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Differential Responses to Constraints on Naming Agency among Indigenous Peoples and Immigrants in Canada

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Author Biography

Karen Pennesi is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario. Her research explores how language plays an integral part in the construction of individual and group identities. She is currently investigating how personal names influence self-perception and how social inequalities are manifest in the treatment of different kinds of names.

Abstract

This article illuminates the social structures and relations that shape agency for members of two marginalized groups in Canada and examines how individuals respond differently to constraints on their power to name themselves and their children. Constraints on spelling, structure and choice of name are framed according to the particular positions of indigenous peoples and immigrants in relation to European settler society as either 'original inhabitants' or 'recent arrivals'. These historically unequal power relations are manifest in intertwined ideologies of language, identity and nation, evident in ethnographic interviews, media reports and online commentary. Differential responses include resistance, endurance and assimilation. Keywords: agency; names; immigration; indigenous; Canada; media

1. Agency and Naming

One way to see how agency is constructed and negotiated in language is to consider the degree of flexibility an individual has in doing what they want to do with names. Contexts where one set of naming constraints is applied to names originating from different naming traditions make conflicting ontologies of names visible and create rich opportunities for mapping out the sociopolitical positions from which people negotiate and enact naming agency. Following Ahearn (2001), I define agency as the capacity to act within the constraints of sociocultural mediating forces, where 'acts' are specified as those related to names. Naming agency takes various forms, such as the power or freedom to:

- *choose* an appropriate name for oneself or another person
- *bestow* or impose a name on someone, thereby inscribing an identity or relationship
- ensure the proper use, pronunciation and spelling of a name by others in a form of *stewardship* so that the name endures and is respected
- *change* or alter a person's existing name to achieve a specific purpose or wish

Through an examination of three cases, I illuminate how cultural forces and sociopolitical systems of power mediate the enactment of different forms of individual agency in specific contexts surrounding personal names. I compare how agents have more or less flexibility (Kockelman 2007) in using names as the means for achieving their desired ends, and how naming agents are subject to praise or blame for particular (sometimes imagined) outcomes. As Bucholtz observes, 'It is particularly at the borders where ethnoracialized groups come into contact that names become sites of negotiation and struggle over cultural difference, linguistic autonomy, and the right to self-definition' (2016:275). This negotiation is evident in current language ideologies, discourses and naming practices found in the ethnographic interviews, media reports and online commentary that comprise my data sets. I present an analysis of the complex contexts in which immigrants and indigenous people in Canada find their naming practices are constrained by governments, institutions, businesses, and public opinion as part of a broader push toward linguistic assimilation of these groups. I argue that the discursive construction of indigenous people as 'original inhabitants' and immigrants as 'recent arrivals' in relation to the dominant, European settler society leads to different understandings of agency and how it can effectively be enacted by members of each group. The three cases demonstrate how individuals negotiate this sociopolitical positioning and enact different forms of agency by resisting, enduring or adapting to naming constraints.

2. Data and Methodology

The first two cases are ethnographic accounts of naming troubles based on my interviews with adult immigrants to London, Ontario, Canada. These interviews were recorded between 2012 and 2014 as part of a larger study on names and identity in Canada. Case 1 is about an Indonesian man who has only a single name component (i.e. a mononym), which has caused him difficulties in interactions with Canadians. Case 2 is about an Iranian man who changed his name when he immigrated to Canada and who gave his sons English names. Working from the transcribed interviews, I summarize each of the stories and include verbatim quotes from the transcripts where these are analytically significant. Supplementary information has been added from existing literature. Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality but correspond to the gender, ethnicity and language of the original names in keeping with the

analytical points I am making.

Case 3 is about an indigenous woman in Canada who is pursuing a legal fight to have her daughter's name written in Chipewyan characters on her birth certificate. The data for this case comes mainly from a set of online news articles posted between 6-12 March 2015 by major Canadian news sources (CBC News, *Maclean's* magazine, *The Toronto Star* and Northern News Services Online), and a radio interview on CBC Radio's *As It Happens* in the same period. To get a sense of public discourses surrounding naming agency in Canada, the data set also includes 743 comments posted by readers of those stories and posts to the social media platform, Twitter, found with the search term 'Chipewyan baby name'. Nearly all of the Twitter posts contained a link to the original CBC News story and many also included other comments. Comments that did not explicitly address the naming issue were excluded, such as simple statements of support (e.g. 'You go girl!') and those that merely criticized authors of previous comments (e.g. pointing out grammatical mistakes or *ad hominem* attacks not related to the story). While all comments were analyzed, only representative examples are presented here. Comments are reproduced verbatim including all errors, spacing and punctuation. Underlining has been added to indicate text emphasized in the analysis. Comments have been anonymized; they are identified with numbers and the news source where they appeared.

All three cases provide interpretations of individual choices and circumstances. Since the two cases about immigrants' names (1 and 2) make reference to assumptions made in interactions with Canadians and especially people in powerful roles, I have included the media stories and related online comments that comprise Case 3 to allow for an analysis of public discourses surrounding names, immigrants and indigenous peoples. I take the beliefs, values and understandings articulated in these public discourses to be representative of those which influenced the thoughts, feelings and actions of the immigrants described in the first two cases. In other words, newcomers to Canada are made aware of their own position in existing social hierarchies and of expectations about names through things they hear others say about them or others. Examining media representations and public commentary about names helps illuminate the ideologies that underlie the discourses and social structures they refer to in their own stories. I recognize the limitations of including online comments which are essentially anonymous, as commenters use pseudonyms for their user names. There is no information reliably provided about age, gender, region of origin or other potentially important variables, aside from what is mentioned by the writer in the post. My aim in including these comments is to describe some common discourses circulating among Canadians as a way to better understand the context in which naming agency is negotiated.

In the following sections I describe each of the three cases, paying attention to ontologies of names and constructions of agency in different political and cultural contexts. I then demonstrate how the agency of immigrants and indigenous people, and the constraints they face, are framed in different ways in public discourses and in media representations of these groups. I conclude with a summary of how agency, identity and naming are intertwined in discourse.

