it's Caribbean', a tourist slogan once proclaimed. The message is still true: the island Saint Martin is Dutch, French, and Caribbean. The northern area is an integral part of the French Republic, while the south belongs to the Netherlands Antilles, an autonomous constituent of the Dutch Kingdom. However, Saint Martin's most interesting characteristic is its shared 'Caribbean' identity: for notwithstanding a division of more than three hundred and fifty years Saint Martiners still see themselves as one people. They are proud of their unity, 'We are an example to the world' a self-conscious Saint Martiner will say referring to the long-standing peaceful coexistence and not without justification given the fate of other divided islands. But not all Saint Martiners are content with the present situation, some are in favour of a united independence.

International borders have recently received much attention. The reason is clear: they are no longer perceived as fixed and impermeable. The border is inextricably bound up with the fate of the nation state and the nation state is nowadays often confined to the dustbin of history (Creveld 1999, Hobsbawm 1990). Not all agree about its demise, however. Wilson and Donnan (1998:2) stress the continuing importance of the state in shaping the lives of its subjects. According to their viewpoint, "the new politics of identity is in large part determined by the old structure of the state." They propose the development of an anthropology of international borders, an attempt to "integrate seemingly divergent trends in the study of power and culture." They argue that "[T]heir integration in an anthropology of borders resides in the focus on the place and space of visible and literal borders between states, and the symbolic boundaries of identity and culture which make nations and states two very different entities."[2]

Saint Martin is a good case for illuminating

the debate on international borders. On the one hand the border on Saint Martin is like other borders discussed in the literature (Donnan and Wilson 1994, Wilson and Donnan 1998, Rosaldo 1989). The border on Saint Martin, this "twin dependency of other dependencies, [this] double appendage of other peripheries" (Badejo 1990:120), is on the political margins of two (large) states. The French and Dutch governments regulate the daily lives of their subjects on their respective parts of the island. The two Saint Martins are constructed as separate communities by the interventions of the core state to which they belong. The ties which bind each side of Saint Martin to the metropolis create barriers to the unity of the island. This became particularly evident when each metropolitan power stepped up its concern for this distant outpost of the realm concomitant with the process of European unification.

On the other hand Saint Martin is an island, and as an island, and as a (semi)colonial island, it has some specific characteristics. An island is a clearly demarcated space, and in the case of Saint Martin, this is a very small demarcated space indeed, about 90 km² altogether. Donnan and Wilson's (1994:3) assertion, "that all borders, by their very historical, political and social constructions, serve as barriers of exclusion and protection, marking 'home' from the 'foreign'," does not apply to Saint Martin: the border between French and Dutch Saint Martin does not carry this exclusionary significance. As will be seen below, Saint Martiners do share 'communitas' and 'societas' with those at the other side of the border.

This article begins by providing a brief historical background to Saint Martin. I then discuss those elements which are shared by the two Saint Martins and focus on the centripetal tendencies in Saint Martin society. The second part addresses the differences between the two island parts and considers the centrifugal forces. In the third part I review the unity of Saint Martin and speculate about the future.

Historical Background

The division of Saint Martin dates from the early involvement of the French and the Dutch in the Caribbean. A treaty signed in 1648, giving France the slightly larger portion (56 km²) still forms the basis of the relationship today. Nowadays the border is marked by little more than a hump in the road and friendly signs, written in French on the French side and in English and Dutch on the Dutch side[3], welcoming the visitor. A small monument reminds the visitor of the long friendship between the two sides. There are no border controls. This is remarkable, as the border is an outer EU border: French Saint Martin, as an integral part of France, forms part of the EU, while Dutch Saint Martin, which belongs to the autonomous Netherlands Antilles, is only an associated member. The customs barrier was scrapped when Saint Martin became a free port in 1939.

Although Saint Martin was a plantation island in the past, the climate was too dry for successful agriculture. "Salt, not sugar [—] was king here" as Badejo (1990:121) puts it. But salt was never economically important enough for the island to prosper. After the abolition of slavery (in 1848 on the French part and in 1863 on the Dutch part), plantation agriculture practically ceased and the land was divided up for subsistence farming. The majority of the population are descended from African slaves, most white plantation owners left the island after the abolition. Often people had to go elsewhere to earn a living. The most significant destination for Dutch as well as French Saint Martiners, were the oil refineries, established on Curaçao in 1918 and on Aruba in 1927. The tide turned towards the end of the 1950s, when the opening of the first modern hotel in 1955 marked the beginnings of a tourist boom. In 1994 the island had more than 7,000 hotel rooms, nearly 733 cruise ships dropped their anchor at its harbours, and 627,406 persons passed through the airport (La Guadeloupe 1993:120, and 1996:91–93). Consequently, the population grew rapidly (see Table 1).

Table 1. Population of *Sint Maarten* and *Saint-Martin* (1954–1992).

Sint Maarten		Saint-Martin	
1954	1,597	1954	3,364
1972	7,807	1974	6,191
1981	13,156	1982	8,072
1992	32,221	1990	29,505

Source: Hartog 1981: 123; Census of *Sint Maarten* 1992: 45; Census of *Saint-Martin* 1990: 20.

At the end of the 1950s many Saint Martiners[4], who had migrated to Aruba or Curaçao, returned home, accompanied by their children born on one of the Dutch Leewards.[5] Other migrants began to arrive as well and in large numbers as the figures in table 1 suggest. As a result in 1992 only 30 per cent of the population on *Sint Maarten* was born on the island and only 47,9 per cent was Dutch (Census 1992:47-48). On *Saint-Martin* 45 per cent of the total number of registered inhabitants were French subjects, and of these only 28 per cent are born on *Saint-Martin* (La Guadeloupe 1996:89). On both *Sint Maarten* and *Saint-Martin* most of those without either a Dutch or a French passport come from Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the nearby 'English' islands.

