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INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE LANDSCAPE OF NORTH AMERICA

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Abstract

In the North American continent, Amerindian toponyms differ from place names given by Euro-Americans with respect to their denotata, semantics, grammar and, most importantly, to their cultural value. By observing the basic linguistic features of Amerindian toponyms, one can gain a valuable insight into how indigenous people perceive, conceptualize and categorize the significant geographical entities in their surroundings and how they understand the relevance of places in their spatial and cultural orientation: Native Americans use toponyms not only to help to orient themselves in their environment, but also to encode the history of their nations and the elements of their traditional culture so as to pass their knowledge of the world on to the next generation in a verbal form.

1. Prototypical indigenous place names

One of the basic assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics is that language reflects the ways humans understand the world they live in (Evans and Green, 2006, 47-48). Spatiality, including geographical reality, is a crucial component of this world. People, mostly to aid in orientation, universally identify the important geographical objects in their vicinity with the help of place names. Such facts as which geographical features are considered important enough to be named and what the names convey about their denotata are, at the same time, strongly dependent upon how the namers interpret their geographical surroundings. This interpretation is based on human experience with the landscape, which is determined by cultural factors (e.g., way of living, conventions in communication).

In North America, the same geographical reality was experienced, interpreted and named successively by two groups of people whose relationships with the natural environment were distinctly different: indigenous people lived in harmony with nature; European settlers, however, came to possess and exploit the land (Ashley, 1996, 1403). Today, when reliable sources to detect the essential features of Native American culture are relatively scarce, observing the basic features of the surviving Amerindian toponyms gives a valuable insight into how indigenous people approached and mentally processed the geographical entities in their surroundings. As Thomas F. Thornton states, “place names tell us something not only about the structure and content of the physical environment itself but also how people perceive, conceptualize, classify, and utilize that environment.” (1997, 209)¹

1.1. With respect to possible denotata, we can claim that Native Americans gave names to various geographical objects of the landscape, from mountains to deer runs (Ashley, 1996, 1405). Features salient by virtue of their physical appearance or cultural significance (e.g., hunting grounds, communication routes) were consequently named by indigenous people. Places considered to be dangerous were also named to raise awareness of the danger (e.g., *Chicopee* ‘violent river’; Ashley, 1996, 1405). Restrictions on

¹ This consideration in general seems to be the main interest of ethnophysiology, a nascent transdisciplinary field of Humanities, examining the “different human conceptualizations of landscape, especially as indicated by differences in the way languages use generic terms and proper names (toponyms) for landscape features” (Turk, Mark and Stea, 2011, 25).

naming were imposed by “the limits of human perception and cognition” (Thornton, 1997, 221). Large geographical entities (e.g., mountain ranges, big rivers) seldom got a name in the past, as their unity was difficult to observe, and thus, to grasp (Stewart, 1975, 205). Parts of such large entities (e.g., rocks in mountains; or falls, rapids, bends of rivers), however, were regularly named. This contrast was strongly emphasized also by Thomas T. Waterman, when examining Native American place-naming practices on the Pacific Coast (1922, 178). As an object in independent “naming districts” (see Webster, 2007, 111, 117) of diverse indigenous languages, the same denotatum might have several distinct native names based on different conceptualizations of the same entity (Holmer, 1948a, 11): e.g., the Rio Grande, the boundary river between the United States and Mexico, is known as *Gonitséi* ‘big river’ by the Lipan Apaches, as *Tú’íhíidí* ‘red river’ by the Mescalero Apaches, and as *Toob Ba’áadii* ‘female river’ by the Navajos (in Navajo cosmology, south is female; Webster, 2007, 111).²