3. Case 1: A Man with One Name

Najmuddin is an Indonesian man from Java with a single given name and no surname.

Mononyms are common among the various naming structures found in ethnolinguistically diverse Indonesia (Rony, 1970), especially among Javanese. Well-known examples include the former presidents of Indonesia, Sukarno and Suharto. Another common practice is for an individual to have two or three given names and no family name. In Indonesia, children are rarely named after other family members or friends; the preference is to create unique names or choose unique name combinations for new family members. For example, Dick Van der Meij (2010) notes that names in Indonesia are often created by adding suffixes to existing names or words, as well as through other morphological and lexical processes that may blend elements from different languages and ethnic or religious naming traditions. Najmuddin means 'star of the faith/religion' and the suffix *-uddin* makes it a recognizably Arabic name of the type commonly given to Indonesian Muslims. Indonesian wives and husbands retain their own names after marriage and family names are optional, so individual members of a family unit may not share any name components at all. Therefore, names are both highly individual and enduring identifiers among Indonesians.

The outcome of these productive name-creation processes is a large number of unique given names in Indonesia. The variation in name structure and in name form results in given names being used as primary identifiers for distinguishing among individuals. For example, Indonesian directories tend to organize entries by given name, rather than by surname. In contrast to the common Canadian practice of choosing names that sound good to parents (see any baby naming discussion online), Indonesian names are not thought to be merely pleasant-sounding labels. Much more than a term of individual reference, names usually 'convey a kind of message, or a kind of hope or expectation for the newborn child...a child's name is the shortest and most persistent mantra its parents utter over it in order to help it through life' (Van der Meij, 2010:347). Names hold such importance that 'if the 'mantra' fails and the child often becomes ill or is otherwise unsuccessful in life, its name is often changed for another in the hope to reverse unhappy conditions' (Ibid). Significantly, this renaming is initiated by the parents and happens when the individual is still a child, not in adulthood. Thus, bestowing names happens in childhood and by adulthood, the name-as-message has been established in relation to a particular individual. In ontological terms, Indonesian names are both reference labels and invocations. The greatest degree of naming agency is exercised when choosing and bestowing a name on one's child, while agency related to one's own name is limited to stewardship.

In an interview, I learn that when Najmuddin visited Canada in the past, he was always detained at the security check because his passport showed that he has no last name. Najmuddin does not understand why the security officers held him for one or two hours to verify his identity when he had already obtained a visa from the Canadian embassy in Jakarta. He reasons that if there was a problem, he would not have received the visa. The Canadian officers do not seem to trust their own process. Sometimes he missed his connecting flights or was separated from his travelling companions due to the delays at security. Aside from the frustration with being held up needlessly, Najmuddin is indignant that the officers treated him with such suspicion, accusing him of some mysterious wrong-doing with their unstated question: 'Who are you with no last name?' Surely the security officers must have encountered mononyms before with so many planes arriving from Indonesia each week. Once he immigrated to Canada, Najmuddin was required to have a last name on his

Canadian identification documents. Since he had none, the Canadian officer filled in the form with 'Najmuddin' in both the first and last name fields. Najmuddin finds this double name ridiculous and it still causes him trouble, provoking questions and suspicious looks when he has to show his identification or state his full name.

In this institutional context, names are only treated as reference labels. Under Canadian law, federal, provincial and territorial governments have the power to impose constraints on the names of citizens and other persons who enter the country. James Scott et al. (2002) describe how standardizing the structure of names (e.g. given name, middle name, surname) makes individuals 'legible' to the state, ensuring that they can be identified, registered, located, taxed and governed. Legal identities are tied to the establishment of permanent personal names, especially surnames which endure through generations. Thus, the immigration officer could not authorize Najmuddin's single name on Canadian identification documents because according to Canada's procedures for establishing name records individuals must have a family name as the primary identifier to facilitate future name searches (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013:17). The officers, constrained in their institutional roles, are obliged to follow the authorized naming conventions of Canada when processing Najmuddin's documents despite whatever personal ethnolinguistic knowledge they may have about the use of given names in Indonesia. At the same time, the system of power that defines Najmuddin as an immigrant, affords the officer the capacity to change Najmuddin's name to comply with regulations. At the individual level, the officer's act of bestowing a surname limited Najmuddin's capacity as an agent of stewardship for his own name.

While accepting the double name allowed Najmuddin to achieve his immigration goal, he remains troubled that it is not his proper name and it has provoked ridicule in other situations. Whether using his single or double name, Najmuddin continually has to explain his unusual name to prove his legitimacy as a person in Canada. Being detained and questioned by security makes him feel guilty, as if he is trying to hide his identity. He is embarrassed in front of his travelling companions when he is singled out and he apologizes for causing them trouble or worry. In his own interpretation, the airport security officers and others who demand explanations and give him suspicious looks are passing judgement as if he has broken the law with his inadequate name. Repeated encounters such as these, in which his 'un-Canadian' name prompts people to make comments and inquiries about his family, nationality, religion, and political views, make it clear that he does not belong in Canada. This undermines his self-esteem and reduces his capacity to freely express his own identity. Despite not having chosen his own name at birth, Najmuddin's status as an immigrant makes him an agent in his process of rebirth in the new country. The expectation of adaptation and assimilation behind government policy and public discourse (to be explored below) rests on the understanding that immigrants are agents responsible for their own success and this involves learning the languages, values and ways of doing things in mainstream Canadian society (Abu-Laban, 1998). In Najmuddin's case the implication is that assimilation includes altering his name, as many other immigrants have done. But it is inconceivable for Najmuddin to change his name. He explains that he has only one name which his parents bestowed upon him with their hopes and best wishes for him to have a good life; he sees no reason to change it. That is, he continues to see his name as an invocation and not simply as a

reference label. For Najmuddin, the trouble is not his name but the new system of regulation in which his name is being interpreted. As an individual and a newcomer there is little Najmuddin can do to change his documents and the responses it evokes. Since he will not voluntarily change his name, he simply endures the bothersome situation.

