THE MITIGATION OF VULNERABILITY

Mutiny, resilience and reconstitution: a case study of Pitcairn Island

MARIA AMOAMO

University of Otago, Dunedin <maria.amoamo@otago.ac.nz>

Abstract

Over the past few decades the Pacific region has undergone much change through decolonisation and postcolonial (re)adjustment. Political change in new and existing Pacific nations is marked by efforts to re-conceptualise identities, histories and futures. Descriptions of islands as fragile, small, peripheral and dependent are often taken for granted; reiterated within a discourse of 'vulnerability'. Such rhetoric sets up a perception of what constructs 'islandness' or island societies. This article uses a case study of Pitcairn Island, the last remaining British Overseas Territory in the Pacific, to argue for a theorisation of social capital as a counter-narrative to such discourse. It contends that an understanding of the historical trajectories of sustainable livelihoods (SL) show that strengths emerge from livelihood strategies specifically adapted to such isolated places. This moves beyond the spatial rhetoric of colonial and postcolonial theory by showing how the materiality of place and people are fundamental parts of colonial and postcolonial formations in the present.

Keywords

Vulnerability, social capital, sustainable livelihood, resilience

Introduction

Islands were the first territories to be colonised in the European Age of Discovery, and have been the last to seek and obtain independence (Baldacchino and Royle 2010). There are a number of factors contributing to the latter, not least the process of "upside down decolonization" and the definitive advantages in *not* being independent (see Baldacchino, 2010). Notwithstanding, a key objective of the United Nations (UN) Special Committee on Decolonization is to progress the decolonisation process in today's world, with a particular emphasis on the Pacific region (United Nations, 2010). All 16 of the world's remaining 'non-self-governing territories' on the UN's list – often referred to as 'overseas territories' – are islands (Baldacchino and Royle, 2010). Of these, the Pacific accounts for five: one of which is Pitcairn, Britain's last remaining Pacific Overseas Territory. Britain's remaining dependencies are, without exception, those that are still seen as too small to become independent; and, in most of them, there is no significant support for this course (Lockhart et al, 1993). In terms of the UN guidelines there has been no progress in Pitcairn towards self-government and since 1999 the pattern has been to reinforce central executive authority rather than to build self-government capacity within the territory (Levine, 2009). However, Pitcairn is not immune

to similar aspirations to South Pacific states in their desire for autonomous and progressive options for future well-being. A revised Constitution in March 2010 has replaced a 1970 Order that no longer serves the needs of those living on Pitcairn, and represents a 'modern partnership' between the UK and the island nation (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2010).

As a non-self governing territory, Pitcairn is administered by the United Kingdom, albeit at a distance of some 5000 kilometres, through the Government of Pitcairn Islands Office in Auckland, New Zealand. Isolation, together with scale, often distances islands from political power (Royle, 2001). Such spatiality does however sit within the framework of post-colonialism. Indeed, post-colonial studies has at its core questions of geography. Who had control of particular spaces and places and who has that control now? What happened as a result of such control? (Baldacchino and Royle, 2010: 141) Moreover, colonial control has been exercised in differing ways in such relationships, falling into two general patterns: direct and indirect rule; and two categories, settled or conquered/ceded. The British most commonly practiced indirect rule with their island colonies. Such a policy has, over time, created different outcomes for different island entities.

Pitcairn's relationship with the UK has been described as one of 'neglect' rather than 'protect' (see Connell, 1988; Farran, 2007), placing the island in a subordinate or peripheral power relationship. Thus, geographical isolation and social dislocation are constraints imposed upon small islands such as Pitcairn. In turn, this has contributed to creating insular societies in which formative social and cultural processes have involved a struggle, even if only psychological or virtual, with an external 'other'. Spatial separateness has bestowed a strong sense of self-pride and identity, not to mention in Pitcairn's case, exclusivity. According to Baldacchino, geographical isolation and the compact socio-political universe of small island states are "likely to promote feelings of fellowship and a sense of community" (2002: 194); whilst Kelman notes: "small, isolated populations form tight kinship networks, a strong sense of identity and unique cultural heritage" (2009: 14). We might argue that the livelihood strategies that evolve through such neglect reflect specific dispositions of resilience to counter vulnerability.

This article locates its discussion within a postcolonial framework in its aim to support Pitcairn's path to self-determined development, although self-determination does not necessarily mean independence. Wolfers (2010) makes the point that while 'self-determination' and 'decolonisation' are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings and implications for the people in non-self-governing territories and states in that "self-determination involves choice; decolonisation refers to the end or the ending of colonial rule" (2010: 1). Postcolonialism deconstructs structures of dependency and poverty and is concerned with uneven and unequal power relations, supporting sustainability and empowering local communities (Scheyvens, 2002; Scheyvens and Momsen, 2008; Tucker and Akama, 2009). The article aims to provide a counterpoint to the discourse of vulnerability and SIDS (Small Island Developing States) through examination of Pitcairn society over time, in order to understand, in light of its unique beginnings and isolated existence for over 200 years, how cultural livelihood has been sustained. It contends that social capital, occurring through historical trajectories, sustains livelihood. The OECD defines social capital as "networks, together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within and among groups" (Helliwell, 2003: 9). In other words, social capital is a resource that arises from relationships or interaction between people or groups of people (Coleman, 1988).

Discussion examines how the concepts of resilience and vulnerability, in partial or complete ways, are exhibited in the context of Pitcairn society in order to support social capital theory. The ability to articulate these in the context of Pitcairn is also transferable to non-island geographies and provides cross-disciplinary benefits for researchers.

In support of this proposition, it will be argued that Sustainable Livelihood (SL) strategies have been critical factors of adaptation between people and environment. SL is a people-centred paradigm that emphasises the inherent capacities and knowledge systems of community (Tao and Wall, 2009). These actions derive not so much from size or resources, but from particular skills centred on achieving social cohesion – among others, leadership, discipline, personal responsibility and adaptability (Connell, 2007: 116). Livelihood strategies equate with social capital to the extent that they are cooperative, affecting the ways in which people use their assets to achieve their goals (Graci and Dodds, 2010). To date, little research has been conducted about Pitcairn in the past fifty years to explore this phenomenon. The island community has survived several crises notwithstanding; it is a community that has shown immense resilience and adaptability, suggesting the considerable strength that lies in social cohesion. Examination of Pitcairn's historical events will show that social capital underwrites recovery from crises, supports sustainability and provides a tangible way forward.

