



Geographies of toponymic inscription: new directions in critical place-name studies

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Abstract: The study of place naming, or toponymy, has recently undergone a critical reformulation as scholars have moved beyond the traditional focus on etymology and taxonomy by examining the politics of place-naming practices. In this article, we provide a selective genealogy of the ‘critical turn’ in place-name studies and consider three complementary approaches to analyzing spatial inscription as a toponymic practice: political semiotics, governmentality studies, and normative theories of social justice and symbolic resistance. We conclude by proposing that future scholarship should explore the political economy of toponymic practices as a step toward expanding the conceptual horizon of critical place-name studies.

Key words: critical place-name studies, governmentality, politics of calculation, semiotics, social justice, symbolic resistance, toponymy.

I Introduction

You won’t find Canal Road, California or Coors Street on the commercial street maps of Baghdad, but this is the new Iraq, where US soldiers are redrawing the city one English name at a time ... Oklahoma and Pennsylvania replaced street names in the industrial section of the old city framed by historic Al-Rashid and Khulafa streets. In the world of the occupier, name familiarity breeds security, said Major

Dean Thurmond of the US Army’s Combined Joint Task Force Seven ... Main, Cigar, and South streets were scribbled [on maps] over the names more familiar to Baghdadis ... ‘These boys are far from home and they tend to use names that remind them of home,’ said one special forces sergeant in the town of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, dismissing suggestions that the practice carried an air of imperialism. ‘There’s nothing magical or sinister about it.’ (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2003)

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In early April 2003, a mere two weeks after the initial invasion of Iraq, US troops commandeered Saddam International Airport, and the US Central Command swiftly renamed the complex 'Baghdad International Airport' (Woznicki, 2003; *USA Today*, 2003; Hunt, 2005; Pike, 2007a). The renaming of Baghdad's airport marked the opening salvo of the US occupation, which continues to reshape Iraq's toponymic landscape today. New US military camps and bases were given names that resonated with righteousness, such as 'Camp Freedom', 'Camp Liberty', and 'Camp Justice', and other toponyms were taken straight out of the American geographical lexicon, including 'Camp Arkansas' and 'Forward Operating Base Manhattan' (Pike, 2007b).

In an attempt to render the unfamiliar more manageable, US forces also devised a system of American-inspired street names that they overlaid upon maps of Baghdad, dotted with names like 'California Street', 'Virginia Avenue', and 'Main Street' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2003). The principal highway to the Baghdad Airport was rechristened as 'Route Irish', with a nod to the 'Fighting Irish' of Notre Dame, and various other supply routes across the country were also named for American sports teams (Baggio, 2006). With a more familiar set of toponyms at their disposal, US soldiers were better able to navigate throughout Iraq and 'pinpoint locations' of potential interest. At the onset of the occupation, US Army Major Dean Thurmond explained the purpose of such place-naming practices by noting that '[i]t's for the sake of communication and security and making sure everyone is on the same sheet of music' (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2003). From the vantage point of the occupier, Baghdad's landscape was seen as an unwieldy symphony that could only be understood – and hence secured – if its melodies were clearly demarcated and inscribed on a single 'sheet of music', thereby producing a toponymic text to serve as a map of calculable territory.

The Americans were not the only ones to remake Iraq's toponymy after the fall of the former regime. Shi'a communities in Baghdad renamed streets, squares, bridges, mosques, hospitals, universities, and entire neighborhoods in an attempt to rid themselves of Saddam's legacy. While many were eager to replace the city's Saddam-era place names, some Shi'a themselves raised concerns that this might result in additional 'frictions' with Sunnis. The renaming of Baghdad's streets opened a space of recognition for the Shi'a, which they had long been denied, yet it also produced a symbolic arena that held the potential to further divide the city along sectarian lines at a time of rising social tensions (*Fox News*, 2003; Price, 2003; Slevin, 2003).

As the case of Iraq's toponymic reconfiguration during the US occupation powerfully illustrates, the renaming of streets and other landmarks often plays a crucial role in the social production of 'place'. The discursive act of assigning a name to a given location does much more than merely denote an already-existing 'place'. Rather, as scholars from various fields have suggested, the act of naming is itself a performative practice that calls forth the 'place' to which it refers by attempting to stabilize the unwieldy contradictions of sociospatial processes into the seemingly more 'managable' order of textual inscription (Palonen, 1993; Yurchak, 2000; Kearns and Berg, 2002; Rose-Redwood, 2008c). While Massey (2005: 54) rightly warns us against embracing 'the longstanding tendency to tame the spatial into the textual', this need not imply a wholesale dismissal of the interrelations of space, place, and textuality. On the contrary, a critical analysis of the *politics* of spatial inscription remains one of the most effective strategies for challenging essentialist claims to affixing stable identities to particular spaces. Moreover, the naming of places is one of the primary means of attempting to construct clearly demarcated spatial identities. Therefore, if we are to call into question the 'taming' of the

spatial-into-the-textual, as Massey (2005) insists, this nevertheless still requires a critical analysis of the social and political struggles over spatial inscription and related toponymic practices.

