

Cape-Helena: An Exploration of Nostalgia and Identity  
through the Cape Town - St. Helena Migration Nexus

By

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# Declaration

I, Damian Sean Samuels, declare that 'Cape-Helena: An Exploration of Nostalgia and Identity through the Cape Town - St. Helena Migration Nexus' is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged with complete references.

Damian Samuels

05 September 2018





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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: St. Helena Immigration to South Africa, 1838-1879.....	12
Chapter 2: St. Helena Immigration to South Africa, 1880s-1948.....	67
Chapter 3: Nostalgia and the Sacral Introjection of an Island.....	109
Chapter 4: Race and Respectability, Nostalgic Associations and Disassociation.....	143
Appendix.....	179
List of illustration.....	188
Bibliography.....	190



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# Introduction

For an Island measuring merely 128 square kilometers, and in spite of its remote location in the mid-South Atlantic, St. Helena “punches way above its weight in history”,<sup>1</sup> earning and occupying a privileged place in British scholarship of its imperial thalassocratic age. However, prior to this period in which the Island was indispensable to British Empire formation, it had passed through the hands of at least two former European naval nations before it was eventually laid claim to and effectively colonised by the British. The Portuguese, who were the first to stumble upon the uninhabited Island in 1502 - naming it St. Helena in honour of Roman Emperor Constantine the Great’s mother - managed to keep its existence a closely guarded secret for over eight years. For nearly a century, the Island was reserved for exclusive use by the Portuguese as a port for recuperation, replenishing and re-provisioning, which they usually visited on their homebound journey from trading (and conquering) in the East Indies.<sup>2</sup>

This Portuguese monopoly of use of the Island, however, ended during the last decade of the sixteenth century when other maritime nations, particularly Dutch and later English traders, became aware of and started frequenting the Island. The initial overlap period, constituting the first three decades of the seventeenth century when mostly the Dutch and Portuguese shared use of the Island, was cause for occasional hostile encounters between the two nations. Apparently, continued Dutch and English harassment of Portuguese (and Spanish) ships made visiting the Island untenable for the Portuguese who opted to avoid St. Helena and instead make use of a number of their other port ‘possessions’ along the West African coastline to replenish and repair their ships.

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<sup>1</sup> This is how one of my research participants, Paul Alexander, articulated St. Helena Island as a historical place. Paul Alexander. Interviewed by Damian Samuels. Woodbridge Island, Cape Town, July 24, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Portuguese were the first to partially colonise the Island by making some utilitarian ‘improvements’ for their own benefit: they colonised the Island naturally by introducing fruit trees, vegetables and domesticated farm animals. However, they did not fortify or settle the Island, leaving it uninhabited and vulnerable to being seized by other sea-faring European nations.

The Dutch eventually made a formal claim to the Island as a 'proprietary' of the United Provinces of the Netherlands on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1633, but they too neglected the Island, preferring instead to commit their energy and resources to their 'possession' at the Cape.<sup>3</sup> The English formally annexed the uninhabited Island of St. Helena in 1659 (see document image 1 in the appendix) as a strategy to secure sustainable trade in the East Indies. A delayed Dutch response to re-stake their former claim to the Island saw St. Helena temporarily wrested back from the English in December 1672. Following a tactical skirmish with no casualties, the British successfully recaptured the Island from the Dutch in May 1673.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of this brief five-month interstice, St. Helena has remained, in various legal forms, an uncontested British territory since 1659.<sup>5</sup> Initially, to discourage further Dutch retaliation and dissuade other ambitious maritime nations who may have coveted the Island, the British, under the auspices of the English East India Company, fortified and garrisoned the Island, settling it permanently and, therefore, effectively colonising the Island for the first time.

It is under the rubric of British imperial maritime history that St. Helena ascended as a remarkably fascinating historical place that has undoubtedly played a pivotal role in establishing British maritime supremacy and dominion.<sup>6</sup> So vital was St. Helena, it has even been argued that the commonly accepted triangular transatlantic trade was actually a quadrangular trade where St. Helena functioned as the tiny pivot around which the British oceanic trade rotated.<sup>7</sup> For this very reason it was enticing for early historiography – textual and visual - on or related to St. Helena to follow that typical format that commences with the Portuguese 'discovering' St. Helena Island in 1502 and

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938* (Shropshire, England: Anthony Nelson Ltd, 1990), 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-8.

<sup>5</sup> When the English colonised the Island they considered it unclaimed by any of the other European maritime nations on the grounds that there were no inhabitants or permanent fortifications entitling any of the other nations to ownership.

<sup>6</sup> The Island has also been of great interest to astronomers, conservationists, environmentalists, evolutionary theorists and natural historians, but my work is located exclusively within the limits of social history.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel A. Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing: St. Helena and the South Atlantic World," *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 33, no.2 (December 2007): 146.



proceeds from that point forward to conclude with a retrospective romanticisation and celebration of Britain's past thalassocratic prowess.

In terms of my approach, I refrain from this familiar imperial militaristic framing of St. Helena Island as a place that, in the main, signifies British victory and triumph over its enemies – the Boer, Dutch, French, Portuguese and Zulu, for instance. Then, there are also a number of recent descriptive attempts to compress the history of St. Helena into single volumes.<sup>8</sup> These works tend to lose much nuance in its effort to be 'all encompassing', often resulting in repetition of knowledge already available.<sup>9</sup>

Considering that the *where* is just as important as the *when*, *why* and *how*, St. Helena as both a topography and a concept of place is important to my study, even though I tend to treat *place* as an ancillary concept. According to Malpas, human consciousness and, therefore history, cannot exist without being *in-situ*. Such a philosophical premise renders human experience *in* place rather than having us 'possess' experiences *of* place. In other words, to be able to think *about* the world (or a place) carries the prerequisite that we are *in* the world (or place) to begin with.<sup>10</sup> Historically, St. Helena can be described, along with its more dominant romanticised and contemporary touristic constructions, as a little landscape of epic drama, strife and trauma. The Island's topology has inscribed on history as much as history had inscribed its landscape, and this dual inscription of the human on the land and the land on the human body, memory and imaginaries, is vital if we consider that St. Helena is a place where bodies convalesced, settled, eked out a living, were revitalised, indentured, interned, interred, and even liberated.

At various moments in history, St. Helena has served different, yet distinct, purposes for the British. Its initial *raison d'être* can be captured in notions such

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Gill and Percival Leslie Teale, *St. Helena 500: a chronological history of the island* (St. Helena: St. Helena Heritage Society, 1999); David L. Smallman. *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002* (Cornwall: Patten Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> But this is not to say they are not worth reading.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

as *paradise, sanctuary, refuge* and *refreshment station* during the height of the English East Indian Company's (EEIC) trade in Southeast Asia. During this period the Island was effectually 'leased' to EEIC by the British sovereign. There the Company governed uninterruptedly between 1659 and 1815 while utilising the Island as re-victualing stopover port. This long duration in which the Island was the 'possession' of the EEIC allows for St. Helena to be studied as a wieldy microcosmic place or 'unit of analysis', if you want, for those interested in the historical role of this London based 'Company of Merchants' in contributing to British nautical mercantilism.<sup>11</sup>

Historically, St. Helena is better known as a *fortress Island*<sup>12</sup> - a place of exile and banishment, a gaol for prominent political prisoners and prisoners of war (POWs) who opposed or threatened British imperial expansion. Besides Napoleon, who was by far the Island's most famous detainee,<sup>13</sup> St. Helena was utilised as the natural penitentiary for other influential political prisoners. Amongst its eminent captives were the Sultan of Zanzibar, Sayyid Khalid bin Barghash Al-Busaid (between 1917-1921),<sup>14</sup> and (between 1957-1961) three Bahraini nationalists: Abd al-Rahman al-Bakir, Abd al-Aziz Shamlan, and Abd al-Ali Aliwat.<sup>15</sup> After Napoleon, next in order of what St. Helena is most famous for as a prison island, is the incarceration of large cohorts of Boer captives from the second Anglo-Boer War - approximately 5000 - who were imprisoned there between 1900 and 1902. The existence of Boer internment camps on St. Helena remains the most infamous historical event fuelling present imaginaries of St. Helena Island extant in South Africa.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Royle, *The Company's Island: St Helena, Company Colonies and the Colonial Endeavour* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> To borrow a term from the title of one of Robin Castell's book: Robin Castell, *St. Helena...island fortress* (Middlesex: Byron Publicity Group, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Often, Napoleon's stint on the Island is accredited as the very historical fact lifting St. Helena Island from obscurity to fame.

<sup>14</sup> Susan O'BEY, "St. Helena-Prison Island." Napoleon.org. <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/articles/saint-helena-prison-island/> (accessed December 13, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Miriam Joyce, "The Bahraini Three on St. Helena, 1956-1961," *Middle East Journal*, 18 (Fall 2000): 617.

<sup>16</sup> The Afrikaner imaginary of the Island has led to the production of a full-length fiction film in which St. Helena features prominently: *Modder en Bloed (Blood and Glory)*. DVD. Directed by Sean Else (Wendywood, Johannesburg: Dark Matter Studio and Collective Dream Studios, 2016).

However, prior to being a penitentiary for these Boer POWs, St. Helena was also the place of internment for the Zulu King, Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo. He was sentenced and detained - along with his two uncles, Ndabuko and Tshingana - on the Island between 1890 and 1897 for undermining British authority and resisting their expansionist policies in Natal subsequent to British annexation of Zululand in 1887. A retinue of assistants, wives and interpreters, totalling a party of thirteen, accompanied them. Again, between 1907 and 1909, St. Helena was used for the confinement of twenty-five Zulu chiefs accused of instigating the 1906 Bambatha rebellion against the colonial imposition of the Natal government's Poll Tax.<sup>17</sup> Both the incarceration of the Boers and the Zulus are better-known events linking St. Helena and South African history, yet they are surprisingly understudied.

In addition, St. Helena, from its more notable narratives (the outcome of more rigorous research endeavours), features as a *court* for the adjudication of 'illegal' slavers, and the *port of liberation* for freed African slaves. At the height of the British antislavery campaign, the Island served as the locus for the direct and often unilateral enforcement of a plethora of British antislavery legislation<sup>18</sup>, which was, from its incipient groundswell within the abolitionist movement, underway in London since the early 1780s.

By 1840, St. Helena Island became the locus for an antislavery complex. These included a Vice-Admiralty Court, instituted by proclamation on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1840<sup>19</sup> (see document image 2 in the appendix), as the judicial arm for the adjudication of offenders of 'international' maritime law, particularly aimed at targeting slavers and eradicating the Atlantic slave trade. In addition, the Island simultaneously served as a base for the British Royal Navy's West African

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<sup>17</sup> Susan O'BEY, "St. Helena-Prison Island."

<sup>18</sup> The British summoned either customary international law or those laws dealing with the mutually sanctionable action appropriate during times of war. In other words, by making a case that slave ships were waging a war against humanity, purported breaches in belligerent rights of war laws or piracy laws were evoked by the British to pursue, cease, search and appropriate, as prizes of war, Brazilian and Portuguese slavers and their cargo (including slaves). See: JP van Niekerk, "The Role of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St. Helena in the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Preliminary Investigation (Part 1)," *Fundamina*, 15, no.1 (September 2009): 85.

<sup>19</sup> Robin Castell, *St. Helena Proclamations: 1818-1943* (St. Helena: The Castell Collection, 2004), 287.

Squadron, a maritime military enforcement wing for the practical execution of its antislavery laws, and the 'Liberated' African Depot, the transitory abode for African recaptives that in actuality resembled a refugee camp.

This antislavery complex operated in full swing on the Island for roughly twenty-five years. The naval West Africa Squadron, as a consequence of their own success in ameliorating Atlantic slavery, became redundant and withdrew from the Island in 1864.<sup>20</sup> The Africa Depot fell into disuse around the same time. The Vice Admiralty, however, continued to act as the official court at St. Helena until 1911, when it was replaced with the Supreme Court of St. Helena, even though Vice-Admiralty Courts in the rest of the British colonies were replaced with local Colonial Courts as of 1890.<sup>21</sup>

During the full period the West African Squadron and the Vice Admiralty Court operated from and on the Island, the number of slaves 'liberated' at St. Helena was 24,221 between 1840 and 1864<sup>22</sup>, roughly 20-25% of the more than 100,000 African slaves freed by the West African Squadron.<sup>23</sup> Yet, other official records number the African slaves 'emancipated' at St. Helena between June 1840 and December 1849 – a narrower timeframe – as 15,076.<sup>24</sup> Most of these 'liberated' slaves were resettled as 'free' labourers in various British West Indian sugar plantations; in total, about 40% of the roughly 40,000 former slaves were resettled throughout the British Caribbean.<sup>25</sup> William Green, in his initial

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<sup>20</sup> JP van Niekerk, "The Role of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St. Helena in the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Preliminary Investigation (Part 2)," *Fundamina*, 15, no.2 (September 2009): 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Pearson. *Distant Freedom: St Helena and the abolition of the slave trade, 1840-1872* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 278-83. There are other sources recording the number of slaves 'freed' via the St. Helena Vice-Admiralty Court, but Pearson's painstaking work analysing the records of the Vice-Admiralty Courts previously situated in Cape Town, Freetown, Luanda and St. Helena between 1836 and 1868 is the most meticulous.

<sup>23</sup> Marion, R. Adderley, "*New Negroes From Africa*": *Slave Trade Abolition and Free African Settlement in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>24</sup> British Parliamentary Papers (*BPP: Col Gen VOL 5*, pp. 943-944), the *Blue Book of 1849*, cited in van Niekerk, "The Role of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St. Helena (Part 2)," 53 (footnote 383).

<sup>25</sup> Adderley, "*New Negroes From Africa*," p.3. Figures for liberated slaves differ vastly depending on which sources scholars used. By way of illustration, Adderley's case study, where she used the Governor of Trinidad correspondences as her main source, has revealed that 3,124 former slaves were resettled via St. Helena in Trinidad alone between 1842 and 1860 (pp. 245-247). On the

analysis, was the first to suggest the definitive number of 16,287 African recaptives 'liberated' via St. Helena's Vice-Admiralty Court and resettled throughout the British colonies in the Caribbean between 1840 and 1860.<sup>26</sup> Pearson's recent work puts this figure at 17,144 former slaves resettled in the British Caribbean between 1840 and 1867.<sup>27</sup>

Some earlier scholarship suggests more conservative and less accurate estimates over shorter timeframes. For example, "over 10,000 liberated Africans were forwarded"<sup>28</sup> to British Caribbean Islands during the tenure of the West African Naval Squadron and the Vice-Admiralty Court on St. Helena Island. Jackson offers the following summary: "the number of Africans captured by H.M. cruisers and brought to St. Helena between June 9, 1840, and September 30, 1847 [...]" were 9,155. As for the "[...] manner of their disposal", 4,344 of these 'liberated' slaves were re-settled as (indentured) servants and waged labourers in British West Indian colonies – Guiana, Jamaica, and Trinidad; while 2,926 perished and were interred at Rupert's Bay<sup>29</sup> on St. Helena Island. A further sum of 445 was removed from the African Depot to work as servants on the Island, where they remained as part of the St. Helena population.<sup>30</sup>

Of direct significance to South Africa, it was recorded that 1,410 of these 9,155 'liberated African slaves' were resettled at the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>31</sup> This would be the first known case of organised St. Helenian settlement in South Africa.

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other hand, Pearson's analyses in which he uses the Vice-Admiralty Court records as his primary source suggest that 4,033 slaves were resettled in Trinidad during the same period – see: Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 273. Green is also cited as Schulenburg's principle source on numbers of slaves liberated at St. Helena Island, see: Alexander Schulenburg, "Aspects of the Lives of 'Liberated Africans' on St Helena," *Wirebird*, 26 (Spring 2003): 24.

<sup>27</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 284–87. 25,233 slaves were "landed" at St. Helena, but only 17,144 were resettled. Some slaves were legally manumitted posthumously.

<sup>28</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 310.

<sup>29</sup> This figure arguably comprises the majority of the slave corpses discovered and excavated by archeologists at Rupert's Bay in 2012 and roughly concurs with Pearson's 30% mortality rate suffered by African recaptives domiciled in St. Helena's African Depot in comparison to the number of former slavers successfully resettled throughout the Caribbean. See reference below.

<sup>30</sup> E.L. Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island from its Discovery to the Present Date* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1905), 261.

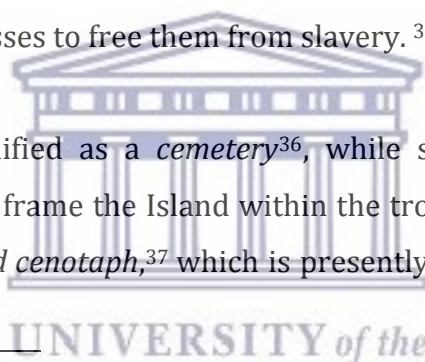
<sup>31</sup> Jackson, *St. Helena: The Historic Island*, 261. This figure is concurred by Pearson's statistical summary - Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 284-87.



Other official records concur with this figure, showing only marginal discrepancies in dates and number. A figure of 1,404 liberated African slaves are reflected to have made their way to the Cape between June 1840 and December 1849, with 1,332<sup>32</sup> in 1842 alone, the first cohort of that year amounting to 650 free slaves resettled at the Cape.<sup>33</sup>

The (mal)treatment of slaves as 'statutory objects' within the bureaucracy of liberation has not gone unnoticed or without critique. By this term, I mean slaves (as chattel or capital prior to liberation) were often treated inhumanely in the process of liberation and manumission. For instance, slaves had to be transferred as the property of Brazilian and Portuguese slavers through judicial processes to the British Crown and thereafter manumitted.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it is approximated that about 30% of these African recaptives perished during, and often due to, the prolonged judicial processes to free them from slavery.<sup>35</sup>

Often the Island is signified as a *cemetery*<sup>36</sup>, while some relentless popular scholarship continues to frame the Island within the trope of *Napoleon's distant, remote prison bastille and cenotaph*,<sup>37</sup> which is presently revived as a key tourist



<sup>32</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 286.

<sup>33</sup> van Niekerk, "The Role of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St. Helena (Part 2)," 54 (footnote 387), cited from the British Parliamentary Papers (*BPP: Col Gen VOL 5*, pp. 943-944). Although the discrepancy in the number of resettled slaves at the Cape (six) is marginal, the dates also differ. Whereas Jackson's date is a seven-year period (June, 1840- September, 1847), the official records present a nine-year period (June 1840 - December 1849) - a compressed period constituting a heightened spell of activity for the Royal Navy in which large sums of slaves were 'liberated'.

<sup>34</sup> This was a precautionary measure to ensure that dispossessed slave traders would not appeal or make 'legitimate' future claims against the Admiralty Court for the return of their 'property', since slaves, legally speaking, would no longer be their property.

<sup>35</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 9. Pearson's Chapter 4 - *The Life and Death in the Depots*, 106-53 - is particularly revealing of the horrendous condition for African recaptives awaiting liberation in the St. Helena African Depot.

<sup>36</sup> It is estimated that the bodies of approximately 5000 liberated African slaves, who did not survive the ordeal of being captured by slavers and then recaptured by British cruisers in the throes of the middle passage, were interred on St. Helena. These logically include the already deceased slaves found on slaver ships since the figures of slaves who perished in British care are markedly fewer. See: "Archeologists find graves containing bodies of 5,000 slaves on remote Island", *The Guardian*, March 8, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/08/slave-mass-graves-st-helena-island> (accessed October 22, 2016). Moreover, there are monuments aplenty on the Island of former notable prisoners of war; the Boer cemetery and memorial site, and most notably, Napoleon Bonaparte's gravesite.

<sup>37</sup> For recent literature pertaining to Napoleon and St. Helena, see a few selected titles amongst a plethora of titles: Julia Blackburn, *The Emperor's Last Island: A Journey to St. Helena* (Great

attraction. This literature, emphasising Napoleon's six-year confinement on St. Helena (1815-1821), suits the production of a reduced popular imaginary of the Island to stimulate an increase in tourism. The development of this modern tourism industry is deemed to be the exigent solution to wean the Island off its interminable dependency on British public subsidy in order to sustain its society. Unfortunately, St. Helena is usually recognised and associated by laypersons as Napoleon Bonaparte's prison Island, which attests to the success of these touristic and reductive discourses framing St. Helena as 'Napoleon's Last Island'.

Charlotte Parker's 2012 PhD thesis in sociology emphasises the Island's enduring dependency on British subsidy and the effects of this dependency on St. Helenian identity. Here she touches critically on the conception of St. Helena as a *repository of excess labour*<sup>38</sup> made in earlier scholarship,<sup>39</sup> emphasizing that 'people are the Island's greatest export'. Indeed, this is a contentious point since many St. Helenians usually did and still do not emigrate voluntarily, but rather under duress caused by the historical and contemporary socio-economic structure of the Island.

Recent discourses on St. Helena have seen nostalgic responses to the new airport opened on the Island in October 2017: to them it signals a worrisome end to a cherished spatiotemporal era, a loss of the island's allure, its *je ne sais quoi*, so to speak. This uniqueness conceives of St Helena Island as a temporal vacuum - the pristine *idyllic refuge from modernity* - to which the Island and its highly-emphasised isolation has seemed impervious until 2017. Within this framing, the newly developed airport heralds the 'opening' of the Island to the corrosiveness of modernity by incorporating it into the modern global world to which it had for so long remained impenetrable. Although I deal with nostalgia in this thesis, I

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Britain: Vintage, 1997); Johannes Willms, *Napoleon and St Helena: On the Island of Exile* (London: Haus Publishing, 2011); Brian Unwin, *Terrible Exile: The Last Days of Napoleon on St Helena* (London and New York: I.B Tauris, 2013); and, Thomas Keneally, *Napoleon's Last Island* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Parker, "An Island Between: Multiple Migrations and the Repertoires of a St Helenian Identity" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2012), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Maarten Hogenstijn and Daniel van Middelkoop, "Saint Helena: Citizenship and Spatial Identities on a Remote Island," *Journal of Economic and Social Geography*, 96, no.1 (2005): 96-104.

find the touristic framing of St. Helena as a ‘magical place with the friendliest people’ a vacuous appropriation of nostalgia fraught with unwarranted conviviality.

What is largely absent from the discourses and knowledge production on the Island summarised above is a thorough account of the migratory relationship between St. Helena and South Africa – the latter being the host country that has arguably received the largest number of St. Helenian immigrants. With the exception of Daniel Yon’s work,<sup>40</sup> there is no other historical account, to my knowledge, exploring the migratory relationship between St. Helena Island and South Africa. Moreover, Yon’s focus does not set out to provide a full historical account of St. Helena immigration to South Africa. Instead, his work, with which I engage later, offers vital conceptual frameworks and insights for understanding the effects of race on identity within the South Atlantic world.

My initial intention with this study was to focus exclusively on the concepts of nostalgia and identity. However, such an analysis was impeded by the challenges I encountered with the absence of literature providing a coherent account of the immigration of St. Helenians to South Africa. I believe such ‘historical context’ was needed to underpin my analysis on nostalgia and identity. Thus, I have taken it upon myself to initiate this foundational and structured - yet preliminary - immigration narrative.

My research efforts in contributing to historiography on the Island of St. Helena are, therefore, two-fold. Considering the distinct methodologies, my thesis can be read in two ‘parts’, each with its unique central focus, and self-contained introductions and conclusions. The first ‘part’ of my thesis (Chapters One and Two) is a concerted attempt to offer a structured preliminary account of the number of St. Helenian immigrants who settled in South Africa between the

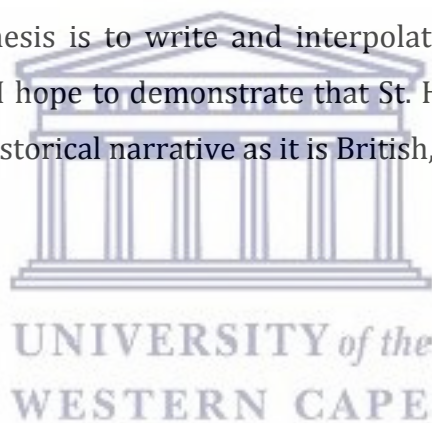
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<sup>40</sup> Daniel Yon, “Race-Making/Race-Mixing”; Daniel Yon, *The Island, the Ocean and the Desert: memory and the St Helena presence in the Northern Cape* (unpublished paper from a special lecture delivered at Stellenbosch University, July 2015); and his latest film - *Mining Memory*. Directed by Daniel Yon (South Atlantic World Productions, 2018).



1830s and 1940s. This has required intense archival research that afforded me the opportunity to analyse the conditions and circumstances pressuring the emigration of St. Helenians from the Island in conjunction with the simultaneity of factors that drew them to South Africa. The second 'part' of my thesis (Chapters Three and Four) deals directly with the *affectivity of place* and the role of nostalgia in identity formation. Here I analyse eleven in-depth interviews: two of my participants are direct St. Helenian immigrants, while nine of them are descendants of St. Helenians who settled in South Africa as naturalised citizens.

In 'part one' of my thesis St. Helena is discussed as a historical place, with inherited meanings through more dominant historical narratives pertaining to British imperial expansion, whereas 'part two' is an exploration of St. Helena as a mythological place and ancestral homeland. It will become clear that one of my key objectives of this thesis is to write and interpolate St. Helena Island into (South) African history. I hope to demonstrate that St. Helena Island is as much part of a South African historical narrative as it is British, past and present.



# Chapter 1

## St. Helena Immigration to South Africa: 1838-1879

### 1. Introduction

In the following two chapters I will attempt to offer a more systemic account of St. Helena immigration to South Africa between 1838 and 1948. To date, no such study has been undertaken, despite a vibrant oral tradition amongst the descendants of St. Helena immigrants celebrating their St. Helenian heritage and often, in peculiar fashion, romanticise *their* Island of provenance. The commencement date for my chosen timeframe emerges from a need to authenticate rather tenuous historical accounts of St. Helena's first mass emigration for the Cape of Good Hope in 1838. Where cases of migration are discussed, these are either incidences of large-scale<sup>41</sup>, often aided, migration and settlement, or of those St. Helena migrant workers initially employed under temporary contracts to work in South Africa, specifically within burgeoning industrial sectors of the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century South Africa.

With the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa and the portentous implementation of the apartheid regime in the 1950s, aided migration to South Africa was prohibited.<sup>42</sup> Besides, for many St. Helenians (also referred to as Saints<sup>43</sup>) it was no longer desirable to move to an overtly and legislatively racialised South Africa and immigration started to taper off. Although there may have been Saints 'trickling' in during the apartheid era (post 1948), these numbers were minuscule. The bulk of the migration occurred in 'waves' during the earlier part of the period under discussion, which I will demonstrate below.

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<sup>41</sup> 'By 'large-scale' I mean relative to the size of the St. Helenian population at any given time.

<sup>42</sup> Aided migration correlates directly with the exporting of superfluous 'coloured' labour from the Island.

<sup>43</sup> An epithet by which most St. Helenians choose to refer to themselves.

Archival records suggest that the bulk of St. Helena migration to South Africa occurred principally between the 1860s and 1940s<sup>44</sup>. For this chapter, therefore, I will draw extensively from primary archival research and to a lesser extent from secondary sources, although the latter, too, are indispensable for telling as complete a story as possible of the Saints who settled in South Africa during my selected timeframe. Furthermore, despite extending invitations via St. Helenian heritage institutions and networks to participate in my research study, I was not able to locate a live individual who had emigrated from the Island of St. Helena to South Africa more recently than 1948.<sup>45</sup>

My research enquiry is an effort to understand both the qualitative socio-economic factors that fomented mass St. Helena emigration as well as a determination to come to grips with the extent of migration through undertaking a quantitative study of the number of migrant Saints who settled in South Africa. The latter has proven to be my greatest challenge since there has been no systematic record of St. Helena migration to South Africa attempted by either St. Helenian or South Africa institutions that might be presumed to have the task of keeping integral accounts and records of this particular case of migration. My final conclusion relating to the number of St. Helenian immigrants should, therefore, be understood as an incomplete commencement and by no means a closed, comprehensive or definitive account of the total numbers of St. Helenians who immigrated to South Africa. To accomplish the latter would require considerably more time, resources, access and dedication.

The best way forward is therefore to present known migratory events chronologically, with the intention that they serve as groundwork for the subsequent chapters' sustained conversation regarding the impact of these

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<sup>44</sup> The archival data points emphatically to 'waves' of organized/aided migration to South Africa during the last four decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These migrants would be deceased at the time of conducting my research. In my subsequent chapter I discuss the identificational effects of this migration on the descendants of these immigrants.

<sup>45</sup> The oldest participant I interviewed during my fieldwork was a 97 year old woman, Gwen Benjamin, who had immigrated to South Africa in 1941, at the age of twenty-two. Ethel Feils, another participant, is my most recent direct immigrant; she arrived in South Africa in 1948. I discuss my 'findings' from these interviews in chapter 3. Methodologically, I have solicited my respondents through genealogical societies and St. Helena heritage associations with an active patronage and who nurture and cherish their historical links to the Island of St. Helena.

migratory incidents on South African imaginaries and St. Helena identity currently being nurtured and preserved in South Africa.

## **2. A note on numbers, sources and methodological challenges**

Approximations of the number of Saints who immigrated to South African range from an incredible 22,232 supposedly occurring between 1873 and 1884,<sup>46</sup> to the more measured and circumspect 2,000 between 1870 and 1875.<sup>47</sup> It is clear from these two estimates that neither the narrow scope of period, nor the numbers of Saints give us a clear sense of their total migratory story; the former is out of all proportion generally and especially for the narrow time-frame and specific dates quoted, whereas the latter is simply an excerpt of a restricted timeframe. This is a typical problematic when studying St. Helena migratory history: information on the migration of Saints is sparsely scattered over a large spectrum of unrelated sources and much of what is written is often unverifiable.

While I may make reference to literature positing figures about the extent of St. Helena immigration, I will only include those figures that can be supported by credible evidence. My total figure, therefore, will be gleaned from primary sources I uncovered during my own archival research as well as from those authentic secondary sources citing figures from other primary sources to which I don't have direct access. Moreover, it must be conceded that there would certainly be innumerable cases of voluntary emigration of individuals and families that left no documentary trace for explication. Since I rely quite extensively on the various St. Helena newspaper periodicals from the 1800s, it creates another methodological anxiety: the individual/s or institution/s responsible for authoring these articles are mostly unnamed, and, at times, it is unclear whose anonymous voice I am reproducing. In these cases I refer to the 'voice' as that of the editors of these weekly newspapers.

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<sup>46</sup> See for example, "Descendants of Saints: St. Helena Heritage, *Mole Genealogy Blog*, <http://molegenealogy.blogspot.co.za/2011/07/descendants-of-saints-st-helena.html> (accessed October 23, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Alexander Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," *The Local Historian* 28, no.2 (May 1998): 113.

Nevertheless, my research suggests an estimated result of only 2,032 Saints having migrated to South Africa between the 1830s and 1940s. My timeframe may extend to over a century, but organised and aided emigration from St. Helena Island for South Africa was sporadic and occurred intermittently only a few times over my selected timespan. The early 1870s witnessed the most intense surge of immigration and set the scene for further waves of emigrants from the Island, who settled primarily in South African port cities. Although I have used both emigration<sup>48</sup> and immigration<sup>49</sup> sources, it must be emphasised that I have not exhausted every possible source and it is probable that I have missed some. For this very reason, the work presented in this chapter and the next will continuously be in the making, and will require constant updating as new information is uncovered.

### 3. Historical 'collapses' of the St. Helena economy

It is seldom one finds unanimity on the reasons for certain historical events, but in the case of St. Helena, its historiography presents a near consensus on the causal factors triggering mass St. Helena emigrations. For the purposes of my study, I will present, as context, the central and relatively uncontested conditions that facilitated and ignited mass emigrations of the St. Helena's labouring class.

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<sup>48</sup> The St. Helena's Government Archives has proven to be the most useful source. It's surprising that official British colonial government records located in the Island produced scant evidence of the emigration of Saints from the Island for South Africa. The best sources for emigration I have found were newspaper articles or periodicals like the *St. Helena Spectator*, the *St. Helena Advocate* and the *St. Helena Guardian* newspapers. These newspapers often contained the names and figures of emigrants departing for South Africa as well as the contextual circumstances under which these Saints emigrated. I could not yet find related South African newspapers reporting on immigration to corroborate specific cases of St. Helena emigration other than for the 1870s; this is despite the founder (Saul Solomon Jr.) of one of South Africa's first English medium newspaper, the *Cape Argus* (in 1857), being a Saint himself and a member of parliament in the 'new' post 1872 colonial administration's 'Responsible Government'. It is often assumed that the Anglican Church's record keeping is second to none. As that may well be, these records have not proven to be useful to my study and key questions around immigration. Baptism and marriage records are the Anglican Church's mainstay depository of information, and, although these records are crucial for those undertaking genealogical research, it is methodologically unwieldy and inappropriate for me to use them.

<sup>49</sup> For the latter part of my chosen period, when the Saint Helena emigration records had ground to a halt, the Union of South Africa's Office of Census and Statistic (especially post World War 1), offer the best immigration statistics. However, these statistics should also be considered askance.

Often in migration studies, these pressures are referred to as the 'push' factors – that which compels emigration from one's homeland. Insofar as these push factors relate to my work, a vast majority of the emigrating Saints settled in South Africa, where the 'pull' factors<sup>50</sup> – that which attracts and draws, if not lures, immigrants to a new home – are concomitant with the expulsive pressures experienced in the Island. I write this section upfront instead of threading it throughout my chapter since the factors that affected the mass emigration of Saints between 1938 and 1948 are explicit and consistent, remaining applicable throughout my century-long selected timeframe. My aim is that the reader will be able to contextualise various emigration events discussed throughout the next two chapters within the socio-economic and political trajectory summarised in this section.

By and large, reasons for the exodus of Saints are inextricably linked to historical fluctuations in St. Helena's miniature, impermanent and undiversified economy. St. Helena industry was never intended to develop an adequate permanent economic base to underpin a sustainable settlement that could flourish. During the approximately 170 year tenure of English East India Company's (EEIC) possession of the Island (1659-1815 and again between 1821-1834) it was valued for its strategic location as a liminal intermediary place, a 'pit-stop' en-route to the East Indies. The prior 150-years, when the Island was almost exclusively visited by the Portuguese and Spanish trading in the East, and later by Dutch traders, was no different. Being isolated, devoid of prized natural resources demanded of a modern economy and its topography rendering it uncondusive to plantation style cash crop farming, St. Helena was hardly recognised as a place with intrinsic commercial value that would attract any considerable or long-term investment.

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<sup>50</sup> This is what Lee Everette, in his attempt to formulate a generalised theory of migration, refers to as negative (minus) and positive (plus) "factor associated with the area of origin and the area of destination" that "hold and attract or repel people (immigrants)." Other factor proposed by Everette includes "intervening obstacles and personal factors." See Lee S. Everette, "A Theory of Migration," *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 50-52.



The prevailing logic of the past, which is only beginning to become unravelled in the last decade or so with concerted efforts to construct a proper tourism industry, was that the Island's size and remoteness proscribed it for serving any purpose other than that of a replenishing/re-victualing port, exclusively dedicated to servicing<sup>51</sup> laden European ships on their homebound journey from trading in the East Indies. This very premise of St. Helena integration into a global trade network had, thus, set early the Island *raison d'être* as a place of transitory utility, which underpins the precariousness of its economic history.

Despite the South-East Trade Winds ushering ships along the East Indian trade route past St. Helena, and the Island's being a 'godsend' or an "ocean oasis"<sup>52</sup> in the centre of the south Atlantic, it all came to an end in the mid-1800s. This happened first by virtue of the advent of steam engine propelled ships in the 1820s facilitating all year round trade, thus supplanting sailing ships that could only seasonally traverse the open sea. Secondly, following the EEIC's acquisition of the Port of Aden, southeast of the Red Sea, in 1838, St. Helena's days as a refreshment station drew to a gradual close. Steam engine ships, along with other industrial developments like refrigeration and canned food enabled speedier and more reliable trade and distribution between the East and Europe.<sup>53</sup> The Island's quietus from global trade was cemented with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, making travel to the East Indies via the Atlantic redundant, as traders preferred the shorter route by way of the Red Sea.<sup>54</sup>

There were several miscarried attempts between 1873 and 1973 to reinvent the St. Helena economy by establishing a coaling station on the Island for steam engine ships engaged in trade to refuel. From as early as 1832 the EEIC begun stockpiling trivial quantities of coal, imported from the United Kingdom, in a

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<sup>51</sup> These services included the replenishing returning ships with fresh water and produce, repairing damaged vessels, and often sailors and soldiers were left to convalesce on the Island should they fall ill or become injured elsewhere.

<sup>52</sup> Trevor W. Hearl, *St Helena Britannica: Studies in South Atlantic island history*, ed. Alexander Hugo Schulenburg (London: Society of Friends of St. Helena, 2013), 11. Schulenburg assembled most of Hearl's unpublished writings, edited and presents it in this published work posthumous to Hearl's life.

<sup>53</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 329.

<sup>54</sup> Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002*, 64.

designated coal yard on the Island. By the 1930s, South Africa, offering more affordable options, became the Island's primarily supplier of coal. However, imported coal was predominantly used for domestic purposes, including the refuelling of the antislavery West African Squadron during the period of the suppression of the slave trade (1840-1870s). The odd occasion would find luxury liners and trading steamers draw into the Island for refuelling, but often these erratic clients would complain bitterly about the exorbitant costs charged for coal at the Island, discouraging any prosperous and sustainable coaling station from developing in the Island.<sup>55</sup>

Although a refuelling station signalled a change in a mode of provisioning to correspond with modifications in technology and locomotion, it was a far cry from diversifying the St. Helena economy; it was much of the same and did little to transform the nature of St. Helena as a 'sail-through' port. The recurring efforts at founding a coaling station at St. Helena failed mainly due to the simple fact that the Island could be circumvented with the opening of the Suez Canal offering shorter trade routes to and from the East Indies.

Another interlocking factor responsible for St. Helena's volatile economic reality rests with its history of dependence on Britain. The EEIC's excessive levels of paternalistic subsidisation produced an artificially high and incommensurate standard of living along with expectations by the inhabitants that such standards would be sustained indefinitely.<sup>56</sup> For instance, it is well cited that toward the end of the EEIC's effective rule of the Island (between 1831-1833) its annual expenditure was no less than fifteen fold its yearly income. As the research of Schulenburg, the most thorough and prolific of the lot of scholars, demonstrates, in the year 1833-4, the EEIC's revenue was merely £6,709 compared to its £89,906 expenditure.<sup>57</sup> Gosse states, "[t]he annual expenditure of the Company on the island amounted to between eighty and ninety thousand pounds, in return

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<sup>55</sup> Hearl, *St Helena Britannica*, 293-300. Hearl's chapter 29 offers the only coherent, yet incomplete, narrative about the history and failures of the Island's authorities to establish an efficient and profitable coaling station.

<sup>56</sup> Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," 111-12.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112.



they received back three or four thousand”.<sup>58</sup> Smallman concurs with them both, but declares the income in the same range as Gosse - at “no more than £4,000”.<sup>59</sup>

Despite some minor discrepancies in how these writers interpreted the revenue of the EEIC for this period, they are all in unison about the expenditure. What these fiscal facts allude to is not necessarily maladministration, but a testament of the disproportionate decadence funded with profits generated by the Company’s trade in China and India, and justified by the strategic value the Island held for the EEIC and their officials. St. Helena was their very own “Company Island”<sup>60</sup> doubling as an elite, secluded corporate resort for the EEIC governors who earned roughly £9000 per annum, living an almost incomparably lavish lifestyle.<sup>61</sup>

This legacy of subsidisation has been perpetuated into the present. Much of the continued British support and aid granted to the Island is attributable to this history of dependence and paternalism on the part of the British imperialist structures (beginning with the EEIC and adopted, since 1834, by its government), which reluctantly accept that the responsibility for the Island’s inhabitants rests with them. On the other hand, the inhabitants have become accustomed to expecting such benefaction. Proving whether such expectations are founded on a sense of entitlement emanating from an awareness of being historically ‘wronged’ or marginalised, on plain apathy, or on historical socialisation that has now become ‘culture’, sits outside the sphere of this study. But it may very well be the convergence of all these factors.

To balance its fiscus, recent available statistics declared the annual St. Helena Grant-in-Aid, funded by British tax -payers, at £13.6 million for financial year 2014/2015. Domestic revenue, chiefly composed of remittances sent home from Saints working abroad, tourism generally, and the export of fish and coffee,

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<sup>58</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 301.

<sup>59</sup> Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002*, 60.

<sup>60</sup> To take a leaf from the title of Stephen Royle’s book - *The Company's Island: St Helena, Company Colonies and the Colonial Endeavour*.

<sup>61</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 302.

amounted to £11.7 million.<sup>62</sup> Older statistics reveal the same trend:<sup>63</sup> in 2005/6 St. Helena Island's public expenditure amounted to £15.3 million, while 55% of the Island's population was employed by local government's thirteen departments, prompting Parker to referring to the Island as primarily a "public economy".<sup>64</sup> The British taxpayer has also funded the Island's physical connectivity to the rest of the world: "[a]t the end of the 1980s the RMS (Royal Mail Ship, St. Helena) cost the British taxpayer £57 million, which now continues to run at a loss so is subsidized by the British Government."<sup>65</sup> The expense of the airport, currently under construction, and on which all contemporary hopes are pinned as the latest 'saving grace' that would ultimately set St. Helena Island on its path to self-sufficiency by boosting tourism, is estimated to cost the British public at least £250 million<sup>66</sup>, while various news agencies peg the cost at approximately £285 million.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that the local is entangled with the international economic, political and technological arenas, which are themselves innately indivisible. Alterations in modes of local government, affected by international law and broader transformations in imperial relations, also accrued to generate the inevitable exoduses of Saints. After the EEIC was forced to cede possession of the Island to the British Crown in 1834, effectively rendering the Island a Crown Colony, changes for Saints were generally negative and met with intense dissatisfaction and opprobrium. Often posited as the catalyst for St. Helena's economic decline, the first crown appointed Governor, George Middlemore, who

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<sup>62</sup> St. Helena Government, Corporate Policy and Planning Unit, *State of the Island 2015*, <http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/State-of-the-Island-2015.pdf> [accessed 20 June, 2017], p.10.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, Schulenburg, in making his case that "the island has had virtually no industry of its own" states that St. Helena received Grant-in-Aid from the British government totaling £7,92 million against a recurrent expenditure of £7,01 million in financial year 1991/2. See: Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," 111.

<sup>64</sup> Charlotte Parker, *An Island Between*, 15-16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> St. Helena Airport Project, *Saint Helena Access*, <http://www.sainthelenaaccess.com/news/faqs/> (accessed October 16, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> "St Helena airport delayed due to danger of high winds," *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 9 June 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36490496> (accessed January 15, 2017); Patrick Wintour, "St Helena islanders want compensation over unusable new £285m airport," *The Guardian*, September 21, 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/21/st-helena-islanders-compensation-285m-airport>> (accessed January 15, 2017).

assumed his duties in February 1836, was tasked with radically reducing public expenditure in the Island. Almost immediately “[g]overnment expenditure fell ... from about £100,000 annually under the Company to about £20,000 under the Crown – the Governor’s salary alone was cut from £9,000 to £2,000.”<sup>68</sup>

Cost-cutting was effectively achieved by ‘retrenching’, without the expected proportionate pension or compensation of former EEIC servants, officials and military officers. However, arguments pertaining to the effects of the transfer are more nuanced and cannot simply be generalised to have had monolithically affected all St. Helenian classes. In fact, Hearl and Schulenburg argue that the elite landowners of the EEIC were the ones who lost the greater stake by way of the depreciation of their real estate property, which they either had to sell or rent on the cheap in a “falling market” to “augment their pensions”. Furthermore, the cessation of EEIC’s monopoly, according to Hearl and Schulenburg, had spiked an increase in the new ‘open’ shipping trade, bolstered by new entrants previously prohibited from participation in the industry, and creating a new class of traders who, in turn, became the landed class of the Island.<sup>69</sup>

The significance of St. Helena’s “social revolution” in Hearl’s articulation for my study, however, hinges intimately on the effects it had on the poorer working class, who were dependent on servicing, whether as domestic servants, former slaves or public labourers, the class directly affected by the purposive transfer of the Island from the Company to the Crown. Although the labouring class hardly possessed assets to lose or devalue, they were most vulnerable. The choice for them was often limited to suffer penury or risk emigrating, and sensibly, the latter choice was more often made. In other words, the abrupt discontinuation of EEIC ‘patronage’ toward the working class of the Island had an unequivocal bearing on the mass emigration for South Africa that followed from 1838 until 1948.

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<sup>68</sup> Hearl, *St Helena Britannica*, 186.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-97 (Chapter 16).

The island's remoteness, its virtual inaccessibility and impregnability, rendered it ideal as a penal colony for the quarantine of political prisoners. To say that the Island's economy was driven by and contingent upon the presence of a military class assigned to garrison the island or guard political prisoners is by no means an overstatement. The incarceration of Napoleon (1815-1821), along with his retinue of servants and representatives is often cited as a period of "great prosperity" and the Island's "sole claim to fame".<sup>70</sup> The same arguments are advanced for the imprisonment of 4655 Boer prisoners of war between 1900-1902.<sup>71</sup> Principally, the billeting of thousands of soldiers, for various reasons from 1659 to 1907, had stimulated the bulk of the trade in the Island; soldiers (and passing sailors) constituted a core casern military market, often spending their income on banal products and services, including sexual services supplied by 'native' St. Helenian women.

In each of these cases, once these military regiments were recalled or redeployed elsewhere within the British Empire to either consolidate, expand or protect its annexed territories or business interests, the transient increases in St. Helena trade volumes ceased. Suffice to say, an economy driven by the ephemeral presence of imperially-funded military regiments to garrison the island or guard prisoners were unsustainable and any reference to these episodes as prosperous periods is contestable as it nourishes the crisis of conceiving, in a materialist sense, St. Helena as anything more than a "fortress Island" or "victualing port" servicing passing ships or as a site for incarcerating political prisoners. During the two World Wars the trade in the Island was once again temporarily bolstered, none having any permanent positive effect on the Island's economy.

