

# 'Texelian at Heart': The Articulation of Identity in a Dutch Island Society\*

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*Some anthropologists perceive an increasing nationalisation or even globalisation of cultures and identities. Others, however, stress that in many places villagers assert their right to a local identity. This article discusses how the inhabitants of the Dutch island of Texel have renegotiated and articulated their identity within the context of processes of nation building and state formation in the Netherlands. It aims to show that nationalisation of culture and localisation of identity are inextricably intertwined.*

Shortly after arriving on the Dutch island of Texel to conduct anthropological fieldwork in December 1989, I noticed that in front of my neighbours' house a flag with horizontal green and black stripes was flying from a flagstaff. I was not initially familiar with this flag, but I soon discovered that it represented the colours of Texel and that similar flags decorated scores of other buildings on the island.

When I started to look more closely at the use of the colours green and black, I discovered that Texelians also employ them in other situations to symbolise their 'islandship'. Many cars on the island have stickers with the word 'TEXEL' on a background of green and black. The motto of the local newspaper is 'Green-black, Texelian at heart' (it rhymes in the vernacular: *Groen-zwart, Texels in het hart*). Green and black are painted on the funnels of the ferries maintaining the connection with the mainland. Nearly all local sporting clubs use green and black sportswear, and scores of houses in the island's villages are adorned with green and black shields. I even saw a young man with the name and colours of Texel tattooed on his upper arm.

This colour symbolism was my first observation of and confrontation with a manifest aspect of Texelian identity. I soon found that this identity is also

evident in other aspects of community life, which the locals regard as 'genuinely Texelian'. The revitalisation of old customs and observances, the rise of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) and a growing awareness of and attention given to *Texels eigen* (literally Texel's Own, a shorthand for the island's cultural heritage) are but a few examples of an increasing local consciousness or localism.

In her working definition, Jane Nadel-Klein states that localism refers to 'the representation of group identity as defined primarily by a sense of commitment to a particular place and to a set of cultural practices that are self-consciously articulated and to some degree separated and directed away from the surrounding social world' (1991:502). I subscribe to this definition. I prefer the concept of 'articulation' to the more usual notion of 'construction' of identity, because the latter seems to imply that people lend meaning to their identity in strictly intentional ways. This, however, is only partly true: identity is also the result of unintentional behaviour and thought. Thus, people do not usually celebrate feasts, participate in rituals or keep artefacts in museums with the aim of constructing their identity, but for other reasons. Yet, such activities can indeed become important referents of identity. Moreover, the concept of construction could easily bring to mind the idea that people work with cultural 'building blocks', chosen more or less at will, to create identity. Appealing though this idea of *bricolage* may be, it obfuscates the fact that identities are not new and cannot be created wilfully. What is important is that identity can change, that it is a relational concept both socially and temporally: it refers to the process of becoming conscious of 'others' and emphasising the ways in which people differ from 'others', both contemporaries and forebears. As such, it is part and parcel of historical transformations in the wider society; as Löfgren stresses, 'it is [the] dynamic and dialectical approach to identity management that is important' (1989: 9).

This article follows this approach and deals with the articulation of Texelian identity from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. It aims to shed light on the transformation of identity within the context of nationalisation and localisation of culture and identity. Some anthropologists, sociologists and historians stress that there is a tendency towards nationalisation or even globalisation of culture (see, for example, Weber 1976; Frykman & Löfgren 1987; Featherstone 1990), while others emphasise the uniqueness of local cultures and deny any tendency towards cultural homogenisation (see, for example, Cohen 1982, 1985, 1987; Sandsdalen 1988; Rodgers 1991) or postulate a revitalisation of local sentiments and identities (Boissevain 1991a,

1991b). This raises the question of whether the articulation of identity on Texel is yet another example of a process of localisation which seems to contradict the view proposed by those who point out that the world is becoming more closely integrated in a cultural sense. However, this article will show that these processes are related and that pressures to homogenise culture may even have the opposite effect of generating desires for a locally distinctive cultural identity.

Before stating my arguments, I shall briefly present background information on Texel. I then present the consequences for the culture and identity of Texel folk of the nationalisation of Dutch culture through processes of integration and civilising offensives. I shall then discuss how Texelians became aware of, and began to articulate, their local identity. To shed more light on this matter I delve somewhat deeper into the development of a local feast called *Ouwe Sunderklaas* (a name which cannot be translated but which has vague connections with old Santa Claus). The intra-local symbolic boundaries perceived by Texelians are also considered before I present some final reflections on theoretical considerations.

### The Setting

The island of Texel, to which the natives fondly refer as 'The Golden Knoll', is the southwesternmost isle of the Frisian Islands. Of its 180 km<sup>2</sup>, nearly one-third was reclaimed during the nineteenth century. Texelians therefore distinguish between 'the old land' and 'the new land'. The 'old land' ranges from between slightly above sea-level to fifteen metres above it, while the 'new land' (the reclaimed polders or fens) is just above or just below sea-level. Dunes protect the island from the sea on its northwestern side, while dykes protect it on the southeastern side. The island is approximately thirty-five kilometres long and ten kilometres wide and is separated from the mainland by the Marsdiep Strait. A regular twenty-minute ferry service, maintained by two modern double-decker vessels, connects the island with the mainland.

