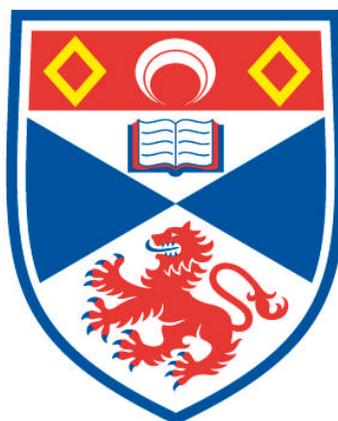


**TRANSIENT OBSERVATIONS
THE TEXTUALIZING OF ST HELENA THROUGH FIVE HUNDRED
YEARS OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

Alexander Hugo Schulenburg

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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TRANSIENT OBSERVATIONS

THE TEXTUALIZING OF ST HELENA
THROUGH FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF
COLONIAL DISCOURSE



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April 1999

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the textualizing of the South Atlantic island of St Helena (a British Overseas Territory) through an analysis of the relationship between colonizing practices and the changing representations of the island and its inhabitants in a range of colonial 'texts', including historiography, travel writing, government papers, creative writing, and the fine arts.

Part I situates this thesis within a critical engagement with post-colonial theory and colonial discourse analysis primarily, as well as with the recent 'linguistic turn' in anthropology and history. In place of post-colonialism's rather monolithic approach to colonial experiences, I argue for a localised approach to colonisation, which takes greater account of colonial praxis and of the continuous re-negotiation and re-constitution of particular colonial situations.

Part II focuses on a number of literary issues by reviewing St Helena's historiography and literature, and by investigating the range of narrative tropes employed (largely by travellers) in the textualizing of St Helena, in particular with respect to recurrent imaginings of the island in terms of an earthly Eden.

Part III examines the nature of colonial 'possession' by tracing the island's gradual appropriation by the Portuguese, Dutch and English in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and the settlement policies pursued by the English East India Company in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

Part IV provides an account of the changing perceptions, by visitors and colonial officials alike, of the character of the island's inhabitants (from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century) and assesses the influence that these perceptions have had on the administration of the island and the political status of its inhabitants (in the mid- to late twentieth century).

Part V, the conclusion, reviews the principal arguments of my thesis by addressing the political implications of post-colonial theory and of my own research, while also indicating avenues for further research.

A localised and detailed exploration of colonial discourse over a period of nearly five hundred years, and a close analysis of a consequently wide range of colonial 'texts', has confirmed that although colonising practices and representations are far from monolithic, in the case of St Helena their continuities are of as much significance as their discontinuities.

I, Alexander Hugo Schulenburg, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 20.4.99 Signature of Candidate

I was admitted as a research student in October 1989 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in October 1992; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1992 and 1999.

Date 20.4.99 Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 22.12.11 Signature of Supervisor

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any *bona fide* library or research worker.

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TRANSIENT OBSERVATIONS

THE TEXTUALIZING OF ST HELENA
THROUGH FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF
COLONIAL DISCOURSE

for my parents,
who made it all possible

for Darlene,
and for little Edward and Rupert,
who made it all worthwhile



Far from being writers - founders of their own place,
heirs to the peasants of earlier ages working on the soil of language,
diggers of wells and builders of houses -
readers are travellers;
they move across lands belonging to someone else,
like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write,
despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.
Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place
and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction.
Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time
(one forgets oneself *and* also forgets),
it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly,
and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise.

(Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984)





A little traveling Stage-Troupe, is St. Helena really, all Performance, -
a Plantation, sent out years since by its metropolitan Planet,
which will remain invisible for years indeterminate
before revealing itself and acquiring a Name,
this place till then serving as an *Aide-Mémoire*, a Representation of Home.
Many here, Descendants of the first Settlers, would never visit the Home Planet,
altho' some claim to've been there and back, and more than once.
"What if'twere so?" declares Maskelyne.
"Ev'ry People have a story of how they were created."

(Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 1997)



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PREFACE



In the opinion of A.P. Thornton, writing in the mid 1960s, "colonisation is not, and is never likely to become, a 'field' in which the earnest will seek a Ph.D."¹ Yet, since then the study of imperialism and colonialism have flourished, most recently in the shape of, indeed, "the institutionalized field of post-colonial studies."²

When I decided on field research on the South Atlantic island of St Helena in 1992, I admittedly had no particular interest in post-colonial theory or colonial discourse analysis, although the island is one of Britain's few remaining colonies. Instead, I had initially opted for what I had conceived of as a fairly conventional study of 'the social construction of identity'. This approach was largely based on the fact that well before my embarkation to St Helena I had been made aware of the islanders' proposed campaign to

¹ A.P. Thornton, 'Jekyll and Hyde in the Colonies', in A.P. Thornton, *For the File on Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1968), 329. This review of M. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban* was originally published in *International Journal*, Vol.20, No.2 (1965). Seven years later, in 1972, the rise of imperial and colonial studies found expression in *The Journal for Imperial and Commonwealth History*.

² Stephen Slemon, 'The Scramble for Post-Colonialism', in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds), *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994), 15. Slemon's paper reviews the current state of that field.

call for the restoration of their right of abode in the United Kingdom. I hence suspected that once in the field, I would find a well articulated discourse on island identity. However, when I arrived at St Helena in 1993 it became obvious to me that conversations on public affairs revolved predominantly around matters of government, of which the nationality question was just one aspect. After several consultations with the island's Chief Secretary, at which I agreed 'not to rock the boat', I consequently decided to turn my attention to a study of the overtly political aspects of island life. Almost by coincidence, this research introduced me to the island's archives and the history they made available to me. In the process of my archival and field research I began to identify several trends in the island's political development and realised that an analysis of St Helena's contemporary politics would be severely limited without a comprehensive study of its political history. Hence, my analysis would henceforth have to be based on historical sources as much as on contemporary fieldwork.³

In 1994, having returned to the United Kingdom after 13 months in the field, including eight weeks at sea, all seemed set for a thesis entitled "*For the Good Government of this Settlement*": *A study of the history, conduct and perception of colonial government in the British Colony of St. Helena, South Atlantic, 1658-1994*. However, as I began to organise the material I had brought back from the field, mostly in the form of photocopies and notes from the island's archives, I began to struggle with the fact that while I could turn my experience of fieldwork into text, I could not convert my historical sources into experience, despite of what I considered to be an intuitive understanding of these sources through my contemporary experience in the field. As a result, I considered myself caught between history and anthropology and their supposed differences.

In early 1995, largely in order to resolve this conundrum, I turned at last to the growing literature in colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial theory (a literature which was to guide my project from then on, despite the unease I felt respecting its overtly political agenda). It had after all been clear for some time that the ongoing campaign of islanders for the right to British citizenship was ultimately aimed at a comprehensive textual representation (in form of a report) of the British identity of St Helenians, a representation heavily dependent on already existing textualizations of the island and its inhabitants. St Helenian discourses of identity and politics were not only

³ For a comparable approach, see Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), x.

interconnected, but were both dependent on the island's history of textualization and on the textualization of that history. As a result of this renewed change in orientation, however, I fell victim to the 'literary turn' in the humanities, which contributed significantly to my decision to eliminate from my study the substantive aspects of my field research and to concentrate instead solely on the textualizing of St Helena.

A further factor underlying that decision was the fact that my appreciation of St Helena has been greatly enhanced by being engaged on a daily basis with one very dear and individual manifestation of St Helena, my island-born wife, Darlene. Not least in the face of her lifelong insights into St Helena, I felt that I had no right to speak either for or about 'her people' by way of a conventional ethnography of contemporary island life and politics.⁴ Likewise, my partial incorporation into St Helenian society (by marriage, if not by residence), placed me under a severe obligations to abide by the advice I was given by an informant when I first entered the field: "Only write the good things, don't write the bad things."

In consequence, from 1995 to 1998 I (re-)turned to the archival field, spending many months accumulating often obscure or forgotten texts in archives and libraries across London and the United Kingdom, including an outstanding private collection. In the process, I had the opportunity to reflect further on the close relationship between anthropological and historical research (local history in particular), an opportunity I found immensely enriching.

A first version of this thesis was eventually submitted in September 1997, a version, alas, which suffered from being what Eric Hobsbawm might have called "a history-cum-social anthropology that abandons the old belief in the procedures and vocations of both disciplines."⁵ Feeling caught not only between disciplines, but also between innumerable varied approaches to colonialism, I had toyed with an excessive amount of quotations aimed at achieving the multiplicity of voices missing in traditional histories and ethnographies, an attempt I now consider to have been misguided. Furthermore, I claimed quite truthfully that I had written my thesis with a St Helenian readership in mind, not merely an academic one, and that despite the principal format of my project,

⁴ See Darlene Schulenburg, 'St Helena: Community as Complexity', *Going Native: Anthropology Journal*, University of St Andrews, Vol.1 (1995).

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 261.

that of a doctoral thesis, I considered my responsibility to the island's inhabitants to be paramount.⁶

Since that initial submission of my thesis I have returned to St Helena, along with my wife and two children, as they now are. On this occasion, however, my fieldwork had a distinctly contemporary objective, given that my research was in part undertaken with a view to contributing to the work of the UK based St Helena Research Project, an ESRC sponsored study of the recent impact of broadcast television on St Helena.⁷ In particular, I had been brought on board the project to provide some much needed socio-cultural context, and to explore islanders' understandings and experiences of 'community' on St Helena. Largely as a result of this research, I have now overcome what difficulties I once had in writing about contemporary culture and society on St Helena, although it has not proved possible to incorporate any such material into this thesis for the purpose of its resubmission.⁸ Instead, in preparing this final version of my thesis, I have solely attempted to refine my existing arguments and to iron out serious deficiencies in its presentation.⁹

Given the varied history of my thesis, I would like to use this opportunity to thank and acknowledge some of the many individuals and institutions who have made my research both possible and enjoyable.

My voyage to St Helena in 1993/1994 was financed by generous grants from the Russell Trust and from the School of Philosophical and Anthropological Studies, University of St Andrews, and in 1998/1999 by the St Helena Research Project, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, and by the University of

⁶ On the ethics of writing about others and on the question of whom one is writing for, see Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 133.

⁷ See the web site of the St Helena Link/Research Project, <http://www.chelt.ac.uk/st-helena>.

⁸ However, see Alexander Schulenburg, 'Media and Community: The Social and Cultural Contexts of Television Viewing on St Helena', in Tony Charlton et al (eds), *Television and Violence: The Introduction of Broadcast Television into a Remote Community* (London: Sage, forthcoming).

⁹ Although I have attempted to include material published since the initial submission of this thesis in September 1997, I have unfortunately been unable to evaluate the outstanding and inter-disciplinary papers collected in the first two volumes of the new *Oxford History of the British Empire*. [Nicholas Canny (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume I: The Origins of Empire, British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).]

Plymouth. At St Helena itself, I have benefited immensely from the assistance given to me by staff at the Government Archives (Cecil 'Bobby' Maggott, Maureen Stevens), at the Government Printing Office (Peter Thomas, Gilbert Stevens), the Legal and Lands Department (Alan Nichols, Gavin George), at the St Helena Heritage Society Museum, at the Prince Andrew School Library, and at the Public Library. Neither would my research in 1993/1994 have been possible without the toleration and support of the island's Governor (Alan Hoole), Chief Secretary (John Perrott), Attorney General (David Jeremiah), and of its Executive and Legislative Councillors.

Acknowledgements are also due to Melanie and David Henry, to the late John Bailey, and to Clive Borrowman, Basil George, Cliff Huxtable, Ian Maté, and Nick Thorpe, as well as their families, all of whom shared with me their knowledge and/or impressions of the island. Yelka Weaver (née Ward) kindly allowed me access to her late father's private papers, while Jessie Crowie (née Young), as well as Stedson Francis, shared with me many an old family photograph. My fellow researchers at the island's archives (Barbara George, Ken Denholm) provided me with guidance on numerous occasions.

In the United Kingdom, I have benefited greatly from the efficient assistance of staff at the British Library, the British Library Oriental and India Office Collections, the British Library Newspaper Library, the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education Learning Centres, the National Maritime Museum Library, the Public Record Office, and the University of St Andrews Library. I am also fortunate to have been able to exchange views on St Helena with Jack and Jill Shepherd, Ian Mathieson, and many other members of the Friends of St Helena. George A. Lewis shared with me his recollections of the St Helena General Workers Union.

Quentin Cronk (University of Edinburgh), Stephen Royle (Queen's University Belfast), Barry Weaver (University of Oklahoma), and Dan Yon (York University, Toronto) have kindly shared with me aspects of their own research relating to St Helena. Alfredo Pinheiro Marques (Centro de Estudos do Mar, Portugal) has provided invaluable advice on the discovery of St Helena. Aldo Corcella (formerly of the University of St Andrews) kindly translated an account of St Helena from the Italian, and João Miguel Ferreira provided translations from the Portuguese. At the University of Sussex, where I taught from 1996 to 1998, my colleagues and my students have kindly allowed me to reflect on numerous issues in the anthropology of colonialism. I also appreciate the

inspiration I have derived from contributors worldwide to the St Helena Family History Mailinglist, one of the many facilities provided by the internet-based St Helena Institute.¹⁰

Trevor Hearl, doyen of St Helena research (with his wife Elisabeth) has been a loyal friend and supporter of my research, as well as an invaluable font of information on St Helena and its history, whether in print or in form of his phenomenal memory.

Throughout my academic career, I have had the privilege of sitting at the feet of individuals who were both my teachers and my friends. These include, above all, the late Ladislav Holy, as well as other members past and present of the department of social anthropology at the University of St Andrews, in particular Richard Fardon, the late Sandor Hervey, and, not least, David Riches (who first suggested St Helena as a location for my fieldwork). Roy Dilley, my supervisor at St Andrews over these past few years, has been a steady supporter of my research, not least by giving me the freedom to pursue this project as I saw fit. Others to whom I owe similar debts are Tony Gorton (Atlantic College), Yasir Suleiman (University of St Andrews), and Anthony Giddens (University of Cambridge). My two examiners, Elizabeth Tonkin and Mario Anguilar, have provided me with detailed and incisive comments and recommendations respecting the resubmission of my thesis, not all of which I have been able to adopt, however much appreciated they were. I do hope that in the years to come, all these individuals will see an acceptable return on their support.

Andrea Timm, Trevor Hearl, Alan Hoole and, of course, Roy Dilley, all read various drafts of this thesis, and I am grateful for their many observations and corrections.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family on St Helena (who have diligently supplied me with a range of further sources during my absence from the island), my parents, whose support throughout these years has never been taken for granted and, above all, my loving wife and two little sons, who have immeasurably enriched my life and my relationship with St Helena.

¹⁰ The St Helena Institute, <http://www.st-helena.org>.

PART I

”LANGUAGE OF A CANNON”

~ COLONIALISM, ANTHROPOLOGY, HISTORY AND THE ‘LITERARY TURN’¹



In his introduction to *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (1986), James Clifford now famously remarked:

No longer a marginal, or occulted, dimension, writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter. [...] The focus on text making and rhetoric serves to highlight the constructed, artificial nature of cultural accounts. It undermines overly transparent modes of authority, and it draws attention to the historical predicament of ethnography, the fact that it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures.²

¹ All chapter headings in quotation marks are taken from Thomas Herbert's account of St Helena in *Some Yeares Travel Into Africa & Asia the Great* (London: 1638), 352-5.

² James Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (London: University of California Press, 1986), 2.

In the context of such critiques, post-colonial theory has proved particularly unsettling for anthropologists, not least given its project of deconstructing the "ethnographic texts by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others [...]"³ Moreover, as JanMohamed has argued, "[s]ince the object of representation - the native - does not have access to these texts (because of linguistic barriers) and since the European audience has no direct contact with the native, imperialist fiction tends to be unconcerned with the truth-value of its representation."⁴

Even those who have taken a more moderate stance have considered anthropological representations and other forms of colonial discourse to be cognate, for as Stuart Schwartz has noted, "[f]irst observers of another culture, the traveler to foreign lands, the historian, and the ethnographer, all share the common problem of observing, understanding, and representing."⁵ Neither did history or historiography escape such a critique, for as Bernard S. Cohen has remarked, "[b]oth historians and anthropologists [...] were always directly involved in the colonial situation."⁶

This is not to say that anthropology's relationship to and involvement in colonialism had not previously come under scrutiny, for it has been debated frequently since at least the 1970s.⁷ The foundation of that earlier debate has been the acceptance of the fact that

³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7. Also see Edward W. Said, 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.15 (1989).

⁴ Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr (ed), *"Race," Writing and Difference* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 82.

⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, 'Introduction', in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1. Also see Judith Modell, 'From Ethnographies to Encounters: Differences and Others', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.XXVII, No.3 (1997).

⁶ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

⁷ For a review and an original argument, see Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, 'Introduction: Five Theses on Ethnography as Colonial Practice', *History and Anthropology*, Vol.8, Nos.1-4 (1994). This paper is the introduction to a single issue of the journal dedicated to ethnography and colonialism. Also see Talal Asad (ed), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973); Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School*, revised edition (London: Routledge, 1983), especially chapter 4, 'Anthropology and colonialism'.

the basic reality which made prewar social anthropology feasible and effective was the power relationship between dominating (European) and dominated (non-European) cultures. We then need to ask ourselves how this relationship has affected the practical preconditions of social anthropology; the uses to which its knowledge was put; the theoretical treatment of particular topics; the mode of perceiving and objectifying alien societies; and the anthropologist's claim to political neutrality.⁸

However, critiques of this shared legacy of colonialism and scholarship received considerable new impetus in consequence of the so-called 'linguistic turn' in anthropology and the humanities in general.⁹

These various concerns with colonial history, colonial discourse, and post-colonial theory constitute the context of my thesis, even if, as most of my colleagues would be honest enough to admit, "[p]ost-colonialism is far from being a unified field."¹⁰ Indeed, academics have probably devoted as much effort to discussing the nature of that field, as they have to any substantive research.¹¹

⁸ Talal Asad, 'Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter', in Gerrit Huizer and Bruce Mannheim (eds), *The Politics of Anthropology: From Colonialism and Sexism Towards a View from Below* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 91.

⁹ "[T]he 'linguistic turn' has turned professional historians around to face language as primary, active and meaningful in their work (rather than secondary, passive and transparent - the pre-turn story)." [Nancy F. Partner, 'Historicity in an Age of Reality-Fictions', in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds), *A New Philosophy of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).] For the 'linguistic turn' turn in anthropology, see George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (London: University of California Press, 1986); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); E. Valentin Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (eds), *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literature* (London: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 5.

¹¹ In order to echo some of these debates, I have decided to quote extensively, following in part the example set by Stephen David Ross' article, 'What of the Others? Whose Subjection?', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed), *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

Post-colonialism not only constitutes a renewed interest in imperial and colonial history, or of specific aspects thereof, but claims for itself a distinctive and new approach, a "postcolonial reading of the colonial encounter".¹² This overtly chronological denotation is based largely on the assumption, shared by most writers, that "the era of formal colonial control is over, apart from aberrations such as the Falklands/Malvinas."¹³ However, in complete defiance of a chronological reading of the term post-colonial, Ashcroft, Giffiths, and Tiffin have decided to "use the term 'post-colonial' [...] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day."¹⁴ That is, post-colonialism "begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being."¹⁵

Anne McClintock's critique of the terms 'postcolonialism' and of 'postcolonial theory' highlight a contradiction she perceives between the terms themselves and the theory/approach that they claim to denote. Whereas postcolonial theory has set itself against the linear notion of time implied in imperial ideas of progress, the term 'post-

¹² David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 9. For an excellent introduction to postcolonialism see the papers collected in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds), *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994). For a wide selection of post-colonial texts see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), as well as Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993). For a wideranging discussions of post-colonialism see Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), as well as Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds), *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996). For a useful introductory monograph see Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997).

¹³ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 3-4. This remark, calling the Falklands an "aberration", is a good example of not only of the political agenda of post-colonial theory (which I discuss in chapter 11), but also of its frequent inapplicability to Britain's remaining overseas territories, especially those which were uninhabited at the time of their colonisation, such as St Helena.

¹⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.

¹⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), 117.

colonial' is part of such a linear conception of development which the theory itself hopes to counter and dismantle. Likewise, the term 'post-colonialism' perpetuates binary conceptualisations associated with western historicism and poses yet another such opposition, colonial/post-colonial. McClintock also believes that the term post-colonial "confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper; colonialism is the determining marker of history."¹⁶ Other cultures consequently are not defined positively, but in subordination to European chronology.

Simon Gikandi, on the other hand, uses the term 'postcolonialism' as "a code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation."¹⁷ That is, whereas "postcoloniality has been defined as the transcendence of imperial structures and their histories, such a definition is obviously contradicted by the everyday experiences and memories of the people in the ex-colonies."¹⁸ According to Gikandi, the reason why imperial structures have survived colonialism rather than transcended it is their "universal appeal" within "the context of modernity".¹⁹ Hence, far from suggesting a merely temporal reference, the term 'postcolonialism' is seen by some less as denoting phenomena or ideas subsequent to colonialism, but as "having somehow superseded that term."²⁰

No matter how it is defined by its practitioners, 'post-colonialism' makes for an ambitious and novel approach to the study of imperialism and colonisation, a fact recognised by Dane Kennedy in an article in the home of traditional approaches to imperial history, the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*. According to Kennedy, imperial history has until now "continued to cling to the methodology and *mentalité* of the

¹⁶ Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism'', in Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 255.

¹⁷ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 3.

'official mind"', although "[d]ecolonization robbed imperial history of most of its practical incentives [...]".²¹

Overall, the challenge posed by 'post-colonial' writers is that they are writing "with a view to restructuring European 'realities' in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based."²² In addition to a new substantive emphasis on culture, this approach provides a new ideological critique of imperialism, unlike earlier, materialist and marxist critiques of Empire.²³ According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, "it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in its colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world. Thus the rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record is a vital and inescapable task at the heart of the post-colonial enterprise."²⁴

The emphasis here is on the 'texts' or textualization of empire, rather than solely its material foundations. "Colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial theory are thus critiques of the process of production of knowledge about the Other."²⁵ Or, to quote a position that does not conflate the two terms, "[c]olonial discourse analysis refers to the examination and interpretation of particular colonial texts. Post-colonial theory refers to the political and ideological position of the critic who undertakes this analysis."²⁶

²¹ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 345.

²² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 33.

²³ See Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey* (London: Routledge, 1980). Also see Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (London: University of California Press, 1982). For a marxist case study of particular relevance to the history of St Helena, see Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company: A Sociological Appraisal* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973; orig. 1955).

²⁴ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 196.

²⁵ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 8.

²⁶ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 346.

Arguably, this critical dimension is post-colonialism's most defining feature. According to Edward Said,

[n]either imperialism or colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth century imperial culture is plentiful with such words and concepts as 'inferior' or 'subject races', 'subordinate peoples', 'dependency', 'expansion', and 'authority'.²⁷

Post-colonialism's focus on these forms of knowledge is explained by David Spurr's claim that "[t]he writer is the original and ultimate colonizer, conquering the space of consciousness with the exclusionary and divisive structure of representations. [...] In fact the structures of writing and those of power can never be wholly distinguished from one another [...]."²⁸

According to Elleke Boehmer, empire "was conceived and maintained in an array of writings - political treaties, diaries, acts and edicts, administrative records and gazetteers, missionaries' reports, notebooks, memoirs, popular verse, government briefs, letters 'home' and letters back to settlers."²⁹ This process of textualization is seen to have been

²⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 8. Also see Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous People* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992); Urs Bitterli, *Cultures in Conflict: Encounters Between European and Non-European Cultures, 1492-1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989; orig. German 1986); Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed), *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed), *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

²⁸ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 93. This approach was derided by Dane Kennedy, who criticises Spurr for arguing that "the same discursive forms recurred over more than a century in the diverse writings that Western travellers, officials, and others produced about the profoundly varied peoples across the globe with whom they came into contact." [Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 351.] It could be argued, however, that Spurr solely proposes a 'deep structure' of colonial discourse, rather than positing a monolithic colonial discourse at the level of colonial praxis.

²⁹ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13.

a core feature of empire from the very beginning of the imperial process, when already there was no shortage of such representations.

European adventurers not only depended on go-betweens, but were themselves go-betweens, servants of the great representational machine. Journals, letters, memoranda, essays, questionnaires, eyewitness accounts, narrative histories, inventories, legal depositions, theological debates, royal proclamations, official reports, papal bulls, charters, chronicles, notarial records, broadsheets, utopian fantasies, pastoral eclogues, dramatic romances epic poems - there is in the sixteenth century a flood of textual representations, along with a much smaller production of visual images, that professes to deliver the New World to the Old.³⁰

The study of this wealth of different genres was pioneered in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978, which is widely acclaimed as the founding text of post-colonial theory.³¹ And if this diversity of genres is striking, so is the quantity of texts, as Thomas Richard observed. "The British may not have created the longest-lived empire in history, but it was certainly one of the most data intensive. The civil servants of Empire pulled together so much information and wrote so many books about their experiences that today we have only begun to scratch the surface of their archive."³²

In speaking of this type of discourse, Boehmer uses the term 'colonialist' in preference to 'colonial'.

Colonialist discourse can be taken to refer to that collection of symbolic practices, including textual codes and conventions and implied meanings, which Europe deployed in the process of its colonial expansion and, in particular, in understanding the bizarre and apparently unintelligible strangeness with which it came into contact. Its interpretations were an expression of its mastery, but they also reflected other responses: wonder, bewilderment, fear."³³

³⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 145.

³¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985; orig. 1978), especially page 23.

³² Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 4.

³³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 50. Also see Boehmer's definitions of 'colonial' literature and 'colonialist' literature on pages 2-3.

I note that insofar as Boehmer refers to colonialist discourse as a *collection* (collected, that is, amongst others, by colonial discourse analysts), it is as much of a textual construct as, supposedly, empire itself.

This approach is fairly representative and is echoed by Peter Hulme, who defines colonial discourse as "an ensemble of linguistically based practices unified by their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships, an ensemble that could combine the most formulaic and bureaucratic of official documents [...] with the most non-functional and unprepossessing of romantic novels [...]."34

The basic orientation of post-colonial approaches to imperialism and colonialism is stated succinctly by Nicholas Thomas:

[C]olonialism is not best understood primarily as a political or economic relationship that is legitimized or justified through ideologies of racism or progress. Rather, colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process; its discoveries and trespasses are imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives; even what would seem its purest moments of profit and violence have been mediated and enframed by structures of meaning.³⁵

Arguably, such an approach goes some way beyond an earlier interest in 'imperialism and popular culture', which was evident in studies undertaken during the 1980s.³⁶

However, given that a majority of writings in post-colonial studies are primarily theoretical rather than substantive, some scholars, including Thomas himself, have felt exacerbated when confronted with what appears to be nothing more than post-colonialism's tendency to "put Fanon and Lacan (or Derrida) into a blender."³⁷ More

³⁴ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London: Methuen & Co., 1986), 2.

³⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 2.

³⁶ See John MacKenzie (ed), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

³⁷ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), ix.

significantly, Thomas perceived a certain contradiction within post-colonialism between the need to theorise and discuss colonialism and the resulting risk of assuming 'colonialism' to constitute a single meaningful category or totality. In particular, Thomas saw a danger in imposing an order on the colonial experience which it would never have appeared to possess, had it not been made a distinct field of inquiry. "Colonialism is not a unitary project, but a fractured one, riddled with contradictions and exhausted by its own internal debates as by the resistance of the colonized."³⁸ This is a problem also noted by McClintock, who laments the rarity with which the term 'post-colonial' is used to denote multiplicity. Rather, "[t]he term [...] signals a reluctance to surrender the privilege of seeing the world in singular and ahistorical abstraction."³⁹ Fortunately, as John and Jean Comaroff have recently remarked, the "image of colonialism as a coherent, monolithic process seems, at last, to be wearing thin."⁴⁰

Most strikingly, in its monolithic approach to colonialism, post-colonial theory appears no different from colonial or 'orientalist discourse itself', as is evident from Bernard Cohn's discussion of eighteenth century approaches to Indian society. According to Cohn, the orientalist's "acceptance of a textual view of society [...] led to a picture of Indian society as being static, timeless, and spaceless." Such a view featured "no regional variation and no questioning of the relationship between prescriptive normative statements derived from the texts and the actual behaviour of individuals or groups."⁴¹ Some strands of post-colonial theory, I argue, present this very same textual view of colonialism, a view which in its 'orientalist' guise they apparently set out to deconstruct. But post-colonial theorists may well have been taken in by misleading self-representations of empire provided by colonial texts themselves. As Esmé Wingfield-Stratford pointed out in 1939, the

Empire proclaimed by Kipling, and boomed in the cheap Press and the music halls, the chief of which significantly took to itself that very name, was the one on

³⁸ Ibid., 51.

³⁹ Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Postcolonialism'", in Francis Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (eds), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 255.

⁴⁰ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 183.

⁴¹ Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 143.

which the sun never set - or rose either, because it was the empire of a dream, a Nevernever Land of escape from a bondage of salaried routine and dreadful gentility.⁴²

This may well explain why some post-colonial theorists write in just such a Nevernever Land to which historians fail to relate. As Robert Young has pointed out, "colonial-discourse analysis has meant that we may have learnt a lot about the fantasmatics of colonial discourse, but at the same time it has by definition tended to discourage analysts from inquiring in detail about the actual conditions such discourses were framed to describe, analyse or control."⁴³ Arguably, there are good reasons for the construction of such a Nevernever Land, the importance of which lay in the fact that "never free of the threat of destabilization, colonial power had still to produce an illusion of permanence: hence the prevalence, or even the overproduction under colonial administrations of reams of documentation, ethnographic and scientific studies, journals, accounts, censuses, dispatches, laws, etc."⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, as Nicholas Dirks has warned, "it is all too often the case that the historical experience of colonialism [...] gets lost in the elegant new textualism of colonial discourse studies."⁴⁵ Ultimately, colonialism is more than a mere system of representations. I hence support Young's assertion that without "an understanding of the historical specificity of colonialism [...] we run the risk of imposing our own categories and politics upon the past without noticing its difference, turning the otherness of the past into the sameness of the today."⁴⁶

Furthermore, Peter Hulme, for one, has emphasised that "the colonial discourse studied here cannot remain as a set of merely linguistic and rhetorical features, but must be related to its function within a broader set of socioeconomic and political practices

⁴² Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, *The Foundations of British Patriotism* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1939), 366.

⁴³ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 160.

⁴⁴ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 97. Also see, Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), especially his introduction.

⁴⁵ Nicholas B. Dirks, 'From Little King to Landlord: Colonial Discourse and Colonial Rule', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1992), 175.

⁴⁶ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 179.

[...].⁴⁷ Nevertheless, colonialism and its broader practices are above all available to the post-colonial analysts solely in the form of discourse. As Hulme admits, largely the only evidence available of colonialism's historical reality "are the very European texts that constitute the discourse of colonialism."⁴⁸ It must, hence, always be borne in mind that just as the production of colonial discourse is essentially praxis, it relates to and forms part of a praxis that is never primarily textual, eventhough that praxis may now only be accessible through texts. To isolate colonial discourse and to treat it independently of the wider praxis of which it formed a necessary part is likely to lead to partial and flawed understandings of colonial experiences.

I likewise believe that there is a particular danger in a naive reductionism which reduces the colonial experience to colonialism itself. Explaining colonial discourse by reference to itself hardly seems productive. Indeed, if it is colonial experience which is to be explained, then the discursive practices of colonialism are more profitably sought in areas of (discursive) praxis not exclusively linked with colonialism. Hence, colonial discourse must be seen as the result of a coming together of a variety of existing discursive practices, even if these are in due course augmented by practices resulting from the colonial experience itself.

It is for this reason in particular, that historians of colonialism and empire have been critical of post-colonialism and colonial discourse analysis, although they themselves are partly to blame for its monolithic excesses in that they have "tended to confer a lot more unity on the British Empire than is justified. Most people during the nineteenth century were aware that their empire was something of a collective improvisation."⁴⁹

John MacKenzie, a professor of imperial history for one, although sympathetic to many writings in colonial discourse theory, has noted that Said and his followers "are not imperial historians, and their 'imperialism' has a disturbing vagueness about it. It becomes a generalised concept inadequately rooted in the imperial facts, lacking historical dynamic, innocent of imperial theory or the complexities of different forms of imperialism and varieties of economic and political relationships."⁵⁰ As for the striking

⁴⁷ Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London: Methuen & Co., 1986), 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁹ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 3.

⁵⁰ John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xv.

difference in style between historiography and post-colonial writing, MacKenzie has the following to say:

The finest historians seek to wear their scholarship lightly, to infiltrate ideas and searching analysis into a good story. Above all, the historian is interested in a clear and readable style, a supple English in which jargon is kept to a minimum. By contrast, some of the discourse theorists cloak themselves in an invented language, embroidered in lengthy sentences of great opacity, and indulge in tautology akin to a repeated abstract design in which complex filigree is more important than symmetrical pattern. No one outside the field would read them for pleasure, and they appear to use an esoteric argot in order to communicate essentially with each other.⁵¹

While this critique may at first appear somewhat petty, there is a very serious side to his argument, and one that post-colonial theorists, of all people, should be able to appreciate. Commenting on this issue of post-colonial jargon, Dane Kennedy has remarked: "Let us agree that the non-Western world remains in thrall to the discursive system of the West [...]. How do the post-colonial theorists propose to liberate these hostages? By writing in a manner that is utterly inaccessible to most of them?"⁵² Similarly, from the point of view of anthropology, Ernest Gellner recently asserted his conviction that "[o]bjectivity is not a misguided aspiration, still less a form of domination, and subjectivism and obscurity are not forms of liberation."⁵³

However, imperial historians were at one stage clearly perturbed by post-colonialism, although as a result of MacKenzie's extensive and substantive critique, as one reviewer has remarked, "[h]istorians who are quaking in their shoes at the thought of receiving Said-fuelled barbs from sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists [...] need

⁵¹ Ibid., 39.

⁵² Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 350. For a glossary of post-colonial terminology see Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), 227-34.

⁵³ Ernest Gellner, 'Segmentation: Reality or Myth?', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, New Series, Vol.1, No.4 (1995), 821.

quake no longer."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, as Kennedy's recent paper on 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory' shows, imperial historians are in principle open to the issues raised by colonial discourse analysis,⁵⁵ expecting it to lead to "a new form of imperial history" as exemplified by the papers collected in Bernard Bailyn's and Philip D. Morgan's *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire*.⁵⁶ I have indeed found the most convincing texts in this area to be those that are firmly grounded in historical research, rather than in post-colonial theory.⁵⁷

CONTEXTUALIZING STRATEGIES

Amongst the existing multitude of different approaches to colonial and post-colonial experiences, I consider Nicholas Thomas' *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, published in 1994, the most assured general text in this field. In effect, Thomas addresses an omission noted by T.O. Beidelman that "[c]olonial life is a topic neglected by anthropology even though only two generations ago it involved nearly half the world and was witnessed by most anthropologists as part of their fieldwork."⁵⁸ In fact, one of the attractions of Thomas' suggested approach and terminology is that an

⁵⁴ Francis Robinson, 'Review of *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* by John MacKenzie', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.25, No.1 (1997), 168. For a slightly more critical review, see Partha Mitter, 'Close encounters with far pavilions', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 24.11.1995.

⁵⁵ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996).

⁵⁶ Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 9.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, T.O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj (The New Cambridge History of India, III, 4)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Neil Parsons, *King Khama, Emperor Joe and the Great White Queen: Victorian Britain Through African Eyes* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁵⁸ T.O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 1.

"anthropology of colonialism' cannot situate 'the colonial' as an external object of study [...]." Because of its history, "anthropology [...] is more conspicuously part of the problem than part of a solution."⁵⁹

Unlike many other writers, Thomas does not lose sight of the historical experiences underlying his subject matter, nor does he lose himself in an attempt to combine substantive studies with a hopelessly general critique of the humanities. In particular, Thomas' criticism of post-colonialism's monolithic approach to empire, which I have already discussed, is combined with an emphasis on local and heterogeneous strategies, the central aspect of his approach.

Colonial projects are construed, misconstrued, adapted and enacted by actors whose subjectivities are fractured - half here, half there, sometimes disloyal, sometimes almost 'on the side' of the people they patronize and dominate, and against the interests of some metropolitan office. Between the Scylla of mindlessly particular conventional colonial history, which fails to move beyond the perceptions of whichever administrators or missionaries are being documented, and Charybdis of colonial discourse theory, which totalizes a hegemonic global ideology, neither much tainted by its conditions of production nor transformed by the pragmatics of colonial encounters and struggles, lies another path, which amounts to an ethnography of colonial projects: that presupposes the effect of larger objective ideologies, yet notes their adaptation in practice, their moments of effective implementation and confidence as well as those of failure and wishful thinking.⁶⁰

Such an approach to colonial experiences should be especially suited to an investigation of "the extent to which the subaltern may have played a constitutive rather than a reflective role in colonial and domestic imperial discourse and subjectivity."⁶¹ As Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman have emphasised, "[r]ather than being that other one onto which the coloniser projects a previously constituted subjectivity and knowledge, native

⁵⁹ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 192.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶¹ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 16.

presences, locations, and political resistance need to be further theorised as having a determining or primary role in colonial discourses [...]."⁶² As Kennedy has stressed, "the British empire was a widely varied phenomenon that inspired different responses in different places and at different times."⁶³ It is this very localisation, which is addressed by Thomas' approach to the study of a rather broadly defined 'colonial discourse'.

[I]t is becoming increasingly clear that only localized theories and historically specific accounts can provide much insight into the varied articulations of colonizing and counter-colonial representations and practices. [...] It is also striking that many writers stress, in principle, the localized character of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities, while resisting much engagement with either localities or subjects.⁶⁴

The Comaroffs support such an approach, arguing that "colonialism simply does not have a single, transhistorical 'essence,' neither political nor material, social nor cultural. Rather, its form and substance are decided in the context of its making."⁶⁵ It is in this respect, that Thomas advocates what is effectively a unification of anthropological and historical approaches, for he suggests that

historical anthropology offers a localized vision, not of communities imagined outside global relationships, but of moments, transactions and events in the constitution and reconstitution of colonial power. [...] [A]n 'anthropology of colonialism' may provide an effective alternative to the weakly contextualized analyses that abound in colonial studies at present.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., 16.

⁶³ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 353.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), ix.

⁶⁵ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 211.

⁶⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 7. Also see Nicholas Thomas, 'Introduction', *History and Anthropology*, Vol.5, Nos.3-4 (1992), 283-4.

A similar point in favour of localising colonial studies is made by the Comaroffs when they argue for what they call "an ethnography of the historical imagination", which aims to "contextualize the fragments of human worlds, redeeming them without losing their fragile uniqueness and ambiguity." What is required hence is "a historical anthropology that is dedicated to exploring the processes that make and transform particular worlds - processes that reciprocally shape subjects and contexts, that allow certain things to be said and done."⁶⁷ Furthermore, such

a historical ethnography must always go beyond literary traces, beyond explicit narratives, exegesis, even argument. For the poetics of history lie also in the mute meanings transacted through goods and practices, through icons and images dispersed in the landscape of the everyday. [...] Certainly, the great empires of the past established themselves as much in a welter of domestic detail and small-scale civilities as by assertive political and economic means.⁶⁸

Examples of just such an historical anthropology of colonialism can be found in Kajsa Ekholm Friedman's *Catastrophe and Creation* (1991), Roger Keesing's *Custom and Confrontation* (1992), and Richard D.E. Burton's *Afro-Creole* (1997).⁶⁹

Although anthropology has in the past taken too localised an approach to defining the margins of cultures, the approaches taken by historians have arguably not been localised enough.⁷⁰ It is in this respect, that colonial discourse analysis can derive considerable inspiration not only from anthropological and historical approaches, but also from the

⁶⁷ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁹ Kajsa Ekholm Friedman, *Catastrophe and Creation: The Transformation of an African Culture* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991); Roger Keesing, *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Richard D.E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997). For a guide to other such studies, see Susan Kellogg, 'Histories for Anthropology: Ten Years of Historical Research and Writing by Anthropologists, 1980-1990', in Eric H. Monkkonen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁷⁰ See James Clifford, 'Traveling Cultures', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992), 100-1.

unjustly neglected pursuit of local history.⁷¹ Despite local history's obvious dedication to the local, 'locality' must "be interpreted with considerable elasticity,"⁷² just as the "seeming simplicity of the term local history camouflages immense complexity."⁷³ Furthermore, as John Walton Caughey pointed out as early as 1943, well before anthropologists came to adopt a similar stance, some parts of local history "move inexorably in the rhythm of the nation or the world", while "other parts are unique". He nevertheless noted that "between the definitions of local history as 'a small-scale model of national or global history,' and as 'a narrative of peculiar and unique experiences,' choice is neither easy nor comfortable."⁷⁴ Given this "increasing recognition of the contribution made by small-scale 'micro' research when set within a wider perspective," the journal *Family and Community History* was launched in 1998 to provide a forum for "detailed, down-to-earth studies of family and community informed by a wider social and historical perspective."⁷⁵

From an anthropological perspective in particular, what makes local and community history so fascinating is its refined conceptualisation of locality. As Shelton Stromquist has argued, the

⁷¹ According to Burke, "a striking feature of contemporary French historical writing [...] is the importance of the regional monograph [...], which attempts to reconstruct the 'total history' of a region in a particular period, in a manner not unlike an anthropological community study [...]." [Peter Burke, 'French Historians and their Cultural Identities', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 159.] In historical geography too, "locality studies" have recently come to the fore; see Richard Dennis, 'History and Geography: At the Intersection of Space and Time', in Eric H. Monkkonen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 169-70.

⁷² Constance McLaughlin Green, 'The Value of Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 91.

⁷³ Judith M. Wellman, 'Local Historians and their Activities', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 47.

⁷⁴ John Walton Caughey, 'The Local Historian: His Occupational Hazards and Compensations', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 203. On the comparative aspect of local history, also see Carol Kammen, 'Local History - in Search of Common Threads', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 13. Also see Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Local History and Societal History', *Local Population Studies*, No.51 (1993).

⁷⁵ *Family and Community History: Journal of the Family and Community Historical Research Society*, Vol.1 (1998), inside front cover and 3.

defining attribute of local history is its attempt to capture and convey the uniqueness of a place and time. That finely tuned sense of place, nurtured by direct experience and familiarity with a particular physical environment and its people, makes a local historian particularly well situated to identify the special qualities of a community.⁷⁶

One particular attraction of this approach to historical research and historiography is the emphasis on the need for the close involvement of the researcher with the locality of his research itself. Constance McLaughlin Green, for one, has argued that a local historian

must be sufficiently part of the community he is scrutinizing to be able to understand what has importance and meaning for its citizens and why. Perception of the values that obtain in the community should serve as a guide. Indeed some feeling of oneness with the community of which he writes, some sympathetic comprehension of its attitudes, is probably an essential factor in writing sound local history.⁷⁷

Such a stance is particularly valuable in that it involves and takes account of a given community in the present as much as in the past, for "set in familiar surroundings and peopled by individuals whose surnames are known, local histories address in a direct and personal manner a large segment of the population."⁷⁸ As Judith Okely has noted, personal knowledge of a locality can even allow for "participation in the past".⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Shelton Stromquist, 'A Sense of Place: A Historian Advocates Conceptual Approaches to Community History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 182-3.

⁷⁷ Constance McLaughlin Green, 'The Value of Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 98.

⁷⁸ Shelton Stromquist, 'A Sense of Place: A Historian Advocates Conceptual Approaches to Community History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 182.

⁷⁹ Judith Okely, 'Vicarious and Sensory Knowledge of Chronology and Change: Ageing in Rural France', in Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik (eds), *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1994), 49. On the role of participation and experience in social anthropology, see Judith Okely and Helena Callaway (eds), *Anthropology and Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 1992); Kirsten Hastrup and Peter

Furthermore, an emphasis on locality meets Felipe Fernández-Armesto's demand that "[h]istory ought to be a zoo full of real creatures with the mythical beasts excluded: [...] merchants, industrialists and financiers appear but 'Capitalism' is unmentioned [...]. There are knights and peasants but no 'Feudalism'."⁸⁰

Lastly, the localisation of colonial discourse analysis shows an awareness for the inherent localisation of all research, as Richard Fardon has pointed out, and which is found in the discursive contexts of the production of ethnographies (and travelogues, etc.) themselves.

Ethnographic accounts are pervasively cross-referenced, both explicitly and implicitly, to accounts both within and outside conventionalized regions of enquiry. [...] [A] relational view of locality and theoretical focus would suggest that ethnographies are also reworked versions, inversions, and revisions of previous accounts. Periodic crystallizations create images of place which need to be understood as multiply determined. [...] At its simplest then, the regional tradition influences the entry of the 'working' ethnographer into a 'field' imaginatively charted by others.⁸¹

Within historiography, according to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the effect of such fields can be such that "the historical narrative within which an actual event fits could precede that event itself [...]."⁸²

Hervik (eds), *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1994). Also see Roy Dille, 'Ways of Knowing, Forms of Power', *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol.11, No.1 (1999).

⁸⁰ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millenium: A History of Our Last Thousand Years* (London: Black Swan, 1996), 7.

⁸¹ Richard Fardon, 'Localizing Strategies: The Regionalization of Ethnographic Accounts', in Richard Fardon (ed), *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions in Ethnographic Writing* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 22-5. Also see Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Reading Culture: Anthropology and the Textualization of India', in E. Valentin Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (eds), *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literature* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 292: "Only when we begin to unravel the genealogies of colonial encyclopaedias of ethnographic knowledge does it become fully clear how problematic is the knowledge we perforce take to the field with us."

⁸² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.

With respect to the textualization of India, this has been shown with great effect by Nicholas Dirks, who argued that ethnography and history "will not be located outside of texts but rather in an intertextual field, constructed by the genealogical relations between histories of prior texts and the reflexive conditions that construct - and are constructed by - successive readings of these texts."⁸³ In consequence, Dirks prefers to speak of 'pretexts' rather than of 'contexts',⁸⁴ two terms to which Nigel Rapport could well be adding a third, 'post-texts', for as he has pointed out, "as the anthropologist makes sense of the field so his sense-making is informed by accounts he has read before, and mediated by the effect he would wish his writing to have on others."⁸⁵ That is, contextualizations must also take account of the texts that may come thereafter. In the words of Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, the "picture is, or should be, no longer that of a lone anthropologist and his or her informants (or the infamous "my people") standing, or sitting, in a stark landscape devoid of intellectual traditions."⁸⁶ Neither can the landscape in which ethnographies are written justifiably be called stark, for as Clifford Geertz points out, "[h]owever far from the groves of academe anthropologists seek out their subjects [...] they write their accounts with the world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars all about them."⁸⁷

⁸³ Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Reading Culture: Anthropology and the Textualization of India', in E. Valentin Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (eds), *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literature* (London: University of California Press, 1996), 279.

⁸⁴ Dirks defines 'pretext' as "both the texts that are read before and the conditions of the production, circulation, and consumption of these texts." [Ibid., 279.]

⁸⁵ Nigel Rapport, 'Edifying Anthropology: Culture as Conversation; Representation as Conversation', in Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson, *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1997), 179-80.

⁸⁶ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, 'Introduction: The Historization of Anthropology', in Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3.

⁸⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 129.

A focus on localisation is of particular relevance to questions of individual and socio-cultural identities, which have been central to post-colonial theory. Simon Gikandi, in his *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, explained that "my textualization of colonial culture is the recognition that texts were important and indispensable weapons in the imposition of rule and governance; [...] texts provided the medium through which the crisis of both colonial and domestic identities were mediated."⁸⁸ Nevertheless, I consider it misguided to approach such mediation as Roger Keesing does, namely as "the deep internalization by the colonized of the discourse of domination", which he considers "[o]ne of the dynamics in the colonial situation".⁸⁹

Instead, the Comaroffs argue that to understand the making of colonial identities, one has "to treat as problematic the *making* of both colonizers and colonized in order to understand better the forces that, over time, have drawn them into an extraordinarily intricate web of relations."⁹⁰ Harish Trivedi consequently discusses the relationship between the English and India in terms of an "interactive, dialogic, two-way process", that is, in terms of "colonial transactions".⁹¹ It is hence inadequate to argue, as Ged Martin and Benjamin Kline do, that "indigenous people were rarely given a significant role in shaping the identities of the new settlers communities, although their presence might have an important effect on the way immigrant societies saw themselves."⁹² Instead, "the categories of identity that gave meaning to colonizers and colonized alike cannot be taken for granted: they must be problematized and presented in the context of power."⁹³

⁸⁸ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xix.

⁸⁹ Roger Keesing, 'Colonial and Counter-Colonial Discourse in Melanesia', *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol.14, No.1 (1994), 54.

⁹⁰ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 183.

⁹¹ Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, new edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995; orig. 1993), 1 and iii.

⁹² Ged Martin and Benjamin E. Kline, 'British Emigration and New Identities', in P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 255.

⁹³ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 358.

Although Gikandi asks initially "How do colonial subjects write their identities within the cultural totality established by imperialism?",⁹⁴ he goes on to stress that "even when the culture of colonialism appears to be absolute and its totality unquestionable, its narratives have to contend with the colonized locality as not simply a space of transgression and resistance but one in which metropolitan identities are made and remade."⁹⁵ That is, the making of colonial identities is a reciprocal process. "Colonial culture is as much about the figuration of the metropolis in the imagination of the colonized themselves as it is about the representation of the colonized in the dominant discourses of the imperial centre."⁹⁶

Despite such realisations, as Laura Ann Stoler has pointed out, "anthropologists have taken the politically constructed dichotomy of colonizer and colonized as a given, rather than as a historically shifting pair of social categories that needs to be explained."⁹⁷ Instead, as Gikandi notes, "when we look beyond the metaphorical and mythological binarism promoted by empire, we discover the notions of margins and centres are conflated and often reversed; such binarisms are sometimes sustained by the colonized themselves, sometimes rendered meaningless by their experiential situations."⁹⁸ De Kock likewise warns of the danger that in exploring colonial binaries posited by many post-colonial theorists, such as coloniser/colonized, Western/non-Western, one runs the risk of reproducing them. He consequently suggests the need to "differentiate between binarisms in their primary operations as historically embedded discursive effects, widely employed by colonisers themselves, and sceptical appraisal of the ambit of such binarisms [...]." This is born out not least by the fact that "the heterogeneous range of voices in the record will not fit into dualistic conceptual schemes." As he explains, "it is one thing to describe the *attempts* by missionaries and others to enforce a coercive narrative of identity on people, and quite another to argue that such a narrative

⁹⁴ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1992), 321.

⁹⁸ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 37.

adequately reflects the experience of colonial interaction."⁹⁹ In consequence, more recent debates have abandoned conceptual binaries in favour of "tropes such as hybridity, diaspora, creolisation, transculturation, border."¹⁰⁰

This is a point acknowledged even by those writing in a more traditionally oriented disciplinary context. According to Dane Kennedy, "imperialism was a process of mutual interaction, of point and counterpoint that inscribed itself on the dominant partner as well as the dominated one. [...] any assessment of this interaction which ignores the cultural dimension - that is, the realm of mutual representations of the self and the other - is one that misses what may well be the most persistent and profound legacy of the imperial experience."¹⁰¹ According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the gradually evolving culture of colonial societies is "inevitably a hybridized phenomenon between the 'grafted' European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity."¹⁰²

Indeed, within a more traditional approach to colonial history "considerable attention has been devoted to the economic, social, and cultural institutions and structures created by colonists", not least because "[s]tudents of the European colonizing experience have long insisted that one of the most attractive aspects of their subject is the opportunity to observe the development of the new social entities they study from their very beginnings." This has largely been made possible by the fact that in "contrast to the European societies from which they emanated, the origins of which are no longer recoverable, early-modern colonies in America and elsewhere all have identifiable beginnings, about which, in many cases, the documentary record is sufficiently detailed to permit a reconstruction of the basic processes of social formation." Despite such studies, however, "much less consideration has been given to the ways in which those colonists acquired coherent identities as peoples and societies knit together by a series of

⁹⁹ Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 16-7.

¹⁰⁰ Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

¹⁰¹ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 359.

¹⁰² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helena Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 195.

common aspirations and experiences in particular places."¹⁰³ As Ann Laura Stoler has pointed out, "[c]olonial cultures were never direct translations of European society planted in the colonies, but unique cultural configurations, homespun creations in which European food, dress, housing, and morality were given new political meanings in the particular social order of colonial rule."¹⁰⁴

Such issues were addressed explicitly by a collection of papers edited by Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, arguably the most significant contribution in recent years to the study of colonial identities. Given that these papers deal exclusively with settler societies, rather than any of the so-called 'colonies of exploitation' (such as in Africa), they are of particular relevance to my own research.

In his contribution to the above volume, Jack Greene argues that the acquisition of "a well-articulated definition of itself" by "the inhabitants of each new society in the early-modern colonial world" arose from the interaction among four sets of variables: "attributes of place, goals, standards, and history". For Greene, "notwithstanding certain manifest similarities, the emerging identity of each new early-modern American society was powerfully shaped by a distinctive set of place-specific and time-specific experiences that gave it a content unique to the place, society, and people it had been constructed to describe." Ultimately, "the colonists' ability to perceive themselves as a separate community with a separate culture was one of the factors that gave them the confidence to make the bid for freedom whenever political circumstances dictated that it was in their interest to do so."¹⁰⁵ Rather than being inevitable, "during the age of Atlantic colonization and settlement [...] 'holding on' and 'breaking away' were for a long time half-options in which profit and loss, hope and disillusionment, interest and risk endlessly counterbalanced each other in uneasy equilibrium." In any case, 'breaking

¹⁰³ Jack P. Greene, 'Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 213.

¹⁰⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 321.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Pagden and Nicholas Canny, 'Afterword: From Identity to Independence', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 278.

away' "had first to be thought before it could happen, and the unthinkable would not have become thinkable without a prior process of self-definition."¹⁰⁶

Hence, to understand all the complex processes of the transformations formations of colonial identities involved "bringing on to center stage the fascinating question of self-image in the infinitely complicated history of the triangular relationship of mother country, colonists, and subject populations."¹⁰⁷ One of the principal problems faced by studies of colonial identity in this respect, Elliott admits, is that of finding "the evidence that will allow us to examine the process of self-definition among the underprivileged in the same kind of detail as is likely to prove possible for the colonial elites."¹⁰⁸ This problem is of particular relevance given that that the "most self-aware may indeed have been [...] the blacks and the children of miscegenation, those for whom the colony was the only 'mother country'." Alas, "few such groups were able to give any articulate expression to their sense of identity until the rebellions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like the poor of Europe, we can only know how they perceived themselves through the necessarily incomplete and partial accounts of others, and then only on those infrequent occasions when they succeeded in making their voices heard."¹⁰⁹

More often than not, recourse must be had to texts produced by 'colonisers' rather than the 'colonised'. Such a reliance on colonialist writings, however, is justified by Neil Whitehead, who argues that a colonialist text, such as a traveller's account, "might be appropriately labeled an 'implicit ethnography', in view of its lack of any sociocultural theory to guide the observations and analyses of others."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, such texts, if

¹⁰⁶ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁹ Jack P. Greene, 'Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 269-70.

¹¹⁰ It is this stance which underlies Neil Whitehead's analysis of Raleigh's account of Guiana. [Neil L. Whitehead, 'The Historical Anthropology of Text: The Interpretation of Raleigh's *Discoveries of Guiana*', *Current Anthropology*, Vol.36, No.1 (1995), 57.] On the use of 'indigenous' documents in ethnographic research, see Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Routledge, 1983), 127-143; Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey, 'Analysing Documentary Realities', in David Silverman (ed), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice* (London: Sage, 1997).

they are "contextualized in a wider body of documentation and ethnologically organised data", can indeed be "given a new and illuminating reading for the purpose of establishing past native praxis [...]"¹¹¹ In his study of African missionaries, de Kock has similarly pointed out that although the texts he studied were "narratives of what are taken to be facts and not unmediated facts themselves [...], there is always *some* purchase on reality in a historical account, even if that connection is no more than a recognition that a certain story has been told in a certain way about an ascertainable event."¹¹²

INVISIBLE PRESENCES

Although historians have long stressed that the "mere accident that records have survived in plenty does not by itself invest a subject with historical significance",¹¹³ the processes underlying such supposed 'accidents' have only ever been extensively explored by post-colonial theorists. These have made a point of emphasising, arguably above all else, the need "to retrieve a subaltern history that rewrites the received account both of the colonizing academics and of the native ruling elite, a history of the excluded, the voiceless, of those who were previously at best only the object of colonial knowledge and fantasy."¹¹⁴

As Elizabeth Hallam discovered during her archival research,

In order to interpret my chosen documents I realized I had to try to identify their limits - what had been omitted or silenced by the process of record making and the practicalities or politics of documentary survival and preservation? Making assessments and decisions about the content of the documents necessarily involved an exploration of their boundaries. In a sense the omissions or undocumented

¹¹¹ Neil L. Whitehead, 'The Historical Anthropology of Text: The Interpretation of *Raleigh's Discoverie of Guiana*', *Current Anthropology*, Vol.36, No.1 (1995), 56.

¹¹² Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 25.

¹¹³ H.P.R. Finberg, 'How Not to Write Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 194.

¹¹⁴ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 162.

spaces constituted a form of otherness which lay beyond the archive. Locating and identifying this otherness was part of the process.¹¹⁵

In his *Silencing the Past*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot addressed these very points, arguing in particular that "[s]ilences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). [...] any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly."¹¹⁶ Furthermore, according to Troillot,

Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing. Something is always left out while something else is recorded. There is no perfect closure of any event, however one chooses to define the boundaries of that event. Thus whatever becomes fact does so with its own inborn absences, specific to its production. In other words, the very mechanisms that make any historical recording possible also ensure that historical facts are not created equal. They reflect differential control of the means of historical production at the very first engraving that transforms an event into a fact.¹¹⁷

It is on account of such silences, that one cannot arrive at "a more accurate reconstitution of the past, and therefore the production of a 'better' history, simply by an enlargement of the empirical base." Nevertheless, Troillot acknowledges that the attention paid recently to "hitherto neglected sources (e.g., diaries, images, bodies) and the emphasis on unused facts (e.g., facts of gender, race, and class, facts of the life cycle, facts of resistance)" has accounted for "pathbreaking developments", and that the

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Hallam, 'The Archive's Others; Marks and Traces' in Elizabeth Hallam and Nicky Levell (eds), *Communicating Otherness: Cultural Encounters* (Brighton: University of Sussex, 1996), 35.

¹¹⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26-7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

"continuous enlargement of the physical boundaries of historical production" has been both "useful and necessary".¹¹⁸

In consequence, according to the Comaroffs, a "historical ethnography [...] must begin by constructing its own archive. It cannot content itself with established canons of documentary evidence",¹¹⁹ nor can it rely on "any preconstituted 'documentary record'," having instead to "pursue [...] the 'textual traces' of the period [...]."¹²⁰ But any such traces cannot simply be taken at face value, for if they are "to be more than literary topoi, scattered shards from which we presume worlds, they have to be anchored in the process of their production, in the orbits of connection and influence that give them life and force."¹²¹

All told, however, and given the overwhelmingly historical character of colonial studies, Greg Denning concludes that

Perhaps the historian is better served than the anthropologist by the variability of the genres of texts of culture, and certainly he or she has more checks on the way in which culture is mediated. The historian's ambition is to be exhaustive of all the texts available, knowing that in the end the return on all the lateral pursuits is a sense of balance and possibility. There is the authenticity in that of having done all that can be done, of having confronted all there is to be confronted. The anthropologists are forever left wondering in what way the mediating point of entry into another culture - their informants, their own experiences - is prejudiced by any number of selectivities - class, gender, personality, age, among them.¹²²

To what extent such perceived differences between historical and anthropological approaches are valid has been a matter of considerable debate, and it requires at least a brief examination of a number of conceptual and methodological problems in historical

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 34.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹²¹ Ibid., 34.

¹²² Greg Denning, "The Theatricality of Observing and Being Observed: Eighteenth-Century Europe "Discovers" the 18th Century "Pacific", in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 464.

and anthropological research, not least because I have had to wrestle with them myself. In undertaking such an examination, however, I shall not attempt to trace the emergence of a "more historical anthropology" as such, an insightful and detailed review of which has recently been provided by Susan Kellogg.¹²³

SIMILARITIES OF PERSPECTIVE

Claude Lévi-Strauss declared in 1949 that "[b]oth history and ethnography are concerned with societies *other* than the one in which we live. Whether this *otherness* is due to remoteness in time (however slight), or to remoteness in space, or even to cultural heterogeneity, is of secondary importance compared to the basic similarity of perspective."¹²⁴ Some anthropologist, however, have considered this comparison to be limited.

Historians are aware, of course, that another time is like another culture, which requires an effort of imagination before it can be understood. Social anthropological fieldwork, however, requires this effort as a matter of everyday experience, in matters both mundane and subtle. Within historical research,

¹²³ Susan Kellogg, 'Histories for Anthropology: Ten Years of Historical Research and Writing by Anthropologists, 1980-1990', in Eric H. Monkkonen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 9. Kellogg's article benefits from a fairly comprehensive bibliography. For an earlier review, see Bernard S. Cohn, 'History and Anthropology: The State of Play', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.22 (1980). For an account of the meeting between history and sociology, see Andrew Abbott, 'History and Sociology: The Lost Synthesis', in Eric H. Monkkonen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994).

¹²⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction: History and Anthropology', in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 16. Originally published as 'Histoire et Ethnologie, Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale', Vol.LIV, Nos.3-4, 1949. For a reiteration of this view, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 64-5. Also see, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essay 1971-1991* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991).

however profound, the problem must tend to remain a library exercise, which can be put down, or closed with a book.¹²⁵

In direct contradiction, Greg Denning claims that it was the anthropologists who were inclined to put down and close books prematurely, even if their research involved a certain degree of historical analysis.

Anthropologists stopped at the library and published sources. They did not seem to have the zeal to track down the unlikely letter or log or to chase home the past into all the nooks and crannies of personal, social and institutional life. [...] We *knew* that anthropologists had no patience for all the lateral pursuits that were essential to history. Every new source found raised a question about its relation to the rest, the interpretive framework into which it must be put, the contextual knowledge that would make sense of it.¹²⁶

This view confirms G.R. Elton's rather holistic conceptualisation of the practical principles of historical research, which he claims "does not consist, as beginners in particular often suppose, in the pursuit of some particular evidence which will answer a particular question; it consists of an exhaustive, and exhausting, review of everything that may conceivably be germane to a given investigation."¹²⁷ Such an approach, however, is not as practical as it may sound, for as Eric Hobsbawm has recognised, "the fundamental problem for the contemporary historian in our endlessly bureaucratized, documented and endlessly enquiring times is an unmanageable excess of primary sources rather than a shortage of them."¹²⁸ That this applies to earlier periods as well, as is evident from

¹²⁵ Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction' in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 5.

¹²⁶ Greg Denning, 'The Theatricality of Observing and Being Observed: Eighteenth-Century Europe "Discovers" the 18th Century "Pacific"', in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 460-1.

¹²⁷ G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Sidney: Sidney University Press, 1967), 88.

¹²⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 316.

Lytton Strachley's remark that the history of the Victorian age "will never be written [...] because we know too much about it."¹²⁹

Elton also argued that although the historian must make an initial choice of one main area of study or line of approach, "after that [...] he becomes the servant of his evidence of which he will, or should, ask no specific questions until he has absorbed what it says. At least, his questions remain general, varied, flexible: he opens his mind to the evidence both passively (listening) and actively (asking)."¹³⁰ It is not just anthropologists that listen and ask, nor is that which historians get to hear all that different.

The more the historian knows, the more he despairs of his ability to tell it, for the sheer complexity of the historical process stands inexorably in the way. At times it seems as though, contrary to reasonable expectations, real understanding and the possibility of conveying it grew together in steady harmony. [...] Life - and therefore history - are like that: they defy the sun-lit clarity and clearcut road through the wilderness which good writing requires. Indeed, in a very real sense, history cannot be correctly written. The processes to be analysed and described occur on a broad front, simultaneously and interconnectedly; writing is a linear development quite unlike the matter to be written about.¹³¹

Richard J. Evans similarly pointed out that "[e]very historian is aware of the complexity of the facts, their irreducibility to a single linear narrative; and everyone writing history, or, come to that, a doctoral thesis, is confronted by the problem of how to separate out the still inchoate material collected - or to be collected - during research into a series of more or less coherent narrative and structural strands, and then how to weave these strands into a more or less coherent whole."¹³²

These problems should be only too familiar to anthropologists, just as they should be able to relate to J.H. Elliott's caution that "[...] neat arguments should properly arouse

¹²⁹ Quoted in Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 22. In this connection, Pemble remarked that according to Flaubert "writing history was like drinking an ocean and pissing a cupful." [Ibid., 23.]

¹³⁰ G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Sidney: Sidney University Press, 1967), 83.

¹³¹ Ibid., 114-5.

¹³² Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 143.

the suspicions of the historian, whose explorations of the past ought to have made him aware of the untidiness of life."¹³³

The historian and the ethnographer share very similar commitments and resources. Each is committed to a systematic and thorough account of cultural phenomena, yet neither can reproduce all the 'evidence' and detail available. There is an element of *bricolage* in both types of writing. The historian will find him or herself using 'telling' examples, quotations and instances in order to convey to the reader more general or diffuse phenomena. So too will the ethnographer. They will both employ appropriate metaphors or models in order to impose order, coherence and meaning on their material.¹³⁴

After all, as Hobsbawm has argued, the purpose of historical research "is not simply to discover the past but *to explain it*, and in doing so to provide a link with the present. There is an enormous temptation in history simply to uncover what has hitherto been unknown, and to enjoy what we find. [...] But curiosity, sentiment and the pleasures of antiquarianism are not enough. [...] What we want to know is *why*, as well as *what*."¹³⁵ And as historical anthropologists have been keen to point out, "[t]o the extent that historiography is concerned with the recovery of meaningful worlds, with the interplay of the collective and the subjective, it cannot but rely on the tools of the ethnographer."¹³⁶

Despite all such efforts to recover meaningful worlds, Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik rightly argue that given that "the anthropologist's and the actor's interests in the same social reality fundamentally differ [...], the anthropologist's explanatory model has

¹³³ J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492-1650*, revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 69. Or, in Trouillot's words, to the fact that "[h]istory is messy for the people who must live it." [Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 110.] Also see Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 319-26.

¹³⁴ Paul Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality* (London: Routledge, 1990), 49.

¹³⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 284. He also argues that "since so much of the lives, and even more of the thoughts, of the common people have been quite unknown, this temptation is all the greater in grassroots history [...]." [Ibid.]

¹³⁶ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), xi.

to be by definition different from any kind of model the actors have."¹³⁷ Historians too are only too aware of this. According to Denning,

The ambitions of historians and anthropologists about their ethnographic presents are the same. The Past and the Other should be re-presented as they were. But that representation is never a duplication, a copy, and instant replay. Neither the Past nor the Other need recognize themselves in ethnography. Both are transformed into something else. They are not made to relive. They are made texts in other people's living, in other times.¹³⁸

Raymond Firth likewise acknowledged that the "ethnographical text is constructed by elaborate processes of winnowing, imaginative inference, identification of the abstract in the concrete, recognition of pattern in event. However faithful be the intent, the text clearly cannot be just a 'representation' of the society."¹³⁹ Hence, according to the Comaroffs, "ethnography does not speak *for* others, but *about* them. Neither imaginatively nor empirically can it ever 'capture' their reality."¹⁴⁰

In consequence, it appears somewhat naïve to argue, as the Comaroffs sadly do, that perhaps one of the remaining principle distinctions between historical anthropology and social history is that the former's "methodological concern is less with events than with meaningful practices", while social historians "fault historical anthropologists for not writing 'real' histories; that is, detailed chronicles of events."¹⁴¹ In any case, as Evans has stressed, an "event is a fact, but a fact is not necessarily an event. History is not just

¹³⁷ Ladislav Holy and Milan Stuchlik, *Actions, Norms and Representations: Foundations of Anthropological Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 121.

¹³⁸ Greg Denning, "The Theatricality of Observing and Being Observed: Eighteenth-Century Europe "Discovers" the 18th Century "Pacific", in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 464.

¹³⁹ Raymond Firth, 'Fiction and Fact in Ethnography', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 48. According to Trevelyan, as paraphrased by Evans, history in turn was "a mixture of the scientific (research), the imaginative and speculative (interpretation) and the literary (presentation)." [Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 25.]

¹⁴⁰ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 9.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37, 48n.

about events [...]."¹⁴² A failure to appreciate this is largely due to the very narrow conceptualisation held by postmodernists of the nature of historical sources. Furthermore, also according to Evans, "the textual metaphor can easily be unhelpful to the discussion of history, by suggesting that history depends on the analysis and composition of literary texts just as much as literary criticism and scholarship does." Rather "a historical source is not the same as a literary text. It is not usually a description of an event or a state of mind or a story. [...] historians have long been skilled in dealing with sources that do not directly tell a story themselves, or report events even in the most recent past. [...] Even where the historian's sources are written down, they very often bear little resemblance to any form of literature."¹⁴³

Indeed, it is on account of the nature of its sources, that there is "no reason for supposing that historians' imagination is entirely unfettered when it comes to reconstructing it."¹⁴⁴ In fact, according to Evans, historical writing "makes a point of conveying the provisional and uncertain nature of interpretation, and the need to test it constantly against the source materials used as evidence in its favour."¹⁴⁵ But such a position is not accepted by all. Elizabeth Tonkin, who surely cannot be called a postmodernist, argues that

Truth, that elusive historical goal, can also lie in the intersection of narrator and discourse, where we have to see how accounts are authorised. The polysemy is significant, for the act of authoring is a claim to authority. How it is achieved varies generically and politically and culturally, as does the kind of truth claimed, expected or accepted. The historian who adjudges another only as an imperfect source of facts is probably using a different set of criteria from that other, but both sets derive from authorisations.¹⁴⁶

Tonkin hence argues that to a great extent "authority-claiming is done through the form of the product itself, so that the sober format of an academic book, its hopefully witty

¹⁴² Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 79.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110-1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 8.

punning title (legitimated by a realistically pedantic and more limited sub-title) and the apparatus of citation and footnote are all reassuring to fellow academics that this is serious stuff."¹⁴⁷ The historian Richard J. Evans, however, has insisted that "[f]ootnotes and bibliographical references really are designed to check the sources on which a historian's statement is made and to see whether they support it or not. They are no mere rhetorical devices to produce a spurious 'reality effect'."¹⁴⁸

All in all, the debate on the relationship and the differences between anthropology and history continues, although, according to Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin, it was already shown in the late 1960s "that anthropologists could, as it were, 'do' history", and that a "historical anthropology" had developed by the late 1980s. By then, anthropologists no longer needed to be "convinced of the importance of historical material to their subject." Nevertheless, in 1989 "social anthropology and history, social theory and history, are still far from being entirely reconciled."¹⁴⁹ The reason that, in Edwin Ardener's words, a "theory of history has long eluded social anthropology,"¹⁵⁰ is arguably because "'anthropologists' previous failure to tackle history seriously was due primarily to their colonial *mentalité*. Perhaps not deliberately but nonetheless persistently, they shared the Eurocentric belief that 'nonliterate' peoples did not really have a history."¹⁵¹

Having overcome such eurocentrism, not least in the face of post-colonial critiques, and having realised that "there is no great gulf between 'tradition' and 'modernity' - or 'postmodernity,' for that matter", "it follows that the modes of discovery associated with them - ethnography for 'traditional' communities, history for the 'modern' world, past

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁸ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 127. For an exhaustive discussion, see Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).

¹⁴⁹ Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 4.

¹⁵⁰ Edwin Ardener, 'The Construction of History: 'Vestiges of Creation'', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 22.

¹⁵¹ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, 'Introduction: The Historization of Anthropology', in Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 2. Also see Peter Burke, 'Historians, Anthropologists, and Symbols', in Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

and present - also cannot be sharply drawn."¹⁵² Given that there is also "no longer any need to consider any area of collective representation [...] as outside the bounds of anthropological interest",¹⁵³ it is possible to argue that "one can 'do' ethnography in the archives," just as one can "also 'do' the anthropology of national or international forces and formations", such as, presumably, colonialism.¹⁵⁴

Yet, Edmund Leach, for one, argues that one should not "distinguish history and ethnography [...] at all."¹⁵⁵ In a similar vein, David William Cohen regards "as largely vacuous and unproductive the efforts [...] to discern the essential qualities of, and distinctions between, the two 'disciplines' of anthropology and history. What seemed far more vital, and also productive, was to examine how guild practices inscribed as 'anthropological' and 'historical' operated in broader fields of practices of producing knowledge, in the broadest sense, of culture, society, and past."¹⁵⁶ Such guild practices are particularly noticeable in the case of the writing of doctoral dissertations.

Interestingly, frequent recourse is had to colonial imagery, such as when historian Richard J. Evans writes with respect to post-modern theorists that "some of the intellectual barbarians at the disciplinary gates are loitering there with distinctly hostile intent."¹⁵⁷ Dane Kennedy noted in a recent paper this "widespread perception that disciplinary boundaries are akin to ethnic or national ones, abstract entities that must be patrolled and protected at all costs against outsiders."¹⁵⁸ Even more so, just as within metropolitan colonial discourses hybridity was largely considered dangerously improper, practitioners of traditional academic disciplines appear to view with similar distaste those of their fellow academics whose work does not conform to the proper

¹⁵² John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 6.

¹⁵³ Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 20.

¹⁵⁴ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 11.

¹⁵⁵ Edmund Leach, 'Tribal Ethnography: Past, Present, Future', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 37.

¹⁵⁶ David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), xv-xvii.

¹⁵⁷ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 8.

¹⁵⁸ Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.24, No.3 (1996), 359. Also see the cartoon accompanying an article by Joyce Tait, 'Help for Academic Nomads in Search of their own Sympathetic Tribe', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 4.3.1999.

'nature' of their ascribed discipline. In this respect academic discourse can be considered 'colonial' in so far as it essentialises academic disciplines in accordance with a classificatory system.

Having himself established the overriding affinity between anthropology and history, Lévi-Strauss argued as early as 1949 that such methodological differences as do exist between the two disciplines, can indeed be overcome, especially insofar as "history and ethnography have often been contrasted on the grounds that the former rests on the critical study of documents by numerous observers, which can therefore be compared and cross-checked, whereas the latter is reduced, by definition, to the observations of a single individual." According to Lévi-Strauss, "the best way to overcome this obstacle in ethnography is to increase the number of ethnographers,"¹⁵⁹ a proposal reminiscent of those made by recent advocates of 'modernist' ethnographies¹⁶⁰ and of a need for 'polyphony'.

POLYPHONY

One aspect of anthropological and historical writing that has come in for particular comment by postmodern critics is the privileged voice of the author. "That the historian in the text acts as the single mediator in the end not only privileges that version's overall viewpoint above others but authorizes it as the best by doing so."¹⁶¹ Hence, history and anthropology are both confronted with the need to de-centre histories and to abandon attempts to represent history from a single synoptic viewpoint.¹⁶² For Robert Berkhofer,

¹⁵⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'Introduction: History and Anthropology', in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 17. For Lévi-Strauss, the principle difference between history and anthropology is that they examine the conscious expressions and the unconscious foundations of social life respectively.

¹⁶⁰ See George E. Marcus, and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹⁶¹ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr, 'A Point of View on Viewpoints in Historical Practice', in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds), *A New Philosophy of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 189.

¹⁶² For recent debates on writing history, see Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington, and Robert Young (eds), *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990); Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*

an answer to this challenge lies in the introduction of multiple viewpoints into historical discourse.

Historical actors can be given their own voices in historical discourses. By having (being given?) voice the historical actors move from being the subjects in and of the discourse to being subjects with their own views. As with the author, the actors' voices can range from explicit and personal to implicit and impersonal. The most explicit voice comes when past actors speak for themselves through quotations."¹⁶³

In anthropology, this lack of other or multiple voices was perceived to be identical, although anthropologists, unlike historians, had to explain why still living actors did not represent themselves.

The others are not any more present in the text the anthropologist offers to her readers than their voices are present in (or even behind) the phonetic transcriptions of their utterances. In fact, it is because of this, because of this phonic and existential absence that these others can in the end be represented by the anthropologist, for, if they were here, there would be no point in representing them, that is, to stand for them and speak for them.¹⁶⁴

In effect, if anthropology allowed others to represent themselves, there would be no place left for ethnography (both contemporary or historical).¹⁶⁵

(London: Routledge, 1991); Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds), *A New Philosophy of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995); Keith Jenkins, *On 'What is History?': From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London: Routledge, 1995); Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁶³ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr, 'A Point of View on Viewpoints in Historical Practice', in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (eds), *A New Philosophy of History* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 175.

¹⁶⁴ Louis Dumont quoted in Johannes Fabian, 'Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.16 (1990), 755.

¹⁶⁵ De Kock, however, has commented that he does not consider his "interpretation of African response to missionary orthodoxies as a case of *speaking for* or *giving voice* to the African subjects from a position of critical objectivity [...]. I am able to comment on African response because Africans affected by missionary colonialism have in fact voiced their own positions. I have found examples of such expressions in archival sources. My work has been to review critically the degree of discursive meditation, subversion

However, as with the 'new history', an experimental approach is suggested as providing a possible way forward. Marcus and Fischer speak of such an approach as constituting 'modernist texts', which "arise centrally from the reciprocity of perspectives between insider(s) and outsider(s) entailed in any ethnographic research situation."¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, while 'realist texts' follow "the convention of allowing the ethnographer to remain in unchallenged control of his narrative, modernist texts are constructed to highlight the eliciting discourse between ethnographer and subjects or to involve the reader in the work of analysis."¹⁶⁷ Marcus and Fischer hence argue that "the experience represented in the ethnography must be that of the dialogue between ethnographer and informants, where textual space is arranged for the informants to have their own voices."¹⁶⁸

According to Paul Atkinson,

The ethnography, then, can be a complex text with various levels and voices. The viewpoint can thus shift as the author engages in dialogue with him or herself, and can combine or counterpose the voice of the sociologist with that of social actors. The deployment of exemplars from field notes, interview transcripts, documents and the like, can be used to give the reader the 'actual type' - a way of confronting the reader with the unfamiliar, or the recognizable, the striking, the exotic, the mundane, or whatever suits the purpose of the argument.¹⁶⁹

Such an approach, however, is far from novel, for as Clifford has pointed out, Malinowski himself effectively provided "an open text subject to multiple reinterpretations", given that in the many dictated myths and spells that fill his books,

or mimicry which is evident in these texts, but this remains a critical act." [Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 27.]

¹⁶⁶ George E. Marcus, and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 67. They do indeed use the term 'modernist' to denote approaches most other writers would term 'post-modernist', while using the term 'realist' to denote what are commonly called 'modernist' approaches.

¹⁶⁷ George E. Marcus, and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 67.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

"he published much data that he admittedly did not understand". It is this, Clifford argues, which constituted "ethnography's 'archival' function",¹⁷⁰ and he compares "such older compendiums with the recent model ethnography, which cites evidence to support a focused interpretation but little else. In the modern, authoritative monograph, there are, in effect, no strong voices present except that of the writer [...]."¹⁷¹

Likewise, according to Evans, history books have always contained a "multiplicity of voices", and hence "[r]eading any history book necessarily involves listening to this chorus of different voices sounding through the text."¹⁷² In addition, given the kind of sources the majority of historians work with, it has also always been true that one may "read against the grain of the text's dominant voice, seeking out other half-hidden authorities, reinterpreting the descriptions, texts, and quotations gathered together by the writer."¹⁷³

What examples there are of histories and ethnographies which present a "polyphony, in which the various voices of the sources speak side by side with the author's", have been criticised by historians and anthropologists alike for the fact that "[i]nvariably the planned polyphony turns out to be an accompanied aria. There is only one voice and one conception: the author's."¹⁷⁴ According to Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik, "[h]owever many 'voices' speak in the ethnographic text, they must be edited and reformulated through analysis and reflection if they are not to remain mere voices, speaking to no one in particular."¹⁷⁵ Even Clifford acknowledges the ethnographer's "executive, editorial position", even in supposedly polyphonic or multiple-author works.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ Paul Atkinson, *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Reality* (London: Routledge, 1990), 95.

¹⁷⁰ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 46 n11.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷² Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 106-7.

¹⁷³ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 53.

¹⁷⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 259.

¹⁷⁵ Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik, 'Introduction', in Hastrup, Kirsten and Peter Hervik (eds), *Social Experience and Anthropological Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1994), 5.

¹⁷⁶ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 51.

Local historians, for one, have long warned of the downside of polyvocality. In a paper ironically entitled 'How to write a dull town history', Elan recommended that it "should be written by a committee", which would ensure that "different viewpoints will be represented", but which would result in "a bland pudding of a book without a point of view."¹⁷⁷ More often than not, polyvocality is seen as a sign of laziness rather than principle, for "sooner than face the exertion of shaping his facts into an ordered narrative, [many a local historian] contents himself with printing the documents and leaving them to speak for themselves. Instead of a local history he produces a collection of raw materials."¹⁷⁸

But a solution to these problems must certainly be found, for as Marcus and Fischer have commented,

given the sort of heightened critical self-consciousness with which fieldwork is undertaken and conducted, the usual dissonance between what one knows from fieldwork and what one is constrained to report according to genre convention can grow intolerable. Perhaps genre control bears down most strongly at the point of professional qualification - the writing of ethnography for the doctoral dissertation.¹⁷⁹

For understandable reasons, a textually oriented approach to the writing of ethnography did not receive a general welcome, for many argued that "[w]hat a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to places, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in practical form, not lounging about in libraries reflecting on literary questions."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Geoffrey Elan, 'How to Write a Dull Town History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 210.

¹⁷⁸ H.P.R. Finberg, 'How Not to Write Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 195.

¹⁷⁹ George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 37.

¹⁸⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1. For a related review, see Richard Fardon, 'Postmodern Anthropology? Or, and Anthropology of

It is in the context of the above debates in colonial studies, anthropology, history, and other fields, that I have found my own work to be situated. This does not mean, however, that I have sought to deal with each and every of the issues I have raised. Instead, I have chosen to focus on those areas which seemed most pertinent to the colonising¹⁸¹ of St Helena, not least because the island fits uneasily into established areas of colonisation, such as the 'Atlantic World'.¹⁸² On reflection, my examination of the colonising and textualizing of St Helena has largely been guided by the approach taken by David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire*. That is, my project has involved the following two basic procedures, namely "a *mapping* of the discourse, which identifies a series of basic tropes which emerge from the Western colonial experience," and "an informal *genealogy*, in which the repetitions and variations of these tropes are seen to operate across a range of [...] contexts."¹⁸³ This approach recognises that "colonial discourse is neither a monolithic system nor a finite set of texts; it may more accurately be described as the name of a series of colonizing discourses, each adapted to a specific historical situation, yet having in common certain elements with the others."¹⁸⁴

The latter point has also been made by Kate Teltscher, who has stressed that despite a need to situate colonial texts "in their specific national, social and religious contexts", "it is equally important to recognize the elements shared by these texts, to note the way that

Postmodernity?', in Joe Doherty, Elspeth Graham, and Mo Malek (eds), *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

¹⁸¹ Where possible, I have opted for the more processual terms 'colonising' and 'textualizing', rather than the somewhat static and monolithic term 'textualization' employed by Nicholas Dirks in his study of India. (Nicholas B. Dirks, 'Reading Culture: Anthropology and the Textualization of India', in E. Valentin Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (eds), *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literature* (London: University of California Press, 1996).)

¹⁸² Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁸³ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 3. Given the different scope of my project, I have omitted the words "nineteenth- and twentieth-century" from the quotation.