In 1995 two hurricanes struck Saint Martin, causing heavy material damage. This disaster also effected the composition of the population, however this cannot be illustrated by figures.

Unity, Co-operation and Shared Experiences

The French and Dutch who carved up Saint Martin in 1648, ruled over an empty land. The people who came or were brought to the island over the years were a heterogeneous group, but the mixture was almost identical on both sides. Hartog (1981:130) writes that the population was "ethnically the same in the French and in the Dutch part." Among the whites there were many people of British descent, who came to Saint Martin by way of an English island. The slaves came from Curaçao, St Eustatius, or Guadeloupe, but quite a few also arrived via English islands or North America. Given the anglophone origin of many inhabitants, and the contacts with the surrounding 'English' islands, English of a Creole variety became the mother tongue of all Saint Martiners.

The 'English' influence is also clearly discernible in the religious orientation of Saint Martiners, the majority of whom belong to a Protestant church (Richardson 1996:62). These churches have an all-Saint Martin organization. The Roman Catholic Church is now the largest on both *Sint Maarten* and *Saint-Martin* as most newcomers are Roman Catholics. This church is not organized on a cross-border basis. However the split is, or never was, that serious. French priests with sufficient command of English to preside at mass were difficult to find so Dutch priests were often appointed on the French side. This co-operation on the personal level continues till the present time, irrespective of the national origin of the incumbents. The shared ethnic background, the language, and the religion make Saint Martin in many respects a cultural unity. This cultural unity is expressed in the 'national' anthem: 'Sweet Saint Martin's Land', which is common to both sides. Most political rallies are opened and closed now with the communal singing of this song.

There have always been flourishing social and economic contacts across the border. The treaty of 1648 stipulated that the natural resources of the island should be placed at the disposal of all inhabitants, and that people should be allowed to move freely from one side to the other. These opportunities were well used, in ways foreseen by the treaty, but also by less conventional activities: Saint Martiners became adept at skirting the border.

The exodus to the Dutch Leeward Islands also furthered the mixing of *Sint Maartenaren* and *Saint-Martinois* both through their common experience as '*Ingles*' on Curaçao or Aruba, where Papiamentu is the vernacular, and because the French Saint Martiners send their children to Dutch schools and often obtained Dutch nationality. Most Saint Martiners preferred to go to Aruba because English was spoken at the American EXXON (ESSO) refinery whilst Dutch was spoken at the SHELL plant on Curaçao.

In the 1950s the oil refineries introduced automation and many jobs were scrapped. Luckily on Saint Martin the tourist boom was just about to begin. The Dutch side took the lead and for twenty years dominated touristic developments. The explanation for the difference between the two sides lies in the views of Saint Martin's local leaders. *Sint Maarten's* political leader, the late Dr Claude Wathey, was a staunch advocate of development, of any kind of development. He admired the U.S. and hoped to attract American capital and American visitors. In both respects he was successful. Wathey's counterpart on the French side, Dr Hubert Petit, had other ideals. He wanted to transform *Saint-Martin* into a luxury resort for the privileged few, a *'Petit St.Tropez'* as it was called at the time. His development policy was more restricted and employment opportunities were fewer than on the Dutch side. Consequently, Saint Martiners who returned to the island, be they originally French or Dutch, tended to settle on *Sint Maarten*. Therefore many Saint Martiners who now live on the Dutch side have a 'French' background.

The departure of many to work in the oil refineries and the subsequent economic boom on the Dutch side of the island had other repercussions for the inhabitants. Many *Saint-Martinois* crossed the border to fill the gaps in the *Sint Maarten* labour market or to profit from the newly created jobs. In 1978 about 40% of the French work force was employed on *Sint Maarten* (Bakhuis Report 1978:102).

Saint-Martin did not remain oblivious to tourist developments. The Lowlands, the scarcely inhabited Western triangle of the island, was parcelled out for luxury villas. Movie stars, famous singers, and other members of the international jet set bought houses in this area and gave Saint Martin a welcome touch of glamour. Restaurants offering excellent French cuisine opened up in Marigot, the capital of the French side, and especially in the village Grand' Case.

In the 1980s, *Saint-Martin* opened up to large scale tourism and underwent a complete metamorphosis. In 1990 hotels had been built with a total capacity of 3,000 rooms (the Dutch side had a capacity of about 4,000 rooms at that time) and luxurious shopping precincts and large residential areas were constructed in Marigot. The binational character of the island could now be exploited to the full. In the wording of a recent slogan, 'Twice the Vacation, Twice the Fun'. The fact that English is spoken everywhere and the dollar is the most common currency means that language and money problems, which a simple Dutch-French situation might present, simply do not exist. Altogether it is a ticket that makes the island very appealing to the (anglophone) tourist.

The social and economic ties between the two sides can be illustrated in many ways, but one example summarizes it all. Mr Fleming, the present mayor of *Saint-Martin,* was a building contractor before he became *Saint-Martin's* local leader in 1983. As a contractor most of his income came from the Dutch side where the tourist industry began. The mayor still owns two building firms both of which are located on the Dutch side, with a subsidiary branch on French Saint Martin. Mrs Fleming stems from a French Saint Martin family, but she was born on Aruba, where her parents had migrated to work at the EXXON refinery. She studied in Aruba and in the Netherlands (and later in the U.S.A.). With her teaching certificate she returned to the island of her parents, and found a job at the Dutch side, becoming the headmistress of a school there. The Flemings used to live on the Dutch side, but they moved across the border before the municipal elections of 1989, as the mayor had been criticized for his living 'abroad.'

