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On the Edge of Britishness: The Rupture of a National Identity

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Abstract

St Helena is a British Overseas Territory. This paper investigates how an imagined and ideological link between Britain and the island was created, maintained and eventually weakened. British citizenship was removed in 1981. Since its return in 2002, many St Helenians have migrated to the UK. Whilst a sense of Britishness has weakened, a sense of lived Britishness has simultaneously occurred. Investigating the feelings, emotions and cultural values within this migrant community, the islanders are far from deluded about their downgraded national identity and, as a community, are willing to articulate their mixed emotions.

Introduction: St Helenian National Identity

This research provides a nuanced insight into the national identity of the St Helenian islanders. St Helena, a British Overseas Territory situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, sits 1,200 miles from its nearest mainland of the West of Angola (Schulenburg, 1998), 1,700 miles from Cape Town and 4,606 miles from London (Cohen, 1983a). Drawing on in-depth narratives from the St Helenians themselves, this research captures the complex and contradictory nature of St Helenian Britishness. St Helena provides an example of how tenuous, precarious and turbulent national identity can be.

Many authors and academics have documented the 'Britishness' of the St Helenian islanders, stating: the islanders have a dual notion of a St Helenian local identity and a British national identity (Schulenburg (1998, p. 114); that a St Helenian local identity and a British national identity exist alongside each other (The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship, 1996); that a St Helenian identity includes Britishness (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 102); and the St Helenian identity is dependent upon the broader British national identity (Turner (1997, p. 16).

Cohen (1983a) noted how the St Helenian school children disproportionately identified with their British ancestors, and demonstrated a firm recognition of their British ancestry yet ignorance to their African heritage[1]. The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship (1996) and Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop (2002) however, argued that Cohen had underestimated the Britishness of the islanders, claiming the St Helenians have an integral

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[1] See Parker (in prep a) for St Helenian stories on their diverse ethnic heritage

British identity and that St Helenians display a proud yet 'outdated version' of Britishness (2005, p. 101).

In an attempt to clarify Britishness, Ichijo stated 'although there is no consensus as to what Britishness is, some shared understanding of its nature seems to have emerged ... Its most potent marker is the British passport, and therefore Britishness is often understood as inclusive' (Ichijo, 2004, p. 113). Ironically between 1981 and 2002, it was the British passport which was taken from the St Helenians due to changes in their British status. Nonetheless, the St Helenian islanders, geographically positioned 4,606 miles from the 'motherland'[2], remained steadfast regarding their British national identity during this period (The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship, 1996).

This paper contributes to the small body of academic literature and limited primary research about the St Helenian community. Through the feelings, emotions and cultural values of the islanders themselves, this paper explores St Helenian narratives on their national identity. The aim is to consider how British national identity and British loyalties have been naturalised on the island, as well as demonstrate how for the St Helenian community British national identity is something which cannot be taken for granted, presumed as fixed, or arguably depended upon. This paper explores how Britishness for the St Helenian community, is constantly worked at, justified and defended, with the paradoxes and contradictions smoothed over. Moreover, the aim of this paper is to document that the islanders are openly questioning the purpose of their British national identity as well as questioning their emotional attachment to Britishness.

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[2] Moore (2000) argued that the islanders don't view Britain as the 'motherland' but rather the 'mainland'

The Ideology of Britishness

The 130-year period between 1707 and 1837 has been highlighted as the period when Britishness was invented and forged, with expectations of loyalty and allegiance (Colley, 1992). Britishness seeded with the uniting of Scotland and England, whereby the Scottish viewed Britishness as access to resources, yet the English perceived Britishness to be another name for Englishness (Ichijo, 2004). Wales, Scotland and England united to defend themselves from France, although they did not blend (Colley, 1996). Kearney (2004) argued that relations between the Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English were antagonistic and hostile, and a sense of Britishness for many was weak. Nonetheless, Colls (2011) argued that the Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English were content to be part of Great Britain as well as the Empire.

Unlike the nationalities of the Welsh, Scottish, Irish and English, the British national identity was an artificial construct, a chosen rather than imposed national identity, and one which was associated with whiteness (Ichijo, 2004). Although encompassing (Colley, 1992), all the nations within Britain except for the English, were actually on the periphery (Porter, 2014). Britishness was underpinned by a hegemonic English (Black, 2016); interwoven with imperialism and racism (Colls, 2011); and the prestige of the Empire was actually the prestige of the English (Wood, 2014).

Centuries later, the 'raison d'etre' of Britishness: the fierce Protestantism, the threat of France, and The Empire may have been lost (Colley, 1992, p. 6), yet similar characteristics have prevailed. The 1960s witnessed a 'pathological character' of Englishness. The Conservative politician Enoch Powell was driving a conservative Englishness, based upon resentment and racism as well as anti-immigration and anti-Commonwealth, for the sake of national interest and an anti-European national identity (Nairn, 1977, cited in Kenny, 2015). It was during this

period that the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act increased control over non-white immigration into the UK (Cohen, 1995).

A succession of nationality acts followed. The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrations Act prevented Commonwealth citizens, particularly those from Asia and East Africa, migrating into Britain; The 1971 Immigration Act further reduced the status of Commonwealth citizens, resulting in more 'foreigners'; and The 1981 British Nationality Act finally shifted the status of the former citizens of the UK and colonies, to Citizens of the British Dependent Territories, 'with no right of abode within the UK'[3] (Moore, 2000: 3). A handful of British Dependent Territories, now British Overseas Territories remained, each with a shifted, reformed and downgraded version of a British national identity and reduced citizenship rights.

