

Fleeing to World's End today (Floreana, Galápagos): Microislandness in a global changing world

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Abstract

Floreana, the smallest and least inhabited island in the Galapagos, is considered both a “hell” and a “paradise”; a remote and isolated place and, at the same time, a context that today has more comforts and privileges than the Mainland. Extensive ethnography developed over a decade, which analyses the practices, discourses and tactics of the islanders and other social actors, shows how Floreana residents live with high levels of transformation, resemanticise, and creatively blend elements of continuity and innovation. The historical and anthropological analysis of anthropisation on this island reveals a process characterised by dynamism, paradox, and ambivalence, resulting in unique tactics of empowerment by a heterogeneous population that has, nonetheless, generated a strong local identity. The study describes a complex microislandness, in which isolation and hyper-connectivity are compatible, and where State wages, environmental protectionism, tourism, the Internet, and other global features do not impede but rather favour the concept of fleeing to and living ‘at World’s End’ in an experience that resituates the local within the global.

Keywords

Islandness, isolation, connectivity, Tourism, Environmental protection, Galapagos

Introduction

Island studies have long distinguished between *insularity* and *islandness*, even if there is no consensus on the differences between the two concepts (see Nimführ & Otto, 2020, pp. 188-189). To a large extent, the distinction runs parallel to other dichotomies used by cultural geography, social anthropology, and other disciplines, distinguishing

between *physical space* and *social or produced space*, *space* and *territory* or between *space* and *place* (Lefevre, 1974; de Certeau, 1984; Hirsch, 1997; Crang, 1998). On the one hand, there is the physical, objective, often quantifiable and measurable spatial reality; on the other hand, the experienced, lived, conceived, recounted, represented reality, that is, socially constructed. Islandness does not derive *naturally* from the island; it is necessary to live and breathe the island, to feel it, even use it tactically, in the sense proposed by de Certeau (1984), and at the same time to think about it, to recount and narrate it.

As in other sciences, island studies have also been permeated by different constructivist paradigms (Del Campo, 2017), including post-structuralism, which denounce rigid dichotomies (nature/culture; island/mainland) and problematise assumed categorisations such as “insularity” or “isolation”. The answer, widely supported in island studies, is the “relational turn” (Pugh, 2016) and experimentation with different approaches and concepts, sometimes inherited from non-island scholars, such as “aquapelago” (Hayward, 2012), “hyperobjective island” (Krieg, 2018) or “isandscape” (Nimführ & Otto, 2020). The complexity, multidimensionality, relationality and social construction of islands has become within island studies somewhat of a mantra (Pugh, 2016, 2018; Grydehøj, 2017; Boomert & Bright, 2007; Chandler & Pugh, 2020; Hadjimichael, Constantinou & Papaioakeim, 2020).

However, and perhaps due to the relative recentness of island studies itself, scholars continue to emphasise the limitations or the fact that there is still a long way to go. For example, Owe Ronström (2013, p. 154) claims that an island is usually studied as locus or as focus, “the relations between the discourses about islands and islands as physical spaces, between islands as metaphors (or models) and as lived realities”. Nimführ & Otto (2020, p. 186) bemoan that fact then, when we talk about islands, we continue to evoke “Western notions of immobility, isolation, insularity and a collective island identity [...], but how those who live on and with the island make use of it, practice or narrate it often remains undertheorised and overlooked”. In reaction to the stereotype of the island as an autonomous context, isolated and signified from outside, island studies have emphasised the experiences both lived and contested by islanders (Hadjimichael, Constantinou & Papaioakeim, 2020; Hong, 2020), as well as the dynamic and even hyper-connected character of the islands, even if that connectivity goes unnoticed beneath the myth of a pristine and isolated island (Krieg, 2018).

In our view, the question is not to see isolation and connectivity as two opposing poles, but as two elements that, in praxis and discourse, can coexist. Similarly, islandness does not derive exclusively from the experiences and processes of signification of islanders, nor does it derive solely from the uses and accounts of non-islanders, in social structures of power that would greatly condition the life of islanders and the image we have of their islands. Moreover, one and the other are not always antagonistic, nor do they imply univocal and coherent groups.

The aim of this article is to understand the historical process and actual experience of microislandness on the Galapagos island of Floreana. In their discourse, but also in their profound experience, the inhabitants of Floreana convey that they came to live ‘at World’s End’, and that they still do and still feel that way. There are frequent comparisons between Floreana and ‘World’s End’ in oral and written discourses; it is embedded in the experience of tourists and islanders alike. The core element of this microislandness is ambiguous, given that ‘World’s End’, as it is experienced and recounted in Floreana, can be both ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’. That is not the only ambiguity that makes this island a relevant case study. Floreana is the smallest of the Galapagos Islands (just 173 km²) and has the fewest inhabitants (147 people in 2020). It can thereby be regarded as a paradigmatic case of a *microisland* with a secular history of isolation and its own set of challenges in terms of colonisation. Furthermore, unlike other islands in the Pacific, with an ancient, homogeneous population and deeply entrenched ways of life (Campbell, 2009), people came in contact

with Floreana on several occasions from the 16th Century onwards, but it was not populated definitively until the 1930s, and by a heterogeneous population. Although far from the mainland (around a thousand kilometres), and secularly isolated, Floreana has in recent years been subjected to a powerful incursion of the Market and State. The confluence of these variables generates a paradoxical context, given the strongly rooted sense of microislandness in spite of 1) the recent and heterogeneous population, which in theory should hinder the emergence of a singular and differentiated 'island identity'; 2) the hyperintervention of the State and Market through two prototypical practices: environmental protection and tourism, which theoretically should break secular isolation.

The purpose of this article is to analyse how this paradoxical microislandness has developed here, and through which types of discourses, practices and tactics. The aim in doing so is to understand a complex social phenomenon, which blends myths and empirical realities, physical facts and inner worlds, and where situations of isolation, difficulty and privation coexist alongside abundant resources, not only from the natural environment, but also, above all, from the State and Market. How can 'World's End' be compatible with State services and salaries, influxes of tourists, and the Internet? Is microislandness just an instrumental discourse for the outside world, void of any daily experience of life on the island? How could a strong sense of islandness have crystallised when the population is not only recent but also characterised by heterogeneity and having to deal constantly with changing situations?

