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Labour, Environment and Empire in the South Atlantic (1780-1860)

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But then, I suppose
we all are, in our own way, aren't we?
Bootmakers to Kings

THE GOOD SHEPERD (USA, 2009

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List of abbreviations

CO: Colonial Office
EIC: East India Company
IOR: India Office Records
IOW: Indian Ocean World
SHA: Saint Helena Archives
WO: War Office

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Introduction

And the sea will grant each man new hope, as sleep brings dream of home
CRISTOPHER COLUMBUS[1]

When in 2001 BBC brought television for the first time on the remote island of Tristan da Cunha, a German journalist present in the settlement started to complain vigorously about how this technological development would have destroyed the true 'islandness' of Tristan and of its inhabitants. The inhabitants of Tristan – apparently unconcerned about their loss of 'islandness' – decided to send the journalist immediately away from the island on the first cargo ship that stopped in the port[2].

On November 3rd 2011 the British Government finally decided to finance the construction of an airport on another remote island, that of Saint Helena. This long-awaited decision will see the island connected with direct flights from and to the Cape in 2016, when the RMS Saint Helena – the only ship that today connects the island with the rest of the world – will be decommissioned. I have been one of the last 'lucky' people that reached the island using boat, in a five-day long journey from South Africa. People will probably complain – like the German journalist on Tristan – of how this sudden technological step will destroy the 'magic' and the 'mystique' of this island. For sure the Helenians will be quite happy of this airport, making it easy for them to reach their relatives in the Cape or send a letter in a reasonable time.

On September 15th 2015, almost two-hundred years after Napoleon Bonaparte arrived on Saint Helena, the first airplane – albeit just a test and not a commercial flight – landed at the Saint Helena International Airport. Four hundred years of isolation are coming to an end, and Saint Helena will become part of the international system of commercial flights that today makes relatively easy for everyone reach almost every place in the World in a few hours.

These examples serve as an introduction to the main themes of my dissertation. The South Atlantic Islands – Saint Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and the Falklands – are a relatively unexplored chapter of the history of the British Empire. Furthermore, the region in which they are – the South Atlantic Ocean – is another region that has been researched extensively only in recent times. The aim of this dissertation will be the study of the South Atlantic and its islands in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century in order to contextualise the role of this

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[1] This quote is from the movie 'The Hunt for Red October' (USA, 1990) and in truth was never said or written by Columbus himself

[2] The episode is told in Kornet S., *A dutchman on Tristan* (Katwijk, 2004)

region in the wider themes of Atlantic, World and Transnational (in this case more Trans-imperial) history. The South Western Indian Ocean, with the islands of Mauritius and Reunion, and the Colony of the Cape will be also taken into consideration, although only through secondary sources and literature and for the purpose of a comparative study of the South Atlantic. Moreover, the connections between this region and the South Atlantic are crucial, as this cross-oceanic and cross-imperial border region played a crucial role in the history of European imperialism in the East since the first journeys of the India Companies. I want to analyse this region and these relationships starting from two processes that evolved in this period: slavery and labour relationships and the evolution of colonial government. The latter it is analysed also considering the evolution of environmental policies in colonial context. I think that the chronological period chosen – from the Age of Revolutions to the early decades of the nineteenth century – is adequate to analyse all these processes and connections and also it adds further elements to the debate with the long-term consequences of the Revolutionary Age. 'Explorations' of earlier and later periods were necessary to fully explain some of the historical processes involved.

I think the potential significance of this research lies in the re-discovery of the South Atlantic in juxtaposition with the leading 'Atlantic historiography' which has focused mostly on the North and Mid-Atlantic. The recent historiography on the South Atlantic has studied mostly the Iberian colonies, and with my work I want to expand this historiography analysing also the islands, with their peculiarities and different perspectives than the vast land Empires of South America. Furthermore, the connections and the comparisons between Saint Helena, the Cape and Mauritius could help to expand the knowledge on the interactions between these crucial outposts and their owners – the English, Dutch and French empires – and how they related in this border area of the World.

The aim and structure of this thesis

There are three main historiographical themes that need to be discussed before moving to the description of the main contents of this dissertation: the relationships between the history of the South Atlantic islands and the history of other island-colonies; the connections of the South Atlantic's history with the main ideas of Atlantic history and the idea of microhistory in connection with Atlantic history.

There are some similarities between Saint Helena and other island-colonies, notably with the Caribbean, South-West Indian Ocean islands and Sri Lanka. Saint

Helena seems to have many features in common with Mauritius, following M. Vaughan's account of this island[3]. Both Mauritius and Saint Helena are in a relatively remote position, faced a change in governance in the early nineteenth century and remained unproductive for most of their history. Mauritius at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the plantation of sugar started to improve its condition, while Saint Helena's economy always remained stagnant. Another difference between the two islands is that on Mauritius slaves were able to escape to the interior – the so called *maroonage* – while on Saint Helena this was not possible. Also, on Mauritius Port Luis became a true city since the early stages of colonisation, while on Saint Helena the settlement of Jamestown became a true city only in the late nineteenth century. Mauritius, Saint Helena, Reunion and Cape Town all also share another common feature being in an Ocean with strong links across it and with the surrounding regions: Saint Helena and the Cape were both part of the Atlantic, but their relationships with the East were extremely important. At the same time the Mascarene Islands were part of the Indian Ocean world but had strong economic, trade and political links with the Atlantic and its dynamics. All these colonies were in a cross-oceans border zone in the southern seas that developed in a rich and important network, a crossroad for the relationships between the East and the West in the first centuries of European imperialism.

Sri Lanka, another island-colony, was forced into an enclosure system by the government with the Wasteland Ordinance almost in the same period when on Saint Helena a similar enclosure system was introduced by the local governor[4]. At the same time the two colonies shared a similar path of emancipation of slaves and of early introduction of indentured labourers: as it is demonstrated in chapter two, the deliberations on slavery of the assembly of Ceylon were taken as an example by Saint Helena's planters.

The Caribbean islands and Saint Helena had many differences: different slave systems, different populations, different economies, different urban structure and different plantation systems. However, both in the Caribbean and on Saint Helena the role of government and the military presence had many points in common. In the Caribbean a stronger government and a strong military force was seen necessary mainly to avoid slave rebellions, especially after the outbreak of the Haitian revolution, while on Saint Helena the reason for the presence of a strong military was eminently for the defence from a foreign invasion.

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[3] M. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island : slavery in eighteenth-century Mauritius* (Durham N.C., 2005)

[4] See chapter three

How can this dissertation fit into the debate concerning Atlantic history? P. Morgan and J. Greene in a recent work[5] identified in the Atlantic islands one of the 'leading edges' of this subject: D. Hancock's research on Madeira[6] proved how the history of small islands can be a starting point to analyse the Atlantic system and its issues. L. Putnam in a 2006 article[7] already linked the role of microhistory as an effective way to study the Atlantic. Picking up on all this work, this dissertation aims to be a microhistory of the South Atlantic islands in order to illustrate and test the claims and boundaries of the Atlantic Ocean's history. A second historiographical question is whether the islands' histories are part of Atlantic history or not. As it will be extensively explained in this dissertation, Saint Helena (and the South Atlantic in general) was linked deeply with the East and the Indian Ocean rather than the Atlantic. This historiographical issue was already raised by D. Armitage in his *The British Atlantic World*[8] when – as a premise – he stated that the Atlantic described in his book would have been notably the Northern and Mid-Atlantic, with reference to the relationships mainly between Britain and the West Indies, West Africa and the Thirteen Colonies.

The idea itself of Atlantic history – with its ideological implications – is strongly linked with a North and Mid-Atlantic-centric view of this Ocean, as B. Bailyn enunciated in his *Concept and Contours* of Atlantic history[9]. The South Atlantic islands are part of the South Atlantic, a region that played a decisive role in the relationships between Europe and Asia since the sixteenth century. Using Armitage's categories, this dissertation is partially a *cis*-Atlantic history because it 'seeks to define that [of specific Atlantic places] uniqueness as the result of the interaction between local particularity and a wider web of connections'[10]. This thesis sheds light on the South Atlantic as a border region between the Indian and the Atlantic oceans, and the evolutions of the South Atlantic in the early nineteenth century[11].

Expanding the concepts and the ideas of Atlantic history also to the South Atlantic is important to contextualise the role of Saint Helena's history. Saint Helena was on the border between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic world with a network of relationships that stretched from Saint Vincent in the Caribbean to Bengkulu on Sumatra. Due to this wide network, studying the microhistory of Saint Helena and

[5] J.P. Greene and P.D. Morgan (ed.), *Atlantic history : a critical appraisal* (Oxford, 2009)

[6] D. Hancock, *Oceans of wine : Madeira and the emergence of American trade and taste* (London, 2009)

[7] L. Putnam, 'To study the fragments/whole : microhistory and the Atlantic World', *Journal of Social History*, XXIX, 3 (2006), pp. 615-630

[8] D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick (ed.), *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2009)

[9] B. Bailyn, *Atlantic history : concept and contours* (London, 2005)

[10] D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick (ed.), *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 23

[11] See chapter four

its wider relationships also challenges the borders and the contours of Atlantic history: where the Atlantic world starts and the Indian ends? How the network of the English and Dutch East India Companies influenced the South Atlantic and its relationships with the nearby regions? How the British Empire exerted its hegemony between the two oceans after the Napoleonic wars? This dissertation aims to respond only partially to these huge historiographical themes, focusing its attention more on the transformation within the British Empire rather than a wider cross-border (and cross-imperial) analysis of the region.

With all that said, the main thesis I would like to demonstrate is that the South Atlantic was a maritime system with its own identity that together with the South West Indian Ocean formed in the early decades of the nineteenth century – up to the opening of the Suez Canal – a trans-oceanic region centred around the Colony of the Cape. The focus of this dissertation, however, will be on the South Atlantic leaving the Cape and the South Western Indian Ocean on the side in order not to excessively widen the scope of the research.

Why Saint Helena and the South Atlantic? What was the reason to choose such remote and small settlements to analyse these themes? Peripheral places like Saint Helena are interesting when studying these huge themes because they help to analyse how differently they influenced such remote colonies. Moreover, islands were used during the first centuries of colonialism as 'experimental places', where trying new social and economic experiments before exporting them to the mainland or to other colonies.

A theme of this dissertation is the great historiographical debate concerning the years 1760-1830 and the transformations within and outside the British Empire that led Vincent T. Harlow to define a 'first' and a 'second' British Empire[12]. The 'first' British Empire was identified with maritime rule, a predominance of small settlements, a degree of colonial self-government and with an Atlantic-centric focus. The 'second' Empire instead was more land-based with huge landmasses colonies, a more centralised colonial rule and with an Indian-centric perspective. This simplified division is now considered surpassed: forms of responsible government and the Commonwealth appeared during the 'second Empire', and the Atlantic remained important for Britain even after the American Revolution.

I agree with P.J. Marshall when he writes of the 'making and unmaking' of the British Empire[13]: there are not a first and a second Empire, but the same institution that evolved. There are lineages of continuity before and after the

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[12] V.T. Harlow, *The founding of the Second British Empire* (London, 1964)

[13] P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2007)

American Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. There are significant differences between the Empire in 1750 and 1850, but the transition did not mean a complete caesura. For example, slavery, a peculiar trait of the 'first' Empire, continued after the transition and later evolved in the form of indentured labour. The Atlantic was not completely left by the British after the American Revolution, and it even faced a new British expansion in the south. This is the 'making and unmaking' of the British Empire, a coexistence of both changes and continuities, of Empire-building and deconstruction of old paradigms. In this dissertation sometimes the terms 'first' or 'old' and 'second' or 'new' Empire have been used: they have to be interpreted in Marshall's perspective, and are used only to simplify the definition of the imperial period pre-Seven Years War and the period after the revolutionary wars. Using an expression invented by C.A. Bayly, the years between these two events are referred to in this dissertation as 'imperial transition' or as 'imperial meridian'[14].

Thus another aim of this dissertation is to analyse this theme and support Marshall's theory on 'making and unmaking' of the British Empire, demonstrating the continuities between the 'old' and the 'new' Empire and the substantial historical unity of this period. Starting from this assumption, I have focused on three sub-themes linked with the issue of the imperial transition: the so-called 'swing to the East', the evolution of the role of islands before and after the transition and the evolution of the ideas of governance and authority within and outside the Empire.

The 'swing to the East' – a concept theorised first by Harlow[15] – implies that Britain after the loss of the Thirteen Colonies gradually left the Atlantic for India, 'swinging' eastward. In this dissertation this concept will be contested, stressing the important role of the South Atlantic after the American Revolution. The role of islands in the Empire will be analysed focusing on the different role that this peculiar kind of colonies played in the different ages of British imperialism, and how they declined from a position of absolute relevance to a lesser role in the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, the theme of authority will be scrutinised connecting it with the idea of 'Global Age of Revolutions'[16] and the reactions within the Empire to this turbulent age.

In the first chapter are going to be detailed some preliminary historical and geographical overviews that will be necessary to fully understand the following argumentations. What a 'maritime system' is will be defined and compared to what historiography has debated on the subject from Braudel's *Mediterranean* onwards. This dissertation does not aim to be the *Mediterranean* of the South Atlantic, neither

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[14] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994)

[15] V.T. Harlow, *The founding of the Second British Empire* (London, 1964)

[16] D. Armitage and S. Subrahmanyam (ed.), *The age of revolutions in global context, c. 1760-1840* (Basingstoke, 2010)

in scope nor in ambition, because the Braudelian approach could not be applied to the Atlantic, as I will argue in Chapter I. The chapter will further detail a general overview over the history of the British Empire and of the South Atlantic islands.

The second chapter will focus on labour relations in the South Atlantic, focusing mostly on the evolution of slavery and servitude on Saint Helena. The chapter will consider also the role of the slave-owners and of the Chinese indentured labourers. The emigration from the island, by both black and white people, is also analysed. The organisation of labour on Ascension and Tristan will be described, focusing on the more relevant traits.

In the third chapter environment and environmental experimentations will be analysed. Again Saint Helena will be the main topic of analysis, albeit also Ascension Island will be mentioned for its important role in Darwin's research. The role and conceptualisation of islands will be analysed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is the more related to the main thesis, analysing the evolution of authority on Saint Helena from the East India Company to the Crown Governors, with a peculiar attention to the Napoleonic period. The chapter tried to identify the true feelings of the inhabitants towards the Colonial government and to contextualise Saint Helena in the recent historiographical debate concerning settler colonies. The history of the 'Republic' of Tristan will be told, and contextualised in the debate over authority in the Empire.

Sources

Studying this area of the World is not easy because documentation is scarce and archives are, in truth, spread around the Seven Seas. The ambition I had at the beginning of this dissertation to include also Ascension, Tristan and the Falklands proved to be a challenge. Primary sources on these islands are too scarce to build any significant argument and secondary literature on the subject is dated and mostly non-professional[17]. Saint Helena will play the role of the main character, and the other islands will be present but mostly in their relationships with Saint Helena. Ascension and Tristan will be analysed in some of their most peculiar aspects, whilst the Falklands did not provide any particular contribution to the dissertation.

Primary sources were consulted in London at the National Archives, at the British Library (India Office Records), at the National Maritime Museum, at the Royal Botanical Garden and at the Royal Horticultural Society. The last two archives were focused mostly on environmentalism and the botanical history of Saint

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[17] The Falklands are an exception for the period of the 1982 war which, however, was not of relevance for this thesis

Helena. Some primary sources were also consulted at the University Libraries in Oxford (Rhodes House) and Cambridge (Royal Commonwealth Society archive).

The Saint Helena archives and the Western Cape Archives in Cape Town provided further primary sources, whilst the visit to the National Archives in Mauritius proved to be unsuccessful due to the absence of a detailed catalogue and the precarious condition of the documents.

At the end of this thesis there is an appendix of pictures taken on Saint Helena during my visit there that I hope will help to better understand the peculiar traits of this island relevant to this thesis.

Chapter I - *The historical and geographical context*

There are people, Gideon used to say… who find islands somehow irresistible
LAWRENCE DURRELL[1]

In order to understand the history of the South Atlantic islands it is necessary to examine their geography and wider history. The surrounding environment and the human interactions in the area shaped the society and the development of the colonial settlements that endured on the islands. The main historiographical issues concerning maritime and insular history will be discussed, having in mind the great work of Braudel, the *Mediterranean*. The geography of the islands and of the surrounding seas will be analysed in order to better understand how the environment influenced the human presence in this remote part of the World. The historical geography of the South Atlantic will be also taken into account to understand how the Europeans saw this sea during the centuries. The evolutions of the political context in the region are analysed to stress how the different European countries had different interests and perspectives of the South Atlantic. The chapter ends with a long overview on the British Empire, its wider history and dynamics, in order to offer to the reader the chance to contextualise all the aspects of imperial and colonial history that are analysed in this dissertation.

First, a question needs an answer: was the South Atlantic Ocean a 'system' per se as the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic or the Indian Ocean?

Any historian who approaches this debate must face the long shadow casted by F. Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, as all the following historiography on the subject confronted, directly or indirectly and with praise or criticism, with the monumental book of the French historian. Braudel's interpretation is based on the fact that the Mediterranean 'can no more be separated from […] the lands surrounding it[2]': not only the coastline, but a wider region encompassing even the Low Countries must be considered part of the Mediterranean world, creating a unity of space and sea. A second point is that Braudel studied the Mediterranean in a specific temporal unity, the kingdom of Philip II of Habsburg, because he wanted to contrast the idea of the decline of the Mediterranean after the beginning of the Age of Discoveries. Thirdly, Braudel considered *Nature* a deterministic factor in shaping the history of the sea, the so-called *long dureé*, as currents and winds shaped the rhythm of the life in the Mediterranean for centuries without any change until the Industrial Revolution. As

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[1] L. Durrell, *Reflections on a marine Venus* (London, 1953), pp. 15-16

[2] F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (London, 1974), p. 17

a fourth and final point Braudel did not considered the actions of humans, and individual humans mostly, important in shaping the history of the sea.

Bearing these four core-ideas in mind, the debate whether if a Braudelian history of the Atlantic is possible can be understood better. In my opinion a strictly Braudelian approach could not work if applied to the South Atlantic. If the inland territories of the South Atlantic are included in this part of the Ocean (with the enormous colonies of Latin America and the African kingdoms on the other shore), the risk is to lose the real focus of this region that is eminently maritime and littoral. Secondly, a specific time span as the one identified by Braudel could limit the comprehension of wider processes that happened in the South Atlantic. Finally, it is my opinion that the actions of humans influenced the history and the societies of this region, as the processes of settling colonies like Saint Helena demonstrate.

P.E. Steinberg, after describing the main approaches to maritime history, proposed a new model called 'territorial political economy perspective', a constructivist theory based on the relationships between nature and society[3]. The interesting point raised by Steinberg is the view of the ocean as a construction of subordinates places where power generates a hierarchy and a social division of space and functions[4]. This approach could work applied to the South Atlantic if interpreted, for example, as T. Metcalf did in his description of India as a sub-imperial centre[5]. In the South Atlantic a colony as the Cape could play this role of sub-centre, and Saint Helena and the other colonies the role of nodal points of the system with specific functions and spaces.

D. Abulafia made an articulated answer to the Braudelian approach with his book on the Mediterranean[6]. Abulafia is against the deterministic view of nature and the scarce importance of humans in the history of the sea proper of Braudel[7]. The main difference between the two historians is that Abulafia considers only the sea and its surface, islands, littorals and ports as part of his research opposed to Braudel's 'land inclusive' approach[8]. Crucial in Abulafia's interpretation is the role of the constant flux of exchange between the societies and the civilisations of the Mediterranean in creating a unity of the sea: the diaspora of people – merchants, slaves, missionaries, soldiers, sailors, etc. – was this true unifying factor[9]. The approach used by Abulafia could work with the South Atlantic and its insular and

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[3] P.E. Steinberg, *The social construct of the Ocean* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 38
[4] *Ibid*, p. 38
[5] T. Metcalf, *Imperial connections : India in the Indian Ocean arena 1860-1920* (London, 2007)
[6] D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea : a human history of the Mediterranean* (London, 2011)
[7] *Ibid*, pp. xxviii and xxx
[8] *Ibid*, pp. xxiv
[9] *Ibid*, p. 648

littoral structure, and looking at its routes and exchanges can reveal if this part of the Ocean ever had its own unity.

A point made by Abulafia is that the control of the Mediterranean was a control of the sea routes, of islands and other outposts: for example Britain, a country with no access to the *mittle mer*, was able to assert dominance in the region thanks to her control of crucial islands and outposts (Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus after WWI)[10]. It is my belief that Britain asserted such dominance also in the South Atlantic in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries, and this aspect will be analysed later in this chapter.

In their introduction to 'Seascapes', Bentley-Bridenthal-Wigen state that European empires with their mercantilist policies created a world system of oceans channelled in fixed routes where stewardship was asserted through the control of sea routes and crucial settlements[11]. Their model can be applied to the South Atlantic, further reinforcing also the crucial role of the Cape between the two Oceans[12].

D. Abulafia's theoretical perspective is the more suitable to study the South Atlantic. Studying the relationships between the different ports of the region and of the nearby South-Western Indian Ocean could reveal if the 'Ethiopian Ocean' had been – even if for just a period – a unified maritime system.

1.1 Historical Geography of the South Atlantic

Are there one or two Atlantic Oceans? This question has several answers that depends from which perspective the Atlantic Ocean is observed. From a purely geographical perspective, the ocean is one. However, if currents and winds are taken into account, the equator marks a first separation between two different systems[13].

The perception of the ocean that the people who lived on its shores and sailed on its waters presented in this research is mostly of European or colonial origin, as expanding the analysis would have exceeded the focus of this research. From this perspective, the European representation of the Atlantic was strictly correlated to the progress of geographical explorations, the establishment of colonies in the New World and the expansion of trade with Africa and Asia. Furthermore, every

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[10] *Ibid*, p. 642

[11] J. Bentley, R. Bridenthal and K. Wigen (eds.), *Seascapes : maritime histories, littoral cultures, and transoceanic exchanges* (Honolulu, 2007), pp. 13-14

[12] K. Ward, 'Tavern of the Seas?', in [12] J. Bentley, R. Bridenthal and K. Wigen (eds.), *Seascapes : maritime histories, littoral cultures, and transoceanic exchanges* (Honolulu, 2007)

[13] Currents and winds are analysed later in this chapter

European country established its own relationship with the Atlantic due to their different involvement in the region.

For centuries the Europeans saw the Atlantic as a mysterious place. *Oceanus* was the great mass of water that surrounded the world and marked its borders. *Atlanticus* was the name of the Western Sea, since the times of Plinius. The explorations of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries expanded Europe's knowledge of the ocean, although the term 'Atlantic Ocean' was used for the northern and central Atlantic. The southern part of the ocean was called in Europe 'Ethiopian Ocean' (or Ethiopian Sea) up to at least the nineteenth century[14]. This misconception derived from the earliest charts of the World that portrayed inaccurate shapes of Africa, positioning Ethiopia almost as the southernmost point of the continent.

Inaccurate charts, however, do not justify the prolonged use of the term 'Ethiopian' up to the nineteenth century. Bartolomeu Dias discovered the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, and in the following centuries, Europeans realised that Africa was bigger than they thought. The reason of the prolonged distinction of a northern 'true' Atlantic and a southern 'Ethiopian' Atlantic is probably due to the evolutions of the European presence in the area. The triangular trade, the Caribbean and North American colonies played an important role in the early stages of European colonialism in the New World. Most of this system developed in the North Atlantic, thus making it the 'true' Atlantic. Even modern-day historiography is still strongly north-centric, despite claiming an ecumenical name of 'Atlantic history' and not of 'North Atlantic History'[15]. In recent years new research on the Atlantic world tried to widen the borders of Atlantic history also to the South Atlantic, chiefly in Elliott's work on Iberian America[16].

The recent historiographical debate highlights one of the issues of analysing the Atlantic only from a national perspective and building on it concepts on Atlantic history. The British Atlantic was different from the French Atlantic and the Dutch Atlantic. The 'philosophical stone' of modern Atlantic history has been the attempt to write a Braudelian *Mediterranean* for the Atlantic Ocean: the history of the Atlantic is too diverse from country to country and the idea of 'maritime unity' of Braudel's Mediterranean cannot be applied to the Atlantic Ocean.

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[14] For example: G. Ripley, C. Anderson Dana, *The American cyclopaedia : a popular dictionary of general knowledge* (New York, 1873)

[15] See for example: B. Baylyn, *Atlantic history : concepts and contours* (London, 2005); D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2009); J.P. Greene and P.D. Morgan, *Atlantic history : a critical appraisal* (Oxford, 2009)

[16] J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic world : Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (London, 2006); But also: J. Cañizares-Esguerra and E.R. Seeman (eds.), *The Atlantic in global history, 1500-2000* (London, 2007); I. Phaf-Rheinbergerg, *The Air of Liberty* (New York, 2008)

If the South Atlantic is analysed from this perspective, it is possible to identify at least two South Atlantics. The first one, the Iberian South Atlantic, was strictly related to Spain and Portugal. It was very similar to the North Atlantic as the Iberian powers established a triangular trade between the motherland, the African coast and the South American Colonies (Portuguese Brazil and the Viceroyalties of Rio de la Plata and Peru). The second South Atlantic was the British, French, Dutch and again Portuguese – although declining since the arrival of the British and Dutch East India Companies. This South Atlantic had a complete different structure from the Iberian South Atlantic: the ocean was only a passage for the East Indies and the South Atlantic was a place of small trade settlements, like Saint Helena, essential to protect the trade with India and China. This South Atlantic had much more in common with the South Western Indian Ocean, where European powers had only small trade settlements, rather than the North Atlantic.

It is now clear why Europeans considered the South Atlantic so different from the North, and the reason of the persistence in the use of the term 'Ethiopian'. It is not also a chance that the term 'Ethiopian' was abandoned in the mid-late nineteenth century. European colonialism and imperialism in the East evolved to direct control, and also in Africa larger colonies were established. The superpower of the nineteenth century, Great Britain, after the loss of the American colonies and the substantial decrease of the Dutch and French power after the Napoleonic Wars, focused its efforts towards India and the East[17]. The South Atlantic further rose in importance up to the opening of Suez, and was finally recognised as part of the Atlantic losing the 'Ethiopian' name.

1.2 The South Atlantic Ocean

The geographical[18] borders of the South Atlantic Ocean are roughly the equator on the north and the Antarctic Circle on the south, whilst the eastern limit is Africa and the western is South America. The distance between the two sides of the Ocean in the South is, on average, wider than the North Atlantic: the closest distance is between Pernambuco and Angola (almost 5,300 km) and the widest is between the Cape and South America (almost 6,500 km)[19]. The South Atlantic coastline is almost without islands, opposite to the North where there are many archipelagos.

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[17] P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2005)

[18] All the geographical data used on the Atlantic in this chapter are from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* online [page visited on February 10th 2015]

[19] The widest distance in the North Atlantic is 4,800 km south of Newfoundland and the closest is 2,850 km between Brazil and Liberia

The weather of the South Atlantic is fine and pleasant in the latitudes of high-pressure (between 30°-40° South) whilst is extremely stormy further South as the cold generated from Antarctica interferes with the adjacent wide open waters creating dangerous storms and difficult conditions for navigation. This condition generates also moisture and abundant clouds and fog that move northward meeting with warmer currents and winds.

The currents of the South Atlantic reflect almost the one in the North (albeit reversed due to the Coriolis Effect). The southeast winds maintain the South Equatorial Current that flows from the Cape towards Guyana and the Caribbean. The Equatorial Countercurrent instead flows from west to east, and after combining with the Canary Current becomes the Guinea Current. The last of the great currents is the Brazilian one, that flows from west to east becoming the South Atlantic Current and then moving northward as the Benguela Current. Further south the Falklands Current flows south-north along the Argentinian coast. Tides instead are the same in the whole Atlantic, as the great ocean acts as a united maritime system. The Atlantic is characterized by four tides a day (two high, two low) in a cycle of 24h and 50 minutes. The average water temperature in the South Atlantic is slightly lower than the North (at the same latitude north/south) due to the influx of colder currents such as the Falklands Current.

The winds from the west (the antitrade winds or the westerlies) are present from 40° south down to the Antarctic Circle. The anticyclone area of the South Atlantic is centred around 30° south, with winds rotating around this area in the opposite direction to that of the Northern Atlantic due to the Coriolis Effect. The main trade winds (east-west winds) come from southeast and meet the northeast trade winds in the intertropical convergence zone.

The South Atlantic presents small but substantial differences from the North, differences that influenced the human exploration and navigation of the area. The winds favoured more south-north travels rather than east-west as in the North. The South Atlantic was thus more favourable as a 'transit zone' for the fleets coming from the East and going back to Europe rather than as a zone of trade between the coastlines surrounding the ocean. Trade between Africa and South America existed (for example slaves brought from Angola to Brazil) but was not the main flow of ships in the region[20].

1.3 The islands

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[20] I. Phaf-Rheinbergerg, *The Air of Liberty* (New York, 2008)

The South Atlantic islands are limited in number compared to the North Atlantic as already stated in the previous section of this chapter. They can be divided roughly in three groups: the islands close to the South American littoral, the volcanic islands of the Atlantic Rift and the Antarctic islands.

The first group includes a dozen of small islands close to the coast of Brazil and Argentina. Due to their proximity with the American continents their life and interaction was thus limited to the relationships with the nearby coastline. These islands did not make any significant contribution to the maritime and insular history of the South Atlantic analysed in this research due to their geographical position.

The second group includes Ascension, Saint Helena and the Tristan da Cunha archipelago. This islands where unpopulated before the arrival of the Europeans, as no human ever set foot on the islands before the Portuguese navigators of the late fifteenth-early sixteenth centuries. The islands are still inhabited today and are crucial in the history of the South Atlantic as a unified maritime system.

The third group consists of the Falklands, Bouvet Island, South Georgia and South Sandwich, the Tierra del Fuego and the islands surrounding it. The latter are so close to the American continent that could be considered almost as a part of the main landmass. Most of the other Antarctic islands are uninhabited, with the exception of few scientific outposts. The only exceptions are the Falklands Islands, an archipelago of 778 islands with only a handful inhabited. Most of these islands played a marginal role in the history of the South Atlantic, albeit the Falklands become a constant cause of tension between Britain and Argentina since the occupation of 1833.

Ascension is 1,600 km from the Coast of Africa and 2,250 km from South America. Discovered in 1501 by the Portuguese navigator João da Nova, the island was never settled permanently until 1815 when the British occupied it as a precaution due to Napoleon's presence on Saint Helena. Charles Darwin described the island in 1836, during the journey of the Beagle, as a place with scarce vegetation and trees.

Tristan da Cunha was discovered in 1506 by the Portuguese navigator Tristão da Cunha. Tristan is part of a small archipelago, together with the islands of Nightingale, Gough and Inaccessible. The archipelago is close to the Antarctic Ocean and storms are frequent in the area. Shipwrecks were common, and even today landing on Tristan is possible only with good sea conditions. The settlement of Edinburgh of the Seven Seas on Tristan is the only human presence in the archipelago, with the first colonists that moved here in 1816. Tristan is the remotest

human settlement of the World, being 2,400 km from South Africa and 3,360 km from South America.

1.4 Saint Helena, the island-fortress

The geography of Saint Helena needs to be fully understood in order to analyse better its history. Saint Helena is the island with the oldest permanent human settlement of the area (1657) and even today the most populous (over 4,000 inhabitants versus 3,000 of the Falklands). Saint Helena is the second oldest remaining British colony after Bermuda.

Saint Helena is a volcanic island. Usually small volcanic islands revolve around a single volcano, whilst Saint Helena is the result of the eruptions of two volcanoes that merged, creating valleys and rifts between them. Most of the land that emerged with the two volcanoes fell under the ocean, leaving the two craters at the opposite sides of the island and close to the sea. Saint Helena is 2,000 km away from the nearest continent (Africa), 1,300 km from Ascension and 2,430 km from Tristan. The island is the second furthest human settlement in the World after Edinburgh of the Seven Seas. The island measures sixteen by eight kilometres for a total amount of 121 square kilometres. Even more than Ascension and Tristan, Saint Helena presented hundreds of endemic species of plants, bugs and birds, with a rich ecosystem and biodiversity. The human impact on the island endangered and even brought to extinction most of those species: for example, today only the Saint Helena wirebird (*Charadrius sanctaehelenae*) survives as an endemic bird species[21].

The rich endemic biodiversity of Saint Helena was due to the island's peculiar climate. The island is 15° 56' South and 5° 43' West, falling in the tropical zone. Saint Helena, however, does not present a tropical climate, as the isolation from other landmasses creates a strong influx of the sea on the weather, mitigating the warm and humid usual climate. The average temperature on the island is quite constant, from 28°-22° degrees in March to 22°-17° degrees in August with a yearly average of 24°-19° degrees. The island has an average of forty-one rainy days a year with about 113 millimetres of precipitations[22]. The island compensates these low precipitations with rich water resources and humidity generated by the 'cloud forest'. The richest ecosystem of the island is concentrated in the relative small area of Diana's Peak (Saint Helena's highest point) where a rich vegetation favours the

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[21] See picture 2 in the Appendix

[22] Weather, temperature and rain average are from the database of BBC Weather and refer to Jamestown. The rest of the island has slightly lower temperatures and higher rain amounts [page visited on February 10th 2015]

creation of moist and clouds, creating frequent showers in the interior of the island[23]. This 'cloud forest' system for increasing precipitations on islands was replicated by the British on Ascension, as it will be described later. However, in Saint Helena the 'cloud forest' was not made by men but endemic, and even in the earliest decades of colonisation of the island the inhabitants recognised the role of the 'cloud forest' in the formation of clouds and its relationships with the amount of rain[24].

The island presents very high cliffs all around its borders, with only two accessible landing points in Sandy Bay and Jamestown. The sea around the island is often strong, making the approach to the coast difficult, as many treacherous rocks surround the coastline. The trade winds from southeast made the approach to the only port of the island in Jamestown difficult, and often trade ships had pilots on board specialised in approaching Saint Helena. Jamestown is in the north part of the island, forcing the ships coming from the South to circumnavigate almost half of Saint Helena. The island thus fortified Sandy Bay (where a proper port was never built, making the landing even more difficult) and Jamestown, and mounting cannon batteries all around the perimeter of the island[25]. This created the concept of Saint Helena as an island-fortress, impregnable by the enemies unless paying a dire price in terms of men and ships. The remoteness of Saint Helena and its impregnability deeply influenced the life on the island, shaping its laws, customs and behaviours. A third aspect related to the geography of the island that influenced its life was the precarious state of Saint Helena's ecosystem, that was often put in danger by the exploitation of men.

1.5 The political context

The history of the South Atlantic in the late modern age could be divided in two distinct periods, before and after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

Before the Revolution the South Atlantic was contested between the main European powers. At first Spain and Portugal, later France, the Dutch Republic and England/Britain. One side of the South Atlantic, South America, was colonised in the early stages of European expansionism by Spain, the Dutch Republic and Portugal, although in 1654 the colony of Dutch Brazil was conquered by the Portuguese. The mid seventeenth century was a turning point in the history of the South Atlantic as Portugal and Spain started to decline as great powers and new countries emerged in the region.

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[23] See picture 3 in the Appendix
[24] See for example: Letter April 7th 1708, London, British Library, India Office Records, IOR E/3/96, ff389-94
[25] See pictures 4 and 5 in the Appendix

The trade with the East Indies was crucial for Europe and the rising powers of England, the Dutch Republic and France started to expand their position in this venture, at the expense of the Portuguese. Portugal had been the European leader in the trade with the East in the sixteenth century, however the more dynamic Dutch, French and English East India Companies quickly gained prominence during the seventeenth century.

A problem for these late-come colonial powers was where to establish trade ports to support the ships sailing to and from Asia. The American coast was in the hands of the Iberian powers, furthermore the winds were not favourable in travelling towards South America during the return journey from Asia. The African coast, especially the one of the Gulf of Guinea, was a harsh place were European settlements struggled to be established and often survived few years. For this reason, a rush to occupy the few hospitable lands started between the French, the Dutch and the English: the Dutch established the Cape Colony in 1653 and Mauritius in 1638, in 1657 the English settled Saint Helena, and the French settled Réunion in 1649. The French later acquired Mauritius in 1715 from the Dutch. The East India trading companies of the three countries established all these settlements, and they served as stopovers for their fleets in the journeys back from India and China. The three countries fought an endless number of naval battles to establish supremacy in the area, although a substantial balance of power continued for the whole eighteenth century.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars changed everything. The complete defeat of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and the decline of the Dutch power due to the European wars led to a British domination of the region. The Cape became a British colony in 1814, Mauritius in 1810, Ascension and Tristan in 1815-16. Furthermore, the Iberian empires collapsed, and new countries emerged in Latin America. The British extended their informal influence also on those new-born countries[26]. Britain asserted its position as the dominant power in the Indian subcontinent.

The South Atlantic and the nearby South-Western Indian Ocean became, for a time, British ponds. When the other powers recovered from the wars, they started to contest this predominance, albeit from a position of disadvantage. Portugal continued to defy the British ban on slave trade, the French and the Dutch tried to reassert their position in Indonesia and Indochina. The colonisation of Africa opened new scenarios, for example with the arrival of the Germans in Tanganyika.

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[26] P.J. Cain P.J., A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism : 1688-2000* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 243-271

This dramatic change in the political geography of the South Atlantic deeply influenced the lives and the fates of the colonies in the region, shifting from a multipolar scenario to a unipolar one.

1.6 The Empire

The origins of the British Empire can go backwards several centuries. It might even be argued that the beginning of English colonialism was 1169 when Henry II started to meddle in the internal politics of Ireland and sent an army beginning the occupation of the Emerald island. This claim is obviously a provocation, as the patterns of colonialism and imperialism were proper of the modern age and not of medieval England. However, the beginnings of the Empire were truly very close to England, in Ireland and partially in Scotland were patterns of colonialism developed in the early to middle modern age. The English and later British Crown considered the Gaelic-speaking population of the Highlands and the Irish like the native Americans, populations that needed to be civilised and educated[27]. Both in Ireland and Scotland attempts were made to anglicise the local nobility. In Scotland the attempts were focused on dismantling the clanship of the Highlands' lords, eradicating ancient customs and traditions via the imposition of statutes[28]. In Ireland a powerful tool of Anglicisation was the imposition of the English law to settle disputes between noble families[29]. In both Ireland and Scotland the English manoeuvred the local families stirring old rivalries and favouring the ascension of more loyal nobles over others.

However, when did the English Kingdom became the British Empire? The English Kings always laid claims to ruling an 'empire' to emphasise their isolation and independence from the continent. The Reformation and the Act of Supremacy of Henry VIII marked a further step in this direction, however it was not until James VI and I unified the Crowns of England and Scotland that the term 'British' was used, in an attempt to reunite all of his subjects under the almost-mythical idea of 'Britain', 'Britannia' or 'Great Britain'. The first colonial attempt of this new 'British' entity was recorded in Ulster where English and Scottish protestant nobles established joint plantations and created a settler society[30]. Again, as stated at the beginning of this section, Ireland was a laboratory of Empire and where the British Empire asserted first its colonial policies. Lands were expropriated from the natives

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[27] A. Hadfield, J. McVeagh (eds.), *Strangers to that land : British perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine* (Buckinghamshire, 1994)

[28] G. Donaldson (ed.), *Scottish Historical Documents* (Castle Douglas, 1998)

[29] C. Brady, *The Chief Governors : The rise and fall of Reform Government in Tudor Ireland* (Cambridge, 1994)

[30] N. Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580-1650* (Oxford, 2001).

to be reallocated to 'foreign' settlers of English and Scottish origins and, more important, of Protestant faith.

Overseas expansion started later for Britain. The British, like the French and the Dutch, were latecomers in the colonial race as the Iberian powers had already colonised most of the New World. For most of the sixteenth century the main focus of English explorers and sailors was privateering and depredating the rich Spanish and Portuguese colonial fleets. The Crown, following the example of the Iberian kings, hired navigators and explorers. The most notable of those explorers was the Italian John Cabot that followed the old Viking route to the New World discovering Newfoundland. The first attempts of colonisation of the New World proved to be unsuccessful, with the double attempt made by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1585 and 1587 to establish a colony on Roanoke Island.

The first success in colonising America began in 1606 when the Virginia Company was given a charter that allowed them to colonise territories north of Spanish Florida. In 1607 the Company sent three ships that arrived in Chesapeake Bay and established the first settlement of Jamestown. The Virginia colony struggled to exist for at least thirty years, due to difficult relationships with the natives, famine and epidemics. In 1633 Williamsburg was founded and in 1644 the colony was organised in at least ten counties. By the end of the century about 114,500 settlers lived in the region[31].

The other main colonial enterprise in North America was the colonisation of New England. John Smith explored the coast of this territory and described it in his book 'A description of New England' in 1616. The colonies that were established in New England during the seventeenth century, reaching a population of 145,900 by the end of the century[32], played a decisive role in defining the British Empire. New England resembled the motherland for many aspects: its landscapes, its urbanisation and its economy resembled England's. However, seeds of divergence were planted since the inception, with the arrival of the pilgrims with the Mayflower. The Puritan religion was the first and most important difference with Britain. The abundance of land allowed the settlers of New England to enjoy a higher standard of living than the average Englishman. Furthermore, the Thirteen Colonies had to relate with the native Indians, an occurrence that shaped their mentality and the one of the future United States of America.

The relationship with the natives was crucial in the history of New England. The dramatic drop in the Indian population since the seventeenth century – the native population in the Thirteen Colonies region dropped from 562,100 in 1500 to

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[31] J.J. McCusker, R.R. Menard, *Economy of British America* (Chapel Hill N.C., 1985), pp 103, 136, 173, 203
[32] *Ibidem*

254,485 in 1700 – allowed and eased the rapid expansion of the colonies. Starting from Massachusetts the Colonies began an effort to evangelise the Indians and convert them in order to civilise them. The last stand of the Indians in New England happened in 1675 with the so-called King Philip's war that saw attacks on half of the colonial cities. Colonial soldiers were defeated, however in 1676 they managed to starve the rebels and gained the support of the Mohawks, an Iroquois tribe[33]. The Colonies realised that they were able to defeat the Indians without any support from the motherland, starting a period of growing insubordination towards the central government.

Britain started to consider also how to exploit the rising trade to and from Asia. In 1600 the Crown issued a charter that established the East India Company granting them the monopoly of trade in the region between the Cape of Good Hope and the Straits of Magellan. The first attempts of the Company in the Spice Islands saw the fierce competition of the Dutch, culminated in the 'massacre of Amboina' in 1623. This event was not the end of the British presence in the area, for example the Bantam factory continued its operation for more than sixty years. The Company, however, never truly asserted itself as a stable and credible entity until the end of the Civil War in the 1660s, when the government was finally able to sustain its effort in a more efficient way. It was the Lord Protector Cromwell that in 1657 granted Saint Helena to the EIC in order to improve their status in the trade with the East.

Even if Amboina did not mean a shift from the Spice Islands to India for the EIC, it was from the 1620s that the EIC started to establish a strong presence in the subcontinent. The factory in Surat was established in 1613, whilst Madras was established in 1644. In 1661 Bombay changed hands from Portugal to Britain due to Charles II's royal marriage. Calcutta fell under the EIC hegemony in 1690, with the construction of Fort William in 1696. At the closure of the seventeenth century the three main Indian Presidencies of the EIC were established. The British were able to establish a firm presence in India not only because they were able to contrast efficiently the Portuguese, but also because they established good relationships with the hegemonic power of the region, the Mughal Empire. It was the EIC that allowed the European to discover more about the Mughals, establishing embassies and long-term relationships since 1609 when William Hawkins was received by the Emperor as an official emissary of the King[34]. The hostilities with the Portuguese ended in 1635 after the British seized their outpost in Hormuz.

The political landscape changed in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Mughals started to lose their grip on the west of India. The EIC

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[33] R. Bourne, *The Red King's rebellion : racial politics in New England* (New York, 1990)

[34] J.F. Richards, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 104-105

was able to exploit both the weaknesses and the strength of the Mughals using their protection when needed and gaining more influence when the Empire was in crisis. Bombay, Madras and Calcutta prospered in this second phase, and they were different from Surat because they were British settlements with an Indian population, whilst Surat was an Indian settlement – the rulers of the city were appointed by the Mughals – with British merchants.

The British started their colonisation of the Caribbean in 1609-1612 with the first settlement of Bermuda. They later moved to colonise the Lesser Antilles, establishing British rule over St. Kitts, Barbados, Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat in the years 1624-1632. They later colonised the Bahamas in 1648. In 1664 Jamaica was colonised not only because it was much larger than the Antilles, but also because it was strategic in counterbalancing the Spanish presence in the region. The West Indies, as those colonies were collectively called, were extremely different from New England. On these islands the population was overwhelmingly composed by black slaves and a minority of white, free, planters. The economy was based on a plantation system based on the cultivation and transformation of the sugar cane. The West Indies were often part of wars for most of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This state of war and the presence of a huge black population shaped the mentality of the white planters, with a constant increase in defence spending and militarisation. *Maroonage* was a constant threat for the planters, and fear of a slave revolts or runaways was their greatest concern[35]. The West Indies faced a strong competition on the sugar market, and it was only in 1733 with the Molasses Act that imposed a de facto monopoly of West Indian sugar in the Empire that they gained more economic stability. In the second half of the eighteenth century the West Indies became the World's leading sugar producer, surpassing the Spanish. The American Revolution and later the French Revolution proved the precarious safety of the West Indies. Britain invested men and resources in several attempts to expand its presence in the region, although most of them were ineffective. Britain lost interest in expanding its territorial domains, however the West Indies continued to grow as lead exporters to the motherland. Sugar imports in Britain grew from 41,425 tons in 1748 to 164,859 in 1815[36]. The presence of slaves increased accordingly in order to improve the production output, from 255,400 in 1748 to 743,100 in 1815[37].