Anderson's (2006, p. 7) *Imagined Communities* argued that members who have never encountered each other can have a connection nonetheless, and 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail ... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'. Nationalism is thus a 'geographical doctrine', consisting of a sovereign, a geographical space, and a population who self-identifies (Kaplan & Guntram, 2011, p. 349).

Colls (2011) reaffirms however, that national identity is an imagined, not imaginary process. National identity is symbolically projected through the real and material apparatus of the constitution, the monarchy, the architecture, the countryside and the history (Stevenson and

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[3] The 1981 British Nationality Act shifted British nationality from the principles of *jus soli* (birthplace) to the principles of *jus sanguinus* (blood law) (Cohen, 1995). The Act was passed to prevent immigrants from Hong Kong entering the UK after Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997 (Royle, 2001). However, two of the British Dependent Territories were actually exempt from the Act, those being the white populated islands of Gibraltar and The Falklands. The Act has subsequently been referred to as 'racist' (Moore, 2000: 3) and discriminatory (Cohen, 1983a).

Abell, 2011). Nations demand loyalty and devotion (Kelen, 2015; Wood, 2014), in return for 'material and psychological benefits' (Ned Lebow, 2010, p. 166 cited in Wood, 2014, p. 108), in ways similar to religion (Kelen, 2015).

Althusser (2001) argued that ideology is the process that transforms an imaginary and false understanding of the social world into a real condition of existence. Through ideology, individuals become subjects of the social system: subjects of a capitalist system, subjects of nationalism: 'The individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, ...* he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself' (Althusser, 2008, p. 56). Smith (2004, p. 302) however, argues that national identity is not 'simply a 'dominant ideology' that seduces gullible citizens', but rather is an active cultural process of 'self-understanding', whereby the myths and stories of a nation are reaffirmed through, for example, attending a heritage event, history festival or public ceremony. 'For the participants it is a visceral connection with an imagined past', creating a 'living history' (Smith, 2004, p. 306). Smith highlights the feelings and emotions of nostalgia, glory, and a sense of belonging, for the 'ordinary people', who connect to the 'symbolic victories of the nation' (2004, p. 309). Claiming that national identity 'exists mainly in oral traditions' Colls (2011, p. 574-575) argued that national identity should thus be understood through an appreciation of a community's history, alongside the collective memories, emotions, and myths and 'continuing desire to identify'.

On the Edge of Empire

St Helena remained undiscovered until 21st May 1502 (Cross, 1980; Gosse, 1990)[4]. The Portuguese originally discovered the island and for over 150 years the Portuguese, Dutch and English used it as a stopping off-point for ships (Schulenburg, 1998). Following the taking of the island by the British Royal Navy, the island was granted to, and fortified by, the East India Company by 1673 (Schulenburg, 1998)[5]. In this year King Charles II declared St Helenians to be 'free denizens of … England' in the Royal Charter, and the islanders have been British citizens ever since (The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship, 1996).

The island was transferred from the proprietorship of the East India Company, to the British Crown in 1834 (Schulenburg, 1998). The island has no substantial indigenous economy of its own (Moore, 2000). With the financial generosity of the East India Company now removed and the shifting of the island's identity as a maritime base to a Crown Colony, the island was in 'economic depression' by the 1870s. Due to the decline in ships calling at the island, 1910 saw the 'virtual collapse of the island's economy' (Schulenburg 1998, p.111-113). The island eased its dire economic situation through its flax industry (Schulenburg, 1998), but this had collapsed by the mid-sixties (Cohen, 1983a).

Following the 1960s, the island's economy became subsidized with a British Grant-in-aid, which was introduced by the St Helenian Development Plan. Cohen (1983b) argued that the development plan for St Helena remained non-developing and embedded within the discourses of colonial style practices. He alleged that the development plan of the 1970s appeared to be

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[4] although Schulenburg (1998) argued the possibility that it wasn't actually discovered until 1503

[5] The history of the Island, including short periods of economic prosperity, has been well documented. See Charlton, Gunter and Hannan (2002); Cohen (1983a, 1983b); Cross (1980); Drower (1992); Evans (1994); (Gillett, 1983); Gosse (1990); Royle (2001, 1991); Schulenburg and Schulenburg (1997); Schulenburg, (1998); Yon (2002).

more of a 'planned form of increased dependency' (Cohen, 1983b, p. 132). In the financial year 2011/12, for example, the island received £26.326 million which consisted of Budgetary Aid, Shipping Subsidy, Development Aid & Technical Co-operation (St Helena Statistics Office 2012/13)[6]. It has been estimated that between 2012/13 and 2021/22, the island will cost the British Government a minimum of £116.8 million[7] (St Helena Government, 2014). Gillett (1983) argued that the number of St Helenians working for the St Helenian Government was actually a reflection of the numbers who would be unemployed, and 'effectively on the dole' (Drower, 1992, p. 220).

'Empires establish a sometimes spurious order that often, nevertheless, long outlast them' (Catterall, 2011, p. 330-331). Indeed, St Helena remains part of the 'permanent empire' (Drower, 1992, p. xx) and 'one of Britain's more intractable colonial responsibilities' (Gillett, 1983, p. 151). St Helena's post-colonial 'parasitical standard of living' (Gillett, 1983, p. 152) has become the responsibility and liability of Britain (Royle, 1991). Once characterised by a flourishing community, St Helena is now characterised by migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy (MIRAB) (Royle, 2001).

Alongside the island's economic dependence upon the Development Plan, 'at the stroke of a pen' (Skinner, 2002a: 313) the St Helenians lost their right of access into the UK as well as any right to a British passport as a consequence of the 1981 British Nationality Act. The St Helenian community lost their ability to travel without restraint. Migration to the UK ceased

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[6] Imports in 2011/12 totalled 13.02 million whereas Exports totalled £0.85 million (St Helena Statistics Office 2012/13).

