

Street-Naming Cultures in Africa and Israel

Power Strategies and Place-Making
Practices

Liora Bigon and Michel Ben Arrous

First published 2022

ISBN: 978-1-032-00347-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-00351-1 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-17376-2 (ebk)

Chapter 1

**Introduction: toponymic cultures
and the study of place naming in
African (and Israeli) contexts**

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



ROUTLEDGE

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

1 Introduction

Toponymic cultures and the study of place naming in African (and Israeli) contexts

This book expands on the processes that have been shaping and reshaping the semantic, textual and visual environment in urban Africa and beyond. It touches the multidisciplinary field of place-names studies, which incorporates political geography, cultural and subaltern studies; landscape and urban histories; sociology; anthropology; economics; and Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)/GPS knowledge, together with the growing multidisciplinary field of ‘linguistic landscape’, which “attempts to understand the motives, uses, ideologies, language varieties and contestations of multiple forms of ‘languages’ as they are displayed in public spaces”, such as in “flashy advertisements and commercials, names of buildings, streets and shops, instructions and warning signs, graffiti and cyber space” (*Linguistic Landscape*, online). Yet the contribution of this book is unique in three main aspects:

- Firstly, it concentrates on street names and street-naming processes rather than on place names (toponyms) more generally, which brings to the fore the urban context and the actual and conceptual organisation of cities. Moreover, the cities in question are predominantly in Africa, a region which – considering Eurocentric academic traditions, research topics and related methodologies (see the following) – has so far been poorly represented in toponymic studies.
- Secondly, the book directly contributes to the incorporation of neglected toponymic cultures into the meta-narratives of global (urban) history. We emphasise this point, not merely for the sake of better representing a currently underrepresented world region but also because the toponymic cultures we are examining here can hardly be grasped using the frameworks of analysis that have been developed ignoring them. Thus, many of the toponymic cultures that this book expands on challenge the relevance, heuristic scope and alleged universality of much of conventional toponymic scholarship.
- And thirdly, the book incorporates an especially rich variety of visual evidence from a wide range of cities, large and small, drawing attention to the often-overlooked materiality of signage. We show, for example,

2 Introduction

that the materials used for street signs, their state of wear or maintenance, their rewriting with makeshift means or the uneven display of the languages in which official or alternative names are posted can provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of naming policies and politics, government bureaucracies, mundane practices, attitudes toward history and the production of urban space.

The book provides textual and visual analysis of signage in some 30 cities, covering 14 countries with different official languages, language policies, colonial histories and political cultures: Morocco (Casablanca, Fez), Senegal (Dakar, Pikine, Gorée, Saint-Louis, Thiès), Mali (Gao), Niger (Niamey), Nigeria (Ibadan, Lagos, Zaria), Cameroon (Douala, Mutengene), Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo (Lubumbashi), Angola (Luanda), Mozambique (Maputo, Mapelane), South Africa (Cape Town), Kenya (Nairobi), Israel (Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Holon, Ashkelon, Be'er Sheva and environs, Jerusalem, Bnei Brak, Haifa, Akko and the village of Tur 'ān) and France (Bordeaux). Figure 1.1 constitutes a visual synopsis of the geographical scope that is dealt with in this book. As the title of the book indicates, our research deals with urban Africa and Israel. Chapters 1 and 2 are Africa-centred while offering several theoretical and empirical glimpses at Israeli cities; Chapter 3 addresses Bordeaux in addition to discussing Africa-cum-Israeli related aspects of urban namescapes. Chapters 4 and 5 then portray a genealogy of namescapes through a multiplicity of trajectories in an African and an Israeli case study, respectively.

The juxtaposition of a huge and diverse continent (Africa), a tiny country (Israel) and a single French city (Bordeaux) might seem odd at first glance. While our regional positioning might recall the Surrealists' games intended to evoke ideas, imageries and deeper truths by recomposing random words and images together (Brotchie and Gooding 1995), it still inspires meaningful connections and conversations. For instance, it invites interrelated investigations of place-naming processes under different colonial or imperial rules (French or of other European powers in Africa, Ottoman then British in Mandatory Palestine) and their transformations in subsequent contexts of decolonisation and state-building. This juxtaposition has already inspired previous book-length discussions inaugurated by the authors of the present study, such as the volume *Garden Cities and Colonial Planning: Transnationality and Urban Ideas in Africa and Palestine* (eds Liora Bigon and Yossi Katz 2014). In the present context, such a juxtaposition reflects the relations between the politics of the production of linguistic landscape and their reception in contexts of ethno-linguistic diversity and place-making. It is exemplified in the forceful strategies of toponymic Hebraisation in Israel and the more toponymic laissez-faire in Africa's cities, resulting in gradually evolved mixes of formal and informal toponymic inscriptions in a variety of ex-colonial and African languages. Moreover, comparing differently located viewpoints leads to exposing and challenging some unspoken assumptions



Figure 1.1 Location map of the cities covered in this book.

Source: Drawn by Tamar Lev-On.

and beliefs, regarding, for instance, the influence of street naming on the shaping of public memory, the effectiveness of street naming as a technology of power, or the supposedly universal use of street names to navigate in cities. This in turn highlights the importance of considering the toponymic practices of underprivileged groups, their counter-hegemonic memories as

4 Introduction

expressed in the urban landscape and the complex webs of relations binding together formal and informal toponymic systems – at different scales in each region.

In addition, beyond the academic rationale that stands behind the book's geographic and thematic juxtaposition, there are a couple of further reasons. The first is to challenge some conventional habits in critical toponymic studies, such as a problematisation of 'mere' street indexing and mapping, as mentioned in the following, and the inattention to subaltern place-naming processes and practices in a way that unconventionally creates fresh methodological excitement. The latter cuts across the second reason, which simply stems from the authors' native and residential backgrounds. Being a Tel Avivian Israeli and a Dakarois currently living in Bordeaux, we chose to add these layers of situated experience to our otherwise preoccupation with Africa's urban cultures and history, striving, by such juxtaposition, to generate some new toponymic insights, innovative perspectives and fresh understandings.

In examining the streetscapes of so many different cities, our concern has been to link them in a way that the analysis of each would contribute to the analysis of one or more other cities through its peculiarities, suggestive similarities or differences. However, we refrained from developing systematic comparisons between the cities in question for two main reasons. We were uncertain that this would be relevant. What should be compared? Streetscapes at given points in time, whatever their unique (hi)stories? Their contribution to the urban order, by definition unstable, of ever-changing cities? Formal models or processes of street naming, but how then to account for the streetscapes 'experienced' by city dwellers? Intended or actual meanings, with great variations between those who name the streets and those who interpret or reinterpret names in the lived space of mundane activities? Our second reason for refraining from systematic comparisons is that all of these issues arise in different ways in specific contexts, and we did not want to diminish and thereby impoverish their understanding. Any comparison involves a selection of comparables – that is, a small number of characteristics that will by priority be sought in each of the objects or situations to be compared. This may lead to fruitful connections, but at the same time, there is a disadvantage in overlooking the non-comparable aspects and reducing the richness of each case. While providing occasional comparative glimpses, we have favoured extensive analyses whenever possible, linking different toponymic situations through open-ended problematics rather than fixed sets of comparables.

In several respects, this work continues our previous collective volume *Place Names in Africa* (Bigon 2016b), which proposed a long-term exploration of African toponymic landscapes and their colonial or present-day transformations. Through in-depth area studies research and the convergence of varied perspectives shared by authors in related disciplines, the 2016 volume showed the importance of 'culture' in toponymic research.

From a multidisciplinary standpoint, the preoccupation with ‘culture’ or more precisely with ‘planning cultures’ enabled us to treat toponymic processes as a cross-sectional topic, while at the same time highlighting the varied site-related conditions, historical contexts and present-day societies. The present book also maintains the long-term approach, but it sharpens and more tightly integrates the problems and questions particular to our respective fields of study – urban history and political geography – into a holistic perspective on street naming. It relies again upon a ‘cultural prism’ for diffracting a wide spectrum of research directions, but the change of prism that we operate here, from ‘planning cultures’ to ‘toponymic cultures’, considerably extends the scope of research. It allows for a more comprehensive view, not only of naming processes as inaugurated by the naming agencies but also, quite unusual in toponymic studies, of the *reception* of street names in everyday life.

This introductory chapter is made up of three sections. In the first section, we develop our notion of ‘toponymic cultures’, intertwining its conceptualisation with the research avenues that this notion helps to open or broaden. Our purpose is to clarify why we deem the reception of place names pivotal to the understanding of the actual state of urban toponymies and what, in particular, can be learnt from the meaning-making practices of everyday life in African cities. Writing from (mostly) African terrains involves two risks. One is to appear to confirm the supposedly dysfunctional character of African cities – whose realities tend to resist conventional patterns of urban management and general analysis. The other risk is to indulge in ad hoc theorising, which would supposedly ‘work’ in Africa only – and would therefore have no theoretic value at all. Our ‘other’, Israeli terrains, helped to circumvent both pitfalls. Besides their own specificities, not least in terms of political and ideological climate, the Israeli cases we discuss in this book have provided a valuable counterpoint to our ‘African’ intuitions, leading us to develop the notion of toponymic cultures in ways that could offer novel and inspiring insights on very diverse situations. The second section of this introductory chapter examines the difficulties and challenges of expanding the conceptual horizons of place-naming studies from our atypically African and Israeli position – and what this position can contribute to the field of place naming and adjacent research areas. The third section consists of the book outline, highlighting its thematic coherence.

Conceptualising toponymic cultures: why, what for and how?

How are place names used in everyday life? What do they mean for whom? How do people transform them or adapt them to their practices? How do they consider (or ignore) the signposts above their heads and other toponymic inscriptions around them? These questions are central to this book but are rarely addressed in place-name studies. The aspect of place-name

6 Introduction

reception that has attracted the most scholarly attention since the 1990s has been the popular acceptance, or non-acceptance, of elite-led initiatives to rename places, generally following radical political change. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc, for example, or the official demise of apartheid in South Africa, provided specific contexts for grasping a (limited) range of popular attitudes towards place-renaming (Duminy 2014; Kumalo 2014; Crețan and Matthews 2016). However, cases of non-use of the new names in daily life have as a rule been considered through the lens of more or less deliberate resistance – a lens that further reduced the range of observable processes of toponymic reception. As an unorthodox study on the persistence of socialist-era street names in post-socialist Bucharest points out, resistance is certainly an important practice, but it “does not explain every instance where place names fail to find popular acceptance” (Light and Young 2014, 672).

Years before the rise and current burgeoning of critical toponymic studies, a distinguished representative of old-school onomastics had advanced a much broader conception of place-names reception.¹ In the context of apartheid South Africa at the time, Peter Edmund Raper considered place names as a “social barometer” and suggested that “the study of the reception of toponyms may be of value in anticipating and avoiding names and name forms which could cause offence” (1984, 29). In particular, he advocated the study of “idionyms” – i.e. unofficial names employed orally – arguing that they were “very revealing of attitudes and emotions”, including “acceptance, resignation, antagonism, aggression, satisfaction or whatever the case may be, towards the entity that bears the name and in the eyes of the users” (Raper 1984, 30). Post-apartheid authorities have since officialised many such idionyms and the toponymic reconfigurations underway have become an extensive focus of attention (Guyot and Seethal 2007; Jenkins 2007; Ndletyana 2012; Adebaniwi 2018). In the words of Sarah Nuttall, “the examination of the idea of desegregation constitutes a politics in itself”, which cultural expressions at present invite us, *inter alia*, “to take the surface more seriously” (2009, 15, 155). Yet, ironically, the social practices that, in post-apartheid South Africa as in post-socialist Europe, ultimately make official renaming effective or not in everyday life have not stirred any noticeable trends in research.

