RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rural Autochthony? The Rejection of an Aboriginal Placename in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia

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Abstract

This article addresses the question of why the name 'Mullawallah', advanced by local Wada wurrung for a new suburb in the Ballarat area, was contested and rejected by residents. It argues that the intersection between corporate profit, government policy and meaning-based issues of belonging should be highlighted for a deeper understanding of practices around place naming. The contextual conditions regarding the democratisation of place-naming policy, overwhelming power of commercial developers to 'name Australia' with marketable high status names and a 'carpentered' pastoral environment 'emptied' of the Indigenous population, created an environment conducive for the contests over naming. The Indigenous people appeared to have been wiped from the landscape and the worldview of settler locals. Concepts of 'locals' and 'rural autochthony' prove useful for understanding the ambiguities of belonging and placename attachment in Australia. The article argues that cultural politics of naming remains a contested social practice.

Keywords

Place naming; Mullawallah; toponymy; rural autochthony; Wada Wurrung

Introduction

'For by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into place, that is, space with a history.'[1]

On 10 December 2014 a crowded and energised Ballarat City Council meeting at the Ballarat Town Hall addressed the issue of community response to 'Mullawallah'. the name proposed for a suburban development in Ballarat West, in the Central Goldfields region of Victoria, Australia. Three residents, one of whom was a young nurse, used the maximum five-minute speaking time to impress upon council the life and death situation for emergency services when a name was difficult to spell, to say and had similarities to other names in Australia. One speaker asked the meeting to recall the proud Eureka democratic tradition of Ballarat that gave residents the right to reject a name they did not like. In question time, the nurse asked the council whether any one of the one hundred plus opposing submissions was 'racist' and received a clear negative response.

When a councillor attempted to delay the decision to give supporters of the name more time to present their case, sixty or more residents jeered and booed loudly. Members of the meeting shouted out derisively about the apparent absence of 'Mullawallah' supporters at the meeting. (A small group of supporters, including traditional owners from the Wada wurrung [Wathaurung], sat in a front corner, cowed into silence by the aggressive crowd.) All bar one of the councillors responded to the mood of the crowd and agreed the issue should be decided without further delay. The name was rejected according to Victorian Government policy guidelines and the procedure to choose a new name had to begin again. Meanwhile state, national (and even some international) press and talk-back radio hosts had a field day expressing disbelief at the reasons given for the name rejection. People approached in the street managed to pronounce and sometimes spell Mullawallah on the spot, and dozens of people tweeted or called in to proudly pronounce their own Aboriginal placename, even more difficult to pronounce for an English speaker than Mullawallah.

In this article I wish to further critical scholarship relating to settler belonging and placename theorisation by addressing the question of why the name 'Mullawallah' was contested and rejected by residents in the area between Delacombe and Smythes Creek in west Ballarat, which was targeted as a new growth suburb of 10,000 people. I assess Rob Garbutt's concept of the 'locals' and 'rural autochthony' for an understanding of belonging and placename attachment in Australia.[2] I argue that the *intersection* between corporate profit, government policy and meaning-based issues of belonging should be highlighted for a deeper understanding of practices around place naming. I show how the contextual conditions regarding the democratisation of place naming policy, the overwhelming power of commercial developers to 'name Australia' and a 'carpentered', pastoral environment 'emptied' of its Indigenous population, created an environment conducive for the contests over naming. The Indigenous was irrelevant (at least) and unwelcome (at most) in the lives and interests of the vocal Ballarat outer suburban dwellers.

To do this, it is first necessary to explore issues around the critical turn in placename studies (toponymy), belonging to Australia in relation to Indigeneity and autochthony, and place branding.

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1   Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p. xxii.

2   Rob Garbutt, *The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging in Australia and Beyond*, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2011.

Literature

TOPOPHILIA AND TOPONYMY

The codifying of placenames has occurred since at least the Domesday Book of 1086. In the colonial and modern era considerable energy was expended in gazetting and categorising Indigenous and other placenames. On the world stage a significant scholar was George Stewart who began work classifying placenames in the 1950s and in 1975 presented a study applying his typology titled 'Names of the Globe'. He argued that a key motivation to name places was the desire to distinguish and separate.[3]

William Brough-Smyth's *The Aborigines of Victoria* (1878) and later A.W. Reed's *Aboriginal Place Names and their Meanings* (1967) and Aldo Massola's *Aboriginal Place Names of South Eastern Australia and their Meanings* (1968) were key texts of the Australian modern project. These toponymic reference works had considerable influence, but generally imposed a colonial view of the Indigenous people, language and culture, prizing them primarily as an avenue for 'giving depth' to white settlers' national identities and tending to merge and homogenise Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.[4]

Around the 1990s, a critical turn took place in the study of place naming or toponymic inscriptions. The mainly antiquarian, etymological and empiricist tasks of cataloguing lists and meanings moved to a broader project more centrally located in geographic and cultural studies theoretical frameworks.[5] Central to this shift were works such as *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* by US scholar Yi-fu Tuan in 1974 (reprinted in 1990), Naftali Kadmon's *Toponymy, the Lore, Laws and Language of Geographic Names* (1997) and Lawrence Berg and Robin Kearns's *Naming as Norming* (1996).