¹⁸⁴ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 1-2.

they constantly refer to, reproduce, counter and build on one another."¹⁸⁵ According to Teltscher, texts across a range of genres "share certain assumptions, strategies and imagery" and they "influence, plagiarize, and attack one another."¹⁸⁶ In her specific case, she consequently went as far as speaking of "a European tradition of writing about India."¹⁸⁷ One aspect of that tradition, very noticeable in the case of St Helena also, is that "[a]ccounts of India typically rely on Europe as a constant parallel, either through explicit analogy or implied reference", and that difference, especially cultural difference, is "elided through comparison, or registered in terms of deviation from a European norm."¹⁸⁸

In fact, it is the approach taken by Teltscher in *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800*, which I consider most comparable to my own, not least because the book examines a much broader range of colonial genres than other such works have tended to do.¹⁸⁹ And although her analysis, like mine, has been informed by colonial discourse theory, the latter never intrudes unnecessarily upon her book.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, I believe that Teltscher went too far in applying "the techniques of literary analysis [...] on non-literary as well as literary texts",¹⁹¹ in so far as it has led her to mistake her interpretations of texts for an elucidation of their authors' true meanings.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2-3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). See her comments on page 3. For more limited approaches, see Kenneth Parker, 'Fertile Land, Romantic Spaces, Uncivilized Peoples: English Travel-Writing About the Cape of Good Hope, 1800-50', in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁹⁰ See Javed Majeed's review of Teltscher's *India Inscribed* in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.26, No.3 (1998), 110-1.

¹⁹¹ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

¹⁹² For an example, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 23: "By stressing the incongruity of worshipping an image that is 'fearful to behold', of adoring a monster, Finch implies that Hinduism is strangely illogical and perverted."

The principal and significant difference between Teltscher's approach and mine, however, is that Teltscher "largely excluded unpublished work from consideration, partly because there would simply be too much material, and partly to build a network of intertextual relations, to show how one work informs another." In this respect, she highlights the absence from her work of "the vast body of statistical and economic research produced during the early decades of [East India] Company rule", an absence she explains by arguing that it did not "occupy a prominent position in public debate on India", although she acknowledges that it was "central to the formulation of British policy".¹⁹³ Quite unlike Teltscher, I have paid particular attention to unpublished sources, government records in particular, for it is here that the link between colonial discourse and colonial praxis is most explicit. Furthermore, intertextual relations are just as evident in these unpublished sources, which reflect not only published ones, but which also inform one another.

The use of official sources in particular has an added advantage, for as Spurr has argued, a focus on non-fiction writing allows one to examine colonial discourse "in a form unmediated by the consciously aesthetic requirements of imaginative literature." Journalistic texts in Spurr's case, official records and travelogues in mine, can be said to be "distinguished from fiction by the conventional expectation of its grounding in an historical actuality; its relation to this actuality is understood to be primarily metonymic and historically referential rather than metaphoric and self-referential."¹⁹⁴

In setting myself the task of examining a very wide range of colonial texts, I have been fortunate in that the volume of St Helena oriented 'colonial discourse' is relatively small (compared to a territory like India in any case, but even compared to a small island colony such as Barbados), although it includes examples of all the major genres of colonial discourse (official records, travelogues, newspapers, early histories, prose fiction, poetry, and a fair amount of pictorial material, especially maps, prints, drawings and early photographs). Hence the task of gaining an overview over what were almost five hundred years worth of records did indeed prove feasible. Inevitably though, like other scholars, I have felt "compelled to select exemplary texts and to contain archival material

¹⁹³ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁹⁴ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 2.

within the demands of my particular arguments."¹⁹⁵ And despite the comprehensiveness of the St Helena 'archive', some acknowledged colonial genres are severely underrepresented, such as missionary discourse, making it impossible to discuss these in their own right. Hence, like Teltscher, I have not separated "the literary from the non-literary, nor rigidly isolated one genre from another."¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, I have chosen not to draw a distinction between primary sources and secondary sources, although Evans argued only recently that that distinction "on the whole has survived", given "a qualitative difference between documents written in the past, by living people, for their own purposes, and interpretations advanced about the past by historians living at a later date."¹⁹⁷ Such a distinction, however, denies the contextual nature of historiography, for as Elizabeth Tonkin has argued, "representations of pastness [...] are made by persons in interaction, situated in real time and space [...]."¹⁹⁸ When Thomas Brooke wrote his *A History of the Island of St Helena* in 1808, he was advancing interpretations about the past, as well as writing for his own purposes, namely to "afford [...] useful or even satisfactory intelligence to those connected with the government of the island and friendly to its interests".¹⁹⁹ This fact alone should qualify his work as a primary source, not to mention that from my vantage point at least, Brooke had certainly been writing in the past.²⁰⁰

Neither do I draw a distinction between 'colonial' texts and contemporary ones, not least because the island's current pound coins that I carry in my wallet still have "Colony

¹⁹⁵ Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 19.

¹⁹⁶ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁹⁷ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 126.

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3.

¹⁹⁹ Brooke's *History* is in fact dedicated to the directors of the East India Company. The preface to the book's first edition is reprinted in T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), viii.

²⁰⁰ Only for the purposes of my bibliography have I chosen to distinguish between 'principal sources', that is, texts containing substantive and analytical material respecting St Helena, and 'supplementary sources', including texts on the analysis and history of empire, and on methodological issues. In addition, I have included a separate section on archival sources, all of which I consider to be 'principal sources' for bibliographical purposes.

of St Helena" engraved on their rim. Nor do I rigidly distinguish sources according to whether their authors were 'insiders' or 'outsiders' with respect to St Helena, although I do take note of such labels if they have been assigned to these authors by others. Insofar as I argue that the authors of all the texts examined in this thesis were party to the colonising of St Helena, they were in any case all 'insiders'. And as for texts published on St Helena itself, especially in local newspapers, where writers always speak of 'our' island, it is generally impossible to tell definitively whether these were locally born, immigrants, or expatriate officials. There is no point, as I argue at length in chapter 10, in trying to impose criteria for the identification of an authentic St Helenian voice. In consequence, none of the literature has been defined as distinctly St Helenian or as a 'voice of their own', although such a definition could well be imposed. Taking a cue from a definition of African literature discussed by Chinua Achebe, St Helenian literature could arguably be defined as: *Creative writing in which a St Helenian setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in St Helena are integral.*²⁰¹ Such a definition has the advantage that the identity and origins of an author are considered to be irrelevant. However, as I have already indicated, the obvious disadvantage of such a definition lies in its notion of authenticity, for what does it mean to say that a St Helenian setting is "authentically handled", and who is to decide?²⁰²

These difficulties explain the apparent absence from my discussion of the type of texts which post-colonial theorists term 'counter-colonial', not least because such a distinction is also based on the kinds of essentialising binarisms which I consider unsustainable. While it is possible to identify texts which 'write against' certain other texts, not least because they usually do so explicitly, I see no justification in assigning them to a category which glosses over the internal complexities of these texts and of their engagement with other texts. Consequently, having decided against a number of

²⁰¹ For the definition of African literature on which my hypothetical definition is based, see Chinua Achebe, 'The African Writer and the English Language', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 428. For my own purposes, I have merely substituted the words 'St Helenian' and 'St Helena' for 'African' and 'Africa'.

²⁰² For a flawed attempt to review and hence define 'St Helenian literature', see Trevor Hearl, 'St Helena', in Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (eds), *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Vol.II (London: Routledge, 1994). The tendency of post-colonial theory to produce "its own exclusions and marginalia" is discussed in Saeed Ur-Rehman, 'Decolonising Post-Colonial Theory', *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing*, Vol.XX, No.2 (1998), 38.

possible binary distinctions between types of texts, I have chosen to use sources as I saw fit, rather than on the basis of some predefined merit.

Without wanting to follow the erroneous example set by Emily Jackson (see chapter 2) and without false overtures to polyvocality, I have nevertheless chosen to quote extensively where appropriate, for a study of colonial discourse which is devoid of that very discourse would appear somewhat vacuous. Furthermore, quotations do allow the reader to share some of my 'readings', in both senses of the word, that is, to share my 'texts' and my 'interpretations'. This is particularly important given that the majority of my sources have not previously (or recently) been (re-)published.²⁰³

A VERY BRIEF OUTLINE

Overall, my thesis approaches the textualizing and colonising of St Helena from both a chronological and a thematic perspective, tracing the development of the island's colonisation through different periods from the early sixteenth century onwards, while relating these to changes in colonial discourse in general. While certain 'colonial themes' can be identified as being more prevalent in some periods than in others, thus favouring a chronological framework, it is unavoidable that chronology cannot always be strictly reconciled with thematic concerns.

Part I has already situated this thesis within a critical engagement with post-colonial theory and colonial discourse analysis primarily, as well as with the recent 'linguistic turn' in anthropology and history. In place of post-colonialism's rather monolithic approach to colonial experiences, I have argued for a localised approach to colonisation, which takes greater account of colonial praxis and of the continuous re-negotiation and re-constitution of particular colonial situations. Part II focuses on a number of literary

²⁰³ I have also been guided by the words of C. Northcote Parkison, a past master of the history of East Indian maritime history, who admitted that he had "never seen the merit of paraphrasing what might just as well be given in the original words." [C. Northcote Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas, 1793-1813* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966; orig, 1937), xiii.] Furthermore, by letting quotations illustrate one another, one is arguably put in a position to hear "books talk to one another", that is, to come to appreciate their connections and debts. [Peter Ackroyd, *The House of Doctor Dee* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), 129.]

issues by reviewing St Helena's historiography and literature, and by investigating the range of narrative tropes employed (largely by travellers) in the textualizing of St Helena, in particular with respect to recurrent imaginings of the island in terms of an earthly Eden. Part III examines the nature of colonial 'possession' by tracing the island's gradual appropriation by the Portuguese, Dutch and English in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and the settlement policies pursued by the English East India Company in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Part IV provides an account of the changing perceptions, by visitors and colonial officials alike, of the character of the island's inhabitants (from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century) and assesses the influence that these perceptions have had on the administration of the island and the political status of its inhabitants (in the mid- to late twentieth century). Part V reviews the principal arguments of my thesis by addressing the political implications of post-colonial theory and of my own research, while also indicating avenues for further research.

All in all, rather than trying to develop anthropology, history or post-colonial studies in an interdisciplinary way, the following chapters have been intended primarily as a detailed exploration of a particular localising of colonial discourse over a period of nearly five hundred years, a time span not usually covered by a monograph.²⁰⁴ A close analysis of a consequently wide range of colonial 'texts' has confirmed that although colonising practices and representations are far from monolithic, in the case of St Helena their continuities are of as much significance as their discontinuities.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ My approach hence differs considerably from that taken by Jonathan Skinner in his study of the British overseas territory of Montserrat, in which he argues for a "postmodern impressionistic anthropology [...] illustrated by ethnographic vignettes", which pays hardly any attention to the island's colonial dimension, past or present. [Jonathan Skinner, *Impressions of Montserrat: A Partial Account of Contesting Realities on a British Dependent Territory* (Ph.D. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1997), abstract.]

²⁰⁵ For a comparison with India, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 255.

PART II

”AND SERVE TO TESTIFIE”

~ OF PONDEROUS TOMES¹



A POTTED HISTORY OF ST HELENA

St Helena is one of the United Kingdom's 13 remaining overseas territories.² A lone mid-ocean island, a mere 47 square miles in size, St Helena is situated at Lat. 15¼ 55' S

¹ Parts of this chapter have been published in Alexander Schulenburg, 'St Helena: British Local History in the Context of Empire', *The Local Historian*, Vol.28, No.2 (1998).

² For a general introduction to St Helena and its dependencies, see Tony Cross, *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (London, 1980). For surveys of the 'Dependent Territories', as they were called until 1998, see George Drower, *Britain's Dependent Territories: A Fistful of Islands* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1992); Sara Oldfield, *Fragments of Paradise: A Guide for Conservation Action in the U.K. Dependent Territories* (Oxford: Pisces, 1987). For the most recent such survey, see *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories* (London: HMSO, 1999). Also see John Connell and Robert Aldrich, 'Europe's Overseas Territories: Vestiges of Colonialism or Windows on the World?', in Helena M. Hintjens and Malyn D.D. Newitt, *The Political Economy of Small Tropical Islands: The Importance of Being Small* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992).

and Long. $5\frac{1}{4}$ 45' W., 1200 miles west of Angola, its nearest mainland (*map 1*). The island is volcanic in origin, surrounded by steep cliffs on all sides and rises to a height of 818m. The island's capital and only town is Jamestown, with a population of 1,302, out of St Helena's total population of 5,644.³

St Helena is said to have been first located by the Portuguese in 1502 and for over 150 years the island was used by mainly Portuguese, Dutch and English mariners as a victualling station on their return passage from the East Indies, but remained uninhabited. The London East India Company fortified and settled St Helena in 1659, and its proprietorship of the island continued until 1834, when St Helena was vested in the Crown. The island has been a colony ever since, although it is now described as an overseas territory. Ascension Island, 700 miles to the north west, became a dependency of St Helena in 1922, as did Tristan da Cunha, 1200 miles to the south west, in 1938.

St Helena's economy was never geared towards self-sufficiency, but revolved around the provision of supplies for shipping and for the local garrison. Although the island served as England's and later Britain's principal base for supplying ships on their return voyages from the East Indies, China and India (*maps 2 and 3*), the advent of steam and the opening of the Suez Canal led to a collapse in shipping⁴ and, in consequence, of the island's economy. The island never played any significant role as a coaling station. A flax industry was established in 1907, in turn declined by the 1960s. Since then the island has had virtually no industry of its own⁵ and is nowadays largely dependent on aid from the United Kingdom, which has been projected at \$26 million over the period 1997/98 to 1999/00.⁶ The majority of St Helena's workforce are employed by government while 1,000 St Helenians are employed offshore on Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands.⁷

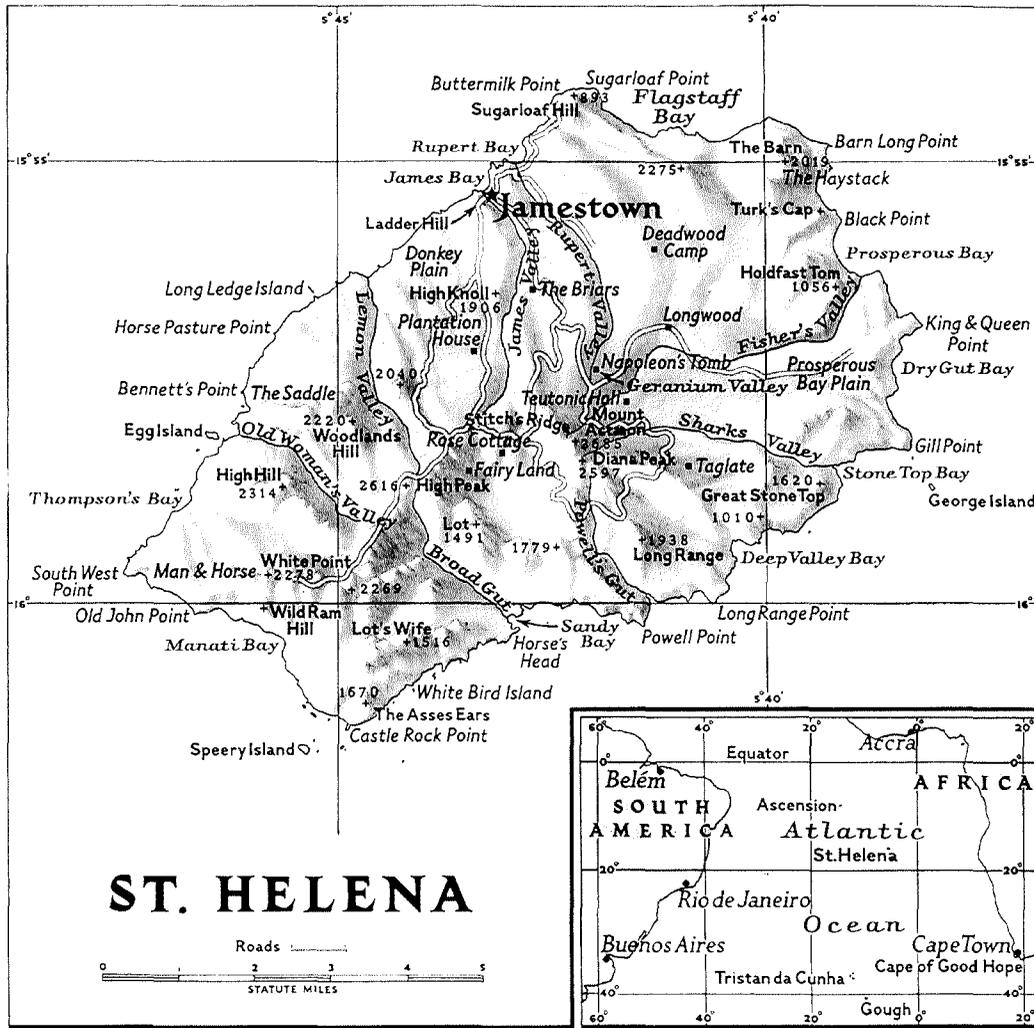
³ *St Helena and Ascension Island Census 1987* (London: Overseas Development Administration, 1988). A preliminary count based on the census of 1998 enumerates the island's total population at 5,010 [*St Helena Statistics Office - Statistical News*, Vol.1, Issue 12 (1998)].

⁴ For a summary of shipping statistics see *St. Helena and Dependencies: Statistical Yearbook 1992* (St Helena, 1992).

⁵ The only major export worth noting is fish, the value of which amounted to a mere £83,000 in 1991, as opposed to imports worth £5.74 million in 1990/91 (*St. Helena and Dependencies: Statistical Yearbook 1992*). A promising new industry is coffee, which has been exported in small quantities since 1989.

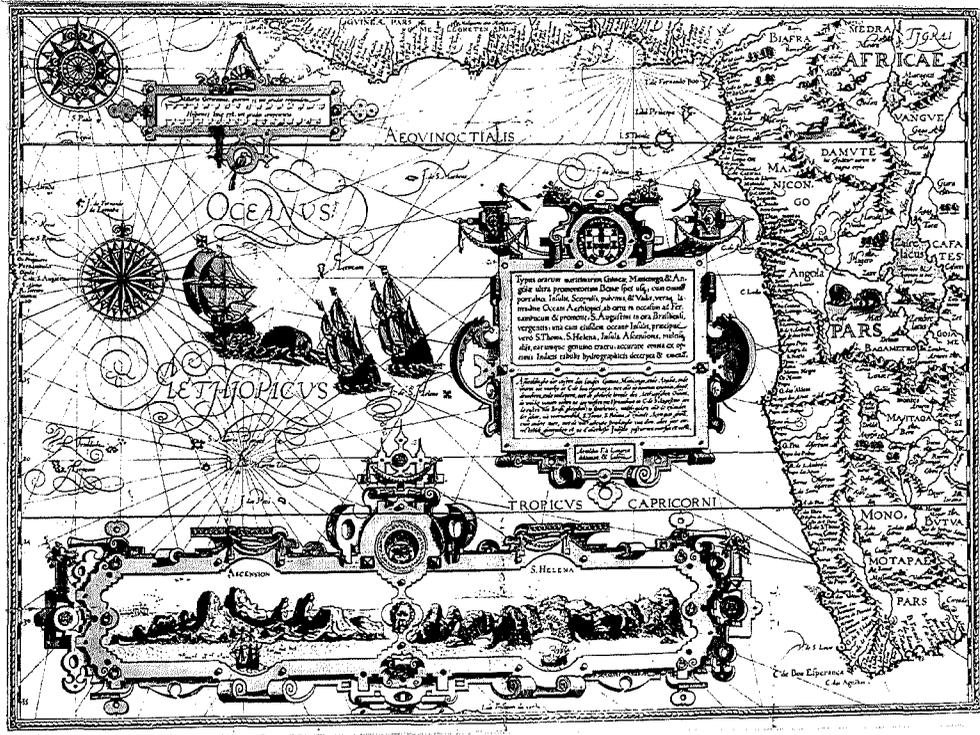
⁶ *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories* (London: HMSO, 1999), 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*



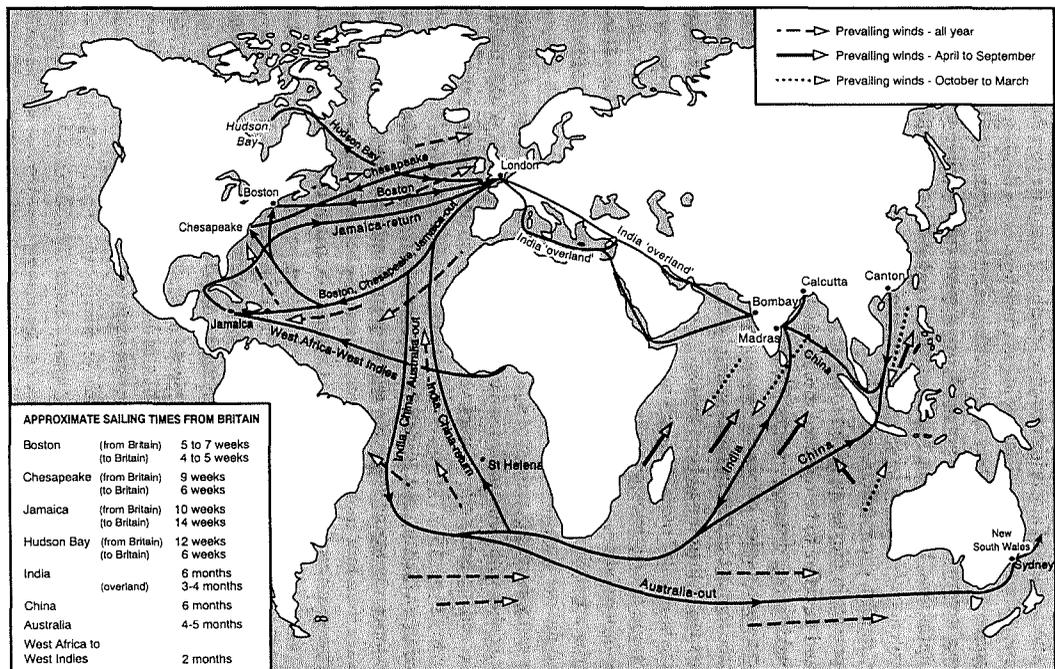
Map 1: St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean

source: Quentin Keynes, 'St. Helena: The Forgotten Island', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 2 (1950)



Map 2: The South Atlantic (including inset of St Helena)

source: Arnold Florisz van Langren, *Typus Orarum Maritimarum Guineae* (Amsterdam: c.1600)



Map 3: Eighteenth Century Imperial Communications

source: P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

The island's economic situation is not improved by the fact that, as in the sixteenth century, St Helena's only transport link with the outside world is still by ship.⁸

St Helena's present day community has its origins in the white settlers taken there by the East India Company, and these settlers and the Company's increasing number of slaves. By 1718 the island's population amounted to 542 whites (including a garrison of 128) and 411 slaves. Chinese indentured labourers were brought to the island in 1810, some of whom remained. Slavery finally came to an end in 1832. From 1839 to 1874 the island became a temporary home to Africans freed from slaving vessels, a small number found employment locally, primarily as servants. From the 1830s onwards, St Helenians began to emigrate to South Africa primarily. The island's population had peaked at 5,838 in 1871, but by 1901 had sunk to 3,342, before rising to 4,748 in 1946, and 5,008 in 1998. The island's present population is invariably described as mixed and no divisions in terms of 'race' are recognised. Islanders' views of their identity revolve primarily around the dual notions of a St Helenian local identity and a British national identity.

THE ST HELENA 'LITERATURE'

St Helena historiography has suffered above all from the undue emphasis which has generally been placed on the six years of Napoleon's exile. As Joshua Slocum remarked, "St. Helena has been an island of tragedies - tragedies that have been lost sight of in wailing over the Corsican."⁹ Despite a vast literature on Napoleon, texts on St Helena as such would appear to be few and far between. For Ross Clarke, writing a piece about St Helena for *The Spectator* in 1994, the problem of finding information on St Helena even took on a turn for the slightly bizarre. "It is not easy finding out anything about St Helena. It is impossible to go there unless you have six months to spare. [...] It is not easy finding somebody who has visited St Helena, either. When I did eventually manage

⁸ The island's London registered RMS *St Helena*, a purpose built cargo/passenger vessel of 6,767 tonnes, travels at regular intervals between the United Kingdom and South Africa, a route serviced by the Union Castle Mail Steamship Company until 1977.

⁹ Joshua Slocum, *Sailing Alone around the World and Voyage of the Liberdade* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1955), 230.

to find a book about the island, I noticed that the foreword had had to be written by somebody who had never been there [...]."¹⁰

But even prior to Napoleon's death, accurate knowledge of the island was apparently hard to come by. In 1808 Thomas Brooke already noted that "[d]escriptions of the island to be met with in various authors are partial and incomplete, the result only of transient observations [...]."¹¹ Ironically, it was Napoleon's exile there, which showed up the inadequacies of most of the existing literature on St Helena.

In 1815, the general idea of St. Helena was that derived from handbooks and gazetteers. The endless descriptions which were published to satisfy public curiosity upon the announcement of Napoleon's deportation - descriptions which the [French] Government transmitted and speculations spread abroad - did no more than reproduce conceptions at least two hundred years old.¹²

Alas, often outdated descriptions of the island are quoted and rehashed even today.

By 1937, however, the literature on St Helena had become sufficiently extensive for G.C. Kitching to edit *A St. Helena Bibliography*, which amounted to four pages and included only a few references to Napoleon. More recently, a comprehensive bibliography for St Helena and its dependencies (containing 754 references in all) has been compiled by Alan Day and published in the 'World Bibliographical Series'.¹³

The first monograph about St Helena, entitled *Klare Besgryving Van't Eyland Sanct Helena*, had in fact been published in Amsterdam as early as 1652, but is not listed in any of the existing literature and appears to have gone unnoticed until I was first issued with a copy at the British Library in 1995. No further descriptive monographs are known to have been published until the anonymous publication in 1805 of *A Description of the Island of St. Helena; containing Observations on its Singular Structure and Formation; and an Account of its*

¹⁰ Ross Clark, 'We Always Have Been British', *The Spectator*, 3.9.1994, 18. The reference is to John Betjeman's introduction to Oswald Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957).

¹¹ T.H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St. Helena* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), viii.

¹² Frédéric Masson, *Napoleon at St. Helena 1815 - 1821*, translated by Louis B. Frewer (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand, 1949), 99-100.

¹³ Alan Day, *St. Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha*, World Bibliographical Series Vol. 197 (Oxford: Clio Press, 1997). See also entries on St Helena in H.G.R. King, *Atlantic Ocean*, World Bibliographical Series Vol. 61 (Oxford: Clio Press, 1985).

Climate, Natural History, and Inhabitants, which set the tone for several subsequent publications which all showed a desire to encompass the island in its entirety.

Other notable titles in this genre include *A Geographical and Historical Account of the Island of St. Helena; of its Discovery by the Portuguese; its Climate; Population; Manner of the Inhabitants; Mountainous Aspects; and Natural Security*, also published anonymously in 1815. These were followed in 1817 by Capt. John Barnes' *A Tour through the Island of St. Helena; with Notices of its Geology, Mineralogy, Botany, &c. &c.*, in 1851 by Joseph Lockwood's *A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical*, in 1865 by *Saint Helena* by 'A Bird of Passage', in 1875 by John Charles Melliss' *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island, Including its Geology, Fauna, Flora, and Meteorology* and in 1883 by Benjamin Grant's *A Few Notes on St. Helena, and Descriptive Guide*. The most recent island survey of this kind is Tony Cross' *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (1980).

Given St Helena's prominent position on the once main shipping route from the East Indies, invaluable accounts of St Helena can be found in the many books of travel that have been published since the early 16th century. Accounts of visits to the island have featured regularly in such travel narratives, and many of those that were not published at the time, have since become available through the excellently edited volumes of the Hakluyt Society. Moreover, since the Second World War, several books of travel have been devoted exclusively to St Helena, the most notable of which are Oswell Blakeston's *Isle of St. Helena* (1957), Roland Svensson's *Ö Och Människa: En Resa till Napoleons ö Sankt Helena* (1968), Margaret Stewart Taylor's *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (1969), Julia Blackburn's *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (1991), and Kenneth Bain's *St Helena: The Island, Her People and Their Ship* (1993). Extensive sections on St Helena can also be found in Lawrence Green's *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town, 1956), Simon Winchester's *Outposts* (1985), Gavin Young's *Slow Boats Home* (1985), and Harry Ritchie's *The Last Pink Bits: Travels Through the Remnants of the British Empire* (1997).¹⁴

Early attempts to provide comprehensive descriptions or depictions of St Helena have not been restricted to writing alone. As Margaret Stewart Taylor pointed out in 1969, "it is impossible to give an adequate word picture of variations in rock formations that abound along St. Helena's coast. Visitors may grasp, writers may try to describe them without success, but only the artist and the photographer can hope to convey any idea of

¹⁴ For details of these publications, see the bibliography.

their fantastic beauty."¹⁵ Hence, several individuals have opted to describe St Helena in volumes of views and photographs, attempting also to meet the great demand for views of the island which arose in the wake of Napoleon's exile to St Helena.¹⁶ Such demand existed both for individual views and, particularly, for collections, one of which was published in London in 1821 and is entitled *A Series of Views, Illustrative of the Island of St. Helena; in which the Picturesque Scenery, Craggy Precipices, Cultivated Vales, and Public Buildings, which have Rendered that Distant Spot Worthy Such General Attention, are Faithfully Portrayed. Drawn on the Spot by James Wathen Esq. of whom a Portrait is Prefixed.* Even after Napoleon's death, demand for views continued, as is shown in a work of thirteen views which made use of the latest technology available. Published in 1857, this work is entitled *Views of St. Helena; Illustrative of its Scenery and Historical Associations; From Photographs by G.W. Melliss, Esq., Surveyor-General of the Island.*

Apart from Melliss' photographs, the first significant collection of photographic views of the island is that by John Isaac Lilley, who took a series of 80 photographs which were made available for purchase in the form of lithographs.¹⁷ Since then, four major photographic surveys of the island have been published, one of them as part of a report on island architecture.¹⁸ Robin Castell's two books of photographs, one of general views (in colour), the other of the island's principal houses (in black and white), were published in 1977 and 1979 respectively. Both are comprehensive, if uninspiring. The most recent photographic survey of St Helena is by Helmut Schulenburg (my father) and myself, published in a work plainly entitled *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean*, which features approximately 280 contemporary black and white photographs and several historical illustrations.¹⁹

¹⁵ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 73.

¹⁶ For a collection of St Helena views over the centuries see Robin Castell, *St Helena Illustrated* (Cape Town: National Book Printers, 1998). Unfortunately, Castell's annotations are not just idiosyncratic, but also full of errors.

¹⁷ *Descriptive List of Photographic Views of the Island of St. Helena* (1862). For a detailed discussion of Lilley's photographs, see Trevor Hearl, 'John Isaac Lilley, St Helena's Photo Pioneer', *The Photographic Journal*, (December 1990), 517-9.

¹⁸ Hugh P. Crallan, *Island of St. Helena: Listing and Preservation of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest* (typescript, 1974).

¹⁹ Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg, *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997).

A wholly new genre of St Helena literature made its appearance with the publication in 1995 of Danny Francis' *The Cruel Jungle and the Desert Vultures*, the first memoirs by a St Helenian émigré. Although only one of the twenty one chapters is set on St Helena, it nevertheless provides a unique glimpse of the world of a young St Helenian in the 1940s.

The island's contemporary literary output has been restricted to several collections of short stories for children, Basil George's *Stories from the Island of St Helena* (1960), Keith Yon's *Watchcum and Other Fables for Island Children* (c.1976), John Bailey's *Nine Tales from the Magic Island* (1992), and Bobby Robertson's *The Stowaways and Other Stories from St. Helena* (1996), only the latter of which is available other than as a typescript.²⁰ According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen this "absence of indigenous fictional texts crucially distinguish[es] societies from each other", because the "widespread social appropriation of texts generally suggests the presence of a certain kind of historical consciousness", while "the social appropriation of fictional texts, notably novels, may enable the members of society to reflect critically about their own identity [...]".²¹ On St Helena, such opportunities are few and far between.

Lastly, there have to date been no detailed anthropological or sociological studies of St Helena,²² although Ian Shine's *Serendipity in St. Helena: A Genetical and Medical Study of an Isolated Community* (1970) contains a valuable section on island culture. Robin Cohen and Stephen Royle both undertook some quantitative research into the attitudes and aspirations of islanders with respect to education and social identity.²³ For several years now, a study has also been under way into the effects of broadcast television on St

²⁰ Basil George, *Stories from the Island of St Helena* (typescript, 1960); Keith Yon, *Watchcum & Other Fables for Island Children* (typescript, c.1976); John Bailey's *Nine Tales from the Magic Island* (typescript, 1992); Bobby Robertson's *The Stowaways and Other Stories from St. Helena* (Bishop Wilton: Wilton 65, 1996). In line with my remarks in chapter 1, I have chosen not to classify these writings as 'St Helenian literature'.

²¹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'The Author as Anthropologist: Some West Indian Lessons About the Relevance of Fiction for Anthropology', in Eduardo P. Archetti (ed), *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994).

²² This is a point raised in a report by the then Overseas Development Administration, *Report on Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy and Action Plan for St Helena*, Vol. 2 (1993), 11.

²³ Robin Cohen, 'St. Helena: Welfare Colonialism in Practice', in Robin Cohen (ed), *African Islands and Enclaves* (London: Sage, 1983); Robin Cohen, 'Education for Dependence: Aspirations, Expectations and Identity on the Island of St. Helena', *Manchester Papers of Development*, Issue 8, (1983); Stephen Royle, 'Attitudes and Aspirations on St Helena in the Face of Continued Economic Dependency', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 1, (1982).

Helena's children, but its quantitative research has until recently been surprisingly insensitive to cultural factors.²⁴

ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES²⁵

No matter how interesting and comprehensive these books, accounts of travel, reports, and other volumes may be, the most extensive, richest and most fascinating material on St Helena can be found in form of the island's voluminous official and unofficial archival records. Governor Sterndale, for instance, remarked in 1899 that the "past of St. Helena is almost a sealed book to the reading public of England [...]. Yet it was a microcosm of great interest, of which voluminous manuscript records remain, in ponderous tomes [...] and which form a sort of distant reflection, or far off echo of contemporary manners and customs of the greater world beyond the waters."²⁶

To appreciate the nature of these 'ponderous tomes', that is, of the island's early manuscript sources, one has to consider above all that the East India Company was most particular in issuing instructions to its servants respecting the proper format for correspondence and records of consultations.²⁷ With respect to the composition of

²⁴ Tony Charlton, 'The Inception of Broadcast Television: A Naturalistic Study of Television's Effects in St Helena, South Atlantic', in Tony Charlton and Kenneth David (eds), *Evasive Links: Television, Video Games and Children's Behaviour* (Tewkesbury: Park Publishing, 1997).

²⁵ According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot (whose thoughts on the production of 'silences' I quoted in chapter 1) archives are "the institutions that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements. [...] They are the institutionalized sites of mediation between the sociohistorical process and the narrative about that process." [Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 52.]

²⁶ R.A. Sterndale, 'St. Helena in ye Olden Tyme', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol.VIII (1899), 345.

²⁷ For an insider's account of the East India Company's Public Department and its handling of correspondence, see Benjamin Scutt Jones' testimony given in 1832 before the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, in *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, I. Public* (London: House of Commons, 1832), 23-7. For a discussion of the East India Company's records and correspondence in relation to India ("complicated and complex forms of knowledge created by Indians, but codified and transmitted by Europeans", 16), see Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

general letters, for instance, the Company instructed that all matters be dealt with under a number of specific heads, for in this way "it will be the sooner, and more certainly found out on Enquiry, [...] and by collecting materials of the same nature together will help your attention as well as memory and prevent omission and tautologies." As for the governor's consultation books, the Company instructed that they "be in the nature of a journal" and that they "may contain a particular account of all y^r transactions sufficiently plain to the understanding of a stranger who peruses it."²⁸

That these instructions were not always followed is evident from a letter in which the island's governor and council were reprimanded for the sloppiness with which records had hitherto been kept. "The writing must be more carefully done, and not so many faults of words omitted, or wrong wrote, that makes the sense scarcely intelligible: no material Papers must be omitted to be entered as in these before us, where it is said, here comes in the Storekeeper^s Acco^t whereas there is not one word of the Acco^t."²⁹ Overall, the Company's directors expected correspondence to be "without artfull Colourings or Evasions That we may know the naked truth."³⁰

It appears that these problems were as much due to lack of experience as to negligence, for in 1717 the governor and council wrote to the Court of Directors to explain the problems that they continued to encounter in composing their correspondence.

We believed your Honours sometimes have been tired with the too great length of our letters which we would remedy if we knew how, but find it requires more ingenuity than we are master of. Your Hon^{ts} are at London where all your directions are penned by men of the brightest parts. We have nobody but ourselves and though we take your Hon^{ts} letters to us for Copys to write ours by yet when we have answered them the best we can we have judgment eno[ugh] to find we are vastly short.³¹

²⁸ SHGA: In-Letter, 14.3.1715.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ SHGA: In-Letters, 22.2.1717.

³¹ Governor's & Council's letter dated 8.5.1717; quoted in Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*, second edition (St Helena, 1908), 143.

That 'too great length', however, is much appreciated by those using the records for their research so many centuries later. Unfortunately, following the island's transfer to the Crown in 1836, the island's records became less detailed, primarily due to the abandonment of the East India Company's consultation books, although these were at first replaced by a 'Journal of the Proceedings in the Colonial Department, Island of St. Helena'³²:

A good general introduction to these records, both on and off the island, is G.C. Kitching's 'Records of the Island of St Helena', published in the *American Archivist* in 1947, which provides an outline of the holdings of the three principal repositories of St Helena records, namely the St Helena Government Archives, the British Library (in its collection of the India Office Library and Records),³³ and the Public Record Office. Archives and libraries in the United Kingdom preserve duplicates of most material available on St Helena itself, as well as a number of very early manuscript records not found locally. Between them, British Library, the Public Record Office, the Rhodes House Library in Oxford, and Cambridge University Library, hold the vast bulk of this material, whether in published or in manuscript form. A fairly comprehensive listing of St Helena records held by United Kingdom and foreign repositories can also be found in Brian Smith's recently published *A Guide to the Manuscript Sources for the History of St Helena*.³⁴ Other important repositories of St Helena materials include the relevant archives in India, South Africa, as well as, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands. Unfortunately, as a result of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, none of the relevant Portuguese manuscript sources appear to have survived.³⁵

³² This journal was an attempt to continue the 'Records' of the East India Company, but the first volume soon turned into the 'Entry Book - Correspondence: Colonial Secretary', under which title the journal and its compendium volumes are now classified.

³³ For St Helena records now held by the British Library see Frederick Charles Danvers, *Report to the Secretary of State for India in Council on the Records of the India Office* (London: HMSO, 1888); William Foster, *A Guide to the India Office Records, 1600-1858* (London: India Office, 1919); Martin Moir, *A General Guide to the India Office Records* (London: British Library, 1988). All three books contain extensive background information on the East India Company and its records.

³⁴ Brian Smith, *A Guide to the Manuscript Sources for the History of St Helena* (Tadmorden: Altair Publishing, 1995). Also see Noel Matthews and M. Doreen Wainwright (eds), *A Guide to Manuscripts and Documents in the British Isles Relating to Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³⁵ See Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 7.

On the island itself, the St Helena Government Archives were established in 1962 following a visit by an adviser from the Public Record Office. They are situated at the Castle in Jamestown, alongside the government's main administrative offices and contain the records of both the East India Company's administration and of that of the Crown.³⁶ The archive's East India Company's records date from 1673 to 1836 and include local council 'consultations', books of letters to and from England, judicial, military, maritime and other administrative records. There are several registers of wills (1682 - 1839) and of leases and deeds (1682 - 1849). The records of the island's Crown administration date back to 1836 and consist of council records, correspondence between the governor and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the island's Blue Books, and other miscellaneous administrative records. Some government departments also have small, current archives of their own. Most records in this category are subject to a 30-year access rule. Another invaluable resource, especially for family historians, are the island's Anglican parish registers dating back to 1680, which are held on loan by the Government Archives. Also available are the island's Baptist registers. In recent decades, all these registers have been extensively indexed.

The archives also house copies of St Helena's various weekly newspapers, the first of which, the *St. Helena Advocate*, was published in 1851 (a monthly gazette was first published in 1806), and which were particularly prolific during the Victorian period, which also saw a number of short-lived satirical magazines. Amongst the more notable papers were the *St. Helena Herald* (1853-1860) and the *St. Helena Guardian* (1861-1923), the longest running of all. Further such publications include the *St Helena [Diocesan] Magazine* (1901-1951), and the *St. Helena "Wirebird"* (1955-1966). The weekly *St Helena News Review* was first published in about 1940 and renamed the *St Helena News* in 1986. It is still published today. Another particularly valuable source of information are the *St. Helena Calendar and Directory*, published between about 1829 and 1842, and its successor, the *St. Helena Almanac and Annual Register*, published between 1843 and 1883, with a further one-off issue published in 1913.³⁷

³⁶ Daphne Gifford, *Report to His Excellency, Sir John Field, CMG, Governor of St. Helena, on the Public Records of the Island of St Helena* (typescript, 1962); Brian Smith, *Heritage St Helena: A Report on the Museum, Archives and Historical Sites* (typescript, 1993).

³⁷ For an introduction to the history of publishing on St Helena see G.C. Kitching, 'The St. Helena Printing-Presses', *Notes and Queries*, No.171 (1936). Also see Trevor Hearl, 'Publishing (St Helena)', in

Despite this abundance of primary sources, few general histories of St Helena have to date been published, although brief reviews of the island's past have been included in more general descriptions since the late sixteenth century.³⁸ While the literature on Napoleon's exile at St Helena is extensive,³⁹ that literature has little bearing on the history of the island as such, although Gilbert Martineau's *Napoleon's St. Helena* contains a fairly perceptive chapter on 'The Daily Life of the Inhabitants'.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the six years of Napoleon's exile there from 1815 to 1821 have had little bearing on the overall significance of St Helena to the expansion of the British Empire, and as such the island's history certainly cannot be reduced to them.⁴¹ This absence of an extensive secondary literature meant that my research has had to start almost from scratch, for even the most basic dates and statistics were either unavailable or unreliable.

In the preface to his *A History of the Island of St Helena*, the first general monograph history of the island, published in London in 1808, Thomas Brooke explained that

Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (eds), *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Vol.II (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁸ For a review comparable to my own, see Trevor Hearl, 'Historical Writing (St Helena)', in Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (eds), *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Vol.I (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁹ Most of this literature is sympathetic to Napoleon, hence tending to portray St Helena in the worst possible light. For one such account, see Emil Ludwig, *Napoleon* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1991; orig. 1924), 600-3.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Martineau, *Napoleon's St. Helena* (London: John Murray, 1968), 153-82. A later work of his, Gilbert Martineau, *Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène, 1815-1821* (Paris: Librairie Jules Tallandier, 1981), is arguably the most succinct history available of Napoleon's exile on St Helena. See also Paul Frémaux, *The Drama of St. Helena*, Vol.1-3 (London: Andrew Melrose, 1910); Frédéric Masson, *Napoleon at St. Helena 1815-1821*, translated by Louis B. Frewer (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand, 1949). On the wealth of memoirs of Napoleon's exile, see John Holland Rose, *The Life of Napoleon I*, sixth edition revised (London: G. Bells and Sons, 1913), Vol.II, 564. On the birth of the Napoleonic 'legend', see Gilbert Martineau, *Napoleon's Last Journey* (London: John Murray, 1976).

⁴¹ Sadly, St Helena is a mere footnote in the majority of imperial histories, although John Keay, in his *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), has duly recognised the island's import role in the foundation of the British Empire in India. Within a regional context, a fair number of references to St Helena can be found in Robin Knox-Johnston, *The Cape of Good Hope: A Maritime History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989).

"[a]mong the numerous settlements and islands annexed to the British empire, St. Helena is certainly ancient in the date of its establishment; yet no historical account of it has hitherto been attempted; and to this deficiency, perhaps, may be attributed the idea of insignificance that has been attached to it, and the consequent indifference of the public with regard to its concerns."⁴² In fact, Brooke was the first of St Helena's few historians to make extensive use of the East India Company's records, access to which had been afforded to Brooke by virtue of his position as Government Secretary.

A residence of fifteen years on the island has enabled him to obtain the local knowledge essential to his design; and his appointment as public secretary has given him free access to the official records. Possessing such sources of information, he has only to hope that the accuracy and truth of the circumstances which he records may compensate for defects in style or composition.⁴³

Brooke's narrative may well have set the tone for a number of subsequent publications, and his attention to detail in combing the old records provided some essential groundwork for future historians, however misleading. A substantially revised edition of Brooke's *History*, including new material, appeared in 1824, neither edition of which Frédéric Masson, for one, was at all fond of. "There in detail could be found the most insignificant course of events in the administration, and this narrative is particularly tedious and dull."⁴⁴ Then again, Masson's interests lay with Napoleon. But the approach of writers of Napoleonic St Helena memoirs and histories had hardly been all that different from Brooke's. Already in 1823, this was pointed out with great flair by Fowell Buxton MP when he addressed the House of Commons on the question of the abolition of slavery. Citing St Helena as a favourable example for his argument, Fowell Buxton had this to say:

⁴² T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), vi. Alas, his efforts seem to have been fruitless, for Graham Creelman lamented in *The Listener* in 1984 that the "tragedy is that we do not care about St. Helena, because we know nothing about it." [Graham Creelman, 'An Island in Exile', *The Listener*, 16.8.1984.]

⁴³ T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), vii-viii.

⁴⁴ Frédéric Masson, *Napoleon at St. Helena 1815-1821*, translated by Louis B. Frewer (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand, 1949), 99.

Public curiosity has recently been excited in an extraordinary degree. Books, enough to fill a library, have been written, detailing the administration of Sir Hudson Lowe. Acts the most slight - anecdotes the most trivial - expressions the most unmeaning, have been recorded with exact fidelity. Generations yet unborn shall know, that on such a day in July, Sir Hudson Lowe pronounced that the weather was warm; and that on such a day of the following December, Bonaparte uttered a conjecture that it would rain in the course of the week. Nothing has escaped the researches of the historian - nothing has been overlooked by the hungry curiosity of the public - nothing - Yes! one thing only has never been noticed; namely that Sir Hudson Lowe gave the death-blow to slavery at Saint Helena.⁴⁵

Brooke's attention to detail, that is, his antiquarianism, was easily surpassed by Governor Hudson Ralph Janisch's efforts to record the history of St Helena under the East India Company. As in the case of Brooke, Janisch's work was made possible by the access he had to the government's records given his position as governor of the island for eleven years, from 1873 to 1884. His *Extracts from the St. Helena Records* was published posthumously on the island in 1885. The particular interest of Janisch's *Extracts* lies in the fact that they enabled readers to draw conclusions largely their own, given that he include hardly any editorial remarks. Commenting on Janisch's extract from the records in a contribution to the *St. Helena Guardian*, 'A. Native' wrote that these "afford much food for thought to those who would grumble at the existing Constitution and the liberty they enjoy under it compared with the thralldom and despotism under which the inhabitants groaned under the rule of the East India Company."⁴⁶ But Janisch's *Extracts* was seen by 'A. Native' as more than merely food for thought, for he goes on to say that "should one of Mr. GRANT'S productions fall into the hands of Mrs. BEECHER STOWE she will find in it plenty of matter on which to found a Sequel to Uncle Tom's Cabin, and add another page to the many tales of horror attendant on Slavery as viewed in its true life."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, N.S. Vol. IX (1823); entry for 15.5.1823.

⁴⁶ *The St. Helena Guardian*, 9.4.1885.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

But Janisch was clearly aware of the limitations of the sources with which he worked.

In these Records we find in minute details the quarrels, squabbles, and crimes, of the inhabitants for nearly 200 years and would be tempted to the hasty conclusion that they must have been a bad lot, if we did not remember that such is History in all ages and in all lands. The virtues of private life are not exciting enough for its pages and are passed over in silence, but they constitute the real happiness of all communities. [...] In reading therefore ludicrous or sad occurrences in the Records it is necessary to remember that they attract the more notice only because like Comets they are something out of the ordinary way.⁴⁸

However, rather than providing extracts as such, Janisch continuously moves between quotation and calendar, as a result of which his *Extracts* is often not as reliable as one would like it to be, although it continues to be an important guide for research. Taken on their own, Brooke and Janisch provide only a selective insight into the island's history to the 1830s and should be used with caution.

While Brooke (for obvious reasons) and Janisch worked only with the records of the East India Company's administration on St Helena, the first to make extensive use of official documents of the Crown was G.C. Kitching, Government Secretary from 1932 to 1940. In the introductory note to his *Handbook and Gazetteer*, Kitching explained that when he arrived at St Helena "[t]here was nobody to tell me, nor was there any book in which one might read, what had really happened during the past 100 years. I had to find out everything for myself, so I read every despatch, in or out, since 1824, and the results are embodied in this volume." Kitching was also the first to concentrate his research efforts on detailed studies of very particular aspects of St Helena's history, such as in his papers on the capture of St Helena in 1673 and on the East India Company's St Helena regiments.⁴⁹ This research effort, as well as Kitching's encouragement, were essential to the writing of Philip Gosse's *St Helena 1502 - 1938*, which is still regarded as the best

⁴⁸ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Scraps from the Records* (St Helena, 1880), ii.

⁴⁹ G.C. Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol.36, No.1 (1950); 'The St. Helena Regiments of the East India Company', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. XXV (1947). The only other paper to have been researched locally is 'Astronomers and Other Scientists on St. Helena', *Annals of Science*, Vol.31, No.6 (1974), which was written by W.G. Tatham, an old Etonian and one time honorary archivist on St Helena, and K.A. Harwood, a visiting ophthalmic optician.

general history of the island, and which was reprinted in 1990 with a new introduction by Trevor Hearl.⁵⁰ Gosse is very close in style to Brooke, on whom the earlier parts of his history are based, although he included a large amount of new material, especially for the period prior to 1673. In more recent times, Percival Teale has been an admirable discoverer of little known published references to St Helena, and particularly of hard to come by prints and travel narratives. However, both his *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659* and volume 1 of his his three volume *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island* consist almost entirely of badly referenced and unedited facsimiles of these narratives and other materials.⁵¹ While these works are useful in that they make available a range of important sources on St Helena, Teale makes hardly any attempt to analyse or even structure his material, other than by chronology. These criticisms do not apply to Teale's research into the island's architectural history, found in volumes 2 and 3 of his his *Saint Helena*, which are genuinely valuable.

For its curiosity value alone, I must also mention the worst general history of St Helena ever to have been published, Mario Marquet's *Sankt Helena: Insel ohne Geschichte?* (1980; 'St Helena: Island Without History?'). Marquet worked on the assumption that no such history had as yet been written, and as he had no primary sources to hand, he relied on a selection of miscellaneous secondary sources, mainly French, none of them central to the St Helena literature.⁵²

The only two extensive histories of recent decades are Edward Cannan's *Churches of the South Atlantic Islands 1502-1991* (1992) and Dorothy Evans' *Schooling in the South Atlantic Islands 1661-1992* (1994), both of which deal primarily with St Helena.⁵³ While each presents a highly detailed narrative history of its chosen subject, there is no attempt at a contextualised, comparative or critical analysis, which may not be so surprising, given that both books were written by people intricately linked with the island's Anglican

⁵⁰ For a contemporary review, see John Squire, 'The "Earthly Paradise" of the South Atlantic; "St. Helena" 1502-1938: By Philip Gosse', *The Illustrated London News*, 25.6.1938.

⁵¹ Teale, Percival *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1-3 (Natal: 1974); Teale, Percival *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978).

⁵² Mario Marquet, *Sankt Helena: Insel ohne Geschichte?* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau, 1980). In the book's bibliography there is no mention of either Brooke's, Janisch's, Jackson's, or Gosse's work, although Marquet reprints a photograph taken from Jackson.

⁵³ Both books include relevant accounts of Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha, and the Falkland Islands.

church and education system respectively. The same is true for Ronnie Eriksen's *St. Helena Lifeline* (1994), a history of St Helena shipping, and as a result these books are little more than 'glorious histories, which avoid contentious issues. Written in an arguably similar vein are a number of genealogical studies, such as Edward Carter's *The Dovesons of St. Helena* (1973).⁵⁴

Other books of recent years include Edward Hibbert's *St. Helena Postal History and Stamps* (1979), David Vice's *The Coinage of British West Africa and St Helena 1684 - 1958* (1983), and Martin Levy's *Napoleon in Exile: The Houses and Furniture Supplied by the British Government for the Emperor and his Entourage on St Helena* (1998), as well as Lady Margaret Field's well researched and well told *The History of Plantation House - St Helena*, completed locally in 1967, but only published posthumously in 1998. Natural histories are represented by Alasdair Edwards' *Fish and Fisheries of Saint Helena Island* (1990) and Beau Rowland's *The Birds of St Helena: An Annotated Checklist* (1998).

Since 1980, Trevor Hearl has produced a steady flow of typescript articles and publications on a large number of island subjects,⁵⁵ and similar research has recently been undertaken by Stephen Royle.⁵⁶ A regular forum for St Helena history is provided by *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena*, published twice a year, which contains short articles on historical and contemporary topics, book reviews and news, as well as by the

⁵⁴ See also Francis C. Anderson, *History of the Connection with India and St. Helena of the Family of Findlay Anderson* (Edinburgh: 1927); Barry Porteous, *The Porteous Story: A Scottish Border Family From 1439 A.D.* (Canada: 1980); Kenneth John Pritchard, *The Pritchard Family in South Africa* (Durban: 1989); Philip F. Skottowe, *The Leaf and the Tree: The Story of an English Family* (Chippenham: 1963); Robert Colquhoun, *Yamstocks, Brushmakers and Latter-Day Saints: The Isaacks of St Helena and their Descendants* (London: 1998). For a review of St Helena family history, see John Titford, 'Settlers of the Old Empire: The South Atlantic Islands - St Helena', *Family Tree Magazine*, Vol.14, No.9, July 1998.

⁵⁵ See for instance 'Baptist Pioneers of St Helena: A Sesquicentennial Survey', *The Baptist Quarterly: Journal of the Baptist Historical Society*, Vol.XXXVI, No.5 (1996), and 'John Isaac Lilley, St Helena's Photo Pioneer', *The Photographic Journal*, December 1990. A selection of Hearl's studies is set to be published by Anthony Nelson as *St Helena Britannica*.

⁵⁶ Stephen A. Royle, and Anthony B. Cross 'Health and Welfare in St Helena: the Contribution of W.J.J. Arnold, Colonial Surgeon, 1903-1925', *Health & Place*, Vol.2, No.4 (1996), and Stephen A. Royle, 'St Helena as a Boer Prisoner of War Camp, 1900-2: Information from the Alice Stopford Green Papers', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol.24, No.1 (1998).

South Atlantic Chronicle, published quarterly by the St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha Philatelic Society.⁵⁷

For some years now, new input into historical research has also come from the Bishop of St Helena's Commission on Citizenship, much of whose argument rests on promises made by Charles II in his charter of 1673, which granted St Helena to the East India Company. Research is centred on this charter and copies thereof, and the Commission recently stated that "[f]ull facsimilies and transcribed texts, with accompanying critical notes will be published, as definitive works [...]"⁵⁸ Alas, the Commission is trying to prove a political and legal point, not to inquire openly into the texts in question. Furthermore, their and much other research into St Helena's history has been done in isolation, resulting in a duplication of such research, as well as a tendency to exaggerate the importance of apparently new evidence. In one instance, Percival Teale commissioned the transcription of a manuscript account of a battle at St Helena in 1625, on the publication of which he stated that "[b]efore this document was transcribed, historical evidence tended to show that the Portuguese lost interest in Saint Helena soon after coming under the Spanish yoke in 1580. In line 69, the fact that they had two forts ashore as well as their Chapel is indeed an historical [*sic*] revelation."⁵⁹ However, not only had the document been previously transcribed and placed in context by C.R. Boxer,⁶⁰ but the two forts were mere temporary structures, which had been erected as a result of a shipwreck; they did not hence constitute a long term strategic investment. As such, Teale's discovery provided no historic revelation at all.

Another development in recent years has been the increase in St Helena based research by settlers or long term residents, including a steady output of studies by the Australian Ken Denholm, namely 'St Helena, South Atlantic Fortress' (1990), *South Atlantic Haven: A Maritime History for the Island of St Helena* (1994), *From Signal Gun to Satellite: A History of Communications on the Island of St Helena* (1994) and *Island of St Helena:*

⁵⁷ For a selection of articles, see Russell V. Skavaril (ed), *St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha Philatelic Society's 20th Anniversary Anthology* (Columbus: St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha Philatelic Society, 1997).

⁵⁸ Nicholas Turner, *St Helena: A British Island, The Second Report Produced for the Citizenship Commission* (London: The Wanderer, 1997), 49.

⁵⁹ Percival Teale, *Island of St Helena, 1625: The Battle for Chapel Valley* (typescript, 1975), author's note.

⁶⁰ See C.R. Boxer, 'On a Portuguese Carrack's Bill of Lading in 1625', reprinted in C.R. Boxer, *From Lisbon to Goa, 1500-1750: Studies in Portuguese Maritime Enterprise* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984).

The Flax Industry 1874-1966 (1996).⁶¹ Most of these studies have been printed and published on St Helena itself, and provide fairly elementary and rather selective coverage of their chosen subject.

A more significant local contribution to St Helena research have been a number of publications by Barbara George: *The First 'St. Helena': The East India Company Schooner St. Helena, 1814-1830* (1994; writing as Barbara Montgomerie), *Jacob's Ladder: The Fascinating Story of St. Helena's Famous Landmark, Originally Built as a Railway* (1995), and *The Chinese Connection: The History of Chinese Indentured Labourers on St. Helena, 1810-1836 and Beyond* (forthcoming).⁶² Unfortunately, George's narratives are obscured by often quite unnecessary detail, although she does provide fairly comprehensive documentary coverage of the particular subjects she set out to research. Hence, the particular benefit of these publications, which consist largely of extensively annotated transcriptions of local government records, has been the very transcription of these records.

As Barbara George (a Scot married to an islander) has lived on the island for almost thirty years, the most notable about her work is the way it engages with contemporary St Helena through the use of editorial asides, which are either included within brackets or in the form of footnotes. This is particularly well illustrated with the following footnote to a letter informing the island's council that the schooner *St Helena* had to be docked for repairs: "* Sounds familiar?"⁶³ To those acquainted with the present day RMS *St Helena*, it does. Given therefore that these comments require a certain amount of local knowledge, they add an extra layer of meaning to the text's primary purpose of providing a detailed account of one or other aspect of St Helena history. Moreover, footnotes such as "* Did you know that we used to EXPORT potatoes TO Capetown?" make a point of providing St Helenians with their very own historiography.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, for those looking for a more conventional text, these asides are more of an irritant, and despite such novel aspect, George's work suffers by lacking contextualization.

The only notable examples of a contextualised, comparative and critical discussion of St Helena's history can be found in A.E. Ekoko's paper 'The Theory and Practice of

⁶¹ For details of these publications see the bibliography.

⁶² For details of these publications see the bibliography.

⁶³ Barbara Montgomerie, *The First 'St. Helena': The East India Company Schooner St. Helena, 1814-1830* (Bristol: Printsetters, 1994), 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 83. For other such gems see Barbara George, *The Chinese Connection: The History of Chinese Indentured Labourers on St. Helena, 1810-1836 and Beyond* (Bristol: Printsetters, forthcoming), 18 and 55.

Imperial Garrisons: The British Experiment in the South Atlantic 1881-1914' and, above all, in Richard Grove's wide-ranging *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, which includes a lengthy analysis of the island's key role in the early history of global environmentalism.⁶⁵ Despite Grove's reliance on a limited number of primary and secondary sources, his work is an inspiring example of the valuable contribution which studies of St Helena's history can make to colonial studies at large.

Hence, the current state of St Helena historiography is not as encouraging as might at first appear. By and large, existing studies of St Helena are more antiquarian than anything else, that is, to use G.R. Elton's definition of antiquarianism, they can

be recognized by a devotion to detail for its own sake: the antiquarian wants to know, not to understand, and it is of little consequence to him what knowledge he is acquiring. [...] The proper home for the antiquarian is parish history, local archaeology, genealogy, lawyer's history of law - the areas where many facts can be accumulated without straining the reasoning or synthesizing capacity of the student. In its proper place it should not be despised, but it should be seen for what it is. [...] It is when antiquarianism pretends to be history that doubts must arise.⁶⁶

As I have argued in the previous chapter, there is much to be said for a localised approach to colonial history, which is inspired by ideas in anthropology and a 'new local history'. Sadly, current St Helena historiography is firmly in the antiquarian camp of old, the state of which has been both accurately and humorously depicted in H.P.R. Finberg's paper on 'How Not to Write Local History'.⁶⁷ This temptation to tell St Helena's history

⁶⁵ A.E. Ekoko, 'The Theory and Practice of Imperial Garrisons: The British Experiment in the South Atlantic 1881-1914', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol.XII, Nos.1&2 (December 1983-June 1984); Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Also see Richard Grove, 'Conserving Eden: The (European) East India Companies and their Environmental Policies on St. Helena, Mauritius and in Western India, 1660 to 1854', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.35 (1993).

⁶⁶ G.R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (Sidney: Sidney University Press, 1967), 152.

⁶⁷ H.P.R. Finberg, 'How Not to Write Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996).

by means of an abundance of disorganised detail was inspiringly mocked as early as 1831, as is evident from an 'obituary' published in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* (see Appendix 1).⁶⁸

Even Oswell Blakeston initially succumbed to telling the island's early history in some detail, but soon became wary of doing so. Although he included a degree of historical material in his *Isle of St. Helena*, he only got as far as 1684, before he considered it "permissible to abandon the chronological record. Once one has got the flavour of the background, one finds that sustained narration degenerates into parish-pump gossip, and there is too much repetition."⁶⁹

The arguably most notorious publication in this respect is Emily Jackson's *St. Helena: The Historic Island* (1903), which is nevertheless much valued for its documentary extracts and photographs, which cover mainly the period from Napoleon's exile to the turn of the century, including the captivity on St Helena of Boer prisoners of war. On the whole, however, her book as a whole is terribly ill-organised, because, for all intents and purposes, Jackson had done what Finberg has called paying "homage to the muse of history after their fashion by serving up the contents of their notebooks in a kind of substitute for narrative. Each fact is presented in a paragraph quite unconnected with the paragraphs before and after [...]."⁷⁰ Or, in words caricaturing the writings of many a local historian, "spilling the contents of his notebooks pell-mell over the page".⁷¹ Jackson's approach cannot even pass for 'postmodern' historiography.

⁶⁸ *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China, and Australasia*, Vol.VI, New Series (September-December 1831), 14.

⁶⁹ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 21.

⁷⁰ Finberg, H.P.R. 'How Not to Write Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 196.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

”HAPPY IN THEIR EASE AND SAFETY”

~ OF EDENS AND RUINS



No thunderbolts nor lightning shafts, no burning drought nor deadly disease,
 no savage brute nor noxious reptile, not even a *lawyer*,
 surely this St. Helena [...] must be the "Island of the Blessed"
 so fondly believed in and so earnestly sought for by the ancient mariners."¹

In *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, Michael Taussig asked "about history and landscape, about the way men interpret history and recruit landscape to that task." For Taussig, landscape was "created as much by social as by natural history" and he asked himself "whether or not there is a poetics of imagery, sensuous and passionate, that is

¹ Isobel Gill, *Six Months on Ascension Island* (London: John Murray, 1878), 44.

active in binding ruled to ruler and colonized to colonizer."² These 'poetics of imagery' form an important aspect of repeated conceptualisations of St Helena's landscape and people, including their history, right through the centuries, however inappropriate this ruler/ruled dichotomy may be to the island's circumstances.

In colonial discourse theory, these poetics have been discussed primarily in terms of the Picturesque, nowhere more so than by Paul Carter in *The Road to Botany Bay*, especially with respect to Australian travel writing and art. According to Carter, "[p]icturesqueness is the offspring of the viewer's orientation, his cast of mind, his explanatory urge, his pleasure in imagination. [...] The picturesque in Australia made the space of travelling visible to the traveller. It realized for him his own historical destination - to travel or to settle down."³ Mary Louise Pratt, analysing this 'Victorian discovery rhetoric', as she termed it in *Imperial Eyes*, identified three means of creating value for the explorer's achievement. Firstly, she says, "the landscape is estheticized", that is, the sight is seen and described in terms of a painting. Secondly, the landscape is represented as extremely rich in material and semantic substance, using a high number of adjectives. And thirdly, the description conveys a relation of mastery between the explorer or viewer, who "has the power if not to possess, at least to evaluate the scene," and the landscape. In other words, according to Pratt, "the esthetic qualities of the landscape constitute the social and material value of the discovery of the explorer's home culture, at the same time as its esthetic deficiencies suggest a need for social and material intervention by the home culture."⁴ It is this, which Andrews has called one of two paradoxes at the heart of Picturesque tourism, namely that "the tourist wants to discover

² Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 287. See especially chapter 18. Also see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 240 and 242. For Carter's discussion of the picturesque, see especially chapter 8, 'A more pleasing prospect'. For a comparative discussion of the 'semantic trope of the sublime landscape', see Sidonie Smith, 'Isabelle Eberhardt Traveling "Other"/wise: The "European" Subject in "Oriental Identity"', in Gisla Brinker-Gabler (ed), *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 304-6.

⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 204-5.

Nature untouched by man; and yet, when he finds it, he cannot resist the impulse, if only in the imagination, to 'improve' it."⁵

In the case of St Helena, on the other hand, the Picturesque never had a major role to play in encouraging colonisation itself. Instead, on St Helena the Picturesque went hand in hand with an earlier perception of the island and its society in terms of an enchanted, rural idyll, an Arcadia or Eden.⁶ As Elleke Boehmer explained, "[o]ne image among many which colonial writing projected from the centre represented potentially fruitful lands as pastoral Edens, a multiplicity of English meadows."⁷ In the colonies themselves, especially in the Americas, many emigrants in fact "refused the real England of their experience in order to try to re-create the archaically idealized England of their imagination."⁸

But these imaginings also drew on much older imaginings, which had been an early aspect of Europeans encounter with the New World. According to J.H. Elliott, "[t]he temptation was almost overpoweringly strong to see the newly-discovered lands in terms of the enchanted isles of medieval fantasy." Given the total unfamiliarity of the Americas, Elliott deems it "natural for Europeans to look back into their own traditions, and seek to evaluate the puzzling world of the Indies by reference to the Garden of Eden or the Golden Age of Antiquity."⁹ In Renaissance Europe, 'Eden' and the 'Golden Age' carried connotations of the very qualities which were seemingly unattainable, however much desired, namely innocence, simplicity, fertility and abundance. The 'Golden Age,

⁵ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 3.

⁶ See Friedrich Gundolf, 'St. Helena als Irdisches Paradies', *Modern Languages Quarterly*, Vol.6, 1945.

⁷ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 53. Also see Geoff King, *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 67.

⁸ Zuckerman, Michael 'Identity in British America: Unease in Eden', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 116.

⁹ J.H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New 1492-1650*, revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; orig. 1970), 24. Elliott's book has been unjustly neglected by colonial discourse theorists. Also see David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), especially chapter 8, 'Idealization: Strangers in Paradise'. For a general discussion, see H. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man* (London: 1965).

for one, was "that mythical time set in an eternal spring when man lived in harmony with his society and with the natural environment."¹⁰ With the discovery of the New World, what was once believed to be remote in time, was now thought to be merely remote in space, an assessment certainly true for St Helena.¹¹

In so far as descriptions and depictions of earthly Edens and of Arcadia are presented as inviting, these images too, like those of the Picturesque, have the potential to encourage colonisation in areas that have not been colonised already.¹² As Richard Grove has pointed out with respect to the seventeenth century, "tropical island and new colonies were also becoming the context, at a time of religious and social turmoil, for locating New Jerusalems and Promised Lands."¹³ In so far as the seventeenth century holds no monopoly on turmoil, this context is still of relevance today. This view is supported by Susanne Howe, who has taken the analysis of European imaginings of island Edens much further back in time, claiming that "[s]ince time immemorial the mind of man has turned to distant places where the ordinary difficulties of every day are not known, where life is easy and harmonious. [...] In the strenuous fiction produced by colonial expansion, a few quite intervals are provided by characters who, in their travels, stumble upon some such Eden. [...] These earthly paradises provide one of the pleasantest by-products in the fiction dealing with the rush for empire."¹⁴

¹⁰ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 5. Also see Eugénie Shinkle, 'The Troping of (the) Landscape: Nature and the Politics of Representation', *Cultural Dynamics*, Vol.8, No.3 (1996); Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 447-578.

¹¹ According to Johannes Fabian, "for the historian otherness normally means remoteness in Time, whereas the anthropologist is concerned with cultural difference as it appears in spatial distance and distribution." It is on this account, that anthropology has been contingent on the 'age of discovery'. [Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 64.]

¹² See Kenneth Parker's discussion of James Edward Alexander's description of the Cape as "so park-like and inviting, that it realises all that we have read of Arcadia." [Quoted in Kenneth Parker, 'Fertile Land, Romantic Spaces, Uncivilized Peoples: English Travel-Writing About the Cape of Good Hope, 1800-50, in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996), 215.]

¹³ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41.

¹⁴ Susanne Howe, *Novels of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 123. See page 128 for a discussion of island paradises.

Not even anthropology has been immune to this appeal, not least because of the acknowledged "attraction of islands for research and living (romantic, ecological, academic, hedonistic, exotic)."¹⁵ According to George Marcus and Michael Fischer, the development of the ethnographic paradigm in the 1920s entailed "a submerged, unrelenting critique of Western civilization" and the idea that "we in the West have lost what they - the cultural other - still have, and that we can learn basic moral and practical lessons from ethnographic representations."¹⁶ Given recent work in post-colonial theory, this constituted anthropology's 'age of innocence' as much as a search for a 'golden age' and 'promised lands'.

The possibly archetypal appeal of earthly paradises, has been remarked on by Ron Tamplin with reference to Pacific island travel narratives, who suggests: "Add to all these Golden Ages, primitive Utopias, the Gothic frisson of the cannibal isles, and the South Seas can be everything that psychologies demand."¹⁷ Furthermore, according to Gillian Beer, island Edens may have had a particular attraction for the English in that "[t]he island has seemed the perfect form in English cultural imaginings, as the city was to the Greeks. Defensive, secure, compact, even paradisaical [...]. The island is equated with England in the discourse of assertion, though England by no means occupies the whole extent of the geographical island [...]."¹⁸ The presence in English literature of this peculiarly English obsession with islands has also been noted by Donald McCormick, writing in 1949. "So many of our best-known books are about islands ... *Robinson Crusoe*, *Coral Island*, *Treasure Island* ... those inseparable companions of the schoolroom. These well-thumbed volumes have all helped to mould the subconscious island philosophy that makes us escapists all in our innermost desires."¹⁹ Such escapism has not diminished, for

¹⁵ Jonathan Skinner and Mils Hills, 'Symposium Themes', in Jonathan Skinner and Mils Hills (eds), *Managing Island Life: Social, Economic and Political Dimensions of Formality and Informality in 'Island' Communities* (forthcoming).

¹⁶ George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 129; also see page 134.

¹⁷ Ron Tamplin, 'Noblemen and Noble Savages', in Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), 62.

¹⁸ Gillian Beer, 'The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 269.

¹⁹ Donald McCormick, *Islands for Sale* (London: Peter Garnett, 1949), 1. For a similar view on the attraction of islands, see the preface to Claude C.H. Williamson, *Great True Stories of the Islands* (London: Acro Publications, 1961).

it has been claimed that "[t]o people everywhere, and especially those who live in overcrowded cities, there are few more evocative words than 'island'."²⁰

AN ISLAND EDEN

The Portuguese were the first to portray St Helena, albeit implicitly, as an earthly paradise, the 'Ilha dos Amores' (Isle of Lovers).²¹ The first English account of St Helena to take extensive recourse to such notions of a rural Eden is that of C.F. Noble, who visited St Helena in 1748 and judged that the island's inhabitants could count themselves fortunate, given the situation in which they found themselves settled.

Notwithstanding the general poverty of the island, yet they live very happy. [...] They live in perfect security, neither in danger of enemies nor robbers, wild beasts, nor rigorous seasons, and, for the most part, are in a continual state of health. Their walls are the highest rocks, and their moat the ocean. As they are here detached from the world; dwelling in uninterrupted quiet; enjoying a serene sky; steady and moderate breezes; surrounded with herds of cattle; shady trees of various kinds; and, above all, with the convincing marks of the general catastrophe of the flood [...].²²

But if a lack of intelligence was already bad enough, a lack of appreciation was worse, for Noble thought that

²⁰ Leslie Thomas, *My World of Islands* (London: Methuen, 1993), xi.

²¹ See António Cirurgião, 'S. Helena é a Ilha dos Amores de *Os Lusíadas*', *Ocidente*, Vol.72, No.2 (1970). For an early English play of that title, see Edward Thompson, *St Helena or The Isle of Love* (Huntington Library: Larpent Plays: LA 412). An annotated transcription of the play can be found in Catherine Neal Parke (ed) *The Plays of Edward Thompson* (London: Garland Publishing, 1980). Also see Edward Thompson, *Sailor's Letters Written to His Select Friends in England During His Voyages and Travels in Europe, Asia, Afric, and America From the Year 1754 to 1759*, Vol.I (Dublin: 1766).

²² C.F. Noble, *A Voyage to the East Indies in 1747 & 1748* (London: 1762); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 190-1.

[t]ho' the inhabitants enjoy all the tranquillity and health above described, are very few in number, and lie at such distance from all other parts of the world, yet there is perhaps no place, in proportion to its extent, that furnishes more instances of pride, contention, and division, than here.²³

In imaginings like these, St Helena is seen as an earthly paradise of which its people are seemingly unworthy. If these people were not Englishmen themselves, this could be read as an explicit call for their displacement and colonisation.

In the same year as Noble visited the island, a Dutch visitor, by the name of Aertsbergue, recorded a strikingly different impression:

As to the Genius and Temper of the Natives, they seemed to be the honestest, the most inoffensive and hospitable People I had met with of the *English* Extraction, having scarce any Tincture of Avarice or Ambition. I asked some of them if they had no Curiosity to see the rest of the World, of which they had heard so many Things, and how they would confine themselves to a Spot of Earth, scarce seven Leagues in Circumference and separated from the rest of Mankind? To which they answered; They enjoyed all the Necessaries of Life in great Plenty: [...] that as there were no rich Men amongst them [...] so there were no Poor in the Island; [...] they are generally governed with an equal and impartial Hand, and while they are so, *St. Helena* is a Paradise, compared with any other Part of the World. [...] I question whether there be any Town in the Universe, where there are fewer Disorders and Outrages committed than at *St. Helena*. Here, though the People appear with an Air of Freedom not known in other Governments, yet an exact Order and Discipline is observed, and a universal Quiet and Satisfaction seems to reign in this fortunate Island.²⁴

For Aertsbergue, unlike for Noble, the island's inhabitants appeared in perfect harmony with their little world. It is on this account, that a writer named Susannicus chose to

²³ Ibid., 193.

²⁴ Aertsbergue, *A Voyage to the Island of Ceylon on Board a Dutch East Indiaman* (Dublin: 1755); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 205.

explicitly compare St Helena to the Golden Age in an article published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1759.

The manners of the inhabitants are such as poets have fabled of the golden age; they are to the last degree kind and affectionate to one another, and extremely hospitable to strangers; detraction and envy are vices they have no idea of, and so little do they know of the litigious disputes and chicanery of the law, that there is not a single person of that profession upon the island. [...] They are in general polite without grimace, honest without the affectation of it, and sincere in their professions of friendship. They seem to be very happy, because they think so themselves, and are perfectly sensible how valuable the blessings they enjoy [...].²⁵

The pivotal role of landscape in these imaginings of St Helena can be seen in what is probably the first poem ever to have been printed on St Helena, 'A Fragment', published anonymously (by "A Correspondent") in the *St. Helena Monthly Register* in 1810. The poem speaks of "A rugged zone, encircling treasures rare,/Where dwells continued spring, throughout the year;" where "The plenteous produce teems twice ev'ry year;/And thrice a harvest pays the Planters care." Furthermore, "What though the Isle can boast few hoards of wealth,/Upon its mountains dwell content and health,/Domestic cares the Planter's mind employ,/Domestic comfort, mans chief earthly joy/Here holds its place. [...]."²⁶

Such a perception of St Helena in terms of the Picturesque is made explicit in the account of a visitor as recent as Harry Ritchie, albeit with reference to the Renaissance, for during a tour of the island in 1996 Ritchie noted that "in the background would usually be a view of hills and escarpments that could have modelled for what I always thought until now were completely unrealistic renaissance paintings."²⁷ Likewise on an excursion around the island, in 1819, James Prior gave expression to the Picturesque's implicit call for improvement. "[A] charming valley appeared to the left, decked with gardens and pretty white cottages, the outlines skirted by eminences, a small stream

²⁵ Susannicus, 'An Accurate Description of the Island of St. Helena', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (November, 1759); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 213.

²⁶ Anon. [A Correspondent], 'A Fragment', *St. Helena Monthly Register* (1810), 32-3.

murmuring near the centre, and a few sheep browsing. The contrast was striking, and only required the aid of a pretty shepherdess, with her crook, to be complete."²⁸ Despite all its glory, St Helena could obviously still be bettered. Furthermore, Prior's account exemplifies what David Bunn has chosen to call "colonial rusticity", arguing that "[c]ottage architecture is a key signifier in the rustic tradition" which "continues to operate in the colonies."²⁹

Examples of the Picturesque on St Helena abound in the fine arts and are well exemplified by G.H. Bellasis' series of views published in 1815 (*illustration 1*) and by series published in 1868 (*illustration 2*).³⁰ Inadvertently, my own published photographs of St Helena (*St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean*, featuring approximately 280 black and white photographs)³¹ have been judged to reinforce such imagery.. According to a recent review, the "portrait of St. Helena which emerges" is one in which "even ruins retain a decayed elegance echoing the best of the past." Furthermore, alluding to the Golden Age, the reviewer asks "Is this where 'the world we have lost' is still to be found?"³²

Governor Sterndale, for one, very much advocated the island's landscape in terms of its variety and potential familiarity, while placing his advocacy squarely within the institutional context of the production of imperial imagery. He remarked 1901 that if "any of our artists, who roam afar in search of new pictures to place on the walls of the Academy, would only spend an English winter, our summer, in this island, they would be amply repaid for their troubles and expense."³³ At about the same time as Sterndale

²⁷ Harry Ritchie, *The Last Pink Bits* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 221.

²⁸ James Prior, *Voyage Along the Eastern Coast of Africa [...] in the Nisus Frigate* (London: Richard Phillips and Co., 1819), 86.

²⁹ David Bunn, "'Our Wattled Cot': Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes', in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 148-50.

³⁰ George Hutchins Bellasis, *Views of St Helena* (London: John Tyler, 1815); Anon. *A Few Thoughts for the Stranger and the Resident in St Helena* (London: Vincent Brooks, Day & Sons, 1868). The latter illustrations were reprinted in John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875). Also of interest are two paintings by an unknown artist, dated to c.1810, which were recently sold at auction by Christie's (*Catalogue*, 28.5.1992).

³¹ Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997).

³² Trevor Hearl, 'St. Helena in Focus', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1997).

³³ R.A. Sterndale, 'St. Helena in the Present Time', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol.IX (1901), 103.

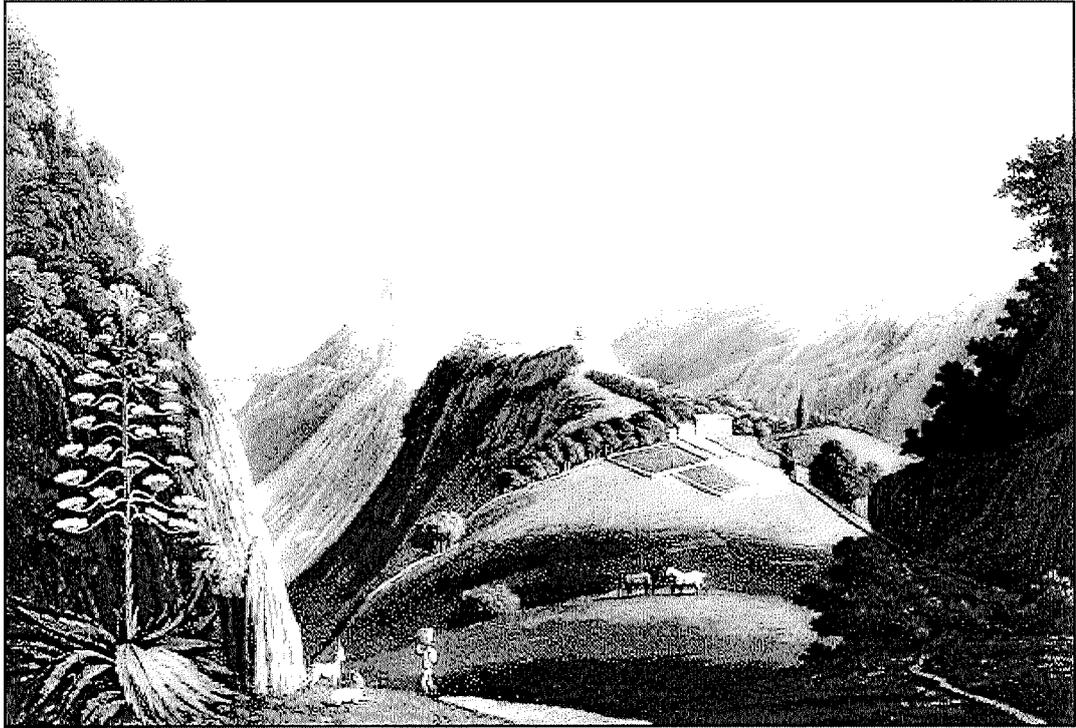


Illustration 1: 'The Column Lot, Fairy Land, Sandy Bay'

source: George Hutchins Bellasis, *Views of St Helena* (London: John Tyler, 1815)

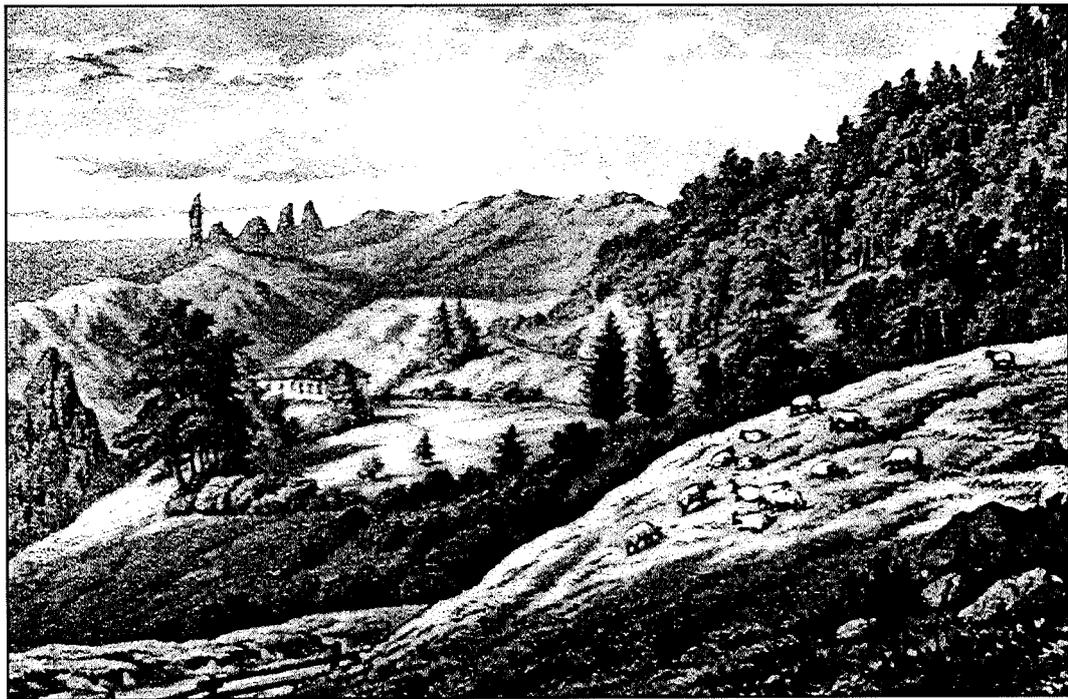


Illustration 2: 'Sandy Bay in St Helena'

source: Anon. *A Few Thoughts for the Stranger and the Resident in St Helena* (London: Vincent Brooks, Day & Sons, 1868)

advocated the Picturesque, Arthur Montefiore Brice discovered Arcadia in person when he reached Sandy Bay on ride through the interior

As I stood on the high "divide" and looked across the country at my feet to Sandy Bay, I saw all this in the sharpest contrast. Fifteen hundred feet below, but still near at hand, lay Arcady - a country flowing with milk and honey (though, by the way, the bee comes not on this speck in an ocean) - little farms and cottages, pleasantly white; a herd of cattle, a flock of sheep, a tiny church, pastures, and some fields sown with corn. But all around it and beyond it rose bluff after bluff of rock [...]. The nearer hills were fir clad, and here and there upon their lower slopes rested a cottage; but ever as they approached the sea, the barer and more precipitous they became, and the vale of Arcady itself lost all its fertility.³⁴

The fragility of the Arcadia and of its visions appears to be integral to its attractions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, such imaginings of St Helena have also found their way into one twentieth century Napoleonic novel, Vaughan Wilkins' *Being Met Together*, published in 1944, which describes Plantation House as set in "a strange and wonderful garden at world's end. A garden where apple and bread-fruit, pear and orange, plum and guava, gooseberry and tea-shrub grew side by side. The Garden of Eden - of Cyrus - of the Hesperides."³⁵ But Wilkins also presents a more troubled interpretation of some the island's other landscapes, the "ferocity" of which "seemed a rightful setting to the climax of the Napoleonic tragedy. To such confusion of splintered hills might have withdrawn the older gods after Ragnarok, that day of fatal battle, to brood in the twilight of their divinity."³⁶

Such an explicitly 'mythic' view of St Helena could already be found in an anonymous booklet entitled *The Baptism of Slaves at St. Helena*, published in 1862, in which the story's principal character, Aunt Ina, recounts a visit to St Helena during which she witnessed the baptism of a large number of liberated Africans at Ruperts Valley.