1.2. Considering the names, descriptive adequacy is more than striking: a large number of native place names depict the indicated geographical features in an astonishingly precise fashion (Holmer, 1948a, 14; Ashley, 1996, 1403). Most scholars appreciate the “descriptive force” (Webster, 2007, 108, 117), the “evocative power” (Ashley, 1996, 1406) of these indigenous toponyms, by which they can clearly visualize the designated geographical entities (Thornton, 1997, 219). Keith H. Basso (1996, 13-17, examples are from pp. 14, 16) calls attention to the historical relevance of some of these name forms: a few native place names attest drastic environmental changes which took place after the name had been invented. For example, *Tliish Bi Tú’é* ‘snake’s water’, near Cibecue, Arizona is a dried-up spring today; *T’iis Sikaadé* ‘grove of cottonwood trees’, also in Apache country, is now a barren area with a single surviving tree. As many Amerindian toponyms still in use today are intelligible to native speakers, descriptive place names store an enormous amount of information for the members of indigenous communities about the past and present geographical reality of their homeland in fixed linguistic forms, and as such these name forms can also be considered as important cultural icons (Thornton, 1997, 219). “Fanciful descriptions” (cf. Cowell, 2004, 23-24; Webster, 2007, 107), i.e. metaphorical names are also quoted quite commonly in native place nomenclature, e.g., Tewa *Paxwemp’in* ‘the fish-tail mountain’, Kwakiutl *Gwa’xume* ‘the raven’s face’, northern Athapascan *Tsalak’oh* ‘the beaver hand river’, Dakota *Ptāsi’nta* ‘the otter’s tail’ (the examples are from Holmer, 1948a, 35-36).³

Some scholars went further, questioning whether these practical “descriptive phrases” (Ashley, 1996, 1403; Bright, 2003, 669) should be considered as true proper names at all. Holmer (1948a, 11, 15–18, 41) claims that the Natives, having no need for official toponyms as a result of lack of centralization, used their elusive descriptions as appellatives, and only the Euro-Americans understood them as place names. Though this idea was widely held by several experts (cf. Ashley, 1996, 1403),⁴ contemporary linguistic anthropological fieldwork does not seem to support this view; instead, the thoroughly conscious use of place names is emphasized (Basso, 1996; see also 3.3.). Toponyms, landscape descriptions and generic landscape terms, however, are not necessarily differentiated today in all Native American languages (e.g., the Navajo language; Turk, Mark and Stea, 2011, 35).

Another remarkable characteristic of Native American toponymy is its highly utilitarian perspective on the landscape: most place names indicate sites from which food (e.g., *Mugget Hill* from Algonquian *mashamugget* ‘great fishing place’, Ashley, 1996, 1405; Kwakiutl *Ha’mdzas* ‘the berry picking place’, Holmer, 1948a, 21), medicine (Lipan Apache *izjūidich’ihii* ‘bitter medicine’, Webster, 2007, 109; Dakota *Pežihū tak’apimakepa* ‘the river where they dig the yellow medicine’, Holmer, 1948a, 21), and materials (for

² American Indian place names in the paper are spelled and explained as found in the indicated sources.

³ Holmer’s (1948a) Tewa examples were taken from Harrington (1907-1908), his source of the Kwakiutl (in today’s term: Kwakwaka’wakw) place names was Boas (1934).

⁴ A possible consequence of this consideration is that some scholars write the relevant expressions by using lower-case letters at the beginning (see the examples in this paper taken from Bright, 1984 and Webster, 2007).

building houses, e.g., Arapaho *Takakuan* from *tóh' okóóxeeni* 'where we get tepee poles', Cowell, 2004, 38; see also Nahuatl *Tecozautila* 'at the yellow ocher', Holmer, 1948a, 13; for making weapons, e.g., Apache *T'obk'aa Sikaadé* 'stand of arrow cane', Basso, 1996, 16) have been obtained.

