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► **To cite this version:**

Marie Redon. One island, two landscapes. *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures.*, 2011, 5 (2), p. 68-85. hal-00802130

**HAL Id: hal-00802130**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00802130>**

Submitted on 19 Mar 2013

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## ONE ISLAND, TWO LANDSCAPES

Or, How does Otherness manifest itself on Other Sides of the Border? (Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten & Haiti/Dominican Republic)

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### Abstract

This article investigates the impacts and implications of the imposition of national boundaries across islands that were unified and homogenous prior to political partition by western colonial powers. The article explores these aspects with regard to two politically divided Caribbean islands: Quisqueya (shared between Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and the Island of Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten (whose different spellings reflect the French and Dutch ownership of separate parts of the Island). The article examines the creation of 'Otherness' on either side of the borders and the manner in which territorial 'Others' sharing the same island space develop mechanisms for both separation and interaction.

### Key Words

Borders, divided islands, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Saint Martin, Sint Maarten

### Introduction

The links between identity, otherness and landscape in islands divided by political borders are significant in various regards. For islands that are morphological entities with relatively similar physical features, the existence of an international border in such an enclosed space modifies the initial insular unity to a point where, in certain cases, a type of 'dual insularity' can be created. In this circumstance we can observe islands splitting into two distinct territories, which can sometimes be apparent in the landscapes on each side of the border. In these circumstances, the otherness becomes visible and legible and the country can be seen in its landscapes. Without entering into an analysis of the notion of landscape, the etymologically con-substantial link between land and land/scape can be considered as crucial. Chapter 1 Article 1a of the 'Convention européenne du paysage' ('European Landscape Convention') (2000) asserts that the term landscape "designates an area perceived as having a character determined by the action of natural and/or human factors and their interrelationships" (Council of Europe, 2000: online – author's translation) and for the purposes of this article, landscape will be considered as the visible appearance of the effects of anthropogenic forces in action.<sup>i</sup>

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The article deals with the cases of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in the Greater Antilles, and of Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten, in the Lesser Antilles (see location map, Figure 1). Apart from their shared division and their location between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean, the two islands they share are very different: in terms of their size (one is 880 times larger than the other); the densities of their populations (about 240 persons per km<sup>2</sup> for Haiti/Dominican Republic and 830 for Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten); their development level; and their political status (etc). But the key similarity between the two Caribbean islands is that their borders result from colonial initiatives in the 17th and 18th centuries - imposed by the French and the Spanish, in the case of the island then called Hispaniola (now Quisqueya); and the French and the Dutch in the case of Saint-Martin<sup>ii</sup>. In these locations, the colonial powers designed borders across the insular spaces of the islands that are now apparent in their landscapes. In both cases, the presence of political borders has meant a separation between two territories (sovereignty with full rights in one case, dependencies in the other), which materialise in the existence of a discontinuity. Two political systems face each other, on an equal level, but their functionality, their organisational systems and legal systems differ. Paradoxically, the international representations of these two islands rarely acknowledge them as divided; very few non-informed interlocutors know that the touristic and appealing Dominican Republic shares an island with the devastated nation of Haiti; similarly, when Saint-Martin is mentioned, French people have a tendency to see the island as wholly French and the Dutch tend to regard Sint Maarten as wholly Dutch, often unaware that the island that houses each entity is divided. It is indeed hard to consider the insularity bearing the otherness in itself since we are so accustomed to thinking of an island as an entity easily definable and conceivable for our understanding (Redon, 2010).



Figure 1 - Location of islands addressed in this article (Marie Redon/Geneviève Decroix)

How do insular identity and political otherness articulate around each other? How is each country defined by specific landscapes within the same island? The landscape will

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be approached as the result of a given modality of enhancement of space, which is clearly distinct on each side of the border (Haiti/Dominican Republic) or, on the contrary, very similar (Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten). We will then see that this visibility of the border in the landscapes may be the result of a will to differentiate one territory from its neighbour for economic reasons (Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten) or for political ones (Haiti/Dominican Republic). These two axes will enable us to understand how, on one island, two countries are embodied in landscapes.