Tuan acknowledged the vivid and concrete experience of an affective bond between people and place in *Topophilia*.[6] Topophilia, or love of place, is not the strongest of human emotions but '[when] it is compelling we can be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol'.[7] Over time more emotion is invested in a place and 'awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place'.[8] Embodiment and emplacements are pathways to local knowledge. When used in certain contexts toponyms contribute to a sense of place.[9]

Tuan also noted that colonisers almost inevitably imposed a 'carpentered' habitat of straight lines, angles and rectangles to the new habitats.[10] Pastoral subdivisions, roads and new suburbs

3   Jan Tent and David Blair, 'Motivations for Naming: A Toponymic Typology', Australian National Place-names Survey, Technical Paper no. 2, Australian National Placenames Survey, South Turramurra, NSW, 2009, http://www.anps.org.au/documents/anpstechpaper2.pdf; Laura Kostanski, '"What's in a Name?": Place and Toponymic Attachment, Identity and Dependence', PhD thesis, School of Business, University of Ballarat, 2009.

4   Laura Kostanski, 'Toponymic Books and the Representation of Indigenous Identities', in *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and Re-naming the Australian Landscape*, ed. Harold Koch and Luise Hercus, Aboriginal History Monographs, ANU Epress, Canberra, 2009, pp. 175–88.

5   Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman and Maoz Azaryahu, 'Geographies of Toponymic Inscription: New Directions in Critical Place-name Studies', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2010, p. 455.

6   Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values,* Columbia University Press, New York, 1990 [1974], p. 4.

7   Ibid., p. 93.

8   Ibid., p. 99.

9   Steven Feld and Keith Basso, 'Introduction', *Senses of Place*, School of American Research, New Mexico, 1996, p. 11.

10   Tuan, p. 74.

carpenter a landscape. Tuan's comments on suburbs are pertinent. A suburb is 'a society coming into being'. Often initial living conditions are quite raw and require a pioneering spirit and cooperation between residents.[11] Suburbs begin as less than urban or civilised in some ways but also represent an ideal embracing the best of the city and the country. The front lawn and backyard replace the farm and the pets the livestock. Popular names for suburbs characteristically recall some aspect of nature or country.[12] New middle-class suburban communities try to copy exclusive older suburbs but without 'the sanction of history and tradition they must depend on economic fences or walls of racial prejudice to keep out the undesirable elements'.[13]

Tuan describes a process of 'Boosterism' where cities promote certain aspects of place with nicknames to promote favourable images, individuality and uniqueness. Chambers of commerce, civil leaders and journalists try to bolster the reputation of a hometown with a striking image. Nicknames that imply a centre, or a cross roads, gateway or a mountain are popular, as can be seen in Victoria when in 1919–1920 the suburb 'Evelyn' became 'Mt Evelyn' in an effort to attract holiday makers from Melbourne.[14]

A key text for the critical turn in scholarship about Australia's history, and naming generally, is Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay*, published in 1987. Carter's linguistic analysis of how Botany Bay was named contends that the 'namer inscribes his passage permanently on the world'.[15] Powerful colonisers map and name as part of a process of taking over their known world. '"Naming" becomes a primary colonising process because it appropriates, defines, captures the place in language.'[16] Carter continues: 'The map is a crucial signifier of control over place and thus of power over the inscription of being. When the colonial map is drawn it effectively erases both the indigenous map and the indigenous knowing it signifies.'[17] Settlers who move to colonies are displaced from their original homelands, so invest a great deal in the culture and constitution of their new places.[18]

Carter tried to explain that history writing and map making were part of the British imperial project. The motivations of Aboriginal actors remain hidden: 'They were made to speak a language that was not theirs.' When European names were given to Aboriginal people they were applied without any link between the particularities, of either the person or the connotations of the name (for example, Napoleon, Nobody). They were applied as a scientific process to distinguish between one Indigenous person and another. Even when Governor Macquarie, an explorer such as Thomas Mitchell (who was eager to learn Aboriginal names but superficial in his enquiries) or surveyors went to the effort of asking for and applying an Aboriginal name to a place, it was a colonial act, 'a quotation out of context'. The authority resided in the person who had the power to name: 'Preserved out of context in a linguistic environment quite foreign to it, a stuffed bird in a museum cage, it scarcely mattered whether

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11 Ibid., p. 238.

12 Ibid., p. 237.

13 Ibid., p. 211.

14 Ibid., pp. 201–5; Janice Newton, Paula Herlihy and Karen Leadbeater Phillips, *Tracks to Trails: A History of Mt Evelyn,* 2nd edn, Mt Evelyn History Group, Mt Evelyn, Victoria, 2001, p. 138.

15 Carter. p. xxii.

16 Ibid., p. 5, p. 33, p. x, p. 28.

17 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Triffin, 'Introduction to Part Thirteen: Place', *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, Oxford, 2006, p. 345.

18 Ibid., p. 345.

the aboriginal name was the "real" one or not.'[19] Although Westerners were, thus, unable to enter the worldview of the Aborigines, Carter is optimistic that occupation of the same country can lead to a spatial history that gives scope for some historical understanding that is mutually intelligible.[20]

Since the 1990s the focus in placename studies has moved in a helpful direction towards looking at how power and ideology is applied in contested social practice and to the cultural politics of naming.[21] Studies in global contexts such as the reunited Germany and US-occupied Iraq demonstrate how renaming plays a central role in 'the social production of space'. It is a 'performative practice that calls forth the place to which it refers'. The 'naming of places is one of the primary means of attempting to construct clearly demarcated spatial identities'.[22]

Placenames are a form of symbolic capital for creating social distinction. Place naming involves the production of racialised, gendered and commodified landscapes.[23] 'Toponymic cleansing' can take place when names of one language are replaced by names of another.[24] Rose-Redwood et al. argue: 'People seek to control, negotiate, and contest the naming process as they engage in wider struggles for legitimacy and visibility.'[25] Sometimes, they continue, commemorative functions interfere with utilitarian roles of placenames. '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'.[26] Commemorative toponyms are vulnerable to political shifts but can be applied to newly built neighbourhoods 'to compensate for … past commemorative deficiencies'.[27]

Naming can be a way of challenging hegemonic meanings to introduce alternative 'narratives of identity'.[28] Marginalised groups can challenge established naming practises. In the United States, minorities 'are increasingly turning to place naming as a political strategy for addressing their exclusion and mis-representation within traditional, white-dominated constructions of heritage'. Racist names have been removed and other places renamed to recognise 'the historical importance of minorities'.[29] For African Americans, renaming streets in honour of Martin Luther King was 'a potent form of cultural resistance' but public opposition often led to the segregation of the name onto minor streets. However, if a minority name is used but the minority has no voice in how their identities are reflected in the naming process, the process can still be exclusionary.[30]

Naming brings spatial identity. In countries such as the United States and New Zealand, government naming projects have been initiated to recognise, give visibility and legitimacy

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19 Carter, pp. 327, 331, 329, 328.

