

12. Islanders, immigrants and millionaires: the dynamics of upper-class segregation in St Barts, French West Indies

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Gordon Gekko: “That’s great, pal, it’s really great . . . So what’s up next?”

Bud Fox: “You’re looking at it: golf, winters in St Barts, philanthropy”.

Oliver Stone, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, 2010.

A French island of 21 km² located in the northern part of the Lesser Antilles, Saint-Barthélemy (St Barts) is one of the world’s most exclusive vacationing localities. In 2007, this municipality, which used to belong to the département of Guadeloupe, acquired the more autonomous status of Overseas Collectivity (COM, for *Collectivité d’Outre-Mer*). Most of its 8600 permanent inhabitants act as a local service class to the international economic elites patronizing the island as seasonal residents, amateur sailors or vacationers (IEDOM 2009). St Barts’ specialization as a resort for the super-rich and the upper class began as early as in the 1950s. It has resulted in a distinctive set of relations between the three main groups – predominantly white – cohabitating on the island: (1) the Saint-Barths, descendants of the French settlers who populated the island from the 17th century on; (2) the immigrants, who for the most part come from Metropolitan France (and Europe) to work there; finally (3) a well-to-do clientele shared with other seaside localities such as the Hamptons, Cape Cod and its islands (Higley 1995), Saint-Tropez and the French Riviera, Portofino, and the Costa Smeralda.

This chapter describes how the three populations combine to maintain the existing class exclusivity of the site, which is its explicit model of development, and one of its main sources of attractiveness to the super-rich (Cousin and Chauvin 2012). The first section provides some historical background to the socio-economic genesis of St Barts. The second describes local upper-class sociability on the island, insisting on the importance of ostentation practices. The third shows how interactions between

vacationers and service professionals fabricate the island's socially distinctive exoticism in ways that minimize its Caribbean heritage. Finally, the fourth section examines the strategies implemented today by the Saint-Barths to orient the island's development in ways that preserve their control of numerous political and economic levers.

Our research draws on ethnographic fieldwork¹ carried out in December and January 2003–4 and 2004–5, July and August 2010; on formal and informal interviews carried out during those same periods;² and archival study of the local press.

FROM SHORTAGES TO ROCKEFELLER

A mountainous island, St Barts was discovered in 1493 by Christopher Columbus.³ The French occupied it in 1648, resulting in the permanent settlement of peasants after 1659. While the island was regularly assailed by pirates and visited by privateers, its economy gradually developed around subsistence agriculture and cotton growing. Poor whites worked often side by side with black slaves. In 1785, Louis XVI handed the island to the Swedish Crown. A first period of prosperity ensued, during which the free port of Gustavia benefited from strong commercial and demographic growth. But the end of the Napoleonic naval wars, along with competition from the neighbouring islands of Sint Eustatius and St Thomas, which were better positioned to serve as hubs for transatlantic trade, caused the gradual decline of the Swedish colony from the 1820s onwards. Commercial activities disappeared almost completely, and in 1878 the island was retroceded to France with the agreement of the Saint-Barths. Even as Europe and the United States were going through the Industrial Revolution, St Barts reverted to a shortage economy supported by a closed and endogamous community structure. The decline of port activities and the abolition of slavery in 1847 gave way to the departure from the island of almost all of its black population, for lack of sufficient land to exploit. Much later, this exodus allowed numerous promoters of local tourism to recurrently use as a selling point the fact that the population is not *métissée* (miscegenated) in St Barts – even if it wrongly implied slavery had never existed on the island.⁴

The development of luxury vacationing in the Caribbean gradually put an end to over a century (circa 1840–1950) of insular destitution: during that period, the difficulties of daily life, along with isolation from the French mainland, had led many Saint-Barths to emigrate to neighbouring islands or to the American continent. Fishing, farming, and small domestic craftsmanship were about the only local activities available (Leiris