There are very few studies that set out resolutely to articulate the practical and discursive dimensions, the material and the mental, all of which bring together the historical and anthropological perspective (in other words, taking into account different populational uses and accounts about the island, as well as the current situation of the islanders). This seems to us to be more difficult in view of the space constraints in an article of this scope, which requires a much more complex exercise in synthesis, in our case, given that we have a wealth of information, derived from the extensive ethnography carried out over a decade. However, the attempt is worth it since only then can we offer a comprehensive and holistic view of what Baldacchino (2004, p. 274) established as one of the central elements of the study of islandness; the paradoxical tension between openness and closure, which can only be resolved — and here we agree with Hong (2017) — by combining focus and locus, taking into account the different actors involved at different historical points in time, and the way in which they feed back into one another.

Our methodological approach is to give priority to the voices, feelings and actions of the islanders, not to offer a discourse about the inhabitants of Floreana but one that is by, for and with them, as proposed by Baldacchino (2008, p. 49). Western scientists often carry out research that reproduces questions and answers that concern our academic and cultural field (Mignolo, 2011; Del Campo, 2017), and this has also been found in island studies (Grydehøj, 2017, pp. 9-10; Nimführ & Otto, 2020, p. 186). The prominence given to the islanders in our study derives not only from compiling their interests and problems, but by gaining our own experiences during extensive periods of field work, as well as creating spaces for discussion and debate where they can raise the different issues that concern them, the solutions they propose and the tactics developed to empower themselves in the circumstances. Portraying the island as an autonomous and sustainable microcosm, rather than studying the real problems and concerns of its inhabitants, is one of the "darker sides of islands and island studies" (Grydehøj, 2017, pp. 10-11). Especially when the concerns of the islanders are subject, in many cases, to similar contradictions and paradoxes to those we find elsewhere, island or otherwise.

Our starting point is that understanding islands today "on their own terms"¹ (McCall, 1994) means keeping in mind the stories and experiences of those who were born on the island, but also of those who came from the mainland and who

visit it fleetingly, as well as weaving these into the tensions and opportunities generated by globalisation with variables such as tourism, environmental protectionism or the action of the State, elements that are indivisible and influence each other, so they must and can be treated in unison. Accustomed to our holistic approach, social anthropologists might have an advantage when it comes to undertaking this task, just as we are accustomed to being on our guard about the risks of confusing reality with our ethnocentric perspective as well as turning the islander into a singular otherness.

The findings presented here are based on an ethnographical study conducted between 2009 and 2019, encompassing a total of eleven months' fieldwork². Firstly, the article traces, historically and ethno-historically, human presence on the island of Floreana. It then goes on to describe how the population has reacted to some fast-paced changes, triggered particularly by environmental protectionism and tourism.

Pirates, prisoners, visionaries and utopians

The worldview of the Galapagos Islands is that of a pristine unblemished place, where endemic species have been safeguarded for millions of years, enabling Darwin to formulate his theory of evolution. The English naturalist did indeed arrive in Floreana on board the *HMS Beagle* on 23 September 1835 and found a colony, of fewer than 300 individuals, "nearly all people of colour, who have been banished for political crimes from the Republic of the Equator" (Darwin, 2003, pp. 383-384). Almost two centuries on, the population of Floreana is half the number encountered by Darwin, whereas the population of the Archipelago as a whole has grown at an astonishing rate and is now around 30,000 inhabitants. The history of this small island dates back to Fray Tomás de Berlanga, Bishop of Panama, who drifted off course on his journey to Peru and came across the Archipelago on 10 March 1535. In his account of Floreana, he highlights the rugged, harsh and uninhabitable nature of the island (Figueras Vallés, 2009) (Plate 1). Indeed, for many years, from the 17th Century onwards, it was only used as a refuge by pirates as they sailed around the Pacific Ocean in search of Spanish ships. Christened Charles Island in honour of King Charles II of England, the island was used sporadically to get provisions or to remain hidden. Buccaneers and pirates (such as Hawkins, Dampier, Rogers or Cowley) brought rats, goats and dogs to the island, and left behind them tales of hidden treasures and outlaw life, not bound by convention. One of the main tourist attractions on the island, Post Office Bay, dates back to this time, an anchorage where an old barrel of rum could be exchanged for correspondence, and which tourists can still use.

In the 19th Century, it was chiefly naturalists, geographers and other scientists who were curious about the Galapagos Islands (Andrada, Cantero & Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2015, pp. 63-65). However, this century also brought visionaries and utopians to Floreana. In 1831, four years before Darwin arrived, General Villamil founded the *Sociedad Colonizadora del Archipiélago de Galápagos*, with the idea of annexing the archipelago to Ecuador. One year later, the island was renamed Floreana in honour of President Flores. A first colony was established there with soldiers from the Flores battalion, deported following a military uprising. They arrived with their families in a voluntary exile. The name of the residence constructed by Villamil on the upper part of the island — *Asilo de la Paz* (meaning refuge of peace) — is significant of the role this new colony was supposed to play in terms of redemption and reintegration (Plate 2). However, neither General Villamil (who died in 1866) nor the Spanish merchant José Valdizán, who once again colonised the island in 1869 in order to exploit a type of fungus that grows here (*Rocella tinctoria*, used as a dye), saw their dreams fulfilled. Valdizán was killed by a group of prisoners he had brought there from Guayaquil to "reform them" (Idrovo, 2005, p. 53). For decades, the island bore witness to frustrated attempts at settlement (including a group of Norwegians who tried to set

up a fishing factory there, traces of which can still be seen today), with long periods of abandonment, in which wild cows, goats and donkeys grazed freely, as the island was used as a sporadic hunting reserve for adventurers and castaways.



Fig 1. Floreana. Interior of the island. Photo by Javier Andrada.