The Historical and Geographical Context of Pitcairn

There was one thing above all others the British Navy was slow to forgive: mutiny. Pitcairn was born not of colonisation but of anti-colonialism, if we understand the term 'mutiny' to mean "open rebellion against constituted authority" (Wordnet, 2010: online). Pitcairn is renown as the refuge for the mutineers of H.M.S. *Bounty*, a ship that in 1787 embarked on a colonial mission to collect breadfruit trees from Tahiti and transport them to the West Indies as food for slaves. Dening has commented on the paradox that, "the *Bounty* was transporting the breadfruit tree, the very symbol of a free and unencumbered life, from the island of freedom, Tahiti, to the islands of bondage, the West Indies and their slave plantations" (1992: 11). The saga of the mutiny is well known not only in maritime history but also in global history. Led by Fletcher Christian, the mutiny against Captain William Bligh is a tale invested with personal pride, vanity, courage, pettiness, insult, resourcefulness, loyalty, treachery and superb seamanship (McKinney, 1989).

As a result of the mutiny, nine mutineers, together with six Tahitian men and twelve women, landed on Pitcairn Island in January 1790. They would, over time, develop cultural and life skills particularly adapted to the environment, speak an exclusive 'Pitkern' language and maintain a uniqueness and exclusivity that today is still strongly influenced by the island's *Bounty* heritage. But over time, the island's inhabitants would not escape crisis and vulnerability. Conflict between the Tahitian men and mutineers resulted in several murders in the island's early settlement and by 1800 only one mutineer, John Adams, survived along with a number of women and children. In the ensuing years, determined to care for the welfare of the women and children, Adams transformed the small community to one of Christian piety, following the teachings of the Bible and Church of England prayer book landed with the *Bounty* provisions; a disposition that was subsequently fostered by like-minded patriarchal leaders after his death. From such transformation, Pitcairn became (in the eyes of the 'colonial' world) an iconic representation of Pacific 'paradise' and Christian morality during much of the

19th and 20th centuries (Clune, 1966; Shapiro, 1929; Young, 1894); a disposition that has remained strongly ingrained in Pitcairn culture. The community went on to develop a range of livelihood strategies that revealed that the strength of small island communities resides in a strong communal spirit, attachment to place and the ability to cope with, and adapt to, internal and external contingencies. In this manner, they show mitigating factors against the discourse of island vulnerability.
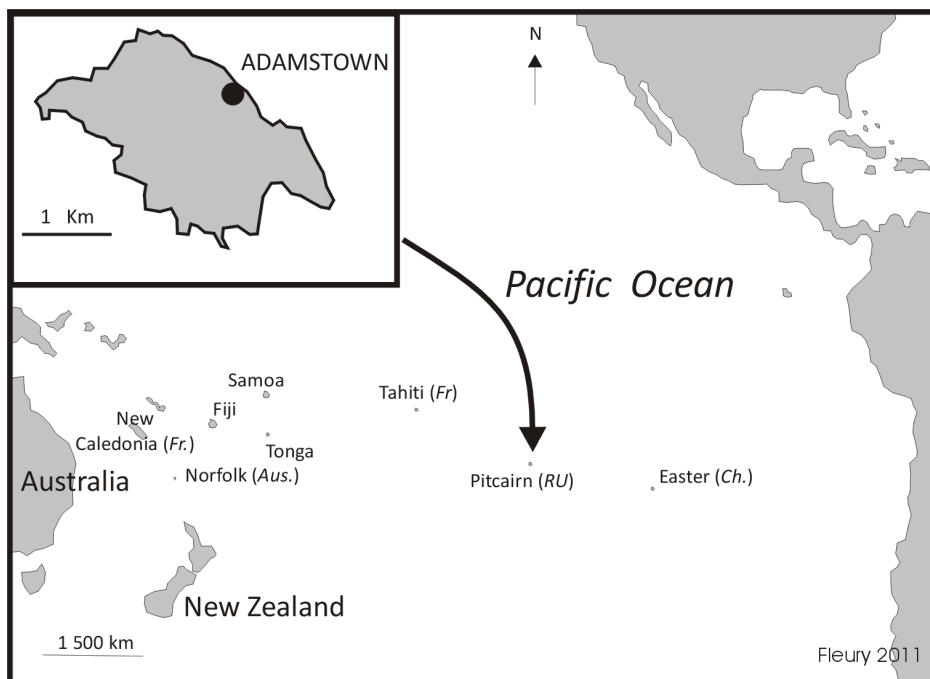

Figure 1 – Location of Pitcairn island (map by Christian Fleury)

Pitcairn is situated halfway between New Zealand and South America, some 6600 kilometres southwest of Panama and 5300 km northeast of Auckland and is often referred to as one of the most isolated islands in the world (Ford, 1996; Kirk, 2008). The Pitcairn Island group consists of Pitcairn, Henderson, Oeno and Ducie. Oeno and Ducie are small low atolls while Henderson is a much larger, raised coral island (and UNESCO world heritage site). Pitcairn is 3.2km long by 1.6km wide with a rocky and cliff-dominated coastline. There is no safe harbour or anchorage and the difficult access has limited economic development. As the only inhabited island of the group, Pitcairn's nearest landfall is Mangareva in the Gambier Islands, part of French Polynesia, 480 kilometers north west. Due to its remote location and difficult terrain, air services have yet to be delivered to the island. Access to the island currently takes 36 hours by boat from Mangareva. The current service operates only four times per year, bringing supplies and providing passage for islanders and visitors. This has continually been a barrier to economic growth - especially tourism - but current plans include securing a six-month yacht charter service. This would lessen the dependence on external providers of transportation that is often problematic for small island nations (Conlin and Baum, 1995).

Island Vulnerability

On an island, material values lose their despotic influence: one comes more directly in touch with the elemental – water, land, fire, vegetation and wildlife. Although each island naturally has its own personality, the unity of islands undoubtedly wields an influence over the character of the people who live upon them: life there promotes self-reliance, contentment and a sense of human scale (Wilstach, 1926: 2-6).

Increasing academic interest in the topic of island vulnerability is highlighted by the emergence of a dedicated website <www.islandvulnerability.org>. At the political level the UN Special Committee on Decolonization recognises the wishes of small island states to reflect their unique vulnerabilities in terms of survival in the modern world and recognizes that today major issues of sustainability – in economic, environmental and social terms – confront everyone but especially smaller, more vulnerable societies (UN, 2010). At the end of the Second International Decade for the Elimination of Colonialism the UN has called for "creative solutions" to the situation of those remaining non-self governing territories (Wolfers, 2010). In this, the socio-economic needs of the territories' peoples need to be attended to on a case-by-case basis.