2. Some universal features of indigenous place names

Based on the above account, one might be tempted to believe that Native American toponymy is uniquely picturesque, however, to get a real picture we must add that the majority of indigenous place names are, in fact, colourless and monotonous expressions, displaying semantic contents found in several distinct toponyms of very different languages in many parts of the world (Holmer, 1948a, 37-40; Cowell, 2004, 34). Amerindian place names referring to vegetation (e.g., Kwakiutl *Sə'ldzade* 'the blue-berry spot', Holmer, 1948a, 21; Lipan Apache *dzítzosikaa'i* 'wild plum trees', Webster, 2007, 106), animals (e.g., Tewa *Kibu'u* 'the prairie dog corner', Holmer, 1948a, 22; Papago, i.e. Tohono O'odham *Cababi* 'badger well', Bright, 1984, 71), buildings (e.g., Huron *Canada* 'collection of huts', Ashley, 1996, 1405; Nahuatl *Jacala* 'hut', Holmer, 1948b, 32), numerals (e.g., Kwakiutl *Ma'l'ama'no* 'the two heads', Holmer, 1948a, 36; Mayan *Hopelchen* 'the five wells', Holmer, 1948b, 33), tribal names (e.g., Tewa *Yutá'imp'o* 'the Ute river', Holmer, 1948a, 29; probably Creek *Yemassee*, from the tribal name Yamasee, Pearson, 1978, 67) and historical events (e.g., Tewa *Buduk'ekwage* 'the mesa where the donkey was killed', Holmer, 1948a, 33; Arapaho *Tsadenanthal* from *hísei tihnóó3eet* 'woman when she was left behind', Cowell, 2004, 38), as the surviving examples suggest, must have been fairly regular in the past.

3. Some unique features of indigenous place names

More importantly, surviving Native American place names also display some special, culture-dependent characteristics, particularly when certain semantic and grammatical features as well as possible functions in discourse are involved. By examining toponyms manifesting such unique features, one might get an idea about how indigenous people conceptualize the significant elements of their geographical surroundings and how they understand the relevance of places in their spatial and cultural orientation.

3.1. In relation to native place-name semantics, concepts of (i) location and direction, (ii) figure-ground organization, (iii) qualification, (iv) possession as well as (v) spirituality must be mentioned.

(i) First, several indigenous toponyms are in the locative case, i.e. they incorporate an affix (see also 3.2.) whose concrete local sense, in most cases, is still intelligible to the native speakers (Holmer, 1948a, 23-24, 26). These place names are usually rendered in English with the help of such phrases as 'place (where)...', 'where there is/are...', 'at/to...', e.g., Pomo *Gualala* 'place where water goes down' (Bright, 1984, 66), Tewa *'Abè'ime* 'where there is chokecherry' (Holmer, 1948a, 22), Tewa *Si'ime* 'where there are onions' (Holmer, 1948a, 22), Mohawk *Caughmanwaga* 'at the rapids' (Holmer, 1948a, 25). Holmer (1948b, 41, footnote 24), however, points out that in most Amerindian languages there is no clear distinction among such adverbial notions as 'at', 'to' and 'from'; as a result, location and direction are not properly distinguished in the native place names either. In a similar way, Palmer (1996, 257-258) shows that Coeur d'Alene, a Salish language, has a set of locative prefixes referring to contiguity in general; thus, relevant toponyms do not make a difference between proximity and contact, or attachment. At the same time, indigenous place names might express "such relations as different distance from the speaker, visibility or invisibility, etc." (Holmer, 1948a, 27), e.g., Carrier Indian *T'aL'a* 'at the farthest end of the water (river)' (Holmer, 1948a, 25), Ventureño Chumash *Saticoy* 'it is facing (in a certain direction)' (Bright, 1984, 67), Tewa *T'obap'enge* 'beyond the cliffs' (Holmer, 1948a, 27). Direction in native toponyms is usually indicated not with respect to the cardinal points of the compass, but in relation to a striking geographical object

(e.g., a big river, a mountain range) of the territory (Holmer, 1948a, 27), e.g., Kwakiutl *Gwa'as* 'the place down the river' (Holmer, 1948a, 27), Tewa *P'imp'enge* 'beyond the mountains' (Holmer, 1948a, 24).

