

The Importance of Being Insular: Tristan da Cunha and the British Imperial World

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the tiny South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha and its role within the British Empire. It asks why Britain has retained this peripheral possession for more than two centuries, as well as why this island has loomed large in the minds of colonial bureaucrats, metropolitan dreamers, missionaries, medical researchers, and naturalists. Hailed as the most remote inhabited island in the world, Tristan da Cunha presents a degree of insularity that few locations can match. Precisely because of this, various individuals have sought to exploit and sometimes even cultivate Tristan da Cunha's extreme seclusion, circumscribed connections, and limited governmental supervision for personal, spiritual, and scientific gain since the 1810s, when the first settlers arrived. By focusing on the manifold opportunities of an insular and loosely governed colony, this work challenges dominant narratives about space, which portray conquering distance and extending state authority as the optimal outcomes of Britain's empire-building process. The case of Tristan da Cunha reveals an underappreciated countercurrent within imperial thought that craved and celebrated isolated places under nominal control. It also suggests that well into the twentieth century Britain's authority over insular Atlantic territories remained much weaker and less complete than commonly recognized.

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Introduction

Amid the hysteria that attended the birth of the atomic age, Reverend David Luard advanced his former parish, the British-held island of Tristan da Cunha in the southern Atlantic, as the ideal refuge in the event of nuclear war. Insignificance guaranteed that neither Washington nor Moscow would target the island. “Isolated by a thousand miles from the nearest land, hiding no store of uranium or other minerals, economically worthless, lacking any harbour to serve as a base or any flat space to make an airfield, it would be hardly worth the trouble of liquidating,” he reasoned.¹

Although Tristan da Cunha lacked conventional significance, this dissertation argues that the island had something even more valuable. In a densely networked world, Tristan da Cunha offered a degree of insularity that few locations matched. Those who sought to exploit the microscopic size, bounded borders, and extreme isolation of Tristan da Cunha for personal, spiritual, and scientific gain form the basis of this study that spans the 1810s to 1980s.²

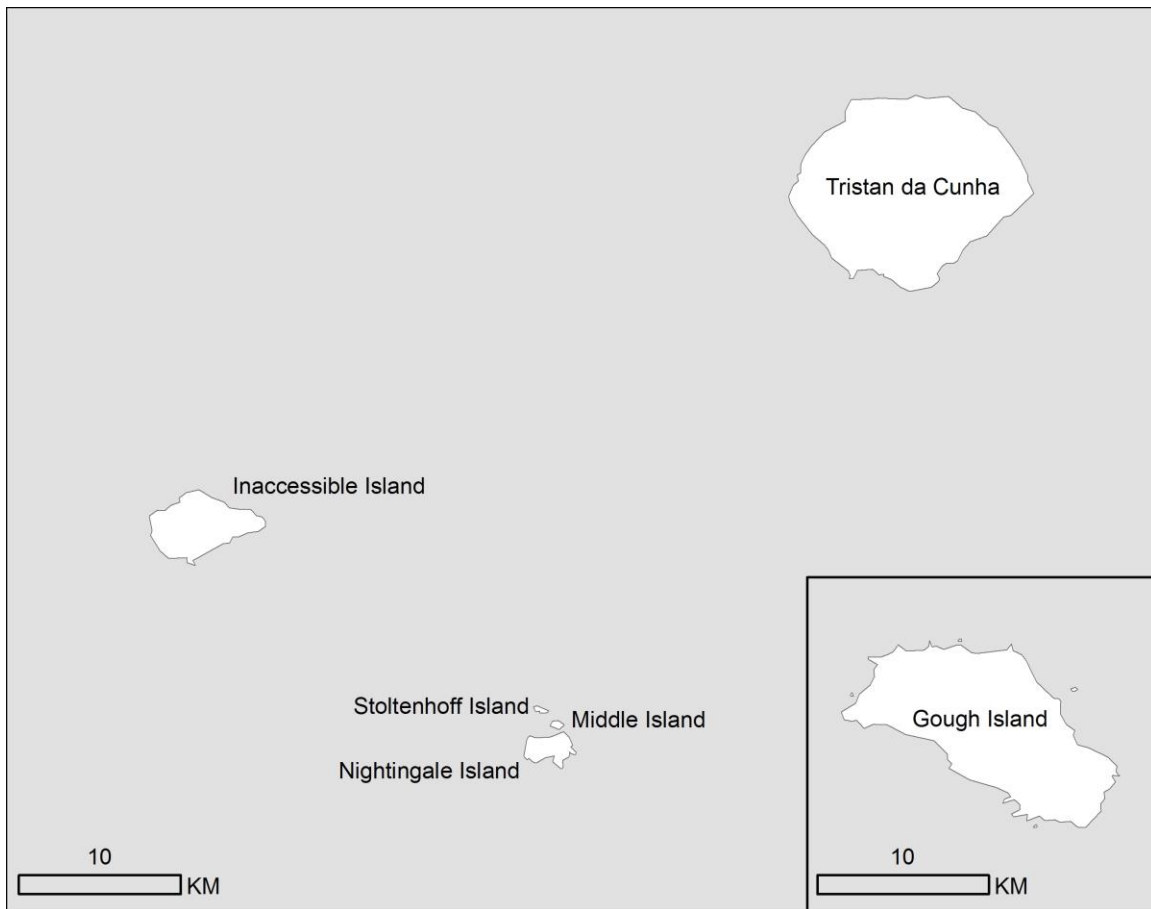
The four principal islands of the archipelago—Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible, Nightingale, and Gough—have long occupied the literal and imaginative margins (see map 1). Lord Elton deemed Tristan da Cunha “one of the least known and in many ways the most romantic of all British possessions.”³ Indeed, the cluster seemed alluringly lost or hidden. “To linger over the map of the South Atlantic is to produce an effect on the mind similar to that produced in contemplating the photograph of a vast empty space in

¹ D.I. Luard, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Corona: The Journal of His Majesty’s Colonial Service* 2, no. 8 (1950), 305.

² On the characteristics of insularity, see Stephen A. Royle, *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

³ Lord Elton, introduction to *Tristan da Cunha: The Lonely Isle*, by Erling Christophersen, trans. R.L. Benham (London: Cassell, 1940), vii.

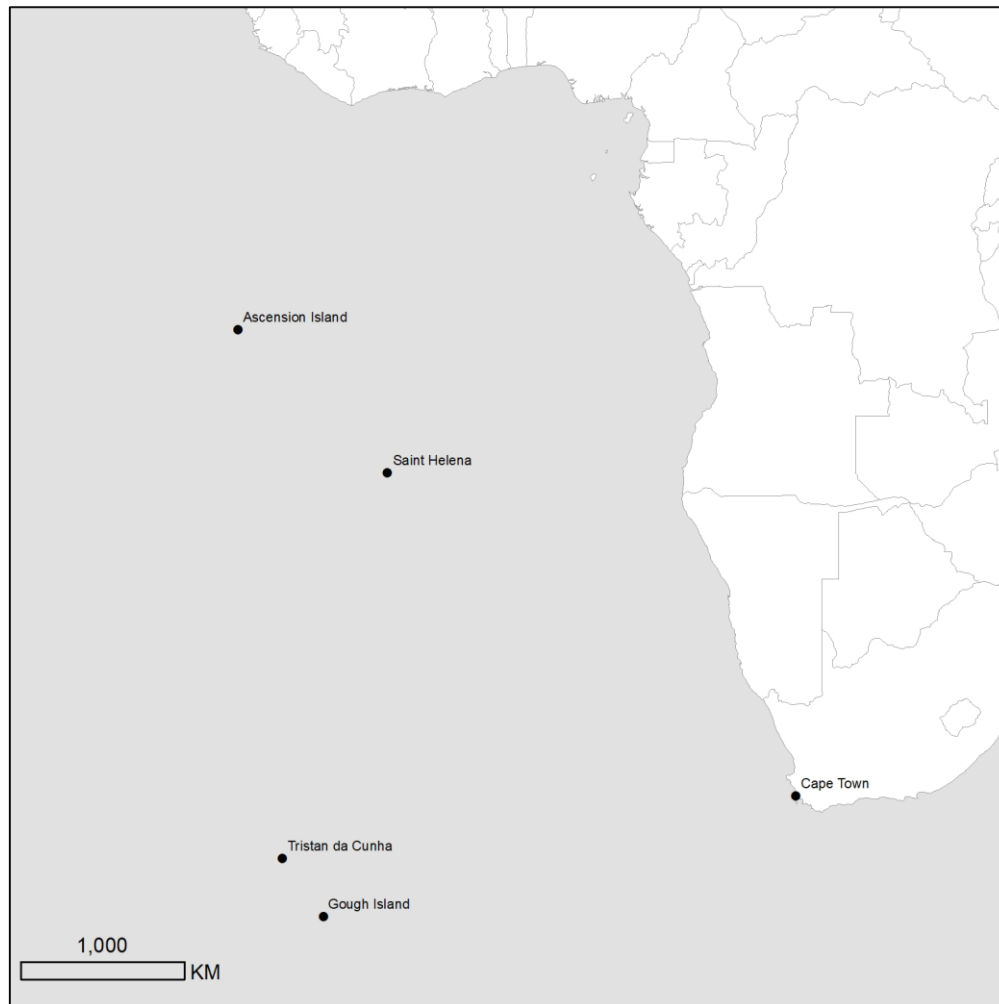
the heavens where one bright star shines in isolation—there is the same suggestion of awe in the immense loneliness,” read one account. The fact that the archipelago had avoided being “engulfed in that wild waste” suggested a miracle.⁴ “Tristan da Cunha has become a symbol of remoteness,” another account maintained. “Most of us have let our imagination dwell with wonder and curiosity on that tiny speck in the illimitable ocean solitudes,” the periodical continued.⁵



Map 1. The Tristan archipelago. Courtesy of Chris Gist, Scholars' Lab, University of Virginia Library.

⁴ “The Tristanians,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, 3 November 1932, 17.

⁵ “Callisthenes,” “Our Loneliest Customers,” n.d., *Tristan da Cunha Cuttings*, vol. 3, British Library.



Map 2. Tristan da Cunha in relation to other British islands and southern Africa. Courtesy of Chris Gist, Scholars' Lab, University of Virginia Library.

But many could not even find the archipelago that stoked countless imaginations (see map 2). Derrick Booy, who served on the island during the Second World War, recalled that most incoming draftees “had not even heard of the island called Tristan da Cunha.” Overcome with curiosity, they turned to an atlas: “Several pairs of eyes roved the empty sea spaces at the left side of the page, until a cry—‘There it is!’—announced

our landfall: a tiny speck between the ten- and twenty-degree lines of longitude. It just managed to edge on to the same page as the continent of Africa.”⁶

Formed over eons from the upwelling and cooling of magma, sea, wind, and rain lash these rocky outcroppings on the cusp of the “Roaring Forties.” Tristan da Cunha, the largest among the bunch, experiences regular wind gusts, as well as an annual average of 250 rainy days and 80 percent humidity. The temperature never dips below 37.4°F (3°C) or above 76.8°F (24.9°C), with an average of 58.4°F (14.7°C). Gough Island, which sits much further south, endures chiller temperatures.⁷

Although Gough hosts a team of meteorologists, Tristan da Cunha remains the lone island in the archipelago to claim a civilian population, which descends from a handful of European, South African, Saint Helenian, and American settlers.⁸ Historically, the island’s population never surpassed 300 individuals.⁹ As of October 2019, 246 islanders and twenty-five expatriates called the British Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha home. An additional twenty-three islanders live abroad.¹⁰ The peopling of Tristan da Cunha, which sits some 1,242 miles (2,000 kilometers) south of Saint Helena and

⁶ D.M. Booy, *Rock of Exile: A Narrative of Tristan da Cunha* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1957), 2-3.

⁷ On weather, see J.H. Dickson, “Part I: General Introduction,” in “The Biological Report of the Royal Society Expedition to Tristan da Cunha,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B* 249, no. 759 (1965), 265-267. See, too, Erling Christophersen and Georg Schou, *Meteorological Observations*, no. 10, vol. 2 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938*, ed. Erling Christophersen (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1946), 1-24; O. Höflich, “Climate of the South Atlantic Ocean,” in *World Survey of Climatology: Climates of the Oceans*, ed. H. Van Loon (Amsterdam and New York: Elsevier, 1984), 78-80.

⁸ On Gough Island’s history, see Christine Hänel, Steven L. Chown, and Kevin J. Gaston, *Gough Island: A Natural History* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press, 2005).

⁹ See figure 1, D.F. Roberts, “The Demography of Tristan da Cunha,” *Population Studies* 25, no. 3 (1971), 469.

¹⁰ The population fluctuates with the comings and goings on ships. See “Tristan da Cunha Families,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 25 October 2019, <https://www.tristandc.com/population.php>.

1,491 miles (2,400 kilometers) west of South Africa, transformed this cluster of rocks into “the world’s most remote inhabited archipelago.”¹¹

This study does not offer the first history of this obscure island in the middle of nowhere. A veritable cottage industry churning out popular histories, travelogues, and downright works of fiction has existed since the early twentieth century. However, these texts, which portray Tristan da Cunha as “the lonely isle,” an unchanging landscape peopled by relics of the age of sail, say more about the preoccupations and fantasies of contemporaries than the island’s value to the world.¹² In recent years, islanders have waded into this genre by publishing popular histories of Tristan da Cunha and memoirs of an upbringing in such a remote British Overseas Territory.¹³

Scholarly publications number far fewer. Kerry Ward counts Tristan da Cunha among “places that have almost literally dropped off the map of our historical understanding.”¹⁴ The Norwegian-born sociologist Peter Munch made a concerted effort

¹¹ Christian Depraetere and Arthur Dahl, “Locations and Classifications,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Island Studies*, ed. Godfrey Baldacchino (New York: Routledge, 2018), 32-33.

¹² Katherine M. Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1910); Rose Rogers, *The Lonely Island* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1926); Douglas M. Gane, *Tristan da Cunha: An Empire Outpost and its Keepers with Glimpses of its Past and Considerations of the Future* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1932); Jan Brander, *Tristan da Cunha, 1506-1902* (London: Cassell and Company, 1940); Christophersen, *Tristan da Cunha*; Allan B. Crawford, *I Went to Tristan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941); Booy, *Rock of Exile*; Margaret Mackay, *Angry Island: The Story of Tristan da Cunha* (Chicago and New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1963); Nancy Hosegood, *Corporal Glass’s Island: The Story of Tristan da Cunha* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964); Arne Falk-Rønne, *Back to Tristan* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1967); Allan Crawford, *Tristan da Cunha and the Roaring Forties* (Edinburgh and London: Charles Skilton, Ltd., 1982); Simon Winchester, *The Sun Never Sets: Travels to the Remaining Outposts of the British Empire* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1985), ch. 3; Ben Fogle, *The Teatime Islands: Journeys to Britain’s Faraway Outposts* (London: Michael Joseph, 2003), ch. 1.

¹³ Conard J. Glass, *Rockhopper Copper: Life and Police Work on the World’s Most Remote Island: Tristan da Cunha* (Clifton-upon-Teme, UK: Polperro Heritage Press, 2005); Daniel Schreier and Karen Lavarello-Schreier, *Tristan da Cunha: History, People, Language* (London: Battlebridge Publications, 2003); Daniel Schreier and Karen Lavarello-Schreier, *Tristan da Cunha and the Tristanians* (London: Battlebridge Publications, 2011).

¹⁴ Kerry Ward, review of *Britain’s Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the Southern Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763-1820*, by John McAleer, *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 4 (2018), 1390.

to understand the social organization of Tristan da Cunha between the 1930s and 1970s.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the passage of time has rendered these works obsolete.

Most recently, Stephen Royle and Lance van Sittert have respectively authored articles on the island's early and interwar social history, while Mattina Pessina and Thierry Jean-Marie Rousset have written dissertations that include or focus on Tristan da Cunha.¹⁶ Pessina adumbrates Tristan da Cunha's first decades as part of a larger study on Britain's South Atlantic colonies, particularly Saint Helena.¹⁷ Rousset, meanwhile, engages the topic of race and identity. He explores "how the representations of Tristan da Cunha and its inhabitants initially allowed them to be integrated into the larger body of metropolitan Britain and, due to their increasing isolation, later saw them become estranged from this body." As such, Rousset focuses on perceptions of visitors, who first saw the islanders as transplanted kin in "a rural English idyll" and later as racial others that cut "a site/sight of degeneration." He thus traces the evolution of the islanders in the imagination from "Anglo-Saxon settlers" to "natives." By considering how interactions

¹⁵ Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945); Peter A. Munch, "Cultural Contacts in an Isolated Community: Tristan da Cunha," *The American Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 1 (1947), 1-8; Peter A. Munch, "Culture and Superculture in a Displaced Community: Tristan da Cunha," *Ethnology* 3, no. 4 (1964), 369-376; Peter A. Munch, "Economic Development and Conflicting Values: A Social Experiment in Tristan da Cunha," *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 6 (1970), 1300-1318; Peter A. Munch, *The Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha* (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center, 1970); Peter A. Munch, *Crisis in Utopia: The Ordeal of Tristan da Cunha* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971).

¹⁶ See, for example, Stephen A. Royle, "The Inside World: Tristan da Cunha in 1875," *Journal of Historical Geography* 23, no. 1 (1997), 16-28; Stephen A. Royle, "Perilous Shipwreck, Misery and Unhappiness: The British Military at Tristan da Cunha, 1816-1817," *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 4 (2003), 516-534; Lance van Sittert, "Fighting Spells: The Politics of Hysteria and the Hysteria of Politics on Tristan da Cunha, 1937-38," *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (2015), 100-124; Lance van Sittert, "Begging Letters: Tin Trunk Literacy and the Empathy Economy of Tristan da Cunha, c. 1909-39," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 2 (2016), 263-287.

¹⁷ Mattina Pessina, "Labour, Environment and Empire in the South Atlantic (1780-1860)" (Ph.D. diss., Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015).

between islanders and visitors shaped depictions of Tristan da Cunha, Rousset declines “to focus on Tristan da Cunha’s supposed insularity.”¹⁸

This dissertation takes the opposite approach. It frames Tristan da Cunha not only as an object of representation, but also as a space managed, contested, and exploited for its insularity.¹⁹ Tristan da Cunha’s value derived exclusively from its seclusion, lack or lag in telecommunications, and nonexistent to loose supervision. As the globe became more networked, integrated, and centrally governed over the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, Tristan da Cunha remained apart. In an age defined by the ideals of connectivity, mobility, and territoriality, hard-to-reach, anarchic places with isolated people and animals achieved cachet and scientific significance. This anomalous status frustrated as well as enticed a diverse blend of elites who appreciated, manipulated, and even sought to preserve Tristan da Cunha’s insularity. Through the exploration of the manifold opportunities and challenges that an ungovernable territory in the middle of nowhere presented in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this dissertation reappraises imperial, insular, and Atlantic spaces.

This does not mean, however, that the islanders suffered from parochialism. As spaces encircled by water, islands have enjoyed contact with sailors, whose peripatetic lifestyle brought news and knowledge of far-away places.²⁰ Visiting mariners, along with

¹⁸ Thierry Jean-Marie Rousset, “Island Bodies: Registers of Race and ‘Englishness’ on Tristan da Cunha, c. 1811-1940,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2017), 9, 14-16, 19-20, 264.

¹⁹ On the production and domination of space, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991); John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); David J. Elkins, *Beyond Sovereignty: Territory and Political Economy in the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

²⁰ On the mobility and cosmopolitanism of sailors, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston:

waves of voluntary and forced migrations, left an imprint. Many islands in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific and Indian Oceans boast composite societies with a welter of influences and a reputation for cosmopolitanism.²¹

The same held true for Tristan da Cunha. Peter Munch placed the seaward-looking community within “that cosmopolitan tradition which may be referred to as the cultural heritage of the Seven Seas.”²² Nor did this vanish with the eclipse of sail. Coal-fired and later oil-powered ships, such as M.V. *Pequena*, which fished the archipelago’s waters in 1950, contained “an extraordinary lot—the new skipper is a fat short Afrikaner [*sic*], the 1st Officer a hard-bitten but humourous young Englishman, the Chief Engineer a Viking-like Norwegian, the 2nd Engineer a Pole, etc [*sic*] etc.”²³ The diversity of such fishing vessels, thought biologist and visitor Martin Holdgate, represented “probably as perfect a microcosm as it is possible to find.”²⁴

Tristan da Cunha always remained integrated into global networks, though to differing degrees. Following its discovery in 1506, the island became an infrequently

Beacon Press, 2000); Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), esp. ch. 1; Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada’s Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), esp. ch. 2; Emily Cuming, “At Home in the World? The Ornamental Life of Sailors in Victorian Sailortown,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 47, no. 3 (2019), 463-485;

²¹ On the Caribbean, see Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989); Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. James Maraniss, 2nd ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996). On the Pacific see, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007); Epeli Hau’ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008). On the Indian Ocean, especially Zanzibar, see Thomas H. Eriksen, “In Which Sense Do Cultural Islands Exist?” *Social Anthropology* 1, no. 1B (1993), 133-147; Abdul Sheriff, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Anne K. Bang, “Cosmopolitanism Colonised? Three Cases from Zanzibar, 1890-1920,” in *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*, eds. Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 167-188.

²² Munch, “Culture and Superculture in a Displaced Community,” 369.

²³ Hugh Elliott diary, 12 April 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlans.1, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (hereafter BL).

²⁴ Martin Holdgate, *Mountains in the Sea: The Story of the Gough Island Expedition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1958), 69.

utilized way station for mariners headed to destinations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as well as a site for intermittent sealing. After centuries of relative disuse, Tristan da Cunha received its first settlers in the 1810s. The presence of a civilian population, who offered provisions, and the expansion of whaling into the southern Atlantic drew visitors to Tristan da Cunha. At its early nineteenth-century apogee, dozens of ships simultaneously plied the archipelago's waters in pursuit of whales.²⁵

Tristan da Cunha's early history as a maritime hub resembles that of many Atlantic islands. As the body of water that surrounds Europe, the Atlantic served as a conduit that deposited navigators on islands closest to home.²⁶ The Atlantic, and the islands scattered therein, thus became the earliest nodes and laboratories for Iberian maritime circuits and empire-building projects.²⁷

While later to oceanic exploration, the Atlantic specifically and the sea broadly became no less vital to England (Britain after 1707). At first, English mariners opportunistically raided Iberian vessels traversing the Atlantic to the Azores, Canaries, Cape Verde, São Tomé, and Madeira.²⁸ Over time English involvement expanded and became more strategic.²⁹ As David Armitage contends, a distinctive imperial ideology

²⁵ William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D'Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 39-40.

²⁶ Elizabeth Mancke, "Early Modern Expansion and the Politicization of Oceanic Space," *The Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999), 225-236.

²⁷ Germán Santana Pérez, "The Canaries to Africa: The Atlantic Strategy of 'To Be or Not to Be,'" in *African Islands: Leading Edges of Empire and Globalization*, eds. Toyin Falola, R. Joseph Parrott, and Danielle Porter Sanchez (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 39-67; T. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands: Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes in Seventeenth-Century Commerce and Navigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

²⁸ G.V. Scammell, "The English in the Atlantic Islands, c. 1450-1650," *The Mariner's Mirror* 72, no. 3 (1986), 295-318.

²⁹ Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, eds. *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Kenneth R. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480-1630* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

emerged over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that adopted maritime supremacy and oceanic commerce as tenets.³⁰

Islands like Tristan da Cunha played a prominent role in early maritime history. John Gillis has labeled “the period 1500-1800 the great age of islands.”³¹ Dependent on wind and surf, the halting and unpredictable pace of travel required frequent landfalls to acquire provisions. This made islands essential victualing stations.³²

The importance of islands also owed much to the frailty of early-modern empires. Maritime regimes lacked the interest, technological capacity, or state-building power to penetrate hinterlands. They consequently focused on establishing coastal settlements and island enclaves that facilitated commercial activity, including access to slaves and commodities from the interior, as well as hubs from which to harass rival powers.³³ “In

³⁰ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³¹ John R. Gillis, “Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania, 1500-1800,” in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, Kären Wigen (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 23.

³² Stephen Royle, *The Company’s Island: St Helena, Company Colonies and the Colonial Endeavour* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Jane Hooper, *Feeding Globalization: Madagascar and the Provisioning Trade, 1600-1800* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2017);

³³ On islands as bases in the age of sail, see Alan Frost, *The Global Reach of Empire: Britain’s Maritime Expansion in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, 1764-1815* (Victoria, Australia: The Miegunyah Press, 2003), ch. 6; Ashley Jackson, *War and Empire in Mauritius and the Indian Ocean* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2001), ch. 1, esp. 15-21; Ashley Jackson, *Distant Drums: The Role of Colonies in British Imperial Warfare* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), ch. 3, esp. 40-60; Andrew Lambert, “Strategy, Policy and Shipbuilding: The Bombay Dockyard, the Indian Navy and Imperial Security in Eastern Seas, 1784-1869,” in *Worlds of the East India Company*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby, 137-151. On islands as trading posts, see Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Malyn Newitt, “Mozambique Island: The Rise and Decline of an East African Coastal City, 1500-1700,” *Portuguese Studies* 20 (2004), 21-37; Patrick Harries, “Mozambique Island, Cape Town and the Organisation of the Slave Trade in the South-West Indian Ocean, c. 1797-1807,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016), 409-427; Malyn Newitt, “The Comoro Islands in Indian Ocean Trade before the 19th Century,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 23, nos. 89-90 (1983), 139-165; David Richardson, “Cape Verde, Madeira and Britain’s Trade to Africa, 1698-1740,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22, no. 1 (1994), 1-15; Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, “African Islands and the Formation of the Dutch Atlantic Economy: Arguin, Gorée, Cape Verde and São Tomé, 1590-1670,” *The International Journal of Maritime History* 46, no. 3 (2014), 549-567; Martin Lynn, “Commerce, Christianity and the Origins of the ‘Creoles’ of Fernando

1800, after three centuries of lurking offshore, Europeans could claim only a few footholds in Asia and Africa, mainly harbors and islands,” Daniel Headrick remarks.³⁴

Balmier islands functioned as production sites for the brutal plantation agriculture regime. By the mid-seventeenth century, when this system had become entrenched in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean, slave-produced sugar generated fabulous profits for planters and merchants. The sugar-slavery nexus helped solidify the importance of tropical islands until the early nineteenth century, when abolition and the global diffusion of production led to a drop in price.³⁵

Po,” *The Journal of African History* 25, no. 3 (1984), 257-278. On shorelines and coastal enclaves, see Stephen Hornsby, *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 2005), esp. ch. 2; Dale Miquelon, “Envisioning the French Empire: Utrecht, 1711-1713,” *French Historical Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001), 653-677; Nuria Valverde and Antonio Lafuente, “Space Production and Spanish Imperial Geopolitics,” in *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires*, eds. Daniela Bleichmar et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), esp. 209-214; K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), chs. 4-5; Michael Pearson, *Port Cities and Intruders: The Swahili Coast, India, and Portugal in the Modern Age* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 5; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007); Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving “Port,” 1727-1892* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004); Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011); Stephen J. Hornsby, “Geographies of the British Atlantic World,” in *Britain’s Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15-44; Malyn Newitt, “The East India Company in the Western Indian Ocean in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 2 (1986), 5-33; I. Bruce Watson, “Fortifications and the ‘Idea’ of Force in Early English East India Company Relations with India,” *Past and Present* 88 (1980), 70-87; Stephen J. Hornsby, “Discovering the Mercantile City in South Asia: The Example of Early Nineteenth-Century Calcutta,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 23 (1997), 135-150; P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India, 1740-1828*, vol. 2, no. 2 of *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Christopher Ebert, “European Competition and Cooperation in Pre-Modern Globalization: ‘Portuguese’ West and Central Africa, 1500-1600,” *African Economic History* 36 (2008), 53-78;

³⁴ Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5.

³⁵ On the Indian Ocean, see Vijaya Teelock, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius* (Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute Press, 1998); Richard B. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). On the Atlantic, see Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville and London:

But Tristan da Cunha diverges from other islands, especially those in the Atlantic, in crucial respects. Tristan da Cunha never experienced a commercial boom. Moreover, unlike most Atlantic islands, the Crown seized Tristan da Cunha in 1816 following the end of the Napoleonic wars. By then, Asia, and specifically India, had had become the prime locus of empire building. This eastward pivot diminished, though certainly did not end, the relevance of the Atlantic basin to Britain.³⁶ Its eastern empire continued to hinge on the Cape of Good Hope, which fused “the Indian and Atlantic oceans into a single maritime world.”³⁷

The transition from maritime to terrestrial imperialism remained contingent on the ability to claim territory and produce space. Land becomes space through human agency, which aims to make the unknown familiar, and pursues “attainment of stability” as the

University of Virginia Press, 2006); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Selwyn H.H. Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002); Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006);

³⁶ On the supposed disjuncture between the “First” and “Second” British Empire, see Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*; P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, 1750-1783* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London and New York: Longman, 1989). Maritime connections thereafter remained key in projecting British power. See P.J. Marshall, “*A Free Though Conquering People*”: *Eighteenth-Century Britain and Its Empire* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); David Killingray, “Imperial Seas: Cultural Exchange and Commerce in the British Empire, 1780-1900,” in *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2004), 1-12. On the Indian Ocean specifically, see Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), ch. 7; Edward A. Alpers, “On Becoming a British Lake: Piracy, Slaving, and British Imperialism in the Indian Ocean during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, eds. Robert Harms, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 45-60.

³⁷ H.V. Bowen, “Britain in the Indian Ocean Region and Beyond: Contours, Connections, and the Creation of a Global Maritime Empire,” in *Britain’s Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550-1850*, eds. H.V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2012), 65. On the strategic importance of the Cape of Good Hope, see John McAleer, *Britain’s Maritime Empire: Southern Africa, the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, 1763-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

ultimate goal.³⁸ According to Charles Maier, the space-producing capacity of states grew exponentially from the sixteenth century onward. As the state's infrastructure expanded through the construction of forts, roads, railroads, and communication networks, so too did its reach. Territorializing permitted the state to exert greater control over its citizenry, including levying taxes, which served to increase wealth and power.³⁹

The rush inward involved more than the centralizing and wealth-generating interests of the state. Fueled by enhanced immunity to disease and the spread of nutritious crops like potatoes and corn, a late eighteenth-century population explosion happened across the Atlantic. As populations climbed, people migrated into the interior seeking land and resources. Gradually, inland metropolises like Chicago mushroomed and forged coastal links through canals and miles of railroad tracks.⁴⁰

New technologies drove the territorializing process in the colonial context. Repeating rifles, quinine, and steam-powered locomotion opened new vistas. Areas once foreclosed to extensive European penetration, such as the interior of sub-Saharan Africa, suddenly became exploitable.⁴¹

³⁸ Valverde and Lafuente, "Space Production and Spanish Imperial Geopolitics," 198-199, 208. On geography and British constructions of power, see Jeremy Black, *Geographies of an Imperial Power: The British World, 1688-1815* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

³⁹ Charles S. Maier, *Once within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); Charles S. Maier, *Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000), 807-831.

⁴⁰ J.R. McNeill, "The End of the Old Atlantic World: America, Africa, Europe, 1770-1888," in *Atlantic American Societies: From Columbus through Abolition, 1492 to 1988*, eds. Alan L. Karras and J.R. McNeill (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 245-268. On the demographic explosion, see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). On the rise of Chicago, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

⁴¹ Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress*; Ben Marsden and Crosbie Smith, *Engineering Empires: A Cultural History of Technology in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Robert Kubicek, "British Expansion, Empire, and Technological Change," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3, ed.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the center of gravity had shifted to the hinterlands, which reduced the significance of the Atlantic. “The Portuguese caravel opened the Atlantic world,” asserts J.R. McNeill, “and the railroad closed it.”⁴² “In the era of industrial capitalism and the nation-state,” concurs John Gillis, “history turned its back on Atlantic Oceania, forgetting that it had ever existed.”⁴³

While McNeill and Gillis overstate their cases, Atlantic and especially insular territories had an undeniably different purpose by the late nineteenth and twentieth century.⁴⁴ Atlantic islands no longer produced sugar barons or stood at the forefront of empire-building projects. The real utility henceforth derived from the fact that these dots facilitated connections between land-based empires through coaling bases and communications centers.⁴⁵ The Falkland Islands, for example, provided coal and refuge

Andrew Potter (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 247-269; Ian J. Kerr, *Building the Railways of the Raj, 1850-1900* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); John A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada, 1896-1914* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989); Anyaa Anim-Addo, “‘Thence to the River Plate’: Steamship Mobilities in the South Atlantic, 1842-1869,” *Atlantic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2016), 6-24; Robert Kubicek, “The Colonial Steamer and the Occupation of West Africa by the Victorian State, 1840-1900,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 18, no. 1 (1990), 9-32; Robert V. Kubicek, “The Role of Shallow-Draft Steamboats in the Expansion of the British empire, 1820-1914,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 6, no. 1 (1994), 85-106; Frances Steel, *Oceania under Steam: Sea Transport and the Cultures of Colonialism, c. 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Sarah Searight, *Steaming East: The Forging of Steamship and Rail Links between Europe and Asia* (London: Bodley Head, 1991); Kim A. Wagner, “Savage Warfare: Violence and the Rule of Colonial Difference in Early British Counterinsurgency,” *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018), 217-237; Howard Bailes, “Technology and Imperialism: A Case Study of the Victorian Army in Africa,” *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 1 (1980), 83-104; Philip D. Curtin, *Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴² McNeill, “The End of the Old Atlantic World,” 244-245.

⁴³ Gillis, “Islands in the Making of an Atlantic Oceania,” 33.

⁴⁴ For a countervailing view that stresses the shallowness of imperial power, see Lauren Benton and Jeppe Mulich, “The Space between Empires: Coastal and Insular Microregions in the Early Nineteenth-Century World,” in *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History*, ed. Paul Stock (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 151-171.

⁴⁵ On naval bases, see Jackson, *Distant Drums*, ch. 10. On coaling centers, see Steven Gray, “Black Diamonds: Coal, the Royal Navy, and British Imperial Coaling Stations, circa 1870-1914” (Ph.D. diss., University of Warwick, 2014). On communication hubs, see Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network* (Duke and London: Duke University Press, 2015), ch. 5. On imperialism and communications more broadly, see P.M. Kennedy, “Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy, 1870-1914,” *The English Historical Review* 86, no. 341 (1971), 728-752; Daniel R. Headrick, “Strategic and Military Aspects of

for warships rounding Cape Horn.⁴⁶ Saint Helena and Ascension Island, meanwhile, had telegraphic services, with the latter serving as a major hub.⁴⁷

Jet propulsion reinforced the auxiliary and strategic role of islands. During and especially after the Second World War, Britain and the United States maintained a string of permanent or contingency bases across the Atlantic. Much to the chagrin of the islanders living there, the militarization of insular Atlantic space became indispensable to Cold War-era grand strategy.⁴⁸

Submarine Telegraph Cables, 1851-1945,” in *Communications under the Seas: The Evolving Cable Network and Its Implications*, eds. Bernard Finn and Daqing Yang (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2009), 185-208; Simone Müller-Pohl, “Wiring the Pacific: North American Perspectives on a (De)colonial Project,” in *Provincializing the United States: Colonialism, Decolonization, and (Post)Colonial Governance in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Ursula Lehmkuhl, Eva Bischoff, and Norbet Finzsch (Heidelberg, Germany: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014), 155-180; Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930* (Duke and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ Peter J. Hugill, *World Trade since 1431: Geography, Technology, and Capitalism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 133-139.

⁴⁷ Stephen A. Royle, “‘The Island has been Handed over to Me’: Ascension Island as a Company Colony, 1922-42,” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 25, no. 1 (2004), 109-126.

⁴⁸ Ashley Jackson, “African Ports and Islands during the Second World War,” in *African Islands*, 170-207. Ruth Oldenziel, “Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire,” in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), 13-42; Valur Ingimundarson, “Britain, the United States and the Militarization of Iceland, 1945-1951,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37, no. 2 (2012), 198-220; Nancy Fogelson, “Greenland: Strategic Base on a Northern Defense Line,” *The Journal of Military History* 53, no. 1 (1989), 51-63; Clive Archer, “The United States Defence Areas in Greenland,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 23, no. 3 (1988), 123-144; Luís Nuno Rodrigues, “Azores or Angola? Military Bases and Self-Determination during the Kennedy Administration,” in *Military Bases: Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Challenges*, eds. Luís Rodrigues and Sergiy Glebov (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2009), 68-78; Harvey R. Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Spencer Mawby, “‘Uncle Sam, We Want Back We Land’: Eric Williams and the Anglo-American Controversy over the Chaguaramas Base, 1957-1961,” *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 1 (2012), 119-145; César J. Ayala and José L. Bolívar, *Battleship Vieques: Puerto Rico from World War II to the Korean War* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner, 2011); Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Steven High, *Base Colonies in the Western Hemisphere, 1940-1967* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jana K. Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009); John Lindsay-Poland, “U.S. Military Bases in Latin America and the Caribbean,” in *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*, ed. Catherine Lutz (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 71-95; Jan Rüger, *Heligoland: Britain, Germany and the Struggle for the North Sea* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. ch. 9; Fraser MacDonald, “The Last Outpost of Empire: Rockall and the Cold War,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 32, no. 3 (2006), 627-647; Christopher Maternowski, “Anglo-American Relations and the Politics of Militarization in the British Bahamas, 1960-1973” (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 2016).

The presence of major communication hubs and military installations seems to belie oft-repeated claims that islands represent exceptionally insular spaces shut off from the world. This construct ironically crystalized during the age of exploration, when improved mobility brought far-away islands into the European orbit. These cross-cultural interactions not only shaped how Europeans understood themselves, including helping to nurture Britain's "island race" mythology, but also transformed perceptions of the distant places that water bounds.⁴⁹ Through the discursive practices of European colonizers, islands became closed spaces and their "worldliness" erased and forgotten. "Although all islands are isolated by etymological definition," explains Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "their remoteness has been greatly exaggerated by transoceanic visitors."⁵⁰

The imaginative processes that affected islands writ large also molded how people saw Tristan da Cunha. The potent lure of remote places caused many to inflate the island's insularity by overlooking or downplaying its connections, including irregular pen-pal exchanges, infrequent radio broadcasts, and occasional ship visits. As Tristan da Cunha's "lonely island" moniker conveys, the overwhelming majority of visitors and dreamers wished to encounter or visualize a far-off, unreachable island that had entirely avoided civilization. Such fantasies, though, bore little resemblance to the reality on Tristan da Cunha, which cultivated and relied on circumscribed links with the outside world. Despite ardent romanticizing, even extreme isolation never completely removed the island from the various networks crisscrossing the globe.

⁴⁹ Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. ch. 2.

⁵⁰ DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 2-3, 8, 12. On this point, see also Eriksen, "In Which Sense Do Cultural Islands Exist?," 133-147; Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean*.

Yet, while recognizing the extant connections and highlighting the crucial distinction “between literal and metaphorical understandings of islands,” this dissertation positions Tristan da Cunha as enduring stretches of real and profound isolation from a concatenation of events.⁵¹ First, whaling entered a period of terminal decline in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.⁵² Then, in 1869 the Suez Canal opened, which increasingly routed shipping toward the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.⁵³ Far fewer vessels rounded the Cape of Good Hope, which drastically reduced the number calling at Tristan da Cunha.⁵⁴

The island subsequently slipped into insignificance, at least for outsiders. On average, 6.6 ships visited per annum between 1904 and 1937. But averages obscure. No ships visited in 1921 or 1924.⁵⁵ The dearth of shipping, along with sporadic or nonexistent telecommunications, left Tristan da Cunha highly insular.

Advances in food preservation made Tristan da Cunha even less relevant for the decreasing number of ships plying the archipelago’s waters. From the 1810s onward, ships stocked canned foods.⁵⁶ Yet refrigeration, not canning, fundamentally weakened

⁵¹ Klaus Dodds and Stephen A. Royle, “Introduction: Rethinking Islands,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 4 (2003), 489.

⁵² Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816-1906* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

⁵³ Max E. Fletcher, “The Suez Canal and World Shipping, 1869-1914,” *The Journal of Economic History* 18, no. 4 (1958), 558-559, 563-564. On regional shipping patterns, see Collette Dubois, “The Red Sea Ports During the Revolution in Transportation, 1800-1914,” in *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, eds. Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C.A. Bayly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 58-74.

⁵⁴ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 211, 214.

⁵⁵ Average calculated from data in Table 1 in Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 40.

⁵⁶ A.E. Bender, “The History and Implications of Processed Foods,” in *Starving Sailors: The Influence of Nutrition upon Naval and Maritime History*, eds. J. Watt, E.J. Freeman, and W.F. Bynum (London: National Maritime Museum, 1981), 117-122; Carl Thompson, “The Heroic Age of the Tin Can: Technology and Ideology in British Arctic Exploration, 1818-1835,” in *Maritime Empires: British Imperial Maritime Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. David Killingray, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2004), 84-99.

Tristan da Cunha's position as victualing node. Following the first successful international shipment in 1877, a growing proportion of ships had refrigerated holds.⁵⁷ Mariners no longer needed to call at islands for provisions.

Heightened isolation made Tristan da Cunha an outlier in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As Rousset observes, Tristan da Cunha charted "a very different historical trajectory to that of many other islands."⁵⁸ Indeed, scholars typically characterize these years as a period of intensifying connections. Steam-powered locomotion and telegraphy not only enabled the state to penetrate hinterlands, but also facilitated the rapid movement of people and dissemination of information. The distance between people dissolved and old concepts of time vanished, which supposedly caused the world to shrink and synchronize.⁵⁹

Tristan da Cunha demonstrates the limits of globalization, particularly in colonial spaces, which conventional wisdom maintains profited from the centralizing proclivities

⁵⁷ On refrigeration and shipping, see Rebecca J.H. Woods, *The Herds Shot Round the World: Native Breeds and the British Empire, 1800-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 119-123; Richard Perren, *Taste, Trade and Technology: The Development of the International Meat Industry since 1840* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 51-78; Derek J. Oddy, "The Growth of Britain's Refrigerated Meat Trade, 1880-1939," *The Mariner's Mirror* 93, no. 3 (2007), 269-280.

⁵⁸ Rousset, "Island Bodies," 7.

⁵⁹ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time, 1870-1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002); C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004); Duncan Bell, "History and Globalization: Reflections on Temporality," *International Affairs* 79, no. 4 (2003), 801-814; Yrjö Kaukiainen, "Shrinking the World: Improvements in the Speed of Information Transmission, c. 1820-1870," *European Review of Economic History* 5, no. 1 (2001), 1-28; Martin Lynn, "From Sail to Steam: The Impact of the Steamship Services on the British Palm Oil Trade with West Africa, 1850-1890," *Journal of African History* 30, no. 2 (1989), 227-245; Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); John A. Britton, *Cables, Crises, and the Press: The Geopolitics of the New Information System in the Americas, 1866-1903* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting, 1870-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. chs. 2-4, 14.

of empires.⁶⁰ “Structures and networks that penetrate certain places and do certain things with great intensity,” comments Frederick Cooper, “but their effects tail off elsewhere.”⁶¹ As a number of scholars have acknowledged, the reconfiguring of space had patchy and unequal effects.⁶²

Tristan da Cunha fits awkwardly into dominant narratives about imperial space, which until the rise of network theory emphasized cores and peripheries rather than webs.⁶³ One historiographical tradition presents the empire, particularly the settler

⁶⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, “Globalization as Empire,” in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, 2nd ed., eds. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000), 116-121; Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶¹ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 91-92.

⁶² On resistance to and the limits of telegraphy, see David Paull Nickles, *Under the Wire: How the Telegraph Changed Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Glen O’Hara, “New Histories of British Imperial Communication and the ‘Networked World’ of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries,” *History Compass* 8, no. 7 (2010), 609-625; Roland Wenzlhuemer, “The Dematerialization of Telecommunication: Communication Centres and Peripheries in Europe and the World, 1850-1920,” *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007), 345-372; Graham Murdock and Michael Pickering, “The Birth of Distance: Communications and Changing Conceptions of Elsewhere,” in *Narrating Media History*, ed. Michael Bailey (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 171-183. On the limits of mobility, see Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On this trend more broadly, see Tim Cresswell, “Toward a Politics of Mobility,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 1 (2010), 17-31.

⁶³ On network theory, see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996). For an overview of metropole and periphery, space and imperialism, see Antoinette Burton, “Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating ‘British’ History,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1997), 227-248; Alan Lester, “Spatial Concepts and the Historical Geographies of British Colonialism,” in *Writing Imperial Histories*, ed. Andrew S. Thompson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 118-142; Alan Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 14, no. 1 (2006), 124-141; Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); David Lambert and Alan Lester, “Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects,” in *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 1-16; Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Simon J. Potter, “Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007), 621-646; Magee and Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation*; Gareth Curless, Stacey Hynd, Temilola Alanamu, and Katherine Roscoe, “Editor’s Introduction: Networks in Imperial History,” *Journal of World History* 26, no. 4 (2015), 705-732.

colonies, as approximating a coherent, networked bloc.⁶⁴ Exemplified by the concept of “Greater Britain,” or the idea that Britain encompassed more than its isle parts, John Pocock and David Armitage date this expansive conception of territory to the genesis of Atlantic empire.⁶⁵ Duncan Bell and Theodore Koditschek have pushed this insight into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the latter contending that the advent of steam-powered locomotion and telegraphy strengthened the conception of “Greater Britain.”⁶⁶ While some have since questioned the unity of this bloc and the settler focus, the emphasis on “British world spaces” interlaced through networks and, at least among settlers, shared affinities retains currency.⁶⁷

Others emphasize the shallow penetration of imperial networks and portray the empire as disjointed with pockets resting tenuously under or perilously beyond control.

⁶⁴ Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003); Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ For arguments, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David Armitage, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (1999), 427-435; Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. For larger context, including critiques, see Trevor Burnard, “The British Atlantic World,” in *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, eds. Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111-136.

⁶⁶ Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of Greater Britain* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Duncan S.A. Bell, “Dissolving Distance: Empire, Space, and Technology in British Thought, 1770-1900,” *Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005), 523-562; Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁶⁷ Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013), 447. See, too, Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850-1939* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013); Adele Perry, “Whose World was British? Rethinking the ‘British World’ from an Edge of Empire,” in *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007), 133-152; Saul Dubow, “How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009), 1-27. For critiques of the British world concept, see Rachel K. Bright and Andrew R. Diley, “Historiographical Review: After the British World,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017), 547-568; James Vernon, “The History of Britain is Dead; Long Live a Global History of Britain,” *History Australia* 13, no. 1 (2016), 19-34.

Despite a “rage for order,” total control remained elusive.⁶⁸ Instead, as Sebastian Conrad and Marion Stange assert, “the colonial state can be understood as a prototypical area of limited statehood.”⁶⁹

But even limited statehood exists on a continuum, with some spaces under weaker authority than others. According to the classic schema, power radiates outward, which positions the margin as a meeting point between rival authorities.⁷⁰ For this reason, the places deemed most peripheral, such as zones of settlement and frontiers, which policymakers imagined as stultifying, “lawless” spaces, became the focal point for especially acute personal insecurities, territorial anxieties, and spatial rationalization projects.⁷¹ As Martin Bayly notes, “imperial history highlights the enduring sense of paranoia with which empire views its peripheries.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Antoinette Burton, *Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: The British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁶⁹ Sebastian Conrad and Marion Stange, “Governance and Colonial Rule,” in *Governance Without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, ed. Thomas Risse (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 40

⁷⁰ David Ludden, “The Process of Empire: Frontiers and Borderlands,” in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, eds. Peter Fibiger Bang and C.A. Bayly (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132-150; Walter Nugent, “Frontiers and Empires in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1989), 393-408.

⁷¹ Eliga H. Gould, “Zones of Law, Zones of Violence: The Legal Geography of the British Atlantic, circa 1772,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2003), 471-510; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008); Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Kenton Storey, *Settler Anxiety at the Outposts of Empire: Colonial Relations, Humanitarian Discourses, and the Imperial Press* (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2016); Cole Harris, “Strategies of Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade,” in *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 31-67; Eric Hinderaker and Peter C. Mancall, *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Elbourne, “Violence, Moral Imperialism and Colonial Borderlands, 1770s-1820s: Some Contradictions of Humanitarianism,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 17, no. 1 (2016); Lisa Ford, *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Elbourne, “The Sin of the Settler: The 1835-36 Select Committee on Aborigines and Debates over Virtue and Conquest in the Early Nineteenth-Century British White Settler Empire,”

Both approaches have much in common, including similar shortcomings. Each notes the centrality of space in building and retaining empires. Additionally, both schools stress “the progressive rationalization of space in an increasingly interconnected world,” or rendering areas legible and therefore governable to imperial states through cartographic pursuits, discursive practices, and establishment of legal regimes, as the desired and optimal outcome. But as Eliga Gould, Lauren Benton, and others argue, this process unfolded unevenly, which wove a variegated patchwork that left even tiny,

Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History 4, no. 3 (2003); Benjamin Madley, “From Terror to Genocide: Britain’s Tasmanian Penal Colony and Australia’s History Wars,” *Journal of British History* 47, no. 1 (2008), 77-106; Brett Shadle, “Settlers, Africans, and Inter-Personal Violence in Kenya, ca. 1900-1920s,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 1 (2012), 57-80; Brett Shadle, *The Souls of White Folk: White Settlers in Kenya, 1900s-1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Julie Bonello, “The Development of Early Settler Identity in Southern Rhodesia: 1890-1914,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010), 341-367; Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier, 1865-1915* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Martin Ewans, *Securing the Indian Frontier in Central Asia: Confrontation and Negotiation, 1865-95* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010); C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 3; Eric Lewis Beverley, “Frontier as Resource: Law, Crime, and Sovereignty on the Margins of Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013), 241-272; Hugh Beattie, *Imperial Frontier: Tribe and State in Waziristan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Christian Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877-1947* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Reeju Ray, “Interrupted Sovereignities in the North-East Frontier of British India, 1787-1870,” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2019), 606-632; Taz Barua, “Return of the Frontier: Understanding the Demands for Inner Line in Northeast India,” *Alternatives* 42, no. 3 (2017), 107-120; Robert Nichols, *Settling the Frontier: Land, Law, and Society in the Peshawar Valley, 1500-1900* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Thomas Simpson, “Bordering and Frontier-Making in Nineteenth-Century British India,” *The Historical Journal* 58, no. 2 (2015), 513-542; Benjamin D. Hopkins, “The Frontier Crimes Regulation and Frontier Governmentality,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015), 369-389; Brandon Marsh, *Ramparts of Empire: British Imperialism and India’s Afghan Frontier, 1918-1948* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Benjamin D. Hopkins and Magnus Marsden, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Martin J. Bayly, *Taming the Imperial Imagination: Colonial Knowledge, International Relations, and the Anglo-Afghan Encounter, 1808-1878* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Arash Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire: The Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert S.G. Fletcher, *British Imperialism and ‘The Tribal Question’: Desert Administration and Nomadic Societies in the Middle East, 1919-1936* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷² Martin J. Bayly, “Imperial Ontological (In)Security: ‘Buffer States,’ International Relations and the Case of Anglo-Afghan Relations, 1808-1878,” *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 4 (2015), 817.

discrete islands contested and under a range of legal regimes and overlapping authorities throughout the nineteenth century.⁷³

Political scientists have stretched this line of inquiry into the twenty-first century. James Scott has described “Zomia,” a chunk of territory that encompasses South and Southeast Asia, as a shrinking space “of deliberate and reactive statelessness.”⁷⁴ Thomas Risse, meanwhile, contends that “modern statehood,” which includes “the monopoly over the means of violence and ability to make and enforce central decisions,” has proved “the exception rather than the rule.” In fact, “limited statehood,” which he defines as circumscribed sovereignty and capacity, applies to the majority of the globe in the past and at present.⁷⁵

How should scholars understand places that occupy the interstices of nation-states and empires? Such liminal, extraterritorial spaces offered certain advantages. As Vanessa Ogle, Ruth Oldenziel, and Daniel Immerwahr have argued about tax havens, communication nodes, and military installations, spaces shielded from the scrutiny of nation-states, or perched on the margins, constituted useful territorial anomalies manipulated for financial profit and strategic gain.⁷⁶

⁷³ On legal regimes, see Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9; Lauren Benton, “Spatial Histories of Empire,” *Itinerario* 30, no. 3 (2006), 19-34. On overlapping authorities, see Eliga H. Gould, “Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007) 764-786; Orlando Patterson, “Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Sociohistorical Analysis of the First Maroon War, 1665-1740,” in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed., ed. Richard Price (Baltimore, 1996), 260-275; Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration, and Betrayal* (Trenton, NJ, 1990).

⁷⁴ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), x.

⁷⁵ Thomas Risse, “Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction and Overview,” in *Governance Without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, ed. Thomas Risse (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1-2, 5, 17.

⁷⁶ Vanessa Ogle, “Archipelago Capitalism: Tax Havens, Offshore Money, and the State, 1950s-1970s,” *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (2017), 1431-1458; Oldenziel, “Islands,” 13-41; Daniel Immerwahr,

But Tristan da Cunha represented a remarkably insular space to which most impute negative connotations like imprisonment, quarantine, exile, and stasis.⁷⁷ “In contemporary cultural discourses of the west,” write Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, “islands often represent sites of cultural stagnation, as in media accounts of remote South Atlantic islands such as the Malvinas/Falklands and Tristan da Cunha.” “Isolation, once conceived of enabling, has come to be thought of disabling, damagingly cut off from modernity rather than a utopian alternative to it,” they continue.⁷⁸

The nineteenth-century conflation of insularity with parochialism caused one of two responses.⁷⁹ The first impulse stressed conquering distance by integrating remote places into globe-spanning networks.⁸⁰ Conversely, the second approach romanticized the want of connections. “Marginal places, those towns and regions which have been ‘left behind’ in the modern race for progress, evoke both nostalgia and fascination,” observes Rob Shields.⁸¹

This dissertation acknowledges the drive to tame isolated spaces, while highlighting the neglected relevance of irrelevance. In surveying the British annexation of Cyprus, historian Andrekos Varnava claims that policymakers grossly inflated the island’s significance. “An important or at least a successful possession must be financially/economically viable, relatively easily governable, and developed through

How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), esp. 355-371.

⁷⁷ Carolyn Strange and Alison Bashford, eds., *Isolation: Places and Practices of Exclusion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁷⁸ Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, introduction to *Islands in History and Representation*, eds. Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 8.

⁷⁹ On shifting perceptions of insularity, see John R. Gillis, “Taking History Offshore: Atlantic Islands in European Minds, 1400-1800,” in *Islands in History and Representation*, 19-31. See, too, John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), ch. 7.

⁸⁰ Bell, “Dissolving Distance,” 523-562; Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain*.

⁸¹ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

public works and its resources,” he summarizes. Since Cyprus lacked these qualities, it deserved the sobriquet “inconsequential possession.”⁸² But Varnava’s critique rests on a narrow understanding of utility. In his estimation, islands only matter insofar as they advance economic or strategic aims. Perversely, Tristan da Cunha, which burdened the Exchequer, resisted centralized government, and had no infrastructure, enjoyed a fabled reputation precisely because of these supposed deficiencies.

In many respects, Tristan da Cunha resembles Pitcairn Island. Like its South Pacific analogue, Tristan da Cunha coalesced into a small, multiracial population on an uninhabited rock that had the most tenuous of links with the wider imperial system and world. Between the 1810s and 1930s, Tristan da Cunha had none of the hallmarks of colonial rule, including reliable communication or much of an administrative apparatus. Yet, reminiscent of Pitcairn, where Adrian Young identifies a similar phenomenon, outsiders prized and nurtured Tristan da Cunha’s marginality. The histories of these two far-away islands point to an underappreciated countercurrent in imperial thinking that craved and guarded peripheral sites for their own sake. “Historians could attend more closely to the historicity of these often purposely peripheral places, whose marginality and remoteness abetted their prominence in the imperial imaginary, and vice-versa,” Young states.⁸³

Indeed, as antipodean historiography indicates, resting on the periphery presented opportunities. In 1966, Geoffrey Blainey published *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia’s History*, which stressed the challenges of geographic

⁸² Andrekos Varnava, *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915: The Inconsequential Possession* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), 3-5.

⁸³ Adrian Young, “Mutiny’s Bounty: Pitcairn Islands and the Making of a Natural Laboratory on the Edge of Britain’s Pacific Empire” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2016), 19-23.

seclusion for settlers.⁸⁴ His work cast a long shadow.⁸⁵ Until relatively recently scholars, especially those in the history of science, hewed to Blainey's position by emphasizing the ways in which isolation marginalized those operating on the edge of empire.⁸⁶ But in an article about collecting the bones of moa, an extinct bird, Ruth Barton suggests that the fringe afforded "opportunities." Since moa remained endemic to New Zealand, Kiwi scientists found themselves in a privileged position that metropolitan elites envied.⁸⁷ Jim Endersby similarly argues that isolation, which inhibited metropolitan anthropiles from visiting Australia, elevated the standing of local collectors.⁸⁸

This dissertation extends the insights of Barton, Endersby, and Young gleaned from vastness of the distant Pacific into the smaller, closer (for metropolitan elites), and seemingly known Atlantic. Tristan da Cunha has always been an Atlantic island, which entails more than simple geography. Although increasingly infrequent, Tristan da Cunha still marked a point on north-south and east-west axes.⁸⁹ The island thus enjoyed integration within the Atlantic quadrangle through maritime networks that conveyed people, goods, plants, and ideas.⁹⁰ These connections shaped the island's identity. As a

⁸⁴ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1968).

⁸⁵ On the ongoing emphasis on distance and connection, see John Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), esp. ch. 4.

⁸⁶ For contours of the debate, see D.W. Chambers, "Does Distance Tyrannize Science?" and D. Knight, "Tyrannies of Distance in British Science," in *International Science and National Scientific Identity: Australia between Britain and America*, eds. R.W. Home and Sally Gregory Kohlstedt (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 19-38, 39-53.

⁸⁷ Ruth Barton, "Haast and the Moa: Reversing the Tyranny of Distance," *Pacific Science* 54, no. 3 (2000), 261.

⁸⁸ Jim Endersby, "A Garden Enclosed: Botanical Barter in Sydney, 1818-39," *British Journal of the History of Science* 33, no. 3 (2000), 313-334.

⁸⁹ On the Global South, including the role of southern Atlantic islands like Tristan da Cunha, see Joseph R. Slaughter and Kerry Bystrom, "The Sea of International Politics: Fluidity, Solvency, and Drift in the Global South Atlantic" and Isabel Hofmeyr, "Southern by Degrees: Islands and Empires in the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, and the Subantarctic World," in *The Global South Atlantic*, eds. Kerry Bystrom and Joseph R. Slaughter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 1-30, 81-96.

⁹⁰ On Atlantic history, see Bernard Bailyn, "The Idea of Atlantic History," *Itinerario* 20, no. 1 (1996), 19-44; Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman, eds., *The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000*, 2nd ed.

multiracial people eager to avoid apartheid, the islanders defined themselves in relation to Britain and in opposition to South Africa. This left Tristan da Cunha imaginatively oriented toward Britain, but economically tethered to South Africa.

The island's peculiar trajectory advances knowledge about the constitution of insular space in the Atlantic. Tristan da Cunha, which had circumscribed connections until the Second World War, specifically challenges the periodization of Atlantic islands as accessible and ordered spaces by the nineteenth century. In close proximity to Europe and relatively easy to reach, the argument runs, maritime empires devoted effort to studying Atlantic islands like Saint Helena, which many mythologized as Eden, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, "Atlantic islands were the most closely examined, mapped and inventoried parts of the world, much better known than most of the continents, which would not be fully explored until the twentieth century." Amassing this breadth of knowledge implied heightened connectivity. As maritime networks unfurled, "Atlantic islands no longer occupied a place on the periphery." Rather, "Atlantic islands that had been the least accessible became the most accessible places on earth."⁹¹

The case of Tristan da Cunha, which survived as an isolated pocket of anarchy into the twentieth century, also questions the chronology of rationalization and extension

(London and New York: Routledge, 2018); Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005); David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Greene and Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History*; Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *The American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006), 741-757.

⁹¹ On the specific shrinking and mythologizing of Atlantic space, see Gillis, "Taking History Offshore," 27-30. On mythologizing Saint Helena and other islands, see also Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

of governmental authority over Atlantic enclaves and insular spaces.⁹² Citing the demise of piracy, scholars have portrayed the latter half of the “long” eighteenth century as the period when the state consolidated power over the Atlantic through deep-sea patrols, coastal surveillance, and legislation.⁹³ Guy Chet and others have revised the causes and pushed back the timeframe for this process, though only to the mid-to-late nineteenth century and with the same result, namely the disappearance of oceanic lawlessness and privateering in the Atlantic.⁹⁴

Critiquing perceptions of the twentieth-century Atlantic as a tamed and ordered spatial monolith, this dissertation argues that Tristan da Cunha’s ongoing loose supervision and isolation uniquely positioned the island as a site of self-aggrandizement,

⁹² On island jurisdiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*, ch. 4.

⁹³ On the historiography, see David J. Starkey, “Voluntaries and Sea Robbers: A Review of the Academic Literature on Privateering, Corsairing, Buccaneering and Piracy,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 97, no. 1 (2011), 127-147. Works representative of this corpus include James G. Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: The Gregg Press, 1971); Robert C. Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Alejandro Colás and Bryan Mabee, “The Flow and Ebb of Private Seaborne Violence in Global Politics: Lessons from the Atlantic World 1689-1815,” in *Mercenaries, Pirates, Bandits and Empires: Private Violence in Historical Context*, eds. Alejandro Colás and Bryan Mabee (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 83-106; Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Joel Baer, ed., *British Piracy in the Golden Age: History and Interpretation, 1660-1730*, vols. 1-4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007); Arne Bialuschewski, “Pirates, Markets and Imperial Authority: Economic Aspects of Maritime Depredations in the Atlantic World, 1716-1726,” *Global Crime* 9, nos. 1-2 (2008), 52-65.

⁹⁴ Guy Chet, *The Ocean Is a Wilderness: Atlantic Piracy and the Limits of State Authority, 1688-1856* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014); David J. Starkey and Matthew McCarthy, “A Persistent Phenomenon: Private Prize-Taking in the British Atlantic World, c. 1540-1856,” in *Persistent Piracy: Maritime Violence and State-Formation in Global Historical Perspective*, eds. Stefan Eklöf Amirell and Leos Müller (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), esp. 142-147; Lauren Benton, “Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (2005), 700-724; Lauren Benton, “Toward a New Legal History of Piracy: Maritime Legalities and the Myth of Universal Jurisdiction,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 23, no. 1 (2011), 225-240; Michael Kempe, “‘Even in the Remotest Corners of the World’: Globalized Piracy and International Law, 1500-1900,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 3 (2010), 353-372; Jan Martin Lemnitzer, “‘That Moral League of Nations against the United States’: The Origins of the 1856 Declaration of Paris,” *The International History Review* 35, no. 5 (2013), 1068-1088. As Janice Thomson argues, this trend parallels the state’s effective monopolization of violence by the twentieth century. See Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

space of fantasy, place of discovery, and node of knowledge production for bureaucrats, metropolitan daydreamers, missionaries, medical researchers, and conservationists. By recognizing the difficulties as well as the advantages that accrued because of geographic seclusion and nominal authority, this work contributes to rehabilitating perceptions of insularity.

The assortment of individuals physically or imaginatively voyaging to 37.8 square miles of volcanic rock in the farthest stretches of the South Atlantic made Tristan da Cunha a microcosm of the empire. As John Darwin observes, there existed multiple British “empires” formed of administrators, soldiers, missionaries, settlers, and others. Constituents of each group fantasized about or visited the island, which transformed Tristan da Cunha’s insularity into something mythical and cherished.⁹⁵

Islands like Tristan da Cunha have long invited microcosmic thinking. “The island easily became, in practical environmental as well as mental terms, an easily conceived allegory of a whole world,” asserts Richard Grove.⁹⁶ The conception of islands as scaled down versions of the world has generated criticism.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, it helps explain why contemporaries flocked to Tristan da Cunha. Studying the island, believed botanist and one-time visitor Erling Christophersen, offered insights “on problems of the

⁹⁵ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), 26-30. On the concept of “empire,” “empires,” and “British world,” see Stephen Howe, “British Worlds, Settler Worlds, World Systems, and Killing Fields,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 4 (2012), 691-725.

⁹⁶ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 9.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Modern Pacific,” *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 2 (2013), 167-194; Nancy J. Turner, Iain J. Davidson-Hunt, and Michael O’Flaherty, “Living on the Edge: Ecological and Cultural Edges as Sources of Diversity for Social-Ecological Resilience,” *Human Ecology* 31, no. 3 (2003), 439-461; John R. Gillis, “Not Continents in Miniature: Islands as Ecotones,” *Island Studies Journal* 9, no. 1 (2014), 155-166.

greatest significance for the whole of humanity.” “Few places in the world offered such opportunities,” he declared.⁹⁸

Tristan da Cunha’s microscopic size holds analytical value. Insularity amplifies the consequences of international developments, thereby rendering them more discernable.⁹⁹ As a work of global micro-history, this dissertation illuminates how the local and international intersected and interacted on Tristan da Cunha.¹⁰⁰ Global trends, including decolonization, secularization, and conservation, affected Tristan da Cunha. And on occasion, data from Tristan da Cunha benefited the world.

Tristan da Cunha’s insularity conjured images of a “living” or “natural” laboratory. As small, bounded places, islands have given the illusion of impermeability and false sense of control, which suggests fewer confounding variables and thus an optimal setting for experimentation.¹⁰¹ Rousset touches on this tendency, though in

⁹⁸ Christophersen, *Tristan da Cunha*, 7.

⁹⁹ See Stephen A. Royle, “‘Small Places Like St Helena have Big Questions to Ask’: The Inaugural Lecture of a Professor of Island Geography,” *Island Studies Journal* 5, no. 1 (2010), 5-24; Royle, *A Geography of Islands*.

¹⁰⁰ On global micro-history and scale in history, see Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?” *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011) 1-24; Sebouh David Aslanian et al., “How Size Matters: The Question of Scale in History,” *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013), 1431-1472; Bernard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History,” *The International History Review* 33, no. 4 (2011), 573-584; Antoinette Burton, “Not Even Remotely Global? Method and Scale in World History,” *History Workshop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2007), 323-328. For examples of this genre, see Donald Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa: A History of Globalization in Niimi, the Gambia*, 3rd ed. (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2010); Tonio Andrade, “A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory,” *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010), 573-591; Heather Streets-Salter, “The Local Was Global: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915,” *Journal of World History* 24, no. 3 (2013), 539-576; Guotong Li, “Local Histories in Global Perspective: A Local Elite Fellowship in the Port City of Quanzhou in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Frontiers of History in China* 11, no. 3 (2016), 376-399.

¹⁰¹ On the living laboratory concept, see Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011). On islands as “natural” laboratories, see Beth Greenhough, “Tales of an Island-Laboratory: Defining the Field in Geography and Science Studies,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31, no. 2 (2006), 224-237; Beth Greenhough, “Assembling an Island Laboratory,” *Area* 43, no. 2 (2011), 134-138; Robert J. Whittaker and José María Fernández-Palacios, *Island Biogeography: Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-9; Young, “Mutiny’s Bounty”; Roy MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock, eds., *Darwin’s Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994);

relation to discrete episodes and without discussing how knowledge of Tristan da Cunha's people, plants, and animals interacted and informed larger medical and scientific developments.¹⁰² This dissertation treats Tristan da Cunha as a serious, albeit flawed, site of data production, highlighting how doctors and scientists from a variety of disciplines saw the archipelago as a locale to resolve big questions. In the words of post-war administrator Hugh Elliott, "there are so many studies one might indulge in here that it is difficult to know where to begin."¹⁰³

The impetus to experiment extended into the realm of state building, social engineering, and environmental planning with missionaries, administrators, and conservationists trying to achieve a degree of control impossible in larger and less remote venues. By promising omnipotence, downsizing has seduced many. For instance, in his assault on the "idolatry of gigantism," economist E.F. Schumacher praised "the virtues of smallness," above all "manageability."¹⁰⁴ Insularity, seconds geographer Godfrey Baldacchino, "inspires a greater malleability to grand designs."¹⁰⁵

By reducing scale, herculean tasks seem doable. James Scott labels this propensity the "miniaturization of perfection."¹⁰⁶ Instances of "thinking small" abound. Daniel Immerwahr has revealed the persistence of localism as an antidote to centralism in

Sujit Sivasundaram, *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Warwick Anderson, "Racial Hybridity, Physical Anthropology, and Human Biology in the Colonial Laboratories of the United States," *Current Anthropology* 53, S5 (2012) S95-S107; Warwick Anderson and Ricardo Roque, "Imagined Laboratories: Colonial and National Racialisations in Island Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018), 358-371.

¹⁰² Rousset, "Island Bodies," 111-124, 157-166, 228-230, 253-257.

¹⁰³ Hugh Elliott diary, 11 February 1950, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.s.1, BL.

¹⁰⁴ E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper Colophon Books 1973), 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands as Novelty Sites," *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (2007), 166.

¹⁰⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 257-261.

development initiatives before, during, and after the Second World War.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Greg Grandin has chronicled how Henry Ford imagined the eponymous “Fordlandia,” an industrial town in the Amazonian heartland of Brazil, as a mausoleum for the idealized America of the tycoon’s youth.¹⁰⁸ On the other end of the ideological spectrum, Stephen Kotkin reveals that the Soviets envisioned Magnitogorsk, the industrial settlement in the Ural Mountains, as the ideal urban space and microcosmic embodiment of Stalinist values.¹⁰⁹

Paeans to smallness generally and Tristan da Cunha specifically challenge the fixation on larger territorial incarnations in the twentieth century. Before and especially following the Second World War, conventional interpretations assert, smaller spaces had become nuisances, economically stunted holdovers from the divisive and fissiparous age of nation-states. Across the post-war world, some attempted to imagine a world without such geopolitical entities by embracing alternative territorializing projects, including federalism, pan-nationalism, and economic blocs.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁸ Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), esp. ch. 3.

¹¹⁰ Amanda Sives, “Dwelling Separately: The Federation of the West Indies and the Challenge of Insularity,” in *Defunct Federalisms: Critical Perspectives on Federal Failure*, eds. Emilian Kavalski and Magdalena Zolkos (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 17-30; Michael Collins, “Decolonisation and the ‘Federal Moment,’” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 24, no. 1 (2013), 21-40; Samuel Moyn, “Fantasies of Federalism,” *Dissent* 62, no. 1 (2015), 145-151; Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Richard Drayton, “Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no. 2 (2017), 401-406; Chris Vaughan, “The Politics of Regionalism and Federation in East Africa, 1958-1964,” *The Historical Journal* 62, no. 2 (2019), 519-540; Dina Gusejnova, *European Elites and Ideas of Empire, 1917-1957* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third-World Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), ch. 8; Michael Collins, “Nation, State, and Agency: Evolving Historiographies of African Decolonization,” in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future*

But the impulse to enlarge small spaces and to transform the societies therein sometimes clashed with the desire to celebrate and protect them. Scholars have tended to portray imperialism and “modernity” as interlinked. As European and American power radiated outward, so too did a homogenizing, Western-style modernity.¹¹¹ As elsewhere, administrators, missionaries, and technocrats attempted to foist certain ideas concerning governance, society, and agriculture on the Tristan islanders.

At the same time, insular spaces like Tristan da Cunha seemed pleasantly shielded from change. Isolation prevented or slowed the importation of the modern, thereby leaving islands as “iconic sites of bygone ways of life elsewhere extinct or fast succumbing to modern progress.” Cast as sites of stasis, islands became refuges from “the insistent drumbeat of modern progress.” This transformed islands into spaces where “visitors can fancy themselves in the midst of a truly living past.”¹¹²

The idea that Tristan da Cunha represented a time portal to a simpler age frequently recurred. Peter Munch recalled “entering the village of Tristan da Cunha was like stepping several generations back in time, into a forgotten nineteenth century.”¹¹³

Imperfect?, eds. Andrew W.M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen (London: University College London Press, 2017), 17-42; Sven Beckert, “American Danger: United States Empire, Eurafica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870-1950,” *American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017), 1137-1170; Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

¹¹¹ Paul Gillen and Devleena Ghosh, *Colonialism and Modernity* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd., 2007); Gregory A. Barton, *Informal Empire and the Rise of One World Culture* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014);

¹¹² David Lowenthal, “Islands, Lovers, and Others,” *Geographical Review* 97, no. 2 (2007), 209-210. As Steven Fischer argues, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) transitioned into the quintessential and perhaps most famous “Museum Island.” See Fischer, *Island at the End of the World: The Turbulent History of Easter Island* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), ch. 5.

¹¹³ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 94.

A.H.P. Crosbie, Lieutenant Commander, Royal Navy, likewise remarked “to penetrate well into the settlement is to step back in time 200 years.”¹¹⁴

Searching for a more harmonious existence had a rich lineage. From the outset, the imperial project, particularly on islands, pursued earthly idylls.¹¹⁵ Although lacking in island tropes like palm trees and abundant sunshine, the actions of settlers, bureaucrats, metropolitan elites, doctors, and naturalists on Tristan da Cunha bear the imprint of this utopian legacy.¹¹⁶ According to an editorialist:

There is probably no remote island which excites more interest throughout the world—for the interest reaches far beyond England and South Africa—than Tristan da Cunha, the life and welfare of whose simple inhabitants engage the attention not only of the learned sciences, medical, economic, and social, but also of the philanthropist and, to a surprising extent, of the dreamers of Utopia.¹¹⁷

This study highlights these grandiose aspirations for Tristan da Cunha, as well as attends to the sobering realities of attempting to realize utopia on the margins of the world.

This dissertation consists of five chapters that pursue the same span with common turning points. The 1810s to 1850s, when sealers and whalers visited, witnessed the formation of a multiracial and anarchical society. From the 1850s onward, a dwindling number of ships visited. While never totally secluded, the plunge in maritime traffic left the islanders with few visitors by the interwar period. During these years, the community depended on the largesse of metropolitan benefactors. From the Second World War, when a garrison occupied the island, to the volcanic eruption of 1961 Tristan da Cunha experienced a renaissance. Its links multiplied and commercial fishing led to rising

¹¹⁴ A.H.P. Crosbie, report of the shore party, 8 October 1962, Appendix A, Puma’s Report of Proceedings, 5, CO 1024/399, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew.

¹¹⁵ Andrekos Varnava, ed., *Imperial Expectations and Realities: El Dorados, Utopias and Dystopias* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2015). On islands specifically, see Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*; Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

¹¹⁶ On this point, see Johannes Riquet, “Islands Erased by Snow and Ice: Approaching the Spatial Philosophy of Cold Water Island Imaginaries,” *Island Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (2016), 145-160.

¹¹⁷ “An Island Far Removed,” *The Times*, 19 April 1937.

prosperity. The volcano, which sent the islanders to Britain, halted the upward trend. After nearly two years as refugees, the community returned, thereby initiating another flurry of development and consolidation of Colonial Office authority. This period came to an end by about 1981, when Tristan da Cunha received the designation British Dependent Territory. Through this chronological framing, this project relates the entirety of Tristan da Cunha's history as a British colony.

Each chapter engages a distinct theme involving the pitfalls and advantages of insularity. Chapter one looks at how the islanders exploited isolation to establish an egalitarian society, which devolved into anarchy. It then explores how administrators tried to centralize this order, while seizing on insularity to act out fantasies. Chapter two investigates insularity's effect on imaginations and emotional states through literature, stamp and souvenir collecting, and tourism. It stresses the sense of wonderment and agony that arose from isolation. Chapter three treats insularity as a spiritual and moral problem and opportunity. It begins by elucidating the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anxieties of missionaries, who linked insularity to vice, before highlighting the benefits of distant, undeveloped spaces after the Second World War, when fears of secularization ran rampant. Chapter four examines the perceived medical benefits and dangers that accrued through isolation, most notably a homogenous diet and limited gene pool. The final chapter turns to insularity's impact on flora and fauna, especially birds. It contends that isolation, which evolved endemic bird species and curbed development, made the archipelago a favored conservation node. At the same time, insularity made the island group's birds susceptible to disturbance, which hindered the implementation of effective conservation strategies.

While falling short of a true prosopography, these chapters offer a snapshot of Tristan da Cunha's *aficionados*. Early sealers, whalers, and mariners commonly came from the working classes. But with the demise of sail, getting to Tristan da Cunha required wealth or connections. As administrators, cruise ship passengers, missionaries, doctors, and social and natural scientists, admirers overwhelmingly hailed from the upper strata of North American, European, and South African society.

The emphasis on elites partially arises from the practical challenges of writing about an insular place. Compared to more accessible spaces, Tristan da Cunha has a small, scattered archive. Prior to the 1950s, the islanders, many of whom were illiterate or semiliterate, generated few written sources, save letters soliciting charity. While a valuable resource, these missives adhered to a script and contain little about the happenings on the island. The largest source of archival material about island affairs comes from the relatively limited number of outsiders who managed to reach and then decided to write about Tristan da Cunha.

The restricted number of visitors informs the organizational structure, specifically the unconventional decision for each chapter to relate the identical chronological sequence through disparate thematic lenses. In such a small and secluded community, outsiders fulfilled multiple duties, which makes drawing on the same individuals for different purposes necessary. "The missionary is doing the work of state here by teaching, doctoring, surveying and acting as magistrate," explained Reverend Robert Pooley, who ministered on Tristan da Cunha in the 1920s.¹¹⁸ As in the past, engaging Tristan da Cunha means ignoring disciplinary boundaries.

¹¹⁸ Robert Pooley, report on Tristan da Cunha, February 1928, 2, USPG D320, BL.

Equally important, raconteurs have related Tristan da Cunha's colorful and improbable story many times over. As such, the narrative remains well known. By favoring thematic analysis over storytelling, this dissertation makes a novel attempt at illuminating the island's place within the empire and relevance to the world, principally the promise of its exceptional insularity.

Chapter 1

Rulers

In 1950, Hugh Elliott, the Colonial Office's inaugural administrator on Tristan da Cunha, waded through an "immense pile of letters." Penning replies left him wistful. "One cannot but regret that the turmoil of life has made it impossible to maintain contact with so many excellent and amusing people," he rued. Emerging from his reverie, Elliott drew a comparison with Tristan da Cunha, where "people scarcely seem to have friends and there can scarcely be a community anywhere where every individual is so segregated and self-sufficient."¹

This decentralized and highly individualistic society began in the 1810s, when a handful of dreamers from Britain and the Cape settled the empty volcanic rock. Lacking an indigenous population, preexisting governmental institutions, or entrenched class system, isolated Tristan da Cunha afforded the newcomers an opportunity to undertake "ex nihilo" a social experiment.² Inspired by utopian currents, they renounced private property and eschewed rank.

Over time, immigrants from Europe, the United States, and Saint Helena joined the tiny band. This influx of disparate peoples into an uninhabited space positioned the island as a point of convergence, a site of intermingling.³ While British culture

¹ Hugh Elliott diary, 19 March 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlan.s.1, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (hereafter BL).

² Godfrey Baldacchino, "'Upside Down Decolonization' in Subnational Island Jurisdictions: Questioning the 'Post' in Postcolonialism," *Space and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2010), 193-194.

³ Daniel A. Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing: St. Helena and the South Atlantic World," *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007), 144-163; Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999); Françoise Vergès, "The Island of Wandering Souls: Processes of Creolisation, Politics of Emancipation and the Problematic of Absence on Reunion Island," in *Islands in History and Representation*, eds. Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 162-176; Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Durham and London: Duke University Press,

predominated, American and Afrikaner linguistic and musical traditions shaped the community as well.⁴

Settlers also imported the racial ideas and prejudices shaping and riving the Atlantic world.⁵ As the population grew larger and more diverse, racial tensions and personal antagonisms mounted and communalism gave way to tight-knit, though self-contained households. Loath to impose any form of governance or authority, a “spirit of anarchical independence prevailed.”⁶

Like other multiracial peoples, the islanders occupied a precarious, liminal position within the imperial imagination.⁷ On one hand, the English-speaking, monarch-venerating, and overwhelmingly Protestant community seemed stereotypically British.

2005); Jean Houbert, “Réunion I: French Decolonisation in the Mascareignes,” *The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 18, no. 2 (1980), 145-171; Burton Benedict, “Slavery and Indenture in Mauritius and Seychelles,” in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 135-168.

⁴ Daniel Schreier, *Isolation and Language Change: Contemporary and Sociohistorical Evidence from Tristan da Cunha English* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Peter A. Munch, *The Song Tradition of Tristan da Cunha* (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Center for the Language Sciences, 1971).

⁵ Rana A. Hogarth, *Medicalizing Blackness: Making Racial Difference in the Atlantic World, 1780-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); John D. Garrigus and Christopher Morris, eds., *Assumed Identities: The Meanings of Race in the Atlantic World* (Arlington, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2010); Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).

⁶ Peter A. Munch, *Crisis in Utopia: The Ordeal of Tristan da Cunha* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971), 74-75, 181.

⁷ D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988); Robert Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Gad J. Heuman, *Between Black and White: Race, Politics, and the Free Coloreds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Racial Crossings: Race, Inter marriage, and the Victorian British Empire* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Daniel Livesay, *Children of Uncertain Fortune: Mixed-Race Jamaicans in Britain and the Atlantic Family, 1733-1833* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Christopher J. Lee, *Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial Lives, and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014).

On the other, African ancestry and darker complexions rendered them exotic and impossibly different.⁸

A population formed from white men and multiracial women had implications for colonial power. For many, such relationships, which fostered intimacies and produced children, destabilized the racial categories that underpinned imperialism. Others, however, saw “race mixing” as biologically subsuming colonized peoples into settler societies.⁹ Colonial powers therefore oscillated between policing interracial interaction and pursuing cultural and biological “assimilation.”¹⁰

Tristan da Cunha’s social structure equally vexed mandarins, who projected British and patrician understandings of class onto “acephalous,” or headless, societies. The diffusion of power within these communities upended the conservative shibboleth that strong leaders and defined hierarchies guarded against social breakdown and descent into “mob” rule.¹¹ By flouting this orthodoxy, headless societies seemed aberrant and intrinsically dangerous to Whitehall. As such, Tristan da Cunha’s leaderless order

⁸ On shifting depictions of the islanders, see Thierry Jean-Marie Rousset, “Island Bodies: Registers of Race and ‘Englishness’ on Tristan da Cunha, c. 1811-1940,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2017).

⁹ Warwick Anderson and Ricardo Roque, “Imagined Laboratories: Colonial and National Racialisations in Island Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018), 363.

¹⁰ On the policing of racial boundaries, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Ann L. Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in the 20th-Century Colonial Cultures,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989), 634-660; Ann L. Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 3 (1992), 514-551; Ann L. Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989), 134-161; Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). On “assimilation,” see Martin Deming Lewis, “One Hundred Million Frenchmen: The ‘Assimilation’ Theory in French Colonial Policy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4, no. 2 (1962), 129-153; Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2002), esp. ch. 8; Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

¹¹ Beverly Gartrell, “British Administrators, Colonial Chiefs, and the Comfort of Tradition: An Example from Uganda,” *African Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (1983), 1-3, 11-13.

became what anthropologist Martha Kaplan termed in another context “colonially constructed disorder.”¹²

Acephalous societies like Tristan da Cunha defied incorporation into the system of indirect rule, whereby the Colonial Office, particularly before the Second World War, governed the empire through networks of patronage involving mandarins and local elites.¹³ In hierarchical societies, this entailed coopting notables, such as “chiefs.”¹⁴ But in dealing with headless societies the Colonial Office lacked that option, for “they provided no institutional levers or handles with which to enter the community, negotiate with it, or govern it.”¹⁵

The government worked to bring this heterogeneous, anarchical society under a form of supervision that minimized expense and trouble. On a marginal island with no reliable communications until the 1940s, ruling through proxies proved most convenient. As with other headless societies, the Colonial Office undertook the process of fashioning and elevating “chiefs.”¹⁶ Until the interwar period, when chiefly authority became

¹² Martha Kaplan, “*Luve Ni Wai* as the British Saw It: Constructions of Custom and Disorder in Colonial Fiji,” *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 4 (1989), 366. On the colonial creation of disorder, see also Michael Aung-Thwin, “The British ‘Pacification’ of Burma: Order Without Meaning,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 16, no. 2 (1985), 245-261.

¹³ For an overview of a vast literature, see Colin Newbury, “Patrons, Clients, and Empire: The Subordination of Indigenous Hierarchies in Asia and Africa,” *Journal of World History* 11, no. 2 (2000), 227-263; Colin Newbury, *Patrons, Clients, and Empire: Chieftaincy and Over-rule in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ See, among others, David Vumlallian Zou, “*Vai* Phobia to Raj Nostalgia: *Sahibs*, Chiefs and Commoners in Colonial Lushai Hills,” in *Modern Practices in North East India: History, Culture, Representation*, eds. Lipokmar Dzüvichü and Manjeet Baruah (Oxon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018); Donna J. Amoroso, *Traditionalism and the Ascendancy of the Malay Ruling Class in Colonial Malaya* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2014); David W. Akin, *Colonialism, Maasina Rule, and the Origins of Malaitan Kastom* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2013); Colin Newbury, “*Bose Vakaturaga*: Fiji’s Great Council of Chiefs, 1875-2000,” *Pacific Studies* 29, nos. 1-2, 82-127.

¹⁵ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 274.

¹⁶ See, for instance, John Tosh, “Colonial Chiefs in a Stateless Society: A Case-Study from Northern Uganda,” *Journal of African History* 14, no. 3 (1973), 473-490; Gartrell, “British Administrators, Colonial Chiefs, and the Comfort of Tradition,” 1-24; Peter Geshiere, “Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style,” *Africa* 63, no. 2 (1993), 151-175; H.S. Daannaa, “The

accessible to native-born and female islanders, the Colonial Office enlisted white, male immigrants born in Europe or empowered British missionaries.

By exercising influence through westernized elites and limiting interaction with the masses, indirect rule emphasized “tradition,” which meant translating anthropological conceptions of “primitive” societies as simple, static, and vulnerable into a code of governance. Administrators thus saw anthropology as essential for penetrating alien social structures and constructing hierarchical orders. Once rendered legible or simply invented, administrators could not only understand how “traditional” societies differed from the metropolitan model, but also how best to exercise authority through indigenous channels. However, anthropologists often hindered the projection of power. In addition to providing knowledge that fell short of expectations, many came to reject the idea of natural, unbridgeable hierarchies between peoples.¹⁷

While indirect rule encountered difficulties across the empire, Tristan da Cunha presented mandarins with unique challenges. Unlike most Crown colonies, where administrators exercised power through local notables from disparate cultures, on Tristan da Cunha they lacked comparable elites and confronted a variant derived from their own society, albeit with less social stratification and greater diversity. This made the ever-tenuous distinctions between rulers and ruled even less stable, which cut to the core of the

Acephalous Society and the Indirect Rule System in Africa: British Colonial Administrative Policy in Retrospect,” *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 26, no. 34 (1994), 61-85.