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[35] M. Craton, *Testing the chains : Resistance to slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982)
[36] N. Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (London, 1950), pp. 193-198
[37] B.W. Higman, *Slave population of the British Caribbean 1807-1834* (Baltimore, 1984), p. 77

During the eighteenth century Britain was the first European power that changed the paradigm of colonialism in Asia. For centuries Europeans had not been hegemonic in Asia, as the great eastern Empires were too powerful to be subjugated like the ones in the Americas. During the first half of the eighteenth century Britain broke this pattern and established by 1765 a strong and vast territorial dominion in India. The East India Company was on the verge of success, with its trade and revenue constantly growing during the eighteenth century and its operations concentrated mostly in India. The Company kept its peaceful policy up to the half of the century, when political events changed the landscape and war began to be a necessary part of the business. The rivalry and fighting with France started in 1744 and was concluded in 1761 with an overwhelming British victory that effectively established a vast area in India as a protectorate of the EIC. Robert Clive, the man responsible for most of those military successes, fought against the Mughals until 1765 when the Emperor recognised the full rule of Britain over Bengal. In 1759 the British seized also full control of the Mughal port of Surat. The decline of the Mughal Empire is a fact, however in some regions (such as Bengal) local rulers gained *de facto* independence from the Emperor and established stable and working states. In the west the situation was more complex, with a more general confusion and spread warfare between warlords. The British expansion in India in this phase was not coordinated by the Imperial centre, as generals were sent to India without a precise strategy or direction, only with the order to follow the decisions of the EIC[38]. The triumphs managed against powerful Indian states boosted the rapacity and the greed of the EIC officers, that started to develop more aggressive and expansionistic projects. Furthermore, the establishment of a large base tax in Bengal allowed to sustain a larger trade. This trade was extremely valuable for Britain, and it became clear to the Imperial government that the establishment of a solid territorial dominion was crucial for the interests of the EIC. India was becoming crucial for the Empire, and the British started to acknowledge this[39].

The British in India managed to keep the Hindu and Islamic traditions intact, and this process allowed them to be seen as the continuation of the Mughal domain gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the Indians. They gained legitimacy also because they defeated the other power that was doing a usurpation of the Mughals, the Marathas. The British and the Marathas influenced the Emperor for decades, up until 1803 when the British occupied Delhi and gained permanent control over the Emperor.

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[38] G.J. Bryant, *The East India Company and its army* (London, 1975)

[39] H. Bowen, *Revenue and reform : The Indian problem in British politics* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 22-23

The growing responsibilities of ruling a vast Empire in India made the central government aware that the East India Company might had not been the most suitable way of ruling such vast territories. In 1772 a collapse in the Company's finances and the increasing number of reports of mismanagement by Company officers sparkled interest in the Parliament that started to inquire more in the affairs of the EIC. Lord North attempted to suggest reform to the Company's Board, but he faced strong opposition both in the EIC and in the Commons. North decided to begin a process that would eventually led the full takeover of the Indian dominions by the Crown, starting imposing the appointment of judges from the Crown in the Bengal's Supreme Court. North's Regulating Act of 1773 put the EIC under stricter ministerial supervision. The outbreak of the American Revolution halted the process, however after the independence of the United States politicians recognised the importance that India now had in the new Empire. William Pitt in 1784 decided to implement new measures to regulate the Company. The India Act of 1784 established a Commission that was charged with full control over all of the Company's despatches. The powers of the Governor-General were enhanced, and offensive wars were prohibited. Furthermore, the power of the Company's shareholders was diminished.

In 1813 the process was completed with the Charter Act. The Act not only reduced and weakened the EIC trade monopoly, allowing space on EIC ships for private-owned goods, but also *de facto* established the full control of the Crown over the Indian dominions. The EIC still retained power and influence, however an era of British rule in India was coming to a close and another was beginning.

The Pacific was a region barely touched by colonialism still during the eighteenth century. The Ocean was so vast and the islands so scattered that ships were not well equipped to undertake a comprehensive exploration of Oceania. For the first time Britain was not a late comer, and James Cook was indeed a pioneer of exploration in the Pacific. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Pacific was, to Britain, just the waters off South America, a place where Britain's privateers could predate the Spanish ships. Still up to the 1730s the Pacific was still mostly a place for British pirates, rather than explorers and settlers, also due to the so called 'South Sea Bubble'. After 1763 many in Britain agreed that the colonisation of Australia would tip the balance of colonial supremacy in their favour, breaking the long stalemate with France. Many scientific expeditions were sent to the Pacific to better explore and chart the seas and the islands. In 1768-1771 Cook explored and claimed for Britain many islands, including New Zealand and East Australia. He undertook two more voyages, dying killed by Hawaiians in 1779 during his quest for the North-Western passage. Colonisation started soon after Cook's voyages, with the First Fleet reaching Australia with 733 settlers in 1788. Whalers were also

quick in reaching the Southern Seas, thanks also to the Act for 'The Encouragement of the Southern Whale Fishery' in 1786. Several attempt were made to increase the British presence also in the South Atlantic, but Spain managed to fend all of them off. The Australian colony faced difficulties, however it endured and in 1792 there were 2,500 colonists[40]. In 1814 the term 'Australia' was first used, and finally adopted officially by the Colony in 1817[41]. The exploration of the Pacific was also a further exploration of America, with the voyage of George Vancouver that discovered and claimed land of today-western Canada.

The British colonies in North America in the first half of the eighteenth century faced a period of prosperity. If at the end of the seventeenth century Indian raiders, French pirates and lacklustre infrastructures were the norm, less than fifty years later the society and economy of the Colonies were prosperous, stable and bourgeois. The end of the Glorious Revolution in 1688 placated the Colonies, with Britain becoming again a paramount of Protestantism and with the beginning of the marginalisation of Catholics also in North America. This period also laid the conditions for the American Revolution, as the subsequent wars of the League of Augsburg and of the Spanish and Austrian Succession (spanning from 1689 to 1748) exacted a heavy toll from the Colonies both in term of manpower and resources. The wars did not affect the Colonies *per se*, and indeed all those European wars increased the number of immigrants to the Colonies. The population of British North America rose from 210,00 in 1690 to 1,200,000 in 1750[42]. Slaves and immigrants from England and other parts of Europe (mostly Germany and the Netherlands) made another important source of new inhabitants. To accommodate all this population, the need for new lands was constantly increasing, mostly at the expenses of the natives.

Politics in the Colonies resembled the British one, with legislative bodies careful to serve the needs of their white Protestant electorate and a Governor that found loyalty in a King beyond the Ocean. This caused bitter political rivalry and feuds in the Colonies. The necessity of wars, instead of strengthening the executive branch of the government, gave more power to the Colonial Assemblies. War was a constant in the period 1748-1763, and even after a great victory against France, North America would soon go back to fight and this time peace would not come back until 1783. After 1748 settlers continued to defy the limits of the Colonies, crossing into French, Indian and Spanish territory. Tensions mounted and war occurred, and in the end the British Colonies covered the whole eastern seaboard

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[40] A. Frost, ' Australia: The emergence of a Continent' in G. Williams and A. Frost (Eds.), *Terra Australis to Australia* (Melbourne, 1988)
[41] *Ibidem*, pp. 209-238
[42] J.J. McCusker, R.R. Menard, *Economy of British America*, p. 136

from Nova Scotia to Florida. This new lands required new troops in order to be protected, and thus the Colonies had to pay for them. The Imperial government also enforced a stricter ban to the expansion of the colonies beyond the Appalachian Mountains and imposed new taxes. In 1766 the government had to make concessions to the Colonies, and again in 1770. In 1773 a dispute on taxation on tea sparkled protests leading in 1774 to the constitution of the Continental Congress. In 1776 with the Declaration of Independence and further later with the Articles of Confederation a new country was born, the United States of America. Over 100,000 loyalists fled the USA for the Northern Territories and the British Empire lost its most important Colony and the most similar to Britain on many aspects.

However, the loss of the United States did not mean the end of the British Empire in North America. The Seven Years War expanded the Northern Territories, integrating New France as the province of Quebec. This colony was less populated than the Thirteen Colonies, and the economy relied on fish (Newfoundland) and furs (Quebec). The British tried to anglicise Quebec, although their attempts were unsuccessful. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 was decisive in the success of British North America. The immigration of loyalist coming from the south and the necessity for the government to treat well what was left of their North American Empire allowed a rapid growth of the Colony. In 1791 Quebec was divided in two: English-speaking Upper Canada and French-speaking Lower Canada. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were the other two North American British Colonies. The political tensions in North America led the US to issue an embargo on Britain in 1807, forcing the West Indies to trade with Canada instead with the United States. This tensions led to the 1812 war between Britain and its former Colony. The main effect of the War was the constitution of the Dominion of Canada, uniting all the remaining British North American colonies. With a more stable situation on the East, Canada begun exploring and colonising the Western part of the continent, thanks also to the Hudson's Bay Company. Canada in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth centuries was never enough rich, populous and ambitious to seek independence (in contrast with the Thirteen Colonies), remaining thus loyal to the Empire.

With the loss of the Thirteen Colonies and the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain began a new period of expansion in India. The Madratha Confederacy was defeated in 1818, marking the definitive predominance of Britain as India's strongest player. Sindh was subjugated in 1843 and Punjab in 1849. The government had to sustain a standing army of over 235,000 men composed both by Europeans

and Indians[43]. Indian families found that serving in the Company's Army was useful to get privileges, and local nobles that supported the Army were in turn supported by the British in their local issues. The *de facto* subjugation of the subcontinent created expectation in Britain that trade with India would increase greatly. The government was disappointed, as the trade income did not raise during the 1830s. The Company was thus further weakened with the new Charter Act of 1833. The most immediate effects of this wider British rule in India were a despotic and militaristic rule of the colony, an internal Indian economic depression and the culling of the Indian ruling class from any position of power. This led India towards searching traditional values and going 'backwards', favouring a 'peasantisation' of the lower classes. A part of the gentry was instead employed in the Imperial bureaucracy improving its status. This stagnating Company-State proved its inefficiency during the Afghan wars (1838-1842). New public servants, more trained, and new ways of communicating with Britain (steam power and telegraph) allowed a more efficient rule, less despotic. The economy started to recover and the Company tried to 'Westernise' the State and military machine. This led to the Mutiny of 1857 that marked the end of the Company's rule in India. Both the Orientalist and the Westernising factions in India continued to battle, however the Indian gentry employed by the Company began to form a political consciousness of independence.

Since 1858 India was ruled by the Crown and since 1876 the Kings and Queens of Britain were also Emperors of India. The colony was governed by a Governor and a Council appointed by co-optation and mostly independent from the Parliament. After the Mutiny the Indian Army was reorganised in a remarkable force, that played an important role in many British wars and in the two World Wars. The Liberal governments of the late nineteenth century managed to pass many progressive reforms in India, including self-elected local governments. In 1914 the Raj was still a despotic regime, however the local Indian elite was now a force to be reckoned with in the administration of the Subcontinent.

During the nineteenth century Britain started to expand its Imperial influence also to other parts of Asia. Thanks to the Opium War of 1840-42 the great Chinese Empire was finally open to British and Western traders. China was never a colony of any European state, however the contact with the West was essential in the construction of the modern nation-state. The 'concessions' given to foreign powers were of little strategic relevance, and Britain never truly exploited any of them (Kiukiang and Tientsin). On the other hand, the enclave at Shanghai was more relevant for the British trading interests in the East. Britain was able to impose to

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[43] D.M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon : Colonial armies and the garrison state in India* (London, 1995)

China the so-called Unequal Treaties creating a *de facto* informal colonial rule on China. The British diplomats in China had great power, and the use of military force was often used to enforce the Treaties. Hong Kong, conquered in 1842, was used more as a port to connect with South East Asia rather than extending influence in China.

The British presence in South East Asia declined during the eighteenth century, as settlements were abandoned due to the strong Dutch hegemony in the area. After the Seven Years War the British tried to expand east of Bengal, facing some failures. Finally, in 1786 they acquired the port of Penang. During the Napoleonic Wars the Dutch passed all their colonial possessions to the British in 1795, albeit most of them were returned after the Wars. In 1819 Singapore was conquered, sparking a rivalry with the Netherlands. In 1824 the Anglo-Dutch treaty divided the region in two separate spheres of influence that allowed further colonisation of the region. In 1826 Penang, Malacca and Singapore were incorporated into the Straits Settlements, under the Bengal Presidency. This was a form of sub-imperial colonialism, as it will be explained later in the dissertation, with India operating as a sub-imperial centre.

The First Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-1826 set the stage for further British penetration in Indochina. In 1852 the Second Anglo-Burmese war saw the defeat of Burma, albeit Burma became a province of the Raj only after a third war. In 1874 a series of treaties *de facto* established the British rule over Malaya, whilst in 1888 Sarawak was put under a stricter control from the central government, together with Brunei and Sulu. The stipulation of the Entente with France in the early twentieth century eased the political tensions in Indochina.

In the Americas during the nineteenth century Britain continued the development of the Canadian colony. Manitoba was established in 1870, British Columbia in 1871, Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905. Despite fertile land was scarce in Canada, most of the population lived in rural settlements, due to the late development of other industries. Still in the 1840s Canada had little appeal in Britain as a destination for emigrants[44]. The idea of a possible annexation of Canada to the United States remained during the whole nineteenth century. There were border raids in Upper Canada in the 1830s, and in British Columbia attempts were made to favour annexation in the fashion of what happened in Texas. Instability in the Red River in 1869-1870 was another event that sparkled the possibility of annexation. However, only in 1849 a Manifesto was issued petitioning the annexation of Canada to the United States, although without much popular support. The US Constitution of 1787 did not contain any provision for the accession

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[44] J.K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton First Lord Stanmore* (Toronto, 1964), p.6

of Canada to the Union, and a bill to favour the annexation of the Canadian Provinces did not make it through Congress in 1866. Canada thus developed a different 'British North American' identity rather than their southern neighbours. Canada proved to be one of the most loyal dominions when World War I erupted, immediately siding with Britain and sending a great contingent to fight.

In the nineteenth century the West Indies were a very diverse set of colonies. The oldest ones had produced sugar for two hundred years, whilst the newest were just implementing the process of transformation of the sugar cane. The oldest colonies had elected assemblies and were granted liberties, newest colonies were Crown Colonies directly managed from London. Most of the Caribbean islands became Crown Colonies during the nineteenth century due to the evolutions in the society of the islands. The free black had grown in numbers and importance in the societies of the West Indies, especially in the cities. The fight against slavery was harsh in the West Indies as the economy of the colonies relied heavily on slavery, as the process of production of sugar was a very demanding occupation ill-suited for free men. The Anti-Slavery movement thus was particularly strong in the Caribbean. Several slave rebellions, most notably in Demerara and Jamaica, made the government realise that the situation could not be tolerated, and on July 31st 1834 all the slaves in the West Indies were freed, albeit they had to remain in service of their masters as paid apprentices for a period of four-to-six years. Free blacks entered some of the colonial assemblies as representatives and opposed the party of the planters. The planter thus had to focus on other forms of cheap workforce, importing indentured labourers from India and China since the 1830s. To better manage the colonies the government transformed some of them in Crown Colonies, the most important was Jamaica, losing the old elected assemblies.

In the Americas the British extended their influence also on South America. South America never became a British colony but the Empire extended its political and economic influence over the former Iberian colonies. Cain and Hopkins[45] argued that the 'gentlemanly capitalism' of the City created an economic system that put some countries, including the South American ones, into the sphere of influence of the Empire. Historians argue whether informal imperialism is truly a form of colonialism or not. Britain invaded South America with its own goods and investments as soon Spanish mercantilism collapsed together with its own colonial Empire. Britain signed a series of treaties, however they did not succeed in every country. Failures happened in countries where political instability and internal strife were excessive. In Argentina, Chile and Brazil, with more stable governments, Britain was able to exert a stronger influence.

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[45] P.J. Cain, A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (Oxford, 2001)

The nineteenth century saw the beginning of the establishment of a strong British presence in Africa. The continent up to that period had been scarcely colonised by the Europeans due to harsh living conditions, diseases, climate and hostile populations. Until the nineteenth century Europeans simply organised small trade settlements along the coast, used mostly for the management of the slave trade. In 1795 the British seized control of the Colony of the Cape from the Dutch for strategic interest. The Cape was a rich and promising land, essential in controlling the trade to and from Asia. The British had to compete with the Dutch for two hundred years using only the island of Saint Helena. The conquest of the Cape allowed to secure British interests in the South Atlantic and in the trade with the East. The Cape in 1795 had a population of 20,000 Dutch-speaking colonists, 25,000 black slaves and 15,000 Khoikhoi, the indigenous population of the region[46]. Britain started to support the expansion of the Colony, offering military aid to the settlers in their struggle against the local populations for the control of the scarce fertile lands. In 1811 the British already fought against the Xhosa for the control of the land of Zuurveld. The British used Afrikaneers as public servants in the colony, and most of them Anglicised. However, it was not until 1820 that a massive English immigration began. The British began to change the administration of the Colony to their needs, integrating it into the Imperial system. The most significant change was the full abolition of slavery in 1834 and the suppression of the laws discriminating the Khoikhoi. The British settlers lived in the cities and created a bourgeois society with strong links with the Empire. The Afrikaners remained mostly rural, and the two groups did not intermarry or merge. At the end of the nineteenth century the Afrikaners were still the majority of the white population. The Afrikaners did not accept the British rule and the reforms adopted by the new administration. Thus between 1834-1840 thousands of Afrikaners moved to the interior, during the so-called Great Trek. They managed to establish two independent Republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic of Transvaal in 1852 and 1854. Britain feared that the Boer expansion in the interior, with their seizing of land from the natives, would had impacted also the Cape Colony. The discovery of diamonds in 1867 near the border between Orange and the Cape started to cause the first attritions. The discovery of gold made Transvaal the biggest gold producer in the World by the end of the nineteenth century.

Cecil Rhodes was a centric figure in defining the fate of Southern Africa. He became rich thanks to diamonds, and in 1889 he was granted a charter to colonise the region of Limpopo. He established the colony of Southern Rhodesia, that however proved to be poor of gold, making Transvaal even more valuable to Britain

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[46] R. Elphick, H. Giliomee, *The Shaping of South African Society* (Cape Town 1979), p. 360

to establish a united and prosperous South Africa. Thus tension mounted and in 1899 war erupted and lasted until 1902. Albeit Orange and Transvaal were fully annexed by the end of 1900, guerrilla endured for at least two more years, resulting in an expensive and bloody affair for the Empire. The Afrikaners in 1902 accepted peace in exchange of promises of self-government and that the African population disfranchisement from the vote would be decided by the newly elected colonial government of South Africa. In 1909 the Union of South Africa was created as a self-governing Dominion of the Empire, joining Canada and Australia. However, the Union was dominated by the Boer white minority and racial segregation and racism lasted until 1994.

If South Africa was the richest and most important British Colony in Africa, the Empire expanded also in other regions of the continent. These other colonies were never profitable for the Empire, as South Africa and later Egypt accounted for more than eighty percent of British trade in Africa during the nineteenth century[47]. In East Africa the British tried to exert influence over the Sultan of Zanzibar, that had controlled the trade along the coast for centuries. In West Africa starting from the enclaves of Lagos and Sierra Leone the British had to compete with the French for the control of the local resources. Berlin's conference in 1884 helped to define the spheres of influence of the Great Powers in Africa, and paved the way for more direct control. The British established a Niger Company in West Africa and a Company in the East to carry out the process of colonisation. In the East the British established a protectorate over the sultanate of Zanzibar and established a presence in Somaliland. In the West the region of Niger and Lagos were expanded as a British-ruled area.

Egypt was occupied by the British in 1882. During the first half of the nineteenth century Egypt saw an influx of Europeans, both in terms of people and capitals. The administration of subsequent Egyptian rulers led the country to disaster, especially under the rule of Khedive Ismail (1863-1879). The county failed to industrialise and the construction of the Suez Canal caused financial instability. The country declared bankruptcy in 1875, and Egypt's finances were put under European administration. The Ottoman Sultan removed Ismail, however his successor was even weaker and subject to European control. In 1881 part of the Army rebelled, in order to free Egypt from foreign rule. This brought the British to extend direct rule over Egypt in 1882 to protect the Suez Canal and other economic interests. In 1880 Sudan rebelled and Egypt was unable to recapture it. It was done only in 1899 under a joint British-Egyptian administration, were the British had all the real power. The kings of Egypt remained formally in power but they had no real

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[47] *Statistical abstracts for the United Kingdom* (London, 1903)

say in the government. The Ottoman Empire had to forfeit its suzerainty over Egypt as the Turks needed British support against the Russians. The British rule in Egypt was harsh, and a nationalist movement for independence immediately began, reinforced also by events like the retribution for the Dinshawai incident of 1906.

Australia had an impressive growth during the nineteenth century. If in 1815 the Colony was made essentially by small coastal outposts, in the 1860s the continent was colonised and in 1901 Australia became a federal Dominion of the Empire with an autonomous government and an efficient internal State. The expansion of the colony, like in America, happened at the expenses of the Aboriginal population. At the beginning of the century the Aboriginal population was about 500,000 and the white population no more than 15,000. In 1861 the whites were 1,000,000 whilst the Aboriginal 250,000. In 1911 there were 4,5 million white Australians versus 100,000 surviving Aboriginal[48]. The economy of Australia relied mostly on agriculture and cattle, as the settlers expanded into the interior. Mining was the main industry for the whole nineteenth century. Australia established a sub-imperial system, acting as a subordinate colonial power of Britain. The islands of Oceania, Fiji, Salomon, etc. were occupied and exploited by the Australian colony. Fiji provided land for the production of cotton, whilst other island provided cheap indigenous workforce for sugar plantations. The Imperial government intervened in 1872 with the Pacific Islanders Protection Act. In the 1870s and 1880s Britain asserted direct control over the islands, whether in the form of direct rule or protectorate. New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon were the first to be ruled in such way.

After several voyages and explorations, in 1840 New Zealand was finally annexed by Britain and managed with direct rule. During the first half of the century, Britain only had small settlements on the islands and they faced strong opposition from the local Maoris. A pivotal point in the history of New Zealand was the Treaty of Waitangi signed by Britain ad hundreds of Maori chiefs. This document created New Zealand as a nation with two identities, Maori and British. The Treaty was not enforced fairly for the Maoris, and since the 1840s they were deprived of some rights and some land. However, they were still the majority of the population and had a strong military position. At the time of the Treaty there were 2,000 Europeans and 90,000 Maoris[49]. In 1896 there were 701,000 Europeans and 42,000 Maori[50]. New Zealand thus followed the same colonialist path of North America and Australia, with the marginalisation and extermination of the indigenous inhabitants. Like Australia, also New Zealand had sub-imperial ambitions. They repeatedly asked to the Imperial Government to annex the nearby

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[48] N. Butlin, *Our original aggression* (Sidney, 1983)

[49] I. Pool, *Te Iwi Maori : A New Zealand population past, present and projected* (Aukland, 1991), p. 55

[50] *Ibidem*

islands and archipelagos. The Government finally ceded to their requests in 1888 establishing a protectorate over Cook Islands, and in 1899 over Samoa.

The British Empire entered the twentieth century at his apex, reaching his greatest extent in the years following World War I. The Balfour Declaration of 1926 stated that Britain and her Dominions were 'equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations'. Following this declaration, the Statue of Westminster in 1931 established formally the Commonwealth. The Empire thus became the Empire-Commonwealth as part of the colonies were still ruled directly by the government. The Second World War marked the end of the Empire. Britain was too weak economically to sustain the Empire, as more and more nationalistic movements were emerging in many colonies. The independence of India in 1948 marked the most significant step in this direction. In less than two decades what had been 'gained by so many generations of toil, administration and sacrifice', using Churchill's words[51], disappeared and many countries gained their independence. Today the remnants of the Empire are the fourteen 'British Overseas Territories': Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Antartic Territory, the British Indian Ocean Territory, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Falklands Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands, the islands of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, the islands of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. They cover just 17,684.5 square kilometres and have a combined population of about 250,000. Saint Helena and the South Atlantic islands are one of these imperial remnants, and their history explains why today they are still a colony.

1.7 The history of the islands

In order to fully understand what it will be discussed in the next chapters, it can be useful to make a brief overview of the South Atlantic islands' individual history.

Ascension Island was discovered for the first time in 1501 by the Portuguese João da Nova and called *Ilha de Nossa Senhora da Conceição*. Another Portuguese, Alfonso de Albuquerque re-discovered the island in 1503, calling it *Ilha de Ascensão*

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[51] Cabinet minutes, 19th Dec. 1946, London, National Archives, CAB 128/6

(Isle of Ascension) because the discovery happened on Ascension Day. The island was barren and dry, thus was not permanently occupied by neither the Portuguese nor other European countries. Water was discovered on the island for the first time in 1701 when the HMS Roebuk sank close to Ascension. The men of the crew survived for two months, having discovered the Breakneck Valley water spring. During the eighteenth century Ascension was again visited by vessels but never permanently settled. In 1815 the Crown occupied the island in order to better protect Saint Helena and avoid an escape of Napoleon Bonaparte from that island. The island was under the administration of the Royal Navy, that rebranded the island 'RMS Ascension'. Ascension became a 'stone frigate': a stone frigate was a land establishment used by the Navy for training or accommodation that originally were hosted on old real floating decommissioned vessels. On a 'stone frigate' the rules of living and the discipline were the same enforced on a real ship, and thus were considered efficient by the Navy as military installations. The West African Squadron, employed in the fight against slave trade, stationed on Ascension in the 1820s and 1830s. In 1836 Charles Darwin visited Ascension and made observations on the island, followed in 1843 by Joseph Hooker[52]. By the 1870s the efforts of many botanists made the island flourish, creating a great forest and a more suitable environment for living. In 1899 Ascension was reached by telegraph, being a crucial point in the line between South Africa and Britain. The island's main purpose, however, always remained military. During and after World War II the military base in Ascension had been shared between Britain and the United States of America.

Tristan da Cunha was discovered in 1506 by the Portuguese navigator Tristão da Cunha, who called the island after himself as *Ilha de Tristão da Cunha*. The island already appeared on Mercator's map in 1541, albeit it was not visited often by European ships due to its position away from the main trade routes. The first recorded landing on Tristan happened in 1643, and the Dutch had an interest in the island in the middle of the seventeenth century but in the end decided that the island was not suitable for a stable settlement. The first attempt to establish a settlement was made in 1810 by the American Johnathan Lambert. Despite his attempt was not sanctioned by the US government, Britain saw this as an intrusion in its sphere of influence. Lambert's attempt was a failure, and on August 14th 1816 Britain formally annexed the island establishing a base on it in order to protect Saint Helena and avoid the escape of Napoleon Bonaparte. The Royal Navy decided to discard Tristan as a naval base due to the high risk of shipwrecking in 1817. A group

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[52] Darwin's and Hooker's relationships with Ascension will be discussed in Chapter 3

of settlers, led by Corporal William Glass persuaded some of the soldiers to remain on Tristan and establish a community. The island during the 1820s and 1830s had huge variations in its population, as shipwrecks were now more common due to the opening of new routes. People who was rescued on Tristan often left, but few now and then decided to stay, increasing the local population. In 1826 the island had a shortage of women, and some volunteers left from Saint Helena to find a husband on Tristan. Thanks to this event, in 1832 the island had a population of thirty-four. In 1836 Pieter Groen (later anglicised as Peter Green), a Dutchman, arrived on Tristan with his wife after a shipwreck. Green became the leader of the island's community for most of the nineteenth century and one of the leading figures in the history of the island. The opening of Suez and the introduction of steamships caused a great crisis on Tristan in the 1870s. The visit in 1866 by the Duke of Edinburgh gave to the settlement its official name of Edinburgh of the Seven Seas. Another significant event in the history of the island was the arrival in 1899 of two Italian sailors when their ship sank near Tristan, creating a strong presence of Italian-Tristan population up until today. In 1961 the island's volcano erupted and the entire island population was evacuated to Britain. In 1963 the Government encouraged the inhabitants to remain in the United Kingdom, but they voted 148 to 5 in favour of returning on the island.

The Falklands despite being closer to the mainland than the other South Atlantic islands, were never inhabited before the Europeans. The islands were spotted by several expeditions since 1516, including Magellan's and Gomes'. The first close exploration of the islands was made in 1592 by the English explorer John Davis, and Richard Hawkins claimed the islands for England in 1594. In 1690 the British landed for the first time in the islands, that were called Falklands in honour of Viscount Falkland, treasurer of the Navy. The French instead called the islands Malouines in honour of the port of Saint Malo. The French were the first to settle the islands in 1764 establishing the town of Port Louis. In 1766 the British built their own settlement in Port Egmont. In the same year the Spanish managed to take Port Louis from the French, renaming it *Puerto de la Soledad*. In the 1770s France, Britain and Spain quarrelled over the islands. In the end the British left the Falklands due to the American Revolution. In 1811 Spain had to leave the Falklands in order to defend its colonial empire. The 1820s were troubled years for the Falklands. Argentina, Britain and America quarrelled over the rightful sovereignty on the islands, and in the struggles the settlement of *Puerto de la Soledad* was destroyed. In the end the US sided with Britain on the matter, and the Falklands in 1833 were occupied by Britain and the Argentinian garrison had to leave. The islands saw a slow but steady increase in their population, and remained under British rule until

today with the exception of the brief Argentinian occupation of 1982. In 2013, 99.8 per cent of the population voted in a referendum to remain a British Overseas Territory.

Saint Helena was discovered on May 21st 1502 by the Portuguese João da Nova. May 21st in the Orthodox calendar is the day of Saint Helena of Constantinople, after which the island was then named, *Ilha de Santa Helena*. The first inhabitant of the island was the Portuguese Fernão Lopes, a convict that was maimed and abandoned on the island around the year 1515. Saint Helena was a more suitable island for colonisation than Ascension and Tristan. Saint Helena had fresh water and a safe harbour, whilst the two other islands lacked both of these characteristics. Nevertheless, no major power settled the island for almost a century and a half. The European powers used the island for refurbishment of water and fresh fruits, however it was not until 1633 that the Dutch first claimed the island for themselves. They did not establish any presence on the island, and in 1651 they abandoned any claim in favour of their new colony at the Cape of Good Hope. In 1657 the Lord Protector Cromwell issued a patent to the East India Company to colonise the island, and they did so with Captain John Dutton who became also the first governor of the island from 1659 to 1661. The Dutch tried to seize the island in 1673, but the EIC quickly took the island back. Edmond Halley visited Saint Helena in 1677 to watch the transit of Mercury. The island slowly grew for the whole eighteenth century, with a plantation economy heavily subsidised by the Company. In 1815 the British Government chose Saint Helena as the prison for Napoleon Bonaparte, and the island became heavily militarised until Napoleon's death in 1821. With the India Act of 1833 the island was given to the Crown permanently, and the Royal Navy used Saint Helena as a base to fight slave trade. In 1840 the corpse of Bonaparte was transferred from Saint Helena to Paris. The island faced a growing crisis in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal. The island was again used as a prison for dangerous enemies of Britain, in 1890 Chief Dinizulu was sent to Saint Helena and in 1900-1902 over 6,000 Boers were imprisoned. The islanders lost their British citizenship in 1981 with the British Nationality Act. After a long political struggle, the full UK Citizenship was regained in 2002.

1.8 The Empire, the South Atlantic and Saint Helena

The years between the Seven-Year war and the 1830s – with the abolition of slavery and the new India Act – were crucial in the history of the South Atlantic.

The British Empire deeply transformed itself in this period, and especially in the South Atlantic and South-Western Indian Ocean the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars hugely transformed the political geography of the area, as described above.

The years 1760-1830 are crucial in defining the evolution of the British Empire, from colonial government to slavery and from political ideology to geopolitical long-term plans. V.T. Harlow in 1952 was the first historian to underline the importance of those years in the building of the 'Second' or Victorian Empire in the nineteenth century[53]. C.A. Bayly, starting from Harlow's assumptions, further analysed this period stating that the processes that led to the birth of the 'Second Empire' started during the Seven-Year war and coexisted in this transitional period together with the remnants of the 'First' Empire[54]. In this period Britain asserted new forms of authority both within the colonies – reforming the government of the non-white ones – and outside with a stronger commitment against pirates, nomads and riders[55]. A new conservatism emerged in Britain, which on the one hand was a reaction against the Revolutions in America and France and on the other tried to maintain the idea of Britain as a free and seaborne country. Free trade emerged more slowly than previous historian stated, and the trade monopoly of the East India Company survived in the East for a very long time.

P.J. Marshall agrees with most of Bayly's conclusions, and he further expands the analysis to the concept of 'making and unmaking' of the British Empire to explain the coexistence of new and old in this period. Marshall connects the American war of independence with the revolt that occurred in India in the same period also supported by the French. In the 1780s Britain lost a war in America and won another in India, shaping its future developments as an Empire.

Both Marshall and Bayly disagree with Harlow when he stated that during this period a 'swing to the East' occurred, with a shift of the imperial focus from the Atlantic to India. They argued that the role of the Atlantic remained crucial in the Empire, and the newly-born United States remained the first commercial partner of the Empire. R. Hyam explained better this concept when he stated that the British Empire after the Revolution had an economic barycentre in the Atlantic and a strategic barycentre in India[56].

Studying the South Atlantic further strengthen this idea of the importance of the Atlantic in the nineteenth-century British Empire. The fight against the slave trade, the so-called 'Informal Empire' in South America and the scramble for Africa are wider events that help to assess Britain's interests in this area. Moreover, the

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[53] V.T. Harlow, *The founding of the second British Empire* (London, 1964)
[54] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial meridian : the British Empire and the world 1780*-1830 (London, 1989)
[55] *Ibid*, p. 7
[56] R. Hyam, *Britain's imperial century, 1815-1914 : a study of empire and expansion* (Basingstoke, 2002)

imperial transition influenced the life and the development of many colonies in this area – from the inland expansion of the Cape to the Indian migration to Mauritius to the Crown takeover on Saint Helena. These are important to understand the evolution of their role in the Empire between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

Chapter II - *Labour relations in the South Atlantic*

Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves
ABRAHAM LINCOLN[1]

Labour relationships in the South Atlantic islands followed the same pattern of the rest of the Empire. However, what makes the evolution of labour relationships on islands like Saint Helena interesting is that labour-relationships evolutions happened a few years earlier than the rest of the Empire. For example, Chinese indentured labour was introduced a decade earlier than elsewhere, as it will be discussed later in this chapter. These islands were not the only ahead of time, as in other parts of the Empire some changes also happened earlier. Nevertheless, these other colonies were again islands and peripheral, for example Ceylon introduced Chinese labourers a few years before Saint Helena.

Working relationships are essential to understand how society worked on the islands. The relationships between masters and slaves, masters and indentured labourers and finally masters and free workers need to be scrutinised at first without considering the humanitarian aspect of forced labour. This is not to underestimate the human cost of slavery, but to better understand if and how labour relationships really changed before and after the abolition of slavery. The humanitarian aspect of this historical process is useful in this research to understand the mentality and the feelings of the inhabitants of Saint Helena when facing these historical decisions and their approach towards illegal slavery and indentured labour.

The chapter will also analyse how emigration was a factor in the South Atlantic in the second half of the nineteenth century and how Ascension and Tristan developed very different labour systems from each other due to their different colonial administration.

2.1 The historiographical context of slavery and slave trade

In the last decades the debate concerning slavery and slave trade has changed the way this crucial historical issue has been approached. H.S. Klein in 1978 was one of the first historians that changed radically the common perceptions on slavery and slave trade, notably he argued that overcrowding was not the main cause of death during the voyage from Africa to America and that Africans had a role in determining the gender and age of the slaves sold to the Europeans[2].

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[1] From Lincoln's letter to H.L. Pierce, April 6th 1859
[2] H.S. Klein, *The middle passage: Comparative studies in the Atlantic slave trade* (Princeton, 1978)

Another debate was about whether slavery and slave trade influenced positively or negatively the economic and demographic development of Africa. Curtin[3] and Reinhard[4] argued that slavery eased the demographic pressure over Africa allowing the local population to survive better, whilst Inikori and Engerman[5] argued that slavery damaged the economic development of Africa. Rodney in his work on Africa and Europe[6], identified slavery as one of the means which Europeans used to exploit Africa.

A third element of debate is about the development of creole societies in the New World, an aspect that is interesting for Saint Helena as it will be explained later. Brathwaite, for example, gave us a detailed explanation on how a new culture was born in Jamaica from European and African influences[7]. Patterson was more sceptical on this view, and argued that the fragmentation of the plantations in the Caribbean avoided the birth of a true unified culture[8], something that also happened on Saint Helena. Vaughan in his work on Mauritius analyses how the attempts to avoid creolisation failed, as internal and external forces acted against the will of the colonists[9].

Slave revolts and religion are a fourth theme regarding slavery strictly intertwined with the idea of a 'Black Atlantic', where information and ideas travelled between the slaves of very different locations. Genovese[10], Gaspar[11] and Craton[12] offer a detailed study on how the revolts shaped the New World and its societies. Genovese divides the slave revolts before Haiti and after Haiti. He considers the former an attempt to restore an African past and the latter a form of social revolutionary attempt to overthrow the *status quo*. Gaspar on the other hand demonstrates how co-operation between slaves worked since the earliest rebellions. Saint Helena offers another example of this co-operation as it will be explained later. Gilroy expanded further this concept, arguing that information and ideas travelled around the Atlantic, including religious beliefs and news of rebellions that inspired others[13]. This approach is important because it helps to connect slavery and slave trade form a new perspective in the idea of an 'Atlantic system'. May argued that

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[3] P.D. Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1987)

[4] W. Reinhard, *A short history of colonialism* (Manchester, 2011)

[5] J. Inikori, S.L. Engerman eds., *The Atlantic slave trade: effects on economies, societies and peoples in Africa, the Americas and Europe* (Durham NC, 1992)

[6] W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Cape Town, 2012)

[7] E. Brathwaite, *The development of creole society in Jamaica* (Oxford, 1971)

[8] O. Patterson, *The sociology of slavery* (London, 1967)

[9] M. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island : slavery in eighteenth-century Mauritius* (Durham N.C., 2005), p. 9

[10] E. Genovese, *From rebellion to revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1979)

[11] D.B. Gaspar, *Bondmen and rebels* (Baltimore, 1985)

[12] M. Craton, *Testing the chains* (Ithaca, 1982)

[13] P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge MA, 1995)

religion was essential in creating a common identity between the slaves, allowing a first form of organisation that allowed later revolts and forms of resistance[14].

Slavery in the Atlantic was only half of the issue. The Indian Ocean presented a different framework and different historiographical issues. Campbell and others[15] argued that slavery in the Indian ocean was very different from the Atlantic one: slaves in the IOW were mostly female, employed in complex jobs, more protected and held a more respected position in society. Campbell acknowledges the existence of exceptions, for example Mauritius and Reunion where an Atlantic-system of slavery was implemented. Hawley agrees with Campbell, stating how the Indian system of slavery was older than the Atlantic one, and where blacks were a minority of the slaves. Other studies had instead argued the opposite, for example Chattopadhyay in his study on the Bengal Presidency: slaves received a harsh and ferocious treatment even if the British had decided to maintain the pre-existent Hindu and Muslim traditions. Thus, according to these traditions, child slave trade was banned in the region[16]. This dichotomy between the Indian and Atlantic slavery is crucial for Saint Helena, as both these traditions met on the island.

2.2 Evolution of slavery in the Empire between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

It would be a great mistake to link the concept of slavery with the 'Old Empire' and to consider the 'New' as the epitome of free labour. The British Empire – and the West Indies in particular – was still eager for a cheap workforce. From the beginning of the nineteenth century the British began a new trade in human beings, mainly from the Indian subcontinent and China, as 'indentured labourers'. These workers were nominally free, but *de facto* for the fixed time of their contract they were treated no better than slaves. The size of this new trade is estimated as two million people from 1834 to the 1920s[17], the period when this system came to an end[18].

If indentured labour could be considered a *fil rouge* between the Empires of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, the overall evolution of forced labour and slavery demonstrates deep changes in the social and economic structure of the imperial system. The progressive abolition of slavery created new social

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[14] C. May, *Evangelism and resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (London, 2008)

[15] G. Campbell, 'Slavery and other forms of unfree labour in the Indian Ocean', *Slavery and Abolition*, XXIV, 2 (2003), pp. xiii-xiv

[16] A.K. Chattopadhyay, *Slavery in the Bengal Presidency* (London, 1977)

[17] R.B. Allen, 'The mascarene slave-trade and labour migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries', *Slavery and Abolition*, XXIV, 2 (2003), p.34

[18] It is remarkable that in the same period (the 1920s) in Great Britain another long-standing form of 'forced' labour came to an end: the Elizabethan workhouses, instituted in 1601 with the Poor Law.

issues, as the liberated former slaves needed to find a new role in the colonial society. Furthermore, the emancipation of slaves led the British to expand the colony of Sierra Leone; defending the former slaves and spreading Christianity among them contributed to the colonial expansion in Africa, a distinctive characteristic of nineteenth-century Empire. The Atlantic triangular trade was shaken to the ground as the main sources of workforce became India and China, overshadowing Africa.

Saint Helena's peculiar slave system and social structure could help us study these wider processes in a new light. Saint Helena moved from slavery to indentured labour and then to free labour in a relatively short time – from the 1800s to 1830s – and earlier compared to the rest of the Empire: when the last Chinese labourers left the island in the 1830s, the indentured system started to spread successfully in the West Indies and elsewhere[19].

2.3 Slavery on Saint Helena: between two Oceans

It has been already stated that Saint Helena was linked more with the Indian Ocean world of the East India Company rather than with the Atlantic. It is important also to consider this aspect when studying the history of slavery and slave trade on the island.

Atlantic slavery and Indian Ocean world (IOW) slavery presented, from a general perspective, different characteristics; these were not 'closed' systems, however, and within each Ocean every colony had its own history and peculiarities. Nevertheless, some general common features can be spotted. Slavery in the Atlantic was a relatively modern process based on the trade of blacks – mostly men – from Africa to the plantations in the Americas, and these slaves were used mainly for unskilled duties and treated as trade goods in a harsh and often violent way. IOW slavery, on the other hand, was an older process going back thousands of years: slaves in the IOW were often women rather than men, were trained for more skilful professions and had a more respectable position in the society[20]. While in the Atlantic slaves were almost exclusively from Africa, in the IOW Africans were only a minority of the total amount of slaves[21].

The two systems where not strictly linked to the geographical dimension of the two Oceans. Reunion and Mauritius, due to their economic structure as

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[19] R.B. Allen, 'The mascarene slave-trade and labour migration in the Indian Ocean during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries', p.34

[20] G. Campbell, 'Slavery and other forms of unfree labour in the Indian Ocean', *Slavery and Abolition*, XXIV, 2 (2003), pp. xiii-xiv

[21] G. Campbell, 'Slave traders and the Indian Ocean world', in J.C. Hawley (ed.), *India in Africa, Africa in India : Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism* (Bloomington, 2008), pp. 21-22

plantation islands, used an 'Atlantic' system of slavery[22], even if their main sources of slaves were Madagascar, Zanzibar and Mozambique, the same African locations used by the IOW slave traders.

The two oceans presented a spectrum of slaving traditions, with similarities and differences even in the same geographical context. Saint Helena's position between the two oceans favoured the mixing of different slavery traditions, both from the Atlantic and the IOW, creating a new peculiar system. On the one hand, Saint Helena slaves were mostly of African origin and their primary role was to work on the island's plantations under the whip of their owners. On the other hand, Saint Helena slaves were treated better than other slaves in the Atlantic world and were often employed in skilled jobs. Moreover, their emancipation started early compared to other colonies, since the last decades of the eighteenth century. Saint Helena's situation derived from its economic and social structure and from its remote position. Nevertheless, some similarities with some slave systems of the Indian Ocean could be seen, and it could not be denied that the East India Company was in direct contact with these Asian cultures and their different slavery ideologies.

A possible further proof of this better treatment of the slaves on Saint Helena is given by James Cook, who visited several times the island during his voyages. He visited the island in 1775, his second time on Saint Helena, and wrote to the Admiralty

> It is my opinion that there is not a European settlement in the World
> where slaves are better treated and better fed than this Island. I never
> met with one who had the slight shadow of complaint[23].

Cook had travelled for many years around the World and visited many colonies. If he stated that the slaves of Saint Helena were treated well compared to other colonies he might be trusted. Even if Saint Helena was not better than any other 'European settlement in the World', Cook's observation could be considered consistent with the other findings of this chapter that will be explained later. Cook then continued with his description

> That a servant might have a bad master here as well as in other
> parts cannot be denied but the actions of one man […] ought not
> to be charged to the community in general[24].

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[22] G. Campbell, 'Slavery and other forms of unfree labour in the Indian Ocean', pp. xiii-xiv
[23] General Records and Descriptions, London, National Maritime Museum, REC 20
[24] *Ibidem*

Cook's impression was that at the end of the eighteenth century the vast majority of the planters were treating the slaves better than the average colonial slave-master. This is also consistent with the other findings of this Chapter, as the collective consciousness of the planters towards slavery eventually led them to abolish the trade on the island in less than a decade.

2.4 Slavery on Saint Helena: peculiarities and comparisons

Slave trade to and from Saint Helena was managed along two main guidelines: the preservation of the island's security and the general interest of the wider East India Company system. Slaves on Saint Helena were imported mainly from Madagascar[25] but also sometimes from Bombay[26] or the Gulf of Guinea[27]. Since 1687 and throughout the eighteenth century, Saint Helena was often required to send its excess slaves to Bencoolen[28], another remote outpost of the Company. This slave trade system between the great presidencies of India, Saint Helena and Bencoolen demonstrates why T. Ballantyne defined India a 'sub-imperial centre'[29]. The dichotomy between centre-periphery has to be surpassed and the Empire should be considered a network[30] of various and different 'nodal points' with their own links and relationship at a 'local' level. In this context, India became the pivotal point of the British Indian Ocean world and of its related colonies, including Saint Helena. Moreover, it can be seen how Saint Helena played a role of intermediate intersection between the sub-centre – Bombay – and a minor node of the Indian Ocean – Bencoolen. These relationships are not vertical, like the ones between the metropolis and the periphery, but 'horizontal linkages'[31] between different parts of a sub-imperial system.

Preserving the security of the island was the other guideline followed by the governors and the Company on Saint Helena when dealing with slave trade. The fear of a slave revolt was always present in their thoughts, not only because of the risks to the lives of the planters but also because of the remote position of the island. Whilst a revolt in any island of the West Indies could have been suppressed also with the help of the nearby colonies, a slave revolt on Saint Helena, maybe not

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[25] Letter, 14 Mar. 1681, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/89, ff. 276-77

[26] Letter, 14 Oct. 1737, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/107, ff. 140-44

[27] Letter, 27 Oct. 1662, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/86, f. 86

[28] Letter, 3 Aug. 1687, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/91, ff. 179-86

[29] T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and race : Aryanism in the British empire* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 15

[30] Concept explained by Ballantyne also in: T. Ballantyne and A. Burton (ed.), *Bodies in contact : rethinking colonial encounters in world history* (Durham N.C., 2005)

[31] T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race : Aryanism in the British Empire*, p. 15

during the sailing season – when usually the East India ships stopped at Saint Helena in their journey back from Asia – would have been a disaster.

