

Indigenous Toponyms in the Antipodes: A Gazetteer-Based Study

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During the centuries of Britain's colonial expansion, English was transplanted to the four corners of the globe, and became an extensive and prolific borrower of general lexical items and toponyms from indigenous languages. The Englishes of Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji are three typical examples. Indigenous loanwords and toponyms comprise one of the most distinctive features of these Englishes, and are regularly used to express national identity. Although these nations share a common colonial language, they differ markedly in their indigenous cultures and languages, the way they were occupied, and the colonizers' attitudes towards indigenous peoples. These factors significantly influenced relationships between the two groups, and resulted in distinct patterns and degrees of indigenous borrowings into the three regional varieties of English. This gazetteer-based study provides evidence of these patterns and degrees of borrowing through an analysis of the number and distribution of indigenous toponyms in the three jurisdictions. It also considers the various linguistic, sociocultural, attitudinal, and historical factors that shaped place naming.

KEYWORDS Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, toponyms, place names, indigenous

Prolegomenon

When Europeans colonized large areas of the globe, they encountered unfamiliar flora, fauna, topographies, cultures, and artifacts, all of which needed to be given names. The occupiers also encountered settlements and topographic features with existing indigenous names. Often these were adopted into the colonizer's language, but all too frequently, these were simply ignored and European names or toponyms were used instead. This practice is one of the characteristic by-products of conquest and colonization: for when a new or replacement name is bestowed upon a place, it is a symbolic act of appropriation (Berg and Kearns 1996; Birch 1992; Carter 1987; Crocombe 1991; Herman 1999). One good example of this phenomenon is Australia, where countless indigenous toponyms were ignored, replaced, or transferred by the European settlers

to other regions in the country, making it difficult or impossible to determine their linguistic or geographical source, let alone their meanings. Many indigenous place names were also re-analyzed (e.g. Anglicized), for example: Collector < Colegdar or Caligda; Tom Groggin < ? tomarogin "water spider"; Cammeray < "the Kameraigal people." A renaming and transferring of toponyms also occurred in New Zealand, though to a much lesser extent, whilst in Fiji, they were almost totally acknowledged and adopted.

Although all three nations are former British colonies, the circumstances of their colonization vary greatly, as do their subsequent histories. Moreover, British attitudes towards and treatment of the indigenous peoples of these regions differed significantly. Not only have these factors had a major impact on the patterns of indigenous words adopted into the local varieties of English, they also shaped local place-naming practices. As Tent and Slatyer (2009) have shown, early place-naming practices in Australia were heavily anchored in contemporary social, cultural, and political contexts; and toponyms offer insights into the belief and value systems of the name-givers, as well as political and social circumstances at the time of naming.

Even before the European colonization of Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji, European names had regularly been bestowed on the newly "discovered" landscapes (see Tent and Slatyer 2009). However, from the moment of colonization, two sources drove the colonies' introduced toponymies, first through unofficial naming by the new European immigrant settlers, and then through official government bureaucratic processes. Both of these processes tended to displace indigenous toponyms, even though in many instances indigenous names were freely adopted and adapted as part of the new system. The toponymic systems of former European colonies are thus best classified under two broad systems – the "indigenous" and the "introduced" – each of which may be further divided into appellations bestowed before and during European occupation (see Tent and Blair 2011).

Aim of this study

The general objective of this study is to determine whether there are any significant differences between European place-naming practices in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji in regard to the recognition and adoption of indigenous toponyms. If such distinctions exist, why do they, and what factors could be responsible for them?

Methodology

The national gazetteers of Australia (*Geoscience Australia*), New Zealand (*Land Information New Zealand*), and Fiji (*GeoCommunity*) were used as the data sources.¹ Each named place in the three national gazetteers was downloaded and melded into a single database. Toponyms were then coded with one of the following two numerical codes:

(1) **Indigenous** (i.e. containing at least one indigenous element, either the specific or generic, or both). These comprise: (a) toponyms consisting entirely of indigenous words: *Aryillarlarg Billabong*, *Talbingo* (AU); *Anaotamaraukura*, *Waihou* (NZ); *Koroiboribori*, *toba ko Laucala* (FJ); (b) toponyms with an indigenous specific but introduced generic: *Gidgiegalumba Creek* (AU); *Kinakina Island*

(NZ); Cagabuli Bay (FJ); (c) toponyms with an introduced specific and indigenous generic: Chambers Warrambool (AU); Welshman Pakihi (NZ); (d) Compounds, i.e. blending of introduced word with an indigenous word: Malleeland (AU) mallee "species of eucalypt" + land; Gleniti (NZ) glen + iti "small"; (e) Portmanteaus, i.e. blending of an indigenous toponym with an introduced toponym: Kurmond (AU) from Indigenous Kurrajong and introduced Richmond; Manui (NZ) from introduced Masterton and indigenous Tīnui; and (f) dual names: North Head / Yacaaba Head (AU); Dart River / Te Awa Whakatipu (NZ); Treasure Island / Eluvuku (FJ).