¹⁷ On the linkages between social anthropology and imperialism, see George W. Stocking, Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The British School in the Twentieth Century*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), esp. ch. 4; David Mills, *Difficult Folk? A Political History of Social Anthropology* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), esp. 5, 9; Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 5; Freddy Foks, “Social Anthropology and British Society, c. 1925-1970” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2018); Freddy Foks, “Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘Indirect Rule,’ and the Colonial Politics of Functionalist Anthropology, ca. 1925-1940,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 1 (2018), 35-57.

imperial project. As Mahmood Mamdani observes, “it is under indirect rule colonialism that the definition and management of difference was developed as the essence of governance.”¹⁸ Since domination rested on hierarchies of power and notions of difference, a leaderless and seemingly British population appeared impervious to the very logic of imperialism. The absence of a well-defined class of “traditional” elites with a countervailing national identity partially explains the failure of indirect rule, as well as the enthusiasm for continued association with Britain.

The chronic weakness of chiefs, extreme isolation, and the specter of racial anarchy led to recurrent and abortive campaigns to resettle the islanders elsewhere, most notably in South Africa, between the 1850s and 1960s. The evacuation movement stalled for a host of reasons, including high costs, logistical challenges, South African opposition, and resistance from the islanders. The preponderance of islanders opposed moving, particularly to South Africa, where they dreaded negotiating the color bar as a multiracial and self-avowedly British community.

To stymie evacuation proposals, the islanders turned to patriotic appeals and invocations of monarchical sentiment. By celebrating Crown and kinship, the islanders summoned “Britishness” to forge affinities with metropolitan advocates who could scuttle initiatives to depopulate Tristan da Cunha.¹⁹ Affirming Britishness had the added benefit of generating sympathy with benefactors, including the Royal family, whose

¹⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁹ For similar examples, see Stephen Constantine, “Monarchy and Constructing Identity in ‘British’ Gibraltar, c. 1800 to the Present,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006), 23-44; Klaus Dodds, *Pink Ice: Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), ch. 7.

donations compensated for the islanders' worsening isolation in the years preceding the Second World War.²⁰

Mirroring trends across the post-war empire, the failure of the evacuation movement, along with the advent of commercial fishing, prompted the Colonial Office to adopt a system of direct rule for Tristan da Cunha.²¹ Colonial Office administrators unleashed bureaucratization and democratization throughout the 1950s. Intending to make the islanders governable, they enlarged the administrative apparatus, called elections, and passed a litany of laws and regulations. Crucially, however, these reforms left the position of chief untouched. Through reorganization, administrators tried to make the chief an effective instrument for ruling the community.

Smitten with the island's diminutive scale, which gave rise to grandiose ambitions and illusions of omnipotence, the administration over-governed by superimposing a political structure designed for larger, federated spaces onto a tiny village.²² Top-down reform not only generated needless confusion, but also opened the administration to accusations of authoritarianism, which commonly surface in insular spaces. In such small settings, where the distinction between public and private sometimes blurs, government

²⁰ Lance van Sittert, "Begging Letters: Tin Trunk Literacy and the Empathy Economy of Tristan da Cunha, c. 1909-39," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 2 (2016), 263-287.

²¹ On the shift to direct rule in Africa, see R.D. Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa: British Colonial Policy, 1938-48* (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1982), esp. ch. 6.

²² On the challenges of governing small islands, see Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Roger Wettenhall and Ian Thynne, "Machinery of Government Innovation in Micro-States: The Cases of Nauru, Niue and Norfolk Island," *Asian Journal of Public Administration* 16, no. 1 (1994), 60-86; John Stanhope, Roger Wettenhall, and Thaneshwar Bhusal, "Governance Challenge: Australia's Indian Ocean Island Territories," *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 38, no. 2 (2016), 87-102; Roger Wettenhall, "Small States: Some Machinery-of-Government Considerations," in *Public Administration in Small and Island States*, ed. Randall Baker (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1992), 49-68.

can become “all pervasive, ubiquitous and impossible to avoid.”²³ Despite the democratic pretenses, administrative overreach gave the colony a feudal flavor with echoes of the Brooke dynasty on Borneo or Clunie-Ross potentate on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean.²⁴

By the 1960s, the relationship between the community and the administration had deteriorated. Exiled to Britain following a volcanic eruption, they fought for repatriation. Grudgingly granted, the islanders returned determined to thwart the state-building project, including the growing clout of the administrator and changes to the position of chief islander. Ironically, an office designed to serve the imperatives of the colonial state had become accepted as an integral part of civic life.²⁵

Tristan da Cunha’s challenges nonetheless paled in comparison to other colonies. In the years after the Second World War, the empire dissolved as the costs of retention escalated. These woes even extended to Britain’s “limpet colonies.”²⁶ On Bermuda, anti-colonial nationalists assassinated the governor and his aide-de-camp in 1973.²⁷ The

²³ Godfrey Baldacchino, “Islands and Despots,” *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50, no. 1 (2012), 107.

²⁴ Martin Mowbray, “The Cocos (Keeling) Islands: A Study in Political and Social Change,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 51, no. 3 (1997), 383-397; John G. Hunt, “The Revenge of the Bantamese: Factors for Change in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, 1930-1978” (M.A thesis, Australian National University, 1989); J.H. Walker, *Power and Prowess: The Origins of the Brooke Kingship in Sarawak* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002).

²⁵ On creation and persistence of ceremonial institutions, see Terence Ranger’s seminal “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. 237-246. See, too, Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,” in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A.H.M. Kirk-Greene*, eds. Terence Ranger and Olufermi Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1993), 62-111; Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003), 3-27.

²⁶ On “limpet colonies, see John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988), 307-314.

²⁷ Quito Swan, *Black Power in Bermuda: The Struggle for Decolonization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Falkland Islands, meanwhile, became mired in a diplomatic stalemate that precipitated the 1982 conflict.²⁸

Tristan da Cunha's lack of rival claimants, political quiescence, and pro-British sentiment ensured all of the benefits of imperialism with few of the downsides. As the empire convulsed and shrank, Tristan da Cunha remained too small and loyal to pursue independence. Its insularity therefore offered administrators an imperial oasis in which to indulge in anachronistic displays of pageantry and to act out fantasies of control without having to suffer the demands of nationalists or to undertake the ugly work of repression.²⁹ From the mid-1960s onward, Tristan da Cunha struck administrators as a quaint remnant of a romanticized imperial age.

I

Tristan da Cunha remained unknown until 1506, when the Portuguese dispatched to India a fleet under Afonso de Albuquerque and Tristão da Cunha. After reaching Brazil, westerly breezes catapulted the ships into the southern Atlantic. While sailing toward the Cape of Good Hope, Tristão da Cunha spotted the island that henceforth bore Anglicized versions of his name.³⁰

The island remained little frequented until the mid-seventeenth century, when the Dutch East India Company coveted victualing stations in the southern Atlantic. The ensuing visits presented the island as a desolate haven for seals, penguins, and seabirds.

²⁸ For background, see Dodds, *Pink Ice*.

²⁹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2001).

³⁰ N.M. Wace, "The Discovery, Exploitation and Settlement of the Tristan da Cunha Islands," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch* 70 (1969), 12-14.

According to Willem de Vlamingh, who called in 1696, “it is barren land overgrown with beach grass or some other tall grass.”³¹

The island proved no more inviting a century later. In 1786, Alexander Dalrymple, geographer and hydrographer of the Royal Navy, advanced Tristan da Cunha as more suitable for a penal colony than Botany Bay. In closer proximity to Britain, and marooned in a region renowned for whaling, the government could dispatch convicts much more easily. Once exiled, the prisoners could achieve self-sufficiency by harvesting penguins, seals, and potatoes. In addition to removing the need for supply, such punishing isolation encouraged reform and inhibited escape, which made supervision superfluous.³²

While some saw Tristan da Cunha’s insularity as punishment, others sensed opportunity. In 1811, Jonathan Lambert, Thomas Currie, and “Williams” disembarked a sealer filled with grand ambitions. Lambert, the Salem-born leader, claimed Tristan da Cunha, as well as Inaccessible and Nightingale, “solely for myself and my heirs forever.” Renamed “the Islands of Refreshment,” which the raising of a flag designed for the occasion solemnized, Lambert dreamed of amassing a fortune by provisioning passing mariners. Although Lambert, along with Williams, drowned slightly over a year later, naming, flag hoisting, and agricultural improvement constituted acts of ownership that, by virtue of the architect’s roots in Massachusetts, situated the island group within the so-called “American Atlantic.”³³

³¹ Quoted in Günter Schilder, ed., *Voyage to the Great South Land: Willem de Vlamingh, 1696-1697*, trans. C. de Heer (Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society, 1985), 22-36, 103-106.

³² Alexander Dalrymple, *A Serious Admonition to the Publick on the Intended Thief-Colony at Botany Bay* (London: George Bigg, 1786), 29-33.

³³ Quoted in James Fichter, “The British Empire and the American Atlantic on Tristan da Cunha, 1811-1816,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 4 (2008), 567-570, 573, 580.



Figure 1.1. Congressional medal honoring Captain James Biddle, who commanded U.S.S. *Hornet* during the action that captured H.M.S. *Penguin* off the coast of Tristan da Cunha. MEC2500, © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, used with permission.

Britain did not take much interest until the Napoleonic wars, when enemy vessels, particularly American warships, exploited the island as “the only place in these seas where they can water.” With warring countries calling at the island, conflict ensued. In 1815, U.S.S *Hornet* captured H.M.S *Penguin* in Tristan da Cunha’s waters (see figure 1.1). As a result, Lord Somerset, Governor of the Cape Colony, feared “that should the British Flag not fly there, the Island will forthwith be taken possession of by some other

Power.” Seizing Tristan da Cunha for the Crown had the benefit of spoiling any French plans of rescuing an exiled Napoleon Bonaparte from nearby Saint Helena.³⁴



Figure. 1.2. Augustus Earle, “Governor Glass and companions at Tristan De Acunha [i.e. da Cunha], the Gov. is lighting his pipe,” circa 1824, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134494132, used with permission.

Britain thus garrisoned Tristan da Cunha from August 1816 to November 1817, when the last troops withdrew, thereby abandoning the island to a handful of settlers (see figure 1.2).³⁵ The colonizers reflected a British and South African background: William Glass, a corporal in the Royal Artillery from Scotland; his wife, Maria, from the Cape,

³⁴ See A.J. Cloete to Charles Somerset, 23 August 1817 and Charles Somerset to Earl Bathurst, 7 June 1817, in *Records of the Cape Colony from November 1815 to May 1818*, vol. 11, ed. George McCall Theal (William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1902), 301-302, 350-351.

³⁵ For a narrative of the garrison, see Stephen A. Royle, “Perilous Shipwreck, Misery and Unhappiness: The British Military at Tristan da Cunha, 1816-1817,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 4 (2003), 516-520.

likely of European and African ancestry (see below); their young son and newborn daughter; and Samuel Burnell and John Nankevel, stonemasons from England.³⁶

In electing to remain, pecuniary considerations ranked highest. The Napoleonic wars coincided with a period of agricultural change in Britain. Population increase, enclosure, surging agricultural prices, and the concomitant push to day and seasonal labor led to a rise in landless poor.³⁷ The prospect of obtaining free land therefore proved irresistible. “I have no trade,” William Glass explained, “and am now too old to learn.” “I have a young wife,” he continued, “and a chance of a numerous family; what could I do better for them than remain?”³⁸

Race may have played a role, too. Maria’s ethnicity vexed post-war scholars. Sociologist Peter Munch, for example, thought Maria, who bore the maiden name Leenders, was a white woman born to Afrikaner parents in the Cape. He based this conclusion not only on the surname, but also contemporary descriptions. Reverend William Taylor, who ministered on the island, once characterized Maria as “Cape Creole.” For Munch, this implied not mixed descent, but rather a white person born in the colonies.³⁹ On another occasion, however, Reverend Taylor removed any ambiguity by describing Maria as “a coloured woman of Capetown [*sic*].”⁴⁰

³⁶ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 27-30.

³⁷ John E. Archer, *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England, 1780-1840* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8-13.

³⁸ Augustus Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand in 1827; together with a Journal of a Residence in Tristan d'Acunha, an Island Situated between South America and the Cape of Good Hope* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 308-309.

³⁹ Peter A. Munch, “Race and Social Relations in Tristan da Cunha,” in *The Blending of Races: Marginality and Identity in World Perspective*, eds. Noel P. Gist and Anthony G. Dworkin (New York and London: Wiley-Interscience, 1972), 266-267. See, too, Nigel Wace to Peter Munch, 4 June 1976, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0156, Peter A. Munch papers, Pope Pius XII Library, Saint Louis University (hereafter SLU).

⁴⁰ W.F. Taylor, “Thirty-Two Years in Mission Life, Spent Mainly in South Africa,” *The Mission Field* 28, no. 334 (1 October 1883), 340.

Accounts from other mariners suggest that Maria perhaps had an Afrikaner father and Khoikhoi mother. W.H. Leigh contemptuously described Maria as “a pretty looking pensive-featured dark girl, and very unlike her illustrious sire; nor did she partake in the maternal features, being quite a genteel looking lass, whilst her mamma was a fat ill-favoured bastard Hottentot.”⁴¹ Nathaniel Taylor labeled her “a fair African” as well as “a firm believer in the doctrine of amalgamation.”⁴²

Maria’s heritage matters insofar as it helps to explain Glass’ decision to stay. Partnerships like that of the Glasses remained common in imperial spaces.⁴³ Yet, even prior to the rise of Victorian prudery and scientific racism, romances across racial boundaries had detractors.⁴⁴ The Glasses had likely experienced prejudice. For instance, Alexander Greig, who shipwrecked on the island, made racist remarks about the Glass’ newborn.⁴⁵

Unfettered by class structures, and shielded from much racist abuse, the Glasses and their followers embarked on a social experiment. The settlers personified the

⁴¹ W.H. Leigh, *Reconnoitering Voyages and Travels with Adventures in the New Colonies of South Australia; A Particular Description of the Town of Adelaide, and Kangaroo Island; and an Account of the Present State of Sydney and Parts Adjacent during the Years 1836, 1837, 1838* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1839), 27.

⁴² Nathaniel W. Taylor, *Life on a Whaler or Antarctic Adventures in the Isle of Desolation* (New London, CT: New London County Historical Society for Dauber and Pine Book Shop, Inc., New York City, 1929), 37.

⁴³ Ronald Hyam, “Empire and Sexual Opportunity,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 2 (1986), 34-90.

⁴⁴ See Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ronald Hyam, “Concubinage and the Colonial Service: The Crewe Circular,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 3 (1986), 170-186; Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*, 2nd ed. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Raymond T. Smith, “Hierarchy and the Dual Marriage System in West Indian Society,” in *Gender and Kinship: Essays toward a Unified Analysis*, eds. Jane Fishburne Collier and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 163-196; Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980).

⁴⁵ Alexander Greig, *Fate of the Blenden Hall, East Indiaman, Captain Alexander Greig, Bound to Bombay: With an Account of Her Wreck, and the Sufferings and Privation Endured by the Survivors, for Six Months, on the Desolate Islands of Inaccessible and Tristan D’Acunha* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1847), 186.

utopianism and communitarianism endemic to the age, most notably Robert Owen and the “Owenites,” who turned to social planning to eradicate the injustices of industrialization.⁴⁶ Glass, Burnell, and Nankevel agreed to share supplies, evenly distribute profits, and contribute equal sums toward future purchases. The trio also decreed: “No member shall assume any superiority whatever, but all to be considered as equal in every respect, each performing his proportion of labour, if not prevented by sickness.”⁴⁷

In the age of sail, this collective occupied an advantageous position. Roughly equidistant between the South American and African continents, mariners rounding the Cape of Good Hope found the archipelago “a very convenient place for vessels which are only in want of water and such other articles as the Islands supply.”⁴⁸ Steady maritime traffic brought runaways and shipwrecked mariners, which expanded the community beyond its original nucleus.⁴⁹

At the same time, transient mariners imperiled the tranquility of this “utopian fraternity.” In 1821, the *Blenden Hall* shipwrecked on Inaccessible Island, where the survivors languished until a contingent from Tristan da Cunha effected a rescue.⁵⁰ The influx of sailors on Tristan da Cunha wrought disorder. On one occasion, a mob upset with the quality and quantity of provisions proceeded to Glass’ house “armed with bludgeons, cheering and hooting as they came.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ R.G. Garnett, *Co-operation and the Owenite Socialist Communities in Britain, 1825-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972); Krishan Kumar, “Utopian Thought and Communal Practice: Robert Owen and the Owenite Communities,” *Theory and Society* 19, no. 1 (1990), 1-35.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 28-30.

⁴⁸ Peter Gordon to Henry Alexander, 27 May 1815, in *Records of the Cape Colony from April 1814 to December 1815*, vol. 10, ed. George McCall Theal (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1902), 304.

⁴⁹ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 32-34.

⁵⁰ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 34-35.

⁵¹ Greig, *Fate of the Blenden Hall, East Indiaman, Captain Alexander Greig, Bound to Bombay*, 179-182.

Alarmed, Glass attempted to entrench the power of the remaining founders and emerging island elite. To do so, he inserted new clauses in the original accord.⁵² Provided that everyone evenly contributed labor, Glass decreed: “Everything that arises from the produce of the Land, shall be equally divided in like manner.” However, the agreement contained the caveat “that the whole of the Land, Stock, &c., &c., is the sole and joint property of Wm. Glass and Jon Nankevile [*sic*].” In a further act of aggrandizement, Glass became “the head of the firm.”⁵³

By enshrining his status as head of the community, Glass undermined the values of “equality and freedom” that had drawn passing mariners to Tristan da Cunha. While consenting to the accord, its terms did not sit well with the others, who in practice did not acknowledge Glass’ preeminence. Tristan da Cunha consequently devolved into “a community of economically independent households, each man cultivating his own plots of land and raising his own flocks of sheep and cattle.”⁵⁴

During the age of sail, this confederation of households remained connected to the British world. Homesick mariners believed that Tristan da Cunha had a distinctly “English” feel. Augustus Earle, a stranded artist of future H.M.S. *Beagle* fame, took comfort in the Union Jack fluttering over one of the settlement’s stone-and-thatch dwellings, which “had an air of comfort, cleanliness, and plenty, truly English.”⁵⁵

This miniature Britain suffered severe demographic imbalances. In 1827, the island boasted a population of twenty-one, of whom only two were women. The situation

⁵² Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 36.

⁵³ Copy of revised agreement available in Douglas M. Gane, “Early Records of Tristan da Cunha: The Discovery in New London,” *United Empire: The Royal Colonial Institute Journal* 24 (1933), 593-594.

⁵⁴ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 57-58.

⁵⁵ Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months’ Residence in New Zealand in 1827*, 290, 292.

distressed Tristan da Cunha's bachelors, who enlisted a sea captain to recruit wives from Saint Helena.⁵⁶

The arrival of five Saint Helenian women, some of whom had children, altered the island's demographics. The unions begot children, which increased the number of individuals living on the island to thirty-six by 1832.⁵⁷ The women from Saint Helena, whose population consisted of European settlers, enslaved Africans and South Asians, and indentured East Asian laborers, also changed its racial composition.⁵⁸ Save one woman, who may have been born to white parents from Britain, the ancestry of the others mirrored the genetic diversity of Saint Helena.⁵⁹

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century naturalists and emerging anthropologists questioned classificatory schemas and grappled with how to make sense of such human diversity.⁶⁰ The concept of "hybridity" excited especially fierce debate. Discussions centered on the reproductive capacity and physical suitability of individuals born of interracial partnerships. In contrast to monogenists, who deemed that such unions could benefit progeny, polygenists portrayed races as distinct, fixed, and reproductively incompatible "species."⁶¹ By mid-century, the latter group, who drew on pseudoscience

⁵⁶ The request for wives came through Captain Amm, who conveyed a letter to the Governor of Saint Helena. See unknown to Dan Taaffee, 17 March 1827, in Douglas Gane, "Early Records of Tristan da Cunha: The Discovery in New London. —II," *United Empire: The Royal Colonial Institute Journal* 24 (1933), 655-656.

⁵⁷ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 47-49.

⁵⁸ On Saint Helena's demographics, see Daniel A. Yon, "Race-Making/Race-Mixing: St. Helena and the South Atlantic World," *Social Dynamics* 33, no. 2 (2007), 149-152.

⁵⁹ Munch, "Race and Social Relations in Tristan da Cunha," 266-267.

⁶⁰ Clark Niekerk, "Buffon, Blumenbach, Herder, Lichtenberg, and the Origins of Modern Anthropology," in *Johann Friedrich Blumenbach: Race and Natural History, 1750-1850*, eds. Nicolaas Rupke and Gerhard Lauer (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 27-52; George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982), esp. chs. 1-2.

⁶¹ See Claude Blanckaert, "Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, eds. Sue Peabody and Tyler

to bolster claims of immutable, typological differences between peoples, had gained traction in the Anglo-American world.⁶²

As the varied observations of crewmembers of the H.M.S. *Challenger*, which visited in 1873, suggest, those born on the island resisted straightforward classification within the Victorian racial taxonomy and destabilized distinctions between “British” and “other.” Lord George Campbell commented “some are mulattos, with the result of an odd-looking mixture of white and yellow-skinned children.”⁶³ “The women had a gipsy looking appearance, several of them were Creoles from the Cape, & S. Helena, but the native born children were very handsome,” remarked Joseph Matkin.⁶⁴ Sir Wyville C. Thomson characterized the islanders as “somewhat of the English type, but most of them with a dash of dark blood.”⁶⁵

The island’s heterogeneity occasioned questions about the future. Some saw Tristan da Cunha as undergoing “racial amalgamation,” a process whereby white settlers outnumbered and biologically overwhelmed those of African ancestry. As “Europeans” predominated, a gradual lightening of pigmentation occurred among the islanders and Tristan da Cunha transformed into a “white” space.⁶⁶ Visitor Matthew Nolloth, for example, described the islanders as ranging “from quite fair, with light hair, to moderate Mulatto,” though nearly all displayed “a predominance of their European parents’

(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 42-70; Bronwen Douglas, “Confronting ‘Hybrids’ in Oceania: Experience, Materiality and the Science of Race in France,” *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 27 (2015), 27-63.

⁶² John P. Jackson, Jr. and Nadine W. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006), ch. 2.

⁶³ Lord George Campbell, *Log Letters from “The Challenger”* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), 55.

⁶⁴ Joseph Matkin to Cousin Tom, 15 October 1873, in *At Sea with the Scientifics: The Challenger Letters of Joseph Matkin*, ed. Philip F. Rehbock (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 106.

⁶⁵ Sir C. Wyville Thomson, *The Voyage of the “Challenger”: The Atlantic: A Preliminary Account of the General Results of the Exploring Voyage of H.M.S. “Challenger” during the Year 1873 and the Early Part of the Year 1876*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1878), 141.

⁶⁶ On New Zealand, see Salesa, *Racial Crossings*, esp. ch. 1.

characteristics.”⁶⁷ Others, though, classified the islanders as “three distinct races, of which the different types are well marked, the Saxon by immigration from England, the United States, and Holland, the African from St. Helena and Cape, and the Hindoo from St. Helena.”⁶⁸

Although diverse, observers tended to regard Tristan da Cunha as quintessentially “English.” As H.M. Denham noted, “these isolated people, who, as a nucleus of English blood, language, customs, and church, claim our sympathy and protection.” This conspicuous “Englishness” even assimilated newcomers like Pieter Groen (Anglicized as “Peter Green”), a castaway from the Netherlands.⁶⁹

The Royal family became critical in sustaining this British identity in a remote corner of the South Atlantic. Visitors frequently commented on Glass’ loyalty to the Crown. He reportedly treasured “a highly coloured painting” of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.⁷⁰ As homage to the reigning monarch, Glass even named his youngest daughter Victoria.⁷¹

II

In 1853 William Glass died, which unleashed simmering frustrations. The light-skinned Glasses and white American whalers arrayed against families forged from unions between European men and Saint Helenian women.⁷² In addition to racial tensions,

⁶⁷ M.S. Nolloth, “Visit of H.M.S. ‘Frolic’ to Tristan da Cunha,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 25, no. 8 (August 1856), 412.

⁶⁸ Walter Reid to Lindesay Brine, 3 November 1876, Enclosure, No. 2, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha*, C. 4959 (London: HMSO, 1887), 5.

⁶⁹ H.M. Denham, “A Day at Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 22, no. 4 (April 1853), 183-186.

⁷⁰ Rev. John Wise to Bishop of Colombo, 5 May 1849, in *The Colonial Church and Missionary Journal*, vol. 3, July 1849-June 1850 (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1850), 79.

⁷¹ “Tristan d’Acunha,” letter from R.Y.S. Wanderer, March 1842, in *The Athenaeum*, no. 765, 25 June 1842, 565.

⁷² Munch, “Race and Social Relations in Tristan da Cunha,” 268-272.

antagonisms between the “landlubber” Glasses and “sea-dogs”—sailors and whalers from Europe and the United States—precipitated a rift. In January 1856 Maria and dozens of the Glass clan boarded whalers for Connecticut, where many subsequently settled.⁷³

This inaugurated an exodus from the island, which outsiders encouraged owing to mounting isolation and supply shortages associated with the demise of the whaling industry in the southern Atlantic. In March, Nolloth, acting on behalf of the Governor of the Cape Colony, extended to interested individuals “an offer of a home in the Cape Colony.” The proposition appealed to many “heads of families,” who lamented “the absence of all prospect of providing properly, viz., decently for their children here, and the impossibility of settling them, especially their daughters, in life.”⁷⁴ While logistical considerations militated against immediate transportation, thirty-five islanders left for the Cape Colony in 1857.⁷⁵

Emigration altered the racial makeup of Tristan da Cunha, which had become a society composed of the Green, Cotton, Swain, and Hagan families. All one-time sailors, Alexander Cotton, Thomas Swain, and Peter Green had married and had children with women of African and European ancestry. Munch described the Hagan family, which consisted of American whaler Alexander, his wife, a daughter of Maria and William Glass, and their children as the sole “all-white family” on the island.⁷⁶ (Given Maria Glass’ probable African heritage, the term multiracial better describes the diversity of the Hagan family.)

⁷³ Peter A. Munch, “The Marginal Group as a Medium of Change in a Maritime Community: The Case of the Glasses in Tristan da Cunha,” *Those Who Live from the Sea: A Study in Maritime Anthropology*, ed. M. Estellie Smith (Saint Paul and New York: West Publishing Company, 1977), 144, 146; Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 57-59.

⁷⁴ Nolloth, “Visit of H.M.S. ‘Frolic’ to Tristan da Cunha,” 401-402, 405, 410-411.

⁷⁵ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 58-59.

⁷⁶ Munch, “Race and Social Relations in Tristan da Cunha,” 272-273.

Authority in this diverse community remained vested in the hands of white men born in Europe. At the behest of Governor Grey, and based on the recommendation of the resident missionary, Nolloth “appointed Alexander Cotton to take charge of the settlement until further orders.”⁷⁷ As a white Englishman, veteran of the Napoleonic wars, and “devout admirer” of Horatio Nelson, Cotton likely eased anxieties about this distant, self-governing, and racially diverse island.⁷⁸

Following Cotton’s passing, Peter Green assumed the title.⁷⁹ His status as an elderly, naturalized Englishman garnered the respect of prejudiced outsiders like visitor G. Stanley Bosanquet. He declared that Green’s “position has been conceded to him, not alone from his superiority in years, but also from having greater force of character, being a European, than the rest of the community, who are half-castes, and of more plastic materials.”⁸⁰

But the power granted to white patriarchs like Green remained symbolic and obscured the anarchy that still undergirded the community. In 1867, Green informed a visitor “that he was in no respect superior to the others, and that they were all equal—there having been nothing like a governor or a government of any sort or kind since the death of old Glass.”⁸¹

The lax authority of the patriarch failed to inspire confidence, which led to calls for tightening authority over the island. Following a visit, Noel Digby opined “that there

⁷⁷ Nolloth, “Visit of H.M.S. ‘Frolic’ to Tristan da Cunha,” 405.

⁷⁸ William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D’Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 16.

⁷⁹ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 60.

⁸⁰ G. Stanley Bosanquet to W.N.W. Hewett, report on visit of H.M.S. *Diamond*, 15 October 1875, Enclosure 2, No. 5, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha*, C. 1445 (London: HMSO, 1876), 6.

⁸¹ Rev. John Milner and Oswald W. Brierly, *The Cruise of H.M.S. Galatea, Captain H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., in 1867-1868* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1869), 37.

should be some recognized authority on the island.”⁸² The Colonial Secretary, Henry Herbert, agreed that Green’s position as “leading man” needed strengthening. Thus, if the Cape Colony obtained “any jurisdiction over the island,” Herbert recommended that its governor, Henry Barkly, contemplate granting Green “some magisterial powers, which, however, ought to be of a simple and limited kind.”⁸³

Barkly, however, uncovered no documentary proof that Tristan da Cunha fell within the Cape’s or even Britain’s sphere of authority. Moreover, situated over a thousand miles from the mainland, and lacking telegraphic infrastructure, the Cape Colony had no means to administer Tristan da Cunha. Thus, while agreeing “that better arrangements for the maintenance of order are desirable,” Barkly lacked a “mode by which this is to be accomplished.” Unable to confer magisterial authority, Green’s influence on Tristan da Cunha remained informal.⁸⁴

In the late nineteenth century outsiders insisted on bolstering governmental authority over the distant, multiracial community. In Lindesay Brine’s estimation, “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, it may be found expedient, when these form the active members of the community, to adopt some judicial regulations for their control.”⁸⁵

But Tristan da Cunha’s marginality discouraged any resolute action. In 1885, the government rejected a proposal to evacuate the community. The Royal Navy lacked the

⁸² Noel S.F. Digby to W.B. Grant, 8 January 1875, Enclosure, No. 1, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha* (1876), 1.

⁸³ Henry Herbert to Sir Henry Barkly, 5 March 1875, No. 2, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha* (1876), 2.

⁸⁴ Sir Henry Barkly to Henry Herbert, 1 May 1875, No. 3, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha* (1876), 2-3.

⁸⁵ Lindesay Brine to William N.W. Hewett, 1 November 1876, Enclosure, No. 2, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha*, C. 4959 (London: HMSO, 1887), 3-4.

logistical capabilities to remove the islanders and their cattle *en masse*, whereas the South African government had no interest in admitting penurious settlers.⁸⁶ In 1887, another evacuation plan similarly came to naught. Many doubted that the islanders wished to leave, particularly given the presence of valuable cattle.⁸⁷ The Cape Colony, meanwhile, opposed permanent resettlement in South Africa because of the economic downturn of the 1880s and widespread joblessness.⁸⁸

Distance and neglect meant that government played an inconsequential role for the islanders during this period. Between 1888 and 1900, the community's contact with authorities in London remained confined to perambulating letters and eleven visits from warships conducting welfare checks and distributing supplies.⁸⁹ As a result, intermittent missionaries remained the sole vestige of outside authority.

Yet this isolation and lack of supervision suited the community. As proof, a mere ten islanders, who relocated to the Cape in 1889, heeded calls to abandon Tristan da Cunha.⁹⁰ Peter Green criticized these emigrants, accusing them of naively accepting rosy views of life in the Cape Colony.⁹¹

III

Yet in the late nineteenth century the community began to suffer not only from the steady demise of whaling and sealing, but also from the opening of the Suez Canal, which

⁸⁶ See Charles Dodgson to Lord Salisbury (and footnote no. 1), 25 December 1885, in *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, vol. 1, eds. Morton N. Cohen and Roger L. Green (London: Macmillan, 1979), 614.

⁸⁷ Rear-Admiral W. Hunt-Grubbe, Reporting Proceedings on Arrival from Tristan da Cunha, n.d., Enclosure 2, No. 93, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D'Acunha* (1887), 58.

⁸⁸ Hercules Robinson to Earl Granville, 6 April 1886, No. 70, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1887), 41.

⁸⁹ Ian R. Stone, "Royal Naval Visits to Tristan da Cunha 1852-1904: An Annotated List," *Polar Record* 47, no. 2 (2011), 161-162.

⁹⁰ Captain R.U. Stopford to Rear-Admiral Richard Wells, Respecting Island of Tristan Da Cunha, 19 December 1889, Enclosure, No. 2, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1887), 3-4.

⁹¹ See J.P. Pison to Rear Admiral Henry F. Nicholson, 16 December 1890, Enclosure, No. 4, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, C. 8357 (London: HMSO, 1897), 6.

further diminished the volume of maritime traffic in the southern Atlantic.⁹² Having served for decades as a victualing node for sailing ships, Tristan da Cunha had become stranded. As Peter Green lamented, “it seems we [are] too far off from the world, and if not [*sic*] some kind souls would remember us sometimes I think nobody would know we are existing [*sic*].”⁹³

Islanders and policymakers alike contemplated evacuating Tristan da Cunha. If reimbursed for abandoning cattle and sheep, the male “heads of various households” expressed a willingness to leave in 1903.⁹⁴ This finding reinvigorated the resettlement movement. After considering Saint Helena, the Colonial Office fixated on the Cape Colony because of the sizeable community of islanders already living there. Once evacuated at the expense of the British and South African governments, Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, backed ceding the depopulated island to the Cape Colony.⁹⁵ Smitten with the scheme, the government of the Cape Colony agreed to contribute funds.⁹⁶

In 1904, the Colonial Office and Cape Colony dispatched H.M.S. *Odin* to extend an offer. The representative of the government of the Cape Colony, W. Hammond Tooke, proposed to “provide them with a free passage, purchase their live stock from them and settle them within 100 miles of Cape Town, allowing them about two acres of land on rent, and also advance them money on loan to start their homes.” Most islanders rejected

⁹² Stephen A. Royle, “The Inside World: Tristan da Cunha in 1875,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 23, no. 1 (1997), 24.

⁹³ Peter W. Green to B.R. Balfour, 4 November 1898, Enclosure, No. 4, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 1600 (London: HMSO, 1903), 4.

⁹⁴ H.L. Watts-Jones and F.F. Lobb, report on visit of H.M.S. *Thrush*, January 1903, Enclosure, No. 15, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1903), 14, 17.

⁹⁵ Joseph Chamberlain to the Governor of the Cape, 24 July 1903, No. 1, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3098 (London: HMSO, 1906), 1-2.

⁹⁶ Governor of the Cape Colony to Secretary of State, 23 November 1903, No. 4, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1906), 3.

the proposal. Contingent on the acquiescence of the entire community, the majority's spurning of the plan dashed the Colonial Office's hopes of transferring the island to the Cape Colony. When the *Odin* departed, only six of the seventy-seven-person community sought passage to the Cape.⁹⁷

While Tristan da Cunha had survived dismemberment, the fragmentation of power that accompanied the passing of Peter Green in 1902 renewed fears of disorder.⁹⁸ "In the days of Peter Green the Government might have been described as patriarchal," asserted Tooke, "but since his death there is no recognised head of the settlement." Instead of a collective enterprise under the loose and consensual authority of a designated patriarch, the male-dominated nuclear family had become "the social unit" and means of organization.⁹⁹

However, scarcity temporarily overshadowed the perils of anarchy. In 1906, letters from the islanders alleging privation reached the Colonial Office.¹⁰⁰ These missives prompted Victor Bruce, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to resurrect the evacuation schemes advanced in 1904.¹⁰¹ Yet, while amenable to assisting the islanders in migrating to South Africa, financial considerations prevented the government of the

⁹⁷ H. Pearce to Sir A.W. Moore, report on H.M.S. *Odin* visit to Tristan da Cunha, 3 February 1904, Enclosure, No. 6, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1906), 4-5.

⁹⁸ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 73.

⁹⁹ W. Hammond Tooke, report on Tristan da Cunha, 4 July 1904, Enclosure, No. 9, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1906), 27.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, B.R.T. Balfour to Colonial Office, 26 October 1906, No. 1 *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3764 (London: HMSO, 1907), 1; Fred Graham to Admiralty, 27 October 1906, No. 2, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 1.

¹⁰¹ Secretary of State to the Governor of the Cape, 26 November 1906, No. 5, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 3.

Cape Colony from accepting the terms of the earlier plan.¹⁰² In lieu of evacuation, the Colonial Office bankrolled a shipment of provisions to the island.¹⁰³

In supplying the islanders during a critical shortage, the British government feared establishing an expensive precedent. Consequently, the Colonial Office ordered Reverend J.G. Barrow, resident missionary, to entice islanders to leave with blandishments of “free passage” to the Cape.¹⁰⁴ Having heard the proposal, Barrow reported that the islanders replied “we had rather starve here than at the Cape!”¹⁰⁵ Rebuffed, the Colonial Office shelved talk of evacuating the island.¹⁰⁶

By Barrow’s tenure, Andrea Repetto, an Italian mariner who had shipwrecked on Tristan da Cunha in the waning days of sail, had ascended to the position of community patriarch. Yet, while Repetto commanded the barter economy and acted as spokesperson with the outside world, the title still conferred little real power. The community continued to prize social equality and “no family would recognise a central authority who might impose his will upon them.”¹⁰⁷

Anarchy continued to trouble the sailors who visited the island during the interwar period. “There appeared to me to be a decided need of a strong leader,” remarked Chaplain Archer Turner, “with abilities not only of leadership but also of compelling his

¹⁰² Governor of the Cape to the Secretary of State, 13 December 1906, No. 6, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 3-4.

¹⁰³ Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Cape, 5 January 1905, No. 12, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 7.

¹⁰⁴ H. Bertram Cox to J.G. Barrow, 11 January 1907, No. 15, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in J.G. Barrow to Colonial Office, 5 March 1907, No. 20, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 17.

¹⁰⁶ G.H. Murray to Colonial Office, 27 July 1907, No. 23, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 26.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond Rallier du Baty, *15,000 Miles in a Ketch* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1912), 72-73, 101-102.

fellows to follow.”¹⁰⁸ Fellow Royal Navy Chaplain E.H. Griffiths similarly thought that the island suffered from want of a “strong man.”¹⁰⁹

To ward off disorder, the outgoing Reverend Henry Rogers considered wielding a firearm. But since a gun-toting man of God did not sit well, he believed “the Colonial Office ought to be appointing the Missionary as a Resident Magistrate, with a Commission of the Peace, + power to threaten + of needs to enforce law by an appeal to the Crown authorities.”¹¹⁰ The acting Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill, rejected his request.¹¹¹

Without magisterial functions, and confronted with a relatively equitable distribution of male power, Rogers sought to inculcate “a sense of corporate responsibility among the men” and to unite them under a governing body. He worked through the preexisting structure, whereby the patriarchs gathered for “the Meeting of all the Heads of Families.” Dubbed “Parliament,” he convened such meetings “for really important matters touching public morals or public business.” Styled “chairman or speaker,” Rogers presided over approximately four such meetings, “controlling the debate and putting resolutions.”¹¹²

Although wary of authority, the community remained “very loyal” to Britain and the Crown. They celebrated Empire Day, admired portraits of monarchs (see figure 1.3), treasured royal messages, and devoured news about the House of Windsor.¹¹³ The islanders saw the Royal family as patrons and protectors. On one occasion, an islander

¹⁰⁸ Archer Turner, report on visit to Tristan da Cunha aboard H.M.S. *Yarmouth*, 6 August 1919, 5, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

¹⁰⁹ E.H. Griffiths, report on visit to Tristan da Cunha aboard H.M.S. *Dartmouth*, 11 October 1920, 3, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

¹¹⁰ H.M. Rogers to A.H. Dolphin, 9 January 1922, 2-3, USPG D278, BL.

¹¹¹ C.T. Davis to Secretary of the SPG, 18 January 1922, 1, USPG D278, BL.

¹¹² Rose Rogers, *The Lonely Island* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1926), 72-73.

¹¹³ Henry Rogers, “An Outpost in the Atlantic,” *The Times*, 12 July 1922, 16.

requested that Rose Rogers, wife of Reverend Rogers, “thank the Queen for sending me the blankets and ask her will she send me a new saucepan.”¹¹⁴ In a fruitless petition to the Crown, meanwhile, a group of male islanders sought redress for “extreme infrequency of letter mails to this island.”¹¹⁵



Figure 1.3. Royal Navy sailors show the islanders photographs of King George V and Queen Mary, circa 1919. © IWM (HU 56599), used with permission.

But deference to the monarchy could not stop Reverend Rogers from proposing to cede jurisdiction over the islanders to South Africa. Geographically closer than Britain, South African rule would satisfy the Colonial Office’s drive to invest authority in “some sort of resident administration official with civil powers.” Ceding the island to South

¹¹⁴ “Britain’s Loneliest Island,” in *Traveller’s Tales: A Series of BBC Programmes Broadcast throughout the World*, ed. Leslie Bailly (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1945), 116.

¹¹⁵ H.M. Rogers, petition to Secretary of State for the Colonies, n.d., 1-2, T 161/739, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter TNA). On the outcome of the petition, see E.J. Harding to D.M. Gane, 23 March 1925, 1, T 161/739, TNA.

Africa, which harbored designs of erecting a weather station in the vicinity, would improve forecasting. Finally, the familial links in South Africa would purportedly render the scheme reasonable to the islanders.¹¹⁶

The annexation movement fizzled. “The expense involved would have been considerable,” explained Vice Admiral Maurice Fitzmaurice, Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, “and no advantage on either side would ensue to counterbalance that expenditure.” Moreover, he alleged that previous immigrants from the island had not thrived in South Africa, for “they disliked the ordered life that they were expected to live.”¹¹⁷

The reality proved much more complicated. In some respects, the islanders’ position as a multiracial community improved in the interwar period. A more liberal strain of thought in the medical and human sciences challenged scientific racism.¹¹⁸ Anthropologists, many of them devotees of the German-born Franz Boas, pushed for jettisoning the hardened, biological typology of innate difference in favor of a more malleable, culturally informed understanding of human variation. Anthropologists evinced growing interest in multiracial communities, which seemed to offer evidence in support of this shift.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ H. Martyn Rogers to Governor-General of South Africa, 16 September 1922, 1-3, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

¹¹⁷ Vice Admiral, Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, to Secretary of the Admiralty, 8 October 1924, 1, T 161/739, TNA.

¹¹⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, chs. 5-6; Gavin Schaffer, “‘Like a baby with a box of matches’: British Scientists and the Concept of ‘Race’ in the Inter-war Period,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 38, no. 3 (2005), 307-324.

¹¹⁹ On island communities specifically, see Warwick Anderson, “Hybridity, Race, and Science: The Voyage of the *Zaca*, 1934-1935,” *Isis* 103, no. 2 (2012), 229-253; Warwick Anderson, “Human Biology in the Colonial Laboratories of the United States,” *Current Anthropology* 53, supplement 5 (2012), S95-S107; Warwick Anderson, “Ambiguities of Race: Science on the Reproductive Frontier of Australia and the Pacific between the Wars,” *Australian Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009), 143-160; Hans Pols and

Peter Munch, who conducted several months of doctoral research on Tristan da Cunha in the late 1930s, embraced the Boasian perspective. Aside from a couple of immigrants from Europe, Munch observed that “there is no person living on Tristan today who has not a greater or smaller ‘coloured’ admixture in his pedigree, varying from 3/64 to 3/8.” Rejecting deterministic arguments, he saw the challenges of “hybrids” as environmental instead of biological. “They are backward in many ways,” asserted Munch, “but this seems rather to be a consequence of their social and cultural isolation than of their mixed racial origin.” Claims to the contrary remained the product of racism introduced through outsiders and internalized by the islanders.¹²⁰

But Munch represented the minority position. Many harbored racist fantasies of biological amalgamation.¹²¹ Douglas Gane, London solicitor and founder of the philanthropic Tristan da Cunha Fund, took satisfaction that “with one solitary exception (an obvious ‘throw-back’) the trace of negro blood is almost completely eradicated.”¹²² Missionary Philip Lindsay agreed, noting “the dark blood is dying out fast, and within the next thirty years will probably have died out altogether.”¹²³

Until Tristan da Cunha became “white,” many South Africans displayed hostility toward the islanders. “South Africa may congratulate herself that the problem of Tristan

Warwick Anderson, “The Mestizos of Kisar: An Insular Racial Laboratory in the Malay Archipelago,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018), 445-463. On multiracialism, pseudoscience, and science more generally, see Paul Lawrence Farber, *Mixing Races: From Scientific Racism to Modern Evolutionary Ideas* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), esp. ch. 2; William B. Provine, “Geneticists and the Biology of Race Crossing,” *Science* 182, no. 4114 (1973), 790-796; Paul Farber, “Race-Mixing and Science in the United States,” *Endeavour* 27, no. 4 (2003), 166-170.

¹²⁰ Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945), 52-54, 233-234.

¹²¹ For similar trends in interwar Australia, see Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, ch. 8; Anderson, “Ambiguities of Race,” 143-160; Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 68-74.

¹²² Douglas M. Gane to Charles Close, 6 October 1930, 3, CB10, Royal Geographical Society, London (hereafter RGS).

¹²³ Philip Lindsay to W.F. France, 7 April 1930, 4, USPG D334, BL.

da Cunha is not hers,” claimed an editorialist. This “forgotten backwater,” the writer alleged, had a racially debased population stricken with “delayed mentation.”¹²⁴ Another editorialist also opposed admitting the islanders on racial grounds. South Africa sought “‘white’ settlers and people capable of work,” not a lot of impoverished “loafers and illiterates” from Tristan da Cunha.¹²⁵

Racist sentiment, coupled with anti-Semitism, prompted South African authorities to maintain and enact additional legislation to slow or halt the flow of immigrants from outside of Western and Northern Europe, including the islanders.¹²⁶ To enter, they had to prove “that satisfactory employment is assured, or that the immigrant is in possession of capital sufficient to maintain himself and dependents, if any, for at least 12 months after arrival, or that he is proceeding to relatives or friends able and willing to maintain him.”¹²⁷ These “immigration difficulties” deterred several interested islanders from relocating to Cape Town.¹²⁸ Regulations also kept islanders, such as Donald Glass and Tom Rogers, awaiting permission to land, which authorities did not grant until members of the Tristan diaspora offered lodging.¹²⁹

To overcome the community’s reluctance to leave, and to circumvent immigration barriers, Douglas Gane hatched a plan. In 1929, the Tristan da Cunha Fund, the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal Empire Society, Boy Scouts Association, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) petitioned the British

¹²⁴ “The Problem of Tristan Da Cunha,” *Cape Argus*, 7 April 1923.

¹²⁵ “Afrikander,” letter to the editor, *Stamp Collecting* 31, no. 791 (December 1928), 322.

¹²⁶ Audie Klotz, “South Africa as an Immigration State,” *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 39, no. 2 (2012), 193-195.

¹²⁷ Douglas M. Gane, “Removal of Islanders,” *The Times*, 20 March 1929, 17.

¹²⁸ “World’s Loneliest Island,” *Cape Argus*, 3 March 1928.

¹²⁹ See cuttings “Author’s ‘Atlantic Home’ in 60 Foot Ketch,” *Cape Argus*, 9 April 1930; “Homes for Tristan Islanders,” *The Argus*, n.d.; Douglas Gane, “Tristan da Cunha,” *The Times*, n.d., Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 2, British Library.

and South African governments to fund educational training in South Africa for a small contingent of islanders.¹³⁰ But J.B.M. Hertzog, South African Prime Minister, withheld funding because of a slumping economy and joblessness.¹³¹ In response, the Treasury balked at paying the entire cost.¹³² William Bankes Amery, meanwhile, feared that the islanders might not acclimate to South Africa without help. He made support for the scheme contingent on the implementation of “a strong committee in South Africa who will undertake the responsibility of looking after the boys on their arrival.”¹³³ Although a Cape Town welfare committee eventually materialized, the scheme remained in abeyance.¹³⁴

With the islanders unwilling to leave, and minimal contact with the outside world, authority remained tethered to missionaries like Reverend Augustus Partridge, who briefly received magisterial authority from the British government in 1932.¹³⁵ Working through the “Island Parliament,” Partridge formalized a “judicial court.” In the event of a breach of the peace, he convened a court composed of “Heads of Families” and meted punishment on the convicted.¹³⁶

Upon departure, Partridge devolved power to Frances and William (“Willie”) Repetto (see figure 1.4), a mother-son duo born on Tristan da Cunha. Willie became “chief” islander and “Chairman of the Island Council,” assumed the duties of

¹³⁰ Douglas M. Gane, memo, n.d., 1-2, CB9, RGS; Douglas Gane to unknown, 16 September 1929, T 161/739, TNA.

¹³¹ J.B.M. Hertzog to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 17 April 1930, 1, T 161/739, TNA.

¹³² A.P. Waterfield [?] to F. Skevington [?], file minute, 18 June 1930, 1-2, T 161/739, TNA. They warmed to paying a larger share. See F. Skevington to J.B. Sidebotham, 30 August 1930, 1-3, T 161/739, TNA; J.B. Sidebotham to F. Skevington, 6 January 1931, 1-2, T 161/739, TNA.

¹³³ William Bankes Amery to Douglas Gane, 3 October 1930, 1-2, CB10, RGS.

¹³⁴ Bishop of St. Helena to W.F. France, 22 January 1932, 1, USPG D346, BL; “Tristan da Cunha: The Quest for an Outlet for its Population,” *United Empire: Journal of the Royal Empire Society* 22, no. 10 (1931), 575. [check]

¹³⁵ W.F. France to Under Secretary of State, 18 March 1932, 1-2, USPG CLS 183, BL.

¹³⁶ A.G. Bee, report on visit of H.M.S. *Carlisle*, 11 January 1932, 4, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

spokesperson to outsiders, and received the ability to officiate marriages.¹³⁷ Frances, meanwhile, became “Chief of the Women.” While the term “Chief” enjoyed currency, the positions conveyed little clout in Partridge’s absence.¹³⁸



Figure 1.4. Chief Repetto holds vegetables aloft for the camera during the visit of H.M.S. Carlisle in 1937. The National Archives, ref. ADM 116/3646, used with permission.

The Colonial Office had no viable alternative to delegating authority to missionaries or island elites. Whitehall’s mandarins still declined to resettle the islanders. The global economic downturn of the 1930s made large expenditures impossible, particularly for marginal concerns. Moreover, given the grim economic climate, the Colonial Office doubted “in what other part of the world the islanders could be

¹³⁷ *The Tristan da Cunha Fund: Report, 1931-1934*, 7, FD 1/4965, TNA.

¹³⁸ Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 245-246.

satisfactorily absorbed.” Nor could the British government compel the islanders to leave against their wishes.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, the British government took shaky steps to strengthen its control over the distant outpost. In 1938, Tristan da Cunha became a dependency of Saint Helena. This constituted a legal maneuver, for the incumbent missionary retained “administrative responsibility” for the island.¹⁴⁰ The Colonial Office also agreed to dispatch a supply-laden warship biannually and to contract a third-party shipping firm to send supplies annually.¹⁴¹

The outbreak of the Second World War, which prompted the British and South African governments to exploit Tristan da Cunha’s strategic assets, further bound the island to the empire. It began in 1941, when the Admiralty and Union of South Africa started discussing placing a joint meteorological station and communications hub in the archipelago. In addition to improved forecasting, which would assist convoys rounding the Cape of Good Hope, a high-frequency-direction-finding (HF/DF) station would facilitate the tracking of enemy submarines in the southern Atlantic.¹⁴²

Fearful of introducing British sailors and South African soldiers into a society that lacked an administrative apparatus, the Colonial Office moved to bestow “general authority” on a Royal Navy doctor.¹⁴³ In 1942, E.J.S. Woolley, the appointee, expanded government (see figure 1.5). He oversaw the constitution of the ten-person Island Council under the authority of Willie Repetto. It aimed “to advise on island affairs and to co-

¹³⁹ J.E. Shuckburgh to W.F. France, 23 May 1934, 1-2, USPG D384, BL.

¹⁴⁰ J.B. Sidebotham to Secretary, 31 March 1938, 2, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁴¹ J.B. Sidebotham to W.F. France, 31 May 1938, 1-3, USPG D477, BL.

¹⁴² Minutes of meeting, 29 October 1941, 1, CO 323/1828/54, TNA.

¹⁴³ W.J. Bigg to E. Gold, 21 October 1941, 1-2, CO 323/1828/54, TNA; illegible to Sir C. Parkinson, 29 November 1941, 1, CO 323/1828/54, TNA.

operate in the enforcement of law and order and in improvements in the conditions of the civilian population.”¹⁴⁴



Figure 1.5. Commander Woolley (in the forefront) gives remarks at the christening of H.M.S. “Atlantic Isle,” as Tristan da Cunha was codenamed during the war, on 15 June 1944. © IWM (A 29740), used with permission.

The enlargement of government yielded mixed results. “The islanders are obedient and amenable to discipline originating from an ‘outside’ source, particularly when that source is thought to be connected in some way with H.M. Government or with the flow of charity,” shared Woolley. As an extension of British power, the Island Council gradually commanded support. At the same time, skepticism of authority left the headman impotent “in the absence of a missionary or other authority.”¹⁴⁵

Woolley’s successor, H.S. Corfield, shared this jaundiced outlook. While the community increasingly participated in meetings of the Island Council, it mostly

¹⁴⁴ E.J.S. Woolley, Sixth Report on Job No. 9, 7 November 1942, 3, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

¹⁴⁵ E.J.S. Woolley, report on Tristan da Cunha, July 1944 [1962 copy], 11-12, FD 23/110, TNA.

functioned as gatherings for the medical officer to issue directives. Nor was the Island Council especially democratic. “A new council is usually elected every year, not necessarily by ballot, but at the choice of the Medical Officer-in-Charge,” explained Corfield.¹⁴⁶

IV

Questions about the future of the population lingered after the war. According to a brief prepared by Assistant Secretary A.H. Poynton, the government had two choices. The first involved the islanders remaining *in situ* with expanded “educational, medical and other facilities.” The second entailed the removal of “the community en bloc to another locality in which these facilities are already available.” Poynton recommended resettlement because of the costs associated with development and “the unfavourable geographical formation of the island, the very adverse weather conditions prevailing, and the inevitable effects of persistent in-breeding on a small community.”¹⁴⁷

Evacuation, especially to South Africa, still lacked the support of the islanders. In addition to the pull of home and misgivings about “the unknown,” the islanders reportedly worried about sacrificing their autonomy to compete in a tight labor market as low-skilled workers. The prospect of life in South Africa as a multiracial people “intensely loyal” to Britain only made this prospect more unappealing.¹⁴⁸ “Tales have reached these islanders from time to time with regard to the not altogether Christian racial classification which is the policy of the Union Government and I have heard the islanders

¹⁴⁶ H.S. Corfield, report on H.M.S. Atlantic Isle, 29 May 1946, 2, ADM 1/19705, TNA.

¹⁴⁷ Note on the future of Tristan da Cunha, Annex in A.H. Poynton to Offices of the Cabinet and Minister of Defence, 25 July 1945, 1-2, CAB 121/93, TNA.

¹⁴⁸ E.J.S. Woolley, report on Tristan da Cunha, July 1944 [1962 copy], 14-15, FD 23/110, TNA.

express the desire to never be forced to come under that Government,” reported Allan Crawford.¹⁴⁹

By the autumn of 1945, the Colonial Office had reluctantly accepted the unsuitability of South Africa and sought alternatives. Complicating the situation, the islanders’ prejudices toward darker-skinned people meant that the Colonial Office should avoid resettlement in “a country inhabited by a negroid race with whom they would never willingly intermarry.” With South Africa specifically and sub-Saharan Africa more generally deemed unfeasible, Saint Helena gained traction because its inhabitants spoke English, led an agrarian life, and shared “a racial background not unanalogous [*sic*] to that of the Tristanites.”¹⁵⁰

Concerns thwarted the plan’s implementation. The Treasury’s A.J.D. Winnifrith believed that transferring the community jeopardized the islanders’ unseasoned immune systems, overburdened Saint Helena’s economy, and drained the Exchequer’s coffers.¹⁵¹ The parsimonious Treasury instead agreed to finance a small-scale evacuation plan, provided that such a proposal received the islanders’ backing.¹⁵² Confronted with a welter of opinions, Arthur Creech Jones, Secretary of State for the Colonies, decided “to postpone a decision as to the removal of the community from the island in whole or in part, until an administrative officer has been appointed to the island and has had time to make recommendations in the matter.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Allan B. Crawford to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, South Africa, 26 September 1945, 1, USPG D510/3, BL.

¹⁵⁰ Note on Tristan da Cunha, n.d., 1-3, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁵¹ A.J.D. Winnifrith to J.B. Sidebotham, 2 May 1946, 1, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁵² A.J.D. Winnifrith to J.B. Sidebotham, 21 December 1946, 1-2, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁵³ E.L. Scott to Secretary, Treasury, 28 February 1947, 2, T 220/254, TNA.

The wishes of the community to stay, along with prohibitive costs and the strident white nationalism emanating from South Africa, had prevented removal. But the Colonial Office could no longer countenance a multiracial community existing as a loose, anarchical confederation of individual households under the nominal authority of the Repettos and intermittent missionaries. The exact replacement for this system, though, had yet to emerge.¹⁵⁴

A permanent fix came with the advent of the South African-run fishery in 1949. Worried about elevating a South African company to a position of prominence on an ostensibly British island with no formal administrative apparatus or legal protections, the Colonial Office moved to bolster its control.¹⁵⁵ Extending “portions of St. Helena legislation,” the Colonial Office sought to bring the island under “a formal body of law.” This legal regime would aid the “Administrator-Magistrate who would be in sole charge of the Island.”¹⁵⁶

As the inaugural administrator, Hugh Elliott tackled issues of law and order. He expanded the size of the Island Council and opened the body to women. In addition to the “Headman,” “Headwoman,” missionary, and Company officials, the enlarged council included ten male and five female islanders. To combat “petty offences,” Elliott empowered the Island Council to craft and apply byelaws.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ The Colonial Office debated the matter. See, for instance, J.B. Sidebotham to A.E.A. Sulston, 24 December 1946, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹⁵⁵ D. Kelvin Stark to W.A.J. Marshall, 31 July 1948, 1, T 220/254, TNA; D.B. Pitblado to J.J. Paskin, 9 July 1948, 2-3, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁵⁶ Note of a Meeting Held on the 23rd July to Discuss Proposals Put Forward by the Lambert’s Bay Canning Company in Connection with their Request for a Concession to Establish a Fisheries Industry on Tristan da Cunha, n.d., 1-2, CO 852/682/2, TNA. See, too, Proposals for the Establishment of an Administration in the Tristan da Cunha Group of Islands in Connection with the Grant of a Fisheries Concession to the Tristan da Cunha Exploration Company Proprietary Ltd, Memo C, in J.J. Paskin to D.B. Pitblado, 30 August 1948, T 220/254, TNA.

¹⁵⁷ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report on Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 4, 9-10, CO 1024/84, TNA.

The islanders distrusted these political and legal measures. The prevailing “mental indigestion among older men and women” arose from the long history of governmental non-involvement, which made the islanders reluctant to defer to compatriots or outsiders. Codifying and enforcing previously unwritten laws in a tight-knit community also conflicted with “a latent anarchism or antipathy to authority, the result of many years during which the smallness of the community in comparison with the abundance have made it possible to do without controls and regulations without prejudicing survival.”¹⁵⁸

Although frustrated, Elliott counseled patience on chauvinistic grounds. Like many Victorian visitors, Tristan da Cunha’s diversity bewildered him. He noted “the incredible racial admixture from the lad who looked like a pure Malay to the lass whom one would not be surprised to meet in Glasgow.” The presence of those resembling the latter, which blurred distinctions between colonizer and colonized, complicated the running of Tristan da Cunha. “The trouble is that because of the whitish skin and English speech of the Tristaners people expect too much of them and a rate of progress which they would never dream of in a bunch of Masai or Zulu or even of Polish peasants,” he sneered.¹⁵⁹

In 1952, Elliott called Tristan da Cunha’s first-ever election. During two days of gendered voting, all men and women over the age of eighteen separately cast ballots for male and female candidates.¹⁶⁰ Elliott wanted to create a government “fully representative of all sections of the community.” Thus, although the election intended to select ten male councilors, he expanded the number to fourteen to include a member of a

¹⁵⁸ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report on Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 9-10, 21, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁵⁹ Hugh Elliott diary, 21 February 1950, 22 March-25 March 1951 entries, vols. 1, 4, MSS.Atlan.s.1, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹⁶⁰ Hugh Elliott diary, 14 May-25 May 1952 entry, vol. 7, MSS.Atlan.s.7, BL.

marginalized family. With the inclusion of the five elected women, and the five *ex officio* members, the Island Council bloated to an unwieldy twenty-four. Elliott saw the election as a watershed. Over time, the Council had the potential to unite “this very individualistic community” and develop into a body that “can and should speak for the Island not merely for its individual Members.”¹⁶¹

J.P.L. Scott, Elliott’s successor, further entrenched the power of the administrator. In March he enacted the Tristan da Cunha Bye-Laws Ordinance, which “besides establishing the Council, empowered the Administrator both to impose a general tax and to make by-laws concerning practically any matter of local importance.” Hailed as bestowing “a somewhat more formal” footing to governing Tristan da Cunha, the Ordinance created an apparatus through which the administrator could legislate and thus exert additional influence on island affairs.¹⁶²

The islanders’ displayed ambivalence toward the administrator and the newly elected body. Instead of working through the administrator, they preferred the old system. “In purely domestic Island matters,” asserted Scott, “the Islanders seem to manage their affairs effectively enough with a mixture of anarchy and the minimum and somewhat nebulous authority of the Chief Islander.”¹⁶³ Likewise, while the islanders participated in regular Island Council meetings, they did so with little enthusiasm.¹⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the Island Council grew in stature throughout the 1950s. Enlivened by the election of younger, first-time members, it facilitated energetic debates about a

¹⁶¹ Extract of Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18 June 1952, 3-5, DOC MSS 002 0011 0005, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU; Hugh Elliott, Second Quarterly Report for Tristan da Cunha, 19 July 1952, 6, CO 1024/85, TNA.

¹⁶² J.P.L. Scott, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1952, 1-2, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁶³ J.P.L. Scott, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1953, 1, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁶⁴ Forsyth Thompson, Annual Report on Tristan da Cunha, 1955, 1-2, CO 1024/201, TNA.

number of important issues. “A marked improvement was noted in the readiness of the Councillors to speak out at meetings and at least one long and healthy discussion was held in which most Councillors took part,” observed then-administrator P.R. Forsyth Thompson (see figure 1.6).¹⁶⁵



Figure 1.6. P.R. Forsyth-Thompson, Prince Philip, Headwoman Martha Rogers, Mrs. Forsyth-Thompson, and Chief Willie Repetto during H.R.H. Duke of Edinburgh's visit in 1957. © IWM (A 33706), used with permission.

Nonetheless, elections and councilor turnover had failed to improve the efficacy of representative government by the end of the decade. On the contrary, the islanders showed indifference toward the new system. “It is not easy to stir up much enthusiasm in Council meetings,” wrote the next administrator Godfrey Harris, “and the only topics

¹⁶⁵ P.R. Forsyth Thompson, *Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1956*, 20 February 1957, 2-3, CO 1024/261, TNA.

which raise much response from the Members are to do with the Company, or trading with Ships.”¹⁶⁶

The imposition of government seemed an unwelcome intrusion. For over a century, the islanders had regulated themselves with virtually no input from Whitehall. As Harris complained, “the Tristan islanders are a proud and independent-minded people not prone, readily, to yield to authority over them and resentful of outside interference in their way of life.”¹⁶⁷

It did not help that the community disliked Harris. Allan Crawford reported that the islanders “hide their thoughts from him and even go so far as to smuggle letters out under the impression that he might see them.” Another opined that “Harris hasn’t got enough humility, charity or humanity to get on in a remote, eccentric and conservative community like Tristan.”¹⁶⁸

His preoccupation with deference and hardline stance certainly did little to curry support. “I have insisted on polite behaviour in my office,” wrote Harris, “and a few Sirs from the younger element.” He demanded obedience, remarking “unless they are made to toe the line sometimes we shall be landed with a difficult bunch of ‘Teddy Boys’ and no goal [*sic*] to put them in!”¹⁶⁹

Nor did bureaucratization and democratization allay Malthusian anxieties. “There is little doubt that Tristan is becoming over populated,” commented Harris, “and steps must be taken to provide for some outlet for the spill over.”¹⁷⁰ But removing the islanders

¹⁶⁶ G.F. Harris, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1957, 24 February 1958, 3, CO 1024/261, TNA.

¹⁶⁷ G.F. Harris, Notes for the Guidance of the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha, n.d., 6, CO 967/393, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ Illegible to R.H. Belcher, 21 February 1958, 1, DO 119/1461, TNA.

¹⁶⁹ G.F. Harris to C.G. Eastwood, 7 July 1958, 2, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹⁷⁰ G.F. Harris, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1958, 13 January 1959, 5, CO 1024/261, TNA.

encountered familiar obstacles like racially discriminatory immigration policies and the islanders' preferences as ardent monarchists who identified as "British" and "European."¹⁷¹ The Falkland Islands, where one family had recently settled, fleetingly appeared a viable alternative because of superficial similarities with Tristan da Cunha.¹⁷² But having experienced the desolation of the cattle industry, they soon returned.¹⁷³ Tristan da Cunha seemed an insoluble dilemma.

V

In the late austral winter and early spring of 1961, a series of tremors, which portended a volcanic eruption, frightened the community. In late September, the administrator requested that an "expert" survey Tristan da Cunha to determine whether "there is genuine danger and that the island must be evacuated."¹⁷⁴ Less than a month later, the volcano erupted (see figure 1.7). After fleeing to Nightingale, the islanders clambered aboard a Dutch liner for Cape Town.¹⁷⁵

On October 16, the M.V. *Tjisadane* sailed into Table Bay with 264 "grieved and shocked" evacuees aboard.¹⁷⁶ As "survivors of a great disaster" transiting through Cape Town, the islanders who "could pass for whites," as well as those who could not, received warm hospitality and exemptions to the immigration policies of the South

¹⁷¹ H.G. Stableford to G.F. Harris, report on the Future of Tristan—Agriculturally and Otherwise, July 1957, 4, CO 1024/235, TNA; G.F. Harris, Tristan da Cunha: Future Policy, 8 August 1957, 12, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹⁷² Philip H. Bell, "Tristan—Will Its People All Leave?" *The Cape Argus*, 9 January 1960.

¹⁷³ Peter A. Day, A Report on the First Quarter, 1961, Tristan da Cunha, 27 March 1961, 2, CO 1024/360, TNA.

¹⁷⁴ Peter Wheeler to R.G. Pettit, telegram no. 61A, 26 September 1961, CO 1024/396, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ Allan B. Crawford, "The Evacuation of Tristan da Cunha," Weather Bureau, Department of Transport, Union of South Africa, New Newsletter, October 1961, 156-157, MS 1531/1/2, Thomas H. Manning Polar Archive, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge (hereafter SPRI).

¹⁷⁶ Allan B. Crawford, "The Evacuation of Tristan da Cunha," Weather Bureau, Department of Transport, Union of South Africa, Newsletter, October 1961, 157, MS 1531/1/2, SPRI.

African government. “There was to be no colour bar for them,” explained Bernard Pouncefort.¹⁷⁷



Figure 1.7. View of the smoldering volcano during the visit of H.M.S. *Leopard* in 1961. © IWM (A 34530), used with permission.

Still, the Colonial Office hurried to transfer the islanders to Britain. Staying in South Africa would not only rupture the “extremely loyal” islanders’ connection to Britain and the monarchy, but would also leave them susceptible to virulent racism. Instead, the community-minded islanders, who lacked resistance “to common ailments of civilisation” and any “knowledge or understanding of the problems of living in towns,”

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Pouncefort to M.H. Morgan, 31 August 1971, 1, FCO 83/129, TNA.

needed to be ensconced as a group in rural Britain, preferably in “a small army camp, which is no longer in use.”¹⁷⁸

After disembarking in the port city of Southampton in November, the Colonial Office spirited the islanders to Pendell Camp, an abandoned army barracks in Surrey.¹⁷⁹ The rather bleak, cramped quarters served as temporary housing until the Colonial Office made long-term arrangements.¹⁸⁰ The Colonial Office envisioned a gradual acclimatization process, whereby the islanders would stay together until assimilated into the British population.¹⁸¹

The Colonial Office considered a number of sites for resettlement.¹⁸² But the desire to preserve the community as a whole curtailed the options. “The only possibility is to find a service camp which has just been given up,” the Colonial Office concluded. Calshot, a disused Royal Air Force married quarters on the coast with plentiful employment opportunities nearby, seemed ideal (see figure 1.8).¹⁸³

Although the move to Calshot, which occurred in January 1962, improved living conditions and secured employment in local industries, the islanders struggled to adjust.¹⁸⁴ They remained firm individualists who bridled at subordinating themselves to

¹⁷⁸ A.H. Poynton to Evelyn Sharp, 12 October 1961, 1, CO 1024/398, TNA. Within Britain, many deemed island-dotted Scotland an excellent site for resettlement. See, for instance, W. Runnell [?] to J.M. Kisch, October 1961, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA.

¹⁷⁹ Newsletter from Pendell Camp, Merstham, Surrey, n.d., 1, DO 119/1462, TNA.

¹⁸⁰ Hugh Fraser to Julian Amery, 23 November 1961, 1, CO 1024/398, TNA.

¹⁸¹ Illegible, file minute, 13 November 1961, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA.

¹⁸² On the various sites discussed, see, among others, W. Runnell [?] to J.M. Kisch, October 1961, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA; J.M.M., file minute, 14 November 1961, 1, CO 1024/398, TNA; Illegible to John Martin, file minute, 16 November 1961, CO 1024/398, TNA; Illegible, file minute, 20 November 1961, 1, CO 1024/398, TNA; unknown, file minute, n.d. [c.a. November 1961], 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA; J.M. Kisch to E.R. St. Aubrey Davies, 15 November 1961, 1, CO 1024/398, TNA; Record of a Meeting in the Colonial Office, 22 November 1961, 1-4, CO 1024/398, TNA.

¹⁸³ Illegible, file minute, 13 November 1961, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA.

¹⁸⁴ On the conditions at Calshot, see, Hugh Fraser [?] to Sir Hilton Poynton, file minute, 2 January 1962, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA. On employment, see G.H. Whitefield, report on the Resettlement of the Tristan da Cunha Islanders at Calshot, 7 February 1962, 1-2, CO 1024/398, TNA.

authority figures and smarted at the regimentation of daily schedules. Wage labor had other downsides, such as negotiating bureaucracies. Worse, the material rewards begotten through this system paled in comparison to those obtained less onerously on Tristan da Cunha.¹⁸⁵ Thus, as the islanders' petition to Elizabeth II underscored, they yearned "for the independence of our way of life."¹⁸⁶

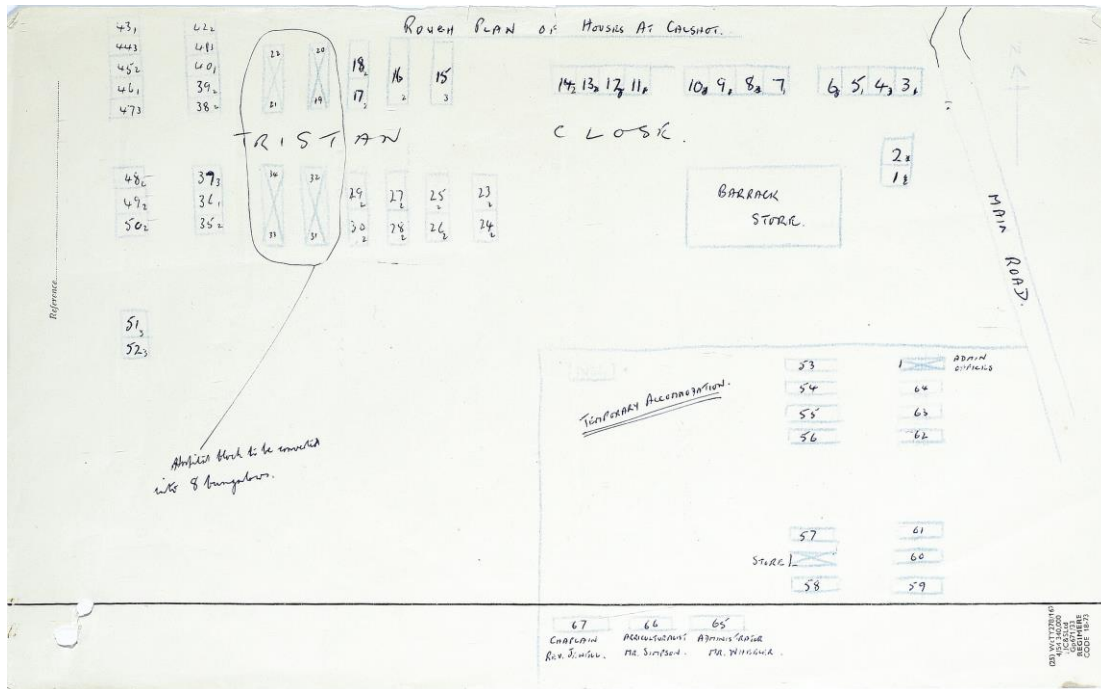


Figure 1.8. Drawing of the Calshot facilities. Although nameless and undated, the handwriting and positioning in the file suggests that Gordon H. Whitefield sketched the map in the winter of 1962. The National Archives, ref. CO 1024/398, used with permission.

Furthermore, the hostility the islanders experienced in Britain surpassed that of South Africa.¹⁸⁷ In Surrey, locals snubbed them and hurled xenophobic epithets.¹⁸⁸ One or more bigots in Yorkshire, meanwhile, dispatched letters that contained racist invective

¹⁸⁵ Gertrude Keir, "The Psychological Assessment of Children from the Island of Tristan da Cunha," in *Studies in Psychology*, eds. Charlotte Banks and P.L. Broadhurst (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), 130-131, 134.

¹⁸⁶ Martha Rogers and Willie Repetto to Queen Elizabeth II, 18 December 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Munch to Allan B. Crawford, 24 June 1971, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0092, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁸⁸ Bill Eyton Jones, "The Scandal of Tristan da Cunha: A Shambles of Official Bungling and Indifference," *Tit-Bits*, no. 3993 (15 September 1962), 25.

and death wishes. While some disregarded the letters as the musings “of a few crackpots,” others “thought the attitude expressed might be typical of a lot of English people’s feelings.”¹⁸⁹

By the spring of 1962, the respective positions of the islanders and Colonial Office had become irreconcilable. The wearied islanders demanded to return home. Yet, given that the smoldering volcano posed an ongoing threat to the community, most within the Colonial Office cautioned against repatriation. Keen to avoid “a hysterical outbreak,” which brusquely rejecting the islanders’ pleas for return supposedly might induce, the Colonial Office temporized. Citing the need for scientific evidence, they announced the impossibility of the islanders “going back this season.” Although ambiguous, it granted the Colonial Office “time and within a few months they may well have changed their present attitude.”¹⁹⁰

At this juncture, the resettlement of Tristan da Cunha seemed so unlikely that some advanced the empty island as a testing ground for nuclear weapons.¹⁹¹ It was not farfetched. Although the details remain hazy, in 1958 the United States Air Force had detonated a thermonuclear device in the stratosphere in the vicinity of Tristan da Cunha as part of top-secret “Operation Argus.”¹⁹²

While the islanders accepted the Colonial Office’s announcement with equanimity, they certainly did not want to see Tristan da Cunha leveled with an atomic blast and remained eager to return.¹⁹³ In July, Willie Repetto floated the idea that twelve

¹⁸⁹ Joseph B. Loudon, *Putting Wishes*, n.d., 1, DOC MSS 002 0012 0002, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹⁰ Illegible to Hugh Fraser, 16 May 1962, 1-2, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁹¹ HC Deb 20 February 1962, vol. 654, cols. 39-40.

¹⁹² Mark Wolverton, *Burning the Sky: Operation Argus and the Untold Story of the Cold War Nuclear Tests in Outer Space* (New York: Overlook Press, 2018), 9-10.

¹⁹³ See Eastwood to John Martin and Fraser, file minute, 31 May 1962, 1-2, CO 1024/399, TNA.

islanders plan and fund a reconnaissance trip.¹⁹⁴ The exasperated Colonial Office relented, though tacked on the proviso “that it should be an expedition to test the fitness of the island for resettlement and any decision on resettlement must be made only after a report has been submitted to the Colonial Office.”¹⁹⁵

The dozen islanders, as well as former agricultural officer and government representative H.G. Stableford, reached Tristan da Cunha in September. Having surveyed the situation, Stableford issued a report that endorsed resettlement under certain circumstances: extensive redevelopment, reconstitution of an administrative apparatus, and resurrection of the wireless station.¹⁹⁶ Even with affirmative findings, the government worried about incurring considerable expenses to resurrect “a small community which is bound over the years to degenerate,” or face extirpation from another volcanic blast.¹⁹⁷

However, the Colonial Office could no longer disregard the community’s preferences. Regardless of the fate of the Company’s obliterated freezing facilities, which emerged as the chief concern arising from Stableford’s report, a dormant volcano, the weight of public opinion, and the islanders’ steadfast demands for repatriation compelled the Colonial Office to capitulate.¹⁹⁸

Once committed to returning the islanders, the Colonial Office had two concerns. First, since the community did not enjoy complete unanimity about returning, the Colonial Office thought “it might be useful to arrange for a secret ballot to be taken at

¹⁹⁴ J.M. Kisch, file minute, 17 July 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁹⁵ R.G. Pettitt to F.G. Burrett, 31 July 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁹⁶ H.G. Stableford, report on Visit to Tristan da Cunha from 8th September to 3rd October, 1962, 1, 26, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁹⁷ Eastwood to N. Fisher, file minute, 2 November 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

¹⁹⁸ Colonial Office memo, 13 November 1962, 1-5, CO 1024/399, TNA.

Calshot in the near future.” Second, the eruption and abandonment had left the island in disarray. The Colonial Office therefore advocated for “an advance party to rehabilitate the land beaches, instal [*sic*] unloading winches, and repair the houses.” This vanguard would depart several months early to ready Tristan da Cunha to receive the remainder, who would follow in 1963.¹⁹⁹

In December, the Colonial Office polled adult islanders about whether they preferred to stay in Britain or return home. The community voted resoundingly for repatriation. In accordance with majority wishes, the Colonial Office made arrangements for the advanced guard to depart in February 1963.²⁰⁰

VI

The British sojourn had provoked a crisis of authority. Peter Day (see figure 1.9), who returned to Tristan da Cunha with the advance party to serve a second stint as administrator, perceived a change from the romanticized calm of the pre-eruption days. Exposure to “the temptations and pressures” of the wider world had revealed the islanders’ shortcomings, hastened the deterioration of the community, and threatened to precipitate “flouting established authority.”²⁰¹

Fearful that Tristan da Cunha would sink further into anarchy, Day took punitive steps to reassert the administrator’s power. During the resettlement of the island, he doubled the fines for offences and limited the amount of alcohol imported. “Respect for

¹⁹⁹ Nigel Fisher to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 November 1962, 1-2, CO 1024/399, TNA.

²⁰⁰ Nigel Fisher to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 December 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA. Twelve adult male islanders, their family members, and the families of the contingent who had departed with Stableford comprised the 51. See G.H. Whitefield to J.N. Elam, 11 December 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

²⁰¹ Peter A. Day, memorandum on Maintenance of Law and Order, n.d., 1-3, CO 1024/558, TNA.

law and order has been re-established without resorting to police forces and jails,” he boasted months after landing.²⁰²



Figure 1.9. Peter Munch photographs his nemesis, Peter Day (looking directly at the camera), during an island wedding, circa 1964-1965. Tristan Slide 2E24c, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

Day held the islanders in low repute. He regarded himself as “a hard master” dispatched to transform the stubborn and hopelessly retrograde community.²⁰³ Rather than consult, he preferred to dictate. “I’m not having any bunch of peasants thinking they can tell me what to do,” Day once thundered.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Peter A. Day, Tristan da Cunha: Report Covering the Resettlement Period March 1963 to December 1963, 25 September 1964, 5, 13, CO 1024/514, TNA.

²⁰³ Peter Day to Peter Munch, 6 June 1968, 2-3, DOC MSS 002 0004 0096, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Joe Loudon to Peter Munch, 6 February 1964, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0126, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

His dictatorial attitude did not confer legitimacy on the administrator's position. On the contrary, interfering in Tristan affairs further eroded the islanders' goodwill. As Peter Munch recorded, "the Administrator and the Colonial Office have undoubtedly lost some of their esteem in the eyes of the Islanders."²⁰⁵

Symptomatic of this, the novelty of popular politics had diminished. In 1964, one-third of women and two-thirds of men cast ballots for the Island Council. For Day, this paltry tally underscored "the apathy which is prevalent among Islanders for the Council, which by its nature is not truly representative and too unwieldy in its present form to be a useful instrument of local government."²⁰⁶

The office of the headman and especially headwoman appeared even more devoid of functionality. After the resignation of the incumbent headwoman in April 1964, Day, in consultation with the male-dominated Island Council, abolished the post. The position of headman endured, though deprived of more power than formerly. As Day observed, "the Headman is in no sense a real leader and is not an effective link between the Administrator and the people."²⁰⁷

During resettlement, the question of authority extended to academia. Following his 1937-1938 fieldwork, Munch returned to the University of Oslo. While working on his dissertation, Norway fell to the Nazis and the Gestapo imprisoned the left-leaning Munch. After liberation Munch finished his degree and immigrated to the United States, where the sociologist eventually secured a tenured position at Southern Illinois University (SIU). Although broadly interested in peasant societies, Munch had a special

²⁰⁵ Peter Munch to Irving Gane, 26 November 1965, 3, DOC MSS 002 0004 0112, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁰⁶ Peter A. Day, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1964, 22 February 1965, 2, CO 1024/514, TNA.

²⁰⁷ Peter A. Day, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1964, 22 February 1965, 2, CO 1024/514, TNA.

passion for Tristan da Cunha and spent most of his nearly two-decade-long career at SIU studying the island.²⁰⁸

Following the eruption, Munch sensed an opportunity. Flush with grant money, he appealed to the Colonial Office and the Medical Research Council (MRC), which had recently formed a Working Party to study the exiled islanders (see chapter four).²⁰⁹ Munch's research interests aligned with those of the Working Party's sociological component, so the MRC seized on his offer.²¹⁰

After conducting fieldwork in Calshot, Munch formulated a hypothesis on the islanders' post-eruption conception of authority. Building on the work of anthropologist Robert Redfield, who argued against understanding "primitive" societies in isolation, Munch interpreted the current conflict as a clash between the islanders' "culture" and the "superculture" of the world. Other than infrequent visitors or missionaries, the demise of sail had severed Tristan da Cunha's contact with the superculture. Seclusion, in turn, refashioned the "Outside World" into an awe-inspiring monolith. Such reverence had survived wartime occupation and the fishery. But evacuation and the efforts to thwart repatriation constituted "the point at which the Islanders' deference and obedience to the authority of the superculture reached its limit." In uncharacteristic solidarity, the islanders coalesced to contest the values "and institutions that have been superimposed upon a little community by the authority of the greater tradition."²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Charles R. Snyder, "Peter A. Munch, 1908-1984," *Footnotes* 12, no. 3 (1984), 16.

²⁰⁹ Peter A. Munch to Harold Lewis, 3 May 1962, 1, DOC MSS 002 0008 0010, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²¹⁰ Harold Lewis to Peter A. Munch, May 1962, 1, DOC MSS 002 0008 0010, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²¹¹ Peter A. Munch, "Culture and Superculture in a Displaced Community: Tristan da Cunha," *Ethnology* 3, no. 4 (1964), 369-376. For Robert Redfield's argument, see "The Social Organization of Tradition," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1955), 13-21.

Having identified a shift, Munch wanted to see how these changes shaped resettlement. “I know of no other case where a trained sociologist or social anthropologist has had an opportunity to observe a whole population removed from its original environment for a period for two years then repatriated,” he explained. “It comes quite close, in fact, to a controlled experiment.”²¹²

Peter Day saw Munch as useful to the colonial state. By “studying the problems of representation and leadership,” he thought sociology could help to resolve the difficulties in ruling a community predicated on “rugged individualism.”²¹³ The proposed collaboration had precedent. As students of “primitive” societies, social anthropologists and sociologists profited from, and indeed became integral in shaping, the expansion of development schemes across the post-war empire.²¹⁴

But social scientists like Munch sometimes undermined imperial rule.²¹⁵ Having suffered at the hands of the Nazis, he rejected authoritarianism and challenged “the White Man’s faith in the infallibility of ‘Progress.’” It saddened Munch to see traditional societies collapse under the weight of “Occidental commercialism, leaving them no choice but to become wage slaves and lackeys to external industrialism.”²¹⁶

Munch had no interest in seeing the Colonial Office develop a romanticized vision of traditional Tristan society into oblivion. On the contrary, he called for

²¹² Peter A. Munch to Peter A. Day, 2 May 1964, DOC MSS 002 0011 0003, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²¹³ Peter A. Day, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1964, 22 February 1965, 2, CO 1024/514, TNA.

²¹⁴ James Ferguson, “Anthropology and Its Evil Twin: ‘Development’ in the Constitution of a Discipline,” in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 150-175; George Steinmetz, “A Child of the Empire: British Sociology and Colonialism, 1940s-1960s,” *Journal of the Behavioral Sciences* 49, no. 4 (2013), 353-378.

²¹⁵ Ferguson, “Anthropology and Its Evil Twin,” 150-175; Foks, “Social Anthropology and British Society,” ch. 4; Steinmetz, “A Child of the Empire,” 353-378.

²¹⁶ Peter Munch to Nigel Wace, 8 July 1969, 1-2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0156, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

protecting Tristan da Cunha as “a rare and unique form of human life.”²¹⁷ His perspective aligned with anthropologists, most notably Claude Lévi-Strauss, who continued to embrace the concept of “salvage,” shielding “primitive” cultures and peoples from the onslaught of civilization and development.²¹⁸

Despite this anti-imperial agenda, Munch secured permission to research on Tristan da Cunha.²¹⁹ During Munch’s 1964-1965 trip, he enjoyed the administration’s full support. “Peter Day is very cooperative and helpful,” he reported, “and although he started out by giving me several lectures about the Islanders and how I ought to go about my work, he now does not interfere with any work at all.”²²⁰

Predictably, Munch wove his research into a critique of colonial governance, particularly the assault on “principled anarchy,” and emphasis on development. He asserted that the islanders had tolerated “the absolute but protective and benevolent power of the British Crown,” but now bridled at the disorienting economic transformations underway. Tensions developed because the administrator, who had embraced “the ethos of the Economic Man,” was trying to crush independence by coercing the islanders into relying on fishing wages.²²¹

A shared draft of the article, which cast Day as a modernizing “villain,” upset the erstwhile administrator, who had transitioned to a managerial role in the Company. Day expressed “dismay” at Munch’s piece, which contained “innuendo, omissions and

²¹⁷ Peter Munch to Nigel Wace, 8 July 1969, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0156, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²¹⁸ Jacob Gruber, “Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology,” *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 6 (1970), 1289-1299; Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future,” *Current Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (1966), 124-127.

