Directions in English Place-Name Studies:
an invitation to debate, with a case study of Salford Quays[1]

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Abstract:
Since the beginnings of the English Place-Name Survey (EPNS) in the 1920s, analysis of English place-names has focused mainly on historical questions relating to etymology and the ways that name evidence can shed light on early cultures, medieval settlement patterns, and so forth. The county volumes of the English Place-Name Survey are now well advanced and much important groundwork relating to the collection and analysis of names and their historical origins has been completed. However, we contend that the political implication of names and naming, and the power relations and inequalities behind such practices, have yet to be fully examined, although some work is emerging in this area. This article reviews the current position of English place-name research in the light of the framework of 'critical toponymy' advanced by Vuolteenaho and Berg in *Critical Toponymies* (2009). Our intention in reflecting on both 'traditional' and 'critical' toponymy is to encourage timely and beneficial dialogue and to suggest that English toponymy can be further interrogated and interpreted from new perspectives.

The Critique of English Traditional Toponymy

In a recent volume bringing together different writings on 'critical toponymy', Jani Vuolteenaho and Lawrence Berg criticise the 'political innocence' and 'atheoretical character' of traditional place-name research.[2] Dividing traditional approaches into three distinct strands—the philosophical, the technical-authoritative and the historical-culturalist—

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[2] J. Vuolteenaho and L. Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', in *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place-Naming*, edited by J. Vuolteenaho and L. Berg (Farnham, 2009), pp. 1–18 (p. 1).

they level a number of criticisms at each. They summarise their position thus:

> [...] philosophically oriented reflections on naming [... are] abstract[ed] from any place-bound historical context [...] the technocratic-authoritative and historical-cultural strands [...] adopted theoretically (and politically) naïve empiricist foci [...][3]

These are important points that each raise further questions for the multi-faceted discipline of name studies, and their volume suggests consider-able scope for further development of the 'critical analyses of the politi-cal implications of the naming of places'.[4] In this article we consider the implications of this critique for toponymy as a discipline and as a col-lection of research practices. Our aim is not to be prescriptive about the future direction(s) of the discipline, but rather to open up dialogue about how we can more fully understand, or at least engage with, philosophical and methodological advances in place-name studies across the social sciences and humanities.

Our discussion progresses as follows. First, we outline the critique of 'traditional' toponymic research and research practice examined in the collection edited by Vuolteenaho and Berg with regard to English name studies, though we recognise that similar critiques exist elsewhere, par-ticularly in other social science disciplines.[5] We then consider the poten-tial approaches and practices that may constitute a 'critical' toponymy that goes beyond descriptive and/or empirical scholarship, and offer a brief overview of bodies of work that may be considered part of the 'critical' turn in studies of names and naming. In the remainder of the paper we consider two implications for a 'post-traditional' toponymic landscape, addressing first, the ongoing relevance of historically situated folk-etymologies, and second, a critically-informed assessment of place-

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[3] Vuolteenaho and Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', p. 6.

[4] Vuolteenaho and Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', p. 14.

[5] See for example M. Azaryahu, 'The critical turn and beyond: the case of commem-orative street naming', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 10:1 (2011), 28–33; R. Rose-Redwood, D. Alderman and M. Azaryahu, 'Geogra-phies of toponymic inscription: New directions in critical place-name studies', *Pro-gress in Human Geography*, 34:4 (2010), 453–470; W. Zelinsky, 'Along the front-iers of name geography', *Professional Geographer* 49 (1997), 465–66.

name changes that have accompanied the regeneration of the industrial dockyards and waterfronts in the city of Salford (UK).

An Outline of English 'Traditional' Toponymy

Current English place-name research, or at least that based on the methodologies of the English Place-Name Survey (EPNS), is heavily weighted towards what Berg and Vuolteenaho label a 'traditional' (and more specifically 'historical-cultural') approach to name studies. Analysis focuses largely on empirical, at times empiricist, enquiry, working through extant historical records in order to chart the history of name spellings, and infer name origins from established philological paradigms, drawing where possible on comparative material from related disciplines such as history and archaeology.

The methods of the EPNS evolved in part from Walter Skeat and Henry Bradley's pioneering philological research in the early twentieth century.[6] A useful history is provided by Alexander Rumble, who remarks that, since its inception, the EPNS has depended heavily on its directors for its survival, lacking 'the more official, government-funded status of place-name research in other countries'.[7] As a consequence, the work has been driven by a small number of dedicated scholars. [8] The dominance of the EPNS and its Society has established a degree of disciplinary cohesion and authority, and the Survey's methods have been taken up across the wider United Kingdom.[9] Until all survey work has

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[6] A. Rumble, 'The Landscape of Place-Name Studies', in *Place-Names, Language and the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, edited by N. J. Higham and M. J. Ryan (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 23–50 (p. 29).

[7] Rumble, 'The Landscape of Place-Name Studies', p. 30.

[8] This is reflected in the publication of a number of festschrifts in recent years, notably: *Names, Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson*, edited by A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (Stamford, 1997); *Names through the Looking-Glass: Festschrift in Honour of Gillian Fellows-Jensen*, edited by P. Gammeltoft and B. Jørgensen (Copenhagen, 2006); *A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in Honour of Margaret Gelling*, edited by O. J. Padel and D. N. Parsons (Donington, 2008).

