Wilderness and the Media Politics of Place Branding

Lyn McGaurr, Bruce Tranter & Libby Lester

It is 30 years since the Australian environmental movement enlisted the term "wilderness" to protect Tasmania's remote Franklin River from hydroelectric development. Environmentalists deployed "wilderness" strategically during the conflict to build public support for their no-dam campaign, aided by national and international media who used the term liberally, while Tasmanian news media and pro-development elites acknowledged the term's inherent political qualities by suppressing its use. Our interest is in the political and media framing of "wilderness" since the concept was "branded" by government and industry at the turn of the twenty-first century. Drawing on continuing environmental conflict over Tasmania's remote Tarkine region as a case study, we ask to what extent media portrayals of "wilderness" have changed since the Franklin dam was stopped and the Tasmanian World Heritage Wilderness Area was created in 1982. Using content analysis of related articles in the local media and qualitative analysis of international travel journalism about Tasmania published over an extended period, we find that place branding has contributed to the routinization of "wilderness" and to a shift in the focus of mediated conflict from "wilderness" to "tourism." The Tasmanian experience demonstrates that while the actions of the environmental movement can valorize place, branding can depoliticize contested natural areas. Yet brands that incorporate or allude to "wilderness" may have the unanticipated consequence of valorizing "wilderness" transnationally, in a manner that the environmental movement would struggle to emulate.

Keywords: *wilderness; branding; news media; Tasmania; politics; tourism*

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Introduction

Environmentalists have for decades used the concept of "wilderness" to valorize wild places, as the label "wilderness" signifies an unspoilt, untouched-by-humans quality. The process of setting aside wild areas as distinct, of differentiating them as "other than human," is a powerful way of highlighting what for many environmentalists is the intrinsic value of wild places. Categorizing contested areas as "wilderness" is a strategy that has been used to great effect by environmentalists in Australia, particularly in the island state of Tasmania, with its long history of environmental campaigns and protest actions aimed at the preservation of wild rivers, lakes, and old growth forests against extractive and related industries. Such campaigns began with the attempt to save Lake Pedder in Tasmania's southwest from hydroelectric development in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The beauty of this lake was publicized by environmental protesters and aesthetes, bringing wilderness areas to public attention. The Pedder campaign failed, but a more professionalized and intense version a decade later saw the remote Franklin River protected and the Tasmanian World Heritage Wilderness Area—one of the world's largest tracts of temperate wilderness—created.

Problematizing "wilderness" potentially undermines its efficacy in environmental campaigns. Nevertheless, three decades later, the notion of "wilderness" remains deeply contested, barely shifting from Nash's (2001) memorable observation that one man's wilderness may be another's roadside picnic ground. As Nelson and Callicott (2008, p. 1) note, it "remains emotionally highly charged, contested, and controversial," connoting to some "a place for a certain kind of physically challenging recreation; to others … a place of solitude and reverential reflection; to still others … a habitat for big fierce predators." Many are highly critical of the concept, particularly the common definition that it is "untouched by human hands" (Nelson, 1998, p. 156). Bayet (1998, p. 318), for example, points out that "the concept of wilderness as nature without any trace of human interaction dehumanises the indigenous peoples living within that landscape." "Wilderness," therefore, is very rarely pristine or untrammeled by humans. For Cronon (1995, p. 12), "wilderness" is a complex cultural construction that "embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall"[1]:

> [I]t is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can … be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it's a product of that civilization and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made. (Cronon, 1995, p. 69)

Lester (2005) suggests that:

> into the 1960s, as organised efforts to protect the southwest of Tasmania began, the word "wilderness" maintained a specific, descriptive and uncontested meaning. It defined a particular type of place—a place without roads or human interference (indigenous histories were ignored), not an inherent promise of something more. (p. 125)

The meaning of wilderness then shifted. A decade later, "[w]ild lands had become desirable for what they offered in their wild state," so that by 1982 and the Franklin campaign "the idea of wilderness as desirable has begun to enter the mainstream" (Lester, 2005, p. 126). In an analysis of media coverage of the peak of the Franklin campaign—from December 1981 to March 1983—Lester found an important difference between the use of the word "wilderness" in news coverage of the conflict between the highest circulating daily newspaper in Tasmania, the editorially pro-dam *Mercury* published in the state's capital city, Hobart, and the "prestigious" mainland newspaper, the Melbourne *Age*, which campaigned strongly in its editorials and opinion pages against the dam. In writing and responding to the perceived beliefs of their audience and editors, *Age* journalists used the word to name the contested area—as in "the wilderness area" or "the southwest wilderness"—while the *Mercury* journalists avoided using it altogether, aware of its political power (Lester, 2005, p. 132). Lester (2005, p. 126) concludes that when used in news during the Franklin campaign, the word "wilderness" was "powerful, emotive and loaded":

