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‘St Helena, an island between’: Multiple migrations, small island resilience, and survival

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Abstract: St Helena is a non-sovereign British Overseas Territory located in the South Atlantic Ocean. When full British citizenship was removed in 1981, migration destinations were reduced to Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands. The islanders of St Helena are not only transnational; they are trans-islander. With the return of citizenship in 2002, many St Helenians migrated to the UK, depleting the population on the island, creating doubts regarding the island’s future. Whilst the islanders defended their British national identity, they simultaneously questioned it. This paper demonstrates how although St Helena officially economically relies on the British Government, the islanders themselves support their island through economic remittances. This paper offers an insight into how communities survive during times when their national identity is ruptured. The St Helenian community remains intact; the islanders have ensured this. A suite of Bourdieu’s concepts have been utilised for a theoretically driven understanding of islandness. Islander identity is formed as outward-looking desiring opportunity, freedom of movement and capital, and inward-looking with a strong sense of feeling and attachment to the island. Continuity and survival for this small island community is composed of migration, shift, and rupture.

Keywords: Bourdieu, Britishness, islandness, islands, migration, St Helena, transnational

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A small number of former colonies remain, with little desire for independence. Whilst non-sovereignty can provide economic security, a passport, and right to settle in the metropole, being a non-sovereign small island can also lead to ambiguity, controversy, and tension (Ferdinand, Oostindie, & Veenendaal, 2020). Islandness has been considered a “political stance” (Bustos & Roman, 2019, p. 97) against such tensions, caused by an island’s relationship to its mainland state. Memories of disappointment, lack of fulfillment, resentment, and “waiting for the next let-down” (Bustos & Roman, 2019, p. 100) become structural. Mobility has thus been considered an essential ‘adaptive strategy’ for small island developing states (SIDS), for accessing opportunities and livelihoods as well as influencing identities, meanings and empowerment (Lama, 2018). However, little is known about the coping strategies of migrants, i.e., the formal and informal forms of social protection as they embark on their migrant trajectories (Faist et al., 2015). This paper contributes to filling this gap.

This study of St Helena in the years 2006–2008 provides an insight into islanders' use of informal forms of social protection, at a point in time when their national identity and citizenship rights had been returned. Full British citizenship was removed in 1981 and returned in 2002. Memories of frustration and disappointment were captured (see Parker, 2020) following over two decades of a downgraded British status. The memories of a fickle, undependable, and even dispensable national identity, as a consequence of the fluctuating political decisions of the metropole, remained. At the time, this island community appeared disenchanted, diminishing, possibly even disappearing (Drower, 1992; Royle, 1991) due to the reduced population, as the islanders capitalised on their returned British citizenship.

The focus of this paper is to demonstrate how, at the time of the study, St Helena's islanders were working towards sustaining the future of their island community, utilising the opportunities available to them. This paper demonstrates that, although geographically dispersed, the islanders were retaining their attachments and commitments to their island community, adopting survival strategies for both on and off the island, and drawing upon informal forms of social protection alongside their reinstated formal citizenship rights. This paper thus provides a snapshot, a case study, and reflects upon a moment in time in St Helena's history.

This paper draws from 68 interviews undertaken with the St Helenian community between 2006 and 2008. Whilst islandness is undoubtedly composed of the mundane (Vannini & Taggart, 2012), this paper is written with the shifts and ruptures, continuities and discontinuities, uncertainties and survival strategies in mind. Such reflections are particularly pertinent, with Britain leaving the European Union in 2020. The timeframe within which the data was collected will enhance the anonymity of the participants within this small island community.

Citizenship, strategy and survival

Baldacchino (2014, p. 9) explains the “strategy game,” where small island states play out their international relations with their former colonial power, resulting in islanders being both “victims and actors.” Whilst small island communities remain dependent upon overseas aid from their associated metropole, retaining the MIRAB (migration, remittances, aid, and bureaucracy) existence, for Baldacchino (2011, p. 243), “empowerment and human agency” underpin islandness and island survival. Small islands demonstrate a resilience and an ability to utilise (a lack of) resources “that simply boggle the mind” (Baldacchino, 2014, p. 3); “managing ‘boom and bust’ scenarios [...] like loops on a roller coaster” (Christensen, 2011, ctd. in Baldacchino, 2011, p. 241). Opportunities come and go, and islanders reinvent themselves accordingly (Baldacchino, 2014).

Reinvention is a particularly apt word, given the precarious nature of citizenship within the neo-liberal world (Ong, 2006a). The boundaries between the citizen and the non-citizen can dissolve in favour of the needs of the neo-liberal market, thus challenging the notion of citizenship as tied to a geographical landscape as well as the imagination of the nation-state (Ong, 2006a). The selling of passports and citizenship by small island tax havens serves as an explicit case in point (van Fossen, 2018).