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<sup>70</sup> The 1817 St. Helena 'census' declared 820 soldiers in total were deployed to guard Napoleon. At least three regiments were posted to St. Helena during Napoleon's confinement. These were: "the 53<sup>rd</sup> Foot Regiment. Later on the 66<sup>th</sup> Regiment from India and still later, in 1819, the 20<sup>th</sup> Foot Regiment." Various naval officers and distinguished civil and military guests also added to the populace. Gosse exaggerated the increased number of inhabitants as "doubling the population" during Napoleon's internment See: Gosse, *St Helena 1502 - 1938*, 270. The 1814 'census', taken before Napoleon's captivity, quantified the total population at 3,587, while the 1817 'census' declared the full number of inhabitants at 4,299, only 721 more. In 1814 there were 933 white men employed on civil or military duty, by 1818 the population of white males increased to 1,614. Roughly stated, the 53<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Regiments contributed to this 681 increase, unless, in Gosse's notion of a "doubling" he was referring to the 'free' segment of the population' as the general population in 1817 included 1'540 slaves.

<sup>71</sup> A garrisoned 1428 British troops were employed to guard the Boer prisoners of war.

Despite small-scale subsistence farming and the infinitesimal export of primary commodities such as coffee and fish, the Island was, indeed, a land without industry other than that instigated by the metropolitan government or by well-intentioned philanthropists. St. Helena's flax growing, processing and exporting business is the single industry of any substance worth mentioning. First attempted in 1874-5, the industry failed after running for six years due to the unexpected depreciation in the value of fibre and poor logistical design of the industry's farmland and processing plants. The second endeavour to establish a flax industry begun in earnest in 1907, eventually running its course by the late 1960s, when it was forced to close after thriving during the two World Wars. The industry lasted longer than any on account of its flax being supplied to the Island's single major client, the British Post Office. Apparently, the St. Helena flax industry's collapse can be attributed to the British Post Office substituting flax for a synthetic fibre used to bind stacks of letters.<sup>72</sup>

Two philanthropic ventures register in St. Helena's economic history, like the fortuitous failure of the fishing and canning business sponsored by a "Mr. A. Mosely, CMG" in 1909. The said philanthropist invested considerable capital into the venture to catch, can and export tinned mackerel, a fish available in abundant quantities around St. Helena Island. Yet, in the uncanniest of circumstances, the regular mackerel run did not happen for ten months after opening, forcing the factory to close. More or less during the same time (1907) 'native' St. Helenian women were trained in the productive (and gendered) art of lace making and sold their wares to the passengers of passing ships. Single woman with children and no "bread-winner" – a common feature in the Island, for imperial soldiers and sailors who impregnated 'native' women generally abjured their responsibilities - were the most vulnerable. The lace-making business was vested with an expert, paid for six months from the "Imperial Treasury" the sum of £170, to train St. Helenian women in lace making and needlework. Lace-making provided a pittance for these women, so it was of no great loss when the

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<sup>72</sup> Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002*, 65.



endeavour frayed to tatters in 1917 with the closure of a formal lace-making school.

Another squandered opportunity in St. Helena's economic history was the inability of Island's authorities and its entrepreneurial class to profit from the thriving whaling industry practiced around its waters. Instead the whaling trade was intercepted and the south Atlantic waters thoroughly exploited by American fishing enterprises, who were able to do so on the back of a sizable market resting on a domestic demand for whale derivative products. Baleen (or whalebone) - food strainers in the upper jaw of a whale's mouth - was demanded in the production of prestigious women's clothing, but more importantly whale blubber and spermaceti, harvested from the whales' head cavities, were extracted and distilled into whale oil.

This delicate oil was used to make soap, as a lubricant in industrial machinery and fine technological products, like watches, and as lamp oil for illumination. Candles were manufactured from the waxier by-product after the extraction of whale oil. The demand for products derived from whaling lasted longer in rural America considering the switch to fossil fuel energy like coal, kerosene or petroleum came later than it did in Britain and urban America. Furthermore, the American whalers business models, in comparison to English enterprises, were more fluid and streamlined, obviating bureaucratic structures, which was especially effective when it came to raising capital for whaling ventures.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, as discussed in chapter one, at the end of the antislavery 'industry's' self-termination on the grounds of its success in suppressing the Atlantic slave trade, the Island fell into its all-too-familiar depressed economic state. This transient 'economic period' revolved around a few locals provisioning supplementary goods, otherwise not supplied by the government (for instance, 'entertainment' and accommodation), to the Royal Navy's West African Squadron stationed at the Island. Administering and operating the African Depot required labour, which provided limited employment to the working class. Therefore, the closure of the

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<sup>73</sup> Hearl, *St Helena Britannica*, 89-110 (Chapter 7).

African Depot, and to a far lesser extent the cessation of the Vice-Admiralty Court, put many local Saints temporarily employed out of work. Given the stemming of substantial public expenditure routed toward the suppression of the slave trade, including all associated fringe and sundry functions between 1840 and the mid 1860s, it is spurious to posit such a period, contingent on the presence of the Royal Navy, a Vice-Admiralty Court or the African Depot, as an economic boom.

Considering that the Island was only fully settled by 1811<sup>74</sup>, and that merely twenty-seven years later large constituents of its population were compelled to emigrate in mass, speaks volumes to the impermanence of a St. Helena settlement and the land's inability to support a stable settlement without exorbitant subsidisation from the British government. Although there certainly are cases where Saints emigrated for Ascension Island, Britain<sup>75</sup> and other lands within the ambit of the commonwealth, the vast majority of the labouring class headed for South African port cities to work as artisans, boatmen, general labourers, miners, and in the case of women, as domestic servants. Since the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa, as the closest, larger and younger colony, offered securer job opportunities and employment prospects owing to its mineral discoveries from the late 1860s. It was sensible that the majority of the migrant Saints eventually settled in either of the two British colonies in South Africa, especially within its port cities of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban. Those who entered via Port Nolloth to work in the copper mines settled in the Northern Cape for a while, but after the closure of the Concordia copper mines, many of them too made their way to one or other of the English port cities.

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<sup>74</sup> An increased need for agricultural labour occurred during the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when victualing services rendered to passing shipping reached a zenith. However, the 1793 legislation prohibited the importation of slaves into British territories. The challenge was resolved with the importation of approximately 400-500 Chinese indentured labourers, adding to the size of the populace and to the genetic admixture of the Island. See: Gosse, *St. Helena 1502 – 1938*, 231 & 245-46; and Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," 112.

<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Parker, "An Island Between," 25; Daniel Yon, 'Contested Britishness: The case of one hundred agricultural workers from St. Helena in post-war rural England', a paper presented at the *British World Conference*, University of Cape Town (January 2002). Also see Yon's 2008 film, *One Hundred Men* (South Atlantic World Productions); and Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002*, 66.

Pervading St. Helena historiography are statements and references to its economic 'declines' or 'collapses', but from the vantage point of the present, this may be misarticulating the very fact that St. Helena was never meant to be a place of permanence. The historical treatment of the Island as a place of transitory utility disenabled the Island from becoming a self-sustaining colony at first, and later an independent Island state. Unlike other Islands in the Atlantic, St. Helena's seclusion in the ocean's mid-south, its distance from continental land masses or clusters of productive Islands, along with the Island's lack of natural resources and a landscape unconducive to commercial farming, does not justify or attract private investment for the Island.

St. Helena is the remotest and tiniest of places as well as the least inhabited in relation to the Grant-in-Aid it receives from its metropolitan government annually. Its rather late encounter (1502) and integration into global economics, coupled with a lack of an autochthonous population, renders the Island somewhat devoid of political vitality, save for the inhabitants' objections to the revoking of their British citizenship in 1981 and the Island's working class' historical petitioning of its local government for aided emigration. To this day, the Island remains dependent on subsidies from the British public coffers allocated to run local government departments that employ a majority of the adult population of approximately 4500 inhabitants. It should, therefore, not be unanticipated, given all the compounding factors mentioned above, when the Island's minor workforce is faced with the interminable compulsion to emigrate or sojourn in other lands.

#### **4. Military men who paved the way for immigrants to the Cape**

Four decades prior to the first 1838-1841 migration period, which I discuss immediately below, the British imperial relations between the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena had already been hitched with the loaning of St. Helena military men to aid the British capture of the Cape. There are two cases of St. Helena-based regiments being called upon to serve the Crown in battles between



the British and the Dutch at the Cape in 1795 and 1806. Notwithstanding the paucity of evidence for St. Helena settlement in the Cape prior to 1838, what can be ascertained is the imperial military rapport between the two places that at least enabled two successful British invasions of the Cape of Good Hope.

Given St. Helena Island had been in the physical possession of the British since 1659 - officiated during the English interregnum period by Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell's Charter to the EEI Company in 1657 and again by Royal Charter in 1661<sup>76</sup> after the British monarchy's restoration - it is one of England's oldest colonies, external to its even older colonies in the Americas. Coupled with this fact of early colonisation (first through fortification and later entrenched by settlement) and considering its closer proximity to Africa's west coast, the Island, logically, served as a launch pad for confrontation with the Dutch at the Cape, first in 1795.

When, in January 1795, the first French revolutionary State wrested and proclaimed the former Republic of the United Netherlands as its vassal Batavian (sister) Republic, the fate of the Cape (and later South Africa) was to alter. European colonialism and settlement meant that Europe's being turned inside out by the French Revolution's affront to Europe's monarchical tradition, its liberal and popular ideological appeal, and French military might, had serious implications for all the European states and their colonies elsewhere.

The British, rendered anxious by the new Franco-Dutch political arrangement, feared a potential occupation by the suzerain French, via its Dutch vassal, of the Cape of Good Hope. They were apprehensive such an occupation could lead to French domination of the East Indian trade routes, its monopolisation of established Dutch trade relations in East India, whilst also spreading liberal French political ideology to the colonised world. The British responded with a 'pre-emptive strike', and started devising a plan to capture the Cape from the Dutch before the French could use the strategically important Cape of Good Hope to fulfil its own interest and disrupt British trade relations in the East. Britain

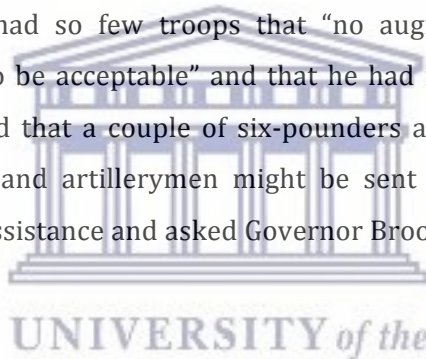
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<sup>76</sup> Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," 109.

responded by dispatching military contingents to the Cape in April 1795, under the command of Vice-Admiral George Elphinstone, Commodore John Blankett and General Craig, and a month later, in May 1795, dispatched a larger army under the command of General Alured Clarke.

The British confrontation at the Cape did not go as planned; they were seriously frustrated by a determined Dutch militia, who possibly anticipated such a British stratagem, and temporarily managed to forestall British usurpation of the Cape. As early as the beginning of the conflict, Vice-Admiral Elphinstone was forced to seek military aid from his nearest military comrades, and St. Helena was his closest support base. As emphasised by Gosse,

General Craig's little army was held up by the Dutch militia at Muizenberg, and he wrote to say that he had so few troops that "no augmentation could be so inconsiderable as not to be acceptable" and that he had not a single gun nor an artilleryman and begged that a couple of six-pounders and a howitzer with the necessary ammunition and artillerymen might be sent him. The Admiral also begged for immediate assistance and asked Governor Brooke to send him a supply of silver (money).<sup>77</sup>



Reasons, in particular, for General Craig and Vice Admiral Elphinstone's being ill-prepared to fight the Dutch (comprising largely of settler militia rather than professional soldiers) leads me to speculate that they underestimated the resolve of the Dutch at the Cape and that their small army and limited ammunition<sup>78</sup> may not have been intended for full scale military engagement with the Dutch; possibly, the original plan was for Elphinstone and company to negotiate Dutch capitulation, and if that failed, to await the arrival of reinforcements before engaging in direct conflict with the Dutch.

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<sup>77</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 - 1938*, 223. Gosse does not reference his source, but it appears he is referencing and citing from a letter General Craig addressed directly to the then Governor of St. Helena, Colonel Robert Brooke.

<sup>78</sup> For the sake of expediency, Admiral Elphinstone and General Craig was sent ahead to secure the Cape (preferably via negotiations) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1795, but the larger, more equipped army was only dispatched from England on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1795 (more than a month after Elphinstone and Craig's departure).

Moreover, physical conflict followed roughly a month after unsuccessful negotiation between the English and the Dutch at the Cape; this may have also allowed the latter to plan a more effective resistance to the British invasion. Regardless of all these justified possibilities, it can be asserted, however, that the St. Helena regiment's arrival - after a desperate request by the suppliant Admiral George Elphinstone to which the Island's Governor Brooke assented to aid the floundering British troops at the Cape of Good Hope - was indispensable for ensuring a decisive British victory against the Dutch at the battle of Muizenberg in 1795. The contribution of the St. Helena regiment is unequivocal and should not be understated:

Not a moment was lost in putting on board the *Arniston* ten pieces of field ordnance, two howitzers, a complete company of artillery and three of the infantry, amounting in all to eleven officers, four hundred men, a supply of ammunition and salt provisions, and fifteen thousand pounds of cash.<sup>79</sup>

While being cognisant of Gosse's encomiastic tone and jingoistic slant in favour of Governor Brooke's "zeal and alacrity", it does not discount the fact that the St. Helena Governor's military and material support, to augment and constitute the larger contingent of British forces that would arrive at the Cape later, contributed to British military victory at the Cape<sup>80</sup>. Governor Brooke was spared neither praise nor applause. Firstly, the British Secretary of State for War, Henry Dundas, offered his gratitude on behalf of the Crown:

... I obey his Majesty's commands in communicating to you ... his Majesty's perfect approbation of the zeal and alacrity you have manifested on every occurrence interesting to this country, in the course of war, and particularly of your judicious and spirited proceedings since you have received the intelligence of the invasion of the United Provinces by the enemy... and your exertion in forwarding to Admiral Sir George Keith Elphinstone and General Craig, at the Cape, the succours

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<sup>79</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 223.

<sup>80</sup> The St. Helena *Arniston* despatched by Governor Brooke in July 1795 arrived at the Cape on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1795 with the desperately needed provisions to relieve the Vice-Admiral's woes. A further St. Helena infantry unit arrived with General Clarke on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1795.

of money, men, ordnance and stores, at a time when a speedy supply of those article was become so essentially necessary, ...<sup>81</sup>

Secondly, Admiral, Sir George Keith Elphinstone, too afforded Governor Robert Brooke his note of appreciation, saying that the Dutch at the Cape surrendered “thanks to Gov. Brooke, Capt. Seale and officers and men of the St. Helena corps”.<sup>82</sup>

St. Helena military support at the battle of Blaauwberg in 1806 (the second British invasion of the Cape) was far less impressive. Although it bolstered the overall British military force at the Cape, the St. Helena troops were accused of ill discipline and insubordination; this incident is considered one of the blunders and an embarrassing moment in St. Helena imperial history. However, the St. Helena based troops and militia did play a role in seizing the Cape and this date (1806), inaugurated by the second British triumph over the Dutch, signals the official moment the English arrogated the Cape. It is with the advent of British seizure of the Cape that the migratory nexus between South African and St. Helena Island is initiated, coalescing the two places indefinitely.

These cases of the peculiar participation of the St. Helena Corps in the double British triumph at the Cape is generally subsumed under the grander imperial narrative of British colonial conquest and victory. Of specific significance, however, is the acknowledgement that although the Island of St. Helena may be a distinctive place, often presented with a unique and distinctive history, there should be no doubt of the Island’s participation and contribution in the African expansion of the late British Empire.

## **5. Brokered bodies: the first St. Helena exodus**

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from Henry Dundas to Robert Brooke, 30 October 1795. Cited in Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, pp.223-224.

<sup>82</sup>Letter from George Keith Elphinstone to Robert Brooke, 1795 (nd). Cited in Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 224.

St. Helena's first mass emigration for South Africa – or anywhere else for that matter - is presented by Gosse to have occurred in 1838, shortly after ownership of St. Helena Island has effectively passed for the second time<sup>83</sup> from the English East Indian Company (EEIC) to the Crown (the favoured metonym for British Monarch/Sovereign) in 1834. This transfer, or rather the intra-imperial appropriation of the Island from the Company by the Crown, appears to be the catalyst for the first documented exodus of St. Helenians from the Island to the Cape of Good Hope.

This moment in St. Helena history – hitherto the Island was considered by the EEIC to be of strategic importance as a victualing port that enable effective trade with in the East Indies - is often cited as the birth of all the Islanders' contemporary woes, manifesting as economic instability, impermanent habitation and an interminable migratory exodus<sup>84</sup>. By virtue of its effect, the British parliamentary act known as either the Charter Act of 1833, The Government of India Act 1833 or The St. Helena Act 1833, represents a new chapter in imperial relations between Company and the Crown, as well as between the Islanders and their British metropole.

Its purpose - “An Act for effecting an Arrangement with the East India Company, and for the better Government of His Majesty's Indian Territories”<sup>85</sup> - produced ramifications that were felt by the EEIC and the inhabitants of St. Helena, who until then enjoyed the generous patronage of the EEIC. The Company effectively

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<sup>83</sup> The colony first passed temporarily to the Crown between 1815-1821 when Napoleon Bonaparte was incarcerated in the Island. The British government wisely assumed control of the Island, having the means and authority to fortify defenses with additional troops and warships during this period to prevent any possibility of a French attempt to rescue Napoleon. Although this period is considered by some scholars to have produced increased economic activity in the form of human traffic, investment, and trade, the subsequent period of diminished economic activity did not necessarily result in immigration as a corollary of increased unemployment. St. Helenians may have enjoyed a relative increase in general prosperity due to increases in trade and employment opportunities during Napoleon's incarceration, but the ephemerality of the period did not produced a permanent effect on the St. Helena economy and the exodus of people was principally the departure of troops intended to be stationed there on a temporary basis anyway.

<sup>84</sup> Gosse may be the first to refer to this moment as ill-fated for the inhabitants of the Island, but he is not the only one. For instance, other scholars, like Schulenburg, Smallman and Pearson, who I reference in this chapter, make this same consistent point.

<sup>85</sup> Taken from the title of the Act I reference below.

transitioned from a commercial to a political-administrative body - where many (but not all) of its servants and officials became employees of the Crown while the Company's shareholders continued to receive their annual dividends for the proceeding forty years. Although the Government of India Act 1915 (Chapter 61) repealed all the previous 1833 sectional acts related to St. Helena Island (sections 1-111 and 113-117), one section in particular (section 112) remains in effect to this today:

**112 Saint Helena vested in the crown.**

The island of St 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, shall be vested in his Majesty, and the said island shall be governed by such orders as his Majesty in council shall from time to time issue in that behalf.<sup>86</sup>

The change in status and ownership of St. Helena to a Crown Colony and the cost-cutting procedure that ensued may have been responsible for the high levels of under- and unemployment, but it must be understood as a ripple effect of a broader imperial restructuring of other major transitions in macroeconomics, labour relations, governance and to modern industrial modes of production developing in Britain. The Government of India Act was one such manifestation of economic overhaul that profoundly altered the role and purpose of St. Helena Island in British imperial history.

In 1836, when the first Crown appointed Governor Major General George Middlemore effectively assumed his duties, he began to reduce government expenditure in the Island. St. Helena residents had become accustomed to an unusually (and some would argue, 'unjustifiably') high standard of living afforded by the hefty subsidisations of their benefactor, the English East India Company (EEIC), up until the Island became a crown colony.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> British National Archives, Legislation.gov.uk. *St. Helena Act 1833*, Chapter 85 3 and 4 Will 4. (Section 112), <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Will4/3-4/85>, (accessed January 14, 2017).

<sup>87</sup> Schulenburg, "St. Helena: British local history in the context of empire," 111-112.



Gosse, being rather sympathetic to the way the EEI Company had run the Island, all the while expressing, quite disparagingly, the manner the Crown managed the Island, had this to say:

To such bitter straits were the inhabitants reduced that in 1838 many whole families as well as about one hundred and ten other persons, consisting principally of young men, emigrated to the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>88</sup>

Gosse's work is considered canonical and the most comprehensive account of St. Helena historiography, but by contemporary standards, his work is vulnerable to intense critique since most of what he asserts in his book is largely unreferenced narrative. This problematic extends to his writing on St. Helena emigration for the Cape (a rather inconsequential theme subsumed by the vastness of his scope): it is unclear what sources he had consulted, nor is apparent whether he drew from oral history or simply wrote what had come to be accepted as 'general knowledge' at the time he wrote his book.

Despite Gosse's neglect in referencing his sources, he may in fact be referring to letters sent by Governor Middlemore to the Secretary of State for Colonies. For instance, in July 1839 Middlemore addressed a letter entitled "Recapitulation of the Island Population" to the Colonial Secretary:

The census was taken in July 1839 at which time exclusive of the children the Island population constituted 4'205. Emigration to a considerable extent had taken place from 1836 to the above date. Since that period to the 30<sup>th</sup> of Sept 1841 218 have emigrated, principally of the Colored Classes. The population of the Island may therefore be estimated as follows.

1839	_____	4205
Deduct		
Emigrated	218	
Deaths	190	_____ 408
		3797 [sic] <sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Gosse, *St Helena 1502 – 1938*, 303.

Under the rubric of a census report, this imperial epistle may well be the first official communiqué addressing St. Helena emigration. It is not stated in this particular letter where these Saints had emigrated. But from a previous letter, also sent by Middlemore to the Colonial Secretary of State in August 1838, he states that he had received

... a memorial which has been addressed to me by Mr Ed Banks, late an uncovenanted servant of the East India Company upon the Establishment and now a pensioner of Her Majesty's Government (at £10 per annum) together with several testimonials of the most satisfactory nature. As Mr Banks had no means of supporting his family here he has removed to the Cape of Good Hope in the expectation of obtaining some employment there [...] the sum of £40 has been paid to Mr Banks to enable him to procure his passage.<sup>90</sup>

A few pertinent observations can be drawn from Middlemore's August 1838 letter: firstly, that there had indeed been a depressed economic state in the Island, which resulted in high levels of unemployment, even amongst respectable servants of the then decommissioned EEIC; secondly, by as early as the mid-1830s, some limited petitioning by inhabitants of the Island - particularly from those of the poorer "colored"<sup>91</sup> class - for government succour to enable them to emigrate, had already been underway; and thirdly, it appears the Cape of Good Hope, as the closest colonial continental land mass, was the preferred destination for emigrants. It is also clear that Mr Banks and his family had received government aid that enabled them to emigrate, but most of the inhabitants constituting the initial cohorts of emigrants were not as fortunate as Mr Banks and his family.

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<sup>89</sup> Governor General Major George Middlemore to the Colonial Secretary of State, 19 November 1841, *Despatches to Secretary of State, 1837-1842*, pp. 264-65. Obtained from the St. Helena Government Archive.

<sup>90</sup> Middlemore to Colonial Secretary of State, August 1838, *Despatches to Secretary of State, 1837-1842*, p.5. Obtained from the St. Helena Government Archive.

<sup>91</sup> Despite my discomfort in reproducing these racial labels throughout this chapter, I find it useful in articulating my analysis, especially in response to the manner in which the colonial and apartheid administration in both St. Helena and South Africa appropriated the term. I will approach the racial label 'white', to denote those of European descent, in the same way.



From a Government Proclamation published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1839<sup>92</sup> (see document image 3 in the appendix) it can be ascertained that St. Helenians who had previously emigrated for the Cape of Good Hope may not have found their expectations met, nor the favourable economic and labour relations they had hoped for. The purpose of this particular proclamation was for the local St. Helena based Colonial Secretary to offer a caveat to future emigrants to be more conscientious of the forms of contractual labour agreements they enter into with 'labour brokers' in the Island and potential employers in South Africa.

Exactly ten months later, the local Colonial Secretary wrote a letter to his superior, Governor Middlemore, asserting:

I have the honor to inform your Excellency that as the various persons, who had left that Colony for the Cape of Good Hope by the 'Munster Lass', are agreeably to regulation obliged to apply to one for a permit to leave the Island. I have been generally in the habit to ask them whether they were proceeding under any engagement, with few exceptions, they have led me to understand, they had entered into agreements with JW. Baron the master of the 'Munster Lass', to leave individuals at the Cape for a term of years.<sup>93</sup>

The following can be inferred from the Colonial Secretary's letter and the preceding Proclamation: first, the Governor and his staff had begun displaying a trifling measure of interest in the terms under which emigrants departed the Island for the Cape; secondly, however, this concern did not translate into any urgent intervention on the part of the government to manage labour speculators the likes of JW Baron; lastly, and perhaps most salient, is the observation that the majority of the initial St. Helena emigrants possessed neither the personal means nor yet the government support required to emigrate. The majority felt compelled to enter into unfavourable labour contracts, which in a practical sense meant indentureship to secure their passages to the Cape of Good Hope.

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<sup>92</sup> St. Helena *Proclamations 1835-1898*, p.102. Obtained from the St. Helena Government Archive.

<sup>93</sup> W.H Seale, Colonial Secretary at St. Helena, to Governor Middlemore, 25 March 1840, *Colonial Secretary's Entry Book Out-Letters 1839-40*, pp. 247-48.

Although it cannot be ascertained from the current evidence whether or not these emigrants understood the terms of the employment agreements they entered into, what we do know is that the emigrants were dissatisfied enough to motivate other inhabitants of the Island (who probably considered emigrating themselves but were discouraged after they had learned about the experiences of their forerunners) to request a government inquiry into the matter. By 1841, representing the end of the first period seeing 218 St. Helenians emigrating for the Cape, it appears many of these emigrants were lured to the Cape with promises of better economic security as free labourers by labour speculators based in St. Helena Island, only to find themselves indentured as servants to strangers who purchased labour contracts from these very speculators, who, in turn, profited from re-selling these contracts.

Such forms of exploitative contractual agreements to settle debts - incurred to enable passage - with labour are not anachronistic, but rather a standard manner for the working classes to ensure carriage to lands deemed to offer better economic prospects. Furthermore, the master-servant relations in the Cape were in their infancy after slavery had just been abolished five years prior to the Proclamation. Apprenticeships for most former slaves had likewise only just ended the year before. This first St. Helena migratory period signals the enduring feature of labour brokerage appearing under various guises throughout the St. Helena emigration history, which is simultaneously a protracted and perpetual case of reconfiguring and shifting labour within the British Empire.

## **6. Settler Saints: continuous St. Helena emigration**

### **6.1. 'Begging petitions' to aid St. Helenian 'pauper emigration' for South Africa (and elsewhere)**

More than a decade after the close of the first migratory period, the population of the Island had risen to approximately 6,000 inhabitants.<sup>94</sup> The relief on public

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<sup>94</sup> Governor Colonel Thomas Gore Browne to Colonial Secretary of State, *Despatches to England* 1852, p.10.

coffers and the 'economic equilibrium' that had ensued from the initial emigration was transient. Again, public petitions by inhabitants directed at government to permit and aid emigration emerged, and from 1852 a new pattern of organised and direct mass petitioning begun in the Island. On the 26<sup>th</sup> August 1852 "[o]ne of the largest Meetings ever held in St. Helena took place at the Victoria Tavern...to take into consideration the propriety of bringing the subject of Emigration formally to the notice of the Colonial Government."<sup>95</sup>

The 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1852 meeting marked a significant historic moment for the activism of the labouring 'class' of St. Helena:

The meeting was called at a few hours' notice, and was attended by nearly two hundred of the working classes (to deliberate over) the almost hopeless state of destitution existing amongst the labouring classes, and invite the discussion of the subject with a view to elucidate the opinion of the meeting as to the desirability of Emigration.<sup>96</sup>

It was also commented about the meeting that, "it has never been our lot to witness more unanimity, order and decorum, at any assemblage of persons met together for any object in St. Helena."<sup>97</sup> The meeting concluded with a few pivotal outcomes and suggestions for immediate action. The vast majority of the attendees believed and argued that the economic state in the Island was indeed dire and that they had little hope for its improvement or recovery. Manifested by 174 petitioners signing a "memorial", they lobbied for emigration as an immediate remedy. Thereafter, a deputation was elected to present the memorandum of concerns and recommendations to the Governor. The "memorialists" were explicit that "[i]t mattered very little to those assembled what Colony they were sent to, provided they could obtain employment, the want of which, in St. Helena, is now being severely felt."<sup>98</sup> Yet, contradictorily,

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<sup>95</sup> *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 2, 1852, p.35.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

they made sure to present their preferred destinations for emigration as Natal or Australia.<sup>99</sup>

This plenary of the poor was the first deliberate and organised attempt to convince the Colonial Government “that the Island was in a most impoverished condition, and that Emigration was the only remedy to save hundreds from starvation.”<sup>100</sup> Evident from the memorandum<sup>101</sup> (document image 4 in the appendix), the key purpose of the petitioners was to first garner the support of Governor Browne and to use the local government as its conduit through which to channel its concerns and lobby the “Home Government” for aid to emigrate.

It is perhaps opportune here to comment that this type of well organised petitioning, in which a relatively large segment of a working population mobilised, was precocious and unusual for its time within British colonial territories. What it may suggest - other than petitioning being a prudent and effective response to a dire economic situation, and a valid mode of appeal to those who have the power to effect change - is a recognition of the confidence the working class possessed and displayed in lobbying their local government. In holding their local governor to account and to the ideals of the metropolitan government, pressuring it to take responsibility for its distant subjects, the St. Helena petitioners constructed and demonstrated their sense of self-worth and respect, realising in themselves the power to perform their agency and their insistence in being considered dignified subjects.

Unexpectedly though, Governor Browne responded to the petition with a curt, yet strong, reply:

Gentlemen,

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<sup>99</sup> *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 2, 1852, p.35.

<sup>100</sup> *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 2, 1852, p.35.

<sup>101</sup> A Memorandum addressed by 174 petitioners to Governor Browne. Reprinted in the *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 9, 1852, p.37. Consult document image 4 in the appendix.

I would with pleasure forward the Memorial you have presented to me, but I would not recommend its prayer to the consideration of the Home Government, on account of the Poor Rate of the Island being only 15s. in the £100.

I have no doubt that the current depressed state of the Labour Market of the Island is temporary; but if you can furnish me with the records of any cases of actual starvation existing on the Island, I will forward them.

I advise you to call another meeting to ascertain what security you can give for the payment of your passage money, and I will receive you again on Monday at 2 o'clock.<sup>102</sup>

Governor Browne was even more direct and detailed in his letter to Secretary of State, John Pakington:

Sir,

I have the honor to forward the accompanying petition and letter from certain inhabitants longing for assistance to enable them to emigrate. 2. I have not doubt that individual cases of distress do exist in the Island, but I have no reason to believe that it prevails to any past extent. 3. The staple food of the lower orders is rice and fish, the former of which averages 1½ pence per pound and the latter is caught with lines in [...] abundance. 4. Mechanics earn from 3/6d (3 shillings, 6 pence) to 6/6d per diem and laborers from 1/1d to 2/ per diem – the poor rate is sixteen shillings in the hundred declared value. 6. (sic) The population amounts to about 6000 persons, but if the land were properly cultivated there would be ample employment for many more. On the other hand the high price of labor is the alleged cause of neglected or indifferent cultivation. 7. Many of the petitioners are not fitted for emigration from age or infirmity, others would doubtless succeed, but I cannot learn that any sober industrious man would be long without employment in this Island unless he demanded unreasonable wages.<sup>103</sup>

Notably, the 1852 petition expressed the ardent effort undertaken by the majority of the St. Helena Island's labouring and mechanic 'classes' to emigrate

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<sup>102</sup> Governor Browne's response to the petitioners. Reprinted in the *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 9, 1852, p.37.

<sup>103</sup> Governor Colonel Thomas Gore Browne to Colonial Secretary of State, John Pakington (nd), *Despatches to England 1852*, pp.9-10.

elsewhere within the empire in search of secure employment and better economic prospects. But Governor Browne did not believe that emigration was the principal solution to redundant labour or the depressed employment situation in the Island. He may have forwarded the petition to the Colonial Secretary of State, but he did not sanction or support the petitioners' request. More than just withholding his recommendation, so beseeched by the petitioners, he felt the need to elucidate his stance on the matter to the Colonial Secretary of State, the petitioners in particular, and the inhabitants of St. Helena generally.

As can be gleaned from his letter to the Colonial Secretary of State, Governor Browne was sceptical of petitioners' claims of impoverishment: he argued that the employed labourers of the Island earned wages beyond the means of the Island and that they were not food insecure. He went as far as to attribute the low rate of employment to the high wage demands made by the working class. Furthermore, Browne made the case that on account of the Poor Rate<sup>104</sup> in the Island, he could not justify local government expense or a request to the home government to fund emigration, implying that such costs can only be paid from the limited budget dedicated to welfare. Instead, he deflected the responsibility of the cost of potential emigration to the petitioners, asking them what collateral they could offer for the costs of emigration, and, in turn, exposing potential emigrants to possible conditions of indentureship.

Moreover, it is evident Governor Browne considered emigration an inferior solution to that of kindling a local agricultural industry to thoroughly exploit arable land, which he believed would absorb excess labour as well as provide greater food security for the poor. He found the labouring class's general aversion to performing low-earning agricultural labour, for what he considered a fair wage, problematic.<sup>105</sup> Lastly, Browne thought a rather large number of the petitioners were unfit for emigration on account of many being too old or ailing.

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<sup>104</sup> A local parish tax charged on property and used for the relief of the poor.

<sup>105</sup> This is despite the structural legacies of slavery that ended just two decades earlier, which meant the majority of the 'coloured' working 'class' - themselves a majority on the island - did not own sufficient farmland to profit from.



Browne's argument reveals his underlying sentiment: that he may have considered the petitioners more opportunistic than he would have liked.

On the other hand, the petitioners, perplexed by the governor's parsimony and dismissiveness, felt he had undermined the severity of their indigence and framed his response as a "political enigma." Referring to discussions between the governor and the deputation, the petitioners also found his response - despite governor Browne's experience with "Pauper Emigration" in Scotland and Ireland - dubious at best. The petitioners questioned the governor's unsophisticated solution that their vulnerable economic position could be resolved through applying for relief from the local parish. The petitioners were critical of such 'relief', which they called nothing more than a "box a deal at contract prices"<sup>106</sup>, suggesting that the parish would profit from their indigence by selling them basic subsistence goods on credit at inflated prices.

The evidentiary trail runs cold here and it cannot at this stage be determined what the final outcome of the 1852 petition was. It appears, however, that the petitioners were largely unsuccessful with their plan to emigrate. Instead, redundant labour seems to have been absorbed by large public initiatives to "rebuil[d] nearly the whole of the public buildings in Jamestown ... with stone, iron and teakwood" which had been destroyed by "termites and white ants..."<sup>107</sup> borne by and introduced to the Island by the condemned Brazilian slavers. This probability is corroborated in an article published on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1868 - sixteen years after the first mass petition - in which the editor of the *St. Helena Spectator* states:

[t]he last ten years have been exceptional ones as to the amount of labour in the market, begetting 'good times' for the artisan. For within that period, the almost entire renovation of the lower half of Jamestown has taken place; the ravages of the white ant since the period of its introduction, have during the past ten years been (it is hoped) effectually remedied.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 9, 1852, p.37.

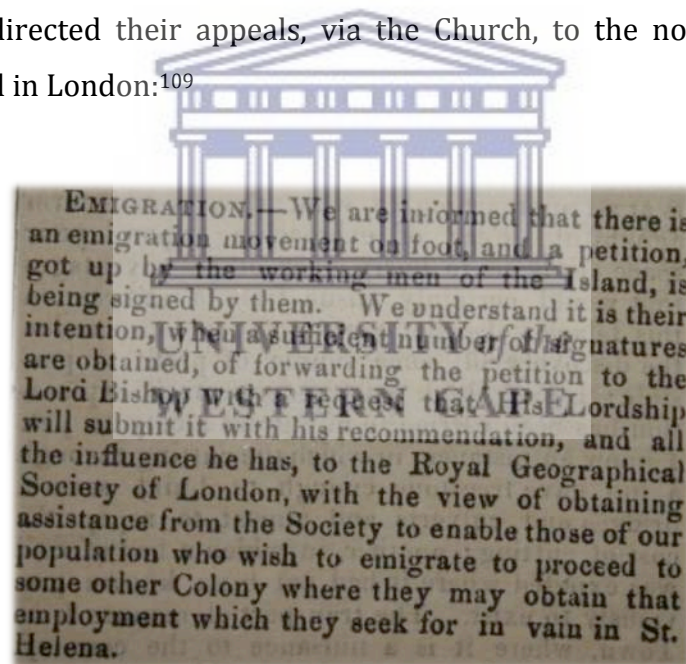
<sup>107</sup> Gosse, *St. Helena 1502-1938*, 324.

<sup>108</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, March 14, 1868, p.65.

The 1852 interlocution between the Governor Browne and the organised labouring class is the start of a protracted dialectic resulting from the St. Helena government's efforts to enact the mandate to reduce public expenditure while securing labour in the Island. In addition, the governor's job was further complicated by being simultaneously compelled to consider the reality of the lived experience of the working class. To emigrate or not to emigrate appears to remain the prevailing question for the latter half of the nineteenth century.

## 6.2. Second-wave emigration lobbyists

The impulse to lobby for assistance to emigrate only resurfaced again in 1868. However, this time the supplicants – processing the knowledge of past experience - directed their appeals, via the Church, to the non-governmental societies based in London:<sup>109</sup>



**Figure 1:** A notice declaring the intent of pro-emigration petitioners to garner the support of the local Bishop to their cause.

A lengthy letter, written by an articulate labourer-mechanic, in which he simply refers to himself as “emigrant”, was published in the *St. Helena Spectator* on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1868. In it he makes a compelling case for aided emigration, castigating the government for replacing native skilled labourers (referred to as

<sup>109</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, February 29, 1868, np.

mechanics) formerly employed by the Island's Royal Engineer and the Civil Engineering Departments, with "a company of Sappers".<sup>110</sup> After a protracted grievance about the lack of employment opportunities in the Island, the working class having larger than usual families to support, the inheritable problem of idle unproductive youth and the general indebtedness of the working class to traders and shop owners, 'Emigrant' declared:

Why I say EMIGRATE! There is land enough in the world, and plenty of places to which we can go and obtain a good living, if we could only reach them. Places already colonized and others to be inhabitant; but how to get there is the difficulty, as the only capital we have is our labour. This capital would be turned to good account in other lands, whereas here it is dormant.<sup>111</sup>

'Emigrant', alluding to the sentiment of the St. Helena working class - one that was not reflective of colonialism's effects on the colonised majority in Africa - considered himself a poor labouring British subject resolved on securing a greater relative stake within the Empire's expanding borders. Forthwith, it will become evident throughout the rest of my findings that for the successive St. Helena petitioners, who were acquiescent and well acculturated British labouring subjects (and predominantly of the 'coloured' class), it was a matter of localised class interest divested of any form of critique of colonialism. They recognised in imperial expansion their opportunity for class mobility and better economic prospects as self-subjecting Britons who sought to escape the vagaries of the stifling economy in St. Helena, augmented by the Island's remoteness.

A week after 'Emigrant's' letter, the editor of the *St. Helena Spectator* published his response saying that, indeed, skilled labour supply exceeded employment demands in the Island. He agreed that emigration was a viable plan in response to dwindling employment rate in the Island, but he lamented the loss of "the young, the brave and the strong" while leaving behind a 'worthless' class of dependants.<sup>112</sup> It was even suggested, in an article published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>110</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, March 7, 1868, p.64.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, March 14, 1868, p.65.

March 1868, the possibility of labourers emigrating to East Africa, for “Dr Livingstone, who, in 1853, ascended the Zambezi [...] describes the country bordering the Zambezi as fruitful.”<sup>113</sup>

However, of particular interest is ‘Emigrant’s’ registering of a fresh lament, indicative of the poverty reintroduced by yet another flux in the St. Helena economy:

At one time some of my class, when work was slack, could get employed as Overseers in the African Department (but with) [t]he Slave trade being suppressed, no more slave vessels arrive here, and so there is an end to the African Department, as can be seen by the Visitors to Ruperts which was the station for the Africans to be located at...<sup>114</sup>

One of the more paradoxical consequences for St. Helena Island, resulting from the success of the British Navy and its Vice Admiralty Court in abolishing Atlantic slavery, was another distinct period of economic ‘collapse’. Having drastically curbed the trade in African slaves across the Atlantic, the slave abolitionist activities, for which the Admiralty Court and the West African Naval Squadron were initially instituted and mandated, shrunk to near complete dormancy by the 1870s. Although the Vice Admiralty Court was only officially replaced by the St. Helena Supreme Court in July 1911<sup>115</sup>, their de facto anti-slavery services were no longer required from as early as the late 1860s.

Anti-slavery activity, albeit transitory, was big business for St. Helena between the 1840s and 1860s; it required immense resource allocations, and drew considerable investment, which resulted in substantial economic activity and traffic for St. Helena. Specifically, “a whole new ship-breaking industry in Jamestown... [resulting from]... the condemnation of vessels set in train a whole series of profitable activities.”<sup>116</sup> These shipbreaking activities ensured the

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<sup>113</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, March 28, 1868, np.

<sup>114</sup> *St. Helena Spectator*, March 7, 1868, p.64.

<sup>115</sup> van Niekerk, “The Role of the Vice-Admiralty Court at St. Helena (Part 2),” 55.

<sup>116</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 91.

gainful employment of many labouring artisans and general prosperity for St. Helenians. The components of the disassembled ships, which were sold at public auctions and resold at profits, created considerable trade and generated wealth for many traders. Court officials of the Vice Admiralty Court earned generous fees for all cases brought before the. And, generally, the West African Squadron's numerous naval sailors demanded supplies and services far exceeding that supplied through official channels, which enabled lucrative trade for local merchants and service providers.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, the African Depot and Departments generated jobs for locals and also demanded suppliers and labour to feed, house and medically treat liberated slaves before their resettling.

However, the intended impermanence<sup>118</sup> and eventual dissolution of the African Depot and African Department located in St. Helena Island were decisive factors for yet another bout of economic depression in the Island.<sup>119</sup> Inevitably, this meant a shift in the purpose, or, rather, the revoking of a defined short-lived moral assignment for the Island. The corollary of the diminution of the Vice-Admiralty Court and the West African Squadron's activities after the mid-1860s, and the termination of African Depot and the African Department on St. Helena in 1874, was a reduction in the demand (in volume and type) for (particularly skilled) labour in the Island. In the words of Pearson, currently the most informed scholar on the topic, "[t]he final withdrawal of the West African Squadron in the late 1860s, however, ushered in a long period of genuine hardship – one which arguably still continues today."<sup>120</sup>

### 6.3. Success: the 1870s

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 90-2.

<sup>118</sup> Here Pearson refers particularly to the Liberated African Establishment in its entirety as a "permanent impermanence: nearly always operational, but perennially on the brink of closure," Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 72.

<sup>119</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 93.

<sup>120</sup> Pearson, *Distant Freedom*, 94.



On the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1871, “[...] an organized meeting was held at the baptised Mission School for the formation of a Mutual Emigration Society” in St. Helena, headed by Rev. Cother, who addressed the meeting,

shewing very clearly, by incident and argument, that it (emigration) evidently appeared the only means by which our superabundant, and in many cases, distressed poor, or rather, unemployed mechanics and laborers, could hope to better their condition.<sup>121</sup>

By January 1872, two decades after the first organised petitioning for aided migration, we begin to witness the pendulum swing in favour of the labouring emigration lobbyists. The petitioners - possessing twenty years experience, and having garnered the support of the faith-based community and its leaders, whilst channelling its appeals through a formal institution - had become more sophisticated and eloquent in their rhetoric. This time, the poorer labouring class direct their appeal to the more fortunate class in the Island, asking them to pay for their passages elsewhere with the hope that the sympathy evoked would lead to patronage.

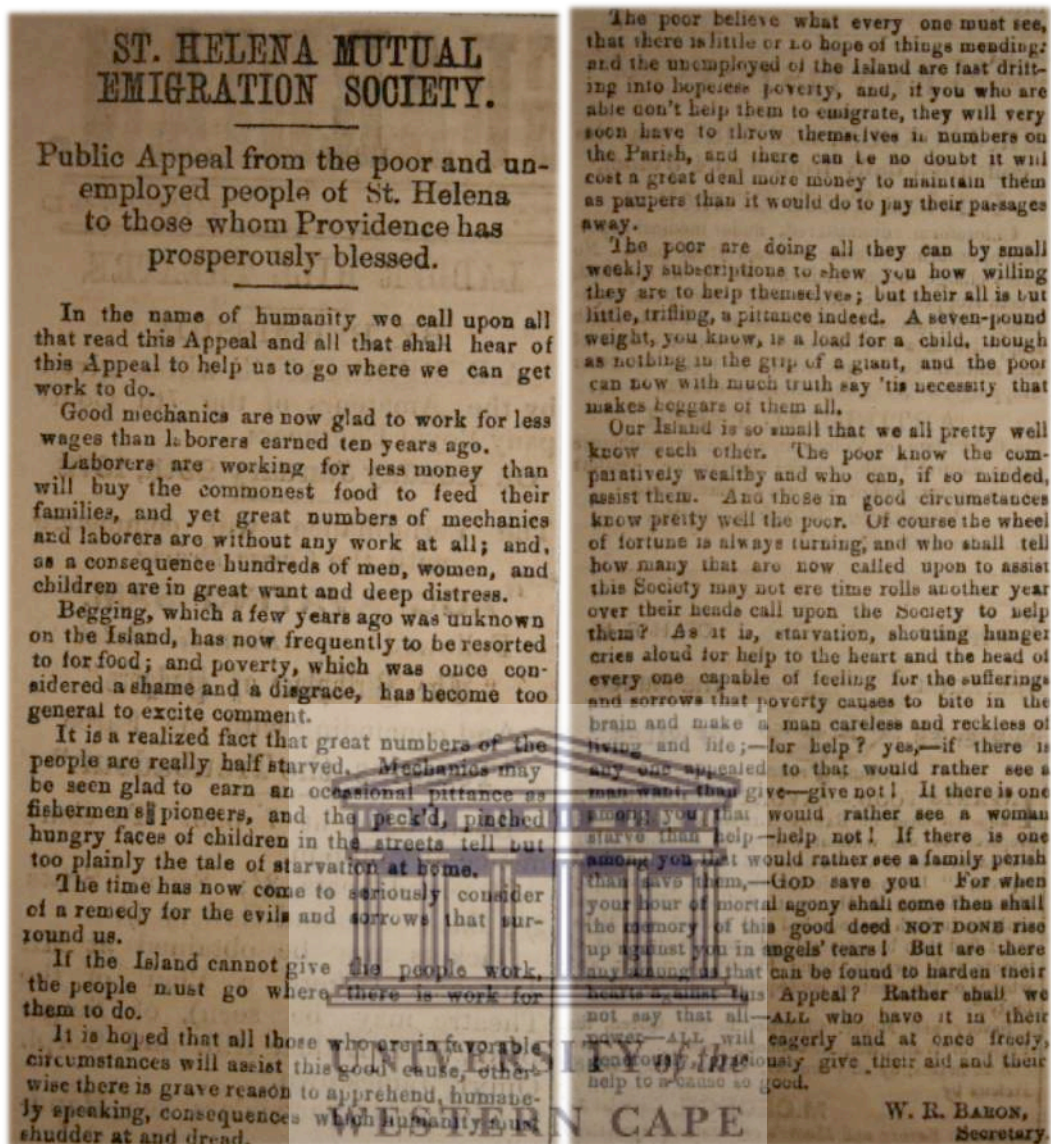
The plea follows the familiar structure: the petitioners argue that labourers and mechanics are indigent in the Island as a result of enduring unemployment and underemployment; their consequential impoverishment and hunger; and general feelings of shame and disgrace induced by the new phenomenon of mendicancy as a means of survival. Their polemical petitions had become increasingly convincing, appealing to both logos and pathos, and almost tantamount to effective moral blackmail. It's worth reproducing their 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1872 letter:<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, December 28, 1871, np.