We recognize that our call for a renewed focus on the geography of place naming may initially be received with a certain degree of suspicion. After all, haven't most geographers attempted to distance themselves as much as possible from the public perception that geography is about nothing more than memorizing place names and state capitals? Such skepticism is understandable considering the largely esoteric and encyclopedic nature of much of the traditional scholarship on place names. This goes a long way toward explaining why place-name research has carved out such a marginal existence within the discipline of geography and is commonly conceived of as 'the old and largely discredited field of toponymy' (Goodchild, 2004: 712). Even the long-time geographic proselytizer for place-name studies, Wilbur Zelinsky (2002: 243), laments that, after many years of scholarship, '[t]he theoretical scene in the study of names leaves everything to be desired'. Yet, despite this association of place-name studies with antiquarian empiricism, there are signs that a sea-change is currently under way in toponymic research. A growing number of scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding place naming as a contested spatial practice rather than viewing place names as transparent signifiers that designate places as 'objects' or 'artifacts' within a predefined geographical space (Berg and Vuolteenaho, 2009).

In this article, we trace the recent shift in place-name studies away from its traditional focus on etymological and taxonomic concerns and toward a critical interrogation of the politics of place naming. If it could be argued in the mid-1990s that a 'critical appreciation of power and ideology is often far from the center of concern in toponymic studies' (Myers, 1996: 237), this is no longer the case today since the 'political' has now

become one of the central concerns of critical approaches to place-name studies. This so-called 'critical turn' in toponymic scholarship has produced an exciting new body of research, which situates the study of toponymy within the context of broader debates in critical human geography.

We begin by providing a selective genealogy of contemporary place-name studies in the next section. The aim of this genealogical investigation is not to propose some sort of teleological progression from the 'traditional' to the 'critical' in toponymic scholarship. Such a characterization would surely be an oversimplification, since it obscures the diversity of approaches currently being employed in the multidisciplinary field of toponymy, which includes everything from the unapologetic empiricism of applied toponymy to the theoretical formulations of poststructuralist critique. We would like to argue, however, that the level of explicit and self-reflexive engagement with critical theories of space and place over the past two decades has marked an important turning point in toponymic research, and it is this shift toward theorizing the politics of place-naming practices that we seek to highlight in our admittedly 'selective' genealogy. We see in this work the potential to overturn the long-standing perception that toponymy is reducible to the encyclopedic search for the authentic origins of names while also challenging the notion that a 'definitive' classification system can be constructed to impose order on the bewildering multiplicity of place names.

There are many different directions that critical place-name studies might take in the future. We have chosen to emphasize three distinct approaches to examining toponymic practices. First, we consider place naming from the standpoint of semiotics. Next, we draw upon governmentality studies to theorize the making of regimes of spatial inscription as an integral strategy in the production of calculable spaces. Lastly, we focus our attention on issues of social justice as

they relate to conceptualizing place-naming systems as 'cultural arenas'. These three approaches to place-name studies are by no means mutually exclusive nor do they exhaust the realm of theoretical approaches at our disposal. Rather, they are highlighted here to illustrate the multiple perspectives that can inform a critical politics of place naming, and we hope that future scholarship will expand the epistemological, ontological, and methodological horizon of critical place-name studies.

II Towards a genealogy of the 'critical turn' in contemporary place-name studies

For much of the twentieth century, the study of place names was preoccupied with accumulating and cataloguing the names of places rather than analyzing the sociospatial practice of toponymic inscription itself. Wright (1929: 140) long ago argued that this approach to place-name studies could be likened to that of 'the botanical collector, whose first interest is in gathering and ticketing specimens'. Similarly, he suggested that the 'toponym collector draws up lists of place names and garners details regarding the origin and meaning of each'. By focusing so intently on the origins of individual place names, such studies have tended to neglect the political struggles over the processes of place naming (Kearns and Berg, 2002). As Withers (2000: 533) incisively argues, 'Attention to the name alone, either on the ground or on an historical map, runs the risk of concerning itself with ends and not with means; of ignoring, or, at best, underplaying the social processes intrinsic to the authoritative act of naming'. At the close of the twentieth century, Zelinsky (1997: 465) soberly observed that the study of geographical names amounted to little more than 'collecting, classifying, and seeking origins for names, with only occasional probes of the connections to the encompassing totality of human phenomena'.

By the mid-1980s, however, there were already various scholars at work seeking to challenge such traditional approaches to toponymic research (Cohen and Kliot, 1981; Azaryahu, 1986; 1988; Carter, 1987; Ferguson, 1988; Stump, 1988). Maoz Azaryahu's (1986; 1988; 1990; 1992; 1996) early work on street naming and political identity laid the groundwork for a critical interrogation of urban toponymic practices and the politics of commemoration. Moreover, the publication of Paul Carter's now-classic study, *The road to Botany Bay* (1987), also drew attention to the constitutive role of naming in the production of 'places' that were invested with cultural meaning and social power. Focusing particularly on the ways in which naming practices literally 'invented' new spaces of colonial possession, Carter demonstrates how the act of naming brought specific places into the realm of 'cultural circulation', thereby 'transforming space into an object of knowledge, something that could be explored and read' (Carter, 1987: 28, 67). Whatmore (2002: 68), however, questions Carter's 'insistence on the primacy of language and his preoccupation with naming as a definitive spatial practice'. She contends that the focus on imperial naming strategies – while important – often results in the conceptual erasure of those indigenous spaces that were not subject to the intentional gaze of imperial inscription (see also Ryan, 1996; Clayton, 2000).