The population of the island has grown from 6,000 at the turn of the century to around 13,000 in the 1990s. There are seven villages, the largest of which is Den Burg (about 5,300 inhabitants), and the smallest, De Waal (about 250 inhabitants). The other villages are Oosterend and Oudeschild (each approximately 1,000), De Koog (nearly 800), Den Hoorn (around 450) and De Cocksdorp (nearly 400 inhabitants). The remainder of the population live in hamlets or in the countryside. The island is a municipality, and so not only a geographical unit, but also an administrative one.

For generations, agriculture, sheep-farming and fisheries have been important sectors of the local economy, but there has never been any large-scale industry. Since World War II, tourism has assumed enormous proportions, and today it dominates the island economy. Sandy beaches and the island's nature and culture attract many tourists from the mainland, both from the Netherlands and from Germany as well as other European countries. At the height of the tourist season in July and August there are nearly four holidaymakers for every islander. The villages on the North Sea coast (Den Hoorn, De Koog and De Cocksdorp) are especially popular and geared to the tourist industry with a host of facilities.

With regard to politics, Texelians follow national trends at elections to the second house of the legislature, the *Tweede Kamer*. During the election of 1989, the Christian Democrats (CDA) received 37% of the votes, Labour (PVDA) nearly 27% and the Conservative Party (VD) approximately 20%. During local-level elections, however, these parties are always second to a local political party – Texel's Interest (*Texels Belang*). Since 1966, it has invariably won elections. In 1990, for instance, *Texels Belang* received 28% of the votes.

In 1981, the number of islanders without religious affiliation was about 30%; 28% of the population was Roman Catholic, 27% Dutch Reformed (*Hervormd*), 9% Calvinist Reformed (*Gereformeerd*) and 5% Baptist. The remaining 1% belonged to other denominations. But there are remarkable differences between the villages. Thus, Oosterend is referred to as 'the Jerusalem of the North' (with 31% Calvinist Reformed and 30% Dutch Reformed – still 19% of the village population has no religious affiliation), while in Oudeschild the percentage of people without religious affiliation numbered almost 40%.

### Texelians and the 'Nationalisation' of Culture

Since the mid-nineteenth century in particular, the Netherlands has experienced a process of homogenisation which increasingly eliminated various socio-cultural differences between rural communities. In their book, *De eenwording van Nederland* (The Unification of the Netherlands), the social geographers Knippenberg and de Pater (1988) have shown how this process came about. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Dutch countryside was a mosaic of communities with their own habits, customs, costumes and other cultural characteristics, where inhabitants in the first instance oriented themselves to their own village and the surrounding area. Through the de-

velopment of transport and communication, mass production, increasing trade, tourism and the growing influence of central government, as well as the involvement of ever larger groups in national politics, local and regional cultures gradually gave way to a national Dutch culture. The inhabitants of different areas came into contact more often and more intensively, they became more dependent upon each other and increasingly started to resemble each other in a sociocultural sense. In other words, the condensation of networks of dependence and communication – and the accompanying growing economic, political and cultural integration of social formations in national, international and supranational units – seemed to bring about the demise of local cultures. In this process, civilising and disciplining offensives emanating from urban bourgeois circles were also important (cf. van Ginkel 1991:124, 1993: 231ff.; Goudsblom 1979; Groot 1989:114; Verrips-Roukens 1989:116).

These processes have had far-reaching consequences for Texelian society and culture. As elsewhere in the Netherlands, the idiosyncrasies of local culture gradually eroded under the influence of this development. Teachers and preachers – in alliance with local elites – played a major role in this process. Their civilising offensives were not limited to schools and churches and they constituted the driving force behind various local associations; for example, in the form of organisations such as the local departments of the Society for Public Welfare (*Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen*), a temperance society which included several theatre companies, and which sought as an underlying goal to educate, develop and 'civilise' the islanders. These relative outsiders were the messengers of the culture and the norms and values of urban bourgeois citizens. Their work yielded results. At the turn of the century, a De Cocksdorp teacher wrote: 'Regarding housing, clothing, furniture, etc., the Texelian keeps up with the times; ancestral mores, customs and traditions are disappearing altogether' (Deuzeman 1897:639).<sup>1</sup>