For these reasons the Company always strictly monitored the number of slaves on the island, careful not to raise their number excessively. A look at some census data available for the period 1659-1832 can show how the number of slaves was always lower than or slightly over the total number of whites – counting as whites the planters, the garrison and the Company servants. The proportion of slaves, including free blacks, to whites always remained stable at a fifty-fifty ratio during the entire East India Company rule[32]. These numbers show us a first difference between Saint Helena and other colony-islands: if looking for example to Jamaica, where more than the eighty per cent of the population were slaves[33], it can be understood that the strict balance on Saint Helena was kept to avoid an excessive increase of slave population.

The island suffered a chronic lack of workforce for all its history, due to low immigration from England and a general trend of emigration from the island which was even encouraged by the Company until 1712[34]. From 1679[35] the Governors of the island had petitioned, unsuccessfully, to the Court of Directors for more slaves, and when the Company agreed to these requests also sent more soldiers to 'compensate' for the increase of the enslaved population[36].

Despite the fear of a slave revolt, the situation on Saint Helena could be considered an unusual exception in the Atlantic world. The island never faced a true slave revolt: in 1695 did some slaves plan an insurrection, but they were betrayed by one of them who revealed the plan to the governor[37]. The slaves – having heard from some sailors of other rebellions where the slaves successfully seized the local fort – planned to do the same on Saint Helena and then wait for a ship to steal and reach freedom[38]. Ideas and information travelled throughout the Atlantic, indirectly between slaves, creating a system called the 'Black Atlantic'. Taking a look to the wider context of the 'Black Atlantic' a general trend of rebellion between slaves in the seventeenth century can be seen, followed by a more peaceful attitude in the

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[32] For 1659, 1665, 1672, 1673, 1678, 1680, 1694, 1696, 1706, 1722 censuses: S. Royle, *The Company's Island : St Helena, company colonies and the colonial endeavour* (London, 2007), p. 176. For 1814 census: The East India House to Governor Hudson Lowe, 10 Oct. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162. For 1714, 1802 and 1817 censuses see: P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972). For 1832 census: Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[33] C. Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica : colonial society and culture during the era of abolition* (London, 2009), p. 7

[34] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, p. 52

[35] Letter, 24 Mar. 1679, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/89, ff. 123-25

[36] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98

[37] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, p. 98

[38] *Ibid*, p. 98

eighteenth and eventually a new period of uprisings at the beginning of the nineteenth century[39]. Saint Helena did not follow this pattern: after the 1695 attempt, no subsequent slave uprisings happened on the island until the final abolition of slavery in 1833.

Saint Helena was also exempted from 'maroonage', a common occurrence in other islands with an Atlantic slave system. Mauritius, Reunion and many West Indies islands faced this issue, with bands of escaped slaves living in the interior of the islands threatening the white planters on the coast. Maroonage on Saint Helena was simply impossible: the small size of the island and its geographical structure made it hopeless for any fugitive slave to remain hidden for a long time.

The reasons of the relatively quiet behaviour of slaves on Saint Helena can be found in two aspects: firstly Saint Helena's social structure prevented the slaves from creating a strong community within the island; secondly, slaves on Saint Helena received better treatment compared with other colonies, both for their value and for keeping them peaceful.

The island's social structure was different from other island-colonies. The island completely lacked a true town or city where a community of slaves could have found its roots and relationships. The descriptions of the island from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries agreed on the fact that Jamestown was a 'true city' only in the few months of the sailing season. For the rest of the year, when few or no ships arrived on the island, the town was unmanned with the sole exception of the fort and the Company's warehouses[40]. This meant that slaves and their owners lived on the plantations for most of the year, limiting the interactions between the blacks. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries towns like Port Louis in Mauritius[41] or Bridgetown in Barbados[42] became places where slaves could find more freedom and autonomy compared to the countryside, becoming skilled workers and getting in touch with new political and religious ideas.

Furthermore, Christianity played an important role in keeping the slaves peaceful. The propagation of the Word between slaves was seen in the wider Black Atlantic as a way to impose a strong form of social control[43]. The side-effect of this strategy was the spread of non-conformist 'black' forms of Christianity[44] that

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[39] H. Beckles, *Black rebellion in Barbados : the struggle against slavery, 1627-1838* (Bridgetown, 1984), p. 121-22
[40] See for example: R. Philips, *A Description of the Island of St Helena containing observations on its singular structure and formation and an account of its climate, natural history and inhabitants* (London, 1805); C.F. Noble, *A voyage to the East Indies in 1747 and 1748 containing an account of the Islands of St Helena and Java of the City of Batavia of the government and political conduct of the Dutch of the Empire of China, with a particular description of Canton* (London, 1762)
[41] A.J. Anthony, *Slavery and antislavery in the Mauritius 1810-33* (London, 1996), p. 135
[42] H. Beckles, *Black rebellion in Barbados*, p.62
[43] *Ibid*, p. 57
[44] See for example: C. May, *Evangelism and resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (London, 2008)

eventually led to creation of self-consciousness in the slaves about their condition. Saint Helena remained immune from these external influences, and conformist Anglicanism became the religion of the slaves. The only moment of common gathering for the slaves was in church on Sunday, under the hold of the Church of England[45]. Slave children had attended Sunday school since 1677[46], so they were under the 'moral' control of the Church since their childhood.

Slaves on Saint Helena generally received a better treatment compared to other colonies. During the eighteenth century slaves' condition gradually improved: they gained more rights and better duties, even if during the first and second governorships of Isaac Pyke (1713-1718 and 1731-1738) slaves received a worse treatment[47]. From 1705 the India House recommended that the governors and council of Saint Helena treat their slaves well: in 1705 they ordered the planters to give more food to their slaves[48] and in 1721 the Court ordered to encourage marriage between slaves in order to contain prostitution and thus avoiding the spread of venereal diseases between the slaves[49]. This was a first great peculiarity of Saint Helena, especially when compared to other colonies in the Black Atlantic, where slave masters had little or no regard for separating a wife from her husband or from their children. The religious education of slaves was also in the thoughts of the Company: it has been already mentioned that in 1677 a Sunday school for slave children was established, and in 1717 the Company imposed the observance of the Sunday rest for all the slaves[50]. The concessions granted to the slaves did not come from liberal ideologies, as the political culture of the island in the eighteenth century was based on strict religious conservatism. Religious education and participation in Church life were strong instruments of social control and a better treatment was granted to the slaves only for economic and security reasons.

The Company was also concerned about corporal punishments: in 1723 some slave overseers considered too violent were dismissed[51] while in 1734 corporal punishments were strongly discouraged[52]. In 1737 the Company made a strong admonition to Governor Pyke, who applied castration as a punishment for male slaves and thirty lashes for slave women accused of bastardy; moreover, when a free black woman had a child with a soldier, Pyke made mother and son both slaves. The Company found the Governor's behaviour unacceptable, and removed him the

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[45] E. Cannan, *Churches of the South Atlantic Islands 1502-1991* (Oswestry, 1992), p. 30
[46] Letter, 15 Mar. 1677, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/88, ff. 285-89
[47] Letter, 14 Oct. 1737, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/107, ff. 140-44
[48] Letter, 14 Dec. 1705, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/96, ff. 15-26
[49] Letter, 23 Feb. 1721, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/101, ff. 93-100
[50] Letter, 21 Mar. 1717, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/99, ff. 240-50
[51] Letter, 12 Feb. 1723, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/102, ff. 247-52
[52] Letter, 4 Dec. 1734, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/106, ff. 148-53

following year[53]. In 1748 the Company strongly discouraged the use of capital punishment for slaves on Saint Helena[54].

These few examples compared to other islands in the Black Atlantic suggest that slaves on Saint Helena were better treated. In Barbados mutilations, castration and the death penalty were common punishments for slaves[55]. Barbados planters did not accept that a slave could understand the Christian religion[56], so they never tried to convert slaves and only in 1805 did the murder of a slave become a serious criminal offence[57]. In Jamaica slave masters imposed a true regime of terror over their slaves, using violent tactics and ferocious punishments[58].

In Mauritius corporal punishments were common and planters were authorized to shoot on sight every slave who entered in their plantations, with the idea to kill them before discovering if they were maroons or not[59]. Slaves were judged according to the '*Code noir*', they were treated as free men in court but if found guilty they were sentenced always with the harsher punishment[60]. In Reunion the situation was similar, with violent punishments and strict discipline for all the slaves[61].

It is not an aim of this dissertation to depict Saint Helena slaveholders as enlightened masters: the causes of this better treatment were predominantly economic. Barbados, Jamaica, Mauritius and Reunion were better connected with slave trade routes: the West Indies with the triangular trade, whilst the two French islands were close to Madagascar and other important slave outposts. Slaves on Saint Helena were a more valuable good than in other colony-islands due to – using an economic definition – their different 'marginal utility'. Keeping slaves healthy and alive and allowing them to create families in order to improve island-born slaves reducing the need of external importation, was crucial in keeping slavery economically sustainable. Extremely high death rates among slaves, like the ones in the West Indies, would be completely unsustainable on Saint Helena. Reading Royle's account of slavery on Saint Helena[62] might suggest different conclusions compared to the one made in this chapter. However, as stated before on Saint Helena slaves were treated *better* than in other colonies: this means that in any case they were treated as slaves, and in no measure this dissertation implies that they

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[53] Letter, 14 Oct. 1737, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/107, ff. 140-44

[54] Letter, 15 Feb. 1748, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/110, ff. 139-40

[55] H. Beckles, *Black rebellion in Barbados*, p.21

[56] *Ibid*, p.23

[57] *Ibid*, p.23

[58] C. Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, pp. 7-11

[59] R.B. Allen, *Slaves, freedmen and indentured laborers in colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 36

[60] M. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island : slavery in eighteenth-century Mauritius* (Durham N.C., 2005), p. 83

[61] P. Eve, *Les esclaves de Bourbon, la mer et la montagne* (Saint-Denis, 2003), p. 231

[62] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, pp. 84-102

were not subject to the human degradation proper of the institution of slavery. In addition, Royle's account focuses more on the Company's slaves rather than the slaves owned by the planters – which were treated better – and on the early years of the Company's rule (1670s-1720s). As it has been showed in this chapter, favourable regulations towards slaves started to be enacted later in the eighteenth century.

As it can be inferred from the description of slavery on Saint Helena, the social role of slaves on the island was different from other experiences in the Black Atlantic. While in other colony-islands slaves used to do skilled jobs only in the main urban settlements[63], in Saint Helena most of the slaves were trained for different tasks. The island's lack of workforce made necessary the training of slaves for occupations like midwifery, bricklaying, fishing, masonry, cloth making and gardening. The Company encouraged the governors from the early eighteenth century to train slaves for various artisans' skills and handcrafting: three ordinances were sent from the India House to Saint Helena in 1712[64], 1714[65] and 1725[66]. Slaves were considered absolutely necessary in the workforce to build and maintain the island's fortifications, and all the slaves were forced every year to work in the building and restoring of Saint Helena infrastructures[67]. Slaves were employed as the main fishermen of the island: letting slaves using a fishing boat was a 'freedom' hardly granted to slaves in other colonies[68]. When the Company complained about the excessive expenses for slaves' clothing, Governor Dunbar employed them in cloth making in order to give them better apparel[69]. Most importantly, slaves were considered fundamental for the defence of the island[70]: in 1756[71] the governor proclaimed that every male slave between sixteen and sixty years old should intervene in case of attack of the island and fighting together with the militia and the garrison. This military commitment was not merely on paper: slaves were involved in watches and patrols used to spot enemy ships around the island. Saint Helena was a true 'island-fortress', and all the inhabitants of this fortress were required to do their part in its defence.

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[63] We have already mentioned in this chapter the situation in Port Luis (Mauritius) and Bridgetown (Barbados)

[64] Letter, 20 Mar. 1712, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/98, ff. 1-7

[65] Letter, 4 Feb. 1714, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/98, ff. 262-71

[66] Letter, 24 Dec. 1725, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/103, ff. 74-78

[67] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98

[68] Moreover slaves were rewarded for their role in fishing: the Governor granted them the right of eating fish as their main food instead of dried beef and yams, improving the quality of their diet. See: Letter, 29 Nov. 1728, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 169-73; and also: Letter, 28 Nov. 1729, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 291-94

[69] Letter, 17 Jan. 1745, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/109, ff. 185-88

[70] Letter, 14 Oct. 1737, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/107, ff. 140-44

[71] A. Beatson, *Abstract of laws and regulations established by the honorable Court of directors or by the governor and council 1751-1813* (Saint Helena, 1813)

The regard for slaves was higher than in other colonies because of their 'added value': their training in skilled jobs and their role in the defence of the island made them more precious, encouraging their good treatment. Nevertheless, Saint Helena society never became truly 'creole' during the EIC rule. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century racial separation remained between the 'Europeans' – the white planters and the Company civil and military servants – and the 'blacks' – both slaves and free. Relationships between the two racial groups were limited by the absence of a true city and the fact that slaves and planters lived for most of the year in the countryside far from each other. There are only few examples of mixed children[72] and the censuses, where mixed people were counted among the free blacks, confirm this deduction. D. Shreirer, in his analysis of Saint Helenian English language[73], gives further evidence: according to his research in the archives of Jamestown, many maps show that slaves and masters lived in sparse houses in the countryside, with limited interaction between different families and groups of slaves[74]. This social structure deeply influenced any possible process of 'creolisation' of the island's society, influencing the collective mentality of each racial group.

The non-creolisation of Saint Helena society was present not only in demographics but also in culture, religion and mentality. As previously stated in this chapter, religion on Saint Helena remained conformist Anglicanism both for blacks and whites. Language, considered an essential part of 'creolisation'[75], remained the English spoken by the settlers, and slaves learned the language of their masters without giving any significant influence[76]. The slaves, living scattered around the island, never created a true 'black common culture' on the island. Moreover, the whites always considered England as their true home[77] and tried to create a 'copy' of their motherland on Saint Helena, this is evident the shapes of the fields that resembled to many travellers England's countryside[78], the architecture[79] and the social and economic structures. D. Schreier, analysing the social context of Saint Helena, wrote that (white) Helenians 'felt as English in a colony, not as an independent colony'[80]. Helenians today still call their island 'the lost county of

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[72] Letter, 14 Oct. 1737, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/107, ff. 140-44

[73] D. Shreier, *St Helenian English : origins, evolutions and variations* (Amsterdam, 2008)

[74] *Ibid*, p. 112

[75] P.M. Larson, *Ocean of letters : language and creolization in an Indian Ocean diaspora* (Cambridge, 2009)

[76] D. Shreier, *St Helenian English*, p. 115

[77] C.F. Noble, *A voyage to the East Indies in 1747 and 1748*, p. 36

[78] See picture 6 in the Appendix

[79] J. Wathen, *A series of illustrative views of St Helena* (London, 1821). See also picture 7 in the Appendix

[80] D. Schreier, *St Helenian English*, p. 229

England'[81], showing how the island remains an exception, quite different from other insular colonies like the West Indies or Mauritius, where a creole society developed.

This could seem an apparent contradiction: 'freedom' for slaves often led to the creation of a creole society in other islands, like in the urban settlements of the West Indies. Again the geography of the island solves this contradiction: as the map in the appendix shows, the various plantations were often divided by hills and mountains making contacts between people scarce and unlikely. Slaves were divided in small groups – no planter could own more than four slaves[82] – and they often worked in the limited space of their owner's plantation. Only the Company's slaves formed a bigger group, but they lived and worked closer to the fort and the garrison, making them easier to control and monitor.

Freedom was often linked with social mobility: on Saint Helena slaves remained always in the same condition, without any chance of improving their status. Society on Saint Helena was more divided according to wealth rather than race or status: while in other colonies the condition of white planters was often connected with a better status in the social hierarchy, on Saint Helena few white planters shared this privilege. As it will be better explained in the fourth chapter, most of the planters were poor and in a meagre economic condition, making them socially more close to their slaves rather than to the richest planters. Saint Helena lacked social mobility, with few families holding most of the wealth and power and the rest of the white and black population living in poor conditions. Opportunities for improvement, not only for the slaves but even for the small planters, were scarce and often the only true solution was far from the island. Tracking the history of Saint Helena family names shows how the oldest and wealthiest families lived on the island since the seventeenth century while the small planters had a bigger 'turnover', with high immigration and emigration trends[83].

It can be argued that slaves on Saint Helena were, as a matter of fact, under strict social control even if not in a way similar to other colonies. If in other colonies slaves were controlled with violence and captivity, on Saint Helena religion, geography and regulated duties – serving in the militia or working on the island's infrastructure for example – played a decisive role. If in the West Indies cities were places where slaves could find a wider degree of freedom and less social control, the lives of the slaves of Saint Helena were constantly regulated and they had no chances to escape from this control, due to the island's structure. Under an apparent

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[81] See for example the Island's website: http://www.sthelena.se/history/island.txt last accessed 0 1 Mar. 2014
[82] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98
[83] Using the research made by Shreier [D. Schreier, *St Helenian English*] and Martineau [G. Martineau, *Vie quotidienne a Saint-Helene au temps du Napoleon* (Monaco, 1966)] it has been possible to have a general idea on the demographic trends of Saint Helena during the East India Company rule.

surface of more freedom, slavery on Saint Helena hides more social control and a different form of authority, less violent in its exterior appearance but no less effective.

The fact that Saint Helena was completely unmanned before its colonization also led the Company and the governors to seek utopian experiments of social and racial engineering. In fact, another possible reason for the low importation of slaves might also be the desire for a white-only island. The governors always aimed to attract a more 'white' workforce rather than slaves[84]: forced labourers – slaves and the Chinese later – were seen as temporary solutions awaiting more white immigrants from Britain[85]. These aspirations were based on the assumption that as Saint Helena did not have a pre-existent population, the island economy did not require an extensive use of slaves like other plantation-colonies. Saint Helena did not attract enough immigrants from Britain, and thus these aims remained only on paper[86].

2.5 Slavery on Saint Helena: the path to abolition

In 1673 the Court of Directors ruled that every slave on Saint Helena who converted to the Christian faith should be freed after seven years[87]. The principle behind this deliberation was that slavery was morally acceptable only if imposed on heathens or Muslims, whereas a Christian should never be a slave. This kind of deliberation was not uncommon in the Black Atlantic, although in other colonies slave masters questioned the honesty of the conversions in order to avoid freeing their slaves[88]. This system also found little success on Saint Helena: in 1722, almost fifty years after the ruling, there were only eighteen 'free blacks' on the island[89], a small number if considered that in 1714 there were 302 slaves[90]. Slaves were very valuable to Helenians planters, so it could be inferred that they also questioned the true conversion of some of their slaves so not to lose them.

The first steps towards true abolition on Saint Helena were made in 1792. In this year the Court of Directors banned the importing of slaves to the island – an exception in the whole EIC world[91]. In his account on slavery on Saint Helena[92], A.

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[84] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98
[85] Consultation, 20 Jan. 1827, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/926/25975
[86] See further on 'settler colonies' in chapter four
[87] Letter, 19 Dec. 1673, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/88, ff. 41-44
[88] H. Beckles, *Black rebellion in Barbados*, p.23
[89] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, p. 101
[90] P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972)
[91] A. Beatson, *Tracts relative to the island of St Helena written during a residence of five years* (London, 1816), p. 327
[92] *Ibid*, p. 327-28

Beatson, governor of the island between 1808 and 1813, did not explain the reasons of this decision. It can be inferred that the reason that might have led the Court to this resolution had been the beginning, in 1791, of the Haitian revolution. This revolution was the first successful slave revolt in the Black Atlantic and eventually led to Haiti's independence from France. The wider impact of this event, contextualised within the broad period called 'Age of Revolutions', was an increase of slaveholders' awareness of the risks connected with slavery, mainly on small islands like Saint Domingue. Jamaican planters, for example, accepted a new authoritarian government on their island, with an increase of the royal garrison, to avoid a similar outcome[93].

It can be easily understood why the East India Company feared a slave revolt on Saint Helena in 1792, and the decision to put an end to the importation of slaves in order to keep their number 'under control' was consistent with their previous deliberations, as discussed in the first part of this chapter. Furthermore, the slave population on the island reached demographic stability at the end of the eighteenth century. Beatson confirms that no illegal slave trade was made on the island after 1792[94]: he can be trusted, because of the island geographical structure. There was only one point where ships could land, Jamestown's port; all goods imported to the island (including slaves) were checked there. Without any illegal importation, slave population rose in the years 1792-1813, thanks to the birth of children from slave parents[95]. This demographic increase suggests us that the EIC banned the importation of slaves on Saint Helena because their population was stable, avoiding economic consequences and saving money.

Slave trade was eventually completely banned by Britain fifteen years later, in 1807. Whereas Saint Helena was free from illegal trade, other colonies followed different paths. In Mauritius the illegal slave trade continued after 1807 because the new British governor wanted to keep good relationships with the local planters who were mainly French[96]. In the colony of the Cape, especially under the governorship of Lord Somerset (1814-1820), slavery and illegal trade were tolerated[97]. Illegal trade remained a common issue of the Black Atlantic; a further proof of the exemption of Saint Helena from this trade is that the island needed indentured labourers in great numbers since 1810 while in the rest of the Atlantic world and in the Mascarene Islands the mass importation of indentured labourers started only in the 1830s with

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[93] C. Petley, *Slaveholders in Jamaica*, p. 54
[94] A. Beatson, *Tracts relative to the Island of St. Helena*, p. 328
[95] *Ibid*, p. 328
[96] A.J. Anthony, *Slavery and antislavery in the Mauritius 1810-33*, p. 163-64
[97] N. Worden, 'Indian Ocean slavery and its demise in the Cape Colony', in G. Campbell (ed.), *Abolition and its aftermath in the Indian Ocean, Africa and Asia* (London, 2005) p. 39

the final abolition of slavery and a stronger commitment of the British government to the fight against illegal slave trade.

A new aspect of Saint Helena's society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a stronger commitment of planters – and broadly of the white population – against slavery or, at the very least, for a better treatment of slaves. Previously the main decisions made to improve the conditions of slaves were imposed from outside the island – mainly from the Court of Directors of the Company. After 1792 the main initiatives in favour of slaves and against slavery came directly from planters, with the benevolent consent of the India House. The planters started to develop moral concerns towards slavery.

If the improvement of slave conditions in the eighteenth century was driven mainly from economic and security reasons, in the early nineteenth century a new 'moral' attitude spread within the planters. Religious fervour against slavery began in the late eighteenth century in Britain; the main supporters of the 1807 act were from such religious groups. On Saint Helena, planters were 'forced' to treat their slaves better from the beginning of the eighteenth century: this 'duty' might have gradually changed the mentality of planters, who eventually accepted this new 'Christian' commitment against slavery. In the rest of the Atlantic world and in the Mascarene Islands planters were never forced to treat better their slaves, and thus they remained with a different mentality. For nearly a century economy influenced ideology on Saint Helena, and in the early nineteenth century ideology was about to change the economy of the island forever, pushing for the complete abolition of slavery. A 'Benevolent Society' – a decisive player during the path to abolition – was also founded by the most eminent Helenian slaveholders.

Another initiative in favour of slaves was established in 1802, proposed by Governor Patton. The 'Committee for encouraging slaves' was established by the Planters Society in order to 'amending the moral disposition of slaves'[98]. The goal was to give incentives to the slave to be more productive, as at the time they had no incentives to work harder or better without any acknowledgment of their efforts. Thus sixty-five planters contributed to the Committee with a total of £ 99.19. This money was distributed between eighty-two slaves, proposed by their own masters. The Committee analysed the proposals and divided the money between the slaves, with an average of £ 1 or £ 2 each[99]. The Committee was operational at least until 1806, when the records about it in the archives end.

A key moment of this process came in August 1818. The governor of Saint Helena was Sir Hudson Lowe and the island was under special administration of

[98] Committee accounts for encouraging slaves, 1802, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[99] *Ibidem*

the Crown and the Company due to the captivity of Napoleon Bonaparte. On 13 August, Lowe addressed the Council of Saint Helena stating that 'no person […] could be ignorant of the persevering efforts which had been made by the British legislature, and the British nation at large, during the last twenty years for the total abolition of the Slave Trade'[100]. He then suggested that the councilmen continue in the tradition of the island and anticipate the initiatives of the Crown and of the EIC against slavery:

> How infinitely, preferable it would be, to anticipate their desires by a voluntary act of the inhabitants themselves, than to await the dictates of what might be suggested to them! In no part, he was happy to find, and gratified to express to them, did slavery exist in a milder form than in this island - he ever was ready and willing to do justice to the disposition of the inhabitants in this respect. Still slavery existed, and would remain in perpetuity upon the, system which at present prevailed, of every child born of a slave being also a slave[101].

The Governor then mentioned the example of Ceylon, where a voluntary resolution of the island's slave masters had ruled that every child born from a slave should be free[102]. He suggested to the council to adopt the same decision on Saint Helena, and the Council accepted the proposition enthusiastically[103]. The next day, 14 August 1818, a slaveholders' assembly unanimously approved Lowe's proposition[104]. The moral commitment of the slaveholders and their awareness of the possible negative economic outcomes of their decision were present also in a letter they sent to Lowe at the end of his governorship:

> A prominent measure of your Excellency was a proposal, which might have been expected to have been unpopular in a colony where slavery had been long recognised; yet, Sir, it met with the instantaneous and unanimous approbation of the inhabitants,-a result which affords no slight proof of our entire confidence in your concern for our welfare[105].

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[100] (No Author), *Papers regarding the progressive abolition of slavery on the Island of St. Helena* (London, 1832), p. 9
[101] *Ibid*, p. 10
[102] *Ibid*, p. 10
[103] *Ibid*, p. 10-12
[104] *Ibid*, p. 12
[105] Ibid, p. 39

The number of free blacks started to rise dramatically even before 1818: from eighteen in 1714 they became 227 in 1802, 420 in 1814, 500 in 1817 and 1,949 in 1832[106]. It is evident that not only were children freed, but also adult slaves who converted themselves to Christianity (giving full enactment to the 1677 deliberation). Moreover, after 1818 new deliberations were enacted in order to improve the welfare of slaves. During 1824 the Council ruled again to further reduce corporal punishments for felon slaves, and new decisions were made for the religious education and morality of the slaves, encouraging their participation in church life and Sunday school[107].

The final abolition of slavery on Saint Helena started in 1832, one year before the Abolition Act that formally abolished slavery in the British Empire. In 1832 only 386 slaves remained on Saint Helena; the Council ruled that a quarter of those slaves should be freed every year, in order to accomplish the full abolition of slavery on the island in four years[108]. The approval of the Abolition Act in 1833 pushed the Council to approve a further deliberation that decreed immediate freedom for all the remaining slaves of the island[109].

The 1833 Abolition Act was not extended to all East India Company territories, Ceylon and Saint Helena[110], even if during the same period in India and the East slavery and slave trade were also transforming and evolving under the EIC rule. If during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Saint Helena's slave system was influenced both by the Atlantic and the Indian worlds, during and after abolitionism the island became involved deeply in the fight against slavery waged by the Royal Navy mainly in the Atlantic. As it will be discussed in chapter four, after 1833 Saint Helena started to become less linked with India and more involved with the Atlantic and its issues.

Further documents, however, add more details on the lives of the freed slaves. The planters started to free their slaves well before 1832/33 due to emigration or debts. Due to the Company's legislation, each slave could be set free if they paid for their freedom. Thus, planters with economic needs were further motivated to free their slaves in order to obtain fresh cash for their emigration or repayment of

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[106] For 1814 census: The East India House to Governor Hudson Lowe, 10 Oct. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162. For 1714, 1802 and 1817 censuses see: P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972). For 1832 census: Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[107] Consultation, Nov. 1824, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/766/20734

[108] Consultation, 22 Apr. 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/1373/54693

[109] Letter, 25 Jun. 1833 , London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210

[110] *A bill [as amended by the committee] for the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies, for promoting the industry of the manumitted slaves, and for compensating the owners of such slaves* (Parl. Papers, 1833, IV.209), 593

mortgages or debts. The first of these economic transitions recorded in the archives is from 1827[111] when a planter named Cole granted freedom to his five slaves and their four free-born children[112]. Those slaves did not have the money to cover their price: each slave had to pay between £ 20 and £ 50 to gain their freedom, a considerable sum of money. The Company paid the full amount of £ 157 in advance for the slaves, which were then indebted with the EIC and forced to repay this 'loan' with a share of their future salary as free workers[113]. Slaves were indeed able to have some money on their own, as for example it is mentioned that a slave named 'Molly' was mother of twelve children, ten born free whilst two born still slave but freed by her paying her master[114].

This system soon proved to be a net economic loss for the Company, as in 1828 former slaves had repaid less than the 10% of what they owed to the EIC for their freedom. In 1830, the last figures fully recorded, 107 former slaves had repaid a mere £ 960 out of a grand total of £ 5,033 due, and again the average repayment made by each slave was under 10% of their own shares[115]. To better realise the impact of this sum on the government's debt, the island's administration in 1838 (the earliest data available) had a budget of £ 42,104[116]. In 1835 the Governor received a report on this situation, that stated that former slaves were unable to pay their debt because they received an unfair treatment from their employees. They received their salary often late and not in the full amount due[117].

It can be inferred from these data one of the reasons why the 'coloured' population emigrated from Saint Helena with a smaller rate than the 'whites'. Former slaves were again in a form of forced labour, as they could not emigrate from the island until they repaid their debt to the Company. They were again a form of cheap labour without any rights. This demonstrates how the end of slavery was a slow process with little gain in term of freedom for the former slaves.

2.6 Chinese indentured labourers on Saint Helena

The forced migration of indentured labourers from India and China started in the early nineteenth century in the years preceding the 1807 Act. The first labourers from China were sent to Singapore and Malaysia between 1800 and 1810,

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[111] Slave Emancipation Consultations, 2 April 1827, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[112] As mentioned before, all the children born from slaves were considered freemen/freewomen
[113] Slave Emancipation Consultations, 2 April 1827, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[114] Slave Emancipation Consultations, 19 April 1827, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[115] Slave Emancipation Consultations, 31 October 1830, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[116] Blue Book 1838, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[117] Slave Emancipation Consultations, 10 April 1835, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

to the Caribbean in 1806 and to Brazil in 1810[118]. These first migrations were of small size: only in the 1830s indentured labour did begin to be massively exploited, with 250,000 Chinese sent to Cuba and Peru[119]. L. Yun defines the pre-1830s migrations 'experiments', such as the forced migration of 192 Chinese to Trinidad[120]: the Chinese presence on Saint Helena could be considered also as such an experiment, both for its relatively short timespan (between 1810 and 1840) and its impact on the island[121].

Furthermore, the presence of Chinese indentured labourers on Saint Helena presented unique characteristics. Firstly, Chinese arrived on Saint Helena early, in 1810. Secondly, their number on Saint Helena was conspicuous, considering the island population, especially as compared to other colonies of the same period. Moreover, when in the 1830s indentured labour expanded in the whole Empire with huge numbers, on Saint Helena Chinese labourers had almost disappeared.

The censuses counted 247 Chinese in 1814, 618 in 1817 and only 139 in 1832. By the end of the 1830s the number of Chinese was reduced only to a few individuals. Governor Beatson wrote that Chinese were first imported in 1810, and they proved to be such good workers that their number was doubled by the Company in three years[122]. Beatson, who was Governor at the time of the first importation of Chinese, wrote that similar experiments were attempted in Java and in Ceylon: in the former the experiment proved to be successful, in the latter was a failure[123]. Beatson identified this failure in the lower price of goods produced by Chinese farmers compared to the price made by white planters, and to avoid this failure he organised the Chinese into an establishment, employing them at the service of the Company and paying them a shilling a day[124]. Again the term 'experiment' was used: it can be noted how the East India Company was trying to find new ways to substitute slavery, making these kinds of social experiments. Saint Helena was one of these experiments – and a rather successful one according to Beatson[125]. The Chinese were employed in many fields: in 1814 thirteen were

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[118] L. Yun, *The coolie speaks : Chinese indentured laborers and African slaves of Cuba* (Philadelphia, 2008), p. 6
[119] *Ibid*, p. 6
[120] *Ibid*, p. 6
[121] On the indentured labourers see also: A.M. McKeown, *Melancholy order : Asian migration and the globalization of borders* (Chirchester, 2008); R.B. Allen, *Slaves, freedmen and indentured laborers in colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge, 1999); W. Look Lai, *Indentured labor, Carribean sugar : Chinese and Indian migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore, 1993); A.M. McKeown, 'Global migration 1846-1940', *Journal of World History*, XV, 2 (2004), pp. 155-89
[122] A. Beatson, *Tracts relative to the Island of St. Helena*, p. 328
[123] *Ibid*, p. 187
[124] *Ibid*, p. 187
[125] *Ibid*, p. 328

carpenters, thirty-one stonecutters, seventeen masons. However most of them were registered as unskilled workers (164)[126].

The Chinese population on Saint Helena faced issues that they found also in other colonies. In 1824 the governor and council praised the successful integration of the free blacks in the island's society whilst complaining about the total isolation of the Chinese community[127]. The greatest complaint made against the Chinese was their refusal to send their children to the newly-created school and their lack of participation in the religious life of the island: for these reasons the council ruled to reduce the number of Chinese, considering the number of whites and blacks enough for the island's economy[128]. The council also complained on further importation of non-white workforce, detailing how the money spent for 200 Chinese labourers could have employed seventy English farmers. Again the idea of strengthening the white community on the island appears even in the years of abolitionism. This form of 'racial planning' is another example of the strength and authority of Saint Helena's government.

In 1817 the government agreed that Chinese should be judged by other Chinese for their crimes with the exemption of murder, violent robbery, housebreaking, murder and sodomy[129]. In 1823 further Chinese were hired on Saint Helena in order to establish a silk factory[130]. The Government tried to make efforts to integrate and understand the Chinese, for example hiring an interpreter, a code and a dictionary in 1824[131]. Nonetheless, for all its effort the Government was not able to integrate the Chinese and made them accepted by the population. They were accused of laziness and to be riotous and violent[132]. For such reason the Crown when took over the island decided to move most of the Chinese indentured labourers to the Cape, in order to avoid any tension on the island[133]. Less than thirty Chinese remained on Saint Helena, most of them became planters[134].

In the West Indies the Chinese gradually became part of the society with mixed marriages and the learning of the English language[135]. Moreover, few of them returned to China at the expiration of the indenture contract[136], whilst on Saint

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[126] Accounts on Chinese Labour, 1814, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

[127] Consultation, 30 Dec. 1824, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/894/21573

[128] Consultation, 30 Dec. 1824, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/894/21573

[129] Accounts on Chinese Labour, 1817, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

[130] B. George, *The Chinese Connection* (Bristol, 2002), pp. 42-43

[131] *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49

[132] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44

[133] Letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Cape, 21 May 1849, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/201-324

[134] B. George, *The Chinese Connection*, pp. 78-79

[135] W. Look Lai, *Indentured labor, Carribean sugar : Chinese and Indian migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore, 1993), pp. 202-203

[136] *Ibid*, p. 202

Helena most of them left[137]. In the Mascarene Islands the beginning of the cultivation of sugar in the 1810s led to new arrivals of slaves from India, and only in the 1830s did indentured labourers arrive from Asia[138].

Moreover, the population of the island became more stable during the 1820s and 1830s, reducing the necessity of importing a workforce from outside. It is worth noting here a peculiarity of Saint Helena both from the Atlantic and to the Indian worlds: indentured labour, which became the most exploited source of forced labour for the whole nineteenth century both in Asia and in the Americas, did not become important on the island.

2.7 Emigration and creolisation in post-EIC Saint Helena

One last and final aspect to analyse regarding labour in the South Atlantic was the role of the whites and how labour relations changed when the Crown took over the island in the 1830s from the Company.

The size of emigration and other dynamics are further analysed in chapter four. In relation to labour relationships it can be stated that the departure of the EIC provoked a small economic crisis on the island. The new Crown administration employed less people and reduced the garrison, thus reducing the amount of people with a steady and fixed income able to spend money on the island. The Company also subsidized programs and initiatives to improve the island's economy (as shown in chapter three), and the end of this financing further reduced opportunities for good employment on Saint Helena.

The liberated slaves were also a source of very cheap workforce compared to the free white one. As stated before, many former slaves were forced to stay on Saint Helena and work to repay their debt. The island was able to gain subsidies from the government in the 1840s when hosted the Liberated Slave Depot, however this caused further issues and was a short-lived initiative[139]. In fact many liberated slaves of the depot just added men and women to the already large cheap workforce of the island.

The Colony of the Cape, on the other hand, was a booming colony with a high request for workforce. In 1840 the Cape made its first formal request to Saint Helena to have some liberated slaves transferred to Cape Town[140]. The next year some employees of the Cape even organised a fundraising in order to finance the

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[137] See for example: Letter, 15 November 1836, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, CO 3985-24
[138] R. Allen, *Slaves, freedmen, and indentured laborers in colonial Mauritius*, p. 55-56
[139] Further details on the history of the Liberated Slave Depot are told in Chapter 4
[140] Letter, 1840, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, CO 4008-100

transportation of said liberated slaves to their colony[141]. In the end those petitions were successful, and a steady flow of liberated slave started to move from Saint Helena to the Cape: the island economy was relieved by a huge number of people it could not employ whilst the Cape received the cheap workforce it so desperately needed[142]. The Cape also made specific requests on the sex of former slaves they needed: instead of a 50-50 male/female ratio, they requested two-thirds of the liberated slaves to be men[143].

The white and free inhabitants of Saint Helena suffered a fate no different than the one of the liberated slaves. The history of white emigration from Saint Helena to the Cape is a history of exploit, poverty and harsh conditions. As stated before, the island's economy was shrinking and many people found themselves unemployed. The Colony of the Cape advertised emigration, promising good jobs with a decent pay. The truth, however, was very different. Already in 1839 several Saint Helenians emigrated to the Cape filed complaints stating that 'their masters starved them' and that the Cape was 'not a land overflowing with milk and honey, neither are the wildernesses of the interior' and that a worker there was 'a slave except in name'[144]. Soon after this complaint, the Governor of Saint Helena, General Middlemore, instituted a Commission to analyse those claims. The Commission discovered that children and adults were tricked by dishonest employees to sign contracts as 'apprentices', whilst signing a contract of indentured servitude[145]. The Governor thus issued a proclamation that 'recommended to avoid entering in any engagement of servitude but to leave the island free'[146]. The situation was so dire that the complaints arrived directly to the Imperial government in London. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Aberdeen, wrote a letter to the Governor of the Cape stating that he received complaints from Saint Helenians labourers in the Cape and that he requested the Governor to investigate their condition[147].

Emigration from Saint Helena, both of liberated slaves and whites, continued for a long time. Only in 1899 the Crown decided to stop emigration in order to avoid the complete depopulation of the island[148].

These emigrational fluxes and the evolution of the conditions on Saint Helena, led a rapid change in the composition of the population of the island. Whites and blacks were now mostly poor people, belonging to the same social class.

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[141] Letter, 23 December 1841, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, CO 4009-54
[142] Letter, 18 June 1842, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/148-2457
[143] *Ibidem*
[144] Letter, 24 March 1839, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/131-2070
[145] Letter, 30 April 1839, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/131-2070
[146] Proclamation, 28 May 1839, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/131-2070
[147] Letter from Lord Aberdeen to the Governor of the Cape, 16 November 1839, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/131-2070
[148] Letter, 1899, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, PWD 2/8/20-234

The distinction between the white free planter and the black slave workers was thus completely replaced. The island entered a period of racial mixing, creating a creole population with mixed origins. On the Blue Books, the official statistical record that each colony had to compile and send to London, the Governors were forced to divide the population between 'white' and 'coloured'. On Saint Helena, often the governors were unable to do such distinction, and thus compiled the simple amount of the total population without distinctions between 'whites and coloured'[149]. In 1868 Governor Elliot wrote to the Duke of Buckingham[150]:

> In no other place on Earth were it would be more difficult to discriminate between the various strains of blood of which the body of the population is composed than here in St. Helena. […] Of European we are but a handful. […] It is significant to mention that in this island contrary to my long experiences in all part of the World where the populations are of mixed origin, we do not use the expression 'coloured people' at all. It would be considered reproachful to do so. The population here in short is distinguished broadly into 'white' and 'dark' people. The last term signifying every conceivable tint from deep black to a complexion impossible to distinguish from that of the purest white.

Interbreeding and the endogamy dynamics of a small isolated island favoured this racial mixing, and even today the population of Saint Helena presents a unique blend of characteristics.

2.8 Slavery on Saint Helena in the wider context

Saint Helena could be considered a case-study in the history of slavery and abolitionism. Even if the island was not alone in the 'experiments' that led to the abolition of slavery and the rising of indentured labour, Saint Helena was always on the edge of each one of these processes. The island faced the abolition of the slave trade fifteen years earlier than the rest of the Empire, employed the Chinese indentured labourers on a large scale twenty years before the West Indies and planned to abolish slavery before the approval of the Abolition Act in 1833.

During the eighteenth century, Saint Helena presented a slave system that was influenced both by the different traditions of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

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[149] Blue Book, 1850, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[150] Elliot to Buckingham, 11 September 1868, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

The island was truly a connection point between two worlds, and meshed these influences to create a unique slave system. In the early nineteenth century the island became more involved in the fight for abolitionism against slavery. This change in the mentality of the island's planters, who became truly committed to the cause of anti-slavery, was a long process that began at the beginning of the eighteenth century with the introduction of regulations for the better treatment of slaves. The economic structure changed the idealistic framework of the people, gradually making Saint Helena free of any form of forced labour by the 1830s. The process was long, and took the entire century to change the planters' minds: nevertheless the economic influence strongly worked to shape their mentality, transforming them from slave masters only reluctantly committed to treat better their slaves to inspired abolitionists. This deep change in their mentality influenced the first decades of the nineteenth century, with the promotion of abolitionist laws on Saint Helena that further changed the island's economy and society.

Saint Helena became gradually involved in the active fight against the slave trade in the South Atlantic, shifting the 'position' of the island more to the Atlantic network rather than to the IOW one. During the 'swing to the East' of the British Empire Saint Helena went to the opposite direction, towards the Atlantic world: this – apparent – contradiction is explained in chapter four.

Abolitionism and evolution of labour was however not a straight line towards freedom: setbacks occurred also on Saint Helena, and the path to full emancipation was long. Former slaves become de facto indentured labourers to repay their debts and also the white population descended into forms of forced labour when emigrating to the Cape. The government, especially the East India Company's, played a decisive role in emancipating the slaves, for example guaranteeing loans to the slaves in order to buy their freedom, and was probably a decisive force in changing the mentality of the slave owners.

Saint Helena's fast transition from slavery to indentured labour and then to free labour dramatically anticipated the same changes that the British Empire made in the nineteenth century. The undeniable transitions that occurred between 1780 and 1830 shaped the British Empire into a new form: if analysed in the specificity of small places like Saint Helena it can be seen how the Empire moved not as a whole but as separate entities, with different 'speeds', linked by a network of relations. Saint Helena moved faster than other colonies towards the noble goal of free labour, and faced more difficulties in other aspects of the 'transition' between the two 'ages' of the Empire.

Tracing the history of labour relationships on Tristan and Ascension is harder than Saint Helena. Both the islands were peculiar in their own way, as Tristan had an extremely small population whilst Ascension was essentially a military base. Furthermore, both islands were colonised when Britain had already abolished the trade and was about to abolish slavery *in toto* in less than twenty years.

The main source on how labour was organised on Ascension is the report of Captain Barnard written in 1864[151]. Ascension had been a base for the African Squadron during the fight against slave traders. Ascension even received more liberated Africans from Saint Helena, as it was described earlier. Labour on Ascension was dependant in great degree from the local military base, which owned in the 1860s also most of the cultivable land. The few free planters had small lots of land to work for themselves.

Several free paid 'African' workers were employed by the Navy on its land. Barnard's approach to the matter reflects the racism strictly intertwined with the second, imperialistic, phase of British colonialism. Common elements of this racism were the low esteem of the abilities of the Africans and the firm belief that white men were not only superior but they were also able to 'improve' the Africans. Barnard reported that

> The farm workers at the Mountain are all Africans. They are paid by the day, are unskilled, and require the most constant watching; there are, however, many duties, such as collecting grass, planting shrubs, carrying manure, and doing scavenger's work, which they can perform better than white men; and I have found that when employed on any particular job, with marines as leading men, they do a fair amount of work[152].

Barnard thinks that a reorganisation of labour on the island could increase the agricultural output of Ascension. He elaborated a proposal of reorganisation and submitted it to the Admiralty

> I would propose the introduction of a new system of labour, without any addition to the present number of labourers or

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[151] Observations on Ascension, 1864, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12
[152] *Ibidem*

expense. […] I am of opinion that about twelve qualified agricultural labourers, under a non-commissioned officer, should be selected from marines of known good character […] with the extra pay of *9d.* per diem […] The number of Africans should be reduced gradually by sending home those who had served their time[153].

From Barnard's report it can be inferred that the marines were also employed in the fields, probably because the base of Ascension did not have much daily activity to do. It can also be inferred that the Africans were probably under a contract similar to indentured labour. A third element is the will of Barnard to expel the African, the 'Other', from the island like the inhabitants of Saint Helena wanted to do with the Chinese indentured labourers. Furthermore, this stark distinction between 'white' marines and 'African' labourers signals that the society of Ascension did not faced a process of creolisation and racial mixing like the one that happened on Saint Helena. According to Barnard's report, in 1867 there were only six marines employed in agriculture and forty-eight Africans. His project to gradually substitute the work of forty-eight Africans with that of just six more marines seems pretentious and racially prejudiced-driven.

Together with agriculture, the day-to-day activities of the naval base were the other industry present on the island. The HMS Meander was the main ship anchored at Ascension, together with three schooners used for lime collection and turtle hunting and three smaller ships in constant use for towing lighters. The Naval base consisted of eighty-eight marines, one-hundred and fifteen Africans and sixteen carpenters. A great deal of work in the base was the disembark of trade goods and supplies. Most of the marines and the African had to work, however the government did not recognise any further pay for the Africans for this extra work. Barnard instead decided to pay them a little extra for this work. Another industry where Africans and marines were employed was turtle hunting. African workers were employed in the patrolling of the beaches to avoid stealing, however they did not receive any extra pay for this duty.

Ascension in the nineteenth century had a simple economy centralised and organised by the military administration of the island. Barnard reduced the private-owned land to a minimum, as he considered that a centralised organisation of the work in the fields was more profitable. The workforce on Ascension was entirely free, at least on paper. The Africans employed on the island were under a contract of indentured, with few rights and underpaid. They were employed in the more

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[153] *Ibidem*

demanding and demeaning jobs, from carrying manure to disembark cargo. They could not leave the island until the end of their contract, and thus they were bind in a *de facto* servitude. The white population of the island was composed mostly by marines and sailors. They were free by every right, however they were subject to the military authority of the island that on Ascension was also the civil administration. Their work was organised according to a military approach, and they were almost deprived of any form of private initiative as the fertile lands were owned by the Navy. This contrast with other islands, were farming was an essential part of the salary of a soldier stationed there.