4. Case 2: Who is going to give them a job?

Dariush, an immigrant from Iran, told me that since coming to Canada thirty years ago he has noticed how important names are and how they can relate to a person's success. He talked about his friend Hashim, a Muslim Iranian who also immigrated to Canada about twenty years ago. Hashim had four sons who he named Joseph, William, Michael and Adam. When Dariush asked Hashim why he gave them English names, he said, 'Well, because if I name them Ali Hashim Amir, who is going to give them a job?' Dariush explained Hashim's reasoning that having a name which marked him as both foreign and Muslim had hindered his search for employment and that he didn't want his sons to have the same trouble if he followed the Muslim practice of giving them Arabic names or even common Persian names like Amir or Hassan. For example, Dariush recalled that one time he had talked to someone about giving Hashim a job. When Hashim did not get the job after the interview, the employer told Dariush: 'His English is good, his French is good. He is very fluent. But you know what? His name is Hashim. I cannot put him in front of the customer.' Hashim later decided to go by the name Harold and now everyone calls him Harold, even other Iranian-Canadians.

When choosing names for his sons in Canada, Hashim was constrained by social prejudices with economic consequences in a hierarchical hiring system which positions non-whites, non-Christians and foreign-born applicants at the bottom. Dariush's revoicing of Hashim's question, 'Who is going to give them a job?' and of the employer who said he could not 'put him in front of the customer' expresses the belief that employers would be prejudiced against people with names that marked them as Muslims, Middle-Eastern or non-whites. In fact, others I interviewed with Arabic names (religious affiliation and nationality varied) also reported difficulties in getting hired despite their education and experience. Moreover, studies have shown that candidates with foreign-sounding names are indeed called less frequently for job interviews in major Canadian cities (Eid, 2012; Oreopoulos and Dechief, 2011), while Muslims in Canada experience and perceive discrimination associated with both ethnic group membership and religious affiliation (Litchmore and Safdar, 2014). In choosing common English names for his sons, Hashim wanted to create conditions for them to be read as Canadian-born, possibly to pass as white, or at least not to be instantly marked as Muslim.

This case brings up the question of what it means to name someone in different sociopolitical frameworks. Following Iranian custom, Hashim had the power as their father to choose his sons' names. Dariush explained that Iranian-Canadians tend to choose Arabic or Persian names with positive meanings. Inventing names is uncommon and English names which are homophones of words unsuitable for people are also avoided (e.g. Jack > car jack). Within the institutionalized contexts of birth registration and hiring, a name works primarily as a label to identify a particular individual among others. But institutions are embedded in cultural contexts and Hashim knew that some names would label his sons in more desirable ways than others. Since his children were born in Canada and would grow up there, Hashim

restricted his choice to a set of popular English Canadian names in the hopes that this would increase their economic opportunities. Thus, the mediating forces of both Iranian and Canadian culture constrained Hashim's agency in the form of restricting his choice of names for his sons. In this way, Hashim's understanding of his own agency emphasized responsibility over freedom of choice to mark his children as members of his religious or ethnic group.

Hashim's renaming of himself was performative as it created a new relationship between him and other Canadians (including his sons who also had English names) as well as between him and other Iranian immigrants. While this strategy of privileging what Diane Dechief (2015) calls the 'quotidian audience' seems to have worked to help Hashim find employment and fulfill his responsibility to provide for his family, his name shift did not meet with the approval of the traditional audience—other Iranians—who interpreted it as a distancing move. Dariush told me, 'It's hard for me to call someone Harold that I knew for more than thirty years as Hashim. All of a sudden his name is Harold. It's hard to remember each time... When you change your name it has a double edge. You might be accepted by Canadian white society but your own community will not appreciate that.' Richard Alford's observation is useful here:

When members of insider and outsider groups mix, naming systems may collide. The most frequent response is for members of the outsider group to accommodate, in some way, to the naming system of the insiders.... Of course, members of an outsider group may refuse to accommodate to an insider naming system, and in this way express their more general unwillingness to redefine their identity (Alford, 1988:119).

Dariush interpreted his friend's willingness to redefine his identity by adopting the name Harold as a move to align himself more with Canadians than with the Iranian community. And according to Dariush, Hashim's Canadian name was also accompanied by more 'Canadian behaviour' which met with disapproval among the Iranian community. For Dariush, a man's agency consists in choosing and bestowing names on his children as he sees fit, and in acting as a steward for his own name to carry on the connection it establishes to family, to culture and to country. His agency should not extend to changing the name and identity that has already been established. Nonetheless, Dariush and everyone else respected Hashim's request and began to call him Harold. When I asked Dariush whether he considered changing his own name, which is a common Persian boy's name and one historically used by Persian emperors, Dariush replied:

I lost my home. I lost my family members. My family members [were] killed. Our home burned. Our money was taken. We ran away like thieves, like criminals from the country [to escape religious persecution for practising the Baha'i faith rather than Islam]. And you want- and I have to change my name from Dariush to- to Peter? No. Bullying myself? No. I'm not going to blend that much because it's a gift of my father and my father was thinking to give me a status as someone who loves Iran. I'm not going to betray my father. So I didn't change the name Dariush.

For Dariush, the strong ties to family, culture and nationality associated with his name prevented him from adopting a new name to fit into a new society. He had already lost everything; he was not prepared to give up his name, too. Changing his name would erase

his Persian identity and be a betrayal of his father as well as a rejection of the gift of his name. In ontological terms, Persian names are gifts which are detachable from personhood and which can be passed on or put aside.

The divergence of opinion between Dariush and Hashim, two men from the same ethnic and national (but not religious) background, shows how the criteria for determining a name's appropriateness vary according to circumstance. Naming is one aspect of the continual negotiation of belonging to multiple communities in which all immigrants engage. Or as Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2009:11) put it in their discussion of the discursive production of migrant identities, 'migration remains a unique and subjective experience that resists generalization.' This case also demonstrates how agency is negotiated at an individual level rather than categorically predetermined.