(2) **Introduced** (i.e. no indigenous generic or specific elements, e.g. *Mount Kosciuszko*, *Orange* (AU); *Clive River*, *Dunedin* (NZ); *Heemskercq Reefs*, *Toorak* (FI)).

Frequency counts of indigenous vs introduced toponyms in all three jurisdictions were then made.

General survey results

Australia has almost 375,000 named places in its most recently published gazetteer (2012); New Zealand some 13,800; and Fiji approximately 13,400. Although the Australian and New Zealand gazetteers document names in their respective Antarctic Territories, these were excluded from the present study since no indigenous place names existed prior to European engagement with the continent.

The percentage of named places with indigenous and introduced toponyms or toponymic elements in each of these gazetteers is shown in Table 1.

As can be seen, there is a substantial difference in the number of named places with indigenous toponyms or toponymic elements among the three countries – New Zealand has 14.1% more of such named places than Australia, and Fiji has 54.6% more than New Zealand. A Chi-square analysis was conducted on these counts and indicated a highly significant difference between the countries (Pearson Chi-square = 10087.564, df = 5, $p \le 0.001$).²

Table 2 explicates the geographical feature types in each jurisdiction that bear indigenous names or name elements. For an explanation of the geographic feature themes used here, see Blair (2014).

In Australia and New Zealand, natural features overwhelmingly have introduced names; however, New Zealand's non-natural features have nearly twice as many indigenous names as Australia. In other words, two-thirds of Australia's non-natural features have introduced names, whilst almost two-thirds of New Zealand's non-natural features have Māori names. In addition to this, marine features in Australia have the

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF INDIGENOUS TOPONYMS PER JURISDICTION

Country of gazetteer	Percentage indigenous	Percentage introduced
Australia	28.2	71.8
New Zealand	42.3	56.8
Fiji	96.9	3.1

		Topographical feature theme	Percentage	
Country	Natural vs non-natural		Indigenous	Introduced
Australia	Natural	1 Marine	12.1	87.9
		2 Inland water	23.7	76.3
		3 Relief	20.2	79.8
		4 Vegetation & Desert	27.2	72.8
		Total percentage	21.1	78.9
	Non-natural	5 Constructed (human artifice on the topography)	30.0	70.0
		6 Civic (administrative units)	44.6	55.4
		Total percentage	33.6	66.4
New Zealand	Natural	1 Marine	52.4	47.6
		2 Inland water	29.9	70.1
		3 Relief	18.6	81.4
		4 Vegetation & Desert	31.2	68.8
		Total percentage	32.0	68.0
	Non-natural	5 Constructed	61.6	38.4
		6 Civic	65.1	34.9
		Total percentage	62.1	37.9
Fiji	Natural	1 Marine	88.4	11.6
		2 Inland water	99.9	0.1
		3 Relief	95.8	4.2
		4 Vegetation & Desert	100.0	0
		Total percentage	96.6	3.4
	Non-natural	5 Constructed	75.4	24.6
		6 Civic	99.2	0.8
		Total percentage	98.4	1.6

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF NATURAL VS NON-NATURAL FEATURE TOPONYMS

lowest percentage of indigenous names in the three countries. This is perhaps not so surprising given Australia's indigenous people did not have a maritime tradition like the New Zealand Māori or Fijians, who were very much seafaring cultures (see, for instance, Finney 1994, ch. 8; Geraghty 1994, 1995, 2004; Tent and Geraghty 2001, 2012; Geraghty and Tent 1997a, 1997b).

This is reflected in the considerably higher percentages of indigenous names for maritime features in New Zealand and Fiji. Australia and New Zealand's remaining natural features (2, 3, and 4) are dominated by introduced names – the percentages for both being reasonably comparable and consistent, conceivably reflecting the dominance and control colonists had over geographic nomenclature.