[7] Although the recent arrival of the island's airport is hoped to inject tourism into the island and hence increase the island's economy. 'Britain would love to see St Helena become self-sufficient' (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2002).

unless a St Helenian obtained one of the few permits per year[8], and migration increased to Ascension Island and The Falkland Islands as low paid contractors with no rights or security.

Part of 'Enoch Powell's debris', the shift in the St Helenian national identity was considered an injustice given that their 'incorporation into England pre-dated the Act of Union with Scotland therefore giving the Saints a more ancient claim to Britishness than the Scots' (Moore, 2000, p.11). With regards to St Helena such acts were 'probably illegal' because of the 1673 Royal Charter (Cohen, 1983a: 9).[9] The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship (later renamed the Citizenship Commission) was established, who wrote reports opposing the act, particularly focusing on the Royal Charter and the British national identity of the islanders. As the Commission (1996, p. 53) made clear: 'they are, and always have been, British nationals living on British soil'.

St Helena remains one of the last outposts and a 'relic' (Winchester, 2003) of the British Empire. The English are known to be nostalgic (Baena & Byker, 2015) and texts documenting the history of the island romanticise the island's place within the British Empire:

> 'St Helena is one of the last remaining British colonial possessions and it is part of its charm that it is so obviously that. The fact that it is British cannot be mistaken. It is possible that some of this certainty stems from its buildings' (Cross, 1980, p. 11).

With architecture symbolising national identity (Baena & Byker, 2015, p. 351-352), Schulenburg (1998, p. 114) also wrote how some buildings on the island lean towards 'English

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Some St Helenians retained their full British citizenship rights if they, or their 'parents of grandparents were born, adopted, naturalized or registered in the UK (Moore, 2000, p. 3).

ideals'. The ex-pat Governor resides in the largest residential and occupied property on the island, and its name Plantation House, holds an explicit reminder of the island's imperial and colonial past.

Other texts have patronised and positioned the island as a passive place, depicting the subordinate economic situation of the island as well as the subordinate psychological position that the islanders have been continuously subjected to:

> 'St Helena is the Cinderella, or shall we say the poor forgotten orphan, of the British Empire. Once upon a time she was the pampered darling of the Honourable East India Company. Given just a little help, a little encouragement and a fair share of their own land to cultivate, and a voice in their government of their native island, the St Helenians would be the happiest and most contented race in the world'. (Gosse, 1990, p. 373)

Lawrence (2002, p. x), a St Helenian, confirmed that the community remains one that is 'raised on subservience, and giving way to authority and others with elevated status'. Cohen (1983b) cited a British parliamentarian in the 1950s, claiming the St Helenians to be subservient and shy. Cohen however, argued for a more complex reading of the St Helenian character. He argued that the St Helenian character has been formed through a loyalty to the UK, a suspicion of British 'experts' and visitors, a cynicism of colonial officials, and a 'sense of resentment and helplessness in the face of the adverse circumstances that confront them'.

Just over two decades after the 1981 British Nationality Act, in 2002, British Citizenship along with a British passport and the ability to travel without restraint was returned to the British

Overseas Territories including the St Helenians. Since then, the islanders have been leaving at 'an alarming rate' (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 103), migrating mostly once more to the UK although migration to Ascension and Falkland Islands continues to be popular. A complex and critical interpretation of the St Helenian character and St Helenian Britishness is long-overdue.

Researching Islandness

Individuals construct their identities, as well as make sense of their past and future, by locating themselves within their personal narratives. Narrative identity is thus a means for individuals to exercise agency as they articulate their experiences and self-perceptions of their identity. The identities and experiences of marginalised groups are often hidden from history, yet in-depth discussions with, for example, cultural minorities offer new knowledge and fresh interpretations of history (Perks and Thompson, 2010, p. ix). Narratives can therefore produce a subjective, culturally specific perspective on significant, plausible and even distorted 'coherent identities' (Kaiser & McMahon, 2017).

A typical characteristic of island communities are their 'multiple migration processes'[10] (King, 2009, p. 68). Baldacchino (2008, p. 47) thus raised the problem of defining who is a legitimate islander and who is not. In a world characterised by migration, movement and multiple identities, the distinctions between an islander as an *insider*, in contrast to an islander as an *outsider*, is not clear and such distinctions can induce a form of prejudice and exclusion, or in research terms, a form of bias. In this research, it was subsequently decided that each

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[10] On St Helena there were St Helenians who had only recently moved back to the island after 50 years of living overseas; there were St Helenians who were born on Ascension, live on Ascension and only visit their 'home' of St Helena for short holidays; there were 'islanders' who had married a St Helenian, had St Helenian children, and had lived on the island for decades yet had no St Helenian lineage themselves; there were St Helenians who lived on the island and had a St Helenian parent, yet they did not self-identify as a 'true' St Helenian, in the stereotypical sense, due to their self-recognised difference from the rest of the community.

interviewee would have at least one St Helenian parent and be first generation St Helenian, irrespective of how long they had lived off the island[11].

68 interviews were undertaken with members of the St Helenian community between 2006 and 2008. 46 were undertaken on the Island of St Helena (nine weeks were spent on the island); 22 were undertaken in the UK. In total, 70 hours and 56 minutes of research data were collected. Semi-structured interviews enabled the stories and narratives of the islanders to flow as conversation. Of the eleven questions, four questions focused on migration, three focused on 'islandness', three focused on citizenship, and one focused on identity. Two further questions invited the interviewee to add anything else, followed by the basic demographic questions of age, city/town/district where they live now, place of birth and occupation/s.