³⁴ Arthur Montefiore Brice, *St. Helena: Old and New* (1901), 179.

³⁵ Vaughan Wilkins, *Being Met Together* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 440.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 436-7. Also published as *Napoleon's Submarine* (London: New English Library, 1972).

One road lay for a short distance through one of the most smiling parts of the island. A narrow ledge-like path afforded barely room for a horse's feet to tread; but the green slopes which bordered it, the flowering gorse, and the browsing goats, were beautiful and pleasant objects for the eye to rest upon. The open hillside, however, was soon exchanged for a shady grove of dark fir-trees, and this again for a small verdant plain, looking lovely and inviting in the sunlight, and not the less so from the contrast it presented to the frowning rocky hills, which rose abruptly from it immediately in front of us. Our path descended by the very edge of a kind of crater in the midst of these hills; and quitting the smooth and pleasant plain, we must follow its guidance along rocky ways and giddy precipice, not without their dangers. [...] Here we dismounted and led our horses, from a mingled feeling of mercy to them and to ourselves. Few care to ride along the verge of this precipice, where a false step might throw the rider over his horse's head into the depth below. [...] But as we remembered the purpose of our journey, the varied, though familiar, pathway might awake in us thoughts which it had, haply [*sic*], never before aroused, - thoughts akin to those of the good old Bunyan in his famous allegory. We had had the soft turf, the alluring shade, the glowing plain, and now the steep and stony way, bordered by the yawning gulf, into which one incautious footstep might hurry us. Was not this a picture of the pilgrimage of life?³⁷

As in the case of Edens and Arcadias, the perception of St Helena is conditioned not by the landscape itself, but by already existing textualizations which provide the context or 'pretext' within which it is perceived, in Aunt Ina's case, it is that of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. No less than Bronislaw Malinowski has quite fittingly argued that myth "as it colours [the landscape], gives it meaning, and transforms it into something live and familiar. What was a mere rock, now becomes a personality; [...] a meaningless configuration of landscape acquires a significance, obscure no doubt, but full of intense emotion."³⁸

³⁷ Anon., *The Baptism of Slaves at St. Helena* (London: Bell and Dally, 1862), 13-5.

³⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 298.

However, the imaginings of St Helena in terms of the Golden Age have long ago been dismissed as mere illusions, such as in the anonymous *A Description of the Island of St. Helena*, published in 1805.

The situation of a little colony, embosomed in the recesses of a rocky island, and separated by an immense ocean from the troubles and calamities of the surrounding world, we should willingly figure to ourselves as the retreat of happiness; which those who sought for it in retirement, might expect to find in the valleys of ST. HELENA. [...] Yet it must be confessed, with whatever sorrow, that the happiness and content, which some consider as attainable in a state of retirement from the great and busy world, are only delusive phantoms, feigned by sages and poets, in the fond hope of finding somewhere, what hitherto has not been found upon earth. Few of the inhabitants of ST. HELENA seem to live satisfied with their present condition, or without a longing desire to quit it; and the wish of "going home," by which is meant going to England, is fondly and familiarly expressed, as well by the native inhabitants as by the recent settlers. They appear to consider their situation as a state of exile, which few of them have any hopes of getting away from [...]. Of a little society, thus shut up in an irksome solitude, and having so few opportunities of intercourse with the rest of mankind, it would be pleasant to think, that they passed their days agreeably together; and that envy and discord had never found their way to those sequestered retreats, where fancy would gladly paint the abode of simplicity and innocence. But whether from the effects of family jealousies, which are apt to arise in such confined situations, or from those little tales of scandal and whispers of detraction which are so frequently heard in small communities, or from whatever other course, it is to be regretted, that the peace and social intercourse of this settlement have been sometimes disturbed. [...] It cannot offend prejudice, or surprise credulity to be told, that the natives of ST. HELENA are like the rest of the human race; and actuated, at times, by the same selfish passions. A tale of incredible manners, however it might amuse the ignorant and credulous, would not obtain belief; and it is not intended here, to paint a fabulous race of Beings, different as widely from the rest of mankind, as the singular aspect of those rocks which they

live among, differ from the appearance of other countries. It may serve to repress envy, and to abate our partiality for the imaginary virtues of seclusion, to know, that those whom their local seclusion has removed the farthest from evil communication, are not however exempted from the specks and blemishes of other mortals.³⁹

This description did not aim to paint a picture of a natural Eden, merely despoilt by unappreciative inhabitants. Instead, it dismissed the entire idea of such Edens. Joseph Lockwood, author of *A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical*, published locally in 1851, came to an identical assessment, even satirising St Helena society in what is arguably the first piece of prose in island's literature.⁴⁰

But Lockwood's satire was rather mild compared to the comments of at least one visitor who, in a letter written in 1886 and published in *The Christian*, conveyed a vision of St Helena diametrically opposed to that of Eden.

Not that there are not pleasant spots and beautiful scenes and views on the island, but ignorance, sin, squalor, poverty, intemperance, and shameless immorality have run and still run riot. [...] No wonder that numbers of the inhabitants from time to time leave this centre of wickedness [...], which may well be called one of *Satan's Southern Seats*.⁴¹

W.H. Leigh's did not find kinder words in his description of the horrifying view he had in 1839 while ascending Side Path. Looking down upon Upper Jamestown, Leigh noted "the miserable-looking hovels of the indigent [...]. This situation, viewed from our

³⁹ Anon., *A Description of the Island of St Helena* (London: R. Phillips, 1805), 197-200, 210-1. John Barnes objected to these observations in his *A Tour Through the Island of St Helena* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1817), 80-2.

⁴⁰ Joseph Lockwood, *A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical* (St Helena: 1851), 55, 56-7. Lockwood's little satire was quoted approvingly by Berthold Seaman in a narrative of his visit to the island in 1851. (Berthold Seemann, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald During the Years 1845-51*, Vol.II (London: Reeve and Co., 1853), 273-4.)

⁴¹ 'Letter from the Cape', *The Christian*, 7.10.1886.

eminence, resembled, in my imagination, a city of the plague; it was a picture of filth and squalid wretchedness [...].⁴²

A 'city of the plague!' 'Satan's Southern Seat!' Notably, Leigh finds his impressions disturbed by more than just squalor, for having noted "a couple of decent streets, with good English-looking houses, much resembling a street in an English country town", this "dream is dispelled by the dark-looking natives, apparently a mixture of African with Portuguese."⁴³

Gone is the image of a picturesque, Arcadian Eden and its pretty shepherdesses. Neither the state of the town nor the dark looking natives fit the requirements of the Picturesque. It is this infringement of the people into the landscape and onto the picture is integral to what is probably the bleakest descriptions of contemporary St Helena in print, Julia Blackburn's *The Emperor's Last Island* (1991), especially her description of Sandy Bay, once the site of Arthur Montefiore Brice's Arcady.

I look back at the landscape of Sandy Bay and can see only naked earth where once there were trees. I look at a rich fold of land peopled with the white flowers of arum lilies, the hanging lace flowers of the petticoat tree, the fat well-fed trunks of the thorn trees, but I am distracted by a tumbled-down house, a new barbed-wire fence, the line of plastic piping which carries a trickle of water into the cistern of a flushing lavatory.⁴⁴

But Blackburn is not alone. Kenneth Bain, describing the settlement at Half Tree Hollow, the "escarpment on which, apparently higgledy-piggledy, are scores of houses, school, community centre, and church. [...] All this would be nothing if it were not laid out before the vast panorama of the South Atlantic Ocean. [...] Such splendour is taken for granted at half Tree Hollow. Hardly noticed in fact. [...] It was a sort of unplanned betrayal, I suppose [...]."⁴⁵

⁴² W.H. Leigh, *Reconnoitering Voyages, Travels and Adventures in the New Colonies of South Australia, &c.* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1839), 275.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁴ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 225-6; see also 166-7.

⁴⁵ Kenneth Bain, *St Helena: The Island, Her People and Their Ship* (Bishop Wilton: Wilton 65, 1993), 67.

St Helena, it would seem, is still or once again too good to be appreciated by the people who actually live there. But if St Helena's landscape no longer conforms to the picturesque imagery of much of the past five hundred years, than this may well be a sign of its emancipation. The new barbed wire is a different kind of writing on a different type of page; a local discourse which is influenced by utility rather than nostalgia or Renaissance longings. Amongst all this desolation, Blackburn's equally bleak view of the island's inhabitants can hardly be surprising.⁴⁶

But St Helena had already been the object of such considerations well before the island was permanently settled, for very similar imaginings of desolation are present in Thomas Herbert's reflections on a visit to St Helena in 1638.

There are but two rivolets in that Ile: the one bubbles down into the Chappell, th'other into the Lemmon Vallyes. They take their names frō a Lemon tree whence it arises, and an old Chappell built at the very bottome by the Spaniard Anno 1571, and delapidated by the Dutch; a place once intended for Gods glory, but by malice of rude man made ruinous and a profane nest of uncleane avarice. The ruines of a little Towne demolisht lately shew themselves, and serve to testifie a like Fate makes men and Villages dye, Death and destruction makes both mortal and miserable.⁴⁷

The contemporary relevance of such conceptualisations of St Helena in terms of an island Eden now fallen from grace is given expression in Thomas Pynchon's outstanding 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*, which is in part set on late eighteenth century St Helena.

"The St. Helena of old has been as a Paradise," avers Euphrenia. "The Orange and Lemon-Groves, the Coffee-Fields,- "

"Gone before your Time, Euphie."

"Does that mean I am forbidden to mourn them? They are mine as much as anyone's to mourn."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 165-6.

⁴⁷ Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travel Into Africa & Asia the Great* (London: 1638), 354.

⁴⁸ Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 105; also see 134-5.

Nowhere else in the literature can I find a better manifestation of the sense that St Helena and its history do not belong to its inhabitants alone. Where some see St Helena as the ultimate proof of the doom of mankind, others see it as a refuge of all that is best and good, both in nature and in man. Evidence that even academics are not immune to the Arcadian appeals of St Helena comes from Tony Charlton, head of the St Helena Research Project, who is quoted as saying that St Helena is "the only place I have ever been where I've been envious of the population [...]. They are a group of people who have learnt, or haven't forgotten how, to live with each other."⁴⁹ St Helena, it would appear, will long remain a site on which to project many an imagining of an earthly Eden.

⁴⁹ 'The Waves Reach St Helena', *Newslink: The Alumni Magazine of Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education*, Vol.2, No.1 (Spring 1995), 10.

”A LARGE PROSPECT AND HORIZON”

~ OF APPEARANCES AND IMPRESSIONS



Perhaps there is no pure or primal gift of vision. Perhaps vision can only be tutored, and depends on an ability to compare one thing with another.¹

Mary Louise Pratt described her study of travel writing, *Imperial Eyes*,² as "a study in genre as well as a critique of ideology," which was aimed at identifying the dominant

¹ V.S. Naipaul, *A Way in the World* (London: William Heinemann, 1994), 76.

² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992). Other recent books on discourses of travel include Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

"conventions of representation which constitute European travel writing."³ These conventions were, above all, rooted in the past. As John Noyes has argued, "colonial discourse brings with it a memory of European experience as a grid of knowledge within which the new can be apprehended."⁴ While this has certainly been the case in the sixteenth century, during the nineteenth century, when much that was once new had already become familiar, previous textualizations of the 'new', rather than European experiences, served as the principle grid of apprehension. As Ali Behdad argued in his *Belated Travelers*, "to write about the Orient inevitably involves an intertextual relation in which the 'new' text necessarily depends for its representational economy on an earlier text."⁵ That is, the experience of orientalist travellers is mediated by previous accounts of what they experience, and the

experience of the orientalist subject can be meaningful only in relation to the intertextual context of the discursive domain in which he participates. [...] The orientalist representation is thus always a *re*-presentation of the Orient: The narrative of the voyage is not, and perhaps, one should add, cannot be, a direct transcription of the reality seen by the enunciating subject; it is either a rewriting of the precursor's text - from which he derives his authority - or the reexperience of a phantasmatic text. [...] Moreover, the fantastic stories of the mediating text, ironically, make the 'real' experience of the city [Cairo] appear like a dream in which everything is thrown into an oblique past.⁶

Although the mediating text to which Behdad refers is the classic *The Thousand and One Nights*, traveller's' accounts of St Helena often feature similar dream-like perceptions of

³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 10-1. For a concise discussion of travel writing and empire, see Gillian Beer, *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 55-70. It must be noted, however, that European travel writing was not restricted to non-European localities, or English travel writing to non-English localities, as is shown in Esther Moir, *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourist 1540-1840* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

⁴ John Noyes, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992), 251.

⁵ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 23.

the island, mediated as they are, above all, by the often equally fantastic tales of Napoleon's exile. Hence, what is required for an understanding of the many imaginings of St Helena is, in Bernard Cohen's words, a careful examination of "the creation of a repertoire of images and typifications that determined what was significant to the European eye. It was a matter of finding themselves in a place that could be made to seem familiar by following predetermined itineraries and seeing the sights in predictable ways."⁷ Travellers to St Helena were particularly prone to use such stock images, repertoires and typifications, given especially that they tended to call at the island on their return from extended periods travelling in India primarily, but also Africa and Australasia.

Esther Moir has argued in her *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourist 1540-1840* that "[t]o follow these journeys through three centuries is not only to watch the changing English landscape through the eyes of contemporaries, it is also to see the change in the vision itself as the interests and concerns of the tourists grow and develop from one generation to another."⁸ In the case of St Helena, more often than not, no such development can be ascertained; instead, the literature consists largely of variations on a theme.

Furthermore, as stated plainly by Isobel Gill in 1878, the major problem confronted by anyone writing about the island since 1821 has been that "St. Helena can hardly be mentioned, much less looked upon, without memories of Napoleon crowding upon us."⁹ Nearly a hundred years later, in 1969, Margaret Stewart Taylor likewise found that "Napoleon can never be forgotten while one is living or staying on St. Helena. His spirit still hovers over the island"¹⁰ and, for that matter, over the literature.

⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 6.

⁸ Esther Moir, *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourist 1540-1840* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), xiv.

⁹ Isobel Gill, *Six Months on Ascension Island* (London: John Murray, 1878), 22.

¹⁰ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 97.

By and large, those who have written about St Helena have not made any secret of their purposes and motives in doing so. Writing in *The Scotsman* in 1960, Charles Campbell judged that "St Helena is not, and never will be, a popular resort. But if you are threatened with a nervous breakdown, or wish to write a book, or even just to turn your back for a time on the world of to-day, then, take a ship there."¹¹ That St Helena itself did not necessarily have to be the subject of any such book is acknowledged in local St Helena literature itself, namely in the 1888 short story *A tale of four Christmas Eves, long years ago in St. Helena*, which makes explicit the motives that brought the story's narrator to the island in the first place.

I am about thirty years of age, a women of independent means, and an equally independent spirit. I like to have my own way. Just now I feel very cross, for I cannot have what I had set my heart upon. I have been travelling half over the world trying to find the *Hero*, or *Heroine* of some really romantic love story, being determined when found, to write such thrilling novel that should altogether eclipse any book previously written; but every one seems too matter of fact for Romance, and I feel quite disgusted. When I arrived here a few weeks ago I began to pluck up spirits again. Surely, I thought, St Helena! with its historic associations; its thrilling slave incidents; its marvellous West Lodge Ghost Story, must also have its romantic love history; but no, I cannot hear any out of the common; people seem too prosaic for romance.¹²

Such may well have been the case with many a Victorian lady traveller.¹³

While for other writers it may not have been romance, the principle remained much the same. For one, St Helena had a lot to offer to those who were open to the inspiration which its landscape could provide. As Johnson and Bernard commented in 1805, "this place would certainly be a fine retirement, and give large opportunity to a

¹¹ Charles Campbell, 'St Helena: The Strange Appeal of a Remote Island', *The Scotsman*, 1960.

¹² 'A tale of four Christmas Eves, long years ago in St. Helena', Supplement to *The Mosquito*, 22.12.1888.

¹³ For a historical account, see Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965). For a post-colonial critique of such an account, see Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

philosophic mind, in observing and contemplating the works of nature."¹⁴ Xavier Pionkowski, hero of Val Gielgud's Napoleonic novel *Confident Morning*, appears to have just such a 'philosophic' mind, for it was upon reaching "Hutt's Gate, when the mist was cleared by a rising wind as swiftly as it had fallen, that Xavier could justly appraise the full significance of St. Helena, that 'little island' ... unreality, isolation, and most of the other attributes of the Inferno of Dante. ..."¹⁵

Such longings for philosophic contemplation are also found in the writings of Lawrence Green who, in 1956, recalled a stay on St Helena explaining that "[o]nce I spent a month on a lonely isle, hoping that someone would tell me the secret of that solitude."¹⁶ Sir Cedric Morris, writing in 1969, "went there to paint and to study the indigenous flora and fauna. Also I was interested in seeing how the ex-slaves were faring."¹⁷ Oswell Blakeston had somewhat similar reasons in 1957.

I was intrigued by a vanishing point on the map. What sort of life happens on St. Helena today? What are the inhabitants? Do they have a culture of their own? What sort of atmosphere does the place itself distil? Is there a European community with petty pomps and feuds? These were some of the questions I wanted to answer.¹⁸

Such attitudes though are questioned by Meg Hoyte in an article in *Homes & Gardens* in 1966. "What is it like to live on St. Helena, a small, remote island where history lies thick? It sounds idyllic, doesn't it? It's every escapist's dream, but dreams don't have to be lived in."¹⁹

Although travelling to St Helena, and writing about it, had for many individuals been a case of finding answers to their questions, however philosophical or mundane, for

¹⁴ James Johnson and J.G. Barnard, *Descriptive Sketches in India and China in H.M.S. Caroline* (London: Richard Phillips, 1806); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 191.

¹⁵ Val Gielgud, *Confident Morning* (London: Collins, 1943), 200.

¹⁶ Lawrence G. Green, *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 185.

¹⁷ Cedric Morris, 'Foreword' in Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 11.

¹⁸ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 11.

¹⁹ Meg Hoyte, 'Life on Napoleon's Island', *Homes & Gardens* (October 1966).

some it was also a case of seeing for real what was already familiar, as in the case of Quentin Keynes, writing in 1950. "Ever since I first read an impelling sentence about St. Helena which my great-grandfather, Charles Darwin, had written in *The Voyage of H.M.S. "Beagle"* after a week's visit in 1836, I had dreamed of going to that remote island."²⁰ When Keynes finally came to make the trip in 1949 he "realized my fondest and most romantic dream."²¹ This was especially the case for those whose fascination was with Napoleon, but for whom the history books alone did not suffice. This was certainly the case for Julia Blackburn, for "always in the background there is the fact of the island itself, the distant steep-sided stage in which this particular drama was enacted. [...] [T]he island is as much part of this story as the man."²²

And even if Napoleon was not the initial reason for a visit to the island, he was frequently the reason for why travellers' accounts made it into print, especially while he was still alive and in exile on the island. This is shown most perceptively in Vaughan Wilkins' novel *Being Met Together* (1944). "Merely to have seen St. Helena was to secure distinction; to have made the toilsome pilgrimage from Jamestown to the windy upland where was the dwelling of the former master of Europe, was to have earned fame: to have glimpsed, even if only through a spy-glass, a short figure in cocked hat and green hunting coat, was to become an author."²³ Authorship, hence, was simply thrust upon some.²⁴

Even for those who set out for St Helena to find answers, the island was always already familiar and known by the time they get there, either in the context of other texts about the island or within that of general literature. For many, like for myself, the discovery of St Helena initially took place at a library.²⁵ Margaret Stewart Taylor, for example, "started reading about St. Helena before I definitely decided to go there, and, during the intervening months, I studied every book I could find dealing with the island,

²⁰ Quentin Keynes, 'St. Helena: The Forgotten Island', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol.XCVIII, No.2 (1950), 265.

²¹ Ibid., 265.

²² Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 4.

²³ Vaughan Wilkins, *Being Met Together* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), 429.

²⁴ For a discussion of criteria of authorship, see Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38-41.

²⁵ See Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 16.

also Napoleon's captivity, and I familiarized myself with a map, so when I did arrive I knew the background and had some idea of what places I particularly wanted to see."²⁶

According to Max Chapmen, Oswell Blakeston prepared himself in a similar manner.

Oswell had been deeply engaged in research at the British Museum. Preliminary investigation had persuaded him that, in the manner of travel books about the Island, the 'Bonaparte ticket' was heavily over-subscribed. *His* book must have wider parameters. And so he had brought his field of research back to the very start of the Island story: to the Age of Discoveries. Here there were rich seams of history to be mined which, for drama, suffered nothing by comparison with the Imperial Exile. ²⁷

In this case, not only does research prepare the traveller, but it also influences subsequent research and writing. Julia Blackburn provides comparable insights into how in the months prior to her departure she had "been accumulating more and more scattered pieces which all claim to belong to a jigsaw puzzle picture of this place I have never seen."

St Helena is becoming familiar to me, as a dream becomes familiar when you look back at it and watch its sequences as they repeat themselves on the screen of your waking mind. And when I have been there, then there will be two islands, the one that I have imagined and the one that I have seen, and although they will have some features in common, there will be others that have no point of connection or duplication.²⁸

After so much preparation, it may not be surprising that writers will relate their impressions of the island and of their voyage there before they have even embarked on their respective journeys. This peculiar narrative device, to say the least, is employed by both Margaret Stewart Taylor in 1969 and Julia Blackburn in 1991. Stewart Taylor, for one, tells her readers that "I should cross the equator [...] and when I got to St. Helena in

²⁶ Ibid., 67-8.

²⁷ Max Chapmen, 'Oswell Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 18.

November the climate would be warm and sunny."²⁹ Julia Blackburn, likewise, tells how leaving Ascension she "will travel for three days across an unknown sea [...]. Finally I will catch sight of the steep cliffs of St Helena, a fortress of rock with the clouds always banked up above the mountains on the eastern side. As the ship approaches the land I will see the white buildings of the port of Jamestown crammed into the steep valley."³⁰ In the face of such foreknowledge, does the 'real' St Helena ever stand a chance of making its own impression.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Despite of so much preparation, the moment of arrival at St Helena has invariably been perceived as quite momentous, as described by Max Chapman, Oswald Blakeston's travel companion.

As we surveyed the elephant-grey hump of St Helena, now unbelievably before us, it seemed to be answering stare for stare, challenging us to dispute its existence out there, league after league from dry land in all directions. But Oswald's "vanishing-point on the map", at close quarters, proved to be most convincingly palpable and only the pearly light of dawn could fairly be accused of deception. Yet deception of a kind there was, for despite all evidence to the contrary a state of unreality seemed to prevail: a quasi-halucinatory sense, the outcome perhaps of Legend being transmogrified into Fact!³¹

It is this 'transmogrification' of legend into fact, the confrontation between the imagined and the real, the familiar and the new, which is the most striking aspect of each visitor's encounter with St Helena. When Blackburn arrived at St Helena she felt she had "come full circle, walking through a crowd of strangers beside a high wall, over a bridge,

²⁸ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 5-6.

²⁹ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 17.

³⁰ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 6-7.

³¹ Max Chapman, 'Oswald Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 19.

through a stone archway and into a town where everything is familiar because I know so much about it and yet utterly strange because it is like waking up to find yourself surrounded by the landscape of a recurrent dream."³²

Such experiences seem especially common with those who have come in search of Napoleon, as even Blakeston observed. "So much has been written about Napoleon's captivity on St. Helena that every visitor must have a choice of scenes to re-create as he walks through the house."³³ But this may well lead to disappointment also, as it did for Edward Towle and his companions, visitors to the island in 1852, who like so many before them had made their way to Napoleon's tomb. "At length we saw a pretty little valley before us at one extremity of which we recognised the well known willow but not so graceful or so luxurious as it appears in our prints."³⁴

Likewise, Stewart Taylor, "having read a number of books about the Napoleonic era on St. Helena", and studying place names on a modern map of the island, expected to be "going to an island teeming with fruit."³⁵ But this error in her expectations did not affect her experience of the island as such, for to "someone like myself who had never before been in the southern hemisphere nor in such an unsophisticated, isolated, sub-tropical island, the first week on St. Helena was one of constant surprise and a sense of being almost overwhelmed by so much that was unfamiliar."³⁶ In her diary she hence noted: "I formed a colourful picture of the island before I arrived, but I have found the real St. Helena more exciting and more beautiful than I could have imagined."³⁷ In my second-hand copy of *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse*, the second part of that sentence is heavily underlined. Clearly, there were others who had felt just like her.

But not only those with an interest in Napoleon have had their imaginings guided by the literature, as is clear from Charles B. Frater's acknowledgement of the influence that earlier texts could have on the first time visitor. "In 1962, when I visited for the first time, the most recent book about the island was [Oswald Blakeston's] *Isle of Saint Helena* and we read it avidly both before and after our visit. [...] We stepped ashore [...] with

³² Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 157.

³³ Oswald Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 118.

³⁴ Edward Towle, *Extract from Diary of Edward Towle, Passenger on Board Brunel's Ship SS Great Britain, 1852* (typescript, n.d.).

³⁵ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

our treasured copy of Blakeston in our luggage to find that what he had described was true."³⁸ This seems to confirm my assertion that St Helena is always already known. As a result, the island itself serves merely to correct one's impressions, never to form them in the first place.

And if previous accounts of St Helena go a long way towards raising the expectations of first time visitors, an even wider field of literature provides many of the additional terms and images in which the island is perceived. Numerous instances, especially in the period since the Second World war, make this clear. Thus, when Lawrence Green arrived at the Consulate Hotel in 1956, "[t]he atmosphere reminded me vaguely, for some reason, of the Schomberg's Hotel, the queer place in Surabaya which Joseph Conrad described so well in 'Victory'."³⁹ For Blakeston too, St Helena had its literary double. "In the square was a bus - perhaps the world's original bus - and many islanders with dark complexions were sitting in it, holding up umbrellas as parasols. It was complete Ronald Firbank."⁴⁰ Blakeston's companion Max Chapman remarked on that impression many years later, particularly with reference to Blakeston's meeting with the Bishop of St Helena. "It had delighted Oswell that his Palace turned out to be a mirror-image of some villa in a Betjemanesque suburb [...] and that His Lordship's wit and charm prompted close comparison with the Bishops often enthroned on semi-tropical islands portrayed in Ronald Firbank's delightful novels!"⁴¹

But Chapman too experienced St Helena in terms of his very own literary referents.

We fell in love with "The Consulate" at first sight. Coming upon it halfway up the fine main street ... where it sat at ease right opposite the fabled Post Office ... we found irresistible its slight air of dilapidation, combined with the sense that creature comforts would be obtainable within. To our romantic way of seeing

³⁷ Ibid., 177.

³⁸ Charles B. Frater, 'Some Memories of 1962', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1995), 31.

³⁹ Lawrence G. Green, *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 187. Also see K.A. Harwood, 'Return to St. Helena', *The Ophthalmic Optician*, 1.10.1966, which describes the Consulate Hotel as "Conradesque" (961).

⁴⁰ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 63.

⁴¹ Max Chapman, 'Oswell Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 27.

things it suggested the kind of lodging where characters created by Graham Greene or Somerset Maugham might be lurking ... not so much *louche* ones as people pursuing unusual, secret lives!⁴²

This is not far from Kenneth Bain's impression of sailing to the island on the RMS *St Helena*. "If Agatha Christie had written *Murder on the RMS St Helena*, she could hardly have contrived to put together a more fascinating collection of passengers and circumstances."⁴³ A similar observation was made by the wife of David Gollan, travelling on the RMS *St Helena* in 1994, who "insisted that central casting had freshly minted the Brits on board and somehow diverted them from Masterpiece Theatre."⁴⁴ But even I must admit that there is a lot of validity in this, for both the RMS *St Helena* and the island itself could indeed have been a setting for the writings of the likes of Greene, Maugham, Firbank, Christie, Conrad and others.⁴⁵ That is not to say, however, that St Helena can justly be viewed in terms of that literature.

Unfortunately, St Helena not only goes to confirm one's pre-existing impression or possibly better them. Particularly in the case of those who came looking for an island of the past, the reality of St Helena can come as quite a shock, as it did for Julia Blackburn.

Nothing had prepared me for all this gypsy-brash modernity. Back in England, I had asked several people to tell me about St Helena as they had known it, but no one I spoke to had been there for ten, twenty, even thirty years, and within that time there had been many changes. Napoleon had expected the luxury of fruit trees and rich forests and instead he found himself living in that desolate land called Deadwood Plain. I had expected donkeys and the occasional antique car crawling along in a haze of exhaust fumes, but there are hardly any working donkeys left and most of the old cars had quite recently been dumped in the bay at Jamestown to make an artificial reef of rusting metal and disintegrating upholstery. I had expected a lot of singing and dancing in people's houses in the evening, and visits to the local cinema with the audience roaring and shouting when the villain

⁴² Ibid., 21.

⁴³ Kenneth Bain, *St Helena: The Island, Her People and Their Ship* (Bishop Wilton: Wilton 65, 1993), 24.

⁴⁴ David Gollan, 'Slow Boat to the South Atlantic', *The Washington Post*, 4.2.1996.

⁴⁵ Conrad is believed to have called at St Helena in his youth, but I am unaware of any reference to the island in any of his works.

was being dangerous or the hero was in love, but the cinema has been turned into a shop that sells plastic goods shipped over from Brazil, and all that sociable noise has been swept away by the video machines that keep everyone staring silently in their own front rooms, and they have become ashamed of the old songs which do not have the rhythm and the confidence of Country and Western music.⁴⁶

Cecil Maggott, the island's archivist, told Blackburn quite frankly that she "had come ten years too late".⁴⁷ But not everyone suffered such disappointment. Sir Cedric Morris, perhaps because of his more realistic expectations, would appear to have fared much better. "Remote though the island is, I did not have the hope of getting away from 'all that', knowing that 'all that' had spread almost everywhere and has to be endured. However, St. Helena was far less all thatish than most places."⁴⁸

Hence, for most travellers, St Helena turned out to be a kind of fantasy land come true. That was certainly Charles Frater's feeling, who recalls that when he and his companions arrived at St Helena in 1962 they "stepped ashore into a fantasy land and were immediately completely won over by the old-fashioned world with its pleasant and welcoming people. [...] The world that we had left to go to St Helena seemed an awfully long way away and [the island] was, therefore, the ultimate in escapism."⁴⁹

Frank Wightman and his companion Gary had a similar experience when they called at St Helena in their yacht *Wylo* in the 1940s.

Jamestown, in all its oddity and perfection posed before me. Huddled between those two overpowering hills, it had the unreal charm of something seen through the wrong end of a telescope: you knew everything was full size but could not believe it. It had the quaint authority and appeal of an old-world cameo.

⁴⁶ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 196-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁸ Cedric Morris, 'Foreword' in Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 11.

⁴⁹ Charles B. Frater, 'Some Memories of 1962', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1995), 39.

The castle walls with their Lilliputian frown; the moat; the drawbridge; the old Georgian houses, snuggled together for company, the square old church tower, like an illustration from *Westward Ho*, gave the place an "air". [...]

"It certainly is of the past; even the people move with the deportment of the past. Look at those men on the castle walls."

They've forgotten their halberds," said Gray. There was also something about the place that made it look like those ambitious creations by confectioners in, shall we say, nougat.⁵⁰

This comes close to seeing St Helena in terms of a giant stage. Indeed, textualizations of Jamestown in particular are notable for the way successive writers have indeed seen the town as a stage, a film set, and/or a historic relic. Upon his arrival at St Helena, Geoffrey Stamp, for one, found that

my eye was drawn to an area of light nearer sea level, brighter and wider than any other. As the ship drew nearer it seemed to be a floodlit stage awaiting an evening performance. The lighting was mellow, suggesting the atmosphere of a tragic opera. But the stage was empty, still to be filled with actors making their entrances and exits, playing their parts and taking their bows.

Around the edges of light, an undefined area of shadow seemed to move and breath in the darkness. The ship came closer to the island and the illusion of the empty stage grew stronger. But now, the angle of vision shifted. The stage already had its spectators, hundreds, maybe thousands of them, in the shadowy mass that moved restlessly: that shadow was made of people standing so thickly together that light could not pass through them.

[...] Suddenly we, on the ship, found our roles changed from watchers to actors with an entrance to make and maybe a role to play.

For the passengers returning home and meeting people this was a moment of great excitement, which soon became a dramatic explosion of voices and arms: great operatic gestures of welcome and arrival. But for those who had never set foot on the island it was an awesome moment, making one's entrance on that stage in the middle of the ocean desert, stepping down from the ship, ferried by swift

⁵⁰ Frank Wightman, *The Wind is Free* (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1949), 99.

oarsmen in long boats to the steps that climbed the pierhead, then to stand for the first time on that remote rock, a stranger on paradise.⁵¹

Presumably, some post-colonial critics might read such an account as a conceptualisation of the islanders as a mere audience on whose island stage history is performed by colonising outsiders, but this would not credit much of a constituting roles to islanders themselves, hence it is not an interpretation I would support.

In one frequently repeated description of St Helena by Lawrence Green, Jamestown is seen above all in terms of a historical relic.

Jamestown is indeed unique. By sheer chance rather than a love of beauty it has preserved its past almost complete, so that you step into a Main Street which is a handsome relic of the eighteenth century. [...] In some ways Jamestown is still early Victorian, and keen observers say that Main Street seems to have been lifted bodily from Tunbridge Wells.⁵²

But rather than any such similarities, it is the actually existing contrasts that often baffle the visitor, such as Margaret Stewart Taylor, who thought that "Jamestown itself was most unusual - a mixture of wild west, old Spanish, Indian and Victoriana, with such modern touches as petrol pumps and street lighting."⁵³ Quentin Keynes, visiting in 1949, saw the town in a similar way, although he chose to refer to contemporary entertainment technologies to explain to himself what he considered an anachronism.

As the car started with a reluctant put-put, I had a weird sensation that both the car and I were 20th-century anachronisms. The whole atmosphere of the island was early-19th century; and the houses on the main street of Jamestown seemed like a convincing Hollywood set constructed for a film about the end of the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. [...] It was almost as if the death of Napoleon in 1821 had so shattered everything on the island that even Time had stood still ever since.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Geoffrey Stamp, *Seasoned Tales* (Yately: Baobab Publishing, 1993), 65.

⁵² Lawrence G. Green, *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 203.

⁵³ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 31.

⁵⁴ Quentin Keynes, 'St. Helena: The Forgotten Island', *The National Geographic Magazine*, Vol.XCVIII, No.2 (1950), 268.

But Keynes could only compare what he found on St Helena with what he thought an early nineteenth century atmosphere must have been like. Likewise, a set is after all only a set. Gavin Young saw Jamestown in much the same terms in 1979.

Stepping ashore in the tiny port of Jamestown was not just a step back into the architectural past, it was like stepping into Toy Town. Everything seemed to be at peace and in miniature [...]. In the main street here you could have shot a film about Napoleon's exile or the life of Nelson or the Duke of Wellington without doing much more than remove a telephone line or two.⁵⁵

For one writer at least, St Helena has a greater variety to offer to television and film than mere historical dramas. Harrie Ritchie narrates his 1996 experience of Jamestown in the following, quite remarkable way.

The heart of Jamestown appeared to have suffered a stroke. The main artery, Napoleon Street, was deserted, save for a woman standing outside a hardware store and a group of passengers from the ship. They were walking up the street as if they were on a reconnaissance party from the Starship *Enterprise* checking out a suspiciously abandoned settlement. Jamestown itself looked just like the kind of stringently budgeted filmset that reconnaissance parties from the Starship *Enterprise* often found themselves checking out. There were a few vaguely Georgian buildings, notably the bright-blue Wellington House - leftovers from a TV adaption of *Moll Flanders* that jostled unconvincingly with the verandahed, tinroofed frontiersville look of the cream post office and the worryingly rickety Consulate Hotel. Some of the vehicles that were parked aslant down the center of Napoleon Street definitely had no place in the production, having been imported long ago from an early episode of *Z-Cars*.⁵⁶

In a similar manner, St Helena's landscape too has been perceived in terms of archaic English landscapes (as I have already discussed with reference to Arcadia), as well as in

⁵⁵ Gavin Young, *Slow Boats Home* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 403.

⁵⁶ Harry Ritchie, *The Last Pink Bits* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 218-9.

comparison with landscapes from all across the globe.⁵⁷ To begin with, behind a veneer of otherness, there always appeared to lie the secret of the island's familiarity.

St. Helena with its two thirds bare,
Its sunlite hills that end so sheer,
As when approaching one cannot tell
That inside the island is like a Devon fell.⁵⁸

That hidden quality, as well as the island's familiarity, are also expressed in Geoffrey Stamp's description of Jamestown in 1993, namely that it is "the sort of place you would expect to find tucked away on the coast of Britain, a little fishing town forgotten by twentieth century progress, a mixture of wealth and poverty, with signs of former prosperity and everywhere a touch of history."⁵⁹

Comparisons with the landscapes of England were already drawn before the island's permanent settlement in 1659. Peter Mundy, visiting St Helena for a third time in 1656, relates that "Breaknecke Vally [...] putt mee in minde of a place of thatt quallity and name in English, butt in Cornish, our country speach, [...] near our towne of Penrin."⁶⁰ Viscount Valentia, who visited in August 1802 on his way to India, had occasion to ride out to Longwood in the company of the acting Deputy-Governor, Doveton and remarked that the "scenery is more like England than anything I had seen in the island, and is much admired by the natives for a reason that had no weight with us; namely, because it is more level [...]."⁶¹

Most famously, it was Charles Darwin, while spending four days on the island in July 1836 during his voyage on the H.M.S. Beagle, who gave the clearest expression to this perception of an English landscape, as well as of its creation.

⁵⁷ I know of only one recorded instance when St Helena provided a measure for description. Robert Fortune (1813-1880), a traveller and botanist, reports his first sight of the weeping cypress tree, which he later introduced to Europe, as follows: "I observed a noble-looking fir-tree, about sixty feet in height, having a stem as straight as a Norfolk Island pine, and weeping branches like the willow of St. Helena." [Quoted in Dorothy Carrington, *The Traveller's Eye* (London: The Pilot Press, 1947), 211.]

⁵⁸ E.D.L., 'A Tour of St. Helena' in *The St. Helena "Wirebird"*, Vol.III, No.100 (1963), 304.

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Stamp, *Seasoned Tales* (Yately: Baobab Publishing, 1993), 68.

⁶⁰ Richard Carnac Temple and Lavinia Mary Anstey (eds), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.V (London: Hakluyt Society, 1936), 79.

⁶¹ George, Viscount Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt*, Vol.I (London: F., C., and J. Rivington, 1811), 9.

In latitude 16°, and at the trifling elevation of 1500 feet, it is surprising to behold a vegetation possessing a character decidedly British. The hills are crowned with irregular plantations of Scotch firs; and the sloping banks are thickly scattered over with thickets of gorse, covered with its bright yellow flowers. Weeping-willows are common on the banks of the rivulets, and the hedges are made of the blackberry, producing its well-known fruit. When we consider that the number of plants now found on the island is 746, and that out of these fifty-two alone are indigenous species, the rest having been imported, and most of them from England, we see the reason of the British character of the vegetation. Many of the English plants appear to flourish better than in their native country [...].

The English, or rather Welsh character of the scenery, is kept up by the numerous cottages and small white houses; some buried at the bottom of the deepest valleys, and others mounted on the crests of the lofty hills.⁶²

This familiarity with St Helena's landscape, therefore, is re-enforced by other factors, such as the type of buildings to be seen. Almost a hundred and fifty years after Darwin's visit, travel writer Gavin Young was to confirm this perception of the landscape's essentially English character, by now, however, with a sense of nostalgia.

St Helena is perfectly preserved, like a piece of old English countryside of the seventeenth century, long before the intrusion of pylons, airports, motorways or factory chimneys. It was as green and lush as the Vale of Evesham in summertime. Houses like dwellings in Jane Austen novels and tiny Georgian farmhouses sprang into view from behind folds in the hills and in terraced valleys full of spreading trees.⁶³

Alas, as Young continued on his tour around the island, he "saw that the island was not all green and English" after all. Young was not the only one to come to this realisation. James Prior, having ridden some way up into the country in 1819, remarked that "we constantly perceive there is little resemblance to Europe; all the objects are essentially

⁶² Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches [...] During the Voyage Around the World of H.M.S. 'Beagle'* (London: John Murray, 1905), 466-7.

different, and this is occasionally confirmed by a distant view of the immeasurable Atlantic Ocean."⁶⁴ Not only those parts reminiscent of England, but the whole variety of the island's landscapes has been viewed in terms of the familiar, especially by well travelled commentators, such as Michael Crook, writing in the early 1990s.

The area around Jamestown [...] is virgin desert. Driving a mile up the zigzag 'Ladder Hill Road' one comes to an area of Karoo indistinguishable from that in Cape Province. A mile further on approaching the Cathedral one turns a corner on the mountain side and comes upon rolling English downlands as far as the eye can see. One can then if one wishes turn right towards my present home, winding down a typical Devon lane to reach my Orange and Lemon orchard in what is still called 'Lemon Valley'. Otherwise one carries on down towards the far side of the island, through a small patch of tropical rain forest which could well be in Borneo, before reaching a half mile strip of barren rock along the southern coastline.⁶⁵

Harry Ritchie also marvelled at this rapid change of scenery.⁶⁶ This appreciation of the diversity of St Helena's landscape is made possible not least by the fact that the island can be physically encompassed in a relatively short span of time. The 'tour' of St Helena has been described extensively at least since 1806, such as in Johnson's and Bernard's *Descriptive Sketches*,⁶⁷ and detailed instructions as to how to effect that tour are presented in the briefest possible manner by Philip Gosse in 1938.⁶⁸

But not everyone who compared St Helena with other places far and wide has done so in order to give expression to the wonders of the island's landscapes. Berthold Seeman, visiting St Helena in 1851, found that "James Town, which is built in a narrow

⁶³ Gavin Young, *Slow Boats Home* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 415.

⁶⁴ James Prior, *Voyage Along the Eastern Coast of Africa [...] in the Nisus Frigate* (London: Richard Phillips and Co., 1819), 87.

⁶⁵ Michael Crook, *Surgeon in Borneo, Priest in St. Helena* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1992), 260.

⁶⁶ Harry Ritchie, *The Last Pink Bits* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 221.

⁶⁷ James Johnson and J.G. Barnard, *Descriptive Sketches in India and China in H.M.S. Caroline* (London: Richard Phillips, 1806); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 251.

⁶⁸ Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 432. Gosse's tour is based on a small booklet entitled *Mileage of Roads* (St Helena: 1937).

valley, has a mean appearance; the houses are low, the windows small. The whole makes an unfavourable impression, especially to one coming from China, the East Indies, or the Cape of Good Hope, and retaining a recollection of the fine edifices of Hong Kong, Singapore, and Cape Town."⁶⁹ But such a comparison hardly seems fair.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the tendency to perceive the island's landscapes and townscapes in terms of the already familiar has even been extended to the perception of its inhabitants, as is shown in two recent travelogues. None other than Julia Blackburn, writing in *The Times Saturday Review* in 1990, reports:

In their faces there seemed to be all the races of the world. There was Mr Isaacs [...]. He had the pale skin and square features that might have originated in Poland or Czechoslovakia, and he was talking to a man in a cowboy hat with a Chinese face and a long elegant body that could have belonged to a Masai warrior. Three women in a row looked like comfortable Italian matrons. A man like a South American gaucho wore a T-shirt that told me that "The Eagle Has Landed" [...].⁷⁰

According to Kenneth Bain, writing in 1993, "of the dining saloon stewards on the ship, one looked Indonesian, one Italian, one Micronesian, one straight Devon, one Spanish, one Afro-Caribbean, one Chinese-Polynesian. One older man might conceivably have been Latin-American Indian. Yet they all come from St Helena."⁷¹ Like the island's landscape, St Helenians are always like other people, never like themselves, just as the island as a whole is explicitly perceived in terms of analogies and the familiar.⁷²

⁶⁹ Berthold Seemann, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald During the Years 1845-51*, Vol.II (London: Reeve and Co., 1853), 270.

⁷⁰ Julia Blackburn, 'A Thousand Miles From Nowhere', *The Times Saturday Review*, 20.10.1990.

⁷¹ Kenneth Bain, *St Helena: The Island, Her People and Their Ship* (Bishop Wilton: Wilton 65, 1993), 30.

⁷² For a discussion of 'analogies with home' in the textualization of India, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20-8.

Even if St Helena is perceived largely in terms of what is already known and familiar, ostensibly not everything is imposed onto the island, for St Helena can be also be 'read' or be 'listened to' in its own right. These are notions related closely to that of St Helena being a stage. For Max Chapman, for one, the stage set of St Helena was decidedly revealing.

Making across the moat and up through the archway we debouched into the wide Square [...], and it was like stepping onto a stage: for there, spread out before us and rising gently towards a back-drop of distant rocky heights lay the whole anatomy and meaning of the little town, whose ample main street narrowed into the receding perspective and then seemed to vanish into the threatening arms of a grey and importunate ravine.

Arguably, having been exposed to just that 'anatomy' and 'meaning', Lawrence Green concluded that Jamestown "holds more of the strong meat of history, I think, than any other town in Britain's colonial possessions. You sense history in the old gun emplacements and powder magazines along the waterfront; in the seventeenth-century English castle with its moat, barring the valley."⁷³ Simon Winchester, who visited St Helena in the early 1980, likewise found that "there is more history and a greater fund of anecdotes squeezed into the tiny city of Jamestown than in any other place on earth."⁷⁴ These anecdotes, it appears, could certainly be heard by Frank Wightman.

And over everything an air of faded tranquillity: of having been forgotten. Door-steps are still scrubbed and whitened; handsome knockers on heavy teak doors still twinkle, but the place looks like an empty stage which has once pulsed with the life of the actors. Now the actors are gone and only the empty stage remains. It is full of the whispering voices of memory.⁷⁵

⁷³ Lawrence G. Green, *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 187.

⁷⁴ Simon Winchester, *Outposts* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 133-4.

⁷⁵ Frank Wightman, *The Wind is Free* (London: George Allan & Unwin, 1949), 102.

And Wightman was not the only one to hear such whisperings, for Max Chapman had a similar sensation, when he contemplated St Helena from the vantage point of Diana's Peak. "[T]he island's human story was somehow soaked into the living soil, and gave off an exhalation redolent of its sufferings perhaps also of its private joys which rose up to be accessible to us on our peak."⁷⁶ A similar, haunted feeling had also been noted by Sir Cedric Morris.

Of the many places known to me, St. Helena is the strangest. There one lives in a half-dream of 150 years ago, a curiously haunted dream - and haunted, I suspect, by past cruelties and injustices. It was not until some weeks after my arrival that I read a history of the island, but the haunted feeling was there from the first day.⁷⁷

Even more remarkably, the island's hauntedness reached Julia Blackburn well before she herself reached St Helena.

A place can be haunted by the people who knew it long ago and who stared at the stones under their feet, the leaves on the trees, and out at the far distances and horizons that encircle them. Something about St Helena's isolation seems to concentrate this sense of the land being haunted, soaked to the bone with the lives of people who were once here, and are now long since dead. It is as if the island's own loneliness creates a feeling of kinship that stretches back to everyone who has ever stood on this little platform which seems to be balanced on the very edge of the world.⁷⁸

If the land is haunted and soaked to the bone, it is not surprising that even the sand can tell a story, as it did for Geoffrey Stamp.

In many ways the sand tells the story of St Helena itself, its people and its ancient natural beauty: a fascinating contrast of rock and growth, cultivation and

⁷⁶ Max Chapman, 'Oswell Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 28.

⁷⁷ Cedric Morris, 'Foreword' in Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 12.

wilderness, inhabited by a people whose mixture is full of colour and contrast; originally British, then African, some Chinese, and finally South African Boer - St Helenians are a unique race, the result of four hundred years of melting pot genetics.⁷⁹

To those who did not hear such voices, such as Charles Frater, the island presented itself as "like a living history book," which Frater gradually came to read during the five weeks of his stay.⁸⁰

Slowly, but with gathering pace, Saint Helena, its people, features and history, were laid bare. [...] The language with its lilting accent and gentle turn of phrase were an open window on to the past. The faces of the people betrayed their origins, the Chinese faces of the artisans who carved the roads out of Jamestown still lingering generations later, the melancholy of liberated West African slaves alive with new vigour, living on in today's generation.⁸¹

Given this mixture of the sublime and the frankly ridiculous, it is a relief to learn that some visitors found far more mundane ways of learning about St Helena. Hence, Margaret Stewart Taylor "not only tried to see as much of the island as I could, but I also endeavoured to get various points of view." To that end, she "talked to overseas folk, to government and trade-union officials, to visitors and residents, to rich and poor", while also keeping "a day-by-day diary, recording impressions while they were fresh in my mind."⁸² Tony Cross in turn stressed the advantages of long term residence and, above all, the need "to talk to the islanders themselves, to join them in their pursuits, find the pleasures of meeting fascinating people and maybe make enduring friendships among them."⁸³

⁷⁸ Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St Helena* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 12.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Stamp, *Seasoned Tales* (Yately: Baobab Publishing, 1993), 74.

⁸⁰ Charles B. Frater, 'Some Memories of 1962', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1995), 39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸² Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 179.

⁸³ Tony Cross, *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (London, 1980), 123.

Despite the supposed ease of 'reading' St Helena, the difficulties of distilling St Helena into a coherent narrative were put into words by Blakeston, in *Isle of St. Helena*, when he described a conversation he had had with his companion Max Chapman.

A ship is to call, and we are to have the pleasure of being islanders who watch the ship come in.

"Such a short time ago," Max said, "and St. Helena was still only a dot, a hardly visible dot on the map to us. Isn't life crazy?"

"Some people would say it was us," I countered. "And now that we are about to play the role of residents, how would you describe the salient features of the place to a visitor, if challenged?"

"One shouldn't be surprised," Max said, "that life has some imagination; but only a mad visitor would ask for a description of a place he was already visiting. But if you mean what should he not fail to see on a one-day visit, I suppose we have to allow him all the things he *will* see - the Ladder (which he'll be fool enough to climb), Longwood, the Tomb and a drive around the island, including a glimpse of Sandy Bay."

"I suppose so, yes. But what I really meant is, as people for whom the dot is already becoming filled out with human, familiar things, what so far could we agree on as an overall pattern?"

"This absurd little capital, no bigger than a village, so British, so outlandish, like its red corrugated-iron roofs." Max pause. "And pork, the rich man's party dish."

"Peace and poverty and pride?" I suggested.

This he ignored.

"The crumbling ruins of 'great houses', seldom bigger than a seaside bungalow. And the way the island gets greener the higher you go. And Sandy Bay, looking like those pictures Hodges painted on Cook's voyages. That against the chapels and the sects, and Cornish back streets. And the flowers and the old felt hats ..."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 175.

Blakeston is caught between being an 'outsider' and an 'insider', between the island's 'Britishness' and its 'outlandishness', and, not least, between the colonial imagery of 'dots on the map' and 'Hodges'. How, given the range of his impressions, was Blakeston to meet Chapman's call for "salient features" and an "overall pattern"? Individual details require composition, and Blakeston was keenly aware of this.

You may say that we travelled a long distance to find a little fort, three pubs, some decaying houses, odd Europeans, nice islanders, a few historical relics, dramatic views, flowers and sunshine. We would not agree with you. Had we travelled twice as far and stayed half the time, we would still have been uniquely enriched.⁸⁵

Composition, hence, implied interpretation. Indeed, for Blakeston writing about St Helena had to be a creative process, as much as anything else.⁸⁶ In his own reflections on the preparations for their visit, Chapman was explicit about the approach that Blakeston was likely to be taking in composing his narrative.

During Oswell's previous Portuguese assignment I had witnessed his quick eye for The Bizarre and The Outrageous, with which he enlivened the informative content of his writings; and had watched him, 'in the field', gathering his 'raw material' by simple method of exerting personal charm. That raw material was then converted into vivid prose, whose format could be structured to the exigencies of the 'narrative thread'.

According to Chapman, with embarkation day upon them, "our new *narrative thread* was being set in motion [...]."⁸⁷ Blakeston himself was equally candid, explaining to the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁶ According to a French biographer of Napoleon, writing in 1936, "St. Helena was the studio where Napoleon sculptured his ideal image from the rock." [Raoul Brice, *The Riddle of Napoleon*, translated by Basil Creighton (London: Putnam, 1937; orig. 1936), 52.] The reference is, of course, to the fact that while on St Helena Napoleon dictated of his memoirs.

⁸⁷ Max Chapman, 'Oswell Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 18.

readers of his *Isle of St. Helena* that inaccuracy was an intentional part of his approach, that is, a legitimate technique employed in writing about his experiences.

[E]verything I have recorded is true in so far as it happened. It would, inevitably, have been unfair had I not given certain incidents disguise; [...] and people on St. Helena should not attempt to identify themselves with characters in this book, for I have constructed composites and personified general opinions. [...] Criticism is directed to imaginary puppets who are symbols of such abuses as exist. My concern has not been scholarship, but impact. If I have said a pepper tree stands where there is really a peepul, I make no apology. What I mean is that from the point of view of impact, it does not matter.⁸⁸

Arguably, some post-colonial critics have likewise been more concerned with impact than with scholarship, a privilege, I believe, which is available neither to anthropologists, nor historians, nor to hybrids of these two.

PARTIAL AND INCOMPLETE

In 1808 Thomas Brooke remarked that descriptions of the island had largely been "partial and incomplete, the result only of transient observations", hence the title of my thesis.⁸⁹ John Barnes likewise noted in 1817 that "idle and unfounded stories have been caught up during a few weeks or days residence here, and given to the world with as many amplifications as suited the *unprejudiced* and *liberal* dispositions of such narrators and historians [...]" St Helena has hence been plagued for some time with the problems resulting from a precedence of impact over scholarship, whether deliberate or not, for as Alexander Beatson (Governor of St Helena from 1808 to 1813) speculated in 1816, erroneous descriptions of the island may "have originated with early writers, or in hearsay

⁸⁸ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 12.

⁸⁹ T.H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St. Helena* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), viii.

information of passing visitors, or in wilful misrepresentation to answer particular ends [...]."⁹⁰

Following Napoleon's exile on the island, and following a steep increase in shipping and visitors, these problems became ever more acute, causing the editor of *The St. Helena Guardian* to comment on the matter in a leading article in August 1891, in which he informed his readers that "we publish a lady's account of a trip to St. Helena, appearing recently in the *Queen* - an account dressed in the usual style, in which these wonderfully self-thinking, shrewd, observers, who see the island during a fleeting visit, inflict on a gullible public their intensely imaginative stories on the Napoleonic prison."⁹¹ In fact, the local press has on occasion picked up and commented on such publications. According to an article entitled 'As Others See Us', published in the *St. Helena Diocesan Magazine* in 1925,

There is a certain whimsical interest in knowing what other people think of us, although the impressions are usually and necessarily somewhat superficial and often many degrees removed from accuracy. Still, it is interesting to know what impressions a casual acquaintance with island life has made on visitors; and although their observations are sometimes shrewd, it is generally necessary to make a large allowance for imagination.⁹²

Alas, there are too few such comments to assess the influence which "the views of early travellers have had [...] upon the islander's own ideas about themselves and their place in the world," as J.B. Loudon did in his paper on 'Early Travellers to Tristan Da Cunha'.⁹³ Neither, as Loudon has done, has it been possible "to show the extent to which the descriptions given by travellers, particularly regarding the status differences among the islanders, can be related to the kind of person the traveller happened to be", for this

⁹⁰ Alexander Beatson, *Tracts Relative to the Island of St. Helena; Written During a Residence of Five Years* (London: 1816), vii.

⁹¹ *The St. Helena Guardian*, 27.8.1891.

⁹² 'As Others See Us', *St. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, Vol.XXIV, No.282, May 1925, 6-7. Also see *St. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, Vol.XXVIII, No.330, May 1929, 69; *St. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, Vol.XXIX, No.341, April 1930, 35-6; *St. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, Vol.XXIX, No.348, November 1930, 141-2.

⁹³ J.B. Loudon, 'Early Travellers to Tristan Da Cunha', in Meyer Fortes and Sheila Patterson (eds), *Studies in African Social Anthropology* (London: Academic Press, 1975), 139.

would have required a degree of biographical research well beyond the scope of this thesis.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Those readers who subscribe to the recent 'death of the author' will not be too perturbed by this.

PART III

”STRANGELY FOUNDED”

~ OF DISCOVERIES AND POSSESSIONS’



All processes of colonisation and of taking possession of lands were effected through a range of discursive practices and texts.² According to Elleke Boehmer, the "text, a vehicle of imperial authority, symbolized and in some cases indeed performed the act of taking possession. In diary descriptions of new lands, or by carving their initials on trees and stone tablets, colonists declared their intentions to make a home, to begin a new history. Often the effect of their descriptions was to erase, either wholly or in part, the

¹ In the case of St Helena, to speak of 'discovery' does not carry the Eurocentric connotations of the term as denoting "the first invasion of inhabited lands by Europeans". [Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 114.]

² These were subject to satirical commentary from very early on, as seen in Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994; orig. 1726), 325-7 [Part IV, Chapter XII]. Also see, Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; orig. 1704), 31 ['A Tale of a Tub', Sect. IV].

signs of other lives which had unfolded in that particular space."³ On St Helena, which was uninhabited at the time of its discovery, no 'other lives' had as yet unfolded and there was no indigenous population to be dispossessed. In this respect, many aspects of writings on colonial possession are largely inappropriate to an understanding of the particulars of St Helena's acquisition, even if they illuminate the conceptual background of that colonisation.⁴ However, one particularly interesting study is Patricia Seed's *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640*, in which she compares in detail European symbolic practices for instituting authority overseas, practices which often differed drastically from one colonising state to another. "Every European legal code defined the meaning (and history) of possession, dominion, lordship, and regal sovereignty differently. [...] No two powers had identical ideas as to how colonial power should be symbolically created, or even over what it should be established."⁵

In this chapter, I shall be examining the way St Helena came to be discovered by mainly Portuguese, Dutch and English mariners, how it became an object of colonial desire, and how its possession came to be effected and legitimised. I hence disagree with Nicholas Turner's recent assessment that the period between St Helena's discovery in 1502 and its permanent settlement in 1659 were "not especially significant to the Island and its future development. It would be more appropriate to regard this first century and a half as a period of *pre*-history, a time when important events might have occurred but in fact did not."⁶ To the contrary, I argue that this period constitutes an integral and necessary part of the island's history of colonisation. In particular, the story of St Helena's acquisition goes to confirm John Noyce's assertion that "[t]he birth of the colony is the result of an ever increasing alignment between an inscription of the earth,

³ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13.

⁴ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁵ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 10.

⁶ Nicholas Turner, *St Helena: A British Island, The Second Report Produced for the Citizenship Commission* (London: The Wanderer, 1997), 9.

which marks the presence of the colony, and a writing on paper, which interprets this presence in terms conducive to possession."⁷ The appropriation of St Helena most certainly was a gradual process, that is, it was the result the coming together of both praxis and imaginings.

PORTUGUESE SEAS, SOLEMN DUTCH DEEDS

St Helena's discovery in about 1502 came as a direct result of European attempts to find a sea route to the East Indies by way of the Southern shore of Africa, which was eventually rounded by Bartolomeu Dias in 1488. That year marked the beginning of the establishment of a Portuguese trading empire in the East.⁸ St Helena is commonly said to have been discovered by João da Nova, a Portuguese captain, who in 1501 had been placed in command of a squadron of four ships, which were to constitute Portugal's annual India fleet for that year. On the outward voyage the fleet apparently discovered Ascension Island, and on its return voyage, in 1502, the island of St Helena.⁹ The first chronicler to claim this discovery for da Nova was the Portuguese historian João de Barros. According to Barros, da Nova

was fortunate, because God revealed to him a small island, which he named St Helena and where he took in water, although he had already done so twice since departing India, first at Melinde, then at Mozambique. God appears to have

⁷ John Noyce, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 225.

⁸ For an excellent introduction to the history of European expansion into and beyond the Indian Ocean, see Richard Hall, *Empires of the Monsoon: A History of the Indian Ocean and its Invaders* (London: Harper Collins, 1996). For a general introduction to the Dutch empire in Asia see C.R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1969). Also see Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415-1580* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); K.G. Jayne, *Vasco da Gama and His Successors, 1460-1580* (London: Methuen & Co., 1970; orig. 1910).

⁹ E. Feust (ed), *Die Asia des Joao de Barros* (Nürnberg: Theodor Cramer, 1844), 184. Also see Walter de Gray Birch (ed), *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalboquerque*, Vol. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1877), xx. For biographical information on da Nova see the entry for NOVA (João da) in *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, Vol. XVIII (Lisbon: Editorial Enciclopédia, 1945), 949.

created this island in that very location, in order to nourish all those who come from India, as all endeavour to call there since its discovery, for it offers the best water on the whole journey or at least the most necessary, which one requires on the return voyage from India.¹⁰

There are, however, reasons for doubting this version of events. These have convincingly been discussed by Duarte Leite in his monumental study on the Portuguese discoveries, *História dos Descobrimentos*, published in 1960. Dismissing Barros' claim for accrediting da Nova, Leite suggests that St Helena had only been discovered in July 1503, albeit by a Portuguese fleet.¹¹ The details of that dismissal are of no particular consequence to my argument. The main basis of Leite's claim, aside from a range of improbable dates, is an account by a Thomé Lopez, which was first published in 1507 in Francanzano de Montalbodo's *Paesi Nuovamente Retovati & Nuovo Mondo da Alberico Vesputio Fiorentino Intitulato*, thus pre-dating Barros' account by forty five years.¹² The advantage of accepting Leite's claim is that in place of the mere fact of St Helena's discovery it provides an actual account.

Thomé Lopez served as a writer in the squadron of Estavão da Gama, which formed part of a Portuguese fleet under Admiral Vasco da Gama, whose second voyage to India this was. The first two squadrons of the fleet had left Lisbon in February 1502 and were followed by Estavão da Gama's squadron in April of that year. The two fleets met up at Moçambique in July and reached Calicut in October. After several rather eventful months in India, Vasco da Gama's fleet left Calicut for Moçambique in February 1503.¹³

The island now known as St Helena makes its appearance in the last few paragraphs of Lopez' narrative, which is here translated into English for the very first time.

¹⁰ This English translation is based on a German translation of Barros' *Asia*, namely E. Feust (ed), *Die Asia des Joao de Barros* (Nürnberg: Theodor Cramer, 1844), 190-1, which I have compared with the original Portuguese edition, *Asia de João de Barros, dos Feitos que os Portugueses Fizerão no Descobrimento e Conquista dos Mares e Terras do Oriente, Decada I, Book 5, Chapter X, folios 66-67* (Lisbon: 1552).

¹¹ Duarte Leite, *História dos Descobrimentos*, Vol.II (Lisbon: Edições Cosmos, 1960), 206.

¹² The Italian version of Tomé Lopes' account was first published in Francanzano de Montalbodo, *Paesi Nuovamente Retovati & Nuovo Mondo da Alberico Vesputio Fiorentino Intitulato* (Venice: 1507). The account was later included in the first volume of Giovanni Battista Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Venice: 1550), an early collection of travel narratives.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of this voyage, see Henry H. Hart, *Sea Road to the Indies* (London: William Hodge, 1952).

On the 30th [of July 1503], we sighted an undiscovered island towards which we made our way. On the north-west side of the aforesaid island we cast our anchor. We did not find any fish, nor did we see any kind of trees, but it was completely green, and we judged that there should be some water. As our anchor dragged, the other ships sent out their shallops and told us what they found in it. So we got under sail, and on that day, and for most part of the following one, we were waiting for them. As they showed no signs of coming, we understood that the two aforesaid ships were still riding at anchor at the aforesaid island.¹⁴

Following details of the island's geographical location, Lopez narrative breaks off abruptly, leaving many an interesting question unanswered, including what it was that Lopez had been told about the island. Nevertheless, there is no particular reason to doubt the authenticity of Lopez' narrative.

To whichever fleet St Helena's discovery is rightfully assigned, it is worth noting that the 'existence' of Southern islands had already been projected onto Atlantic maps well before their eventual discovery.¹⁵ Both St Helena and, in particular, Ascension Island had in effect been conceived of before they had been discovered. A world map by Henricus Martellus, dated to about 1490, shows a cluster of four islands south of the Cape of Palmes, roughly in the location of present day Ascension Island. This cluster certainly does not represent the islands of St Thomas, Annobon and Princes Island, which are shown separately.¹⁶ A similar cluster of islands is also shown on a chart known as the Columbus map, which is dated to ca. 1500.¹⁷ This cluster even survives in the so-called Cantino map, which is the work of an unknown Portuguese cartographer and which was smuggled to Italy by Alberto Cantino, an agent of the Duke of Ferrara,¹⁸

¹⁴ G.B. Ramusio, *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi*, Vol.I (Venice: 1550), 156. Prof. Aldo Corcella, formerly of the University of St Andrews, very kindly translated this passage at my request.

¹⁵ For a useful introduction to maps of this period, see Fred L. Hadsel, 'Early Maps of Africa: The Crucial Decades from 1490 to 1520', *The Portolan*, No.43 (Winter 1998-9).

¹⁶ For a reproduction see Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (London: The British Library, 1994), 42-3.

¹⁷ For reproductions see Kenneth Nebenzahl, *Atlas of Columbus and The Great Discoveries* (New York: Rand McNally, 1990), 22-5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34-7.

where it is known to have been received by the Duke in November 1502.¹⁹ In the exact location of present day Ascension Island, a group of seven small islands is depicted, the largest of which is coloured differently from the others and is labelled *illa adadajzachamaba ase, cussam*. The island group as a whole, as on an earlier chart by La Cosa, is labelled *illas tebas*. As the map was completed after da Nova's return to Portugal, it undoubtedly incorporated his fleet's discovery of that island. By not erasing the cluster in favour of the solitary island found by da Nova, the maker of Cantino's map seems to underline the aspect of 'confirmation' involved in the island's 'discovery'.²⁰

St Helena, more significantly, was likewise conceived of before it was discovered. A map of the world by Juan de la Cosa,²¹ which is commonly dated to 1500, shows two clusters of islands, one in the approximate location of Ascension Island, the other in the location of St Helena.²² The first of these clusters is labelled in two different ways, *yslas tibras etiopicas yn mare oceanon austral*, as well as *tlubeas*. The second cluster is labelled in three different ways, *Islas tansens montises etiopiens oceanas*, as well as *y tausens* and *tausens*. According to George Nunn, who has examined the map's dating in great detail, the second of these clusters, the one corresponding to St Helena, is a representation of the Tristan da Cunha group, which was discovered in 1506.²³ This, and a number of other features relating to discoveries in the West Indies, lead Nunn to consider 1508 as the most likely date of la Cosa's chart. Not all scholars agree with this.²⁴ One reason is that la Cosa's designation of the Ascension cluster as *yslas tibras*, is retained by Cantino in 1502 as *illas tebas*, despite Cantino's addition of the name *ase, cussam*. This would presume an

¹⁹ G.R. Crone, *Maps and their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography*, 5th edition (Dawson: Archon Books, 1978), 49.

²⁰ Note that St Helena is missing from this map, which is one argument for not crediting da Nova with its discovery. On the other hand, given that most maps had not pre-conceived St Helena's existence, there was nothing to be confirmed.

²¹ For reproductions see Kenneth Nebenzahl, *Atlas of Columbus and The Great Discoveries* (New York: Rand McNally, 1990), 30-3.

²² According to George E. Nunn these two clusters of islands are also featured in the Leonardo da Vinci gores and the Egerton No. 2803 Mappemonde, neither of which I have to date been able to inspect. See G.E. Nunn, *The Mappemonde of Juan de la Cosa: A Critical Investigation of its Date* (Jenkintown: George H. Bean Library, 1934), 47-8.

²³ Even this date is open to debate.

²⁴ G.R. Crone, *Maps and their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography*, 5th edition (Dawson: Archon Books, 1978), 48.

acquaintance by Cantino with la Cosa's map, or one very like it. If Cantino's map is earlier, than why did la Cosa's map not designate Ascension Island as such? Likewise, if la Cosa's map, or any addition to it, does indeed date from as late as 1508, why are Ascension Island and St Helena not represented more accurately?²⁵

Given the cartographic evidence, despite some uncertainties, it appears reasonable to consider St Helena's (and Ascension Island's) discovery less as a chance event, than as the result of an earlier projection. This paradox of knowing the unknown has recently been addressed with particular reference to the voyages of Columbus.²⁶ In narratives of the island's discovery, however, the event is as frequently ascribed to providence as it is to chance. For Barros, for one, da Nova "was fortunate because God revealed to him a small island", whereas Lopez merely informs his readers that they "sighted an undiscovered island". But then again, Lopez was writing as an eye-witness, Barros with the hindsight of a historian.

In retrospect, discoveries tend to be imbued with the trappings appropriate to their significance, a significance not necessarily obvious in the context of the more mundane actualities of discovery. A narrative tendency to enhance is obvious in the St Helena literature itself, where the standard account of the island's discovery can be found in Philip Gosse's *St Helena 1502-1938*. Leaving aside the factual and bibliographical problems of Gosse's account,²⁷ a noteworthy feature of his text is the very narrative license that he takes in describing da Nova's discovery, for he writes that "the sailor at the mast-head cried out, 'Land ho!' and on the horizon could be seen a lofty island."²⁸ This seems to make the momentous moment of discovery that extra bit more

²⁵ Much of the above problem relates to the process of dating early charts by the presence or absence of places whose date of discovery is known, which merely allows for a fairly accurate dating with the respect to the earliest possible date of a map's draughting. On the other hand, the discovery of places is frequently dated by reference to their presence or absence on maps whose date of draughting is thought to be known. Unfortunately, while this may seem a useful approach in principle, in practice it can often be shown to constitute little more than circular reasoning. Later additions to maps complicate the situation infinitely, but appear to be rare. For an introduction, see G.R. Crone, *Maps and their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography*, 5th edition (Dawson: Archon Books, 1978).

²⁶ Robert Paine, 'Columbus and the Anthropology of the Unknown'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol.1, No.1 (1995).

²⁷ For a discussion, see Alexander Schulenburg, 'Note. Philip Gosse and the Discovery of St Helena', *Notes and Queries*, Vol.45, No.4 (1998).

²⁸ Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 2.

memorable, a moment that has recently been commemorated on a St Helena postage stamp (*illustration 3*). The Rt. Rev. C.C. Watts, writing about St Helena in 1936, appears to have taken this narrative license the furthest.

Nearly four hundred and fifty years ago a Portuguese captain named John Baptista was creeping down the coast of Africa in his little ship no larger than a fishing smack. Blown out of his course, he found on St. Helena's Eve a little island irregular in shape and some forty-seven square miles in area. [...] Sailing round the rock-bound coast, Baptista's vessel eventually found a creek down which a crystal stream flowed into the sea, a ravine or cleft in the rock, making a little valley of luxuriant fertility. [...] After a few days to refresh his crew, and a little exploring in the woods without finding any sign of human or of animal life, Baptista again set sail, marking the island on his rude map.²⁹

St Helena history meets *The Boy's Own Paper*, although this is not all that surprising, given that Watts admits to having written his book "at sea, and far from books of reference."³⁰

It is not known what markers, if any, of their discovery the Portuguese may have left behind at St Helena. There is no evidence to suggest that Portuguese vessels continued to carry *padrões* after 1488, that is, stone columns to be erected at prominent points on newly discovered lands.³¹ According to some historians, the Portuguese built a chapel upon discovering the island, but there is no evidence to support this.³² Likewise, there is no evidence to suggest that they formally claimed the island as a possession of the Portuguese crown. Notably, the Portuguese never fortified the island, nor did they establish a permanent settlement there. This is an issue raised by Filippo Pigafetta, the Italian compiler of a sixteenth century travel narrative by the Portuguese Odoardo Lopez, who described St Helena in some detail. Pigafetta, in an editorial aside, recounts how he had once queried why the Portuguese had never "had any care to fortify this

²⁹ C.C. Watts, *In Mid Atlantic: The Islands of St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha* (London: S.P.G., 1936), 13-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

³¹ J.H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration and Settlement 1450-1650* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), 175-7.

³² Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938).

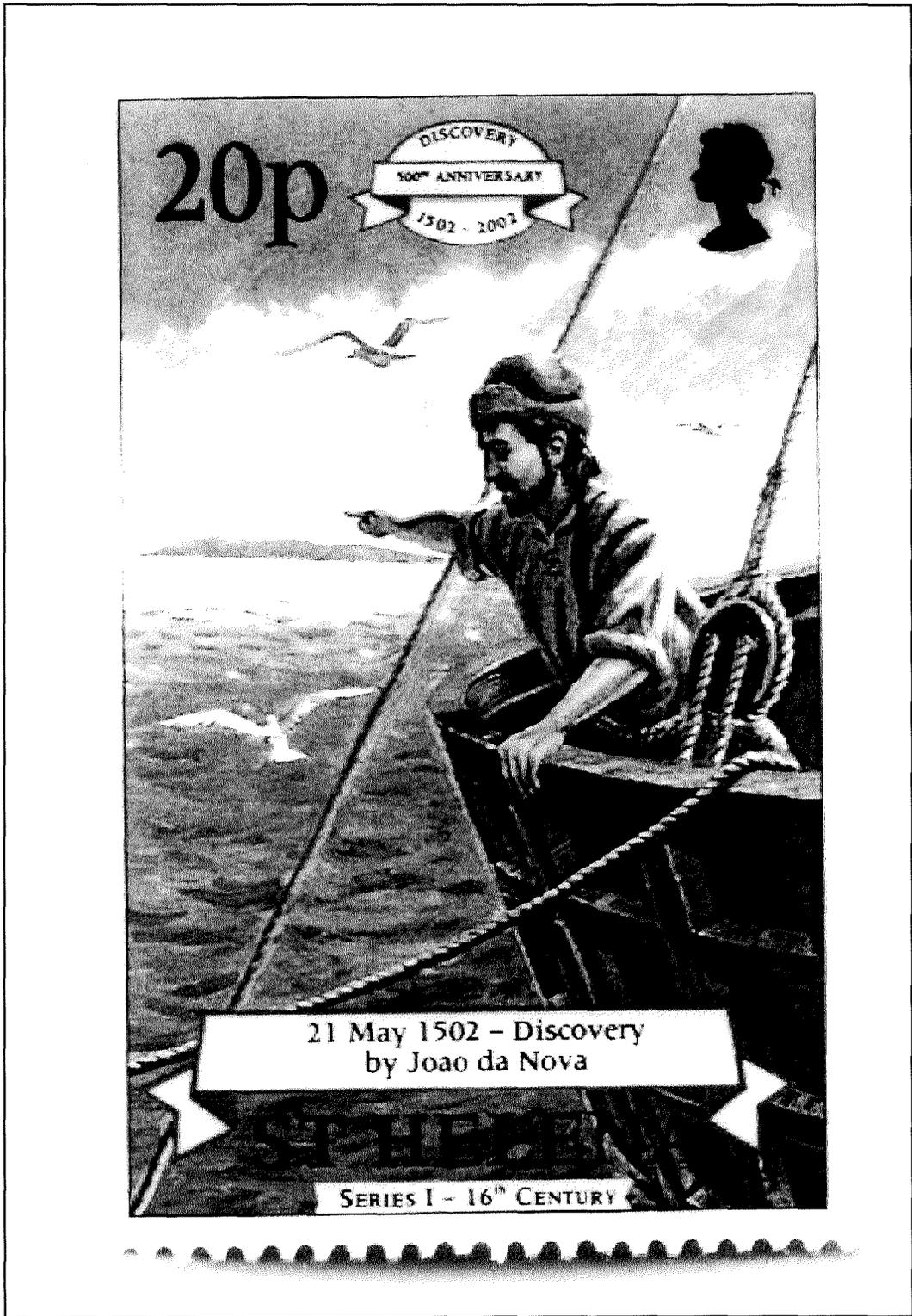


Illustration 3: Joao da Nova - 20 Pence Postage Stamp (1997)

source: Philatelic Bureau, St Helena

island, considering it was so fit and necessary for sailors, and founded there, as it were, by the providence of God, for the relief of the *Portuguese* [...]."

[B]ut answer was made unto me, that there was no need to do so; for that the island serveth to no purpose for a voyage into the *Indies*, because there is another way for that passage, and it is also a very hard matter to find it out; but, in returning from thence it lieth full in the way, and is very easily descried; so that it would not quit the cost to bestow money and time in maintaining soldiers therein, without any profit, seeing no other vessels come thither, but those of the *Portuguese*.³³

Although Pigafetta mentions the then recent appearance in the waters around St Helena of two English mariners, Drake and Cavendish, he is told that "nevertheless, it could not possibly be brought to pass to fortify the same, in a sea so far off, and seeing that all the provision for building there must, of necessity, be brought out of *Europe*."³⁴

These reasons for not fortifying St Helena must be seen in context of the Portuguese' distinctive attitude to their empire in India, the *Estado da India*, of which St Helena, albeit west of Africa, had then formed an integral part. According to John Villiers, the Portuguese empire in Asia was not primarily based on the direct control of territory. The *Estado da India's* "claims to sovereignty were based not upon any hegemony it might gain over areas of land and their populations, but upon its mastery of the open sea and dominance of the shipping lanes that linked those lands together."³⁵ While this was certainly the case for most of the sixteenth century, by the end of that century the Portuguese no longer felt as sure of their dominion of the seas. Consequently, in 1598 Portuguese royal instructions called for an investigation of St Helena's need for fortifications and gave orders to the captains of Portuguese vessels calling at the island to

³³ Filippo Pigafetta (ed), 'A Report of the Kingdom of Congo, by Odoardo Lopez', reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 37.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ John Villiers, 'The Estado da India in Southeast Asia', in Malyn Newitt (ed), *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1985), 38. Also see Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9-10.

survey all its landing places, to report on them and to provide a plan.³⁶ Neither such a report nor plan have survived.

While it is frequently claimed that the Portuguese kept their discovery of St Helena a secret, I can find no convincing evidence to support this claim. Instead, there is a fair range of documentary evidence to provide at least some idea of the context in which the existence and location of St Helena became more widely known. Particularly with the introduction of printing, information was inevitably disseminated fairly quickly and, as it happens, the earliest surviving evidence of St Helena's discovery does not come from a Portuguese source at all. Both the location of the island and its name appeared in print in a Dutch book published at Antwerp as early as 1508. The book contained the account of a Portuguese voyage to India in the year 1505, and was published by Jan van Doesborch, a printer from Antwerp. The account's author, Albericus, has been identified as Albericus Vespuccius, but this is far from certain. This Albericus relates that on the return voyage, "[o]n the twenty-first day of July we saw land, and it was an island lying six hundred and fifty miles from the Cape, and called Saint Helena, howbeit we could not land there. [...] And after we left the island of Saint Helena, we saw another island two hundred miles from there, which is called Ascension."³⁷

In the wake of the Netherland's growing interest in establishing a presence in the East Indies, Dutch vessels had been calling at St Helena at least since 1589.³⁸ For them, as for the Portuguese, St Helena provided an important victualling base on the homeward voyage from their factories and territories in the Indies.³⁹ The sea route to India via the Cape of Good Hope having opened up to sailors other than the Portuguese, there is also some evidence of a visit to St Helena by two French ships, the *Sacre* and the *Pensee*, in 1530.⁴⁰

The background to the gradual appropriation of the island by the Dutch is told by the 17th century composer of the travel memoirs of Johann Wurffbain, a German merchant with the Dutch East India Company. "After the Netherlanders had found this island and

³⁶ See Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 105.

³⁷ C.H. Coote (ed), *The Voyage from Lisbon to India 1505-6* (London: B.F.Stevens, 1894), 18. In the original Dutch, the islands are spelt "sinte Helena" and "Ascecion".

³⁸ Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 56.

³⁹ For a general introduction to the Dutch empire in Asia see C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965).

