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Thematic Section: Island Toponymies

Do island toponymies exist? (Guest Editorial Introduction)

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ABSTRACT: Explicit consideration of the concept of island toponymy is scant. Following a summary of recent island toponymic experiences on Pitcairn Island, this introduction reviews how the seven papers in this thematic section of *ISJ* offer methodological and theoretical groundwork towards establishing island toponymy as a subfield of research in its own right both within island studies and toponymy more generally. The creative aspects and eclectic nature of investigating island toponymies is proposed as a possible means of further enquiry.

Keywords: linguistics, onomastics, Pacific islands, Pitcairn Island, placenaming, toponymy

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Introduction: Are islands and toponymy reasonable bedfellows?

On the back cover blurb to my 2013 book about Norfolk Island and Dudley Peninsula (Kangaroo Island) toponymy, I posed the following questions:

> 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? (Nash, 2013)

Having returned six weeks ago from three months of intense linguistic and toponymic fieldwork on Pitcairn Island, a 5km^2 island in the remote South Pacific with a human population of around 50 and a toponymic citizenry of more than 500, I realize the answers to these queries remain largely unanswered. My questioning in this direction began in March 2007 when I first travelled to Norfolk Island to begin my PhD research on the placenames of this island external territory of Australia. I remain unconvinced by my own chief conclusion from a recent exploratory piece on island toponymy,

> 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 (Nash, 2015, p. 146).

The unresolved claim that island toponymies are somehow distinct from other toponymies was the major motive which drove the rationale for this thematic section. Beyond the principally linguistic and toponymic focus of research into island toponymy thus far, island studies seems a reasonable ripe field to indulge in an exploration of the nature of such toponymies.

Before outlining the personal, theoretical and epistemological associated with editing this collection of papers, let me indulge in a brief chronicle of a recent island toponymic adventure. Pitcairn Island (South Pacific) is both toponymic dream and placenaming encumbrance. The astonishing number of placenames contained within and just offshore the island, a volcanic outcrop famed as the home of the descendants of the British mutineers of the *Bounty* and their Polynesian entourage, must be unprecedented. The Pitcairn Islanders are proud of their *islotoponomastiscape*. And why shouldn't they be? From *Vibebea*, presumably remembering a Polynesian person, through *Itei*, named after the white tern known as *itae* (*Gygis candida*) in the Society Islands of Polynesia, to my personal favourite, the well-known and well-remembered *Break Im Hip*, a small rocky promontory on the island's south coast where a Pitcairn Islander once slipped and broke his hip, any Pitcairn map provides seemingly endless entry points into the island's history as observable through its toponymy.

A large majority of Pitcairn Island toponyms are pristine. Dealing with a colleague's Pitcairn Island toponymic data from the 1940s, Ross (1958, p. 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 PhD 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 (2012, pp. 37-45) and several maps (e.g. Evans, 2005) 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. It is to these gaps that I plan to dedicate a large chunk of the next stage in my career; so, sadly, this thematic section offers little to the toponymically inclined Pitcairn Island- or *Bounty*-ophile.

Pitcairn Islanders have named both toponyms and hydronyms (names for water) 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 I believe 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?

The net of island toponymies

The broad inter-disciplinarity covered within this section is noteworthy. Of the eight authors, three are linguists (William Davey, Rachel Hendery, Joshua Nash), two are geographers (Jesús

Israel Baxin Martínez, Carmen Sámano Pineda), and one each hails from island studies (Phil Hayward), history (Charles Dalli), and composition and sound art (Cathy Lane).

The selection kicks off with Lane inviting us on her aesthetically satisfying expedition of sound as a way of knowing (place). Language(s), islands remote and close, and the crofts and hillocks of the Scottish Outer Hebrides all drift into the fluid performance-as-landscape zones mediated by an exquisite orality of placenames. Lane takes the interiorized silent living in maps and people's minds and tells us of how mapping the islands of South and North Uist in sound came about as a personal toponymic configuration. Places are literally given voices through recording and reproducing the people and the stories who and which exist within these self imbued, sonic communities. The deep maps and accumulative narratives stickily adhere to sites and to our islanded imaginaries both musically and cartographically.