Table 1. Respondents in the Sample

St Helenian Interviews	On-Island Interviews		Off-Island Interviews	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age				
17-20	5	2	1	
21-30	5	2	1	2
31-40	5	4	2	1
41-50	6		4	2
51-60	3	5	6	1
61-70	1	5		
71-80	3		2	
total	28	18	16	6
Total	**46 – on-island interviews**		**22 – off-island interviews**	
Hours	**41 hrs 9 mins on island**		**29 hrs 47 mins off island**	
Total of St Helenian interviews = 68				
Total of hours = 70 hours 56 minutes				

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11 Two people who have lived on the island for a substantial period of time, married a St Helenian and had St Helenian children were interviewed. However, they had no St Helenian lineage themselves. Whilst interesting in their own right, the contrast between their stories and those with St Helenian lineage were striking and so were eliminated from the sample.

This research attempted to potentially include any St Helenian, irrespective of their educational or employment history[12]. Anyone who was over 18[13] and approached, and who agreed to an interview, were included[14]. Typical of many small island communities (Skinner, 2002a, p. 308), most St Helenians work for local Government as well as have had multiple professions and/or currently have multiple roles/forms of employment (Skinner, 2002b, p. 212). Occupations within the sample on-and-off the island have included, for example, engineers, administrators, cleaners, nurses, employees on the RMS, ex- mill and dairy workers, bar staff, plumbers, teachers, classroom assistants, finance managers, managing directors, business owners, shop workers, accountants, retail managers, domestic workers, students. Some were retired, some were not. For the purposes of anonymity within this small island community, as well as due to the multiple professions many islanders have had, their individual employment status or history has not been identified.

As a starting point, interviews on the island were requested of St Helenians already known to the researcher[15]. Additionally, the researcher approached strangers, from all districts on the island, when in the bars, the shops, at the golf course, sat at bus stops, or out walking. Only

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[12] Previous empirical research on the island has tended to include school children (Charlton, 2002; Cohen, 1983a; Royle, 1991, Schulenburg, 2002), teachers (Charlton, Gunter & Hannan, 2002; Cohen, 1983a) or 'key informants' consisting of Heads of Departments and other professionals as well as the ex-pat Governor (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2002, 2005). Exceptions include Cohen (1983b) who surveyed the general public and Yon (2002) who interviewed the St Helenian '100 men' who migrated to England as farm labourers.

[13] Although two 17-year-olds agreed to an interview, following the recommendation of the then Head Teacher of the island's secondary school.

[14] Demonstrating the hierarchies of class, power and capital that are embedded on the island, as well as how particular narratives can exist for an outside audience (Schulenburg, 2002, p. 26), some islanders argued the research was including the wrong 'type' of islander and directed the research towards particular St Helenians on the island, for example, those St Helenians with higher or professional status.

[15] I was employed as a Research Assistant at the University of Gloucestershire for the then Head of the St Helena Link, Professor Tony Charlton. I was on occasion requested to support the duties of the St Helena Link Office: driving St Helenian teachers, students and their families to and from the military airport, Brize Norton; assisting St Helenians with opening bank accounts in the UK; introducing teachers and students to bus and train travel; making numerous cups of coffee and tea for when a student or teacher needed some administrative support or wanted a chat with a familiar face whilst on campus.

three St Helenians approached refused an interview, and one person cancelled an appointment. On the contrary to what some islanders predicted, the majority of St Helenians who were approached for interview did not refuse, thus not demonstrating a shyness towards ex-pats[16]. Interviews were undertaken in public places, places of work, as well as in homes. Of the 46 St Helenians interviewed on island, 5 had never been overseas (aged 18, 20, 37, 70 and 78)[17]. Most of the interviewees had been off the island on several occasions, for a variety of reasons, including Medivac, holidays, work, education, training, as well as semi-permanent settlement in, for example, the UK. For this reason, it became quickly evident that any preconceptions of contrasting the stories of those on-island with those off-island were futile.

A daily diary was kept, detailing fieldnotes such as events, conversations, the local environment, thoughts and feelings. Printed material such as tourist leaflets, Government papers, population statistics were collated. The archives, the museum, Napoleon's home (Longwood House), and the island's only secondary school Prince Andrew School were visited. Invitations to tea were accepted; formal and informal social gatherings were attended.

Stevenson and Abell (2011) argue the norms and values of nationalism, manifest in social interaction. They claim that 'commemorations, celebrations and rituals of state' have tended to be neglected within national identity research, even though social scientists acknowledge their role in 'the reproduction of national community' (2011, p. 124-125). Within this research, the Remembrance Sunday Service at The Wharf, and Songs-of-the-War at the Consulate Hotel were attended, as well as a children's swimming gala, school Christmas services and cantatas, and the children's Christmas procession through the town.

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[16] I am not St Helenian and had never been to the island before. As an 'outsider' I would be unaware of who was avoiding me within this small, close community.
[17] although one of these left one week after the interview to start employment on another island

The British flag flying at The Castle, The British flag flying at Plantation House, The British flag and the St Helenian flag flying at the Cenotaph, and the French flag flying at Napoleon's home were photographed. Such national symbols are emotionally loaded, 'mediating the relationship between the nation and the people' (Finell & Liebkind, 2010, p. 325).

St Helenians interviewed in the UK were approached via the means of a snowball sample (see Geddes, Parker & Scott, 2017) either recommended by someone living on the island, or by a St Helenian living in the UK who had already taken part in the research. Most interviews were undertaken in Gloucestershire, although not all[18]. All interviews were undertaken in the home of the St Helenian except one, which was undertaken in a public place. No-one refused an interview, although two St Helenians did not respond to the e-mail sent requesting an interview.