⁴⁰ Edward Strangman, *Early French Callers at the Cape* (Cape Town: Juta & Co., 1939).

their might had over time outgrown that of the Portuguese, the latter had been forced to abandon the island altogether, so that they rarely avail themselves of it even in great need, and then with fear; the Netherlanders though avail themselves of it with great profit."⁴¹

A painting now in the collection of the Nederlandsch Historisch Scheepvaart Museum at Amsterdam, shows the Dutch India fleet at anchor at St Helena in about 1600.⁴² But not only the Portuguese had been made to avoid the island. At one point St Helena became so popular with Dutch shipping, that the London East India Company's council at Bantam felt it likewise necessary to suggest that "Ascension be made the place of Rendezvous for the homeward bound vessels in lieu of Saint Helena which being yearly all overrunne by the Dutch, affords little or noe refreshing for our shippes besides fish and brackish water."⁴³

In time, the Dutch appear to have come to consider the island such an important asset to their interests in the East Indies, that they laid a formal claim to St Helena in 1633. The Rijksarchief at The Hague preserves a parchment document which translates into English as follows:

On the 15th day of April 1633, the noble sire Jacques Specx, late Governor General of the State of the United Provinces of the Netherlands in India, together with the Council-in-pleno of the Dutch fleet which has just arrived here, consisting of the ships, the *Prins Willem*, the *Princesse Emilia*, *Hollandia*, *Zutphen*, *Rotterdam* and *Hoorn*, have accepted the possession and proprietorship of the island, named of yore *St. Helena*, with all its grounds, hills, cliffs and rocks belonging to it, for the State of the United Provinces, in order to the benefit and advantage of the said Netherland State, as soon as circumstances shall allow, to fortify, occupy, populate and defend it against the invasion of enemies, in the way as their Highnesses the High and Mighty States General of the said United Provinces shall deem advisable.

⁴¹ Johann Sigmund Wurffbain, *Reise nach den Molukken und Vorder-Indien, 1632-1646* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1931), 151. The English translation is mine. For a history of German merchants travelling to the East Indies, see Peter Kirsch, *Die Reise nach Batavia: Deutsche Abenteurer in Ostindien 1609 bis 1695* (Hamburg: Ernst Kabel Verlag, 1994).

⁴² For a reproduction see William Napier, *Lands of Spice and Treasure* (London: Aldus Books, 1971), 88-9.

⁴³ Quoted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 191.

As is shown clearly by the solemn deed, made out in due form, of the aforesaid possession and proprietorship. To certify this and confirming the truth, that nobody may pretend ignorance thereof has been erected this pillar, as well as this notification, duly sealed and signed and nailed thereonto in the above mentioned year and on the date mentioned.⁴⁴

Despite the document's rhetoric, there is no evidence that the Dutch ever followed up their plans to fortify and populate the island, and their claim therefore failed to make any difference on the ground. While the Dutch may have thought themselves proprietors of the island, judging by Peter Mundy's account of St Helena merely one year later, there was absolutely no evidence of a Dutch settlement. Even the above proclamation, which is not mentioned by Mundy, would appear to have gone missing.⁴⁵

Incidentally, although St Helena was well known to mariners by 1600, the element of discovery was re-introduced into its history when some time in 1646 or 1647 the island of 'S. Helena Nuoua' (New St Helena) first made its appearance on a chart, about half way between St Helena proper and the coast of Angola.⁴⁶ The existence of this island was 'confirmed' by a Dutch sailor, Lodewyk Claessen, from Delft, who claimed that in 1652 he had twice visited St Helena Nova. According to Claessen, the Portuguese had two fortifications on this fertile island, and were currently building a third.⁴⁷ This claim was taken very seriously by the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope, where Jan van Riebeck had established a base in 1652, for in an entry in his journal for 20 August 1657, he records the following orders: "On her return voyage to the Cape the 'Maria' is to cross over to St. Helena Nova to see if perchance she can find a Portuguese vessel there and at the same time to observe the situation of that place closely and make a chart thereof. Thence she is to proceed to Old St. Helena in order, if possible, to capture and bring back horses which are still there and are badly needed here [...]."⁴⁸ Though no such island was ever found, 'St Helena Nova' could still be found on the charts as late as 1720,

⁴⁴ Translation quoted in Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 41.

⁴⁵ This is intriguing, because the document's presence in a Dutch archive today may indicate that the Dutch themselves withdrew their claim within the year. The proclamation had certainly not been vandalised.

⁴⁶ The chart is part of a sea atlas by Sir Robert Dudley, *Dell' Arcano del Mare* (Florence: 1646/7).

⁴⁷ See George McCall Theal, *Chronicles of Cape Commanders* (Cape Town: W.A. Richards & Sons, 1882), 105.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 205.

namely in a map by Gerard van Keulen, hydrographer to the Dutch East India Company.⁴⁹

ENGLISH DESIRES

The earliest evidence that St Helena and its whereabouts had become known to the English, comes from several accounts of Edward Fenton's infamous voyage of 1582 and 1583. Fenton had been selected by the Earl of Leicester to command an expedition of four ships, ostensibly to discover the north-west passage, but really for trade with China and the Moluccas by way of the Cape of Good Hope.⁵⁰

In his account of that voyage, William Hawkins, Fenton's second-in-command, relates a conversation between himself and Master Walker on 26 September 1582 while at anchor in Sierra Leone River. Walker told him that there had never been any intention to proceed in the voyage in which they were sent, but rather in a more profitable voyage "of their owne devising." Futhermore, Walker told him, "the generall was determined [to enter] into St Helena, and to possesse the same, and theare to be p[roclaimed] King, promising great rewardes to all the well-willers [who would] consent to the same."⁵¹ This account is confirmed by Master Percy who speaks of a "determination by the General and his Counsaile [...] to goe to S^{ta} Helena to inhabite and to take the Protingall fleet coming from thest Indias [...]."⁵² Peter Jeffrey, also aboard, in turn confirms that there had been an intention "to go for y^e Iland [of St Helena] south y^e line, & there to inhabit etc."⁵³

These plans had apparently first been mentioned by Fenton to Richard Madox on 11 September, who recorded that the "king conferred with me about the island of St. Helens

⁴⁹ For a reproduction see Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (London: The British Library, 1994), 108-9.

⁵⁰ For information on the context of Fenton's and later English voyages, see A.L. Rowse, *The Expansion of Elizabethan England* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1955), 158-205.

⁵¹ Quoted in E.G.R. Taylor (ed), *The Troublesome Voyage of Captain Edward Fenton, 1582-1583* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1959), 278.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 259.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 262.

between the equator and @ [Tropic of Capricorn]; he said it was a land very fertile in all things and wholly without inhabitants; a place moreover, suitable and convenient for a settlement, where having constructed walls we could establish a colony [...]"⁵⁴ By December 1582 these plans were still alive, although in his journal, Madox never mentions any intention on Fenton's part to be proclaimed king on St Helena. Instead, according to Madox, Fenton was to be made king at the town of St Vincent in Brazil.

Although nothing came of Fenton's plans, what is particularly interesting about his story is that St Helena was from the very first a place which Englishmen could conceive of as a convenient place for settlement. By 1582 at the latest, therefore, St Helena had become an object of English colonial desire, if only in the mind of a mariner of the character of Edward Fenton. As yet, any English designs on St Helena were not part of a co-ordinated English interest in the East Indies. However, as a result of Fenton's voyage, and of the enquiries that followed, St Helena had certainly, by 1583, become well known amongst English mariners. From Fenton's voyage alone, it is evident that even prior to 1588, when Thomas Cavendish became the first Englishman known to have visited the island (see below), English captains already had an often detailed knowledge of the island's location and resources, as well as of the use to which it was put by the Portuguese. This assertion is supported by a manuscript dated by Richard Hakluyt to 1584, which he published in his *Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation* in 1589. The author, a William Barret, had written extensively on various aspects of trade in the East Indies, including an account of St Helena's importance to that trade. It is not known how Barret had acquired his knowledge of the East Indies, but it is fairly certain from his account that he had not visited St Helena himself.

The shippes depart from *Cochin* betweene the 15. and last of January, going on til they have sight of *Capo de buona speranza*, and the Isle of *S.Helena*, which Islande is about the midway, being in 16. degrees to the South. And it is a little Island being fruitfull of all things which a man can imagine, with great store of fruite: and this islande is a great succour to the shipping which returne for *Portingall*. [...] And

⁵⁴ Quoted in Elizabeth Story Donno, *An Elizabethan in 1582: The Diary of Richard Maddox, Fellow of All Souls* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1976), 181-20.

undoubtedly this Island is a great succour, and so great an ayde to the ships of *Portingall*, that many would surely perish if that help wanted.⁵⁵

St Helena's location was likewise made known in 1585, the year after the composition of Barret's manuscript, when an Atlantic map depicting St Helena was published in Thomas Cotes' *A Summarie and True Discourse*, although the island is left unnamed.⁵⁶

There is nothing to suggest, therefore, that St Helena had ever been a closely guarded secret of the Portuguese, nor even that the English were unaware of its existence until 1588. And although Thomas Cavendish is usually credited as having been the first Englishman to set foot on the island, even this is probably a mere conjecture based on the prominent status of the narrative of his voyage, which was published by Hakluyt in his above mentioned *Principall Navigations*. Claims such as Gosse's that it was Cavendish who was able "to reveal to the world what had been a close secret of the Portuguese for eighty-six years", serve merely to enhance the moment of Cavendish's visit to St Helena. I say visit, for given that Cavendish, who called at St Helena on 9 June 1588, having first sighted the island on the previous day, had found his way to St Helena with the help of a pilot captured on board a Spanish vessel off California, it can hardly be described as a discovery.⁵⁷

By the end of the sixteenth century, therefore, St Helena had become well known even to English mariners as a potentially invaluable port of call on the return voyage from the East Indies. Nevertheless, from an English point of view, colonising St Helena was little more than a passing thought amongst larger considerations respecting the development of overseas trade.

Nevertheless, English vessels did make St Helena a port of call from the first, such as in 1593, when James Lancaster called there with a fleet of three ships on their return from a reconnaissance mission to the East Indies for the future East India Company. Ten years later, this experience would serve Lancaster extremely well. On 21 February 1603, the English ship *Ascension* called at St Helena as part of the first fleet of four vessels of the newly founded Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies,

⁵⁵ Quoted in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1965; orig, 1589), 222.

⁵⁶ See Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 42-3.

⁵⁷ Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 15.

which had been chartered by Queen Elizabeth in 1600.⁵⁸ In the opinion of John Keay, the return voyage of the *Ascension* was remarkable for thus "inaugurating the Company's long association with that island [...]."⁵⁹ Surprisingly, a chronicler of the *Ascension's* voyage was not all that impressed by St Helena, for he writes that "[t]his island is not an earthly Paradise, as it is reported", although he goes on to say that "it is a place of good water and some lemmon trees and fig trees [...] and great stoare of hoats and hogges and partridges."⁶⁰ The *Ascension* departed the island on 14 March, and eventually reached England in June. As it happened, the *Ascension*, which was travelling several months ahead of the rest of the fleet, was not the only one of the Company's ships to call at St Helena. A storm off the Cape of Good Hope had resulted in the loss of the rudder of Lancaster's flag ship the *Red Dragon*. A new rudder was eventually fixed with the help of the crew of the accompanying *Hector*. After four months at sea, some of which the *Red Dragon* spent drifting out of all control near the Cape, the two ships "had sight of the island of Saint Helena; at the sight of which there was no smale rejoycing among us."⁶¹ Had the Company's first voyage to the East Indies resulted in the loss of half the Company's fleet and the largest part of its cargo, this thesis would probably never have been written.

While St Helena became a regular port of call for the ships of the London East India Company, the Company (not unlike the Portuguese before them) made no attempts to settle or fortify the island. Nevertheless, ideas for colonisation were evidently still current amongst Englishmen, and Richard Boothby appears to have been the first to suggest in print that St Helena could or should be colonized by the English. Writing in 1644, Boothby recounts his visit to the island on a return voyage from the East Indies with one of the London East India Company's fleets, when they called at St Helena "for

⁵⁸ On the history of the (English) East India Company, see Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993); John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991); Brian Gardner, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971).

⁵⁹ John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 20.

⁶⁰ William Foster (ed), *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster to Brazil and the East Indies, 1591-1603* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940), 139-40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 119. For a summary account of the voyage see John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 14-23.

a moneths time refreshing our selves in the uninhabited Island." He described the island as

so pleasant, healthfull, fruitfull, and commodious a place for trading with all Nations at their return out of *India*, and so invincible and impregnable, being once (though but easily fortified) that one hundred men may easily oppose and defend themselves against one hundred thousand, and a matter of no great charge, that I am perswaded some one mans estate in *England* is able to perfect that businesse; to whose endeavours, if at any time attempted, I wish all prosperous and happy successe.⁶²

A similar argument for the colonisation was made by Francis Goodwin in his *Man in the Moone* in 1638, in which the story's principal character, Domingo Gonzales, did "wonder [...] that our King in his wisdome hath not thought fit to plant a Colony, and to fortifie it, being a place so necessary for refreshing all travailers out of the Indies."⁶³ Although the fictitious Gonzales ostensibly refers to the King of Portugal, Goodwin, as the author, appears to refer to Charles I. An even more subtle and less obvious argument for colonisation was advanced by Thomas Herbert that same year.

Saint Helena is an Ile, & and was in-nominate till *Iohn de Nova* gave it one [...] and so named, for that he discovered it [...] the third of May; a day consecrated to the memory of *Helena* the Empresse: She that first found the Crosse, she that was the most religious of Ladies in her time, she that was the mother of the first Christian Emperour, great *Constantine*: both of them glorious to the world; *Brittans* both; both bright Jems of this our Nation.⁶⁴

⁶² Richard Boothby, *A True Declaration of the Intollerable Wrongs Done to Richard Boothby [...]* (London: 1644), 24.

⁶³ Francis Goodwin, *The Man in the Moone; or, A Discourse of a Voyage Thither* (London: 1638), 16. Interestingly, this passage is omitted from R.B.'s reprint of the Goodwin's story published in 1700, for by that year, there was no longer any need for advocating the colonization of the island. [R.B., *The English Acquisitions in Guinea and East-India* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1700)]

⁶⁴ Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travel Into Africa & Asia the Great* (London: 1638), 353.

It is these remarks, amongst others, which Herbert must be alluding to when he writes towards the end of his book that he had "formerly in a line or two vindicated the honour of our Country."⁶⁵

All these texts, that of Herbert, of Goodwin and of Boothby, as well as the accounts of Barret and Cavendish published in Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*, were an integral part of the sixteenth and seventeenth century flood of anthologies, ballads, pamphlets and translation, which exhorted the opportunities of the Americas and the East Indies. According to Lesley Cormack, it is above all in this 'descriptive geography' of the period, that one can find the clearest indication of English imperial thinking.⁶⁶ In Philip Lawson's words, "a 'literary empire' existed in England long before the trading or territorial empires. [...] The attraction of the literary empire in the late sixteenth century was that it possessed the right mix of nascent nationalistic fervour, religious zeal and economic determinism."⁶⁷ This argument applies equally well to the mid-seventeenth century literature respecting St Helena.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 355.

⁶⁶ See Lesley B. Cormack, 'The Fashioning of an Empire: Geography and the State in Elizabethan England' in Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (eds), *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

⁶⁷ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993), 10. Also see J.H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration and Settlement 1450-1650* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), 269-71; J. Parker, *Books to Build an Empire: A Bibliographic History of English Overseas Interests to 1620* (Amsterdam: 1965); Richard Helgerson, 'Camões, Hakluyt, and the Voyages of Two Nations' in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992); Klaus E. Knorr, *British Colonial Theories, 1570-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1944).

⁶⁸ St Helena also makes a brief appearance in Van Sloetten's 1668 novel *Isle of Pines*, which tells the story of a family and their servants who are shipwrecked near Terra Australis, having embarked on the apparently first trading voyage to the East Indies. On their voyage south the fleet of four ships calls at the Cape Verde islands and "about the first of August came within sight of the Island of St. Hellen, where we took in fresh water." From there they make their way to the Cape of Good Hope, although St Helena did not usually feature as a port of call on the outward voyage. By 1668 the island had, of course, already been settled. [Henry Cornelius van Sloetten, *The Isle of Pines* (London: Alan Banks and Charles Harper, 1668), reprinted in Ernest Rhys (ed), *Everyman's Library Shorter Novel: Jacobean and Restoration*, Vol.2 (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930), 228.]

Since the days of its discovery, many sixteenth and seventeenth century visitors to St Helena have remarked on the prevalence of inscriptions on the island.⁶⁹ In this respect, St Helena has quite literally experienced a little of what John Noyes has called the "inscription of the earth, which marks the territory with the presence of the colony". These inscriptions constitute a parallel to what Noyes called "a writing on paper, which interprets this presence in terms conducive to possession", that is, to the literature advocating colonisation, which I have discussed already.⁷⁰ When visiting the island in 1589, Jan Huyghen Linschoten for one, noted that sailors calling at St Helena

use to Carve their names, and markes in trees & plants for a perpetuall memorie: whereof many hundreth are there to be found, which letters with the growing of the trees, doe also grow bigger and bigger, we found names that had been there since the year of the Lord 1510 & 1515 and everie yeare following, which names stode upon Figge trees, every letter being of the bignesse of a spanne, by reason of the age and growing of the trees.⁷¹

If not inscribing the territory as such, of which the trees are an extension, visitors inscribed stones, leading to the presence of a notable abundance of markers, for as the chronicler of a Dutch visit in 1599 reports, "[m]oreover here we left behinde us some remembrances in writing, in token of our being there."⁷² Inscriptions were above all left

⁶⁹ Given that for early visitors to St Helena the presence of inscriptions had been such a noteworthy feature, it is remarkable to read in a 1995 report by a visiting English consultant to St Helena, John Haynes, that "[w]hat immediately strikes a visitor to St. Helena is the relative lack of words on public display: hardly any advertisements in shop windows or elsewhere [...], the paucity of public notices, only a very few signposts on the island's roads." [John Haynes, *Visit of English Consultant to St. Helena* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, 1995), 3.]

⁷⁰ John Noyce, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 225.

⁷¹ P.A. Tiele (ed), *The Voyage of Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, Vol.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), 258. Also see Albert Gray (ed), *The Voyage of François Pyrard*, Vol.II, Pt. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 302.

⁷² Anon., *A True Report of a [...] Voyage to the East Indies* (London, nd.), reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 75.

on so-called postal stones, the only surviving of which at St Helena dates from 1645 and commemorates a visit by the ship *Dolphin*.⁷³ The stone is now situated outside the Castle in Jamestown. A Portuguese mariner, Antonio Correia, when visiting the island in 1612, left an extensive record of these inscriptions by English and Dutch sailors which he copied from such stones, although he knew neither language.⁷⁴

Inscriptions of another kind could be found about three and a half miles inland from Lemon Valley. Peter Mundy relates how, in 1638, "[a] mile above the olden lemon trees in the same valley, in a private and remote place, wee Found a certaine wall off stone by pilyng them one on the other, enclosing a pretty peece off ground, and about 22 or 23 Severall Names off Dutchmen written and graven on the stones in Anno 1637."⁷⁵

But St Helena's most visible marker of the island's discovery was a small chapel erected there in 1571. Linschoten's 1589 account of the island tells how the space of this chapel too had become a discursive space for visiting mariners. Referring to the visit of an English ship just four months prior, that of Cavendish, Linschoten reports that

they tooke in fresh water and other necessaries, and beate downe the Alter of the little Church and the Crosses, and left behind them a Kettle and a Sword, which the Portingales at our arrival found there, yet could they not conceive what they might meane. Some thought it was left there for a signe to some other ships of his companie, but everie man may thinke what he will thereof.⁷⁶

The chapel had hence become a symbolic battleground, although it was restored soon thereafter, for Francois Pyrard, on his first visit to the island in 1601, found the church "adorned with a fair alter and handsome images and pictures, while above in front was a fine large cross of freestone, white as marble and well carved". However, calling at the island for a second time on his return from the Indies nine years later, Pyrard found that

⁷³ For an illustration see Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg, *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997), 31.

⁷⁴ C.R. Boxer, 'The Naval and Colonial Papers of Dom Antonio de Ataide', reprinted in C.R. Boxer, *From Lisbon to Goa, 1500-1750: Studies in Portuguese Maritime Enterprise* (London: Variorum reprints, 1984), 32.

⁷⁵ Richard Carnac Temple (ed), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.III, Pt.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1919), 414.

⁷⁶ P.A. Tiele (ed), *The Voyage of Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, Vol.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), 253; I have altered this translation slightly in accordance with the notes.

"all had been broken by the Hollander". There was no need to guess the reasons why, for the Dutch had "left a note for the Portuguese to this effect: 'Leave our drawings, writings, and notes, and we will leave yours'; but the Portuguese consented not thereto, and so, out of the hatred these nations have for one another, everything is broken and spoiled [...]"⁷⁷ Despite the destruction, Pyrard found "some letters in the chapel, left there by three other carracks that had passed there in company. We also found some letters left by a caraval sent by the King of Spain [...]"⁷⁸ Pyrard only left the island after the altar and the chapel doors had been repaired and the ornaments had been replaced.

Despite such struggles, the chapel continued to serve as a communicative focus. As Peter Mundy reports in 1638, "[c]oming to Chappell vally, Wee Found the Chappell New repaired by the Hollanders, covered with a tarpaulin off New Double Canvas [...]. The Names of Divers shippes, principall Men, as allsoe off some weomen, were Fairly written on boards and Nailed upp in the said Chappell."⁷⁹ Mundy and his companions do likewise and "[h]aving on a board written our Shippes Commaunders etts. Names, with the tyme off our arrivall and Departure Saint Laurence, Allsoe off the tyme off our arrivall and Departure hence, which wee made to bee the 15th currantt, wee placed and Nayled itt Fast in the Chappell by others thatt were there."⁸⁰

In their own way, these inscriptions which quite literally bear out John Noyes' earlier argument with respects to the "texts of colonization", that it is "[t]heir written words that bear constant witness to the struggle involved in clearing a space in which colonization was possible."⁸¹ But on a mere practical level too, there was a need during this period for clearing a space, not least to accommodate the church, which I have mentioned already, and a range of temporary shelters, given that St Helena served as temporary abode above all to returning India fleets.

⁷⁷ Albert Gray (ed), *The Voyage of François Pyrard*, Vol.II, Pt. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 297. Apart from the reason stated by the Dutch themselves, Calvinist zeal probably had a large part to play in their destructiveness; see C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 157.

⁷⁸ Albert Gray (ed), *The Voyage of François Pyrard*, Vol.II, Pt. II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 296.

⁷⁹ Richard Carnac Temple (ed), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.III, Pt.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1919), 415.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 415-6.

⁸¹ John Noyce, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 284.

The first recorded permanent structure on St Helena is a chapel built by the Portuguese in 1571. It was this chapel, if anything, which was the most visible marker of Portuguese appropriation of the island. Its first detailed description comes from Francis Pretty's account of Cavendish's visit to the island in 1588.

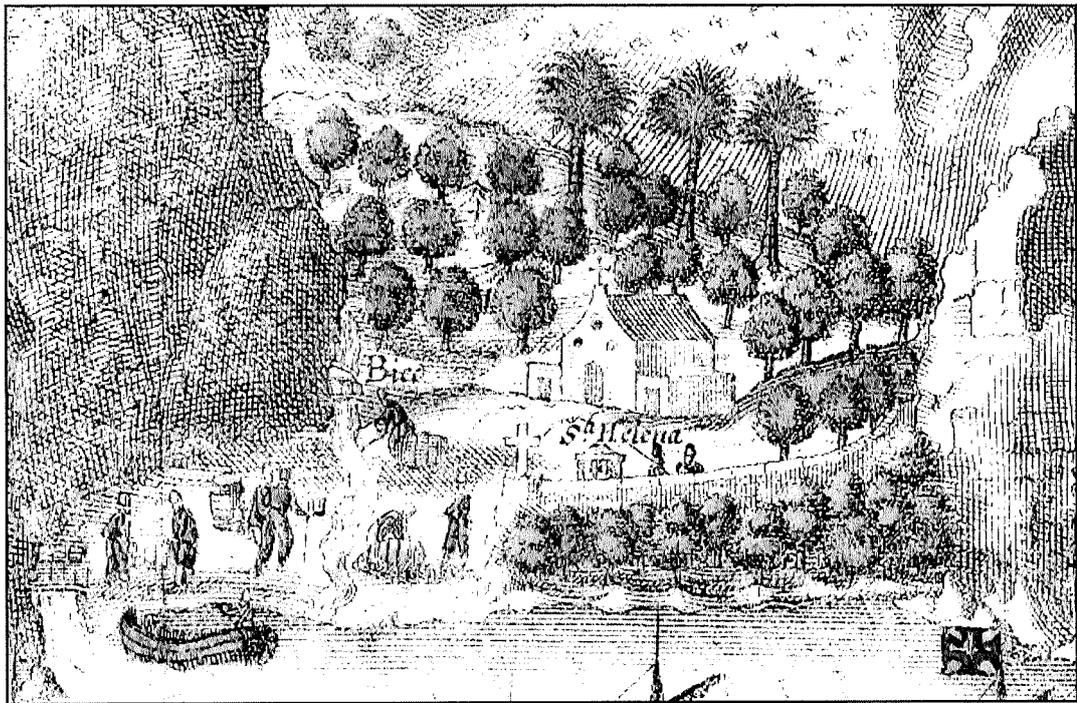
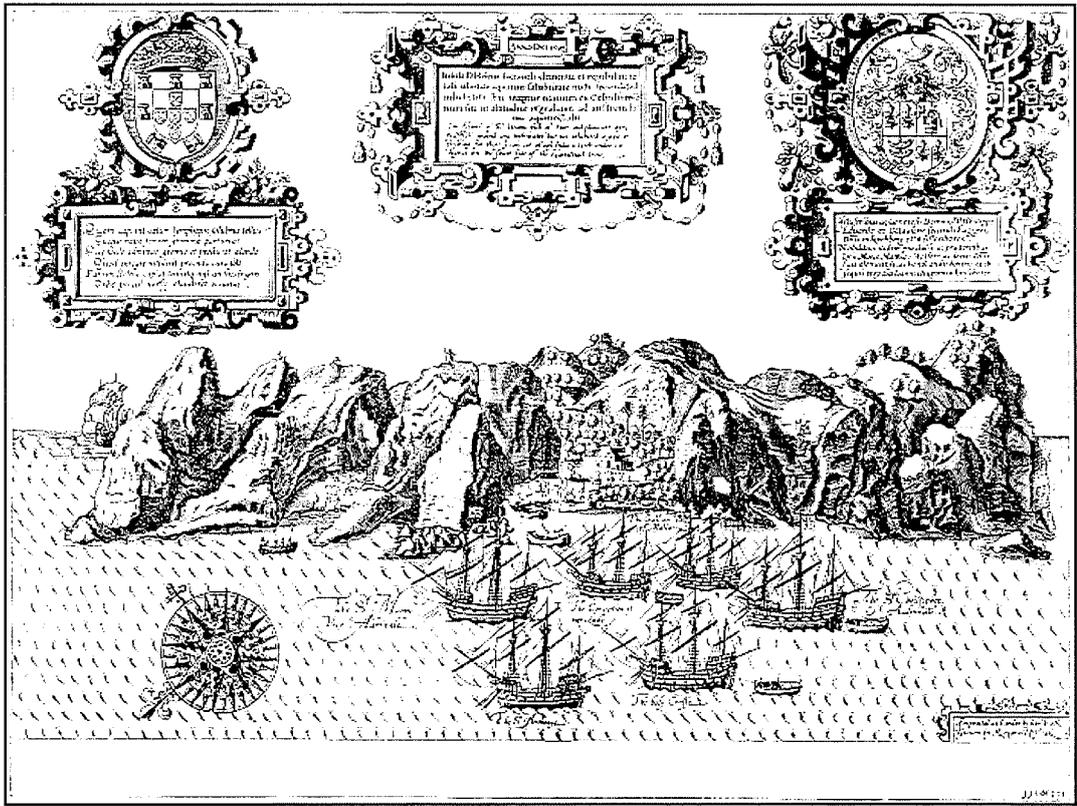
[A]bout two or three o'clock in the afternoon we went on shore, where we found an exceeding fair and pleasant valley wherein diverse handsome buildings and houses were set up; and one particularly which was a church, was tiled, and whitened on the outside very fair, made with a porch; and within the church at the upper end was set an altar, whereon stood a large table, set in a frame, having on it the picture of our Saviour Christ upon the cross, and the image of our Lady praying, with diverse other historicis painted curiously on the same. The sides of the church were hung round with stained clothes having many devices drawn on them. [...] There is also over and against the church a very fair causeway made up with stones [...] and upon the said causeway is a frame erected whereon hang two bells, wherewith they ring to mass, and near to it a cross is set up, which is squared, framed, and made very artificially of freestone, whereon is carved in cyphers what time it was built, which was in the year of our Lord 1571.⁸²

That date is also a reasonable date for the building of the church, although this does not rule out the existence of an earlier chapel. Pretty, in addition to describing the church, writes that "[t]here are two houses adjoining to the church, on each side one, which served for a kitchen to dress meat in with necessary rooms and houses of office. The coverings of the said houses are made flat, where is planted a very fair vine and through both the said houses runneth a very good and wholesome stream of fresh water."⁸³ This account is confirmed by the earliest extant views of the island by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, based on his own visit to the island in 1589 (*illustrations 4a and 4b*).⁸⁴ Linschoten, who travelled with a Portuguese fleet, described the manner in which the Portuguese established themselves on the island during the period of their stay, a description which helps to counter the impression of a ghost town provided by Pretty.

⁸² Quoted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 45.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Jan Huyghen Van Linschoten, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naar Oost ofte Portugaels Indien [...] 1579-1592* (Amsterdam: 1569).



Illustrations 4a: 'Insula D. Helenæ' and 4b: detail

source: *John Huighen van Linschoten his Discours of Voyages into y^e Easte & West Indies*
(London: 1598)

When the ships come thether, everie man maketh his lodging under a tree, setting a Tent about it: for that the trees are there so thicke, that it presently seemeth a little towne or an armie lying in the field. Every man provideth for himself, both flesh, fish, fruite, and woode, for there is enough for them all: and everie one washeth Linnen. There they hold a generall confession and communion, with Mass everie daye, which is done with great devotion, and thankesgiving and other Himnes [...].⁸⁵

Neither the chapel, nor the adjoining houses, of whose use Linschoten reports nothing, were therefore built to cater for a resident population, but solely for the needs of the passing fleets. Thirty five years later, the buildings in Chapel Valley had grown significantly in number, albeit as a result of an enforced stay by a stranded Portuguese fleet. Peter Mundy, calling at St Helena in 1634, reports that besides the almost ruined chapel

there are the walls of about 40 or 50 dwellings built also by them [the Portuguese], Att such tyme as one of their Carracks (there being 3 in Company) proved Leakie and not able to proceed was here hailed ashoare and her goods landed, where they remained till other shipps from Portugall came and brought all away, dwelling here the mean tyme and fortifieing themselves against English, Dutch, or any others that should offer to molest them. Many of the Ribbs of the Carrick were yett to bee seene and abundance of Iron worke all over the Strond.⁸⁶

Up to that time, no dwelling of any kind have ever been reported to exist other than in Chapel Valley. It is Mundy, visiting the island again in 1656, who reports that on an excursion inland in a valley named Palace Green there were "many bootthes or cottages

⁸⁵ P.A. Tiele (ed), *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, Vol.2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), 258.

⁸⁶ Richard Carnac Temple (ed), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1914), 329.

built of bowes (by those who were lately here before), some of them handsome and compleatt."⁸⁷

SETTLEMENT, FORTIFICATION, PLANTATION

Up to this point in time, St Helena's colonisation had been gradual and restrained, but when a decision to occupy the island was eventually taken, its execution was extremely thorough. By the mid-seventeenth century, St Helena had become increasingly important to the East India Company as a place where their vessels could take on fresh supplies and as a place of rendezvous for their homeward-bound shipping, who would proceed from there in convoy. This had become a necessity as the waters nearer England had been rendered somewhat unsafe by the Dutch War and by hostilities between England and Spain. Such a convoy was usually protected by an English man-of-war, detailed for the purpose by His Majesty at the request of the Company.⁸⁸

It was the insecurity brought about by these wars and hostilities, which brought about a fundamental change in the Company's approach, not only to St Helena. In 1658 the London East India Company had made plans for the colonisation of the island of Pulo Run in the Malay Archipeligo.⁸⁹ The islanders of Pulo Run had apparently pledged their allegiance to the English in 1616, but as the East India Company was not at that time empowered to hold overseas territories, that pledge had to be accepted on behalf of the King. The island was lost to the Dutch a mere four years later, although by treaty it was returned by them in 1654.⁹⁰ According to the historian John Keay, even "Oliver Cromwell had a soft spot for Run, and [...] it was with Run in mind that the Protector

⁸⁷ Richard Carnac Temple and Lavinia Mary Anstey (eds), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.V (London: Hakluyt Society, 1936), 79. Given the directions given by Mundy, the place in question may well have been what is today known as Plantation Gardens.

⁸⁸ See for instance the entry for 18 November 1658 (No.121) in M.A. Everett Green (ed), *Calendar of the State Papers, Domestic Series, 1658-9* (London: Longmans & Co., 1885), 189

⁸⁹ For a popular history of these plans, see Giles Milton, *Nathaniel's Nutmeg: How One Man's Courage Changed the Course of History* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999).

⁹⁰ Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 357.

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issued the Company with a new charter which included the authority to hold, fortify and settle overseas territories."⁹¹ Unfortunately, no copy survives of Cromwell's charter, which was granted in 1657.⁹²

In the event, the Company's plans to settle Pulo Run were abandoned for fear of a renewed conflict between England and the Dutch, whose forces in the East Indies were far stronger than those of the English. Instead, the Company's attention was diverted to St Helena, as the Court's minutes for 15 December 1658 record:

The Court, having severall tymes very lately, taken into their consideration the great conveniency & concernement that it might prove, both to the Company & to this Nation, for to fortifie the Island of St. Helena, whereon (it is beleived) many good plantations may in tyme be made; Did againe this day reassume the serious consideration of that businesse: and finding somuch reason to engage them to this worke, aswell as Encouragment, after a long Debate of the whole businesse; Resolved by a generall Erection of hands, to send 40 men with all expedition to remayne on the Island: with conveniences to fortifie & begin a plantation there.⁹³

Two days later, Captain John Dutton, previously chosen to effect the Company's colonisation of Pulo Run, was asked, and he agreed, to be in charge of the St Helena expedition instead.⁹⁴ A committee was appointed to "conferre with Cap^t Dutton concerning such Necessaries as are fitt to be sent to S^t Hellena,"⁹⁵ and a mere three days

⁹¹ John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 5; also see 129.

⁹² On the basis of other surviving documents, William Foster is prepared to accept that Cromwell's charter did include authority to "to fortify and plant in any of their settlements, to transport thither colonists, and to carry out ammunition and stores free of custom" and that these provisions were "probably granted in view of the Protector's expressed desire to see Pulo Run 'planted'." [William Foster in his introduction to E.B. Sainsbury, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes etc. of the East India Company 1655-1659* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), xvii.]

⁹³ IOLR: B/26, f.81. Quoted in William Foster, 'The Acquisition of St. Helena', *The English Historical Review*, No.CXXXV (1919).

⁹⁴ IOLR: B/26, ff.81. Further interesting details are contained in William Foster, 'The Acquisition of St. Helena', *The English Historical Review*, No.CXXXV (1919).

⁹⁵ IOLR: B/26, ff.81; entry for 17 December 1658.

later, on 20 December, the list of stores for St Helena was approved by the East India Company's Court of Directors.⁹⁶

No further decisions were taken until 5 January 1658 [ie. 1659], when the minutes record: "Sr James Drax Kn^t & Cap^t Broakhouen To give direction for the drawing up a Commission & Instructions for Captaine Dutton for planting & fortifying of S^t Hellena."⁹⁷ Yet again, a mere two days later, the minutes record that "[t]he Drought of a Commission and Instructions for Capt Dutton for his better managing the Designe of St Hellena, were this day read in court, wherein they gave such further directions as they thought fitting, and so appointed them to be ingrossed."⁹⁸

In the case of St Helena, at least, colonisation was a matter of 'design'. The instructions and commission in questions are arguably the most important documents on the colonisation of the island, as they provide a blueprint (a design) for St Helena's appropriation, unlike in cases of more haphazard colonisations, such as of some English islands in the Caribbean. This differences was in no small part due to the fact that Dutton's commission and instructions were drawn up by at least one man very experienced in matters of colonisation, Sir James Drax, who had pioneered both cotton and sugar production in Barbados and was knighted by Cromwell in 1658.⁹⁹

John Dutton's commission is invaluable not least for stating in detail the manner in which he was to take possession of St Helena, while his instructions spelled out some of the details of how the island's colonisation proper was to be effected.

Whereas wee the Governour and Company of Marchants of London trading to the East Indies, have by the Allmighties assistance resolved to settle fortifie and plant upon the Island of S^t Hellena, [...] and by this our commission doe declare appoint and authorize you to be our Governour in cheife in the said Island of S^t Hellena, and over all those persons whom wee have appointed for the carrying on of this worke, Wee doe therefore require you that imediatelie you repair on board

⁹⁶ IOLR: B/26, f.82; entry for 20 December 1658.

⁹⁷ IOLR: B/26, ff.84.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 246-7. Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 331-2.

our ship London, whom wee have appointed for the transport of your selfe and the rest of our people, and in her to saile first for the Island of S^t Iago, and from there to the said Island of S^t Hellena, where when it shall please the Allmightie to arrive you, wee hereby impower authorize and require you that forthwith after your coming to Anchor in the Roade you with ye Commander^s and as many English, as convenientlie may be spared from aboard the ships doe repair on shoare, and in the name of his Highnesse Richard Lord Protector of England Scotland and Ireland and the Dominions thereunto belonging, and for the use of the Hono^{ble} English East India Company doe take possession of the Island, and with Drum, and Trumpett proclaime the same.¹⁰⁰

The *London* and the *Marmaduke* arrived at St Helena on 5 May 1659, where and when it is likely that Dutton did indeed carry out his orders as instructed, as well as attend to the further orders he had been given, namely, that

The Allmightie having arrived you at S^t Hellena you shall with all speede proceede to fortifie in the most convenient place of Chappell Valley (taking y^e Advice of your counsell herein) and in such other place and places on the Island as you shall iudge most necessarie and requisite for the defence of the same, and to offend any Enemies that shall come into or neare the Roade or Roades of the said Island.

But while this worke is going on, you are especially to have regard to the first season and opportunitie that God shall grant unto you to proceede to planting of your provisions, but especially your Plantons & Cassada, because they otherwise will be in danger to perrish, And this doe in severall places of y^e Island as you shall find convenient, And that you also proceede to set your Carpenters and your Artificers on work for the framing and getting up your Magazine and storehouse and other houses necessarie for your Accommodation within y^e lynes of your fortifications, [...].¹⁰¹

It is in this respect, above all, that the Company's orders, and the actions undoubtedly taken by Dutton and his men and women, confirm Patricia Seed's focus on 'planting' as

¹⁰⁰ IOLR: E/3/85, f.96; Capt. John Dutton's Commission, 11.1.1658.

¹⁰¹ IOLR: E/3/85, ff.94; Capt. John Dutton's Instructions, 11.1.1658.

the essence of English acts of colonisation, as opposed to those of other European powers. According to Seed, planting "involved neither simple physical exertion nor mere aesthetic enjoyment; planting the garden was an act of taking possession of the New World for England. It was not a law that entitled Englishmen to possess the New World, it was an *action* which established their right."¹⁰² She furthermore states that the acquisition of overseas territory was ultimately founded in the principle of English law that "neither a ceremony nor a document but the ordinary action of constructing a dwelling place created the right of possession. The continuing presence and habitation of the *object* - the house - maintained that right."¹⁰³ Hence for the English, even if they had known about the Dutch claim to the island of 1633, that claim would have been quite vacuous. Given the way possession was construed by the English at the time, despite their temporary dwellings neither the Dutch nor, for that matter the Portuguese, had ever been in *possession* of the island at any time. Notwithstanding the unusually formal nature in which Dutton had been ordered to take possession of St Helena, his further orders and subsequent actions exhibited this fundamental pattern of English overseas acquisition as identified by Seed.

Moreover, the inscription of the land by way of buildings continued to be as important an element of the island's colonisation as it had been prior to 1659. Further such instructions were issued by the Company in 1673, namely "That all or any the Inhabitants of the said Island be permitted and allotted upon their request and desire; ground sufficient to build a house or houses in any Valley Provided they build their houses regularly in order to a Towne of defence about each of the fortifications, that shall be made in any valley."¹⁰⁴ This concern with regularity was above all evident in the Company's extensive instructions of August 1683.

In the contriving of the market place and the building for increasing of the ffort Towne, We would have you use all possible regard to the uniformity & regularity of the Streetes & buildings after the manner they are now in London since the ffire, and if there be any irregular buildings that obstruct the Evenes of the lines of the Streete or other decent usefull uniformity cause the owners of such buildings to

¹⁰² Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30-1.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19.

pull them down or alter them [...], the charge whereof cannot be much to ye propietario' yet since we understand most of them are built but of 13 or 14 foot high with loose stones piled one upon another.¹⁰⁵

In this passage one can find evidence of what John H. Elliott has called "one of the paradoxes that runs through the whole history of metropolitan-colonial relationships", namely that "the colonists, even while coming to appreciate the qualities that made their environment unique, devoted a great deal of time and energy to making it resemble as closely as possible the environment they had left behind."¹⁰⁶ This particular instance supports the argument that its colonial architecture, above all, "which vividly epitomizes the dilemma of communities caught between their desire to ape metropolitan fashions in order to show themselves the equals of their countrymen at home, and the need to construct buildings that would enable them to live in some comfort in what was often a very different climate from that of the mother country."¹⁰⁷ Although the orders respecting the building of Jamestown issued from the metropolis itself, the observation is nevertheless true for the St Helenian architecture in general.¹⁰⁸

The East India Company's settlement was given formal recognition in King Charles II's charter to the Company of April 1661. It stated amongst much else, somewhat retrospectively, that

it shall and may be lawful to and for the said Governour and Company [...] to erect and build such castles Fortifications Forts Garrisons Colonies or Plantations at St Helena [...] as they in their directions shall think fit [...] And for the Supplying

¹⁰⁴ IOR: E/3/88, letter to St Helena, 19.12.1673.

¹⁰⁵ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 1.8.1683. This, it is worth noting, is the only seventeenth century description to give any indication of the manner in which the fledgling settlements buildings were constructed.

¹⁰⁶ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion of early types of dwellings, farms and settlements found in the settler colonies of North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, see Norman Pollock, 'Colonies, Explorers, Pioneers and Settlers', in Anthony Lemon and Norman Pollock (eds), *Studies in Overseas Settlement and Population* (London: Longman, 1980).

of such [...] to send out from this Kingdom [...] all kind of Cloathing Provision of Victuals Ammunition and Implements necessary [...] As also to Transport and carry over such Number of Men being willing thereunto [...] And also to govern them in such Legal and reasonable manner as the said Governour and Company shall think fit [...].¹⁰⁹

These privileges had been requested by the Company when they petitioned the King in October 1660 to confirm their former royal charters, as well as to grant them new and additional powers, such as those above.¹¹⁰ It is interesting to note therefore, that there is indeed some uncertainty as to the authority upon which the East India Company took possession of St Helena, as neither Dutton's commission nor his instructions make any reference to Cromwell's charter of 1657. Had that charter indeed given the Company the right to settle and acquire territories overseas, one would expect Dutton's orders to refer to these rights explicitly. Nevertheless, the facts of the Company's appropriation of St Helena are fairly clear, and as its directors summarise in their commission and instructions of December 1660 to Robert Stringer, Dutton's replacement as Governor of the island, "we [...] have at our own cost & charges, taken possession of, settled upon, planted and fortified, the Island of St Hellena [...]."¹¹¹ This somewhat disorganised state of affairs was not unusual for the time, as has been pointed out by G.V. Scammel in a review of English colonial policy during the mid-seventeenth century.¹¹²

Moreover, the East India Company's possession of the island was as yet far from secure, even from its own servants, nor were the piratical schemes of the likes of Fenton a thing of the past. This is shown in a report received by the English government in 1671 from "one Baron" who provided intelligence on a scheme "to propose to the King of France, whether he would incline to be master of the English island of St. Helena, and

¹⁰⁹ Reprinted in Sheila Lambert (ed), *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, George III, *East India Company 1767 and 1773* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.), viii.

¹¹⁰ E.B. Sainsbury, *A Calendar of the Court Minutes etc. of the East India Company 1660-1663* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 39-40.

¹¹¹ IOLR: E/3/85, f.177; Capt. Robert Stringer's Commission and Instructions, 19.12.1660.

¹¹² G.V. Scammel, *The First Imperial Age: European Overseas Expansion c. 1400-1715* (London: Harper Collins, 1989), 160-8.

if so it should be put into his hands"¹¹³ Likewise, with renewed hostilities between England and the Netherlands, the Dutch came to regret their earlier omission to fortify St Helena. In December 1672 a fleet of four ships was despatched from the Cape of Good Hope under the command of Jacob Gens with orders to take the island from the English. Little resistance was offered, leaving the Dutch in control of the island, albeit for a mere six months, until May 1673, when the island was re-captured by a fleet under the command of Richard Munden.¹¹⁴ The standard account of the island's re-capture is a contemporary document published in 1673 by Andrew Anderson at Edinburgh, entitled *A Relation of the Re-taking of the Island of St^a Helena, And three Dutch East-India Ships*.¹¹⁵ Although the island had not been re-captured by ships of the East India Company, Charles II was willing to return the island to them. The East India Company's possession of St Helena was confirmed in a charter by the King dated 31 December 1673, which made the Company the island's sole proprietors.

And them the said Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies [...] We do [...] make create and constitute the true Lords and Proprietors of the Island and Premises aforesaid and of every part and parcel thereof [...] To have hold possess and enjoy the said Island [...] for evermore to be holden of us Our Heirs and Successors as of the Manor of East Greenwich in the County of Kent in free and common soccage and not in capite nor by Knight Service [...].¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Quoted in F.H. Blackburne Daniell (ed), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, January to November, 1671* (London: 1895), 316; entry for 12 June 1671.

¹¹⁴ This story has been told fairly extensively and accurately by G.G. Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol.36, No.1 (1950), and C.R. Boxer, 'The Third Dutch War in the East (1672-4)', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. XVI, No.4 (1930). For background information on the Dutch Wars see J.R. Jones, *Britain and the World, 1649-1815* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980), 49-112.

¹¹⁵ Reprinted as an appendix to C.R. Boxer, 'The Third Dutch War in the East (1672-4)', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. XVI, No.4 (1930), 382-4.

¹¹⁶ The charter is reprinted in Sheila Lambert, (ed), *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century, George III, East India Company 1767 and 1773* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.). For the original charter, see IOR: A/1/22. It is this passage which has lead Percival Teale and Robin Gill to claim that "[t]he Charter shows clearly that Saint Helenians have an inherent right of abode in East Greenwich. [...] I appeal to the University of Greenwich and their Member of Parliament to bring these loyal St Helenians back into the fold. What could be a better way to celebrate the Greenwich Millennium." [Percival Teale

The island's handover to the Company was hence ordered in a Royal warrant issued to Capt. Keigwin, asking him "to deliver unto the said Governo^r and Comp^a or their order, the possession of the said Island [...]."¹¹⁷ Although it can be correctly argued that St Helena was initially acquired by settlement, the island's most recent acquisition was hence by conquest. The King's charter of 1673 acknowledges clearly that the States of the United Provinces "had and kept quiet Possession thereof [ie. St Helena]" and states that the island had been "retaken from the said States." On this basis, the Charter grants to the East India Company "the said Island of Sancta Helena with all the right profits Territories and Appurtanances [...] as We Our Self now have and enjoy or may or can have or enjoy the same by virtue or force of *our said Conquest thereof*."¹¹⁸

Following the events of 1673, St Helena had become an English possession for good. In 1709, in accordance with the agreed take-over of the Old or London East India Company by the New or English East India Company, St Helena was transferred to the latter, an event little noticed on the island itself and of no significant constitutional implications, as the New Company's rights to St Helena equalled that of the Old Company.¹¹⁹ While the island never again passed into foreign hands, its status within the growing empire of which it formed a part was to nevertheless undergo some drastic changes.

MAPS AND GARDENS

This is a suitable point at which to examine and reflect on another aspect of St Helena's colonisation, that of the textualizing of its landscape through mapping and naming, especially as it has been claimed that "cartographic inscriptions are not simply reflections

and Robin Gill, *St Helena Island: The Lost Denizens of East Greenwich* (typescript, 1995), foreword.] The reference to East Greenwich, however, was a common feature of similar charters during that time.

¹¹⁷ IOLR: E/3/88; His Majesty's order to Capt. Keigwin, 23.12.1673.

¹¹⁸ Reprinted in Sheila Lambert (ed), *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century*, George III, *East India Company 1767 and 1773* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.), xxv and xxvi. Italics added.

¹¹⁹ Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 404.

of reality but organize and license the appropriation and exploitation of land."¹²⁰ The power of maps in affecting one's view of the world can even be so considerable as to become a framework for perception itself, rather than merely for reference, as happened in the case of Margaret Stewart Taylor who, recalling her visit to St Helena in the 1960s, describes how "[a]s we drew near the top of Diana's Peak we began to see the southern part of the island, spread out like a map far below [...]"¹²¹ Like mapping, naming too has been seen as an essential part of processes of colonial appropriation. According to Paul Carter, the point "where spatial history begins [is] not in a particular year, nor in a particular place, but *in the act of naming*." It is this act of naming, he claims, which transforms a mere space, in this case the new island, into a place, "that is, a space with history", and which opens up this former space to colonisation, "making a metaphorical word-place which others may one day inhabit."¹²²

Although Thomé Lopez makes no mention of the fact, one can assume with certainty, that St Helena was named upon its discovery by someone in da Gama's fleet, as was the common practice of the day. Unlike other islands, St Helena has always been known by its original name, in whichever language and spelling it was rendered. Some uncertainty, however, surrounds the assumption that the island was named in honour of Saint Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine. Although the island's discovery is usually dated to the 21 May, this appears to be due to an effort on the part of even the early writers to square the island's name with a suitable date, that day being St Helena's Day, which is celebrated on 21 May in the Eastern calendar, although it is celebrated on 18 August in the Western calendar.¹²³ It is mere conjecture, therefore, that João da Nova called there on that day, while Thomé Lopez is known to have arrived off St Helena on 30 July 1503, a date unconnected with any Saint by that name. If anything, St Helena may have been named in association with St Helena Bay in Southern Africa, which faces the island to its north west, and which was visited and named by Vasco da Gama on 7 November 1498 during his celebrated first voyage to India. The 7 November had no

¹²⁰ Simon Ray, 'Inscribing the Emptiness: Cartography, Exploration and the Construction of Australia' in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds), *Describing the Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994), 127. For an excellent discussion of this aspect of post-colonial theory, see Geoff King, *Mapping Reality: An Exploration of Cultural Cartographies* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

¹²¹ Margaret Stewart Taylor, *St. Helena: Ocean Roadhouse* (London: Robert Hale, 1969), 73.

¹²² Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), xxiv.

¹²³ See David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 188.

obvious connection with any Saint Helena feast day either, and writers on da Gama's voyages have made no attempts to explain the choice of name.

I have already discussed how prior to its discovery, the existence of one or more islands in the locations of St Helena had already been posited. Once St Helena was discovered it was inevitably charted, the earliest known example being a manuscript atlas by Valentim de Moravia, later known as Valentim Fernandes Alamao, which dates from some time between 1506 and 1510. His chart of St Helena is one of 39 sketch maps of Atlantic islands bound in a collection of his manuscripts and is of particular interest because it represents St Helena merely in a stylised shape (*illustration 5*).¹²⁴ This representation, different from the stylisation of other islands, hence constitutes less of a chart than the mere representation of a boundary where previously there had been nothing but unbounded ocean. Considering that de Moravia's outlines of the other Atlantic islands bear equally little resemblance to the true course of their coastlines, de Moravia's sketch maps can be seen more as a system of geographical signifiers, rather than an attempt a geographically accurate representation of these islands.

The earliest chart to show the solitary island of St Helena, as opposed to a group of islands, is a map by Pedro Reinel, dating from 1510.¹²⁵ Reinel's depiction of St Helena corresponds to the drawings of Valentim de Moravia. The correspondence between Reinel and de Moravia may be of course be explained by suggesting that both may have been working from the same source. In either case, no date before 1510 can be assumed for certain.

Having been charted, the boundary represented by de Moravia 'demanded' to be filled in.¹²⁶ The first individual map of St Helena, engraved by Pieter van den Keere, was published in 1598 in a miniature world atlas, the *Caert-Thresoor, Inhoudende de Tafelen des Gantsche Werults Landen* (*illustration 6*).¹²⁷ Apart from various points along the coast, none

¹²⁴ Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. hisp. 27 (583 Catalogus Codicum Manu Scriptorum Bibliotheca Regia Monacensis, 1858); see also J.A. Smeller, *Über Valentim Fernandez Alema und seine Sammlung von Nachrichten [...]* (Munich: 1847).

¹²⁵ For a reproduction, see Charles H. Hapgood, *Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings: Evidence of Advanced Civilization in the Ice Age*, revised edition (London: Turnstone Books, 1979; orig. 1969), 116.

¹²⁶ For a detailed discussion of some maps from this period, see Barry Weaver, 'Early Views and Maps of St. Helena, 1596-1814' (typescript, 1998).

¹²⁷ Barent Langenes, *Caert-Thresoor, Inhoudende de Tafelen des Gantsche Werults Landen, met Beschryvingen Verlicht [...] nu Alles van Nieuw [...] Toegereet* (Middelburg: 1598).

of the as yet little explored interior of the island has been named. However, the island's fruitfulness and its appropriation are indicated by an excessively prominent depiction of Chapel Valley, showing numerous trees, including the word 'pomar' ('orchard'), and the chapel itself.

Interestingly, two years prior to the publication of this map, Linschoten published his famous, detailed views of the coastline of St Helena (*illustration 4a*).¹²⁸ One of these views, intended for use by mariners, is remarkable in that it does in fact consist of three views of the island, albeit set in the same seascape, rather giving the impression of a group of island (which recalls St Helena's pre-conception on la Cosa's chart of 1500). The emphasis of these views is still on the island's exterior, although individuals can be seen on some of the hilltops and hillsides.

Despite an obvious emphasis on St Helena's coastline, the island's yet unexplored exterior is stressed in subtle ways in two prints published in the 1600s. Both prints represent a cross between a view and a map, and as such bridge the gap between an individual's actual perception of the island from ground level, and the cartographer's need to represent the island in form of an all-revealing plan. The first of these prints presents a bird's eye view of the island showing six rivers running in parallel lines from the island's north west coast (the coast familiar to mariners) into the island's rocky and barren interior (*illustration 7*).¹²⁹ The second print is only known for its inclusion in a British Library edition of Melchior Estacio do Amaral's *Tratado das Batalhas*, published in 1604 (*illustration 8*).¹³⁰ Despite its depiction of the island's outline, the print is devoid of

¹²⁸ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naar Oost ofte Portugaels Indien [...] 1579-1592* (Amsterdam: 1569). It must be borne in mind that the majority of these early maps and views are based on draughts and drawings made well before they were published in print. Linschoten's views, for instance, are based on a visit in 1589, nine years prior to their publication.

¹²⁹ The version illustrated is from Alain Manesson Mallett, *Description de l'Univers* (Paris: 1683), which is based on a version in John Ogilby, *Africa, Being an Accurate Description of the Regions of Ægypt, Barbary, Libya [...] with all the Adjacent Islands* (London: 1670), which in turn is based on a view which first appeared in Olfert Dapper's *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche eylanden* (Amsterdam: 1668) of which Ogilby's Africa is a translation. Given that the island is shown as uninhabited, the view is most likely based on a sketch dating from Johan Nieuwhof's visit to St Helena in 1658. It is for this reason, that I feel justified in including it in at this point in my discussion.

¹³⁰ For a reproduction and further details, see C.R. Boxer, 'An Introduction to the História Trágico-Marítima', reprinted in C.R. Boxer, *From Lisbon to Goa, 1500-1750: Studies in Portuguese Maritime Enterprise* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 73-4.

Nach Figur. LIII gegen P.
Die S. Helenen Insel.

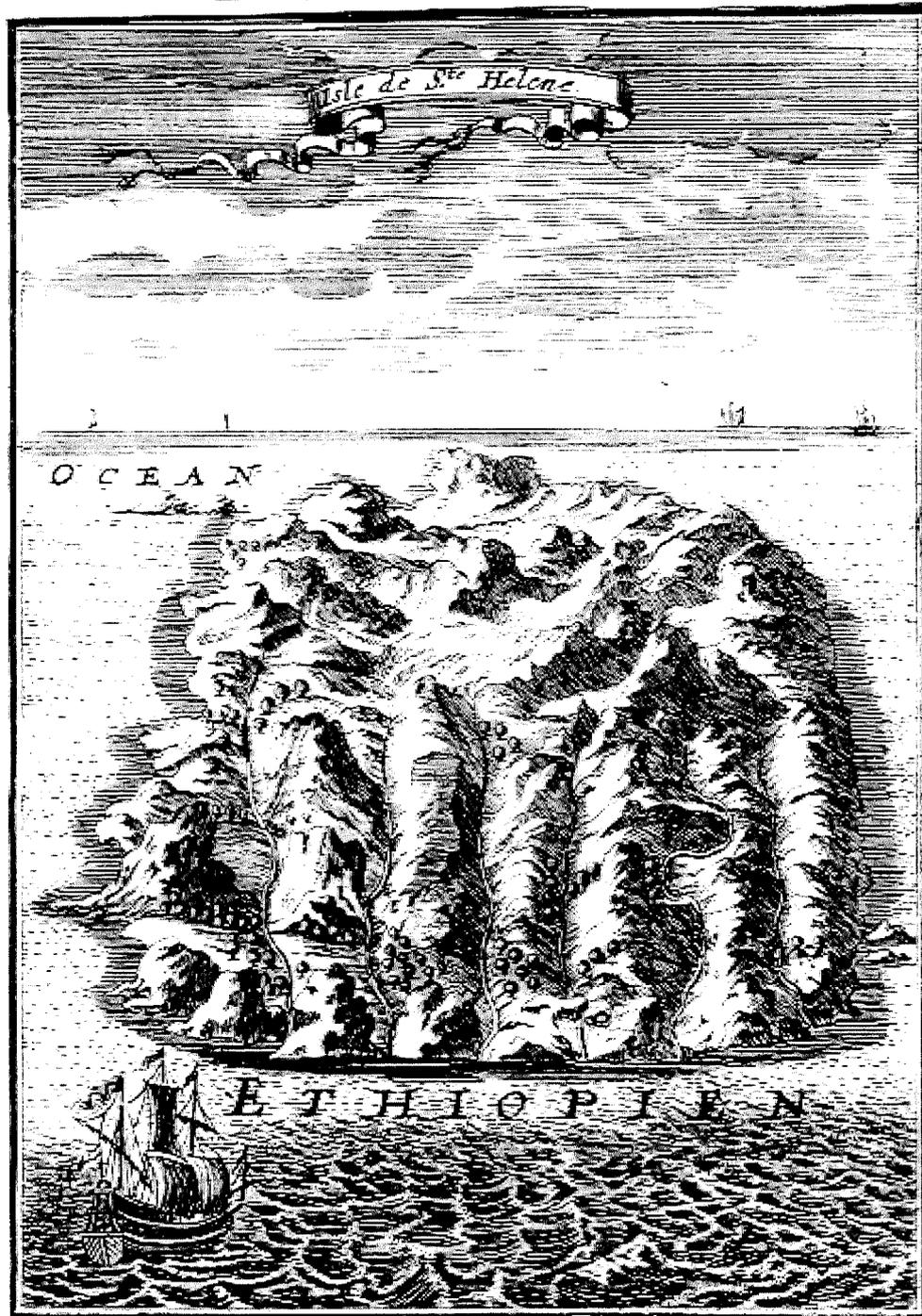


Illustration 7: 'Isle de S^{te} Helene'

source: Alain Manesson Mallett, *Description de l'Univers* (Paris: 1683)

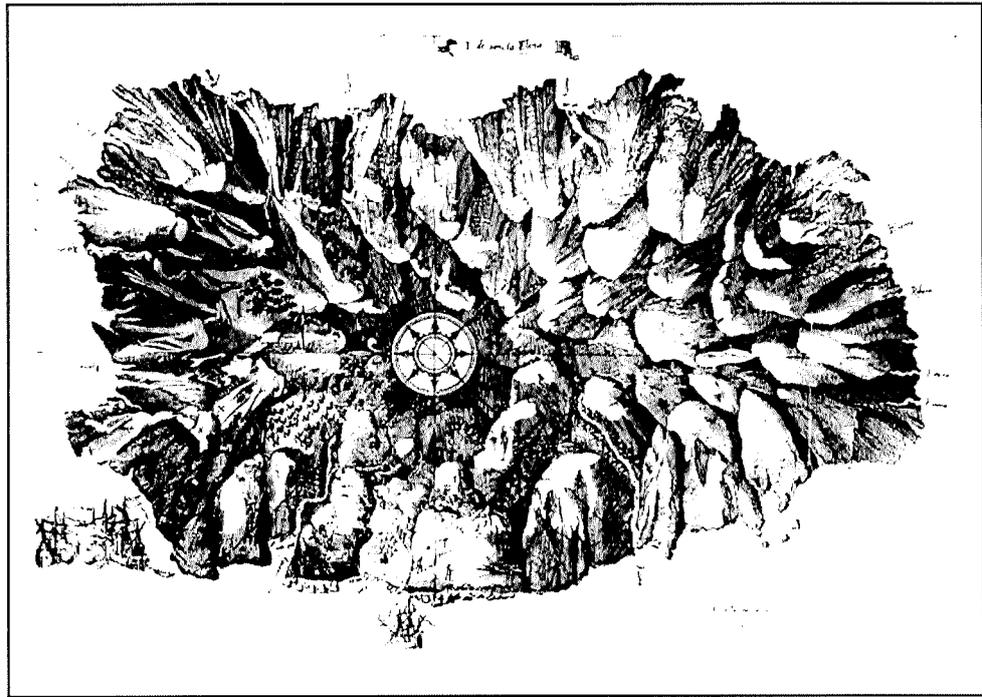


Illustration 8: 'I de Sancta Helena'

source: Melchior Estacio do Amaral, *Tratado das Batalhas* (1604)

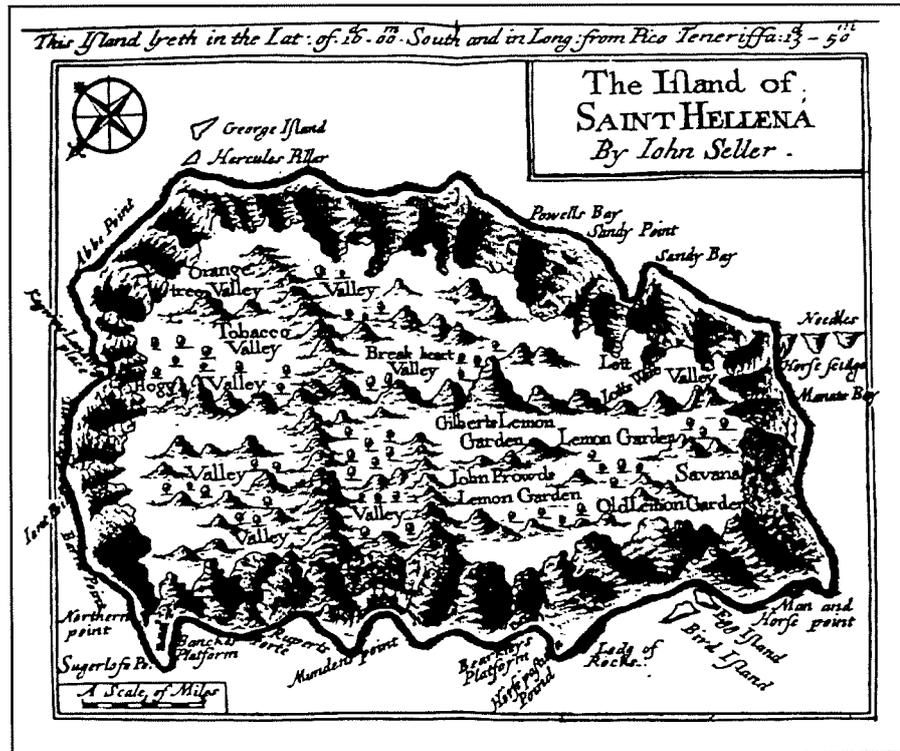


Illustration 9: 'The Island of Saint Hellenena'

source: John Seller, *Atlas Maritimus, or the Sea Atlas* (London: 1682)

any representation of its interior which is wholly obscured from view, as it is in reality, by the island's mountainous coastline.¹³¹ Instead, at the heart of this plan is a compass, obscuring a dark and mysterious pit. Both prints direct the gaze to the island's interior, one by means of the compass, the other by means of the lines of the river. The interior remains devoid of features, but the invitation to supply such features is expressed quite clearly.

On the basis of these prints, I do not concur with John Noyce's assertion that "[c]olonial landscape is not found by the colonizer as a neutral and empty space", something which he calls "one of the most persistent myths of colonization." Rather, Noyce argues that it is the "production of empty space", which is one of the most important spatial strategies in the age of empire.¹³² In the case of St Helena there was no need for "the cartographic practice of representing the unknown as a blank", which "actively erases (and legitimises the erasure of) existing social and geo-cultural formations in preparation for the projection and subsequent emplacement of a new order."¹³³

Even if there were no social or geo-cultural forms to be erased on St Helena, the island's flora and fauna was not allowed to persist undisturbed, as had been noted extensively by Charles Darwin on a visit to the island in 1836.¹³⁴ Instead, it was St Helena's landscape that came to be erased and cultivated by those who colonised the island. This was a fact not lost on those visitors. Berthold Seemann, who called at the island in 1853, writes: "We also paid a visit to Diana's Peak, the most elevated spot in St. Helena, and the only one where the indigenous vegetation still prevails; yet even there it is fast receding, - like the Indian race before the Caucasian, - and in almost every other part has been completely superseded by plants introduced from foreign countries."¹³⁵

¹³¹ I suspect this print may solely be based on Linschoten's views of 1598.

¹³² John Noyce, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 6-7.

¹³³ Simon Ray, 'Inscribing the Emptiness: Cartography, Exploration and the Construction of Australia' in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds), *Describing the Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994), 116.

¹³⁴ Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches [...] During the Voyage Around the World of H.M.S. 'Beagle'* (London: John Murray, 1905), 466-71.

¹³⁵ Berthold Seemann, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Herald During the Years 1845-51*, Vol.II (London: Reeve and Co., 1853), 275.

This was undoubtedly the inspiration for Governor Sterndale's comments in 1901 about the "struggle" between the indigenous and the imported flora. "As the Red Indians slowly retreated before the pale faces, so the old flora of St. Helena, which clothed the now barren rocks down to the sea in the days when [...] Juan de Nova discovered the lonely isle [...], has retreated inland to the peaks of Actæon and Diana." St Helena's only real indigenous 'Other', both by analogy and by description, is the island's landscape and its endemic species, for as Sterndale writes, in the area covering the peaks "the foliage strikes you as being of an old-world character" and the trees have a "weird, unfamiliar look".¹³⁶ If, to return to an earlier point, there was anything on St Helena to be erased in preparation for the emplacement of a new order, that is, for its colonisation by cultivation, it was the island's old world flora.

John Seller's 1682 map of St Helena is the first to provide a record of this colonisation and to fill the compass void of the *Tratado das Batalhas* map, though not by portraying the island's interior in any further detail (*illustration 9*).¹³⁷ Instead, Seller simply inscribed the island's interior with topographic labels, such as 'Tobacco Valley' and 'Savana', and apparent markers of ownership, such as 'John Prowds Lemon Garden' and 'Gilberts Lemon garden'. In addition, and for the first time, the Company's main fort in Chapel Valley and its fortifications along the coast are shown and named, such as 'Ruperts Forte', and 'Bearkley's Platform'. It is not least through such place names, that the colonising of St Helena has become inscribed upon the island, nor has this fact gone unnoticed in the St Helena literature. In 1880 the then Governor Hudson Ralph Janisch compiled a little booklet entitled *Scraps from the Records*, drawing on the consultations dating from 1673 to 1836, which he addressed "to those who are familiar with the names" of a range of island localities, and which presented details "relating to the name or to some incident connected with the spot".¹³⁸ In his booklet, Janisch argued that some "old names seem to have originated, some from the settlers who formerly held the land [...], some from peculiar formation or natural feature in the place which explains its own name [...]. Others from some accident or event which made the spot notable,

¹³⁶ R.A. Sterndale, 'St. Helena in the Present Time', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol.IX (1901), 102.

¹³⁷ John Seller, *Atlas Maritimus, or the Sea Atlas* (London: 1982).

¹³⁸ Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Scraps from the Records* (St Helena, 1880), i.

[although] it does not seem to have been the fashion in those days to indulge in romantic and poetical names of the modern description [...]."¹³⁹

Once the decision had been taken to occupy St Helena permanently, a new desire arose for the island to be charted in great detail. Consequently, Capt. John Dutton had been instructed by the Company in 1659 "that you cause an exact draught of the whole island to be platted downe in a large scale, after the manner of a landscript, by the most ingenious person that shall be present, by which wee may discern the severall vallies, hills, & ridges in the said island; and these to send unto us by the first opportunitie."¹⁴⁰ While this draught has not survived, it (or one very like it) was certainly still in existence at the time of the island's conquest in 1673 by Sir Richard Munden. Commenting on Munden's journal of 1673, Richard Gibson complained to Samuel Pepys that there was a serious flaw with Munden's "describing St. Helena by his giving new names to all forts and bays thereon so as it becomes useless to such as know not the Island; who cannot by reading Sir Richard Munden's journal find any such names as are in the draft."¹⁴¹ Naming, here, was certainly a matter of utility.

Despite Dutton's draught of the island and the increasing knowledge of the interior's particulars, when it came to regranting the island to the Company in 1673, the language of the King's charter of 31 December is not concerned with the particulars of St Helena's geography, although it acknowledges it to be an island, but with conveying the totality of

¹³⁹ Ibid. A more recent investigation of St Helena place names is presented in a paper by Vivienne Dickson, 'St. Helena Place Names', *Names*, Vol.21, No.4 (1973). Dickson notes that "[b]ecause of the remarkable conservatism which the islanders have displayed in their retention of place-names, the island's history is written on its map. It is exceptional for a new name to replace an old." (205.) However, there is a contradiction here, albeit one that fits the facts. While there is 'history' written all over the map of St Helena, it is primarily the island's early history which is recorded on its present day maps. Perhaps it is for this reason also, as Dickson points out with no regret, that St Helena has not commemorated the visits or reigns of monarchs. "There are no Queen Victoria Squares or King George Avenues for later generations to deplore when the anti-British fit comes on them". (210.) Napoleon Street, however, recalls one of the island's more infamous visitors. Overall, Dickson's concern is primarily with establishing a typology of island place names, although her approach is much the same as Janisch's in relating a number of incidents or explaining the geographical features underlying names. Surprisingly, she admits that "[o]n my visits to the island I have not been able to examine the archives". (205)

¹⁴⁰ IOLR: E/3/85; see also Foster 1919.

¹⁴¹ Letter from Richard Gibson to Samuel Pepys, 7.4.1678 (Cambridge, Pepys MS. 2350), quoted in G.G. Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol.36, No.1 (1950), 67.

the Company's right to ownership of the island. In specific, the charter grants the East India Company

all that the said Island of Sancta Helena with all right profits Territories and Appurtenances whatsoever and all the Soil Lands Fields Woods Mountains Farms Lakes Pools Harbours Rivers Bays Isles Islets situate or being within the Bounds or Limits thereof [...] And all the Veins Mines and Quarries [...] whether the same be already discovered or not discovered [...] And all and singular Royalties Revenues Rents Customs Castles Forts and Buildings and Fortifications erected and to be erected on the Premises or any part thereof and all Priviledges Franchises Preheminences and Heriditaments whatsoever within the same [...].¹⁴²

Despite such totality, possession of St Helena nevertheless had to be manifested in a more tangible manner. As mentioned earlier, according to Patricia Seed, it is acts of planting and building which have been seen to establish English rights of possession overseas. Moreover, Seed argues that "[a]s a sign of possession the garden represented the entire colonial ambition to possess the land by establishing a part of the project in a central and visible way."¹⁴³ This use of the garden as a symbolic claim to the whole is acknowledged in a striking plan of St Helena by Bellin, based on Seller, published in France in 1764 (*illustrations 10a and 10b*).¹⁴⁴ Based on van den Keere's map of over one and a half centuries earlier, its only novelty is the imposition onto St Helena's landscape of detailed depictions of the Company's fort and plantation in James' Valley and of the Company's large plantation in the country (at what is now known as Plantation Gardens). A separate map shows the layout of the fort and plantation in James' Valley in more detail. In both these maps, but especially in Bellin's depiction of the plantation in the country, the rectangular layout and precise delineation of the gardens fits uneasily into the rugged terrain of the island's interior, thereby emphasising the more so the impact of deliberate cultivation on the natural state of the island. More so than any other prints, it

¹⁴² Reprinted in Sheila Lambert (ed), *House of Commons Sessional Papers of the Eighteenth Century, George III, East India Company 1767 and 1773* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc.), xxv-xxvi.

¹⁴³ Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 29.

¹⁴⁴ J. N. Bellin, *Petit Atlas Maritime. Recueil de Cartes et Plans des Quatre Parties du Monde* (Paris: 1764), Vol.III, plate No.123.

these maps by Bellin which give the starkest portrayal of the island's acquisition by planting.

The overall extent of the island's acquisition was manifested in the early part of the nineteenth century in three particularly noteworthy representation of St Helena, the first of which is Lieut. Read's *Geographical Plan*, published in 1815.¹⁴⁵ Read still employed the convention found in all St Helena maps to that date, of depicting the hills of the island's coastline and interior in profile. Unlike Sellers, however, he is able to enhance his plan with many more place names, while also depicting roads, farms and houses, along with the names of their principal inhabitants. Taking Read's comprehensiveness into a literally further dimension was Major Robert Francis Seales' model of St Helena, which on his own initiative he had begun to construct in 1821 on a scale of one foot to one mile. When hearing of his project, the island's governor and council, and even the Company's directors in London, were so impressed with the only half completed model, that Seale was to be paid £500 for completing it. In particular, he was instructed to show "every fortification, house, road, garden, enclosure and division of land." The model having been completed, presumably in the details required, it was shipped to England, where it was displayed first at the East India Company's College at Addiscombe, then at the Museum of Artillery in the Rotunda at Woolwich, where it is said to have been destroyed in 1932.¹⁴⁶

A comparably detailed depiction of St Helena was G.W. Melliss' trigonometrical survey of the island, undertaken between the years 1825 and 1836, which is recorded on a single sheet map, the original of which is kept at the Legal and Lands Department on St Helena. Melliss' survey shows and lists 265 estates, the names of these estates and of their proprietors, their number of acres, as well as miscellaneous information respecting these properties. The survey also features a separate index of estates belonging to the East India Company, a list of the island's principal springs, and an alphabetical index of "remarkable places inland". By the time Melliss' survey was completed in 1836, it conveniently served to prepare St Helena for yet another phase of its appropriation, its transfer to the Crown.

¹⁴⁵ It was first published in a cloth backed version, folded into a little booklet entitled *A Descriptive Sketch of Saint Helena, to Accompany Lieut. Read's Geographical Plan of the Island* (London: 1815).

¹⁴⁶ For further details see G.C.Kitching's account of R.F. Seale and his model in Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 303-9.

The East India Company's possession of St Helena continued until 1834, although part of the island's administration was temporarily transferred to His Majesty's government during 1815 to 1821, while Napoleon was exiled on the island.¹⁴⁷ However, in 1833, after lengthy debate at Westminster and at India House, an extensive Act of Parliament was passed "for effecting an Arrangement with the East India Company, and for the better Government of His Majesty's Indian Territories". This act had become necessary as the Company's charter was once again up for renewal. The preamble to the India Act stated that "whereas the said Company are entitled to or claim the Lordships and Islands of St. Helena and Bombay under Grants from the Crown [...]: And whereas the said Company have consented that all their Rights [...] to or in the said Territories [...] shall [...] be placed at the Disposal of Parliament [...]: Be it therefore enacted [...]" that, as prescribed by section 112 of the Act,

the Island of *Saint Helena*, and all Forts, Factories, public Edifices and Hereditaments whatsoever in the said Island, and all Stores and Property thereon fit or used for the Service of the Government thereof, should be vested in His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and the said Island should be governed by such Orders as His Majesty in Council should from Time to Time issue in that Behalf.¹⁴⁸

The date set for St Helena's transfer to the Crown was 22 April 1834. However, matters proved less straight forward than initially expected and there is an obscure entry on St Helena in the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register* for 1834 which states that a "report has been in circulation, that on account of some informality in the new India Bill, his Majesty's Government are not prepared to take possession of the island; and that in consequence some overtures have been made to the East India Company to retain it

¹⁴⁷ For details of the island's status during the time of Napoleon's exile see T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924).

¹⁴⁸ *Act of Parliament, Gulielmi IV Regis, Anno Tertio & Quarto, CAP. LXXXV*. The section quoted is still in force today, and the St Helena Constitution Order 1988 is made with reference to the powers conferred by this section, as well as by related pieces of later legislation.

under their management for a year longer."¹⁴⁹ In the event, the Company did indeed continue to administer the island until February 1836.

Nevertheless, on 21 April 1834 a proclamation was published at St Helena informing the inhabitants of the provisions of the India Act of 1833, as well as of the Company's agreement to administer the island until the year following. Notably, this proclamation was headed by the Royal Arms, rather than those of the East India Company.¹⁵⁰ And there were other markers of the island's new status as a Crown colony. As the island's council records for the 22 April 1834 note: "Yesterday a Proclamation was published respecting the transfer of the Island to the Crown, which is pasted in the Proclamation Book dated 21st April 1834. This morning at Daylight the Royal Standard was hoisted at Ladder Hill, and at 12 O'Clock a royal salute was fired from Munden's Battery."¹⁵¹

As late as October 1835, well after the originally agreed one year during which the Company was to continue to administer the Island, a Royal Order in Council was finally made to provide St Helena retrospectively with its first Crown 'Constitution'. Apart from affirming what was to be the law on St Helena now that it was a Crown possession, it regulated the appointment of and powers pursuant to the Governor and Council.¹⁵² The Company's care-taker government continued longer than expected, and it was not until 24 February 1836, that Major General Middlemore, St Helena's first Crown Governor arrived.¹⁵³ On 27 February, a proclamation was published by the governor, once again displaying the Royal Arms, which declared that

His Majesty William the Fourth, by the Grace of GOD, King of Great Britain and Ireland, &c. &c. &c. Having been Graciously pleased to take possession of the Island of St.Helena in the name of the Crown, and having placed the Government thereof, under the management and controul [*sic*] of His Majesty's Ministers, has directed me to notify to the Inhabitants of the Island, as well as to all others

¹⁴⁹ *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China, and Australasia*, Vol.XIII, N.S. (1834), 132.

¹⁵⁰ SHGA: Original Proclamations and Notices, 1831-1835.

¹⁵¹ SHGA: St Helena Records, 22.4.1834.

¹⁵² SHGA: His Majesty's Order in Council, St Helena, 12.10.1835.

¹⁵³ This journal was an attempt to continue the 'Records' of the East India Company, but the first volume soon turned into the 'Entry Book - Correspondence: Colonial Secretary', under which title the journal and its compendium volumes are filed.

connected therewith, His Majesty's gracious disposition to make every necessary and proper Provision for the good Government of this Settlement.¹⁵⁴

On 12 March, sixteen days later, Governor Middlemore reported on his arrival at St Helena in his first despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, whom he informed that he had "taken possession of the Island of St Helena in the name of His Majesty [...]."¹⁵⁵ It is somewhat uncertain why Middlemore had been instructed to take possession of St Helena, when the island had by law been a Crown colony since 22 April 1834. In any event, I can find no evidence to support Gosse's version that Governor Middlemore's "first official duty on landing was formally to take possession of the island in the name of King William the Fourth, when the red and white striped flag of the Company was lowered and the Standard of Great Britain hoisted in its place."¹⁵⁶ In any case, the Company's flag was never flown at St Helena. However, once again, Gosse's version succeeds in imbuing the island's transfer from the Company to the Crown with the symbolic effect required by his narrative.¹⁵⁷

In any event, the consequences of the Crown's take over of the island were severe, not only in economic terms, but especially in the way the island and its inhabitants came to be perceived. This was already pointed out by John Melliss in 1875.

The view taken of St. Helena by the Home Government has, I think, altogether been a mistake. It has been looked upon as a colony, and, under the management of the Colonial Office, made self-supporting. It has, however, no claim to the former, and endeavours to make it the latter must end in failure. The place is really a fortification, and, as the key to the whole of the South Atlantic, is one of

¹⁵⁴ This is the date recorded in the colony's 'Blue Book'. In the 'Proceedings in the Colonial Department' the proclamation is recorded as having been issued on 29th February.

¹⁵⁵ SHGA: Governor's Out-Letters, 12.3.1836.

¹⁵⁶ Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 302; c.f. the events recorded for 22 April 1834.

¹⁵⁷ For further details on St Helena's transfer to the Crown, see Alexander Schulenburg, *A Documentary History of the Transfer of the Island of St Helena [...] 1834* (St Helena: 1994).

England's greatest fortresses, and as such ought to be under the control of either the Admiralty or the War Department.¹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, even under the Crown, St Helena was considered an important naval base, at least until 1906 when for the first time in its history the island's garrison was withdrawn completely. And small as it was, St Helena found a firm place in the long list of Britain's nineteenth century imperial possessions, in particular amongst the names of the many ports that lined the shipping routes of an ever increasing empire. For Philo-Israel, writing in his *The Geography of the Gates* (1880), as for de Barros and Melliss before him, St Helena's role in the British Empire was indeed that of 'one of England's greatest fortresses' which had been made available on account of no less than divine providence.

This spot which has been an invaluable acquisition for our commercial navy, and an indispensable *rendezvous* for our ships of war too, navigating the tropical ocean in the South Atlantic, was obtained in peace. It fell to our nation, humanly speaking, by mere chance, though, as Israelites, we well know that this island, being a veritable "Gate" of the ocean high-way [...] was placed in our hands by our heavenly Father, the Father of His chosen people, in fulfilment of his promise to our forefather, when he swore to him that "his seed should possess the Gate of his enemies."¹⁵⁹

Philo-Israel asserts that although other nations may have held the island previously, when the Dutch abandoned St Helena, "[j]ust then the British Lion, or House of Israel, was beckoned to the island by their God, and warned to take possession at once and for ever."¹⁶⁰

St Helena is still a British possession today, over three hundred years after John Dutton first landed at the island.¹⁶¹ An interesting addition to this story of colonisation is

¹⁵⁸ John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875), 44.

¹⁵⁹ Philo-Israel, *The Geography of the Gates* (London: Robert Banks, 1880), 103.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁶¹ For the most recent discussion of the political status of Britain's remaining overseas territories, see *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories* (London: HMSO, 1999). For an earlier

the fact that St Helena has meanwhile acquired two dependencies of its own, Ascension Island and the Tristan da Cunha group (including Gough Island). The former was transferred from the control of the Admiralty in 1922, the latter was made a dependency in 1938. Both Ascension Island and the Tristan Group had been annexed by Britain in 1815 to prevent other nations from launching attempts to rescue Napoleon from St Helena. Neither had been inhabited or colonised previously, but the history of their discovery and settlement, while an interesting one in itself, shall not concern me here.¹⁶²

discussion, see George Drower, *Britain's Dependent Territories: A Fistful of Islands* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1992).

¹⁶² See Duff Hart-Davis, *Ascension: the Story of a South Atlantic Island* (London: Constable, 1972); Allan Crawford, *Tristan da Cunha and the Roaring Forties* (London: Charles Skilton, 1982).