The situation on Tristan was very different than the one on Ascension. Despite the small size, the island was able to offer enough cultivable land to every settler as their number was limited. The work in the field was not hard on Tristan, Captain Brine reported that

> As the labour required for clearing or planting this friable soil is very slight, the community are able to maintain comparatively large stock and to raise with ease great quantities of vegetables. This freedom from severe labour, together with the frequent visits of ships, which enable them to exchange their produce for such goods and comforts as their families may require, must greatly add to their contentment and reconcile them to their isolated position[154].

All the families of Tristan were planters, and no garrison existed on the island since 1817 thus making Crown-owned lands non-existent. The organisation of the island's society reflected this organisation of labour. Tristan was a community of peers, with all the families enjoying the same amount of wealth. Doctor Reid described the division of labour in the families in this way

> Their occupation is almost purely pastoral; the men look after their flocks and herds of sheep, cattle and swine, they till the ground for the potato and other vegetables, and occasionally go fishing. The women look after their household affairs only, and the children, especially the boys, scamper about the island[155].

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[154] Report upon the Island of Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 1st 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[155] Medical Report on Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 3rd 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

This community reflected the society of a small village of Europe before the enclosures and the industrial revolution. In this Arcadian society the issue of race was also non-existent as the population of the island was created by a mixture of populations that arrived on Tristan with shipwrecks or, like in 1826, with the arrival of women from Saint Helena. The population was a mixture of Indian, African and European origin[156], in this aspect very similar to the racial mixing that happened on Saint Helena and that abolished many racial barriers.

2.10 Conclusion

Labour is an essential part of society and how labour is organised influence greatly society. The South Atlantic islands developed three very distinct societies due to the different developments of labour.

Slavery was the most prominent form of labour organisation in the Atlantic. The slave trade was a business that involved three continents and was essential in sustaining the colonial economies of the New World. The Atlantic was a complex system where slavery influenced the societies of Europe, Africa and America. Slaves brought with them their culture, their traditions and forged some new in the lands they were employed. African kingdoms' economies benefitted of the trade, warring against other populations in order to have slaves to provide to the Europeans. The system presented peculiarities and differences within the Atlantic world, as Saint Helena demonstrated, however it had a common leitmotif of exploitation, harsh punishments, hard labour and rebellion.

Britain, although a latecomer in the Atlantic world, established its role in the slave trade. The British were also the first to start to abandon this form of labour, since the abolition of the trade in 1807. The history of the South Atlantic was deeply influenced by this commitment of the government to contrast the trade.

Saint Helena found itself in the network of slavery and slave trade, albeit it was a secondary, or even tertiary, node of this network. Nevertheless, the ideas of the 'Black Atlantic' travelled also on Saint Helena together with influences from the East, from that Indian Ocean World where slavery was completely different than in the Atlantic. In the East, the East India Company related to a world where slaves were employed in skilled duties, had a status in the Asian societies and received a treatment radically different from the Africans in the Atlantic. Slaves on Saint Helena gained a better status as their cost was extremely high on the island and the scarce population also required more manpower to perform skilled and even military duties. Thus, even if they received influences of the 'Black Atlantic', slaves

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[156] *Ibidem*

on Saint Helena rarely revolted and they conformed to the society of the island. They adopted conformist Anglicanism instead of developing new forms of Christianity and they were trusted with greater freedom of movement on the island. These apparent freedoms, however, were limited by the social structure of the island, and from the idea of Saint Helena as an island-fortress itself. The island's structure and isolation allowed the government to exert a stricter social control on everybody, slaves included, making traditional ways of coercion of slaves useless.

Nevertheless, Saint Helena's inhabitants developed a more 'progressive' attitude towards slavery, and the island anticipated the rest of the Empire on every step towards the full emancipation of slaves. Indentured labour was a form of *de facto* slavery, and its failure was due most to the lack of integration of the Chinese community rather than moral concerns of the inhabitants, that continued to exploit the former slaves with other forms of labour. The real change on the island happened with the end of the Company's rule that caused a social turmoil on Saint Helena with the whites becoming poorer and more close to the former slaves. Emigration was an important issue on Saint Helena, that contributed to the feeling of abandonment that the inhabitants perceived after the Crown's takeover.

In the nineteenth century Saint Helena and Tristan, where society was more equal and the government less present, developed a more creole society. Racial differences gradually disappeared on the two islands. On Ascension, instead, where the government's rule was strong and the society militarised, the process of creolisation did not happen in this period.

This is one of the first conclusions that could be drawn from this chapter, as the South Atlantic islands proved that where social control was strong the different social groups remained more separated (pre-Crown Saint Helena, Ascension), whilst when the government did not interfere with the society the process of creolisation happened quickly (Saint Helena post-1837 and Tristan). This contrasts, apparently, with the Caribbean where the islands faced creolisation albeit a strong government presence. The causes could be found in the different size of the islands and the ability of the government to effectively control the territory.

The second conclusion is that the case-study of the South Atlantic islands proves that the social dynamics of labour and slavery happened faster here, where societies were smaller and the processes limited to a small group of people. The position of these islands and their unique geographical conditions were essential in shaping the labour organisation on them. Their uniqueness from the rest of the Empire demonstrates how the periphery is not necessary more 'retrograde' and even could be more 'advanced', anticipating the developments in the rest of the colonial societies.

Chapter III - *Environment and environmentalism*

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how environmentalism influenced European imperialism and vice-versa. This analysis is conducted starting from the South Atlantic islands where their unique environment forced the colonial agencies to act in new ways still not experienced in Europe or elsewhere. The analysis starts defining what islands were during the age of colonialism, and how they were perceived by Europeans. Then the 'experiments' conducted on Saint Helena to improve the island's environment by the East India Company are scrutinised and contextualised in the wider themes of the British Empire. Great attention is given to the so-called network of botanical gardens and on the island's legislation on environment. From this analysis the chapter is going to enter the debate whether Britain exerted an 'imperial environmentalism' or an 'environmental imperialism'. The cases of Ascension and Tristan are described, with particular regard to Ascension and the experiments conducted there by the great British Botanist Sir Joseph Hooker.

3.1 Islands and Empire

Islands have played a key role in the mentality of Europeans since the Greek and Roman age: islands – as J.R. Gills has explained[2] – are a crucial part of the imagination of the 'western civilisation' and are deeply connected with the Europeans' ideas of utopia and their vision of the world outside Europe (and the Mediterranean basin)[3].

Christianity during the late Roman and Medieval age further influenced Europeans towards an idealistic view of islands, often identifying them with Biblical locations like the Garden of Eden[4]. This cultural background, according to Gills, created the preconditions for the age of discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth

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[1] E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978)

[2] J.R. Gillis, *Islands of the mind : how the human imagination created the Atlantic World* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 5-7

[3] On islands and Utopia see also: S. Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans : colonialism and agency, 1688-1804* (Durham N.C., 1999); M.D. Gordin, H. Tilley and G. Prakash (ed.), *Utopia/dystopia : conditions of historical possibility* (Woodstock, 2010); R. Edmond and V. Smith (ed.), *Islands in history and representation* (London, 2003)

[4] J.R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*, p. 19

centuries[5]: Columbus' intention was to discover an island, Cipango, and the Americas were only recognised as a continent and not as an archipelago only several decades later.

Connected with this idea of islands, Gills has also analysed the idea of *Oceanus*, which slowly evolved from the medieval conception of an insuperable barrier to a new idea of bridge and connection between islands and Europe[6]. The birth of the 'Atlantic world' started with this new European mentality and people, goods and ideas began to travel around *Oceanus*[7]. The 'mythological' quest to find the Eden and other utopian islands moved constantly from isle to isle; when all the Atlantic was mapped and discovered the quest shifted to the Pacific and Oceania[8]. The evolution of this process created a new idea of the 'Atlantic as an archipelago'[9]: Atlantic islands became a network and a system independent from the borders of the European Empires, as D. Hancock has demonstrated with his work on Madeira's wine[10].

There are two more relevant outcomes of the discovery of Atlantic islands. Firstly, they played a rising role in colonial empires; secondly there is the evolution of the concept of utopia related to them. Britain, a relative late comer imperial power, built its strength on islands and maritime supremacy: islands were crucial for trade with the rich plantations of the West Indies and with the Asian civilisations of the Indian Ocean. The mercantilist ideology and naval warfare made islands crucial for European empires to rule the seas[11].

Atlantic islands, nevertheless, remained in the minds of European sailors as Edens and utopian places: explorers' descriptions of islands all depicted them as the epitome of paradise on Earth[12]. Saint Helena was not exempt from this process. The island itself resembles the description that Dante gave of the island of Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*: a mountain, emerging from the sea, with the Garden of Eden on the top of it. Descriptions of Saint Helena depicted the island as the best example of 'Edenic, Arcadian and Picturesque imagery in the textualization of islands in an imperial and colonial context[13]'. The truth, as this chapter will demonstrate, was far from these idealistic views. Islands began to be depicted as dystopian places: they

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[5] *Ibid*, p. 45

[6] *Ibid*, p. 47-48

[7] D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick (ed.), *The British Atlantic World 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 1

[8] Gillis J.R., 'Taking history offshore', in R. Edmond and V. Smith (ed.), *Islands in history and representation* (London, 2003), p. 27

[9] *Ibid*, p. 27

[10] D. Hancock, *Oceans of wine : Madeira and the emergence of American trade and taste* (London, 2009)

[11] J.R. Gillis, 'Islands in the making of an Atlantic Oceania', in J.H. Bentley, R. Brindenthal and K. Wigen (ed.), *Seascapes : maritime histories, littoral cultures and transoceanic exchanges* (Honolulu, 2007)

[12] J.R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*, pp. 70-71

[13] A.H. Shulenburg, 'Island of the Blessed : Eden, Arcadia and the picturesque in the textualizing of St Helena', *Journal of Historical Geography*, XXIX, 4 (2003), p. 536

were used as prisons, like the early Australian colony, and their 'Edenic' nature revealed itself as being as cruel as inhospitable. This process of 'demolition' of the utopian image of islands started in the eighteenth century and found its full development in the nineteenth, with a new wave of dystopian literature on islands[14].

The consequence of the rising position of islands and their utopian role was that from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth century Atlantic islands became 'experimental places'. Atlantic islands were deeply involved in the trade system, in the cultural and ideological network of the Atlantic and, with the beginning of the trade with the East Indies, also with the Indian Ocean world as well. Ideas, social models, trade goods and people travelled and mixed on islands creating new societies and social structures. External forces, such as the East India Company in the case of Saint Helena, influenced and encouraged these experimentations. This process, however, was not only from the metropolis towards the periphery: it could be observed also how the local communities autonomously evolved and created new experiments. The system of influences and interactions between different parts of the Empire was a complex network that often connected colonies to each other with a horizontal, rather than hierarchical, system of relationships.

Small islands like Saint Helena are of particular interest: in their small social environment significant processes that later influenced wider contexts were tested. The focus of this chapter is on the role of the state and how experiments in the field of governance and authority were first tried on islands before being extended on a wider scale.

3.2 The East India Company experiments on Saint Helena

When the famous explorer James Cook visited Saint Helena for the second time in 1775 he wrote a report to the Admiralty describing the situation he found on the island. He wrote

> Whoever views Saint Helena in its present state and can but conceive
> what it must have been originally will not hastily change the
> inhabitants with want of industry[15].

Cook continued analysing the economy of the island and how Saint Helena could become economically independent and profitable as a Colony, making some suggestions

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[14] See the introduction of M.D. Gordin, H. Tilley and G. Prakash (ed.), *Utopia/dystopia : conditions of historical possibility* (Woodstock, 2010)

[15] General Records and Descriptions, London, National Maritime Museum, REC 20

More land [must be] appropriated to planting of corn, vegetables, roots etc. instead of being laid out in pasture[16].

Cook identified also the causes of why the situation was not going to improve, indicating the East India Company as the main force against this process

This is not likely to happen so long as the greatest parts of land remain in the Company their servants. Without industrious planters this island can never flourish and in a condition to supply shipping with the necessary refreshments[17].

Was really the Company a force against the progress and the well-being of Saint Helena? Or did other factors influence the failure of Saint Helena as a self-sustaining colony?

Saint Helena remained an expense for the Company for the whole period of its rule, and making experiments on the island in order to improve its productivity seemed an obvious solution. From a historiographical point of view these kinds of economic experiments could appear of scarce relevance in the wider context of the East India Company and in general in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean world. However, some of these experiments provide a glimpse of a wider picture, larger than the small island of Saint Helena: a wider world of relations and processes was often involved, expanding the network and the relationships of the island. Social experiments, mainly in the field of the organisation and division of labour, were analysed in the previous chapter. In this chapter the focus is mainly on economy, agriculture and the laws issued to regulate the environment on the island.

The East India Company made several attempts to improve the productivity of Saint Helena. Table one shows a list of the more relevant interventions of the EIC in the field of agriculture and industry:

Table one: Chronological list of Saint Helena agricultural and industrial innovation

Year	New cultivation or industry
1672[18]	Cultivation of indigo, seeds sent from Surat

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[16] *Ibidem*

[17] *Ibidem*

[18] Letter, 14 Jun. 1672, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/87, ff. 272-73

1683[19]	Cultivation of indigo (new seeds), olive trees, production of saltpetre from the island soil
1684[20]	Cultivation of sugar, cassava, linen, grapefruit tree and tobacco. Building of an iron mine
1687[21]	Cultivation of yams, potatoes and lemon trees
1689[22]	First vineyard planted by Capitan Poirier
1698[23]	Production of arrack
1703[24]	First 'botanic' garden established close to the Governor's house
1727[25]	Extensive plantation of yams
1729[26]	Cultivation of coffee, plants sent from Mokha
1745[27]	Establishment of cloth industry using slaves as employees
1747[28]	Establishment of the firsts 'public houses'
1802[29]	First brewery established on the island
1814[30]	Cultivation of 'Baingan melon'
1815[31]	South African trees imported
1820s[32]	Establishment of a whale fishery
1824[33]	Establishment of a saving bank
1826[34]	Importation of silk worms from China and consequent production of silk
1826[35]	Establishment of a pottery and brick manufacture with technical support from Bombay
1827[36]	Cultivation of white mulberry

Three interventions made by the East India Company are particularly interesting: the implantation of vineyards in 1689, the establishment of the first

[19] Letter, 03 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98
[20] Letter, 05 Apr. 1684, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 175-81
[21] Letter, 31 Aug. 1687, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/91, ff. 188-89
[22] Letter, 05 Apr. 1689, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/92, ff. 16-18
[23] Letter, 15 Dec. 1698, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/93, ff. 74-76
[24] Letter, 31 Dec. 1703, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/95, ff. 120-23
[25] Letter, 29 Nov. 1727, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 11-18
[26] Letter, 28 Nov. 1729, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 291-94
[27] Letter, 17 Jan. 1745, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/109, ff. 185-88
[28] Letter, 09 Mar. 1747, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/110, ff. 44-45
[29] A. Beatson, *Abstract of laws and regulations established by the honorable Court of directors or by the governor and council 1751-1813* (Saint Helena, 1813)
[30] Letter, 21 Nov. 1814, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/9/13, ff. 106-37
[31] Letter, 27 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/9/13, ff. 140-57
[32] Consultation, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/1373/54697
[33] Consultation, 31 Dec. 1825, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/804/21569
[34] Consultation, 1826, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/866/22852
[35] Consultation, 19 Jul. 1826, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/866/22831
[36] Consultation, 31 Aug. 1827, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/926/26005

botanic garden in 1703 and the introduction of coffee plants in 1729. These three events all fit into wider themes and wider contexts, which link Saint Helena with the East India Company world, and demonstrate the relevant role of the island in the imperial network, alongside its use as supply station for the India fleet. The arrival of Captain Poirier and his planting of vineyards on Saint Helena is linked with the wider theme of the 'Huguenot diaspora', as Poirier and his followers were all Huguenots. Saint Helena's botanic garden became crucial in the history of botany in the British Empire and linked Saint Helena with the botanic gardens of Kew and Calcutta. The cultivation of coffee on Saint Helena was another experiment: the island was the first EIC territory to plant coffee, beforehand this valuable cultivation was extended to the rest of the Company's empire.

The East India Company hired Captain Stephen Poirier in 1689 with the specific purpose of setting up vineyards on Saint Helena in the Company's plantation[37]. Poirier travelled with twenty other French people[38], other experts in vine cultivation and their families[39]. Poirier's orders were to set up a vineyard, teach the local planters how to keep it and evaluate if using the grapes for the production of wine or, possibly, for the distillation of brandy[40]. Notably the correspondence between the Court of Directors and the governor of Saint Helena omitted an important detail concerning Poirier and his fellows: they were all Huguenots.

The presence of Poirier and other Huguenots on Saint Helena is thus part of this wider historical process called the 'Huguenot diaspora'. The Huguenots were not simple immigrants from France, but most of them were well educated and skilled in many fields. Sending them to the colonies where most of the immigrants were unskilled workers – the North American plantations for example – was a precise strategy aiming to improve the 'quality' of these colonies. Poirier was sent to Saint Helena for the same purpose; as the local planters were unskilled and unable to set up more complex cultivations, he was hired to improve the quality of Saint Helena as a colony.

Poirier and his fellows in 1689 were unable to speak English; indeed the Company had hired a translator[41]. By the time Poirier became the governor of Saint Helena in 1697– a quite impressive rise in the social hierarchy of the island – he was able to keep written correspondence in English and, *ça va sans dire*, to rule the colony in the name of the East India Company. This was not unexpected: Poirier was probably one of the most educated and skilled of the Company's civil servants on

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[37] Letter, 05 Apr. 1689, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/92, ff. 16-18
[38] D. Shreier, *St Helenian English : origins, evolutions and variations* (Amsterdam, 2008) p. 100
[39] Letter, 05 Apr. 1689, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/92, ff. 16-18
[40] *Ibid*
[41] Letter, 05 Apr. 1689, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/92, ff. 16-18

the island, making him a suitable candidate for the governorship. Moreover, even if it always acted in the interest of Britain, the East India Company was an enterprise with several employees of non-English (or non-British) nationality.

For most of the eighteenth century the botanic garden of Saint Helena played only a 'local' role, with no great connections or influences with the rest of the Empire. The garden was first established in 1703[42], with the purpose of preserving some of the island's indigenous plants and cultivating flowers, exotic vegetables and fruit for the governor's table[43]. After the drought of 1722-1728 Governor Byfield saved the last two remaining indigenous redwood trees of the island by planting them in the garden, and later used their seeds to repopulate Saint Helena's forests[44].

It was not until the 1780s that within the British Empire and more specifically within the East India Company a system of 'botanic gardens' started to evolve. Botanists in India and in Britain started to create stronger relationships between each other, and thus emerged the need to send plants from Britain to India and vice-versa[45]. The reasons were both scientific and economic: not only did botanists in Kew aim to study plants typical of India, but also it became crucial for the East India Company to send different valuable plants all over its Empire, in order to cultivate them in different places and maximise the profits. Saint Helena was a fundamental link in this system: it was very hard for a plant to survive the long journey between India and Britain, so Saint Helena's garden became a 'resting place' for these plants[46]. Plants arrived on Saint Helena from India or Britain, were planted in the Company's garden to regain strength, and then were sent to their final destination. This system expanded and started to involve the West Indies as well: the botanic garden of Saint Vincent joined those of Saint Helena, Calcutta and Kew[47]. The East India Company started to send trained personnel to the island since the late eighteenth century[48] and at least until 1825[49]. Together with plants, ideas travelled throughout this network: in 1792 the governor of Saint Helena asked to the Company for the authorisation to use 'Saint Vincent policies' on environment protection[50]. In 1802 the famous French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Bory de Saint-Vincent visited Saint Helena and described in his report how the Company Garden worked at that time as resting point for the plants travelling to England

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[42] See picture 8 in the Appendix

[43] Letter, 31 Dec. 1703, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/95, ff. 120-23

[44] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism : colonial expansion, tropical island Edens, and the origins of environmentalism 1600-1860* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 119

[45] *Ibid*, p. 339

[46] Consultation, 5 Aug. 1824, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/766/20734

[47] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 341

[48] *Ibid*, p. 342

[49] Consultation, 7 Jul. 1825, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/804/21610

[50] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 342

C'est au jardin de la compagnie, situé sur la place et vis-à-vis l'église, qu'on familiarise les végétaux, nouvellement arrivés, avec l'aridité du sol : ils trouvent là une assez bonne terre de rapport[51].

The botanic garden links Saint Helena with the wider history of science and environmentalism in the Empire. The garden started in the early eighteenth century as an experiment to solve a local issue – the preservation of the local species – but in a century evolved into a more complex structure connected with the West Indies, India and Britain.

The third and final experiment was coffee. Although coffee remains today one of the most exported – and valuable – product of Saint Helena, primary and secondary sources on this topic are scarce[52]. Europeans have traded coffee since the sixteenth century, but the secrets of the cultivation and transformation of coffee beans remained out of their reach for the whole seventeenth century. Only in the early eighteenth century were European traders finally able to obtain seeds and 'secrets' of coffee from Mokha, a trading city of the Arab peninsula. The East India Company obtained the first coffee beans in the 1720s, and decided to send the first ones to Saint Helena in order to set up a coffee plantation[53]. Saint Helena was the first EIC colony to plant coffee[54], although it is not possible to find the reasons in primary and secondary sources. There are two main causes that could be inferred. Firstly Saint Helena was a tropical island, with a climate similar to other EIC colonies in the Indian Ocean. Secondly Saint Helena's position was strategic to further spread coffee seeds and plants throughout the Company's empire. It can be inferred that, similarly to the botanic gardens network, the Company decided to plant coffee for the first time on Saint Helena in order to have a good amount of seeds and plants to send to other colonies from a strategic position on the Company's main trade routes.

How does this history of experiments link with the main themes of this dissertation? The evolution of the role of islands in European empires – notably the British – is deeply connected with the debate concerning the transition from the old to the new British Empire. As Gillis wrote 'in the nineteenth century, western civilization came decisively on shore, turning his back to the oceans. The great age of islands was giving way to a new age of continents, an era that bring us to the

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[51] Voyage dans les quatre principales îles des mers d'Afrique, 1802, London, Royal Botanical Gardens, qT11

[52] Saint Helena's coffee became popular in Europe during Napoleon's captivity on the Island, and even today is considered a sophisticated and expensive product. See for example: A. Wild, *The East India Company : trade and conquest since 1600* (London, 2000), p. 80

[53] Letter, 28 Nov. 1729, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 291-94

[54] A. Wild, *The East India Company : trade and conquest from 1600*, p. 22

brink of our own times'[55]. Islands continued to play a role during the first half of the nineteenth century, but by then India was the greatest concern of the British government. The British Empire until at least the Seven Years war remained a maritime Empire, built with the strength of the Royal Navy and based on islands, littoral outposts and riverbanks settlements – with the notable exception of the Thirteen Colonies[56]. During the nineteenth century islands lost their prominent role in empires, as a result of both the invention of steamships and the evolution of the economic and social contexts[57]. Islands thus moved from a position of crucial nodes – strategic for the exploration and control of the seas – to a minor role, usually limited to science[58].

The role of islands as micro-environments for experimentation with new social and economic models gradually decreased during the nineteenth century, as the 'imperial focus' moved to mainland colonies like India or, in the second half of the century, Africa. Even if it is very difficult to identify direct influences of the experiments run on Saint Helena and other islands in the development of nineteenth-century colonies, some common patterns can be noted. Forest regulation in India in the late nineteenth century and the links between the botanic gardens are two examples of these remote linkages. In India the fencing of forests and in Sri Lanka the creation of an enclosure system in the nineteenth century are both examples of policies experimented earlier on islands like Saint Helena.

Saint Helena followed a path of decline like other islands, and the 'age of experiments' ended with the rule of the East India Company: after 1834 some experiments continued, notably in the fight against slavery – but with the marginalisation of the island the government gradually started to pay less and less attention to Saint Helena in the remainder of the nineteenth century, leading the island to the depressed situation found by travellers like P. Gosse during the inter-war years of the twentieth century[59].

3.3 The Crown rule and the case of Ascension

After 1837 the new Crown administration was less eager to experiment on Saint Helena as the island became less and less important in the Empire. Sources are

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[55] J.R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*, p. 124

[56] D. Cannadine (ed.), *Empire, the sea and global history : Britain's maritime world, c.1760-c.1840* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 3

[57] J.R. Gillis, 'Islands in the making of an Atlantic Oceania', in J.H. Bentley, R. Brindenthal and K. Wigen (ed.), *Seascapes : maritime histories, littoral cultures and transoceanic exchanges* (Honolulu, 2007)

[58] A. Vieira, 'The islands and the Atlantic system', in H. Pietschmann (ed.), *Atlantic history : history of the Atlantic system* (Gottingen, 2002)

[59] See the introduction of P. Gosse, *Saint Helena 1502-1938* (London, 1938)

scarce, as reports on agriculture and forestry were present in the archives for the EIC period but not for the Crown period. A precious source of information is a report written in 1884 and found in the Royal Horticultural Society in London[60]. The first information Morris gave us was that all the Crown lands were barren, with the exception of the farm of Longwood. This contrasts with the EIC period when the Company owned the most fertile lands, including the vast estate of Plantation House. These estates were passed from the Company to the Crown, and so they were either sold to private owners or abandoned. Morris states that in 1869 the Crown sent a 'skilled gardener', named J.H. Chalmers, to replenish the trees population of Saint Helena. Chalmers was successful at the beginning, however later he wrote that 'there is nothing, either in the climate or situation of an unsuitable character, the soil alone seems to be at fault, being insufficient for the further development of the plants'. This emerges also in Morris report, written twenty years later: the majority of the land of Saint Helena was now unsuitable for agriculture or forestry. The exploitation of the island by the inhabitants damaged the ecosystem of the Saint Helena beyond repair: the cutting of the trees favoured the erosion of the soil by the wind, creating vast barren regions that resembled desert[61]. If the first accounts of Portuguese navigators were accurate, trees reached the edge of the cliffs in Saint Helena before the arrival of humans. Three hundred years later trees were limited to a very small area, and the coastline were unsuitable for any large vegetable life.

Another important piece of information contained in Morris's report is regarding 'flax'. This plant from New Zealand, scientific name *Phormium tenax*, produced a very valuable fibre (not to be confused with the northern hemisphere's 'flax', *Linum usitatissimum*). Many planters on Saint Helena started the cultivation of this plant and a factory for the transformation of the fibres was established in Jamestown. Unfortunately, the island was not able to produce enough flax, as 100 tons of leaves are needed to produce just five tons of fibre. Morris did not stress in his report of any damage caused by the *Phormium tenax*, however today the plant is considered to have infested and destroyed several parts of the island, causing the extinction of several endemic species[62]. The introduction of the flax was the fatal blow to the unique ecosystem of Saint Helena, reducing the endemic forest just to Diana's Peak. Morris also revealed that beekeeping was no longer practiced on the island since the 1860s and encouraged the Crown to influence the inhabitants to start such industry. Today honey is again produced on Saint Helena, and in the last

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[60] D. Morris, *A report upon the present position and prospects of the agricultural resources of the island of St. Helena* (London, 1884)
[61] See picture 9 in the Appendix
[62] See picture 10 in the Appendix

ten years it has surpassed coffee as the most expensive produce of the islands. In fact, Saint Helena's bees are immune to the great disease that is killing millions of bees worldwide, mostly due to pollution and other factors. Bees on Saint Helena, isolated from the rest of the World, now face immediate extinction if they come in contact with a contaminated product. Thus the island government has issued a very strict embargo on import of any bee-related product[63]. For this reason, honey produced on Saint Helena is now considered to be one of the purest in the World, reaching an astronomically high price.

The famous botanist Joseph Hooker after his visit to Saint Helena in the 1840s made a series of recommendation to improve the agriculture of the island. He suggested to the government to implement a plantation of cinchona. In less than twenty years the plantation, that initially had a good success, was destroyed due to the limited care it was given[64].

In 1836 Charles Darwin travelling on the Beagle sailed first on Saint Helena and then to Ascension Island. The visit of the famous scientist on Saint Helena is well documented, and he observed the endemic species and the ecosystem of the island in his research on biology and evolution. When he reached Ascension he observed that the island was barren, without any vegetation capable of sustain a population. Darwin made important observations also on the ecosystem of Ascension and shared his thoughts with his friend and colleague Joseph Hooker of the University of Cambridge[65]. Hooker visited Saint Helena and Ascension in 1843 and made four suggestions to the Admiralty in order to develop a self-sustainable ecosystem on Ascension. The core of this project was the creation of a cloud forest, such as the one on Saint Helena, to capture humidity and increase rain precipitations on the island. The initiative was a success and Ascension developed a cloud forest on the top of the Green Mountain (its highest peak) and abundant vegetation all over the island[66]. When Hooker visited Saint Helena he remained impressed of the island and of its unique ecosystem:

> The principal interest of this wreck of an indigenous Flora of St Helena
> is, however, its great peculiarity: taking it at its highest, of 50 species
> of flowering plants; 40 of these are absolutely peculiar to the Island –
> a wonderful proportion of an order so cosmopolitan – […] The Flora

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[63] http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/The-problem-with-honey.pdf [Page visited on October 2nd 2015]

[64] The Academy, April 19th 1879, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12

[65] D.M. Wilkinson, 'The parable of the Green Mountain: Ascension island, ecosystem construction and ecological fitting', *Journal of Biogeography*, 31 (2004), pp. 1-4

[66] *Ibidem*

of St Helena is thus an unread riddle, none other at all resembles it, either in the peculiarity of its indigenous vegetation, or in the rarity of any of the species of other countries[67]

Hooker in the same document also described how his experience on Saint Helena helped him in devising the plan to improve the environment of Ascension:

On my return to Europe, I drew up, at the request of the Admiralty, a report on the island [of Ascension], and recommended that its green summit should be planted with all sorts of common tropical and temperate shrubs and bushes, such as I see flourishing at St Helena. […] the result is that the water supply is now increased […] The consequences to the native vegetation of the Peak however, will, I fear, be fatal, and especially to the rich carpet of Ferns, that clothed the top of the mountain when I visited it[68].

This event is relevant for two reason: first, it shows how the botanical 'network' of experiences and structures worked in order to advance the imperialist goals of Britain, as Ascension was a crucial naval base for the Navy; second it shows how the British government had the knowledge and the means to contrast the deforestation and desertification of Saint Helena but acted effectively only on Ascension, that was at the time considered more important from a strategic point of view[69]. Saint Helena retained still some interest for the Imperial botanists due to its own unique flora of endemic plants. In 1866 Mellis, the Crown Land Commissioner of Saint Helena, wanted to send a plant of the endemic 'St Helenian Tea Plant' (*Frankenia portulacifolia*) to Hooker at Kew Gardens for study and conservation at the Royal institution. Mellis considered that most of the endemic species on Saint Helena were dying and thus they needed to be preserved at Kew. The system of Botanical networks, however, was not working on Saint Helena as efficient as it worked in the past. Mellis had to concede that 'it is very difficult to transplant […] but shall still go on trying'[70].

Ascension gradually replaced Saint Helena in the botanical garden's system of the British Empire. The presence of botanists on Ascension and the interest of the Royal Navy in the success of Hooker's idea, favoured this shift. In the reorganisation of the sub-imperial system of the South Atlantic following the conquest of the Cape

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[67] Sir Joseph Hooker Papers, London, Royal Botanical Gardens, JDH 1.9
[68] *Ibidem*
[69] See Chapter 4 for further details on the rise of Ascension and the fall of Saint Helena
[70] Mellis to Hooker, Sept. 9th 1866, London, Royal Botanical Gardens, 920 MEL

Colony and the reshuffling of importance of the colonies in the Empire, Saint Helena did not only lose its role as trading hub in favour of the Cape, but also its role as botanical hub in favour of Ascension.

3.4 Environment, authority and social control on Saint Helena

During the period called 'Wood civilisation'[71] – the long timespan between the Neolithic and the Industrial Revolution when wood was the primary human energetic source – the exploitation of forests became a prominent economic, and then political, issue. In Europe forests started to reduce in size during the Roman age, and after the decline and fall of the Roman Empire they started to grow again[72]. Even during the early Middle Ages the use of forests was considered a privilege and was protected by feudal rights. The economic growth that started after the year 1000 saw a new reduction of forests: this process was not entirely European; China for example also faced a high exploitation of forests in the same period[73].

England faced an extraordinary reduction of its forests: in 1086 almost 15% of England was covered by forests, and by 1400 between one-third and one-half of these forests had been cut[74]. The subsequent 'maritime' development of Britain politics, with a further need of wood for ships, made the demand even higher but it was not until the end of the Civil War that the first concerns about forests emerged[75]. England's answer to deforestation was not a stricter regulation to protect forests, but rather was an increase of the demand of wood from the colonies. Moreover, England started to use coal as energy source in the early 1620s, and by the year 1700 almost fifty per cent of England's energy was from coal[76]. This was quite early compared to the rest of Europe. France, for example, adopted instead a completely opposite solution: in 1669 Louis XIV issued the 'forest ordinance', the first set of national regulations concerning forests[77]. The French approach was different from the English because, instead of looking for different sources of wood or other alternatives, it focused on the restoration of the woods in metropolitan France.

This premise was necessary to introduce the theme of this section that is not environmentalism *per se* but one of the main themes of this dissertation: the evolution of the role of government and authority. How are environmental policies linked with authority?

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[71] P. Malanima, *Pre-modern European economy : one thousand years 10th-19th centuries* (Leiden, 2009)

[72] *Ibid*, p. 56

[73] *Ibid*, p. 57

[74] *Ibid*, p. 57

[75] G.A. Barton, *Empire forestry and the origins of environmentalism* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 12

[76] P. Malanima, *Pre-modern European economy*, p. 61

[77] G. Barton, *Empire forestry and the origins of environmentalism*, p. 12

Firstly, it is necessary to contextualise the term 'environmentalism' in the pre-nineteenth-century world. As G. Barton has put it:

> The earliest regulations of forest use occurred within the framework of custom and usage. Legal structures tended to preserve traditional forest usage for every stratum of society […] Through deforestation raised concern, this concern did not amount to a modern conception of environmentalism, with all its varied implications of ecological balance, biota preservation, water flow, soil, air and climate stability[78].

R. Grove had a different opinion, stating that 'conservationist' concerns emerged even before the nineteenth century[79]. However, both R. Grove and R. Guha agree on the link between authority and environmentalism: Guha stated that environmentalism was not appreciation of nature, but a social program with precise goals[80]. R. Grove balanced these two aspects, linking both the need for more social control with genuine environmentalist ideas[81].

A point of divergence between Guha and Grove is that the former considers the influences of the metropolis over the colonies paramount in defining social control towards environmental laws[82]; the latter instead considers colonies the true engine of these regulations, with the 'periphery' that influenced the 'centre'[83]. The philosophical difference between these two interpretations can be summarised by the question posed by R. Rajan: is it 'imperial environmentalism or environmental imperialism?'[84] Guha's interpretation implies a more direct intervention of the Europeans in the colonies' internal policies creating an 'environmental imperialism', while Grove's interpretation implies a more direct involvement of the local colonial officers and local populations defining more an 'imperial environmentalism'. The two interpretations should not be considered exclusively: the two visions can coexist if using a wider perspective. Grove is right when he considers islands and the 'periphery' as the 'engines' of experiments and regulations if looking at the pre-1800 Empire, and Guha is also right when he considers the metropolis the source of environmental regulation and authority in nineteenth-century India. The answer that unifies these two theories is the transition

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[78] *Ibid*, p. 11

[79] R.H. Grove, 'Early themes in African conservation', in D. Anderson and R. Grove (ed.), *Conservation in Africa* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 22-23

[80] R. Guha, *Environmentalism : a global history* (Harlow, 2000), p. 3

[81] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 358-59

[82] R. Guha, *Environmentalism : a global history*, p. 3

[83] R. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 486

[84] R. Rajan, 'Imperial environmentalism or environmental imperialism?', in R.H. Grove, V. Damodaran and S. Sangwan, *Nature and the Orient : the environmental history of South and Southeast Asia* (Oxford, 1998)

between the different phases of the British Empire: environmental regulations developed in the periphery during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, influencing the centre – the EIC and the Crown. These ideas were then applied in the new colonies in Asia and Africa. This process shows both the transition between two ages and the lineages of continuity within the Empire. In this context Saint Helena emerges as a significant case study, as Grove already underlined in his *Green Imperialism*. Two aspects are notably relevant: the laws enforced to protect the forests and the agricultural system of the island.

Saint Helena's ecosystem was particularly delicate, and the human presence started to threaten the 'ecological balance' of the island from the first years since its discovery. The introduction of goats by the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century proved to be a long term and almost unsolvable problem for the island, as the goats became wild during the first 150 years due to the absence of a stable human population and started to destroy the vegetation of the island. Rats arrived with some ships as a further alien species of dangerous animals. Once trees were destroyed by these animals, and later by men, the strong Atlantic winds quickly 'brushed away' the fertile soil leaving only useless rocks and infertile land. In a 1956 review on the agriculture of Saint Helena the long term effects of this deforestation remained evident: the fertile and forest areas of the island remained only in the interior and were reduced to a small portion of the total surface[85]. The author remarked how, according to his analyses and old descriptions of the island, trees and plants used to grow very close to the cliffs- At the time of his enquiry those areas were only naked rocks[86].

The conservation of the island's forests became a major issue for the governors of Saint Helena from the first half of the eighteenth century. A first great project was the fencing of the 'great wood': the first proposal was made in 1683[87], but the project was only completed in 1728 after long years of work[88]. Fencing forests is considered a first measure of social control: the presence of a fence around common woods completely changed the idea of public and private property and deeply influenced the surrounding agricultural world[89]. Even if the first idea of fencing was made as a response to the presence of wild goats, its implication for the agricultural life of the island were wider: access to the forest was no longer free for everyone, and the government was able to monitor who entered the forest and what they could (or could not) do in it.

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[85] N. Humphrey, *A review of agriculture and forestry in the Island of St Helena* (London, 1957)
[86] See picture 9 in the Appendix
[87] Letter, 03 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98
[88] Letter, 29 Nov. 1728, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/104, ff. 11-18
[89] M. Rangarajan, *Fencing the forest*, p. 207

Almost a century later, in 1813, another measure taken to preserve Saint Helena's forests proved to be a new strong intervention of the government in the life of the planters. Governor Beatson ruled that every land on the island needed to be fenced, and that one of every ten acres of land should have been planted with at least 2000 trees[90]. This measure not only forced the planters to 'sacrifice' one tenth of their cultivable land for the collective benefit of the island's environment, but also created a more stable and definitive system of enclosure: fencing the fields using trees was a more 'permanent' solution than just using a normal fence, thus imposing the government's view on the shape of the fields and on the concept of private property.

The 1813 act involved not only forests but also the fencing of the planters' fields. The island presented a quite peculiar agricultural system that 'was effectively a hybrid of a freeholder English agriculture and a plantation system established in the North American colonies and in the West Indies'[91]. The reduced amount of land was employed both for sustenance agriculture and for a profitable plantation production. Planters were encouraged to produce food for themselves and their families and as well as exportable goods like sugar[92]. What Grove called an 'uncertainty of purpose'[93] of Saint Helena was reflected in the constant legislation of the council towards the planters, creating even more confusion and a general mismanagement of the island's agricultural production. Agriculture on Saint Helena soon became a highly-regulated sector: from strict regulations on cattle and other domestic animals to hunting rules and from legislation on the total amount of wood that every planter could take from the forests every year to complex public works on canalising water the island's council was quite busy in its legislative activity[94].

The combination of a heavy, but often ineffective, legislation which seldom gave confusing indications to the planters generated a situation of constant tension between the community of planters and the Company's government. Both Royle[95] and Grove[96] agreed on this state of constant unrest: it is significant that the island faced five mutinies of either the planters or the garrison in 1674, 1684, 1693, 1787 and 1811. The three mutinies of the seventeenth century, which happened with a

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[90] A. Beatson, *Abstract of laws and regulations established by the honorable Court of directors or by the governor and council 1751-1813* (Saint Helena, 1813)

[91] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 102

[92] *Ibid*, p. 102

[93] *Ibid*, p. 103

[94] A. Beatson, *Abstract of laws and regulations established by the honorable Court of directors or by the governor and council 1751-1813* (Saint Helena, 1813)

[95] S. Royle, *The Company's Island : St Helena, company colonies and the colonial endeavour* (London, 2007), pp. 103-124

[96] R.H. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 104

quite high frequency every ten years, could be related to the fact that during those years the Company enforced most of the regulations to shape the island's economic and agricultural structure, and enforced the main laws concerning justice and crime punishment[97].

The new social order imposed by a stronger government generated new social unrest caused by the clash between the common people and new forms of authority. On Saint Helena the forest and agricultural regulations, which were started with conservationist and economic reasons, generated social unrest in the planters. These troubles caused the government to impose new regulations, not only in agriculture but also in other fields of public life, which created further tensions: this casual process continued until the nineteenth century when the rise of governments' influence in public life increased dramatically during the 'Global Age of Revolutions'.

During the Crown rule, paradoxically, the regulations on Saint Helena in terms of environment were extremely scarce. In the period 1837-1861 just five laws were passed on subjects related to environment[98]. The first, in 1838, issued stricter regulations on hunting, defining better the times and places were game could be hunted and regulating how hunters must operate. The second regulation, also issued in 1838, was about cattle and sheep, banning their pasture over Crown lands. The third law was again on game and hunting, issued in 1857 and limiting the number of hunting licenses. In 1857 two regulations were issued regarding fire prevention, organising the population in order to intervene effectively in case of fire. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, the Crown issued less laws than the Company even if its rule was more direct and intrusive. Did the same thing happen on environment? There is no definitive answer, as the Crown Governor might not had needed to issue more environmental regulation because the Company already did it extensively in the decades before.

Before the Revolutions the states had already started to become more powerful and intrusive into the life of their citizens. Environment and agriculture, for their dominant economic and fiscal role in pre-industrial societies, became priority issues for most of the governments[99]. In small colonies, and notably on islands like Saint Helena where social control was supposedly easier, social experiments in this field started and developed to answer specific needs of that colony. However, as Grove stated, these small experiments at the end of the eighteenth century influenced the great policies of the main imperial agents – such

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[97] S. Royle, *The Company's island*, p. 57
[98] Local Laws 1837-1853, 1853, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[99] J. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (London, 1998), pp. 11-12

as the East India Company[100]. This 'imperial environmentalism' reached the centre of the Empire and transformed itself during the nineteenth century into an 'environmental imperialism' when, for example, the British created the powerful Forest Department in India in 1864[101].

This new process of asserting authority towards environmentalism found its roots in small colonies like Saint Helena, although there was a marked difference between the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Empire and the nineteenth and twentieth century one. If during the 'old' Empire these processes of authority towards environment emerged from the colonies, in the 'new' Empire the same processes were driven mainly from the central power. Islands were places where European states experimented and 'explored' new fields of government intervention: the long process that transformed the old *Ancient Regime* monarchies into modern and omnipresent states started and was favoured also by islands like Saint Helena.

It could be argued that the experiments attempted on islands like Saint Helena anticipated, and even created the premises, for what the British Empire did during the nineteenth century in India, Africa and South East Asia. Looking also at Europe, it could be seen how experimental islands like Saint Helena anticipated some developments that did not occur in the Old World until decades later. A committed program of fencing and 'scientific' forestry was tried in Europe for the first time in Prussia in the 1780s[102]: similar measures were taken in Saint Helena at least forty years earlier. The extent and the influence of these experiments must not be exaggerated – and this is the main critique that could be made against Grove – even if some links, and continuities (and discontinuities) are undeniable. The experiments of a single island like Saint Helena alone have little importance, but a more defined picture emerges if considered with and connected to the wider network of islands and relationships of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

3.5 Ascension and Tristan da Cunha

In this last section of the chapter it is going to be analysed the general situation of the other South Atlantic islands in the second half of the nineteenth century. The two main sources for this analysis are the report of Captain F.L.

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[100] R. Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 104

[101] M. Rangarajan, *Fencing the forest*, p. 5

[102] J.C. Scott, *Seeing like a state : how certain schemes to improve human condition have failed* (London, 1999), pp. 14-15

Barnard for the Admiralty on the island of Ascension of 1864[103] and the report on Tristan da Cunha sent by Captain L. Brine to the Admiralty in 1876[104].

The island of Ascension faced some dramatic changes during the nineteenth century. The island was colonised at the beginning of the century and in the course of several decades saw its environment completely changing, becoming a bright example of how environmental policies and imperialistic intentions combined could effectively shape the World. It has been already mentioned how the combined efforts of Charles Darwin and Joseph Hooker changed the history of the island, using science to transform empirical observations into a concrete plan that transformed a quasi-deserted island into a green and fertile one. It is not absurd that newspapers compared Hooker's success on Ascension to the modern-day research on how to terraform xeno-environments like Mars, in order to make them suitable for humans and thus paving the way for the ultimate colonisation, that of the Solar System[105]. The situation of the island at the beginning of the century was dire. Several accounts of Ascension describe it as an arid and inhospitable place. The island was still confused with others, and still in the early decades of the nineteenth century Captain Macdonald had to write to the Admiralty that

> I have heard some say they [Brazilian and Spanish sailors] had seen the Trinidade, and would maintain is by the distance from Brazil, but probably they did not give any allowance for currents so subject to the most with on that coast, and if they had seen the Trinidade, and their course is exactly on the same parallel, they must have seen Ascension also. It is my firm opinion that there is but one isle seen on different bearings and differently described[106].

