

ST HELENA—ON THE CUSP OF GLOBALIZATION

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## **ABSTRACT**

TIFFANY PRY SOCK DEVEREUX: St Helena—On the Cusp of Globalization  
(Under the direction of Dean Jan Yopp, Dr. James Peacock and  
Associate Professor Patrick Davison)

In the next five years, we have a rare opportunity to witness transformation of a society toward a globalized world market. St Helena, a British Overseas Territory, is only accessible by ship—the same vehicle used to access the island since its discovery in 1502. Throughout its 510 years, the island’s economic prosperity has risen and fallen through globalizing trends due to its remote location in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean. The island’s economy has faltered since the 1960s and it currently receives British government aid in the form of subsidies. In 2015, airport construction is expected to be complete which may catapult the island—once again—into the globalized world through tourism. This thesis and three-part documentary seeks to record the lives of the islanders by looking at the economy, social structure and identity of the islanders in 2009, prior to airport construction. This documentary is intended to be a baseline to compare the islanders’ lives after the airport construction is complete.

*To the Saints—may your friendly spirit always remain.*

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## INTRODUCTION

St Helena is one of the three most remote islands in the world.<sup>1</sup> It is located in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean—770 miles (886 road miles) away from the nearest island or landmass. It lies between Brazil and Angola. A British Overseas Territory, St Helena's isolation seemed so impenetrable the British imprisoned Napoleon Bonaparte on the island in 1815 after the Battle of Waterloo; the former emperor died there six years later.

Today, much like Napoleon's time, everything arrives on St Helena by ship. The 4,035 people who inhabit the island currently depend on the Royal Mail Ship (RMS) *St Helena* as the only passenger and cargo transportation. At a minimum, passage to or from St Helena on the RMS takes three days, and up to 30 days, but an end to the island's insularity is in the near future.

In 2015, Saints, as St Helenians call themselves, will see a dramatic change in their way of life. The catalyst will be the completion of an airport and eco-tourism resort built by the British government and a private investor, respectively. With the onset of convenient transportation to and from the island, changes to this culture are expected to be steep and unlike any other seen in recent globalization history. The islanders' lives will be impacted by the expected precipitous increase in tourists to the island; tourism has nearly doubled globally in the number of international tourists since 1990 (Theobald, 2005, p. 6). The airport will also provide additional accessibility for Saints to travel to and from other countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Closest landmass to top three remote islands: Tristan Da Cunha (37° 04'S and 12° 18'W), also a British Overseas Territory, is 1313 nm from St Helena. 2. Easter Island (27° 08'S and 109° 23'W), owned by Chile, is 987 nm from Pitcairn Island (25° 04'S and 130° 05'W). St Helena (15° 57'S and 5° 42'W) is 699 nautical miles from Ascension island (7° 57'S and 14° 22'W). Source for coordinates - Webster's New Geographical Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1988. Source for distances: <http://boulter.com/gps/> (April 20, 2012).

If tourism increases to dramatic levels as expected, St Helena offers a rare opportunity to document radical globalization to an island society in the 21st Century. Documenting the Saints' current way of life gives a baseline of how the people live prior to the airport's construction and will enable retrospection into social, economic, and identity changes that take place over 10 or 20 years after the arrival of air transportation.

### ***The Country at a Glance***

St Helena is 1,200 nautical miles (nm) from Angola, 1,500 nm from Brazil and 770 nm south of Ascension Island (Cornell, 1998, p. 148). The volcanic island was uninhabited when discovered by Portuguese sailor João da Nova in 1502, on the anniversary of Saint Helena of Constantinople (Ashmole et al., 2000, p. 37).

Once discovered, the island was used to resupply fresh drinking water, fruit, and herbs for ships transiting the South Atlantic Ocean. The island is located on the trade wind route between Europe and Asia via the Cape of Good Hope (Cornell, 1998, p. 148). Ships began depositing goats and pigs on the island for fresh meat to be used on later landings (Ashmole et al., 2000, 37).

After the Portuguese abandoned the island, the Dutch laid claim in 1633 only to lose the island to the East India Company (claiming it for England) in 1659. In 1671, the Dutch reclaimed the island for a short time, but the East India Company recaptured the island a few months later (Steiner, 2002, p. 8). The British government formally took over the administration of St Helena from the East India Company in 1834 and fortified the island in 1894 (Ashmole et al., 2000, p. 43; Steiner, 2007, p. 9).

St Helena was intended to be used as a military base completely supported by the United Kingdom (UK); thus, the island—which lacks natural resources—was never intended to be self-sufficient (Steiner, 2007, p. 26). During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the economy was based on supplying provisions for ships and the local garrison (Steiner, 2007, p. 26). This industry collapsed with the



rise of steamships and shipping route diversion away from the island after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Steiner, 2007, p. 26).

New Zealand flax was introduced to the island in 1852 and became the major export for the economy in the early 1920s and employed up to 300 people in the flax mills. (Ashmole et al., 2000, p. 157; Steiner, 2007, p. 26). The flax industry faltered in the 1930s and became a government subsidy before it finally collapsed after synthetic materials largely replaced flax in the 1960s. None of the original nine mills remains in operation today (Ashmole et al., 2000, p. 157).

Saint ancestry includes British soldiers, entrepreneurs from the East India Company, freed African slaves, former Boer prisoners of war, Chinese laborers, and Malays recruited as soldiers for the East India Company (Ashmole, et al., 2000, 43-4). The population on the island during the 2008 census was 4,035—a 19.4 percent drop from 5,008 just 10 years earlier (Census, 2008, p. 39). The last recorded income statistics in 2005/06 states the average annual pre-tax income as £4,063 (\$6,427) and £3,616 post tax (\$5,720) (Statistical Yearbook 2009, 6). Many families manage financially, thanks to remittances from Saint family members living in the Falklands, Ascension Island, and the UK. The money sent home from abroad provides the island with the largest source of non-governmental revenues (Steiner, 2007, p. 27). These off-island remittances are the largest part of the economy after government subsidies. It is estimated that more than 2,000 Saints send remittances home from abroad (Steiner, 2007, p. 27). According to the 2009 Statistical Yearbook, remittances reached £5 million (\$7.9 million) in 2006/07, but have since declined to £3.4 million (\$5.3 million) in 2009/10 (1.4).

It is hoped that the pending airport construction will bring tourism jobs and revenue to the economy in the near future after its completion. Tourism now brings 600 people to the island annually but accounts for very little of the island's gross domestic product (Segal, 2005, p. 3). The island government's annual deficit, subsidized by the British government, was £20.6 million (\$32.6 million) in 2009 (Department of Tourism, 2008; Statistical Yearbook, 2009, 1.2).

The purpose of this thesis is to document St Helena before the opening of the airport and to establish a baseline of the island, the lifestyle of its residents, and the Saints' identity. Such a baseline is important for future researchers to determine the subsequent changes, both positive and negative, and the extent of those changes. This thesis will explore the lifestyle of typical Saint residents prior to the pending airport construction. It will also set out the economic struggles, social structure, and identity of the islanders in three-part videos.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Globalization*

*Globalization* is a term used prevalently in media, academia, and everywhere in-between. According to Harvey, prior to American Express using the word “globalization” to advertise the reach of its credit card, the term was “entirely unknown before the mid-1970s” (2000, p. 12-13). However, Merriam-Webster Online dates the etymology to 1951 and defines the term as: “the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets.” The Levin Institute online says, “Globalization is a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology” (2011).