### 1. The landscape as a manifestation of the use of space: a visible otherness?

A functional reading template enables the geographer to determine which form of social organisation corresponds to the division of the area they observe without it necessarily telling them about the present of the society (for example, American Middle West landscapes refer to end of 19th Century society - Claval, 2003: 187). The landscape depends on the way in which space is populated and organised. If on each side of the border the uses of the territory are different, this can be visible in the landscape. We can identify this first manifestation of otherness as a functional rupture. In the islands studied in this article, this functional rupture does not appear equally clearly.

#### 1.1. Haiti/Dominican Republic: visibly differentiated enhancements

Quisqueya island is the second largest of the Greater Antilles (c76 500+ km<sup>2</sup>). The boundary that divides it, which was established by the Aranjuez Treaty of 1777, runs from north to south whereas the terrain's relief pattern runs from east to west. The differentiated enhancements of the territories by the French and Spanish colonial powers gave their respective aspects to the two countries of the island.

An aerial photograph taken in 1984 (Figure 2) shows the frontier region of Dajabón as it had developed by the late 20th Century. The distinction between the Haitian territory, to the west, and the Dominican territory, to the east, is obvious. The contrast between the farming systems on either side of the border appears clearly and the "insular division of work" (Cassa, 1992) is definitive. The Massacre River forms the borderline in the major part of the area in the photograph. The western part appears drier, the ground is apparent on the surface, which may be a sign of the erosion afflicting the Haitian rural space, most particularly in the mountain areas, and plant coverage appears to be scattered, except along riverbeds. Cultivation plots appear to be small-sized, with a few fruit trees, a vegetable garden and a hut, exhibiting the classic structure of a creole garden (or *lacou*) (Théodat, 2001). The vast majority of cultivation plots are not connected to any visible pathway. We can clearly identify an axis towards the Haitian city of Ouanaminthe, which can be identified by several streets. This town appears less distinctly than its Dominican counterpart, Dajabón, even though it is home to about 90,000 people. The contrast is striking in the eastern part of the photograph. The darker shades indicate denser plant coverage - groves in the north, trees alongside the rivers and even inside the city of Dajabón. This town is easily identifiable. There is a clear 'chequerboard' of plots and the number of streets clearly indicates a city upon which several trunk roads converge. Plots of land, when visible, are geometrical in form (usually a stretched rectangle) and are served by pathways, suggesting a rationalisation of the agricultural land. How can we explain this obvious contrast in landscape between the two areas?

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Figure 2 – Map of Dajabón landscape adjacent to Massacre River border, Quisqueya island (Source: Dominican Army, 1984)

The key factor is the different land management resulting from the Andalusian-derived *hatos* system in Dominica, which is based on large cattle and horse breeding properties, and the intensive sugarcane plantations prominent in Haiti. As a result, the border divides the landscape between two visibly distinct approaches to space. Once the gold sought by early Europeans on Hispaniola island had run out, an economy based on agriculture and breeding was set in place. The first black slaves were introduced around 1500 but the colonists rapidly tried to limit the use of the servile work force in order to preserve the numerical superiority of the whites (with the first black insurrection occurring in 1522). If sugar and coffee cultivation implied an intense use of the work force, it wasn't the case for the *hatos*. The extensive breeding became the privileged

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form of enhancement of the island, which the Spanish started to neglect in order to exploit Mexico and Peru, larger areas with gold deposits. Other European countries decided to enter the race to the wealth and sent corsairs after the galleons and then into Spanish harbours: the British (with pillage of Santo Domingo by Francis Drake in 1585), then the French. The withdrawal of the Spanish on the eastern part of the island enabled a group of corsairs and pirates to reach the small, nearby Turtle Island in 1630, then the north-west coast of the main island. From this strategic position they slowly started to advance toward the west of the island by building small settlements in the most remote areas. This 'nibbling' process led to the division of the island and this was officially recognised in 1697 by the Ryswick Treaty. The island was thereby divided in two: a French part on the west, called the colony of Saint-Domingue, and a Spanish part on the east. In 1777, the two European nations agreed on an initial borderline (Glénisson, 2006).