[9] Standard reference works such as *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, edited by V. Watts (Cambridge, 2004) draw substantially on the work of EPNS. For similar approaches across the UK, see A. D. Mills, *Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991, 1998, 2003); H. W. Owen and R. Morgan, *Dictionary*

been completed, 'traditional' toponymy will remain a corner-stone of UK place-name studies.[10] Vuolteenaho and Berg's critique implicitly targets some aspects of the methodology employed by EPNS, hinting that, by providing an essentially 'canonical' history of official names, traditional toponymists run the risk of emphasising a 'standard' diachronic name history which may fail to take account of conflicting historical narratives and the representation of dialects and minority languages.[11] Name politics arguably has a higher profile in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Questions about the status and uses of Welsh, Scottish and Irish Gaelic, Scots and Ulster Scots are relevant to the symbolic power structures embedded in the linguistic landscape of these three countries.[12] Yet this name politics is considerably less visible in English toponymy, which has yet to fully explore such issues as the assertion of different identities within the urban linguistic landscape.[13]

This is not to suggest that the development of the English 'canonical' approach was not without risk-taking. One of the pioneers of the field was the late Margaret Gelling, whose influential work is specifically criticised by Vuolteenaho and Berg for 'yield[ing] suspiciously innocent and bloodless accounts of history'.[14] However, Gelling's legacies are wide-ranging. Her research helped to challenge the view that topographical terms were of little value to historians, and in *The Landscape of Place-Names* she presented a compelling argument for the existence of a

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of the Place-Names of Wales (Llandysul, 2007); The Northern Ireland Place-Names Project <http://www.placenamesni.org>; S. Taylor and G. Márkus, *The Place-Names of Fife*, 4 vols. so far published (Donington, 2006–2010).

[10] To date (November 2011), eighty-four EPNS volumes have been published and others are in preparation.

[11] Vuolteenaho and Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', p. 6.

[12] See for example C. Nash, 'Irish placenames: post-colonial locations', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24 (1999), 457–480; D. Hicks, 'Scotland's linguistic landscape: the lack of policy and planning with Scotland's place-names and signage', paper delivered at the University of Edinburgh, April 24th 2002 <http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/celtic/poileasaidh/hicksseminar.html> (accessed October 2011).

[13] One notable exception is the study by M. Pires, 'Investigating Non-Universal Popular Urban Toponyms: Birmingham's *Pigeon Park*', *Onoma*, 42 (2007), 131–154.

[14] Vuolteenaho and Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', p. 6.

naming system that 'operated over most of England, from Kent to Northumberland and from the east coast to Offa's Dyke'.[15] As she recounts in the Introduction:

> For much of the 75-year-long history of organised English place-name study topographical names were [...] considered to have little to offer [...] Topographical settlement-names began to seem more important in the second half of the 1960s, when a number of studies disputed earlier beliefs in the chronological sequence of place-name types. [...] Once attention had been focused on these names it became apparent that they had much more to offer than had previously been appreciated.[16]

Other innovators continue to shape English toponymy. In *Celtic Voices English Places*, the authors argue that 'more of the major place-names of England date from before the advent of the Anglo-Saxons than is generally believed'.[17] Coates puts this perspective in context with the following caveat:

> One cannot make a point such as this by issuing a resounding declaration and expecting a shift of consensus among scholars to follow. Place-name study is a mature discipline whose prac-titioners, for the most part, share a batch of common tenets and working hypotheses, and do 'normal science' in the sense explained by Thomas Kuhn in *The structure of scientific Revolutions* (1962). They will need to be persuaded by a counter-hypothesis, backed by a weight of evidence pointing in the same direction, that any assumption should be abandoned, as in any scientific work.[18]

To some extent then, the discipline moves forward by building on and developing what might be termed a 'collective ontology', at least as far as

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[15] M. Gelling and A. Cole, *The Landscape of Place-Names* (Stamford, 2000), p. xv.
[16] Gelling, *The Landscape of Place-Names*, p. xii–xiii.
[17] R. Coates, 'Introduction', in R. Coates, A. Breeze and D. Horovitz, *Celtic Voices English Places: Studies of the Celtic Impact on Place-Names in England* (Stamford, 2000) pp. 1–14 (p. 7).
[18] Coates, 'Introduction', p. 7.

'accepted' historical, linguistic and philological principles can be said to be ontologically binding. In contrast, critical toponymy is concerned with the unequal power-dynamics behind the contested development and uses of place-names.

Towards a Critical Toponymy

Although certainly drawing on older work, critical theory as a body of intellectual work caught the imagination of students and intellectuals—particularly in the political and social sciences—in the 1960s and early 1970s, evident for example in the formulation of what became the New Left and its commitment to struggles against racism, imperialism, sexism and capitalism.[19] In his overview of critical theory, Held[20] outlines a variety of positions and approaches that nonetheless share some common routes to Western Marxism with its criticism of positivism and empiricism, and the broad view that knowledge is historically conditioned and contingent.[21] More latterly, theorists have drawn on and contributed to the development of a range of approaches such as feminism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism. While this is not the place to outline the myriad of internal differentiations within critical theory, it is useful to consider how these schools of thought differ from and challenge 'traditional' ways of working and thinking. A 'critical' toponymy should go beyond empirically describing 'what is' present in the named landscape to consider the inequalities in place-naming practices and processes.

There is a growing collection of work from across the humanities and social sciences that adopts a critical perspective on naming. This includes understanding naming as part of a broader process of (capitalist) modernization;[22] urban regeneration and transformation;[23] street-names and

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[19] D. Held, *Introduction to Critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley, 1970), p. 497.

[20] D. Held, *Introduction to Critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*.

[21] H. Benton and I. Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundations of Social Thought*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 260; D. Held, *Introduction to Critical theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*.

[22] A. Pred, *Lost words and lost worlds: modernity and the language of everyday life in late nineteenth century Stockholm* (Cambridge, 1990).