1955; Benoist 1966; Morrill 1977). But, in 1957, David Rockefeller Sr, who had just discovered St Barts during amateur sailing trips, bought a promontory of 27 hectares overhanging the Anse de Colombier, one of the island's most beautiful coves, and built a villa on it. He also bought two other plots of land located on Mont Jean and in the Anse du Gouverneur. The first one was sold the following year to another investment banker also fond of sailing, the French–Swiss Edmond de Rothschild (1926–97). The second was bought by the American Francis Goelet (1926–98), heir to a Francophile high-society family of Manhattan real estate developers. During the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, many other friends and partners of the Rockefellers⁵ – primarily middle-aged Americans – began patronizing St Barts and established secondary residences there, leading their neighbours from Park Avenue and elsewhere to do the same (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 2007, p. 151–2). Those arrivals inaugurated the island's mutation into an 'exceptional site, ensuring a family-oriented and confidential ambiance to tourists during the high season, and a high degree of security, distinguishing this destination from the other Caribbean islands' (Baverez 2000, p. 30, translated by us). Real estate and temporary accommodation became very expensive in the 1980s. Access to St Barts has also remained difficult: landing is only possible for small planes, liners cannot dock in the harbour, and there is no public transportation on the island. As a result, St Barts 'captured the high-end clientele, intent on preserving the destination's confidentiality' and 'the market segment of super-yachts, rapidly expanding in the Caribbean' (Baverez 2000, p. 26). On the island's streets, very dense retail activity developed, centred on French luxury products. Indeed, processes of mutual symbolic legitimization between the place, its residents and commodities that are sold in Saint-Barthélemy, have led to the reinforcement of the local spatial brand (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1992). Its prestige is all the more easily appropriated as the brand presents a rich distinctive polysemy: today 'St Barts' simultaneously connotes insular exclusiveness, tropical exoticism, French refinement and Euro-American cosmopolitanism, while evoking the transatlantic mobility inherent to luxury yachting.

Thus, our research has strong links to the sociology of bourgeois seaside resorts and to the analysis of upper-class multi-territoriality, initiated in France in the last 20 years by Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot. But several aspects also distinguish this case study. Past research by Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot mostly focused on the first generation of resorts (Deauville, Biarritz, Arcachon), whose rise during the nineteenth century was connected to the aristocratic sociability of the Second French Empire and to railway development. Today those localities have lost part of their prestige and their attractiveness to economic elites, notably

in favour of the French Riviera. They are now mostly patronized on weekends, and less socially selective than in their early days. By contrast, St Barts was 'discovered' by the high bourgeoisie and became one of its retreats at a time when tourism was already a mass phenomenon. It developed primarily by attracting rich Americans, taking advantage of the growth of air traffic in the Caribbean. Today, it continues to receive the world's wealthiest families for seasonal stays, and to maintain a high level of exclusivity. It is therefore a better adapted site for the contemporary study of the spatial segregation of the super-rich.

A SEASIDE HAUNT FOR GLOBAL BOURGEOISIES

While the island hosted only a few hundred visitors in 1963, there were 47 000 in 1980, and 323 850 in 2007 (INSEE 2009). Those figures signal obvious but moderate touristic development compared with most of the Lesser Antilles (McElroy and De Albuquerque 1998), especially the neighbouring island of St Martin (Chardon and Hartog 1995a; Redon 2006). St Barts has primarily remained a socializing site for the upper classes, both the old bourgeoisie and the newcomers. Even in times of global economic crisis or during the boreal summer, when most of their wealthiest customers prefer the shores of the Mediterranean or the Northern Atlantic, the island's 635 rental villas⁶ and almost all its 520 hotel rooms are offered at a price making them unaffordable to middle-class vacationers (IEDOM 2009, pp. 39–40). Their owners prefer to take the risk of keeping their properties temporarily vacant and thus miss monetary profit opportunities rather than to adopt a strategy of partial democratization that could lead to the symbolic devaluation of the destination.

A second concern for the island's regular patrons is to avoid co-presence with a mass of less wealthy 'spectators' personifying for them the spectre of social promiscuity associated with Saint-Tropez. Acting on those fears, shop owners and inhabitants of St Barts' main town and capital, Gustavia, staged a protest in January 1996 against cruise liner tourists brought on the island for a one-day visit. Three years later, the number and size of ships authorized to land their passengers in St Barts were officially restrained by local authorities. Cruise passenger visits have been cut by 60 per cent since then, plummeting from 106 656 in 1998 to 42 477 in 2008 (IEDOM 2009, p. 40).