5. Case 3: A Chipewyan Baby Name

In March 2015, a story about a baby girl born in Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT) made the news and set off a flurry of public commentary for a few weeks. At issue was the letter used to represent the glottal stop in the name the baby's parents had chosen: Sahaiʔa. The name is Chipewyan (a Dene language) and the Chipewyan writing system¹ uses some symbols derived from the International Phonetic Alphabet, including the glottal stop (ʔ). Officials at the Northwest Territories Vital Statistics office explained that the letter for the glottal stop could not be represented on the birth certificate because the government's computers and printers did not have the technical capacity to do so. All names registered had to be spelled using the Roman alphabet. This is another example of state-imposed standardization of names, but unlike Najmuddin in the first case, Sahaiʔa's mother, Shene Catholique-Valpy, took actions to resist what she believed to be an unfair constraint on her agency. Shene argued that since Chipewyan is one of the eleven official languages recognized by the NWT, the government should find a way to print the name according to the traditional spelling. Refusing to submit an alternative spelling using a hyphen in place of the glottal stop, Shene could not get a birth certificate or an identification card for her daughter to receive government-paid health insurance. After a year of paying the baby's medical expenses out of pocket and losing out on tax credits for dependent children, Shene finally gave in and registered Sahaiʔa's name with a hyphen. Meanwhile, making use of the resources available to her as a territorial resident and a member of a First Nation, Shene filed an official complaint with the NWT Languages Commissioner and pursued the matter through legal channels. She also reached out for public support through social media, posting an invitation for others facing similar issues to contact her on Facebook, as well as through traditional media, granting several interviews for radio and print stories. To bring further attention to the case, Shene even welcomed the opportunity to speak with an anthropologist (the author) in a phone interview during the preparation of this article in 2018.

Shene was able to effectively mobilize other actors in both social and institutional

¹ Currently, there is no single standard orthography for Chipewyan, also called Dëne Sų́łné. The language has contrasting nasal vowels as well as high and low tones which are marked with diacritics in most alphabets. As a Chipewyan language learner, Shene was unaware of the diacritics until after the news stories were published in 2015. Therefore, I focus only on the glottal stop in this article because it was the subject of the news stories. Shene now spells her daughter's name Saháíʔa.

arenas. After two years and a ruling from the NWT's Languages Commissioner that the territorial government is obligated to issue birth certificates in official aboriginal languages (Anselmi, 2015), Bill 5 was introduced to allow Dene, Inuit and Cree characters to be used on identification documents issued by the NWT government (Bird, 2016). The legislation was passed and the Vital Statistics Act was amended in July 2017; however, the section allowing indigenous spellings is not in force (Strong, 2017). According to the Registrar General, Vital Statistics of NWT's Department of Health and Social Services, this is 'due to the complexities involving required changes to existing electronic systems and to ensure clients are not adversely impacted in terms of eligibility to receive other federal and territorial services.' In her estimation, 'it could be a number of years before the Indigenous characters can be implemented on certificates' (Jenetta Day, personal communication, 25 May 2018). Meanwhile, the NWT's Languages Commissioner recommended that a single standardized orthography for Aboriginal Official Languages be developed to create better conditions for implementing the proposed change (Gullberg, 2017).

Shene's capacity to officially bestow a name on her child is still constrained by the NWT government which does not allow her to spell her daughter's name using the Chipewyan glottal stop letter on the birth certificate. This spelling restriction becomes meaningful as a constraint on name choice when we consider that names are tangible signs of membership in a particular group (Alford, 1988; Pina-Cabral, 2012). In this case, giving her daughter a Chipewyan name creates a visible and audible connection to the cultural and linguistic heritage of the child and to herself as name-giver. While the name Sahaiʔa can be spelled and pronounced in the Chipewyan way in unofficial contexts, the restrictions on the orthographic representation of the name for the legal birth registration means that the baby's name is written 'incorrectly' and is not authentically Chipewyan, according to Shene. Since Shene is not a fluent speaker of Chipewyan, she consulted with her mother who contributed to the preparation of the Chipewyan dictionary. She chose a name with a 'powerful' meaning that would be unique for her child and which also had a good sound. Chipewyan names are composed of everyday words or phrases in the language, which allows for less variation in spelling. Without the glottal stop, the name loses its meaning ('the sun just as it breaks over the horizon or breaks through the clouds'), thus negating the reason for choosing it in the first place. It is more than simply a question of alternative spelling or modified pronunciation. The name Sahaiʔa brings her into a relationship with her Chipewyan community and culture. By giving her daughter a Chipewyan name, Shene wanted to instill in her a sense of pride as an indigenous woman. As Shene told an interviewer on CBC Radio's *As It Happens*, 'I have a traditional name. My name is Chipewyan. So it was important for me to pass this on to my daughter' (CBC Radio, 2015).

The ideological connections between spelling, identity, authority and correctness embedded in discourses surrounding the representation of the Chipewyan glottal stop on NWT birth certificates are reminiscent of Suzanne Romaine's analysis of debates over how the glottal stop in Hawaiian place names should be represented. Romaine (2002:191) observes that 'within the context of ongoing struggles to give minority languages and speakers increased status... spelling comes to have moral and political investments.' She notes that as certain orthographic choices are associated with different sources of authority (e.g. school versus church), 'individual symbols function as material objects invested with particular social

values in local political economies' (Romaine, 2002:192). In both the Chipewyan and the Hawaiian cases, the correct spelling of the glottal stop with its distinct symbol is a visible marker of a language resistant to English influence and of the named person or place as belonging to a particular cultural group.