Developments in this direction gained momentum when contacts with the mainland intensified. However, to avoid misunderstandings it is important to note that Texelian society has never been static, isolated and self-sufficient. But since the end of the nineteenth century and especially following the establishment of a regular ferry service, Texel has, as it were, come closer to the Netherlands. Therefore, influences from the mainland penetrated the island more easily and the islanders could increasingly become acquainted with the fashions and ideas of the mainland inhabitants. Not only was it easier to reach 'the other side', but a growing number of people came to the island, either temporarily or permanently. Between 1850 and 1880 the population

increased slightly from around 5,700 to nearly 6,500, decreasing to less than 5,800 in 1903, and has grown continually ever since, especially as a result of immigration. In this respect, the establishment of TESO (*Texels Eigen Stoomboot Onderneming* or Texel's Own Steamboat Enterprise) in 1907, which started a regular ferry service the following year, was of paramount importance. The improved infrastructure also gave an impetus to tourism. In 1908, a sea-side hotel was established in the former fishing village of De Koog. Holiday-makers began to invade the island after 1948, when all Dutch employees acquired the right to a paid holiday. This had a major impact on the island's culture, as is clear from a minister's comment in 1955: 'the characteristically, typically Texelian is disappearing more and more' (Janse 1955:259). For example, many farm implements which were typical of Texelian material culture fell into disuse as a result of agricultural modernisation. Moreover, state institutions gained a growing influence in local matters. During the nineteenth century, Texel was governed predominantly by Texelians, but increasingly they had to adapt to the rules and decisions originating in the country's capital, The Hague. National newspapers, followed by radio and television, also influenced this process. For example, a local minister wrote with regard to the changes on the island between 1922 and 1952:

On Texel, the radio entailed – without Texelians noticing it – a revolution. Suddenly, they encountered the culture of the mainland, and what kind of culture. They started to consider this culture as genuine and developed a sense of inferiority with respect to their own Texelian culture. And thus life on Texel has become hopelessly blurred in a relatively short period of time (*Texelse Courant*, August 6, 1952).

However, the minister failed to say that he himself was a purveyor of mainland culture. And it is precisely because of such 'civilisers' that Texelians began to regard themselves as a somewhat backward and isolated island population, plagued by inbreeding. At least they thought that mainlanders perceived them as such, which reinforced their stereotypical self-image. Small wonder, then, that the islanders wanted to adapt as quickly as possible to what they perceived as 'mainland culture'.

According to the anthropologists Vlaming and Witte – who were born and bred on the island – in the 1950s and 1960s Texelians showed 'a remarkable alacrity with regard to integration in and adaptation to the rest of the Netherlands' (1980:12). They hold the view that the broadening of the horizon of Texelians through rapid modernisation and integration with the

mainland and the island's economic needs, which could be alleviated by the tourist industry, explain a great deal in this respect. They add, 'it [would seem] to follow naturally from these developments that people would identify less with old customs and habits' (ibid.).

Nonetheless, counterpoints developed. The islanders began to realise that there were disadvantages attached to the process of adaptation. It was precisely because of the increasing influences from without that the islanders could become aware of the unique cultural character of Texel, and all the more so when much of this idiosyncratic culture had already been eroded. In an era when the outside world appeared to be far away, Texelians lived their lives without wondering what made their ways so special. They perceived their existence as 'normal', as the only one possible. Vlaming and Witte write: 'Becoming a part of a wider community has at the same time given rise to the awareness of the typical, the uniqueness and specificity of the small closed group, of everything which was undertaken before without reflection and as normal' (1980:13).

I shall now discuss how this growing self-awareness has expressed itself in the past few decades. As Nadel-Klein writes, 'local identity ... cannot be taken for granted as having a continuous, clearly bounded existence and uniformly experienced tradition. Rather, such identity is historically produced and may be strategically renegotiated by those who claim it' (1991:501).

## The Articulation of Local Identity

### *The Awakening of Local Consciousness*

From the above it is clear that as a consequence of processes of modernisation and integration, much of 'Texel's own' had disappeared or faced the danger of disappearing. Several inhabitants began to realise that something unique was about to fade into oblivion. They tried to preserve as much of Texelian culture as they could – particularly material culture. To that end, a number of museums were established by native Texelians: an antiquities room (in 1954); an agrarian museum (1965) and a maritime and beachcombers' museum (1980). Thus, artefacts were the first to be conserved. These museum collections contain Texelian art and implements, such as, for example, traditional costumes, photographs and paintings of Texelian land and seascapes, three-wheeled carts and so forth. Of course, the rise of tourism also played a role in the establishment of these museums. However, the initiative was also intended to make the local population aware of the Texelian cultural heritage.

Due to post-war rationalisation in agriculture, two other typically Texelian objects were about to disappear: the *tuinwallen* ('garden walls') and the *scha-peboeten* ('sheep sheds'). Many *tuinwallen* – partitions of stacked balls of soil between plots of land – were levelled following the land consolidations of the 1950s. Scores of sheep sheds fell into disuse, and when they had become dilapidated beyond repair they were demolished. However, more and more Texelians started to realise that this would mean an impoverishment of the Texelian landscape. Today, *tuinwallen* are maintained whenever possible and during the last few years several new ones have been constructed. Owners of *scha-peboeten* are encouraged to maintain their sheds with the help of considerable subsidies from the municipality of Texel. At the same time, attention was given to characteristic edifices, which were declared monuments. Also, some village views (like those of Oosterend and Den Hoorn) are now 'protected', that is, they must be kept intact and no new buildings are allowed to be erected in the village centres. These artefacts and objects now constitute the 'fetished emblems' of local culture (Cohen 1987:37).