The confusion between Ascension and Trinidade led the Admiralty to ask Captain Macdonald and others to clarify if there were other islands in the region other than Ascension and known only to the Portuguese and Spanish. The exact date of this letter is not known, as the document is not dated and is together with other descriptions of the island of Ascension collected in 1818-1819, thus after the British occupation of the island. It might seem unlikely that after colonisation the British were so ignorant about the geography of the island, so the report might had

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[103] Observations on Ascension, 1864, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12

[104] Report upon the Island of Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 1st 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

[105] H. Falcon-Lang, 'Charles Darwin's ecological experiment on Ascension isle', BBC News Online, http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-11137903 Page last visited on January 8th 2016

[106] Descriptions of the isle of Trinidade or Ascension, 1818-1819, London, National Maritime Museum, PLT.77

been written a few years before. Furthermore, there is an island called Trindade 1,200 kilometres east of Brazil and thus the report of the sailors heard by Macdonald could have referred to this island instead of Ascension. The report describes the island as very high and steep, with the presence of 'a river of good water[107]' flowing into the bay. The author also painted a map showing clearly the river flowing. This is unexpected as the water sources of Ascension were in the interior, one of the reasons sailors avoided the island for refurbishing water during the eighteenth century. The island had also 'orange and lemon trees, a great number of birds of the size of Dunghill fowls which have combs like cocks and a great quantity of fish'. The birds described by Macdonald could be the Ascension frigatebird (*Fregata Aquila*) one of the eleven original endemic species of the island. The presence of lemon and orange trees was because they were most certainly planted by the Europeans, as it was a common practice to cultivate those trees along the trading routes to have a constant supply of citrus used to contrast scurvy. Macdonald's report thus contrasts with the general consensus of Ascension as a barren and desert island. However, Macdonald's report seems overoptimistic. Still in 1850 Dr. E.H. Cree visiting Ascension wrote on his journal 'I did not land [on Ascension] having seen enough of the desolate cinder in my former visit in the "Vixen"[108]'. And the reports of Darwin and Hooker of the 1830s and 1840s confirm Cree's impression on Ascension rather than Macdonald's. It can also be inferred that Hooker's 1843 plan for the environmental development of Ascension was not completed, as Cree still described the island as 'desolate'.

In the 1860s Hooker's project instead was progressing. In a letter dated March 8th 1863 written by the Commander in Chief of the Cape Station B. Walker to the Admiralty a report on the progress of the transformation of the island is present[109]. Walker reports that

> Mr. Bell the Head Gardener continues with praiseworthy perseverance and much skill to cultivate every available piece of ground, as far as the labour at his disposal will permit. He has planted several thousands of young trees and shrubs, many of which are thriving particularly on the North East side of the mountain and on the south front he has increased in raising some good patches of gorse which will in time afford shelter for bearing more important things[110].

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[107] *Ibidem*
[108] Private Journal of Dr. H. Cree, 1850, London, National Maritime Museum, CRJ 13
[109] Walker to the Admiralty, Mar. 8th 1863, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12
[110] *Ibidem*

The actions of Bell were driven by a scientific approach, based on decades of observations and studies on botany. This is probably one of the great differences between the environmental experiments conducted on Saint Helena to repopulate the island's groves and Hooker's great plan. The scientific approach of Hooker and Bell, and the increased knowledge on the subject, contrasted with the empirical and naïve approaches used on Saint Helena. However, it was thanks to those experiments conducted on Saint Helena that scientists like Hooker were able to improve their techniques and transform Ascension in a success of environmental interventionism. Hooker studied Saint Helena and exchanged ideas and knowledge with other scientists that studied the island[111].

During the same report, Walker immediately reminded us that those environmentalist efforts were conducted by the Royal Navy not out of philanthropic goals but in order to improve the efficiency of Ascension as a naval base. In fact, is stated that

> The greater portion of the weather garden is cultivated with the common and sweet potato, and pumpkins, which promise a good crop. The grass particularly the Park appears to succeed, and to be spreading favourably. The North Cottage grounds are being successfully worked, and all sorts of trees and plants are flourishing there beyond expectations together with considerable plots of grass[112].

The main goal and purpose of the project was to make Ascension self-sustaining and able to maintain the men of the Royal Navy stationed there. The project had also some setbacks, such as in the case of a great spread of caterpillars. In order to counterbalance them, Bell required the importation of birds that could eat those caterpillars, as the local endemic birds were mostly devoted to eating fish

> The caterpillars have been very destructive to the vegetables, and although flocks of small birds are located on the mountain, some other kind is required which feeds on this kind of vermin

This approach mirrored the one used on Saint Helena, where often an environmental issue was solved introducing another variable in the equation,

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[111] See for example: Letters from Melliss to Hooker, 1866, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 920 MEL
[112] Walker to the Admiralty, Mar. 8th 1863, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12

opening the road to new possible issues. Importing foreign birds on Ascension was one of the factors that contributed to the extinction of some of the local endemic species of birds, the same thing that happened on Saint Helena. In this case the lesson from past mistakes was not learned.

In 1864 Captain F.L. Barnard filed a long and detailed report on the situation of Ascension[113]. The report is interesting also because Barnard studied the history of the island, recovering first-hand reports on site, and thus giving us an excellent overview on how the situation on Ascension evolved in the fifty years between 1814 and 1864. He used the records present in the office archives of Ascension and reviewed the work of his predecessor on Ascension, Captain W.F. Burnett. Even Barnard in 1864 found difficult to recover information about Ascension in the period 1815-1824, when a detachment of Royal Marines arrived on the island relieving the previous Naval personnel. In 1824 on Ascension there were only donkeys and mules, brought by the military, and sheep and bullocks were asked for to the Admiralty. When Dampier's crew was on the island in 1701 they discovered water following the goats. This means that at some point between Dampier's shipwreck and 1824 goats went extinct on Ascension.

Barnard first focused on the issue of water, essential for life on any island. He wrote:

> The supply of water was scanty and precarious, and even in 1829
> it depended on drips in the banks, and the rain that was collected
> in casks and a few old tanks. Three carts, six oxen, and three
> drivers were employed daily in transporting about 360 gallons a
> distance of six miles, and even this quantity was liable to a
> considerable diminution after long droughts[114].

This report, one that could be considered more than reliable, further discredit Macdonald's description of the island. It can be questioned if Macdonald's did truly visited Ascension or was indeed describing the Brazilian island of Trindade. The Brazilian and Spanish sailors that he mocked in his letter might had been right and he wrong.

In 1824 the garrison started to work on pipelines connecting the springs found by Dampier to the settlement. They were able to stock forty tons of water[115], but they were still not enough to fully sustain the settlement. Furthermore, the

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[113] Observations on Ascension, 1864, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12
[114] *Ibidem*
[115] *Ibidem*

Admiralty decided that making Ascension a port where ships could embark fresh water was a priority. In 1829 a boring machine was brought on Ascension, and several attempts were made to find water. In the end in 1830 Captain Brandreth decided to proceed to excavate higher in the mountain, near a site of volcanic debris.

> The experiment succeeded and at the depth of 25 feet from the surface a spring was found; the shaft was sunk 60 feet and still yields (in 1864) from three to four tons daily, even after a long drought[116].

Thus the island was able to provide water for the African Squadron, the ships that had the goal to stop the slavers in the Atlantic. Two more springs were opened during the 1830s and a system of waterworks created also artificial ponds where birds and animals could drink, and spread water across the island to improve cultivation and agriculture. The constant growth of the island population soon made the need of more water again an issue. In February 1847 the first machine to desalinise seawater was brought to Ascension. Barnard's opinion was that further work was necessary in 1864 to ensure a more stable water supply to Ascension. Barnard during his command of the station, took some decisions to improve the situation. He paved the roads, because water flew on them becoming muddy and damaging the roads. He constructed several pipelines and tanks to improve the distribution of water. He installed in 1863 a wind engine to operate a water pump. In 1861 he installed a larger and more efficient distilling machine that pumped water directly out of the sea. He further suggested other improvements to the pipes and the tanks to the Admiralty. According to Barnard the rainfalls were not enough to generate water reserves for the drought season (that lasted six months every year). This means that after twenty years the cloud forest idea of Hooker still did not operated at full force, leaving Ascension without rain for a long period.

Barnard then moves into analysing the agricultural situation of Ascension, dividing its territory into four distinct homogenous parts. The first part is the Peak of Green Mountain, with its immediate surrounding areas. This area is the most interesting, as it is where Hooker and Bell focused their attention in order to replicate the cloud forest of Saint Helena to increase the rain output of Ascension. Barnard described the highest part of the Peak this way

> At the summit is a small piece of table land, on which the Bermudian cedar, guava, hibiscus, and other shrubs flourish; it is

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[116] *Ibidem*

frequently enveloped in mist […] Orange trees brought with great care from Rio and the Cape of Good Hope, have been tried on the N.E. side where the soil is deep and good but without success […] [the surviving trees] were transplanted into a nursery, where they must remain until the weather is favourable for putting them into sheltered spots in the ravines where lime trees flourish[117].

Essential was the role of the Gardener, Mr. Bell:

Numbers of shrubs have been planted by the sides of the path leading to the Peak since Mr Bell's arrival in 1857. They look healthy and strong, and the more tender ones are guarded by tree guards. […] a proof of how much moisture is attracted by planting[118].

This report confirms the content of Walker's letter, with a great success of Bell's attempt to create the forest on the Peak. Barnard acknowledged the results, especially in the role of the forest in generating moisture and humidity.

The second region of Ascension are the fields located right below the Peak, between 650 and 450 metres over the sea level. This region is for Barnard the most important, as the most fertile and productive lands were located here, with the presence of both agriculture and cattle. Barnard found the region was poorly organised, stating that

The farm buildings were so scattered and ill arranged that no great body of manure could be collected. All the slaughtering was carried on in the garrison and the offal thrown into the sea. I made a complete change in the system: built a fodder store, demanded chaff cutters and oil-cake crushers, formed large yards adjoining the cow-house by excavating, did away with the detached sheds, and connected a sufficient number of iron tanks to ensure a constant supply of water on the spot[119].

Again on small islands the role of the government was extremely strong, able to reshape the entire agricultural economy of Ascension without any interference of the local planters. The agriculture of the island was focused mostly on potatoes and pumpkins. The most cultivated ones were the sweet potatoes, albeit they 'are not

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[117] *Ibidem*

[118] *Ibidem*

[119] *Ibidem*

generally liked as a vegetable, and cannot be used in soup'[120]. Barnard attempted to increase the production of English potatoes, importing seeds from the Cape and Loanda. The infestation of caterpillar was regarded seriously, as it impacted heavily on the island's agriculture. In particular, it affected the cultivation of English potatoes and cabbage, a plant that it was tried to introduce. French beans and turnips were other minor produce of the islands, together with the wild New Zealand spinach. In the private grounds of the cottages, planters succeeded in producing small quantities of leeks, French beans, lettuce, endive and herbs. Pineapples were also successfully introduced on the island. He suggested a change in the management of the Crown lands, firing the African workers and replacing them with trained workers from the Marine garrison. The most fertile lands were seized by the government in order to improve them, and Barnard recommended to continue this arrangement

> I do not think it would be expedient to appoint a commissioned officer to the Mountain or allow private gardens to be re-established. The present Mountain regulations would not require any alteration, everything not exclusively military remaining under the head gardener[121].

The lands were in fact militarised in order to organise production, thus excluding private property by the inhabitants of the island from the most profitable lands. The heavy presence of the military on the island had an influence on the civilian population, that lived in an extremely regulated environment. The work on the Mountain involved also the fencing of grounds in order to create areas for the cattle. From the comments of Barnard, it seems that sheep were not a threat to the environment like they were on Saint Helena.

Another important element of Ascension's economy were turtles. The government had created an organised and efficient way to exploit this 'natural resource' of the island. The turtles laid their eggs in the three main bays of Ascension, and watchers were appointed to constantly monitor when this happened. Every bay had a ship and a crew assigned to do all the work. After the eggs hatched and the little turtles went to the sea, they returned to the shore when they were bigger. Then the crews captured them and returned them to the main port of Ascension. The government paid half a crown for each turtle, which was sold abroad fifty shillings, meaning a profit of over two pounds per turtle. The

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[120] *Ibidem*

[121] *Ibidem*

beaches were garrisoned to avoid the catch of turtles by unauthorised people. In the period 1845-1863 were captured and sold 9,320 turtles on Ascension. Despite Ascension Island has the second largest nesting population of sea green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) of the Atlantic Ocean, the species is now endangered of extinction due to the massive exploitation of this animal. At the time of Barnard this was not a concern, as the annual number of captured of turtles remained steady. The environmentalist concerns of the Navy were materialistic, and thus trees needed to be preserved to provide food to the troops whilst hunting turtles did not affect the survival of the human population of the island.

Barnard left Ascension shortly after writing this report. His zeal in trying to improve the island's forests and fields did not disappear, as an 1866 letter demonstrate

> In consequence of the death of Dr. Luidley [we] have been deprived of his occasional services in connexion with horticultural matters at the island of Ascension. I am therefore commanded by their Lordship to request that in the event of their requiring any advice upon such subjects in future, you will kindly lend them such assistance as may be in your power[122]

The letter was sent to Hooker, still considered by the Admiralty as the main expert on the environment of Ascension and the best person suited in advise the Navy on how best manage the island.

The optimism of Barnard, Bell and Hooker was criticised about ten years later in a book titled 'Six months in Ascension : An unscientific account of a scientific expedition' written by a certain Mrs. Gill. Her husband, David Gill, was an astronomer that was sent by the Astronomer-Royal to Ascension to monitor, measure and observe the 'Opposition of Mars'. The Gills arrived on Ascension in 1877 and spent six months on the island. Mrs. Gill had read Captain Barnard's (in the meantime he had become Admiral Barnard) report of 1864 and had great expectations on Ascension, however she was disappointed about what she found. She wrote

> Stones, stones, everywhere stones, that have been tried in the fire and are now heaped about in dire confusion, or beaten into dust,

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[122] Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty to J. Hooker, January 31st 1866, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12

which we see dancing in pillars before the wind. Dust, sunshine,
and cinders, and low yellow houses fizzling in it all![123]

Gill continued stating that meat, milk and water were all rationed on a daily basis to preserve the scarce quantities of such essential goods.

By careful management, and a plentiful use of salt water whenever
it was practicable, we could eke out our scant allowance of fresh
water to a sufficiency; and this novel poverty enabled me to make
two valuable discoveries in culinary art-viz., that fish and potatoes
are better when boiled in salt water than in fresh[124].

Gill's description of the wrongs of Ascension continued, criticising the wood on the top of Green Mountain as there was not 'any special beauty in this mountain'[125]. Did Barnard's report be so exaggerated? Or instead was Gill's book too critic? Barnard in his job had to paint his work in a positive way, however never in his report he depicted Ascension as a lush island, emphasising only the most relevant areas of Ascension. Furthermore, Gill's description could be the rant of a middle-class Londoner forced to reside in a remote island inhabited mostly by soldiers. Any picture of modern-day Ascension will reveal that most of the island is covered by rocks, and that trees grow only in some parts of it. As always, science can solve this problem: Hooker's plan, and Bell's and Barnard's, did work. They, and the other men involved in the environmental engineering of Ascension, succeeded in creating a new ecosystem more stable and suitable for the life of humans as modern scientific studies by biologists proved[126].

Discussing the agriculture and the economy of Tristan, and if it was used as an experimental island like Ascension and Saint Helena, is an extremely difficult task. Sources on Tristan are scarce, its population was less than one-hundred people for most of the nineteenth century and the island was not able to produce anything of value. Bearing these premises in mind, in this section a brief overview of the island's economy and ecosystem is made.

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[123] The Academy, April 19th 1879, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12
[124] *Ibidem*
[125] *Ibidem*
[126] See for example: D.M. Wilkinson, 'Guest Editorial: The Parable of Green Mountain: Ascension Island, Ecosystem Construction and Ecological Fitting', *Journal of Biogeography*, 31.1 (2004), pp. 1–4

An early description of the island, few years before its settlement in 1815-1816, was written by the French botanist[127] A. Du Petit-Thouars. He described the shores of Tristan populated by many penguins, seals and sea lions. He identified 'une trentaine de Plantes nouvelles' on Tristan da Cunha, revealing also on this island a great biodiversity. Especially in the area close to the waterfall that ends in the ocean, many endemic and peculiar species were discovered. The island was dominated by its volcano, and the colour of the rocks identified a clear volcanic origin. The island was rich of water and small vegetation. Petit-Thouars concluded his thoughts on Tristan stating that

> D'un autre côté, l'île Sainte-Hélène est une preuve de ce que peut l'industrie d'un peuple civilisé, car je doute que pour ce qu'elle tient de la nature elle soit supérieure à Tristan d'Acugna[128].

One of the few accounts on the condition of the colony of Tristan is a report written on November 1st 1876 by Lindesay Brine, Captain of the Wolverine, a ship that called at Tristan that same year[129]. The island had little land available for cultivation, although from the report food did not seem a problem for the inhabitants. They needed to trade with ships for other goods of primary use, however they often paid those supplies with food and water for the ships, indicating even a surplus of production. The settlement of Tristan was described this way by Brine

> The only part of Tristan d'Acunha which can be made available for cultivation is the slope at its north-west angle. […] The village is built on that portion of the slope which lies near a beach singularly protected by an outer belt of kelp, and thus rendered convenient for landing[130].

The settlers had worked hard to create this small area of cultivable land. They cleared the volcanic debris and removed the wild weeds present, planting then English grass that allowed to create good pastures for the cattle. The English grass proved to be stronger than the indigenous weeds, that disappeared wherever that grass was planted. The soil was soft, thus not requiring a great amount of work and allowing a great output of both cattle and vegetables. The importation of mice due

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[127] Mélanges de Botanique, 1811, London, Royal Horticultural Society, 581.DUP
[128] *Ibidem*
[129] Report upon the Island of Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 1st 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[130] *Ibidem*

to ships and of a white fly that was inside a parchment arrived from England were the two threats to the agriculture of Tristan. The economy of Tristan was then depending only on the number of ships calling at their port for water and fresh food

> It is evident that the prosperity of the community chiefly depends upon the number of vessels that visit the island, and I was informed by Peter Green and others that latterly not less than an annual average of 20 ships have called for the settlement lately. The greater number were of British nationality and were proceeding to China or Australia. The visits of the American whalers are becoming less frequent, and now only one or two call in during the year; but there is an annual schooner from the Cape of Good Hope, upon which the people rely for maintaining their communication with their friend[131]

The other source of 'income' for the economy of Tristan were shipwrecks. In the first chapter was mentioned how shipwrecks were the only form of 'immigration' in Tristan. Ships continued to have incidents near Tristan, and Peter Green estimated that in forty years about two hundred people were rescued on Tristan from a shipwreck. The island was even used as a temporary prison during the American Civil War

> The "Shenandoah" landed 30 of her prisoners. These men were supported until taken away by the United States gun vessel "Iroquois" which arrived a few days after the departure of the "Shenandoah"[132].

The welfare of the inhabitants of Tristan was also of concern of the government. Captain Brine was asked to attach to his report another one written by the medic of his ship assessing the health of the islanders. The island population in 1876 amounted to ninety-one people, forty-five males and forty-six females. Forty-two of the islanders were under fifteen years of age. The doctor recognised that on Tristan the islanders lived under the 'healthiest conditions' also thanks to a climate that was 'temperate and free from any extremes of heat or cold' and where the thermometer never fell under five degrees Celsius[133]. The doctor analysed also the population of Tristan, indicating that

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[131] *Ibidem*

[132] *Ibidem*

[133] Medical Report on Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 3rd 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

The community is made up of three distinct races, of which different types are well marked, the Saxon by immigration from England, the United States, and Holland, the African from St. Helena and the Cape, and the Hindoo from St. Helena, descendants of the race imported into that island while it was in possession of the East India Company[134].

There are important elements of analysis. First of all, this is one of the few sources that mentions the ethnic composition of Tristan, the only exceptions are the mentions of the arrival of a Dutch family (1836) and of two Italian sailors (1899). Otherwise, it might be thought that the rest of the population was of British descent. Second, Indians (if the word 'Hindoo' used in the text refers to them) were not a huge community in Saint Helena, even during the EIC period. The so-called 'Lascars' were less than thirty in the 1810s. It can be argued that this influx of Saint Helenians of African and Indian origin coincided with the arrival of several Saint Helenian women on Tristan in 1826 in answer to the islanders call for potential wives. It does seem unlikely that the diverse ethnic groups were 'distinct races' as the doctor pointed out. In an island of less than a hundred inhabitants interbreeding was inevitable and thus racial mixing, the same process that happened on Saint Helena with a population forty time the one of Tristan.

The diet of the islanders was varied and healthy, and alcohol abuse was non-existent. The population appeared 'well-nourished' and the men were 'vigorous', the women 'inclined to corpulency' and the children had 'a particularly healthy appearance'[135]. The doctor had to admit that

Such being the main conditions of the mode of life of these people, it is not surprising that there should be an almost absolute immunity from disease or from any weakly physical state […] Of upwards of 200 children born on the island only five have died in infancy or from the accidents of childbirth. Of the older inhabitants, one died at 102, another at 83, and Corporal Glass, the original settler, died at 67, of cancer, which was no doubt hereditary.

The average child mortality rate for England in 1876 was around 4,5 percent whilst on Tristan this number was 2,5. Even considering that the sample on Tristan

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[134] *Ibidem*

[135] *Ibidem*

is smaller than England-at-large, it is remarkable that on an island isolate, without a trained doctor and without a supply of medicine child mortality was so low. This isolation of the community of Tristan was beneficial for their health, but did not made the islanders immune. Instead, they became more sensitive to common diseases like measles and influenza, and vaccination was done rarely

> It does appear, however, that these islanders are peculiarly liable or rather susceptible to epidemic influences introduced amongst them by ships calling at the island. They have accordingly suffered at different times from measles, hooping cough, and influenza, or some form of epidemic catarrh.

The doctor was concerned with the possibility that a ship could bring smallpox to Tristan, with tragic effects on the population. He also discovered that the last vaccination for smallpox was made twenty years before, thus he decided to vaccinate thirty-nine islanders. He made a suggestion to the government to supply every ship calling at Tristan with the vaccine, to keep the inhabitants always protected.

The dependence of Tristan on trade with passing ships meant that the island would certain face decline. In in 1876 the effects of the opening of Suez were still minor, although in 1882 the Admiralty had to order to a ship returning from Australia to stop at Tristan and Saint Helena as no other ship would do that during winter[136]. In 1885 the situation of the rats on the island was getting worse, as the government refused to send further seeds to Tristan if all the rats were not killed in advance[137]. The islanders, in the person of Peter Green, decided to write to the government to 'complain bitterly of the neglect shown them by the Government of Great Britain'[138]. In 1886 the Reverend of Tristan, E.H. Dodgson, suggested to the Admiralty to evacuate the island and relocate the inhabitants somewhere else[139]. The Admiralty, the government and the colonial government of the Cape (the proposed place of relocation of the settlers) delayed the decision for several months. The evacuation failed for two reasons: the Governor of the Cape stated that the 'chance [for the islanders] of their obtaining a livelihood in the Colony [of the Cape] is hopeless'[140] and the Admiralty and the Treasury did not find the funds to finance the operation[141]. In the following years the requests for further aid to the islanders became more

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[136] Admiralty to Colonial Office, Dec. 1st 1882, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[137] Colonial Office to Admiralty, Feb.16th 1885, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[138] Peter Green to Admiralty, Apr. 4th 1885, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[139] E.H. Dodgson to Admiralty, Mar. 13th 1886, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[140] Governor Robinson to Imperial Government, Apr. 6th 1886, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[141] Admiralty to Treasury, Apr. 13th 1886, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

frequent and more urgent[142], marking a rapid and steady decline of the peaceful and Arcadian society found by Captain Brine less than a decade before. The Treasury even decided to discontinue the 'gratuitous' supplies to the islanders in 1886, worsening their condition. Tristan never enjoyed a 'golden age' like Saint Helena, never became a part of the Imperial system and thus was quickly forgotten when its use was over. Still the islanders of Tristan endured, and as their internal consultation of 1963 that rejected the offer to permanently settle in England demonstrated, they will never leave their own home.

3.6 Conclusion

The role of islands evolved during the centuries of European imperialism and colonialism. Islands moved from being places of Utopia from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries to be places of Dystopia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. European empires relied on islands and littoral settlements to assert their control over trade in Africa and Asia, and islands were instrumental in the exploration, discovery and colonisation of America. Islands were in the earliest years of colonisation *loci* where Europeans could find a defined space for their ambitions, something they could control and manage compared with vast continental lands. Even in the Americas, before expanding on the continent Europeans settled and conquered islands, and only after securing their position there they moved forward. Islands were closed systems, with borders well defined by the sea and where the European states could experience and experiment new forms of authority and social control that they could not enforce in the motherland.

The South Atlantic islands both confirmed and discredited the view that islands became less relevant in the nineteenth century. The islands of the South Atlantic never were like the Pacific islands, that with their discovery and exploration contributed in changing the view on islands as Edenic places – as events like the death of Cook shocked and changed the perception of the 'good savage' to that of the 'cruel savage' that rejects the 'civilisation' effort of the Europeans. It is true that the islands of the South Atlantic lost their importance during the nineteenth century, however the true decline began a few years after the opening of Suez in the 1870s. For most of the nineteenth century Saint Helena and Ascension still played a role in the Empire. If in the nineteenth century the South Atlantic could be defined as a sub-imperial system centred around the Cape, inside this system the hierarchy of the islands changed. In fact, in imperial systems there is a hierarchy between the colonies, based

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[142] See for example: Lt. Gen. H. D'O. Torrens to the Admiralty, April 17th 1886; Rev. E.H. Dodgson to the Admiralty, April 19th 1886; Rev. E.H. Dodgson to the Admiralty, May 18th 1886; London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

on their relevance (economic, strategic, military). In the South Atlantic Saint Helena was the most important, and only, British Colony up to the Napoleonic Wars. The conquest of the Cape made Saint Helena less important, as the Cape became a sub-imperial centre of the Empire. Saint Helena was still able to retain some of its usefulness for the Empire thanks to the Navy and the botanical gardens network. During the nineteenth century the island lost both in favour of Ascension, that enjoyed a greater attention by the government thanks to its importance for the Navy. In the nineteenth century Saint Helena became a third-grade node in the South Atlantic system, behind Ascension and the Cape.

The network of botanical gardens and the experiments conducted by Hooker on Ascension demonstrated how science and Empire were also combined. The success of Kew Gardens as the World's hub for hundreds of plants was not entirely driven by environmentalist and humanitarian goals. The necessities of Empire were to improve the colonies and make them more profitable and self-sustaining. Agriculture was essential, and thus botany became an extremely popular science, well-funded by the government. Hooker's experiments on Ascension transformed the environment of an entire island creating a new ecosystem, pushing forward the idea that colonialism and imperialism could not only shape the society they conquer but also the land. In India, in Australia, in the Pacific the Empire re-shaped the environment and thus deeply changed and influenced the society it ruled.

Experiments on island like Saint Helena during the early centuries of European colonialism were essential in preparing the ground for most aggressive forms of social control in the nineteenth century. The 'imperial environmentalism' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was driven by empirical observations and constant attempts to implement new solutions. In the nineteenth century the 'environmental imperialism' was driven by scientists and was more efficient and effective on the colonies. The various experiments conducted on Saint Helena might seem irrelevant if taken alone, however in this context of evolution of the role of environmentalism in Empire they acquire more sense and relevance. They tell us the story on how the British Empire was able to develop such an efficient 'environmental imperialism' in the nineteenth century. Environmental policies in the late modern age were thus instruments in the hands of the states to assert their authority and exert control over the economy, as most of the production was still linked to agriculture and wood. The Navy, as a branch of the Imperial government, used environmental policies also for its needs, transforming Ascension in a useful base for operations. Environmentalism was driven by utilitarian means, as proper humanitarian environmentalism evolved only during the twentieth century.

To answer to James Cook's questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, the East India Company did good to Saint Helena with its experiments. It is true, the Company retained most of the land on the island to conduct the experiments, however this was necessary to try and achieve success. When in the nineteenth century the Crown forfeited most of its land, the local planters alone were unable to do much with the land they had acquired. It was the Company that managed to save what's left of Saint Helena's forests, imposing limits to the planters and trying to replant the trees. Without such control, the inhabitants would have depleted the island's resources in a few decades.

The final conclusion of this chapter is linked to the present. What happened on Saint Helena anticipated of two hundred years the present situation of the World. Overconsumption of natural resources, desertification, loss of biodiversity: all happened on Saint Helena and other island-colonies much earlier. Those islands were signals, however nobody realised the meaning of what was happening in a wider perspective. Those island faced the risks of introducing alien species in a new environment, with tragic effects. Hundreds of unique animal and vegetable species went extinct in few decades. The governments at that time tried to improve the situation focusing on economy, trying to save the productivity of the islands. The governments tried to solve a crisis creating a new one: if a caterpillar was destroying the crops, they introduced a bird that ate that caterpillar; but then the new birds were too aggressive and led the local birds to extinctions. The lesson of Saint Helena, Ascension, Mauritius and other island-colonies might be of extreme importance today, with the World facing a global emergency on climate.

Chapter IV - *Evolutions in Colonial Government*

Patience, friends.
Change is slow.
The struggle long.
And Rome did not burn in a day.
ERIC JAROSINSKI[1]

During the course of its history, Saint Helena saw a constant increase of the power of the local government over the life of its inhabitants. There were elements of continuity from the East India Company period to the Crown rule, as it will be analysed in this chapter. Four time periods can be identified: the EIC rule (1658-1815 and 1821-1837), the Napoleonic period (1815-21), the early Crown rule (1837-1850s) and the late Crown rule (1850s onwards). As it will be discussed later, the Crown rule evolved from a first phase when Saint Helena was still crucial for the Imperial government to a second phase of decline of the island importance.

The South Atlantic islands evolved in three very distinct and peculiar ways, each one with a different colonial government. These differences and similarities will help to define how authority evolved in the British Empire, especially in the nineteenth century when the aftermaths of the American Revolution and of the Napoleonic Wars deeply changed the Empire.

4.1 Government and authority in the Empire: an overview

The British Empire ruled its colonies in different ways in different times and places. For this reason, it is hard to define a 'general theory' and historians have debated long on this subject. Most historians agree that British imperialism evolved between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Historians disagree whether this evolution was sudden or gradual and on the causes of this change.

England, and later Britain, was a latecomer in the colonial race. The early British Empire was centred on predominantly coastal, white colonies. The reasons of this first wave of expansion were two: on the one hand England, having lost all its footholds on the continent, focused on the Atlantic as a way to expand its power; on the other hand, a strong demographic pressure, starting from 1600, encouraged Britain to find new lands to settle this new population. In just one century, from 1600 to 1700, over 400.000 people emigrated from the British Isles to North America[2]. These early colonies enjoyed a great degree of autonomy from the Imperial centre, both for logistical and political reasons. Furthermore, in the early British Empire the

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[1] E. Jarosinski, *Nein : A Manifesto* (New York, 2015)
[2] H.A. Gemery, *The white population of the Colonial United States 1607-1790* (Cambridge, 2010)

East India Company played a central role in the colonisation of the East, as a sort of 'state within the state'. Thus another element of historical analysis must be considered: British colonialism and East India Company colonialism followed, for at least the first centuries, a different path and different evolutions. The East India Company in its earliest days established outposts, like Saint Helena, instead of proper colonies. The EIC early colonialism was more based on establishing monopolies of trade. Furthermore, the European supremacy in the East started to rise only in the late eighteenth century; before that, the great Asian and Muslim empires were partners and not subjects in their relationships with the Europeans.

The events of the late eighteenth century that so much influenced the evolution of the British Empire can be analysed in a global perspective. Bayly was the first to summarise and organise this view[3], followed by others that expanded or integrated this framework of events[4]. The agricultural crisis of the late seventeenth-early eighteenth century caused troubles to the three great Muslim empires: Ottoman, Persia and Mughal. The latter entered a period of great distress, facing internal struggles and military decline. The Europeans, mostly France and Britain, started to exploit this weakness expanding their influence in India. This competition was one of the main causes that eventually led France and Britain to war in the Seven Years War (1756-1763). This war was extremely expensive and caused both France and Britain to face a fiscal crisis. This fiscal crisis was one of the causes of the American and French Revolutions. These two events shaped and deeply influenced the evolution of British colonialism. The expensive wars against France combined with a rise of the power of the British Parliament, mostly after George III accession to the throne, sparkled a contrast between the colonial assemblies and the central government. Britain wanted to assert a stricter rule over the colonies, not just for fiscal reasons but also to manage them more effectively. Furthermore, colonies without a white Protestant majority were increasing inside the Empire (Quebec, Senegambia, St Vincent, Tobago, Granada, Dominica and Florida)[5]: they received an elected local Assembly at the beginning, however afterwards most of them became Crown Colonies[6].

The effects of the American Revolution on the British Empire are a subject of debate between the historians. Was the American Revolution the end of the British rule in the Atlantic or not? In this dissertation it is argued that this was not the case, as Britain continued to exert its influence on the Atlantic for decades after the

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[3] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004)

[4] For example: W. Klooster, Revolutions in the Atlantic World (New York, 2009), P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2007)

[5] J.P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional development in the Extended polities of the British Empire and the United States* (Athens GA, 1986)

[6] *Ibidem*

Revolution. The American Revolution for some historians, most of all Harlow[7], was an event that marked the distinction between a First and a Second Empire. For Bayly the greatest result of the American Revolution was the shift of the imperial focus from the Atlantic to India[8]: the centre of the British Empire was in the subcontinent as the Imperial administration focused and revolved around the Raj. Marshall was the historian that most tried to find a more coherent explanation of the evolutions of the British Empire. He argued that there weren't a First and a Second Empire but that the same institution evolved during a long period changing its own structure and not only for the effects of the American Revolution. Furthermore, the British imperial focus did not moved entirely on India, as the Atlantic remained under British influence still for decades[9].

The second event that influenced the British Empire was the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic period. The British perceived 'freedom' and 'the navy' as the cores of their imperial and national identities before the Revolutions. In a Europe where absolutist monarchies were the norm, Britain was proud of its individual freedoms, and the Navy symbolised the tool to assert independence from the continental powers. Britain approached the fight against Revolutionary France considering itself a paladin of freedom and liberty against the excesses of the Revolution[10]. In doing so, however, Britain sided with the most reactionary and autocratic monarchies of Europe (Austria and Russia) and started to limit the liberties of its own citizens at home. The nearly twenty years of war saw an increase of the authority of the government in Britain, mostly with the excuse of the war. This increase in authority at home was mirrored by an increase of direct rule in the colonies, with the institution of the 'Crown Colonies' as forms of more direct rule of a territory[11]. This trend endured until the 1830s, when a new wave of liberalism and free trade started to reform the situation both in Britain and in the colonies, with again new liberties and autonomy[12].

Historians also debated if the British state was weaker than the other European countries because it lacked a large land army. From Parker[13] and onwards, many historians thought that the growing importance of standing armies and their cost forced the late Medieval European states to evolve into modern and more efficient entities. Marshall has demonstrated that this is not true, as Britain

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[7] V.T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793* (New York, 1952)

[8] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994) and C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004)

[9] P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2007)

[10] D. Cannadine, *Empire, The Sea and Global History* (London, 2007). p.3

[11] *Ibidem*

[12] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994), pp. 102, 103

[13] G. Parker, *The Military Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996)

was capable to wage war as effectively as other continental countries. Also the East India Company, the state within the state, had a very efficient and modern structure '[the expansion in India] extend the very limited capacities of an 18th Century states to the utmost'[14]. The Napoleonic wars and the innovations in terms of state organisation changed Europe and Britain, creating stronger and more intrusive institutions. The British case is a strong evidence of what Tocqueville stated in his book 'The Ancient Regime and the Revolution': Britain was never conquered by Napoleon and the Napoleonic Code was never implemented there, however Britain evolved into a more efficient and pervasive state nonetheless. The wars of the eighteenth century fought all around the World and the increasing difficulties of managing a worldwide empire caused the changes that created the modern British state.

British nationalism also was born during the Napoleonic wars. Britons considered themselves always the true defenders of freedom, and that their Empire was a force for good: the Royal Navy, the pride of Britain, was the instrument of progress. Reality was instead that white supremacy and racism intertwined with this nationalism, creating the ideology of the nineteenth century Empire[15]. The approach towards colonies also changed: white colonies managed to obtain, mostly after 1830, forms of self-government. Other colonies, for example India, instead faced the presence of a direct rule that tried to pervade all the aspects of the lives of the ruled populations[16].

This long phase of transition not only changed the Empire but strengthen it. In the 1780s Britain was in crisis, with the loss of most of its Empire and a slowing economy. The Age of Revolutions changed everything and in 1815 Britain was the World's leading power. The new Empire was stronger because was also more integrated: for example, the Indian Army was deployed for the first time in 1801 during the war in Egypt[17].

4.2 Government and authority under the East India Company (1658-1815)

Saint Helena's social structure and authority during the East India Company rule need to be analysed from two points of view: the relationships and the social hierarchy between the whites and the military situation of the island. In his book on Saint Helena during Napoleon's captivity, G. Martineau has provided us a clear

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[14] P.J. Marshall, *Problems of empire* (London, 1968) p. 18

[15] R. Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century 1815-1914* (Basingstoke, 2002)

[16] T. Ballantyne, *Bodies in contact* (Duke, 2005)

[17] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994)

picture of the island's hierarchy before 1815[18]. The members of the ruling elite were called 'great whites': the governor and the high-rank Company's officers were in this group, together with the richest planters. These planters were the oldest families of the island, having arrived in the seventeenth century with the first EIC's ships. Their surnames were Doveton[19], Maldivia, Hodson, Brooke and Oaklands[20]. It can be inferred from the map of Saint Helena present in the appendix of this dissertation that these families had their plantations close to Plantation House[21] – the residence of the Governor – and to the more fertile lands of the island: the Dovetons and the Brookes likely had the best plantations after the Company's one[22]. These families controlled the main offices of the island, such as the Company's storekeeper or the sheriff, sat on the island's council and often held the post of deputy governor. During the analysis of the India Office Records documents it was striking how a Doveton was always listed among the members of the island's council in the correspondence with the India House. Martineau, in his studies on the marriage lists of the island, also demonstrated how these families made strong alliances with the military by marrying their daughters to officers[23]. Martineau also suggested that the EIC always named someone with no previous local relationships or links as a governor of the island in order to avoid excessive nepotism in the appointment of the island's and Company's offices[24].

This alliance between the great planters, the high-rank Company's officers and the militaries – often sealed with marriages – created a strong social block interested in keeping order, peace and the *status quo* on the island. Nevertheless, the majority of the white population was part of another social class, the 'little whites'. These were all the other planters, the low-rank Company's servants and the soldiers of the garrison. The small planters owned only twenty acres of land each, granted to them by the Company's regulation and unalienable even by the great planters[25]. These small lots were just enough for the sustenance of their families and of the few slaves who often shared the same roof and table as their masters. These small planters were often able to produce something for trade, and the East India Company always protected their right to trade with the ships that landed at Saint Helena, even if some governors tried to limit this privilege[26]. The condition of the low-rank military and civil personnel of the Company was even more meagre: the

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[18] G. Martineau, *Vie quotidienne a Saint-Helene au temps du Napoleon* (Monaco, 1966), pp. 200-201

[19] On the Dovetons see also: E. Carter, *The Dovetons of St Helena : a family history* (Cape Town, 1973)

[20] G. Martineau, *Vie quotidienne a Saint-Helene au temps du Napoleon*, p. 201

[21] See picture 11 in the Appendix

[22] R.P. Read, *This geographical plan of the island & forts of Saint Helena* (London, 1815)

[23] G. Martineau, *La Vie quotidienne à Sainte-Hélène au temps de Napoléon*, p. 207

[24] *Ibid*, p. 200

[25] Letter, 20 Mar. 1679, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/89, ff. 126v-126

[26] Letter, 09 Mar. 1747, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/110, ff. 44-45

Company denied them the right to own land on Saint Helena until they were employed by the EIC[27], thus making them dependent solely upon their wages and without any chance to improve their incomes, trading with the planters or the ships.

It can, accordingly, be easily understood why soldiers were the main source of troubles for the Company; soldiers were the main protagonists of four of the five revolts on the island – in 1674, 1693, 1787 and 1811. In 1684 the revolt was started by the planters and then joined by part of the garrison[28].

According to the planters the 1684 revolt started because in 1683 the Company decided to lay 'several Impositions on the Planters, which in the whole amounted to more than the real value of their land'[29]. The planters' main complaint was that the Company had promised not to impose duties as an encouragement to settle the island[30]: the revolt started because the EIC betrayed this promise. The leaders of the revolt were hanged after a quick trial, and the widows appealed to the King and the Parliament complaining that the trials were not fair and not managed under the King's law, but under the Company's[31]. As it was stated before, it was usually the governors and the local servants of the Company who decided to raise duties on the planters' trade, whilst the Court of Directors and the India House always reminded them to do the opposite, in order to preserve the island peace.

Justice and crime punishment were first established with a coherent system of regulations in 1681[32]. These regulations reflected the moral conservatism of the island's elite: gambling, alcoholism, blasphemy and prostitution were considered serious crimes and thus sanctioned with harsh punishments[33]. Often the sentence for major offences was being expelled from the island: due to Saint Helena's limited supplies having lots of felons in James Fort prison was an incredible waste of resources. Even minor crimes were often sentenced with some corporal punishment or a fine and not with detention for this specific reason. If the felon was a soldier his fate was often the same: being reassigned to Bencoolen[34], that was seen by the Company's soldiers at that time as the 'bottom of hell' – both for its unhealthy climate and for the dangers of that region.

Gender also played a possible role of social destabilisation on Saint Helena. The male population of the island was overwhelmingly superior in numbers of its

[27] Letter, 24 Mar. 1679, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/89, ff. 123-25
[28] S. Royle, *The Company's Island : St Helena, company colonies and the colonial endeavour* (London, 2007), pp. 103-124
[29] D. Bowyer and M. Bolton, *The deplorable case of the poor distressed planters in the Island of St Hellena under the cruel oppression of the East-India Company* (Unknown publication place, 1689)
[30] *Ibid*
[31] *Ibid*
[32] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, p. 58
[33] *Ibid*, pp. 62-64
[34] Together with felons another category of Company's soldier was often sent to Bencoolen: Catholics. Letter, 31 Jan. 1744, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/109, ff. 133-35

female counterpart. In fact, if considering the three social groups of Saint Helena this element clearly emerges: between the black population male slaves accounted for a percentage between sixty and seventy per cent; between the white civilians the population was balanced on a normal fifty-fifty per cent proportion; the military and civil servants of the Company were all male, and they often accounted from one-third to one-half of Saint Helena's population. As common sense and sociology could reveal, such gender unbalance in the population created unrest derived from the social 'unhappiness' of a significant percentage of unmarried males. Even prostitution – a possible 'relief valve' for this situation – was limited by the small extent of Saint Helena's female population. The initiatives of the Court of Directors against prostitution[35] reveal that often female slaves were involved in this 'business'. As it can be easily inferred, sexual assaults against women – both white and black – were a common matter for the island's court: in the vast majority of cases the felons were the soldiers of the garrison[36].

However, slave women were not the only females involved in prostitution on Saint Helena. Accounts of the island written by travellers[37] reveal that both white and black women offered their services as prostitutes during the sailing season when many East India Company sailors were stopping on Saint Helena for supplying. Saint Helena was described in this dissertation as an island with a strong government, a rigid social hierarchy and an intrusive social control over slaves and freemen: other forms of 'rebellion' developed on the island, different from an armed uprising like in 1684. Prostitution of white women – due to their small number they were mostly daughters or wives of local planters – is one of these different forms of social rebellion from the conformist society of the island. Alcohol was another: the flow of arrack, Cape and Madeira wine and beer to Saint Helena was constant. The Court of Directors often warned Saint Helena's governors of the excessive quantity of alcohol ordered from the Company's traders for their small island. Sir Hudson Lowe in a letter sent to him few days prior his arrival at Saint Helena was warned by the Court of Directors that the rumours he might have heard about the notorious drunkenness of the island's soldiers were true[38].

This situation of unrest and the constant threat of a foreign invasion led the Company to set up a strong military presence on Saint Helena, and the island thus became an 'island fortress'. The concept of 'island fortress' is again strongly linked

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[35] Letter, 23 Feb. 1721, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/101, ff. 93-100

[36] S. Royle, *The Company's Island*, p. 58

[37] C.F. Noble, *A voyage to the East Indies in 1747 and 1748 containing an account of the Islands of St Helena and Java of the City of Batavia of the government and political conduct of the Dutch of the Empire of China, with a particular description of Canton* (London, 1762)

[38] The East India House to Governor Hudson Lowe, 10 Oct. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

with the concept of authority and social control, bringing another element of government's intrusion into the lives of the inhabitants.

The military presence on the island remained conspicuous for the whole of the EIC's rule on Saint Helena. Looking at the census data it can be noted that the number of soldiers, including the officers, was often the same as the whole white civilian population: in 1814, for example, one year before Bonaparte's arrival there were 736 white civilians and 891 troops[39].

Saint Helena's government also required the civilians to serve in a militia, usually employed as an auxiliary force to patrol the coastlines and watchtowers. As stated in previous chapters, from 1756 slaves and free blacks were also enlisted in the militia[40]. This strong control of the civilians' bodies and lives – with a *de facto* compulsory conscription in the militia – appears more to be a feature of the nineteenth-century state rather than of the pre-Age of Revolutions period.

Saint Helena resembled an 'island fortress' – or an 'island garrison' if looking at the military regulations of the island – for its geography, as was already discussed in the first chapter. The high cliffs[41], typical of this kind of volcanic islands, and the presence of Jamestown as the only possible landing site for ships – friendly, neutral or hostile – naturally created a strong line of defence against outsiders and on the other hand favoured – from the inside – the development of the idea of 'permanent fortress'. The Company had learned well their lesson in 1672, when the Dutch captured the islands with a small force[42]. The island's descriptions[43] return us to the image of the 'fortress': Jamestown was protected by a fort[44], a strong wall facing the sea and two different batteries of cannons on both sides of the bay[45]. All around the island watchtowers, alarm houses and cannons guarded the sea from all the sides. The cannons were positioned strategically: all the ships that wanted to approach Saint Helena needed to do this windward, due to the winds from south-east that blow there. Cannons were placed on the cliffs, in a more elevated position than the

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[39] *Ibid*

[40] A. Beatson, *Abstract of laws and regulations established by the honorable Court of directors or by the governor and council 1751-1813* (Saint Helena, 1813)

[41] See picture 12 in the Appendix

[42] (No Author), *A relation of the retaking of the island of S.ta Helena and three Dutch East India ships* (London?, 1673)

[43] Paintings, maps and physical descriptions of Saint Helena: C.F. Noble, *A voyage to the East Indies in 1747 and 1748 containing an account of the Islands of St Helena and Java of the City of Batavia of the government and political conduct of the Dutch of the Empire of China, with a particular description of Canton* (London, 1762); (No Author), *The island of St Helena described* (London, 1759); R. Philips, *A Description of the Island of St Helena containing observations on its singular structure and formation and an account of its climate, natural history and inhabitants* (London, 1805); R.P. Read, *This geographical plan of the island & forts of Saint Helena* (London, 1815); (No Author), *An accurate view and description of the Island of St Helena the intended residence of the banished Napoleon Buonaparte, ci-devant Emperor of the French* (London, 1815); J. Wathen, *A series of illustrative views of St Helena* (London, 1821)

[44] See picture 13 in the Appendix

[45] See picture 14 in the Appendix

ships, and in places that led them to strike with a strategic advantage: every incoming enemy ship would have been under the fire of the cannons during approaching manoeuvrings.