The French embarked upon an intensive cultivation of sugar cane and coffee that quickly made the colony 'the pearl of the French Antilles', before Martinique and Guadeloupe achieved that status. In contrast, the Spanish colony persisted with the *hato* system but stagnated due to its eclipse by the development of the continental spaces of America. The exchanges between the two parts of the island were many and clearly dominated by the more populated French part (about three times more people at the beginning of the 19th Century). The breeders of the east sold leather and meat to the west but it was also from the west that the imported goods came. The whole colonial edifice depended on this relationship and on border permeability (Cassa, 1992). There was then almost a simultaneity in the setting of the border and in the economic complementarity between the two parts of the island; a complementarity made obvious by the development of very different landscapes. Little by little, the difference became so clear that effectively distinct environmental entities were born on this same island.

Deforestation in Haiti dates back to the early colonial period, especially after 1770, with the rapid development of coffee cultivation. By the late 1880s logging exports (mainly of *Pithecellobium dulce*) were also a major enterprise, with 140,000 tonnes exported in 1887 (Moral, 1961). Small farming enterprises also grew in number as a direct consequence of strong demographic growth. In addition to these factors, areas of forest were cleared to facilitate urban development in order to supply timber for various purposes, including firewood for brickworks, potteries and domestic use. This deforestation was less marked on the Dominican side, given the difference in enhancement evoked earlier. The forest map of the island reveals this difference: the situation is catastrophic on the Haitian side, where plant cover only occupies 1.4% of the territory, against 20% in the Dominican Republic, where a relatively efficient environmental policy exists (involving protected areas). Beyond the environmental catastrophe represented by the deforestation of Haiti (Diamond, 2010), this combines with the actions of tropical rain and the high proportion of steep slopes on this mountainous island to induce strong erosion and bad drainage of soils permeated by salt. We can observe a form of desertification connected to the salinity as well as a stronger vulnerability to cyclones. Indeed, the risks of flooding are higher on the Haitian side. The impact of cyclone Jeanne (a class 4 hurricane) in August 2004 exemplifies this: this same meteorological phenomenon produced more deaths in Haiti (2,400 deceased) than on the other side of the border (27 deceased) for the reasons referred to as well as the unbalanced quality of the rescue. In the case of Quisqueya, "the juxtaposition of different systems, along a line that is notional but rigorously imposed,

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determines discrepancies that can be read in the landscape” (Guichonnet and Raffestin, 1974: 7 – author’s translation).

### **1.2. Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten: homogenisation associated with tourism-centric activity on an Americanised island**

The second island studied is of a much smaller size (about 90 km<sup>2</sup>). The treaty that established a division of the island is older than its neighbour’s in the Greater Antilles, since the division dates from 1648, when a handful of French and Dutch representatives signed the Mount of Agreements Treaty. The Saint-Martin natural environment was “strongly marked by the drought that stopped any intensive agricultural development. Neither sugarcane, nor banana found the perfect conditions for their culture” (Burac, 1981: 570 – author’s translation).