20 Ibid., pp. 335, 337, 350.

21 Rose-Redwood et al., p. 455.

22 Ibid., p. 454.

23 Ibid., p. 456.

24 Ibid., p. 460.

25 Ibid., p. 457.

26 Ibid., p. 459.

27 Ibid., p. 460.

28 Ibid., p. 463.

29 Ibid., p. 463–4.

30 Ibid., p. 465.

to minorities and to improve relations between ethnic groups. Naming new areas can make up for past deficiencies for those who should have been commemorated much earlier.

Since the 1990s we may see, then, there has been a strong focus in toponymic studies on the meaning, symbolic weight and cultural politics of naming, particularly in the context of colonisation. In recent times, naming projects that challenge hegemonic meanings have been promoted both by marginalised groups and by governments. Newly built neighbourhoods are ripe for 'compensatory naming'. Renaming places is a performative practice likely to call forth the referred object or person or place. But there are suggestions that the places where new names are to be applied may not always be fertile soil for such a transplant. Issues of belonging, attachment to place and Indigenous invisibility are pertinent in assessing environments open to renaming.

BELONGING

In settler Australian history, at certain times and among certain marginal groups, belonging and national identity has been sought through acknowledging, and reaching out towards, Indigenous people and culture. Margaret Preston drew on the colour schemes and motifs of Indigenous art in the 1930s and 1940s, and between the 1930s and 1950s a group of poets called the Jindyworobaks attempted to incorporate the music of Aboriginal language into their writing. During the 1988 Bicentennial period, a resurgence of interest (and some say appropriation) of Indigenous motifs took place among alternative communities, artists and musicians.[31]

Since that time this reaching out for 'authentic belonging' by settler Australians, through the incorporation of Aboriginal culture, has become more mainstream and metropolitan. Governments have acknowledged loss, expressed sorrow, incorporated respectful protocols and set up mechanisms that return some limited powers for Aboriginal groups and their identifying descendants to control aspects of heritage and land management. Patrick Wolfe describes this as a 'contradictory re-appropriation of a foundationally disavowed Aboriginality', and argues the 'erasure of indigeneity conflicts with the assertion of settler nationalism'.[32]

In the State of Victoria, Australia, the Office of Geographic Names encourages the use of traditional names, as outlined in the Principle 1(K) of its guidelines: 'The use of Indigenous Australian names is encouraged for features, localities and roads, subject to agreement from the relevant Indigenous communities.'[33]

As Ballarat City Council added in their proposal to residents:

> *Unique names are increasingly being encouraged for use throughout Australia; this is*
> *in part due to the need to avoid duplication but, equally due to increased awareness that*
> *we as inhabitants of land owned previously by Indigenous peoples should, in the spirit*
> *of reconciliation, provide recognition through appropriate place naming. Indigenous*

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31   Andrew Lattas, 'Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordiality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness', *Social Analysis*, no. 27, 1990, pp. 53–7; Janice Newton, 'Aborigines, Tribes and the Counterculture', *Social Analysis*, no. 25, 1988, pp. 53–71; Janice Newton, 'Becoming "Authentic" Australians through Music', *Social Analysis*, no. 27, 1990, pp. 93–129.

32   See Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387–409: 'On the one hand, settler society required the practical elimination of the natives in order to establish itself on their territory. On the symbolic level, however, settler society subsequently sought to recuperate indigeneity in order to express its difference ... from the mother country', p. 389.

33   Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Guidelines for Geographic Names 2010. Version 2*, DSE Victoria, Melbourne, 2013, http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/217691/FEB2013-Guidelines-Version-2.pdf

names, like all names, become familiar and easy to spell and pronounce with use. The use of Indigenous names is also becoming increasingly popular as residents embrace names that evoke a special uniqueness for their address.[34]

Recent non-Indigenous scholars replicate this concern to reconcile with Indigenous peoples while interrogating their own attachment to place. Peter Read begins his influential book, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* asking how non-Indigenous Australians justify their 'continuous presence' and their 'love for the country' while Indigenous people remain 'dispossessed' and their 'history unacknowledged'.[35] Mark McKenna elaborates that 'the way in which we create and remember history plays a crucial part in determining our local and national identities and our political agendas'. Due recognition of what happened in the past is a necessary condition of reconciliation in the present.[36] Both Read and McKenna express shock at the disappearance or dearth of knowledge about Aboriginal activities in the past and present in their home environments. It is rarely acknowledged now that it was the Indigenous owners who navigated the pathways and pastoral runs that 'opened up the country'. Carter cites Hallam: 'by using the same network of nodes (water sources) linked to tracks, the European pattern of land use was based on (and modified) the Aboriginal pattern'.[37] According to Robinson, half the squatters' runs in western Victoria were shown to them by Aboriginal guides and scouts.[38]

Read argues that through acknowledging unpalatable history, finding out about contemporary persistence of Aboriginal culture and respecting and acknowledging Aboriginality, but not attempting to co-opt it, he can belong deeply to his country. A step towards mature belonging is to stop pretending that Aboriginal people do not exist and to remind ourselves with plaques 'that Aboriginality is around us and beside us'.[39] McKenna calls for dual naming of landmarks.

