

## Introduction

# TOWARDS A THEORY OF POLITICAL ONOMASTICS

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## A Personal Reflection

### *Immigrants*

All those names mangled on Ellis Island ...

...

... cut, stitched, and ... remade as Mann ... Carpenter or Leary.

...

Others, more secretive or radical,  
made up new names ...

(Carole Satyamurti in Satyamurti 2005: 25)

*June 30, 1992. (The morning after my mother died)*

They took away your name  
at the border

Forsaking borders,  
You gave away your names.

Rebecca Rivke not yours to give  
Bertha not yours to take

Surnames    middlenames  
Hungarianised    Jewish names  
Yiddishised    Hungarian names  
Unnamed    renamed  
remained

My mother  
who shall remain  
nameless  
would not name  
my children  
did not know  
her daughter's name  
mis-naming me,  
un-named herself.

Cruel and unusual punishment  
inflicted on  
daughters  
grandsons  
granddaughter ...  
even the chosen ones injured  
by unreasoned distinction

child  
after child  
after child  
abuses of  
body  
mind  
trust

The cycle of trust  
begun again  
in sisters  
sisters' children  
children's hope.

What was lost:  
mothering and  
motherlove  
acceptance and  
resolution  
kindness and  
peace

What we have:  
names  
our own names  
our owned names  
love  
and hope  
and children.

As the child of European-Jewish (Ashkenazi) immigrants to North America, I grew up hearing naming stories. I knew I was named Valerie for a place called Valeria where my parents met, and Lee to commemorate a relative named Leah. I knew I was a giver as well as a receiver of names when, at age six, my parents invited me to help name my sister. I also knew the limits to my power, as my original choice of Susannah (which I thought 'fancier' and prettier) was shortened to my parents' preference of Susan.

My next name-giving experience was as a mother. My sons David and Daniel Restivo (who now call themselves Dave and Dan) were named to commemorate the different families and cultures they inherited (Italian-Catholic, Hungarian-Jewish). Dave's middle name, Owen, commemorates a residence hall at Michigan State University, where his parents met. Dan's middle name, Olam, is a Hebrew word meaning 'world', 'universe' and 'humanity', suggested by a friend when we ran out of ideas for another 'O' name. The middle 'O' that creates my sons' shared monogram (DOR) itself has several private meanings. It is a beautiful and untranslatable word in Romanian, which I was studying when Dave was born. In French, *dor* means 'of gold'; in Hebrew, 'generation'.

My daughter-in-law, Peggy Jane, shares a name with her mother and maternal grandmother. The naming of my granddaughter, Mary Margaret, whose Hebrew name, Zahara, means 'to shine' and who is nicknamed 'MMZ', is more complicated. In an account reminiscent of Inuit naming stories, her father recalls how she 'named herself' a few days after she was born:

She picked her own name, from a series of names that each of us liked. All the names were written four times and she was given four opportunities to pick randomly. That is the name she picked every single time, and the only name anyone else got when they tried. So I guess she knew who she was! (Restivo 2004)

The name Margaret follows her mother's family custom of giving that name to a girl in each generation. That lovely tradition is in direct conflict with her father's Ashkenazi Jewish heritage, in which it is forbidden to name a child for a living relative. In a multicultural family there is no perfect way to resolve such differences.

Even where all members of a family share a cultural background, there are issues. Immigrants often name or rename family members to reflect the language and customs of the new country.

My father's family immigrated to the United States long before he and his siblings were born. Like many others, the family maintained a double cultural life. I knew that my father's 'American' name, Julius, was transformed in Hebrew to Yehuda in family conversations and in synagogue.