”IS BUT LATELY MADE SOCIABLE”

~ OF RESIDENTS AND SETTLERS



The gradual settlement of St Helena was intricately linked to the equally gradual process of the taking of possession of the island. Given that the island was uninhabited at the time of its discovery, it would appear largely inappropriate to examine its settlement with reference to the literature on 'settler societies',¹ considering that such societies have generally been defined "as societies in which Europeans have settled, where their descendants have remained politically dominant over indigenous people, and where a heterogeneous society has developed in class, ethnic and racial terms."² Nevertheless, recent studies of settler societies have been valuable in shifted the focus away from

¹ See, for instance, Anthony Lemon and Norman Pollock (eds), *Studies in Overseas Settlement and Population* (London: Longman, 1980). For a general overview of early colonial societies, see G.V. Scammell, *The First Colonial Age: European Overseas Expansion c. 1400-1715* (London: Harper Collins, 1989), chapter 6.

² Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Introduction: Beyond Dichotomies - Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class in Settler Societies.' in Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis (eds), *Unsettling Settler Societies: Articulations of Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 3.

selected, dominant European groups of migrants and onto the diversity of settlers and the settlement processes. "Hence, adventurers, merchants, homesteaders, convicts, slaves, indentured labourers, religious and political refugees and many other types of migrants [...] have all shaped the settler societies to which they migrated." ³ Such a stance towards the colonising of St Helena is certainly more relevant than one positing a mere binarism of coloniser and colonised.

HERMITAGE AND HIDEAWAY

Writing in the sixteenth century, Leo Africanus reports in his *The History and Description of Africa*, that at St Helena "the kings of Portugall haue enacted, that none may remaine to inhabite, except it be sometime two or three sicke persons for the recouerie of their health [...]"⁴, although no such edict has survived in the records.⁵ Nevertheless, even prior to St Helena's settlement by the East India Company in 1659, the island had not been completely devoid of residents other than the sick, however temporary. Indeed, the most notable way in which the Portuguese made St Helena their own was by a process of cultivation which was quite unlinked to permanent settlement.

According to a description of St Helena by the sixteenth century Portuguese chronicler and theologian J. Osorio, "[t]here are many delightful rivers in this place. It is covered with fine trees, and the air is temperate and healthy; and after it was inhabited and cultivated [...] it abounded in all kinds of cattle, and the soil produced plenty of all sorts of fruit and refreshing herbs. It is now rendered the most useful spot for our

³ Ibid., 5.

⁴ Robert Brown (ed), *The History and Description of Africa [...] Written by Leo Africanus*, Vol.I (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896), 92.

⁵ Interestingly, this Portuguese approach to permanent residency on St Helena is not unlike the regulations on residency at Ascension Island today. Section 2. (1) of the Ascension Ordinance No. 4 of 1977 states: "For the avoidance of doubt, it is hereby declared and confirmed that there is no entitlement for any person to land or remain in Ascension." Despite a 'population' of 722, everyone residing at Ascension Island does so merely by virtue of having been granted permission to land and remain there by the island's administrator. [*St. Helena in Figures 1992* (St Helena: Development and Economic Planning Department, 1991).]

people who trade to India."⁶ This fruitfulness of St Helena and its consequent usefulness to trade was given visual expression in a print published in Amsterdam in 1652 as a fold-out in *Klare Beschryving van't Eyland Sanct Helena* (illustration 11).⁷

The implication of Osorio's description is that St Helena was not of itself rendered useful to Portuguese shipping. It is this need for cultivation which David Spurr considers one of the principal aspects of what he calls the 'proprietary vision' of colonial appropriation. "It effaces its own mark of appropriation by transforming it into the response to a putative appeal on the part of the colonized land or people. This appeal may take the form of chaos that calls for restoration of order, of absence that calls for affirming presence, of natural abundance that awaits the creative hand of technology."⁸ Credit for transforming the island into more than a mere watering place was given to one Fernao Lopes who "sowed and planted this island with various fruits and trees, which afterwards became extremely serviceable to the ships putting in to water at that place."⁹ At least one writer, the Frenchman Tavernier, appreciated this method of colonisation as being a distinct virtue of the Portuguese, when he described St Helena saying that "[t]here are a great store of Citrons, and some Oranges, which the *Portugals* had formerly planted there. For that Nation has that vertue, that wherever they come, they make the place the better for those that come after them; whereas the *Hollanders* endeavour to destroy all things wherever they set footing."¹⁰

⁶ Jerome Osorio, *The History of the Portuguese During the Reign of Emmanuel*, Vol.I, translated by James Gibbs (London: A. Millar, 1752), 126.

⁷ This print has never before been reproduced, just as the volume it is taken from appears to have escaped the attention of earlier writers on St Helena, although it is clearly listed in the British Library Catalogue under 'St Helena'. In the pictorial history of St Helena this is the only print to muster comparison with one of de Bry's engravings for a 1625 edition of Raleigh's *Guiana*, entitled 'Devoured by *Lagartos*', which reveals and represents the newly discovered delta-system of the Orinoco as an earthly paradise, "a kind of heraldic landscape: a wild place endowed with order and regulation." [Charles Nicholl, *The Creature in the Map: A Journey to El Dorado* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), 153; a reproduction of de Bry's engraving appears on page 154.]

⁸ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), 28.

⁹ Jerome Osorio, *The History of the Portuguese During the Reign of Emmanuel*, Vol.II, translated by James Gibbs (London: A. Millar, 1752), 88. I shall discuss Lopes' cultivation of the island in chapter 4.

¹⁰ John Baptista Tavernier, *The Six Travels of John Baptista Tavernier [...] Through Turkey and Persia to the Indies*, Second Part (London: 1678), 207. Even more so than as a result of sowing and planting, it was the



Illustration 11: 'Het Vruchtbaer St Helena' (detail)

source: *Klare Besgryving Van't Eyland Sanct Helena* (Amsterdam: Jodocus Hondius, 1652)

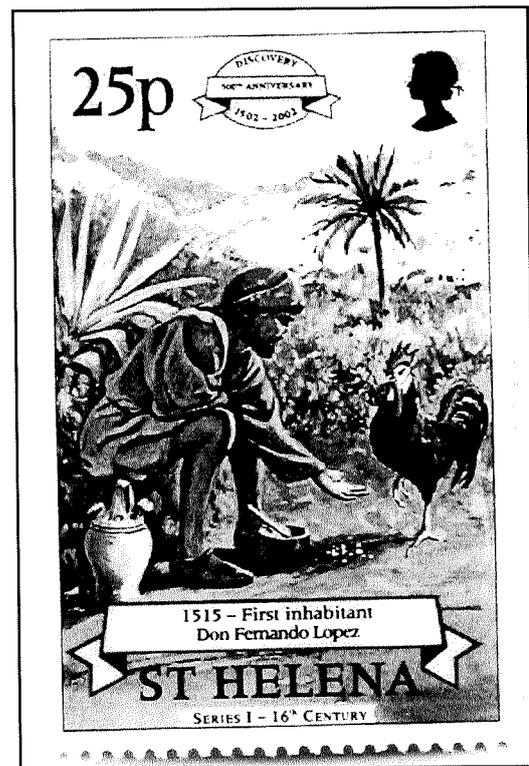


Illustration 12: Don Fernando Lopez - 25 Pence Postage Stamp (1997)

source: Philatelic Bureau, St Helena

Even a contemporary island song virtually treats Fernao Lopes as the quasi-mythical founder of the colony, as does a recent commemorative stamp (*illustration 12*).¹¹ In this respect alone, his story deserves a closer look. As reported by the Portuguese historian Gaspar Correa in his *Lendas da India*, Fernao Lopes, a Portuguese, is reported to have been a traitor to Portugal's interests at Goa in 1512. In consequence, he was punished by severe mutilation, before being placed on board a vessel returning from India to Portugal.¹²

[T]his ship brought him to the island of Saint Helena, where they took on water, and there this Fernao Lopes remained hidden. When they found he was missing, they searched for him, and when they could not find him they left him a barrel full of biscuits, and slices of meat, and dried fish, and salt, and fire, and old clothes which each one gave, and the ship sailed, and they left him a letter that any ship coming there should bring word whether he was dead or alive, and if he showed up they should provide him with whatever he needed; and the ship left.

Fernao Lopes, seeing the ship leave, came out from the undergrowth and took what he found, and relit the fire which had gone out, and then he looked for stones, which he beat one against the other, and saw that they made fire, and he kept them. So, with the four fingers of his left hand, and the stump of his right

livestock left at the island by the Portuguese which helped to open up the interior of the island in its own particular way, for as Francis Pretty reported just over eighty years after St Helena's discovery, the "mountains are exceedingly high and difficult to climb, and were it not that the vast number of goats and pigs, by trampling, wear the hill-sides into paths, it would be impossible to ascend, and still more to descend." [Albert Gray (ed), *The Voyage of François Pyrard*, Vol.II, Pt.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1890), 300.] Also see Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially 70-4.

¹¹ "Looking through the eyes of Don Fernando, St Helena you must 've been a pretty sight, I know that loneliness was ever with him, But the freedom that you offered, Made ev'rything alright." [Looking Through the Eyes of Don Fernando', words and music by Ralph Peters, 1979, published in Eric M. George (ed), *St Helena Songs, 1941-1994* (St Helena: 1995), 54-5.]

¹² Lopes' story fits the pattern identified by O. Mannoni with respect to tales of island exile, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Tempest*, *Sinbad the Sailor*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, that the reason for their exile "is usually a wrongdoing, deliberate or otherwise, and it constitutes disobedience to the gods, the customs, or more generally the father." [O. Mannoni, *Propero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, second edition (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 99.] While I do not hold with Mannoni's archetypal approach to these stories, especially assuming that of Lopes to be a true account, it is worth noting the similarity.

which had been cut off, as God helped him in his great mercy, he dug into a ravine, in which he made a small cave, which he then enlarged, and sheltered and slept in it, and he covered the mouth of the cave with furze. He found tender herbs which were good to eat, and cooked them with salt in two pipkins which had been left for him.

This being so, the next year a ship came, and seeing the ship he hid himself. The men from the ship came to land and found the cave, and the bed of straw on which he slept, and the bags, and the staves of the barrel in which the biscuits had been left for him, and pipkins, and the coals of fire, and they were amazed and believed that there were negroes who had fled there from another ship, but seeing the clothes decided that he was Portuguese. They got their water, and did not touch anything before they had left him biscuits, and cheeses, and things to eat, and a letter in which they told him that he ought not to hide himself but should speak when a ship called, as they would do him no harm. Then the ship sailed. As the ship was putting to sea, a rooster fell overboard, and the waves brought it to land. Fernao Lopes picked it up and gave it some rice that they had left for him and thereupon the rooster remained with him in such friendly way that it always accompanied him wherever he went, and at night it went to bed with him in the cave. This rooster was with this man for many years, and he called to it, and afterwards with the passage of time this man appeared and talked with the people from the ships that passed, and they all gave him things to plant and sow, so that he raised many pumpkins, pomegranates, ducks, chickens, pigs, breeding goats, so that it all became a large stock, and all became wild in the undergrowth.

[...] This man passed ten years on this island, never seeing anyone because he hid himself. On this island there remained a boy who had already fled there, who was with him many years. This boy was the one who made him known to a ship which put in there, which had as its captain Pero Gomes Teixeira, who was Auditor General in India, and who frightened the negro so much he disclosed where he was hidden.¹³

¹³ Beau W. Rowlands, 'Fernao Lopes - St Helena's First Settler - An English Translation of the Original Account', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1992), 14-5. The original can be found in G. Correa, *Lendas da India*, Vol.2, Part 1 (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias, 1860), which, together with Castanheda's account of the same, is also reprinted in Walter de Gray Birch (ed), *The Commentaries of the Great Alfonso Dalboquerque* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1880), 238-41. For a romanticised re-telling of

When Lopes was apprehended by Teixeira, he was greatly alarmed by the prospect of being forced to return to Portugal, for which reason Teixeira "gave him assurance in the name of the King, and swore to him that no one would take him from the island against his will. Thereupon, Fernao Lopes remained assured that no one would take him from the island against his will, and he talked to everybody, and gave them what had been produced on the island, which was greatly increasing; and he died on the island after a long time, which was in the year 1546."¹⁴

If this rendering of Lopes' exile more or less fits the facts, it is interesting to note the way it is presented in *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque*, where the reader is told that

This Fernão Lopez [...] made up his mind to stay there with a slave who belonged to him, and there he ended his days. He was the first who made a habitation in this island, establishing a Hermitage, and planting many trees, and he bred a great number of hogs and goats, so that the site became a very commodious place of shelter for our ships which touched there on the homeward voyage from India.¹⁵

Although, according to Correa, the said slave had been on the island "already", it is Lopes who is accorded the status of having been the first, albeit temporary, settler of St

Lopes' exile, see Hugh Clifford, 'The Earliest Exile of St. Helena', *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol.173 (1903). It has recently been claimed that the story of Lopes' exiled provided the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; see Christina Lamb, 'Was Crusoe a Copycat Castaway?', *The Guardian*, 19.4.1998.

¹⁴ Beau W. Rowlands, 'Fernao Lopes - St Helena's First Settler - An English Translation of the Original Account', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1992), 15. While Lopes' exile on St Helena had hence been voluntary, first the Dutch and later the English took to banishing people on the island long before Napoleon, as is evident from a Dutch narrative of a visit there in 1599, which tells of "a man banished out of our society [...] because he had stroken the master." [*A True Report of the Gainefull, Prosperous and Speedy Voyage to Java in the East Indies*. (London: n.d.). Reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 68-76.]

¹⁵ Walter de Gray Birch (ed), *The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1880), 239-40.

Helena.¹⁶ Such a neglect or devaluation of the contribution by (runaway) slaves to the island's early cultivation can be found in several other accounts as well.

Blacks or escaped slaves were in fact frequent 'residents' on St Helena from very early on. When calling at the island in 1588, Thomas Cavendish and his men "found in the house [adjoining the church] at our coming three slaves who were negroes and one who was born on the island of Java."¹⁷ These inform him of the recent departure and size of the East India fleet, but their presence on the island is not explained. Even more intriguing is Jan Huyghen van Linschoten's narrative of a visit to St Helena in 1589, which includes the account of a number of runaway slaves who stayed on the island for several years. Linschoten writes that

upon a certaine time two Caffares or blacke people of Mosambique, and one Iaver, with two women slaves stoale out of the shippes, and hid themselves in the Rockes of this Island, which are verie high and wilde, whereby men can hardly passe them. They lived there together, and begot children, so that in the ende they were at the least twentie persons, who when the ships were gone, ran throughout the Iland and did much hurt, making their houses & dweling places betweene some of the hilles, where not any of the Portingales had beene, nor yet could easily come at them: and therein they hid themselves untill the shippes were gone, but in the end they were perceived, and the Portingales used all the meanes they could to take them; but they knew so well how to hide and defend themselves, that in many years they could not be taken: in the end, fearing that they might in time be hurtful unto them, and hinder them much, by express commaundement of the king, after long and great labour, they tooke them all and brought them prisoners into Portingall: so that at this present no man dwelleth therein, but only the sick men [...].¹⁸

¹⁶ This theme of the lone European hermit and his black slaved is picked up in Francis Goodwin's *Man in the Moone: or A Discourse of a Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonzales* (London: 1638), the earliest use of St Helena in a work of fiction, but which may well have been written earlier. For detailed background information on Goodwin's story, see Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Voyages to the Moon* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 71-5.

¹⁷ Quoted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 46.

¹⁸ P.A. Tiele (ed), *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies*, Vol.2 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1885), 157.

Given the loss of the relevant Portuguese archives for this period, it is impossible to verify the accuracy of Linschoten's story. What is of interest, however, is not merely the story itself, but also the fact that it has been virtually ignored in the existing St Helena literature. Although Philip Gosse does include the information gleaned from Linschoten's account in his history of the island, it is left to pass without remark,¹⁹ as it is by Percival Teale, who quotes Linschoten in full, without commenting on any part of the account.²⁰ What makes Linschoten's account so noteworthy, though, is that he tells the story of the first people born on St Helena, that is, the children of these runaway slaves, and of how they and their parents lived for a number of years in dwellings they had built themselves in the country beyond Chappel Valley. Prior to Linschoten, there are no accounts of anyone ever having been born on the island, and while there are other accounts of runaway slaves, as well as of hermits staying on the island for several years, there are no other accounts at all of such a resident community of men, women and children.

I do not intend to make a grandiose claim that St Helena had originally been colonised by a group of runaway slaves, for this would go against my processual approach to the island's gradual colonisation. Such a claim, I believe, would be as misplaced as Jackson's claim that 'Fernandez Lopez' (Fernaio Lopes) was "the first Governor of St. Helena"²¹, or Gosse's account of Lopes wandering around St Helena "to explore his kingdom".²² Nevertheless, should Linschoten's account be accurate, there is little point in denying that St Helena's first resident community of men, women and locally born children consisted of runaway slaves from, possibly, Mozambique and Java. Although the reason that this community was not allowed to survive for long can be found in the overall policy of the Portuguese respecting the island's settlement, the community's silencing in the literature appears to have more to do with its having been a community of slaves.

¹⁹ See Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 21.

²⁰ See Percival Teale, *Saint Helena 1502 to 1659 Before the English East India Company* (Natal: 1978), 47-52.

²¹ E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903), 10.

²² Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 6.

The arrival in 1659 of John Dutton and the soldiers and settlers accompanying him marks the beginning of an entirely new phase in the island's settlement. Rather than using St Helena as a mere temporary base, the East India Company had finally "resolved to settle fortifie and plant upon the Island".²³ As mentioned previously, the decision to colonise St Helena came as result of the abandonment of a plan to colonise the island of Pulo Run. The fitting out of these two expeditions, although quite separate, has been combined in a rather dramatised way by a recent historian of the East India Company. Despite its inaccuracies, Keay's version fits today's popular conception of the nature of seventeenth century colonial settlement.

Even Oliver Cromwell was to have a soft spot for Run, and at his instigation arrangements would be made for re-establishing a permanent colony there. Solid Presbyterian settlers were recruited; goats, hens, hoes, and psalters were piled aboard the good ship London; and it was only at the very last minute that renewed hostilities with the Dutch led to the ship being redirected to St Helena in the south Atlantic.²⁴

Redirected, presumably, with solid Presbyterian settlers, psalters and all. Admittedly, many details survive, including the fact that Dutton's party had been "furnished [...] with Bibles, and sundry other good Bookes."²⁵ Overall, there is sufficient information to gain some idea of the probable course of the island's first permanent settlement, although not as much, given the absence of ships' logs and private letters, as would be necessary for a treatment as extensive as that provided by David N. Durant in *Raleigh's Lost Colony: The Story of the First English Settlement in America*.²⁶

²³ IOR: E/3/85, 'Capt. John Dutton's Commission as Governor of the Island of St. Helena', 11.1.1658.

²⁴ John Keay, *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 5.

²⁵ IOR: E/3/85, 'Capt. John Dutton's Commission as Governor of the Island of St. Helena', 11.1.1658.

²⁶ David N. Durant, *Raleigh's Lost Colony: The Story of the First English Settlement in America* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1981). Even Durant is at times left to speculate extensively, such as in his account of Ralph Lane's settlement of 1585-6 (see chapters 7 and 9).

Having arrived at St Helena on 5 May 1659 and having taken possession of the island as discussed previously, Dutton appears to have attended to his instructions for within one month, the most essential parts of this work were completed, as can be seen from a stone let into the walls of the present Castle which replaced Dutton's original fort. It reads:

CAPT IOHN DUTTON GOVERNOUR OF THIS ISLE FIRST ERECTED THIS
FORTIFICATION FOR THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMP^A IUNE ^{YE} 4 AN DOM
1695 OPERA ESTANTUR DE ME²⁷

An illustration of Dutton's fort can be found in a print by J. Thornton (*illustration 13*).

At first, however, the new settlers had to make do much the way the Portuguese and Dutch had done before them. In his diary entry for 26 October 1659, Peter Mundy, now in England, records having "had newes allso that Captaine Dutton, Cheife, Captaine Springall, etts., with 30 or 40 men and some weomen arrived last May on St. Elena, sent thither by the East India Company to take possession of the said iland and to plant themselves there, where they began to build a fort and planted eleven peeces of ordnance in Chappell Vally, the people yet living in tents in the said vally [...]"²⁸

When John Dutton was replaced as Governor in 1660, his successor Capt. Robert Stringer was issued with further detailed instructions regarding the planting of the island, which were closely tied to the fact that Dutton's removal was occasioned by the Company's decision to after all occupy the island of Pulo Run, for which they desired Dutton's services, and also as many of their settlers on St Helena "as shall bee willing to depart from the said Island". However, as the Company wished to retain possession of St Helena, they decided to provide encouragement to their settlers there by ordering "That all our servants, that shall bee remaying on our Island of St Hellena and shall declare their willingnes, rather to remaine on the said Island, then to be transported for Pollaron, That they bee imediately set at libertie, to plant, & inhabit as freemen."²⁹

²⁷ For a photograph of this stone, see Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg, *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997), 22. The stone is transcribed slightly inaccurately in the *St. Helena Almanack and Annual Register 1913* (St Helena: 1913), 9.

²⁸ Richard Carnac Temple and Lavinia Mary Anstey (eds), *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667*, Vol.V (London: Hakluyt Society, 1936), 109.

²⁹ IOR: E/3/85, 'Commission and Instructions unto Capt. Robert Stringer', 19.12.1660.

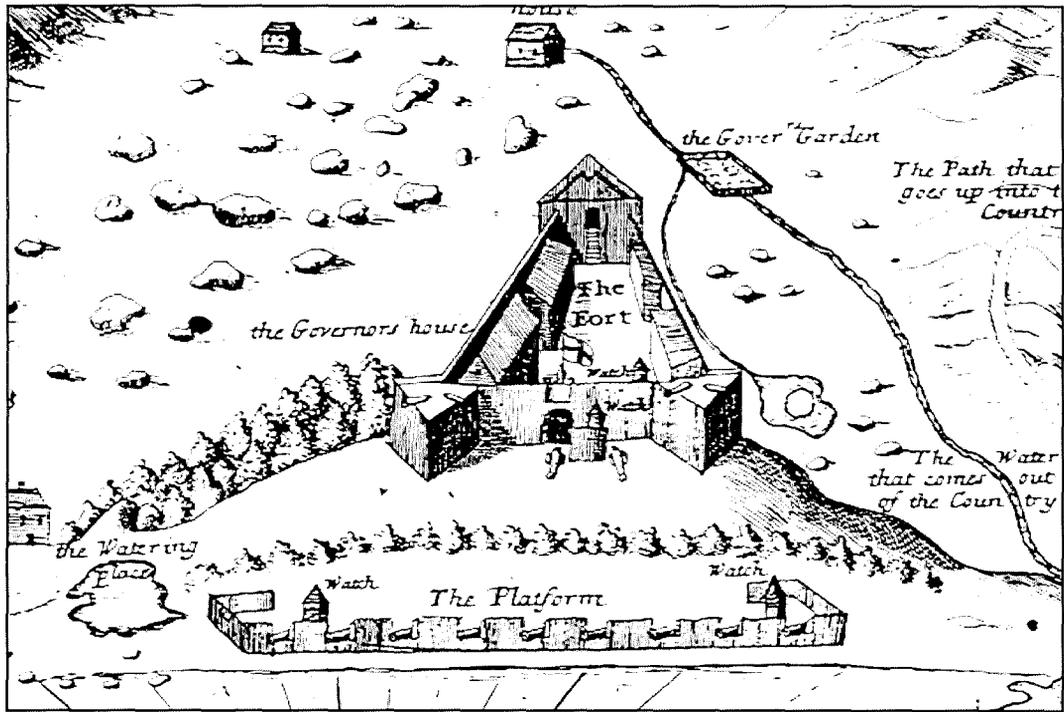


Illustration 13: 'A Prospect of James Fort on the Island of S^t Hellena' (detail)

source: By J. Thornton (Private Collection)

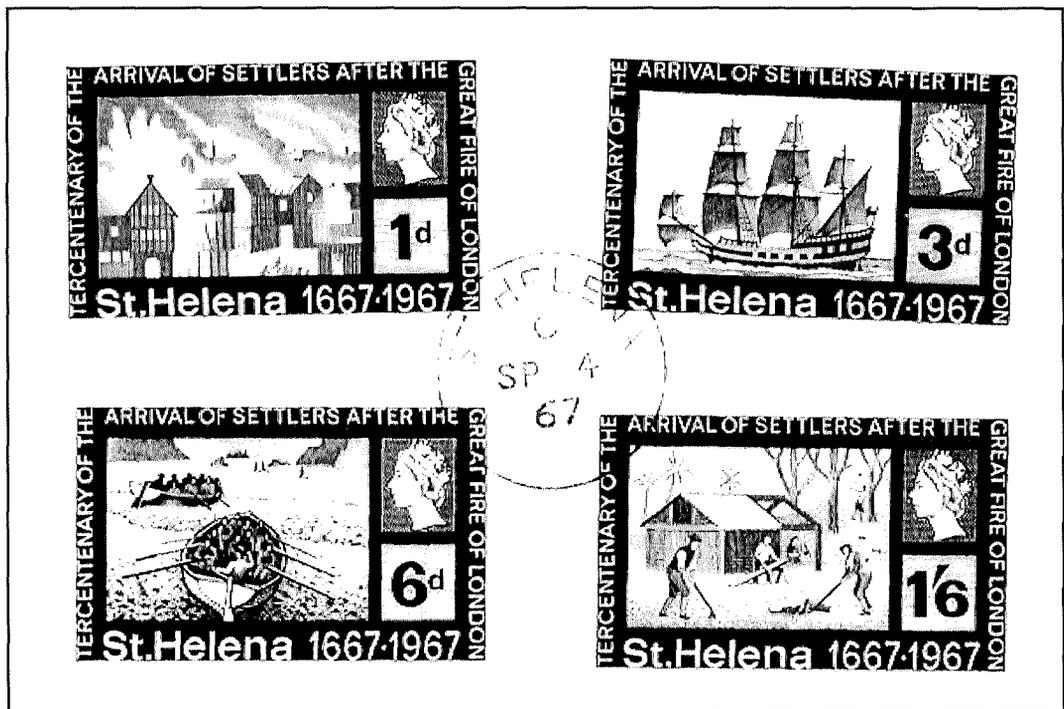


Illustration 14: Great Fire of London - 1d, 3d, 6d and 1'6 Postage Stamps (1967)

source: Philatelic Bureau, St Helena

Detailed instructions followed on how to assign land to these settlers and on what their duties were to be in return for their privileges. The Company also expressed their hopes for the future prosperity of these settlers. However, as is evident from the Company's letter to St Helena of 11 July 1662, a year and a half later, these orders were never put into effect.³⁰

Despite this initial breakdown in communications, the Company's approach to further settlement of St Helena continued to be based on their earlier, neglected orders. That the Company was clearly eager to attract further settlers to St Helena is recorded in the Court minutes for 21 April 1662.

The Court did this day direct that bills should be set up in convenient places to encourage men and women to goe for St Helena to remaine there as free planters, to whom the Company will give their passage thither gratis and a proportion of Lands to plant on.³¹

In history books, such as Marguerite Eyer Wilbur's *The East India Company and the British Empire in the Far East*, published in 1945, this piece of documentary evidence is the basis for a much embellished account. This example alone, if any were needed, should serve as sufficient justification to prefer straight quotation to paraphrase.

Later another attempt to lure colonists to St. Helena was made by what was known as the Committee for Plantations, a group appointed by the Company, by whom bills, placards, and notices were distributed through the city. The literature described the joys of pioneer life on the island, and urged men and women to go out to St. Helena as free planters, free land and passage being supplied by the Company.³²

³⁰ IOR: E/3/86, letter to St Helena, 11.7.1662. Hence, it must be borne in mind that however interesting any of the Company's orders may be in giving some insight into the development of their ideas on colonisation, they are of little use as a guide to actual developments on the island.

³¹ IOR: B/26, Court minutes, 21.4.1662.

³² Marguerite Eyer Wilbur, *The East India Company and the British Empire in the Far East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1945), 196.

The Company's bills may well be able to account for the fact that in a letter to St Helena on 23 January 1662 (ie. 1663), the Company is able to inform their Governor that they had "Enterteined severall Men Women and Maids, to Reside wth you, the terms and conditions, you will receive in a Letter herewith sent you from M^r Thomas Kendall, one of or Committee, to whome wee referred their enterteynement."³³

Despite such successes, by 1668 the Company had encountered serious problems in attracting settlers to St Helena (more of which below), as a result of which they announced a major change in the relation between itself and the island's settlers.

Wee have had it often, under our Considerations, how wee might best order our affaires at S^t Hellena so as to ease our charge, & yet to promote y^e planting & secure the safety of that Island, and having found by experience from other English plantations, that to let y^e people bee free, & devide the Land, Negroes & Cattle, in some equal proportion will bee a meanes to answeere the ende aforesaid, for that thereby we shall free our selves from constant pay, And y^e people having an Interest of their owne, & working for themselves, [...] It will make them the more Industrious, encrease y^e number of the Inhabitants, & will conduce to y^e greater safety & defence of the Island. Wherefore, wee doe hereby appoint, that only our Governor, & and our Chirurgen [...] shall, be continued in our pay, & that all other persons whatsoever (except Negroes) y^t shall be upon the place, whose covenanted times are expired, shall upon receipt thereof be discharged from our said pay.³⁴

By way of compensation to the planters, the following rewards were ordered: "And 1 Negroe a peece to every married man, that hath a family, & where two married families shall joyne together they shall have twoo Negroes vzt 1 man & 1 woman."³⁵ Those unhappy with this deal, were allowed to leave or move on, for the Company declared that "though we think this wilbe a considerable incoragement to all Inhabitants there, yet if any of them shall not bee contented to continue upon the Island, you are to permitt

³³ IOR: E/3/86, letter to St Helena, 23.1.1662.

³⁴ IOR: E/3/87, letter to St Helena, 10.2.1668.

³⁵ IOR: E/3/87, 'Commission , Mr. Robert Swallow', 10.2.1668.

them freely to proceed in our service for our Island of Bombay, or to come for England on our next returning shipping."³⁶

This change in policy seemed to have borne instant fruit, for aside from these instructions, the Company's Directors could inform the Governor that they "have entertained severall persons, Men, Women & Children, whoe taketh their passage on this ship, a List of whose names wee herewith send you."³⁷ Sadly, that list is now lost.

Edward Barlow, who called at the island in April 1671 on his return from Bombay, noted these changes, remarking that "now the people that live upon it are free from the East India Company".³⁸ More interestingly though, Barlow, like Portuguese writers before him, makes a point of the role of the improvements wrought by colonisation, this time by the English, much in contrast, he believes, to the Portuguese.

In former times it was inhabited by the "Portangalls", but being a place which produceth no commodities, and being out of the way of their trade, and their people not liking very well to work, as they must do that intend to live upon it, they left it, and since then our East India Company have taken it in possession and have transported people hither to till it and keep it for them, sending out of England a stock of cattle with them, which have increased very much through our people's industry [...].³⁹

In so far as Barlow believed the island to have been 'inhabited' by the Portuguese, he was, of course, mistaken. Nevertheless, his account supports Elliott's argument that "one of the most striking features of these colonial societies is the frequency of their

³⁶ IOR: E/3/87, letter to St Helena, 10.2.1668.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Basil Lubbock (ed), *Barlow's Journal*, Vol.I (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1924), 199-200.

³⁹ Ibid., 199. A similar account of the small settlement dates from December of that year, when the island was visited by Domingo Navarrete. "The place where the English were, is a small Valley, not a musket Shot in Breadth, without a tree or bush, or a Foot of Strand [...]. Beyond the Rocks they say there is plain and pleasant Ground well water'd. In that place there is a little Town of English, who till the Ground, sow Rice, make Butter and Cheese [...]. The Fort is considerable enough for that place, the Garison small but there is no need of many Souldiers to oppose any Enemy." Navarrete also noted the precense of "some Blacks of Madraspatan" and "two French Men", for all of whom he is concerned for they "had bin Catholicks at home, and were Hereticks there [...]." [J.S. Cummins (ed), *The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete, 1618-1686*, Vol.II (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1962), 356-7.]

resort to the language of improvement." The reasons for such an emphasis on improvement were that "it countered the prevailing assumption in the mother country that all colonists were endemically idle", while also helping "to legitimate their enterprise in their own eyes and also - or so they hoped - in those of their fellow countrymen. It provided them with a sense of purpose and helped to place them in a divine order of things, which was perceived in essentially developmental terms."⁴⁰

THE GREAT FIRE

St Helena, like other colonial territories, has its myth of settlement.⁴¹ In his *A History of the Island of St. Helena*, published in 1808, Thomas Brooke was ostensibly the first to claim that "after the year 1666, the island received a considerable increase of inhabitants by the dreadful fire in London, which ruined so many families, and, like other public calamities, induced numbers to seek relief in distant climes."⁴² Ironically, Brooke's statement on the Great Fire refugees is followed by his debunking the claim that St Helena had been assigned to Charles II as part of his queen's dower. That, Brooke, says, "is not justified by any authentic information." If only he had been as cautious regarding some of the other claims of his *History*. Even Philip Gosse, one of the first writers to make extensive use of the Company's records in London, wrote in 1938 that it "is true that the Constantinople brought out twenty-six men in 1663, and the Charles another thirty or

⁴⁰ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 10-1.

⁴¹ For other such colonial myths, see 'Mythological origins', in P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 263, where it is stressed that "[h]istorians have sometimes connived in this myth-making." Also see Roy Porter, *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). For a theoretical discussion, see G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1967), chapter 12, 'The Evidence for Generic Statements - Myths, Impressions and Quantifications'; Jonathan Friedman, 'Myth, History, and Political Identity', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.7 (1992).

⁴² T.H. Brooke, *A History of the Island of St. Helena* (London: Black, Parry and Kingsbury, 1808), 50. For the Great Fire itself, see Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1996); W.G. Bell, *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (London: John Lane, 1920).

perhaps more, victims of the Great Fire of London, four years later."⁴³ This 'Great-Fire-Myth', as I choose to call it, has since become a standard of even the briefest of historical overviews of St Helena. Ross Clark, writing in *The Spectator* in 1994, offers the following version:

Another group who inadvertently ended up on St Helena were Londoners made homeless in the Great Fire of 1666. Quite what they had done to deserve being transported 5,000 miles from their former homes is difficult to guess, but whatever the reason, the East India Company felt it was doing them a favour.⁴⁴

Tony Cross, writing in 1980, appears to have even more detail at hand, for he says that "[a]fter the Great Fire of London in 1666 the company made grants to settle some homeless families in the island, and although some returned to England later a nucleus remained."⁴⁵

The Great-Fire-Myth has even found its way into a whole range of arguments, from politics to genetics. To provide an example of the former, one of St Helena's legislative councillors, Harry Legg, referred to the Great Fire in a speech objecting to the British Nationality Act 1981. "Have our people to become refugees to enter Britain as our ancestors became from the Great Fire of London to come to St Helena?"⁴⁶ Ian Shine, on the other hand, drew on the genealogical side of the 'Great-Fire-Myth' in his otherwise admirable medical study of island, *Serendipity in St. Helena*, published in 1970.

The term "founder principle" refers to the changes in gene frequency that may occur whenever a colony is founded by a small number of individuals carrying genes that are rare or unrepresentative of the parent population. Consider a Londoner in the year 1666 who was made homeless in the Great Fire and emigrated to St. Helena, as some did. Whatever rare gene he happened to carry

⁴³ Philip Gosse, *St. Helena 1502-1938* (London, 1938), 51.

⁴⁴ Ross Clark, 'We have always been British', *The Spectator* (September 1994), 20.

⁴⁵ Tony Cross, *St Helena: Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (London: David & Charles, 1980), 86.

⁴⁶ *St. Helena: Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 20.6.1985.

(perhaps he was the only Londoner with Christmas disease), as soon as he became one of St. Helena's 100 settlers, his rarity value changed from 1:500,000 to 1:100.⁴⁷

Most significantly, however, the Great-Fire-Myth received official approval in 1967, when the 300th anniversary of the settlers' arrival was celebrated with a commemorative issue of four stamps (*illustration 14*). The first of these shows a cityscape of burning timber-framed house, with a number of people running from the flames. The second shows an East Indiaman under full sail. The third shows two crowded longboats approaching a shallow beach through the surf and being met by people on the shore. Finally, the fourth shows a group of people felling trees and building a log cabin of sorts, and clearing and hoeing the ground. All four stamps are bordered by the caption 'Tercentenary of the arrival of settlers after the Great Fire of London, St. Helena 1667-1967.' In addition, the stamp issue's first day cover featured a chart illustrating the route taken by the settlers on their voyage to the island.

Writing about the *Charles* in 1994, Trevor Hearl, clearly accepting the 'Great-Fire-Myth', requested that "[n]ow we have found St. Helena's '*Mayflower*' and those who sent it, will someone please find the Saints' 'Pilgrim Fathers'!"

Alas, St Helena's pilgrim fathers did not travel on the *Charles*. In fact, the East India Company during those years found that settlers for St Helena were not at all easy to procure.⁴⁸ On the 26 January 1665 [ie. 1666], the East India Company's Court of Directors had requested "the Committee for plantations to consider & provide Men Blacks Ammunition & what else they think needful for St^t Hellena",⁴⁹ and one month later, a "M^r Kendall was desired to agree for Freight, passengers & Blacks to bee carried

⁴⁷ Ian Shine, *Serendipity in St. Helena: A Genetical and Medical Study of an Isolated Community* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1970), 142.

⁴⁸ A similar problem was experienced in the Caribbean colonies; see F.R. Augier, S.C. Gordon, D.G. Hall and M. Reckford, *The Making of the West Indies* (London: Longmans, 1960), 45. I am not aware of any cases of forced emigration to St Helena, such as occurred with respect to the Americas; see Peter Wilson Coldham, *Emigrants in Chains: A Social History of Forced Emigration to the Americas, 1607-1776* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992). See J. Ovington for a lengthy account of how women were apparently tricked into emigrating to St Helena in the late seventeenth century. J. Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*, edited by H.G. Rawlinson (London: Humphrey Milford, 1929), 59-60.

⁴⁹ IOR: B/28, Court minutes, 26.1.1665.

to St Hellena, upon the best termes he can. [H]is discretion shall direct him."⁵⁰ On the 30 March, however, "M^r Kendall acquainted the Court that he had according to their order endeavoured by all waies he could to supply St Hellena with men & mony, but he could not effect it now [...]."⁵¹ No particular reasons are recorded, although they would presumably have been given at the time. In consequence, the court deferred any further moves until after the Company's next meeting of shareholders, which took place the following month. At the end of April, the court renewed its request to Mr Kendall "to take care to furnish that Island with such men Amunition, & provisions As may be thought fit or needful for the better security reinforcing that place, & perticularly to supply them with an able planter to instruct the people there."⁵²

As the issue of St Helena is not mentioned again for several months, Mr Kendall presumably made some progress in the matter. On 28 November, the Court again requests the committee for shipping to arrange for the supply of the island and orderd a Mr Maurice Thomson "to appoint such goods to be laden on the Charles as are proper for that place."⁵³ Eventually, in December 1666 the East India Company addressed a petition to the King, stating

That though your Petitioners doe not adventure to carry on their trade as in tyme of peace, Yett in Order to yo^r Ma^{ties} service & preserving the Kingdomes interest in those parts, & for keeping things in the best order there that may be possible in this time of eminent danger Have prepared onely 3 ships namely the London John Privitt Comannder burthen 400 tonns with 80 men the Bantam William Barker Comannder 120 tonns with 25 men, the Charles Samuell Smith Comannder 130 tonns with 30 Seamen (& also 30 Landmen for supply of the Island of St Hellena) designed for some ports in India where they hope (by the blessing of God) they may Arrive & from thence returne with safety.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ IOR: B/28, Court minutes, 23.2.1665.

⁵¹ IOR: B/28, Court minutes, 30.3.1666.

⁵² IOR: B/28, Court minutes, 24.4.1666.

⁵³ IOR: B/28, Court minutes, 28.11.1666.

⁵⁴ IOR: H/42, 'Petition to His Majesty', no date, page 134. In his reply, the King only granted permission for the *London*, but as the *Charles* is known to have sailed, permission must have been granted at a later stage, although no record survives. IOR: H/42, 'Royal Order', 5.12.1666, page 135.

On 14 December, the Court's minutes record that a "draught of severall heades of agreement with Henry Gargen to goe for St Helena with his family was now read & approved by the court, and the Committee for plantations were desired to perfect them in the form of articles."⁵⁵ But Gargen was no ordinary settler. In its final form, the agreement with Gargen provided that

himselfe with his wife, & her sister whoe hath skill in Dary, together, wth a man & Maid Servant (if hee can procure them) & one childe of a yeare & halfe old, may be transported for y^e Island of St^t Hellena, at y^e charge of the East India Company. [...] That he be employed [...] y^t he shall chiefly attend y^e affaires of y^e Comp^a in y^e prudent manadgm^t of their plantacon & their cattle, & that his wife and her sister improove y^e Comp^{as} Dary, in y^e making of Butter, Cheese &c.⁵⁶

The *Charles* actually missed the island at first and had to land at Spiritu Sanctu in Brazil, although it did reach St Helena eventually.⁵⁷ However, apart from Henry Gargen and his family there were no other passengers on board, nor do they qualify as victims of the Great Fire of London. Not only do Gargen's and his sister-in-law's expertise in farming make it unlikely that either of them came from the City of London itself, but, more importantly, Gargen had previously been resident on St Helena, from 1661 to 1665.⁵⁸ As for their man and maid servant, it is not even known whether any were ever engaged by him. Although it is correct to speak of Gargen, his family and servants as settlers who travelled to St Helena on the *Charles*, there is no reason to suppose any of them to have been victims of the Great Fire. And even if they were, their small number hardly deserves the attention they have inadvertently been given over time.

⁵⁵ IOR: B/28, 14.12.1666.

⁵⁶ IOR: E/3/87, 'Agreement with Mr. Henry Gargen', pages 53-4. Gargen was certainly no ordinary settler, not least because the Company's agreement with him stipulated that he be "second to y^e Governor, & one of the Counsell". His story, including that of his previous residency on the island from 1661-1665 will have to be told elsewhere.

⁵⁷ IOR: E/3/87, letter to St Helena, 10.2.1668. For an account of some of the circumstances of the voyage of the *Charles*, see William Foster, *The English Factories in India, 1668-1669* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 313-7.

⁵⁸ See Henry Gargen's manuscript account of St Helena held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford: M.S. Rawl. C. 843.

Rather than clinging to such a myth of settlement, St Helenians are in fact in a position to research their ancestors through the island's extensive registers of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths. In 1956, the South African traveller Lawrence Green wrote that "St. Helena has its old families with remarkable histories, but there are very few survivors of the seventeenth century settlers."⁵⁹ This is certainly not the case.⁶⁰ If St Helenians and their historians do have a need for an identifiable set of founding settlers, then I suggest that their attention be turned to the island's resettlement following its temporary occupation by the Dutch in 1673.⁶¹

PEOPLING THE ISLAND

The history of the Dutch occupation of St Helena in the first six months of 1673 has been told in some detail in a paper by J. de Hullu, entitled 'De oost-Indische Compagnie en St. Helena in de 17^e eeuw', published in *De Indische Gids* in 1913. That occupation in itself is of no interest to my current argument, other than that it displaced almost all the English inhabitants of the island, leading to its effective re-settlement later that same year.

Amongst the English Domestic State Papers, there is a report by a John Paige on the capture of St Helena, in which he relates that "we, having not above 170 fighting men, were forced to retire to our fort, which they doubted they could not keep, so they embarked both men, women, and children, and carried away what provisions and

⁵⁹ Lawrence G. Green, *There's a Secret Hid Away* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1956), 194.

⁶⁰ Through the records held at the St Helena archives and elsewhere, I have indeed been able to trace the ancestry of my wife, and hence our children, to a number of seventeenth century settlers, including a Thomas Harper, one of only four 'free planters' named by Henry Gargen in his account of the island between 1661 and 1665. See Henry Gargen's manuscript account of St Helena held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford: M.S. Rawl. C. 843.

⁶¹ Despite advocating such a change of focus, I do note G.C. Spivak's point that "a nostalgia for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities within the critique of imperialism." [Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 87.]

ammunitions were in the fort, spiking the guns, and went to Brazil to refresh."⁶² Another account states that at the time of the island's capture "our man of warr Cap^t Medfoard, carried all y^e people of from y^e Island & so y^e dutch took it wth out any resistance [...]"⁶³ According to Dutch sources, however, it would appear that between six and twelve settlers were left behind at St Helena, either because they were not at hand when Governor Beale withdrew, or because they were too sick to be moved.⁶⁴ It is hence not known for certain how many of the English settlers and their slaves remained on St Helena during the island's occupation by the Dutch. It is likewise unknown, how many of the planters and soldiers who left with Beale returned with him in the ship he had chartered in Brazil.⁶⁵ What is known, is that Beale was accompanied by a slave, Black Oliver, who had formerly belonged to a Mrs Coulston, but who had sold him on her arrival in Brazil. Beale purchased Black Oliver for the Company, in the hope that his knowledge of the island's coast and the tracks to the interior would facilitate its recapture. In the event, Black Oliver's advice proved most useful, and as a reward he was made a free planter and, like other free planters, was granted 20 acres of land. He was shot during a mutiny of planters and soldiers in 1684.⁶⁶

Having been re-granted the St Helena by the King in 1673, the East India Company appointed Captain Richard Fieles⁶⁷ to be their Governor on the island. The new Governor and his Council were informed that the Company had "entertained severall persons as planters, who come by this shipping; & are named in the Lyst here with sent."⁶⁸ The ships in question were the *European* and the *John and Alexander*. Between them, they carried 110 passengers, the list of whose names (except for those of their servants or slaves) is still extant.⁶⁹ Likewise extant are lists of names of those of the

⁶² Quoted in F.H. Blackburne Daniell (ed), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, March 1st to October 31st, 1673* (London: 1895), 296, entry for 26 May 1673.

⁶³ Log of the *London*, quoted by C.R. Boxer, 'The Third Dutch War in the East (1672-4)', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol. XVI, No.4 (1930), 384.

⁶⁴ J. de Hullu, 'De Oost-Indische Compagnie en St. Helena in de 17e Eeuw', *De Indische Gids* (1913), 896.

⁶⁵ See G.G. Kitching, 'The Loss and Recapture of St Helena, 1673', *The Mariner's Mirror*, Vol.36, No.1 (1950), 62.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-6.

⁶⁷ Richard Fieles also appears in the records as Richard Fiele, Richard Field, and Gregory Field.

⁶⁸ IOR: E/3/88, letter to St Helena, 19.12.1673.

⁶⁹ IOR: E/3/88, 'A List of Passengers ordered on Board the Two Shippes for St Hellena, 1673'; p. 88.

King's soldiers left at the island following its re-conquest.⁷⁰ I suggest that these lists be used to identify the island's 'founding father', if such an identification is necessary at all, for the individuals contained thereon would do much better than any mythical refugees from the Great Fire.

Although it would appear from remarks quoted earlier, that these were all new planters, at least some of the old planters were expected to return. The Governor was hence instructed that

all the old planters formerly settled on the said Island, & now bound thither, shall be repossessed of their severall houses & plantations w^{ch} formerly they enjoyed, in the condicon they shall be found at the arrival of these shipp, and that all new planters, shall upon their arrivall have twenty Acres of Land⁷¹ rough & plaine, sett out unto them, by the Gov' & Councell for each family to build and plant upon it, and that all the plantacons, both to the old, and new planters, be con[vayed] to them, their heirs, and assignes for ever; [...].⁷²

Instructions were also given that besides the said allotment of land, "each family shall have two Cowes".⁷³ Despite allowing settlers to become free planters, the Company's orders imposed on them certain obligations regarding the defence of the island. Thus, they were to be listed under two officers who "may exercise and trayne them up in Armes at least once in 2 Months", and in case of an alarm, they were to man various posts that had been assigned to them. In turn, the Company's soldiers were given the option of becoming planters, for it was ordered that "We require yo^u to take a list of all soldiers who desire to be discharged of their duty and pay as soldiers, and to become Planters, and that yo^u grant to them the same accomodacon of Lands and Cattle and other immunities that are allowed to other planters, auquainting them that are married persons that if they desire it their wives shall be sent to them passage free."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ SHGA: In-Letters (Book B), p. 12-13.

⁷¹ I find no evidence to support Gosse's claim that those settlers "who preferred to reside on the windward side of the island were to be granted a double quantity of land." [Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London: Cassell & Co., 1938), 72.]

⁷² IOR: E/3/88, letter to St Helena, 19.12.1673.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

The Company's new arrangements on St Helena are reported by John Fryer, who visited the island in 1682.

The course taken to People the Island is this; they indent either as Servants or Soldiers for Five Years with the Company, at the expiration of which Term, they are free either to go or stay; if they stay, they have liberty to chuse Twenty Acres of Ground unoccupied, as their own proper Portion, on which they live and maintain themselves and Families; of which Islanders there may be Four hundred *English*, reckoning Men , Women, and Children.⁷⁵

With as large a number of settlers as that, it is perhaps not surprising that the population of St Helena was gradually viewed as growing up into a proper society, as is evident from a letter respecting the island's planters in which the Company's directors note that "It hath been o' care and o' cost, to nurse them up to what they are now, as it shall be to raise them to a better condicon."⁷⁶ The Company certainly felt that their occupation of St Helena was a wise move and hoped that the island's settlers would learn to appreciate their good fortune.

Wee have inclosed a Paper to you containing severall singular and great advantages that that Island hath above any English Plantacōn, Wee know in any part of the World. The Consideracōn whereof as it hath a little encouraged Us, after o^f long and chargeable disbusm^{ts} upon it, so hope it may incourage o^f Planters to settle themselves to make a better Improvement of that great opportunity which God almighty by his Providence, and o^f Indulgence to them hath put into their hands.⁷⁷

However, the Company did consider there to be enough planters for the time being, and it hence ordered that "For the future Wee do forbid that any of o' soldiers shall turn Planters or Leasees untill their 7 years time of Service as soldiers be fully expired."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ William Croke (ed), *A New Account of East India and Persia [...] by John Fryer*, Vol.III (London: Hakluyt Society, 1915), 183.

⁷⁶ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 1.8.1683.

⁷⁷ OIOC: E/3/90; Letter from the Court to St Helena, 1.8.1683.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

St Helena did not experience any large scale immigration by settlers after the mid-1700s. The state of the island's population at that time is summed up neatly by C.F. Noble, who called at St Helena in 1747, and noted that "there are about 150 families, all of English extraction. There are commonly about 300 soldiers maintained here, in the company's service. [...] There are also 300 slaves, brought from Guinea, Madagascar, and Bengal. [...] All the people of the island speak English, dress after the English mode, and are generally of a tall slender shape, but somewhat tanned."⁷⁹

While it is impossible to chart the transformations which took place during the following decades in the running of the island and its inhabitants, by and large a pattern had been established which was to alter little until the late nineteenth century. St Helena served to supply the East India Company's shipping, primarily homeward bound, and the island's inhabitants as well as the Company's plantations, served and existed to furnish the necessary supplies.⁸⁰

MEN AND WOMEN SLAVES

The 'Great-Fire-Myth' aside, the origins of St Helena's early European settlers has never seriously been in doubt. However, this is not so for the origins of the island's slaves, a difficulty similar to that experienced by historians of slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, whose situation is most comparable to that of St Helena in this respect. Robert C.-H. Shell, in his outstanding study *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838*, has calculated that 73.3% of slaves imported to the Cape between 1652 and 1808 came from Madagascar, India and Indonesia, with roughly equal numbers coming from each of these.⁸¹

⁷⁹ C.F. Noble, *A Voyage to the East Indies in 1747 & 1748* (London: 1762); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 178-9. A table giving details of changes in the island's population between 1683 and 1821 can be found in *Census of the Island of St. Helena in 1901* (St Helena: 1901), 9.

⁸⁰ For an account of life in the East India Company's settlements in India itself, see Percival Spear, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in 18th Century India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

⁸¹ Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 40-1. Also see Nigel Worden et al., *The Chains that Bind Us: The*

In any event, slaves were integral to the island's first settlement under the East India Company in 1659 and it is highly likely, that these first slaves arrived on St Helena with John Dutton and the island's first settlers. In the instructions given to Dutton by the Company's directors he had been told: "In case at S^t Iago you can procure 5 or 6 Blacks or Negroes able men & women wee desire you to buy them, provided they may had at or under 40 Dollars p pooll [...]."⁸² West Africa, likewise, was an early source of slaves, some of whom may already have been 'acculturated' to a degree, as can be seen from the Company's letter to St Helena of 23 January 1662, in which they stated that "wee have Ordered our Agents in Guinea, to send you 12 Blacks, vzt 6 Men and Women such as can speak English [...]."⁸³

The more obvious source for slaves for St Helena, however, were the Company's 'factories' (trading forts) in the Indian sub-continent. In a letter dated as early as 23 June 1659, the Company's agent and factors at Fort Cormantine are informed that "[w]ee have desired the commander of this ship [the Fruroe] that (for y^e use of our plantation at S^t Hellena) [...] to procure 10 lusty young Black men and women [...]." Likewise, in a letter from the Court to Fort St George of 20 February 1663, the Governor there is requested "to purchase a couple of Gentue Barbers, such as are most expert amongst them, in letting Blood, and send them on some of our Shippes for St. Hellena, there to remain for the use of People on the Island".⁸⁴

Demand for slaves increased after 1683, for in that year the Company announced an important change in the island's system of slavery.

We have formerly prohibited the free Planters from buying any negroes upon the Reason vizt least the number of the negroes, upon the Island exceeding the whites should become formidable and dangerous, to the Inhabitants and the security of o^r Island; but upon further thinking of this matter considering likewise that there are in Barbados usually 50000 Blacks for 6000 Whites and yet are kept in subjeccon, without other Garrison than the Planters themselves, and considering that the soile

History of Slavery at the Cape (Kenwyn: Juta & Company, 1996). For a general history, see Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (London: Picador, 1997).

⁸² IOR: E/3/85, letter to Fort Cormantine, 23.6.1659.

⁸³ IOR: E/3/86, letter to St Helena, 23.1.1662.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Henry Yule (ed), *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. During His Agency in Bengal*, Vol.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1888), cccliv.

& climate of that Island [ie. St Helena] is fitt for produccion of commodities of a richer nature than Cattle or Potatoes, Yams, Plantans &c^a and being willing that our Inhabitants and Free Planters should not only live and grow rich as Wee know they will if they have hands to cultivate their Plantacons as they have in Barbados, Jamaica & other places, Wee have thought fitt to take off that Restraint from o^f free Planters of buying of negroes with only this condicon, that every free Planter, Leasee or other Person that shall keep to the number of 4 Negroes shall besides what he ought to do by former custome and o^f orders keep one English man extraordinary to attend Alarms, as every Person ought to doe upon 20 Acres of Land [...].⁸⁵

At that time India was certainly seen as a steady supplier of slaves for St Helena for in 1683 the Company informed the Governor of St Helena that "wee shall write to o^f Factors in India to send o^f Govern' negroes by every ship for the Comp^{as} use, which he may either imploy upon the Comp^{as} Plantacons or when he is overstocked sell some of them for the Comp^{as} use."⁸⁶ This policy is confirmed in the same year by instructions in the Director's letter to their governor and council at Fort St George.

We write you this on Purpose to oblige you to provide for Us ten Negroes, and ship on board every ship of Ours, and order them to be left with o^f Governor and Council of S^t Hellena, Wee having now given order at that place for great Plantacons to be made for us, Wee say ten Negroes upon each Ship. We would have them most Men & if you can that they be all above 16 years of Age.⁸⁷

However, not all of the island's Indian inhabitants of that time arrived on St Helena as slaves. Judging by an earlier letter from the Directors to Fort St George, and assuming that the Court's orders had in fact been complied with, some of these appear to have been proper émigrés.

⁸⁵ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 1.8.1683.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Records of Fort St George: Despatches from England, 1681-1686* (Madras: Government Press:1916), 51.

Wee [...] desire you [...] to procure young Gentues or Arcans and their wives to bee sent as our servants to remaine on our Island of St. Helena, Wee being very desirous to make tryall of them, suposing they may bee more vsefull and ingenious than those people which come from Guinea. In the procuring of these 8 persons, we require that noe violence be used, or any act to give discontent to the Natives, but that they may be such as will willingly embrace our service, And then cause them to bee furnished with convenient necessaries for the voyage, and on each of our 4 ships let one man and his wife take their passage for St. Hellena, and order the Comanders to provide some fitting Cabben for their accomodation in the voyage.⁸⁸

The attitude of procuring slaves or 'servants' without force is also partly borne out in a letter from Bengal to the Court, dated 29 November 1669, which provides a further insight into the way slaves were acquired for St Helena. The letter states that "We have tried to obtayne eight men and women slaves for St. Hellena, but cannot this yeare procur them; the natives seldom selling themselves or children, except in a famine, which (God be thanked) hath not this yeare happened to the countrey."⁸⁹

But slaves did not come from India exclusively. The other main source of slaves for St Helena appears to have been Madagascar. In their letter of August 1683, the Company issued the following regulation: "For every Madagascar ship besides the former duty [...] for anchorage, shall leave with the Governor for the Comp^{as} use, one able negroe a man or woman at the Govern^{ts} eleccon."⁹⁰ Ships were also sent to Madagascar specifically to supply slaves for the island, such as in 1684, when the Directors informed the governor that "we have proceeded in sending Cap^t Knox to you with a quantity of Madagascan negroes [...]"⁹¹ Likewise, in 1716 the Council informed the Directors that they required at least 200 more slaves for otherwise "we cant without hiring blacks to Labour". They argues that a " small Vessel from Madagascar would effectually do our business and they are the best blacks for our purpose, the next best to them are the Gold Coast Slaves of Guinea, and those who are almost if not quite equall

⁸⁸ Quoted in Henry Yule (ed), *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. During His Agency in Bengal*, Vol.II (London: Hakluyt Society, 1888), cccliv.

⁸⁹ William Foster, *The English Factories in India, 1668-1669* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 311.

⁹⁰ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 1.8.1683.

to them are the slaves that are sometimes in Great Plenty in Bengall of which each of your Hon^{ts} returning ships might bring eight or ten with Little trouble and half the charge of others."⁹² Arrangement were made accordingly,⁹³ and in 1717 the Council was able to inform the Company in London that they had "received thirty Blacks out of the Mercury [...], and if your Hon^{ts} doe think fitt to Lycence any more ships from Madagascar We pray that [...] We may have liberty to choose out of the whole number such Blacks as we think fittest [...]."⁹⁴ In a similar manner, slaves are recorded to have come from the coast of South West Africa. In a letter dated 15 February 1765, the President and Council at Fort William inform the Court that "our ship *Royal George* sailed the 18th December for the coast of Angola, where we have ordered our agents to purchase 250 slaves, 100 whereof are to be left at the island of St Helena."⁹⁵

It is not surprising, that slaves ultimately came from a wide range of countries, given St Helena's location on the trade routes and the variety of ships that arrived at St Helena. Barlow, writing in 1671, relates that "sometimes 'Portangall' ships stop there which come from Angola and are bound to Brazil, and also French ships that come from the East India, and sometimes other English ships, which go to buy negroes at Mozambique and the island of St. Lawrence and sometimes from the coast of Guinea."⁹⁶ This is born out by St Helena own records for 1707, in which a number of "the Portugeeze blacks" are accused of plotting to kill the island's white inhabitants.⁹⁷

Slaves also arrived at the island as convicts, such as after the East India Company's evacuation of Bencoolen in 1719, when St Helena was substituted for Sumatra as a place for convicts to be sent from the Indies. The consultations of Fort St George for 3rd December 1719 note one such case: "Pallee Narraan being convicted of Stealing some of the Company's cloth from the Washers, Order'd that he be sent a Slave to St. Helena, and all of the Jentu or Pariar casts that do so for the future."⁹⁸ However, this was not a

⁹¹ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 5.4.1684.

⁹² SHGA: Out-Letters, 20.1.1716.

⁹³ SHGA: In-Letters, 22.2.1717.

⁹⁴ SHGA: Out-Letter, 8.5.1717.

⁹⁵ C.S. Srinivasachari (ed), *Fort William - India House Correspondence* (Public Series), Vol.IV: 1764-1766 (Delhi: National Archives of India, 1962).

⁹⁶ Basil Lubbock (ed), *Barlow's Journal*, Vol.I (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1924), 199.

⁹⁷ SHGA: St Helena Records, 10.1.1707.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Henry Davison Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800* (London: John Murray, 1913), 176.

policy approved by the Directors in London, for in 1757 they wrote to their Governor at Fort William:

The Chief and Council at Anjengo having ordered ten Mallabar men to be transported to St. Helena as slaves (who had been officers to the King of Travencore), five of them soon after their arrival desperately hanged themselves rather than submit to any kind of work. We mention this instance only, though we could point out others, to prevent your sending such kind of people, delinquents or malefactors of any sort to that island, as the Governor and Council have represented that the having such desperate fellows upon the island may be attended with bad consequences. This is a general order to all our settlements.⁹⁹

Notably, slaves were not merely imported to St Helena, but also passed from there to the other locations, as is evident in at least one instance. In their letter of 25 March 1717 the Company's directors in London inform the Governor at St Helena that a certain

Capt. White is very positive that the slaves he formerly brought you from Guinea and which you changed for some of his Madagascar People were twice the worth of those you had from him, being askt what happen'd he said when he in the Voyage to the West Indies from St Helena discoursed with them they told him of their miserable usage and that they had little or nothing besides yams and rejoiced exceedingly they were delivered from St Helena. He cided [?] the Madagascar sort you now have will prove of little service unless you feed them well for that in their own country they had plenty of heartening food [...].¹⁰⁰

Ultimately there is no way to establish the place of origin of the majority of slaves imported to St Helena. Likewise, any speculations as to the 'racial' make up of the St Helena's population today and over the centuries, is extremely difficult, although I do hope to have shown that a much larger number of slaves than had hitherto been accepted arrived at St Helena from the Indian subcontinent.

⁹⁹ Quoted in H.N. Sinha (ed), *Fort William - India House Correspondence (Public Series)*, Vol.II: 1757-1759 (Delhi: Government of India, 1957), 48.

¹⁰⁰ SHGA: In-Letters, 25.3.1717.

Prior to its take-over of St Helena, the Crown took stock of its future possession by despatching a commission of enquiry to the island. The resulting report, produced by the two commissioners, H.R. Brandreth and Edward Walpole, provides the most detailed account available not only of the conditions of St Helena's settlement at that time, but also of its history under the East India Company. This is the case not merely with respect to the island's various governmental and military institutions, but also with respect to its inhabitants, not least on account of the commissioners' lengthy observations which accompanied their census and which are indexed under the term 'population'.¹⁰¹ A full transcript of their observations can be found in Appendix 2.

Brandreth and Walpole noted above all "the warm attachment, which the Inhabitants appear to entertain for their island; an attachment that has been inherited for some generations, and which in uniting the Community together, by the bond of one common feeling, has created among them, an almost distinctive feature as a separate people." In particular, they found that

[S]ituated by their peculiar locality as to be debarred from the usual intercourse with the rest of the world, and taught to consider this Island as their only home, and sphere of action, the Public Servants entered early into marriages, numerous offspring have been born, and intermarriages prevailed so generally throughout the Island, that the Community, with few exceptions are now united by ties of consanguinity into one Family.

Nevertheless, they "cannot but regret that the peculiar inaptitude of the Island for a Settlement, should have rendered the indulgence of this feeling inconvenient if not unfortunate [...]." The East India Company was chiefly the one to blame, for the "Island, the Inhabitants and their Children, seem to have been considered as forming a little State or community in itself; dependent indeed on the Company for means of support (which it was never contemplated would be diverted from it) but where all Offices and Employments were esteemed almost as hereditary." This they believed "to

¹⁰¹ For all quotations from the H.M. Commissioner's report, see SHGA: 'The Commission of 1835'.

be both a political and social condition unknown in any other British Colony or Settlement".

In further explanation, Brandreth and Walpole advance five points which had primarily contributed to this state of affairs:

1st The system of continuing public Employment in the families of the public servants induced both parties to regard the island as their own home, encouraged early marriages and consequently numerous offspring.

2ndly The practice of confining the Troops exclusively to the island. The Soldiers married or formed connections with the Coloured women of almost equal obligation with marriage. There are about 800 Soldiers in the Island who are relieved once in twelve or twenty one years; and those who are discharged frequently settle or leave their families in the Island, while their Successors follow up a similar course.

3rdly The introduction of African Slaves as predial [*sic*] Labourers, into a Country, the Climate of which would have admitted of the European Labourer working with advantage.

4thly The introduction of the Chinese who however valuable as an intelligent and industrious people were yet introduced at a time, when the existing means of labour in the Island had not been attempted by every effort to have been brought into full operation.

5thly Finally the large outlay in the Island derived from home, and considered to be from a permanent source.

Inevitably, Brandreth and Walpole had to reflect on the changes that were likely to occur as a result of the island's transfer to the Crown and even as a result of the recommendation they themselves were intending to make. In particular, they concluded that following the withdrawal of the East India Company, the "resources of the Colony will as in other Colonies be drawn forth by the free and unchecked industry and speculation of the Settlers, who will depend solely for encouragement on the demand of the Island Market and the Shipping." Given the likely economic impact, they suggest that the "employment of as many of the present Population of all Classes as possible in India or elsewhere would in our opinion be highly desirable".

More significantly though, they remark that the ensuing "social disorganization" "will ultimately tend to promote measures more in accordance with the natural course of a small Colony's progress, than could ever have been effected under the artificial system, which the Company found it necessary to adopt in relation to their commercial transactions." This is as insightful as any an assessment of the peculiarities of St Helena's colonisation.

In conclusion, it is intriguing to note that from as early as 1689, St Helena's inhabitants had in fact been encouraged to emigrate, that is, well before Brandreth's and Walpole's recommendations, as is evident from one of the Directors' letters.

This ship from yo' place is bound for Bombay, w^{ch} is now in a flourishing condition, being made y^e residence of our Gen' & Councill of India; [...] Wee would therefore now people it with English Inhabitants, by all conviant opportunitys, & because we know yo' Island abounds with young people w^{ch} growing up cann hardly find roome to subsist wthin yo' narrow limitts We doe therefore hereby give License to all young people of Either sex exceeding fourteen years of age wth y^e consent of their Parrents to take their passages on this ship the Benj' for Bombay [...].¹⁰²

Similarly, in 1715, Governor Pyke wrote to the Court informing them that he had heard "that the fruitful Island called Mauritius that was lately left by the Dutch is yett uninhabited and has not had any dearth upon it but abounds plentifully. [...] [W]e have several young people here more than we can supply with plantations that because of their way of living here would be very proper Inhabitants to settle in that place [...]."¹⁰³ Although it is not known whether anyone took up the offer to go to Bombay, it is certain that the suggestion to settle Mauritius came to nothing.

Emigration did, however, become a significant aspect of the population history of St Helena from about 1838 onwards. Largely as a knock-on effect of the Crown's take-over

¹⁰² SHGA: In-Letters, 5.4.1689.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*, second edition (St Helena, 1908), 121. It is incorrect, as Richard Grove claims, that Pyke "canvassed the possibility of resettling the inhabitants on Mauritius." [Richard Grove, 'Conserving Eden: The (European) East India Companies and their Environmental Policies on St. Helena, Mauritius and in Western India, 1660 to 1854', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.35 (1993), 328.]

of the island in 1836 and the consequent reduction in general expenditure and salaries, the colony's 'Blue Book' for 1839, notes that "the year previous [...] an extensive emigration of the lower classes took place to the Cape of Good Hope". Likewise, according to the official census report for 1881 "a large emigration [...] took place in 1871, 1872, and 1873 consequent on the change and reductions which followed on the opening of the Suez Canal. Emigrant vessels were dispatched to this Island from the Cape and Natal, inviting emigrants and offering good employment in those Colonies to any who were disposed to avail themselves of it."¹⁰⁴ Although the scheme came to an end in May 1874, St Helenians continued to arrive in South Africa throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1936 the Rt. Rev. C.C. Watts actually went so far as to suggest that the only way to help the people of St Helena was "[w]holesale emigration under Government supervision and at Government expense is the only remedy; God grant it may soon come." And he went on to stress that a "colony of St Helena people would be a most valuable asset in some undeveloped country. The Island itself must ever remain a British possession. The second oldest of the Colonies, it has played a great part in the expansion of the Empire [...]. And it has produced a fine race, worthy of better things."¹⁰⁵

For Watts the colonisation of St Helena appears to have run its course and come to a natural end. This is a view echoed by John Cunningham's assertion in the *Daily Mail* in 1984, that it "would be difficult to construct a tiny society of greater pointlessness than exists on St Helena."¹⁰⁶ If the society had become pointless, maybe it could find a role elsewhere. Hence Watt's suggestion that the very people who were the products of an earlier colonisation must now become a colony, if not colonisers, themselves.

¹⁰⁴ *Census of the Island of St. Helena in 1881* (St Helena: 1881). For a preliminary study, see P.A. Erasmus, 'St. Helenas' aan die Kaap: Migrasie, Uitbuiting en Assilasie', *South African Journal of Ethnology*, Vol.17 (1994).

¹⁰⁵ C.C. Watts, *In Mid Atlantic: The Islands of St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha* (London: S.P.G., 1936), 46.

¹⁰⁶ John Cunningham, 'Britain's Island of Insecurity in an Ocean of Doubt', *Daily Mail* (1984).

PART IV

”BUT FOR THAT AFFINITY”

~ OF BLACKS AND 'OTHERS'



Central to colonial discourse analysis have been the stereotypes employed in European conceptions of the 'Orient' and of different peoples as 'other(s)' or, to use post-colonial jargon, 'the Other', the essential cultural and racial characteristics of which, according to Timothy Mitchell, are in each case the polar opposites of the West (passive rather than active, static rather than mobile, emotional rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered) [...]."¹ In the words of Abdul R. JanMohamed, "the dominant model of power-

¹ Timothy Mitchell, 'Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 289. For an excellent introduction to recent writing and debates on 'the Other' see Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 'Introduction', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed), *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995). V.G. Kiernan's *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (London: The Cresset Library, 1988; orig. 1969) was the pioneering, but nowadays largely neglected, study in this field. For an outstanding historical monograph, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native."² Central to the "colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation" is what he calls "the manichean allegory", that is, "a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and, sensuality, self and Other, subject and object."³ According to Edward Said, colonial discourse, or 'Orientalism', "depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative superior upper hand."⁴ That is, representations of otherness play a key role in "establishing and maintaining social inequality."⁵ It is in this respect, however, that one must remember that binarisms of 'otherness' were not merely restricted to non-European 'others', nor did they originate in early encounters with these. Instead, as V.G. Kiernan has argued, "Europeans of superior countries thought of inferior Europeans and non-Europeans alike. Stereotypes such as the Englishmen's image of Paddy the Irishman [...] provided ready-made categories for Burmese or Malays to be fitted into."⁶

As Jan Nederveen Pieterse has argued at length, such stereotyping is far from static; instead, "otherness is historical". That is,

² Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr (ed), *"Race," Writing and Difference* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 82. For a critique of the claim that the European construction of the 'other' is a simple "act of political appropriation", see Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), especially 183-8.

³ Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Literature', in Henry Louis Gates Jr (ed), *"Race," Writing and Difference* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 82. For a discussion and summary of European stereotypes of 'Africans' see Sarah L. Milbury-Steen, *European and African Stereotypes in Twentieth Century Fiction* (London: New York University Press, 1981), 3-36.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985; orig. 1978), 7.

⁵ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 234.

⁶ V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (London: The Cresset Library, 1988; orig. 1969), 28. Also see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 212-23.

[t]he process character of otherness is an indication of shifting social relations and patterns of hegemony. Changes in the representations of otherness according to time and place tend to reflect, not changes in the characteristics of the labelled group but rather, in the circumstances of the labelling group, or in the relationship between the labelling group and the labelled.⁷

In the case of St Helena, such changes in representations of otherness are particularly evident in the treatment, textual and otherwise, of the island's black population. What must be remembered is that given that St Helena was uninhabited at the time of its settlement in 1659, its first settlers never confronted an indigenous 'other' as such, as settlers in the Americas had done. Nevertheless, shifting representations of 'otherness' on St Helena can be found above all in the treatment of the island's slaves, as well as, during the nineteenth century, of its indentured Chinese and liberated African population.⁸

POOR BLACKY

The 'manichean allegory' of JanMohamed, however, is not as manichean as he claims, as is evident from an account of a story about an escaped slave told to visitors to St Helena, and published by them in 1806.

[O]ne of the islanders related, among other anecdotes, the following one respecting the rock which goes by the name *Lot*.

⁷ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 233. For an extensive study of shifting representations and social relations, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a more limited approach, see Kenneth Parker, 'Fertile Land, Romantic Spaces, Uncivilized Peoples: English Travel-Writing About the Cape of Good Hope, 1800-50, in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁸ Space does not permit me to discuss the history and sociology of slavery on St Helena as such, but further details of this can be found in Appendix 2, which also contains details on the island's Chinese indentured labourers and the liberated Africans.

A slave belonging to one of the farmers, who had (or fancied he had) been maltreated by his master, seizing one day a small quantity of provisions, ran to this rock, and in his ardour for *freedom*, climbed with unparalleled efforts to its very summit.

Having been observed in his flight, a number of slaves were collected, and rewards offered to those who would go up and seize the fugitive: he very soon, however routed these *invaders* of his newly acquired *independence*, by hurling down fragments of rock, which forced them to fly in all directions, and with the utmost precipitation, to a considerable distance. Here, though with the prospect of famine before him, he preferred his solitary aerial abode, with *liberty*, to all the allurements which society and food held out to him in the valley, at the expense of that *favourite ideal goddess!* As the base of the rock was of considerable extent, and as they were obliged to keep at a respectful distance even from this, it was found a very difficult matter to blockade him. Accordingly he contrived to steal down occasionally by night, and levy contributions on the neighbouring farm-yards, with whose local situations he was well acquainted, taking care always to repair, before day-light, to his lofty citadel, where he might enjoy at leisure the fruit of his expeditions, without fear of being molested in his "*solitary reign.*"

Such a *predatory system*, however, was attended with too many dangers to exist long; and accordingly he was one night detected in his rambles; the alarm was given, and before he could regain his favourite *rock of liberty*, poor *blacky* was caught, and condemned once more to the galling chain!⁹

Whereas 'freedom', 'independence', and 'liberty' (some of the words highlighted), constitute the very ideals of English civilisation, in the case of 'poor blacky', they amount to no more than a 'predatory system'. On the other hand, 'poor blacky' would not be on the island were it not for a 'predatory system of sorts'. In place of manichean oppositions, one finds the authors mocking what they represent as an apparent mimicry of white European ideals.

⁹ James Johnson and J.G. Barnard, *Descriptive Sketches in India and China in H.M.S. Caroline* (London: Richard Phillips, 1806); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 255. For the recorded facts behind this story, see Hudson Ralph Janisch, *Extracts from the St. Helena Records*, second edition (St Helena: 1908), 151.

According to Homi Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire of a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite."¹⁰ But as mimicry questions and hence undermines colonial representations, in this instance mockery serves to counteract any such effects of colonial mimicry.

FELLOW CREATURES

On St Helena, however, claims for equality were not only mocked, as is evident from an incident in 1779, when a complaint was made by a slave named Woodberry against his master, a John Worrall. The legal merits of the case aside, it is of particular interest here in that it provides a glimpse of the increasingly humanitarian views on slavery that existed on St Helena at the end of the eighteenth century, just as they did in England.¹¹

On 29 November 1779, Major Henry Bazett, a member of the island's council, informed the Board of Justices of "a Complaint made to him by Woodberry a Man Slave belonging to John Worrall, of his punishi[ng] of him in a severe and Cruel manner, by running a Fish Hook through his Ear, also lighting of greased Wicks and putting them between his fingers, which has burnt him in a Cruel manner."¹² Woodberry was presented before the Board, told of his general ill-treatment by Worrall and showed his wounds. The Company's surgeon was called to examine the wounds and, after dressing them, reported to the Council on the extent of Woodberry's injuries. Bazett was uncertain how to proceed regarding this "inhuman treatment", as "the Oaths of Blacks have not ever yet been admitted against White Men."¹³

In consequence, a few days later, on 13 December, Governor John Skottowe informed the council that after "his inquiry into the Law Books" he still agreed with the

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86.

¹¹ For a critical and extensive discussion, see Jack Gratus, *The Great White Lie: Slavery, Emancipation and Changing Racial Attitudes* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1973).

¹² IOR: G/32/40, St Helena Records, consultations, 29.11.1779.

¹³ *Ibid.* A related controversy in 1686 concerned the question of whether blacks were to be allowed "the priviledge of an English subject who are by our Instructions to be tryed by Juries". [SHGA: St Helena Records, 21.6.1686.] In the event, the Company's directors decided that blacks were to be tried solely by the Governor and Council. [SHGA: In-Letters, 3.8.1687.]

sentiments expressed by him and other members of the council in letters to the Company in 1762, 1763 and 1764, namely that "they think they cannot admit of Blacks giving Evidence in any case whatever against a White Person, as they think it may be attended with very dangerous Consequences."¹⁴ Instead, any doubtful cases were to be presented to the Directors in London for their opinions, according to which the Council's decisions would then be taken. Major Dan Corneille, the Lieutenant Governor, on the other hand, believed that Bazett ought to proceed in the usual manner "by a due process in Law" and "take a regular informat[ion] from the plaintiff, and depositions upon Oath from such Eviden[ce] as may be brought forward to prove the Cruel treatment complained of." Corneille's minute went on to state that

M^r Corneille is further constrained both from his duty as [a] Magistrate, and humanity to his fellow Creatures of whatever Colour or Complexion they may be of, to observe, that if the Oaths of Blacks are not admitted against white Men, in cases of so high and Criminal a nature against the Laws of God and Man, that however arbitrary Custom may have formerly established here that Illegal and local distinction; Yet sure he is that it was never sanctified by the Hon'ble Company, who alone are authorized to approve or disapprove.¹⁵

Mathew Bazett, however, agreed that the Council should not deviate from its previous practice, while stressing that he concurs with the opinion that the admission of evidence by blacks could have serious consequences for the island, "as the number of Blacks greatly exceeds that of the Whites, and as there has been several Schemes in agitation, for their cutting off all the White Inhabitants." Nevertheless, Worrall should be punished "to prevent as much as possible the repetition of the like barbarous, and inh[uman] Acts of Cruelty so contrary to all the Laws both divine and Human, and what should be discountenanced in every Christian Country or Society."¹⁶ William Wrangham also supported the view that no changes should be made to the island's legal conventions, although he agreed that an inquiry should be made into Woodberry's allegations and the results of that inquiry be submitted to the Directors. Having been informed of the

¹⁴ IOR: G/32/40, St Helena Records, consultations, 13.12.1779.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Board's opinion, Henry Bazett decided that as the case in question was "undoubtedly criminal", it would be "most advisable to take an examination of the Facts, and transmit them to England" for the opinion and guidance of the Company's Directors.¹⁷

At a subsequent meeting, on 3 January 1780, Corneille laid a lengthy minute before the Board in response to their decision not to admit Woodberry's evidence on oath, "on a point of so great Consequence as he consi[ders] this to be to the community; as the natural Liberty of Man, Life and Limb the immediate gift of God bestowed on all humane Beings alike, and not wantonly to be sported with by the malice of Man [...]" In particular, Corneille argued that

he conceives with all deference that both the Letter and the Spirit of said Laws, admits all Witnesses of whatever Religion or Country, as Competent; unless rendered Infamous, as the Statute in that case directs. That this happy distinguishing privilege, is the Centinel of every individuals life and property, and the test to make every Man amenable to the Laws of his Country; else, who is safe in distant Colonies, if one part of the human species, lording it over the other, have it in their power to perpetuate the most atrocious Crimes against the Ordinance of God and Man, upon Whites or Blacks (for it will hold good in either case) in presence only of the latter Colour whose evidence are not to be admitted, therefore the perpetrator in consequence of that illegal distinction escape with impunity.¹⁸

Corneille goes on to remind the Board "the whole System of British Law has a Superior excellence over every other Cod[e] of Laws in the known World, as thereby, the meanest Individual of Society is protected from the insults and oppression of the greatest [...]" Furthermore,

begs leave to add one observation, in answer, to the dangerous and fatal Consequences apprehended from Blacks being allowed to give Evidence upon Oath against White People as tending to endanger the lives of the White Inhabitants and safety of the Island. On this it must be observed that the same

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ IOR: G/32/40, St Helena Records, consultations, 3.1.1780.

argument will hold good in respect to Infant Colonies as nations, That selfdefence the first Law of Nature may oblige Communities to at first Establish a Severity of regulations justifiable upon those grounds; History no doubt furnishes Us with innumerable Examples; Yet at same time teaches Us that so soon as Society's begin to feel their own strength and permanency, Justice then supercedes oppression, humanity, Severity, and every Individual becomes interested in support of that Authority to which they owe the protection of Life and property. Let us apply this to the present, both here, and in every other place where that portion of Our unhappy Fellow Creatures are doomed to Civil Slavery. Convince them of the protection and Justice of our Laws over their natural Liberty of Life and Limb (which the meanest of the Humane Species knows they have right to, as a donation from a Superior power) You will then rescue their Confidence, unfetter even Slavery itself, and dispell all those frightful apprehensions of Cutting off the White Inhabitants [...].¹⁹

In the event, Woodberry's complaint was heard in full. The particular details of the case do not concern me here, and it suffices to say that they did largely accord with the complaint as stated originally. Apart from Woodberry, evidence was given by four other slaves, as well as the Company's surgeon. Worrall appeared in his own defence. However, in signing the minutes for that day, Dan Corneille noted his objection to the format of that enquiry.

In response to a further minute by Corneille,²⁰ Skottow, Matthew Bazett, Wrangham and Henry Bazett defended their earlier opinions, to the effect that they had "found our reasons for not admitting the Eviden[ce] of Blacks against Whites upon the following Arguments. first, from the knowledge we have of their great ignorance of a Deity, having no form of Worship among them. Secondly the Vague Idea they can form of the sacred nature of an Oath, which from such People could be no more binding upon their Consciences than asseverations and declarations, [...]" They also point out that "when the slave finds himself encouraged by indulgencies of this nature, he will immediately conclude himself more upon a footing with his Master, and be more apt to withstand his

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ IOR: G/32/40, St Helena Records, consultations, 10.1.1780.

Will and neglect his Business [...]."²¹ They go on to conclude that Corneille seemed to suffer from "an unhappy propensity to give unnecessary trouble." As for themselves, "respecting his feeling, conscience, humanity and adherence to the Laws, we think ourselves at least equal to him in all these points [...]."²²

Corneille, however, was not the first to express severe doubts about the moral foundations of slavery, for C.F. Noble, visiting St Helena in 1747, already commented that

This being the first place where I had ever access to see the slavery of our fellow creatures, I could not help bewailing their hard fortune, and being sensibly touched at the sight of their misery. My heart silently pleaded in their behalf, and pitied their masters insensibility, and sometimes cruelty, at the same time that I condemned them. Nothing ever gave me better lesson of the misery and weakness of mankind. What is more cruel, barbarous, unchristian, and shocking to nature, than to see one half of mankind torturing the other; or that the different tincture of the skin, or simplicity of manners, should induce us to exercise the greatest cruelty towards them. [...] [W]ith what shew of justice can we make slaves of a people of another free country, and even of little children, who have done nothing to provoke us? Were they not, were not all mankind originally born to liberty? [...] Custom may make such practices common, but will never make them lawful.²³

Slavery, alas, on St Helena as elsewhere, was as much a matter of law as it was of common practice.