In contrast with this drop in middle-class and upper-middle-class tourists, the old United States' East Coast families which originally patronized the island were joined by many of their European friends and counterparts in the 1970s, and later by the new tycoons of the global economy. During

New Year celebrations in January 2005, the cove of Gustavia accommodated Bill Gates, Paul Allen (Microsoft founders), Larry Ellison (Oracle founder) and Roman Abramovich⁷ among others. Their respective yachts, all registered in British offshore centres – George Town (Cayman Islands) or Hamilton (Bermuda) – can be described as floating palaces. They are simultaneously symbols and vessels of their residential multi-territoriality. Old patrimonial families and new industrial elites intermingled with entertainment moguls such as David Letterman, Steven Spielberg, Jerry Bruckheimer and Sean Combs, as well as with many fashion, music and Hollywood stars such as George Michael, Uma Thurman, John Travolta and Brad Pitt, who would walk the streets and patronize the beaches eliciting no visible sign of local excitement.

However, socializing by business and show business celebrities on the island is often confined to private spaces (boats and houses). This is true both during the ‘landlord month’ (August) when villa owners enjoy their houses in the calm of the low season and visit each other. But it is even more salient during the very high season around Christmas and New Year celebrations. For instance, on 31 December 2009, Roman Abramovich invited (and in some cases privately flew in) 250 noted guests to his new property, where he offered them a pop music concert by Prince, Gwen Stefani and Beyoncé, along with a party intended to mark his establishment in St Barts by expressing unequalled magnificence, for a total cost of US\$5 million.

Festive commercial venues such as beach bars, restaurants and night-clubs generate a higher degree of social mixing: they are also patronized by less wealthy vacationers, as well as by immigrants and Saint-Barths. Thus, the Yacht Club, the island’s most prized discotheque, is not primarily frequented by yacht owners. True, one night in January 2005, one could see Colonel Qaddafi’s sons seated nearby members of the British and French branches of the Rothschild family, sharing the dance floor with them along with American actor Zach Braff. However, most of the customers around them were less rich or less prominent in the media. The Yacht Club and the Nikki Beach – another popular local venue – have numerous attributes in common with some of Paris’ Right Bank nightclubs. Both offer a dramatization of success appealing to the economic upper class and those aspiring to it (Réau 2006), and provide the possibility of ‘meeting’ multi-millionaires without having to know them personally. Wealth is performed without always being really possessed. Fame seems to be acquirable by mere contact with famous people, or with the places they have patronized, which are regularly mentioned in the international press in the case of St Barts. Finally, they are places where mainstream canons of contemporary feminine beauty are exhibited, legitimized and embodied

– all the more so, as supermodels and other professional mannequins often figure among the clientele of the winter high season.

Those are favourable venues for practices of ostentatious spending, occasioning for a few hours an apparent narrowing of economic gaps between customers, whether the €2215 magnum of Cristal Roederer represents an exceptional collective effort or an insignificant individual expense.⁸ The consumption of such bottles cannot go unnoticed. First, it qualifies the ordering party for a table and seats, allowing them to take an exclusive although publicly visible place within the venue. Second, each bottle is brought in with a clamour. The ice buckets are endowed with sparkle cannons whose pyrotechnics attract looks from all corners of the room. Such manufactured visibility promotes competitive consumption between tables, often triggered by the venue's owner and his or her friends. This competition can sometimes lead to the purchase of entire champagne cases. Although most bottles are consumed, others are occasionally showered upon the party, or shared with neighbouring tables.

Among other St Barts places combining characteristics of a bar, a restaurant, a beach and/or a nightclub, the Yacht Club and the Nikki Beach contribute to a global space of entertainment and partying, which is simultaneously worldwide in its reach and limited in its clientele. From 25 December 2009 to 9 January 2010 – and every year since – the Yacht Club hosted the VIP Room's team and events. The association with this prestigious and flashy Paris nightclub, which relocates to Cannes during the Film Festival, to Monaco during the F1 Grand Prix, and to Saint-Tropez during the summer, strengthened the island's position within the jet-set calendar. Along with the Nikki Beach brand, whose few establishments are present in Miami and Saint-Tropez as well as Marrakech and Ko Samui (in Thailand), it contributes to reinforcing and expanding the geographical repertoire of luxury seaside leisure (Corbin 1994; Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot 1994, 1998, 2000).

In contrast with the latter destinations, however, St Barts is more often chosen for family-oriented vacations. During summer afternoons around the swimming pool of the Hotel Guanahani, an establishment on the island's north-eastern shore, adults of all ages danced to house music mixed by a guest DJ (Claude Challe and his own family in August 2010), as children played in the water, and nannies swung a little while cradling the younger ones. At Le Ti St-Barth (a lounge-restaurant in Pointe Milou), late teenagers dined, drank and danced⁹ side by side with their parents and grandparents,¹⁰ until the latter paid the evening bill using their AmEx Centurion Card, recognizable by its characteristic black colour. Such inter-generational co-presence results in a certain level of restraint, limiting exaltation, intense dancing or the overt sexualization of

interactions. This restraint distinguishes St Barts from other elite resorts where the festive supply is more differentiated or more geared towards amorous encounters.