<sup>122</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, January 18, 1872, p.5.





**Figure 2:** A reproduction of the letter of public appeal made by the St. Helena Mutual Society, directed at the privileged classes of the Island, to aid the migration of the poor.

A week after the publication of the letter by the *St. Helena Mutual Emigration Society*, the editor of the *St. Helena Guardian* revived Governor Browne's 1952 argument regarding the merits of emigration versus the development of a local industry to resolve the problem of unemployment. Like Governor Browne, he favoured the latter. While referring to the 18<sup>th</sup> January letter as "an Urgent Pathetic Appeal", he nonetheless recognised the plight of the poor, and suggested the dual solution of emigration, and the development of a flax and agriculture industry in the Island, as the only answers to the employment crisis. He dismissed completely the older debates of whether social welfare, enabled by the

Poor Rate tax dispensed via the parish, offered a sustainable solution to protracted indigence.<sup>123</sup>

In concert with Governor Browne twenty years prior, the editor argued that emigration was an inferior solution since it manufactured a contradiction to its intended outcome in the Island. He warns of the undesirable side effect of emigration: that those “steady, respectable, useful members of society (usually the breadwinners) will be sent ... but the idle, vicious and helpless will be increased in proportion.”<sup>124</sup> Concealed in the his response to the subject is buried a rather interesting fact:

... to a large extent Emigration up to the present time has helped to bring this about (an increase in idle dependant Saints). For a very considerable number of voluntary emigrants have within the last two or three years left St. Helena, taking with them all their available property (and skills) and leaving behind a number of dependents, formerly on their wages and bounty, now on chance or charity.<sup>125</sup>

Seemingly, numbers of Saints – those possessing the personal means to do so - had emigrated voluntarily, though it is not clear how many and to where they had emigrated. It could mean this was a repercussion of the 1868 petitioning, but it is presumed these numbers were few since the vast majority of the petitions required aid to emigrate and my research findings, as yet, have not revealed any mass migration between 1842 and 1872. Worth noting, though, is that by 1872 there had been recent history and experience of the negative effects of emigration. Leading to the comment that “Assisted Emigration (was) a great boon to those who go, but leave an additional burden on those that remain.”<sup>126</sup>

Despite the enduring public debate around the soundness of emigration to resolve St. Helena’s interminably high unemployment rate (the corollary of

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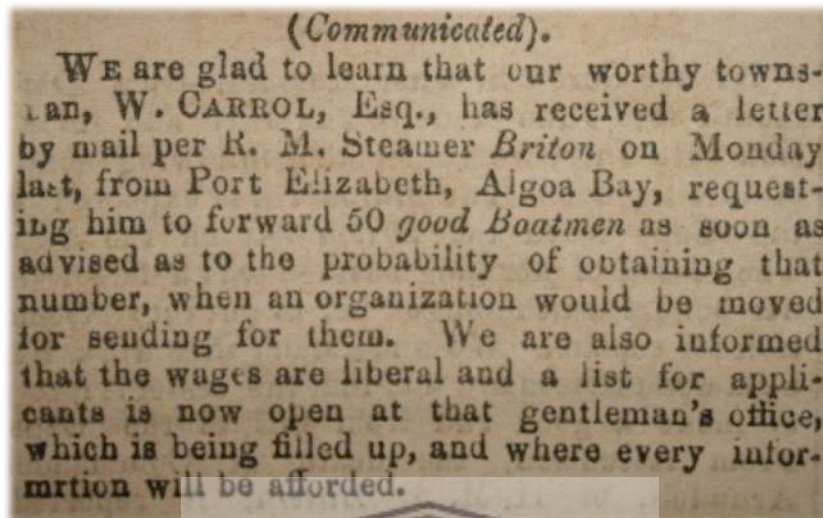
<sup>123</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, January 25, 1872, np.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* Also, we must bear in mind that St. Helena had not yet developed an economy largely dependent on filial remittances from abroad, which presently is its second largest form of income for the Island after British public subsidy.

<sup>126</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, January 25, 1872, np.

overpopulation, compounded by the Island's lack of industry), a breakthrough for the petitioners (although it is not apparent if this is to the credit of the St. Helena Mutual Emigration Society) is finally reported on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1872:<sup>127</sup>



(Communicated).  
WE are glad to learn that our worthy townsman, W. CARROL, Esq., has received a letter by mail per R. M. Steamer *Briton* on Monday last, from Port Elizabeth, Algoa Bay, requesting him to forward 50 good Boatmen as soon as advised as to the probability of obtaining that number, when an organization would be moved for sending for them. We are also informed that the wages are liberal and a list for applicants is now open at that gentleman's office, which is being filled up, and where every information will be afforded.

Figure 3: A record of the first cohort of brokered St. Helena labourers sent to work as boatmen in the Eastern Cape

It stands to reason that during the period between January and August 1872<sup>128</sup> - when "50 good Boatmen" were requested for work in Algoa Bay, Port Elizabeth at "liberal" wages - the Emigration Society and the petitioners had made considerable strides in brokering skilled St. Helena labour for the burgeoning industrial markets of South Africa. These fifty boatmen were speedily sent for and within two weeks they were readily employed by a Port Elizabeth Boating Company.<sup>129</sup> However, as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1872, the *Cape Argus* carried an article highlighting the arrival of forty St. Helena immigrant labourers who had reached Cape Town in search of work.<sup>130</sup> The names of these labourers were listed in the *Cape Standard and Mail* newspaper publication of the same date, and in fact, they were forty-five in total (see document image 5 in the appendix).<sup>131</sup> If anything, what the 18<sup>th</sup> June 1872 South African report illustrates is either the

<sup>127</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 1, 1872, np.

<sup>128</sup> The *St. Helena Guardian*'s media silence around matters of emigration during this period elicits a response of surprise as 'suddenly' there appears in its publication a clear demand in South African for skilled St. Helena labouring men.

<sup>129</sup> *The Cape Standard and Mail*, August 13, 1872, p.2.

<sup>130</sup> *The Cape Argus*, June 18, 1872, p.4.

<sup>131</sup> *The Cape Standard and Mail*, June 18, 1872, p.2.



inconsistencies of reportage on the St. Helena side, or quite frankly that I missed this incident of migration during my archival research period.<sup>132</sup>

Mr. W. Carrol (figure 3 above), on the other hand, appears to be a respectable land-owning 'gentleman' and may well be the same W. Carrol employed as the St. Helena based "Consular Commercial Agent for the United States of America."<sup>133</sup> Other sources, within the patriarchal convention of the time, have *his* name venerably inscribed on the gravestones of both his deceased wives, inevitably, avowing the value of their lives. The first, Matilda's gravestone, describes "William Carrol Esq" as a "Merchant of the Island of St. Helena"<sup>134</sup>; while on his second wife Helen Ann Margaret's headstone,<sup>135</sup> he is attributed with the title "Sheriff and Swedish and Norwegian Consul for this Island".<sup>136</sup> Mr. Carrol was aptly situated and qualified to engage in labour brokering.

Bearing in mind that the majority of the petitioning working class of St. Helena at the time were interested in gainful employment in industrial(ising) contexts rather than local agricultural initiatives that would produce mere subsistence, using the term brokering, as a type of labour opportunism, is not to suggest any form of victim-hood on the part of the labourers, as they were complicit in their own labour transferences. The prospects of their skilled labour being optimally employed and the chance of better economic opportunities attracted them to South Africa as much as the depressed economic situation in the Island compelled them to emigrate.

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<sup>132</sup> As mentioned in my introduction, a fuller account of St. Helena-South African migratory history will require considerably more research time and effort.

<sup>133</sup> His name appears innumerable times in the British Parliamentary Paper in this capacity. See: British Parliamentary Papers (doc. 650), *Accounts and Papers: 1842, Class C: Correspondence on Slave Trade with Foreign Powers, United States of America, Fourteenth Enclosure, no. 254* (Digitised Archive, Harvard College Library, nd), 225-31.  
<[https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fFcSAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en\\_GB&pg=GBS.PA229](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=fFcSAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en_GB&pg=GBS.PA229)> (accessed 05 May 2017). It is evident he operated as a court Sheriff of the Vice Admiralty Court and performed the dual role as United States Consul at the time in St. Helena.

<sup>134</sup> *The University of Witwatersrand Historical papers, "Gravestones and memorials on St. Helena 1886 to 1875,"* vol. 1, p.4, 2017<[http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv\\_pdfo/AB2073/AB2073-9-1-2-001-jpeg.pdf](http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdfo/AB2073/AB2073-9-1-2-001-jpeg.pdf)> (accessed May 10, 2017).

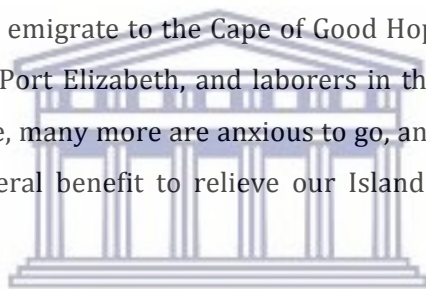
<sup>135</sup> Matilda died in 1840 and Helen married William Carrol 10 years later, in 1850.

<sup>136</sup> *Genealogical Society of South Africa, "eGGSA Gravestones, St. Helena,"* <[https://www.eggasa.org/library/main.php?g2\\_itemId=2520680](https://www.eggasa.org/library/main.php?g2_itemId=2520680)> (accessed May 10, 2017).

Despite the culmination of two decades of organised intermitted petitioning and lobbying for assisted emigration eventually yielding results, this ‘break-through’ cannot be read as the unilateral outcome of a culture of active petitioning by the St. Helena labouring classes or the Mutual Emigration Society. It is around the 1870s that industrialising South Africa develops an insatiable demand for general and skilled labour to realise various public development projects.

From an article published on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1872 it becomes indubitable that the demand for skilled labour at the Cape reaches a zenith, precipitating a sluice of St. Helena labour heading for Cape of Good Hope.

[a]dvertisements in our papers and placards on the walls of Jamestown are calling to our labouring men to emigrate to the Cape of Good Hope. Boatmen and wharf-laborers are wanted at Port Elizabeth, and laborers in the Copper-mines of Port Nolloth. Many have gone, many more are anxious to go, and there can be no doubt it would be to the general benefit to relieve our Island of some of its surplus population.<sup>137</sup>



Patent from the quote above, although I am yet to uncover more substantial sources, is that many had already emigrated for the Cape of Good Hope prior to August 1872. Besides the men emigrating to work as boatmen and wharf labourers in Port Elizabeth, and those heading to labour in the mines of Port Nolloth, this same article provides other pertinent information. Firstly, it remarks, “[o]f the large number that have thus left St. Helena there (were) several classes.”<sup>138</sup> Apparently, by the end of August 1872 an assortment of labouring ‘types’ were ‘exported’ to the Cape: miners, mechanics, general labourers, domestic servants, clerical workers and agricultural labourers.

“Young men of some education, fair ability, but no prospect of finding suitable employment” in St. Helena had “gone to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth” and were “employed as clerks or in some similar situations.” This particular group of

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<sup>137</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 29, 1872, np,

<sup>138</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 29, 1872, np.

young men were more fortunate, having been spared from engaging in hard physical labour, “but steady habits (were) absolutely necessary, and very small remuneration at the beginning (was) the rule.”<sup>139</sup> “Domestic servants”, another ‘class’ of gendered labour, were “in demand all over the Colony. Many (had) gone and the letters from them to their friends were most satisfactory. St. Helena could send a good many more of this class if any good arrangement could be made for passage money.”<sup>140</sup>

Secondly, to these labouring groups were afforded the advice to consult the letters from emigrants in South Africa who had gone before them. A general caution was also proffered, along with the suggestion to seek council from “masters of old family servants, clergymen and managers of ... various Friendly Societies”, who were invited to assist in guiding intended emigrants on matters ranging from:

The terms of engagement, the agreements as to passage, whether free or repayable out of wages, the amount of comfort that the promised wages will procure for laboring men and their families, ... all items of information that ought to be carefully enquired into.<sup>141</sup>

Reinvoking some of the same concerns highlighted in the May 1839 proclamation (document image 3 in the appendix) with regard to the first cohort emigrating for the Cape, these emigrant labourers were encouraged to mitigate their risk of entering into undue exploitative work relations in South Africa. Naturally, such advice was to be sought from the more educated and better-travelled privileged class residing in the Island.

To mining and farm labour groups were extended specific caveats. Agricultural labourers were outright discouraged from emigrating to the Cape of Good Hope due to expected language barriers they would encounter, poor work and living conditions they probably would experience, and being forced to associate with

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<sup>139</sup> St. Helena Guardian, August 29, 1872, np.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.



“races of half-savage people.” For many prospective emigrants the perceived risks associated with, and their particular aversion to, ‘rural’ South Africa, or any other territory on the periphery of the British nuclei zones of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown or Durban, was unambiguous. Miners, on the other hand, especially those intending to make their way to the “Diamond Diggings” were forewarned that they must be physically suited to the type of intensive labour. Further caution stressed that they might be gambling with their lives as they had to “have command of a considerable sum of money in order to get there, and always keep in mind that they (were) putting into a lottery, where if some gain splendid prizes, there (were) many blanks.”<sup>142</sup>

Two weeks later, it was reported that the *Lord of the Isles* ship removed “about twenty-five men” from the Island, taking them to Port Nolloth to work in the Copper mines of Concordia, along with a number of other passengers making their way to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.<sup>143</sup> The next week, a subsequent article states that the actual number of emigrant “laborers” sent to Port Nolloth was in fact twenty-one<sup>144</sup>; it also furnished the names (see document image 6 in the appendix) of 29 more emigrating “passengers”<sup>145</sup>, totalling fifty emigrants who left St. Helena for South Africa on Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1872 aboard the *Lord of the Isles*.<sup>146</sup>

Contained in a letter from the Cape written by E. Brooke-Smith, a representative for the “Directors of ... several Boating Companies”, which he addresses to William Carrol, the man at the helm of the St. Helena labour exporting project,

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<sup>142</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 29, 1872, np.

<sup>143</sup> “The Week’s Shipping News,” *St. Helena Guardian*, September 12, 1872, np.

<sup>144</sup> The group of twenty-one nameless labourers en-route to the copper mines at Concordia is the first report of such an organised labour transference I have uncovered. This trend continues until the late 1920s. Please read further below and in chapter 2.

<sup>145</sup> Daniel Yon has commented on the difference in treatment between the ‘emigrant’ and the ‘passenger’ aboard these transit vessels. However, such a distinction may be a misnomer – both groups were emigrants, despite emigrant ‘passengers’ being treated better than emigrant ‘labourers’ (who were ‘second-class’ passengers) while en-route to South Africa. The preferential treatment of ‘passengers’ may also be attributed to them having paid for their passage, rather than their type of labour supply. See: Yon, “Race-Making/Race-Mixing,” 155.

<sup>146</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 19, 1872, np.

was the assurance that emigrant boatmen and domestic servants from St. Helena were indeed in high demand at the Cape:

... for we all agree that it would be a great boon to this place (South Africa) to have an addition to its population of a number of families whose younger members would take service either in the employment of tradesmen if boys, and as domestic servants, if girls; and I shall not let the subject drop, so that you may encourage the people who had signed the List with the hope of employment here eventually.<sup>147</sup>

The above assertion was made along with, and in spite of, an explanation by Brooke-Smith of his insurmountable “present difficulty” pertaining to the “want of (securing) dwelling houses for them (emigrants)” as it would be “absurd to import a number of families and on their arrival have no houses for them to live in.”<sup>148</sup> Emigration had been temporarily forestalled due to the lack of suitable accommodation available for St. Helena immigrants in South African port cities. However, these challenges were quickly resolved, so that by the mid-1870s a torrent of St. Helena immigrants had swept in and settled in three main port cities of South Africa, performing a range of labour services. Brooke-Smith concluded his letter saying, “[y]ou will be glad to hear that our two servants continue to give us satisfaction.”<sup>149</sup>

1872 heralds the onset of a continuous influx of St. Helena’s working class to South Africa. In the majority of these cases emigration was organised and often aided or subsidised. It is also evident that the transference of variable St. Helena labour to South Africa was brokered between formal governmental and commercial institutions in both places. St. Helena labouring men were required predominantly for public development projects, and to a lesser extent for private enterprise, as illustrated by the demand emanating from the collective of “Boating Companies” that operated in Port Elizabeth; while emigrant women

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<sup>147</sup> Brooke-Smith’s letter to William Carrol, reproduced in the *St. Helena Guardian*, September 9, 1872, np.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

were desired “throughout the colony” as domestic servants primarily for private households.

From the discourse in newspapers and letters I’ve presented above, it can be determined that the expectations amongst labour speculators, in both the small and large colony, were of St. Helena immigrants settling in South African port cities, as well as from their progeny, to reproduce future labourers and servants. The hope was to introduce such ‘respectable’ and amiable labour relations in South Africa, relations that would replicate and perpetuate, often verbatim, the colonial racial-class order extant in St. Helena at the time. What the socio-political and economic colonial structures of South Africa desired, and which they were willing to accommodate, was affordable, ‘respectable’, skilled and semi-skilled technical labour that could be optimally exploited in a large industrialising colony.

St. Helena men were generally more accustomed and trained to perform a range of artisanal and mechanical work<sup>150</sup>, whereas such skilled labourer was in short supply in South Africa at the cusp of its developmental boom in the late nineteenth century. Another contributing factor fomenting the demand of St. Helena labour, especially with regard to female domestic servants, was that St. Helenian workers could relate convivially with the dominant settler class in South Africa since they shared an associative, although incommensurate,

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<sup>150</sup> There are at least three reasons for this: first, most St. Helenian men were ‘apprenticed’ to learn trades as ‘free labourers’ earlier (during the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) than former slaves in South Africa as a result of precocious amelioration and manumission measures applied, largely voluntarily, in anticipation of the 1833 Slave Abolition act; secondly, the Island’s isolation and its insular economy, based on servicing and resupplying passing ships en-route between major entrepôts in the East Indies and Europe, as well as local (re)construction projects, meant that technical and mechanical labour was intrinsic to the type of micro economy extant in the Island; lastly, St. Helena can boast being ‘ahead of the curve’ in some communications, maritime and military technological initiatives that were often implemented in St. Helena before the arrival for these technologies at the Cape. We can include here, for instance, the Eastern Telegraph Company using St. Helena as a base to install the first submarine telecommunications cable linking Cape Town to the Island (1899), the printing press (1808) and coin minting industries instigated by Saul Solomon senior. But despite many of these industrial developments occurring gradually earlier in St. Helena, the Island was too small to sustain a diverse and enduring industry, a situation exacerbated by the fact that most productive initiatives were driven by government rather than by private industry. This may explain the development, and later the ‘over-supply’, of technically skilled labourers in the Island. Although South African industrialised marginally later, the scale, complexity and diversity of South African industry merited and attracted the transference of redundant technical labour from the Island.

relationship to the British Empire; these would include mutual political, cultural (especially linguistic) and religious subjectivities.

In as much as St. Helena's working class believed and were assured that their migration was necessary for them to acquire securer job opportunities in the larger colony and escape their perpetually precarious economic milieu on their Island, their move to South Africa, across space, cannot be construed as any kind of economic or upward class mobility. Such mobilisation was the result of long-term temporal changes in race relations, labour law and politics generally, throughout the empire and specifically in South Africa. I make this point now since it remains salient and consistent throughout the rest of the St. Helena emigration narrative that follows.

An intensification of St. Helena labour migration continues throughout 1873. First to be mentioned was the arrival in February 1873 of forty-one labourers brought to Port Nolloth from the Island.<sup>151</sup> These labourers were referred to as "superior men" owing to their being acculturated in English norms and cultural performance – their musical abilities were favourably commented upon. On Saturday the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1873, sixty-two Saints emigrated for Port Nolloth (including 4 children), "being another lot of valuable mechanics and labourers withdrawn from our Island." Leading newspapers in the Cape Colony at the time corroborated the departure of "60 emigrants for Port Nolloth."<sup>152</sup> It was reported then that "[i]n the course of the last twelve months the total number of emigrants embarked under government inspection is 503, beside very many whose passages had been paid by themselves."<sup>153</sup>

The editor of the article published in the *St. Helena Guardian*<sup>154</sup> was critical of what he considered an ill-founded sentiment prevalent amongst the privileged class in the Island of a 'skills drain' that would lead to the demand for inflated wages by remaining labourers. Regrets expressed by the privileged employer

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<sup>151</sup> *Cape Standard and Mail*, February 8, 1873, p.2.

<sup>152</sup> *Cape Argus*, March 8, 1873, p.3. and *Cape Standard and Mail*, March 8, 1873, p.2.

<sup>153</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, March 6, 1873, p.22.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

class for the loss of “decent domestic servants”, the upsetting of old “relations of masters and servants” and the ministrations of the remaining “helpless women and children” which would have to be undertaken by the parish (church) on account of them having been deserted “by their natural protectors”, was also challenged by the editor as grave exaggeration of the effects of emigration.

In favour of emigration and that “the laboring man should have his share of advantage where work is of unusual abundance”, the editor’s central concern was with “idleness” spawning moral degeneration. The key supposition, underlying his line of argument, hinged on the notion that the generative qualities of work and stable, gainful, employment rendered people honest. And, in further defence of emigration, if such possibilities for work presented themselves at the Cape, it should be eagerly grasped. He intended to lay to rest exaggerated fears emanating from the anti-emigration faction regarding the possibility of women being launched into a state of severe indigence, since it was “a noteworthy fact that the much abused colored people of St. Helena have strong family affections, and not a mail arrives from the Cape without bringing considerable remittances, mostly in post office orders, for the families of those who have emigrated.”<sup>155</sup>

In fact, a proposal offered in this newspaper article called for the current “experiment” in labour emigration for the “larger colony” to be extended to the growing numbers of “boys and girls from 14 to 20” years of age, who were idle in the Island. As justification, it was said, “the few who have gone to the Cape have done well and are well liked and well spoken of.”<sup>156</sup> As a proviso, however, the editor emphasised that “friends in the larger colony” demanded those of “unblemished character and good testimonials”, which appears to have been rare as those who are of impeccable character “have, for the most part, no need to emigrate”. His inference was that the indigent were most likely those of dubious character. Another deduction from this line of reasoning, which is a resurrection of older arguments pertaining to emigration, revolves around a concern that the

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<sup>155</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, March 6, 1873, p.22.

<sup>156</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, March 6 1873, p.23.



loss to the Island, and conversely a 'gain' for the Cape, would not simply be experienced as a deficit in labour but a loss to the Island of a large constituent of its respectable working class to the Cape.

In passing reference, however, it was reported that "two unfortunate young men ... had vainly eloped from respectable well-paid domestic services here in order to see the world at Port Nolloth."<sup>157</sup> It is easy to gloss over this incident, but what it addresses was the compulsion for young labouring men of the Island to express their agency in the face of isolation, insularity and intimate, yet restrictive, exploitative labour relations in the Island. Young St. Helenian men stowing-away for South Africa appears to have been a phenomenon during the early to mid 1870s, particularly evinced by the curious case of Mr. Samuel Mitchell, who was charged with stowing away for Cape Town in December 1872.<sup>158</sup> In his defence, Mitchell claimed to have been on board the ship the night before its departure – no reasons for why he was on board the ship were given – and in his state of inebriation, he fell asleep. When he awoke, he found himself en-route to the Cape. From scant information available, it appears Mr. Mitchell was found guilty and repatriated back to St. Helena.

The makeup of the March 1873 group of emigrants setting off for Port Nolloth, including their names, listed and published (figure 4 below)<sup>159</sup>, was as follows: fifty-five men - thirteen artisans, forty labourers and two other men categorised as passengers (Holmes and Ferguson); three women and four children (all passengers), totalling sixty-two emigrants. The distinction made between labourers and mechanics to that of private passengers is also pivotal; passengers were generally treated in a more dignified manner, having been able to emigrate for South Africa 'under their own steam' and not being dependent on local St. Helena government to facilitate or fund their emigration.

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<sup>157</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, March 6, 1873, p.23.

<sup>158</sup> *Cape Argus*, December 12, 1872, p.4.

<sup>159</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, March 6, 1873, p.23.



WE publish the following for general information :—

**LIST OF EMIGRANTS** actually engaged to proceed to Port Nolloth per brig *Sir Robert McClure*.

**MECHANICS.**

*Masons.*—David Samuel, William Samuel, George Anthony, James Stevens, Charles John, Thomas Yon.

*Carpenters.*—Joseph Mittens, Thomas Woods, Henry Leo, John Scott, Henry Thomas.

*Blacksmith.*—John Harris.

*Shoemaker.*—Albert Gibb.

**LABORERS.**

William Brooks, Joseph Hern, James George, Henry Yon 1st, William Stevens, William John, John Seale, William Henry, Robert Clarke, William Bowers, James Parrott, Richard William Leo, William Benjamin, William Lawrence, William Richards, John Bargo, Henry Yon 2nd, Robert Datey, William Thomas 1st, William May, John Samuel, Ezekiel Henry, William Anthony, John Thomas, Henry Joshua, James Duncan, William Thomas 2nd, Richard Connolly, Abraham Smith, Charles Lawrence, Richard Yon, Robert Bagley, Samuel Samuel, Francis Peters, James Alex Jockey, Henry Samuel, William Leo, Louis Segura, Joseph Gunnell, Thomas Mittens.

**PRIVATE PASSENGERS.**

Mrs. Maggott and 2 children, Mr. and Mrs. Holmes, Mrs. Joshua and 2 children, John Ferguson.

**Figure 4:** A list containing the names of the sixty-two emigrants, including their professions and status, who set sail for Port Nolloth aboard the brig *Sir Robert McClure*, in March 1873

A shift occurs around 1873 when St. Helena authorities and emigrants began declaring the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony as their preferred location for settlement instead of the “half Dutch Western Cape, where our people have to serve long before they can feel themselves at home.”<sup>160</sup>

From various private communications and from [...] the 115 [...] first class [...] passengers by the *Dunabe*<sup>161</sup>, we learn that St. Helena people who had gone up to the Eastern Frontier as servants have given general satisfaction... [W]hereas, the

<sup>160</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 24, 1873, p.33.

<sup>161</sup> The passengers on the *Dunabe* steamship were well-to-do travellers who often made the commute between the United Kingdom and the Cape via St. Helena. Many were settlers at the Cape, some of whom employed St. Helena servants in their households.

best opening for our St. Helena servants is either Port Elizabeth, Graham's Town, or the English parts of the Eastern Province...<sup>162</sup>

Amidst complaints where "those who wish to better their circumstances by emigration" were prevented from doing so due to the exorbitant passage fees charged by the monopolistic Union Company, there were also then decisive plans underway for "younger emigrants" - boys and girls ("12 to 16" years of age) - to emigrate for South Africa, a month after the suggestion was made to extend the emigration experiment, honed through the export of men, to younger emigrants.

Published on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1873 was yet another list revealing the names of 59 emigrants and their destinations (see document image 7 in the appendix).<sup>163</sup> Heading for Port Elizabeth were eleven passengers (five men and six women), Cape Town received eighteen Saints (five children, six men and seven women) while thirty labouring men headed to work on the Cape Railway, the installation and operation of which was at first mandated to the colonial Public Works Department before becoming the responsibility of the Cape Government Railways department. A Mr. Humphries, who was commissioned by the Public Works department to procure 'suitable' labour for the Railway construction project, solicited these thirty railway workers from the Island. He was remunerated £8 for each St. Helenian male he recruited through his "labour emigration scheme".<sup>164</sup>

A South African newspaper confirmed the arrival of the thirty immigrant Saints set to work on the Western Province railway line.<sup>165</sup> Yet despite all the excitement and promise the immigration scheme generated, within just two weeks, disappointment was expressed in the quality of labouring men, who apparently proved to be "most unsatisfactory".<sup>166</sup> The author (no name was given) of the article commented that at least seven of the thirty Saints working on the railway line had been hospitalised for injury and/or exhaustion. It was

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<sup>162</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 24, 1873, p.33

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Cape Argus*, March 22, 1873, p.2

<sup>165</sup> *Cape Argus*, May 10, 1873, p.2; and *Cape Standard and Mail*, May 13, 1873, p.4.

<sup>166</sup> *Cape Standard and Mail*, May 31, 1873, p.4.

also published that news of the dreadful working conditions travelled fast and many Saints back home were discouraged from participating in Mr. Humphries' emigration scheme, opting instead to work in the Concordia copper mines where working conditions were better. Mr. Humphries scheme had failed prematurely; the following year he was able to secure only three labourers for the railway construction project at the Cape. As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1873 Member of Parliament, Mr. Saul Solomon junior, a Saint himself, argued that St. Helenian men were 'unsuited' for railway work.<sup>167</sup>

Supposedly, by mid July 1873 immigration to the Cape ceased after "bad reception".<sup>168</sup> But just three days later, in another newspaper article it was declared that 370 emigrants were preparing to leave the Island for the Cape.<sup>169</sup> Considering the substantial number, it's astounding that I did not pick this up in the St. Helena Government newspaper archive. At this point, I am unsure whether the 370 referred to actually included those heading for Natal, via the Cape, which I discuss below. Presently, it could be the most plausible explanation that the 370 emigrants is an aggregation in this particular media report of all those who left between August and October 1873 to settle in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and Durban.

By August 1873, emigration for the Cape Colony recommenced and a migration scheme of a different gendered and generational character got underway in the Island, one specifically set to relieve St. Helena of its surplus young 'colored' population, particularly females, who if left to their own devices may resort to illicit activities to survive:

This time it is not our labouring men going to the Copper Mines of Namaqualand or the Railway Line in the interior districts, but mainly domestic servants engaged for respectable families, where they will be well treated, and if properly

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<sup>167</sup> "House of Assembly, Railway Construction and Immigration," *Cape Argus*, May 17, 1873, p.3.

<sup>168</sup> *Cape Standard and Mail*, July 19, 1873, p.4.

<sup>169</sup> *Cape Argus*, July 22, 1873, p.2

conducted, will have every opportunity of making for themselves comfortable homes in a larger colony.<sup>170</sup>

On Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1873, the *Lord of the Isles*, which just the previous year brought fifty immigrants to South Africa and fifty-nine more in April of the same year, embarked with thirty-eight more passengers (fourteen men and twenty-four women) for Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. The women were to commence their new 'respectable' lives as domestic servants. Document image 8 in the appendix contains the list of names of these immigrants.<sup>171</sup>

In reference to earlier commentary on the relationship of work, as a duty, to respectability, the obvious critique to level concerns the path in realising a genteel status for these young St. Helenian women. The attainment of such a status was wholly underwritten by their proximity and attachment as domestic servants to 'respectable' families and, furthermore, contingent upon them 'conducting themselves properly'. It follows that their avowal as virtuous and worthy settlers was primarily conferred by their attachment to their masters and the diminutive extension of the 'natural' respectability of the families they worked for onto themselves. Notwithstanding, these domestic servants were well received and gave "great satisfaction" to their employers in the Cape Colony, especially within its English Eastern districts of Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, where there begun emerging a network and a tightly-knit community of Saints who often funded the passage of relatives still on the Island who wanted to join them in the Cape Colony.<sup>172</sup>

Underlying the newspaper discourse, which infers that the immigrant St. Helenian female's explicit sexuality can be contained and sublimated through domestic duty, is the latent, but persistent, stereotype of the lasciviousness of the 'coloured' population in the Island. I was also confronted with these notions in

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<sup>170</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 14, 1873, np.

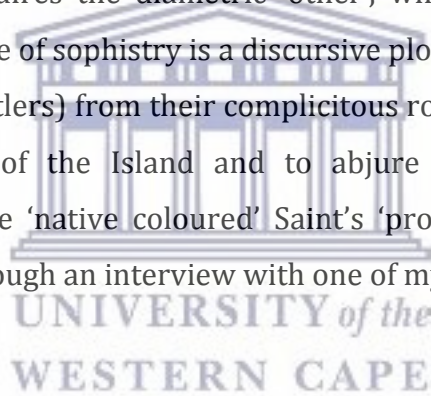
<sup>171</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 21, 1873, np.

<sup>172</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 14, 1873, np.

my interview with one of my participants<sup>173</sup> and in the literature emphasising the racial character of the St. Helena population:

Africans and Asians outnumbered the population of European origin throughout the period of slavery which, taken with the continuing extraordinary level of promiscuity, has resulted in a genuinely 'rainbow' population today.<sup>174</sup>

In a 1876 article, it was stated that the "St. Helena girls make good servants, but lack moral restraint."<sup>175</sup> If we are to entertain the stereotype, it seems the ostensible good honest servitude did not 'cure' these young women of their 'innate promiscuity'. But that would be a moot point since the stereotype is problematic to begin with and requires a dedicated critique, which I will not be undertaking in this thesis. Save to say, the stereotype of the respectable (usually white) St. Helenian requires the diametric 'other', which is embodied by the 'coloured' Saint. This type of sophistry is a discursive ploy to absolve white males (sailors, soldiers and settlers) from their complicitous role in 'siring' many of the mixed-race population of the Island and to abjure their responsibility by deflecting such upon the 'native coloured' Saint's 'promiscuity'. I address the issue in chapter four through an interview with one of my research participants.



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<sup>173</sup> Robin Castell, Interviewed by Damian Samuels. Simonstown, Cape Town, July 18, 2016. In the interview Robin unreservedly said that the number one St. Helenian pastime was engaging in venereal activities. He meant it as a critique of the 'callousness' of the 'coloured' population's reproducing children in a highly suppressed economic environment – they should have been rational and known better. But his understanding is decontextualised from history and the social. Firstly, the insularity and isolation of the island amplifies the desire for intimacy and connection to others, which is an accessible response considering Saints were cut off from the rest of the world but held close personal proximity with neighbours. Being alone together in seclusion with virtually no possibility of movement, expect for those imperial agents who had the freedom and means to move around within the empire, these relations were often expressed sexually. But more importantly, I suppose, the need for liberated slaves and their descendants to create the most fundamental social institution – a family – was what they sought most, having been generally deprived thereof as slaves. The ultimate, expression of freedom, therefore, is the creation of one's own family. And the larger the family, the greater is one's expression of freedom. Ironically, the newfound freedom reproduces the 'free' laboring class and compels men, in a patriarchal system, to support their families through selling their labour 'freely', thus obviating the need for coerced labour. Such was the brilliance of the 'Great Experiment' in free labour.

<sup>174</sup> Smallman, *Quincentenary: A Story of St Helena, 1502 – 2002*, 6.

<sup>175</sup> *Cape Times*, August 7, 1876, p.3.



In mid September 1873 two hundred Saints emigrated for Port Natal under crowded and unfavourable conditions aboard the bark *Actea* (see document image 9 in the appendix for a full list of immigrant names).<sup>176</sup> “No such large number of St. Helena people had ever before embarked in one ship for one port...”<sup>177</sup> In comparison to the then established and popular Eastern and Western Cape settlements, a measure of caution was expressed against the risk associated with this novel exodus of emigrants from their “native rock” to Port Natal (Durban).<sup>178</sup> Two South African newspaper articles concurred the departure of 221<sup>179</sup> and the arrival of 200<sup>180</sup> immigrants in Durban October 1873.

The usual regret for the unfortunate and reluctant loss of respectable Saints to the larger colony was augmented by further concerns around the “swarms of children” who would grow into unemployed adults and “outrun all means of maintenance” in the Island.<sup>181</sup> The proposition made by the editor was one of ‘due prudence’ in finding future possibilities for the emigration of these young boys and girls. To enhance the prospect of potential host colonies accepting these future emigrants from St. Helena without much reservation, the editor challenged the diminishing state of St. Helena schools. He called for the government intervention to improve the quality of education so that these children may be fitted with the “proper education to be a credit to the country they come from and useful in that they go to.”<sup>182</sup>

It appears that by the mid-1870s emigration had become the default and entrenched solution to the Island’s enduring problem of overpopulation and unemployment. This may be attested by the intentionality and forethought that an emigration scheme should be planned ahead for even these young, categorically ‘coloured’, boys and girl, who were primarily conceived of as future

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<sup>176</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 4, 1873, p.73.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, August 14 & 21, 1873, np.

<sup>179</sup> *Cape Standard and Mail*, September 16, 1873, p.2.

<sup>180</sup> *Cape Argus*, October 16, 1873, p.2.

<sup>181</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 4, 1873, p.73.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

emigrants rather than vested compatriot St. Helenian minors in the 'proper' sense.

Between September 1873 and February 1879 emigration for the Cape dwindled and along with it St. Helena's media coverage. But during this media lacuna in the Island, South African newspapers had begun reporting on the reception and experiences of Saints in South Africa.

In 1875 a discourse begins to emerge that the Saints who settled in Natal were "not good immigrants".<sup>183</sup> Racial ascriptions were mounted upon St. Helenian settlers and attempts were made to force them to live in segregated communities, compelling the Church of the Province to intervene and halt such segregation.<sup>184</sup> Even St. Helenian children were not spared subjection to humiliating racial classification and segregation. Twenty-three children were expelled from a Durban school on account of their colour,<sup>185</sup> and after being met with fervent protests,<sup>186</sup> the Natal education department was at a loss and, therefore, pressured to consult the Cape government on how they handle their colour issues.<sup>187</sup> The 'issue' was eventually resolved with the re-admission of Saint Helenian children back into the schools from which they were expelled.<sup>188</sup> All the while in Port Nolloth, at the Concordia copper mines, it seemed the workmen there were "giving great satisfaction".<sup>189</sup>

The event to draw to a close the 1870s, an intense decade of St. Helena emigration, occurred on Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1879: fifty-three emigrants (forty men, six women women and seven children) embarked on a schooner, the *Millie Bain*, for Port Nolloth.<sup>190</sup> The *Millie Bain's* captain was intent on collecting one hundred labourers for the Namaqua Copper Mines and was said to only have considered leaving once the quota was procured. However, in

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<sup>183</sup> *Cape Standard and Mail*, April 13, 1875, p.3.

<sup>184</sup> *Cape Argus*, June 10, 1875, p.3.

<sup>185</sup> *Cape Town Daily News*, August 26, 1875, p.3.

<sup>186</sup> *Cape Argus*, September 4, 1875, pp. 2 & 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Cape Argus*, September 7, 1875, p. 2.

<sup>188</sup> *Cape Argus*, September 25, 1875, p.3.

<sup>189</sup> *Cape Times*, May 17, 1876, p.3.

<sup>190</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, February 27, 1879, np.

the end, the vessel transferred less than half their desired number of men, who departed the Island shortly after signing their contacts with the “Copper Mining Company.”<sup>191</sup>

I conclude this chapter as the first of two exclusively dedicated to rendering a foundational narrative of the Saints who emigrated for South Africa between 1838 and 1948. Since no such narrative exists, it had become vital to begin constructing such an on-going account. The aim, therefore, is that chapters two and three serve as a qualitative and quantitative contextual basis that would enable critical analyses in future work, including latter chapters of this thesis, of the historical immigration of Saints to South Africa. I defer my conclusions to both chapters two and three to the end of the subsequent chapter.



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<sup>191</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, February 13, 1879, np.

# Chapter 2

## St. Helena Immigration to South Africa:

### 1880s to 1948

#### 1. The 1880s: Saints in the Public Works records

The Colonial Ministerial Department of Public Works, or rather (by its fuller name) the Ministerial Department of the Honourable the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, was formally placed in charge of immigration at the Cape on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1876<sup>192</sup>, four years after its official investiture. Since the late 1850s the local English settler community had for a number of decades lobbied its metropolitan government for a measure of independence and better local representation in government affairs and decision-making structures. Following the establishment of a 'new' colonial parliament of "Responsible Government"<sup>193</sup> in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope - epitomising the success of the local settler community's leadership - various government ministerial departments were inaugurated to perform specialised functions.

These departments, of which Public Works was one, were thereafter accountable to the 'new' Parliament comprised of local leaders who apparently held localised interests and supposedly the welfare of an electorate constituting all the races of Cape at the time. Prior to the Act no. 1 of 1872 the Department of the Colonial Secretary, headed by the Crown appointed Governor, held concentrated powers and made central decision, whereas from 1872 onwards, power and

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<sup>192</sup> "Government Notice No. 2," *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, January 3, 1876, published January 7, 1876.

<sup>193</sup> Act. No. 1 for Responsible Government, November 28, 1872 entitled "An Act to Amend the Ordinance enacted on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1852... intituled, An Ordinance for Constituting a Parliament for the said Colony", *Statute of the Cape of Good Hope, 1652-1895*, vol. 2, 1872-1886 (Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and Johannesburg: J.C Juta & Co., 1895), p.1191.

responsibilities were disseminated amongst multiple departments, themselves constituents in a more complex colonial government structure in the Cape.

The Ministerial Department of the Honourable the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works held a sizable mandate. Its key responsibilities included the construction and development of Crown lands and forests; roads; bridges; harbour works and jetties; public buildings; lighthouses; railway works and telegraphs, et cetera.<sup>194</sup> Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century these industrial development functions became unwieldy for a single department to execute and begun fragmenting, precipitating the formation of extra, even more specialised, departments. Immigration was a vital associated function that would facilitate the Department of Public Works' directive in constructing urban public infrastructure. Under its auspices 268 Saint Helena immigrants – exclusively adults - found their way to South Africa between 1882-1884. They settled predominantly in the port cities of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, but were generally dispersed widely. A few made for themselves new homes in smaller towns and suburbs like Wellington, Beaufort West, Somerset West, Colesburg or Wynberg, to mention just a few destinations.

Buried in the Western Cape's Provincial Government Archives in Roeland Street Cape Town is some form of a hand-written ledger unflatteringly scribbled with a title "St. Helena Immigration 1882-1884". Catalogued and archived under the rubric of the Public Works Department, this ledger is one of a kind. Besides it being the only such document I could locate during my archival research, it contains the following information: names of adult immigrants; what I construe as the dates of departure from the Island and date of arrival at the Cape; the ship's name that carried them to South Africa; in most instances the specific destination of the immigrants; and the associated freight charges for passage. See figure 5 below for an example from the ledger.

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<sup>194</sup> "Government Notice No. 619," *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, December 16, 1872, published December 17, 1872.