Such sentiments are supported by many among the educated metropolitan population and, as we have seen, have permeated state policies in place naming and Ballarat City Councils' efforts towards reconciliation. It is not the whole story, however, as these attitudes are not necessarily mirrored in rural and less wealthy areas. Distance from the city is an index for interest in acknowledgement and celebration of Aboriginal past, just as, in the early colonial period, 'the greater the distance from the frontier, the greater the concern for the protection of indigenous rights'.[40] Read acknowledges that anxiety around and a quest for unattainable 'deep belonging' to the land of Australia is located more among the urban, middle-class 'Anglo' population than it is among the young, the rural, migrants and so on.[41] Rob Garbutt's concept

34   City of Ballarat, Naming Proposal NP-197, Name a New Locality Mullawallah, 2014, Internal Document Management System, City of Ballarat. 'Have Your Say Page', http://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/. As part of their Reconciliation Action Plan Ballarat City Council began flying the Aboriginal flag in May 2004.

35   Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 1.

36   Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas Point: An Australian History of Place*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002, pp. 220, 221.

37   Carter, p. 339.

38   McKenna, p. 227, Carter, pp. 320, 325, 340. See also Fred Cahir, 'Are You Off to the Diggings? Aboriginal Guiding to and on the Goldfields', *The La Trobe Journal* no. 85, May 2010, pp. 22–36; Ian D. Clark and Fred Cahir (eds), *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills*, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, 2013.

39   Read, p. 210.

40   McKenna, p. 9.

41   See Read, pp. 5, 15. Views of year 11 rural boarding school girls interviewed by Read diverged markedly from those of the scholars, historians, artists and poets. 'Those raised on rural properties are much less troubled by the past than the Anglo-Celts of the cities...' (p. 80). 'They reject gilded stories of Aboriginal culture, as they 'know' the reality of unemployment and problematic behaviour in rural towns.

of rural autochthony in his work *The Locals: Identity, Place and Belonging* can help explain this spatial divide in attitudes.[42]

AUTOCHTHONOUS LOCALS AND DISAPPEARING INDIGENOUS

Like Read and McKenna, Garbutt had his sense of being local and belonging to his rural area in Lismore, New South Wales, unsettled when he was confronted by an Indigenous incursion on his consciousness.[43] He theorised that 'being local' is an unstable identity that is stabilised through cutting off relations with others, most significantly Aborigines. He set out to understand the 'collective post-colonial amnesia' involved in making the original residents of a place invisible.

Space clearing involves 'physical and psychical practices of identity formation through labour, place-making and dwelling'. The land clearing by settler pioneers becomes material for legend while the clearing of local Aboriginal people becomes the 'stuff of silence'. The locals are defensively autochthonous.[44]

The Ancient Greek word autochthon means 'sprung from the land itself' and implies being indigenous to a territory. It is a 'single unifying myth' that masks 'inequalities and violence that accompany the foundation of the state', provides a myth of peaceful origins and 'legitimates a claim to territory through boundaries dictated by nature' rather than through 'social contract'. It is a Western ideology that has contemporary salience in Africa and Europe. Evidence from wider Australia and Lismore local history and language use furnishes an argument that being a local in rural Australia is a claim to settler indigenisation and autochthony.[45]

Such claims are riddled with logical inconsistencies. The European settler initially may be seen as a successor in linear time. 'Constant re-iterations of "the last of his tribe" can be read in this light.' However, the notion of an empty land (*terra nullius*) also provides a 'founding forgetting', while history for the pioneering settlers is valorised.[46] Furthermore, to set themselves apart from more recent migrant groups in Australia, the descendants from the original British migrants of early colonisation, who claim to belong to the land as true locals, downplay and erase from public memory their own migrant history. They arrived in Australia with Anglo-Celtic cultural concepts of born-and-bred kinship and notions of exclusive rights to property owners that tap into processes of indigenisation.[47] Thus, cultural autochthony is a social order in a:

> *co-productive relationship with practices and processes of indigenisation. Both express the transformations of the imaginary of the colonist/settler in terms of cultural and spatial identity … in a tension between exile and belonging, past and future.*[48]

Each has a horror story about someone they know who has been robbed, physically attacked or about property that has been destroyed by Indigenous people. They assume these Aboriginal people know nothing about their background and see no reason why they should feel guilty about mistakes of the Anglo Australians in the past. They do not accept Aboriginal "ownership" of the land or any need for special treatment/positive discrimination as they buy into multicultural equality' (pp. 55–75).

42   Garbutt.

43   Garbutt writes that in 2000 he did not know what to write in a 'Sorry Book' to acknowledge, specifically, the 'Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children removed from their parents but seen as a public apology to past wrongs to Indigenous Australians. Garbutt, p. 17.