For the most part, these criticisms are generally well founded, yet many of the issues raised concerning Carter's approach have been remedied by other scholars who have explored the social struggles over competing systems of spatial signification (eg, Yeoh, 1992). Other studies have also explored how colonial powers frequently erased, marginalized, or appropriated the languages and place-name systems of colonized, indigenous groups (Bassett, 1994; Herman, 1999; Withers, 2000; Grounds, 2001). Not surprisingly, a reclaiming of language, memory,

and identity has accompanied postcolonial independence, and, as revealed in place-renaming efforts, this reclamation has been anything but straightforward politically (Berg and Kearns, 1996; Yeoh, 1996; Nash, 1999). In critical place-name studies, the emphasis has been placed not so much on the name itself but rather on the cultural politics of *naming* – that is, how people seek to control, negotiate, and contest the naming process as they engage in wider struggles for legitimacy and visibility.

By the mid-1990s, a significant reorientation in place-name studies was evident as a growing number of scholars began ‘reconnecting place-name analysis to the study of power’ (Myers, 1996: 237). Many of these studies drew upon Cohen and Kliot’s (1992) seminal analysis of place naming as a strategy of nation-building and state formation, and a heavy emphasis was therefore placed on how governmental authorities have constructed new regimes of toponymic inscription to promote particular conceptions of history and national identity. Subsequent work has chronicled the toponymic changes accompanying major ideological struggles and power shifts within different countries (Azaryahu, 1992; 1997; Faraco and Murphy, 1997; Azaryahu and Golan, 2001; Robinson *et al.*, 2001; Azaryahu and Kook, 2002; Light, 2004; Gill, 2005). As Whelan (2005: 62) maintains, these name changes ‘act as a spatialization of memory and power, making tangible specific narratives of nationhood and reducing otherwise fluid histories into sanitized, concretized myths that anchor the projection of national identity onto physical territory’.

As this research shows, the renaming of streets has proven to be an especially popular strategy for removing signs of earlier regimes and honoring a new set of heroes, campaigns, and causes (Ferguson, 1988; Palonen, 1993; Azaryahu, 1996; Yeoh, 1996; Faraco and Murphy, 1997; Alderman, 2000; Light *et al.*, 2002; Pinchevski and Torgovnik, 2002; Light, 2004; Rose-Redwood, 2008b). This focus in the literature on the naming of streets is

indicative of the power that street-naming systems have in constituting the taken-for-granted spaces of everyday life, especially when ‘everybody uses them [street names] but hardly anyone pays attention to their specific historical meaning and to the fact that they belong to the structures of power’ (Azaryahu, 1996: 321). It is precisely this process of using street naming as a mechanism for *naturalizing* hegemonic power structures that critical place-name scholars have sought to challenge by demonstrating the historical instability and contingency of place-naming regimes.

While the majority of studies on the politics of place naming have emphasized questions of nationalism and ideology, there is also a growing recognition that the naming of places is implicated in the production of racialized, gendered, and commodified landscapes (Berg and Kearns, 1996; Boyd, 2000; Yurchak, 2000; Kearns and Berg, 2002; Hagen, 2007; Mitchelson *et al.*, 2007; Alderman, 2008; Rose-Redwood, 2008b). The image-generating power of toponyms has long played a role in the political economy of place promotion; from the intentional misnaming of Greenland to the more current practice of giving subdivisions, businesses, casinos, and even hospitals marketable monikers (Zelinsky, 1989; Kearns and Barnett, 1999; Raento and Douglass, 2001). Place-naming rights are increasingly bought and sold like commodities, used to project the power of corporations and privatize public space and memory (Boyd, 2000; Yurchak, 2000). Drawing from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, recent studies have suggested that toponyms function as a form of ‘symbolic capital’, or a means of creating social distinction and status for both elite and marginalized groups as well as individual actors (Hagen, 2007; Alderman, 2008; Rose-Redwood, 2008b). Of course, symbolic capital can be converted into economic capital, but it often holds even greater currency as people vie for prestige and influence within the larger social and political order (Forest and Johnson, 2002).

The socially contested nature of place names comes from the fact that they are powerful semiotic texts embedded in larger systems of meaning and discourse that are read, interpreted, and acted upon socially by people in different ways (Duncan, 1990; Pinchevski and Torgovnik, 2002). Toponyms, according to Thornton (1997: 221), 'evoke a wide range of poignant associations, mental and physical, illustrating how people learn to "think" with the landscape and not just "about it"'. Place names are also important in creating and maintaining emotional attachments to places, even in the face of physical alienation from these very same places (Kearney and Bradley, 2009; see also Davidson *et al.*, 2005). Associated intertextually with larger cultural narratives and stories, toponymic inscriptions serve as a 'means of situating people in places' and assisting the public in making moral and ethical judgments about themselves and others (Carbaugh and Rudnick, 2006: 167).

As this selective overview of critical place-name studies shows, the field of toponymy has experienced a major transformation over the course of the last 20 years. A variety of new thematic concerns have been explored, and there is now a far greater recognition that toponymic research should be firmly grounded in an explicit engagement with critical theories of space, place, and landscape. In the remainder of this article, we consider three distinct theoretical frameworks that can be employed to critically analyze toponymic practices: political semiotics, governmentality studies, and normative theories of social justice and symbolic resistance. This discussion is meant to be a suggestive, rather than comprehensive, account of possible approaches to critical place-name studies.