It was, however, not only the material cultural heritage that was preserved. The islanders also developed an eye for the immaterial elements of Texelian culture. They tried to record as many aspects of this culture as possible. Thus, in 1972 the *Stichting Folklore Texel* (Foundation for Texelian Folklore) was established, including working-groups which seek to record Texelian dialect in spoken and written word, to interview elderly Texelians, to collect old photographs and postcards of the island, and to establish genealogies of Texelian families. Local historical research flourishes: in 1985, the *Historische Vereniging Texel* (Historical Association Texel) was established to stimulate research into the island's history and regularly publishes a journal. In 1993, the Association comprised nearly 700 members. The recently established local radio, *Radio Texel*, dedicates much of its broadcasting time to Texel's history and interviews with elderly islanders.

All this attention to the culture and history of Texel did not go unnoticed. In 1979, a reporter for the local newspaper wrote:

[T]he interest in old local traditions flourishes ... The number of people on the island who collect old photographs, implements, stories and other characteristic matters by now runs into the hundreds. Youngsters who used to sniff at it today listen carefully to stories which old folks tell about old-time local affairs. Merchandise rises in value phenomenally when designated as 'genuinely Texelian'. The times when islanders respectfully and uncritically admired everything coming from afar seem to be gone and among some this even threatens to turn into

the opposite. After having been burdened by a collective feeling of inferiority, we are now starting to be quite pleased with ourselves. Green-black, Texelian at heart! (*Texelse Courant*, December 7, 1979).

This increasing attention to local culture and history reflects the growing self-consciousness of Texelians and at the same time it reinforces this awareness. With respect to this, it is striking that – as mentioned in the quotation above – some locally produced items are sold as 'genuinely Texelian'. These products – amongst other things sheep's cheese, duvets, alcoholic beverages and potatoes – find a ready market among the island population. As Jonathan Friedman points out, 'goods are building blocks of life-worlds ... they can be further understood as constituents of selfhood, of social identity. From this point of view, the practice of identity encompasses a practice of consumption and even production' (1990:327). That these 'genuinely Texelian' products are produced in part for holidaymakers is of no consequence for the fact that they form a source of pride for the islanders. On the contrary, it is precisely the presentation of these characteristic goods to the outside world that reinforces the awareness of the value of everything Texelian, an awareness which sometimes even gives rise to local chauvinism (see also Rosander 1988; Sandsdalen 1988). It can do miracles for people's self-esteem when outsiders show an interest in local nature and culture. At the same time, this stimulates them to preserve this nature and culture. In the case of Texel, the islanders have to 'sell' the characteristic properties of their island to keep attracting tourists. Yet, they are also ambivalent about tourists, who provide an important source of income to many, but who are also perceived as exacting priors. As one young woman put it: 'Tourists are terrorists.'

In the post-war period, the articulation of Texelian identity was also evident in local politics. A local political party, *Texels Belang* (Texel's Interest) was established. In the first year of its existence, 1962, it obtained only 1% of the votes in the municipal election, but during the next election in 1966 it became Texel's largest political party. Ever since, it has been able to count on between 25% and 30% of the islanders' votes. The driving forces of this party are autochthonous Texelians. Unlike most other parties – which are local branches of national political parties – *Texels Belang* can concentrate exclusively on local matters without having to take into account the policy directives of a master-organisation.

The growing self-consciousness is, as mentioned earlier, also reflected in the display of green and black flags and stickers. But this green and black flag

itself is, as Texel's official colours, of recent origin. It was only in 1964, during the celebration of Texel's 550th anniversary of city rights, that the flag was awarded official status. On this occasion, the organisers of the festivities said that there was no 'better symbol of the united energy of Texel' (*Texelse Courant*, April 17, 1964). Texelians themselves have considered the colours green and black as the symbol of their island for centuries.<sup>2</sup>

The festivities accompanying the celebration of city rights in 1964 and 1989 are an invented tradition. When in 1914 the island had had city rights for 500 years, there was no celebration at all. Hobsbawm (1983:9) rightly points out that such invented traditions can bring about or symbolise social cohesion and the membership of a community. However, some Texelian traditions did not need to be invented or revitalised, because they are alive and kicking, such as the *meierblissen* (Easter fires) which are burned on April 30. The celebration of a local feast, *Ouwe Sunderklaas*, on December 12 has also taken place since time immemorial, though the gusto with which people partake in it has fluctuated. I shall now go into the development of this feast, because it throws light on the articulation of local identity.

#### A Local Feast: 'Ouwe Sunderklaas'

Each year on December 12 Texelians celebrate a carnival-like feast, which they call *Ouwe Sunderklaas*. This annual ritual has a long tradition, but its origin is unknown. For the present discussion this is of no consequence, since I aim to point out that the form and meaning of this feast have undergone remarkable transformations during the present century. These changes cast a clear light on the articulation of local identity (see also van Ginkel 1994).