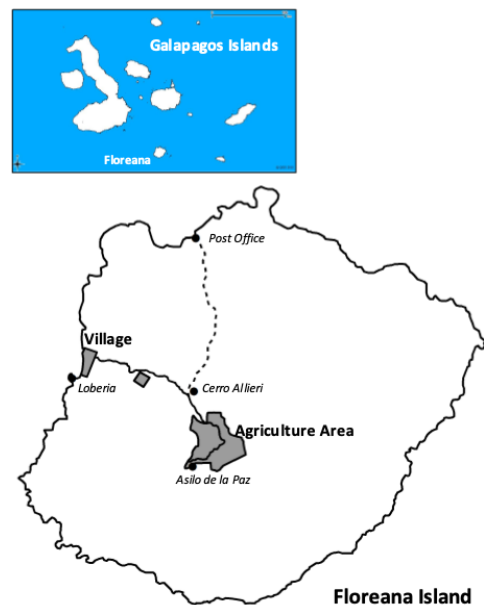


Fig 2. Map of Floreana.

By that time, the Galapagos Islands, following Darwin's account, had become a mythologised place among scientists, explorers and tourists. After visiting the Archipelago, the American naturalist William Beebe (1877-1962) published a book in 1924 that had a decisive impact on the island of Floreana: *Galapagos: World's End*, a very readable text, brimming

with enthusiasm, romanticism and adventuring spirit, which sealed Floreana's reputation as a pristine unblemished place, far from the corruption of cities, where one might begin a new life in harmony with nature. The rough and rugged island, cursed by man, might also be a paradise in which utopia could be constructed. Fascinated by this possibility, having read the book, the German physician Friedrich Ritter and his lover Dore Strauch-Körvin left their respective spouses in Berlin and decided to move to Floreana and became its sole inhabitants. The adventure of these two lovers, followers of Nietzsche, was cut short four years later, when the enlightened doctor died in puzzling circumstances. Having read the incredible chronicles of the Ritters in the German press, in 1932 Heinz Wittmer arrived on the island of Floreana with his wife and son, also in search of utopian isolation.

Many of today's inhabitants know the story of these first extravagant settlers. One of the residents has even named their restaurant after baroness Eloísa Wagner de Bousquet, who arrived on the island a few months after the Wittmers, accompanied by three men. 'La Baronesa', as she is known on the island, seemed to have had a somewhat delirious vision and sought to turn the island into an exotic destination for high-class tourists, who would stay at the *Hacienda Paradiso*. Her life, like that of other settlers, was full of mystery. Were those three men her lovers? One of them, Felipe Valdivieso, left Floreana after just one month, having seemingly had enough of the Baroness' wild ideas, and Robert Philippon, another of her 'companions', disappeared without a trace. The last of 'the Baroness' men' died of thirst on the island of Marchena, after leaving Floreana. As if afflicted by some kind of curse, Doctor Ritter also died that same year.

Stories such as these, known by the inhabitants of Floreana and even on other islands in the Galapagos, have forged Floreana's reputation as a 'cursed island', a destination for intrepid and extravagant individuals, many of whom meet tragic endings or die in mysterious circumstances. The legend of Floreana has also fed into different books, with significant titles, such as *Satan Came to Eden*, by Dore Strauch (1936), Dr Ritter's lover; *Ceux de la soif*, by Georges Simenon (1938); *Floreana, paraíso infernal*, by Maurice Brezieres (1941); and *La isla de los gatos negros*, by Gustavo Vásconez (1973)³. Many of these literary portrayals convey the paradoxical image of a remote, exotic, paradise island due to the lack of human 'contamination', but also one that resists domestication or taming, a cursed, infernal, inhuman place; in short 'World's End' (according to Beebe's book), for better or for worse.

The Galapagos Islands are associated with wilderness, tortoises and Darwin's finches, but Floreana in particular holds a place in the collective imagination populated by a series of settlers and inhabitants that spark fascination and unease in equal measure: errant bishops, castaway pirates, unscrupulous whalers, redeeming military generals, prisoners, unconventional European families, and in general a whole host of explorers, utopians and dreamers, including zealous figures who sought in vain to build a new world at 'World's End'. Visitors who arrive on the island for a daily tour are treated to a more or less simplified version of this 'history' from the tour guides, who interweave legends, myths and exaggerations in their account of this 'cursed paradise' (Plate 3).



Fig 3. Beach in Floreana from the Baronesa's viewpoint. Photo by Javier Andrada.

Heterogeneous colonisation in the past century

After a century of various frustrated attempts at colonisation, one family managed to settle there: the Wittmers. Even today, their descendants run the most famous hotel on the island with the following inscribed on the lintel: "Hilf dir selbst, so hilf dir Got!" (God helps those who help themselves). 28 years after Margret Wittmer reached the island in 1932, she wrote a book, translated into several languages: *Postlagernd Floreana* (1960), published with two highly significant subtitles: *Eine moderne Robinsonade aun den Galápagos-Inseln* (a modern castaway tale on the Galapagos Islands) and *Ein aussergewöhnliches Frauenleben am Ende der Welt* (A woman's life less ordinary at World's End).

A fair number of tourists to the island have already read or heard about Floreana's unique history, through Wittmer's book or others. As they are brought from the airport on the island of Baltra to Puerto Ayora (Santa Cruz), tourists are usually surprised when they discover roads, traffic, restaurants, shops, and all the hustle and bustle of any other tourist spot. Disappointed, some of them want to go somewhere untouched, unblemished, remote, wild and exotic (in line with the image they have of the Galapagos Islands) and so they set off on one of the boats that sail to Floreana on certain days, to reach an 'island set apart from the world', as many of the tourists themselves stated when interviewed. Surprisingly, these reasons largely coincide with those that led many islanders to come and live on Floreana.

The Wittmers are still one of the richest, most influential and important families on the island. The other family are the Cruz-Bedóns, who came here from Ibarra (in the north of Ecuador) in the early 1940s. The residents of Floreana like to point out the bohemian and utopian personality of Elécer Cruz. Like other settlers, he was determined to explore a land where he could live beyond stifling urban conventions. His wife, Emma Bedón, provided the practicality and tenacity that allowed them to flourish. Several of their children still live on the island. Utopian dreams and fearless tenacity are still two vital attitudes frequently found among the island's settlers.