Migration and transnationalism are therefore not prerequisites for upward social and/or spatial mobility, but rather one's citizenship status, nationality, and birthplace, alongside the ability to socially adapt, are what distinguishes migration from mobility (Faist, 2013). A migrant's life chances thus depends on the migrant's desire to migrate and adapt, the migrant's

demographic characteristics and whether they potentially lead to exploitation and exclusion, and any successful outcome for the migrant such as securing work and housing (Faist, 2016). Transnational migrants utilise ‘patchwork’ forms of social protection throughout their migration trajectory, through an amalgamation of the formal and informal institutions of “states, markets, civil society, families” (Faist, 2017, p. 21).

With mobility and transnationalism considered an essential ‘adaptive strategy’ for SIDS (Lama, 2018), islandness, therefore, should be characterised as an amalgamation of mobilities and non-mobilities, global connections, infinite links, and “transnational circulation” (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014, p. 49). Islandness however, is also an internalised feeling, informing “what islanders do, how they move, how they problem solve” (Vannini & Taggart, 2012, p. 227). The habitus forms the belief systems (the rules, regulations, values, discourses) forming a tactical inclination (Bourdieu, 2009), the “‘feel for the game’ ... that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations” (Johnson, 2009, p. 5). Conkling (2007, p. 193) confirms islandness to be a form of common sense, part of ones’ identity, a reflection: “there is self-consciousness about islandness among islanders [...] a generalized sense of loss, of what could have been, of what probably happened that shouldn’t have; of the blood, sweat, and tears which permeates every foot of island rock, soil, and beach.”

This paper amalgamates each of the above definitions of islandness, to add testimony to Baldacchino’s (2014) point that small islands play out their strategy game, managing opportunities and resources at a time when there appear to be none. Islanders reinvent themselves accordingly, protecting the future of their island community and island identity. As this paper will demonstrate, islandness for small island, non-sovereign territories is about multiple migrations, shifts and rupture, resilience and survival. Islandness is an outward-looking desire for opportunity and freedom of movement, and an inward-looking commitment with a strong sense of feeling and attachment to the island.

St Helena: A British Overseas Territory

At 47 square miles, St Helena sits in the South Atlantic Ocean, 4,606 miles from its ‘motherland’, the UK. St Helena’s closest neighbour is Ascension Island, 703 miles away. St Helena, Ascension Island, and Tristan da Cunha are clustered as one British Overseas Territory (see Figure 1). The St Helenian population was recorded as being 5,415 in 1987 before British Citizenship was taken away and 3,867 in 2008 once citizenship along with a British passport had been restored, increasing to 4,122 in 2016 (St Helena Government, 2016) and 4,610 in 2019 (St Helena Government, 2019).

St Helena was discovered uninhabited in 1502 by the Portuguese. The Portuguese, Dutch, and English recognised the importance of the island during such times of imperial, colonial, and mercantile trade, dependent upon the sea, when islands were “strategic hubs that defended trade routes and provided opportunities for revictualing, ship repair and refreshment” (Royle, 2019, p. 53). At varying times, these “European maritime nations” (Royle, 2019, p. 47) fought over ownership of the island but, in 1673, the English Navy took the island once more and it was handed back to the East India Company for the last time (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” (Bishop of St Helena’s Commission on Citizenship, 1996, p. 8).