(ii) Secondly, numerous indigenous descriptive place names display a unique conceptualization of the indicated geographical objects. Gary B. Palmer (1996, 257-262) offers an attractive analysis of the inner structure of these toponyms. In such names a salient feature is profiled in relation to its background, e.g., Apache *tse biká' tú yabillí* 'water flows down on the top of a regular succession of white rocks' (Palmer, 1996, 261), Kwakiutl *tləmxʷsəm* 'gooseberries, tangled bushes on surface' (Palmer, 1996, 260), Kwakiutl *tíbis* 'spot on beach' (Palmer, 1996, 260). The author identifies "a common American Indian pattern of naming places after features of the landscape, which are perceived to stand in figure-ground (or trajector-landmark) relationships" (Palmer, 1996, 261). Such a conceptualization of the geographical feature, however, as Palmer observes, is not always expressed in a complete form in the language. The landmark and its relation to the trajector, if evident, are often left out of the actual place names, e.g., Apache *tse tsgai dab sūdíl* 'white rocks lie above in a compact cluster' (Palmer, 1996, 262), Lipan Apache *tsínaaslá* 'pairs of stones lie about' (Webster, 2007, 106). Sometimes it is the trajector that is vague, e.g., Sahaptin *Palouse River* 'what is standing up in the water', referring, presumably, to a huge rock in the Snake River, not far from the mouth of the Palouse River (Bright, 2004a, 208).

(iii) A third special feature in the semantics of indigenous place nomenclature is the rarity of English-style adjectival compounds. Although colour terms are relatively common in compound native place (especially river) names (e.g., Osage *Ni'čka* 'the white river', Choctaw *Bogalusa* 'the black river', but also Tewa *K'up'endive* '(at) the black stone', Kwakiutl *Mo'gves* 'the yellowish beach'; Holmer, 1948a, 20-21); other adjectives appear less frequently in indigenous toponyms than in place names of English origin in the North American continent, except for the adjectives meaning 'little' and 'big' (Holmer, 1948b, 24), e.g., Carrier Indian *Tçet'i* 'the great rocks', i.e. the Rocky Mountains; Kwakiutl *Wa'bido* 'the little river' (Holmer, 1948a, 16). The latter concept, however, is often expressed in native toponyms by way of using diminutive and augmentative suffixes. For example, the diminutive suffix in Tewa place names is *-e*, whilst augmentation is indicated by the ending *-yo*, e.g., *Texna'e* 'the little house', *P'oyo* 'the big hole' (Holmer, 1948a, 17-18; 1948b, 25).

(iv) Fourth, compound toponyms referring to possession, another characteristically English (or rather European) semantic type, are also conspicuously missing from the Native American place nomenclature (Cowell, 2004, 36; Webster, 2007, 117). Using an individual's name in or as a place name contradicts the basics of indigenous culture:

"The red man considered himself a part of nature, not the master of it, a traveller through the landscape and time, not empowered to claim it, name it, and control it forever. The Amerindian did not bestow the names of people on geographical features, did not seek to commemorate himself or his passing in lasting names." (Ashley, 1996, 1403)

Today's North American place names including the name of an indigenous individual were usually given by Euro-Americans. *Seattle* (Washington), for instance, was named after a West Coast chief⁵ in 1853 (Ashley, 1996, 1405; FNESz, 2: 461); *Waleska* (Georgia) got its name for Warluskee, the daughter of a Cherokee chief around 1836 (Ashley, 1996, 1404); *Keokuk* (Iowa) was named after a Sauk chief shortly after 1832 (Ashley, 1996, 1406); *Cateechee* (South Carolina) is supposed to preserve the name of a Cherokee princess mentioned in a legend of questionable authenticity (Pearson, 1978, 64). Alternatively, native

⁵ As Constance M. Matthews (1972, 199) remarks: "a minor Indian chief, called See-yat or something like it, and described by those who knew him as a scamp and a villain though a likeable one, has his name (in one of its variable forms) preserved in the city of Seattle". Leonard R. N. Ashley (1996, 1405) mentions that he in fact sold the right to white men to use his name as a place name.

toponyms reflecting possession often commemorate a Euro-American individual, e.g., *Stiběsōkwijobinaba* ‘old Mrs. Stevenson’s ranch’, *Eldōbitexwa* ‘Eldodt’s house’ (Holmer, 1948a, 30).