III Political semiotics and the cultural economy of commemorative place naming

Names and the nomenclatures they belong to occupy a central place in any cultural system.

Semiotics, or the study of signs, explores the cultural communication of meaning and how messages that are disseminated in the sphere of social communication are encoded and decoded. Since the pioneering work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, a number of semiotic traditions have developed as a means of examining sign systems of various kinds (Chandler, 2007).

Applying a semiotic approach appears to be especially rewarding for the study of commemorative toponyms. The semiotic association between place naming and political power can be traced back throughout the course of history. Naming places after their founders, for instance, is an ancient tradition. Following the example of Alexander the Great, new cities in the Hellenistic and the Roman Empire were named after emperors. Similarly, new settlements founded in the American West were often named to commemorate political leaders and prominent citizens. Moreover, cities in the former Soviet Union were also named after members of the Soviet pantheon. In 1924, for example, Petrograd was renamed Leningrad. Stalin's cult of personality was also evident in naming cities after him in each of the 16 Soviet Republics. During the second half of the twentieth century, in the era of mass travel, airports have similarly been named after national heroes.

In previous studies, one of the present authors has drawn upon the work of Umberto Eco to analyze the political semiotics of commemorative street naming, which involves the interplay between primary, utilitarian functions that are 'denoted' and a complex set of secondary, symbolic functions, which are 'connoted' (Azaryahu, 1996). The latter involve cultural values, social norms, and political ideologies that are associated with the symbolic message of the sign (Eco, 1986). The utilitarian function of toponyms is to designate different 'places' as part of a general system of spatial orientation. However, the official naming of places by authorities

opens up the possibility of instituting names that, in their commemorative capacity, conform to and accord with the ideological premises underlying the ruling sociopolitical order. This commemorative dimension invests place names with ideological meaning and political significance (Palonen, 1993; Azaryahu, 1996).

When commemoration is prioritized over orientation, the commemorative function can interfere with and even undermine the utilitarian function of a toponym. One example of such a situation is when geographically continuous thoroughfares are divided into smaller units to accommodate multiple commemorative names, each of which is assigned to a particular consecutive segment of a thoroughfare between neighboring intersections. From the perspective of those in charge of bestowing these commemorative names, the aim is to maximize the number of commemorations in a given area. For many who are attempting to navigate through a city, however, such a practice defies 'common-sense' assumptions that a continuous thoroughfare is one and the same urban unit and should be designated as such.

The use of place names for commemorative purposes is based on a long-standing cross-cultural convention, which maintains that pronouncing the proper names of the dead facilitates remembrance. From a semiotic perspective, the commemoration of Stalingrad is illuminating since it entails a cluster of explicit and implicit commemorations. *Avenue de Stalingrad* in Paris was named after the Soviet city that, following the decisive victory of the Red Army in 1943, became a metaphor for the heroic and victorious stand. On another commemorative level, the name of the city commemorated Stalin. A prominent symbol of the Stalinist cult of personality, the city was renamed Volgograd in the course of de-Stalinization, yet the commemoration of Stalin is preserved in the name *Avenue de Stalingrad* in Paris. The name also appears in various other European cities, such as Lyon and Brussels.

After a commemorative name is given to a place, it increasingly becomes associated with its geographic location: history becomes geography. Kennedy, Bismarck, Martin Luther King, and Ben Gurion come to answer the question 'where' rather than the question 'who'. As a result of the conversion of historical names into place names, the geographic denotation takes over while the existence of a historical referent becomes increasingly obscure to most users of the city: 'When I hear the name Friedrichstrasse or similar street names, I don't think in this minute at all that the street is named after Friedrich I or anyone else' (Loewy, 1927: 303). Notwithstanding the ideological perspectives that underlie commemorative place naming, the meaning individuals ascribe to and associate with place names is to a substantial extent also a function of how personal experiences frame their semiotic engagement with the landscape.

The version of history that commemorative place naming introduces into social communication is experienced as obvious, part of the 'natural order'. In this sense, the apparent weakness of the historical referent actually augments the power of commemorative place names to render a certain version of history not only familiar, but also self-evident. The merit of a place name as a commemorative vehicle is that it transforms an official discourse of history into a shared cultural experience that is embedded into practices of everyday life.

In their commemorative capacity, place names offer a mapping of space and historical time that figures as a cartographic text. Street names, for example, are embedded into the cityscape to form a particular 'city-text' displayed on street signs and maps (Azaryahu, 1996). Notably, such a city-text represents the priorities of former municipal administrations and political regimes. Written over prolonged periods of time and eventually re- and over-inscribed, a city-text at any given time is the sum of former additions and erasures, and in this capacity is

a palimpsest (Ferguson, 1988; Crang, 1998). The writers of a city-text are mostly lesser-known members of committees and officials put in charge of naming streets and other public places. Their choices represent urban contingencies but also the ideological commitments and political concerns of local elites in charge of the semiotic make-up of the city. As a particular geography of public memory, a city-text represents not only a version of history but also commemorative priorities and hegemonic discourses of former periods.