In the Netherlands, a feast with a similar name, *Sinterklaas* (St. Nicholas or Santa Claus), is celebrated on December 5. However, this Dutch feast – popular throughout the country and characterised by the exchange of gifts – has nothing to do with the way Texelians celebrate their *Ouwe Sunderklaas* a week later. On December 12 individuals, couples and groups of Texelians disguise themselves, wearing masks (*grimmen*) and the most curious attire. When dressed up this way, they start to 'play' (*speulen*), that is, perform songs, sketches, poems or display texts, while going round their village streets in procession – children in the afternoon, adults in the evening. Following their performances the adults visit the local pubs, where the feast is continued into the early hours of the following morning.

During the first few decades of this century, the performances could relate to a number of topics, but usually it was the masked procession itself which

was central. The players, for instance, impersonated clowns, chimney-sweeps, bears, gypsies, nurses and so on. The mummers, or *sunderklazen*, went from street to street and entered several houses where they played/performed, drank and ate. In the 1930s, enthusiasm for participating in the feast of *Ouwe Sunderklaas* diminished considerably. The local newspaper, the *Texelse Courant*, tried to revitalise the feast by giving awards for the best performances.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the number of participants began to increase again and more attention was given to the disguises.

However, it was only well after World War II that there was a clear revival of the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration. Hundreds of people participated as players and hundreds more looked on. The contents and form of the performance also changed. The subjects of the performances increasingly referred to Texelian circumstances and people who were often ridiculed in a resourceful way. The themes which were expressed by means of recitations, songs and texts took on an increasingly local character. This development was stimulated by reporters from the *Texelse Courant* – usually native islanders. Thus, shortly before the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration of 1967, the newspaper reported that, 'An *Ouwe Sunderklaas* performance in our times is the most successful when it hides some deeper sense or meaning. It should be "food for thought" concerning Texelian events and situations' (*Texelse Courant*, December 8, 1967). To achieve this end, early in December each year since the 1960s the newspaper has published a list of Texelian facts of that year which can be used by Texelians as a theme for the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration. This was very successful: for about the last two decades the performances have almost exclusively dealt with Texelian subjects. The newspaper report on 1977's *Ouwe Sunderklaas* says:

The time-honoured folkloristic feast increasingly comes up to its modern ideal: an extremely playful comment on the Texelian ups and downs of the year gone by. We hardly discovered any performances with a national or international character. Even among the youngsters home-related performances were favourite (*Texelse Courant*, December 13, 1977).

It is also striking that most texts are spoken, sung or written in Texelian dialect. Though a myriad of Texelian themes are played, the *Texelse Courant* itself, *Texels Eigen Stoomboot Onderneming* (Texel's Own Steamboat Enterprise), and the municipal councillors and civil servants constitute the topics which are played and commented upon most frequently.

All in all, the *Texelse Courant* has been important in maintaining the celebration of *Ouwe Sunderklaas* and in the rise of performing Texelian themes. Adjudication of the performances was later taken over by village committees, which prefer to reward players who have ridiculed local matters in an original manner. There is, then, during the past few years, a tendency towards the performance of strictly local and not generally Texelian events and subjects. These kinds of events and subjects, which seldom find their way to the pages of the local newspaper, tend therefore to be significant only for those who are members of such village communities.

The point of this development is that, whereas earlier all outsiders – if they wished to observe the feast – could make sense of the subjects performed, today this is no longer possible. One needs to know the ins and outs of village life thoroughly to understand what is alluded to in the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration. This has created a reinforcement of local identity. These village communities have started to develop an esoteric culture:

A local population can possess a largely unique culture that remains distinctive in that its symbolic manifestations convey meanings that are commonly understood only among those people. Performances in such *esoteric cultures* relate only to the local milieu that shares a specifically local social knowledge (Mewett 1982:222).

The songs and texts one can hear or read during the feast are almost without exception an unvarnished critical or ironic comment on the island society – and on local authorities, representatives of the impersonal central authority (Vlaming & Witte 1980) – of which the players are a part. These texts are for the islanders, as Geertz (1973: 448) puts it, 'a story they tell themselves about themselves'. The implicit message of the *Ouwe Sunderklaas* celebration appears to be: 'We are Texelians through and through and we know what is going on here.' The feast has thus become an important referent of identity for those who consider themselves to be (genuine) Texelians. This does not only hold true for those who reside on the island, but also for those who have emigrated temporarily or permanently. Many, predominantly young Texelians return to the island in order to participate in the celebration. In doing so, they remain members of the island society and its village communities.<sup>4</sup>

More than ever before, the feast of *Ouwe Sunderklaas* has become specifically Texelian and the islanders are well aware of this:

[*Ouwe Sunderklaas*] is a genuine Texelian feast that nobody else has anything to do with. Regarding this, it is good that it will be celebrated on a Wednesday this year, for ... the number of priors who do not understand the feast and persistently describe it as 'a kind of Carnival' [will] be kept to a minimum. So we will be amongst ourselves and thus it is not so awful to wash one's dirty linen in public, to learn a lesson and have fun. Although we may be tolerant and democratic (and recently also very assertive) on Texel, uttering harsh criticism of one another is not so easy, because we have to live with each other. Therefore, *Ouwe Sunderklaas* is a nice safety valve. Relative to mainland standards it is of course very cowardly to wear a mask when giving vent to criticism, but it certainly fills a need and today there is not a single soul who doubts that this is Culture with a capital C (*Texelse Courant*, December 7, 1979).

