

**Babel, Belonging, and Colonial
Queensland (1840–1870):
Language, Naming, and the Making
of a Colonial Order**

Content note:

This essay discusses nineteenth-century colonial policies, missions, reserves, language loss, and archival descriptions that may reflect outdated or offensive terms. Where such terms appear in quoted or paraphrased archival material, they are marked as historical usage.

Abstract

This essay is a historical reconstruction rather than a literary interpretation. Between the 1840s and 1870, officials, missionaries, surveyors, and settlers in the colony that became Queensland assembled an Anglophone “language order”: a modular set of practices that distributed belonging and exclusion through interpreting, schoolroom regulation, and naming. David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* serves only as an aperture for the question; the argument rests on administrative records and policy traces.

Methodologically, the essay pairs microhistory with a history of concepts. It reads individual depositions, press notices, and rulebooks alongside survey charts, government gazettes, and mission files, and treats archival guides and indexes not as neutral finding aids but as artefacts of the order under study. Three mechanisms structure the analysis: (1) interpreting and translation as instruments for policing, governance, and evangelisation; (2) classroom language rules that ranked tongues and redirected children’s speech; and (3) onomastic practices of people and places that stabilised spellings and categories for filing, mapping, and search.

Three clusters anchor the case studies: (A) administrative correspondence around Somerset in the 1860s shows how categories and names travelled between London, Brisbane, and Cape York, carrying vernacular labels into official geography; (B) mission schooling and rationing regimes reveal a covert curriculum in which First Languages were discouraged in dormitories and classrooms even as bilingual pupils were enlisted to interpret for order and catechesis; and (C) early translation and grammatical projects in eastern Australia, used here as a comparative lens, expose the politics of nomenclature in paratexts, glossaries, and prefaces, and illuminate Indigenous agency in mediating meanings.

The contribution is twofold. Substantively, the essay recovers how authority moved through routine paperwork such as petitions, rolls, indexes, and gazetteers rather than through a single statute, and explains why the archive still speaks more loudly in some voices than others. Practically, it clarifies the retrieval pathways that continue to govern access today and suggests how indexing, place name restoration, and language programs co-designed with communities can unsettle inherited spellings and categories. Overall, it reframes belonging in colonial Queensland as co-produced through speech governance and naming power.

Introduction: From Literary Aperture to Historical Question

In the opening pages of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993), settlers encounter a liminal figure at the edge of their community: a white child grown among Aboriginal people who stutters "B-b-British object," a phrase that dramatizes how language sorts of body and claims them (whether as property, subject, or threat). Critics have long read the novel for its allegory of language and belonging. Yet for the purposes of a historical essay, Malouf's scene functions best as an aperture, not an object: it focuses attention on a nineteenth-century colonial practice in Queensland: how speech, translation, and naming were deployed administratively, missionally, and socially to structure inclusion and exclusion.

This essay, therefore, pursues a question that is historical rather than literary: between the 1840s and 1870, how did colonial and missionary institutions in Queensland organise a "language order," and how did that order distribute belonging and exile? I use the term language order to denote the ensemble of practices through which authorities and settlers decided what counted as proper speech, how interpreters and translators mediated hearings and transactions, how schoolrooms and mission stations permitted or punished Indigenous languages, and how survey maps and gazetteers converted place-talk into entries with standardised spellings. The period chosen spans late New South Wales administration in the north through to Queensland's separation in 1859 and the 1860s consolidation of northern outposts such as Somerset (established 1864; principal administrative functions moved to Thursday Island in 1877).

Two considerations justify the focus. First, Indigenous languages in what is now Queensland were and remain numerous and diverse. Before formalisation of Queensland's place naming processes and long before twentieth-century protection legislation, missions and local administrators had already embedded logics of linguistic hierarchy into daily life. Second, a conceptual history of "Babel" in nineteenth-century philology and missionary linguistics helps to clarify how colonial actors imagined language difference: was it a problem to be overcome through English schooling and translation, a resource to be used for policing and conversion, or a marker of alterity to be erased? The imperial philological tradition, reconstructed by scholars of colonial knowledge, provides critical vocabulary for reading the archives of Queensland administration alongside missionary projects in eastern Australia.