Foreign Immigrants

As mentioned earlier, Saint Martin harbours a substantial number of foreigners (i.e. people who have neither French nor Dutch nationality). Table 2 sets out the growth of the most numerous groups.[6]

Table 2. Origins and numbers of the largest groups of foreigners on *Sint Maarten/Saint-Martin*.

	Sint Maarten		Saint-Martin	
	1981	1992	1981	1990
Dominican Republic	124	4,111	144	3,046
Haiti	462	3,871	631	7,157
Dominica	?	1,590	222	1,099
St.Kitts/ Nevis	?	1,487	168	?

Source: *Sint Maarten,* Census 1992; *Saint-Martin* Monnier 1983: 56, Census Guadeloupe 1990.

As we see, the same immigrant groups predominate on *Sint Maarten* and *Saint-Martin*. Timmer (1994:15,17) notes that both the Haitians and those from the Dominican Republic intend to stay for more than ten years on the island. This makes them look like permanent residents, who will probably follow a transnational lifestyle (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994). Both these groups have their own associations on the island and membership is organized on a cross-border basis. Dominicans and Kittians are also organized and I presume that the pattern of interactions with regard to the border will not differ from those of the Haitians and Dominican Republicans.

The foreign immigrants play a crucial part in Saint Martin's economy. They supply the hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities with cheap labour and provide a welcome solution to Saint Martin domestic problems, cleaning the homes and minding the children. Altogether it seems not too far-fetched to conclude that the foreign immigrants help to bind the two Saint Martins together. The one proviso to this relates to the large number of Haitians on the French side. This point will be addressed later in the section on differences.

Americanization

Saint Martin is one of the most americanized islands in the Caribbean, being not so very different from the U.S. Virgin Islands. Americanization has been an uneven and protracted process, affecting Saint Martiners in different ways and at different times. We can distinguish at least four aspects of this process.

First, there is a history of migration from Saint Martin to the U.S. In the first half of the 20th century a considerable number of Saint Martiners settled permanently in the U.S. Many of them were sailors who found a job on shore. Migrants from the French side often retained their French nationality, even though they may have lived many years in the U.S. and have acquired American citizenship. Some still vote in *Saint-Martin* elections either in person or by proxy. The main candidates for *Saint-Martin* always visit the U.S. and American Saint Martiners help to run the campaign. There exists an American-*Saint-Martin* friendship society, i.e. a club which unites the emigrants with the people on their island of origin. Such intensive organized contacts do not exist on the Dutch side, but Dutch Saint Martiners have other vital links with the U.S. as many do their advanced studies there.

Second, there is the fact that following the opening of the EXXON refinery on Aruba in 1927 many Saint Martiners have been employed by an American company. On Aruba Saint Martiners underwent an important learning experience in what they understood the U.S. to stand for: modernity, efficiency, wealth.

Third, U.S. citizens and companies played a very important role in the development of tourism and in the 'hospitality industry' in general. The boom in the 1960s and 1970s on *Sint Maarten* was mostly based on American investment. Both sides have American residents (Monnier 1983:56, Timmer 1994:23,24). According to Timmer, on the Dutch side nearly 50 per cent of the Americans are managers and business owners, the highest proportion of any other group on the Dutch side.

Fourth, there is the general phenomenon of U.S. cultural hegemony. As the U.S. cultural influence grew across the globe, its popularity was reflected in Saint Martin. Dutch Saint Martin even applied for the Puerto Rican status of 'free associated state' of the U.S., a request which was politely ignored (Badejo 1990:139). Today most of the news on Saint Martin comes from U.S. sources. Large transistor radios can

pick up the U.S. stations, and satellite television enables Saint Martiners to follow popular U.S. programmes. As the majority of the tourists stem from the U.S., they tend to set the scene as far as style of dress and hotel culture is concerned, especially on the Dutch side. The importance of the dollar was mentioned already.

The long and positively evaluated association with the U.S. helps to bind the two Saint Martins culturally. To be called 'American' is generally liked on Saint Martin, it makes one feel good, it stands for money and modernity. (Being identified as 'English' does not have such a positive connotation, being associated with the impoverished Caribbean 'English' islands.)

While Americanization has gone further on the Dutch side, *"l'insidieuse américanisation,"* (Monnier 1983:46) has not left *Saint-Martin* untouched. Monnier, an Euro-French geographer, visited *Saint-Martin* before it turned to large scale tourism. He expresses concern about the Americanization of French territory, not only because of cultural factors – Monnier (1983:114,120) recommends *"[L]a qualité, le bon goût français"*, as a remedy to *"[la] banalisation de l'île"* – but also because of what he perceives to be lost economic opportunities for France. He would certainly be more at ease with changes in the 1980s when metropolitan France rediscovered *Saint-Martin*. In the 1990s the European Dutch also intensified their interest in *Sint Maarten*, not so much because they worried about 'good taste,' no matter how defined, but because they were concerned about 'good governance,' and thought that *Sint Maarten* could use a metropolitan push in the right direction.

Differences and Centrifugal Forces

Saint Martin has been advertised as 'Delightfully Dutch' and 'Fantastically French', but nowadays it is 'A Little European' and 'A Lot of Caribbean': to stress Frenchness and Dutchness is no longer fashionable. The question arises of just how French and Dutch is each part of Saint Martin? In answer, one can say that the French side is notably more French than the Dutch side is Dutch. This is a reflection of the difference in administrative status, but historical chance also plays a part in explaining this dissimilarity. The economic efflorescence of southern Saint Martin began at a time when the Netherlands was not much interested in the last remnants of the colonial domain. By contrast *Saint-Martin* began to develop its tourist industry in the beginning of the 1980s, a time when metropolitan interest in the island was increasing. There is more to explain the uneven impact of the two metropolises. Globally France and the French language have more prestige than the Netherlands and Dutch. In the popular imagination it is more *chic* to be French and to speak French, than to be Dutch and speak Dutch. Furthermore France pursues an explicitly nationalistic cultural policy, of which the promotion of the French language is an important strand. This concern for cultural and linguistic purity is not found in the Netherlands.[7]

The cultural differences between the two metropolitan powers and its implications for local identities were already noted in the 1950s. The Keurs write: "It is notable that if one asks the native of French Saint Martin what he is, he will say, 'French,' but the Dutch are more likely to say, 'a St. Maartener'. When any conflict arises, however, he is proud to be 'Dutch' (Keur and Keur 1960:274).

