

Public consultation and pub talk as toponymic workspace: Kings Square to Walyalup Koort¹

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ABSTRACT

The drive to recognise and assert pre-colonial toponymies and Indigenous place names in settler colonial cities has been gaining local and global momentum. Localized systems of governance have emerged as an effective scale for public engagement, consultation and decision-making. In this paper, we explore the City of Fremantle's initiative for the (re) naming of its civic centre Kings Square now Walyalup Koort. The paper presents an analysis of texts produced through the consultation process and dialogue at a Pub talk question-and-answer session. We assert that the consultation and talk can be understood as toponymic workspace for opening up a politics of place-naming and a method for assessing and improving procedural justice. Such forms of public consultation can be applied by local governments and communities seeking ethical representation in and of public places, and they can be made effective through substantial inclusion of Indigenous visual culture, language and stories within the toponymic workspace.

Keywords

Toponymies, postcolonial, settler colonial, Indigenous, subjectivity, Australia

In contemporary Australia, colonization's aftermath appears as a horizon of collaborative action seeking to unsettle the structuralism of settler colonialism (Wolfe 2001) while evading the appropriation of recognition and reconciliation works by the neoliberal state (Coulthard 2014). Aftermath here can be seen as a horizon for negotiations between postcolonial and Indigenous subjectivities (Moreton-Robinson 2015) in a land scaped by human activity for over 50,000 years (Ouzman 2021). Towards such an aftermath, this article analyses discursive events that led to the renaming of Kings Square in Walyalup/Fremantle in 2021 and offers advice to anyone intent on this horizon.

In postcolonial spaces around the world, the political drive to rename places with pre-colonial names, arguably, has as much to do with desire to erase colonial symbolism as with "attempts to assert regional ethnic and linguistic identities against the homogenizing narratives of the nation state" (Kumar 2017, 818). The drive to remove monuments to white masters has been shown to be about asserting regional identity and building a more reflective represent-

ation of human diversity within that community (de Velasco 2019). It has also been an opportunity for developing critical pedagogies of place naming in educational institutions and, potentially, broader society (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020). Yet, as symbols of white patriarchal power are challenged and, sometimes, removed from public places, persisting colonial relationships and practices of dispossession remain (Herman 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2015). In Australia, this persistence can be seen in the Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart on constitutional reform (Hobbs 2020). Despite the re-energized defence of white possession by the Australian Government, the drive to rename places has been gaining momentum in local government. This momentum is evident in initiatives to restore Indigenous place names in the port towns of Fremantle and Albany (City of Albany 2021) on the southwest coast of the continent. This movement towards pre-colonial toponymies has been preceded by a successful native title claim for the region (South West Land and Sea Council, Host with Owen 2009), and by increasingly problematic Australia Days and successful alternative days of inclusive community celebration in Fremantle (Cox and Kerr 2018). When the City launched community engagement in October 2020 on the renaming of Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2020b), the authors of this article saw an opportunity for analysing representations in the public consultation process. By the time Fremantle Council voted to rename the site in Whadjuk Nyoongar, 'Walyalup Koort', the authors had become involved in the renaming discussion and begun considering its educational potential. In this article, we focus on how public consultation and a pub talk functioned as toponymic workspace for community education on the impacts of colonization. This focus engages with Alderman and Rose-Redwood's (2020) educational strategies for reshaping commemorative landscapes by acknowledging, debating and coming to terms with legacies of white supremacy.

Walyalup and the Kings Square invasion

Whadjuk Nyoongar people have been living in Walyalup for up to 50,000 years (Moodjar Consultancy 2016). Walyalup incorporates the sea, foreshores, swamps, river mouth, river and land in Fremantle and surrounding areas. It is spiritually, socially, aesthetically and historically significant:

Walyalup has spiritual significance to Whadjuk Nyoongar people for its connection to dreaming narratives and creative ancestral beings, particularly the Waugal, and its ritual role as a place of funerary rites [...] Walyalup has social significance to Whadjuk Nyoongar people for its wide social functions. It was a shared space between many Nyoongar people and was a highly significant place of trade and exchange. It was a place where families gathered for kinship and in-law making, cultural and ceremonial business [...] Walyalup holds historic significance [...] with the first Nyoongar sightings of the arrival of the British fleet at Fremantle and having been one of the first places in Western Australia that Nyoongar people experienced the full impact of colonisation including massacres, forced removal, the loss of land and incarceration of Nyoongar and other Aboriginal people. (Moodjar Consultancy 2016, 32)