As for Fiji, given that almost 97% of its toponyms are indigenous, a substantial difference between names for natural and non-natural features cannot be expected. As noted above, of the natural features that do carry introduced names, most are maritime features (e.g. *Ethel Reefs*, *Herald Passage*, *White Rocks*). Not surprisingly, these were bestowed for navigational purposes by European mariners or the British colonial administration. The largest number of introduced place names for non-natural features (24.6%) are found in Fiji's constructed features; this is because these features were built by the British colonizers (e.g. *Pacific Harbour*, *The Domain*, *Flagstaff*).

TABLE 3 MOST COMMON AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES WITH AN INDIGENOUS NAME

Feature type	Percent with an indigenous toponym/element	
rock holes (e.g. Yarri Gnamma Hole)	86.5	
clay pans (e.g. Marillana Claypan)	67.3	
soaks (e.g. Koonundra Native Well)	64.1	
springs (e.g. Bogolong Springs)	56.6	
parishes (e.g. Adaminiby)	53.7	
gas fields (e.g. Daralinge Gas Field)	52.2	
plantation forests (e.g. Awaba State Forest)	49.8	
waterholes (e.g. Bunyip Waterhole)	49.9	

Specific survey results

Australia

The percentage of indigenous toponyms within each state or territory of Australia is quite homogenous (see Figure 1).

Tasmania is the odd one out with less than 4% indigenous place names. This probably reflects its shameful history of European occupation and the concomitant genocide of Tasmania's indigenous people during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³ Many, if not most, of Tasmania's current toponyms of indigenous origin have been introduced from the mainland.

It is worth noting that of the most common natural features that possess an indigenous name, five (the top four and the eighth), designate inland water features (Table 3).⁴ This is perhaps not surprising, given the importance of water sources to Aboriginal people (and later European pastoralists) in such a generally arid continent. It is interesting also that the other three features are constructed and civic features – all artifacts of European occupation.

New Zealand

The named places of New Zealand tell quite a different story. Almost 57% of them are introduced, but this varies considerably between the North and South Islands. ⁵ Table 4 shows this distribution.

It is not surprising that almost 72% of toponyms on the North Island are Māori, or have a Māori element, compared to 22% on the South Island. This is because the North Island is where the majority of Māori currently live, and lived prior to European occupation. Offshore islands also had, and currently have, sparse Māori populations which is naturally reflected in the small number of Māori toponyms at these locations. Indeed, Māori names survived European occupation mostly in places where significant numbers of Māori lived, as is reflected in the preponderance of Māori names on the North Island.

Subsequent to the commencement of European settlement in the early nineteenth century, Māori people continued to use their own place names which were often quite readily adopted by European settlers. However, features that the Māori had named, such as eel catching traps or fishing grounds, were unfamiliar to Europeans, and were, as a rule, expunged after European occupation.

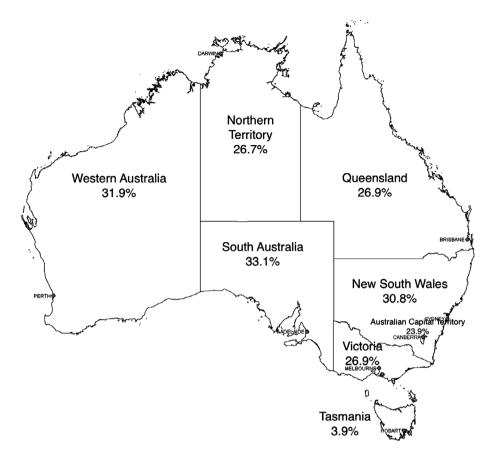


FIGURE 1 Percentage of indigenous toponyms in Australia's States and Territories

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF MĀORI TOPONYMS

		Proportion per region		
Region	Proportion (%) of total national	Māori (%) toponyms	Introduced toponyms	
North Island	43.1	71.7	28.3	
South Island	54.6	22.0	78.0	
Offshore islands	2.3	14.5	85.5	

Fiji

As already noted, almost 97% of Fiji's toponyms are indigenous or have an indigenous element.

Only 2.7% of natural features bear introduced names – 12.1% of marine features and 3.8% of relief features (e.g. Bligh Water, Alacrity Cays, Adolphus Reef, Middle Passage, Pandora Bank; Mount Freeland, Needle Peak, The Hogsback, Cape Washington).

Of the 1866 populated places and localities listed in the gazetteer, only 13 (0.7%) have an introduced name. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of introduced names (e.g.

