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Review

Names and Nunavut: Culture and Identity in Arctic Canada. By VALERIE ALIA. Pp. xx + 172. Illustrations, acknowledgements, introduction, glossary, bibliography, index. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. ISBN: 1-84545-165-1.

Too few entire volumes are devoted to indigenous American onomastic systems, and fewer yet to the rich and complex naming system of the Inuit (Eskimo) people. Valerie Alia, identified for us as a 'scholar, journalist, photographer, and poet,' gives us this thought-provoking and engrossing ethnography of the politics of personal naming practices in the recent history of colonialism and home rule in what is now Nunavut, Canada's newly created Arctic territory.

Alia's focus is an ill-fated government effort called Project Surname, which from 1968 to 1972 attempted to impose a system of European-style first names and last names on an Inuit population that had always used single names, but a multiplicity of them, in a system of transmission that mapped reincarnation trajectories and also linked identically named individuals through an institution of 'namesake' relationships. The Inuit naming system makes and has always made perfect sense to the Inuit, but the colonial government saw it as an obstacle to their attempt to maintain records in the same format as Euro-Canadian citizens. Project Surname followed close upon a humiliating system of registry numbers on fiber disks issued to Inuit — the parallels between the two imposed systems are sobering — but was in some sense a more confusing continuation of the same practice.

The introductory chapter's grand title, 'Towards a Theory of Political Onomastics,' belies an emphasis more on the literary and personal-political than on ethnography or the philosophy of language, but this first chapter provides an engaging preamble. Alia first outlines the complex web of naming choices in her own extended family (Ashkenazic, Hungarian, Italian). Then she surveys other treatments of naming practices and the meaning of names, stressing, with vivid examples, how naming choices, or lack of choice, can highlight problems of assimilation and biculturalism.

The chapter on the 'Importance of Names in Inuit Culture' is, for me, the ethnographic meat of the book: a capable and invigorating survey of the anthropological literature on Inuit naming practices, their variability, and their relationship to other cultural complexes and beliefs. There is hardly a finer summary anywhere else in the literature.

The next two chapters cover colonialism in the Arctic and Project Surname itself. The latter chapter in particular is the first detailed description of this strange episode in Canadian history and its effect on Inuit lives, livened by lengthy quotations from Inuit and even from government officials, from Alia's own extensive interviews.

However, I found myself wishing for a bit less on the bureaucratic and political details of Project Surname (where Alia spends a lot of time triumphantly pointing out every misuse of terminology by outsiders) and a bit more on how naming systems reinforce or embody a concept of personhood wholly different from the European-derived Canadian one and, more importantly for her purposes, how Project Surname might then have threatened to create a cosmological crisis (or not, and, if not, why not?).

Given the centrality of naming to Inuit cosmology and personhood, the quotations and anecdotes focus mainly on the routine misunderstandings and indignities common to many traditional peoples' experience of being absorbed into a bureaucracy. It would have been interesting to know, for example, given the close correlation between names and souls in the Inuit worldview, whether the bureaucratic application of a man's name to his wife and children

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as a surname was perceived as a dissipation of personhood or soul essence, or whether the disruption of the naming system was thought to distort the very cycle of reincarnation. Parallel situations from farther south in North America would not have these effects, since nowhere are names and souls so closely identified with each other as in the Arctic. If every Inuit name is thought to be a soul, essentially a person, and if a naming process is the very ritual execution of a rebirth, then do or did the least acculturated Inuit feel that whites' names had the same properties, and that giving a European name or names to an Inuit was another kind of metempsychosis? And what of Inuit who lack names? Perhaps these matters are difficult for any outsider to get at.

Such a grievance is, however, a compliment to this thought-provoking book. Alia lays out the intricacies of Inuit naming so clearly, describes the Arctic environment so vividly, and conveys such a rich sense of Inuit values, concerns, and humour that readers are likely to hunger for more information and to pose ethnographic and onomastic questions that press forward the horizons of Inuit ethnography.

Names and Nunavut is a welcome addition to Arctic ethnography and should be of interest not only to linguists and anthropologists working in the Arctic but to anyone interested in the relationship between onomasty, personhood, and cosmology and to anyone looking for fresh insights to the micropractices of linguistic and onomastic colonialism.

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Lough Neagh Places: Their Names and Origins. By PATRICK MCKAY and KAY MUHR. Pp. xii + 156pp. Cló Ollscoil na Banríóna and Queens University Belfast. 2007. £15.00. Pb. ISBN: 978-0853899099.