Vlaming and Witte conclude: 'The feast seems an illusion which is obstinately preserved – the phantom that the island is still an autonomous and well-ordered community, that the world does not extend beyond the island' (1980:13). However brief, the celebration of *Ouwe Sunderklaas* can create a feeling of belonging, of togetherness and of being a part of a community. Through this identification, the Texelians can project an image of unity and solidarity to the outside world.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely the communal celebration of feasts which can bring about this feeling. Not only does it reflect community members' identity, but at the same time it is a model for the expression of identity, an expression of a 'we-ideal'. The fact that this feast is celebrated when the holiday season is over can only add to this. The event is removed from the gaze of outsiders, the Texelians are amongst one another and this facilitates the re-establishment of old ties and an expression of 'we-ness'. It is telling in this respect that Texelians do not like mainlanders and tourists to participate in or watch the celebration of *Ouwe Sunderklaas*. During the 1990 celebration of the feast, one man expressed this quite clearly. He displayed a text reading 'I am genuine Texelian, because I do not perform with mainland folk.'

### Symbolic Boundaries

On the face of it, Texel not only seems to be a geographical and administrative unity, but a socially homogeneous one as well, a locality where all inhabitants reckon themselves to be members of a 'we-group' vis-à-vis a generalised 'they-group', to wit *overkanter*s ('other-siders'), as Texelians call them. This term *overkanter*s is interesting in itself. It expresses a Texel-centric worldview: from the perspective of mainlanders, Texel's location is eccentric and at the other side of the Marsdiep, the strait separating the island from the



mainland. However, the idea that Texel constitutes a homogeneous social unity is a myth carefully maintained vis-à-vis outsiders. Relative to 'other-siders' Texelians see themselves as a unity, but within the island society a plethora of symbolic boundaries are drawn. In many cases, however, these boundaries also reflect the growing self-awareness of the Texelians.

A distinction is made between 'genuine Texelians', 'Texelians' and 'imports', at least by the first group. The 'import' category consists of newcomers who have settled on the island fairly recently. 'Texelians' are those who have usually been born and bred on the island, but whose parents or grandparents were not born there. 'Genuine Texelians' are those who pride themselves on having many generations of ancestors who have lived on the island.<sup>6</sup> The notion of 'genuine Texelian' could only develop because there has been considerable immigration to the island. It is a relational concept that presupposes differentiated social knowledge of who can be ascribed to which category. The term 'genuine Texelian' appears to refer to roots in blood and soil. It also has a symbolic value, because those who count themselves as such are quite proud to do so and feel that they belong to an in-group which gives them the opportunity to distinguish themselves from others. In other words, meaning is given to and derived from this notion.

This applies today, but the same thing also occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. A Baptist minister, Jakob Huizinga, himself a newcomer, made several remarks in his diary which elucidate this point. On June 10, 1853, he wrote that mayor Keijser had said to him: 'that I [Huizinga] was a *stranger* here and always would be, since they [Texelians] were born here, lived here and died here'.<sup>7</sup> This is only one instance of the fact that the autochthonous elite regarded those who were not born and bred on the island as strangers and outsiders.

Thus, in the past distinctions and symbolic boundaries were also drawn on the island. However, it was only with the rise of tourism and the immigration to the island of hundreds of *overkanter* after World War II that local consciousness and the articulation of local identity gained real momentum. Many elderly people told me that so many 'imports' have come to live in their village, that they hardly know anyone anymore. In the past, they knew their fellow-villagers quite well and they cherished the days when they could count on solidarity and neighbourliness. Though such stories are sometimes exaggerated, many newcomers have indeed established themselves in the villages during the past few decades. The elderly villagers especially, but certainly not exclusively, experience this as a loss of community and regard the

newcomers as intruders in their more or less closed world. They often show a nostalgic longing for a better past.

Perhaps this is the reason for the growing localisation of *Ouwe Sunderklaas*, because this feast revives the ideal of a face-to-face community, a feeling of belonging and a sense of place. Groot writes:

... in several Dutch villages ... the homogenisation of the village in a material and immaterial sense remains in the experience of the inhabitants on the surface... However, this equalisation is perceived by the inhabitants as a threatening levelling of the social landscape and the possible disappearance of points of reference relevant to them. This may be accompanied by the rise of feelings of uncertainty and a sense of insecurity. The villagers are likely – often unconsciously – to respond by giving their own meaning to forms imposed from without. Through this signification 'from within' of material and immaterial forms 'from without', these villagers ... create symbolic boundaries which re-establish the feeling of belonging. Thus, they can feel secure in a structurally levelled macro-society and through the development of their own collective identity they can meet their needs to distinguish themselves from the outside world (1989:114).

Other weapons against the influence of newcomers and outsiders are, for example, monopolising the administrative positions in village and island organisations for natives of the island. These natives are 'genuine Texelians' but also 'Texelians' who have demonstrated that they hold the island and the islanders in great affection. One person told me:

There are always people who have just settled here who think that they can arrange everything for us in associations and so on, because they think they know better. But we Texelians don't like that, and these people are likely to find this out; they'll never feel at home here, because we ignore them.