If changing the spelling is tantamount to changing the name, then the government's limitation on the allowable spelling of names restricts not only the choice of possible names but also the set of languages that can be used to create names. This makes evident the language ideology prevalent in Canadian law which values English and French more than indigenous languages even when they have official status, as well as the power structure which affords more agency to users of those dominant languages. Shene acknowledged that for practical purposes, such as obtaining a passport or other identification documents issued outside the NWT, her daughter's name would have to have an additional, alternative conventional spelling. Nonetheless, it was important to her that the birth certificate have the correct Chipewyan spelling. The birth certificate is the one document where having the traditional Chipewyan spelling is the most significant for Shene because she says it represents her daughter's true identity (c.f. Pina-Cabral 2010). As she noted, until Sahai?a is issued a birth certificate, 'she doesn't exist' in the eyes of the government (Leonard, 2015). Shene framed the constraint on name spelling in terms of language rights, arguing that she should have the right to name her daughter in Chipewyan because it is an official language of the NWT. She said in a radio interview (CBC Radio, 2015) that she wanted to have the Chipewyan spelling on the birth certificate in particular:

because we went home [from Alberta to the NWT] to have our little baby so we could have these type of rights, so that they are from the NWT and that's where we're from, born and raised so we figured we should be able to have our daughter's name spelled traditionally, if there's eleven official languages in the NWT

Many readers who commented on the news stories online shared the belief that having a language officially recognized is supposed to increase the agency of its speakers, enabling them to use the language in all official contexts. The best example is the following comment, posted after the original story by CBC News, which received 97 'likes' by other readers.

- (1) It's in Chipewyan, and it is an official language of the NWT. The appropriate spelling of the kid's name should be available on all documentation issued by the territorial government. (CBC 1:11)

The argument that Chipewyan's status as an official language of the NWT means that all government documents, including birth certificates, should be available in that language prompts questions about what an 'official language' is. According to the NWT Languages Commissioner (2018), official languages may be used in the Legislative Assembly, in court and in translations of official legal notices. Government services may be provided in these languages only where 'sufficient demand' warrants. This means that collectively, speakers of official languages only become more powerful agents when there are a sufficient number of them grouped together to reverse the cost-benefit ratio that constrains certain actions. But 'sufficient' is never specifically quantified and 'demand' is not defined. There are currently fewer than 600 speakers of Chipewyan in the NWT, ranking it fifth out of nine official indigenous languages in the territory (Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The

Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com) classifies the status of Chipewyan as 'threatened', meaning that the number of users is decreasing despite the language being used in face-to-face communication by members of all generations. It must be noted, however, that the Ethnologue data includes language users in provinces outside the NWT, where most of the younger speakers are found. In fact, only a small number of children are learning Chipewyan in the NWT and about 77% of speakers are over 40 years old (Northwest Territories, 2010:32). Shene's experience is representative: she reported that she does not know any fluent Chipewyan speakers in her generation. While some commenters used this low number to support the argument for efficiency in government which justifies the spelling constraint for names on birth certificates, others suggested that giving children Chipewyan names and using the language in official documents is one way to increase collective agency as it bolsters the value and viability of Chipewyan. Both of these arguments acknowledge the current disadvantaged position and minority status of indigenous languages and indigenous peoples in Canada; however, only the second one conceives of indigenous agency as a capacity with potential for change which merits government's investment and support. Shene explained that one of her motivations for giving her daughter a Chipewyan name was to help preserve the language: 'It's important for us to have strong names for our children...It should be recognized throughout Canada. It should be everywhere. This is our homeland and this is our opportunity to rebuild our languages for everyone' (Bird, 2016).

The Official Languages Act (R.S.N.W.T., 1988, c.O-1) states that the NWT government is 'committed to the preservation, development and enhancement of the Aboriginal languages' and believes 'that the legal protection of languages will assist in preserving the culture of the people as expressed through their language'. In the popular interpretation illustrated in the quotes below, indigenous languages (including words used as names) are part of indigenous identities. Therefore, respect for the cultural identity of indigenous peoples includes respect for their languages and their names.

- (2) And another fine example of how we disrespect our First Nations people. Bad enough that they were forced into residential schools for hundreds of years and now they won't even allow a letter to be used. Shame on Canada. (CBC 1:22)
- (3) For Arok Wolvengrey, head of the indigenous languages department at the First Nations University of Canada in Regina, these stories aren't surprising, and point to the ways Aboriginal languages are under threat. 'The decision not to allow the proper representation of their children's name is a serious insult,' he says. 'This is another example of the dual messages governments often send. They say they respect our official languages, but that's definitely not how it plays out in practice. For many people who no longer speak these languages, this is the only way they can preserve their ancestry.' (Maclean's, 2015)
- (4) 'I would absolutely love to see the changes implemented so the traditional names can be spelled properly and they don't have to be compromised,' she said. 'I think it's a part of my daughter's cultural identity and who she is as a person and I think having to compromise that takes away from that for her.' (CBC 2, quoting Shene Catholique-Valpy)

Constraints on naming agency that derive from the language of the name's origin and which are imposed by government are therefore seen as unfair, racist and counter to the stated goal

of preservation and enhancement of indigenous languages.

- (5) This case is an example of the systemic racism faced by Indigenous people. The system has been designed in such a way as to discriminate against Indigenous people and prevent them the same access to their culture and history enjoyed by most non-Indigenous Canadians. (CBC 1:33) [shortened by author]
- (6) And, of course, the problems is that the rest of Canada didn't care enough about first nations peoples to include them in the databases in the first place. It's not their fault if we have to make up for that intentional oversight. (CBC 1:45 in reply to CBC1:44)