> By 1982, "wilderness" was a very powerful idea. Its essential core had changed to signify desirability, yet it maintained an element of awe and exclusivity. That summer it really meant something to be "arrested in the wilderness" … In the late twentieth century, the concept of wilderness was increasingly exploited for politics and commerce. Accessibility, commodification and eventually cliché joined to create another shift in the meaning of "wilderness". A "Tasmanian wilderness experience" now carries with it no connotation of hardship, but rather one of luxury. Good food. Good wine. Good wilderness. (Lester, 2005, p. 133)

Lester's account of the mainstreaming of "wilderness" is supported by the earlier work of Pakulski, Tranter, and Crook, who argue that environmental issues in Australia have become "routinized" as radical new issues and "unconventional" forms of political participation enter the political mainstream. Routinization involves the "absorption of social innovations into the established, and typically institutionalised, ways of doing and experiencing things through repetition and habituation" (Pakulski, Tranter, & Crook, 1998, p. 239). They suggest a shift occurred from the "new, unusual and unique" (e.g. the environment as a "new" political issue) to the "old, expected and familiar" (i.e. environmental issues are absorbed into the platforms of political parties; Pakulski et al., 1998, p. 239). According to Pakulski and Crook (1998, p. 9), "'the environment' hit Australian headlines in the early 1980s defined almost exclusively as a political issue related to wilderness conservation and opposition to logging."

If such claims are correct and environmental issues have become increasingly routinized, we should witness a greater willingness among journalists to use the term "wilderness" as an uncontested label when reporting on environmental conflict. Furthermore, if "[a]ccessibility, commodification and eventually cliché joined to create a shift in the meaning of 'wilderness'" (Lester, 2005, p. 133), we argue that it is important to examine across time the media and political dynamics that have emptied the term of its once impressive symbolic power. We suggest that one of the primary mechanisms has been *place branding*. Using the mediation of environmental

conflict over Tasmania's wild Tarkine region as a case study, we map the incidence and application of the term "wilderness" in news media, before examining how place branding has contributed to the routinization of this key site of environmental politics and contestation.

Politics and Place Branding

Place branding has been employed by many governments at least since the 1990s and continues to be popular, as evidenced by the launch in 2004 of the journal *Place Branding*, the annual publication of the *International Place Branding Yearbook* (Go & Govers, 2010, 2011), and books such as *Place Branding* (Govers & Go, 2009). Place branding attempts to "build a coherent product offering (which includes tourism, trade, temporary employment and investment opportunities), communicated in the right way in order to guarantee the emotion-laden place experience that consumers are seeking" (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 17). While others differentiate "destination branding" from "place branding" when referring specifically to tourism, Govers and Go use the latter term to encompass both when discussing tourism destinations that have adopted place branding—a practice we follow in this paper.

Anholt (2010) equates place brands with strong or weak reputations. In tourism-oriented place branding literature, the brand is more likely to be defined as a discursive asset—for example, as "a representation of identity, building a favourable internal (with those who deliver the experience) and external (with visitors) image" (Govers & Go, 2009, p. 17). According to Anholt (2004), "[p]lace branding is the consequence of a realisation that public opinion is an essential component of achieving a political end. It is, one might say, a necessary consequence of democracy and the globalisation of the media" (p. 9). While Anholt (2007, p. 88) views tourism communications as having the legitimacy to empower the tourism sector, geographers Ateljevic and Doorne (2002) emphasize the power, ideology, and discourses of place as hegemonic. Ateljevic examines tourism from the perspective of "worldmaking," a term that signifies the way tourism can be used not only positively by groups and communities to advance new visions but also negatively to silence unwanted interpretations of place (see Hollinshead, Ateljevic & Ali, 2009, p. 430). For Byrne Swain (2009), worldmaking is complementary to cosmopolitanism, as tourism contains the potential "to transform differences into equity" (p. 505)—an assessment that resonates with the rhetoric of place branding. For van Ham (2002, p. 252), however, place branding warrants critical attention because it represents "a shift from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence," suggesting that if "this trend continues, it will have a pronounced impact on the nature of international politics." In a comprehensive analysis of national branding as a global phenomenon, Aronczyk (2013, p. 3), too, argues that its implementation as a solution to "problems of economic development, democratic communication, and especially national visibility and legitimacy amid the multiple global flows of late modernity" has troubling consequences for concepts of nation and citizenship.