Together with these two families, and in many cases occupying a subaltern position, an extremely heterogeneous population arrived on the island of Floreana from the 1930s onwards, including figures shrouded in mystery who seemed to be fleeing to the last refuge in the world. This is certainly the case of Humberto Goya Rico, a Chilean captain and engineer, exiled after he was accused of participating in a bomb explosion in Guayaquil. He arrived with his wife and their eight children. As noted by Margret Wittmer (1960, p. 132), the island became a kind of Tower of Babel: some, like the Wittmers, spoke German, others spoke Spanish, English, French, and even Quechua, since indigenous people from the continent also came here. Many of these families — as remembered by Floreana's oldest inhabitants — left the island because “they couldn't get used to” tough island life, in which survival depended on a combination of hunting, growing, fishing, and bartering, developed with tenacity, ingenuity, and determined resistance. Many people who came to the island were destitute and saw Floreana as their last hope. The families who arrived from Loja (southern Ecuador) in the 1970s were particularly significant, with their praxis of community organisation and their knowledge of agriculture, which set them apart from previous settlers. Since then, the island has been constantly subject to a diverse population flow: some have stayed for only a short time and then left the “inferno”, others “got used to it”, and others still were born here but left to see the world and then returned after a while, a frequent occurrence particularly in recent years.

The memory of Floreana: between an epic tale of toil and socio-ecological resilience

In order to understand the connection between today's inhabitants and those who, for various reasons, came here centuries ago, we need to understand a tale of continuity in which heterogeneity is concealed beneath a singular enterprising spirit of those who managed to “*enseñarse en la isla*” (get used to the island), in spite of the difficulties faced. Most of the island is arid and dry (Grenier, 2007), especially between the months of June and December. Volcanic lava and the dominant shades of ochre give the island an inhospitable, uninhabitable look. During these dry months, only the “*parte alta*” (upper part), around the Pajas volcano, remains muggy with an uncomfortable, fine, soaking mist (called *garúa* here) (Plate 4). Tourists are often disappointed because it is rarely sunny: the sky is usually grey and the water is cold, influenced by the Humboldt Current. The rest of the year, influenced by the Panama Current, the water temperature rises, although there is frequent rainfall. This dynamic of extreme weather patterns is exacerbated by phenomena such as *el Niño*, which has caused a fair few disasters, or the extreme droughts brought some years by the Humboldt Current.

Water is one of the main problems that have always hampered the anthropisation of the island. Floreana is an exceptional island since, unlike most of the Archipelago, it has four fresh water springs (D'Ozouville, 2010). However, the volume of water produced by them is very meagre. In the 1970s, the possibilities for fishing and exchanging with the few boats that reached the island, among other factors, led the majority of the population to abandon the main settlement area in the ‘upper part’ of the island and move down to “*la playa*” (the beach), around the urban centre: Puerto Velasco Ibarra (Plate 5). This process is associated with bringing water to the urban centre by means of a seven-kilometre pipeline built through collective labour. Today, the people of Floreana still remember that epic feat from half a century ago. Even though the main water source is located on the Wittmer's estate and is, *stricto sensu*, private, the private sphere has, since then, been subordinate to the public sphere, as part of a collective initiative to survive. The primacy of public over private is framed within a discourse that prioritises values such as community effort over the individualistic self-centredness characteristic of the early settlers.



Fig 4. Floreana, “parte alta”. Photo by Javier Andrada.



Fig 5. Puerto Velasco Ibarra. Photo by Javier Andrada.

To survive as a community, the scarcity of water has forced the people of Floreana to be disciplined in their consumption, which is restricted to around 30 litres per week per inhabitant (D'Ozouville, 2010). The lack of water is a frequent concern and topic of conversation, just like the ever-changing, unpredictable weather. This is explained by some as a sign of “climate change” and by others as a divine punishment, but the majority of residents view the weather as simply another variable in the island’s untamed nature that only the toughest can adapt to: nature overcomes any attempt not only to tame it but also to predict and regulate. The third major topic of conversation on the island is the sea.

At gatherings of friends and family, tales of tragedy or heroism are often told, portraying the sea as an unsettling space of transit and the fundamental reason for isolation. After all, the very word “*aislamiento*” stems from *isla* (island) and refers not only to being physically surrounded by sea but also to the perceptions, emotions and feelings derived from this ‘isolation’ (Anderson, 2016).

In short, the singular perception of insularity or isolation is derived not only from the size of the island, or its remoteness, but also from the difficulties faced in terms of inhabiting the island, set against a background of occupational failures marked by the scarcity of drinking water, the changeable weather and the perilous sea. Isolation is experienced as disconnection, marginalisation, neglect, and in practice as a self-sacrificing privation of resources. Even today, a certain austerity experienced by the inhabitants of Floreana contrasts with the standards of comfort they know they must offer tourists. Catching octopuses wearing just a pair of pyjamas (supposedly to avoid the cold) rather than a neoprene wetsuit during the months when the water is freezing cold represents, in the minds of the islanders, one of those practices associated with virility, epic feats and isolation from the comforts of urbanites and tourists, who rarely dive without a proper wetsuit.

However, even though the islanders interpret the triumph of their settlement in terms of an epic exploit, this particular form of anthropisation has been subject to different types of resilience strategies (Ruiz-Ballesteros & Del Campo, 2020), such as the consolidation of collectivist practices, as shown by the way in which they have tackled recent transformations. As some island studies scholars have recently pointed out (Pugh, 2018), island resilience is not a question of archaic indigenous wisdom, but of heterogeneous and dynamic practices in a changing world, which forces islands to reinvent themselves quickly, even under certain leitmotifs and arguments that remain stable.

