Pitcairn Island, Island Toponymies and Fishing Ground Names: Toward the Possibility of a Peaceful Onshore and Offshore Reconciliation

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Structured Abstract

Article type: research paper

Purpose—This article reflects on the results of documenting fishing ground naming history on and around three islands—Norfolk Island (South Pacific), Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island (South Australia), and Pitcairn Island (South Pacific)—and placenaming practices more generally encompassing islands, insularity, isolation, and the sea. The major study is Pitcairn Island.

Design, Methodology, Approach—There are more than 500 placenames contained within and just offshore five-kilometre square Pitcairn Island, a volcanic outcrop famed as the home of the descendants of the British mutineers of the *Bounty* and their Polynesian entourage. The Pitcairn Islanders have named hydronyms (names for water bodies) surrounding their island primarily as utilitarian linguistic and historical tools used for locating fishing grounds. These sea names are not only stark examples of maritime and aquatic cultural heritage; they illustrate how perceptions and processes of naming the marine environment relate to and can inform terrestrial naming.

Findings—The interaction involving small-scale sea names and names as folk

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capital is presented as a possible mandate for creating a peaceful reconciliation between naming sea and land.

Practical Implications—The Pacific example is extended to the ongoing dispute between Korea and Japan regarding naming the *East Sea–Sea of Japan*.

Fishing Ground Names, Contested Sea Space and Island Toponymies

This exploratory article attempts to reconcile several political, linguistic, and ethnographic aspects associated with island toponymy (placenaming) and the naming of contested sea space. It reviews the author's nearly 10-year toponymic field investigation with island populations in Australia and the South Pacific. An integral aspect of this research has involved documenting offshore fishing ground names, their locations, and their histories. This previous enquiry[1] should be of interest to linguists, toponymists, and island studies scholars, as well as to researchers and policy makers engaging in the industry of assessing how smaller scale studies of names of islands and sea could be put into practice in more large scale political work intended to connect people, culture, history, and the future, as the title of the recent 22nd International Seminar on Sea Names on Jeju Island, South Korea, proposed.[2]

The position taken assesses the role of smaller micro fishing ground name nexuses situated around islands in possibly contributing to understanding larger macro issues of sea naming. Because sea and land are so closely linked in the three small island situations detailed, it is posited that this sea and land connectivity might be linked to the sea–land contention involved in more general and larger scale explications of sea naming. While the linguistics and politics of naming fishing grounds around islands are not comparable in size with the issues of, for example, the naming of the *East Sea* and the *Sea of Japan*, the matters at hand are alike. The application of the most recent documentation and results from Pitcairn Island fishing ground naming and island toponymy should be applicable enough to the higher order international issue of naming larger areas of sea and assessing relationships between island places, placenames, and people and their sea-based livelihoods.

It is not essential to present the basis and history of the contention of the naming of the *East Sea–Sea of Japan* to a readership informed about such topics. Interested readers are referred primarily to the writings of Choo[3] and any number of papers dealing with the *East Sea–Sea of Japan* naming dispute found in the 2015 *Proceedings of the 21st International Seminar on Sea Names*,[4] among other versions of this seminar. What is essential is to detail the philosophical relevance and basis upon which this article draws and how it is related intellectually and politically to broader hydronymic and toponymic controversies. In addition to work on fishing ground

placenaming, the author is a world expert in a novel subfield of island studies and toponymy called *island toponymy*. On the back cover blurb to the author's 2013 book about Norfolk Island (South Pacific) and Dudley Peninsula (Kangaroo Island) toponymy, the following questions were posed:

> How do people name places on islands? Is toponymy in small island communities affected by degrees of connection to larger neighbours such as a mainland? Are island (contact) languages and mainland languages different in how they are used in naming places? How can we conceptualise the human-human interface in the fieldwork situation when collecting placenames on islands?[5]

Having returned three months ago from three months of detailed linguistic and toponymic fieldwork on Pitcairn Island, a 5 km[2] island and Britain's last remaining overseas territory in the remote South Pacific with a human population of around 50 and a toponymic citizenry of more than 500, it is clear the answers to these queries remain unanswered. The questioning in this direction which began in March 2007 with fieldwork on Norfolk Island associated with the author's Ph.D. research on the placenames of this island external territory of Australia. In a probing piece, the chief conclusion remains somewhat unconvincing:

> It is claimed the principal difference which distinguishes island people from non-island people is island people's self-perceived difference. It is speculated this difference and awareness can be observed and demonstrated in island toponymies, both through distinction based on belonging to an island-specific language group and through knowledge and use of locally peculiar eponymous toponyms.[6]

The unresolved claim that island toponymies are somehow distinct from other toponymies was the major motive which drove the rationale for the recently published thematic section "Island Toponymies" in *Island Studies Journal*.[7] The basis of island toponymy was borne out of "dirty" and people-involved toponymic work across many visits with the community of Norfolk Island, approximately 1,700 kilometers east of Sydney, and with residents of Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, South Australia[8] (see Nash 2013 for a detailed summary of this research). These more nascent ideas were cultivated more recently in the fertile soil and the toponymically high-yielding incident seas around Pitcairn Island.

Pitcairn Island Toponymy

Pitcairn Island is a small, remote volcanic island in the South Pacific noted for its famed connection to the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the settlement in 1790 of British mutineers and a larger group of Polynesian women and men (Figure 1).

What is significant to a study of Pitcairn Island toponymy is that there is placenaming within the bounds of this steep and rocky landmass in at least three languages, namely English, Polynesian languages, and Pitcairn, the Pitcairn Island language, a highly endangered contact language, which developed as a result of contact between European and non–European influences. Because there are more than
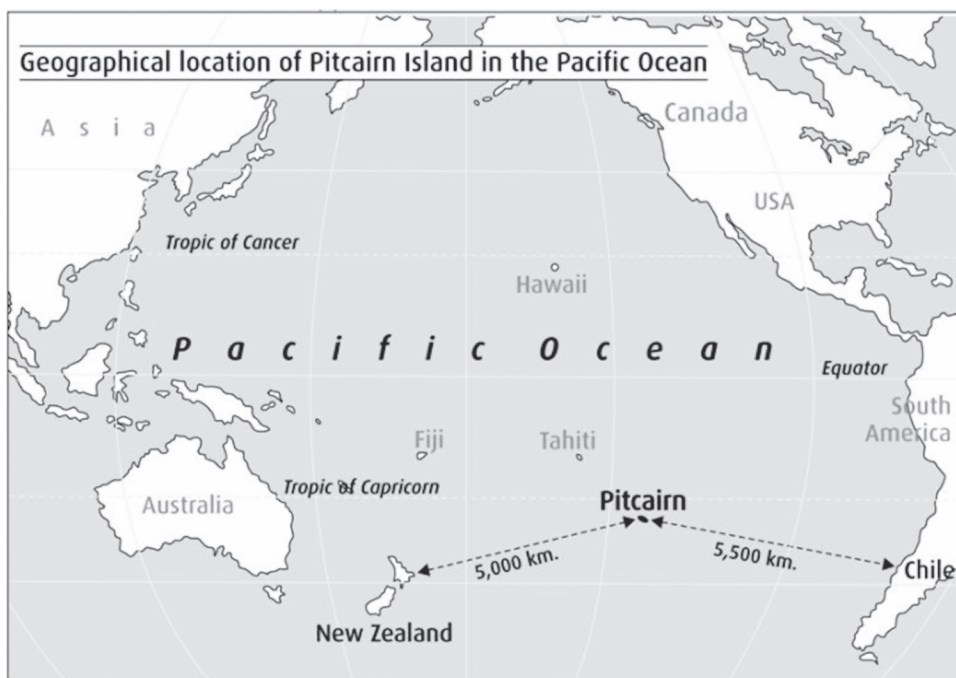
Figure 1. Location map of Pitcairn Island (http://gerardoneil.blogspot.com.au/2014/01/exercise-66-pitcairn-island.html).

500 placenames contained within this small space and in incident near offshore zones, Pitcairn Island's toponymy is highly dense and historically complex. Moreover, the population of Pitcairn Island is small and has been so for many years. Much of the placename knowledge no longer exists orally; historical records and maps are essential to compile something nearing to a complete toponymic history.

A large majority of Pitcairn Island toponyms are pristine. Dealing with a colleague's Pitcairn Island toponymic data from the 1940s, Ross[9] (1958, 333) considers a toponym pristine "if, and only if, we are cognizant of the actual act of its creation." Never having made it to the island, Ross's entry into the toponymic imaginary of these placenames was limited to the depths that his student Moverley, who died before he completed his Ph.D. on the Pitcairn Island language, had attained during his almost-three-year tenure as the island's first non-islander school teacher. Since this time and apart from descriptive morsels about placenames associated with fish and fishing in Götesson[10] and several maps[11] detailing how heavily populated this toponymic space actually is, the world knows little beyond the history and etymology of many of these quirky and emplaced monikers.