In this respect, globalization is not a new concept. Some scholars point out that the movement of goods, capital, and people has been around since 1492 (Edleman and Haugerud 2005, p. 23). Globalization also described the imperial expansion of most European countries after 1870 (Edleman et al., 2005, p. 10).

Globalization is no stranger on St Helena. During an early wave of globalization, Europeans discovered and settled the island while sailing to and from India. Thousands of ships called on the islands on this major trade route annually. In 1899, the Eastern Telegraph Company landed cable on the island as the first link from Cape Town to England via St Helena, Ascension Island, and Europe. This line enabled the Saint society to receive news and information at the same rate as mainlanders in Europe and Africa. However, the globalization on St Helena today is on a much more personal level.

In his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas Friedman states that the globalization the world is experiencing through technology today is not only “making it possible for traditional nation-states and corporations to reach farther, faster, cheaper and deeper” around the world, but

that it is enabling individuals to do so (Friedman, 1999, p. 31). Accessibility by individuals to the outside world is the new dynamic in globalization.

Many anthropologists believe that—in addition to accelerated connections, information, and capital—globalization brings exclusion, marginalization, and dispossession (Edleman et al., 2005, p. 22). Friedman’s definition of the world as flat is expansive, but includes outsourcing, “offshoring,” and access to information. He says the fact that the world is flat enables people to compare their circumstances with others, and this comparison only sharpens their frustrations (Friedman, 2007, p. 558). Friedman says:

[Many people] live in the twilight zone between [the flat and unflat world]. Among these are the people I call the too disempowered. They are a large group of people who have not been fully encompassed by the flattening of the world . . . They are healthy people who live in countries with significant areas that have been flattened but who don’t have the tools or the skills or the infrastructure to participate in any meaningful or sustained way. They have just enough information to know that the world is flattening around them and that they aren’t really getting any of the benefits (Friedman, p. 546).

Friedman’s comments on the unflat world are certainly true for Saints living on the island. Television and the Internet were introduced there in 1995 and 1998, respectively, allowing islanders access to information from around the world, but the broadcasting is limited and the Internet connection is comparable to dial-up speeds (Charlton, Coles, Gunter, Panting, 2000, p. 65) (Charlton and O’Bey, 1997, p. 132). The *RMS St Helena* calls on the island about 30 times per year, bringing clothes, building materials, and tools from other countries, but many find it difficult to buy the goods on their income (Morris, 2010, p. 9) (Stevenson, 2009, p. 16). Grocers are able to import an abundance of inexpensive food from South Africa, eliminating the need—or cost-effectiveness—for farming on the island (Statistical Yearbook 2009, p. 44; Segal, 2005, p. 11). Without government support, the local farmers cannot compete with subsidized farmers in globalized nations.

Continuing support for Friedman’s theory on the globalization of individuals, Saints have access to better employment opportunities abroad because of their British citizenship. In 2002,

Saints regained full British citizenship after it was stripped from them under the 1981 British Nationality Act. Citizenship enables Saints to emigrate to the U.K., other British Overseas Territories, and other countries for higher wages. As a result of few jobs and high living expenses on the island vis a vis opportunities abroad, St Helena's population declined 27 percent in 20 years (Census, 2008, p. 6). Many of those emigrating leave children on the island in the care of grandparents. It is estimated that 150 children are in informal foster care on the island (Stevenson, 2009, p. 15).

The people who remain on the island remain in an unflat world. They earn much lower wages than their contemporaries in the U.K., yet they pay higher prices for nearly all food and building supplies that must be imported, and they have limited access to competitive prices because of insularity. In 2009/10 nearly 53 percent of all imports came from South Africa while 47 percent came from the UK (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 5). Perhaps a more striking figure is the export versus import figures. The 2009/10 Statistical Yearbook reports exports of £321,000 (\$507,764) and imports of £10.2 million (\$16.1 million) (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 5.8).

Stephen Royle (2001) describes the "powerlessness" of many small islands in his book *A Geography of Islands, Small Island Insularity* (p. 56). Royle (2001) describes Japan as the only island nation that was not previously ruled by a foreign power. He says,

Every other island is either an offshore part of a mainland state, or, if not part of an independent insular nation, was once a colony, or at the very least, like Tonga or Bahrain, a protectorate of a colonial power . . . We see here the operation of unequal power relationships. In politics, particularly when politics descends into conflict, might is all that matters and usually, the more powerful protagonist wins (2001, p. 57).

Royle could have used St Helena as one of his examples of islands—once Europeans populated the desolate island, it was invaded and re-invaded by European powers during the colonial era (2001, p. 8).

St Helena’s helpless state is described perfectly by Royle when he says, “Powerlessness is not normally associated with military battles, it is a daily dependence on more powerful forces off the island to take decisions that affect the life and livelihoods of islanders. If an island is an offshore part of a larger political unit, it is inevitable that it will not be at centre [sic] stage when decisions are taken. Its needs for, say, infrastructure investment to help a small population will have to compete against expenditure needs of greater populations elsewhere (2001, p. 59).”

St Helena is not alone in its quest to become a participant in the unflat world. It is marginalized places like St Helena that prompted Development Economist Gerald Helleiner to write: “The poor complain, they always do, but that’s just idle chatter. Our system brings rewards to all, at least to all who matter” (Ritzer and Atalay, 2010, p. 164).

### ***Economy***

Royle said St Helena is well off compared to other Atlantic tropical islands, but that its domestic economy is in a parlous state (1992, p. 33). “Saint Helena is a typical case of a MIRAB economy (Migration, Remittances, Aid, Bureaucracy), a term usually reserved for Pacific island states (Hogenstijn, et al., 2005, p. 98, quoting Royle, 2001, and Aldrich & Connell, 1998).

Similar to St Helena, economic consumption increases in South Pacific islands have been pinned to the growth of migrant-labor remittance, government budgetary assistance, and other small rent incomes (Bertram, 1986, p. 809). Bertram maintains that this dependency policy is detrimental to the island and to it developing a self-reliant economy.

The situation in St Helena is quite different from other British possessions. Out of the 14 British Overseas Territories, all except St Helena, Montserrat, and Pitcairn cover their annual operating budget from locally generated revenues (DFID Overseas Territories Department Operation Plan 2011-2015, 2011, p. 6). According to the St Helena government (SHG), “The key

economic features of St Helena are its isolation, its small and declining population, and limited productive capacity. These features have created an economy with a small domestic market, limited local production and exports, high reliance on aid and a small tax base.” (SHGSDP, 2007, section 2.1)

The “features” of St Helena, as described in the Sustainable Development Plan, demonstrate the need for aid from the British government for the foreseeable future. In fact, aid from the UK dominates the economy, which had a gross domestic product of £15.5 million (\$24.5 million) in 2009; the British government contributes 74 percent of the revenues needed to run the country (Statistical Yearbook 2009, 5.8).<sup>2</sup>

The local and British governments employ 48.7 percent of the 2,194 economically active residents, and 48.8 percent are employed in the private sector. The private sector has seen a 28 percent increase since 2003/04 (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 6.13). In 2004, 218 private businesses employed 886 part-time and full-time employees on the island (SHGSDP, 2007, Table 5).<sup>3</sup> Government revenue from direct taxes amounted to £2.3 million in 2009/10 (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 4.5). Private sector employment includes business in agriculture, fishing, and forestry; however, under-employment remains very high on the island (Ashmole et al., 2000, p. 45; SHGSDP, 2007, p. 2.2.6).