Sources for this reconstruction are eclectic but commensurable: indexes to the Colonial Secretary's correspondence (1859–1896), which summarise administrative traffic about Aboriginal peoples and, to a lesser degree, Torres Strait Islanders; government histories of administration that chart the transfer of responsibilities after separation and the rise of northern outposts; guides to mission/reserve records held by AIATSIS and State Library networks; place naming databases and policy statements that reveal how Indigenous names were recorded, distorted, or replaced; and comparative materials on early translation, especially the Threlkeld–Biraban collaboration in Awabakal, whose peritexts reveal much about naming and authority.

I also draw selectively on recent overviews of language revitalization to highlight the afterlives of nineteenth-century policies.

The argument unfolds in five steps. Section I situates “Babel” as a colonial concept in nineteenth-century philology, clarifying how European theories of language and translation travelled with missionaries and administrators. Section II reconstructs Queensland’s mid-century administrative landscape, with attention to the Colonial Secretary’s Office and the northern outpost at Somerset. Section III turns to missions, schools, and stations to examine the everyday regulation of speech. Section IV analyses translation and naming, focusing on grammar-making and scripture projects in eastern Australia as a comparator and on naming practices that converted Country into gazetteer entries. Section V offers three microhistories that demonstrate how language and naming distributed inclusion and exclusion in concrete settings. A short coda returns to Malouf as a mirror rather than a proof, noting both convergences and necessary corrections. The conclusion reflects on legacies for contemporary policies of language revival and place name reform.

The aim is neither to homogenise Queensland’s diverse Indigenous societies nor to treat colonial institutions as monolithic. Instead, the essay reconstructs a modular “language order”: a repeatable set of practices traceable across missions, offices, maps, courts and classrooms that determined who could be heard, who could speak, and under what name. Methodologically, I read everyday paperwork as language technology and use microhistory and explicit archival retrieval paths to test and unsettle macro narratives.

I. “Babel” as Colonial Concept: Philology, Mission, and Translation

When nineteenth-century missionaries and administrators wrote about language, they drew upon and contributed to a broader imperial philology. Sir William Jones’s famous comparative method: tracking affinities among Sanskrit, Persian, and European languages, had yielded a developmental model in which language mapped cultural evolution. In the settler colonies, this often translated into a presumption that English would and should replace local languages, either through schooling or through what missionary correspondence sometimes called the “gradual adoption of civilised speech.”

A conceptual history of “Babel” helps to clarify the stakes. As a biblical trope, Babel functions both as a myth of dispersion and as a warrant for projects of linguistic unification. In the nineteenth-century scholarship, it provided an allegorical vocabulary for classifying people by tongue and for imagining translation as a redemptive overcoming of division. Recent intellectual histories have shown how this philological imagination became entangled with colonial power, as grammars and dictionaries codified “native” languages while subordinating them to an Anglophone order. In such a framework, translation is never innocent: it authorizes administrators to recognize some voices (through interpreters, schoolmasters, or court translators) and to render others inaudible. Missionary linguistics participates in this ambivalence: it can preserve lexicons and textualise speech, yet it may also rename worlds and align them with imperial categories.

Mid-nineteenth-century Queensland records show that this conceptual background mattered in at least three ways. First, it set mission aims: in schoolrooms and on stations, Indigenous languages were variously tolerated, restricted, or used instrumentally for catechesis, rationing, and order. Second, it shaped administrative voice: officials privileged English or mediated speech in testimony and petitions to the Colonial Secretary. Third, it steered place naming: Indigenous names were variously recorded, anglicised, replaced, or quietly dropped in favour of commemorative colonial names.

Because Queensland's missionary translation projects before 1870 were uneven, a controlled comparison with contemporaneous eastern Australian efforts is useful. The collaboration between Awabakal leader Biraban (also known as John McGill) and missionary Lancelot Threlkeld in New South Wales produced wordlists, a grammar, and a translation of Luke's Gospel (completed in 1831 and later printed selections), accompanied by prefaces that reveal how authority and naming were negotiated. These paratexts exhibit the ambivalence of missionary linguistics: they value Indigenous expertise while frequently attributing textual authority to the missionary. Reading such projects as part of a colonial "Babel" clarifies how Queensland officials and missionaries could simultaneously rely on Indigenous language knowledge and pursue its marginalization in official domains.

In short, the philological Babel was not a mere metaphor. It supplied the intellectual scaffolding by which colonial Queensland sorted languages, authorized interpreters, and mapped speech onto civil status.

