



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document, Crown Copyright © 2019 Published by Elsevier Inc. This manuscript version is licensed under the Open Government License 3.0 <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/> and is licensed under Open Government license:

**Parker, Charlie ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4569-7580> (2021) The Contradictions of Islandness: The Small Island of St Helena and the Emotions of Transnationalism. Emotion, Space and Society, 39. Art 100795. doi:10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100795**

Official URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100795>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2021.100795>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/9559>

#### **Disclaimer**

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

## **Title Page**

### **The Contradictions of Islandness: The Small Island of St Helena and the Emotions of Transnationalism**

**Word Count excluding abstract – 7967**

#### **Author**

Dr Charlotte Parker  
Senior lecturer Sociology  
University of Gloucestershire  
Francis Close Hall  
Swindon Road  
Cheltenham  
Glos  
GL50 4AZ

[cjparker@glos.ac.uk](mailto:cjparker@glos.ac.uk)

01242 714740

Charlotte Parker is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Gloucestershire. Her research interests include island communities, military communities and identities.

The research was conducted whilst working for the University of Gloucestershire.

**Declarations of interest: none**

#### **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of the St Helenians who kindly provided their experiences and narratives and enabled this research to take place. A special thank you to Cilla McDaniel.

## **Abstract (187)**

This paper investigates the emotions of transnationalism, when coming from the small, remote British Overseas Territory of St Helena. This paper captures how St Helenian islanders migrate for new opportunities and to escape island monotony. Even though dispersed, the St Helenian islanders retain a strong sense of attachment and belonging to their island, often establishing emotional and material ties in two hemispheres. This paper thus captures the emotions of feeling torn and the contradictory emotions of islandness. This research draws from 68 in-depth interviews with St Helenian islanders between 2006-2008, following the return of British citizenship in 2002, but before the island had a functioning airport in 2017. This research captured the emotions of transnationalism when travel was expensive, complex and arduous, due to a fickle British national identity as well as the island's dependence on one single ship. At the point of publishing this research however, the UK was negotiating deals for Brexit and international air travel was limited due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Mobility for this transnational small island community, thus remains uncertain and complicated, due to their post-colonial national identity and geographical isolation.

### **Key words**

Islandness

St Helena

Emotion

Post-colonialism

Transnationalism

Small islands

Stories

## Introduction

The island of St Helena is the most isolated, populated island of its size (Royle, 1991). 47 square miles, with a population of around 4,610 (St Helena Government, 2019), this post-colonial British island is situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, 4,606 miles from ‘the motherland’<sup>1</sup>. The political decisions of mainland Britain, has had undeniable consequences for the islanders. In 1981, the Island’s official status shifted from a British Crown Colony to a British Dependent Territory, with reduced citizenship rights and a downgraded British national identity (Parker, 2020a). In 2002, citizenship rights including the right of abode in the UK, along with a British passport and unrestricted travel, were returned to this now British Overseas Territory. Whilst migration has always been a norm for this small island community, with the return of British citizenship the islanders left at “an alarming rate” (Hogenstijn & van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 103).

The original aim of this research was to investigate the meanings of islandness, Britishness, citizenship and migration, for St Helenian islanders (Parker, 2020a; 2020b). However, one significant outcome of this cultural investigation was that contradictory emotions were at the heart of this research, with the contradictions smoothed out through the everyday decisions and lived experiences of the St Helenians. The specific focus of this paper, is thus to articulate the contradictory emotions of islandness, as a consequence of the extraordinary decisions made about the island due to its post-colonial relationship with the metropole. Such contradictory emotions have become mundane, typical and internalised for this small transnational island community.

---

<sup>1</sup> St Helena is 121km sq. The U.K. is 7240 km away<sup>1</sup>. Its closest landmark is Ascension Island, 1131 km (700 miles) away

The data for this research was collected between 2006 – 2008, following the return of British citizenship, yet before the island's international airport was built. The timeframe between data collection and publication will enhance the anonymity of the participants within this small island community. Nonetheless, the timing of publication is particularly pertinent. Despite the arrival of the airport on the island, air travel is currently limited due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, the UK is in the midst of negotiations with the European Union for Brexit. Restricted travel and mobility, as well as a fluctuating national identity and citizenship rights, remain on-going for this small island community.

This paper contributes to the growing literature on migration, transnationalism and emotion. This case study contributes to the limited literature on the emotions of transnational small island communities, responding to Baldacchino (2008, p.47) who requested a nuanced understanding into how islanders' need to escape whilst they 'manage the pain'. More specifically, this research contributes to the small body of literature on St Helena and provides the first scholarly paper dedicated to the emotions of the St Helenian islanders.

### **Islandness, Transnationalism and Emotion**

The literature questioning what is a small island, including the 'inconclusive 'size matters' debates' (Skinner 2002a, p. 209) have been superseded by questions regarding 'islandness' and how islanders on their specific island 'do' island life. Islandness however, 'is arguably not easily defined; it can take as many different forms as there are islands' (Vannini & Taggart, 2012, p. 238). Islandness has been argued to be a heightened sense of place (Randall, et al.,

2014); a sensation accompanying physical isolation (Conkling, 2007); which encompasses on and off island experiences (Wang and Bennett, 2020). Islandness includes the feelings encountered through speeds, rhythms and sensations (Vannini and Taggart, 2012); as well as the emotions as a consequence of ‘insulation and isolation’ (Vannini, 2011, p. 250). Islandness is also a ‘political stance’, against the tensions caused by an island’s relationship to its mainland state (Bustos & Roman, 2019, p. 1).