Intrinsic characteristics of island vulnerability include: small size (limited natural resource base); insularity and remoteness (high external transport and freight costs, geopolitical weakeness); environmental factors; disaster mitigation capability; demographic factors (limited human resources, dis-economies of scale); and economic factors (dependence on external finance, small internal market) (Adger, 2006; Pelling and Uitto, 2001: 53). Thus, vulnerability is a product of access to economic, political, social, environmental and geographical assets (Pelling and Uitto, 2001: 51). Globalisation has also posed acute economic problems for small, remote and fragmented island states with limited natural resources, human capital and domestic markets (Connell, 2009: 17). The reality for many populations today is that increased globalisation has restricted freedom of choice, excluded many, generated unequal exposure to risk and robbed them of even the promise of development (Hilhorst and Bankoff, 2004). But some authors have also argued that many Pacific peoples choose to live in relatively small island communities, notwithstanding that these 'vulnerable' aspects exist, and have contended that such comments may reflect a Eurocentric view rather than a local one (see Hau'ofa, 1998). Wolfers (2010: 8) suggest that such questions may help to explain the various ways in which different communities view the prospect of decolonisation and, especially, the options for self-determination.

Much academic debate over the past few decades has focused on the ecological aspect of vulnerability. Generally, vulnerability is a term related to being susceptible to harm or hazard and the capacity to adapt (Berkes, Folke and Colding, 1998). Whilst often related to a specific threat, vulnerability tends to be a condition of a particular entity (such as a person, group of people or place), often seen at the current state; in a sense, referring to what society is "at the moment" (Campbell, 2009: 86). This article's objective is to consider vulnerability not *only* at the current state but also the historical process and practices by which that current state was reached and the direction in which the current state is heading. This objective introduces resilience theory, which focuses on coping and recovery from hazard or shock. These processes are often cyclical in that they lead to periods of stability followed by periods of rapid change (Gunderson et al, 1995). Linking discussion with resilience theory also combines notions of *adaptive capacity* and *opportunity.* Understanding the current livelihood activities and

assets of a community enables a better understanding of how their livelihoods can be made more productive and more sustainable (Helmore and Singh, 2001). Moreover, context is critically important. Assessments of vulnerability carry an implicit assumption that people are 'equally' vulnerable (Stephen, 2004: 99*)*. Such discourse needs to be balanced by recognising resilience and strengths. The same island characteristics that augment vulnerabilities can also lead to successful coping mechanisms (Lewis, 2001). Despite the challenges, islands often have livelihood opportunities unavailable elsewhere and present useful locations for understanding livelihood interactions (Kelman, 2005).

The latter perspective underpins this case study of Pitcairn Island; a geographically isolated island in the southeast Pacific with an ageing and declining population of less than sixty people. Indeed, Pitcairn has been described as "an anachronism in the modern world" in its ability to defy population decline to the point that the tiny, isolated community would eventually outlive its ability to remain on the island (Connell, 1988: 199). Contradiction is evident in the ability of those left to sustain the labour-force required to keep Pitcairn viable*.* In his examination of contemporary population change on Pitcairn, Connell admits the island's history demonstrates the remarkable resilience of small island populations who maintain island life long after demise has been confidently predicted *(*see Ball, 1974; Fogg, 1962; Frazer, 1970; Harre, 1968)*.* Members of the Pitcairn community have strongly expressed their determination to remain on the island and to preserve their ability to live as an economically self-sustaining community (Pitcairn Island Administration, 2008). A recent Government restructure devolves operational responsibility for local governance to the community, and aims to develop an economic model that creates better standards of living and to encourage repopulation. Improved infrastructure and communications, better access and diversity of economic livelihood, with a focus on tourism, are all proposed. Juxtaposed with this change, the pressing needs of economic development and re-population are currently the most critical for Pitcairn's future survival.

Methodology

Research on SIDS has primarily focused on issues of climate change and fragile environments, and the impact of migration, diaspora and transnational flows (see Campbell, 2009; Cassidy and Brown, 2010; Coles and Dallen, 2004; Douglas, 2006; Opeskin and MacDermott, 2009; Pelling and Uitto, 2001). This study aims to present an alternative view of island development by focusing on the strengths rather than vulnerabilities of such environments by examining social capital theory and sustainable livelihoods.The study draws on a mixed method qualitative approach, including literature reviews, participant-observation and ethnography; the latter drawn from the author's experience of living on Pitcairn Island between August 2008 and September 2009. During this time I was completing my PhD studies on Māori Tourism and whilst not 'actively' researching Pitcairn, the experience of living within and partaking of community life amongst a population of less than 60 people contributes to the ethnographic nature of this research. During this time I was an invited member of the Pitcairn Tourism Committee as well as working alongside my partner in the Medical Clinic. Drawing on this context, the article takes a phenomenological approach based on understanding, interpretation and examination of data. The present and the past are key aspects of this article's examination of Pitcairn society, thus primary and secondary documents are an important component of data analysis, alongside participant

observation. It is not the intention of the researcher to represent a timeless description of the people being studied (and thus purport an 'ethnographic present') but rather to point to a broader temporal and spatial perspective that can inform current theoretical positions. In this, the ethnography is consciously located with regard to the past, whilst giving attention to the likely future that is being produced, a concern which brings political and moral responsibility to the fore (Sanjek, 1990: 197).

In order to fully appreciate the historical context of the social and environmental development of Pitcairn, a wide range of historical literature was studied. The majority of 19th Century accounts of Pitcairn settlement derive from the records of visiting British naval ships. Numerous books have been written on the story of the *Bounty* mutiny, which, today, still contribute to contemporary debate about the 'true' reasons for the mutineers' actions. One key source from this era was Rosalind Amelia Young's 1894 publication, *Mutiny of the Bounty, and the story of Pitcairn Island 1790-1894.* As a 'true account' written by a 'native daughter' of Pitcairn (Young, 1894) this is one of the few authentic records of 19th Century Pitcairn life. Contemporary literature included traveler accounts, anthropological, archaeological and environmental studies, government reports, books, magazine and newspaper articles, web media, as well as academic literature pertaining to issues of sustainability and social resilience. Visual documentary material also provided additional comparative analysis of daily life. Furthermore, the material published in the *Pitcairn Miscellany* (henceforth *TPM*), a local island newsletter published since 1959, is used as primary data to inform a contemporary perspective and discussion of Pitcairn social life. Over 500 copies of this publication dating between 1964 and 2009 were examined and, whilst not the sole focus of data analysis in this article, offer a rich representative narrative of the life of 20th Century Pitcairn. As mentioned earlier, this period reflects the 'anachronism' that is Pitcairn, therefore identifying an important temporal dimension to issues of contemporary social change and resilience. Notably, there have been large gaps of information about Pitcairn during both centuries that reflect both the geographic isolation and relatively strong regulation of visitors to the island. Thus, Pitcairn has maintained a substantial degree of inaccessibility and exclusion from the outside world.