I knew that for decades he had fooled my mother into thinking his middle name was the dashing European 'Anatol' instead of the ordinary, if biblically distinguished, Abraham. He playfully stole his adopted name from Arthur Schnitzler's eponymous play recounting the adventures of a spoiled young rake. Along with other Schnitzler works, *Anatol* (written in 1893) enjoyed New York revivals in the early years of my parents' marriage. They were Schnitzler fans, and my mother thought Anatol a charming 'coincidence'. I also knew that my father sometimes used his monogram, JAG, as a *nom de plume*. I thought it great fun to read a letter from a reader calling him 'JAG m'boy' (Graber, J.A. 1931). On rereading the cuttings of his reviews for the publication of New York's 'Ninety-second Street Y' (the YMHA, or Young Men's Hebrew Association), the *Bulletin*, I see that this was a response from 'The Notorious -O-' to his review of Eugene O'Neill's play, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and (based on this and previous correspondence) suspect it was the playwright himself who was responding.

I knew my mother hated her name. At birth she had received a 'good name' – the Hungarian version of Rebecca. In childhood she was given a nickname meaning 'buddy', which in Hungarian also started with 'B'. As a small child arriving with her family at Ellis Island, she was crudely renamed by an immigration officer whose sensitivities (if he had any) were likely subsumed by a preoccupation with moving people swiftly through the queue. Hearing her called by her Hungarian nickname, that powerful but anonymous individual inscribed the new identity that would follow her on documents throughout her life: Bertha. It was a name she considered ugly, though she sometimes joked about 'Bertha the Sewing Machine girl', an industrious garment worker in Harold Rome's 1937 musical, *Pins and Needles*. Rome's musical was derived from an earlier play with roots in a less cheery 'dime novel' called *Bertha the Sewing Machine Girl or, Death at the Wheel*, by Frances S. Smith (1871). In the musical version – inspired and produced by members of the International Ladies' Garment Workers (ILGWU) – Bertha survives the advances of a lecherous, non-union impostor and is taught how to preserve her virtue in the song, 'It's Better with a Union Man': 'Always be upon your guard / Demand to see a union card!' (Bronski 2003). My parents loved the show; my mother continued to dislike her name, both in its original form and in her acquired nickname, Bert. The injury of renaming was compounded by poverty and loss – her mother died of puerperal fever soon after my mother was born. I could never understand why she did not change her name back to Rebecca, and reclaim her birthright.

When I left the United States and an unfortunate marriage for a new life in Canada, I took a new last name: Alia – a Hebrew and Arabic word meaning 'going up' – to new places (both geographic and sacred) and new levels of consciousness – liberation. Having discarded both 'maiden' and 'married' names for an identity of my own, I vowed never again to change

my name for others. I kept that vow even when I joyfully married Pete Steffens, whose father, the great 'muckraker', Lincoln Steffens, was much admired and often quoted in my parents' home. I love, respect and treasure that name. Nevertheless, I have kept my own.

Pete's real name is Pete, not Peter, though people often get it wrong (including scholars who think that 'Peter Steffens' is a mysterious other man). Pete's father nicknamed his mother Peter (for Peter Pan) and then named him for *her*, adding the straight-laced middle name, Stanley, in case he grew up wanting to be a businessman or banker. In *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* he explains the naming games.

This girl danced. Her eyes danced, her mind, her hands, her feet danced as she ran ... I was fascinated ... She was not for me, of course. Too young. But I felt something which I smothered by likening her to a boy. Her name was Ella Winter, but I called her Peter.

...  
... she had not decided which of her suitors would suit her ... in short, I disapproved of all the other candidates for husband and recommended myself ... We went to San Remo, took a villa, and there in the fall of 1924 my son, Pete Stanley Steffens, named after his mother, Peter, was born. (Steffens 1931: 812, 820)

Ella Winter came from an Ashkenazi Jewish family originally called Wertheimer. Branches of the family immigrating to Britain, Australia and the United States variously renamed themselves Wertham, Winton and Winter. Freda Lust and Adolph Wertheimer left Nuremberg for London and then Melbourne, where their children – Rudolph, Rosa and Eleanora (Ella) – were born. Returning to London in 1910, they encountered a climate of anti-German hatred and changed their name to Winter to disguise their German origins.