Naval officer James Stirling led the British fleet that sailed to Walyalup in 1829 to colonize the coastal plain via the beachhead township he named “Fremantle” after a captain in his fleet (Statham-Drew 2003). The eviction of Nyoongar people occurred discursively through exploration cartography, during and after the voyage, and physically by the invading British colonists. Discursive eviction continued through the 19th and 20th centuries via general exclusion of Nyoongar words and names on European-imagined maps of the area (Mickler 1991, 72-74). Meanwhile, the coastal plain was surveyed and occupied by settlers backed by British arms and symbols of entitlement. Rich men and favoured colonial officers were awarded occupation rights to land by Stirling on behalf of the British Crown in the settlement’s 1829 regulations (Statham-Drew 2003). By 1831 land grants were traded, and by 1832 the land grant system was replaced by the sale of Crown land. Settlers ignored the land-occupation laws and spatial organization of the invaded Nyoongar people (Carter and Nutter 2005). Stirling asserted he could grant rights to all “unoccupied land”, but this was written “wasteland” in regulations because it was occupied by Nyoongar people (Carter and Nutter 2005, 4-28). Despite the discursive dexterity of colonisation, social memory of the Crown’s theft of Walyalup remains: “This is where our land was taken from us [...] The white people claimed all of Fremantle. They took our ancestors from us” (Moodjar Consultancy 2016, 14).

Stirling’s colonists established Kings Square as a public reserve at the inland end of High Street, but the site was appropriated by Anglican church trustees (Ewers 1971) who built St. John’s Church there by 1843. This church was demolished and reconstructed on the northern portion of the square by 1879, enabling Fremantle Council to purchase the southern triangular portion of Kings Square and build a Town Hall there by 1887. These alterations enabled an unimpeded view and traffic flow along the extended High Street from the Round House gaol on the headland, through the merchant district, past the Town Hall and up to Monument Hill. The Town Hall was constructed as a “grand monument of Victorian architecture” (Brown 1996, 102) sponsored by Fremantle’s merchant elite, whose influence slipped away with industrialization. By the 1960s a one-way road system had been constructed around the square and a car park built within it, interrupting the view along High Street. Amid subsequent regentrification, the car park was removed and the passage along High Street from Bather’s Bay to Monument Hill restored, making High Street a popular tourist strip. Meanwhile, Kings Square functioned as a resting, meeting and networking place for many Aboriginal people despite systematic whitewashing over representations of their culture at the site (Cox 2018).

In April 2019, construction of a civic centre began as part of the “\$270 million Kings Square Renewal Project” (City of Fremantle 2019). In February 2020, Fremantle Council voted to name it the “Walyalup Civic Centre [...] in recognition of the Traditional Owners of Fremantle and in the spirit of the City’s Reconciliation Action Plan” (City of Fremantle 2020a). The Walyalup Reconciliation Action Plan calls for Whadjuk Culture and history to be included in the

Kings Square Redevelopment and in place names around Fremantle. On 26 May 2021, Fremantle Council voted to rename the square “Walyalup Koort”. Endorsed by Western Australia’s Minister for Lands, the name was implemented from July 2021 as: “Walyalup Koort (heart of Fremantle) - Walyalup (*Wal-ya-lup*) being the name for the Fremantle area and Koort (*koo-rt*) being the word for heart” (City of Fremantle n.d.).

