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Naming the World: Place-Naming Practices and Issues in Neotoponymy

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Naming the world is very much the adventure societies, groups, individuals and humans engage in when they inhabit a portion of earth, a territory, a city, or they follow routes, discover them, invest in them, or map them. This takes very different forms according to whether someone is a hunter-gatherer, a farmer, a navigator, a merchant, a conqueror, an engineer, or an administrator. Depending on whether someone is colonizing a frontier or claiming back ancestral lands, whether or not they have a written form of their language, whether they are part of a collective with shamanic approaches or work for a modern state, or whether they plan a serviced space or produce and inhabit an informal space, the naming operation is never definitive nor exclusive; it is in any case fundamental.

Are the Aragonese peaks the world of their so-called Pyreneist discoverers, somewhat settlers and cartographers of the peaks, whose names stuck to these eminences in the 20th century, or are they the world of the peasant populations of the valleys and high mountain pastures that used them as a starting point for religious and cosmogonic meanings, and named the passes and slopes instead? The Aragonese government has resolutely opted for the second option, renaming all the peaks above 3,000 meters after Aragonese names borrowed from the local and

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peasant microtoponymy. The operation, a toponymic restoration, was carried out by transferring or extending vernacular names of practiced places (passes and slopes) to the peaks thus seen as "indigenized" and "decolonized". Another option, probably that of the majority of users-inhabitants and hikers, will be to refer alternately to each of the naming systems, making these worlds of meaning cohabit at the cost of a certain practical confusion. For naming participates simultaneously in the practical and magical organization of situated life, in heritages processes and in individual and collective identities.

1.1. Political/critical toponymy: an emerging field at the core of territorialization issues

Thus, toponymy appropriates places and spaces through addresses, landmarks, referents, routes, signage and cartography. In a word, it territorializes. Place names are indeed at the core of the operations of territorialization; it is the soulful bit that transforms a habitat into an inhabited place in the full sense of the word, a space invested with meaning and therefore a territory. Claude Raffestin defined the territory as follows in 1986:

> The territory is a reordering of space whose order is to be sought in the informational systems available to man [sic] as he belongs to a culture. The territory can be considered as space informed by the semiosphere (semiosphere = set of signs); all the mechanisms of translation, which are employed in the relations with the outside, belong to the structure of the semiosphere (Raffestin 1986, p. 177).

The activity of naming and renaming places, *neotoponymy*[1], as well as making names visible through signage and cartography, associated with the linguistic and functional use of place names, in other words, the toponomascape[2], participates fully in this production of territory through the semiotization of space.

Naming thus territorializes, politicizes and ideologizes because it exists in itself as a sphere (that of the toponomascape) that possesses its own logic, its own autonomy, which has as much to do with the question of power, property (Ritchot 1989) and technique as with representation and identity. The meaning of naming is

1. The concept of *neotoponymy* refers to the activity of producing new place names by naming new places or by renaming, but the term also refers to the corpus constituted by these new names.

2. The *toponomascape* is thus made up of all place names, their linguistic use and their figuration in signage, addressing, cartography, nomenclatures, databases, discourses, practices, etc.

not only in what we finally designate; it is also to be sought on the side of what we designate or do not designate, of what makes us designate, of those who designate and of what we do with the designator.

The naming of places is fundamentally political because it participates in the institution of an order endowed with a regime of representation that hierarchizes places, resources, values and beliefs. It is subject to debates, to controversies, to claims, passions and conflicts, but it is also a discrete component of symbolic and practical order that insinuates itself in everyday life and pervades it. It is constitutive of the civil status, of the address – therefore of the identity – and of the system of location, and by that it shapes the individual and collective relationship with the places.

Thus, the study of place naming, the naming of the World, constitutes an autonomous field, distinct and complementary to that of classical toponymy, which is a branch of onomastics or the study of proper names in linguistics. It is an emerging field, referred to as critical toponymy or political toponymy or place naming studies, and this book outlines its contours, issues, contributions and perspectives.

While classical toponymy studies the composition, meaning and alteration of place names by mobilizing etymological, philological and pragmatic approaches, political toponymy studies the social, economic and cultural stakes involved in their choice and use. The study of place naming and its issues is also different from toponymy as an indicator of human occupation and environmental changes, allowing for an archeology of settlement and/or environment dynamics.

However, the links between toponymy, settlement and the relationship with the environment also provide information on the contradictory motivations and legacies of naming, and are of direct interest to political toponymy in this sense. This is what **Sébastien Boillat** presents in this book, by pointing out the power issues concerning microtoponyms in different environments, and how much they reveal about the environmental perception and ethics of the inhabitant groups, particularly the Indigenous populations.