²¹⁹ Peter A. Munch to Harold Lewis, 27 June 1964, 1, DOC MSS 002 0008 0010, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²⁰ Peter A. Munch to Harold E. Lewis, 9 December 1964, 2, DOC MSS 002 0008 0010, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²¹ Peter A. Munch, “Economic Development and Conflicting Values: A Social Experiment in Tristan da Cunha,” *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 6 (1970), 1307-1308, 1313-1317.

statements that are just not true! [*sic*].” More damning, he questioned sociology’s value and Munch’s objectivity.²²²

Munch defended himself. He noted “the wall of shrewd non-commitment on the part of the Islanders that separated the Village from the Station,” which limited the information reaching the administrator. The gulf prevented Day from truly appreciating how the islanders perceived the person and policies of the administrator, who symbolized “the authority of the Crown.” As Munch explained, “the fact that you were the sole maker of ‘laws,’ to the extent that practically every word you spoke as an Administrator was regarded as ‘law,’ then you will realize that the image that the Islanders had of you, however exaggerated, was a formidable factor in their lives, perhaps more so than with most other Administrators they had in the past.”²²³ Nevertheless, he apologized for some muddled points and losing critical distance at times, though to no avail. Day henceforth held a grudge against the sociologist.²²⁴

Meanwhile, before Day had departed and the feud with Munch had reached its denouement, the administrator again raised the specter of migration. The fishing industry, he claimed, could not provide for all in the burgeoning community. “Some form of limited emigration, with assistance from the Administration, will probably be necessary in about three to four years time,” Day concluded.²²⁵

Although Day advocated delaying the emigration plan until at least 1967, the Colonial Office, keen to ease population pressures and to ensure a Tristan diaspora in

²²² Peter A. Day to Peter A. Munch, 4 March 1968, 1, 6, DOC MSS 002 0004 0096, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²³ Peter A. Munch to Peter A. Day, 20 March 1968, 1, 3-5, 7-9, DOC MSS 002 0004 0096, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²⁴ Peter A. Day to Peter A. Munch, 2 December 1971, 1-2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0096, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²⁵ Peter A. Day, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1964, 22 February 1965, 14, CO 1024/514, TNA.

Britain, proceeded forthwith.²²⁶ In April 1966, thirty-five islanders returned to Britain. These immigrants joined twenty islanders who had remained in Calshot or had left earlier. It amounted to one-fifth of Tristan da Cunha's population. (Once again homesick and dissatisfied with Britain, most eventually drifted back to Tristan da Cunha.)²²⁷

Yet the crusade to depopulate Tristan da Cunha had fallen out of favor. Since the Colonial Office had expended considerable funds resettling the island, they had no intention of bankrolling any further large-scale migrations. Henceforth prospective immigrants to Britain had to pay their own way, while disaffected returnees to Tristan da Cunha would receive a loan covering a maximum of half the ticket price. Also, after decades of discussion, the Colonial Office deemed apartheid an insurmountable barrier to relocating the islanders to South Africa.²²⁸

The shift from dissolving to retaining the community made Tristan da Cunha an outlier by the late 1960s. Tristan da Cunha bucked the general decolonizing trend for two reasons. Emotionally, the islanders had no interest in severing the cherished link with Britain.²²⁹ Practically, the island remained far too small and remote for anything but continued dependency.²³⁰

Instead of downplaying imperialism, on Tristan da Cunha the Colonial Office actually celebrated the institution. In 1966, Tristan da Cunha entered its one hundred and fiftieth year of British rule. The sesquicentennial called for festivities on both sides of the Atlantic. On Tristan da Cunha, a play, display, treasure hunt, gala, and other events

²²⁶ Peter A. Day to R. Garth Pettitt, 12 November 1965, 1-2, CO 1024/545, TNA; R.G. Pettitt, file minute, 15 November 1965, 1-3, CO 1024/545, TNA.

²²⁷ Munch, *Crisis in Utopia*, 290-291, 295, 298-301.

²²⁸ Record of a meeting held in the Colonial Office, 31 May 1966, 1-3, FCO 44/1769, TNA.

²²⁹ Notes of Discussions with Mr. B. Watkins, Administrator Tristan da Cunha, held in the Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Overseas Development, November/December 1967, 9, FCO 42/285, TNA.

²³⁰ Tristan da Cunha (with Inaccessible, Nightingale and Gough Islands), memorandum, n.d. [c.a. 1967], 2-3, FCO 42/285, TNA.

commemorated the day.²³¹ In Britain, meanwhile, the Commonwealth Institute featured an exhibition, the BBC established a radio connection, and the post office issued a special stamp.²³²

The merriment had a purpose, namely to reaffirm the linkages between Britain and Tristan da Cunha. Elizabeth II conveyed felicitations and commended “the courage and determination of all who have made their homes on this lonely island in the past and especially of those who, after the volcano had destroyed their livelihood, returned with their families to start life there again.”²³³ In acknowledgement, the Island Council released a statement of loyalty. They expressed “heartfelt thanks for the benefits which we have received in those years as Loyal Subjects of the Crown,” as well as promised “that nothing will ever change the attachment which the people of this island feel for Great Britain or the continuance of their loyalty and devotion to Your Majesty’s Throne and Person.”²³⁴

But Tristan da Cunha’s continued and anomalous association with Britain presented challenges. With the death of the evacuation movement, as well as shelving of decolonization talk, a different set of issues gripped Whitehall. “Tristan da Cunha is, on the face of it, a territory whose important problems are practical rather than political,” explained J.S. Bennett.²³⁵ Like Saint Helena, where top-down reform was taking place,

²³¹ Administrator, Tristan da Cunha, to R.G. Pettitt, 29 May 1966, 1, CO 1024/603, TNA.

²³² Press Brief, 150th Anniversary of Tristan-da-Cunha: Anniversary Celebrations on Tristan and in Britain, 29 July 1966, 1, CO 1024/603, TNA.

²³³ Secretary of State for the Colonies to Administrator, Tristan da Cunha, 2 August 1966, 1, CO 1024/603, TNA.

²³⁴ Administrator and Chief Islander, Loyal Address to Queen, 15 August 1966, 1-2, CO 1024/603, TNA.

²³⁵ J.S. Bennett to Staveley, file minute, 2 November 1967, 1, FCO 42/283, TNA.

modernization and bureaucratization henceforth formed the primary concern of Tristan da Cunha's administrators, including Brian Watkins.²³⁶

Born into a working-class family in depression-era Wales, Watkins attended the London School of Economics, where the "staunch young Liberal" recoiled at radical politics. To protest "an anti-Monarchist article in the student newspaper," he vacated the position of Vice President of the Students' Union. Following graduation and National Service, Watkins joined the Colonial Office in 1958. Posted to Sierra Leone, he served as an Assistant District Commissioner in Port Loko, where his enthusiasm for law and constitutionalism grew. He did not hold the position for long. In 1961, Watkins witnessed the lowering of the Union Jack for the last time. He served briefly in an independent Sierra Leone before retiring from colonial service. Shortly thereafter, however, he accepted a request to govern "that remote and isolated outpost of what remained of the British Empire." Deference to tradition, an interest in constitutionalism, and a sense of imperial retreat defined Watkins' years on Tristan da Cunha.²³⁷

Arriving in 1966, Watkins inherited a clunky, inefficient government apparatus. The Island Council needed trimming and energizing, while sub-committees should assume "more responsibility." The government needed to devolve power to the islanders, who proved reluctant to participate in the Island Council.²³⁸

In November, Watkins passed rules concerning the election of the Island Council. It provided for the community to submit nominations for the newly pruned Island Council, which would accommodate eight men and four women. An election, in which

²³⁶ Stephen Constantine, "Governor Sir John Field in St Helena: Democratic Reform in a Small British Colony, 1962-68," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 4 (2016), 672-696.

²³⁷ On Watkins life prior to Tristan da Cunha, see Brian Watkins, *Feathers on the Brain! A Memoir* (Vancouver: Oscar's Books 2011), chs. 1-4.

²³⁸ Extract of letter from John Field, 27 May 1966, 1, CO 1024/599, TNA.

all nonexempt community had to vote, would only occur if the number of nominees exceeded twelve.²³⁹

The January elections seemed to reinvigorate democracy on Tristan da Cunha. “It was clear during the year that the efforts to bring the Islanders through their Councillors into closer touch with the government was appreciated,” wrote Watkins. Heartened by these “encouraging” results, he looked forward to implementing further constitutional reforms.²⁴⁰

This included democratizing and improving the efficacy of the office of Chief Islander. Watkins deemed the presiding Chief Islander as “ineffective and not highly regarded by the Islanders,” which handicapped the administrator. He, along with councilors, hoped for someone “to whom the Administrator could turn for general service as the spokesman for the Council.”²⁴¹ But instead of appointing the Chief Islander to serve indefinitely, selection should henceforth rest with democratically elected councilors casting secret ballots at set intervals.²⁴²

Watkins’ professed support for democratization masked a craving for power. He spoke unabashedly of the “imperial nature” of the administration. As the Crown’s representative on the island, Watkins sought “to restore to the office of Administrator the prestige and authority it was in danger of losing.”²⁴³

²³⁹ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha By-Law Ordinance, Rules No. 1 of 1966, Rules Governing Election to the Island Council, 15 November 1966, 1-3, FCO 42/284, TNA.

²⁴⁰ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Report, 1967, 17 February 1968, 3, 17-18, FCO 42/290, TNA.

²⁴¹ Brian Watkins to M.S. Staveley, 25 May 1968, 1-2, FCO 42/283, TNA.

²⁴² Memo: Proposals for Revision of Island Council, n.d., 2, FCO 42/283, TNA.

²⁴³ Britain Watkins, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1966, 28 January 1967, 3, FCO 42/290, TNA.

Convinced of the linkages between ceremonialism and authority, Watkins relished the trappings of imperial power.²⁴⁴ He trundled along a Lilliputian network of newly asphalted streets named after administrators, including himself, in a Land Rover spacious enough to accommodate “cocked hats and dress swords.”²⁴⁵ Watkins grandiloquently appointed a secretarial assistant, adopted the honorific “His Honour,” and referred to the administrator’s dwelling as “Government House” or “The Residency” (see figure 1.10).²⁴⁶



Figure 1.10. “The Residency” in 1964. Tristan Slide 1F19b, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

²⁴⁴ On prestige and pageantry, see Christopher Prior, *Exporting Empire: Africa, Colonial Officials and the Construction of the Imperial State, c. 1900-39* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), ch. 4; Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 165-210; Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, esp. 220-236.

²⁴⁵ Tony Hocking, “1969 A.D. Comes to Tristan da Cunha,” *The Star Johannesburg*, 3 June 1969, newspaper clipping, DOC MSS 002 0003 0023, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU; Peter Munch to Doreen Gooch, 25 March 1968, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0116, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁴⁶ M.S. Staveley to Sir John field, 18 April 1968, 1, FCO 42/285, TNA.

Watkins' passion for pageantry attracted ridicule. During the visit of H.M.S. *Kent*, naval officer Anthony Whetstone chortled at "seeing a British colonial governor complete with ostrich feather hat stepping out of a helicopter to call on the captain."²⁴⁷ Similarly, Evelyn Davies, wife of the incumbent missionary, expressed dismay "at the changes made by the New Admin and the pomp and splendour of the Residency."²⁴⁸ Even Watkins' colleagues thought the administrator "a little pompous" and mocked his "'empire building' tendencies."²⁴⁹

Contemporaries thought Watkins' initiatives plucked from a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, which delighted in satirizing the grandiose ambitions of imperial bureaucrats.²⁵⁰ "To run a 'mid-ocean village' such as Tristan in such a way is a real piece of Gilbertian nonsense," scoffed an observer.²⁵¹ The administration, echoed schoolteacher Keith Flint, "seems to have been a complete Gilbertian turn, and while he probably had care for the good of the Islanders he seems to have had at least as much for his own status and 'kingship'!"²⁵²

While perhaps haughtier than his predecessors, Watkins remained a creature of the colonial service, which nurtured a self-aggrandizing, sycophantic culture. Tristan da Cunha's remoteness exacerbated the preoccupation with status by granting unprecedented

²⁴⁷ Anthony J. Whetstone, interview by Conrad Wood, 7 July 2000, reel 2, 20513, Imperial War Museum, London.

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Doreen Gooch to Peter A. Munch, 9 November 1966, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0115, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁴⁹ Memorandum of talks with Britain Watkins, 4 January 1968, 2, FCO 42/285, TNA.

²⁵⁰ Derek B. Scott, "English National Identity and the Comic Operas of Gilbert and Sullivan," in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 3, eds. Peter Horton and Bennett Zon (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 137-152. For a countervailing view, see David Cannadine, "Gilbert and Sullivan: The Making and Un-Making of a British 'Tradition,'" in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 19-22.

²⁵¹ Tristan Investments (Pty) Ltd., Wages—Island Fishermen, n.d., 5-6, FCO 42/287, TNA.

²⁵² Keith Flint to Peter Munch, 30 April 1970, DOC MSS 002 0004 0106, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

autonomy in running the island.²⁵³ With no rival bureaucrats present on the island, and the supervising governor located on far-away Saint Helena, the administrator became an omniscient “Poo-Bah.”²⁵⁴ The Colonial Office understood that wielding power “in such an isolated and independent position” had the potential to despotize. To guard against the emergence of a possible “tin-god,” by Watkins’ tenure the Colonial Office had limited administrators to one tour.²⁵⁵

Despite the sense of omnipotence, Watkins struggled to exert control over the community, which increasingly contested the imposition of outside authority. According to Watkins, “the character and outlook for the Islanders has changed considerably since their return from the U.K., and that it will be and indeed already is much more difficult to bluff them than before.” Fishing wages, more than anything else, revealed the newfound resolve.²⁵⁶

Despite a recently arbitrated pay bump, the islanders continued to seethe over the Company’s rates.²⁵⁷ Citing an increase in the cost of living, the “Fishing Committee,” a union for fishermen, appealed for a 96-percent raise in wages in August 1968. Dubious of the veracity of the cost-of-living claims, fearful of setting a Company-wide precedent, and disenchanted with the islanders’ work ethic, management countered with a significantly lower offer and assurances of double pay on Sundays and holidays. When the Company refused the Fishing Committee’s counteroffer, a group of islanders launched a strike.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Prior, *Exporting Empire*, chs. 1, 3, 6.

²⁵⁴ R.G. Pettitt, file minute, 2 March 1967, 3, FCO 42/283, TNA.

²⁵⁵ Christopher G. Eastwood to John Field, 22 February 1966, 1, CO 1024/571, TNA.

²⁵⁶ Brian Watkins to R.G. Pettitt, 16 February 1967, 1-2, FCO 42/292, TNA.

²⁵⁷ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Report, 1967, 17 February 1968, 6, FCO 42/290, TNA.

²⁵⁸ Memo, Tristan Investments (Pty) Ltd., Wages—Island Fishermen, n.d., 2-5, FCO 42/287, TNA.

The strike had “clear political over-tones” and anti-colonial impulses. It morphed into a challenge of the growing authority of the administration and the arrogance of the Company. The fury that the islanders harbored for the outsiders led to imprecations and threats of violence.²⁵⁹ Fortunately, the islanders and Company peacefully reached an agreement by late October.²⁶⁰

But the islanders’ grievances with the administrator and constitutional reform outlasted the strike. In August 1969, passage of the Island Council Ordinance shrank to eight the number of elected members, stipulated that only one councilor needed to be a woman, and transformed the selection process for the position of Chief Islander.²⁶¹ After a round of elections, J.I.H. Fleming, who had succeeded Watkins, convened the Island Council and appealed for nominations for Chief Islander. Fleming’s request rankled councilors Basil Lavarello and Benny Green, who “expressed strong dis-satisfaction that the selection of Chief Islander was not being made by ‘the whole island.’” Undeterred, Fleming proceeded with the selection protocol, which yielded Harold Green as the lone nominee. Following Harold Green’s automatic selection, Lavarello and Green resigned as council members.²⁶² The resignations demonstrated that the community opposed any further advances that bolstered the administrator’s hand, as well as that the position of chief had become accepted as legitimate and useful.

Once tensions subsided, Fleming reported few problems in early sessions of the Island Council.²⁶³ Still, Fleming and the Foreign Commonwealth Office (FCO), as the

²⁵⁹ Brian Watkins to Commonwealth Office, telegram no. 192, 16 September 1968, 1, FCO 42/287, TNA.

²⁶⁰ Brian Watkins to FCO, telegram no. 200, 24 October 1968, 1, FCO 42/401, TNA.

²⁶¹ See An Ordinance to Provide for a Council and for the Making of By-Laws and Levying of Taxes in Tristan da Cunha, 29 August 1969, FCO 42/397, TNA.

²⁶² J.I.H. Fleming to J. Mark A. Herdman, 6 February 1970, 1-2, FCO 42/497, TNA.

²⁶³ J.I.H. Fleming to J.M.A. Herdman, 28 March 1970, 1, FCO 42/497, TNA.

Colonial Office became known following its merger with the Foreign Office, began to discuss opening the position of Chief Islander to a community-wide vote.²⁶⁴ Given the failure of Watkins' constitutional innovation, with the passage of an amendment in 1972 the selection of the Chief Islander reverted to the individual that received the most votes.²⁶⁵

Despite the FCO's volte-face, Fleming soon fell out of favor with the islanders. In another act of community protest, in 1974 the islanders petitioned the FCO over the passage of the "Protection of Government Property By-Law." To appease expatriate staff, who resented the noise associated with children playing in the "Station" on Sundays, Fleming had crafted "a simple by-law whereby it would be an offence for anyone to be on Government property outwith working hours without due authority."²⁶⁶ Fleming's overreaction to minor noise disturbances generated "strong feeling locally which was aimed at the Administration."²⁶⁷

Legislating such trivial matters spoke to how administrators treated Tristan da Cunha as a fiefdom in which to wallow in imperial nostalgia, which implies a sense of loss.²⁶⁸ The French writer Hervé Bazin, who authored a fictionalized account of the evacuation and repatriation, grasped Tristan da Cunha's significance to the British and role in the imperial imagination. "They were losing whole provinces, whole countries even, with apparent unconcern, in that vast ebbing of the white tide that was leaving the strained links of Empire high and dry," he noted. In this disorienting process, Tristan da

²⁶⁴ See Note of Discussions about Tristan da Cunha Island Council Ordinance No. 3 of 1969, 9 June 1970, 1-4, FCO 42/497, TNA.

²⁶⁵ S.G. Trees, Government of Tristan da Cunha, Government Gazette, May 1976, 1, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

²⁶⁶ T. Oates to W.T.A. Cox, 9 January 1975, 1, FCO 44/1263, TNA.

²⁶⁷ Stan G. Trees to Mary E. Hunt, 12 August 1975, FCO 44/1263, TNA.

²⁶⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

Cunha transformed into an imperial oasis in the emerging post-colonial world. Bazin concluded, “an island, a tiny island with the Union Jack still fluttering atop of it in the sulphurous vapors, O myth of Empire, waken from your slumbers!”²⁶⁹

A sense of wistful longing suffused the reports of Stanley Trees, who replaced Fleming. He luxuriated in the administrative perquisites of insularity. As Trees recorded, “it is refreshing to serve in and report on a small and isolated Dependency which is so free of the many problems besetting other territories within and without the Commonwealth.”²⁷⁰ In the absence of popular politics or nettlesome “politicians seeking power,” authority rested with eleven (eight elected, three appointed) council members, who supposedly deferred to the administrator (with veto privileges) and hewed to “the attitude that ‘Father knows best.’”²⁷¹

Despite this paternalistic attitude, the negative associations with the administration and constitutional reform had dissipated by the late 1970s. Although the islanders “maintained a strong characteristic of independence,” collective bodies like the Island Council had attained improved standing.²⁷² In 1979, nearly three-quarters of eligible voters cast ballots for the Island Council.²⁷³

Nevertheless, the islanders maintained complicated relations with Britain. Decades of meddling and exile abroad had made them warier of “the word of the British expatriate.”²⁷⁴ But at the same time, Trees observed that the islanders remained

²⁶⁹ Hervé Bazin, *Tristan: A Novel*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 75-76.

²⁷⁰ Stanley G. Trees, *Tristan da Cunha Annual Review*, July 1975-July 1976, 1, FCO 44/1383, TNA.

²⁷¹ Stanley G. Trees, *Tristan da Cunha Annual Review*, 1 July 1977 to 30 June 1978, July 1978, 1, FCO 44/1766, TNA.

²⁷² Stanley G. Trees, *Tristan da Cunha Annual Review*, July 1975-July 1976, 2-3, FCO 44/1383, TNA.

²⁷³ Eddie C. Brooks, *Government of Tristan da Cunha Government Gazette*, June 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²⁷⁴ G.C. Guy, *Notes on Tristan da Cunha*: 5-12 1978, 3-4, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

“extremely loyal to the Crown” and “consider themselves British.”²⁷⁵ Such sentiments made the British Nationality Act (1981), which removed the guaranteed right to residence of inhabitants from newly minted “British Dependent Territories,” sting even more.²⁷⁶ By further effacing the islanders’ already fragile British identity, and erecting another bulwark to equality, the Act engendered fierce resentment. As in the past, the islanders yearned “for a gesture that would acknowledge the warmth, generosity and loyalty always given towards Britain and the Crown.”²⁷⁷

VII

As a remote, uninhabited island, Tristan da Cunha inspired grand visions. Disillusioned with British society, William Glass and his followers abolished private property, disavowed hierarchies, and embraced communalism. But like all utopian endeavors, the experiment unraveled. An influx of settlers caused fractures that never mended. In response, the firm splintered into a loose confederation of self-sufficient households.

The islanders’ anarchical social order imperiled the values and objectives of Colonial Office mandarins, who exploited hierarchies to dominate foreign societies. Concerned about anarchism, particularly among an isolated, multiracial, and tenuously British community, the Colonial Office worked to bolster the authority of European-born patriarchs and missionaries.

For the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century the islanders confounded the Colonial Office’s initiatives. They endowed the position of chief with symbolic meaning, though resisted efforts to make the office a mouthpiece of missionaries or administrators.

²⁷⁵ S.G. Trees, *Tristan da Cunha Annual Review*, 1 July 1977 to 30 June 1978, July 1978, 1, FCO 44/1766, TNA.

²⁷⁶ See Robert Moore, “The Debris of Empire: The 1981 Nationality Act and the Oceanic Dependent Territories,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 19, no. 1 (2000), esp. 3.

²⁷⁷ Robert Kauders, “A Tristan Year,” *The Geographical Magazine* 59, no. 2 (1987), 72.

While frustrated with this recalcitrance, Tristan da Cunha's isolation gave the Colonial Office few options, save evacuation, which haunted the community.

Invoking patriotism ensured that the islanders remained on Tristan da Cunha, but with greater supervision. Unable to evacuate the islanders, the Colonial Office implemented direct rule and turned to democratization and bureaucratization in the 1950s. These initiatives did not provoke significant backlash until the 1960s and 1970s, when the islanders fought to return to Tristan da Cunha and to wrest control of the community from imperious administrators.

Despite periodic clashes, administrators relished wielding authority over this tiny community. As a small, bounded space seemingly immune to anti-colonial impulses, Tristan da Cunha enabled administrators to luxuriate in imperial splendor without engaging in political debates or repression. By the late 1970s, Tristan da Cunha enjoyed esteem as one of the last imperial territories.

Tristan da Cunha's insularity, then, had benefits and pitfalls for islanders and administrators alike. Marginality, as well as the defiance of its inhabitants, kept the island unmoored from the empire and impervious to the dictates of London for over a century. Existing beyond the reach of Whitehall and secluded from the empire-building project created opportunities for the islanders to pursue a decentralized social order. The remote island's anarchical social structure resisted all efforts at centralization. Once gradually and imperfectly brought within the yoke of direct rule, isolation afforded administrators an opportunity to strive for omnipotence and to act out imperial fantasies of control. As chapter two reveals, seclusion presented metropolitan escapists with equally seductive opportunities.

Chapter 2

Dreamers

In 1943, Reverend Walter France, Oversea Secretary of the SPG, found himself managing the missionary organization's global affairs at the height of the Second World War. Overburdened and perhaps suffering the strain of such weighty circumstances, France showed little sympathy for the SPG's mission on Tristan da Cunha, whose "isolation makes it a 'focus' for the escapist day-dreaming of all sorts of otherwise sane people." "It so far commands dramatic attention that, while a famine in India or China affecting millions will be dismissed in 2 lines in the press, yet the potato crop on the Island can command 'head-lines,'" he grumbled.¹

As France suggests, although islands have long kindled utopian visions, Tristan da Cunha's insularity exercised a surprisingly powerful and disproportionately large hold over the metropolitan imagination.² Few historians have explored why the island attracted a degree of attention incommensurate with its microscopic size. Lance van Sittert regards this fascination as the product of island amanuenses and metropolitan philanthropists, who idealized the island as a "pre-industrial England displaced into the south Atlantic and frozen in time by isolation," during the interwar period.³ In a study spanning a larger swath of time, Thierry Rousset similarly argues that representations of the island alternated between "site of degeneration" and "Romantic English rural idyll."⁴

¹ W.F. France to E.J.S. Woolley, 20 April 1943, 1, USPG CLS 291, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (hereafter BL).

² John R. Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

³ Lance van Sittert, "Begging Letters: Tin Trunk Literacy and the Empathy Economy of Tristan da Cunha, c. 1900-1939," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 44, no. 2 (2016), 271.

⁴ Thierry Jean-Marie Rousset, "Island Bodies: Registers of Race and 'Englishness' on Tristan da Cunha, c. 1811-c. 1940," (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2017), 259.

While bucolic charm seduced many, so too did the intrinsic cachet associated with Tristan da Cunha laying claim to the title of “the loneliest inhabited island in the world.”⁵ The gradual shrinking of geographic space, which advances in nautical, aeronautical, and broadcasting technologies made possible, endowed isolation with many positive valences and lent inaccessible spaces like Tristan da Cunha a romantic aura. As steamships, telegraphs, radios, televisions, and airplanes gradually penetrated and interlaced remote areas, locales that avoided such intrusions obtained a special distinction that for many merited sentimentalizing.

Tristan da Cunha’s colonization coincided with industrialization, which unleashed technologies that reimagined geographic space.⁶ In the 1810s, when the first settlers arrived on Tristan da Cunha, conveying people, goods, and information across the immensity of the ocean required significant time, demanded skill, and courted catastrophe. By the late nineteenth century, however, telegraphy and steam-powered propulsion had shortened distance, as well as accelerated the speed and increased the ease of exchanges between geographic points.⁷

Paradoxically, while gutta-percha cables and coal-fired boilers had shrunk the globe, the island stood apart until the Second World War. Deemed too marginal for enhanced communications or frequent visits, Tristan da Cunha lay beyond all telegraphic circuits and the routes of most steamers. Moreover, when wireless transmissions and

⁵ Allan B. Crawford, “Tristan da Cunha Had World’s Smallest Army,” *The Outspan*, 15 February 1946, 37.

⁶ On the shrinking of space in the late-modern period, see Barney Warf, *Time-Space Compression: Historical Geographies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), ch. 4. On the British context specifically, see Duncan S.A. Bell, “Dissolving Distance: Technology, Space, and Empire in British Political Thought, 1770-1900,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005), 523-562.

⁷ See, among others, Douglas R. Burgess, Jr., *Engines of Empire: Steamships and the Victorian Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

airplanes further eroded distance in the early twentieth century, Tristan da Cunha did not benefit. Marooned in the southern Atlantic on the cusp of the blustery Roaring Forties, Tristan da Cunha's poor weather and sheer cliffs prevented the island from enjoying visits from airplanes or reliable wireless communications. With limited maritime traffic, and reaching Tristan da Cunha through telegraphy, wireless transmissions, and airplanes rendered impracticable or impossible, the island remained extremely isolated through the mid-twentieth century. This made the island an intriguing anomaly in an increasingly interconnected world. In an epoch famed for multiplying connections, Tristan da Cunha's intense seclusion gained legions of admirers.

Tristan da Cunha especially fascinated metropolitan collectors, who pursued hard-to-get objects, such as model boats and penguin-skin mats, fashioned on the remote island. Embodying more than souvenirs of place, the popularity and meanings attached to these curios reveal the centrality of collecting to imperialism. Through acquisition, circulation, and display, these artifacts communicated the oddity of Tristan da Cunha's exceptional isolation to metropolitan audiences.⁸

Philately figured as a particular focus for collectors. Stamps held tremendous importance for imperial authorities. The artwork and iconography emblazoned on them not only visually conveyed the empire and monarchy to users, but postal connections

⁸ On imperialism and collecting, see Diarmid A. Finnegan and Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *Spaces of Global Knowledge: Exhibition, Encounter and Exchange in an Age of Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. part 2; Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display: Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013); Sarah Longair and John McAleer, eds., *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Annabel Cooper, Lachy Peterson, and Angela Wanhalla, eds., *The Lives of Colonial Objects* (Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2015); Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture and the Conquest of the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

bound the metropolitan core to the imperial periphery.⁹ Philately thus functioned as a form of imaginative voyaging and vicarious imperialism that enabled collectors to access distant Tristan da Cunha from the comfort of their parlors.

Tourism offered another outlet for fulfilling escapist fantasies. Imperialism spawned “empires of travel,” spaces loosely bound together through, among other things, the flow of people, including cruise ship passengers.¹⁰ Tristan da Cunha proved especially attractive for adventurers because the colony existed well outside the reach of “civilization” and therefore offered a respite from “the humdrum of the ordinary life.” By visiting Tristan da Cunha, globetrotters obtained an “authentic” glimpse of an allegedly elemental society spared the ills of civilization.¹¹

Realizing these “primitive” fantasies required the cooperation of the islanders, who readily played the Victorian and Edwardian role of “living curiosities” well into the twentieth century.¹² Without access to much-needed goods, the cash-strapped islanders

⁹ Keith Jeffrey, “Crown, Communication and the Colonial Post: Stamps, the Monarchy and the British Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006) 45-70.

¹⁰ On networked conceptions of empire, see David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Alan Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006), 124-141. On “empires of travel,” see John M. Mackenzie, “Empires of Travel: British Guide Books and Cultural Imperialism in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” in *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict*, ed. John K. Walton (Clevedon, Buffalo, and Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2005), 19-20. On the relationship between imperialism and tourism, see Shelley Baranowski et al., “Discussion: Tourism and Empire,” *Journal of Tourism History* 7, nos. 1-2 (2015), 100-130. For an Anglo-centric approach, see Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan, eds., *Travellers and Tourists*, vol. 1 of *The British Abroad Since the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Martin Farr and Xavier Guégan, eds., *Experiencing Imperialism*, vol. 2 of *The British Abroad since the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Martin Anderson, “The Development of British Tourism in Egypt, 1815 to 1850,” *Journal of Tourism History* 4, no. 3 (2012), 259-279; F. Robert Hunter, “Tourism and Empire: The Thomas Cook and Son Enterprise on the Nile, 1868-1914,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 5 (2004), 28-54.

¹¹ Robert J. Gordon, introduction *Tarzan was an Eco-Tourist...and Other Tales in the Anthropology of Adventure*, eds. Luis A. Vivanco and Robert J. Gordon (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 3-6.

¹² On primitivism as an intellectual and aesthetic movement, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990). On “living curiosities” and ethnographic spectacle, see Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on Parade: Exhibitions, Empire, and*

turned to soliciting donations from metropolitan benefactors through the post or in person aboard passing cruise liners. Capitalizing on the allure of objects and people from remote places, the islanders exchanged souvenirs and stamps, as well as engaged in staged spectacles, for material gain.

The military occupation, as well as the commencement of commercial crayfish operations, brought reliable communications, paid wages, expanded access to consumer goods, and introduced a steady stream of outsiders. Expanding connections and socio-economic change, which intensified in the 1950s and especially after the volcanic eruption of 1961, challenged the mythical stature that extreme isolation had long conferred on Tristan da Cunha. As Tristan da Cunha began to resemble and to communicate more frequently with the outside world, the island became less appealing to some escapists.

Nevertheless, insularity ensured that Tristan da Cunha retained its cachet throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Although more connected than previously, the inability to land airplanes or to receive television broadcasts meant that radio transmissions and ships still remained the only means of reaching or conveying information to Tristan da Cunha. This kept the island fairly inaccessible and exceptionally remote. As a result, while some questioned romantic imaginings of isolation, most did not. Tristan da Cunha's seclusion, which had few equivalents in the

Anthropology in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 8. See, too, Pascal Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empire*, trans. Teresa Bridgeman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), esp. the introduction and chs. 2, 4, 16, 18, 22; Roslyn Poignant, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester and Dover, NH: Manchester University Press, 1984), ch. 4.

late twentieth century, guaranteed that the island continued to hold a place of prominence in stamp albums, itineraries, and imaginations.

The ineradicable appeal of Tristan da Cunha owed much not only to the timelessness of utopian longings for places far removed from civilization, but also the palliative effect that such fantasies offered for the specific and ever-shifting anxieties animating metropolitan society. During the interwar period, when the world suffered economic collapse and lurched toward another global conflict, outsiders styled the island as a peaceful refuge. Similarly, as atomic fears gripped the world in the 1950s, Tristan da Cunha seemed to offer a haven from potential nuclear fallout. And, when Britons began to doubt the benefits of consumerism in the 1960s, a fishing community in the South Atlantic tantalized as a pre-capitalist oasis. In short, dreamers imputed to Tristan da Cunha qualities, such as peacefulness and authenticity, found wanting in their own societies. “It is a simple psychological fact that the ‘escapist’ idealizes his ‘projection’ and would see Utopia in any projection,” Reverend France remarked of Tristan da Cunha’s admirers.¹³

Thus, while the islanders shaped perceptions of Tristan da Cunha, the romantic discourse primarily reflected the subjective and shifting preoccupations of outsiders. Scientist Martin Holdgate noticed that short-term visitors “go away loud in their praise,” while those “who stay longer sometimes seem to become disillusioned, speaking of the islanders in far different terms.” The variable opinions had little to do with the islanders, but rather “a change in the minds of the visitors themselves.” “At first contact,” he opined, “the friendliness and simplicity of island life, and its freedom from trials peculiar to an urban civilisation, are tremendously attractive.” “Later,” he continued, “comes the

¹³ W.F. France to E.J.S. Woolley, 20 April 1943, 2, USPG CLS 291, BL.

realisation that the islanders are not paragons of virtue; they are ordinary people, with the normal mixture of human failings.”¹⁴

The emotional state of the observer, which often sunk after prolonged periods of isolation, also informed why individuals frequently came to reimagine Tristan da Cunha over the course of a stay. As a spate of recent scholarship has underscored, how people experience and perceive emotions has evolved through time and space.¹⁵ The application of this insight to the study of empires has illuminated the romantic associations as well as the negative emotional and psychological consequences, including alienation, alarm, terror, and breakdowns, that governing tracts of tropical land and hostile populations commonly induced among colonizers.¹⁶ As of late, attention has shifted to more banal, though nonetheless powerful, sentiments like boredom that manifested in imperial

¹⁴ Martin Holdgate, *Mountains in the Sea: The Story of the Gough Island Expedition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1958), 207-208.

¹⁵ For an introduction to the history of emotion, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002), 821-845; Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge and Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018); Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

¹⁶ On sentimentality, see Joanna Lewis, *Empire of Sentiment: The Death of Livingstone and the Myth of Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). On imperial worry, see Ranajit Guha, “Not at Home in Empire,” *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997), 482-493; Harald Fischer-Tiné, ed., *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Robert Peckham, ed., *Empires of Panic: Epidemics and Colonial Anxieties* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015); Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum, eds., *Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization* (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013); Kim A. Wagner, “‘Treading upon Fires’: The ‘Mutiny’-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India,” *Past and Present* 218 (2013), 159-197; Nancy R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016). On psychological disorders among the colonizers, especially in the supposedly enervating tropical settings, see Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800-58* (London, New York, and Delhi: Anthem Press, 2010); Dane Kennedy, “Diagnosing the Colonial Dilemma: Tropical Neurasthenia and the Alienated Briton,” in *Decentering Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World*, ed. Dane Kennedy and Durba Ghosh (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006), 157-181; Dane Kennedy, “Minds in Crisis: Medico-moral Theories of Disorder in the Late Colonial World,” in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings*, 27-47; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), ch. 5; Anna Crozier, “What Was Tropical about Tropical Neurasthenia? The Utility of the Diagnosis in the Management of British East Africa,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 64, no. 4 (2009), 518-548.

contexts.¹⁷ Building on this corpus, this chapter elucidates the oft-overlooked effects of loneliness on those serving in colonial outposts.¹⁸ In so doing, the case of Tristan da Cunha highlights the disjuncture between metropolitan idealizing and the harsh lived experience that so often characterized the imperial project.¹⁹

I

At the apex of the Romantic era, when settlers began arriving on Tristan da Cunha, the oceanic expanse that separated the island from Britain represented “a great void” with contradictory associations. The sea symbolized beauty, adventure, and opportunity. It facilitated introspection, discovery, and the accumulation of wealth. Simultaneously, however, the vast expanses of the ocean remained places fraught with danger. Even with the new panoply of nautical technologies, the sea resisted human control, menaced wind-powered ships, and claimed lives.²⁰

In consonance with this image of oceanic spaces, early nineteenth-century visitors construed Tristan da Cunha as strategically valuable but geographically dangerous. Captain Abraham Cloete, the Afrikaner who commanded Britain’s short-lived garrison, remarked that passing mariners from the United States, France, and the Netherlands “all expressed themselves, in terms of the greatest surprise that their respective Governments should not have taken possession of an Island which nature seemed to have placed so immediately in the track to the East, and in such a peculiar situation, as nearly to divide

¹⁷ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁸ Fay Bound Alberti, “This ‘Modern Epidemic’: Loneliness as an Emotion Cluster and a Neglected Subject in the History of Emotions,” *Emotion Review* 10, no. 3 (2018), 242-243, 252.

¹⁹ Andrekos Varnava, “El Doardos, Utopias and Dystopias in Imperialism and Colonial Settlement,” in *Imperial Expectations and Realities: El Dorados, Utopias and Dystopias*, ed. Andrekos Varnava (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 1-25.

²⁰ See Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ch. 4, esp. 113-124; Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), ch. 2.

in two equal parts so long a voyage.” At the same, the tempestuous climate and “the rocky nature of the ground” made calling at the island a formidable challenge. In fact, because of these “almost insurmountable obstacles,” Captain Cloete had to abandon two attempts at surveying Tristan da Cunha.²¹

These rocky, windswept shoals caused the demise of many ships. The settlement witnessed its first nautical tragedy in 1817, when a swell buffeted the H.M.S. *Julia*. The moored ship consequently took “a sudden plunge” and “parted the smaller bower, carried away the jib-boom, and tore in the three foremost ports.” Confronted with a hopelessly immobilized vessel, “the officers agreed to the propriety of running her on the beach,” where the H.M.S. *Julia* splintered into pieces, killing fifty-five crewmembers.²² It inaugurated a century of shipwrecks. Between 1817 and 1898, the archipelago claimed at least eighteen vessels through blazes, deliberate groundings, abandonments, and accidental wrecks.²³

Surviving a shipwreck marked the beginning of a trying ordeal, for castaways sometimes waited long stretches to secure passage home. In 1824, Augustus Earle endured eight months of isolation on Tristan da Cunha after the *Duke of Gloucester* departed abruptly, stranding the hapless artist. In an otherwise romantic account, he described the maddening experience of ships skirting Tristan da Cunha without stopping (see figure 2.1). With every missed opportunity, Earle grew gloomier about escaping his “miserable imprisonment on this wretched island.” As he hoped for a swift end to “this

²¹ Abraham Josias Cloete to Lord Charles Somerset, 23 April 1817, in *Records of the Cape Colony from November 1815 to May 1818*, vol. 11, ed. George McCall Theal (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1902), 301-303.

²² Captain Jones to Rear Admiral Plampin, 17 October 1817, *Records of the Cape Colony from November 1815 to May 1818*, vol. 11, 397-398.

²³ W. Hammond Tooke, report on Tristan da Cunha, 4 July 1904, Enclosure, No. 9, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3098 (London: HMSO, 1906), 41.

painful sojourn,” the coastline loomed large. “I sit for hours together watching the horizon,” Earle wrote, “with the faint hope of catching sight of a vessel, and thinking of my friends in England.”²⁴



Figure 2.1. Augustus Earle, “Solitude, watching the horizon at sun set, in the hopes of seeing a vessel, Tristan de Acunha [i.e. da Cunha] in the South Atlantic,” 1824, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134493611, used with permission.

To be sure, not all visitors suffered such calamities or harbored negative views of the island. For instance, during a brief respite in 1829, Benjamin Morrell, captain of an American whaler, found much to commend about the isolated community. “We found only seven families on this island, living a retired life, far from the bustle and confusion

²⁴ Augustus Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand, in 1827; together with a Journal of a Residence in Tristan D'Acunha, an Island Situated between South America and the Cape of Good Hope* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 334-336, 341-342, 362-364.

of the world, and happy within themselves, having at their command all the necessities and many of the comforts of life,” he recalled.²⁵

But the misfortunes of stranded seafarers overshadowed these positive accounts and led to Tristan da Cunha gaining an invidious reputation in shipping directories and periodicals. In 1817, D.H. Kolff of the *Dourga*, a Dutch vessel en route to the East Indies, described the formidable approach to the island. “Its shores were steep and lined with alternate patches of sand and rock,” he wrote, “against which the sea beat with great violence.”²⁶ In 1826, James Horsburgh offered a stern warning to prospective visitors: “It is dangerous to anchor without great caution, as the sea rises suddenly prior to a strong N.W. or North wind, which is liable to drive a ship on the rocks if she cut or slip from her anchor in order to gain an offing.”²⁷ Captain James Liddell also portrayed the island as perilously inaccessible. “I would desire to caution all from calculating with any confidence even on communicating,” he counseled, “since, in two instances, when purposing to touch there, the boisterous weather prevented us, and out of our four visits (all in the summer season) the last was the only one in which we were favoured with fine weather.”²⁸ By the 1830s, many sailors regarded Tristan da Cunha as “the most dangerous coast upon which any vessel could be driven.”²⁹

²⁵ Benjamin Morrell, *Four Voyages, to the South Sea, North and South Pacific Ocean, Chinese Sea, Ethiopic and Southern Atlantic Ocean, Indian and Antarctic Ocean* (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1832), 351.

²⁶ D.H. Kolff, *Voyages of the Dutch Brig of War Dourga, through the Southern and Little-Known Parts of the Moluccan Archipelago, and along the Previously Unknown Southern Coast of New Guinea, performed during the Years 1825 and 1826*, trans. George Windsor Earl (London: James Madden and Company, 1840), 2.

²⁷ James Horsburgh, *India Directory, or Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the Interjacent [sic] Ports: Compiled Chiefly from Original Journals at the East India House, and from Observations and Remarks, Made during Twenty-One Years Experience Navigating in Those Seas*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (London: Kingsbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1826), 74.

²⁸ James Liddell to editor, 2 December 1835, in “Tristan d’Acunha,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 5, no. 52 (June 1836), 339.

²⁹ “Shipwreck of the *Blendenhall*,” *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal* 5, no. 240 (3 September 1836), 253.

Until the mid-century, accounts continued to emphasize the difficulty and grave risks involved with visiting Tristan da Cunha. The island's location, which seldom offered "two successive days' steadiness of wind, weather, or swell," threatened anchored vessels. Safely visiting the community depended on timing, with the comparatively halcyon spring and summer presenting less danger than fall and winter, as well as maintaining distance from the perilous shoreline. As Captain H.M. Denham informed mariners, "the swell which attends the brief calm preceding the change of the wind on shore, (North and N.W.) would be very likely to snap his cable, or jerk his anchor home, and be drifted on the rocky shore."³⁰ M.S. Nolloth, commanding officer of H.M.S. *Frolic*, likewise stressed the imperative of never coming "nearer than two miles to any part of the coast, however promising the appearance of the weather, and not to anchor."³¹

Although whalers, sealers, and other passing vessels seeking victuals guaranteed contact with the outside world, dangerous conditions did little to entice visitors and the island suffered increasingly protracted periods of isolation. "The little settlement of Tristan d'Acunha is for certain the one most remote from every other inhabited place to be found in the whole world," opined Reverend W.F. Taylor, who ministered for six years on the island. He struggled to adjust, writing: "to one used almost his whole life to the noise and bustle of the largest city in the world, it was no small change to come to the loneliness of Tristan, where, for the first seven months after my arrival, scarcely once was another face to be seen save those immediately around me, and one day was spent as

³⁰ H.M. Denham, "A Day at Tristan D'Acunha," *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 22, no. 4 (April 1853), 157, 184 [185 incorrectly paginated as 157].

³¹ M.S. Nolloth, "Visit of H.M.S. 'Frolic' to Tristan da Cunha," *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 25, no. 8 (August 1856), 410.

like other days as could be.”³² The island’s isolation and sense of loneliness worsened over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

II

The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed a gradual reconceptualization of time and space that elevated the standing of remote, hard-to-reach places like Tristan da Cunha. From the 1850s onward, people, commodities, and information began to flow between geographic points with decreasing effort and at speeds previously thought unimaginable.³³ It owed much to the wonders of telegraphy and steam engines.³⁴ As cables and coal shrank the world, the dwindling number of isolated locales like Tristan da Cunha grabbed the attention of escapists, philatelists, and tourists. While neither universally nor uncritically accepted, Tristan da Cunha had intoxicated enough metropolitan dreamers to coalesce into a mass, organized movement by the eve of the Second World War.

In an age of rapid travel and proliferating connections, far-away Tristan da Cunha struck late nineteenth-century observers as an inexplicable oddity. “It seems surprising that people can be found to leave associations and friends, and isolate themselves in such an out-of-the-way place as this, more remote from other inhabited places than any other settlement on the face of the globe,” remarked William Spry of H.M.S. *Challenger*.³⁵

³² William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D’Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 2, 65-66.

³³ See Jeremy Stein, “Reflections on Time, Time-Space Compression and Technology in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, eds. Jon May and Nigel Thrift (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 106-119; Iwan Rhys Morus, “‘The Nervous System of Britain’: Space, Time and the Electric Telegraph in the Victorian Age,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 4 (2000), 455-475.

³⁴ Burgess, Jr., *Engines of Empire*; Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World*.

³⁵ William J.J. Spry, *The Cruise of Her Majesty’s Ship “Challenger”: Voyages over Many Seas, Scenes in Many Lands* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1877), 94.

Living in such exceptional isolation began to confer prestige on the community, which redounded to the benefit of the islanders. Charles Wyville Thomson, chief scientist aboard H.M.S. *Challenger*, reported: “Their isolation and their respectability, maintained certainly with great resolution and under trying circumstances, include a perhaps somewhat unreasonable sympathy for them, which they by no means discourage, and which usually manifests in substantial gifts.”³⁶

Indeed, John Milner and Oswald Brierly, who accompanied Prince Albert, Duke of Edinburgh, on an around-the-world voyage (1867-1868) that included Tristan da Cunha as a stop, romanticized visiting such an isolated place.³⁷ “Those who go down to the sea in ships may, despite the usually prosaic nature of their calling, sometimes realize situations bordering upon romance, and encounter such facts as fiction is made up of,” they enthused. The verisimilitude between Tristan da Cunha, where a band of intrepid settlers had eked an existence from a resource-strapped island, and the plots of adventure novels like Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* stoked their imaginations. The stopover evidently left Prince Albert smitten as well, for the Duke of Edinburgh lavished gifts on the community, including 240 pounds of chocolate.³⁸

This romantic, Defoesque isolation inspired novelists, who deployed familiar tropes of exile and haven. In Anne Manning’s *Belforest: A Tale of English Country Life* (1865), Captain Homer commands a detachment on Tristan da Cunha and tries to

³⁶ Sir C. Wyville Thomson, *The Voyage of the “Challenger”: The Atlantic: A Preliminary Account of the General Results of the Exploring Voyage of H.M.S. “Challenger” during the Year 1873 and the Early Part of the Year 1876*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1878), 142.

³⁷ On oceangoing monarchs, including Prince Albert, see Miriam Magdalena Schneider, *The ‘Sailor Prince’ in the Age of Empire: Creating a Monarchical Brand in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³⁸ Reverend John Milner and Oswald Brierly, *The Cruise of H.M.S. Galatea, Captain H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., in 1867-1868* (London: W.H. Allen and Company, 1869), 28, 37.

convince his wife to join him in “monotonous isolation.”³⁹ In John C. Hutcheson’s fictionalization (1886) of the real-life story of the Stoltenhoff brothers from Germany, a fraternal duo colonizes Inaccessible Island. Harboring rosy visions of “crusoe life” and fortunes from sealing, the two begin to feel “shut in entirely” and depart “its deadly monotony and dreary solitude” after two years.⁴⁰ In the final volume of William Clark Russel’s *The Convict Ship* (1895), Marian Johnstone sneaks aboard a vessel carrying her wrongly convicted betrothed, Captain Butler, to Tasmania. Eager to escape unjust punishment and separation, the couple, along with a small band, resolves to refuge “in the middle of the ocean in the very loneliest of the islands that are washed by salt water.” Upon arriving at Tristan da Cunha, however, the party encounters those guilty of framing Captain Butler and extracts a confession, thereby obviating the need to seek permanent haven there.⁴¹

Most famously, though, French author Jules Verne, who stood at the vanguard of a literary movement interested in exploring the socio-cultural implications of technology’s enhanced reach, incorporated the island into the plots of two globe-girdling, swashbuckling stories.⁴² Verne drew inspiration from and even rewrote some of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, whom he had long idolized.⁴³ In one of the more staid chapters of Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), the

³⁹ Anne Manning, *Belforest: A Tale of English Country Life*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1865), 186-187.

⁴⁰ John C. Hutcheson, *Fritz and Eric; or, The Brother Crusoes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), 226, 359, 424. For the Stoltenhoff’s account, see “Two Years on Inaccessible,” *The Cape Monthly Magazine* 7, no. 42 (1873), 321-337.

⁴¹ W. Clark Russell, *The Convict Ship*, vol. 3 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1895), chs. 39-45, quote at 153.

⁴² On Verne’s role in this movement, see Rosalind Williams, *The Triumph of the Human Empire: Verne, Morris, and Stevenson at the End of the World* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), esp. part one.

⁴³ Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 205-213.

eponymous protagonist calls at Tristan da Cunha for provisions and “five hundred sealskins and some ivory.”⁴⁴ Similarly, in Verne’s *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant* (1867-1868), which reached English-speaking audiences as *In Search of the Castaways* in 1873, Tristan da Cunha, styled as a refuge for “seals and Robinsons,” figured as a locale in a multi-sited, coal-fueled search for a missing English sea captain.⁴⁵ In *Les Sphinx des Glaces* (1897), which became known in English as *An Antarctic Mystery* in 1898, Tristan da Cunha likewise provided the backdrop for, among other things, a manhunt across the “lonely isles in the wilderness of the south Atlantic.”⁴⁶

As Verne’s works suggest, the ability to reach remote places had expanded. Yet by 1906, when Reverend J.G. Barrow and his wife Katherine Barrow left for Tristan da Cunha, eighteen vessels, including a mere four steamships, visited the island.⁴⁷ High costs rather than sheer distance kept mariners away from the island. Although a steamship from South Africa could reach Tristan da Cunha within ten days, most balked at footing the £400 bill for a round-trip journey.⁴⁸ The sparsely inhabited island held little of economic or strategic value. As H.L. Watts-Jones and F.F. Lobbs summarized, guano,

⁴⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838), 133-136.

⁴⁵ Jules Verne, *In Search of the Castaways; Or, The Children of Captain Grant*, vol. 4 of *Works of Jules Verne*, ed. Charles F. Horne (New York and London: F. Tyler Daniels Company, Inc. 1911), 178-181.

⁴⁶ Jules Verne, *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, trans. Frederick Paul Walter (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 60-61.

⁴⁷ On the volume of maritime traffic in the early twentieth century, see table 1 in Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945), 40.

⁴⁸ J.G. Barrow to Colonial Office, 15 July 1906, Enclosure 1, No. 2, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3764 (London: HMSO, 1907), 2; W. Hammond Tooke, report on Tristan da Cunha, 4 July 1904, Enclosure, No. 9, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1906), 40-41.

telegraphy, and castaways “seem to be the only reasons that can be imagined for occupying the island.”⁴⁹

The dearth of maritime traffic, as well as the absence of telegraphic connections, made Tristan da Cunha an even lonelier destination for long-term residents like the Barrows, who stayed on the island until 1909. Katherine equated disembarking on Tristan da Cunha to “leaving the world behind us.” The island afforded a degree of solitude with few parallels. “When on higher ground and looking at the expanse of ocean one realizes more than ever how we are cut off from the rest of the world,” she observed.⁵⁰

At the same time, mounting isolation worked to heighten the interest of escapists, who bemoaned the ills of mechanized civilization. According to one account, the alleged lack of avarice and crime bespoke a veritable utopia: “Nature has been at no pains to prepare an earthly paradise on this lonely isle. Its remoteness from the world of strife and unrest is what has contributed most to the establishment of an Arcadia there.”⁵¹ French explorer and one-time visitor Raymond Rallier du Baty agreed that living without “the vices of civilisation” had produced an upstanding, law-abiding community. “Truly,” he reflected, “on this lonely rock in the South Atlantic, we have a people who belong rather to the Pastoral Age of the world than to our modern unrestful [*sic*] life, and who, without theory or politics or written laws, have reached that state which has been described by the imaginative writers of all ages, haunted by the thought of the decadent morality of the seething cities, as the Golden Age or the Millennium.”⁵²

⁴⁹ H.L. Watts-Jones and F.F. Lobb, report on visit of H.M.S. *Thrush*, January 1903, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 1600 (London: HMSO, 1903), 17.

⁵⁰ K.M. Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1910), 7, 91-92.

⁵¹ “Here is a Happy Land: No Money, No Law, No Taxes, No Crime, No Vices,” *The Washington Post*, 22 May 1904.

⁵² Raymond Rallier du Baty, *15,000 Miles in a Ketch* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1912), 102-103.

Despite such paeans extolling the virtues of isolation, many tried to establish closer contact with Tristan da Cunha, particularly after the First World War, when advances first in radiotelegraphy—using radio waves to send and receive messages through Morse code—and later voice broadcasting promised to conquer isolation and unite Britain’s far-flung empire.⁵³ (In fact, optimists celebrated Tristan da Cunha as an untapped and potentially invaluable communications hub that could better link South America and Africa.)⁵⁴ Conversant with the rudiments of Morse code, Reverend Henry Rogers hopefully transported “a wireless receiving set” to Tristan da Cunha in April 1922.⁵⁵ It lay quiescent until June, when the islanders and crew of the visiting *Quest* damaged the apparatus during installation. With “irreparable” harm done, they “had to content themselves with erecting about two-thirds of the original length,” which guaranteed that wireless telegraphy on the island would not work “to any epoch-making extent.”⁵⁶

Throughout the interwar period, radio worked sporadically, if at all. In 1928, Reverend Robert Pooley, who, along with layman Philip Lindsay, had succeeded Reverend Rogers, reported that the wireless set lacked sufficient “battery power” and

⁵³ On the development, applications, and limits of wireless in the imperial context, see Peter J. Hugill, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), esp. ch. 4; Daniel R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851-1945* (Oxford and New York: University of Oxford Press, 1991), esp. ch. 7; Priya Satia, “War, Wireless, and Empire: Marconi and the British Warfare State, 1896-1903,” *Technology and Culture* 51, no. 4 (2010), 829-853; Aitor Anduaga, *Wireless and Empire: Geopolitics, Radio Industry and Ionosphere in the British Empire, 1918-1939* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 56-71; Simon J. Potter, “Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007), 621-645; Simon J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴ Douglas Gane, Tristan da Cunha pamphlet, 20 June 1922, 2, CB 9, Royal Geographical Society, London (hereafter RGS).

⁵⁵ Percy A. Snell to Herbert Stanley, 30 December 1931, 1, ADM 123/97, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter TNA).

⁵⁶ Scout Marr, *Into the Frozen South* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1923), 211.

therefore remained “too weak to work.”⁵⁷ Experts, including the naval telegraphists aboard H.M.S. *Carlisle*, which visited in 1932, asserted that transmission remained possible, though finding an adequate power source would be “much more difficult.”⁵⁸ This left Reverend Harold Wilde pining for radio during his first stint ministering on the island.⁵⁹ Accordingly, the minister brought along a wind-powered radio, which aimed to resolve the problem by harnessing the island’s notorious gusts, at the beginning of his second term in 1937.⁶⁰ Instead, the winds battered the apparatus, thereby depriving him of any further transmissions.⁶¹ Even the Norwegian Scientific Expedition’s trained radioman only once succeeded in getting a reply (from a whaler 350 nautical miles away) to endless wireless transmissions. The volcanic peak and low wattage simply smothered the signals.⁶² As a result, months elapsed before Wilde or the islanders received word of the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe.⁶³

By ascending above the thick cloudbank and choppy seas, many also entertained the possibility of aircraft bringing Tristan da Cunha within reach. “The day cannot be far distant when the inhabitants of ‘the lonely island’ will experience the surprise of a visit by air in much the same way as in those earlier days they had the surprise visit by steamship,” glowed one optimist.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ R.A.C. Pooley to A. Macleod Murray, March 1928, 2, USPG D320, BL.

⁵⁸ F.R. Barry to Commander-in-Chief, Africa State, 12 January 1932, 1-3, TNA.

⁵⁹ Harold Wilde to W.F. France, 19 July 1935 excerpt, 30, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

⁶⁰ “Tristan Can Get Opera Now,” *Star*, n.d. [c.a. 1937], newspaper clipping, USPG C/TDC/1, BL; “Glad to Go to Loneliest Island,” *News Chronicle*, n.d., newspaper clipping, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

⁶¹ G.B.B. Hawkins, report on visit of H.M.S. *Bermuda*, 29 August 1940, 5-6, USPG D510/2, BL.

⁶² Erling Christophersen, *Tristan da Cunha: The Lonely Isle*, trans. R.L. Benham (London: Cassell, 1940), 219-221.

⁶³ “Tristan and the War,” script, *The World Goes By*, 30 April 1941, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park (hereafter BBCWAC).

⁶⁴ Douglas Gane, “The People of Tristan,” *The Times*, 19 October 1931.

In reality, integrating Tristan da Cunha into air routes proved nigh impossible. Having just morphed from the “wood-framed bi-plane structure covered in fabric to an all-metal stressed skin monoplane,” aviation remained in its infancy, particularly in Britain. Although these characteristically “modern aircraft” obtained higher speeds and better maneuverability, deficiencies hampered long-distance travel.⁶⁵ For many destinations across the empire, limited range and necessity of regular refueling meant air travel had little to commend over steamers.⁶⁶

Forbidding geography compounded the difficulty of bringing Tristan da Cunha within the reach of these primitive machines. “As a ‘half-way house’ for aeroplanes and airships Tristan is useless—it is a volcanic peak with hardly an acre of flat land anywhere,” concluded one visitor.⁶⁷ The experts from the Royal Navy agreed. Gusty winds, opaque fog, and rough, uneven topography militated against safely landing airplanes.⁶⁸

The shortcomings of radiotelegraphy and airpower left missionaries precariously dependent on establishing contact with scarce vessels. But Tristan da Cunha’s formidable shores hindered easy landing. Any vessel, cautioned Frank Wild of the *Quest*, “should be prepared to spend at least a week at Tristan da Cunha.” He rationalized the long stay for a host of reasons: “there is no good shelter, and on many days a landing could not be

⁶⁵ Peter Fearon “The Growth of Aviation in Britain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (1985), 29; Peter J. Lyth, “The History of Commercial Air Transport: A Progress Report, 1953-93,” *The Journal of Transport History* 14, no. 2 (1993), 167.

⁶⁶ Gordon H. Pirie, “Passenger Traffic in the 1930s on British Imperial Air Routes: Refinement and Revision,” *Journal of Transport History* 25, no. 1 (2004), 73-74. See, too, Gordon H. Pirie, *Air Empire: British Imperial Civil Aviation, 1919-39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ “Mails and Visitors for Tristan da Cunha,” *Cape Argus*, 31 December 1931, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 3, British Library.

⁶⁸ F.R. Barry to Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, 11 January 1932, 1, ADM 116/2275, TNA.

effected. Bad weather might compel the ship at any moment to leave her anchorage, and so she should have some power other than sail.”⁶⁹

Hence, as improved steamers, radio, and airplanes stitched the world closer together, Tristan da Cunha succumbed to mounting isolation. “They are shut off from civilisation far more now than say seventy or a hundred years [ago], for with the passing of sail, Australian bound ships no longer call there,” wrote Lieutenant A.W. Wynn.⁷⁰ “We know that, in a sense, the world has shrunk to-day, distances are reduced by high-speed steamers and rapid aeroplanes, and annihilated by cables, telegraph and wireless,” concurred Reverend Augustus Partridge. “But Tristan is outside the reach of all these products of modern civilisation.”⁷¹

Isolation wreaked havoc on Tristan da Cunha’s missionaries during the interwar period. Following three years of service on the island, Reverend Rogers complained about “the long spells of loneliness when weeks and months are spent in vain longing for the ships that never come.”⁷² “One cannot realise what loneliness is until one has lived here,” echoed Reverend Robert Pooley, who suffered a nervous breakdown.⁷³ Reverend Partridge, who replaced the ailing Pooley, saw Tristan da Cunha in similarly bleak terms: “there were moments when it seemed that I was peering, as it were, into the dark dim-lit windows of hell-the hell of loneliness, the abyss of misery.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Frank Wild, *Shackleton’s Last Voyage: The Story of the Quest* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1923), 263-264.

⁷⁰ A.W. Wynn, report on H.M.S. Carlisle visit to Tristan da Cunha, n.d. [c.a. 1932], 3-4, ADM 123/97, TNA.

⁷¹ A.G. Partridge, *Tristan da Cunha: The Isle of Loneliness* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1933), 5.

⁷² “Three Years on Lonely Tristan,” *The Cape Argus*, 14 February 1925, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 1, British Library.

⁷³ C. Theodora Ward to Macleod Murray, 2 March 1928, USPG D 320, BL; R.A.C. Pooley to A. Macleod Murray, 2, USPG D320, BL.

⁷⁴ Partridge, *Tristan da Cunha*, 24.

However, for those unfamiliar with the agony of isolation, an island beyond the reach of ships, wireless, and airplanes fueled escapist longings. One commentator labeled Tristan da Cunha “an unspoiled haven of rest for the weary soul, a Mecca for those who long for relief from worries of life.”⁷⁵ “Isolated, away in the middle of the sea, these unfortunate—or fortunate, perhaps—people drag out their strange existence, far from the clamour of the world, free from the cares of the people of a great city, living in lonely isolation,” asserted another.⁷⁶ “The horrors of civilisation have passed Tristan da Cunha by,” echoed a like-minded dreamer.⁷⁷

Some disillusioned escapists even contemplated taking up residency. “I have letters from not only city-bound escapists,” griped Reverend France, “but from all sorts of responsible people, asking to be sent there to ‘solve the problem.’”⁷⁸ This included Harry Yorke, who led a contented life “in the very secluded woods,” and wished to embrace Tristan da Cunha’s isolation.⁷⁹ So, too, did forty-six-year-old Fred Fairless, who wanted “a quiet life away from this country.”⁸⁰ R.G. Guy, a schooner captain, hoped to resettle his family on Tristan da Cunha for similar reasons: “The so called benefits of a doubtfull [*sic*] civilization, such as prevails in Europe today do not interest us in the least. We are both quite used to a life close to nature and find cities both nerve wracking and otherwise unhealthy.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ Quoted in “Tristan da Cunha: A Haven of Rest,” *Sunday Times*, 27 February 1921, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 1, British Library.

⁷⁶ “Parson for Tristan da Cunha,” *South Africa*, 12 August 1921, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 1, British Library.

⁷⁷ J.D., “Tristan da Cunha,” *Cape Times*, 7 January 1932, newspaper clipping, ADM 123/97, TNA.

⁷⁸ W.F. France to E.J.S. Woolley, 20 April 1943, 1, USPG CLS 291, BL.

⁷⁹ Harry Yorke to SPG, 20 October 1931, 1, USPG D340, BL.

⁸⁰ Fred K. Fairless to Harold Wilde, 24 April 1937, 1, USPG D459, BL.

⁸¹ R.G. Guy to Harold Wilde, 1 November 1937, 1-2, USPG D459, BL.

The tumult of the 1920s and 1930s, which intensified escapist longings, boosted Tristan da Cunha's appeal. With an ever-growing list of nations embroiled in economic turmoil or war, Erling Christophersen, leader of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition, expressed gratitude for the island sojourn of 1937-1938, which offered refuge "away from the trials and tribulations of this modern world." Likewise, fellow Norwegian Scientific Expedition member Allan Crawford deemed the remote island preferable to "the wars and rumours of wars, the fight for monetary security and the struggle for self-betterment in our too mechanized world."⁸²

At its interwar apogee, isolated Tristan da Cunha inspired literature, exhibitions, lectures, and radio broadcasts. Roy Campbell, the South African writer and fascist sympathizer, penned a poem (1931) that deployed Tristan da Cunha as a metaphor for alienation.⁸³ Rose Champion de Crespigny made the victim of *Accessory After the Fact* (1932), a theatrical rendition of a murder-mystery, a woman from Tristan da Cunha.⁸⁴ Winifred Holtby cast the protagonist of *The Astonishing Island* (1933), a satirical novel about contemporary Britain, as a Tristan islander.⁸⁵ Rose Rogers, widow of Reverend Rogers, developed a cottage industry giving talks about the island at home and abroad.⁸⁶ The South African pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley included a

⁸² Christophersen quoted in Allan B. Crawford, *I Went to Tristan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941), 18. Crawford's views on the island available on page 196 of the same work.

⁸³ Roy Campbell, "Tristan da Cunha," in *Adamastor: Poems* (New York: The Dial Press, 1931), 63-67.

⁸⁴ "'Accessory After the Fact': A Writer's Club Presentation," *The Times*, 8 December 1932.

⁸⁵ Winifred Holtby, *The Astonishing Island: Being a Veracious Record of the Experiences Undergone by Robinson Lippingtree Mackintosh from Tristan da Cunha during an Accidental Visit to Unknown Territory in the Year of Grace MCMXXX-?* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933).

⁸⁶ Maurice Cook to Rose Rogers, 25 October 1927, 1, CB 9, RGS; Douglas Gane to A.R. Hinks, 8 November 1927, 1, CB 9, RGS; "Unique and Lonely Island: Life on Tristan da Cunha," unknown, n.d. [c.a. 1932], Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 3, British Library.

Tristan da Cunha display.⁸⁷ And the BBC beamed broadcasts about the “lonely wind-swept place where the only noise is the cry of birds and the ceaseless moan of the sea.”⁸⁸

However, Douglas Gane, a London solicitor who maintained offices in the exclusive Gray’s Inn, became Tristan da Cunha’s most vociferous champion and voluminous source of information for metropolitan audiences. He had nurtured a fascination with the far-off spot since visiting as a young man en route to Australia.⁸⁹ Gane’s career as the islanders’ “godfather” and unofficial representative in London dated to 1886, when he exhibited handicrafts and “natural history specimens” from Tristan da Cunha at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London.⁹⁰ Following the outbreak of the First World War, Gane took an active role in generating public interest in Tristan da Cunha, launching the first of many heart-rending appeals in 1916.⁹¹ In the jaundiced opinion of Reverend Partridge, Gane harbored “a purely sentimental and idealistic view of the situation” prevailing on Tristan da Cunha.⁹²

Nevertheless, the well-meaning Gane, along with the SPG, launched regular appeals in *The Times* and spearheaded the founding of philanthropic organizations like the Tristan da Cunha Fund in 1921. In an effort to secure for the island visits by warships, regular shipments of provisions, and funds for the maintenance of clergymen, the Tristan

⁸⁷ “Tristan da Cunha Section,” *South Africa*, 11 April 1924, newspaper clipping, Tristan Cuttings, 74/Tab.583.f.17, British Library.

⁸⁸ Harold Wilde, “Tristan da Cunha,” script, 5 November 1937, 1, BBCWAC.

⁸⁹ For a description of Gane’s 1884 visit, see Douglas M. Gane, *New South Wales and Victoria in 1885* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1886), 21-25.

⁹⁰ “Godfather to the Islands: Death of London Solicitor,” *The Sun and Guardian*, 9 June 1935, 7; Douglas M. Gane to A.R. Hinks, 18 March 1922, 1, CB 9, RGS.

⁹¹ Douglas M. Gane, “Tristan da Cunha,” *The Times*, 21 September 1916; Douglas M. Gane to A.R. Hinks, 18 March 1922, 1, CB 9, RGS.

⁹² W.A. Harman, file minute, 26 September 1934, 2, CO 448/42, TNA.

da Cunha Fund mobilized the public, corporations, and Royal family to great effect.⁹³ In addition to the contributions of many individual donors, between August 1922 and March 1926 the Fund generated over £445 from companies like Lipton Tea and Lever Brothers and Queen Mary.⁹⁴

The islanders also assumed a prominent role in romanticizing isolation for the metropolitan masses. A handful of literate “amanuenses,” who copied messages on behalf of the illiterate majority, crafted “begging letters” to pen pals and even “entire strangers.”⁹⁵ The letters relied on evoking empathy to solicit donations of food, clothing, and essentials.⁹⁶ The following plea from Frances Repetto to an unknown benefactor typifies the content of such letters:

It was so very kind of the many ladies and gentlemen to help and send the many useful things, and I send them many, many thanks; and please dear Madam tell them how their kind gifts were appreciated by an unknown friend on a lonely little island, who often thinks about them and prays for each one. I wish I could do something in return, but Tristan is so cut off from the outside world. Ships seldom pass and there are no shops.⁹⁷

Repetto, however, had perhaps the highest level of literacy on the island. Most begging letters conveyed the island’s isolation and solicited goods in less polished syntax and more unconventional orthography. Islander Elsie Swain, for instance, wrote the following to a benefactor:

Thank you very much for your nice letter and card that you sent to me [.]. It arrived on the 12 [*sic*] of this month. Mr. Linsday [*sic*] left by the same steamer that brought your letter. We all miss him very much for he was so good and kind

⁹³ On the origins and purpose of the Tristan da Cunha Fund, see, among others, Douglas M. Gane to A.R. Hinks, 18 May 1922, 1-3, CB 9, RGS; Douglas M. Gane to A.H. Dolphin, 6 May 1922, 1-2, USPG D278, BL; Douglas M. Gane, *The Tristan da Cunha Fund*, pamphlet, 20 June 1922, 1-2, CB 9, RGS.

⁹⁴ Douglas M. Gane, *The Tristan da Cunha Fund Report, 1921-1925*, pamphlet 10-17, P.P.910.es, British Library.

⁹⁵ N.B. Kent, Chaplain’s Report on H.M.S. *Dublin* Visit to Tristan da Cunha, 31 March 1923, Enclosure No. 1, Report on Visit of H.M.S. *Dublin*, 4-5, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

⁹⁶ van Sittert, “Begging Letters,” 263-287.

⁹⁷ Frances Repetto to unknown, 24 March 1926, 1, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

to us all. Our potatoes [*sic*] crop are [*sic*] much better this year. I am sorry that we shant [*sic*] have any pleasure boat as they allways [*sic*] give us so much [.]. I am engaged to be married so if a mail should call again you might be able to send a few odds and ends to put in me [*sic*] house as we always find things so hard to get here. The wireless wont [*sic*] work here [.]. It is rather sad for we would [like to] be able to know what is going on in the out Side [*sic*] world. Yes my little nephew [*sic*] name is Leonard [.]. I must now close [.]. Wishing you all kind wishes for the new year.⁹⁸

The public adored these mawkish epistles and readily imbibed the pitiful sentiments. “It is like reading ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ with all the terror taken out and nothing left but simplicity, kindness, uncomplaining preoccupation with hard gaining of a subsistence, and piety which has not grown shy of the name of God,” summarized the recipient of one begging letter.⁹⁹

As an inducement, letters sometimes promised unique “curiosities” only available from Tristan da Cunha (see figure 2.2). “Mats and caps made of penguins’ feathers, decorated sheep-skin mats, home-knitted stockings and Guernseys, ox-hide moccasins, models of their canvas boats,” explained Peter Munch, “these are the things that the islanders can offer in exchange for the things they need.”¹⁰⁰ This led to unusual requests, at least by metropolitan standards. Islander Andrew Swain, for instance, traded “feather mats” for a violin bow and offered “a few wild birds [*sic*] shell [*sic*]” for “a few biscuits” and “a type writer.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Elsie Swain to Elsie, 17 February 1930, 1-2, USPG C/TDC/1, BL. This file contains many additional and similar examples of “begging letters.”

⁹⁹ “Letters from Tristan da Cunha,” *Manchester Guardian*, 30 October 1934, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 5, British Library.

¹⁰⁰ Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 41.

¹⁰¹ Andrew Swain to Miss Thomas, 7 November 1920, 1-2, USPG D269, BL.



Figure 2.2. Reverend Harold Wilde displays island handicrafts, including a penguin skin mat (center), destined for Buckingham Palace aboard H.M.S. *Carlisle* in 1937. The National Archives, ref. ADM 116/3646, used with permission.

Tristan mementos exploited the inherent allure of souvenirs. As tokens connoting place, souvenirs remind people of memorable experiences. They also communicate social standing, as items from abroad bestow prestige on the recipient.¹⁰² The rarity of handicrafts from isolated Tristan da Cunha implied exclusivity, for few had an opportunity to acquire a material reminder of such an isolated place. As Allan Crawford recalled, the receipt of an iconic model longboat (see figure 2.3) on departing Tristan da Cunha in 1938 made him feel privileged.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Pavlos Paraskevaïdis and Konstantinos Andriotis, “Values of Souvenirs as Commodities,” *Tourism Management* 48 (2015), 1-3.

¹⁰³ Allan Crawford, *Tristan da Cunha and the Roaring Forties* (Edinburgh and London: Charles Skilton Ltd., 1982), 53.

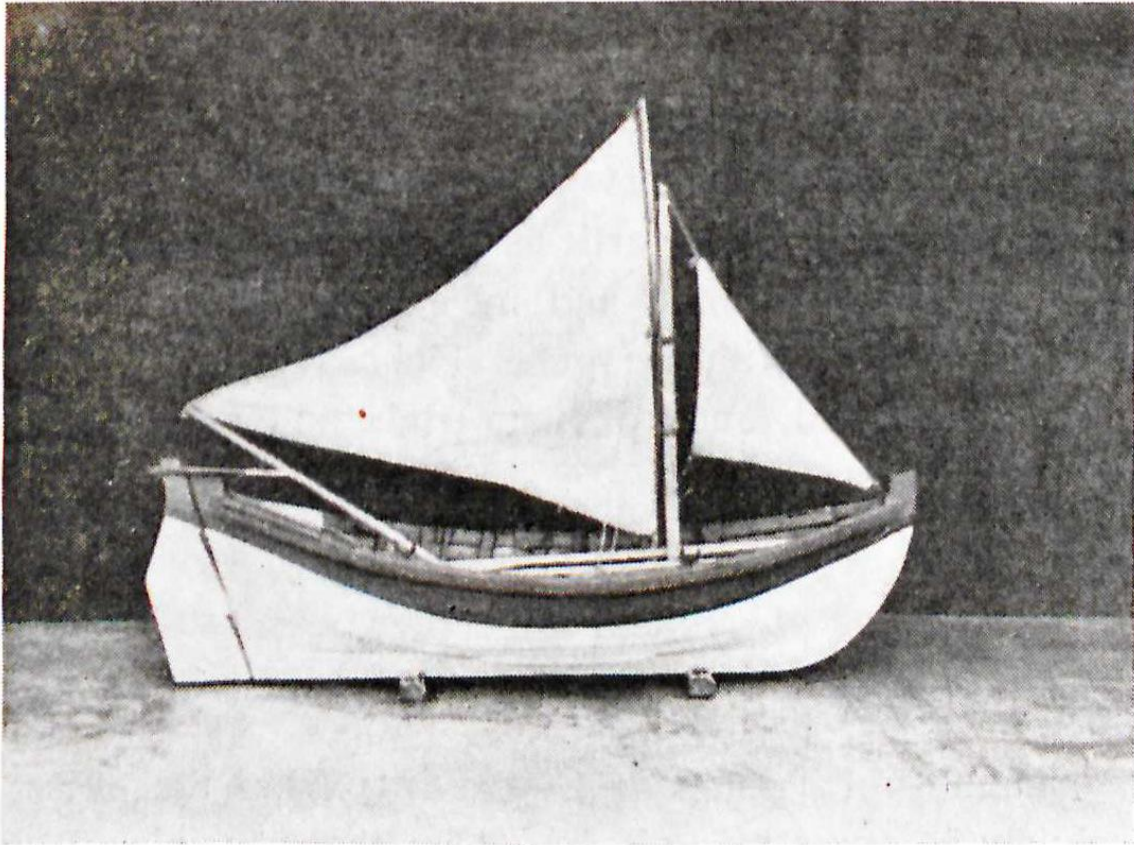


Figure 2.3. A model of a Tristan da Cunha longboat, circa 1937-1938. Tourists bartered or purchased such items for souvenirs. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 183. With the permission of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

The promise of unusual souvenirs from far away helped the islanders succeed in soliciting generous donations from the public. “If the number of parcels addressed to individuals who had never left the Island and cannot possibly have friends outside is any criterion,” mused visiting chaplain N.B. Kent, “this policy seemed to be eminently successful.”¹⁰⁴

Epistolary exchanges with Tristan da Cunha traveled long, circuitous routes. A missive composed in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in September 1932 did not depart for Tristan da Cunha until March 1933. Then, because of prevailing conditions, the delivery

¹⁰⁴ N.B. Kent, Chaplain’s Report on H.M.S. *Dublin* Visit to Tristan da Cunha, 31 March 1923, Enclosure No. 1, Report on Visit of H.M.S. *Dublin*, 4-5, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

had to be postponed until February 1934, when another ship called at Tristan da Cunha. Penned and posted in March 1934, the reply transited through Singapore before reaching Port Elizabeth in October 1934. According to calculations, and accounting for the fact that some of vessels participated on “round-the-world” voyages, “the two letters must have travelled nearly 32,000 miles in their two years.”¹⁰⁵

Reading as well as handling letters that had crisscrossed the globe enabled imaginative voyaging. After receiving a missive from Tristan da Cunha, J. Perkin and her friends marveled at holding an object that had traveled so far.¹⁰⁶ A.C. Holliday, a teacher in Rochester, England, likewise related the joys of reading and touching letters received from Tristan da Cunha as part of a class project. “There was a positive stir among the boys concerned when they knew that letters bearing the magic name of the old Portuguese discoverer of 1506, Tristan-da-Cunha, had come to hand at last,” he wrote. “I confess myself to a certain thrill as each letter was opened,” he continued, “and the latest secrets of the home-life in that far-off spot were revealed.”¹⁰⁷

Tristan da Cunha transfixed stamp collectors for the same reason. Philatelists, reported Allan Crawford, “seem to derive a vicarious pleasure from the travels of their envelopes.”¹⁰⁸ Well-traveled stamps held special cachet in an age of rapid travel. As philatelist A.J. Sefi observed, Tristan da Cunha appealed to stamp collectors because of its extreme isolation: “In these days of rapid travel the time-worn *cliché* ‘an outpost of Empire’ makes no reverberations in our sophisticated ears. Yet—when talking of Tristan

¹⁰⁵ “Reply by Return: A Letter Goes to Tristan,” *Children’s Newspaper*, 22 December 1934, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 5, British Library.

¹⁰⁶ J. Perkin to W.F. France, 2 June 1932, 1-2, USPG D346, BL.

¹⁰⁷ A.C. Holliday, “Tristan da Cunha: Home-Life in Britain’s Loneliest Colony,” *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham News*, 30 March 1934, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 5, British Library.

¹⁰⁸ Crawford, *I Went to Tristan*, 33.

da Cunha—it rings true. The mail service to this remote and often inaccessible island surely provides one of the greatest romances of the modern post.”¹⁰⁹



Figure 2.4. In these drawings and accompanying marginalia, postal authorities try to make sense of the variety of unauthorized cachet stamps that had emanated from Tristan da Cunha by 1930. Reverse of “L’Union Postale,” February 1930, File 30, POST 29/830, The Postal Museum, London. © Royal Mail Group Ltd 1930, courtesy of The Postal Museum.

The absence of an official post office meant that letters from Tristan da Cunha acquired an array of markings and stamps en route. Since British stamps seldom reached Tristan da Cunha, and the island had none of its own, the islanders often dispatched mail on passing vessels without postage (such letters would be surcharged upon arrival at postal facilities).¹¹⁰ To cancel stamps or to distinguish mail from Tristan da Cunha,

¹⁰⁹ A.J. Sefi, “Tristan da Cunha: Britain’s Most Inaccessible Possession,” *Philatelic Journal of Great Britain* (December 1932), 242.

¹¹⁰ Memo, February 1938, 1, File 12, POST 122/1426, Postal Museum, London (hereafter PM); A.G., “Letters from Tristan da Cunha,” Foreign Mails circular, 18 May 1928, File 21, POST 29/829, PM.

sailors, islanders, and missionaries practiced “franking,” which involved imprinting the postage stamp with text indicating the point of origin.¹¹¹

Philatelists went to great lengths to obtain one-of-the-kind markings from far-away colonies like Tristan da Cunha. In 1937, for example, R.M.S. *Arlanza* delivered registered mail that included “returned letters” from Britain, Yemen, South Africa, Bermuda, and Fiji, which indicated that philatelists had sent mail from elsewhere expressly to obtain the coveted and purely ornamental Tristan da Cunha cancellation stamp (see figure 2.4). “It is clear that philatelists are using mails to and from Tristan da Cunha to create philatelic curiosities,” surmised a postal worker.¹¹²

While letters and stamp collecting remained for many the sole medium to access Tristan da Cunha, a privileged minority had the opportunity to visit. Tourists began reaching Tristan da Cunha in the 1920s, when Europeans and North Americans started escaping the cold in droves aboard winter cruises to the Southern Hemisphere.¹¹³ In 1926 the R.M.S. *Orca* became the first commercial liner to include Tristan da Cunha as a stop, though weather prevented the vessel from establishing contact.¹¹⁴ The R.M.S. *Asturias* became the first passenger liner to do so the following year.¹¹⁵

The *Orca* and *Asturias* represented a fraction of global tourist traffic. For the most part, the mass tourism that the interwar period birthed drew travelers away from isolated

¹¹¹ Sefi, “Tristan da Cunha,” 238, 240-242. For a more in-depth discussion of Tristan da Cunha franks and postage stamps, see George Crabb, *The History and Postal History of Tristan da Cunha* (Surrey, UK: Self-published, 1980).

¹¹² Tristan da Cunha: Use of Unauthorized Obliterating Stamp, memo, n.d. [c.a. 1938], 1-3, File 17, POST 122/1426, PM.

¹¹³ Gordon H. Pirie, “Elite Exoticism: Sea-rail Cruise Tourism to South Africa, 1926-1939,” *African Historical Review* 43, No. 1 (2011), 73-74, 97.

¹¹⁴ “Africa Welcomes our First Tourists: Royal Mail Liner Orca Back from a Cruise to New Lands with Tales of Wonders Seen,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1926, 40.

¹¹⁵ “AN UNUSUAL CRUISE of 101 DAYS,” *The Times*, 30 November 1926, 2.

places like Tristan da Cunha.¹¹⁶ “People have never traveled more widely and in greater numbers than now,” explained Catherine Mackenzie, “yet routes have never before been so standardized and the places off the routes have never been more remote.” As the linkages between populated places multiplied, the connections with smaller, out-of-the-way spots like Tristan da Cunha withered.¹¹⁷

The fact that Tristan da Cunha stood outside communication networks and stricken from most travel itineraries became the rationale to visit. “Even in these days of easy travel,” wrote Lawrence Green, “there is a certain distinction in having landed on the black, volcanic shores of Tristan da Cunha.” Lying “beyond the airship zone and seaplane routes,” the island possessed “a glamour that is cherished by all of us who are growing older and remember that there were more lonely islands when we were young.”¹¹⁸

Cruise ships offered a safe and luxurious way for the rich to visit exotic places like Tristan da Cunha. During the interwar period, industry leaders like Cunard and White Star Line constructed sumptuous vessels not only to attract wealthy patrons, but also to allay any lingering anxieties about crossing vast expanses of ocean.¹¹⁹ As a result, commercial steamers became spaces famed for leisure and the languorous pace of daily life.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ See Bernhard Rieger, *Technology and the Culture of Modernity in Britain and Germany, 1890-1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 6.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Mackenzie, “Lonely Spots Still Abound on Earth: Greenely Island is Only One of Many Isolated Places Where Man Makes His Habitation,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 27 May 1928, 16-17.

¹¹⁸ Lawrence C. Green, *The Coast of Treasure* (London and New York: Putnam, 1933), 243.

¹¹⁹ Graham P. Gladden, “Marketing Ocean Travel: Cunard and the White Star Line, 1910-1940,” *The Journal of Transport History* 35, no. 1 (2014), esp. 61-66.

¹²⁰ See, for instance, Frances Steel, “An Ocean of Leisure: Early Cruise Tours of the Pacific in an Age of Empire,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14, no. 2 (2013); Paul Ashmore, “Slowing Down Mobilities: Passengering on an Inter-war Ocean Liner,” *Mobilities* 8, no. 4 (2013), 595-61.

By visiting a hard-to-reach island (see figure 2.5) in luxury, affluent passengers claimed an exclusive experience. “Most of the tourists are widely-travelled men and women, who have made long voyages round the world and visited strange and distant countries,” ran a newspaper account of the 1929 visit of the *Duchess of Atholl*. “Yet never have they had an experience as unique as this.”¹²¹ The Canadian writer Ethel Kirk Grayson, a passenger aboard the *Duchess of Atholl*, recalled the mounting excitement of visiting Tristan da Cunha: “Our pulses inevitably quickened, as if to martial music. A unique experience was awaiting us.”¹²²



Figure 2.5. Viewing Tristan da Cunha from the deck of H.M.S. *Thrush* in 1903. Although a warship, the view would have been nearly identical for cruise ship passengers. The National Archives, ref. CO 1069/775, used with permission.

The promise of material goods incentivized “staged” encounters abroad cruise liners, whereby the islanders engaged in exaggerated performances of identity that

¹²¹ “Mr. Pooley Back from Tristan,” *Cape Argus*, 28 February 1929, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 2, British Library.

¹²² Ethel Kirk Grayson, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Canadian Geographical Journal* 1, no. 8 (1930), 707.

comported with romanticized tourist expectations. These “highly mediated” displays of island life gave rich tourists from across the globe the “authentic experiences” that they craved.¹²³ Keen to capitalize financially on their exoticism, the islanders helped tourists to realize their primitive fantasies by presenting a scripted and closely guarded image to the outside world (see figure 2.6). The islanders, opined E.J.S. Woolley, Royal Navy doctor, “certainly know which side their bread is buttered and are very reticent on any subjects which spoil their value as sociological and anthropological curiosities.”¹²⁴



Figure 2.6. Chief Repetto signing autographs for sailors aboard H.M.S. *Carlisle* in 1937. Such incidents attest to how outsiders regarded the islanders as human curiosities and celebrities. The National Archives, ref. CO 1069/777, used with permission.

The arrival of cruise ships, such as the R.M.S. *Asturias*, therefore followed a common theatrical pattern. Once sighted, the islanders rowed toward the cruise liner

¹²³ For an overview of these spectacles, see Michael Harkin, “Staged Encounters: Postmodern Tourism and Aboriginal People,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 3 (2003), esp. 575-578.