This was certainly not the only remark of this kind which I heard during my research. In this respect, too, Texelians are more self-conscious than ever before.

Besides the differentiation between 'genuine Texelians', 'Texelians' and 'imports', the members of the first two categories distinguish categories among the inhabitants of the villages. They say that each village has its own character and that the mentality of the inhabitants of the respective villages differs markedly. The observations of a married couple living in Oosterend illustrate this:



**Woman:** The mentality between the villages differs completely here on Texel. The mentality of someone from Oudeschild is quite different from someone from our village, Oosterend, and the mentality of people from Den Burg is different again.

**Man:** Oudeschild and Oosterend is a difference in mentality, of course. But you should not mention Den Burg because you can find all sorts of people there. An Oudeschilder could live in Den Burg and I could also live there. But there is a mentality difference with Oudeschild, even today. Don't assume that an Oosterender would want to live in Oudeschild or that you could get an Oudeschilder to live here. Not for the world. It's like that even now.

A woman hailing from Oudeschild said: 'In Den Burg it's much more "ladies and sirs". We don't know that kind of thing here in Oudeschild.' Such contrasts were also made in the past. In 1830, an anonymous author wrote that each village seemed to have its own character: 'This even goes so far that each village has a certain feeling of "own-self" relative to the other villages, which reveals itself even in futilities' (V.D. 1830:391). In the past, these boundaries were marked symbolically through the use of collective nicknames: thus, the villagers of Den Hoorn were called *stienepickers* ('stone pickers'), those of Oudeschild, *skilderbokken* ('billy-goats of Oudeschild'), and the Oosterenders *gortbuuken* ('grit bellies'). Moreover, a boy from one village ran the risk of being beaten up when courting a girl from another village.

Within village communities, symbolic boundaries are also drawn, for example based on occupation (farmers versus fishermen) or membership of a fishing boat crew, but particularly religious affiliation. Thus, the village of Oosterend was, and to a certain extent still is, divided into two general camps: the *groven* (liberals) and the *fijnen* (orthodox).<sup>8</sup> The latter are the orthodox Calvinists, the former, those without or with only a nominal religious affiliation. This distinction was also reflected in the geography of the village (*fijnen* lived in the same neighbourhood), it determined where one bought one's groceries and it divided the corporate life of the village. However, such demarcations within the villages have become blurred in the past two decades as a result of the process of deconfessionalisation.

Moreover, to the outside world the villagers present themselves as a harmonious and united social constellation, as a closed front. In 1964, Texel's mayor wrote, for instance, that the villagers show nothing of these religious frictions to outsiders: these 'disappear into the background ... compared to the united spirit of [a] village' (de Koning 1964:197). Apparently, the image of a homogeneous community can create a strong feeling of belonging.

The gist of my remarks is that islanders can present themselves as people with an orthodox Calvinist background from the village of Oosterend, as Oosterenders, Texelians or Netherlands, depending on the context. Nonetheless, the islanders seem to identify mostly with the island society as a whole. They cherish the adage of 'Green and black, Texelian at heart'. It is no accident that Texelians drive around in cars with stickers saying 'TEXEL' and not with stickers referring to their village, such as 'OOSTEREND' or 'OUDESCHILD'. There is a unity in diversity, but a unity nonetheless. To the external world Texelians present a rather harmonious picture of their island society, even if this image is a facade. Those who do not display a certain amount of chauvinism with respect to the island will never become accepted members of its society and will not be able to feel at home. Some graffiti on the toilet wall of a local pub is telling in this respect:

I'm glad  
I'm glad  
I'm glad  
I don't live on Texel any longer (Viktor).

Beneath this effusion someone has written:

And I'm glad that you don't live here anymore.

To which another person has rejoindered:

Yeah! Get out.

## Conclusion

It is precisely because of the development towards cultural unification in the Netherlands – an ongoing process – that Texelians became aware of their cultural uniqueness. This swing of the pendulum has also occurred in other Dutch communities. The process of cultural homogenisation thus appears to be the driving force in the rise of local consciousness and the articulation of local identity. Although in the latter half of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth centuries Texelians readily adapted to the culture of the urban bourgeois messengers of 'civilisation' such as teachers, preachers and tourists, they began to realise that adaptation to and integration within the wider society implied at the same time a loss of their own identity.

Once this dawned on them, they could counter its threatened disappearance by asserting their right to their own local culture and identity. The processes of nationalisation and localisation of culture, then, are not autonomous or mutually exclusive; the former reinforces the latter in a dialectical relationship.