44   Ibid., pp. 22–5.

45   Ibid., pp. 177–8.

46   Ibid., pp. 190–1.

47   Ibid., p. 199.

48   Ibid., p. 195.

Whiteness is the normalised, unremarked-upon, taken-for-granted background of localism in many rural areas in Australia. Historical silences and effacements aid contemporary 'not noticing' or 'seeing' Aboriginal people. Race, argues Garbutt, is a component of Australian localism.[49] Rural and non-metropolitan Australia, where settlers are the vast majority, are likely to have made the local Indigenous people become invisible in the process of developing their own belonging and attachment to place that may take the form of cultural autochthony. Although toponym literature acknowledges, of course, belonging and attachment to place, there is room for a more nuanced understanding of settler belonging in relation to indigeneity and appreciation of the economic context. Indeed, a holistic understanding of the environment in relation to issues of toponymy and the contemporary corporate culture of commercial naming is central in addressing current place-naming disputes. As Rose-Redwood et al. argue: 'Greater procedural justice for minority groups will inevitably require analysing the growing commodification and privatization of place naming and breaking the stranglehold that class and economic power have over the construction of public place.'[50]

COMMERCIAL BRANDING AND NAME OWNERSHIP

Those who have precedence in naming in contemporary society are the owners, not the renters, workers or travellers. In the United States, we have seen the beginning of commodification of place-naming rights for towns as well as sports stadiums. Half.com, Oregon and DISH, Texas are two towns with corporate-sponsored names.[51] According to Rose-Redwood et al. this poses 'serious risks to the very notion of public space as a site of social life beyond the commercialized world of corporate culture'. The authors wonder whether, if people resist such a name, the official name may lose some of its 'performative force'.[52]

The 'boosterism' noted by Tuan is similar to 'branding'. Aspects of a placename can be important for branding or advertising a place for utilitarian reasons. Sometimes this is to a point where the 'authentic' Indigenous meaning of a placename can be rendered redundant as it is used to develop a 'hook'; to mark a place as unique and thus to promote tourism and economic survival.[53] Names given to new retirement villages provide a clear indication of the type of name believed to sell such facilities: words alluding to hills, water, English village life and high status English names, such as Riverside Gardens, Windsor Country Village, Glenhaven Green and Cherry Tree Grove, abound. Laura Kostanski, in her 2009 thesis on the placename or 'toponym' arguments over the northwest Victorian National Park named the Grampians/Gariwerd, says that emotion invested in placenames can be as powerful as attachment to place, but does not function in exactly the same way.[54]

THE GRAMPIANS/GARIWERD CASE

Kostanski alerts us to the similarity of place attachment and placename attachment but also to discernible differences in the realm of dependencies. Places are depended on for various

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49 Ibid., pp. 147, 164.

50 Rose-Redwood et al., p. 465; Kostanski '"What's in a Name?"', p. 54.

51 Rose-Redwood et al., p. 466.

52 Ibid.

53 The central NSW township of Dunedoo, named after the Aboriginal word for a local swan, was embroiled in an emotional and divisive argument in 2001 over plans to build a giant dunny in the town to attract tourists. Janice Newton, 'Dunnies and Australian Culture: Looking Backward and Forward to Explicate Community Memory', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 91, 2007, pp. 81–92.

54 Kostanski '"What's in a Name?"'.

functional services but placenames offer a branding opportunity on which people and governments are also dependent.[55] Often this is for business purposes: the need to have a 'good' address or to have a name that attracts lucrative tourism. Branding helps destinations to create a unique identity and to differentiate themselves from competitors.[56] Tony Birch's and Kostanski's research on the clumsy 1989 attempts of the Victorian state government to rename the popular mountain range national park known as the Grampians, in north-western Victoria, and the sites within it, with the Indigenous name 'Gariwerd'—to encourage international tourists with an interest in Indigenous culture—highlights the difficulties in (Indigenous) place branding when there is support from neither the area's residents nor Aboriginal stakeholders. Petitions signed by 60,000 people were mostly negative and the Grampians remains the dominant name used for the area with 'Gariwerd' only secondary. The name 'Grampians' was for many already known widely and reflected the 'locational and identification needs of a population'.[57] Although this major place and park name change was resisted, there were some acknowledged problems with original translations of Aboriginal words applied to cave art sites and waterfalls, for example, so by 1990 ten Indigenous names were applied to 'new' features in the park; eight Indigenous names replaced non-Indigenous names; and a further thirty features were dual-named. There was less opposition to Indigenous names where the names were 'perceived to be linked directly to the attributes of the places'.[58]

Literature on belonging to place and place naming alerts us, then, to a number of issues pertinent to the rejection of the name Mullawallah. People can have affective bonds to placenames as well as to places. Colonial mapping can erase Indigenous maps and ways of knowing. Minority groups and indigenous peoples in the Western world are involved in renaming projects that are strongly linked to identity, visibility and legitimacy. While many educated and metropolitan Australians grapple with historic displacement of Indigenous people in their sense of belonging to the country, this is not the case for all segments of society, so attempts to commemorate, rename and honour the Indigenous may not meet with wholesale approval. The failure to convince rural Victorians to rename the Grampians National Park 'Gariwerd' stands as a salutary warning about future attempts to name or rename.

On another level, placename boostering and branding are central processes in the contemporary toponymic landscape which is in some sectors largely privatised and commodified. The suburb is a raw society coming into being, modelled on rural–urban mix ideals that may be reflected in names and suburban practices. The residents may need to cooperate and unite to build 'fences' so that the ideal lifestyle can be protected. Before looking in detail at the direct responses of residents in the Mullawallah example, I will outline, in brief, three necessary factors that set fertile conditions for their rejection of this name: the environment of the proposed suburb; the democratisation of the place naming policy; and the power of commercial developers to name and brand an area.

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55   Ibid., p. 9. Laura Kostanski, 'Toponymic Dependence Research and its Possible Contribution to the Field of Place Branding, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, p. 17.

56   Kostanski, 'Toponymic Dependence', pp. 9–22.

57   Kostanski, '"What's in a Name?"', p. 21; Kostanski, 'Toponymic Dependence', pp. 9–22; Tony Birch, '"Nothing has Changed": The "Making and Unmaking" of Koori Culture', in *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians,* ed. Michele Grossman, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 145–58.