Islands are historically intertwined with migration (King, 2009). In addition to being characterised by class, ethnicity, and possibly also post-colonialism, the concept of islandness is further complicated as island migration includes the additional characteristics of being inter-island, intra-island, and/or migration to the mainland (King, 2009). Islander identities remain ‘firmly rooted in the small place that is ‘their’ island’, despite their life trajectories often becoming global (King, 2009, p. 62). Transnationalism, the ‘sending remittances, making return visits, supporting hometown associations, trading goods, close communication with kin back home’, is thus significant within island communities (King, 2009, p. 62).

Emotions are increasingly being addressed within the transnational literature (Morse, 2017), considered inseparable from migrant stories (Christou, 2011). Hope (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015), negotiations, contradictions, agonies, dilemmas (Christou, 2011, p. 257) nostalgia, excitement, freedom, love, guilt and obligations (Baldassar, 2015, p. 87), are just some of the emotions which underpin transnational migration stories, thus providing the qualitative generalisations for the transnational literature.

Emotional geographies award much importance to ‘geographies of belonging’ and ‘alternative perspectives of homeland’ (Brown, 2011, p. 231). Transnational migrants refer to ‘home’

interchangeably as a specific geographical place, a sense of belonging and a network of social relations (Morse, 2017). Home is thus 'reshaped and reconstituted' within the transnational imaginary (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019, p. 64), to ensure 'emotional survival' for the migrant as well as those left behind. Notions of home and identity thus become complex, fluid and renegotiated (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019, p. 67).

Emotions thus provide the 'meaning frameworks' for 'shaping the migration experience and reproducing transnational connections' (Wise and Velayutham, 2017, p. 127). 'Emotional reflexivity' provides the interpretative agency actors draw upon, for when making decisions 'which no longer have clear guidelines about conventions of feeling' (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019, p. 65). Emotional reflexivities reassess the 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979) when norms and expectations become fractured due to distance (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Vermot, 2015; Winarnita, Dirgantoro & Wilding, 2019; Wise and Velayutham, 2017).

Gender norms become strained as migrants are blamed for violating family expectations (Vermot, 2015). However, emotional care can be undertaken from a distance (Wise and Velayutham, 2017) and emotions serve as the reminder to migrants to provide the expected care, despite the disruption caused through distance. Relationships can be healed when those left behind reposition their perspectives on what constitutes a family (Vermot, 2015). Migrants can thus be physically absent, whilst still complying with moral expectations, despite emotions becoming contradictory, blurred and challenged (Winarnita, Dirgantoro & Wilding, 2019).

Emotional pain can occur with parent-child separation; a lack of remittances can also offset emotional pain (Coe, 2008). Migration can be considered an expectation and 'a duty' (Winarnita, Dirgantoro & Wilding, 2019, p. 80), for economic remittances as well as 'new

knowledge, skills, and resources’ (Coe, 2008, p. 227). Transnational families and their emotions are thus complex and culturally specific (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Coe, 2008). Understanding what ‘motivates, compels, and structures transnational migrants’ decisions and choices, offers ‘new theoretical and methodological’ approaches into understandings of transnationalism (Wise and Velayutham, 2017, p. 116).

### **Research context: St Helena Island**

St Helena was discovered uninhabited in 1502. The Portuguese, Dutch and English fought over the island for strategic trade routes (Royle, 2019) and in 1673 the English Navy took this ‘prized maritime troph[y]’ (Lowenthal, 2007, p. 204) and handed it to the East India Company (Royle, 2019). In the same year, King Charles II stated within the Royal Charter that the islanders of St Helena to be ‘free denizens of ... England’ (The Bishop of St Helena’s Commission on Citizenship, 1996).

St Helena has since shifted in status from a fortress island and a colonial asset with military immigration (King, 2009), to a post-colonial liability (Drower, 1992, p. xx), part of the ‘permanent empire’ (Royle, 1991). St Helena’s economy has been subsidized with a British Grant-in-aid since the 1970s, retaining its MIRAB (outward Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy) characteristics (Royle, 2001). An ex-pat British Governor resides on the island overseeing the island’s affairs. The island’s economic dependency on the metropole has caused feelings of subordination; their fickle British national identity has further enhanced feelings of insecurity (Parker, 2020a).



As stated within the Introduction to this paper, between 1981 and 2002, travel for the islanders became limited as a consequence of reduced citizenship rights and lack of an internationally recognised passport. Migration to the UK ceased unless a St Helenian obtained one of the few permits per year. Many St Helenians became low paid temporary contractors on Ascension Island or The Falkland Islands, leaving their families behind.

Once British Citizenship was restored, many islanders including whole families, migrated to the UK at ‘an alarming rate’ (Hogenstijn & van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 103). Whilst ‘alarming rate’ may be apt for describing the fluctuating population on the island (see Parker, 2020b), the speed of departure is actually very pedestrian. Reliant on one single ship (the RMS St Helena), the island was ‘one of the few places left in the world where travel times to anywhere is measured in days’ (Royle, 2001, p. 115).

On ship day, ‘emotions run high’ (Hogenstijn & Middelkoop, 2002, p. 8.2) with the ‘joy of homecomings and the sadness of farewells’ (Lawrence (2002, xi). The ‘Saints’ have a strong attachment to their island (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2002, 6.1.4). Although typically dispersed, the transnational St Helenians have demonstrated their islander resilience, determination and agency, despite the literature documenting St Helenian disempowerment and psychological damage as a consequence of their relationship to the metropole (Parker, 2020b).