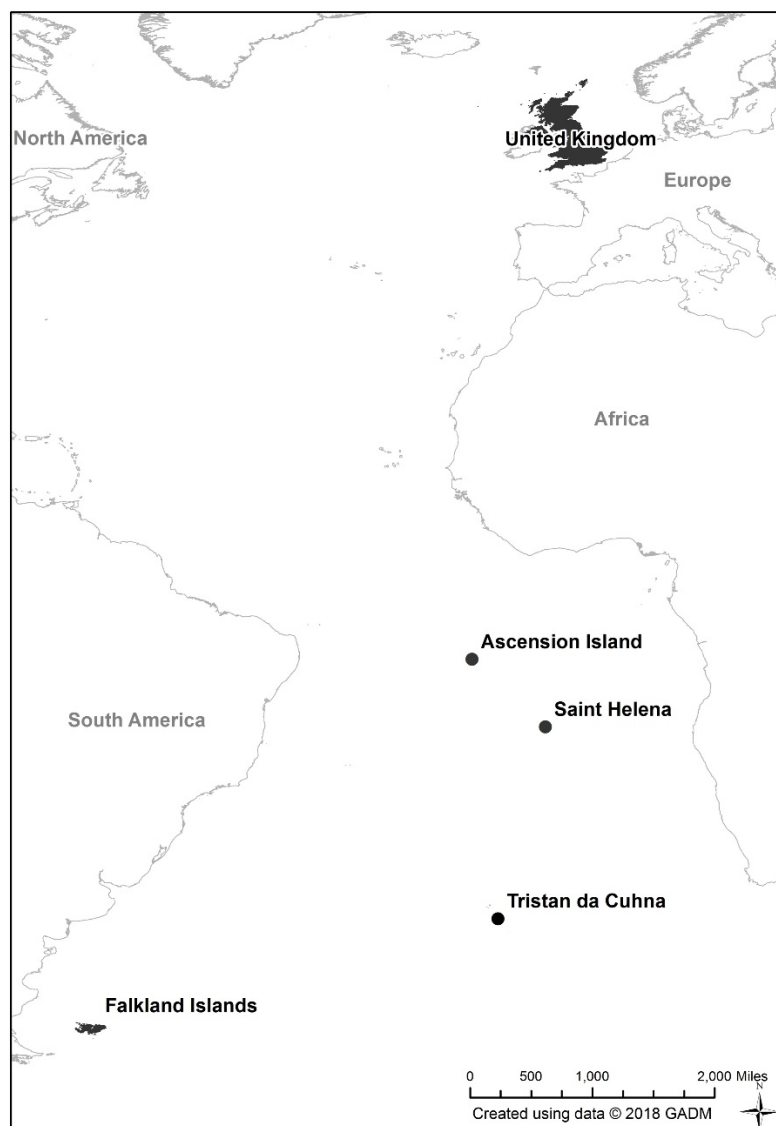


Figure 1: Saint Helena, Ascension Island, and Tristan da Cunha in Relation to the United Kingdom. *Source:* <https://gadm.org/>

St Helena has shifted in status from colonial asset to post-colonial liability, not unlike some other islands (Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010). The status of the remaining non-sovereign territories is what secures them their standard of living, which although below the standards of the metropole, tends to be better than other independent islands of similar size (Ferdinand, Oostindie, & Veenendaal, 2020). The constitutional arrangements for the territories of the UK are more “reminiscent of colonialism” than those of the Dutch or French (Ferdinand, Oostindie, & Veenendaal, 2020). In the 1970s, St Helena’s economy became subsidised with a British grant-in-aid. Cohen (1983a) argued that the development plan for St Helena remained non-developing and embedded within the discourses of colonial-style practices, which appeared to be more of a “planned form of increased dependency” (p. 132). An ex-pat British Governor continues to reside on the island overseeing the island’s affairs.

Concepts such as subordination, helplessness, and disempowerment characterise island literature (Baldacchino, 2014) and St Helena is no exception, referred to as part of the “permanent empire” (Drower, 1992, p. x) under the responsibility and liability of Britain

(Royle, 1991). With no substantial locally based economy of its own (Moore, 2000), the island is characterised as a MIRAB economy (Royle, 2001).

In 1981, for the first time in just over 300 years, the islanders lost their British citizenship rights due to the 1981 British Nationality Act. This act was “probably illegal” (Cohen, 1983b, p. 9) because of the 1673 Royal Charter, but passed nonetheless to prevent immigrants from Hong Kong entering the UK after Hong Kong was handed over to China in 1997 (Royle, 2001). The Act has been referred to as “racist” (Moore, 2000, p. 3) and discriminatory (Cohen, 1983b), given that the two colonies exempt from the Act were the white populated islands of Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands.

With the 1981 British Nationality Act, the St Helena’s status shifted from a British Crown Colony to a British Dependent Territory. With the right of abode within the UK now denied (Moore, 2000), migration to the UK ceased unless a St Helenian obtained one of the few permits allocated per year. In contrast, migration of St Helenians to Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands increased. Migrating as low-paid temporary contractors with no rights or security, St Helenians became a cheap and willing labour force, constantly under threat of being deported (Moore, 2000).

In 2002, the island’s official status shifted once more to a British Overseas Territory. British citizenship, along with a British passport, the right of abode in the UK, and unrestricted travel, was restored. Subsequently, the islanders left at “an alarming rate” (Hogenstijn & van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 103). Schools and community centres closed and the island suffered from a loss of registered nurses, teachers and police. Royle (2010) stated that “the future of the island itself must be in some doubt” (p. 20). Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop (2005) stated “at present, the future looks grim,” (p. 103) and “St Helena’s main export product is formed by its people” (Hogenstijn and van Middelkoop, 2002, p. 40).