From the Wertham branch of the family came the U.S. psychiatrist and author, Fredric Wertham, whose postwar struggle to understand the roots of violence resulted in his study of the effects of violent comic books on children (Wertham 1953). From the Winton branch came the English stockbroker, Nicholas Winton, who in 1939 organised the rescue of 669 children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia (BBC. 1998; CNN September 2002; CNN December 2002). From the Winter branch came the Australian-British activist and author, Ella Winter, my husband's mother (Winter 1968; Winter and Shapiro 1962). An outsider would be hard pressed to trace the family line through all the changes of names and countries. It is reminiscent of a well-known joke. Two immigrants meet. One says, 'What's your name?' The other tells his name, to which the first person replies by asking, 'What was it *before*?'

Pete's daughters were named by their Israeli mother. Daneet is the feminine form of Dan, which in Hebrew means 'judge'. Sivan is an early

summer month in the Hebrew calendar – chosen for its sound rather than its meaning, as Sivan was born in January.

Despite the vast cultural and geographical differences between Jewish Europe and North America and Inuit-dominated Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic, my experience of names and naming provided me with excellent preparation for the encounters with Inuit and their ways of naming. Like Ashkenazim (European Jews), Inuit prefer commemorative naming, treasure and honour the namesake connection, and when naming their children, usually choose names of relatives who are no longer living. The proscription against a living namesake is stronger for Ashkenazim – there are some Inuit (usually elders) who give their names to favoured people during their own lifetimes. Like Inuit, Ashkenazim see namesake relationships as a way of continuing people's lives. I have heard stories of survivors naming children for each relative who was killed in the Holocaust, not resting until every name was sent on its new life's journey. However, Inuit have taken the namesake relationship farther, to a sometimes literal version of reincarnation.

The parallels and similarities suggest why I may have felt so much at home on landing in a culture and country entirely unfamiliar. Before my first trip to what is now Nunavut I had never been to an Arctic or sub-Arctic place, or met Inuit, or learned more than a few words of Inuktitut (the dominant language in Nunavut). Certainly, it was a shock to feel comfortable among people who spoke an unfamiliar language, who lived in a region remote from Europe, southern Canada and the United States, and who on the surface had nothing in common with my own ancestry. But it was not only naming that brought us together. Even when specific comments had to be translated by an interpreter, the Inuit style of humour, laughter and body language felt like home.

## Language, Names and Power

The sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, says: 'There is no social agent who does not aspire ... to have the power to name and to create the world through naming' (Bourdieu 1991: 105). He calls 'official' naming 'a symbolic act of imposition [that makes] the state the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence' (ibid.: 239).

On the surface, naming is simply part of the process by which people classify their environment. The essential premise of this enquiry is that it is much more – that naming people and places is a political activity of universal significance. Naming has been studied primarily by psychologists, linguists and philosophers. The *politics of naming* has never been defined as such, but has existed between the lines of many disciplines. Anthropology, linguistics, political science, sociology and

cultural studies provide the foundation for political onomastics, the politics of naming. Onomasticians, also called onomatologists, increasingly address questions of power relations, though such questions remain on the margins of most work in onomastics. In some cases (e.g., Junghare 1975; Rennick 1969) issues of power are implied but not identified. Since the early 1980s, I have sought to move this inquiry forward, towards an understanding of naming cross-culturally as it embodies and creates relations of privilege and power. The research into archives and experiences – of Inuit and of immigrants in Canadian, U.S. and European diasporas – contributes to an understanding of the role of naming in political behaviour and political structures, and supports my contention that naming is inseparable from other political phenomena and is an important key to analysing power relations.

### *The Place of Names in Language*

The word ‘name’ appears in some form in all Indo-European languages. Considered more broadly, names themselves ‘are universal in language’ (Kramarae and Treichler 1988: 290). For Vygotsky, the moment at which a child discovers names for things is the turning point at which ‘speech begins to serve intellect’ (Vygotsky 1962: 43). Vygotsky saw words the way we now see DNA cells – as receptacles for the whole of information, with nuclei of names. As he put it, ‘A word is a microcosm of human consciousness’ (ibid.: 153). Nomenclature – the bestowing of names on individuals – has a long history. Pliny claimed that some ancient tribes were *anonymi* and Hook (1982: 8) considers it ‘barely possible that a few *anonymi* may still exist in remote corners of the world’. As we will see, there are instances in which names are withheld, in special circumstances or life stages. Such conjectures and instances notwithstanding, personal names appear in every known culture.