Here as elsewhere across Africa, widespread practices such as calling the same place by different names, different places by the same name or having different toponyms used by young and old largely remain below the radar of academic scrutiny (Dorier-Apprill and Van den Avenne 2002; Ben Arrous 2016). The same goes for orienting oneself by landmarks or alternative toponyms rather than street names – when they exist. Figure 1.2 shows an aerial view of Pikine, a large suburban city bordering Dakar, Senegal. The only named street visible on the photo is Tally Icotaf (Icotaf Street), a name derived from an old textile factory, now closed, at one of its ends. Interestingly, it has been a widely used idionym that became formalised. The other streets and alleys have recently been numbered without interfering



Figure 1.2 An aerial view of Pikine, Senegal, showing Tally Icotaf on the right (Icotaf Street, a widely used toponym) and a network of recently numbered alleys.

Source: Photo by Michel Ben Arrous.

with the popular practice of navigating this densely populated area through the names of corner shops, corner shop owners or well-known resident families. A different orientation practice prevails in Mutengene, Cameroon, a major junction town without paved or signposted streets. Where a visitor experiences disorientation, the residents navigate without error through shared idionyms of each of its six major streets and for the several minor streets. These are called after major landmarks of the cityscape, such as an electricity pole, or the main cities towards which the major streets are oriented [Figure 1.3]. Although such practices are constitutive of the ‘lived’ toponymic landscapes, they seldom elicit more than brief empirical observations in the research literature, astonished remarks or, in concluding sections, calls to deepen their study one day.

Our notion of toponymic cultures is grounded in the recognition that place naming is both a universal trait of human experience and a cultural fact. All human societies name places, but the principles and social means they mobilise in this regard vary across time and space. Fundamentally, every place-naming system presupposes conceptions of what a place is, what elements should be named in the space of societies, by whom, for what, according to which sets of norms, customs or beliefs. These meta-conceptions are the core of what we call toponymic cultures. Analyses dealing exclusively with formal naming processes can at best capture a dominant state of these conceptions at a given moment. In also examining the reception of place names



Figure 1.3 A main street in Mutengene, Cameroon, a junction town with no official signage.

Source: Photo by Liora Bigon.

and their many variations over time and between social groups, one can better perceive how toponymic cultures – and the toponymic systems that reflect them – are historically developed and socially embraced, disputed or negotiated. By linking formal analysis with the informal, and both strands to the same notion of toponymic cultures, we posit that place naming and the reception of place names are interrelated in more complex ways than is generally acknowledged. Viewed through the “lens of resistance” (Light and Young 2014, 683), it is only top-down processes that trigger bottom-up reactions. Our book brings some nuance to this widely held view by tracing and mapping out more subtle interrelations – including the impact of place-names reception, even if from a subordinate position, on the policies and politics of place naming. To the best of our knowledge, this book is the first to (a) put everyday toponymic practices at the forefront and (b) to consider the production and transformation of toponymic landscapes from the perspective of discursive relations between place naming and place-names reception.

Besides issues of acceptance and use (or non-use) of official street names, much of our work addresses the twin questions of meaning and significance. That is, how do ordinary town dwellers interpret street names? And to what extent do old or new names affect their everyday urban experience and practices? Originally, we had focused on the halo of meanings that toponyms – official and unofficial alike – carry according to locutors, language, time,

position in space and society and actual situations of utterance.² Empirical observations about particular street names in particular cities quickly led us, however, to interrogate the more general significance of naming *streets*. The later naming was conceived as a category of ‘sites’ supposedly infused with notions of collective identity; though in reality across Africa, these sites are not always socially constructed as *places* generating a strong sense of belonging. With a few exceptions, notably in South Africa (Goodrich and Bombardella 2012; Duminy 2014; Musitha 2016), it appears that street (re) naming has more often generated indifference than passionate debates. This observation is more applicable for the African cities discussed in the book rather than for the Israeli ones. We will expand this point in more detail later and explain the advantages of developing the notion of toponymic cultures from the very different contexts of African and Israeli urban histories. It may already be noted, however, that the politics of street naming are a much more polemical and ‘hot’ topic in Israel than in most African cities – which does not, of course, exempt Africa from controversies about the names of places other than streets, such as neighbourhoods, local councils and country subdivisions (Girault et al. 2018).³

Even geographers as insightful as Duncan Light and Craig Young, who mentioned “habit” and “inertia” as important factors in the (non) acceptance of newly imposed names, called for more analysis of the reception of street-name changes by “the populations affected by them” (2014, 671), “directly affected” (2014, 675) or “whose lives are most directly affected by them” (2014, 683) – without envisaging situations where people may not be affected at all. This book suggests that indifferent attitudes to street (re)naming are nonetheless worthy of interest: they express and reveal the dual nature of toponymic systems in most of urban Africa, with official and unofficial place names developing along distinct conceptions of space, which itself has implications in terms of urban governmentality, social dynamics and lived space.

Still, every city at every moment of its singular history is a particular case. To what extent, then, can the previous observation or others be generalised? In drawing on a rich corpus of visual evidence while investigating local attitudes to local street signs, this book takes Spiro Kostof’s point that “physical patterns always encapsulate an extra-physical reality. As one geographer put it, ‘few social values and actions are so abstract that they fail to be reflected in material forms’” (Conzen 1980, 119 as cited in Kostof 1991, 25). On the other hand, we can only share part of Kostof’s restraint as to the aims and means of urban geographers and certainly not his anti-theoretical stance:

Much of their effort goes to generating theory, which brings with it an insistence on measurement, statistical samples, and reductive diagrams. A practical side of these preoccupations is the definition of type independent of particular historical circumstance. . . . But as one of their

own, Harold Carter, observes, “if geographers reduce to abstract generalization the rich variety of urban places from Timbukto [*sic*] to Tottenham, from Samarkand to San Francisco, from Narberth to Nabeul, then theirs is an odd craft”.

(Carter 1981, 335 as cited in Kostof 1991, 25)

Thirty years back, we might have proudly written that it is through the irreducible quality of the local that our contribution to global urban history is made. However, the spatial turn that the social sciences and humanities have experienced since, moving away from the impasses and “tyrannies of historicism and developmentalism” (Crang and Thrift 2000, 1), re-entwined the making of history with the transformation of space – i.e. with its reordering by the spatial practices of historical actors and agents. This spatial turn not only exposed the heuristic limitations of reified binaries such as self and other, here and elsewhere, endogenous and exogenous but also helped to re-situate these categories within a relational rather than oppositional frame of understanding (Mudimbe 1988; Amselle 1990; Glissant 2009). From this perspective, the local is not a discrete or stable object that would exist independently of the changing contexts through which it is being produced. Urban toponymies, in particular, are never ‘purely’ local, in the sense that they would comprise solely ‘autochthonous’ names – nor ‘purely’ imposed by an external power or centralising authority (be it colonial or other). As places where diverse and historically varied flows of people, goods, and ideas intersect, cities are sites of maximal toponymic hybridity.

The toponymic landscapes we examine in this book all have a distinct character, a unique flavour that pervades place-naming processes, institutions and everyday practices. Each city is recognisable by particular ways of mixing toponymic patterns, of dealing with vernacular, borrowed or imposed names, of sidelining some and giving new meanings to others, of adopting or disputing the resulting combinations and of making sense of all of this through social interaction, power relations and ordinary practices. Conceiving this local flavour as a perceptible, tangible expression of toponymic cultures helps to elaborate on how place-naming processes and meaning-making practices are socially ingrained at various historical depths. In keeping with a Foucauldian notion of identity as a particular way of changing in contact with what changes (Foucault 1979), we can now refine our own notion of toponymic cultures and conceive them as how heterogeneous place-naming patterns are assembled, reworked and made meaningful in the changing circumstances of a particular city. As will be shown repeatedly in this book, the extent to which a city’s street names are used, contested or substituted with alternative systems of spatial orientation largely depends on site-specific combinations of collective values, attitudes and behaviours grounded in local history. Such combinations are sufficiently shared (beyond the social antagonisms inherent in the urban experience) and stable enough (beyond the dynamics of cultural change) to

influence the public reception of street names and signage. These combinations constitute important drivers for the selective acceptance, rejection or ignoring of a city's street names and for their incorporation, or not, in the geographic imaginations and mental maps of its inhabitants.

One may wonder why place-names studies so rarely venture into the vast fields of enquiry just mentioned. This may be partly due, paradoxically enough, to their considerable refocusing, over the last decades, on place-naming processes rather than name explanations or typologies as was previously the case. Although this shift represents an undeniable qualitative development, process-oriented studies have limits of their own: insofar as the establishment of official names is the practical conclusion of the studied processes, this establishment tends to also constitute the temporal limit of investigation efforts. What happens once names are formally given or signage is actually installed is, as a rule, left beyond the horizon of enquiry or considered a side question. Yet this is when the social appropriation of place names – or, to paraphrase Appadurai (1988), the “social life” of names and signage – begins.

More than just a metaphor, ‘social life’ in the context of this book refers to two basic observations: (a) street names and signage are dependent on human interpretive cooperation, and (b) their effective order emerges from social practices. To grasp the first aspect, one need only imagine a toponym that no one would use or a street plaque that no one would read: they would signify nothing. The meanings that toponyms carry, the political messages they convey, the reactions and interactions they elicit are not intrinsic properties. They are ascribed to them by historically and socially situated people or groups of people, whose interpretations of the place names generate more diverse meanings than that which the place namers may have sought to communicate (Creţan and Matthews 2016; Jenjekwa and Barnes 2017).

The second observation stems from street signs being both semiotic *signs* in their own right and material *things*. As bits of meanings that are placed in the cityscape (Scollon and Scollon 2003), formal street signs emanate from positions of authority. Whatever they actually communicate, they follow not only particular naming decisions and city-specific signage policies but also universalised norms, rules and principles that construct the signs as mediums of a dominant, globalising, if not fully hegemonic, order of toponymic standards. It is not sufficient in this regard to equate the power to name with political, government or state power, as toponymic studies tend to do, too conventionally, when they address the leitmotif of power over space. While it makes little doubt that the “legitimate monopoly” of political-bureaucratic institutions over place naming and street signage constitutes “a political practice par excellence of power over space” (Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002, 367), a much broader conception of ‘power’ is required to capture the elusive authority to which these institutions themselves conform. What is at play here is a more ubiquitous, diffuse form of power, one that could perhaps be better grasped as a ‘government’ in the sense of

Foucault, where power consists of “guiding the possibilities of conduct”: to govern, in this sense, is “to structure the possible field of actions of others” (1982, 313–314).