The first white colonists grew tobacco then indigo and then, until the middle of the 18th Century, stock breeding and cotton production were the two main activities (animals were mainly sold to Saint-Christophe, a neighbouring island dominated by sugarcane production). During the 17th Century a few sugar refineries were first created in the Dutch part and then in the French part. Sugarcane cultivation occurred where the soil was deeper and more even. The final division of the island of Saint-Martin gave an advantage to the French, since their territory is slightly wider. But each group of colonists had opposing agendas for the island: if the Dutch wanted salt and a sheltered harbour, the French, as in the rest of the Lesser Antilles, wanted to possess land in order to cultivate it. Each was eventually satisfied by this unprecedented division since the Dutch part includes the deep Great Bay, a wide saline expanse with (at the time) two access routes, with the other, flatter lands more suitable for cultivation being on the French side. Without addressing processes of insular division at work, the main activities were distinct on each side of the border, which stayed notional for an extended time. The small island was then not the object of intensive and extended types of enhancement to the point of shaping its landscapes differently. Contrary to the previous case, where the inscription of the otherness has been a long-term process, the economic and demographic dynamism of Saint-Martin is recent and unequivocal.

The historically distended links with their respective European mother countries led Sint Maarten and Saint-Martin to establish a strong relationship with each other and to subscribe to the direct regional environment (much more than in the cases of Guadeloupe or Martinique, which were closely connected to the colonial powers’ home territories). We are here in presence of both a ‘shared mono-insularity’ (Taglioni, 2003) and the condition of an island located in what can be called the ‘American Mediterranean’, following Alexandre de Humboldt, then Elisée Reclus (Godard and Hartog, 2003), whereby the two territories of the island are in synergy with the American sphere. The beginning of the Americanisation of the Dutch part arose from the construction of a US military airfield in 1942 that was then upgraded to the civilian Princess Juliana airport in 1943, receiving flights from the US mainland. This intensified the traditional use of English as the common language for islanders on both sides of the border. In this context, the Dutch part immediately grabbed the opportunity represented by the development of tourism in the Caribbean area and the geographic proximity to the United States (the island is now 30 minutes away from Puerto-Rico, 2 hours 30 minutes from Miami and 3 hours 15 minutes from New-York by air). After the development of Cuba, which was arrested with the arrival to Fidel Castro’s accession to

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power in 1959, rich Americans took increasing interest in this small island with its coasts, numerous beaches and welcoming English-speaking population.

We can distinguish three stages in the development of tourism: in the 1960s, Americans bought holiday homes in the areas of the Lower Lands and a few luxury hotels were built in the Dutch part; in the 1970s, big hotel complexes were built in the Dutch part while the French part lagged behind through lack of investors; and in the 1980s, there was a clear acceleration of the growth of tourist activity on the island marked by a balancing in favour of the French part. Indeed, the tax exemption (French) Pons Law (1986) led to a twofold multiplication of bedrooms for the Dutch part and an eightfold increase in the French part over the subsequent fifteen years. This incredible rise of tourism led to a massive influx of workers on each side of the border, especially from neighbouring Caribbean islands (Haiti/Dominican Republic, Dominique, Saint Lucia, etc.). The population then went from about 20,000 people at the beginning of the 1980s to more than 70,000 today. One of the reasons for this successful expansion of tourism concerns the imagery of this small island's landscapes. Look for 'landscapes of Saint-Martin Antilles' on the Internet and you mainly find photographs of beaches and a turquoise sea, without the possibility to determine if we are on the French or the Dutch side. On the positive side, the landscape of the tropical island provides a postcard image that unequivocally sells. The negative side of the tourist phenomenon resides in the impact of its mass visitation. Saint-Martin island, fully dedicated to tourism, belongs to the American world. The dual impact of the Americanisation of lifestyles and the supremacy of tourism is visible on the French and Dutch sides (figures 3-4).



Figure 3 - the streets of Marigot, French side (author's photograph, 2005)



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Figure 4- the streets of Philipsburg, Dutch side (author's photographs – 2005)

On these two divided islands, the functional reading template shows that the contrast of the landscapes on each side of the insular border is inherent to the age and depth of the enhancements: in Quisqueya, the border grabs our attention, since the space has been modelled by distinct social and spatial systems; in Saint-Martin, the massive and recent inception of tourism has contributed to homogenised landscapes that were already very similar. The landscape appears here as a 'social product' variable according to the type of society which produced it.