What distinguishes place branding from historical forms of image management, according to van Ham (2008, p. 134), is its "mediagenic creation of emotional ties between the citizen-cum-consumer and the (place) brand." "Wilderness" is also mediagenic and a source of strong emotional ties between places, residents, and visitors. Being included on the world heritage list ensures "wilderness" areas gain international recognition (Ryan & Silvanto, 2009). Established as a conservation measure by the United Nations, the list is "a coveted brand and seal of approval" that attracts nominations of natural sites from governments around the world (Ryan & Silvanto, 2009, p. 291). The global significance of world heritage endorsement of natural phenomena contributes not only to their preservation but also to their commodification. Listing allows governments to transform landscapes into branding messages and to attribute natural qualities or purity to products and cultural artifacts. In New Zealand, where the place branding campaign "100% Pure New Zealand" had outstanding success for more than a decade, Ryan (2002, p. 68) argues that landscape, nature, and "greenness" form a "powerful identity 'myth'" that disguises or ignores historical and contemporary environmental mismanagement (Dürr, 2007; Ryan, 2002). As Dürr (2007, p. 6) maintains, "[B]oth national identity and international reputation are intertwined, and constitute and reproduce each other. Therefore, the '100% Pure' representation also plays a role in constructing New Zealand's identity at home, just as it does work abroad."

Offering an alternative to Anholt's view that public diplomacy should be subsumed in place branding or, at least, fused with it, van Ham (2008, p. 135) argues "the theory and practice of place branding is part of a wider discourse that involves propaganda at one end of the spectrum, and public diplomacy at the other." Public diplomacy, he writes, is "the strategy of appealing to the core values of foreign audiences by using new techniques that are frequently directly derived from commercial practice" (p. 135). This form of diplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in that it is government communication aimed at foreign publics rather than at foreign governments and their diplomats. The difference between place branding and public diplomacy, according to van Ham (2008), is that the former is also concerned with shaping local identity. However, they both in principle rely on the power of attraction rather than on coercion.

In a study of travel journalism about Tasmania during periods of environmental conflict, McGaurr (2012) found that government place branding strives to restrict what Lury (2004, p. 162) describes as "margins of indeterminacy" in the "processes that organise the brand," but that international travel journalists of a cosmopolitan predisposition can contribute to making place brands more open. Because place branding shapes local identity as well as its global reception, even when the environment movement uses "universally understood dramatic frames" such as "wilderness," it must also "manage meanings of its actions within local and particular contexts" (Lester & Cottle, 2011, p. 289; see also Hutchins & Lester, 2006). In places for which the remote natural environment is a contested place brand, the local, national, and global are likely to interact (see Beck, 2009), as place brand managers

and environment movement activists attempt to use internal and external media to manage, for example, the meaning of "wilderness." However, in what Lash and Lury (2007) describe as the "global culture industry":

> Products no longer circulate as identical objects, already fixed, static and discrete, determined by the intentions of their producers. Instead, cultural entities spin out of the control of their makers … they move and change through transpositions and translation, transformation and transmogrification. (Lash & Lury, 2007, pp. 4–5)

The question is no longer what branded "wilderness" symbolizes, but whether it can be managed.

Case Study: The Tarkine "Wilderness"

As suggested earlier, if "wilderness" has become routinized in Tasmania since the Franklin campaign, we expect this to be evident in newspaper coverage, with marked differences where tourism, wilderness, and environmental conflict coexisted before and after place branding was adopted by the Tasmanian Government in 1999. Our case study centers on the Tarkine, one of Australia's most contested areas. The Tarkine extends inland from the Island's remote west coast and south from the Arthur River approximately 100 kilometers to the Pieman River. Its 439,000 hectares encompass coastal landscapes, Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage, buttongrass plains, and 190,000 hectares of rainforest, including the "largest area of cool-temperate rainforest wilderness" in Australia (Australian Heritage Council, 2013, p. 31). Before describing our methods and findings, we provide a short history of the Tasmanian brand and the Tarkine in the years leading up to and encompassing the period of our detailed media analysis.

In 1983 the Tasmanian Government was prevented from constructing a dam that would have flooded the wild Franklin River in the southwest of the island. Almost immediately, it began exploiting the promotional value of "wilderness" to take full advantage of the area's world heritage listing and the international publicity the successful environmental campaign and spectacular protests had gifted the tourism industry (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2006; Evers Consulting Services, Tasmania, Department of Tourism, 1984). Ecotourism was encouraged, and in 1987 commercial accommodation was permitted in a Tasmanian world heritage national park for the first time. In a period of relative environmental calm, "wilderness" was celebrated, but by 1992 concerns over native forest logging and the impact of tourism development in wilderness areas were intensifying in several locations around the island. Among these was the area previously described by locals as the Arthur-Pieman but christened "the Tarkine" by environmentalists in the 1990s in honor of its original inhabitants, the Tarkiner band of Tasmanian Aborigines (Lester, 2007). In November 1994, just prior to a World Congress on Adventure Travel and Ecotourism in Hobart, the state government announced it had resumed construction of a road from the northern to the southern end of the region, claiming that it would contribute to the development of the tourism industry. The announcement and its timing angered the

environmental movement. The government agency, Forestry Tasmania, had a strong association with the organization of the international conference (Australian Tourist Commission, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation Tasmania, and the Adventure Travel Society Inc., 1994), leading Greens spokesperson Bob Brown to accuse it of drawing "the sheepskin of ecotourism around its shoulders, demoralizing genuine local ecotourism operators" (p. 12). Brown (1994) criticized the government for plans to "bulldoze a 4-wheel drive track through the heart of the Tarkine wilderness":

> Who would call for the Tarkine's protection from the road and cable-logging, as a world wilderness resource?