A case in point, abundantly documented in photos in this book, is the “canonization of nationalist ideals in the nomenclature of cities” (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009, 2). Independently of the particular names matching specific visions or narratives of particular nations, the national or city governments instrumentalising toponymy to serve ideological ends are complying in a banal manner, in Africa as elsewhere, with a global canon. Less banal is the ‘resistance’ offered by urban dwellers who sometimes do not exactly embrace the official names as expected nor even challenge them. Widespread reliance on unofficial place names and relative indifference to official street naming may thereupon be construed as counter-hegemonic practices in their own right. These practices do not confront political-bureaucratic institutions on their grounds (including ideological-nationalist agendas). Rather, they ignore or indeed escape the toponymic standards that would lead to confronting powerful institutions (and thereby perhaps to lose, from the weak positions of everyday life, in an asymmetric confrontation). At a higher level of counter-hegemony, such practices actually point to the limitations of globalised toponymic norms. In cities where several place-naming systems coexist, hegemony cannot be taken for granted.

As *material things*, the meanings of street signs only arise out of ‘signifying practices’ – i.e. the meaning-making human practices in which the signs are engaged (Hall 1997; Malinowska and Lebek 2017). A glance at this book’s photos suffices to observe many diverse instances of meaning-making, ranging from graffiti and overwriting official signage to, inter alia, self-initiated signposting (showing official or alternative names), artist-activist interventions and creative reuse of signage codes for displaying political or other statements. Some highly signifying practices do not even imply the use of signage – which may be surprising in light of the general consent, within the field of cultural studies, that “it is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we give them meanings” (Hall 1997, 3). This book suggests that non-use may also be a signifying practice in some cases and shows that this is the case of street signage. Use or non-use of official toponyms, indifference to signage decay or disappearance of street signs behind vegetation or market stalls are relevant to an understanding of the effective toponymic – and urban – order.

The ‘social life’ of street names and signage can thus be understood as their entanglement with the variety of social agencies involved, as well as with social practices that transcend their original purpose and denotations. These practices are of heuristic interest beyond toponymic studies. When analysed in their context, they reveal myriad re-compositions and re-appropriations of the lived space; provide useful insights about how such assemblages are being negotiated, both between competing social groups and between them and local or national governments; and bring into the

fore stimulating questions about the broader configurations of cultural hegemony. African citizens, not less than their rulers, have turned street signage into a multi-purpose resource, with toponymic inscriptions being used both to express social concerns and to promote particular group identities or to insert a neighbourhood into political patronage networks that might potentially be helpful to its development. At the same time, widespread reliance on alternative place-naming and orientation systems testifies to selective and “subversive re-readings” of the dominant toponymic practice, undermining “cultural hegemonies that restrict the uses and meanings of things” (Malinowska and Lebek 2017, 6).

The actual order of signage, Michel de Certeau could have said, is what everyday practices turn to their ends.⁴ His *Practice of Everyday Life* was path-breaking in terms of theorising both the formal side and the ‘lived’ side of urban landscapes in general and streetscapes in particular. It paved the way for the understanding of street nomenclatures as “constellations” of power-laden proper names that “hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city”, in accordance with the “historical justifications” that suit the powerful (de Certeau 1984, 104). On the other side, that of the weak, he suggested that the ability to signify “outlives” the intended original meanings of toponyms. That is, people transform or divert the names in their own ways, ways which are “neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop” (de Certeau 1984, xviii).

The impact of *The Practice of Everyday Life* has been quite amazing. James Duncan (1990) has acknowledged this work as a major source of inspiration for his hermeneutic approach to urban landscapes. Derek Gregory (1994) has discussed at length its contribution to the renewal of our geographic imaginations (1994). Robin Kearns and Lawrence Berg (2002) have relied on it for their analysis of the contested pronunciations of Maori place names, showing how such a banal act as pronouncing names could involve political positions (and thereby offering critical toponymy one of its rare case studies of everyday practices). Aside from these studies, critical toponymy scholarship tends to cite and comment on de Certeau abundantly but without going as far as responding to its own calls to explore the political economy of practices (Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). This is remarkable insofar as many ‘puzzling’ instances where new place names fail to find popular acceptance are reminiscent of de Certeau’s oft-quoted chapter “Walking in the City” (1984, 91–110). In this chapter, de Certeau draws our attention to the fact that beyond the intended meaning of ‘authorised’ street names, “these names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by” and thus become liberated, emptied-out and wore-away by them (1984, 104–105).

There are, indeed, “parallels” between naming places as one wishes and the shaping of lived space by passers-by who, “through their unreflexive everyday practices (or tactics), quietly challenge and subvert an unseen authority (even if sometimes they are not aware of doing so)” (Light and Young

2014, 681). For all that, challenge or subversion must not be understood as a threat to the dominance of formal toponymic systems, nor to any institutional norm entrenched in the formal organisation of cities. What everyday practices undermine is rather a *fiction* – and that is not a small thing. The ‘everyday’ dimension erodes the illusion that a toponymic landscape is engineered and reengineered through formal decisions only. Cumulative naming (or renaming) decisions and the installation (or replacement) of the signage accordingly certainly set the scene, but the lived or enacted toponymic landscape is also being produced, in more diffuse ways, through what people do with it, how they rework it in everyday life and assign meanings to it.

African studies have shown a long-standing interest in the everyday, bringing to the fore how people interpret their experienced spaces and re-fashion the frames that are supposed to orient their lives (Newell and Okone 2014; Adebaniwi 2017). We would be happy if our work could assist in building bridges between this African academic tradition and the field of place-name studies.

Mainstreaming Africa in critical toponymy scholarship: issues and challenges

Place names and signage have long been a burning subject in Israel, arousing highly invested political strategies and attracting a considerable amount of critical research. The Hebraisation of place names, streets, cities, villages, ruins and natural features alike had already been considered a powerful tool in nationalising the landscape before the creation of the state in 1948. Even the virtually banal endeavour of road signposting is nowadays embedded with the passionate and nationalistic ideology of Hebraisation, with minimal consideration given to national and ethno-linguistic minorities. Against the background of the continuous Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this and related policies of place-renaming have firmly established Israel as a hotspot for toponymic studies (see, for instance, Benvenisti 1997; Katz 1999; Spolsky and Shohamy 1999; Azaryahu and Golan 2001; Ben-Shemesh 2003; Suleiman 2004; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Margalit 2007; Shohamy 2011; Shoval 2013; Bigon and Dahamshe 2014).

By contrast, taking African situations never played a significant part in shaping the field of critical toponymy. In the 1990s, when this field emerged, the main focus of analysis was on place renaming in the former Eastern Bloc and on the toponymic expressions of nationalism, of heroic narratives and of power relations with minority groups, there, in Western Europe and North America. From the onset, critical toponymic scholarship has thus been “rich for some periods and places, but weak in others particularly for Latin America, Asia, and Africa” (Foote and Azaryahu 2007, 125–126). The situation concerning Africa has been gradually changing, at least quantitatively (e.g. McDougall 1991; Bühnen 1992; Myers 1996; Ben Said 2010; Garakchene 2011; Giraut and Antheaume 2012; Castela and Meneses

2015; Bigon and Njoh 2015; Stolz and Warnke 2016; Nyambi et al. 2016; Mamvura et al. 2017, 2018).

However, mainstreaming Africa in critical toponymic scholarship is not just a quantitative issue. It is more fundamentally (or should be) about improving the quality of research approaches to African toponymic landscapes and broadening the conceptual horizons of critical toponymy more generally. The deepest challenge of the present book is to foster an intelligence of African toponymic realities which would show what they can bring to more global knowledge systems. In this respect, it is disturbing to note that even though their numbers are increasing, African place-name studies remain chiefly centred on official toponyms. In that, they certainly follow a habit that also prevails in European, North American and Israeli toponymic scholarship, yet the impacts on the scope and relevance of research are much more acute here. A major characteristic of African toponymic landscapes is the vibrancy of alternative naming systems that coexist and interact with official nomenclatures. In overlooking this aspect, one only gains a partial vision of the namescapes and misses out on the societal dynamics at play.

The formal tree and the informal forest

Blinding preoccupation with official toponyms has far-reaching implications, affecting the study sites and interpretive frameworks of street-name studies. In African urban settings where, as a rule, not all the streets are named or only informally, and where uneven municipal investment in toponymy and signage tends to overlap with the spatial distribution of wealth and prestige, the logical focus of research is on the town centre and relatively well-off districts – that is, on the *ville officielle*, where the objects of study can be found. These are the areas with the highest concentration of formally named streets since the colonial era. The namescapes of that time, fed with Eurocentric references, had been designed to meet the ideological needs of the colonial enterprise. It thus seems natural that post-independence renamings, when they occur, are widely interpreted in contrast to the colonial past, with emphasis on new names now commemorating national or pan-African leaders. Studies focusing on place renaming as a tool for decolonising the urban landscape, cementing national unity or reshaping public memory, have gained prominence in recent years (Ndletyana 2012; Bigon and Njoh 2015; Hassa 2016; Wanjiru and Matsubara 2017a). They go well with the “nationalism and wars of independence” paradigm (Foote and Azaryahu 2007, 125) that has dominated toponymic scholarship since the 1990s. They also fit with the propensity of critical toponymy to privilege contexts of radical political change, real or assumed. However, an exclusive focus on official toponyms, far from being a benign methodological decision, inhibits the ability to assess the scope and significance of renaming policies in their broader context. The major flaw of many street-name studies is thus to overshadow the diversity of place-naming regimes at the city level and,

hence, the power/knowledge relations that this diversity entails within the societies concerned.

Put differently, the substitution of Afrocentric names for Eurocentric ones is in many regards the tree that hides the forest. Sixty years after the independence of most African countries, cities have expanded well beyond their formal colonial limits. The vast majority of African urban dwellers now live in areas where the streets never had a colonial name – and often still have no official name. Even within the former colonial limits, the popular toponyms in actual use outside of town centre locations were not ‘Eurocentred’ during the colonial era and could, therefore, not be ‘Afro-recentred’ after independence. By their informal character, they eluded the struggles for the symbolic control of formal namespaces. Their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the realm of official toponymy is manifested in an eclectic variety of place-naming vocabularies that borrow more from neighbourhood history, place-specific concerns, community politics and counter-memories than from grand narratives of nationhood (Myers 1996; Wanjiru and Matsubara 2017b; Choplin and Lozivit 2019). At the city level, the significance of street naming is, therefore, not as obvious as town centre studies suggest. The incomplete hegemony of official toponymy over everyday toponymic practices casts at least some doubt over the actual importance, in African urban settings, of the role played by street-renaming policies in the decolonisation of urban landscapes. The belief that this role is instrumental, though widely shared by policymakers and most toponymy scholars, remains questionable when the social, spatial, cultural and, indeed, political reach of the said policies is itself uncertain.