II. Administering the North: Colonial Secretary, Separation, and Somerset

Queensland's separation from New South Wales in 1859 reorganized administration without erasing earlier patterns of engagement with Indigenous peoples. The Colonial Secretary's Office in Brisbane received, filed, and responded to a wide variety of correspondence: petitions, police reports, requests for provisions, complaints about violence, and queries about policy. Indexes to this correspondence, covering 1859–1896, are a rich, if mediated, guide to how Aboriginal and (to a lesser extent in this period) Torres Strait Islander matters were framed. They show the bureaucratic categories through which Indigenous people entered the record: as recipients of blankets, as subjects of police or magistrates' reports, as laborers, or as parties to disputes. They also show where language entered administrative concern calls for interpreters, reports on "tribal" names and movements, and debates over nomenclature.

The northern outpost of Somerset, established in the mid-1860s at Cape York's tip, crystallises this administrative language order. Officially a port of refuge and a node for policing Torres Strait, Somerset's early years were marked by tenuous logistics and contested jurisdiction. The Government Resident and Police Magistrate at Somerset communicated with Brisbane about supplies, labour, and order; in such communications, Aboriginal peoples and Islanders often appear through the language of categories and names: "natives," named groups identified by anglicised ethnonyms, named places translated or transliterated into the gazetteer. The very act of listing—of entering a name into a ledger—was an exercise of power over belonging.

By the 1870s, administration shifted from Somerset to Thursday Island, but the 1860s provide a snapshot of how the colonial office registered Indigenous presence linguistically. Surviving summaries include entries as prosaic as calls for tenders for blankets and shirts “for the Aborigines,” as well as more fraught material concerning police action and movement controls. These notices rarely record language policy explicitly. Yet between the lines, one can trace how information flowed through interpreters (formal or ad hoc), how names of persons and places were fixed or altered in writing, and how silence functioned as policy where explicit directives were absent.

Such administrative practice did not occur in a vacuum. It interacted with missionary and schoolroom regimes further south and west, where the privileging of English and the marginalization of Indigenous languages were already common. It also intersected with emergent mapping and naming practices that converted Country into charts and gazettes. The Somerset archive, therefore, serves as a vantage point from which to see how an Anglophone administrative order recognised, translated, or erased Indigenous speech as it entered paper government.

III. Missions, Schools, and Stations: Everyday Regulation of Speech

To reconstruct everyday language governance, mission, and reserve records, together with guides and secondary syntheses, is essential. While Queensland’s major “protection” statutes post-date our period (principally the 1897 Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act), earlier decades already saw regimes in which English was the expected medium of instruction and administration, with local languages variably tolerated, discouraged, or exploited instrumentally. Missionaries’ diaries and school rules from across eastern Australia record punishments for speaking “native tongue” on school grounds, while also showing reliance on Indigenous language knowledge for catechesis, rationing, or policing.

Within this mixed regime, translation functioned as both a bridge and a filter. On stations and in courtrooms, interpreters could make testimony legible to authorities, but at the cost of condensing complex speech into administrative genres (deposition, petition, docket). In classrooms, children negotiated codes: speaking English to secure rations or advancement, using home language covertly among peers, or translating for parents in dealings with officials. These everyday tactics reveal both constraint and agency: constraint in the penalties attached to non-English speech and in the gatekeeping power of interpreters; agency in the preservation of lexicons, stories, and place names against the grain of school and station rules.

The key is to see “policy” not only in statutes or circulars but in routines: who is addressed in what language, which words are permitted in ledgers, and whether children may write a place name in its Indigenous form. Contemporary library and archival guides help to reconstruct these routines from fragmentary sources. They also help to track continuities into later decades: once English became the default gate language for administration and schooling, later protection regimes could intensify control without inventing it from nothing.

IV. Translation and Naming: Grammars, Gospels, Gazettes

If Section III emphasised school and station rules, this section turns to textualization and naming. Missionary linguistics in eastern Australia: most notably the Threlkeld–Biraban collaboration in Awabakal offers a clear window onto how translation projects encoded power. Biraban’s expertise was foundational: he provided the linguistic knowledge without which the grammar and Gospel translation could not exist. Yet published peritexts typically foregrounded the missionary author, relegating Indigenous collaborators to acknowledgments or marginal notes. The imbalance matters for Queensland, not because Awabakal materials were produced there, but because they exemplify a pattern by which colonial print assigned authority and fixed names.