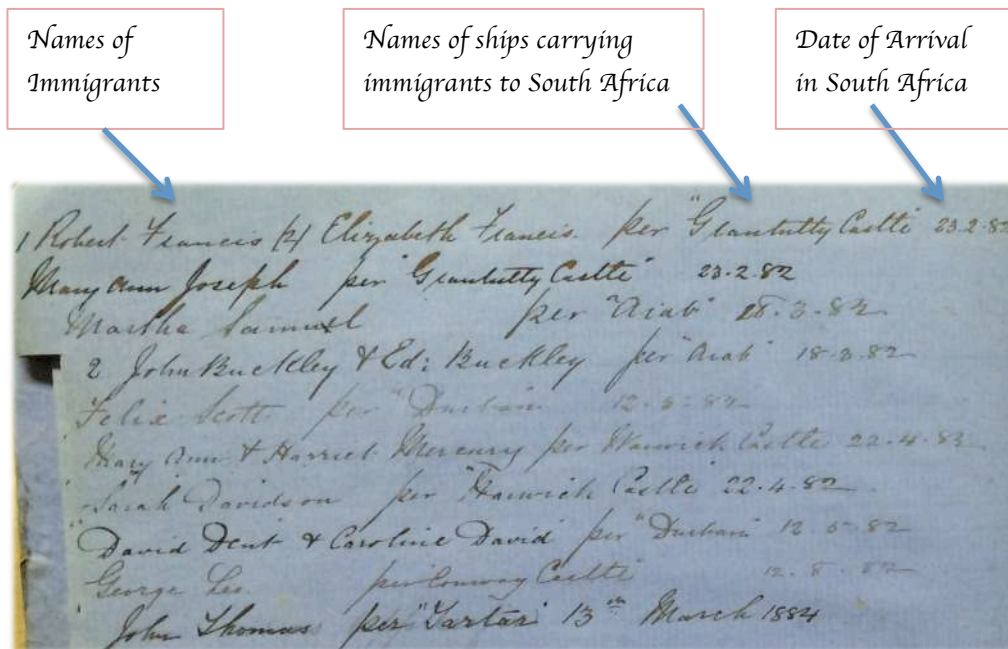


Figure 5a: index D, left section of ledger

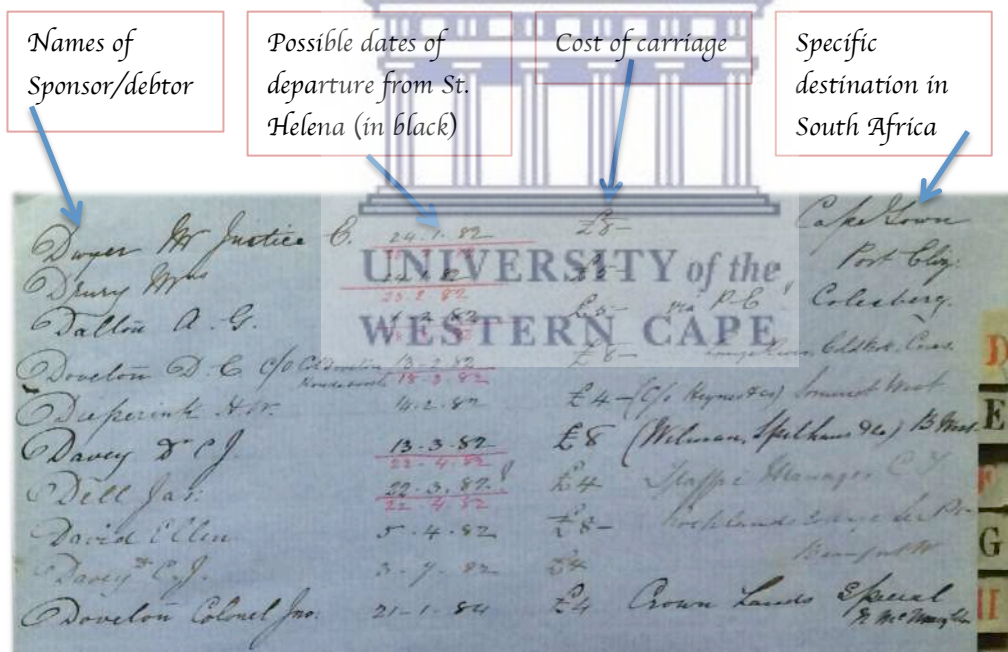


Figure 5b: index D, right section of ledger

Why this document is an accounting ledger and not simply an immigrant list can be attributed to the fact that it was alphabetised according to the surname of the person liable for the payment of passage, along with the value of the charge. Generally, £4-5 were levied per head for passage to South Africa, mainly via the various vessels of the Castle Shipping Line Company making trips between

Europe and Africa. Interestingly, these debtors were never the immigrants themselves, but a third party sponsor based in South Africa. A few of these third party names appear on more than one occasion and in the case of a (Mr?) R. Armstrong, a single debtor was charged for the transportation of up to six immigrant Saints – totalling £24, a substantial sum of money in 1882.<sup>195</sup>

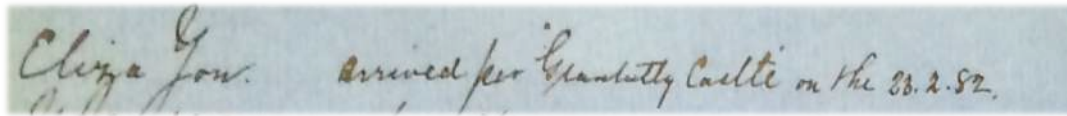
A reasonable supposition – since there is no contextual material or even headings in the columns of the ledger to assist my analysis - would lead me to conclude that these sponsors were probably the new employers of these immigrant Saints. Judging from the pattern of numerous individual sponsors, the higher ratio of female immigrants and the dispersive character of the destination of these immigrant Saints, it may be suggested they were employed as personal servants or workers in the respective households or smaller businesses of affluent South African families. This proposition is also consistent with the 1870s trend, discussed in my previous chapter, in which sizable numbers of St. Helena women made their way to the Eastern and Western Cape, and Natal to work as domestic servants.

It could be argued that these sponsors were perhaps friends of the immigrants or forerunner St. Helena migrants themselves. Or, they may have been acquaintances, benefactors or even potential marital partners, but the surnames of the sponsors are not recognisably St. Helenian, and, as I will explain below, this form of immigration scheme was consistent with other migratory cases managed by the Public Works Department during this period. Moreover, it was extremely rare to find a sponsor with the same surname as the immigrant, which might be indicative of family assisted immigration. Below is an example of one such an exceptional instance:<sup>196</sup>

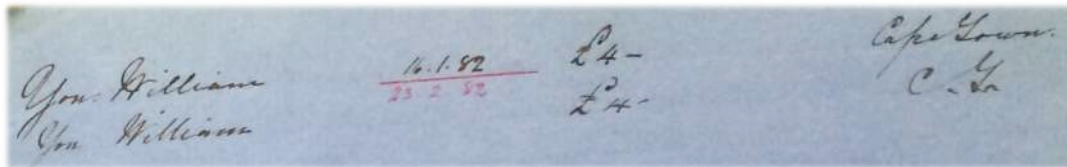
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<sup>195</sup> The Ministerial Department of the Honourable the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, *St. Helena Immigration, 1882 to 1884*, Index A. [accessed from the Western Cape Provincial Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town, 14 April 2016] Accession number: PDW 2/759.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, Index Y: William Yon pays passage for Eliza (?) Yon.



**Figure 6a:** index Y, left section of ledger



**Figure 6b:** index Y, right section of ledger

This type of St. Helena immigration is not unique for its period, during which vast influxes of free European and indentured Indian agricultural labour was ‘imported’ to South Africa. However, Indian indentured migrants - by far the most voluminous - were concentrated in the Natal colony. Where the Cape Colony was concerned, the ethnic-racial colour of labour was largely ‘brown’, to a lesser extent ‘black’, and latently ‘white’. Tellingly, the case of St. Helena immigration is marginal when compared to, say, the influx of immigrant German-Swiss agriculturists and artisans, Scottish agricultural workers, and Italian sericulturalists during this same period.<sup>197</sup>

Demand for technical, agricultural and domestic labour in the English controlled colonies of South Africa exceeded that which the colonies had locally available and was, therefore, sourced from places considered replete with the various required labourers, places traversing Europe and Asia. Although one would expect that the majority of the immigrants were to be employed directly within the civil projects of the Public Works Department, it is evident from the case discussed above and clearly demonstrated by the notice below<sup>198</sup> (figure 7) that the Public Works Department often operated, in our present parlance, as an intermediary labour brokerage or procurement agency for the incipient

<sup>197</sup> Three other hand-written ledgers, similar to that of St. Helena immigrant records, were uncovered at the Cape Town, Roeland Street Archive during my archival research. These records range in date between 1876 and 1896 and contain details of European immigrants from Germany, Scotland and Italy. Like the St. Helena ledger, they were all archived under the Public Works Department. These may also be accessed with the following accession numbers: PDW 2/750-2/760.

<sup>198</sup> “Government Notice No. 737,” *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, August 29, 1878, published September 6, 1878.



industrialising and relatively diverse economy of the Cape Colony in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

GOVERNMENT NOTICE.—No. 737, 1878.  
Office of the Commissioner of Crown Lands  
and Public Works, Cape Town,  
Cape of Good Hope, 29th August, 1878.

**I**T is hereby notified, for general information, that the Ship *La Rochelle*, which sailed from Hamburg on the 18th July, may be expected to arrive in Table Bay in the course of two or three weeks, with the undermentioned German Immigrants on board. Persons wishing to secure the services of these Immigrants should communicate either directly with them on arrival or with the Immigration Board at Cape Town.

JOHN LAING, Commissioner.

LIST OF PASSENGERS forwarded per Ship *La Rochelle*, Captain J. H. WITT, from Hamburg to Cape Town, under the agreement made by Mr. WILLIAM BERG, under date of 17th August, 1876, with the Honourable JOHN XAVIER MERRIMAN, Esq., Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, on behalf of the Government of the Cape of Good Hope:—

NAME.	Sex.		Age—Years.	OCCUPATION.	Adults.		Children under years.
	Male.	Female.			1	2	
Adolph Gessler	1		19	Mason	1		
Augusta Gessler		1	20	Domestic servant		1	
Carl Gessler	1		17	Mason	1		
Bertha Gessler		1	12	Children of Joh. Gessler			1
Gustav Gessler	1		15		1		
Johann Gessler	1		50	Labourer	1		
Marie Gessler		1	40	and wife		1	
Carl Schurmann	1		45	Shoemaker	1		
Sophie Schurmann		1	40	and wife		1	
Friedrick Schafer	1		32	Shoemaker	1		
Pauline Schafer		1	29	and family		1	
Anna Schafer		1	8				1
Emma Schafer		1	5				1
August Schafer	1		34	Joiner	1		
Pauline Schafer		1	20	and family		1	
Selma Schafer		1	4				1
Elsa Schafer		1	1				1
Hermann Riedel	1		15	Joiner	1		
Edward Moritz	1		25	Carpenter	1		
Emma Moritz		1	19	and family		1	
Carl Moritz							1

**Figure 7:** An excerpt of a list containing the names, sex, age and occupation of German immigrants.

The 1878 migratory case - whereby 234 German immigrants, consisting of 180 adults and 54 children - constituted a varied group of skilled artisans, labourers and female domestic workers. As evinced by the government notice above, a labour agreement was brokered between the Commissioner of Public Works and government authorities in Germany, represented by William Berg. Furthermore, the list was stamped by the British Consulate in Hamburg as well as by John Ceasar Godeffroy Jr. on behalf of John Ceasar Godeffroy and Son, “as Emigration Agent in Hamburg for the Government of the Cape of Good Hope”.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> “Government Notice No. 737,” August 29, 1878.

The labour immigration schemes instigated and overseen by the Public Works Department were meticulous and focused - they sought specific forms of labour to perform pre-determined functions. There existed too a measure of racial prejudice in the relationship between the 'type' of labour consignments imported and the form of jobs assigned and permitted. Europeans – Germans-Swiss, Scottish and Italians - were often allotted opportunities to land as agriculturalists (we should not mistake this term to mean farm labourers), while 'coloured' St. Helenians, who were arguably more culturally and politically British, were earmarked for servile jobs as domestic servants for women or industrial labours in the case of men. If one studies the various ledgers, for instance, St. Helenians were not labelled under any specific labour category, unlike European labour immigrants. Lastly, Saint Helenians may have been beholden to their sponsors, wriggling the best they could within the economic confines of intimate servitude, whereas the Germans, for instance, were freer to exploit economic opportunities through the relatively egalitarian exchange of their 'services' with the local citizens.

### **2.1. The 1890s: 'worthy' St. Helena emigrants heading for the Cape aboard a warship**

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1891 the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time, Henry Holland (or 'Lord' Knutsford), addressed a letter to the then Governor of St. Helena, William Grey-Wilson, permitting the transference of no more than twenty-three emigrants (ten men, five women and eight children) to the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>200</sup> These emigrants were to hitch a ride upon the HM Troopship *Orontes*, ordered to call at St. Helena on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1891 with a directive to embark the East Yorkshire Regiment and disembark them at the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>201</sup> Since the HMS troopship *Orontes* was a ship of war, the Secretary of State made his qualifying stipulations clear:

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<sup>200</sup> Knutsford to Grey-Wilson, February 21, 1891, *Secretary of State Despatches no. 6*, pp. 23 and 25 (accessed from the St. Helena Government Archives, April 27, 2016).

<sup>201</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, p.33.



With regard to the first condition I have ascertained from the Admiralty that emigrants will not be rejected on account of their colour if they are such as can properly be associated with the troops on board. You will of course exercise the greatest care in your selection and only select such persons as are of good character and in other respects fit to associate with the soldiers and their families.<sup>202</sup>

Further conditions insisted upon by the Secretary of State were that the Colonial Government of St. Helena was responsible for the victualing costs of the emigrants, which he estimated as £10 (“eleven pence a head per diem” for a nine-day trip) and to be paid by the Colonial Government directly to the Admiralty. Knutsford encouraged the Governor Grey-Wilson to make direct “arrangements between the emigrants and the Colonial Government” and permitted the St. Helena government may aid the emigrants to a value not exceeding his £10 allowance. But he put forward his stern opinion that the emigrants should bear the cost of their provisioning upon the Orontes while en-route to the Cape. Lastly, the Secretary of State instructed Governor Grey-Wilson to communicate directly with the Officer Administering the Government of the Cape of Good Hope and supply him with “all the information in (his) power with regard to the intended emigrants in order that the Cape Government may be able to endeavour to secure employment for them as they have kindly offered to do so.”<sup>203</sup>

Governor Grey-Wilson relayed Knutsford’s injunction containing the conditions of this particular emigration scheme to his newly appointed Emigration Committee. He made sure to foregrounded the Secretary of State’s central concern with the possible rapport between the labouring class of St. Helena and the imperial military class of British soldiers. Grey-Wilson recapitulated to the Emigrations Committee, whom he had assigned responsibility for the examination and selection of emigrants, that “only persons of good character”

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<sup>202</sup> Knutsford to Grey-Wilson, February 21, 1891, p. 23.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., pp. 23 and 25. The subsequent communications between Gov. Grey-Wilson and the Officer Administering the Government of the Cape of Good Hope warrants further archival research.

(his emphasis) fit to associate with soldiers and their families”<sup>204</sup> are to be selected from applicant Islanders on account of them having to share a proximate space with military personnel upon the troopship. Secondly, Grey-Wilson requested the Emigration Committee draft a list of thirty-six to forty possible emigrants - more than the initial twenty-three - for “as many as may be, will be sent”.<sup>205</sup> Finally, the Governor ordered his Emigration Committee to collect the victualing fee from all selected applicants and to ensure that they make such deposits to the Committee by no later than the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1891 in order to secure their passage to the Cape.<sup>206</sup> In an ensuing epistle Grey-Wilson instructed the Emigration Committee to issue notices of approval to each successful applicant, addressed per family, and insisted the “victualing charges be noted thereon.”<sup>207</sup>

In the end, seventy-five emigrants<sup>208</sup> - forty-five men, twenty-six women and children and four infants - were granted their embarkation orders from a total of 118 applicants responding to an initial advertisement.<sup>209</sup> And on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1891 these emigrants set sail for the two South African colonies of the Cape and Natal with the hope and expectation of securing a better life for themselves in a promising new land they believed offered greater economic prospects. Male emigrants paid 1 shilling per day for the nine-day trip, women were charged 10 pence and children under four years of age levied 8 pence per day for the voyage.<sup>210</sup> Despite the relative affordability, many indigent islanders could still not secure the fares for passage. Larger families with many children found it harder to leave due to costs assigned per head and so remained in their vulnerable economic milieu on the Island. Those fortunate ones who fulfilled the two key criteria – they had to be ‘respectable’ and be able to raise the bulk of

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<sup>204</sup> Governor Grey-Wilson’s communiqué to the Emigration Committee, March 16, 1891, *Secretary of State Despatches*, no. 6, p. 24.

<sup>205</sup> Grey-Wilson to the Emigration Committee, March 16, 1891, p. 24.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Governor Grey-Wilson to the Emigration Committee, April 6, 1891, *Secretary of State Despatches*, no. 6, p. 26.

<sup>208</sup> The accumulation of the fees paid by emigrants and the £10 government subsidy allowed for a larger contingent of emigrants than was originally intended.

<sup>209</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, p.33.

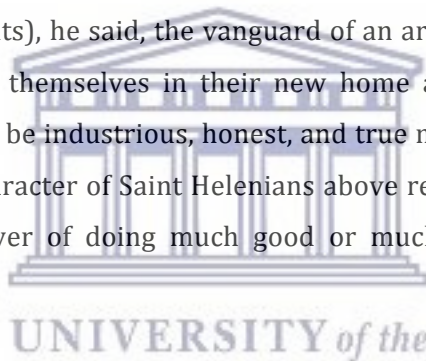
<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

their victualing fees - were subsidised by Governor Grey-Wilson from the imperial treasury.<sup>211</sup>

Along with the names of all seventy-five emigrants (see document image 10 in the appendix) it was later expressed in a final article published about this 1891 migratory episode that these emigrants would not be left to their own devices “as is generally supposed to be the case”, but that “they will be assisted by the Cape Government to get employment.”<sup>212</sup>

If there were a couple of salient points to take away about the meaning of this event, the first would be illustrated in the task set and articulated by Governor Grey Wilson to the emigrants:

They were (the emigrants), he said, the vanguard of an army; and he trusted that they would so conduct themselves in their new home as to be a credit to St. Helena; that they would be industrious, honest, and true men and women, so that they might raise the character of Saint Helenians above reproach... (as) they held in their hands the power of doing much good or much harm to their native Island.<sup>213</sup>



Impelled by the governor in his rather animated farewell speech, the emigrants were encouraged to inject the South African colonies with a healthy dose of St. Helena (British) respectability and to go forth and serve as ambassadors for the Island, and Britain generally. Before wishing “one and all “good-bye and God speed”, Grey-Wilson is quoted further as saying, “... (i)n the South African Colonies, what was wanted was a supply of men and women who are not afraid of work, and are not afraid of being jeered at for doing right.”<sup>214</sup>

The article concluded with reproductions of commending missives exchanged between the Governor (Grey-Wilson) and the head of the Emigration Committee

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<sup>211</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, p.33.

<sup>212</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 30, 1891, np.

<sup>213</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, np.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

(Fowler), congratulating each other on a job well done. The Governor conveyed his appreciation for the

... deep sense of value of the services rendered in selecting and embarking the very large contingent of Islanders... The benefits, for which I hope, from this fresh departure...will I am sure amply repay the Committee for their very considerable labours.”<sup>215</sup>

To which Fowler replied, “the deep interest evinced by Your Excellency in the welfare of these emigrants will be an additional stimulus to their, we trust, natural desire to reflect, by their future conduct, credit upon the land of their birth.”<sup>216</sup> The “courtesy” of the Admiralty, and specifically the “very real considerations” of the Orontes’ Captain McKechnie, were also applauded. In fact, Governor Grey-Wilson remarked in his final communiqué to the Secretary of State that Captain McKechnie was the one who said he could accommodate approximately seventy emigrants, which led to an additional twenty-three Saints being selected out of 118 applicants responding to an eleventh-hour advertisement posted by the governor.<sup>217</sup>

This migratory event was presented by officials as an Anglo-centric act of patriotism as well as one of imperial munificence. This particular migratory incident is framed as a having occurred under the benevolent stewardship of the metropolitan government – in that it approved the transfer of seventy-five emigrants, without charging for passage per se to the Cape on board a warship otherwise off limits to general emigrants – and the “instrumentality” of Colonial government of St. Helena that subsidised the costs of this emigration scheme. For, “[t]he Inhabitants cannot express their gratitude more forcibly for this great privilege granted them...”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Grey-Wilson to his Emigration Committee, reproduced in the *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, np.

<sup>216</sup> Fowler to Governor Grey-Wilson, reproduced in the *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, np.

<sup>217</sup> Governor Grey-Wilson to Secretary of State, Knutsford, April 22, 1891, *Secretary of State Despatches*, no. 28, pp. 385-386. Obtained from the St. Helena Government Archive.

<sup>218</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, April 23, 1891, np.

## 2.2. The 1890s: a cohort for Concordia

1893 presents another relatively major migratory occasion for St. Helena Island. On the 4<sup>th</sup> September that year fifty-six men, five woman and eleven children (mainly family of some of these men) left for Port Nolloth aboard the *Pembroke Castle*.<sup>219</sup> Accompanying the aforementioned seventy-two emigrants were two unmarried women who, however, were the only two bound for Cape Town (see document image 11 in the appendix for a full list of all emigrants aboard the *Pembroke Castle*).<sup>220</sup> Like many of their forerunners, these St. Helenian men were to work as migrant labourers under three-to-four-year contracts for the Namaqua or Cape Copper Companies in Concordia, an arid Northern-Cape region of the country. Formally offered 3 shillings per ten-hour day's work, there was also the potential for them to earn up to "4 shillings, 6 pence per diem at most by overtime."<sup>221</sup> Their labour transference signalled the median of many successful past schemes, and heralded even larger future labour conveyances for Port Nolloth brokered between the St. Helena Government and representatives of the Namaqua and Cape Copper Companies.

Much of the article pertaining to the matter, published on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1893 in the *St. Helena Guardian*, was the usual lambasting of advocates for emigration and the lament for the loss of the Island's productive workforce by proponents for the development of a sustainable St. Helena industry – an unresolved contestation raging for at least the preceding forty years. Amplifying their argument were murmurs around the supposed oversight of the metropolitan government in failing to institute a voluntary militia scheme that would have absorbed superfluous labour and curtailed the large percentage of unemployed men. It was posited that they would "prefer a Militia to expatriation, because (they) believe(d) in an industry sooner or later, and Militia pay would have kept the wolf of starvation at bay whilst an industry was growing strong..."<sup>222</sup> These campaigners for the development of local commercial

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<sup>219</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 7, 1893, np.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 7, 1893, np.



enterprise presumed the militia a legitimate temporary measure that would assuage the effects of unemployment while industry in the Island was underway.

Still, the central premise of their arguments was that working St. Helenian men would prefer, foremost, to remain on the Island were there more sustainable industries extant, rather than emigrate for the “half-civilised” lands of South Africa. Moreover, those in favour of industrialising St. Helena contended, instead of “closing the gate after the loss of a horse”, they believed that most of the emigrants labouring in South Africa would “return home if things were better [...]”; and that those who are coming on to early manhood would not look forward to either the Cape or the Copper mines.”<sup>223</sup> “With patriotic-insular feeling”, they delivered a persuasive argument, but regretted the lack of local leadership to propel the project for the instigation of a reliable and sustainable local industry to the top of domestic and metropolitan government agendas.

Although the fifty-six miners comprised at the time the single largest cohort of migrant labourers, the article begins by stating, “[t]he advocates of emigration can now be satisfied for 106 able-bodied men had left the Island for Port Nolloth, Namaqualand...”<sup>224</sup>. It therefore suggests that smaller groups of male labourers had already preceded the company of fifty-six mentioned above and whose names appear below. Prior to 1893, evident from my previous chapter, there had begun a pattern of men leaving the Island to work in the Concordia copper mines, and the 1893 incident simply represents an intensification and formalisation of the trend.

It is unclear whether these migrant Saints were simply sojourning or settling in South Africa. If one is to judge by the short duration of the contracts, such arrangements allude to an impermanent stay in South Africa. However, this may be misleading as only few miners opted to return to St. Helena after their initial contracts had naturally terminated at the end of their employment term. It so happens that the majority of St. Helena migrants renewed their contracts with

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<sup>223</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, September 7, 1893, np.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

the Namaqua Copper Company or the Cape Copper Company several times, some may even have been employed interchangeably by both companies, extending their working tenures and, in due course, ensuring their process of naturalisation as South African citizens. Many left with their entire families, which is indicative of the intention to settle. Others acclimatised and gradually became accustomed to their new economic lives, while some remittances sent back home would certainly have allayed much of the economic pressures in the island. All the while, the pattern of fresh migrant Saints leaving their panoramic littoral home which they so cherished, and heading to work in the desolate Concordia copper mines in South Africa, continued well into the first two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, after which the Copper Company liquidated in the 1930s.

The overarching plan, after all, involved these migrant Saints building for themselves new homes in the larger British Cape Colony, a project well articulated in the discourse of local newspapers debating the issue of emigration as a remedial measure for unemployment and overpopulation in St. Helena Island. I have reason to believe that Edward Caswell, whose name appears on the 1893 list of emigrants aboard the *Pembroke Castle*, was my great-grandfather. Indeed, he was barely an adult - no older than fourteen years of age - when he first emigrated from St. Helena to labour in the Concordia copper mines. Evincing by his contract reproduced below (figure 8 below) is the hand-written commencement date - 1905 - on an otherwise template typed contract. By 1905, twelve years after his departure from the island, he was considered a 'local', "also of Concordia, Namaqualand, Cape Colony..." (see the last line in the first paragraph of the contract).



AN AGREEMENT made this *first* day of *May* 1905,  
Between THE NAMAQUA COPPER COMPANY, LIMITED, hereinafter called  
"the Company", of Concordia, Namaqualand, Cape Colony, of the  
one part, and Edward Caswell, also of Concordia, Namaqualand,  
Cape Colony of the other part.

1. The Company hereby engages the said Edward Caswell to work as an Engine Driver or in any other capacity as directed, at the Company's Mines in Namaqualand, for the term of three years from the 1st day of *May* 1905, but subject to termination as herein provided, and the said Edward Caswell hereby accepts the engagement on the terms and conditions following.
2. The said Edward Caswell will, during the continuance of this Agreement, faithfully and diligently employ himself as an Engine Driver, or in any other capacity as required.
3. The said Edward Caswell will, if he work steadily, industriously and with due diligence, during all usual working hours, as set forth by the Company's rules and regulations, or when required, performing a fair day's work in each working day, be paid at the rate of £8 (Eight Pounds) per month for the first year; £8 : 10/- (Eight Pounds ten shillings) per month for the second year, and £9 (Nine Pounds) per month for the third year of this Agreement.
4. The said Edward Caswell shall not engage in any other business or work without the Company's consent.
5. The said Edward Caswell will at all times faithfully and punctually obey and perform the orders and directions of the Company's Principal Mining Agent or other Agents under whose authority he may be placed by the Principal Mining Agent, and will observe and conform to all rules and regulations which may from time to time be issued by the Company or their Principal Mining Agent for the preservation of order and discipline in connection with the working of the mines. And it is expressly declared that for any breach of the said rules and regulations a fine not exceeding one month's pay may be inflicted by the Principal Mining Agent and deducted from the pay of the said Edward Caswell, or he may be summarily discharged, in which case he shall forfeit all benefit and advantage whatsoever under this Agreement, which shall thereupon be deemed to be terminated except as regards any payments due to or rights of the Company thereunder.
6. In the event of the said Edward Caswell becoming incapable of performing his duties by ill-health, or accident arising from negligence or misconduct on his part, he shall not be entitled to any pay during or in respect of the period while he is so incapable of working, or to any other payment whatsoever under this Agreement, but if rendered incapable of performing his duties by ordinary ill-health or accident he shall receive four pounds per month for a period not exceeding four months, after which period he will not be entitled to any payment whatsoever.
7. The Company may terminate this Agreement at any time by giving to the said Edward Caswell one calendar month's notice in writing terminating the same.

For and on behalf of  
THE NAMAQUA COPPER COMPANY, LIMITED,

..... *L. J. Phillips* .....  
Deputy Superintendent.

Witnesses to Signatures

..... *C. S. Storr* .....

..... *Edward Caswell* .....

Figure 8: Edward Caswell's 1905-1908 mining contract.

### 3. 1907: one hundred copper mineworkers

As late as 1907 the most sizable contingent of men left the Island of St. Helena to work for either of the Concordia based Namaqua or Cape Copper Companies.

Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 1907, will be a day long remembered in St. Helena, for on that day 100 men<sup>225</sup> embarked on R.M.S *Galician* for Port Nolloth to work in the Copper Mines at Concordia. At different times there had been batches of men leaving, but never more than 50 at a time (sic), so that this is a record exodus and one affecting a great many families.... It was a sad and pathetic sight to witness the leave-taking of husband and wife, father and child, brother and sister, who in many cases will be separated for four years, a long time to look forward to, but we shall hope to hear that some wives and children will be able to follow and rejoin their husbands and sons when they have got settled in their new homes.<sup>226</sup>

From the excerpt above explicating the May 1907 migratory event, we can deduce that the intention of the St. Helena migrant labourers was indeed to settle in South Africa and that, inevitably, many of their families were to follow them to the Northern Cape (document image 12 in the appendix is a list containing the names of these one hundred mineworkers). It was certainly a case of emigration rather than sojourn, despite the labourers' initial contracts being drawn by the Namaqua, Cape or O'Kiep Copper Companies for only a three to four-year period. This migration instance is one of the earliest cases and largest single case of emigration of a group comprised exclusively of labouring men from the Island that had been documented, and one of the few immigration cases being written about in scholarship.

Considering that Daniel Yon is currently the only other scholar working on the migratory relationship between South Africa and St. Helena, it is worth taking a short detour here to discuss what meaning has been made of this particular migratory incident. Being enthused by "a letter from the Governor of St Helena to

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<sup>225</sup> Please see document image 12 in the appendix. It contains the full list of names of the one hundred men who left for the Cape Colony's Concordia copper mines on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1907. Reproduced in the *St. Helena Guardian*, May 16, 1907, np.

<sup>226</sup> *St. Helena Guardian*, May 23, 1907, p.44.



the Governor of the Cape, thanking him for helping to facilitate the departure of the 1907 one hundred men”,<sup>227</sup> Yon extracts this episodic 1907 event from a more comprehensive immigration history and superimposes onto it a dynamic and complex, mainly anthropological, conceptual framework prevalent in oceanic studies. In his approach to making sense of the relationship between these two places, Yon posits the desolate Concordia copper mines as a place of “convergence” and premised much of his writings on notions of creolisation, cosmopolitanism, globalisation, memory, race and transnationalism, which coalesce as identity politics. Yon also theorises the confluent properties of the sea, especially the Atlantic Ocean, as a ‘lived-in’ and vibrant space, which, in the first instance, produced the creole Saint, encouraging us to discard dated conceptions of the sea as dead instrumental space that simply facilitates movement. To him, if the sea represents anything for the St. Helenian, it is that memory, culture and home can be in situ of the sea, it’s not only within land that these human functions are embedded.

Furthermore, Yon privileges topographic metaphors to illustrate the effects of movement, via the sea, producing vacillation in the ‘sense of self’ experienced by immigrant Saints in South Africa. Their confrontation with racially inscribed landscapes and rigid racial identities imposed on immigrant Saints were relatively unfamiliar to them. Of particular interest to Yon, and myself, is how Saints negotiated their identity, and how are we to begin making sense of the sticky residue that still persists on holding a St. Helena identity intact, as espoused by the present descendants of emigrant Saints in South Africa.<sup>228</sup> In my subsequent chapters, when dealing with the role of movement and nostalgia in identity adaptation and reformation, I will engage indirectly with some of Yon’s concepts and theories constituting his conceptual framework as a mode of understanding the migratory relations between St. Helena Island and South Africa. However, my principle objective with these chapters is to provide a more comprehensive account of this historical migratory relationship between the two places. The last section of this chapter moves to the period of the Union of South

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<sup>227</sup> Yon, *The Island, the Ocean and the Desert*.

<sup>228</sup> Also see Yon’s latest film: *Mining Memory*. Directed by Daniel Yon (South Atlantic World Productions, 2018).



Africa, from 1910 to just before the institution of formal apartheid in 1948, when aided bulk immigration from the Island to South Africa start to taper off.

#### **4. St. Helena immigration post Unionisation of South Africa**

##### **4.1. Context: upsurge in bureaucratic racial regulation**

The 1900s present a diminished period for St. Helena immigration to South Africa, seriously dwarfed by the comparable waves of organised aided migrations that occurred during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. None the less, this migratory trickle deserves some explication and reflection since its value lay beyond its numbers and rather with providing a qualitative contextual and comparative understanding of race, rendered accessible for analysis via official epistles and documentation pertaining to how immigrant Saints were received and treated upon arrival in South Africa.

After the two Anglo-Boer wars the two central Afrikaner Republics and the British coastal colonies set aside their bloody difference to form the Union of South Africa in 1910. These erstwhile rivals reasoned that such an uneasy settler alliance was in the best interest of the former four settler state colonies. It would allow for the joint mining exploitation of recently discovered precious metals in the interior, and offer mutual protection of their mining interest from other European rivals and dissident indigenous nations, who did not stand at all to benefit from this alliance.

During this period - which technically ended with the Westminster Statute of 1931, but de facto after the South African referendum declaring the country a republic in 1961 - the task of recording St. Helena emigration sensibly shifted to the new bloated 'united' South African government. I say 'sensibly' because the St. Helena government, on behalf of the British Crown, had hardly ever kept a systematic record of its emigrants. For all intent and purposes, the white British St. Helenians were British citizens moving freely within the empire's territories. For those who were considered 'coloured' St. Helenians, a different set of

regulatory and documentary rules applied, which I argue below. Furthermore, especially since the bulk of the migration had already occurred prior to this period, there was no reason for the St. Helena Crown Colony to start keeping judicious records.

Pointedly, though, the Union of South Africa, ushered into urbanisation and modernity on the stakes of newly discovered mineral wealth, now had a vested interest in knowing, controlling and regulating the constituency of their new and prosperous modernising state. Despite South Africa acquiring the legal status as a semi-independent, yet relatively autonomous, Dominion within the British Empire, in effect it remained largely under British control. This British political control was maintained by the Union's sworn legal allegiance to the empire, and secured by the Crown's representation through its Governor-Generals as well as by virtue of the new Union's legislative capital residing in Cape Town, the centre of the former British colony.

As part of negotiations between the British and the Afrikaner to form a new unitary state, a formative political compromise was reached, which saw the administrative (executive) capital situated in Pretoria - the capital of the previous Transvaal (Afrikaner) Republic, while the judicial capital (exemplified by the Supreme Court of Appeal) was to be based in Bloemfontein - the capital of the former Orange Free State (Afrikaner) republic. The enthusiasm of the former Transvaal republic in undertaking its new role as administrative capital is evident by the bureaucratic surge in establishing intelligence and regulatory departments, like the South African Government Department of Census and Statistics relevant to my study.

#### **4.2. Figures, methodological challenges and analysis**

An aggregation of figures from available reports<sup>229</sup>, published by the Union of South Africa's Department of Census and Statistics, asserts that only 314 immigrant Saints settled in South Africa between 1919 and 1977.

Union of South Africa summary of St. Helena Immigration and Emigration 1919-1963							
Year	Non-European		Non-European				Difference
	Immigrate to SA		Emigrate from SA				
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1924	6	6	12	2	2	4	8
1925	4	16	20	0	3	3	17
1926	6	4	10	2	6	8	2
1927	9	5	14	2	0	2	12
1928	6	5	11	0	0	0	11
1929	4	8	12	0	0	0	12
1930	2	4	6	0	0	0	6
1931	0	2	2	1	1	2	0
1932	0	3	3	0	0	0	3
1933	0	3	3	0	0	0	3
1934	1	1	2	0	0	0	2
1935	5	4	9	0	0	0	9
1936	3	5	8	0	0	0	8
1937	5	5	10	0	0	0	10
1938	8	13	21	1	0	1	20
1939	9	12	21	0	0	0	21
1940	4	7	11	0	0	0	11
1941	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1942	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1943	0	2	2	0	1	1	1
1944	0	3	3	0	0	0	3
1945	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
1946	11	9	20	0	0	0	20
1947	5	0	5	0	1	1	4
1948	45	87	132	0	2	2	130
Total	134	204	338	8	16	24	314

Table 1: Reflecting the net migration of St. Helenians to and from South Africa during the period of the Union of South Africa, just prior to the implementation of apartheid policies.

<sup>229</sup> During my research I have consulted numerous emigration-immigration reports produced in Pretoria by the Union of South Africa government. The main dossier of annual reports, *Statistics of Migration 1919-1963*, published by the Department of Census and Statistics, has proven to be particularly useful. From these various reports I have managed to collate and produce a snapshot of St. Helena immigration to South Africa between 1919 and 1963. Table 1 above is a summary of these immigration statistics. In cases where there were duplicate reports for specific periods, the figures were cross-referenced and verified. From 1949 to 1963 there are no statistics on the immigration of 'Non-European' Saints, except for a note on page IX of report number 297, *Statistics of Migration 1963 and Earlier Years*, stating, "[t]he number of non-whites is so small and only a few tables showing the essential statistics have, therefore, been included towards the end of this report." I found nothing related to St. Helena in report number 297.

Sensibly, as a small British island colony, St. Helena Island does not appear as a sovereign national or territorial category (or data filter) in the Union of South African's migration records. But, after scrutinising the national archival records on immigration for weeks, the most worthwhile 'variable' I managed to uncover was the "Birthplace of immigrant/emigrant". This latent category, subsumed under reams of quantitative data, could easily have gone unnoticed despite it being the only instance in which St. Helena Island appears as an entry in nearly all of these reports. Aside from my satisfaction in having stumbled upon this information, it has proven to be indispensable to any quantitative study pertaining to St. Helena immigration during the period South Africa was a 'union' state.

Although the beginning of the reports is dated from 1919, in effect, the Union only commenced scrupulous analysis of its own migration figures and reporting on them from 1924 onwards. Between 1919 and 1923, it was conceded by the department of Census and Statistics, the Union had not discriminated between migrants taking up or relinquishing domicile and those in transit via the Union as tourists or business travellers. In all case prior to 1924 entrants were "classed as new arrivals" and those exiting as "permanent departures."<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the Union required time to develop its 'mutually beneficial' racialised imperial-nationalist institutions after being considerably beset and impeded by its involvement in World War I. But once published, and as is characteristic of bureaucratic data, the immigration reports of Saints, consistent with other migration records<sup>231</sup>, were articulated and chronicled in an officious manner, deprived of narrative and taxonomically limited mostly to delineations of the age, race, marital status, nationality/citizenship and the sex of immigrants. To a lesser extent, these reports contained the professions of immigrants, but how it was organised and presented largely exhibits narrow racial categorisations

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<sup>230</sup> South Africa, Office of Census and Statistic, Special Report Series. *Statistics of Migration to and From the Union, 1919-1926*. Introduction to English files. (Pretoria: Government Printers, July 1924), p.1. Available from the National Library of South Africa's Cape Town General Collections, accession number S.A. STATS 07-20.

<sup>231</sup> This may well be the place to say that St. Helena immigration was a marginal occurrence, its numbers were considerably overshadowed by the migration statics of 'Asians' (Indians in particular) and Europeans (the overwhelming majority being British) settling in South Africa during the first six decades of the 1900s.

indicative of a racist-segregatory ideology, which eventually culminated in the system of apartheid.<sup>232</sup>

To begin with, the Union's immigration-emigration reports were arranged to bifurcate between the 'European' and the 'Non-European' as a fundamental filter in the manner the migration statistics were presented. These reports are also limited to that which was documentable; for instance, information was derived and compiled principally from data contained in Arrival and Departure forms B.I.55 and BI.117, and later included RSA Declaration Form I.M.132. The former were used to establish the 'foreign' traffic through South Africa – the number and condition of entry to and exit from South Africa. While the latter registered 'foreigners' who assumed domicile (immigrants) in South African and citizen who relinquished residency and /or citizenship, emigrating for elsewhere. Despite my reservations that these reports reflect only a partial story and limited figures, I can only verify these figures for now until more information is uncovered.

It can be determined from the figures in Table 1 that a vast majority of Saints remained (settled) in South Africa, while only 7.1 per cent used South Africa as an intermediary terminal en route to settling within other British controlled territories.<sup>233</sup> Notably, these immigrants were largely female, in contrast to the

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<sup>232</sup> This issue regarding the discursive nature of official registration practices and the indexing of immigrants along racial delineations – later forming distinct segregated archival collections - is unpacked in a number of works. See, for instance: Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie (ed.), "Paper Regimes," *Kronos* 40 (November 2014): 11-22. In her introduction Dhupelia-Mesthrie refers to the application of separate state procedures and "vocabularies" of documentation in which racial classifications were manufactured rather than simply recorded and meant to construct a differentially raced subject upon whom disparate rights and privileges were conferred. These documents were used particularly to control the mobility of non-white immigrants into and within the Union and apartheid South Africa. However, in a later article in the same volume, Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie illustrates, by way of example, how the austere system was creatively and advantageously manipulated by Indian immigrants it was meant to control through registration and documentation - Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "False Father and False Sons: Immigration Officials in Cape Town, Documents and Verifying Minor Sons from India in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," *Kronos* 40 (November 2014): 99-132. Other works in the volume outline how the state attempted to invent racial identities, but failed to a large extent in its intention to document and control its populace, including immigrant groups, see: Keith Breckenridge, "The Book of Life: The South African Population Register and the Invention of Racial Descent, 1950-1980," *Kronos* 40 (November 2014): 225-40.

<sup>233</sup> In some cases the information gathered from my interviewees, which I present in Chapters Three and Four, alludes to South Africa as a liminal place/space in which the majority of these



cohorts of artisanal and industrial male workers who migrated during some of the earlier periods.<sup>234</sup> From in-depth interviews with my participants, and to some extent from the 1882-1884 records and other earlier cases discussed in this chapter and my previous one, it can be extrapolated that ('coloured' and mostly unmarried) St. Helenian women were preferred to work as domestic servants in the households of privileged white (usually English-speaking) families. On account of their perceived respectability<sup>235</sup>, and their political, cultural, religious, and lingual affinities with employers, St. Helenian women were sought after and many were often readily employed as domestic servants, especially when such demands for domestic labour in South Africa were concomitant with high rates of unemployment and overpopulation in St. Helena Island.<sup>236</sup>

A particularly interesting observation about the figures is that 130 St. Helena immigrants settled in South Africa in 1948 alone, the very same year the National(ist) Party returned to power and commenced their overt construction of state-engineered apartheid policies under the pretext of 'good-neighbourliness' and ethnic sovereignty. As a consequence of the effects of World War II, St. Helena Island had experienced another exodus.<sup>237</sup> This was partly due to a relatively large population at the time, but mostly on account of subsidy cuts as the metropole's priority shifted to diverting funds for critical reconstruction

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emigrating Saints hoped to pass through for other lands - like Australia, New Zealand, even Canada and the United Kingdom - considered to offer better economic and marital prospects. However, for most, they did not have the means to continue the second leg of their journeys to reach their desired destinations, and had no choice but to settle and eke out a living in South Africa.

<sup>234</sup> The sex ratio within the St. Helena population at this time was disproportionate with female inhabitants far outnumbering their male counterparts. For instance, the 1946 census report, published two years before this 1948 emigration event, declares that, out of a total population of 4748, there were 386 more females than males. See: St. Helena Government, *Census of Population of St. Helena Island and Ascension Island 1946* (The Castle, St. Helena Island: Government Printing Office, 1949), <<http://sainthelenaisland.info/census1946.pdf>> (accessed July 20, 2017), p. 3.

<sup>235</sup> For a discussion on how the perceived respectability of immigrant Saints were deliberated amongst South African and St. Helenian authorities see: Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing," 155-61.

<sup>236</sup> Interview with Mogamat Kamedien September 19, 2015, Wynberg, Cape Town. The legacy of racialised domestic servitude amongst the descendants of Saints is a theme I address in my fourth chapter.

<sup>237</sup> David L. Smallman, p.66. Smallman, who was the Governor of St. Helena Island between 1995-1999, specifically mentions the emigration of Saints for Britain, but the same expulsive reasons hold for the 1948 South African immigration event.

projects in its proximate home country and continent. Faced with yet another state of economic uncertainty, many of the working class 'coloured' Saints had to emigrate for elsewhere, which explains the unusual and comparatively high South African immigration figure for 1948. This rather contemporary form of immigration, characterised by large cohorts of immigrant Saints, was not peculiar to South Africa; during this time many Saints also migrated to Britain and other British Dominions.<sup>238</sup>

It may appear strange that I have included only 'non-Europeans' in my figures, but this is not an omission of statistics containing 'European' emigrants. Rather, it is indicative, firstly, of the fact that the majority of the poorer working class emigrants compelled to emigrate were considered 'coloured' (a legacy of slavery and generations of métissage and miscegenation), and that they composed the majority of the population of St. Helena at this time and presently. Secondly, there is considerable disparity in the presentation of various statistical reports often covering the same period but published at different dates. For instance, the migration reports between 1919-1926 and 1966-1977 include 'European' St. Helena immigrants in its statistics. However, the most comprehensive dossier of annual reports covering 1919-1963 makes no reference to 'European' immigrants born in the Island of St. Helena.

These discrepancies in presentation of reports may also reflect the austere racist sensibilities that permeated the Union government's bureaucratic structures: the curators of the 1919-1963 dossier of annual immigration statistics, published from 1927 forwards, refrained from classifying the birthplace of white ('European') St. Helenians' under the category 'St. Helena', when in fact there were such cases mentioned in other contemporaneous reports. Instead, they were classified as *British Other* - that is other than '*British*' *South West African* or

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<sup>238</sup> Daniel Yon's 2008 film entitled, *One Hundred Men*, offers a contemporary and rare account of an organised St. Helena emigration scheme for Britain. In his filmic case study, one hundred St. Helenian men were solicited and their migration aided by British government officials on both sides of the Atlantic to work as agricultural labourers in rural England. However, the value of the film is more complex and nuanced, extending way beyond the fact of one hundred men having emigrated for Britain.

*'British' Rhodesian*, each qualifying as a separate category.<sup>239</sup> It cannot be determined for certain if this omission was employed for benign statistical methodology reasons or if there were more malignant racial ideologies underlying the presentation. (I would imagine it was the confluence of both as a clear taxonomical binary was applied to the 'European' versus the 'non-European'.)

But, we can draw at least two conclusions: foremost, an obvious one – that the numbers of white St. Helenians emigrating for South Africa was so marginal the bureaucracy did not deem these immigrants constituted a 'category', incorporating them instead under that which is considered 'sundry'. But, certainly of greater analytical merit, is the observation that although present-day Namibia and Zimbabwe were by far responsible for the largest number of white immigrants to South Africa, in all these cases the Union Government made sure to prefix white English-speaking immigrants from 'Other African countries' – a category in which St. Helena was subsumed - with the label 'British'. This process of subjection signifies the conflation of race and place of provenance, and in its effect, the British label denotes a composite imperial identity, inclusive of racial, nationalist and cultural subjectivities.

The Union's Department of Census and Statistics' emigration-immigration records contained in the dossier 1919-1963 reserved and applied the appellation '*St. Helenian*' chiefly for 'Non-European' immigrants originating from St. Helena Island. White St. Helenians were generally not included under the rubric *St. Helena*.<sup>240</sup> Daniel Yon's primary argument is an explication of the fallible bureaucratic process of inscribing the reductive and mutable 'coloured' racial marker on creole, and otherwise phenotypically multifarious, groups of St. Helena immigrants.<sup>241</sup> He juxtaposes the racial rigidity and determinacy of South African mores in foregrounding race (rather than class or culture, although they

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<sup>239</sup> This racial taxonomy is consistent throughout most of the reports I have investigated in dossier *Statistics of Migration 1919-1963*.

<sup>240</sup> Yet, it is an identity linked to place of origin strongly invoked by descendants of St. Helenian immigrants who would otherwise be considered white South Africans. An exploration of this phenomenon follows in my subsequent two chapters on nostalgia and identity.