Methodology: public consultation and pub talk as toponymic workspace

This study examines discursive events leading to Fremantle Council’s resolution to change the name to Walyalup Koort. We analysed 15 digital texts (145 pages in PDF format), published by the City of Fremantle between October 2020 and May 2021, and two digital audio recordings, totalling 1 hour and 42 minutes, of the speaker panel and the question-and-answer session at the Politics in the Pub talk on 25 May 2021, the eve of the council resolution. The Pub talk was organized by the Fremantle Network activist group with the primary author being one of three invited speakers. The digital texts were analysed by close reading and critical thinking (hooks 2010), building on the authors’ earlier research on Kings Square (Cox 2018; Kerr 2012). As themes emerged through an iterative process of analysis and review of scholarly literature, we could see the public consultation and pub talk beginning to function as a toponymic workspace for community education. From North American campus research, Alderman and Rose-Redwood argued that classrooms could function as toponymic workspace, enabling students “to understand the politics of place (re) naming” and to critique “seemingly naturalized toponymic formations within their own educational institutions” (2020, 124). They developed three instructional strategies “for documenting, analysing, and intervening to reshape the commemorative landscapes”: firstly, classrooms should discuss the ‘landscape backstories’ of naming conventions and place names and consider how they shape political debates; secondly, classrooms should consider the ‘affective entanglements’ of place names in relation to “contemporary identities, memories, and material conditions of different people, empathizing with social actors and groups traditionally marginalized from the power to name”; thirdly, classrooms should serve as space for interrogating place naming policies, assessing ‘procedural justice’ in these policies, and for planning “a more inclusive and anti-racist naming policy and campus landscape” (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020, 125). In engaging with this approach, classroom and campus were substituted respectively with public consultation/pub talk and local government area.

Public consultation on Aboriginal heritage has been problematic in Western Australia (Kerr and Cox 2016). Pubs, like breweries, have been problems too (Cox et al. 2016). The pub talk venue of The Local Hotel was, potentially, even more problematic given Garbutt’s (2011) demonstration of “local” places as Australian nativist space, cleared of Indigenous histories and cultures. Seeing places through the lens of Massey (2005, 265) as contingent and

privileged collections of stories, this study aimed to examine whose stories were represented in discussions hosted by colonial settler institutions: the local government and the local pub. Could these institutions be hospitable to Indigenous sovereignty (Creagh et al. 2016) as toponymic workspace when subjectivity values in postcolonial Australia were so asymmetrically in favour of the colonizer over the colonized? Moreton-Robinson argues the “right to be here and the sense of belonging it creates are reinforced institutionally and socially; personal profound sentiment is enabled by structural conditions” (2015, 18). White possessive discourse ignores Indigenous possession, violating “the subjectivity of Indigenous people by obliterating any trace of our ontological and epistemological existence” (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 114). This construction of ignorance is supported by the colonial facades and monumental architecture in and around Kings Square (Kerr 2012). However, white possessive discourse may become apparent, and disrupted, when shown as “excessive desire to own, control, and dominate” (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 67). With this in mind, the authors set out to analyse the public consultation and pub talk.

Public consultation: indigenous perspective to community engagement

Making settler-colonial-dominated places safer for Indigenous habitation is a complex process that should begin with Indigenous hospitality to the project (Creagh et al. 2016). In consultation with the Whadjuk Working Party of the South West Land and Sea Council and the Walyalup Reconciliation Action Plan (WRAP) Working Group, the City of Fremantle (2020b) began exploring in 2019 the issue of changing Kings Square to a Whadjuk Nyoongar name. The process was lent state legitimacy when Western Australia’s Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ben Wyatt invited “local governments to partner with Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Language Centres, Native Title Representatives and body corporates to identify opportunities to preserve and reawaken local languages through place naming” (Ben Wyatt, Letter to City of Fremantle, July 8, 2019). Positioned in the spirit of 2019 being the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages, the letter was sent in Wyatt’s capacity as Minister for Lands and co-signed by the Minister for Local Government. This letter provided the City encouragement to adopt Aboriginal names starting with “Walyalup Civic Centre” for its new library and civic building in Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2020b). In February 2020, Fremantle Council considered Whadjuk Nyoongar renaming options developed through consultation with Traditional Owners, but voted to “broaden the engagement with the whole community” (City of Fremantle 2021a).