## **Method**

Between 2006 and 2008, 68 in-depth interviews were undertaken with the St Helenian

community; 46 on the Island of St Helena (the researcher spent nine weeks on the island) and 22 in the UK. In total, 70 hours and 56 minutes of research data were collected. When on the island, I acquired research participants from all districts on the island, by approaching them in bars, shops, the golf course, at bus stops, or out walking. In the UK, participants were approached via a snowball sample, recommended by a St Helenian either on or off the island, who had already participated in the research. The research did not draw from any random sample, so cannot claim to be representative of all St Helenians. For the purposes of anonymity, pseudonyms have been used and individual employment status or history not identified. The data being over ten years old enhances anonymity.

Most of the participants had been off the island on several occasions, for reasons including Medivac, holidays, work, education, training, temporary and permanent settlement overseas. Subsequently, any preconceptions of contrasting on-island with off-island participants were futile. Some islanders tried to direct the research towards key informants, or St Helenians with higher or professional status. This research however, did not exclude due to education or employment history and the sample includes engineers, administrators, cleaners, nurses, RMS employees, 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. All participants were over 18 except two 17-year-olds who agreed to an interview, following the recommendation of their Head Teacher at the island's secondary school, Prince Andrew School.

My research interests into the island arose whilst working for the St Helena Link, the

educational link between the island and the UK<sup>2</sup>. Similar to Morse (2017, p. 18), whilst this research ‘was not initially envisioned as a study of emotions’, the significance of emotions became apparent when they appeared inaccessible. My naivety as an ex-pat British mainlander and outsider to the island, was that I would go to the island and capture the resentment caused by a ruptured British national identity as well as migration and detachment from kith and kin.

Lowenthal (2007, p. 210) reminds how islands ‘can be dreadful for someone from outside ... heading into a tight little group of people’. When arriving on the island, I soon realised I was witnessing the well-rehearsed ‘standardised exterior’ for the outside audience (Richards, 1982, p. 170). Islanders are experts at silencing their hostility (Baldacchino, 1997) and I had underestimated how emotions are culturally specific, often expressed symbolically (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019; Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Wise and Velayutham, 2017). Following a more reflexive and determined approach, I eventually penetrated the silence and recognised the significance of this paper.

### **Small Island and the Metropole**

Islandness is a ‘political stance’ against the memories of disappointment, resentment and ‘waiting for the next let-down’ which can become structural (Bustos and Roman, 2019, p. 4). The islanders are undoubtedly aware of their disempowered, subordinate British status and hierarchical relationship with mainland Britain (Parker, 2020a). The memories of reduced citizenship remain and many recited the Royal Charter of 1673 to confirm their right to an intact British national identity:

---

<sup>2</sup> at the then Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education (now the University of Gloucestershire)

*Eve, 78*            they was really cross and angry, really cross ... they say that no, it wasn't right to take it away ... if Royalty give you anything, they shouldn't touch that

Due to the lack of economic capital on the island, Marcus confirmed islanders are 'forced' away. Zoe expressed her sadness that her Dad became a contractor on Ascension Island when she was a child; she articulates her expertise at silencing her emotions, yet simultaneously reveals her inner turmoil regarding dispersal, detachment and disempowerment:

*Zoe, 27*            yes, we get all defensive and say you know, it doesn't matter, it's got to be done ... but when you are on the ship or you are here and that person is leaving you, you crying your eyeballs out for days ... it is hurt, that you have to be torn apart for something that we can't change or something that we have no control over

The political decisions of the metropole regarding citizenship, employment and migration were not the only issues which generated resentment. Many islanders articulated feelings of vulnerability and anxiety, concern and anger, with the island's inaccessibility and reliance upon one single ship. At the time of the research, the RMS did shuttle-runs between the islands in the South Atlantic, in addition to the voyage to the UK in the North Atlantic:

*Emma, 34*        mum got sick ... the ship took 2 weeks to get to the UK, 2 weeks to get back down, one week to get to Ascension, and then another week to get to Cape Town so that's six weeks in total before she could get the transplant she needed ... I was so angry, I was angry at the government for not providing an escape ... we are isolated

Some spoke of how islanders have lost their lives due to inaccessible medical attention. 'Whereas islanders feel pride and joy about being insulated, they often feel angry and resentful about being isolated' (Vannini (2011, p. 258).

### **Coming-of-Age Stories & the Emotions of Migration**

As stated earlier within this paper, expressions of explicit anger and pain were rare. More subtle emotions were captured through the St Helenian stories, often considered by the islanders to be typical for this geographically isolated, remote community. The islanders reveal however, that accepting their emotions and ‘managing the pain’ (Baldacchino, 2008) is a learnt process.