<sup>241</sup> Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing," 144-63.

all conflate) to the greater degree of liberty, “flux and fluidity, indeterminacy and possibility” of the Creole Atlantic world in negotiating (racial) identities.<sup>242</sup>

According to Yon, these immigrant Saints were “confounded” when they first encountered a hyper-racialising process of incorporation into South African society. Their historical trajectory on the insular Island was one of malleable creolisation and precarious assimilation to ‘Britishness’, which denotes a degree of relative “respectability”. This was to differ quite markedly from the blatant and rigid forms of racial reification imposed on identity in South Africa. While the austere bureaucratic process of racial labelling and imposition succeeded, to some extent, in reducing and simplifying the multiplicity and nuanced racial subjectivities of Saints - if one considers the lament of many Saints in having to resign and subject themselves to the racial label ‘coloured’ - it also manufactured a variation within “coloured” group identity in South Africa.<sup>243</sup>

To add to Yon’s valuable argument regarding the process of race-making, in the South African context, it was simultaneously a process of nation-making. Labelling constructed more than just the moot category of ‘race’, it concurrently produced a parallel quasi-nationality/citizenship and an ersatz racialised indigeneity. What has become analogous with St. Helena is the notion of the mixed-raced majority being autochthonous to the Island when in fact their derivation lies in the very cauldron of British Empire formation. There was neither an indigenous mixed-race community in the Island, nor did the inhabitants of the place constitute a nation. In Yon’s articulation, St. Helena, as a microcosm of the Atlantic world, “is a place that is always en-route but where people, commerce and community (life) also took root,”<sup>244</sup> or similarly phrased by Schulenburg, as a place of both “transit (and transition).”<sup>245</sup>

There are a few virtually imperceptible cases one can glean from the records where St. Helena-born whites were recorded to either have emigrated to South

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<sup>242</sup> Yon, “Race-Making/Race-Mixing,” 145.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>245</sup> Schulenburg, “St Helena - British local history in the context of empire,” 120.

Africa, or in some rarer cases, South African whites who had emigrated to St. Helena. For instance, between 1924 and 1926<sup>246</sup> twenty-one white Saint Helenians (five males and sixteen females) immigrated to South Africa. However, during the same period sixteen immigrants (seven males and nine females), who had their birthplaces recorded as St. Helena, emigrated from South Africa. It is beyond the parameters of this study to ascertain where they emigrated to, but one can presume they headed for other British territories within the 'commonwealth'.

Since the 1924-1926 reports are the only that explicitly make reference to white St. Helena-born immigrants, the net immigrant amount of five immigrants for this period is negligible. What is salient, though - if one compares this transient trend with that of the 'non-European' immigrants from St. Helena - is the recognition of their fluidity of movement and the degree borders within the British Empire were more porous to white migrants, who experienced these austere racial delineations by an authoritarian South African Union state as liberating to their motion, whereas for the 'coloured' St. Helenians it was restrictive.

In a later report, four (one male and three female) 'European' immigrants, with their previous residence being St. Helena, were documented to have settled in South Africa between 1970-1971.<sup>247</sup> These reports were meticulous, in the sense that it could report the three women as "economically inactive"<sup>248</sup> and the male as a "professional".<sup>249</sup> There was even a case where a single male emigrated from South Africa for St. Helena Island.<sup>250</sup> But these cases were marginal and inconsistent. They are eclipsed by the comparative numbers of 'coloured' St. Helenians who had immigrated to South African, which is analytically more

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<sup>246</sup> South Africa, Office of Census and Statistics. *Statistics of Migration to and From the Union 1919-1926*. Special Report Series, No. 25 (1924), p.22, table 12; No.41 (1925), p.22, table 13; and No. 45 (1926) p.19, table 14. Afrikaans and English files. (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1925 and 1927). These statistical reports can be accessed with accession number S.A. STATS 07-20 from the National Library of South Africa's Cape Town General Collections.

<sup>247</sup> South Africa, Office of Census and Statistics. *Statistics of Migration 1966-1977* (Pretoria: Government Printers, n.d.), tables 35, p. 60.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., table 38.3, p. 85.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., table 38.2, p. 80.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., table 45, p. 101.



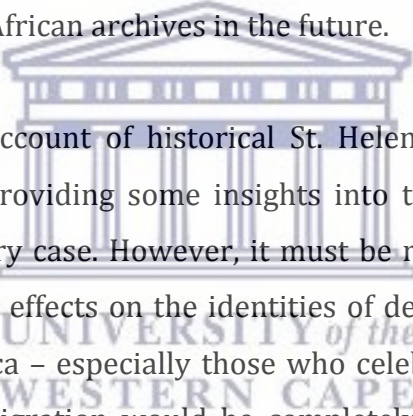
poignant for the manner in which a stigmatised racialised marker was imposed upon these Saints, and for their rebuttal of these labels as the 'terms and conditions' for their interpellation into the Union of South Africa.

## 5. Conclusion

As an epilogue to this chapter and the previous, I believe it useful to reflect on some of the key critical themes that may have emerged from the research enabling me to produce these chapters. I need to highlight, upfront, that the most challenging aspect of my research lay in the fragmentedness of archival material. Most of my research time was spent meshing together governmental and media archival fragments with the hope that this textual tapestry, assembled from chequered information, presents some coherent narrative regarding the overall migratory relationship between St. Helena Island and South Africa. My hope is that these chapters are received as an arduous initial attempt to construct such a foundational narrative, also to serve as the basis for my own future studies on the topic of St. Helena emigration for South Africa.

The approach to these chapters was intentionally chronological, and sometimes (unintentionally) excavatory and descriptive, as reason would dictate the necessity to locate denser theorisations within a fuller basic narrative, albeit incomplete, relating to the one-way migratory relationship between St. Helena Island and South Africa. We may acknowledge that there were instances of temporary transferences of South African prisoners of war, who were incarcerated on the Island after being captured in battles or for their general resistance to British colonial expansion in South Africa. Thus approximately 5000 Boer prisoners of war (1899 – 1902) and Zulu captives, most notably King Dinuzulu and his entourage, were interned on the Island between 1890-1897, and a different Zulu unit of twenty-five leaders of the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion were gaoled on the Island between 1907 and 1909. However, these transfers do not constitute migrations, and whilst important for political historian, they do not figure in my two chapters on St. Helena emigration.

From my initial research findings, it can be claimed with some certainty that at least 2,032 St. Helenians had emigrated for South Africa between 1838 and 1948. Although this number is a conservative aggregation of several relatively large migration events that had left a trace in governmental and newspaper archives, it cannot be accepted as a definitive representation of the full scale of St. Helena migration. Varied governmental correspondence and newspaper articles make several references to smaller cohorts of emigrants leaving for the Cape as well as that of individuals and families who possessed the personal means to pay their own passage to the Cape. Considering that emigration-immigration record-keeping on both the St. Helena and South African fronts were unsystematic, inconsistent and incomplete, it is sufficiently reasonable to believe that many emigrants left no formal trace for present historical study. In addition, it can also be expected that further information will be uncovered with more time spent in the St. Helena and South African archives in the future.



Perhaps a quantitative account of historical St. Helena immigration to South Africa is important for providing some insights into the extent and recurrent character of this migratory case. However, it must be recognised and conceded that if it were not for the effects on the identities of descendants of Saints who had settled in South Africa – especially those who celebrated their St. Helenian heritage - this case of migration would be completely imperceptible within a broader South African immigration history. Furthermore, the settlement of Saints is comparatively marginal and diminutive when compared to the tens of thousands of European settlers and Indian indentured labourers who settled in South Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Therefore, a more salient set of questions arises from an analysis of factors fomenting several instances of mass St. Helena emigration. In conjunction, an examination of the concomitant factors that attracted Saints to South Africa as well as how these immigrant Saints were received and assimilated into their new homes in South Africa also stimulates more interesting research questions. Concerning the factors generating the pressures for labouring St. Helenians to emigrate, I have not made unique arguments. Rather, I have recapitulated and

compressed, under the section 'Historical collapses of the St. Helena economy', existing, relatively unanimous, arguments that St. Helena Island was/is, maybe until very recently,<sup>251</sup> a land without a sustainable private industry to support the population with the required employment and economic opportunities to thrive.

However, I have also made a case for the historical misarticulation of the island's economic collapses, since St. Helena was not intended as a place of permanence on the grounds of an imperial economic logic that the Island could not ascend beyond its fixed *raison d'être* as a victualing port or, later, as a fortified gaol and internment camp for political prisoners of war. What constituted St. Helena as a distinct and unique place— its remoteness and strategic location in the mid South Atlantic – paradoxically also produced its limited economic usefulness in the British imperial project. And, although it would be correct to recognise the vital role St. Helena Island played in advancing British imperialism and its nautical militarism, it is also apt to acknowledge that the inhabitants of the Island did not, in truth, benefit in any substantive material way from the imperial process, at least not until Saints were officially declared British citizens in 2002 which obviated a political precarity but did not necessarily resolve the economic uncertainty of local Saints. I have tried to encapsulate the interminable problematic of St. Helena's vagarious economic history by framing it as a place of transitory utility in the process of British Empire formation. It was a utility that had diminished since the advent of steam engines in the mid-1800s and the opening of a new route, the Suez Canal, to the Indies, rendering redundant St. Helena's principle (and dated) purpose as a 'pit stop' replenishing port.

This historical, and until recently, enduring crisis in imagining St. Helena as anything more than a victualing and replenishing port of call for ships trading in the East Indies lay squarely with British imperial powers - first the EEIC (from

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<sup>251</sup> Expectation are that the new airport on St. Helena, which opened in October 2017, will increase accessibility to the Island and shift its miniature 'bespoke' tourism industry to one that is more mainstream and stimulate greater consistent revenue for the Island. However, it is too early to tell what effects the airport will have on a St. Helena tourism industry or if it will, indeed, meet economic expectations.

1659-1834) and then later with the British government (from 1834 until recently). Consequently, this crisis of imagining manifested a condition that has had a lasting effect on the poorer labouring class of the Island, who remain themselves a 'precariat' class continually seeking (gainful) employment elsewhere.

However, British imperial structures, for the most part, have taken responsibility for the survival of local Saints, a remnant of empire formation. Since, to paraphrase Yon, 'life had taken root on the Island', despite St. Helena having been intended as a place always 'en route' to elsewhere, the British government cannot be faulted and should be credited for adopting a position of responsibility to mitigate the liminal existence of Saints. However, where my critique rests, along with those others who have come before me, most notably Schulenburg and Parker, is not in the fact that responsibility was assumed, but with the paternalistic, if not possessive and self-serving, manner in which this duty was exercised.

English cultural paternalism toward the creolised Saint is a dedicated study and one I merely address in my next chapter. The type of paternalism under discussion in my chapters on emigration relates, first, to the English East Indian Company's (EEIC) excessive historical subsidisation in the running of the Island's most fundamental affairs. The EEIC governor and company servants treated the island as its own private resort, artificially inflating the quality of life effecting expenditure incommensurate by ten-fold with the Island's income. Benefaction continued after the British government repossessed the Island from the EEIC in 1834 and it persists into the very present in the form of the British metropolitan government's Grant-in-Aid scheme. In addition, the local government employs roughly two-thirds of the Island's adult population. These facts lead Parker to refer to the island as a public economy dependent on British public taxes. Such historical and contemporary forms of patronage are claimed to have produced a 'culture of dependency', which has had a disabling effect on the development of a general entrepreneurial 'spirit' in the Island, restricting such privileges to a few elite families, the Solomon family being a synecdoche for such privilege.

Furthermore, I have made arguments that although there were genuine attempts to develop local industries – like fishing and canning; whaling; flax production; lace-making; and a coal refuelling station – these were often compromised and hampered by either bureaucratic or welfarist government rationalities, or in some cases, by sheer misfortune. As argued by Trevor Hearl, attempts to derive financial benefit for the Island by entering the whaling industry were frustrated and handicapped by British bureaucracy and government monopolistic tendencies. The fishing and canning venture, on the other hand, was contingent on the benevolence of a philanthropist named Mr. Mosely, but unfortunately miscarried by *force majeure*<sup>252</sup> before catching or canning a single mackerel.

Lace making was not an industry; it was a government-funded welfare relief mechanism to ameliorate the indigence of unemployed, particularly unmarried, local women in the Island. The Coal Refuelling station's failure was linked to the inevitability that St. Helena could be circumvented altogether after the opening of the Suez Canal, which enabled a shorter route to the and from the East for European East Indian traders. As a result, the number of ships calling at the island plummeted, and it mattered not that St. Helena could supply coal to speedier steam ships, which was simply an alternation in its mode of provisioning that did not transcend its status as a replenishing port. A second flax production industry, begun in 1907, could be considered the Island's only true industry. It lasted roughly fifty years, but was fraught with its own set of risks and limitations. Firstly, the industry did not provide a dignified standard of living for its labourers, and secondly, it was unstably held afloat by metropolitan patronage in that the British Post Office was essentially its sole client. The Flax industry supposedly collapsed when the British Post Office substituted its need for flax with synthetic material. All these strategies to ignite a durable local industry were exigent and reactionary; none provided the opportunity to

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<sup>252</sup> Mosely's significant capital outlay to set up a mackerel fishing and canning factory was justified since it was taken for granted that the sea around St. Helena always teemed with mackerel. But, an apparent act of nature, which could not be accounted for, stymied the establishment of this enterprise. It appears a comet passed over the Island and changed the predictable and reliable behavioural patterns of the mackerel, pushing them further away from St. Helena's usual fishing grounds. See: Gosse, *St. Helena 1502-1938*, 347-348.



extricate St. Helena from a barrage of composite challenges endemic to its natural location and inherent in its colonial historical trajectory. Nor could they 'liberate' its inhabitants to act autonomously in plotting a sustainable economic future for the Island.

To analytical suggestion made of St. Helena's 'economic collapses' post-Napoleon (1815-1821) and the Boer war prisoners' incarceration (1900-1902), I have responded by arguing that these were dubious conceptions of what an 'industry' entails. The temporary billeting of soldiers to guard prisoners of war cannot possibly constitute an authentic industry or a sustainable economy, despite evanescent economic activity, and an increase in traffic and trade. At best, these are dubious references to periods of economic prosperity. I have applied a similar critique for the period between 1840 and 1864, during which time the Island was appropriated as a base for a final assault against the Atlantic slave trade. The Island involvement in committed British slave abolition activities was instantiated by the locating there of the African Depot, the Vice Admiralty Court and the stationing of the Royal Navy's West African Squadron. However, these instances in which the Island was apprehended for imperial purposes, were inadequate economic measures if, indeed, the objective was economic sustainability of the island's inhabitants. Andrew Pearson, who referred to the pseudo-abolition industry as a "permanent impermanence", best captures this phenomenon.

The sum total of my analysis posits that the historical pressures that had underlain St. Helenians emigrating for South Africa were near-exclusively economic, stemming from constant fluctuations in the St. Helena's miniature, impermanent and undiversified economy. To the above factors discussed, we may add the following precursors: the Island's remoteness from continental landmasses and the Caribbean to its north west, proscribing it from broader and fuller economic integrations; its lack of natural resources to build a diverse modern economy; and the topography of the Island rendering it uncondusive to

cash crop farming. All these features amass to position St. Helena as a place of economic undesirability.<sup>253</sup>

What drew Saints to South Africa in particular were the confluent factors of the Island's proximity to the southern region of the African continent; the Anglicisation of the Cape of Good Hope brought about after British occupation in 1806; and, as of the 1870s, the industrialising processes underway in the expanding British South Africa colonies. Considering the depressive economic situation in St. Helena Island, the 'larger (English) colonies' of South Africa offered better economic prospects and securer employment opportunities for Saints, especially after the instalment of a British Parliament of Responsible Government in 1872, which sanctioned and spearheaded a range of industrialising processes.

The initial cohorts of immigrants - totalling 218 - who arrived in South Africa between 1838 and 1841 left the Island out of precipitous desperation. Little is known about their reception in South Africa except for most finding themselves in unexpected exploitative labour arrangements upon their arrival at the Cape. Quite literally, as is evinced by the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1839 Proclamation and by local colonial secretary Searle's correspondence to Governor Middlemore on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1840, these emigrant Saints were indentured to labour speculators like JW. Baron, the master of the 'Munster Lass' ship, who entered into these 'arrangements' with desperate Saints only to resell their contracts, presumably at a profit, to 'strangers' at the Cape.

Labour brokering, as a general practice, was not unusual throughout the history of St. Helena emigration. Although media and governmental sources are steeped in a convivial language, which either evaded or gloss over the specifics of labour agreements,<sup>254</sup> a close reading of sources reveals a more telling tale of labour

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<sup>253</sup> In stark contrast to other forms of desirability, especially that of a nostalgia for the secluded and idyllic; a lost Eden to which only a few privileged could 'escape', for a time, from 'the world'.

<sup>254</sup> Besides the dearth of contractual information, often the names of those complicit in labour transferences were substituted with the pronoun 'party' while the names of institutions importing labour is generalised as "concern" or "company".

brokerage. For instance, Brooke-Smith, a 'representative of a Port Elizabeth boating concern' corresponds with Mr. Carrol, a "Merchant of the Island of St. Helena" requesting "50 good Boatmen" from St. Helena, which he secures. A merchant undertakes the 'supply' and 'export' of 'excess' labour, and not the government, which has in all likelihood 'outsourced' the function of aided emigration.<sup>255</sup>

In 1891 seventy-five St. Helena emigrants were embarked for South Africa aboard the *Orontes* warship. Grey-Wilson, the governor at the time, wrote to *his* Emigration Committee, led by Mr. Fowler, thanking them for a job well done and that they would be "amply repa(id) for their very considerable labours". The instance of Mr. Humphries, a Cape Town based labour broker who set up a labour procurement scheme to 'import' St. Helena men for work on the Western Province Railways, was far less ambiguous; he was remunerated £8 by the Cape Government's Public Works Department for each St. Helenian male employed under his scheme.

After a second wave of petitioning in 1868, it appears that "a very considerable number of voluntary emigrants" settled in South Africa, but this fragment of information from a newspaper article is all I could uncover, no figures, names or unique circumstances were as yet discovered. Justified by the discovery and exploitation of mineral resources, industrialising processes in South Africa began in earnest around 1872. It was around this time, as I have demonstrated, that private and government industrial concerns at the Cape were interested in importing varied St. Helena labour. For instance, the 'Port Elizabeth Boating Company' employed fifty skilled St. Helenian boatmen. The Concordia based Cape and Namaqua Copper Companies demanded and absorbed hundreds of St. Helena immigrant labourers. Commencing with the initial group of twenty-one men who left for Port Nolloth on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1872 aboard the *Lord of the*

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<sup>255</sup> I am aware that the figurative line between the 'private' and the 'public' was not as rigid in 1872 and that this 'line' was particularly porous for St. Helena given its insular and intimate social structures. But using the term 'outsourcing' to describe labour procurement and transference assigned to 'agents' coheres with our present sensibilities.

*Isle*, several cohorts of hopeful copper miners followed suit, a pattern that continued well into the 1910s.

The Public Works Department, as a public entity mandated by the Cape Parliament to undertake numerous industrial development projects – the most significant being the building of harbours, road, bridges and a railway network – was often responsible for the direct employment of immigrant Saints. We now know, for example, that Mr. Humphries was charged with the procurement of St. Helena men to work on the Western Province Railway Company, which at that point was still under the auspices of the Public Works Department. So too have we learned that Humphries' scheme failed soon after the initial thirty labourers 'proved unsuited and unsatisfactory' for railway work; the required labour was arduous and at least seven of the thirty Saints were hospitalised for injury and/or exhaustion. When Humphries attempted to solicit a second cohort of Saints for the Railway project, he garnered the interest of only three St. Helena men. Prospective emigrants had heard of the experiences of their compatriots working on the railways and preferred instead to risk labouring in one or other of the copper mines in the Northern Cape, since the working conditions were better despite similar fringe benefits, like the food rations permitted Saints on the railway works and mines.

Furthermore, in 1876 the Public Works Department was assigned the additional function of managing immigration. In this regard, immigrants were not necessarily directly employed within the department's public works projects, but the department did oversee the immigration processes and sometimes the settlement of hundreds of Saints in South Africa during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Although mine is a St. Helena case study, for which I have uncovered, under the rubric of the Public Works Department's (PWD) collection, an 1882-1884 hand-written immigration ledger, I have also stumbled upon similar ledgers and notices stored under PWD collections for German, Italian and Scottish immigrants arriving in South African around the same period. I have however commented on the manner in which the German immigrants' occupations were listed in government notices and where citizens were

encouraged to deal directly and freely with German immigrants. In contrast, I have not found similar government notices proclaiming the arrival of Saints and the encouragement of citizens to trade freely with them. Instead, the St. Helena 1882-1884 PWD ledgers suggest that their new South African employers sponsored their passage, which set on them weighted obligation tantamount to indentureship.

The first cohorts of St. Helena emigrants during the 1870s emigrated for South Africa without any definitive plans, often finding themselves 'marooned', with no job or accommodation. However, later emigrations, commencing with the fifty boatmen required to work for a shipping concern in Algoa Bay in 1872, was planned and aided to facilitate the transfer and settlement of various types of labouring Saints. Many settled, often with their families, to work as artisans, boatmen, clerks, general labourers, miners, and, as British settlements expanded, (mostly young) Saint Helenian women were sought after as domestic servants. St. Helena immigrant labourers were often favoured for their outright British character, which in turn contributed to the proliferation of British values and culture in South Africa. A palpable case in point would be the commentary in a *Cape Argus* article on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1873 in which a cohort of forty-one newly appointed Saint Helena copper miners were referred to as "superior men", compared to local labourers, because they formed a band that could perform familiar English melodies for the entertainment of the copper mine management.

During this century-long timespan of sporadic and intermittent St. Helenian emigration, most settled in South African port cities such as Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Port Nolloth (Concordia) and Port Natal (Durban), and in urban cities or towns under British control - Grahamstown and East London in particular. However, from the 1882-1884 Public Works Department's ledgers it can be determined that a trickling of Saints settled throughout the Cape Colony and often in smaller towns and peri-urban areas like Wellington, Beaufort West, Somerset West, Colesburg, et cetera. This was particularly the case with female servants working in the homes of the far-flung privileged.



Interestingly, and less known, the newspaper discourses suggest that during the 1870s - after decades of successive British victories in Eastern Cape frontier wars, colonial settlement and cultural entrenchment - the British Eastern Cape territories were regarded as the more ideal and desirable new home for respectable English subjects. This is demonstrated by the multiple references to the Cape of Good Hope as the “half Dutch” and “half civilised” settlement option for Saints. Yet, by far, the Western Cape had received and accommodated, over a longer timeframe, the majority of settler Saints. Durban (Port Natal), on the other hand, did not received a steady constant flow of Saints, but the approximately four-hundred Saints who had settled in Durban during the 1870s have made a significant contribution to the overall figure and heritage of Saints who settled in South Africa.

Throughout these two chapters on emigration I have been cognisant of and often referred to the lament of emigrating Saints in having to leave *their* island for South *Africa*, but the materialist pressures trumped romantic desires to live in the seclusion of an English, and by extension, *civilised* Island. This deep regret felt by many emigrant Saints was often buttressed by the promise of a sustainable local industry that would foreclose on the pressures to emigrate. Despite prior held pejorative stereotypes of Africa,<sup>256</sup> many Saints had immigrated to South *Africa*, but only under the conditions that they were heading to *British Africa*. Saints were often entangled in the rhetoric and processes around the civilising of Africa, for which they, as the epitome of imperial English labour, served their part in the Anglicisation of South Africa. We'll do well to recall that Saints were referred to by governor Grey-Wilson governor as the “vanguards of an army” or the ‘ambassadors’ who would “raise the character of Saint Helenians above reproach” - a ‘respectable’ anglicised workforce that would serve to elevate the status of South Africa.

Since 1838 until recently, Islanders have been consumed by protracted debates regarding the merits of emigration vis-à-vis the development of a sustainable

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<sup>256</sup> In my following chapter I relate the experience of one of my participants, Mrs. Ethel Feils, who was utterly surprised by the level of development in Cape Town (Africa) when she debarked here in 1948.

local industry to absorb superfluous labour. Often the solution posited and executed was a synthesis of both local industrial development and emigration. An inadvertent outcome that had arisen from this dialectic was a culture of effective petitioning of the local and metropolitan government by the “working men of the Island”. From as early as the 1830s, there were a number of literate labourers, albeit negligible, who had forwarded ‘memorials’ imploring local St. Helena government for aid to emigrate. Appeals were usually directed to the metropolitan government who held the authority and means to provide assistance. However, the support of the local colonial government was always sought to forward, recommend and sanction these pleas of the poor.

Although the petitioners expected local government to function as a conduit for their cause, their appeals to sponsor or subsidise passages to elsewhere, particularly between the late 1830s through to the early 1860s, were mainly unsuccessful. Often petitioners found their entreaties wholly unsupported by colonial governors; pointedly, governor Thomas Gore Browne in 1952 contested the premises of arguments made by petitioners and challenged their assertions of abject poverty as gross exaggerations, implying they were being opportunist. His responses were met with outrage - petitioners rebutted accusing him of being irrational, referring to his retorts as a “political enigma”. But it can be deduced from Governor Browne’s stance that he was anxious about being considered incapable of finding a local solution to a local problem.<sup>257</sup>

By the late 1860s petitioners employed more sophisticated tactics to garner the support from benefactors: they reorganised, and instead of directing all their appeals to and through government, they began soliciting the support of British citizens residing in the metropolis, faith-based organisations and influential social institutions like the Royal Geographical Society of London. Later, in 1872, a “mutual emigration society” was formed, headed by clerics. Petitioners even resorted to the beseeching of support from the local St. Helena privileged class. Literate petitioners making a solid case for emigration were highly articulate,

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<sup>257</sup> In hindsight, however, the petitioners are correct in perceiving their strife as an imperial problem require metropolitan government intervention.

and their appeals exhibited rational arguments flavoured with persuasive rhetoric. Their use of affective language and logic resulted in much of their letters addressed to local government being reproduced in local newspapers.

Yet, what has also become evident from my analysis which I found noteworthy and provoking, was an absence of a critique of African colonialism in the petitions of working class Saints. They viewed their tensions with imperialism principally as a class dialectic. Although St. Helena is a British colony and Saints being colonial subjects themselves, labouring Saints saw themselves as uncontested British subjects despite racial demarcation constraining this identity to the periphery. Their desire to emigrate for “uninhabited” British colonies in Africa, therefore, falls into the colonial discourse of *terra nullius*, negating the existence of the colonised African and African ontology and, comparatively, affording them a greater stake in empire.

It is salient to emphasise that St. Helenian immigrants were almost exclusively ‘coloured’, which - if we are to judge by both the official discourses of, say, Governors Middlemore and Browne, and by newspaper editors - was an endemic British racial imposition inscribed on the mixed-raced labouring class of St. Helena whilst residing in their natal home. St. Helenians did not *become coloured* upon their arrival and settlement in colonial South Africa, although these racial subjections were augmented, legally reified and structurally concretised in the apartheid South Africa racio-political context. What is important is that we do not juxtapose South African processes of racialization with that of St. Helena. These should be understood as spatio-temporal contextual variations of colonial racialization rather than juxtapositions. The irony, as explicated by Daniel Yon, is how these racial alterities, once imposed on Saints and intended as a stigma, are now appropriated by their descendants in present-day South Africa as a social cachet to further reticulate and differentiate within the mixed-race community of South Africa.

These ‘intra-racial’ stratifications are often meant to denote a perceived class-cultural hierarchy, which places the descendants of Saints at the apex of

'colouredness'. It is more often than not that the 'coloured' person who celebrates his/her St. Helenian heritage – or more commonly, who simply recognises and acknowledges this heritage – are middle class, educated and Christian, three composite subjections that certainly confer relative privilege and prestige. My forthcoming contribution to this theoretical framework is how a community is constructed through the invocation of a commonly shared nostalgic object – in my case this object is for the place of origin, St. Helena – as an active device that serves to differently emplace anglicised (and anglophilic) 'coloured' South Africans within the kaleidoscope of South African racial identities (chapter four).

While this commonly-shared nostalgic object is rallied around and produces 'sameness' or even group solidarity within a smaller group, it also produces further alterities and fragmentation within a perceived race group, which undermine the efforts of certain political ideologies in emphasising racial solidarity as a tool against the racial majoritarianism of the *other* in South Africa. At this point I cannot and will not offer a normative critique on whether this identity formation is positive or not. What can be said without much controversy is that the complex process of identity formation includes both the processes of resisting imposed and ascribed racial imposition – as was the case with St. Helenians who had always resisted their identity being reduced by subsuming then under the racial category 'coloured' – and how, with the unfurling of socio-political changes, through the passage of time, these subjections are re-appropriated and rearticulated as an appreciative social asset.

In the section entitled 'St Helena immigration post Union of South Africa', I presented the political context in which and to which the final trickle of St. Helenian immigrants would make their way to South Africa, while using as my evidentiary base immigration and emigration records compiled by the Union of South Africa's Department Census and Statistics. Although the net immigration of 314 Saints was marginal – compared to both earlier periods of the same migratory case and in comparison with immigration cases from elsewhere – and believed to be incomplete, the worth of my analysis, I hope, should reside in my

critique of the manner in which these records exhibit clearly how the Union State perceived and constructed Saint Helenians in racial terms.

I have also drawn attention to how St. Helena Island was inflicted as a spatio-temporal identity marker reserved and applied exclusively for 'coloured' St. Helenians. In this regard I have asserted that the process of movement and re-emplacement of Saints in South Africa was meant to divest St. Helena immigrants of their complex and nuanced self-image as a mode of induction into South African society. But to reiterate, in as much as the austere state bureaucracy attempted to interpolate immigrant Saints into South African's rigid and hyper racialised 'landscape', they were, from the vantage point of the present, unsuccessful. Although the Union state tried to impose upon these immigrant Saints an essentialist racialised identity, they failed in their totalitarian and deterministic hope to encumber and restrain St. Helenians in racial straightjackets.

The next chapter's exploration of nostalgia and identity will justify my final statements to this chapter. In the next chapter, I will explore the effects on the identity of the descendants of these emigrant Saints, who are now naturalised South African citizens. This approach lends itself more aptly to interesting conceptual frameworks and theorisation. After all, how is it possible that approximately 2,000 immigrant Saints could have such a profound affect on the identities of their descendants?



# Chapter 3

## Nostalgia and the Sacral Introjection of an Island



**Figure 9:** Photograph taken by Damian Samuels on the N2 freeway, near the town of Heidelberg, Western Cape, South Africa on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2015.

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“Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole.”<sup>258</sup>

### 1. Introduction and methodology

The preliminary research presented in my previous two chapters, which I structure as Part One of this thesis, suggests that no less than 2,032 Saints immigrated and settled in South African between 1838 and 1848. I concede that the figure is provisional and incomplete; arriving at a more exhaustive figure remains a work in progress, a project worth undertaking on an on-going basis.

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<sup>258</sup> Derek Walcott, *The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory* (from his Nobel Prize Lecture, December 7, 1992), [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html) (accessed May 10, 2015).

However, even if future research efforts uncovered more cases of St. Helena immigration to South Africa, I believe that any increase in this number will be marginal.<sup>259</sup> In the conclusion to my previous chapter I posed a question, which I now paraphrase: how can such a negligible number of St. Helenian immigrants over a protractedly dispersed timeframe be responsible for, and explain, the countless claims to St. Helena heritage I have encountered in Cape Town?

Notably, these claims to St. Helena heritage are limited to 'coloured'<sup>260</sup> and white South Africans. Although a curiosity about, and sometimes the predilection for romanticising, the Island of St. Helena appears to exist predominantly amongst large constituents of the 'coloured' population, it is not solely a 'coloured phenomenon'. It is for this very reason that I had made concerted efforts to interview participants who are raced as white, but who identify strongly with their St. Helena heritage - or often outrightly as Saints, despite being South Africans only *partially* descended from St. Helenian immigrants.

As I have articulated in my previous chapter, I wish to offer a mode for making sense of the sticky residue that still persists for holding an intergenerational St. Helena identity intact in present-day South Africa, even though St. Helena immigration grounded to an abrupt halt in the late 1940s with the instituting of formal apartheid. In Daniel Yon's framing of this same question, what is at stake in the process of "making home 'here' [in South Africa] while retaining attachments and loyalties to 'there' [St. Helena Island]?"<sup>261</sup> Even more strikingly, why has the Island of St. Helena been conferred a mythical status in a sense that it is accorded a sacred aura by descendants of Saints who often possess sparse knowledge of the Island, if any at all? Perhaps it is precisely the configuration of an imperfect knowledge of the Island, its limited accessibility, distance, and

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<sup>259</sup> I believe I have uncovered, analysed and presented the majority of the migration cases, especially the large incidences that had left an archival trace. This figure and future figures will certainly fall far short of some of the more outlandish claims that more than twenty-thousand Saints arrived at the Cape during the 1873-1884 (see: Chapter Two, p.3). I am resigned to think that such inflations are related to and conflating with nostalgia for the Island.

<sup>260</sup> As an abridged definition, for now, I use the contestable term 'coloured' to denote South Africans of multifarious genetic and cultural origins who constitute a specific and distinct historical, and arguably political, group in South Africa. See the following chapter for a more thorough and detailed explanation.

<sup>261</sup> Yon, "*The Island, the Ocean and the Desert*," 2.

relative isolation, that imbues it with a certain valence – an attraction that lends the island to forms of consecration.

I will be arguing that proud claims to St. Helena ancestry are a nostalgic artefact of a shared - yet dissimilarly experienced - colonial history and its concomitant attachment to an enduring association with British respectability. Again, Yon has already made the latter argument, emphasising that assertions to St. Helena ancestry are indeed a mode to access and affirm respectability in the contemporary South African context.<sup>262</sup> Although we are both engaged in the working of memory and its effects on self-identity, and while my arguments may largely concur with those of Yon on the intended outcome of such claims, my explanation of the process to these reconstructions of the self and the magnitude of what is at stake in making such claims will differ.

Yon is able to draw a contrast between Saint Helena's 'hydroponic' cultural identity – that is, a people and a place of “fluidity” and “indeterminacy”, a culture characterised by its malleable attitudes towards race and difference, and its free-flowing roots submerged in the solvent of an atemporal sea – with the rigid and restrictive 'edaphic' identity embedded in a hyper-racialised land, South Africa. My analysis, however, will focus on nostalgia as a form of sacred re-memory for St. Helena immigrants as well as a vehicle that drives the claims made by the descendants of Saints who are all, in the first instance, citizens of South Africa.

Despite common traits in the manner in which the shared nostalgic object (St. Helena) is appropriated by those descendants of Saints differently raced, the effects of and motivations for introjecting a nostalgic image of the Island of St. Helena are often variegated. My propositions may well be another case in point for underlining the obscurities and discrepancies of racial subjectification under colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. Similarly, my 'findings' attest to the constructive narrative dimension of nostalgia - as creative memoir or even complete invention - and are, therefore, not invested in authenticating my

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<sup>262</sup> Yon, “Race-Making/Race-Mixing,” 144-63.

participants' claims to St. Helena descent, although there are cases where such claims are indeed questionable. In particular, this chapter and the one that follows are dedicated to explicating the affectivity of nostalgia in identity formation and not concerned with the historicity of my participants' claims to St. Helena ancestry.

Inclusive of this introduction to Part Two of my thesis, this chapter delineates my theoretical framework for both chapters Three and Four and moves on to explore the reasons why St. Helena is nostalgically construed as sacred and then introjected as central to my participants' senses of self. The following and final chapter addresses the relationship between race and nostalgia as it relates specifically to the question of 'colouredness' in South Africa. In Chapter Four I also provide my conclusions to both these chapters under the rubric of nostalgia and identity.

The conclusion that I draw from in-depth interviews with my participants, all of whom are immigrant St. Helenians or descendants of Saints (the evidential premises on which this chapter's explorations and conclusions rest), all point to the life-long process of identity-making, which include processes of un-making and re-making the self. Underscoring the course of identity formation which features in my exploration, are its concomitant concepts: that of avowal and subjection of the self, on one's own nostalgic terms, to dated templates of distinguishability; the politics of subalternity and (sub)alterities in the post-colonial context; race and culture; and particularly, the significance of a sacred object of nostalgia in constructing an imagined community, which is my point of entry and the stem concept to which the other aforementioned concepts are attached.

All these concepts are entangled and usually crescendo into the delicate performance of composite identities always in flux. Yet, the objective of these identificational performances, apparent from interviews with my participants, is to ensure a measure of individual (or group) distinction while obviating the effects of alienation. How does one belong without simply conforming or

negating indispensable parts of the complex self? Can we belong without having to discard chunks of characteristics we consider as part of our inimitability?

Then, how does one hedge against anomie when asserting an alterity? Does that alterity manufacture prestige, or stigma? Which features of the self do we accentuate to bolster cachet or attenuate to preclude that which is considered a social liability? How do we know we have 'crossed the line' into the realm of conformity at the expense of ipseity, or, inversely, excluded oneself from belonging in an attempt to affirm our uniqueness? In other words, what is the outcome of the power dynamics between agency and structure that compete to produce the dialectic between assigned identity permeating from the outside and processes of self identifying emanating from within? With regard to the poiesis of the self, which situational identity do we evoke and perform in different contexts? What about the self is negotiable and what is not?

In a sense, my findings can be thrown against the backdrop of these sub-questions pertaining to the continuous negotiation of the self when moving between contexts (place, time, and fluctuations in race and class privileges) and the uncompromising need to compromise and sometimes 'settle', albeit for a time, on that which is conceptually unsettling. These realisations occurred to me, in hindsight, to be the related work I am engaging in when, at first, I believed my focus was dealing exclusively with the effects of nostalgia on the way my participants self-identify. I have found in my research that the object of nostalgia – in my case, *place* (St. Helena Island) – was the foundation for the construction of a reticulated imagined community in South Africa.

Considering the explorative approach to my study, my interlocations with numerous participants<sup>263</sup> were lengthy, producing information that is both rich

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<sup>263</sup> In total I have conducted eleven in-depth interviews. Two of my first interviewees, both women, are immigrants from Saint Helena: Gwendolyn Ivy Benjamin, who arrived in South Africa in 1942, was ninety-seven years of age when I interviewed her; while Ethel Feils (nee Bruce) was eight-four years of age when I interviewed her, having arrived in South Africa in 1948. I then proceeded to interview the children of immigrant Saints: Stephen Caswell and his older sibling Castella Elizabeth Fourie (née Caswell) as well as Melissa Joseph (this is a pseudonym). Thereafter, I interviewed numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Saints: Mustafa



and varied, itself a living archive conducive to multiple interpretations and analyses. After processing all my research material, the arguments put forward in this chapter will be contained within what I consider my core deduction as well as the common thread connecting all my participants: that is, the introjection of an image of the Island of St. Helena as a nostalgic object that is simultaneously sacred and secular. This nostalgic introjection occurs first through memory recalled by immigrants, and later, with the passing of time, as mutated imaginaries inherited through narrative from ancestral memory which is then conjured and nurtured by their descendants who had usually never travelled to the Island.

In a strict sense, my 'methodology' entailed conducting in-depth conversational interviews with actual St. Helena immigrants who can speak directly to their transmigrations<sup>264</sup>, as well as with some of the children and grandchildren of other St. Helena immigrants – the second and third generations of Saints in South Africa. I recognise that nostalgia is usually the prerogative (perhaps also the burden) of the older amongst us, those who have lived long enough to take stock of what has been lost, most of all, their 'running out of time'. However, I hope in the future to explore how nostalgia operates amongst the fourth generation descendants of Saints, myself included. I will present my 'findings'<sup>265</sup> starting with the direct St. Helena immigrants, from where I will progress and incorporate the effect of nostalgia on the identities of the children and grandchildren of Saint Helena immigrants. But I will begin this chapter with an overview of the applicable properties of nostalgia salient to my work.

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(Peter) Solomons, Mervin Watson, Paul Alexander and Kamila Bennet (a collaborative interview with Daniel Yon). Robin Castell was the only participant who does not claim St. Helena heritage, but he is the leading producer of St. Helena visual historiography and offers useful insights into the allure of the Island for relatively privileged English folk. Lastly, I conducted ad hoc interviews at the Cape Town History Associations Family Day on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, where I interviewed Mogamat Kamadien, Merle Martin (the founder of the South African St. Helena Heritage Association) and Lionel Davids. Save for Davids and Stephen Caswell, who were either indifferent or critically suspicious of claims to St. Heritage made by South Africans, all other participants were deeply enamoured with the ideas they held of the Island of St. Helena.

<sup>264</sup> For these St. Helena immigrants, the shift was more than just geographic; it was also temporal and metaphysical.

<sup>265</sup> In all sincerity, these 'findings' are rather ruminations for further study.

In reference to the photograph prefacing this chapter, it is my endeavour that this image instantiates part of my argument that the 'stillness' of nostalgia - for a fading image of the Island - provides continuity for my participants in the face of an otherwise tumultuous contemporary world characterised by the hastened pace of modernity. It signals a withdrawal into my participants' constructed and curated certainties of their pasts. In another's words, "[n]ostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of live and historical upheaval [...] Nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress."<sup>266</sup> The excerpt inscribing the picture is a quote from Derek Walcott's poetic 1992 Nobel Prize lecture. It serves firstly to demonstrate the fragile nature of memory in retaining the pristine nostalgic object innate to one's sense of self. Secondly, it highlights this research project as a 'labour of love', so to speak - my patchwork experience in assembling the shards of memory and imaginaries with the hope of producing something meaningful for those interested in the historical relations between St. Helena Island and South Africa.

## **2. Theoretical framework: nostalgia and its contents**

The purpose of this section is to introduce the interdisciplinary theoretical framework in which my exploratory 'findings' are located. Although nostalgia is a ubiquitous sentiment, often inadvertently present in most narrative literature, subjecting nostalgia as a concept to critical analysis is still a developing intellectual enterprise.<sup>267</sup> Etymologically, nostalgia is a "pseudo-Greek" neologism created by a Swiss medical doctor named Johannes Hofer in 1688 to diagnose the ailing and debilitating longing of displaced peoples for a return to

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<sup>266</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), XIV & 3.

<sup>267</sup> Ironically, I join an array of other scholars who have made this point over the last decade. I believe this is partially due to the dearth of literature in which the central concept is nostalgia. As an analytical and critical concept though, nostalgia may not be established, but it certainly is no longer new to scholarly interrogation. See for instance, Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (New York and London: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 4.

their native home.<sup>268</sup> *Algia* is meant to denote a *longing*, while *nosto* means *to return*: nostalgia, therefore, is a *longing to return*.

A crude transcription of the erstwhile psychosomatic condition coined by Hofer would translate as “home sickness” – in German the ‘affliction’ is called *Heimweh*; in French, *Maladie du Pays*, and in Afrikaans, *Heimweë*. However, the ‘ailment’ has further antecedents and wider applicability, or, to paraphrase Laubscher, Hofer simply coined *nostalgia* in 1688 as a psychiatric pathology, as disease<sup>269</sup>, but the ‘condition’ of yearning or “desiring”, which has its craved material object rooted in the past, is indivisible from being human – it is an atavistic, timeless and universal human sentiment.

Notwithstanding, nostalgia, as a concept “counter-intuitively” having its origin in medicine and not as to be expected in “poetry or politics”<sup>270</sup>, has travelled deeper and farther, infiltrating the consciousness of individuals and the collective consciousness (media) of contemporary society. Today nostalgia has proliferated across disciplines and saturates popular media with stock-images and motifs of the past to the point that it has become banal. As a means to wrestle the concept away from popular conceptions and rescue it from reductionist meanings, nostalgia has itself fairly recently become the object of theoretical study as a distinct “critical analytic category” that transverses “a range of contemporary cultural, social and psychological phenomena.”<sup>271</sup> In the first instance, we are cautioned not to conceive of nostalgia in relation to memory as “trivialising romantic sentimentally”<sup>272</sup>, although it can, indeed, be that too.

From first being circumscribed by the medical field as a curable disease, nostalgia is now theorised as an “incurable modern condition” or a “symptom of

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<sup>268</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 5.

<sup>269</sup> Lewin Laubscher, “Of Odysseus and Abraham: Nostalgia, Heimweë and the Ways of Home,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012): 215.

<sup>270</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” *The Hedgehog Review* 9, no.2 (Summer, 2007): 7.

<sup>271</sup> Norman Duncan, Christopher Sonn and Garth Stevens, “Introduction: Of Narratives and Nostalgia,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 18, no. 3 (2012): 205.

<sup>272</sup> Nadia Seremetakis, “The Memory of the Senses, Part 1: Marks of the Transitory” in *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, ed. Nadia Seremetakis (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

our age, a historical emotion"<sup>273</sup>, sometimes as ubiquitous, yet abstract, as the embedded concepts of love, fear or jealousy. Another significant shift in the nature of nostalgia is that the object of nostalgia has also evolved from a longing for a return to a spatiality (home, in particular) to become a longing for a lost temporality – a yearning for yesterday.<sup>274</sup> A more accurate description of nostalgia however is that it is a pining for the hyphenated time-space. The nostalgic object is, therefore, a spatiotemporal object.

It has some bearing on my work, that the possibility of a return (*nostos*) must be foreclosed in order for nostalgia to operate optimally. "The alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive,"<sup>275</sup> and this necessary impossibility of a return must remain an intrinsic property of nostalgia for it to function. The object of nostalgia is, therefore, spectral rather than a retrievable incarnate entity. Furthermore, absence of, and distance from, the nostalgic object enables the nostalgic narrative to flourish. In other words, nostalgia has to be "invisibility felt" and "absently present."<sup>276</sup> In short, it could be said, the etymological term *nostalgia* no longer directly encapsulates the concept in its contemporary incarnation, but rather it is itself a nostalgic placeholder for an amorphous condition of longing for a constructed ideal object rooted in the past, yet one that *must* remain elusive.

Therefore, in its most quotidian contemporary sense, nostalgia has come to temporarily settle as a harkening and a yearning for the unrecoverable pleasures of the past, whether experienced or imagined. It is about the lament for the loss of such past pleasures, as well as for the sense of a loss of (perhaps perceived) wholeness and continuity - one's 'place' in the world.<sup>277</sup> Once past pleasure is committed to memory, however, nostalgia is a paradox in which the affective sense of loss can be recalled and revisited as an oxymoronic "mournful

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<sup>273</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIV & XVI.

<sup>274</sup> Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (London: Free Press, 1979).

<sup>275</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIII.

<sup>276</sup> Lewin Laubscher, "Of Odysseus and Abraham: Nostalgia, Heimwee and the Ways of Home," 216.

<sup>277</sup> Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, 1-23.

pleasure... stir[ed] up” by one’s own “busy-meddling memory”.<sup>278</sup> More precisely, nostalgia is a deep and longing pain to return to one’s distant, lost, or in many instances, imagined home. And home does not necessary have to represent a place, but a ‘state of being’, a metaphysical place of rest and solace.