²¹ IOR: G/32/40, St Helena Records, consultations, 24.1.1780.

²² Ibid.

²³ C.F. Noble, *A Voyage to the East Indies in 1747 & 1748* (London: 1762); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 196-97.

Even if opinions clearly differed, from at least the late seventeenth century onwards slavery on St Helena was regulated by an extensive set of so-called *Laws and Orders, constituted for the Negro Slaves, by the inhabitants of the island, with the approbation of the Governor and Council*. A copy of the laws survives in a manuscript volume by Governor Thomas Goodwin, entitled *Laws Ordinance & Constitutions for the Good Government of y^e Island of S^t Helena*, which he collated in 1708 from letters and other instructions from the East India Company's Directors and the island's governor and council.²⁴ The headings of the various provisions of these laws give an ample indication of their overall emphasis:

- Against Wandring on Sundays
- For Pilfering and Stealing
- Absenters and Runaways
- For Breaking open Houses
- In Relation to Strikeang or Assaulting and White Person
- In Relation to those that shall give Sawcey Language Resist Oppose or Strike any White Person
- Against one BlackBartering wth Another
- Againts any White Person Trucking or Bartering with Blacks
- No black to Prescribe Physick Each to Other²⁵

Their emphasis is on prohibition and punishment, in contrast to the slave laws of 1792, which were concerned primarily with rights and duties (see below).²⁶ But no matter how severe some of the punishments meted out to slaves may appear today, the Company's directors felt that many slaves had been far too leniently punished, for they informed the

²⁴ The precise date of these laws is not known, although Thomas Brooke assumed them to have been framed between 1674 and 1678 and considered them of such interest that he included them in their entirety as an appendix in his *History of the Island of St. Helena* (1824). [T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), 449-53.]

²⁵ SHGA: Thomas Goodwin's *Laws Ordinance & Constitutions for the Good Government of y^e Island of S^t Helena*, p. 71-6.

²⁶ For a comparative analysis of slave laws, see Elsa V. Goveia, 'The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century', in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds), *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (London: James Currey, 1991). For a wide-ranging, comparative study of the nature of slavery, including its changing status in law, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

island's governor in 1683 that "we approve of your manner of trying the blacks but think very meanly of you for the matter of the sentence & wonder the more how you could be guilty of such weakness as to let those Blacks pass with whipping which an Englishman would have been condemned to dye here by a Jury [...]."²⁷

But contrary to their earlier comments and contrary to the letter and spirit of the island's slave laws, the East India Company's directors soon found it necessary to provide some rather different advice in 1717.

The next Branch relating to this head is the Article of Slaves you have now and may Expect a much greater Number than in any time past and therefore if you are industrious and carefull to make them most usefull to us they will answer all those purposes which you suggested as the reason why you desired a Supply. Be sure to use them humanly. Remember they are men. Suffer none to Insult them nor even to Strike them but their immediate overseere and let not those Tyrannize over them, apply them to such works of ours as they are or can be severally made fittest for. Breed them up Especially the younger to all Sorts of Handicraft or other business which our affairs Stand in need of. Keep them to constant hours of labour. Allow them leizure on all Sundays except in cases of present real necessity and on some particular festivals. This will make them love and fear you and they can discern the difference between wrong & right and if only Punisht when they deserve it and with no more severity than their faults deserves they will stand self condemn'd in their own consciences which is the first step to Reformation.²⁸

To what extend these recommendations led to the earlier slave laws being enforced less stringently is difficult to tell. On 24 February 1792, however, an altogether new set of slave laws was passed entitled *Laws, Orders, and Constitutions, made by the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies, as Lords and Proprietors of the island of St. Helena, for the better government of Slaves in the said island, and for their protection and relief, and to prevent the increase of slavery in the said island.*²⁹ As is clear from their very title, these laws put St

²⁷ SHGA: In-Letters, 3.8.1687.

²⁸ SHGA: In-Letters, 25.3.1717.

²⁹ Reprinted in T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), 462-80. Also see PRO: CO 247/36.

Helena slavery on a substantially new footing.³⁰ In 1815 an anonymous author commented on these laws accordingly, saying that they "place the slave system on as mild a basis as appears possible".³¹ Amongst a total of 42 articles could be found the following provisions respecting the slaves:

- II - To be treated with kindness and properly maintained.
- V - Excess punishment by proprietors of slaves to be considered as an assault and misdemeanour.
- XI - Rape, or attempt to committ a rape, on a female slave, to be punished according to the Laws of England.
- XX - Slaves allowed to give evidence if found to understand and be impressed with the obligation of an oath.
- XXVII - Slaves to have the enjoyment of, and be protected in respect to such property as they shall lawfully acquire.
- XXXVII - The mode in which slaves may be made free.
- XXXIX - No new slaves to be imparted [*sic*] and every person labouring or entertaining a new slave to pay fifty pounds, and also the expenses of sending him to the place to which he belong.

Nevertheless, the overriding aim in curbing the excesses of that slave system were eminently economical, in that they were aimed at preserving a slave population that could no longer be augmented by further procurements.³²

The 1792 slave laws also made provisions for the religious instruction of slaves: "X - To go to church and be instructed on Sundays, when the Chaplain is to attend two hours for the purpose besides the ordinary divine service." This concern with the supposedly spiritual 'improvement' of the island's slave had already been integral to the East India Company's attitude as far back as 1670, when they had provided orders for their education and gradual emancipation. In particular, the directors had ordered that

As for our Negroes y^t shall be brought to you or y^t you have there already, wee desire y^t they may be carefully instructed in y^e knowledge of Jesus Christ, & y^t you

³⁰ For a comparative analysis of the protective aspects of slave laws, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (London: Louisiana State University Press), chapter V.

³¹ Anon., *A Geographical and Historical Account of the Island of St. Helena* (New York: Van Winkle & Wiley, 1815), 64.

³² In the late eighteenth century the East India Company, along with some free traders and anti-slavery peers, were among the few supporters of Wilberforce's calls for an abolition of the slave trade. See Oliver Ransford, *The Slave Trade* (London: John Murray, 1971), 189.

will by your lives & conversations give them good examples, that they may be incorage therein, & when they shall give a good accompt unto you of the knowledge of their faith & live up therein accordingly, that then they be baptized, & after y^t time to serve 7 yeares & noe longer, & then to be free planters.³³

More specifically, in their letter of December 1673, the Directors announced that they were sending a new minister to the island who had been instructed "that he teach; and direct the teaching of the children as their M^f to read, and write, And also as many of the negros children as are capable of learning [...]."³⁴ Even more significantly, the Company confirmed their previous order "that all negroes both men & women living on the Island that shall make profession of the Christian fayth and be baptized; shall within 7 years after their such publique embracing the Christian Religion; be free planters, & enjoy the priviledges of other planters, both of land & cattle."³⁵ These instructions were again confirmed in 1677, in the East India Company's instructions to Governor Blackmore.³⁶ So far, however, I have been unable to find any evidence in the records of even a single slave who became a free planter under these provisions.

Religious instruction aside, in 1684 the directors encouraged slaves being trained for specific tasks, arguing that "Madagascan Blacks in Barbados are found to be most Ingenious of any Blacks in learning manuell trades such as Smiths, Carpenters, Coopers, Masons, Briklayers &c^a."³⁷ This concern with industry became a central theme in many a writer's deliberations, such as those of Viscount Valentia, who concluded in 1811 that he had "no doubt that the slave of St. Helena, were he properly taught, would soon become a valuable member of society. He has the usual good qualities of his race, and is as well provided for, as the labourer of England."³⁸ These particular remarks are interesting not least insofar as Valentia seemed to presume no fundamental distinction between the potential of these slaves and those of Englishmen. Similarly, John Barnes in his 1817 *Tour of the island* noted that

³³ IOR: E/3/87, letter to St Helena, 9.12.1670.

³⁴ IOR: E/3/88, letter to St Helena, 19.12.1673.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ SHGA: In-Letters, 20.2.1677.

³⁷ IOR: E/3/90, letter to St Helena, 5.4.1684.

³⁸ George, Viscount Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt*, Vol.I (London: F., C., and J. Rivington, 1811), 16.

[t]he blacks, or slaves, as they are called, perform the labours of the farms; are employed in domestic services as fishermen, and some as mechanics: they are descended from progenitors long since imported, and from others subsequently brought from various parts of the globe. [...] From the dissemination of instruction important benefits may be expected to result; for, by no means deficient in natural understanding, the impressions made on their minds by the education they receive, must render them better men and more faithful servants, in every respect, as their predecessors have been.³⁹

The island's growing population of free blacks were indeed seen to have shown their aptitude for industry, as is evident from the completion in 1825 of the Company's new Head School by a labour force drawn solely from amongst them. This fact was commented on with pride by the governor, who laid a corresponding minute before the council, noting that he was "happy to observe that the entire labor of this work has been executed by the hands of the freemen of colour, and that Lt Col^l Kinnaird [gave] a very favourable testimony of their general good behaviour, diligence and activity. We have every reason to expect that their utility will increase with their growing numbers, and that this work which may be called their first fruits, will be a pledge that the native population will be adequate and sufficient for all the labour of the Island."⁴⁰

In the appendix to their report of 1834/5, Brandreth and Walpole present the 'evidence' given before them by Capt. den Taffe, Reporter of Emancipation, who "gave the following account of 'the general character and condition of the emancipated coloured population'."

They are generally intelligent and active and I think not wanting in Industry - those men who reside in the Country are sober and when fairly and kindly treated make good Servants. In the relations of Husbands and Wife, Parent and child they are faithful and affectionate in these respects their feelings are very strong. In the lower Schools there appears to be no want of capacity in the colored children, and amongst the Men and Women there is an aptness in acquiring any art. The Men as

³⁹ John Barnes, *A Tour Through the Island of St. Helena* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1817), 82-3.

⁴⁰ SHGA: St Helena Records, 5.9.1825.

far as we are enabled to judge are not wanting in personal courage. They become strongly attached to families in which they have been kindly treated. In putting their children to service they are very particular in what families they will place them and generally make it a condition that their educational and moral and religious instruction shall be attended to.⁴¹

Den Taffe also stated that the "people of color are now nearly all Natives - the importation of Slaves having been abolished since 1792 there are but very few Foreigners remaining and those are very old."⁴² As for the emancipation referred to by den Taffe, this constituted the last phase of a gradual process which began in about 1800 with the emancipation or sale of most of the East India Company's slaves,⁴³ and which received new impetus in 1818, when it was declared that all children born of slaves after Christmas Day that year were to be born free. This process culminated in the eventual emancipation of all the island's remaining slaves from 1832 onwards.⁴⁴ Given that St Helena was a possession of the East India Company, it had in fact been excluded from the provisions of the Abolition of Slavery Act 1833, and it was not until 1839 that a local ordinance declared slavery unlawful on the island, although by then it had already ceased to exist in practice.⁴⁵

Although a history of slavery on St Helena remains to be written, the existence of slavery on the island should at least be known on account of the frequent reproduction of a St Helena public notice advertising slaves for sale. I say 'should', because the notice in question is usually assigned to the West Indies. The first known reproduction of this poster (*illustration 15*) can be found in *The Story of the British People in Pictures* published in

⁴¹ PRO: CO 247/39, item 1679.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The circumstances of this early emancipation still require further studies, but some details can be found in SHGA: St Helena Records, 10.2.1800 and 17.2.1800.

⁴⁴ For further details, see T.H. Brooke, *History of the Island of St. Helena, From Its Discovery by the Portuguese to the Year 1823* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allan, 1924), 404-7. For an overview, see George A. Lewis, 'The Liberation of Slaves in St Helena, Part I and II', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Winter 1991 and Spring 1992). For a comparative analysis, see William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

⁴⁵ See 'An Ordinance for the Abolition of Slavery in the Island of St. Helena, No.24 - 1839'.

TO BE SOLD & LET

BY PUBLIC AUCTION,

On *MONDAY* the 18th of *MAY*, 1829,

UNDER THE TREES.

FOR SALE,

THE THREE FOLLOWING

SLAVES,

VIZ.

HANNIBAL, about 30 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character.

WILLIAM, about 35 Years old, a Labourer.

NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse.

The MEN Belonging to "LEECH'S" Estate, and the WOMAN to Mrs. D. SMIT

TO BE LET,

On the usual conditions of the Hirer finding them in Food, Clot in & Medical

THE FOLLOWING

MALE and FEMALE

SLAVES,

OF GOOD CHARACTER,

ROBERT BAGLEY, about 29 Years old, a good House Servant.

WILLIAM BAGLEY, about 18 Years old, a Labourer.

JOHN ARMS, about 18 Years old.

JACK ANTONIA, about 40 Years old, a Labourer.

PHILIP, an Excellent Fisherman.

HARRY, about 27 Years old, a good House Servant.

LUCY, a Young Woman of good Character, used to House Work and the Nursery.

ELIZA, an Excellent Washerwoman.

CLARA, an Excellent Washerwoman.

FANNY, about 14 Years old, House Servant.

SARAH, about 14 Years old, House Servant.

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'Clock,
Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,
Needles, Pins, Ribbons, &c. &c.

AT ONE O'CLOCK, THAT CELEBRATED ENGLISH HORSE

BLUCHER,

ADDISON PRINTER GOVERNMENT OFFICE.

Illustration 15: Public Notice for the Sale of Slaves, St Helena (1829)

source: Wilberforce Museum, Hull

1937, where its provenance is given as the Wilberforce Museum in Hull,⁴⁶ although no mention is made of St Helena in its extensive caption. In the absence of a correct ascription, which is easily done using internal evidence, Lucretia Stewart considered a copy of the notice "the most striking exhibit" on display in the Grenada National Museum, which appeared to claim it for Granada.⁴⁷ F. George Kay even used the poster as the cover illustration for his *The Shameful Trade*, published in 1967, where it is captioned as "a slave-sale bill, 1829, posted in the West Indies to advertise a public auction".⁴⁸

INDENTURED CHINESE

During the early nineteenth century, St Helena experienced the influx of a large number of Chinese indentured labourers. In common with the island's black slaves and free blacks, these Chinese became subject to a process of colonial 'othering'.

The origin of the island's Chinese settlers is outlined by Brandreth and Walpole in their report of 1834/5, where they explain that in "the year 1810 fifty Chinese were introduced to the Island, in consequence of a representation from the Governor, that there was a deficiency of labour, and this particular race of people was selected from their known orderly and industrious habits and ingenuity." Unlike their fellow black labourers, therefore, these Chinese did not need to establish their industrious credentials.

"In the course of a few years the number of Chinese was increased to 600", but by the time of the enquiry in 1834/5., that number had fallen to "116 of which 86 are attached to the Company's Service; and 30 are established as free Settlers." Only 14 of these had expressed a wish to return to China following the island's take-over by the Crown. "Their ages vary from 30 to 65 and average 45 years, and their residence in the Island averages from 18 to 20 years."⁴⁹ Further details can be found in Appendix 2.

As with the island's slaves and free blacks, Brandreth and Walpole provided an overall assessment of the Chinese on St Helena and offered extensive comments on those

⁴⁶ Harley V. Usill (ed), *The Story of the British People in Pictures* (London: Odhams Press, 1937), 422.

⁴⁷ Lucretia Stewart, *The Weather Prophet: A Caribbean Journey* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), 34-5.

⁴⁸ F. George Kay, *The Shameful Trade* (London: Frederick Muller, 1967), cover and facing 43.

aspects of the Chinese population which they considered to be in need of being addressed by any future administration. In so far as the "introduction of the Chinese has been pronounced one of the greatest blessings conferred upon the Island," they beg to differ. Instead, they argued, "it would have been wiser to have introduced the English Labourer rather than the Alien Chinese", who "would continue a Foreigner in habits, interest feelings and religion."⁵⁰

Given that this was not done at the time, Brandreth and Walpole faced up to the fact that as "the people have been so long in the Colony, and have established small Settlements and otherwise naturalized themselves, and are admitted to be a peaceable, industrious and hard working people, we think it would be both just and humane to accede to the wish of those who desire to remain [...]." However, given "a disability, under which these people laboured, owing to their peculiar Religious Tenets, disqualifying them from being married according to the rights of the Church", they recommend that "this difficulty can only be obviated by a Law of the Island, making the marriage in the case of these People a Civil Contract; and in this opinion the Senior Chaplain concurs, adding that the Law should be restricted to the present generation; and that the Children should be reared as Christians." Such an 'improvement' in the character of the Chinese is considered of the utmost importance. As Brandreth and Walpole go on to explain at length:

We are of opinion that the moral and religious character of this people, has not much engaged the attention of the proper authorities so long as they were hired for a limited period of three or five years and then exchanged or returned to their Country, it might have been extremely difficult, if not impracticable (from the ignorance of language) and possibly in direct opposition to the wishes of the people themselves to attempt any change in their breed or habits - but after they were permitted and indeed encouraged to become a virtual part of the Population; and their future prospects were as entirely involved in the Island, as those of any other Class of the Community. we are of opinion that they should have engaged the attention of the Government. So that all expedient and proper measures should have been pursued to encourage a knowledge of the language of the

⁴⁹ SHGA: 'The Commission of 1835'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

adopted Country; and an acquaintance with its Religious creed, or failing in the last object, they should at least have had secured to them, every civil advantage enjoyed by the rest of the Population.

Notwithstanding the excellent character given of these Peoples and the proofs of their ingenuity, industry, and quiet demeanour, which we ourselves witnessed, we were concerned to observe their degraded condition of life; the miserable hovels they inhabited, their filthy habits; and the suspicion under which they laboured of acts of low cunning and knavery; thus presenting a striking contrast between their social and domestic habits; and their industry and great usefulness to the community.⁵¹

As long as these Chinese were mere temporary members of the community, their alien nature could be accepted, but now that they were to be incorporated into the main body of the community, their 'naturalisation' had to be carried to its apparently logical conclusions. Interestingly, Brandreth and Walpole admit that they "cannot suggest any immediate mode of Instruction by which the Moral and Religious habits of the Chinese may be improved, but from the progress some of them have made in acquiring the English language, it is hoped that if a teacher was sent amongst them, improvements in those respects would take place; [...].⁵²

CHINATOWN

During the decades following Brandreth's and Walpole's report, several other observers have recorded their impressions of the island's Chinese, all of which go to indicate that for at least a generation the majority of those Chinese who remained on the island chose to live as a separate community, distinguished by religion, dress and housing. As late as 1835, James Edward Alexander, for one, had observed the attire of "some of the Chinese gardeners who are employed on the island, in their broad straw hats, loose blue dungaree

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

jackets and trousers, and long pigtails."⁵³ He likewise noted the distinctive style of "the joss-houses of the Chinese labourers, with their grotesque dragons and griffins on the roofs, their paper lanterns and flags inside, and their sacred vessels and altar before the portly figure of the god Fo."⁵⁴ These descriptions correspond with the only known illustration picturing some of St Helena's Chinese in detail, namely a print of Plantation House, showing in the foreground two Chinese and a 'joss house' at what is now Plantation Square (*illustrations 16a and 16b*).⁵⁵

Alexander's impressions are more than matched by Joseph Lockwood's observations of the Chinese in 1850. Lockwood, as a long term resident, wrote from a rather different perspective from Alexander, being much better acquainted with the island as a whole. Leaving aside their documentary value, Lockwood's account is the arguably best example of the 'orientalist' genre in St Helena literature.⁵⁶

These chinamen keep up most of the habits, and all the propensities of their countrymen. They wear their tails, or an apology for them, but twisted round their heads under their hats to keep the boys from having a sly tug at them as they pass along. They are great merchants in a small way - know the value of money, love it as their souls - delight in hording it in their huts - make its possession the study, and be it said, the labour of their lives; for they are not a lazy people, any thing but that. They dabble in everything, from fireworks and crackers - *hwa chub hiang pau*; rice paper pictures - *ting chi wha*; tea - *cha yea*; sugar - *hwang tang*; down to lollipops and sweatmeats - *ki koh yang tang kwol* and have a finger in every pie where a penny is to be got. They are the remnants of some three or four hundred introduced into the Island by the East India Company, now reduced perhaps to a couple of dozen, mostly old and wrinkled; they have grafted a new breed on the old stock of the Island, and will leave behind them a generation of "china faces" to swell the motley mixture of the population. They are excellent gardeners, and when in their prime,

⁵³ James Edward Alexander, *A Voyage of Observation Among the Colonies of Western Africa in 1835* (London: Henry Colburn, 1837).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ John Kerr, *Series of Views in the Island of St Helena* (London: Colnaghi, 1822); 'View of Plantation House'.

⁵⁶ In this instance I follow Edward Said's use of the term 'orientalism', rather than John MacKenzie's. [Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985; orig. 1978), 1-9; John MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).]

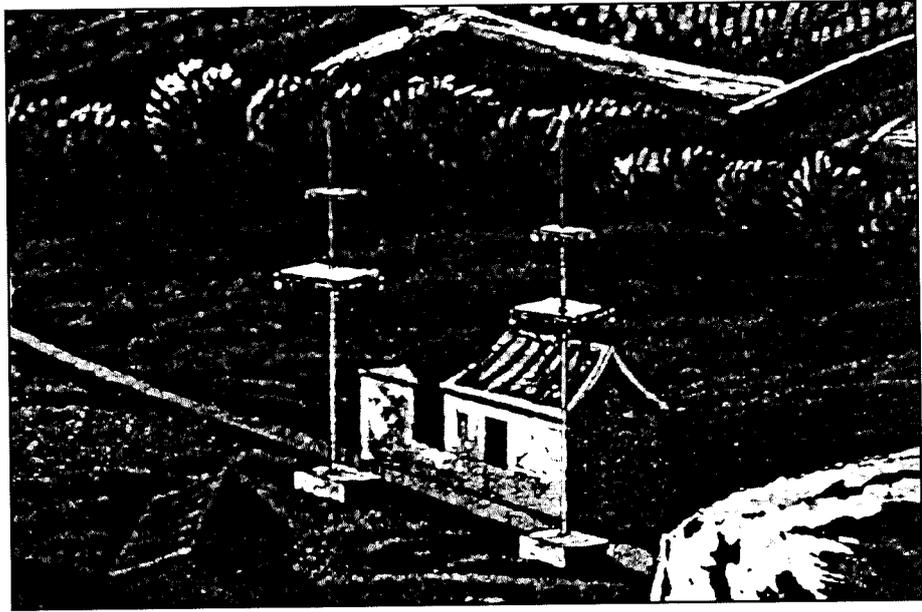


Illustration 16a and 16b: 'View of Plantation House' (details)

source: John Kerr, *Series of Views in the Island of St Helena* (London: Colnaghi, 1822)

were good and useful workmen, their peculiar imitative faculty enabling them to turn their hands to anything. They are steady, harmless, inoffensive people, partial to feasts and good living however; fond of their national vice of gambling, as far as they can amongst themselves - given a little to illicit and unlicensed trading, but in other respects orderly in their pursuits, and persevering in their peculiar avocations, shrewd in their judgement, and alive to every move played in the lottery of life.

Their broken english is highly amusing, and difficult to understand by persons not well used to their peculiar terms and expressions, and the whimsical way in which they mutilate and shorten a word of its fair proportions; they keep up their own language in conversation, and in writing, as may be seen by little hand bills stuck about, on occasion of a funeral, or other matter important to themselves, when they wish to call their community together, and gather the clan for a great confabulation.⁵⁷

Although Lockwood belittles many aspects of Chinese character, he evidently shows sufficient respect to enable him to accept the community's impact on the island.⁵⁸ This is the case less so with Lockwood's description of the Chinese quarters in Jamestown, an account also exemplifying his characteristically verbose style.

China Town! who can describe its beauties, thread its labyrinths, enjoy its unsavoury smells, penetrate its many mysteries, elucidate the idiosyncracies of its motley inhabitants, be edified by the gabble of its people, smile at their curious customs, - who can do all these - yea, who can do them in the limits of a guide book - not I faith; and therefore I shall not make the attempt. There is the terrestrial abode of the "celestials" of St. Helena - huts, little huts, sheds, and bothies, jammed together, put in rows face to face, a yard apart to make a street, - a narrow passage leading to a blind alley, with dirty courts and passages so narrow, that two crummy people would be puzzled to pass. A complicated net-work of

⁵⁷ Joseph Lockwood, *A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical* (St Helena: 1851), 59-60.

⁵⁸ For a comparative examples of the 'orientalist' textualizing of China and the Chinese, see Andrew Blake, 'Foreign Devils and Moral Panics: Britain, Asia and the Opium Trade', in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996). Also see V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (London: The Cresseet Library, 1988; orig. 1969), 159-64.

alleys, made of mud covered huts, one-half sans doors, and the other half sans windows, with open smokey kitchens, piggeries and fowleries. There are two Jos houses, one neglected, and the other not much attended to - both furnished with Gods, and plentifully festooned with cobwebs, which the God in his wisdom never removes, nor the "faithful" in the plentitude of their idleness.⁵⁹

What a contrast Chinatown would seem to represent compared to the supposedly neatly laid out streets of Lower Jamestown, which I have discussed previously.

An interesting footnote to the story of Chinese labourers on St Helena can be found as recently as 1992, when a Hong-Kong clothing manufacturer, Yu Sang Lee, proposed the relocation of his parent company from Hong Kong to St Helena, a plan that involved the setting up of a factory on the island. Integral to this relocation was the plan "to bring in a number of Chinese personnel, the numbers, (including families), would be between 300 and 1000." To accommodate these, the company suggested that "following the example set in the United Kingdom, a separate 'Chinatown' away from other settlements would be best, this despite the large influx of Chinese would allow integration to take place at a natural rate, along with the setting up of the principal business, (the factory), other infrastructural businesses such as shops and restaurants would follow, providing their own community."⁶⁰

This plan caused considerable consternation on the island and several constituency meetings were called to discuss the matter, at one of which, in Jamestown, "the question was asked 'Does an island as small as St Helena want a separate cultural community?'"⁶¹ Several correspondents to the *St. Helena News* also noted their views, one of whom asked: "Will St Helenians retain their culture? Communication is very important, can these people speak English, as we certainly don't speak Chinese."⁶² In the event, nothing ever came of Yu Sang Lee's proposals.

⁵⁹ Joseph Lockwood, *A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical* (St Helena: 1851), 58.

⁶⁰ Yu Sang Lee, 'Business Proposal'; reprinted in the *St. Helena News*, 14.8.92.

⁶¹ *St. Helena News*, 7.8.1992.

⁶² Letter by Gavin Thomas, *St. Helena News*, 10.7.1992.

Even after it had been abolished, slavery once again became a subject of concern to St Helena when, in 1840, a Vice-Admiralty Court was established at St Helena in order to try the crews of vessels engaged in the slave trade on the west coast of Africa⁶³, constituting an very important contribution to the suppression of the slave trade, but which has almost completely been ignored in the literature.⁶⁴ Between 1840 and the 1870s, captured slave vessels were escorted to St Helena, where their crew were tried, the vessels condemned, while those Africans who had survived the voyage were liberated and cared for at one of several 'depots' established for the purpose, particularly at Ruperts Bay.

Strangely enough, in order for these Africans to be liberated, they first of all had to become the legal property of those who intended to give them their freedom, that is, of the Crown. This language of liberation was, to say the least, peculiar. When a captured slaver, the *Santissima Trinidad*, was brought to St Helena in 1852, the vessel was impounded, while the Vice-Admiralty Court at St Helena "condemned the 37 male slaves and 27 female slaves, part of the same, surviving at the time of adjudication, to the sole use of our Sovereign Lady the Queen [...]"⁶⁵ From all available accounts, however, these Africans were grateful for such 'condemnation' and for the change of circumstances afforded them by their liberation, even if the exuberance of the following letter is unlikely to be expressive of their sentiments, couched as it is in the style of the time.

⁶³ For a range of documentary sources on the Liberated African Establishment, see E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903), especially pages 259-288.

⁶⁴ See Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Green and Co., 1949); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988). On the abolition of the slave trade and its replacement by indentured labour, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 174-7.

⁶⁵ 'Judgement in the Case of the "Santissima Trinidad"', in *Class A. Correspondence with the British Commissioners at Sierra Leone, Havana, the Cape of Good Hope, and Loanda; and from British Vice-Admiralty Courts, and from British Naval Officers, Relating to the Slave Trade. From April 1, 1852, to March 31, 1853* (London: 1853).

To His Excellency Major-General Sir Patrick Ross, G.C.M.G. and Governor, etc., etc., etc.

May it please your Excellency, -

We, the liberated Africans residing at Saint Helena, do beg to return our most hearty and sincere thanks for the care that has been taken of us since our arrival in the British Dominions, and we have become the subjects of our beloved Queen, Victoria, Defender of the Faith, etc., etc., etc. We likewise return our most hearty thanks and praises to God for his merciful guidance in bringing us into the hands of Christian people from whom we have been taught to love and serve God, and who have been instrumental in bringing us to return those thanks which we cannot find words to express for our feelings towards our most Gracious Queen; and it is the prayer of us all that she may obtain a Crown in Heaven when this life terminates. We were poor, forlorn, friendless and ignorant beings, and did not know there was a God, from whom we derived our being. We cannot return the thanks we wish, but if we were called upon to defend the rights and possessions of Great Britain, we will, one and all, endeavour to defend it with our last breath.

Benjamin Vemba,	}	
John Marsch	}	<i>Africans</i>
James George	}	

The above-signed Africans inform His Excellency that their countrymen have requested them to forward this as a respect due to the British Government.

St. Helena, *August 18th*, 1848.⁶⁶

Their conversion, as evident from this letter, is one of two principal 'improvements' to which these Africans were subjected during their time on St Helena, the other having been their drafting into the military, which I discuss a little further on.

Bishop Gray, who visited St Helena in 1849, once went to Ruperts Valley to inspect a captured slaver of about 100 tons that had been brought to St Helena with 560 slaves on board, giving a most vivid description of the conditions in which he found the newly liberated Africans.

The deck was entirely covered with them. They had a worn look, and wasted appearance, and were moved into the boats like bales of goods, apparently without

⁶⁶ Quoted in E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903), 263-4.

any will of their own. I crept down between decks to the place where they are usually stowed away. It might be between three and four feet high, and the atmosphere was most offensive, although not occupied by one third of the usual number. [...] I never beheld a more piteous sight - never looked upon a more affecting scene - never before felt so powerful a call to be a Missionary.⁶⁷

While Bishop Gray, for one, had been impressed by the general efforts to restore the liberated Africans to health, he was critical of a lack of spiritual provision. "I was pained to find that no effort is made to instruct these poor things during the time they are on the island; and the more so because the Superintendent informed me that they show a great aptitude for instruction and have a strong desire for it."⁶⁸ But Bishop Gray's concerns were eventually addressed, as is evident from a fascinating little booklet published in 1862, entitled *The Baptism of Slaves at St. Helena*, which tells of the missionary aspects of the Liberated African Establishment at Ruperts Bay. Although it is presented in the form of a story of religious instruction for children, I see no reason to doubt that the little book is based on the author's experience of just such an event.

The story's narrator, Aunt Ina, tells a group of children about a visit she had paid to St Helena some years before, where she had had the opportunity of witnessing the baptism of over 230 Africans at Ruperts. The decision to be baptised had apparently been taken by them "though truth has only been set before these people through the doubtful means of an interpreter" and although "they seem a people slow to hear, slow to understand."⁶⁹ Aunt Ina had approached the ceremony of baptism with considerable doubt, but she had been relieved to find none of what she had feared.

I had doubted them - I had questioned whether they had really received that impression of truth which they professed to hold - whether they had, indeed, a deep conviction of the act they were performing [...]. I needed but to look on the faces and the gestures of these men to be reassured. There was faith and humility of soul stamped on their earnest features - there was steadfastness of purpose in the calm, patient figures as, unmoved, they awaited the commencement of the

⁶⁷ Robert Gray, *Cape of Good Hope: Journals of Two Visitations in 1848 and 1849* (London: S.P.C.K., 1849), 109.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

solemn service. [...] Strange it was, in that wild spot, to hear the holy words spoken to these men of 'stammering lips' - strange, as one after the other passed in file before the minister, to hear the familiar names of our distant homes pronounced upon these poor savages, names which they would henceforth bear as badges of their new life in Christ [...].⁷⁰

Although any suspicions of possible mimicry have here been put aside, in describing these Africans as "men of 'stammering lips'", the anonymous author of the above nevertheless writes within what Spurr has called "the rhetorical tradition in which non-Western peoples are essentially denied the power of language and are represented as mute or incoherent." Within this tradition, "the degraded or inadequate condition of language signifies a corresponding degradation in the political and social order of the other."⁷¹ Similarly, Lockwood too had remarked on the "broken english" of the island's Chinese labourers (see above).

Of those Africans who had been offered baptism, apparently only 30 had declined to be baptised. Oswald Blakeston, for one, writing about his visit to St Helena in 1957, professed himself highly critical of this particular part of the history of the Liberated Africa Establishment. Having read *The Baptism of Slaves at St. Helena* while undertaking research at the British Library prior to his visit, he wondered "how parsons dared to convert the last of the slaves to a faith which has no record of protesting when St. Helena's gentlewomen flogged slaves to death or rolled them in nettles to amuse the children."⁷²

Their religious instruction apart, the general treatment of liberated Africans at Ruperts Bay, and their transformation, is best described by an anonymous author, whose account was published in 1865.

Worn almost to skeletons in the hold of a slave-ship, the horrors of which must be seen to be understood, the poor creatures on landing crouch down in the sitting position to which they have been restricted for weeks; emaciated, dirty, loathsome

⁶⁹ Anon., *The Baptism of Slaves at St. Helena* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1862), 13.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 18-9, 20.

⁷¹ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 104.

to the sight, and apparently regardless of everything about them, or of what is to be their next charge. They present little more resemblance to human beings than do their own carved fetishes or grigrees. A few weeks of kind and careful treatment, nourishing food, and enforced habits of cleanliness, produce a wonderful change in their appearance and manner; they move with quickness and activity, walk erect, and chatter like their country's parrots. Being excellent imitators, they soon pick up from the assistant superintendent a series of motions in unison, sit down in rows to their meals at a motion of his hand, jump up at another, clap their hands, take off their caps, give three cheers, and replace their caps, all with the alacrity and precision of time of well-trained soldiers, or nearly so.⁷³

Once again, the problem of mimicry rears its head, for as David Spurr has pointed out, in a "paradox of colonial discourse, the natives are reviled for their non-Western otherness, yet ridiculed for their attempts to imitate the forms of the West."⁷⁴ That is, they are "held in contempt for their lack of civility, loved for their willingness to acquire it, and ridiculed when they have acquired too much."⁷⁵

As for being 'well-trained soldiers', they turned out to be not just 'nearly so', for in 1863 orders were received that some liberated Africans at St Helena were to be recruited into a West Indian regiment. In the event, 200 hundred of the men "signified their willingness to enlist"⁷⁶ While it had at first been suggested that these may replace the island's European troops,⁷⁷ things took a dramatic turn on 22 September 1863, the responses to which provide an insight into the attitudes prevailing at the time. On that day the Assistant Superintendent of the liberated Africans reported to the governor " that the Africans on this Station turned out this morning, and being armed with knives, sticks, iron bolts and other missiles, made a great riot and disturbance, and violently assaulted a overseer named Thomas, who was with much difficulty rescued out of their hands." The origin of the riot had apparently been "the recent appointment of the man Thomas,

⁷² Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957), 83.

⁷³ Anon. [A Bird of Passage], *Saint Helena* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1865), 72.

⁷⁴ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 84.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁶ PRO: CO 247/98, letter from the Governor to the Secretary of State, 29.8.1863.

whose duty would be that of Instructor and Interpreter to which they appeared to have a great aversion; [...]." According to the superintendent's report, the "most prominent actors in this riot and general disturbance are 200 men who have been selected some time past as Candidates for enlistment in the 5th West Indian Regiment".⁷⁸

Order was restored eventually, and despite these events and the assessment related to the governor, the latter surprisingly remarked in a letter to the Secretary of State written a few days later, that "if there had been no other than black troops here my apprehension would not have been that they would not act promptly at the command of their officers to suppress disorder, but, on the contrary that they would act with unnecessary violence." In the governor's opinion,

Any insulting cry from the ranks of the rioters in one of the native dialects addressed it might be to some of the troops belonging to hostile tribes might be swiftly and terribly resented, for it is too true that African soldiers resort suddenly and on light provocation to the use of their arms. [...] [W]hilst it is true that this particular riot was of no more importance [...] than the casual outbreak of schoolboys and was quite as easily quelled, it is also not to be denied that there would be a great increase of danger if we had only African troops here. These people, like most people in that low stage of civilization take fire suddenly, and sometimes on very trivial causes of provocation.⁷⁹

The Africans were hence still seen as in the early stages of their 'improvement', mere 'schoolboys', a danger to one another as much as to anyone else. In the event, although liberated Africans were still formed into a West Indian regiment, this was now no longer intended to replace the existing garrison on St Helena. In the eyes of one commentator at least, the 'improvement' resulting from the raising of that regiment had been a great success, for those who had enlisted "in an incredibly short space of time were changed into something different from their former state, that no one could have recognized, in the erect, well set up, confident soldier, the miserable, crouching, degraded being that was squatting down, a heap of disease and filth, on the stony beach at Rupert's a few

⁷⁷ See *The St. Helena Guardian*, 10.12.1863.

⁷⁸ PRO: CO 247/98, letter from Assistant Superintendent of the liberated Africans to the Governor, 22.9.1863.

months before." Interestingly, the writer admits that "much of this alteration and improvement was due to the officers of the Saint Helena Regiment and to the drill-sergeants is indisputable; but unless the required intelligence had existed in a latent form, ready for development when properly treated, so great a change could not have been produced by any human agency."⁸⁰ Still not willing to accredit these Africans with any intelligence proper, the possibility of divine intervention appears to have been raised.

Embarking for Jamaica in April 1864, 155 of these liberated Africans left the island as members of the 5th West Indian Regiment. Other Africans emigrated to the West Indies, such as the island of Demerara, on passages financed by loans from the Colonial Government of Demerara, as well as to West Africa. Posters advertising passages to "any able bodied men, women and children willing to emigrate" were advertised accordingly.⁸¹ This presumably did not restrict the offer to Liberated Africans only. It is estimated that a total of 16,287 Africans were liberated at St Helena and removed from there to other British colonies.⁸²

But not all of these Africans departed the island. Instead, several entered employment on St Helena or even chose to be apprenticed locally, the legal framework for which can be found in Ordinance 3 of 1842, entitled 'An Ordinance for the Protection and Care of such Liberated Africans as shall become Servants or Apprentices in the Island of St. Helena'. Writing in 1875, John Charles Melliss provided a brief assessment of the life of those liberated Africans who had chosen to make their home on St Helena, repeating the principal themes of earlier accounts.

Many of them remained at the Island as domestic servants in the first instance, and, very soon adopting the English language, the tall black hat, and the green cotton umbrella, became settlers also. They are a strong race of men, capable of doing any amount of hard work upon a scanty supply of food, and are very tractable and well-behaved until their jealousy is excited or passion roused, when, in a sort of momentary phrensy, they will commit crime even to murder. With the

⁷⁹ PRO: CO 247/98, letter from the Governor to the Secretary of State, 23.9.1863.

⁸⁰ Anon. [A Bird of Passage], *Saint Helena* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1865), 73.

⁸¹ For a copy of one such poster from 1862, see PRO: CO 247/97.

⁸² William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 273. See chapter 9 for a detailed discussion of a history of the immigration of liberated Africans to the Caribbean.

"native" they do not blend, but live apart in little colonies or settlements; not half a dozen instances of intermarriages have occurred during thirty years, and the "natives" still consider themselves superior.⁸³

Although protected by the law, the liberated Africans were subject to considerable prejudice by islanders, especially by the majority of 'natives', a term which by then had come to denote the island's coloured population. Meanwhile, schooling for liberated Africans was provided by the Hussey Fund Charity, founded in 1865 "for the redemption of slaves", and the African Benefit Society was founded later that same year along the lines of other friendly societies.⁸⁴

It is unclear how many of the liberated Africans did eventually settle on the island. The census for 1881 points out that the earlier returns in the census for 1871 "distinguish the children of Liberated Africans born in St. Helena, but owing to the mixture with the other portion of the coloured population it is now difficult and almost impossible to make this distinction with accuracy, and the present returns therefore distinguish only those Africans who are Natives of the West Coast of Africa."⁸⁵ The latter are numbered to total 77. Finally, in 1911, it is reported that there were "still 9 of the original Liberated West African Settlers living at the taking of the present census."⁸⁶ A rare photograph of some of these liberated Africans is included in E.L. Jackson's *St. Helena* (1903) (*plate 1*).⁸⁷

As in the case of the island's Chinese, I must mention a contemporary footnote to the history of the African Depot, respecting in particular the African burial grounds in Ruperts Valley, where those who had not survived the journey were buried. In December 1984 a complaint was made to the vicar of Jamestown that workers on the site of a new power station in Ruperts Valley had disturbed a number of graves there. The vicar inspected the site, informed the governor of his disquiet, and work on the site was suspended. When formal objections were received in response to a public notice to build

⁸³ John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875), 80-1.

⁸⁴ *St. Helena Almanac and Annual Register [...] 1875* (St Helena: 1875), 75.

⁸⁵ *Census of the Island of St. Helena in 1881* (St Helena: 1881). For a comment on enumeration of liberated Africans in the 1871 census, see the editorials in the *St. Helena Guardian* on 20.4.1871 and 6.7.1871.

⁸⁶ *Census of the Island of St. Helena in 1911* (St Helena: 1911), 3.

⁸⁷ For another such photograph, see Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957); also see *plate 3*, which appears to show two liberated African members of the Salvation Army band.



Plate 1: Liberated Africans (c.1900)

source: E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day*
(London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903)

at Ruperts, a commission of enquiry was set up to look into these objections. One of the concerns raised by objectors, the commission noted, was that it "is suspicious that the remains in question are those of slaves, for this can be seen as discriminatory. If the graves and the remains belonged to more important people, there would be no question of disturbing them."⁸⁸ The commission found that "[i]t is unlikely that any of the dead in these graveyards are the forebears of St Helenians, but, if they are, then their descendants would be better served and respected by a decently marked and maintained site, memorial and much needed Power Station, than by a sterile, eroded, neglected and bone strewn valley.. It was also pointed out, clearly to pre-empt any criticisms, that "[t]here is no question of Government, in this case, discriminating against the remains of slaves. Graveyards of non-slaves in Jamestown have been put to other uses in the past by Government, with no recorded disagreement from the Church or the majority of the people."⁸⁹ Overall, the commission recommended that work be continued and that old bones should be cleared, collected and kept for later re-internment. For this purpose they recommended that part of the old graveyard "be put aside for the reinternment of bones disturbed in any future development of Ruperts Valley", and that "a memorial [be] designed and erected to the memory of the Liberated Slaves, and to the work of the Liberated African Depot, containing a bas-relief depiction of what it commemorates, if a suitable artist can be found to execute it."⁹⁰ Sadly, these recommendation have not as yet been implemented, although the remains recovered have already been re-intered at the island's principal cemetery at St Paul's Cathedral.

⁸⁸ *Report of the Proceedings of the Commission of Enquiry into Objections Raised to the Erection of a New Power Station at Ruperts Valley on Part or Parts of Disused Burial Grounds* (issued by Proclamation, 29.1.1985), 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

"PART OF TH'INHABITED WORLD"

~ OF INHABITANTS AND NATIVES



Despite the absence of an indigenous population, nineteenth century accounts of St Helena are distinctive for their engagement in the construction of a St Helenian 'native', a discourse which is indeed comparable to colonial discourses about an indigenous 'Other'. This representational creation of an indigenous population is explained by Dorothy Carrington in her classic *The Traveller's Eye* (1947), where she drew a contrast between eighteenth century travellers and "the more rigid and censorious Victorians, to whom Europe was old and smelly, America crude and new, and the rest of the world inhabited by natives."¹ That the connotations of the last of these terms, even though not the term itself, could even be applied to European settlers in the colonies, was also pointed out by Greg Denning, who has argued that "[i]n the views of those at the center of empire, of course, distance made everybody a little 'native'. The changed accent and vocabulary, the social awkwardness, the unstylishness of dress and behavior, marginalized the colonials

¹ Dorothy Carrington, *The Traveller's Eye* (London: The Pilot Press, 1947), 2-3.

as somewhat strange [...]. Colonials are always grotesque because they lie in the liminal space between being stylishly modern and nostalgically antique."²

In analysing the discursive construction or imagination of a St Helenian 'native', I have, in the words of Nicholas Thomas, referring to his work on Fiji, been primarily concerned with "the construction, not the misconstruction, of this sort of islander for this sort of imagination."³ Kate Teltscher too has approached the texts she worked with "primarily as representations", that is, "they are neither evaluated on their supposed accuracy, nor assessed on the extent of knowledge of India which they display."⁴ I have hence not been concerned with establishing the truth or falsity of any particular representation of St Helena and St Helenians.

Rather, I have tried to set the scene for my subsequent discussion (see chapter 9) of the political implications of these representations. As David Spurr has argued, and as the previous chapter has also shown, colonial discourse ensured the "demarcation of cultural and moral difference between the civilized and the noncivilized." Paradoxically though, "the ultimate aim of colonial discourse is not to establish a radical opposition between colonizer and colonized", but rather "to dominate by inclusion and domestication rather than by a confrontation which recognizes the independent identity of the Other."⁵ It is in this respect, according to Spurr, that systems of classification must be considered "indispensable to the ideology of colonization as well as to the actual practice of colonial rule." On an ideological level, such systems "demonstrate the fundamental justice of the colonial enterprise by ranking native peoples according to their relative degree of technical and political sophistication", while on a practical level, they "show that each category of native requires its own administrative tactic."⁶

² Greg Denning, "The Theatricality of Observing and Being Observed: Eighteenth-Century Europe "Discovers" the 18th Century "Pacific", in Stuart B. Schwartz (ed), *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other People in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 469-70.

³ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 35.

⁴ Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

⁵ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

The principal effect of a colonial system of classification is that it "governs the procedures of observation", as a result of which the "weakness of African character is not something discovered or revealed to a pure, unfettered eye, but rather is determined by the logical order followed by Western observation and by the system of classification [...]." In this respect, a such a system "contains within it, already and as given, the judgment of their character."⁷

CLASSIFICATIONS

By the mid-nineteenth century the population of St Helena presented a rather different picture to the one from a time when its inhabitants could be seen in terms of whites and 'others'. The problems which the Colonial Office consequently faced in (re-)classifying the island's inhabitants is shown clearly in a letter in 1868 which requested the island's governor, Charles Elliott, to report whether "discrimination in the Census of this population between the portions of it non European would lead to any material evils or mischief".⁸ In his reply, Elliott noted at the outset that "[f]rom causes not difficult to understand, there can be no position on the face of the earth where it would be more difficult to discriminate between the various strains of blood which the body of the population is composed than here in St. Helena, beyond indeed the two plain distinctions of black and white." According to his opinion, of "Europeans we are but a handful - of undoubted African parentage on both sides Your Grace will perceive in the census that we are more plentifully supplied. We have besides, a considerable mixture of Chinese, Hindoo and other races mixed with European, partly European, and African and partly African blood in various proportions."

Despite the fact that Elliott had identified these constituent strands, he stated that

It is significant to mention that in this island, contrary to my long experience in all parts of the world where the populations are of mixed origin, we do not use the

⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸ As paraphrased by Governor Elliott in his reply; SHGA: Governor's Out-Letters, 11.9.1868. On the colonising role of the census, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition (London: Verso, 1991), 163-70.

expression "coloured people" at all - it would be considered somewhat reproachful to do so. The population here in short is distinguished broadly into "white" and "dark" people - the last term signifying every conceivable tint from deep black to a complexion impossible to distinguish from that of the purest white.

Moreover, he adds, that "as the complexion becomes fairer, there is a constant tendency in such persons to place themselves under the description of 'whites'- and much offence might be taken if all of known mixed blood should be classified in the registry under the head of 'dark' people."⁹ Although Elliott's advice had been accepted with respect to the census, St Helena's 'Yearly Statistical Register of the Gaol' continued to distinguish between 'white' and 'coloured' prisoners until 1918.¹⁰

This apparent state of affairs on the island, however, did not eliminate the inclination to classify, the pseudo-scientific character of which is nowhere better in evidence than in John Melliss' account of the island's population in 1875, which stands out, above all, for being included in that part of his book dealing with the island's 'zoology'. I quote it here including its heading.

PART III. - ZOOLOGY
I. VERTEBRATA
CLASS I. - MAMMALIA
HOMO, Linn.

H. sapiens, Linn. - As is elsewhere stated, there were no human beings on the Island when it was discovered; yet in the present day the term "natives" has, it appears, its significant application there. The "natives" of St. Helena are rather tall, slight built, good featured specimens of the human race, with straight hair, good evenly-set white teeth not prone to decay easily, and pleasing countenances; their general colour is a very light brown or copper, sometimes deepening into nearly black, and in other cases becoming almost white. They speak very fair English as their only language, and are not a little proud of their local designation of "Yam stalks." Their ancestors came from various parts of the world, though chiefly from Europe and Asia, and there is now some difficulty in tracing the prevailing element

⁹ SHGA: Governor's Out-Letters, 11.9.1868. Elliott's letter is quoted in full in Barbara George, *The Chinese Connection: The History of Chinese Indentured Labourers on St. Helena, 1810-1836 and Beyond* (Bristol: Printsetters, forthcoming), 88-9.

¹⁰ SHGA: Yearly Statistical Register of the Gaol, 1886-1950.

in their composition, or in saying which predominates, whether it is Portuguese, Dutch, English, Malay, East Indian, or Chinese. [...] Their early history was that of slavery through a couple of centuries, indeed until the year 1832, when they were emancipated by the East India Company purchasing their freedom for a large sum; but, as might be expected, they possessed none of those qualifications which are absolutely necessary to command success in settlers. The habits of dependence and indolence, as well as ignorance, which so long a period of slavery has engrafted, remain to this day evident, not only in individuals, but pervading the whole character of the place. The "Yam stalks" must not be confounded with the Africans or negroes, as the greatest insult they can hurl at one another is the epithet of "nigger"; they respect and look up to the Europeans and white population, but consider themselves as occupying a much higher step on the ladder of social positions than the Africans, who certainly had the disadvantage of arriving at the Island just eight years after the "natives" became free men. They are a very quiet, tractable inoffensive people, amongst whom crime is small [...]; their greatest vice is drunkenness [...]. [...] They are very superstitious, and still retain some belief in witchcraft. [...] As domestic servants, when carefully and kindly treated, they are excellent, becoming closely attached to their employers, and exceedingly jealous of whatever belongs to them, but still they are as indolent as most inhabitants of warm countries. [...] The European or White population is chiefly formed of Government officials, a few clergymen, a small garrison of about 200 men, a certain number of mariners including shipwrecked seamen, and those, with their descendants, who settled there during the East India Company's government, either as merchants, shipping agents, or farmers of the land.¹¹

As for Melliss' use of the term 'natives', whereas Capt. John Barnes, writing in 1817, could speak of the island's white inhabitants as "either of British descent or natives of Great Britain", and of its troops as "natives of the united kingdoms",¹² the term as applied to St Helena by a Lieut. Robert Stuart of the Royal Fusiliers, in 1838, carried rather different connotations. In Stuart's opinion, "the natives are a degenerate race, without any distinguishing complexion or cast of features that might lead to a probable

¹¹ John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875), 79-81.

conjecture as to their origin, but showing every possible shade between the fair European and the swarthy Indian. Among them I could discover none of the muscular race of Africa, notwithstanding the proximity of the island to that continent; [...]"¹³ Notable, here, is the reference to the idea of degeneracy, which was seen at the time as a result of miscegenation primarily.¹⁴

Other observers, however, were of a different opinion, even though they too perceived St Helenians as 'natives', as is evident in 1852, when the island was visited by Edward Towle, a passenger on board the SS *Great Britain*, who recorded his impressions in an as yet unpublished diary. Arriving too late in the day to disembark, Towle decided that "[w]e shall overrun the island tomorrow and astonish the natives." And that, apparently, is what they did.

We must have astonished the negroes on our landing for the first thing we did was to play at leap frog all the way to St. James Town much to the amusement of ourselves and the natives. The working class are principally negroes and the half cast, the latter are an extremely well made race, Apollo's in shape though not in feature, and a remarkable pleasing intonation of voice and free from provincialism. [...] I wanted very much to bathe, but we were afraid of the sharks which are very numerous about the Island. We however saw some Mullatos bathing and I ventured in and had a swim. [...] When I was in the water these little scamps frightened me to death. I asked them whether there were any sharks here, "Oh yes, plenty shark, but they never touch black man, can't see him".¹⁵

Despite a whole menu of classificatory terms, 'negroes', 'natives', 'half casts', and 'Mullatos', as well as the apparently self-ascribed 'black man', not degeneracy, but Classicism now serves as a referent. As for the variety of terms used by Towle, it should be noted, according to Zuckerman, that whereas "the English who colonized America

¹² John Barnes, *A Tour Through the Island of St. Helena* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1817), 72, 77-9, 82.

¹³ Robert Stuart 'St. Helena in 1838' *United Services Journal*, Vol. XXVIII (1839), 72.

¹⁴ See Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 142-50; Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 83 and 109-14.

¹⁵ Edward Towle, *Extract from Diary of Edward Towle, Passenger on Board Brunel's Ship SS Great Britain, 1852* (typescript, n.d.).

acknowledged only the polarized alternatives of white and black", there existed "a more elaborate and complex set of color categories in the British West Indies", although "even in the British islands the intermediate categories were less elaborately and more grudgingly applied than in the French, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies [...]." The reasons, apparently, for drawing "a dichotomous color line between themselves and the Africans that denied all gradation or degree" was a means of defying "the abundant actuality of miscegenation and the evidence of the varied complexions before their eyes."¹⁶ In the case of St Helena, such variety is given a literally graphic expression in a late nineteenth century illustration of the island's inhabitants, captioned 'Types to be met with in the Streets of Jamestown', which consists of a set of four small portraits that form part of a page of five frames entitled 'Notes at St Helena', published in *The Graphic* in 1877 (illustrations 17a and 17b).

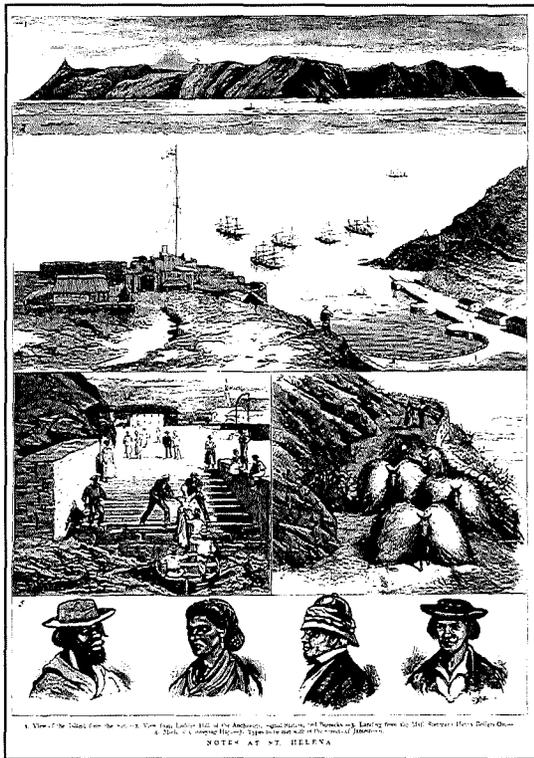
Once the St Helenian 'native' had been properly 'identified' by way of classification, late nineteenth century travellers were seemingly less concerned with race and origins, than with merely portraying these natives in line with the narrative conventions applied to a host of other people encountered on their various travels, not least on whatever voyage had caused them to call at St Helena. As Elleke Boehmer has observed, "[t]he expanse of the Empire, because vast, heterogeneous, and confusing, encouraged the exchange of the dependable stock images between widely separate cultural and geographic spaces, blurring their differences."¹⁷

A Mr. Hall, for one, who called at the island in 1886 on his way from Australia, succeeded in 'colouring' both the island's entire population and exoticising St Helena before he ever got ashore, when he recorded that "[w]e soon had a small fleet of boats with black people in them at the side of the ship [...]. Topsy and her fellow washer women were soliciting orders for passengers' dirty things; other natives had their goods arranged on the deck. They consisted of beads, sticks, fruits - bananas, figs, prickly pear, and other articles."¹⁸ Arthur Montefiore Brice, published in 1900, imbues St Helena with an Orientalist imagery echoing the impressions of Mr Hall.

¹⁶ Michael Zuckerman, 'Identity in British America: Unease in Eden', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 150, 150n.

¹⁷ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 55.

¹⁸ Quoted in *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1991), 20.



Illustrations 17a: 'Notes at St Helena' and 17b: detail

source: *The Graphic* (14.4.1877)

Here, then, I come to the first sign of any port - to those who by profession abide the wayfarer. For here are the African ladies who would sell us pears and immature peaches; here are the African boys who would hire unto us horses feeble of fabric, but gallant enough in spirit, as one learns in time. And here loaf those limpet men of all ports - some of them with evidence of work to do and all of them with no intention of doing anything of the kind. And beyond, as we come to the old fortifications, stand the eloquent gentlemen of colour who will sell you anything from a tooth-pick to a walking stick, with a perfect guarantee that they are all made of that wonderful willow which shaded Napoleon's grave.¹⁹

Jamestown, it would appear, to these travellers is just another port somewhere off the African coast. That impression is conveyed nowhere more so than in C. Parkinson's article entitled 'A Sailing Trip to St. Helena' published in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1901.

Many boats put off from the shore to welcome the arrival of a passenger sailing-ship, a somewhat rare event at St. Helena since the good old days of the Cape route to the East Indies [...]. The swarthy boatmen are half-castes, being for the most part a mixture of races in which Portuguese and African blood predominates. The traders brought fresh fruit, such as guavas, bananas, loquats, figs, and the like; curious kinds of tropical shells, brightly coloured seeds strung as necklaces, and wonderful collections of cage birds [...]. A brisk trade was done on the main deck, canaries, finches, avadavats, waxbills, &c., changing hands freely during the morning. Negro women who came for laundry orders formed picturesque groups, their heads adorned with light-coloured handkerchiefs, and their dresses of all hues of the rainbow. They sang Methodist hymns in broken English, rolling their eyes towards heaven with every manifestation of extreme religious fervour; and we received many cordial invitations to visit the shore.²⁰

¹⁹ Arthur Montefiore Brice, *St. Helena: Old and New* (1901), 173.

²⁰ C. Parkinson, 'A Sailing Trip to St Helena', *The Cornhill Magazine*, New Series, Vol.XI (1901), 395.

Parkinson, in closing his article, notes that "if the omission must be acknowledged, we left the shores of St. Helena without paying the orthodox visit to Longwood [...]"²¹ Perhaps none of these visitors ever made it into the island's interior, which may have left them with anything but a tropical vision of St Helena. Notably, following the Second World War, writers no longer placed a similar degree of emphasis on the exotic aspects of St Helena.

THE ENGLISH AND THE ISLANDERS

The above shift in the perception of the island's inhabitants became firmly established by 1897 at the latest, when Governor R.A. Sterndale, in an article published that year, proceeded to "say a few words about the people of St. Helena. Not the English descendants of the old Colonial officials who settled the island, the gentry of the place, but the coloured population, the St. Helenians proper."²² In place of a distinction between the island's 'whites' and its 'natives', during the twentieth century that distinction by and large came to be expressed in terms of one between the 'expatriates' or 'the English', that is, those on short term government service on the island or long term residents, and 'islander', that is, those born of islander parents St Helena itself. Philippa Esdale, in a report on education, remarked in 1937 that there is "little intercourse between the English and Islanders except at Government House. The English women appear to help a little with Girl Guides and some serve on the Poor Relief Board."²³ For other observers too, there existed a distinct sense of an English community apart from rest, as is attested by Ralph Deakin, who reported that during his visit to the island in 1925, the then Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, "took tea with the English community at the castle - a garden party without a garden, but with the ramparts as a pleasant promenade - and in the early evening he walked to the landing-stage with dozens of swarthy little native boys galloping barefoot along in front of him."²⁴

²¹ Ibid., 401.

²² R.A. Sterndale, *Sancta Helena: An Island "In Extremis"* (London: 1897), 2.

²³ PRO: CO 1045/57, Philippa C. Esdale, Report - St. Helena (October 1937).

²⁴ Ralph Deakin, *Southward Ho! With the Prince in Africa and South America* (London: Methuen & Co., 1925), 232.

Interestingly, in the case of St Helena, the expatriate community did not have recourse to a standard fixture existing in almost all other British colonies, for as Governor Pilling explained to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in May 1938, St Helena had "no club where persons can foregather for social intercourse in the evenings and the only time that officers meet other than on official duty is at an occasional sherry or 'sundowner' party."²⁵ In place of the club, expatriates and others had to make do with invitations to Plantation House, as Max Chapman recalls.

The Governor's "At Home" is a memory not too difficult to bring back to mind. For one thing, there was that amazingly '*Home Counties*' setting of Plantation House, complete with the crunch of cars drawing up on the gravel drive. And then 'le tout St Helena' chattering in style and on their best behaviour, while Their Excellencies nicely balanced the formal with the informal in a display of impeccable charm.²⁶

Interestingly, this description is no less exoticising than those quoted earlier, although here it is the island's 'English' community, rather than its natives, who are its subject.

INDUSTRY AND INDOLENCE

Despite a certain amount of overlap with the accounts provided by travellers, official descriptions and assessments of St Helena's inhabitants were written with a view to the administration, government and, especially, economic policy. However, they were written within the same representational field, hence influencing each other by constituting and re-constituting the con-text of their production.

A concern with the inhabitants' industry had already occupied the East India Company's directors, as shown by a remark in 1676 that "there is yet wanting Industry

²⁵ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 4.5.1938.

²⁶ Max Chapman, 'Oswell Blakeston Visits the Island in 1956', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Spring 1993), 25.

and paines takeing in many of y^e Inhabitants which we will not permit to continue [...]."²⁷ Such concerns, however, became ever more acute under the administration of the Crown, primarily because His Majesty's Government had hoped to make the island self-sufficient, rather than to continue to subsidise it on the scale seen during the days of the East India Company's administration. St Helena's first Crown governor, Middlemore, took a dim view of St Helenians from the start, stating that "St Helena would undoubtedly become a very flourishing little Colony if we only possessed an industrious people but the present race have been too much indulged by their very munificent masters."²⁸ Middlemore enlarges on this assessment by placing the island in the context of the wider population of the British Empire, while recommending the apparently only means of radical improvement to native character, when he states that if "we had a set of people like the Maltese St Helena would soon bear a very different appearance but our present race are not likely to be reclaimed from their idle and profligate habits until absolute want shall compell them to work."²⁹ Gone, hence, is the image of an English settler society, to be replaced by the image of a population as separate as the Maltese. Even more so, a separate 'race'.

In 1871 a commission was appointed to inquiry into the present social and economic conditions of the island, largely as a result of a 'memorial' (petition) of the inhabitants, whose main plea was that Her Majesty's government should afford the islanders some relief "by transferring from them the burthen of supporting such parts of the Establishment as are required more for maintaining the position of St. Helena as a Possession of the British Crown than for the mere Government of its Inhabitants".³⁰ In their subsequent report the commission, which consisted entirely of local appointee, concluded that one of the causes of the present distress was

[t]hat the habits of a large (perhaps the largest) portion of the laboring population of this Island are idle improvident and immoral, but the Commissioners feel bound to express their conviction, that it would be unreasonable to expect that a People of mixed Asiatic, African and European blood, only 32 years ago emancipated from Slavery, unaccustomed to self dependence, living under the influence of a

²⁷ SHGA: In-Letters, 8.3.1676.

²⁸ SHGA: Governor's In-Letter, 12.4.1836.

²⁹ Ibid.

warm climate, with few inducements to be industrious, poor, and in no part of the Island far removed from the temptations of a Garrison and sea-port, should be other than they are.³¹

Hence, blood alone was not to blame, for circumstances too had to be taken into account. But 'race' was still considered a factor of importance, even in 1906, when Governor Gallwey wrote that there was "no doubt that the apathy of the St. Helenian, which is born in the race, has been one of the great factors that has worked against an industry being established."³²

An arguably more damning assessment than the commission's was to follow in 1874, three years later, when Chief Justice Parker submitted a 'Report as to Crime in St Helena', which was written, albeit at short notice, on the basis of five years experience of the island. The report is worth focusing on for its psychological appraisal of St Helena's inhabitants, which is quite perfectly exemplified in its two opening sentence: "Crime in St Helena is neither very various in its manifestations, nor very heinous in its nature. Its specific development in this island is, as might be expected, characteristic of a shy and timid, rather than a bold and venturesome people."³³ Parker goes on to argue in a similar vein that

[t]hose offences which require any amount of personal daring in their performance may be said to be unknown. [...] Equally rare are those crimes which require, for their inception and accomplishment, any ingenuity or contrivance; the timidity of the people being quite equalled by their indolence of disposition, and want of inventiveness or other mental resources.³⁴

The prevailing offences on the island, according to Parker, are larceny and felonious receiving, a fact which afford him the opportunity for further insights. "Acquisitiveness

³⁰ 'Memorial of the Inhabitants of St. Helena', *Supplement to the "St. Helena Guardian"*, 9.3.1817.

³¹ SHGA: The Bishop of St Helena's Inquiry into the Condition of the Island, 1871.

³² SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 30.3.1906.

³³ SHGA: Colonial Secretary's In-Letters, 10.2.1874 - Chief Justice Parker, 'Report as to Crime in St Helena'.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Parker considers these various absent offences as being in the nature of murder, robbery, mobbing, rioting, forgery, swindling, personation, and poisoning.

and secretiveness form the basis of the native character; and out of these arise its propensities of stealing and falsehood."³⁵ As the commission of 1871, Parker acknowledges that these crimes are also encouraged by the shortage of "honest" means to make a living, especially for people of the "lower orders".³⁶ Similarly, the nature of Jamestown being a sea port is held accountable for the large number of offences relating to prostitution, drunkenness, disorderly conduct and assault. The larger part of his report is in fact taken up with comments on the social rather than mental foundations of crime on the island, but it is his analysis of the psychological factors that predominate, having been given pride of place at the beginning of his report.

What is striking about Parker's analysis of the native character is that it is almost with regret that he feels compelled to bemoan the absence of 'various' and 'heinous' crime. The qualities associated by Parker with such crime are after all not negative assets as such and their presence amongst the inhabitants might well have delighted the likes of Governor Middlemore. 'Daring', 'ingenuity' and 'inventiveness' surely were the very stuff of which the British Empire was (about to be) made.

That such reports had an influence on subsequent assessment of the character of the island's population, is strikingly evident from a confidential report by Governor Harper in 1927, which was submitted to the Rt. Hon. L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies.³⁷ What makes the report so interesting is the fact that Harper himself places his own observations in the context of observations made previously by, amongst others, his predecessors. As such, he provides a unique example of the way in which the textualization of St Helena was ultimately conditioned as much by conditions on the ground as by the wider context of earlier textualizations.

According to Harper, St Helena's "problems and difficulties are little, obvious, unchanging, and they have been enunciated from time to time during the past hundred years or earlier. I have found it no difficult task, therefore, to discover confirmation of my opinions in the experience of my predecessors." Reviewing the remarks made by previous commentators about the island's inhabitants, Harper states that

³⁵ SHGA: Colonial Secretary's In-Letters, 10.2.1874 - Chief Justice Parker, 'Report as to Crime in St Helena'.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 12.8.1927.

Governor Janisch wrote in 1875 "Labour is dear and of indifferent quality as a rule owing to the influence of a mild climate they are indolent and deficient in energy but they are tractable and intelligent".

Governor Galway in 1908 spoke of the "unenthusiastic nature of the Islanders" which he thought "would be a bar to quick progress". [...]

Mr. Mosely, who during 1908 and 1909 greatly interested himself in attempting to develop local industries "was particularly struck with the apathetic and indifferent attitude of the people; and soon saw that neither gratitude nor self-help were conspicuous among the labouring community as a whole".

In summoning up the position in 1909 Governor Galway wrote "The absolute necessity for strenuous labour as far as earning an ordinary living went, not being imperative, this fact coupled with a genial climate, has produced an easy going people who do not appear to know even how to begin to help themselves".

In compiling his report, Harper also commissioned separate reports on the performance of island labourers both on St Helena itself and on Ascension island nearby. Respecting the latter, the former manager of the island's guano company commented that from his "experience of labour which has been fairly extensive in many parts of the world, they compare very unfavourable with Indians, Malays, west Africans, Hausas, Arabs, or Chinese." Harper is careful to note, however, that "the acting Manager has a different opinion, I understand, of St. Helena labour". Similarly, with respect to the character of the labour force on St Helena itself, Harper quotes the Superintendent of Works as stating that the "great majority are honest, steady, and industrious." Governor Harper himself feels forced to conclude that the "people as a whole have not won a reputation for energy and enterprise, qualities which the climate and environment are not likely to produce or sustain in the average man." Harper, at least, considered St Helenians as a 'people', whom he assesses with respect to the 'average man', rather than with respect to race.

And just as Harper's views were clearly conditioned by views recorded by others and preserved by the official records, the views of officials in London were likewise conditioned by such reports. People on St Helena were only too aware of this, as is evident from a leading article in *The St. Helena Advocate* in 1852.

Colonies are awkward places when the officials at head-quarters are unscrupulous in their misrepresentations home. Such dishonest proceedings are too often the cause of serious injury to the best and dearest interests of a colony - more especially to one so small and insignificant as St. Helena. [...] The inhabitants of a remote colony are much at the mercy of the governing authorities - if they break faith with the people, and send home misrepresentations and partial statements [...].³⁸

The effect of such misrepresentations was nowhere of more significance than in the political and constitutional history of St Helena, as I shall discuss in chapter 9.

PHOTOGRAPHY

However prominent a place photography may have taken as an illustrative device in imperial histories, it has been subject to comparatively little analysis in its own right, despite being acknowledged to have been integral to colonial discourses and experiences.³⁹ As Peter Lyon has pointed out, "[a]s new territories came under European control and administration, and were opened up for settlement, it became standard practice for the enterprising photographer to document both the landscape and peoples of these acquisitions."⁴⁰ Hence, according to Peter Quartermain, photography is "no mere handmaid of empire, but a shaping dimension of it: formal imperial structures institutionalised the attitudes and assumptions necessarily entailed in viewing another individual as a subject for photography."⁴¹ In this respect, as far as anthropology was

³⁸ *The St. Helena Advocate*, 5.2.1852.

³⁹ See Peter Quartermain, 'Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea', in Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous People* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992). For an extended and recent attempt to address this omission, see James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

⁴⁰ Peter Lyon, 'The Role of the Photographer', in *Commonwealth in Focus: 130 Years of Photographic History* (Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1982), 9.

⁴¹ Peter Quartermain, 'Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea', in Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous People* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992), 85.

concerned, "photography offered a classificatory system for recording the diversity of the world's peoples into the universal Family of Man."⁴²

St Helena, of course, had been acquired long before the advent of photography, although Lyon's statement can equally as well be applied to other forms of visual representation, such as drawing and painting, by means of which St Helena and its inhabitants have certainly been documented since the days of its discovery.

The objective of colonial photography, however, was not mere 'documentation' as such, but familiarisation by way of dissemination. As in other colonies, photographs produced by local photographers were hence "sold to a metropolitan and international consumer",⁴³ although in the case of St Helena such photographs were almost exclusively of landscapes, townscapes and troops.⁴⁴ I only know of one photograph of St Helena published during the heyday of empire which depicted a subject other than these. Taken by a local photographer, B. Grant, the photo shows a class of children in their pews at the Head School in Jamestown. It was published in 1906 in Volume II of *The King's Empire*, arguably the finest example of the genre of the photographic survey of empire, where it is placed in a section on 'The Education of the King's Empire' (*plate 6*).⁴⁵ A contemporaneous but unpublished photograph of town children taken by the Rev. Tom Aitken in 1900 provides a striking contrast (*plate 7*).

Despite the absence of a commercial dimension to photographs of islanders, such photographs came to be disseminated more widely by way of their inclusion in official publications and travelogues from the beginning of the twentieth century. Depending as they do on "captions or accompanying prose that attempts to firm up the political and moral associations of the image", however vague these may be, these photographs can be

⁴² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 124.

⁴³ Peter Quartermaine, 'Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea', in Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous People* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992), 85.

⁴⁴ One such publication was E.J. Warren's *Souvenir of St Helena* (St Helena: c.1914), which not only contained many of his photographs, but also advertised his ability to supply "photographic postcards of all the noted view therein". For a brief introduction to St Helena photography, see Trevor Hearl, 'St. Helena in Focus', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1997). Also see Trevor Hearl, 'John Isaac Lilley, St Helena's Photo Pioneer', *The Photographic Journal*, December 1990.

⁴⁵ J.H. Bacon, *The King's Empire*, Vol.II (London: Cassell & Co., 1906), 24. The explanatory caption accompanying this photograph can be found on page iv.

located within an "ideological context" which Nicholas Peterson terms "documentary".⁴⁶ Oswell Blakeston's *Isle of St Helena*, published in 1957 (plates 30 and 31), and Roland Svensson's *Ö Och Människa: En Resa till Napoleons ö Sankt Helena*, published in 1968, are the most notable.⁴⁷ More recently, Tony Cross chose to illustrate a chapter on 'The People of St Helena' with a photograph captioned "Island schoolgirls among the bananas", arguably unaware of the interpretative possibilities that this caption opens up for many a post-colonial, feminist critic.⁴⁸

Potential subjects for post-colonial critique do indeed abound. Hence, for Nicholas Thomas, the studio portrait is "the paradigmatic form of colonial representation" for it constitutes "a frame for representation that permits a photographer [...] to surround decontextualized bodies with meanings of his choice," that is, a space within which "others are reified in surroundings that specify their attributes and our appropriate responses to them."⁴⁹ In the case of colonial postcards, for instance, as argued by Anne McClintock, "primitive icons and atavistic relics were arranged around sitters to metonymically signify an anachronistic relation to the technological time of modernity."⁵⁰ Such contextualization did indeed occur on St Helena, although not of the kind to which non-European 'others' were usually subjected. Instead, the contextualization of studio and quasi-studio photographs on St Helena tended, at least in principle, to take the form associated with the photography in the 'metropolis' where, according to Anne McClintock, people "were posed before artificial backdrops, often exotic and incongruously out of keeping with the sitter's world, but nonetheless expressive of fantasies of imperial control over space, landscape and interior."⁵¹ However, in those instances where props and backdrops were indeed used by photographers on St Helena, they either appear to have been neither 'out of keeping' with their subjects (plates 16 to

⁴⁶ Peter Quartermaine, 'Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea', in Mick Gidley (ed), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous People* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1992), 93.

⁴⁷ Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957); Roland Svensson, *Ö Och Människa: En Resa till Napoleons ö Sankt Helena* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1968).

⁴⁸ Tony Cross, *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (London, 1980), facing 89.

⁴⁹ 194 and 193.

⁵⁰ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 125.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

18), nor 'exotic', albeit a little out of keeping with the local environment (*plate 11*).⁵² And as for a series of wholly decontextualised portraits taken on St Helena in the 1940s (*plates 21 to 24*), these would appear to differ little from the decontextualised portraits of young Australians taken in the 1980 and championed by Nicholas Thomas as a post-colonial response to colonial photography.⁵³

Although I am unable to detect an overtly colonial agenda amongst the contents of St Helena's photographic 'archive', this is not to say that one should take a wholly uncritical and unreflective approach to photographing the island and its inhabitants. Rory Coonan's and Stuart Mackay's photographs of St Helena, exhibited at the Commonwealth Institute in 1984, explicitly confront the multiplicity of St Helenian identities and their representations. In a contribution to the exhibition catalogue, Stuart Mackay explained that both by word of mouth and via the island's radio "we were able to reassure the Saints that, although we could not show the image they had of themselves (there being 5000-odd different images anyway), we would aim to allow the subjects to speak for themselves as much as possible through the pictures."⁵⁴ While acknowledging the validity of that position, my own published photographs of St Helena were aimed not so much at portraying a multiplicity of identities, than to support local demands for British citizenship, demands which were premised not least on an assertion of the islanders' exclusively British heritage (*plates 33 and 34*).⁵⁵

However, given that the majority of individual, family and group portraits on St Helena were never meant for anything other than personal use, I believe that they are able to illustrate the gradual transcendence by St Helenians and their society and culture of any established forms of colonialist classification, characterisation, and representation based, above all, on conceptualisations of 'race' (*see plates, especially plate 9*). Overall, the photographic heritage of St Helena should be treated as more than a mere resource for discourse analysis. Instead, the photographic heritage of St Helena should also be seen

⁵² On studio backgrounds and props, see Robert Polls, *Dating Old Photographs* (Newbury: Countryside Books, 1993), 37-9.

⁵³ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 193-4, 233-4.

⁵⁴ Rory Coonan and Stuart Mackay, *Lives of the Saints: St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1984), 7.

⁵⁵ Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean* (Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997).

as a unique documentary resource of images "to make us wonder still", as Jan Morris' work has shown.⁵⁶ It is in this respect, that these photographs can help to counter some of the more fanciful textualizations to which the island and its inhabitants have at times been subjected.

⁵⁶ Jan Morris, *The Spectacle of Empire: Style, Effect and the Pax Britannica* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 247. In the case of St Helena, any particular photograph or series of photographs is generally the only surviving record of one or other aspect of the island's history.