Saint-Martin, the Relationship with France and Guadeloupe
Saint-Martin forms part of the department of Guadeloupe, one of the overseas departments of the French Republic. The tie with the metropolis is reflected in several ways. Marigot, with its *Hôtel de Ville* and *Palais de Justice* is "unmistakably Gallic" (Block 1991:193). French is the sole official language on the French side and the sole language of instruction. English is only taught as a foreign language at high school level. This means that only a tiny minority of the *Saint-Martinois* learns to write English, the mother tongue of the population. For higher or specialized education *Saint-Martinois* go to Guadeloupe or to European France.

France was never much interested in this 'speck on the map', where people neither spoke French nor 'proper' English. French interest amounted to little more than sending out a few officials to run the place, and a handful of

private citizens who opened restaurants. The main changes came in the 1980s. Albert Fleming, who became mayor in 1983, aimed to develop *Saint-Martin* as a tourist resort just as *Sint Maarten* had become. Fortuitously, in 1986 the metropolitan French government introduced a tax incentive programme to stimulate French investment in the DOM-TOM, the *départements* and *territoires d'outre-mer*. This programme, which was intended to stimulate DOM-TOM economy, fulfilled another aim as well. When the borders of the EU member states were opened to all EU citizens on the 1st January 1993, French metropolitans (*métros*) were already well-established in the overseas territories. This new policy was a great success on *Saint-Martin* and is reflected in the pervasive French economic and cultural influence. *Métro* investments helped to build the new *Saint-Martin*. A few big business names are *Saint-Martinois*, as are the largest landowners, but nearly all the new hotels are in the hands of *métro* companies, as are many of the new shops. The *métros* are also found in the professions and in the administration. Competition from *métros* is particularly keenly felt by the smaller local enterprises for not all French incomers are well-to-do. Some spent their last penny to settle on the island. One wonders whether there is a group of *'petits blancs'* in the making.

In 1990 about 8 per cent of the French subjects on *Saint-Martin* were born in metropolitan France (La Guadeloupe 1996:89). There are however more *métros* on *Saint-Martin* than the figures show. Not all metropolitans are registered on the island, some because they see their stay as temporary, while others commute between Europe and the Caribbean. Nor are the statistics an accurate measure of influence. While there may be only a handful of *métros* in the whole administration, this handful occupies pivotal positions. For instance, the developments in the 1980s were steered by SEMSAMAR (*Société d'Economie Mixte de Saint-Martin*) the *Saint-Martin* development company. SEMSAMAR was led by a *métro*.

The *Saint-Martinois* are ambivalent about the increased presence of the European French on their island. Most French Saint Martiners have never been attracted to independence. For many, the connection with France means being part of a big, modern and democratic country and is felt as a form of security. Belonging to France also means financial help and better opportunities for higher education. Moreover 'France' stands for culture and glamour: to be French, to speak French, elevates one's status. The policy which stimulated the arrival of the *métros* also brought new opportunities, progress and modernity to *Saint-Martin*. France, for its part, did not question the existing relationship: the departments of Guadeloupe, Martinique and Guyana are part and parcel of the French Republic. Nevertheless, there are signs of unrest on northern Saint Martin as seen in the associations which have sprung up to protect the interest of local businessmen, and local people and culture in general. The main association is SMECO which stands for 'Saint Martin Educational and Cultural Organization'. SMECO is in the first place a cultural organization, but a subject like 'Saint-Martin identity,' cannot be separated off from a discussion of the position on the labour market of the 'sons and daughters of the soil.' The main issue addressed by SMECO is the tie with France and the resulting influx of *métros*. The right of free entry to *Saint-Martin* of European French citizens, and after 'Schengen' of other EU citizens is greatly resented. When asked to reach a final assessment however, the verdict of the *Saint-Martinois* is clear: Mayor Fleming, who is seen as the main instigator of developments, has been re-elected twice.

The *métros* are not the only French subjects on *Saint-Martin*, about 9 per cent of the French citizens originates from one of the other French Antilles (La Guadeloupe 1996:89). Among them the Guadeloupeans form the large majority. At the beginning of the 1980s Guadeloupeans formed the target for local action groups, who charged them with taking jobs and houses away from *Saint-Martinois*. This charge was later dropped as the focus shifted to new groups of competitors, such as *métros*. *Saint-Martin's* administrative subjugation to Guadeloupe is another matter. This relationship is disliked, perceived more as a hindrance than as a help, and many people would prefer to have a direct line to France.

Another group of francophones, the Haitians, have already been referred to and identified as one of the unifying factors on Saint Martin. That is certainly not wrong, however in Euro-French eyes they are perceived differently. In the government report on the hurricanes (Our-agans Luis et Marilyn 1995:14) their contribution to *Saint-Martin's* GNP and to the recovery effort is singled out for praise. The report continues: "They are without doubt the cause of the revival of the French language on the island, whereas only a few years ago English was mostly used" (my translation). It is not implausible to interpret the official acceptance on *Saint-Martin* of more than 7,000 Haitians as part of the French policy to strengthen the position of the French language on the island. It means the Haitians play a double role in defining identity. They not only make the French side more French, but by building bridges with Dutch Saint Martin, they contribute towards the maintenance of an island-wide identity.