New Town, Penang) are found in or around the main urban areas of Suva, Lautaoka, Nadi etc. – the general abodes of Europeans. However, since the 1960s some islands, especially those off the western coast of the main island of Vitilevu, given over to the tourist trade and developers, have been given introduced names (e.g. Beachcomber Island, Castaway Island, Bounty Island, Musket Cove Island, and Treasure Island). On the flip side of the coin, 52 geographic features that formerly had an introduced name have had their original Fijian names reinstated (e.g. Koro Levu formerly Goat Island; Tomanivi formerly Mount Victoria) (Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use 1925). Forty-five of these (86.4%) designate marine features.

Discussion

What accounts for the striking difference in the number of indigenous place names in the three regions? Why do place names with an indigenous element in Australia total only 28.2%, those in New Zealand 42.3%, and Fiji 96.9%? The reasons are complex, multifarious and interconnected, and influenced the colonial administrations of these countries in their recording and/or adoption of indigenous toponyms. Some of the possible influences are discussed below.

On the one hand, the distinct figures (Tables 1 and 2) are possibly the result of the disparate Māori/Fijian and Aboriginal cultures and their toponymic systems. Although Australian Aboriginal peoples had a comprehensive, very sophisticated, and complex topographic nomenclature system, the naming of non-natural features was insignificant, if not non-existent, compared to the practice of the Māori and Fijian people. The latter cultures had well-established systems of settlement names that were readily incorporated into New Zealand's and Fiji's introduced toponymic systems. The Australian indigenous names attached to non-natural features (such as settlements and parishes) today were bestowed by Europeans and, therefore, are part of the introduced system. These names have their origin in numerous sources, which include: many indigenous names for localities (e.g. Wagga Wagga "place of many crows"); names for nearby topographic features (e.g. Adjungbilly < nadjong "water" + billa "creek"); generic words (e.g. Barranjoey "young kangaroo"); or expressions (e.g. Wendouree "go away"). In contrast, settlement names in New Zealand and Fiji are overwhelmingly original settlement names.

Another conceivable influencing factor may be found in the vastly dissimilar linguistic landscapes of the three countries. Unlike New Zealand and Fiji, Australia had an estimated 200 to 300 distinct languages prior to European occupation (Dixon 1980; Yallop 1982). This would make the recording of languages and their place names difficult. In New Zealand, on the other hand, there were only two main closely linked dialect groups of Māori (*Te Reo Māori*) – North Island and South Island (Biggs 1989, 65). Compared to the Australian situation, the recording of the language and its toponyms would have been straightforward. A similar linguistic situation existed in Fiji. Although various varieties of Fijian were spoken, one regional dialect, Bauan, was being used as a lingua franca across the archipelago because the people of the island of Bau were politically the most influential and powerful. When Fiji became a British colony in 1874, Fijian (Bauan) was generally the medium of communication in the colonial administration, and the ability to speak the language was mandatory for British colonial officials and employees, their contracts stipulating they had to pass an examination in Fijian after

a certain period of residence. In the 1920s, the use of Fijian was at its zenith; it was the major medium of communication between government and people, as well as the major medium of education. These factors combined to greatly increase the status of the language.

Perhaps the most influential factor in the disparity in the number of indigenous place names lies in the asymmetrical power relationships between the British colonizers and the Aboriginal peoples of Australia on the one hand and between the British and the Māori and Fijian peoples on the other. In the latter two instances, indigenous peoples enjoyed a higher level of power than Aboriginal people, who from their first sighting by Europeans have been considered almost sub-human. William Dampier's ([1697, 1729] 1937, vol. 1, ch. 16) oft quoted and notorious indictment of them set the scene and tone for the continued opprobrium towards them:

The Inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world. [...] And setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes. [...] They are long visaged, and of a very unpleasing Aspect, having no one graceful Feature in their Faces.

Māori and Fijian people were afforded political, social, and economic power by the British from the late nineteenth century. In contrast, Aboriginal people were not even counted in the Australian census until after 1967, and are today still very much marginalized in all areas of life – employment, education, living standards, political representation, and economically. The reasons for this are highly complex and contentious. However, I venture a few thoughts on why this may be so.

First, Aboriginal society was not seen as agrarian (at least not according to European understanding), whereas the Māori and Fijian peoples practiced the cultivation of crops by methods parallel to European agricultural practices, and they sold their produce to the British colonists. Aboriginal people also tended to eschew western goods, technology, and culture; Māori and Fijians readily adopted these. Aboriginal societies were not stratified or run in any recognizable way to Europeans, whereas the Māori and Fijian societies were very stratified. Unlike Aboriginal people, Māori and Fijians lived in permanent, often heavily fortified villages, with large meeting houses, food storage buildings; they had highly developed arts and crafts, technology, and built large ocean-going canoes that could hold hundreds of people. As a result, both these societies were much better understood and respected by the British, and subsequently considered more superior. The differences between Aboriginal societies and British society were perhaps too great for any positive perceptions by the colonizers.

