

**‘Salvaging Residual Brand-value from Retro Place-Names’ - An unexploited bonanza from
De-colonization. An Initial, Exploratory Study.**

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Statement of Key Contributions

The *East India Company* example discussed in the extended abstract and many others like it, bring up a host of interesting, but embarrassing, ethical, legal and public policy questions which ought to be of interest to cartographers, ethicists, etymologists, linguists, historians, lawyers, legislators, lexicographers, marketers, philologists and public-policy makers, among others. Here are just a few of these questions/research propositions.

1. Who owns the right to these discarded names?
2. As is true for many of these names, since they are loathed and discarded by their former colonized owners, can they now be freely appropriated by anyone who has a vested interest in them. After all, one must remember that “one man’s poison can be another man’s manna”.
3. Even more troubling, can these discarded names now be copyrighted, trademarked or in other ways legally appropriated and controlled by shrewd marketers, investors, etc., who eventually intend to rent, license or sell these names to third parties (including those who formerly loathed and despised them), for use in branding, advertising, movie-making, book-writing, etc.
4. Or, are these former names still considered *de facto* to be part of the cultural vernacular in each country, and therefore cannot, in perpetuity, be copyrighted or trademarked or in other ways be legally restricted in use, in the same way that existing place names are recognized in ‘national gazettes’ (i.e., place name adoptions or changes are typically published in a national ‘gazette’ or ‘register’, after being duly adopted and approved by a national, state or local legislature).
5. Finally, should ‘reparations’ first be paid to the victims of these colonial masters, before their besmirched names are used again, in commerce, in the arts, in the media, or in public discourse.

Extended Abstract

It is a well-known fact in the field of marketing that there are many products and brands, whose names are tied, implicitly or explicitly, to the names of places. A few product examples include, Burmah teak, Cashmere silk, Ceylon tea, Colombian coffee, Darjeeling tea, India rubber, Jamaican ‘Blue Mountain’ coffee, Jamaican rum, Madras cotton fabrics, Malabar teak and Persian carpets, among others. A few brand examples include the *Bombay Dyeing Co.*, *Burmah Shave*, *The East India Co.*, *Mysore Sandalwood soap* and *Nilgiri’s tea*, among others.

Such name recognition bestows upon these places a type of brand value. For names with a high degree of recognition and acceptance, the financial value of the place-brand can be substantial, as for example is the case with Jamaican ‘Blue Mountain Coffee’, which can signify a distinctly different, highly prized and much sought after type of coffee, that cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

We readily acknowledge that none of the above is “terribly novel” or new to the field of marketing. What we wish to point out however is that behind this ‘facade’ of old and familiar place-linked products and brands, a new and evolving phenomenon is quietly turning the ‘old and familiar’ into ‘discarded’ detritus, that is then cleverly rejuvenated (by smart and astute marketers) and re-purposed, as a new ‘brand you knew’. We explain this evolving modus operandi, next.

The centuries-old practice by the colonial masters of yesteryear was to systematically ‘Anglicize’ and ‘Westernize’ millennia-old native place-names, from the minute they landed on foreign shores and ‘gained control over the locals’. Out went Millennia-old names like ‘Denali’ and in came new, anglicized and westernized names like ‘McKinley’ (Hetter 2015) that did all of

the following: (1) it honored and glorified the newly-triumphant colonizers and their heroes, (2) it sent a new signal of superiority to the just-conquered locals (in case they had any lingering doubts about who was now 'in charge'), (3) it rolled off their western tongues much more easily (than a native name such as, say, 'Thiruvananthapuram', known formerly by its anglicized name of 'Trivandrum', see Chakravorty (2018)) and, (4) it was also easier on the western ear. Talk of killing four birds with one stone !

Now, let's fast forward three to four centuries (depending on the place), until we are in the era right after WWII, when many of these places underwent ownership transfer (a.k.a. gained 'independence'). Suddenly, citizens of many of these places found that they faced tremendous social and political pressure to change the names of their places of abode, to shed all remaining vestiges of their colonial past and display new-found national pride and self-worth, by adopting new, indigenous names, many of which were the names they had pre-colonization. A few such examples include 'Myanmar' (formerly 'Burma'), 'Sri Lanka' (formerly 'Ceylon') and 'Mumbai' (formerly 'Bombay', see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: (Right-wing, Hindu Nationalist) Shiv-Sena Activists attacking the Marquee of the Indian textile manufacturing company, known as the 'Bombay Dyeing Company', in Mumbai, India, on 5-15-2008.



All of this name-changing resulted in a vast ethereal graveyard of colonial-era place names freed-up from any ownership (legal or otherwise) and discarded by the new post-colonial masters, many of them with hatred and loathing for their colonial past. These discarded and now ‘free’ former colonial place names are often etymological gold-mines, with much vestigial cultural, historical and commercial value, waiting to be ‘discovered’ by shrewd and astute marketers.

One such prime example is the name, *The East India Company*, “the world’s first multinational company”, which “began as a trading monopoly under Queen Elizabeth I in 1600 to ship commodities to the West from India, China and the Spice Islands, countering the clout of the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese. At various times, the company controlled the trade in indigo dye, cotton, silk, opium and tea” (Boulden 2010).

With the passage of time, “the British crown slowly took control of the company's routes, ports, currency and military, becoming the symbol of the British empire” (Boulden 2010).

Finally, “in 1874, the company ceased trading, prompting an obituary in The Times newspaper now inscribed in a marble table at the new store: ‘It accomplished a work such as in the whole history of the human race no other company ever attempted, or is ever to attempt in the years to come’” (Boulden 2010).

The company was almost universally loathed by the colonized and almost universally gloated over by the colonizers. According to (Boulden 2010), “the company's name may ... remind some of the illegal opium trade from China, and oppression and wars in India”.

But, in 2010, a London-based, but “Indian-born importer and entrepreneur”, named Sanjiv Mehta “bought the intellectual property rights to the company in 2005, after they had lain dormant for a century. His goal was to create a global luxury brand”. Mr. Mehta’s dream is now “realized in a new store off London's high-end Regent Street, where the new East India Co. now sells gourmet tea, chocolate, coffee and gifts (Boulden 2010).

Mr. Mehta “invested around \$20 million in the company so far. He hopes to open more stores and launch leather goods, jewelry and home interiors, plans that will take an additional \$100 million, he said” (Boulden 2010).

There are many other examples like the East India Company, we just discussed, but in the interest of brevity (and word count), we cannot list or discuss them here.

Suffice it to say, that we are just in the exploratory phase of our programmatic research endeavor. Hence, we do not have an approved methodology, we have not gathered any data yet

and therefore, most obviously, we do not have any ‘results’ or ‘conclusions’ to show yet. All that we have right now, is a lot of questions (such as those we listed earlier), in answer to which, we are in the midst of a search in the popular press, the trade press and the academic literature for anecdotes and evidence for and against each of the research questions/propositions, we listed earlier. More is yet to come.

References

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