¹²⁴ E.J.S. Woolley to J.B. Sidebotham, 17 July 1942 extract, 1-2, USPG D510/2, BL.

moored offshore. After boarding, the performance began. They offered provisions and curios for barter (see figure 2.7). Then, as the film ran and cameras flashed, the islanders entertained the gathering throngs through such acts as fiddling or sampling frozen treats with a naivet  that must have been feigned. “The majority had never seen or tasted ice cream,” read one fantastic account, “and many of the onlookers smiled as a few of the men ‘blew’ on their over-filled spoons before eating!” In appreciation, thrilled tourists distributed gifts among the islanders.¹²⁵



Figure 2.7. Most visitors, such as the sailors of H.M.S. *Thrush*, experienced Tristan da Cunha from the deck of a ship, where seabirds congregated and islanders bartered for supplies. The National Archives, ref. CO 1069/775, used with permission.

As the proceedings of R.M.S. *Asturias* suggest, the curio trade depended on tourist consumption. According to Peter Munch, “the islanders have understood how to take advantage of the widespread and increasing pursuit of souvenirs in the modern world, and have adjusted their domestic industry accordingly.” They fabricated miniature

¹²⁵ See, among others, “Lonely Settlers Hail Columbia! How American Tourists Brought Good Cheer to Tristan da Cunha,” *Cape Argus*, 21 February 1927, *Tristan da Cunha Cuttings*, vol. 1, British Library.

longboats, spinning wheels, bullock carts, and even penguin-foot bags. In Munch's estimation, "there seemed hardly to be a limit to the attempts made to produce new articles that were believed to be characteristic of Tristan da Cunha and were expected on this account to be attractive to the people from 'the outside world' hunting for souvenirs."¹²⁶

Experiencing Tristan da Cunha's isolation by witnessing spectacles or purchasing souvenirs did not disappoint. "The most impressive and interesting thing I have yet seen on this trip is the lonely island of Tristan da Cunha," reported a delighted Canadian banker aboard the *Empress of France*, which called in 1928. "The utter loneliness of the place, and how that isolation affects the people there was the thing that struck me, at any rate," he elaborated.¹²⁷

Of course, not everyone accepted these romantic depictions of Tristan da Cunha's insularity. The Bishop of Saint Helena, William Holbech, emphasized Tristan da Cunha's ordinariness: "There is nothing extraordinary about it, or the people that live there, except its remoteness; it is out of the way, remote from the track of travelling ships, and no longer visited by wandering whale ships."¹²⁸ But Holbech remained an exception during the interwar period, when countless philatelists, tourists, and escapists fantasized about life away from a bankrupt civilization.

III

The military occupation and advent of commercial fishing in the 1940s, which opened the island to outsiders, initiated wage labor, prompted infrastructural development, and

¹²⁶ Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 169, 181-184.

¹²⁷ "More Tourists: Less Hustle," *Cape Times*, 2 March 1928, Tristan Cuttings, 74/Tab.583.f.17, British Library.

¹²⁸ W.A. Holbech to Duke of Devonshire, 9 May 1923, 1-2, T 161/739, TNA.

established reliable communications, brought Tristan da Cunha's extreme isolation and poverty to an end. For some, witnessing the wartime and post-war transformations dispelled the mythical stature surrounding the remote island. But for many others, Tristan da Cunha remained sufficiently secluded and exotic to function as an intoxicating escape from the banalities of civilization and the horrors of the nuclear age.

The influx of military personnel modified Tristan da Cunha's built environment. In addition to constructing weather forecasting and HF/DF stations, the military laid plumbing and electrical wires, as well as erected housing and facilities for washing, laundry, and recreation.¹²⁹ It unleashed a slew of conveniences. "Inventions and amenities of which the primitive islanders were wholly ignorant were thus unfolded before their astonished eyes in rapid succession," scorned the *Cape Times*.¹³⁰

While the islanders enjoyed new amenities and closer contact with the world, some delighted in escaping the horrors of the war by serving on "the most peaceful of backwaters." "Except for radio broadcasts we should have known nothing about the world struggle that was our occasion for our presence on the island," serviceman Derrick Booy reminisced. "It was as if we had been dropped out of the conflict," he continued, "lost or forgotten."¹³¹

For many other service personnel, however, isolation made Tristan da Cunha a difficult positing. A number of sailors and soldiers gained first-hand experience with the loneliness and monotony that had menaced so many interwar missionaries. Surgeon Lieutenant-Commander H.S. Corfield reported that sporadic disagreements and "fits of

¹²⁹ W. Norman Roberts, final report, November 1942, 6-8, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

¹³⁰ "Fine Pioneer Job by S.A. Engineers," *Cape Times*, 4 July 1945.

¹³¹ Derrick M. Booy, *Rock of Exile: A Narrative of Tristan da Cunha* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1957), 111.

depression” commonly arose from the “loneliness and boredom” prevailing on Tristan da Cunha.¹³²

Residency on the island sometimes dispelled entrenched utopian views of the isolated community. “The general outside world opinion of these Islanders is that they are to be pitied living on what has been previously described as ‘the loneliest island in the world,’” noted Captain W. Norman Roberts of the South African sappers. After experiencing the island, however, he concluded that the islanders deserved neither this romantic reputation nor sympathy, for the portrait of “an angelic pure living community is entirely erroneous.”¹³³ “Both Dr. Woolley and I found that most of the information that we obtained about the Island and its people before we left England turned out to be entirely misleading,” echoed C.P. Lawrence, Royal Navy chaplain. “Our sources of information were reports from S.P.G. and Colonial Office archives and that various books written on the subject which were either out of date, as we found that conditions have changed considerably during the last two generations and a speedy deterioration and retrogression has set in,” he continued, “or else they were highly imaginative writings of ‘Romanticists’ who had made a very short visit to the Island or in one case had never been there at all.”¹³⁴

But Tristan da Cunha’s mystique survived the war mostly intact. Requests from metropolitan escapists still trickled into the hands of the SPG’s chaplains. “We have had dozens of letters—many quite useless, and lots from sentimental or romantic minded

¹³² H.S. Corfield, A Summary of the Administration of H.M.S. “Atlantic Isle” (Tristan da Cunha) and the Conditions of the Island during the Period 1944-1946, 29 May 1946, 1, ADM 1/9705, TNA.

¹³³ W. Norman Roberts, final report, November 1942, 10, 12-13, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

¹³⁴ C.P. Lawrence to SPG Secretary, 10 June 1947, 2, USPG D510/4, BL.

people, and some from stamp-collecting fiends who do not know there are no postage stamps,” wrote Reverend A.E. Handley.¹³⁵

The atomic anxieties of the post-war period helped to keep Tristan da Cunha relevant.¹³⁶ “For anyone wishing to escape from a possible Atom-war it would make the best of hide-outs,” claimed author Gordon Cooper.¹³⁷ Reverend D.I. Luard, who served a stint for the SPG, regarded the island similarly.¹³⁸

But the advent of commercial crayfish operations and civil administration, which brought expatriate staff to the island, also increased Tristan da Cunha’s links with the world. “The normal turn-over of ‘station’ personnel since the war has provided a considerable variety of new contacts fresh from Europe or from South Africa,” asserted psychologists K. Rawnsley and J.B. Loudon.¹³⁹

Radio had an equally significant effect in forging contacts with the world beyond Tristan da Cunha’s shores. The island now enjoyed contact two times per day with the Wingfield Aeradio Station in Cape Town, South Africa.¹⁴⁰ As of February 1952, each year the station transmitted some 50,000 words worth of official and personal (by way of telegraphs converted to airmail and vice versa) communications between the island and London and Cape Town.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ A.E. Handley to N.J. Blow, 23 August 1945, 2, USPG D510/3, BL.

¹³⁶ On nuclear weapons and post-war society, see Daryl Jones, Elizabeth McCarthy, and Bernice M. Murphy, *It Came From the 1950s! Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties* (Hampshire, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jonathan Hogg, “‘The Family that Feared Tomorrow’: British Nuclear Culture and Individual Experience in the late 1950s,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 45, no. 4 (2012), 535-549.

¹³⁷ Gordon Cooper, *Isles of Romance and Mystery* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 26.

¹³⁸ D.I. Luard, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Corona: The Journal of His Majesty’s Colonial Service* 2, no. 8 (1950), 305.

¹³⁹ K. Rawnsley and J.B. Loudon, “Epidemiology of Mental Disorder in a Closed Community,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 110, no. 469 (1964), 832.

¹⁴⁰ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 14, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁴¹ Telecommunications on Tristan da Cunha memo, n.d. [c.a. 1953], 1, DO 35/4933, TNA.

Yet, although expatriates forged more connections with the wider world, post-war Tristan da Cunha remained hard to reach. Jet aircraft, which overtook steamships as the dominant mode of travel in 1957, hastened the collapse of space, multiplied connections, and eroded the symbolic importance of the ocean.¹⁴² But airplanes remained alien to the island. Schoolteacher Jim Flint reported (apocryphally, perhaps) that after the first reconnaissance airplane sighted over Tristan da Cunha terrified unsuspecting islanders, “few, if any have been seen since.”¹⁴³

Without an airport, and in the absence of helicopters, most visitors intent on getting ashore had to battle Tristan da Cunha’s punishing surf. “Gale-force winds prevail in this area of the South Atlantic for some 300 days in the year,” explained F.B. Gamblen of the Royal Navy. “The captain of a frigate or sloop with a range of some 3,000 miles (without refuelling) is naturally concerned that, having reached the island, he should be able to get back again,” he iterated.¹⁴⁴

The island’s inaccessibility restricted visitors. In 1950, seven vessels conveyed mail to and from Tristan da Cunha. The Company owned all visiting vessels, save one. In addition, a Dutch tanker dispatched mail, though did not bring any to Tristan da Cunha. These eight vessels constituted the only ships to visit during the administration’s inaugural year.¹⁴⁵ By 1953, the number of ship visits with mail had increased to a paltry

¹⁴² Jeremy Black, *The British Seaborne Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁴³ Jim Flint, *Mid-Atlantic Village: Life on the World’s Most Isolated Inhabited Island: A Memoir of the 1960s* (Newbury: Best Dog, 2011), 137-139.

¹⁴⁴ F.B. Gamblen, “Dental Caries among the Inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha: The Breakdown,” *Royal Society of Health Journal* 83, no. 3 (1962), 136-137.

¹⁴⁵ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report for Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 14, CO 1024/84, TNA.

fifteen.¹⁴⁶ On post-war Tristan da Cunha, remembered Elizabeth Elliott, wife of the first administrator, “you were totally shut off.”¹⁴⁷

Isolation made boredom an ongoing concern for outsiders stationed on the island. “There is nothing at all to relieve the sameness of life except the dances at the festivals and now the M.U. [Mother’s Union] meeting,” related Marjorie Handley, wife of Reverend Handley.¹⁴⁸

Tristan da Cunha’s insularity (see figures 2.8-2.12) compounded the claustrophobia endemic to colonial service. As Christopher Prior has noted, the monotonous lives of administrators and expatriates, which involved bruited and endless drinking sessions with the same people, caused tensions.¹⁴⁹ “On Tristan we have an existence under isolated and unnatural conditions and conflicts arising from close contact with the same individuals day after day,” observed schoolteacher Ronald Harding.¹⁵⁰ “It is also difficult in such a small community not to get involved in everyone’s work to an extent,” echoed Godfrey Harris, “and it needs considerable tact on the part of the Administrator to keep things reasonably happy and on an even [*sic*] keel.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ J.P.L. Scott, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1953, 15 February 1954, 3, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁴⁷ Joan Alexander, *Voices and Echoes: Tales from Colonial Women* (London, Melbourne, and New York: Quartet Books, 1983), 133.

¹⁴⁸ Marjorie Handley to Mrs. Manners, 1 April 1947, 1, USPG E94/21, BL.

¹⁴⁹ Christopher Prior, *Exporting Empire: Africa, Colonial Officials and the Construction of the British Imperial State, c. 1900-1939* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 83-85.

¹⁵⁰ Ronald Harding to Bishop Roberts, 14 September 1955, 3, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

¹⁵¹ G.F. Harris to C.G. Eastwood, 7 July 1958, 2-3, CO 1024/235, TNA.

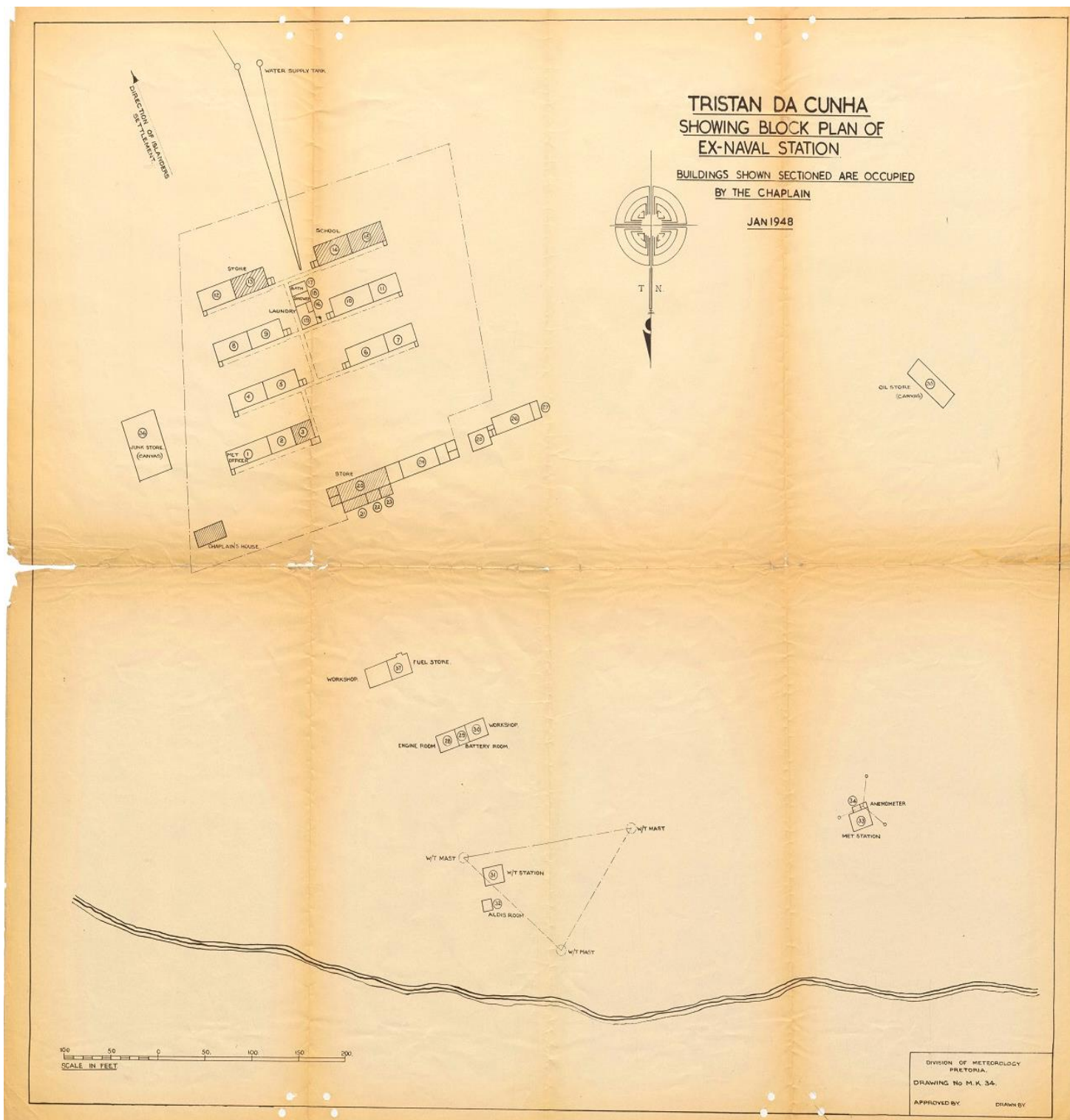


Figure 2.8. The full extent of the "Station" in 1948. The National Archives, ref. CAOG 14/173, used with permission.



Figure 2.9. View of the community from the sea, circa 1964-1965. Tristan Slide 1D3b, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.



Figure 2.10. View of the community from above, circa 1964. Hardened magma is visible in the right corner. Tristan Slide 1D9a, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.



Figure 2.11. View of the Settlement, circa 1964-1965. Tristan Slide 1D16a, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.



Figure 2.12. Another view of the Settlement in 1964. Tristan Slide 1D11a, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

In this oppressive atmosphere, gossip and alcohol flowed in dangerous amounts. Over the years, several suffered breakdowns and tried to commit suicide. Harris actually urged his successor to avoid the stifling social scene as much as possible. “My advice would be to any Administrator to remain friendly with all,” he counseled, “but try to live a family life, and shut himself up quite a lot within his family, and do not see too much of all the others on the Station.”¹⁵²

Yet retreating into the home did not necessarily offer a respite. The affliction of what Hugh Elliott facetiously referred to as “islanditis,” a sort of mania that arose from leading an insular existence, sometimes brought bizarre and inappropriate behavior to the doorstep.¹⁵³ Elliott described how one expatriate staff member went “off his rocker,” summoning “visions of strait-jackets and deportation in irons.” Obsessed with the schoolteacher, the deranged man decided on “climbing drunk through her window at midnight and threatening to commit suicide.”¹⁵⁴

Nor did the family always provide comfort. Evidently “wife-changing” occurred frequently among expatriates.¹⁵⁵ Sometimes, too, expatriates formed relationships with islanders that endangered domestic tranquility. A radio operator’s trysts with several islanders evidently exacerbated the “mental condition” of the latter’s wife.¹⁵⁶

However, Tristan da Cunha’s isolation continued to charm. Many channeled their romantic curiosity into stamp collecting, which flourished in the 1950s in spite of the lack of official postal facilities. “The fantastic collectors are not in the least worried at the absence of stamps,” grouched Elliott, “they collect ‘franked’ envelopes instead and supply

¹⁵² G.F. Harris to C.G. Eastwood, 7 July 1958, 2-3, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹⁵³ Hugh Elliott diary, 28 June-30 June, 1950 entry, vol. 2, MSS.Atlan.s.2, BL.

¹⁵⁴ Hugh Elliott diary, 11 January-12 January 1951 entry, vol. 4, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹⁵⁵ Peter A. Munch 1962 notebook, 1 July entry, DOC MSS 002 0007 0062, Peter A Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁵⁶ Peter Day to P.B. Lewis, 22 November 1960, 1, DO 119/1461, TNA.

the islanders with quantities of stamps from Pitcairn, Morro Agencies and other unlikely spots to enhance the envelopes.”¹⁵⁷

Given the interest surrounding Tristan da Cunha, the advent of an official postal service (as a subsidiary of Saint Helena) in 1952 thrilled the stamp-collecting world. On opening day, the island post office sold 20,000 stamps valued at more than £1,080 in the span of just three and a half hours.¹⁵⁸ In the first year, the island administration sold £2,635 worth of stamps, which excluded “a considerable sum” raised through sales of the Crown Agents in London. Stamp money enabled Tristan da Cunha to enjoy its first-ever budgetary surplus in 1952.¹⁵⁹

Philatelists received another fillip in 1954, when Tristan da Cunha received its own postage stamps. Each featured a profile of the young Elizabeth II, as well as various and quintessentially Tristan iconography, including penguins, crayfish, and bullock carts.¹⁶⁰ The Crown Agents’ profits from the handsome Tristan stamps soared, ballooning to approximately £30,000 in 1956.¹⁶¹ The demand proved insatiable. According to one authority, “the issue [of stamps] finds an immediate market, at about twice the face value of the stamps, among the world’s philatelists by whom Tristan stamps are much prized.”¹⁶²

In addition to stamp collecting, infrequent cruise ships continued to arrive at Tristan da Cunha as part of a post-war revitalization of the liner industry. Interrupted by

¹⁵⁷ Hugh Elliott diary, 31 January-6 February 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.s.1, BL.

¹⁵⁸ Hugh Elliott diary, 1 January-6 January 1952 entry, vol. 7, MSS.Atlas.s.7, BL.

¹⁵⁹ J.P.L. Scott, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1952, 31 January 1953, 5, 8, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁶⁰ E.R. Yarham, “Stamps of the World’s Loneliest Island,” *The Nautical Magazine* 181-182 (1959), 202-203.

¹⁶¹ Notes on an interview at the Colonial Office with Mr. M.A. Willis and the Rev. A.E.A. Sulston, 8 March 1956, 1, USPG X1116/F2, BL.

¹⁶² P.B. Lewis, Visits to Cape Town by Mr. P.A. Day and Mr. M.A. Willis, 1 March 1960, 1, DO 119/1461, TNA.

the Second World War, Cunard and other companies tried to recapture the glamor that had defined sailing in the 1920s and 1930s by launching new vessels like the R.M.S. *Caronia*.¹⁶³ The newly christened ship, which called in 1950, offered passengers an experience substantially unmodified since the interwar period. “We approached the 34 000 ton monster from the decks of which serried ranks of millionaires gaped at us,” remembered Hugh Elliott. The selling of souvenirs and an inquisition then commenced, during which a member of the island administration endured “an unforgettable series of silly questions and superb gifts from the dollar-laden throng.”¹⁶⁴ As the decade drew to a close, the fascination surrounding the island showed no sign of waning.

IV

The volcanic eruption, evacuation of the islanders to Britain, and resettlement redoubled curiosity about Tristan da Cunha. As evidenced by the surge in exhibitions, stamp sales, and charitable donations, the public enthusiastically imbibed sensational media representations of the islanders, which reprised tropes of the islanders as pastoral throwbacks. While gratifying for the metropolitan gaze, the islanders tired of playing the role of human curiosities and opted to return to Tristan da Cunha. Their decision, which observers interpreted as spurning civilization, bolstered critiques of the affluent society. But resettlement, which unleashed further infrastructural development, improved communications, and more amenities, challenged these views by remaking the island in the image of suburbia. Although this made Tristan da Cunha more comfortable, the British sojourn left some islanders, especially younger members of the community, restive for more opportunities. The ensuing exodus of several dozen islanders, as well as

¹⁶³ Paul Butel, *The Atlantic*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 285-286.

¹⁶⁴ Hugh Elliott diary, 31 January-6 February 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.1, BL.

the marked hostility to the press among the remaining members of the community, prompted some to question Tristan da Cunha's mythical stature. Yet, despite expressions of skepticism, Tristan da Cunha's ongoing isolation attracted stamp collectors, tourists, and escapists throughout the 1960s.

From the outset, many likened the islanders' evacuation to an act of time travel in which lurked considerable dangers. "Like Rip van Winkles from another age, the 262 refugees from Tristan have begun preparing themselves for life in the 20th Century," proclaimed *The Cape Times*.¹⁶⁵ Administrator Peter Wheeler, too, characterized Tristan da Cunha as "a land bypassed by the 20th century." This left them unprepared for the "glittering, mechanized world."¹⁶⁶ "Because the Industrial Revolution had largely passed them by and left them in the nineteenth century, they were, in a manner of speaking, temporal British foreigners," echoed Harold Lewis, who headed the MRC's Tristan da Cunha Working Party.¹⁶⁷

The evacuation intensified public interest in these purported living anachronisms. The Tristan da Cunha Fund, which had come under the control of Irving Gane upon his father's death, received almost £20,000 in donations for the evacuees.¹⁶⁸ Philatelists, too, relished new opportunities for collecting, including the "very much prized" stamps associated with the Royal Society Expedition of 1962 (see chapter five).¹⁶⁹ The

¹⁶⁵ "Tristan Islanders Are Dazed and Bewildered by the 20th Century," *The Cape Times*, 11 November 1961.

¹⁶⁶ P.J.F. Wheeler, "Tristan da Cunha: Death of an Island," *National Geographic* 121, no. 5 (1962), 680, 695.

¹⁶⁷ H.E. Lewis, D.F. Roberts, and A.W.F. Edwards, "Biological Problems, and Opportunities, of Isolation among the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha," in *Population and Social Change*, eds. D.V. Glass and Roger Revelle (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 411, 416.

¹⁶⁸ The Tristan da Cunha Fund, 1961-1964, pamphlet, 3, P.P.910.es, British Library.

¹⁶⁹ Allan B. Crawford to George Hemmen, 31 March 1962, 2, EXP/4/2/4, Royal Society, London (hereafter RS).

Geological Museum in South Kensington hosted an exhibit.¹⁷⁰ Some schools in Britain, meanwhile, showed television programs about the eruption.¹⁷¹

The islanders could not evade the prying gaze of the press or public. “Since they fled from the lava-streams to safety and civilization the Tristans have been blinking in a constant spotlight,” wrote journalist Michael Moynihan.¹⁷² “The islanders were quite aware, as they must have been when they lived on Tristan, that they were objects of curiosity, under intensive observation by strangers,” repeated Thomas Whiteside of *The New Yorker*.¹⁷³

The stifling attention and sensational stories tried the islanders’ patience and intensified longings for the unanimity of Tristan da Cunha. Regarding the intrusions of the press, one islander complained: “They comes here, they talks [*sic*] to us, they goes [*sic*] away and they writes [*sic*] lies. Why doesn’t [*sic*] they stay in London and make up their lies there and leave us in peace?”¹⁷⁴

However, the press misconstrued the islanders’ frustration and homesickness as a revolt against civilization broadly and contemporary Britain specifically (see figure 2.13). As journalist James Blair wrote, “after 18 unsettling months in England, amid the glitter and gadgetry of modern civilization, they had delivered an implied rebuke to the 20th century by electing to return to their harsh and timeless island.”¹⁷⁵ “Paradise, in the shape of twentieth century enlightenment and the material comforts of our welfare state, has

¹⁷⁰ Brief on Tristan da Cunha: Natural History Display at Geological Museum, n.d. [c.a. 1962], 1, EXP/4/4/4, RS.

¹⁷¹ W. Maccoby to G.E. Hemmen, 20 December 1962, 1, EXP/4/5/3, RS.

¹⁷² Michael Moynihan, “Tristan da Cunha: Little World Lost,” *Sunday Times Magazine*, 19 August 1962, in *In the Sixties*, ed. Ray Connolly (London: Pavilion, 1995), 23.

¹⁷³ Thomas Whiteside, “Annals of Migration: Something Wrong with the Island,” *The New Yorker* (9 November 1963), 201.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Holdgate, *Penguins and Mandarins: Memories of Natural and Unnatural History* (Spennymoor, UK: The Memoir Club, 2003), 57.

¹⁷⁵ James P. Blair, “Home to Lonely Tristan da Cunha,” *National Geographic* 125, no. 1 (1964), 60, 62.

become a purgatory for the volcano victims erupted from their simple, unsullied way of life into a world which was previously unknown,” claimed journalist Bill Eyton Jones.¹⁷⁶ Sir William Connor thought the desire for repatriation constituted “the most eloquent and contemptuous rebuff that our smug and deviously contrived society could have received.”¹⁷⁷

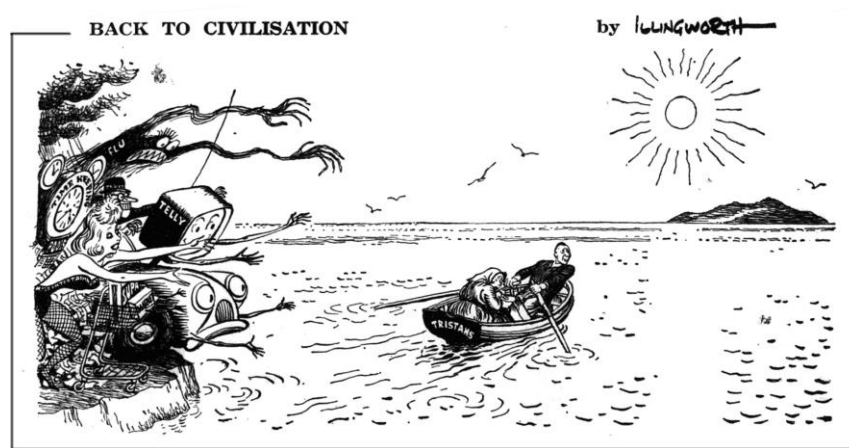


Figure 2.13. Islanders spurn Britain for the hardships of Tristan da Cunha. Cartoon by Leslie Gilbert Illingworth, *Daily Mail*, 18 March 1963, 8. With permission of the *Daily Mail*.

These critiques echoed larger condemnations of the affluent society. By the early 1960s, post-war Britain’s socio-economic transformation had detractors along the political spectrum. The Right railed against the vices and permissive culture that affluence had supposedly unleashed, while the Left attacked consumerism as vapid and responsible for the country’s economic inequalities.¹⁷⁸

As the islanders drifted home, many worried about the long-term consequences of exposure to Britain’s decadence. They returned branded with “the stigmata of

¹⁷⁶ Bill Eyton Jones, “The Scandal of Tristan da Cunha: A Shambles of Official Bungling and Indifference,” *Tit-Bits*, no. 3993 (15 September 1962), 23.

¹⁷⁷ Cassandra, “148 For, 5 Against,” *Daily Mirror*, 4 December 1962.

¹⁷⁸ Lawrence Black, “The Impression of Affluence: Political Culture in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited*, eds. Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (New York: Routledge), 85-106.

civilization,” such as the latest fashions and cutting-edge electronics, which left James Blair to ponder “if the island would every really regain its old isolation, its old tranquility.”¹⁷⁹ Journalist Nancy Hosegood also harbored doubts, writing: “You couldn’t, after all, spend two years in civilization without some of it rubbing off on you; without adopting some of its ideas and attitudes; or without, perhaps, missing parts of it, even if you never thought you would.”¹⁸⁰



Figure 2.14. The juxtaposition of traditional and modern Tristan da Cunha, circa 1964-1965. Tristan Slide 2B8a, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

To the consternation of dreamers like Blair and Hosegood, who romanticized Tristan da Cunha as a static space untouched by the march of time, civilization seemingly

¹⁷⁹ Blair, “Home to Lonely Tristan da Cunha,” 65, 69.

¹⁸⁰ Nancy Hosegood, *Corporal Glass’s Island: The Story of Tristan da Cunha* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1964), 192.

followed the islanders back home (see figure 2.14). In 1968, Martin Holdgate, who had visited in the mid-1950s, commented that the enlarged administrative apparatus and new furnishings, sewerage, paved roads, state-of-the-art crayfish factory, motorboats, and harbor and loading facilities smacked of “conventional English suburban rather traditional Tristan.”¹⁸¹ Martha Rogers, an elderly islander concurred, remarking that a handful of cars rumbling down island roads looked absurd and that “Tristan seem [*sic*] to be coming [*sic*] in some ways like the out side [*sic*] World.”¹⁸²

Post-eruption Tristan da Cunha also received improved communications, though the island still remained relatively remote. In 1964, Tristan da Cunha got “[a] commercial radio link with Capetown [*sic*],” which, along with “airletter telegram service,” enabled faster and more efficient personal communication with the outside world. These telegrams complemented the radiotelephone set, which permitted voice transmission. In addition, the island enjoyed regular intercourse with the world through “seven incoming mails and eight outgoing mails during the year.”¹⁸³

The growth of communications generated new opportunities to exploit Tristan da Cunha’s insularity. By the 1960s, ham radio had become a popular hobby whose enthusiasts vied to connect with far-away places. For this reason, magazines advertised Tristan da Cunha’s call signs and the times at which the signals came on air.¹⁸⁴ If successful, so-called “DXers” could write and receive “QSL cards” from the transmission site to verify the contact and to record the pertinent details. These cards that documented

¹⁸¹ Holdgate, *Penguins and Mandarins*, 62-63.

¹⁸² Martha Rogers to Peter Munch, 21 February 1967, 3, DOC MSS 002 0004 0048, Peter A. Munch papers, Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University (hereafter SLU).

¹⁸³ Peter Day, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1964, 22 February 1965, 5, 7.

¹⁸⁴ See, for instance, Urb Le Jeune, “DX,” *CQ: The Radio Amateur’s Journal* 22, no. 5 (May 1966), 68; Urb Le Jeune, “DX,” *CQ: The Radio Amateur’s Journal* 22, no. 7 (July 1966), 93.

radio communications with locations like Tristan da Cunha, which some commercial philatelists even began to sell (presumably affixed with stamps), became another souvenir medium and highly collectible.¹⁸⁵

Collectors coveted QSL cards from Tristan da Cunha precisely because remote places defied many ham operators, particularly those in urban areas. Sylvia Margolis of Essex, for instance, commented on the difficulty of trying to beam a signal from a city with competing ham operators. She joked that Tristan da Cunha, whose limited connectivity meant no interference from televisions or radios, seemed an ideal broadcasting site. Additionally, “isolation and rarity” made the island a fabled location for DXers.¹⁸⁶

High-quality sets struggled to connect with the island, too. On the roof of the Natural History Museum, Kensington incongruously stood a two-story broadcast tower. Erected in 1955, the museum’s station aimed to interest children in radio through regular demonstrations. Of all connections, asserted museum visitor and ham operator Bruce Ellison, “lonely Tristan da Cunha is probably the most interesting.” But even the museum’s splendid perch and advanced equipment failed to reach the island during one particular demonstration, though staff succeeded in reaching Singapore. Although geographically closer than Southeast Asia, Tristan da Cunha seemed a world away.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ On the purpose and collectability of QSL cards, see Timothy D. Taylor, introduction to part 3 of *Music, Sound, and Technology in America: A Documentary History of Early Phonograph, Cinema, and Radio*, eds. Timothy D. Taylor, Mark Katz, and Tony Grajeda (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 240. On the enthusiasm that some DXers displayed for QSL cards, see John A. Attaway, “DX,” *CQ: The Radio Amateur’s Journal* 26, no. 7 (July/August 1970), 68-69. On philatelists selling QSL cards from Tristan da Cunha, see Pat Hawker, “In brief,” in “World of Amateur Radio,” *Wireless World* 81, no. 1470 (February 1975), 86.

¹⁸⁶ Sylvia Margolis, “Some Day We’ll Build a Home on a Hilltop High, You and I...,” *CQ: The Radio Amateur’s Journal* 23, no. 7 (July 1967), 90.

¹⁸⁷ Bruce Ellison, “London’s Science Museum Demonstration Station,” *73 Magazine* 116 (May 1970), 125-126.

Some took this passion further. By the 1960s, Tristan da Cunha had become a location for a “DXpedition.” During these trips, “DXpeditioners,” such as Gus Browning of South Carolina, exclusively traveled to Tristan da Cunha for the thrill of broadcasting to and from such an exotic, remote setting.¹⁸⁸

Yet, despite becoming more networked and accessible, getting ashore continued to be arduous, with airplanes unable to land and boats still waiting extended periods for choppy seas to subside. “The ship is here now, hanging around somewhere near the island, but the beach is so rough we can’t get a boat off to her,” wrote Peter Munch during his 1964-1965 research trip to the island. It sat helplessly moored offshore for days.¹⁸⁹

The efforts to raise living standards and to mitigate Tristan da Cunha’s insularity did not satisfy everyone. Some islanders began to voice discontent with life on the remote island. Twenty-year-old Gerald Repetto claimed that returning to Tristan da Cunha had proved “a mistake.” He, as well as other islanders, missed recreations like “twisting, cinemas, TV” and now “resented the quiet life.”¹⁹⁰ Fellow island youth Rosemary Green likewise pined for “the television, the twist and being able to go into a shop and buy a can of food.”¹⁹¹

The press took notice, for these sentiments pointed to the deleterious effects of isolation and ostensibly vindicated Britain’s affluent society. According to *The Times*, Tristan da Cunha represented a place “all right for pelicans, but not all it is cracked up to

¹⁸⁸ Gus Browning, “Tristan de Cunha,” *73 Magazine* 46, no. 8 (August 1967), 84-86.

¹⁸⁹ Peter Munch to Charles Snyder, 8 May 1965, 1, DOC MSS 002 0010 0003, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹⁰ Brian Dixon, “Good Times in Britain Lure 25 from Tristan,” *Daily Sketch*, 4 November 1965, CO 1024/545, TNA.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in “You Can’t Go Home Again,” editorial, *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 9 May 1966, DOC MSS 002 0003 0020, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

be by romantic townees.” “This return to what they pronounce ‘the Houtside World’ shatters the potent, sentimental myth about happy isles beyond the sunset, frugal life and the golden age, Calypso and Crusoe,” ran the editorial.¹⁹²

Those left on the island did not appreciate the ongoing publicity and evinced particular fatigue with being styled as human curiosities. Unlike in 1937, Peter Munch reported being “under suspicion” while ashore in 1964. “They had been exposed in England to a great number of very tactless journalists, and of course they thought, or many of them did, that I was just another newspaperman,” he explained.¹⁹³ “I got the impression when I was last there that the Tristanians themselves were tired of these attentions and particularly at being regarded as human guinea pigs and that they wanted nothing more than to be allowed to relapse into their accustomed obscurity,” related John Field, Governor of Saint Helena.¹⁹⁴

Regaining a modicum of privacy proved difficult, for outsiders continued to see Tristan da Cunha through rose-tinted lenses. The island loomed in the imagination as a haven from the hectic bustle and callous anonymity of the world. “On Tristan I found that time ran fast because I was enjoying every minute of my stay there,” shared Reverend Keith Flint. “I was breathing freely and soaking in the peace and tranquility of the Island, always engaged with something or somebody, but always with time to know what I was doing and to be fully engaged in whatever I was doing.”¹⁹⁵ Likewise, Jim Flint reveled in

¹⁹² “35 Return from Tristan and Shatter a Myth,” *The Times*, 4 May 1966.

¹⁹³ Peter Munch to Doreen Gooch, 3 July 1966, 3, DOC MSS 002 0004 0115, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU. See, too, Peter Munch to Nigel Wace, 5 August 1976, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0156, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹⁴ John Field to M.S. Staveley, 5 March 1968, 2, FCO 42/285, TNA.

¹⁹⁵ Keith Flint to Peter Munch, 1 October 1967, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0106, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

the “unconditional friendliness and traditional hospitality,” as well as “the sense of belonging,” that had supposedly vanished long ago in Britain.¹⁹⁶

For some this affection for the island became a fixation. Peter Munch would forever cherish “the golden days on Tristan.”¹⁹⁷ And Doreen Gooch, wife of one-time island doctor Stan Gooch, confessed: “I would never have believed anyone that Tristan could get into ones [*sic*] blood but its [*sic*] in mine. I spend most of my time just thinking Tristan and the opportunity to talk Tristan is like gold to me.”¹⁹⁸

Yet, of all the Tristan fanatics, Allan Crawford was perhaps the most fervent and devoted. Born in Cumbria on the eve of the First World War, Crawford’s father, an armaments manager with Vickers-Armstrong, provided a comfortable, middle-class upbringing. After graduating from preparatory school, Crawford followed in his father’s footsteps by pursuing an engineering apprenticeship at Vickers-Armstrong. The apprenticeship took Crawford to Nazi Germany, where he studied the machinery that produced typewriters. Following a year there, Crawford returned home and began contemplating a life in South Africa. While voyaging to Cape Town, Crawford happened to meet Erling Christophersen, who was en route to Tristan da Cunha. Having heard of Christophersen’s need for a surveyor, Crawford, who lacked any training, facetiously offered his services. To Crawford’s surprise, Christophersen accepted. According to Crawford, the voyage and subsequent encounter changed “the whole course of my life.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Flint, *Mid-Atlantic Village*, 146-147.

¹⁹⁷ Peter Munch to Doreen Gooch, 13 April 1966, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0115, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹⁸ Doreen Gooch to Peter Munch, n.d. [c.a. 1966], 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0115, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹⁹ Allan B. Crawford, *Memoirs: North, South, East and West* (Easton: George Mann Publications, 2006), 3-5, 8-9, 13-20.

The amateur surveyor soon became infatuated with Tristan da Cunha. In fact, Crawford, who had become incensed with Reverend Wilde's behavior (see chapter three), hoped to prolong his stay by plotting a "little revolution." According to Munch, "he had planned to drive Wilde from the island and take his place as dictator." While his fellow expedition members thwarted the rebellion, it demonstrated Crawford's passion for the island, which grew with time.²⁰⁰ Crawford, who went on to become a meteorologist for the South African government, served on the island during and after the Second World War. Over his long life, he visited sporadically, held the position of "Honorary Welfare Officer for the Island in Cape Town," helped to orchestrate the return of the community in the wake of the eruption, designed a number of postage stamps, and wrote several books on his experiences. For these efforts, Crawford received several accolades, such as the Medal of the Order of Simon Cyrene from the Diocese of Cape Town, as well as a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE) from Elizabeth II.²⁰¹

Crawford's life offers insights on why Tristan da Cunha captivated so many. Beyond mere altruism, his intimate and almost proprietorial hold over the island provided prestige and social capital, which alienated others involved with the community. According to the Archbishop of Cape Town, Crawford was "a little impetuous and inclined to think that no-one has so much right to speak for Tristan da Cunha as

²⁰⁰ Peter A. Munch, *Glimpsing Utopia: Tristan da Cunha 1937-38: A Norwegian's Diary*, trans. Catherine Munch Snyder (Easton: George Mann Publications, 2008), 193.

²⁰¹ Crawford, *Memoirs*, 32-34, 61, 63, 65-77, 83.

himself.”²⁰² Similarly, Peter Munch quipped that the Crawford regarded Tristan da Cunha as “his Garden of Eden.”²⁰³

Throughout the 1960s, the island remained particularly seductive for philatelists, who purchased the designs of the eccentric Crawford and others. A first-day cover to commemorate the resettlement of Tristan da Cunha, for instance, sold almost 5,000 copies, which taxed the stamina of H.G. Stableford, the beleaguered agricultural officer and postmaster.²⁰⁴ By the late 1960s, Tristan stamps reaped an annual profit of £35,000. Astonishingly, this sum made the island administration solvent “purely on stamp revenue.”²⁰⁵

Moreover, older cachets from the era before official postage stamps had become even more coveted as collectibles. The worth of these objects stemmed from the rarity of letters emanating from a tiny, semiliterate community with restricted connections with the outside world. By 1969, for example, the scarce envelope that bore the so-called “Type I” cachet, which remained in use from roughly Reverend Barrow’s tenure to the end of the First World War, fetched some R 150 (equivalent to approximately \$721 in today’s values).²⁰⁶

Intent on experiencing the thrill of seeing inaccessible places, legions of outsiders also flooded the administration with requests to visit.²⁰⁷ Those lucky enough to get ashore patronized the islanders and generated ill will. Evelyn Davies, wife of Reverend W.P.S.

²⁰² Archbishop of Cape Town to Bishop, 8 October 1945, 1, USPG D510/3, BL.

²⁰³ Peter A. Munch to Joseph Loudon, 28 April 1963, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0126, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Blair, “Home to Lonely Tristan da Cunha,” 79-80.

²⁰⁵ Tristan Investments (Pty) Ltd., Wages—Island Fishermen, memo, n.d. [c.a. September 1968], 5, FCO 42/287, TNA.

²⁰⁶ Eric Rosenthal and Eliezer Blum, *Runner and Mailcoach: Postal History and Stamps of Southern Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Purnell, 1969), 242-244.

²⁰⁷ Brian Watkins, *Feathers on the Brain! A Memoir* (Vancouver: Oscar’s Books, 2011), 46.

Davies, expressed frustration with “the advent of cruise ships for the idly rich come to view the islanders and believe me I know just what the poor zoo lions feel like.” On one occasion, Davies had an encounter that left her incredulous: “a dowager from America poked me in the ribs & said ‘Yo speaky English’ [...] I had to be supported & became mute—then after being tutted over & stared at I was given a quarter & patted ON THE HEAD!”²⁰⁸ A longing to catch a glimpse of out-of-the-way places meant that Tristan da Cunha’s otherworldly reputation had survived the tribulations of exile and resettlement relatively unscathed.

V

As the 1970s progressed, Tristan da Cunha continued to acquire amenities and expand links with people beyond its shores. For some, the encroachment of civilization and intercourse with the outside world made the community less exceptional and worthy of idealization. Yet, the ongoing lack of airplanes and stunted broadcasting technologies rendered Tristan da Cunha exceptionally insular by the standards of the late twentieth century. As such, stamp collectors, adventure tourists, and escapists continued to fantasize about far-away Tristan da Cunha into the 1980s.

Throughout the 1970s, the material gap between Tristan da Cunha and the outside world narrowed. “Life on Tristan today mirrors the outside world—us,” proclaimed journalist Michael Moynihan, who visited in 1971. Peering through a doorway revealed a peek of the trappings of “suburbia.” “And the village itself,” he continued, “on a closer

²⁰⁸ Evelyn Davies to B. Norris, 21 February 1968, 2, MU/OS/5/7/62, Church of England Record Centre, Lambeth Palace Library.

look, is different from the old films and photographs I have seen, with bullock-carts lumbering on rutted tracks and laden donkeys.”²⁰⁹

However, life on Tristan da Cunha taxed many expatriates. Even with decades of development, as Stan Trees enumerated, the island lacked the amenities obtainable in more populated areas: “A film show once a week (when we have films), a whist drive weekly during the winter months, two snooker competitions (played in the pub) and ‘Radio Tristan’ on the air for three hours three nights a week. That’s the lot.”²¹⁰ In a remote, claustrophobic setting with few amenities, tempers sometimes flared among the drained expatriates, producing outbursts that administrator J.I.H. Fleming likened to “‘storms in teacups.’”²¹¹

For some, loneliness also remained an escapable problem. After two and a half months without mail, Reverend Edmund Buxton, who ministered on the island in the mid-1970s, complained of being “hungry for letters and news.” The dearth of information had an emotional toll: “It does make you feel cut-off and remote. And a very lonely island.”²¹²

For outsiders, however, remote places commanded tremendous cachet, particularly among philatelists, who craved stamps from Tristan da Cunha more than ever. As in the past, the primary attraction of Tristan stamps arose from the island’s remoteness. Logistics and expense prevented most from visiting such an isolated spot, so

²⁰⁹ Michael Moynihan, “Tristan—Ten Years After,” *The Sunday Times Weekly Review*, 12 December 1971, 25.

²¹⁰ S.G. Tees to P.C. Duff, 9 July 1977, 2, FCO 44/1520, TNA.

²¹¹ J.I.H. Fleming, Handing Over Notes, 1 May 1975, 8, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

²¹² Edmund Digby Buxton, *Island Chaplain: Tristan da Cunha, 1975-1978* (Hampshire, UK: George Mann, 2001), 57.

Tristan philately continued to function as imaginative travel, or “a kind of vicarious tourism.”²¹³

To fulfill these fantasies, the administration began issuing a “Government of Tristan da Cunha Stamp Bulletin,” which offered information “on all stamps and postal items available at the time of printing, and gives you advance information on forthcoming issues.” It had tips on how to acquire new issues, including the “The Lonely Island” stamp, which depicted Tristan da Cunha’s isolation in philatelic form, released in October 1974. “Many serious collectors now deposit sums of money here,” it recommended, “and make a standing order for their requirements.”²¹⁴

Such initiatives helped Tristan philately to boom in the 1970s. “The way our stamps have been selling is just too good to be true but true it is, according to information from the Crown Agents,” Stan Trees reported in 1978.²¹⁵ In 1979, the island netted an astonishing £262,775 from selling postage stamps.²¹⁶

While philately soared, stormy weather and rough seas kept the visits of cruise liners “inevitably brief and intermittent.”²¹⁷ As in the past, firms like Cunard billed these voyages, such as the opulent *Queen Elizabeth II*’s world cruise in 1979, as novelty experiences that enabled the rich to access Tristan da Cunha’s isolation in splendid comfort. “If you like your islands truly remote,” celebrated *Cruise Travel Magazine*,

²¹³ N.M. Wace and M.W. Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan da Cunha Islands* (Morges, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1976), 85.

²¹⁴ Government of Tristan da Cunha Stamp Bulletin, January 1974, 1-2, DOC MSS 002 001 0003, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²¹⁵ S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha, Report No. 8, May to August 1978, 8, FCO 44/1767, TNA.

²¹⁶ E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Review, 31 December 1979, 2, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²¹⁷ Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan da Cunha Islands*, 84-85.

“you’ll love the Queen Elizabeth II’s afternoon stop at *Tristan da Cunha*.” It promised an “unusual and memorable” experience.²¹⁸

Representations that cast Tristan da Cunha as an isolated anachronism in the modern world brought negative attention to the islanders. In 1978, for instance, a British tabloid described Tristan da Cunha as a “*Rip Van Winkle community*,” where some resided in a “*stone hut*.”²¹⁹ In response to the derisive piece, when a batch of reporters visited aboard the *Queen Elizabeth II*, an islander offended with the story gave them “a good humoured” tongue-lashing.²²⁰

Nevertheless, these outlandish portrayals piqued the interest of metropolitan audiences, who parted with large sums of money to experience or to own a souvenir of Tristan da Cunha’s isolation. During the stopover of the *Queen Elizabeth II*, the island post office sold 10,000 regular, five-pence stamps in the span of two hours, as well as a number of stamps commemorating the liner’s visit. Moreover, in advance of the visit of the *Queen Elizabeth II*, and in exchange for handsome remuneration, stamp dealers had recruited representatives from each of the seven island families to sign thousands of first-day covers commemorating the ship’s arrival. Dealers sold these stamps at “a tremendous price” through clever marketing ploys, such as affixing them to dinner menus.²²¹ In addition, the islanders sold £750 worth of curios and traded one ton of souvenir volcanic stone for the promise of “a video television set plus tapes.”²²²

²¹⁸ “Did You Know: Here and There Travel Bits from around the World,” *Cruise Travel Magazine* (June 1979), 4.

²¹⁹ Quoted in “Wheeling and Dealing on the QE2,” *The SA Philatelist* (June 1979), 150, DOC MSS 002 0022B 0001, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²⁰ See E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha Report No. 10, 3 to 31 January 1979, 3, FCO 44/2043, TNA; E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha Report No. 11, 1 February-20 March 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²²¹ “Wheeling and Dealing on the QE2,” *The SA Philatelist* (June 1979), 150-153, DOC MSS 002 0022B 0001, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²²² E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha Report No. 11, 1 February-20 March 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

This first-ever television, which arrived months later aboard M.V. *Atlantic Isle*, underscored the remote island's technological lag.²²³ Although the islanders had been so-called "film fans" with access to a projector since at least the late 1950s, Tristan da Cunha had trailed well behind metropolitan Britain in analogue television viewing.²²⁴ By 1957, the majority of British homes (56.3 percent) had televisions. In 1978, the year before Tristan da Cunha received its first television, nearly every British home (97.7 percent) boasted a television.²²⁵ The discrepancy between Britain and Tristan da Cunha had arisen because isolation made receiving and translating radio waves into picture over vast distances exceedingly difficult.²²⁶

The arrival of television, albeit closed-circuit, represented a landmark moment that had come by the early 1980s to epitomize Tristan da Cunha's rising standard of living and integration into the modern world. "Perhaps the most unexpected—and, I have to say, most dismaying—result of the comparative wealth of the island is that, a cable providing them with programmes from a small video tape centre...and at seven each Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday evening the cassettes begin to unroll, and the delights of the 'houtside warl' begin to pour into the little Tristan houses," wrote journalist Simon Winchester, who visited in the early 1980s. The sight of "the proud, private, fearless Tristanians, heirs to the traditions of egg-gathering on Inaccessible Island, and bird-collecting on Nightingale" congregating around televisions flickering with *Dallas* or

²²³ Patrick J. Helyer, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic, 1981, 17, MS 1446, Thomas H. Manning Polar Archive, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge (hereafter SPRI).

²²⁴ M.A. Willis, "Tristan Today," *Corona: Journal of Her Majesty's Overseas Service* 10, no. 5 (1958), 173.

²²⁵ For data on television sets in Britain, see table 24 in Burton Paulu, *Television and Radio in the United Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 351.

²²⁶ For television's impact on similarly situated Saint Helena, see Tony Charlton, Barrie Gunter, and Andrew Hannan, eds., *Broadcast Television Effects in a Remote Community* (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002).

Mannix left the romantic Winchester wistful. “To that small extent Tristan Island is beginning to resemble Staten Island, and it somewhat saddened me to find no real opposition, anywhere, to the trend,” he rued.²²⁷

Television and other amenities made Tristan da Cunha less exceptional to visitors like journalist Robert Kauders, who visited in the late 1980s. “It would be a misconception to assume that the island offered a peaceful haven-like alternative to the cares and troubles of the wider world, or had remained an isolated bubble and unaffected by change,” he asserted. Houses boasted “an impressive assortment of modern conveniences,” the canteen sold “imported luxuries,” roads buzzed with motorbikes, and, of course, the televisions glowed with Hollywood shows.²²⁸

For some, the flourishing of suburbia in the South Atlantic dissipated the romantic image of Tristan da Cunha as an isolated island beyond the reach of civilization. “Do not be unduly influenced by the blurred photographs of dour looking people, regarding the camera from under their eyebrows, which appear in that old book you borrowed from the local library,” counseled an anonymous expatriate to newcomers. “Neither pay much attention to the ‘Lonely Island’ line which appears from time to time in the popular press,” they continued. “Unless you deliberately choose otherwise you will be anything but lonely.”²²⁹

Yet, Tristan da Cunha remained isolated and relatively inaccessible in the 1980s. “Their radio links and the occasional supply ship are their only contact with the world,”

²²⁷ Simon Winchester, *The Sun Never Sets: Travels to the Remaining Outposts of the British Empire* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1985), 85.

²²⁸ Robert Kauders, “A Tristan Year,” *The Geographical Magazine* 59, no. 2 (1987), 69-70, 72.

²²⁹ Unknown, A Guide to Living Conditions on Tristan da Cunha, February 1980, MS 1531/4/3, SPRI.

remarked Reverend Patrick Helyer, who ministered from 1978 to 1980.²³⁰ And the weeklong trip through swelling seas continued to be arduous and unpleasant. “Just getting there is an adventure in itself,” recalled Hilary Jones, one-time medical officer.²³¹

Insularity sustained enthusiasm among collectors like seventy-five-year-old Mary Starr. Growing up in small-town Ontario, Starr had contracted polio, which left her disabled. With spirits at a low ebb, Starr found comfort in daydreaming about Tristan da Cunha, which she first encountered on the schoolhouse map: “Here I am, the lonely child, lame and miserable. Looking at that lonely little island in the South Atlantic, I thought I’m going to try to connect myself to that island.” It sparked a life-long interest that turned into a “mania.” Starr began corresponding with the island and “collecting every stamp and envelope from Tristan da Cunha she could lay her hands on.” By the early 1980s, she had amassed an impressive collection of ephemera and maintained contact with “Tristan experts” and “fellow fanatics” across the globe. As an elderly woman living in an assisted-living facility, Starr expressed disappointment at never having visited the island. “But thinking about it and talking about it and remembering it,” she comforted herself, “that’s enough.”²³²

Starr was not alone in wanting to catch a glimpse of Tristan da Cunha. Winchester recounted coming into contact with escapists eager to visit the island. In East London, South Africa, he met an electrician, who, after harboring this dream for decades, entertained quitting his job, liquidating his assets, and sailing to Tristan da Cunha with family in tow. Winchester also made the acquaintance of Parke Thompson, the Ohio attorney whom the American edition of *Guinness Book of Records* immortalized as “the

²³⁰ Patrick J. Helyer, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic, 1981, 2, MS 1446, SPRI.

²³¹ Hilary Jones, “Tristan 20 Years On,” *Sunday Times Magazine*, 8 November 1981, 70-71.

²³² Bruce Johnstone, “Lonely, Little Island a Godsend,” *The Leader-Post*, 4 April 1981, C11.

World's Most Travelled Man," en route to receive a coveted Tristan da Cunha passport stamp.²³³ Nor did these individuals represent anomalies. As Allan Crawford explained to Peter Munch's widow, Helene: "Tristan as you know is really quite inaccessible for most people, and there are so many here and there who have fantastic dreams about visiting the island—just because they want to—and really the authorities have to try to fend them off because there are no hotels there, no boarding houses and indeed very bad communications altogether."²³⁴

The island now had a range of amenities that created a likeness to the outside world. But as long as people fantasized about peripheral places that remained difficult to reach, then the fascination with Tristan da Cunha's isolation showed no signs of waning. For better or worse, believed journalist William Mayo, Tristan da Cunha would always enjoy fame partially because of "its status as the world's loneliest isle."²³⁵

VI

The idealization of Tristan da Cunha's isolation arose from the reconceptualization of geographic space. At the time of settlement, when the sea represented a beautiful but perilous obstacle subjected to the whims of the wind and surf, chroniclers commonly portrayed Tristan da Cunha's isolation as dangerous and unenviable. The late-nineteenth-century ascendance of telegraphs and steamships, which fused the world, helped to recast far-away places like Tristan as sites of romance bracingly beyond reach. The twentieth-century innovations of wireless communications and flight caused the fabled island's status to continue to grow. As wireless technologies and airplanes penetrated the globe's

²³³ Winchester, *The Sun Never Sets*, 63-66, 71, 74.

²³⁴ Allan Crawford to Helene Munch, 8 March 1985, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0092, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²³⁵ William L. Mayo, "Tristan da Cunha: World's Loneliest Island," *Islands* 1, no. 1 (1981), 71.

remote corners, Tristan da Cunha incongruously and alluringly remained apart. With the assistance of the islanders, this extreme isolation grabbed the attention of not only escapists, but also philatelists and tourists, who embraced collecting and traveling as pursuits that enabled views of remote peoples and places.

The years following the Second World War, which brought an influx of outsiders, improved communications, and an elevated standard of living, caused some to reject the notion that Tristan da Cunha's isolation represented something romantic. With dazzling amenities, reliable radio transmissions, and expanded maritime connections, Tristan da Cunha had manifold links with, and indeed seemed to resemble, the maligned outside world. As development quickened during and after resettlement, further doubts arose. For some, a community integrated into commercial markets and communication networks no longer seemed worthy of idealization.

Yet, while the wartime occupation, advent of industry, and development heightened public skepticism, the island's ongoing and seemingly insurmountable isolation in a globalizing world ensured that Tristan da Cunha mesmerized stamp collectors, tourists, and escapists into the 1980s. Since the world had precious few inaccessible places, even with televisions Tristan da Cunha retained the cachet associated with being labeled the loneliest inhabited island in the world.

Tristan da Cunha's mystique persisted because the island functioned as a projection of the fears of metropolitan escapists. The hard-to-reach place beckoned as a haven from the troubles of the world, which fluctuated over the decades. During the interwar period, metropolitan escapists coveted peaceful communities spared the horrors of economic stagnation and mechanized war. In the immediate post-war period, they

sought refuges from nuclear fallout. Then, during the 1960s, economic inequality and consumerism became their primary preoccupation.

As a projection, Tristan da Cunha never represented an objective or static reality. On the contrary, this ordinary community became filtered through a utopian lens. Given these lofty expectations, the lonely island romance often fell short. While a life on the margins of the world intoxicated the uninitiated, the lived experience often proved markedly different. With limited contact and few amenities, outsiders frequently suffered agonizing monotony and succumbed to pangs of loneliness.

This was especially true of the SPG's missionaries, who endured years on the island with no companionship except that offered by intermittent visitors and their parishioners. As a result of this first-hand experience with isolation, Tristan da Cunha's seclusion became a personal and institutional concern for the SPG and its missionaries. As chapter three will show, Tristan da Cunha's isolation also became imbued with great spiritual dangers and opportunities.

Chapter 3

Ministers

On May 12, 1949, Marjorie Handley, teacher and widow of the late missionary Alec Handley, addressed an audience at Mary Sumner House, the Westminster headquarters of the Mother's Union, a Christian charity, about her tenure on Tristan da Cunha. Far removed from the shipping lanes that crisscrossed the globe, Handley explained, the islanders survived through donations. But, she continued, extreme seclusion and excessive charity had made them lazy, ignorant, and greedy. "In this vast family of the Anglican communion the Church on Tristan is in the position of a spoilt younger child," she deprecated. The islanders had treated the SPG's ministers as a source of "material benefits" rather than fonts of "spiritual counsel." Successive missionaries had tried to remedy this situation, though to no avail. However, the recent launch of a commercial lobster fishery in the archipelago afforded "a great opportunity" to end the dependence on charity, inculcate a work ethic, and bring about a spiritual awakening.¹

The SPG had grappled with the spiritual and moral ramifications of Tristan da Cunha's insularity since 1851, when Reverend William Taylor embarked on a six-year stint as the first resident missionary. At the time, only whalers visited with any regularity. Tristan da Cunha's status as a moribund "port town," where seafarers and landlubbers socialized, gave rise to moral panics.² Taylor and his successor, Reverend Edwin Dodgson, saw the recurrent stretches of isolation punctuated with arrivals of whalers,

¹ Marjorie Handley, Address at Mary Sumner Hall, 12 May 1949, 1-3, USPG D510/7, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford (hereafter BL).

² On the cultures and morals of port towns, see Brad Beaven, Karl Bell, and Robert James, eds., *Port Towns and Urban Cultures: International Histories of the Waterfront, c. 1700-2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

whose crews consisted of young, unaccompanied working-class men, as a grave threat to public decency and the integrity of the mission.³

Taylor and Dodgson regarded sailors as subversive figures that challenged gender norms and codes of conduct. In the Victorian age, the model Christian man embodied physical strength, chivalrous deportment, and virtuous outlook.⁴ But the sailors reaching Tristan da Cunha comported with the drunken, profane, and libidinous deviants of Anglo-American lore that reformers targeted.⁵ By leading transient lives that privileged self-gratification over industry and domestic responsibility, sailors challenged public morals and the sanctity of the Victorian family.⁶ Since mariners provided the community's lone source of intercourse with the world, Tristan da Cunha became perceived as a space beyond moral regulation that demanded evacuation.⁷

³ On the composition and culture of whalers, see Margaret S. Creighton, *Rites and Passages: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830-1870* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. ch. 2.

⁴ On masculinity and Christianity, see Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁵ On the language and stereotypes of sailors, see Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear Like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750-1850* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), esp. chs. 1-2; John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels, 1719-1917* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Joanne Begiato, "Tears and the Manly Sailor in England, c. 1760-1860," *Journal of Maritime Research* 17, no. (2015), 117-133. On reform movements, see Hugh H. Davis, "The American Seamen's Friend Society and the American Sailor, 1828-1838," *The American Neptune* 39 (1979), 45-57; Myra C. Glenn, "The Naval Reform Campaign against Flogging: A Case Study in Changing Attitudes toward Corporal Punishment, 1830-1850," *American Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (1983), 408-425; Richard Blake, *Religion in the British Navy, 1815-1879: Piety and Professionalism* (Woodbridge, UK and Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2014); Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986).

⁶ Valerie Burton, "'Whoring, Drinking Sailors': Reflections on Masculinity from the Labour History of Nineteenth-century British Shipping," in *Working Out Gender: Perspectives from Labour History*, ed. Margaret Walsh (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 84-101. On the conception of family during the Victorian age, see Karl Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press, 1995); Anthony S. Wohl, ed., *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

⁷ "Sailortowns" in Britain, most notably Portsmouth, earned such a distinction. See Karl Bell, "'They Are Without Christ and Without Hope': 'Heathenism,' Popular Religion, and Supernatural Belief in Portsmouth's Maritime Community, c. 1851-1901," in *Port Towns and Urban Cultures*, 49-68; Brad Beaven, "The Resilience of Sailortown Culture in English Naval Ports, c. 1820-1900," *Urban History* 43, no. 1 (2016), 72-95.

Taylor and Dodgson, who operated as vanguards and proxies of imperial governance, lacked regular oversight.⁸ Save an occasional visit from a warship or the Bishop of Saint Helena, no governmental or ecclesiastical authorities visited “the furthest outpost of the Church of England.”⁹ As such, missionaries exercised a degree of authority denied to ministers elsewhere.

By the interwar period, missionary isolation and influence had grown in tandem. The demise of whaling meant that missionaries, who had neither telegraphs nor reliable radio communications, went even longer without contact. With less oversight than Taylor or Dodgson, missionaries wielded formidable power. In the 1930s, writes historian Lance van Sittert, Tristan da Cunha became “a medieval feudal estate” subjected to the caprices and abuses of a “missionary-lord,” who sought to revitalize the island’s economy.¹⁰

Missionaries justified heavy-handed tactics as essential to resolving the spiritual and moral dangers of isolation. Throughout the interwar years, missionaries saw the situation as untenable and recommended evacuation. Until this materialized, however, they recognized that the remote, resource-strapped community had to rely on philanthropy.

Although missionaries assisted in soliciting donations, unrestrained charity discomfited them. Begging supposedly encouraged loafing and indolence. This had

⁸ For works that position missionaries as at the vanguard of imperial expansion, see Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990); John H. Darch, *Missionary Imperialists? Missionaries, Government and the Growth of the British Empire in the Tropics, 1860-1885* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009). For works that acknowledge the ways in which missionaries challenged British rule, see Andrew Porter, ed., *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003); Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁹ E.H. Dodgson, “Eight Years at Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Church Abroad* 5, no. 49 (November 1907), 81.

¹⁰ Lance van Sittert, “Fighting Spells: The Politics of Hysteria and Hysteria of Politics on Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (2015), 107, 115.

especially grave consequences for the community's men. By preventing male islanders from obtaining a regular wage and realizing the "breadwinner ideal," charity effeminized.¹¹

The SPG's approach to Tristan da Cunha reveals Christianity's conflicting relationship with charity. The Scripture, which exhorts believers to give, provides a theological rationale for charity.¹² Although always a tenet of the faith, Christianity and charity became even more enmeshed during the nineteenth century. The early 1800s witnessed Protestantism splinter into evangelical factions, which became "voluntary" organizations that sought donations to proselytize at home and abroad.¹³

The influence of voluntarism waxed during the altruistic Victorian age, when social services fell within the ambit of multiplying benevolent societies and the Church. Public donations not only funded ministries, but also schools, orphanages, and more. Philanthropy and the private-public partnership deepened over the nineteenth century and endured unscathed until the mid-twentieth century, when the state assumed a much larger role in the provision of welfare services.¹⁴

¹¹ Marjorie Levine-Clark, *Unemployment, Welfare, and Masculine Citizenship: "So Much Honest Poverty" in Britain, 1870-1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

¹² On the theological roots of poverty and charity, see Kent A. Van Til, "Poverty and Morality in Christianity," in *Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, eds. William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 62-83.

¹³ On voluntarism, fundraising, and missionary organizations, see Jeffrey Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise since 1700* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), ch. 5; Bob Tennant, *Corporate Holiness: Pulpit Preaching and the Church of England Missionary Societies, 1760-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. ch. 6. On the influence of missionaries and missions on the British public, see Susan Thorne, "Religion and Empire at Home," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, eds. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143-165; Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹⁴ On altruism, see Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). On voluntarism and the Christian tradition in Britain, see Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). On voluntarism, the state, and provision of welfare services, see Bernard Harris, "Charity and Poor Relief in England and Wales, Circa 1750-1914," in

But altruism had limits. Religious and secular authorities understood poverty as a voluntary choice that afflicted the morally lax. This had implications for the disbursement of alms. Charity functioned as a temporary expedient for the deserving, not a long-term benefit for the indolent. The former intended to earn their keep, while the latter did not. This distinction between “poor” and “paupers,” which laws codified, legitimized punitive strategies. Prone to idleness, paupers needed to experience the disciplinary regimes of the country’s workhouses.¹⁵ While ubiquitous throughout Victorian Britain, the structures and ideas undergirding workhouses persisted into the interwar period, when a softer stance toward poverty began to predominate.¹⁶

In 1947, when Lambert’s Bay Canning Company, a South African fishing firm, approached the Colonial Office about exporting lobsters from the Tristan da Cunha island group, a solution to the dilemmas of isolation and charity emerged. The advent of

Charity and Mutual Aid in Europe and North America since 1800, eds. Bernard Harris and Paul Bridgen (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 19-42; Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988); Jane Lewis, “Voluntary and Informal Welfare,” in *British Social Welfare in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Robert M. Page and Richard Silburn (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1998), 249-270. On interwar philanthropy, see Eve Colpus, “*The Week’s Good Cause: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-war BBC*,” *Twentieth Century British History* 22, no. 3 (2011), 305-329; Eve Colpus, *Female Philanthropy in the Interwar World: Between Self and Other* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

¹⁵ David Englander, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: From Chadwick to Booth, 1834-1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), ch. 2; Robert Humphreys, *Sin, Organized Charity and the Poor Law in Victorian England* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan Press, 1995); Kathleen Callanan Martin, *Hard and Unreal Advice: Mothers, Social Science and the Victorian Poverty Experts* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), ch. 3; Felix Driver, *Power and Pauperism: The Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Elizabeth T. Hurren, *Protesting about Pauperism: Poverty, Politics and Poor Relief in Late-Victorian England, 1870-1900* (Woodbridge, UK and Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2007).

¹⁶ On the persistence of poor laws and workhouses, see M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981); Anthony Brundage, *The English Poor Laws, 1700-1930* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2001), esp. ch. 7; Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 10. On the linkages between Christianity and welfare during the interwar period, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Bruce Wollenberg, *Christian Social Thought in Great Britain between the Wars* (Lanham, MD and London: University Press of America, 1997).

commercial industry meant jobs and wages for the islanders. It promised to make Tristan da Cunha self-reliant.

Although many greeted development as a salutary restructuring of Tristan da Cunha, others questioned the wisdom of introducing industry into a sleepy, agrarian community deemed untouched by civilization. Since the early twentieth century, the prospect of unleashing modern technologies and ideas into such societies had occasioned anxieties. These paternalistic misgivings had prompted bureaucrats, anthropologists, and other agents of development to pursue strategies that achieved economic uplift of “primitive” peoples without trampling a preconceived, chauvinistic conception of their societies.¹⁷

Reservations about developing a secluded, pastoral society like Tristan da Cunha had a spiritual dimension as well. Post-war Britain’s rising secularism highlighted the challenges of reconciling faith and the technologically sophisticated modern age, which some thought mutually exclusive. According to the dominant narrative, the years

¹⁷ On the fears of modernizing supposedly primitive societies, see Robert Cribb, “Nature Conservation and Cultural Preservation in Convergence: Orang Pendek and Papuans in Colonial Indonesia,” in *A Sea for Encounters: Essays towards a Postcolonial Commonwealth*, eds. Stella Borg Barthet (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009), 223-241; George Steinmetz, “The Uncontrollable Afterlives of Ethnography: Lessons from ‘Salvage Colonialism’ in the German Overseas Empire,” *Ethnography* 5, no. 3 (2004), 241-288; George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 10; Fenneke Sysling, “‘Protecting the Primitive Natives’: Indigenous People as Endangered Species in the Early Nature Protection Movement, 1900-1940,” *Environment and History* 21, no. 3 (2015), 381-399; Kevin Grant, “Trust and Self-Determination: Anglo-American Ethics of Empire and International Government,” in *Critiques of Capital in Modern Britain and America: Transatlantic Exchanges 1800 to the Present Day*, eds. Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), esp. 164-166; Frederick Cooper, “Development, Modernization, and the Social Sciences in the Era of Decolonization: The Examples of British and French Africa,” *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 1, no. 10 (2004), 9-38; Freddy Foks, “Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘Indirect Rule,’ and the Colonial Politics of Functionalist Anthropology, ca. 1925-1940,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 1 (2018), 35-57.

following the Second World War witnessed a short-lived “revival.”¹⁸ These accounts minimize evidence of slumping Sunday school attendance, declining observance of the Sabbath, and other affronts to ecclesiastical authority.¹⁹ But, to the extent that a revival occurred, most agree that it had fizzled by the late 1950s.²⁰

While the causes, periodization, and even the idea of a loss of faith remain contested, many contemporaries confidently attributed the perceived decline of organized Christianity to industrial development.²¹ It reflected the logic of the “secularization thesis,” which asserts “religious belief is in inexorable (and inevitable) decline as a fundamental process introduced by the arrival of modern society and its consequences.”²²

¹⁸ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), 443-447; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 170-175.

¹⁹ S.J.D. Green, “Was There an English Religious Revival in the 1950s?,” *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 7, no. 9 (2006), 530-533; Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning, “When Was Secularization? Dating the Decline of the British Churches,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010), 108-109, 115-116, 118, 120-123.

²⁰ On the decline of Christianity in Britain over the long 1960s, see Callum Brown, “What Was the Religious Crisis of the 1960s?,” *Journal of Religious History* 34, no. 4 (2010), 468-469; Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 175-187; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In contrast, some scholars have argued that Britons have abandoned organized, public forms of worship in favor of private, increasingly pluralistic assertions of faith. See, among others, Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Paul Badham, “Religious Pluralism in Modern Britain,” in *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from Pre-Roman Times to the Present*, eds. Sheridan Gilley and W.J. Sheils (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 488-502; John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²¹ For a historiographical overview, see Thomas W. Heyck, “The Decline of Christianity in Twentieth-Century Britain,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 28, no. 3 (1996), 437-453. For accounts that situate the origins of secularization before the post-war period, see, for instance, Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London and New York: Longman, 1980); Richard Brown, *Church and State in Modern Britain, 1700-1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), esp. ch. 5; Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Julie Melnyk, *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2008); I.D. McCalman, “Popular Irreligion in Early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London,” in *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society: Essays in Honor of R.K. Webb*, eds. R.W. Davis and R.J. Helmstadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 51-67; Clive D. Field, “Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain, 1918-1939,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013), 57-93.

²² David Nash, “Reconnecting Religion with Social and Cultural History: Secularization’s Failure as a Master Narrative,” *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 3 (2004), 303.

Believing that industrialization secularized, and that isolation had hitherto shielded Tristan da Cunha from the vices and secularism besetting mechanical civilization, the SPG orchestrated a program of Christian development.²³ In negotiations with a consortium of South African fishing firms and the Colonial Office, the SPG secured welfare provisions to protect the interests of the Church of England and to safeguard the islanders' faith and morality. The SPG secured funds for social services, banned alcohol sales to islanders, and protected the chaplain's position as paramount authority over the school.

Launched in 1949, the fishery weaned the islanders from charity, but also left the SPG uneasy. Having reimagined Tristan da Cunha as a space long insulated from industrial vice, missionaries blamed any drops in church attendance, spells of intemperance, and lapses in morality on the intrusion of external forces into the SPG's preserve. These recurrent moral panics symptomized the gradual attenuation of SPG control, particularly over education, that attended the advent of fishing and especially the repeal of the contractual commitments. Alarmists, who feared British-style secularization, nurtured a utopian hope of realizing on tiny, remote Tristan da Cunha a level of control and spiritual perfectibility unobtainable on a grander scale.²⁴

²³ On missionaries as agents of development, see Rebecca Hughes, "'Science in the Hands of Love': British Evangelical Missionaries and Colonial Development in Africa, c. 1940-60," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41, no. 5 (2013), 823-842; John Stuart, "Overseas Mission, Voluntary Service and Aid to Africa: Max Warren, the Church Missionary Society and Kenya, 1945-63," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 3 (2007), 527-543; John Casson, "Missionaries, Mau Mau and the Christian Frontier," in *Missions and Missionaries*, eds. Pieter N. Holtrop and Hugh McLeod (Suffolk, UK: The Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2000), 200-215; Andrew N. Porter, "War, Colonialism and the British Experience: The Redefinition of Christian Missionary Policy, 1938-1952," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 5, no. 2 (1992), 269-288.

²⁴ On the "miniaturization of perfection," see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 257-261.

These concerns became even more prominent during and especially after the evacuation to Britain. While some within the SPG welcomed resettlement in Britain, others took a more sentimental view. They romanticized Tristan da Cunha's piety, sobriety, and thrift as a welcome and endangered foil to the irreverence, overindulgence, and materialism blighting post-war Britain.

The SPG's laments smacked of irony. Missionaries had spent nearly a century ascribing the island's sins to isolation and arguing on that basis for evacuation or economic transformation. Once achieved, however, they blamed the island's shortcomings on contact with civilization. It attests to how Tristan da Cunha functioned as a site on which Anglicans projected metropolitan religious anxieties, including the immorality of nautical culture, the dangers of begging and male unemployment, and the perils of industrialization.

An emphasis on geographic space, specifically Tristan da Cunha's proximity or distance from civilization, united these disparate concerns. At times, most notably the late nineteenth century and interwar period, the island's insularity appeared to pose greater spiritual and moral dangers than the iniquities of civilization. During other periods, especially in the 1960s, the reverse held true. Civilization appeared infinitely more dissolute than isolated Tristan da Cunha.

I

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the first missionaries served on Tristan da Cunha, isolation did not have an intrinsically dangerous association. Embodying the ascetic ideal, some thought living far removed from the world elevated the importance of God. "In this isolated spot, cut off to so great an extent from communication with the rest

of the world, religion, if it lays hold upon the mind at all, is likely to become the chief concern,” thought Robert Gray, Bishop of Cape Town and one-time visitor.²⁵ Yet, while isolated, Tristan da Cunha never remained “cut off.” The sailors that frequented the island, albeit in decreasing numbers, provided the community intercourse with the world. In keeping with popular tropes, Taylor and Dodgson construed sailors as universally debased and the vectors of all sin. Unable to counterbalance the prejudicial influence of mariners, and faced with economic deprivation, they argued for the community’s resettlement.

Prior to Reverend Taylor, the islanders necessarily maintained a homegrown church. Without clergymen, spiritual ministrations, including christenings and burials, and religious instruction fell to William Glass.²⁶ Although raised Presbyterian, the Scotsman performed services and rites in accordance with the preferences of the Anglican majority.²⁷

This state of affairs seemed destined to continue until Reverend John Wise, a missionary en route to Sri Lanka, called in 1849. The community’s plight touched Wise, who urged the Bishop of Colombo to assist.²⁸ Wise’s widely circulated letter of entreaty

²⁵ Robert Gray to E. Hawkins, 5 April 1856, appendix of *Three Months’ Visitation, by the Bishop of Capetown, in the Autumn of 1855: With an Account of His Voyage to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha, in March, 1856* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1856), 151-152.

²⁶ Letter the Fourth, 6 October 1836, in Julia Charlotte Maitland, *Letters from Madras, During the Years 1836-1839*, rev. ed. (London: John Murray, 1861), 11-12.

²⁷ John Wise to the Lord Bishop of Colombo, 5 May 1849, in *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal* 3 (1850), 79-80. In 1851, Captain Denham stated that the entire population remained practicing Anglicans. See H.M. Denham, “A Day at Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 22, no. 4 (April 1853), 157 [185 incorrectly paginated as 157].

²⁸ John Wise to the Lord Bishop of Colombo, 5 May 1849, in *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal*, 79-80.

grabbed the attention of an anonymous benefactor, who agreed to fund a missionary through the SPG.²⁹

Through Wise's letter, Reverend William Taylor, then "preparing for Missionary labours," first encountered Tristan da Cunha. Taylor not only sought "to claim even this truly the utmost part of the earth for his possession," but also adventures in a far-off corner of the globe. As he recalled, "having somewhat of Robinson Crusoe's disposition, I felt much inclined to venture to Tristan, to try what good, by God's help, I could do in so retired a place." After receiving the SPG's sanction, the newly ordained Reverend Taylor arrived on the island 1851.³⁰

Taylor found a community craving spiritual fellowship. "Scarce ever is any one absent on the Sunday," he wrote after nearly a year, "either morning or evening; & they all join heartily & earnestly in the service." Although not as popular, even weekday services attracted a sizeable number. "I have good reason to believe that the good seed is already beginning to bring forth good fruit," he boasted.³¹

Soon, however, Taylor adopted a more jaundiced stance. As he griped, "at my first coming all seemed so much brighter in appearance than it really was."³² Taylor turned to battling "grosser sins," such as drinking and profanity.³³ He also waged a campaign against the unchaste behavior "of young men & women rambling about all day upon the hill together."³⁴

²⁹ William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D'Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 51.

³⁰ Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth*, 51-52, 64.

³¹ W.F. Taylor to E. Hawkins, 21 January 1852, 4, 8-9, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

³² W.F. Taylor to W.T. Bullock, 30 October 1855, 3-4, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

³³ W.F. Taylor diary, 3 April 1852 entry, in "Tristan D'Acunha," *The Gospel Missionary* 3 (1853), 50.

³⁴ W.F. Taylor to E. Hawkins, September 1853, 1, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

The sin infecting this remote corner of Christendom worried Taylor, who thought evacuation the only suitable solution. The islanders had few opportunities, save participation in the iniquitous whaling industry, which prevented a family-oriented community of upstanding Christians from taking root. Because too many marriageable-aged men left Tristan da Cunha to join whaling crews and embark on “a wild sailor’s life,” the island had a pronounced gender imbalance. With absent or insufficient numbers of respectable husbands, families suffered and unwed women fell prey to the wiles of roaming sailors, whose habit of breaking the Sabbath and penchant for “drunkenness & lewdness” threatened the community. The barren soil, which yielded insufficient potatoes, compounded the moral situation. Only removal promised to fulfill “the blessed work of rescuing a little band of 80 souls, upon this little speck in the wide ocean, from being a foul blot upon the face of God’s creation.”³⁵

Despite refusals, Taylor implored the SPG to secure the evacuation of the island through the entirety of his ministry, which ended in 1857.³⁶ Although he had tamed the “grossest vices” and brought civility and literacy to youngsters “scarce one shade better than the wild untaught brutish heathens,” Tristan da Cunha remained too isolated for fellowship or inhabitation. “A place where only a dozen souls cd [could] get a decent living, twelve hundred miles from all the world, is not a fit place for men to live on,” he wrote.³⁷

³⁵ W.F. Taylor to E. Hawkins, September 1853, 2-4, USPG C/TDC/1, BL; Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth*, 38-40, 77-78.

³⁶ W.F. Taylor to W.T. Bullock, 30 October 1855, 2-4, USPG C/TDC/1, BL; W.F. Taylor, plan for evacuation of Tristan da Cunha, September 1853, 1-2, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

³⁷ W.F. Taylor to E. Hawkins, 27 January 1855, 3-4, 7-8, USPG C/TDC/1, BL; Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth*, 80.

There existed a general consensus that whalers presented a poor example and damaged the community's moral fiber. Nathaniel Taylor, who visited during Reverend Taylor's ministry, expressed dismay that while at Tristan da Cunha "the departure and return of the schooners, whaling, boiling and coopering oil and all kinds of work were conducted on the Sabbath without the slightest token of respect for the day or its Author."³⁸ These fears intensified with Taylor's departure. "The whalers' visits, in a moral point of view are, I think, injurious, and now that their Pastor, the Rev. Mr. Taylor, has left, I fear they will not improve," opined W. Pulley.³⁹

After a long absence, the SPG appointed Reverend Edwin Dodgson to minister on Tristan da Cunha in 1880.⁴⁰ Born into an upper-middle-class household, the youngest sibling of Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) benefited from first-rate schooling.⁴¹ Following a stint as a civil servant, he entered the Chichester Theological College in 1871.⁴² After completing his studies, though prior to ordination, Dodgson served as a transitional deacon in various parishes.⁴³ In 1879, the recently ordained Dodgson proselytized in Zanzibar.⁴⁴ Shortly after assuming the post, however, he became stricken

³⁸ Nathaniel W. Taylor, *Life on a Whaler or Antarctic Adventures in the Isle of Desolation* (New London, CT: New London County Historical Society for Dauber and Pine Book Shop, Inc., New York City, 1929), 117-118.

³⁹ W.J.S. Pullen, "Voyage of H.M.S. 'Cyclops' from England to the Cape," *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 31, no. 4 (April 1862), 201.

⁴⁰ "Monthly Meeting," *The Mission Field* 25, no. 219 (1 November 1880), 394, 396.

⁴¹ Jean Gattégno, *Lewis Carroll: Fragments of a Looking-Glass*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974), 72; Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 76, 319.

⁴² See 10 October 1870 and 1 November 1871 entries, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*, vol. 6, ed. Edward Wakeling (Herefordshire, UK: The Lewis Carroll Society, 2001), 130, 186.

⁴³ Ordinations, in *The Ecclesiastical Gazette; or, Monthly Register of the Affairs of the Church of England, and its Religious Societies and Institutions* 36, no. 422 (12 August 1873), 27; Preferments, in *The Ecclesiastical Gazette; or, Monthly Register of the Affairs of the Church of England, and its Religious Societies and Institutions* 36, no. 421 (8 July 1873), 16.

⁴⁴ See 11 March 1879 and 20 March 1879 entries, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*, vol. 7, ed. Edward Wakeling (Herefordshire, UK: The Lewis Carroll Society, 2003), 164, 166.

with malaria and returned home.⁴⁵ While recuperating, Dodgson's uncle facetiously shared a clipping expressing the islanders' desire for a chaplain. Much to his uncle's chagrin, though, the "outlandish place" appealed to Dodgson.⁴⁶ It offered an outlet for missionary energies without risking further exposure to malaria in "his former unhealthy station."⁴⁷

Dodgson, who arrived in 1881, wielded tremendous control over the remote community. "At Tristan he was 'monarch of all he surveyed,'" his famous brother recalled, "and could carry on matters exactly as he liked—which was delightful for an extreme 'Ritualist' as he is."⁴⁸ Dodgson not only dictated the content and schedule of services, but also oversaw the education of children and adults.⁴⁹ During several hours each day of instruction in temporal and religious matters, the children remained under his watchful eye and subject to thrashings for insubordination.⁵⁰

He initially formed a favorable impression of the community, though expressed concerns about intemperance. "Drunkenness, I am sorry to say, has a hold on a few of the men when they get the chance, but immorality appears to be unknown, and they are decidedly a *religious* people in their way, and I have not the least difficulty in getting them to Church either on Sunday or week day," he wrote.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Charles L. Dodgson to Richard 'Espinasse, 7 March 1881, in *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, vol. 1, eds. Morton N. Cohen and Roger L. Green (London: Macmillan, 1979), 409.

⁴⁶ Dodgson, "Eight Years at Tristan D'Acunha," 81-82.

⁴⁷ Henry W. Tucker to R.H. Meade, 21 September 1880, No. 31, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D'Acunha*, C. 4959 (London: HMSO, 1887), 19.

⁴⁸ Charles Dodgson to Gertrude Chataway, 2 December 1890, in *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, vol. 2, eds. Morton N. Cohen and Roger L. Green (London: Macmillan, 1979), 815.

⁴⁹ E.H. Dodgson letter, 23 April 1881 excerpt, in "Tristan D'Acunha," *The Mission Field* 26, no. 309 (1 September 1881), 332.

⁵⁰ E.H. Dodgson letter, 30 October 1881 excerpt, in "Tristan D'Acunha: Arrival of H.M.S. 'Diamond,'" *The Mission Field* 27, no. 316 (1 April 1882), 126-127.

⁵¹ E.H. Dodgson letter, 23 April 1881 excerpt, in "Tristan D'Acunha," *The Mission Field* 26, no. 309 (1 September 1881), 333.

But Tristan da Cunha's role as a peripheral node in global maritime networks gave cause for alarm. Sailors mediated all contact with this southernmost fringe of the Atlantic world. "No one ever comes on shore except from a man-of-war," Dodgson reported, "so that with the exception of the men who board the ships, the people here have *very rarely* any communication with the outer world."⁵²

This exposed the islanders to an inordinate amount of vice. "Drinking is a great temptation here," Dodgson explained, "for whenever the men board any passing ship they are always offered a glass of grog; and very often they bring a case of brandy on shore."⁵³ The salty argot of the sea also vexed him. "You would be horrified to hear the disgusting words & expressions which the children, both girls and boys, pick up from these whaling crews when they come on shore," Dodgson deplored.⁵⁴

After several years battling sin, Dodgson vainly devoted the remainder of his first term to disbanding the community. He believed Tristan da Cunha's "unnatural state of isolation" not only presented an insuperable obstacle to achieving economic prosperity, but also to leading a righteous existence. The lone option available to youths remained joining the crews of passing whale ships, "where it would be a very hard struggle for even the bravest & best principled man to live a Christian life."⁵⁵

Edwin sought advice from his elder brother. Deeming the situation untenable, Charles recommended "getting all the Tristan folk moved to the Cape."⁵⁶ With Edwin's

⁵² E.H. Dodgson letter, 21 May 1881 excerpt, in "Tristan D'Acunha," *The Mission Field* 26, no. 309 (1 September 1881), 334.