Caribbean ethnology and the sociology of tourism have studied extensively the successive migration and acculturation processes that led to the archipelago's contemporary diversity, including those processes related to the development of tourism in the most popular destinations. By contrast, however, social scientists have rather overlooked the often smaller and less populated islands – in the West Indies and elsewhere – that turned into specifically upmarket vacation spots: for instance St Barts, Mustique, Saba (in the Caribbean) and the Out Islands of the Bahamas, but also the Île de Ré (in France), Capri (in Italy), Formentera (in Spain), Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and Mount Desert Island (in New England). Yet, the study of St Barts shows how heuristic the understanding of these territories can be for the sociology and social geography of the super-rich. First, they interrogate the articulation between geographical insularity, spatial isolation, social self-segregation, and the imaginary of remoteness (Bernardie-Tahir 2005), thus allowing comparisons with the more 'urban' Fisher Island in Florida (Hay and Muller 2012) or Sentosa Island in Singapore (Pow 2011). Second, these resort localities are even more segregated and socially exclusive than the most high-end neighbourhoods of the global cities, where so many of the super-rich have their main residences. Third, as holiday escapes, they enable us to observe specific forms of upper-class sociability and inter-class relations: the rich may no longer be the only leisure class, but their forms of leisure still function as marks of distinction (Réau 2011). In addition, and in a more methodological perspective, our fieldwork pinpoints the fact that – if individually owned, and entirely or almost entirely privatized islands do obviously exist – many other luxury islands are, like St Barts, largely made of public spaces where numerous interactions are directly available for social scientific observation.

IMPORTING GENERIC EXOTICISM

In St Barts, as elsewhere, facilities and services offered to rich vacationers come with discourses celebrating authenticity and personal regeneration (Rauch 1988; MacCannell 1999; Cousin and Réau 2009) for which local business managers present themselves as inspired mediators. Here, however, this offer to rediscover oneself entails no change of cultural landscape, nor any emphasis on an exoticized local culture. Secondary residences on the island do not come from the rehabilitation of traditional

Saint-Barth houses, aside from a few cases. Among the 50 or so touristic restaurants, only one specializes in Caribbean cuisine (the owner comes from the island of Marie-Galante): most of them – even when advertised as ‘world cuisine’ – offer no Creole dish. The music played in bars and nightclubs is imported from Europe and the US. That which is composed on the island fashions itself as emancipated from the local legacy.¹¹ Finally, statistical data (INSEE 2010) complemented by direct observation indicate that the service staff in contact with hotel and restaurant clients come mainly from Metropolitan France, rarely from St Barts and almost never from the rest of the West Indies.

Employees in those establishments bring with them high-end international standards, as much by their schooling as by their accumulated professional experience in the luxury world (from palatial hotels to haute couture boutiques), and by the type of service they offer [corporate hexis (Bourdieu 1990), interactional scripts with the clientele (Goffman 1967), products presentation]. Indeed, the comfort standards, practices and expectations of continental luxury, which surfaced in St Barts during the 1980s, have gained ground since and became hegemonic in the 2000s. Today for example, vacation houses conceived by Saint-Barth builders compete with an increasing number of creations by international architects. In all domains, former production styles are becoming stigmatized. Thus, one establishment run by Saint-Barths was signalled disapprovingly as a ‘local restaurant’ by vacationers (‘they still haven’t understood what a restaurant is’, proclaimed a villa owner to us in August 2010, warning against patronizing it).

Exoticism is nonetheless ubiquitous in St Barts, but it is almost always imported from elsewhere. ‘I remember thinking how strange it was that elements of the original house, like the support beams from Bali, or the stone paths or certain views, reminded me of my grandfather’s farm in Indonesia. It felt oddly familiar and comforting’, recalled Miki Singh, evoking the purchase of his estate in Gouverneur (*VIP Guide St-Barth* 2004, pp. 51–4).¹² The valorization of cultural otherness, with its investments in symbolic universes reputedly old and sophisticated such as Bali, Polynesia, Brazil or Sub-Saharan Africa, functions mainly by importing and adapting to St Barts the geocultural references of global exoticism. More precisely, it brings to the island a version of exoticism that Western upper classes concur in finding distinctive, by contrast with places typical of the middle-class touristic imaginary, such as Hawaii or the Dominican Republic for example. The entire Antillean heritage remains very marginal within it.