State and Market: islandness amidst environmental protectionism and tourism

Weather conditions change dramatically in the Galapagos Islands as you climb around a hundred metres up their volcanic slopes. Although there is a marked difference in temperature on all islands between the coastal part, “the beach”, and “the upper part”, the people of Floreana believe that this contrast is much more discernible on their island. In recent years, the local residents can often be heard to express the opinion that in the dry Puerto Velasco, where they live, there is perhaps too much “civilisation” and “modernity”: the bustling port with its tourists, the restaurants, cars, and motorbikes make Puerto Velasco an urban area, and therefore they disassociate it from the myth of their unspoiled island. Tourists, naturally, highlight the slow pace of life they see in Puerto Velasco as one of the main reasons for coming here: they talk about “peace” and “quiet”, and emphasise the contrast with the other islands in the archipelago. “*Pasar tranquilo*” (a quiet calm life) is the ideal lifestyle lauded by the majority of islanders. This ideal aspiration can be seen in countless daily practices on the island: the pace at which they walk, the time they take to have a brief chat when they meet, the friendly tone taken even when they disagree, and in general the leisurely pace of any activity — from inspecting tourists’ suitcases to reaching decisions at an assembly meeting — is imbued with a quiet calm that is particularly striking for visitors, especially if they are European or American.

Throughout the duration of our fieldwork (2009-2019), we witnessed this aspiration for a ‘quiet calm life’ in several areas: tourism is a case in point. With the exception of the Wittmers’ enterprise, until the year 2006, the population had largely turned its back on tourism, in an economy of farming and fishing self-sufficiency, in which very little money changed hands. From the 1970s onwards, a few tourists arrived on the island on their luxury cruises, but they disembarked in an uninhabited area in the northwest and did not come into contact with the island’s inhabitants. However, from 2006

onwards, tourism progressively became more established, with daily tours involving five-hour visits. In a short space of time, the number of visits increased to 20,000 a year. The inhabitants of Floreana felt overwhelmed: the daily tours that arrived on up to 10 boats a day created excessive commotion, noise from the cars that drove tourists to the 'upper part', and stress at having to prepare food for so many people at the restaurants. Their levels of concern progressively increased: were they following the same steps that led to such drastic changes on neighbouring islands and ruined farming and a lifestyle that they appreciated? Furthermore, with that model of tourism, only 20% of revenues generated remained on the island.

To control this flow of tourism, the inhabitants set up a model of community-based tourism, through the Floreana Community Centre (*Centro Comunitario Floreana -CECFLO*R), established in 2014. In addition to self-management, this model pursues economic, ecological and social sustainability. In practice, it involves decisions being reached collectively by its 71 members (representing practically all the households on the island), that tourism should complement other activities, and that it should not be purely profit-driven; hence any profits should benefit the community as a whole. The eight tourist accommodation businesses, five restaurants, as well as water taxi operators, and snorkelling, kayak and bike hire businesses receive around half their customers from the community project, and the other half from their own contacts with tour operators.

In 2018, the community decided to pursue a strategy of degrowth in tourism even more actively, further reducing the types of visits available. Since then, the community has been split between those in favour of increasing the flows of tourism, and those who are determined to safeguard their lifestyle and keep tourism flows down to around half the level seen a few years ago.

The pursuit of degrowth is feasible, largely because a third of the islanders (46 out of 147 inhabitants), representing almost all the households on the island, have stable earnings from State institutions, which pay double the rates received on the mainland. Hence, as witnessed on other small islands (Royle, 2008), the move from marginalisation to resurgence on this microisland is linked with the role of the State, combined with a singular effort on the part of the population with regard to tourism. Of the remainder, 35 gain income from from tourism. Many families have income streams from both sources, and a fair few combine tourism or public employment with other activities: 13 work in construction and the same number work in agriculture.

Thanks to pluri-activity in the majority of households, as well as full employment on the island and high salaries, the residents of Floreana have no doubt that they are privileged, especially since they can buy up urban land at much cheaper prices than on other islands. Given the restrictions imposed by the government to limit the population, it is no longer possible to move permanently to the island, unless you were born in the Archipelago or marry a native-born resident. The privileges are even greater in Floreana, among other reasons because, given its low population, the inhabitants have been able to negotiate favourably with the Archipelago's institutions. For example, urban land in Floreana costs around a third of the price payable on other islands.

Taking full advantage of this bargaining position, and especially following the establishment of their Community-based Tourism project, the inhabitants of Floreana have also notched up some unimaginable achievements: for example, the Natural Park, resistant to any type of joint exploitation, agreed to grant a licence to the community to recover the old trail that leads from the urban centre to Post Office Bay, and the islanders were able to turn this enclave into a tourist product. Secular isolation, the difficulties surviving on the island, the low impact of a small population that is conscious of protecting its habitat, together with community praxis that has enabled them to develop projects such as bringing water

or controlling tourism, are important in explaining why different administrations have given them favourable treatment, which the islanders see as victories on their part. If tenacity and collective toil were essential in the complex anthropisation of the island, they are now used to negotiate with the Market and, above all, with the State, capitalising on the fact that many State representatives on the island are also residents.

Another significant example is hunting, fishing and gathering, which in theory are governed by strict regulations on the Galapagos Islands. Throughout the Archipelago, hunting is prohibited, and fishing, which at another time was the main resource for its inhabitants, has been substantially restricted. Only a few still have a fishing permit. In Floreana, just one. Yet, just as on some islands there are still goat hunters (not so in Floreana, where goats have been eradicated completely), some of the islanders frequently catch lobsters, octopus or liquorice sea cradle (a highly prized shell fish) for their own consumption, through *orilleo* (shoreline fishing). The same occurs with the gathering of introduced (and now effectively 'wild') fruits — such as oranges and avocados — that grow within the Park, which occupies more than 98% of Floreana. In theory, this territory is not passable (except for park rangers or scientists with special permission), but the islanders understand that Park restrictions would excessively limit their world and that their impact is negligible, bearing in mind the tiny population and the fact that they are all strongly committed to their 'paradise'. Furthermore, these activities, like goat hunting in times gone by, create a bond between islander and island that is not economic, but rather affective: economic exploitation of the Park lands in pursuit of personal wealth would be prohibited, but not the endurance of 'traditional' practices of self-supply, even though the islanders' economic sufficiency means that this seeking of provisions is not essential. In any case, the islanders feel that such restrictive measures, necessary to protect the environment, should be flexible on such a small, remote, and sparsely populated island. In contrast to visitors, who 'buy into' the vision of a 'unblemished pristine world', islanders understand that it is in fact a "hybrid ecosystem" (Hobbs et al., 2009), wherein the island cannot be understood without its singular anthropisation within a context marked not only by geography and climate, but also by the State and the Market. Hence, microislandness is inscribed within process that is as much about change and socio-ecological resilience as it is continuity with certain discourses and practices.