From Mutiny to (re)Constitution

Let's return to Connell's description of Pitcairn Island as an "anachronism in the modern world", a comment made over twenty years ago (op cit). The term 'anachronism' means relic, leftover, an artifact that belongs to another time, or is chronologically misplaced. The term befits Pitcairn's temporal history. The island was not only mis-charted by its original European discoverer, Philip Carteret, in 1767, but was also 'lost in time' for 18 years to the outside world as its *Bounty* settlers forged a unique, biracial community where their descendants still live today (Kirk, 2008). During this time, survival strategies relied on people, their resources and activities. Thus, the island community relied on social capital. As previously mentioned, the processes of resilience theory are often cyclical and focus on the characteristics of the temporal dynamics of a human-in-ecosystem perspective that led to "adaptive capacity and opportunity" (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes, 2003: 76). Holling describes this situation as one in which societies reproduce and reinvent in the process of cyclic transformations when deep changes are created. He alludes to this as an "evolutionary dance generated by cycles of growth, collapse, reorganization, renewal and re-establishment" (2003: xv), which he calls the

"adaptive cycle" (ibid) (see Figure 2 below). These events show an adaptive and regenerative capacity by which the essence of SL can be identified.
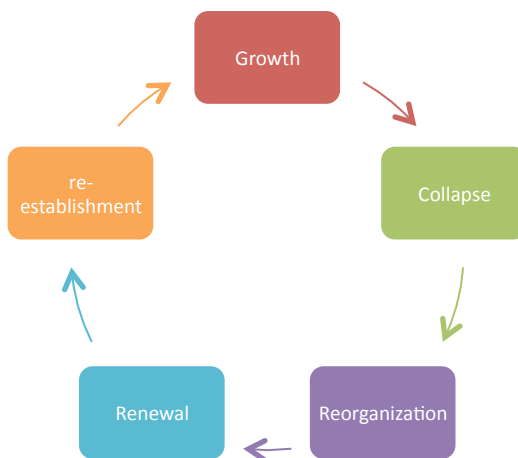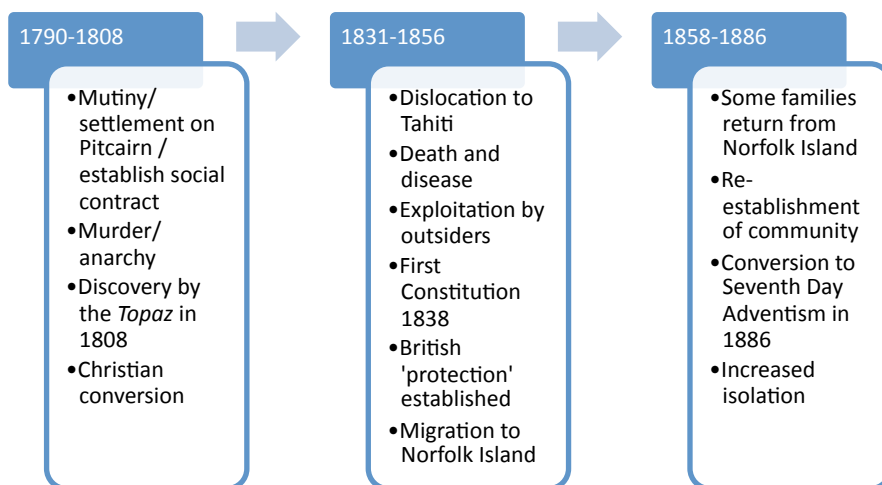

Figue 2 The Adaptive Cycle (Holling, 2003)

In Pitcairn's relatively short history, it is clear that crisis and vulnerability have occurred in which the cycles of *growth, collapse, re-organisation, renewal* and *re-establishment* are evident. The following timeline highlights vital periods of change, disruption and adaptation in Pitcairn's history:

1790-1808
- Mutiny/settlement on Pitcairn / establish social contract
- Murder/anarchy
- Discovery by the *Topaz* in 1808
- Christian conversion

1831-1856
- Dislocation to Tahiti
- Death and disease
- Exploitation by outsiders
- First Constitution 1838
- British 'protection' established
- Migration to Norfolk Island

1858-1886
- Some families return from Norfolk Island
- Re-establishment of community
- Conversion to Seventh Day Adventism in 1886
- Increased isolation

1904-1940s
- Constitutional revision
- population growth
- Panama Canal opens 1914
- Outmigration occurs
- Remittances
- World Wars I and II
- Increasing periods of isolation and lack of supplies
- 1940 established philately as economic revenue

1960-1990s
- Increased out-migration population decline
- economic downturn - need to diversify economy
- co-operative store initiative
- decline in shipping/ trade
- British aid to increase infrastructure and add capacity

1999-2010
- 2004 Trials and subsequent convictions of island men
- New Governance structure
- SPC-Joint Country Strategy 2009-2013
- MOU with French Polynesia
- Revised Constitution in 2010
- Economic Reform - growth of tourism
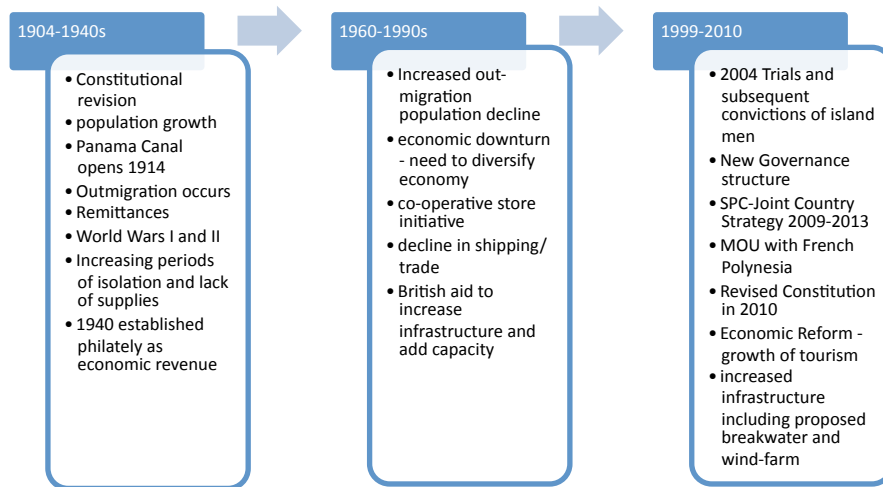- increased infrastructure including proposed breakwater and wind-farm

Figure 3 - Timeline of change and development on Pitcairn since 1790

The following section discusses some of these events to illustrate the cyclic nature of the adaptive cycle. From these events sustainable livelihoods are identified that translate to social capital in action and are then examined in the context of contemporary Pitcairn. This analysis advocates that an understanding of the historical trajectories of SL reveals strengths specifically adapted to such isolated environments. The conclusion will argue that whilst the vulnerabilities of SIDS are of the utmost analytical and policy importance (Campling and Rosalie, 2006); small Island territories may be the best sites for seeing the effects of a strong social fabric. This posits a new development paradigm surrounding the concept of vulnerability for SIDS and reaffirms the centrality of the social in environments that are simultaneously colonial and postcolonial.