The research did not draw from a random sample either on-or-off the island, and so cannot claim to be representative of all St Helenians. Indeed, due to the use of a snowball sample those living within the UK with no contact with any other St Helenian, had no chance of being selected for the research. No interviews were undertaken with any of the St Helenian community living anywhere else other than on St Helena or in the UK.

The Symbols of British Nationalism

Nairn (1994) stated the British Royal Family to be a unique marker for the British national identity and Marklund (2017) argued the monarchy to play an essential role within the propaganda of nationalism (Marklund, 2017). Gibson & Condor (2009, p. 316) referred to the

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[18] There is no documented evidence which states the number of St Helenians residing within the UK, nor is there information about where they live. However, high numbers of St Helenians are known to live in Cheltenham, Gloucester, London, Southampton, Oxford, Reading and particularly Swindon (commonly known by the St Helenian community as Swindelena).

monarchy as the 'enduring apparatus of State'. Royal rituals, as well as myths and narratives, express continuity, whilst continuing with the discourses of the past. 'It is therefore perhaps somewhat surprising that relatively little research has addressed issues pertaining to British national identity in relation to perceptions of the monarchy' (2009, p. 316).

It is Britishness which underpins the island's ideological language and the islanders have been constantly subjected to the banal symbols of British nationalism (Billig, 1999). Within their narratives, many of the islanders recited The Queen, the Union Jack and the British Empire as the official symbols which demonstrate their British identity. Some St Helenians recited the moto that accompanies the St Helenian flag, 'loyal and unshakable'. Eve, for example, refers to the national anthem, considered to be to be the 'sanction of the state' (Kelen, 2015, p. 48); Derek acknowledges his obligation of loyalty, alongside his gratitude and dependency; and Carol acknowledges her sense of belonging to an imagined community:

> *Eve, 78,* after all we are British see lovey, we are British and uum, I say we uh, speak the British language, we sing the British anthem, we abide by the British laws, so we can't be nothing else but British see

> *Derek, 63,* well you need to be loyal to your country eh, and … England has provided St Helena with a lot of things you see, even now as I say, with our medical stuff and all our money that we have, we ain't got that by ourselves, we can't provide ourselves, we have to ask Britain to do it

> *Carol, 54,* proud to be British and I'm proud to be St Helenian, uum, I don't know, it's just nice to know your roots, who you belong to, just like a family, you want to know who you belong to, yes, because especially when my Dad was here … always, your walls were covered with the British Royal Family

'British national identity has been built on the celebration of Empire' (Colls, 2011, p. 580). Moreover, 'prestige' has been attributed to the success of Britain governing its 'far-flung

network of colonies' (Wood, 2014, p. 100). Adam acknowledges how the national identity of the island has evolved alongside the power and prestige of British history. He acknowledges the island's position within the empire, who 'probably don't get the best'. He also detaches the island from Englishness, confirming its Britishness:

> *Adam, 52,* We been British ever since the island been discovered, right, 82 years after the island was discovered, travellers came here eh, and from then on the British colonized it. You know, the Dutch did take it for a month, for a few days, or maybe a few weeks, but not for very long. But ever since the island have always feeled British, not English but British, you know what I mean, part of the empire as it was, and we have never been neglected, I don't think so. Our education was free, our medical is free, we probably don't get the best, the first class, but its free, you know, maybe that's why the wages is lower, but uh, ... because of Napoleon being exiled here and we had the Duke of Wellington here, Edmund Helliot and some famous people, Captain Blithe from the bounty, so we had some famous people here, even her Majesty been here, 1947, she was Princess then, her and her sister Margaret. In 84 we had Prince Andrew, and in 82 we had uh 2002 we had Princess Anne

The symbols of British nationalism on the island continue, reminding and reinforcing the St Helenian position as British 'others'. The islanders are immersed within a sense of Britishness; repeatedly reminded of their British history.

The 'Naturalisation' of St Helenian Migration

Power and domination are embedded within the Institutional State Apparatus (ISAs) of religious institutions (churches), educational institutions (schools), the family, the legal system, the political system, trade unions, media and communications, and culture (Althusser, 2008). Although the ISAs are diverse and even contradictory in their material existence and nature, they are unified by ideology, in other words, the ideology of the ruling class.

The ISAs of the family and education have been instrumental in teaching the official British national identity and the desire to be a successful migrant. Most importantly, the islanders

articulated that they are aware of this. Ruby, for example, reflects on how she went to the UK for teacher training:

> *Ruby, 44,* I didn't know if I wanted to come over, it never really bothered me, and my dad said I must go 'cause it would fulfil his dream to come here, for me to come here, cause he couldn't come, uum he wanted to and my mum wouldn't leave the island, so he felt that he would never be able to come … I remember thinking this [Britain] is absolutely beautiful, like there is green everywhere and you know, trees and flowers and I was getting all excited, and for months I was just writing to my mum - trees and flowers and trees and flowers and grass - like you know, cause I had always thought of England as buildings, ... when we got taught in school we got taught about the iron and steel industry [in the UK], the coal mines, and trains, but we never really talked much about the grass and the greenery eh, we just talked about industry

Althusser (2008) argued that for the means of production to survive, production must become an 'endless chain'. Individuals have to desire consumerism and materialism, which for them drives their desire to work hard and spend hard. Indeed, a complex and contradictory situation has occurred whereby many islanders love their life on the island and do not want to leave, yet simultaneously wish to embark on the 'St Helenian Dream' of overseas success. This is symbolised by the purchasing of material things. Tania, for example, recollects the symbols of success returning to the island:

> *Tania, 58,* growing up, you see girls coming home [to St Helena] who have been over here [the UK], sort of they used to come and work in domestic[19] and then they did like a two year contract, and then they'd come home and then of course when they come home they are wearing all the new gear and you think oh wow, you know, when I grow up that's what I want to do, I want to go to England, so of course uum I suppose when I came of age, … that's what inspired me in the first instance to come over

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[19] A popular form of migration, particularly for St Helenian women, was to work in service for the British gentry as 'domestics' in domestic service (Cohen, 1983b). This started in the 1940s and continues to the present day.