In October 2020 the City of Fremantle (2020b) launched a community engagement process to explore the renaming of Kings Square, and provided a 16-page information pack titled, *What’s in a Name? Information Pack (Stage One Engagement)*. The pack can be read as an educational document providing background, a participatory task and a set of texts and

images offering varying views on the topic. The pack contributes to toponymic workspace (Alderman and Rose-Redwood 2020) by opening the site's historized 'backstory'. The pack includes a painting of King William IV in robes that suggest his constructed supremacy. The Kings Square name is described coming into being as "an assertion of ownership [...] using familiarity as one way to attract settlers and investors to the Swan River Settlement." Endurance of the name, from this distant king, is disrupted in the adjacent column showing St. John's Church in 1985 during the decade the site was named St. John's Square. The following page provides four Whadjuk Nyoongar naming options with reasoning that mentions dispossession and violence endured by the Whadjuk clan. Then, a timeline begins:

To the local Whadjuk people, whose heritage dates back tens of thousands of years, Fremantle is a place of ceremonies, significant cultural practices and trading. The area contains many campsites and spiritual sites which have been used by Nyoongars from precontact to the present day. (City of Fremantle 2020b, 6-9)

The community engagement pack promotes reflection on 'procedural justice' in the power to name, and encourages readers to consider some 'affective entanglements' around the site's names and the contemporary identities of people connected to them. However, the pack does little to solicit empathy for Whadjuk Nyoongar marginalized in the naming of public places. Visually, the pack relies on European cartography and landscape painting perspectives which enabled their dispossession. Besides the absence of Whadjuk Nyoongar images, word usage disproportionately favours the colonial establishment with "Fremantle" included 98 times compared to "Walyalup" 14 times and, for example, "church" 30 compared to "Whadjuk" 25 (City of Fremantle 2020b). The visual and language bias is reproduced in the report on stage one of community engagement, and in the idea card poster and display at Fremantle Library used to promote the engagement (City of Fremantle 2021e, 3-4).

Stage one of community engagement solicited digital submissions and idea card suggestions for naming "the heart of Fremantle, with fantastic new community, cultural and civic facilities" (City of Fremantle 2020b, 5). Suggestions would be assessed on whether the name generated a sense of pride, was relevant to Fremantle, and was enduring. The City received 194 submissions (150 online, 39 idea cards, 5 direct emails) with proposals for 128 new Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal names, five dual-naming suggestions, and 108 general comments about keeping the current name or renaming (City of Fremantle 2021e). The submissions were assessed against the criteria, provided to Landgate for preliminary comment then presented to the stakeholder group representing St. John's Church, Whadjuk Nyoongar elders, Department of Communities, Fremantle Chamber of Commerce and Fremantle Council. The *Community Engagement Report – Stage One* suggested a binary in the submissions between using an Aboriginal name for "recognition of the Traditional Custodians", and not changing the name of Kings Square (City of Fremantle 2021e, 6) because it "relates

to the constitutional monarchy by which the country is still governed.” An analysis was provided in a supplement document showing 70 name types measured against assessment criteria with comments from Landgate and the stakeholder group, and a determination on whether the name would be included in stage two engagement (City of Fremantle 2021f). Almost all name suggestions were rejected outright: including names of historical and contemporary non-Aboriginal figures, Nyoongar words and names suggesting decolonization, ‘Freedom Square’, and reconciliation, ‘Sorry Square’. Fremantle’s Italian migrant heritage featured strongly, contributing a suffix for consideration in stage two engagement. Suggestions were marked in the style of an educational assessment rubric, indicating the criteria by which some passed the assessment while most others failed. The supplement provided participants limited feedback on their submissions and little opportunity for reflection. It was left to the engagement report to present an argument for the affirmed naming suggestions being included in stage two along with “Kings Square” and three of the four Whadjuk Noongar names (“Midgegooroo,” “Whadjuk” and “Walyalup”) nominated earlier in consultation with the Whadjuk Working Party and Whadjuk elders.

Stage two of community engagement began in March 2021 with the release of *What’s in a Name? Community Discussion Pack* (City of Fremantle, 2021d), a 20-page document promoting community conversation on renaming:

It’s a big decision, so we encourage you to explore the information behind the space before sharing your thoughts. Start a discussion around the dinner table, with your neighbours, at your school or local community group, then let us know what you think! (City of Fremantle 2021d, 2)

In enabling toponymic workspace, the 2021 discussion pack is an improvement on the 2020 information pack. The discussion pack favours British heritage and cartography but with some improvements: naming Nyoongar territories – including Walyalup in Midgegooroo’s Beeliar territory – in one of the maps (City of Fremantle 2021d, 3); and showing images of an art installation proposed for the site that depicts Nyoongar night sky and represents Nyoongar clans (9). Although limited, these inclusions solicit empathy with Indigenous people marginalized from the power to name and promote openness to their affective relationship with the site. There is also a clearer attempt to solicit empathy and historicize background knowledge in the document’s area timeline:

Midgegooroo attempted to resist settlement of his country and after many confrontations he was caught and executed outside Perth Gaol in 1832. His son Yagan was killed a few months later. The same year Roe’s town plan for the colonial settlement of Fremantle was published and showed Kings Square. (City of Fremantle 2021d, 3)

Three naming themes were outlined. “Theme 1: Monarchs and Leaders” (City of Fremantle 2021d, 7) begins with background on colonists’ pragmatic decision to use King William’s title.

The theme suggests a dual-naming option to retain 'Kings Square' with reasoning presented in the form of submission comments, arguing that the name reflects the heritage of the dominant population and the ongoing system of government. They are contrasted with comments appealing for local community relevance and justice in the "Midgegooroo Square" option:

Those who live in Walyalup have a great sense of pride in their city & to reflect this with Indigenous Cultural naming supports this. This move will also support a strong sense of community & greater awareness of the work that's still yet to be achieved in recognising our Colonial past. (City of Fremantle 2021d, 8)

The appeal to assert local area identity over imperial identity was reinforced in "Theme 2: Walyalup Koort" and "Theme 3: Boya Karla" (City of Fremantle 2021d, 8-9). Then an appeal for 'procedural justice' is implied in answering "Why do you want to destroy all of our history?" (City of Fremantle 2021d, 13) with reference to a study finding that no Indigenous names were used in Fremantle between 1829 and 1850 and that 61% of the British names were primarily British places shifted to the colony to attract settlers and investors. Suggested destruction of 'our history' was countered with only 10 in 500 street names being Aboriginal.

The final quarter of the document encourages readers to host group discussions, constructed around a set of notes, tasks and questions. Groups would reflect on the timeline and street-naming statistics then comment on advantages and disadvantages of the proposed names and suffixes. If the group had a clear preference, they were asked to write it down with their reasoning then send their group discussion notes and feedback to the City. Through this process, participants had an opportunity to consider 'landscape backstories', 'procedural justice' and 'affective entanglements' around past naming policies and to reflect on a more inclusive naming policy.

It is not known how many group discussions were attempted. Only one discussion pack was returned to the City: from a family who wanted Walyalup Koort over Kings Square because there was "no need for mention of royalty" (City of Fremantle 2021a, 12). Instead, most recorded engagement came via the *My Say Freo* webpage with 2,000 visitors including "182 participants in the online discussion, who made 275 comments and placed 647 votes on other people's comments" (City of Fremantle 2021a, 7). Most positive sentiment (78 comments) was in favour of "Walyalup Koort" with only 2 negative comments in this name thread. "Kings Square" had the second highest number of positive comments (37) but also the most negative (28). As toponymic workspace, *My Say Freo* provided useful downloads, an opportunity to comment on the proposed names and to read comments by other participants. Comments in favour of Walyalup Koort were expressed in few sentences. These comments were often forward looking, expressions about identity, beauty, and respect for Nyoongar culture; indicating an opportunity to express 'affective entanglements'. The word "respect" appears

nine times and “beauty” eight times in the Walyalup Koort thread (City of Fremantle 2021c) but only once and twice respectively in the Kings Square thread (City of Fremantle 2021b). Whereas “colonial” appears 10 times and “political” five times in the Kings Square thread but only five times and not at all under Walyalup Koort. Comments in favour of retaining Kings Square were longer, and argumentative – such as, the name change was a waste of City resources and settlers should be respected.

Pub talk as toponymic workspace

The night before Fremantle Council voted to rename the site ‘Walyalup Koort’, several councillors could be seen in the audience of about 50 people at *Politics in the Pub* in The Local Hotel. Despite yard-like aesthetics, the spatial arrangement was much like a university seminar with a series chair, MC and three speakers presenting for a total of 40 minutes from the front of the room. Audience participants stood and sat around tables in the middle and rear of the room. Their voices dominated the hour-long question and answer session.

