NORFOLK PITCAIRN *BOUNTY*: MYTH NARRATIVE PLACE[1]

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Abstract

The myth of Pitcairn Island and Norfolk Island is significant for Pacific contact linguistics, anthropology, and narrative studies. Norfolk toponymy (placenaming) is used to explore aspects of cultural acclimatisation, narrative, and identity construction. The treatment of physical placename signs as observable narrative form and the idea of narrative construction through naming comprise the theoretical scope. *Bounty* as a heuristic observed in placenames is explored through contemporary small story narratives which operate within the broader big story constructions in the social and linguistic landscape of Pitcairn and Norfolk. Several narratives are put forward which examine how key road names on contemporary Norfolk Island make sense of a Pitcairn and *Bounty*-inspired past. Placenames as linguistic artefacts and cultural capital demonstrate how settlement, cultural and linguistic adaptation, and the eventual crystallisation of a quintessential way of viewing the Norfolk landscape through Pitcairn and *Bounty*-originated toponyms has become realised.

1. Stories and the use of heuristic narratives

Pitcairn, an island of five square kilometres, was uninhabited when the *Bounty* mutineers and their Polynesian consorts arrived. When Norfolk, an island

of 35 square kilometres, was discovered, it was also uninhabited. Research in Pitcairn archaeology evidences European arrivals were not the first to set foot on this South Pacific island outcrop (e.g. Erskine 2004). Archaeological evidence suggests Norfolk had been inhabited for brief periods by Polynesians; they were most likely travelling from eastern Polynesia southward to New Zealand (Anderson & White 2001). Both islands appear to have served as a base for movements in and around the area, although landings on the islands were most likely not for long periods. As there are no known historical records concerning the linguistic history of Pitcairn and Norfolk by the sea faring Polynesians, scholars consider these islands historically uninhabited prior to European colonisation of the South Pacific. It is here Pitcairn and Norfolk written history and documentable narratives and stories begin. My take identifies and idealises how myth becomes solidified in narratives. These narratives exist in the distinct yet intimately and intricately related societies and languages of Pitcairn and Norfolk, cultures separated by more than 6000 kilometres of ocean.

Pitcairn's history is a quintessential example of the search for a safe and peaceful haven in the wide expanse of a then being-explored South Pacific. The history and geography of Pitcairn and Norfolk are important in illustrating discrepancies involving actual geographical and perceived space, time, and distance. On Norfolk Pitcairn is perceived as being close in time-space, with the transpiring of events such as the Mutiny on the *Bounty* in Tahiti in 1789 and the shift to Norfolk in 1856 intuited as recent happenings. The legend of Pitcairn and Norfolk and its significance for Pacific contact linguistics and anthropology has existed for more than 150 years. The way of seeing the world is associated intrinsically with their common past and a strong awareness of boundaries of their home, and the importance of the myth of discovery and life on two separate and idyllic South Seas paradises. Here I am concerned with whether the social and linguistic stories and narratives, which exist in the cultures of these islands, can be used heuristically to explain how two similar examples of settlement, cultural, and linguistic adaptation, and the eventual crystallisation of a quintessential way of viewing the Norfolk landscape through Pitcairn and *Bounty*-inspired toponyms.

I adhere in part to Labov's (2011) definition emphasising the importance of a linear temporal ordering of events, people, and things. Under such a rubric, narrative is one way of recounting past events in which the order of narrative clauses matches the order in which events occurred. I interpret myth as linked intricately to narrative; a myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning

the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon. Where descriptions of myths typically involve supernatural beings or events (e.g. Berndt & Berndt 1989, Rumsey & Weiner 2001), my posing of the *Bounty* myth is not based in fictitious history or events, but in how such events and narratives are managed, give rise to, and shape the members of the communities who know and use them. *Bounty* is a larger master cultural narrative or *big story* (cf. Bamberg 2006; Freeman 2006), which I conceive of containing several *small stories* (e.g. Georgakopoulou 2007), of which toponymy is but one. While the Pitcairn-Norfolk myth is problematic when treated from a temporary linear approach to narrative, because of the complexity of parallel events such as the back migration to Pitcairn of certain families from Norfolk in 1861, and other events which have occurred in different time-space, 'The Norfolk, Bounty, Pitcairn saga' (Clark 1986) is well established within Pacific history and social science.