Mary left the island over thirty years ago and she noted how she was ready to go. She admitted she was blinkered by the prospect of leaving; focused on migration, oblivious to anything else, and dressed ready for her 'round of compliments' from her community (Goffman, 1972, p. 71):

> *Mary, 59,* by the time it came, and that big ship was sitting there waiting to take you away, I can remember getting all dressed up, gloves and stiletto heels and my handbag, as though I were going to a wedding, getting dressed up to leave the island, there's my mother crying, uum, and all I could see was that ship

For a competent labour force, capitalist society thus needs to provide 'apprenticeships' ready for the means of production and reproduction, and this is done through an education (Althusser, 2008). Education teaches the ruling classes the ability to manipulate and exploit the workers; teaches the prospective workers the skills required for labour and their necessary submissiveness; teaches workers the desire to 'achieve' through accumulating capital and material possessions:

> 'It takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most 'vulnerable', squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State apparatus, it drums into them …. Somewhere around the age of sixteen, a huge mass of children are ejected 'into production'
>
> (Althusser, 2008, p. 29)

St Helenians however, are not only 'ejected 'into production'', they are ejected overseas. Cohen argued that the education system on the island, which claimed to be aiming for 'less dependent minded' children, was counter-productive and did not educate the St Helenian children for a life on the island (Cohen, 1983a, p. 9). He argued that even if the teachers

believed the education system could improve the aspirations and skills of the school children on the island, this would be unlikely 'first, because the raison d'être for the original existence of the island has disappeared; second, because British colonialism cannot provide a legitimating ideology for its existence' (Cohen, 1983a, p. 26).

Due to employment prospects on St Helena being so dire[20], alongside the islanders' restricted migration opportunities, the islanders have become a 'stagnant pool of 'relatively surplus population'' (Cohen, 1983a, p. 8). The contradictory nature of migration continues whereby many do not want to leave St Helena, yet with the denial of British citizenship in 1981 many islanders 'choose' to migrate to the islands of Ascension Island and the Falklands on short-term, temporary contracts. Zoe reflected upon when her Dad went to work on The Falkland Islands. She argued that the islanders are 'forced' to go away to better themselves. Ironically, she simultaneously refers to island migration as a 'decision'.

St Helenians often fill the unskilled, lower paid jobs and are paid less than the Americans or British that also work on the islands. Moore (2000) noted the benefits of a cheap and willing labour force. He also noted the St Helenians lack of rights on Ascension, whereby 'they are treated as migrant workers and may be deported' (Moore, 2000: 9). Donna explicitly described the unfairness of the situations she found herself in:

> *Donna, 36,* you get more money on Ascension Island. So we moved to Ascension …we had to live in two separate bashes as they call them. Even though we were married we weren't allowed to live together….We actually went and spoke to the … Administrator about it, Tony and I did. Cause we didn't think it was fair that married couples should be separated like that and he said

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[20] On St Helena, a St Helenian nurse or teacher can find themselves working alongside a higher paid, yet less experienced ex-pat nurse or teacher. A St Helenian teacher or nurse can earn more as a cleaner on Ascension Island or in the UK, for example, than when they are working within their profession on the island.

he knew it was wrong but there was nothing he could do because of the way SERCO had signed the contracts … so he was aware that it was a human rights issue and he showed us where it was written that couples shouldn't be separated or even families who have children. It's against our human rights. And also what we weren't happy with was the fact that we were doing the same job as British people [yet with lower pay]

In 2002, full British Citizenship was returned to the islanders. As mentioned previously, the islanders have been leaving at 'an alarming rate' (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 103), migrating mostly once more to the UK although migration to Ascension and The Falkland Islands continues. Migration remains a naturalised characteristic of the St Helenian community, a characteristic which has accelerated since the return of British citizenship. The contradictions within this small island community continue, whereby the islanders 'submitting freely' coincides with the islanders' discontent at the prospect of leaving.

The ISAs continue to play their part. Joanna stated how fifty percent of her teaching staff migrated in one academic year, not only creating a disruptive experience for the children, but also acting as role models for the next generation of school children who will undoubtedly become migrants. One young islander spoke about how her mother was currently encouraging her and her sister to go overseas for 'better opportunities and better experience of life'. Another islander commented how she was not asked 'whether' she was going overseas, but 'when'.