Like many places with high under-employment, St Helena has been experiencing massive emigration since the 1980s, as noted earlier (SHGSDP, 2007, section 2.2.4). Some research suggests that the people of St Helena are the island’s most important resource (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 99). The authors of this report go on to speculate that the decline can be attributed to the changes in out-migration.

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<sup>2</sup> Capital Transfers from ROW + Balancing Item / Total St Helena Payments.

<sup>3</sup> 2004 was the last year the number of private businesses and the number of employees was recorded.

Whereas, Ascension and the Falkland Islands remain the main destinations for St Helenian migrant workers, the share of the UK has been increasing significantly and has become the primary destination for migrants who are leaving with their families. When migrants leave with their families, less money is remitted back to the island (SHGSDP, 2007, section 2.2.1).

The recent increase in Saints packing their bags for the UK is a result of a change in public policy by the UK. Anticipating a high number of immigrants fleeing Hong Kong prior to the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, the British government revoked citizenship from all residents in Overseas Territories under the 1981 British Nationality Act. As a result, Saints working in the UK were required to have work permits. In 2002, the British government restored citizenship to the Saints, and many left the island with their families to find employment in the UK (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2005, p. 96).

“The greatest loss of population has come from those of working age with skills. Loss of key skills has led to an increasing requirement for UK assistance to meet the islanders’ basic needs, including health, education, energy, water, and access” (DFID Consultation Document, 2009, p. 5).

Bernice Olsson, legislative council member of the St Helena government, described a typical economic emigrant scenario in an interview:

I know I was talking to a couple. [The] husband gets £63 the wife gets £230, by the time she pays tax. They've got two children. Out of that [pay] they've got to pay their loan, they've got to pay £80 to the babysitter, [and] then they've got to put money away for water and electricity. And as you know, electricity is very expensive on the island. And this is where the breakup of families comes into play. [The] father goes off to the Falklands and then next thing you know, he's got a job for mom, and then they are both on the Falklands and the children are left here with grandma. [It] is so, so unfair, because grandma is solely responsible for those, be it two children or three children (2009).

In addition to its people, St Helena exports other commodities that contribute to a small portion of its economy. Exports, including fish and coffee, were valued at £280,000 in 2005-06. The island lacks natural resources and, therefore, relies on imports for food and other necessities for 90 percent of GDP (Ashmole et al., 2000, 44-46). Tourism more than doubled in 2009/10 to £707,000 accounting for nearly 2 percent of the GDP (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 1.4).



The majority of the tourists arrive on St Helena by cruise ships. In 2005, cruise ships brought 1,500 day-visitors to the island; however, this number greatly fluctuates depending on the cruiseline and landing opportunities, and only an average of 10 to 15 cruise ships stop in a year (SHGSDP, 2007, section 2.2.7). Another source of tourism comes from the approximate 160 yachts that call on the island annually (Statistical Yearbook, 2009, section 9.5).<sup>4</sup>

Hogenstijn, et al., maintain that the lack of economic development and career opportunities—resulting in emigration—is unlikely to change on St Helena without air access (2005, p. 103). They further postulate that the most serious consequence is the “brain drain” with the most educated and entrepreneurial people leaving the island for better wages (2005, p. 103).

In the SHGSDP, the authors state, “The economy is characterised [sic] by a high cost environment as a consequence of its isolation and long distances from its suppliers. The decision to build St Helena an airport represents a monumental opportunity for St Helena’s economic development prospects” (SHGSDP, 2007, section 2.1).

In their study “Insularity and Accessibility: the Small Island Communities of Western Ireland,” Cross and Nutley explored the effects of a “fixed link” (bridge) on several islands’ population. The question was whether there would be out-migration or in-migration (1999, p. 217-330). They state that population stability depended solely on the ability to earn a living (Cross and Nutley, 1999, p. 329). And they further noted, “Transport factors cannot be related directly with population trends or development chances, but there is a widespread understanding that the former is a necessary condition for the latter. Effective local development needs the coordination of transport improvements with island-based enterprise” (Cross and Nutley, 1999, p. 329).

On other islands, such as the Canary Islands, local service sector economies have profited from tourism, including restaurant and bars, general stores, boutiques, and car rentals (Macleod,

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<sup>4</sup> Average between 1995-2009.

1999, p. 448). “All hope is pinned on tourism. However, to attract tourists, better physical access to the outside world is a prerequisite” (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop 2005, p. 102).

### ***Identity and Culture***

St Helena’s population of 4,035 creates insular communities, where the locals sometime claim that it’s difficult to understand people on the island who have arrived from other places. The majority of Saints, 901, live in Half Tree Hollow on the north side of the island. Saints also live in clustered areas: Jamestown (capital), St Paul’s, Blue Hill, Alarm Forest, Blue Hill, Sandy Bay, Levelwood and—Napoleon’s former residence—Longwood (Census, 2008, p. 11). The census also records 114 Saints residing on the RMS. Seventy-five percent of the homes were owned or borrowed through government financing (Census, 2008, p. 30; Royle, 1992, p. 33). Twenty-five percent live in rented houses.<sup>5</sup> Sixty-four percent of the private occupied dwellings have four or five rooms (Census, 2008, p. 31). Most of the homes had piped water and flush toilets (Royle, 1992, p. 33).

More than 37 percent of the adult population is married, 50.7 percent are single, 4.8 percent are separated or divorced, and 7.2 percent are widowed (Census, 2008, p. 48). Of the total 3,981 residents<sup>6</sup> on the island, 16 percent (680) are 0-15 years of age; 66 percent (2,759) are 16-64; 17 percent (745) are 65+; and less than 1 percent (7) did not state their age category (Census, 2008, 55).

One-quarter of the private sector employees are service, sales, and store workers. The second largest category of workers is employed in elementary occupations, and the third largest category is craftsmen and production workers (Census, 2008, p. 76).

The insularity of this “extreme island” has affected the environment as well as the society and economy throughout history, Royle noted (2001, p. 210). “St Helena lacks anything endemic

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<sup>5</sup> 12.5 percent are rented free from the government (Census Report 2008).

<sup>6</sup> This population figure does not include the 54 residents living abroad.

of the splendour [sic] of the dodo and is too isolated to have developed the biological interest of, say, the Galapagos. However, it has species of significance, in particular . . . the wirebird [sic]” (Royle, 2001, p. 211). Royle goes on to comment on the late discovery of the island in 1502 and the island’s use as a prison for both Napoleon and for prisoners-of-war camp during the Boer Wars (2001, p. 212). And finally, “The geographical, insular constraints of St Helena rule against the island being able to develop a self-sustaining economy” (Royle, 2001, p. 217).

“In the case of Saint Helena the notions of insularity and spatial identity are closely intertwined” (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2004, p. 98). A useful definition of identity that can be applied to the Saints comes from Hogenstijn, *et al.*, as the feeling of attachment to a territory at a small social geographical scale and perceived as unique to an individual or group (2004, p. 98). They add that national identity among the residents of St Helena is not quite clear and that they often confuse the idea with citizenship, an issue the Saints resolved with the British government in 2002 (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2004, p. 98).