The association of commemorative toponyms with specific social, cultural, and political systems makes them vulnerable to shifts in political ideologies and discourses of history. A pertinent issue is the impact a change of local administration has on a city-text. This is of special relevance when the new administration champions a commemorative agenda that differs from those of its predecessors. When continuity is desired, a possible solution is the commemorative naming of public spaces in newly built neighborhoods to compensate for alleged or real past commemorative deficiencies.

Another option is to rename existing landmarks, streets, and other places. This phenomenon figures prominently in periods of regime change and revolutionary transformation, when 'renaming the past' is a measure of officially promoted historical revision. Together with pulling down monuments, an ideologically motivated rewriting of city-texts belongs to a 'semiotic revolution' that signifies discontinuities in political history. Aimed at the reconstruction of the symbolic infrastructure of society, renaming places introduces the political change and the ideology of the political order into mundane spheres of human experience. When conducted in the context of a regime change, the renaming of places is a powerful message in its own right about the new regime's control over a community's symbolic infrastructure.

'Toponymic cleansing' has figured prominently in nationalist contexts, where

'renaming the landscape' is directed to weld the national language to the national territory by excluding 'foreign' place names (Azaryahu and Golan, 2001). The 'nationalization' of toponymies as a symbolic homeland-building measure has belonged to periods of nation-building and state-formation in Europe since it was first practiced in a newly independent Greece after 1830, when Turkish, Slavic, and Italian place names were Hellenized. The toponymic cleansing of colonial place names is also a common feature in postcolonial contexts (Yeoh, 1996).

Based on the premise that the political economy of signs and social formations are interrelated, political semiotics explores ideology as a cultural form and investigates the sociopolitical dimension of signs. The political semiotics of place naming offers important insights into the study of the relations between toponymy and the politics of cultural signification. In doing so, it sheds light on how commemorative measures of place naming are embedded within the political geographies of public memory.

IV Governmentality, regimes of spatial inscription, and the production of calculable spaces

Most accounts of the semiotics of place naming devote considerable attention to the ways in which toponyms constitute the landscape as a 'text' through which the commemorative priorities of a people can be read. As noted above, the utilitarian function of a sign is often contrasted with its commemorative dimensions, whereby the former is reduced to the commonsense notion of the need for spatial orientation (denotation) and the latter consists of the more complicated world of symbolic associations (connotation). This neat distinction between denotation and connotation has not gone unchallenged (eg, Baudrillard, 1981; Davis, 2005), yet the logic of utilitarian denotation too often goes unquestioned while much of the attention is concentrated on the politics of cultural signification that plays an admittedly

important role in the place-naming process. It is high time, however, that we apply the same level of critical scrutiny to the seemingly self-evident rationalities of spatial calculation and geographical orientation as place-name scholarship has devoted to the social meanings of commemoration and cultural identity. To put it more concisely, we need to develop the theoretical tools necessary to pry open the 'blackbox' of spatial denotation much as has already been done with the symbolic realm of connotation.

A useful point of departure to initiate such an encounter between critical place-name studies and an analysis of the politics of calculation is to recognize that place naming is part of a broader history of spatial identification. A genealogy of the latter requires not only a consideration of place naming itself but also how it relates to a whole series of spatial practices such as street and house numbering, the establishment of signage systems, cadastral mapping for the purposes of property management, the creation of postal codes, and other related techniques of spatial inscription (geo-coding). The naming of places, then, is not an isolated semiotic activity but rather a form of spatial inscription that has considerable material implications as one among many 'apparatuses of identification' (Caplan and Torpey, 2001).

Since the eighteenth century, the construction of regimes of spatial inscription has become a key strategy for ordering geographical spaces, which is intimately linked to the production of governmental knowledges and the spatial identification of individuals that constitute a population (Curry *et al.*, 2004; Curry, 2005; Farvacque-Vitkovic *et al.*, 2005; Rose-Redwood, 2006; 2008a; Thale, 2007). The history of governmental rationalities, the governance of populations, and the construction of calculable spaces has become an important focus of critical geographic scholarship over the past decade (Braun, 2000; Hannah, 2000; 2009; Elden, 2001; 2005; 2007; Blomley, 2003; Pickles,

2004; Crampton and Elden, 2006; 2007; Huxley, 2007; Mayhew, 2009). Much of this work draws upon Michel Foucault's (1991; 2007) discussions of *governmentality*, or governmental rationality, particularly his emphasis on the key role that statistics has historically played in the formation of governmental knowledges of 'populations'. Foucault was interested in understanding how power is exercised through an assemblage of political technologies enabling the production of knowledge, which is targeted both at the individual subject and at the population as a whole.

Geographers who have engaged with the literature on 'governmentality studies' have generally focused on the history of population censuses, mapping, and the partitioning of geographical spaces. Yet the use of numerical 'addressing' as a political technology has received far less attention among those interested in the relations of space, knowledge, and power (Rose-Redwood, 2006; 2008a). At the same time, very few place-name scholars have engaged with the literature on governmentality and the politics of calculation. We would like to suggest here that it is at the intersection of these two emerging literatures that considerable insights can be achieved concerning toponymic inscription, systems of governmental identification, and the spaces of calculation.