A Ruptured National Identity and the Cyclical Characteristic of Britishness

At the beginning of this paper, it was discussed how the St Helenian community have been considered to be subservient, passive and subordinate. This research however, encountered many islanders who were very willing to be open and opinionated:

Keith, 40, I think it's already started to change yes, because going back to like I said before, my generation, uum when we were growing up, we never used to uum speak out or anything, and you still find that the older people, you go to meetings and like after the meeting you will hear people complaining about this and that, but they wouldn't necessarily say it in the meeting, and that is very very true of uum older people, but I think younger people are now more confident in speaking out and so as time goes on I think that will change even more

Faith, 46, that comes from going out into, you could call it the big world, and coming back and getting confidence on the way, studying, working, living with the [British] people, …., I wouldn't even have questioned them, I would have whispered behind their back, and said you know, how intolerable they are, but I would not have questioned their motive for anything, now I question it, uum, and you know, … people have been sick of ex-pats on this island for years, absolute years, because when we were at school I remember we wrote a song, uum, farewell expert, learner welcome

This research explicitly documents the feelings of the islanders, using the testimony from the islanders themselves. In 1981 each St Helenian *heard* the explicit rejection of the St Helenian community from the mainland British. They heard themselves being explicitly labelled as 'others'. The islanders have been hailed into a sense of insecurity. Their psychological damage (Royle, 2001) and 'symbolic rejection' (Moore, 2000, p. 10) has been documented. With the 1981 British Nationality Act, a rupture occurred within the St Helenian's ideological sense of their national identity and they started to question their collective British national identity:

Ben, 22, was it Labour or something that gave us the citizenship back, and you know, it's not, if they lose power again then it could be taken off us again really, realistically it could go again, which is wrong

Victor, 55, what does it say on the crest, 'loyal and unshakable' eh, I think they are, they have to be … you don't bite the hand that is feeding you, do you, so I mean, would people be as loyal and unshakable if they were independent, if independence came tomorrow, good question, would we still have the Queen's picture at home?

Tania, 58, I think when it was taken away they just felt out on a limb on their own, belonged to no-where

Clive, 60, well its sort of like made them feel like second class citizens, like … you stuck on St Helena as it were, that's from a movement point of view cause there's no access, opportunity of access to the outside world. At the same time you feel that somebody has taken something away from you, that was your human right, your right, it's part of you, why should they take it away, even though I don't want to use it … why should it be taken away, you know. It's sort of a like little bit downgrading, you know, like you don't mean nothing

Terry, 57, yes they were trapped, I mean they could be migrant workers on Ascension or the Falklands and that was it, uum, so any ambition they had was, or living anywhere else, or doing anything else, was blocked

Rosemary, 50, I just wonder when the British flag was up, why it's [St Helena] classed as not British

Edward, 60, what was the reason? Cause they still sending us the grant … so what was the point? It was better for them to see some of us come over here [the UK] and get work

Britishness has arguably lost its 'raison d'etre' (Colley, 1992), as has St Helena (Cohen, 1983a: 26-27). Colls (2011, p. 578) proclaimed that 'at critical times … new identity paradigms do emerge, but they are rare'. Within this small island community, the rupture to the islanders' national identity in 1981 appears to have enabled a 'heteroglossia' of voices (Bakhtin, 2006). Within the islanders' narratives, old and new ideologies are merging, struggling and opposing each other simultaneously. The multiple, paradoxical and contradictory positions, which comfortably sit alongside each other within this particular island community, are being debated as the islanders consider who they are and who they want to be, enabling an evaluative and reflective community:

Clive, 60, we were brought up British so I haven't got a problem with that, but uh we have to belong to somebody you know, like if it is the Russian or French or whoever like that, you just need that you belong to somebody[21]

Angela, 36, England at the time when she wasn't going to give us back our passport, the other option was to ask the Portuguese if they want us

Simon, 55, sometimes I wish the Americans would come here and take charge of this place

Zoe, 27, I think more and more we are becoming not like Britain [culturally]

Donna, 36, as long as we were treated fairly I think that's important … it's just the sense of wanting to belong that is more important to us regardless of what nationality you are

Royle administered a questionnaire to the schoolchildren on the island and discovered no one wanted independence (1992, p. 37), finding 'little entrepreneurialism within the island's young people' (2001, p. 217). Drower (1992) found St Helenians to be lethargic and unenthusiastic with regards to the islander's desires to be independent. This research undoubtedly encountered some desire of independence:

Faith, 46, [our] culture is one [where], we have handouts and we're supported financially, uum, …, it's an expectation, and just sometimes you want to say, look hang on a second, where's the pride, …, wouldn't it be nice to generate our own money … we might struggle in the beginning, but if we get this right or if we generate tourism, if we bring some money in, who knows, it may take ten years down the line but we might just be able to afford our own [independence]

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[21] As Royle (2001, p. 141) has noted, 'whole islands have been purchased … Islands have even been swapped'. Thus, the disposable and precarious nature of islands should not be underestimated.

The weakening of the island's interpellated British national identity, alongside the return of British citizenship, has provided the islanders with a sense of empowerment, a desire to make capital for themselves and a shift away from a culture of dependency. This paper merely touches upon the changes to the islander's aspirations within the community (see Parker in prep b). Ironically, however, this is where the story of Britishness is not over. Whilst the islanders have come to terms with their insecurities about their British national identity, many islanders have migrated to the UK, thus forming a new attachment to their 'motherland'. Moreover, they articulate they are prepared to fight for their re-established rights to their British national identity.