The importance of toponymic production is, however, often disputed. However, each time the question of the name is a public issue, it unleashes passions and reveals potentially contradictory positions and representations. The debates, controversies and counter-initiatives then draw a geopolitics of variable scale. But the relevance and relative importance of toponymic production among the social issues and political choices considered as priorities are also systematically questioned, contested and devalued. This questioning and the relativistic and anti-neotoponymic discourses comprises elements of the reactionary rhetoric

dissected by Albert Hirschman (1991): the inanity of the subject (in other words, its anecdotal nature or futility); its adverse effects in terms of costs and functionality, and the threat to social, political and cultural equilibrium. This systematic contestation of the naming question in the public debate, in spite of the mobilizations around it, has made the affirmation of the related scientific field more difficult.

1.2. Political toponymy: a recent history?

The history of critical or political toponymy – which we do here from a corpus unfortunately limited for linguistic reasons to the literature in English and French – is indeed recent. While reflections and observations on the link between power and place names may have accompanied works of classical toponymy or descriptive geography, such as accounts of conquest like Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* or those of the administration of an empire like *Historia Augusta* (included in the literary biography *Memoirs of Hadrian* by Marguerite Yourcenar in 1951), publications entirely dedicated to the question of the political stakes and techniques of naming are contemporary. In addition to Gramsci's work in *Prison Notebooks* that makes street names elements of hegemonic domination (see infra; Vuolteenaho and Puzey 2018), two works from the first part of the 20th century appear to be true pioneering works before the explosion of studies in the 1980s and the attempts to mark out the field in the 21st century. These works are Lucien Gallois' *Régions naturelles et noms de pays* in 1908 and George R. Stewart's *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* in 1945.

In the first work, the author starts from a questioning on the adequacy of the names of French rural regions with knowledge and peasant traditions, academic knowledge and political divisions. Thus, for the Brie region, Lucien Gallois notes:

> For the geographer and the cartographer, the Brie became a sort of territorial subdivision to which it was necessary to give precise limits and it is thus that one understood it between the Seine and the Marne. The farmer has other preoccupations, it does not matter to him that the Brie was originally a forest, what he calls thus is the plateau which crowns the cereal lands; he does not feel the need to delimit it exactly, but he knows successfully how to distinguish the good and the bad parts of it (p. 138).

He comes to believe that the uses and promotion of these names of regions always have to do with questions of representations and stakes to be contextualized. Jean-Claude Chamboredon who proposes an exegesis of the text in 1988 concludes:

> On the basis of spatial variations, of diverse historical-natural units, unequally relevant according to the domains (agricultural economy, landscape, mobility, etc.) and unequally present in common practice and perception, the work of naming specialists (from academics to local scholars) who, if necessary, borrow popular terms, progressively constitutes categories that can come back to confirm, with the authority of a scientific foundation, the vernacular designations. Describing and naming, they define, according to a modality that one can say performative, territorial resources as spaces of adhesion and forms of identity (p. 34)[3].

George Stewart's work was addressed to the general American public after the war, inviting them patriotically to immerse themselves in the ingenuity and diversity of the American melting pot through colonial and pioneer neotoponymy. In doing so, he was already tracing the possibility of a reflection on toponymic and territorial creation and translation in a context of plurality of legacies, representations and actors[4].

It was not until the 1980s that a number of studies of political toponymy were published that examined the stakes and actors involved in naming. The very first known publication of a monographic study in this field dates from 1977. Inge Kleivan invokes cultural imperialism in her analysis of Greenlandic neotoponymy. She shows how, after Norwegian imperialism, Danish imperialism imposed an indigenization of neotoponymy for the benefit of its southern community representatives. The Middle East, Africa and Oceania were then the subject of pioneering publications that opened up different avenues. South Africa, constantly giving rise to studies in the field, introduced with Gordon Pirie's text (1984) the bureaucratic creation of the name of Soweto, a political concern in the deciphering of the neotoponymic factory in a highly segregated, technocratic and racist context. Roland Pourtier (1983) was interested in the creation of a postcolonial state toponomascape by identifying continuities and divisions in the naming of regions and districts in French-speaking Central Africa, particularly in Gabon, where the newly independent state systematized a naming policy based on a "neutral" hydrographic reference system in contrast to cultural groups and their territorial anchors. The Middle East, with the two neotoponymic hotspots of Iran (Lewis 1982)

3. The geographer Alain Reynaud and the linguist Philippe Gardy took up such an approach, respectively, for Larzac (1987) and for Champagne (1990), which has become the place and name of the dispute.