One of the key metaphors which propels Pitcairn and *Bounty* narratives on Norfolk is how a paradise might become hell and how hell turns to paradise. I appraise this aspect of knowledge creation and claim that knowledge and how these ways of knowing are produced and represented in the Norfolk landscape. In addition, my study is concerned with insider-outsider dichotomies of language use, particularly lesser known, esoteric toponyms in Norf'k, the Norfolk Island language. I present a selection of road name toponyms collected on Norfolk to illustrate how the *Bounty* and Pitcairn myth can be used to explore the narratives which appear in the Norfolk toponymic landscape. I am concerned with how linguistic relationships, namely the relationship between myths, stories, and narratives from Pitcairn, are depicted on road and business signs associated with the *Bounty* on Norfolk.[2] I investigate these relationships by observing the representation of the *Bounty* myth in the linguistic landscape of the island by considering how Norfolk Island placenames embody linguistic adaptation which remember, commemorate, and often confuse the myth of the Mutiny on the *Bounty* and the legend of the settlement of Pitcairn Island which occurred in 1790.[3]

The rationale for studying Pitcairn and Norfolk narratives is coupled with how language and place-knowledge can be analysed and realised through toponyms. Small islands are manageable case studies of language and cultural change where parameters of measurement are appreciable and minimised. Islands can starkly depict people and how people strive and learn to adapt to new and trying situations and environments after large spatial and geographical movement. The metaphors of 'islands as utopias' (King &

Connell 1999, Laycock 1987) and 'islands as laboratories' (Spriggs 2008) are applicable in the case of Pitcairn and Norfolk; that these paradises became living hells and paradise again (Clarke 1986) and that they are experiments in human and environment interaction (Nobbs 1991, Mühlhäusler 2003) is integral to the history of these two minute snapshots of humanity.

The story of Pitcairn and Norfolk represents a prototypical example of how two small populations have lived distanced yet connected by the influence of outsiders, while incorporating these outsider ideas, myths, and beliefs into their own relationships to their own island worlds. The perception that the Pitcairn Islanders and the Norfolk Islanders, the Pitcairn descendants living in this external territory of Australia, are somehow special and different is deeply related to the exile of the Pitcairners to Norfolk Island in 1856 and is inextricably linked to the myth of the *Bounty*. The story of language genesis, linguistic adaptation, and environmental change makes the resultant amalgam of linguistic and cultural mixing all the more complex.

Pitkern, spoken by the people of Pitcairn Island, developed into a separate variety on Norfolk Island after the entire population of Pitcairn was relocated in 1856 to Norfolk Island. What was termed *the experiment* by the British Crown (see Bladen 1906; Nobbs 2006: 51), i.e. placing a small group of people from a distant island on a new and unknown environment and observing the results, on Norfolk has evolved into an amalgamation of the major influences on this small group of people with English and Polynesian lineages.

What transpired on Norfolk after the relocation is a study of exile and the naming of an uninhabited island. This linguistic exile (Stroińska & Cecchetto 2003) is manifested in a type of lexical and metaphorical longing for the place from where they had come (see Mühlhäusler 2009) which became solidified particularly in the Norf'k placename and biotic name lexicon. Many entries which remember Pitcairn, e.g. 'hoem' (Pitcairn), 'hoem nanwi' (the Norfolk dream fish [nanwi], which reminded the Norfolk fishers of the Pitcairn nanwi).