Claude Lévi-Strauss views names as both universal and elemental. ‘To say that a name is perceived as a proper name is to say that it is assigned to a level beyond which no classification is necessary ... [proper names] always remain on the margin of classification’ and represent the *quanta of signification* below which one no longer does any thing but point’ (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 215). He suggests a continuum between ‘the act of signifying’ and that of ‘pointing’, with each culture expressing and maintaining its own acceptable thresholds. Lévi-Strauss calls space ‘a society of named places’ and people ‘landmarks within the group’ (ibid.: 168) and discovers that personal and place names are interchangeable in some societies. His term ‘personified geography’ covers systems like that of the Yurok in California, in which place names sometimes replace personal names in daily use. The discussion of Inuit naming takes the matter further.

W.F.H. Nicolaïsen suggests that names embody at least the following levels of meaning: lexical – dictionary meaning; associative – the explanation for using the particular lexical or onomastic items in the naming process; and onomastic – the ‘meaning of a denotative name as a name’ (Nicolaïsen 1974: 104). Using this ‘threefold semantic tier’, Nicolaïsen calls naming ‘the process by which words become names by association’ (ibid.). John Algeo sees names as simply words used to call someone or something by. If, like Algeo, we understand names as mere linguistic artefacts minus any social, psychological or political context, a ‘strong’ or predictive theory is hard to come by. ‘Such onomastic theory as we can reasonably hope for is not likely to be a predictive theory’, but rather the ‘unscientific sort ... that offers a view of the field for onomatologists to work within’ (Algeo 1985: 142). This theoretical restriction relies on Algeo’s insistence on a shaky dichotomy between ‘science’ and ‘non-science’ and on his assumption that onomastics is no more than ‘a part of linguistics, albeit a part generally ignored by linguists’. Adhering to an archaic perception of ‘pure’ language, he fails to account for such fields as sociolinguistics and its offshoot of political linguistics. At the same time, he acknowledges that names may relate more closely to performance or speech action than do other aspects of language. He calls for an onomastic theory that can connect name invention and name use to other aspects of life, and help us to discover ‘such universals of naming as may exist’ (ibid.: 144).

It is my conviction that once names are placed in sociopolitical context, as speech *acts*, a predictive theory is possible. My own work concentrates on *naming* rather than *names* – the sociopolitical process rather than the linguistic product. The following chapters include material on place names, but aim primarily at understanding the political implications of personal names and naming practices through the case study of Inuit experiences in pre- and postcolonial Nunavut. As will be seen, especially in the material on Inuit naming, personal and place names are not always separable, nor is such separation always desirable. In many instances, especially in the case of colonisation-caused and liberation-caused name changes, personal and place name changes occur simultaneously.

My initial fascination with naming led to the discovery of a fierce interface between names and power which emerged even from politically ‘innocent’ data. This relationship is only marginally acknowledged in the disciplinary literatures. It resides in what Edwin and Shirley Ardener (Ardener 1977) call ‘p-structures’ and ‘s-structures’ – adaptations of Lévi-Strauss’s terms, ‘syntagmatic’ (ordinary language observable on the surface of everyday life) and ‘paradigmatic’ (sacred language that is buried under layers of meaning and practice) (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 211). ‘S-structures’ – surface structures – are most easily observable; ‘p-structures’ are what others have called ‘deep’ structure – a level at which



ideas that form a society's foundation may be concealed by ritual, custom and everyday practice. In any society, dominance can be measured by the relative discrepancy between p- and s-structures. Naming practices can shed new light on the overt and covert uses of power, and the relationships between dominant and subordinate (or what Shirley and Edwin Ardener call 'muted') groups (Ardener 1977).

Within the international onomastics community, a small but growing number of scholars are looking at ways in which naming reflects societal changes. Robert R.K. Herbert (1996) calls this extension of sociolinguistics 'dynamic onomastics', while Bertie (S.J.) Neethling calls it 'dynamic socio-onomastics' (Neethling 2005: 3). Because I am most interested in the link between naming and power relations, I call it 'political onomastics'.