“Britishness is an integral part of ‘being a Saint’” (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2004, p. 102). When the 1981 British Nationality Act was in place, only a limited number could go to the UK to find employment (Hogenstijn & Van Middelkoop, 2004, p. 96). Despite their displeasure with the legislation, Saints never lost sight of their identity as British subjects and celebrated the restoration of their British citizenship on the island’s 500<sup>th</sup> birthday, May 21, 2002 (Thomas, 2009).

Saints have similar views to other islanders regarding emigration. Many intend to emigrate temporarily and then return to the island after saving enough money to build a home on the island (Thomas, 2009; Bone, 2009; George 2009). In Pitcairn, an island nation with free association to New Zealand, researchers found that the islanders rarely intend to emigrate permanently. “Few Pitcairners in New Zealand recall having made an explicit decision to emigrate, rather they make a series of decisions related to varying situations which eventually put them in a position tantamount to having emigrated” (Connell 1988, quoting Frazer 1970, p. 196).

Hogenstijn, et al., found this behavior to be true of those who left St Helena. The overwhelming majority of the Saints who emigrated to the UK, Falklands, or Ascension planned to return to the island when they retired, if not before (2004, p. 102). One of the reasons Saints want to return to the island from their overseas communities is the distinct culture that can be found on the island. However, author James Peacock warns of emotional reactions when global and local identities are not reconciled.

In *Grounded Globalism*, Peacock discusses the transformation of identity after globalization. He states that globalization alters identity “because the rest of the nation is no longer the dominant framework—the world is. The nation no longer dictates who you are and are not, who you should be and should not be, what matters and does not. One orients not only toward the nation but toward the world” (Peacock, 2007, pg x). The landscape of a place where people hold territorial attachment can cause defensive reactions (Peacock, 2007, p. 9). The global identity must be incorporated with the local identity in order to reconcile the two identities. He states, “Globalism, if unanchored, threatens every dimension of life, economic, political, and cultural; outsourcing, disengagement from government, and lack of identity can all flow from ungrounded globalism and globalization” (Peacock, 2007, p. 12).

In reading Willms’ *Napoleon & St Helena*, one can see where Peacock’s grounded globalism theory could hold true for Saints. Wilms comments directly about the Saints’ identity: “St Helena is a thoroughly old-fashioned place, a remote and bizarre vanishing point devoid of blaring discotheques and exempt from the risk of liver damage occasioned by the consumption of exotic cocktails. In short, St Helena is a philosophy of life” (2007, p. 3).

### ***Expected Changes After Airport Construction***

Edleman and Haugerud (2005) paraphrased Walt Whitman Rostow in *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) with the following stages for all countries in economic development:

1. “Traditional society,” characterized by little or no social mobility and strong family- or kin-based ties that limit investment and circumscribe economically rational decision-making.

2. A pre-take-off period in which nation-states emerge and traditional institutions and values begin to break down and new ideas of progress and enterprises emerge.
3. "Take off," where traditional impediments to economic growth are overcome, agriculture modernizes, industry expands, and investment rates rise.
4. "The drive to maturity market," marked by technological innovation and enlargement and specialization of the industrial base.
5. "The age of high mass-consumption," a period of widespread affluence, growing urbanization, service-sector expansion, and ubiquitous consumer durables, such as automobiles and refrigerators.

Seemingly with this evolution in mind, the SHG has several goals in its intent to reverse trends of the island over the last 50 years by: a) bringing families back together, b) creating jobs, c) increasing the standard of living, d) increasing access to the island, e) enabling financial self-sufficiency in long-term, and f) increasing private sector opportunities on the island (SHG Nov. 3, 2011).

The Sustainable Economic Development plan lays out two scenarios: 6,300 and 30,000 tourists annually. With 30,000 tourists annually, the plan states, "It is estimated that on average tourists will increase the size of the population by just 12 percent" (SEDP, 2012, 11).

The turnaround efforts will begin with the airport construction. In total, Basil Read expects the total employment to increase to 450 at the height of the project (SHG November 3, 2011). After the airport completion, a need for 500 to 700 employees to operate the airport and related businesses has been identified between 2015 and 2025. With the island currently at nearly full employment, this labor need is likely to attract Saints aboard back to the island. Additionally, the public sector is expected to reduce headcount in employees, and both the public and private sectors plan to improve productivity with better work practices and more efficient equipment (SEDP, 2012, p. 13).

Based on the projection of 30,000 tourists per year, average annual salaries are expected to reach £10,010 (\$15,834) (SEDP, 2012, p. 12). Even with just 6,300 tourists, the average annual salary is expected to nearly double to £7,191 (\$11,375) (SEDP, 2012, p. 12). The annual government revenues are projected to swell to £15.3 million with 6,300 guests and £22.4 million

with 30,000 guests, reducing the need for aid from the UK. However, investment in infrastructure has been planned to accommodate the increase in people on the island.

Focusing on the “drive to maturity,” Edleman and Haugerud point out that Rostow’s theory suggests that in this stage, home production of previously imported goods resides (2005, p. 16). The SEDP expects an increase in the agriculture sector so that Saints may support the influx of people to the island by increasing domestic supplies of crops. The government will support this effort by marketing a “buy local brands” and helping farmer determine which crops are in highest demand by tourists (SEDP, 2012 p. 13).

In addition to the positive benefits of tourism, some negative effects are likely to occur. In other islands, increased tourism created a desire for more material goods such as fiberglass boats, outboard motors, televisions, etc. (LaFlemme 143-145). Significant disruptions to localized work patterns are likely, too, where people give up their trades for service-based employment (LaFlemme 143-145). And less tangible effects such as dehumanizing locals with employment in menial jobs, adverse effects on community life, and hostility toward tourists can occur (Macnaught 368-70). There are also cases where crime, prostitution, gambling, and drug traffic have been imported (Theobald 79-99).

On an ecological front, St Helena has many endemic plants and one endemic bird and, thus, because of its insularity, a fragile environment. The SEDP mentions investigations on other places with fragile environments, such as the Seychelles, Bhutan, the Galapagos Islands, and Machu Picchu. Others have studied ecological effects in Koh Phi Phi, Thailand, the Nepalese Himalayas, and Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, Costa Rica. In an effort to thwart negative effects on the environment experienced in some of these other places, the SHG will experiment with caps on the number of tourists (SEDP, 2012, p. 9-15).

Another possibility is that an airport might not increase the number of tourists at all. It took a number of years for tourism on Easter Island and the Galapagos to increase after an airport was built, although it did so during the 1990s with the increase in tourism worldwide (Taylor, et

al. 2006). However, Montserrat opened an airport in 2005, and the number of visitors did not increase (SEPD, 2012, p. 15).

Other islands increased access in the form of bridges and ferries. “Tory Island has shown a remarkable transformation, due to the coincident innovations of the regular ferry in 1992 and the new hotel, built with international funding in 1994. These depend on each other, and have brought in more visitors, income and employment, at least in summer . . . Another island—Inishmore—has reputedly been ‘ruined’ by easier access and tourist-led commercialism” (Cross & Nutley, 1999, p. 329).