⁵³ E.H. Dodgson letter, 21 May 1881 excerpt, in "Tristan D'Acunha," 334.

⁵⁴ E.H. Dodgson to Henry W. Tucker, n.d., handwritten copy, 3, DOC MSS 002 0008 0020, Peter A. Munch papers, Pope Pius XII Library, Saint Louis University (hereafter SLU).

⁵⁵ E.H. Dodgson to Henry W. Tucker, n.d., handwritten copy, 1-3, DOC MSS 002 0008 0020, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

⁵⁶ 27 September 1883 entry, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries: The Private Journals of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)*, vol. 8, ed. Edward Wakeling (Herefordshire, UK: The Lewis Carroll Society, 2004), 37.

blessing, he began lobbying for the islanders' removal.⁵⁷ Exploiting his reputation as renowned mathematician and author, Charles raised the islanders' struggles with eminent personages, including Hercules Robinson, baron and current governor of the Cape Colony, and Sir George Smyth Baden-Powell, brother of Robert Baden-Powell and Conservative Member of Parliament.⁵⁸

Edwin wrote accounts about Tristan da Cunha, which he dispatched to Britain. Described by Charles as "half-letter-half-journal," Dodgson's sisters copied these screeds for dissemination "among friends."⁵⁹ In turn, they may have provided the basis for Edwin's pamphlets about Tristan da Cunha, such as "About Us Sinners," which portrayed the islanders as iniquitous, racially debased mariners.⁶⁰

The islanders, who overwhelmingly wished to stay, objected to Edwin's racist characterizations and meddling in Tristan da Cunha's affairs. Tristan da Cunha, Peter Green assured authorities in London, remained a viable and thriving community integrated into global shipping circuits. A contented lot, the islanders had invested much time in settling Tristan da Cunha and did not wish to leave. "I would rather remain here as a British subject than to go and leave Tristan with the reputation of a Satanic subject," Green averred.⁶¹

Dodgson nonetheless remained committed to evacuation throughout his second term on Tristan da Cunha, which began in 1886. From the outset, he vowed to resettle the islanders. "I have told them that it is my present intention not to leave them again until

⁵⁷ 19 October 1883 entry, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, vol. 8, 44.

⁵⁸ In 1883, see entries for 29 October, 9 November, and 25 November, *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, vol. 8, 52, 58, 63-64.

⁵⁹ Charles Dodgson to Edwards Cust, 11 December 1889, in *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, vol. 8, 492-493.

⁶⁰ Peter W. Green to the Admiralty, 29 December 1884, No. 58, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D'Acunha* (1887), 34.

⁶¹ Peter W. Green to the Admiralty, 29 December 1884, No. 58, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D'Acunha* (1887), 34-35.

the looked-for opportunity arrives,” Dodgson wrote, “for I feel that my work lies here to prepare the people for life in the world, and to teach the children.”⁶²

Although Dodgson failed to achieve this aim, he stayed for an additional three years to mitigate the spiritual dangers of isolation. “It may seem unreasonable to make any fuss about such a mere handful of people (less than eighty) when so many thousands of the heathen are yet uncared for,” he wrote, “but the Tristanites are *not* heathen, but Christian colonists—more or less English—*imprisoned* on a little rock in mid-ocean.”⁶³

II

Tristan da Cunha’s insularity remained no less of a moral problem in the twentieth century, though for different reasons. As several interwar missionaries commented, the island’s isolation, which wrought deprivation and tribulation, could stimulate spiritual growth.⁶⁴ But the islanders had no interest in embracing an ascetic lifestyle. While often destitute, the begging economy, which had become the chief source of supplies by the interwar years, periodically brought the islanders lavish gifts from metropolitan benefactors with minimal effort. This disgusted missionaries, who railed against pauperism as spiritually degrading and effeminizing. Yet, marooned in the southern Atlantic with no industry, missionaries acquiesced and even assisted in begging. Throughout the interwar period, and especially the 1930s, missionaries groped for solutions, but without success. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the islanders remained hopelessly dependent on charity.

⁶² Quoted in “Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Mission Field* 32, no. 375 (1 March 1887), 85.

⁶³ Quoted in “Notes of the Month,” *The Mission Field* 34, no. 408 (2 December 1889), 476.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, R. Pooley to editor, *The Church Times*, December 1928, 1, USPG E 83 (B), BL; A.G. Partridge diary, 6 March 1929 excerpt, USPG D328, BL; Harold Wilde to W.F. France, 6 November 1935 excerpt, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

Tristan da Cunha remained without a missionary until the early twentieth century, when the Reverend John Graham Barrow and Katherine, his wife, stumbled upon a letter in a periodical. The missive, which publicized the need for a minister on the far-away island, grabbed their attention. As a boy, Reverend Barrow's mother, a survivor of the *Blenden Hall* shipwreck, had regaled him with romantic tales about Tristan da Cunha. Gratitude for the services rendered to his mother, as well as an opportunity to realize childhood dreams of adventuring to a remote South Atlantic island, persuaded Reverend Barrow to offer his services to the SPG.⁶⁵

The Barrows, who arrived in 1906, encountered a community that had fallen on lean times and required immediate assistance. "The late winter has been a hard one for them," explained Reverend Barrow, "even their potatoes running short on account of the wind having blighted the crop."⁶⁶ Since the few and infrequent passing vessels could scarce offer a sufficient volume of trade or donations to meet the desperate needs of the community, he appealed for supplies.⁶⁷

For Barrow, though, moral concerns held greater weight than economic misfortunes. "I consider the inter-marrying danger much nearer than the danger of starvation," Barrow concluded. Isolation interfered with islanders' ability to find mates, which prevented them from enjoying domestic bliss. "As things are at present," he

⁶⁵ K.M. Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1910), 1-4; J.G. Barrow to Colonial Office, 21 August 1905, No. 13, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3098 (London: HMSO, 1906), 58-59.

⁶⁶ "News from Tristan da Cunha," *The Mission Field* 52, no. 619 (July 1907), 199.

⁶⁷ J.G. Barrow to Andrew Kemm, 15 August 1906, Enclosure, No. 19, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3764 (London: HMSO, 1907), 10-11.

opined, “if the people are to marry, they must inter-marry, not only to a wrongful but to a dangerous, degree.”⁶⁸

However, Barrow counseled against evacuation. Although poor, he characterized the islanders as better positioned than the pinched working classes in Britain. Rather than evacuating Tristan da Cunha, the Colonial Office needed to overcome its isolation by cultivating connections with the world. Regular contact would remedy “the marriage difficulty by enabling the young people to find partners at the Cape,” as well as facilitate the establishment of “a paying trade” that could generate revenue.⁶⁹

This did not materialize and the begging that ensued from extreme isolation dismayed visiting chaplains. In 1919, Archer Turner, chaplain of H.M.S. *Yarmouth*, observed that dependence on charity had degraded the islanders. “Their present life probably dose [*sic*] not necessitate any very great effort or hard work,” Turner wrote, “and naturally tends to make unindustrious [*sic*], lazy and beggarly, and hardly a credit to the Empire.” While conceding that the isolated and cash-strapped community had no alternatives, he nevertheless made recommendations to the islanders on how to cultivate “the spirit of industry.”⁷⁰ A year later, fellow naval chaplain E.H. Griffiths reiterated the dangers of indolence and importance of toil. The original settlers “were men of grit who worked hard,” whereas “the present inhabitants were doing nothing by way of building upon the foundation laid by their forebears.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ J.G. Barrow to P.J. Hannon, 1 May 1907, Enclosure, No. 21, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 22

⁶⁹ J.G. Barrow to Under-Secretary of State, 5 March 1907, No. 20, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 17-18. See also J.G. Barrow to P.J. Hannon, 9 March 1907, Enclosure in No. 21, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1907), 22-23.

⁷⁰ Archer Turner, report on visit of H.M.S. *Yarmouth*, 6 August 1919, 2, 7-8, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

⁷¹ E.H. Griffiths, report on visit of H.M.S. *Dartmouth*, 11 October 1920, 6-7, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

This bleak situation awaited Reverend Henry Rogers and his wife Rose, who reached Tristan da Cunha in 1922.⁷² At first, Reverend Rogers evinced optimism about the mission. “There is much to be thankful for, a real desire for instruction in both religious and secular education,” he reported. Almost half of the population attended the newly established “Church of England Day School” and everyone frequented services on Sundays. It indicated a high moral standard.⁷³

Within a year, however, he had grown pessimistic about the moral condition. Profanity, lying, begging, and thieving purportedly remained widespread, though crippling poverty made the last two vices somewhat justifiable. “The reason the people steal and beg all our groceries is that they are often desperate for food and clothes,” explained Rogers.⁷⁴

Although Rogers favored evacuation for moral and economic reasons, until this occurred he sought to keep Tristan da Cunha afloat by soliciting donations.⁷⁵ Since currency did not widely circulate, and any proceeds went toward furthering the Lord’s work, Rogers had no compunction resorting to charity. As he quipped before departing, “Tristan must, if it is a place for beggars, be just the place for me, since I am now always begging assistance for this coming far-off parish of mine!”⁷⁶

N.B. Kent, Royal Navy Chaplain, who visited the island in 1923, thought the begging that took place under Rogers a disgusting affront to masculinity. “I have never seen it displayed in so lavish or blatant a way before and I venture to suggest that means

⁷² On arrival and first impressions, see Henry Martin Rogers to Douglas Gane, May 1922, 1-4, CB 9, Royal Geographical Society, London.

⁷³ H.M. Rogers to A.H. Dolphin, 15 May 1922, 1-2, USPG D278, BL.

⁷⁴ H.M. Rogers to SPG, March 1923, 1, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

⁷⁵ See H.M. Rogers to Secretary of State for the Colonies, n.d., 1-6, ADM 1/8645/190, National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter TNA).

⁷⁶ G.A. Wade, “A Glorious Adventure,” n.d., clippings, Tab 583.f.17, British Library.

should be devised to compel the inhabitants to face the economic problem and cease to become entirely dependent on the Empire,” he asserted. Otherwise, the men faced emasculation. “A long experience in the slums of London taught me that nothing degrades manhood so much as indiscriminate charity,” he concluded.⁷⁷

Begging also delayed spiritual progress. In the opinion of W.A. Holbech, Bishop of Saint Helena, Rogers’ three-year tenure had inflicted “harm by encouraging the islanders in discontent and craving for publicity, and that with a view to begging.” “That is not the Christianity which our Lord taught,” he continued, “and the good ones amongst the islanders have remembered better teaching given them before.”⁷⁸

The spiritually corrosive proclivity for begging endured into 1927, when Reverend Robert Pooley and lay reader Philip Lindsay arrived at Tristan da Cunha.⁷⁹ At first, Pooley and Lindsay formed high opinions of the islanders. They labored diligently and assiduously attended school and church. “The people are a lovable set,” wrote Lindsay, “and I think that the only drawback is that they are continually worrying on for something or other.”⁸⁰

Pooley touted the “great progress” already achieved on Tristan da Cunha. In addition to embarking on the construction of a school and rectory, they thinned and enclosed herds of livestock, thereby shielding the potato crop from predation. “Starvation has now by these means been averted,” he touted.⁸¹

⁷⁷ N.B. Kent to Hugh S. Shipway, report on visit of H.M.S. *Dublin*, 31 March 1923, 5, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

⁷⁸ W.A. Holbech to A.H. Dolphin, 1 July 1925, 1-2, USPG D298, BL.

⁷⁹ “The Lonely Island: Volunteers to Go to Tristan da Cunha Next Month,” *The Times*, 14 December 1926.

⁸⁰ Philip Lindsay to Macleod Murray, 16 April 1927, 1-3, USPG D320, BL.

⁸¹ R. Pooley, report on Tristan da Cunha, February 1928, 1-2, USPG D320, BL.

Still, the island remained extremely isolated and dangerously deprived. From March 1927, when the missionaries reached the island, and the arrival of the *Empress of France* in February 1928, no ships visited Tristan da Cunha.⁸² “We badly need SHIPS to call,” scrawled a panicked Pooley.⁸³

To secure resources for his isolated parish, Pooley turned to charity. He relied on correspondence with philanthropist Douglas Gane and newspapers to voice material wants to the world.⁸⁴ In a letter to the *Natal Mercury*, for instance, he even emulated the islanders’ begging letters: “We can’t help begging. Please excuse us. We are the poorest folk in the world.”⁸⁵

While these pleas appealed widely, they had particular resonance for churchgoers, who saw the islanders as a model for Christendom. S.W. Given, who married into the Dodgson family, characterized the islanders as “brave, industrious, law-abiding and God-fearing.” She queried: “Would they remain thus if suddenly transplanted to face the turmoil and strain, also, alas! the vices of a more ‘civilised’ country? I very much doubt it!” Rather, the islanders’ seclusion offered something special. “The islanders in their far-away home set us in this a splendid example, and one we might all well imitate,” she concluded.⁸⁶

But charity from inspired Christians could not satisfy everyone’s needs, and the poverty of isolation prompted some to transgress. “Several cases of theft we found out +

⁸² R.A.C. Pooley to A. Macleod Murray, February 1928, 1, USPG D320, BL.

⁸³ R. Pooley, report on Tristan da Cunha, February 1928, 2, USPG D320, BL.

⁸⁴ R.A.C. Pooley to A. Macleod Murray, March 1928, 2, USPG D320, BL.

⁸⁵ Quoted in “Penniless Tristan da Cunha Asks Yearly Visit of Warship,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 1928, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 2, British Library.

⁸⁶ S.W. Given, “Should the Islanders Be Removed,” *Church of England Newspaper*, 5 April 1928, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 2, British Library.

[we] warned the culprits that no stores will be given them if it happens again,” reported Pooley. “I preach against the evil of stealing + lies!”⁸⁷

In February 1929, Reverend Augustus Partridge relieved Pooley, who had suffered a breakdown the previous year.⁸⁸ Partridge, who overlapped with Lindsay for a year, first encountered an island on which faith and propriety thrived. Over three-fourths of all “possible communicants” packed into the “much too small over-crowded church” each Sunday (see figure 3.1).⁸⁹ The upright community had morals befitting churchgoers as well. “The only sin on the Island is a tendency to [ill] temper quickly over accompanied by swearing,” he concluded.⁹⁰



Figure 3.1. Following services, the Bishop of Saint Helena exits Saint Mary's Church during a January 1932 visit to the island. The National Archives, ref. ADM 123/97, used with permission.

⁸⁷ Robert Pooley to A. Macleod Murray, March 1928, 1, USPG D320, BL. Binding covers the edge of the letter, which may include the bracketed “we.”

⁸⁸ For an account of Partridge's arrival, see A.G. Partridge to Donald Hughes, 28 February 1929, 1-4, USPG D328, BL.

⁸⁹ A.G. Partridge to Donald Hughes, 28 February 1929, 5, USPG D328, BL.

⁹⁰ A.G. Partridge, 15 May 1929, 3 USPG D328, BL. Binding covers the edge of the letter, which based on context and the visible lettering suggests the bracketed “ill.”

Gradually, however, Partridge's opinion shifted. Although frequent churchgoers, he uncovered evidence of sin among the islanders toward the end of his first year. "Two cases of stealing have been dealt with + the culprits punished after proper trial by the Parliament," Partridge reported.⁹¹

Without supervision, he could impose severe punishments on mild offences. Partridge had some male transgressors flogged with a fearsome "strip of cowhide, 2 ft. long and 1/4 wide."⁹² Punishments for women proved equally drastic. He sanctioned manacled female wrongdoers to "stocks," which a visitor described as "an amusing contrivance consisting as they do of a box (of the soap box type) with two ankle holes and a padlock."⁹³

Deploying the stocks and especially the lash had a symbolic purpose. Flogging, argues Brett Shadle, represents "a ritual of power." These public spectacles intend to elevate the standing of the flogger, while debasing that of the victim. It serves to reinforce the presumed social hierarchy.⁹⁴

Partridge, who outsourced punishment, seems to have enjoyed seeing men brutalized and women humiliated. After a vicious flogging, for instance, he ordered salt massaged into the man's bloody sores. Furthermore, he placed the stocks near the church, so female offenders "could be ridiculed by people going to and from the church service." Partridge allegedly even encouraged the passerby "to spit on them." To further degrade, women charged with "uncleanliness" had hair shorn, bodies washed, and clothes "bloody from menstruation" publicly exhibited. Having heard this litany of horrors, Peter Munch

⁹¹ A.G. Partridge, report on Tristan da Cunha, 31 December 1929, 1-3, 5, USPG E 84 (B), BL.

⁹² A.G. Bee, report on visit of H.M.S. *Carlisle*, 11 January 1932, 4-5, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

⁹³ Capt. Nelson, report on visit of H.M.S. *Discovery II*, 22 November 1933, 4-5, USPG D384, BL.

⁹⁴ Brett Shadle, "Settlers, Africans, and Inter-Personal Violence in Kenya, ca. 1900-1920s," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 1 (2012), 64-65.

labeled him “a sadist and scoundrel of the first order.” So, too, did the islanders. On one occasion, the islanders had to prevent an enraged man from marching to Partridge’s door with “an axe in hand.”⁹⁵ Many decades later some still remembered Partridge as a vindictive, controlling man.⁹⁶

Such viciousness undoubtedly acted as not only a humiliating deterrent for misconduct, but also an outlet for frustrations about the island and the begging economy, which Partridge regarded as morally dangerous. “The present system is pauperising the people, sapping their energies, making for greed + jealousy,” he opined.⁹⁷ As result, he urged evacuation and in the interim worked to curb the excesses of the begging economy. Since sensational press sustained the flow of charity, Partridge refused to contribute and punished those who did.⁹⁸

Yet, despite Partridge’s best efforts, the problem remained intractable. “I have given and given until I have no more to give + precious little to live on myself,” he complained. “I am sick + tired of their greed and should be glad to know that the Government was sending a warship to take them all off or else blow the Island up,” Partridge fumed.⁹⁹

Following Partridge’s chaplaincy, which came to an end in 1932, the remote mission on Tristan da Cunha appeared in crisis. “The cessation of all opportunity of barter makes them entirely dependent on charity for all the necessities of life,” explained Reverend France, “except such very meagre and uncertain food supplies as the Island

⁹⁵ Peter A. Munch, *Glimpsing Utopia: Tristan da Cunha 1937-38: A Norwegian’s Diary*, trans. Catherine Munch Snyder (Easton: George Mann Publication, 2008), 5, 170, 172.

⁹⁶ Putting Wishes, 16 March 1963, 1-2, Peter A. Munch papers, DOC MSS 002 0012 0002, SLU.

⁹⁷ A.G. Partridge to W.A. Holbech, 6 March 1930, 2, USPG D334, BL.

⁹⁸ A.G. Partridge to W.A. Holbech, 6 March 1930, 2, USPG D334, BL.

⁹⁹ A.G. Partridge to Gibbs, 30 May 1930, 1, USPG D334, BL.

provides.” As a result of this isolation and lack of industry, the islanders had degenerated into skilled and well-organized mendicants. But insistent calls for contributions had led to a drop in donations from members of the public, who increasingly expressed “a querulous note of interrogation about the future, and a growing impatience with the reiteration of appeals on behalf of a people, whose needs can only increase.” Rather than donate, a growing number inquired about removal. This flagging public support demanded action. “It is, we submit, clear that charity is falling, and that without charity disaster will sooner or later overtake the people, if action to terminate the present situation is not taken,” Reverend France concluded.¹⁰⁰

In 1933, the SPG delegated to Reverend Harold Wilde the difficult task of transforming Tristan da Cunha from dependency to self-sufficiency.¹⁰¹ On paper, Wilde seemed the optimal candidate. A veteran of the First World War, Lieutenant Wilde had served with distinction on the Western Front, where he received a Military Cross for bravery “under heavy fire.”¹⁰² Following the war, he earned a Licence in Theology from Durham University and turned to missionary work, which included a five-year tour in Suez, Egypt.¹⁰³

Although regularly described as “a charming personality,” Wilde had a darker side that remained concealed from the SPG. Reverend France noted “rather disquieting information about his past life,” though did not elaborate.¹⁰⁴ Whatever the secret, Wilde

¹⁰⁰ W.F. France to the Under-Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, 17 January 1934, 2-3, USPG CLS 183, BL.

¹⁰¹ W.F. France to A.G. Partridge, 24 November 1933, 1, USPG CLS 183, BL.

¹⁰² Harold Wilde entry, *Supplement to the Edinburgh Gazette of Tuesday, the 7th of October, 1919*, 8 October 1919, 3319.

¹⁰³ Entry for Harold Wilde, *Crockford's Clerical Directory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1652; “Tristan da Cunha: New S.P.G. Chaplain on his Task,” *The Times*, 2 December 1933.

¹⁰⁴ Unknown to S.J. Gibbs, 13 January 1934, 1, USPG C/TDC/1, BL; W.F. France to the Archbishop of Cape Town, 13 November 1940, 1, USPG CLS 279, BL.

undeniably struggled with alcoholism and had a violent streak.¹⁰⁵ While speculative, these unsavory attributes may have been the reason that Wilde had long lived apart from his wife, which baffled the SPG.¹⁰⁶

Wilde, who reached Tristan da Cunha in 1934, faced the familiar and interrelated problems of isolation and begging. From the start, the islanders habitually pestered the missionary for goods. “I’ve given + given + given until I shall return to England dressed in tussock grass with an empty bag,” he bemoaned. Instead of receiving, he aspired to foster “the Christian spirit of giving.”¹⁰⁷

But Wilde did not outright reject charity. On the contrary, he solicited generous support for the island.¹⁰⁸ Yet he saw these donations as temporary expedients to achieve self-sufficiency. As one visitor summarized, “he wanted to get money, material and support in order that he may develop some industry on the Island which would enable the Islanders to rise from a people who received a lot from the outside world but gave nothing of it.”¹⁰⁹

In a step toward self-sufficiency, Wilde launched a so-called “Five Year Plan” on neighboring Inaccessible Island. “This plan is an attempt to grow more crops and to extend cattle raising,” he explained, “and altogether to provide a greater supply of food.” It entailed transporting the male population to Inaccessible, where they built a house for fourteen “pioneers” in which to live while developing the agricultural potential of the

¹⁰⁵ On Wilde’s drinking, see unknown to W.F. France, 2 October 1940, 1, USPG D510/2, BL.

¹⁰⁶ W.F. France to Archbishop of Cape Town, 13 November 1940, 2, USPG CLS 279, BL.

¹⁰⁷ Harold Wilde to W.F. France, 12 August 1934 excerpt, 5-6, USPG C/TDC/1, BL.

¹⁰⁸ W.F. France to Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, 17 November 1937, 1-2, USPG CLS 230, BL.

¹⁰⁹ H. Beardmore to H.R. Marrack, report on visit of H.M.S. *Carlisle*, 4 March 1937, 2-3, USPG E92 a, BL.

island. Once agriculture also extended to Nightingale Island, Wilde would wean Tristan da Cunha from charity.¹¹⁰



Figure 3.2. Reverend Wilde presides over the distribution of stores that H.M.S. *Carlisle* delivered in 1937. The National Archives, ref. ADM 116/3646, used with permission.

In the interim, Wilde increased control over donated goods (see figure 3.2). He could not trust the islanders, who supposedly squandered supplies, to manage their shares. Wilde thus built a “store-house” capable of holding provisions until distribution. Instead of issuing goods “in bulk” following the receipt of a shipment, Wilde, with the assistance of headman Willie Repetto and head woman Frances Repetto, now doled out “rations” from the storehouse on Saturdays. It formed the locus of his power. “The key of success, for any missionary who comes to Tristan, which he must hold + always keep in

¹¹⁰ Harold Wilde, “Islands of Opportunity: Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands,” 2-3, in *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter*, June 1937, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

his hand in order to govern the Island with that happy even spirit, is the one that unlocks the cupboards,” he reasoned.¹¹¹

Wilde’s superiors looked favorably upon the activities of their isolated underling. “Mr. Wilde is probably the most effective chaplain on the Island for a long time,” effused Reverend France in 1936.¹¹² A year later, Charles Aylen, Bishop of Saint Helena, likewise spoke in glowing terms of Wilde’s work, which had “banished the defeatist spirit.”¹¹³



Figure 3.3. Parishioners gathered for service circa 1937. The National Archives, ref. ADM 116/3646, used with permission.

Indeed, Bishop Aylen contrasted Tristan da Cunha’s pew-packing piety (see figure 3.3) with Saint Helena’s supposed irreverence. On the latter “the people have been much exposed to the vices of our own countrymen,” whereas on the former “the only

¹¹¹ Harold Wilde to W.F. France, 24 June 1935 and 19 July 1935 excerpts, 2-4, 27-28, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

¹¹² W.F. France to Undersecretary of State for the Colonies, 28 February 1936, 1, USPG CLS 230, BL.

¹¹³ Bishop Charles Aylen to SPG, n.d., 2, USPG E92 a, BL.

influences that have been externally introduced are the influences of the men of God whom for 84 years the S.P.G. with sublime forethought has been sending at her expense.”¹¹⁴

However, Aylen and others received an incomplete portrait of Wilde, who operated with impunity on the isolated outpost. His gruff, “very dictatorial” demeanor inspired fear in visitors and islanders alike.¹¹⁵ One islander who now lived in Cape Town likened Wilde to Benito Mussolini, while another said that the missionary carried on “as if he were a king.”¹¹⁶

Like an island despot par excellence, the imperious missionary often became unhinged, particularly while drinking. On one occasion, an inebriated Wilde accidentally shot an islander.¹¹⁷ Another time, Wilde assaulted Frances Repetto. According to Peter Munch, Wilde “dragged her into the house and closed the door.” The slightest affronts sent Wilde into a rage. After an islander struggled and refused to remove the besotted missionary’s coat, Wilde “clawed and hit” the man.¹¹⁸

Chafing under Wilde’s tyrannical regime, the islanders disobeyed and mocked the “crazy fellow.” They flouted his proscriptions, such as bans on private trading, and declined storehouse goods. To escape Wilde’s reach, many islanders even defected from Anglicanism and embraced Catholicism.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Bishop of Saint Helena to J. McLeod, 3 August 1937, MS 3124, Folio 67-69, Church of England Written Archive Centre, Lambeth Palace Library (hereafter Lambeth).

¹¹⁵ See Adrian Seligman, *The Voyage of the Cap Pilar* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939; London: Seafarer Books, 1993), 124-125. Citations refer to the Seafarer Books edition; G.B.B. Hawkins, report on visit of H.M.S. *Bermuda*, 29 August 1940, 2-3, ADM 1/11120, TNA.

¹¹⁶ Munch, *Glimpsing Utopia*, 2, 9.

¹¹⁷ “Notes on Guns,” n.d., 2, DOC MSS 002 0012 0002, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹¹⁸ Munch, *Glimpsing Utopia*, 55, 124-125.

¹¹⁹ Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945), 249-257.

The arrival of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition, which brought these improprieties to light, precipitated Wilde's ouster. Expedition members like Allan Crawford learned that Wilde engaged in unbecoming behavior, such as reading and redacting outgoing mail. It led Crawford and Erling Christophersen to advocate for the missionary's dismissal.¹²⁰ "I do not think that Mr. Wilde is the right man for Tristan," Christophersen explained to the SPG, "and I do not hesitate in recommending his removal to a place where he can be controlled so that advantage could be taken of his good points."¹²¹

Reverend France sympathized with Wilde, who denied and bristled at the allegations.¹²² "I attach far more importance to the mind of a man who has lived there five years than to the 'impressions' of a four months' visitor who is without responsibility, which soon smother 'the romance of the lonely island,'" he told J.B. Sidebotham of the Colonial Office. Nevertheless, France thought the missionary displayed clear signs of fatigue.¹²³ Thus, in the winter of 1939 the SPG moved to remove Wilde a year early.¹²⁴ In an episode eerily reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's infamous Kurtz, Wilde went rogue and refused to leave for several months until the Royal Navy finally managed to extract him in August 1940.¹²⁵ For the SPG, Tristan da Cunha's isolation appeared unconquerable.

¹²⁰ See Allan B. Crawford diary, 28 December 1937, 2 January 1938, 21 March 1938, 22 March 1938, 23 March 1938, 24 March 1938, 28 March 1938, 30 March 1938 entries, MS 1531/5/4, Thomas H. Manning Archive, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge (hereafter SPRI).

¹²¹ Erling Christophersen to W.F. France, 15 September 1938, 1, USPG D477, BL.

¹²² Harold Wilde to W.F. France, 10 February 1939, 21-23, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

¹²³ W.F. France to J.B. Sidebotham, 27 February 1939, 1-2, USPG CLS 230, BL.

¹²⁴ W.F. France to J.B. Sidebotham, 6 January 1939, 1, USPG CLS 230, BL.

¹²⁵ On Wilde's refusal to leave, see W.F. France to O.G.R. Williams, 22 January 1940, 1-2, USPG CLS 279, BL. For an account of Wilde's exit, see G.B.B. Hawkins, report on visit of H.M.S. *Bermuda*, 29 August 1940, ADM 1/11120, TNA.

III

At the beginning of the Second World War, Tristan da Cunha's isolation and dependence on charity presented a dilemma for the SPG. Yet, as Reverend France explained, no solution existed:

Now, something must be done about the future. What? I don't know. Move them? No country will have them. Go on steadily increasing their dependence on charity until mendicancy and indolence leaves them sub-human: and finally over-population plus falling food supplies lead to starvation? Equally impossible.¹²⁶

While seemingly hopeless, the wartime occupation laid the groundwork for an economic transformation and spiritual reimagining of Tristan da Cunha. Convinced that a commercial fishery would solve the islanders' problems, though fearful of introducing industrial vices and impiety into an insular and supposedly pure community, the SPG orchestrated a program of Christian development. Through a raft of welfare provisions and contractual safeguards, the SPG intended to curtail the flow of charity without altering the mythicized character of the community or attenuating the incumbent missionary's hard-won power.

Throughout the war, Tristan da Cunha remained a guarded secret.¹²⁷ As a result, "strict instructions" kept the SPG muzzled from divulging information about Tristan da Cunha's happenings.¹²⁸ Prevented from launching appeals for a missionary or soliciting donations, the SPG entrusted the islanders' spiritual welfare to Reverend C.P. Lawrence, Royal Navy chaplain, whose services they discreetly obtained through military channels in 1942.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ W.F. France to C.P. Lawrence, 20 April 1943, 2, USPG CLS 291, BL.

¹²⁷ J.B. Sidebotham to W.F. France, 4 February 1943, 1, USPG D510/2, BL.

¹²⁸ W.F. France to Archdeacon, 10 February 1945, 1-2, USPG CLS 286, BL.

¹²⁹ On Lawrence's appointment, see W.F. France to J.B. Sidebotham, 18 December 1941, 1-2, USPG CLS 279, BL; J.B. Sidebotham to W.F. France, 8 January 1942, USPG D510/2, BL; W.F. France to Thomas

During Lawrence's hushed tenure, wages remitted to the islanders for assisting the military in unloading stores, constructing facilities, and undertaking other jobs compensated for the loss of donations.¹³⁰ The islanders earned an estimated £15 in chits for forty hours of weekly "shift" work, which they exchanged for goods at the naval canteen.¹³¹ In 1944, the Royal Navy replaced chits with currency, which generated deposits for a newly created Post Office Savings Bank.¹³²

The islanders' experience as wage laborers integrated into a cash economy convinced Reverend Lawrence that making Tristan da Cunha self-supporting depended on exploiting the maritime skills and natural resources of the community through commercial fishing.¹³³ Tristan da Cunha's waters teemed with *Jasus tristani*, the Tristan spiny lobster. Known colloquially as "crawfish" or "crayfish," this crustacean had export potential.¹³⁴ Driven by the hankerings of cash-flush American consumers, the burgeoning South African commercial crayfish industry alone exceeded one million dollars by the late 1940s.¹³⁵

However, the idea of exporting Tristan rock lobster remained a pipedream until 1947, when Norman Howell, a South African journalist and acquaintance of Lawrence, received word that Lambert's Bay Canning Company had sought a fishing concession in the South Atlantic. Howell consequently contacted Caesar Gaggins, the Managing Director of Lambert's Bay Canning Company, about the richness of the waters of the

Crick, 19 February 1942, 1-2, USPG CLS 279, BL; Thomas Crick to W.F. France, 4 May 1942, 1, USPG D510/2, BL.

¹³⁰ E.J.S. Woolley to Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic Station, 19 July 1942, 1, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

¹³¹ E.J.S. Woolley, Fifth Monthly Report, Job No. 9, 7 October 1942, 2-3, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

¹³² H.S. Corfield, A Summary of the Administration of H.M.S. "Atlantic Isle" (Tristan da Cunha) and the Conditions of the Island during the Period 1944-1946, 29 May 1946, 2-3, ADM 1/9705, TNA.

¹³³ C.P. Lawrence to SPG Secretary, 10 June 1947, 1-2, 4, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹³⁴ Norman Howell, "Orphan Island," *Libertas* (September 1945), 57.

¹³⁵ Maxwell Pulca, "S.A. Crawfish Market in America," *Cape Times*, 28 January 1948, newspaper clipping, DOC MSS 002 0003 0007, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

Tristan da Cunha island group. With Howell's prompting, this initial exchange resulted in a string of parleys between Gaggins and Lawrence.¹³⁶

The fishing tycoon portrayed the venture as a humanitarian and Christian undertaking. He intended to replicate on Tristan da Cunha the model already implemented in South Africa. "As part of our policy of fostering the well-being of the fishing communities," he explained, "we would take steps to ensure the provision of adequate medical facilities, housing and social ammenities [*sic*], as we have done at Lamberts Bay and in other fishing centres in which our Company is interested."¹³⁷ Gaggins also stressed his unimpeachable "Christian" aims, as well as those of the companies involved.¹³⁸

The record of "progressive industrial planning" and sensitivity to Tristan da Cunha's "social problems" left Lawrence smitten. As he wrote, "this is a great opportunity for these people and will solve most of their problems and give them a chance to become self-supporting." The alternative to development remained begging, deterioration, and evacuation, which the islanders opposed.¹³⁹

Although a plausible solution to Tristan da Cunha's economic woes, some remained wary. The centrality of Saint Mary's Church and eponymous school to the community struck observers like Reverend Alec Handley, who had ministered on the island, as reminiscent of fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Britain.¹⁴⁰ In an increasingly secular age, such religiosity demanded appreciation and protection. John Russell

¹³⁶ C.P. Lawrence to SPG Secretary, 10 June 1947, 2, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹³⁷ C.H. Gaggins to SPG Secretary, 20 June 1947, 1-2, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹³⁸ C.H. Gaggins to A.E.A. Sulston, 8 March 1948, 2, USPG D510/6, BL; C.H. Gaggins to SPG Secretary, 20 November 1947, 2, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹³⁹ C.P. Lawrence to SPG Secretary, 10 June 1947, 1-4, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹⁴⁰ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 7 (August 1947), 3-4, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

Darbyshire, the Archbishop of Cape Town, thanked “God for this community still largely untouched by the evils of modern materialism and industrialism.” He thus fretted that the Company’s proposed modernization scheme could unleash vices that “might upset the hitherto comparatively blameless life of the Islanders.”¹⁴¹

The debates over the fate of the cannery on Tristan da Cunha spoke to the wider issues troubling the Church of England. The war and post-war years gave rise to fears that the secularization of British society had begun to accelerate. Seeking solace from wartime disruption and angst, some had gravitated toward secular ideologies like communism and private, syncretic spiritual practices.¹⁴² Thus, while not an exodus, between 1939 and 1945 overall church membership in Britain experienced a four-percent dip, though Anglicanism suffered greater attrition.¹⁴³

Nevertheless, dire predictions about Britain’s secularization abounded in the post-war period. In 1946, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Green pseudonymously claimed from informal sampling “that nearly half the young men leaving our public and secondary schools are almost pagan.”¹⁴⁴ While unrepresentative, Mass-Observation, a social research firm, published equally sobering findings from a survey of an undisclosed London borough the following year.¹⁴⁵

Many attributed the alleged decline of organized Christianity to modern life, particularly industrial development. This “secularization thesis” had gained traction since the depression and Second World War, which had heightened the visibility of the

¹⁴¹ Archbishop of Cape Town to Rev. B.C. Roberts, 27 August 1947, 1-2, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹⁴² For examples, see James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14-15, 203-204.

¹⁴³ Clive D. Field, “*Puzzled People* Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939-45,” *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 4 (2008), 472-473, 477.

¹⁴⁴ B.G. Sandhurst, *How Heathen is Britain?*, rev. ed. (London: Collins, 1948), 15.

¹⁴⁵ Mass-Observation, *Puzzled People: A Study in Popular Attitudes to Religion, Ethics, Progress and Politics in a London Borough* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1948), 8, 12, 50-52, 154.

working classes. Since this group had suffered industrialization's greatest iniquities and sharpest drop in belief, concerned Christians of various denominations made the spiritual welfare of laborers a top priority. In 1942, for instance, Methodists launched "Commando Campaigns," which dispatched the faithful to factories and slums.¹⁴⁶ The Church of England, too, mobilized "industrial chaplains," most famously Colin Cuttall and Edward Wickham, to preach in factories in South London and Sheffield in the final years of the war.¹⁴⁷

These activities formed a small part of a movement to arrest secularization at home and abroad. Under Wickham's supervision, the Sheffield Industrial Mission became a center for theological innovation in the post-war period. He helped to train a generation of missionaries headed to the colonial and post-colonial world. Wickham also assumed a prominent position in the Urban Industrial Mission (UIM).¹⁴⁸ Established by the World Council of Churches in 1964, the UIM coordinated the urban and industrial missions that had sprouted across the world since the Second World War.¹⁴⁹ While no link between Wickham and Tristan da Cunha existed, the conviction that secularism represented a "problem" and "disease" contracted from exposure to industrial conditions

¹⁴⁶ David Bebbington, "Evangelism and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Nonconformity," in *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Alan P.F. Sell and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 186-187, 200-202.

¹⁴⁷ Michael S. Northcott, *The Church and Secularisation: Urban Industrial Mission in North East England* (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Verlag Peter Lang, 1983), 37-38. On the most famous wartime mission, the Sheffield Industrial Mission, see also Paul Bagshaw, *The Church Beyond the Church: Sheffield Industrial Mission, 1944-1994* (Sheffield, UK: Industrial Mission in South Yorkshire, 1994), 4-18; John Mantle, *Britain's First Worker-Priests* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 53-54, 76-92.

¹⁴⁸ Hugh Lewin, ed., *A Community of Clowns: Testimonies of People in Urban Rural Mission* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publishers, 1987), 27.

¹⁴⁹ George Todd, "Mission and Justice: The Experience of Urban and Industrial Mission," *International Review of Mission* 65, no. 259 (1976), 251-255.

circulated widely and commanded the attention of the Church of England's Social and Industrial Council, which devoted resources to the problem.¹⁵⁰

While many feared that industrialization led to secularization and moral drift, the SPG warmed to the fishery because Lambert's Bay Canning Company and Reverend Lawrence, who had assumed a growing role in the proposed scheme, prioritized the islanders' welfare. B.C. Roberts, General Secretary of the SPG, thought Lambert's Bay Canning Company the only firm committed to elevating the "spiritual and material" position of the islanders.¹⁵¹ Reverend C.T. Wood similarly praised Lawrence as "the one person who can modify the effects of industrialization upon a very simple people."¹⁵²

The Colonial Office, meanwhile, had agreed in September to proceed with negotiations if a scientific survey substantiated Lawrence's claims of abundant seafood.¹⁵³ The support lent to commercial crayfish harvesting on Tristan da Cunha reflected the Colonial Office's post-war embrace of technocratic development. In an era of economic dislocation, social upheaval, and nationalist revolt, the beleaguered Colonial Office turned to expert-run development initiatives to buttress British power and to enrich depleted government coffers.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), 7-8, 11-13, 221-222; Matthew Grimley, "Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954-1967," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 4 (2009), 740; *The Task of the Church in Relation to Industry: A Report Prepared by a Working Party of the Social and Industrial Council* (London: The Church Information Office, 1959).

¹⁵¹ B.C. Roberts to J.B. Sidebotham, 3 October 1947, 1, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹⁵² C.T. Wood to Bishop, 18 March 1948, 2, USPG D510/7, BL.

¹⁵³ C.H. Gaggins to SPG Secretary, 20 November 1947, 1-2, USPG D510/4, BL.

¹⁵⁴ On colonial development, see Michael Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. ch. 10; Sabine Clarke, "A Technocratic Imperial State? The Colonial Office and Scientific Research, 1940-1960," *Twentieth Century British History* 1, no. 4 (2007), 453-480; Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

In January 1948, with the backing of the Colonial Office and South Africa's leading fisheries, the Lambert's Bay Canning Company surveyed the Tristan da Cunha island group.¹⁵⁵ To the expedition's delight, Tristan da Cunha's waters teemed with life, including crayfish.¹⁵⁶ "Judging by cables received everything tends to indicate that a fishing industry may be profitably started, even though a large capital will be required," enthused Gaggins.¹⁵⁷

Since the scheme required such a massive financial outlay, several South African companies formed a consortium called the Tristan Exploration Company Proprietary Limited (later known as the Tristan da Cunha Development Company). The Lambert's Bay Canning Company, of which the South African government owned one-third, held a 50-percent stake. In addition to various small investors, South-West African Fishing Industries, Ltd., Ocean Products, Ltd., Vitamin Oils, Ltd., and South African Sea Products, Ltd. retained the remainder.¹⁵⁸

On December 9, the Tristan Exploration Company Propriety Limited formalized an agreement with the Crown Agents for the Colonies. In exchange for a fifteen-year, exclusive, and renewable concession for the fish, crustaceans, and mollusks in the waters of the Tristan archipelago, which included the islands of Nightingale, Inaccessible, and Gough, the Company committed to generous terms. In addition to paying £1,500 into trust each year, the Company promised to remit a sixpence levy on each case of tinned

¹⁵⁵ C.P. Lawrence to Colonial Secretary, 28 January 1948, 1, USPG D510/5, BL.

¹⁵⁶ Reprint of 1948 Tristan da Cunha Expedition Reports, in *The South African Shipping News and Fishing Industry Review* (1948), 1, 9, 11, 23.

¹⁵⁷ C.H. Gaggins to A.E.A. Sulston, 8 March 1948, 1, USPG D510/6, BL.

¹⁵⁸ Minutes of meeting with Lambert's Bay Canning Company and Colonial Office, 3 May 1948, 42, USPG D510/5, BL.

crayfish sold. They also agreed to contribute 15, 17.5, 20, 22.5, and 25 percent of net profits that exceeded £15,000, £25,000, £35,000, £45,000, and £55,000, respectively.¹⁵⁹

As promised, the Company pledged resources to transform the islanders into upstanding wage earners. According to clause 11, the fishery had “the object of providing the means of regular employment and the opportunity of earning regular incomes for as large a proportion of the Islanders as possible.” The Company therefore had an obligation to “engage as many of the Islanders as may be practicable in all departments of its business and in all other undertakings.” Lest intemperance occur, they agreed to abstain from providing the islanders “intoxicating liquors or noxious drugs,” except for medical reasons. They also committed to safeguarding the islanders’ health by providing a nurse, doctor, and agricultural expert at the cost of £3,100. The agriculturalist had the task of overseeing the “utility farm,” which the Company pledged to fund and manage on a non-profit basis for the nutritional benefit of the community. The non-profit canteen, which the Company likewise ran, served the same purpose.¹⁶⁰

Crucially, while clause 5(a) bound the Company to funding a teacher for Saint Mary’s School, the SPG selected and managed the candidate.¹⁶¹ Erected during the wartime occupation, when learning had become systematized and compulsory, Saint Mary’s School served all ages as the lone educational institution on the island.¹⁶² Its

¹⁵⁹ Agreement between the Crown Agents for the Colonies and the Tristan Exploration Company Proprietary Limited, 9 December 1948, T 220/255, TNA.

¹⁶⁰ Agreement between the Crown Agents for the Colonies and the Tristan Exploration Company Proprietary Limited, 9 December 1948, T 220/255, TNA.

¹⁶¹ Agreement between the Crown Agents for the Colonies and the Tristan Exploration Company Proprietary Limited, 9 December 1948, T 220/255, TNA.

¹⁶² Dorothy Evans, *Schooling in the South Atlantic Islands, 1661-1992* (Shropshire, UK: Anthony Nelson, 1994), 273-274.

curriculum, which contained healthy doses of religious instruction, served as the primary means of inculcating Christian values.¹⁶³

While “fraught with danger,” the new fishery also promised “opportunity and hope.” For too long, claimed the SPG’s newsletter, “there existed that spiritual and moral degeneracy among the islanders which corrupts communities when they lose their sense of independence and self-respect.” However, the fishery would elevate “the physical and material levels, without which the spiritual regeneration of the islanders is doomed to frustration.”¹⁶⁴

IV

In January 1949, the Company’s vessel departed Cape Town to convey the first wave of supplies and technical experts to Tristan da Cunha.¹⁶⁵ The SPG anticipated some discontent from the “transition from pastoral seclusion to commercial activity.”¹⁶⁶ Yet, despite careful planning, the advent of commercial fishing, as well as the introduction of colonial administration, corrupted the SPG’s spiritual utopia. Zealous contractual safeguards, most notably the alcohol ban, could not impose a strict Christian code of conduct on the islanders. The SPG, which regarded sin as a foreign import and byproduct of commercialization, held expatriate staff responsible for instances of intemperance and irreverence.

The fishery swiftly had achieved the intended goal of making supplicants into wage earners. “From being independent and conducting their lives on a precarious hand to mouth economy, with starvation always just round the corner in a bad year, they have

¹⁶³ Ethel Harvey, report on school on Tristan da Cunha, 13 October 1949, 2-3, USPG D510/7, BL.

¹⁶⁴ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 8 (December 1948), 2-3, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

¹⁶⁵ “On Way to Tristan,” *Cape Times*, 17 January 1949.

¹⁶⁶ A.E.A. Sulston to Dennis Wilkinson, 9 November 1950, 1, USPG D510/8, BL.

become wage earners who can buy their needs in a well equipped store,” wrote Reverend David Luard, who served two terms on Tristan da Cunha in the 1940s. “As a result,” he continued, “Tristan has become part of the economic world, and should not again have to depend on the generosity of the missionary society and other supporters.” It portended a bright future. “It is the end of a curious chapter in history,” Reverend Luard believed, “and one that always seemed romantic to those who have not had much to do with it, though the romance is not so obvious when you are an islander with nothing in the larder, several children getting visibly thinner every day, and a sheeting gale just entering its third week.”¹⁶⁷

Indeed, the fishing industry brought unprecedented prosperity to Tristan da Cunha. In 1951, for example, the Company remitted £4,300 in wages to the islanders.¹⁶⁸ The influx of cash “completely transformed the situation,” even permitting the Colonial Office to cease issuing government grants.¹⁶⁹

But this prosperity came at a cost for the SPG. In the first years of the venture, when Reverend Dennis Wilkinson served as the inaugural missionary in the new regime, the SPG already struggled to maintain its overweening control over its isolated flock. The Company and Colonial Office represented alternative and competing sources of power in the one-time “SPG Dominion.”¹⁷⁰ As Hugh Elliott observed, “the hold exercised on the inhabitants by the Church through the medium of ceremonial, habitual routine and the key of the storecupboard [*sic*] has been greatly weakened.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ D.I. Luard, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Corona: The Journal of His Majesty’s Colonial Service* 2, no. 9 (1950), 339.

¹⁶⁸ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report of Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 16, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹⁶⁹ Overseas Secretary to J.O. Moreton, 4 December 1951, 1, USPG X1115/F1, BL.

¹⁷⁰ Hugh Elliott diary, 20 April 1950 entry, vol. 2, MSS.Atlas.s.2, BL.

¹⁷¹ Hugh Elliott diary, 23 March 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.s.1, BL.

The tension between the SPG and Company manifested in multiple ways. Reverend Wilkinson railed against the Company for introducing alcohol and plying the islanders with drink to make them favorably disposed toward work. Much like Taylor and Dodgson, he saw the fishing industry as a corrupting influence that lured innocent islanders into a life of vice.¹⁷²

The Sabbath, though, constituted the largest grievance. Given the tempestuousness of the southern Atlantic, the Company sought to exploit any instance of fine weather. As a result, the Company sometimes enlisted the islanders for Sunday work, such as unloading stores or gathering bait.¹⁷³

As “militantly Lord’s Day observant,” however, Reverend Wilkinson resented the Company promoting work on Sundays. It not only violated the sanctity of the Sabbath, but also the authority of the missionary. Regulating the Sabbath, thought Elliott, counted among the missionary’s “last shreds of power.” In response, Wilkinson “raised the old Sabbatarian bogey” at Island Council meetings, as well as warned “of damnation for Sabbath breaking from the Pulpit.”¹⁷⁴

Wilkinson’s moralizing alienated many. Elliott loathed his “treble ration of amour propre.”¹⁷⁵ While the islanders sympathized with Wilkinson on the issue of the Sabbath, they evidently found the missionary sanctimonious as well.¹⁷⁶ Hugh Elliott implicated

¹⁷² J.O. Moreton, file note, 30 January 1953, CO 1024/64, TNA.

¹⁷³ Hugh Elliott diary, 23 March 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlan.s.1, BL; Hugh Elliott diary, 12 September-1 October 1952, vol. 7, MSS.Atlan.s.7, BL; Hugh Elliott diary, 7 May-13 May 1951, vol. 5, MSS.Atlan.s.5, BL.

¹⁷⁴ Hugh Elliott diary, 7 May-13 May 1951 entry, vol. 5, MSS.Atlan.s.5, BL; Hugh Elliott diary, 12 September-1 October 1952 and 2 October-20 October 1952 entries, vol. 7, MSS.Atlan.s.7, BL; Hugh Elliott diary, 24 August-3 September 1951 entry, vol. 5, MSS.Atlan.s.5, BL.

¹⁷⁵ Hugh Elliott diary, 1 February 1951 entry, vol. 4, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹⁷⁶ Hugh Elliott diary, 14 May-25 May 1952 entry, vol. 7, MSS.Atlan.s.7, BL.

Wilkinson's "highbrow" attitude in declining rates of churchgoing.¹⁷⁷ According to one estimate, fewer than several dozen in total attended morning services on Sundays.

Evensong attendance dipped even lower.¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the SPG agreed with Wilkinson that the Company represented a moral threat to the community. The Archbishop of Cape Town, for instance, saw the islanders as pure and with "very few vices," though remained suspicious at "the increased association with the outside world which modern conditions have brought." It had the potential to corrupt. "Gradually the Islanders are becoming like other people, which is not necessarily an improvement," he rued.¹⁷⁹

Wilkinson's replacement, the Reverend David Neaum, also held the Company in low repute. Its staff members, few of whom attended church, allegedly impeded the islanders' "spiritual advance." He accused the Company of having "corrupted" island youths through such irreverence and intemperance.¹⁸⁰

Yet, despite pervasive fears of moral contagion, Neaum proved more pragmatic and conciliatory than Wilkinson. He tolerated occasional work on Sundays.¹⁸¹ Neaum also inveighed against the "myth" of teetotalism and the penchant for treating the islanders like "pious children—which they are not!"¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Notes on an interview between Hugh Elliott and A.E.A. Sulston, 5 December 1952, 3, USPG X1116/F2, BL.

¹⁷⁸ Wilfred Parker to Bishop, 15 November 1952, 1, USPG D510/8, BL.

¹⁷⁹ Archbishop of Cape Town, excerpt from *Good Hope*, November 1955, 4-5, USPG X1117/F1, BL.

¹⁸⁰ Memo on meeting between J.P.L. Scott and A.E.A. Sulston, 8 December 1954, 1-2, USPG X1117/F1, BL.

¹⁸¹ Wilfred Parker to Bishop, 15 May 1953, 1, USPG D510/9, BL.

¹⁸² Quoted in A.E.A. Sulston to A.J. Fairclough, 1 June 1953, 1-2, USPG D510/10, BL.

Prohibition certainly smacked of hypocrisy. Expatriates drank to excess and virtually no one, including the administrator, strictly obeyed the alcohol ordinance.¹⁸³ Moreover, the Company continued to engage in the “evil” habit of furnishing the islanders alcohol.¹⁸⁴

Since the islanders drank, and the expatriate staff had access to liquor, Neaum and others successfully argued for repealing prohibition in 1953. “For my part,” explained Neaum, “I hate the present distinction between the ‘station’ and the ‘islanders’ in this matter and feel that if there is to be drink at all it should be open to all.” Beyond furthering equality, lifting the ban promised to end clandestine drinking, thereby removing alcohol’s mystique and reducing consumption.¹⁸⁵ Thus, with the backing of the SPG and Colonial Office, the Company agreed to permit the sale of alcohol to islanders in 1956.¹⁸⁶ Henceforth, the islanders, who applauded the decision, could buy liquor and wine at the canteen.¹⁸⁷

Following the end of prohibition, alcohol purchases soared. A year after repeal, Godfrey Harris noted that “the sales have been very high, 600 bottles of gin in the first six months of the year for a male population of 100.”¹⁸⁸ Rates of consumption showed no

¹⁸³ Hugh Elliott diary, 27 December 1950 and 3 March to 4 March 1951 entries, vol. 4, MSS.Atlas.s.4, BL; Hugh Elliott diary, 27 November to 1 December 1951 entry, vol. 6, MSS.Atlas.s.6, BL.

¹⁸⁴ Quoted in A.E.A. Sulston to A.J. Fairclough, 1 June 1953, 1-2, USPG D510/10, BL.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in A.E.A. Sulston to A.J. Fairclough, 1 June 1953, 1-2, USPG D510/10, BL; note on discussions with J.P.L. Scott and J.O. Moreton, 28 March 1953, 1, USPG D510/10, BL.

¹⁸⁶ Minutes of fifth directors meeting of Tristan da Cunha Development Company, 6 February 1956, 1, USPG D510/9, BL.

¹⁸⁷ Forsyth Thompson, Tristan da Cunha Quarterly Report, First Quarter, 1956, 18 April 1956, 3, CO 1024/203, TNA.

¹⁸⁸ G.F. Harris, Quarterly Report for Tristan da Cunha, Second Quarter, 1957, 16 July 1957, 3, CO 1024/261, TNA.

sign of abating. According to averages calculated through canteen records, each islander purchased 13.01 ounces worth of alcoholic drinks per week between 1958 and 1960.¹⁸⁹

V

In addition to combating the perceived sins of industrialization, the SPG vied with the Colonial Office for control of Saint Mary's School, which foreshadowed and reflected in microcosm debates that would rive the educational establishment in post-war Britain.¹⁹⁰ Believing the school integral to transmitting Christian values, and fearful of suffering British-style secularization, the SPG fiercely resisted the Colonial Office's encroachment. Saint Mary's School thus became symptomatic of church-state conflict in the post-war era and a flash point in the contest between ecclesiastical and secular authorities on Tristan da Cunha. If the Church could not check secular education in the much larger British Isles, then it would do so on the smaller and more manageable venue of Tristan da Cunha.

From the outset, Reverend Wilkinson's bid to control the school, which sometimes pitted him against the SPG's appointed teacher, rankled Hugh Elliott.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, Wilkinson and C.P. Lawrence, now Resident Director of the Company's operations, deemed the SPG hold over the school tenuous.¹⁹² Although the agreement stipulated that the Company provide the SPG with the funds to select a teacher, it made no provisions about who exerted authority over the school on a day-to-day basis. This troubled Wilkinson and Lawrence, who feared "losing the control of our school in the

¹⁸⁹ See table 6 in H.G. Stableford to Elaine C. Taylor, 3 June 1964, FD 23/121, TNA.

¹⁹⁰ Rob Freathy and Stephen G. Parker, "Secularists, Humanists and Religious Education: Religious Crisis and Curriculum Change in England, 1963-1975," *History of Education* 42, no. 2 (2013), 222-256.

¹⁹¹ See, for instance, memorandum from C.P. Lawrence, May 1951, 1-2, USPG X1116/F2, BL; Hugh Elliott to J.O. Moreton, 21 July 1951 extract, 1, USPG D510/8, BL.

¹⁹² On Wilkinson's perspective, see Dennis Wilkinson to A.E.A. Sulston, 25 October 1949, 1, USPG D510/8, BL.

same way as we have done almost throughout England in our Village Church Day Schools.”¹⁹³ In response, the Africa Sub-Committee approved resolutions, most notably conferring on the chaplain paramount authority over the school in dealings with the Colonial Office, to give the missionary maximum clout.¹⁹⁴

The Colonial Office’s influence over the school grew because of the Company’s parlous financial condition. In its first three years of operation, the Company ran a loss.¹⁹⁵ This dampened its enthusiasm for uplifting the islanders. “The company are no longer interested in the Welfare side of their venture,” explained J.O. Moreton, “and wish to concentrate on running their affairs as a commercial concern.”¹⁹⁶ In response, the Colonial Office acquiesced to releasing the Company from recruiting and remunerating medical staff and an agriculturalist, as well as bankrolling a teacher. From 1952 onwards, the Company made an annual payment of £3,100 to the Colonial Office, which assumed responsibility for hiring and funding medical and agricultural staff, as well as paid for the teacher that the SPG still recruited.¹⁹⁷ Thus, the Colonial paid the salaries of Ronald Harding and his wife, who assumed their teaching posts in 1953, through fishing industry payments and government grants.¹⁹⁸

The disputes of the Wilkinson era carried into Reverend Neaum’s tenure. By 1955, the missionary had begun to bridle at Harding’s secularism. As a result, Neaum had assumed responsibility for religious instruction.¹⁹⁹ His intrusions and parochial outlook irked Harding, who wanted to implement a more secular curriculum and to curb the

¹⁹³ C.P. Lawrence to A.E.A. Sulston, 25 October 1949, 1-3, USPG D510/8, BL.

¹⁹⁴ A.E.A. Sulston to Mrs. D. Wilkinson, 9 December 1949, 1, USPG D510/8, BL.

¹⁹⁵ Memo on Tristan da Cunha, 3 July 1952, 1-2, USPG X1116/F2, BL.

¹⁹⁶ J.O. Moreton, file minute, 12 June 1952, 3, CO 1024/86, TNA.

¹⁹⁷ F.W. Winterbotham to M.A. Willis, 2 July 1952, 1-3, CO 1024/86, TNA.

¹⁹⁸ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 11 (December 1952), 1-2, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

¹⁹⁹ David Neaum to A.E.A. Sulston, 17 March 1955, 1, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

authority of the chaplain. To do so, he advocated creating a community school board and making the headmaster subordinate to the Colonial Office or the SPG instead of the chaplain.²⁰⁰

Harding's request elicited trepidation. The Bishop of Fulham deemed Harding's demands redolent of the secularism of Britain's National Union of Teachers. Nevertheless, he thought transitioning to the voluntary aided school model—privately run schools with governmental oversight and funding—a “wise course” of action for resolving tensions.²⁰¹ The SPG's Edward Sulston likewise refused to countenance curtailing “the influence which the Chaplain is able to exert through the periods of religious instruction during school hours.” Yet, he too proved amenable to conceding some power to a school board.²⁰²

The Colonial Office espoused a similar position. While in favor of religious instruction, W.E.F. Ward, deputy educational adviser, urged the SPG to pursue “the delimitation of functions between manager and teacher.” By facilitating greater cooperation and freeing the headmaster from the chafing personal control of the SPG missionary, the constitution of a school board had much to commend.²⁰³

By 1956, Neaum regarded the establishment of a school board as the sole means of halting Harding's power grab. Without intervention, Neaum feared that education on Tristan da Cunha would “deteriorate to the English level, i.e. with Religious Knowledge being taught merely as another subject.” While Neaum wished to retain control over the school, he accepted the idea of a school board provided that the chaplain assumed the

²⁰⁰ Ronald Harding to B.C. Roberts, 14 September 1955, 1-4, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

²⁰¹ Bishop of Fulham to A.E.A. Sulston, 17 October 1955, 1, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

²⁰² A.E.A. Sulston to P.R. Forsyth Thompson, 20 October 1955, 1-2, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

²⁰³ W.E.F. Ward to A.E.A. Sulston, 21 October 1955, 1-3, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

position of chair. Investing power in a school board would presumably weaken Harding's secular authority.²⁰⁴

In July, the Africa Sub-Committee accepted the creation of the "School Council," which consisted of the administrator, expatriate and island parents, and chaplain, who served as chair.²⁰⁵ It functioned as an advisory body by affording members a space to discuss educational matters and a platform to voice concerns to the chaplain, who retained the title "Manager of the School."²⁰⁶ J.P.L. Scott and P.R. Forsyth Thompson also backed the creation of a school board to ameliorate tensions.²⁰⁷

Ironically, the islanders had little interest in wading into this dispute. In fact, on at least one occasion no islanders showed up to cast ballots for the council. "The general attitude is that the school is a place where their children are taught, and they know little or nothing about education, and there is little they can do on the Council," administrator Godfrey Harris elaborated.²⁰⁸

However, neither the departure of Neaum and Harding in 1957 nor the creation of the School Council mended the breach between the SPG and the Colonial Office.²⁰⁹ Godfrey Harris and Peter Day successively maintained that the school belonged within the ambit of the administration because the government now paid the instructors' salaries and handled logistics.²¹⁰ Anything approximating a secular takeover of the school,

²⁰⁴ David Neaum's notes on management of Saint Mary's School, 12 March 1956, 1-3, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

²⁰⁵ Report of Africa Sub-Committee, 12 July 1956, 1, USPG X1115/F4, BL.

²⁰⁶ Evans, *Schooling in the South Atlantic Islands*, 279, 284-285.

²⁰⁷ J.P.L. Scott to unknown, 28 October 1955, 1, USPG X1115/F3, BL; P.R. Forsyth Thompson to A.E.A. Sulston, 31 January 1956 extract, 1, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

²⁰⁸ G.F. Harris, Tristan da Cunha Quarterly Report, First Quarter, 1959, 24 March 1959, 4, CO 1024/261, TNA.

²⁰⁹ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 15 (April 1957), 3-4, USPG X1117/F1, BL.

²¹⁰ Allan Crawford to A.E.A. Sulston, 2 March 1958, 2, USPG X1116/F1, BL; M.A. Willis to A.E.A. Sulston, 2 July 1959, 1, USPG X1115/F2, BL.

though, remained anathema to the SPG. Reverend Philip Bell, who succeeded Neaum as chaplain, instead recommended that the chaplain and administrator serve as “co-Manager” of the school.²¹¹ However, Maurice Willis, who oversaw Britain’s South Atlantic colonies, dismissed Bell’s proposal because it added another obstacle in the management of the school.²¹²

The hostility arose from divergent aims. The Church did not want to concede the vast privileges enjoyed before the intrusion of the state. The administration, on the other hand, wished for the missionary to remain, though rejected the previous omnipotence wielded over the insular community. “One has to support the Church all the time, but also it is necessary to support the Islanders against the Church at times,” Harris neatly summarized.²¹³

The Africa Sub-Committee disagreed. They wanted provisions to shield the SPG from further erosion of authority by pursuing something akin to the voluntary aided school model in Britain. This educational structure recognized the growing influence of the state, but left much of the SPG’s power intact through adoption of the “Instrument of Management,” which would define the terms of operation.²¹⁴

Enacted in 1959, the Instrument of Management passed new provisions and created a “Board of Management.” In exchange for the Colonial Office continuing to pay for the school’s upkeep and the salaries of its personnel, the SPG agreed to consult with the government in the selection of the head teacher, who henceforth reported to the Board of Management instead of the chaplain. Although the SPG chose the head teacher, the

²¹¹ A.E.A. Sulston to M.A. Willis, 5 August 1959, 1, USPG X1115/F2, BL. See, too, A.E.A. Sulston to M.A. Willis, 24 July 1959, 1, USPG X1115/F2, BL.

²¹² M.A. Willis to A.E.A. Sulston, 1 September 1959, 1, USPG X1115/F2, BL.

²¹³ G.F. Harris to C.G. Eastwood, 7 July 1958, 4, CO 1024/235, TNA.

²¹⁴ A.E.A. Sulston to M.A. Willis, 23 September 1959, 1, USPG X1115/F2, BL.

Board of Management now recruited assistant teachers. Consisting of the SPG chaplain and the Colonial Office's administrator, both of whom picked one individual to serve, the four-person Board of Management further circumscribed the SPG's authority over the school.²¹⁵

By 1961, tensions over the school had yet to subside. The departure of Neaum and Harding had removed a major source of irritation, though larger questions about managerial responsibility had lingered. Consequently, R.G. Pettitt believed that "there is some advantage in having a constitution for the school which clarifies the position of the administrator and the chaplain in relation to it."²¹⁶

The SPG refused to relent on implementing managerial systems and especially constitutional obligations that lent maximum heft to claims that the school functioned as a parochial institution. "What we are really seeking to maintain is that St. Mary's School should continue as a Church School," explained Edward Sulston. This needed legal enshrinement. "All that the Constitution is trying to do is to make it clear that the School is a Church school," he continued, "and not a secular one." Without this, the school's claim to being a parochial institution remained hollow.²¹⁷

Despite footing the sizeable annual operating cost, the Colonial Office did not object in principle to the school retaining its parochial character.²¹⁸ On the contrary, the Colonial Office had always deferred to "the special position of the Anglican Church in the Island" and taken faith into consideration in the selection of administrators. They wanted Anglican teachers. However, bloated supervisory bodies or the "elaborate

²¹⁵ Evans, *Schooling in the South Atlantic Islands*, 289.

²¹⁶ R.G. Pettitt to P.J.F. Wheeler, 8 August 1961, 1, CO 1024/317, TNA.

²¹⁷ Edward Sulston to M.A. Willis, 5 May 1960, 1, CO 1024/317, TNA.

²¹⁸ Peter Day to R.G. Pettitt, 1 December 1960, 1, CO 1024/317, TNA.

wording” of the various proposed constitutions struck many as “too complicated for the Lilliputian stage of Tristan.”²¹⁹

VI

The volcanic eruption and evacuation to Britain trivialized the squabbling over the school. The SPG and Church of England sought to minimize the discomforts of the transition from seclusion to civilization. During and especially after the two-year stay, many within the Church continued to project concerns about the secularization of industrialized Britain onto the islanders. Gazing on the island through rose-tinted lenses, Anglicans recast the isolated islanders as previously untouched by sin and thus worked to protect them from the vices of the fishery and Britain.

The SPG sought to shield the islanders from the glare of the spotlight. Eric Trapp, Secretary of the SPG, committed to paying for Reverend Charles Jewell, incumbent missionary, to remain with the exiled islanders.²²⁰ Jewell saw the pre-eruption islanders as simple pastoralists unprepared for the dangerous world. “The islanders were gentle people who never argued among themselves,” he commented, “and were not conscious of poverty or richness.”²²¹

Following Jewell’s departure, “pastoral care” of this flock of prelapsarian innocents fell to Reverend Noel Brewster, Rector of Fawley. He formed a close bond with the islanders. In addition to ministering in the Calshot chapel, Brewster provided

²¹⁹ R.G. Pettitt to J. Redmayne, 29 June 1961, 1-2, CO 1024/317, TNA.

²²⁰ Eric J. Trapp to Archbishop of Canterbury, 20 October 1961, 1, Ramsey Papers, vol. 12, folio no. 130, Lambeth.

²²¹ Quoted in Brian Dixon, “Good Times in Britain Lure 25 from Tristan,” *Daily Sketch*, 4 November 1965.

transportation to the doctor, organized social events, and even assisted in the completion of paperwork.²²²

In addition to providing for the islanders, the SPG unsuccessfully sought to influence the Colonial Office's decision making. While committed to ministering to the islanders if returned, they sought to impress that repatriation had no advantages. After the excitement of Britain, Reverend John Redmayne explained, the chance of the young islanders readjusting to life on far-away Tristan da Cunha remained low. If the able bodied abandoned the island, then the elderly "could not grow enough food or man the boats." In addition to these population concerns, which the uncertainties of the fishing industry compounded, he voiced concerns about their constitutions and "moral well-being" on the remote island.²²³

Reverend Brewster, however, appraised repatriation much more positively. The islanders possessed "a serene, untarnished faith which sees the loving hand of God in everything."²²⁴ The decision to return only reinforced this conviction. He touted the islanders' embrace of exile and imminent homecoming as proof of the hollowness of "mechanical civilisation." The islanders, whom he regarded as the most devout parishioners in Fawley, did not derive satisfaction from material goods, but rather God and family. As a result, they offered Britons a lesson about "what is really important in human life."²²⁵

²²² Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 19 (October 1963), 6-7, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

²²³ R.G. Pettitt, file minute, 16 July 1962, 1, CO 1024/399, TNA.

²²⁴ Noel Brewster, "Back Home to Tristan," *The Winchester Churchman: The Monthly Journal of the Diocese of Winchester*, no. 9 (December 1963), iv, MS 1531/4/2 BJ, SPRI.

²²⁵ Script, "Seeing and Believing: Flight from Civilisation," 22 September 1963, 4-5, BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading.

While vindicating for Brewster, the Church faced a diminished role in Tristan da Cunha's future. During the planning for resettlement, the SPG and Colonial Office devised new terms for the school.²²⁶ In the fresh constitution, the SPG relinquished to the Colonial Office the task of selecting the head teacher, who became an employee of the government of Saint Helena funded through Tristan da Cunha's coffers. Although the SPG retained a voice in the selection process, the decision officially rested with the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Meanwhile, the administrator, with the input of the head teacher, selected the school's assistant teachers.²²⁷

Nevertheless, the SPG retained influence in running the school. In addition to securing the proviso that the head teacher be an adherent of the Church of England or affiliated church, the missionary obtained the right to give at least six hours of religious instruction each week, albeit on a voluntary basis. Henceforth, parental objections exempted a child from religious instruction.²²⁸

In addition to the altered situation at Saint Mary's School, the SPG confronted the first of several moral panics. Reverend Keith Flint, who accompanied the returning islanders as the SPG's missionary, worked to ameliorate the spiritually corrosive effects of Britain's "civilising influences." Convinced that church attendance had slumped from exposure to the wider world, Flint launched daily services and seized his privileges at Saint Mary's School, most notably overseeing morning prayers and religious instruction, to instill faith in the children.²²⁹

²²⁶ R.G. Pettitt to J. Redmayne, 20 March 1963, 1, CO 1024/457, TNA.

²²⁷ Constitution—School on Tristan, n.d. 1, CO 1024/457, TNA.

²²⁸ Constitution—School on Tristan, n.d., 1, CO 1024/457, TNA.

²²⁹ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 20 (June 1964), 2-3, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

After a year on the island, he boasted that communions had increased, youth participation had risen, and Saint Mary's Church was "bursting at the seams" on Sunday mornings (see figure 3.4).²³⁰ "For those of us grown accustomed to dwindling congregations in English churches it was surprising to find that in St. Mary's every seat was taken," echoed Jim Flint, who taught at Saint Mary's School.²³¹



Figure 3.4. Interior of cramped Saint Mary's Church, circa 1964-1965. Tristan Slide 1E15b, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

This piety of the islanders heartened Flint and others, who exalted remote Tristan da Cunha as a rarity in a dissolute world. The islanders had preserved their virtue through the crucible of Britain, though the sojourn accelerated changes already underway from years of industrial development and contact with civilization. "They did become a little more sophisticated, in particularly the younger women in their dress, and they became a little more money-minded," he believed. Still, Flint trumpeted the "moral and law

²³⁰ J.E. Keith Flint, *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter* (December 1964), 1, MU/OS/5/7/62, Lambeth.

²³¹ Jim Flint, *Mid-Atlantic Village: Life on the World's Most Isolated Inhabited Island: A Memoir of the 1960s* (Newbury, UK: Best Dog, 2011), 125, 127.

abiding” islanders, who derived strength from community and God, as an example worthy of emulation.²³² Following a visit, Robert Mize, Bishop of Damaraland, likewise held Tristan da Cunha aloft as a “lesson for an artificial, materialistic, ‘outside’ world as to where true values lie.”²³³

But the resumption and expansion of the commercial crayfish industry imperiled these values. The volcano had destroyed the landing beaches and the shore-based freezing facilities, which had helped to make commercial operations lucrative following installation in the late 1950s.²³⁴ The Company had survived on the profits from ship-based fishing operations, which continued throughout the islanders’ exile.²³⁵ This kept the fishing venture, recently reorganized as the South Atlantic Islands Development Company, humming during the ordeal.²³⁶

To revive shore-based operations, the Colonial Office and Company financed a harbor and crayfish processing and freezing facility, respectively. Completed in 1966, the harbor and freezing facility “transformed” Tristan da Cunha’s fishing and hence economic prospects by creating a landing area sheltered from the pounding surf. Calmer waters at the harbor launch point, coupled with a new jetty and propeller-powered dinghies, increased the number of fishing days and the ease with which the Company could process catches.²³⁷

²³² Transcript of an interview between G. Hartley and J.E. Keith Flint, 8 April 1970, 1-3, DOC MSS 002 0008 0020, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²³³ Robert H. Mize, “For an Island, God’s Protective Love,” *The Living Church* 150, no. 1 (1965), 17-18.

²³⁴ M.A. Willis to A.E.A. Sulston, 13 December 1957, 2, USPG D510/10, BL; “Tristan Topics,” no. 5 (June 1960), 3-4, C.S.C 721, British Library.

²³⁵ “Durban Shipyard Obtains Order for Tristan Rock Lobster Vessel,” *The South African Shipping News and Fishing Industry Review* (November 1964), 79, 81.

²³⁶ P.A. Day, Tristan da Cunha: Report covering the Resettlement Period March 1963 to December 1963, 25 September 1964, 12, CO 1024/514, TNA.

²³⁷ P.A. Day, “A Harbour for Tristan,” *The South African Shipping News and Fishing Industry Review* 21, no. 9 (September 1966), 128-131.



Figure 3.5. Reverend Flint (behind the flower stalks) speaking with a male parishioner. Tristan Slide 2E23a, Peter A. Munch Photograph Collection, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

Reverend Flint worried about the spiritual effects of the resurgent crayfish industry. Presumably believing that toiling for the administration inhibited men from attending church, he created an early-morning, “working-clothes” worship.²³⁸ Much to Flint’s chagrin, though, male parishioners (see figure 3.5) remained conspicuously absent from the pews of his bid at an industrial mission.²³⁹

In addition to faith, ecclesiastical and secular authorities alike worried about alcohol consumption. Reverend Flint noted mounting intemperance.²⁴⁰ So, too, did Peter Day, who implicated contact with the crayfish industry and British society. The Company’s hard-drinking employees not only set a bad example, but also had flooded the island with alcohol. Close contact with the Company, coupled with Britain’s “temptations

²³⁸ J.E. Keith Flint, *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter* (December 1964), 1, MU/OS/5/7/62, Lambeth.

²³⁹ J.E. Keith Flint, *Tristan da Cunha Newsletter* (February 1966), 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0106, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

²⁴⁰ Jim and Roanne Flint to Peter Munch, n.d., 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0105, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

and pressures,” had transformed the average islander “into a person of low moral fibre.”²⁴¹

Available figures suggest that the population drank heavily. On an island with limited amenities and consumer goods, alcohol provided an outlet for wages and source of entertainment.²⁴² According to one study, which crucially did not disaggregate expatriate staff from islanders, by 1966 Tristan da Cunha’s population consumed approximately 14.8 ounces per week, or roughly 5.9 gallons annually.²⁴³ By this crude and imperfect metric, the average island resident imbibed over three and a half times more alcohol than Britons.²⁴⁴

Bouts of heavy drinking had social repercussions, which prompted the state to take action. While by no means a dangerous community, a log of “incidents,” such as theft, knife brandishing, and disorderly conduct, catalogued from April to July 1963 invariably involved drink. Alarmists like Day, who feared mass unrest, followed these developments with unease.²⁴⁵ He doubled financial penalties for offences and initially enacted restrictions on the amount of alcohol imported to the island.²⁴⁶ The administrator even prohibited the sale and consumption of drink outside the confines of the island bar.²⁴⁷

²⁴¹ Peter A. Day, Memorandum on Maintenance of Law and Order, n.d., 1, CO 1024/588, TNA.

²⁴² Peter A. Day, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1960, 15 January 1960, 15, CO 1024/261, TNA.

²⁴³ See table 2, in Margaret A. Chambers and D.A.T. Southgate, “Nutritional Study of the Islanders on Tristan da Cunha, 1966: Foods Eaten by Tristan Islanders, Their Methods of Preparation and Composition,” *British Journal of Nutrition* 23 (1969), 229.

²⁴⁴ See table 1, in Reginald G. Smart, “Is the Post-War Drinking Binge Ending? Cross-National Trends in Per Capita Alcohol Consumption,” *British Journal of Addiction* 84, no. 7 (1989), 745.

²⁴⁵ Peter A. Day, Memorandum on Maintenance of Law and Order, n.d., CO 1024/588 TNA.

²⁴⁶ P.A. Day, Tristan da Cunha: Report covering the Resettlement Period March 1963 to December 1963, 25 September 1964, 5, 13, CO 1024/514, TNA.

²⁴⁷ Peter A. Day, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1964, 22 February 1964, 3, CO 1024/514, TNA.

Day's replacement, Britain Watkins, harbored similar fears about drunken disorder.²⁴⁸ Such worries only strengthened the case for establishing a law-enforcement apparatus.²⁴⁹ In 1967, Watkins inaugurated a police force that consisted of an officer and several "special constables"²⁵⁰

Shortly thereafter, an assault occurred. The police officer responded to an incident of an inebriated and combative islander. Following a verbal interchange, the officer and perpetrator exchanged blows. The altercation escalated, with the assailant striking the constable "with a large rock."²⁵¹

The incident "horrified" the community, including Reverend Paul Davies, who ministered on Tristan da Cunha from 1966 to 1968.²⁵² He thought that the assault, as well as other vices, spoke to the islanders' moral deterioration since returning from Britain. "Some of the young girlies smoke now," Davies complained, "and the young boys cuss a bit, and we're having to build a one-cell jail to take care of our first crime of violence, a rock fight between two brothers."²⁵³

For the missionaries of the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG), as the SPG became known following a merger with the Universities' Mission to Central Africa in 1965, civilization posed a threat to God-fearing Tristan society.²⁵⁴ Although attendance at Sunday services often approached one-third of the community, Davies wanted to increase the number of churchgoers, particularly among wage-earning

²⁴⁸ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Report, 1966, 28 January 1967, 14, FCO 42/290, TNA.

²⁴⁹ Brian Watkins to R.G. Pettitt, 13 June 1967, 1, FCO 42/291, TNA.

²⁵⁰ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Report, 1967, 17 February 1968, 4, FCO 42/290, TNA.

²⁵¹ Brian Watkins to Commonwealth Office, telegram no. 155, 5, August 1968, 1, FCO 42/291, TNA.

²⁵² On the response of the community, see Brian Watkins, *Feathers on the Brain! A Memoir* (Vancouver: Oscar's Books, 2013), 45-46.

²⁵³ Hugh A. Mulligan, "Pop Conquers Loneliest Island," *The Washington Post*, 8 December 1968.

²⁵⁴ Daniel O'Connor et al., *Three Centuries of Mission: The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1701-2000* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 159-161.

men. Tasks associated with building the harbor, processing facilities, and infrastructure wooed them away from Sunday services with enticements of “double pay.” Missing church for work, and prioritizing wages over worship, underscored Tristan da Cunha’s commercialization and tragic evolution “with the times.”²⁵⁵

Concerns about the spiritual consequences of the outside world penetrating remote Tristan da Cunha similarly exercised Reverend Angus Welsh, who served on the island from 1968 to 1971. He believed that Britain had infected the islanders with “an active sense of discontent,” thus hastening the transformation begun with the advent of commercial fishing.²⁵⁶ The brewing “crisis,” fundamentally a conflict “between new ways and old ways,” positioned the islanders at a spiritual “crossroads.” The traditional values of thrift and piety jostled with imported secularism and materialism. “They could maintain their old life of faith,” hoped Welsh. “They could possibly lose their belief in the Providence of God, and the living power of prayer, and sink into the life of unbelief and indifference so characteristic of the England they all lived in for almost two years,” he fretted.²⁵⁷

These fears, which the administration continued to share, intensified throughout the decade. J.I.H. Fleming made similar accusations that Britain had corrupted the islanders. Following two years there, “morals are little better than elsewhere in the Western world.” He alleged spousal infidelity, climbing rate of illegitimacy, drop in churchgoing in the younger demographic, mounting “materialistic outlook,” and uptick in crimes committed under the influence of drink.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 22 (November 1967), 4-5, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

²⁵⁶ Quoted in Michael Moynihan, “Tristan—Ten Years After,” *The Sunday Times*, 12 December 1971.

²⁵⁷ Tristan da Cunha Newsletter, No. 23 (Spring 1973), 11, USPG X1117/F4, BL.

²⁵⁸ J.I.H. Fleming, Handing Over Notes, 1 May 1975, 1-2, 6, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

To combat allegations of excessive drinking, the administration deployed various approaches. Administrators had the power to prohibit known offenders from purchasing drinks at the bar or canteen.²⁵⁹ By the late 1970s, this “stop list” had grown lengthy.²⁶⁰ The administration also discouraged drinking by artificially inflating the price of alcohol.²⁶¹ Later, the administration briefly resorted to capping liquor sales “to one bottle per head per week and three for birthdays.”²⁶²

Despite these measures, the islanders continued to slake their thirsts, though accusations of alcoholism remained controversial. According to an estimate from 1977-1978, “220 people over the age of 18 drink on average each week half a bottle of sherry, half a bottle of hard liquor and 2 ½ pints of beer.” Some, such as administrator Eddie Brooks, thought these figures heavy but within the normal range.²⁶³ Medical Officer Robert Barton agreed that these robust consumption levels did not represent a serious concern.²⁶⁴

Others, though, attributed medical and social problems to pathological drinking. In 1976, the medical officer Christopher Beech blamed endemic “peptic ulceration” on excessive alcohol consumption.²⁶⁵ The Company’s managers, meanwhile, reported surges in alcohol-related absenteeism and drinking on the job.²⁶⁶

Drinking also alarmed Reverend Edmund Buxton, who served as chaplain in the late 1970s. Having witnessed unacceptable rates of alcohol consumption among the

²⁵⁹ Watkins, *Feathers on the Brain!*, 46.

²⁶⁰ Patrick C. Duff to Stratton, Cortazzi, and Rowlands, 20 April 1978, 1, FCO 44/1766, TNA.

²⁶¹ Minutes of Meeting of the Health and Works Committee, 27 March 1973, 1, FCO 44/920, TNA.

²⁶² G.C. Guy, Notes on Tristan da Cunha: 5-12 1978, 7-8, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²⁶³ E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha, Report No. 9, 14 September-30 November 1978, 1, FCO 44/1767, TNA.

²⁶⁴ Robert Barton to E.C. Brooks, 6 December 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²⁶⁵ C.J. Beech, Annual Report from the Medical Department for the Year 1976, n.d., 8-9, 15-17, FCO 44/1520, TNA.

²⁶⁶ Peter Day to S.G. Trees, 8 November 1977, 1-2, FCO 44/1520, TNA.

community, he had a spiritual obligation to tackle the problem. On at least one occasion, he delivered a sermon about the evils of overindulgence.²⁶⁷

His parishioners did not appreciate the sententious rhetoric. Having “blasted everybody for taking two drinks when one should suffice,” some came to resent the missionary. “I am afraid he has lost a few of his flock and roused the ire of his Church Council by his somewhat dogmatic approach to drinking habits on the island,” reported Stan Trees.²⁶⁸

Yet, despite fears of moral decay, Tristan da Cunha remained a sleepy parish in which even unpopular missionaries like Buxton commanded respect. “There is a timeless feature of life here,” he commented after an adolescent had delivered potatoes. “Can you imagine teenagers in England ringing the Vicarage bell,” he mused, “and popping in from time to time for a leisurely visit?”²⁶⁹

The missionary continued to enjoy such sway over the insular community through the tenure of Reverend Patrick Helyer, who served as the last USPG minister on the island from 1978 to 1980. While no longer a missionary fiefdom, Helyer had a much more prominent role in the insular community than clergy ministering in less secluded settings. He preached, gave broadcasts on “Radio Tristan,” organized Mother’s Union meetings, held advisory roles, and provided religious instruction. His active involvement helped to pack the pews, particularly on Sunday mornings and holidays like Holy Week

²⁶⁷ Edmund Buxton, *Island Chaplain: Tristan da Cunha, 1975-1978* (Hampshire, UK: George Mann, 2001), 23, 68, 72.

²⁶⁸ S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha Report No. 2, October 1975-February 1976, 3, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

²⁶⁹ Buxton, *Island Chaplain*, 23.

in 1979, when approximately two-thirds of the community flocked to Saint Mary's Church.²⁷⁰ Insularity still had notable advantages.

With Helyer's departure, the USPG bequeathed the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, which assumed responsibility for appointing ministers to Tristan da Cunha as a parish of the Diocese of Cape Town, an ambiguous legacy.²⁷¹ For over a century, the missionaries of the SPG and later USPG afforded education, material goods, and spiritual comfort. At the same time, however, many missionaries, particularly those during the interwar period, evinced little sympathy for the plight of the isolated community. Perceived as indolent rather than impoverished, some missionaries turned to heavy-handed tactics that not only surpassed the mandate of a minister, but also constituted criminal behavior. While post-war missionaries adopted a gentler approach, they infantilized and often turned to romanticizing the islanders, who supposedly lacked the capacity to navigate a profligate, mechanized world.

VII

Tristan da Cunha's insularity had long presented the SPG with opportunities and obstacles. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, when whalers called in decreasing numbers, the island's mounting isolation had serious drawbacks. The islanders only interacted with sailors, whom Taylor and Dodgson regarded as archetypal rogues that unleashed sin upon the tiny community. Without a more wholesome, countervailing influence, the islanders had no chance but to succumb to the vices of the sea. This moral turpitude, coupled with economic impoverishment, allegedly made evacuation the proper course of action.

²⁷⁰ Patrick J. Helyer, *Tristan da Cunha*, South Atlantic, 1981, 7, 9, 14, MS 1446, SPRI.

²⁷¹ Edward Cannan, *Churches of the South Atlantic Islands, 1502-1991* (Shropshire, UK: Anthony Nelson 1992), 231.

The collapse of the South Atlantic whaling industry, however, did little to solve the SPG's problems. On the contrary, the demise of maritime traffic aggravated the spiritual challenges of insularity. The declining volume of ships left the islanders reliant on organized charity throughout the interwar period. The SPG believed that this transition to begging not only jeopardized the islanders' work ethic, but also their manhood and souls. By accepting unrestrained charity, male islanders spurned the wage-earning model of masculinity and work ethic so necessary for independence, domestic comfort, and spiritual salvation. In the eyes of successive missionaries, this made the islanders aberrant paupers. While begrudgingly buoying the remote community through donations, interwar missionaries, who had internalized the workhouse ethos, turned to reforming the islanders' warped characters through harsh disciplinary measures.