When linked to a coordinated system of house numbers and postal codes, a city's street names become elements of a *geo-locational regime* that enables governmental authorities to more easily tax, police, and provide services to their populations, allows companies to spatially target potential consumers using various geodemographic information systems; and becomes incorporated into the taken-for-granted infrastructure of daily life. While the practice of numerically addressing geographical spaces can certainly serve the repressive ends of social control, a Foucauldian analysis of political technologies is also concerned with how such techniques

produce new modes of subjectivity as geo-coded spaces become the condition of possibility for locating the place of the 'self' and 'others' in both social and spatial terms.

Crampton and Elden (2006) highlight the need to critically examine how techniques of numerical calculation have reshaped the politics of space since the seventeenth century. More specifically, they seek to reconsider the interrelations of calculative thought and political action by exploring the 'geographies of mathematization and calculation' (Crampton and Elden, 2006: 681). If the history of place naming is reformulated as part of a genealogy of geographical addressing and geo-coding, then its relevance to the project of a spatial history of calculation becomes increasingly evident. This is particularly the case when considering the spatial organization of most American cities, where street numbering systems are utilized as a primary geo-locational strategy of spatial ordering (Baldwin and Grimaud, 1989; Hamlin, 1999; Rose-Redwood, 2008a). In large cities and small towns alike, the numbering of streets is unquestionably one of the most visible indications that 'number' and 'calculation' have been embedded into the very spaces of everyday life.

A genealogy of the techniques of spatial calculation must be attentive to the specificity of their emergence in different historical and geographical contexts, including the virtual realm of cyberspace (eg, McDowell *et al.*, 2008). While all such projects have had the common goal of producing spaces of 'legibility' (Scott, 1998), this need not suggest that we should envision a universal process of state-driven spatial 'rationalization' encompassing the entire globe from the Age of Enlightenment to the present. As Foucault rightly argues, 'the word *rationalization* is dangerous. What we have to do is analyze specific rationalities rather than always invoking the progress of rationalization in general' (Foucault, 1983: 210, emphasis in original). The spatial history of numerical

addressing is far too messy and piecemeal to accommodate such grand theorizations on a global scale.

Regardless of the scale of analysis, it is critical that a genealogy of calculable space should not merely superimpose a preconceived theoretical lens upon its 'object' of analysis but rather remain open to reformulation, contradiction, and fundamental challenges to the theoretical frameworks that inform genealogical investigations. What is called for here, then, is not a strict adherence to *the* Foucauldian perspective on governmentality – if such a thing even exists. Instead, Foucault's work on governmental rationalities and political technologies should inspire further inquiry into the relationship between toponymic inscription and the production of calculable spaces as opposed to constructing a rigid conceptual cage with all the trappings of a theoretical straitjacket.

V Social justice, symbolic resistance, and place naming as a cultural arena

Discussions of how place naming is involved in the semiotics of political regime change and the creation of governable spaces tend to focus our attention on issues of social and political control. No doubt, the naming process sheds light on power relations – how some social groups have the authority to name while others do not – and the selective way in which such relations reproduce the dominance of certain ideologies and identities over others. Yet, in emphasizing the control behind toponymic inscription, we must also recognize the extent to which this control can be challenged. The metaphor of 'cultural arena' focuses on the capacity of place names to serve as sites of contest, debate, and negotiation as social groups compete for the right to name and, in the words of Don Mitchell (2008: 43), 'the power to define the meanings that are to be read into and out of the landscape'. The results of these naming struggles have a direct bearing on whose vision of 'reality' will appear to

matter socially, since landscapes are not just the products of social power but also tools or resources for achieving it.

While theories of hegemony recognize that dominant groups or classes control the production of cultural space, they also insist that this dominance is never complete and is challenged by counter-hegemonic ideologies of subordinate groups. Resistance is sometimes confrontational, but often symbolic. Symbolic resistance involves the 'appropriation of certain artifacts and significations from the dominant culture and their transformation into symbolic forms that take on new meaning and significance' for subaltern groups (Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987: 99). Place naming can be interpreted as a conduit for challenging dominant ideologies as well as a means of introducing alternative cultural meanings and narrations of identity. Kadmon (2004) goes as far as to use the notion of 'toponymic warfare' to describe the extent to which marginalized nationalities and linguistic cultures within countries have appropriated and rewritten place names on maps as part of their campaigns of resistance. Maps are more than simply innocent repositories of name data. They work – through their textual authority and repeated use – to normalize certain ways of knowing and naming the landscape over others (Melville, 2006).

The material landscape itself can also be an important site of toponymic resistance as social actors and groups engage in the 'counternaming' of places (Zeidel, 2006: 201). As Raento and Watson (2000) illustrate, radical Basque groups have carried out some of their territorially based political protest by painting over Spanish place names on public signs. 'This linguistic redesign', they argue, 'constitutes a direct challenge to the authority of both the Spanish state and the moderate nationalist concept of Basque society, politics, and culture' (Raento and Watson, 2000: 727). A similar type of resistance has long occurred in Northern Ireland with Irish nationalists spray-painting through the word

'London' on road signs to Londonderry (Doherty, 2007). When Chicago officials rebuffed a proposal to rename Monroe Street for Fred Hampton, a Black Panther leader who had been killed on that street by city police in 1969, members of the Illinois Black Panther Party marched to the 2300 block of Monroe and posted their own home-made street signs with Hampton's name written on them (Grossman and Avila, 2006).