2. Islands and indigeneity: processes and principles

Membership of the Society of Pitcairn Descendants is reserved for those with Pitcairn ancestry — anyone who can trace their blood back to the settlers of 1856. The society aims 'to promote knowledge of the Pitcairn race' and claims Pitcairners are indigenous to Norfolk Island. 'It's not a claim,' says Ric [Robertson] in response to the use of the 'c' [claim] word. 'It's a fact. We

were the first people as a whole to settle on Norfolk Island as a permanent
homeland — now if you want a definition of indigenous that's it, isn't it?'
(Latham 2005: 97)

The term *indigenous* is awkward when applied to the people of Pitcairn
Island and Norfolk Island. In Australia it is usually reserved to describing
Australian indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures,
and languages. In the Pacific, indigenous is typically applied to the people
and cultures of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. The position of
Norfolk Island and the Norfolk Islanders is contentious. In some ways, their
indigenousness or indigeneity is linked by blood, language, and ways of
seeing the world to Polynesia and Tahiti rather than to Australia. Low's (2012)
reflection on how the Australian constitutional position poses Norfolk as an
"integral part of Australia" (Commonwealth of Australia 2003) is at odds
with the Pitcairn descendants' perceived 'distinctiveness', 'separateness',
and connections to place. That much Australian Government reporting
describes "Norfolk Island as lacking any pronounced cultural differences
to the mainland", which sees "the Island's population as 'ethnically akin'
to the rest of Australia" (Low 2012: 20), and that any claim to indigeneity
by the Norfolk Islanders is not borne out of historical evidence exists in
conflict with claims by some in the Norfolk community "that Norfolk Island
is ethnically and culturally distinct from Australia, and that Norfolk Islanders
of Pitcairn descent are indigenous and Norfolk Island is their 'homeland'…"
(Commonwealth of Australia 2003: 9).

   While the complexity of these intricacies fall beyond the scope of my
argument, several points are worth noting; with the establishment of the
Norf'k Language Act (2004) (Administration of Norfolk Island 2004), the
only piece of language legislation in Australia and its territories, Norf'k, along
with the variety of English spoken on Norfolk, a language with around 400
speakers, became the only official languages recognised with legislation in
Australia and its territories. The legacy of the Norfolk Islanders to Pitcairn,
a British overseas territory, helps Norfolk and the Norfolk Islanders little in
their claim to any arguable degree of Indigenous status within the political
confines of Australia. The assumptions which drive my analysis of the *Bounty*
narrative on Norfolk are that Norfolk is politically and geographically a part
of Australia, that Norf'k is an official language of Australia and its territories,
and that the Norfolk Islanders have strong cultural links to Pitcairn Island and
hence to Tahiti and the legend of the *Bounty*.

The main theoretical approach I take in my analysis is that of ecolinguistics and linguistic ecology. This perspective holds that language is a management tool which enables its users to manage, orientate, and sustain functional links between themselves and their environment. Mühlhäusler (2011) provides some methodological and theoretical suggestions as to what these may be; for example, analysis of a language's referential and denotational lexicon is key to assessing its ability to describe adequately a particular environment; lexical adaptation to new natural environments is a prolonged gradual process; ecolinguistics judges the adequacy of the lexicon in terms of its ability to adapt, expand, and adjust to change. Remote environments provide congenial research situations for observing the relationship between parameters of language, here the placename lexicon, and means by which speculations as to the evolution of these parameters have changed and evolved over time.

The second theoretical strand is an evolving perspective within applied linguistics and semiotics termed linguistic landscape (LL). The seminal work of Landry and Bourhis (1997) in their analysis of bilingual signage and language and power structures in multilingual environments has evolved into a new subfield of scholarship. My work is relevant to LL because I analyse the narrative import of physical signs, while also proposing 'unsigned' placenames, which may or may not appear on maps, as being essential constituents of the LL. I argue the English road name lexicon is an integral part of the LL lexicon as a marker of linguistic narrative and identity at the same time as little known Norf'k names comprise a more esoteric aspect of the Norfolk LL.