## **Names and Power Relations**

In more than twenty years of interdisciplinary and international exploration, I have identified several propositions concerning names and power relations:

- Naming is universal. While it is true that unnamed places do exist, virtually all people are named or are in some way linked to the naming process. Even where a name is deliberately withheld, naming is central to the development of a person's conception of self.
- Name avoidance is a key expression of power relations and in some form or other appears to be common to all societies (Alia 1989). Avoidance taboos help to illuminate degrees of dominance and subordination. At the extreme, rules of avoidance can represent denial of power and symbolic death. An ostracised person whose name goes unspoken becomes a non-person. Conversely, a member of a subordinate group may be expected to show deference by avoiding the attention-getting device of using someone's name.
- Negative naming – the giving of 'ugly' or otherwise low-priority names – is a deliberate strategy for protecting a child or adult from harm and is often seen as a way of fooling evil spirits into leaving the person alone.
- Secret naming is also used protectively, especially where a culture is threatened or there are more direct threats of violence to individuals who resist absorption or assimilation into the dominant society. 'Underground naming' is a form of secret naming.
- Renaming during illness or danger occurs in many regions and cultures where dangers are rampant and life is fragile; Inuit use this practice extensively.
- Considering personal and place names, personal names are the most charged with power. This upholds, and is supported by, Lévi-Strauss's

observation that individuation is the 'final level of classification' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 172)

- Renaming for personal or political change: any substantial regime change or change of dominance and power is inevitably accompanied by changes to personal and place names. Taking control of naming is an important component of the process of assuming political power and is a fundamental part of social and political change. This kind of renaming can indicate either subjugation or liberation.
- The power to name is a politically charged power. The right to bestow names is a right which signifies that the namer has power. That said, it is not always the case that individuals who are given the right to bestow names are those most powerful in more general terms, across society. For example, women may be the namers and men the politicians or owners of property.

### *Would a Rose by Any Other Name Smell at All?*

Whether names are seen as mere labels, as *representations* of people, or as *people*, they are always central in defining identity. Along with a multitude of psychologists, Kenneth L. Dion (1983: 245), Muzafer Sherif and Hadley Cantril (1947) emphasise the link between name and sense of self. Gordon Allport (1961) goes so far as to call the name the focal point for the organisation of self-identity. The poet Goethe goes even farther to say that one's name equals one's self. 'A man's name is not like a cloak that merely hangs around him ... It's a perfectly fitting garment. It grows over him like his very skin. One cannot scrape and scratch at it without injuring the man himself' (Goethe, in Zabeeh 1968: 5). Whitney, on the other hand, lowers naming to a *classification* and *identification* convention. 'When a human being is born into the world, custom, founded in convenience, requires that he have a name; and those who are responsible for his existence furnish the required adjunct, according to their individual tastes, which are virtually a reflection of the community in which they live' (Whitney 1979: 135).

Bentham takes a similar approach to name-as-identifier. But his distress at the ramifications of naming hints at a naming-politics far deeper than he will admit.

... wherever a man sees a NAME he is led to figure to himself a corresponding object, of the reality of which the NAME is accepted by him, as it were of course, in the character of a CERTIFICATE. From this delusion, endless is the confusion, the error, the dissension, the hostility, that has been derived. (Bentham, in Bolinger 1980: 59)

Others see naming as an act of gaining *power over* something or someone, or of giving power *to* a person or an object. In the Old Testament, naming is very important to the Creation story. God creates man in His image, to be master over other creatures. 'And God said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth ..."' (Genesis 1: 24). Adam's likeness to God includes his role as namer, a symbolic part of Creation. 'And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast ... and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof' (Genesis 1: 24). Genesis clarifies man's power over woman by having Adam name Eve. 'And the man called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living' (Genesis 3: 15). As in the case of Eve, individuals gain as well as lose power through names. A child knows that her name distinguishes her from others; often, it is the first word she learns to spell or write. The child owns the name and, for a time, is likely to believe it is hers alone (Miller and Swift 1977: 2–3). Lévi-Strauss' extensive look at ethnographic naming literature (1966) is limited by his insistence on a name-as-classification bias. While class differences in naming systems are noted, he does not consider linking them to power relations or political structures. Thus, Lévi-Strauss is able to call personal and species names 'class indicators' as though 'class' had no connection to equality or inequality but existed only within a context of apolitical and cultural relativity. He is interested in the personality and the social role-related characteristics that accrue to totemic names, but not in the problem of who holds what kind of power.