Plate 2: Untitled (c.1880)

source: Private Collection



Plate 3: Untitled (c.1890)

source: St Helena Government Archives

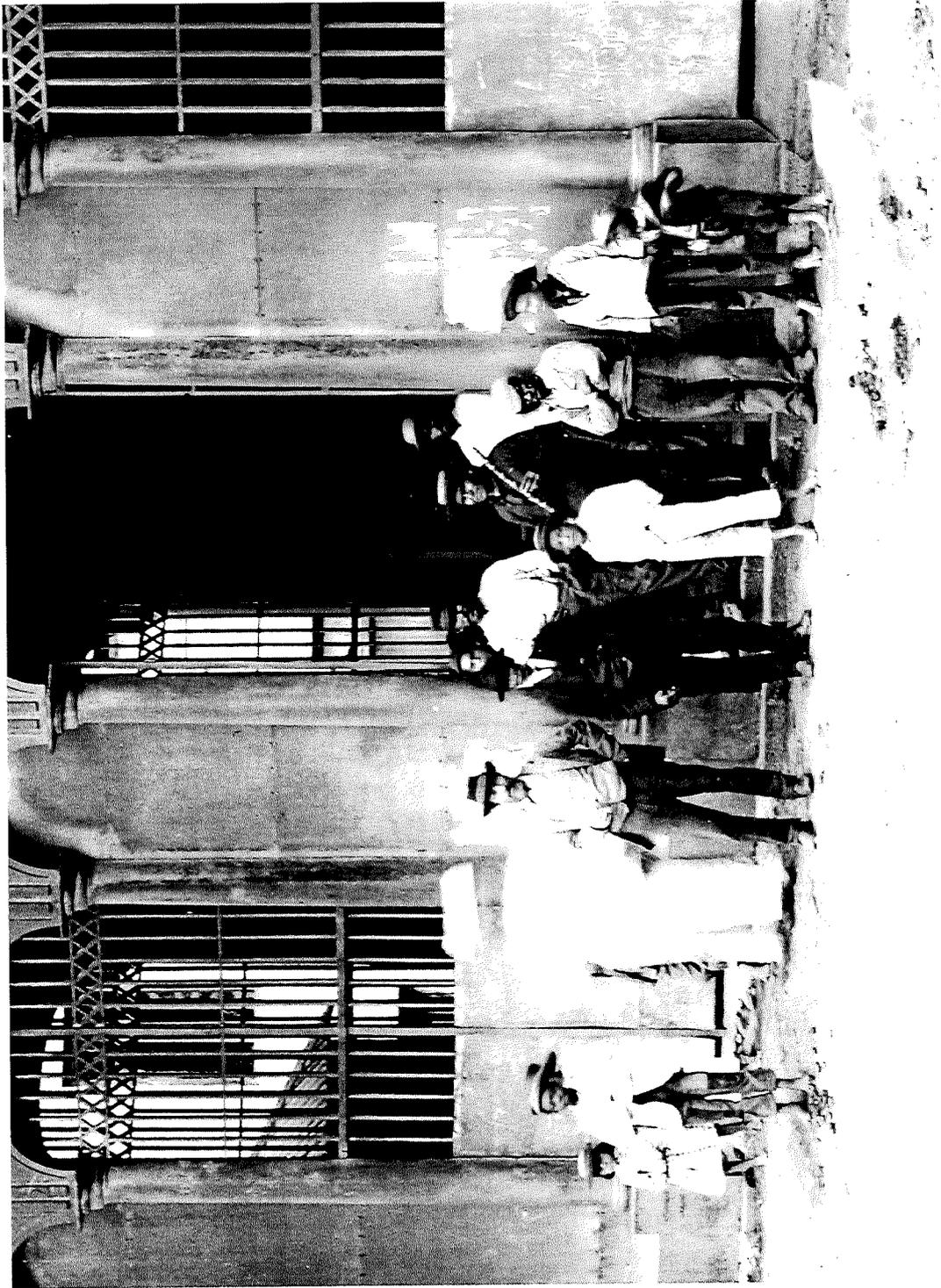


Plate 4: 'The Market' (detail), by *Rev. Tom Aitken* (c.1900)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum

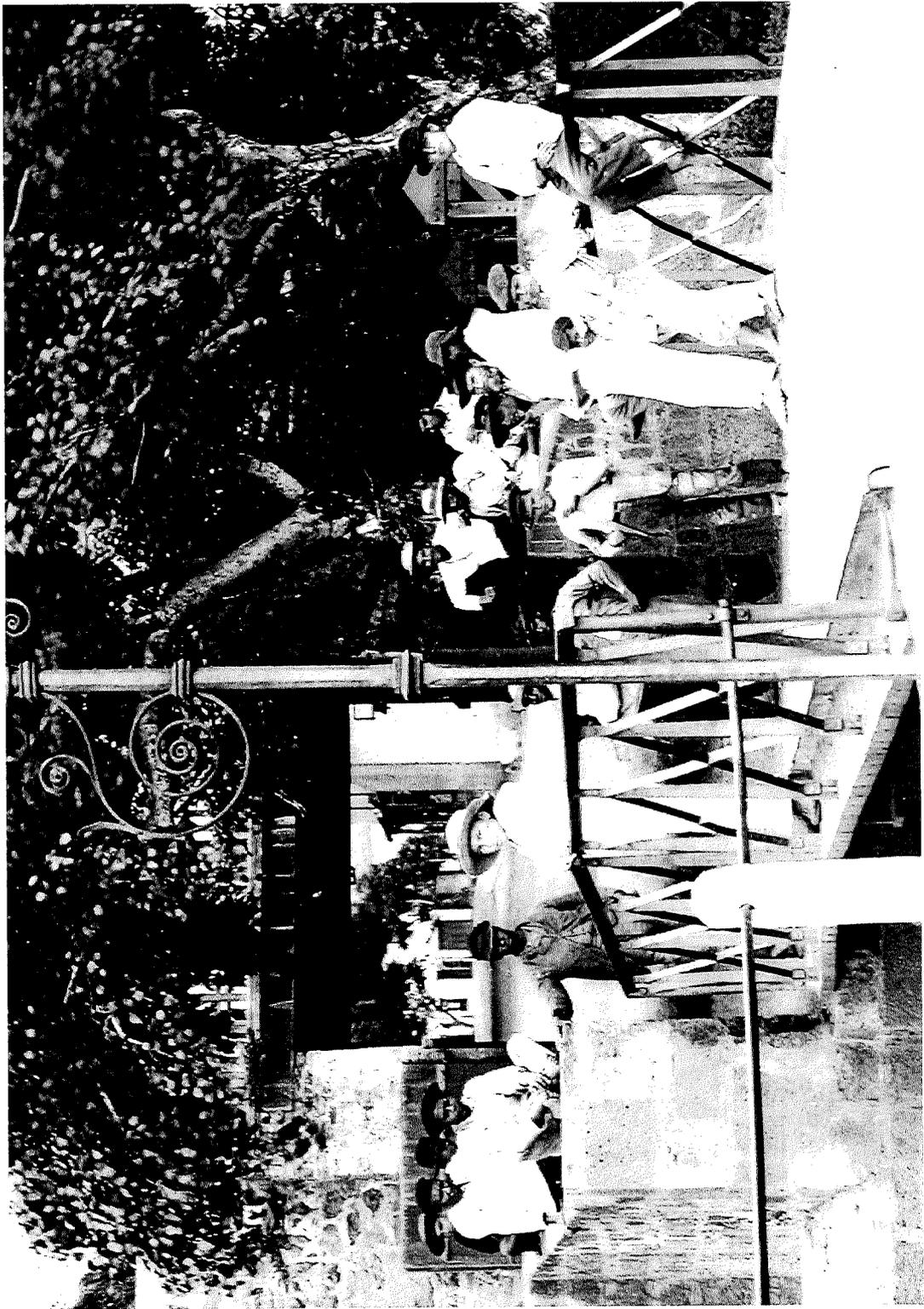


Plate 5: 'The Town Gate' (detail), by *Rev. Tom Aitken* (c.1900)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum

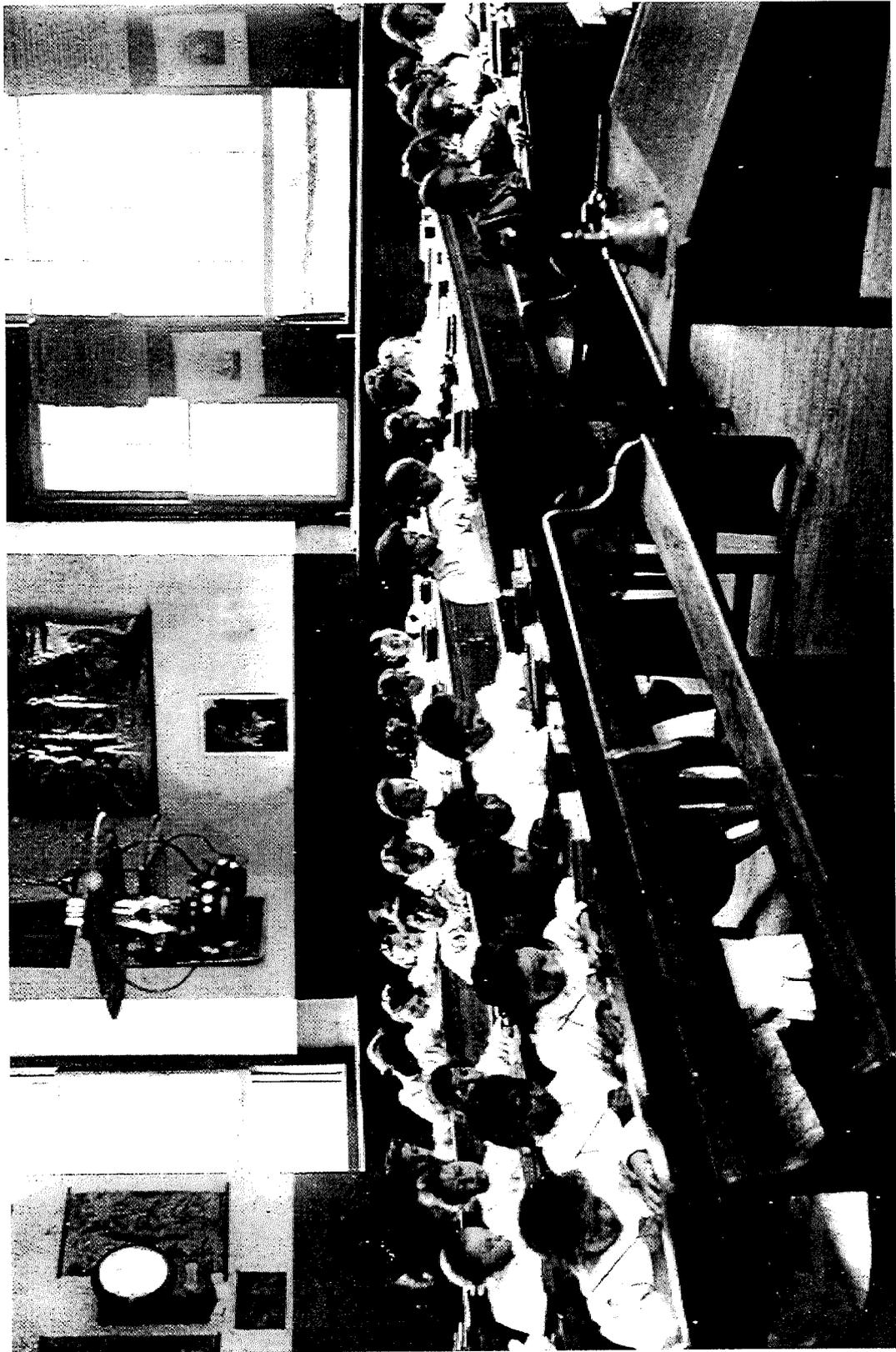


Plate 6: Head School, Jamestown, *by B. Grant*

source: J.H. Bacon, *The King's Empire*, Vol.II (London: Cassell & Co, 1906)



Plate 7: 'Town Children', by *Rev. Tom Aitken* (c.1900)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Mackerel curing . St Helena.

Plate 8: Mackerel Curing, St Helena (c.1910)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum (Le Rougetel Family Album 1910-1912)



Plate 9: Untitled (c.1910)

source: Private Collection



Plate 10: Untitled (c.1910)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum

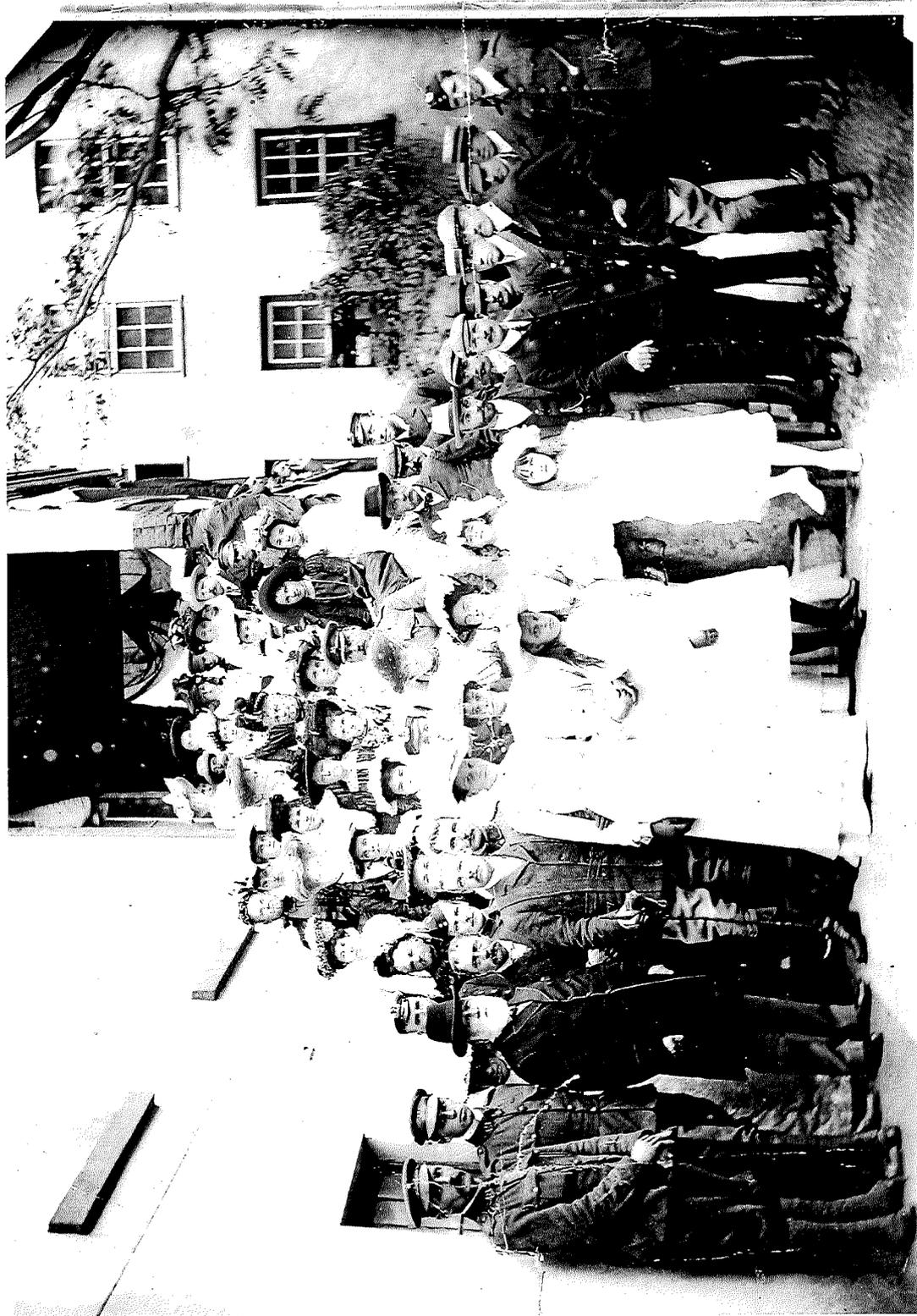
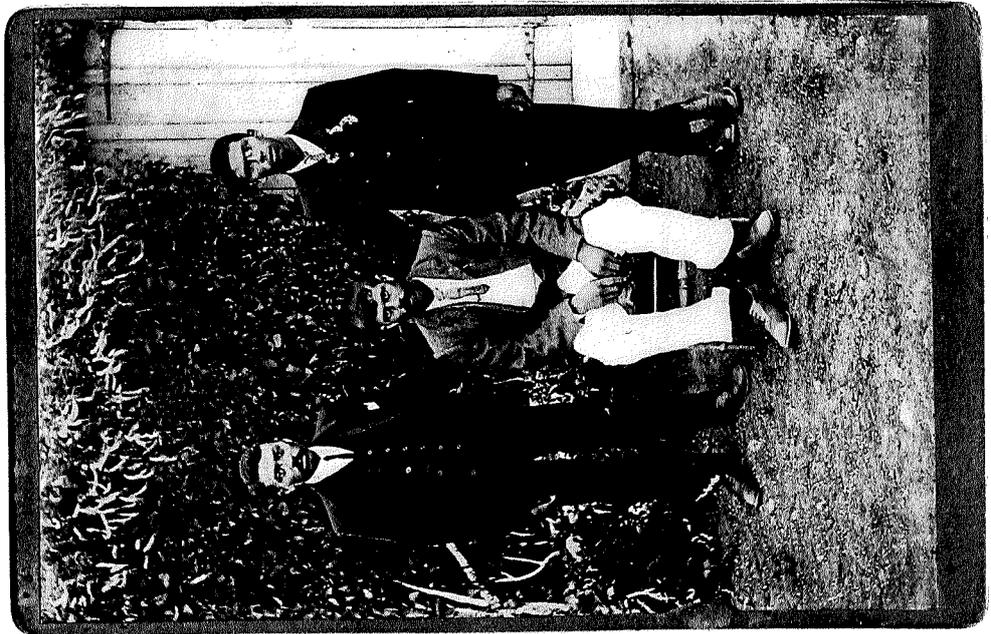


Plate 11: Untitled (c.1915)

source: Private Collection



Plates 12 and 13: Untitled (c.1920s)

source: Private Collection



Plate 14: Untitled (c.1920s) and Plate 15: Untitled (c.1930s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plate 16: Untitled (c.1920s) and Plate 17: Untitled (c.1930s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plate 18: Untitled (c.1930s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plates 19 and 20: Untitled (c.1930s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plates 21 and 22: Untitled (c.1940s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plates 23 and 24: Untitled (c.1940s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plate 25: Untitled (c.1940s)

source: St Helena Heritage Society Museum



Plates 26, 27 and 28: Untitled (c.1955)

source: St Helena Government Archives

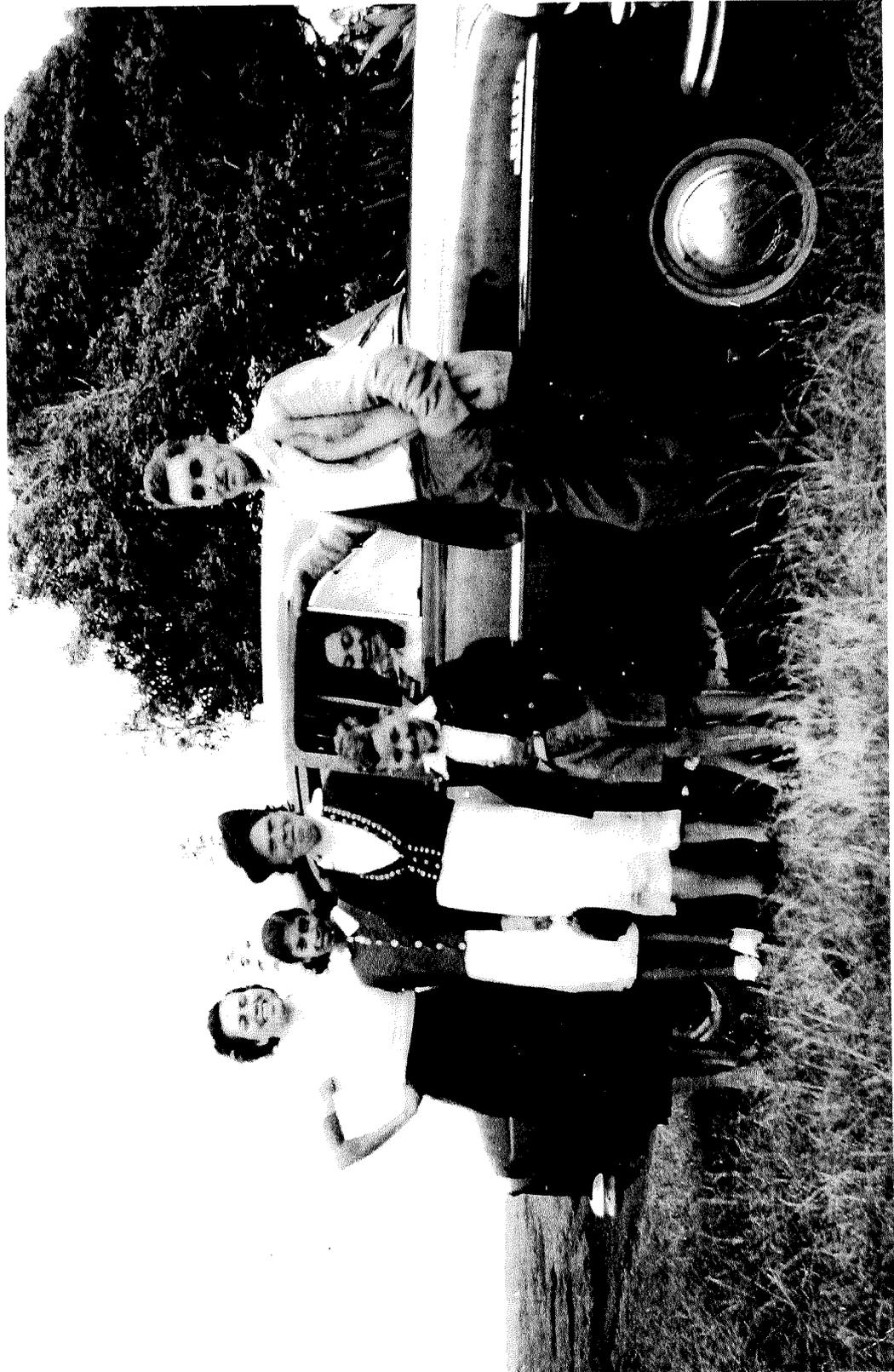


Plate 29: Untitled (c.1960)

source: Private Collection



Plate 30: 'Outside the Market'

source: Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957)



Plate 31: 'Islander at Quayside'

source: Oswell Blakeston, *Isle of St. Helena* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1957)



Plate 32: Some of the Natives of St. Helena (1960s)

source: St Helena Government Archives (The Times Newspaper © Ref. No. RT. 725)



Plates 33 and 34: *Untitled*, by *Alexander Schulenburg* (1993)

source: Helmut Schulenburg and Alexander Schulenburg, *St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean*
(Allersberg: Jacob-Gilardi-Verlag, 1997)

”DESOLATE OF REASONABLE INHABITANTS”

~ OF GOOD GOVERNMENT



Although colonial discourse theory has done much to expose the workings of powers outside the formal structures of colonial government, post-colonial theorists, given their concern with the diffusion of power, have to date paid little attention to the development of colonial forms of government as such, in specific the development of different forms of legislature. And while discursive processes of colonial government have been subject to some degree of scrutiny, not least in a number of papers by Homi Bhabha, collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994),¹ Bhabha's inscrutability and lack of historical grounding do nothing to significantly enlighten aspects of colonial administration proper.²

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). See especially 'The other question', 'Of mimicry and man', 'Signs taken for wonders', and 'Sly Civility', a paper on J.S. Mill and the role of writing in the administration of India.

² Within post-colonial theory, a more approachable discussion of colonial authority is woven into the argument of David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994).

In David Spurr's words, the "primary affirmation of colonial discourse is one which justifies the authority of those in control of the discourse through demonstrations of moral superiority."³ Such justification and legitimation of colonial rule by conceptions of difference has been extensively explored in Thomas Metcalf's *Ideologies of the Raj*. As Andrew Blake has rightly argued, the "economics and politics of empire have always been imbued with rich fantasies which - far from standing at one remove from reality in the merely discursive world patronized by deconstructionist theory - have themselves been productive of economic and political change."⁴

Instead, the best way to examine the political dimension of colonial discourse on St Helena, is by way of an explicit investigation of the island's constitutional and political history during the mid-twentieth century primarily.⁵ It is this history which bears out the claim that the descriptions contained in official reports, in particular, did not merely serve to describe, instead they "existed to be acted upon: the document was always intended to be a charter for intervention [...]."⁶ Indeed, official correspondence exhibits the same tendency as, for instance, travelogues, which are not ostensibly concerned with 'government' as such, for as J.B. Loudon has commented with respect to St Helena's dependency of Tristan da Cunha, "early accounts of Tristan have had a marked effect

³ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 110.

⁴ Andrew Blake, 'Foreign Devils and Moral Panics: Britain, Asia and the Opium Trade', in Bill Schwarz (ed), *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵ For an introductory essay on colonial authority, see A.J. Stockwell, 'Power, Authority and Freedom', in P.J. Marshall (ed), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a detailed history of British imperial administration, see Martin Wright, *The Development of the Legislative Council, 1606-1945* (London: Faber & Faber, 1946). Also see Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden (eds), *Essays in Imperial Government* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963); A.F. Madden, "'Not for Export": The Westminster Model of Government and British Colonial Practice', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.VIII, No.1 (1979). The only contemporary discussion of any note is by David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). For a case study, see G.B. Endacott, *Government and People in Hong Kong 1841-1962: A Constitutional History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1964).

⁶ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 115.

upon the attitudes towards the islanders of more recent travellers and visitors."⁷ He could well have added 'administrators' to his list.

Hence, I consider an approach focusing on the explicit processes of and concerns with government to be as worthwhile as an investigation of more diffuse manifestations of colonial power. And in so far as the St Helena weekly press has had a constituting part to play in any of these developments, my discussion is not restricted to official correspondence alone. Interestingly, even within the overall scheme of official correspondence the inhabitants too had had their own particular slot, namely by way of petitions, many of which featured prominently in the nineteenth century press, although, as one commentator has observed, "experience has too well proved that our 'right of Petition' is but designed at the best, to improve us in the calligraphic art, and a right to amuse ourselves in the manufacture of waste paper."⁸

LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Under the proprietorship of the East India Company, St Helena was administered by a governor and a council, who were appointed by the Company's directors in London.⁹ Prior to 1673, a majority of members of the council were to be chosen by the settlers, but this provision was later revoked and councillors were appointed solely by the Company. Although generally autocratic, the East India Company's administration was

⁷ J.B. Loudon, 'Early Travellers to Tristan Da Cunha', in Meyer Fortes and Sheila Patterson (eds), *Studies in African Social Anthropology* (London: Academic Press, 1975), 138. For an excellent socio-cultural study of Tristan da Cunha, see Peter Munch, *Crisis in Utopia: The Story of Tristan da Cunha* (London: Longman, 1971). For a general history and description, see Allan Crawford, *Tristan da Cunha and the Roaring Forties* (London: Charles Skilton, 1982).

⁸ *The Advocate, or, St. Helena Weekly News*, 19.6.1851. While this appears to have been the case by and large, a mock petition by 'A. Farthing' published in the *St. Helena Guardian* in 1874 employs this 'calligraphic art' not only in making a substantive point, but also in 'mocking' the petition format itself. [*St. Helena Guardian*, 21.5.1874.]

⁹ For an introduction to the nature of early English colonial government, see Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 327-9;

informed by the instruction that 'English men are led not forced'.¹⁰ On account of the personalities involved, this had not always been the result on the ground and governors were frequently accused of acting arbitrarily.

After St Helena came under the control of H.M. Government in 1836, the island's affairs continued to be run by a governor with the advice of an executive council. Despite being an exclusively English speaking colony, most of whose inhabitants were the descendants of white settlers and soldiers, political reform on St Helena was slow. From the 1850s onwards, local newspapers campaigned vociferously for representative government, initially without success. Although the first non-official members were introduced into the council in 1878, the first significant constitutional changes under the Crown occurred in the 1930s.

In March 1933, Governor Davis forwarded a petition to the Secretary of State which had been signed by 571 inhabitants. The petition was headed *Petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Grant Saint Helena Elective Representation in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Taking over of the Island by the Crown Administration*. It voiced, in particular, the inhabitants' "request for elective representation in the government of this Colony" in form of "a reasonable number of elected representatives on a Legislative Council," emphasising that the fact that "the principle of elective representation is well understood and appreciated by us is shown by the conduct of the members of the Parish Board and Health Board the members of which are elected."¹¹

In a letter accompanying the petition, those members of the committee which had drawn up the petition, informed the Secretary of State that as "the official attitude locally has been to deprecate the signing of this Petition, Government officials and employees - permanent and casual - and pensioners have not been canvassed."¹² As such, the number of signatories represented a much higher proportion of those that had been canvassed, than they might appear to constitute for the population as a whole.

In his own letter accompanying the petition, Governor Davis, however, explained that "the fact that approximately two-thirds of the adult population have refrained from signing the petition, goes to show that a very large majority do not desire that their interests be represented by elected members of a Legislative Council. Of those who have

¹⁰ SHGA: In-Letters', 25.3.1717.

¹¹ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 5.5.1933, enclosure, 'Petition of the Inhabitants'.

¹² SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 5.5.1933, enclosure, letter by Warren and Woodward.

signed the petition many are the employees of the promoters or under their authority or have business relations with them." In conclusion, Davis stated that he was "not prepared to recommend the inauguration of an elected Legislative Council."¹³

Interestingly, in a confidential letter of the same date, the Governor elaborated on that assessment.

There is no real demand on the part of a very large majority of the Islanders for a Legislative Council. The Islanders are in fact supporters of Government notwithstanding that many of them are not in a position freely to express their views and have been impelled by their circumstances to sign the petition. [...] I am opposed to an elected Council for the reason that the principal employers of labour will virtually decide who shall be elected. Elections would therefore become a farce. [...] [I]t is apparent to me that the Islanders would be better represented in a nominated than in an elected Legislative Council [...].¹⁴

Some of these views were in fact shared by the *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, copies of which were undoubtedly received by the Colonial Office. According to Canon Laurence Walcott, its editor,

Our people are certainly educated enough and advanced enough to appreciate the responsibility of an electorate. [...] The only thing we fear is that the large employers (and that also includes the Government) may have too dominant an influence over the working class for that class to exercise an independent judgment. There exists, I have discovered, but whether justified or not I cannot say, a constant dread of retaliation.¹⁵

¹³ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, 5.5.1933.

¹⁴ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, confidential, 5.5.1933.

¹⁵ *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, March 1933. On Walcott, see Trevor Hearl, 'Publishing (St Helena)', in Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly (eds), *Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*, Vol.II (London: Routledge, 1994), 1329-30.

Not surprisingly, the Secretary of State informed the petitioners that he could not accede to their request, stating that he was "not convinced that the inauguration of such a system would best serve the interests of the population as a whole."¹⁶

Despite being a church publication, the *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine* did not shy away from being 'political', for while a "diocesan magazine may appear to be an unusual form of press to represent public opinion, but when there is no other the burden can hardly be refused."¹⁷ Although the *Magazine* claimed that "If we ever criticise the Government at all it is only to ask, What are they doing for the poor?"¹⁸, its issue of April 1939 adopted a rather different stance.

[D]emocracy has not yet reached St. Helena, and pressless, voteless, inarticulate, the St. Helenaman has no voice whatsoever in his own affairs. There is a Council, but it is neither elective [*sic*] nor representative. [...] Without some form of suffrage or self-expression it is difficult to see in what way St. Helena can partake of that democratic character of which Englishmen are so justly proud, which we regard as our common heritage in the British Commonwealth, and without which we cannot really be considered free.¹⁹

But changes to the constitution were only months away, when in the island's first major administrative change since 1863, a new constitution was introduced providing for an Executive and an Advisory Council. The St Helena Order in Council 1939 was accompanied by detailed explanations by the Secretary of State, giving the reasons for this innovation. Special permission was granted for these to be made public through the *St. Helena Government Gazette*.

Taking into account existing circumstances in the island and the possibilities of future development, I have come to the conclusion that half of its members should be drawn from specific section of the community and the other half to be nominated by the Governor at his discretion. Two members will therefore be appointed as representatives of, and after consultation with, the registered Friendly

¹⁶ SHGA: Governor's In-Letters, 15.7.1933.

¹⁷ *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, October 1932.

¹⁸ *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, September 1936.

Societies to which a large proportion of the islanders belongs. The effect of this should be to secure the representation of the islanders by persons nominated by themselves. One member will be appointed as representative, and after consultation with, the firms engaged in flax milling, the island's chief industry. The remaining three members will be nominated by the Governor: and in making his nominations the Governor's object should be to secure as far as possible adequate representation on the Council of all the unofficial sections of the community. [...]

I trust that these changes will foster a growing interest and participation in the conduct of the island's affairs by the islanders themselves. The small size of the population makes elaborate constitutional machinery inappropriate to local circumstances: but I hope that the new Council may prove to be the nucleus of a representative body which at a later stage may be established on an elective basis.²⁰

The Executive Council, in turn, was to lose its unofficial members, who had been introduced in 1873. This measure was taken "in order to give no unfair weight to any one section of unofficial opinion."²¹

The introduction of this new constitution was welcomed by the editor of the *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, who commented that some of the constitution's measures had been "the nearest approach to the election of a member of Council there has been in St. Helena."²² The *Magazine* did, however, bemoan the removal of unofficial members from the Executive Council, which it considered progress "in a reverse rather than in a forward direction," and the loss of "a privilege [the island] had enjoyed for the whole period of its history."²³

The new Advisory Council was officially opened on 12 June 1940 and in his opening address, Governor Pilling expressed his hope that councillors would be guided by their "consideration of the general good of the whole community rather than be influenced by selfish motives of personal or small sectional interest" and that he hoped the people of the Island would "take advantage of the opportunity thus provided and so obtain

¹⁹ *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, April 1939.

²⁰ Letter from the Secretary of State to the Governor, 10.1.1940, reprinted in *St. Helena Government Gazette*, 15.2.1940.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *S. Helena Diocesan Magazine*, April 1940.

through their representatives that participation in the Government which the constitutional change is intended to afford them".²⁴ In time, however, the Advisory Council seemed to have lost its innovative momentum. In a letter to the *St. Helena Magazine*, John A. Thorpe, one of the Councillors, expressed his opinion that the Advisory Council "serves no useful purpose whatever."²⁵

The new constitution remained unchanged until 1956, although the *S. Helena Magazine* kept up its own pressure by publishing a constant stream of articles on democracy within the empire in general, as well as on the problems of St Helena's constitution in specific. Debates about a reform of the constitution continued for most of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. As these debates frequently revolved around differing perceptions of St Helena and the character of its inhabitants, I shall discuss here some of the most revealing letters and minutes found amongst the official records, not least those of the Colonial Office, which, according to Hyam, stand out for "their extended and intelligent analyses of diverse problems."²⁶

One particularly interesting exchange arose in 1952 in response to a query by a Member of Parliament, John Parker.²⁷ Replying to Parker's query for the Secretary of State, Henry Hopkinson explained that as far as he was aware, there had been

no demand locally for an elected Advisory Council, and I am doubtful whether the time is quite ripe for this yet. [...] The circumstances of the Falkland Islands, to which you refer, are very different. [...] The Falklands are not dependent on a grant in aid from this country, and the population is entirely of European origin, sharing more fully in the democratic tradition.²⁸

'Race' appears to have re-entered into such considerations. This reply, however, as is obvious from the original Colonial Office file, is a much abbreviated version of the letter's original draft. Initially, the letter explained in some detail the intention of the

²³ *S. Helena Magazine*, October 1943.

²⁴ 'Opening of the Advisory Council', *New Review*, 17 June 1940.

²⁵ *S. Helena Magazine*, January 1944.

²⁶ Ronald Hyam, 'The Colonial Office Mind 1900-1914', in Norman Hillmer and Philip Wigley (eds), *The First British Commonwealth: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Mansergh* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 31.

²⁷ For all correspondence relating to this episode see PRO: CO 1024/67.

1939 constitution to minimise the influence of the three large landholding families on the island, members of whose families had "almost invariably formed the unofficial side of the Council." One of the sections which were eventually deleted stated that

it was perhaps natural that the unofficial side tended to aim at the preservation of the somewhat feudal conditions then existing. The people themselves had no voice, in practice, in the management of their affairs and were in fact almost wholly inarticulate and disinterested. The 'slave mentality' had lingered on.²⁹

Another deleted section explained that it had hence been the intention of the 1939 constitution "to afford a better opportunity for a wider range of unofficial members to express their views freely to the Governor, which they were certainly not inclined to do in the presence of those to whom they looked for their daily bread. It was anticipated that representatives of the three leading families would not in person wish to sit on a large Advisory Council and this proved to be the case."³⁰

The Colonial Office subsequently asked Governor Joy for his comments on Parker's query and whether he thought that the time may now have come for "the recreation of a Legislature."³¹ Governor Joy commented in his reply to J.B. Sidebotham that "[e]lsewhere the problem is that of yielding successive powers to a populace vociferating for self government. Here, the problem is that of encouraging a diffident people to demand and accept responsibility for their internal affairs. In a sense our problem is upside-down!"³² Sidebotham, in a comment on Joy's letter in a minute to Sir C. Jeffries, wrote that the "truth is that there is so little political consciousness, in the accepted sense, among the bulk of the inhabitants of St. Helena, that a change would only benefit one or two individuals."³³ This exchange provides an apt illustration of the process by which such opinions are passed from officials on St Helena onto the Colonial Office in London and their subsequent progress up the chain of command.

²⁸ PRO: CO 1024/67, 28.5.1952.

²⁹ PRO: CO 1024/67, draft (28.5.1952).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ PRO: CO 1024/67, 10.6.1952.

³² PRO: CO 1024/67, 8.8.1952.

³³ PRO: CO 1024/67, 8.10.1952.

In 1954, however, the constitutional debate within the Colonial Office and between the Colonial Office and the Governor gained new momentum.³⁴ In a long letter to John Sidebotham, Governor Harford gave his assessment of the political situation on St Helena, as well as making detailed recommendations for changes to the constitution.

[A]fter a time the observer is disturbed and it may be shamed less by the material poverty and the austerity of the Island way of living, than by the subdued and passive air and outlook, the onlooker status, the depressed position (not spirits) of the people, from one end of the community to the other. Here is a whole people near-British in blood, tradition, and way of life, essentially a civilised people, yet from top to bottom innocent of the rudiments of cultural or political life, and with only instinctive promptings of social life. A people dwarfed, with no scope for acquiring stature - unless they leave for lands other than their own. [...]

The great majority no doubt have no "political" views or stirrings of any kind. But [...] I have seemed to discern among the more thinking members of the community a quiet resentment at a sense of relegation to secondary and menial roles in the island, and a passive disquiet at being left behind in the modern Colonial race by peoples they regard as inferior.³⁵

Yet again, issues of blood and 'race' enter into the governor's deliberations, although his comments also support John Melliss' account of the apparent the superiority felt by non-white St Helenians with respect to 'Africans'.³⁶ Harford, whose comments on the industry of St Helenians I also quoted in the preceding chapter, touched on these issues in a number of detailed proposals on constitutional reform, when writing that the "general impression of the Island [...] is one of apathy and stagnation, of a lack of overt common purpose, of individuals immersed in their own aims and pursuits. It is a strange and paradoxical tribute to the ethos of the island that there may be felt in it a greater sense of cohesive unity than is experienced among more developed peoples elsewhere."³⁷

³⁴ For all correspondence relating to this episode see PRO: CO 1024/188.

³⁵ PRO: CO 1024/188, 20.7.1954.

³⁶ John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875), 79-81.

³⁷ PRO: CO 1024/188, 'Provisional Appreciation of Constitutional Arrangements on St. Helena', 19.7.1954.

In specific, Harford recommended that unofficial members should once more form part of the Executive Council. In doing so he commented that

Failure to associate the unofficial element as prominently and intimately as possible with administration must add to the apathy and stagnation which are so prevalent. There is no public ventilation of affairs, no press, little Government publicity. Island-wide affairs or gatherings are practically restricted to the annual Empire Day shoot on the open range, the 1st January sports day for children, the occasional Agricultural Show, the Armistice Day ceremony in Jamestown. Public life in fact as understood today hardly exists.³⁸

The Colonial Office minutes accompanying this correspondence make, as always, fascinating reading. The views expressed therein are probably best summed up in a minute on St Helena by S.J. Moore, who noted that the "situation is almost unique in our recent experience, insofar as instead of finding ourselves pulling on the curb to restrain the more extreme political zealots we have to rely rather on applying a judicious spur."³⁹

One idea that raised at this time, was to divide the island into parishes, who could supply representatives to a revised Advisory Council. But, as another minute noted, "whether one could find in St. Helena persons in each of these parishes who would be really capable of 'expressing a view' if 'elected' is a matter on which I have some doubts."⁴⁰ In his eventual reply to Governor Harford, Sidebotham declared that while a political approach was one way "of awakening the St. Helenians to their responsibilities and to political interest in their own affairs [...], the bringing to life of a spirit of community development based on a broad front is, perhaps, even more important."⁴¹

In 1955, further detailed proposals by Harford in line with his earlier suggestions attracted the following Colonial Office minute from P. Rogers to Sir T. Lloyd.

You should know of these proposals in view of the political interest that may be attracted by constitutional advance even in so small and quiet a place as St. Helena.

The words "constitutional reform" or "advance" applied to such a territory raise

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ PRO: CO 1024/188, 23.8.1954.

⁴⁰ PRO: CO 1024/188, 29.9.1954.

absolutely no enthusiasm in my mind at all for it is in effect a Parish to which a Parish form of Government with a local squire as Governor is what is really appropriate [...]. On the other hand these rather high sounding phrases such as constitutional advance are in my view hardly a suitable description of the present proposals which are essentially Parish pump [...].⁴²

In the event, the St Helena Order in Council 1956 did in fact provide a significantly revised constitution for the island. Its major innovations were the re-introduction of unofficial members to the Executive Council and the addition of district representatives to the Advisory Council. The Advisory Council was now constituted to consist of one representative for each of five districts, which were to be constituted specifically for that purpose, and chosen in consultation with the existing district associations. Two representatives were to be nominated by the Friendly Societies. There was also scope for appointing a further three members at the Governor's discretion. The unofficial members of the Executive Council were to be chosen by the Governor from amongst the Advisory Council. These would join the four official members of the Council, two of whom are the Government Secretary and the Government Treasurer.

HUGHES, EMANUEL, AND THE GENERAL WORKERS UNION

The late 1950s are notable for two detailed reports, one by the then Member of Parliament for Anglesey, Cledwyn Hughes, the other by Aaron Emanuel, CMG, a civil servant in the Colonial Office. Cledwyn Hughes' visit to the island came as a result of an invitation by a local settler, Charles Wells, and had the concurrence of the British Labour Party. In his report, Hughes primarily addressed the depressed social and economic situation of the island, but devoted a number of comments to its political culture.

The St. Helenians are a people of mixed European, African and Asiatic descent. They are highly intelligent and their charm and cheerfulness in adversity must be

⁴¹ PRO: CO 1024/188, 20.9.1954.

⁴² PRO: CO 1024/189, 19.8.1955.

seen to be appreciated. Several factors have combined to produce a subservience and shyness in their nature and tardiness to complain or to appeal for help. The great majority suffer distress in silence and really outspoken St. Helenians can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. This quality in their nature is due to tenuous memories of the days of slavery which die hard in an isolated community; to the very real fear of victimisation in work; to the virtual monopoly in business enjoyed over generations by one private company and to the aloof and often unimaginative rule of the Colonial Administration over the years. The islanders have never been encouraged to take a responsible part in Government, which has appeared in a greater or lesser degree to be indifferent to their sufferings and aspirations.⁴³

Apart from reproducing established concerns with the islanders' origins and slave history, Hughes also took issue with the existing constitution, pointing out that there is now "a general demand for proper elections so that the people may choose their own representatives. The St. Helenians are a literate and intelligent people and I find it hard to understand why this privilege was not granted to them years ago."⁴⁴

Hughes' report was met with the publication of a detailed series of 'observations' by the St Helena government, which corrected a number of factual details in his report, but could do little to deflect its overall impression.⁴⁵ In addition, Governor Alford also sent an extensive reply to the Secretary of State, criticising Hughes for not having been "at pains to acquaint himself with the Government attitude and point of view in respect of most of the matters of which he is critical."⁴⁶ The Governor noted the following in particular.

Early in my time in the Island, in 1954, it was borne in on me that the task of a St. Helenian Government in the political field could be said to be the converse of that in almost every other British Colonial territory. It was not the task of holding back or guiding a people straining at the leash, and possibly overreaching itself; but

⁴³ Cledwyn Hughes, *Report of an Enquiry into Conditions on the Island of St. Helena* (St Helena: 1958), 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁵ St. Helena Government, *Observations on Mr. Hughes' Report of an Enquiry into Conditions in St. Helena* (St Helena: 1958).

rather one of bringing on and encouraging a people who - for reasons for the most part rightly analysed, in my opinion by Mr. Hughes - are diffident, retiring, and inarticulate, to play an overt and constructive part in the business of government.⁴⁷

In the interval between Hughes' visit and that of Emanuel, the Governor of St Helena supplied the Colonial Office with three 'intelligence reports' by the island's Government Secretary, George A. Lewis. These reports were principally aimed at providing a picture of the island's current political climate. The first of these, of August 1958, commented in specific on the impact of Cledwyn Hughes' visit.

The average St. Helenian [...] accustomed to many years of hardship and privation, and feeling that any attempt to rebel against the status quo would result in even worse hardship and privation had become apathetic and disinclined to make any protest. The remoteness of the Colony from the outside world had accentuated his apathy and produced a feeling of helplessness. [...] The general belief that the Island has now, in effect, a Member at Westminster ready to champion its cause has generated a boldness and a highly critical attitude of mind in the average St. Helenian which would seem to be hitherto unknown.⁴⁸

In March and April of 1959 the island was visited by Aaron Emanuel of the Colonial Office. Emanuel's visit came as the result of several developments, which included the recent closing of some of the flax mills, evidence of low nutrition, and the findings of Hughes' report. Emanuel's visit was announced prior to his arrival, and inhabitants were invited to ask for appointments with him if they had any matters to discuss. In the report of his visit, Emanuel opened his examination of the state of St Helena's affair by way of a section entitled 'The Psychological Problem: the Climate of Discontent', repeating a range of now well established claims.

St. Helena is our second oldest colony, celebrating its 300th anniversary this year. [...] During that long history and before the freeing of the slaves and the spread of

⁴⁶ PRO: CO 1024/276.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ PRO: CO 1024/267, 16.8.1958.

liberal doctrines grim injustices were perpetrated on the people. After the emancipation, as elsewhere, political freedom meant little in economic terms. Large areas of land were, and are, held by the few and the lot of the ordinary islander was that of hewers of wood and drawers of water. [...] [T]he people as a whole have belonged to the subordinate and labouring classes and the accusation is often made that they have never really shaken off their largely slave ancestry. It is not surprising that few if any persons of outstanding ability or personality have originated in St. Helena. The tradition of St. Helena people has been that of a passive, docile, friendly and servile race from which no trouble need ever be expected. [...] All this would seem irrelevant to an analysis of present day conditions. But it is not. The modern age, in St. Helena as elsewhere, has produced a new psychological climate.⁴⁹

Despite this assertion, the relevance of these comments was not made clear, although Emanuel provided further observations in a section of his report devoted specifically to matters of the island's constitution.

The "political" situation on the island is, like many other things in St. Helena, a somewhat peculiar one. Indeed the word "political" is almost, but not entirely, a misnomer. There are no political parties as such and no organisations which are serious political bodies. District Associations provide local centres for recreation and discussion, and discussion includes, inevitably, pin-pricking at Government (particularly the overseas part of it.)⁵⁰

The idea of the peculiarity of the island's political situation was extended to the notion of 'public opinion', just as Emanuel elaborated further on the problem of pin-pricking.

An important point to grasp in all this is that public opinion, such as it is, does not express itself effectively through any of these channels. The term "public opinion" is of course one of art and it is probably safe to say that public opinion in St. Helena has rarely existed, let alone expressed itself. But to-day it does exist and

⁴⁹ SHGA: A. Emanuel, *Report on a Visit to St. Helena, March-April, 1959*, 3. Also, PRO: CO 1024/260.

⁵⁰ SHGA: A. Emanuel, *Report on a Visit to St. Helena, March-April, 1959*, 10.

certainly public opinions exist. But it, and they, are expressed, not through debate between representative citizens in a public body but by the spread of gossip, criticism and complaint, not only by the Union but more or less by all and sundry.⁵¹

Emanuel was forced to conclude that "there is now a greater interest in public affairs than before, that the present machinery is inadequate, both as a means of expressing public opinion and as a means of getting the Government's policy across to the public."⁵² While Emanuel's comments were received with great interest by the Colonial Office, and despite some initially favourable suggestions to that end, his report was never published.⁵³

THE GENERAL WORKERS UNION

Both Hughes' and Emanuel's visit coincided with an important new development in St Helena politics, the rise and demise of the St Helena General Workers Union.⁵⁴ Its brief history is of interest not least for providing an insight into the manner in which the Colonial Office kept a tab on developments on St Helena, not least through Emanuel.

Fred Ward, the union's main figure during its early years, was born at St Helena in 1916 and left school at the age of 14 to work in a government garage. At 17 he went to work at Ascension Island, but was sacked for refusing to apologise for telling "a white employee where to get off." It was that event, Ward later wrote, "where it all started".⁵⁵ He subsequently spent some time working in the gold fields of Welkom and Odendaalsrust in the Orange Free State.⁵⁶ After almost six years of military service and

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 11.

⁵³ For a discussion of Emanuel's report see, D.J. Morgan, *Guidance Towards Self-Government in British Colonies, 1941-1971*, The Official History of Colonial Development, Vol.5 (London: Macmillan, 1980), 118-23.

⁵⁴ For an account of the union by its General Secretary, see Fred M. Ward, 'The Trade Union Struggle in St. Helena', *Plebs*, July 1962. Also see David Mitchell, 'Sgt Ward Does Battle - For Napoleon's Island', *Today*, 11.11.1961.

⁵⁵ Private archives: Letter from Ward to Oldenbroek, 1.6.1960.

⁵⁶ Private archives: Letter from Ward to George Woodcock, 18.6.1963.

another six years in the Merchant Navy, he eventually returned to St Helena. He later claimed that it was his experience of travelling all around Africa, Britain and the United States, which had "broadened my outlook and made me more determined to make life in general better for my own people. I crossed the Rubicon and made up my mind to stay here: Mine was but a voice in the wilderness."⁵⁷

Early on, Ward's views were given expression in letters to *The St Helena "Wirebird"*, in which Ward queried the wisdom of one or other government measure, and in which he already stated unequivocally that "[a] Govt. belongs, or should if Democratic, belong to the people."⁵⁸ An 'intelligence' report in 1958 described Ward as "one of the few St. Helenians who has never been afraid to criticise anyone or anything, [...] but he has the merit of being on the whole a reasonable being who can see both sides of a question."⁵⁹

Ward soon became instrumental in founding the St Helena General Workers Union, whose General Secretary he became. With the encouragement of Cledwyn Hughes,⁶⁰ the union had been formed at a meeting at the Jamestown Cinema Hall on 23 July 1958, two days after Hughes' departure.⁶¹ Over the following year, the union organised a series of strikes and protest marches, the largest of which was held on 29 July 1959 (*plates 35 and 36*). Ward, in later years, commented on that march in heavily underlined notes written by him on the back of two photographs showing the assembled protesters in front of the Court House.

Everything was organised by yrs truly. This was by far the Biggest Protest March ever held on the Island - and the Results can still be seen today. [...] The "Grand Parade" was actually Filled with people. Thank God everything was very Orderly. I also did most of the Placards myself - [...]. The "British Government" (at that time) did exactly as they liked. We worked for what was Tantamount to a slave wage. All that went out - thanks to the "Union" - Thanks too to me, Fred Ward.

⁵⁷ Private archives: Letter from Ward to Oldenbroek, 1.6.1960.

⁵⁸ *Wirebird*, April 1956.

⁵⁹ PRO: CO 1024/267, 16.8.1958.

⁶⁰ Cledwyn Hughes, *Report of an Enquiry into Conditions on the Island of St. Helena* (St Helena: 1958), 12.

⁶¹ *St. Helena News Review*, 26.7.1958.



Plates 35 and 36: Rally, St Helena General Workers Union (29 July 1959)

source: Private Collection

Today we have a Council (Elected) & can truthfully say that these changes came about & were due to the efforts of the St. Helena General Worker's Union.⁶²

Some of these placards proclaimed, amongst other things, "We Demand Representation By Secret Ballot", "Advisory Council Elective: Executive Council Partly Elected", "Holidays With Pay", "A Minimum Wage Legally Enforced", "Playgrounds For Our Children", "Road Improvement", and many more.

The union's march attracted considerable comment from the government in form of a printed *Message from His Excellency the Governor to All in Employment*. In that message, Governor Alford explained the serious matter of striking and the importance, on the part of workers, to resort to it at the right moment, namely only after demands have been issued to an employer. But the governor had other concerns as well.

All workers [...] have the right to strike if they wish to, but in the Government's opinion they are making a mistake if they strike without exactly knowing why they are striking. On this occasion, as far as I can make out, members of the Union were given a leaflet asking them to assemble at Barrack Square to take part in a protest march in order to show their solidarity and support for their leaders and not to let the Union down. I cannot discover that any other information was given to the members or that they were told what they were going to protest about, and the people I asked before the march were unable to tell me. It seems therefore that many of those who went on strike, perhaps all of them, did not know why they were doing so.⁶³

Emanuel, in his report of March-April 1959, had expressed similar concerns, for he had commented that while there were "members of the Union at all of my meetings and it was evident that they were primed to make the usual points."⁶⁴ Furthermore, he also suspicious that union members may have acted less out of conviction than out of obligation, for he related that in order to show that there was support for a new constitution (contrary to the Governor's claims), "the Union Secretary referred to the

⁶² Private archives.

⁶³ SHGA: 'Message from His Excellency the Governor to All in Employment', n.d.

⁶⁴ SHGA: A. Emanuel, *Report on a Visit to St. Helena, March-April, 1959*, 10.

question in the public meeting in Jamestown. He invited those who agreed with him to stand and the whole meeting (of about 500) rose. Whether this indicates genuine intensity of feeling on a subject few would really understand, or merely a sheepish inclination to follow my leader, is difficult to say."⁶⁵

In October 1959 Ward travelled to England to attend a Trade Union Congress course, and in November a suggestion was made by Cledwyn Hughes that Ward should meet Julian Amery, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office. Aaron Emanuel, in a minute commenting on this idea, saw no objection, but pointed out the following:

I think the interview would do no harm provided that Mr. Ward is not treated as though he is the uncrowned King of St. Helena and given immediate answers to everything he says. Despite the measures that were taken in the spring, he is reported in the press as having said in London that St. Helena was a "hell" and that revolt was brewing. In point of fact, it is anything but a "hell" and since Mr. Ward has been away, things have been very quiet. [...] Mr. Amery will have seen the telegram from the Governor describing the preparations for the tercentenary celebrations this week which suggest that the people were happily engaged in various kinds of jollification. If there is danger of revolt, it will only be because of the determination of people like Mr. Ward to stir up feeling in an irresponsible way and the fact that the simpleminded people of St. Helena seem peculiarly susceptible to his influence when he chooses to exercise it.⁶⁶

It must be remembered that this is the same Emanuel speaking, whose report of March-April 1959 certainly did not speak of the 'simpleminded people of St Helena'.

In the event, the meeting between Ward and Amery took place on 27 November 1959. Reporting on the meeting in a letter to Governor Alford, Emanuel described the meeting as "short and informal" and said Ward had been "courteous and restrained" and had "stressed his sincerity and good intentions but indicated there were lots of matters that needed putting right and that he would continue to struggle to do so."⁶⁷ On 1

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10-1.

⁶⁶ PRO: CO 1024/275, 6.11.1959.

⁶⁷ PRO: CO 1024/275, 1.12.1959.

December, Ward met with Emanuel and spent about two hours with him, including lunch at the Colonial Office canteen, on which occasion they discussed a range of matters affecting St Helena, especially, the problem of constitutional reform. Emanuel's letter to Alford concluded with the postscript that "[p]erhaps I ought to say that Ward spoke in friendly terms of both yourself [Governor Alford] and Lewis [the Government Secretary]."⁶⁸

Despite the cordial atmosphere existing at that time, Emanuel's views on the union remained rather cautious, as the following quite remarkable comment, made in a minute in 1960, shows: "I am quite clear that provided the Governor has a frigate within easy reach of St. Helena he can continue to govern the people in spite of the wishes of Mr. Ward and Mr. Walsh. I am however also quite clear that this is an unsatisfactory basis of government."⁶⁹ Emanuel obviously did appreciate that change had to be forthcoming.

Ward, however, had been far less confident about the union and his own efforts than might have appeared to the Colonial Office, for after four years as General Secretary he accepted the offer by the St Helena government of the post of Social Welfare Officer, to which he was appointed on 1 December 1962. He justified his decision in his last *Voice of the Union*, a news-sheet he had been publishing for the Union since its foundation. According to Ward, "We have NEVER worked with government before simply because from top to bottom they were impossible to work with; not that we did not try. This has now CHANGED. This government is willing to co-operate with us. We must do our part."⁷⁰ But there was also a considerable degree of personal disillusionment behind Ward's decision 'to change sides'.

I know that some of you will say "He won't fight the Government now because he is a Government man". See how well I know you all. If any of you think that, then here is my answer to you. Have YOU ever tried to do any fighting yourself?" No? Then it is about time you got off your fanny and tried to DO something. If you have neither the brains nor the guts then why not keep quiet?⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ PRO: CO 1024/252, 4.1.1960.

⁷⁰ *The Voice of the Union*, 30.11.1962.

⁷¹ Ibid.

In a letter to George Woodcock, then Secretary General of the Trades Union Congress, Ward likewise explained that "you will perhaps appreciate that working with people who are educated [...] is very very different to running a Union entirely on your own; when there is NOT ONE SINGLE PERON who can offer you ONE constructive idea; not one question is ever asked you; but plenty is said when you are a mile away."⁷²

All in all, Ward's decision to quit his Union appear to bear out the opinion, which the Colonial Office had been holding all along. Nevertheless, a major constitutional change occurred in 1963, when the island's first general elections to a newly constituted advisory council took place, and in 1966 this council was reconstituted as a legislative council. Unfortunately, the official papers relating to these and subsequent changes are still classified and as such I have been unable to examine the decisions underlying these changes in the way I have done for previous decades. The island's most recent constitution of 1988 further enhanced the responsibilities of the legislative council, although locally these constitutional arrangements are still considered to be insufficiently representative, although both the legislative and the executive council have a majority of non-official members. The island's executive authority rests with the governor in council, the latter being composed of ex-officio members as well as the elected heads of legislative council committees, but there is no ministerial system. The governor retains a number of reserved powers, primarily with respect to defence, external affairs, internal security, justice, finance and shipping, and it is these which have been criticised primarily.

However, just as changes in the island's constitutional, arrangements appeared to open up new possibilities, other changes resulted in a significant loss of opportunities. It is these latter ones which I have discussed in the following chapter.

⁷² Private archives: Letter from Ward to George Woodcock, 28.6.1963.

"BRIGHT JEMS OF THIS OUR NATION"

~ OF ENGLISHMEN AND CITIZENS



The current attitude expressed by St Helenians to questions of national identity is captured quite accurately in Arthur Bryant's assessment of the attitude shown to Britain by the white settler colonies at the end of the nineteenth century.¹

[T]he colonist themselves, though they had no love for Whitehall and resented interference, wished to remain British. They wanted to enjoy their lands of promise under the flag their fathers had know. In other words, they were

¹ In chapter 1 of this thesis I have already reviewed a number of current approaches to the construction of colonial and post-colonial identities. For a brief but pertinent introduction, see Catherine Hall, 'Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (eds), *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996).

sentimental about patriotism. They refused to view it like superior folk in England as an old-fashioned thing to smile at.²

Nevertheless, St Helenians can certainly vouch for Elliott's assessment that "settlements and colonies that owed their existence to a distant mother country [...] all found themselves trapped in the dilemma of discovering themselves to be at once the same, and yet not the same, as the country of their origin."³ Furthermore, as Pagden and Canny have pointed out with respect to the Atlantic colonists, these, like St Helenians even today, had never "come to terms with their continuing absence from a land they often persisted, even into the third or fourth generation, in regarding as their true 'home', their 'mother country'."⁴ In spite of this, such colonies found that "without exception their countries of origin held them in low regard,"⁵ an experience only too familiar to St Helenians, borne out above all by United Kingdom legislation enacted in the 1960s, which was to have profound effects on the citizenship status of St Helenians.

ENGLAND THEIR HOME

From the mid seventeenth to the mid nineteenth century, St Helena's inhabitants were generally divided into two distinct groups, that is, its white settlers and their slaves. In matters of identity, the 'Englishness' of the former was never in dispute, while the latter

² Arthur Bryant, *English Saga, 1840-1940* (London: Collins, 1940), 237. Arguably, such 'superior folk' are still going strong today; see, for instance, the critical essays contained in the three volume collection of essays edited by Raphael Samuel (ed), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, Vol.I-III (London: Routledge, 1989).

³ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9.

⁴ Anthony Pagden and Nicholas Canny, 'Afterword: From Identity to Independence', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 267.

⁵ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 9.

were deemed largely invisible. Nevertheless, as early as 1715 the settler's Englishness was already noted for an unusual characteristic, which was pointed out by the island's Governor and Council, when they asked in a letter to the Company's directors that "your Hon. would please to send over Farthings & halfe Pence they would certainly doe much better than Pice & have been more agreable to the English people for all the St Helenians account themselves so tho' three quarters of them never saw England."⁶ Hence, for the descendants of St Helena's first settlers to identify themselves as English was not apparently dependent on any personal acquaintance with England itself.

According to Raymond Williams, English people in the colonies did, during the 1880s, develop "the idea of England as 'home,' in that special sense in which 'home' is a memory and an ideal", including that of "rural England: its green peace contrasted with the tropical or arid places of actual work."⁷ On St Helena, however, this attitude could be found over one hundred years earlier, for in 1747 C.F. Noble confirmed the earlier opinion that "[t]hey always speak of England as their home, and most of them that I have spoke with expressed a strong inclination to see it. But the ties of friendship, and the expense of the voyage, prevail with them to remain, even after resolving on the voyage: so that few of them have ever been in their parent country."⁸

Even though over time the majority of the island's white inhabitants had never been to England, their 'Englishness' was apparently confirmed, as remarked by an anonymous author in 1815, by the fact not only that the appearance of Jamestown "give the heart of the returning voyager a truly English feeling,"⁹ but also, as John Barnes observed in 1817, they were "speaking the English language, professing the established religion, and conforming to the dress, customs, and general mode of life in the mother country."¹⁰

⁶ SHGA: Out-Letters, 7.7.1715.

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters: Interviews with the "New Left Review"* (London: New Left Books, 1979), 26.

⁸ C.F. Noble, *A Voyage to the East Indies in 1747 & 1748* (London: 1762); reprinted in Percival Teale, *Saint Helena: A History of the Development of the Island with Special Reference to Building Civil and Military Engineering Works*, Vol.1 (Natal: 1974), 199-200.

⁹ Anon., *A Geographical and Historical Account of the Island of St. Helena* (New York: Van Winkle & Wiley, 1815), 6.

¹⁰ John Barnes, *A Tour Through the Island of St Helena* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1817), 72. For comparative material on the American colonies see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), 134.

In the course of time, however, the terminology employed by such accounts did change, even if their substance remained largely the same. Most notably, during the nineteenth century expansion of the British Empire, 'loyalty', 'colour' and 'purity' entered the picture, and 'English' gave way to 'British'.

Respecting local reactions to the news of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, Governor Sterndale wrote that "[b]eing an English speaking intelligent, fairly educated and loyal hearted people their Queen had ever been to them the embodiment of all that was good and gracious [...]"¹¹ In an article in the *Anglo American Gazette* in 1906, which addressed the island's general crisis during those years, a recent visitor to St Helena described the inhabitants as "this little band of sea-bound British subjects, as loyal as any in the Empire".¹²

But loyalty, it would appear, could not be taken for granted. Writing in *United Empire*, the journal of the Royal Empire Society, in 1939, E.R. Yarham informed his readers that St Helenians "are of mixed European (British, Dutch, Portuguese), East Indian and African descent, for many of the early settlers had been sailors on the East Indiamen and others came from the whaling fleets, which for a number of years used the island." He goes on to stress that the "people of St. Helena are a mixed race, but they are intensely loyal."¹³ By implication it would seem that loyalty and mixed racial origins were not normally considered compatible. It must also be noted that Yarham's emphasis is on loyalty, not on Britishness as such. For all the reader knows, the islanders' culture may well have been anything but English. This added interest in 'colour', was already evident in Governor Gallwey's observation, recorded in 1906, that "[a]lthough a coloured community, the St. Helenian is a Britisher knowing only the English language [...]"¹⁴ In an Empire nearly at the height of its territorial expansion, a coloured people who knew nothing but England were clearly an exception. With the gradual demise of British Empire, Cledwyn Hughes, writing in 1959, suggested instead that if the island's current

¹¹ SHGA: Governor's Out-Letters, 15.2.1901. Remarkably though, St Helena must be one of the few places in the British Empire never to have been graced with a statue of the Queen Empress.

¹² Anon. "'Who Only England Know!'", *Anglo American Gazette*, 15.12.1906.

¹³ E.R. Yarham, 'St. Helena To-Day', *United Empire: The Journal of the Royal Empire Society*, Vol.XXX (1939), 794.

¹⁴ PRO: CO 247/65, Governor's letter, 21.5.1906.

problems were addressed satisfactorily, "St. Helena will continue to be a happy and loyal member of the British Commonwealth of Nations."¹⁵

One aspect of St Helena which has always been considered worthy of comment, such as in the island's annual colonial report for 1931, has been the apparent fact that the "English environment which was created by the English colonists has persisted ever since. There existed no indigenous social system as an alternative and the language of the island has always been English. Thus it is that the St. Helenians of to-day are in descent, are in their ideas and sentiments essentially English, as English as a great deal of the Island scenery."¹⁶ It is interesting how recourse to the landscape was here used to enhance the naturalness of the social 'environment'.

The precise nature of that environment was spelled out in a broadcast prepared by the government for transmission on the BBC in April 1934, the island's centenary as a Crown Colony.

The only language spoken on the Island since its occupation has been English; and today it is remarkable for its purity. The money is English, weights and measures are English, the clothes are English, meals are English (Longwood mutton is famous). Public holidays are spent in English fashion by games of cricket, hockey and soccer; sea fishing, in rifle shooting or an excursion into the country. Even Guy Fawkes day is celebrated with fireworks. English residents have a nine hole

¹⁵ Cledwyn Hughes, *Report of an Enquiry into Conditions on the Island of St. Helena* (St Helena: 1958), 34. In 1984 this emphasis on loyalty became enshrined in the motto that accompanied the island's arms, which were granted in time to coincide with the celebrations of the island's 150th anniversary as a crown colony. In an interview with Radio St Helena (20 February 1984), Governor Massingham explained the significance of that motto. "Now, 'Loyal and Unshakeable', there are two reasons for this. We are and take pride in our loyalty to the Crown, so I think all Saints would want this commemorated. We are very proud of our association with Britain and particularly to the Queen. 'Unshakeable' in heraldic terms, we are unshakeable in our loyalty, but you look at those rocks on our badge; [...] this is called punning in heraldic terms, something referring to the picture; so you've got the unshakeable island, unshakeable not only physically, but in its loyalty to the British Crown."

¹⁶ *Colonial Reports - Annual: No. 1568, Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of St. Helena, 1931* (London: HMSO: 1932), 5.

course at Longwood. The English setting has survived from the early days of the Colony.¹⁷

If that is so, then one must wonder what it is that distinguish the island's "English residents" from other inhabitants. It appears that the majority of islanders were not in fact included in that phrase. Over twenty years later, in 1959, Cledwyn Hughes added to these details the facts that the islanders' "small clean and frequently overcrowded houses are furnished as British cottages would be" and that even in "the most meagre and drab shacks, several photographs of the British Royal family are proudly displayed."¹⁸

Of all such indicators of 'Englishness' or 'Britishness', language was arguably the most significant.¹⁹ At the turn of the century, however, R.A. Sterndale remarked that St Helena's inhabitants were "kindly disposed one to another, showing much sympathy in sickness and trouble, and are courteous to strangers, who are generally struck by this, and by the comparative purity of the English spoken by them."²⁰ This notion of 'comparative purity' appears to have related both to the remoteness of St Helena from the mother country and to notions of 'racial' purity. This is clear from another paper by Sterndale, which employs an additional comparative referent in describing the islanders' purity of English, arguing that the "St. Helenian of to-day, however dark complexioned he may be, is English in thought, manners, and language - in fact the English tongue is spoken by him with greater purity than in most of our rural districts in England."²¹ Again, as in the case of loyalty in the face of mixed origins, purity in the face of colour was to be

¹⁷ SHGA: Governor's Despatches, enclosure with despatches, 'The St. Helena Centenary, 23.4.1934'. Also note that in 1958, Fred Ward, General Secretary of the St Helena General Workers Union, had written to the editor of the London *Daily Herald*, protesting strongly against reports that islanders were keen to emigrate *en toto* to the United States as domestic servants. "We are not. We aim to fight for a better way of life for the island. We are British to the core. Emigrate to the U.S. en masse? Not likely. Our way of life is English. Where could we play cricket in the U.S.?" [SHGA: press clippings, *Daily Herald*, 1958.]

¹⁸ Cledwyn Hughes, *Report of an Enquiry into Conditions on the Island of St. Helena* (St Helena: 1958), 2. For a recent description of this kind, see Simon Winchester, *Outposts* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 147-8.

¹⁹ For a recent analysis of contemporary St Helenian English, see Alexander Schulenburg, 'English in St Helena and Ascension', in Loreto Todd (ed), *Varieties of World English* (forthcoming - London: Cassell, 2001).

²⁰ R.A. Sterndale, 'St. Helena in the Present Time', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol.IX (1901), 99.

²¹ R.A. Sterndale, 'St. Helena in ye Olden Tyme', *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Vol.VII (1899), 345.

marvelled at especially. Moreover, no longer was the English spoken on St Helena merely comparatively pure, it was 'in fact' of greater purity. This same point was made by Governor Gallwey when writing that "the St. Helenian is a Britisher knowing only the English language, which he speaks even more purely than the majority of the lower classes in the Mother Country."²² 'Purity', according to these authors, was to be found in the country, rather than the cities. Although Sterndale's and Gallwey's rural references were repeated as recently as 1978, the notion of 'purity' was not. According to C.D. Moyes, the author of a nutritional study commissioned by the government, St Helenians "speak a rather archaic and rustic form of English, but the customs are said to resemble closely those of rural England at the beginning of this century."²³

But not every writer chose to identify St Helenian English in rural terms. Emily Jackson, for instance, stated in 1908 that islanders "find a difficulty with the letter 'v' and 'w,' calling a veil a wale, a person said to be vain is described as wain, while a child named Willie will become Villie; in this respect they are no worse than uneducated Londoners."²⁴ This view accords more with Gallwey's emphasis on class, although Jackson does not seem to be concerned with purity. Less definitively, Simon Gillett, writing in 1984, thought that St Helenians "talk the dialect of the county you have never visited."²⁵

But at least one writer, Tony Cross, writing in 1980, was honest enough not to concur with any of these views for he found that "[t]o hear a St Helenian speak might, in an extreme case, lead one to believe that it was not English that was spoken, but there can be absolutely no doubt that the islanders are British subjects."²⁶

It is against the backdrop of these textualizations of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' on St Helena, that late twentieth century debates on the politics of identity must be seen. Alas, what none of the above writers have done, other than by implication, is define the meanings of as opposed 'English' and 'British', as well as the reasons for changing from the former to the latter. According to a lecture given by Alfred Zimmern in 1926, fairly contemporary with many of these above accounts,

²² PRO: CO 247/65, Governor's letter, 21.5.1906.

²³ SHGA: C.D. Moyes, *Stature and the family: A Study of Schoolchildren in St. Helena* (unpublished report).

²⁴ E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903), 153.

²⁵ Quoted in Graham Creelman, 'An Island in Exile', *The Listener*, 16.8.1984.

the content of that adjective 'British', so common on men's lips, defies exact interpretation. It is not an adjective of race. It is not an adjective of nationality. It is not an adjective of territory. It is indeed at home in five continents and, most of all perhaps, on the oceans that unite them. If we are to attempt to define the indefinable we can perhaps say that it denotes a political and social tradition and a mode of life in which that tradition is revealed - a mode of life characterized by common habits, common institutions, and a certain unexpressed philosophy of public affairs. These habits and institutions and the outlook and philosophy of those who maintain them together constitute the atmosphere of homeliness, of Britishness, of which any one who is British-born is instantly conscious when, coming from 'abroad', he finds himself once more, whether on land or sea, under the British flag.²⁷

Without necessarily disagreeing with the substance of these remarks, Robert Young put a rather different gloss on the matter when he argued in 1995 that "'British' is the name imposed by the English on the non-English."²⁸

ENGLISH BY CHARTER

In contemporary debates on St Helena confusion certainly reigns with respect to the differences between 'English' and 'British'. This is evident from a recent supplement to the *St Helena News*, headed *The Citizen*, which uses the terms 'English' and 'British' quite interchangeably, arguing that "Britain settled the island in 1659", that the royal charter of 1673 confirmed that St Helena was "part of the family community of Britain", that it "gave the inhabitants [...] full English citizenship", and that it was granted by "an

²⁶ Tony Cross, *St Helena, Including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (London, 1980), 92.

²⁷ Alfred Zimmern, *The Third British Empire* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1926), 68.

²⁸ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 3.

English king to show we were part of the family of Britain", although acknowledging that this occurred "some 30 years before [...] the United Kingdom came into existence".²⁹

The charter in question, which I have already referred to in chapter 5, stated that

wee doe for Us Our heires and Successors Declare by these presents That all and every the persons being Our Subjects which doe or shall Inhabite within the said Port and Island and every of their Children and posteritie which shall happen to bee borne within the Precincts and limitts thereof shall have and enjoy all Liberties Franchises Immunities Capacities and abilities of ffree Denizens and naturall Subjects within any of Our Dominions to all intents and purposes as if they had beene abideing and borne within this Our Kingdom of England or in any other of Our Dominions [...].³⁰

According to the historian Martin Wright, this clause asserted above all "the principle that settlers carried with them the right of English law."³¹ Indeed, the charter of 1673 was not unlike those granted to some early American colonies and its clause on 'liberties and immunities' was not as unique as some would make out, for the very same clause was contained in a charter granted in April 1606 for the establishment of a colony in Virginia.³² However, as one commentator has pointed out with respect to that charter, "[t]his promise was not kept by the Kings of England. Several of the provisions of the charter itself were not consistent with it. In later years it was disregarded again and again by the royal commissions and instructions."³³ As Frederick Madden has likewise pointed out, the provisions of such charters with respect to liberties "had been intended perhaps as no more than an assertion, grandiloquent indeed, that settlers, though exiled in a mere

²⁹ *St Helena News*, Vol.13, No.22, 27.11.1998.

³⁰ IOR: A/1/22.

³¹ Martin Wright, *The Development of the Legislative Council, 1606-1945* (London: Faber & Faber, 1946), 25.

³² Philip Alexander Bruce, *Institutional History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol.II (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 230-3.

³³ Thomas J. Wertenbaker, 'Virginia under the Stuarts, 1607-1688', in Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Shaping of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1958), 34. For a discussion of Charles II's American policy, see A.P. Thornton, *For the File on Empire* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1968), chapter 8.

dependency, were still Englishmen. At most it implied no more than a standard of judgement which would retain for the Crown its discretion and supervision."³⁴

Even with respect to 'denizenship' alone, it is difficult to assess the precise significance of royal charters during this period. In a paper on the changing laws of naturalization, William Shaw stressed that during the mid-seventeenth century at least, although there had been the assumption that "an Englishman in the Plantation was an Englishman in England" and that "all English in England were English in the Plantation", he believes that "there can be no doubt that both sides of this proposition became weakened and dubious as the Plantations grew in self consciousness."³⁵ Arguably, this trend culminated not only in the American Revolution, but in the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 and the British Nationality Act 1981.

ACTS OF PARLIAMENT

The realisation that on St Helena matters of national identity and of politics were closely integrated is already evident from a Colonial Office minute by Aaron Emanuel, dating from 1961, respecting Fred Ward's call for constitutional reform.

The starting point of Mr. Ward [...] is that the people of St. Helena are "English" and not "Colonial". In their eyes this means that the model for them is not the ordinary Colonial constitution but a straightforward imitation of British practice. They stress on every possible occasion the fact that they have had universal primary education ever since it was introduced in the United Kingdom, that their customs are those of a civilized people, that they have no tribal, linguistic or customary features, which distinguish them (apart from the colour of their skins) from people in this country. Anything that would be said to the contrary about

³⁴ Frederick Madden, 'Origins and Purpose of British Colonial Government', in Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden (eds), *Essays in Imperial Government* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 3.

³⁵ 'Introduction', in William A. Shaw (ed), *Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization For Aliens in England and Ireland, 1603-1700* (Lymington: Huguenot Society of London, 1911), xxvii.

their ignorance and innocence would be regarded as an insult and could not be used as an argument in favour of less than the full democratic works.³⁶

What Ward could hardly have predicted was that at the very same time that progress on constitutional reforms was being made, the islander's citizenship status within the Empire would in fact begin to regress. Admittedly, these changes had not emanated from the United Kingdom itself, for as James Morris has pointed out with reference to the 1920s, "while the British fitfully honoured the criterion of equal rights for all civilized men, the Australians and New Zealanders were concerned to keep all Asiatics out of their territories, the Canadians had allowed no Asian immigrants since the turn of the century, and the South African denied their vast black majority any rights of citizenship whatever."³⁷ In the United Kingdom, drastic changes to the national status of St Helena's inhabitants came about in November 1961, when the governor of St Helena received a circular savingram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, enclosing copies of the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill,³⁸ which had been published earlier that month. The savingram explained that the purpose of the Bill was to legislate that "apart from persons 'belonging' to the United Kingdom, any Commonwealth citizen may be refused admission [...]" to the United Kingdom.³⁹ While such news should probably have been received with considerable concern, Governor Sir Robert Alford presented this matter at a meeting of the St Helena Executive Council on 21 November and "concluded by saying that he thought there was nothing to worry about."⁴⁰

³⁶ PRO: CO 1024/252, 4.1.1960.

³⁷ James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: An Imperial Retreat* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 332. See chapter 15 for a discussion of changing notions of Britishness in the early part of the twentieth century. For an interesting discussion on citizenship in the eighteenth century, see Kathleen Wilson, 'Citizenship, Empire, and Modernity in the English Provinces, c. 1720-1790', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol.29, No.1 (1995).

³⁸ For a study of immigration from St Helena to the United Kingdom, see Bob Carter, 'Colour, Culture and Citizenship: The St Helenian Scheme 1949-1951' (unpublished paper presented at the *Citizenship and Cultural Frontiers* Conference, Staffordshire University, September 1994). For background information, see Tom Rees, 'Immigration Policies in the United Kingdom', in Charles Husband (ed), *'Race' in Britain: Continuity and Change* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

³⁹ SHGA: Secretary of State, Savingram Circular No.981, 1.11.1961.

⁴⁰ SHGA: Minutes of Executive Council, 21.11.1961.

Nevertheless, at the end of December 1961, Sir Robert wrote to the Secretary of State suggesting that if the Bill was passed, St Helenians would not "get a look in for years" and that St Helena "can fairly ask to be treated as a different case." After all, as the governor pointed out to the Secretary of State, "St. Helena and Falkland Islands are the only small colonies which Britain is responsible for having populated [...]"⁴¹ This argument was to be repeated to this present day with equally few results. While the Secretary of State's lengthy response to the Governor's savingram showed appreciation of the concerns expressed by Sir Robert, it was made clear that nothing much by way of exceptions could be expected at present.⁴² Eventually in June 1962 the *St. Helena Government Gazette* announced that the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, as it now was, was to come into operation on 1 July of that year. The announcement explained the major measures of the Act and stated that a person is subject to immigration control "if not born in the United Kingdom and holds a passport issued by a Commonwealth country or a colony or protectorate [...]"⁴³ From 1962 onwards, therefore, the majority of St Helenians had lost their right to live and work in the United Kingdom, although St Helenians do not usually ascribe the loss of their right of abode in the United Kingdom to the 1962 Act, referring to the 1981 Nationality Act instead. In this they are not alone, for as Ian Spencer has commented with respect to British immigration legislation in general, "[t]here has been a collective and persistent failure among writers on race and immigration in Britain to recognise the true position and importance of the 1962 Act."⁴⁴

As if these provisions were not bad enough for people who had for centuries considered England as their national home, things took a turn for the worse with the passing of the British Nationality Act 1981, which had been draughted to give a clear indication of a person's right of abode in the United Kingdom by means of his citizenship. As such, different categories of citizenship were introduced to determine a person's immigration status. These included the category of 'British Citizen', which entailed the right of abode in the United Kingdom, and those of 'British Dependent Territories Citizen', 'British Overseas Citizen', and 'British Subject', all three of which did

⁴¹ SHGA: Governor's Savingram, No.309, 27.12.1961.

⁴² SHGA: Secretary of State, Savingram, No.23, 12.3.1962.

⁴³ *St. Helena Government Gazette*, June 1962, 740.

⁴⁴ Ian R.G. Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), 129.

not. St Helena, along with Britain's other remaining colonies, came under the category of British Dependent Territories.⁴⁵

The proposed Bill was neither noticed nor discussed on St Helena, where it appears to have made not impact at large, although the question of citizenship did feature in a debate on St Helena in the House of Lords in 1984. According to the Minister of State, Baroness Young, the government had no intention of changing the principle "that British citizenship should be confined to those with close connection with the United Kingdom."⁴⁶ Lord Cledwyn of Penrhos (formerly Cledwyn Hughes), however, challenged Baroness Young on that point, asking her "whether she can tell the House of any other population in any other British territory which has a closer connection with this country than St. Helena?" The Baroness did or could not tell the House.⁴⁷

While the British Nationality Act 1981 had at first failed to be noted on St Helena itself, local opposition became obvious in 1985 when two Bills were introduced to the St Helena Legislative Council designed to amend two local ordinances in line with the new British Nationality Act. The debate on the two Bills occurred against the background of the Bills' referral to Legislative Council against the advice of the island's executive council, who had believed that their approval would have been seen as an endorsement of the British Nationality Act and an acceptance of the status of St Helenians as mere Dependent Territories Citizens. With all the elected councillors objecting to the two Bills, these failed to reach a second reading and were eventually passed by the Governor under special powers granted to him by the island's constitution. The otherwise laconic *St. Helena News Review* devoted two pages to the debate about these Bills.⁴⁸

Drawing on virtually the entire repertoire of the constituent symbols of St Helenian identity, Councillor Ivy George argued that to accept the first of these Bill

is tantamount to signing away the birthright of the people of St Helena. For more than three hundred years Britain has laid claim to this Island. Last year we celebrated a hundred and fifty years of rule under Britain: A British Crown Colony.

⁴⁵ British Nationality Act 1981, Schedule 6. Tristan da Cunha, by virtue of being one of St Helena's two dependencies, suffered the same fate, a fact criticised strongly by Allan Crawford in an editorial in the *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter*, September 1991, 7.

⁴⁶ *Hansard*, 4.12.1984.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *St. Helena News Review*, 28.6.1985.

Now under the British Nationality Act 1981 Sir, the status of St Helena has been lowered. To regard us as British Dependent Territories Citizens, I think, is an insult to people who for hundreds of years have been loyal to the Crown. Our Sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth, we look to as our head; we sing to the top of our voices the National Anthem, and we fly the Union Jack. Sir, we are nothing but British on this Island. Our way of life is British, our language, our mother tongue, the only language we speak is English; we do not know any other language. There hasn't been a need to learn another language as far as we consider.⁴⁹

Other speakers likewise referred to the "birth right of all St Helenians",⁵⁰ to the fact that "we are British, always have been British and wish to remain British",⁵¹ to having been "born under that one flag", to being "true, loyal, faithful",⁵² and to the "mother country".⁵³

John Musk, the only 'settler' or non-St Helena born councillor to speak at the debate, moreover introduced a historical dimension into the debate, arguing that "Britain created St Helena and our histories are inexplorably [*sic*] linked." St Helena, according to Musk's history, had been the

stepping stone to empire, Far East, India, Africa, so important to the foundation of the Cape Colony, to the British presence in Africa, and we share and have shared Britain's joys and Britain's sadnesses. The heartbeat of Britain is the heartbeat of St Helena. We cannot turn to China, or India, or Africa or anywhere. Our every point of reference is Britain. We, as has been said, have only your language, Britain, your culture, we are British. Our families have been happily settled in every part of Britain for generations, involved in every facet of British life from the

⁴⁹ *St. Helena: Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 21.6.1985.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* The reference to the Union flag can also be found in an editorial in the *St Helena News*, which said "we 'Saints' have an inalienable right of abode in the United Kingdom because we were born under the 'Union Jack' whilst the people of Hong Kong were born under a ninety nine year lease!!!" [*St Helena News*, 19.1.1990.]

⁵³ *St. Helena: Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 21.6.1985.

royal households to the Armed Forces, teaching, industry, manufacture, the service industries, the Merchant Navy, etc, etc, etc.⁵⁴

Arguably, all these statements must be seen in the context of the textualizing of St Helena over many centuries. Notably, the same repertoire was used in a debate on St Helena and British citizenship in the House of Lords in February 1994.⁵⁵

PETITIONS AND COMMISSIONS

Further opposition to the British Nationality Act showed itself in 1985, when the Legislative Council of St Helena sent a petition to the Secretary of State asking for a review of the Nationality Act, but the Foreign Office "did not feel able to accept its [ie. the petition's] terms."⁵⁶ Likewise, a popular petition was organised in 1986, again asking for a revision of the law. It read, quite simply, "We, the loyal subjects as per charter of 1673, which was later consolidated in 1834, are not happy with the fact that our full citizenship has been revoked. This has caused many personal and economic problems to us, and we would like our full citizenship restored."⁵⁷ That petition received a total of 2863 signatures, not only from people on St Helena, but also on Ascension Island (538) and in the United Kingdom (456). It was initially forwarded to Stan Newens M.P., who informed the Foreign Secretary of its receipt and its content. The Foreign Office replied that the "St Helenians' case for British citizenship has been considered carefully and sympathetically, but we have concluded that it would be wrong to make exceptions to the British Nationality Act [...]."⁵⁸ A further petition from Councillors in 1990 drew a similar response.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Hansard*, 1.2.1994.

⁵⁶ *St Helena News*, 14.11.1986.

⁵⁷ *St Helena News*, 10.10.1986.

⁵⁸ *St Helena News*, 14.11.1986.

⁵⁹ *St Helena News*, 27.4.1990.

Opposition to the British Nationality Act was, however, put on a substantially new footing in 1992, when a resolution was passed at the 15th Session of the St Helena Diocesan Synod to the effect that

the Bishop, clergy and laity of the diocese should seek, over the next five years, to give visible expression to its moral responsibility to support the restoration of the full right of citizenship of those British subjects who are St. Helenians. To help this forward it is requested that a Bishop's Commission on Citizenship be established, with a view to producing a detailed and considered report within two years.⁶⁰

In a series of notes issued in July 1992, Nicholas Turner, one of the two co-chairmen of the Commission, expressed his ambition that the Commission's report should take the form of a well produced book which could be circulated and sold to all interested parties.

WHAT is the book to be: A moral and historical representation of the Saint Helenian right to be British. WHY is such a book needed: Although the argument is known to all, it appears that the full case has not been worked out and presented in a way that is publicly available. To an outsider too much seems to be little more than folklore.⁶¹

A draft report with excerpts from future chapters was presented at a public meeting in August 1993, a provisional review was published in July 1994, and the final version of the report, entitled *St Helena: The Lost County of England*, was published in May 1996.⁶²

The commission's main argument is presented in a chapter of their report entitled *National Identity* and which is set in the context of the apparent problem of confusing Britishness with Englishness. According to that report, "[a]nyone who is Welsh or Scottish knows only too well how often 'British' is equated with 'English', and how often English values and history are taken to be the same as British values and histories. There are English, Welsh, Scottish, and Saint Helenian, identities, but there is also a British

⁶⁰ The Bishop of St Helena, circular letter, 20.7.1994.

⁶¹ Nicholas Turner, 'Bishop's Commission on Citizenship: Some General Notes' (typescript, 1992).