This belief in the importance of street renaming, together with the unequal distribution of its material inscriptions in the urban space, participates in a form of symbolic power different from that which is conventionally studied – symbolic power that stratifies space and society as much as it unites them. Insofar as renaming policies give precedence to (re)inscriptions of nationhood in the parts of town that colonial town planning and toponymy had themselves constructed as being the most prestigious, these policies also maintain or accentuate inherited hierarchies and inner-city divisions. They amount to a factor of “distinction”, in the sense of Bourdieu: “The dominant culture [which] contributes to the real integration of the dominant class”, in this case a political culture whose value system governs toponymic inscriptions, “is also the culture which separates (the instrument of distinction) and which legitimates distinctions by forcing all other cultures (designated as sub-cultures) to define themselves by their distance from the dominant culture” (1991, 167).⁵ ‘Other’ toponymies are indeed designated in priority by a character of deviation: non-official, informal, non-compliant. Their ‘unruly’ character overrides other possible categorisations and blurs the differences between ‘vernacular’ toponymies (which transform to adapt to their rejection in informality), ‘popular’ (in the sense of being more widely used than the formal system), ‘alternatives’ (to the formal system) and more.

These ‘others’ now form a continuum without precise boundaries. Their distance from the norm is both spatial and social. Spatial because they are separated – in a more or less perceptible way, with variations from one city to another – from the neighbourhoods best endowed with commemorative street names and signage, by having little or no such names or signage.⁶ And social because they are often perceptible at the very heart of city centres as well, if one takes notice of practices.

One of countless telling examples is Djibo Bakary Square in central Niamey, Niger, named after a pivotal and well-respected figure of the independence movement. Participants at a recent symposium on place naming in Africa (Giraut et al. 2018) were brought to the square, just opposite the town hall. Amazing situation: a private car park had informally taken hold of the once-public place. The plaque and monument commemorating the great man were now only visible from this privatised area, and neither the people nor the town hall at the opposite side seemed to care [Figure 1.4]. Discussions with nearby traders and residents elucidated that they remembered Djibo Bakary with great admiration, yet they did not care much for the monument, generally ignored that the square had been named after him and, in fact, used ‘town hall’ or the nearby ‘Petit Marché’ as their preferred toponym for this part of town.⁷ While no great conclusion can be drawn from the anecdote, its merit is to suggest that street naming does not always or everywhere play a major role in the formation of public memory. Niger’s national narrative and the public memory associated with it attach great value to Djibo Bakary, but his toponymic commemoration went unnoticed.



Figure 1.4 Djibo Bakary Square in Niamey, Niger, currently used as a private car park.

Source: Photo by Michel Ben Arrous.

This invites caution when discussing the scope of commemorative street names and their ability to “substantiate a particular version of history” (Azaryahu 1996, 328). No ability is inexorably destined to be realised in all circumstances. We, therefore, deem it prudent to consider the ideological ‘power’ of commemorative street names as an *expectation*, or a *potential*, whose effective accomplishment would be limited, in some African cities more than elsewhere, by the diversity of place-naming systems and non-compliant toponymic practices.

The persistent plurality of place-naming patterns and non-preponderance of street names in everyday toponymic practices make it difficult to measure changes in the urban landscape on the sole basis of official names. The present book shows that these elements of continuity are no less crucial than formal changes for a political interpretation of street naming in African urban contexts. It, therefore, offers a wider understanding of the colonial toponymic legacy, encompassing not only the names per se but also the inherited place-naming mechanisms and processes, codes and conventions and the routinisation of toponymic instrumentation for political or ideological purposes. Our approach leads to significant differences in interpretation compared to studies devoted exclusively to official names.

At this point, reviewing a representative example of such studies may help to highlight and explain the differences. The study in question deals with the formal namescapes of Nairobi, Kenya, and Dakar, Senegal. It first examines the “toponymic nomenclatures imposed on African built spaces by colonial authorities and agents of Western civilisation” (Njoh 2018, 198) and then the extent to which they were “supplanted” after independence by “veritable Kenyan [or Senegalese] and Afrocentric equivalents” (216). The first aspect is addressed through a compilation of available work on colonial planning in the two cities. The second is approached in a more impressionistic way by selecting illustrative toponyms. In Nairobi, virtually all street names of colonial origin have been replaced by names with nationalist or pan-African connotations. The overhaul began immediately after Kenya’s independence from the British in 1963 and effectively ended in the mid-1970s when there were no more colonial names to replace. The city centre of Dakar, on the other hand, still retained many street names dating from the colonial era. Since Senegal’s independence from the French in 1960, street-renaming endeavours have always been specific but without a comprehensive and resolute policy as in Kenya. The study suggests that the “radically different” toponymic ambiances of Nairobi and Dakar are due to contrasting decolonisation processes. In contrast to Kenya, which separated from Britain following a “bloody war” and embarked on a “fervent process to [honour] war-of-independence heroes” (208); France maintained a “firm grip” and cultural hold on its former colonies, including Senegal, long after they were “granted” political independence (209). The conclusion is that the toponymic landscape

of Nairobi “evokes a sense of veritable African ‘placeness’, identity, power and history” while that of Dakar continues to express mainly “Western power” (218).

The study epitomises a classic approach to the decolonisation of African urban landscapes by illustrating the fascination that formal renamings exert on a large stream of research at the expense of more profound colonial continuities. One of the most obvious of these, in both Dakar and Nairobi, is precisely the duality of formal and informal toponymies. As alluded to earlier, popular place-naming practices are constructed as *informal* only in relation to formal toponymic inscriptions. Colonial cities were the birth-place of a divide, which current cities have inherited. The colonial institutionalisation of a monopoly on place naming and the unruly practices of the colonised who continued to name places in their own ways, now informal, spawned a duality which since then has been reproduced in actualised forms. The attention we pay to this critical aspect of the colonial heritage, to the state-society relations that it nowadays embodies and to its materialisation in the urban space leads to quite different interpretations from those presented previously.

It is particularly important to consider the informal toponymy in a city like Nairobi, where over half of the population lives in extra-legal settlements (Mitullah 2003) and has no other toponyms than informal ones for their places of life. Melissa Wanjiru’s fieldwork and extensive analysis of place-naming dynamics in Kibera, Mathare and Mukuru, being some of Nairobi’s main slums, bring out a picture far removed from the official namescape (2018, 94–128). Toponymic inscriptions by the residents themselves borrow little from the state’s ideological repertoire. They instead communicate about their struggles as marginalised communities, the continuing socio-political injustices, the evictions and demolitions they have faced and may face again, with some toponyms also being borrowed from more distant “places and events signifying violence and opposition to the ruling class”, like Soweto, Vietnam or Kosovo (Wanjiru 2018, 147).

The majority of Dakarais also lived on unnamed streets until the early 2000s, not due to a slum phenomenon but to the lack of interest of the city authorities in street-addressing systems.⁸ Colonial-era street names are still “a slight majority” in Dakar’s Plateau (Gørny and Gørna 2019), the former heart of the colonial city, which constitutes a small part of the whole city. A home to less than 3% of the population, the Plateau is far from being representative of the broader metropolitan toponymic landscape. Thus, recent research that concentrates exclusively on this quarter and its official signage (Gørny and Gørna 2019) only points to the conceptual-cum-geographic limits of the traditional place-names scholarship while producing a partial, synthetic understanding of the African city and its toponymic ambiance. From the standpoint of toponymic cultures, the lax attitude of Senegalese

authorities to colonial-era names could be seen as coinciding with, or echoing, the relative importance of street names or numbers in everyday toponymic practices. By pushing the interpretation a little further, one could provocatively consider street naming as a colonial, administrative-political language: the Senegalese attitude could then be regarded as a high form of “decolonisation of the mind”, which reduces the role of this language in the writing of the city-text.⁹ The technocratic uses of street naming have been scaled back (resulting in patchy addressing systems) as have its standard manipulative uses (whose political efficiency would in any case be limited by counter-hegemonic toponymic practices). We will return to Dakar in detail in Chapter 4, which is entirely devoted to its multilayered toponymic tapestry – and we will turn to Tel Aviv in similar detail in Chapter 5. Now, we simply wish to underline how interpretations may vary, depending on whether one only considers the official namescape or the broader toponymic fabric of cities.

The same goes for the attention paid to the reception of place names, which offers a unique perspective on toponymic dynamics. The post-independence history of Nairobi’s namescape is again a good example of interplay between an authorised version of public memory and counter-memories resisting it. A particularly contentious issue in the early days of Kenya independence was the memory of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), commonly known as Mau Mau. The colonial government had never recognised the Mau Mau Uprising of the 1950s as a war, not even a rebellion, but portrayed it as hooliganism or terrorism (Anderson 2005). The new political elite of independent Kenya adopted this view, rejecting the Mau Mau as a symbol of national liberation. In a famous speech delivered shortly before becoming the first prime minister and then the first president of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta defined the official position that would remain in force for decades:

We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which had been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.

(Reprinted in Kenyatta 1968, 189)

Kenyatta had previously issued a press statement referring to the Mau Mau as “gangsters” (Clough 2003, 255). Vilification of the Mau Mau gave impetus to street-renaming policies, not in the sense of “honouring war heroes” (Njoh 2018) but of suppressing their memory (Wanjiru 2018, 75–78). As a result, they were conspicuously absent from the new namescape – with a single exception: Kimathi Street, named after the senior military and spiritual leader of the KLFA.¹⁰ A different situation prevailed in informal settlements, especially those that had been hideouts for the rebel group during the years of struggle. For instance, the main road cutting through Mathare is

unofficially named Mau Mau Road. In the formal landscape, only Kimathi Street violated Kenyatta's directive to "never remember" the Mau Mau. But this one exception indicates that "the notion of the group being 'terrorist' was not widely accepted and was in fact rejected by some" (Wanjiru 2018, 91–92). It also suggests that the City Council of Nairobi could not totally ignore the state of public opinion without risking compromising the legitimacy of the entire renaming exercise.¹¹

Another important issue of place-name reception in Nairobi was the perceived over-representation of the political elite in the new toponymy, in particular of the Kikuyu political elite surrounding Jomo Kenyatta, the Father of the Nation. Calls for more inclusivity and ethnic balance on street signs rose under his presidency and continued after his death in office in 1978. Numerous letters to the city council, newspaper letter columns and the multi-ethnic character existing in the slum toponymy itself articulated a feeling of dispossession. Public discontent with a namescape that still "served to represent those who were in power. . . , like that of the colonial period" was a powerful reminder that "the purpose of the fight for freedom [had been] to promote inclusivity and power for the Kenyan people and not the politicians" (Wanjiru 2018, 92). The reception of place names functioned in this respect as a political and ideological "barometer" (Raper 1984) showing the limits and the loss of credibility of the national narrative of unity and highlighting the need for a reconfiguration of commemorative space.

The ban on Mau Mau memory was finally lifted in the 2000s. A Kimathi statue was installed along Kimathi Street in 2007, and three years later, the national day was renamed *Mashujaa* Day (Heroes Day) instead of Kenyatta Day (Coombes 2011; Charton 2013). This belated change reopened the competition for the symbolic control of the public arena. Decades of divisive politics and memory struggles, along with the daily struggles of the slum population, have anchored place naming issues in the city's political culture. At least as much as the fight for independence, it is its selective and controversial memorialisation that has made toponymy a prime object of political and public attention.