All of these views suggest the difficulty of answering the question, 'Would a rose by any other name smell at all?' The proponents of *naming-as-creation* must answer in the negative, for how could an object recreated retain its former properties? The *classifiers* might find the rose's aroma subdued, limited or generalised to a vague sweetness identifiable only as odour of *flower*. The *name-as-power* thinkers might refer to the namer's right to own the rose's odour or alter it at will; or they might focus on the rose's right to assert its roseness, a power received from human namers.

The most extreme positions are held by P. Ziff and John Stuart Mill. Ziff insists that 'there is nothing in a proper name. It has information content but even so, it is all sound and if the sound is changed the name is changed' (Ziff, in Zabeeh 1968: 24). Ziff's assumption that language is *audible* ignores the existence and import of written language and the considerable abilities of deaf and non-speaking people to use language. If we follow his view to its logical conclusion, people who are hearing- or speaking-impaired would have no names, or would be 'owned' by those able to hear and speak. Alternatively, Mill sees personal and place names as 'meaningless marks' meant simply to distinguish people and things

from each other. As Ziff errs on the side of spoken and heard language, Mill errs on the side of inscription and ignores the existence of spoken language. Both ignore the language of gesture and the significance of naming behaviour. Zabeeh understands names and naming by observing uses and functions of proper names in comparison with other linguistic expressions, basing this on the Austin–Searle hypothesis that speech is action (Austin 1962; Searle 1970). The ‘speech acts’ principle is: ‘to say something is to *do* something (Austin 1962: 12). ‘I name’ is one of Austin’s exemplary ‘performatives’ – utterances that indicate action (ibid.: 56). The range and complexity of perspectives, which this summary only begins to sketch, indicates both the importance attached to names and the challenges to understanding naming across countries, regions, times and cultures.

### *Language, Name and Power*

Children discover their world with the help of naming: as soon as concepts are articulated, words identify objects. Other parts of speech, such as adjectives and verbs, apparently come later. In an ego-centred universe, proper nouns are all-important. The importance attached to naming is exemplified by familiar expressions:

*She has a name.* (She is famous.)

It is important to have a good name. (It is important to be virtuous.)

*He will carry on the family name.* (Children – most often males – provide continuity for family or clan through the symbol of the surname.)

*They named names.* (They revealed who was responsible, usually for something thought to be bad or shameful.)

*She made a name for herself.* (She transcended the limits of class or status to achieve something important or prestigious in the world.)

*They called him names.* (He was ridiculed or insultingly nicknamed).

Paolo Freire follows the Old Testament story of Adam’s discovery with a secularised version: ‘to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it ...’ (Freire, in Bell 1975: xii). Similarly, Dale Spender (1980: 163) considers naming a way of manipulating the world, while Goethe’s view that to injure the name is to injure the person has echoes in many locations and cultural traditions.

The formal and informal rules of naming help to clarify the ways in which political reality is shaped in a given society. The tendency to deny or ignore the naming mores within one’s own society is partly due to the taking-for-granted of daily life, but it also amounts to a kind of avoidance

taboo. In a surge of political idealism Nancy Parrot Hickerson, a linguistic anthropologist, declares that everyone in the United States 'can claim an inalienable right to freedom of choice in naming the baby' (Hickerson 1980: 131). Farther out on the same limb, she says that in North America, names are chosen with no restrictions of any kind, most often on the basis of 'personal taste'. To make this claim she must ignore an array of formal and informal rules that govern the selection of appropriate names and avoidance of inappropriate names in Canada and the U.S.A., nationally and additionally in the various Canadian provinces and American states. Her own observation that Americans select from a very limited name repertoire contradicts her position – she finds that about a dozen men's and about twenty women's names predominate, with about six million 'Johns' and four million 'Marys' (ibid.: 131). In fact, there is no evidence to support Hickerson's thesis. North Americans follow many naming rules, some of them specified by law and others by custom. While the attitude is not set out formally in law, there are strong undercurrents to support the widespread, cross-culturally observable view that naming a child and giving the child life are closely connected.