The MC, former state Legislative Council member Lynn MacLaren, positioned the renaming of Kings Square within Western Australian desire “to embrace our history, wanting to name things with the original names”.² Renaming was positioned as a fun, self-deprecating process: “Kings Street, Kings Square, Kings Park, what do they all have in common?” This hint at royal excess in naming popular nearby places produced substantial audience laughter.

The first speaker, Brendan Moore, was introduced as Fremantle’s Aboriginal Engagement Officer, and Chair of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. After welcoming participants to Whadjuk land, Moore said:

all places in Australia have an Aboriginal history, and Walyalup has an Aboriginal history [...] Engaging with Aboriginal knowledge can empower community and ensure spaces they live in reflect their diverse and localized cultural values, traditions and uniqueness of place.

Moore said drawing on the locality’s cultural identity in renaming would support its future direction through shared history and collaboration. Moore discussed the injustice of only 10 streets in Fremantle having Aboriginal names and even fewer having Whadjuk Nyoongar names, then described new state and local government policies to address the lack of ‘procedural justice’ in place naming. Moore closed emphatically: “English language and culture is not at risk in Australia”. This was met by laughter and applause.

The next speaker, Russell Kingdom, was introduced as the ‘Kings Square Project Director’ overseeing the revitalization project. Kingdom described a timeline of events around naming the site beginning with 1833, a pivotal year in “Walyalup and also the colonial settlement”: when Midgegooroo and his son, Yagan, were killed by colonists and the first town plan showing “Kings Square” was published. Kingdom jumped to 1982 when Fremantle

Council voted to rename the site St. John's Square, then to 1991 when Council changed the name back in a narrow vote in which a dissenting councillor called for a pre-colonial name. Desire to adopt Aboriginal names is not new but the renaming process has been building momentum from engagement with the Whadjuk working party then broader community consultation. Kingdom said these processes were never perfect and, with feedback, would be improved – towards a horizon of 'procedural justice'.

The next speaker, the primary author of this article, read an observational account by the second author from a decade earlier that describes Aboriginal representations being recorded overtly then whitewashed covertly from the square. The primary author (Kerr) then described fieldwork in Broome, Western Australia, and Banyuwangi, East Java, where Indigenous heritage volunteers had expressed desire to preserve colonial heritage to learn more about what had happened to their communities (Kerr and Wahyudi 2021); also, how Indigenous media in these towns were exploring, rather than ignoring, British colonial heritage in Indigenous lands.

Audience members who wanted to speak were asked to raise their hands. MacLaren said all hands belonged to men and asked for questions from females first because of the all-male panel. The first participant cited an Aboriginal commentator who did not want to see Aboriginal names adopted. Moore responded that one Aboriginal person did not speak for all Aboriginal people. A participant interrupted to ask whether Moore represented the views of all Aboriginal people in Fremantle. Moore responded that in Fremantle everyone is heard before a considered approach is taken – later, Kingdom confirmed a unanimous opinion for the name change had come through consultation with the Whadjuk Working Group, Traditional Owners and a broader Aboriginal group. Another participant said change was unnecessary because many Aboriginal names were used in Eastern Australia. Moore responded that English names were adopted in Fremantle to attract investors to the new colony, but for his family it was "Walyalup, it's always been Walyalup and always will be Walyalup". This comment was met with applause. A participant suggested dual naming would be best: "You can have Kings Square and Walyalup [...] it makes perfect sense". A participant then offered to play devil's advocate by stating that in India, for instance, "renaming has actually been a tool for some of the most ugly violent anti-Muslim nationalism that the world has ever seen" and that language or cultural programs or appropriate use of the space, through funding, would be more useful than simply renaming it. Another participant introduced himself as a fourth-generation local and expert in urban planning, saying that Aboriginal naming was positive but was irrelevant for Kings Square, which "was totally a Western creation [...] from beginning to end a creation of the settlers". Speaking for six minutes, this participant said renaming was "about the re-writing and erasing of an important part of our history" yet it was important to maintain "the truth of our heritage". The participant was interrupted by other audience members when disputing the