[23] M. Rofe and G. Szili, 'Name games 1: place names as rhetorical devices', *Landscape Research*, 34.3 (2009), 361–370.

commemoration;[24] colonial settlement;[25] state formation and national-ism;[26] and post-colonialism and independence.[27]

Beyond toponymy, geography is perhaps the one discipline that has the most chequered history regarding place-naming. Up until the 1950s the discipline continued to contribute to almanacs of regional identities, and formed part of the wider body of collectors of place-names: cataloguing and accumulating names rather than analysing their use and inscription.[28] In doing so, scholars often neglected the ways in which naming is a political act, replete with powerful intentions, relationships of sub-ordination and domination, in doing so overlooking the idea that naming is an authoritative spatial practice.[29]

As geographers grasped the critical turn, they increasingly eschewed traditional toponymic practice in favour of analysis of the socio-spatial and political acts of naming, focused on two broad scales. One, around the use of place-names as part of the process of commemoration, explores how naming implicates the landscape in a series of politically charged cultural symbols. Here, work examining the impacts of colonial-ism has looked at the renaming of colonised spaces that erases indigenous

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[24] M. Azaryahu, 'The critical turn and beyond: the case of commemorative street naming'; R. Rose-Redwood, 'From number to name: Symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9:4 (2008), 431–452.

[25] P. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration in Landscape and History* (London, 1987).

[26] B. Yeoh, 'Street-naming and nation building: toponymic inscriptions of nation-hood in Singapore', *Area*, 28 (1996), 298–307; A. Saparaov, 'The alteration of place names and construction of national identity in Soviet Aremenia', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 55/1 (2003), 179–198; G. Gill, 'Changing symbols: the renovation of Moscow place names', *The Russian Review*, 64 (July 2005) 480–503; S. Cohen and K. Nurit, 'Place names in Israel's ideological struggle over the administered territories', *Annals of the Association of American Geography*, 82 (1992), 653–680.

[27] C. Nash, 'Irish placenames: post-colonial locations'.

[28] Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 'Geographies of toponymic inscrip-tion'; Zelinsky, 'Along the frontiers of name geography'.

[29] J. Vuolteenaho and L. Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', in *Critical Topo-nymies: The Contested Politics of Place-Naming*, edited by J. Vuolteenaho and L. Berg (Farnham, 2009); C. W. J. Withers, 'Authorising landscape: "authority", nam-ing and the Ordnance Survey's mapping of the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century', *Journal of Historical Geography* 26/4 (2000), 532–554.

histories and subordinates indigenous identities, for example, by re-
naming or overwriting indigenous names.[30] The other, at a smaller scale,
has focused on the naming of streets, including the commemoration of
war heroes and important leaders, and the renaming of streets following
shifts in power-regimes or redevelopment.[31] As this literature suggests,
then, place-names are caught up in wider practices of commemoration
and collective memorialising, contributing to the on-going myths of
nationhood and imagined communities that enable particular identities to
be inscribed on to physical territories.[32]

This work indicates that, far from being a neutral, mundane set of
categories, place-names are imbued with power-full histories. Yet their
everyday, taken-for-granted-use means these are rarely recognised: to
echo Berg and Kearns, naming becomes a process of 'norming'.[33] It is
often during periods of renaming that these hidden structures are re-
vealed, as is evident in the reclaiming of names following postcolonial
independence.[34] As this work shows, postcolonial renaming is far from a
straightforward process of restoring past names, but is central to the
'struggles for legitimacy and visibility'[35] taking place in the named
landscape, highlighting the importance of naming as well as the name.

Consequently, while Vuolteenaho and Berg's book does not present
'new' ground, it does offer an attempt to unite some of these different,
and quite distinct, approaches to names and naming research, and, to

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[30] T. Bassett, 'Cartography and empire building in nineteenth-century west Africa',
Geographical Review, 84 (1994), 316–335; P. Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An
Exploration in Landscape and History*; S. Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How
explorers saw Australia* (Cambridge, 1996).
[31] See for example D. Alderman, 'A street fit for a king: Naming places and com-
memoration in the American South', *The Professional Geographer*, 52:4 (2000),
672–684; B. Yeoh, 'Street-naming and nation building: toponymic inscriptions of
nationhood in Singapore', *Area*, 28.3 (1996), 298–307.
[32] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of
nationalism* (London, 1991); Withers, 'Authorising landscape'.
[33] L. Berg and R. Kearns, 'Naming as norming: "race", gender, and the identity
politics of naming places in Aotearoa/New Zealand', *Environment and Planning D:
Society and Space* 14:1 (1996), 99–122.
[34] C. Nash, 'Irish placenames: post-colonial locations'; B. Yeoh, 'Street-naming and
nation building'.
[35] Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 'Geographies of toponymic inscrip-
tion', 457.

echo Withers, reveals 'the social processes intrinsic to the authoritative act of naming'.[36] In doing so, the volume seeks to make more explicit the intersection of naming, place-making and power in ways that demonstrate how names and naming are part of broader questions of equality, culture and identity-formation, and indeed, how toponymic research is itself caught up in these power-laden practices.[37] Vuolteenaho and Berg mark a 'critical turn' in the study of toponyms, demonstrating the relationships between cultural practices and political processes to show how 'power relations shape commemorative priorities and produce certain geographies of public memory'.[38] For them, toponymy is about more than the neutral description and classification of names (that is, what might be summarized as the etymology and taxonomy) in which place is an unproblematic backdrop. Rather, it is about demonstrating how place-names, and those who research, classify or seek to understand them, are caught up in acts and processes that not only (re)present but also (re)produce places and cultures.[39]

Towards a 'post-traditional' toponymy?

Vuolteenaho and Berg have posed a difficult challenge to traditional English toponymists and no clear response has yet emerged. Of course, anticipating any 'collective' response may imply an unrealistic level of cohesion within the research community. Those who follow the historical-cultural approach are not necessarily hostile to critical theory, though some may feel it is not relevant to their research. However, we do believe that taking these critiques seriously has the potential to open up a number of new directions for 'traditional toponymy', or at the very least, encourage us to re-examine our 'canonical' approaches.

Certainly, it may be that the critique will be dismissed as reactionary, irrelevant or un-representative of the discipline that has been shaped by

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[36] Vuolteenaho and Berg, 'Towards Critical Toponymies', p. 7

[37] For cartographic contributions to the power-imbalances behind the construction of map-knowledge see J. B. Harley, 'Maps, knowledge and power', in *The Iconography of Landscapes*, edited by S. Daniels and D. Cosgrove (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 277–312.