In many cultures a child is not considered human or alive until named, and often is not named until expected to survive.

At birth a child is nothing – neither Tsimihety, nor kinsman, nor human being. Its only identity is male or female, and an 'event' marked by an arbitrary name such as place of birth if this was unusual, or an object present at the birth ... If the child dies during the period between birth and the cutting of the first tooth 'it is buried without ceremony somewhere in the bush', without having received a permanent name. (Wilson, in Skinner 1973: 267)

The Imbonggu of New Guinea do not name a child for several months after birth. It is referred to and addressed as *wambiri*, meaning 'child' or 'infant'. The child demonstrates its humanity at six to eight months, by showing that it 'knows people', and the father then bestows the first personal name (Wormsley 1980: 184). Thus, while the Imbonggu consider a newborn child human, it is placed in a generic category, more 'flower' than 'rose'. Among the North Australian Tiwi, naming is even more directly linked to survival.

Some fathers gave the first name when the infant sat up by itself, and still others waited until the day when the infant stood or even walked. In the words of one informant, 'If I name him before, he might die and name no good'. (Goodale 1971: 32)

The avoidance of early naming is by no means universal. In some cultures a child must have a name, *especially* if it is expected to die. In this instance, the child must be named in order to be protected from dying

soulless. In one study, nurses in a hospital in Toronto, Canada reported a long-standing tradition of naming fragile infants so that they would not die nameless (Embleton 1983).

In some instances adoption is an occasion to rename a child, with the birth name seen as only a temporary stopgap. In John Irving's novel, *The Cider House Rules*, the orphans who find permanent homes are renamed to signify their rebirth and express respect for their adoptive families.

Dr Larch made it a firm policy that the orphans' adoptive families *not* be informed of the names the nurses gave with such zeal. The feeling at St. Cloud's was that a child, upon leaving the orphanage, should know the thrill of a fresh start ... (Irving 1985: 2)

Some Inuit report a similar kind of name-changing when a child is 'adopted out', a term used to refer to what Inuit call 'custom adoption' to distinguish it from state-sponsored legal adoption (1984–2006). According to Inuit custom, adoptions are part of everyday life. They often have less to do with need than with the view that a family is complete only with children. Adults of any age are 'given' children and it is not uncommon for elders to parent young children. Unlike government-sponsored legal adoption, Inuit 'custom adoption' is transparent in all directions, with children not only aware of their birth parents, but free to move fluidly between their birth and adoptive families in their daily lives.

Renaming occurs not only in cases of adoption, but in numerous other instances. It is important on many levels, in every culture I have studied. Where a new name cancels the old, the child (or adult) effectively becomes a new person. The adoptee gains both new status and new life. The American orphan who (like Irving's protagonist Homer Wells) must keep his nurse-given name throughout life, is doomed to live outside the normative family structure. Homer Wells gets a chance to demonstrate that such an individual may also transcend status limitations. Although Homer keeps his orphanage name, he also *makes* a name for *himself*. 'Whether a name is self-chosen or bestowed at birth, making it one's own is an act of self-definition' (Miller and Swift 1977). While names contribute to, or create self-definition, they do not universally designate or represent gender. We see this most clearly in the naming practices of Inuit, where the Inuktitut language provides neither gendered names nor pronouns. In New Guinea, native North America and Polynesia, gender-anomalous individuals are culturally recognised and sometimes accorded special honours. Some cultures designate several sexes (Ortner and Whitehead 1981). Even where 'male' and 'female' are clearly delineated categories, naming does not necessarily follow those categories. Again, this is the case in Inuit society, in which many kinds of gender roles are sharply identified but naming does not follow the gendered categories.