This is a book that I would recommend to all who have an interest in placenames. Thoroughly enjoyable, this fascinating book kept my attention consistently from front to back cover. More than any other placename book I have encountered, the focus of Patrick McKay's and Kay Muhr's delightful offering is on the physical places, and the authors do all they can to introduce the reader to those places. They eschew the usual alphabetically organized list of names and instead take the reader on a journey around the largest lake in Britain and Ireland and the 'fifth largest lake in Europe'. When I say 'journey' I mean just that; the book has been organized geographically, 'grouping places with those adjacent to them in the landscape' (1). The *Introduction* is followed by four chapters, each of which discusses one of the shores of Lough Neagh: *Eastern*, *Southern*, *Western*, and *Northern*. For those of us comforted by the more usual categorization, though, there is an alphabetical index of names at the back of the book.

And you can take this book on a literal journey as well. It has been created in collaboration with Sustrans, the UK's 'leading transport charity', which has created the National Cycle Network that provides 'well-signed tours connecting towns and villages, countryside and coast on traffic-free paths, quiet lanes and traffic calmed roads'. Using Sustrans (Sustainable Transport) route maps and this book, readers are able to pedal a 113-mile bicycle trip throughout which this authoritative guide will introduce them to the placenames of the Lough Neagh area and 'to the linguistic and historical heritage which has informed those names' (1). Even if you are not able to fly to Ireland and ride your bike around Lough Neagh, you will have fun with this beautiful book. In addition to the thorough descriptions of hundreds of placenames, there are over 200 color photographs and maps of the areas discussed. You can take the journey and never leave your library! Before the trip begins, though, the helpful and instructive *Introduction* prepares the way by discussing *The Route*; *The Layout of the Entries*; *Irish Place-name Divisions* (*Townlands*, *Parishes*, *Baronies*, *Counties*); *Sources for Place-Name Research*; *Selected Writings on Lough Neagh*; *Topography of Lough Neagh*; *The History of Lough Neagh*; and *The Mythology of Lough Neagh*.

Each placename entry has been standardized and color-coded so that the reader knows exactly what he is being told about the name. As McKay and Muhr explain:

> In general there is an individual entry with a heading for each place-name, although additional relevant names are sometimes explained in the following text .... Each place-name Headword is given in blue. The first part of the next line, in black, usually indicates the sort of place .... [for example], townlands (tld) and parishes (par.) and counties (co.) .... The black line continues with the civil parish and county in which the place is located, and then a short grid-reference comprising grid letter and co-ordinates, which can be used to cross-refer to the Ordnance Survey *Discoverer* Map.
>
> On the next line, the original spelling to the place-name is given in gold, preceded by an identification of its original language (very often Irish) ....
>
> The discussion of the place-name which follows gives some information on its origin and history, with (in brackets) references to earlier sources which can be looked up in the bibliography at the back to the book. (1)

The authors have thought of everything! You can sit back in your chair or up on your bicycle and enjoy a journey through truly breathtaking scenery while you are being thoroughly informed at the same time.

The trip begins on *The Eastern Shore* in Antrim and 'takes the form of a journey clockwise round Lough Neagh' ending at the 'historic town of Antrim at the north-eastern corner' (2). Each chapter begins with a very helpful map of the area to be discussed, again color-coded, and with the placenames situated in civil parishes so you can project your next move.

Chapter One opens not only with the just described map that situates the reader in the townlands and parishes, but also with a 1785 map which offers some historical perspective. In addition, there is a photograph of the 'famous round tower at Antrim' which 'marks the site of an early Christian monastery which is dedicated to *St. Comhghall*'. We learn that the name Antrim was 'first recorded in the year 612AD when the *Annals of the Four Masters* informs us that *Fiontain Oentreibh, abb Bendchair, décc*, i.e., Fintan of Antrim, abbott of Bangor died ...' Antrim itself 'derives from Irish Aontreibh "single house of habitation", no doubt referring to the monastic settlement' (13).

And so, the book takes us from town to town, toponym to toponym, on an over one-hundred-mile journey which ends on *The Northern Shore* with Carnearny, from the Irish *Carn Éireann* (Éiriu's cairn). According to the authors, *Éiriu* (Modern Irish Éire) was not only the usual Old Irish name for Ireland, but also a goddess's name and a woman's name. In this case it is a 'variant of *Airiu* who, according to the origin legend of Lough Neagh, was the daughter of Eochu mac Maireda, the king after whom the lake is named' (134).

This book is filled with well-documented histories, fascinating legends, informative maps and beautiful photography. I recommend it highly and believe that it can become a model for a new type of placename book which can do all that those of us who are students of onomastics want with language, history, and geography. In addition, I applaud the way it situates readers in the actual physical surroundings in which those names came to be placed on the land. Look for this book; you won't regret it.

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