3. A toponymic landscape made real through myth and narrative

Norfolk placenames and business names show a search for linguistic adaptation which remember, commemorate, and even confuse the myth of the *Bounty* and the legend of the settlement of Pitcairn. Myths and narratives do not have any truth-value; their utility is assessed by the work they do. The *Bounty* myth and the use of Pitcairn anthroponymous and eponymous road names are effective in signalling a significant past for the Norfolk Islanders, which is brought into the congruent present in a search for identity through toponymy. Pitcairn personal names as placenames seen through the narrative medium of the *Bounty* seem to be an agreeable method for the Norfolk Islanders to explore

and relate to their new 'hoem' (home) in terms of their previous one.

The Pitcairn-inspired eponymous road names in alphabetical order are: Captain Quintal Drive, Edward Young Road, Fletcher Christian Road, George Hunn Nobbs Place, John Adams Road (Figure 1) and Pitcairn Place.[4] Of note is that none of these names are named after women; it was only in 2008 during a community consultation process where 53 previously unofficial and unnamed streets, roads, and easements were made official and named that the first Pitcairn-inspired road name named after a woman was established with the naming of Tevarua Lane.[5]

These signs and names as texts and the meanings, portrayals, and micro-mythology which surround them punctuate the landscape of Norfolk. The presence of these signs is physically and materially driven as much as their existence relies on the abstract; the names are known within the sphere connecting Pitcairn and Norfolk through the medium of the *Bounty*. The road names Fletcher Christian Road and Edward Young Road are not arbitrary but are loaded with assumed cultural and linguistic meaning; they conjure up memories of the past crossing the boundedness of time-space which the *Bounty* emblem realises. The names form a type of post-mutiny paradise within the safe milieu of a far-flung and potentially indeterminate Norfolk Island.

The appearance and recognition of these names heralded the beginning of the celebration and honouring of the Norfolk Islanders' connection to Pitcairn and possibly Polynesia. Until the 1960s, there was a great deal of shame associated with the events that took place in Tahiti and on Pitcairn Island. There was also a large degree of Eurocentric and

Figure 1: John Adams Road, Norfolk Island (the author 2007)

normative male superiority that had an effect on naming things (Mühlhäusler 2003), with similar naming habits initially employed by the Pitcairn Islanders on Norfolk (Nash 2013). The recognition of this connection to Pitcairn through road names is only one example of a renaissance of Pitcairn cultural symbolism on Norfolk Island. The six Pitcairn-inspired road names epitomise how a presumed Pitcairn (linguistic) renaissance on Norfolk is manifested in a variety of different yet similar condensed forms. These forms represent a reification and a spatialisation of Pitcairn ancestry through a process of localisation of naming. The names symbolise processes of linking of Norfolk's ancestral connection to Pitcairn and Tahiti and the depersonalisation of the names through being made spatial and linguistic facts.

The road name signs are a symbolic re-enactment and re-evaluation which re-visits the previous deficit of foregrounding of Pitcairn elements of the ancestry of the Norfolk Islanders. The past suppression of the Pitcairn, and to some extent the Polynesian aspect of Norfolk Islanders, is becoming adjusted in the linguistic landscape. *Bounty* and Pitcairner names, as well as a reinterpretation of the semiotic landscape of Norfolk Island through the medium of physical *Bounty* memorabilia such as the *Bounty* statue erected

Figure 2: *Bounty* statue erected in 1988 near the Norfolk Island Post Office
(the author 2007)

in 1988 near the Norfolk Island Post Office for the Australian Bicentennial (Figure 2), appear as tangible resolutions of the past in terms of the present through effective and pertinent narrative and myths.