Islands were strategic for Europeans during the early centuries of expansion and exploration of the world; protecting islands like Saint Helena was therefore crucial in defending the EIC trading routes. At the same time islands were also important from an economic point of view: the plantations of Jamaica and the West Indies were the most profitable colonies of the early British Empire. A 'side effect' of this plantation system was the massive presence of slaves, which often outnumbered the whites and the soldiers. Defence from external invader and from – potential – internal revolts made islands places where governments tried to strongly assert their rule. While in Europe governments still struggled to completely define their monopoly of the legitimate use of force – or the 'monopoly on violence' as Max Weber stated – on islands this process was moving faster during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Nevertheless, islands in the British Empire maintained a degree of autonomous government, with a direct involvement of the planters in the government of the colony. The 'Global Age of Revolution' of 1760-1840 and notably the French, American and Haitian Revolutions changed everything: governments started to assert strongly their authority in Europe, and colonial government became less autonomous and more authoritarian.

One of the great protagonists of this Age was Napoleon Bonaparte, whose legacy in the field of authority and centralised government with the 'Napoleonic Code' deeply influenced the further development of the idea of state. His captivity on Saint Helena not only made the island famous but also influenced Saint Helena's history in the field of authority and governance, and anticipated future development of colonial rule on the island.

4.3 Order and authority on Saint Helena during Napoleon Bonaparte's captivity (1815-1821)

Napoleon Bonaparte's history after Waterloo has been the subject of various historical works: the once-mighty conqueror of Europe imagined staring at the Ocean, remembering his past days of glory has evoked a charming influence over historians[46].

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[46] On Napoleon's exile on Saint Helena see also: J. Blackburn, *Emperor's last Island* (London, 1997); P. Brunyee, *Napoleon's Britons and the St Helena decision* (Stroud, 2009); A. Chaplin, *A St Helena who's who or a directory of the Island during the captivity of Napoleon* (London, 1922); A. Chaplin, *Napoleon's captivity on Saint Helena 1815-21* (London, 2002); F. Giles, *Napoleon Bonaparte, England's prisoner* (London, 2001); G. Gorrequer, *St Helena during Napoleon's exile* (London, 1969); D. Gregory, *Napoleon's jailer : Lt. Gen. Sir Hudson Lowe* (London, 1996); H. O'Connor, *The Emperor and the Irishman* (Dublin, 2008); B.E. O'Meara, *Napoleon at St Helena* (London, 1888); G.

In this dissertation there is neither the space nor the time to add new contributions to the history of the life of Bonaparte on Saint Helena, or on the speculations around his death on the island. This section will analyse Bonaparte's captivity linking it with the theme of authority and government, and discuss how his exile influenced these processes on Saint Helena.

Napoleon's captivity was a matter of highest concern for the British government: Napoleon had been already imprisoned on an island – Elba – but soon escaped from that place and regained his power, ruled for a hundred days, and then unsuccessfully challenged the Seventh Coalition at Waterloo. Britain's main concern after Waterloo was to put an end once and for all to the 'Napoleonic' threat. The solution of this problem was not easy: Napoleon surrendered to the British voluntarily after his last defeat, putting himself under the protection of the United Kingdom. The British then could not execute him, because Napoleon remained – even if most of the aristocracy thought the opposite – a former Emperor. Executing a monarch soundly resembled the early years of the French Revolution, that was a chapter of history that the cautious rulers of Britain wanted to close forever.

The British did not trust any other country to solve the problem, thus the only remaining solution was to keep Napoleon as a captive in the safest possible place of the whole Empire. Europe was too risky, as the Elba escape demonstrated Napoleon still had some allies in the Old World. Napoleon's prison must be an extremely remote place, isolated and far from any possible Napoleon's ally. In the summer of 1815 two options remained that fulfilled these criteria: Saint Helena and the newly-conquered Colony of the Cape[47].

General A. Beatson, a former governor of Saint Helena, wrote a memorandum for the Earl of Buckinghamshire – the then president of the Board of Control – explaining to him the advantages and the disadvantages of Saint Helena[48]. Beatson described that Saint Helena had a remote position, a scarce population, high cliffs and few landing sites for ships. The island also had a system of optical telegraphs, watchtowers and alarm towers that helped the communications between its various military outposts. Beatson also recalled the long history of Saint Helena as a lonely British bulwark surrounded by enemies: this emphasised the construction of massive fortifications, giving the island the nickname of 'island fortress', as it was already described in the first part of this chapter.

Martineau, *Vie quotidienne a Saint-Helene au temps du Napoleon* (Monaco, 1966); J.P. Kaufmann, *Black room at Longwood* (New York, 1999); B.H. Weider, *Assassination at Saint Helena revisited* (New York, 1995); B.H. Weider, *The murder of Napoleon* (London, 1982); J. Willims, *Napoleon & St Helena* (London, 2008); J.D. Markham, *Napoleon and Dr Verling on St Helena* (Barnsley, 2005)

[47] Liverpool to Buckinghamshire, 21 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162
[48] Memorandum on Saint Helena made by General A. Beatson, 28 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

Beatson had also underlined some disadvantages: the island's remote position made supplying difficult, for example, and Saint Helena's history of mutinies and rebellions, with the most recent uprising only occurred in 1811. Moreover, Beatson worried about the limited resources of the island, doubting if there were enough water, food and accommodation for a bigger garrison. Beatson suggested that other colonies, like the Cape or Mauritius, had fewer issues from this point of view. The British government had an opposite view: their 'obsession' with Bonaparte's potential escape made them to opt for Saint Helena, preferring remoteness and safety to other possible concerns.

The agreement between the Crown and the East India Company was eventually reached on 28 July 1815. The governor of Saint Helena was appointed by the government, but his duties were also towards the Company for the civil administration of the island. All the extra costs of Napoleon's presence were in the Crown's charge, and after the end of Bonaparte's exile the island would be returned to the full control of the Company[49]. The Directors of the EIC were not unanimous in their consent[50]: Saint Helena was a £ 100,000[51] asset of the Company, and handing it to the government, even for a limited amount of time, was considered a risky option.

This introduces a first aspect of the change of role of government during and after the 'Age of Revolutions': Buckinghamshire's letters to the Company for Saint Helena were more a direct order than a request[52]. The East India Company, long a powerful player of the British political arena, had lost its influence on British politics and was it now the government that influenced, with a strong and authoritative decision, the Company. This is a first radical change of perspective as compared to the pre-Revolutionary age, and the first sign of the different role of government in the metropolitan context. In the next section the decline of the Company will be analysed more in detail, focusing on the relationships between the EIC and the Crown in the early nineteenth century.

The British government was affected by a fear, almost paranoia, of the possible escape of Bonaparte. Saint Helena was chosen for this reason, and some immediate actions were immediately taken to make the island even more secure. If the return of Napoleon to France to take power and wage war against Britain looked

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[49] Buckinghamshire to the East India Company, 28 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

[50] Bosanquet to Buckinghamshire, 27 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

[51] G.C. Kitching, 'Sir Hudson Lowe and the East India Company', *English Historical Review*, LXIII, 248 (1948), pp. 322-41

[52] The Earl of Buckinghamshire was president of the Board of Control from 1812 to 1816 and never hid his personal hostility towards the Company and its autonomy. See: H.V. Bowen, *The business of empire : the East India Company and Imperial Britain 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 82

unlikely, another fear was that Napoleon could flee to the United States, where the French revolutionaries still had friends. The Crown took into serious account any possible news, intelligence or other information relating to potential plans to free Napoleon from his captivity. Both serious and facetious threats were taken into consideration: in 1818 the watchtowers of the island recorded a 'suspicious' ship – probably American – sailing around Saint Helena[53] and in another occasion the Admiralty notified Saint Helena that two Spanish pirate ships were seen in the proximity of the island[54]. Sometimes the intelligence on these 'plots' seemed more a novel rather than a serious threat, with exotic locations and science-fiction devices: in 1818 a trade agent in Rio de Janeiro reported that a former French general, now employed by the British in the region of Pernambuco, was plotting to free Napoleon; in the same year, the government received notice of a plan involving a ship able to operate for short time under water – a sort of submarine – in order to sneak close to Saint Helena and avoid patrols[55].

Other concerns about the 'revolutionary' nature of Bonaparte were expressed in a letter written in 1816[56]: Napoleon, after meeting some of the slaves of the island, publicly expressed concern about the condition of those people. The governor immediately warned the central government of a possible sedition and revolt of slaves, possibly 'inspired' by the words of Bonaparte. This slave revolt did not happen, however, and no serious attempt was made to free the Emperor.

This 'paranoia' also led the British government to enact stricter rules on Saint Helena. The government even proposed to prohibit ships from stopping at Saint Helena, however General Beatson's suggestion not to enact this decision was ultimately followed[57]. Napoleon was allowed to bring to Saint Helena his furniture, his books and his wine, but the Emperor's valuables, such as his gold and gems, were taken in custody by the governor of the island. Bonaparte was free to ask to the governor to buy any good that he needed, and the governor would use the Emperor's money that had been taken in custody. Any correspondence from and to the Emperor was under the censorship of the governor himself, and two soldiers had to stay with Napoleon every time a ship was in Jamestown port[58]. An explicit indication was given to every person involved: Napoleon had to be referred as 'General Bonaparte', and was prohibited to style him as 'Emperor' or 'former

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[53] Letter, 14 Aug. 1818, London, British Library, India Office Records, MSS EUR E398/8
[54] *Ibid*
[55] Letter, 08 Jan. 1818, London, British Library, India Office Records, MSS EUR E398/8
[56] Letter, 10 Apr. 1816, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162
[57] Memorandum on Saint Helena made by General A. Beatson, 28 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162
[58] Memorandum for Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of Saint Helena, concerning the captivity of General Bonaparte, 30 Jul. 1815, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

Emperor'. The censorship on private correspondence was extended to the whole population of the island, making the Helenians even more isolated from the outside world[59].

The number of forces deployed on the island for the protection of a single prisoner was impressive: in addition to the 769 Company's Garrison, in 1816 a Royal Garrison of 978 men was present on the island[60]. In 1817 the Royal Garrison was raised to 1475 men and the Company's Garrison to 820[61]. Furthermore the Royal Navy sent three freights, two armed vessels and six brigs to Saint Helena for the patrolling of the surrounding waters[62]. Two of these ships were constantly sailing around the island, one clockwise and the other counter-clockwise[63].

In 1816 an act of Parliament, titled '*An act for the more effectually detaining in custody of Napoleon Buonaparté* [sic!]', was approved. The act declared that Napoleon Bonaparte was a war prisoner and thus he needed to be treated as such[64]. One of the more relevant resolutions of this act was that every British citizen found guilty of aiding Napoleon in his escape was to be punished with death.

4.4 After Bonaparte: continuity and evolution (1821-1837)

The 'Global Age of Revolutions'[65], a global period of revolts that lasted from 1780 to 1820[66], deeply changed the role of government and produced a new form of state. Bayly has connected this process with the rise of national identities in America, Europe, Africa and Asia as a result of the revolutionary wars and of the expansion of the West and Christianity towards the old Asian and African civilisations[67].

In the British Empire an outcome of the Age of Revolutions was a stronger commitment of the central power of controlling colonies, in order to avoid another American Revolution. The years 1780-1830 were a period of centralisation and

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[59] G. Martineau, *La Vie quotidienne à Sainte-Hélène au temps de Napoléon*, p. 199

[60] Census of Saint Helena, 20 Jun. 1816, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

[61] P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972)

[62] T. Cross, *St Helena including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (Newton Abbot, 1981), p. 59

[63] *Ibid*, p. 59

[64] An act for the more effectually detaining in custody Napoleon Buonaparté [sic!], 11 Apr. 1816, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/32/162

[65] On the 'Global Age of Revolutions' and on the evolution of British colonial government see also: D. Armitage and S. Subrahmanyam (ed.), *The age of revolutions in global context, c. 1760-1840* (Basingstoke, 2010); W. Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic world : a comparative history* (New York, 2009); D. Cannadine (ed.), *Empire, the sea and global history : Britain's maritime world, c.1760-c.1840* (Basingstoke, 2007); M. Lange, *Lineages of despotism and development : British colonialism and state power* (Chicago, 2009)

[66] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914* (Oxford, 2004)

[67] *Ibid*

authoritative rule, with the imposition of 'colonial despotism'[68]. The introduction of the 'Crown Colony' system[69], a stronger and more authoritarian rule, was a direct effect of this new attitude: old colonies like Jamaica, considered to be under a direct threat due to the Haitian Revolution, saw an immediate enforcement of this new rule. The newly acquired colonies of the Mascarene Islands and the Cape were immediately organised according to this system, and all the Indian territories acquired after the Seven Years War followed the same path. The introduction of huge amounts of land and non-British and non-Protestant populations into the Empire was another cause of this shift from self-government to direct rule[70].

Nevertheless, the Napoleonic interlude of 1815-1821 did not mark the end of colonial self-government on Saint Helena. After Napoleon's death the island's council continued to work, involving the planters in the decisional process. Even during Bonaparte's captivity the island kept its own democratic and participative customs, as the 1818 consultation against slavery proved[71].

4.5 The struggle between Crown and Company until the 1833 Charter Act

The expansion in India during and after the Seven Years War had deep consequences on both Britain and the East India Company. If Clive's victories in India marked the apex of the East India Company power and influence they also marked the beginning of the end of the Company's independence. The years 1763-1813 were a transitional period were Britain and the Company evolved in order to settle an effective way to rule the Indian territories; both the Crown and the EIC were unprepared to this task in 1763 due to the limits of an *ancient regime* state, as Marshall clearly pointed out. In 1813 the new Charter Act created the foundations for the British rule in India[72]. However, the outcome of 1813 Act was a substantial weakening of the East India Company and the definite assertion of the government influence over the EIC.

The causes of this process are both from internal weaknesses of the Company and from external initiatives made by the Parliament. Clive's conquests caused an impressive speculation on the Company's stocks during the 1760s. This speculation weakened the Company's internal governance with new stockholders more active

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[68] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994)
[69] P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America – a Second Empire?' in P.J Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (5 vols., Oxford, 1999), II, p. 589
[70] P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2007), p. 6
[71] See chapter two
[72] *Ibid*, p. 16

in the life of the Company, for example during elections and committees meetings[73]. The usual co-optation system used to determine the composition of the Court of Directors was gradually changed with a higher degree of intervention from the stockholders[74]. This process weakened the power of the Court of Directors which was unable to contrast efficiently several acts of Parliament that undermined Company's independence. The India Act of 1784 defined the relationships between Crown and Company until the 1857 Mutiny[75] and the Board of Control was created in order to put the Company under effective control of the government. Four years later, in 1788, the Company's budget was already matter for Westminster rather than for the Court of Directors or the stockholders' assembly: the Commons approved an 'East India budget' for the Company[76].

The new Charter Act of 1813 marked a further step forward. The Parliament deprived the EIC of its trade privileges but maintained the Company's political power in India, even if with some limitations[77]. The Company, which started its history as a trade agency, lost its 'core business' in favour of a new one, the political rule of India. This change in the purpose itself of the Company is relevant, and could explain the developments of the Company rule on Saint Helena.

In the subsequent twenty years the Company's popular support dropped dramatically, and in 1832-33 this wave of popular enmity reached its peak due to the Company's opposition to the Reform Bill. As a figure of this decline, the MPs loyal to the EIC in Westminster dropped from sixty-two in 1830 to forty-five in 1832[78]. The Charter Act of 1833 determined the definitive predominance of the Board of Control over the Court of Directors and the President of the Board became the ruler of the Company and thus the government's *de facto* 'minister' for India[79].

The act of 1833 scored a crucial point for the supporters of free trade in the Empire, and marked the definitive decline of the Company. C.A. Bayly clearly explains[80] this radical change in the Empire ideology: since the 1820s the ideas of liberalism and free trade became dominant between the imperial ruling elites. The monopolistic East India Company seemed even more anachronistic compared to these new ideas and it was seen as a relic of the imperial histories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The debate concerning the transformations inside the

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[73] H.V. Bowen, *The business of empire : the East India Company and Imperial Britain 1756-1833* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 54-63
[74] *Ibid*, p. 63
[75] P.J. Marshall, *Problems of empire : Britain and India 1757-1813*, p. 43
[76] H.V. Bowen, *The business of empire : the East India Company and Imperial Britain 1756-1833*, p. 72
[77] P.J. Marshall, *Problems of empire : Britain and India 1757-1813*, p. 22
[78] C.H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834* (London, 1998), pp. 285-86
[79] *Ibid*, p. 297
[80] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994)

Empire will be analysed better later, however it can be seen how this political 'war' against the East India Company is related with the imperial transition.

Another effect of the India Act was the transfer of Saint Helena from the Company to the Crown. The 174-years Company rule over the island was dissolved with only one clear paragraph:

> And be it Enacted, That 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, His Heirs and Successors; and the said Island shall be governed by such orders as His Majesty in Council shall from time to time issue in that behalf.[81]

The measure was supposed to take effect from 22 April 1834[82], nevertheless the Crown asked the East India Company to rule the island on behalf of the Sovereign until 22 April 1835[83]. In the spring of 1835 the Crown asked the Company to continue to rule the island for few more months[84], and finally during the autumn a Crown governor was appointed[85]. Even if Governor Middlemore arrived on the island only on 24 February 1836, it was not until the beginning of the year 1837 that Crown rule was finally enforced on the island[86].These years were not, as in other colonies, a period of 'dual control' with the Company that continued to rule the island, only with a stricter control on the expenses.

The takeover period of 1832-1837 was the result of another metropolitan decision that affected the whole imperial network, like during the captivity of Bonaparte. How did this decision radically change many of the nodes of this network? Saint Helena was 'created' and 'fostered' by the East India Company, was a crucial part of its economic and trading system, and enjoyed the benefits of the profitable trade with the East in the form of generous transfers of money from the Company for the sustenance of the island. The great transformations in the metropolitan context, with the rise of the liberal and free trade ideas and the weakening of the Company, affected Saint Helena changing the island's social structure and its role in the British Empire. From this perspective a huge colony like

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[81] *A bill for effecting an arrangement with the India Company, and for the better government of His Majesty's Indian territories* (Parl. Papers, 1833, II.165), 451

[82] Letter, 4 Sept. 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210

[83] Letter, 22 Feb. 1834, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210

[84] Letter, 20 May 1835, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210

[85] Letter, 21 Oct. 1835, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210

[86] P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London, 1938), p. 302

India that can be considered almost a sub-imperial centre[87], and a small one like Saint Helena were both affected from the same metropolitan decision. As a consequence, their horizontal linkages eventually evolved towards a different *status quo*. Saint Helena's links with India changed due to this metropolitan decision, transforming the island. The East India Company network that linked Saint Helena to India and Southeast Asia was severed, and the island needed to find a new position in the Empire.

Investigating the causes and the reasons that led the Parliament to approve the takeover of the island proved to be a hard task. It was not possible to find any reference neither in the correspondence between the India House and Saint Helena[88], nor in the Parliamentary papers related with Saint Helena or the Charter Act debate[89]. In the former the Directors never shared their thoughts concerning the fate of the island with the governor, in the latter the attention was focused on more crucial topics such as the government of India or the governance of the Company. Also the bibliographical sources lack any reference to the true causes of the takeover of Saint Helena. The historians of the East India Company[90] and the historians of Saint Helena[91] only mention the event of the takeover and its outcomes, forgetting about the causes. As a consequence, the cause has to be inferred from indirect sources and from the broad literature. Therefore, the conclusions that have been made are not decisive, being open to future discovery of other primary sources.

4.6 The causes of the takeover

A possible cause of the takeover might be that the East India Company eventually decided that Saint Helena was too expensive to maintain as a colony. During the previous centuries the Company tried several solutions to make the island more profitable, yet without success, as it has been discussed in the third

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[87] T. Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race : Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 15

[88] Letters, 1833-1839, London, National Archives, Colonial Office, 247/36-49; Letters, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/210; Letters, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, L/PS/9/207; Letters, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/9/17; Letters, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, G/9/24

[89] *A bill for effecting an arrangement with the India Company, and for the better government of His Majesty's Indian territories* (Parl. Papers, 1833, II.165), 451; *A bill [as amended on the report] for effecting an arrangement with the India Company, and for the better government of His Majesty's Indian territories* (Parl. Papers, 1833, II.201), 558; *Copy of correspondence between Directors of East India Company and Board of Control, respecting the East India charter* (Parl. Papers, 1833, XXV.1), 125; *Papers respecting the East India Company's charter* (Parl. Papers, 1833, XXV.9-75-107-115), 126-370-378-549

[90] C.H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834* (London, 1998) ; J. Keay, *The Honourable Company : a history of the English East India Company* (London, 1993); A. Wild, *The East India Company : trade and conquest since 1600* (London, 2000)

[91] P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London, 1938); T. Cross, *St Helena including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (Newton Abbot, 1981)

chapter. Even in the last years of its rule, the Company attempted various actions in order to improve the productivity of Saint Helena: in 1824-1825 a savings bank was established for aiding the small planters financially[92]; in 1826 the Company introduced on the island a small pottery and brick industry, not without a good success[93]; in 1824 Captain Pillon brought to the island some silkworms[94], and in 1827 almost twenty pounds of silk were finally produced on the island[95].

Nevertheless, these attempts proved to be inadequate to raise the productivity of the island: in 1833 the island produced only £ 1,708 of revenues compared to more than £ 31,284 of expenses. Moreover, some of the industries established on the island to make it more profitable proved instead an even bigger source of trouble for the Company. In 1833 the governor of Saint Helena asked £ 10,000 to the Company in order to sustain and help the local whale fishery[96].

The financial and economic reasons that might have caused the Company to leave the island appear self-evident. The Company had already left the colony of Bencoolen in 1824 to the Dutch, in the wider agreements of the Anglo-Dutch treaty: Bencoolen, like Saint Helena, was a poor and unproductive colony. However, Saint Helena and Bencoolen had been a 'waste' of money for the Company since the beginning: why leaving them now?

The answer might be in the mutated geopolitical situation. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the East India Company was in the first line of fight during the several wars against other European colonial powers, mainly the French and the Dutch. In the Atlantic and in the southern Indian Ocean the East India Company was in a disadvantaged position compared to other colonial powers: the Spanish held the Canarias, the Portuguese the Azores and Cape Verde, the Dutch the Cape and the Moluccas. For the East India Company, it was a matter of survival to conquer some strategic outposts that could serve as supplying stations for the trading ships. Saint Helena and Bencoolen were 'marginal' remaining outposts, if the East India Company would have not conquered them the Dutch or the French would have.

On the contrary in the 1830s the diplomatic situation was deeply different: Spain and Portugal had lost most of their colonial empires, the Dutch were allies of the British and the French threat had disappeared after Waterloo. Moreover, the British had expanded their influence over the Cape and other minor islands and

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[92] Consultation, 31 Dec. 1825, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/804/21569
[93] Consultation, 19 Jul. 1826, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/866/22831
[94] Consultation, 1824, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/766/20724
[95] Consultation, 31 Aug. 1827, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/926/26005
[96] Consultation, 1833, London, British Library, India Office Records, F/4/1373/54697

settlements both in the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean. The Royal Navy had also emerged from the Napoleonic wars as the strongest naval force in the World.

For the East India Company then the supplying of its ships could have been made at the Cape or at Mauritius, instead at Saint Helena. If during the turbulent years of the naval wars against the French and the Dutch the benefits of holding Saint Helena and Bencoolen highly surpassed the costs, in the 1830s the balance was inverted.

It may be inferred that the Directors of the East India Company decided that the costs of holding Saint Helena were no more tolerable for the actual benefits derived in holding the island, and 'used' the 1833 Charter as a way to get rid of the island, as was done in 1824 when Bencoolen was dismissed 'using' the Anglo-Dutch treaty.

An 'ideological' cause of the takeover could be found in the central government's new attitude towards the rule of colonies. In his essay *Britain without America – a Second Empire?*[97] P.J. Marshall explains the evolution of the metropolitan ideas towards the government of colonies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The weak executive power of the Thirteen Colonies, considered a failure by the British for the outcome of the American Revolution, was substituted by a stronger rule. In the white colonies like Canada, were the society was more egalitarian than in Britain, was built a political system that was a copy of the British one. In other colonies, where the white population was a minority, a more authoritative government was enforced under the name of 'Crown Colony'[98]. The new acquisitions made after the Napoleonic Wars, like Trinidad, Mauritius or the Cape, were all organized under this new system. As Marshall wrote 'Crown Colony government was intended to place colonies under effective metropolitan control'[99]. Saint Helena was a colony with a history of mutinies and rebellions, the last one happened in 1811[100] and the 'Europeans' were less than half of the total population of the island. It may be inferred that the Parliament decided to put the island under a stricter control, enforcing the Crown Colony system, in order to control more directly the island and prevent a rebellion.

As a consequence, the Parliament might have decided to take over the island because it saw a strategic use for Saint Helena. The island was strategic for the East India Company for the trade to the east. From this perspective Saint Helena was more involved in the Indian Ocean world rather than in the Atlantic. The Crown

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[97] P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America – a Second Empire?' in P.J Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (5 vols., Oxford, 2001), II
[98] *Ibid*, p. 589
[99] *Ibid*, p. 589
[100] A. Beatson, *Tracts relative to the island of St Helena written during a residence of five years* (London, 1816), p. 207

found a new role for Saint Helena, a more 'Atlantic' one, suitable for the new needs of the Empire.

Saint Helena position between Africa and South America and between Sierra Leone and South Africa made the island strategic for the new objectives of the Empire: the fight against the slave trade, the expansion in South America and the defence of the Cape. This interpretation is strongly opposed by the main historians of the island, who instead described Saint Helena after the takeover as a declining place, mismanaged by the Crown and left in the worst poverty. In the next section of this chapter it will be analysed the island after the takeover, attempting to discover the true conditions of Saint Helena in the first years of the Crown rule.

This could seem an apparent contradiction. If the Company left Saint Helena because it did not consider it strategic, why did the Crown think the opposite? The answer is that the geopolitical evolutions which followed the Napoleonic wars changed the political agenda of both the Company and the Crown. What was important for the Crown was not for the Company: Africa, South America, the fight against slavery were all important issues for the Crown, whilst they were of no or few interest for the Company. This explains the different perceptions that these two institutions had towards Saint Helena and its usefulness.

In conclusion, it could be said that the main cause of the island takeover was Saint Helena excessive cost for the Company, which the mutated geopolitical conditions of the Atlantic and Indian world made completely useless compared to the previous centuries. Furthermore, the new attitude of the Crown towards the administration of strategic island-colonies like Mauritius or Jamaica, where a centralized and autocratic Crown government was enforced, might have influenced the Parliament's decision.

4.7 Social and demographic effects of the takeover on Saint Helena

The 1830s in the history of Saint Helena were crucial years: not only the takeover but also the end of slavery deeply changed the shape of the island. The main works on the history of Saint Helena all agree that after the Crown takeover the island entered a chronic economic depression and many whites, seldom members of the oldest families of the island, left Saint Helena for England or the Cape[101]. P. Gosse's 1938 work, that was used by many later historians of the island as a fundamental starting point for their research, is deeply influenced by the

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[101] See for example: P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938*, (London, 1938); T. Cross, *St Helena including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (Newton Abbot, 1981); A. Wild, *The East India Company : trade and conquest since 1600* (London, 2000); P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972)

context where and when Gosse wrote his book. The island of Saint Helena that Gosse visited in the 1930s was a poor, depressed and long forgotten periphery of the British Empire: the first pages of the introduction clearly demonstrate the attitude and the beliefs of the author, deeply shocked by the situation he found in Jamestown[102]. The great influence of Gosse's research on the following historiography regarding Saint Helena[103] could explain the almost unanimous judgment on the post-Company age.

The three main evidences used to demonstrate the decline of the island are the lower investments by the Crown in the island compared to the Company's, the emigration of the whites for the Cape and Britain and the increase of the black and 'non-white' population of the island. The last two are sometimes linked together in a slightly racist way, implying subtly that the 'quality' of the island population decreased with the loss of white Europeans and the increase of blacks.

The less financial involvement of the Crown in the island looking at the statistics is almost self-evident. In 1832 the East India Company invested £ 31,284 for the civil and military administration of the island[104], in 1836 always the Company invested £ 42,104[105]. No more than three years later, the Crown expenses dropped to £ 19,259[106]. The Crown also decommissioned all the Company's garrison and dismissed most of the Company's civil servants. These people found themselves in extreme poverty and they had to make several appeals to the Parliament in order to receive a pension[107].

The idea that several white families left the island after the takeover is, in my opinion, based on false assumptions. In-depth analyses of the island's censuses from 1832 to 1882 clearly demonstrate the opposite. In 1832, before the takeover, the white population was 2,352[108]. Ten years later, in 1842, the white population was 2,295[109]. It was only fifty years after the takeover, in 1882, that for the first time the white population of Saint Helena dropped under 2,000 people (1,947)[110]. It must also

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[102] See the introduction of: P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938* (London, 1938)

[103] Gosse's book has deeply influenced several later historians of Saint Helena and other historian who wrote in their research about the island. For example: T. Cross, *St Helena including Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha* (Newton Abbot, 1981); A. Wild, *The East India Company : trade and conquest since 1600* (London, 2000); P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972); M. Brookes, *St. Helena story* (London, 1960); D.L. Smallman, *Quincentenary : a Story of St Helena 1502-2002* (Penzance, 2003); E. Cannan, *Churches of the South Atlantic Islands 1502-1991* (Oswestry, 1992)

[104] Balance of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[105] R.M. Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire* (London, 1889)

[106] Blue book, 1839, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[107] P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938*, p. 301

[108] Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[109] Blue book, 1842, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[110] Blue book, 1882, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

be noted that according to many sources after the 1850s it was very hard to distinguish between 'whites' and 'non-whites' on Saint Helena[111].

The same considerations could be made on the number of the blacks and the 'non-white' people (including the Chinese and mixed population) on the island. The number of the non-whites never grew as fast as the past historiography on Saint Helena stated. The number of the non-whites in 1832 was 2,474[112], ten years later was 2,301[113]. There are only two 'peaks' in the number of the non-white population of the island, in 1841 and 1851, when the non-whites were respectively 3,061[114] and 3,580[115]. Table two summarizes the data from 1832 to 1882:

Table two: Population and expenses of Saint Helena 1832-1882

Year	Whites	Non-whites	Total population	Expenses
1832[116]	2352	2474	4826	£ 31284
1836[117]	2200	2777	4977	£ 42104
1839[118]	2326	2410	4736	£ 19259
1840[119]	2256	1949	4205	£ 18299
1841[120]	3004	3061	6065	£ 25045
1842[121]	2295	2301	4596	£ 17756
1843[122]	2338	2493	4831	£ 19169
1844[123]	2357	2474	4831	£ 19260
1845[124]	2377	2488	4865	£ 19116
1846[125]	2381	2579	4960	£ 21193
1847[126]	2390	2567	4957	£ 21676
1848[127]	2256	1949	4205	£ 21675

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[111] See chapter II

[112] Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[113] Blue book, 1842, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[114] Blue book, 1841, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[115] Blue book, 1851, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[116] Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[117] R.M. Martin, *Statistics of the Colonies of the British Empire* (London, 1889)

[118] Blue book, 1839, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[119] Blue book, 1840, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[120] Blue book, 1841, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[121] Blue book, 1842, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[122] Blue book, 1843, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[123] Blue book, 1844, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[124] Blue book, 1845, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[125] Blue book, 1846, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[126] Blue book, 1847, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[127] Blue book, 1848, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

1851[128]	2614	3580	6149	£ 16426
1869[129]	2877	2619	5496	£ 27505
1879[130]	3390	2548	5938	£ 12486
1882[131]	1974	2537	4511	£ 11212

The analysis of these data shows us a general trend of a stable population and a slow progressive decrease of money invested on the island by the Crown. In 1869, when the Suez Canal was opened, the island had approximately the same population of the 1830s and saw even a slight increase of the Crown expenses. Ten years later, when the Suez Canal was fully operational and became the fastest route to the Indies, the island was still inhabited by almost 6,000 people, even if the Crown expenses had dramatically dropped to just £ 12,000. Three years later, in 1882, the demographic trend of emigration from the island seems to be really started.

A constant, yet small, white emigration away from the island was present during the period 1832-1882, even so it never reached the size of an 'exodus' as it was depicted. The former civil and military servants of the Company that were left without land were probably the most likely people that emigrated. The planters, whom in any case had a small but secure source of revenue in their lands, formed the main bulk of the 'Europeans' who remained on the island. As stated in previous chapters, the richest families emigrated to the Cape and England, however their number compared to the total population was small. Emigration to the Cape, as demonstrated in chapter two, proved also to be extremely hard for the Saint Helenians.

Another trend that can be inferred from the data is related to the fight against slave trade. The importation of slaves on the island was made illegal in 1792, in 1818 Governor Lowe ruled that every child born from a slave should have been a free person[132] and as a matter of fact in 1832 only 386[133] slaves were still present on Saint Helena, compared to the 1,540 of 1817[134]. In 1832 the government of the island ruled that from that year and the subsequent four or five all the remaining slaves should have been freed and their former owners repaid for the loss[135]. Moreover, Saint Helena became deeply involved in the fight against slave trade after the takeover. In 1839 a naval squadron engaged in the war against slave ships arrived at Saint

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[128] Blue book, 1851, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[129] Blue book, 1869, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[130] Blue book, 1879, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[131] Blue book, 1882, Cambridge, University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society, RCS.L.BB.482

[132] (No Author), *Papers regarding the progressive abolition of slavery on the Island of St. Helena* (London, 1832), p. 9

[133] Census of the Island of Saint Helena, 1832, London, National Archives, CO 247/36

[134] P.L. Teale, 'Saint Helena : a history of the development of the island with special reference to building civil & military engineering works' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1972)

[135] (No Author), *Papers regarding the progressive abolition of slavery on the Island of St. Helena* (London, 1832c)

Helena and a 'Liberated African Depot' was established on the island as a camp where hosting liberated slaves[136]. The census data, that counted also the inhabitants of the 'Liberated African Depot', show us the activity of this naval squadron. The black population 'peaks' of 1841 and 1851 showed particularly good 'hunting seasons' for the naval squadron.

The constant arrival of liberated slaves in the 1840s and 1850s should have showed a constant increase of the non-white population. On the contrary, the non-white population remained constant or even decreased during certain years. In chapter two it was demonstrated how this was due to the high request of liberated slaves made by the Colony of the Cape.

A further consequence of the Crown takeover was the transformation of the island's governance. During the East India Company rule the island's council and the assembly of the planters played an important role in the political life of Saint Helena. Since 1683 the Company ruled that every landowner with at least twenty acres of land had the right to vote in the island's assembly, and the planters with more than twenty acres were awarded at the same way with only one vote[137]. The assembly was still active in the early nineteenth century for example in passing regulations and laws against slavery on the island, as it has been discussed in chapter two. The new government installed by Major-General Middlemore was on the model of other Crown Colonies, where the 'democratic' initiative of the planters was limited by a new military and centralized rule. Saint Helena followed the path of other colonies like Mauritius and Jamaica, even if the island history of mutinies and rebellions was not even comparable to the *maroonage* of Mauritius or the slave revolts in Jamaica.

Saint Helena's decline was slow: the island remained somewhat important for the Empire during the 1840s, but already during the 1850s it started to lose more and more relevance. The opening of Suez and the spread of the steamship in the following decades caused a further decline: however, it was not until the 1880s that the island entered the decadent and meagre condition depicted by Gosse. For at least forty years after the takeover Saint Helena remained in a 'static' situation. The loss of importance in the trade with the East was temporarily substituted by the fight against slave trade, and the pre-existent social structure of the island partly opposed the inevitable decline. Was this decline all a Crown's fault as Gosse implied? Steamships, railways and Suez would have damaged the importance of Saint Helena even if the island had remained under the East India Company: technological and scientific progress was an inevitable historical process.

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[136] P. Gosse, *St Helena 1502-1938*, p. 310
[137] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98

4.8 Saint Helena as a Crown Colony and its inhabitants (1837 onwards)

Saint Helena lost its self-governmental powers only after the Crown takeover, when the newly-installed Crown governor established a more direct and authoritarian rule that abolished of the old democratic customs. Notably, this process occurred when most of the old 'aristocratic' families of Saint Helena – like the Dovetons – had left the island for the Cape or England[138]: without a ruling elite capable of counterbalancing the centralising process enacted by the Crown governor, the people soon found themselves without any true power.

Thus in the same period when Saint Helena began to lose its self-governing status, the general attitude of the Empire towards colonial governments started to change again: forms of responsible government were granted for colonies like the British North America, even if non-white colonies were not involved in this process[139]. Again Saint Helena followed a different trend compared to the general history of the Empire: a unique event – Napoleon's captivity – influenced the history of the island once more in an original and peculiar way.

The issuing of new legislation, a form of asserting a stronger government, followed two different phases. Between 1837 and 1853, the first sixteen years of Crown rule, over seventy new local laws were approved[140]. The aspects of government that faced the highest legislative production were the regulations on customs (eight laws) and boats (eight laws)[141]. The first laws enacted by the new Crown administration were significant. The Governor issued a new regulation for the local militia, reinforcing the EIC duties and introducing fines for those inhabitants whom did not participate[142]. Another early law regarded crime punishment: whilst during the EIC period deportation from the island was the norm, this new regulation introduced imprisonment as a substitute punishment[143]. A new law creating a supreme court on the island was also enacted: the new court would function as an appeal court for every civil, criminal and jurisdiction case of the island[144].

In the period 1853-1861 only twenty-six local laws were approved[145]. This decrease in the legislative zeal of the government might suggest a loosening of the

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[138] E. Carter, _The Dovetons of St Helena : a family history_ (Cape Town, 1973)
[139] C.A. Bayly, _Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830_ (London, 1994)
[140] Local Laws 1837-1853, 1853, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives
[141] _Ibidem_
[142] I_bidem_
[143] _Ibidem_
[144] _Ibidem_
[145] Local Laws 1853-1861, 1861, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

Crown rule. However, governors enacted several orders-in-council, a form of more direct executive orders, keeping a consistent rate for the whole period[146]. The emergence of the orders-in-council as the prevalent form of regulation denotes another decline in the involvement of the inhabitants in the rule of the islands, as governors were able to avoid public discussions and debates over most of the issues. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the Crown paid more attention to the legislation of Saint Helena until the 1850s, when the liberated slave depot was still active and the island was still crucial in the fight against slavery. Afterwards, as the importance of the island declined, the government lost its interest in the island and issued less legislation.

The Crown decided to cut subsidies to Saint Helena since the inception of its rule. In a document dated March 25th 1835[147] Lord Aberdeen, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to the Governor of the Cape stating that:

> It is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to follow up the system under which the East India Company used to supply not only the garrison but the inhabitants of St Helena with provisions and stores of every description. The inhabitants must henceforth obtain their supplies through the ordinary channels of trade[148].

This decision had an impact on the island, as the end of those provisions proved a harsh economic struggle for the less wealthy inhabitants of the island. This document also proves how the Imperial government planned to put St Helena under the Colony of the Cape since the beginning, in a sort of sub-imperial (or sub-colonial) system[149].

To better understand how the people on the island perceived the new Crown rule our primary source are the newspapers published on Saint Helena in that period.

In the archives, both in London and Jamestown, there are almost no traces of Saint Helenian free newspapers before 1851. Up to that date the only newspaper published on the island was, apparently, the official Government's Gazette. On 8 May 1851 the first private-owned newspaper was printed, 'The Advocate or St.

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[146] Orders in Council 1835-1916, 1916, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

[147] Aberdeen to the Governor of the Cape, 25 March 1835, Cape Town, Western Cape Archives, GH 1/104-1525

[148] *Ibidem*

[149] The Colony of the Cape was, however, reluctant in assuming those sub-colonial duties: the Cape asked the central government to be paid in order to maintain a garrison on Tristan da Cunha, another South Atlantic Island under their influence (see GH 1/21-178, Western Cape Archives)

Helena Weekly News[150]'. The small audience of the island allowed, for most of the time, the presence of only one newspaper. The *Advocate* survived until 1853, replaced by the *Herald* that lasted seven years until 1860. The *Herald* then became for one year the *Record* (1860-61) and then the *Guardian*, a newspaper that survived until the twentieth century. The Government tried to support a rival newspaper in the form of the *St Helena Chronicle*, but the experiment lasted only one season (1852-1853). Another independent newspaper was published from 1865 until 1866, the *Saint Helena Advertizer,* although in the opening editorial declared to focus more on 'Great Britain, or any of the British Colonies more particularly, and all Foreign News of general interest[151]' rather than the day-to-day life of the island.

A *fil rouge* links the newspapers that followed the *Advocate* with different names. Their political views on the past, present and future of Saint Helena were extremely similar. Some of them shared the same editor, but all were dependent on the advertisement made by the same families of Saint Helena. The business families of the island supported the free press and the free press pursued their agenda.

As stated before, the East India Company employed many on Saint Helena and prominent families (for example the Brookes, the Dovetons, the Hodsons and the Oaklands[152]) held the same Company's offices for generations. They sat on the council of the island and owned the best plantations. After the end of the Company's rule, some of them lost their position and some left the island for the Cape or other British territories[153]. Others remained and served again in the Council. The Crown employed a smaller number of public servants, often not from the island. However, new families like the Janisch, managed to hold public offices several times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The end of the Company's trade regulations on Saint Helena freed the market and allowed some brave tradesmen to build a small fortune on the island. W.E.G. Solomon, a British Jew, arrived on St. Helena sometime around 1796[154] and his family became in the following decades one of the more affluent on the island. These tradesmen were initially excluded in the ruling of the colony, and managed to get public offices regularly from the 1860s.

The background of the business elite directed the press of St. Helena towards a liberal approach. The press championed, from time to time, most of the founding principles of Britain's liberalism: no taxation without representation; a judiciary properly separated from the executive power; free elections and representative

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[150] *St. Helena Advocate*, No. 1, May 8th 1851
[151] *St Helena Advertizer*, No. 1, August 5th 1865
[152] G. Martineau, *Vie quotidienne a Saint-Helene au temps du Napoleon*, p. 201
[153] See for example: E. Carter, *The Dovetons of St Helena : a family history* (Cape Town, 1973)
[154] *Notes on Salomon*, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives

democracy; free trade and free market; a paternalistic approach towards the poor; strong faith in the mission of the British Empire. The newspapers often chastened the governors of the island and Westminster for their wrongdoings towards St. Helena. This attitude lead to several frictions culminated in 1858 with the withdrawal of government advertisements from the *Herald*[155].

In the period 1851-1870 the press on Saint Helena focused on four main political issues related to the administration and government of the island: the first was on how the governors applied the laws approved in Westminster; the second was the call for an elected council on the island; the third was on how badly public money was spent; the fourth was the role of the island in the Empire and its relationships with nearby colonies. The analysis on how the press addressed these issues could give us a clearer picture on how the colony was managed.

The '*Governor and Council*' of Saint Helena had to enact the laws approved in Westminster passing executive ordinances. In 1851 the Governor approved an ordinance on the press[156]. The ordinance was a long and elaborate regulation that demanded that all the newspapers had to be edited, written and published by registered people and not by anonymous contributors. Every newspaper had to inform the Colonial Secretary with this information and submit him a copy of the newspaper. It was approved a fine of 20 schillings for each copy of the newspaper not delivered to the Colonial Secretary and two pounds for not submitting the required information about the publishers to the Secretary. The official government *Gazette* was exempt from this ordinance.

The *Advocate* attacked the ordinance with a sarcastic editorial in his July issue[157]. The ordinance had been discussed by the Council since at least June 1851 and despite the protest made by the *Advocate* was approved in August. The *Advocate* first compared the ordinance with the Stamp Act of 1765 – one of the laws that prompted the American Revolution – and later boldly pointed out that the ordinance was harmless. The editorial continued underlining the hypocrisy of the government towards the free press:

> We congratulate the Public on this change of tone – no more threats now – no more inquisitorial investigation – no more attempts at intimidation will for the future made against the conductors of the Advocate – the lion will lie down with the lamb, the eagle with the tomtit – all is peace and unity[158].

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[155] *St Helena Herald*, No. 279, June 17th 1858
[156] Ordinance on newspapers, Jamestown, Saint Helena Archives, August 18th 1851
[157] *St. Helena Advocate*, No. 9, July 3rd 1851
[158] *Ibidem*

It can be assumed that the government immediately felt threatened by a free newspaper that scrutinised the wrongdoings of the Imperial administration. The *Advocate* was also outraged by the exemption of the government-held *Gazette* from the provisions of the ordinance, stressing with sarcastic comments this uneven treatment.

During August 1851, the *Advocate* strongly criticised another ordinance from the governor. The 'Auction duty ordinance' raised the fees due by the inhabitants when purchasing or selling goods in public auctions. The inhabitants appealed against this ordinance directly to the Earl Grey, Secretary of State for War and Colonies. The Earl confirmed the ordinance recommending the Queen's approval. The *Advocate* launched strong accusations both to the governor and to the government in London:

> We object on it on the same principle, that 'taxation without representation is virtual despotism' and because it is a monstrous and unworthy injustice of the Home Government to start so poor an offshoot into the world, without at least preliminary advice and relief from a little of the load with which it has been pleased to furnish our weak shoulders. […] Our Government displays in their favourite trick of creating crimes, and superseding Acts of Parliament, comes out with a bold and lawyer-like definition of what shall, and what shall not 'be deemed Perjury'[159].

Again, the themes and the slogans of the American Revolution are present in this editorial. The ordinance *per se* was not a direct threat to free trade and the fees amounted no more to £ 150 yearly[160]. However, the tradesmen that supported the *Advocate* saw a potential future threat to their business, as this ordinance could had been only a first step. These businesspersons were dependent on low taxes, low duties and free trade. They dreaded the days of the Company were the trade monopoly firmly limited their actions.

In 1856 it was the *Herald* that contested an act of the governor. An order was issued to limit emigration from Saint Helena. People engaged in 'remunerative employment' were no longer able to emigrate to the Cape. The *Herald* analysed that these people consisted mostly of servants and other low-paid workers, representing the poorest social class of Saint Helena[161]. The *Herald* contested that the order was issued by the government under pressure of the 'masters' of the servants. The

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[159] *St. Helena Advocate*, No. 14, August 7th 1851
[160] *Ibidem*
[161] *St. Helena Herald*, No. 160, September 25th 1856

newspaper stated that these servants were the ones who most would had benefitted from emigration to the Cape, a colony with a fast-growing economy and a favourable legislation thanks to Sir George Grey's actions.