### 2) The identity differentiation: an otherness that shows

Apart from its functional imprint, a landscape is, additionally, the carrier of a symbolic charge: what do we want to show? In these divided islands, the symbolic projection has two major aspects: commercial, taking into account the landscape preferences of the consumer, and political. In the latter case, the landscape comes under the collective heritage of the citizens and of political decision makers.

#### 2.1. Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten: 'Two for the price of one'

While Saint-Martin may be promoted in terms of its shared natural heritage of idyllic beaches and turquoise seas, advertisers have also tried to establish a distinct brand image for the island in order to differentiate it from its Antilles neighbours and to give added value to the 'product' by emphasising its two intrinsic but distinct identities. The slogan 'Two for the price of one' was initially used in advertisements in the 1970s and

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has been regularly promoted since in various web sites: “There's the delightfulness and soberness of the Dutch on one side, the savoir-faire of the French on the other, and the blending of both with exotic native heritage”<sup>iii</sup>; “Two regions, two cultures, twice as many occasions and choices to shop.”<sup>iv</sup> Indeed, a whole folklore of sharing exists in Saint-Martin. The legend of the division itself<sup>v</sup>, the markers of the border framed with welcoming signs, the nickname of the island (the ‘Friendly Island’) shown on some Dutch car license plates, etc; everything is given a “Disneyland twist” (Brunel, 2006) in terms of the harmonious existence that it is supposed to symbolise.

The French side offers, among other things, quality food and if we walk along the main street of Grand-Case, known as one of the Caribbean’s major culinary destinations, we can see a succession of restaurants whose signs remind us of traditional French cuisine: ‘L’auberge gourmande’, ‘Le taste-vin’, ‘Le bistrot caraïbe’, ‘Le gourmet des îles’ etc. This image is extensively promoted by a variety of advertisers on the Internet, now one of the main promotional media for tourism organisations. Witness, for example, the following extract from St Martin’s official tourism website:

*As renowned for its tiny bistros as for its sophisticated restaurants, often housed in colorful old traditional houses or “cases”, Saint-Martin has earned over the years a reputation as the gastronomic capital of the Caribbean.*<sup>vi</sup>

Apart from the promise of French gastronomy, this promotional copy emphasises the charm of a setting with shimmering colours and preserved seas. Moreover, the seafront of Marigot (the main town of de Saint-Martin), offers a succession of welcoming terraces. A number of private and public initiatives try to promote a certain authenticity for the creole identity by preserving a ‘typical’ architecture with medium sized constructions that resemble cases (creole cabins). Another asset strongly promoted on the French side are luxury shops with prestigious Parisian signs that can be found along the streets of Marigot promoting a certain type of refinement.

Despite those attractive arguments, the Dutch side continues to attract more tourists. Large passenger planes, including those of the French companies, arrive at the Princess Juliana international airport, whose traffic has steadily intensified. Espérance airport at Grand-Case does not have the same capacity and welcomed only 160,000 passengers in 2004, about ten times less than its Dutch neighbour. The ratio is the same when it comes to shipping and the presence of a deep water harbour in Great-Bay, capable of welcoming several gigantic cruise ships at the same time, has worked to the Dutch side’s advantage. In 2006, for instance, the Dutch harbour welcomed about 1.5 million visitors.<sup>viii</sup> The imbalance of infrastructures partly explains the Dutch success but as significant are catering and accommodation options based on the ‘American style’ with massive constructions, king size hotel beds and brands such as McDonald’s, KFC, Burger King, etc. that target a particular American tourist demographic. The landscapes of Sint Maarten are entirely and ostensibly made to answer to the standardised demands of mass tourism, and the trend is for increased construction. In addition to the high capacity infrastructures of transport and hotels, the Dutch side also offers locals and tourists the opportunities to avail themselves of the pleasures offered by many clubs, bars, striptease clubs and casinos (etc.)