4. Names as narrative residue

There is another subset of Norfolk names bound to Pitcairn which persist as a curious linguistic and narrative residue. Ama Ula Lane (ama'ula < Tahitian 'clumsy, careless, slovenly') is one of only a few road names which uses Norf'k words. Like Tevarua Lane, the officialising of this road name illustrates an acceptance within the community of the Norfolk Islanders' Tahitian heritage; Bounty Tours, Bounty Divers, Bounty Folk Museum, and The Mutiny on the Bounty Show, a dramatised re-enactment of the mutiny, *Bounty*-fy Norfolk; Fletcher Christian Apartments, and especially the emblematic sign on a fence on one of Norfolk's main thoroughfares (Figure 3), maintain attachment to the sordid yet reinvented events of the *Bounty* through a specific personalisation and name form; Yorlor Lane (yorlor or yollo 'a slab of pumice stone brought from Tahiti and Pitcairn used to grate vegetables for baking') is a recent inclusion into Norfolk toponymy and embodies the contemporary renaissance of Pitcairn-inspired material culture and language on Norfolk through what appears as physical narratives.

Ghost Corner, Ghostie Ghostie, Side Suff Fly Pass (literally 'Place Swell Flies Past'), and Suicide Rock suggest Norfolk's landscape is perilous and unsafe. It is possible Norfolk's perceived hazardousness witnessed through toponyms as narratives represent a residue of how the original Pitcairners perceived this landscape: it was unknown, unnamed, and perilous. Ecolinguistics claims that one way to manage such unfamiliarity is through naming; these new names signifying danger, peril, and inhospitableness, and exist as cultural markers and micro-texts about how the new arrivals narrate details of their new 'hoem'.

In addition to these threatening names, several dangerous names that existed prior to 1856 were changed into more innocuous ones. I interpret this name changing and linguistic sanitisation as a form of 'toponymic denial'; the purging of the past through the creation of an ideal linguistic paradise leads to a more acceptable and less controversial linguistic environment within which to inhabit. Some of these changes were Bloody Bridge to Dar Naughty Bridge ('dar' is the Norf'k definite article), Murderers Glen to Music Valley,

Figure 3: Fletcher Christian Apartments, Norfolk Island (the author 2007)

Murderers Mound to Dar Cemetery. The presence of taboo and off-limits toponyms like Parloo Park (parloo <Tahitian 'to masturbate'), and Gudda Bridge (gudda < Tahitian 'to fuck'), and Horsepiss Bend (horsepiss < Norf'k 'name of a weed so named because the flowers smell of horse urine when squashed') reveal not only dangerous narratives within Norfolk Island toponymy but also potentially rude linguistic entities. The fact that these delicate cultural names-as-narratives have been traditionally passed down orally is likely testament to their sensitive nature.

5. Revealing and revelling in narratives

Returning to the philosophical focus of this paper, my analysis into the creation, perpetuation, and obfuscation of Pitcairn and *Bounty* myths, places, people, and placenames through narratives of exile and reconciliation is productive on Norfolk Island. In other words, the narrative of the Mutiny on the *Bounty* does a lot of work for the Norfolk Islanders. Road and business names and signs show a striving for linguistic adaptation through knowing of the past, remembering and commemorating people in places and signs, and living the present in terms of hazy ancestry and history. A study of toponyms as narrative texts offers a key insight to linguistic change and linguistic adaptation demonstrate the ability of this element of the lexicon to be flexible in adapting to and revealing new necessities within altered cultural schemas. While toponyms can withstand change and exist as solidified local memory represented as material linguistic data in the world, they are at the same time malleable to suit the storied needs of a people.

The data has demonstrated that when–where there is a mismatch between myths and narratives which work and those which do not, a changing toponymic landscape may result. The modern day presence of Pitcairn, *Bounty*, and Norf'k names on Norfolk is not at all as taboo as it was some decades ago. On the contrary, such embracing of the new celebrated importance of the Pitcairner heritage is encouraged societally through the implementation of toponymy using Norf'k and Pitcairn-inspired names, with business and house names depicting explicitly allegiances to Pitcairn ancestry or 'comefrom'.