Sint Maarten: Relations with the Netherlands and the Netherlands Antilles

Since Aruba left the federation (1986), the Netherlands Antilles consist of five so-called 'island territories': the Windward Islands of *Sint Maarten*, Saba and St Eustatius, and the Leeward Islands of Curaçao and Bonaire. The autonomy enjoyed by the Dutch Antilles has a real significance. For instance, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba are not integrated in the EU, but are associated members. Another important point concerns the regulations relating to settlement: Euro-Dutch persons need a residence permit for the islands, this notwithstanding the fact that inhabitants of the Antilles with a Dutch passport have free access to the Netherlands.

With respect to cultural identity, it is rather hard to define what is Dutch about the Dutch side. There is not anything which could be characterized as a Dutch atmosphere on *Sint Maarten* and the Dutch language is rarely heard. A 'dead language' in the opinion of Saint Martin linguist Richardson (1983:64). Indeed, *Sint Maarten* is more American than Dutch, having "given itself wholeheartedly to American tourist culture" (Block 1991:193). Normally the

Dutchness of *Sint Maarten* is only invoked to attract tourists. A shopping centre, constructed in the 1980s, has gables (painted in pink and yellow), and squares and streets are given such names as 'Rembrandtplein', or 'Van Goghstraat'. A windmill has long formed one of *Sint Maarten's* attractions.

Both Dutch and English are officially used, as on the sign for the local government in Philipsburg: '*Bestuursgebouw*/Administration Building.' Dutch is used in all official correspondence, especially where Willemstad (Curaçao) or the Hague are involved. At the local level English is normally used. Dutch is the official language of instruction, at least after the two first classes of the elementary school. But over the last twenty years the use of English has increased in schools and some schools teach only in English. English is taught as a (foreign) language in all schools. For further studies people go to Curaçao or to the Netherlands. Those who can afford it often send their children to the U.S.A. and the *Sint Maarten* administration also provides scholarships for the U.S. This means that there are well-educated *Sint Maartenaren* who have hardly any knowledge of Dutch or the Netherlands. Recently, however, Dutch has been regaining ground. In 1994 one elementary school reintroduced Dutch as the sole language of instruction in all classes.

The fluctuating fortunes of the Dutch language on *Sint Maarten* reflect the fluctuating relationship between the Netherlands towards its overseas territories. At the end of the 1960s Holland proposed independence to the Antilles, in line with its view that 'colonies' were a thing of the past. However, this proposal was not well-received in the 'colony' itself and delaying tactics were successfully applied. In 1989 the Hague declared that independence was no longer on the agenda. This U-turn was never really explained but the EU may well have played a part. As was the case in France, the Netherlands may have realised that within the context of the common market, the Antilles could become an asset rather than a liability. The islands are often referred to as a stepping stone to the Latin American continent. The sudden benevolence had a price: a larger voice for the Netherlands in

local affairs. For instance, the access of Euro-Dutch in the Antilles had to be enlarged or no longer subject to restraint. More influence of the Netherlands is not what the Antilles see as in their interest, they want to remain as autonomous as possible. At the time of writing, nothing has been decided yet concerning the future relations within the Kingdom.

The new involvement of the Netherlands had a decisive influence on *Sint Maarten*. *Sint Maarten* had a bad name, being linked to drug-related crime, and its administration being accused of corruption, and misgovernment. The complaints dated from the 1970s, but no action was ever taken. In 1992, however, *Sint Maarten* was put under a form of legal restraint, the most extreme form of intervention provided in the regulations of the Kingdom. After *Sint Maarten* became a ward of court, the Hague sent police officers, tax officials, judges and other personnel to improve administrative proceedings.

According to the latest census (1992), 5,6 per cent of the Dutch subjects on *Sint Maarten* are born in the Netherlands. The majority plans to leave after a short stay on the island (Timmer 1994:22). The number of metropolitan Dutch on *Sint Maarten* has always been small. They include a handful of business people, among whom were one or two big names, and others like teachers, who took up jobs for which local people were not then available. How the latest developments influenced the figures could not be established.

In the past most *Sint Maartenaren* were pleased to have Dutch citizenship, which was perceived as a guarantee of legal security and political stability, opportunities for higher education and financial support. This situation has not changed, but the number of people who are dissatisfied with the present situation has increased and support for independence is growing. In 1998 15 per cent voted in favour of independence compared to 6.24 per cent in 1994 (Oostindie & Verton 1998:161). There are several reasons for this change of heart. Many people experienced the intervention by the Netherlands (and Curaçao as its representative) in 1992 as an insult, even if a few people believed the charges to be unfounded. These recent events are grist to the mill of people already dissatis-

fied with the status quo. Some time before the Euro-Dutch intervention in *Sint Maarten* an organization 'We fo We' was set up to protect the interests of the local people, especially business people. 'We fo We' condemned the imposition of legal restraint as colonialism. These are not the only signs of discontent. Lasana M. Sekou (the pseudonym of H.H. Lake) a *Sint Maarten* or better Saint Martin poet and newspaper editor is the driving force behind a group of people from both sides of the island who are struggling for an independent and united Saint Martin. Lasana's position is ideological: 'colonies' belong to the past and the colonial border has to disappear (Sekou 1996, Sekou, Francis and Gumbs 1990). Due to his efforts Saint Martin now also has its own flag.