4. Wilbur Zelinsky (1967, 1983) and Christian Montes (2007) continue this line of analysis of the production of the American toponomascape by Euro-Americans.

and Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories (Cohen and Kliot 1981, 1992), also appears in works on toponymic nationalism and its geopolitical declinations. Starting with Oceania, Paul Carter (1987) introduces a complementary reflection on colonial toponymy and its motives (see the chapter on conquest toponymy in this book). Also, the problem of indigenous toponymy is addressed through contemporary power issues within customary authorities in Vanuatu (Rodman and Rodman 1985). In Canada, as academic knowledge of indigenous geographical knowledge progresses (Collignon 1996), the question of land claims and associated toponymic knowledge and maps becomes an object of study (Wonders 1987; Müller-Wille 1989).

The question of the invisible toponymies of subaltern populations was thus launched, and it was to be the subject of spectacular research during the 1990s and 2000s (Stickler 1990; Nash 1993; Berg and Kearns 1996), particularly in settler colonial contexts, and especially in South Africa, where the already burning issue became crucial with the end of apartheid (Jenkins 1990, 2007; Giraut et al. 2008). The invisibility of toponymy is a major political issue today with the question of toponymic restoration and revision in a perspective of inclusiveness. Thus, the question of colonial names that negate or recuperate indigenous names is the subject of much work (see Giraut's chapter), which is not yet the case for the question of gender in commemorative and more generally in official toponymy. At the same time, there has been an opening towards private actors in real estate development and the imaginary associated with the world of suburban housing or tourist resorts (Debarbieux and Gumuchian 1987; Perkins 1989; Hopkins 1998; Wood 2002). These works can be considered as precursors of those that would come to deal with the toponymic commodification and the economic value of place names, as well as with metropolitan storytelling and, more generally, territorial marketing.

Since the mid-2000s, major advances have been made towards the constitution of a real field around original and potentially interdisciplinary themes. Above all, the field is becoming aware of itself and is developing an agenda and theoretical concerns. The corpus of studies is considerably enriched with collective publications in the form of special issues of mainly francophone journals (*Espace géographique* 2008; *Espace politique* 2008; *Geojournal* 2008; *ACME* 2011; *Droit et culture* 2012; *Echogeo* 2020) and edited books (Bouvier and Guillon 2001; Guillorel 2008; Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009; Bigon 2016; Puzey and Kostanski 2016; Rose-Redwood et al. 2018; Caïazo and Nick 2020) that compile a number of case studies and propose transversal readings.

It is also worth noting, at the beginning of the period, the publication of textbooks (Randall 2001; Kadmon 2000; Monmonier 2006) which approach the

question of toponymy from the angle of geopolitical issues in order to reaffirm and illustrate that the imposition or claim of geographical names is a question of power and imperialism by proposing an inventory of different practices (Houssay-Holzschuch 2008).

Among the original themes that were asserted during the period, most of which are summarized in this book, one of the most represented is the question of commemorations via odonymy[5]. The context of the end of the Cold War, with a number of radical changes in political regimes, particularly in central and eastern Europe, led to massive changes in place names and particularly in the names of urban streets. These practices could be interpreted as state interventions aimed at imposing new political referents and above all at reversing an inherited and reviled frame of reference for landmarks. The work of Almeida-Topor (1996), Azaryahu (1996), Yeoh (1996), Light et al. (2002), Bigon (2008), Palonen (2008), Bourillon (2012) and Njoh (2017) has been particularly salient in the study and interpretation of these practices in different contexts. Following Milo's seminal work on odonymy as places of memory (Milo in Nora 1984), Azaryahu has given a comprehensive interpretation of these processes (2011) after **Alderman** (2008) integrated them into a broader reflection on issues of heritage and memorialization. In particular, in his chapter dedicated to toponymic commemoration, Alderman works on the meaning of the challenges to past commemorations related to colonialism and racism, based in particular on the US experience. Alderman lists the major questions related to this issue: "What political actors, decisions, and social relations enable certain memorialized names to be displayed publicly? Who is given the power and authority (or not) to do this work of remembering and naming? Whose identifications with the past are enacted (or denied) through place naming? How do these toponyms work to benefit (or disadvantage) the belonging and social standing of certain public groups over others?"

These questions point to many of the programmatic elements proposed in the seminal article by Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu (2010), which was followed by a special issue of the journal *ACME* (2011). In these publications, the authors identify a scientific agenda for critical toponymy, in addition to methodological reflections and proposals concerning actors, scales (Hagen 2011) and sources. This agenda proposes three main, non-exclusive paths: "political semiotics, governmentality studies, and normative theories of social justice and symbolic resistance" (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010), paths to which the following section returns.

5. It was itself methodologically and historically marked out in the French context by Badariotti (2002) and Bouvier (2007).