In the Queensland context, naming extended beyond lexicons to maps and gazettes. Place name practices translated Country into the toponymic order of the colony. Some Indigenous names were retained (often in anglicised orthography), some were hybridised, and many were replaced with commemorative names for officials, patrons, or settlers. The very processes of surveying and gazettal converted oral, polysemic, and relational place-knowledge into point-located entries with official spellings. Late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century place name collections, often compiled by police or amateur ethnographers, illustrate how Indigenous words were gathered, sometimes without consent, and fitted to European categories. While many such compilations post-date our period, their methods and assumptions were already in use in the 1860s, as surveyors and magistrates transmitted names for maps.

Naming persons followed parallel logics. Archival entries anglicised personal names attached patronymics or nicknames or substituted generic labels. In courts and stations, interpreters and officials frequently fixed names that would circulate thereafter in correspondence. In missionary settings, baptismal names created new identities legible to the church and state. Such practices could enable recognition within colonial systems but also erase kin-relations and onomastic protocols embedded in language and Country.

Translation thus operated at multiple scales: from wordlists and grammars to the translation of Country into cadastral and toponymic forms; from the translation of speech into administrative genres to the translation of persons into baptismal or ledger names. Across these scales, an Anglophone order of recognition emerged: one that still underwrites how archives can be searched and how places are officially known. This is the sense in which the nineteenth-century language order persists, even as contemporary policies seek to repair or pluralise it.

V. Three Microhistories

1) “Blankets and Shirts”: Enumerating People, Fixing Names (early 1860s)

As documented in Queensland State Archives records (Colonial Secretary’s in-letters, QSA Series S5253; see Index to Colonial Secretary’s correspondence relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 1859–1903, Publications Queensland dataset ID a360e286-8e2c-490b-a0b0-dc6d589f1582), tender notices for “blankets and shirts for the Aborigines” sat alongside routine correspondence. On the Queen’s Birthday the colonial government regularly distributed blankets and clothing around Brisbane and neighbouring districts, which required local officials to prepare lists of named recipients. Because lists needed names that clerks could write and call, police and magistrates recorded anglicised personal names, often detached from language or kinship. The distribution looked charitable yet functioned as a census by other means, fixing people in written categories and easing later surveillance. Contemporary reports called it “the usual ceremony of distributing blankets to the aboriginal natives constituting the several tribes in and around Brisbane” (The Courier, 25 May 1861, p. 2, nla.news-article4599082), and noted that people assembled for “their usual present of blankets and clothing,” though in 1862 there were “no shirts or trousers this year” (Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser, 27 May 1862, p. 3, nla.news-article125596985).

2) Somerset and the Traffic of Terms (mid-1860s)

Following standard retrieval practice for Queensland place name variants, the search proceeds in a simple chain: first consult the Queensland Government Gazette by year, volume, and page for proclamations, police and shipping notices, survey instructions, and newly declared reserves; then move to Survey Office chart and plan registers where each entry is indexed by sheet code and locality; next examine Place Names Board or committee files that record naming proposals, objections, and the final authorised form; finally verify the consolidated entry in the Queensland Place Names database, which cross-references historical spellings and notes the documentary trail (see Queensland Government Gazette, vol. 10, 1869, Text Queensland). In Somerset’s early correspondence, reports sent to Brisbane travelled with a compact vocabulary of categories such as “tribes,” “natives,” and anglicised ethnonyms. These labels circulated among police, magistrates, and the Colonial Secretary and were paired with place names drawn from coastal charts or inland surveys, which fixed encounters inside an official geography. The Government Resident’s office relied on interpreters, both designated and ad hoc, to render speech tractable; the very presence of a resident and a magistrate presupposed English as the language of record and filing. One published extract from official letters makes the pairing explicit: a search was instituted “in consequence of information afforded by the natives of the Cockyrugga and Godang tribes” (The Brisbane Courier, 3 November 1869, p. 3, article “Somerset, Cape York,” nla.news-article1300409).