After the Second World War, Tristan da Cunha's insularity became construed as an asset. While pauperism degraded, the pursuit of the wage-earning ideal through industrialized development, which the secularization thesis maintained inexorably corrupted, had weakened post-war Christendom. As a result, the communities that industrialization had bypassed, such as remote Tristan da Cunha, became special and worthy of preservation. Thus, to achieve prosperity without corrupting Tristan da Cunha's pastoral idyll, the SPG planned a program of Christian development. Robust welfare provisions, stringent morality clauses, and circumspect stewardship of the school promised to prevent or to counteract the excesses of industrialization, thereby keeping Tristan da Cunha a pious, isolated bastion of Anglicanism in an increasingly secular world.

The fishery transformed Tristan da Cunha into a hub of wage earners, though purportedly transported the sins of civilization to its far-away, previously protected shores. Missionaries saw the isolated islanders as virtuous, uncorrupted souls nobly fighting against the vices of the fishery and the iniquities of post-war Britain. Violations of the Sabbath, bouts of drunkenness, and drops in church attendance invariably became the fault of wicked expatriate staff and symptomatic of the secularization afflicting Britain.

Between the 1850s and 1970s, then, Tristan da Cunha embodied the spiritual worries of Anglican missionaries. In the age of sail, when whalers and sailors navigated the globe, maritime sin formed a prime focus of concern. During the mass unemployment of the interwar period, poverty and pauperism ranked among the Church's priorities. In the post-war period, when industrial development gathered speed in the colonial and post-colonial world, the secularization thesis held sway.

Shifting perceptions of space and civilization likewise informed how doctors and dentists experienced Tristan da Cunha's insularity. Far removed from the world, the islanders became conceived of as a living control for studying the benefits and pitfalls of civilization on bodies and teeth. Remote Tristan da Cunha's impact on the agendas of doctors and dentists guides the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Doctors

In 1961, Britain's MRC established a Working Party to investigate the health of the volcanic refugees from Tristan da Cunha, who had enjoyed renown for embodying dental and physical perfection since the early nineteenth century. The Working Party hoped to discern the reasons behind these pristine teeth and hale constitutions, thereby unraveling "the natural history of health." Shortly after arriving, however, they uncovered a host of infections, congenital disorders, and rotten mouths. Over a century of isolation had hindered public health initiatives, restricted diet, attenuated immune systems, and curtailed genetic diversity. "But isolation has also brought the opportunities to investigate these problems," observed investigators Harold Lewis, Derek Roberts, and Anthony Edwards.¹

The physical effects and tremendous research possibilities of Tristan da Cunha's insularity had intrigued visitors for years. In the early decades of the colony, its isolation had a positive valence. An absence of civilization's foul air and decadent fare purportedly kept the islanders immune to disease, save the occasional cold contracted from passing ships. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century visitors mostly confirmed the advantages of insularity, though a minority warned that endogamy had precipitated degeneration, a pseudoscientific fiction that lent medical clout to prevailing social, political, and racial anxieties.

During the interwar period, isolated populations, including the islanders, became prized subjects for biomedical inquiry. With scientific racism at its peak, researchers

¹ H.E. Lewis, D.F. Roberts, and A.W.F. Edwards, "Biological Problems, and Opportunities, of Isolation among the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha," in *Population and Social Change*, eds. D.V. Glass and Roger Revelle (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 385-386, 415-417.

sought serological and anthropometrical data that enabled the “typological” classification of peoples. An obsession with measuring human difference heightened the allure of island communities, which had the best chance of retaining genes or physical features through reproductive isolation.²

The value of the Tristan islanders and other isolated populations extended to the emergent field of nutrition, which economic depression, political turmoil, and mass hunger elevated to prominence.³ Researchers aimed to overcome the limits of the conventional laboratory by observing how a variety of diets, especially those devoid of

² On anthropometry and typological understandings of race, see Veronika Lipphardt, “Traditions and Innovations: Visualizations of Human Variation, c. 1900-38,” *History of the Human Sciences* 28, no. 5 (2015), 49-79. On the rise of serology and its influence on race and human difference, see Pauline M.H. Mazumdar, “Blood and Soil: The Serology of the Aryan Racial State,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 64, no. 2 (1990), 187-219; Rachel E. Boaz, *In Search of “Aryan Blood”: Serology in Interwar and National Socialist Germany* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2012); William H. Schneider, “Blood Group Research in Great Britain, France, and the United States between the World Wars,” *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 38, S21 (1995), 87-114; Marius Turda, “From Craniology to Serology: Racial Anthropology in Interwar Hungary and Romania,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 43, no. 4 (2007), 361-377. On the research value of isolated populations, including island dwellers, see Veronika Lipphardt, “Isolates and Crosses in Human Population Genetics; or, A Contextualization of German Race Science,” *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (2012), esp. S74-S76; Fenneke Sysling, *Racial Science and Human Diversity in Colonial Indonesia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2016); Alexandra Widmer, “Of Field Encounters and Metropolitan Debates: Research and the Making and Meaning of the Melanesian ‘Race’ during Demographic Decline,” *Paideuma* 58 (2012), 69-93; Warwick Anderson, “Racial Hybridity, Physical Anthropology, and Human Biology in the Colonial Laboratories of the United States,” *Current Anthropology* 53, Supplement 5 (2012), S95-S107; Warwick Anderson, “Hybridity, Race, and Science: The Voyage of the *Zacca*, 1934-1935,” *Isis* 103, no. 2 (2012), 229-253; Warwick Anderson and Ricardo Roque, “Imagined Laboratories: Colonial and National Racialisations in Island Southeast Asia,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018), 358-371; Hans Pols and Warwick Anderson, “The Mestizos of Kisar: An Insular Racial Laboratory in the Malay Archipelago,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2018), 445-463; Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard, eds., *Foreign Bodies: Oceania and the Science of Race, 1750-1940* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2008).

³ On the issues elevating the importance of nutrition, see Josep L. Barona, “Nutrition and Health: The International Context during the Inter-war Crisis,” *Social History of Medicine* 21, no. 1 (2008), 87-105. On malnutrition in Britain, see Charles Webster, “Healthy or Hungry Thirties?” *History Workshop*, no. 13 (1982), 110-129; Madeleine Mayhew, “The 1930s Nutrition Controversy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 3 (1988), 445-464. On the internationalization of malnutrition, see Nick Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (2007), esp. 352-360; Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921-1946* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009); Maria Leticia Galluzzi Bizzo, “Postponing Equality: From Colonial to International Nutritional Standards, 1932-1950,” in *Health and Difference: Rendering Human Variation in Colonial Engagements*, eds. Alexandra Widmer and Veronika Lipphardt (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), 129-148.

processed foods, affected people in supposedly natural settings. This impulse transformed discrete populations into control groups for gauging civilization's impact on human health.⁴

Colonies like Tristan da Cunha thus became sites for far-reaching dietetic research. Studies from across the empire yielded breakthroughs in deficiency disorders, such as beriberi and kwashiorkor, and helped formulate diets for famine victims.⁵ And, though dwarfed by the literature on nutrition, imperialism, and medicine, dietary investigations in the colonies furnished dentists equally important evidence about caries (popularly known as cavities).⁶

Indeed, data gathered with the islanders' cooperation enhanced knowledge about the etiology of dental decay. The correlation between sugar consumption, vitamin intake, and low incidence of caries on Tristan da Cunha bolstered claims that nutrition impacted teeth. In so doing, these statistics challenged the hygienic practices of the "civilized"

⁴ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 105-108.

⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 104-116; Anne Hardy, "Beriberi, Vitamin B1 and World Food Policy, 1925-1970," *Medical History* 39, no. 1 (1995), 61-77; David Arnold, "British India and the 'Beriberi Problem,'" *Medical History* 54, no. 3 (2010), 295-314; J. Stanton, "Listening to the Ga: Cicely Williams' Discovery of Kwashiorkor on the Gold Coast," in *Women and Modern Medicine*, eds. Lawrence Conrad and Anne Hardy (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2001), 149-172.

⁶ On the linkages between British imperialism and nutritional science, see Michael Worboys, "The Discovery of Malnutrition between the Wars," in *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, ed. David Arnold (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 208-225; Marilyn Little, "Imperialism, Colonialism and the New Science of Nutrition: The Tanganyika Experience, 1925-1945," *Social Science and Medicine* 32, no. 1 (1991), 11-14; Cynthia Brantley, *Feeding Families: African Realities and British Ideas of Nutrition and Development in Early Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002); Cynthia Brantley, "Kikuyu-Maasai Nutrition and Colonial Science: The Orr and Gilks Study in Late 1920s Kenya Revisited," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, no. 1 (1997), 48-86; David Arnold, "The 'Discovery' of Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31, no. 1 (1994), 1-26; Jonathan E. Robins, "'Food Comes First': The Development of Nutritional Policy in Ghana, 1900-1950," *Global Food History* 4, no. 2 (2018), 168-188; Sarah C. Hartley, "Interweaving Ideas and Patchwork Programmes: Nutrition Projects in Colonial Fiji, 1945-1960," *Medical History* 61, no. 2 (2017), 200-224. On dentistry, see Alyssa Picard, *Making the American Mouth: Dentists and Public Health in the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2009), chs. 2-3; Jean J. Kim, "Experimental Encounters: Filipino and Hawaiian Bodies in the U.S. Imperial Invention of Odontoclasia, 1928-1946," *American Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2010), 523-546.

world, most notably tooth brushing, thereby underscoring the subversive potential of colonial science.⁷

While industrialization and urbanization had implications for health, the medical and dental critiques of civilization, which research on Tristan da Cunha helped to sustain, tended to express anxieties about modern life.⁸ The industrialized slaughter of the First World War, which cast serious doubt on narratives of technological progress, redoubled these fears.⁹ Throughout the interwar period, the prospect of machines displacing, maiming, or manipulating the natural world remained a concern.¹⁰ This technological alarmism, coupled with resurgent nationalism, economic dislocation, divisive politics, and spiritual drift, prompted many to romanticize the pre-industrial age with renewed vigor.¹¹

The medical profession's disillusionment with civilization and idealization of rural spaces, including Tristan da Cunha, drew strength from primitivism. Although typically understood as an anthropological concept or aesthetic movement, primitivism

⁷ Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011); Erik Linstrum, *Ruling Minds: Psychology in the British Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁸ Charles E. Rosenberg, "Pathologies of Progress: The Idea of Civilization as Risk," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 72, no. 4 (1998), 714-730; Roy Porter, "Diseases of Civilization," in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, vol. 1, eds. W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 585-600; Mark N. Cohen, *Health and the Rise of Civilization* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Bill Luckin, *Death and Survival in Urban Britain: Disease, Pollution and Environment, 1800-1950* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

⁹ Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 6.

¹⁰ Angus McLaren, *Reproduction by Design: Sex, Robots, Trees, and Test Tube Babies in Interwar Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹¹ Michael T. Saler, *The Avant-Garde in Interwar England: Medieval Modernism and the London Underground* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, rev. ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), ch. 2; Peter Mandler, "Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1997), 155-175; John Field, "An Anti-Urban Education? Work Camps and Ideals of the Land in Interwar Britain," *Rural History* 23, no. 2 (2012), 213-228; Jeremy Burchardt, "Rethinking the Rural Idyll: The English Rural Community Movement, 1913-26," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 1 (2011), 73-94; Bernhard Dietz, "Countryside-versus-City in European Thought: German and British Anti-Urbanism between the Wars," *The European Legacy* 13, no. 7 (2008), 801-814.

had an arguably much longer and more influential career as a medical discourse.¹² European forays into the Americas and Pacific, as well as the writings of *philosophes*, had first popularized the myth of the preternaturally healthy “noble savage.”¹³ It proved an enduring trope. The notion that “savages” enjoyed exemplary constitutions, raw power, and high fertility away from enervating civilization thrived throughout the interwar period and beyond.¹⁴

The dental and medical utopia of Tristan da Cunha underwent reassessment from the 1940s onward. Following the wartime occupation and advent of commercial fishing, which flooded the island with sugary foods, dentists witnessed a deterioration of the islanders’ teeth. The islanders’ physical health, meanwhile, vexed doctors, who continued to attempt to substantiate the spurious assumptions of degeneration theory and the legitimate, though often problematic scientific concerns about inbreeding, a biological concept that describes reproduction among individuals with one or more common ancestors.

¹² On primitivism and anthropology, see Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987); George W. Stocking, Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). On primitivism as an aesthetic movement, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹³ Francis Schiller, “Health Aspects of the Noble Savage,” *Clio Medica* 6 (1971), 253-273; Kathryn Rountree, “Maori Bodies in European Eyes: Representations of the Maori Body on Cook’s Voyages,” *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 107, no. 1 (1998), 35-59; Malcolm Nicolson, “Medicine and Racial Politics: Changing Images of the New Zealand Maori in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies*, 66-104.

¹⁴ See, for example, Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000), 246-273; Jane Marcellus, “Nervous Women and Noble Savages: The Romanticized ‘Other’ in Nineteenth-Century US Patent Medicine Advertising,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41, no. 5 (2008), 784-808; Rune Graulund, “From (B)edouin to (A)borigine: The Myth of the Desert Noble Savage,” *History of the Human Sciences* 22, no. 1 (2009), 79-104; Andrew Grainger, “Rugby Island Style: Paradise, Pacific People, and the Racialisation of Athletic Performance,” *Junctures* 12 (2009), 45-63; Greg Blyton, “Reflections, Memories, and Sources: Healthier Times?: Revisiting Indigenous Australian Health History,” *Health and History* 11, no. 2 (2009), 116-135; Brendan Hokowhitu, “‘Physical Beings’: Stereotypes, Sport and the ‘Physical Education’ of New Zealand Māori,” *Culture, Sport, Society* 6, no. 2-3 (2003), 192-218.

Investigations into inbreeding had long relied on visual diagnostic methods, such as physical examinations and pedigree analysis, which necessarily limited the questions that doctors posed. Contemporary wisdom suggested that an observer could discern inbreeding upon inspection. “Funny people, I suppose being interbred, they looked queer,” recalled sailor Harry Johnson, who visited during the Second World War.¹⁵ Although not a doctor, Johnson’s comment encapsulates the logic. But the post-war move away from visualization to quantification enabled the Working Party to calculate that the islanders’ worsening homozygosity predisposed them to a range of health problems, including rising rates of incurable hereditary disease. These studies, which often flouted post-Nuremberg ethical standards, resolved questions about the physical consequences of isolation at the cost of the islanders’ dignity.

The cognitive and methodological shift owed much to post-war innovations in genetics. Long before the mid-nineteenth century work of Gregor Mendel, who articulated the notion of particulate inheritance, physicians had guessed at the hereditary mechanisms of disease.¹⁶ But from the mid-1950s to mid-1970s, and especially the “transformative” early 1960s, the study of genetics underwent revolutionary change, including visualizing the life-giving sequence encoded in Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA).¹⁷

¹⁵ Harry Johnson, interview by Conrad Wood, 31 July 1994, reel 1, 14256, Imperial War Museum, London.

¹⁶ See Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982); Staffan Müller-Wille and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *A Cultural History of Heredity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), esp. chs. 2-3; Charles E. Rosenberg, *No Other Gods: On Science and American Social Thought*, rev. ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), ch. 1; Peter S. Harper, *A Short History of Medical Genetics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ M. Susan Lindee, “Genetic Disease in the 1960s: A Structural Revolution,” *American Journal of Medical Genetics* 115, no. 2 (2002), 75-76, 78. On DNA, see Robert Olby, *The Path to the Double Helix: The Discovery of DNA* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994).

The post-war efflorescence of genetics, particularly the rise of population genetics, again enhanced the research value of the Tristan islanders and other isolated peoples. The subfield abandoned the emphasis on measuring external markers of difference in favor of documenting the distribution of alleles. In response, geneticists turned to investigating communities with high rates of consanguineous marriage, such as island peoples and religious and ethnic minorities, whose endogamy and status as colonized or marginalized populations rendered them discrete and easily exploitable.¹⁸

The enthusiasm for the Tristan islanders and similar populations also stemmed from anxieties about mutagenic agents.¹⁹ Before atomic civilization irretrievably harmed humans, researchers needed to engage in “salvage biology.” This involved establishing “biological baselines” of peoples dwelling in “a more natural, less technologically

¹⁸ Veronika Lipphardt, “From ‘Races’ to ‘Isolates’ and ‘Endogamous Communities’: Human Genetics and the Notion of Human Diversity in the 1950s,” in *Human Heredity in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Bernd Gausemeier, Staffan Müller-Wille, and Edmund Ramsden (London and Brookfield, VT: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), esp. 55-59, 63. On blood typing and allelic distribution, also see Veronika Lipphardt, “‘Geographical Distribution Patterns of Various Genes’: Genetic Studies of Human Variation after 1945,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 50-61; Jenny Bangham, “Blood Groups and Human Groups: Collecting and Calibrating Genetic Data after World War Two,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 74-86; Lisa Gannett, “Racism and Human Genome Diversity Research: The Ethical Limits of ‘Population Thinking,’” *Philosophy of Science* 63, no. 3 (2001), S479-S492; Jenny Reardon, *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in an Age of Genomics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), ch. 2. For research on minority and island-dwelling communities, see Melinda Gormley, “The Roman Campaign of ’53 to ’55: The Dunn Family among a Jewish Community,” in *Race and Science: Scientific Challenges to Racism in Modern America*, eds. Paul Lawrence Farber and Hamilton Cravens (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 95-129; Edna Suárez-Díaz, “Indigenous Populations in Mexico: Medical Anthropology in the Work of Ruben Lisker in the 1960s,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 108-117; Alexandra Widmer, “Making Blood ‘Melanesian’: Fieldwork and Isolating Techniques in Genetic Epidemiology (1963-1976),” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 118-129.

¹⁹ See Susan Lindee, “Human Genetics after the Bomb: Archives, Clinics, Proving Grounds and Board Rooms,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biomedical Sciences* 55 (2016), 45-53; Angela N.H. Creager and María Jesús Santesmases, “Radiobiology in the Atomic Age: Changing Research Practices and Policies in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 39, no. 4 (2006), 637-647.

contaminated past.” By studying such groups, doctors hoped to ascertain how modern civilization had corrupted human bodies and teeth.²⁰

At the same time, technology became integral to post-war genetics and the investigations of the Working Party.²¹ Beginning in the 1940s, the “Second Information Revolution” swept the world. The resultant electronic calculators and digital computers accommodated more digits and therefore facilitated greater precision in the computation of more difficult equations.²²

Deploying computers to unlock the secrets of the islanders’ bodies aligned with what James Sumner has termed the “national technodream.”²³ Confronted with economic decline and diminished influence, Britain sought salvation in the laboratory. Innovations,

²⁰ Joanna Radin, *Life on Ice: A History of New Uses for Cold Blood* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), ch. 3, quotes at 6, 92. See, too, Joanna Radin, “Unfolding Epidemiological Stories: How the WHO Made Frozen Blood into a Flexible Resource for the Future,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 62-73; Jenny Bangham and Soraya de Chadarevian, “Human Heredity after 1945: Moving Populations Centre Stage,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 47, Part A (2014), 45-49; Ricardo Ventura Santos, “Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonial Contexts and Genomic Research in the Late 20th Century: A View from Amazonia (1960-2000),” *Critique of Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (2002), 81-104; Rosanna Dent and Ricardo Ventura Santos, “‘An Unusual and Fast Disappearing Opportunity’: Infectious Disease, Indigenous Populations, and New Biomedical Knowledge in Amazonia, 1960-1970,” *Perspectives on Science* 25, no. 5 (2017), 585-605; Ricardo Ventura Santos, Susan Lindee, and Vanderlei Sebastião de Souza, “Varieties of the Primitive: Human Biological Diversity Studies in Cold War Brazil (1962-1970),” *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 4 (2014), 723-735; Daniele Cozzoli, “Ethno-biology during the Cold War: Biocca’s Expedition to Amazonia,” *Centaureus* 58, no. 4 (2016), 281-309; Mary Jane McCallum, “The Last Frontier: Isolation and Aboriginal Health,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 22, no. 1 (2005), 103-120.

²¹ Lindee, “Genetic Disease in the 1960s,” 75-76; Horace Freeland Judson, “A History of the Science and Technology Behind Gene Mapping and Sequencing,” in *The Code of Codes: Scientific and Social Issues in the Human Genome Project*, eds. Daniel J. Kevles and Leroy Hood (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. 53-60.

²² Gerald W. Brock, *The Second Information Revolution* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), ch. 3, esp. 55-79. See, too, Paul E. Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2003); Tony Hey and Gyuri Pápay, *The Computing Universe: A Journey through a Revolution* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²³ James Sumner, “Defiance to Compliance: Visions of the Computer in Postwar Britain,” *History and Technology* 30, no. 4, 318.

particularly those related to jet propulsion and computing, promised to fuel the nation's post-war recovery.²⁴

For over a century, and especially between the 1920s and 1970s, doctors and dentists saw the islanders as a living control group and Tristan da Cunha as a site for generating data about how modern life impacted bodies and teeth. Tristan da Cunha's transformation into a laboratory for observing the benefits and pitfalls of insularity not only reflected the empiricism of the scientific method, but also the presumed infallibility of numbers.²⁵ By uncovering and mobilizing quantitative data, scientists could translate age-old prejudices about civilization into hard facts and scientific realities.

I

In the first half of the nineteenth century, observers ascribed Tristan da Cunha's good health to the lack of atmospheric impurities and dietary excesses of civilization.

Investigations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which birthed the germ theory of disease and degeneration theory, qualified these sanguine assessments.

²⁴ On the computerization of Britain, also see Richard Coopey, "Empire and Technology: Information Technology Policy in Postwar Britain and France," in *Information Technology Policy: An International History*, ed. Richard Coopey (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 144-168; Simon Lavington, *Moving Targets: Elliott-Automation and the Dawn of the Computer Age in Britain, 1947-67* (New York: Springer, 2011); John Hendry, *Innovating for Failure: Government Policy and the Early British Computer Industry* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1989); Jon Agar, *Turing and the Universal Machine: The Making of the Modern Computer* (Duxford: Icon Books, 2001). On research and development programs, see Lorna Arnold and Katherine Pyne, *Britain and the H-Bomb* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Richard Coopey, "The White Heat of Scientific Revolution," *Contemporary Record* 5, no. 1 (1991), 115-127; Robert Budd and Philip Gummett, eds., *Cold War, Hot Science: Applied Research in Britain's Defence Laboratories, 1945-1990* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999); David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chs. 2, 4-6; David Edgerton, *Science, Technology and the British Industrial 'Decline,' 1870-1970* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Edgerton, *Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources, and Experts in the Second World War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Edgerton, "The 'White Heat' Revisited: The British Government and Technology in the 1960s," *Twentieth Century British History* 7, no. 1 (1996), 53-82; David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1991); Robert Bud, "Penicillin and the New Elizabethans," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 31, no. 3 (1998), 312.

²⁵ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Seclusion left the islanders' immune systems weak and vulnerable to pathogenic assault, while decades of reproductive isolation had wrought unclear genetic changes. Some maintained that mounting isolation and the concomitant drop in genetic diversity enfeebled the islanders and unleashed hereditary diseases. However, concerns about inbreeding and increasing rates of genetic disease remained divorced from any empirical moorings and therefore too speculative to unseat the island's claim as one of the healthiest communities in the world.

Britain colonized Tristan da Cunha during a period of tremendous dietary change. Early-modern Britons had eaten a diet rich in wild game and fresh vegetables.²⁶ In the mid-eighteenth century, however, industrialization and urbanization initiated a "nutrition transition" that diminished the variety and nutrients served at the nation's tables. Animal proteins, refined carbohydrates, and sugar increasingly dominated the proportion of calories consumed.²⁷

As food became standardized, concerns about purity and quantity arose. Industrialization and urbanization delocalized and increased food production, which created opportunities for profit seekers to boost bulk by adding adulterants. The ensuing outrage prompted government intervention, which birthed regulation aimed at ensuring wholesome food and drink.²⁸ Easier access to food, especially among the upper strata of society, also led to proscriptions against excess. Elites had long treated the ill effects of overindulgence, including gout, an arthritic inflammation linked to consuming rich foods,

²⁶ Joan Thirsk, *Food in Early Modern England: Phases, Fads, Fashions, 1500-1760* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006).

²⁷ Chris Otter, "The British Nutrition Transition and its Histories," *History Compass* 10, no. 11 (2012), 812-825.

²⁸ P.J. Rowlinson, "Food Adulteration: Its Control in 19th Century Britain," *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 7, no. 1 (1982), 63-72; Bee Wilson, *Swindled: The Dark History of Food Fraud, from Poisoned Candy to Counterfeit Coffee* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 36-39.

as perverse markers of gentility.²⁹ By the early nineteenth century, however, a powerful countercurrent emphasized the moral and alimentary benefits of moderating the intake of decadent foods and spirits.³⁰

In the etiology of disease, though, the medical profession endowed climate and atmosphere with greater weight. Physicians had blamed “foul air” for infection and ill health since antiquity.³¹ But in the eighteenth century fears of bad air cohered into an explanation of disease.³² The miasmatic theory, which maintained that noxious vapors from rotting organic substances sickened, held sway in the medical community in the first half of the nineteenth century.³³

Early visitors praised Tristan da Cunha’s salutary environment. Of the dragoons manning the garrison in 1817, Captain Abraham Cloete reported “with the exception of accidental hurts, not a single individual has been ill, since the first occupation of these islands.” Given the damp weather and monotonous rations, the lack of disease pleasantly surprised him. It highlighted the alimentary advantages of “the even state of the atmosphere.”³⁴

²⁹ Roy Porter and George Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

³⁰ Gwen Hyman, *Making a Man: Gentlemanly Appetites in the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), 27-29; Steven Shapin, “How to Eat Like a Gentleman: Dietetics and Ethics in Early Modern England,” in *Right Living: An Anglo-American Tradition of Self-Help Medicine and Hygiene*, ed. Charles E. Rosenberg (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 33-34; Stephen Mennell, “On the Civilizing of Appetite,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 4, nos. 2-3 (1987), esp. 387-392.

³¹ See Lori Jones, “The Diseased Landscape: Medical and Early Modern Plaguescapes,” *Landscapes* 17, no. 2 (2016), 119-120; Mary J. Dobson, *Contours of Death and Disease in Early Modern England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. ch. 1; Lucinda Cole, *Imperfect Creatures: Vermin, Literature, and the Sciences of Life, 1600-1740* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2016), ch. 1.

³² Anita Guerrini, “The Pathological Environment,” *The Eighteenth Century* 31, no. 2 (1990), 173-174.

³³ Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), esp. ch. 2.

³⁴ A.J. Cloete to Lord Charles Somerset, 23 April 1817, *Records of the Cape Colony from November 1815 to May 1818*, vol. 11, ed. George McCall Theal (William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1902), 301.

Tristan da Cunha continued to enjoy a reputation for good health under civilian governance. In 1824, Augustus Earle marveled that illness had afflicted neither him nor the islanders for almost a year. Adopting a meager diet, undertaking strenuous physical activity, and abstaining from alcohol had clear benefits.³⁵

At mid-century, when the miasmatic theory of disease reached its zenith in Britain, this salubrious climate and ascetic lifestyle appeared determinative in conditioning Tristan da Cunha's fabled good health.³⁶ The islanders' low mortality rate, thought Reverend William Taylor, furnished "sufficient proof of the healthiness of the climate, and of their mode of life."³⁷ "The great salubrity [*sic*] of the island may be inferred from the fact of there having been no death traceable to climatic causes," echoed M.S. Nolloth.³⁸

The islanders' reputation for enjoying immunity to common complaints grew throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. "It is asserted that a more healthy place than this island cannot be found; that none of the epidemical diseases have reached them, and the children are not subject to any complaints or illnesses common to children," observed Captain Denham in 1851.³⁹ A little over a decade later Captain W.J.S. Pulley observed that the islanders scoffed at receiving medicine, for "no one was

³⁵ Augustus Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand, in 1827; together with a Journal of a Residence in Tristan D'Acunha, an Island Situated between South America and the Cape of Good Hope* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 342, 352-353.

³⁶ On Victorian sanitation, see Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michelle Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008); Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1983); John M. Eyler, *Victorian Social Medicine: The Ideas and Methods of William Farr* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

³⁷ William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D'Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 84.

³⁸ M.S. Nolloth, "Visit of H.M.S. 'Frolic' to Tristan da Cunha," *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 25, no. 8 (August 1856), 411-412.

³⁹ H.M. Denham, "A Day at Tristan D'Acunha," *The Nautical Magazine and Chronicle* 22, no. 4 (April 1853), 183, 186.

ever sick here.”⁴⁰ The crew of H.M.S. *Challenger* found the situation, including the noted superfluity of medicine, unchanged in 1873.⁴¹

Although seldom ill, visitors, who had become cognizant of the invisible pathogens that sickened through the late-century ascendance of the germ theory of disease, recognized that seclusion rendered the community unusually susceptible to the microbes that managed to reach the far-away island.⁴² In 1869, John Milner and Oswald Brierly noted that viruses lurking aboard calling vessels tended to ravage the “remarkably healthy island.”⁴³ Dr. Walter Reid, who visited in 1876, similarly remarked that isolation left the healthy community “peculiarly liable or rather susceptible to epidemic influences introduced amongst them by ships calling at the island.”⁴⁴

The closed population and limited intercourse with the outside world also raised the specter of decline. The medical profession fixated on the mental and physical regression of individuals, communities, and nations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Fears of halting or reversing evolutionary progress became enshrined in degeneration theory, which asserted that a deleterious combination of social, environmental, and hereditary pressures could induce a deterioration of genetic stock.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ W.J.S. Pullen, “Voyage of H.M.S. ‘Cyclops’ from England to the Cape,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 31, no. 4 (April 1862), 200.

⁴¹ T.H. Tizard et al., *Narrative of the Cruise of H.M.S. Challenger with a General Account of the Scientific Results of the Expedition*, vol. 1 of *Report on the Scientific Results of the Voyage of H.M.S. Challenger during the Years 1873-76 under the Command of Captain George S. Nares, R.N., F.R.S. and the late Captain Frank Tourle Thomson, R.N.* (London: HMSO, 1885), 249.

⁴² Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press); Michael Worboys, *Spreading Germs: Disease Theories and Medical Practice in Britain, 1865-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴³ John Milner and Oswald W. Brierly, *The Cruise of H.M.S. Galatea, Captain H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, K.G., in 1867-1868* (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1869), 49.

⁴⁴ Walter Reid to Lindesay Brine, 3 November 1876, Enclosure, No. 2, *Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan D’Acunha*, C. 4959 (London: HMSO, 1887), 4-5.

⁴⁵ On degeneration theory at its peak, see Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robert A. Nye, “Sociology

Fueled by fears about urbanization and industrialization, as well as angst over Britain's sluggish performance in the Boer War, degeneration theory ranked high on Victorian and Edwardian agendas.⁴⁶

Degeneration theory influenced perceptions of Tristan da Cunha. In 1889, R.U Stopford, captain of the visiting H.M.S. *Curaçoa*, alleged that islanders were "rapidly deteriorating for want of infusion of fresh blood," and had already suffered "two cases of mental disability and one of physical malformation."⁴⁷ "The inhabitants of this oceanic island are not of such a good physique as one would have expected, considering the healthiness of the climate and surroundings in which they live," seconded G.F. Collingwood. He recorded asthma, enlarged glands, deformities, and retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic disease that results in loss of visual acuity and eventual blindness. He attributed the insidious condition to inbreeding.⁴⁸

Others disputed these rumors of degeneration. During the visit of the *Thrush*, Lieutenant H.L. Watts-Jones and Surgeon F.F. Lobb observed instances of hernia, deformity, and weather-induced asthma but rejected accusations of "mental or physical deterioration arising from the system of intermarriage."⁴⁹ Hammond Tooke, who visited

and Degeneration: The Irony of Progress," in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, eds. J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 49-71.

⁴⁶ On the presumed links between urbanization, industrialization, and degeneration, see Bill Luckin, "Revisiting the Idea of Degeneration in Urban Britain, 1830-1900," *Urban History* 33, no. 2 (2006), 234-252; Richard Soloway, "Counting the Degenerates: The Statistics of Race Deterioration in Edwardian England," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 1 (1982), 137-164; Patricia L. Garside, "'Unhealthy Areas': Town Planning, Eugenics and the Slums, 1890-1945," *Planning Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (1988), 24-46; John Macnicol, "In Pursuit of the Underclass," *Journal of Social Policy* 16, no. 4 (1987), 293-318; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), esp. ch. 6.

⁴⁷ R.U. Stopford to Rear-Admiral Richard Wells, 19 December 1899, Enclosure in No. 2, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, C. 8357 (London: HMSO, 1897), 3.

⁴⁸ G.F. Collingwood to G.M. Marston, 13 April 1895, Enclosure in No. 33, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1897), 23-24.

⁴⁹ H.L. Watts-Jones and F.F. Lobb, report on visit of H.M.S. *Thrush*, January 1903, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 1600 (London: HMSO, 1903), 12-14.

aboard the H.M.S. *Odin*, agreed. In the agricultural officer's inexpert opinion, "there is no sign of mental or physical deterioration, nor is it likely that a mixture of so many different races would, in so few generations, produce the ill effects of interbreeding which appears to have been feared, especially as new strains are from time to time being introduced." Given "the infusion of fresh blood" and genetic diversity of the islanders, "degeneration theory" held no explanatory power.⁵⁰

The diagnostic methods, namely rapid questioning and hasty physical examinations, deployed to answer pseudoscientific queries about degeneration remained inadequate for unraveling real genetic secrets and population trends. Observers not only deemed degeneration a legitimate concern, but also assumed that its effects remained readily discernable upon inspection with the naked eye. "I could see no real sign of physical degeneration and none of mental decadence among these men, in spite of the absolute necessity among them of intermarrying to a degree which in civilised lands would be regarded as highly dangerous," explained visitor Raymond Rallier du Baty.⁵¹

II

Faced with a welter of conflicting opinions, the Colonial Office worried that insularity posed a threat into the interwar period. The 1920s and 1930s consequently witnessed several medical and dental surveys. Instead of revealing degeneration, however, these investigations uncovered a medical and dental utopia. The statistics on dental decay amassed on Tristan da Cunha especially electrified researchers, who wielded the data in debates about the relationship between diet and dental decay.⁵²

⁵⁰ W. Hammond Tooke, report on Tristan da Cunha, 4 July 1904, Enclosure, No. 9, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha* (1906), 26, 28.

⁵¹ Raymond Rallier du Baty, *15,000 Miles in a Ketch* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1912), 72.

⁵² Worboys, "The Discovery of Malnutrition between the Wars," 215.

The islanders' teeth became objects of inquiry because of twentieth-century developments in medicine and dentistry. In 1912, Polish-born biochemist Casimir Funk identified the "vitamine," or the nutritive properties of foods. Following this breakthrough, laboratories isolated and synthesized additional vitamins in 1920s and 1930s.⁵³ The insight that particular foods contained specific nutrients led doctors to focus less on quantity and more on the alimentary aspects of what people ate.⁵⁴

The discovery of vitamins and constitution of the field of nutrition raised awareness about Britain's addiction to sugary, processed foods. On the eve of the First World War, each Briton consumed approximately fifty-five pounds of sugar annually. By 1920, that figure had climbed to almost seventy-three pounds.⁵⁵

This unwholesome diet inflicted a toll on British bodies and teeth. During the First World War, the military rejected recruits at an alarmingly high rate because of malnutrition.⁵⁶ Likewise, "defective teeth" kept a great number of recruits out of the ranks and treatment drained army resources.⁵⁷

To combat interwar Britain's epidemic of sickly bodies, dieting and exercising fads increased in popularity and organizations concerned with wellness mushroomed. Many of the advocates and architects of the so-called "life reform movement" celebrated the supposedly robust health and splendid constitutions of "primitive" peoples, who

⁵³ See Robyn Smith, "The Emergence of Vitamins as Bio-political Objects during World War I," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 40, no. 3 (2009), 179-189; Harmke Kamminga, "Vitamins and the Dynamics of Molecularization: Biochemistry, Policy and Industry in Britain, 1914-1939," in *Molecularizing Biology and Medicine: New Practices and Alliances, 1910s-1970s*, eds. Soraya de Chadarevian and Harmke Kamminga (Amsterdam: Hardwood, 1998), 78-98.

⁵⁴ Vernon, *Hunger*, 117.

⁵⁵ Derek J. Oddy, *Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s* (Suffolk and Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2003), 12, 114.

⁵⁶ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health, and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 151.

⁵⁷ W.G. MacPherson, ed., *History of the Great War: Medical Services General History*, vol. 1 (London: HMSO, 1921), 134-136.

shunned the excesses of civilization, as worthy of emulation.⁵⁸ Sir William Arbuthnot Lane's New Health Society, for instance, encouraged members to copy aspects of "native" life, such as consuming more whole-wheat carbohydrates, fresh fruits and vegetables, and milk.⁵⁹

The movement extended to dentistry, too. Dentist John Menzies Campbell, for instance, wrote a popular guide to oral health that presented cavities as "a disease of civilisation." The people of antiquity, as well as contemporary "primitive" peoples, had experienced very little dental decay due to "the coarse nature of the food eaten and to the lack of the refined and concentrated foods, especially sugar and foods manufactured therefrom." Campbell thus urged readers not only to adopt good oral hygiene and a sensible lifestyle, but also to eat a balanced, low-sugar diet replete with nutritious, mastication-inducing foods.⁶⁰

With interest in nutrition awakened, Tristan da Cunha became useful to dental researchers, who chanced upon the islanders' excellent teeth as a result of talks to transfer sovereignty to South Africa in the early 1920s. But before even contemplating assuming responsibility for the island, Union authorities required details on "the conditions of life of the people, their mental capacity and general physical development."⁶¹ In response, the Royal Navy commanded Surgeon Commander C.R. Rickard, Fleet Medical Surgeon, to survey the islanders.⁶²

⁵⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body*, 161-178.

⁵⁹ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Raising a Nation of 'Good Animals': The New Health Society and Health Education Campaigns in Interwar Britain," *Social History of Medicine* 20, no. 1 (2007), esp. 77-78, 81-82.

⁶⁰ J. Menzies Campbell, *Those Teeth of Yours: A Popular Guide to Better Teeth*, 2nd ed. (London: William Heinemann, 1931), xiii, 29, 34-35, 38-46, 49-50.

⁶¹ J.C. Smuts, minute no. 69, 6 February 1923, 1, ADM 1/8645/190, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter TNA).

⁶² Rear Admiral, Commander-in-Chief, Simonstown, to Secretary of the Admiralty, 22 April 1923, 1, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

During his short visit in 1923, Rickard concluded that consanguineous marriage had not led to the expected degeneration, which, though under criticism, still garnered widespread support, informed medical practice, and shaped government policies.⁶³ Many societies had married close relations with no ill effects. On Tristan da Cunha, where the islanders wed relatives “very many degrees removed” and the number of families proved adequate to ensure “very many combinations in the dilution of blood to be made,” the chance of physical danger remained even lower. Regardless of the degree of interrelation, fit parents invariably begot healthy children.⁶⁴

As proof, Rickard pointed to an incidence of disease much lower than that obtaining in “civilization.” Robust genetic stock and breezes purified from drifting over the “empty ocean” kept the island “almost germ free.” Besides an unspecified renal condition and instance of epilepsy, he pronounced dyspepsia the lone widespread condition. “They are physically above the average, the children being exceptionally so, the condition of their teeth is almost perfect,” he gushed.⁶⁵

⁶³ On the interwar assault on eugenics, see Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982), esp. chs. 5-6; Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the Worlds Wars* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). On the persistence of degeneration theory and eugenics in Britain, see John Welshman, “Eugenics and Public Health in Britain, 1900-40: Scenes from Provincial Life,” *Urban History* 24, no. 1 (1997), 56-75; Dan Stone, *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002); Greta Jones, *Social Hygiene in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); G.R. Searle, “Eugenics and Politics in Britain in the 1930s,” *Annals of Science* 36, no. 2 (1979), 159-169; Pauline M.H. Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); John Macnicol, “Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization in Britain Between the Wars,” *Social History of Medicine* 2, no. 2 (1989), 147-169; Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop* 5 (1978), 9-65.

⁶⁴ C.R. Rickard to Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, medical report on visit of H.M.S. *Dublin*, 3 April 1923, 1-2, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

⁶⁵ C.R. Rickard to Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, medical report on visit of H.M.S. *Dublin*, 3 April 1923, 1-3, ADM 1/8645/190, TNA.

Rickard's survey occurred at a pivotal moment in the development of dentistry. During the interwar period, researchers clarified questions that had plagued dentists since 1889, when microbiologist Willoughby Miller extended the germ theory of disease to dentistry. He correctly asserted that food debris initiated a noxious chemical reaction that eroded enamel and enabled bacteria to enter through fissures, thus decaying the tooth. This so-called "chemico-parasitic theory" transformed dentistry by identifying the previously mysterious process by which cavities occurred.⁶⁶

Since bacteria required nourishment, Miller thought the prevention of cavities centered on controlling the foods upon which they thrived. This entailed "hygienic measures" and dietary proscriptions. Miller recommended practicing "repeated, thorough, systematic cleansing of the oral cavity and the teeth" with mouthwashes, toothbrushes, and "tooth-soaps." Furthermore, he urged "prohibiting or limiting the consumption of such foods or luxuries which readily undergo acid fermentation to remove the chief source of the ferment-products injurious to the teeth." He believed carbohydrates especially fermentable and prone to releasing acids. Miller consequently deemed foods like potatoes and bread, and to a lesser extent stodgy, sugary sweets, most prejudicial to the enamel of teeth.⁶⁷

By the interwar period, the dental profession had largely embraced Miller's explanation of the etiology of cavities, including the indictment of sucrose.⁶⁸ But no consensus had cohered on how to treat the problem. Two divergent modes of thinking

⁶⁶ David Mason, "W.D. Miller: His Origins and His Influence 100 Years On," *Dental History* 45 (2007), 4, 8, 11.

⁶⁷ Willoughby D. Miller, *The Micro-Organisms of the Human Mouth: The Local and General Diseases Which Are Caused by Them* (Philadelphia: The S.S. White Dental Manufacturing Company, 1890), 223-224, 236-237.

⁶⁸ April Merleaux, *Sugar and Civilization: American Empire and the Cultural Politics of Sweetness* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 221-227.

predominated. The debate centered on the respective importance of extrinsic and intrinsic causes in combating decay. One group maintained that cavities resulted from genetic predisposition, whereas the other asserted that some combination of dietary choices, nutrition, and bacteria decayed teeth.⁶⁹

Proponents of the latter school began exploring preventative treatments for cavities. Improving oral hygiene became a primary concern for dental professionals. As a result, the toothbrush grew in popularity throughout the interwar years.⁷⁰ Dentists also started to consider the effects of nutrition on tooth development and cavity prevention.⁷¹

In the search for answers, dentists saw colonies like insular Tristan da Cunha as optimal laboratories.⁷² As a geographically diffuse entity, the British Empire contained a variety of diets perceived as untainted by civilization. This granted researchers the opportunity to observe how disparate diets affected the dentitions of subject populations.⁷³ Equally cogent, dentists believed caries to be “a strikingly modern disease” from which “primitive races” boasted immunity.⁷⁴

For these reasons, organizations like the Dental Society of the Cape Province received the news that cavities did not menace the islanders’ teeth with interest. Its members appealed to the South African Minister of Health to request that an extra dentist accompany a future warship to Tristan da Cunha. By conclusively determining that the

⁶⁹ Picard, *Making the American Mouth*, 42-43.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Fee and Theodore M. Brown, “Popularizing the Toothbrush,” *American Journal of Public Health* 94, no. 5 (2004), 721.

⁷¹ Picard, *Making the American Mouth*, 52.

⁷² On dental research conducted in the American Empire, see Pickard, *Making the American Mouth*, ch. 3; Kim, “Experimental Encounters,” 523-546.

⁷³ On the colonies as sites of nutritional research, see Vernon, *Hunger*, 105-106.

⁷⁴ Weston A. Price, *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern Diets and Their Effects* (New York and London: Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., 1939), 13.

islanders had caries-free mouths, such a study would offer insights on dental health for South African authorities and the MRC.⁷⁵

The rumors about Tristan da Cunha also grabbed the attention of the MRC, which dispatched Lieutenant-Colonel E.H. Marshall, surgeon aboard R.R.S. *Discovery*, to further investigate the islanders' bodies and teeth in 1926. Marshall's hasty examination uncovered "no signs of mental or physical degeneration due to inter-marriage," though he encountered the usual litany of Tristan complaints. More significantly, Marshall detected a high incidence of gum disease but a "remarkably low" rate of dental decay among the approximately one-third of mouths probed. In the 3-14, 21-44, and 45-90 age groups only .69 percent, 1.6 percent, and 6.2 percent, respectively, of teeth proved carious.⁷⁶ By comparison, a 1925 MRC survey of English and Welsh school children revealed a caries rate for permanent and deciduous (baby) teeth of 13.10 percent and 43.34 percent, respectively.⁷⁷

The superb condition of the islanders' teeth lent support to dietary explanations of decay, for modern dental hygiene did not exist on Tristan da Cunha. According to Marshall, some islanders' regimen consisted of cleaning their teeth "with finger and soap." Since even this crude practice had few adherents, the lack of cavities likely had a dietary explanation, most notably the dearth of sugar.⁷⁸

The paucity of decay, as well as the ability to disentangle hereditary and environmental factors among such a small, isolated population, made Marshall's findings

⁷⁵ C.N. Cunningham, Martin Braun, Walter Floyd, Committee of the Dental Society of the Cape Province, to Minister of Health, South Africa, 21 August 1924, 1-2, ADM 123/197, TNA.

⁷⁶ E.H. Marshall, "Report on a Visit to Tristan da Cunha," *British Dental Journal* 47 (1926), 1099-1101.

⁷⁷ See Table 9 and 10 in MRC, *Reports of the Committee for the Investigation of Dental Disease: II: The Incidence of Dental Disease in Children*, (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925), 41-42.

⁷⁸ Marshall, "Report on a Visit to Tristan da Cunha," 1101-1102.

exciting. “This report is extremely interesting because of the relative homogeneity of the stock, because of very uniform conditions, because of the shortage in flour, sugar and jam, because of the remarkably low incidence of dental caries, and because of the relative prevalence of pyorrhea,” summarized one publication.⁷⁹ The MRC’s Dental Committee likewise clamored for another comprehensive study of the islanders, enthusing “much interesting and really valuable information could be got by the study of this wholly exceptional and wholly isolated group of people.”⁸⁰

In 1932, H.M.S. *Carlisle* conducted a follow-up study on Tristan da Cunha. After “overcoming their prejudices to going before the doctors and dentists,” the visit dispelled rumors of degeneration.⁸¹ “In view of the close affinity between the families and the in-breeding which must be prevalent,” remarked Surgeon Commander A.G. Bee, “we were prepared to find a community of low mentality and physically inferior type.” But aside from the case of ulnar deformation, a handful of hernias, reports of intestinal worms and recurrent respiratory “attacks” attributable to “slight bronchitis,” Bee detected “no other cases of organic disease on the island.” Nor had isolation caused the presumed mental enfeeblement.⁸²

The expedition devoted special attention to dental questions, particularly how diet and lifestyle influenced teeth.⁸³ Having examined the mouths of all but a handful of islanders, dentists W.E.A. Sampson, C.H. Egan, and James Moore deemed a mere 1.84 percent of teeth carious and 4.44 percent of gums afflicted with periodontal disease.

⁷⁹ “Tristan da Cunha,” *The Dental Cosmos* 69, no. 1 (1927), 115.

⁸⁰ Unknown to Chambers, 28 June 1926, 1, FD 1/3717, TNA.

⁸¹ F.R. Barry, H.M.S. *Carlisle* Report of Proceedings, 16 January 1932, 5, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

⁸² A.G. Bee, General and Medical Report on the Island of Tristan da Cunha, 11 January 1932, 2, 6, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

⁸³ James Moore and W.E.A. Sampson to F.R. Barry, Preliminary Report on the Dental Conditions of the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha, following the Investigation Made upon 9th and 10th January, 1932, 11 January 1932, 1, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

Sampson beamed, “it would be difficult to find any other community in the world who are so dentally perfect.”⁸⁴

These findings challenged “civilized” wisdom and dental heterodoxy. Moore and Sampson thought that the islanders, who never brushed, “entirely contradicted” the axiom that “[a] clean tooth never decays.” The data suggested that future research privilege diet over oral hygiene.⁸⁵ “Those whose faith is riveted to the toothbrush and hard foods to prevent dental disease,” echoed John Menzies Campbell, “will find considerable difficulty in reconciling their beliefs with the conditions prevailing at Tristan da Cunha.”⁸⁶

However, implicating nutrition in the development of cavities engendered controversy. Mirroring earlier debates about rickets, which had polarized the scientific community, James Sim Wallace and Wilfred Fish deemed vitamins irrelevant to the formation of teeth. In contrast, physiologist Lady May Mellanby and her proponents thought cavities the product of insufficient vitamin intake, which weakened enamel and rendered teeth vulnerable to decay.⁸⁷

Tristan da Cunha figured in these polemics. At the centenary meeting of the British Medical Association in July 1932, for example, Fish and Mellanby exchanged salvos on the significance of data from the island. Discounting the salience of vitamin D, Fish argued that caries represented “a saprophytic phenomenon,” whereby inborn faults

⁸⁴ W.E.A. Sampson, “Dental Examination of the Inhabitants of the Island of Tristan da Cunha,” *The British Dental Journal* 53, no. 4 (1932), 397, 400-401.

⁸⁵ James Moore and W.E.A. Sampson to F.R. Barry, Preliminary Report on the Dental Conditions of the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha, following the Investigation Made upon 9th and 10th January, 1932, 11 January 1932, 2, ADM 116/2775, TNA.

⁸⁶ J. Menzies Campbell, “The Curious History of Tristan da Cunha: A Blow to Accepted Theories,” *The Dental Journal of Australia* 5, no. 7 (1933), 483-484.

⁸⁷ M. Nicolson and G.S. Taylor, “Scientific Knowledge and Clinical Authority in Dentistry: James Sim Wallace and Dental Caries,” *Journal Royal College Physicians Edinburgh* 39, no. 1 (2009), 65-71.

in the enamel inexorably rendered the tooth susceptible to bacterial colonization, necrosis, and eventual decay. Given the high degree of interrelation on the island, Tristan da Cunha confirmed that “caries appear to be definitely racial and hereditary in character,” with hygiene playing only a secondary role.⁸⁸ Mellanby’s rejoinder downplayed inheritance and hygiene. Recent findings from Tristan da Cunha, as well as the Inuit and “tribes in tropical lands,” revealed that lifestyle, especially vitamin D intake, absorbed through food or sunlight, negated the harmful effects of the indeterminate “toxamin” present in cereals and produced perfect teeth.⁸⁹

Both hypotheses contained important elements of truth. Hygienic and dietary choices certainly affect enamel, though Mellanby grossly overstated the pre-eruptive salience of vitamins. Yet, as post-war research later demonstrated, fluoridation of water, milk, and toothpaste prove more important in combating dental decay than hygiene or diet.⁹⁰

Not everyone treated these data with reverence. Edward Samson, a dentist and social reformer, objected to extrapolating grand theories from tiny Tristan da Cunha. He claimed that Fish and others irresponsibly deployed these statistics in support of their hypotheses. Rather than a significant case study for understanding the etiology of caries, Tristan da Cunha had become a space onto which dentists projected their utopian longings for pristine mouths.⁹¹

⁸⁸ E.W. Fish, “The Aetiology of Dental Caries,” *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3746 (1932), 747-749.

⁸⁹ May Mellanby, “The Aetiology of Dental Caries,” *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3746 (1932), 749-751.

⁹⁰ Andrew Rugg-Gunn, “Dental Caries: Strategies to Control this Preventable Disease,” *Acta Medica Academica* 42, no. 2 (2013), 119-125, 127-129.

⁹¹ Edward Samson, *Common-Sense Dentistry (A National Necessity)* (London: J.S. Cottrell, 1935), 19-23.

Nevertheless, the data generated on insular Tristan da Cunha and other colonies assisted in a professional consensus about the relationship between diet and dental decay beginning to coalesce by the end of the decade. At the 1934 meeting of the British Dental Association, for instance, diet dominated the discussions. Virtually everyone accepted that food influenced dental decay, with the teeth of “primitive” Maori, Inuit, Pacific Islanders, and Tristan islanders cited as evidence.⁹²

III

These dental debates, which illuminated the fraught topic of how much weight to ascribe to inheritance versus environmental factors in the etiology of disease, dominated subsequent investigations of the islanders. As the decade progressed, the methodological limitations of interwar genetics, notably an emphasis on visualization, kept doctors struggling to discern the pitfalls of insularity, except for the susceptibility to the microbes that purportedly made removal to civilization a dangerous prospect. In theorizing about the islanders’ excellent health, physicians increasingly privileged geography over inheritance.

Doctors repeatedly discounted the possibility of decline through endogamy, though acknowledged the grave immunological consequences of Tristan da Cunha’s extreme isolation. “As far as could be seen the intermarrying that must necessarily occur in this small community has brough[t] about no degeneracy, mental or physical,” concluded Dr. J. Purser, who visited for two days in 1933. Yet, despite splendid bodies and teeth, the absence of “common infectious diseases” left the islanders’ immune

⁹² “Diet and Teeth,” *Manchester Guardian*, 8 August 1934.

systems vulnerable to attack. The islanders remained “badly equipped for life in the modern world.”⁹³

Surgeon E.F.D. Owen, who went ashore for a morning in 1935, agreed. While healthy, their immune systems represented a liability. With few pathogens reaching the remote island, the inhabitants had no immunity to contagious illnesses. He cited an islander who had immigrated to Cape Town, where he allegedly suffered unrelenting pathogenic assault. “Without doubt if these Islanders were taken to a populated area they would succumb to every disease that came into their way,” he pronounced.⁹⁴

While hyperbolic, an immunological phenomenon common to isolated groups certainly occurred on Tristan da Cunha. Following the rare visit of a ship, the entire community tended to become acutely stricken with the common cold or influenza. The islanders referred to these outbreaks as “ship’s cold.”⁹⁵

The death of islander Donald Glass in 1937 seemingly validated fears about the islanders’ unseasoned immune systems. Feted as the lone islander to reach Britain, twenty-eight-year-old Glass settled in Kent, where he worked in a factory that produced instrumentation. After two years making aircraft gauges and indicators, he contracted a fatal case of tuberculosis.⁹⁶ Having grown up on a germ-free island, Glass “lacked the necessary powers of resistance.”⁹⁷

The question of why the islanders had not degenerated on an isolated, wind-swept rock but sickened upon contact with civilization vexed scientists. “The reason why they

⁹³ J. Purser, medical report on the island of Tristan da Cunha, 2 December 1933, 1, 4, 6, 9-11, 14-15, FD 1/4965, TNA.

⁹⁴ E.F.D. Owen to E. Griffith, medical report on visit of *Empress of Australia*, 22 March 1935, 2-4, DO 35/469/13, TNA.

⁹⁵ A.G. Partridge to Stacy Waddy, 5 September 1929, 1, USPG D328, BL.

⁹⁶ “Victim of English Climate,” newspaper clipping, n.d., Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 4, British Library.

⁹⁷ Irving B. Gane, “Death of an Islander,” *The Times*, 25 March 1937.

can keep so healthy in a place that seems so little fit for human beings to live is an interesting problem from a scientific point of view,” mused physician Sverre Dick Henriksen and Peter Munch.⁹⁸

The conundrum inspired the Norwegian Scientific Expedition, which visited Tristan da Cunha from December 1937 to March 1938. Initially envisioned as a natural history survey, the largesse of Crown Prince Olav and others helped to expand the expedition’s scope to encompass every facet of life on Tristan da Cunha, including the teeth and bodies of the islanders.⁹⁹ In so doing, the expedition cast the insular community as the ideal setting for wide-ranging inquiries. “The isolated existence of the Tristanites was in reality a gigantic experiment, a century-old test under laboratory conditions, of which we only had to go and collect the results,” elaborated expedition leader Erling Christophersen.¹⁰⁰

Fears that the islanders would resist such lengthy, intrusive clinical and laboratory examinations proved unfounded. Whether through the coercion of Harold Wilde, who controlled how investigators interacted with the community, or free will, the islanders purportedly provided “the best possible human material for a scientific study.” According to Henriksen and Munch, they endured “any sort of examination with a kind and smiling face.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Sverre Dick Henriksen and Peter A. Munch, “The Healthiest People in the World,” *Discovery Magazine* 1, no. 8 (1938), 369-370.

⁹⁹ Erling Christophersen, *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938: A Short Account of the Expedition* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1946), 1-2, 5-6.

¹⁰⁰ Erling Christophersen, *Tristan da Cunha: The Lonely Isle*, trans. R.L. Benham (London: Cassell, 1940), 5.

¹⁰¹ Henriksen and Munch, “The Healthiest People in the World,” 370, 376; Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945), 252.

As a result of these varied examinations, Reidar Sognaes, the expedition's dentist, concluded that the islanders' increased, though comparatively low rate of caries (7.9 percent) owed little to inheritance. According to established guidelines, "the teeth of the islanders are far from perfect with regard to developmental structure." In fact, "developmental defects" occurred at roughly the same rate among the islanders as Britons. He instead cited "environmental" causes as of primary importance. Although lackadaisical in brushing, the islanders benefited from high doses of fluoride (to the point of possible fluorosis) through fish and a restricted consumption of sugary, processed foods.¹⁰²

Sverre Dick Henriksen and Per Oeding (see figure 4.1), who formed the expedition's medical contingent, likewise deemed environmental factors more significant than genes in sustaining the record of good health. "Only mild infectious disease and disease more or less directly due to hereditary factors play any role on the island," they concluded. The presence of diseases with a genetic basis, as well as the fact that islanders who left contracted "infectious disease," supported claims that isolation favorably conditioned health. Restricted opportunities for intercourse with the outside world shielded the island from the stressors, germs, and over-processed foods of civilization. These advantages more than compensated for Tristan da Cunha's lack of amusements, insufficient food, and parasite-laden water.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Reidar Fauske Sognaes, *Oral Health of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 24 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1954), 11, 39, 42-43, 45-47, 90, 104-107, 112, 135-137.

¹⁰³ Sverre Dick Henriksen and Per Oeding, *Medical Survey of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 5 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1940), 15, 56, 58, 84, 89, 138, 140, 142, 144-145.



Figure 4.1. Sverre D. Henriksen (seated foreground), Per Oeding (standing), and Peter A. Munch (seated in background) working in the prefabricated “medical laboratory” erected on Tristan da Cunha in 1937-1938. Christophersen, *A Short Account of the Expedition*, 13. With the permission of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

The growing awareness of genetic conditions on Tristan da Cunha came by scrutinizing lineages, which pointed to a hereditary basis for endemic asthma and allergies, several cases of aural deformity and concomitant hearing loss, and one instance of retinitis pigmentosa.¹⁰⁴ This “pedigree study,” or the painstaking scouring of genealogies for pathological conditions that comported with preexisting knowledge about the transmission of dominant and recessive alleles, spoke to the limits of interwar genetics. Many evinced reluctance at utilizing biometrical techniques, such as correlation coefficients, which kept genetics an overwhelmingly “visual” discipline shorn of its quantitative roots.¹⁰⁵ In the 1930s, pioneers like Lionel Penrose increasingly adopted statistical techniques in pedigree studies of discrete populations.¹⁰⁶ But such innovation

¹⁰⁴ Henriksen and Oeding, *Medical Survey of Tristan da Cunha*, 45, 47, 50, 60-61, 64, 143, 145.

¹⁰⁵ Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings*, ch. 2.

¹⁰⁶ On Penrose, the Colchester Survey, and early efforts at quantifying the study of inheritance, see Jean-Paul Gaudillière and Ilana Löwy, “The Hereditary Transmission of Human Pathologies between 1900 and

did not inform the approaches of most physicians, who received little training on heredity.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the expedition's application of the principles of Mendelian inheritance to Tristan da Cunha constituted an important step in moving genetic studies of the islanders away from simple physical examinations.

IV

The Second World War and advent of crayfish canning initiated the demise of Tristan da Cunha's status as medical and dental utopia. The wartime occupation brought imported foods and opened the islanders to increased medical observation. Satisfying their sweet tooth from the canteen caused the prevalence of caries to grow, while expanded pedigree analysis affirmed that generations of inbreeding had caused a high incidence of genetic disease. Doctors continued to probe the islanders' teeth and bodies after the war, when commercial operations sustained the flow of goods from abroad and resident administrators voiced concerns about the health conditions afflicting the community. Still, the value of applying quantitative techniques to the study of the islanders remained sufficiently underappreciated. As a result, pressing questions about the effects of generations of endogamy went unresolved.

The Second World War increased medical observation of the islanders. During two years as garrison commander, Lieutenant-Commander E.J.S. Woolley documented widespread ill health. He diagnosed a high incidence of deformed ears with attendant deafness, polydactyly (supernumerary appendages), and asthma. The prevalence of

1940: The Good Reasons Not to Become 'Mendelian,'" in *Heredity Explored: Between Public Domain and Experimental Science, 1850-1930*, eds. Staffan Müller-Wille and Christina Brandt (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2016), 325-327; Sean A. Valles, "Lionel Penrose and the Concept of Normal Variation in Human Intelligence," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43, no. 1 (2012), 281-289; Jean-Paul Gaudillière, "Mendelism and Medicine: Controlling Human Inheritance in Local Contexts, 1920-1960," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences*, series 3, *Sciences de la Vie* 323, no. 12 (2000), esp. 1118-1123.

¹⁰⁷ Lindee, "Human Genetics after the Bomb," 51.

asthma left the islanders with “poor powers of recuperation from infections,” which often resulted in serious bronchial illnesses. Woolley also treated virtually the whole community for roundworms and multiple instances of musculoskeletal complaints, as well as extracted almost 100 carious teeth from gingival gums.¹⁰⁸ The appalling condition of the islanders surprised Woolley, who wondered if they had “always exaggerated their extreme healthiness.”¹⁰⁹

While “the legend of good health” owed much to hyperbole, Woolley thought a real “deterioration” had occurred. Given that no new immigrants had arrived since 1906, Tristan da Cunha had remained a closed population for decades. (Whether through ignorance or discretion, Woolley neglected to mention that at least one tryst between an islander and serviceman resulted in pregnancy.) The children begotten through the ensuing consanguineous marriages of pairs with an increasing number of shared alleles had restricted the community’s genetic diversity.¹¹⁰

Building on the work of Henriksen and Oeding, Woolley tracked the frequency and probability of hereditary conditions by compiling Tristan da Cunha’s genealogies through records that dated to the nineteenth century. This Mendelian exercise confirmed that inbreeding placed the population at an elevated risk for inheriting several conditions with a hereditary component, including “night blindness,” aural deformities with attendant deafness, polydactyly, and asthma.¹¹¹ However, the studies could not ascertain

¹⁰⁸ E.J.S. Woolley, report on Tristan da Cunha, July 1944 [1962 copy], 8-11, FD 23/110, TNA.

¹⁰⁹ E.J.S. Woolley, “The Health of the Civilian Population of Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 32 (1946), 7.

¹¹⁰ Woolley, “The Health of the Civilian Population of Tristan da Cunha,” 4-5, 8; D.I. Luard to W.F. France, October 1944, 1-2, USPG D510/3, BL.

¹¹¹ Woolley, “The Health of the Civilian Population of Tristan da Cunha,” 4, 8-9, 11-12.

the extent of the inbreeding, which meant that questions about genetic drift remained unanswerable.

H.S. Corfield confirmed his predecessor's findings. He estimated that asthma and bronchial infections afflicted approximately one-third of the island population. Infestations of roundworm and dermatological infections occurred at similarly high rates. Gingivitis and caries had also achieved near universal proportions, which belied previous statements of pristine mouths.¹¹²

The establishment of commercial canning, which brought a resident medical officer to the island, made surveillance of the islanders a permanent feature of life on Tristan da Cunha.¹¹³ Throughout the 1950s successive medical officers, along with administrators, compiled health statistics that further complicated the pre-war portrait of the islanders' teeth and bodies.

These observations continued to erode claims to superior health. During the inaugural year of the colonial administration, intestinal worms remained the scourge of poor sanitation and epidemics of chickenpox and influenza ravaged immune systems on several occasions, which aggravated asthma and caused a number of serious bronchial infections. Complications from these sicknesses claimed the lives of three islanders.¹¹⁴ After an acute outbreak, a petulant Hugh Elliott complained about the "many wild inaccuracies and idiocies" circulating in periodicals about, among other things, the

¹¹² H.S. Corfield, A Summary of the Administration of H.M.S. "Atlantic Isle" (Tristan da Cunha) and the Conditions on the Island during the Period 1944-1946, 29 May 1946, 6-7, ADM 1/9705, TNA.

¹¹³ The Tristan da Cunha Development Company furnished a nurse and doctor until 1953, when the Colonial Office assumed responsibility for providing medical treatment. See J.P.L. Scott, Annual Administrator Report, Tristan da Cunha, 1953, 15 February 1954, 1, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹¹⁴ Hugh Elliott, Annual Administrator Report, Tristan da Cunha, 1951, 30 January 1952, 6, CO 1024/84, TNA.

excellent health of the islanders.¹¹⁵ Several years later, schoolteacher Ronald Harding reported “that Island Sickness (for want of a better name) i.e. epidemics of heavy colds and tonsilitus [*sic*], and diorrhoea [*sic*] type illnesses, are becoming increasingly prevalent on the Island.” While not an expert, he thought renewed contact with the outside world, weakened “physical resistance” from chronic sickness, and “very close contact in homes” responsible.¹¹⁶

Royal Naval investigations revealed an even worse dental condition. A survey in 1952 showed an increase of nearly six-fold in the caries rate since the celebrated visit of H.M.S. *Carlisle* two decades earlier.¹¹⁷ By 1957, when S.R. Wallis, Surgeon Commander, and T. Ockerse, Dental Health Officer, Union Health Department, visited, the situation appeared grave. Although treatment in 1955 had reduced the prevalence of cavities, Wallis argued that the caries rate of 9.74 percent and widespread gum disease indicated “the serious dental problem which the British government must face.” Inbreeding, poor oral hygiene, and the penetration of “the long arm of civilization,” which enabled the islanders to satisfy cravings for sugary foods and drinks, had combined to produce a crisis.¹¹⁸

The perceived physical malaise and surge in the incidence of cavities revived concerns about degeneration. “It has in the past been said that the Islanders are very healthy, but I do not consider this is correct now,” wrote Godfrey Harris in 1957. Hereditary complaints most concerned him, for the prevalence would rise as genetic diversity declined. As such, he thought evacuation or widening the gene pool prudent,

¹¹⁵ Hugh Elliott Diary, 23 January 1951-31 January 1951 entry, vol. 4, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹¹⁶ Ronald Harding to A.E.A. Sulston, 10 October 1956, 3, USPG X1115/F3, BL.

¹¹⁷ F.B. Gamblen, “A Dental Examination of the Inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 39, no. 4 (1953), 242, 255-257.

¹¹⁸ S.R. Wallis, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of the Royal Naval Medical Service* 44, no. 1 (1958), 35-43.

though recognized the difficulties in resettling the community or turning to eugenic solutions.¹¹⁹

His superiors in London adopted a rosier position. “My own impression was that the effects of inbreeding were less noticeable on Tristan than in some other communities I have seen, even in Europe,” opined Maurice Willis. Evacuation because of inbreeding seemed too extreme. “Nevertheless you cannot continue to breed indefinitely from a tight community like this without some deterioration in the stock,” he conceded.¹²⁰

An undeterred Harris continued to call for addressing the islanders’ alleged degeneration through a combination of emigration and immigration, which led the Colonial Office to solicit the opinion of John Alexander Fraser Roberts, one of Britain’s premier geneticists and president of the Royal Anthropological Institute.¹²¹ Having reviewed the materials, he dismissed Harris’ concerns, stating “there does not seem to be any reason for immediate alarm.” Instead, the population presented “an interesting long term problem, which would repay study if someone were available to undertake the work and if it were practicable.”¹²² With Harris’ departure imminent, the Colonial Office decided to let the matter rest and defer to the next administrator.¹²³

On the eve of the volcanic eruption, then, doctors and dentists had begun to reappraise the islanders’ health. While the extent and impact of inbreeding remained unclear, many eyed the encroachment of civilization with unease. Commercial links with the outside world led to regular imports of alcohol and processed foods that increased the

¹¹⁹ G.F. Harris, *Tristan da Cunha: Future Policy*, 8 August 1957, 3-4, 11, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹²⁰ M.A. Willis to A. Emmanuel, file minute, 14 November 1957, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹²¹ G.F. Harris to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 February 1958, 2, CO 1024/235, TNA; M.A. Willis to J.A. Fraser Roberts, 28 October 1958, 1, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹²² J.A. Fraser Roberts to M.A. Willis, 4 December 1958, 1, CO 1024/235, TNA.

¹²³ M.A. Willis to J.A. Fraser Roberts, 4 February 1959, 1, CO 1024/235, TNA.

consumption of sugars. According to Dr. Paul Winter, who had visited Tristan da Cunha in 1961 to administer and study the efficacy of a poliomyelitis vaccine, consuming greater quantities of processed foods and alcohol had already damaged the islanders' pristine teeth and threatened to vitiate their renowned constitutions. It afforded scientists "a unique opportunity for measuring the effect of the acquisition of civilized eating and drinking habits on health."¹²⁴

V

The islanders' reputation for excellent health nevertheless lingered in many quarters until the autumn of 1961, when the volcano forced the community to refuge in Britain for two years. The eruption dismayed Paul Winter, whose poliomyelitis research had profited from "the unique test-tube like nature of the island population." As he later recalled, "my test-tube was broken and had lost most of its magical potential for obtaining information on some interesting problems as they affected an isolated community, which these islanders could no longer be considered to be."¹²⁵ For most, however, the eruption enhanced rather than spoiled the research potential of the islanders. Even before reaching Pendell Camp, the prospect of the entire population of a remote island relocating to Britain tantalized doctors, who wanted "to see what effect civilisation will have on these previously segregated people."¹²⁶ The British sojourn forever transformed medical and dental perceptions of the islanders.

¹²⁴ P.A.D. Winter to R. Lewthwaite, 23 May 1961, 2, CO 1024/333, TNA.

¹²⁵ Paul Winter, "Tristan da Cunha—The Medical Test-Tube that Exploded," *South African Philatelist* 59, no. 8 (1983), 211-212.

¹²⁶ Cecil Hymers to George Godber, 23 October 1961, 1, MH 123/315, TNA.

Once settled, pleas to undertake medical and dental examinations of the islanders only multiplied.¹²⁷ Christopher Eastwood, Assistant Under-Secretary of the State at the Colonial Office, noted that the islanders had become “potential guinea pigs for a whole number of medical research purposes.”¹²⁸ Similarly, administrator Peter Wheeler quipped: “The medical world has gone completely wild in their frantic enthusiasm to investigate these strange men from Mars!”¹²⁹

Indeed, every aspect of the islanders’ teeth and bodies appeared worthy of researching. Studying the dental condition of the islanders promised to illuminate the role of lifestyle and especially diet on teeth.¹³⁰ Isolation also rendered the islanders desirable medical specimens for immunologists, who wanted to better understand the genetic and environmental factors governing resistance and susceptibility to disease.¹³¹ The small, consanguineous, and well-documented family lineage likewise represented a boon for geneticists eager to understand inheritance.¹³²

Inundated with requests, the MRC devised a plan for systematic study. Shortly after arriving, the MRC’s Brandon Lush implored John Buchanan, Chief Medical Officer at the Colonial Office, to implement “a Working Party under the Chairmanship of a distinguished physician to ensure both that the best interests of the Islanders were preserved, and that an [*sic*] unique opportunity to add materially to knowledge in several fields of medicine was taken.”¹³³ Formed under the auspices of the MRC, the Working

¹²⁷ Brandon Lush to H. Atkins, 1 December 1961, 1, FD 23/109, TNA.

¹²⁸ C.G. Eastwood to J.P. Dodds, 22 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

¹²⁹ Peter Wheeler to Peter B. Lewis, 6 February 1962, 2, DO 119/1462, TNA.

¹³⁰ File note, 13 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

¹³¹ Brandon Lush to John Buchanan, 10 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

¹³² George E. Godber to Harold Himsworth, 8 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

¹³³ Brandon Lush to John Buchanan, 10 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

Party emerged by early December 1961 as a “co-ordinating body” to supervise the interdisciplinary inquiries into the health of the islanders.¹³⁴

The Working Party enlisted the services of Britain’s best biomedical researchers. Its members and collaborators included David Tyrrell, doyen of the MRC’s Common Cold Unit, Alan Woodruff, Wellcome Professor at the London School of Hygiene and physician at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, Lionel Penrose, editor of the *Annals of Human Genetics* and chair of the Galton Laboratory, University College London, and Graham Selby Wilson, famed microbiologist and director of the Public Health Laboratory Service.¹³⁵ These luminaries worked under the direction of Sir Hedley Atkins, whom Harold Himsworth, the Secretary of the MRC, selected as the chairman of the Working Party.¹³⁶ Atkins, a trained surgeon with distinguished career, brought decades of experience to the Working Party.¹³⁷

In addition, Norman Samuels and Harold Lewis joined the Working Party’s ranks as secretaries. Samuels’ value to the Working Party came from a brief tenure as medical officer on Tristan da Cunha, where he had formed a good rapport with the islanders and collected “first class” information on their health.¹³⁸ Although the South African-born Lewis had no personal connection to the islanders, he brought expertise accumulated through a stint as lecturer in physiology at University College London, member of the

¹³⁴ Unknown to George Godber, 24 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

¹³⁵ Caroline Richmond, “David Tyrrell: Virologist who Unlocked Many of the Secrets of the Common Cold,” *British Medical Journal* 330, no. 7505 (2005), 1451; S.G. Wright, “A.W. Woodruff,” *British Medical Journal* 305, no. 6864 (1992), 1287; David C. Watt, “L.S. Penrose FRS (1898-1972): Psychiatrist and Professor of Human Genetics,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 173, no. 6 (1998), 458-461; E.S. Anderson and Robert Wilson, “Graham Selby Wilson, 10 September 1895-5 April 1987,” *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society* 34 (1988), 888-919.

¹³⁶ Brandon Lush to H. Atkins, 1 December 1961, 1, FD 23/109, TNA.

¹³⁷ “Sir Hedley Atkins,” *British Medical Journal* 287, no. 6407 (1983), 1803.

¹³⁸ Brandon Lush to John Buchanan, 10 November 1961, 1, FD 23/107, TNA.

British North Greenland Expedition, and current staffer at the division of human physiology in the National Institute of Medical Research.¹³⁹

The investigators became aware of the islanders' poor health soon after arriving in Britain, when Samuels informed Lewis during a visit to Pendell Camp that a litany of ailments plagued the refugees.¹⁴⁰ The islanders, recalled Lewis, had "a high incidence of intestinal worm infestation, a peculiar chronic asthmatic state which has apparently always affected almost half of the community, low resistance to respiratory infection, serious dental deterioration and other conditions which might be expected in an underdeveloped community."¹⁴¹

After focusing on treating these pathologies for several weeks, the Working Party's efforts shifted. Hailing from a remote island, they saw the islanders as a "control" group that would yield insights into "what modern society has done to man."¹⁴² The Working Party subsequently advanced plans for inquiries with little therapeutic value, including psychiatric studies, nutritional surveys, and anthropometrical and skin color assessments, in early January 1962.¹⁴³

As the Working Party's investigations became more experimental, dissent surfaced. The islanders balked at purely experimental requests like the anthropometric inquiries of J.H. Tanner, Institute of Child Health. Approximately half of the islanders declined Tanner's requests to be photographed, x-rayed, and measured. On the third day

¹³⁹ "H.E. Lewis," *The British Medical Journal* 3, no. 5765 (1971), 55.

¹⁴⁰ Appendix 1, minutes of the first meeting of the Working Party, 8 December 1961, 1, FD 23/109, TNA.

¹⁴¹ H.E. Lewis, introduction to "Symposium on Medical Problems Presented by the Tristan da Cunha Community," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 57, no. 1 (1963), 9.

¹⁴² Harold E. Lewis, "The Tristan Islanders: A Medical Study of Isolation," *New Scientist* 20, no. 370 (1963), 722.

¹⁴³ Progress Report, 8 January 1962, 3-4, FD 23/110, TNA.

of his investigations, none volunteered. As a result of this “disappointing” turnout, the study stalled.¹⁴⁴

To secure cooperation, Lewis traveled to Calshot, where the islanders had recently relocated. On February 17, he discussed the Working Party’s research agenda with administrators, local doctors, and Reverend Charles Jewell. Lewis appealed to the islanders the next evening. He described how the investigations, though sometimes unpleasant or silly, benefited the islanders. Lest anyone contemplate not participating, Lewis warned that employment in local industries depended on being rid of intestinal parasites, which meant complying with demands.¹⁴⁵

The cavalier attitude toward the islanders’ concerns, which worsened as the investigations progressed, accorded with accepted practices in post-war Britain. Scholars have touted the Nuremberg Code (1947), which arose in response to the horrific experiments of Nazi doctors, as a seminal moment that enshrined informed consent as the hallmark of sound biomedical research.¹⁴⁶ The profession certainly condemned war crimes and took notice of the Nuremberg Doctors’ Trial.¹⁴⁷ But Nuremberg did little to dampen enthusiasm for suspect experimentation or to displace the paternalist credo that doctors knew best. Rather, a professional commitment to bioethics began to emerge haltingly during the 1960s, when the furor over thalidomide-induced birth defects

¹⁴⁴ Progress Report, 13 February 1962, 3, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁴⁵ Progress Report, 22 March 1962, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁴⁶ See George J. Annas and Michael A. Grodin, eds., *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul Weindling, “The Origins of Informed Consent: The International Scientific Commission on Medical War Crimes, and the Nuremberg Code,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75, no. 1 (2001), 37-71; Paul J. Weindling, *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials: From Medical War Crimes to Informed Consent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Ulf Schmidt, *Justice at Nuremberg: Leo Alexander and the Nazi Doctors’ Trial* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Paul Weindling, “Human Guinea Pigs and the Ethics of Experimentation: The BMJ’s Correspondent at the Nuremberg Medical Trial,” *British Medical Journal* 313, no. 7070 (1996), 1467-1470.

reached a fever pitch and “whistleblowers,” most notably Maurice Pappworth, exposed ethical lapses.¹⁴⁸

VI

Ethical questions intensified rather than slackened during and after the spring of 1963, when the Colonial Office began to repatriate the islanders. As the locus of activities started to shift from Britain to Tristan da Cunha, the islanders, who resented their status as medical subjects, increasingly challenged the Working Party. This resistance not only threatened the integrity of the studies, but also produced a public relations fiasco that highlighted the internal divisions within the Working Party about the purpose and future of the investigations.

The Colonial Office never solicited advice from the Working Party about repatriating the islanders, though the decision sparked controversy.¹⁴⁹ Many thought returning an inbred community to reproductive isolation irresponsible. These concerns centered on the prevalence of genetic disease, most notably retinitis pigmentosa. Ophthalmologist Arnold Sorsby diagnosed four related individuals as having the condition. Although “impossible to tell how widely scattered the gene actually is,” Sorsby conjectured “eight carriers amongst the younger generation of these islanders.” Such prevalence had potentially severe consequences. As he cautioned, “the eight carriers

¹⁴⁸ Jenny Hazelgrove, “The Old Faith and the New Science: The Nuremberg Code and Human Experimentation Ethics in Britain, 1946-73,” *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 15, no. 1 (2002), 109-135. On the thalidomide tragedy, see Gordon E. Appelbee, “From Arsenic to Thalidomide: A Brief History of Medicine Safety,” in *Making Medicines: A Brief History of Pharmacy and Pharmaceuticals*, ed. Stuart Anderson (London and Chicago: Pharmaceutical Press, 2005), 243-260.

¹⁴⁹ Lewis, “The Tristan Islanders,” 722.

and the unknown number of other carriers all constitute a serious menace in this closed community.”¹⁵⁰

The specter of mass blindness and enfeeblement alarmed many, who proposed eugenic solutions. Ophthalmologist Peter Choyce believed “that the Tristan islanders stood in grave danger of serious biological consequences if they returned to the island without taking with them fresh genetic material from which to breed.”¹⁵¹ Administrator Peter Day likewise deemed “new blood” absolutely “essential.” “What I would like to do is to set up a stud at Calshot and get as many of the girls pregnant as possible this summer,” he sneered. Conversely, Lewis endorsed restricting who reproduced through “selective contraception” of the afflicted, with “tainted couples” discouraged from having children.¹⁵²

At the same time, the impending return of the islanders to remote Tristan da Cunha presented investigators with opportunities. The islanders had lived in equilibrium with their environment for decades. “Through the experience of 150 years in their unique circumstances on Tristan,” explained Harold Lewis, “the islanders were learning to cope happily enough with many physical, biological and social problems that threatened their existence, and they achieved all sorts of subtle adaptations to their environment.” By continuing the Working Party’s studies on Tristan da Cunha, investigators might obtain insights on how environment shapes health.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Arnold Sorsby, “Retinitis Pigmentosa in Tristan da Cunha Islanders,” in “Symposium on Medical Problems Presented by the Tristan da Cunha Community,” 15-17.

¹⁵¹ Discussion in “Symposium on Medical Problems Presented by the Tristan da Cunha Community,” 24.

¹⁵² Notes of a meeting with Harold Lewis, Peter Day, and Joseph Loudon, 27 February 1963, 2, DOC MSS 002 0012 0002, Peter A. Munch papers, Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University (hereafter SLU).

¹⁵³ Lewis, “The Tristan Islanders,” 722.

Harold Lewis therefore solicited and obtained support for resuming the studies on Tristan da Cunha from across the MRC.¹⁵⁴ In April, the MRC appealed to the Colonial Office to permit psychiatrist Joseph Loudon as well as Dr. Stanley Gooch, a nutritionist, and his wife Doreen to return with the islanders to Tristan da Cunha to conduct further research.¹⁵⁵

These investigations coincided with the International Biological Program (IBP). Launched in 1964, the IBP aimed to survey life on the planet and to integrate humans and environments into a single analytical framework by studying biomes across the world. The interdisciplinary, decade-long IBP consisted of seven “sections,” including a Human Adaptability group, which spawned 232 discrete projects concerned with the interplay between peoples and environments. The Human Adaptability section paid especially close attention to “primitive” and remote populations that functioned as “biological baselines” who had supposedly avoided contamination from the radiation, chemicals, and germs of atomic civilization.¹⁵⁶

While never incorporated into the IBP, Tristan da Cunha’s tiny population size and bounded area made the island particularly well suited for exploring the same questions.¹⁵⁷ Its insularity seemingly enabled researchers to control more easily for confounding variables, thereby helping to distinguish between environmental and heredity factors in disease causation. “Ultimately we hope to consider Tristan as a

¹⁵⁴ For the aspirations of the Social Psychiatry Unit, see Aubrey Lewis to J.C.R. Hudson, 1 March 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA. For a succinct summary of the medical rationale behind the MRC’s planned nutritional survey, see E.M.B. Clements to B. Bronte-Stewart, 16 April 1963, 1-2, FD 23/119, TNA.

¹⁵⁵ E.M.B. Clements to J.M. Liston, 19 April 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁵⁶ Radin, *Life on Ice*, ch. 3, esp. 90-91. See, too, Radin, “Unfolding Epidemiological Stories,” 62-73; Joanna Radin, “Latent Life: Concepts and Practices of Human Tissue Preservation in the International Biological Program,” *Social Studies of Science* 43, no. 4 (2013), esp. 494-495; Bangham and de Chadarevian, “Human Heredity after 1945,” 45-49.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis wanted to see the IBP extended to Tristan da Cunha. See, for instance, H.E. Lewis to Martin Holdgate, 26 February 1965, 1, EXP/4/3/1/4/11, Royal Society, London (hereafter RS).

laboratory for long-term human and biological studies,” Lewis later explained, “and I believe that the island will be one of the few places in the world where we shall get to appreciate the total ecology.”¹⁵⁸

Insularity and the presence of ailments endemic in South America, Africa, and Asia supposedly made Tristan da Cunha a microcosm. Lewis likened Tristan da Cunha to “an analogue underdeveloped country.” For this reason, he believed “there are a number of useful principles that might emerge from micro-studies on Tristan that might be applicable to larger countries.”¹⁵⁹

However, before returning the islanders and transforming Tristan da Cunha into an ecological laboratory and model of the world, the Working Party had to defend the investigations against attack. In May, Mike Manley, a reporter with the tabloid *The People*, made inquiries that opened the Working Party’s investigations to internal review and public scrutiny. Having visited and canvassed the islanders, who made “a number of complaints,” he alleged that the Working Party’s “studies were being undertaken without adequate explanation or their consent.” Lurid tales circulated that the Working Party had subjected the islanders to bloodletting, fingerprinting, and nude photography without explicit permission.¹⁶⁰

Even before publication, Manley’s revelations provoked recriminations within the Working Party. The MRC determined that Lewis had allowed the investigations of geneticist Paul Polani and his subordinates to draw blood on three separate occasions, as well as engage in palm printing (dermatoglyphics) and facial photography for the benefit of Lionel Penrose, without the written consent or knowledge of the Working Party. This

¹⁵⁸ Harold Lewis to Martin Holdgate, 21 July 1965, 1, EXP/4/3/1/4/11, RS.

¹⁵⁹ “Tristan da Cunha—the Human Biology of Isolation,” *The Listener* 81, no. 2077 (1969), 68.

¹⁶⁰ File note, 20 May 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

constituted a breach, for the Working Party had agreed only once to allowing Polani to make use of blood collected for other purposes.¹⁶¹ In light of these revelations and the worsening “climate of opinion in Calshott [*sic*],” Edmund Clements temporarily suspended the investigations, save the nutritional survey, psychological observation, and limited sampling for Alan Woodruff, until the Working Party accorded matters further consideration.¹⁶²

Lewis rebuked Clements. He argued that the Working Party’s concerns were baseless, for administrator Peter Wheeler had known of these investigations. Furthermore, he maintained that all of the tests benefited the islanders. With the community’s departure looming, the Working Party needed to hasten the completion of these studies. Lewis thus demanded that his colleagues desist from further meddling and defer to his judgment.¹⁶³

But denunciations could not silence dissent. On June 2, *The People* sensationally reported that the islanders were “sick of being treated like a load of rare guinea-pigs.” They had endured a battery of uncomfortable tests, many of which no one had bothered to explain. The piece contained accusations of “over-zealous medical teams” terrifying elderly women and cowing them into cooperating. “Although these dedicated people mean well,” the story said of the Working Party’s investigators, “many of them have completely lost sight of the fact that the Tristans are human beings, not freaks.”¹⁶⁴

While of indeterminate authenticity, the reported ethical lapses discomfited the Working Party’s collaborators. Lionel Penrose expressed strong disapproval of the

¹⁶¹ Joan Faulkner to Brandon Lush, 22 May 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁶² E.M.B. Clements to Harold Lewis, 23 May 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁶³ H.E. Lewis to E.M.B. Clements, 27 May 1963, 1-2, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁶⁴ “200 Simple Souls Are Being Treated Like Guinea-Pigs,” *The People*, 2 June 1963.