(v) Finally, traditional mythological stories were often regarded by the Natives in their relationship to the landscape. Mountains and bodies of water especially were suspected to be the abode of supernatural beings; thus, their names frequently contain references to deities, demons and spirits, e.g., the Tewa *Tsabiýondebuku*, the name of a prominent cliff, tells us about a child-eating giant (*tsabiyo*); the Athapascan *Nak’al*, a river name, mentions a female dwarf; the Algonquian *Manitoba*, originally the name of a lake in Canada, conjures up the spirit of the Great Manitou himself (Holmer, 1948a, 34-35; FNESz, 2: 89). In traditional Arapaho culture, as the surviving native place names in the territory of the present Rocky Mountain National Park suggest, the highlands were dedicated to sacred mythological figures, whilst the lowlands were occupied by human beings (Cowell, 2004): cf., for instance, today’s *Bear Paws Peaks* from *woxéihtoo* ‘bear paw’, also a common decorative motif in the early 19th-century native art, appearing regularly in connection with the legendary Whirlwind Woman, who is supposed to have witnessed how the Earth was created (Cowell, 2004, 24) and *Takakuan* from *tób’ okóóxeeni* ‘where we get tepee poles’ (Cowell, 2004, 38).

3.2. Grammatically, as we have seen above, several place names in various Native American languages are in the locative case. In these languages, locative suffixes have often been formed from agglutinated appellatives, e.g., the endings *-vik* ~ *-ving* or *-lik* ~ *-ling* in Eskimo (or Inuit–Yupik) toponyms mean ‘place’, but they do not occur alone any more (e.g., *Ukiadliving* ‘winter or fall place’, *Nettiling* ‘ringed-seal place’; Holmer, 1948a, 19); likewise, the endings *-as* ‘place’ and *-es* ~ *-is* ‘beach’ in Kwakiutl have recently turned into real suffixes from independent words (e.g., *Eik’as* ‘the high place’, *L’a’gwis* ‘the red beach’; Holmer, 1948a, 16, 20). In other cases, the original, full sense of the present locative suffix is not perceptible any longer, e.g., Tewa *-ge* in *Husoge* ‘at the large arroyo’, Athapascan *-me* in *L’obwānme* ‘in the glade’ (Holmer, 1948a, 23-25). Though locative place names are frequent in many Amerindian languages, not all native tongues admit them. The Siouan languages, for example, lack locative endings, thus corresponding toponyms: cf. Dakota (a Siouan language) *Mi’nixaxa* ‘curling water’, ‘waterfall’ (i.e. today’s Minnehaha Falls) and Chippewa (or Ojibwe, an Algonquian language) *Pawating* ‘at the falls or rapids’ (anglicised as *Bamating*, still in use in geographical names near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; Holmer, 1948a, 25-26).

Another interesting grammatical feature of indigenous place names is their readiness to include verbs, e.g., Tewa *P’osayé’ive* ‘where the water bubbles or boils’, Kwakiutl *Q’wawe’la* ‘(the trees or stones) standing in the water’, Dakota *wakpi’ pa’ksā* ‘the river that bends itself’ (Holmer, 1948a, 30-33). Several Lipan Apache toponyms contain a so-called classificatory verb stem, e.g., *-lá* ‘two objects have position’ in *tsínaaslá* ‘pairs of stone lie about’, or *-jaa* ‘a mass or collectivity has position’ in *tsízhíshijaa’i* ‘black rocks that lie there’ (Webster, 2007, 107-108, 117). All these constructions are nominalized when used as place names (Holmer, 1948a, 32; Webster, 2007, 107).

3.3. In discourse, place names are used by Natives consciously and with great care (Basso, 1996). In American Indian oral literature special genres have been developed to pass on a nation’s geographical and historical knowledge from one generation to the other. The Upper Cowlitz Indians invent “travelogue narratives”, in which an individual reports on his travels, enumerating the names of the places he visited in his life (Thornton, 1997, 217). The Apaches believe that places are the most reliable witnesses of history (what is sure is where and not when an event happened), and place names inform us about the relevance of the actual locations in the nation’s history (Basso, 1996, 30-35). They regard toponyms as “frozen ancestral quotes”, mostly about the past, left to the present generation to provide valid experience (Basso, 1996, 13). In their view, place names, through the agency of historical tales that include them, often warn us about the disruptive effects of individual or collective misbehaviour and guide us towards accepting and maintaining historically established moral, cultural and social norms, e.g., the story about the

disastrous consequences of denying help to relatives in need behind the toponym *Chaa Bi Dalt'obé* 'shades of shit' (Basso, 1996, 23-30). For Native Americans, an important component of the "meaning" of a toponym is undoubtedly the encyclopaedic knowledge they associate with the designated place (cf. Langacker, 2008, 316-318).