In a nonchalant manner, Keith described migration from the island as a ‘way of life’ where islanders ‘get used to it’ yet ‘feel the pinch’. Tania explained migration to be a choice, where islanders learn to control their emotions following a temporary display of sadness:

*Tania, 58,*        they realize they've made a choice ... they just have to stand by it ... you've seen the tearful goodbyes that the pier has here, but you know after a day at sea then they are fine again, and I suppose everybody struggles to deal with their emotions in their own individual way, but uum, I think the youngsters look forward to going

For those coming-of-age, migration is about enhanced opportunities, as well as economic, social and cultural capital (Parker, 2020b). Islanders are eager to leave (Lowenthal, 2007), as Janet confirms when she left for teacher training in the UK:

*Janet, 51,*        I was excited [going to the UK]... Mum had been over ... I wanted to get that same kind of experience, I was really looking forward and I think I was at the right age to leave home and branch out ... I wanted that challenge to look after myself ... I was ready for it

In contrast, Geoff left St Helena for contract employment on Ascension Island. He described his bleak new environment, whereby he instructed himself to adjust. He stood by his decision, despite initially struggling:

*Geoff, 47* When I went to Ascension Island ... when I was about 18 ... that was the first time I'd been offshore ... when the gentleman showed me my room you know ... I felt like I could have gone back to the quay and to the docks and got on a boat you know and sail back home again, it was very depressing ... first time away from home ... I forced myself and said I've got to pull my socks up ... I am a young man now and life begins

Like Janet, Donna left for teacher training within the UK; yet like Geoff, she explains how she needed time to adjust and settle. However, it was her Mum's non-sympathetic and instrumental guidance which surprised her:

*Donna, 36,* I remember getting here, I was all excited ... everything was new ... I remember walking past House of Fraser and I had my nose against the window and this shop just went on and on and on, ... that night we were coming back from the pub ... people were coming out and I felt so threatened ... they were so loud ... I was just so upset and I phoned my mum up and she said 'look just pull yourself together, it's ridiculous' she said, 'you came all that way, now just get used to it'. She didn't say oh don't worry you'll be fine, she just gave me a rough talking ... and it did help ... slowly I just sort of got used to everything ... suddenly I had a bank account and a card to use, I was here

Those left behind feel reassured that the migrant is accessing newly acquired knowledge, capital, skills, and resources (Coe, 2008; Lowenthal, 2007). With one son on Ascension Island and another on The Falklands, Derek explained his role as a parent within the migratory process:

*Derek, 63,* that's opportunity ... cause they've got good jobs and they makin' good money, they are going to stretch themselves, educationally ... its opportunities ... I miss them, but I'm not sad ... when you raise a family, you gotta give the children what they would like to have and let them do it comfortably, ... what you say as a parent to a child, it hangs on them, it can make them or break them ... I will encourage them to do things, I'll support them all the way, that's important.

In contrast to Derek's strategic response, Joanna explicitly articulated her pain. She admits this emotional contradiction, because as an islander she prepared herself, as well as her children, for their inevitable departure:

*Joanna, 47,* when Rosie left I felt absolutely gutted, it hit me right here in my stomach ... living on an island we grow up with the expectation that when people leave it's going to be a long time before you will see them again ... I think we are much more accepting here ... I sort of groomed them if you like, to leave home, you know, it's like – you will leave home! Because I want them to at least experience [opportunities] which St Helena can't necessarily give them. But it's difficult, it's hard

Losing one's child to migration can be excruciatingly painful. One potential participant cancelled her interview because her daughter left on the ship the day before, symbolically demonstrating her trauma. Plummer (1995) confirms story-telling is a complex process, whereby what is left unsaid can be as important as what is explicitly articulated. Emotions are often expressed symbolically, without words and through interaction.

Ruby left the island for teacher training in the UK. She explained how some emotions do not need to be explicitly articulated, because of the common acceptance within the St Helenian community, regarding the painful St Helenian rite of passage:

*Ruby, 44,* I got in the boat and my mum said 'you wouldn't do that would you Ruby' and I said 'no mum I wouldn't ever'. It may sound stupid but I knew what she meant, basically what she meant was, you wouldn't go over there and stay over there. Because girls used to leave home on domestic service, but that was because they wanted to, I didn't want to, I was going because my dad said I had to, so I thought no I wouldn't do that, I wouldn't come over and uum, stay over here, didn't even think I would like England

Similar to the story of Ruby, Baldassar's (2015, p. 85) research identified a migrant whose family 'made me swear you will come back no matter what'. Emotions serve as reminders to migrants, to remain emotionally close (Winarnita, Dirgantoro & Wilding, 2019). However, Ruby's story takes the inevitable twist when she fell in love. Ruby's story reveals the dilemmas of migration, reconciled when her parents repositioned their perspectives on what constitutes a family (Vermot, 2015), i.e. letting go of their daughter for her marriage, love and new family. Ruby's Mum made her wedding dress, but her parents on the island did not attend the wedding in the UK:

*Ruby, 44,* my Mum ... said if you love him we are behind you all the way, but she said if you don't love him don't go, and that's all they said... She made my wedding dress ... she brought the material and everything from Cape Town and my Mum then had two days to make my dress before I left, absolutely gorgeous, white satin and lace, pearl ... them days you used to have to change out of your wedding dress into another dress for the evening but I stayed in mine the whole day long, because I thought that was like my Mum you know, close to me

Within this research many islanders recalled the strategic role of the family within the migratory process. Parents and guardians, prepare, groom and support the young migrants as they embark on their exciting, daunting and inevitable migratory trajectory. Those left behind manage their pain, as do those who leave. Emotions provide the necessary 'meaning frameworks' (Wise and Velayutham, 2017, p. 127), when opportunity and excitement blur with loss, separation, detachment and dispersal.