Each destination is unique in attributes and detractors. St Helena has pinned hope on modest increases in tourism and an expectation of great benefits when those numbers are achieved.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

### *Research Questions*

The purpose of this thesis is to document St Helena before the opening of the airport and before the subsequent changes, both positive and negative. A baseline of the island, the lifestyle of its residents, and even Saints' identity are important for future researchers to determine the extent of changes. This thesis will explore economic issues, social structure, and identity of the islanders in a three-part video documentary and attempt to address the following questions:

1. What was life like for the community of St Helena in three different facets in 2009: economic, social, identity?
2. What was life like for a typical Saint who migrates to works off the island and sends remittances back to a family living on St Helena?
3. What were residents' fears and expectations of airport construction, and do they believe the arrival of the airport will improve their lives?
4. Are the resultant changes an acceptable trade-off for economic improvement, and why?

Each part of the documentary will attempt to address the research questions. I also plan to write a final chapter that will recount the challenges with this project and advice to any other student or documentary producer who wants to undertake such a project. My experiences and what I have to overcome may serve as a blueprint for other reporters, writers, photographers, videographers, etc.

### *Methodology*



As journalists, we have many options in the way we tell a story. We can use a variety of media and a variety of modes. We don't even have to choose just one—we can blend different media and modes in ways that we hope enrich the experience for the viewer.

For this series, I planned to use visual, auditory and written methods to relate the story of the Saints. I captured still photography, recorded video and audio, and wrote about the experience. The story will be accessible through a website. These media tools will relate the story in a condensed but compelling and informative way.

I intend to demonstrate the status of the people of St Helena in a reflexive-narrative mode where I interviewed the Saints, found the statements that were broad representations of the people and conditions, and then related a narrative using the subjects' own words. In many respects, I view this as an ethnographic documentary similar in general themes to Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, a film produced in 1922 about an Inuit family and included their community social structure, economic conditions, and introspective identity.

I spoke to more than 30 people and sources in collecting material for the documentary. Out of those people, I formally interviewed 14 people. I chose eight people to appear in the videos:

- ❖ Tara Thomas. I met Thomas and her boyfriend, Tom Wortley, on the RMS while we sailed from Ascension to St Helena. Thomas was moving back to St Helena with her British boyfriend after living in the U.K. for five years. I chose her as a main subject because she was very likeable and her story was what most emigrants hope to achieve—returning home to build a house after a short period abroad. She also joked that she brought Wortley back to widen the gene diversity on the island.
- ❖ Rosie Mittens. Darrin and Sharon Henry, a photographer and a storeowner on St Helena, suggested Mittens to me for the economic story. Mittens is articulate, photogenic, and open to discussing her life, family, and finances.

- ❖ Father Alan Bateman. Father Bateman presided over the funeral of Sally Bone's father. I wanted to interview him mainly about the social structure of the islanders and the difficulty of a delayed grieving process because many Saints must wait for the RMS to bring family home for the funeral. A South African, Father Bateman had a wealth of knowledge about the local politics and social problems after living on the island as a clergyman for three years.
- ❖ Major Jay Block. The commanding officer of the U.S. Air Force base on Ascension Island, a major employer for Saints off of St Helena, Major Block was able to answer questions about the livelihoods of the Saints on Ascension and about the specific factors regarding the economic appeal of Ascension to Saints.
- ❖ Anthony George. I was introduced to George by Sadie Legg, an officer on the RMS, after inquiring about people who reside on Ascension Island and were making the trip home. I felt it was imperative to find a Saint who would be making both the outbound trip to St Helena and the return trip that I was scheduled on four weeks later. Many Saints were planning to be on St Helena for six weeks instead of four weeks. George was schedule to return to Ascension on the same passage that I was scheduled. He works for VT Communications on Ascension and had been working on the island for 12 years. He has a son and owns a house on St Helena, which he works on when on vacation from Ascension.
- ❖ Sally Bone. I met Bone on Ascension Island the day before boarding the RMS. Sally lived in the Falkland Islands with her two daughters. Bone was returning to St Helena to make arrangements for her father's funeral. I chose to make Sally one of subjects in the social documentary because of her struggle to reach the island from abroad and dealing with her father's funeral was a typical storyline for many Saints living overseas.
- ❖ Bernice Olsson. A legislative council member for St Helena Government for 12 years, Olsson was an authority on the economic and social conditions on the island. I met

Olsson through several people, one of which was her husband, Mike Olsson, the newspaper publisher and radio producer of the only two government media alternatives on the island. Olsson is privy to research conducted for the government, legislation, and aid from the British government, plus she is an advocate for the people of St Helena. In my observation, Olsson worked tirelessly in her role and seemed passionate about the island and compassionate for the people she represents. Olsson was a good, supporting, informative source for the documentary.

- ❖ George Stevens. As the chairman of the board for the St Helena Development Agency, Stevens was able to comment directly on the airport and the hopes of economic reform on the island. He also commented on what he felt were the attributes of the Saints' identity. Mike Olsson suggested that I interview him regarding the airport and economic development on the island.

Sources not featured, but informative in understanding the culture:

- ❖ Nick Thorpe. One of the largest private employers on the island and an amateur historian. Thorpe provided me with a wealth of information about the history of the island, the economic conditions, and the identity of the Saints. Mike Olsson suggested Nick Thorpe as a source.
- ❖ Pamela Young. As the tourism director, Young was able to comment on a variety of features of St Helena, the economic hopes, and the identity of the people. She was also able to connect me with additional sources for more information. Young was one of the first people I spoke to prior to the trip and was a huge help in connecting me with housing and private car rental, in addition to the information she provided in an interview.
- ❖ Hilda Clingham. I called the senior living center to inquire about the elderly Saints to gain perspective that only older people can provide. At 99 years old, Clingham was the oldest known living Saint. I found her to be a charming lady who had worked abroad in

South Africa for a number of years, after raising her family on St Helena. She was easily confused by my questions, but painted an appealing image of St Helena and Saints.

- ❖ Christy Bedwell. Bedwell was an aspiring journalist and a recent winner of a British Territory-wide essay competition. I felt that she would be more articulate than the average 15-year-old student and could contrast the age and perspective of Hilda Clingham.
- ❖ Shane Crowie. A skilled laborer and part-time disc jockey, Crowie was a good storyteller, but difficult to understand due to his accent. I sought out Crowie when I arrived on the island after watching an interview of him online while I conducted preliminary research. The interview was about Crowie's near miss of a boulder during a dramatic rock-fall, when a rock fell through the building where he worked. Rock falls are rare, but certainly an issue being addressed by the St Helena government. I interviewed Crowie about the Saints' identity.
- ❖ Wilson Scipio. Scipio is employed as a janitor on Ascension where he has lived for 20 years. He lives in the U.S. barracks on the island and enjoys taking tourists around the island at no charge.

In the first documentary, I examine the economic lives of Saints living on St Helena and how they make ends meet. I followed a highly paid (for the island's standards) nurse to record her home life, her job, and her discussion about her personal finances and living situation. I also interviewed several people about the airport and broader living conditions on the island. This piece comes first because of the need to set up the financial situation of the Saints and to introduce the airport that will affect the island's economy.

The second documentary begins on Ascension Island and features a Saint who has migrated to the island for work. This documentary follows three Saints as they reconnect with friends and family after being away between 15 months to six years. This piece demonstrates the

issues of maintaining social connections with family members on St Helena while living nearly 1,000 miles away.

For the third documentary, I interviewed various Saints and non-Saints regarding the identity of St Helenians. The intention of this piece is to expand on the people and the island community and to give context to the other two pieces.