Pitcairn Islanders have named both toponyms and hydronyms surrounding their island primarily as practical linguistic and historical tools used for narrating stories, utilitarian situating within landscape, and locating fishing grounds. These geographical names and offshore fishing grounds are not only astute examples of land and sea based cultural heritage; they illustrate how perceptions and processes

of naming an island with no toponymic record prior to the arrival of the *Bounty* has taken place and changed over time. How are these names any different from patterns of continental placenaming? What can islands tell us, if anything, about how island people and hence island toponymies are dissimilar or distinctive from other mainland toponymies? And in line with what is at the heart of a more aesthetic appreciation of islands, island toponymies, and island languages: How do creative and artistic takes help us to measure scientifically the reality of the effectiveness and distinguishing nature of island toponymies?

Because the population of the island who speak Pitcairn and who have access to large amounts of this knowledge is even smaller than the island's population, around 20, admission into what can be argued is a sketchiness of community memory is often the only means of documenting extant data. These recollections may not be as reliable as one would expect:

> Sometimes the original story can only be conjectured. *Tati-nanny*: Tati must have been a Polynesian and *nanny* is a nanny-goat, so we must suppose that a Tahitian kept one here. By no means all the names can be explained and some will certainly be wrongly explained by the islanders in a few years [*sic*—no possessive] time.[12]

While much of the locational, spatial, and historical information concerning these toponyms has been documented,[13] what has not been considered in any significant detail is the pragmatics of the modern use of these placenames and how maps, names, people, and trust interact in synchronic placename practice on contemporary Pitcairn Island. Additionally, although several of the offshore fishing ground names still known have been mapped most recently by Evans[14] and initially by Gathercole,[15] the coordinates and locations of these places and the importance of this ill-documented aspect of the island's toponymy to broader investigations into the Pitcairn Island language has not hitherto been emphasised. The taxon of fishing ground names is an opportune feature of Pitcairn Island language and culture for understanding and realizing not only toponymic truth and placename trust, but also how the reliability of linguistic data in general can be tested across informants. Additionally, because of its small people numbers, Pitcairn Island offers an apt example in examining small community languages and how language change, nostalgia, and evolving linguistic priorities evolve in environments where the language competency of each individual has marked affects on an entire and specific linguistic and social landscape.

Realizing how dependent we are on belief and the bestowal of trust to what Stolz and Warnke[16] refer to in one of the subheadings of their article as potential "little white lies" and how maps may tell lies, more popular takes on the toponymy of Pitcairn Island give a direct sense of fading community memory:

> There are many other places on the island with names which remain long after the circumstances of the naming are forgotten, such as Allen's Stone, Hole For Matts, Tati-Nanny, Bitey-Bitey, Rat's Hole, Old Man's Fishing Place and there is no reason ever to use any other name.[17]

The concern here is with the toponymic truth and placenaming trust the author has had to place on those interviewed relating to their knowledge of offshore fishing ground toponymy on Pitcairn Island. Moreover, the specialized, gender-specific, and almost mythical nature of fishing ground toponymy makes this section of the island's placenaming history highly effective at depicting change and variation. Such names depict the ways names cling to landscape and reveal the shaky grip language and knowledge have on spaces and how humans strive against all odds to describe and work the specific environments they inhabit.

Whether or not Pitcairn Island placenames are pristine or transparent in their meaning, location, or use does not in any way mean that they are truthful and that these names give a more accurate rendition of the present sociocultural landscape than any other account might. While many use the common "oh, that was way before my time" or "that's what the old people used to say" when asked about the history and who of toponyms, one is left to *trust* the several maps which have been compiled and completed. In the absence of people on contemporary Pitcairn Island who remember the rationale or history for many of these names, one relies justifiably on accessible contemporary accounts which are the only accounts one can go by. One is forced to *trust* informants. With respect to fishing ground names and those interviewed recently on Pitcairn Island, the oldest was 90 and the youngest was around 60.