"A quiet calm life... in the upper part": fleeing to an intra-insular paradise

In spite of the downturn in tourism, a strategy adopted consciously although not without debate and controversy, many of Floreana's inhabitants are fearful about the dramatic changes experienced over the last 15 years. It is certainly true that they have convinced the State to invest a level of resources that would have been unthinkable years ago, such as the installation of an electric power grid, a desalination plant, tarmacking the only road that leads from the urban centre to the farms on the upper part of the island, and an antenna that provides internet connection. Thanks to this antenna, all the island's inhabitants, with the exception of one technophobe, communicate with one another through different WhatsApp groups, to let the whole population know, for example, when the baker has a batch of freshly baked bread, or when one of them has been fortunate enough to catch more octopus than he can eat.

In their chats, the inhabitants regularly recall the drastic changes they have seen over recent years. One woman, who came here from Cotapaxi with her husband, remembered how she cried inconsolably for the first few weeks and months after arriving on the island in 1993: why had she come to this hunk of rock, with no water, isolated from the world, where the people told stories of how such and such intrepid settler had failed or died? It was all wild scrubland, with a stone dock, remembers another woman who came here in 2011 from Macará. Even the few tourists that ventured here

appeared to be cursed, such as Saydee Reiser, an American who disappeared in 1964, and whose remains were not found until 1980.

During our fieldwork, over the last decade, we have seen how stories about isolation, deprivation, despair and pain have been filtered through a lens of romanticism. There are some who miss the barter system, goat hunting, the absence of cars, as they recall the decision made in the 1970s to promote the construction of the current cemetery through *mingas* (a type of collective labour rooted in the Pre-Hispanic Andes). It was then that many realised they would stay on the island and die here. That in spite of the diversity of their origins and circumstances, they could be a community. And that together they would conquer the island. Reciprocity largely guided exchanges, including the lending out of cropland free of charge. They became established as a community, according to the islanders, “and now life is better than ever, with highly desirable services”.

However, there are those who are increasingly sensing a resurgence of the same inner impulse that led them to abandon the mainland and embark on the ill-advised enterprise of settling on Floreana. Furthermore, they miss the positive effects of “*aislamiento*”. Progressively, the islanders are feeling the need to spend time working their land on the upper part of the island, which they increasingly refer to as a “paradise”. The majority of tourists find their own ‘paradise’ sunbathing on *Playa Negra* or diving with sea lions and turtles in *La Lobería*, but islanders increasingly feel the urge to climb up to the humid green lands nestled at the foot of the Pajas volcano. In contrast to the financial motives that guide exchanges with tourists on the lower part of the island, the upper part represents ‘a refuge’, a haven for islanders, a place where space and time are experienced in growing opposition to life in the lower part. The conditions of the land and the climate allow them to grow both mountain and coastal crops (agave, corn, potatoes, oranges, vegetables, etc.), barely needing to plough the earth or use fertiliser or pesticides, as explained by one agronomist from Ecuador’s Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Farming, who has been living on the island for more than two years. The upper part of the island is an area of exuberant abundance. Darwin (2003, pp. 383-384) noted that settlers “obtain without much trouble, the means of subsistence”. The agronomist interviewed expressed frustration because islanders do not exploit this wealth in mercantile terms, and he cannot understand why, with only a few rare exceptions, they only grow for their own consumption. There is certainly a frequent perception that these islanders “are happier with less” and “live a very laid-back life” compared to the greater industriousness seen on the mainland, especially in mountainous areas. The fact that the majority of them obtain a good income from the State or from tourism explains why they are not overly interested in increasing their earnings through a side business in farming. And yet, the islanders spend much more time in the upper part of the island than they did ten years ago. A growing number of them have bought small holdings or have intensified their farming activity; small houses have been built and existing ones restored; reservoirs for irrigation have been installed; the area of cultivated land has been expanded; and in general, when they are free from their other obligations on the beach, they head up to this part of the island “even if it’s just for a bit of peace and quiet”. Some are even planning to live up there permanently, whilst others think that even their dogs’ behaviour changes when they are up there. For a growing number of people, “going to the upper part, even if it’s just for a few hours, is like breathing”.

Ten years ago, our informants highlighted the isolation and the damp cold of the *garúa* mists that, although responsible for the abundance of the land, also explained why islanders had preferred to live in the more benign climate down by the beach. Today, these factors have changed. Undoubtedly, the lower part of the island is synonymous with economic development, comfort and urban life, but this now appears to leave islanders dissatisfied, and they are recovering discourses not only about the heroic feats of the first inhabitants who lived in the upper part, but also of a supposed ‘golden age’ in which people lived in harmony. “Addiction to mobile phones... I see so many negative things, even parents

who have no authority over their children..., I think things are better in the upper part”, says Paulina, an Afro-Ecuadorian school teacher who arrived here over a decade ago, and who has held various positions of responsibility in the community.

Between the coast and the croplands around the Cerro Pajas volcano, there is only a difference of 400 metres in altitude and five kilometres of road, but this is enough to mark out two different worlds in terms of experience and conceptualisation (Plate 6). It would appear that, in the praxis of flight or escapism pursued by these islanders, there is a need to remove themselves once again and even further from civilisation. If sailing west to a practically deserted island was the escapist leitmotiv a few years ago, the time has now come to climb up to Cerro Pajas, a move that is not without images of spirituality for them: “I have to get away every day, even if it’s just for a while up here... Here, I feel at peace, with the plants, the animals”.



Fig 6. View of Cerro Pajas from Playa Negra. Photo by Javier Andrada.