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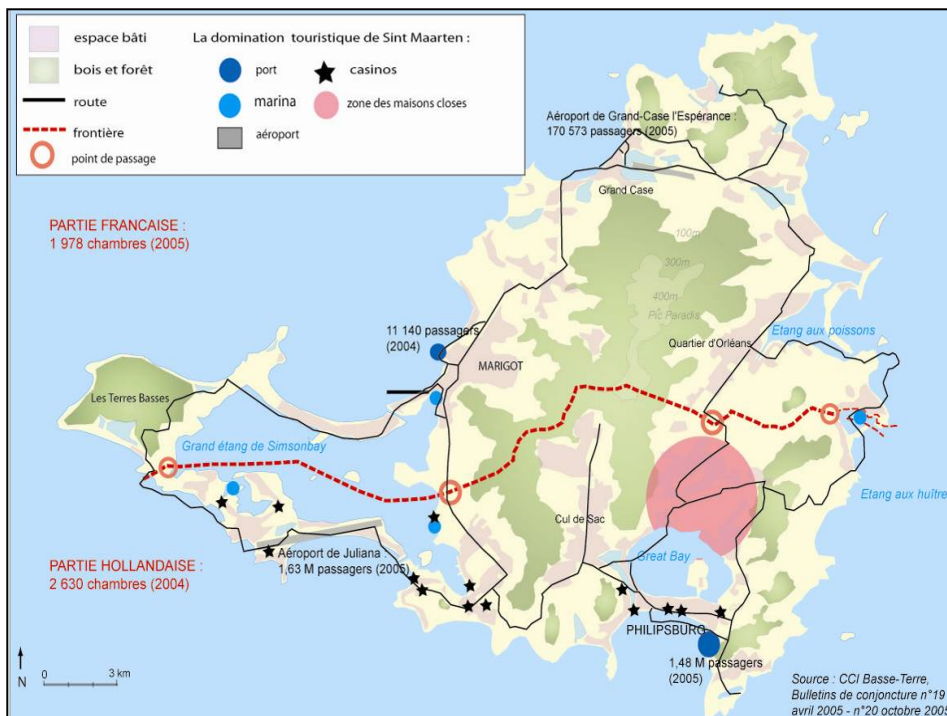


Figure 5 – Map of Saint Martin/Sint Maarten

Jean-Pierre Chardon concluded his analysis of the tourism in Saint-Martin in the following way:

*the product of Saint-Martin must be proposed according to the specificity of each clientèle... Each type of clientèle projects itself in the insular space according to its expectations and its mental representations.*  
(Chardon, 1995: 26 – author's translation).

As a result, each type of clientèle corresponds to a type of landscape, forged specifically for the potential consumer. On each side of the border, the different actors of the tourism sector occupy a landscape they have conceived as attractive and then build accordingly.

### 2.2. Haiti/Dominican Republic: the symbolic inscription of the national territory

The border is the place of contact between two national territories, the legitimate spatial hold of one state stops where the other begins. While this point of contact has been folklorised in Saint-Martin, the stakes are higher between Haiti and the Dominican Republic because of an often violent history of contact between the neighbours (Théodat, 2003). Bilateral relations are ambiguous today: on one side, the Dominican Republic shows a substantial benevolence toward its poor neighbour, which nevertheless represents a major commercial and economical partner; on the other side,

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strong Haitian immigration in the adjacent country provokes tensions concerning the management of these migratory flows by the Dominican government. The number of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, a country with a population of more than nine million people, is estimated as around one million people by some observers. The ambiguous relationship between the states can be detected in the landscapes of the border (figures 6-8).