Working Party's tactics. "I have a rather uneasy feeling that the Tristan Islanders are being exploited because they are all in one place and can be investigated easily," he complained.¹⁶⁵ The shadiness of the investigations also troubled William Court Brown, director of the MRC's Clinical Effects of Radiation Research Unit. "If it is only going to be possible to obtain blood in circumstances in which the islanders are unaware of what use it is going to be put to," he lamented, "then I suggest that, as this is ethically an objectionable procedure, no further consideration be given to completing these studies."¹⁶⁶

Still, the Working Party rationalized continued investigations as medically necessary. While the "advance party" had already returned to Tristan da Cunha, the impending repatriation of the remainder required a diagnosis of good health, which had prompted additional blood sampling. However, after *The People's* story ran, the Working Party had suspended all hematological studies. Concerned about the possibility of syphilis, anemia, and other conditions, they reasoned that certain hematological investigations remained essential. Thus, with assurances that the one-third of islanders who had eluded testing before the article broke "were co-operative and well-disposed," the Working Party proceeded with select blood work "on a voluntary basis." In addition to considering new requests for the testing of pre-collected blood, the Working Party agreed to proceed with the nutritional survey, anthropometrical measurements, and social observation.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ L. Penrose to E.M.B. Clements, 10 June 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁶⁶ W.M. Court Brown to E.M.B. Clements, 12 June 1963, 1, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁶⁷ Minutes of the seventh meeting of the Working Party, 14 June 1963, 1-4, FD 23/116, TNA. For a summary of the testing undertaken between January and June 1963, see also Working Party on Tristan da Cunha Progress Report, 1-3, FD 23/118, TNA.

However, cooperation between March and May 1963 did not prove as forthcoming as suggested. On March 4, Polani's staff saw sixty-six islanders, of whom all but two young children submitted to venipuncture, oral smears, and skin color surveys. On March 14-15, however, thirty of fifty-nine islanders declined some or all of the studies—finger and palm printing as well as hair and eye color assessments—that Dr. A. Taylor had proposed. And on the last visit of Polani's staff members, compliance dropped further. Of the sixty-one islanders solicited, only twenty-six submitted to all of the requests for photographs, finger and palm prints, and assessments of skin, eye, and hair color.¹⁶⁸ It signified a growing weariness with the never-ending studies.

VII

With the return of the islanders to Tristan da Cunha, the Working Party entered its terminal phase. As of July 1964, the Working Party had undertaken over fifty studies on a number of topics, including genealogy, genetics, nutrition, virology, bacteriology, dental disease, anthropometry, and psychology.¹⁶⁹ But as the lines of inquiry multiplied, the objectives became murkier. Despite calls from islanders and doctors to halt the investigations, the Working Party endured until 1971.

With the islanders back on Tristan da Cunha, internal criticism grew more strident. In September 1964, for example, proposals for Margaret Chambers, a trained nutritionist with the Division of Human Physiology, National Institute of Medical Research, to supplement the earlier inquiries of Elaine Taylor and Stanley Gooch,

¹⁶⁸ The dermatoglyphic studies proved the least popular. On compliance, see Appendix A and Summary of Investigations, Report on Investigations Carried Out on the Population of Tristan da Cunha at Calshott [*sic*], Hants, February-May, 1963, 1-3, in agenda for seventh meeting of the Working Party, 14 June 1963, FD 23/116, TNA.

¹⁶⁹ H.E. Lewis, The Islanders of Tristan da Cunha: Their Ecology, Sociology, Biology and Medicine: List of Topics Studied by Investigators, 23 July 1964, 1-2, FD 23/121, TNA.

resident medical officer, with further investigations into the islanders' diet revived concerns that the Working Party had exposed the small community to unwarranted scrutiny.¹⁷⁰ Doctors such as B.E.C. Hopwood believed that with this request for another nutritional study the Working Party had gone too far.¹⁷¹ But these reservations did not prevent the Working Party from moving forward with the proposed survey, albeit only after a suspicious Head Office at the MRC had verified independently that the islanders consented to the study.¹⁷²

These studies, which had expanded to sixty-six lines of inquiry by February 1965, also faced continued opposition from the press and islanders.¹⁷³ Journalist Nancy Hosegood characterized the Working Party's never-ending studies of the islanders "as an unwarrantable invasion of their privacy."¹⁷⁴ While replete with inaccuracies, Hosegood correctly sensed the community's profound fatigue with the interminable and invasive studies. As one islander quipped, "the Doctor had been around for blood and the next time he would probably want their heads."¹⁷⁵

For the imperious Harold Lewis, the investigations proved too important to brook interference. He saw the investigations as invaluable to professional development and therefore exercised a proprietorial hold. "Harold certainly seems to want to make sure he

¹⁷⁰ Minutes of the meeting held at the offices of the Medical Research Council, 20 Park Crescent, London W 1, on Monday 28th September 1964 at 2.0 p.m., 17 December 1964, 2-6, FD 23/121, TNA.

¹⁷¹ B.E.C. Hopwood to Brandon Lush, 29 September 1964, 1, FD 23/121, TNA.

¹⁷² Minutes of the meeting of the Working Party, 28 January 1965, 1, FD 23/122, TNA. On the Head Office's suspicions, see Tristan da Cunha Progress Report, 28 March 1966, 3, TNA, FD 23/122.

¹⁷³ The Islanders of Tristan da Cunha: Their Ecology, Sociology, Biology and Medicine: List of Topics Studied by Investigators, February 1965, 1-2, FD 23/108, TNA.

¹⁷⁴ Nancy Hosegood, *Corporal Glass's Island: The Story of Tristan da Cunha* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), 181-182.

¹⁷⁵ Peter A. Munch to Joan and Joseph Loudon, 2 October 1964, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0126, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

has nobbled Tristan for research purposes and is hugging it close to his chest,” opined colleague Joseph Loudon.¹⁷⁶

With the investigators in Britain, the resident medical officer supervised the “medical laboratory” on behalf of the MRC.¹⁷⁷ During his tenure, Stanley Gooch tracked the symptoms of cold epidemics, tested the aptitude of the islanders’ minds, and measured, weighed, prodded, and photographed their bodies throughout 1965 and 1966. Following Gooch’s departure, these duties transferred to M. Shibli, who, along with recently arrived Margaret Chambers, redoubled efforts to understand the islanders’ diet.¹⁷⁸ The Working Party also made plans for additional dental surveys and entertained proposals for audiology research.¹⁷⁹

Occurring from April to December 1966, the nutritional survey and dental investigation evidently marked the first on-island studies of the Working Party to involve more than the resident medical officer. Building on the work of Taylor and Gooch, Chambers compiled information on the islanders’ diet from testing, observation, and questioning.¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, F.J. Fisher, School of Dental Surgery at the University of Birmingham, subjected the islanders’ teeth to further examination and treatment.¹⁸¹

The investigations of 1965 and 1966 taxed the patience of the islanders, who remained confused as to the purpose. The administrator and staff thought the studies disruptive, while certain islanders “expressed the view that they should now be left

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Loudon to Peter Munch, 7 October 1964, 1, DOC MSS 002 0004 0126, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁷⁷ Christopher G. Eastwood to John Field, 22 February 1966, 1, CO 1024/571, TNA.

¹⁷⁸ Tristan da Cunha Progress Report, 28 March 1966, 2-3, FD 23/122, TNA. On Gooch’s efforts to monitor outbreaks of the common cold, see memo on Common Cold Survey and attachments, n.d., 1-3, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁷⁹ Minutes of eleventh meeting of the Working Party, 7 April 1966, 2-3, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸⁰ Margaret A. Chambers, Nutritional Survey of Tristan da Cunha Islanders, April-October 1966, 1 March 1967, 1-3, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸¹ F.J. Fisher, “Oral Health Survey of Tristan da Cunha Islanders,” 1 March 1967, 1-4, FD 23/122, TNA.

alone.”¹⁸² Rather than scale back, though, Lewis advocated expanding the scope to include studies into the etiology of the high incidence of asthma, parasites, dental decay, deafness, and retinitis pigmentosa.¹⁸³

As the investigations of Chambers and Fisher came to an end, Harold Lewis wanted to substantiate claims that the islanders did not suffer heart disease by taking electrocardiograms and conveying them through radio to London by way of the station in the Natural History Museum, Kensington.¹⁸⁴ Although members of the Working Party, such as Henry Bunjé, Senior Medical Officer of the MRC, harbored misgivings about the far-fetched scheme, they acquiesced anyways.¹⁸⁵

The backlash revealed the extent of the disillusionment with the investigations.¹⁸⁶ Brandon Lush, who represented a growing number, opined that the Working Party incurred considerable expenses and represented a heavy burden for the islanders, who received little “immediate or longer-term benefit” from the studies. They had persisted only because of the “energetic salesmanship” of Harold Lewis. Accordingly, he deemed the termination of the Working Party long overdue.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, scientific interest had yet to abate. By December 1968, approximately eighty scientific teams had cooperated to understand the medical, dental,

¹⁸² Henry Bunjé, note on twelfth meeting of the Working Party, 17 March 1967, 1, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸³ Harold Lewis, Present Assessment of Tristan da Cunha Survey, 3 March 1967, 1, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸⁴ Minutes of the twelfth meeting of the Working Party, 10 March 1967, 1-3, FD 23/122, TNA. For additional background on Lewis’ ECG scheme, see Harold Lewis, memorandum, 13 October 1967, 1-2, FD 23/126, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ Henry Bunjé to Brandon Lush, 23 September 1967, 5, FD 23/126, TNA; Harold Lewis, memorandum regarding the return of Dr. M. Shibli, 21 February 1968, 1-2, FD 23/123, TNA.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, Henry Bunjé to Brandon Lush, 23 September 1967, 5, FD 23/126, TNA; Henry Bunjé to Brandon Lush, 20 September 1968, 1, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸⁷ Brandon Lush to Henry Bunjé, 24 September 1968, 1, FD 23/122, TNA.

and psychological consequences of isolation.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, scientists still flooded the Working Party with invitations for conference presentations and requests for further studies on the islanders.¹⁸⁹

However, the Working Party suffered an irrecoverable blow in June 1971, when Harold Lewis unexpectedly died.¹⁹⁰ His passing deprived the Working Party of its long-time secretary and most vociferous champion. The Working Party, which had long suffered criticism and had not formally convened since 1967, thereafter elected to disperse.¹⁹¹

VIII

By its dissolution, the Working Party had pursued at least eighty strands of research. Through years of study in nutrition, dentistry, immunology, genetics, and anthropometry its members had uncovered “the biology of human isolation.” A century and a half of seclusion had consequences for almost every aspect of the islanders’ health. Isolation curtailed the islanders’ diet, which forced them to rely on processed foods from the canteen. These dietary choices quickened the rate of dental decay. Geographical remoteness, too, weakened the islander’s immune systems by reducing their exposure to pathogens. Insularity also narrowed the genetic pool, which raised the level of inbreeding

¹⁸⁸ “Tristan da Cunha: A Biomedical Study of Isolation,” radio script, BBC Third Program, 2 December 1968, 18, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁸⁹ On conference invitations, see Egon Szabady to D.F. Roberts, 4 March 1970, 1, FD 23/130, TNA. On the Working Party’s activities and requests for further studies, see, among others, Harold Lewis, memorandum regarding the return of Dr. M. Shibli, 21 February 1968, 1-2, FD 23/123, TNA; Harold Lewis to Henry Bunjé, 22 February 1968, 1, FD 23/123, TNA; P.W. Dill-Russell to Brandon Lush, 29 December 1970, 1, FD 23/118, TNA.

¹⁹⁰ “H.E. Lewis,” 55. Although the obituary omits the cause of death, Peter Munch labeled it “sudden.” See Peter Munch to Joseph Loudon, 5 September 1971, 2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0126, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁹¹ Minutes of the Working Party, 13 June 1973, 1-3, FD 23/133, TNA. The 13 June 1973 minutes state that the Working Party had last met in 1966. However, minutes from 1967 contradict that assertion. See minutes of twelfth meeting of the Working Party, 10 March 1967, 1-4, FD 23/122, TNA.

and incidence of congenital disorders.¹⁹² The investigations, which relied on laboratory studies and on computerizing the principles of inheritance, had transformed Tristan da Cunha into a medical and dental dystopia.

The nutritional inquiries of the Working Party revealed the community's dependence on imported foods. After repatriation, foods from the canteen provided over half of the islanders' diet.¹⁹³ The canteen alleviated scarcity, but purportedly failed to provide sufficient calories. Although above starvation level, the islanders consumed on average 2,030 calories of the recommended 2,400 per day in 1960.¹⁹⁴ The calorically insufficient diet, along with chronic infections, produced abnormal hemoglobin levels and thus the widespread anemia.¹⁹⁵

While the canteen made the islanders' diet more plentiful, it also flooded the island with sugary, processed foods. Between 1952 and 1957 the amount of sugar purchased from the canteen, as measured in pounds, almost doubled. Even more startling, compared to the 1952 figures, the islanders consumed over thirteen times as many "sweets" in 1957.¹⁹⁶ By 1966, processed foods constituted roughly 25 percent of the islanders' calories.¹⁹⁷ The newfound affluence did not necessarily lead to an improvement.

¹⁹² Lewis, Roberts, and Edwards, "Biological Problems, and Opportunities, of Isolation among the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha," 389-390, 395.

¹⁹³ Margaret A. Chambers and H.E. Lewis, "Nutritional Study of the Islanders on Tristan da Cunha, 1966: The Energy Expenditure and Food Intake of Tristan Islanders," *British Journal of Nutrition* 23, no. 2 (1969), 246-247.

¹⁹⁴ Elaine C. Taylor, Dorothy F. Hollingsworth, and Margaret A. Chambers, "The Diet of the Tristan da Cunha Islanders," *British Journal of Nutrition* 20, no. 3 (1966), 393-397, 399.

¹⁹⁵ S.M. Lewis, "'Nutritional' Anemia in an Isolated Community," *Israel Journal of Medical Sciences* 2, no. 4 (1966), 507-509. See, too, S.M. Lewis, "Normal Hemoglobin [*sic*] Values Versus Observed Values: Problems of Establishing the Normal Haemoglobin Values in a Community," in *Standardization in Hematology*, eds. G. Astaldi, C. Sirtori, and G. Vanzetti, (Milan: Fondazione Carlo Erba, 1970), 92-101.

¹⁹⁶ F.B. Gamblen, "Dental Caries among the Inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha: The Breakdown," *Royal Society of Health Journal* 82, no. 3 (1962), 137-138.

¹⁹⁷ Chambers and Lewis, "Nutritional Study of the Islanders on Tristan da Cunha, 1966," 244-247.

As Margaret Chambers observed, “the rural way of life is rapidly becoming mixed with both the good and bad of our technological age.”¹⁹⁸

Indeed, the increased availability of sugary, processed foods worsened the condition of the islanders’ teeth.¹⁹⁹ In their 1962 assessment, P.J. Holloway, P.M.S. James, and G.L. Slack deemed the islanders’ teeth “grossly carious,” with cavities afflicting over a quarter of the population. Moreover, they rated over a third of the islanders’ gums as in “poor” condition.²⁰⁰

The biology of isolation extended to the immune system. Seclusion acted as a buffer that prevented microbes from reaching Tristan da Cunha. While isolation meant that epidemics occurred less often on Tristan da Cunha than in high-density areas, they affected the islanders more acutely.²⁰¹ This meant that the islanders’ unseasoned immune systems resembled those of children who lack protection from common infections because of insufficient exposure.²⁰²

Making sense of waves of epidemics depended on quantitative analysis, which profited from the advent of electronic computers. Compared to analogue machines, even the most primitive digital computers enabled scientists to devise exponentially more complex algorithms.²⁰³ Once rendered meaningful to a computer through coding,

¹⁹⁸ Margaret A. Chambers, report on nutritional survey of Tristan da Cunha Islanders (April-October 1966), 10 March 1967, 5, FD 23/122, TNA.

¹⁹⁹ Gamblen, “Dental Caries among the Inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha,” 136.

²⁰⁰ P.J. Holloway, P.M.C. James, and G.L. Slack, “Dental Disease in Tristan da Cunha,” *British Dental Journal* 115, no. 1 (1963), 21-22.

²⁰¹ M. Shibli et al., “Common Colds on Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of Hygiene* 69, no. 2 (1971), 255, 258-261,

²⁰² D.A.J. Tyrrell, M. Peto, and N. King, “Serological Studies on Infections by Respiratory Viruses of the Inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of Hygiene* 65, no. 3 (1967), 327, 336, 338.

²⁰³ Jon Agar, “What Difference Did Computers Make?,” *Social Studies of Science* 36, no. 6 (2006), 888.

algorithms had the ability to discern rapidly and accurately patterns and relationships in heaps of data.²⁰⁴

Virologists B.J. Hammond and D.A.J. Tyrrell simultaneously deployed analogue (Pace TR 48) and electronic (Honeywell DDP 516) computers to code and test competing models in the field of “mathematical epidemiology” that sought to explain the development and spread of common cold epidemics. Once Hammond and Tyrrell had inputted four years of self-reported records on seven outbreaks into the computers, algorithms revealed the limitations of prevailing models and illuminated how outbreaks moved through and ravaged insular Tristan da Cunha.²⁰⁵

However, insularity left its greatest mark on the islanders’ genes. Seclusion restricted the choice of mates and affected the genetic constitution of each islander alive. Tristan da Cunha received virtually no immigrants after the early twentieth century. While at least four children resulted from liaisons with outsiders, extreme isolation dictated that most islanders reproduce with fellow islanders. In 1961, most of the several hundred Tristan islanders shared fifteen ancestors. This common ancestry, coupled with a scarcity of marriageable-age mates, made inbreeding inevitable.²⁰⁶

Measuring the degree of this inbreeding likewise relied on quantitative techniques, which post-war population geneticists embraced as a means of making the study of heredity more empirical and less subjective, and innovation in electronic

²⁰⁴ On algorithms, see Hey and Pápay, *The Computing Universe*, ch. 5, esp. 84-90.

²⁰⁵ B.J. Hammond and D.A.J. Tyrrell, “A Mathematical Model of Common-Cold Epidemics on Tristan da Cunha,” *Journal of Hygiene* 69, no. 3 (1971), 423-426, 430.

²⁰⁶ H.L. Bailit, S.T. Damon, and A. Damon, “Consanguinity on Tristan da Cunha in 1938,” *Eugenics Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1966), 30, 32.

computation.²⁰⁷ These investigations coincided with a shift away from mechanical and electromechanical to electronic calculators.²⁰⁸ Beginning in 1960, when British firm Sumlock Comptometer launched the ANITA Mark VII, electronic desktop calculators began to supplant slide rules. These typewriter-sized behemoths made computation easier and more accurate.²⁰⁹ Digital computers had an even greater impact. As with mathematical epidemiology, the calculations that algorithms facilitated proved useful to biologists and geneticists, who relied on them to understand the complexities of human variation.²¹⁰

Long a subject of conjecture, these breakthroughs in computational technologies permitted doctors to not only calculate the extent of inbreeding among the islanders, but also to explore questions about drift and population growth. Confronted with the limitations of “traditional methods of pedigree depiction,” Derek Roberts transferred updated genealogical and health data that Lionel Penrose and assistant Helen Lang-Brown had assembled from Woolley to “punch cards” for manipulation by electronic calculators and computers. By digitizing numbers and computerizing the principles of Mendelian inheritance, Roberts and others modeled the “flow” of genes, including the

²⁰⁷ Lipphardt, “Geographical Distribution Patterns of Various Genes,” 54-55; Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), ch. 14;

²⁰⁸ On the interwar origins of electronic computation, see Paul E. Ceruzzi, “Electronic Calculators,” in *Computing before Computers*, ed. William Aspray (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 223-249.

²⁰⁹ Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, 211-217; Earl E. Swartzlander, Jr., “Stars: Electronic Calculators: Desktop to Pocket,” *Proceedings of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers* 101, no. 12 (2013), 2558-2562; Kathy B. Hamrick, “The History of the Hand-Held Electronic Calculator,” *The American Mathematical Monthly* 103, no. 8 (1996), 633-639; Christian Sandström, “Facit and the Displacement of Mechanical Calculators,” *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 35, no. 3 (2013), 20-31.

²¹⁰ Hallam Stevens, “Coding Sequences: A History of Sequence Comparison Algorithms as a Scientific Instrument,” *Perspectives on Science* 19, no. 3 (2011), esp. 263-277; Miguel García-Sancho, *Biology, Computing, and the History of Molecular Sequencing: From Proteins to DNA, 1945-2000* (New York: Macmillan, 2012).

“genetic contribution of any particular individual,” through specific families and the larger Tristan community in the past, present, or future. It made the population amenable to complex exploration with the punch of a button (see figure 4.2). “The computer technique provides us, in essence, with an analogue of the true population, which we may interrogate at will,” explained Lewis, Roberts, and Edwards.²¹¹

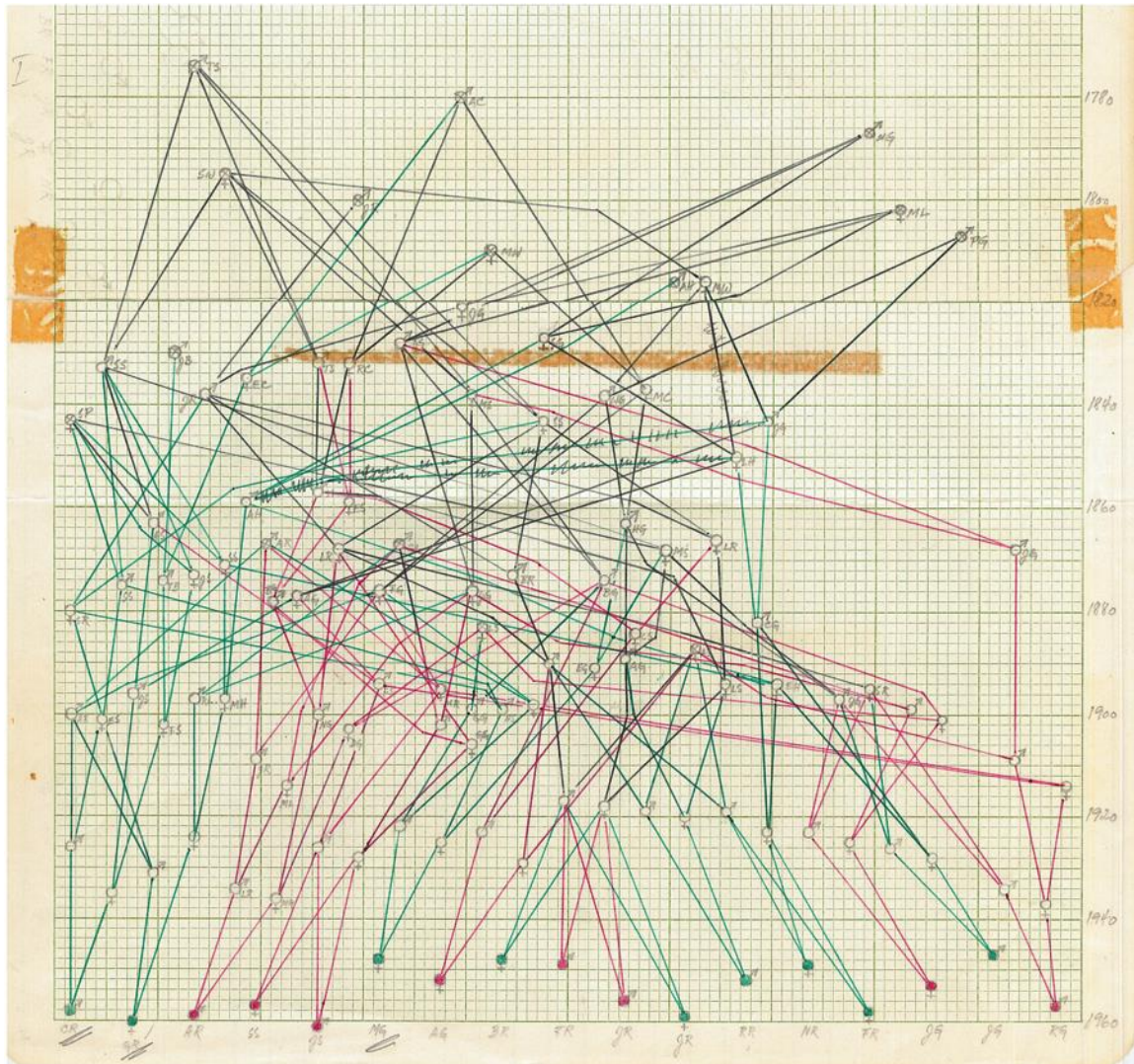


Figure 4.2. A partial pedigree of the Tristan community that Peter Munch assembled, circa 1960s. This tangled skein conveys the difficulties of undertaking genealogical studies without computers. DOC MSS 002 0012 0007, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU. Courtesy of Saint Louis University Libraries, Archives, and Digital Services.

²¹¹ Lewis, Roberts, and Edwards, “Biological Problems, and Opportunities, of Isolation among the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha,” 390-395.

Doctors developed an “inbreeding coefficient” that utilized computer algorithms to measure the “probability that two allelic genes at a given locus have a common origin.” These algorithms removed guesswork from genetics and revealed that the islanders had a relatively high inbreeding coefficient in the past and present. In 1938, the islanders had an inbreeding coefficient of .03483, which made them the second most inbred people in the world.²¹² With insufficient numbers of new settlers, the inbreeding coefficient of the Tristan islanders had risen to .03749 by 1961.²¹³

The average obscured significant generational differences. The elderly (60-69 years old) had an average inbreeding coefficient of .029, whereas among children (under ten years old) the figure jumped to .068. It spoke to how the community’s insularity had worsened over several generations.²¹⁴

The inbreeding coefficient supposedly underscored the genetic vulnerability of the islanders. Since just a handful of settlers founded the community, the genetic pool contained little variation. Known as the “founder effect,” Tristan da Cunha’s genetic origins reduced the possibilities of random sampling. Exacerbating the tendency toward genetic drift were several “bottlenecks,” or drastic population reductions in 1856, 1885, and 1961. In a scientific first, Roberts demonstrated that these three population bottlenecks further reduced the already miniscule gene pool and altered the “the relative contributions of the remainder.”²¹⁵

Genetic bottlenecks, along with the prevalence of consanguineous relationships, impacted the health of the islanders. Endogamy had allegedly increased the frequency of

²¹² Bailit, Damon, and Damon, “Consanguinity on Tristan da Cunha in 1938,” 31-32.

²¹³ D.F. Roberts, “The Development of Inbreeding in an Island Population,” *Ciência e Cultura* 19, no. 1 (1967), 80-83.

²¹⁴ D.F. Roberts, Interim Report: Tristan: Demography and Genetics, n.d., 1, FD 23/122. TNA.

²¹⁵ D.F. Roberts, “Genetic Effects of Population Size Reduction,” *Nature* 220, no. 5172 (1968), 1084-1088.

congenital abnormalities. In 1961, Britain experienced a rate of 25 anomalies for every 1,000 births, whereas the figure approximated 185.3 on Tristan da Cunha.²¹⁶ The restricted gene pool had also led to an unusually high rate of retinitis pigmentosa.²¹⁷ Asthma, too, had attained almost epidemic proportions from inbreeding.²¹⁸ Endogamy even influenced mortality, for the children of the most “consanguineous matings” purportedly had the lowest survival rates within the community.²¹⁹

While these investigations revealed much about the islanders, they had a relatively shallow impact on general medical knowledge. To be sure, some of the studies, such as Roberts’ work on bottlenecks, had useful future applications. But unlike the dental studies of the interwar period, these studies, which formed a small part of a much larger project to study isolated biomes, did not significantly advance metropolitan discussions. Despite the promise of yielding worldwide insights, the Tristan laboratory mostly served to confirm prejudices about civilization and legitimize a decade of questionable studies. In reality, Tristan da Cunha did not fulfill the tremendous expectations attributed to insularity.

IX

The termination of the Working Party curbed rather than halted biomedical research on Tristan da Cunha. Individuals and institutions, including the MRC, thought that Tristan da Cunha continued to offer fruitful avenues for inquiry.²²⁰ This interest kept the

²¹⁶ J.A. Black et al., “Tristan da Cunha: General Medical Investigations,” *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 5364 (1963), 1023.

²¹⁷ Sorsby, “Retinitis Pigmentosa in Tristan da Cunha Islanders,” 15-17.

²¹⁸ K.M. Citron and J. Pepys, “An Investigation of Asthma among the Tristan da Cunha Islanders,” *British Journal of Diseases of the Chest* 58, no. 3 (1964), esp. 119, 122-123.

²¹⁹ D.F. Roberts, “Consanguineous Marriages and Calculation of the Genetic Load,” *Annals of Human Genetics* 32, no. 4 (1969), 409.

²²⁰ See, among others, minutes of the Working Party, 13 June 1973, 1-3, FD 23/133, TNA; *Medical Research Council Annual Report, April 1974-March 1975* (London: HMSO, 1975), 31.

islanders under biomedical observation throughout the 1970s. Resident medical officers amassed statistics on the islanders' health.²²¹ And thanks to cryobiology, blood gathered from the islanders reached laboratories in places like South Africa, where researchers still maintained that Tristan da Cunha's insularity presented "a unique opportunity."²²²

Tristan da Cunha's insularity had transfixed generations of doctors preoccupied with the ills of civilization. In the first half of the nineteenth century, visitors thought that isolation shielded Tristan da Cunha from the bad air and dietary excesses of urban areas. The mid-century ascendance of the germ theory of disease and degeneration theory tempered these pronouncements of unalloyed good health. The islanders' immune systems fell prey to cold and influenza viruses contracted from passing vessels. While these viral infections usually proved mild and self-limiting, the same could not be said of genetic diseases. Some speculated that endogamy had caused these conditions to occur at high rates that threatened the vitality of the community. Yet, based on brief visual inspections and devoid of empirical evidence, diagnoses of degeneration gained little traction among doctors keen to lambaste civilization.

Throughout the interwar years, Tristan da Cunha functioned as a laboratory for conducting research in the new field of nutrition and exploring old questions about degeneration. Insular communities seemed ideal for testing a range of hypotheses, including how the foods of civilization affected bodies and teeth. The islanders, who tolerated several brief dental surveys, served as controls for understanding how diet influenced the formation of cavities. The statistics gathered from there became useful to

²²¹ See, for instance, C.J. Beech, Annual Report from the Medical Department for the Year 1976, n.d., 3-14, FCO 44/1520, TNA.

²²² See, for instance, M. Richardson et al., "Serum Lipid Patterns in the Islanders of Tristan da Cunha," *South African Journal of Science* 71, no. 8 (1975), 243.

researchers, who deployed them to refute or defend theories about the dietary origins of decay. Studies on the effects of inbreeding, meanwhile, foundered from methodological stasis. While applying pedigree analysis to Tristan da Cunha revealed the hereditary pathways of disease, it could not measure drift, assess population trends, or answer other complex questions about the islanders' genes.

During and especially after the Second World War, Tristan da Cunha retained its status as a laboratory, though with a drastically different outcome. Doctors, who now saw isolated populations as control groups for measuring the effects of atomic civilization and studying environmental adaptation, remained interested in the insular community. However, the dental and medical surveillance of the islanders, especially after the formation of the Working Party, confirmed a sugar-induced deterioration of teeth and revealed a host of conditions, most notably an increase in genetic diseases related to endogamy. Transcending the limits of pedigree analysis, the Working Party's investigators profited from revolutions in genetics and computation, which helped illuminate past, present, and future population trends, including the degree of interrelatedness and frequency of genetic disease within community. These ethically suspect studies, which severely tried the patience of the community, made visible what many researchers had long suspected, namely that hidden dangers lurked in the islanders' genes from decades of isolation.

The same attributes that made Tristan da Cunha a laboratory for medical and dental experimentation—geographic seclusion, circumscribed land area, and reproductive isolation—made the island ideal for ornithological research and conservation. Isolation had evolved rare and unusual species that scientists worked to protect. But at the same

time, extreme remoteness kept species populations low and made these birds susceptible to environmental change and overexploitation. The ornithological opportunities and pitfalls of isolation form the focus of the final chapter.

Chapter 5

Naturalists

In 1966, botanist Nigel Wace issued a warning about the Tristan island group. Until the volcanic eruption had destroyed the on-shore processing facilities, the archipelago's flora and fauna had weathered years of development relatively unscathed. But talk of resurrecting the factory and exposing the island to further civilizational encroachment imperiled the archipelago's "undisturbed biota." Wace recognized the impossibility of barring industry, though opposed subjecting the remote island group to "the usual more or less haphazard processes of exploitation and development." Instead, he pressed for seizing on "research and conservation as a first priority." The scientific establishment confronted a stark choice: "Will the Tristan da Cunha islands be remembered like the Mascarenes with their dodos for the unique species which man has exterminated there? Or can they be maintained, with care and forethought, as a vulnerable living museum of insular evolution?"¹

As Wace suggests, Tristan da Cunha's insularity simultaneously pleased and worried scientists. In addition to evolving endemic flora and fauna, most notably the Inaccessible Island Rail (*Atlantisia rogersi*), the archipelago's microscopic size and extreme isolation proved advantageous by removing problems of scale and reducing the number of confounding variables that beset researchers laboring in larger, less remote settings.² The positive attributes ascribed to insularity reflected the Darwinian legacy and

¹ Nigel M. Wace, "Last of the Virgin Islands," *Discovery* 27, no. 2 (1966), 42.

² *Atlantisia rogersi* sometimes appears in the literature under other names, including the Inaccessible Island Flightless Rail. This dissertation, however, consistently refers to *Atlantisia rogersi* as the Inaccessible Island Rail. For various descriptions, see Percy R. Lowe, "A Description of *Atlantisia rogersi*, the Diminutive Flightless Rail of Inaccessible Island (Southern Atlantic), with some Notes on Flightless Rails," *Ibis* 70, no. 1 (1928), 99-131; Yngvar Hagen, *Birds of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 20 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-

supposedly made Tristan da Cunha a “natural laboratory” for pursuing biological inquiry.³

At the same time, insularity made the species that evolved on Tristan da Cunha, whose ecosystem exists in fragile equilibrium, susceptible to habitat loss and alteration, competition and predation from invasive species, and human exploitation. The expanse of ocean separating the archipelago from South America and Africa created an obstacle to colonization. Extreme isolation, along with circumscribed area, encouraged adaptation, gave rise to endemism, limited population size, and curtailed the diversity of plants and animals.⁴ Birds and sub-Antarctic Fur Seals and Southern Elephant Seals are the sole indigenous terrestrial vertebrates.⁵

The vulnerability of the species that constitute island ecosystems like Tristan da Cunha has long exercised conservationists. Indeed, the despoliation of lush, microcosmic spaces, which evoked biblical imagery, first launched the conservation movement.⁶ The odd birds that evolved in bounded, isolated biotas likewise grabbed attention. Since the nineteenth century, the Dodo, Moa, and Great Auk have served as textbook examples of the perils facing insular bird species.⁷

Akademi, 1952), 187-199; Hugh Elliott, “The Fauna of Tristan da Cunha,” *Oryx* 2, no. 1 (1953), 49; Austin L. Rand, “The Origin of the Land Birds of Tristan da Cunha,” *Fieldiana: Zoology* 37 (1955), 142-143; Martin Stervander et al., “The Origin of the World’s Smallest Flightless Bird, the Inaccessible Island Rail *Atlantisia rogersi* (Aves: Rallidae),” *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 130 (2019), 92-98.

³ Roy MacLeod and Philip F. Rehbock, eds., *Darwin’s Laboratory: Evolutionary Theory and Natural History in the Pacific* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), esp. part one.

⁴ Natalie R. Graham, “Island Ecology and Evolution: Challenges in the Anthropocene,” *Environmental Conservation* 44, no. 4 (2017), 324-328.

⁵ Peter Ryan, “Important Bird Areas: Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island,” *British Birds* 101, no. 11 (2008), 601-602.

⁶ Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷ See Mark V. Barrow, Jr., *Nature’s Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), ch. 2, esp. 47-66.

Tristan da Cunha has experienced anthropogenic change since the first human landfalls, though the pace accelerated in the early nineteenth century when the island became inhabited. Its early settlers not only hunted seals and birds, but also sought to create a “Neo-Europe” by clearing land for imported crops and invasive livestock, which competed with, and sometimes displaced, native species.⁸ Mirroring trends in other sub-Antarctic islands, altered vegetation and deforestation deprived birds of ground cover and nesting sites. In addition to habitat reduction, the introduction of pigs, cats, dogs, mice, and rats, all of which preyed on eggs and fledglings, wreaked further havoc on bird populations.⁹

Tristan da Cunha’ integration into the market also taxed the insular ecosystem. In the age of sail, the island’s role as a victualing hub for passing mariners intensified

⁸ On biological exchanges, see Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986). On European-induced ecological transformations in settler colonies, see, among many others, William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); William J. Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Stephen J. Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1991); Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers: A History of Australians Shaping their Environment*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992); Ann R.M. Young, *Environmental Change in Australia since 1788* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Timothy Fridtjof Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (Chatswood, UK: Reed Books, 1994); Robert Peden, “Pastoralism and the Transformation of the Open Grasslands,” in *Seeds of Empire: The Environmental Transformation of New Zealand*, eds. Tom Brooking and Eric Pawson (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 73-93; Margaret Derry, *Ontario’s Cattle Kingdom: Purebred Breeders and their World, 1870-1920* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Rebecca J.H. Woods, *The Herds Shot Round the World: Native Breeds and the British Empire, 1800-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Elinor G.K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); William Beinart and Peter Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Thomas R. Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment, 1770-1950* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

⁹ On the sub-Antarctic context more broadly, see Peter Convey and Marc Lebouvier, “Environmental Change and Human Impacts on Terrestrial Ecosystems of the Sub-Antarctic Islands between Their Discovery and the Mid-Twentieth Century,” *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 143, no. 1 (2009), 33-44.

agricultural output and dictated the crops sold.¹⁰ While cool weather spared Tristan da Cunha the degradation wrought elsewhere by tropical cash crops like sugar, the effects on the remote biota proved nonetheless transformative.¹¹ The island also became a favored site for commercial sealing and whaling, which pursued profits regardless of the environmental costs incurred.¹²

Given the nexus between commerce and ecological change, scholars, especially those of a Marxist bent, have seen capitalism as inherently destructive. Endless accumulation requires constant consumption, which demands boundless natural resources. As this system integrates distant points into global supply chains, environmental costs diffuse and escalate.¹³

While capitalism has profoundly impacted the environment, Tristan da Cunha shows that the absence of market connections can have equally harmful consequences. The late nineteenth-century demise of whaling, ascendance of steam, and opening of the Suez Canal halted attacks on cetaceans and ended the island's status as a victualing hub. This deprived the islanders of a regular source of trade, which put pressure on slender

¹⁰ Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990), 1087-1106.

¹¹ Jason W. Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy: Commodity, Frontiers, Ecological Transformation, and Industrialization," *Review* 23, no. 3 (2000), 409-443. On the socio-ecological effects of other commodities, see Cameron Muir, *The Broken Promise of Agricultural Progress: An Environmental History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹² On commercial whaling and sealing, see John F. Richards, *The World Hunt: An Environmental History of the Commodification of Animals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), chs. 2, 4.

¹³ See John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010); Hannah Holleman, *Dust Bowls of Empire: Imperialism, Environmental Politics, and the Injustice of "Green" Capitalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018); Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (London: Verso, 2015); Alf Hornborg, J.R. McNeill, and Joan Martinez-Alier, eds., *Rethinking Environmental History: World-System History and Global Environmental Change* (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2007); Peter Dauvergne, *The Shadows of Consumption: Consequences for the Global Environment* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

resources. Birds provided oil for illumination and cooking, eggs and meat for sustenance, and plumage for the production of the curios that served as objects of barter.¹⁴

The surge in fowling from the late nineteenth century onwards primed the ground for a showdown between outsiders, who wanted to shield birds from overexploitation, and the islanders. Conservationist rumblings surfaced in the interwar period, when missionaries imposed arbitrary hunting quotas. These clumsily devised and sporadically enforced measures failed to reverse the downward trend. During the Second World War, the military government responded by banning all fowling. Resentful of the deprivation of a key resource, the islanders flouted this legislation.

After 1950, the new technocracy pursued conservation through legislation and development. Motivated by an admiration for birds and the need to manage the island's flora and fauna as valuable economic resources, administrator Hugh Elliott enacted a string of conservation ordinances.¹⁵ Simultaneously, the administration attempted to address the economic roots of fowling, namely a limited resource base and lack of imports. Reforestation, fertilization, and experimentation promised to expand agricultural capacity, while the fishery guaranteed goods from abroad. Adequate legal protections,

¹⁴ On the resource-draining effects of tourism and development for small island states and dependencies, including Tristan da Cunha, see John Connell, *Islands at Risk? Environments, Economies and Contemporary Change* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013).

¹⁵ On the economic origins of conservation, see Ramachandra Guha, "Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis," *Economic and Political Weekly* 18, no. 44 (1983), 1882-1896. For accounts that emphasize how the economic, security, and political dimensions of environmentalism converged, see Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-1914* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Karen Brown, "Cultural Constructions of the Wild: The Rhetoric and Practice of Wildlife Conservation in the Cape Colony at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *South African Historical Journal* 47, no. 1 (2002), 75-95; Gregory A. Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-Development, 1800-1950* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Gregory T. Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

along with regular access to foodstuffs, would reduce the importance and thus scale of fowling.

The emerging field of ecology, the study of the interplay among and between organisms, facilitated the colonial state's bid at mastery over the archipelago's natural resources. Ecology, which disaggregated plants, animals, and people, transformed the natural world into an object amenable to control. The discipline not only functioned as a developmental tool to optimize resource extraction, but also a disciplinary mechanism to reorder the relationship between islanders and birds.¹⁶

Technocrats constructed the archipelago, especially the uninhabited islands of Inaccessible, Nightingale, and Gough, as impermeable to anthropogenic change. This romantic strain of thought not only denaturalized the presence of humans, but also portrayed any intervention as blighting.¹⁷ In an act of "salvage biology," the archipelago functioned as one of many "biodiversity arks," controlled spaces with untouched ecologies that only scientists entered.¹⁸

But even without permanent inhabitants, seed dispersion, animal migration, and other natural processes have bound the most remote islands to the wider world. While less altered than continental landmasses or islands positioned closer to a mainland, the

¹⁶ On imperialism and ecology, see Peter Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. chs. 10-11; Libby Robin, "Ecology: A Science of Empire?" in *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, eds. Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 63-75.

¹⁷ On environmental romanticism, see Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Jeffrey Sasha Davis, "Scales of Eden: Conservation and Pristine Devastation on Bikini Atoll," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25, no. 2 (2007), 213-235; Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991); William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996), 7-28.

¹⁸ Megan Raby, "Ark and Archive: Making a Place for Long-Term Research on Barro Colorado Island, Panama," *Isis* 106, no. 4 (2015), 804, 808.

archipelago's seemingly complete ecological isolation functioned as a metaphor rather than an objective reality.¹⁹ Yearnings for idyllic spaces that had avoided breakneck development and the deluge of pesticides, pollutants, and radioactive fallout associated with the Green Revolution and Cold War-era militarization held mass appeal and ignited a global ecological consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁰

The international system played a crucial role in the rise of the conservation movement in the Tristan archipelago. Collaboration across borders on such issues dates to the late nineteenth century. But internationalism became especially influential during the Cold War, when intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations with an environmental focus like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) proliferated.²¹ Although the Tristan archipelago

¹⁹ On critiques of "microcosmic" studies and total ecological insularity, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 20-23; Thomas H. Eriksen, "In Which Sense Do Cultural Islands Exist?" *Social Anthropology* 1, no. 1b (1993), 133-147; Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, eds. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 86-100; Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific," *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 2 (2012), 167-184; Elizabeth Hennessy, "The Politics of a Natural Laboratory: Claiming Territory and Governing Life in the Galápagos Islands," *Social Studies of Science* 48, no. 4 (2018), 483-506; Ashanti Shih, "The Most Perfect Natural Laboratory in the World: Making and Knowing Hawaii National Park," *History of Science* 57, no. 4 (2019), 493-517; Raf de Bont, "A World Laboratory: Framing the Albert National Park," *Environmental History* 22, no. 3 (2017), 404-432; Peter S. Alagona, "A Sanctuary for Science: The Hastings Natural History Reservation and the Origins of the University of California's Natural Reserve System," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 4 (2012), 651-680; Patrick Kupper, *Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Patrick Kupper, "Nature's Laboratories? Exploring the Intersection of Science and National Parks," in *National Parks beyond the Nation: Global Perspectives on "America's Best Idea,"* eds. Adrian Howkins, Jared Osri, and Mark Fiege (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 114-134.

²⁰ See J.R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 16, esp. 342-352; Gary Haq and Alistair Paul, *Environmentalism since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), ch. 2; J.R. McNeill, "The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s," in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, eds. Niall Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 263-278.

²¹ On the internationalization of environmentalism before and after the Second World War, see Robert Boardman, *International Organization and the Conservation of Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana University

followed rather than dictated trends, the IUCN, WWF, and other organizations devoted disproportionately large attention to it. In so doing, the Tristan island group contributed to internationalizing the fragility of island ecosystems.

But conservation remained tethered to the colonial state, which struggled to revitalize the ecosystem or to devise a strategy that overcame Tristan da Cunha's insularity. For too long technocrats focused on policing the community rather than devoting sufficient resources to remediating the social problems that encouraged poaching. While living standards rose because of post-war development, the high costs associated with importing goods to a far-away island ensured that birds remained prized for sustenance and illumination. Despite the passage of conservation legislation in 1976 and 1979, economic necessity and a woefully small constabulary rendered poaching commonplace.

This legislation, which prioritized conserving the islands of Nightingale and Inaccessible as supposedly unspoiled spaces, smacked of environmental romanticism. Although evincing more sensitivity for the islanders' economic plight than previous legislation, the ordinances nevertheless favored conservation over the needs of the community, as well as retaining elements of earlier punitive approaches. Leveling

Press, 1981); John McCormick, *The Global Environmental Movement*, 2nd ed. (Chichester and New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1995); Lynton K. Caldwell, *International Environmental Policy: From the Twentieth to the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Raf de Bont, "Borderless Nature: Experts and the Internationalization of Nature Protection, 1890-1940," in *Scientists' Expertise as Performance: Between State and Society, 1860-1960*, eds. Joris Vandendriessche, Evert Peeters, and Kaat Wils (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 49-65; Marc Cioc, *The Game of Conservation: International Treaties to Protect the World's Migratory Animals* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009); Nico Shrijver, *Development without Destruction: The UN and Global Resource Management* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010); Raf de Bont, Simone Schleper, and Hans Schouwenburg, "Conservation Conferences and Expert Networks in the Short Twentieth Century," *Environment and History* 23, no. 4 (2017), 569-599; Anna-Katharina Wöbse, "'The World After All Was One': The International Environmental Network of UNESCO and IUPN, 1945-1950," *Contemporary European History* 20, no. 3 (2011), 331-348; William M. Adams, *Against Extinction: The Story of Conservation* (London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2004).

restrictions succeeded in exercising greater control over the islanders but did not translate into a strategy that made a large enough impact on birds.²²

Tristan da Cunha reveals the difficulties in attempting to implement conservation programs in remote and economically disadvantaged communities. Early conservation initiatives failed by adopting the “fences and fines approach,” or restricting access and punishing offenders. Post-war conservation measures enjoyed greater, though limited success by grasping the linkages between conservation and development. To disincentive poaching, the Colonial Office had to raise awareness and develop alternative sources of sustenance and wealth.²³ Yet the administration never succeeded in rendering birds a valueless commodity because of the high import costs associated with isolation. Attempting to conquer this seclusion, moreover, intensified agricultural output and development, which undermined conservation by reducing habitat, enlarging the poaching base, and creating industrial hazards. This gave rise to an insoluble

²² On backlash against colonial and post-colonial conservation strategies, see, for instance, Roderick P. Neuman, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Terence Ranger, “Whose Heritage? The Case of the Matobo National Park,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989), 217-249; Terence Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); K.M. Homewood and W.A. Rodgers, *Maasailand Ecology: Pastoralist Development and Wildlife Conservation in Ngorongoro, Tanzania* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 4; Wiseman Chijere Chirwa, “Fishing Rights, Ecology and Conservation along Southern Lake Malawi, 1920-1964,” *African Affairs* 95, no. 380 (1996), 351-377; A. Fiona MacKenzie, *Land, Ecology and Resistance in Kenya, 1880-1952* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); A. Fiona D. MacKenzie, “Contested Ground: Colonial Narratives and the Kenyan Environment, 1920-1945,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000), 679-718; Peter Delius and Stefan Schirmer, “Soil Conservation in a Racially Ordered Society: South Africa, 1930-1970,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 4 (2000), 719-742; Dan Brockington, *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve Tanzania* (Oxford and Bloomington: The International African Institute, 2002), esp. ch. 3; Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chs. 7-8; Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Richard H. Grove, “Colonial Conservation, Ecological Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Towards a Global Synthesis,” in *Imperialism and the Natural World*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 15-50.

²³ Christopher B. Barrett and Peter Arcese, “Are Integrated Conservation-Development Projects (ICDPs) Sustainable? On the Conservation of Large Mammals in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *World Development* 23, no. 7 (1995), 1073-1074.

contradiction: Without economic development, poaching occurred at a high rate; with development, poaching decreased but environmental costs escalated.

I

The transformation of this insular biota began shortly after discovery. In a bog sample that dates to 1570, scientists detected pollen from ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), a flowering plant native to Eurasia. This finding, along with charcoal residue, suggests that humans went ashore and began altering the landscape well before a party of Dutchmen made the first documented landfall in 1643.²⁴

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, visits from English and Dutch mariners further disturbed the biota.²⁵ Analysis of pollen extracted from sediment indicates that sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), a Eurasian herb, arrived around 1650. A concurrent drop in pollen from *Phylica arborea*, the ubiquitous island tree, points to deforestation.²⁶ Moreover, to guarantee a supply of meat on subsequent voyages, these early mariners likely deposited pigs and goats.²⁷

Tristan da Cunha's late eighteenth-century economic integration hastened the environmental changes already underway. The American Revolution and Napoleonic wars, which closed European markets to the United States, drove Yankee mariners to Asia. Catering to prevailing tastes, American sailors plied the South Atlantic in search of

²⁴ Karl Ljung and Svante Björck, "A Pollen Record of the Last 450 Years from a Lowland Peat Bog on Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic, Implying an Early Anthropogenic Influence," *Journal of Quaternary Science* 26, no. 7 (2011), 692.

²⁵ N.M. Wace, "The Discovery, Exploitation and Settlement of the Tristan da Cunha Islands," *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch* 70 (1969), 14-15.

²⁶ Karl Ljung et al., "Late Holocene Multi-Proxy Records of Environmental Change on the South Atlantic Island Tristan da Cunha," *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 241, nos. 3-4 (2006), 557-558.

²⁷ N.M. Wace, "The Discovery of Oceanic Islands in the South Atlantic by the Portuguese during the Sixteenth Century," *Portuguese Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (1999), 148-149; N.M. Wace and M.W. Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan da Cunha Islands* (Morges, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1976), 25.

seals, whose skins fetched hefty sums in China. Beginning in 1790, when John Patton of Philadelphia slaughtered 5,600 seals, the great demand for pelts and oil drew American sealers to the archipelago.²⁸

Nineteenth-century settlement had more pronounced consequences for wildlife. Although Jonathan Lambert perished shortly after arriving, his activities accelerated the ecological transformation. In addition to importing pigs and fowls, Lambert and his companions sowed fifty acres of crops.²⁹

The pace of change quickened after 1816, when Britain occupied the island. The garrison voraciously consumed the island's scarce resources. They razed acres of vegetation for planting, as well as killed many animals to supplement meager military rations.³⁰

The decision of Glass and his band to stay behind had permanent implications for the insular biota. As the population of humans and invasive species increased in the 1820s, demands on Tristan da Cunha's flora and fauna mounted. Razing acres to expand agriculture and pasturage diminished native plant life in the proximity of the settlement. Animal and human predation dented the numbers of certain species. Dogs and feral cats stalked fowl. The islanders, meanwhile, pursued albatrosses (see figure 5.1), penguins, and seals for feathers, meat, and oil.³¹

²⁸ Wace, "The Discovery, Exploitation and Settlement of the Tristan da Cunha Islands," 20-21.

²⁹ James Fitcher, "The British Empire and the American Atlantic on Tristan da Cunha, 1811-16," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 4 (2008), 568, 570, 578-580.

³⁰ Stephen A. Royle, "Perilous Shipwreck, Misery and Unhappiness: The British Military at Tristan da Cunha, 1816-1817," *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 4 (2003), 518-520.

³¹ Augustus Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence in New Zealand, in 1827; together with a Journal of a Residence in Tristan D'Acunha, an Island Situated between South America and the Cape of Good Hope* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 319-320, 324, 327-328, 331-333, 336-337, 357-362, 366.

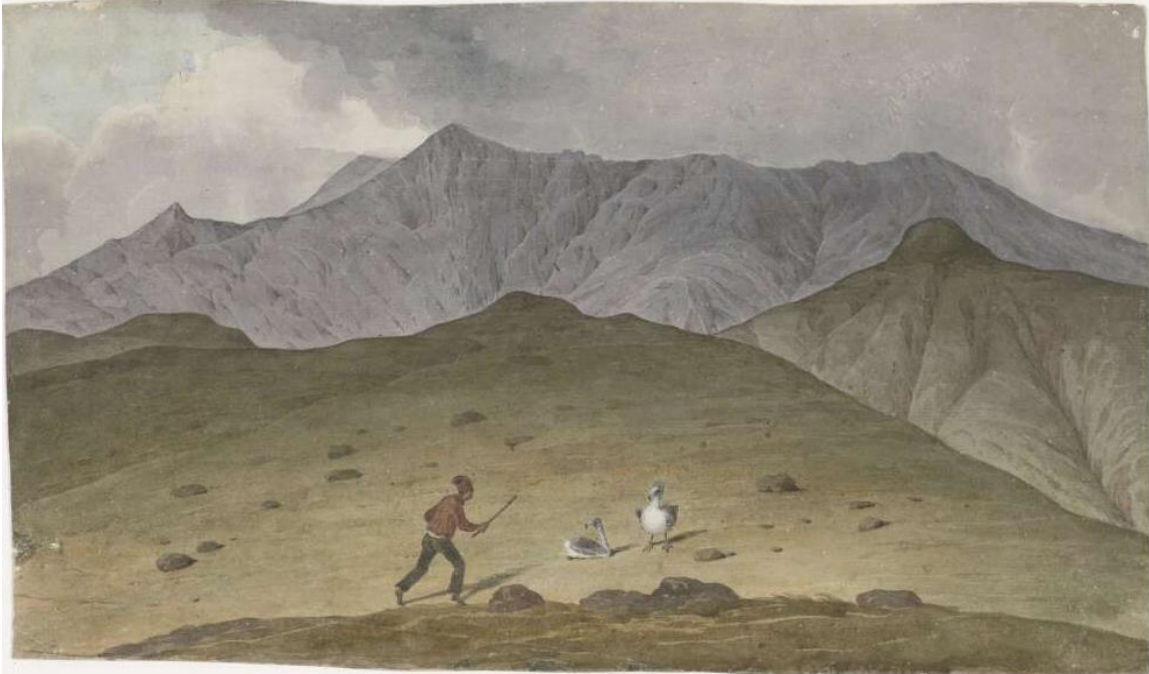


Figure 5.1. Augustus Earle, “Summit of Tristan De Acunha [i.e. da Cunha]: a man killing albatross,” 1824, National Library of Australia, nla.obj-134495617, used with permission.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, “the Tristan Ground,” as whalers referred to the oceanic expanse that encompassed the islands, became a preferred hunting area for Southern Right Whales and other species.³² This spike in traffic negatively impacted whale populations. Between 1830 and 1834, which marked the apogee of whaling in Tristan da Cunha’s waters, American and French fleets alone harvested an estimated 2,500 Southern Right Whales.³³

The slump in trade that attended the mid-century collapse of the Tristan Ground, along with population growth in the community, taxed the island’s agricultural capacity. The labor involved in repeatedly harvesting potatoes from the same plot led the islanders

³² Howard A. Clark, “The Whale-Fishery,” in part 15, section 5, vol. 2 of *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States: History and Methods of the Fisheries*, ed. George Brown Goode (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1887), 16.

³³ Peter B. Best, “Right Whales *Eubalaena australis* at Tristan da Cunha—A Clue to the ‘Non-Recovery’ of Depleted Stocks?,” *Biological Conservation* 46, no. 1 (1988), 27-31.

to till new land at the beginning of each planting season. The expansion of farming accelerated the deforestation of the area around the settlement.³⁴

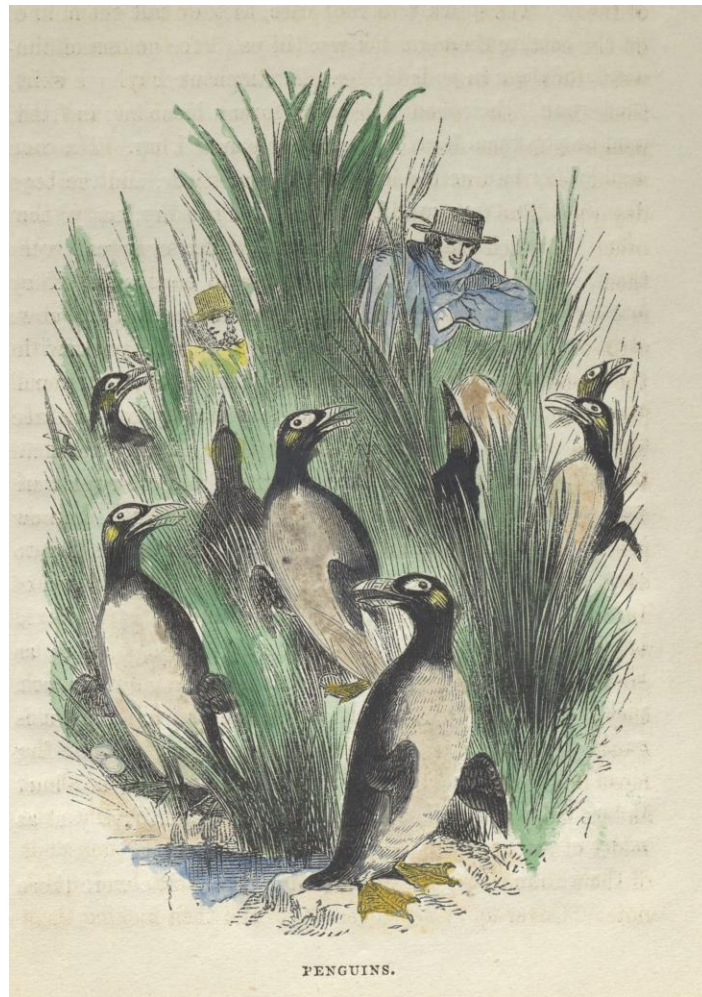


Figure 5.2. An artistic depiction of men hunting penguin eggs on Tristan da Cunha, circa 1853. “Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Gospel Missionary* 3 (1853), 53. Courtesy of Cornell University Library.

Deforestation, which the search for kindling and an unspecified insect plague expedited, affected the island’s flora and fauna. Without wind-breaking trees, the blustery South Atlantic winters killed cattle and withered potatoes. The ensuing food scarcity

³⁴ M.S. Nolloth, “Visit of H.M.S. ‘Frolic’ to Tristan da Cunha,” *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* 25, no. 8 (August 1856), 402, 412.

compelled the islanders to hunt albatrosses and to gather penguin eggs in greater numbers (see figure 5.2).³⁵

Even after the exodus of 1857, when dozens of islanders emigrated, the environmental situation deteriorated. Straitened economic circumstances encouraged rapid land clearance and overhunting. In 1873, the crew of H.M.S. *Challenger* encountered a bleaker island: rabbits, pigs, and goats had vanished; fur seals had become scarcer; and the islanders had not seen an elephant seal for two years. *Phylica* trees and other flora around the settlement suffered similarly stark losses from firewood gathering and overgrazing.³⁶

Infestations of rodents, too, stunted agriculture and altered the island's ecology.³⁷ The proliferation of mice, which came to Tristan da Cunha on the earliest ships, devoured crops.³⁸ More menacingly, voracious black rats, which arrived as stowaways aboard the shipwrecked *Henry B. Paul* (1882), consumed crops and small vertebrates, including young seabirds.³⁹

By the late nineteenth century, habitat loss, feline and canine predation, and hunting had inflicted devastating and, for some bird species, irrecoverable losses. Using

³⁵ William F. Taylor, *The Utmost Parts of the Earth: Some Account of the Settlement of Tristan D'Acunha, in the South Atlantic Ocean* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1856), 4, 66, 86-88.

³⁶ Henry N. Moseley, *Notes by a Naturalist on the "Challenger," Being an Account of Various Observations Made during the Voyage of H.M.S. "Challenger" round the World, in the Years 1872-1876, under the Commands of Capt. Sir G.S. Nares, R.N., K.C.B., F.R.S., and Capt. F.T. Thomson, R.N.* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879), 109, 111, 113-114.

³⁷ Peter W. Green to B.R. Balfour, 4 November 1898, Enclosure, No. 4, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 1600 (London: HMSO, 1903), 3-4.

³⁸ "Naval and Military Intelligence," *The Times*, 26 November 1878; W. Hammond Tooke, report on Tristan da Cunha, 4 July 1904, Enclosure, No. 9, *Correspondence Relating to Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3098 (London: HMSO, 1906), 15.

³⁹ Arthur T. Brooke to Nowell Salmon, 1 January 1885, Enclosure, No. 56, *Correspondence Relating to Tristan D'Acunha*, C. 4959 (London: HMSO, 1887), 31; H.L. Watts-Jones and F.F. Lobb, report on visit of H.M.S. *Thrush*, January 1903, Enclosure, No. 15, *Correspondence Relating to Tristan da Cunha* (1903), 14; P.C. Keytel, report on Tristan da Cunha, n.d., Enclosure, No. 21, *Further Correspondence Relating to the Island of Tristan da Cunha*, Cd. 3764 (London: HMSO, 1907), 25.

Bayesian probability, a recent article has hypothesized that several species vanished from Tristan da Cunha between approximately 1869 and 1880. The Tristan Moorhen went completely extinct, whereas the Tristan Bunting (*Nesopiza acunhae*) and Tristan Albatross (*Diomedea dabbenena*) disappeared from the main island, though survived elsewhere in the archipelago.⁴⁰

Although spared many of the perils that accompanied permanent human habitation, the islands of Nightingale and Inaccessible also experienced anthropogenic change. In addition to whaling and sealing, for several months the passengers of the shipwrecked *Blenden Hall* (1821) had survived on Inaccessible Island by consuming its natural resources.⁴¹ Half a century later, Gustav and Frederick Stoltenhoff weathered two years as prospective colonizers by hunting birds and seals, razing acres of tussock, and unleashing dogs, goats, and pigs (reports suggest that Inaccessible had goats and pigs before the brothers' arrival).⁴² Around the same time, the islanders also began to undertake regular trips to Nightingale and especially Inaccessible to harvest eggs, birds, and seals.⁴³

Nevertheless, Inaccessible Island had luxuriant bird life. Henry Mosley, naturalist aboard H.M.S. *Challenger*, related trudging through a dense carpet of tussock, penguins, and guano: "At first you try to avoid the nests, but soon find that impossible; then maddened almost, by the pain, stench and noise, you have recourse to brutality."

⁴⁰ Alexander L. Bond, Colin J. Carlson, and Kevin R. Burgio, "Local Extinctions of Insular Avifauna on the Most Remote Inhabited Island in the World," *Journal of Ornithology* 160, no. 1 (2019), 49-60.

⁴¹ For account of the shipwreck, see Alexander Grieg, *Fate of the Blenden Hall, East Indiaman, Captain Alexander Grieg, Bound to Bombay: With an Account of Her Wreck, and the Sufferings and Privations Endured by the Survivors, for Six Months, on the Desolate Islands of Inaccessible and Tristan D'Acunha* (New York: William H. Colyer, 1847).

⁴² "Two Years on Inaccessible Island," *The Cape Monthly Magazine* 7, no. 42 (1873), 324-325, 327, 329-330, 332, 337.

⁴³ Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 30.

Frustrated and unable to move, Moseley began desperately clubbing and kicking the birds to escape (see figure 5.3).⁴⁴



Figure 5.3. Illustration depicting the escape of the naturalists of the *Challenger* from the rookeries of Inaccessible Island. T.H. Tizard et al., *Narrative of the Cruise of H.M.S. Challenger with a General Account of the Scientific Results of the Expedition*, vol. 1 of *Report on the Scientific Results of the Voyage of H.M.S. Challenger during the Years 1873-76 under the Command of Captain George S. Nares, R.N., F.R.S. and the late Captain Frank Tourle Thomson, R.N.* (London: HSMO, 1885), 288. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

Jaunts to bird-rich Nightingale and Inaccessible compensated for the community's isolation, which had become extreme by the twentieth century. With less imported food,

⁴⁴ Moseley, *Notes by a Naturalist on the "Challenger,"* 120-121.

the islanders harvested thousands of birds and eggs, which gave rise to questions about sustainability. In the 1900s, Katherine Barrow bemoaned the “wholesale” gathering of penguin eggs. She lamented, too, the disappearance of breeding pairs of Wandering Albatross on Tristan da Cunha. Barrow likewise questioned the wisdom of the harvesting hundreds of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, referred to colloquially as “Mollymawk,” eggs per season. If such wanton collecting continued, she fretted that “these beautiful birds will be driven from the island.”⁴⁵

II

Denied a role in victualing steam-powered ships, demands on the insular ecosystem intensified. Without a trade outlet, the islanders supplemented their diet with birds. Moreover, since the islanders had few items with which to entice passing sailors or cruise ship passengers, they turned to producing souvenirs from bird carcasses. Hugely destructive to birdlife, sustenance hunting and the curio trade galvanized Tristan da Cunha’s first conservation measures. Yet inconsistent enforcement and inattention to the economic realities of isolation dogged such efforts from the outset. Antithetical to the islanders’ material interests, they disregarded protection orders and bird numbers plummeted.

During the lean interwar years, Reverend Rogers tried unsuccessfully to expand the island’s productive capacity. He superintended sowing experimental plots and transferring livestock to Inaccessible and Nightingale, where the less disturbed grasses afforded better fodder.⁴⁶ Despite such initiatives, agricultural conditions on Tristan da

⁴⁵ K.M. Barrow, *Three Years in Tristan da Cunha* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1910), 15, 79-82, 85, 117-118, 163, 166.

⁴⁶ H. Martyn Rogers to Secretary of State for the Colonies, n.d., 2-4, ADM 1/8645/190, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (hereafter TNA).

Cunha failed to improve. The seeds never germinated and the cattle on Inaccessible “vanished mysteriously.”⁴⁷

In this grim climate, the islanders harvested prodigious quantities of eggs and birds for sustenance. “The people live now by eating young sea birds and then eggs but consequently these (as seals and whales have done) are leaving the islands or being so reduced in numbers as soon to be likely to cease to be available,” reported Rogers.⁴⁸ According to islander Robert Glass, the community gathered over 25,000 penguin eggs over the span of a year, allegedly taking over 7,000 in a single day.⁴⁹ Yellow-nosed Albatross fared no better. Between 1923 and 1927, the islanders harvested nearly 22,000 of the species.⁵⁰

As a result, finding birds on Tristan da Cunha had become much more difficult by the 1920s. “Thirty or forty years ago anywhere on the slopes of the hillside one could pick up young birds in any quantity for food, now one cannot find half a dozen in a day’s hard march yet we still have to depend on sea birds for a living,” reported Rogers. Albatrosses no longer nested on Tristan da Cunha, while Rockhoppers had become elusive.⁵¹

The curio trade proved determinative in this collapse of bird numbers. Seabird plumage, meat, and bones had long functioned as bedding, sustenance, tools, and curios

⁴⁷ Rose Rogers, *The Lonely Island* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1926), 98-99, 170-171.

⁴⁸ Henry M. Rogers to Governor-General, Union of South Africa, 16 September 1922, 2, T 161/739, TNA.

⁴⁹ Rogers, *The Lonely Island*, 135-136.

⁵⁰ Peter A. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, no. 13 of *Results of the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, 1937-1938* (Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi, 1945), 141-142.

⁵¹ Quoted in “An S.O.S. from Tristan,” *Cape Argus*, 27 November 1923, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 1, British Library.

for sailors.⁵² Exploiting this niche, the islanders had bartered products fashioned from feathers and carcasses since at least the late nineteenth century.⁵³ Yet, as a result of the decreased demand for fresh provisions associated with the spread of refrigerated shipping, the trade in souvenirs fashioned from birds exploded.⁵⁴ Visitors reported that the islanders bartered an assemblage of albatross parts.⁵⁵ The commodification of Rockhoppers, whose signature yellow-feathered tufts formed the basis of “tossel” mats, led to the plundering of rookeries. A single “double-row” tossel mat required harvesting thirty adult penguins.⁵⁶

Islanders and outsiders alike expressed alarm about this slaughter. Robert Glass feared that the Yellow-nosed Albatross could not sustain the current rate of predation without risking extinction.⁵⁷ “There is an abundance of seabirds on Tristan and the neighbouring islands, but with the indiscriminate destruction of young birds and eggs there is danger of them being exterminated,” echoed J.R. Stenhouse of the visiting R.R.S. *Discovery*.⁵⁸

Lay preacher Robert Pooley also called attention to the deteriorating situation of birds in the late 1920s. Without culling feral cats, controlling dogs, and stemming over-hunting, he feared certain bird species “being wiped out.” Working through Tristan da

⁵² See, for example, William B. Whitecar, Jr., *Four Years Aboard the Whaleship: Embracing Cruises in the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian and Antarctic Oceans, in the Years 1855, '6, '7, '8, '9* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1860), 52-53.

⁵³ See, for instance, “Tristan D’Acunha,” *The Mission Field* 26, no. 309 (1 September 1881), 333.

⁵⁴ Derek J. Oddy, “The Growth of Britain’s Refrigerated Meat Trade, 1880-1939,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 93, no. 3 (2007), 275-277.

⁵⁵ “A Lonely Spot: A Visit to Tristan da Cunha,” *Sphere*, 12 April 1924, Tristan Cuttings, 74/Tab.583.f.17, British Library.

⁵⁶ Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 40-41, 73, 76-78, 140-142, 168-169, 177-178, 183-184.

⁵⁷ Copy of Bob Glass’ diary, January 1925 entry, DOC MSS 002 0007 0063, Peter A. Munch papers, Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University (hereafter SLU).

⁵⁸ J.R. Stenhouse to “Discovery” Committee, Colonial Office, 23 February 1926, 4-5, T 161/739, TNA.

Cunha's version of the Parochial Church Council, Pooley stressed the importance of resource management, including birds.⁵⁹

The concerns of Rogers and Pooley aligned with those of the Church of England. Although biblical injunctions encouraged subduing wilderness, Christianity also imparted reverence for nature as God's creation. Anglicans had figured prominently in founding the Yorkshire Association for the Protection of Sea Birds in 1868. As a result of the group's lobbying, the Sea Birds Protection Act of 1869, the first of a flurry of such legislation in Britain, seasonally restricted the hunting of select species. These religious and moral foundations remained perceptible in the transatlantic anti-plumage movement, which birthed the Society for the Protection of Birds in 1889. (After securing the patronage of Edward VII in 1904, the organization became known as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.)⁶⁰ Across the empire, meanwhile, missionaries took an active role in conservation.⁶¹

But the first documented measures to protect Tristan da Cunha's wildlife did not materialize until the arrival of Reverend Augustus Partridge. At Saint Mary's Church, he circulated "notices" about important happenings, as well as issued "orders" that dictated

⁵⁹ R. Pooley to editor, *The Church Times*, December 1928, 1, USPGE 83 (B), Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (hereafter BL).

⁶⁰ T.C. Smout, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 27-31; Robin W. Doughty, *Feather Fashions and Bird Preservation: A Study in Nature Protection* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975); R.J. Moore-Colyer, "Feathered Women and Persecuted Birds: The Struggle against the Plumage Trade, c. 1860-1922," *Rural History* 11, no. 1 (2000), 57-73; John Sheail, *Nature in Trust: The History of Nature Conservation in Britain* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1976), 11-16, 22-36.

⁶¹ On missionaries, the natural world, and conservation, see Richard Grove, "Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa, 1820-1900," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, no. 2 (1989), 163-187; Grove, *Green Imperialism*; Sujit Sivasundaram, *Nature and the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795-1850* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); James Beattie and John Stenhouse, "Empire, Environment and Religion: God and the Natural World in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," *Environment and History* 13, no. 4 (2007), 413-446; Denis McKim, "God's Garden: Nature, Order, and the Presbyterian Conception of the British North American 'Wilderness,'" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017), 398-433.

weekly tasks. Through this system, he set the day of the hunt and prescribed the number of birds (Yellow-nosed Albatross) available for harvesting (see figure 5.4).⁶²



Figure 5.4. Islanders posing with slain mollymawks, circa 1937-1938. Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 139. With the permission of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

Quotas pointed to an emphasis on resource management. In the nineteenth century, preservation, which advocated sparing “specific species or a specific landscape from economic development or exploitation,” dominated environmental debates. In the early twentieth century, conservation, which championed the sustainable utilization of natural resources, held sway.⁶³

However, with birds one of the few resources available, the impoverished islanders disregarded the quotas.⁶⁴ “The only common crime is taking mollyhawks out of season,” noted the Bishop of Saint Helena. “That would deplete the island of its food

⁶² A.G. Partridge, *Tristan da Cunha: The Isle of Loneliness* (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1933), 9, 14.

⁶³ On the distinction between conservation and preservation, see Cioc, *The Game of Conservation*, 7; Libby Robin, “Conservation and Preservation,” in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, eds. Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 191-194.

⁶⁴ Munch, *Sociology of Tristan da Cunha*, 143.

supplies,” he continued, “and offenders are strictly punished.”⁶⁵ On at least one occasion, Reverend Partridge flogged a convicted poacher.⁶⁶

Under Reverend Harold Wilde, the Island Parliament continued to regulate how many eggs and birds the islanders took.⁶⁷ Headman Willie Repetto, who authorized the harvest of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross and Sooty Albatross, appreciated the system. But Repetto’s quotas, such as 140 Yellow-nosed Albatross eggs and 30-60 chicks per family in 1938, remained too imprecise and lax in enforcement. Some islanders griped that the quotas did not take into account family size and believed the application of these rules to bird-rich Nightingale “unnecessary.” Instead of adhering to the regulations, the islanders simply harvested “what they need.”⁶⁸

As a result, the islanders hunted birds in great numbers throughout the 1930s. While Tristan da Cunha’s iconic penguins bore the brunt of the slaughter, seals and many species of bird, including the Sooty Albatross, Wandering Albatross, Yellow-nosed Albatross, Great Shearwater, and Long-winged Petrel, also suffered. “On the whole, all the rich wild life of the higher animals, birds and mammals, is now more or less devastated as a result of human activity,” concluded visiting ornithologist Yngvar Hagen.⁶⁹

But the conditions that drove the islanders to harvest unsustainable numbers of birds remained unchanged. Rat infestations, poor potato harvests, blustery weather, and the fact that the majority of cattle remained concentrated among a handful of “old

⁶⁵ Quoted in “‘Government’ of Tristan,” *Cape Times*, 19 January 1932, Tristan da Cunha Cuttings, vol. 3, British Library.

⁶⁶ A.G. Partridge to W.F. France, 4 July 1942, 2, USPG D510/2, BL.

⁶⁷ G.R. Windsor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 January 1936, 2, USPG D436, BL.

⁶⁸ Peter A. Munch, *Glimpsing Utopia: Tristan da Cunha 1937-38: A Norwegian’s Diary*, trans. Catherine Munch Snyder (Easton: George Mann Publications, 2008), 114, 129, 134.

⁶⁹ Hagen, *Birds of Tristan da Cunha*, 20, 32-35, 38, 46, 55-57, 108, 114-115, 202-203.

settlers” left the islanders dependent on the island’s limited natural resources, including birds.⁷⁰

Fortunately for the archipelago’s beleaguered birds, the endemic Inaccessible Island Rail mobilized conservationists. While exploring Inaccessible Island in the early 1920s, Reverend Rogers had obtained the first-known specimens of this diminutive and striking creature with pinkish-red eyes and brownish-black plumage, whose scientific name (*Atlantisia rogersi*) forever honors the missionary’s contribution to natural history. Aware of the curiosity surrounding the bird, Rogers dispatched the specimens to London.⁷¹

Long coveted, the discovery of the smallest flightless bird in the world excited ornithologists like Percy Lowe, who served as the Curator of Birds at the Natural History Museum in the early 1930s. He thus fretted “that attempts will be made on the part of dealers and collectors to acquire specimens.”⁷² Lowe’s trepidation proved warranted, for the islanders had begun to trade Inaccessible Island Rail skins with benefactors abroad by the 1930s.⁷³

The fact that these birds existed nowhere else lent the isolated, inaccessible archipelago a mystique. Given the scientific, aesthetic, and economic value of certain animals and plants, metropolitan scientists, collectors, and entrepreneurs had long sought specimens from far-flung corners.⁷⁴ Species from hard-to-reach places commanded the

⁷⁰ G.R. Windsor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 January 1936, 1-2, USPG D436, BL.

⁷¹ Rogers, *The Lonely Island*, 169-170.

⁷² Percy Lowe, “The Flightless Rail (*Atlantisia Rogersi*) of Inaccessible Island,” appendix 2 of *The Lonely Island*, 209-211.

⁷³ E.B. Bowyer to Denis Rickett, 22 October 1938, USPG D477, BL.

⁷⁴ Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004); Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven and

most interest and highest profits because of the difficulties involved in obtaining them. Until steam-powered shipping eclipsed sail, which made accessing and circulating specimens from far-away places easier, the image of the collector traipsing through tracts of rugged terrain in pursuit of faunal or floral perfection had romantic associations.⁷⁵ As Ruth Barton and Jim Endersby argue, nineteenth-century antipodean floral and faunal specimens attained cachet by coming from a place that most metropolitan collectors could only dream of reaching.⁷⁶ The same held true for the Tristan archipelago, though this allure persisted well into the twentieth century because of the ongoing lack of connections.

The commodification of the Inaccessible Island Rail became an object of concern in the 1930s for two reasons. First, decades of big-game hunting, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, had imperiled megafauna. The extinction of rhinos, elephants, and other impressive beasts threatened to jeopardize this treasured pastime of colonial elites. As a result, animals, including birds, became more visible to policymakers and intruded on government agendas.⁷⁷ Second, throughout the interwar period, but especially after the onset of the global depression, the efficient management of resources became a priority for governments increasingly under the spell of technocrats.⁷⁸

London: Yale University Press, 2000); Jim Endersby, *Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ Jim Endersby, *Orchid: A Cultural History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 108-109, 127-128.

⁷⁶ Jim Endersby, "A Garden Enclosed: A Botanical Barter in Sydney, 1818-39," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 3 (2000), 313-334; Ruth Barton, "Haast and the Moa: Reversing the Tyranny of Distance," *Pacific Science* 54, no. 3 (2000), 251-263.

⁷⁷ On the elite prerogatives and class dimensions of conservation, see John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988); Lance van Sittert, "Bringing in the Wild: The Commodification of Wild Animals in the Cape Colony/Province, c. 1850-1950," *Journal of African History* 46, no. 2 (2005), 269-291.

⁷⁸ Cushman, *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World*, esp. ch. 5.

Percy Lowe, who now occupied the position of governmental adviser and Chairman of the European Section of the International Committee for Bird Preservation, likely with the support of Secretary of State for the Colonies Malcolm MacDonald, an avid birder, internationalized the plight of the Inaccessible Island Rail by adding the species to the agenda of the Second International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa in 1938.⁷⁹ Convened in London, the Conference assembled representatives of the imperial powers to discuss revising the *Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State* (1933), which had established the first international measures for conserving Africa's wildlife.⁸⁰ At the 1938 Conference, representatives concluded that gathering eggs or hunting the Inaccessible Island Rail posed a "very grave danger" to its survival. Conferees thus advised their governments to extend "Class A" protections (special status) in any forthcoming amendment of the original 1933 convention.⁸¹

Although the outbreak of the Second World War derailed progress, local protections for the Inaccessible Island Rail acted as a stopgap.⁸² MacDonald entreated the SPG "to persuade the inhabitants to leave the Flightless Rail unmolested."⁸³ In 1939, Wilde duly received instructions to impress on the islanders the significance of the bird and "to exhort them not to collect either skins or eggs." But lacking magisterial powers,

⁷⁹ On Malcolm MacDonald and birds, see Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), ch. 24. On discussions to protect the Inaccessible Island Rail, see *Second International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa, London, May, 1938: Final Act* (London: HMSO, 1938), 6, 10, 62-64.

⁸⁰ See *Agreements Concluded at the International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa, London, November 8, 1933*, Cmd. 4453 (London: HMSO, 1933). On the history of the conference, which informed the subsequent 1938 gathering, see Cioc, *The Game of Conservation*, 47-53.

⁸¹ *Second International Conference for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora of Africa*, 62-64.

⁸² MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature*, 217.

⁸³ W.J. Bigg to W.F. France, 23 November 1938, 1-2, USPG D477, BL.

even the imperious Wilde could do no more than admonish the islanders to spare the species.⁸⁴

Instead of conserving fauna, Wilde focused on increasing agricultural output. On Tristan da Cunha, he sought counsel on the potato blight, as well as waged war against rats with liberal doses of poison.⁸⁵ On Inaccessible, meanwhile, the “Five Year Plan” pursued more crops and larger herds of livestock.⁸⁶

In this agricultural transformation, Wilde received support from the British and South African governments. In 1937, the H.M.S. *Carlisle* surveyed conditions. At the invitation of the Admiralty, the crew included botanist Robert Dyer, whom the South African government had selected to study Tristan da Cunha’s flora. During a rushed stay, Dyer discerned “drastic changes” to the landscape. Deforestation and the introduction of large herds of quadrupeds had hastened the demise of native flora, thereby exacerbating erosion and enabling invasive grasses to predominate around the settlement.⁸⁷

For Dyer, the situation on Tristan da Cunha demanded action. In an experimental initiative, he transplanted nine species of African grasses in the garden plot of an islander. Dyer left instructions to cultivate the grasses that flourished “on a more extensive scale in order to improve the pasturage.” Another member of the expedition oversaw the planting of 700 trees and shrubs from over a dozen species in a “trial” to halt erosion.⁸⁸

Efforts to preserve the archipelago’s flora remained ad hoc during the military occupation. To regenerate Tristan da Cunha, E.J.S. Woolley, garrison commander,

⁸⁴ W.F. France to Harold Wilde, 13 January 1939, 2, USPG CLS 230, BL.

⁸⁵ Harold Allen to W.F. France, 13 February 1935, 1-2, USPG D417, BL; W.F. France to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12 July 1935, 2, USPG CLS 183, BL.

⁸⁶ Harold Wilde, “Islands of Opportunity,” n.d., 1-2, USPG C/TDC/2, BL.

⁸⁷ R.A. Dyer, “The Flora of Tristan da Cunha: H.M.S. *Carlisle* Expedition, 1937,” *Bothalia* 3, no. 4 (1939), 589-591, 593-596.

⁸⁸ Dyer, “The Flora of Tristan da Cunha,” 593-594, 596.

ordered the sowing of two *Acacia* seeds for every tree felled.⁸⁹ Woolley's successor, H.S. Corfield, expanded these efforts. Launched in 1945, his "forestry scheme" planted several acres with *Phylica* and several species of *Acacia*.⁹⁰

The war cast the predicament of Tristan da Cunha's avifauna in sharp relief. "Within living memory the bird population of the island was colossal, but as the result of the uncontrolled depredations of the Islanders very few penguins and mollymawks (yellow billed albatross) now nest here," asserted Woolley. In response, he issued a ten-year ban on the taking "of all bird life on the island," save the predatory Tristan Skua which earned the distinction of varmint.⁹¹

The protection ordinance did not apply to the other islands in the archipelago, including Nightingale, which in the late 1930s had surpassed Inaccessible as the community's prime fowling locus.⁹² According to Woolley, the islanders killed or harvested the eggs of some 150,000 birds on Nightingale per annum. Inaccessible suffered depredations as well, though to a lesser degree. Despite this carnage, Woolley recognized the impossibility of extending the ordinance. "It is feared that the birds on Nightingale face a similar fate to those on Tristan," he noted, "but they play such an important part in the economy and nourishment of the islanders that protection without compensation is impracticable."⁹³ Saving birds meant overcoming insularity.

⁸⁹ E.J.S. Woolley, Job No. 9 Second Monthly Report, 7 July 1942, 3, ADM 116/4809, TNA.

⁹⁰ H.S. Corfield, Summary of the Administration of H.M.S. "Atlantic Isle" (Tristan da Cunha) and the Conditions on the Island during the Period 1944-1946, 19 June 1946, 5, ADM 1/19705, TNA.

⁹¹ Monthly Report on Tristan da Cunha, No. 264/1403, 7 March 1944, 2, ADM 1/15935, TNA.

⁹² Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 30.

⁹³ E.J.S. Woolley, report on Tristan da Cunha, July 1944 [1962 copy], 12, FD 23/110, TNA.

III

The advent of commercial fishing in 1949 precipitated another wave of agricultural reorganization and conservation measures. By improving the island's agricultural output and economic prospects, the Colonial Office hoped to ameliorate the economic pitfalls of insularity that had fueled unsustainable fowling. Better farming meant easier access to homegrown produce, while fishing wages enabled the islanders to purchase imported goods. In addition to grappling with deprivation, the commencement of fishing coincided with the arrival of an administrator who enacted protections. Although these measures extended the administration's regulatory powers over the community, they foundered from weak enforcement powers, tepid community support, and the multiplying hazards of commercial fishing. Fishermen poached birds for bait, as well as committed other environmentally destructive acts.

Tristan da Cunha's environmental transformation represented an outgrowth of post-war political economy. Launching Britain's economic revival required refurbishing empire through the rational and managed utilization of natural resources. Since ecology yielded actionable data for agricultural and conservation policies, the discipline became central to the aims of development.⁹⁴

The colonial state understood that development and conservation needed to unfold in tandem. "For the project to succeed it would probably also be essential to make sure that the Islanders undertook to cease destroying their own means of livelihood," opined Evelyn Baring. Tristan da Cunha "is overgrazed and the bird populations of the neighbouring islands named Inaccessible and Nightingale will soon be destroyed." The

⁹⁴ Roderick P. Neumann, "The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa," *Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (2002), 28-35; Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire*, ch. 10.

administration therefore needed “(a) to take steps to preserve the pasture now being ruined by over-grazing, and (b) to cease killing sea birds on Inaccessible and Nightingale at the present rate.”⁹⁵

Operating in the heyday of the expert, the Company and Colonial Office gave latitude to technocrats like Mary (Bunty) Rowan and A.N. (Bertus) Rowan, a South African married couple smitten with birds. While Bertus functioned as Company manager, Bunty, the recipient of an advanced degree in zoology from the University of Cape Town, served as staff marine biologist.⁹⁶ From the outset the Rowans, especially Bunty, evinced concern about the “great depredations on the fauna and flora of the three islands particularly with regard to birds.” She sought to convince the incoming administrator “to restrict the export of animals and plants to whatever degree appears desirable.”⁹⁷

The Rowans’ cause resonated with the inaugural administrator Hugh Elliott. The Oxford-educated aristocrat had become a student of birds and committed conservationist during a stint in Tanganyika.⁹⁸ With Elliott to supplement the Rowans’ expertise, Tristan da Cunha flourished as “an ornithological Ministry of all the Talents.”⁹⁹

Elliott thought the isolated archipelago, which boasted an unusual assemblage of avifauna, a paradise for naturalists and especially birders. “Of outstanding ornithological interest,” he later explained, “the group remains the only breeding-station of the great shearwater *Puffinus gravis*, and of several distinct races of sea-birds, while the ten

⁹⁵ E. Baring to Machtig, 16 April 1948, 2, T 220/254, TNA.