### **The Sense of Belonging: the Tensions, the Trauma**

As mentioned previously, transnationalism is at the heart of island migration (King, 2009) and Donna's story captures how transnationalism is determined by emotions. Donna completed her



teacher training in the UK and returned to St Helena. She articulates the dichotomy of the large mainland island of Britain, and the small island territory of St Helena:

*Donna, 36, off-island* when I went back [to St Helena] I felt my eyes had been opened to how isolated the island was ... I really needed to get off again ... the fact that there's a shortage of food sometimes, fresh fruit, and the cost of it, it's just frustrating ... it takes so much money to get off for a short holiday ... you get two weeks, but you can't go anywhere you are stuck so, lack of access ... regular access to the outside world... realising, you know, how in abundance it is [in the UK], to get fresh food and choices of food ... I just couldn't live with it anymore, because I knew the difference it was frustrating. I felt trapped in a way actually, especially when the ship would leave, that was it, you're cut off instantly. ... I thought this is not what I want

Donna's desire to escape the island shifted some years later, into a yearning to return. Donna is now living in the UK, with her St Helenian husband and UK-born children. Her narrative reveals a complex web of feelings as she interchangeably uses the word 'home'. For Donna, a 'home' visit ends positively, with a settled sense of belonging within the UK:

*Donna, 36,* I took my daughter [to the island] ... I got quite post-natal depression and I went home [to St Helena] and it was the closure I needed ... I sort of realised that no, this is my home now, UK, and I have been much happier since I came back ... much more settled ... I am finding I am losing memories about home

In contrast to Donna, Ruby has not achieved a sense of belonging in the UK and she cried within her interview. She knows the island could never support her non-St Helenian husband's medical needs and her UK-born children would never settle on the island. Migrants make expensive trips to try to alleviate their 'longing for home' (Baldassar, 2015, p. 86) and Ruby confirmed that despite the expense, she feels emotionally compelled to go. The last time Ruby

went to St Helena it cost her a loss of wages because she is self-employed, additional wages to her employees to cover her shifts, and £8,000 in travel expenses for her family of four:

*Ruby, 44,* I love St Helena ... I'm one of the few people who cry probably once a week, if not once a month ... I remember it every day, I never forget it and I don't let my kids forget it ... every 4 years I get into such a hellish mood that I have to go and so I book my passage, we all go

Gray (2008, p. 943) highlighted the 'uncomfortable contradiction' of emotions, when a migrant cannot achieve a sense of belonging in one place. Islanders manage their trauma when they cannot live on their island, yet they simultaneously cannot live without it. Tania recognised and summarised the contradictions within her own emotions:

*Tania, 58,* I know, I know ... I love my island and I leave. Because you leave to better yourself ... to get the things that you can't have on the island, ... it's a lovely island, ... but way of life over here [UK] is just so much easier ... everything is so easy to get hold of, you know you are not waiting for the ship to come in, ... I am contradicting ... saying I love my island

After migrating to the UK, Mary did not return to the island for two decades. For some, a return visit can be emotionally draining (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019), inducing melancholy and a 'state of sadness' (Christou, 2011, p. 254). Indeed, Mary explained how she was surprised at how emotional she found seeing 'home' for the first time in twenty years. Another two decades later and she is planning another visit:

*Mary, 55* you never think that the day you step onto that big ship that you might never get back ... this country [UK], I've been here what 41 years, it will never be home ... when I went back ... through the port hole all I could see was nothing terribly spectacular, it was just volcanic rock, barren, and I cried, it was like, you could almost smell it, of home, ... when I left ... I cried and cried, I

watched the island just disappear, I mean I'd intended to go back before now, but circumstances, financial and health, and other priorities took over, so here I am again 22 years later planning to go back again

Even when islanders migrate, their identities are rooted in the small place that is 'their' island' (King, 2009, p. 62). To ensure their 'emotional survival', notions of home and identity become renegotiated (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019, p. 67). Such renegotiation however, does not make the process any less painful. Migration is undoubtedly an emotional experience, intensified when the cost and time of travel makes return visits sporadic, and family members do not share your desire to return to a small, remote, inaccessible place referred to as 'home'.

### **Guilt, Obligation and Freedoms**

Emotional care can take place from a distance (Wise and Velayutham, 2017) and migrants can comply with expectations even when dispersed (Winarnita, Dirgantoro & Wilding, 2019). Emotions serve as reminders for migrants, to provide the expected care from a distance. Elderly parents inform their overseas off-spring of their loneliness (Belford & Lahiri-Roy, 2019); guilt is often elevated during times of births, deaths and illness when the migrant is absent (Baldassar, 2015). Some St Helenians described how guilt is expressed explicitly :

*Tania, 58,* My Dad ... I didn't have the opportunity to go back before he died ... I used to go back as often as I could, ... she [mum] used to say to me, when are you coming home and I would feel guilty

Others described how guilt is explicitly symbolically:

*Terry, 57,* they dwell on it, these old ladies, they might say "oh ... I got no slippers for my feet", when they've got a whole wardrobe full of slippers really

To alleviate guilt, and to demonstrate love, duty and morality, migrants invest much time in maintaining contact (Baldassar, 2015). New forms of media are constantly facilitating the ‘maintenance of emotional bonds’ (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015, p. 75) and Tania confirmed how she negotiated the financial costs of staying in touch with her own emotional needs, as well as the needs of her family. Communication was expensive and challenging, but preferable to a lack of contact:

*Tania, 58*      they have internet now ... skype. Before, I would phone my sister up and we are on the phone half an hour and think oh my god, the cost ... Back when I first came over [UK], it was writing letters and it took forever to get a reply ... to phone home they didn’t have direct dialling, it was the old exchange ... so I had to let them know in advance and they had to go to the Cable and Wireless office, say at 12 o clock because that’s when I would phone and they had to be there ... I [did] think maybe I should phone a bit more often, you do have your guilty sort of moments, but then I think I did alright

King (2009) referred to the feminization of migration and recognized the global prominence of female migrants, who migrate independently of their spouse and/or children. Women in particular, can feel a sense of guilt when distance prevents their care giving role. Donna confirmed she has prepared herself for the guilt:

*Donna, 36*      we just have to live with it ... it’s our decision, it’s brought it home ... my mum being ill, I really want to go and see her but I just can’t, ... but we knew that when we moved here, we were just waiting for the knock or the phone call, you know one day, we always knew it would come, hard, you can feel really guilty about it

Some migrants will return home once they have made sufficient money; others wait until retirement but expect their children to join them overseas at some point (Coe, 2008). Some migrants migrate with their children, or start a family when abroad, and then realise that their

children will not return with them (Christou, 2011). In the previous section, Donna described her return visit to the island following post-natal depression, which resulted in a positive outcome and a sense of belonging within the UK. Donna acknowledges however, that her settlement in the UK is not permanent; one day she intends to leave her adult children and return to St Helena:

*Donna, 36,* I will retire to the island, I wouldn't want to retire here [UK] and end up in an elderly care home ... my wish is to go, .... then there's that wrench ... these two won't [her children] and then the whole history will replay itself again and I will be my Mum on St Helena and these two will be here [UK]... because they will eventually grow up and have their own family here, it's that sad wrench ... but I know when they are older I will go

Donna's story narrates the transnational life-cycle for this small island community. The dispersal of St Helenian families spans generations, as Faith also articulates. Following her divorce, Faith left the UK and returned to St Helena with her children to live. However, her eldest daughter could not settle on the island and she returned to her father in the UK:

*Faith, 46, on-island* it is very difficult ... I remember growing up, my sister was overseas, my brother on Ascension, and we would be, you know, so so looking forward to just times when they would come home. For my children, from my own personal experience, I would like nothing more now, than to have a home where all three of my children could be

Returning home to a 'beautiful place' comes with many emotional and material consequences and 'trade-offs' (Morse, 2017, p. 18). Kin and obligation become juxtaposed with freedom; some migrants give up incomes, employment and homes to be with their poorly loved ones (Baldassar, 2015).

Pauline stated how she had recently returned to St Helena due to her Nana's poor health. Despite wishing she were back in the UK, she confirmed her feelings emotionally restrain her, as 'for all the money in the world I am not going to leave her now'. Some islanders cannot move back to the island due to emotional ties established, accidentally or purposively, when overseas. Ben reflected on his friend, who had an 'accident' when in the UK, so stayed to see his child grow up. As Ben stated, 'it's a strange life isn't it, it only takes one small thing to change all the plans you have made'.

### **Small Island Reflections**

Islandness has been linked to 'quality-of-life' (Randall, et al., 2014). Lowenthal (2007, p. 210) notes the irony that islanders leave their islands to escape 'poverty and isolation', whilst mainlanders fantasize about remote, deserted, island sanctuaries. Nonetheless, many St Helenian islanders explicitly articulated their appreciation of their tranquil and peaceful island:

*Derek, 63,*      what I love about my home ... there are things in the outside world that I just don't like ... I don't have to rush to get on that train, I don't have to watch outside for somebody going to mug me ... the outside world is just not my scene ... the hassle, the rat race

Lowenthal (2007, p. 215) noted the islander 'nostalgic gaze', whereby even those who have spent very little time on their island, reinvent the old traditions. Chris had recently returned to St Helena, which he left when he was 16:

*Chris, 28,*      I just love the lifestyle here ... here you can go anywhere .... swimming, fishing, you don't need money for that, so I think the standard of life, the quality of life is much better, but I suppose you have to migrate in order to appreciate that

Vannini's research (2011, p. 250) recited an islander who felt enriched by their childhood on an island: "I grew up without fear,' ... 'my school friends and I could hitch-hike or play outside freely'". Similarly, Janet has not lived on St Helena for over ten years and through her nostalgic gaze, recalls bringing up her son on St Helena:

*Janet, 51,* I tell people, that I can't remember a day that I ever took him to school, ... he always went on his own, and his first day at school, he was picked up by his little cousin ... those things were taken for granted then, I never appreciated that, until I came here [UK] and every parent every day has to pick their child up or drop them off ... it's all those little things which you value ... from the island

Embedded within island life however, is the 'excruciatingly mundane' (Vannini and Taggart 2012, p. 227). Many islands lack the idyllic island-stereotypes of sand, sun and swimming; whole islands are covered within a twenty-minute drive (Vannini and Taggart 2012). Well-travelled islanders crave pub food, yet are more likely to get a 'potluck going' (Vannini, 2011, p. 254). Many St Helenians noted the island's monotony as well as the lack of commodities. One St Helenian spoke of her desperation for a Kentucky Fried Chicken. Others spoke of the 'cabin fever' and described 'rituals that are as hard as rock from repetition' (Lowenthal, 2007, p. 214):