Sint Maarten's connection to Curaçao has only been mentioned in passing and the presence on southern Saint Martin of many Curaçaoans has not been referred to at all. The bond between *Sint Maarten* and Curaçao resembles the relations between *Saint-Martin* and Guadeloupe. Curaçao has always been the most important island of the Netherlands Antilles, so it played something of the role of a metropolis to the other islands. Unlike the situation on *Saint-Martin*, the low profile of the Euro-Dutch until recently meant that the brunt of local resentment of external influence was borne by Curaçao and the Curaçaoans. The presence of Curaçao is felt directly as 2,100 people on *Sint Maarten* were born on Curaçao (Timmer 1994:14), by far the most numerous group of immigrants with a Dutch passport. For Curaçaoans *Sint Maarten* is their own country, they do not need anybody's permission to come and go. Papiamentu is often heard in the streets of Philipsburg and also in offices, at the banks, and other enterprises, as many Curaçaoans hold jobs in the civil service and in other white collar employment. They also figure prominently in the police force. Curaçaoans are generally better educated and better paid than *Sint Maartenaren*, educational facilities being more advanced on Curaçao than on *Sint Maarten*. Timmer also found that 39 per cent has the intention to stay more than ten years on *Sint Maarten*.[8]

In general the Curaçaoans are not liked on

Saint Martin. Amongst other negative stereotypes, they are seen as arrogant. The problem lies in the division of roles. When Saint Martiners lived on Curaçao they generally belonged to the lowest stratum of Curaçao society. Yet now on their own island, the Curaçaoans are seen to have the upper hand and *Sint Maartenaren* to be subordinate to them.

In recent years *Sint Maarten's* relationship with the Netherlands Antilles has been the subject of debate as it has been many times in history. *Sint Maartenaren* did not like the idea of being subjugated to Curaçao without the Dutch umbrella. The Dutch decision to retain ties with the Antilles has modified the situation somewhat. Nevertheless, in 1994 only 60 per cent of *Sint Maartenaren* voted in favour of a continued relation with the Netherlands Antilles, i.e. Curaçao. This was not a very positive result, especially when it is borne in mind that part of the electorate is from Curaçao. At the end of the 1990s the number of people in favour of the Netherlands Antilles had dropped even further to 41 per cent (Oostindie & Verton 1998:161).

The Border Redefined

Saint Martin's economic development has an important implication for the island: it served to redefine and enhance the border. The accompanying influx of Dutch subjects to southern Saint Martin, and the French subjects to northern Saint Martin had the effect of strengthening the different cultural identities on each side of the border. These changes are more evident on the French side where the use of French has increased considerably, and where some parts are predominantly white and French speaking. A Dutch Saint Martiner experiences these new *métro* precincts as a foreign country.

Turning to the Dutch side, the division opened up by the inflow of Dutch subjects, particularly those from Curaçao, is also apparent. The dislike of *Sint Maartenaren* for the Curaçaoans is shared by the *Saint-Martinois*. When asked about the Dutch side of the island, *Saint-Martinois* will immediately tell you that they do not like all those Curaçaoans, who treat them like strangers and with whom they have nothing in common. The Euro-Dutch are less visible than their Euro-French counterparts as they usually speak English, do not dominate business, and are not concentrated in specific residential areas.

The attitude of the *métros* and Guadeloupeans towards the Dutch side, depends partly on their level of ease with the English language. They do not cross the border very often. Some only make use of the banks on the Dutch side, and then insist on having an interpreter when doing business there.

For those from Curaçao *Saint-Martin* has always been experienced as 'abroad,' a feeling which has intensified the more French it has become. Only the very sophisticated among them will pluck up the courage to enter the *métro* enclaves. The Euro-Dutch perceive French Saint Martin in terms of a holiday resort, somewhere where you go for a shopping spree or a nice dinner. They know as little or as much about the French side as people usually know about their vacation destination.

Recent developments still had an other effect. In the past it has always been the Dutch side which was economically better off, *Saint Martin* was the dependent partner. French involvement in *Saint-Martin* has changed that and nowadays *Sint Maarten* and *Saint-Martin* are almost at equal footing. Only in a few respects *Saint-Martin* is still dependent on *Sint Maarten*. *Saint-Martin* has only a very small airstrip so nearly all tourists land at the international airport on the Dutch side. The large cruise ships, whose passengers disperse over the whole island, nearly all anchor in *Sint Maarten's* Great Bay. Yet *Saint-Martin* has some advantages over *Sint Maarten*. Whilst *Sint Maarten's* development followed the 'free play of market forces,' careful planning in *Saint-Martin* left some rural areas unspoiled, creating a beautiful natural backdrop to the more urbanized localities. Furthermore, the new architecture has an attractive West-Indian appeal. When the many development plans are fully realized, it is not inconceivable that the pecking order between the two sides of the island will be reversed. That will put the relationship between the two Saint Martins to the test, in a situation where not only because of the

immigration of Dutch and French 'nationals' the two Saint Martins are growing somewhat apart, but also because population growth as such made each side more self-supporting in the social and technical sense.

Unity Reconsidered

Saint Martin, that "curious anomaly from the colonial past" (Block 1991:193) is remarkable for its long sustained cultural and social unity. What makes this island different from other divided islands?

Common sense would lead one to think of its small size as an explanation. Certainly smallness removes practical barriers to unity. Saint Martin's relative global marginality – a factor not unrelated to size – has also played a role. A more active colonial interest in the past might have resulted in widening the gap or abolishing the border altogether. Yet smallness in itself is not sufficient, for after all people also quarrel in mini arenas.

We have to look to history to understand how Saint Martin has evaded the fate of some other divided islands: its shared 'ethnic' background, the benevolent partition treaty, and the accident of English becoming the vernacular. Being the tongue of neither of the two colonial powers, it served as a neutral vehicle for communication. Its position on the island is strengthened both by the global status of English and of the U.S., a country which is most admired on both sides of the border. As the U.S. never exercised formal political control over Saint Martin, no (past) colonial connections complicate or cloud the relationship.