⁹⁶ Peter Steyn, “Bunty Rowan—A Tribute,” *Ostrich* 57, no. 2 (1986), 124.

⁹⁷ M.K. Rowan to Norman Boyd Kinnear, 21 October 1948, 1, DF/1004/CP/718, Natural History Museum Archives, London (hereafter NHMA).

⁹⁸ Richard Fitter, “Sir Hugh Elliott (1913-1989),” *Ibis* 132, no. 4 (1990), 620.

⁹⁹ W.R.P. Bourne, “Sir Hugh Elliott, Bt, OBE (1913-1989),” *British Birds* 83, no. 7 (1990), 273.

different forms of thrushes, buntings, and rails rank with the finches of the Galapagos in importance for the study of evolution.” The archipelago also claimed the Inaccessible Island Rail, “surely one of the most attractive as well as rarest little creatures to be found anywhere.” In addition, species of seals, whales, fish, insects, and plants inhabited the archipelago.¹⁰⁰

Safeguarding this ecological gem required incorporating economic sustainability and enforceability into a conservation strategy. These demands inspired a two-tiered ordinance: Islanders could not hunt Schedule I species under any circumstances, while Schedule II fauna had regulated quotas. To avoid alienating the islanders, the proper classification of species required detailed, first-hand information only available to Elliott after arriving at Tristan da Cunha.¹⁰¹

With Elliott’s arrival, the Colonial Office enacted the Wild Life (Tristan da Cunha) Protection Ordinance in March 1950. It banned islanders and expatriates from exploiting the skins or eggs of species, including the Inaccessible Island Rail, listed under Schedule I. During specified months, the ordinance permitted taking the skins and eggs of species classified as Schedule II, provided the fowler applied and paid for a license from the administrator. If breached, the ordinance empowered the administrator to seize the specimens and to levy fines. This first iteration of the ordinance listed nine Schedule I species of bird, but left Schedule II blank.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Elliott, “Tristan da Cunha 1962: The Royal Society’s Expedition and Wildlife Preservation,” *Oryx* 6, no. 4 (1962), 230.

¹⁰¹ N.B. Kinnear to J.B. Sidebotham, 25 October 1949, 1-2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹⁰² Wild Life (Tristan da Cunha) Protection: An Ordinance to Protect Wild Life in Tristan da Cunha, 17 March 1950, 592-594, FT 3/603, TNA.

The planned omission of Schedule II species meant that Elliott had much inquiry to undertake during his first year.¹⁰³ Accordingly, he collected, skinned, and catalogued sixty-one specimens. In addition, he surveyed overall numbers.¹⁰⁴ Elliott believed that this research had yielded “a reasonably accurate idea of the status of the wild life of the Dependency.”¹⁰⁵

Based on this research, and with the input of the Rowans, Elliott devised an updated conservation ordinance.¹⁰⁶ Enacted in December 1951, the revised Wild Life (Tristan da Cunha) Protection Regulations added ten species to Schedule I, including the elephant and fur seal. With the removal of the Great Shearwater, the Schedule I list of protected species now numbered nineteen. Downgraded to Schedule II, the Great Shearwater became one of eleven species, including albatrosses and penguins, eligible for controlled, fee-based exploitation.¹⁰⁷

Elliott believed that the revised ordinance overcame the shortcomings of previous initiatives. Formulated from imprecise data, missionary quotas had failed to measure whether annual bird harvests outpaced reproduction. The Royal Navy circumvented this problem by outlawing all fowling. However, for an isolated, resource-strapped community dependent on birds, the order had merely driven fowling underground. “Hitherto it has all been pure guesswork—either complete protection in theory and much illicit fowling in practice, or thoughtless and greedy fowling uncontrolled and heading rapidly for extermination,” Elliott summarized.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 1, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Hugh Elliott diary, 6 April 1950, 13 May 1950, 5 February-11 February, 1951 entries, vols. 1-2, 4, MSS.Atlan.s.1-MSS.Atlan.s.2, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 1, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹⁰⁶ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 5, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹⁰⁷ The Wild Life (Tristan da Cunha) Protection Regulations, 15 December 1951, 593-594, FT 3/603, TNA.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh Elliott diary, 22 March-25 March, 1951 entry, vol. 4, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

A fowling trip to Nightingale had revealed the extent of the carnage. The islanders roamed the carpet of tussock snatching squawking birds from their nests or burrows. Then, after snapping their necks, mass processing began. The islanders plucked thousands of birds, tossing them into “vast heaps of feathers and corpses.” They proceeded to butcher the birds, placing meat and fat into piles for curing and rendering, respectively.¹⁰⁹

In framing the ordinance, Elliott kept the alimentary value of birds in mind. He repeatedly cited the “sensible fowling traditions” of the Faroe Islands, where regulations on bird hunting had a rich history, as direct inspiration.¹¹⁰ However, the confidence that Elliott placed in replicating the Faroe experience on Tristan da Cunha arose from more than the superficial similarities between the remote islands; rather, such a conviction reflected the technocratic optimism that not only gripped Colonial Office bureaucrats, but also suffused the thinking of birders.¹¹¹

Buoyed by this confidence, Elliott deployed the ecological concept of “Maximum Sustained Yield” (MSY), the idea “that stocks will be managed so they can be sustained, in perpetuity.” Based on the assumption that animals had determinable annual hunting thresholds, MSY dictated the rational use of natural resources to prevent depletion.

Theorized in the context of commercial fishing and whaling, MSY attracted adherents

¹⁰⁹ For a description of Nightingale fowling, see Hugh Elliott diary, 31 March 1950, 2 April 1950 entries, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.s.1, BL.

¹¹⁰ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA; Hugh Elliott to C.A. Kirkman, 21 April 1951, 2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA; Arne Nørrevang, “Traditions of Sea Bird Fowling in the Faroes: An Ecological Basis for Sustained Fowling,” *Ornis Scandinavica* 17, no. 3 (1986), 275-281.

¹¹¹ Helen Macdonald, “‘What Makes You a Scientist is the Way You Look at Things’: Ornithology and the Observer, 1930-1955,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 33, no. 1 (2002), 53-77.

across the post-war world by promising technocratic solutions to the interlinked problems of demographic growth, overuse, and resource scarcity.¹¹²

Elliott hoped that MSY would reorder the relationship between islanders and birds. “If I achieve nothing else on Tristan than the establishment of balanced farming of seabirds it will be something worthwhile,” he mused.¹¹³ Achieving scientifically controlled exploitation required community education and data collection. To compile accurate statistics, the administrator needed to make bird harvesting transparent by adopting “a fairly liberal policy” toward malefactors. Responding leniently to violations encouraged the islanders to report accurate numbers. Precise figures allowed for rapid adjustment to the conservation needs of specific species.¹¹⁴ In short, the system depended on the administrator having increased authority and exercising greater control over how the islanders utilized the archipelago’s resources.

Elliott hoped the two-tiered system would mollify the islanders, who resented the extant fowling ban.¹¹⁵ According to Elliott, only Rockhopper Penguins, Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Great Shearwaters, Sooty Albatrosses, and Great-winged Petrels had any economic or dietary significance to the islanders. Since the community retained the right to “reasonable exploitation” of these species through seasonal Schedule II restrictions, he believed that the ordinance accounted for the community’s needs.¹¹⁶

Yet the conservation ordinances not only threatened sustenance hunting, but also the lucrative trade in specimens, which continued to exploit the intrinsic allure of

¹¹² Carmel Finley, *All the Fish in the Sea: Maximum Sustainable Yield and the Failure of Fisheries Management* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 3, 8-9.

¹¹³ Hugh Elliott diary, 22 March-25 March, 1951 entry, vol. 4, MSS.Atlan.s.4, BL.

¹¹⁴ Elliott, “The Fauna of Tristan da Cunha,” 52-53.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of Island Council meeting, 13 March 1949, 1, DOC MSS 002 0011 0006, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹¹⁶ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

specimens from remote places. At the beginning of his appointment, Elliott estimated that the trade in birds and eggs, which remained confined to current and former expatriate staff, never exceeded fifty specimens annually.¹¹⁷ But multiplying links with the wider world made Tristan da Cunha more accessible for collectors, which led to skyrocketing demand in the early 1950s.¹¹⁸ Thanks to the deep pockets of scientific institutions, the value of bird specimens rose rapidly. In 1951, an American museum offered an astonishing \$200 for specimens of Wilkin's Finch.¹¹⁹

Despite new legislation, the economic value of birds and enforcement difficulties ensured that Elliott struggled to staunch poaching. In this remote archipelago, the lack of a surveillance and enforcement apparatus handicapped the administrator.¹²⁰ Deprived a sufficiently robust system of control, Elliott bemoaned that poachers had abundant "opportunities for undetected poaching."¹²¹

In addition to the passage of anti-poaching legislation, Elliott's arrival coincided with forestry schemes and agricultural reorganization. The Company launched a research station at Sandy Point, where the agricultural officer monitored the progress of imported strains of potato seeds. With insights gleaned from these experimental plots, and liberal applications of fertilizers and pesticides, the agricultural officer sought to increase yields. Anxious to diversify island produce, the agricultural officer also superintended "experimental patches" of other crops.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹¹⁸ Hugh Elliott to C.A. Kirkman, 21 April 1951, 1-2, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹¹⁹ Hugh Elliott diary, 29 July 1951-6 August 1951 entry, vol. 5, MSS.Atlas.s.5, BL.

¹²⁰ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report, 1951, 8, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹²¹ Hugh Elliott to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 August 1950, 2-3, DF/1004/CP/718, NHMA.

¹²² Hugh Elliott, Annual Report, 1951, 10-12, CO 1024/84, TNA.

The agriculturalist also worked to rejuvenate the land, improve the animal stock, and control pests. To stimulate the “recovery and growth” of pasturage, the agricultural officer enclosed a swath of land and explored the prospects of “rotational grazing.” Furthermore, he imported more prolific types of chicken and paid islanders to cull roaming goats. Poisoning campaigns and organized ratting days, meanwhile, waged battle against snails, slugs, and rodents.¹²³

By his departure in 1952, Elliott deemed conservation, reinforced through another revision to the wording of the protection ordinance, as largely achieved.¹²⁴ While the harvest of several species had risen modestly, overall the islanders had killed fewer birds. In 1950, they had harvested roughly 45,250 birds and eggs, whereas that figure dropped to 33,225 in 1951.¹²⁵ Overall, he believed seal and bird populations on the mend, with the notable exception of Wilkin’s Finch.¹²⁶ In addition to the protections granted through legislation, Elliott thought the decline in rodent populations from systematic ratting had played a role in boosting bird numbers.¹²⁷ Wages from the fishing industry, which made missing work for bird-harvesting trips to Nightingale increasingly “uneconomic,” also benefited the conservation cause.¹²⁸

Conversely, progress in agricultural rejuvenation proceeded slowly. R. Upton, the first agricultural officer, earned a reputation as woefully inefficient.¹²⁹ Upton’s replacement, H.G. Stableford, obtained better results. Embarking on the job in 1953, Stableford continued his predecessor’s efforts at diversifying and expanding agricultural

¹²³ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report, 1951, 11-12, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹²⁴ An Ordinance to Amend the Wild Life (Tristan da Cunha) Protection Ordinance, 1950, 13 June 1952, 11-12, FT 3/603, TNA.

¹²⁵ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report, 1951, 13, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹²⁶ Elliott, “The Fauna of Tristan da Cunha,” 41-53.

¹²⁷ Hugh Elliott, Quarterly Report, 19 July 1952, 6, CO 1024/85, TNA.

¹²⁸ Hugh Elliott, Annual Report, 1951, 13, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹²⁹ Hugh Elliott diary, 24 April-28 April, 1952 entry, vol. 7, MSS.Atlas.7, BL.

output. He planted trees, battled grubs, experimented with different potato strains, encouraged personal gardens, imported South African livestock, and sowed new grasses to furnish fodder.¹³⁰

By the mid-1950s, then, Tristan da Cunha's technocratic turn had achieved mixed results. Summarizing the islander's perspective, Chief Willie Repetto reported that birds had become "much scarcer than what they was [*sic*] when we was [*sic*] young."¹³¹ Scientists agreed that some population numbers of some species continued to slump. Yet, although species like the Great-winged Petrel, Rockhopper Penguin, Antarctic Tern, and Brown Noddy had suffered declines since the 1930s, others had increased. M.K. Swales, who surveyed Tristan da Cunha's avifauna as part of the Gough Island Expedition (1955-1956), noted rises in numbers of several species, including the Yellow-nosed Albatross, Sooty Albatross, Broad-billed Prion, and Tristan Thrush. While protection ordinances made poaching more difficult, Swales implied that the fishing industry deserved the largest share of the credit. By boosting living standards, fishing wages had diminished the economic and dietary significance of birds.¹³²

Thanks to fishing wages, islanders increasingly turned to imported goods rather than birds to satisfy dietary and lighting requirements. "The necessity for the killing of countless thousands of sea birds annually for the production of cooking fat and illuminating oil has now been done away with," hailed the Company's manager.¹³³ It

¹³⁰ Philip Scott, Annual Report, 1953, 3-5, CO 1024/84, TNA.

¹³¹ Quoted in John Heaney, "Tristan da Cunha—'the Loneliest Island,'" *London Calling: The Overseas Journal of the British Broadcasting Corporation*, no. 901 (7 February 1957), 8-9.

¹³² M.K. Swales, "Observations on the Status of Some of the Birds of Tristan da Cunha," 4 November 1955, 1-10, EXP/4/4/5, Royal Society, London (hereafter RS).

¹³³ Tristan da Cunha Development Co. Ltd. to Colonial Office, memorandum, n.d. [c.a. September 1955], 3, CO 1024/204, TNA.

certainly made a large contribution. Hugh Elliott estimated that each drum of cooking oil required up to ninety Great Shearwaters.¹³⁴

In addition to furnishing sustenance, birds retained cash value as scientific specimens. Joe Repetto, who reportedly emerged as the lone islander capable of sexing and skinning birds for interested naturalists and institutions, maintained a thriving trade in specimens.¹³⁵ The post office on Tristan da Cunha invariably featured “a box or two of stuffed birds from Joe Repetto” in the pile of outgoing mail.¹³⁶

The crayfish industry proved deadliest to birdlife, though. In the uninhabited islands, where surveillance and enforcement remained exceptionally difficult, fishermen illicitly harvested eggs and birds for sustenance as well as bait for crayfish traps.¹³⁷ According to Martin Holdgate, another member of the Gough Island Scientific Expedition, this practice possibly amounted to 24,000 penguins killed in the archipelago per annum. In addition, zoos paid to acquire a small number of penguins as well as the endemic Gough moorhen.¹³⁸ Insular species still commanded value.

Nevertheless, land management and conservation practices had taken root by 1960. Overgrazing, vegetation loss, and erosion had been interlinked problems throughout the 1950s.¹³⁹ Although the cattle population on Tristan da Cunha continued to rise, the administration’s new enclosure acts and campaigns against the overstocking of pasturage resonated with the community, which enacted legislation to restrict donkeys.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Hugh Elliott diary, 6 April 1950 entry, vol. 1, MSS.Atlas.1, BL.

¹³⁵ Elliott, “The Fauna of Tristan da Cunha,” 53.

¹³⁶ Roger Everett, “Tristan da Cunha,” *Transbladet*, no. 4 (October 1955), 11, DOC MSS 0006 0028, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹³⁷ G.F. Harris to Masters of *Tristania* and *Frances Repetto*, 30 September 1957, 1, CO 1024/546, TNA.

¹³⁸ M.W. Holdgate, “Gough Island—A Possible Sanctuary,” *Oryx* 4, no. 3 (1957), 172-173.

¹³⁹ Unknown, memo on Fencing Scheme for Stock and Pasture Improvement Grant of £2,000, 27 January 1956, 1, CAOG 9/343, TNA.

¹⁴⁰ Peter A. Day, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1960, 6-7, CO 1024/360, TNA.

In keeping with this growing environmental awareness, administrator Peter Day fined two poachers after receiving information from another islander. The informant's action was unprecedented, for no islander had ever reported another member of the community for poaching.¹⁴¹ It seemed to herald a new era for birds.

IV

Although the volcanic eruption temporarily arrested progress toward conservation, in the long term it benefited wildlife by generating interest in the conservation value of extremely insular spaces. In a world blighted by development, the isolated Tristan archipelago, which scientists claimed had relatively intact ecosystems, became envisioned as evolutionary laboratories worthy of preservation from the 1960s onward. This status as an imagined, untouched ecological utopia led to the passage of conservation legislation in the 1970s. While this legislation enhanced administrator's power over how the islanders utilized resources, it could not overcome the economic difficulties of insularity or the environmental pressures associated with the crayfish industry.

Shortly after the volcanic eruption, scientists like Martin Holdgate lobbied the Royal Society, Britain's preeminent scientific institution, to undertake a detailed survey of Tristan da Cunha. The volcano, Holdgate remarked to David Martin, Assistant Secretary of the Royal Society, had the potential to clarify Tristan da Cunha's "geological and biological history." "So few remote oceanic islands of this kind have been studied while erupting," he explained, "that it would be a great pity if the opportunities for examination of the present outburst were missed."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Peter A. Day, A Report of the First Quarter 1961: Tristan da Cunha, 1, CO 1024/360, TNA.

¹⁴² Martin Holdgate to D.C. Martin, 13 October 1961, EXP/4/2/1, RS.

The Royal Society embraced the idea of dispatching an expedition to Tristan da Cunha. In a meeting of the South Pacific Expeditions Committee, which later formed a Tristan da Cunha sub-committee, the participants “agreed that there was urgent need for a small party of geologists and vulcanologists [*sic*] to spend a short time on Tristan da Cunha during the current southern summer.” Given the ongoing eruption, the committee decided to prioritize the physical sciences. Once dormant, the committee would shift attention to the natural sciences.¹⁴³

Despite this geological focus, conservation of insular flora and fauna shaped planning for the expedition from the outset. The abandonment of the island imperiled indigenous animals. Errant cattle and sheep threatened to overwhelm sparse vegetation, thereby causing additional habitat loss. Once rats, dogs, and cats had depleted domesticated fowls and provisions in the settlement, they would prey on wild seals and birds. The recall of the administrator, too, essentially nullified the conservation ordinance and created ample opportunities for poaching from passing vessels.¹⁴⁴

Facing a potential ecological catastrophe, international organizations with an environmental focus drew attention to the archipelago. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations more than doubled and quadrupled, respectively. While at first subordinated to human rights, the creation of UNESCO (1945), the IUCN (1948), the Nature Conservancy (1951), and the WWF

¹⁴³ Minute 4 of meeting of South Pacific Expedition Committee: Tristan da Cunha, 8 November 1961, 1-2, EXP/4/2/1, RS.

¹⁴⁴ Hugh Elliott, “Tristan da Cunha Conservation Needs: A Review and Recommendation,” 15 November 1961, 1-2, EXP/4/5/1/3, RS.

(1961) ensured that environmental issues shaped the thinking of policymakers in the atomic age.¹⁴⁵

Romanticized as a secluded treasure, naturalists lobbied these organizations to shield the archipelago from the civilizational encroachment that it had allegedly avoided for centuries. “As you know,” Martin Holdgate wrote to the deputy scientific director of the Nature Conservancy, “oceanic islands of this kind are peculiarly vulnerable to human interference and it is remarkable that the Tristan group has preserved its natural features so well.” Protecting this ecological heritage required action. The history of southern oceanic islands furnished “many cautionary tales and I should be very sorry to see a further one emerge from Tristan.”¹⁴⁶

Conservation groups heeded the call. To deepen knowledge about volcanoes, and to serve the island’s long-term conservation needs by providing updated data on flora and fauna, the WWF furnished the necessary funds for the Royal Society to include a biological dimension.¹⁴⁷ The WWF’s donation added to the £6,000 that the Royal Society had already committed to the expedition. This money guaranteed “wild life problems were adequately examined,” thereby pushing the expedition beyond its original mandate as a geological survey.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Akira Ariye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 55, 93-95, 98. Anxieties about nuclear war played a formative role in the early environmental movement. See, for example, Jeff Schauer, “‘We Hold It in Trust’: Global Wildlife Conservation, Africanization, and the End of Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018), 520; Wöbse, “‘The World After All Was One,’” 341; Thomas Jundt, “Dueling Visions for the Postwar World: The UN and UNESCO 1949 Conferences on Resources and Nature, and the Origins of Environmentalism,” *Journal of American History* 101, no. 1 (2014), 44-70.

¹⁴⁶ Martin Holdgate to E.B. Worthington, 8 November 1961, 1-2, EXP/4/2/1, RS.

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Elliott, “Tristan da Cunha Conservation Needs: A Review and Recommendation,” 15 November 1961, 3-4, EXP/4/5/1/3, RS.

¹⁴⁸ Tristan da Cunha Expeditions Committee draft minutes, 24 November 1961, 1-4, EXP/4/3/2/2/1, RS.

The Tristan da Cunha expedition had several objectives. It sought to better appreciate the volcano and to situate the eruption of 1961 within the geological history of the island. Furthermore, the expedition intended to study Tristan da Cunha's ecology, as well as how the eruption impacted plants and wildlife. Besides the "direct effects" of sulfurous fumes, ash, and heat, biologists wanted to understand the "indirect effects" of abandoning the settlement to birds, seals, and invasive species after over a century of habitation. Compiling such information would enable the implementation of interim control measures, such as the hunting of "pests and predators," and facilitate long-term conservation initiatives.¹⁴⁹

In January 1962, the Royal Society Expedition disembarked from a South African naval frigate. In addition to two island guides, the twelve-person team included several geologists, a zoologist, a botanist, a meteorologist, an agricultural expert, and a signalman from the British Army. For seven weeks, expedition members undertook their respective studies.¹⁵⁰

Although the Royal Society expedition concluded (see figure 5.5) that the volcano had a modest impact on Tristan da Cunha's wildlife, it thrust the archipelago into the scientific spotlight.¹⁵¹ It sustained interest among members and collaborators of the Tristan da Cunha Expeditions Committee, who pressed for additional studies under the umbrella of a special "working group."¹⁵² The Royal Society expedition also captivated

¹⁴⁹ Hugh Elliott, Notes for the Biological Team, 15 January 1962, 1, EXP/4/2/2, RS.

¹⁵⁰ For a short overview, see "Royal Society Expedition to Tristan da Cunha: Preliminary Report," *Nature* 194, no. 4834 (1962), 1119-1122.

¹⁵¹ On the volcano's impact, see D.E. Baird, "The Effects of the Eruption of 1961 on the Fauna of Tristan da Cunha," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Series B, 249, no. 759 (1965), 428-434.

¹⁵² Minutes of meeting of Tristan da Cunha Expeditions Committee, 18 June 1962, 4-5, EXP/4/3/2/2/2, RS.

environmental groups like the IUCN and WWF, which endorsed “any proposal for continued biological investigations which included conservation studies.”¹⁵³



Figure 5.5. After seven weeks, Royal Society expedition members alight from a helicopter on the deck of H.M.S. *Protector*. © IWM (A 34627), used with permission.

These institutions, particularly the IUCN, where Hugh Elliott had embarked on a career following retirement from the civil service, ensured that conservation remained on the Colonial Office’s agenda. Elliott, who had achieved the position of IUCN’s Acting Secretary-General by December 1962, thought the imminent resettlement of the community made reviving the lapsed conservation ordinances imperative. He urged the Colonial Office to impress on the returning administrator “the excellent opportunity now [available] for some sound conservation.”¹⁵⁴ Revelations about Soviet whaling in Tristan waters during the evacuation likely underscored the need for protections.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Preliminary Report for Project No. 13, May 1962, 3, EXP/4/5/17, RS; Minutes of meeting of Tristan da Cunha Expeditions Committee, 18 June 1962, 4-5, EXP/4/3/2/2, RS.

¹⁵⁴ Hugh Elliott to G.H. Whitefield, 29 April 1963, 1, EXP/4/4/1, RS.

¹⁵⁵ Best, “Right Whales *Eubalaena australis* at Tristan da Cunha,” 36-39.

With the return of the last wave of islanders in 1963, the scientific community focused attention on the fragility of island ecosystems like Tristan da Cunha. In addition to the ongoing work of the IUCN and WWF, in 1964 the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) reiterated the need for studying and conserving “the oceanic islands of the circum-Antarctic seas, whose species-poor and vulnerable ecosystems are of unique importance.”¹⁵⁶ The Special Committee for the International Biological Programme (SCIBP) of the International Council of Scientific Unions issued a similar resolution the same year.¹⁵⁷

Although altered by human activity, the remote Tristan archipelago had fared better than other comparably situated islands. The SCAR Working Group on Biology, which included Martin Holdgate, categorized the ecosystems of Inaccessible and Gough as “little disturbed.” Nightingale earned the less pristine, though commendable designation of “slightly disturbed.” In contrast, the Working Party listed Tristan da Cunha as “very disturbed.”¹⁵⁸

Still, Tristan da Cunha gave scientists preoccupied with unspoiled ecosystems much to celebrate. Holdgate estimated that a mere 15 percent of the island’s flora was non-indigenous. On the Falkland Islands, this figure equaled one-third.¹⁵⁹ As Holdgate

¹⁵⁶ “Statement by SCAR to SCIBP,” Eighth Meeting of SCAR, Paris, *SCAR Bulletin*, no. 19 (January 1965), 352.

¹⁵⁷ Resolutions of the CT Working Group at the First General Assembly of SCIBP, UNESCO House, Paris, 23-25 July, 1964, in Annex, *Handbook to the Conservation Section of the International Biological Programme*, IBP Handbook No. 5, ed. E.M. Nicholson (London: Conservation of Terrestrial Biological Communities, 1968), 60.

¹⁵⁸ “Statement by SCAR to SCIBP,” Annex 6, *IBP News*, no. 3 (June 1965), 32-34.

¹⁵⁹ M.W. Holdgate, “The Influence of Introduced Species on the Ecosystems of Temperate Oceanic Islands,” part 3, no. 9 of *Proceedings of the Tenth Technical Meeting of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Lucerne, Switzerland, 1966* (Morges, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1967), 157.

asserted, the archipelago boasted “four of the least disturbed temperate oceanic islands in the world.”¹⁶⁰

The explanation for this “substantially unaffected” ecosystem rested with the archipelago’s aberrant historical trajectory. The shrinking of the globe had incorporated islands into globe-spanning networks. The Tristan island group, however, had resisted this trend. In turn, seclusion “largely preserved the biota of the Tristan islands from disturbance and alteration at the hands of man.”¹⁶¹

Extreme isolation, which remained anomalous in the 1960s, endowed the archipelago with conservation-worthy attributes and facilitated the manipulation of variables. “Because of the preservation of some of the islands from drastic human interference,” asserted Nigel Wace, “the Tristan group presents numerous opportunities for research into problems of fundamental ecological and evolutionary interest which are not readily obtainable elsewhere.” Unlike more complex ecosystems, this “impoverished biota” made basic “ecological and evolutionary processes” easier to discern. Its simplicity, too, revealed how invasive species and “human-induced alterations” transformed island biotas. Its laboratory-like qualities made protection in the form of strict rules, including regulating the movement of people, and monitoring (aided through the establishment of a cutting-edge “research station”) a priority for the newly formed Royal Society Tristan da Cunha Study Group, as well as matter of international significance.¹⁶²

This conceptualization of Tristan da Cunha as a controlled space and locus for path-breaking research reflected larger trends within ecology, which developed through

¹⁶⁰ M.W. Holdgate to A.M.A. Powell, 19 November 1965, 3-4, EXP/4/3/1/5, RS.

¹⁶¹ N.M. Wace, “The Future of the Tristan da Cunha Islands,” *Nature* 207, no. 5003 (1965), 1233.

¹⁶² Wace, “The Future of the Tristan da Cunha Islands,” 1233-1234.

insular experimentation.¹⁶³ In the 1950s, ecologists, most notably brothers Howard and Eugene Odum, had favored macro-level approaches to studying the natural world. In the 1960s, scientists like Robert MacArthur and Edward Wilson rebelled against macro-level ecology. Uncomfortable with totalizing approaches that overlooked the particularities of place, they began to grapple with questions on a smaller scale. This desire to miniaturize ecological problems, test hypotheses, and limit confounding variables redoubled the allure of islands as “laboratories.”¹⁶⁴

It also spoke to the rising importance of the “field stations” in the production of knowledge. The erection of field stations enabled scientists to establish permanent laboratories in significant ecosystems. By imposing stringent controls on natural spaces, these sites blended laboratory and fieldwork methods to form a novel epistemic tradition.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ On the role of islands in the formation of ecology, Laura J. Martin, “Proving Grounds: Ecological Fieldwork in the Pacific and the Materialization of Ecosystems,” *Environmental History* 23, no. 3 (2018), 567-592.

¹⁶⁴ Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 342-378.

¹⁶⁵ On ecology, field stations, and imperial expansion, see Raf de Bont, *Stations in the Field: A History of Place-Based Animal Research, 1870-1930* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Megan Raby, *American Tropics: The Caribbean Roots of Biodiversity Science* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Philip J. Pauly, “Summer Resort and Scientific Discipline: Woods Hole and the Structure of American Biology, 1882-1925,” in *The American Development of Biology*, eds. Ronald Rainger, Keith R. Benson, and Jane Maienschein (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 121-150; Philip J. Pauly, *Biologists and the Promise of American Life: From Meriwether Lewis to Alfred Kinsey* (Princeton and Oxfordshire, UK: Princeton University Press, 2000), ch. 6; Keith R. Benson, “Laboratories on the New England Shore: The ‘Somewhat Different Direction’ of American Marine Biology,” *The New England Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1988), 55-78; Jane Maienschein, *100 Years Exploring Life, 1888-1988: The Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole* (Boston: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1989); Robert E. Kohler, *Landscapes and Labscapes: Exploring the Lab-Field Border in Biology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), esp. 51-55; Joel B. Hagen, “Problems in the Institutionalization of Tropical Biology: The Case of the Barro Colorado Island Biological Laboratory,” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1990), 225-247; Eugene Cittadino, *Nature as the Laboratory: Darwinian Plant Ecology in the German Empire, 1880-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert-Jan Wille, “The Coproduction of Station Morphology and Agricultural Management in the Tropics: Transformations in Botany at the Botanical Garden at Buitenzorg, Java 1800-1904,” in *New Perspectives on the History of Life Sciences and Agriculture*, eds. Denise Phillips and Sharon Kingsland (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2015), 253-276; Steindór J. Erlingsson, “The Plymouth Laboratory and the Institutionalization of Experimental Zoology in Britain in the 1920s,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 42, no. 1 (2009), 151-183.

As the Tristan da Cunha Study Group exploited the buzz surrounding islands to elicit proposals for a prospective research station, scientists rejoiced at the environmental benefits of Tristan da Cunha's post-eruption economic boom.¹⁶⁶ The growth of the colonial bureaucracy and regeneration and expansion of the fishery created stable jobs, which guaranteed income for the islanders. By 1967, island households averaged £451 each year.¹⁶⁷ Rising living standards continued to erode the economic importance of seabirds. Keen to earn wages, the islanders took trips to Inaccessible and frequented Nightingale less often.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, birds remained economically important. In 1968, Peter Munch asserted that a three-day trip to Nightingale Island yielded for each islander approximately "8-9 gallons of bird fat, which is his supply of liquid cooking fat for a year." In contrast, the equivalent in store-bought oil equaled one month's wages. "To put it another way, by doing three days' work on Nightingale, an Islander can save a whole month's wages," he explained. Clearly, unless wages rose and the cost of imported goods dropped, then birds remained under threat.¹⁶⁹

In addition to economic considerations, the islanders flouted quotas for two reasons. First, implementing the conservation ordinance remained virtually impossible.¹⁷⁰ On a remote island with no police force until 1967, poachers avoided detection by

¹⁶⁶ On the interest in islands, see, for instance, D.C. Martin to G.W. Markham, 1 December 1965, 1-2, EXP/4/3/1/4/41, RS; memo on Interest in Research on the Tristan da Cunha Island Group, 28 November 1966, 1-3, EXP/4/3/1/3/1, RS.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Watkins, Tristan da Cunha Annual Report, 1967, 17 February 1968, 6, FCO 42/290, TNA.

¹⁶⁸ J.H. Dickson, Report on the Recent Visit to Tristan da Cunha, 24 November 1966, 3, EXP/4/3/1/3/2, RS.

¹⁶⁹ Peter A. Munch to Peter A. Day, 20 March 1968, 9, DOC MSS 002 0004 0096, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁷⁰ J.H. Flint, "Conservation Problems on Tristan da Cunha," *Oryx* 9, no. 1 (1967), 29.

burying the carcasses of taken birds in areas away from the settlement.¹⁷¹ Second, many islanders, particularly older members of the community, deemed the ordinance unnecessary because the sheer number of surviving birds gave the illusion of an inexhaustible supply.¹⁷²

Conservation had to involve changing the community's perceptions of animals. Even after decades of conservation, Jim Flint, head teacher and amateur birder, thought that the islanders devalued the archipelago's fauna. He lamented cruel pastimes, including pelting penguins with stones. To inculcate greater respect, Flint backed incorporating conservation into the school's curriculum.¹⁷³

Homegrown poaching, however, formed only part of the problem. Despite pledges, Company fishermen poached. In 1965, for instance, South African law enforcement and customs officials, who were acting on a tip from an informant, intercepted a valuable haul of 432 sealskins and 1,000 penguin eggs poached from Gough Island, as well as forty undeclared cases of crayfish.¹⁷⁴

But the Colonial Office remained impotent to combat poaching, too. In this incident, the administration seized the contraband and remonstrated the Company, which dismissed the ship's captain.¹⁷⁵ However, save warning the islanders not to participate, the Colonial Office had no deterrent powers.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Peter A. Munch notebook, 1 September 1962 entry, DOC MSS 002 0007 0062, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁷² J.H. Flint, *Some Thoughts on the Future of Education on Tristan da Cunha*, n.d. [received on 1 June 1967], 4, EXP/4/3/1/5, RS.

¹⁷³ Flint, "Conservation Problems on Tristan da Cunha," 31; J.H. Flint, *Some Thoughts on the Future of Education on Tristan da Cunha*, n.d. [received on 1 June 1967], 4, 9, EXP/4/3/1/5, RS.

¹⁷⁴ G.H. Whitefield to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 May 1965, 1-2, CO 1024/515, TNA.

¹⁷⁵ G.H. Whitefield to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 May 1965, 1-2, CO 1024/515, TNA.

¹⁷⁶ Administrator, Tristan da Cunha, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 June 1965, 1, CO 1024/515, TNA.

Meanwhile, popular and scientific fascination with the islands' birds mounted. The Inaccessible Island Rail enjoyed something of a cult of celebrity. Geoffrey Jenkins, the South African writer, made the "island cock" a character in his Flemingesque novel about the search for mythical Thompson Island that harbored valuable deposits of space-age minerals. In a ludicrous plot twist, the flightless bird scampers up a ladder during a helicopter rescue at sea. The feathered talisman, which one of the characters names "Suzie Wong," then refuses to leave the cockpit until killed at the hands of a villain.¹⁷⁷

More importantly, the research possibilities of the Tristan archipelago and its rare birds tantalized scientists.¹⁷⁸ The fascination with the island group's wildlife inspired another expedition. Having secured financial support from the Conservation Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, and other institutions, Martin Holdgate, Nigel Wace, and Clive Elliott, son of the former Tristan administrator and affiliate of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, embarked on a trip in 1968.¹⁷⁹

The archipelago continued to grab scientific attention for two reasons. First, geographic isolation led to endemism. This made the archipelago alluringly unique, especially when compared to the larger, less remote British Isles.¹⁸⁰ Second, although these islands had experienced varying degrees of change, extreme isolation had kept the archipelago an evolutionary "laboratory" shielded from the worst effects of development and pollution. The archipelago's relatively unspoiled condition, particularly on

¹⁷⁷ Geoffrey Jenkins, *A Grue of Ice* (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), 17, 20, 22, 77, 86, 92-93.

¹⁷⁸ Martin Holdgate to D.J.H. Griffin, 31 August 1967, 1, EXP/4/3/1/5, RS.

¹⁷⁹ Martin Holdgate and Nigel Wace, Research in the Tristan da Cunha Islands, 1968, 2-5, 14, FT 3/577, TNA.

¹⁸⁰ Tristan da Cunha Conservation Ordinance 1975: Explanatory Note, 8 May 1975, 1, FCO 44/1261, TNA.

Nightingale and Gough, represented something exceptional. “They are the last of the virgin islands,” Wace waxed romantically.¹⁸¹

Such sentiments expressed a longing for empty, unspoiled spaces rather than an objective reality. Humans had exploited these islands, including supposedly pristine Gough, for centuries.¹⁸² The island experienced anthropogenic change into the post-war period. In 1952, Hugh Elliott uncovered graffiti, most recently from visiting Soviet whalers.¹⁸³ The following year, crewmembers set ablaze penguin rookeries, which caused a conflagration that killed “an incalculable amount of wild life.”¹⁸⁴ In 1955, the Gough Island Expedition erected buildings, hunted invertebrates, and sowed crops. Upon departure in 1956, the expedition sold the mouse-infested facilities to the South African government.¹⁸⁵ The meteorologists subsequently posted there imported a small flock of chickens and herd of sheep.¹⁸⁶ These rapacious ruminants quickly stripped parts of the island of vegetation.¹⁸⁷ In the mid-1960s the South African government built “Gough House,” a ten-room weather station, as well as “an elaborate network of steelmesh pathways.”¹⁸⁸ By then, the island had acquired several invasive arthropod and gastropod species.¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, international organizations and the Colonial Office’s successor, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), singled out the unspoiled archipelago and

¹⁸¹ Nigel Wace, “Remote Islands that Interest the Scientist,” *Hemisphere* 14, no. 10 (1970), 27-29.

¹⁸² Christine Hänel, Steven L. Chown, and Kevin J. Gaston, *Gough Island: A Natural History* (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun Press, 2005).

¹⁸³ Hugh Elliott diary, 20 February 1952 entry, vol. 7, MSS.Atlas.7, BL.

¹⁸⁴ Extract on Progress of the Fishing Industry, Quarterly Report, 1953, 1, CO 1024/87, TNA.

¹⁸⁵ J.B. Heaney and M.W. Holdgate, “The Gough Island Scientific Survey,” *The Geographical Journal* 123, no. 1 (1957), 22-24, 26, 30.

¹⁸⁶ Holdgate, “Gough Island—A Possible Sanctuary,” 173-174.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Swales to Martin Holdgate, 13 January 1961, 1-2, MS 476/6/3/2 ER, Thomas H. Manning Polar Archive, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge (hereafter SPRI).

¹⁸⁸ “Year on Gough Island not ‘inconvenient,’ says team,” *The Star Johannesburg*, 6 June 1969, newspaper clipping, DOC MSS 002 0003 0023, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

¹⁸⁹ Martin Holdgate and Nigel Wace, Research in the Tristan da Cunha Islands, 1968, 9, FT 3/577, TNA.

especially Inaccessible Island for special treatment. Spearheaded by Hugh Elliott, who had risen through the ranks at the IUCN to obtain the position of Secretary of the Commission of Ecology, many clamored to designate Inaccessible Island a protected reserve.¹⁹⁰ Several factors made Inaccessible an ideal “National Park.” Disregarding centuries of sealing, whaling, and fowling, Inaccessible Island’s biota had allegedly avoided significant alteration. Equally important, compared to Nightingale or Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible held marginal economic value for the islanders.¹⁹¹

The proposal to transform Inaccessible Island into a National Park revealed in microcosm the core tensions of environmentalism. Martin Holdgate greeted “any measure that will effectively ensure the safeguarding of its flora and fauna.” He also thought similar measures should apply to the equally important islands of Nightingale and Gough.¹⁹² Yet Holdgate wanted to balance the material wants of people with the conservation needs of plants and animals. He sought “to protect Tristan’s unique wild life while preserving the islanders’ traditional rights too.” This proved hard to realize within the international framework. The stringency of international regulations safeguarded flora and fauna better than the laxer protections of national ordinances. But tighter regulations constrained the islanders, for international organizations prioritized plants and animals over people.¹⁹³

The idea of treating the archipelago as a pristine space in which islanders had restricted movement had plenty of detractors. Nigel Wace, noted one critic, saw “this Group of Islands as a happy hunting ground for fellow scientists, rather than a place in

¹⁹⁰ Hugh Elliott to Nigel Wace, 5 February 1968, 1, FT 3/603, TNA.

¹⁹¹ Brian Watkins to Martin S. Staveley, 25 May 1968, 1, FCO 42/286, TNA.

¹⁹² Martin Holdgate to K.H. Robbins, 7 August 1968, 1-2, FCO 42/286, TNA.

¹⁹³ Why Have a Tristan Conservation Ordinance?, consultation paper, n.d., 4, FCO 44/921, TNA.

which people live.” This left the botanist with a quixotic yearning to preserve “the islands as a museum piece.”¹⁹⁴

Disagreements delayed the implementation of legislation, which caused consternation. Holdgate proved anxious to capitalize on the “post-Stockholm climate of opinion.”¹⁹⁵ Convened in Sweden’s capital in 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment announced a turning point. The earth, agreed the delegates of 114 governments, represented more than material resources; it functioned as a life-giving space and the wellspring of human expression.¹⁹⁶ The conference thus declared that “[t]he natural resources of the earth...must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management.”¹⁹⁷

While comprehensive overhaul remained slow to develop, the community followed international trends by devoting increased attention to shielding the island’s biota. In 1973 the Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee, a body of elected council members, agreed to crack down on the Company’s penguin poaching through “spot checks” of traps, as well as issuing “severe” penalties for offenders. The councilors also backed several regulations for mollymawks on Nightingale: ban on egg harvesting; prohibition of hunting prior to mid-February; and stringent quotas.¹⁹⁸

The legislation came into effect at an opportune moment. By the early 1970s, Tristan da Cunha’s birds confronted a host of threats. Habitat loss, cats, and rats still

¹⁹⁴ Memo, Tristan Investments (Pty) Ltd., Wages—Island Fishermen, n.d. [c.a. September 1968], 2, FCO 42/287, TNA.

¹⁹⁵ Martin Holdgate to David C.B. Beaumont, 15 December 1972, 1, FCO 44/921, TNA.

¹⁹⁶ Caldwell, *International Environmental Policy*, 48, 65; See, too, McCormick, *The Global Environmental Movement*, ch. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, A/CONF.48/14/Rev. 1, 3-4.

¹⁹⁸ Minutes of Meeting of the Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee held in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 19 March 1973 at 1400 hrs., 1, FCO 44/920, TNA; J.I.H. Fleming to D.C.B. Beaumont, 23 July 1973, 1-2, FCO 44/921, TNA.

jeopardized the archipelago's birds. Pollution, too, had become a greater problem. Oil slicks from passing tankers had coated some of the island's penguins, while pesticides like DDT accumulated in eggshells and embryos.¹⁹⁹

Company actions especially menaced bird populations. The Company insisted that changes in the design of crawfish traps had rendered using penguins as bait obsolete, with penalties for those who persisted in the practice.²⁰⁰ Disregarding warnings and judicial proceedings against offenders, fishermen still killed penguins for bait. Over the decades, Company poaching had played a prime role in precipitating the collapse of some penguin rookeries.²⁰¹

Moreover, despite increased prosperity and growing ecological consciousness, the islanders harvested even greater numbers of birds. In 1974 the islanders killed 45,000 Great Shearwaters and gathered 40,000 Rockhopper Penguin eggs, which surpassed the 1951 total of 33,225 birds overall. M.E. Richardson, medical officer and avid birder, attributed this puzzling increase to a population explosion among islanders, the recent shift from fowling on depleted Inaccessible to more fecund Nightingale, lackadaisical tracking of species' numbers, and insufficient purchasing power.²⁰²

Richardson estimated the value for the isolated community of the meat, eggs, and oil from the thousands of birds killed in 1973 at nearly £10,000. Disaggregated and assigned a monetary value that equated to canteen-bought meat, eggs, and cooking oil, the prices of which absorbed high import costs, Richardson deduced that each family

¹⁹⁹ M.E. Richardson, "Aspects of the Ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha Group and Gough Island, 1972-1974," *Comorant* 12, no. 2 (1984), 123, 138-139, 150, 155, 173-174.

²⁰⁰ Minutes of Meeting in FCO, 31 July 1974, 5, FCO 44/1077, TNA.

²⁰¹ Richardson, "Aspects of the Ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha Group and Gough Island, 1972-1974," 138, 191.

²⁰² Richardson, "Aspects of the Ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha Group and Gough Island, 1972-1974," 124, 188, 193.

obtained £100 worth of protein from the yearly seabird harvest. Since the average family netted £400 annually, bird harvesting enabled island families to retain approximately one-third of their wages.²⁰³

In this economic climate, Holdgate and Wace completed the most detailed environmental report to date on the Tristan archipelago.²⁰⁴ Drawing on data from the 1968 expedition, they advanced a blueprint for conservation intended to achieve “a sustained and satisfactory standard of living for the Tristan Islanders.” Unlike previous ordinances, they espoused privileging the islanders’ economic prosperity over preserving “those features of the island group which make them unique in the world.”²⁰⁵

Holdgate and Wace drew a distinction between the “lowlands,” the area around the settlement, and the “uplands,” the region beyond. They advocated achieving prosperity “by concentrating intensive agriculture and forestry in the lowlands while maintaining a substantially undisturbed wild area over the uplands.” This meant restricting grazing and expanding agriculture in the lowlands through improved methods and crop strains. In the “wilderness” of the uplands, Holdgate and Wace advocated strict limits on taking animals. Although in favor of banning commercial harvesting, they thought small-scale controlled hunting acceptable. Tighter controls on the application of pesticides, as well as the imports of plants and animals, remained critical for both zones.²⁰⁶

While leaving Tristan da Cunha open to regulated exploitation, they lobbied for strict regulations for the rest of the archipelago. Since Nightingale continued to serve as a

²⁰³ Richardson, “Aspects of the Ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha Group and Gough Island, 1972-1974,” 193-196.

²⁰⁴ Martin Holdgate to David C.B. Beaumont, 15 December 1972, 1, FCO 44/921, TNA.

²⁰⁵ Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 93.

²⁰⁶ Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 93-95.

source of food and bird oil, as well as a socio-cultural purpose as a sort of “holiday” for islanders, Holdgate and Wace deemed occasional, regulated hunting trips permissible. In contrast, they believed that the administration should discourage the islanders from fowling on Inaccessible, which served a marginal economic role. Distant Gough Island should remain undisturbed. As on Tristan da Cunha, they pushed for tight controls on importing non-indigenous flora and fauna.²⁰⁷

Many islanders welcomed the proposal. In September 1975, the Island Council backed revising the conservation ordinance substantially along the lines that Holdgate and Wace had recommended.²⁰⁸ Despite the economic importance of birds, the islanders had become increasingly ecologically conscious. “The territory is fortunate in that local residents already appreciate the importance of their natural heritage,” enthused Stan Trees.²⁰⁹

In 1976, the recommendations of Holdgate, Wace, and others became enshrined in law with few alterations.²¹⁰ The Tristan da Cunha Conservation Ordinance (1976) regulated land-management practices in the archipelago, including erection of buildings, application of pesticides, disposal of chemicals, and introduction of non-indigenous species. It also regulated hunting and constrained the movement of people to certain areas and islands within the archipelago.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Wace and Holdgate, *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 63, 96-98.

²⁰⁸ S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Review, July 1975-July 1976, 2-3, FCO 44/1383, TNA.

²⁰⁹ S.G. Trees, Tristan Section, St. Helena Biennial Report, 23 February 1976, 5, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

²¹⁰ Holdgate, in particular, offered “most valuable” advice. See Mary E. Hunt to H.L.M. Oxley, 22 April 1975, 1, FCO 44/1261, TNA. See, too, Martin Holdgate to David C.B. Beaumont, 23 May 1973, 1-4, FCO 44/921, TNA; M.E. Hunt to Thomas Oates, 24 June 1975, 1-2, FCO 44/1261, TNA. On the contribution of others, such as M.E. Richardson, see M.E. Richardson to J.I.H. Fleming, 27 May 1974, 1-4, FCO 44/1078, TNA.

²¹¹ “New Conservation Ordinance for Tristan da Cunha,” appendix of *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, by Wace and Holdgate, 108-109.

In most instances, the ordinance mandated that fowlers obtain the permission of the administration. Outsiders, including Company staff, had to secure a formal permit to hunt. Conversely, the “oral permission” of the administrator sufficed to permit islanders to gather birds for themselves or other members of the community. Hunting birds on behalf of non-residents required a license.²¹²

In contrast to previous conservation measures, the level of protection granted varied between islands. Tristan da Cunha, the most disturbed ecosystem, had the laxest regulations, whereas Gough Island, the least altered, had the strictest. The other islands, which occupied an ecological middle ground between these two poles, received fairly robust protections.²¹³

The ordinance of 1976 drew a distinction between the socio-economic needs of islanders and the collecting whims of outsiders. Without a proper permit, neither islanders nor outsiders could hunt Schedule I species of fauna (Tristan Thrush, Tristan Gallinule, Wandering Albatross, fur seal, elephant seal, and Southern Right Whale) on or around Tristan da Cunha. (A later provision established permits, quotas, and other regulations on harvesting penguin eggs from Tristan da Cunha.) On the islands of Inaccessible, Nightingale, Middle, and Stoltenhoff, the ordinance prohibited outsiders from harvesting any fauna (or flora, in the case of Inaccessible) without the permission of the administrator. The same rules applied to the islanders, with the exception that they could remove flora from Inaccessible and harvest Schedule II species (Great Shearwater, Sooty Albatross, and Rockhopper Penguin) without the administration’s permission. The

²¹² “New Conservation Ordinance for Tristan da Cunha,” appendix of *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 111-112.

²¹³ “New Conservation Ordinance for Tristan da Cunha,” appendix of *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 109-110.

Ordinance affirmed Gough Island's privileged status as "a wildlife reserve," thereby banning the taking of any plants and animals without authorization.²¹⁴

The Ordinance invested the administration with regulatory powers that had eluded Elliott in the early 1950s. The administrator reserved the right to curtail hunting by augmenting the classifications of protected species and designating "any area of the main island of Tristan da Cunha to be a sanctuary." In addition, disobeying the Ordinance resulted in the seizure of specimens and stiff financial penalties. More importantly, the Ordinance made provisions for "conservation officers." Constables assumed the duties of conservation officer, while others could receive appointment as such from the administrator. This granted conservation officers the ability to search, arrest, and detain poachers.²¹⁵

While an improvement, the ordinance did little to mitigate the hazards that the fishing industry presented. Poachers, such as the Taiwanese long-trawler intercepted in 1978, practiced drift netting.²¹⁶ This method of fishing, which deploys floating mesh, entangled seals and penguins.²¹⁷ Fishing offal and lights also maimed and killed thousands of seabirds. Mesmerized by food scraps and the glow of lights, birds collided with the hull or landed on deck, where their wings often became coated with oily water.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ "New Conservation Ordinance for Tristan da Cunha," appendix of *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 109-110, 114. On the penguin egg proviso, see Government Gazette, Government of Tristan da Cunha, August 1976, 1, FCO 44/1385, TNA.

²¹⁵ "New Conservation Ordinance for Tristan da Cunha," appendix of *Man and Nature in the Tristan Islands*, 112-114.

²¹⁶ S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha, Report No. 7, February 1977 to April 1978, 5, FCO 44/1767, TNA; S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha Annual Review, 1 July 1977 to 30 June 1978, July 1978, 4, FCO 44/1766, TNA.

²¹⁷ Peter G. Ryan and John Cooper, "Rockhopper Penguins and Other Marine Life Threatened by Driftnet Fisheries at Tristan da Cunha," *Oryx* 25, no. 2 (1991), 76-79.

²¹⁸ P.G. Ryan, "The Impact of the Commercial Lobster Fishery on Seabirds at the Tristan da Cunha Islands, South Atlantic Ocean," *Biological Conservation* 57, no. 3 (1991), 343-347.

Litter deposited from the fishery or carried on oceanic currents from abroad became an issue, too. John Woolley, who led the Denstone Expedition to Inaccessible Island in 1982, expressed dismay that a space “supposed to be the most isolated on earth” had managed to accumulate heaps of trash.²¹⁹ A survey later in the decade found hundreds of objects from the fishery, including discarded traps and netting, and even more trash from as far afield as Australia. More than an eyesore, trash imperiled the archipelago’s fauna.²²⁰

Nor could the ordinance redress the economic costs of insularity. While always present, in the late 1970s the effects of insularity became particularly acute because of recurrent energy crises and embargoes against South Africa. From 1978 to 1979, when the Iranian Revolution ousted Reza Shah, the cost of oil rose more than twofold.²²¹ In South Africa, where anti-apartheid sanctions crippled the energy sector, oil could fetch 50 percent more.²²²

Reliance on South African imports, particularly fuel, left the islanders vulnerable. As oil and thus shipping costs rose over the 1970s, so too did the imported goods sold at the canteen.²²³ The cost of fuel, which soared 237 percent between January and July 1979, pinched the community. In 1979, the average island family expended two-thirds of

²¹⁹ John Woolley, *Deliver Me from Safety* (York: Wilton, 1994), 67.

²²⁰ P.G. Ryan and B.P. Watkins, “Accumulation of Stranded Plastic Objects and Other Artefacts at Inaccessible Island, central South Atlantic Ocean,” *South African Journal of Antarctic Research* 18, no. 1 (1988), 11-13.

²²¹ David S. Painter, “Oil and Geopolitics: The Oil Crises of the 1970s and the Cold War,” *Historical Social Research* 39, no. 4 (2014), 198.

²²² Neta C. Crawford, “Oil Sanctions against Apartheid,” in *How Sanctions Work: Lessons from South Africa*, eds. Neta C. Crawford and Audie Klotz (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1999), 111.

²²³ Nigel Wace to Peter Munch, 4 June 1976, 1-2, DOC MSS 002 0004 0156, Peter A. Munch papers, SLU.

household income on gasoline, kerosene, and electricity produced from diesel-powered generators.²²⁴

Despite the growing appreciation for the archipelago's natural wonders, the high cost of living prompted many islanders, particularly poorer segments of the community, to turn to birds for sustenance.²²⁵ As a result, fowling commonly exceeded quotas. The members of the Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee admitted that "many people did not keep the proscribed limits, and more stringent enforcement of the law was necessary for offenders."²²⁶

It led to the formulation of more legislation aimed at regulating the movement of islanders rather than improving the economic conditions that encouraged poaching. In 1979, when the agricultural officer advised the administration to make "Jews Point," a tract of beachside land, into "a bird sanctuary," the Island Council "unanimously approved." It designated a swath of territory a nature preserve in which no one could "kill, capture, take eggs or in anyway molest any birds or mammal there unless they had special permission."²²⁷

But neither the 1976 nor 1979 legislation reversed declining bird numbers. "Bird life around the settlement is very limited, a few Antarctic Terns, Mollymauks, Rock Hopper Penguin, King Birds," reported Reverend Patrick Helyer.²²⁸ Save an increase in the population of Rockhopper Penguins on Inaccessible, an assessment of the

²²⁴ Eddie C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha Report No. 12, 2 May-16 July 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA; Tristan da Cunha Position Paper, November 1981, 4-5, FCO 44/2304, TNA.

²²⁵ S.G. Trees, Tristan da Cunha, Report No. 8, May to August 1978, 3, FCO 44/1767, TNA.

²²⁶ Minutes of Meeting of Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee held on 18 September 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²²⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of the Island Council held in the Council Chamber, 6 December 1979, 1, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²²⁸ Patrick J. Helyer, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic, 1981, 10, MS 1446, SPRI.

archipelago's bird stocks in the late 1980s found that "no substantive improvement in the estimates of breeding populations" had occurred since 1974.²²⁹

In contrast, decades of conservation, including international moratoriums on commercial sealing and whaling, had yielded gains for the archipelago's mammals.²³⁰ "Elephant seals, which were once thought to be in danger of extinction, are being seen in greater numbers and are also, for the first time in years, visiting the beaches near the settlement," enthused administrator Eddie Brooks. "It is also pleasant to see schools of whales sporting in deep water just off the settlement," he continued.²³¹

The divergence in bird and mammal populations has an economic explanation. Environmentalism enjoyed currency among the islanders, especially younger members of the community who became aware of the archipelago's natural heritage at school and through penguin-tagging initiatives.²³² However, applying this ecological consciousness to cetaceans and pinnipeds proved far easier. Seal and whale numbers rebounded because they held minimal financial significance to islanders. Birds, on the other hand, never stopped providing illumination, curios, specimens, and above all sustenance. Given the community's insularity, they could ill afford to do otherwise.

V

Insularity, which led to adaptation, endemism, and small population numbers, rendered Tristan da Cunha's unique flora and fauna susceptible. The isolated archipelago had experienced many changes over millennia, though the arrival of humans and invasive

²²⁹ Peter Ryan et al., "New Information on Seabirds at Inaccessible Island and Other Islands in the Tristan da Cunha Group," *Marine Ornithology* 18, nos. 1-2 (1990), 53; Richardson, "Aspects of the Ornithology of the Tristan da Cunha Group and Gough Island, 1972-1974," 123-196.

²³⁰ See Dauvergne, *The Shadows of Consumption*, ch. 19; Kurkpatrick Dorsey, *Whales and Nations: Environmental Diplomacy on the High Seas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

²³¹ E.C. Brooks, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Review, 31 December 1979, 3, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

²³² E.C Brooks, Tristan da Cunha, Annual Review, 31 December 1979, 3, FCO 44/2043, TNA.

species accelerated the transformation. During the age of whaling, sealing, and sail, the archipelago's natural resources functioned as economic commodities which few, including the islanders, considered conserving.

While discernable for decades, reversing environmental damage only became a priority in the interwar period, when missionaries punitively enforced quotas and metropolitan elites attempted to prohibit hunting of the Inaccessible Island Rail. As a result of these ineffective efforts, which failed by offering no replacement for the loss in food or cash, the military government imprudently banned most fowling during the Second World War. Post-war technocrats attempted to reconcile economic imperatives and conservation needs. Since islanders derived currency and calories from birds, they reasoned that conservation initiatives not only had to permit but regulate hunting. At the same time, the administration needed to address economic considerations. In addition to enshrining in law the principles of sustainable-yield harvesting, Hugh Elliott and successive technocrats pursued agricultural improvement and economic development. The crayfish industry would provide the cash and foodstuffs necessary to wean islanders from bird meat and eggs.

The initiatives of the 1950s fell short of expectations. Legislation gave the administration greater control over the islanders, though it failed to reverse falling bird numbers. High import costs meant that fishing industry wages diminished but did not render superfluous bird meat and oil. Furthermore, the fishery imperiled avifauna. In addition to fishermen poaching for bait and zoological specimens, the lights, pollution, and flotsam of Company vessels endangered countless birds.

Despite decades of use and modification, in the 1960s and 1970s, when environmentalism became a global priority, scientists reimagined the archipelago, particularly the uninhabited islands, as empty and practically unaltered spaces. The archipelago's insularity, which had few parallels in the post-war period, had protected the islands from the degradation that had touched the rest of the world. In the minds of many, the archipelago became an ecological utopia that demanded study and tending. This resulted in a string of conservation ordinances from the mid-1970s onward.

Although this legislation displayed a greater awareness for the economic significance of birds, conservation in the archipelago continued to lean toward controlling the islanders rather than redressing the economic difficulties that arose from exceptional insularity. As the administrative bureaucracy expanded, so too did the capacity to dictate how the community exploited birds. These measures slowed the decline of avifauna on Tristan da Cunha, though could not establish the necessary equilibrium between humans and birds.

The island's isolation and dependence on South Africa meant a high cost of living. With fuel commanding a disproportionately large chunk of household income, birds remained a supplemental lighting and especially food source. The islanders wanted to protect their natural heritage, though insularity often made this impossible. As ever, isolation had tremendous opportunities and pitfalls.

Conclusion

In Hervé Bazin's fictionalized account of the evacuation and resettlement, Hugh Folkes, a journalist who covered the islanders' British sojourn, visits post-eruption Tristan da Cunha. Through existential discussions with expatriates and islanders, he grapples with the purpose of an insular, resource-dependent community in the middle of nowhere:

Perched here on its eight square miles of volcano edge, so small it could be taken in almost with a single glance, so difficult to get to know that chaplain after chaplain in the past had left after three years shrugging his shoulders in dismissal, what was it exactly, this Lilliput? A hope for the future? A Joke? A small scale model of human society? Or merely a product of chance, an apprenticeship in the impossible, doomed sooner or later to extinction, like that of the Vikings of Vinland, like that of the unknown race buried beneath the mysterious walls of Zimbabwe?

Ultimately, Folkes concludes that Tristan da Cunha offers "a moral and philosophical tale" about the modern age. The islanders fled civilization, though could only return and prosper because of modern communications and amenities. Humans forsake technology, but remain dependent on it.¹

This dissertation has proposed an alternative answer to Folkes' question. It has focused on the value that accrued to Tristan da Cunha because of exceptional and aberrant insularity. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Tristan da Cunha formed an important node in global maritime networks. However, the demise of whaling, opening of the Suez Canal, and rise of refrigerated shipping severely curtailed Tristan da Cunha's links. As technology increased connectivity, the island gradually drifted apart. By the early twentieth century, few visited Tristan da Cunha. Even after the Second World War, when Tristan da Cunha became more accessible and tightly integrated into the imperial system, the island remained comparatively insular.

¹ Hervé Bazin, *Tristan: A Novel*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 284-315, quote at 307.

In a closely connected Atlantic basin and increasingly globalized world, hard-to-reach places assumed heightened importance. Resting beyond or tenuously within the grasp of the state and novel communications and travel technologies not only frustrated many within Whitehall, but also endowed Tristan da Cunha with a romantic aura and fueled utopian longings. The island became cast as a site of stasis or recovery, a place immune to progress and therefore a portal to accessing the past.

Insularity had other advantages, too. Tristan da Cunha's diminutive size and bounded borders encouraged microcosmic thinking, social engineering, and experimentation. Administrators, missionaries, doctors, and scientists became stricken with a false sense of omnipotence. Confronted with such a small community and discrete territory, these actors tried to impose total control over the island's society, souls, bodies, and natural resources. They hoped to amass a breadth of knowledge and achieve a degree of control impracticable or impossible in less insular settings.

This lust for control often had negative outcomes. Without firmer supervision, outsiders could and sometimes did engage in unacceptable behavior with impunity. As the cases of interwar missionaries and post-war doctors indicate, grandiose visions sometimes led to cruelty and ethical lapses. Fears of island despotism came to fruition on Tristan da Cunha.

Privileged elites sought to transform Tristan da Cunha into a remote playground for their benefit. Administrators dreamed of wielding tremendous authority and indulging in displays of pageantry; collectors and tourists coveted sought-after souvenirs and unusual experiences; missionaries wanted to bend souls to their will; doctors aspired to obtain path-breaking results through never-ending experiments; and naturalists wanted to

shield the island from development or exploitation. Yet, these visitors amounted to mere interlopers. Authority always rested with the islanders, who remained the true masters of Tristan da Cunha.

Tristan da Cunha and other similarly positioned territories have skirted decolonization and today are locked in a quasi-imperial relationship with Britain and other countries. At first glance, the persistence into the present of dozens of territorial dependencies with varying degrees of autonomy subsumed into far-away nation-states seems anachronistic and perhaps irrational. As Robert Aldrich and John Connell have observed, “there is something seemingly paradoxical about the continued presence of colonies in a supposedly post-colonial world.”² The existence of seventeen “Non-Self-Governing Territories” (nearly all of them islands) under the sovereignty of France, New Zealand, the United States, and Britain, which includes Tristan da Cunha as a dependency of Saint Helena, appears even odder. After all, the United Nations has dogmatically championed self-determination and political devolution for such territories, regardless of the wishes of the inhabitants, since the formation of the Special Committee on Decolonization in 1961.³

Indeed, as Baldacchino and others have argued, the postcolonial ordering of the world into independent and dependent territories, with the former as the optimal and inevitable outcome, fails to account for extraterritorial spaces like Tristan da Cunha, which has no interest in altering its constitutional association with Britain. On the contrary, the island’s ongoing relationship with the Crown has powerful emotional

² Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *The Last Colonies* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

³ Oliver Turner, “‘Finishing the Job’: The UN Special Committee on Decolonization and the Politics of Self-Governance,” *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 7 (2013), 1193-1208.

resonance and practical benefits, including generous subsidies and the all-important right to residency in Britain. Full sovereignty for Tristan da Cunha and Britain's other dependencies appears highly unlikely.⁴

However, the arrangement between these administrative powers and their dependent territories is mutually beneficial. In exchange for security and development funds, New Zealand, France, the United States, and Britain receive access to spaces that serve a variety of functions: "detention camps, quarantine sites, offshore finance centers, low-no-tax havens, enterprise processing zones, geostrategic military bases, remote weapons testing ranges, toxic waste dump sites, duty-free zones, heritage and conservation parks, spaces without right of abode, and various 'mix and match' combinations of the above." Non-Self-Governing Territories continue to exist through the consent of the majority of the governed and because administering powers need such extraterritorial spaces, particularly in an ostensibly postcolonial age.⁵ With the dissolution of formal empires, states now hyper-exploit the world's few lingering territories to bear this designation.⁶

Thus, these extraterritorial spaces are not merely hangers-on from the empire-building project, but rather deliberately constructed and fiercely guarded places resting advantageously on the margins. In Cuba, the United States annexed and then consciously

⁴ Godfrey Baldacchino, "'Upside Down Decolonization' in Subnational Island Jurisdictions: Questioning the 'Post' in Postcolonialism," *Space and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2010), 188-202. On the idea of continued dependency see, too, Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Stephen A. Royle, "Postcolonial Culture on Dependent Islands," *Space and Culture* 13, no. 2 (2010), 203-215; Michael J. Parsons, "Remnants of Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, eds. Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 678-696.

⁵ Baldacchino, "'Upside Down Decolonization,'" 190-191.

⁶ Ruth Oldenziel, "Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire," in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011), esp. 21-41.

developed Guantánamo into a naval base and detention site beyond American legal regimes.⁷ On Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, meanwhile, the United States and Britain collaborated to depopulate and transform the island into a top-secret military installation and notorious “black site,” where human rights abuses have possibly taken place.⁸ And launching rockets from French Guiana, which has functioned as a national and European spaceport since 1968, entailed taming a chunk of equatorial coastal scrub roughly the size of Martinique and importing scores of workers.⁹

As in the past, Tristan da Cunha’s twenty-first-century relevancy comes from its insularity. The island certainly has continued to evolve with the times. The community enjoys all the amenities of the modern world, including dozens of cars (for a mere three miles of asphalt), clothes from retailers like Argos and Boden, and a store that stocks Neutrogena, Heinz, and other brand names. And stepping into an island home, journalist Ben Fogle spotted “two deep-freezers, a huge fridge, a microwave, an oven, toaster, bread maker, and Moulinex blender, a deep-fat fryer, two televisions, a video and a stereo with more lights than Blackpool beach.” But Tristan da Cunha still lacks an airport and the prohibitive cost of phone and Internet (\$15 per minute in the early 2000s) means that islanders continue to rely on ships making the five-day journey from Cape Town. “World

⁷ Simon Reid-Henry, “Exceptional Sovereignty? Guantánamo Bay and the Re-Colonial Present,” *Antipode* 39, no. 4 (2007), 627-648; Stephen Schwab, *Guantánamo, USA: The Untold History of America’s Cuban Outpost* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009); David Rose, *Guantánamo: The War on Human Rights* (New York and London: The New Press, 2004).

⁸ David Vine, *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Peter Harris, “America’s Other Guantánamo: British Foreign Policy and the US Base on Diego Garcia,” *The Political Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2015), 507-514.

⁹ On the construction and use of the launch site, see Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 128-148.

communications may have improved since then,” writes Fogle, “but Tristan da Cunha remains as remote as it was in 1955.”¹⁰

Residing on or visiting Tristan da Cunha certainly means suffering a communications lag. The community can avail itself of Skype, though the connection speed would cause significant disruption. “Currently the internet here is 512kbs for the whole island,” explained medical officer Gerard Bulger. “So if I had a crisis everyone else would have to shut down their computers.”¹¹ Another bemoaned: “the only way to tweet or update your Facebook status is by mustering the patience to deal with the 90s-style-dial-up connection available.”¹² And the ubiquitous cell phone serves no purpose on “unplugged” Tristan da Cunha, where radios enjoy unrivalled supremacy. Without a cellular connection, they basically function as cameras.¹³

The island’s unconquerable insularity presents the same challenges and opportunities. Administrators still wield considerable latitude in this “Lego village,” for the supervising governor of Saint Helena only visits once each year for a three-day stretch. Governing a tiny, largely unsupervised dependency in the postcolonial age has certain perquisites. Bill Dickson, who served as administrator from 2001 to 2004, drove a “shiny new Land-Rover” and hosted gatherings on the manicured lawn of “the Residency.” Under the shadow of the Union Jack, islanders, expatriates, and visitors, including Saint Helena’s governor David Hollamby, mingled and quaffed champagne and

¹⁰ Ben Fogle, *The Teatime Islands: Journeys to Britain’s Faraway Outposts* (London: Michael Joseph, 2003), 7, 30, 34-35, 39-41, 46-47.

¹¹ Jilly Beattie, “Fancy Working on the World’s Most Remote Inhabited Island? Tristan da Cunha Needs an Alcohol Counsellor,” *The Mirror*, 30 April 2015, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/fancy-working-worlds-most-remote-5608289>.

¹² Lucy Corne, “Tristan da Cunha: A Journey to the Centre of the Ocean,” *Lonely Planet*, 6 August 2013, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/tristan-da-cunha-a-journey-to-the-centre-of-the-ocean>.

¹³ Andrew Evans, “Tristan da Cunha by iPhone,” *National Geographic*, 3 April 2011, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/digital-nomad/2011/04/03/tristan-da-cunha-by-iphone/>.

Pimm's liqueur. In addition to reveling, mandarins try to dictate how the community lives. During an annual visit, Governor Hollamby "warned the Tristanians about the hazards of dependency, economic and otherwise." The islanders, though, remain defiant. In reply to Hollamby, James Glass, incumbent Chief Islander, lambasted the "governor and the administrator for failing to communicate with one another, and for their lack of planning and foresight."¹⁴

Insularity still grips imaginations, too. As in the past, "urban idealists in search of the castaway experience" fixate on Tristan da Cunha. Some seek to realize their fantasies. Tristan da Cunha "receives several sackloads of letters each delivery from people wanting to move to the island."¹⁵

For those who do not wish to relocate, tourism is an option. As in the past, the island actively markets its isolation. A 2007 travel guide, for example, featured an advertisement for Tristan da Cunha tourism with a drawing of the mist-shrouded peak and the enticing slogan: "*Discover an extra-ordinary world far from the madding crowd.*"¹⁶ Moreover, a picture-worthy sign bearing the words "WELCOME TO THE REMOTEST ISLAND" greets visitors.¹⁷

These plays work. Besides the birds, which draw professional and dedicated amateur ornithologists, isolation forms the prime attraction. "For some," writes a guidebook, "the whole point of visiting Tristan is simply because it is so remote."¹⁸ Tristan da Cunha's allure, opines Joan Tapper, "rests on the fact that it's so unknown—

¹⁴ Fogle, *The Teatime Islands*, 16, 24, 35-36, 41-43.

¹⁵ Fogle, *The Teatime Islands*, 37.

¹⁶ Advertisement featured in Sue Steiner and Robin Liston, *St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2nd ed. (Chalfont St Peter: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd., 2007), 157.

¹⁷ Fogle, *The Teatime Islands*, 27.

¹⁸ Susan Britt-Gallagher and Tricia Hayne, *St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 3rd ed. (Chalfont St Peter: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd., 2015), 167.

and so distant.”¹⁹ “In the end, of course, Tristan’s main attraction is its solitude,” echoes Lucy Corne.²⁰ “Why travel to Tristan?” asks Andy Isaacson. “Simple: to escape to a place that has eluded even like-minded escapists.”²¹

Inaccessibility and cost curtail the number of visitors to a privileged few. Hitching a ride aboard a fishing vessel, which made ten trips to the island in 2019, is the most economical way to visit. A round-trip ticket from Cape Town to Tristan da Cunha for an adult on S.A. *Agulhas* costs R 8,950, or roughly \$603. Since each ship can accommodate no more than a dozen passengers, visitors must plan well in advance.²² Cruise ships present another means of reaching Tristan da Cunha. In 2020, three cruise ships will visit Tristan da Cunha on voyages in the southern Atlantic.²³ However, these cruises cost exorbitant sums. The cheapest available cabin on the twenty-two-day-long cruise of *Le Lyrial*, which will call at Tristan da Cunha en route from Ushuaia, Argentina to Cape Town, costs £7,878 (approximately \$10,105).²⁴ And, for those fortunate enough, the island can accommodate visiting yachts, which call occasionally.²⁵

Once ashore, there are limited attractions. With the mandatory assistance of island guides, visitors can hike the beautiful scenery, such as the peak that erupted in 1961. Other outdoor activities include fishing, swimming, a round on the nine-hole golf course, and visits to Nightingale and Inaccessible. For the more sedentary or less fleet footed,

¹⁹ Joan Tapper, “Reel Islands,” *Islands* 20, no. 2 (2000), 12.

²⁰ Corne, “Tristan da Cunha.”

²¹ Andy Isaacson, “Tristan da Cunha: Island at the End of the World,” *National Geographic Traveler* 31, no. 5 (2014), 68.

²² “Tristan da Cunha Shipping Schedules,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 24 August 2019, <https://www.tristandc.com/shipping.php>.

²³ “Tristan da Cunha Cruise Ships,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 11 June 2019, <https://www.tristandc.com/cruises.php>.

²⁴ “From Antarctica to Africa-with National Geographic,” Compagnie du Ponant, accessed 13 November 2019, <https://en.ponant.com/cruises/antarctica-from-antarctica-to-africa-with-national-geographic-y250220-2>.

²⁵ “Tristan da Cunha Information for Visiting Ships and Yachts,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 6 March 2019, <https://www.tristandc.com/visitsships.php>.

there is Albatross Bar, Café da Cunha, and a museum and replica of a thatched house that can accommodate visitors for £100 per night. As a memento of the trip, visitors can dispatch a letter bearing coveted Tristan da Cunha postmarks from the post office or purchase souvenirs at the “Island Store.”²⁶

For those unable or unwilling to make the arduous journey, there are means of partaking in Tristan da Cunha’s insularity from afar. The island provides fodder for creative types. In 2000, British playwright Zinnie Harris, the granddaughter of Reverend Dennis Wilkinson, premiered *Further than the Furthest Thing*. Drawing on her family’s Tristan lore, the play dramatizes the eruption and serves as homage to the community’s isolation.²⁷ Likewise, American filmmaker, artist, and poet Rob Nilsson self-published an anthology entitled *From a Refugee of Tristan da Cunha* (2007). Reminiscent of Roy Campbell, the eponymous and introductory poem uses Tristan da Cunha as a device to grapple with familiar insular themes of alienation and loss.²⁸ And in the short story “Deep-Holes” (2008), Canadian novelist Alice Munro includes Tristan da Cunha in the daydreaming of an islophile, who remembers the evacuation as the arrival of “human creatures from another century.”²⁹

Beyond the arts, enthusiasts and islanders living in Britain established the Tristan da Cunha Association in 1987. Through an annual meeting and biannual newsletter, the organization unites a disparate group of “not only people who had served on the island in war and peace time but doctors, clergy, teachers, scientists, ex-administrators as well as

²⁶ Britt-Gallagher and Hayne, *St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha*, 170-180.

²⁷ Zinnie Harris, *Further than the Furthest Thing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000).

²⁸ Rob Nilsson, *From a Refugee of Tristan da Cunha* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007), 1-2.

²⁹ Alice Munro, “Deep-Holes,” in *Too Much Happiness: Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 2009), 100.

philatelists and others who had never visited the Islands but had some special interests in the area.”³⁰

Collectors still covet souvenirs from the distant island. Although tossel mats are no longer available, those interested can order a “bespoke model longboat” that range in cost from £41 to £81, or made-to-order sweaters priced from £88.50 to £120. There are also less traditional souvenirs, such as magnets, aprons, and tea towels emblazoned with “the world’s most remote inhabited island.”³¹

More than anything, though, collectors prize stamps from hard-to-reach Tristan da Cunha. Avid philatelists can order the latest issues online, indicating preferences for mint or cancelled stamps.³² But collectors most crave older issues and especially envelopes bearing cachets from the era before the introduction of postage stamps, which fetch hefty sums. As of 2017, certain rare variants of Tristan cachets commanded upwards of £6,500.³³

The island’s insularity, which supposedly acts as a buffer to sin, also holds the same spiritual appeal. In 2012, Reverend Andrew Neaum, son of the island’s one-time minister, visited Tristan da Cunha. He had fond memories. “The Tristan da Cunha of my boyhood, before the 1961 volcanic eruption, my Garden of Eden, was prelapsarian,” he rhapsodized. However, “[t]he islanders, exiled from Eden, were driven out like Adam and Eve, into the real world of weeds, materialism, and struggle in England.” Tempted by new technologies, the descent continued into the present. Having caught a bawdy episode

³⁰ Allan B. Crawford, *Memoirs: North, South, East and West* (Easton: George Mann Publications, 2006), 85-86.

³¹ For a list of goods available, see “Tristan da Cunha Gift Shop,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 18 March 2019, <https://www.tristandc.com/giftshop.php>.

³² “Tristan da Cunha Post Office,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 19 April 2018, <https://www.tristandc.com/postoffice.php>.

³³ *Stanley Gibbons Commonwealth Stamp Catalogue: St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha*, 6th ed. (Hants, UK: Stanley Gibbons Ltd., 2017), 66.

of *Britain Unzipped*, Neaum lamented “the huge gap between hedonistic young folk and the likes of me and Church folk generally.”³⁴

Communing with God seems easier in the vastness of the Atlantic. “There is something about being in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, reliant on a community of people with whom you live,” reiterates Lorna Lavarello-Smith, an islander then working toward ordination in Britain. “You hear the sound of God’s voice much more clearly,” she continues.³⁵

Medical professionals, too, have continued to take interest in Tristan da Cunha’s insularity. The population retains its relative homogeneity, which presents the same fears (i.e., “the need for ‘new blood’”) and opportunities.³⁶ In 2011, for instance, a team of researchers reexamined data from Mantle and Tyrrell (1973) and tested models to better understand the transmission of influenza.³⁷

The islanders’ narrow gene pool forms a favorite focus of contemporary researchers.³⁸ At times, this fascination has posed anew many of the same ethical questions that dogged the MRC in the 1960s and 1970s. The high incidence of asthma, coupled “with the extensive inbreeding” and visions of the “controlled” island laboratory,

³⁴ Andrew Neaum, “Return to Tristan da Cunha, 15 September 2012 and 19 September 2012 entries, *Andrew Neaum* (blog), http://www.andrewneaum.com/articles/72-Return_to_Trستان_da_Cunha.htm.

³⁵ Matthew Bell, “World’s Most Remote Parish Seeks Vicar,” *The Independent*, 7 April 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/worlds-most-remote-parish-seeks-vicar-8563134.html>. Lavarello-Smith has since been ordained. See “Lorna Lavarello Smith’s Ordination,” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 19 June 2016, <https://www.tristandc.com/newschurchlornaordination.php>.

³⁶ P.A. Levack and I.D. Levack, “Medical practice on Tristan da Cunha—the remotest island community in the world,” *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 43, no. 4 (2013), 291.

³⁷ Anton Camacho et al., “Explaining Rapid Reinfections in Multiple-Wave Influenza Outbreaks: Tristan da Cunha 1971 Epidemic as a Case Study,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 278, no. 1725 (2011), 3635-3643.

³⁸ For some recent studies, see, for instance, Himla Soodyall et al., “Genealogy and Genes: Tracing the Founding Fathers of Tristan da Cunha,” *European Journal of Human Genetics* 11, no. 9 (2003), 705-709; David L. Duffy et al., “Variation at *DENND1B* and Asthma on the Island of Tristan da Cunha,” *Twin Research and Human Genetics* 22, no. 5 (2019), 1-6.

wooded respirologists like the Brazilian-born, Toronto-based Noe Zamel to Tristan da Cunha in the late 1990s.³⁹ At the conclusion of the study, Sequana Therapeutics, a California biotech company, expressed interest in the islanders' genes. Zamel and his collaborators "made the deal to get Sequana to use its computer power to look for the distinctive patterns in the Tristanians' DNA." With a hefty \$70-million infusion from Boehringer Ingelheim, a German company, "the hunt" began. Eventually, Axys Pharmaceuticals, as Sequana became rebranded under new ownership, "isolated a couple of genes after studying the Tristanians' DNA and filed patents for both of them." The patenting of genetic material, particularly since the islanders received a paltry \$50 each in compensation, caused an outcry and led to accusations that Zamel had acted as "a genetic pirate."⁴⁰

Lastly, insularity still excites biologists, who see opportunities for conservation and research. "Five of the six main islands in the group are uninhabited (except for a permanently-manned weather station on Gough Island) and, because of their isolation, contain some of the best-preserved marine and land ecosystems in the cool temperate zone," enthused one-time administrator Mike Hentley.⁴¹ For this reason, in 2017 National Geographic, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and island government

³⁹ Noe Zamel et al., "Asthma on Tristan da Cunha: Looking for the Genetic Link," *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 153, no. 6 (1996), 1902-1906.

⁴⁰ Sarah Scott, "'Loneliest Island' May Hold Key to Asthma," *National Post*, 18 January 2003. See, too, Harriet A. Washington, *Deadly Monopolies: The Shocking Corporate Takeover of Life Itself—and the Consequences for Your Health and Our Medical Future* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 290.

⁴¹ Mike Hentley, foreword to "Tristan Biodiversity Action Plan (2006-2010)," January 2006, 3, available at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/tristan-da-cunha-programme/tristan-biodiversity-action-plan-2-2006---2010.pdf>.

surveyed the marine environment and pronounced the cluster “one of the few places in the world to establish a baseline for unimpacted [*sic*] temperate systems.”⁴²

Yet, the special avifauna rather than marine life attracts the bulk of scientists to the islands. “The bird life is of global significance,” concludes Erica Sommer, Richard Cuthbert, and Geoff Hilton of the RSPB. In addition to “a diverse array of seabirds,” the archipelago boasts “unique, endemic landbird [*sic*] species to evolve in isolation.”⁴³ The presence of several unusual species earns Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island the distinction of “Endemic Bird Areas.”⁴⁴

For scientists, the rare Inaccessible Island Rail remains “the most sought-after of the island’s birds.”⁴⁵ Since Rogers’ discovery, scientists have wondered about the origins of the mysterious bird found nowhere else. Recently, however, ornithologists sequenced and compared the bird’s genome to other species of rails. It revealed that the bird’s ancestors reached Inaccessible Island from South America some 1.5 million years ago before losing the ability to fly.⁴⁶

Of course, a small, remote population of flightless birds faces a number of dangers. “Should a mammalian predator population reach the island,” notes Sarah Laskow, “it could make quick work of the scurrying birds.” But the same isolation that deprived the rail of flight also offers protection. “People are careful to avoid introducing

⁴² Jennifer Caselle et al., “Ecosystem Assessment of the Tristan da Cunha Islands,” Expedition Report, National Geographic Pristine Seas, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, and Tristan da Cunha Government (July 2017), 4, 8.

⁴³ Erica Sommer, Richard Cuthbert, and Geoff Hilton, “Tristan and Nightingale Islands Wildlife Monitoring Manual: Research Report,” RSPB Research Report No. 33, 5.

⁴⁴ Peter Ryan, “Important Bird Areas: Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island,” *British Birds* 101, no. 11 (2008), 587.

⁴⁵ Ryan, “Important Bird Areas,” 597.

⁴⁶ Martin Stervander et al., “The Origin of the World’s Smallest Flightless Bird, the Inaccessible Island Rail *Atlantisia rogersi* (Aves: Rallidae),” *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 130 (2019), 92-98.

any potential predators onto Inaccessible Island,” Laskow continues, “and the risk is relatively low, given how hard it is to get there.”⁴⁷

But even remote archipelagos cannot avoid anthropogenic change. In 2011, MV *Oliva* grounded at Nightingale Island, unleashing tons of oil into the sea. It coated some 20,000 endangered penguins and led to fears of stowaway rats reaching the secluded shores. Isolation prevented a swift and effective response. “The extreme remoteness of the island chain poses a serious challenge for responders as there is no airport and oiled birds cannot be removed because of concern about transmission of diseases to which the birds have no resistance,” noted one source.⁴⁸

In an episode that certainly would have left earlier generations of islanders nonplussed, the community mobilized to save the Rockhoppers. Once transported to Tristan da Cunha, islanders washed and fed thousands of birds.⁴⁹ Despite these dedicated efforts, the mortality rate of the penguins brought to Tristan da Cunha approximated 90 percent. Nevertheless, evidence suggests “no major reduction in breeding numbers in comparison to previous counts from before the spill.”⁵⁰ Nightingale’s penguins evidently received a reprieve.

The episode of MV *Oliva* underscores that the archipelago’s insularity continues to present opportunities and challenges. Since the community’s founding, Tristan da Cunha has experienced tremendous changes. Yet, while innovations in communications

⁴⁷ Sarah Laskow, “How Did the World’s Smallest Flightless Bird Get to Inaccessible Island?” *Atlas Obscura*, 2 November 2018, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/inaccessible-island-rails-history>.

⁴⁸ John Collins Rudolf, “Oil Spill in South Atlantic Threatens Endangered Penguins,” *The New York Times*, 22 March 2011.

⁴⁹ “Tristan da Cunha MS Oliva Shipwreck” Joint Website of the Tristan Government and the Tristan Association, last modified 17 February 2017, <https://www.tristandc.com/newsmsolivatristan.php>.

⁵⁰ Richard J. Cuthbert, “North Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes moseleyi*),” in *Penguins: Natural History and Conservation*, eds. Pablo Garcia Borboroglu and P. Dee Boersma (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2013), 138-139.

and transportation technologies have accelerated exchanges between geographic points, Tristan da Cunha claims comparative insularity. As tiny Tristan da Cunha enters a third century of British rule, the island will likely continue to entice rulers, dreamers, ministers, doctors, and naturalists eager to exploit a discrete cluster of rocks on the margins of the world. The attraction to Tristan da Cunha's insularity shows no sign of waning.

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