Aboriginal people have been so marginalized over the last 300 years that many early published histories of Australia have made little or no mention of the country's Aboriginal heritage. Ernest Scott's (1910) A Short History of Australia, for instance, makes no mention of Aboriginal people at all, and even as late as 1962, Manning Clark (1962, 1: 3), one of Australia's most eminent historians, opens his six-volume history of Australia with: "Civilization did not begin in Australia until the last quarter of the eighteenth century."

Reynolds (1974, 47) chronicles and examines some of the intellectual currents which determined the racist attitudes of Australian settlers during the first half of the nineteenth century. He cites many published works pronouncing the inherent inferiority of indigenous Australians, and argues that since the late seventeenth century, Europeans

developed an ever stronger propensity to classify different ethnicities and to position them in hierarchies, with Caucasians the most high-ranking, and colored people lower down the scale, and those perceived as most primitive (i.e. Australian Aboriginal peoples) being on the same level as the higher order apes.

Concluding remarks

This paper had its genesis when, some years ago, at the annual meeting of the Australian Permanent Committee on Place Names (PCPN), I asked delegates how many indigenous toponyms Australia had.⁶ Estimates ranged between 40% and 60%. At the time, I considered 60% to be a reasonable supposition. Since then I have asked at least 200 Australian citizens what their estimate was. Most ranged between 70% and 80%. A similar generous estimation is offered by Pascoe (2003, 11): "in some districts, Aboriginal words form more than ninety percent of all place names and in most districts rarely less than forty percent." A similar view is expressed by Kennedy and Kennedy (2006, iii): "Nearly three-quarters of Australian place names are of Aboriginal origin." The linguist Ruth Wajnryb (2006, xii, xiv) substantiates these claims. None of these authors provide any evidence to support their assertions. The evidence provided above clearly refutes these figures.

It would be interesting to investigate whether the citizens of New Zealand mirror these over-estimations of their own indigenous toponyms. In Fiji, however, I feel there may be an over-estimation of the number of introduced toponyms. My reasoning is based on the very high status English enjoys in Fiji. Two-thirds of the population claim English is the most useful and important language to speak (Tent 2001). This viewpoint may shape people's perceptions as to the proportion of introduced (i.e. English) toponyms there are in the country.

Indigenous toponyms in the three countries discussed play a significant role in expressing national identity, and help in revealing historical and sociocultural aspects, linguistic heritage, and power relationships within the nations. Indigenous toponyms therefore deserve greater recognition, analysis, and research. Importantly, Birch (1992, 234) reminds us that: "Attaching names to landscapes legitimizes the ownership of the culturally dominant group that 'owns' the names [...] this is an exercise in cultural appropriation." More pointedly, he notes: "for the colonisers to attach a 'native' name does not represent or recognize an Indigenous history, and therefore possible Indigenous ownership." It would be proper if it did.

Notes

- ¹⁻ A gazetteer is an alphabetical index or directory of place names in a jurisdiction. Nowadays, they are compiled by government agencies to provide information on the location and spelling of place names.
- 2- Chi-square analyses could not be conducted on any other data as too many expected frequencies were below 5.
- ³⁻ The estimated indigenous population in Tasmania in 1788 (the year of British occupation) was 4500. By
- 1861, this had been reduced to a mere 18 (Smith 1980; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009).
- + A "clay pan" is a shallow depression, generally circular in outline (varying in diameter from a few to several hundred metres), floored with clay, bare of vegetation, and holding water for a time after rain. A "rockhole" is a hole excavated in solid rock by water action. A "soak" is a damp or swampy area around the base of granite rocks or in an otherwise dry watercourse.

- 5 On 17 October, 2013, New Zealand officially introduced alternative names for its North and South Islands. They can now be referred to as the *North Island* or *Te Ika-a-Māui*, or the *South Island* or *Te Waipounamu* or both names can be used together. They are not dual names, as this would have meant both the English and Māori names would have had to be used together on official documents e.g. *Te Ika-*
- a-Māui / North Island and Te Waipounamu / South Island. Alternative names would also help preserve New Zealand's heritage in both languages (Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) 2013).
- 6. The PCPN coordinates, promotes, and communicates the consistent use of geographic place names in Australia. Its membership comprises all the official naming authorities in Australia.

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