The Names Which Remain

None of the four people who have shared fishing ground knowledge is younger than 60. While most of the grounds the author has obtained offshore locations for are plotted on Evans's[18] and the Hardwicke Knight map published in Gathercole,[19] documenting the little known triangulation coordinates of these grounds is wholly new. Unlike Pitcairn Island's seemingly countless terrestrial names, the close-in off-shore marine environment is less toponymically populated. "In 1965 when canoe-fishing was practised every Tuesday, the islanders had five different offshore fishing grounds to choose from: Nellie, Headache, Oh Dear, Where Johnny Fall, and Minnie Off."[20] There are now upwards of 20 locations islanders know and use. There is no other possibility than to trust those who speak about the locations and nature of the fishing grounds. Although it might be possible to carry out reliability tests with different people about the location of different places and the history of names, one is largely dependent on their stories. To document matters accurately, one must trust islanders are telling some kind of toponymic truth, which, it is certain, they are. For example, all four knew the following fishing ground and its location:

> Out Ha Bear (Out at the Bear): first triangulation mark—use the small stone which comes over the bank down at Glenny's Harbour on the north eastern coast; second triangulation mark—line up the stone called Tanema along with the inside stone of the two stones known as Young's Rock. The ground is about 150 feet out. The fish caught there are ulwa, nanwi, redfish, tiwo (tu'o), jackass (dog-tooth tuna).

Were anyone telling me "little white (toponymic) lies," any of other people involved might have either informed the author of any errors or corrections or told that the others were misinformed. The author began to trust the locations, knowledge, and opinions of the people with whom they were working. Another example known to all four is:

> Out Ha Spot (Out at the Spot); alternate name is Out Ha Speckle Side (Out at the Speckled Place): first triangulation mark—bring the palm at Jim's Ground with the bank at Christian's Cave; second triangulation mark—line up the yellow dirt up at The Lime, on the side of Longridge, in Tedside (western end of the island). The alternate name—Out Ha Speckle Side—refers to the sandy, speckled seaweed like coral at the bottom of the sea at this location. The rocks are visible from a boat and they appear to move around on the bottom when you look down. This is a great place to catch red snapper and faafaiya. This sea area must be large, because trawling and dragging in a boat leads to catching large amounts of fish.

A lesser-known place, the following fishing ground and its exact location was known only to two people recently interviewed:

> Out Ha Side fer Parkins's: only one mark: line up the stone at Ginser Valley with a small cave to the right of Gudgeon. Because this location is close in shore, there is only one mark. On this run at about 80 feet deep, you can drag and come to different fishing bumps. The area is so shallow you can see the fish taking your line. There are plenty of places in this whole area for fishing. There are other marks for these alternate places, but most of these have been forgotten. This is generally a nanwi spot, but red snapper are also caught here. It is named after Parkins Christian.

In the absence of those who named the places, one can develop across interviews and people a large amount of toponymic trust in people's seemingly un-white lies.

More than 50 years ago it was apparent "that [Pitcairn Island] place names are shifting, due perhaps to the absence of sufficient numbers of persons of middle age now living on the island to maintain a sacrosanct [oral] tradition."[21] This tradition implies a need to believe the reliability and truthfulness of and in the tales and stories of those who came before, particularly if people are dependent on the accuracy of these names and their locations for livelihood. Nowhere is the need for trusting in old legend and storied yet practical landscape particulars more demanded than when subsistence and preservation are at stake.

Whether or not the information Pitcairn Island fishers imparted is wholly truthful, and whether what has been mapped previously is trustworthy as mapped territory, there is a degree of testable reliability relating to how we can make sense of such a multiplex of names. Relationships involving truth-falsehood, social construction through naming and power, and the need for accuracy and belief across generations and landscape uses when applied to a placenaming tapestry echoing past survival skills converge on the largely unofficial toponymy. Documenting the current day reality of the amalgam of names and action requires not only an appreciation of the social and ecological functioning of the Pitcairn language, but how layering

of placenames and toponyms as a significant almost-separate linguistic level operates in everyday language-and-life on Pitcairn Island.

Sea Names and Land Names: A Reconciliation?