1.3. On the agenda of political/critical toponymy: contradictory promotion of functional, market and inclusive corpuses

A political semiotic approach points to the well-demarcated field of political odonymy. This field has been enriched by works on the naming and visualization of new emerging territories, resulting from the politico-functional recompositions of new regionalism (Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2008b), or of tourism territories (see **Gauchon**'s chapter) or transport (**Destrem**'s chapter) as places where the political hold of the visual and linguistic landscape extends, together with territorial marketing in a globalizing context. At the same time, collective publications in socio-linguistics, drawing inspiration from visual studies, geopolitics and semiotics, address the linguistic landscape and toponymic issues, in particular in plurilingual situations (Gorter et al. 2011; de Vergottini and Piergigli 2011; Blackwood et al. 2016; Cornips and de Rooij 2018).

This political semiology approach converges with governmentality studies in the Foucauldian sense through the questions of controlling and tracking populations via the identification of places of residence, as well as the commodification of place names (Light and Young 2014; Medway and Barnaby 2014). In this volume, **Reuben Rose-Redwood, Anton Tantner and Sun-Bae Kim**'s chapter offers a long-term perspective on addressing practices that includes numbering and openings to digitization. Jani Vulteenaho, in the chapter devoted to the commodification of place names, proposes a conceptualization of the relationship between ownership and place names that allows us to differentiate practices, issues and toponymic implications.

The third approach, that of social justice issues, in other words, of toponymic inclusiveness, is particularly topical with the overlapping decolonial and feminist demands. These revisit the question of toponymic rights and wrongs and argue for a more equitable toponymy, redressing deliberate and abusive erasures – those of Indigenous people, racialized communities, women and queer people, and more generally of the sabalterns in patriarchal and postcolonial societies. Inventories of recognition and visibility deficits and their historicization are becoming more numerous (Berg 2011; Novas Ferradas 2018; Bigon and Zuvalinyenga 2021; Beck 2021; Zuvalinyenga and Bigon 2021).

Beyond the toponymic injustices related to race and gender (that of class being well known since Gramsci), questioning dominations in naming opens up an important field of research concerning vernacular, alternative and informal toponymies, which could take over from a certain focus on official toponymy, its state actors and its referentials. Thus, the naming of places of so-called spontaneous

or informal settlements in cities of the Global South is becoming an important topic (see Melissa **Wanjiru**'s chapter in this book), be it indirectly in an attempt to understand resistance to addressing (Njoh 2010; Ndock Ndock 2020), or directly for its own sake and its theoretical potential, based almost exclusively on African experiences in the Francophone and Anglophone literature (Bertrand 2001; Dorrier-Apprill and Van den Avenne 2002; Leimdorfer et al. 2002; Boyer 2014, 2017; Cumbe 2016; Wanjiru and Matsubara 2017; Mokwena 2020; Irvine et al. 2021). In parallel, and especially in Europe, anthropological work is devoted to popular practices of counter-naming or uses of alternative toponyms, be they slang or internal to a group and/or counter-culture (Chaté 2005; Steffens 2007; Lajarge and Moses 2008; Paunonen et al. 2009; Veschambre 2011; Vuolteenaho et al. 2019; Bing 2020; Vivant 2020; Wright 2020).

Other studies examine the activist and proactive dimension of inclusive toponymic claims as a social movement that questions the nature of political mobilizations through the double lens of intersectionality and performance studies (Rose-Redwood 2016; Brasher et al. 2017; Beaudouin and Martin 2019; Xu 2021).

With the end of sovereignty over cartographic geographic information, the cartographic scene, and more generally the geoweb, now appears as a potential field for the promotion of alternative toponymic corpuses. But studies going beyond a state of the art and the causes are still rare (Chatelier 2007; Choplin and Lozivit 2019; Casagranda 2020; Ndemo 2020; Palmer and Corson 2020; Carrie et al. 2021). Mathieu **Noucher** offers a chapter on this issue in this book and illustrates it with an enlightening case where actors involved in a public program to collect indigenous microtoponyms in French Guiana must eventually resort to the OpenStreetMap contributory mapping platform to integrate it into the visible toponomascape.

The obvious links between these three approaches are woven together in this book and should belong to the agenda of critical toponymy: the multiple or the simultaneous, plural designations of places, the relational or the overcoming of the exo/endonymy binary, and the questioning, or rather the overcoming by participation of the official, state, paths of naming and mapping. For example, and with regard to the first two points, Bakary Traore (2007) has shown for the West of Burkina Faso, which actors have historically designed a double toponymy, and how: commercial and relational naming in the cities; locally anchored and descriptive of a sacred and lay socio-environmental order in the countryside.