⁶² I quote from both the provisional review and the final report, principally because some sections of the former are more extensive.

identity, and it is this that concerns us."⁶³ Part of the problem faced by St Helena was hence due to these "imprecise boundaries between the notions of 'English' and 'British'."⁶⁴ In the opinion of the commission, a "strong local identity does not preclude a broader national identity. [...] British Saint Helenians have a local identity that is Saint Helenian, and a national identity that is British. [...] A strong Saint Helenian identity is dependent upon the broader British identity."⁶⁵

This notion of a St Helenian local identity had in fact been acknowledged in a 1993 report for the Overseas Development Administration, which found that apart from "an intense association with Great Britain", St Helenians were "also intensely proud of their status as Islanders and will make every effort to convince one of their uniqueness and idiosyncrasies. In reality this is no more or less a portrait than any culture-conscious regional society would present anywhere in the world."⁶⁶

At some length, the commission addressed the question of St Helenian identity with reference to five main criteria, namely 'origin', 'language', 'values', 'lack of discontinuity' and, lastly, 'intention'. As for origin, the review asserted plainly that "St Helena's origin is unequivocally from 17th century England: it had no other birth. [...] The only people *ever* to have settled the island have been British."⁶⁷ Respecting language, the review noted that St Helena "has never used anything other than the Queen's English in all written documents. [...] Saint Helenian differences of accent, words and phrasing carry no more, and perhaps even less weight, than do Yorkshire and Geordie within England itself."⁶⁸ As for values, "[i]f the first two conditions are met, it is a shared system of values that is the most important confirmation of the same identity. The same institutions, social, political and religious, the same forms of teaching, at school and at

⁶³ Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, Provisional Review of The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (Ascension Island: 1994), 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, A Report by The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (St Helena: 1996), 16.

⁶⁶ Overseas Development Administration, *Report on Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy and Action Plan for St Helena*, Vol.2 (1993), 76.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, Provisional Review of The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (Ascension Island: 1994), 9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

home, the same sources of culture and influence and interest [...].⁶⁹ Lack of discontinuity, according to the review, is the absence of a break in the continuity of institutions and people, and thus excludes a mere fictitious recourse to identification with a past age and peoples. 'Intention', finally, was said to revolve around the fact that the Commission "have found no evidence of any independence movement, nor any desire to be linked with another country, no desire and no intention to change the identity of this island and its people."⁷⁰

The commission concludes that St Helena's position with regard to four of these five criteria is unquestionable. "1) Saint Helenians as a community were born British. 2) Saint Helenians have always spoken English. 4) St Helena's British history is continuous. 5) St Helenians have never wavered in wanting to be British."⁷¹ However, the third criterion, that of values, "does not permit just one simple answer", and the commission hence consequently introduced a further five criteria "that consciously or unconsciously are routinely applied to St Helena and its claim (as it is believed) to be British."⁷² These criteria are 'geography', 'poverty', 'third world views', 'colour' and lastly, 'slavery'.

As for geography, the review asserted that "though it is not common for national identity to be maintained over so wide a stretch of ocean, neither is it impossible."⁷³ Excessive distance to the United Kingdom was therefore not considered a valid argument against St Helena's Britishness. Respecting poverty, the commission believed that the relative poverty of St Helena's community as a whole "may suggest that this community is not British. Why? Because a British community (on the mainland) could not be so poor [...]."⁷⁴ This impression was compounded by the criterion of 'third world views', views which offer themselves to those visitors who focus on the 'picturesque', not least in their choice of photographic objects. As a result, such photographs "do not look British. They look, to mainland Britons, more like the Third World, utterly foreign. [...] If that is how it seems, it is too easy to suppose that this is what it is - foreign. [...]"

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.

Familiarity of landscape is not however a criterion of identity."⁷⁵ This issue of the foreign appearance of St Helena was extended to the criterion of colour, for the commission pointed out that the "suspicion is widespread" that the St Helenians' loss of their citizenship had to do with the fact that "a higher proportion of the Saint Helenian British than of the English British are dark skinned." This aspect of St Helena's appearance had to do with the last of these additional criteria, slavery. As for the freed, emancipated and liberated slaves who lived on the island, "[i]s it somehow assumed that their freedom and rights were not meant to include the full privileges of citizenship?"⁷⁶

For the Commission, none of these additional five criteria "survives analysis", especially not the last four. They consequently ask whether anyone can "seriously argue that Saint Helenians cannot be British because of the colour of their skin? Or because the island is too poor? Or because parts of it can look like popular images of the Third World? Or because they are descended from slaves? No, no one."⁷⁷

In 1994 the work of the Bishop's Commission received fairly detailed coverage in *The Spectator* in an article on St Helena by Ross Clarke, entitled 'We have always been British', which formed part of a series on English counties. Justification for St Helena's inclusion in the series was found in the title of the commission's report, and on the cover of *The Spectator*, Clark's article was billed as 'Wannabe County'. Clark put the issue quite succinctly: "The 5,000 souls of St Helena [...] are not content with mere gunboats and a governor's residence [...]: they are begging to be made an English shire, as much part of the homeland as is the Isle of Wight."⁷⁸ Having reviewed the commission's arguments, and having given an outline of St Helena's history (including Great Fire victims), he closes his article by suggesting to the Foreign Secretary that he should seriously rethink the case of St Helena, for it "is not often one gets the opportunity to annex territory at the request of the people who live there. Scotland, Wales and Ireland can do as they chose; I would rather be part of a union made up of willing peoples who know full well upon which side their bread is buttered."⁷⁹ Having apparently missed the point completely, if only for journalistic purposes, Clark effectively argues for the 'colonisation' of St Helena.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 15-6.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁸ Ross Clark, 'We Always Have Been British', *The Spectator*, 3.9.1994, 18.

The work of the Bishop's Commission was extended beyond the publication of its report proper in 1996, which received little attention, and since January 1997 the renamed Citizenship Commission has published a monthly supplement in the *St Helena News*, given details of its activities and outlining some of its arguments. Furthermore, in mid-1997 the Commission published its second report, entitled *St Helena: A British Island*, written entirely by Nicholas Turner. That report summarised the commission's arguments in support of British citizenship for St Helena and addressed a number of issues and criticism that have arisen from the publication of its first report. More importantly though, this second report dropped the notion of the 'lost county of England' for that of a 'British Island', arguing in chapters 11 and 12 for the granting to St Helena of a British Island constitution akin to that of Guernsey or the Isle of Man.

AFRICAN PASTS?

An approach to St Helenian identity radically different from that of the commission had been articulated by Keith Yon, Tony Thornton, and Robin Cohen during the 1970s and early 1980s. Admittedly, this alternative approach pre-dated the commission, but it did not pre-date the views against which it had been articulated, views which were eventually re-iterated by the commission.

This alternative approach to St Helenian identity was first presented in *Slave Song*, 'a choral piece contrived by St. Helena Fourth Formers and Keith Yon'. *Slave Song* was first staged on 15 August 1974 as the second part of a two part programme performed at the Paramount Cinema in Jamestown, the first part of which consisted of a concert of 'rounds' and 'negro songs'.

The script for *Slave Song* was accompanied by a lengthy, explanatory foreword by Keith Yon in which he explained that "[t]his piece started from two points of interest, uncovered during class work: (i) that whereas we accept our settler/garrison/maritime forebears, on the whole we deny ourselves that we are also of slave extraction; (ii) that the word "black" is commonly used as a derogatory term on the island."⁸⁰ Hence, the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁰ Keith Yon, *Slave Song: A Choral Piece* (typescript, 1974), foreword. Compare Yon's analysis with Robert C.-H. Shell's discussion of slavery at the Cape of Good Hope, who judged that "[w]ith the Cape

writing of *Slave Song* had been an attempt to address these two issues, both separately and in relation to one another. In his foreword, Yon explained the thinking behind the exploration of St Helenian and other notions of 'blackness' as follows:

Seeing we have no colour bar, the practice of regarding black as inferior must reflect very primitive fears, (which part of our nature cannot be understood if we are prepared to reject our slave portion). So [...] we have looked at some of the horrors of "black" which take possession of the primitive in us, (and which from lack of history we cannot counteract nor transform.)⁸¹

This is done primarily in parts I, III and IV of *Slave Song*, which address the derogatory use of the word 'black' on St Helena. Part I revolved around negative connotations of the word 'black', such as by the recitation quotes such as "The man is black at heart. Mark him out!"⁸² Part III, an 'Intermezzo with drums', consisted of a series of associations such as "black night horrors", "black hole" and "black silence".⁸³ Part IV, entitled 'Black if beautiful', consisted of a poem and a chorus, the former containing lines such as "Your BREASTS are paupau/cool as dusky arum/on a swaying ebony trunk/like twin moons in eclipse."⁸⁴

Part II, the major part of *Slave Song*, was entitled 'Anecdotes, from Munden to Lowe' and constituted a short history of St Helena from 1673 to 1848, concentrating on the lives of slaves during that time. Intriguingly, the part featured a reading of that section from Charles II's charter which proclaimed that all born on St Helena were to be considered denizens of England, followed by a recitation punishments taken from the early slave code, from whipping to castration and death.⁸⁵ In presenting such a short 'black history' of St Helena, *Slave Song* was apparently intended to counter the common denial by St Helenians of their slave ancestry. As Yon explains,

community's loss of memory of slaves' origins, there was a corresponding loss of identity among the slaves' descendants." [Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1838* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 40.]

⁸¹ Keith Yon, *Slave Song: A Choral Piece* (typescript, 1974), foreword.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 10-1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-10.

it would seem that to reject from our precious meagre 45 decades, a century and a half of slave history, leaves us nothing substantial to renew ourselves from, nor to react against. The taboo creates a void which starves our roots. We dare not look inwards, so have no security to cope outwardly. There can be nothing detrimental in inheriting slave blood [...]. Only the healthiest in physique and wit survived. If there is recrimination against the slave, it must be that when freed after seven years of servitude, he mostly could not throw off dependant slave habits and thinking.⁸⁶

This notion of a surviving 'slave mentality' was in fact played on repeatedly in Part II of *Slave Song*, with frequent repeats of the line "most find it difficult to throw off slave habits and thinking".⁸⁷

Where the issues of the denial of slave ancestry and the derogation of blackness connect, is in Yon's view of the social attitudes of a particular group amongst the early slaves. Yon believes that "most slave blood on Saint Helena would have arrived in house servants from Polynesia, rather than in black labour from Africa." He hence argues that "the Polynesian house slave, unable to release his frustration on his master, secured his own identity by seeing himself superior to the black labour slave, which attitude, it would seem, persists still."⁸⁸ Alas, although Yon's assessment confirms that of Melliss quoted earlier,⁸⁹ his historical facts are essentially flawed, given there had been no Polynesians slaves on St Helena, nor had there ever been a strict division between house slaves and labour slaves.

Even if Yon largely reduced St Helenian identity to its complexion, he inevitably did acknowledge that St Helena's very strength is the fact that most islanders find themselves

⁸⁶ Ibid., foreword. See Nigel Worden et al. *The Chains that Bind Us: The History of Slavery at the Cape* (Kenwyn: Juta & Company, 1996), for an analysis of slave ancestry and identity in South Africa.

⁸⁷ Keith Yon, *Slave Song: A Choral Piece* (typescript, 1974), 8.

⁸⁸ Ibid., foreword.

⁸⁹ Respecting the liberated Africans who settled on the island in the 1860s and 1870s, Melliss explained in 1875: "With the 'native' they do not blend, but live apart in little colonies or settlements; not half a dozen instances of intermarriages have occurred during thirty years, and the 'natives' still consider themselves superior." [John C. Melliss, *St. Helena: A Physical, Historical, and Topographical Description of the Island* (London: Reeve, 1875), 80-1.]

situated (or are caught) in a space defined by binarisms of black and 'white, slave and free, colonised and coloniser. As Yon argues,

Neither the black man nor the white man of the Piece is outside us. They are two potentially [*sic*] building sources within everybody. Balance the instinct of one and the intellect of the other, we become whole and survive. But favour one, whether from envy or through helplessness, we enslave ourselves and remain inadequate in the other.

Despite this statement, I do not believe that *Slave Song* made any attempt at reconciling the mixed origins of the St Helenian population. Instead, Yon reinforced the very distinctions which he believed explain the reluctance on the part of St Helenians to confront their slave ancestry. In *Slave Song*, black and white become essentialised - instinct versus intellect.

Interestingly, Yon's stance was partly taken up by the short-lived St Helena Labour Party in its manifesto of 1975. Written by Anthony Thornton, a British South African who was the main mover behind the party, this was less of a manifesto than a critical essay on St Helena's history and present administration. Its most remarkable feature was its uneasy attempt to create a social divide by stressing the slave dimension of St Helenian identity at the expense of its English dimension.

There used to be over 700 British families on the island, but they began to leave St. Helena. [...]. As the British families left, a greater and greater proportion of the remaining settlers and Solomon & Co., the main traders who stayed behind, took over most of the land. The British families abandoned St. Helena. We claim St Helena as our heritage.⁹⁰

But Thornton's 'we' is hard to pin down.

As adults we are not ashamed of the fact that our forefathers were slaves. We are not ashamed that our forefathers came from many parts of the world. We have become one people with a common heritage. It is at this time that we say we

⁹⁰ G.A.D. Thornton, *The St. Helena Manifesto: The Manifesto of the St. Helena Labour Party* (St Helena: 1975), 5.

intend to direct our own heritage and our own future. Only because we accept our past and the variety of all our people can we look forward into the future.⁹¹

Where initially Thornton had spoken of the island's British families as a separate group who eventually abandoned the island, these are now reintegrated into the surviving fabric of St Helena.

Until the early part of the last century we were prisoners on St. Helena. Many of us feel we are prisoners today. Our forefathers were brought from many lands. From Malagasy mainly, but in our blood runs strongly centuries of British stock, together with many others. Some of those who came to St Helena were high born and killed themselves rather than be slaves. Two slaves claimed their own freedom and defended themselves in a cave on the mountain of Lot. They were recaptured. They were not the first of our people to act as free men.⁹²

For Thornton, therefore, the question of St Helenian culture and identity was tied closely to the island's history, an area which in an earlier discussion paper he considered to have been hitherto neglected.

The due telling of the story of the History of St. Helena has never been done with much understanding of the effect of that history upon the people of St. Helena. The people of St. Helena originated over 300 years ago. There were two main sources of the population, Britain and Malagassy. The Malagassy people are comprised of 17 disparate tribes of polynesian origin mainly, all tribes speak (with a dialectic difference) the same language with plain origins in Javanese. Being brought to St. Helena as slaves their tribal customs were different, coming from different tribes, and were broken up. They assumed English as their language and as slaves no tribal marriage or religion was permitted them, the children of slaves being merely part of the increase of the plantation owners stock. The slaves had little knowledge or understanding of the Christianity practised by their masters, and penalties for striking their master involved castration or worse. The word of a

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

⁹² Ibid., 4. This is a reference to the account I have quoted in chapter 5.

slave was inadmissible in court against a white man. In the eighteenth century there were some 750 British families on St. Helena. They fled the colony as it became depressed when the crown took over from the British East India Company, and they left their (now emancipated) slaves behind them. The land was possessed by the few British who remained held ultimately and largely by one family (Solomon) who became the island's principal trader. Only one octogenarian now remains of all the original British families although more recent immigration mainly of ex-colonials has raised the present 'expatriate' population to 22. The division which exists in St. Helena between the Islanders and the 'expatriates' as the British are now called meant that the islanders did not create a coherent form of social life of their own but adopted a Christian and British culture. To this day they have no song, dance or tradition, except a striving for privacy which is amplified by the small size of the island coupled with its isolation.⁹³

Taking into account the arguments presented in chapters 5 to 9 of this thesis, both Thornton's 'history' and his analysis must be found to be severely wanting.

Nevertheless, Thornton's and Yon's ideas on St Helenian history and identity were taken up by Robin Cohen, a British sociologist who undertook research on St Helena during this period. His principal observations and conclusions were presented in a paper published in 1983, entitled *Education for Dependence: Aspirations, Expectations and Identity on the Island of St. Helena*, and are of particular interest as they have attracted the critical attention of the Bishop's Commission on Citizenship.

According to Cohen, there are normally

two major elements to the formation of a group's identity: (a) a self-conscious attempt by members of the group to characterise its own origins, culture and relationship to other groups, and (b), the definition by other significant actors of a group's identity and characteristics. In the latter case the group is a recipient, not an initiator, of the definition. In so far as an outsider's definition [...] becomes

⁹³ G.D.A. Thornton, 'The Development Survey of St Helena' (typescript, 1974).

internalised by the defined group, it acknowledges the power of an outsider to establish the group's own sense of reality and corporate nature.⁹⁴

Cohen identified such outside actors on St Helena as consisting of the British Government, the colonial officials on the ground, a number of the white settlers, visiting travellers and experts, Americans and Europeans on Ascension Island, and unspecified others. However, according to Cohen, "the most problematic constituent strand" of a St Helenian identity is "the question of race." Of all the various racial elements that have gone into the making of the St Helenian population, Cohen chose to focus on the African element because he believed that there existed on St Helena "a particular sensitivity and negative stereotype to the African inheritance." In particular, he found that "most islanders determinedly reject, or are kept in ignorance of their African past."⁹⁵ Such an approach, however, was based on genealogical guesswork, to the effect that if one "considers slaves from Madagascar as Africans in the pre-1832 period, takes account of the gradual assimilation of the post-1840 African population, minus the fairer number of departures, a rough guess [...] is that about half the population derived from African stock, a quarter from China and the Indian Ocean (excluding Madagascar) and a quarter were of European ancestry."⁹⁶ In other respects too, Cohen operated in a historical Nevernever Land, such as when he "I tried to identify a place on the continent meaningful to St. Helenians. For example, Angola is the nearest land mass and there is a historical connection via the expansion of Portuguese mercantilism. Many ancestors of the St. Helenian population came from Angola or further north along coastal Africa."⁹⁷

Why did Cohen not choose the most straightforward way to identify a place meaningful to St Helenians, that is to ask St Helenians themselves? As for those ideas that he did find St Helenians had of Africa, Cohen found them difficult to accept.

'Africa' was, overwhelmingly, South Africa, which was seen in a positive, pro-white, and more powerful and larger profile than was indicated even in the

⁹⁴ Robin Cohen, 'Education for Dependence: Aspirations, Expectations and Identity on the Island of St. Helena', in Paul Cook (ed), *Small Island Economics* (Manchester: Manchester University, Department of Administrative Studies, 1983), 20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

geographical misconception, shared by a number of students, that it occupied three quarters of the continent. The harsher aspects of apartheid and the racial definition accorded to St. Helenians by the South African authorities were concealed from the students. On the other hand black Africa was Africa of tribal wars, cannibalism and the drum; these, the crudest of stereotypes, remaining unchallenged by the educational system.⁹⁸

Overall Cohen, like Yon, believed that "a St. Helenian identity [...] can not exist without at least a recognition, preferably an acceptance and possibly a celebration of *all* the racial elements that go into the making of the island's population. Deny one, cling onto the increasing figment of 'Britishness', and the purpose and meaning of existence on the island evaporates and creates instead resentment, helplessness and the desperate loneliness borne of isolation and rejection."⁹⁹ The picture which Cohen paints of St Helena and its inhabitants was bleak.

This is a society which lacks binding self-definitions, a people without a nationalism. [...] St Helenians have failed, so far, to come to grips with their own history and what is being done in their name. The impoverishment of St. Helena is not only of the body, but of the intellect. Neither form of impoverishment can be overcome until St. Helenians start to make history themselves rather than being made by it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 26-7. In 1985 Robin Cohen decided to follow up his island based research, elaborating plans to "conduct a social survey of St Helenians in the UK". Section 2 of the project design read: "The St Helena community [in the UK] is thought to number about 6,000 persons, and it is anticipated that the initial trawl will yield about 1,000 names. 3. All these individuals will be sent a questionnaire asking for information relating to their migration experiences, their occupation, their marital and family patterns, their educational and other attainments and their involvement with St Helena activities, both in the UK and on the island. [...] 6. The broad aim of conducting the survey will be to establish whether the St Helenian community has sufficient sentiment and attachment to the island to allow for a more continuous input in the educational welfare and development work on the island and within the community here." [Robin Cohen, *Survey of St Helenians in the UK* (typescript, 1985), 1-2.]

As the deliberations and publications of the Commission on Citizenship has shown, St Helenians would beg to differ.

AUTHENTICITY

Cohen is rightly taken to task for his views by Turner and Hopkins, co-chairmen of the Bishop's Commission on Citizenship. Cohen's error, they believe, is that he presumes the right to define who should and who should not be considered a proper St Helenian. "Seeing evidence of colonialism, he assumed Saint Helenians must be of a different nationality to the 'rulers' from mainland Britain."¹⁰¹ In response to Cohen's call for St Helenians to make their own history, they ask instead: "Has any British village or small city produced so much of its own history?"¹⁰²

Saint Helenians have not only made their own history, they have helped the history of several other countries as well! So why is their contribution so easily minimized or set aside? Because, goes the implicit argument, many of those earlier history makers were white and therefore cannot be counted: they are not 'proper Saint Helenians'. Any white achievement is ignored: any white failure is seen as alienating. It is a difficult point to grasp: much of St Helena's history is indeed alienating to its present inhabitants, but this fact is not a justification for alienating them yet further from that history.¹⁰³

According to Turner and Hopkins, "[w]hat is entirely invalid [...] is the idea that Saint Helenians, because they are black (or colonized or an under class) *cannot* be allowed to share the same culture as those who are white (or colonizers or an upper class)."¹⁰⁴ By emphasising the supposed 'otherness' of a large part of St Helena's population, Cohen

¹⁰¹ Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, A Report by The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (St Helena: 1996), 56.

¹⁰² Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, Provisional Review of The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (Ascension Island: 1994), 37.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

"can make it seem as though Saints were not, are not, should not be, and cannot be British. The sadness of this rejectionist nationalism is that it is in the end racist, almost because it is trying not to be."¹⁰⁵

H. Trask, writing of Hawaii, could well also have Cohen and Thornton in mind, when he wrote accusingly that "anthropologists are part of the colonizing horde because they seek to take away from us the power to define who and what we are, and how we should behave politically and culturally."¹⁰⁶

It appears that the question of St Helenian identity is above all plagued by a misplaced concern with 'authenticity', a mistake already made by Emily Jackson in 1903, when she claimed that while the "white people on the island are for the most part the descendants of the old English officials who settled in the island, [...] St. Helenians proper are of mixed race, quiet, tractable, and inoffensive."¹⁰⁷

Nicholas Thomas, whose work on colonial culture I have already discussed, suggests that within some strands of anthropology, just as in Primitivism, "others are acceptable in so far as they conform to their proper natures, but are degenerate and improper in 'acculturated' or hybridized forms."¹⁰⁸ As Gareth Griffiths has warned, "claims to an 'authentic' voice [...] may be a form of overwriting the complex actuality of difference equal but opposite to the more overt writing out of that voice in earlier oppressive discourses of reportage."¹⁰⁹ That is, supposedly liberating discourses of supposedly authentic, native identities are just as discriminatory and oppressive as the discourses which they criticise. According to Thomas, hence, such "constructions of indigenous identities almost inevitably privilege particular fractions of the indigenous population who correspond best with whatever is idealized."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁶ H. Trask, 'Natives and Anthropologists: The Colonial Struggle', *Contemporary Pacific*, Vol.2 (1991), 163.

¹⁰⁷ E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island From its Discovery to the Present Day* (London: Ward Lock & Co., 1903), 151.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 179.

¹⁰⁹ Gareth Griffiths, 'The Myths of Authenticity: Representations, Discourse and Social Practice', in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds), *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality* (London: Routledge, 1994), 70.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 189.

Peter Caws has recently provided an extensive critique of what he considers this "familiar claim of some advocates of multiculturalism that a culture of one's own (that is, one not imposed from without) is one of the conditions of the achievement of an authentic identity."¹¹¹ According to Caws,

every 'first' or 'native' culture in the singular (by analogy with the first or native language) *is* 'imposed from without,' willy-nilly: although it is 'one's own' in a weak sense (one's background, upbringing, family, country), the possessive relation proves, when thought through, to go the other way - one belongs rather to it, it is not something one has freely chosen or worked to acquire. Consequently an identity that depends on it cannot be *one's own* identity in the strong sense either. The dialogical process of the development of an authentic identity [...] will therefore require the transcendence of one's own cultural origins.¹¹²

As such, the British or English identity of St Helenians is as much or as little their own as any alternatives proposed by Yon, Thornton or Cohen. In consequence, there is no authentic St Helenian identity to be retrieved, there is only the possibility of constructing similarly 'in-authentic' alternatives.

Jane Jacobs, however, has warned that while "the fracture and contingent nature of identity is undeniable", the proposition that "essentialist notions of identity and place are social constructs [...] destabilises a whole range of claims for rights over space which are argued through the idea of origin." In one particular type of case, for instance, an insistence on the contingency of identity "compromises the claims for land made by colonised groups who are still intensely marginalised."¹¹³ In the case of St Helena, presumably, for 'claims for land' read 'claims for right of abode'. Nevertheless, as Gisela Brinkler-Gabler has rightly argued, "[l]ocalization and empowerment do not necessarily

¹¹¹ Peter Caws, 'Identity: Cultural, Transcultural, and Multicultural', in David Theo Goldberg (ed), *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 371.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 371-2.

¹¹³ Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 162-3. For an example, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 277-346.

mean a call for the rediscovery of the 'original' culture, the 'true' self."¹¹⁴ Post-colonial theory needs to show evidence of its own post-coloniality by confirming the rights of people to be who they wish to be, however much their choices are conditioned by previous textualizations. Likewise, I argue that, contrary to Yon, there are no repressed histories to be retrieved either, no need to put together "the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present," in Homi K. Bhabha's words.¹¹⁵

In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon wrote in 1952 "I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance."¹¹⁶ St Helenians, it would appear, have been able to transcend their appearance. To problematise their colour and appearance, as Yon and Cohen did, is anything but liberating. The colonialism of difference and the post-colonialism of difference are too close for comfort. Hybridity is not Bhabha's "revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects."¹¹⁷ Hybridity on St Helena is a fact of life, a "sign of the productivity of colonial power" only in so far as it is a sign of procreation.¹¹⁸ The transcending of the complexion of hybridity makes St Helenian identity genuinely 'post-colonial', at least on the basis of my reading of the term.

In the opinion of Turner and Hopkins, the United Kingdom must confirm that "national identity" of St Helenians "by the rights of citizenship that go with it, and then, and only then, will the island's local identity and culture and values flourish, with no unwanted historical baggage, and with no demeaning dependence. If you truly wish St Helenians to be fully St Helenian, help them to be fully British."¹¹⁹

The answer to that plea for the grant full British citizenship to all St Helenians finally came in March 1999, when the United Kingdom government's 'white paper' on British overseas territories declared that "British citizenship - and so the right of abode - should

¹¹⁴ Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 'Introduction', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed), *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 7.

¹¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 63.

¹¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: MacGibbon & Knee, 1968; orig. 1952). Extract reprinted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), 325.

¹¹⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Nicholas Turner and Cathy Hopkins, *St. Helena: The Lost County of England, Provisional Review of The Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (Ascension Island: 1994), 41-2.

be offered to all those Dependent Territories Citizens who do not already enjoy it and who want to take it up."¹²⁰

¹²⁰ *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories* (London: HMSO, 1999), 17. For a reflection on Britain and its imperial past now that "all that remains of the greatest of Empires [...] are a few unprofitable specks of red on the map", see Denis Judd, 'Britain: Land Beyond Hope and Glory?', *History Today*, Vol.49, No.4 (1999), 18.

PART V

”TURNING AND RETURNING”

~ CONCLUSIONS¹



As I have shown in chapter 1, texts and the circumstances of their production are the defining characteristics of the recent 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and the focus of post-colonial theory and colonial discourse analysis. However, critics of this approach have argued that colonial discourse must not be seen "as a set of merely linguistic and rhetorical features, but must be related to its function within a broader set of socioeconomic and political practices [...]."² I have attempted to address this critique in my exploration of the colonising of St Helena through an analysis of the relationship between colonising practices and the changing representations of the island and its inhabitants over the past five hundred years. In doing so, I too have inevitably been

¹ "The 'Conclusion' [...] has always seemed to my notoriously inconclusive temperament to be so much wishful thinking." [Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 321.]

² Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (London: Methuen & Co., 1986), 5.

involved in the production of a text. It hence appears appropriate at this juncture to consider the con-textualization of writing and the political implications of the representations resulting from such textualizations, not least given the political dimension of post-colonial theory, which I have only briefly touched on previously.

POST-COLONIAL POLITICS AND THE POWERS OF REPRESENTATIONS

Given that writing must be seen within the 'con-text' of its production, that is, as originating within an already constituted literary field, it is worth noting that such contextualization extends to discourses well beyond the mere literary and/or academic ones discussed in chapter 1. Simon Winchester, for example, wrote parts of the closing pages of his *Outposts* at St Helena itself, "in an East India Company room, looking down across a Royal Naval fortress, at a Victorian harbour and a Regency town." Given this setting, he admitted that it "is easy to slip into a fine Imperial reverie, and remember how we came to possess only morsels like these as the parting gift from our days of world dominion."³

The bulk of my own reflections on St Helena were written in England, and while I may have lacked the view of a Victorian harbour, I certainly did not lack the presence of a Regency town. Cheltenham is probably as good a place as any for Imperial reverie, for since the days of the East India Company there had existed a "close connexion between India and Cheltenham."⁴ This was reflected in particular in the large numbers of former military and colonial officers who came to Cheltenham to retire, having been lured there by posters declaring it to be the "naturally sheltered place of settlement for Anglo-Indians returning to England."⁵ Other parts of this thesis were written at Tunbridge Wells, which had once served Lawrence Green as the metaphorical place of origin for Jamestown, St Helena. Last not least, the thesis was revised on St Helena itself, where, as

³ Simon Winchester, *Outposts* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 291.

⁴ See Gwen Hart, *A History of Cheltenham* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1981), 209.

⁵ Charles Allen, *Raj: A Scrapbook of British India 1877-1947* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 139. Also see Colin Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire 1918-1968* (London: Paladin, 1970; orig. 1968), 155.

Haddon Rowat commented in 1956, "[t]hose persons who lament the passing of British Colonial Rule can reside [...] and enjoy it."⁶

Given these settings and given the supposed all-persuasiveness of the mediated representation of orientalist experiences, Behdad doubts the possibility of an authentic experience of the Orient (or, by extension, of anywhere 'other', including St Helena). "The touristic vision is an 'inauthentic' experience of déjà vu mediated through the orientalist intertext that has already identified and codified the signs of exoticism for the viewer. [...] There is no escape from the inauthenticity of the modern journey; for the belated orientalist knowledge is always already *re-connaissance*."⁷

This, I do not doubt (and Behdad just might agree) is as much of an issue for anthropologists or historians as it is for travellers. And insofar as the textualization of St Helena provides the intertextual context of the discursive domain of St Helena's inhabitants themselves, it would appear fruitless to search for an 'authentic' representation of St Helena, as much as it appears fruitless to search for an 'authentic' expression St Helenian identity. St Helenians are what they are because of the discourses to which are not merely subjected, but in which they themselves are involved. It is circumstances such as these, which post-colonial theorists have difficulties accepting, not least because of the political dimension of their position.

For many scholars (and for mainstream imperial historians especially), one of the most problematic aspect of post-colonialism is its explicit and prominent political agenda, especially seeing that as far back as 1973 a historian like John Bowle felt confident enough to claim that "political history written in terms of imperialist pride or post-colonial resentment is on its way out."⁸ Alas, a value-free approach to the study of colonisation does no longer seem acceptable. Jane Jacob's, for one, has argued that "one's speaking must be measured by a responsibility to an anticolonial politics."⁹ Even

⁶ Haddon Rowat, *"This Won't Hurt a Bit": The Musings and Memories of a Dental Surgeon* (Bristol: John Wright & Sons, 1956), 138.

⁷ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 64.

⁸ John Bowle, *The Imperial Achievement: The Rise and Transformation of the British Empire* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1974), 4. For two well-balance modern histories of the British Empire, see Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994); Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience From 1765 to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

⁹ Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 8.

Nicholas Thomas, despite his critique of post-colonialism, is eager to stress that his suggestion to break free from a unitary idea of colonialism "is not some perverse argument that colonialism was not really as vicious or unpleasant as has been previously thought."¹⁰

The implication of this, discernible in most texts within the field, is disconcerting, for as Roger Keesing has pointed out, "it is essential not to depict colonialists as the world's first villains. A view is all too often expressed in rhetorical literature of the Third World that colonial invasion constituted Original Sin."¹¹ De Kock has likewise criticised those who use the 'colonialism' "to denote a self-evident evil, not an object of analytical enquiry."¹² Sadly though, such a restricted view of colonialism is limited neither to rhetorical nor Third World literature.

All in all, most practitioners within the field would argue that if colonial discourse analysis is not a politically informed and oriented discipline, it is not worth pursuing at all. This point is put particularly strongly by Ali Behdad, who accuses many supposedly postcolonial readings of lagging behind the "politics of contemporaneity".

The postcolonial archival work [...] ought to restore to the science of colonialism its political significance in the current global setting. What would emerge out of such a reading is not a specialized erudite knowledge of Europe's guilty past but the provoking rediscovery of new traces of the past *today*, a recognition that transforms belatedness into a politics of contemporaneity.¹³

Behdad holds that postcolonial historiography has to establish a link between past phenomena and present events if it is to be politically meaningful. Arguably, this runs

¹⁰ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 10.

¹¹ Roger Keesing, 'Colonial and Counter-Colonial Discourse in Melanesia', *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol.14, No.1 (1994), 54. For innovative, comparative approaches to imperialism and colonisation which do not focus solely on European expansion, see Marc Ferro, *Colonization: A Global History* (London: Routledge, 1997); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium: A History of Our Last Thousand Years* (London: Black Swan, 1996).

¹² Leon de Kock, *Civilising Barbarians: Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996), 1.

¹³ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 9.

counter to the view of the imperial historian Lawrence James, who argued that "[h]istory cannot be unwritten or written in the subjunctive, and the wholesale application of late twentieth-century values distorts the past and makes it less comprehensible."¹⁴

Whether colonial discourse analysis (rather than post-colonialism) does in fact have to be politically meaningful is debatable, although there would appear to be a political agenda behind most studies within the field, including my own. For Behdad, however, it is not enough to display "an interdisciplinary bent, historical consciousness, and anti-colonial rhetoric."¹⁵ Rather, post-colonialism must also use its historical consciousness to offer criticisms of those cultural conditions which produce unequal relations of power today. *Without* such historical consciousness, Behdad suggests, "the postcolonial reading [...] is at best an informative ethnographic representation of colonial violence, and, at worst, a displaced interpretation of archival materials."¹⁶

In any event, it now appears naïve to think that post-colonial theorists could disassociate themselves from Western discursive practices as easily as they once thought. Even Young, at the end of a quite outstanding study, concludes that "the fantasy of post-colonial cultural theory [...] is that those in the Western academy at least have managed to free themselves from [the] hybrid commerce of colonialism, as from every other aspect of the colonial legacy."¹⁷ It is this realisation which is to blame for what Johannes Fabian has called "the anthropologist's dilemma":

if writing is part of a system of intellectual and political oppression of the Other, how can we avoid contributing to that oppression if we go on writing? There are those who respond to a seemingly radical question with a radical answer; they give up writing about the Other and drop out, if not out of anthropology, then out of ethnography.¹⁸

¹⁴ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1994), xv.

¹⁵ Ali Behdad, *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 182.

¹⁸ Johannes Fabian, 'Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.16 (1990), 767.

If one cannot accept these "melancholy facts" respecting one's own writings about 'others', Anthony Pagden argues, "then the only alternative was to leave 'them', physically and conceptually, alone."¹⁹

While I have a great deal of respect for this stance, I note Clifford Geertz' assessment that an honest display of caution in place of the old certainties may be the most straightforward and least experimental response to this dilemma. "Half-convinced writers trying to half-convince readers of their (the writers') half-convictions would not on the face of it seem an especially favourable situation for the production of work of very much power [...]. Yet that is what must happen if the business is to continue; and if either mere digging in ("Don't think about ethnography, just do it") or mere flying off ("Don't do ethnography, just think about it") can be avoided, it should be possible."²⁰

I hope to have situated my work somewhere between these extremes. Nevertheless, as far as 'ethnography' is concerned, I believe that the main *-graphic* aspect of my work, whether *ethno-* or *historio-*, has arguably been my effort to retrieve, not least by means of quotation, a great number of sources that are little known, hard to find or, with respect to manuscript sources, have never previously been transcribed. By taking this approach I have been able to expose the genealogies of textualizations of St Helena, their ruptures (of which there are few) and their continuities (of which there are many).

And the retrieval of these texts may well prove empowering. Eric Williams, historian and one time Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, whose *British Historians and the West Indies* (1966) is more of an anthology than a history, explained his extensive use of quotations by saying that "[t]he author seeks principally to emancipate his compatriots whom the historical writings that he analysis sought to depreciate and to imprison for all time in the inferior status to which these writings sought to condemn them."²¹

Sadly, I am unable to express such confidence, not least because I am in no doubt that as far as the 'ethnographic' aspect of my work is concerned, and despite efforts to the contrary, I myself have engaged in colonial(ist) discourse of the most exemplary manner. According to John Noyes,

¹⁹ Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 187.

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 139.

²¹ Eric Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), 12.

[w]riting served to collect the myriad diverse lines traced by the movements of explorers, traders and scientists, later of settlers and soldiers, but also by the natives, and organize them into a "text" - a unity which could be called a colony. At the same time, it collected diverse statements relating to the colony and collated them into a body of knowledge. And this organization served as the motivating force which was able to effect the movement of more settlers and soldiers, traders and scientists.²²

In focusing on a particular locale, it would appear that I have unavoidably joined the ranks of all those transient observers who through their writings have played a part in the 'colonising' of St Helena. Undoubtedly, I too have collected diverse traces and statements, organised them into a text and collated them into a body of knowledge. There is no knowing what motivating force this effort and organisation of mine may assume in the years to come. As James, Hockey and Dawson have stressed, "it behoves us to consider carefully, therefore, the political fall-out of our representational practices."²³ Hence, in the Comaroffs' words, "we have to confront the complexities of our relations to our subjects, texts, and audiences - especially because the impact of our work is never fully foreseeable."²⁴ Above all, as Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin asked, "was it an anthropologist's business to tell people under study that they were 'wrong'?"²⁵

I admit that I think it is, not least because, in Eric Hobsbawm's words,

it is essential for historians to defend the foundation of their discipline: the supremacy of evidence. If their texts are fictions, as in some sense they are, being

²² John Noyes, *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa 1884-1915* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1992), 232-3.

²³ Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson, 'Introduction: The Road from Santa Fee', in Allison James, Jenny Hockey and Andrew Dawson, *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1997), 13. According to Hobsbawm, "professional historians produce the raw material for the non-professionals' use or misuse." [Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 356.]

²⁴ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 12.

²⁵ Malcolm Chapman, Maryon McDonald and Elizabeth Tonkin, 'Introduction' in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 9.

literary compositions, the raw material of these fictions is verifiable fact. [...] If a novel were to be about the return of the living Napoleon from St Helena, it might be literature but could not be history. If history is an imaginative art, it is one which does not invent but arranges *objects trouvés*.²⁶

This is especially the case when one deals with individuals and organisations whose 'criterion of what is 'good history' is 'history that is good for us' - 'our country', 'our cause', or simply 'our emotional satisfaction'.²⁷ The same, I believe, applies to people's ab-uses of anthropology. It is worthwhile pointing out in this respect, particularly in the face of post-colonial critiques to the contrary, that "[h]istorians in general have not only always been active in constructing local narratives or counter-narratives, they have also taken special pleasure in attacking master-narratives of every kind."²⁸

Master narratives of sorts are certainly a problem in the case of St Helena 'historiography', for as Mario Marquet has remarked, after Napoleon "Saint Helena became a place of legend - insofar as a legend can at all be fixed geographically - rather than of facts and of history",²⁹ something Aaron Emanuel, for one, found to be the case in 1959.

One of the main problems, if not the main problem, of St. Helena is to distinguish appearance from reality, and to separate the truth from the mass of alleged facts. As Lord Rosebery wrote of the stories about Napoleon's life on the island "There seems to have been something in the air of St. Helena that blighted exact truth; and he who collates the various narratives on any given point will find strange and hopeless contradictions."³⁰

But there is a need to tread carefully when opting to 'tell people under study that they were wrong', for as Gerhard Schutte noted in relation to debates on Afrikaner

²⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 358-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 365.

²⁸ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 150.

²⁹ Mario Marquet, *Sank Helena - Insel ohne Geschichte?: Der letzte Verbannungsort Napoleons von der Entdeckung bis zur Gegenwart* (Vienna: Hermann Böhlau, 1986), 8. The translation from the original German is my own.

³⁰ SHGA: A. Emanuel, *Report on a Visit to St. Helena, March-April, 1959*, 4. Also, PRO: CO 1024/260. For the quotation, see Lord Rosebery, *Napoleon: the Last Phase* (London: Arthur L. Humphreys, 1904).

historiography, "tradition possesses authority and a standardization that allows for a narrow margin of interpretation and correction. It cannot be revised in any extensive way and should such revision be undertaken by academics, they are seen as blasphemous."³¹ It must be remembered, above all, that "we can demolish a myth only insofar as it rests on propositions which can be shown to be mistaken. It is in the nature of historical myths, especially nationalist ones, that usually only a few of its propositions can be so discredited."³² Fortunately, in the case of my demolition of the 'Great Fire Myth', published in the *St Helena News* in 1999, I was able to show that it did indeed rest on false propositions. However, in doing so I did not demolish the principal meaning of the myth, the English origins of St Helena's settlement.³³

Neither did I have a need to worry that "while all representations have effects, those imposed by academic brokers on communities without cultural capital are more likely to have deleterious consequences,"³⁴ for I certainly do not consider St Helenians to be short of cultural capital. In fact, it is I who am in need of such capital, for as Caughey has noted, the "sword of censorship is a greater menace to the local than to the national historian. In part, this arises from proximity to his subject and from dependence upon local sources of support and a local printer."³⁵ As my recent 'Great Fire Myth' intervention in the *St Helena News* goes to show, I did not fare badly in this instance, for it was indeed published locally.³⁶

³¹ Gerhard Schutte, 'Afrikaner Historiography and the Decline of Apartheid: Ethnic Self-Reconstruction in Times of Crisis', in Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman (eds), *History and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 220.

³² Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Abacus, 1998), 362.

³³ Alexander Hugo Schulenburg, 'Myths of Settlement: St Helena and the Great Fire of London (Parts I & II)', *St Helena News*, 12.2.1999 and 19.2.1999.

³⁴ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 12.

³⁵ John Walton Caughey, 'The Local Historian: His Occupational Hazards and Compensations', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 204.

³⁶ Another intervention of mine respecting the minor issue of the correct rendering of the name of St Helena's discoverer, João da Nova [Castella], which was not even published locally, did not fare so well. See Alexander Schulenburg, 'João da Nova and the Lost Carrack', *Wirebird: The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* (Autumn 1997); Trevor Hearl, 'Everyone Knows Joao da Nova Castella Discovered St Helena or Did He?', *South Atlantic Chronicle*, Vol.XXII, No.1 (1998); J. Edgar Williams, 'Letter [João da Nova Castella]', *South Atlantic Chronicle*, Vol.XXII, No.2 (1998); Alexander Schulenburg, 'Letter [More on João da Nova Castella]', *South Atlantic Chronicle*, Vol.XXII, No.3 (1998); Russell V. Skavaril, 'Amid Controversy, the

In a recent review of Kate Teltscher's *India Inscribed*, a book I have already discussed in chapter 1, Javed Majeed asked "how long this sort of work on European representations [of the 'other'] can continue, accompanied as it is by ever more convoluted and attenuated theories about colonial and post-colonial discourses."³⁷ Having examined the textualizing of St Helena at some length, albeit as embedded in colonial praxis, I hope to go on to explore some related but less textual avenues of research which have become apparent during my work.

Perhaps the most important of these is the question of St Helena's wholesale 'Europeanization', which is today marked not least by the apparent absence of any non-European cultural influences. In this respect, St Helena is strikingly different from the West Indian islands. In her study of Nevis, Karen Fog Olwig concluded that "Afro-Caribbean culture [...] can be seen to have developed out of the common ground which the African slaves were able to establish with one another in the situation of oppression which they experienced. This common cultural ground was in many respects radically different and separated from the Euro-Caribbean culture of the colonizers."³⁸ With respect to St Helenian culture no such claims can be made, even if Olwig argues that "African influence" should not be sought "in particular traits or traditions believed to have been retained more or less intact but rather in basic cultural principles and values which underlie cultural forms and behaviour patterns."³⁹

One way of addressing this issue is by way of an examination of the role of commodities in the 'Europeanization' of the island's non-English residents and the apparent maintenance of its English character. In their study of the Tswana, for instance, the Comaroffs have examined at some length the way that "European goods

Question is: Castella or Not?, *South Atlantic Chronicle*, Vo.XXIII, No.2 (1999); Alexander Schulenburg, 'St Helena Historiography, Philately, and the "Castella" Controversy', *South Atlantic Chronicle* (forthcoming).

³⁷ Javed Majeed, 'Review of Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed*,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.26, No.3 (1998), 110.

³⁸ Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), 203.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 20. Also see Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1976); Daniel J. Crowley (ed), *African Folklore in the New World* (Austin: University of Texas, 1977).

had carved out a space in which the habits of the bourgeois home might take root."⁴⁰ On St Helena, where the East India Company maintained a monopoly on imports, European goods were predominant. According to a list of "Goods Sold and deliver'd out of the Honorable Company's Ware House from the 1st July to the 30 Sept^r 1766", 77% of their total value was made up of European goods and only 23% of Indian goods.⁴¹ Such lists, both of stores remaining and of stores sold, are available from as early as 1684 and include a 1717 indent which lists "Goods very much wanted on St Helena".⁴² Overall, these lists allow for a detailed study of the quantity and quality of commodities available on St Helena from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, as well as for a study of their distribution amongst the island's inhabitants, not least because stores sold are classified under various headings including "Inhabitants" and "Blacks". Even in the twentieth century European goods continued to predominate, the import trade still being a near monopoly, a situation that continues to the present day. As a confidential government report found in 1980, wants and expectations on St Helena were influenced not least by the inflow of goods bought with money earned on Ascension Island, "the dominance of the generally more affluent expatriates as taste-setters and the buying policy of the house of Solomon's [the island's largest retailers]."⁴³

An arguably more fundamental way of explaining the 'Europeanization' of St Helena is through demographics, in particular through an examination of the changing ratio between the island's white and black (or coloured) population and its effect on local culture and society. In the case of Barbados, the reason why the "structure, style of life and world view" of white settlers survived for as long as it did,⁴⁴ according to a recent study by Michael Craton, was not least due to the fact that of all the West Indian colonies Barbados had "the most homogeneous class of planters with the fewest absentees", "the

⁴⁰ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), 282. Also see Anne McClintock's discussion of "colonial domination and commodity progress" in her *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 226-31.

⁴¹ SHGA: St Helena Records, 20.10.1766. The total value of good amounted to £8,749.

⁴² SHGA: St Helena Records, July 1717.

⁴³ SHGA: *St Helena Development Survey - Economic Considerations, adapted from papers submitted by J.A. Barnett* (1980), 1-2.

⁴⁴ Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 315.

largest community of poor as well as wealthy whites", and the "lowest rate of miscegenation". Furthermore, especially with a view to the construction of Barbadian identities, "Barbadian blacks were among the earliest and most completely creolized of British slaves, demographically self-sustaining before 1755 and virtually all island born by 1800."⁴⁵ It is this demographic dimension which in the case of St Helena still requires considerable exploration,⁴⁶ although existing figures indicate that of all British Atlantic island colonies St Helena did throughout most of its history have the highest number of white to black inhabitants.

While the number of whites in Barbados amounted to 21% in 1700 and 14% in 1833, that in the Leeward Islands amounted to 24% and 7% respectively, and that in Jamaica to 15% and 5%. In the Windward Islands, which were colonised nearly a century later, it amounted to 10% in 1760 and 4% in 1833, in Trinidad it amounted to 10% in 1820 and 14% in 1833. In comparison, on St Helena the number of white inhabitants in 1715 amounted to as many as 58%, more than half the population. Over one hundred years later, in 1836/7, the island's white inhabitants were still enumerated as making up no less than 42% of the population. This, incidentally, was the last year in which the St Helena census drew a distinction between the island's 'white' and 'coloured' inhabitants. Interestingly, the rate of miscegenation on St Helena was relatively high, not least on account of the size of the local garrison, a fact which may be reflected in the size of the island's free black population, which amounted to 24% in 1821, compared to 7% in Barbados, and 35% in Jamaica, both in 1833.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 360. On Barbadian identity, see Jack P. Greene, 'Changing Identity in the British Caribbean: Barbados as a Case Study', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). For a comparative account, see Polly Pope, 'Danish Colonialism in the West Indies: A Case of Transculturation Failure', in Elias Sevilla-Casas, *Western Expansion and Indigenous People: The Heritage of Las Casas* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977).

⁴⁶ For an introduction to such studies, see E.A. Wrigley, 'Small Scale but not Parochial: The Work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure', *Family and Community History: Journal of the Family and Community Historical Research Society*, Vol.1 (1998).

⁴⁷ The figures for St Helena have been calculated by me from a range of census figures taken from SHGA: St Helena Records, 21.3.1714/15 and 30.9.1821; SHGA: Blue Books, 1836/7 & 1838. The comparative figures for the West Indian colonies have been taken from Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 360.

It is on account of these demographic factors, and those factors relating to commodities, that it can largely be argued, in the words of St Helena's 1931 annual colonial report, that the "English environment which was created by the English colonists has persisted ever since."⁴⁸

Demographic research along the lines suggested would address the need for comparative approaches to colonisation advocated by Elliott in his introduction to the studies collected in Canny's and Pagden's *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500 - 1800*, none of which are in fact comparative as such, but only by virtue of their having been brought together into a single volume.⁴⁹ It would also allow for comparisons with other colonial societies based, for instance, on existing attempts to establish "a typology of the slave populations of the British Caribbean."⁵⁰ One particularly instructive comparison would be between the colonisation of St Helena and that of Barbados, not only because Barbados was likewise uninhabited at the time of its first settlement in 1627, but also because it had at times served as a model for aspects of the colonising of St Helena (see chapters 5 and 6).⁵¹ Barbados, "[n]ever conquered by a foreign power, always retaining a sizeable white population (including a good number of poor whites), and having more than two hundred years to develop before slavery ended, [...] exhibited the most complete and sophisticated plantocratic system, including the highest proportion of

⁴⁸ *Colonial Reports - Annual: No. 1568, Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of St. Helena, 1931* (London: HMSO: 1932), 5.

⁴⁹ On generalisations and comparisons in anthropology, see Ladislav Holy (ed), *Comparative Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

⁵⁰ Barry W. Higman, 'The Slave Populations of the British Caribbean: Some Nineteenth-Century Variations', in Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (eds), *Caribbean Slave Society and Economy: A Student Reader* (London: James Currey, 1991). For a general discussion of the colonisation of the Caribbean, see F.R. Augier, S.C. Gordon, D.G. Hall and M. Reckford, *The Making of the West Indies* (London: Longmans, 1960).

⁵¹ The island had initially been annexed in 1625, although the first group of about eighty settlers only arrived in 1627. The first slaves arrived at Barbados in 1644; see Angus Calder, *Revolutionary Empire: The Rise of the English-Speaking Empires from the Fifteenth Century to the 1780s* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981), 167, 175-7, and 237. Also see Vincent T. Harlow, *A History of Barbados, 1625-1685* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

resident planters."⁵² St Helena, on the other hand, was never principally a plantation nor, as mentioned above, did the proportion of its slaves ever amount to that of Barbados, which rose from 68% of the population in 1670 to 86% in 1833.⁵³ Finally, and very much unlike St Helena, Barbados became an independent state in 1966.⁵⁴

Indeed, an extensive comparison of colonisation on St Helena and one or two other island territories would prove to be of considerable interest not least because localised studies of colonialism of the kind I advocated in chapter 1 are in fact prone to shortsightedness. As Finberg has commented ironically, the local historian who "never knows what is peculiar to his own parish and what is common form [...], unaware that the same things were being done in parishes all over the country, [...] naturally communicates these exciting discoveries to the reader, who, let us hope, will be equally uninformed."⁵⁵ This, as I have mentioned already, has been a particular failing of the historical research undertaken under the auspices of the St Helena Citizenship Commission. Hence, as Susan Kellogg has stressed, "unless it is applied to comparative study, no analytical approach to colonialism will tell us much about it as a process."⁵⁶

St Helena does indeed fit uneasily into established areas of colonisation, such as the 'Atlantic World', for while the colonising of St Helena occurred on much the same lines as that of the West Indian islands, it was tied closely to the trading empires in the East Indies. Slavery was integral to its economy, but the island had no real part in the Atlantic triangle. Although possession of St Helena was fought over by several states, it was only ever settled by the English. Lastly, in this post-colonial age, the island is remarkable for being one of Britain's few remaining colonies, and a willing one at that.

⁵² Michael Craton, 'Reluctant Creoles: The Planters' World in the British West Indies', in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan (eds), *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 316.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁵⁴ An inadvertent comparison of the two islands in the context of contemporary travel writing can be found in the magazine *Islands*, October 1995, which featured the following two articles: Bill Barich, 'Barbados...All Right!', and Ted Botha, 'St. Helena'.

⁵⁵ H.P.R. Finberg, 'How Not to Write Local History', in Carol Kammen (ed), *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings in Theory and Practice* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 193.

⁵⁶ Susan Kellogg, 'Ten Years of Historical Research and Writing by Anthropologists, 1980-1990', in Eric. H. Monkkenen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 29.

Given these circumstances, not all the many definitions of colonialism, colonisation, imperialism, and so forth, are apt. St Helena undoubtedly fits the colonial bill where colonialism is defined as "the settling of communities from one country in another", and where imperialism is defined as "the extension and expansion of trade, and commerce under the protection of political, legal, and military controls."⁵⁷ Nevertheless, St Helena, being uninhabited at the time of its settlement never constituted a 'country' in the sense of a pre-existing socio-political entity, nor was St Helena itself the site of the expansion of trade, however important a staging post it was for that trade.

Susan Kellogg for one has come to conclude that historical anthropologists by and large "have tended to remain uncritical in their use of historical sources, primary and secondary,"⁵⁸ although Elizabeth Tonkin has argued that "a historical anthropology [...] may be a social history, but hopefully even better."⁵⁹ Given the particular historical, contemporary and representational circumstances of St Helena, a study along the lines of Karen Fog Olwig's *Global Culture, Island Identity* would not have been feasible without first addressing the many issues raised by colonial discourse theory, issues which have hence been the principal point of reference of this thesis. Olwig's omission to address the nature of her historical sources is of particular note in this respect, although she acknowledges that her "historical research was troubled by the near complete absence of Afro-Caribbean voices in the records."⁶⁰ Further research into the colonising of St Helena, set within the context of the foregoing research into the island's textualization, is likely to further illuminate and illustrate the "frequently complex process of metropolitan-colonial dialectic, which by no means moves through logical stages of a preordained dénouement."⁶¹

⁵⁷ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), 227.

⁵⁸ Susan Kellogg, 'Histories for Anthropology: Ten Years of Historical Research and Writing by Anthropologists, 1980-1990', in Eric H. Monkkonen (ed), *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History Across the Social Sciences* (London: Duke University Press, 1994), 26.

⁵⁹ Personal communication (February 1998).

⁶⁰ Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993), x.

⁶¹ John H. Elliott, 'Introduction: Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World', in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4.

POST-SCRIPT



"Here am I, [...] with a new cargo of indispensable goods, of real original British manufacture, an authorized work of an author, written for myself, and composed by a compositor, at an enormous outlay, expressly for the private use of the public. Not to waste time by a useless jobation, I shall display all its wonderful points and bearings to your admiring gaze, [...] and warrant them all to be real home made, right down good honest tales, stories, legends, and traditions, with a new and elegant assortment of geographic, topographic, hydrographic descriptions and delineations, true to nature, and real as life, with a brilliant collection of remarkable sayings and wonderful doings, civil, military, and nautical, suitable to all ages, tastes, and capacities; peripatetic peregrinations and perambulations, with all their peculiarities and "incidents of travel," equestrian and pedestrian, by land and sea, in tanks, skiffs, and bum boats, giving a full, true, and particular account of all the remarkable rocks, rivers, ravines, rents, shoals, shelves, swamps, bogs, hills, valleys, plains, woods, wilds, men, women, children, blacks, whites, tawneys, freemen, slaves, yammers, yankeys, french, dutch, paddy-whacks, and "Portuguese", of all kinds, sizes, and descriptions; old tales re-told, stale stories freshened up, renovated, and re-polished, clipped, trimmed, and so altered and disguised, that the "man as made 'em wouldn't know 'em again," - [...] single, separate, mixed, or combined,

descriptive, or historical, analytic or suggestive, with notes, and annotations, infinite emendations, new readings to old versions, curious conjectures, explanatory explanations, and a variety of various variorums, diverse disquisitions, and sublime sentiments, drawn from new and original sources never before explored, developed, studied or understood, for want of means, patronage or convenience, placed at my disposal in the handsome manner, by diligent enquiry, exertion indefatigable, and labour as unlimited as the superior information I am enabled to give in a condensed and epigrammatic form, [...] a fit present for the peer or the peasant, inculcating morality or moral principles, deduced from the revolutions of ages, the crash of empires, and the fall of kings, without a chance of contradiction from anybody but contradictors, impugners of veracity or cantankerous catawaulers, despising what they can't comprehend, loving what they like, admiring what they admire [...]; to be sold without reserve at the cheapest price consistent with honesty, to the highest bidder blest with the chink in tizzies, tanners, bobs, or browns, all of legal weight and carat standard, suitable for the payment of the best of guides, the truest of historians, and honestest of chronicles of the lonely, lovely, windy, rainy, hot, scorching, parched Island of Saint Helena; written by a writer, to be read by readers, as innumerable as the sand on the beach, the stars in the sky, or fools in the world [...]. Heres the book, the truest and best of guides round the elysian fields of Saint Helena [...]."

Joseph Lockwood

A Guide to St. Helena, Descriptive and Historical
(St Helena: 1851, 5-6)

APPENDICES,
ARCHIVAL SOURCES
& BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDIX I

MRS. ELIZABETH HONORIA FRANCES LAMBE

~ AN 'OBITUARY', 1830¹



"St. Helena, Sep. 6th, 1830.- Died in the house of free Sam, at the estate called Railed Cattle Pound, Mrs. Elizabeth Honoria Frances Lambe (relict of the late Serjeant Lambe, of the artillery, of this island), at the advanced age of 110 years and four months. In the year 1731, she was housekeeper in the establishment of Governor Pyke, during his second government, and well remembered having heard that Sir Richard Munden stormed the fort, which now bears his name. Twenty-one personages filled the seat of government of this island during her life-time. She assisted Dr. Halley in fixing his astronomical instruments upon the hill immediately over Dr. Watson's house, at Huts Gate. At that distant period, the house now occupied by Mrs. Hall and the ground upon which Teutonic Hall stands was one continued plain extending to Amos Vale, until the earthquake of 1756, when she recollected the two vallies taking the form they are now in, nearly 300 head of cattle and several huts disappeared.

She was the first who brought sugarcane to perfection, and introduced wiregrass, having obtained the seed from some passing ship. In the year 1741, she instituted a boarding-school for the instruction of young ladies in old English; and was absolutely the first who proposed emancipation of the island slaves to the then Governor Lambert. She remembered the eclipse of the sun in 1743, when the superstitious islanders (from the total darkness which took place) supposed the world was coming to an end. At the time when the lascars mutinied on board the country ship Mahomed, she recollected six of the ring-leaders being executed in the forest then extending to Ladder Hill to Plantation-house.

She was eight times married, had numerous generations (260 of whom are now alive), and died an example of true piety, in the full persuasion that the Millenium will happen in 1836, and that the charter will be renewed to the Honourable East India Company!

She was present when the first stone of the castle was laid in the time the Dutch had possession of the island, and saw an immense quantity of Swamee pagodas laid under the foundation stone."

¹ *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China, and Australasia*, Vol.VI, New Series (September-December 1831), 14.

APPENDIX 2

CENSUS.

REMARKS ON THE PRESENT AND PROBABLE FUTURE CONDITIONS OF THE INHABITANTS

~ BY H.R. BRANDRETH AND EDWARD WALPOLE, 1834/5¹



As the alterations about to take place in the various Government Establishments of the Island will probably be followed by some important changes in the condition of the Community generally, and as the circumstances of the Colony differ essentially from those under His Majesty's Government, we have considered it proper to state our view of the present and probable future condition of the island.

The present population of the Island is stated at 5.151 Persons.

Of this number 2.504 are White Inhabitants including Military and 2.647 a mixed race of free Black and Coloured People, Chinese Lascars and Slaves.

¹ SHGA: 'The Commission of 1835.

Of the White Population, the Civil and Military servants of the Company of all Ranks (including their families) amount to 1759.

Private families who are settled as Residents amount to 745 of whom about 100 including families are attached to the Company's Service but not by Covenant or permanently.

The total number of the Inhabitants Men Women and Children amongst the White Population in the immediate employ of the Company or dependent upon them may be stated at 1895 of which

388 are in the Civil service

37 Widows and Orphans

1470 Military (with their families)

As the Troops have always been employed for the Special Service of the Island the Military Officers like the Civil Functionaries have been regarded as settled Residents; and the two Classes have become united with each other by intermarriages and community of interests.

It would appear from a very able history of the Island, by Mr. Brooke the present Senior Member of the Council, that the Island has always been regarded with peculiar solicitude and indulgence by the Company, and whatever means of patronage it might have created for them at home; They do not appear to have made the large annual outlay a source of patronage in the Island. On the contrary, appointments in both the Civil and Military Service have for many years been bestowed very generally among the Children or relatives of the Public Servants, and where a permanent appointment could not be procured, temporary employment has been found, or created for them with the benevolent intention of relieving immediate distress, and with the tacit consent of the Company.

The island, the Inhabitants and their Children, seem to have been considered as forming a little State or community in itself; dependent indeed on the Company for means of support (which it was never contemplated would be diverted from it) but where all Offices and Employments were esteemed almost as hereditary.

This state of things having been in operation many years, the White Inhabitants with few exceptions are united by ties of Consanguinity into one family, and have been not only solely dependant on the Company for their own present means, but for the prospect of future provision for their Children.

We apprehend this to be both a political and social condition unknown in any other British Colony or Settlement and the evil of the system is now obvious. Applicants have exceeded employments, and notwithstanding the provision made for some Children in India by the liberality of the Company and the large Salaries of the public Servants in the Island, the White Population is verging towards extreme distress; and we fear that any considerable reduction in the means of the present public Servants, would be followed up by the ruin of themselves and their families and dependant relatives. We have elsewhere alluded to the unfortunate results of the farming speculations in which many of the Public Servants have embarked. In reference to this subject we have in tracing the history of this little Island from the earliest period, and in witnessing its present condition been impressed with the conviction that an error has also prevailed another branch of its internal policy. we allude to the falact of all the expectations the Company appear to have entertained hat the Island could ever yield from its own internal resources the means of subsistence for the Inhabitants or of extensive Barter with the Shipping in proportion to the encouragement given in every way to the continued increase of its Population.

For the last 130 years every experiment has been tried to draw forth the latent riches of the Island.

Gold, Copper, Rum, Wine, Brandy and Sugar, and lately Silk have been alternately objects of hope and speculation; while in the experiments in Agriculture each new Governor has brought out with him new theories, and established new laws and regulations to force forward this important branch of the Islands resources.

We say that encouragement was given in every way to promote the increase of the Population; the following we think will show this.

1st The system of continuing public Employment in the families of the public servants induced both parties to regard the island as their own home, encouraged early marriages and consequently numerous offspring.

2ndly The practice of confining the Troops exclusively to the island. The Soldiers married or formed connections with the Coloured women of almost equal obligation with marriage. There are about 800 Soldiers in the Island who are relieved once in twelve or twenty one years; and those who are discharged frequently settle or leave their families in the Island, while their Successors follow up a similar course.

3rdly The introduction of African Slaves as predial [?] Labourers, into a Country, the Climate of which would have admitted of the European Labourer working with advantage.

4thly The introduction of the Chinese who however valuable as an intelligent and industrious people were yet introduced at a time, when the existing means of labour in the Island had not been attempted by every effort to have been brought into full operation.

5thly Finally the large outlay in the Island derived from home, and considered to be from a permanent source.

We have already stated the evil of the first system, in the want of occupation for the rising generation of the present Civil Servants.

The Evil of the second circumstance is obvious, in the numerous families of Women and Children, both White and Coloured, legitimate and illegitimate dependant upon the Troops for their support.

We hold that the introduction of the African Population has been the greatest error committed in the economy of the Island. We venture to assert upon such information as we have obtained and can rely on, that the labour of the European would exceed three fold that of the Slave, and would perhaps even more than double that of the free Black, in the Climate of St.Helena, while his cost would not exceed that of the former whether by the day, or by the year.

A practical admission of this on the part of the White Community is of daily occurrence in the employment of Soldiers whenever they can be obtained, and the fact that the Soldiers both here and in the neighbouring Island of Ascension, are employed throughout the day in the most laborious works without suffering from the Climate, is sufficient to prove that there existed no physical necessity for introducing the Negro Labourer.

In the fourth case, we consider the introduction of the Chinese as a measure that unnecessarily increased the population - unless indeed it can be shown [shewn?] that every effort had been previously tried to encourage the African Labourer to profitable exertion.

Under any circumstances however we are of opinion with the Historian of St.Helena, that it would have been wiser to have introduced the English Labourer rather than the Alien Chinese. The former as a Militia Man would have added to the strength of the island, and prepared the way for a reduction of the costly Military Establishment while the latter, would continue a Foreigner in habits, interest feelings and religion. We admit the Chinese are an industrious intelligent people; and so far have afforded an example (which however has in very few instances been followed) to the coloured people. But the

introduction of a very limited number ought to have been sufficient, inasmuch as the far greater number have been employed otherwise than was originally intended.

Finally the large outlay in the Island by the Company, encouraged the Public Servants to enter into farming speculations on a scale that appears never to have afforded an adequate return; while they drew from their Public resources the means of entering the Market to the disadvantage of the Farmer and Gardener, who under other circumstances would probably have found their moderate prospects sufficiently realized in the demands of the Market for home and shipping consumption.

On the supposition that the present system of Government, and the present Establishments of the Island were to have been continued, we consider that in a few years the population would double its present amount, and the majority become Paupers or dependant for eleemosynary [?] assistance on the liberality of the Company.

Some such crisis as this appears even now to be approaching, and we again beg leave to repeat our conviction, that unless the present Servants of the Company are liberally provided for, either by Pension or Employment the distress in the Community will be severe.

We have had occasion to admire the warm attachment, which the Inhabitants appear to entertain for their island; an attachment that has been inherited for some generations, and which in uniting the Community together, by the bond of one common feeling, has created among them, an almost distinctive feature as a separate people. But however admirable this feeling is in itself, we cannot but regret that the peculiar inaptitude of the Island for a Settlement, should have rendered the indulgence of this feeling inconvenient if not unfortunate, and the encouragement of it impolitic when the extent of the internal resources of the island and the dependance of the Inhabitants on external resources are duly weighed, together with the present condition of Society; where all the comforts, and many of the elegancies of life are enjoyed, but derived principally if not entirely from these external resources.

The venture to add, that many of the foregoing circumstances, which embarrass the present position of the Island, in reference of the approaching change; and which would embarrass its future condition without this change, and must have been overlooked by the Company. And that the able and distinguished Officers who have administered the Government of the Island, could never have been contemplated the probability of the approaching change; and therefore considered the evil of over population either of less consequence than our fears anticipate or too remote for immediate anxiety or

consideration. We however found on our arrival that the condition of the dependant Servants of the Company, and the greater number of all Classes had become a subject of deep commiseration and apprehension among the authorities in the Island.

The approaching change will we presume essentially affect the present system.

The resources from home will be very much diminished and in some cases wholly withdrawn. the rising generation who have hitherto looked forward to promotion or employmet from the Company will unless removed to India be compelled to rely mainly on their own enterprise in trade or Commerce here, or speculation and employment elsewhere. The resources of the Colony will as in other Colonies be drawn forth by the free and unchecked industry and speculation of the Settlers, who will depend dolely for encouragement on the demand of the Island market and the Shipping. The Troops will be very much reduced in numbers, and both Officers and Men be liable to such changes as will prevent them from becoming a fixed part of the population. The system of employing Soldiers in all public and many private Works will probably be discontinued, or much modified, so that the natives may find employment. These measures will we trust check the rapidly increasing population - encourage a more active spirit of self dependance and a desire of enterprise beyond the limited sphere of the island; and compel the Gangs of Idlers and vagabonds that throng the Town, and depend on the numerous Military to help out their precarious means of existence; to turn to staedy and productive industry in the country. The employment of as many of the present Population of all Classes as possible in India or elsewhere would in our opinion be highly desirable, some immediate distress, and some social disorganization will follow this change, but it will ultimately tend to promote measures more in accordance with the natural course of a small Colony's progress, than could ever have been effected under the artificial system, which the Company found it necessary to adopt in relation to their commercial transactions.

Of the 2647 Persons composing the mixed race of the Island, there are 1152 including Wome and Children ostensibly engaged in Trades, Commerce or Fishing.

649 in Agriculture and

846 Females - Widows and Orphans professing to live by washing and any chance of employment. Again of the foregoing number there are

86 chines and

17 Lascars

immediately belonging to the Company.

235 Slaves of both sexes and 47 Women and Children families of Slaves.

Finally in the enumeration of Whites and mixed race 2.000 may be stated as immediately dependant on Incomes and Employment from the Company; and the remaining 3.151 wholly or in part dependant on the expenditure arising out of those Incomes or Employments.

The origin of the Coloured People is as in our West India Colonies traced from the introduction of Slavery, which was coeval with the settlement of the Colony or very soon after.

The Slave Code first promulgated in 1677 was characterized by all the worst features of the early Slave laws elsewhere.

About a Century afterwards an entirely new Slave Code was introduced containing many wise, and humane provisions reflecting much [much?] credit on the Community.

The spirit of the former Code was punishment, that of the latter protection.

In 1818 Sir Hudson Lowe submitted a proposition to the Inhabitants for the gradual extinction of Slavery, which was commonly agreed to. By this law all children born after Christmas day 1818 are free but to be considered as apprentices to the Proprietor of the Mother, if Males until 18 years, and if Females until 16 years of age.

Five hundred and twenty eight Slaves have been emancipated by Loans from the Company, leaving 235 to be emancipated by the 1st May 1836.

The Sum advanced for this object has been £21.168. The probable further sum required will be £12.5000 and the average value of the Slave according to the last valuation £43. 8.,,.

We submit to His Majesty's Government, whether the same indulgence may not be extended to the Slaves who have been emancipated by this measure, and to those who remain emancipated, that has been shown to the Slaves in all other Colonies. The arrangement by which Slaves have been valued and required to pay for their freedom by instalments has fallen peculiarly hard on the industrious and estimable Slave, while the worthless as well as aged and incompetent, have continued to evade payment and the law is insufficient to compel. It appears from the evidence of the Reporter of Slaves that

132 Slaves have paid the requisite Instalments

100 Slaves are unwilling to pay

215 are unable to pay

the average rate of Instalments demanded monthly about £130

The average Amount paid monthly £56

The arrangement however well meant has acted as a tax on honesty and industry and a premium on idleness and dishonesty, We therefore hope His Majesty's Government will be pleased to relieve the industrious Slaves from further payment of Sums that even now press heavily on their industry and actual means of subsistence and will probably become still more onerous if continued under the approaching change.

The effect of this measure will be to reduce the price of labour in the island, and thus afford relief to the Agriculturalist and others.

In 1825 the average wages of free Labourers were from 2s/ to 2s/6d per diem and in 1832, 1833, and 1834 from 1s 4d to 1s 6d but this in reference to the labour of an European is high.

A good servant or cook would obtain from £30 to £40 per annum and food before the Emancipation, but since then the hire has fallen to one third and one half of these prices and there has been a proportionate fall in the wages of all Artificers.

We have given in the Appendix the opinion of the Officer who has acted as Protector of Slaves for some years, and who is considered to be intimately acquainted with this Class of people, and also the opinion of Mr. Brooke the Senior Member of Council on the effect of emancipation on the moral and religious character of the people. Both Gentlemen speak favourably of the present results, and anticipate considerable benefit, to the Community generally from the measure.

It is much to be regretted that the free Coloured People in general prefer occupations in the Town to Agricultural Labour. This complaint has been frequently made, and doubtless the evil has its origin partly in the recent emancipation of the Slaves, and their aversion to their former compulsory labour, but hitherto no efficient means have been adopted to encourage labourers to settle in the Country, and give their Service to the Agriculturist. The Town is consequently overspread with a Population, who live principally on the chance employment of the Merchants Shopkeepers and the shipping - or in Fishing and probably smuggling. The neighbourhood of a large Garrison has also induced a number of women to take up their abode in the Town, who with a numerous illegitimate offspring are dependant on the Soldiers, and the Crews of the Ships.

On the occasion of our inspecting every part of the Town, we were surprized and concerned, to observe the numbers in a state bordering on pauperism and whose only and sensible means of living were washing or chance employment. We are of opinion that want of labour in the Country is to be attributed rather to this idle preference for the

casual occupations in the Town over the steady industry required in the Country, than to any actual deficiency of a labouring population.

To afford a new stimulus to the Agriculturist; and to induce habits of steady and profitable industry among the coloured people; we recommend that certain spots should be selected in the Island; and encouragement given to these people to settle there, and form a rural population.

The employment of the Military to the prejudice of the Native Population we have already noticed. We recommend in future that encouragement should be given to the coloured people to come forward as Artificers, labourers, Boatmen, and seamen in all public Works, and that the Military Artificers and Labourers should only be employed when absolutely necessary in public Works; and under particular restrictions in private Works.

The measures we trust will afford some remedy for the present unsettled and unprofitable condition of the coloured people.

we have already expressed our admiration of the several schools and Institutions for the instruction and relief of all Classes. these it is to be hoped will be retained, but with such modification in the extent of education and its direction among the lower Classes as we have in our first Report alluded to.

In the year 1810 fifty Chinese were introduced to the Island, in consequence of a representation from the Governor, that there was a deficiency of labour, and this particular race of people was selected from their known orderly and industrious habits and ingenuity. But at the time of their introduction the population amounted to 3.500 including military of whom from 100 to 150 were available for labour on Public and Private Works, while from 200 to 300 might without detriment to the duties of the garrison have been employed in the want of a demand for Labour.

In the course of a few years the number of Chinese was increased to 600 and their terms of engagement were 1s/ a day for a Labourer and 1s. 6d for a Mechanic, besides food to the amount of 1s/ more.

They were engaged to the Company for three years, and subsequently the period was extended to 5 Years; and they were replaced from amongst their Countrymen who had entered homeward bound Ships as Sailors.

When Individuals required their labour, they were hired at the rate of 2s/- a day for Labourers; and 3s/- for Mechanics; the Company still feeding them. The hire is now reduced to 1s/-9d and 2s/-6d.

The introduction of the Chinese has been pronounced one of the greatest blessings conferred upon the Island, but we cannot altogether concur in this opinion. That they have been an industrious, an ingenious, and a useful people is very evident, but we think that a few would have sufficed as examples to the Native Labourers, and that the introduction of so large a number of every description of Artificer and Labourer must have been prejudicial to the native, who we consider ought first to have been urged by every just and practicable means to supply the demand for labour. we should also have preferred the encouragement of English, rather than Chinese Settlers for the reason we have lately assigned; and in this opinion we are borne out by the observations of Mr. Brooke, the Deputy secretary Mr. Seale, and other respectable authorities in the Island.

The number of Chinese now in the Island is 116 of which 86 are attached to the Company's Service; and 30 are established as free Settlers.

Of the former there are

51 Labourers

18 Mechanics

11 Gardeners

6 Cooks

and we have ascertained that eleven of the number desire to return to China and the remainder to be allowed to settle in the Island.

Of the free Settlers there are

17 Labourers

10 Artificers

2 Gardeners

1 Cook

and three only desire to return to China. Their ages vary from 30 to 65 and average 45 years, and their residence in the Island averages from 18 to 20 years.

As the people have been so long in the Colony, and have established small Settlements and otherwise naturalized themselves, and are admitted to be a peaceable, industrious and hard working people, we think it would be both just and humane to accede to the wish of those who desire to remain; but on the distinct understanding that with a few exceptions, they are not to become chargeable on the Government. There are a few deserving men, who having been worn out in the Company's service, and being unequal to much exertion for their own support, form the exceptions we mentioned; and

to such men we recommend an allotment of Land of about an acre for each during life, revert to the Crown in the event of an Individual leaving no issue.

It is recommended that the Chinese settling in the Island "should form a fund or subscribe to maintain their own poor". This as a voluntary and private arrangement among themselves would be very desirable, and is deserving of encouragement. But we consider that as the Island has benefited by the labour and ingenuity of these People; the Parish should include them in the provision for the relief of the helpless and poor.

The few who desire to return to China must proceed by way of the cape of Good Hope; and the average expense of their voyage is calculated at £15.

In our first Report, we pointed out a disability, under which these people laboured, owing to their peculiar Religious Tenets, disqualifying them from being married according to the rights of the Church. It appears that several, had applied to be married, but that the Clergyman had declined performing the ceremony.

We consider that this difficulty can only be obviated by a Law of the island, making the marriage in the case of these People a Civil Contract; and in this opinion the Senior Chaplain concurs, adding that the Law should be restricted to the present generation; and that the Children should be reared as Christian.

we are of opinion that the moral and religious character of this people, has not much engaged the attention of the proper authorities so long as they were hired for a limited period of three or five years and then exchanged or returned to their Country, it might have been extremely difficult, if not impracticable (from the ignorance of language) and possibly in direct opposition to the wishes of the people themselves to attempt any change in their breed or habits - but after they were permitted and indeed encouraged to become a virtual part of the Population; and their future prospects were as entirely involved in the Island, as those of any other Class of the Community. we are of opinion that they should have engaged the attention of the Government. So that all expedient and proper measures should have been pursued to encourage a knowledge of the language of the adopted Country; and an acquaintance with its Religious creed, or failing in the last object, they should at least have had secured to them, every civil advantage enjoyed by the rest of the Population.

Notwithstanding the excellent character given of these Peoples and the proofs of their ingenuity, industry, and quiet demeanour, which we ourselves witnessed, we were concerned to observe their degraded condition of life; the miserable hovels they inhabited, their filthy habits; and the suspicion under which they laboured of acts of low

cunning and knavery; thus presenting a striking contrast between their social and domestic habits; and their industry and great usefulness to the community.

There are 17 Lascars, attached to the Marine Department, several of whom have families in Bombay, and will also probably desire to return thither and will therefore be entitled to their passage by way of the Cape. The few who may be disposed to remain will depend on their own exertion for support, and will doubtless succeed as Boatmen or Fishermen from their orderly industrious habits.

In closing these remarks on the present condition of the island, we beg leave to state that the view we have taken is the result of our own personal observation; and the information we have collected from all Classes. Our inferences may be disputed, but there will be found abundant matter in our several Apprentices [Appendices?] to substantiate our facts. We have freely stated our convictions, that errors have been committed, in the policy, that has hitherto governed this Island, and that they have led to mischievous results; but we have done this, with the hope that timely and vigorous measures may be adopted to remedy these evils, or at least check their future increase.

we have stated our opinion that under a different system, the Island may succeed in Commercial enterprise, by opening a communication with the opposite coasts of Africa and South America; with the former for Cattle and other Articles, and with the latter as an entrepôt for the produce of the East. That the Agriculturist left to himself, not controlled by unnecessary laws and Regulations, and labouring to meet the demands of the Shipping, and the Island as his only encouragement will not venture on large speculations; but content himself with a moderate return. That the future Settlers of every description depending on their own industry and enterprise, unfettered by the restrictions which have hitherto been in force in all matters; and no longer contending against the great preponderating influence and example of numerous Public Servants with large means derived from extraneous sources, will be content to succeed in their several pursuits and speculation according to the usual demand, and encouragement as in other Colonies, and to regulate their expenses and Establishments more in accordance with what under ordinary circumstances would naturally be expected in a small Colony producing no staple article of Commercial importance; that their Children will be taught to look beyond the limited means and employment of the Island for their future prospects, and finally that the Labouring Classes no longer depending on the costly establishment of the Island for a precarious livelihood will be compelled to pursue steadier and more profitable employments.

But while, we thus freely state our opinion of what we conceive to have been the impolicy of certain measures in the administration of the affairs of the island; we beg distinctly to be understood as not for one moment questioning either the justice of these measures, or the integrity of any of the Public functionaries. So long as the Island was the exclusive property of the Company, the propriety of these measures was doubtless recognized by the Court of Directors; but as we are called upon to examine them with reference to the future condition of the Island, as a Possession of the Crown, we have felt it our duty to point them out to the notice of His Majesty's Government as errors that require to be promptly dealt with at the very outset of the proposed new Government And which if overlooked might seriously affect the future welfare of the Colony.

We have given in the Appendix a Statement of the Population of the Island for the years 1804, 1814, 1824, and 1834 and of the occupations and pursuits of the present Inhabitants.²

² This appendix does not appear to have survived.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES



UNPUBLISHED ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Details of unpublished archival materials are provided in the references, where the following abbreviations are used:

SHGA	<i>St Helena Government Archives</i>
IOR	<i>British Library, India Office Records</i>
PRO	<i>Public Record Office</i>

ST HELENA GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES

East India Company Records

- i. St Helena Records [or Consultations] (1678-1836)
- ii. In-Letters (1673-1835)
- iii. Out-Letters (1706-1835)
- iv. Court Records (1762-1836)
- v. Registers (1682-1839)
- vi. Miscellanea (1681-1834)

Crown Records

- i. Governor's Out-Letters (1863-1908, 1885-1910)
- ii. Governor's Despatches (1903-1912, 1927-1963)
- iii. Secretary of State's Despatches (1839-1942)

- iv. Colonial Secretary's In-Letters (1839-1908)
- v. Colonial Secretary's Out-Letters (1836-1899)
- vi. Blue Books (1838-1942)
- vii. Miscellanea (1835 onwards)

BRITISH LIBRARY, INDIA OFFICE RECORDS

- i. Charters, Deeds, Statutes and Treaties (c.1500-c.1950) *ref. A*
- ii. Minutes of the East India Company's Directors and Proprietors (1599-1858) *ref. B*
- iii. East India Company General Correspondence (1602-1859) *ref. E*
- iv. Board of Control Records (1784-1858) *ref. F*
- v. Factory Records - 'St Helena' (1676-1836) *ref. G/32*
- vi. Home Miscellaneous Series (c.1600-c.1900) *ref. H*

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Colonial Office Records

- i. St Helena (1815 onwards) *ref. CO 247-CO 252*
- ii. South Atlantic Islands (1952 onwards) *ref. CO 1024*

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The bibliography is divided into three main categories. 1) *Principal Sources (St Helena & Dependencies)*: Texts containing substantive and analytical material respecting St Helena, not all of which have been cited. 2) *Supplementary Sources (Empire, Colonisation & Colonial Discourse)*: Texts on the analysis and history of empire and related areas. 3) *Supplementary Sources (Anthropology, Historiography, Literary Theory, Geography & Misc.)*: Texts on theory and methodology, as well as other miscellaneous subjects. *Even though some texts fit into more than one of the above categories, they are listed here only in the category most appropriate to them in the context of this thesis.*

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"Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground."

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act I, Scene I