There was a strong connection between the opposition to ordinances and laws perceived as unjust and the call for an elected council on the island. The 'Saints' had to wait 155 years to get their first chance to elect their own council: only the constitution of 1988-1989 allowed limited democratic elections[162].

The newspapers used a classical assumption of liberalism to champion the request of an elected government. Their main idea was that economic development was strictly connected with democracy: only elected representatives that have to answer to their electors can pass good legislation. The *Advocate* first sustained this idea in 1853:

> The first operating cause is the want of a Representative Government, - a Government in which the people would have confidence, a Government in which all could trust. St Helena has no favorable antecedents to fall back upon. [..] Our exertions for prosperity rest with ourselves[163].

Seven years later the *Herald* made a direct connection between representative government and economic development referring to the experience of the Colony of the Cape:

> As to the immediate material benefits we should derive from Representative Institutions we do not care to dilate upon them. We might point to the Cape for an illustration of the unlooked-for benefits they bring – to their Railroads, Harbour and Road improvements, Bridges, Immigration, as the more remarkable result[164].

The state of the Cape and Saint Helena were very different, and the *Herald* article was too optimistic. The resources and the trade of Saint Helena were declining, and an elected council could hardly have improved the condition of the economy of the island. However, having the chance to manage the tax revenue focusing on different priorities expression of the inhabitants could had improved the meagre condition of schools, hospitals and roads.

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[162] *The Constitution of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha*, 1988-1989
[163] *St Helena Advocate*, January 6th 1853
[164] *St Helena Herald*, February 2nd 1859

Barred from electing their representative, the editors of the newspapers focused on who and how the governors appointed to the three-people Council of the island. In 1853 N. Solomon was appointed Chief Justice and member of the Council, and the *Herald* hailed to this decision as Solomon's appointment 'opened a door for the representation of the wishes and wants of the mercantile portion of the community[165]'. The *Herald* also appealed to the governor to open the Council to 'one or two gentlemen' elected by the inhabitants[166]. In 1858 the *Herald* even praised the governor when he appointed George Moss as a member of the Council[167]. This was an historic decision as Moss was both a civilian and an inhabitant of Saint Helena, the first appointed to the council since the Crown takeover. The Secretary for the Colonies in London refused to confirm the appointment as it was 'not according to precedents', provoking protests by the *Herald*[168]. This interference in the life of this small colony seems exaggerate, but there is no further documentation to determine whether it was due to the excessive zeal of some bureaucrat in London or a precise political decision of the Imperial centre.

A success for the advocates of a fairer government on the island was achieved in 1863. Since the beginning of the Crown rule in the 1830s the Chief Justice had also been a member of the Council. The head of the judiciary power was also member of the legislative body and advisor of the executive power: the Chief Justice was then responsible for both the approval of laws and their application. In 1863 the constitution of the island changed and the Chief Justice was no longer a member of the Council. The *Guardian* celebrated the event with a long article:

> The 30th November 1863 will for the future be a memorable day in the history of St Helena […] We allude to the alteration in the constitution of the government of this island which was promulgated. […] Thus, in addition to His Excellency having greater dignity and powers he receives an addition to his number of advisers in the carrying of his government His Honor the CHIEF JUSTICE is no longer a Member of Council, and we doubt not it has struck him that the executive of the law he was in a false position as a framer of the law[169].

The governors tried to appease the inhabitants of the island proposing the elevation of Jamestown to the rank of City and granting municipal powers and a

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[165] *St Helena Herald*, No. 109, March 15th 1855

[166] *Ibidem*

[167] The Moss family was connected with the Solomon's. George Moss was also the Consul of Sardinia-Piedmont (and later Italy) on Saint Helena

[168] *St Helena Herald*, September 23rd 1858

[169] *St Helena Guardian*, Supplement, December 10th 1863

charter to the island's capital. Governor Browne submitted the request to London without holding a consultation of the inhabitants. The *Herald* pointed out three issues: the lack of involvement of the inhabitants in this decision; the lack of clarity on how the Municipality would had financed itself; that the election of one or two representatives in the Council would had been be easier and more useful for the inhabitants[170]. The *Herald* pointed out that if the governor still collected the whole tax revenue of the island, the Municipality would had needed to rise more taxes and duties as an income[171]. In 1856 the proposal was withdrawn with great satisfaction from the *Herald*:

> The idea of giving St Helena a Municipality is for the present abandoned. Few will consider that we suffer any great loss by this decision. A Municipality without money would have been a mockery; a Municipality supported by additional taxation would have been an injustice and a crime; a Municipality in any shape, would have been, in the opinion of some a questionable boon[172].

However, this was a pyrrhic victory for the inhabitants. A letter patent of Queen Victoria dated 6 June 1859 created the Diocese of Saint Helena with the Bishop's See on Saint Helena. With the same patent Jamestown was elevated to the rank of City but without a Corporation and a Mayor[173]. The *Herald* commented caustically:

> In any other Colony the important and gratifying news that a Town had been made a City, would have been publicly known by the Government immediately the news was known to have arrived. […] Jamestown a city without a Corporation! Not a corporate body in a city! We shall be told perhaps, 'It is your own fault that you have not a Corporation, and a Mayor at the head of it. Was not the boon offered you in the days of Governor Gore BROWNE and you would not accept it?' - The *name* was offered to us but the powers generally attached thereto were denied[174].

The Municipality could had been a tool for the inhabitants to have a say in the management of the island revenue. In fact, the press repeatedly focused on how the

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[170] *St Helena Herald*, No. 118, May 17th 1855
[171] *Ibidem*
[172] *St Helena Herald*, No. 156, February 7th 1856
[173] *A patent for constituting the Island into a See and making Jamestown a City*, June 6th 1859
[174] *St Helena Herald*, September 8th 1859

Governors spent the tax revenue and seldom accused them of squandering the public money.

The main accusation that the press moved against the governors regarding taxes and public expenditure was related to the cost of the civil and military Establishment of the island. The *Advocate* in 1852 criticised the excessive spending for some of the public servants employed by the government: the Auditor was paid £ 400 while a Clerk did his work for £ 30 and the Colonial Surgeon had a salary of £ 50 although the Parish Surgeon did most of the work[175]. In 1863 the *Guardian* compared the revenue and the expenses of Saint Helena with other colonies. The cost of the salary of the public servants amounted to £ 12,000 for a population of 5,000 civilians. The *Guardian* argued that the number of colonial officers was disproportionate for the relatively simple administration of a small colony as Saint Helena: a Governor with few clerks could had done all the work[176].

Another cause for outrage happened in the period 1864-1867 when the Council of the island discussed whether to ask for a £ 30,000 loan to repair some public buildings. The *Guardian* argued that cutting the salary of the Civil Servants of £ 500 a year would had permitted to save the money for the reparations[177]. In 1867 the effects of this loan still burdened the inhabitants, as new taxes had to be raised to cover the £ 2,400 that the Government had to pay every year for the 1864 loan[178]. In 1870 the *Guardian* further argued in favour of the reduction of the civil establishment, and thus the expenses, of Saint Helena:

> If the Government were in earnest in the idea of abolishing all superfluous expenditure and equalizing our expenses with the fluctuations of a precarious revenue, they would begin with the Governor, follow with their Civil Officers, and end with bringing our condition into the state of that of the Falkland Islands – unless they recognize St. Helena as the French and Americans do – as a military station of possibly very high importance, and are prepared to treat it accordingly[179].

The British Imperial administration prescribed a fixed structure for each territory ruled as a colony. This structure was excessive for a colony with a population and a revenue as reduced as Saint Helena. The structure employed most

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[175] *St Helena Advocate*, April 1st 1852
[176] *St Helena Guardian*, October 29th 1863
[177] *St Helena Guardian*, July 14th 1864
[178] *St Helena Guardian*, May 22nd 1867
[179] *St Helena Guardian*, April 28th 1870

of the revenues of the island in salaries for public servants, leaving roads, schools and hospitals with little else. The *Guardian* proposed two solutions: a demeaning of Saint Helena from the rank of colony, thus reducing the number of public servants in order to spend more money for public services; otherwise recognising a military role to Saint Helena – for example as it was during the captivity of Napoleon – thus increasing the spending by the Imperial centre boosting the colony's revenue.

The role of Saint Helena in the British Empire and the World was also debated on the island newspapers. Their view of the East India Company age was mostly negative: it was true that the island under the Company benefitted from generous subsidies, but the trade monopoly and the plantation system based on slavery were regarded as extremely negative[180]. The *Advocate* even considered the Company's rule as despotic:

> For nearly two years have we made our hebdomadal appearance before the St. Helena public – a public bred under the despotism of the East India Company, and utterly unused to free expression, or even to a free opinion in its own government[181].

The *Advocate*, as it was previously demonstrated, was not a strong supporter of the Crown administration, thus the newspaper's strong critic of the EIC age seems genuine and not an elegy of the new regime. This approach underlines that, at least in the press, there were very few nostalgic of the Company's rule, a time when Saint Helena played a crucial role in the trade with the East. The newspapers looked with more nostalgia to the 1840s when, free of the Company's rule, the island retained a relevant role in the Atlantic due to the fight against slave trade[182]. The Naval Squadron that harboured in Saint Helena brought public investments and trade to the island, however by the 1850s the Squadron and the Liberated African Camp had been dismissed. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the inhabitants felt abandoned on a rock in the middle of the Atlantic that had lost its role in the British imperial system. The two historical functions of Saint Helena, which allowed the island to endure through two centuries – the strategic role as a military outpost and the role as an intermediate trading hub between the East and Britain – were gradually transferred to Ascension and the Cape. The feelings of the inhabitants were expressed in an article on the *Herald* in 1857:

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[180] *St Helena Advocate,* May 29th 1851
[181] *St Helena Advocate,* January 20th 1853
[182] *St Helena Herald,* September 27th 1855

Our Island seems to be shaken from centre to circumference by the emigration movement – from the meanest labourer to those whose position and talent will be most severely felt by us. […] All seem discontented with the Island. […] This is but the crisis to which our affairs has been tending since the change of Government. […] For 19 years we have been kept going on the merest contingency; in the meantime we have seen colonies arising into nations […] while we are still governed by those who can feel no interest for our welfare. […] All thing are going forward, while our poor devoted Island (for devoted it appears to be, on one side by the Admiralty in patronizing Ascension, and on the other by the Imperial Government in patronizing the Cape) remains at a dead stand still – our harbour encumbered with a burdensome tax on the ships and our operatives driven from their homes[183].

The sense that Britain was *leaving behind* Saint Helena was expressed also in comparisons with other colonies. As Saint Helena was one of the oldest, most loyal and 'British' of the colonies, the newspapers compared the island to other colonies with a sense of superiority. The Cape had been for centuries the stronghold of the Dutch, and Ascension was colonised only in the early nineteenth century. The *Herald* compared Saint Helena with Ireland for the treatment they both received 'from various classes of persons and the lowness of the finances of most of its inhabitants'[184]. The *Guardian* compared the colonies of the Roman and the British Empire, stating that Saint Helena was treated more like a Roman colony where its inhabitants did not share the same rights of the citizens of the motherland[185]. The *Guardian* later criticised the government when legislative elected assemblies were granted to 'younger' colonies as St Kitts and Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the *Guardian* argued that St Kitts, an island with a larger population than Saint Helena, spent less for the Civil Establishment. The article concluded with a reply to the adversaries of representative government on Saint Helena, which argued that the island was too small to sustain an elected body: the colony of Heligoland, with a smaller population than Saint Helena, was granted a representative government[186].

The transition and the transformation that the British Empire faced after the American Revolution created a new and more complex Imperial organisation. The Empire enacted a stricter and more centralised rule in order to prevent what

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[183] *St Helena Herald*, February 26th 1857
[184] *St Helena Herald*, December 6th 1855
[185] *St Helena Guardian*, May 22nd 1867
[186] *St Helena Guardian*, April 28th 1870

happened in the Thirteen Colonies[187]. The period between 1780 and 1830 was an age of 'colonial despotism' and the system of the 'Crown Colonies' was enacted through the Empire[188]. Also in Great Britain the Napoleonic Wars saw an increase of the authority of the government in managing internal affairs. The expansion into India and later Africa further justified the use of direct colonial rule[189]. After the 1830s the authoritarian attitude of the Government in Britain started to change in favour of a more liberal approach. Thus, some colonies with a white-dominant population were granted forms of self-government.

Settler colonial studies in recent years are developing new perspectives on the subject[190]. This new historiographical approach identifies in 'settler colonies' a very peculiar colonialism, with its own characteristics. In settler colonies the main aim of the colonizers is to replace the local population, expelling or eliminating it from the would-be colony[191]. Settler colonial studies are focused mostly on the interactions (or neglecting of) between settlers and the native population[192]. Another relevant aspect of settler colonial studies is relative to decolonisation, as settler colonies did not usually follow the path to decolonisation[193] as it is considered in historiography[194]. From this perspective Saint Helena played a different role as a settler colony, as there were no indigenous people on the island. Saint Helena, however, experienced the other social and political experiments of Foucaultian 'biopolitics' proper of all the settler colonies[195]. However, again Saint Helena escapes the general framework of the settler colonial studies as the local population faced a process of radical and fast creolisation that created a new culture on the island in the mid-nineteenth century, whilst other settler colonies, for example Canada or Australia, kept a strong and predominant white majority that exerted their hegemony until the mid-late twentieth century. Furthermore, decolonisation never happened on Saint Helena, as it is a colony still today.

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[187] C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian : the British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London, 1994)

[188] P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America – a Second Empire?' in P.J Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (5 vols., Oxford, 1999), II, p. 589

[189] P.J. Marshall, *The making and unmaking of empires : Britain, India, and America c.1750-1783* (Oxford, 2007), p. 6

[190] For example with the birth of the 'Settler Colonial Studies' journal in 2011

[191] L. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Houndmills, 2010)

[192] For example: P. Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver, 2010); Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, 4 (2006), pp. 387-409

[193] Considering decolonization as a process involving the local population revolting against a foreign power to acquire independence. See: D. Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (London, 2006)

[194] K. Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis, 2007)

[195] S.L. Morgensen, '*The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now, Settler Colonial Studies*', 1:1 (2010), pp- 52-76

Saint Helena lost his self-governing body when the Crown took over and imposed a 'Crown Colony' system. Albeit imperfect, under the Company every planter who owned more than 20 acres had a right to vote for the island's assembly[196]. The island newspapers that so despised the Company rule were the same that asked again for an elected body to rule Saint Helena. While Saint Helena lost self-government, other colonies acquired that right. Moreover, for the whole nineteenth century one after another many other colonies followed that path, but not Saint Helena.

The government on the island during the nineteenth century was not despotic, albeit under some of the Governors assumed authoritarian stances. The ordinance on free newspapers have been already mentioned earlier together with the threats and the bullying to the editors of the *Advocate*. The Governor threatened in 1858 to withdraw Government's advertisement from the *Herald*[197], causing economic distress to the editor of the newspaper. Also in 1858 the *Herald* accused the Governor for having dissolved with the use of force a peaceful gathering of citizens that were discussing about the issue of working class houses[198]. The Crown managed to exert a strict social control on the island as the Company did. The factors that aided this control were the isolation of Saint Helena, the presence of a strong garrison and the limited size of the island. Any sedition or rebellion on the island was doomed to fail, as the history of the previous island's mutinies proved. The island was too dependent from the outside world, any rebellion would had faced hunger, lack of primary goods and certain defeat.

The elite of the island developed a strong liberal approach to politics, championing most of the battles of European liberalism. This is a continuity with the past, as the inhabitants approved progressive laws towards slaves in the last years of the East India Company. This liberal elite failed in changing the social, political and economic condition of Saint Helena, as no representative government was enacted until the late twentieth century. Saint Helena with its racially mixed population and liberal elite remains a peculiar case study. The elite with its newspapers championed the idea of the American Revolutionaries, whilst floating on a rock forgotten by the Imperial centre and at the extreme periphery of Empire. Saint Helena completed its journey from focal point of trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to forgotten settlement, left behind in the great transformations of Britain and Empire into the Commonwealth. The Crown governors that ruled the island from 1837 were uninterested in the future of Saint Helena, making them deaf to the request of the inhabitants. This is a stark difference with the Company's

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[196] Letter, 3 Aug. 1683, London, British Library, India Office Records, E/3/90, ff. 89-98
[197] *St Helena Herald,* June 17th 1858
[198] *St Helena Herald*, July 1st 1858

governors, which tried to improve the economy of Saint Helena during their rule. It can be stated that the Imperial government after the 1850s forgot about Saint Helena: they were deaf to their appeals, showing a determination unjustifiable for such a small and peaceful settlement. The comparison with the evolution of other colonies that, at one point, were regarded with an elected assembly seems to confirm this idea of 'forgetfulness'.

The democratic constitutions of 1988, 1989 and 2009 came late, and even today the newspapers of the island protest against the unfairness of the central government and the imperfection of the island's institutions. In their words the echoes of the *Advocate*, the *Herald* and the *Guardian* can be found:

> Some of St Helena's new political leaders voiced strong objections to having to sign an oath of confidentiality, blocking them from sharing information about government affairs. They promised an early end to the 'embarrassment' of secrecy. […]
>
> No major investor has been seen to be willing to spend the money to improve our tourism infrastructure. During 2014 we can only hope that a few of the potential sources of investment will make a firm commitment. Maybe in late 2014 we can see some movement away from the colonialist administration we are suffering with now where officials having all the say but want councillors to be accountable. Maybe, that is to ask for too much[199].

4.9 Ascension and the 'Republic' of Tristan

Colonial government on Ascension and Tristan followed two radical different paths. The two islands were colonised for the same reason in the same period, to provide further defence to Saint Helena during Napoleon's captivity and to limit the American influence in the Atlantic, however they quickly start to diverge since the 1810s. Ascension became the preferred naval base of the Navy in the region, and evolved under a direct military rule. Tristan, after the sink in 1817 of the HMS Julia that proved the unsuitability of the island as a naval base, was left in a 'grey area' of indirect colonial rule.

Ascension since its colonisation in 1815 was defined by its relationships with the military. The island was identified as HMS Ascension, a 'stone frigate'. The island was thus administered with the same legislation and rules enforced on a war

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[199] Excerpts from: *The Saint Helena Independent*, Volume IX Issue 4, January 4th 2014

ship, with a strict discipline for all the men of the garrison. The naval base remained for most of the nineteenth century the principal centre of the island. The marines and the African labourers of the base were most of the island's population. The settlement of Georgetown mostly hosted the marines and the labourers, and was modelled according to the needs of the Navy. The already mentioned report of Captain Barnard[200], then commander of the island, demonstrates the absolute power he enjoyed on Ascension. As the commander he had a direct rule over the sailors, the lieutenants and the marines. He also was, as the representative of the Navy, the employer of the African indentured workers. He was able to organise their work, and the general economy of the island, in a complete and absolute way. As commander he managed to eliminate the private ownership of land that the marines enjoyed and to centralise the control of most of the fertile lands of Ascension, employing the marines and the labourers on those lands. Ascension did not have a pre-existent population like Saint Helena that had enjoyed a greater degree of liberty in the past. And the fact that most of the population were military men and indentured labourers (most of whom would eventually leave Ascension when their duties as soldiers or their indentured contracts would expire) made the aspiration for more liberty and more colonial rights less prominent than Saint Helena. With the arrival of steam power and coal (1862) and the installation of the important trans-Atlantic telegraphic node (1899) the civil population of Georgetown started to increase. This process would eventually lead the Admiralty to cede Ascension to the Colonial Office in 1922. Ascension was then posed under the administration of the Governorship of Saint Helena and the inhabitants were able to elect their first democratic council in 2002. The island remained strongly devoted to the military, and from the 1960s also to space exploration with the installation of a NASA centre.

The colonial administration of Tristan is an extraordinary history in the context of the British Empire. Perhaps only the colony of Pitcairn, founded by the mutineers of the HMS Bounty, shares this exceptionalism in the Empire. Tristan was occupied in 1816 by the Navy that left the island less than a year later in 1817 after HMS Julia sank in the bay, showing that the harbour of Tristan was too dangerous. Corporal Glass remained on the island with few others settlers, with the agreement of the Admiralty. Glass and the first settlers drafted a document, called 'the firm', that defined the rules of common living on the island. These rules were still in force in 1876 when Captain Brine visited the island[201] and wrote his report to the Admiralty. Brine reported that

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[200] Observations on Ascension, 1864, London, Royal Botanical Garden, 10.12
[201] Report upon the Island of Tristan D'Acunha, Nov. 1st 1876, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

This satisfactory state of manners among a society so peculiarly situated is probably due in some degree to the existence of certain […] customs and rules, which are sufficiently interesting to deserve of their being brought to their Lordships knowledge[202].

The rules detailed essentially how land had to be managed, how provisions needed to be produced, and how trade must be conducted. Brine described them

All land is at first held as common; but whenever a man wishes to cultivate a portion he clears and encloses it, and such enclosed land is considered to belong to him […] but whenever it ceases to cultivate it, it is thrown open and becomes pasturage land. […]

It is arranged that all provisions or produce of any kind supplied to a ship for the general use of the crew and passengers are to be deemed the property of the community, and the proceeds of the sale in clothing, stores, or money are taken to Peter Green's house, and there equally divided among families. […]

But to allow for some measure of individual profit, it is agreed that private sales may take place, provided that these do not affect the quantities required by the masters of vessels for the ship's use. Sheep, potatoes, seal skins, penguin and wild cat skins, and articles like nature, can be sold by their owners and the money or stores received in exchange are retained by them for their own use[203].

Justice was administered by the chief of the island, Peter Green, however 'practically the community act as a simple republic, and are bound by the customs enforced by common consent[204]'. This sort of 'anarchist Utopia' in the South Atlantic was made possible by the economic and social condition of the island. As it was already demonstrated in previous chapters, Tristan had a small population, less than one-hundred when Brine visited them, and enough cultivable land for everyone. War did not touched Tristan, and thus the community could live in this republic, as Brine defined it. Tristan was a 'Commonwealth' in the proper sense of the term, a republic where the common good was paramount together with individual rights.

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[202] Ibidem
[203] Ibidem
[204] Ibidem

Such anomaly in the nineteenth century British Empire was immediately noted by Brine. A colony that was a republic and where the 'law of the land' was not Her Majesty's but a communal agreement of freemen (and freewomen) was incompatible with an Empire that used the instrument of direct rule, with the Crown Colonies, in many settlements. An Empire that was ready to concede self-rule only to white settlement colonies of great size like Canada, Australia and South Africa.

Brine inquired the inhabitants of Tristan on the subject of their allegiance to the Empire, and reported

> There was a rumour prevalent among the men that magistrates were going to be sent to rule over them, with powers of fine and imprisonment, and this created a feeling of uneasiness. It is certain, with their present republican customs and habits of freedom, that the introduction of any system of positive authority would meet with great dissatisfaction[205].

Brine considered necessary for Tristan to have a Colonial administration not only because no inhabitants had any judicial training, but also on racial basis. In fact, Tristan was not a 'white' Colony like Australia or Canada were the inhabitants could be entrusted with self-rule. Brine reported

> It is also doubtful if the establishment of a local magistrate with powers of enforcing certain regulations would be advisable, for there is no one at Tristan D'Acunha fit for such position […] Such are the views necessarily taken upon considering the settlement in its present state, but as the children now growing towards manhood will have less European blood than their parents, and will probably be less self-reliant, less manly, and less capable of self-government[206].

Could it be that the reluctance of the Imperial government to concede self-rule to Saint Helena was dependant on racial issues? Were Tristan and Saint Helena not enough 'European' in blood to deserve the trust of the Crown? Brine comments seems to confirm this idea.

Tristan is interesting as it demonstrates how, even in the 1870s, the World's leading superpower was not able to exert its rule homogeneously over all of its

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[205] Ibidem
[206] Ibidem

dominions. Tristan was a periphery where the abilities of an industrial-era state were put to test. In an Empire as vast as the British it was possible for a small community to establish a little Commonwealth ruled by its own laws. The islanders self-ruled themselves and paid a formal homage to the Crown raising the Union Jack and swearing fealty to the Queen. But in their day-to-day life they were subject to their own laws, and not to the laws approved in Westminster.

Tristan was such an extreme periphery of the Empire that still in 1886 a British traveller that visited the island had to write to the Colonial Office

> Can you kindly inform me what relationship, if any, exists between the British Government and the Island of Tristan D'Acunha; whether the population of about 100 souls on this island have any direct claim for assistance upon our nation[207].

Nevertheless, the Colonial Office tried, with other means, to impose some sort of rule on Tristan. In 1878 the Colonial Office asked to the Society for the Propagations of the Gospel to send a clergyman to Tristan[208]. A member of the clergy could provide not only spiritual assistance to the inhabitants, but he would also be a teacher and an advisor in the island's internal affairs. After several years, and dozens of discussions between the Admiralty, the Treasury and the Colonial Office on whom had to pay for the clergyman travel expenses, a Reverend arrived on Tristan. E.H. Dodgson proved to be more of a trouble than a help to the colonial government. He wrote himself several letters to the government to ask for further supplies and support to the island's population, becoming a sort of spokesperson for the inhabitants.

The freedom of Tristan was made possible by the island's relative good economy based on agriculture and trade. The decline of the South Atlantic routes after the opening of Suez and the steam ships that cut travel times caused a crisis in the economy of the island. Tristan became more reliant on the aid that the government could provide, making the position of the inhabitants weaker towards the authority. The island continued its decline, especially after 1886 when the government cut some benefits and supplies for Tristan[209]. In 1938 the island was made officially a dependency of Saint Helena, in the attempt to create a more stable connection with the rest of the World.

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[207] Mr. A.T. Wilson to the Colonial Office, Mar. 10th 1886, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[208] Colonial Office to the Society for the Propagations of the Gospel, Jul. 26th 1878, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14
[209] Admiralty to the Treasury, Nov. 22nd 1886, London, National Maritime Museum, TIZ.73.14

In the early twentieth century Ascension, Saint Helena and Tristan became officially a single entity, with Saint Helena as the centre of this small peripheral sub-imperial system. Saint Helena with the governor and the Archbishop residing in Jamestown administers the two islands still today.

4.10 Conclusion

Colonial government faced different stages of evolution in the British Empire before and after the Age of Revolutions. The American Revolution was a decisive factor in shaping the nineteenth century British approach to colonies. The Thirteen Colonies were left free to rule themselves, and the colonial assemblies were considered the crucibles that ignited the rebellion. Furthermore, the Thirteen Colonies were the most 'British' of all the colonies, not only because they were in New England, but also for demographic and social reasons. If the Crown could not trust her most beloved children, how could be trusted colonies inhabited mostly by non-Europeans? The Napoleonic Wars brought also a reactionary wave in Britain, with civil liberties being restricted in the name of the effort. The 'Second empire', however, was not only the Empire of Crown Colonies and direct rule. The great colonies of Canada and Australia managed to obtain self-rule. However, racism, sustained by a growing nationalism, was becoming a factor more than it ever was in the 'First empire'. Even if slavery saw its own end in the nineteenth century, the ideas of white supremacy over the other human races were becoming more and more popular in Britain and Europe. The Empire thus trusted white colonies with self-government, whilst non-white colonies were treated differently.

Saint Helena, as the oldest of the South Atlantic British colonies, moved through all the phases and evolutions of the Empire. The years of the East India Company were a period of great government intervention, albeit the island had an elected council that managed to counter-balance in some way the influence of the India House. The complicity between the ruling elite of the island and the Company, often sealed with marriages, created a system were the rule of the Board of Directors was more accepted on the island. The elite worked together with the Company to rule Saint Helena and keep the discontent at bay.

The Napoleonic Wars, as it was already mentioned, had relevant effects on the politics of the Empire. On Saint Helena the captivity of Napoleon, the last chapter of the Wars, had an important effect in terms of colonial government. For the first time the Crown meddled with the internal affairs of the island, and the 'paranoia' of an escape of Napoleon imposed on the island a regime of censorship

and police. The presence of Napoleon was also decisive for the South Atlantic as it triggered the occupation of Ascension and Tristan.

The Crown takeover of Saint Helena happened essentially for two reasons, one political and one strategic. The former was part of the attempts made by the Crown to weaken the East India Company, that culminated with the 1833 Charter Act. The latter was that Saint Helena was no longer strategic for the Company as now the fleets could stop at the Cape, and the Crown instead considered Saint Helena strategic in the fight against slave trade.

Saint Helena faced a slow decline when its role as naval base was moved to Ascension, and the inhabitants became more and more resentful towards a government that not only did little to improve the island's economy, but also it did deny rights of self-government to an island that had enjoyed them for two hundred years. Ascension was the main beneficiary of the decline of Saint Helena, as the island became the main naval base of the middle Atlantic and an important centre for science and botany. Tristan never truly had a 'golden age', albeit the island's economy benefitted from the trade routes to and from Australia and South America.

The South Atlantic as a whole entered a period of decline at the end of the nineteenth century when the Suez Canal deprived all the islands of their strategic role. The government stopped investing in the islands and the economy declined.

The South Atlantic islands presented three different and distinct forms of colonial government. Saint Helena was a Crown Colony with a long history and a political elite that demanded more rights; Ascension was a militarised Naval installation were the wills of the population were subject entirely to the military; Tristan was at the edge of the World and its inhabitants were able to establish a self-ruled community part of the Empire in name only. How these different colonial governments were established and how they evolved is crucial to understand the different ways Britain managed its own Empire in the nineteenth centuries. Elements that were common in the whole Empire, like racism, were present in every one of these small settlements together with peculiarities. The differences between the islands demonstrate how the Empire even in the mid-late nineteenth century was not a monolith and every colony had its own peculiarities and issues connected with them.

The emergence of the Cape as a sub-imperial centre in the South Atlantic created a system were labour, science and the economy were connected. In the field of government this integration did not happen, as the islands never became dependencies of the Cape, unlike what happened in Oceania where some islands became dependencies of Australia and New Zealand. Instead in the twentieth century, when the Union of South Africa was born and its focus shifted from the sea

to the rich interiors of southern Africa, the islands were able to became a single political entity within the Empire.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In the end, glorification of splendid underdogs is nothing other than glorification of the splendid system that make them so
THEODOR W. ADORNO

In order to properly conclude this thesis a general recapitulation of the main themes of the previous chapters will be done in this section. Each one of the main themes, Labour-Environment-Empire, will be scrutinised following the main questions that were posed in the introduction: how the history of the South Atlantic islands relates to those of other island-colonies? How the history of the South Atlantic islands is connected with the great themes of Atlantic history? Do the microhistories of the South Atlantic islands have a significance in relationship with the great themes of British, Colonial and World history?

Furthermore, each theme it will be analysed to determine whether the findings of this research support or not the case for Marshall's 'making and unmaking' of the British Empire and how they help to define the South Atlantic as a maritime system and as a sub-imperial system.

Labour

Slavery was the leading form of labour in the Empire and in the South Atlantic during the first centuries of European colonisation. Europeans were the protagonists of this trade, as their ships traded in slaves and other goods between three continents. Africans were involved in slavery from two perspectives, either as slaves or as slave-traders. The role of the Africans and how they influenced the trade was the subject of most of the recent historiography on the subject.

Slavery in the Atlantic boomed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when Europeans realised that the indigenous populations of the Americas were dying and that the New World was facing a declining workforce. Slaves were employed mostly in plantations, with sugar cane being the most profitable and labour-demanding trade. Slavery in the Atlantic thus involved the exploitation of mostly men, employed in a rural context of a plantation and under a stern treatment. Corporal punishments and death penalty were common practice of the planters. The slaves slowly began to develop a new culture, and a network of information, religious practice and rebellion spread all over the 'Black Atlantic'.

In the Indian Ocean World slavery was a process much older than the Atlantic one. Slavery in Asia followed different paths. First of all, the reason slaves were employed was not the same of the Atlantic – at least since the Europeans began

to establish plantations also in Asia. Slaves in Asia were both men and women and often were employed in skilled works, enjoying a better treatment than the slaves of the Atlantic plantations. Hindu and Muslim traditions regulated the trade and the treatment of slaves, and Europeans had to respect those traditions for a long time.

Slavery was central in the history of the British Empire. During the so-called transition from the 'First' to the 'Second' Empire Britain dramatically changed its approach towards slavery. The British Empire abolished the trade in 1807 and slavery in 1834. Britain established fleets devoted to contrast slave trade in the Atlantic, especially against the Portuguese. Nevertheless, the new conquests made in Asia allowed Britain to establish a new system of indentured labour that involved Indians and Chinese. This system, at least in the first decades of the nineteenth century, was no less than a new form of slavery.

Saint Helena was at the centre of all the above mentioned historical processes. Saint Helena was in the Atlantic but its connections were rooted in the Indian Ocean due to the East India Company. Saint Helena had a sort-of plantation economy, albeit slaves were needed for skilled jobs. The 'Black Atlantic' was present on Saint Helena, although not in the forms of other colonies in the Americas. Saint Helena experienced the great developments of the British Empire in the field of labour always before the rest of the Empire. Saint Helena was between two worlds, the Atlantic and the Indian, and its system of slavery reflected aspects from both.

Slavery on Saint Helena was a complex matter, essentially due to the geographical position of the island. Saint Helena's isolation forced the East India Company to adopt two essential guidelines: preserve the island's security and the general interests of the Company. The EIC feared a revolt on Saint Helena, and thus always kept the number of slaves equal or less than the combined number of the planters and the garrison. The EIC during the eighteenth century intervened several times to increase the well-being of the slaves. In 1705 they ordered to give more food to the slaves, in 1717 they made the slaves rest on Sundays. In 1723 the Company fired some overseers that were too violent and in 1748 they strongly discouraged death penalty for the slaves. Compared to Mauritius or to the West Indies, where slaves were treated violently and often killed for petty reasons, slave condition on Saint Helena were undoubtedly better. Slaves had also a more important role in the island's society. They were trained to do many different jobs and they were even employed as auxiliaries in the patrols that monitored the watchtowers of the island.

The reasons that drove the planters and the EIC to embrace this particular treatment for slaves were eminently economic. A slave on Saint Helena was several times more expensive than a slave on Barbados or in Jamaica. Killing a slave or

maiming him permanently was an enormous economic loss for the island, whilst in the Caribbean it was a matter of a few dollars. The social structure of Saint Helena also influenced the lives of the slaves. There was no urban settlement on the island where the slaves could meet and form bonds and, if necessary, conspire against their masters. Maroonage was not possible as the island was too small to allow escaped slaves to hide. The slaves lived in the plantations with their masters, often sharing the same house. In Saint Helena language, religion and culture did not 'creolise' as this social structure maintained Saint Helenian English close to the motherland's and made conformist Anglicanism the religion also of the slaves. Saint Helena was in the Black Atlantic but the great waves of rebellion never touched the island. Slaves thus enjoyed more freedom than other slaves in other colonies. This freedom was apparent, as slaves were subjected to duties and social control like their white masters. Saint Helena was an island-fortress, and the strict organisation of society involved all the social classes of the island.

Saint Helena began the path to abolition earlier than the rest of the Empire. In 1792 the island abolished slave trade, fifteen years earlier than the rest of the Empire. The Haitian revolution of 1791 had made planters all over the Atlantic fearful of a possible successful sedition by the slaves. Ending the trade allowed to maintain the black population in a smaller number than the 'Europeans', in an attempt to safeguard the stability of the island. Slave-owners on Saint Helena developed in the earlier nineteenth century a more 'humanitarian' approach towards slavery, in contrast to other slave owners of the Black Atlantic. A hundred-years of laws that forced them to treat slaves well might had changed their mentality, moving them from harsh slaveholders to abolitionists. Most of the planters founded a Benevolent Society and established a 'Committee for Encouraging Slaves'. In 1818, during the captivity of Napoleon Bonaparte, Saint Helena's planter decided to unanimously approve the governor's proposition that every child of a slave should be born free. In 1824 they reduced corporal punishments for slaves. In 1832 the planters voted in favour of abolishing slavery entirely, one year before the Imperial government decided to do the same. The planters had their compensation, as all former slaves had to repay their masters of their former value. The Company had to cover the expenses of many slaves, whom struggled to repay. The free blacks were treated poorly, with low wages and unfair conditions. The planters were in peace with their conscience having done their duty as Christians to abolish slavery, although immediately began to take advantage of the situation economically.

Saint Helena experimented indentured labour well before the rest of the Empire. Chinese labourers were present on Saint Helena between 1810 and 1840, whilst in the rest of the Empire indentured labour became the prevalent form of servitude in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Chinese population on Saint Helena reached its apex in 1817 with 618 people, a number comparable to that of the free blacks of the island. The Chinese were employed in many trades: from agriculture to masonry. The Chinese community, however, did not integrate in the island's society. The population considered the Chinese lazy, riotous and violent. They even wrote to the government to complain of their presence, and successfully lobbied to have them removed from Saint Helena. Indentured labour was never reintroduced on Saint Helena, although the freed slaves found themselves in a sort of contract of servitude similar to indentured labour. As they had to repay their former masters, they were indebted with the Company. They had to work on Saint Helena for low wages without the possibility to emigrate.

Slavery, however, was not the only form of labour on Saint Helena. For centuries the free planters of Saint Helena worked their land with the help of the slaves. Most of the planters were poor, in a social condition no better than the one of the slaves. They lived in small houses and shared their food and their roof with their servants. When the Crown took over the island in 1837 and the economy of Saint Helena started to worsen, the condition of those little planters became even meagre. The freed slaves and the ones liberated by the Navy from the Portuguese slavers just increased the number of available cheap workforce of Saint Helena. Saint Helena started to send some of those men and women to the Cape, where the need for new workforce was high. Soon the former white planters decided to follow them, emigrating to the Cape. They faced harsh conditions there, with many of them exploited and ill-treated by their masters. The condition of those immigrants was so dire that the governor of Saint Helena had to inquire to the Colonial Office to solicit an intervention by the governor of the Cape. The government took the question seriously and sent a direct order to the governor of the Cape to investigate the situation. Emigration from Saint Helena was prohibited in 1899 in order to avoid the complete depopulation of the island.

The abolition of slavery and the economic downturn of Saint Helena changed the society of the island dramatically. The process of creolisation started, and in less than thirty years was complete. The social organisation of the society of the island during the East India Company was pervasive and administered every aspect of life on Saint Helena. The planters and the slaves had each their role in the society, and the social groups were kept apart. Saint Helena was an island without an

indigenous population, and both the East India Company and the planters dreamed of transforming it in a new England. This project did not include the presence of blacks, Chinese or Indians. They were just a temporary solution to the lack of workforce, waiting for a brighter future when all of Saint Helena would have been organised in plantations managed and worked by Englishmen and their families. This approach of 'racial' planning was still present in the 1820s when the planters fight to send the Chinese away. The dissolution of the EIC society on Saint Helena meant that both the whites and the blacks became the same social class, a class of poor workers without much future on the island. Mixed marriages began to increase, and the population became an indefinite mix of all the different ethnicities that had lived on the island.

Ascension and Tristan evolved on different paths than Saint Helena. The islands never experienced the presence of slaves, and indentured labourers were present only on Ascension. Ascension was essentially a naval base where most of the population was employed by the government. The commander of the base was also the governor of the whole island. The marines and the sailors constituted the 'European' part of the population, and they were not only employed in their duties as soldiers but also as farmers, fishermen, turtle-hunters and lime-diggers. They were subject to the authority of the commander, and they had no chance to establish a private trade, a common thing on many island colonies. They were stripped of the lands, advocated by the government of the island for strategic supply use. Most of the workers on Ascension were African indentured labourers, employed in unskilled jobs and underpaid. As they were under a contract of servitude with the Admiralty they were also subject to the commander of the base. Society and labour were thus heavily organised and militarised on Ascension.

Tristan was the exact opposite of Ascension. All the inhabitants were planters, owning their own piece of land. There were no slaves and no servants, as any men had the right to own its own land. On Tristan this lack of difference between groups and classes favoured a racial mixture like the one that happened on Saint Helena in the second half of the nineteenth century.

How labour relationship in the South Atlantic islands related to those of other island-colonies? The three islands had very different histories and their labour organisations were very distinct. Saint Helena was extremely different from the other island-colonies of the West Indies and of the Mascarene Islands, where 'Atlantic' slavery was present. Saint Helena's slavery system was less cruel and less violent towards the slaves, and the economy of the island was very different from the other island-colonies. Saint Helena never had a strong plantation economy,

never had a decent sugar industry and thus never developed a society similar to Mauritius or Jamaica. The condition of the planters was also very different, as the Saint Helenians were not as affluent as the planters of the vast plantations of the West Indies. In the nineteenth century indentured labour was present on the islands as it was present in other island colonies, although most of the indentured labourers were Africans, either former slaves or liberated men from the Portuguese ships. The presence of Chinese and Indians was never the same as in the Caribbean or Mauritius.

The histories of the South Atlantic islands relate with the main themes of Atlantic history in a peculiar way. Slavery in the Atlantic was a large business that involved close relationships between the various sides of the Ocean. The islands were never involved completely in the same mechanics, as the main trade routes of the South Atlantic were mostly directed towards India rather than the Americas. When slavery was abolished, the islands were important in the fight against the traders. However, the fight against the slavers happened in the South Atlantic, as the Portuguese acted mostly in this region, and thus this fight was not part of Atlantic history if considered from a North Atlantic-centric perspective, as much of the historiography does.

The microhistories of the islands in the field of labour presented very peculiar traits, influenced mostly by geography. It was the islands' remoteness that defined the slave practices of Saint Helena and it was Tristan almost absolute isolation that allowed the planters to institute an egalitarian society. These geographical conditions were almost unique, however some of these microhistories are relevant in the general historiographical debate. Only Tristan's organisation of free planters is perhaps too exceptional to be of any significance in the field of history of labour in the British Empire. Ascension's and Saint Helena's histories, for their relationships with the central government and the rest of the Empire, are more significant to study in relationship with other models of colonial organisations of labour.

The history of labour in the South Atlantic is essential in confirming Marshall's theory of 'making and unmaking' of the Empire, and highlights the continuities between the 'First' and the 'Second' Empires. First of all, the prevalent form of labour in the South Atlantic before and after the Revolutions was a form of servitude. If before the Revolutions it was called slavery, right after it became indentured labour. This form of servitude was either sanctioned by a regular contract of indenture or by a *de facto* situation of servitude as in the case of the Saint Helenian's indebted former slaves. Secondly, the 'swing to the East' did not happened in the South Atlantic, at least for what concerned labour. The South Atlantic islands even increased their relationships with Africa, both as a source of

indentured labour (Ascension) or during the fight against the Portuguese traders. The relationships between the islands and the Cape and between the islands themselves increased during the 'Second' Empire, another proof that the Atlantic world was not 'abandoned' by Britain in favour of India.

In terms of labour relationships, the South Atlantic developed as a system after the 1840s. The arrival of the African Squadron in Ascension and Saint Helena organised the two islands and the coastal outposts, for example Sierra Leone, in the attempt to contrast the slavers. The Colony of the Cape became involved when the liberated slaves began to be an excessive number for the islands' economies, and thus the flux of liberated slaves was directed towards the Cape. The Cape was also the economic hub of the region, and the primary destination for emigration. Hundreds, if not thousands, of inhabitants of the islands, both 'European' and African, emigrated during the nineteenth century primarily to the Cape creating expats communities in the colony. The money those emigrants sent back home was important to the declining economy of the islands. The system developed a hierarchy where the Cape was the sub-imperial centre, Saint Helena the second-tier node, Ascension and Tristan the third-tier nodes. During the nineteenth century Saint Helena declined and was gradually substituted by Ascension as the second-tier colony of the system, with the increasing importance of the island as a base for the African squadron.

Environment

Islands were crucial during the early years of European colonisation. Islands were essential as outposts for the fleets of traders, explorers, and *conquistadors* to resupply water, fresh fruits and meat. Islands in the minds of late-medieval and early-modern men were Edenic places, with great Biblical significance, and idealised as paradises. This view of islands allowed the first explorers to fight the fear of *Oceanus*, the great sea that should not be crossed. The Atlantic islands created an archipelago of relationships, trade routes and people that was the backbone of the early European expansion. Britain, France and the Dutch as latecomers in the colonialist endeavour had to conquer small settlements like the islands as the great continental territories were already occupied by the Iberian powers. Furthermore, island were easier to manage compared to littoral settlements as they were a defined space with less dangerous indigenous populations and more pleasant living conditions. In popular culture and literature islands were depicted in a positive and Utopian way. In the nineteenth century things began to change. Islands became less important to the European empires, as modern technology allowed them to conquer

and occupy vast lands on the continents. The encounter with the ferocious natives of Polynesia and the use of islands as prisons or as military outposts changed also the perception of islands. Literature began to describe them as dystopian places, no longer the Garden of Eden.

Islands were also used as experimental places. Policies, laws, technologies were experimented on small islands earlier in order to apply them later in the motherland or in other colonies. Islands were particularly adapt to this mean, as they had a definite geographical space, a small population, a closed environment and order was easier to maintain due to the reduced size.

Saint Helena was a perfect candidate as an experimental place, as it was a very secluded island, remote and with a very small population. The East India Company also had interest in experimenting on Saint Helena as the settlement, that was essential to the Company's interest, was very expensive to maintain. If the Company could have managed to make Saint Helena self-sustaining it would have been a great saving of money and resources.

The Company's attempts to improve the economy of Saint Helena were several during the whole period of its rule over the island. The earliest attempt was a cultivation of indigo in 1672. Tobacco and sugar were first planted in 1684, yams were extensively cultivated since 1727. Alcohol was produced in form of Arrack since 1698 and in form of beer since 1802. A silk industry was implanted in 1826 approximately when a whale fishery was established. However, three initiatives of the East India Company were of particular historical interest. The first one happened in 1689 when Captain Poirier, a French Huguenot, was hired by the East India Company to implant vineyards on Saint Helena and implement a wine processing industry on the island. The interest in Poirier's appointment is not related to wine, but to the fact that he was a Huguenot. He arrived on the island together with other fellow countrymen and they quickly integrated with the island's society. The East India Company was a multi-national enterprise that employed not only English people. Poirier was a competent and skilled man, and the Company entrusted him with an important project. He proved to be of such value for the Company that he later became the governor of Saint Helena. His experience could be contextualised in the wider trans-oceanic process of the so-called 'Huguenot diaspora'.

The second, and probably most important, experiment of the East India Company on Saint Helena was the establishment of a botanical garden. The garden was established in 1703, less than forty years after the island's settlement, with the specific purpose of preserving the endemic plants of Saint Helena. In the 1720s the garden was crucial in Governor Byfield's attempts to preserve the island's forests.