Janet starts her narrative explaining her awareness of how the ISAs on the island instructed her Britishness. She was in her late teens when her British citizenship was taken away. Now that citizenship has been returned and she has since migrated to and settled in the UK, she has an appreciation of the barriers that the island has had to overcome and that it is something to be valued, appreciated and cherished. She now has a greater emotional attachment to the UK than ever before:

> *Janet, 51,* as a child I was always taught that I was British, so I have always grown up believing I am British, and to me this [the UK] is just part of my home, it's like, it's almost as if like this is where I am attached, so it's part of my identity I suppose… As much as people say we love the island, if you take Britain from us, away, we've had it, we haven't got much of an identity, because we are, we are very British, uum, and we see ourselves as British people. And I think when we weren't allowed, it's a weird feeling thinking about it now, you know, but it makes you realise how much you have had and how much we need to appreciate… when you think about it now it was quite a barrier we had to get over, to become British citizens, and you see we've grown up in the age when we didn't realise all the benefits that people got before the right was taken away from us. So I can understand how people older than us must have felt, when all of a sudden they couldn't come into Britain or they couldn't work, because they, you know, when you enjoy something and then when something is taken away … now we are enjoying it again and I really wouldn't want it taken away

Contrary to Althusser, Bakhtin argued the importance of history. Subsequently, a final resolution between the classes can never take place because 'nothing is absolutely dead' (Bakhtin, 2006). In other words, conflict can never be resolved because historical processes and actions will always remain within the memory and subsequently the zeitgeist of agents. While history can source national identity (Finell & Liebkind, 2010), history produced by nationalism can be more functional than authentic (Jelsen, 2011). The St Helenian community are aware of their instrumented British national identity, in addition to the fickle nature of their British national identity. They are simultaneously reflecting on the island's history both outside and within living memory, and passionately making use of their re-instated rights to full British citizenship.

Conclusion: A Complex British National Identity

Within this state structured island community, the islanders have been *taught* Britishness and positioned by Britishness, within and on the outside of a British national identity. Whilst some islanders explicitly justify that the island *needs* the British financial support, as well as passionately defend their British national identity, other voices from within the community articulate their resentment and frustration of this mode of existence, due to the restrictions imposed upon them by the St Helenian and British Government. The St Helenian stories reveal that the islanders are far from deceived about their downgraded British status and they are undoubtedly aware of the hierarchical position between themselves and the British. The rupture to their national identity has enabled an abstract identity, and an empty canvas on which to debate their national identity and sense of Britishness. Whilst some romance the idea of belonging to another nation, many islanders within this research expressed their fierce loyalty to Britishness. Diversity can thus come together, without contradiction, symbolically demonstrating the integrity and testimony of local identity (Cohen, 1987, pp. 82-83).

With the return of British citizenship in 2002, many St Helenians have left the island to settle either permanently or temporarily or transnationally in the UK (see Parker, in prep b). This is where the contradictory, juxtaposed and paradoxical nature of the St Helenian identity continues. Although the islanders are now arguably more detached from their ideological sense of Britishness, a new form of Britishness is contributing to their identity and sense of their selves, as many more St Helenians have now settled in the UK. Thus, it could be argued that whilst a sense of Britishness is continuing to weaken, a sense of lived Britishness is simultaneously growing stronger. Britishness has been embodied in a new way. Subsequently the link between the UK and St Helena remains intact, dynamic and potentially strengthened.

The 2012/13 Statistical Yearbook states 'The St Helena economy is essentially aid dependent' (St Helena Statistics Office, 2012/13, 1.0). However, the then St Helenian Governor wrote 'St Helena is now poised for the biggest transformation in her history'. The report continues 'crucially St Helenians themselves have played a pivotal role' (St Helena Government, 2014, p. 1). St Helena has recently undergone considerable change with the island's airport recently opening[22]. Moreover, with an ever-increasing number of St Helenians migrating overseas, and with a substantial number of St Helenians returning to the island after having worked overseas, the St Helenian community have become more empowered and more than willing to articulate their opinions.

Further research is required to capture the ever-accelerating change on the island. Not only has the island recently witnessed the opening of the airport, new information and communication technologies, including social media, are rapidly increasing for the islanders both on and off

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[22] See Parker (in prep c) for perceptions of the arrival of the St Helenian airport.

the island. Whilst globalization has been held accountable for the decline of national identity, social media and other new technologies have been considered to reaffirm national identity, strengthening nationalistic emotions and beliefs (Kania-Lundholm & Lindgren, 2017; Marklund, 2017).

Catterall (2011) reminds that the theories of globalization have raised concerns about the future of states and nations, as well as generated questions regarding the 'universal citizen' who belongs to 'nothing' but uncertainty, insecurity and alienation. Catterall remarks however, that 'the deleterious effects of globalization upon national identities have been overstated' (Catterall, 2011, p. 344). 'Globalisation may have undermined state sovereignty but not, it seemed, national identity' (Catterall, 2011, p. 330).

Cohen (1983a, p. 26) once referred to St Helenians as 'a people without a nationalism'. However, for now, British national identity remains imperative to the St Helenian community. The narratives of the St Helenians have demonstrated that for the St Helenians, their British national identity is not a given or undoubtedly secured, but something that has to be constantly worked at, justified and defended, with the paradoxes and contradictions smoothed over. Multiple, conflicting and newly merging voices are bringing together new ideas and opinions, and creating a continuously evolving evaluative and reflective St Helenian, island, transnational, migrant community.

As previously stated, the existing literature on St Helena states the islanders have a dual notion of a St Helenian local identity and a British national identity; a St Helenian local identity and

a British national identity which exist alongside each other; a St Helenian identity which includes Britishness; a St Helenian identity which is dependent upon the broader British national identity. This research however, argues that for now, a St Helenian identity is each of these, simultaneously and at cross purposes.

The St Helenian identity is thus not an identity that runs parallel to a British identity. Instead, the St Helenian identity is a hybrid identity that draws upon a British identity in differing, various and multiple ways. Through a multitude of meanings and practices, the St Helenian identity is a careful negotiation of Britishness. It is a fusion and a blend. Subsequently, the island is not a 'self-contained, cultural whole' (Olwig, 1993, p. 203). Rather it is a subtle and nuanced identity; complex, reflexive, reactive and interactive. Whilst the islanders are continuously negotiating a space for themselves within and outside of Britishness, they are for now, ensuring Britishness has a space for them.

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