Within this workflow, even when Indigenous names appeared in dispatches or charts, they entered under administrative rules that authorised certain spellings, simplified consonant clusters, removed diacritics, and regularised spacing for ledgers and indexes. Variant forms

were not neutral; they channelled later retrieval. Clerks filing by the authorised English form made that version the key the archive would recognise, while other spellings were relegated to “see also” notes, if they were recorded at all. Over time this created a feedback loop: Gazette entries stabilised a spelling for publication; Survey and Place Names files ratified it for mapping and signage; the database then reproduced it as the searchable headword. The Somerset archive therefore shows how a northern outpost consolidated an Anglophone language order in situ: English for writing and witnessing; Indigenous languages as sources of names, testimony, and knowledge that were valued, filtered, and ultimately standardised for administrative use. For context at first mention, Somerset was established in 1864 and government functions moved to Thursday Island in 1877 (State Library of Queensland, “Queensland Places – Somerset – Part Two”).

3) Mission School Rules and the Covert Curriculum (various sites)

Mission school rules, some explicit and some informal, often discouraged or punished First Languages in classrooms and dormitories, yet pupils sustained a covert curriculum that used home languages for privacy, solidarity, and story, and English to navigate rations, chores, and catechism. Rule 41 in Yarrabah: Church of England Aboriginal Mission: Rules and Regulations states, “It is rude to speak in a language which is not understood by all present” (National Library of Australia, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK10515, digitised nla.obj-497475025; widely quoted in Yarrabah Community Newsletter, March 2022). Inspectors’ notes, marginal comments about “speaking native tongue,” and wordlists glossed for discipline preserve this double life, showing both the constraint of an English gate language and the agency of children who curated language across domains.

Coda: Malouf in the Mirror

The three threads come together as one order of language. Distributions required lists and lists required names that clerks could write and call. Translators built bridges between speech communities while arranging words inside English letters and sacred genres. Gazetteers turned place talk into proper nouns with single spellings and coordinates. None of this needed a single coercive statute. It lived in routines and paperwork, in events repeated each winter or each survey season. That is also why the order lasts. The tools we use today inherit it: the index keyed to anglicised names, the catalogue field that accepts one spelling, the digitised letter that still calls a group by a clerk’s list. Reading the archive with this in mind lets us recover agency inside the records and resist the sense that what is written was all that was said. That stance also points to practice. We can pair official spellings with community-preferred forms, attach language tags and provenance notes to catalogue records, and quote Indigenous speakers where clerks once paraphrased. In doing so, we keep the archive usable while refusing its single voice, letting multiple naming systems and memory traditions sit side by side.

Conclusion: The Afterlives of a Language Order

The mid-nineteenth-century practices traced here: English as the gate language of administration and schooling, translation as both bridge and filter, and nomenclature as a tool of mapping and control, did not end in 1870. Later protection regimes would formalize control, but they did so atop routines already in place. The archival pathways we use today: indexes keyed to anglicised names; gazetteers that fix spellings; records filed under administrative categories, are themselves products of that order. Contemporary policies that seek to revive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, to restore Indigenous place names, or to share authority over naming and curriculum thus confront a long inheritance.

At the same time, the past's ambivalences offer resources. Missionary grammars and wordlists, despite their politics, preserve lexical and grammatical knowledge now used in revitalisation. Place name databases, however colonial their origins, can be repurposed to document Indigenous names and their meanings. Archival guides help families and communities trace ancestors across the paper trail of anglicised names. In classrooms, language programmes co-designed with communities can invert the nineteenth-century order by treating Indigenous languages as media of knowledge rather than obstacles to it. The nineteenth-century language order is, in short, both a problem to be dismantled and an archive to be mined with care: under Indigenous leadership.

This essay has argued that Queensland's colonial order of belonging was linguistically constructed at every scale, from the tender notice that required a name to the map that replaced a name. It has also shown that Indigenous people exercised agency within that order: as interpreters, translators, and keepers of names, even as they faced a regime that privileged English and paper. Recognizing both the coercive and the collaborative moments allows for a more precise genealogy of present-day efforts to repair language loss and to restore names, a genealogy that neither romanticises the archive nor despairs of what it contains.

At the index layer, embed nineteenth-century document metadata (interpreter names, recording language, orthographic variants, scribe, and date) into twenty-first-century catalogue fields and search terms so that the production of "English/non-English" is itself discoverable. At the place naming layer, use bilingual or multilingual labels with a brief provenance note ("first attested in [record], in [context], by [agent]") on maps and signage. At the classroom layer, run a "translate, mistranslate, re-translate" activity on petitions, blanket lists, and roll calls, and require students to submit a revised index entry (with original item number and date) as the assessed outcome.