*Jim, 49,* we go up to the rocks, cook a pot of 'plo'... cause that's what people [do]... go down Ruperts or Horse Pasture or Sandy Bay, cook a pot of plo, sit down on the beach, well it's not really a beach ... have a couple of beers ... there's nothing else to do, ... most people gather ... Rosemary Plain on a Sunday afternoon ... we go out driving ... we would go Hutts Gate ... through Levelwood, Sandy Bay, down the town and back home, and the next Sunday we would go down the town, on our way to Sandy Bay ... we just got fed up with it all, the same routine ... it's the same old story

Bad vibes can circulate an island community indefinitely (Vannini, 2011) and islanders are often judged by the behaviours of 'their grandparents or even great-grandparents' (Lawrence, 2002, p. viii). Feeling the 'claustrophobia of conformity' (Skinner, 2002b, p. 308), Faith

confirmed she liked the anonymity of the UK, stating that if you have a row with your spouse there are plenty of hotels where you can go. Similarly, Dawn enjoyed going to the shop in her slippers simply because no-one would know her. Whilst many islanders expressed their attachment to their home island, many simultaneously described their need for a break from the monotony and suffocating characteristics of islandness:

*Simon, 55,* St Helenians are very close knitted people, everybody knows everybody ... you have support from one another ... [but] you get all the scandal ... people like gossiping ... you could hear people ... talking about me moving out and speculating why we broke up ... if people don't know something they will speculate

'There is no automatic 'safe place' in the world for stories' (Plummer, 1995, p. 79) and Catherine recalls how in the 1980s she did not have a willing audience; domestic abuse went unacknowledged on the island. Catherine's story highlights the problem for small island communities which lack anonymity and neutral strangers. Islander professionals are members of your community. They share your neighbours, friends and even family. They know your upbringing, your family, your perpetrator:

*Catherine, 46* I was absolutely fighting for my life, I don't know really how I survived ... on a professional basis, of course, people would say how are you doing Catherine are you alright, but ... I really wanted to talk to somebody ... that I could pour my innermost thoughts out to ... I couldn't tell anybody, the place is too small, so you keep it all to yourself... on a small island ... because it's a close-knit community, people are sometimes torn between the two different parties ... he was liked by people ... it was a lot ... 'oh he wouldn't have done that', I just needed to go ... I was absolutely petrified ... I was terrified that he would have done it again ... if I had a choice really, I wouldn't have gone ... I know how it feels to leave your child to go, because I did that ... and then ... I came home ... I picked him up and took him away

Catherine articulates the contradictions where everybody wants to know your business, yet there is no-one to listen to you. Islanders can be reluctant to take sides, for fear of causing feuds, which can last generations. They remain neutral, by not listening.



Whilst some islanders cherish the island idyll and the freedoms which accompany living within a small, close-knit island community, others escape the monotony; they seek the freedoms and safety, associated with space and anonymity. Many St Helenians desire each of these freedoms, at varying points in their life.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that small remote island communities can be tranquil, mundane and monotonous. Nonetheless, the insular island idyll becomes juxtaposed with cabin fever. Tranquillity becomes suffocation. This paper has captured the emotions of the banal mundaneness of small island life. It has revealed the desire for anonymity and desire for escape from a close-knit community. The freedoms offered by the island become negotiated with the freedoms offered by the mainland.

Tranquillity, monotony and boredom, shifts to pain, fear and separation, which coincides with excitement, trepidation and opportunity. The once inescapable island community, becomes painfully longed for, as transnationalism for this small island community fulfils the islanders' needs to escape. However, transnational emotions determine the islanders' desires to return. Emotions ensure the island community remains intact, yet simultaneously induces a perpetually ruptured sense of home and belonging, which spans generations. Both the island and the mainland simultaneously and interchangeably, fuel feelings of home, belonging and attachment; detachment, nostalgia and longing.

This paper has also captured the emotions resulting from the extraordinary rupture of a national identity, articulated explicitly and implicitly, as a consequence of an on-going relationship with the 'motherland'. This paper has demonstrated how post-colonial, small island territories can be confronted with atypical and extreme structural barriers. Within their everyday lives, the islanders internalise and negotiate the consequences of the unsettling, upsetting and damaging political decisions made by the metropole.

Due to the islanders, the metropole, overseas corporations and technological advancement, much has changed on the island since the data was collected. There is now a refuge on the island for victims of domestic abuse. Moreover, faster, convenient and even instant mobilities have arrived on the island, undoubtedly changing the island forever. Broadband internet arrived in 2007, with the island previously being served by a dial-up connection since 1996. Mobile phones have been in operation on the island since 2015. The island's airport has enabled commercial flights to serve St Helena since 2017, with the RMS sailing its final voyage in 2018. Further research is required into the emotions of the islanders regarding such changes. Nonetheless, the Covid-19 pandemic has however, hindered aviation and the island has once more returned to a reliance on shipping. Mobility and travel remain limited; a norm for this small island community. This raises more questions regarding emotions on the island. The questions are endless; for now, the stories remain in the future.

This research has responded to Baldacchino's (2008, p. 47) request to investigate how islanders' need to escape, reflect from afar, and 'manage the pain'. This has been achieved through a critical interrogation of small island emotions. This paper has demonstrated that small, remote, transnational and arguably mundane island communities, are actually 'hotbeds' of emotions, brimming with challenging decisions and negotiations. Such emotions form the

qualitative generalisations for the small island, transnational literature. Islandness as a concept is underpinned by emotion. When the emotions of small, remote, post-colonial, transnational island communities are blended together, the outcome is the contradictory emotions of islandness.