Human-animal relations are certainly unique in the Galapagos Islands. Sea lions and iguanas intermingle with humans so freely that you have to watch where you tread so as not to step on one. Tortoises and finches might be the most emblematic animals of the Galapagos, but the people of Floreana highlight other less famous species. Particularly in ‘the upper part’, where not only can they see but also stroke owls that, with no natural enemies, will let people come within touching distance of them. In the upper part of the island, the dense forest conceals the remains of the first settlements, including the hollows carved out in the rock where the first pirates and then the Wittmers sought refuge. It is, therefore, one of the most mythical places on the island.

The sunken crater of the great volcano, Cerro Pajas, is home to another prized treasure: the Galapagos Petrel, a species shrouded in mystery. This bird makes its nest in inaccessible hollows on the sides of volcanoes and returns at nightfall, which makes them difficult to spot. Tourists are forbidden from accessing the crater itself, where you can appreciate the genesis of this island, thanks to its microislandness, since you can see the whole of the island shoreline. If tourists go to

'the upper part', it is to see the remains of the first settlements and the *Galapaguera*, a tortoise reserve containing animals imported from other islands, since the original tortoise species native to Floreana (*Geochelone galapagoensis*) died out in the 19th Century. However, there are other animals on the island. The petrel's most ferocious enemy is also that of human beings: rats, which have not been able to be eradicated despite the implementation of various programs. These rodents are a nightmare for farmers, who use pesticides to combat this problem. For the petrel, rats are killers that get into their nests and eat their eggs and their young. These two animals — the petrel and the rat — respectively, appear symbolically associated with wild nature and the human-urban, the spirit of freedom and wretched depredation, health and disease, good and evil. Those who are in the vicinity of Cerro Pajas as night falls can hear the mysterious flapping of hundreds of petrels' wings, feeling their presence even if they cannot see them. It is at such a time that, surrounded by an endless ocean, you might still feel that you have reached 'World's End'.

Microislandness as discourse, practice and tactic

As we have seen, human occupation of Floreana dates back less than a century and has undergone many changes and transformations, with heterogeneous populations and changing cultural practices. In very few places, however, is the imprint of those who came before, centuries ago, felt so keenly. Many of the inhabitants today heard or read troubling tales about the island, and a good number of them remember how others tried to dissuade them from coming. But these stories also attracted them, just as, elsewhere, novels such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) forged a spirit of adventure and determination on remote islands (Shen, 2016). In their interpretation of themselves and their own history, residents of Floreana stoke the continuity of such discourse with their references to explorers, utopians and dreamers. 'World's End' draws all kinds of outsiders, although not everyone "gets used to it". They often recall their dangerous sea crossings, the epic endeavour of coping with isolation and in general the hard work and toil involved in overcoming adversity, including the changeable weather and scarcity of water. But inferno is also home to paradise. In the microislandness of Floreana, the leitmotiv of fleeing 'to World's End' endures singularly. The islanders consider their island to be a 'refuge' and strongly resist the pernicious effects of modernity. Not only in their discourse, but also in practice, as inhabitants 'flee' to the upper part of the island, the last 'refuge' of nature, peace and harmony, and work towards driving tourism down.

Here, we have analysed very diverse practices in line with that discourse, both written and oral. The case of Floreana illustrates that microislandness is part practice part collective imagination. But above all, it is necessary to analyse both dynamics together. Because, it has been seen, secondly, that these two components feed into one another: the experiences of living on an island influence the narrative generated and vice versa, in what Morin (1998) calls a "feedback loop", which dilutes linear causality and quashes any discussion about the prevalence of practices or discourses. The inhabitants of Floreana believe that their lives are very different to those on the mainland and even those of other more populated islands. The consideration of their island as inferno and paradise at one at the same time suggests a third characteristic of this microislandness: its ambiguity. Of course, the prevalence of either side of the coin has changed dramatically, especially over the last fifteen years: in the current living conditions, islanders experience their existence through a more bucolic and romantic lens. Laments about years gone by are not inscribed with narratives about overcoming difficulties in adverse conditions, or they are ascribed to those who "couldn't get used to the island". Wellbeing is interpreted above all as the fruit of an epic tale whilst they talk about the dangers of living at 'World's End' in the global world, although there is no unequivocal interpretation that is universally agreed upon, as shown by the conflict triggered by the downturn in tourism. This flags up a fourth characteristic: microislandness is dynamic, subject to

change, such as the community practices and the logic of reciprocity brought in by immigrants from Loja, growing State intervention, and the more recent impact of tourism. However, at the same time, microislandness maintains dialogically a certain continuity, in practice and discourse, with the stories of the first inhabitants to set foot on the island. This suggests, fifthly, the paradoxical nature of microislandness. Not just because this process of interventionism, commercialisation and cultural change shatters the idea of secular isolation and statism, but also because the State and the Market, far from being problems or factors that are contrary to microislandness, have become resources; hence the tactical use of microislandness. This sheds light on a sixth characteristic: creativity. Building on the individual experiences of pioneers and their more or less mythologised accounts, the *imagination of the community* — to paraphrase Anderson (1983) — implies giving new meaning to historical elements and memory. Hence, a frontier spirit becomes a spirit of enterprise in the farming or tourist business. Courage and fearlessness are poured into collective and instrumental feats such as bringing water to the urban centre by the coast. The naturalist image of an unblemished Eden is inscribed within environmental protectionism and ecotourism. The adventurous nature and utopian singularity of the first settlers are brought up as models of freedom. And the selfless socio-environmental protective practices that should govern everyday life on the island are taken as a pretext for what we could call a *habitus* of adaptation and resilient flexibility. Microislandness functions for purposes that might in principle seem contrary. Hence, it is used as a marketing resource for tourism but also to contain what is deemed to be excessive tourism, which the islanders believe might jeopardise the microisland lifestyle. Furthermore, the conception and experience of this island singularity forms the basis of the proposed model of socio-economic development based on community tourism (with the consequent control over resources and minimisation of the ecological and social impact), but also on the use of the island's resources outside of legal orthodoxy, the enjoyment of economic stability, and the exceptional services provided by the State within a context considered equally exceptional, or even the participation in the management of tourist resources and environmental protection resources with concessions they have secured from the State. In short, microislandness benefits from the State and the Market, although it also allows for flexibility with regard to the role these forces play and generates tactics to adapt this to the island.