More broadly, one extraordinary case alone illustrates the relevance of these interdisciplinary dimensions: place naming after Nelson Mandela. Today, Nelson Mandela is probably the most widely used place name in the world (nearly 3,000

occurrences recorded as names of publicly accessible places, if we add his clan name Madiba). Does it concern the whole world? No, mainly the Black Atlantic, to follow Paul Gilroy's expression, illustrating the strong political and cultural links between communities and places marked by the history of colonization, the Atlantic slave trade and Black cultures. The toponym was first used in the 1980s, in the midst of the Cold War, evoking a then imprisoned leader, a hero in the fight against the late, spectacular and terrible figure of colonization that was apartheid. This first diffusion happened in very committed and concerned European or American places of contestation and counter-culture: campuses, red belt suburbs or Black ghettos, already creating links of commitment between heterogeneous and distant places. An exponential diffusion then takes place in two directions. The first constitutes a demand for and by the marginalized or relegated, mainly but not exclusively Afro-descendants, who name (spontaneously or as a claim) their camps, informal neighborhoods, collective housing projects or places and community facilities after him. The other direction, composite and very broad, points to a certain political or economic commodification. A Nobel Peace Prize winner and an icon of dialogue between populations and of good governance, the largely ecumenical Mandela figure becomes a kind of brand that allows for the joint celebration of the universal values of human rights and those of a happy globalization that includes Africa. Such a symbolic load makes the name into a resource and a powerful vector of territorial, political and commercial marketing. Since global cities, as well as secondary cities aiming at putting themselves on the map, add references in the public and political nomenclature of roads and facilities as well as in the landscape of private brands. Nelson Mandela is everywhere in the toponomascape, simultaneously embodying the aspirations of progressive and conservative elites and those of the outcasts of the outskirts, within the same metropolitan areas, from the center to the peripheries. Place naming might be bottom-up – a collective called upon by participatory processes to name a new school, a movement of landless people placing themselves under Mandela's patronage to occupy a vacant lot, an informal entrepreneur opening a motorcycle cab station or a registered private management school. But it is also often top-down and the result of a political decision, even if this does not guarantee a successful take: in Douala, the users of the roundabout "*J'ai raté ma vie*" (I messed up my life) do not intend to let go of this vernacular name that ironically shouts to the world the tragedy of the poor and marginalized lives of the neighborhood in exchange for a parachuted Nelson Mandela toponym. On the other hand, the initiators of clandestine funk dances in Brazilian favelas produce in all working-class neighborhoods across the country ephemeral events and places (the *baile do Mandela*) referring to its origin in the eponymous favela of Rio. A fantastic diffusion of the same referent, both exonym and endonym, which generates a bundle of relationships and oppositions, of simultaneous and contradictory uses, of

initiatives and crisscrossing performances, contributing to the variable geometry of globalized metropolitan imaginaries.

This particular and heuristic case mirrors the field of critical or political toponymy: it is indeed proliferating. So, the final question that we must ask ourselves in this introductory overview is surely how to theorize from such a profusion. And this is indeed the most burning issue for this emerging field.

1.4. Theory-in-progress: beyond hegemony and *dispositif*, a toponymic situationism?

A first challenge rises in relation to linguistic approaches, as the postulate of the toponym as a "rigid designator" being questioned (Kripke 1972; Recanati 1983). Critical toponymy reveals it to be contingent, descriptive and evolving. It is therefore descriptivist, in that it grants the toponym a set of characteristics of the place it designates, and pragmatic, which grants the place name a meaning and implicatures that are sensitive to the context of use (Laugier 2004; Moeschler 2019). Better still, it increasingly affirms its performative dimension (Austin 1963; Searle 1963): in other terms, the place name has the capacity to produce social effects depending of its use. Shifts in meaning, designation and use, and resemantizations (Kristol 2002) are thus emphasized and worked on in context. Toponyms that refer to banal places might become landmarks, names that evoke and travel, for example, the names of battles (Paveau 2008) and ideological confrontations such as Larzac (Gardy 1987), the precursor of the "*Zones à Défendre*[6]" such as Notre Dame des Landes, or tourist landmarks such as Lascaux (Neotopo 2020), or of contemporary popular songs such as "Penny Lane" (Gensane 2010; Neotopo 2014). These may be references to landmarks or popular figures whose metonymization is reinforced by associating several toponyms (Charbonneaux 2020). The case of Nelson Mandela is again exemplary, as his name is often caught up in toponymic associations that situate him within a specific pantheon (together with Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Gandhi, more generally with the leaders of decolonization and/or the civil rights struggle, or Nobel Peace Prize winners), or as an actor on the South African scene (associated with Frederik de Klerk or, by contrast, with other anti-apartheid fighters, or even with the name of Soweto, which is associated with the struggle). But mundane names and their negotiation are also a prime field for an application of metapragmatics approaches that work on stakeholders' skills of analyzing the issues and effects of language (Karlander 2017).