[38] M. Azaryahu, 'The critical turn and beyond: the case of commemorative street naming'.

[39] Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 'Geographies of toponymic inscription'.

the EPNS. The modern focus of critical toponymy, which emphasises research on accessible memories and human experiences, cannot necessarily be applied to more ancient data sets where much of the politics must be inferred. Manuscript history does after all tend to focus on the history of those in power, so the history of the marginalised is often correspondingly rendered invisible. Furthermore, the empiricism that underpins much of traditional toponymy is a valid philosophical stance in itself and cannot be simply rendered naïve.

Nonetheless, by embracing a critically informed toponymy, it may be that the discipline of English place-name studies will open up to different ways of thinking about and working with toponyms, providing opportunities for more interdisciplinarity, including work with social scientists, planners, and even socio-legal experts that may provide new perspectives and insights, and perhaps encourage collaborative ventures and funding bids to less conventional funding sources. We also believe there is opportunity to think more creatively about the methods used in toponymic research. Historical work predominantly draws on archival sources and materials such as manuscripts, charters, legal records, diaries, maps and gazetteers, but a focus on the political uses of places-names, particularly in everyday spheres, lends itself to a considerably more diverse array of field techniques. While there is some evidence to suggest these techniques are beginning to be applied, notably in the deployment of ethnographic methods by Myers,[40] and Tucci et al's. use of GIScience (Geographic Information Science) techniques to unearth the toponymic history of Milan's streets,[41] we suggest there is further scope to develop and apply techniques and methods.

A critical toponymy, however imagined, goes further than a call to borrow ideas from other disciplines or develop alternative methods and techniques of data collection. It is also a critique aimed at the epistemological and ontological nature of toponymic knowledge. The rise of critical theory in the social sciences cannot be disaggregated from

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[40] G. Myers, 'The Aloha State: place names and the anti-conquest of Hawaii', in *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place-Naming*, edited by J. Vuolteenaho and L. Berg (Farnham, 2009), pp. 101–136.

[41] M. Tucci, R. Ronza and A. Giordano, 'Fragments from many pasts: Layering the toponymic tapestry of Milan', *Journal of Historical Geography* 37.3 (2011), 370–384.

ongoing debate about what constitutes truth, facts and evidence. The post-positivist turn for example, presented a substantial and long-lasting critique of empiricism and positivism with its belief in scientific method, the separation of objective statements of fact from subjective experiences or values, and the search for universal rules or laws. While the critique is clearly more complex then we can specify here, it nonetheless rests on disrupting discourses of 'scientism' and faith in the abilities of the methods used in the natural sciences to produce absolute understanding of social phenomena and historical processes.[42] Beyond querying the efficacy of the scientific method, post-positivist critiques argue for the need to take experience, interpretation, and values more seriously in attempts to understand the (social) world, calling for a greater awareness of the significance of subjective knowledges. A key idea to emerge from this landscape of alternatives to empirical knowledge was that of reflexivity. Here, rather than assuming that the outcomes of positivist-based scientific knowledge should be universally applicable, objective, and detached from the values and experiential claims of investigators (researcher-scientists), it was argued that knowledge always comes from a particular vantage point. While social constructionists have taken this idea further,[43] the basic tenet suggests that researchers, as conscious, subjective beings cannot present value-free knowledge, for human life is a life of meaning, language and reflective thought and action. Thus post-positivist approaches (of which critical theory is one) call into question the nature of what constitutes 'truth' and the universality of social facts, in essence, reminding us that objectivity is always a 'view from some-where', with the researcher implicated in this.

Consequently, toponymists need to be more explicitly aware, and critically reflexive, of the ways in which their own tools of the trade (the charters, maps, gazetteers and other archival materials) are not impartial,

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[42] See for example T. Benton and I. Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science: The Philosophical Foundation of Social Thought*, 2nd edn (London, 2010) for an account of competing philosophies in the social sciences; A. Chalmers, *What is this thing called Science?*, 3rd edn (St Lucia, Queensland, 1982) for an account of the development of scientific philosophies, and S. Fuller, *Science: the Art of Living* (Durham, 2010) for an outline of the development of science relative to the role of religion in social, political and institutional life.

[43] See for example P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (New York, 1967), p. 240.

objective statements on the (truthful) nature of the world, but particular
accounts or representations of it. The mapping of space and the com-
position of gazetteers are themselves acts of recording and authorising
some names over others, whereby in inscribing names through official
cartography, mapping reflects social power.[44]

Whoever officially records a name is in effect stating that that name is
a 'truthful' entity rather than a particular, dominant or hegemonic view.[45]
This is clearly a process that goes beyond 'names as indicators of land-
scapes' or past events neutralised by time (i.e. the 'bloodless histories' of
Vuolteenaho and Berg's critique), to reflect on the implications of
naming as a powerful act. As Rose-Redwood et al. highlight, there is a
need for further exploration of what is meant by naming as a powerful
practice, outlining how power operates to construct gendered and
racialised landscapes.[46] For instance, there have been recent calls to
explore the political economy of naming, encouraging researchers to
explore the ways in which place-names are commodified, evident for
example in the renaming of football stadiums and transport hubs by
private interests seeking to maximise profit from naming.[47]

Furthermore, there is the opportunity to consider the phonetic heritage
of names and naming. Kearns and Berg for example have explored the
contested uses of Maori place-name pronunciation and in many ways our
discussion of critical research on naming echoes their conclusion that:

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[44]M. Monmonier, *How to Lie With Maps* (Chicago, 1986); J. B. Harley, 'Decon-
structing the map', in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Repres-
entation of Landscape*, edited by T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan (London, 1992), pp.
231–247.