In each piece, I explore individuals' challenges of living on the island, how the Saints' perceive their own situation, and whether the airport will change their way of life. I also expect each piece, along with its B roll or additional footage, to give viewers a sense of the beauty of the island and its residents' way of life.

### ***Limitations***

This project posed many challenges primarily because of the distance to travel in reaching St Helena, the insular nature of the island community, and the inability to return to get interviews or visuals to fill in what I might have missed. I decided to make the trip 8 months after the birth of my daughter. I also had a 2-year-old son at home. Thanks to the support and willingness of my husband to cover all parenting obligations, I was able to plan and accomplish the trip, which meant being away from home for six weeks.

Booking the passages to one of the most geographically remote islands in the world proved to be more difficult and expensive than most trips. Due to the distance involved, one must book passage on the last only Royal Mail Ship in operation to guarantee arrival on the island.<sup>7</sup> The RMS departed from three different ports: Cape Town, Ascension Island, and Portland in the UK. The trip from Cape Town takes five days; from Ascension it takes three days; and from

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<sup>7</sup> Occasional cruise ships embark to St Helena, but the seas are often too rough for the cruise ship's tenders to land. Tenders for the RMS have local knowledge of the sea conditions and can land passengers, or cranes can transport people to barges. Cranes are used to transport younger children to the island. The RMS was once a designation to ships in the fleet that called on the colonies of the United Kingdom. St Helena is the last outpost that is not accessible by airplane. Once the airport is complete, the RMS *St Helena* will be decommissioned.

Portland it took about 30 days. Due to the poor condition of the RMS, a ship that was expected to be decommissioned in 2012, passage from Portland is no longer available. Passages were booked only via facsimile or telephone through Andrew Weir Shipping located in London or in Cape Town. The RMS circles among Cape Town, Ascension Island, and St Helena.

Because Ascension Island is a military base, no permanent residents live on the island; only temporary workers employed by the UK military, U.S. Air Force, and contract companies can reside on the island. An entry permit, similar to a visa, is required by the Ascension Island government for visitors and transients and must be requested directly from the local government in advance of booking a flight. The airport is owned and operated by the U.S. military, and U.S. and British military planes are the only aircraft cleared to land on the island. Civilians can purchase tickets on the weekly Royal Air Force (RAF) flights that service Ascension and the Falkland islands.

In addition to the difficulty in booking a flight and passage, airfare from North Carolina to London and then from Brize Norton Air Force Base, 70 miles outside London, to Ascension was costly. In 2009, the roundtrip ticket cost \$1,059. And then, the round-trip on the RMS between Ascension and St Helena cost \$1,900. Total travel costs topped \$3,000 after the train and cab fares between London Heathrow and Brize Norton. Travel time was five days, but passengers spend an obligatory two days on Ascension Island, so the total time it took to reach St Helena was seven days, and the same amount of time on the return trip.

I anticipated getting to the island with the appropriate equipment would also prove to be quite difficult because of a baggage weight limit for both the airplane to Ascension (40-pound limit) and on the ship (60-pound limit). I foresaw possible limitations in purchasing replacement equipment, if I had any problems, and could carry only limited back up provisions because of the weight restrictions. Among the equipment I took: 2 still cameras, a video camera, 2 battery chargers, 2 electricity converters, 4 lenses (16-35 mm 2.5; 85 mm 1.8; 70-200 mm (2.5); 50 mm

(1.4)), a strobe, audio recorder, microphone, two tripods, and lots of Duracell<sup>8</sup> and camera batteries.

Minimal equipment was pivotal to shooting this documentary, especially given the weight restrictions. To make the weight restriction, I opted for alternatives in my equipment such as a extender 1.4x instead of larger lenses, and smaller external hard drives. I also purchased toiletries on the island in an effort to kept personal items to a minimum. Additionally, because weight restrictions are designated to baggage only, I wore cargo pants and carried almost 8 pounds of batteries on my body, including my laptop battery.

The distance and communication with the islanders also created challenges. Despite the friendly nature of the islanders and contacts I made prior to the trip, I knew I might have difficulty in finding people who were willing to discuss their lives with an outsider once I arrived with camera in hand. Also, I recognized that people might not be willing to predict or verbalize the changes that would come to their island. I also might have challenges in finding an appropriate subject for the story about a migrant living on Ascension and heading back to St Helena for a visit.

A limited number of people would be heading home on the passage I would be taking, and I could face challenges in meeting people on the island of Ascension who are natives of St Helena. I allowed myself two days on Ascension to find a subject. I planned to photograph him or her at a worksite, if permitted by the British or U.S. military. I also allowed myself two days on the return trip from St. Helena to Ascension to shoot anything related to the passage via the RMS that I did not have the chance to get the first time.

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<sup>8</sup> According to sailing magazine *Practical Sailor*, the authority on sailing gear, battery tests showed Duracell batteries last longer than any other battery brand tested.

I also realized I had to be open to stories that came along and that aspect could change my focus. Because my time on Ascension and St Helena was limited, I had to collect as many interviews and visuals as possible. I wouldn't have the opportunity to return to fill in any gaps.

Another challenge would be to demonstrate the uniqueness of this community. I expected to hear "canned" answers to this question, but would try to get to the heart of what makes this place unique. I knew that research and prior reading could tell me only so much about the island, so I would have to use all my senses and interviewing skills to gather information that would tell the story of St Helena.



CHAPTER 1  
ECONOMIC STRUGGLES

**The following is the transcript of the first of three parts in the documentary. The videos can be seen at: [www.sthelenadocumentary.org](http://www.sthelenadocumentary.org).**

**Bernice Olsson:** I think the biggest issue we've got is, uh, people leaving the island to go offshore for more money.

**Text Slide:** St Helena is a British Overseas Territory located in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, below the equator.

The key economic features of the island are its isolation, small population and limited resources.

**Text Slide:** These features have created an economy with a high reliance on aid in the form of government subsidies.

**Text Slide:** Many islanders pin their hopes on an airport and a substantial increase in tourism for economic reform.

**Lower third:** Bernice Olsson, Legislative Councillor, St Helena Government

**Bernice Olsson:** I was talking to one couple—husband gets £63 the wife gets 230, they've got two children. Out of that they've got to pay their loan, they've got to pay £80 to the baby sitter, then they've got to put money away for water and electricity. And as you know, electricity is very expensive on the island.

I can see why people have to go, but it's creating a lot of social problems.

And that is the big sad thing of this lovely island.

**Lower third:** Rosie Mittens, Saint and nurse on St Helena

**Rosie Mittens:** When I have, um, my pay at the end of the month, I have to take out a sum of money for my housing loan, electricity and water bills, or the telephone bill. And then by the time you end up with your pay it's not much really, so it can be quite, um, quite rough.

I work as a nurse and a midwife in the general hospital and I've been working there for 25 years.

I'm on a level six pay—we actually get a monthly pay, and which is something like 600 something pounds a month.

**Text:** Rosie's salary is equivalent to \$953 per month in U.S. dollars. Average pay on the island is \$784 per month.

**Rosie Mittens:** The pay scale for what we are getting, I would think the pay in the UK and elsewhere are doubled.

**Text Slide:** U.S. Air Force Major Jay Block employs about 200 Saints at Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island.

Ascension is a three-day ship's passage from St Helena.