6. Literally meaning "Zone to Defend", it is a French neologism used to refer to a militant occupation that is intended to physically impede a development project. By occupying the land, activists aim to prevent the project from going ahead.

We should also note the recent development of quantitative methods in critical toponymy (Eades 2017; Oto-Peralias 2018; Badariotti et al. 2021; Bancilhon et al. 2021; Fabiszak 2021). They might not self-identify as such, rather as digital humanities, but fully address the social, cultural and political importance of toponymic choices and uses. Even so, these quantitative approaches return to a more fixed and rigid conception of the designator constituted by the toponym, geo-referenced and included as a unique and perennial entity in a nomenclature and/or database. The emphasis is therefore not on the process of naming or renaming but on the unique referents of the place name, within Millian ontologies (Stuart-Mill 1896) and an analytical philosophy of language. A critique of these approaches could focus on the impoverishment of the social value of the toponym when it is reduced to the status of a rigid designator, and on the impossibility of processing toponymic corpuses to extract a global meaning relative to their presence, importance and diffusion, without contextualizing the naming process and accounting for evolving meanings. Finally, the notion of city text (Duncan 1990) allows us to find a common conceptual ground when dealing with odonymy (Palonen 2008; Oto-Perialas 2018; Smith 2018). Some theoretical divergences remain beyond methodological common ground, but allow for diverse contributions, identifying regularities and irregularities that sustain the debate.

Interpreting the origin of the place name, its motivations and modalities, is another issue addressed by linguist toponymists that is of great interest to political toponymists. The recent debate between Tent and Nash (Tent and Blair 2011; Nash 2015; Tent 2015) actually validates what seems to be a consensual, if not hegemonic, result of critical toponymy: the need to take into account the entire naming process and not just the act that establishes the place name. What Nash calls the “how?” must complete and take precedence over the “where?” the “when?” the “who?” or even the “why?” of naming.

Within critical/political toponymy itself, theoretical progress happens incrementally rather than by controversies. Inspirations from varied social sciences allow us to highlight different aspects of the production, function and use of place names.

Sociology is sometimes called upon (Rusu 2020, 2021). The Bourdieusian concepts of field, and especially of capital, are regularly used, even diverted, notably to mark out theoretically the question of the commodification of place names: place names have multiple values, depending on the fields that constitute them as various types of capital, be it for the place owners and/or their users.

Political science is frequently called upon when it comes to understanding the State and the administration investment in toponymy, through self-centered bureaucratic modernist logic (Scott 1998) and the imposition of an everyday, banal nationalism (Billig 1995). Official toponyms are by far the most visible and the most worked upon. More generally, Gramsci and his concept of cultural hegemony as a component of class relations are a frequent and powerful reference to analyze the state toponymic production in terms of intentionality, means and effects (Puzey and Vuolteennaho 2016).

Foucault is also a common and fruitful reference. In particular, the Foucauldian prism of biopolitics is used for the calculation of the world and the intrinsic link between toponymy, addressing and population control through the adoption of practical systems (Rose-Redwood 2011). Toponymic standardization as a means of geolocation in the context of big data offers new possibilities for the development of this theoretical field.

The Foucauldian concept of dispositif is also useful to apprehend the toponymic factory in its various dimensions. Moreover, it can be perfectly combined with the Gramscian notion of hegemony, as a means of its deployment. Our own analytical and interpretative grid (Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2016) uses the notion of dispositif. It is based on extensive bibliographical work on political toponymy monographs, studying various periods of time and situated at very different scales and in different contexts on all continents. Our long-term work on official, community and conflictual nominations in South Africa has also provided fertile ground for a type of theorizing that combines different logics.

First, using the notion of dispositif reaffirms the need to understand the toponym not only per se, but also to systematically situate it within the naming process, which also becomes an object of research. In other words, with the notion of dispositif, the toponym as well as the naming of the place can be interpreted in political terms. The toponymic dispositif thus takes toponyms as objects, nomination as a process and the toponomascape (made up of place names as they are deployed in space or on maps, as well as their referents) as a whole or as a field of governmentality.

In our modelization, the toponymic dispositif combines four types of components: geopolitical contexts; technologies, frameworks and purposes of naming; places, which can be invested in differently according to their status; and the actors who invest in the field in possibly contradictory ways.

We identify four generic contexts that summarize the main historical and geopolitical situations of naming or massive renaming: conquest (imperial, colonial, pioneer, as well as local or regional expansionism); revolution in the sense of the

radical change of a political order and its associated referentials (e.g. decolonizations or, more modestly, the advent of new local executives); emergence in the sense of the establishment or affirmation of new localities or new territorial entities when political power is exercised, whether they be cities, new States or local governments, or, on another scale, neighborhoods, housing projects or resorts, etc.; commodification confers a market value that can be negotiated to the toponym.