To understand how the spelling of a name is a matter of language rights worthy of the national news and hundreds of public comments, we must consider the historical context in which the power to name becomes politically charged (Alia, 2007). Very briefly, the Indian Act, originally passed by Canadian parliament in 1876, specifies legal definitions of who is recognized as an 'Indian' and sets out rules for governance, land use, education, fiscal responsibilities, and almost every other aspect of indigenous people's lives. The Indian Act and other related policies were deliberately designed to assimilate indigenous peoples into Euro-Canadian society. For example, residential schools were government-sponsored educational institutions which were operated by religious organizations across Canada for over a century. Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and taken to live year-round at regional schools, where they were renamed or called by numbers instead of their names and punished severely for speaking their native languages. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) issued a report which describes the residential school system as contributing to Canada's policy of 'cultural genocide' (TRC, 2015:1). Indeed, after generations of indigenous people attending residential schools where their language was denied and their identities were erased, and facing racism and exclusion throughout their lives which pushed a language shift to English or French, all indigenous languages in Canada are now endangered. In recent decades, the government has taken a public stance of reconciliation which acknowledges the value of indigenous cultures, such as by granting official status to some indigenous languages. At the same time, there has been a growing movement to rebuild pride in indigenous identities through the revitalization of languages (Gessner et al., 2014). Recognizing that names were included in the shift away from indigenous languages, the TRC report includes a call to action that makes a specific demand for governments at all levels to enable residential school survivors to reclaim their names and revise official identity documents (TRC, 2015:158). Implementing this call to action requires making technological adjustments to enable the representation of indigenous names with indigenous orthographies. It is within this context that Shene explained how choosing a Chipewyan name contributes to language revitalization efforts. With few or no remaining fluent speakers, names are sometimes used as linguistic symbols connecting individuals to a particular indigenous heritage and community identity. Shene's choice of a Chipewyan name for her daughter, her choice to relocate so she could give birth in the NWT where Chipewyan is an official language, her insistence on the proper Chipewyan spelling, and her move to publicly and legally challenge the government's constraints on naming can thus be understood as an enactment of indigenous sovereignty (Catellino, 2008).

6. Constructing Naming Agents: Public Discourses

I turn now to public discourses which frame constraints on naming agency in different ways, according to constructions of the agent as parent, member of a collective, recent immigrant, or indigenous person descended from 'original inhabitants'. Some of these categories can be applied simultaneously (such as parent and indigenous person), making conflicting concepts of agency and names more evident. As previously stated, all of the comments in this data set were made in response to the Chipewyan baby name story. One reason for this is that there were many comments which mentioned immigrants and other languages or ethnic groups in comparison to the Chipewyan case. The other reason is that I could not find a comparable case which focuses on immigrant struggles over names that garnered a similar amount of media attention. I will return to this point in the conclusion.

6.1 Parents

A salient theme in the comments focused on Shene's agency as a parent and reflected the belief that the naming of children should be unconstrained as a personal choice or a parental right.

- (7) These parents have the right to name their children ! With all the technology we have today it should pose NO problem to accommodate the language. Shame!!!! (CBC 2:65)
- (8) Hey, It's her child and she should be able to call her what she wishes. (CBC 2:93)
- (9) A name is sacred a mother knows right name. Mother fights use traditional *Chipewyan baby name* [link to CBC News story] (Twitter:4)

The idea of constraints on naming agency is offensive to these readers because it challenges the belief that naming is a private choice—like other parental choices about clothing, food or religion—which should be taken freely without the interference of the state. Parents are expected to conform to socially recognized naming conventions, such as avoiding names like Adolf or choosing gender-appropriate names, but further constraints imposed by the government are seen as unnecessary and unjustified.

Emphasizing the responsibility rather than the freedom inherent in parental naming agency, another set of comments expressed the expectation that parents should give the best opportunities they can to their children. Holders of this view imagine how the future of the child will be negatively influenced by the name and hold the parental agent accountable. Parental naming agency is therefore justifiably constrained to avoid names that will cause their children difficulties in social or institutional contexts.

- (10) There will be many errors in spelling and pronouncing the name, therefore the child will probably end up choosing to legally changing her name in the future. Parents should think of what is best for their child and not what is best for the parent, including keeping a language around that is disappearing because the younger generation wants to use English which is the main language in Canada. (CBC 2:88)
- (11) So she may perhaps win the battle, but is it worth it if she thereby subjects her daughter to a lifetime battle trying to explain and spell her name throughout schools and later life, jobs, govt services, banks... everything.....Not really worth

subjecting your child to that just to satisfy your own issues... well at least I wouldn't. (CBC 2:99)

(12) Why would anyone want to complicate their child's life unnecessarily? (Star:501) Recalling Case 2, these comments are in keeping with Hashim's explanation that he gave his sons English names to improve their life chances. For him, his responsibility to create good conditions for his children's future outweighed his freedom to inscribe them with marked cultural, religious or national identities. The same discourse in which Shene's choice is criticized reinforces the positive evaluation of Hashim's choice.

6.2 Member of Collective

One type of comment focuses on naming agents as members of a collective, rationalizing limitations on individual freedoms for the benefit of the group. A common exchange in the data begins with one commenter arguing that if special accommodation is made for the Chipewyan glottal stop, then accommodations will have to be made for all other writing systems used by Canadians from different linguistic backgrounds. This is presented as absurd because it would be too costly, inefficient and impractical. Naming agency is therefore justifiably constrained through standardization for the sake of efficient and effective public administration.

(13) Call you kid and spell his or her name however you like, but for legal documents, we need to keep to a standard alphabet we all recognize and understand. This is important for the simple logistics of running a government. (Star:505)

(14) Government systems are old and extremely complex. They cost tens of millions of dollars and years to upgrade let alone replace. This would impact all facets of NWT systems: Healthcare, private businesses, insurance, education, etc. NWT is not China. There's no market for specialized software for NWT languages. (CBC 1:44) [shortened by author]

These comments reflect a belief in the necessity of a standard orthography which should apply equally to everyone, whether indigenous, immigrant or Canadian born. Those who want to use different spellings are held responsible for their own difficulties if they insist on resisting the forces of conformity. The ethnolinguistic bias of standardization policies, which privilege languages represented by the Roman alphabet and the accent marks used in French, is discursively disguised as impartial institutional constraints, such as technical limitations on computer fonts. From this point of view if the good of the majority is achieved, it is inconsequential that minority languages, even official ones, cannot be adequately represented by this standard orthography. Significantly, the commenters position themselves and their imagined readers ('we' or 'us') in opposition to immigrants and indigenous peoples, and focus on the allegedly unreasonable accommodations the dominant group is being asked to make to satisfy minorities.