O’Bey (2002, p. 15), a St Helenian herself, reported the speculation that a depopulated island was what Britain was secretly hoping for, in an attempt to end the obligation of supporting a territory which “for them has outlived its usefulness.” O’Bey (2002, p. 15) recited a comical yet sinister phrase on the island (variants of which have been used to refer to other small islands, see Baldacchino, 2011, p. 244), “will the last person leaving the island please switch the lights off.”

Researching Islandness

68 qualitative interviews were undertaken between 2006 and 2008. 46 were undertaken on St Helena, and 22 were undertaken in the UK. 70 hours 56 minutes of data were collected, which was transcribed and organised using NVivo between 2006 and 2011. Pseudonyms have been used and identifiable comments omitted. The data being over ten years old will contribute further to the anonymity of the participants within this small island community.

A typical characteristic of island communities is their “multiple migration processes,” (King, 2009, p. 68) and Baldacchino (2008) has raised the problem of defining who is a legitimate islander and who is not. This research encountered St Helenians who, for various reasons, had spent decades of their life living overseas, as well as ‘islanders’ who have lived on the island for decades and married a St Helenian with whom they had children, yet who have no St Helenian lineage themselves. In this research, it was subsequently decided that each

interviewee must have at least one St Helenian parent and be first-generation St Helenian, irrespective of how long they had lived on or off the island.

Demonstrating the hierarchies of class, power, and capital embedded on the island, as well as how particular narratives can exist for an outside audience (Schulenburg, 2002), some islanders argued the research was including the wrong 'type' of islander and tried to direct the research towards, for example, those with higher or professional status, or those considered 'key informants'. The research, nonetheless, did not exclude due to education or employment history. Occupations within the sample on- and off-island included, for example, engineers, administrators, cleaners, nurses, employees on the Royal Mail Ship St Helena, former mill and dairy workers, bar staff, plumbers, teachers, classroom assistants, finance managers, managing directors, business owners, shop workers, accountants, retail managers, domestic workers, and 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.

Typical of many small island communities (Skinner, 2002a), most St Helenians work(ed) in the local government as well as has/had multiple roles/forms of employment (Skinner, 2002b). For the purposes of anonymity within this small island community, as well as due to the multiple professions of many islanders, their employment status and history have not been identified.

When on-island, the researcher approached strangers, from all districts on the island, in bars, shops, at the golf course, sat at bus stops, or out walking. Only three St Helenians refused an interview and one person cancelled an appointment, although as an 'outsider' and a British mainlander, I remained unaware of who was avoiding me within this small, close community. Of the 46 St Helenians interviewed on island, five had never been overseas (aged 18, 20, 37, 70, and 78). Most of the interviewees had been off the island on several occasions, for a variety of reasons, including medical evacuations, 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.

St Helenians interviewed in the UK were approached via the means of a snowball sample, recommended by a St Helenian either on or off the island who had already taken part in the research. Most off-island interviews were undertaken in Gloucestershire, although not all. No one refused an interview, although two St Helenians did not respond to a request via email. Overall, the research did not draw from a random sample either on- or off-island, and so cannot claim to be representative of all St Helenians. In particular, this research does not include those who no longer have contact with the on-island or off-island community.

The Strategy Game

Economic capital, in the form of remittances, can award migrants power, choice and decision making as they can control how remittances are spent (Orozco & Welle, 2006, as cited in Faist, 2016, p). One contributor, Clive, describes how receiving economic remittances, or 'home allotments', form an essential part of St Helena's economy. The older and younger generations who are left behind benefit materially, emotionally, and symbolically, as the remittances symbolise continuity and attachment to the homeland as well as a sense of empowerment from within the community:

Clive, 60: Without that family connection and the remittances from overseas, the island's economy would be in dire straits [...] the income from remittances from family overseas to family over here, they can't put a figure on it, but we guess anything near five million [...] all the cars coming now, that's not coming from the people here, that's coming from the children overseas, they go away, they leave their children for the Grandparents to bring up [...] but the income is not coming from St Helena, not by a long shot, the income is coming from the workers offshore, and they are sending the cars for the parents to use, while they are offshore, and when they come home their vehicles are already there, it makes sense, because vehicles are cheap in the UK at the moment, that's where all the vehicles come from, the remittances are colossal.

Clive continues that, in recent years, St Helenians have progressed from a trend of squandering their money, for example in the pub, to saving for better homes or cars:

Clive, 60: People are making better use of their money, they are spending their money differently. Used to be people have a drink [...] we came back from Ascension every year for a holiday, and you know every penny you had you would blow it [...] but you see people coming back today, no way, they might buy you a drink, if you twist their arm they might buy you a drink, but before days you'd buy the whole bar a drink. When we came back we were the big spenders in those days, but not anymore, in the last twenty years, no, no, no, people live much better lifestyles. They look after their money better.