1790: Arrival at Pitcairn

Pitcairn's early beginnings illustrate the social susceptibility of a community to damage as a result of a de-stabilising human-made phenomenon. Upon settlement of the island a period of *growth* ensued whereby the mutineers and Tahitians established social contract. All usable resources were stripped from the *Bounty* before it was burned (an act that has been argued to demonstrate renunciation of the Crown's protection and thus, English law) (see Farran, 2007). The island was well forested, the flora typical of semi-/tropical Pacific islands including food plants such as banana, coconut and breadfruit. The new inhabitants set about re-establishing garden plots left by previous Polynesian settlers, relying on the knowledge of the Tahitian men and women to exploit a familiar environment (Dening, 1992). All plots and plantations were worked individually and the skills of each were relied upon. Dening states: "each would put into the common store what circumstance of skill or productive land allowed and take out what each needed… land they owned individually, but its products were owned in common" (ibid: 318). This resonates with what contemporary Pitcairners call 'share out', discussed later in the article.

The mutineers and their Tahitian wives brought no idealistic theory for the foundation of a new society with them to Pitcairn. There was commonality with other Pacific islands in respect to the Polynesian culture of the women (eg methods of food preparation and cooking, tapa cloth making etc) but they ultimately created a new social organisation.. Whilst, as Dening states: "Pitcairn's fragile social structures were always at risk… the mutineers planted the seeds of their own destruction" (1992: 316, 319); Shapiro (1936), who undertook an anthropometric study of Pitcairn Islanders in the 1930s, offered an account of their life and customs as the story of the development and growth of an unconscious social experiment. The history of the next ten years is not clear but certain facts are recorded and most agree in their descriptions of the murder and carnage which broke out over unequal division of land and women imposed by European (read colonial) values (Lummis, 1997; Nicolson and Davies, 1997). There also emerged some sense of symbolic societal hierarchy, along the lines of leadership to which the concept of power is linked (Bourdieu, 1992). This hierarchical structure would remain an intrinsic feature of future Pitcairn generations.

All accounts agree that from that time was the beginning of a new era (Young, 1894). As the sole male survivor, Adams turned to the *Bounty* Bible and Church of England prayer book and attempted to inculcate into the young brood of children the principles of Christian life and something of an education (Shapiro, 1929). After such *collapse* came a period of *reorganization* and *renewal* through spiritual change; a disposition fostered after Adams' death by the subsequent community leader, settler George Hunn Nobbs**.** Crucially, *collapse* can ultimately benefit the system's health. As successful adaptations take hold, a different kind of organisation starts to emerge and the growth phase of the cycle begins again (O'Brien, 2009: 4). Indeed, from mutiny and murder had emerged a re-constituted society that may have been the 'purest' of its kind (Ball, 1974). It had set its standards in total isolation from the world, a point Shapiro (1929) makes as important in developing a lack of social and racial inferiority, otherwise experienced by many colonised cultures. Pitcairn became a novelty to all those who visited the island during the first half of the 19th Century but maintained exclusivity built on its unique heritage. But even more interesting are the customs developed by the islanders themselves, especially their self-government and their social and religious attitude which, in part, forms the 'social glue' that would continue to bind the Pitcairn community.

1831: (dis)Location to Tahiti and 1856: Migration to Norfolk

Pitcairn underwent two distinct periods of dislocation during the 19th Century. After its 'discovery' in 1808 the community came under the tutelage of the British Navy whose ships began to regularly visit Pitcairn. In 1838 the islanders secured a 'Constitution', written with the aid of a British naval commander, and secured its first magistrate (Nobbs, 1984). This followed concerns for internal regulation and government and increasing vulnerability to the intrusion of disrespectful whaling crews (Nicolson and Davies, 1997). The new Constitution included the novel provisions of compulsory education for all children and universal suffrage (Farran, 2007). But, importantly, this action further brought the island into the orbit of the British Empire and the Pitcairners themselves claimed to be a British colony from that time on (Nobbs, 1984: 57). Such recognition was further instilled in the likes of the Pitcairn Island Register Book and other correspondence. This peaceful period further developed the cycle of community

growth. Adams keenly sought to establish a higher level of education and well-being for the close-knit community by integrating educated 'outsiders' such as John Buffet in 1823 (although they would not be immune to threat from those who exploited their simple lifestyle) within the existing societal structure. The island's economy also became less dependent on its own resources as increased contact with ships brought trading opportunities.

Upon Adams' death in 1829, and with a growing population, there was concern over the sustainability of island resources. In 1831, with the aid of the British navy, the entire community was relocated to Tahiti. The move proved disastrous. Pitcairners' infrequent contact with outsiders left them vulnerable to diseases encountered on Tahiti. Secondly, after 40 years of near isolation and moral Christian upbringing, the Pitcairners encountered culture shock when confronted with the "lax morality of the Tahitians" (Nobbs, 1984: 25). Maude (1968) has observed the difficulty of reconciling the hybrid Tahitian/English inheritance of Pitcairn culture with that of Tahiti itself. Isolation and a strong attachment to 'English ways', further instilled by community leaders such as Buffet and Nobbs after Adams' death, meant European ideas, habits and technical processes dominated over any Polynesian heritage. Assimilation to Tahitian culture had been expected by the British Government but, in reality, a cultural disjuncture had occurred. The Pitcairners returned to their island within a few months; a fifth of the population having died from disease.

The second and most distinctive change for Pitcairn society was one that would divide the community into two distinct kin groups. In 1856 the island population was nearing 200 and again created concerns for island sustainability. The British Government offered Norfolk Island, some 3700 miles to the west, as it had just ceased being used as a penal colony. Although there was reluctance by some to leave Pitcairn, the entire population relocated to Norfolk in 1856. The Pitcairners adapted to their new environment and set about starting a new life. However, within a few years, some Pitcairners were homesick and sought to return, since:

> *Altogether they found it was so different from the life of freedom and irresponsibility, to all but themselves and their elected magistrates, they had led at Pitcairn; that they had a longing to be back to the island, where nobody could interfere with them, however good and kind the intention, and however necessary perhaps the interference… and that they will establish the same laws as before – once they have enough people to create a new structure… to establish the same rules which have been handed down to them from the time of old John Adams.* (Belcher, 1871: 395)

Thus, memory**,** identity and place became factors in the choice to leave Norfolk. Identity and sense of place are complex concepts but are considered to be linked to the practical activities of people, people's perceptions of an ecosystem and the relational networks that people build within an ecosystem (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes, 2003).

Within five years of relocating to Norfolk, a small group of island families returned to Pitcairn. Their descendants are those that reside on Pitcairn today. They were to face a risky future, as there was no surety that the British navy would frequent the island as in the past and whaling ships had ceased trade in the region. However, they would demonstrate resilience in their capacity to deal with change and to continue to develop.