Objects, practices and styles with diverse origins, all valorized by the tastes of the high bourgeoisie, are thus transplanted locally. As for the

island itself, it is perceived as a virgin natural terrain rather than as a pre-existing cultural substrate to incorporate. Thus architect Patrick Benaben, simultaneously invoking his scholarly training at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, new international comfort standards, and his Brazilian and Congolese experiences, claimed to ‘build smart tropical houses, real tropical houses, and not just “new” Saint-Barth cabins’¹³ (*VIP Guide St-Barth* 2007 pp. 102–6).

However, such exoticism differs from the orientalist and ‘polynesianist’ fantasies analysed by Jean-Didier Urbain’s study of the seaside resort utopia (Urbain 1994). Rather than marking a rupture with ordinary life in a deliberately derealizing gesture, this exoticism displays familiarity with the ‘great’ cultures of the world. Such relative familiarity may have been acquired by direct contact while travelling and vacationing. But it also rests on the labour of highly qualified specialists established in St Barts: these local professionals and managers (Dehoorne 2002) act as artistic and cultural directors of the island. They are the artisans of its reinvention. Most of their personal histories combine three features: (1) an official certification from prestigious training institutions, (2) empathy for the ethos of their clients, and (3) an almost obligatory passage through one or several peripheral places, from which they draw their charismatic originality.¹⁴ Those can vary from India for the yoga teacher to Africa for hotel managers expected to ensure comfort in difficult natural conditions, to East and South-east Asia for antique dealers and decorators having to assist in the elaboration of refined interiors, and to Polynesia for the night-clubs owner (or the chefs) intent on offering the rediscovery of authentic pleasures.

By contrast, St Barts’ vacationers tend to associate the Antilles, especially in their Afro-Caribbean dimension, with negative traits such as slackness or lack of safety. Numbers of Guadeloupians figure among the immigrants who have had a successful career in St Barts, often as business owners. But they are almost always white (Béké or Blanc-Pays ethnicity), even though whites only count for a small minority of Guadeloupe’s population. Thus, while their particular descent disconnects white Guadeloupians from negative Antilles associations, it also keeps them from acting as local promoters of an inclusive Caribbean heritage.

Such downplaying of Antillean creolized identity in favour of an idealized elsewhere sometimes takes unexpected forms, as in the case of Marius Stakelborough. This descendant of slaves, born in 1923 and owner of the oldest bar-restaurant of St Barts, has been the only black Saint-Barth to hold a prominent public position on the island in the last several decades. Marked by the racism of the white majority during his childhood (*VIP Guide St-Barth* 2004, pp. 22–4), he became a sailor after World War II, and

then an increasingly respected business owner in Gustavia (Wall and Wall 2008). However he only obtained the recognition he enjoys today in the 1970s by becoming an advocate – and later the very icon – of the rediscovery of the island's forgotten identity as . . . Swedish. After having learned from Scandinavian amateur sailors and vacationers that he certainly owed his last name to a Swedish ancestor from the era when the island belonged to the Crown, Stakelborough founded several associations with them dedicated to strengthening the links between Sweden and its former colony. Those initiatives led him to travel to Sweden several times and to welcome King Carl Gustaf on the island. The King then received him in Stockholm, decorated him and appointed him as honorary consul in St Barts. Hence, although Stakelborough's originality as both Black and Swedish made him an exceptional character, his ethno-cultural creolity (along with that of St Barts) remained euphemized, and was substituted for by the celebration of the island's white international past in light of its cosmopolitan present.

Processes of exoticization and constructions of ethnicity in St Barts are thus tightly connected with the embeddedness of the entire island within the global luxury world and the symbolics of upper-class cosmopolitanism.

BEYOND THE RESORT ECONOMY?