[45] See for example H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by D. Nicholson-
Smith (Oxford, 1991) p. 464; M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans.
by S. Rendall (Berkeley 1984), p. 260.

[46] Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, 'Geographies of toponymic inscrip-
tion'.

[47] Azaryahu, 'The critical turn and beyond: the case of commemorative street
naming'; R. Rose-Redwood, 'Rethinking the Agenda of the "New" Political
Toponymy'; J. Vuolteenaho, 'From Idea Parks to the Theatres of Dreams: Naming
as a tool of urban place-marketing', paper presented at the 24th Congress of the
International Council of Onomastic Sciences, Barcelona, 5th September 2011.

[...] the fact that a significant proportion of the [New Zealand] populace might be unaware of the various place name pronunciation 'choices' is indicative of the power of hegemonic social relations that underpin and reinforce neo-colonialism. The key question remains as to who gets to map out proper pronunciation, and how and why such topographies of naming might be contested.[48]

Toponymic Mythologies and Toponymic Truths

While remaining valid and defensible, the empiricist focus of traditional English name studies does not fully address many social, cultural and political questions of toponymy. By way of example, we now consider an area of name studies that currently receives little attention, and is often dismissed because of its lack of relevance to empiricist goals. Folk-interpretations of name origins have the potential to reveal alternative readings of place-names positioned within everyday, routinised usage rather than those names represented in official discourses.

Folk-beliefs about the origins of place-names tend not to be held in high regard in the extant scholarly literature.[49] Etymology requires detailed, time-consuming research work, and philological debunking of folk-theories can take a gleefully imperious tone, with 'intellectual' etymology triumphing over 'ignorant' folk-interpretations. 'Folk-etymology' is understood here in the sense of a 'popular explanation' of an etymology, although it can also be used to signify 'the remodelling of a word involv[ing] the replacement of one or more of its syllables by another word with which it is associated semantically', such as the use of *sparrowgrass* for *asparagus*, altering the form 'as a compound of [...] familiar English words', making 'a sort of semantic sense'.[50] Both linguistic phenomena are however relevant to this discussion, since 'remodelling' folk etymologies can also indicate folk-interpretations. Yet rather than focus on the politics that such changes may indicate,

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[48] R. Kearns and L. Berg, 'Proclaiming place: Towards a geography of place name pronunciation', *Social and Cultural Geography* 3.3 (2002), 283–302 (p. 298).
[49] See A. Room, *Dictionary of True Etymologies* (London, 1986) for entertaining examples.
[50] P. Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (Oxford, 2009), p. 205.

onomastic scholars have tended to concentrate their attention on the linguistic processes and motives behind them.[51]

Within British toponymy, the twelfth-century remodelling of *Edenburge* as *E(d)winesburg* is one example that has been regarded as 'notorious' for encouraging the folk-belief that the name Edinburgh originally signified 'the fortress of Edwin, seventh-century king of Northumbria'.[52] As Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards stress:

> 'Edwin's fortress' is [...] a scribal etymology of the twelfth century which is impossible to defend but which has lingered on in history books as a convenient explanation, especially in view of the fact that we do not know what Eidyn, the name of the fortification, meant.[53]

The role of the medieval scribe who subscribed to the 'Edwin's fortress' etymology, and his impact on the views of later commentators who chose to accept this interpretation hints at the complex relationships that can exist between perceptions of names, heritage and identity. The political implications of evolving historical forms have tended to be only of tangential interest to those intent on deciphering the linguistic origins of the name.

The use of 'folk' in 'folk-etymology' can be demonstrably pejorative. As Durkin explains, folk-etymology 'is an explanation of an etymology which is in circulation among "the folk"' but which is taken seriously by very few experts'.[54] Some frustration is evident in Spittal and Field's discussion of the propagation of folk-etymologies in newspaper articles:

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[51] See especially R. Coates, 'Pragmatic sources of analogical reformation', *Journal of Linguistics*, 23 (1987), 319–340 and 'M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England*, 3rd edn. (Chichester, 1997), pp. 202–205; a useful discussion of the processes of analogy and folk-etymology in relation to English place-names can be found in C. Hough, 'Linguistic Levels: Onomastics', in *Historical Linguistics of English*, edited by A. Bergs and L. Brinton (*forthcoming*: Berlin, 2012), pp. 212–223.

[52] W. F. H. Nicolaisen, M. Gelling and M. Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain* (Batsford, 1970), s.v. Edinburgh.

[53] Nicolaisen, Gelling and Richards, *The Names of Towns and Cities in Britain,* s.v. Edinburgh.

[54] P. Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (Oxford, 2009), p. 206.

> If a Latin origin cannot be established, a French one may be proposed, as in the fanciful derivation of the entirely English name Shotover (Oxford) from *Chateau vert*. Charing (Cross) is declared to be from *chère reine* ('dear queen'), in memory of Eleanor of Castile, although the forms *Cherring* and *la Cherynge* date from many years before the queen's death. Relying on what they call 'common sense', retailers of such accounts find it unnecessary to consult recent works on place-names, or to use any evidence other than the modern forms of names. Oral purveyors of these spurious explanations sometimes admit that they are accustomed to tell their hearers what the latter wish to hear.[55]

Lack of regard for such ideas amongst those dedicated to the pursuit of linguistic 'truths' is understandable, but such dismissal can have wider consequences in terms of what is judged to be more broadly 'of value' . Consequently, popular English toponymic myths have yet to be studied in detail in their social, cultural and historical contexts.