Politically, the Island came under the jurisdiction of the British Settlements Act of 1887 and subsequently the 1893 Pacific Order in Council, extending jurisdiction to island territories in the Pacific under British control (Levine, 2009). In their *re-establishment*, one of the primary forces that would continually underpin the structure of the newly settled community would be religion; alongside a livelihood that would continue to be shaped by isolation and insularity.

1886: Conversion to the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) faith

Since the time of John Adams, religion has remained a prominent feature in the lives of Pitcairn Islanders. Practically every visitor to Pitcairn in the past two centuries has dwelt at length on the extremely religious character of the Islanders. Over time, a change in religious faith would illustrate the unity and 'social glue' of the community. Persuaded by literature sent by Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) missionaries in the USA, and subsequently a visit from SDA elders, the entire community converted to the faith in 1886 (Clune, 1966; Kirk, 2008). A meeting of the islanders was held "and the Book of Common Prayer was laid aside" (Young, 1894: 234). The link to the SDA would remain strong for many decades to come, supported by education and religious systems funded externally and gratefully accepted by the Pitcairn people. Subsequent generations of Pitcairners almost certainly obtained a level of literacy that the majority of their Pacific counterparts did not achieve during this time (Clune, 1966). Thus, the descendants of the mutineers grew up with minds directed strongly into two avenues of thought: survival and Christian rectitude.

TPM is full of passages redolent with spiritual overtones, most often contributed by the resident SDA pastor, but it is obvious that religion has shaped Pitcairn life-ways. The SDA faith remained a core disposition of Pitcairn culture well in to the 20th Century, albeit that a noticeable decline in practice is now evident. The decline can be attributed to generational change, as many younger Pitcairners have lived extended periods overseas, removed from the social values of the Island environment. Notwithstanding, a SDA Pastor still resides on the island and Sabbath is strictly maintained, whereby no work occurs. Islanders make use of this one day of leisure to enjoy family activities and children attend Sabbath School. Until recently, trade with visiting ships was forbidden on the Sabbath, restricting Islanders' opportunity for much needed income. The *Bounty* Bible holds pride of place in the local Adamstown Museum, a focal point for visitors to the Island, as is the nearby gravesite of John Adams.

The historical trajectory of settlement in the 19th Century served to create a Pitcairn identity manifest in isolation and insularity that fostered exclusivity and a role of symbolism that created solidarity. That is, recognition of a 'sense of us' and community belonging ultimately resulted in particular *dispositions* that become part of SL strategies. The above discussion highlights critical points in the history of Pitcairn, identifying crises and vulnerability, which have also resulted in periods of adaptation, reorganisation and renewal. As previously stated, a SL approach focuses on people, their resources and their activities and the strategies they develop in order to progress social and economic development. A key feature of this approach is to recognise the diverse range of activities people engage in to make their living. Livelihoods also consist of assets (otherwise known as capital) including human, physical, natural and social. The combination of activities and assets achieves sustainable livelihood (Chambers and Conway, 1992). From examination of literature and personal observation, the following

section identifies key aspects of Pitcairn livelihood that show resilience and strengths on which the future sustainability of the island will rely. Emphasis is given to Pitcairn society from 1960 onwards and data derived from *TPM*. Thus, it makes a comparative analysis of historical and contemporary change in which to discuss social capital theory.

Mitigating Vulnerability: Contemporary change and sustainable livelihoods

TPM provides a rich socio-historical narrative that gives evidence of the vulnerabilities and strengths of Pitcairn culture. Mainly written by the Education Officer (ie school teacher and, until recent times, Government advisor), it presents an accurate view of Pitcairn life, filtered through a credible, if somewhat 'couched', perspective, given the dual role of government employee and temporary island resident. It is representative of 'other' voices by its narrative inclusion of local islanders, external contributors (ie tourists, visitors) as well as the ever-present religious discourse of the SDA pastor. It also provides a conduit for economic capital via the sale of collectibles such as souvenirs, stamps, coins and island produce to subscribers and social capital in the wider local/global context with networks such as the Pitcairn Islands Study Centre in the USA and the Pitcairn Island Study Group in the UK. This article cannot give scope to a full evaluation of this publication but, suffice to say, *TPM* is distributed globally to interested subscribers and presents documentary evidence of internal and external influences on the temporal development of contemporary Pitcairn. As such, it provides insights into social and cultural processes constructed at a particular point in time to support the theoretical assumptions of this article. Such publications are implicated in the cultural meanings and social actions the ethnographer is studying (Aull-Davies, 2008).

One author has described Pitcairn in the period 1960-1979 as "population in freefall" (Kirk, 2008) and this has been subsequently reiterated in studies such as the aforementioned Connell (1988). Like many Pacific island nations during this time, Pitcairn was affected by substantial out-migration. Ironically, as the islanders began to enjoy improved homes and services, such as electricity and better communications with the outside world, Pitcairners left in greater numbers (Kirk, 2008: 183). However, it is evident that livelihood strategies adapted to, and adopted ways of coping with contemporary change and global forces. One of these has continually been Pitcairn's reliance on shipping and trade. Shipping has been, and still remains, the only means of getting to and from Pitcairn. It has also fostered social connections and networks that involve mutual obligations and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000). The notion of investment is inextricably tied to this concept and, by association, to social capital. In the late 19th Century Pitcairners came to the aid of several shipwrecked vessels, taking survivors in to their homes until retrieval could be provided. Unfortunately the islanders have fallen prey to disease by such generosity, as in the case of the shipwrecked *Bowden* in 1893 on Oeno reef. Typhoid brought by crew resulted in the deaths of twelve Pitcairners.

The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 was advantageous to Pitcairn, as the island became a popular stopping point for ships operating between the UK and New Zealand. During busy periods ship arrivals averaged one a week (Kirk, 2008). Pitcairners traded fresh island produce for much-needed basic supplies such as salt, yeast, flour and kerosene and started a lucrative trade in unique handcrafts (wood carving, tapa, intricate basketry) that was to become a mainstay of the economy in the latter part of the century. This contact also enabled Pitcairn men to work abroad, thus sending

remittances back to kinfolk. However sustained outmigration affected the number of able-bodied men needed to maintain and sustain livelihoods. Although the population reached a peak of 233 in 1937 (Ball, 1974) by 1954 it had declined to 136 and by 1972 to only 85. In a 1984 issue of *Geographical Magazine* the discourse of vulnerability was clearly evident stating: "the population was at a low of 46, the shortage of able-bodied men to man the longboats safely was highlighted; there was no doctor, and the world-wide reduction in sea freight had resulted in fewer ships calling at Pitcairn" (Barlow, 1984: 140-42).