From its beginnings, the development of tourism in St Barts resulted from a combination of the arrival of immigrants and external investments, as the biography of Rémy de Haenen (1916–2008) testifies. A French–Dutch venturer and occasional smuggler born in London, de Haenen initiated the island's first regular air connections, owned its first hotel (the Eden Rock) starting in 1953, and was its mayor from 1962 to 1977. Water and power supply as well as phone lines were installed during his terms, thus establishing him as a local figure of adventure capitalism (Weber 2008) while also ensuring his reputation as master builder concerned with long-term development. Today, St Barts' hotels and luxury real estate figure within the portfolios of many international investors, such as Laurence Parisot (the current head of the French national business organization), who also owns a villa on the island, or André Balazs (the American owner of several high-end hotels, including the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles).

However, the Saint-Barths – particularly the large historic families like the Magras, the Lédées and the Gréaux – have maintained control over entire sectors of the island's economy and over local politics. They hold a quasi-monopoly over available land, construction companies,¹⁵ hardware stores, food retailing, and transportation. Many of them have

become multi-millionaires (Chardon and Hartog, 1995b). Even though they now only make up half the permanent population of St Barts, they still dominate the legislative and executive bodies of the Collectivity, and represent it in the French Parliament: Michel Magras, the Senator for the island, is the younger brother of Bruno Magras, President of the COM. Indeed, the local ruling class has been using its political influence to secure its long-term perpetuation. For the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new one, they have held the power to recognize or deny official residency status (and thus potential voting rights, in the case of French citizens) to immigrants established on the island. More recently, they organized St Barts' transition to the status of Overseas Country/Territory (OCT) of the European Union. The new status, approved in October 2010 by the European Council, became effective on 1 January 2012. It allows St Barts – no longer directly subject to EU law – to exert local control over the permanent and temporary immigration of foreign workers (including non-French European citizens).

Such demographic restrictions have officially been justified by concerns for preserving the island's natural environment, and for ensuring the total safety of people and property (routinely presented as a decades-old characteristic of St Barts). In the last few years, those restrictions have also involved a stricter control of the local planning scheme and a quasi-total freeze on building permits. Those delivered today are for the most part authorizations to demolish in order to rebuild something more luxurious on the same plot.¹⁶ Restrictions resulted in an increase in the socio-economic status of buyers (two local real estate agencies have now partnered with Sotheby's and Christie's respectively), thus reinforcing the island's collective bourgeois cultural inwardness. In addition, among other situational boons, local selectivity has benefited St Barts' permanent inhabitants through the generous euergetism of the billionaire seasonal residents, from the island's first asphalted roads offered by David Rockefeller half a century ago to the Collectivity's new sports facility funded by Roman Abramovich in 2010.

However, land restrictions and prohibitive real estate prices have made it impossible for working- and middle-class immigrants to become homeowners on the island, discouraging them from settling there in the long run. And sometimes, the tightness of the market even hurts the interests of hotels and restaurants in need of affordable housing for their workers.

Yet, several recent developments could presage St Barts' diversification beyond the resort mono-economy characterizing it today. The generalization on the island of high-speed Internet, whose capacity will increase

even more upon completion of the fibre optic cabling that began in 2008, already allows numerous residents and vacationers to work from there. Some multinationals have moved part of their staff to the island: in the luxury sector, for instance, the Hermès International group's regional head for Latin America and the Caribbean is based in St Barts. Also, more and more local consulting professionals (lawyers, tax specialists) offer to assist companies in taking advantage of the new legal context: the COM status conferring autonomy to St Barts in fiscal matters. Householders who have been residing there for more than five years are exonerated from almost all national taxes. Local companies only have to pay the Collectivity an annual flat tax of €300, plus €100 per worker, up to a cap of €5000. According to several analysts (see Chavagneux and Palan 2007, pp. 13–14), such generalized tax exemption could trigger the gradual constitution of an offshore financial centre in the increasingly autonomous elite residential haven that St Barts is today.

CONCLUSION

Exploring an area overlooked by the social scientific literature of the last decades, this chapter described the features and transformations that have made the island of Saint-Barthélemy a beacon of social exclusivity and upper-class inwardness. We have shown how Atlantic insularity, small size, and white ethnic identity combined to make it a privileged meeting spot for and between US and French elites, while keeping mass tourism at a distance. 'St Barts' is thus now well settled in the global territorial space of the high bourgeoisie.

The particular type of social mixing that was gradually established between vacationers, immigrant professionals of the luxury sector, and the Saint-Barths, allowed for the importation of high-end generic exoticism on the island: a brand of exoticism which owes much more to the international upper class' strategies of cultural distinction than to Caribbean heritage.