Norfolk toponymy, and especially the apparently marginal elements such as road names and the residual names addressed here, illustrates how language use unites Norfolk Islanders. It is Norf'k, with its cumulative grammar rather than a common denominator lect or levelled way of speaking (Mühlhäusler 2013: 234) and intricate language and place-knowledge (Nash & Low 2014), which combines various eccentrically present and historically determined features of Norfolk Island. Where some stories and narratives are based on 'comefrom' and family connections to inhabitation and landed tenure, placenaming crosscuts other distinctions Norfolk Islanders make between themselves and others. For example, although some views on 'islanderness' and 'islander blood' are driven by 'comefrom' and the authenticity of a person's familial connection to the island, islander place-knowledge surfaces as being less essential. That a person who has lived on Norfolk their entire life, but has no 'comefrom', may have a more developed place-knowledge queries the elements of Norfolk Islander identity, and indeed connection to Pitcairn and the *Bounty*. Where place and blood and knowledge has been contiguous for so long in the island's history (see Low 2012), migration to Norfolk by people from Australia and New Zealand, and migration away from Norfolk by those with 'comefrom', has removed Norfolk Islanders' explicit monopoly on local place-knowledge.

With the changes at hand on contemporary Norfolk Island, it remains to be seen whether the emblematic Norf'k expression *lubbe ucklan* meaning 'leave us [the Norfolk Islanders] alone', a request for the Australian Government to remove its control from Norfolk's political and social affairs, leads to a developed and more localised cultural understanding of the nature of the narratives which guide several outlooks on Norfolk's linguistic and social life. The continuation of Norfolk's connection to a *Bounty* inspired past, like the narratives used in other isolated and insular communities elsewhere, appears in a social environment influenced primarily by economic concerns which override the prominence of culture.

Notes

1 This paper is a significant revision of a paper presented at the *Peuples Premiers et Mythes D'aujourd'hui* conference in Noumea, New Caledonia on 1 September 2009. I thank the organisers of this conference. Much of the paper's content was developed between 2007-2011 during my doctoral research under the supervision of Peter Mühlhäusler. Sections of this work are rewritten extracts from an earlier draft of a now published paper (Nash & Low 2014) which I workshopped for several years with Mitchell Low. Low's (2012) doctoral thesis stimulated my thoughts relating to group identity and indigeneity on Norfolk. Many of the ideas have benefitted from engaging dialogue with Petter Næssan, Rachel Hendery, Paul Monaghan, and Catherine Amis. Thanks to Farzana Gounder, editor of this section of *Te Reo*, and to *Te Reo* editor Kevin Watson.

2 I use 'road name' generically to refer to any road, street, place, lane, or easement.

3 Not all Pitcairn family names are strictly '*Bounty* names'. Of the eight Pitcairn family names on Norfolk, only Adams, Christian, McCoy, Quintal, and Young were *Bounty* mutineers. Buffett, Evans, and Nobbs were later arrivals. This social delineation based on *Bounty* families and non-*Bounty* families is still marked within Norfolk society. Mitchell Low (2012) deals with many of these intricacies in his anthropological work on belonging and the politics of settlement on Norfolk Island. For ease of description, I use the label 'Pitcairn names' and '*Bounty* names' to refer to all eight family names brought from Pitcairn to Norfolk.

4 Pitcairn Place is anthroponymous and eponymous because it remembers the name of Pitcairn Island, which is itself an eponym, although it does not refer to a mutineer.

5 Tevarua, a Tahitian woman who arrived on Pitcairn with the *Bounty* mutineers, died in approximately 1799. She was the consort of Matthew Quintal. Her name is entered as 'Te Walua' in the Pitcairn Register which also lists 'Sarah' and 'Big Sullee' as her other names (Ross & Moverley 1964: 52). The officialising of Tevarua Lane as an emblematic road name symbolises an acceptance within the community of the Norfolk Islanders' Tahitian heritage which began in the 1960s.

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