Shipping is critical to survival of Pitcairn life whilst also making it increasingly vulnerable. The island longboat has always been a symbol of Pitcairn identity and many visitors to Pitcairn write with admiration of the skill of the islanders in navigation and in making the difficult landing in Bounty Bay. These storied vessels are the island's lifeblood and the islanders' only physical link with the outside world and means of reaching offshore ships delivering mail, bringing supplies, selling curios and, importantly, facilitating the evacuation of emergency medical cases. These activities themselves entail much risk, as the transfer from longboat to ship, especially in heavy seas, is extremely hazardous. *TPM* relates numerous accidents that have occurred in the transporting of goods and passengers between longboat and ships, and islanders are reliant on limited or external medical aid (eg from ships doctors). Until 1982, Pitcairners continued to build wooden boats, passing on local knowledge and skills, assimilated into the community over time (ie an adaptive strategy). Originally constructed of coconut palm trunks and rowed by fourteen oarsmen (Murray, 1992) the provision (by the UK Government) of larger aluminum diesel powered vessels has aided the ability to bring modern equipment and increased supplies to the island. The reliability of such trade also brings risk in terms of agricultural production; for instance the introduction of insects and blights has affected crop productivity and requires ongoing management and monitoring to keep the island pest free. Due to growth in air travel in the latter 20th Century and further decline of passenger and container ships calling at Pitcairn, there evolved a need to diversify the economy. The *TPM* commented in 1987:

> as long as shipping companies allow the masters of their vessels to stop for periods sufficiently long enough to discharge and/or receive our mail, we will continue to hold our own… resolving… there is little the people of Pitcairn can do except to continue their warm welcoming of every ship large or small that cares to call. (Unattributed, 1987: 4)

As previously mentioned, the sale of crafts and curios has been a mainstay of the Pitcairn economy and one which today islanders predominantly rely on for much needed income by producing fine wood carvings and intricate woven baskets; a craft actually adopted from visiting outsiders in the early 20th Century. Helmore and Singh (2001) note adaptive strategies entail change and adjustment within livelihood systems in order to cope under difficult circumstances. Both resilience and adaptive strategy is demonstrated in the collection of these resources. For many decades, Pitcairners have made the annual longboat trip to nearby Henderson Island for *miro* (*Thespesia populnea)* wood, a now depleted resource on Pitcairn. The arduous 169 kilometre journey is undertaken by forty foot longboat, often in treacherous seas. The reef surrounding Henderson is risky to cross, and once onshore, Pitcairners must cut and manoeuvre the timber from land to longboat, a process that often takes several days. Since the 1960s, the initiation of reforestation on Pitcairn to replace depleted stocks of *miro* has been successful, although not yet sustainable. The SL strategy lies in the

Islanders' ability to undertake the difficult and necessary journey to Henderson and harvest a much-needed resource for economical benefit.

Figures 4 and 5: Bounty Landing Boathouse and visitorts from liner arriving
(photographs by author - 2009)

Figures 6 and 7 - Landing a new watertank (and other supplies) on Pitcairn Island
(photographs by author - 2009)

It is interesting to note that this trade has stemmed from a collective attitude of honesty and lack of competitiveness. That is, the laws of supply and demand have been altered according to Pitcairn livelihoods. In discussing early agricultural trade Lummis makes note of the fact that "prices were fixed and maintained, even when articles were in short supply or when some ships were in more desperate need than others" (1997: 220). The author also observed similar practices in present day trade. Most Pitcairn items were sold at virtually the same cost regardless of the producer: there appeared little disposition to 'undercut thy neighbour'. Conversely, the author suggested the potential to increase pricing in recognition of the quality and uniqueness of these crafts by constructing a mark of 'authenticity' for Pitcairn handcrafts, an idea supported by the local Tourism Committee. Such concepts are well established in markets such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada to promote indigenous art and crafts and may offer Pitcairners additional economic benefit. Decline in visiting ships since the 1960s meant that mail order sales of souvenirs became a necessary addition to economic sustainability (Kirk, 2008). The ongoing issue for islanders however is the increasing cost of freight and mail services for such products.

Historically, one important economic source of income for Pitcairn has been postage stamps. Recommendation by government officials in 1937 and 1940 resulted in the production of Pitcairn stamps that brought a steady stream of cash from philatelists to the Island adminsitration (Kirk, 2008). Pitcairn managed to make a sustainable and profitable income for over fifty years, providing sufficient funds to maintain public buildings, pay teachers' salaries, build a new school house, as well as make structural improvements to Bounty Bay Landing. With the global decline in postage use in the 1990s and increased use of technology such as email and the internet, Pitcairn has looked to alternatives such as selling the Pitcairn domain name (.pn) and tourism to support future livelihoods.

The development of a greater diversity of economic activity is the key challenge for Pitcairn, with the current focus on reducing isolation, providing opportunities for economic growth and ensuring basic services. Having livelihood diversity assists in adjusting to social changes (Kelman, 2007) and change also brings opportunities. For example, the introduction of the Internet permits online business, giving an opportunity to promote tourism products and reducing the island's isolation. Two Government commissioned reports (see Tourism Research Consultants 2005, 2008) have examined the potential of tourism development for the island; and funding for improved infrastructure has been granted by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to assist economic growth. Pitcairn's geographical position on the 'periphery' of Pacific regionalism has made, and continues to make, it highly dependent on budgetary aid from the UK, emphasising its vulnerability. In recent years with technical support provided by the UK, Pitcairners have also initiated PIPCO - a cooperative honey production enterprise, finding successful markets in the UK and USA. Current moves to seek markets for locally grown coffee are also underway. Thus the development of partnership synergies will also be critical to Pitcairn's future development.

Co-operative Collectivity

In summary, the lifestyle of Pitcairners has predominantly been one of hard physical labour and good health. The longevity of Pitcairners lives is attested to in the pages of *TPM* and is evident from a visit to the island cemetery. Subsistence living has

necessitated such labour - the resources required to sustain and maintain life, must be sought, gathered, and manufactured for human use. Pitcairners were still harvesting salt from the sea in the 1940s and traditional activities such as the annual harvest of arrowroot and sugarcane are today still practiced, albeit not for necessity, as this produce arrives on the three-monthly supply ship. However, from an anthropological viewpoint, these practices retain the 'social glue' inherent within the notion of capital. Commenting about the arrowroot harvest, one travel writer who visited Pitcairn in the early 1990s commented:

> *The Pitcairners worked, not as a set of dedicated individuals, but as part of an organic whole. It was the same when they went out to trade on a ship, unload supplies at the Landing, or hauled the longboat from the boatshed. They moved as if choreographed, with the rhythm coming from within the group itself.* (Birkett, 1997: 79)

From my own observation as an 'outsider' this was clearly evident - there appeared no need for verbal communication; everyone just seems to 'know' what they have to do in such activities.