Whilst several St Helenians in the UK stated they were not sending remittances home to support family members, they confirmed nonetheless that they were saving for their future on the island, sending money back to the builders so when they return their house is already built. Another contributor, Philip, claims that you cannot always see lots of 'real' money on the island, but you can see a rise in property. Hundreds of half-built or empty homes on the island may appear a depressing sight for those left behind, but they also provide a symbol of the future and a symbol that many islanders intend to return home. At the time when the data for this research was collected, Joanna was already noting the trend of some St Helenians in their late 20s or early 30s returning home and settling on the island. She states how they are creating a new social scene that is specific for this age range. Islanders may 'make' a home where they dwell in the host country, but they build a home on their island as a "life-long commitment" (Lam, 2020). For Derek, this is "the crux of the matter":

Derek, 63: Some people [...] they say well, I wonder what's going to happen to the island, that's true in a sense ... but you see, people got short memories eh, [...] [they say] oh my goodness people are leaving the island, there won't be anybody down there, but you don't know eh, that might be the sort of pattern for about ten years, maybe for twenty years. What happens after that, [...] people come back.

Negotiating Britishness and St Hellenianness

“It is certain that on each side of the [...] Atlantic some things are compatible, others are not” (Bourdieu, 2010, p. xv). St Helena is in the South Atlantic and the UK is in the North Atlantic. These two diverse and distant geographical places have been officially attached to each other for three and a half centuries. St Helenians therefore, to differing degrees, are perhaps more advantaged than other cultural groups migrating to the UK because of their birthplace and pre-existing sense of Britishness.

Bourdieu (2010) refers to many different forms of power, which are simultaneous with capital. *Cultural Capital* includes cultural knowledge and cultural competence, leading to prestige, status and culturally valued taste. *Symbolic Capital* consists of academic capital, which can include *Social Capital*, connections, honourability and respectability. *Linguistic Capital* is linguistic competence. The distribution of capital thus varies between different social groups, creating and reinforcing hierarchies (Bourdieu, 2010).

The St Helenians draw upon their sense of Britishness and British capital not only for status on St Helena, but also for a life overseas. Tania describes how, when growing up on St Helena, her father used to work with British experts and so she used to play with British expat children. Similarly, Donna notes how her father obtained the social and cultural capital of Britishness due to working on the ship:

Donna, 36: When Dad came home [...] we would go to school with shiny pens and every half term we would have a new ruck sack [...] and new dresses and things like that. We knew when he was coming, we would run home 'cause he would have Quality Street and things like that. At Christmas, we would get candied fruit and things from Cape Town [...] 'cause that wasn't on the island but because he worked on the ship, we were considered in the community as being well off.

Bourdieu (2009) claimed that speech can be a sign of wealth and capital. Complementing the tools of Bourdieu, Bakhtin (2006) argued that speech genres can be used as a form of empowerment because the more cultured and/or knowledgeable an agent, the more speech genres an agent has to draw upon to form their interaction. Thus, Bakhtin awards agency to individual agents, but only if they are culturally and socially successful enough to draw upon a repertoire of speech genres which they can manipulate.

Philip, for example, describes how he was taught how to speak a 'proper' version of the English language during his schooling on Ascension Island. This could be referred to as repressive Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 2008; Parker, 2020), or as a form of cultural and linguistic capital:

Philip, 36: Growing up on Ascension we were very lucky, cause uum, you are exposed to at an early age, you have English teachers, you know British teachers all the way through the school system, and I remember from early on they always used to correct the way we spoke, always telling us, always correcting our accents and our pronunciations [...] I think I was lucky growing up on Ascension [...] we had a lot of English friends, we had a lot of American

friends, and we travelled as well, we were able to travel abroad, so by having that exposure I think we are just a little bit more balanced.

Migration scholars have applied various concepts of capital for an understanding of how families can be fluid and remain intact as well as provide support, even when geographically dispersed (Levitt, 2001; Zontini & Reynolds, 2007). Faist and Bilecen (2015, p. 289) argue that “family and community support networks and the information exchanged in respective gatherings, form the backbone of informal social protection.” Socialising is thus a form of social capital. Preparing and enjoying food, watching televised sport, engaging in religious and/or cultural festivals can provide “the meaning of life” (Faist & Bilecen, 2015, p. 200), as migrants remain culturally engaged with their homeland.