> Ecotourism, like being Green, like being in love with this planet Earth, is not an easy concept in this age of materialism. But it is a vital, ethical concept. Our task is to foster it, to protect it from those who would corrupt its meaning, and to enjoy it as a term which accords the Earth the respect which we human beings owe to it and to ourselves. (p. 12)

Although Brown here invites his audience to reconsider their understanding of a "resource," the presence and positioning of the word in his speech suggests he also recognized the strategic advantage of attributing economic as well as symbolic value to protected wilderness. But whereas Brown claimed wilderness would be "transmogrified" by a road through the Tarkine (1994, p. 12), the state's tourism minister argued that even wilderness already protected as world heritage required greater tourism access to ensure its continued preservation (Hodgman, 1994, p. 13).

Despite protests by environmentalists and sections of Tasmania's Aboriginal community, and interim listing of the Tarkine on the *Register of the National Estate* (formalized in 2002), a gravel road dubbed "the road to nowhere" by environmentalists was opened in January 1996 (Buchman, 2008). The name "Tarkine" was still stridently opposed by a government determined to deprive environmentalists of the political advantage they had achieved during the Franklin campaign by attaching evocative names to wild places. The term was also resisted by Tasmanian news media, which continued to affix "the so-called" into the first decade of the 2000s.

The year after the Tarkine road was opened, a joint government and tourism industry strategic plan called *Tourism 21* (Tasmanian Government, Tourism Tasmania, and Tourism Council Australia [Tasmanian Branch], 1997) urged government and business to use their Australian and international connections to promote "Brand Tasmania" (Tasmanian Government et al., 1997, p. 22). In the words of *Tourism 21*, by 1999, "100 per cent of all export ready tourism product [was] to be committed to Brand Tasmania" (p. 25). The document advocated reflecting Tasmania's strengths as "a natural, beautiful island with wilderness, heritage and quality wine and food," emphasizing and constantly reinforcing the island's "natural quality" (p. 23). A strategic shift in government discourse from "accessible wilderness" to "accessible nature" was under way (McGaurr, 2013), suggesting that the Tarkine road conflict had contributed to "wilderness" becoming a loaded term again—something we test in our detailed media analysis of the year 1995 below.

In 1999 a joint government and multi-industry Brand Tasmania Council was formed encompassing tourism, forestry, and a variety of other sectors. In 2006 the government released a "brand guide" noting that one of the aims of introducing place branding had been to achieve "strong alignment of message" across stakeholders who might be "in competition or conflict" (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2006, p. 11). The guide nominated tourism as the most important sectoral brand (p. 5) and the state's biggest timber company at the time, Gunns Ltd, as the strongest corporate brand (p. 12). It also cited the works of Anholt (see previous section), described place branding as a "strategic communications strategy for government policy," and acknowledged the internal as well as external aims of the practice by describing it as "projecting a positive image of Tasmania to Tasmanians and our external audience that reflects the reality of the place and the aspirations of our people" (p. 12). The media were criticized in generalities, but we may infer from the context that reports of conflict over government environmental policy would have been regarded as examples of "the tendency of the market, usually represented by the media, to unfairly trivialise or summarise a place" (p. 12).

The phrase "Tasmania is natural" was described as the "essence" of Tasmania's brand (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2006: inside front cover). "Nature" was more politically benign and commercially malleable than "wilderness," yet it was not always more competitive. A form of "wilderness" remained so mediagenic and desirable to tourists that it never entirely disappeared from the state's tourism marketing and public relations. The fervor of the Franklin campaign was decades in the past, and the conflict over the Tarkine road had no doubt receded in public memory. With a substantial promotional budget, marketing and public relations representation in North America, the UK, Germany, and Asia, and an established program for hosting visiting interstate and international travel journalists, Tourism Tasmania may have felt it now had the resources to manage the way "wilderness" was portrayed in the media. In the middle of the first decade after the introduction of place branding, for example, it described "wilderness" as a "key attribute" of the brand in a handout to tourism operators (Tourism Tasmania, n.d.). In 2008, its North American office released an A4 color brochure representing "wilderness" in an advertisement as a playground for tourists wishing to "spoil" themselves and be "pampered" (Tourism Tasmania North America, 2008). Also, in the second half of the decade, the federal government funded the development of a "Tarkine wilderness gateway experience" as an outcome of the 2005 Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement (Australian Government Department of Environment, n.d.), and the area encompassing the southern part of the Tarkine came to be marketed as "the Western Wilderness" (see, for example, Cradle Coast Authority, 2009).