The garden on Saint Helena was well organised and nourished by the governors, that recognised its importance for the island's economic stability. It was not a coincidence when Saint Helena's garden became part of a wider network of botanical institutions within the Empire. During the great scientific revolution of the eighteenth century, botany became an important science. The Imperial government recognised the utility of this science, as a better knowledge of plants could have improved the efficiency of plantations all over the Empire. Botanists and naturalists were especially active in the tropical zone and in India, where exotic and unusual plants were discovered by the Europeans. The Royal Botanical Gardens of Kew became the centre of a network of gardens and scientists spread over four continents. From Calcutta to Saint Helena to Saint Vincent to London plants and ideas travelled on the ships of the Company. Saint Helena's role in this network was as a resting place for the plants, as it was hard for them to sustain the long months of ship travel from India to Britain. The plants arriving from Asia were planted in Saint Helena for few weeks in order to regain strength, and then forwarded to London.

The third important experiment conducted on Saint Helena by the East India Company was the cultivation of coffee. Coffee had remained a well-kept secret of the Arabs for centuries, as the cultivation of this plant requires particular techniques that eluded the Europeans. In the 1720s the East India Company managed to obtain from the Arab city of Mokha some seeds of coffee and the techniques to cultivate it. Saint Helena was the first settlement where the Company planted coffee. Saint Helena not only presented excellent natural condition for the cultivation of coffee, but also was at the centre of the mentioned botanical gardens network that allowed a quick and efficient spread of this cultivation to the whole Empire. Still today Saint Helena's coffee is one of the most exquisite, and most expensive, in the World. All these experiments conducted by the East India Company were, all in all, failures. Saint Helena never became a profitable colony for the whole period the EIC ruled there.

The Crown was less eager to invest and experiment on Saint Helena. The most fertile lands of the island were no longer in the hands of the government, and the island continued its process of deforestation and exploitation of the soil. A gardener was sent in 1869 and was unable to succeed due to the dramatic situation of the island's environment. An apparent success was achieved with the cultivation of New Zealand's flax. The plant flourished on the island, having found a perfect environment. This contributed to the further destruction of the island's endemic species and flax proved an economic failure as the quantity needed to transform it in a fibre was far exceeding the island's production capacity. In the 1860 bees were

introduced on Saint Helena, and they were successful. Today Saint Helena's honey is one of the purest and most expensive in the World. The local government and the inhabitants also contributed to the failures of some of the Crown's attempts, for example in the case of the cinchona plantations established by the famous botanist Joseph Hooker.

The European societies of the pre-industrial age were mostly dependant from wood. Since the late middle ages forests started to be cut intensively in order to supply the demands of a growing economy. England was one of the countries that saw one of the greatest reduction of its own forests, one of the main reason why Britain turned to coal earlier than the rest of Europe. The governments of that time realised that an indiscriminate use of the forests could extinguish them, and thus destroying the economy of an entire country. Historians debated whether the regulations of forests were driven only by utilitarianism or also from conservationists concerns. The case of the South Atlantic confirmed the latter approach. Governments in the eighteenth century started to exert their authority in a more decisive way, and environmental laws were one of the tools used to pursue more control over the citizen. The same approach was used in the colonies even in more advanced and pervasive ways, as it was easier to experiment new regulations and laws. Historians identified two patterns of development of those policies: one of 'imperial environmentalism' and one of 'environmental imperialism'. The former approach states that environmental laws and regulations originated in the colonies where these regulations were experimented and studied before being absorbed and used by the motherland. The latter approach instead sees the Imperial centres as the agents that imposed from outside new laws and regulations on the colonies to assert their control over them better. The case of the South Atlantic demonstrates that before the Revolutions the colonies developed their own policies in a form of 'imperial environmentalism', whilst in the nineteenth century those policies were applied by the imperial centre on other colonies in a form of 'environmental imperialism'.

The environment and the ecosystem of the islands was extremely delicate, as they were isolated from the rest of the World and thousands of endemic species of plants, animals and insects populated them for millennia. Saint Helena had the richest ecosystem of the three islands, and the one that men contributed most to destroy. When it was discovered Saint Helena was completely covered by forests. At the end of the nineteenth century most of the island was arid and barren, with the original forest staunchly resisting at the top of Diana's Peak. The island's environment started to be destroyed almost as soon as Saint Helena was discovered,

as the Portuguese left some goats. The goats became wild and plagued the fields and forests of Saint Helena for centuries. The governors acted since 1683 in order to preserve the island's forests. The main wood was fenced in 1728. In 1813 the governor ordered the planting of several new trees at the expenses of each planter. The governors alternated genuine 'conservationist' concerns with more utilitarian approaches. Whenever their reasons were, the legislative production of the island council was focused mostly on forests and agricultural regulations. This excessive and intrusive legislation in the lives of the inhabitants caused great unrest and discontent. It is a fact that there was just one attempted slave revolt compared to five planters' rebellions. Saint Helena is an example of imperial environmentalism, where Governors legislated on their own to find appropriate solutions to the looming ecological disaster. This imperial environmentalism forced a strict social order onto the planters, strengthening the Company's rule on Saint Helena. The Crown administration after 1837 was less interested in the preservation of the island, and very few laws on the subject were issued after that date. These experiments conducted on Saint Helena in the field of environment were extremely useful for the Company and the Crown, helping them to draft the colonial legislations in larger colonies like India. Imperial environmentalism was transforming into environmental imperialism.

Ascension was another island where experiments in the field of environment were conducted. Charles Darwin was the first to observe in 1836 during the voyage of the *Beagle* that if a 'cloud forest' like the one present on Saint Helena could be planted on top of Ascension's Green Mountain the rainfalls on the island could be increased thus improving the living conditions and sustainability of the Naval base. Darwin shared his thought with Joseph Hooker, one of Britain's leading botanists. In the 1840s Hooker recommended a plan to the Admiralty to do such experiment on Ascension, and in the course of few decades the island grew a cloud forest and increased its rainfall. Again the great network of botanists in the Empire worked together with the Imperial power to serve its strategic needs. In the second half of the nineteenth century Ascension also became the new South Atlantic hub for the botanical network, stealing this position from Saint Helena. Another decisive figure in the development of Ascension was Mr. Bell, the gardener of the island in the 1860s. He was the man that more than others carried out Hooker's plan, planting trees all over the island and experimenting how to let them survive in the new environment. Although the pre-existent ecosystem of Ascension was much arid than Saint Helena's, the island had a rich population of endemic birds and shrubs. Almost half of the endemic bird species are now extinct, also because alien species of birds were imported in order to contrast caterpillars. The human intervention on

Ascension did increase the fertile lands, the opposite of what happened on Saint Helena, but the result was the same on the two islands: a stable and unique ecosystem was destroyed. On Ascension the balance was probably even delicate that on Saint Helena, as the island was very arid and water was a precious resource. Although Hooker's cloud forest did increase rainfall, it did not eliminate draughts. For this reason, one of the main concern of the government was to improve the water infrastructure of the island, from water pumping to the plumbs to the tanks where the water was stored.

On Tristan the small population of the island had less impact on the environment. Nevertheless, the cultivation of fields was made at the expenses of the local endemic vegetation. Tristan, however, never faced desertification (like Saint Helena) or draught (like Ascension), and managed to achieve a natural balance.

The South Atlantic islands were unique for their biodiversity. Still today, they are one of the main sources of biodiversity in the World, with new species of bugs and musk discovered every year. The European intervention on the environment of islands happened in all the colonies. The West Indies and the Mascarene faced deforestation in order to clear new fields for sugar cane. In the Pacific, the islands were likewise transformed to provide agricultural goods for exportation. Where an indigenous population was present, this processes destroyed their culture and their social environment. However, these islands never faced true ecological disasters as Saint Helena or Ascension because they were closer to continents and to other islands. They could import wood from other places at a cheap price, the same goes for other supplies. No Caribbean island faced the risk of becoming unable to sustain human life. The South Atlantic island instead did, as if Ascension would have run out of drinking water or Saint Helena out of wood they would have probably had to be abandoned.

The environmental history of the South Atlantic islands makes them centric in any historical analysis on environmentalism in the Atlantic. The historical debate over environmental imperialism and imperial environmentalism finds in the South Atlantic islands a possible solution. Atlantic historiography on environment focused on the impact that colonialism had on the great continental lands of the Americas and of Europe. If Europe was damaged by the constant need of wood for ships that caused further deforestation, the Americas were involved in colossal exploitations of natural resources that endangered several species. However, the Americas were rich of resources and the predatory attitude of the settlers never faced strong regulations. The South Atlantic islands, with their scarcity of resources

and their unstable environment, challenge this approach moving from the large processes of the Americas to the small issues of the islands.

For this reason, the microhistory of the Atlantic islands is indeed crucial to the historiographical debate over environmentalism in the Atlantic world and in a colonial context. The dynamics that developed on Saint Helena and Ascension were essential for historians like R.H. Grove to define the pillars of colonial environmental history. The micro-cosmos of Saint Helena presented a government desperate to improve the situation of an island and a unique and fragile ecosystem. The combination of these two factors created an impressive *corpus* of laws and an extremely regulated society that provides an excellent case study.

The debate over 'imperial environmentalism' and 'environmental imperialism' seems to work against the argument that the British Empire did not faced two distinct stages, the 'First' and 'Second' Empires. If the 'First' Empire was characterised by a phase of 'imperial environmentalism' in the colonies and the 'Second' by a phase of 'environmental imperialism' especially in India, how could a continuity between the two be identified? The answer is that the experience of the colonies that elaborated 'imperial' environmentalist policies up to the great Age of the Revolutions was directly used and further elaborated by the Imperial centre during the nineteenth century.

The South Atlantic islands were already connected into a wider network made of the different botanical gardens. They were on the main route from the garden in Calcutta to Kew Gardens in London. The Colony of the Cape did not play a direct role in the South Atlantic on this matter, however it was Mauritius in the South Western Indian Ocean that integrated with the system. The French had established there the *Jardin de Pamplemousse*, as an important scientific centre that had to serve their botanical network. When the British conquered the island after the Napoleonic wars, the *Jardin* was integrated into the system and started to work closely with Saint Helena. The region continued to serve in the nineteenth century as a strategic channel for plants and to develop the science of botany in the Empire.

Empire

The British Empire saw its attitude towards colonies change during the course of the centuries. The first British colonies were established by white settlers on littorals and islands. Later they started to employ large number of slaves, especially in the plantations of the West Indies. These early colonies enjoyed a degree of self-rule and self-government due both to the attitude of the government and to the technological limits of the time. Furthermore, all the territories under the

East India Company were administered in the name of the Crown but not directly by the Crown. The eighteenth century saw a growing competition between Britain and France that led to almost six decades of constant war. The government decided to drain even more resources, both military and monetary, from the colonies to sustain the war effort. This eventually led to the American Revolution and to the French Revolution that developed in Napoleon's Empire. The French Revolution led to the Haitian Revolution, where a colony became independent due to a successful slave revolt. These great historical events changed the attitude of the government towards colonies: self-rule was seen as the cause that sparked the American Revolution; colonies with large slave populations needed a stronger rule to avoid a new Haiti; and the long and bloody confrontation against Bonaparte needed a stronger government at home. British nationalism was born during the Napoleonic Wars, with a sense of superiority and the belief that Britain was a civilising power that had to elevate the most retrograde populations on Earth. After the 1830s the government stance, especially after Peterloo and other demonstrations, became more liberal and white colonies of settlement were able to claim again self-rule for themselves.

Under the East India Company Saint Helena experienced a form of self-government. All the planters that owned at least twenty acres were given the right to vote for an elected council that advised the governor. The situation, however, was more complex. The social hierarchy of the island was formed by a small group of rich planters, the so called 'great whites', and under them the vast majority of poor planters. The 'great whites' controlled the main public and Company's offices of Saint Helena. They controlled the more fertile lands, and they often cemented their power with marriages both within the families and with the highest ranking Company's officers. This process created a strong and compact elite formed by the 'great whites' and the appointed Company's officers (the governor, the Commander of the Garrison, the Storekeeper, etc.) that worked together to maintain order and peace on Saint Helena. Nevertheless, the poor planters and the regular soldiers of the garrison formed a large group of 'little whites' that was often dissatisfied with their own condition. This led to several revolts, five during the EIC rule, none successful. The planters were often aided by part of the garrison.

Law and order on the island was organised in a code of law for the first time in 1681. The harsher punishments were reserved for blasphemers, gamblers, alcoholics and prostitutes. Instead of using a prison, the sentence was often the exile, seldom directed towards Bencoolen, a colony with harsh living conditions and a high chance of mortality. Saint Helena also was affected by a significant gender gap. The slaves were mostly men and half of the white population was formed by (male)

soldiers of the garrison. This lack of women caused unhappiness and unruliness. It is a sociological law that unmarried men are more prone to riot and violence than married ones. Furthermore, prostitution was a necessity for the garrison's soldiers. Female slaves were often involved in this trade, punished harshly by the government. Prostitution, however, was a profession reserved not only to female slaves. When a ship was in the port, several white women also practiced the trade with the sailors. This situation created a great pressure over the garrison, that found in alcohol the solution. The Saint Helena's garrison was regarded, still in 1815, as one of the most drunk of the Empire. Alcohol-related crimes were a plague on the island.

During the whole East India Company's rule, the military presence on the island was always conspicuous. The soldiers accounted for the same amount of free whites, and their number combined equalled to the number of slaves. Saint Helena was an essential asset for the Company, the only safe haven between India and Britain. The incident of 1672, when the Dutch successfully conquered the island for a short time, was always in the memory of the Board of Directors. They organised the island as a fortress, a true island-fortress, impregnable by the enemy. The island was heavily fortified in its landing sites, Jamestown and Sandy Bay, and all over the cliffs batteries of cannons and watchtowers were mounted. The entire population, slaves included, was conscripted in the militia that had to man the towers and do patrol rounds to spot potential enemy ships approaching. This huge military presence protected not only from external enemies, but also from potential internal threats. Slaves and relentless planters had to face a formidable garrison. The whole island was a giant military camp where everyone was involved in his duty to the common defence. This created a further pervasive intrusion of the government in the personal lives of the civilian population.

When Saint Helena's most famous inhabitant, Napoleon Bonaparte, arrived in 1815 the island faced a further increase of authority and militarisation. The British Empire considered Napoleon its greatest threat, and the flamboyant escape from the isle of Elba meant that no ordinary prison could contain the French Emperor. Saint Helena was thus shortlisted together with the newly conquered Colony of the Cape as a possible exile for Bonaparte. The Crown opted for Saint Helena because was the most remote settlement of the World and already had a strong garrison on it. The EIC agreed that the Crown would have managed the island for the period of Napoleon's captivity, without damaging the Company's interests. Saint Helena was a £ 100,000 asset of the Company and thus had to be treated carefully. The British government then adopted every possible measure to transform Saint Helena in an

even more impregnable island-fortress, that not only was impossible to enter but also impossible to escape from. Two ships constantly sailed around the island to monitor the waters, and the garrison was almost doubled. Napoleon had to be confined to his house whenever a ship was calling at Saint Helena, and censorship was adopted on all correspondence from and to the island. Death penalty was introduced for whomever was found guilty of aiding the Emperor, and British intelligence investigated even the most ridiculous rumours concerning a possible evasion of Napoleon.

Even if the island returned to the Company after Napoleon's death in 1821, the *status quo* was not going to last. The East India Company and the Parliament were engaged in a silent war since the mid-late eighteenth century. The Parliament wanted to decrease the autonomy of the Company and to assert its rule over the now vast territories controlled by the EIC in India. And the Company was losing this war, as the 1784 and 1813 Acts proved. The 1813 Act in particular deprived the Company not only of political power but also of its trade privileges. The Company continued to be attacked by the Parliament, and other mismanagements of the Indian territories led to the approval of the 1833 Charter Act. Furthermore, free trade was becoming the dominant ideology of Britain, and the Company represented the mercantilist and monopolistic past. The 1833 Act transferred the control of Saint Helena from the Company to the Crown, albeit the effective transition did not happen until 1837.

Why the Crown wanted to take over the island of Saint Helena? Why the East India Company did not fight to keep this valuable asset that just twenty years earlier was 'lend' to the Crown with great reluctance? Saint Helena was a constant loss for the East India Company, and even the investments made in the 1820s did not cause any positive effects. Still in 1833 the island needed £ 10,000 from the Company in order to sustain its expenses. The Company had already used a treaty, the Anglo-Dutch agreement of 1824, to leave an unproductive colony like Bencoolen. The 1833 Act was the chance to leave another 'bad asset' of the Company. This was possible because Saint Helena was no longer essential to the East India Company trade. In fact, until 1815 from India to Britain the EIC ships could find only few friendly ports, and Saint Helena was one of them. After 1815, Mauritius and the Cape were now British, and a new naval base was created on Ascension. The Company's ships now could stop at the Cape, a colony better suited for resupply and trade.

The Crown might instead have found some use for Saint Helena. First of all, the island had a restless population with almost half of the inhabitants that were slaves or former slaves. The new policy of the Empire was to impose a more direct

control on situations like that of Saint Helena, as it happened in many West Indies colonies. Furthermore, the Empire was now committed to fight the slave trade, and Saint Helena was in a strategic position to conduct this war.

There was a great debate on whether Saint Helena faced decline immediately when the Crown arrived in 1837 or if it was a slower process. The investments that the Crown made on the island were lower than the Company's, albeit the African Squadron was still a source of income for the island in the 1840s. The island's population remained almost constant, having an abrupt fall at the end of the nineteenth century. The historical rich families of Saint Helena, the ones that prospered under the Company, left the island for England or the Cape. The poor whites and the former slaves remained, and began to emigrate in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The new Crown Administration meant that Saint Helena was a Crown Colony with an appointed military governor and no elected council. The governors enacted several new laws between 1837 and 1853, establishing a new judiciary system, creating a prison and enforcing the militia duties of the inhabitants. From 1853 onwards, less laws were approved and the governors started to use more the instrument of the order-in-council, a more direct form of intervention that avoided any public debate.

The island's population, however, was not passive to these changes. A new elite was emerging on Saint Helena after the departure of the historical families of the EIC era. The end of the Company's trade monopoly favoured private traders that gained fame and fortune on the island, the most important of them was W.E.G. Solomon. This new social class ran the island's newspapers and managed to get involved in the ruling of the colony only from the 1860s after years of political struggle. The governors even approved laws that discouraged these newspapers, imposing fines and bureaucratic obstacles.

The newspapers defended free trade on the island, as was the case of the 1851 proposed duty over purchases done in public auctions. In 1856 the newspapers contested an act of the governor to limit the emigration from Saint Helena, accusing the masters (great planters) that did not want to let their servants to leave. A great political battle of these newspapers was the call for an elected council on the island, a form of representative government. The first articles calling for this proposal appeared in 1853, and in 1860 the newspapers complained that the Cape, a much 'younger' British colony, had gained an elected council before Saint Helena. The newspapers focused also on who the governors appointed in the three-man council

of the island. In 1853 N. Solomon was appointed Chief Justice, and in 1858 George Moss became the first civilian of Saint Helena to be appointed to the Council. The government in London refused to confirm the appointment, causing strong protests from the newspapers. In 1863 the inhabitants obtained a small victory, as the Chief Justice was no longer a member of the Council. In this way the judiciary power was separated from the executive. Some governors were concerned to appease the inhabitants on the subject of self-government. Governor Browne in 1856 proposed, without consulting the inhabitants, to elevate Jamestown to the rank of city thus granting it an elected Municipality. The main issue raised by the newspapers was that if the governor collected all the taxes, the new Municipality would have needed to raise more taxes to finance itself. The proposal was thus withdrawn. This was not a success for the islanders, as in 1859 Jamestown was elevated to the rank of city without an elected Municipality. The newspapers also scrutinised the expenses made by the Colonial government of the island, often pointing out mismanagements and ill-advised choices. The island had to sustain a huge civil establishment that the law prescribed to run a Crown Colony. The newspapers in 1870 even proposed to demote Saint Helena from the rank of colony to that of military station in order to save money thanks to a smaller administration. The newspapers, however, were not nostalgic of the East India Company. They were owned by men that became rich thanks to the end of the EIC's monopoly. Nevertheless, during the EIC rule the inhabitants of the island had an elected council, the very political goal those men wanted to achieve. They were more nostalgic of the 1840s when the island was ruled by the Crown and the presence of the African Squadron still made Saint Helena important for the government. The newspapers also showed resentment towards the treatment the government reserved to other colonies. The Saint Helenians felt that their colony was older, more loyal and more 'British' than many others. Nevertheless, younger and less 'British' colonies enjoyed more rights and even elected councils. Furthermore, the growing interest of the government towards Ascension spurned further rivalry with the neighbouring island.

The governors of Saint Helena were never despotic, although sometimes adopted some authoritarian measures. They threatened to withdraw advertisement from the newspapers and sometimes used the force to break peaceful gatherings of the inhabitants. The inhabitants had no chance to succeed in a rebellion because the garrison was too strong and they were too dependent from the outside World. Saint Helena developed an elite with strong liberal views, although their voice remained unheard as no elected council was established on the island until 1988-1989.

Ascension had a completely different approach to government than Saint Helena. The island was a military base for the entirety of the nineteenth century and its social structure reflected this situation. The commander of the base had complete jurisdiction and control over the men employed by the base: sailors, marines and workers. The Admiralty had also employed on the island several indentured African workers. The commander was their master and treated them accordingly. The island was considered by the navy a 'stone frigate', meaning that the laws that governed ships at sea applied to Ascension. This was done to exert an even stronger control on the men, as they could indulge in alcoholism or other 'unruly' behaviours. The commander of Ascension had complete control over all aspects of the island's life, from the organisation of the economy to the salary of each man.

Tristan was the exact opposite of Ascension. When Corporal Glass established the first civil settlement on the island after the departure of the Navy in 1817, he and the other inhabitants signed a document called 'the sign' that worked as a *de facto* constitution of the *republic* of Tristan. The island was a colony of Great Britain in name only. The inhabitants were organised in a communal society where all the land was of the community. Each man was entitled to the ownership of the land only if he worked it. The produce of the land was shared and sold together to the passing ships and the profit equally shared between the families. The justice was administered according to the common will of the entire community, and the chief of the island was merely a coordinator. The mere idea that the Crown could send a magistrate to administer the island generated discontent between the inhabitants. The island began to lose its self-ruling state when the loss of trading ships calling at Tristan made them more dependent from the aid of the Crown.

South Atlantic islands colonial governments until the nineteenth century followed the path of other island-colonies. Saint Helena had a similar administration to the West Indies, with a governor that ruled with the help of an elected council. The right to vote was linked to the land, and order was kept by the constant presence of a garrison that had to discourage both external and internal threats. The Global Age of Revolutions changed the situation, with almost the whole West Indies shifting to a Crown Colony administration in order to keep the slaves much under control, having in mind what happened in Haiti. Mauritius followed the same fate when conquered by Britain. Saint Helena also became a Crown Colony in 1837 when the Crown took over. The fate of the South Atlantic islands, however, started to diverge. In the rest of the Empire during the nineteenth century many island-colony received an elected council. Saint Helena did not, neither Ascension. And Tristan was seen as an anomaly by the Crown. Saint Helena and Tristan were

no longer colonies of complete European ethnicity or with a clear and defined separation between the different ethnic groups, with a predominant white-ruling class. The melting pot that happened, caused by emigration and endogamy, made the islands considered 'non-white' by the Crown and so not worthy of self-government.

Atlantic history focuses mostly on the American, French and Haitian Revolutions and their aftermath in the Ocean. Ascension became a naval base with a militaristic government due to the Napoleonic wars. Saint Helena faced an increased authority due to the presence of Napoleon himself on the island. Nevertheless, Saint Helena maintained its elective council during the 1820s, when other Atlantic colonies in fear of the slaves accepted the strong rule of the Crown. Saint Helena lost its status in the 1830s, when the general attitude in the Empire and in the Atlantic world towards self-government was again positive.

The microhistories of the South Atlantic islands on the subject of Colonial Government are each one very different from the other. Ascension was a military outpost that developed a civilian population during the nineteenth century but that remained under military rule until the early twentieth century. Saint Helena was a colony with a long tradition of elected representatives that became a Crown Colony under the direct rule of the Governor. Tristan was so remote that its inhabitants were able to set up an Arcadian and quasi-utopian society of equals. Each one of this microhistories is an important case study to analyse British colonialism from three different points of view. Saint Helena challenges the idea that the Empire in the late nineteenth century returned to concede self-government to colonies; Tristan proved that the Empire was not omnipresent and that it had small sacks of 'resistance' where men could experience new freedoms; Ascension's microhistory is probably the less relevant for the Empire, although it present interesting events related to the government's management of the economy.

The issue of colonial government is central in the debate concerning the transition from the 'First' to the 'Second' Empire and the 'swing to the East', as it will be explained better in the next section of this chapter. The South Atlantic islands can fit into this debate only in part. Ascension and Tristan were not colonies during the 'First' empire. Saint Helena was, and its history was indeed consistent with the historical approach that considers two very distinct British Empires. Nevertheless, a more authoritarian and despotic colonial government arrived only later, meaning that Saint Helena entered the so-called 'Second' Empire as a colony with an elected council. The Global Age of Revolutions did have an impact on how Britain

approached to colonies, however again there are strong lineages of continuity between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Racism, white supremacy and the idea that Britain had a 'civilising' mission over less developed population were all elements that grew in the aftermath of the first great conquests in India in the eighteenth century. Saint Helena and Tristan were considered colonies of less value because their population was no longer of 'pure' European descent. Thus they were not considered suited for self-rule, and discriminated on a racial base.

The Cape never became the official administrative centre of the South Atlantic. The governors of the Cape tried to extend their influence over the islands but never succeeded. Instead the islands were united in a single administrative unit in the 1930s independent from the Cape. Nevertheless, the Cape was often involved by the central government and by the islands in issues concerning their administration, from emigration to supplies. The Cape acted as a sub-imperial centre, often invested by the central government of duties concerning the islands. Saint Helena was able to extend her influence over Tristan as the island needed a regular boat service, and the government considered that the only viable solution. Ascension for most of the nineteenth century remained more involved in the Empire and more dynamic than Saint Helena, and became a dependency only later in the twentieth century when the Navy abandoned it. In terms of authority the islands, together with the Falklands, remained essential to Britain in order to contrast the American claims to became hegemonic in the Atlantic. The islands still today allow the United Kingdom to lay claims over the South Atlantics and parts of Antarctica.

The three transitions of Saint Helena

Three different main historiographical themes can be spotted in order to analyse Saint Helena's transition from the Company to the Crown: the transition between the 'First' and the 'Second' British Empire, the so-called 'swing to the East' and the decline of islands in colonial empires.

From a metropolitan perspective the Charter Act of 1833 could be seen as a further step towards the building of a stronger and more modern British state. A peculiarity of the Medieval and early Modern state was the presence of other 'institutional structures' autonomous from the state but with a recognised role in the society: guilds, corporations, religious and military orders and later trading companies like the EIC. The new idea of state emerged from the Age of Revolutions and the Napoleonic wars was, on the contrary, a 'monopolistic' state where there was no space for other institutions that were not a direct emanation of the central

power. The Charter Act was another nail in the coffin of the Company, seen now not only as a treat to free trade but also as something anachronistic in the new modern state.

On Saint Helena the Charter Act was, on the other hand, the final step of this process because it abruptly put an end to the Company era and started the Crown one. The central power, concerned after the American Revolution to lose its grip on the furthermost peripheries of the Empire, imposed a new centralised and more 'authoritarian' rule on the island, thus reducing the role of old democratic traditions like the planters' assembly. Furthermore, the 1830s were years of radical changes on Saint Helena as it has been discussed in chapter two regarding slavery. The society and the government of the island changed and evolved in a relatively short time span, the first thirty years of nineteenth century, and if looking to the island in 1790 and 1840 two radically different Saint Helenas can be seen. In 1790 Saint Helena presented all the characteristics of the 'old' British Empire: the island economy was based on slavery, the island was ruled with a good degree of autonomy and local democracy, the East India Company was still a strong player of the imperial endeavour and the island's trade was regulated according to the Company's monopolistic laws. On the contrary in 1840 the outcomes of the imperial transition can be seen on the island: slavery was abolished, a new form of centralized government was established, the Company power had dramatically diminished and free trade was enforced.

It has been discussed in this thesis how Saint Helena moved from the Indian Ocean world of the EIC to the Atlantic world under the Crown. This could sound as a contradiction with the 'swing to the East' theory. This contradiction is only apparent if looking at this process from a different perspective. Marshall explains it clearly when he states that 'if there was a swing to the East in the later eighteenth century, there had certainly as yet been no corresponding swing away from the Atlantic'[1]. Trade between America and Great Britain flourished and the West Indies remained an important source of revenue[2].

More than north and mid-Atlantic it was in the south where the British Atlantic world faced a new expansion. In the nineteenth century Britain expanded its influence over South America. When a military invasion of the Iberian colonies appeared to be extremely unlikely, for example after the failed attempt of conquest of the River Plate in 1805, Britain decided to influence the newly-established Latin-American countries with a different approach. Britain's economic relationships with these countries dramatically grew during the nineteenth century. It is not relevant

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[1] P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America – a Second Empire?' in P.J Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (5 vols., Oxford, 2001), II, p. 581
[2] *Ibid*, p. 581

for us if these economic exchanges were a form of 'informal Empire' or not, because the undeniable fact that British trade rose with South America[3] is already a proof of the continuing importance of Atlantic.

Furthermore, in the nineteenth century Britain expanded its colonial empire in the South Atlantic: the colony of the Cape was first conquered in 1797 and permanently in 1806, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha were occupied in 1815-16 and the Falklands were claimed in 1833. The history of the occupation of Tristan da Cunha, an even remoter island than Saint Helena, demonstrates another geopolitical issue of the nineteenth century Atlantic. In fact, United States and Britain started to compete for the maritime supremacy of the Atlantic[4], and strategic naval outposts like Tristan were essential. A further evidence of the relevant role of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century was the already mentioned fight against illegal slave trade and the consequent establishment of the colony of Sierra Leone in the Gulf of Guinea. For the first part of the nineteenth century the war against slave traders was fought mainly in the South Atlantic. The 1810 British-Portuguese treaty limited the actions of anti-slavery squadrons against Portuguese slave ships only south of the equator, as Portugal had surpassed Britain as the largest slave trader after 1807. Only in 1832, when Portugal eventually abolished slavery, the British Navy intervened also in the mid and north Atlantic.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during what is considered the 'Atlantic age' of the British Empire, Saint Helena remained strongly linked with India and the Indian Ocean world. However, in these two centuries the British Atlantic world was limited mainly to the north and mid-Atlantic, where the West Indies and the North American colonies played the leading role. During the imperial transition of 1780-1830 not only the British Indian world but also the South Atlantic faced an economic expansion and gained a new geopolitical position in the British Empire. Saint Helena found itself for the first time surrounded by a stronger network in the island's own geographical region, something completely absent in the previous two centuries. Saint Helena had been unable to interact in a network in the South Atlantic, because the South Atlantic was divided between different European empires, often in war with each other and with Britain. The South Atlantic in the nineteenth century started to become more 'British' and thus more suitable to create a network: Tristan, Ascension, the Falkland, the Cape, Africa, Latin America all started to enter more and more into the British imperial network. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century was essential for Saint Helena of being dependent from the Indian Ocean world, after the Crown takeover the island was

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[3] P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000* (Harlow, 2002), pp. 243-45

[4] J. Fichter, 'The British Empire and the American Atlantic on Tristan da Cunha 1811-16', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XXXVI, 4 (2008), pp. 567-589

able to find a new dimension in a radically changed British South Atlantic world. The importance of Saint Helena in the historiographical debate concerning the 'swing to the East' is not as an evidence of the absence of such 'swing', but as an interesting case-study of the continuing importance of the Atlantic in the British Empire, and of a new and growing importance of a region as the South Atlantic. However, the idea of 'swing' implies that something is taken from somewhere and brought somewhere else: the term 'expansion' might be more appropriate then to define this historical process. An 'expansion to the East' means that the Empire not only gained more influence in the Indian Ocean, but also maintained, with some substantial evolutions, its role in the Atlantic world. Moreover, the British expanded their influence in the South Atlantic that for centuries had always been considered of scarce relevance for the British, which were more focused on the North Atlantic and the relationships with the Thirteen Colonies and the West Indies.

If the British Atlantic was still relevant and even expanding in the nineteenth century, why then did Saint Helena faced a general crisis after the Crown takeover? This question leads us to the third and final historiographical theme related to this transitional period: the decline of islands in colonial empires. In the early modern period islands had been a relevant part of European empires. With the exception of the Iberian empires and the North American colonies, Europeans expanded their influence in the Atlantic, in Africa and in Asia conquering islands or outposts on the coastline. J. Gillis[5] and D. Hancock[6] studied this network of islands that during the first centuries of the Modern Age linked and created the European Atlantic world. Islands acted as intermediaries between the coastal ports of the Atlantic and were fundamental during the age of the great geographical explorations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries[7]. Islands proved to be easier to settle rather than vast extension of land due to their better habitability[8] and they were considered easier to defend[9]. The British Empire before the Seven Years War and the American Revolution was a maritime Empire dependent on the strength of the Navy and formed mainly by islands, coastlines and riverbanks settlements[10], with the exception of the Thirteen Colonies. Furthermore islands were functional to the mercantilist economic doctrine that was dominant in the seventeenth and

[5] J. Gillis, *Islands of the mind : how the human imagination created the Atlantic world* (Basingstoke, 2004)

[6] D. Hancock, *Oceans of wine : Madeira and the emergence of American trade and taste* (London, 2009)

[7] A. Vieira, 'The Islands and the Atlantic system', in H. Pietshmann (ed.), *Atlantic History : history of the Atlantic system* (Gottingen, 2002)

[8] *Ibid*

[9] J. Gillis, 'Islands in the making of an Atlantic Oceania 1500-1800', in J.H. Bentley (ed.), *Seascapes : maritime histories* (Honolulu, 2007)

[10] D. Cannadine, *Empire, the sea and global history* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 3

eighteenth centuries[11]. Islands were essential to rule the main oceanic trade routes and thus imposing fees and duties on foreign traders.

The British Empire evolved into a more land-based 'shape' after the outcomes of the wars of 1756-1815. Moreover, the new free trade ideas slowly overcame the old mercantilist ideology and the East India Company, which was an epitome of mercantilist economy. Steamships and nationalism[12], which demanded the conquest of huge landmasses to prove the greatness of a nation, were two more decisive factors that explain the decline of islands in the nineteenth century. Even if new islands were conquered in the nineteenth century like the Falklands, the reasons were eminently 'land based'[13]. For example, the invasion of the Malvinas in 1833 had to be seen more as a strategic move against Argentina because the Falklands were not essential for any trade route or naval base.

As a consequence, the reasons of Saint Helena's rise and decline can be understood in a wider context. Atlantic islands played a decisive role in the expansion of Britain during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; however, the transformations in economy, politics, technology and society that started and evolved since the last decades of the eighteenth century deeply changed the role of islands in the British Empire.

Saint Helena faced three great transitions in the first decades of the nineteenth century: the island became a Crown colony, its 'world' became the Atlantic instead of the Indian and declined from being a relevant colony to a less important and, during the twentieth century, even a forgotten one. These three transitions could be considered only one, the wider process of transformation of the British Empire between eighteenth and nineteenth century. Saint Helena proved to be fully involved in this process, with its own peculiarities that let us to understand better all the wider implications of the 'Imperial Meridian'.

The case for the South Atlantic as a maritime system

After this long journey it is time to finally draw a conclusion, and answer to the question posed in the introduction: was the South Atlantic a proper maritime system?

As stated in the previous section, in the nineteenth century the South Atlantic became a region within the British imperial system with its own peculiarities and

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[11] J. Gillis, 'Islands in the making of an Atlantic Oceania 1500-1800', in J.H. Bentley, R. Brindenthal and K. Wigen (ed.), *Seascapes : maritime histories, littoral cultures and transoceanic exchanges* (Honolulu, 2007)

[12] *Ibid*

[13] D. Cannadine (ed.), *Empire, the sea and global history : Britain's maritime world, c.1760-c.1840* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 23-24

relationships. This period lasted until the 1860s-1870s when the Suez Canal was open, the fight against slave trade was no longer an issue and the Great Depression of the late nineteenth century loomed over the World Economy. The South Atlantic can be defined as a system only within the context of the British Empire, as other trans-national or trans-imperial perspectives would not be adequate. The South Atlantic was defined by the British colonies, the British naval bases, the British fight against slave trade and the British interests in South America. Was there another 'South Atlantic' in the same timeframe? There is no answer today.

Thus the role of the South Atlantic changed drastically before and after the Revolutions. Before, there was a British South Atlantic that was a region of passage for the fleets to the Indies. But there was also a Spanish South Atlantic, a region of triangular trade between Europe, Africa and South America. There was also a Portuguese South Atlantic, that combined elements of both the British and the Spanish one. This South Atlantic was in strict symbiosis with the South Western Indian Ocean: both these regions were colonised by the Europeans in order to protect the trade to the East, and only small settlements were established.

The new, nineteenth-century, South Atlantic had less differences, as Britain emerged as the hegemonic power in the region. The South Atlantic and the South Western Indian Ocean were now united under a common overlord, Britain, with a strong and dynamic centre in the Colony of the Cape. Thus the relationship between these two oceanic regions was even strengthened, and their scope as 'passage points' for the East trade was reinforced. However, the South Atlantic gained further 'purposes' for the British: as where the fight against slave trade was fought, as the passage for trade with South America and becoming one of the battlefields of the rivalry between the United States and the United Kingdom. The South Western Indian Ocean did not follow those paths. When the South Atlantic and the S-W Indian Ocean seemed so integrated they also started to differentiate their roles in the new world order created in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars.

The role of the Colony of the Cape was also centric in this dissertation. The Cape played on several levels the role of sub-imperial centre in the South Atlantic. It was the main economic hub, it was the main receptacle of immigrants from the South Atlantic islands, it was the leading power in the area with some responsibilities demanded from the Imperial Government. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 diminished the importance of the Cape as a trading and maritime hub. The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 and the gold rush in Transvaal in 1886 changed the perspective of the Cape from the sea to the land. Since the Dutch established the colony there in 1652 the Cape had remained a settlement with its horizons set towards the sea. Suez and gold changed everything, and the Cape began the process that would eventually led to the creation of the

Union of South Africa. The Cape thus relinquished its role as a sub-imperial centre for the South Atlantic, becoming the main sub-imperial centre for the colonisation of the riches of southern Africa.

The South Atlantic the decades of 1815-1869 proved to be an important part of the Empire, proving that there was no 'swing to the East' and that the British Empire evolved in continuity with its history and without any abrupt separation between a 'First' and a 'Second' Empires.

The future awaits

Future developments of this research might focus on the South Western Indian Ocean in order to asses better the geopolitical role of that region in the nineteenth century Empire. Together with this research, it can finally contribute in creating a proper definition and general theory of the vast oceanic region that spans from the Falklands to Mauritius.

The South Atlantic has continued to play a role in contemporary history and in British politics. The war fought in 1982 between Britain and Argentina to assert control over the Falklands was one of the last 'colonial wars' fought in the twentieth century. Every now and then new tensions emerge between the UK and the Argentinian government, and the South Atlantic is now explored as a possible source of oil, as new fields are discovered[14]. Global warming and the constant need for natural resources might, in the future, led the World's power abandon the treaties that today protects the environment and neutrality of Antarctica. The idea of a new imperialism, driven by the need of resources, that will find in the South Atlantic one of the main battlefields is not a new idea and it has already been discussed at various level in Britain and elsewhere[15]. Tomorrow Saint Helena, Tristan and Ascension might find themselves, again, to play a role in the geopolitics of empire.

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[14] See for example: O. Bowcott, 'The New British Empire? UK plans to annex south Atlantic', The Guardian on-line, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/sep/22/oil.politics last accessed 16 November 2015; O. Bowcott, 'UK stakes claim huge area of South Atlantic seabed', The Guardian on-line, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/11/uk-falklands-argentina-un last accessed 16 November 2015; D. McElroy, 'Royal Navy warships on standby over Falklands oil dispute', The Telegraph on-line, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/southamerica/argentina/7266031/Royal-Navy-warships-on-standby-over-Falklands-oil-dispute.html last accessed 16 November 2015; R. Carrol, 'Argentina appeals to UN over Falklands oil drilling', The Guardian on-line, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/25/argentina-united-nations-falklands last accessed 16 November 2015

[15] K. Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London, 2002)

Was this dissertation a 'glorification of splendid underdogs' of the British Empire to use Adorno's words? The South Atlantic islands were, in their uniqueness, both splendid and underdogs. They were 'splendid', from an historical point of view, because their geographical position made them unique in their own way, providing interesting and unusual findings. They were 'underdog', because even in the brightest years of the East India Company they were never a jewel of the Crown.

So, keeping up with Adorno's aphorism, was this dissertation a glorification of the system – the British Empire – that made those islands 'splendid underdogs'? The British Empire played a role in keeping the islands inhabited providing food and supplies. But the Empire neglected them, especially in the twentieth century, when their utility to the United Kingdom was minimal, reaching in 1981 the apex with the removal of the British citizenships for the islanders. But then, are not all colonies 'bootmakers to Kings'?

Appendix[1]
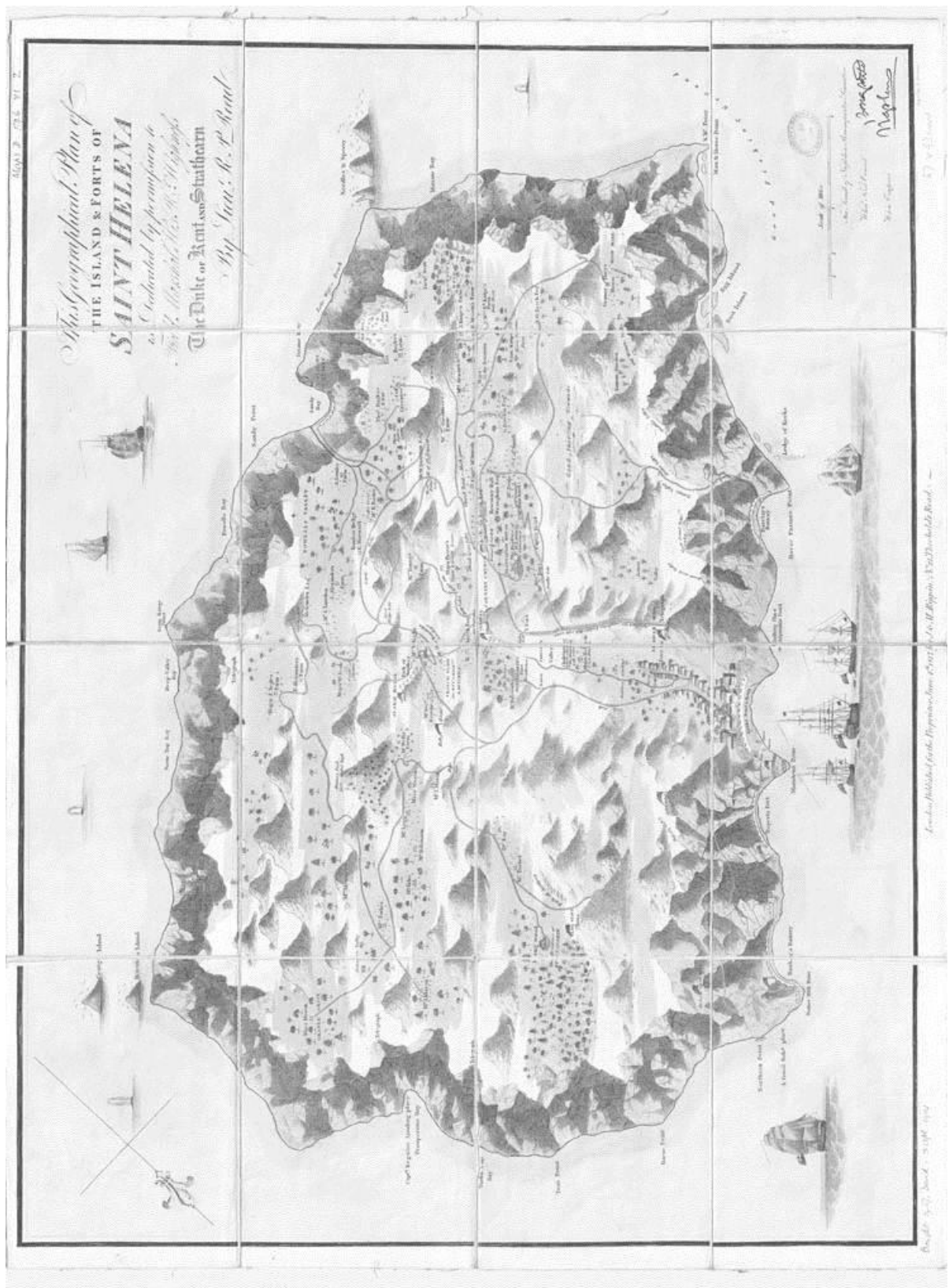
Picture 1: R.P. Read, This geographical plan of the island & forts of Saint Helen*a (London, 1815)*

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[1] With the exception of picture 1, all the images were made by the author of this thesis

Picture 2: The Saint Helena Wirebird (Charadrius sanctaehelenae) the last surviving endemic animal species of the island

Picture 3: The Saint Helena's Cloud Forest in the Diana's Peak National Park

Picture 4: Sandy Bay, one of the two access to Saint Helena from the sea with the remaining of the fortifications

Picture 5: the bay of Jamestown with the wharf on the opposite side

Picture 6: 'The lost county of England'. Saint Helena countryside resembling England's

Picture 7: The church of Jamestown (1774)
the oldest Anglican Church
of the Southern hemisphere

Picture 8: Saint Helena Castle's Garden, where once the island's botanical garden was present

Picture 9: the (almost) barren coastline of Saint Helena. Before the arrival of men, forests covered the island completely

Picture 10: a hill infested with New Zealand's flax (Phormium tenax) as many others on Saint Helena. This plant destroyed many endemic species on the island

Picture 11: Plantation House, the residence of Saint Helena's governors since the East India Company. The House is in one of the most fertile regions of the island

Picture 12: The unassailable cliffs of Saint Helena

Picture 13: the sea-gate of the walls of Jamestown, connected (on the left) with James' Fort, known also as the Castle

Picture 14: one of the two fortified positions guarding the bay of Jamestown where since the East India Company's rule cannons were placed. Many others of such outposts are present on the coastline of Saint Helena

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