Dalli moves us to a thick historical reflection on the etymology of a late medieval corpus of *raḥl* placenames in Malta, framing his work within island studies. He talks about differences in *raḥl* toponyms and wider systems of regional and local toponymy in the western Mediterranean. Dalli concludes by developing a thesis implicating hybridization of placename etymologies, linguistic origins, land use changes and isolation-driven toponymic modification.

Davey considers his perspective on island toponymy as a series of different 'views from the sea,' a motif used throughout to make sense of his positioning and that of his characters. His is a historiography of Cape Breton toponymy, with the whiff of island and sea being a constant companion. The maps Davey depicts reorient the spatiality of sea-based cartographies and their placement vis-à-vis any island's seaward-landward incongruity: not all the maps point north; they are always directed from the sea facing towards land. Placenames change and shift; various maps represent differing cartographic and toponymic priorities; history, charted names, and language-in-place thoughts provide nicely convoluted intellectual habitats within which new island toponymy outlooks can reside.

Martínez and Pineda invite us to a geo-historical trip to the many islands of Mexico. They hone in on Cedros ('cedars'), named after its arboreal vegetation, and provide us with rich details about the nature of its better and lesser-known toponyms. Colloquial placenames from Cedros and the Baja California Peninsula like El Pedregoso (The Rocky One), Campo de los Chinos (Chinese Camp), and El Tesoro del Mar (Treasure of the Sea) reveal tense yet colourful relationships between the official and unofficial-indigenous. Of great significance to future studies of Mexican island toponymy is that "[u]nlike continental toponymy, Mexican island toponymy is rich in Spanish names, poor in indigenous names, and completely lacking in composite toponyms combining indigenous and Spanish words."

Hendery uses the economy of a well-defined corpus of placenames from tiny Palmerston Island, South Pacific, to make us reconsider several matters of concern to island toponymy and toponymy in general: when is a placename actually a placename? How do placenames function in small communities where intimate knowledge rules? What placename typologies work? Her not-knowing about what variants of the same place speakers might use in any given situation and the standout example of *Scratch-my-arse Rock*, also known as *Kick-my-arse Rock*, usher in a sense of both the mystical-mythical and the humorous when considering island toponymies. Although people may leave the island often never to return, placenames remain as toponymic inscriptions and personalized community nostalgia. Island spaces, island names, island people and insular processes all converge fittingly on Palmerston.

Hayward's contribution, while only incidentally engaging with toponymy, is most definitely island focused. Situating his piece within a strong statement about islandness and

how we conceptualize them, he nudges readers on a geographical nomenclative narration of five salt dome islands in Louisiana, USA. The tension between French and English island names and the remote backwater bayous are reminiscent of the 2014 season of the American anthology crime drama series *True Detective*. Among the decommissioned salt mines, a vista of oil well heads, and the noodling of industrial pipelines, Hayward muddies well the already brackish waters of posing islands and toponymy as suitable bedfellows.

My own creative musing on Norfolk Island toponyms and place is the final article in this collection. Although based on linguistic fieldwork from 2007, the investigative writing with its spatial narrative and open-ended method remains fresh and pertinent. As those of us who have worked first hand with people on literal or figurative islands know, the insider-outsider designation can be paramount. Examples of Norfolk Island placenames and their histories, snippets of the Norfolk language, and qualities of intimate relationships formed during fieldwork, are blended in this reflection of and on a specific island, one particular fishermen, and a couple of idiosyncratic toponyms.

Do island toponymies really exist?

What began as a broad call for papers in September 2015 has evolved into a concise thesis into the nature, (ir)reality and future of island toponymies. These papers go a long way to considering the questions I posed on the back cover of my 2013 book and the other formative queries which kick-started the conceptual development and editing linked to producing this thematic section. I offer this collection of papers to islanders, island studies scholars, islophiles, toponymists and linguists, as well as anthropologists, geographers and historians. It is by encouraging and participating in more innovative intellectual research based on island toponymies, languages and histories, and their interaction with islandness and insularity, that a more synthesized and personalized academic product might emerge. So, do island toponymies and toponyms differ from mainland equivalents? Moreover, *do island toponymies exist?* Readers are invited to form their own opinions. I look forward to continuing the discussion.

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