(15) Do we start allowing the Cyrillic alphabet, Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, etc names after this as well? Lets also all start learning every alphabet on the planet so we can accommodate anyone who wants to give their kids names using their own alphabet. So when the person can't read or understand your name when applying for a job that resume goes straight into the garbage bin. You can have

your traditional names, just put the thing into roman letters for the purposes of government documents like the rest of us and call yourselves whatever you want at home also like the rest of us. There's a reason most countries use a particular alphabet. (CBC 1:367)

- (16) It is a lovely name, but for convenience the name can be anglicized to make it accessible to those that do not speak Chippewan. Her family and tribe can use the correct pronunciation and spelling, and the rest of us can use the anglicized version. Many people of all ethnic descents do this and it is hardly a limit on ones freedom, it is not a slur or suppression of culture, it's simply a pragmatism. What would limit her freedom would be having an unpronounceable name that is hard to record in computer systems. It would cause her problems in life that aren't necessary, and, as a first nations person she already faces enough of those. (CBC 1:24)
- (17) look. I get that she wants her kid to have this name. However, changing the entire system for one kid is just ridiculous. Also, this opens the door for Arabic on birth certificates and any other language. (CBC 1:86)
- (18) So should we put Mandarin characters on birth certificates as well if requested? (Star:520)

Furthermore, despite an outwardly positive attitude toward cultural diversity, a strong assimilationist ideology circulates among Canadians which engenders public acceptance of limitations on immigrants' agency as part of the process of their 'integration' into the national identity (Jedwab, 2008; Li, 2003). The commenters quoted in examples 15-18 above discursively position indigenous people in the same minority category as immigrants to justify constraints on indigenous agency as well. None of the commenters mentions the status of First Nations as separate nations. Instead, indigenous peoples are always constructed as a single subgroup of the Canadian polity which exists in opposition to the dominant European settler society. This lumping together of indigenous people with immigrants actually results from the ideological separation of immigration and indigenous issues in contemporary public debates—what Harald Bauder (2011b:517) calls a 'parallax gap'.

A dialectical process of national identity formation involves first welcoming foreign strangers as immigrants and then integrating these immigrants into the fabric of the nation. Aboriginal peoples have no place in this national imagination of a settler society (Bauder, 2011a; Dauvergne, 2005). In fact, recognizing the presence of Aboriginal peoples prior to the formation of the settler society would wreak havoc on the national identity as an immigration country in which belonging is defined in political, not ethnic, terms. A settler nation must deny the ethnic principle of territorial belonging.

Bauder (2011b:517) observes that 'colonized Aboriginal groups...emphasize the separate nature of immigration and Aboriginal matters,' focussing on the nation-to-nation relationship in their struggle for indigenous rights. This is because their goal is not to integrate or assimilate into settler society but to be freed from oppressive and exclusionary political systems. What is needed, according to Bauder, is to address the contradictions evident when immigration narratives converge with Aboriginal narratives. The next set of comments in my data set allow us to do just that.

6.3 Indigenous 'Original Inhabitants' vs. Immigrant 'Recent Arrivals'

While comments that treat indigenous peoples like ethnic minorities gain supporters (e.g. comment 17 got 50 'likes'), they are inevitably followed by counter-arguments from other commenters which distinguish between indigenous rights and immigrant rights. From this opposing perspective, indigenous people are believed to have more rights to linguistic accommodation and inclusion by virtue of their ancestors having been 'here' first. Recognition is given to the fact that the English and French, who created the current power structures, did so by oppressing the original inhabitants of the land. Taking a stance in favour of indigenous language rights is part of a more general belief expressed among these commenters that indigenous people deserve better treatment in Canada, that they must be valued, respected and included. But this stance in favour of indigenous language rights is simultaneously a stance against the same rights for immigrants. Immigrants are seen as having fewer or no rights to demand linguistic accommodations because they have 'chosen' to come to Canada and are therefore expected to adapt to the laws and ways of the society they have joined. This discourse, in which people are assigned language rights according to the length of time they and their ancestors have been in the country, fits into a language ideology of the nation which connects the legitimacy of language to the people understood to be of a particular place. Bauder (2011b:517) describes this as 'the ethnic principle of territorial belonging'. Such reasoning is used to justify constraints on names for newcomers but not for indigenous peoples. Here are some of the responses.

- (19) @CBC 1:86. Arabic? and no it doesn't because they aren't recent immigrants. (CBC 1:87 in reply to comment 17 by CBC 1:86)
- (20) @Star:520 Seriously? This is not the same thing. First Nations people are not from a cultural group that made a conscious decision to come to this country because of the opportunities that this country's current society offered. They were here first. If we recognize English and French, there's a very good argument for recognizing the various First Nations' languages. While obviously it wouldn't be feasible to include all those languages on official documents or things such as food labels, surely we can accommodate inclusion of the proper spelling of a person's name on a birth certificate, even if we also have to include a Roman spelling of the name as well, as the mother in this article seems to acknowledge the need for. (Star:521 in reply to comment 18 by Star:520)
- (21) Chipewyan people were here before Europeans. They are not like the Greeks, the Russians, the Koreans or the Turks in Canada. They now have a written language. We either respect that and honour their ability to give their child a name in their language, or we stomp our feet and whine like spoiled European brats and force them to 'conform to our alphabet goddammit'. (CBC 1:368 in reply to comment 15 by CBC 1:367)

The comments and news stories about using Chipewyan spelling on a birth certificate offer conflicting understandings of indigenous people and immigrants as agents. In the pervasive discourse of multiculturalism promoted by the Canadian government indigenous peoples are 'just another domestic ethnic group' (McElhinny, 2016:52) having the same rights and obligations as immigrants, but still dominated by European settler society. In contrast, some people view indigenous people as having more flexible agency inherent in their status

as members of distinct nations in treaty relationships with the Canadian state. Having preceded both European settlers and contemporary immigrants justifies their claims to proper representation and official recognition. This more critical perspective challenges the Canadian state to address contradictions between discourses of multiculturalism and reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

7. Constructions of Indigenous and Immigrant Agency in News Reports

Media reports about struggles to reduce constraints on naming agency bring attention to the ways in which naming is constrained for everyone. This analysis has shown that not everyone has the same flexibility when faced with the constraints of name standardization, leading some to actively resist the constraints and fight to fully exercise their power to name (e.g. Shene), some to endure the insult but take no action (e.g. Najmuddin, Dariush), and some to conform to the expected practices (e.g. Hashim). News stories about names thus become a forum for identity politics and stance-taking on issues like parenting, the integration of immigrants, settler colonialism in Canada, and race relations.