58   Kostanski , '"What's in a Name?"', pp. 11, 19; Kostanski, 'Toponymic Dependence', pp. 9–22. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/pb.2010.35

Contextual background to suburb naming in Ballarat

First, the area in west Ballarat proposed for the development is gently undulating pastureland with a distant view of Mt Buninyong. It is a 'carpentered' settler landscape with paddock border lines of cypress and pine and roadside hedges of gorse. Housing development, so far, consists of some substantial houses on large rural blocks and two estates of densely packed modern houses abutting landscaped gullies and a little wetland. The archaeological survey before development indicated at least two scatter areas of Indigenous artefacts, but the only obvious memorials to Indigenous landscape are the large, lone gum trees dotted sparsely throughout the pastureland.[59]

Secondly, the vast majority of Australian residents have no power or control over the names of the streets, towns or suburbs where they live. Since the 1998 Act, and suburban growth in Melbourne and regional cities, a small change has empowered those who find themselves living in a proposed growth area. Ivan Zwart describes the decision-making processes now set up in many local governments as 'deliberative democracy', reflecting principles derived from Aristotle and Habermas on the notion of 'ideal speech'. The participatory decision-making structures, built on the representative democratic institutions, have given hope, to some, for consensus and greater understanding of the issues around place naming.[60] In Ballarat, when placenames are proposed the city council places large advertisements in the local newspapers and on a website. Letters are written to every resident in the affected area and all residents in the council area are invited to make written submissions. There is also an opportunity for residents to attend council meetings, lodge questions and take up speaking rights. 'Affected' residents have a right to submit name proposals of their own and to respond to other suggestions; their status as 'immediate community' allows them some weight in decision making. If a clear majority of these residents reject the proposal (with lack of response counted as consent) the name is not applied. As this may involve less than one thousand people in a suburb planned to house ten to twelve thousand, significant power is given to the 'pioneers' in the first housing estates, as well as to the (far fewer) disappearing farming residents and 'lifestyle' rural block owners.

Thirdly, a new suburb in Ballarat has recently been named 'Lucas' after a lingerie factory owner whose female workers had very strong bonds with the area. In particular, these workers contributed much voluntary work and fundraising activity to the construction of the World War I 'Arch of Victory' over Ballarat's western gateway, which marks the beginning of the longest avenue of honour in Australia. Streets in this suburb are named after the soldiers honoured and after the Lucas 'girls' who worked in the factory.

The new suburb between Delacombe and Smythes Creek was not a blank slate. Long-term residents were attached to their Delacombe suburban name or their Smythes Creek hamlet name. Furthermore, newer residents appear to have been able to use, as an interim postal address, the high status names of their commercial developments (which offered

59   Jen Burch and Terence MacManus, Ballarat West Growth Area. Precinct 4 Alfredton and Delacombe, Victoria: Aboriginal and Historical Assessment. Report for City of Ballarat, 2011, Town Planning Library, Ballarat City Council, Internal Document Management System, Ballarat City Council, http://www.ballarat. vic.gov.au/media/531314/precinct_4_aboriginal_and_historical_heritage_assessment_red.pdf. The pasture could have originally been created by Wada wurrung burning, but the original native grasses were destroyed within one season of sheep grazing. David (Fred) Cahir, 'The Wathawurrung peoples encounters with outside forces 1797–1849: A History of Conciliation and Conflict', MA thesis, BSSH, University of Ballarat, 2001.

60   Ivan Zwart, 'A Greener Alternative? Deliberative Democracy Meets Local Government', Environmental Politics, vol. 12, no. 2, 2003, pp. 23–48.

house and land packages between $300,000 and $400,000): Delacombe Heights, Yorkdale and Kensington. The allusions to Britishness and royalty are carried through to the street names, which include Duchess Drive, Yorkdale Boulevard, Majestic Way, Countess Road, Palace Road, Shaftesbury Avenue and Elegant Way. The Ballarat City Council placenames officer explained that, up until now, developers had virtually a free hand in naming their housing estates and streets, and tended towards names that suggested upper-class wealth, royalty, mountains and views; in short, names that would help sell the properties. In the future, developers will have to show how their street names reflect the history or culture of the specific area.

Rejecting Mullawallah

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE[61]

The demographic or class profile of the new suburban area, as ascertained by the placenames officer and the level of education demonstrated in public comments, would be upwardly mobile working class and lower middle class. Modern houses on small blocks in an outer regional city bring pride and home ownership to a segment of society that may be less materially successful in a metropolitan situation. Great care was taken by the immediate community to avoid obviously racist comments and to agree to an Aboriginal name for a park or waterway as an alternative. However, there was a suggestion on one website that property values would decrease with an Aboriginal name for a suburb, disbelief by a key spokeswoman that anyone would want their suburb given a name like 'Mullawallah', claims that an Aboriginal name did not suit their environment and did not match their street names, and a lack of sensitivity to the hurt imparted to the small local Aboriginal population. This indicates values well out of step with those Read describes for reconciliatory urban Anglos, the poets, the historians, the artists, the spiritually inclined and, more recently, the official reconciliation stance of all levels of government. Although difficulty in spelling and pronouncing the name does not register in comparison with many other placenames in Australia and could, arguably, be overcome in less than an hour for primary school children, there are adults, perhaps lacking exposure to non-English tongues, who find it difficult at first or second attempt. What was lacking was an inclination and effort to overcome this barrier.

Local knowledge of the Indigenous Wada wurrung generally supports the 1890s notion that the Indigenous population had disappeared.[62] There are three contributory factors: the commemoration of the burial of 'King Billy' as the 'last of his tribe' in 1896; very recent and narrow recognition that the name of this King Billy was 'Mullawallah'; and very recent incorporation of descendants of Wada wurrung as the state government's recognised authority to deal with matters of cultural heritage.