The embedment of Nairobi's formal toponymy in Kenyan politics and society is in our view a more considerable difference with Dakar than the ideological or social control uses that are made of it. Both cities had experienced the colonial deployment of street naming as an instrument for shaping particular political narratives. The Kenyan authorities after independence took over this instrument and used it to rewrite Nairobi's formal namescape, obviously with more determination than their Senegalese counterparts. But the point we emphasise here is that the rewritten namescape was in turn reread, disputed and questioned by various groups in society. This contrasts with most of the African cities we examine in this book, where street names, even if challenged on a case-by-case basis, seldom fuel a comprehensive critique of the social or political order. While each of these cities has a distinct toponymic flavour, this does not mean that some would be

more ‘veritably African’ than others. Rather, this means that toponymic cultures are by necessity hybrids of diverse influences and that African ones in particular incorporate colonial elements at different depths and in different ways, which extend well beyond the field of view of nationalist perspectives.

A methodological remark about Nairobi can be made here, that the names on the street signs mattered less to the debate than the names that were *not on the street signs* – i.e. the blanks in the revised city-text and public memory. Toponymic scholarship is more familiar with existing names than with absent ones, but in the case of Nairobi, both categories – the apparent and the absent – are necessary to understand how the politics of street naming have become an object of public attention and debate. Beyond Nairobi, a general remark is that the social embedment of street naming is rarely as apparent as its political embedment. Whereas the political embedment can be easily visible from the signposted names only, the social embedment of the names and its impact on the social production of space can hardly be captured without a complementary perspective on place-name reception. Further studies of place name reception in more African cities would also be welcome to address how global street nomenclatures fit into the local toponymic fabric, interplay with vernacular or ‘informal’ place-naming systems and in this process retain or lose some of the salience they had at the time of their colonial inception.

An argument of this book is that the mainstreaming of Africa in critical toponymy scholarship, in the sense indicated earlier, will go through wide-angle views of complex and dynamic realities rather than the snapshots obtained through the usual zoom. The zooming process, let us call it FCCI, consists of focusing on the Formal (F) namescape – > of town Centre (C) locations – > where formerly Colonial (C) names – > were normally replaced by new names symbolising national Independence (I). The FCCI zoom is a mono-function tool, allowing at most to verify that African street-renamings reflect a nationalist ideal, as can be seen almost everywhere in the world. Once this is verified, there is still much uncertainty before one can say anything about the re-Africanisation, nationalisation or decolonisation of the urban landscape. By zooming in, one leaves outside the image (or out of its focus range) most of the (moving) subjects that could provide insight into the political, social or cultural reach of the renamings. These include the respective sprawl of formal and informal namescapes at city scale; the evolving balance between these namescapes since independence; their impact on the conditions of urban governance and the living conditions of the ‘governed’ urban residents; the daily struggles of the urban poor and their toponymic expressions; the changes in cultural and ideological benchmarks in cities that are in a constant state of flux; the social order expressed, challenged or negotiated through current toponymic dynamics, formal and informal, between state and society and within society itself; and, again, the spatial nomenclatures of everyday use in popular practice.

Some of these questions are developed more than others in the next chapters without being addressed systematically. A systematic treatment would have been necessary if the goal were to adapt the study of African (or Israeli) situations to the nationalist paradigm that dominates critical toponymic scholarship globally or to find more relevant verification instruments for it, in situations of multiple place naming, than the aforesaid FCCI zoom. Instead, we reverse the perspective, recognising first the co-presence of multiple toponymic systems in African (and Israeli) cities and then looking for appropriate tools to study their interplay. The distinction between formal and informal naming systems remains in our view a much more fundamental aspect of symbolic power, throughout Africa, than the names in themselves. Street naming, the subject of this book, is therefore considered in its relation to the wider toponymic fabric, not as an isolated sphere. Insofar as naming systems are also systems of values and references, the dominance of one is a strong indicator of the social order being produced or, at least, promoted. It is, however, the social appropriation of toponyms which determines their actual uses and interpretations in specific contexts and thus the capillary flows of symbolic power being conveyed, resisted or deflected. In examining how street-naming politics articulate with the everyday experience of urban dwellers, we bring to the fore the relations that link together toponymic practices in the broad sense, including, of course, formal naming and signage but also counter-hegemonic naming practices and the mundane shifts from one system to another in daily life. This book values everyday practices as a key unit of analysis to grasp the real scope of street naming, just like that of all co-present, simultaneous naming systems. Rather than “seeing all naming as part of a grand, essentialist challenge” (Myers 2016, 57), we indeed regard everyday practices as co-producers of the experienced urban landscape – or, more precisely, as co-producers of plural experiences of a same cityscape.

Deprovincialising Africa’s toponymic studies

We hope to show that the great challenge of toponymic studies in Africa is to generate interpretations that communicate and converse with actual toponymic situations rather than with pre-established interpretive frameworks. By actual situations, we mean the necessity to take into account the tangible practices of those who shape, reshape and interpret the toponymic landscapes, their uses and non-uses of street names and other toponyms and what these signify to them. This implies rethinking research questions, developing problematics that are coherent with the processes observed and their contexts, theorising anew when necessary, unencumbered by dominant though inoperative paradigms and, in any case, making relevant methodological choices.

Such studies would make a small but significant contribution, at the level of place-name scholarship, to the much wider challenge of “deprovincialising

Africa". This ultimate challenge, mapping the entire field of knowledge production, circulation and consumption, has been highly debated and reformulated many times over the decades. One of its latest formulations is that of Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who defines the "deprovincialising of Africa" as a process aimed at repositioning Africa as "a legitimate historical unit of analysis and epistemic site from which to interpret the world, while at the same time globalizing knowledge from Africa" (2018, 4).

The corollary is to 'provincialise Europe', or 'the West', in the sense of pluralising the global history of political modernity.¹² A pervasive legacy of colonial expansion is "the continued privileging of Europe as the [centre and] 'maker' of universal history" (Bhambra 2007, 2). As a result, many thought patterns, analytical grids and theoretical models generating knowledge about Western situations are routinely imposed on the rest of the world with much less explanatory value. Confronting and interpreting historical difference for itself, rather than reducing it to nonconformity or uneasy conformity to Western models, is an issue common to the once-colonised world in general. This is a daunting task when the frames of non-Western histories are conventionally structured around the categories of colonial domination and national independence. As noted by Dipesh Chakrabarty, within these parameters and periodisation, "'Europe' remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyian' and so on" (2000, 27). Centred on a same basic segment – that is, a linear development from domination to sovereignty – these histories have led to other, equally relevant, stories being obscured, ignored or marginalised (Duara 1995; Ben Arrous 1999; Diouf 1999).

A similar observation can be made with regard to critical toponymy. The main parameters are provided here by the 'nationalism and wars' paradigm and by an exclusive focus on official names. African studies that stay within these parameters can only become a remote appendix to the main corpus of Western toponymic interpretations, missing out on the stories being marginalised. These stories are absent from the official namescape but are no less essential to understand the pervasiveness of power relations in the broader toponymic landscape. A re-examination of the universal relevance of these parameters and a pluralisation of perspectives taking into account the complex toponymic fabrics of African cities would, on the other hand, contribute to what we have called a qualitative mainstreaming of Africa in critical place-name studies.

Such mainstreaming, encompassing intertwined processes of provincialisation and de-provincialisation, would benefit critical toponymy scholarship as a whole, especially if it could lead to better consideration of place name reception and people's practices. The field has developed a rich and still growing body of literature on 'official' namescapes, providing fascinating accounts of how "political regimes of varying stripes have enlisted street naming as a strategy of asserting sovereign authority, ideological hegemony, and symbolic power" (Rose-Redwood et al. 2018, 2). But much less has

been done to explore the ‘other side’ of the toponymic landscapes – that which the urban dwellers experience. This ‘other side’ is where the names are received, interpreted and go into various degrees of use. It is thus where, not only in Africa, the actual influence of naming strategies is played out.

Adding to the little that exists on this matter,¹³ Israeli and Bordeaux examples in this book show several situations where meaning-making practices rewrite the official city-text quite differently from the political and ideological utterances it originally conveyed. Some practices physically transform the urban landscape – for example, alternative signposting or interventions on existing signage – and are visually documented. Others reshape it in a less visible but no less profound way by bringing out new, socially shared meanings that replace the initial connotations of official names over time. These slower processes, based in Bordeaux on forgetfulness or ignorance of initial connotations, invite consideration of people’s practices not only during (re)naming exercises or their aftermath, but over time, over periods sufficient to capture the transformations of the experienced streetscape. They also remind us that any collective memory is as much based on what we forget as on what we remember (Fabian 2003; Ricœur 2004; Crimson 2005; Bayart 2018a). Streetscapes are in this respect realms of amnesia as much as “realms of memory” (Milo 1997), and the initiative of oblivion is not the prerogative of governments.¹⁴

Our notion of toponymic cultures may be of less direct appeal to place-name studies beyond Africa than the exploration of place-name reception and everyday practices, which had long been earmarked as desirable research directions. We have mostly used it in this introductory chapter to highlight and problematise the social, political and spatial limits of street naming in African urban contexts. These limits stem largely from a number of characteristics of the African urban environment. In a very general way and with variations from one city to another, the latter include a morphogenesis marked by historically high levels of social (and formerly racial) inequalities between colonial and ‘native’ quarters, an uneven distribution of named streets networks in correspondence with socio-spatial divisions, a generally high prevalence of so-called informal settlements without official toponyms and the widespread use of orientation and naming systems other than street names in the circumstances of everyday life.

These characteristics and their varied contexts invite to question both the social significance of street naming for the urban residents and its political scope as a technology of power. As noted by Mike Crang (2000, 137), “Our studies of technologies of power have often led us to believe their own statements of efficacy”. The political efficacy of street naming is indeed not self-evident in the African contexts of this book, which could perhaps inspire further reassessments in other contexts. The toponymic pluralism of African cities also invites to reformulate another widely held view, that “streetscapes [are] contested arenas in which struggles over identity, memory and place shape the social production of urban space” (Rose-Redwood

et al. 2018, 2). This certainly verifies in all cities, to varying extents. Here, however, streetscapes remain relatively minor arenas in comparison to the broader toponymic fabric where the relations between all place-naming systems are played out and thus the relations between their underlying and heterogeneous systems of norms, values and references. The notion of toponymic cultures as changing ensembles of naming patterns and routinised practices provides a conceptual tool to address how these sets of relations dynamically interact and mutually transform one another.

In African contexts of highly diversified naming patterns, the notion allows to peel back the visible layers of meaning conveyed by street signage to observe the street nomenclature as a whole and how in each city it takes on specific significations related to heterogeneous registers of legitimacy. We think the notion is flexible enough to find uses in other contexts where toponymic pluralism may be less salient but where ethno-linguistic diversity is high. In fact, the term ‘toponymic cultures’ matters less (and we do not use it too heavily in subsequent chapters) than the approach of addressing the domination of a toponymic system, more or less hegemonic depending on the case, from its relationships with the former or still-existing naming systems that it tends to marginalise in specific contexts. The advantage of such an approach is to allow an interpretation not only of particular place names or place naming exercises but also of categories of place names, in our case street naming, and of the specific power relations that specific categories deploy within a city.