In the case of the Chipewyan baby name, Shene and the media framed the issue in terms of language rights. Shene not only exercised her power to name her child according to her own tradition, she resisted the government's constraints on the orthographic representation of her daughter's name by refusing to alter the spelling and crucially, by publicizing her resistance through both mainstream and social media. She gained support from friends, family, members of her own community and other indigenous communities, as well as from the wider Canadian public and prominent authorities on First Nations issues. Shene was able to call on and receive public support for her position by evoking a collective indigenous identity and making a claim for a greater degree of agency on behalf of other indigenous peoples whose languages have official status. The history of oppression and discrimination against indigenous peoples is implicit in the quoted statements about asserting language rights, and preserving cultures and languages. More broadly, Shene and the commenters who align with her stance are demanding respect and recognition of the agency of indigenous peoples as part of the ongoing assertion of their nationhood. Borrowing from the work of Jessica Cattellino (2008), we can say that Shene was able to take agentic action as a member of two polities: the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation and the settler state of Canada. Her choice of a Chipewyan name for her daughter and her legal pursuit of the correct spelling is an enactment of indigenous sovereignty, but her capacity to effect change must also be understood in terms of her position as a Canadian citizen with rights to use an officially recognized language.

In contrast, we do not find such stories of organized resistance in news involving difficulties with immigrant names. Immigrants are portrayed by the media as opportunistic invaders who buy up property (Gold, 2015), take away jobs (Graveland, 2015), push the limits of 'reasonable accommodations' (Séguin and Clark, 2012), threaten national security (MacCharles, 2015), and engage in what the former Conservative government called 'barbaric cultural practices' (Barber, 2015). To escape this negative characterization, immigrants are expected to assimilate and adapt. Fully integrated immigrants are expected to look, act and speak like other Canadians, and have names that conform to Canadian norms. Even in sympathetic stories about 'foreign-sounding names' being a hindrance to securing job

interviews (Keung, 2016; Michael, 2011), immigrants are not presented as collective agents. Ethnographic research (including my own) indicates that immigrants do share similar experiences of discrimination, exclusion, limitations and constraints, whether based on their names or other factors. Being 'recent arrivals', however, means that they have no political, social or historical base from which to mount a strategy of resistance. Instead, difficulties with names are typically categorized simply as annoyances that must be endured in the process of integration, as we saw with Najmuddin and Dariush. If particular names are seen as presenting great barriers, the most likely solution is to change them, as in the case of Hashim. Naming constraints faced by diverse immigrants do not seem to take on the symbolic importance the same way as in the Chipewyan case because they are understood only as individual problems. Furthermore, troubles with names are often seen as trivial relative to other difficulties immigrants face during the process of integration, such as learning a new language, making friends and finding a job. As was mentioned, however, problematic names can exacerbate the difficulty encountered in these pursuits as well.

8. Conclusion

Anthropologists have argued that naming agency is unavoidably constrained because naming is a social and reflexive act in which name-givers consider how they want the named person to be identified, regarded and treated by others (Vom Bruck and Bodenhorn, 2006; Pina-Cabral, 2012). Bestowing names is part of the process of socialization by which individuals are inducted into society and begin to acquire a social identity (e.g. names may index gender and ethnicity). In order for the name to be recognized by the group as an index of certain social categories, it must be chosen in accordance with conventional rules or cultural customs. This usually happens in consultation with others including parents, family members, friends, religious leaders and even lists of popular or traditional names (Alford, 1988). Constraints on naming agency include the requirements and rules related to a name's pronunciation, structure, orthography, meaning, ethnolinguistic markers, and usage of all or parts of a name, as well as limitations on which words can count as names, which names are appropriate for specified social categories, which names are popular at a given time, and who chooses and bestows names. These constraints are imposed by individuals exercising a collective social power. For example, repeated ridicule, shaming or discrimination of one group or individual because of a name makes clear which names are unacceptable. Praise, copying and public visibility of popular names indicates their desirability. The hierarchies of social power which determine who is in a position to make such judgements are based on race, class, caste, citizenship, religion, and language, to name a few.

In addition to these sociocultural constraints, institutional and legal constraints require or prohibit certain acts within specified limitations. In other words, individuals must select and bestow names on themselves or those under their power within the orthographic, structural and semantic constraints specified by policy or law. At issue here is how systems of power constrain naming agency in unequal ways when both names and agents originate from different naming traditions.

There are restricted avenues available to individuals to resist or influence the actions of government agents or the laws and regulations they create. Generally, individuals must enlist the help of others such as lawyers, legislators or those with higher degrees of agency. The

power of the individual may also be increased by joining together with other individuals because the collective agency of the group may have more influence on the reasoning of the state agents or authorities. Shene's pursuit of the Chipewyan spelling on her daughter's birth certificate is a good example of how this can work, though at the time of this writing, her goal has not yet been fully achieved. In the other two cases, we saw how individuals find ways to conform or adapt to the new constraints.

A close look at public discourses surrounding naming issues has shown how the constraints on the naming practices of immigrants and indigenous people derive from intertwined ideologies of language, identity and nation which reinforce the historically rooted hierarchical relations between each of these groups and the dominant, English-speaking majority. The unique sociopolitical positions of indigenous people as original inhabitants and immigrants as recent arrivals thus elicit different responses to naming constraints among the individuals in question and in public discourse. Through their discourses, policies and practices, members of the dominant society act collectively to define the rules for how individuals are named. This analysis contributes to our understanding of how names are negotiated in pluralistic societies, taking into account the identities of the name-giver and the named in relation to the dominant group, as well as diverse ontologies of names. In demonstrating how agency is constructed and enacted through language, I have also shed light on some of the contradictory discourses that construct indigenous people and immigrants as both similar to and distinct from each other and European settler society in Canada.

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