When away from the island, many St Helenians utilise their St Helenianness and St Helenian cultural capital; their habitus, feelings, and emotions, inform what they do and how they behave (Conkling, 2007; Vannini & Taggart, 2012). Donna describes how, in the UK, she feels more at ease with her St Helenian friends than with her British friends. She feels she has to put more effort into her relationships with her British friends, whereas her St Helenian relationships are easier because they all have a common bond. Ellie explains her emotional attachment to her community:

Ellie, 19: I think it’s a sense of wanting to be around your own [...] people bring home cooking [...] like when I go round to my friends it’s like let’s make St Helena curry or fishcakes or whatever, so I think like people move away but they bring a sense of bringing everything they know about the culture, like the food [...] you get the St Helena dances in Cirencester and stuff, because people are close and that’s how it has always been.

Many St Helenians speak of the popular annual gathering for the St Helenian community, known to the St Helenians as Reading Sports. Pauline comments how “you see half of St Helena at the Reading Sports.” Similarly, Jim estimates that he would see more people his own age at Reading Sports than he would if he returned to the island. Philip explains how you “change yourself” when you live in the UK, but when St Helenians come together, they revert back to St Helenian practices. Reading Sports thus provides the St Helenian community a safe place to play out the culture and habitus of their homeland:

Philip, 36: Reading Sports, uum, we all meet up once a year in the UK, [...] it’s well over a thousand, two thousand people meet up on August bank holiday, so even when we are apart for a long time [...] if we don't know the person we just ask who are you, who is your family? Once you establish the link that’s fine, once we know who is who, we just uum, have a conversation, it’s not a problem. I always noticed when I went to Reading Sports how although they are in the middle of the UK, in the whole field all the cars are left unlocked, you know and it’s strange but we just adopt that St Helena mentality once we are altogether again and even though when we go to the St Helena dances in the UK, all your guards come down again and the children are left playing [...] They run around freely and at the end of the

night you go looking for your kids again [...] it always fascinated me how we, we change completely to live there [the UK], but when we all get together it all just became as though we were back here again [on island]. So yes, it's all part of the community, we still, if something happens to somebody on Ascension we are all concerned about it here [...] we send our condolences or whatever to family and friends here, for something that happens abroad, if there is a wedding or a funeral or something like that, the messages that come in from abroad, you know, take forever to read out, so it's still a very strongly linked community even though we are spread apart.

Not all St Helenians choose to retain such closeness. Jane says she has never been to Reading Sports and does not ever want to go. Ruby comments on the “small mindedness” of many St Helenians where everyone knows everyone else's business. It should be noted however, that Jane and Ruby keep in touch with the St Helenian community, both on and off the island. Even those who claim they will probably never return to the island demonstrate a desire to retain their links with their homeland; many cook St Helenian traditional recipes, many listened to Saint FM radio, and all telephone St Helenian friends and family on and off the island.

Symbolic violence, misrecognition, and shifts within the Habitus

Culture and capital contribute to domination, legitimising hierarchy as natural (Johnson, 2009). Social identity is defined through difference, whereby internalised logic, perceptions, and practices unify but also separate specific groups of people. Bourdieu (2010) thus believed that the social world is a cognition, which is actually a misrecognition. Due to distinction and (mis)recognition, symbolic violence can be exercised upon the social agent due to their complicity, their lacking in aspirations, their acceptance to be treated as inferior and denied resources.

Elsa describes how, since the 1950s, the islanders, particularly the young girls, have obtained employment as a ‘domestic’ with aristocrats, relations of “the Queen” (now the late Queen Mother), Dukes, Earls, and Duchesses. When British citizenship was taken from the islanders, being a ‘domestic’ was one of the limited options which remained open to the islanders, albeit for small numbers, and particularly (although not exclusively) to women. Since the return of citizenship, there are many St Helenians who continue to work within ‘domestic’ posts because they come with lodgings, a sense of security, and pre-existing community. Avril became a domestic in her teens in the 1960s. She recalls the enriching experiences she obtained as well as demonstrates the transnational characteristics of St Helenian migration:

Avril, 60: I signed a contract to stay with the family for two years [...] they have their shooting and everything, so we did all that [...] it was an experience [...] I went back to the island and then I got restless [...] I did actually come back [...] the family they were brilliant [...] and like we were chauffeur driven, if we went up to London, we would have the chauffeur take us.