## The Political Onomastics of Shakespeare

In Shakespeare's Verona, as in many other societies, a person's name immediately identified friend or foe. Loyalties were kinship clear, biologically based and socially enforced. Shakespeare is one of the most articulate challengers of the ethic of the family feud, a mini-war whose clearest symbol is the name. *Romeo and Juliet* opens on 'two households, both alike in dignity'. Montagues and Capulets fight for names' sake only, having long since lost the reasons for their feuding. "Deny thy father and refuse thy name", says Juliet; "Ties but thy name that is my enemy. Thou art thyself ...". She sees at least the clan or family name as extraneous, but never suggests that Romeo give up his given name – his deeper sense of self. Shakespeare has a keen sense of a cross-culturally observable pattern. Clues to how a person is to be perceived and treated often come from names, and sometimes survival itself depends on concealing or changing them. Cultural and political changes go hand in hand. Like the Veronese, Americans have sometimes rejected German, Japanese, Russian and other names simply because of the 'enemy' categories they represented. Names have been rejected or devalued (and people with them) because they sounded 'Jewish'. Often the label is mistakenly applied to 'Jewish-sounding' names. An Oregon court case concerning discrimination against entrepreneurs with 'Jewish-sounding' names indicates that the problem still exists (Graber 1986).

Living with a pet name and a good name, in a place where such distinctions do not exist – surely that was emblematic of the greatest confusion of all ... (Lahiri 2004: 118)

Immigrants with 'different' (long, non-English or otherwise unusual) names sometimes change them. The study of Inuit in Nunavut provides a prime example of layers of name-changing under social and political pressure. The ultimate naming nightmare is expressed in F.M. Esfandiary's novel *Identity Card* (Esfandiary 1966). Protagonist Daryoush Aryana loses his official card in his native Iran, and is denied identity by the state. However he *says* his name, he is granted no existence without the document. He remains without a country, trapped *inside* his country. What a person is called affects more than the sense of self. It can cause, create or control a world view. It can dictate whom to love or marry, who not to love, marry or associate with. And as Shakespeare so poignantly demonstrates, it can lead the individual from personal concerns to family feud, war and death.

Names can control relationships, work and the ability to integrate one's personal history into present and future. The politics of naming is not merely a politics on the psychological level, expressing personality

and power in the smaller social order. It is a macro-politics affecting legal structures and the operations of governments and transgovernmental agencies. I have failed to locate a nation that has not passed formal legislation to regulate its citizens' naming practices. This exploration of political onomastics, or politics of naming, concentrates on the impact of large-scale politics and policy, with a focus on the experience of one cultural community – the Inuit of the Canadian Eastern Arctic who reside in what, since 1999, has been called Nunavut Territory. The research is aimed at developing an integrative, interdisciplinary approach that acknowledges the enormous social and political significance of names and naming practices.

Chapter 1 explores the importance of names in Inuit culture, surveying traditional kinship and naming practices and perspectives of Inuit in Nunavut, southern Canada, Greenland, Alaska and Scotland, based on interviews conducted from 1984 to 2004. Chapter 2 looks at the history of visitors' interference with Inuit identity and considers the impact of missionaries, traders, police, government representatives, scientists, explorers and tourists. Chapter 3 surveys the mass renaming programme known as Project Surname, drawing on oral histories and interviews and historical data from public archives, private collections, Inuit and government agencies and organisations. Chapter 4 presents a brief political history of Nunavut and a compendium of contemporary perspectives on names and identity, in the light of recent and current efforts towards cultural revival in the Inuit homeland of Nunavut. Chapter 5 considers views of homeland and diaspora as they relate to name, identity and power. It examines how the Nunavut case study can inform a theory of political onomastics and looks at the Nunavut experience in the broader context of the experiences of other cultures and regions, and of international trends towards recognising cultural diversity.

Citing the work of Wassermann and Jacobs (2003), Neethling reminds us 'that identity is a journey, not a destination' (Neethling 2005: 75). And now, I invite you to join me in a journey to the Canadian Arctic.