The relationship between Saint Martin and its respective metropolitan and regional powers has been described as the main centrifugal force on the island. There can be little doubt about this effect. Yet one might wonder what the situation would be without the 'external' powers. May be their influence is more contradictory: two independent Saint Martins might have more difficulty sticking together. Now they are never (completely) responsible for the decisions made, there are always others to blame.

Wilson and Donnan (1998) analyze international borders as a tool with which to discriminate state from nation. Normally it is the nation not the state which is the elusive entity.[9] What would being a nation mean for Saint Martiners? It is clear that this feeling excludes France and the Netherlands, Guadeloupe and Curaçao: their interference is always felt as the interference of outsiders. The kind of emotion aroused by 'nationhood' does express something of the feelings Saint Martiners have for their island, notwithstanding their 'moving roots' (Richardson 1997), and their eschewal of independence. In fact the loyalty is more established now that Saint Martin is able to feed the 'sons and daughters of the soil.' Of course for Dutch Saint Martiners *Sint Maarten* is more 'home' than French Saint Martin and the other way round, but this does not harm the idea of a community which includes the whole island.

Saint Martin is one of the many cases which challenges the territoriality of the state (see the other articles in this collection and i.a. Donnan and Wilson 1994, Wilson and Donnan 1998). We have to learn to understand the territoriality of the state as a relative notion. Saint Martin also shows that this state of affairs has already a long history, which cannot be simply attributed to such modern phenomena as globalization.

It is interesting to speculate about how many 'imagined communities,' to use Anderson's (1991) term in a somewhat liberal way, will co-exist in the future, three as in the past? Two, given the renewed interest in the island by France and the Netherlands? Or one, born from a unified Saint Martin? Certainly the political unity of Saint Martin is not on the cards for the time being. As neither *Sint Maartenaren* nor *Saint-Martinois* want to become independent the border between French and Dutch Saint Martin is likely to remain. There will continue to be two Saint Martins, but what about the third dimension, the shared cross-border identity? Paradoxically, we saw that the unification of Europe had the effect of emphasizing cultural differences between the two sides of the island.

Will the emancipation of the French side, which came about by the injection of *métro* investment, destroy the harmony between them? It seems unlikely. In the first place because there are no old scores to settle, French Saint Martiners like to be equal to the Dutch side, but

there are no ill feelings about the past. Secondly, the business advantages to be gained from the present situation do include Euro-French enterprises. The foreign migrants were mentioned. Many of the newcomers already have a residence and a work permit. Over time many will acquire full civil rights, and then continue to link the two parts of the island.

With respect to the impact of Americanization, this global cultural influence is likely to grow and affect both sides of the island. Officially and unofficially English is gaining in importance, despite the presence of Euro-French on *Saint-Martin* and the passage of the *loi Toubon* (see note 7). Paradoxically, we saw that the unification of Europe had the effect of emphasizing cultural differences between the two sides of the island. Competition within the EU regional bloc is real, yet there is also evidence of co-operation between enterprises from different member states. Co-operation between France and the Netherlands with respect to Saint Martin barely exists. Yet agreement between France and the Netherlands on the status of Saint Martin has been made necessary by the terms of the Maastricht and Schengen treaties. *Saint-Martin* is part of the single European market and thereby an area where people and goods from Europe can circulate freely, while *Sint Maarten* with its autonomous status can still restrict the entrance of migrants and goods from Europe. If *Saint-Martin* were to be included in a EU tax regime, the differences with freeport *Sint Maarten* would create substantial inequalities. Moreover the border should have to be controlled, which is inconceivable on present-day Saint Martin.

Formal cross-border co-operation is as yet not much developed. As far as organizations such as SMECO and 'We fo We' are concerned, co-operation is generally restricted to cultural affairs, such as joint musical, theatrical, and literary meetings. Yet, there are examples of joint action, and one concerns the very symbol of unity on Saint Martin, the border monument. It happened in 1989. The border monument, a simple pillar with an inscription, was erected in 1948 to commemorate three hundred years of friendly coexistence. It is located at the frontier on the western road connecting Marigot (*Saint-Martin*) with Philipsburg (*Sint Maarten*). To the south of the monument a new tourist attraction was planned. The project included the construction of an eighteen hole golf-course, with sixteen holes on the Dutch side and two holes on the French side. Presumably it was thought that the idea of hitting a golf ball from the Netherlands Antilles into France would inspire many a golfer. However, putting this plan into practice meant replacing the border monument. This proposal caused such indignation throughout Saint Martin that a protest march was organized. It was a great success: the monument remained and the golf-course had to be redesigned. It was a remarkable protest: the symbol of Saint Martin's unity should not be touched. It shows exactly what Saint Martiners want: continued peaceful coexistence.

Notes

1. Fieldwork on Saint Martin took place in 1984, 1998, and 1990. The author, Euro Dutch, stayed in the French part in 1984 and 1989, and in the Dutch part in 1990. She would like to acknowledge the support of the University of Utrecht in funding this research. She is also grateful to Paul van der Grijp, Wim Hoogbergen, Diana Kay, Dirk Kruijt, Françoise Marsaudon, Bill Maurer and Bonno Thoden van Velzen for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.
2. The idea of an 'anthropology of borders' was first proposed in an earlier publication (Donnan and Wilson 1994).
3. Not all Saint Martiners approve of the terms 'French' and 'Dutch Saint Martin' as they sound too colonialist for their liking. They prefer 'northern' and 'southern' to distinguish the parts. In this article I will use the different terms indiscriminately, besides others such as the French *Saint-Martin* and the Dutch *Sint Maarten*. I will ignore the often employed description 'St.Maarten/St.Martin' for the whole island and simply use 'Saint Martin.'
4. In this article the figures relating to Saint Martiners refer to people born on Saint Martin and with either French or Dutch nationality (or both). Needless to say, these 'statistical' Saint Martiners do not exactly overlap with those who feel they are Saint Martiners and are considered to be such by others. My discussion refers to these ethnic Saint Martiners and the statistics are drawn only to give some indication of their number. Also see note 8.
5. I have followed local usage here, 'Leeward' includes Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire, and 'Windward' Saint Martin, Saba, and Saint Eustatius.