Borders are places of contact between national territories, the place where the legitimate spatial hold of one state stops and the other begins. While this point of contact has been relatively unproblematic (and, indeed, folklorised) in Saint-Martin; the stakes are higher between Haiti and the Dominican Republic because of an often violent history of contact between the neighbours (Théodat, 2003). Bilateral relations are ambiguous today: on one side, the Dominican Republic shows a substantial benevolence toward its poor neighbour, which nevertheless represents a major commercial and economical partner; and on the other, substantial Haitian migration to the adjacent country has provoked tensions concerning the management of these migratory flows by the Dominican government. The number of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, a country with a population of more than 9 million people, has been estimated as around one million people. The ambiguous relationship between these two states can be detected in the landscapes of the border (figures 6-8).



Figure 6 - Dajabón border station (author's photograph 2010)

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Figure 7 – Jimani-Malpasse border crossing station, Haitian side (author's photograph, 2010)



Figure 8 - Jimani-Malpasse border crossing station, Dominican side (author's photograph, 2002)

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Figure 8 shows a direct mode of marking the border: the straight white line that we can see in the rear proceeding up the mountain is the border that the Dominicans have materialised. It is impossible here not to realise that there is a border that you cannot easily cross. The omnipresence of soldiers on the Dominican side of the border helps reinforce the symbolic inscription of the territory, emphasising the mutual separation. The roads leading to Haiti are populated with military posts signalled by big speed ramps or removable barriers. The closer you get to the borders, the more (armed) soldiers you will find. The territory is filled with a strong symbolic dimension that is carefully preserved. The border station of Dajabón (Figure 6), the main crossing point between one country to another, is more revealing of this territorial crystallisation clearly visible in space: we can see the name 'Dominican Republic', accompanied by two flags with their national colours, on the entrance porch of the bridge across the Massacre River. On the bottom right side, we can read 'Dajabón customs offices' and on the left appear the images of three founders of the country, and the authors of the 1846 Constitution, Duarte, Mella and Sanchez. The national symbols are clearly displayed.

But the borderline is not only a territorial delimitation, it is, as well, a place of exchange and as such shows the evolution of the Jimani-Malpasse border post between 2002 and 2010: including the construction of permanent building structures, and the installation of a permanent market place. Through this border post, as seen here on the Haitian side in 2010 (Figure 8), many goods transfer, mainly from the Dominican Republic into Haiti. In figure 6, a wheelbarrow loaded with goods is waiting to pass into Haiti, subject to the conversation between the Dominican military and the man in white that we can see next to him. Another set of pictures of the border post of Jimani-Malpasse (Figures 9-10-11), recognisable by the line traced in the mountain, show the shift from one border function to another: in the centre, soldiers watch a closed gate, but when we look to the left, toward the mountain, we notice Haitian trucks ready to load goods coming from the neighbouring country. A few moments after the photo was taken, bags of coconuts were transported into the Haitian territory (as can be seen in Figure 11). The further away you get from the border post, the thinner the separation between territories seems, as if the main axis was the location of the symbolic border, strongly marked when the margins of the border post show its real face, a face of exchanges. This becomes a reality through a massive barrier-border in the centre, which diminishes into a simple low wall topped with a wire netting before ending as wire netting alone.

The borderline itself is then visible in space, either because of a differentiated exploitation of space or by a political will to mark the territory. But this visibility itself is explicable: as we have just seen, the border represented in the customs office is very different from the border a few dozen meters away. The first is loaded with symbols and iconographies and the border is realised by an ensemble of symbols, values and abstract principles through which a community recognises itself. These range from "the flag or the shape of steeples to the accepted social structure, to religious beliefs, to educational principles" and the iconography of these "includes the official interests invested, such as popular ideas on what the group can and must do in its local environment" (Gottmann, 1966: 1763 – author's translation). The border thereby juxtaposes two different iconographies, with an imbalance in favour of Dominica's affirmation of status. But a second aspect demonstrates an everyday life of exchanges on which the border populations depend.