In this respect, it is not always necessary to examine street names with strong ideological connotations in order to detect variations of ‘toponymic flavour’ across time and space. The numbers, though they carry less meaning by themselves, also provide information about real power relations when viewed in relation to the wider political order. In the 1990s, Africa experienced a massive wave of street numbering as part of a World Bank economic-efficiency programme involving 52 cities from 13 countries (Farvacque-Vitkovic et al. 2005). Municipal authorities had the possibility of giving names if they wished. In the vast majority of cases, they opted for the numbers, justifying it as a way to avoid the controversies that could occur around proper names – and which would needlessly weaken their authority. Beyond claims to non-politicisation and ideological neutrality, the new numbered street networks actually testify to the then commitment of municipal authorities to a bureaucratic dream – the rejection in principle of the complexity of urban life, of different life experiences and of contradictory subjectivities in the name of governance efficacy. That was the World Bank’s ideology of the moment and it is now inscribed in African urban landscapes, as a ‘government thing’ that the residents of the cities concerned have not appropriated. The signification of this wave differs from that of the colonial politics of street numbering. By numbering the streets of certain native quarters while naming the streets of European neighbourhoods, the colonial powers shaped hierarchies that were racial, spatial, and symbolic at the same time.¹⁵ However, none of these two different African experiences – the

colonial and the neo-liberal – separated by decades had the same meaning as street numbering in Europe or North America (Vuolteenaho 2012; Rose-Redwood and Kadonaga 2016). In North America, for instance, street numbering constituted an integral part of the urban grid plan – the westwards movement’s model of settlement that went hand in hand with the protestant ethic and its moral and economic lifestyle (Sennett 1990).

The few numbered streets in Israel also carry meanings different from those previously mentioned. These streets may have been numbered in the contexts of unsettled land disputes or extra-legal settlements or urban quarters, as Chapter 5 shows; or where the disputes may have been settled, but city councils reserve their naming to a later date; or, in certain cases, as a reminiscence of an erstwhile colonial regime (especially the British Mandate). The numbered streets are earmarked for joining one day the ideological writing of the city-text and as such, even in their current state, they already contribute to the toponymic strategies of local (and central) authorities. These cases team up with other rare cases of ambiguous non-discrete names, such as ‘Unidentified Alley’ (Simta Plonit) and ‘Anonymous Street’ (Simta Almonit) in downtown Tel Aviv [Figure 1.5]. The latter two toponyms represent a highly constructed Zionist imagery from the times of the consolidation of the city in the early twentieth century: as a result of a fierce



Figure 1.5 Unidentified Alley (Simta Plonit) and Anonymous Alley (Simta Almonit) in Tel Aviv since 1922.

Source: Photos by Liora Bigon.

dispute (dated to 1922) between the entrepreneur and designer of these alleys and the then mayor about the appropriate commemorative names, the mayor's decision was to purposely impose these officially informalised names. Such an act still affirms the upper hand of the municipal authorities in the passionate public struggles for symbolic control of an ideologically biased urban landscape.

Against the background of Israel's contested space in terms of politics, religions and ethnicities, another example of toponymic informality concerns that of the Bedouin informal settlements in the Negev desert in the vicinity of the city of Be'er Sheva. As Bedouin claims for title to land in these settlements are not formally recognised by the state (Kedar 2016), infrastructure and other services are rarely provided, their names are not normally indicated on maps and there are no formal street names or house numbers. From the bottom up, as each settlement tends to comprise a few thousand residents related to the same ancestor, the settlements are named according to their respective dominant families (even in cases where some of them had another formal name in the Ottoman period, usually site-descriptive), and their quarters are named according to well-recognised families. As the few services such as water and electricity are improvised by community heads, there is also no apparent need for formal street naming or numbering.¹⁶ In this case, the state is the main actor in creating informality and its accompanying extra-toponymic narratives by exempting those who do not fit well with the official consensus of the Zionist meta-narrative [Figure 1.6].



Figure 1.6 An unnumbered family compound in an unnamed street of the unrecognised Bedouin village 'Al-Zarnuk' (means 'the water stream' in Arabic, an Ottoman-period toponym) in Be'er Sheva's metropolitan area. The village, however, is called 'Abu-Quider' by its residents after the name of the ancestor-founder.

Source: Photo by Liora Bigon.

Joining global conversations

Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch provided a strong case for going “beyond a purely analytical view of place naming in order to interpret and characterise the place naming process more generally and in relation to a wider social, political, and social order” (2016, 16). These two geographers theorised place naming as a *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense. By this term, often translated into ‘apparatus’ or ‘deployment’ in English, Foucault meant

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic proportions – in short the said as much as the unsaid. . . . The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.

(Foucault 1977, 194)

Foucault used this notion to investigate the most diverse “practices through which we are governed and through which we govern ourselves” (Dean 2010, 18). He applied it to the ways in which “we think about, reform and practise such things as caring, administrating, counselling, curing, punishing, educating and so on” (Dean 2010, 31). Applying it to the naming of places, Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch proposed an integrative framework for deciphering “the very complexity of the situated combinations of discourses, actors, institutions, material objects, etc., that shape naming processes” (2016, 15). Their framework distinguishes between several categories of actors, contexts and technologies of toponymic inscription forming various combinations and nexuses. The framework only addresses formal place-naming processes (and therefore eludes situations of toponymic pluralism where several dispositifs operate at the same time) but encapsulates the growing series of case studies available in the field of critical toponymy and makes them comparable. Having tested it on a series of empirical cases, the authors suggested that the main regularities observed be interpreted as shaping “regimes of place naming”, with regimes being understood, a la Foucault, as “relatively stable forms of organised and institutional practice” (Dean 2010, 31).

This is an interesting theoretical development, helping to reintroduce in the analysis situations of toponymic pluralism and multiple naming that the integrative framework itself tends to overlook. The difference between dispositif and regime is basically a matter of duration and social acceptance.¹⁷ As noted by Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch, a regime of “institutional practice” implies a “routinized and ritualized way” of doing things (2016, 5; citing Dean 2010, 31). It is at this level that the prism of toponymic cultures may contribute to their theoretical endeavour. Their framework explains who names, why and how, at given points of time. Our approach offers a complementary, longer-term perspective on how dispositifs of street

naming are routinised, reproduced and adapted or transformed along with the broader toponymic cultures that incorporate them.

We must here mention a unique project in terms of time span, theoretical, thematic and geographic scope – a monumental collection published by UNESCO under the direction of the French sociologist Christian Topalov (2002a). The second volume of the collection, entitled *Les divisions de la ville* (2002a), examines how names and terminologies, by objectifying social and spatial diversity, have shaped cities through the ages. It consists of 12 case studies, exploring the creation of lexical corpora in specific contexts – with an emphasis on southern cities¹⁸ – and a careful comparative analysis. The tripartite thematic organisation of the collection, from the Anciens Régimes to ‘Current Modernisations’ (in the plural) through ‘the Shock of Western Expansion’, is outstanding in giving precedence to historical factors. The idea is that one cannot fully grasp the inter-relationships between language, territory and society without substantial historical depth. As Topalov posits, “Beneath the apparent simplicity of the spatial divisions of modern administrations, one can perceive the traces of ancient institutions, the placement of the past within the present, the spatial claims of groups” (2002b, 1).

The subdivision of cities into smaller, physically homogeneous and juxtaposed units such as boroughs, districts or wards (with varied competencies according to national policies and local traditions) has become virtually universal and seems self-evident nowadays. The differentiations of urban space and the words that express and institute them are, however, “neither as stable nor as shared as one might think” (Topalov 2002c, 375). Their comparative history reveals an extraordinary diversity of patterns of differentiation, corresponding to the entanglement of heterogeneous forms of power that combined locally. Beyond the ever-specific combinations, ancient urban divisions had a common denominator: the concomitant powers of distinct authorities (e.g. a magistrate, a prelate, a lord or his vassals, merchant or craft guilds and others) meant distinct spatial nomenclatures, diverse logics of place naming and, consequently, distinct and simultaneous toponymic systems. From London to Tokyo and from Bombay to Kairouan, all the cities studied by Topalov’s research group experienced such entanglements of spatial divisions and accompanying toponymic pluralism. The latter is therefore not an African ‘anomaly’ that could justify it being sidelined from current efforts to theorise place naming. Its persistence in Africa’s cities rather calls to pay more attention to how “global socio-historical processes articulate with the everyday lives of urban dwellers” in African cities – which are not “ontologically different from other cities of the world” (Fourchard 2011, 223).

Les divisions de la ville places the global simplification of urban terminologies and toponymies within a larger historical current – the territorialisation of administrative bodies. This current, beginning in Europe in the High Middle Ages and extending at different rates to all regions of the

world, is itself integral to the rise and spread of the modern territorial state. Although the concept of precisely delineated territories is old, the removal by states of any competing authority on their soil implies nested levels of administration, covering the territory in a comprehensive manner, with no gaps or overlaps, and a unified terminology for each level. The replacement of fragmented, heterogeneous and superimposed jurisdictions by new city divisions, conceived as demarcated and contiguous areas, has given streets and street names an administrative and political significance that they did not have before. The identification of the divisions of the city is now done by the streets that delimit them (Topalov 2002c, 440).

France was one of the first countries to have established a public monopoly over street naming. Without being generalisable as to its changing character and details, this monopoly is indicative of the close link between the ideological uses of street naming and the history of European modernity. Technically, the monopoly commenced around the year 1600 (Milo 1997, 1891). The tool existed but the royal power was reluctant to use it. With the exception of a few streets honouring high officials of the kingdom, it abstained from disrupting the medieval practice that names reflect the identity of places and emerge from private-cum-popular initiatives. Most French cities still bear some traces of these medieval customs, as in Bordeaux with the Rue des Argentiers (means ‘silversmiths’), the Rue des Trois-Conils (old French for ‘three hares’), or the Rue des Alaudettes (‘larks’ in the old Gascon language or ‘alouettes’ in modern French) [Figure 1.7]. The break with the ancient forms of street naming occurred only with the Revolution of 1789, which triggered an unprecedented overhaul of urban toponymic landscapes. As Milo points out, “Never had there been such an acute awareness of the ideological and above all the pedagogical role of street names” (1997, 1897).

Assigning a pedagogical role to streetscapes had been a major innovation and an essential hallmark of the Enlightenment, with a sustained impact on street-naming policies well beyond France. At the most immediate level, streets have been renamed to propagate the particular ideals or ideologies of a particular period in the history of a particular country. At a deeper level, the pedagogy in question teaches a new, linear and progress-oriented conception of history, as the Enlightenment thinkers throughout Europe made it emerge. The irruption of a progressive vision of history in street-naming practices (and no longer just the occasional commemoration of events or figures from the past) perfectly illustrates Prasenjit Duara’s argument: “The last two centuries have established History as we know it – a linear, progressive history – not only as the dominant mode of experiencing time, but as the dominant mode of being. . . . That is to say, time overcomes space” (1995, 17). Site-related characteristics gave way to narratives. Nowadays, it would of course be illusory to look for a unifying line of history-writing in streetscapes bearing the cumulative and intermingled traces of different eras, each having inscribed in the city-text its own authorised version of history.