In all these ways and many others, "wilderness" continued to contribute to Tasmania's branding as natural, clean, and green throughout the first 10 years of the 2000s, promoting an image of its government as environmentally responsible and buffering its forestry industry internationally against criticism from the environmental movement. The movement, for its part, also attempted to exploit tourism's

commodification of wilderness by arguing that ecotourism offered a viable economic alternative to forestry. Nevertheless, campaigns and protests were mounted occasionally in the hope of motivating tourists to take action on behalf of Tasmania's forests (see McGaurr, 2010, 2012), and national and international newspaper and magazine articles sometimes drew attention to the disconnection between "natural" place branding and government support for extractive industries (McGaurr, 2010, 2012). In 2009, when a second Tarkine controversy erupted—this time over government support for plans to seal a section of road in a different part of the region, again in the name of holiday visitors—opposition was no longer confined to the environmental movement. On this occasion, the tourism industry also voiced its disapproval.

When the Greens gained the balance of power in the Tasmanian parliament in 2010, the premier announced that this second Tarkine road was no longer a priority, but in 2012—as disputes over proposed mining in the area intensified—revised plans for the roadworks emerged. The environmental movement mounted a campaign to prevent new mining in the region, while some residents who were opposed to increased protection as a threat to employment growth responded with a large public protest of their own. In February 2013, the federal environment minister of the day, Tony Burke, supported heritage listing of a coastal section of the Tarkine because of its Aboriginal cultural values. However, he refused to protect the majority of the region, going against the expert advice of the Australian Heritage Council, which had found that:

> In most cases these wilderness areas are separated only by a single non-conforming influence, such as a vehicle track or road … The consideration of wilderness in the Tarkine as a National Heritage value must encompass all of these areas as parts of a whole … it is likely the Tarkine has outstanding heritage value to the nation … for its high wilderness quality. (Australian Heritage Council, 2013, p. 31)

Minister Burke (2013) justified his decision on the basis of declining employment opportunities in northwest Tasmania, but early in his press conference also implied that his own experience in the Tarkine had led him to question the "wilderness" values of the area:

> There has never, in my career, been an occasion where a site visit has so much changed my view. I, when I went to the Tarkine, was expecting to see nothing but the rainforest pictures that I had seen in campaign posters. When I landed at Savage River, when I went to the legacy mining sites, when I saw in bush walking trails that I was actually walking along an old aqueduct or that there would be old rail lines at my feet, I realised that the Tarkine has a very different history. (Burke, 2013)

It appeared the politics of "wilderness" had come full circle. In 1994, one government had argued—in opposition to the environmental movement—that wilderness required tourism access to demonstrate itself worthy of protection. By 2013, expert advice favoring protection despite traces of human intervention was rejected by another government implying that such evidence demonstrated an irredeemable lack

of "wilderness" values. The aim of the empirical work that follows is to trace the changing portrayals of "wilderness" in the media and determine whether place branding contributed to its routinization or politicization.

Method

Our case study considers three aspects of the mediation of "wilderness" over time. The first seeks evidence of routinization through a keyword content analysis of articles published in the Tasmanian metropolitan newspaper, the Hobart *Mercury*. The second is an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of mediatized struggles over "wilderness" by closely analyzing the way "wilderness" is portrayed in the *Mercury* articles related to the Tarkine, an environmental dispute with strong implications for Tasmanian tourism. The third aspect employs qualitative analysis of international journalism about Tasmania to consider the unanticipated outcomes of using place branding to produce and manage "wilderness" on what Szerszynski and Urry (2002, p. 478) describe as the "cosmopolitan public stage."

Three samples were analyzed. First, keyword searches of the *Mercury* newspaper's electronic database were conducted to reveal the incidence of the term "wilderness" in relation to the Tarkine from 1988 to 2012. Second, to better understand how journalists' employed the term "wilderness" during environmental conflict, we conducted in-depth analyses of the *Mercury* articles relating to the contested Tarkine area during peak years of coverage—1995 and 2009. We coded occurrences of "wilderness" as a journalist's label and those that appear within direct or paraphrased quotes. We also coded whether and how "wilderness" was qualified, questioned, or defined, and considered the role of tourism in the mediated debate. Third, in order to contextualize the Tasmanian data within international trends, we sampled 28 features on Tasmania, published in print or online in high-profile UK and USA travel magazines and newspaper travel sections, between 2000 and 2010.