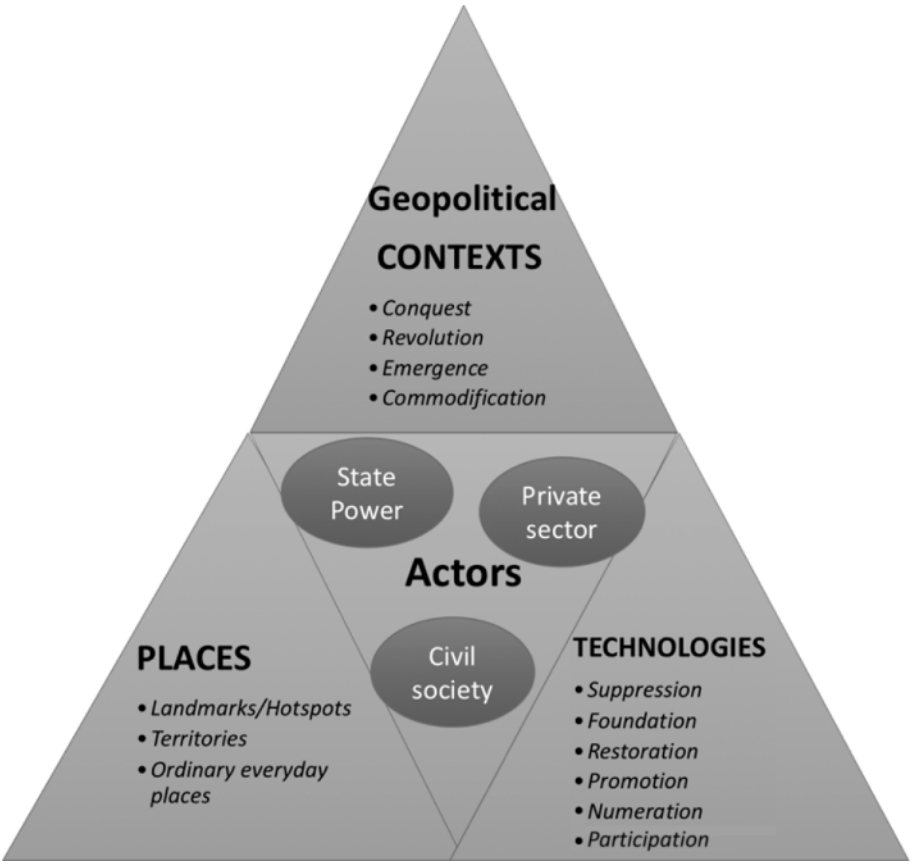

Figure 1.1. *A grid for interpreting the political toponymic dispositif according to geopolitical contexts, toponymic technologies, actors and places (source: from Giraut and Houssay-Holzschulch 2016)*

The numerous political technologies of naming associate techniques per se and the objectives of nomination. They are to be understood in the Foucauldian sense of practical rationalities governed by a conscious objective. We have reduced

technologies to a few in our model, and associate them with contexts. The technology of suppression, or of toponymic cleansing, aims either at symbolically appropriating conquered places (conquest) or at purging the toponymic landscape of the ideological referential of an old regime (revolution). Conversely, the technology of the toponymic foundation aims to assert a new referential in a context of revolution or conquest, or even emergence or commodification. Toponymic restoration consists of a political undertaking to restore names or references that may have been denied or erased. This often happens in contexts of conquest, revolution or even emergence. Finally, the technology of toponymic promotion, which is particularly connected to the contexts of emergence and commodification, covers the transfer of naming rights of a public place to sponsors for advertisement purposes, or the marketing of a place or a destination. Participation technologies associate different stakeholders in the naming process. They are often an initiative of public actors, target civil society and call on private actors as consultants. Naming roads and places by numbers or letters is a practical technology well adapted to the contexts of emergence and urban creation. It can, however, constitute a marker of marginalized spaces, for example, in segregated contexts such as the townships of apartheid South Africa.

This example shows the importance of a specific place, its nature and status, which differentiates the application of technologies across contexts. Thus, landmarks will be particularly targeted when going for foundation, but banal places, the small local streets, for example, will also carry an ideology or promote a specific referential, even if only by the language they use. Finally, territories (spaces corresponding to a more or less formal jurisdiction) can try to distinguish themselves, affirming their own identity through foundation or promotion.

Of course, these typical connections between the components of the dispositif are central to our theoretical proposition; they are orchestrated by the interplay of actors, who also need to be situated. For modern and contemporary history, we have reduced the main actors to the spheres of the state (comprising bureaucracy and local government), civil society (comprising organized collectives and experts) and the private sector. The latter does not only appear in contemporary settings, though, for example, the naming of sports arenas: private actors were instrumental in naming city roads in the Middle Ages.