Of significance, though, is the realisation that a felt nostalgic desire cannot be satiated; the yearning cannot be resolved, as an idealised home cannot truly be reached. Laubscher’s analogy that nostalgia is not about points of departure and (re)arrival, that the act of being nostalgic is more of a “wandering” - as instantiated by the figure of Abraham and his wayfaring, rather than a satisfying return as exemplified by the homecoming of Odysseus.<sup>279</sup> What can be read from the analogy is that an Odyssean return does not cohere with the functioning of nostalgia since it would imply that the nostalgic desire is satiable when, more precisely, nostalgia is a perpetual search of the ideal.

Furthermore, if nostalgia is a yearning for an idealised object constructed from selected memory, as I conceive of it, then neither will the nostalgic subject, nor the object he is nostalgic for, remain static during their period of separation. To return to Laubscher’s analogy, then, it is improbable that Ithaca (home, as the nostalgic object *par excellence*) would have remained unchanged after Odysseus’ decade-long absence. Moreover, Odysseus’ experiences abroad would have altered his perception and expectation of Ithaca as place and, thus, his sense of ‘feeling’ (at) home. These are just some of the elements of nostalgia that inhibit a full recovery of a lost and elusive spatio-temporal object, and the absolute satisfaction of nostalgic desire.

It is acceptable, therefore, that nostalgia, having its force rooted in the ego, has an aesthetic dimension, since it is experienced as a lamented *pleasure*, an “enjoyment absolutely of [the self].”<sup>280</sup> In this comprehension of the

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<sup>278</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavas Vassa, The African* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1999), 5.

<sup>279</sup> Lewin Laubscher, “Of Odysseus and Abraham: Nostalgia, Heimweë and the Ways of Home,” 223.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.



phenomenon, the pleasure principal is fundamentally what distinguishes nostalgia from melancholia.<sup>281</sup> Although both concepts are steeped in the sentiment of loss of an “unobtainable” object, melancholia is characterised by despair, whereas nostalgia holds a measure of enjoyment in the act of relishing “remembrances of things past.” Furthermore, whether the object was experienced or imagined, the nostalgic is palpably aware and can identify (with) the object ‘lost’ in the past and to history. In the case of melancholia, on the other hand, the melancholic suffers debilitating despair for the loss of an unidentifiable object – a generic, pervasive and enervating sentiment of loss. Agamben, citing Freud, writes of the sentiment of melancholia as “a loss without a lost object... a loss without it being known what has been lost... an unknown loss or of an object-loss that escapes consciousness.”<sup>282</sup>

Similarly, Laubscher suggests that nostalgic desire for a past lost ‘something’ that is ontological may be an inadequate substitute for that longing for a ‘pure’ metaphysical ideal object or state that cannot be known, but one ‘worthy’ of true desire, and ‘for the sake of desiring’:<sup>283</sup> *I know I miss something and that I long for it, but I don’t know what IT is. Maybe I shall recognise it when I find it.* This, however, is more the workings of melancholia, as proposed by Agamben in his succinct chapter on “The Lost Object”.<sup>284</sup> Unlike melancholia, nostalgia is not a sentiment of individual ‘suffering’ and can then be conceived as a ‘reining-in’ of melancholia’s abstract, absent and distant object, since the object of nostalgia is more defined, historical, shared<sup>285</sup> and specific, which is given an affectivity and marked by a tinge of self-indulgence.

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<sup>281</sup> A more concerted effort was made to distinguish between the concepts of melancholia and nostalgia and how they operate, as analytic categories, in post-transitional societies. See: Maria Brock and Ross Truscott, “What’s the Difference Between a Melancholic Apartheid Moustache and a Nostalgic GDR Telephone?,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012): 318-328. I limit my comparison to the saliency of my own research.

<sup>282</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Stanza: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,” trans. Ronald L Martinez, in *Theory and History of Literature*, 69, eds. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20.

<sup>283</sup> Lewin Laubscher, “Of Odysseus and Abraham: Nostalgia, Heimweë and the Ways of Home,” 220.

<sup>284</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Stanza: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,” 19-21.

<sup>285</sup> Boym differentiates melancholia from nostalgia as follows: “Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.” See: Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” 8-9.

Notwithstanding the distinction between melancholia and nostalgia, the latter's force remains in the conundrum where desire cannot be redeemed and the nostalgic cannot reunite with the perpetually evasive object of his/her longing. The effect of this absent and distant quality of the nostalgic object promotes the personal constructive dimensions inherent in nostalgia. The contradiction, thus, of lamenting a loss of a past while simultaneously enjoying remembrances of that past, gives nostalgia its generative and constructive narrative power. Nostalgia may have a basis in historical experience and exploits repertoires of historical material, but it is partial invention - through selection, embellishment and distortion of a past - to satisfy a present unfulfilled desire.

Nostalgia, as an affective experience, provides the space for constructed narratives that privilege 'origin' to emerge using non-sequential stock images from memory. The process of nostalgia is autobiographical, or more precisely, memoir, in the sense that one assigns a convenient meaning to the past that buttresses a desired self in the present. As the *zeitgeist* of the now, nostalgia is not just a feeling of being removed (displacement) from where one belongs, which ironically can only be felt once removed from a perceived 'site' of belonging (this can be place, time, place-time or a social hierarchy). It is also a process of taking control of personal re-emplacement within history. The implantation of the desired nostalgic object may have occurred in the past but it seeps into the present.

Often nostalgia is a conflating of memory with desire, and experience with imagination. It can function as an active voluntary preoccupation and attachment with the object of nostalgia or as an involuntary memorative reflex triggered in the present by a sensorial encounter that 'throws one back in time' and leads to a re-experiential savouring of a past pleasure. The latter would suggest that the nostalgic moment is unpredictable and apprehends or besets one like a seizure, which is predominately how nostalgia is currently theorised. The former, which is what I have experienced with my participants, however, proposes that the nostalgic is presently active in invoking the object of his/her nostalgia, or at least

that s/he 'takes control' of an unpredictable reminiscence, seizing the seizure - what Proust referred to as "voluntary memory, the memory of the intellect."<sup>286</sup>

However, nostalgia is not synonymous with memory, although it is dependent on memory – whether re-memory is triggered or actively recalled in the capacity of the personal or cultural-collective. According to Pierre Nora, "[m]emory is absolute [and] installs remembrance within the sacred."<sup>287</sup> Nora's argument can also be read as an exposition on the relationship between memory and the erosion of a continuity in communal identity: "[m]emory is life borne by living societies founded in its name... a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to an eternal present... as it is affective and magical, only accommodate[ing] those facts that suit it [and] is blind to all but the group it binds."<sup>288</sup>

To remember is to recall events or incidences of the past, whereas nostalgia is to invest certain selected (and often distorted) memories with affection and intensity, in other words to cathect memory, to make memories affective. To be nostalgic is then not simply to remember an event or an incident, but to recollect a feeling from the past linked to an event or time – the feeling of safety, warmth, belonging, community, etc. In other words, nostalgia is 'feel-good' re-memory. Memory, in turn, is contingent upon the physical senses – the auditory, gustatory, ocular, olfactory and tactile – that interfaces and links the human consciousness to materiality. If "[n]ostalgia speaks to the sensory reception of history" and memory serves as a "meta-sense"<sup>289</sup> - a sensorium or an accretive site of feeling and re-feeling - then the significance of nostalgia lies in the realisation that a past object cannot entirely be lost after all.

Nostalgic sentiment for that which one has never experienced with one's own senses is yet another apparent contradictory quality of nostalgia. This diachronic dimension of nostalgia – the memorative functioning of a historical object of

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<sup>286</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Volume 1: Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), 59.

<sup>287</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 9.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 & 9.

<sup>289</sup> Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part 1: Marks of the Transitory," 4 & 9.

nostalgia across (life)time(s) - is open to a greater degree of examination, since here is where the concept of nostalgia becomes counter-intuitive: it now delves into the realm of historical and political 'senses' rather than personal experience. This is the case with the first, second and third generation of St. Helena descendants I have interviewed. Through their interviews I will explore how the inherited object of nostalgia is appropriated in the present.

What is retained of British imperialism with some potency, are convictions about its cultural and civilisational superiority, which can be claimed – in the case of this study, via St. Helena - without posing any real political risks in terms of any negation of a national identity. A nostalgic recovery of retrospective British respectability, hinged on its past imperial power, can assume an authenticated veneer, despite an unequivocal parallel subjection to a national identity as (South) African. Borrowing from Judith Butler's theoretical propositions - in which she manages to reconcile the external (political) and internal (psychic) effects of power on identity<sup>290</sup> - nostalgia, I propose, as a psychic motion, is a form of submission and subordination to the object of one's own nostalgia; it is a "passionate [and] stubborn attachment"<sup>291</sup> to the nostalgic object and its associative properties on which, for instance, a St. Helena ancestral identity is dependent.

Nostalgic resuscitations of dated English colonial distinguishability and current subsequent (re)"investments" in this identity, are an example of an "attachment to subjection"<sup>292</sup>, a eulogistic self-subjection to an historic power that has preserved its cultural imprints. However, with the proliferation of liberalism, a vigilance around political correctness and the right to claim whatever identity one desires and can convincingly perform, self re-subjection and claims to a defunct colonial subjectivity on the nostalgic's own temporal terms may be more comprehensive, permissible and tenable than it probably had been during colonialism. This would be the case more so for those racialised 'coloured', who

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<sup>290</sup> Judith, Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-10 & 31.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

may encounter less public ridicule and vituperation when making claims to English descent and respectability. Moreover, the necessary impossibility of an actual return (to empire), inherent in reflective nostalgia<sup>293</sup>, allows for this kind of subjection - to the vestiges of an historical power - to unfold in a benign manner, as a heuristic way of 'controlling' time and one's place within it.

Nostalgia becomes political when a shared longing for an association to the same nostalgic object (Saint Helena Island) serves as the grounds for the formation of an imagined community.<sup>294</sup> In South Africa, Cape Town in particular, this community is held together by regular gatherings and annual fellowship of individuals and families who commemorate and celebrate their mutual St. Helenian ancestry.<sup>295</sup> In many instances, they undertake collective genealogical research that seeks to confirm and affirm their St. Helena heritage. This collective nostalgia functions as a political activity - a motion in subject formation through the process of self-subjectification to a mutually affective nostalgic object - that binds this community. However, identifying as a descendant of Saints does not negate a national identity as South African nor contravene a racial identity as 'coloured' or white, but is meant to accentuate and supplement a national and racial identity, colouring in its otherwise delimited and perforated contours.

Nostalgia, as a politic of hope and desire, is also a sub-textual remark on the contemporary: it is a response to despondency and disenchantment with the present, predicated on disillusionment with ideal past promises and possibilities unrealised in the now. Bradbury's framing of nostalgia as "backward-looking hope" is best encapsulated when she states, "[p]erhaps nostalgia is not only a

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<sup>293</sup> See explanation below with reference to Boym's distinction between two primary types of nostalgia.

<sup>294</sup> I borrow this term for Benedict Anderson's seminal work in which he argues for a direct causal link between the formation of national identity, and the technological developments and proliferation of mass media communications, specifically in print, that attempts to homogenise a group politically by promoting nationalism using common parlance. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>295</sup> The Society I am more familiar with is the South African St. Helenian Heritage Association, run by Merle Martin, who has been supportive of my project and agreed to partake in it as a participant.



longing for the way things were, but also a longing for futures that never came, or for horizons of possibilities that seem to have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events.”<sup>296</sup> Her conception of nostalgia as presently prolific political sentiment of hope, no less so in transitioning South Africa, is on the mark: bolstered by her invocation of the “Ghanaian mythical bird, Sankofa, [which] flies forward while facing backward to gather the wisdom of the past” she proffers an allegory for her citation of “Kierkegaard’s proverbial saying, ‘We live forward but understand backward.’”<sup>297</sup>

Seremetakis, who theorises the connections between time and memory for the senses, writes of her lament for the disappearance of a local Greek fruit – a peach - she enjoyed in her childhood and its replacement with homogenised European Union standardised fruit. As metaphor, she aims to highlight the supplanting of the local by the universal(ising) logic and imperatives of a global(ising) world and to make the point that the “present [for the nostalgic] is characterized as *ánosto*” (a tasteless present), for “nothing tastes as good as the past.”<sup>298</sup> Boym’s conception of nostalgia in relation to time is the most insightful; she postulates nostalgia as an ubiquitous temporal sentiment of the present, a nostalgia that is not necessarily progressive nor retrospective, but a sheer longing for an alternative present, based on past utopian hopes for the, then, future:

The twentieth century began with utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future became outmoded, while nostalgia, for better or worse, never went out of fashion [...] The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future [...] While futuristic utopias might be out of fashion, nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension—only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Jill Bradbury, “Narrative Possibilities of the Past for the Future: Nostalgia and Hope,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no.3 (2012): 342.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Nadia Seremetakis, “The Memory of the Senses, Part 1: Marks of the Transitory,” 8 & 1.

<sup>299</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” 7, 8 & 9.

Furthermore, the politicisation of nostalgia is theorised as its shadowy side. In this regard, nostalgia may be evoked to mobilise a people politically. But it can also be divisive. In as much as a collective nostalgic object or idea can unify and rally a community together, it can simultaneously be appropriated as a means to set that bonded community against another. The Zionist return of Jews to Israel or the Hilterian illusion of returning central and west Europe to the exclusive abode of some idealised and imaginary superior Aryan race, could be understood as political projects inspired by enduring and intense nostalgic sentiment. Boym resolves this paradox innate to the condition of nostalgia with her distinction between what she calls “reflective and restorative nostalgia”:

Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* [the return] and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in the *algia*, in the longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance [...] Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on the ruins, the patina of time and history, of the dreams of another place and another time.<sup>300</sup>

As a framework, I can only locate my finding within Boym’s theory of a reflective nostalgia on the basis that none of my participants, especially those direct immigrants, harbour any idea of a restorative nostalgia. There is no desire on their part for a permanent return to St. Helena of the present, nor do they advocate for a recovery of St. Helena, as a place, to some static idealised moment in history. They simply pine for the specificity of their spatiotemporal ancestral home lost to time, which they can only access through amorphous memory. My participants, all reflectively nostalgic, accept the impossibility of a temporal return, despite the possibility of a spatial return for some. Being able to return to a space, but not to a time they have invested with affection, fosters their reliance on the psychic motion of re-memory to hark back ‘home’ in their minds as an authentic mode of ‘homecoming’.

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<sup>300</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

Occasional vacations and short-term visits to St. Helena appear to temporarily sate the desire for some existential return, but, in most instances, it serves primarily as trigger memory - for those who are actually St. Helena immigrants - to hark back and relish their pleasurable pasts. For those descendants of Saints, a visit to the almost mythical St. Helena Island is construed as pilgrimage (a sacred tour) to the hallowed home of their ancestors, often to engage in genealogical research to 'find their roots'. But this does not imply that a reflective nostalgia is devoid of political impetus; as I have argued multiple times above, it does coalesce a group around the core of a shared nostalgic object and adds weight and substance to their senses of self.

In a sociological sense, nostalgia is then an inter-subjective experience: it may be rooted in individual lived (or inherited) experience, but the shared experience of being nostalgic for the same object is a collective undertaking. I will refer to this type of nostalgia rooted in personal sensorial experience, archived in memory, as a synchronic nostalgia (within the 'moment' of a lifetime) when reflecting on my interviews with immigrant St. Helenians.

The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to reflections on several of the key themes that emerged in interviews with my participants. Of these themes, the hypothesis that nostalgia is a method to countervail the alienating effects of modernity comes through most strongly. My initial intention was to write synoptical reviews of the experience of my participants and the effects that their experiences exerted on their sense of selves, their identities. However, as insightful as that may have been, it demands a capacious scope I'd not be able to adequately fulfill in a single chapter. However, such an undertaking is not foreclosed to future research. By the same token, I am hesitant to reduce the lives of my participants to footnotes and will do so sparingly. It should, therefore, be noted that I am extracting only fragments of my participants' life narratives conveyed to me in conversational interviews and, in a sense, abstracting these experiences to relate to my chapter's key theoretical concepts: those of nostalgia and identity.

### 3. Introjecting the spatiotemporal: “It’s my birthplace [that’s] in me”<sup>301</sup>

Mrs Benjamin was recruited on the Island of St. Helena during World War II by a said “Lizzy Pritchett”<sup>302</sup> to serve as a caregiver to the two children of the Burnside family residing in Mazabuka, Northern Rhodesia (now part of south-east Zambia). She departed St. Helena in 1941, at the age of twenty-two, and en route to Mazabuka, she first arrived in Cape Town via the *Llanstephan Castle* ship along with five other St. Helena immigrants. Mrs Benjamin, who was the “love child”<sup>303</sup> of a local St. Helenian woman and a Scottish soldier named Harry Papler stationed at the Island during World War I, was one of thousands of Saint Helenians compelled to emigrate as soon as she reached working age.<sup>304</sup>

While interviewing Mrs Benjamin<sup>305</sup>, I was first struck by her incessant and unsolicited repetition – as if she was chanting a sacred incantation: “If you are born British, you will die British” [...] “they can never take my birth-right from me” [...] “It’s my birthplace what’s in me” [...] “I was born under the British flag.”<sup>306</sup> Her clear articulation signifies the poignant introjection of a distant cultural home – a distance marked by the Island’s spatial remoteness and partial inaccessibility,<sup>307</sup> as well as by a temporal distance bridged solely by her then diminishing memory.

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<sup>301</sup> Ivy Gwen Benjamin, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, June 27, 2015.

<sup>302</sup> A woman said to have trained local women on the Island in embroidery work, but who also fulfilled the dual function of recruiting ‘coloured’ St. Helenian women for servile work within British colonies and the metropole itself.

<sup>303</sup> I use this term as quoted from another participant when he refers sarcastically to the offspring born of native St. Helena women and imperial British soldiers. Kamedien, Mogamat, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Wynberg, Cape Town, September 19, 2015.

<sup>304</sup> See my arguments in the previous two chapters.

<sup>305</sup> Mrs Benjamin is one of only two surviving St. Helena immigrants I had the privilege of interviewing.

<sup>306</sup> Gwen Benjamin, interviewed by Damian Samuels, June 27, 2015.

<sup>307</sup> By partial inaccessibility, I refer to the mode of travel – until October 2017 the only way to reach the Island was by means of a five-day sea-trip – as well as the cost of travel charged in pound sterling, which, given the disparate exchange rate, most descendants of Saints cannot afford. Although a flight to St. Helena takes only four hours, the new cost of travel by air, even at special reduced rates, is marginally more expensive than the most affordable, now decommissioned, option by sea.

Her home, St. Helena, was not simply a spatiality, but a representation of an idea of herself as a member of a global Anglophone community. And by extension, her avowal through an act of nostalgic recuperation of what Boym refers to as nostalgia for the “Ancien Regime”<sup>308</sup> – a dynastic time where subjection to a ‘divinely sanctioned’ imperial monarch would emplace one with a measure of certitude in the world and where notions of belonging and identities were presumably less ambiguous and fragmented.

Like Mrs Benjamin, the only other St. Helena immigrant I had interviewed, Mrs Ethel Feils (formally Ethel Bruce), began our interview by exhibiting her personal collection of photographs of the British royal family’s visit to the Island of St. Helena in 1947 before proceeding to show me a series of personal family photographs. She believed I would relate to this, as a descendant of a Saint myself, and went on to affectionately recount, in vivid detail, the dresses worn by then Queen Elizabeth, and princesses Elizabeth and Margaret.<sup>309</sup> Her proclivity for identifying by subjection to the imperial power of the past was clear. Mrs Feils made the unequivocal statement that St. Helena Island is “very much my home”, a home to which a permanent physical return was foreclosed, but a home she was able to visit on occasion “just to look”, mournfully, at how it has changed. Pertinent however, was her impossibility of a temporal return to the ‘good’ of her childhood home, that for which she truly yearned.

Indeed, being my first two interviews, I was immediately intrigued by what was comparatively at stake for Mrs Benjamin and Mrs Feils in making such impassioned assertions demonstrative of a “stubborn attachment”<sup>310</sup> to their place of birth. I subsequently learned that Mrs Benjamin had never returned to the island after living in South Africa for over seventy-four years before her

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<sup>308</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” 10.

<sup>309</sup> Ethel Feils, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Sonstraal Hoogte, Cape Town, June 20, 2015. Mrs Feils’ family were white St. Helenians of Scottish descent who were well respected on the Island. She arrived with her mother and brother in South Africa in 1948 at the age of sixteen. Her first job in South Africa was in the employ of Woolworths. Later, she opened her own successful lingerie shop in Durbanville. She naturalised as a white South African citizen and lived a comparatively privileged life to that of Mrs Benjamin. She had physically returned to the Island several times.

<sup>310</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, 31.



passing in 2016. Making sense of her profound attachment to St. Helena Island underlies much of the impetus for this chapter. Moreover, Mrs Benjamin's memories of home particularly, as she relayed them to me, were complex and marked by ambivalences that would unsettle many of the romantic conceptions of life on the island.<sup>311</sup>

Nevertheless, once one's place of birth is affectively internalised, it becomes home, irrespective of whether experiences of home vacillate between pleasure and displeasure; it is an attachment often bound for life and hardly ever met with indifference. Memory of home, thus, can manifest as a form of topophilia or topophobia, or as varied configurations between these two extremes. What is certain is the intensity of its inscription on individual consciousness, as the case may be with Mrs Benjamin and Mrs Feils.

Being born *in situ* of place usually inscribes on the individual her/his first political identity – a citizenship – and the reverence for one's place of birth is normally expressed as a celebration of a specific nationality. It is, therefore, often taken for granted that nation and home are coterminous concepts, a composite state of belonging. Belonging, in turn, commences with the intimate – to a family. Belonging is then rationalised outwardly, becoming increasingly abstract – to a family within a community (my people, a culture). Lastly, a community settles as constituent of a country, a nation. However, in the case of St. Helena, citizenship is a rather vague and fluctuating concept.<sup>312</sup> Although St. Helenians are often

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<sup>311</sup> Raised by her grandmother, Mrs Benjamin was particularly affected by her family's class status as "poor Islanders" and her mother's effective abandonment of her at the age of two in search of a better life in South Africa, after it became clear that her Scottish father was not going to secure her mother's access into Great Britain. Mrs Benjamin's mother married a white "Cornishman", and once settled in Lansdowne, Cape Town, she secured her access into dominant South African society. In inadvertently acknowledging Gwen's existence on the Island, her mother referred to her as "cousin Gwen". She only reunited with her mother after twenty years and discovered she had (white) siblings she was unaware of.

<sup>312</sup> St. Helenians are considered British citizens since the Island was classified by an act of parliament in 2002 as a British Overseas Territory. We are reminded of the precarity of British citizenship for Saints as evinced by their approximately twenty-year loss of citizenship in 1981, after the passing of the British Nationality Act. In effect, St. Helena is still run from London by a Governor whose appointment remains the prerogative of a nominal monarch on advice given by British government. Undisputedly, St. Helena is a living relic of a former imperial time; it should not be surprising that resident Saints and the St. Helena diaspora have a peculiar attachment to the British Ancien Regime, a historical fact that binds an international community of Saints.

enamoured with their home Island and consider themselves Saints first and foremost, this sentiment does not translate into a national or political identity, considering that St. Helena is not a sovereign or independent land. To all intents and purposes, resident Saints are precarious British citizens estranged from their metropolis. In addition, the St. Helena diaspora have become naturalised citizens of their respective host countries. Yet there is a freedom in not having to conflate origin and nationalism, a splitting that would allow for an unusual separation of a secular identity (nationality) and a subjection to a nostalgic object vested as sacred (place), specifically a distant and elusive place of birth construed as home.

In the climate of global retroaction towards autochthony<sup>313</sup> as elementary to one's identity, national pride and political belonging are predicated on one's *place of origin*. Birth and its regular conflation with origin is considered the natural induction of the self and is not simply a mythopoeic matter. States still concede there is no better criterion for recognising an individual's citizenship (political belonging invested with rights and obligation to a particular state) than the citizen's place of birth, the primal attachment to (a) place.

Since origin and to an extent destiny have been secularised and usurped by nationalist sentiment and ideas of nationhood, the history of the place and its autochthonous culture, in turn, affects the politics of belonging to place and serves as the base from which this citizenship – and by extension political belonging – is derived, assigned and negotiated. However, once origin and nation can be divorced, there is room for all kinds of identificational creativity and performance. As the case may be, the relationship to nation and nostalgia that has emerged in my study is one in which all my participants accept the banal fact that they are South African. However, they expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequacy inherent in the idea of belonging fortuitously to this nation. Yet, their efforts were not to negate their South African citizenship, but to relegate its centrality, foregrounding in its stead, origin, their St. Helena descendancy, as

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<sup>313</sup> Peter Geschiere, "Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion - Paradoxes in the Politics of Belonging in Africa and Europe," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18, no.1, article 14 (Winter 2011): 321-39.

epitomised by Mrs Benjamin. They possessed no real power in defining what it means to be South African, but they could set the parameters for constructing nostalgically the value of a St. Helena identity.

Anderson's work on the emergence of nationalism, or the nation as an "imagined" community, is applicable here.<sup>314</sup> In the wake of religion's retreat, after enjoying centuries as a dominant social constructive force and explanatory framework for existence, he argues, something had to take its place. With the "ebbing of religious belief", the upshot was a

[d]isintegration of paradise... mak[ing] fatality more arbitrary and the [a]bsurdity of salvation ... mak[ing] another style of continuity more necessary... What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.<sup>315</sup>

In other words, the loss of a belief in a utopian future, an existential continuity and a commitment to a higher ideal that religion afforded, is the true tragedy of modernity's secular rationalism, to which Anderson proposes:

... [f]ew things were better suited to this end than the idea of a nation (yet) [i]f nation-states are widely conceded to be new and historical, the nations to which they give political expression loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.<sup>316</sup>

His proposition is that nationalism provided the opportunity for the secular sequestration of a religious group's cultural fervour formally dedicated to the sacred, inevitably imbuing the nation with a hallowed quality. I interpret Anderson's proposition to be partly based on nationalism's larger appeal to sentiment, rather than reason. Like *a religion*, *a nation* can be visibly instituted and materially expressed. Moreover, both these forces are centered on the

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<sup>314</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. edn (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*,11.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*,11-12.

supposition that people need to submit to ideals greater than themselves. These ideals, in turn, offer a purpose for which individuals are prepared to die and kill, with the hope that their continuity will take shape in some form of nationalist public memory. Unlike other political ideologies, for instance liberalism and fascism,<sup>317</sup> which are construed as ‘new’ responses to modernity, nationalism has its constructive elements in an immemorial past, but has its sights on the future – a destiny.

But what happens when in post-colonial nation-states<sup>318</sup> belonging to a nation is not always interchangeable with notions of cultural home and origin, and no longer amenable to the realisation of past utopian promises, which, with the passing of time, seem far less plausible? When despondency and disenchantment with the contemporary set in, and nationalism begins showing signs of abating, losing its sacred aura,<sup>319</sup> what shall be its replacement? Nostalgia is proposed to have replaced utopian optimism in the future,<sup>320</sup> reticulating new communities around a shared nostalgic object, while nationalism, with the advent of multi- and transnational arrangements and internationalist<sup>321</sup> aspirations, is slowly becoming unsettled as central to identity.

Furthermore, a nation, as a “style” of “imaging and create[ing]” a political community, is “both inherently *limited* and sovereign.”<sup>322</sup> Nationalism’s ubiquity may be attributed to the fact that it transcends cultural specificities, and to the

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<sup>317</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities*, 5.

<sup>318</sup> This is much like South Africa, which is a hodgepodge of multiple atavistic ‘nations’ and naturalised immigrants from elsewhere (descendants of both former master and slave) all cobbled into one state. Despite South Africa being a young nation-state, barely 22 years old, many citizens have long given up on romantic notions of a rainbow nation.

<sup>319</sup> Notwithstanding the temporal difference for the emergence of nationalism in the colonies versus its European metropolises, the nation in both contexts can be considered secular *and* sacred for different reasons. Anderson’s explanation holds for why the nation is deemed sacred in Europe, ‘the West’ and to some extent in ‘the East’. Since the precepts of nationalism are ironically inherited from imperial European powers, the sacredness of a nation in the post-colony can be linked to its liberatory functions, being *the* progressive political ideology for supplanting imperialist political organisation in the colonies.

<sup>320</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” 8 & 9.

<sup>321</sup> I am critical of this term since I believe it means an assimilation to dominant globalised cultural norms. I also refrain from using cosmopolitanism; my view is that this term signifies an accommodation of a multiplicity of different people in a delimited place (usually, country), which is not what I mean by an *affective sense* of a community that emerges from, and transcends, space.

<sup>322</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities*, 6.

fact that its proliferation is contingent on the propagation of an ideology that has as its key tenet spatially definitive bordered communities, which paradoxically defies ideological and cultural barriers. But it remains a spatially contained (limited) and fragmented political unit, albeit sovereign, which produces multiple diverse polities arising from a singular ideological framework; for beyond the border of each nation, is an increasing number of *other* nations. Identities constructed nostalgically, on the other hand, are often characteristically uncontained, superseding fixed territories, especially if they link with attachments to former empire.

Mrs Benjamin was capable of delicately reconciling her racial, legal and cultural subjectivities. According to her, she was racially 'coloured', South African legally or "by law", culturally British and "St. Helena born"<sup>323</sup> by origin. But what is salient in her constitution of herself, was the mutual exclusivity of these subjectivities. Instead of viewing her identity as a composite of all those imbricated historically constructed subjectivities, she viewed them as separate and independent categories seeming in competition with each other – a farrago rather than a blend. Furthermore, I sensed that her varied subjectivities were independently evoked and performed in certain contexts and situations. Crucially, of all her fragmented and discontinuous subjectivities, *origin* - distinguishable from *nation* here - is the one she underlined to hold the most value for her. It was the very marker of identity most conducive to mystification, and, therefore, favourable to beatification.

I would later encounter a similar longing desire - for a pristine edenic past image of St. Helena - among other participants, some of whom were the children and grandchildren of immigrant Saints who had never visited the Island of St. Helena. Mr Mervin Watson, one of the fortunate St. Helenian descendants who managed a sojourn on the Island in December 2001,<sup>324</sup> pointedly recounted to me his arrival on the Island as one of his life's most inimitable experiences, exceeding

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<sup>323</sup> Interview with Mrs Benjamin, June 27, 2015.

<sup>324</sup> Mr Watson is the only member of his family to have 'returned' to the Island after accessing the means to travel to the Island once a retirement policy matured at the age of sixty. Prior to this time, he possessed the desire to return, but not the means to do so.



his expectations. He described St. Helena Island as “mystical, enchanting and charming”.<sup>325</sup> Of greater significance, though, was Watson’s hesitance in relaying to me a particular incident, which his wife, Lynne, meaningfully introduced in our interview:

I was about to step ashore, when in front of me Mervin, having landed, quite unexpectedly sort of made as if to kiss the ground and say, ‘I’ve arrived, I’m back, I’ve landed on St. Helena.’ Not only to me, [but] to the whole surrounding company. It was very unexpected, but obviously a very emotional moment for Mervin. So, I remember that so clearly.<sup>326</sup>

Watson’s return to the Island is significant, not only to himself, but as redemption for his entire family: “I was so pleased, at last, one person of our family had got back to St. Helena.”<sup>327</sup> It is profoundly peculiar that he speaks of a return to a place he has never before experienced, but what is more illuminating is the fact that his return was conceived as the sacred homecoming to the hallowed Island, the island of his ancestors. The overwhelming sense I got during this interview was a sacrosanct sentiment best articulated as *our Island, which art in the South Atlantic, hallowed be thy Ground.*

As a descendant of Saints, Watson’s physical return to the island can be understood as an otherworldly experience or as holy pilgrimage. In contrast, the temporary return to an ancestral home for Watson is quite a different type of nostalgic satisfaction to that experienced by direct immigrants, like Mrs Feils, for instance. Firstly, Feils was able to witness the changes to the place of her childhood, which she had introjected as affective memory through her physical senses. This I called a synchronic nostalgia – a yearning for what one experiences as a loss in one’s lifetime. On the other hand, Watson’s diachronic nostalgia – a

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<sup>325</sup> Mervin Watson, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Diepriver, Cape Town, August 6, 2016. Mr Watson is a family genealogist *par excellence*; he has managed to research his family heritage in impressive detail and could determine that six of his eight great-grandparents had St. Helena heritage (a fact he is proud of). He has subsequently self-published several books detailing his own family history. Mr Watson had proven to be one of my most knowledgeable participants on St. Helena-South Africa migration history.

<sup>326</sup> Lynne Watson, in interview with Mervin Watson. Interviewed by Damian Samuels, Diepriver, Cape Town, August 6, 2016.

<sup>327</sup> Mervin Watson, interviewed by Damian Samuels, August 6, 2016.

form of nostalgia transferred and mutated over generations – was sated by his visit to the Island. Watson’s experience of St. Helena was influenced by his inherited historical sense of the place, which was laced with mystique and romanticism intensified by the temporal distance between immigrant and descendant. Yet, both forms of nostalgia are subjected to the same impossibility of a permanent return to the beloved Island of their fantasies and memories.

The partial inaccessibility of the Island and the impracticality of pursuing a fulfilling economic life there, for those who must earn a living, may inhibit a permanent return to the Island. But this very necessary impossibility of a permanent return for immigrants and their descendants simultaneously endows the Island with a fragile inviolability that the encroachment of globalism is seen to threaten. Temporary returns to an alterable spatiality, however, are affectively experienced as pilgrimage, tantamount to the manner Muslims and Catholics respectively visit Mecca or the Vatican City. The elusiveness of the Island due to its remoteness, the economic impracticality of living there, and the delayed onset of modernity, all compound to invest the Island of St. Helena with an intrinsic sacredness. That is to say, if St. Helena could be resettled by the descendants of emigrant Saints, chances are it will not retain its hallowed aura enabled by this spatial and temporal distance.

Sacredness of the past, as instantiated by place - St. Helena Island, in my case – is indeed a vestige of a longing for a utopia. But instead of undertaking the arduous task of creating new utopias, or the easier option of simply deferring it to the after-life, the focus shifts to discovering a hidden utopia as a natural place untouched by modernity - a place innocent, good and whole. This apparent compromise seems to entangle the sacred with the secular where that which is sacrosanct can find true instantiation in place and time. This sanctification is given weight by the fact that romantic fantasies and enchantment with the Island are not restricted to St. Helena immigrants and their progenies, but similarly expressed by those relatively privileged and socially well-connected metropolitan residents who sought refuge or simply temporary respite from

modernity's bitter fallout. Robin Castell's<sup>328</sup> confessed despondency with Britain's changing demographics during his youth (1950s-1960s) is suggestive of the Island's valence for some British conservatives:

When I was about eighteen or nineteen, I got a bit fed-up with the United Kingdom and decided I wanted somewhere else to go where it was peaceful and quiet, no crime and everything was absolutely fine. So I studied the world map and I particularly wanted to be able to continue speaking English. I wanted somewhere where the sun shone and it wasn't anywhere that the Germans would want to bomb again. I wanted to get away from horrendous politics, taxation, traffic, cold weather, everything negative [...] The place [England] was filling up with immigrants from Jamaica and everywhere else, and there were Muslims with say three wives and ten children. So it wasn't getting better, it was getting worse [...] I decided that it [St. Helena Island] was definitely the place for me. I enjoyed it there because there were hardly any tourists, you never had to lock your doors, no crime, and one very important point was that the fishing was good.<sup>329</sup>

In Castell's utopian conception, the Island was<sup>330</sup> a paradise on earth that could in fact be reached, provided one possessed the means (cultural, financial and social capital) to overcome the nautical distance. His notion of the Island as an *English* paradise is indicative of a general sentiment that St. Helena retained all that is good about wholesome, unsullied English culture. Moreover, Castell was exceedingly critical of what he considered St. Helenian naivety of worldly affairs external to the Island's insular rhythms, but his critique of St. Helenians' 'natural myopia' is ironic since he was lured by the very prerequisites producing the

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<sup>328</sup> Robin Castell was born in Buckinghamshire, England, in 1941. He is a white Englishman who now lives in Simons Town, Cape Town. He owns property on St. Helena Island and moved freely between there, the United Kingdom and South Africa.

<sup>329</sup> Robin Castell, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Simons Town, Cape Town, July 18, 2016. Castell has self-published widely outside the strictures of academia on St. Helena visual history. See, for instance, Robin Castell, *St. Helena: A Photographic Treasury 1856-1947* (St. Helena: The Castell Collection, 2008); and Robin Castell, *St. Helena Illustrated: 1502-1902* (Cape Town, South Africa: National Book Printers Group, 1998). However, elitist literature on the Island is often produced within various 'Friendly Societies' by those privileged who are charmed and enamoured by the Island and see themselves as responsible for the well-being of local St. Helenians. Castell's work, although valuable, does not escape some critique of having itself immersed in a history and tradition of British paternalism of the Island.

<sup>330</sup> I use the past tense because Castell shares the sentiment that the newly constructed airport is a harbinger for the loss of that which is positive and desirable about the island of St. Helena.

purported St. Helena insularity: its remoteness and distinctly archaic English cultural and architectural character.

However, the fact that he *chose* and could choose St. Helena as his new reclusive home, registers more about privilege than it does about agency, unlike the duress of having to emigrate as experienced by thousands of St. Helenians who settled in South Africa. Both Castell and emigrant Saints - Mrs Benjamin and Mrs Fiels in particular - were appreciative of the Island's "natural beauty", but to these emigrants, St. Helena is a paradise lost to time and circumstance, while to Castell it is a paradise gained in time; two contrary responses to the encroachment of modernity's econocentric impulses.<sup>331</sup>

Of course, here class distinctions between the privileged of the metropole, represented by Castell, and the relative privileged of Saint Helena, represented by Mrs Feils<sup>332</sup>, provided the opportunity for a meaningful analysis. More so, in relation to their relative proximity to the engine of empire and Castell's elitist attitude shared by a small minority of the resident metropolitan privileged towards the welfare of the estranged St. Helenian British subject. But such an analysis requires the attention and extensive coverage my study does not necessary allow. Besides, my focus is on nostalgia as an impetus for different kinds of physical and psychic 'movements'.

Modernity's manifold meanings and manifestations can be unwieldy, but within the context my study, I have contained the concept to describe encounters with unprecedented difference, previously unbeknown, and rapid social change due to the mass migrations of people to new lands, as experienced by my participants. Such convergences with difference and confrontations result in new processes of acculturation and subject-formation, but these responses are multifarious. On the one hand, Castell's voluntary centrifugal movement away from a changing metropolis may not be construed as a nostalgia desire for St.

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<sup>331</sup> Here I mean the gradual replacement of the waning imperial driven mercantilism with the waxing complete nation-state market capitalism.

<sup>332</sup> Both raced as white anywhere within the British Empire. Feils' family was considered respectable white Saints. Her father was one of the first St. Helenians to own a car on the Island.

Helena per se, but for an edenic English place-time that St. Helena offered to satisfy. Rather than choosing to adapt himself to Britain's social demographic and political changes as a result of the contraction of empire and its inability and unwillingness to contain racial types to its former colonies, Castell opted for a retreat in the form of a temporary relocation to St. Helena. His despondency with the changing British state, his apprehensions for potential encounters with the 'other' and the complexities change brought, underly his nostalgic response to grasp on to that which he felt he was losing: 'the proper English way' and the incipient unsettlement of the privileged place inhabited by an English man in a reconfiguring world. To Castell's disenchantment of *his* Britain of the mid-twentieth century, his notion that the Island offered an idyllic spatial and temporal escape from the maladies of modernity is unequivocal.

On the other hand, Feils' and Benjamin's movement towards the closest colony at the Cape<sup>333</sup> occurred under economic duress. There was no question of their need to change and reconfigure their identities. They had to brace themselves against the forces of change brought by a late modernity in the post-colony and make unavoidable adjustments. Significant about Mrs Benjamin's arrival in South Africa was her first encounter with difference in the "larger colony". She was confounded by her encounter with "Africans, moffies<sup>334</sup> and Muslims", especially perplexed by the thobes worn by Muslim men, which she referred to as "dresses".<sup>335</sup> The juxtaposition of St. Helenian insularity with stark alterities at the Cape, disrupted her perceptions of gender, race, religion and sexuality, for instance, which profoundly unsettled her, an unsettling that was necessary for her to make new physic accommodations if she were to live in a cosmopolitan South Africa.

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<sup>333</sup> At the time when Benjamin and Feils immigrated to South Africa, in the 1940s, the country was technically still a Union (a type of federation between white settlers and colonisers) in form, but the Cape was an English colony in character.

<sup>334</sup> An offensive term used to denote effeminate gay men who are usually 'coloured'.

<sup>335</sup> Gwen Benjamin, interviewed by Damian Samuels, June 27, 2015.



Mrs Feils, who arrived at the Cape in 1948 at the age of sixteen, related similar experiences regarding her first encounters with difference in South Africa. But what stuck out for me the most was the following she recounted:

When I came here (Cape Town, 'Africa'), I actually thought, you know, through history and geography you learn that there's animals and palm trees. But when we came here, we arrived here about seven o'clock in the evening and all you saw was lights, lights, lights everywhere. I said to my brother, 'this is fairyland, look at the lights'. It was a town, you know, all the lights were sparkling and everything was absolutely mind-blowing, you know, for us because we were waiting to see animals walking there on the sand or something.<sup>336</sup>

Associating 'Africa' with "fairyland" is a completely antithetical conception one would normally hold of a colonial pre-apartheid South Africa. What sense can then be made of Mrs Feils' astonishment at entering modernity by coming to Africa?

It can be argued that their movements signal temporal shifts as well. Crudely stated, while Castell voluntarily ran from the changes now collated and comprehended as modernity, Benjamin and Feils reluctantly headed toward it. Although Castell's movement to St. Helena from the metropolis, and Benjamin and Feils' movement towards the larger colony, were physical transferences across space, they have different psychic drives and effects. Castell's drive was a nostalgic search for a lost English paradise, which he found instantiated by St. Helena. Benjamin and Feils, however, lost their paradise and had to introject St. Helena, appropriating it through affective memory (nostalgia), which, with time, evolved into a pious sanctification of their beloved Island, lost to them as a cherished space-time. But not lost all together, for memory is a form of retention, and nostalgia is a way to relive the pleasures of the past, as I have argued above, and which is so aptly expressed by Boym:

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<sup>336</sup> Ethel Feils, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Sonstraal Hoogte, Cape Town, June 20, 2015. At the time Mrs Feils left St. Helena in 1948, the Island had not yet undergone general electrification.

Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. [Paradoxically though,] [n]ostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship [where] [t]he alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive.<sup>337</sup>

Mrs Benjamin related to me a reoccurring dream she had of a return home, but this dream was immediately punctured, deflated by her lament for a lost spatio-temporality – the home of her childhood:

But there is nothing more like that now, there are more cars there now than people, I believe [...] St. Helena is no more the St. Helena that I know [...] All my friends are gone...there is no reasons for me to go back [...] I would not want to die there.<sup>338</sup>

Nostalgia is an artefact of this “temporal irreversibility”.<sup>339</sup> The foreclosing of a return is a necessary condition for nostalgia to exist. For Mrs Benjamin, this necessary impossibility of a return home presented the opportunity for multiple conceptions of home. Her notion of a home in South Africa is strictly secular – a place where she ‘so happens’ to reside now as a citizen along with her family. On the other hand, St. Helena is her arche, the place of her inception, one she venerated and invested with spirituality. Mrs Benjamin held dichotomous images in her mind of St. Helena as a place of birth (her genesis) that is otherworldly, and South Africa as a worldly place where she will meet her end (a place of death, a fatality). This juxtaposition she expressed primarily as a lament. But a third, more complex, conception of home was revealed to me in her statement: “I went to the wrong place, I should have gone *home* to England, but I was *sent* to Africa... amongst all those Africans.”<sup>340</sup>

This slippage in her reference to England as ‘home’, although she has never been to Britain per se, should not be understood as a *faux pas* in the performance of her desired identity, but as a parapraxis that alludes to her unfulfilled latent

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<sup>337</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, XIII-XIV.

<sup>338</sup> Mrs Benjamin, interview by Damian Samuels, June 27, 2015.

<sup>339</sup> Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” 10.

<sup>340</sup> Mrs Benjamin, interview by Damian Samuels, June 27, 2015.

desires for a return to an estranged homeland she is yet to encounter. While residing in St. Helena, England served as her aspirational cultural home, yet once in 'Africa', St. Helena is reclaimed as her estranged home(land) as she moves further away from the centre of Englishness. Her lament for her luckless draw in being 'sent' to 'Africa' could only be consoled by the new life she has made of herself in South Africa – a life given purpose by her own family, especially in the form of her dedication to her two daughters.

What binds these three participants is their tendency to romanticise the distant and different place. Race has to be factored into my discussion, which I do in the next chapter. For the moment it suffices to say that the changing world was favourable to Mrs Benjamin; it presented the possibility and opportunity to reside in the motherland of her dreams.<sup>341</sup> But, for Castell, a changing world was largely perceived as repugnant, a risk or threat to what he held dear. With the fracturing of empire, the migration of people and the intensification of competing nations within the commonwealth framework arises a cosmopolitanism characterised by more complex, yet nuanced, social hierarchies in both the colonies and the metropole.

I conclude this chapter with some of the insights obtained from another of my participants, Paul Alexander, who asserted: "for me, through going through a lot of documents of my ancestors, letters and so on, I've connected with their nostalgia, their nostalgia back to a simpler, easier life on the island, although I think it was somewhat idealised [...]"<sup>342</sup> In other words, he was being nostalgic about his ancestor's nostalgia for St. Helena, *after* they immigrated to South Africa. Other than his articulation that captures the heritable force of affective ancestral narrative, Alexander held no reservations about delving into the arcane when I asked how he explains his affective attachment to St. Helena Island,

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<sup>341</sup> Although, in the end, she found herself in South Africa, not England.