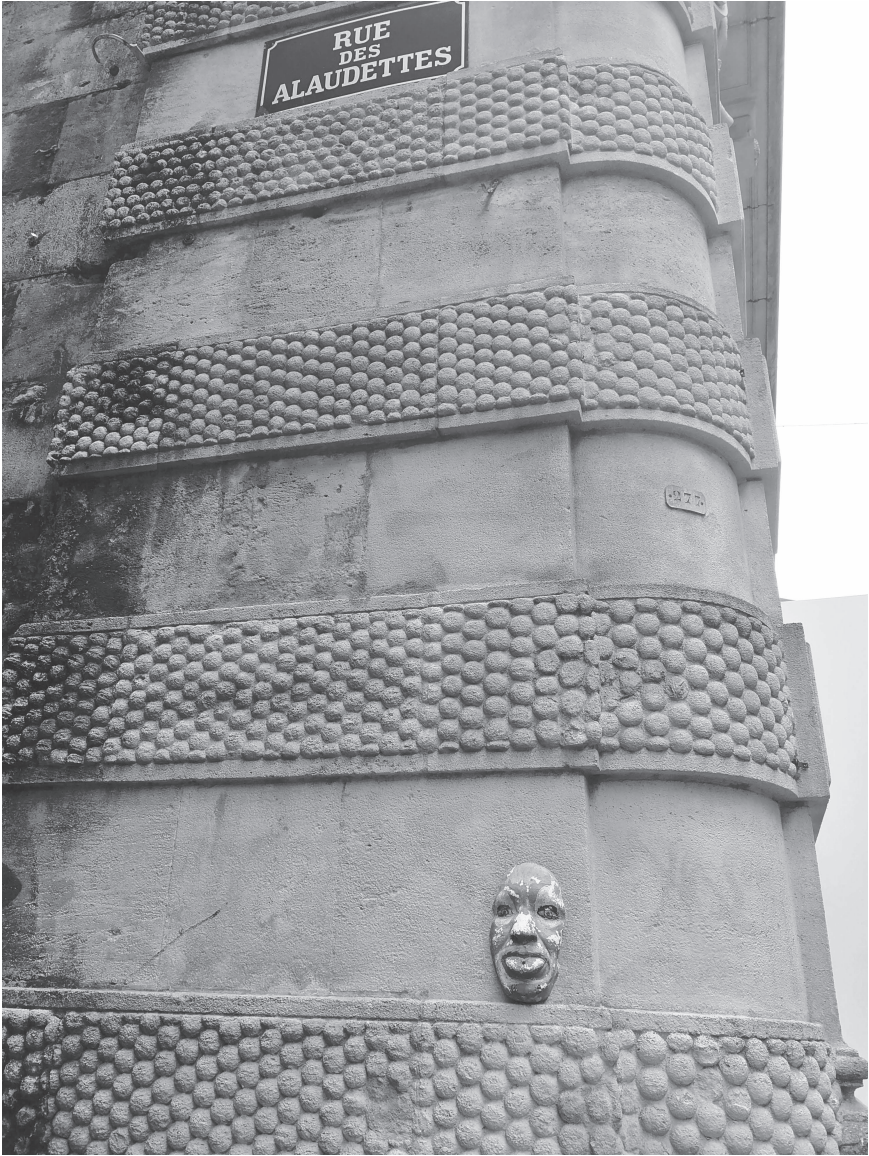


Figure 1.7 Rue des Alaudettes in Bordeaux since 1334, at the heart of the town centre pedestrian precinct.

Source: Photo by Michel Ben Arrous.

City-texts, being “largely devoid of a narrative structure” (Rose-Redwood 2018, 8), are more like “palimpsests” constantly rewritten and reinterpreted (Duncan and Duncan 2010, 228). The introduction and institutionalisation of street nomenclatures in African cities, however, have occurred under *tabula rasa* conditions, making it possible to observe the writing of a linear history from scratch – or at least what seemed scratch to colonial eyes.

The ‘civilising mission’ that colonising nations attribute to themselves differs significantly from the revolutionary ideals of 1789, but early colonial streetscapes have shown the same primacy of time over space and the same linear vision of history – a vision “in which the Other in geographical space will, *in time*, come to look like earlier versions of us” (Duara 1995, 17). The relationships that have developed between colonial politics of street naming and the toponymies, now informal, of the colonised have involved sets of relations with time and space that are not only foreign to each other but mutually irreducible. Arguably, the tension thus introduced in local toponymic cultures has remained unresolved, hindering their full integration of street naming and rather contributing to the relative neutralisation of the latter by everyday practices.

The notion of *tabula rasa* is as valid for the ancient cities of Africa, whose streets or alleys had no official names, as for the cities created in the colonial era. As far as one traces back Africa’s urban past – from the royal cities of ancient Ethiopia to the stone-walled towns of southern Africa and the networks of merchant cities of the Swahili Coast or West Africa – one finds neighbourhood names that are sufficiently stable to be recorded by local chronicles, oral traditions and travellers’ reports (Mauny 1961; Anderson and Rathbone 2000; Igué 2008). Yet we do not find street names as such. The same sources provide information on streets’ layout or appearance, but when one of them is mentioned in particular, it is in a purely descriptive form – ‘the street where . . . is’, ‘the street which leads to. . .’ – rather than a toponym (this form of designation is still present today). The colonial authorities, therefore, had no street name to erase nor, a fortiori, street sign to replace.

The toponymic forms of memory, so to speak, have remained oral and, in cities, have been centred on neighbourhoods. Beyond the extreme diversity of urban forms in Africa, the most recurrent motif is the juxtaposition of quarters “corresponding to a social status, a socio-economic role, a lineage, sometimes a specific language or a religion” (Boutillier 1969, 5). Each city is in this respect “several cities in one” (Topalov 2002c, 395), with variations of spatial and social organisation between quarters. Their names reflect collective stories and specific links connecting particular groups to the city. The names also reflect a demographic history, if only by the language used to name quarters attributed to, or created by, newcomers (Malam 2013). Ironically, while inscribing their own history in the streetscape, colonial authorities largely conformed to this ancient model of juxtaposition. The streets they named were not used to identify the boundaries between juridically

equal districts as had become the custom in Europe. Their uneven distribution was in itself a powerful vector of spatial (and racial) differentiation and hierarchy between colonial quarters, where all streets had names, and native quarters where these were rare. Colonial quarters were in this respect organised along the peculiar rules of a particular group, which was anything but unusual in Africa's urban history. The colonial city centre was one of the "several cities in one". Its streetscape constituted a neighbourhood-related characteristic, 'materialising' a particular story that certainly altered but did not erase the other particular stories inscribed in the oral toponymies of other neighbourhoods. Still today, in cities of colonial establishment as in old cities, studies show that the neighbourhood, much more than the street or the whole city, remains the "main urban frame of identity reference" (Wade 2009, 331; see also Meillassoux 1968; Leimdorfer 2002).

The detour we have just made with the processes of differentiation of city space shows that it is quite possible – and actually desirable – to look at street naming in a historical perspective without the usual binary oppositions that lead to impoverished understandings (postcolonial vs. colonial streetscapes, African vs. Western names and the like). True, the history of street naming in Africa's cities begins with the introduction of colonial nomenclatures. It is also clear that post-independence renaming has marked an inflection in *that* history. But the story of street-naming *significance* for past and present city dwellers starts well before the first colonial street sign is affixed. By broadening the perspective to the pre-existing plurality of toponymic systems – whether these have already been present on a city's site or were introduced at later stages by newcomers to the city – one can better understand that street names are far from constituting the epitome of Africa's urban landscapes. The persistence of this plurality and the everyday practices that constantly update it by giving it ever-changing meanings in the context of city divisions can thus testify to the imbrication, rather than succession, of different historical memories in the wider toponymic fabric of cities.

Book outline

The following chapters are bound by thematic unity. All explore the relationships that develop between street-naming politics, street-name reception and the practices of spatial users in specific contexts. This is a wide area of research, so far neglected, and we saw no reason for limiting ourselves to a single methodological approach. The book is, therefore, marked by some overall methodological eclecticism. It combines the visual aspect of the objects observed – that is, street signage per se – and the contextual meanings they carry, both in different historical situations and in current everyday life. Our toponymic investigations are made through analytical categories and particular examples, between empiricism and reflexivity, diachronic and synchronic approaches and histories of change and continuity across various time spans and geographical scales. In keeping a wider

theoretical and cross-sectional dimension together with a site-specific and intimate knowledge of places, the book is, therefore, multidimensional and multi-sopic. Each chapter, however, has an appropriate methodological framework, consistent with our overall reflection and context-relevant.

Chapter 2 expands on a photography exhibition that we curated in 2018 in Israel, which assembled a rich collection of street signs from a variety of cities in Africa and Israel, with thematic and analytical threads that were passed throughout the images. Dialectic processes of spatial production are exposed throughout this chapter, considering toponymic policies and practices at past and present, semiotics of cultures, emotive values, political traditions and mundane conceptions of space users. The exhibition enabled us to provide a synoptic view of the up-to-date toponymic landscapes and urban imageries, yielding an understanding of official and informal rationales of toponymic inscriptions. This understanding operates on both the macro-theoretical level through introducing several enframing thematic panels and on the micro-level through the visual documentation of particular localities. This chapter points to the many possible ways of thinking about and analysing the namescapes in the selected cities, striving to highlight the divergence in focus, scales, inherent ideological or technocratic limitations, creativity and contextual interplays. It throws some light on place naming processes in the long term and on the many intended and unintended reactions to the names, as appear on, around and through the signage or through alternative signage. The outstanding richness of the visual-material evidence that is incorporated in this chapter highlights the profound and powerful connections between structured politics, current mundane practices, historical traditions and cultures.

In Chapter 3, two toponyms that are intimately related to the history of Central Africa and the Republic of the Congo are brought together: Brazzaville Street in Holon, Israel, and Quai de Brazza in Bordeaux, France. Against the backdrop of historical and contemporary developments at different points of time, geographies and political contexts, the juxtaposition between both Brazza-related names proves useful in advancing a critical yet nuanced viewpoint on spatial production. The methodological issue of spatial intertwining contributes to the de-Eurocentrisation of toponymic studies by the preoccupation with geographies beyond the West and to creating original and novel interpretations. We embrace in this chapter the approach of 'entangled histories' (*histoires croisées*) through an examination of the variety of interactions between varied geographical and socio-political contexts, histories and time spans in terms of nomenclature. This approach, as we shall see, promotes a flexible analysis rather than a strict comparison and is more processual and relational. It enables to crisscross, sometimes quite unexpectedly, between cases that would otherwise not be brought together and thereby to advance new and inspiring ways of understanding the cases separately and together. In our context, the crisscross and its analysis also revealed a variety of popular mundane interpretations and conversations

with the toponyms on each side of the sea – years after the initial inaugurations of the names and well beyond the initial intentions of the naming agencies. This chapter is also enriched by a Brazza-related toponymic insight from West Africa, adding to the multilateral dimension.