Native place names in historical narratives are also used to validate stories by creating an authenticating "narrative space": the retold historical events are anchored to known geographical reality via the use of toponyms (Thornton, 1997, 220; Webster, 2007, 113; Palmer, 2007, 1061-1062). Stories about the past homeland also make use of indigenous geographical names to (re-)establish the image of the former native country by means of evoking its landmarks and boundaries (Thornton, 1997, 220; see also Webster, 2007, 111, 115). What is more, indigenous people often define their sense of identity through place names when identifying the clan they belong to: two matrilineal clans of the Tlingits (the Chookaneidí and the T'akdeintaan) are named after geographical features of the territory (i.e. the present Glacier Bay National Park) they inhabited in the past (Thornton, 1997, 222-223); several Apache clans got their names from the place where life-supporting corn was first produced by their women (Basso, 1996, 17-22).

4. The attitude of Europeans towards indigenous place names

In the course of history, the attitude of the European conquerors and settlers towards indigenous place names in North America has changed from total rejection to corrupted maintenance, romantic revival and creative manufacturing (Ashley, 1996, 1403).

Captain John Smith recorded several native toponyms in the territory of the newly established Virginia Colony, but, because he considered indigenous place names to be barbaric, he urged Charles I to replace them with appropriate English ones. Charles indeed (re)named a number of North American geographical features, mostly after the members of his family (e.g., *Cape Ann*, honouring his mother; *Maryland*, commemorating his wife; Matthews, 1972, 180-184; FNESz, 2: 105). Neither did the Pilgrims and their descendants appreciate native place names. They preferred to use toponyms from England and terms for moral abstractions to indicate their new settlements (e.g., *Boston*, *Providence*; Matthews, 1972, 185; FNESz, 1: 245, 2: 377). The largest number of indigenous place names was collected by French explorers and missionaries, who, being eager to learn the native languages they encountered during their journeys, could understand the meanings of these names. Several surviving native toponyms were first written down (even if in a Frenchified form) and explained by the early French adventurers (e.g., *Mississippi* Chippewa 'great river', *Chicago* Miami-Illinois 'wild onion place'; Matthews, 1972, 193-195; FNESz, 2: 149, 1: 285).

In the New World, the first European explorers made contact with speakers of several distinct indigenous languages in a short period of time, which easily led to misunderstandings. Frequently repeated native phrases are believed to have occasionally been accepted as place names by mistake, e.g., *Yucatán* Mayan 'What do you want?' (Ashley, 1996, 1407),⁶ *Cabo Catoche* Mayan 'Come into my house!' (Stewart, 1975, 153-154). The unsettled orthographic traditions in the different mother tongues of the early settlers must have caused several inaccuracies in recording the unfamiliar native toponyms. The lack of documentation of the early stages of Amerindian languages, and the sound substitutions that occurred when the toponyms were borrowed into English, both make it difficult for today's experts to detect the corruptions in the name forms and find the true etymologies of the indigenous loan names (Holmer, 1948a, 38-42; Pearson, 1978, 60, 62).