This is also demonstrated in the inherent religious disposition that has been a hallmark of Pitcairn culture. Such collective action is herewith given in a musical context. Commonly, Pitcairners gather together as a group and sing hymns to visiting ships' passengers whilst on board to sell their crafts and souvenirs. Many authors have commented on this unique aspect of Pitcairn (and Norfolk) culture (see Clune, 1966; Hayward, 2006) that, according to Hayward, has become an enduring 'signature' of Pitcairn culture. It is indeed an emotive experience when performed as a Pitcairn longboat departs a visiting vessel. Such collective and ritualistic action advances the implication and importance of the concept of social capital. It's in and out of what people *do* that a shared sense of things, and a shared symbolic universe emerges (Jenkins, 2008: 138) and from which the notion of 'community' may be seen as reflective of the notion of 'nation' in terms of solidarity. Such constancy also contributes to particular strengths and, as such, to sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, the action of public work once a month by all persons under the age of 65 exhibits a communal pooling of resources to maintain and upgrade public resources. This work is effectively undertaken in lieu of paying income tax. One further example of communal 'social glue' could be illustrated in the island practice of "share out". Following trade with a passing ship, merchandise is taken to Adamstown Square and shared out amongst the community. Upon experiencing Pitcairn life in 1972, author Ian Ball commented:

> *The spirit of cooperation that has enabled the community to survive is based only partly on practical considerations. It is rooted as much in the heart as in the mind… what little each family might have is there for all to share if need be… noting, that at time of share out, the lot may be pathetically small – tiny piles of three or four potatoes, a single tin of sardines, a dozen crackers taken from a box.* (1974: 223-24)

The tradition still exists today, maintained by a shared norm that facilitates group co-operation and community level action.

Conclusion

This article contends that it is to social capital theory that we may need to turn in order to better understand how small and remote island societies manage a sustainable livelihood. It is simplistic to argue that smallness, remoteness and insularity *per se* generate social capital in SIDS; what is understood by social capital in the case study of Pitcairn is the resourcefulness and adaptation of a people to respond collectively and positively to identified challenges – be they economic, social or political. The 'social glue' evident in Pitcairn culture, which permits stakeholders to work for a common interest, has resided in activities of trade, reciprocity, co-operative ventures, religion, subsistence living, politics and traditional practices such as 'share out'. It is evident that trust, loyalty, and commitment to Pitcairn have endured within the community and there is a strong sense of place and identity built on the foundations of a moral community with a shared history and language that has emerged from both Tahitian and English cultural heritage. Daily life sees many traits that exhibit attachment to both cultures such as the islanders' passion for playing cricket and their passion for culinary dishes such as *pilhi* (a favoured dish amongst Pacific Islanders made of coconut and/or banana). In the Pitcairn context, it may identify an articulated 'islandness' about Pitcairners that becomes part of the referent fabric - inextricably tied to their 'boundedness' by the sea, remote location and unique heritage (Connell, 2007).

One last example is relevant to present-day Pitcairn and the situation of 'self-determination' versus 'decolonisation' from which recovery is still being managed. Holling (2003: xvi) notes that although growth is important, even more so are the forces in a healthy system that dominate during episodes when growth is halted or reversed, when uncertainty arises. It is a time of crisis, but also opportunity. During such times, control is weakened and confused, and unpredictability is high. But there resides space for *reorganization* and *renewal.* In *renewal* creative solutions may arise which can progress a measure of independence. Such has been the case in recent years. In 2004 historical criminal charges of sexual abuse were laid against a number of Pitcairn men and, after protracted legal proceedings, they were found guilty and jailed on the island. It is not this article's intention to examine these events[1] but simply to note that the events stand as a crisis from which resilience emerges. The events divided the community and raised questions about the application of British law on Pitcairn. Indeed, some commentators argued that the prosecution represented the imposition of a set of external and alien legal norms by a dominant and overbearing metropolitan authority upon a small and vulnerable community (Trenwith, 2003). Risk is also apparent in the converse of social cohesion and 'loss of glue' when such events disrupt social capital.

The legal perspective focused on the reasoning used to exercise imperial rule over Pitcairn and has highlighted that the powers of British colonialism remain intact and of contemporary relevance in the Pacific region. It could be argued that it represented a form of ultimate decolonisation and 're-narrativisation' of western imperialism (Baldacchino, 2010) - especially when islanders feared evacuation and loss of control of their island and destinies (Angelo and Townend, 2003). Whilst historical literature supports evidence of Pitcairn as being nurtured as a British settlement for the past two centuries, questions were raised about the relationship between the island and Britain and the paradoxical nature of British control/neglect. Overall, it could be argued that Pitcairn has not had a history of extensive intervention by the administering power in its economic, social, or political affairs (Angelo and Townend, 2003: 245). Pitcairn must now proceed, as a non-self-governing territory, to approach any question of

decolonisation by considering its relationship with the metropolitan state and ways in which this would provide the necessary conditions for a viable community. Pitcairn's small size and isolated vulnerability will ensure (certainly in the short term) a reliance on external aid if any measure of self-determination is to be achieved. Autonomy without sovereignty does not hinder the development of economic opportunities such as tourism. This example seeks to show that the *event* itself is contingent with the cyclic process of Hollings' adaptive cycle and, by association, the application of social capital theory. Future SL will be supported by recent changes enacted since this crisis, such as more autonomous structures of governance, strengthened by the revised Constitution. The community remains close-knit and interdependent, traits that can dually posit vulnerability and strengths. The need to foster harmony and co-operation in order to survive will remain important and, some may say, a pre-requisite for the island's future sustainability.

Pitcairn's future may be uncertain, influenced by changing internal forces, constrained by its ageing population, limited human resources and the still somewhat fragile relationship between Pitcairners and their UK governing body. But Pitcairn has surpassed the threshold of vulnerability, as its historical trajectory shows, 'dancing' through cycles of *growth, collapse, reorganization, renewal* and *re-establishment* (Holling, 2003). Pitcairn may indeed continue to be an 'anachronism in the modern world'. Small islands find themselves poised to take upon themselves increased autonomy and responsibility for their own future. The 'anachronism' that is Pitcairn, is now moving to a new phase: socially, economically and politically. The revised Constitution affords some measure of control and autonomy; livelihood diversification and additional infrastructure will provide greater opportunity to determine what they can do with and without to maintain equilibrium of natural and human capital. The challenge, as Kelman points out, is "to maintain viable islandness without succumbing to vulnerability, but using islandness to reduce vulnerability" (2009: 3).

The descendants of those mutineers, whose Hobbesian state of nature (Woodman, 2009) almost destroyed social capital, have managed to sustain a livelihood through resilience, opportunity and adaptability. This article has aimed to show that there needs to be more attention paid to social aspects of sustainability, an approach which encompasses the ability to adjust to change and thus mitigate vulnerability. Small island states provide poignant case studies in achieving SL from social capital, showing that they have a number of qualities and resources which they can and do draw upon in determining positive development paths for themselves.

End Note:

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[1] For further reading on the background to and conduct of this case see Angelo and Townend (2003); Farran (2007); Marks (2008); Oliver (2009); Power (2007); and Trenwith (2003).

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