**Major Jay Block:** The Saints here make anywhere from minimum wage up to about 12, 13 bucks an hour. But along with the wages that you get here, you get free housing and you get free meals. The only thing they have to pay for is whatever they want to buy themselves out of their wages.

**Text:** Saints make \$1,200 to \$2,000 in U.S. dollars per month—up to double the wages they would get on St Helena.

**Lower third:** Father Alan Bateman, Vicar of St James Parish

**Father Bateman:** Oh, we do have families who are struggling financially on the island. We don't have full agricultural facilities. We do not have industries. They spoke about the airport—you

may have had a 100 people this week, maybe 100 next week, but are they going to spend the amount of money that people think they would?

I know there's talk that this island has to become self-sufficient, but, personally again, I don't see how it could possibly be self-sufficient. Not with less than 4,000 people on the island.

**Text:** On average, 1,050 tourists visit St Helena per year.

**Lower third:** George Stevens, Chairman of the St Helena Development Agency Board

**George Stevens:** Tourism, in my opinion, would be one of the biggest development[s] that the island could have, because, as you say, there's nothing else. And the only way you can actually do that is you must have an airport to start that kind of development.

**Text:** In 2011, the British government approved funding for an airport on St Helena.

**Text:** The St Helena Development Agency is hoping 30,000 tourists will visit the island per year.

**Text:** Construction began in 2012 and is expected to be completed in 2015.

CHAPTER 2  
SOCIAL STRUCTURES

**The following is the transcript of the second of three parts in the documentary. The videos can be seen at: [www.sthelenadocumentary.org](http://www.sthelenadocumentary.org).**

**Sally Bone:** Friends and people you don't know stop you and say, "Oh my god, Sally Bone. When you got back? When you going back?"

**Text:** St Helena is one of the world's most remote islands and has a tight-knit community.

**Text:** But many Saints are forced to leave due to low pay.

**Text:** Most leave with the intention of returning.

**Lower-third:** Anthony George, Saint and homeowner on St Helena.

**Anthony George:** I don't see the reason why I should stay here and struggle when I've got a option of being away, you know. And, and earn my money more comfortably.

The cost of living, materials, everything is sky-high.

I came to St. Helena because it's my hometown and I have a kid and family here and I also have a house, which [I'm] still in the process of getting completed.

The island I live on is Ascension Island. I work as a handyman rigger. I do maintenance for the facilities on the base and also maintenance on the antennas.

Normally, it's be like a year or 15 months that I, I stay away. At times, you do miss home. But by being on Ascension for a while, you learn to adapt and accept the fact that you're away from home.

**Lower-third:** Tara Thomas, Saint who returned from UK to reside on St Helena

**Tara Thomas:** I decided to go to the UK because we got our British citizenship in 2002, and it just made sense for me to try and pursue something more than what was available in St Helena.

I was in the UK for almost five years in total. My boyfriend, Tom, was always very enchanted with the thought of St Helena and the fact that these 4,000 people lived on a 10 by 14 mile long island or whatever it is.

I always spoke very affectionately about how close I was to my family. So I think when we made that decision to come here, it was a combination of reasons. One of which the fact that he appreciated how close I was to my family.

The family business is a retail business. I think we've kind of attempt to sell almost anything and everything.

For me, what's special about being home, the main thing for me is my family. I didn't realize how much I missed seeing my family. And I mean, especially as you know my sister's got three kids, my brother has a son whose 6 and they've just got a newborn now. And in a way I've hated that they've grown up not knowing who their aunty Tara was. That's the biggest part for me, I think, is the family aspect.

**Text:** Sally Bone moved to the Falkland Islands in 2003 for work.

She returned to St Helena in 2009 for her father's funeral.

**Sally Ann Bone:** Just to get here that just from the Falklands to St Helena, [it was] £3,500. It's been 6 years since I seen my family, especially my mum because she the closest one I got here now, and the rest of the family. I went away for work—money. I don't think I would want to come back to live here. Don't think my kids would be able to grow up here. The money is poor. In the Falklands, they're so used to having what ever they want, whenever they want.

A lot of people go away just to make a little bit of extra money to build houses expecting to come back, I suppose, but never did.

I would like to return in the near future, but I still need to pay for this one yet.

## CHAPTER 3

### SAINTS' IDENTITY

**The following is the transcript of the third of three parts in the documentary. The videos can be seen at: [www.sthelenadocumentary.org](http://www.sthelenadocumentary.org).**

**Tara Thomas:** St. Helenians—at the time—were good enough to die for Britain when it was the World Wars and stuff, but we weren't good enough to be British.

**Text:** An insular island community of just 4,000 residents, Saints are said to be amongst the friendliest in the world.

**Text:** Despite the distance from the motherland, “Britishness” is an integral part of the Saints’ identity.

**Lower-third:** Tara Thomas, Saint who returned from UK to reside on St Helena

**Tara Thomas:** When Margaret Thatcher came to power we were classified then, not as British citizens, but as British Overseas Territory citizens. Which meant that if we wanted to work in the UK, we had to get a visa.

So, we fought for it in Parliament. We got our British citizenship back 21st of May 2002, St Helena's 500th birthday.

**Lower-third:** Rosie Mittens, “Saint” and nurse on St Helena

**Rosie Mittens:** I feel the Saint community [has] a lot of friendship. Everybody talks to each other. You know, whenever you meet somebody you always have a chat or just saying hello,

which makes you feel so good. There's always somebody there to comfort you, and um, you know, give you support and everybody knows each other.

**Lower-third:** Father Alan Bateman, Vicar of St James Parish

**Father Bateman:** The Saints . . . friendliness here is, they'll always stop and talk to you. You know, they may not know you really, but they'll always stop and say hello, how are you, and if they can see you're not looking too well, "Anything we can do for you?" "Can we help you with this, can we take you here?" They are very, very helpful people and as I said I've never come across such friendly people as the Saints, they really are an exceptional people.

**Lower-third:** Major Jay Block, U.S. Air Force, Wideawake Airfield, Ascension Island

**Major Jay Block:** Why do I think the Saints are so friendly? You know it's . . . it's different down here. When you're on an island, things are just a little more laid back.

The weather's great, it's a small island, small population. You all just get along. You have to get along. And, uh, just, you know, enjoy being around each other.

The one thing about the Saints is there's a lot of close relationships down here. Maybe that also helps why they open their arms to strangers as well.



## CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

I first learned of the plans and hopes of an airport on St Helena when I sailed to the island in 2006. My husband and I anchored in the rocky anchorage of Rupert's Bay on the northeast side of the island because the island does not have a natural harbor. I was captivated by the insularity and lifestyles of the residents with few outside visitors because of limited ship accessibility and no airport. We learned of the proposal and approval of an airport to be completed by 2010, which was an exciting prospect for the islanders.

In 2008, I tried to convince my photojournalism professor, Patrick Davison, to cover the issues of the island for one of his annual international classes. I felt it would be important to capture the residents' lifestyle before the intrusion of the airport and all the subsequent changes. But the cost-prohibitive logistics of getting a class of students to the island prevented the discussion from going far. I realized that if I wanted to learn about the historic globalization of an island, I would have to do document the island before any changes occurred. I was fortunate to receive significant financing from a supportive family member and also through the journalism school to pursue the documentary.