61　I found myself embroiled in this place naming case as a result of previous research into the King Billy, Mullawallah, in question (see Janice Newton *Mullawallah: the Last King Billy of Ballarat*, Ballarat Heritage Services, Ballarat 2014). Following concern at some of the local correspondence and opposition I wrote two letters to the local paper and attended the council meeting dealing with opposition to the proposal. I received a challenging phone call from a key opposition spokeswoman and spoke with other opponents of the name at a retirees' club. This local involvement allowed me to form impressionistic conclusions about educational and socioeconomic bases for support and opposition. Support for the name via web-based and social media forums embracing locals and people from all over Australia may have reflected a younger and more diverse demographic.

62　This is in spite of regular items in the local newspaper about local Indigenous artists, initiatives relating to an Indigenous section of the cemetery and a few striking public buildings dedicated to Aboriginal matters.

GLIDING OFF THE STAGE 1890S TO 2000

The last Ballarat King Billy died in September 1896 and the founding fathers and men of public position in the proud city of Ballarat united to mark his passing. At the same time, all around rural Australia there was melancholy and nostalgia for the deaths of the last obvious, publicly visible Aboriginal people with no European ancestry, and this was reflected in 'Last of his Tribe' poetry and art of the time. Such commemoration allowed Europeans to feel better about becoming autochthonous locals, who had taken over ownership and custodianship of the land as the Aboriginal owners 'glided off the stage'.[63]

REMEMBERING KING BILLY

Newspaper references in 1896 generally referred to the Ercildoune-based, final Wada wurrung King Billy as 'William Wilson'. A Beaufort pastoralist wrote to the Historical Record Society that King Billy was known as 'Frank' 'in these parts' so the memorial erected in 1897 bore the words, 'Frank, The Last of His Tribe'. Almost a hundred years later, in the 1980s, the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative, a welfare and cultural body for a non–Wada wurrung Aboriginal community under the directorship of historian John Morris, began to take an interest in the plinth for 'Frank' in the Ballarat New Cemetery. It was tidied, repainted and registered as a heritage site. Annual pilgrimages to the gravesite began and have continued to the present.

During 2000, my research into King Billy's death and the resulting publication 'Remembering King Billy' was augmented by some oral history evidence. A small pamphlet was designed and delivered to the cemetery and the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative a few years later, revealing the name 'Mullawallah' for the Ercildoune King Billy.[64] The cooperative had a new sign erected next to the grave and plinth, advising the public that Frank's Aboriginal name was Mullawallah.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE WADA WURRUNG/WATHAURUNG IN PUBLIC LIFE

Up until 2007 the Ballarat Aboriginal community was served under the umbrella of the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative. The community was proud of its emblem of a platypus, which symbolised that they were made up of 'bits and pieces' of people from everywhere, people who had grown up in the Ballarat orphanage and those had moved to Ballarat from other parts of Victoria or Australia.

Of course, Wada wurrung Aboriginality did not end with the death of Mullawallah, but the numbers of the community lost to sickness and violent dislocation between official colonisation in 1835 and the 1890s were horrific and only very few people are able to trace Wada wurrung ancestry from the Ballarat district. Ballarat residents and local historians schooled in the twentieth century were under the impression there were no Ballarat region descendants and that the tribe had, indeed, been wiped out.[65]

63   Janice Newton, 'Remembering King Billy', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2001, pp. 61–80.

64   Ibid. pp. 61–80. New oral history information claiming that King Billy was known as Mr Mulla added weight to the proposition that the last King Billy had the Aboriginal name of Mullawallah or Mullywallach.

65   The first history of Ballarat gives this impression. Withers states that the Aborigines were 'not numerous even in those early days' and describes them as troublesome, treacherous, indolent thieves. William Branwell Withers, *The History of Ballarat from the First Pastoral Settlement to the Present Time*,

In 2007, a small group of families of the descendants of a Wada wurrung Queen Mary and her son John Robinson applied to the Victorian Government to be the registered Aboriginal party for the Ballarat area in Cultural Heritage and Native Title matters. They were successfully registered in 2009. A division of labour was implemented, with the large Ballarat and District Cooperative continuing to run health and welfare matters and the small Wada wurrung (Wathaurung) Corporation dealing with land claims, heritage, cultural permissions, 'Welcomes to Country' and so on. The cooperative continued to run their annual pilgrimage walk to the grave of Mullawallah during NAIDOC week and in the last year or so the pilgrims have included at least one Wada wurrung descendant.

In 2014, Shaun Fagan, from the Wada wurrung families, proposed to the Ballarat City Council that the new suburb be named 'Mullawallah'. He claimed that it was the first time in over a hundred years that a Victorian suburb would be given an Aboriginal name.[66] After a number of other proposed names were considered and vetted by the state naming authority, Ballarat City Council decided to put Mullawallah as their preferred name to the 'immediate community' (those who would be living in the new suburb), most of whom lived in two new housing estates called 'Yorkdale' and 'Kensington'. On reflection, perhaps, we might have anticipated the result, but what followed shocked, stunned, shamed and hurt the Wada wurrung, Cooperative members and many local residents and caught the attention of media commentators in urban Australia and Britain.

The broad current perception that the Wada wurrung had disappeared, recent and narrow local knowledge about the name Mullawallah and about the existence of legally recognised incorporated Wada wurrung descendants, and a carpentered environment that had been corporately branded with high-status Englishness and royal implications each contributed to wiping Indigeneity from the landscape and cultural worldview. Rural autochthony appeared to underpin the intensity of much emotion, without the sentimental symbolic reappropriation of 'the native' embraced by contemporary governments and metropolitan culture. The Wada wurrung were invisible. The social demography of the immediately affected, mainly Anglo, rural community, did nothing to reverse this situation. Aboriginality was not deemed especially relevant to their lives and environment, and certainly was not seen as worth fighting for.