<sup>342</sup> Paul Alexander, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Woodbridge Island, Cape Town, July 24, 2016. Paul Alexander's family was part of the privileged and respectable coffee-growing, land-owning class on the Island of St. Helena. He acknowledges with much shame that his family owned slaves. His great-grandfather pioneered the technology for building slam dams during the early stages of the mining industry in South Africa; the company Fraser Alexander remains a reputable company within the South African mining industry. At the time of my interview, Mr. Alexander was fifty-four years of age.

having never experienced the place personally. In a Jungian vein, Mr. Alexander expounded on what he considered a type of phylogenetic memory inherited from ancestors, a cache memory which predisposes their descendants to venerate and enamour the Island of St. Helena:

[...] that past is very deep, and very rich and somewhere in fibre and DNA of us [...] My explanation is that it's deep within our genes, and somewhere the place [St. Helena] is in our blood and somewhere there is a connection. I believe that stuff travels through generations and we may be shaped by our past much more than we understand.<sup>343</sup>

But, are all my participants, as articulated by Walder on the functioning of nostalgia in the postcolonial context, 'migrants', who along with their descendents, experience "the present as a place marked by a trail of survivors searching for their roots, for a home, in the ruins of history"?<sup>344</sup> Are these complex grappings with a postcolonial identity the unfortunate debris and residue of empire formation? And if so, why the penchant for relapses to the Ancien Regime, to imperial pasts?

Earlier I have argued that nostalgia is not exclusively a retroaction, but permits for the blending of both progressive and the antecedent elements with the aim of constructing alternative desired senses of self within a specific present. To this end, I have thus far sought to explain *how* St Helena Island as a nostalgic object is cathected and introjected through affective memory (nostalgia), and then invested as a sacred nostalgic object that binds the descendants of Saints as a community in South Africa, but I have simply alluded and not explained *why* that may be the case. In the next chapter, which should be read as a continued discussion of the key themes of this chapter, I attempt to address the question of what may be at stake in present proclamations that function as a celebration of St. Helena ancestry, with the purpose of producing an inimitable identity. The following chapter also includes more comprehensive conclusions for both chapters.

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<sup>343</sup> Paul Alexander, interviewed by Damian Samuels, July 24, 2016.

<sup>344</sup> Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory*, 2.

## Chapter 4

### Race and Respectability: Nostalgic Associations and Disassociations

Histories of oppression for marginalised peoples can be depressing and humiliating, promoting the idea that it is rational to look forward instead of backward, since the future 'must' hold for them better promise and prospects. But for those who put their trust in the future, what happens when it forecloses on these promises? What nostalgic recourses exist for historically marginalised people when they, too, become despondent with the present? What is there to be nostalgic about for them?

In contrast, it is presumed that nostalgia works 'painlessly' for those who were favoured by history, who feel, in the present, that they have lost power, privileges or status, or, that their culture and homeland had become tainted by the presence of the 'other'. For them the past should be a resource of delight, and harking back to a romanticised past must surely be an effortless aesthetic recourse. However, nostalgia does not work in this neat antithetic manner; it is marked by ambiguities, contradictions, particularities and pluralities. Nor is there a clear racial binary between the nostalgic and the optimist, those who are subject to either racial group can simultaneously be nostalgic and optimistic.

Furthermore, it is understandable for autochthons – those who have managed to retain vast elements of their culture and tradition, as well as their formative narratives and religious beliefs - to conceive of an idealised 'pre-modern' time before colonialism. These cultural assets can coalesce and be leveraged in decolonisation projects to offer alternative ontological models, even if these alternatives make provision for a syncretic and hybridised synthesis to racial dialects of ontology. But, how does nostalgia operate amongst the historically marginalised who experienced major ruptures and lacunae in their historical continuities? What are the affective investments in memory for the descendants



of those who have experienced slavery and deracination, along with colonialism and apartheid?

In the South African context, there is but a single book directly addressing the relationship between race and nostalgia – Jacob Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia*.<sup>345</sup> Dlamini demonstrates in his critical memoir that one can be nostalgic – that is, deriving pleasure from memory and thinking back with fondness on one’s own past, especially one’s childhood – despite being black and structurally oppressed during apartheid. The significant point to take away from Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia* is that formal structures of oppression, like apartheid, do not overdetermine lived reality, which is primarily constituted of a web of affective interpersonal relations.

Dlamini sets out to subvert grand totalising and generic narratives that tend to homogenise the black subjects’ experiences of colonial and apartheid oppression. He argues for the recognition of the ambiguity, complexity and multiplicity of the black experience under apartheid, experiences that cannot be simplified and reduced solely to that of uniform political struggle, which is in the main reactionary. We learn from Dlamini’s affirmation of his ‘happy childhood’, as a black subject under apartheid, that nostalgia is an all-inclusive human condition, not the exclusive domain of the privileged and powerful, especially when it is felt that such power and privileges have been lost during political transition.

If nostalgia, as affective memory, is a constituent element of human agency, the subtext to Dlamini’s proposition suggests that if one is deprived or denied the right to be nostalgic, it is an assault on one’s humanity. The other deliberate theoretical examination of the concept of nostalgia in a South African context

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<sup>345</sup> Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd, 2014). Although nostalgia is not directly mentioned as a concept, there are many other autobiographical narratives that do similar work: for instance, Chris van Wyk, Shirley, *Goodness & Mercy: A Childhood Memoir* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Picador Africa, 2006). Another insightful article that examines the legacy of apartheid racial subjectification and the “ambivalent identification with the parental figure [that] becomes the object of a nostalgia that oscillates dialectically between the dystopian realities of apartheid racism and utopian remembrances of the family”, see: Kharnita Mohamed and Kopano Ratele, “Where My Dad Was From He Was Quite a Respected Man.” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012): 282-93.

was undertaken by the Apartheid Archive Project research initiative and presented in a special issue of the *Peace and Conflict Journal of Psychology*,<sup>346</sup> from which I cite generously throughout this chapter and the previous.

In setting out to explore the entanglement of race, nostalgia and place, this relationship I restrict mainly to the contemporary connection between 'coloured' people and St. Helena Island. However, it must be stated that the intensity of this relationship is felt and expressed commensurately amongst 'coloured' and white South Africans of St. Helenian descent. For instance, I asked two 'white' participants –Alexander and Watson - why they clench on to a St. Helenian identity and what value the attachment holds for them? Both responded that a St. Helenian identity is something “special, different and unique,”<sup>347</sup> a rare almost enigmatic identity, worthy of emphasis and celebration. It is their 'something extra', their existential inflection.

I have received similar responses from my 'coloured' participants. In all cases, except for one participant who was indifferent to his parentage<sup>348</sup>, possessing St. Helena ancestry is the accentuating feature of my participants' identities, endowing them with inimitability. Despite being South African citizens, somewhat raced in opposition, for all my participants their St. Helenian heritage was evoked as *sui generis*, as their mystical *je ne sais quoi*; their hailing from a mythical elsewhere that no secular identity can circumscribe or eclipse.<sup>349</sup> But for 'coloured' participants, however, this identity carries additional weight in that it offers them a form of historical continuity, along with certain claims to respectability, that serve to countervail what they experienced as a lack of continuity and an enduring affront to their belonging and respectability on the basis of race.

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<sup>346</sup> “Of Narratives and Nostalgia,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>347</sup> Mervin Watson, interviewed in Diepriver, August 6, 2016; and, Paul Alexander, interviewed in Woodbridge Island, July 24, 2016.

<sup>348</sup> Steven Caswell, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Retreat, Cape Town, July 20, 2015. Steven Caswell is my grandmother's younger brother, son of Edward Caswell, my great-grandfather from St. Helena. He was one year of age when he lost his parents and has no memory of them. It is for this very reason that he constantly refers to himself as “a self-made man.”

<sup>349</sup> This was the principle argument in my previous chapter.

I will now discuss what extra investment possessing St. Helena heritage may have for those ‘coloured folk’<sup>350</sup> who foreground this ancestry. While being cognisant that I cannot generalise to all ‘coloureds’ or even more narrowly to ‘coloured’ people with St. Helena lineage, I do assert that the ‘problem’ their invocation seeks to address is a common sentiment among ‘coloured’ people.

### 1. The ‘coloured problem’

It is customary to find oneself in the company of fellow South Africans of confluent cultural heritage and polygenetic origins<sup>351</sup> (some may call this *métissage* and creolisation) where a considerable number of them would make declarations such as: “Ah, my grandmother was from *the* Island”; “You know, I had a great-aunt who was St. Helenian”; “Really, my great-granddad was a Saint too.” Claiming one or more St. Helena ancestor is a point of pride, often an immodest assertion made gratifyingly, reverberating with similar claims to European ancestry so prevalent amongst South Africans of mixed and multiple heritage.

Complex and sophisticated efforts exploring what it might mean to be ‘coloured’ in South Africa had been undertaken elsewhere<sup>352</sup>, nor has the undeniable contribution of ‘coloured’ politics in the service of the South African liberation

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<sup>350</sup> This term, ‘coloured folk’ may seem inappropriate, but I use it intentionally at times to connote the active construction of a mythology of origin by a people still forming their ‘sense of self’ in the present.

<sup>351</sup> I prefer these descriptions to the term ‘coloured’, but practically they can be cumbersome to use and may not convey the political particularity of the inscribed racial identity in South Africa. I am, therefore, inclined to use, as a familiar placeholder, the term ‘coloured’ with single inverted commas to highlight that I find the term problematic but I am yet to find an acceptable shorthand term. I have similar reservations about using the term mixed-race as it centres race as the over-determining definer, when in fact, culture – which encompasses the composite of class, language and religion - has a more powerful bearing on process of self-identification.

<sup>352</sup> For instance, see: Mohamed Adhikari (ed.), *Burdened by race: Coloured Identities in southern Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2009); Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Zimitri Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identity in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Kwela Books and South African History Online, 2001); Zimitri Erasmus, *Race Otherwise: Forging a New Humanism for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017).

struggle gone unnoticed.<sup>353</sup> But for the purposes of my study, by ‘coloured’, I accept that we are South Africans who, in the first instance, have our progenitors originating from African, Asian and European parentage, those who have been genetically commingled through varied permutations of miscegenation during early Dutch colonial settlement and slavery at the Cape. But, the trajectories of formation and the contested meanings that colonial history has produced of ‘colouredness’, framed by the socio-political construct of race, are my conceptual interest. Throughout South African history coloured people have culturally creolised – albeit at times privileging the diffusion of European and Asian cultural practices and values - but it is their political status and subjection as an intermediate and peculiar brand of black or “blacks of a special type”<sup>354</sup> that has over generations solidified the group as recognisably distinct.

The conflation of ethnicity, race and class and its collapse into a single ‘caste-like’ status during colonialism and apartheid augmented the formation of coloured people as a distinct political group in much the same way it hardened other ethnic and racial subjectivities. Spatial segregation during colonialism and its more overt variation enforced by apartheid legislation, which further entangled race and community, meant that those classified ‘coloured’ married and socialised almost exclusively amongst ‘themselves’, which adds credence to conceptions of their specificity and distinctiveness as *a* people in South Africa.

Although this group is certainly not monolithic, and arguably the most heterogeneous in South Africa, the racial marker persists in denoting a real ‘category’ of people. Under apartheid the classifications became concretised as a fixed legislated racial subjectivity to constitute those who are not ‘obviously’ black (tribal autochthons, ‘exclusively’ of Africa descent) or ‘obviously’ white (settler-citizens, ‘exclusively’ of European descent), reifying a facile, if not fictive,

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<sup>353</sup> Gavin Lewis, *Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African Coloured Politics* (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip Publishers, 1987); and, Richard van der Ross, *In Our Own Skins: A Political History of the Coloured People* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015).

<sup>354</sup> Zimitri Erasmus, “Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identity in Cape Town*, ed. Zimitri Erasmus (Cape Town: Kwela Books and South African History Online, 2001), 19.

similarity that sought to eradicate multiple other alterities within the group. In other words, coloured people were reduced and defined in a race-centred society, by what they *are not* – black (African) or white (European) - rather than by what they are, which itself remains a complex, ambiguous and an unresolved process, as is naturally to be expected from grappling with post-colonial identity bequeathed by slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

In one of the first post-apartheid intellectual exercises to confront the discursive denigration of ‘coloured’ people and to redress ‘coloured’ identity as constructively positive, Erasmus correctly diagnoses and attributes the interstitial coloured identity to apartheid and colonial policies bent on enforcing “racial hierarchies” through the strategy of “differential racialisation”:

[C]olouredness as an identity [has never been] understood and respected on its own terms [...] it has always been understood as a residual, in-between or ‘lesser’ identity – characterized as ‘lacking’, supplementary, excessive, inferior or simply non-existent. It has been negatively defined in terms of a [...] remainder [...] which does not fit into any classificatory scheme [...] coloured people [are] the leftovers [...] after the nations were sorted out.<sup>355</sup>

Erasmus further problematises tendencies towards promoting the canard of racial purity “that can be traced to nineteenth century European eugenicists”, arguing that “cultural formations involve borrowing from various cultural forms, and thus all identities should be seen/read as culturally hybrid.”<sup>356</sup> This articulation of colouredness - as a formulation of cultural hybridity that manages to reconcile extreme differences in compressed time and under oppressive conditions - decentres race and foregrounds the cultural formation of ‘colouredness’. It restores agency, affords credit and bestows respect to ‘colouredness’ as that which is not principally the outcome of “race-mixture” but rather of “cultural creativity under conditions of marginality.”<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Erasmus, “Introduction: Re-imagining coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa,” 15-16, 17, 18 & 19.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.



However, negative deterministic biological conceptions of 'coloured' people as those people who are inadequate, marred and unrealised, through the 'contamination of their blood', continue to force 'coloured' citizens to the political margins. They are a complicated and often conceived as a complicit minority that cannot fit neatly into essentialist reductions, making it hard to design political messages tailored for them, which may not be worth the trouble anyhow; it's often easier to ignore or dismiss their particularity all together. The consequence of this is that many 'coloureds' internalise chronic sentiments of alienation in conceiving of themselves as a social residuum to varying degrees dependent on their class status.

The liminality of 'colouredness' arises from a composite cultural-political-racial identity, one construed as sundry and "residual", where many who are subjected or subject themselves to the identity continue to feel, as a numerical and political minority group, their place in South Africa is unstable, if not volatile. This liminality mirrors the 'in-between' space of the Island of St. Helena as somewhere between Africa(n) and Europe(an). It is an empirical fact that despite a clear political subjection as black, 'coloured' cultural relatability is markedly 'western'. In the arena of identity politics, a politics centred particularly on notions of racial purity and atavistic cultural authenticity, the political precarity of 'coloured' people is premised on the historical fact that they are of transnational origins.

Their multifarious origin - deriving from many places<sup>358</sup> - seemingly dilutes their claim to a single specific place of origin, posing a threat to their autochthony. Thus, it is perceived to unsettle their secure sense of belonging and thwart their historical continuity. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, claims to indigeneity remain the premium political currency that validates belonging. Responses to assaults on 'coloured' indigeneity have been controverted by assertions to 'coloured' people's partial descendancy from the autochthonous nomadic and pastoral peoples of Southern Africa. These counter-responses are

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<sup>358</sup> 'Coloured' families are usually quite aware of their multiple origins and can trace their genealogy to many places. It is not a matter of 'coloured' people *not knowing where they are from* as they are so frequently accused of.

credible and have genetic veracity, but, instead of the contrary, 'Khoisan' identity, as a mode of claiming indigeneity, is often uncritically subsumed under 'coloured' identity. Furthermore, these claims do not escape the repetitive game of avowal playing out – where belonging is predicated on autochthony,<sup>359</sup> as a form of politic underwritten by nostalgia - and offers no potentiality to forge a new humanism as invoked by Erasmus' latest book in which she argues for a double-politics.<sup>360</sup> That is, to be simultaneously cognisant of an inherited racial coloniality while seeking to decentre the importance of race in defining who we are as South Africans, and by extension, as human.

Compounding the marginality of coloured identity is the deepened humiliation - one from which other 'race' and ethnic groups are largely spared - in acknowledging that a vast number of the ancestors of those considered 'coloured' were initially 'deposited' as chattel at the Cape. The allochthonous origin (deposited from elsewhere), and the haunting fact that some of our ancestors were brought to Africa as slaves against their will is often leveraged to undermine and unsettle their belonging in South Africa. If indigeneity is the political currency of 'the African', then the onset of modernity and 'civilisation' in Africa, signified by the presence of whites, rationalises, though not uncritically or without problematisation, European colonialism and justifies the place of those of European descent in Africa.

Those raced as 'coloured' do seem to fall through the fissures drawn by these two binary representational modes of autochthony and modernity in claiming belonging.<sup>361</sup> Their heterochthonous origins and attachment to South African

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<sup>359</sup> For a useful reading on the resurgence of autochthony's "self-evidence", as central to claims to political 'belonging' (citizenship), read: Peter Geschiere, "Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion - Paradoxes in the Politics of Belonging in Africa and Europe," 321-339. Geschiere's key argument raises the present political paradoxes inherent in autochthony's countervailing existence with neo-liberalism in a 'globalised' world. More critical readings on 'new nativism' and its antipodal relationship to neo-liberal globalism can be found in the works of: Achille Mbembe, "Ways of Seeing: Beyond the New Nativism (Introduction)," *African Studies Review* 44, no.2 (September, 2001), 1-7; and, Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>360</sup> Erasmus, *Race Otherwise*, xxiv.

<sup>361</sup> This is despite the fact that 'coloured' people can call no other place, but South Africa, home. They share this fact with their 'Bantu' compatriots and to some extent white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who consider themselves indigenous South Africans based on the premised that

slave history is often met with scepticism and pushes 'coloureds' to the periphery of South African politics. The implication, as argued by Adhikari, amongst others, is that those raced as coloured continue to pose a constant contaminant threat to the ideals of African and European racial purity, and clear antithetic conceptions of African autochthony and the European foreign settlement's imposition of a particular modernity in Africa.

Considering the multiplicities of origin and the imbricated subjectivities that converge to produce 'colouredness', along with its present political anxieties and vulnerabilities summarised above, how do we begin making sense of why St. Helena heritage is foregrounded, embellished, and even celebrated, while other antecedents (especially African) are relegated to the margins or emphatically negated through their very silences. Exactly what value proposition does the nostalgic foregrounding of St. Helena ancestry offer those who emphasise this heritage? How does it differently emplace 'colouredness' (as a peculiar brand of blackness), if at all, in the South African context?

No matter how nebulous and distant the St. Helena heritage is, I have found, it remains the strand many 'coloured' South Africans extract, affirm and emphasise as their existential arche. This is especially rife amongst 'coloured' South Africans who are educated and English-speaking. Why? My research findings steer toward the suggestion that once inherited nostalgic narratives of St. Helena are cathected and internalised, this nostalgic image of the Island is then appropriated and invoked as a mythical *homeland* for those raced as 'coloured' in South Africa who are knowledgeable of their St. Helena ancestry. I present at least four reasons justifying my proposition, which I support with elucidations derived from interviews with my participants.

## **2. St. Helena: part of the imperfect 'coloured' solution**

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they too can call no other place home, even though they are aware of and accentuate their composite Dutch-French-German ancestry. This is not the case with many English speaking white South Africans who can hold or can apply for dual British-South African citizenship or at least apply for an ancestral British passport/visa; their possibilities and opportunities for movement are far less restricted.

Firstly, St. Helena's remoteness and size elicit attempts to locate the Island with greater cartographic and memorative precision, compared to similar, imprecise, efforts made to trace places of origin within larger continental territories where there is generally perceived to be a lack of geographic and memorative accuracy.<sup>362</sup> Despite its virtual inaccessibility and elusiveness on account of its minute size and isolation in the South Atlantic, St. Helena, unlike other places of derivation, can be pinpointed with exactness as *the* geographic place of origin, albeit simply *a* strand of origination among many for 'coloured folk'.

This geographic and historical accuracy is used as leverage to refute Afrocentric and Eurocentric accusations that 'coloured people do not know where they come from' because they hail from multiple, distant and ill-defined places that had only 'come into history' with the advent of European (Dutch and English) empire formation.<sup>363</sup> In other words, this pointed exactness to a place of derivation is a rebuttal against any affront to belonging on the grounds of 'coloured' people's allochthonous and heterochthonous origins exercised by 'autochthons' who conflate indigeneity with racial purity and true citizenship.

Secondly, aided by the relative recentness of the St. Helena immigration history, the Island is already shrouded in mystery and simultaneously wrapped in a rich nostalgia for the Island passed down through generations. This nostalgically mysterious and elusive island enables a mystification of origin that most enduring nations often share, expressed as a form of mythology needed to give a

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<sup>362</sup> 'Coloured folk' may be aware that some of their non-European ancestors hail from 'regions' like Bengal, East Africa, India, Indonesia, Madagascar and Malaysia. But they will usually possess scant or simply no knowledge of which 'village' their ancestors were from or to which clan they belonged. This type of detail is usually absent compromising these ancestral bonds and, consequently, a sense of historical continuity. Normally, 'coloured' person's European ancestry is preserved over other antecedents for a number of reasons: its aspirational links to respectability and the fact that the master class has prescribed cultural norms and dominated historiography; and, white colonial families kept more accurate family records and celebrate their proud family histories. Furthermore, with processes of creolisation, some former cultural practices will either be adapted or, in extremes cases, even lost.

<sup>363</sup> The irony is that St. Helena, as a spatiality and cultural construct, is empirically a historical product of British imperialism, but it is invoked as mythology. The other continents' histories exist and predate their entanglement with European imperialism, but the import of oral histories from these other places of origin is more tenuous amongst 'coloured folk'.

deeper historical continuity to a people. In this way St. Helena is susceptible to being invoked as a form of mythopoeism, and therefore sacred,<sup>364</sup> for those considered 'coloured' in the contemporary South African context. The underlying objective is to unsettle, or at least supplement, the secular and historicist narratives that 'coloureds' are simply the biological products of miscegenation with no unique traditional culture of their own. In this regard, the Island serves as the mnemonic device for affirming a historical continuity perceived to be lacking due to a history of deracination and slavery within the context of empire formation.

To illustrate my first two points above, I take, as an example, the case of Mr Solomon, one of my participants well into his eighties, who appropriated his St. Helena ancestry as his single point of origin, simultaneously, but unintentionally, negating his other strands of lineage. This phenomenon appeared with all my participants, but Mr Solomon's consistent references to St. Helena as his sole ancestral home was most acute and impassioned. His nostalgic infatuation with Island was expressed as a conduit connecting him to his ancestors as a means "to satisfy [his] craving for [his] people."<sup>365</sup> This clear tactical construction is meant to counteract the historical discontinuity he believed he suffered as a person who identifies as 'coloured' - a member of a people who presumably lack 'the' clear, uninterrupted and consistent narrative of origin.

In response to his passionate lament for what he articulated as their general ignorance of and disinterest in their ancestry, Mr Solomon went as far as suggesting *all* 'coloureds' of the Western Cape were the "offspring of St. Helenians" and should know their genealogy.<sup>366</sup> Although plainly inaccurate and wishful on his part, the implication of his statement highlights that an absolute claim to a St. Helenian ancestry offers a clear nodal link within the clutter of historical ambiguity, a way to trace and map a lineage one "should take pride in

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<sup>364</sup> The sanctification of St. Helena is another salient point I argued for in my previous chapter.

<sup>365</sup> Mustapha Solomon, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Bergvleit, Cape Town, January 31, 2016. Mr. Solomon was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1932. He was eight-four years old at the time I interviewed him.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.



[...] the way Indians or Malays<sup>367</sup> do, [after all] we don't grow from a tree, out of the ground."<sup>368</sup>

Furthermore, Mr Solomon's inherited family narrative pertaining to St. Helena operates as orature imbued with an historical inventiveness that differentiated him from the rest of my participants. His inherited family narrative is constructed along the following lines: *Queen Victoria personally escorted and disembarked 860 Saint Helenians from the Island at St. Helena Bay on the west coast of South Africa on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 1879 and decided to rename the then called Steenberg's Cove, St. Helena Bay, after the Island and in honour of 860 resettled Saints meant to work there as labourers in a newly established fishing factory.*

Despite the specificity of Mr Solomon's story, there is no other oral or archival evidence to authenticate his nostalgic family narrative. In fact, there is no archival evidence in either St. Helena Island or Cape Town that suggest such a large migration of Saints to South Africa.<sup>369</sup> Furthermore, it is highly implausible that such an enormous case of migration - by St. Helena standards it would by far be the largest - would have gone unnoticed or undocumented.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Interestingly, 'Cape Malays' are normally subsumed under the racial category 'coloured' due to their historical links with Cape-Dutch slavery. But Mr. Solomon makes a distinction between 'coloureds' and Malays, as often is the case. What this really illustrates is the disparate senses of history and discontinuity *within* the purported 'coloured' racial group.

<sup>368</sup> Mustapha Solomon, interviewed in Bergvliet, January 31, 2016.

<sup>369</sup> The immigration of two hundred Saints to Durban in mid-September 1873 currently stands as the largest single St. Helena immigration event. See page 64.

<sup>370</sup> My own latent desire was for Mr. Solomon's story to ring true. Encouraged by the details of his recount - and his 'lead' that the Anglican church there was in possession of a letter stipulating a labour procurement agreement between St. Helena authorities and a local fishing interest in the Bay, mediated by the Church - I spend considerable time in archives and conducting interviews in St. Helena Bay trying to corroborate this migration event. I doubted I would find evidence for the single migration event of 860 Saints, but what appeared to me as highly probable was the possibility of a small number of Saints settled there as boatmen, fishermen and fish factory workers, as the case was with the emigration of 50 boatmen for Port Elizabeth in August 1872. Unfortunately, I turned up no evidence to substantiate Mr Solomon's intriguing story. Moreover, the link between St. Helena Bay and St. Helena Island is arbitrary. In fact, there appears to be no link at all, yet the two places are often erroneously conflated and used interchangeably during discussion with people who usually lack the basic knowledge to distinguish between the two places. However, Mr. Solomon may be touching on something important: it could be that many more 'coloured' people have St. Helena ancestry, but have distorted their family stories by misconstruing some of their ancestors originating from the 'Bay' and not the 'Island'. Of course the inverse could also be true.

It would be more accurate to say that St. Helena was home to one of Mr Solomon's ancestors – his great-grandmother, Eva – and plausible to suggest that she, possibly along with a few other Saints, fortuitously made their way from Cape Town to the West Coast including to the town of St. Helena Bay to make new homes for themselves, forming a small cohesive community of Island Saints living in the Bay. It is not hard to imagine the flourishing of a nostalgic narrative under these circumstances. But such cold rationalisations do not speak to the warm affective power of the nostalgic narrative that, admittedly, is far more enticing. The key illumination from Mr Solomon's interview was the scale and detail of his inventiveness, and the depth of investment into a narrative that is embellished to the point where it acts as a mythology of origin, a type of constructive nostalgia that serves as a panacea for severe sentiments of displacement and historical discontinuity.

On this point, one may argue that descendants of white St. Helenians make similar claims to St. Helena as ancestral home. For instance, Paul Alexander was reflective of his own nostalgia when he conceded that he was in fact being nostalgic about his ancestors' nostalgia, a direct synchronic nostalgia he could access through reading his great-grandfather's letters in which he wrote affectionately about the Island.<sup>371</sup> However, in Alexander's case, as with every other case where I interviewed a participant raced as white, they could hark back further in time to when their ancestors arrived at St. Helena from other specific territories<sup>372</sup> within their native homeland; places like Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London and Yorkshire, for instance, which were territories within an already defined and established imperial polity – the United Kingdom.

For white South African descendants of immigrant St. Helenians the Island functions in their genealogical narratives as a mystical stop-over from one defined place of permanence in the metropole en-route to another defined place of permanence in the colonies where greater economic prospects could alter

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<sup>371</sup> Paul Alexander, interviewed in Woodbridge Island, July 24, 2016

<sup>372</sup> Paul Alexander held knowledge of his first St. Helenian ancestor, Richard Alexander, who arrived on the Island in 1674 as an illiterate settler-farmer from the poor area of St. Gilles in London.

their lot in life. For 'coloured' descendants of Saints, the retrospection and genealogical enquiry often begins and ends with St. Helena, presenting a narrower and younger genealogy.<sup>373</sup> Any attempt to look back further means delving into an ambiguous history of slavery and derivation from ill-defined places.

The ramification is such that, while both 'coloured' and white descendants of Saints claim St. Helena as ancestral home, coloured descendants of Saints commit the additional investment in claiming the Island as *homeland*, precisely because the narrative of derivation does not permit further accurate retrospection; it appears to break and dissipates after St. Helena. White descendants of Saint Helenians, however, can detach the two place of derivation and assert a European *and* St. Helena ancestry, where in the latter place their St. Helenian ancestors were members of the privileged class. There was no irreparable break in their historical continuity since their ancestors hailed from the motherland as representatives of hegemonic culture and race, notwithstanding their own insular differences and internal hierarchies, which become less conspicuous when met with radical racial difference in South Africa.

Thirdly, and certainly in relation to my arguments above, the deceptive historical discourses found in St. Helenian colonial records constructing the "coloureds" of the Island as 'native' - imposing a quasi-indigeneity on mixed-raced Saints - contribute to and promote the notion that St. Helena is the 'natural' home of the 'tanned Anglo'. This fictive interpellation to an ersatz autochthony and 'nationality' was necessary to differentiate the 'locals' from the white metropolitans seconded to the Island to perform various forms of skilled labour and administration, as well as to distinguish between the descendants of the white paramilitary settler-farmer class and those partially descended from slaves (the tainted).

Inherent in these discursive distinctions was the assigning of status connoting the dualistic associations of indigeneity to servant-subaltern and the

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<sup>373</sup> Notwithstanding, this 'stunted' genealogy asserts its associated affiliation to Britishness.

metropolitans to master-civiliser. At times, this false indigeneity was internalised and evoked by 'coloured' resident Saints as a means to distance themselves from freed African slaves who took up domicile on the Island<sup>374</sup>, further concretising the category 'coloured'. In much the same way the formation of 'colouredness' as a liminal 'race' unfolded in South Africa, encounters with the 'other' on both sides of the racial spectrum on the Island entrenched 'St. Helenianess' as indivisible from 'colouredness'. To put it crudely, the 'native' St. Helenian is, culturally speaking, clearly English, yet not white, but certainly not black or African.

In Chapter Two I argued that the Union administration of South Africa applied St. Helena Island as "Place of Origin" exclusively to "non-European" immigrant Saints; white Saint Helena immigrants were classified as "British Other."<sup>375</sup> While white and 'coloured' Saints lived with these differential racial categories on the Island in asymmetrical class relations prior to immigration, they retained a shared affinity for the Island. Once in South Africa, however, the Union government applied these racial distinctions with an extraordinary kind of perversion, legitimising, centering and entrenching race as deterministic of an individual's future prospects.

In so doing, this publically shared affinity to place was detached and separated along racial lines, only to be reattached again in the present. The reason for this temporary interstice in the publicly shared affinity for the Island is on account of the aforementioned spurious discourses, which generate a false nativity for Saints and cements the association of 'colouredness' with the Island. St. Helena is popularly construed as the 'coloured' *homeland*, the natural home of the English creole. But these associations often had undesirable derogatory consequences for the direct St. Helena immigrants.

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<sup>374</sup> Hundreds of former slaves remained on the Island after being freed during the period of active British slave abolition operating from the Island between 1840 and the early 1860s. Refer to my introduction.

<sup>375</sup> See my arguments in chapter two under the subtitle 'Union of South Africa'.

Mervin Watson would relate to me how the once cohesive diasporic community of Saint Helenians in central Durban, committed to their common welfare, fragmented along racial fault-lines after World War II and in anticipation of the imminently crude apartheid segregation policies.

They were a very tightly knit community. In Durban itself they actually formed the Mutual Society, which was there to help anyone who was indigent in the community. And periodically families were in really dire straits and that and they would be supplied with food or clothing or whatever [...] and I think they found a measure of strength in being such a tightly knit community. Unfortunately, as time went by, and especially after the Second World War many of the Saints had gone up North and fought for the British forces in Egypt and Italy and elsewhere. Those who signed up and gone up North were fighting alongside the white community who had been in South Africa [...] and when they came back they did not know where they were really and they decided to live as white because things were so much better for whites at that point. It caused great splits in families. Even today some of those rifts have not been healed. Families were just divided down the middle, brother not greeting brother and things of that nature was going on [...] It was that kind of thing that was very hurtful and caused a big split in the community. And as a result of that kind of split many of the Saints, well certainly those who lived as whites, did not want to and still don't recognise their heritage in that regard, which is most unfortunate.<sup>376</sup>

Due to the connotative associations of 'colouredness' with St. Helena it was often detrimental for white English-speaking South Africans who were descendants of Saints to preserve narratives relating to their St. Helena heritage. Moreover, it was imperative for those immigrant Saints and their early progeny, who could *pass* as white, to be unequivocally raced and streamed accordingly in order to take full advantage of opportunities reserved exclusively for whites during apartheid. In this context, where something as arbitrary as pigmentation determined one's fate, the St. Helena narrative had to be often sacrificed and silenced. It is only in the present that these nostalgic narratives are beginning to resurface and flourish, where proclamation of St. Helenian lineage is

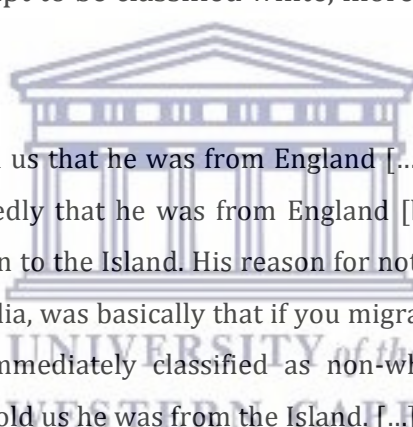
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<sup>376</sup> Mervin Watson, interviewed in Diepriver, Cape Town, August 6, 2016.



rearticulated as prestige and celebrated by descendants of immigrant Saints irrespective of their racial identifications.

In the contemporary *South African* context this hailing from an English Island is appropriated as cachet. But this was not the case with the initial St. Helena immigrants who resisted being classified 'coloured', knowing full well that such a marker would impede their economic and marital prospects. Some even employed creative ways to circumvent the racist application of 'coloured' on their identities, constructing new selves and histories of derivation. By way of example, and in contrast to Mr Solomon's appropriation of the island as his single ancestral homeland to access prestige in the present context, Melissa Joseph's father, Mr Neville Joseph, employed inventive methods to negate his St. Helena origin in an attempt to be classified white, more specifically as English, in South Africa:



My father originally told us that he was from England [...] I grew up thinking [...] believ[ing] whole-heartedly that he was from England [but] we've only recently found out our connection to the Island. His reason for not telling us, we found out from my uncle in Australia, was basically that if you migrated to South Africa from the island you were immediately classified as non-white or coloured. That's basically why he never told us he was from the Island. [...] That did come as rather of a shock, not because of anything to do with race or racism ... but more that he lied and [trying to make sense of] why he lied.<sup>377</sup>

In order to obviate being classified 'coloured' Mr. Joseph concealed the truth of his derivation from his immediate family, a secret that only came to light some time after his passing when his son unsuccessfully tried to apply for a British ancestral passport. Melissa's poignant sentiment of betrayal emanated from the interview, a betrayal by her father for guarding and maintaining the secret of his origin, which she believed would have enriched her own sense of identity. The purpose of the lie, I infer, was initially to enhance his own economic and marital

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<sup>377</sup> Melissa Joseph, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Bothasig, Cape Town, September 21, 2016. This participant asked to remain anonymous. Melissa Joseph is, therefore, a pseudonym, as are the names applied to father and grand-father.

prospects and later maintained for fear that he may jeopardise his children's life chances. Furthermore, Melissa's mother most acutely felt this sentiment of betrayal, having shared a life and children with a man who was supposedly 'coloured' in a society where race is so embedded it determined who one was allowed to love. But what struck me as salient was some of the detail, the exactness, of Neville Joseph's narrative of origin, one he stencilled out of his nostalgia for England:

I remember him telling us a story that his father took him to a pub in St. Just.<sup>378</sup> And he explained this little pub, this lane he had to walk through to get to this pub. What was kind of odd was that a friend of my mom's went to St. Just and this pub was exactly as he explained it ... this little alleyway, how to get there. So he must have done some research on this pub, as I now know he had never ever set foot in England.<sup>379</sup>

Neville Joseph's relationship with his parents and brother had to be sacrificed so no doubt could be cast on his performance as an Englishman from England.<sup>380</sup> Interestingly, his father, Mr Peter Josephs, was classified as a "white foreigner", which may imply that the act of persuading whiteness was one taken as a tacit family decision, although there may have been disagreements about the extent and intensity to which the family secret was guarded.

Although Watson has spoken generally about the fracturing effects on the community and identities of immigrants Saints and their descendants - engendered by an increasingly racialised South Africa of the 1940s - the Joseph narrative is unique to my study owing to the fact that it is my sole case evincing the strategic negation of St. Helena heritage by an immigrant Saint. This disavowal of origin was necessary as a socio-subjective strategy employed by some immigrant Saints to obviate marginality and to secure the social prestige associated with whiteness, itself a tactic to enhance marital prospects and socio-

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<sup>378</sup> St. Just is a small town in Cornwall, England.

<sup>379</sup> Melissa Joseph, interviewed in Bothasig, Cape Town, September 21, 2016

<sup>380</sup> Melissa lamented the fact that her grandparents had been in South Africa her entire life, merely a few kilometres away, but she grew up without them, believing they were in Australia as her father had told her.

economic opportunities within the apartheid temporal context. Neville Joseph's active disassociation from the Island and his nostalgic associations to England functions as a defining nostalgia intent on reshaping identity in line with yearnings for the cultural motherland, a nostalgia similarly expressed by Mrs Benjamin.

I now make my last of four points in an attempt to explicate why many 'coloured' descendants of immigrant Saints emphasise their St. Helena heritage. St. Helena is unarguably a British Island in terms of administration and culture, a place endowed with the English cultural capital that gives it definition and distinction. Therefore, links to British respectability can be made relatively uncontested since there are (and were) no commensurate competing cultural or political systems on St. Helena Island, as the case may be in the larger British post-colonies, that would undercut or disrupt British culture as dominant and ubiquitous. English values and cultural associations to respectability were preserved and handed down relatively uncontested on the Island.

Once immigrants made new homes for themselves in a multi-ethnic, multicultural South Africa they soon recognised themselves in this new context as distinctively English and, subsequently, precarious members of a hegemonic culture. 'Coloured' descendants of Saints in South Africa may not always be able to account for their white predecessors as a means to display respectability, but they can make certain claims to being descendants of respectable 'coloureds' from the English Island of St. Helena. In other words, English respectability can be asserted more confidently via their ancestry to St. Helena.

For all the reasons mentioned above, St. Helena, as a *homeland*, is a desirable appropriation for 'coloured folk' as a place of derivation because it is less culturally ambiguous, geographically tenuous and historically fragile than making claims to other places of origin.

### **3. Laments, miscalculations and consolatory performances in St. Helenian propriety**

It is a logical point to grasp that claims to St. Helena ancestry serve as a mode to access and assert British respectability<sup>381</sup> while simultaneously extending a sense of historical continuity for many 'coloureds' of St. Helena descent. These claims emerged - sometimes as latent, at other times overtly, but they were always the pervasive undertone - in interviews with all my participants. Yet, I can offer no better example than Mrs Benjamin since she exemplifies the unequivocal case of what was both lost *and* gained by immigrant Saints classified as 'coloured' under apartheid:

Look, many years ago the St. Helenian people went as white, but when I went for my ID, they put on there *coloured* so I didn't worry, I left it like that. It didn't make any difference to me whether I was white or coloured, as long as I'm a person. I wasn't going to fight for white, to be white.<sup>382</sup>

On the one hand Mrs Benjamin, in holding a higher moral ideal espousing a common human community that ostensibly transcends race, did not resist being classified 'coloured' and consequently lost the possible opportunity to contest being classified white. It is not clear whether her initial dismissiveness was because she believed it a lost cause<sup>383</sup> or an unworthy fight to undertake. I sensed it may be for both reasons but, principally, that she would not demean herself for what she considered an unwarranted, unsophisticated classification, since any resistance of that nature would mean she recognised herself in the state's attempt to objectify her, ceding her power to the state to define and oppress her.

However, Mrs Benjamin may not have fully anticipated the magnitude of its effects or the extent of its malevolence since her values were precocious and her expectations anachronistic within the context in which she found herself. She did not comprehend that apartheid's goal was to deprive blacks of their *personhood*

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<sup>381</sup> Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing: St. Helena and the South Atlantic World."

<sup>382</sup> Gwen Benjamin, interviewed in Bonteheuwel, June 27, 2015.

<sup>383</sup> Being visibly 'mixed-race', of a poorer class and having already internalised notions of race on the Island, Mrs Benjamin may have been prepared and more susceptible in accommodating the hardened legal classification, 'coloured' in apartheid South Africa.

in which the first step was classification. Although, later in the interview she relayed to me an act of defiance similar to that of the famous Rosa Parks incident where she resisted the disciplinary and regulatory enforcers of apartheid separatist policy:

I was sitting in a bus one day, many years ago, in one of those railway buses because I was living in Hout Bay at that time. And I got in the bus to go to Hout Bay [when] this conductor... I was sitting in front of the board and my first husband's aunty (sic) was also sitting in front of the board... so he said to me I must sit behind the board because I am coloured. So I asked him, why is she sitting in front of the board when she is married to my husband's brother? So I sat there and wouldn't get up, so he moved the board and put it in the front of me, because I'm coloured.<sup>384</sup>

The effect of official racial classification began to rear its malefic head despite Mrs Benjamin initially dismissing her official classification as 'coloured', putting it down to something arbitrary and inconsequential. She was correct in understanding the criteria for classification as arbitrary, but mistaken in her assumption that it was innocuous. Although her act of defiance highlights the absurdity of racist apartheid policies, it was the being of a lifetime of oppression and resistance for her and the slow creep of racial subjectification and interpellation. On the issue of racial self-identification, at the time of the interview, the ninety-six year old from Bonteheuwel considered herself 'coloured' and expressed as much:

Well, I am a coloured, look how I look, I am not white [...] I live here amongst all the coloureds, so I must be coloured, but I am British born, you can't take that away from me [...] I am glad I didn't come [out] black, I'm brown, I'm brown [...] I don't speak Afrikaans, I only can speak English (sic), they [neighbours in Bonteheuwel] ask me where I came from, I say St. Helena Island. Even in the church, I don't go sit by the Afrikaans bible study I sit with the English because I don't speak Afrikaans.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Gwen Benjamin, interviewed in Bonteheuwel, June 27, 2015.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.



Mrs Benjamin's conception of race appears, at face value, to fall within the banal definitions of race on the basis of phenotype and complexion – a biological 'truth', nothing more because she was still culturally English and that was that. However, she understood the social ramification of racial classification: in the act of declaring her relief that she was not black, she conceded to the relative privileges inhered in being classified 'coloured'. Yet, Mrs Benjamin was resistant in acknowledging the full impact of racial subjection through classification, holding on dearly to her notions of a common humanity, pride in her origin and her sense of English propriety.

On the other hand, one may ask, what has Mrs Benjamin possibly gained? Exactly that which distinguished her from the majority of her 'coloured' neighbours in her community: the fact that her native tongue is English and precisely because she refused to speak Afrikaans even though she was capable thereof and proficient in the local Afrikaans vernacular.<sup>386</sup> This negation was necessary to assert her Englishness in a circumstantial and contextual environment. In her community she was considered the "English woman", which conferred onto her a form of self-evident respectability and distinguishability in a largely Afrikaans speaking community. Her St. Helena identity was anything but dormant, in her context it was evoked and resuscitated as cachet. The English language - and all that it represents – acts as the central synecdoche for English culture conferring the prestige Mrs Benjamin relished, an Englishness authenticated by her St. Helena origin and her English native tongue.

Another manoeuvre in performing respectability was Mrs Benjamin's vehement abjuration of her slave antecedents: "no, no, no, there was no slavery there [on the Island in her lifetime] ... that was a different time,"<sup>387</sup> to rearticulate herself in the present in a new nostalgic relations to empire. Her denial illustrates that the relationship between empire and its subjugated has never been a clear dichotomy in the sense that the terms of an erstwhile subjugation can be

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<sup>386</sup> During our interview, Mrs Benjamin responded to a beggar knocking at her door in clear colloquial Afrikaans.

<sup>387</sup> Gwen Benjamin, interviewed in Bonteheuwel, June 27, 2015.

reconstructed and invoked as prestige in a different milieu, like current day South Africa.

Another example, amongst several, demonstrating displays of English respectability emerged from my interview with Castella Fourie. She recalled her father, Edward Caswell, a direct St. Helena immigrant, having never faltered tipping his hat in a gesture to greet each passer-by as he walked confidently down Ebor Road, Wynberg. She continued,

For work he worn a cap, but on a Saturday and Sunday he worn a hat, 'vol houdings, daai swart man'.<sup>388</sup> They used to call him the black-white man because he was ..... full of nonsense [...] He was a character hey, he was a character, you didn't lay a table for my daddy without putting on a cloth, and his cutlery, and his water jug and his crutzen set with all his salt and pepper and vinegar and all that stuff... even if he was [only] going to have a sandwich, the table had to be laid. The only friends he had then were [...] the Jews and the St. Helena people. He had a radio then, which few people had, and then they (his friends) used to sit and listen to the news and then discuss the news. [...] They used to have a drink [...] but those people didn't drain their glasses like [the people] today, they always left a little in their glasses.<sup>389</sup>

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It should be highlighted, however, that these abovementioned consolatory performances of respectability, through displays of etiquette and association, are usually staged in communities engineered exclusively for the subaltern and contrast the servile and sycophantic performance in the presence of whites, especially in the company of white employers. These displays of respectability are often attempts to countervail a deep sense of lament for being classified as 'less than' and for miscalculating the extent of foreclosures to opportunity and dignity on the basis of these disparaging racial classifications.

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<sup>388</sup> A direct translation to English will read, "he had lots of attitude that black man", but this does not entirely capture the idiomatic meaning that would imply he was discerning and of impeccable character, performances one normally associate with 'whiteness'.

<sup>389</sup> Castella Fourie, interviewed by Damian Samuels, Bridgetown, Cape Town, July 18, 2015.