Because Avril was considered a good employee, she recalled how her employer could not understand why she left as a ‘domestic’ to go into retail. However, Avril became a manager very quickly and remarks the “rest is history.” During her low-status domestic work, Avril would undoubtedly have drawn upon her pre-existing Britishness accrued when growing up on the then-British colony. Simultaneously, she would have enhanced her cultural and linguistic capital, her mannerisms, etiquette, appropriate speech, knowledge, and confidence, when working in the UK as a domestic for the British upper classes. For some islanders, their accents, dress sense, mannerisms, confidence, and obvious economic capital can undoubtedly be attributed to the economic, cultural, and linguistic capital accrued when working for the British upper classes and aristocracy. In 2008, Carol lived in the old servants’ quarters at The Court. She was surrounded by portraits of her employer’s family ancestors, photographs of her employer’s sons at Eton (the internationally renowned, prestigious, single-sex English boarding school), the stables, antiques, lakes, and countless bedrooms, as well as a small community of housemaids, gardeners, and butlers. In many ways, she liked her job, but she did not like having to cook for large dinner parties, nor the way she was sometimes spoken to, nor picking up the soiled underwear off her employer’s bedroom floor. In contrast to Avril, Carol may never convert the mannerisms, etiquette, and speech that she had learnt whilst a domestic into cultural and linguistic capital for a life of social mobility once in the UK. However, Carol’s newly acquired economic capital enabled her to buy her home back on the island, thus negotiating her lack of capital in the UK for the accumulation of capital when back on the island. For some transnational St Helenians, their lack of status in the UK is actively negotiated for accelerated economic and cultural capital when back on the island, as Jim, a cleaner in the UK, explicitly stated:

Jim, 49: England to me, well it’s a great place you know, and I am here making shit loads of money, more than Grace making back home, and she is the Head of Department you know, but I mean, I do a fair amount of work for it, it ain’t like you can sit down for your money.

Faist (2009, p. 40) notes the negativity and “renegotiation of boundaries” experienced by some transnational returnees who, for example, pose threats to patriarchy. Noivo (2002) similarly noted the social exclusion, marginalisation and stigma, as well as the contradictions of “identity, membership and belongingness” (p. 264) for migrants. Tensions can occur for the islander who has been overseas, when up against the islanders who have remained on the island. Holly has returned to the island due to her Nana being ill. She describes how she has experienced resistance from her St Helenian community because she has changed since she migrated:

Holly, 35: I’ve been in the UK for 15 years [...] and I’ve travelled a bit, I’ve become more knowledgeable so obviously I’m going to speak of more knowledgeable things or more interesting things, and uum, so it’s hard to become a bit of the community, although I do try I mean, I joined the conservation group [on St Helena] and I’m trying to get lots of St Helenians to come on these walks we do and check out the endemics and see how much we got to offer and what we doing, but no they don’t want to know because it’s an ex-pat thing, the walking and all of this, you know, it’s an ex-

pat thing [...] someone told me straight to my face, I'm not a proper St Helenian any more, and that came from a St Helenian, and a lot of St Helenians tell me that I'm not a Saint anymore.

Some St Helenians speak of the resentment encountered when others on the island better themselves. "Social closure" (Faist, 2017, p. 26) and "opportunity hoarding" (Faist & Bilecen, 2015, p. 288) can lead to preferential treatment within one's close community or family, whilst others are excluded from opportunities. With the loss of expertise on the island at the time, one St Helenian joked about how jobs on the island were being given to the "rough little kids." Other St Helenians spoke about the 'Key posts', which at the time of the research had recently been implemented on the island. Key posts were posts traditionally awarded to ex-pats, with higher salaries than typical St Helenian salaries. Now such posts were being awarded to St Helenians who have been abroad, become qualified and experienced. Lam (2020) argues transnationalism to be a process, which introduces migrants to change, alternative cultures, and becomes a form of "personal development." Migration was indeed shifting the structures on the island in multiple ways.

Through social and cultural capital and remittances, Marcus confirms the younger and middle generations who have lived overseas have an awareness of how to push the boundaries on the island, and steer the island community forward and into the future. Marcus describes how people who have never been off the island will be resistant to, and sceptical of, change, but nonetheless they should be challenged and islanders should no longer conform to the hierarchies and informal rules within the island community:

Marcus, 26: You still have to stand up to the challenge, that's the way I look at it, you can't be backing down for somebody because they've been here for 25 years, [...] those days have gone [...] cause now you got the choice, if you don't like it here and you don't like working under the rules here, you just go someplace else where you [...] get paid for what you can do, [...] you look at all of the skilled workers, I mean in terms of builders and carpenters and that, they get £67 maybe, £60 a week [on St Helena], they go to the UK they get £700, £800 per week, and that's on a bad week, I know a lot of my friends like who I went to school with, they getting like 70 grand a year, some of 'em, civil engineers, [...] I know some people who come off the ship and they getting, they knocking down big money and you can't really knock 'em for that, they take advantage of the situation when it's there, everybody else has got to step their game up, that's the way I look at it.

Marcus narrates what "the game" was then for St Helenians, and it was one of change. He explicitly states that the islanders now have more choice and agency through the return of British citizenship and the right of abode in the UK. Subsequently, change could and should occur. As Clive states, "people are demanding a better lifestyle." St Helenians are not prepared to return home complacently, and are using their agency to create shifts within the habitus, drawing upon their new values, ideas, and strategies accumulated overseas.