In January 2009, I left my husband and two kids for six weeks to document the lives of islanders who often have to leave their children and spouses for 12 months or more. To dampen the longing I had for my own family, I constantly reminded myself of the sacrifice that parents must make in St Helena—and in other unflattered parts of the world. I found inspiration by witnessing those reconnecting with their families and children on the island, and while I found purpose in the documentary, I knew that I would be home by a certain date. I spent more than a hundred hours with Saints who live away from their family, and yet, I still don't know what it feels like to have to face the same decisions Saints make.

As I discovered when I returned to the island, the globalizing of St Helena was not easy to document. While the situation on the island is far from an atrocity, the people are somewhat

oppressed by the inability to make a living wage in their homeland. Saints have not suffered physical expulsion, but weak economic viability has forced migration to places where they could work and send money home. I found their situation to be a sad story that affected me. The stories of separation are touching. It's difficult not to care.

I heard their stories and empathized with them over having to make hard choices, but I'm barred from the constant thoughts, worries, and sadness that must invade their minds as they try to sleep. They must have self-doubt as to whether they made the right decision, regardless if they decide to stay on the island or to live abroad. And if they relocate, do they constantly check their finances, wondering when they would be able to afford to go home for a visit or to move back permanently?

Anthony, a Saint living on Ascension Island who barely knows his son living on St Helena, made stoic comments that moving away is just something that you do for a better life. Perhaps this assertion was the best way for him to cope. It did not escape me that he came home for his son's 6<sup>th</sup> birthday, yet the closest he came to his son was peering over his shoulder at his birthday party. The dislocation was evident.

I met Sally, a Saint who moved to the Falklands six years prior and had brought her two girls to St Helena for the first time. Unfortunately, it was for her father's funeral—he never had the chance to meet his grandchildren. As she stood at the waterfront saying goodbye to her mother before boarding the RMS to return to her Falkland home, Sally did not know when she would see her again. They both cried as her mother handed her a letter. In trying to document the moment, I found it difficult to see through the viewfinder of my camera. Water from my tears had filled up the eyepiece crevice.

I also experienced moments of joy through new experiences. Tara moved back to St Helena with her boyfriend, Tom—a strapping Englishman who had never visited a tropical island. As they unpacked their boxes, a palmetto bug, 4 centimeters long, raced toward Tom in an effort to escape the giants surrounding him. The muscular construction worker shrieked and

jumped around like a young squeamish child shouting, “What is it? What is it?” I believe he thought the exotic bug might kill him. My camera hung by my side and my audio recorder was off as I instinctively reached for a shoe and killed the roach for Tom, saving him from certain cardiac arrest had the roach actually touched him. It wasn’t my best moment of direct cinema, but I enjoyed laughing with Tara as Tom gathered himself.

My goal was to be a witness of the Saints’ lives, one devoid of opinions regarding whether the airport should be built, and one who only presents the stories of the islanders. I could be “in the zone” while shooting as my subjects moved from location to location, but I often found it too lonely for me to be devoid of expression especially during less active periods. Does that mean I crossed the line and failed as a journalist? Is maintaining emotional distance something I expect from other journalists, even those who report in isolation? Do journalists file stories to effect change? Where is the line between journalism and social justice? Which do I prefer?

Throughout the three years that the documentary lay dormant while I attended to my family and started a business, I thought about the island weekly. The airport plans were “paused” in 2009, and it appeared that politics were going to block the future of the islanders once again. I kept up with the news on the island and found myself incensed over the public policy by a first world government that tied the Saints to economic aid for a long foreseeable future.

At first glance, St Helena’s geographical limitation seemed to be situational rather than intentional. My own interviews with authorities at the U.S. Air Force base on British-owned Ascension Island revealed that an airport on St Helena would cause complications for the military and thus a stipulation by the U.S. military was placed in the lease agreement regarding an airport on Ascension Island. This agreement was due to expire in 2010.

The problem, as outlined for me, resulted because the Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island is the closest airport to St Helena by several hundred miles. In the event that a commercial aircraft could not land on St Helena, the U.S. Air Force base would be forced to allow the airplane to land at the strip on Ascension.

While the potential already exists for a commercial airplane to require landing clearance for emergencies, weekly flights to an airport on St Helena would increase the likelihood of such a request—especially during inclement weather.

Additionally, both militaries hire Saints to fill the majority of the positions on the island at lower wages compared to hiring U.S. or non-Saint British. In a recent discussion with a former authority on Ascension, I learned that the U.S. and British military, in anticipation of Saints moving back since the approval for an airport on St Helena, have a contingency plan of hiring people from the Caribbean.

My theory is that plans did not move forward for a airport in the past because the U.S. military had a stipulation in their agreement with the British military. And only since the British government realized that the island is in such economic peril and that continuing to subsidize the island will only make matters worse, did the political parties pressure the military to renegotiate this portion of the contract with the U.S. government.

Despite any previous forces blocking the airport construction, the political pendulum has swung back to the other side, and the airport was approved in 2011. In May 2012, the airport project began and is due to be complete in 2015.

St Helena is a special place, but why? Is it due to the insularity? Is it due to the people? Is it due to the quaint European architecture of Jamestown that gives a sense of a different time? Will the island continue to be so special once the airport is built? Will 30,000 tourists come to this island as hoped?

The island feels like a parallel universe: a world where global franchises don't exist; where cable television doesn't exist; where cell phones are useless gadgets. A world where people go out of their way to talk to acquaintances and strangers on the street. Simplicity is an easily attainable lifestyle here. I visited more than 50 such islands on my sailing voyage around the world. Yet, I have found the people on St Helena to be unique. Compared to island cultures, are they more affluent? Are they more British? Are they, indeed, friendlier? I can't identify

individual qualities. It's so difficult to describe the differences, and it's hard to know what will change.

I documented broad topics of economics, identity, and social anthropology in an attempt to create a baseline of Saints' lives. I captured 13 hours of interviews, took five hours of audio recording, and shot more than 8,000 photographs, all whittled down to 10 minutes of video pieces aimed to attract viewers on the Internet. While I doubt this version of my work will create much world-wide interest today, I hope the documentary has purpose in the future—both for Saints and others in unflattened societies.

While on St Helena and missing my family, I thought constantly about the noble multimedia journalists who choose a career where they must sacrifice time with their families to inform us of injustices from far-flung stretches of land. I thought extensively about the choices I could make and determined while contemplating this documentary that family time is a priority for me. I am fortunate to live in a place where I have a choice to live with my family and make a living wage. I hope public policy by the British government and economic growth on St Helena allow Saints the ability to have more choices with their own lives in the future.

For further research and documentary work about St Helena, I suggest:

- Documentation of the evolution of the economy in St Helena as the airport is constructed and becomes operational. In 2012, more than 100 Saints began employment with Basil Reed, the contractor for the airport construction. How much of an economic impact has this initial effort had on the island and its residents? Have more Saints moved home, or have more Saints on the island gained employment?
- Investigation of the U.S.-U.K. agreements regarding Ascension Island to determine whether the U.S. government was involved in blocking airport construction plans. These agreements would be available through the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

- Visual documentation of the ecological changes on the island as the airport construction progresses. Continued documentation would elaborate on the impact of the airport over a period of time.
- Interviews with some of the caretakers of the 100 children living on the island while their parents work and live abroad.
- A retrospective look at the identity, social structure, and economic conditions of the Saints' lives five or 10 years after the airport is completed.

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