The community relished the participatory rights given by the new state and local government procedures and, inspired by four or five key people, threw their combined weight behind opposition to naming the suburb Mullawallah. It only took the absolute opposition of these few residents to knock on doors and gain over 200 signatures, to create a Facebook page to galvanise support, to organise public meetings and to make sure they addressed only the criteria allowed for opposition (difficulty of pronunciation, difficulty of spelling and confusion with similar names for emergency services). Over one hundred acceptable opposing submissions were received from the immediate community. The ten of the twelve submissions in favour were from Ballarat residents who *didn't* live in the affected area. There was high emotion in relation to placenames that had been in use for many years and support for keeping the estate names as suburb names. There was some compromise support for using

second edn, Niven and Co., Ballarat, 1887. More recent research has attempted to redress this historical near invisibility. See, for example, Weston Bate, *Lucky City: The First Generation at Ballarat, 1851–1901*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003; Fred Cahir, *Black Gold: Aboriginal People on the Goldfields of Victoria 1850–1870*, ANU Epress, Canberra, 2012.

66   New suburbs in western Melbourne, such as Truganina and Derrimut, named after prominent Aboriginal people, were allocated as parish names in the 1839 Surveyor General's map—made four years after white settlement in the district. In the 1860s and 1870s there were post offices allocated to these place names.

Mullawallah's English surname of Wilson. The camaraderie, determination and empowering scent of victory unleashed by the opposition to the naming had the side effect of building a self-conscious, strong sense of community and genuine 'local' togetherness that could be seen as beneficial for future community building. It was also unsettling for those who did not share the views of the opposing parties.

The community action bore out, perhaps, what was found in relation to 'ideal speech' and green issues in Tasmania. The expected consensus and greater understanding of issues was not realised as individuals held subjective and differing perceptions of common interests and legitimacy.[67] In Ballarat, there was participatory decision making weighted heavily towards those people who already lived in the new area rather than the general Ballarat population. Their claims regarding grounds for objections were accepted at face value as valid in that they complied with pre-set acceptable grounds, without necessarily proceeding from reason or legitimate bases.

As one of the Ballarat City Councillors acknowledged, in parallel with the findings of Tuan and Rose-Redwood et al., high emotion is invested in placenames as well as in attachment to place. The rural response to the Grampians/Gariwerd naming analysed by Kostanski and Birch indicated that for Aboriginal names to be accepted by some rural communities as appropriate for natural features, it may be necessary that these features demonstrate clear Indigenous attributes, such as artefact sites and rock art. In this suburb-naming case, the Indigenous, on a number of counts, had become invisible and deemed irrelevant, and for some locals who believed they were autochthonous, probably unwelcome, as it threatened the idea of 'true' local status.

Place naming studies can be advanced through a more detailed and nuanced appreciation of settler belonging in relation to ambiguous relations with the Indigenous. The different weight attached by settler Australians to denying Indigenous past in the quest for local autochthonous belonging, and attraction to symbolic appropriation of the Indigenous to enhance identity may well have spatial as well as educational dimensions. Denial is likely to be stronger among the non-metropolitan and attraction stronger among the educated and metropolitan. These lines of contestation about Aboriginal place names among settler Australians do not, of course, reflect the motivations of contemporary Indigenous communities.

This effort to apply an Aboriginal name began as an Indigenous initiative and reflected the history of a former custodian of the land, so was not a 'quotation out of context' to use Carter's terms. At the official level it was strongly supported as an opportunity to compensate for 'past commemorative deficiencies'.[68] Furthermore, contextual conditions regarding the democratisation of place naming procedures and the overwhelming power of commercial developers to 'name Australia' with perceived high-status 'English' branding in estates and streets also contributed to the motivation and means to reject. Future projects to apply Indigenous names face difficult hurdles and perhaps need long-term educational preparation. Recognising the corporate power in naming Australia as well as addressing the ambiguous relations to the 'Indigenous' in settler belonging are first steps in this direction.

Postscript

In 2015 the new suburb was officially named Winter Valley after a pioneering farmer. John Jock Winter (1803–1875) was a Scottish butcher who migrated to Australia in 1841.

67   Zwart.

68   Rose-Redwood et al., p. 460.

Impressed with the quality of Melbourne beef, he sought out the origin pasture near Ballarat, obtained work as a shepherd, for which he was paid in stock. He then bought his own run, which he called Bonshaw. After his shepherd found gold, Winter went on to make his fortune selling meat to miners and land to gold mines at enormous profit. By these means he amassed many rural properties and became perhaps the richest man in Ballarat.[69]

A new Ballarat naming initiative resonates with African-American experiences of public opposition to new naming proposals leading to 'the segregation' of the opposed name to a minor street.[70] In January 2016, the final ratification of renaming Winter's Swamp (near Lucas, the new suburb adjacent to Winter Valley) to 'Mullawallah Wetlands' was imminent. No objections were received for this name proposal. Plans are afoot to use the site as an educational resource for Wada wurrung life. The desire of the local Wada wurrung and Ballarat City Council to 'distinguish and separate' by naming the new suburb after an Aboriginal person was thwarted. The name may live on in the memory of the debate and, as for the Grampians/Gariwerd case, in the representation of an 'appropriate' recognition of an Indigenous environment or natural feature with demonstrated Indigenous aspects. The cultural politics of naming in this instance indicates continuation of contested social practice.

About the author

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69   'Sudden Death of Mr John Winter', *Gippsland Times*, 31 August 1875, p. 4.

70   Rose-Redwood et al., p. 465.

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