This is not always the case for the study of United Kingdom place-names outwith England. From the Gaelic cultural heritage of Scotland and Ireland, toponymy has borrowed the term *dindshenchas* to describe the process by which 'place-names can give rise to a new narrative [...] (literally "the lore of noble places")'.[56] As Taylor points out, complex relationships can result from the perceptions of names—especially those that have literary or cultural significance—and toponyms themselves: 'once a narrative has taken root in a particular locality, it can then generate new place-names, or alter existing ones'.[57] Modern place-name dictionaries do not include folk-etymologies as a rule, although some well-known examples are discussed. The entry for Beddgelert in the *Oxford Dictionary of British Place-Names*, for instance, includes both etymological and folk-etymological information:

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[55] J. Spittal and J. Field, *A Reader's Guide to the Place-Names of the United Kingdom* (Stamford, 1990), p. 2.
[56] Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[57] Taylor, 'Introduction', p. 6.

> **Beddgelert** Gwyd. *Bedkelert* 1281. "Celert's grave". Irish pers.
> name + Welsh *bedd*. Local legend derives the pers. name from
> *Gelert*, a hound slain by its master, Prince Llewellyn, when he
> thought it had killed his baby son, although it had actually killed
> a wolf that threatened the child.[58]

Given the history of the Celtic dindshenchas tradition with its inherent
respect for folk-etymologies, it may be no coincidence that, of the six
folk-etymologies discussed in the *Oxford Dictionary of British Place-
Names*, four have connections with Irish culture: Beddgelert, discussed
above; Glenavy and Larne in County Antrim; and the Isle of Man, 'linked
in legend with [...] an Irish god, Manannan mac Lir'.[59] The remaining
two are Rowlands Castle in Hampshire and Soho in Somerset. Rowlands
may be a folk-etymology in both senses. The oldest form of the name is
recorded as *Rolokescastel* (*c*. 1315), deriving from Middle English *castel*
'castle' and an Old French personal name *Rolok*, but apparently this was
later remodelled after the name of Roland, the Frankish folk hero, with
forms such as *Roulandes Castell* recorded from 1369 onwards.[60] Like its
parallel in London, Soho derives from a hunting call, but 'legend has it
that it recalls the use of the phrase as the Duke of Monmouth's password
in the 1685 Rising'.[61] The lack of attention that folk-interpretations
typically receive in such major toponymic reference works is indicative
of their low status within English place-name studies as a whole. How-
ever, critically re-engaging with this folk knowledge would be one
method of exploring the marginalised and hidden uses of language and
local culture which 'traditional' toponymy has largely rejected.

Waterside regeneration:
a Case Study in contemporary toponymic relevance
Turning to a more contemporary set of practices, we now consider some
of the ways in which a more critical approach to toponymy can inform
English place-name studies by focusing on a specific example of modern

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[58] Mills, *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place Names*, s.v. Beddgelert.
[59] Mills, *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place Names*, s.vv. Beddgelert, Glenavy,
Larne, Man.
[60] Mills, *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place Names*, s.v. Rowlands Castle.
[61] Mills, *The Oxford Dictionary of British Place Names*, s.v. Soho.

naming and renaming practices in Salford. We demonstrate how processes such as urban development and regeneration—evident for example in the re-branding of names and city-marketing practices—can rewrite local and historical naming traditions.[62]

The city of Salford has a population of over 210,000[63] and shares its border with its larger and arguably more dominant neighbour, the city of Manchester. During the Industrial Revolution Salford increasingly operated as the industrial heartland to Manchester's commercial core. Nonetheless, as Engels observed, economic success was matched with intense polarities in wealth, and by the mid nineteenth century, Salford housed a large working class population suffering from poverty, poor health and overcrowding. [64] While Salford Docks, servicing the Manchester Ship Canal since the late nineteenth century, helped establish the area as an economic powerhouse,[65] decline in post-war industrial activities caused significant local economic depression, including abandonment of much of the dockland area.

Over the last 25 years, the area once occupied by Salford Docks has undergone an elaborate regeneration programme resulting in many changes to the built landscape of the area. As part of this change, Salford Docks has been renamed 'Salford Quays' in official publications, planning reports and wider commercial discourse. It has become a focal point for much cultural activity, with the building of the Lowry Theatre and the Imperial War Museum North and, since 2010, the arrival of the BBC, including the relocation of five departments and 1500 staff from London. Many people living in Salford, both long-term residents and more recent incomers, have come to recognise the re-naming as part of a wider package of rebranding and city-marketing. Development of tourism in the area has in large part built on this foundation, with the creation of attractions such as the Salford Quays Heritage Trail which incorporates

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[62] M. W. Rofe and S. Oakley, 'Constructing the Port: External Perceptions and Interventions in the Making of Place in Port Adelaide, South Australia', *Geographical Research*, 44.3 (2006), 272–284.

[63] Office of National Statistics <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>.

[64] F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London, 1892; repr. St Albans, 1969); see especially 'The great towns', pp. 57–107.

[65] *Salford Quays Milestones: The Story of Salford Quays* (Salford, 2008) <http://www.salford.gov.uk/d/ milestones_v2. pdf> (accessed November 2011).

artworks designed specifically to celebrate Salford's history.[66] The last docks were closed in 1982, following the decline of the industry in the 1970s, and the redeveloped site was formally launched as 'Salford Quays' in 1986. Salford City Council, who bought the old dockland area in the early 1980s, have celebrated the success of this regeneration project in their publication, *Salford Quays Milestones: The Story of Salford Quays*:

> First opened in 1894, the Salford docks, together with the Manchester Ship Canal, were rightly heralded as an engineering masterpiece; a testament to the [...] spirit of the region's industrialists. [...] Salford Quays has now been re-established as an integral part of the region's economy [...] polluted waterways and derelict wasteland have been transformed [...] Salford Quays has also emerged as an attractive and desirable residential location [...] with the arrival of the BBC and the development of the UK's first 'media city', Salford Quays can be seen to have once again reclaimed its place on the world stage, completing a remarkable story that has spanned over 100 years.[67]

It is noteworthy that this account uses 'the Salford docks' (not 'Salford Docks') and 'Salford Quays', according the formal status of a name to the latter only. National media have offered a more pithy summary of this change:

> The City is not rejecting its flat cap and pipe puffing past. Rather it has found confidence to build a new identity upon its industrial heritage. The Lowry [theatre] will transform Salford, by capturing its grimy past and gleaming future.[68]

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[66] See the 'Visit Salford' webpage: < http://www.visitsalford.info/quaystrail.htm> (accessed October 2011).