6. These figures underestimate the number of foreign residents on the island. Whilst the *Sint Maarten* census aims to include all inhabitants, whether documented or not, this does not ensure that all the residents are counted. On *Saint-Martin* only legal residents are counted.

7. One exemple serves by way of illustration. In France the 'loi Toubon,' which was passed in 1994 and named after the Minister of Culture and Francophonie, aims to protect the French language from corruption by foreign, especially English influences. Around the same time in Holland the Minister of Education proposed that university courses should be taught in English. Although the proposal was not accepted, there are no strong objections against the use of English (or other languages) for teaching purposes.

8. There are also quite a few Arubans among the Papiamentu speakers on Sint Maarten. In 1992 they numbered 1,900 (Timmer 1994:13). Among these are many people who are ethnic Saint Martiners, being the children of Saint Martin parents who migrated to Aruba at the time the EXXON refinery created many jobs. Other Arubans arrived in the 1980s after the EXXON refinery island closed down and independence loomed. The people who are born on Aruba surpass the Curaçaoans when it comes to education and pay and are only inferior to the Euro-Dutch in this respect.

9. I am assuming here that Sint Maarten belongs to the Dutch state, an assumption which is debatable. The Antilles are no longer recognized by the UN as being colonial.

References

Anderson, B. 1994: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and the Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Badejo, F. 1990: Sint Maarten: the Dutch Half in Future Perspective. In: Sedoc-Dahlberg, B. (ed.) *The Dutch Caribbean. Prospects for Democracy.* New York etc.: Gordon and Breach: 119–151.

Bakhuis, D. 1978: *Rapport van de commissie van onderzoek Bovenwindse eilanden.* Voorzitter: D. Bakhuis.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N. and C. Szanton Blanc 1994: *Nations, Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-State.* Australia etc.: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Block, A. 1991: *Masters of Paradise: Organised Crime and the Internal Revenue Service in the Bahamas.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Census *Sint Maarten* see: Volks- en Woningtelling.

Census *Saint-Martin* see: Recensement et Résultats.

Creveld, M. van 1999: *The Rise and Decline of the State.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Donnan, H. and T.M. Wilson (eds.) 1994 *Border Approaches: Anthropological Perspectives on Frontiers.* Lanham: University Press of America.

Guadeloupe, La 1993, 1996: Rapport Annuel. Paris: Institut d'Emission des Départements d'Outre-Mer.

Hartog, J. 1981: *History of Sint Maarten and Saint Martin.* Sint Maarten, N.A.: The Sint Maarten Jaycees.

Hobsbawm, E. 1990: *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780s: Programme, Myth, Reality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keur, J.Y. and D.L. Keur 1960: *Windward Children. A Study in Human Ecology of the Three Dutch Windward Islands in the Caribbean.* Assen: Royal Van Gorcum LTD.

Monnier, Y. 1983: *"L'immuable et le changeant", etude de la partie française de Saint-Martin.* Bordeaux: CRET et CEGET.

Oostindie, G. & P. Verton 1998: *Ki sorto di Reino? What kind of Kingdom? Visies en verwachtingen van Antillianen en Arubanen omtrent het Koninkrijk.* Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers.

Ouragans Luis and Marilyn 1995: Rapport de mission 17 au 23 septembre 1995. Ministère du Logement. Direction de l'Habitat et de la Construction. Direction Départementale de l'Equipement. Guadeloupe.

Recensement général de la population de 1990. 1990 Evolutions démographiques 1975 – 1982 – 1990. Départments – arrondisements, communes – unités urbaines. Départments d'outre-mer. Paris: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques.

Richardson, L. 1983: The sociolinguistic situation in St Martin. In: Carrington, L.D. (ed.) *Studies in Caribbean Language.* Society for Caribbean Linguistics: 63–70.

Richardson, B. 1996: Ancestor. Une Etude d'Histoire & d'Anthropologie Culturelle de l'île de Saint-Martin. Unpublished Thesis. Paris/Saint-Martin.

Richardson, B. 1997: Interview in *The St Maarten Guardian.* July 25–26.

Rosaldo, R. 1989: *Culture & Truth. The Remaking of Social Analysis.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Sekou, L.M. (ed.) 1996 (1990): *National Symbols of St. Martin. A Primer.* House of Nehesi Publishers. St. Martin, Caribbean.

Sekou, L.M., Francis, O. and N. Gumbs 1990: *The Independence Papers. Readings on a New Political Status for St Maarten / St Martin.* House of Nehesi. St. Maarten, Caribbean.

Timmer, M. 1994: Ethnicity on St Maarten: Key or Obstacle? Research into the Ethnic Organization of a Timesharing Resort on St. Maarten N.A. Undergraduate Thesis. University Utrecht.

Volks- en Woningtelling. 1993: Derde Algemene Volks- en Woningtelling Nederlandse Antillen. Toestand per 27 januari 1992. Willemstad: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.

Wilson, T.M. and H. Donnan (eds.) 1998: *Border Identities. Nation and State at International Frontiers.* Cambridge University Press.