relationship between place naming and genocide. The MC stated the importance of opportunity to speak and congratulated the participant for voicing “genuine concerns in the community” such as earlier attempts by women’s groups to get more women’s names accepted. The next participant said the panel-discussion was one-sided and there was not “a balanced amount of time for us to have a say” and that the City’s consultation process had excluded Fremantle’s historians from the discussion, which had “become a popularity contest, and history is not a popularity contest”. This was met with murmur and laughter. The participant continued: Walyalup Koort “has absolutely no relevance to Aboriginal interests or culture”, and was patronizing to Aboriginal people while the Kings Square redevelopment was a financial disaster. This generated some applause. Another participant asked what was happening in the square beyond the name change. Moore responded: the name change would have positive impacts on the lives of struggling Aboriginal people who come to Fremantle because they think it has a heart, and a corroboree site was identified 50 metres from Kings Square. Moore said many “colonial names remind Aboriginal people of the theft of their land, and it’s as simple as that [...] Kings Square, Crown land. The settlement of this state was based on a myth of terra-nullius and that’s why this is so important to Aboriginal people”. Kingdom encouraged participants to visit the City’s website to learn more about the reconciliation action plan.

Another participant said, “We are new to this world and we are trying to progress and understand all the culture that we can”. It was easy to access “history about colonialism” but there were not “many opportunities for us, as young people, to dive into this culture that is much older than ours”. This participant called for more visual Whadjuk culture “to back up the name change”, which was supported by another participant and substantial applause.

As the pub talk proceeded, conversation about renaming seemed to become easier; more natural. Much of the discussion shifted from participant to participant, rather than from audience to panel; reflecting a deepening conversation within the audience. Most comments were greeted with applause, even contrary opinions. Effort was made by the organizers, speakers, and participants to make the talk a safe space for discussing radically different opinions. In a hand poll, at the end of the talk, most participants voted for “Walyalup Koort.” As toponymic workspace, the pub talk provided space for historicizing the site’s ‘background’; for understanding ‘affective entanglements’, particularly Aboriginal desire for cultural inclusion; and for discussing ‘procedural justice’ in naming policies and how they might be improved.

Council vote and conclusions

Fremantle Council voted ten to one in favour of renaming the site “Walyalup Koort” through an amended motion that also requested city officers consider options for remembering the square’s previous names. The public consultation process and pub talk leading to this vote functioned as toponymic workspace, with significant indication of the instructional strategies

defined by Alderman and Rose-Redwood (2020). The public consultation and pub talk provided workspace for interrogating place naming policies as well as assessing and improving 'procedural justice' in these policies. The renaming consultation began with Whadjuk Nyoongar people as part of the City's reconciliation plan and was guided by them when consultation was extended to broad community engagement. Also, the pub talk began with a Whadjuk speaker who described overwhelming injustice reflected in contemporary place names, and the positive impact for Aboriginal people that would come from a more ethical naming policy. Opening the workspace with Indigenous voice helped participants to reflect on the 'landscape backstories' of place names so that the name 'Kings Square' could be seen as a political assertion of colonial ownership over Whadjuk land, rather than an impartial place name. Arguably, the community engagement documents would have been more effective in enabling empathy with Whadjuk Nyoongar had they not contained so much colonial settler representation, reflecting contemporary postcolonial subjectivity (Moreton-Robinson 2015) in Fremantle/Walyalup. The packs should have contained a greater proportion of Whadjuk Nyoongar images and had a better linguistic balance by including more Whadjuk Nyoongar words and stories. Better balance in the content of engagement documents may have helped readers to learn more and reflect more critically on the 'affective entanglements' around the site; particularly the impact of excluding Aboriginal culture from public memory. Demand for greater inclusion of Whadjuk Nyoongar culture in public places – particularly visual culture in the square – and for more opportunities to learn about the culture and people was clearly articulated in the pub talk. The findings above suggest that public consultation and pub-talk-style seminars should be adopted and promoted by local governments and communities seeking ethical representation in, and of, public places. The renaming of Walyalup Koort has provided a useful working model for communities to follow and improve upon by including substantially more Indigenous visual culture, language and stories within the toponymic workspace.

Notes

¹ Ngaala kaaditj Nyungar moort keyen kaadak nidja boodja. Ngaany kaaditj Nyungar kabarli bworan koora yey. This article was researched and written in Whadjuk Nyoongar country. The authors pay their respects to Whadjuk elders past and present, and thank Dr Helen Ulli Corbett for ongoing mentorship on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

² The quotes in this section are transcriptions of various interventions from the *Politics in the Pub* event.

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