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Figure 9 – Jimani-Malpasse border crossing station, Dominican side – official entrance (2002) - (author's photograph, 2002)



Figure 10 - Jimani-Malpasse border crossing station, Dominican side, a few metres to the left of the border in Figure 9, where the wall is not so impressive – (author's photograph, 2002)

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Figure 11 – Further along from Figures 9 and 10 – no wall anymore, just barbed wire and goods crossing (author's photograph, 2002)

### Conclusion

What conclusion can we draw from this glimpse of landscapes facing each other, on each side of the borders that divide the substantial island of Haiti/Dominican Republic and its small neighbour Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten? First of all, that an island is not such a distinct geographical identity as might appear in representations.

*Insular Unity? While surrounded with sand or encircled with water, the archetype of an island, restricted, easy to conceive and to envisage, small and homogeneous, as well as perfectly oceanic, does not necessarily constitute a political unity. (Fèbvre, 1922: 250 – author's translation).*

The existence of divided islands shows that any ideal political unity suggested by the very shape of an island can be contradicted by the way humans have imposed themselves on such closed spaces.

On these two islands, the political border is physically defined in the insular space, opposing two territories with their own organisational logic and, in this manner, creating contrasted land/scapes. This inscription may be deliberate, in order to give the border a strong symbolism, or may simply be the result of different enhancements, to the point where anthropogenic impact produces to distinct reactions within ecosystems on the same island. Both cases demonstrate a process of differentiation in the territories. If this identity differentiation is relatively new and has been progressively marked on the face of the island, as in the case of Haiti/Dominican Republic, it arises from a need to differentiate itself from its neighbour in order to exist economically, as in Saint-Martin/Sint Maarten. The mark of French colonial organisation, with the installation of



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companies supporting a plantation economy (Lasserre, 1978), is still discernible in Haiti where the perception of this heirloom is often painful. By contrast, in Saint-Martin, this French mark is promoted as a mark of *savoir-vivre* (the 'French touch').

Whether the otherness is visible or is shown, it appears that its projection in the landscape is necessary, perhaps even more so in the restricted space of an island. Claude Lévi-Strauss provides an anthropological model to highlight this phenomenon. He explains that when in proximity human societies act simultaneously and in parallel in a double direction: one of rapprochement (even of homogenisation) and the one of diversification, of fragmentation (Lévi-Strauss, 1952). Human societies are defined "by a certain optimum of diversity beyond which they would not be able to go, but below which they can't descend either without risk" (ibid: 15 – author's translation). Above this threshold, they might lose all consistency and burst and under it, they would lose their reality and would melt into "a sort of social magma. The dialectic convergence/divergence precisely maintains this differential gap between societies, essential to their survival" (ibid: 30). This dialectic may be even stronger in the case of islands where proximity means, *de facto*, confinement.

### End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Without taking directly into consideration their natural factors, which are secondary for our subject.

<sup>ii</sup> The name Quisqueya is used to refer to the island shared by Haïti and Dominican Republic because the name of Saint-Domingue refers to the former French colony and Hispaniola is not used by the native population. Sint Maarten is the German name of Saint-Martin.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.st-maarten.com> - accessed May 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.attractions-fr/st-martin> - accessed May 2011.

<sup>v</sup> A team representing each side is supposed to have started from Oyster Pond Bay, in the east, and had to go around the island in opposite directions. The two teams met at Cupecoy Bay, in the south-west, because the French apparently ran faster than the Dutch. As a result, the borderline was drawn from one bay to the other, bypassing the mountains. There is no historical document verifying this story.

<sup>vi</sup> Saint Martin official tourism website's Gastronomy page : [http://www.st-martin.org/us/land\\_side/gastronomy.php](http://www.st-martin.org/us/land_side/gastronomy.php) - accessed September 2011.

<sup>vii</sup> 'Points de repères', *Bulletin de Conjoncture et Observation Economique et Social des Iles du Nord* n19, CCI de Basse Terre, 2005.

<sup>viii</sup> 'Points de repères', *Bulletin de Conjoncture et Observation Economique et Social des Iles du Nord* n19-21, CCI de Basse Terre, 2005-2006.

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