In order to reflect on the subtitle of this article—toward the possibility of a peaceful onshore and offshore reconciliation between (terrestrial) island toponymies and fishing ground names—it is necessary to present data from the three island case studies. In Tables 1 (Norfolk Island), 2 (Dudley Peninsula), and 3 (Pitcairn Island) the listed fishing ground names all use terrestrial locations in their names:

Table 1: Norfolk Fishing Grounds Named
After Terrestrial Features (Nash, 2016)

Ar House fer Ma Nobby's (Ma Nobby's House)	Dar Hog (The Hog)
Horse and Cart	Out orn ar Melky Tree (Out on the Milky Tree)
Dar Fig Valley (The Fig Valley)	Down ar Graveyard (Down at the Graveyard)
The Crack	Ar Convict Store (The Convict Store)
Ar Saddle (The Saddle)	The Thumb
Whale's Hump	Dar Boomerang (The Boomerang)

Table 2: Dudley Peninsula (Kangaroo Island) Fishing Grounds
Named After Terrestrial Features (Nash, 2016)

Haystack Ground	The Fence Ground
Pig Sty Ground	The Burnt Out House
The Waterworks	The Halfwindow Patch
Alex Boat Harbour	Middle Terrace Patch
Between the Tits	Mirror Rock Patch
The Old Road	Cable Hut Patch
Fig Tree Patch	Snapper Point

Table 3: Pitcairn Island Fishing Grounds
Named After Terrestrial Features (Nash, 2016)

Out Glenny	Out Headache
Out Marloo	Out Flatcher
Out Glenny	Out Rope
Soeja's (Soldier's)	Out ha Point (Out on the Point)
Timiti's Crack	Out ha Palm (Out on the Palm)
Out Tautama	Down Chair
Oh Dear	

It should be remembered that all fishing ground names use terrestrial features when they are triangulated. That is, the locating of offshore seamarks always implies the use of geographical markers known by fishers.

Instead of dissecting the data linguistically or geographically in order to ascertain how these names operate formally, it seems more advantageous in closing to speculate about how sea and land names interact on three distinct ethnographical levels: fishing ground names and memory; fishing ground names and time-space; fishing ground names and nostalgia.

Fishing Ground Names and Memory

People who have died, houses which are no longer there, and landmarks which are long gone such as trees comprise the seaward–landward axis between fishing ground names and their landed connectivity. People persist in names despite their demise, monikers which recollect the unknown hydronymic expanse in terms of the known terrestrial. There is a safety in talking about seaspace in terms of shore and coast. Norfolk Island's Dar Hog (The Hog) is a well-remembered land feature which looks like a hog when seen from offshore; Dudley Peninsula's The Waterworks is 100 meters offshore directly out from the newly established desalination plant near the cemetery; Out Flatcher is offshore from the onshore stone Flatchers, an orthographic execution more in line with the Pitcairn language pronunciation of the famous Fletcher of Fletcher Christian and *Bounty* fame. Human memory might be fickle but toponymic and cartographic retention perseveres.

Fishing Ground Names and Time-Space

Names can create and destroy absolute and temporal time-space. Building on the memory driven aspect of sea–land memorialization, time–space renders some names close and other far. Norfolk Island's Ar Convict Store (The Convict Store) reminds the viewer of the convict period (1825–1855) on the island; The Burnt Out House was a house which burnt down several decades ago which remained with only walls and nothing else and is still used as a mark for several people's fishing grounds. Out Glenny connects the viewer with George "Glenny" Adams born in 1804 who had a harbor on the north-eastern coast of Pitcairn Island named after him. Although distant in time-space, Glenny is brought into the present through bridging fluid and solid toponymic expression.

Fishing Ground Names and Nostalgia

Nostalgia and naming appear to amalgamate memory and time-space with emotional sentiment. Where several fishing ground names could be singled out in the three data sets, there seems to be little need; all these names are nostalgic, implicating the sensibility of toponymic relics in a compound of the flowing—sea—and the solid—land. All these maps within these micro corpora are representative of more substantial imaginaries, name-focused visions of the merging of walkable and sailable open spaces.

There is a possibility of a peaceful onshore and offshore reconciliation between

(terrestrial) island toponymies and fishing ground names. Where islands and their incident seas may be isolating in terms of how toponymies are accessed,[22] what these examples from Oceania suggest is certain compromises can be met; offshore names do not have to be far away geographically or politically. Perhaps it is in the closeness and intimacy of memory, time-space, and nostalgia that small islands can help scholars in understanding the more intricate hyper political and international nature of the naming of the *East Sea–Sea of Japan*.