[67] Councillor D. Antrobus, 'Foreword', in *Salford Quays Milestones: The Story of Salford Quays* (Salford, 2008) <http://www.salford.gov.uk/d/milestones_v2.pdf> (accessed October 2011).

[68] *The Times*, 29th April 2000. Cited in D. Antrobus, 'Three stories of Salford: Transformation, identity and metropolitan peripheries', in conference proceedings of Building New Urban Identities: From mono-functional to multi-functional cities, Salford, 21–22nd October, 2009 <http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/Projects/Net_TOPIC/

The re-naming strategy that has seen the substitution of Salford Quays for Salford Docks is indicative of the economic, political and cultural processes of urban development. It is more than an exercise in re-branding, and is indicative of the power relationships embedded in the naming of the built environment. The rebranding of 'Salford Docks' as 'Salford Quays' can be read as evidence of a 'neoliberal' regeneration agenda in which Salford is part of a global competitive marketplace seeking to attract capital investment. The establishment of 'MediaCityUK' at Salford Quays indicates that the raft of changes has successfully drawn business to the area. By replacing the 'Dock' element with 'Quays', marketers have overwritten the old, industrial (declining) identity of the area and presented a new, sanitised history without the less marketable connotations of Salford's penurious past.

This re-naming must be seen as part of the Salford regeneration project. As such, it is open to the same kind of analysis and critique as the material, physical regeneration offered, for example, by Christophers' reading of reports and statements issued by all the main parties involved. [69] Christophers outlines the link between a neo-liberal urban development agenda designed 'to mobilize city space as an arena both for market-oriented economic growth and for elite consumption practices'. [70] He argues that this arena is part of an ongoing shift from the organization of city spaces as a discourse of urban management to one of entrepreneurship. This entrepreneurial arena sees city spaces compete with each other for capital investment, populations and infrastructures, [71] such as (as

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outputs_media/THEMATIC_PUBLICATION_2_-_FINAL_VERSION.pdf>
(accessed October 2011).

[69] B. Christophers, 'The BBC, the creative class, and neoliberal urbanism in the north of England', *Environment and Planning A*, 40 (2008), 2313–2329.

[70] N. Brenner and N. Theodore, 'Cities and the Geographies of "Actually Existing Neoliberalism"', in *Spaces of Neoliberalism: Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe*, edited by N. Brenner and N. Theodore (Oxford, 2002), pp. 2–32 (p. 21).

[71] See for example D. Harvey, 'From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism', *Geografiska Annaler, Series B*, 71 (1989), 3–17; and B. Jessop 'The entrepreneurial city: re-imaging localities, re-designing economic governance, or restructuring capital?', in *Transforming Cities: New Spatial Divisions and Social Transformation*, edited by N. Jewson and S. MacGregor (London, 1997), pp. 28–41. For an overview of critical essays on city

in Salford) national museums, theatres and global corporations. More-
over, as Christophers argues, while the project's backers champion the
benefits to 'Salford', 'the precise 'Salford' they envisage, its specific
places and specific peoples is a highly partial one'.[72] Core to achieving
the regeneration of the docklands was the attraction of private invest-
ment.[73] We contend that the symbolism associated with the name 'Docks'
was seen as ill-fitting of a city looking to project a post-industrial future.
Moreover, this rebranding of Salford Quays will speak to and offer a very
different kind of Salford from that experienced and perhaps expected by
other social groups in the city.

Furthermore, the renaming of Salford Quays masks an ongoing
struggle over the right to the waterways that have formed a prominent
part of both Salford and Manchester's industrial past, and now are seen as
key to both cities' post-industrial economic futures. A wide range of
labels are applied to the area in the City Council's publications, including
'Manchester Docks'.[74] Although the larger and more powerful neigh-
bouring city of Manchester can lay claim to this area (it is a part of the
'Manchester' Ship Canal after all), any decision to use 'Manchester' or
'Salford' in this context is highly political, and indicative of the struggles
over the right to claim ownership of place through naming.[75]

Finally, although the change of name to Salford Quays has been wide-
ly, if critically, accepted, attempts have since been made in some market-
ing contexts to rename the area once again. The location's official web-
site describes it as 'The Quays', with the subtitle: 'Greater Manchester's

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marketing see *Selling Places. The city as cultural capital, past and present*, edited
by G. Kearns and C. Philo (Oxford, 1993), and S. Ward, *Selling Places: The Mar-
keting and Promotion of Towns and Cities 1850–2000* (London, 1998).
[72] Christophers, 'The BBC, the creative class, and neoliberal urbanism in the north
of England', 2314.
[73] W. Struthers, 'From Manchester Docks to Salford Quays: Ten Years of Environ-
mental Improvements in the Mersey Basin Campaign', *Water and Environment
Journal*, 11:1 (1997), 1–7.
[74] See for example *Salford Quays Milestones*, p. 3.
[75] Compare also the competing and contrasting discourses of Port Adelaide/'Port
Misery' in Newcastle, Australia, as discussed in Rofe and Oakley 'Constructing the
Port', and M. Rofe and G. Szil, 'Name games 1: Place names as rhetorical devices,
Landscape Research 34:3 (2009), 361–370.

Waterfront'.[76] The name 'Salford' does not appear except in the marketing statement:

> The Quays is a revelation to all who visit it. Here, Manchester, Salford and Trafford come together creating a wonderful mix of culture, retail and leisure around a continually evolving waterfront destination—soon to be home to the BBC and MediaCityUK.