Our theoretical and verified grid offers a tool for modeling, interpreting and comparing complex situations and experiences, but it also restores the complexity and processual nature of each situation. This process is deciphered as a singular nexus of contexts and an interplay of actors deploying technologies that are place-dependent.

The main theoretical challenge, as this book will hopefully make clear, is to go beyond simple binaries: endo-exo, top down-bottom up, producer-user. For this, we draw inspiration from the Southern Turn, which challenges social sciences by centering Southern theoretical and epistemological experiences. For us, African experiences are especially crucial: they show the limits of approaches, analyses and interpretations forged in the North, and provide situations and experiences that deny the primacy of the state, the formal and the normalized. Deserting the "author for the reader" (Düzgün 2020, from Barthes), the nomination for the reception, the landmarks for the ordinary everyday places, the formal for the informal (Bigon 2020), the imposition of a name for its use and appropriation (Ben Arrous and Bigon, in this book) as the horizon of critical/political toponymy refers of course to Michel de Certeau and his "invention of the everyday" (1980) and much more generally to "ways of doing" and performing. It centers concrete practices and uses that might include how place names are materially inscribed in visual space and in the concrete spatial practices that mark inhabited places and circulations.

A barely explored reference (Vuolteenaho and Kolamo 2012; Kasi-Tani 2014; Neotoponymy [blog]) that seems to us potentially very fertile is situationism (Debord 1967; Vaneigem 1967). This movement of thought and action is a powerful conceptual framework for critical/political toponymy. On the one hand, it allows for a deeper understanding of the logics that presides over toponymic production. The toponomascape of everyday life can be interpreted as the toponymic projection of the norms of a desirable life. These norms, which form the basis of the contemporary spectacle, are incorporated, claimed or reproduced from below, by the spectators who participate fully in the construction of the scenery. For instance, they participate in the diffusion and appropriation of a pastoral suburban imaginary, inspired by a fantasized nature and rurality that pervades the names of suburbs and peripheral residential complexes. The spectacle displayed in the center of metropolises is the imaginary of a progressive and commodified world culture, inspired by world cities: "factories" and other "labs", "valleys", "Central Parks" or neighborhoods mimicking Soho with names made up of the initials of cardinal points. In this sense, a theoretical approach based on the notion of the spectacle makes it possible to go beyond or articulate the concepts of hegemony and biopolitics – in the sense of the conduct of conducts of the acting populations – as well as to connect political and market projects. More, this approach gives a political dimension to the questions of reception, appropriation and even subversion and performance. The infatuation with the figure of Mandela throughout the Black Atlantic, in the center and the extreme periphery of Northern and Southern metropolises, displays how incredibly diversified the toponymic projection of the contemporary globalized society of the spectacle is, and how this projection is able

to coopt forms of self-promotion and forms of contestation by using a toned-down reference pointing to a desire for happy, even paternalistic harmony.

On the other hand, situationism allows for inventing situations for which alternative toponymy, as diverse as it can be, offers new horizons for struggle and play, which might include and empower.

Thus, Greil Marcus (2009), explaining the situationist project – that of urban drifting, psychogeography and subversion – implicitly reveals the possibility of a radical reinvention of the environment through words, in other terms, of the toponymic creation of situations:

> In this new world, the disconnected, seemingly meaningless words and pictures of Mémoires would make sense. They would make sense, first, as noise, a cacophony ripping up the syntax of social life – the syntax, as Debord put it in *The Society of the Spectacle*, of "the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself". As the noise grew, those words and pictures would begin to link up – as graffiti on countless walls, shouts coming out of thousands of mouths, even as familiar streets and buildings one suddenly saw as if never before – and then, with the old syntax broken, these things would make a second kind of sense. They would be experienced not as things at all, but as possibilities: elements of what Debord called "constructed situations" […].
>
> Each situation would be an "ambient milieu" for a "game of events"; each would change its setting, and allow itself to be changed by it. The city would no longer be experienced as a scrim of commodities and power […].
>
> When this free field was finally opened by the noise of the exploding syntax, when the fall of the dictionary left all words lying in the streets, when men and women rushed to pick them up and make pictures out of them, such daydreams would find themselves empowered, turning into catalysts for new passions, new acts, new events: situations, "made to be lived by their creators", a whole new way of being in the world. These situations would make a third kind of sense: they would seem sui generis, unencumbered by the baggage of any past, opening always into other situations, and into the new kind of history it would be theirs to make. And this would be a history not of great men, or of the monuments they had left behind, but a history of moments: the sort of moments everyone once passed

through without consciousness and the sort of moments everyone once passed through without consciousness and that, now, everyone would consciously create.

1.5. References

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