The aforementioned cases of people claiming and reinscribing the landscape through place-naming practices of various kinds are evocative and contribute to bringing visibility, albeit often temporarily, to their cause. However, the use of place naming as resistance is often done more subtly, such as when a subordinate population employs a competing, informal system of geographical nomenclature rather than the authorized system of naming (Yeoh, 1992; Bigon, 2009). The very choice not to use the official place-name system is a practice of self-determination. In addition, place-name resistance can involve the 'use of alternative pronunciations for established names', as Kearns and Berg (2002: 286) suggest in examining the postcolonial politics of recognizing the cultural rights of indigenous people within Aotearoa/New Zealand. Pronunciation of a place name, whether sympathetic or not to the Maori, is a social act of narrating identity, a way of 'constructing and positioning the Self in relation to Others' (Kearns and Berg, 2002: 298).

While toponymic resistance is often carried out through everyday practices and performances, marginalized groups can and do use formal, political means to challenge established naming practices. The contested and negotiated nature of naming is especially evident in the use of toponymic inscriptions to serve the ends of public commemoration as people struggle to decide who has the right to determine what is remembered (and forgotten) publicly and officially. Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, for example, are increasingly turning to place

naming as a political strategy for addressing their exclusion and misrepresentation within traditional, white-dominated constructions of heritage. This strategy has led to the removal of racially and ethnically derogatory place names as well as the renaming of places in ways that recognize the historical importance of minorities (Monmonier, 2006).

In Phoenix, Arizona, for example, Native American leaders and sympathetic state officials successfully pushed to have Squaw Peak renamed in honor of Lori Ann Piestewa. Piestewa was the first Native American female soldier to die in combat, a 2003 casualty of the Iraq War. The National Congress of American Indians very much interpreted the issue in terms of identity politics, stating that the use of *squaw* as a toponym is 'an example of the disrespect for and racism toward native women, who are often political and social leaders of our communities' (quoted in Kelleher, 2004: 121). The reidentification of Squaw Peak was envisioned as a way of challenging sexism as well as racial/ethnic stereotypes, prompting us to consider the multiple layers and axes of identity and contestation at work in place naming.

African Americans have been particularly active in using place names to challenge racist commemorations of the past in cultural landscapes. Schools have a long and embattled history within US race relations and the renaming of these institutions is increasingly seen as a means of contesting normative definitions of cultural and historical identity (Alderman, 2002a). In the early 1990s, the Orleans Parish school board in Louisiana implemented a highly controversial policy that prohibited school names honoring slave owners and others who did not respect racial equality. The names of many white historical figures (including the slave-holding first president of the United States, George Washington) were removed from schools and replaced with names commemorating prominent African-Americans, including

slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr (Dart, 1997).

The renaming of streets for Martin Luther King is the most widespread example of African American efforts to contest the hegemonic place-name landscape. Street naming is an especially potent form of cultural resistance and redefinition because of its potential to touch and connect disparate groups – some of which may not identify with King. Yet, the road-naming process is frequently characterized by intense public debate about King's legacy and questions of race and racism (Alderman, 2002b; 2006). For many activists, finding the most appropriate street to identify with King comes with the difficulty of convincing the white establishment that his name belongs on major roads, that his legacy has relevance and resonance to everyone's lives. In practice, public opposition has frequently led to the segregation of his name on minor streets or portions of larger roads located entirely in the African American community, in effect reinforcing traditional racial and economic boundaries and reproducing the very same white control of public space that the civil rights leader fought to correct.

Attempts to limit and control public consumption of King's memory are not confined to the naming of physical, material places. The internet domain name *martlutherking.org* is controlled by a white supremacist organization that uses the URL to host a website that defames King (Alderman, 2009). Thus, protest through naming can be wielded for reactionary objectives as well as progressive ones. Toponymic resistance, as Kearns and Berg (2002: 286) rightly suggest, can be 'thought of not only in terms of the politics of recognition invoked by marginal groups, but also in terms of the resistances enacted by members of hegemonic groups in response to such politics'.

As we think about where the metaphor of a 'cultural arena' might take place-name research in the future, the controversies

surrounding King's commemoration point to the usefulness of analyzing toponymy from a social justice perspective and understanding how the naming of places, as a product of uneven social relations, is used to advance or obstruct opportunities for greater equity. Mitchell (2003; 2008) has been especially vocal in placing social justice at the center of cultural landscape analysis. As he contends, being seen and heard publicly is critical in establishing who has a right to the city and its public spaces (Mitchell, 2003). In assessing the degree to which marginalized groups are being seen and heard through the toponymic process, it is possible to apply the well-established concepts of procedural and distributive justice.