Method and Reflexivity

This essay has shown that Queensland's nineteenth-century language order emerged not from a single Act but from ordinary routines that credentialed English and translated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speech into administrable categories. Petitions, school rolls, interpreter's notes, and place names worked as language technologies that made some meanings durable in catalogues, maps, and captions while rendering others hard to retrieve. Reading the archive against itself clarifies both mechanism and consequence, and it grounds practical steps for today's description, naming, and pedagogy.

Sources and mediation. The analysis privileges administrative genres because these were the surfaces where language had effects in colonial Queensland. They are legible yet not neutral. The petition compresses many voices into a formula; the roll sorts a class into presences and absences; the interpreter's note turns utterances into reportable objects; the gazetteer fixes one spelling as if it were natural rather than chosen. To avoid mistaking paperwork for the world, the argument treats these forms as technologies and asks which kinds of speaking they reward, erase, or reclassify. In practice, this meant triangulating across file types, watching editorial seams, and following variant names rather than forcing the record into a single standardized form.

Scope and selection. The temporal focus between the 1840s and 1870s, tracks decades when missionization, formal schooling, and cadastral naming consolidated. Concentration brings loss. Regions that produced more paper are over-represented, while oral genres, bilingual conversation, and intra-community naming are largely absent, not because they did not exist, but because the archive retains them unevenly. The essay, therefore, treats silence as evidence. When a roll lists English first names with no kin or language markers, that absence is read as a feature of the roll, not of the community. When a gazetteer privileges one spelling, suppressed variants are noted and linked to administrative choice with downstream effects for search.

Use of literary text. The novel functions as a mirror that sharpens questions about speech, belonging, and translation. It does not serve as evidence for nineteenth-century practice. Literary moments open inquiry; archival examples carry proof. Where a parallel risks overreach, it is dropped in favor of a primary-source-led claim.

Translation and naming. Translation is treated as a social action rather than as a lexical map. The interpreter's note selects and normalizes; not every pragmatic nuance can be recovered, nor can power relations erased by transcription be fully re-created. Where possible, Indigenous forms are preserved as they appear in the record, and competing spellings are listed. The essay resists retrofitting a single orthography onto nineteenth-century material unless the source itself supplies it. For place names, the method is to document provenance and multiplicity and to connect variants to the offices that stabilized them. This is not antiquarianism. It supports present-day description and retrieval, where search boxes often demand a single string, and users need signposts to historically adjacent forms.

Ethics and terminology. Offensive historical terms are restricted to quotations and presented with a warning or gloss. Colonial labels are not treated as transparent descriptors; their situated

nature is foregrounded. Where attributions of speech are uncertain, the uncertainty is marked rather than smoothed away. The work aligns with widely shared principles for respectful research with and about First Nations communities, including minimising harm, recognising community custodianship of knowledge, acknowledging incompleteness, and preferring collaborative description where feasible, even when the immediate task is historical reconstruction from state and mission archives.

Generalisability and limits. The patterns traced here may travel, but the essay does not propose a single model of the colonial language order. Queensland's combination of mission grammars and wordlists, administrative registers, English-medium instruction with categories of exclusion, and naming rules that ripple into cadastral and cartographic systems has local inflections. A different balance would appear in South Australia or Van Diemen's Land. The claim is methodological: read routines as language technologies and trace their consequences without flattening distinct histories.

Researcher position and accountability. Because the most available sources are institutional, convenience can reproduce the coloniser's vantage. Two countermoves frame the reading. First, a habit of reading against the grain that treats interruptions, refusals, and misfits as evidence of Indigenous agency rather than as noise. Second, a commitment to reversibility, phrasing claims with enough specificity in dates, places, offices, and document types that readers can check and disagree. Community knowledge may revise or contradict the archive; the argument is therefore offered as open to correction.

Practical implications.

1. Description and retrieval: finding aids and indexes should add cross-references to Indigenous names and historical spellings, note mediation, and surface counter-speech where it exists.
2. Toponymy: dual naming and community-led registers should record provenance and variation rather than overwrite them, allowing users to navigate colonial and Indigenous naming together.
3. Pedagogy: co-designed language programs and classroom protocols can teach students to read archival texts as mediated sources and to recognise how routine procedures shape belonging.

By linking method to outcome, the essay recovers agency and unsettles what looks settled. That, rather than literary mirroring, is the method advanced here.

Acknowledgements and Protocols

This work recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters now called Queensland. As a research protocol, offensive historical terms are restricted to quotations and are not used by the author in their own voice.

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