In a diverse population (in terms of origin, length of residence, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.), the type of microislandness described here largely serves to unify the population within a shared praxis and image, although a certain amount of flexibility is necessary so as to include many different people and circumstances into the narrative development of the island. Island differentiation is taken as a reason not only to make the imprint of the State and Market more flexible, but also to justify in some way the singular life led here, different from the mainland, in which courage and bravery prevail, but also a certain sense of utopianism, which values above all else “a quiet calm life”, developing relations of reciprocity and community actions, within the horizon of a community that has reinterpreted some of the escapist ideals nurtured by the pioneers.

Although tourists might mainly think of these facts as being intrinsically derived from microinsularity, they are in reality heterogeneous elements, characteristic of a lifestyle that has crystallised in a short space of time, with major swings in different directions. Hence, it is through a never-ending hotchpotch process of resemanticisation and creativity that the inhabitants of Floreana experience their role as, at one and the same time, ‘perpetuators’ of an essentialist microislandness and ‘transformers’ in the anthropisation of their island. Floreana is still paradoxically experienced as a remote, distant and different paradise, albeit one that is connected to the world now. It is even viewed as an example of sustainable development and harmonious habitability, something that undoubtedly forges further links with the myths and dreams of the early settlers, as well as the desideratum voiced by institutions and tourists about the Galapagos Islands.

We have glimpsed certain parallels with other small islands, where inhabitants also reinterpret exotic island discourse, adapting it to today's global context (Hayward and Kuwahara, 2014). For example, there is the case of an island turned into a peninsular that has been able to maintain its "island identity", an "island essence", "a sense of islandness through various island-related tropes" (Johnson and Kuwahara (2015, p. 50). If other case studies could confirm similar logics, we could state — paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss (1969) — that microislands are 'good places to think' and that the analysis of microislandness offers an extraordinary field to understand the paradoxes of the local and the global, tradition and modernity, isolation and connectivity.

Conclusions

The case of Floreana shows the islandness is not so much a static and archaic essence, the result of insular determinism and an ancestral population, but rather the result, always ambiguous and multi-faceted, of a never-ending always changing process, involving discourse and practice in equal measure within an interminable loop. If islands, according to Meistersheim (1988, p. 108), are "profoundly paradoxical and ambivalent", so is islandness. In 'fleeing to World's End', the central leitmotiv of this microislandness, there is as much continuity with pirates, fugitives and utopians as there is creative adaptation to transcendent changes. The success of collective practices applied in order to overcome limitations breaks away from the myth of solitary isolated settlers, just as the presence of tourism and environmental protectionism suggests the end of isolation. This forces the inhabitants of Floreana to rethink and give new meaning to their microislandness within a context of hyperintervention, reactivating imaginative forms of escapism and refuge. If, on the one hand, there is move towards 'the upper part' of the island, the State and the Market are also harnessed as a resource that will allow them to colonise their 'paradise' definitively and cushion the 'inferno'. In this context, islandness is also woven into their narrative as an incentive, as cause and consequence at one and the same time, to limit the impact of the State (applying a more flexible approach to prohibitions) and the Market (limiting the impact of tourism).

The category of islanders and non-islanders is artificial in cases such as that of Floreana with significant and heterogeneous population flows, and with multiple experiences that do not depend exclusively on the time spent on the island, nor the fact of being born on the island or not. The study also shows that the discourses and practices of Floreana are interlocked in a triple memory; *soft memory* (narratives derived from myths, stories and books about the island), *hard memory* (mainly derived from the impact of the State and the market) and a *lived memory* (Hong, 2020), which does not simply recreate and reproduce these, or deny them, as is the case on certain islands where the islanders create an alternative "counter-narrative" (Hadjimichael, Constantinou & Papaioakeim, 2020, p. 3). On the contrary, native islandness is intertwined with that of the other actors, in paradoxical and contradictory relationships, which allow us to understand the complexity, the interrelationality of an island. An island that is both paradise and hell, viewed with romanticism and disdain, and which has both isolation and connectivity, deeply rooted practices (which can almost be seen as "traditional"), as well as constant reinvention, State-Market interventionism, and local reappropriation and empowerment, from successive foreign "colonisations" as well the emergence of what we could call, paraphrasing Anderson (1983), an "imagined micro-community."

As Hayward (2018) says, "to be an islander is, increasingly, to live in flux. To be an Island Studies scholar is, increasingly, to be scholar of flux." The question is not whether fluidity and interconnectivity or island isolation prevails, but how one and the other intertwine, allowing for paradoxical coexistence. Recently, it has been shown that "the production of the

isolated 'pristine' island is dependent on global connections and flows" (Krieg, 2018, p. 56): the "restoration" of an island to its "natural" state implies the limitation of certain movements (invasive species or native visitors) but the mobility of others, eco-tourists, scientists, and translocated species, as well as international networks that are activated to support the restoration of that island, so that "creating isolation through connectivity" is made possible (Krieg, 2018, p. 58). In Floreana, the recent heterogeneous population, with the consequent arrival of different cultural practices, environmental protectionism, State wages, tourism, and in general a greater openness towards the global world (including the internet and other typical elements of the Western lifestyle and wellbeing) have not eradicated islandness in small and sparsely populated contexts. Rather, islandness proves to be a singular creative force that allows islanders to live connected to the world and, at the same time, in their unique and hybrid 'World's End'.

Epilogue

As we write these lines, in full lockdown on account of Covid-19, our friends on Floreana let us know via WhatsApp that all is quiet and calm: the island is closed off to the world so that the coronavirus cannot ruin their "paradise".

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Endnotes

1. For a critique of the dangers of the idea of study islands on their own terms, see Grydehøj (2017).
2. See Andrada, Cantero and Ruiz-Ballesteros (2015, pp. 220-241).
3. For more on the image of the Galapagos Islands in literature, see Vasco Aguas (2012).

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