In addition, local complementarity between these three groups ensured that the rewards of concerted development benefited them all. In particular, it allowed historic Saint-Barth families to preserve their local political power, and their control over many economic sectors. By insisting on the multi-class co-production of elite seaside spaces, which up to now had only been done exceptionally (Dolgon 2005), we bring attention to the roles of service relations and upper-class dynamics of distinction in the reconfiguration of local cultures within the places patronized by the super-rich.

NOTES

1. We thank Carole Cousin and Tabatha Lyn, without whose help the fieldwork would not have been possible. We also thank Niko Besnier, Luc Boltanski, Julien Bonhomme, Guy Numa, Monique Pinçon-Charlot, Anne Raulin, Monique de Saint Martin, Martine Segalen and Tommaso Vitale for their comments on previous versions of this text.
2. The first two rounds of fieldwork were conducted by Bruno Cousin (who was housed in Saint-Jean in 2003–4, and in Vitet in 2004–5), and the third one by both of us in 2010 (we were housed in Grand Fond). Each time, we have benefited from material facilities (accommodation and a car) made available to us by Carole Cousin, Bruno's sister, who lived and worked in St Barts for 15 years, and who was our initial local contact. Most notes and quotes were gathered through participant observation.
3. At the end of the fifteenth century, the island – named *Ouanalao* – was between the territories of the Taínos and the Caribs, an expansionist people often at war with their neighbours, and mounting raids against them (Allaire 1980).
4. These advertising practices almost disappeared after 2006, when the newly-born website *Mémoire St Barth* (www.memoirestbarth.com) started a public campaign of memory work against them. This site also offers the most complete bibliographical compilation on the history of the island.
5. A prestigious figure (among the super-rich themselves), acting both as symbolic promoter and property developer, has often played a crucial role in the rise of new luxury resorts. Notable historical examples are the part played by the Duke of Morny in the development of Deauville, Normandy (during the 1860s); by John D. Rockefeller Jr and his descendants in Mount Desert Island, Maine (since the 1910s); by Noémie de Rothschild and her son Edmond in Megève, French Alps (from the 1920s on); by Giovanni Agnelli in Sestriere, Italian Alps (during the 1930s); and by the Aga Khan in Costa Smeralda, Sardinia (since the 1960s).
6. In 2006, there were 3350 main residences and 561 secondary residences on the island (INSEE, 2010). The latter are generally rented out when their owners are absent, making up the bulk of the rental housing stock. During the Christmas break, they are rented for a price that can vary from about €10000 to several hundred thousand euros per week, depending on their locations, sizes, and levels of luxury. Like big yachts, they are thus sources of both profit and use value for their owners.
7. First, 2nd, 5th and 25th world's richest people according to the 2004 *Forbes* ranking. In 2009, Abramovich, the Russian oligarch who already owned three super-yachts, including the longest ever built (*Eclipse*, 163 m), bought for US\$90 million from the Indian-Indonesian-American Miki Singh the 28-hectare estate which until 1998 had belonged to Francis Goelet, and 40 years earlier to David Rockefeller.
8. The three-litre jero boam of Dom Pérignon costs more than €5000. As for those of Cristal Roederer – which St Barts' establishments order in advance for New Year's Eve – they are sold €12000 per unit. Prices rise exponentially with bottle sizes.
9. Drinking is illegal in the US for those under 21, making the island all the more attractive to young Americans.
10. According to an estimate by the Tourism Office of St Barts, in 2007 vacationers paying for a villa rental (for their family and/or their friends) were 55 years old on average (IEDOM 2009, p. 39).
11. US singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffett, a eulogist of 'island escapism' and a regular of St Barts, is considered to be the main musical figure from the island.
12. Similarly, one of the properties of the late Edmond de Rothschild in the *Anse Maréchal* was built by shipping traditional houses from Indonesia. More recently, during the 2000s, several houses were built in Bali to be reassembled in St Barts.
13. The word 'new' was already in English in the original French quote.
14. Each annual issue of the *VIP Guide St-Barth* contains 10 to 18 short interviews retracing the personal biographies of notable permanent residents of the island. Supplemental life histories were collected through fieldwork.

15. However, several construction companies employ Portuguese immigrants and some have been founded by them. The Portuguese community counts for about half of the (non-French) foreigners residing in St Barts, thus 6 per cent of the permanent population of the island (INSEE 2010).
16. However, some new large-scale projects are currently being discussed (Ward 2011).

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