In the 19th century, the white men's increasingly romantic view of the Native Americans resulted in asserting the superiority of Amerindian place names in expressiveness over the ones invented by Euro-Americans in the North American continent. Most of the newly established states of the United States

⁶ Other possible interpretations claim that the name derives either from a Guaraní word meaning 'massacre', or from a Mayan expression meaning 'in the land of the red brockets' (FNESz, 2: 789).

were named after a geographical feature in their territories bearing a name of native origin (e.g., *Ohio*, *Michigan*, from their main bodies of water: Iroquois ‘great river’ and Algonquian ‘large water’, ‘large lake’, respectively; FNESz, 2: 270, 139). If a suitable term was not available locally, names were transferred from distant locations (e.g., *Wyoming* ‘at the big river flat’, originally a name of a valley in Pennsylvania; Bright, 2004b, 576) or created on request (e.g., *Oklahoma* ‘red people’, produced by a Choctaw chief in 1866; FNESz, 2: 271) (Matthews, 1972, 205-207; Bölcskei, 2009, 123-127). Some of the manufactured names acquired symbolic meanings: e.g., *Podunk*, a placeholder name indicating a remote, insignificant habitation in American English, has been derived from an Algonquian word, originally denoting marshy locations and identifying a native tribe; the probably forged native name for today’s Lake Webster (Massachusetts), *Lake Charogggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg*, supposedly meaning ‘you fish on your side, I’ll fish on my side, nobody fishes in the middle’,⁷ might have been invented to mock indigenous place-naming practices (Ashley, 1996, 1406).

5. Factors affecting the survival of indigenous place names

We must not forget that our current views of the characteristics of Native American place names are based primarily on the features of the still existing indigenous toponyms. However, only a small proportion of the former complete stock of native place names has survived up to the present day. Indigenous toponyms still in use today are typically names for topographic features (e.g., rock outcrops, which, as places of “prospect and refuge”, gave the opportunity for the Natives to observe without being observed; see Dutton, 2009, 21); names for hydrographic features (e.g., the names of waterways in Lipan Apache, a native nation which used navigable rivers as important routes to travel; see Webster, 2007, 114); or names for habitations (either metonymical names in which reference to a geographical feature identifies the nearby town, e.g., *tsitizhibii* ‘black rock’, the Lipan Apache name for a Mexican town; or names in which human settlement is explicitly stated, e.g., *Kigotgab* ‘many houses’, the Lipan Apache name for San Antonio, Texas; Webster, 2007, 110). In the United States, Kentucky has the fewest surviving native toponyms (Ashley, 1996, 1406).

The chances for survival of indigenous place names were determined by several factors. A number of great rivers in North America bear a native name because, although the Euro-American settlers erased the native toponyms from the land they occupied, they did not bother to rename such unclaimed geographical objects as rivers (Ashley, 1996, 1406). In West Jersey, designations for the early Indian communities and plantations tended to survive if the name was derived from a tribal name, and if the indicated community was located on a stream which bore the habitation name, in places where settlement activities were either extensive or negligible – especially when the native name was widespread enough to overcome the proposed English competitors (Zinkin, 1978, 218-219). In the territory of the present Rocky Mountain National Park, the revival of the Arapaho place names at the beginning of the 20th century was the result of a conscious local decision to convince politicians to support the establishment of the national park, which, by its nomenclature, recalls the early history of Colorado. In opposition to the requirements of the U.S. Board on Geographical Names, park proponents preserved almost exclusively the exotic, “fanciful” native names (applied often inappropriately to sites as a result of the lack of understanding their cultural significance) to attract tourists into the park (Cowell, 2004, 22, 26–36, 39).

6. Conclusion

⁷ The explanation is a widely known hoax, fabricated by a local journalist at the beginning of the 20th century. Some people claim that the real meaning of the extraordinarily long name is ‘fishing place at the boundaries – neutral meeting grounds’ (Patenaude, 2011).

In the North American continent, as we have stated above, Amerindian toponyms differ from place names given by Euro-Americans with respect to their denotata, semantics, grammar and, most importantly, to their cultural value. As the surviving native place nomenclature suggests, the perception and conceptualization of geographical objects by indigenous people were and still are influenced by their culturally determined attachment to the landscape (cf. also Turk, 2011, 58). Native Americans use toponyms not only to help to orient themselves in their geographical surroundings, but also to encode the history of their nations and the elements of their traditional culture. They can pass on their knowledge of the world in verbal form – a feature not fully grasped by Euro-Americans. Paradoxically, the indigenous toponyms still in use today have been consciously selected, spontaneously formed (transcribed, modified or translated) and (mis)located exactly by the latter group of people.

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