- Baldacchino, G. (2008). Studying islands: On whose terms? Some epistemological and methodological challenges to the pursuit of island studies, *Island Studies Journal*, 3 (1), 37-56.
- Baldacchino, G. (1997). *Global Tourism and Informal Labour Relations: The Small-Scale Syndrome at Work*, London: Mansell Publishing Limited.
- Baldassar, L. (2015). Guilty feelings and the guilt trip: emotions and motivation in migration and transnational caregiving, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 16, 81-89.
- Belford, N. & Lahiri-Roy, R. (2019). (Re)negotiating transnational identities: notions of 'home' and 'distanced intimacies', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 31, 63-70.
- Boccagni, P. & Baldassar, L. (2015). Emotions on the move: mapping the emergent field of emotion and migration, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 16, 73-80.
- Brown, J. (2011). Expressions of diasporic belonging: the divergent emotional geographies of Britain's Polich communities, *Emotion, Space & Society*, 4, 229-237.
- Bustos, B. & Roman, A. (2019). A sea uprooted: islandness and political identity on Chile Island, Chile, *Island Studies Journal*,
- Christou, A. (2011). Narrating lives in (e)motion: embodiment, belongingness and displacement in diasporic spaces of home and return, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 4, 249-257.
- Coe, C. (2008). The structuring of feeling in Ghanaian transnational families, *City and Society*, 20 (2), 222-250.
- Conkling, P. (2007). On islanders and islandness. *Geographical Review*, 97(2), 191-201.
- Drower, G. (1992). *Britain's Dependent Territories, A Fistful of Islands*, Aldershot, Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited.
- Gray, B. (2008). Putting emotion and reflexivity to work in researching migration, *Sociology*, 42(5), 935-952.
- Hochschild, A. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure, *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), 551-75.
- Hogenstijn, M., & van Middelkoop, M. (2005). Saint Helena: Citizenship and spatial identities on a remote island. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96(1), 96- 104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2005.00441.x>
- Hogenstijn, M., & Van Middelkoop, M. (2002). Saint Helena Changing Spatial Identities of the Citizens of Saint Helena Thesis, Retrieved 22nd September, 2006, from <http://www.sthelenat.k/>
- King, R. (2009). Geography, islands and migration in an era of global mobility, *Island Studies Journal*, 4(1), 53-84.
- Lawrence, P. (2002). Foreword, In T. Charlton, B. Gunter, & A. Hannan, *Broadcast Television Effects in a Remote Community*, London, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lowenthal, D. (2007). Islands, lovers, and others, *The Geographical Review*, 97, 2, 202-229.
- Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories, Power, Change and Social Worlds*, London, Routledge.
- Morse, C. (2017). The emotional geographies of global return migration to Vermont, *Emotion, Space & Society*, 25, 14-21.
- Parker, C. (2020a). On the edge of Britishness: the rupture of a national identity, *National Identities*, 22, 3, 245-263.
- Parker, C. (2020b). 'St Helena, An Island Between': Multiple Migrations, Small Island Resilience and Survival, *Island Studies Journal*, 15(2).
- Randall, J. Kitchen, P. Mahajarine, N., Newbold, B., Williams, A. & Wilson, K. (2014). Immigrants, islandness and perceptions of quality-of-life on Prince Edward Island, Canada. *Island Studies Journal*, 9(2), pp. 343 – 362.

- Richards, J. (1982). Politics in small independent communities. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies*, 20, 155-171.
- Royle, S. (2019). Island history, not the story of islands: the case of St Helena, *Shima*, 13, 1, pp. 44-55.
- Royle, S. (2001). *A Geography of Islands, Small Island Insularity*, London, Routledge.
- St Helena Government. (2019). Population. Retrieved from <http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/statistics-data/> accessed June 2019.
- Royle, S. (1991). The economics of dependency: St Helena. In D. Lockhart and D. Drakakis-Smith (Eds) *Environmental and Economic Issues in Small Island Development*, Developing Areas Research Group, Monograph No. 6, The Commonwealth Foundation: 63-78.
- Skinner, J. (2002a). Special section: Introduction. Managing island life: social, economic and political dimensions of formality and informality in 'island' communities, *Social Identities*, 8(2), 205-215.
- Skinner, J. (2002b). British constructions with constitutions: the formal and informal nature of 'island' relations on Montserrat and Gibraltar. *Social Identities*, 8(2), 301-320.
- The Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship (1996). *St Helena, The Lost County of England*, St Helena.
- Vannini, P. (2011). Constellations of ferry (im)mobility: islandness as the performance and politics of insulation and isolation. *Cultural Geographies*, 18(2), 249-271.
- Vannini, P., & Taggart, J. (2012). Doing islandness: a non-representational approach to an island's sense of place. *Cultural Geographies*, 20(2), 225-242.
- Wise, A. & Velayutham, S. (2017). Transnational affect and emotion in migration research, *International Journal of Sociology*, 47, 116-130.
- Vermot, C. (2015). Guilt: a gendered bond within the transnational family, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 16, 138-146.
- Wang, Z. & Bennett, M. (2020) Anywhere but here: Experiences of islandness in Pearl River Delta island tourism, *Island Studies Journal*, 15(1), 205-222.
- Winarnita, M. Dirgantoro W. & Wilding, R. (2019). 'Close, not close': migrant artists negotiating transnational mother-daughter intimacies, *Emotion, Space and Society*, 31, 78-85.