While there is much more at stake in this much larger scale transnational issue of Northeast Asian sea naming than exists in the presented examples from Oceania, associating small island territories like Norfolk Island and Pitcairn Island with their political connection to Australia and Britain, respectively, could inform how the apparent boundlessness of close and faraway seas and their landed territories are managed. This organization is as much an issue of delineating maritime territories as it is of naming circumscription. If what is offered in this paper provides in some way any kind of resolution and thought provocation, it should be the case that the cultural and toponymic priorities of several Australian and South Pacific islands have come into contact with those political and governmental concerns of South Korea and Northeast Asia.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1. Joshua Nash, "Naming the Sea: Offshore Fishing Grounds as Placenames on Norfolk Island and Pitcairn Island." *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures* 3(2) (2009), pp. 118–131; Joshua Nash, "Obtuse Anglers: The Linguistics and Ethnography of Fishing Ground Names on Norfolk Island." *Indigenous and Minority Placenames* (2014), pp. 305–323. Joshua Nash, "Language Contact and 'the Catch': Norfolk Island Fishing Ground Names." *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift-Norwegian Journal of Geography* 70(1) (2016), pp. 62–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2015.1110197.

2. This article is a slight rewrite of a presentation from the Jeju conference presented on 24 October 2016.

3. Sungjae Choo, "Recent Progress for Restoring the Name East Sea and Future Research Agenda." *한국지도학회지* 7(1) (2007), pp. 1–9; Sungjae Choo, "Geographical Feature and Endonym: The Case of East Sea/Sea of Japan." In *The 15th International Seminar on Sea Names*, pp. 3–5. 2009; Sungjae Choo and Heesu Kim, "The Brand Value of Place Names: Topics in Economic Geography." *한국경제지리학회지* 18(4) (2015), pp. 431–449.

4. The Society for East Sea, "Sea Names: Heritage, Perception and International Relations." Proceedings of the 21st International Seminar on Sea Names, Helsinki, Finland, 23–26 August 2015. Seoul: The Society for East Sea.

5. Joshua Nash, *Insular Toponymies: Place-Naming on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Dud-*

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6. Joshua Nash, "Island Placenaming and Insular Toponymies." *Names* 63(3) (2015), pp. 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1179/0027773815Z.000000000110.

7. Nash (2013).

8. *Ibid.*

9. Alan S.C. Ross, eds. M. Cortés, A.G. Blanco and A. Tovar, "Notes on Some 'Pristine' Place-Names of Pitcairn Island," In *Fifth International Congress of Toponymy and Anthroponymy: Proceedings and Transactions* (Acta Salmanticensia: Filosofia y Letras, xI: 1–2., Salamanca, 1958), pp. 333–337.

10. Lars-Åke Götesson, *Fishes of the Pitcairn Islands: Including Local Names and Fishing Methods* (Nomen förlag, 2012), pp. 37–45.

11. David Evans (2005). Pitcairn Island (map).

12. Ross (1958), p. 336.

13. See Evans (2005); Peter Gathercole, "Preliminary Report on Archaeological Fieldwork on Pitcairn Island, January–March, 1964" (manuscript), Hocken Library (Dunedin: New Zealand.1964); Robert Kirk, *Pitcairn Island, the Bounty Mutineers and Their Descendants.* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2008); Henry E. Maude, "Gazeteer [*sic*] of Pitcairn Island," (year unknown [ca. 1940–1945]), The Maude Papers, Pacific Collection, Barr Smith Library, The University of Adelaide, located in "A. Pitcairn Island" section, part 1 series M553, located in Box 1; Alan S.C. Ross (1958); Alan S.C. Ross and Albert W. Moverley (eds.), *The Pitcairnese Language with Contributions by E. Schubert, H.E. and Alaric Maude, E.H. Flint and A.C. Gimson* (London: André Deutsch, 1964); Roy Sanders, "Our Island Being a Study of Pitcairn Community in Transition," MA thesis (Auckland: Auckland University, 1953).

14. Evans (2005).

15. Gathercole (1964).

16. Thomas Stolz and Ingo Warnke, "When Places Change Their Names and When They Do Not. Selected Aspects of Colonial and Postcolonial Toponymy in Former French and Spanish Colonies in West Africa—The Cases of Saint Louis (Senegal) and the Western Sahara." *International Journal for the Sociology of Language*, 239 (2016), pp. 29–56, 50. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2016–0004.

17. Government of the Islands of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno (2013), p. 61.

18. Evans (2005).

19. Gathercole (1964).

20. Götesson (2012), p. 16.

21. Gathercole (1964), p. 25.

22. Nash (2013); Nash (2015).

Biographical Statement

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