The example of Salford Quays offers a useful demonstration of the ways that competing narratives are represented in toponymic discourse. Through a critically-orientated analysis we might read the most recent rebranding as an attempt to emphasise the larger, more powerful and more affluent 'Manchester' at the expense of the less powerful and affluent 'Salford'. In discussion with long-term residents of Salford and relative newcomers to Salford, reactions to this rebranding have been sceptical. We contend that this renaming strategy is part of a wider package to refashion and re-sell 'Salford' as an entity that appeals to global capital investment companies, and indeed, to an affluent social demographic with few explicit ties to the city's industrial history.

'The Quays' has been in use in marketing contexts for about ten years. In 2003 the Former Deputy Chief Executive of Salford City Council stated:

> As architectural landmarks with new leisure attractions, the Lowry, the Museum and the footbridge are marketed together with Manchester United Football Team at the nearby Old Trafford Stadium as a critical mass for attracting visitors and tourists to Salford Quays. 'The Quays' is now used as the overall destination for advertising purposes in tourist literature.[77]

The website of 'The Quays' is produced by The Quays Marketing Partnership. When asked about the use of 'The Quays' rather than 'Salford Quays', the Chair offered this:

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[76] 'The Quays' web page (2010) <http://www.thequays.org.uk/> (accessed October 2011).
[77] T. Struthers, 'The Redevelopment of Salford Quays, Greater Manchester' <www.nsl.ethz.ch/index.php/de/content/download/458/3007/file> (accessed October 2011).

> The simple reason is that the partnership members come from both Trafford and Salford areas and trying to call the destination Trafford & Salford quays would not be a customer friendly solution.[78]

More recently, the Boundary Commission for England recommended a set of proposals to redefine constituency boundaries so that 'the existing Manchester Central constituency extends west to incorporate wards from the City of Salford, specifically Salford Quays and the surrounding area'.[79] This proposal has not been welcomed by all locally. *The Salford Star*, a local independent magazine, reported the news in graphic form, depicting a (presumably mocked-up) version of the familiar 'Welcome— You are now in Salford' street-sign with 'Manchester' scrawled in graffiti over the city's name.[80] This suggested change has provoked a variety of discussions, and considerable speculation over the motives for moving the new, affluent and successful Salford Quays area (encompassing Media City). An article on the BBC's news website reported Salford MP Hazel Blears' reaction: 'It's a disgrace that a significant part of Salford's identity can be considered for being pulled into Manchester'.[81] In this instance, the proposed change is not limited to the toponymic context, and may have further social and material ramifications. Nonetheless, similar concerns are raised by the renaming of 'Salford Quays' as 'The Quays: Greater Manchester's Waterfront', and it is clear from local reactions that the name change is not 'neutral' or 'harmless' but rather has an effect on perceptions, identity and sense of 'belonging'.

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[78] A. McGregor, Chair, Quays Marketing Partnership; personal correspondence, September 2011.

[79] 'North West: Initial Proposals', Boundary Commission for England (London, 2011), <http://www.consultation.boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov. uk> p.15 §66 (accessed October 2011).

[80] *The Salford Star*, 'Salford disappears in boundary changes', 13th September 2011 <http://www.salfordstar. com/article.asp?id=1095> (accessed October 2011).

[81] BBC News 13th September 2011 'Boundary change plans put Salford in Manchester' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ news/uk-england-manchester-14894352> (accessed October 2011).

Conclusion

Our albeit brief case study of the renaming of Salford Quays has, we hope, begun to offer possible routes into a critically-informed (or at least aware) toponymy. While our discussion offers evidence of the benefits of bringing a more interdisciplinary perspective to the study of names and naming, and our use of field methods offers a contemporaneous insight into the complexities of the process of renaming, it is with regard to the power-imbalances that we want to particularly draw attention. Our analysis has not centred on the search for one 'truthful' toponymy of Manchester and Salford's waterside, and we have purposefully steered clear of discussion of whether or not Salford Quays is 'really' Salford Docks. Rather, we have considered the political and commercial aspects of this (re-)naming and what these names symbolise; what and who they exclude; who has the power to rewrite the toponymic landscape; and, more broadly, how such practices are caught up in economic restructuring and urban competition.

Considering the nature of truth in relation to names and naming raises questions about the possibilities for a single or universal etymological truth. Our contention here is to instead ask whose truth (or truths) are represented in official and unofficial place-naming practices. Etymology is a contested practice that can, and does, overwrite populist understandings and uses of place-names that may marginalise, perhaps even reject, alternative beliefs and claims to belonging.

To recognise how toponymy, as part of an official discourse of place-naming, is caught up in the struggle over the right to name a place is also to recognise how the discipline is caught up in discourses of power over historically and culturally identifying (with) place. To reiterate, we are not suggesting that either philology or folk-etymologists are more 'correct' than each other. Rather, we are claiming that, first, observations of the data represented by EPNS need to be situated within fully acknowledged disciplinary histories, and second, that these data afford opportunities to examine the contests and power-relationships evidenced in naming practices.

We believe there is scope for English place-name studies to consider the value of critical theory in relation to traditional, historical-cultural research. For historical researchers, the critical approach may complicate the traditional, etymological interrogation of extant sources in pursuit of a

'canonical' history and etymology of a name. As we have noted, 'official' and 'vernacular' histories of naming and name use may be very different from one another, and it may not always be possible to identify or conjecture the full import of the historical identities and cultures whose conflicting voices cannot reach us through the written record. Nevertheless, study of these narratives may have much to reveal about society, language, place and identity, and we contend that further acknowledgement and exploration of these aspects of names and naming would be directly beneficial to English toponymy. At one level, Vuolteenaho and Berg's critique challenges historical toponymists to engage with place-name material differently, but underpinning their critique is a more subtle question that asks whether traditional toponymy *can* engage meaningfully with these interrogative tools. Time will tell.