Renaming particular places involves decision-making procedures in addition to ideological considerations (Azaryahu, 1997), and it is worth thinking about what specific legal or extra-legal factors impede or facilitate the participation of subaltern groups in place naming. Even when the landscape is renamed to make associations with previously marginalized populations, this can still work to exclude if these populations have no actual voice in how their identities will be used in the naming process (Herman, 1999; Cowell, 2004). Greater procedural justice for minority groups will inevitably require analyzing the growing commodification and privatization of place naming and breaking the stranglehold that class and economic power have over the construction of public space (Mitchell, 2003). Indeed, in the case of the USA, those who own property along potentially renamed streets often play a deciding role in name changes, taking precedence over the pleas of other legitimate stakeholders such as those who rent, work, or simply travel on the road in question. In exploring the procedural (in)justices of place naming, scholars might benefit from making greater connections to research on the injustices of neoliberal governance (Macleod, 2002), the 'consequential geographies' of property (Blomley, 2005), and the politics

of urban citizenship and (dis)enfranchisement (Purcell, 2002).

A consideration of distributive justice prompts us to consider how the toponymic landscape should be reconstructed in ways that reflect and give voice to previously suppressed histories and identities. Exactly how many of our schools, streets, bridges, stadiums, and parks are named for minorities? A concern with distribution also draws attention to an analysis of the intra-urban spatial context and the degree to which toponyms work, depending on their location, to marginalize or raise the perceived public legitimacy of subordinate groups. What is the 'place' of certain named public spaces in relation to a city's array of race-, gender-, and class-based spatial distributions? Without serious consideration of this question, places named for marginalized groups could actually work to alienate and further segregate these groups (Alderman, 2002a). As Raento and Watson (2000: 728) recognize, 'Naming and re-naming are strategies of power, and location matters, because this power is only truly exercised when it is "seen" in the appropriate place'.

At the heart of minority efforts to be recognized publicly through naming is a social reconstruction of the scale of commemoration and identity that challenges conventional geographic and social boundaries (Alderman, 2003). In this regard, scholars of place naming might consider examining how naming, rather than a mere symbolic act, takes place within, and perhaps contributes to, the larger geographies of social opportunity and disparity (Bullard and Johnson, 1997). Finally, to investigate the capacity of place naming to be used as a tool for advancing or hindering social justice, we must expand our understanding of the nature of the symbolic resistance and struggle that underlies the naming process. The vision of the past that is made socially important through place naming is not simply a matter of 'political correctness', as suggested by many opponents, but vital to achieving fairness in cultural and political

representation and preventing the symbolic annihilation of marginalized social groups and their historical identities.

VI Expanding the horizon of critical place-name studies

The field of toponymy is currently undergoing a critical reformulation, and we have attempted to convey some of the exciting new directions in place-name studies as it has developed over the last two decades. No longer is most toponymic research blind to the power structures that underpin the naming process nor to the possibilities of symbolic resistance. If anything, the issues of 'power' and 'politics' have taken center stage, and critical place-name scholarship risks becoming a bit too predictable and formulaic in its repetitious invocations of toponymic domination and resistance (for a similar critique of critical geography, see Blomley, 2006). The point here is not to deny the importance of political struggles over naming, but rather to insist that we must broaden our analysis by considering how the 'political' is related to other relatively unexplored questions in place-name studies.

One recent trend, for instance, that has received surprisingly little attention among critical geographers and place-name scholars is the commodification of place-naming rights (yet see Boyd, 2000; Yurchak, 2000). While the association between property ownership and place naming can be traced back quite far in history, it was only within the past few decades that a number of significant steps have been taken toward the wholesale commodification of place names, whereby the right to name a place is literally sold for a monetary value like any other commodity. Since the 1970s, sports stadiums around the world have been renamed by large corporations that have acquired naming rights for considerable sums of money. In recent years, this has led some cities and towns to consider renaming various public spaces – and in a few rare cases, such as Half.com, Oregon, and DISH, Texas, even

renaming the town itself – for corporate sponsors.

This raises a whole series of questions for critical place-name studies, but what is most intriguing is how far people may actually be willing to take this process of commodifying place names, particularly when it comes to the naming of public spaces, such as parks, schools, subway stations, and streets. Such a proposal may appear to make short-term economic sense for cash-strapped local governments seeking new streams of revenue and property owners in search of untapped spheres of profit-making. However, it also poses serious risks to the very notion of public space as a site of social life beyond the commercialized world of corporate culture.

Given such a trend, it is critical to consider the social costs of indiscriminately allowing the *exchange-value* of a name to triumph over its *use-value* in the public sphere. As place names are increasingly being commodified, it is worth thinking more critically about the importance of the use-value of place naming as an integral part of the social production of public space. This will also redirect our attention to the ways in which such names are performatively enacted through their use in everyday speech, which offers the potential for resisting an officially sanctioned place name that has been sold to the highest bidder. If enough people refuse to recognize a commodified name, the official toponym itself may actually lose some of its own performative force (Rose-Redwood, 2008c).

Another important set of issues involves the question of methodology. There is a growing recognition that the traditional reliance on maps and gazetteers to study place names is inadequate and should be supplemented with some combination of archival research, participant observation, interviews, and ethnographic methods (Myers, 1996). Such a mixed-methods approach lends itself more to a consideration of toponymic space not only as a 'text' but also as resulting from a set of 'performative' practices. The aim of such a theoretical

reframing of toponymic analysis is not to replace the textual metaphor with the notion of performance, but rather to examine the performativity of the landscape-as-text as well as the textuality of toponymic performance. In the future, we hope that the ongoing process of rethinking the conceptual and methodological foundations employed in critical place-name studies will lead to a richer appreciation of the role of toponymic practices in constructing the geographical spaces of everyday life.

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