Tasmanian media: "*wilderness*" *in the* Mercury

The Tarkine has been the subject of environmental dispute since 1992, but despite attempts by activists to emulate the success of the Franklin campaign a decade earlier, it has never achieved a comparable level of national and international attention. Nevertheless, particular years of intense protest actions have resulted in high coverage by Tasmanian media. Our search of the *Mercury* indicated that 1995 and 2009— falling either side of the introduction of "natural" place branding—were the years of highest coverage (Figure 1).

We sampled all articles published in these peak years that contained the word "Tarkine"[2] (excluding letters to the editor). This approach yielded 144 articles in 1995 and 100 articles in 2009. From these, articles that included reference to a Tarkine environmental dispute (i.e. roadworks, logging, or mining) and also mentioned "wilderness" and/or "tourism/ist" were selected for more detailed analysis. The
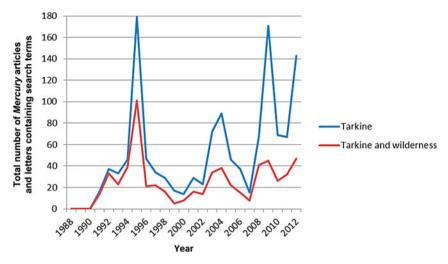
Figure 1. Tarkine and wilderness.

results, some of which appear in Figure 2, indicate how journalists' use of "wilderness" changed between 1995 and 2009.

The appearance of "wilderness" as a journalistic label fell from 25% in 1995 to 18% in 2009, while journalists' use of the expression "Tarkine wilderness" or "Tarkine Wilderness"—coined by the environmental movement—dropped from 17% to 13%. Closer analysis indicates that environmentalists' framing of the Tarkine area as "wilderness" was viewed skeptically by some *Mercury* journalists in 1995, with some
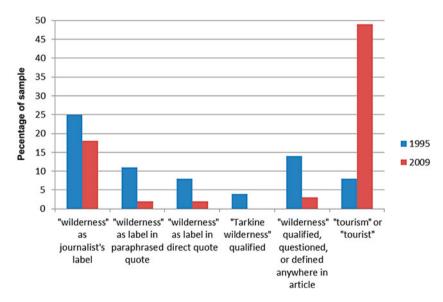

Figure 2. Percentage of sample in which the terms "wilderness" and/or "tourism" and/or "tourist" appear in articles that mention the dispute.

acknowledging governmental contestation of environmentalists' employment of "Tarkine" by qualifying the phrase, as in the following examples:

> Protestors stage-managed their own arrests in a day of theatre and farce on Tasmania's so-called road to nowhere yesterday […] The 50 kilometre, four wheel drive dirt road passes through what is known to green groups as the Tarkine Wilderness. (Bufton, 1995, p. 1)

> Tasmania's so-called Tarkine wilderness area was the focus of national protest action yesterday. (Milford, 1995, p. 9)

In 1995, "wilderness" was qualified in this manner in only 4% of articles, but overall it was qualified, questioned, or defined (rather than accepted uncritically) in 14% of articles, suggesting that the concept was problematized independently of disagreements about the validity of "Tarkine" as a label. In 2009, by contrast—with two notable exceptions where a journalist questioned whether the entire area that environmentalists called the "Tarkine" was in fact wilderness (Neales, 2009a, p. 11, 2009c, p. 7)—the naming was rarely contested, suggesting that "Tarkine"—in a similar manner to "wilderness"—had become routinized and accepted, and was allowed to enter the political mainstream.

During this period, environmentalists and Greens politicians were capitalizing on tourism industry opposition to the Tarkine road (Bingham, 2009). In the following quote, the Greens propose a national park instead of the disputed roadworks, but also advocate improved tourist access:

> Greens leader Nick McKim said their proposal would redress the chronic under-resourcing of Parks and Wildlife management in the Tarkine and provide $4.75 million for road upgrades to improve tourist access without disturbing the rainforest. (*Mercury*, 2009a, p. 13)

This attempt at framing by the Greens contrasts with contestation between environmentalists and the Tasmanian Government during the 1994 international ecotourism conference, and in the *Mercury* in 1995, when environmentalists opposed roadworks because they threatened the Tarkine's natural values. Yet even at the ecotourism conference, where "wilderness" was deployed by environmentalists, tourism was emerging as an elaborate stage for environmental contestation, as exemplified in Greens leader Bob Brown's speech discussed earlier in this paper.