Castella Fourie lamented the loss of characteristics that constituted her St. Helenianess, her intimate distinction, with the sudden death of her father, as well as what she believed to be the loss of St. Helenian propriety as it increasingly became subsumed under general 'coloured' culture over time:

[...] I believe a lot of men came first hey, because they were young men, they came from the Island [...] to seek their fortune here or whatever [...] and they married the coloured women here and they had children and they had children and they had children and so we all became *just coloureds*, you know what I mean, we all became *just coloureds*, we didn't think anything... that we were from a different place. And as far as culture is concerned and character is concerned [...] I don't know how much influence the St. Helenians had on some of their families, I only know how ... we turned out ... a lot of my family turned out well. [...] You know the St. Helenians have their own ... accent hey... have you heard it? You see, my dad spoke like that [therefore] we spoke like that [...] I spoke like my dad. I liked the way he spoke. As we grew older [...] we just lost that. Sorry I did, I would have liked to hold on to it ... to have held on to that accent.<sup>390</sup>

Varying from Mrs Benjamin's conceptions of race as wholly and exclusively a 'true' biological fact, Castella Fourie's understanding of colouredness echoes the problematic sociological conception of this racial category as underdeveloped, reductive and ill-defined. She regarded St. Helena respectability to elevate the status of the coloured community in South Africa in much the same way Mr Solomon conceived the contributions of St. Helenian immigrants and their descendants as emphatic to 'coloured' cultural respectability.

I conclude this section of my chapter with another experience during my interview with Mrs Benjamin. Intrigued by the photos of a happy white family on display in her home, I requested she show me personal family photographs, like I

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<sup>390</sup> Castella Fourie, interviewed in Bridgetown, July 18, 2015. Castella Fourie is my great-aunt, my grandmother's sister. I share some of her lament in terms of reconciling the disruptive paring off of my family narrative that occurred with the abrupt death of my great-grandfather when my grandmother was merely three years old. This project is and inadvertent attempt to recover some of this truncated filial history, which diminishes my own St. Helena heritage.

did with Mrs Feils.<sup>391</sup> Although these photographs existed, they were stowed in dark forgotten crevices of her home. My first instinct was to deduce that, as a working class family, the Benjamins may have had limited access to cameras, which is often my experience. But, eventually and to my delight, she could present a box filled with family photographs that she had to first “look for” and dust off. These photographs were interesting, but the saliency of this experience lay elsewhere.

To recapitulate, Mrs Benjamin’s first job as an immigrant in Africa was that of a child-care worker.<sup>392</sup> After she married her first husband, she managed to escape domestic servitude and become a home-holder. However, as the need arose, Mrs Benjamin continued to work intermittently in various domestic-type occupations throughout her early life.<sup>393</sup> Significantly though, these class-based forms of ensuring a livelihood were reproduced and passed on to the next generation; both her daughters worked and one continues to work as a house-helper.

Part of the Benjamin family’s mode of visually expressing respectability in her community of Bonteheuwel hinged on associative display of photographs in her home. Not the photographs of her own family, however, but a family portrait of her daughter’s employer – respectable manufacturers and owners of a popular local shoe brand - placed conspicuously on the small living room mantle for all to see. I present no judgement about the intimacy of their affective relationship,<sup>394</sup> but simply to illustrate how subjective value and processes of self-avowal remain partially linked to associative displays of prototypical filial whiteness intended to offer the templates for respectability.

What seems to matter is that Mrs Benjamin’s daughter loved her employer’s family and believed that this affection was reciprocated; I have no doubt in the

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<sup>391</sup> The only other picture on display, mounted on the wall of Mrs Benjamin’s lounge, was an image, resembling a tinted photograph, of herself and her second husband.

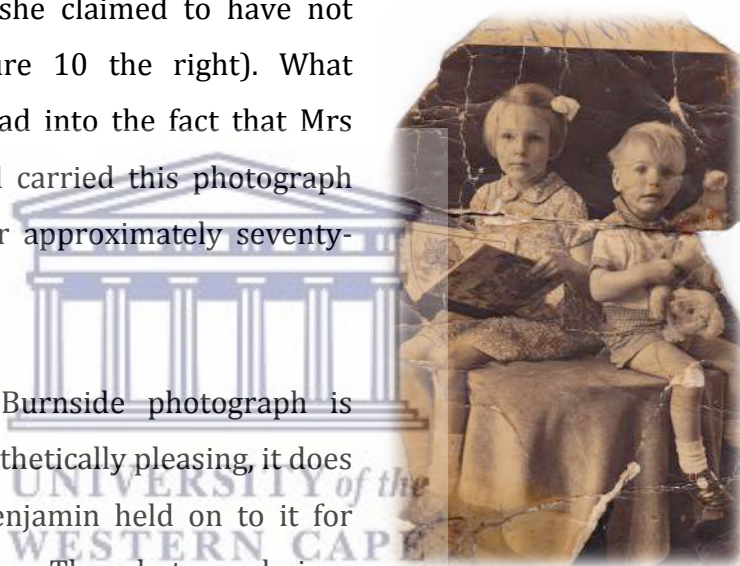
<sup>392</sup> In Chapter Two I referred to the general sentiment that St. Helenian women were perceived to be the ideal ‘nannies’ for privileged white English-speaking families in the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces of South Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This I substantiated with media reports.

<sup>393</sup> Later in her life she worked at a local SPCA – Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

<sup>394</sup> I recognised that these relationships - between employer and domestic worker - are far more complex, ambiguous and intimate than the manner in which I am currently treating it.

sincerity of this relationship. But this mutual affection is shared within an unequal relationship of structural dependency for domestic workers.<sup>395</sup> This display may be dismissed as coincidental and insignificant, rendering my reading of it moot, but the stark absence of personal family photographs, *when they do exist*, means the process of display was an active, albeit an unconscious, action. It appears therefore, that the dependency is not only structural and economic but also psychological and interpersonal, as well as performative and aesthetic.

To augment my argument, Mrs Benjamin carried on her person a photograph of Anne and David Burnside, the two children she cared for in Mazibuku for under a year in 1941; children she claimed to have not been fond of (see figure 10 the right). What meaning can then be read into the fact that Mrs Benjamin preserved and carried this photograph in multiple handbags for approximately seventy-five years?<sup>396</sup>



While it is clear the Burnside photograph is technically adept and aesthetically pleasing, it does not explain why Mrs Benjamin held on to it for such a considerable time. The photograph is a fragment instantiating a temporality she was nostalgic for, but more importantly, its durable tactility renders it a mnemonic device that indexes a performative model of respectability, one worth aspiring towards. Anne and David's deportment in the image represents young English propriety and dignity, a

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<sup>395</sup> Through the works of Jacklyn Cock, for instance, we are reminded of the grossly unequal relations of power between employer and domestic employee in the South African context producing an unprecedented type of dependence on the employer suffered by domestic workers: Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980). Chapters two to four are especially relevant: in these Cook addresses the paradoxical consequence of employer benevolence and relational intimacy that often intensifies the domestic worker's structural and psychological dependency on the employer by obscuring the inequality and giving domestic workers a false sense of being 'part of family'. By extension, this employer benevolence and relational intimacy creates a spurious sense of respectability by association and proximity to a worthy employer family.

<sup>396</sup> She did not carry any photographs of her own children in her handbag.



potentiality and possibility that these children would bring light and order to the world wherever they may go as embryonic cultural scions of British distinction.

The image and its referents signal an incipient imperial dignity that can travel and interpolate into any geographic context, enhancing the status of its place of import. If England was Mrs Benjamin's cultural home she had never reached, to her, the white respectable English family is its most authentic occupant. Her children, on the other hand, would not embody these potentialities of English authenticity and respectability, but she could proximate a measure of respectability by association through *possessing* this grand image and exhibiting it as proof of association in situations where such performances become opportune.

The problematic of this encounter suggests that respectability on Mrs Benjamin's own terms remains unattainable for as long as self-worth remains attached to imperial English cultural precepts according to which the dramaturgical casts and scripts are often racially assigned. Respectability is performed, it is not innate or self-evident. The force of race is that it sets the stage for acceptable racially scripted performances in which black subjects, despite their cultural and linguistic base being English, are reduced to Pygmalion (underling) status. Social 'transformation' from unrealised lowly cast(e) to respectable is, therefore, held and meted out according to the quality of the underling's mimetic performance or associative displays of 'proper' English whiteness.

It can be argued, without much strain on logic, that performances of respectability are constructed and, therefore, expressed pluralistically and heterogeneously. Yet, I found that St. Helenian respectability, having its roots and expression derived from processes of creolisation, still appears to measure its gravitas against some false and limiting notions of 'authentic', 'absolute' and ideal forms of racially defined English respectability. It is in this sense that I construed these specific contextual and situational performances of respectability encountered with some of my participants as consolatory, which I believe is limiting and somewhat self-disparaging. Are there not multiplicitous

inflections of English culture producing variegated, yet commensurate, forms of respectability?

#### **4. Conclusion**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the two chapters on nostalgia and identity, while bearing in mind my methodology in this part of my thesis is more exploratory than explanatory. In the first instance, I have argued that nostalgia is an active, conscious and deliberate type of affective re-memory. It is a way of feeling the past on my participants' own terms, terms that serve an aesthetic function in which pleasure is derived from re-memory through the process of cathecting and introjecting the object of one's nostalgia.

Moreover, I've hoped to demonstrate that personal pasts can be felt intersubjectively and collapse into *a past* when the object of memory is one that is shared to form an imagined community orbiting around a collective nostalgic object. In the case of my study, this nostalgic object is a place - the Island of St. Helena - around which a community has emerged and developed in South Africa, constituted by the descendants of St. Helena immigrants bound by their mutual affection for St. Helena Island.

I have argued that nostalgia operates as a vehicle privileging and foregrounding narratives of origin. The inclination among many of my participants was to reshuffle their memories and fantasies through processes of adaptation, embellishment and sometimes erasure, which led them to effectively curate desired versions of themselves within past and present time. This is particularly evident from the personal narratives of direct St. Helena immigrants like Mrs Benjamin and Feils who have deep sensorial experience of the object of their nostalgia, which they have archived as readily retrievable memory. I have referred to this type of nostalgia as synchronic – where the nostalgic has personal experience of the object of their nostalgia.

Diachronic or inherited nostalgias that are passed down to descendants of Saints as filial orature through time and over lifetimes are particularly susceptible to forms of outright invention due its fantastical tendencies. Here I refer specifically to the case of Solomon whose family narrative pertaining to the Island translates into mythopoeic renderings of identity – a type of ‘mythopoiesis’ forging identities founded and grounded on a nostalgia for a lost, idealised and often romanticised spatio-temporality. However, this phenomenon is not restricted to Solomon. Milder varieties of these forms of inherited nostalgias and imaginaries of the Island are evident in, and acknowledged by, other participants. For instance, the testimonies of Watson and Alexander underlie my argument for the shift in the source and mode of introjecting a nostalgic object from being rooted in personal senses to the efficacy of feeling nostalgic about an object through an interface with collective historical ‘senses’.

My case study analysis has revealed that St. Helena Island possesses a special valence for the descendants of immigrant Saints. In an effort to understand why this may be the case, especially since most of them have not visited the Island, I have deduced and offer the following composite reason: the Island’s minute size, distance, isolation, near inaccessibility and associations to grand imperial Englishness all converge, shrouding the Island in mystery that means it aptly lends itself to mystification, intrigue and fascination. In addition, St. Helenian descendants who have visited the Island often describe the place as charming and enchanting, and found that their experience far exceeded their expectation.

However, we have to bear in mind that these fascinations and romanticised expectations of the Island were idealised to begin with and do set the psychic parameters for descendants’ sojourning experience, which is often contrary to exigent circumstances experienced by immigrant Saints forced to emigrate from their beloved island, as the case may be with Benjamin and Feils. According to Alexander, he believed that his link to the Island was through genetic inherences, rationalising enchantment with the Island that is phylogenetically relayed through generations.

In other instances, particularly exemplified by my interview with Castell, St. Helena is construed beyond the imaginaries of immigrant Saints and their descendants, as an edenic English paradise, an idyllic place apparently free of the abrasive and corruptive impulses associated with modernity. For resident Britons like Castell who sought respite from Britain's changing demographics, the Island was a cultural and temporal refuge. However, most British metropolitans did not and still do not know the island exists, adding to its epistemic exclusivity, which intensifies the notion of the Island as a nirvana.

Knowledge of the Island is mainly restricted to those with an ancestral relationship to St. Helena. However, once information on the existence of St. Helena is acquired and interest in its edenic properties sown, it is another matter getting to the Island and yet another making a living there. Manifested by the economic history of Island, St. Helena is place of impermanence precluding any pragmatic or sustainable (re)settlement for those who have nostalgically introjected the Island, irrespective of whether this nostalgia is derived from immigrants' first-hand experienced and memory or inherited as the case may be with many of their descendants. However, this impossibility of a permanent spatial return has a counter-effect in that it contributes to sustaining the Island as an object of intense fascination. A temporal return is absolutely impossible.

To many of my participants the Island is a sacred place suspended in time, a land that had enjoyed a long duration of imperviousness to modernity's corroding and econocentric impulses. In such renderings of a pristine image of an Island, St. Helena is an interesting example of how nostalgia for place can instantiate a tendency to sanctify the past more generally.<sup>397</sup> Evident from interviews with my participants, their nostalgia and attachments to an ancestral place is a psychic

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<sup>397</sup> As a practical illustration, many of my participants expressed their concern about the opening of the airport in St. Helena in October 2017. Even though most would agree that the airport would probably grow the economy of the Island, for them the cost outweighs the benefits. In most cases the airport is considered a harbinger signaling the 'end of a edenic era' for the Island. Although the airport represents the beginning of a process that will see the Island integrate with the rest of the 'modern world' many of my participants lamented that the Island has finally succumb to modernity and will eventually lose it character, charm, mystery and spirituality.

strategy to countervail the alienating and unsettling effects of modernity as well as to ensure an inviolable continuity of the self across time.

Instigated by the exigencies to emigrate for new territories, nostalgia is often a multifarious reflex to my participants' confrontations with difference and social change, which demanded new psychic accommodations and adaptation to identity. By way of example I drew a comparison here between two contrary responses to social change. On the one hand, forced to immigrate to South Africa under economic duress and in the process reluctantly encountering a large complex industrialising and cosmopolitan state here in the 1940s, Benjamin and Feils lamented the loss of their Paradise Island. Under these disenchanting conditions they had developed a poignant nostalgia for their native home. On the other hand, as recourse to his disenchantment with Britain and the social changes underway in the metropolis around the same period, which he voluntarily chose to evade, Castell temporarily found in St. Helena an English paradise gained in time and space as a mode to satisfy his nostalgia for an idyllic, uncontaminated and idealised English lifestyle.

Of greater significance, though, a temporary return in the form of a visit to the Island for many descendants of Saints – whether they have already gone or yet to go - is tantamount to a holy pilgrimage to their hallowed ancestral land. Underpinned by an inherited nostalgia for the place, a visit to the Island, as elucidated by Watson's experience in particular, is a sacrosanct and redemptive exercise reinforcing ancestral linkages, mending and extending their own elliptical family histories. In this sense, I have proffered that St. Helena is a place of both sacred and secular significance; it is often conjectured as an imperfect nirvana on earth, the closest one could come to a utopian paradise in this world.

By virtue of the delayed onset of modernity, St. Helena is nostalgically evoked as a compromise between an ontological paradise and an idealised metaphysical utopia usually deferred to the afterlife. In this conceptual framework, visiting the Island is a sacral rite of passage to assert and affirm, through ritual, my



participants' uniqueness as descendants of Saints, an epithet that aptly carries with it spiritual connotations.

I have argued that my St. Helena case study suggests the decentering of national and racial identities, placing in its stead a primary subjection to a nostalgic object central to my participants' senses of self in contemporary South Africa. However, despite a sentiment of despondency with the present state, I am cautious not to discount the potency of or to suggest that nostalgic identities supplant these racial and national subjectivities, especially since the race/ethnic-nation has an enduring legacy of being appropriated as a sacred object. Rather, I have asserted that a St. Helenian identity supplements and colours the perforated contours of banal, often fortuitous, national and racial identities.

Foregrounding a St. Helena ancestry offers my participants an affective inimitability without negating the broader secular national and racial identities. In other words, it is a way to belong differently and distinctively to this nation, without alienating the self, which my participants achieve by nostalgically accentuating their origin and genealogies to centralise an inviolable sense of self on their own terms.

In my final chapter I have begun explicating the relationship between nostalgia and race, in which I have argued that claiming St. Helena, as a mythical ancestral home for 'coloured folk', in particular, carried an additional political weight as *homeland*. I've presented several underlying reasons for the current sentiments of alienation producing a range of political anxieties amongst those who identify as 'coloured', a minority group in South Africa. These 'problems' emanate from lingering discourses that predicate belonging on autochthony and notions of racial purity. In this sense, 'coloured' people are often framed as genealogical isolates - culturally and genetically impure 'historical nomads' forged in the context of Cape slavery - because their ancestors hail from multiple places.

This history of deracination, slavery and heterochthonous origins, can be framed more positively by acknowledging 'coloured' people as a rich and varied creole

group. However, a breakdown in their complex and layered family histories produced genealogical ellipses.<sup>398</sup> This occurred firstly by internalising the rhetoric of racial colonial and apartheid discourses that attempted to reduce them to an essentialism as “just coloured”<sup>399</sup> and robbing racialised ‘coloured’ of their fascinating multicultural origins and complexity. Another pragmatic way they became “just coloured”, in which many ‘coloured’ families are complicit, is simply by reproducing silences about their multifarious origins as a way to avoid the attention of apartheid enforcers and to fit uncomplicatedly into new social structures so as to simply ‘get on with life’.<sup>400</sup>

The recovery of a St. Helenian identity is a psychic reaction by those ‘coloured folk’ who cherish their St. Helenian lineage. It is one of the few surviving and accessible recourses that controvert a reduction of a people to banal racial categories. Although critical of some of the conditions – for instance, the fallacious discourses constructing St. Helena as the natural native home of the ‘coloured’ - I have, nonetheless, as an imperfect solution to this ambiguity of origin, argued that the nostalgic appropriation of the Island for ‘coloured folk’ is recourse to historical continuity for a people who have suffered the yoke of deracination and, consequently, present sentiments of alienation.

Considering its recent immigration history and enlivened by inheritable nostalgic narratives, St. Helena can be pointed to with precision as a definitive place of origin with an unambiguous English culture and imperial character. Therefore, making claims to a St. Helena origin is far less culturally ambiguous and geographically tenuous than making claims to other multiple places of derivation. This type of historical continuity is becoming increasingly vital in a political climate associating worth and belonging with one’s ‘genealogical age’.

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<sup>398</sup> I prefer this term as it suggests that part of a continuity is misplaced or actively omitted, rather than a gap or lacunae, which could mean there is ‘nothing’ between ‘somethings’ and, therefore, lack the agency of the subject. If one thing only, claims to St. Helenian ancestry is about the recovery of historical narratives of origin to foster a historical continuity; surely that is ‘something’?

<sup>399</sup> For instance, this idea is illustrated by Castella Fourie’s lament for her loss of St. Helenian heritage, reducing her, and by extension, many descendants of Saints to “just coloureds”.

<sup>400</sup> This was best illustrated by the case of Mrs Benjamin who did not at first resist or protest being labelled ‘coloured’.

In some ways, these claims signal an attempt to flatten social hierarchies predicated on race since assertions to St. Helena ancestry spell membership to a global Anglophone community. These assertions are intended to demonstrate cultural belonging to something bigger and more transcendental that supersedes secularised national and racial identity strictures. Declaration of respectability is certainly a dominant objective of claiming a St. Helenian ancestry. Yet, it appears to be the case where some Saints and their descendants, in foregrounding their St. Helena heritage, have a predilection to subordinate themselves to the dated and distant colonial templates of English respectability.

However, I have argued that this is not clear-cut and suggested that temporal and spatial specificity is significant and should be taken into account when analysing the claim to St Helenian ancestry. For instance, immigrants Saints often negated their St. Helena origins and disassociated themselves from the Island due to the connotative associations of St. Helena to 'colouredness'. Instead, immigrant Saints often employed inventive ways of nostalgically associating to the 'motherland metropolis' – England. For instance, Neville Joseph's case is an extreme example of the extent to which these disassociations are performed as a mode to secure greater social prestige and prospects in South Africa.

Yet, in the contemporary, associations with St. Helenian heritage and origins are performed as a cachet, especially in communities inhabited almost exclusively by so-called coloured people. Mrs Benjamin's nostalgic associations to England as her distant cultural home; her denial of her past filial links to slavery; her refusal to speak Afrikaans in a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking community; and her associative displays of white English propriety are consolatory performances of respectability to ameliorate deep laments for miscalculating the consequences of apartheid racial subjugation. Critical of these dramaturgical performances drawn from dated templates of English distinction, I have suggested the recognition of creative multifarious manifestations of respectability.

I have proffered that natural birth, albeit powerful, is not necessarily synonymous with origin or the single route to claiming derivation. In dealing with the descendants of Saints and their quests for historical continuity, another inadvertent illumination from my case study reveals that historical knowledge of lineage presents the opportunity to assert a different mainstay for origin other than one's own place of birth. Given the efficiency of state and civil records, genealogical research has become a popular response for those with disrupted, discontinuous histories of deracination, slavery and migration under duress. Celebrating and highlighting knowledge of an ancestor's birthplace has become a remedy to the problem of nebulous origins while it also provides a perceived degree of free choice and agency in the poiesis of the self as an active process of identity formation.

In the case of my research, it is this very knowledge of their ancestors' place of origin to which my participants invest as the keystone of their identity. This is especially true when participants were disenfranchised with the present and their host country – South Africa. Affective memory (nostalgia) serves as a political palliative to contemporary despondency with the secular and lingering sentiments of displacement and misplacement. Moreover, claims by many 'coloured folk' to a St. Helena identity is a response to the totalising and positivistic discourses that deprive them of deep historical continuity by embedding their existence exclusively in history.

Notwithstanding, South Africa is a comparatively young nation, but if there is any (sub)group that constitute a *novum populum* – a 'new people' made in the crucible of recent history's empiricism and secularism, rather than mythopoeic atavism– then I will risk it and say 'coloured' people exemplify such a group. This is meant neither as a compliment nor criticism, but as an observation that history's empiricism tends to emaciate and etiolate the spirit. And, St. Helena, being more than just an object of nostalgia or an image of respectability, offers a plausible nodal entry point into the mythical, a path to sacral rites and transcendent truth for those who invest the image of the island with sacredness and, thereafter, introject this image.

For the self to be solid and whole it cannot be explained in totality by history. Some parts of self must remain ineffable and irreducible, if not unintelligible. Therefore, for those who claim St. Helena ancestry, constructing and subsequently clutching onto the fictive, imaginative and mythical elements of the self is what offers this imagined community their *sui generis*. While cultures homogenise on account of beliefs becoming increasingly secular and knowledge more empirical, the countervailing power of nostalgia is a mode of resisting modernity's conforming impulses, by retaining and constructing the self with affective memorative narratives vested in a shared nostalgic object, and thus creating a state of tolerable sanctity, one rooted in the ontological instead of the metaphysical. Nostalgia is a compromise between the abject absurdities of religion - as an outmoded cosmic explanatory framework - and the corroding abrasiveness of modernity's secular materialism.

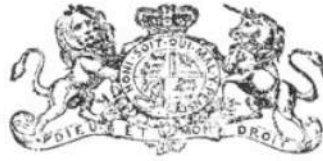
The broader philosophical and theoretical application of my St. Helena case study suggests that to break with that which has come before us - for instance, losing to time that which we love and those who loved us - is to leave fragmented pieces of ourselves behind, which we experience as an unsettling discontinuity. In a present marked by a dull sentiment of despondency coeval with the expectation of a bleak future yet to be felt, the recovery of a past becomes a refuge in constructing new whole selves in the present while nostalgia is a way of sensing temporality, affectively feeling time and ourselves within it more intensely.



# Appendix



**Document image 1:** The British East India Company's claim to St. Helena Island, etched in stone.  
Source: Cape Town Provincial Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town. Accession no. AG16168.



# Proclamation

*By His Excellency Major General George Middlemore, C. B.  
Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Island of St.  
Helena, and Vice Admiral of the same &c. &c. &c.*

WHEREAS Her Most Gracious Majesty the QUEEN, by Letters Patent under the Great Seal of the High Court of Admiralty, has been pleased to appoint me, Vice Admiral of the Island of St. Helena, with power and authority to nominate such Officers under me, as I may deem necessary and requisite, for the due execution of the trust therein reposed.

**BE IT KNOWN,**

That I do hereby constitute and ordain the following Officers, to form a Court of Vice Admiralty for the Island of St. Helena,

C. R. G. HODSON, Esq.—*Judge.*  
W. H. SEALE, Esq.—*Registrar.*  
EDWARD GULLIVER, Esq.—*Marshal.*

**GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.**

Given under my Hand at the Island of St. Helena, this 24th day of March 1840.

Signed, G. MIDDLEMORE.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY'S COMMAND

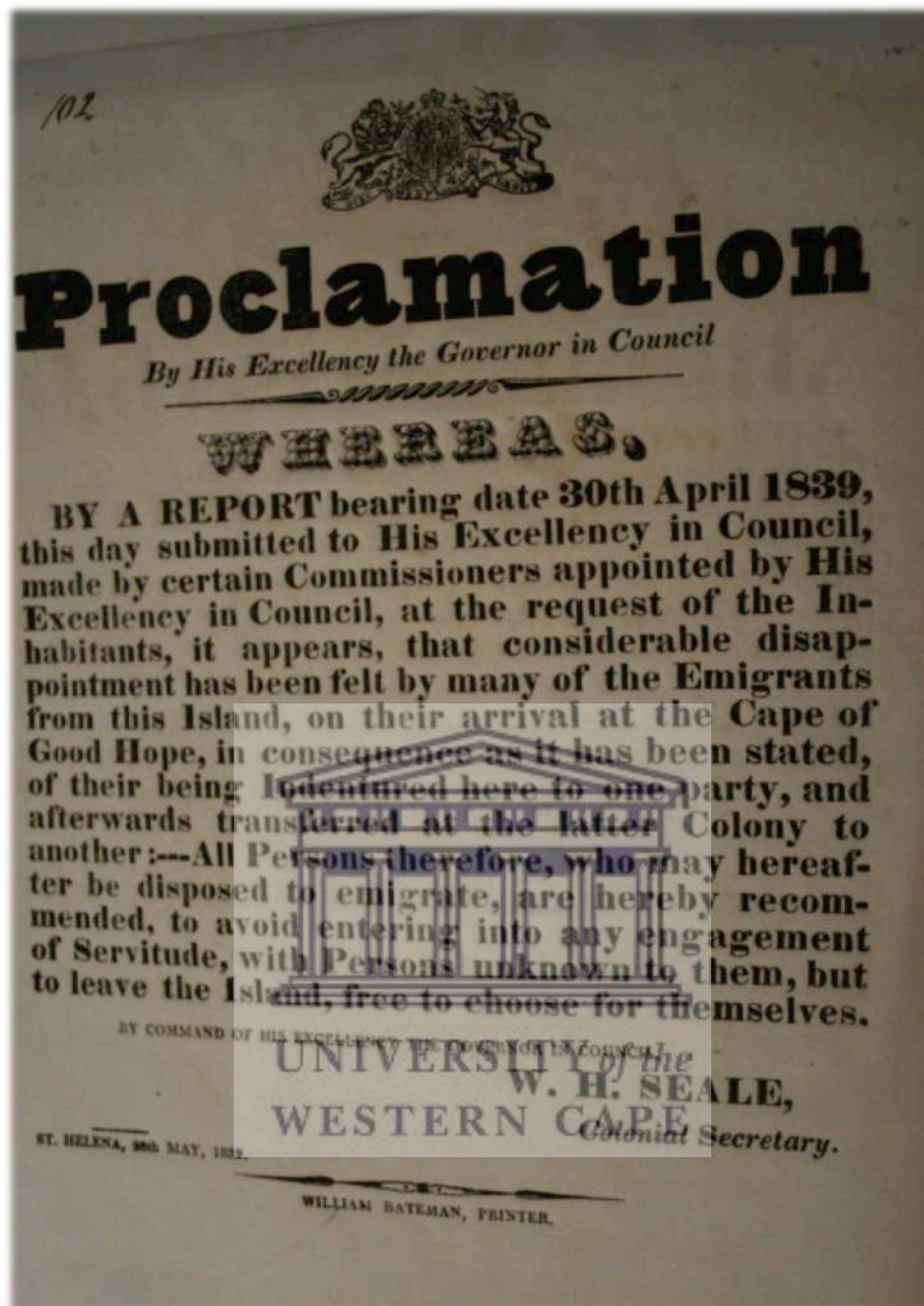
**W. H. SEALE,**  
*Colonial Secretary.*

COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE,  
ST. HELENA, 24th MARCH, 1840.

THOMAS SCOTT, PRINTER.

Document image 2: Proclamation of 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1840, for the establishment of a Vice Admiralty Court on St. Helena Island.

Source: Robin Castell, *St. Helena Proclamations: 1818-1943*.



**Document image 3:** St. Helena Proclamation of 28<sup>th</sup> May 1839.<sup>401</sup>  
Source: St. Helena Government Archives, *Proclamations 1835-1898*.

<sup>401</sup> This proclamation of May 1839 served as a warning to all St Helenians considering emigrating for the Cape. It was published during the period 1836 to September 1841 when the first 218 Saints emigrated for South Africa.



August, 1852.

To His Excellency  
Colonel THOMAS GORE BROWNE, C.B.,  
Governor, &c. &c. &c.

The Memorial of the undersigned Tradesmen,  
Husbandmen, and Labourers, Inhabitants of St.  
Helena,—

Most Humbly and Respectfully Sheweth:—

That your Memorialists, since your Excellency's Government in this Colony, has ever experienced the humane and benevolent feeling evinced towards them, induces them with all due deference in submitting the following Memorial in the firm and solicitous expectation that your Excellency will give it your due and deliberate consideration.

Your Excellency we are confident cannot but be aware of the rapid increase of the population of the Island, and from the graduating decrease of employment, which has thrown upwards of three hundred individuals out of employment, calls for the commiseration of Your Excellency in behalf of the Inhabitants located in this small isolated Island.

Your Memorialists, in consequence of their distressed and very pitiable circumstances, are so precluded the possibility of assisting themselves and families in emigrating from the Colony, that they earnestly implore Your Excellency's favorable recommendation to the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies, laying before the Right Honorable Sir John Packington their lamentable condition; and that the British Government may be prevailed on, and kindly alleviate their present sufferings by soliciting the Australian Emigration Commissioners' serious consideration, and that they may be so disposed to render their miserable fellow-creatures their kind assistance in fitting out an Emigrant Vessel to St. Helena, for the purpose of conveying those, with their families, who are desirous of emigrating from this port to South Australia, in the hopes of succeeding in obtaining employment for themselves and their offspring.

Your Memorialists earnestly beg to impress His Excellency, that they do mutually agree to accede to any proposition, agreement, or engagement, that may be imposed on them, until the expense so incurred by each family emigrating be liquidated.

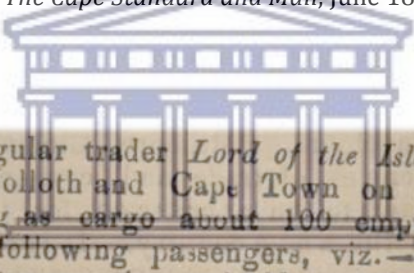
Under these circumstances Your Memorialists prays Your Excellency will be pleased to forward this their Memorial to the Authorities in England, accompanied with Your Excellency's favorable and kind recommendation; and your Memorialists, as is duty bound, will ever pray.

Signed by 174 of the Inhabitants.

**Document image 4:** A reproduction of the August 1852 memorandum forwarded to Gov. Browne, drafted and signed by 174 inhabitants lobbying for aided emigration. Source: *St. Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News*, September 9, 1852.

THE DISTRESS AT ST. HELENA.—A number of people from St. Helena, emigrants to this colony, arrived yesterday by the schooner *Fairlie*, Capt. Abernethy. The following is the list:—Mr. D. Roberts, Mr. W. Dickson, Mr. B. Wilson, Mr. J. Begley, Mr. C. Pain, Mr. W. Scott, Mr. R. Barron, Mr. W. Barron, Mr. Philip Joshua, Mr. R. John, Mr. G. Brown, Mr. Henry Johnson, Mr. C. Hoskins, Mr. B. Sefton, Mr. R. Carsons, Mr. F. W. Benjamin, Mr. W. Thompson, Mr. J. L. Bowers, Mr. H. Turin, Mr. W. Benjamin, Mr. R. Hoits, Mr. E. Croker, Mr. M. Lesbon, Mr. G. George, Mr. A. Johnson, Mr. R. Broadway, Mr. C. Pain, Mr. W. Barron, Mr T. Sefton, Miss Martha Henry, Miss Fanny Barron, Mr. M. Johnson, Miss Louisa Reynolds, Miss Jessie Sifton, Miss Mary Sifton, Miss Sarah Johnson, Miss L. Broadway, Miss Emma Grigsby, Miss Mary Wilson, Miss Sarah Broadway, Miss Rosina George, Miss Mary George, Mr. E. Joshua, Miss Harriet Smith, Mr. L. Joshua, and Mr. Bateman.

**Document image 5:** A list of forty-five Saint Helenian immigrants landed at Cape Town in search of work in June 1872.  
Source: *The Cape Standard and Mail*, June 18, 1872.



THE regular trader *Lord of the Isles* sailed for Port Nolloth and Cape Town on Saturday last, taking as cargo about 100 empty casks, and the following passengers, viz.—Mr. and Mrs. J. Stevens, Mr. and Mrs. John Greenland and son, Mr. Hastie and son, Mrs. George and son, Mrs. Bakke, Mrs. Pearse and son. Misses Murray, Payne, (2) Evans, (2) Benjamin, and Pearse. Messrs James Buchanan, Jno Bowers, John Barker, George Thomas, Henry Cato, John Henry and John A. Dove. Masters Evans and (2) Murray. For Port Nolloth—21 laborers.

**Document image 6:** A list of the fifty passengers, including twenty-one nameless labourers, respectively embarked for Cape Town and Port Nolloth, aboard the *Lord of the Isles* ship in September 1872.  
Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, September 19, 1872.



WE publish the following for general information:—  
**LIST OF PASSENGERS** per *Lord of the Isles*.  
*For Port Elizabeth—*  
 Joseph H. Rogers, Samuel Bowers, Michael Bennett, Charles A. George, James Wade, Selina Stroud, Sarah Seale, Ellen Bartly, Louisa Bennett, Athriel Leo, Sarah Jonas.  
*For Cape Town—*  
 William Mitchell, Geo. D. January, wife and 5 children, John Commin and wife, Richard Williams, H. Barker, James Johnson, Louisa M. Stevens, Sarah Thomas, Elizabeth Ann Clifford, Elizabeth Ann, Catharine Ann.  
*Laborers for Cape Railway.—*  
 John Cunningham, Lewis Wade, James Wells, George Davidson, James Chapman, Thomas Ward, Charles Fowler, Richard Young, Charles Scott, James Henry, Samuel London, Richard Thomas, James Fowler, John Peters, Henry Crowie, James Gray, John Kiley, Thomas Williams, Eden Isaac, Albert Thomas, Charles Fuller, David Maggoti, William Augustus, George Benjamin, Philip Henry, John Mussie, William McLean, Geo. B. McCombie, John Seale, Thomas Kent.

**Document image 7:** Another list revealing the names of 59 emigrants heading for Port Elizabeth and Cape Town aboard the *Lord of the Isles* ship in April 1873.  
 Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, April 24, 1873.

UNIVERSITY of the  
**LIST OF PASSENGERS**  
 Edward Delaney, Sarah George, Mary Hubbard, Harriet Hubbard, Jane Parne, Alice Hastie, Joseph Robinson, Charlotte March, Benjamin Johnston, Charles Coleman, Elizabeth Williams, George Richards, Elizabeth Isaacke, Jane Richards, Jane Yon, Susan Pluke, Margaret Yon, Richard Young, Bertha Young, Charlotte Douglas, John Scott, Isaac Dickenson, Votair Seale, Angelina O'Connor, William Joshua, Eliza Wallace, Isaac Richards, Emma Hercules, Isabella Harris, Eliza Harris, Leah Isaac, Edith McDonald, G. H. Brookes, Sabina Constantine, John Ellis, Mary Ellis, Jane Ellis, John Ellis.

**Document image 8:** Yet another list of thirty-eight immigrants heading for Cape Town and Port Elizabeth via the *Lord of the Isles*. The twenty-four women were destined to work as domestic servants for respectable families in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.  
 Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, August 21, 1873.

LIST OF PASSENGERS per bark *Actæa*  
for Natal:—

Charles McDaniel, wife and 4 children, Margt Lusted, Ann Francis, Elizabeth Stevens, Charlotte Colman, George Leo and wife, Adelaide Seale, Sarah Ann Thomas, George W. Ellis, Ann Philips, John Swain, Fanny Davidson, Sarah Kemp, Mary Stevens, Jane Yon, Eliza Brown, Caroline Seale, C George, wife and 3 children, John Bowers, wife and 7 children, William Twinam, wife and child, Thomas Everton, Henrietta Young, Margaret Young, Mathew Foster, Margaret Brain and 2 daughters, Jas. Essex, wife and 6 children, Richard Hoyles, wife and 5 children, Sophia Richards, Maria Craig and 2 children, Margaret May, James Crowie, wife and 3 children, Henry Knipe, Mary Ann Knipe, Susannah May, Sarah Watson, Richard Tim wife and 6 children, Mary Watson, Sarah Stevens, Adeline O Connor, Charles Isaac, wife and 9 children, Eliza Pi low, Archibald Caesar wife and 1 child, John Leo, wife and 5 children, James Benjamin, wife and 3 daughters, Mary Ann Robinson and daughter, Agnes Coleman, Ellen Coleman, Elizabeth Smith, Susan George, Sarah March, Henry Brain, Rose Fuller, Caroline Bowers, Johanna Samuel, John Joshua, Henry McDaniel, wife and 2 children, Charles Augustus, wife and 5 children, Edgar Williams, wife and 5 children, Caroline E Henry, William Euly, Robert Holmes, William Croker, wife and 2 daughters, George Stapely, wife and 4 children, Henry Watson, Mary Ann Hampton and 5 children, Joseph Wright wife and 6 children, Eliza Wade, Charles Francis, Charles Saunders, Mary Ann George, and 5 children, Julia Jonas, Elizabeth Caswell, Maria Bath, Robert Crowie, Joseph McLean, wife and 3 children, Mary Young, and 5 children, Christopher Brooks, Eliza Francis, Elizabeth Augustus, Henry John, wife and 4 children, John Coleman, wife and 6 children, Jane Harris, Caroline Stevens, Colin Duncan, wife and 3 children, William Duncan, Richard Brooks, Henry W. Janisch.

**Document image 9:** The names of the two hundred St. Helenians who immigrated to Durban, South Africa, in September 1873. This is the largest single St. Helena immigration event.  
Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, September 4, 1873.



The following are the names of the emigrants who proceeded to the Cape per *Orontes*, kindly furnished us by His Excellency the Governor:—

Thos. George, Angelina George, Alice George, Florence George, Louisa Stevens, B. M. Stevens, Reuben Stevens, R. A. Stevens, Gertrude Stevens, Miriam Stevens, Klaus A. Stevens (infant), Charlotte Roberts, Emily Miller, Eliza Thomas, Rosina Jones, J. Simon, J. Cannon, Richard, Sarah, Robert, Henry, Thomas, Louisa, Chas. and Alfred Waldeck, George Lawrence, Benjamin Lawrence, Chas. Donnelly, William Yon, Alfred Conolly, Thos. Francis, Agnes, Bertha, Kate and Florence George, Thomas and Phoebe Lovett, John Brown, Fred. Stevens, James, David, and Beatrice Leo, A. Brady, Forbes Conolly, Edgar and Robert Stevens, Alfred Ellick, Eliza and Walter Thompson, Alfred George, Chas. Mittens, Wm. Richards, Jas. Thomas, Florence Young, Charlotte Robinson, Hannah Lemay and infant, Barbara Hodson and infant, Mary Steckdale, Rosina Marsh and child, Mary M. Seale, John Scott, Thos. Price, Samuel Fowler, James Moyce, Geo. Piploe, Alfred Conolly, Samuel Henry, Lockwood Young, Charles and Vernon Robinson, J. Clingham, Wm. Hern.

**Document image 10:** A list of St. Helena emigrants, who set sail for the Cape and Natal, South Africa on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1891. Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, April 30, 1891.

**PEMBROKE CASTLE.**—The English steamship *Pembroke Castle*, 2580 tons, Captain Warden, from London bound to Cape Good Hope, out 17 days, arrived at 12.40 p.m. on Monday 4th instant, bringing a small mail. She left again at 4.40 p.m., taking a mail, and the following passengers:—For Port Natal—Samuel Young, James Thomas, William Samuel, Thomas Bagley, David Johnson, senior, David Johnson, junior, Frederick McDonald, Edward Henry, John Donnelly, Charles Collins, Henry LeBreton, Thomas Leske, Luther Thomas, Edward Caswell, William Duncan, John Graham, James Graham, Ernest Franks, Iverson Henry, James Drabble, Joseph Saunders, Stephen Sylvester, senior, Stephen Sylvester, junior, William Fowler, Herbert Fowler, William Stevens, Charles Johnson, Henry Peters, William Yon, Henry Stevens, James O’Neil, John Drabble, William S. Yon, Matthew Henry, Thomas Whiteman, John Twynam, John Maggott, Samuel Benjamin, Thomas Maggott, Benjamin Whiteman, Charles Isacke, William Maggott, Henry Thomas, Edward Stevens, James Yon, Richard Henry, Edward Lawrence, Joseph Corker, Charles White, Edward Brookes, Joseph Jonas, Thomas Joshua, Weston Coleman, Alexander Nelson, Thomas Green, John Williams, Mrs. Whiteman and 4 children, Mrs. Wade, Mrs. McLachlin and child, Mrs. William Yon and 3 children, Mrs. Stephen Yon and 3 children. For Capetown—Misses Catherine S. Peters and Elizabeth Davidson.

**Document image 11:** A list of emigrants leaving for South Africa on the 04<sup>th</sup> of September 1893 aboard the *Pembroke Castle*. Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, September 7, 1893.

ST HELENA GUARDIAN

THE following is a list of Labourers proceeding to Port Nolloth by the R.M.S. *Gatician* on 21st May 1907:—

Alfred Plato, John Johnson, Charles Flagg, Archie Andrews, John Bennett, Hudson R. Cannon, George Arms, John Smith, Thomas Smith, George Burton, Arthur Thomas, John Richards, Henry A. Thomas, John Riley, George Fagan, Maurice Stevens, A. O'Connor, P. Neilson, John Brown, Arthur Isaacke, Thomas Bennett, Ernest George, Edward Yon, William George, John Peters, Edward Corker, Thomas Williams, Henry Collins, John Samuel, Matthew John, Frederick Whiteman, Edward Hercules, Frank Stevens, William Essex, William Bennett, Charles Yon, James Seale, George Augustus, Charles O'Neil, John Swain, John Williams, Harry Peters, Arthur Silversides, William John, Henry Thomas, Charles H. Stevens, Henry Williams, Arthur Houndsworth, James Smith, Percy Caswell, Louis Timm, Ruben Yon, Isaac Leo, Thomas Timm, Henry Augustus, John Moyce, Richard Cooper, Ernest Peters, Edward C. Reynolds, Thomas George, Robert Phillips, William Francis, George Buckley, George Grace, William Du Flooy, Alexander Yon, Herbert Bowers, Charles E. Plato, Lockwood T. John, George Leo, Edward Timm, Charles W. Young, Edward Robinson, James Reynolds, John Joshua, Francis March, Joseph Peters, Arthur March, William O'Connor, Frederick Benjamin, Edward Jous, Robert Brooks, Frederick Peters, Joseph Scott, Robert March, Frederick Paynter, Richard Yon, Charles Joshua, Richard Joshua, Edgar Samuel, Charles Stevens, Arthur Yon, Henry J. Crowie, John Arms, Edward E. Thomas, Edward Gannel, Reuben Henry, J. Vangaard, Thomas John, Charles H. Cato.—Total, 100.

Document image 12: A full list of the 100 men who headed for Port Nolloth aboard the *Gatician* in May 1907. Source: *St. Helena Guardian*, May 16, 1907, np.

## List of illustrations

### Figures

Figure no.	Description	Source	Page no. in thesis
<b>Figure 1</b>	A notice declaring the intent of pro-emigration petitioners to garner the support of the local Bishop to their cause.	<i>St. Helena Spectator</i> , February 29, 1868, np.	42
<b>Figure 2</b>	A reproduction of the letter of public appeal made by the St. Helena Mutual Society, directed at the privileged classes of the Island, to aid the migration of the poor.	<i>St. Helena Guardian</i> , January 18, 1872, p.5.	46
<b>Figure 3</b>	A record of the first cohort of brokered St. Helena labourers sent to work as boatmen in the Eastern Cape.	<i>St. Helena Guardian</i> , 1 August 1872, np.	48
<b>Figure 4</b>	A list containing the names of the sixty-two emigrants, including their professions and status, who set sail for Port Nolloth aboard the brig, <i>Sir Robert McClure</i> , in March 1873.	<i>St. Helena Guardian</i> , 06 March 1873, p.23.	59
<b>Figure 5 &amp; 6</b>	Excerpts from an alphabetised register titled, "St. Helena Immigration 1882-1884," containing the details of approximately 268 St. Helena immigrants who	Cape Provincial Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town. Accession no. PDW 2/759.	69 & 71



	settled in the Cape between 1882 and 1884.		
<b>Figure 7</b>	An excerpt from a list containing the names, sex, age and occupation of German immigrants.	Government Notice No. 737," <i>Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette</i> , August 29, 1878, published September 6, 1878.	72
<b>Figure 8</b>	Edward Caswell's 1905-1908 contract with the Concordia Copper Mining Company.	Personal family archive.	81
<b>Figure 9</b>	Photograph taken by Damian Samuels on the N2 freeway, near the town of Heidelberg, Western Cape, South Africa on the 20 <sup>th</sup> of November 2015	Personal photograph	108
<b>Figure 10</b>	A portrait of Anne and David Burnside. Taken in Northern Rhodesia in 1942. Photographer: Unknown	Supplied by Gwen Benjamin, from her personal photograph collection.	168

UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

Table

<b>Table no.</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Page no. in thesis</b>
<b>Table 1</b>	A summary of the net migration of St. Helenians to and from South Africa during the period of the Union of South Africa, just prior to the implementation of apartheid policies.	<i>South African Office of Census and Statistics</i> , "Statistics of Migration: Immigrants 1919-1963" (Pretoria: Government Printers, n.d.).	86

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