Conclusion

James, 70: There is a side of the St Helenian community that has not yet been fully appreciated or investigated.

Over 30 years ago, Robin Cohen (1983a, p. 27) argued St Helenians need “to make history themselves rather than being made by it.” This paper has drawn upon St Helenian narratives and islander testimonies to demonstrate how the St Helenian islanders have been making their own history for themselves. This research has demonstrated that the St Helenian community is a resilient, determined, and dedicated island community who actively utilise the opportunities available to them. Drawing upon informal forms of social protection, social and economic remittances, and various forms of capital, St Helenians are protecting their island community and securing their island future.

This paper contributes to the small body of literature on the island of St Helena, providing a snapshot, a case study, and a moment in time. Nonetheless, this paper also provides a case study into the transnational nature of some small islands and the survival strategies they adapt within their transnational trajectories. Whilst at the time of the research for this paper, the island community appeared disenchanting and diminishing, the data of this paper demonstrates how islanders retain their attachments and commitments to their island and small island community when dispersed.

St Helena is clearly not the first island where its future has been called into question, and small islands have been noted for their resilience, flexibility, and chance-taking (Baldacchino, 2011). Anthony Cohen (1987) identified islanders’ internal discourse and the shifting of an island’s symbolic practices in times of conflict or change, as a form of resistance and self-preservation; Skinner (2002a) identified the habitus as a set of informal skills that aids survival.

The St Helenian habitus was actively protecting island boundaries and maintaining a distinctive St Helenian community. The islanders negotiated their downgraded British status and various forms of symbolic violence for the sake of their economic capital and remittances, as well as social and cultural capital accrued in the UK. Whilst some modes of Britishness had their uses, other forms of Britishness were clearly defied. Where some aimed to preserve the old structures and traditions on the island, others were using transnationalism as a form of personal development, shifting the structures and expectations on the island in multiple ways.

With the return of British citizenship in 2002 and many St Helenians migrating to Britain, it could be argued the British state shifted its “ethics of citizenship” (Ong, 2006b, p. 231) to the responsible citizen, i.e., the individual. Neo-liberal agents are self-governing, using their capital within transnationalism as the passport to individual freedom and economic prosperity (Ong, 2006b). Nonetheless, the agency and culture of the island migrant should not be underestimated and are at the heart of the transnational story (Lam, 2020), alongside islander “dynamic flexibility,” (Baldacchino, 2011, p. 243) strategies, and skills.

This paper has made a number of contributions to the literature. This paper has demonstrated that islandness is composed of shifts and rupture, continuity and discontinuity, conditioned by decisions made in the metropole. This paper demonstrates how small island communities are accustomed to the fluctuating political decisions of the metropole and mainland. They thus adopt survival strategies, demonstrating their resilience, by adapting to whatever transnational lifestyles are available. They utilise their informal forms of social

protection, social and economic remittances, and various forms of capital, to secure their island community and island future.

Further research is urgent, to capture the ever-accelerating change on St Helena. Since the data collection for this paper, the first-ever female ex-pat Governor, Lisa Honan, wrote in her farewell tweet in May 2019 that during her three years of service, the island has achieved, amongst other things, an airport, a four-star hotel, and the funding for a fibre optic cable increasing the island's communication (Honan, 2019). Since the research for this paper, St Helena now has mobile phones and social media. Lisa Honan's Twitter feed has routinely promoted the push for tourism on the island, including the island's natural beauty, marine life, culture and colonial history (Honan, n.d.).

Tourism on small islands has been argued to be the "most lavish, global and consistent branding exercise in human history" (Baldacchino, 2012, p. 55). Mainlands market their isolated and untouched paradises, promoting a shift in the island imaginaries; a significant shift away from the military and trade dominated "colonial-imaginary" (Kothari & Wilkinson, 2010, p. 1396) which has dominated small islands for centuries. Moreover, remote island communities themselves are demonstrating their "cultural and personal pride" (Wennecke, Jacobsen, & Ren, 2019, p. 55) as well as desires for economic development and protection of local identities, by embracing the tourist industry on their islands.

With St Helena's airport making regular commercial scheduled flights since 2017, the marketing of tourism on the island, and the UK departure from the EU, the shifts from the metropole continue. Evolving and new questions regarding Britishness, citizenship, migration, mobility, capital, tourism, autonomy, and even independence are paramount for a continuing understanding of St Helenianness, St Helenian Britishness, and contemporary understandings of islandness. In the meantime, this research has demonstrated that St Helenians *have* been making history for themselves.

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