Our content analysis of the *Mercury* suggests that in 1995 a significant proportion of contestation associated with the disputed area was concerned with whether the Tarkine was "wilderness." In 2009, after the adoption of nature-based branding and subsequent federal government funding for the development of the "Tarkine wilderness" as a tourism destination (Australian Government Department of Environment, n.d.), contestation was more often related to government claims that the disputed section of road was a "tourist road." In the two peak years considered here, the occurrence of the keywords "tourism" or "tourist" increased spectacularly, from 8% in 1995 to 49% in 2009. Although journalists described the road as a "tourist road" in 24% of 2009 articles, in 18% of them it was referred to as a road to be built either by Forestry Tasmania or for forestry purposes, indicating a degree of resistance

to government framing. Indeed, this was the approach taken in an article referring to former premier Lennon, entitled "Roll out the pork barrels for 2009":

> before he quit suddenly in May, Lennon had laid down the framework for a 2010 Labor election win … focused on the Government's construction of a \$23 million new forestry road through the Tarkine. (Neales, 2009b, p. 27)

A month later, the *Mercury* openly challenged the Tasmanian Government's framing in an article entitled "Tarkine road to division," reporting Premier Bartlett's announcement that the road would go ahead. "The State Government's new \$23 million Tarkine road proposal has already been labelled a logging route that will be used by visitors rather than a dedicated tourism initiative" (Kempton, 2009, p. 8). The article included quotes from a tourism operator opposed to the road and a spokesperson for the Tarkine National Coalition, the latter expressing concerns over the introduction of weeds and devil facial tumor disease rather than the road's threat to wilderness per se.

By February 2009, the *Mercury's* editorial position was clear, with the editor stating that money allocated for the road would be better spent on other tourism infrastructure. "Leaving aside the conservation issues, what is the Bartlett Government doing trail-blazing through remote rainforests while tourist routes in the South are being left in such an appalling state?" (*Mercury*, 2009b, p. 36), echoing an argument Brown had made at the international ecotourism conference in 1994 (Brown, 1994, p. 12). The editorial sided with tourism operators in its constituency rather than with the environmental movement. Soon after, the Tourism Industry Council Tasmania, the Parliamentary Opposition, and some local councilors all appeared in the *Mercury*, opposing the road on grounds that funds would be better spent on other tourism initiatives. A campaign claiming that the road threatened Tasmanian devils also received wide media coverage. To the extent that "wilderness" appeared in the *Mercury's* coverage in 2009, it was largely as a fixed, knowable commercial commodity. Branding and media support for the local tourism industry had successfully stripped "wilderness" of its political charge. Coverage of this once powerful symbol of environmental contestation had become routinized.

International media: The spread of Tasmanian "wilderness"

Place branding in the international media, by contrast, was producing not only a wilderness commodity—"single, discrete, fixed" (Lash & Lury, 2007, p. 6)—but also a range of branded "wildernesses." As Lash and Lury (2007, p. 7) explain, "The commodity works through reproduction of identity; the brand through evermore production of difference." Our analyses of articles about Tasmania that appeared in high-profile American and British travel publications from 2000 onwards suggest that "wilderness" was widely mediated as the stable, unquestioned, celebritized commodity so valued by commercial tourism. Yet, similar to Lash and Lury (2007, p. 5), we also found Tasmania's brand was capable of "self-modification over a range of territories, a range of environments." Through the "common sociality" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 94)

of international travel media that were, effectively, both consumers and (re)producers of the Tasmanian brand, opportunities were created for the re-politicization of "wilderness."

Tasmanian "wilderness" was sometimes portrayed in international travel media as something worth fighting for, or at least, something worth fighting *about*. In a *New York Times* article, for example, Tasmania's wilderness was represented as remote, inhospitable, and mesmerizing, and the Tasmanian community as still riven by environmental conflict:

> In the southwest corner of this dense, drenched island lies Tasmania's wildest region: hundreds of miles of steep dolerite cliffs, cool dripping rain forest and glacial valleys virtually untouched since the last ice age. The highest peak in this ancient wilderness is the denuded, boulder-strewn uplift called Mount Anne … much of the state's charm lies in its disorienting contradictions, the still-exposed seams of transition between centuries of isolation and a decade of "rediscovery." Indeed, just beneath Tasmania's amiable surface lies a furious debate over the island's future, particularly of its fierce but fragile environment. (Frey, 2006)

"Wilderness" was even more prominent in an earlier *New York Times* travel article (Power, 2006) that did not refer openly to contemporary forestry conflicts but included details of the Franklin campaign. Here "wilderness" appeared in the title, in a caption, and eight other times in the body of the text, where the author argued that past conservation battles had been "partly successful" and concluded by according hero status to those who had fought for its protection. "That this wilderness is here by the mercy of good governance and dedicated citizens, that it comes on the heels of so long a struggle, makes it all the more beautiful" (Power, 2006). *National Geographic Adventure*'s Adam Sachs (2006) recalled a luxurious guided and catered trek through the World Heritage Area where he represented "wilderness" as a gated enclave for "posh hikers" such as himself, writing that "beyond the confines of the wilderness area" was "a struggle for preservation" (p. 64). The British edition of *Condé Nast Traveller* represented "the forested wilderness of Tasmania" as "again under threat" (Miles, 2008) in an article that cleverly used the government's own logo to highlight contradictions in the brand:

> According to its government, the island of Tasmania is "Australia's natural state." Its star attraction is the UNESCO World Heritage Wilderness Area, which covers 1.38 million hectares. Every year the area is visited by 30,000 people from Britain alone. But now the state has given the go-ahead for a pulp mill that will turn four million cubic metres of wood per year into pulp to make paper. (Miles, 2008, p. 34)

In 2012, Tarkine activism increased once again in anticipation of the federal environment minister's decision on heritage listing. In local media, the frequencies of "Tarkine" rose sharply and "Tarkine and wilderness" also increased (Figure 1). Early in 2013 soon after the federal environment minister announced his decision not to list the entire Tarkine region, the Tarkine received a level of publicity that had the potential to attract the widespread international recognition of its wilderness values. However, it was not environmental protest that bolstered tourism, but tourism that carried the activists' message. *CNN Travel*'s ranking of the Tarkine as first on its list

of "10 of the world's last great wilderness areas" (Reddy, 2013) was covered by Australian national media and by the Tasmanian *Mercury*, where the accolade was represented as politically significant (Borchmann, 2013; Claridge, 2013). When a new national advertising campaign was subsequently launched by Tourism Tasmania, one of its advertisements (see Appendix 1) capitalized on the symbolism of the Franklin struggle by featuring an iconic image of Franklin River activists amid "3 million acres of untouched wilderness" (Tourism Tasmania, 2013).

Following the launch of the new Tourism Tasmania advertising campaign, former leader of the Australian Greens, Bob Brown, who 30 years earlier had led the Franklin dam campaign to success, deployed the Tasmanian brand by announcing he would become an ambassador for the Tarkine. "Tourism and mining don't co-exist," he said. "It will damage the brand, it will damage the image and when you do that, people will go elsewhere" (Mounster, 2013, p. 2).

Conclusion

We began by suggesting we would map the incidence and application of the term "wilderness" in media over time and examine how place branding contributes to the routinization of a key environmental symbol. In Tasmania, "wilderness" was commodified as the environmental movement sought to attract public support to its cause during the Franklin dam campaign. Recognizing the magnitude of the movement's public relations success, the Tasmanian Government harnessed "wilderness" to its own marketing efforts when the High Court ruled against the dam. During the 1995 Tarkine campaign, "wilderness" was represented in the *Mercury* newspaper as highly contested, but the subsequent implementation of nature-based branding strategies contributed to its routinization in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Routinization of wilderness was particularly evident in the *Mercury*'s largely unqualified use of the term during the 2009 Tarkine dispute. Internationally, too, place branding contributed to the commodification of "wilderness" but, perhaps more interestingly, it simultaneously facilitated the circulation of a branded range of "wilderness" goods that resist fixed and manageable signification.

This study of the mediation of Tasmania's "wilderness" since the Franklin River campaign suggests that even when sophisticated and well-resourced campaigns run by industry and government contribute to a routinization of "wilderness," the concept remains open to reinterpretation and contestation. Place branding occurs on both the local and the global levels. To borrow from Beck's (2006) distinction between national and cosmopolitan, place-branded environments are not theirs *or* ours, they are both theirs *and* ours. In the twenty-first century, the local, national, and global interpenetrate; consumerism and political conflict are often symbiotic; and the public sphere accommodates spectacle and affect. The Tasmanian case demonstrates that while the actions of the environmental movement may valorize place, *branding* can depoliticize contested natural areas. Yet brands that incorporate "wilderness" may have the unanticipated consequence of valorizing it globally, in a manner the environmental movement would struggle to emulate. In view of local and national

responses to the *CNN Travel* accolade, one of the questions the 2013 Tourism Tasmania advertisement raises is whether "wilderness" will be commodified further or will prove impossible to tame, a global, place-branded product free from the control of its image-makers.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. In a critique of Cronon, Booth (2011, p. 283), drawing upon Naess, argues that wilderness "is not a cultural concept, but a fluxing and complex gestalt that includes both human and more-than-human-agency."
2. As the word "Tarkine" itself was disputed in 1995, for that year we also included articles that contained alternatives such as "road to nowhere," "Heemskirk Link Road," and "Arthur-Pieman."

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Appendix 1

Wilderness advertisement from 2013 Tourism Tasmania advertising campaign "Go behind the scenery" (Tourism Tasmania, 2013).