Thus, the process of cultural homogenisation goes hand in hand with a fragmentation of local and regional identities. These processes may seem contradictory, but cultural unification is ongoing, in spite of synchronous fragmentation. The point is that people seek an anchorage, a point of reference which can answer questions like 'who am I?' and 'who are we?'. This identification can be found, for instance, in their community, in religion or in their ethnic roots. Local communities in many cases offer their inhabitants a possibility to distinguish themselves from a culturally levelled macro-society (Groot 1989:114). Stressing the boundaries between 'us' and 'not-us' reinforces a sense of belonging. Localism is 'the continuing reference to place in assertions of a political or cultural will to distinctiveness' (Nadel-Klein 1991: 501). People do experience a deeply felt need to associate with others, while at the same time they wish to dissociate from others (both generalised others and precisely defined others). Identification is even a *conditio sine qua non* for all social interaction. The social self-image, both at the level of the individual and of the collective, is expressed most clearly through implicit or explicit contrasts (Cohen 1985:115; 1987:17). Boon (1982) even postulates that the need to make and express such contrasts is the most essential characteristic of human cultures. People perceive symbolic boundaries continually and at the same time give meaning to and derive meaning from these boundaries. Such boundaries are drawn more clearly whenever integration into larger social formations becomes stronger: 'The more complete grows the concentration of power at the centre, the more vulnerable the periphery becomes, expressing its anxiety in a localism which stresses the distinctiveness of its character' (Cohen 1982:7).

This has happened on Texel and elsewhere in the Netherlands and Europe (cf. Boissevain 1991a, 1991b; Ekman 1991). Such processes of integration usually bring about power struggles with regard to the control over the right to self-determination. Localism, the assertion and articulation of one's own culture and identity, may be seen as an exponent of this political struggle. It is a source of power, a form of cultural resistance and a symbolic weapon against a government which has concentrated power in the centre and thereby denies citizens the right to decide over their own lives. In many

Dutch regional and local societies something of what Groot designates as a 'cultural anti-levelling process' (1989:114) has developed. As a consequence of the increasing self-consciousness in local communities, the central government had to take into account the wishes and desires of people at the regional and local levels. The trends towards decentralisation and growing regional and local autonomy are examples, even though they are more often the product of political rhetoric than reality. This process is also occurring outside the Netherlands. Featherstone (1991) writes that the present phase of globalisation of culture is one in which western nation-states have had to learn to tolerate greater diversity within their borders. Hastrup holds a similar view: 'The process of globalisation has a counter effect of producing remarkable strategies of localisation and ethnicity, stressing the uniqueness of a particular locality' (1993:180). In this sense we can expect that the political, economic and cultural unification of Europe will at the same time bring about an even stronger articulation of local and national identities. Thus, anthropologists should focus their attention on the dialectics of identity formation and reformation at different levels of socio-cultural integration, a task which requires a diachronic approach. This would enable them to surmount the unsatisfactory stalemate between those expressing the view that there is cultural homogenisation at the national or even global level, and those denying this development by highlighting cultural heterogeneity.

### Notes

- \* The research on which this paper is based was conducted during a fifteen-month fieldwork period between December 1989 and March 1991. The research was funded by the Foundation for Social and Cultural Sciences of the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (Project No. 500-276-202). I thank Jeremy Boissevain, Nico Dros, Jonathan Fletcher, Piet de Rooy, Jojada Verrips and Kitty Verrips-Roukens for their constructive comments on an earlier version of this paper.
1. Deuzeman's remarks are exaggerations to a certain extent. In the 1950s, two ministers made the same comment (see below). Clearly, then, some cultural elements will have disappeared, while others have survived for a much longer period of time, or even up to the present day.
2. According to the folklorist Rasch (1944), the colour green represents grass and corn and black represents the earth on Texel. His observation is unsubstantiated. The origin of this colour symbolism is obscure. However, children in the island's orphanage wore green and black clothes as early as the sixteenth century.
3. The newspaper's publisher, a man from an old Texelian lineage, was the driving force behind this initiative. He was well aware of the imminent danger of the decline of Texelian culture. For this reason he also started to record island phenomena and people on film.
4. It is striking that scores of Texelians who have emigrated maintain their subscrip-

tion to the local newspaper, which keeps them up-to-date with respect to the ins and outs of life on the island. There are also reunions for Texelians who no longer live on the island, and many keep in touch with each other whilst residing elsewhere.

5. Boissevain observed the same phenomenon with regard to the revival of feasts and rituals in the Maltese town of Naxxar. He writes that the locals 'wish to recapture, for a few moments, the feeling of belonging, of togetherness, of being part of a community' (1991b:94). He continues: 'But just as such occasions reinforce the inward bonds of community, so too they establish boundaries and project an image of solidarity to similar, and often rival, outside units. Such celebrations thus act to structure and project group identity in this small, densely populated and intensively competitive island' (*ibid.*:94-95).
6. This is not uniquely Texelian. Strathern writes with regard to the English village of Elmdon: 'out of the amorphous and generalising image that "villagers" are all related, there is a precise equation between being a "real" villager and being a birth member of one of the "old" Elmdon families' (1981:5). See Nadel-Klein (1991: 506) for a similar example with regard to the Scottish village of Ferryden.
7. Municipal Archives Texel, diary of the minister J. Huizinga, part 4, Friday, June 10, 1853.
8. The literal translation of the words *grof* and *fijn* would be coarse and fine. They refer to the degree of strictness with which people observe the Protestant religion.

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