Chapter 4 works vertically by exposing the toponymic archaeology of a single site, expanding on the idea of a ‘tapestry’ whose layers do not erase each other but rather accumulate side by side along the years. The analysis is focused on the selected site of Dakar, a model space of a colonial regional capital and then the capital city of independent Senegal, which is increasingly subjected to an array of competing autochthonous influences. This chapter shows continuity, change and the multiplicity of cultural, political and everyday practices of place naming. While diving into this multilayered situation and trying to decode it layer by layer, the chapter occasionally shifts back and forth between vernacular toponymies predating the colonial establishment of Dakar and the colonial and postcolonial city. It, therefore, exemplifies a rather loose periodisation, testifying to disseminated and diffused processes and nomenclature practices in the long term. As a result, the toponymic legacies in question, whether colonial or vernacular, coexist in a discursive, hybrid and continuous manner and indeed somewhat *laissez-faire*. Beyond aspects of accumulated memory and conversations between formality and informality, perceiving the city-text as a ‘tapestry’, or toponymic archaeology, involves studying the physical dimensions of the namescape. The materiality of signage is a cross-cutting topic that passes through each of the chapters of this book. It serves as an indicator, *inter alia*, of the reception of the names as it can carry overt, hidden, alternative and other messages through a variety of visual and semiotic means.

The vertical, multilayered approach to urban toponymy of the previous chapter is also mirrored in Chapter 5, which is geographically and thematically complementary by focusing on an Israeli city. This chapter reveals the varied unofficial and semi-official street addressing system in an extra-formal neighbourhood, Givat Amal, Tel Aviv – a world city with an otherwise descriptive, efficient and highly symbolic street naming system. It expands on the historical, geographic, political and social conditions which have contributed to the creation of Givat Amal’s extra-formality, including the variety of agencies and interests that have been involved in this process over the last 70 years. Against this backdrop, the neighbourhood’s multiplicity of changing and alternate names is analysed, with attention on the emotive value behind naming processes and unofficial and semi-official signage. Aspects such as place attachment, and the symbolic, performative, and activist ambiance regarding the signage are also discussed. Givat Amal’s toponymic situation is antithetic in many respects to the ‘perfect’ rationale of the naming system of the city’s officially recognised streets, as a result of the land-rights question and current privatisation. The chapter is enriched with visual evidence, primary and secondary sources and fieldwork.

The book concludes with a short Chapter 6 that highlights and summarises our main findings, ambiguities and problematics, inviting further research.

Notes

- 1 Onomastics is the study of the origin and forms of names of persons and places. A distinction is conventionally made between place-name studies from before the 1990s, which fell mainly within onomastics and favoured etymological and typological approaches, and the critical toponymy studies that have developed since, which focus on the political dimension of place names and the power relations that they inscribe in space. However, the emphasis on the politics of place naming is not an absolute difference, as shown by Raper (1984) or, more recently, by critical toponymic researches mobilising the contribution of onomastics specialists (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009, 227–251, 253–266). The typological approaches have not disappeared either and remain present in studies on colonial or postcolonial contexts, even in simplified forms (e.g. European or African names, endogenous or exogenous). A clearer qualitative difference lies in the multidisciplinary dimension of critical toponymy (mainly involving geographers, historians, linguists and political scientists) and broad theoretical engagement. We retain the conventional distinction between two ‘ages’ of place-name studies while still noting that some important studies such as Topalov’s seminal work on the ‘words of the city’ (2002a) do not fall under any of them.
- 2 We borrow the notion of halo from Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* (1957, 218) interpreted mundane elements of mass culture, or “myths”, as full of situated meanings: “Around any final meaning, there always remains a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost constantly be *interpreted*” (emphasis in the original, our translation). Lisa Radding and John Western note that it is when toponyms become “opaque” (i.e. when people fail to remember the specific connotations that those giving place-names originally sought to emphasise) that they become “more closely tied to the cultures that use them because it is culture that in turn gives a name meaning” (2010, 410). This remarkably applies to many of the postcolonial situations we examine, where colonial street names persist but the initial connotations for which each was specifically chosen were lost over time and new meanings emerge from the fabric of societal connections. In this respect, the “almost constant” reinterpretation of century-old toponyms is no less productive of innovative meanings than the much more studied processes of renaming and creation of neo-toponyms or new names.
- 3 The politics of place naming in post-apartheid South Africa is unique in many respects. Toponymic change has been initiated at all scales: street, suburb, city, municipality, village, district, province, national features and monuments. Names are allowed in the 11 languages recognised by the constitution. Various processes coexist, not only of renaming but also of naming the new entities established as part of a broad and contested territorial reform (Giraut and Maharaj 2002; Mavungu 2016). These processes, which have been ongoing for a quarter of a century, include a wide range of citizen consultations – in accordance with the constitution which obliges the authorities to involve citizens in matters that concern their lives. Participation rates in these consultations are often quite low, with people feeling that “they have far more important issues

to contend with e.g. basic survival, and may lack time, knowledge and skills for effective participation” (Musitha 2016, 65). Low turnout has proven an effective means, particularly for the white and other minorities, for opposing renaming decisions and launching legal challenges against them. While place naming debates do not always take place in the planned forums, they are intense in the political arena, the media and the social media. Part of the difference with the renaming exercises of most other African countries can be explained by the fact that these were held in the 1960s and 1970s, or in the 1980s for Zimbabwe, at a time when single-party states were the political norm and opposed the expression of free speech. In this regard, the ‘hot’ Israeli climate is characterised by the uninterrupted generation of fierce toponymic debates since at least the 1920s, in the pre-state period. We borrow the notion of ‘hot’ climate from Jones and Merriam’s discussion (2009) of Billig’s *Banal Nationalism* (1995).

- 4 “The actual order of things is precisely what ‘popular’ tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon”, wrote de Certeau (1984, 26). For him, “tactics” and “practices” were synonymous for the most part. He was using both terms interchangeably, opposing their unpredictable and unruly character to the “strategies” seeking to dominate and control all behaviours within a “technocratically constructed, written, and functionalized space”, especially the urban space (1984, xviii). Strategies and tactics are in this sense the respective fields of action of the rulers and the governed. This theoretical opposition could be applied to colonial situations, where the authoritarian act of naming sought to “transform polymorphous and uncontrollable ‘space’ into a finite system of neatly isolatable, stabilized and interconnected ‘places’” (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009, 10). But it loses much of its relevance when applied to street naming in present African cities, which are very far from being “jungles of functionalist rationality” (de Certeau 1984, 34). Municipal authorities have rarely shown much willingness to implement functional street-addressing systems, even when foreign development agencies have argued that property identification would be in their interest in terms of tax collection and urban management. The term ‘practices’ makes it possible to account for these deviations as well, compared to what would be a technocratic rationality. We choose to use it here for both the everyday practices of the urban residents and the street-naming practices of local governments.
- 5 Bourdieu’s conception of “the dominant class” goes beyond classical views of class structure. It embraces what is commonly called “the elites”, in the broad sense (Keller 1991; Diop 2012), which is of interest to reinterpret the symbolic power dimension of street naming, in contemporary Africa, from the standpoint of social positions. Bourdieu’s reframing of the class question (Wacquant 2013) is premised on the idea that domination relations are not solely shaped by the property and/or control of the means of production, as in classical Marxian analyses. They are also created and reproduced through forms of capital other than economic capital, notably cultural capital (e.g. knowledge, education, style of speech) and symbolic capital (e.g. prestige, honour, recognition), which may be accumulated and transferred from one arena to another. In this perspective, the ‘distinction’ of street naming from other informal place-naming practices appears as a cultural resource contributing to the reproduction of elite domination. Elite-led naming processes, rather than the particular names selected, are vehicles of this reproduction.
- 6 Toponymic informality is one of the mechanisms of reproduction of informality tout court, excluding the residents of entire city areas from the exercise of rights and access to basic services. On the “fetish about formality” in urban

- planning and governance and its contribution to generate ever more informality, see Rakodi (1993) and Kamete and Lindell (2010).
- 7 Personal observations, 6–7 September 2018. As its name no longer indicates, ‘Petit Marché’ (French for ‘small marketplace’) was the main fruit and vegetable market in Niamey until the fire that devastated it in 2012. It is now a vacant land, but the toponym is still widely used.
 - 8 All of the city’s streets have since been numbered as part of a World Bank programme, though the numbering system has failed to enter popular use.
 - 9 *Decolonising the Mind* is an influential collection of essays by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1987) arguing for African writers’ expression in their native languages rather than European languages. Ngũgĩ’s early novels and plays were in English; he has since been writing his fiction works in the Gikuyu language (while still using English for non-fiction). The book has become a classic of post-colonial studies.
 - 10 Dedan Kimathi was executed by hanging in 1957. By then, the Mau Mau Uprising had been largely defeated. The colonial government lifted the state of emergency in 1959, years before independence, which raises the question of how a militarily vanquished movement was able to force the British out. Historical studies suggest that the colonial authorities had in great part been defeated by their own propaganda: the Mau Mau, whom they had demonised as “irrational murderers”, had become haunting figures, “a Mau Mau of the mind”, resulting in the constant and terrifying fear of seeing them reappear (Lonsdale 1990; Nissimi 2006). In 1960, the colonial government agreed to open negotiations with representatives of the independence movement, provided that Jomo Kenyatta was excluded. He too had been portrayed as a violent extremist, notwithstanding his continuous insistence on achieving independence through peaceful means. Kenyatta had denounced the Mau Mau fighters in public tours as early as 1952 – i.e. at the beginning of the insurgency – but still was, in its aftermath, the man that the British wanted to exclude from power. His renewed attacks on the Mau Mau were a decisive factor allowing him to be ultimately heard, as never before, by British ears. In contrast to the “Mau Mau of the mind” that seemed so threatening, he now appeared as a wise and moderate leader, who reassured white settlers and promised reconciliation with the outgoing colonial power. The complete reversal of his image in British opinion ultimately secured his late participation at the negotiating table and in the political compromise leading to independence (Maloba 2018).
 - 11 The records of Nairobi’s Town Planning Committee show that “colonial street names” were still the majority in 1973, “at 252 names, followed by African street names at 166 and Indian names at 164”. After 1974, “only ten colonial street names and one Indian street name were to be retained, whereas 582 streets would now have African names” (as compiled by Wanjiru 2018, 69–70). Note the erasure of Indian memory. According to the last pre-independence census, those classified as “Indians” accounted in 1962 for one-third of the city’s population. Most of them left in the late 1960s under conditions recalled by Aiyar (2015). Their strong demographic presence dated back to the early colonial establishment of Nairobi as a railway depot for the Uganda Railway, then under construction. Nearly all the workforce involved in building the line was sourced from British India. Like most cities of colonial creation, Nairobi was built on land claimed by some of the weakest groups of the colonised population and developed from inland migrations. It should be noted that the continual sprawl of the urban area, depriving surrounding populations of ever more land, was one of the many land issues that led to the Mau Mau Uprising. Ironically, both the Mau Mau, who could best claim to be “autochthonous ‘sons of the soil’”

(Lonsdale 2008, 305) and fought for it, and the Indians, who were Nairobi's original working class, have disappeared from the street nomenclature.

- 12 The 'Europe' and 'West' in question are meta-geographical and metaphorical constructs, more than geographical places. The two toponyms are used by convenience as language shortcuts referring to the dominant temporal schema of modernity, with Europe meaning the (idealised) 'bedrock' of most of the political, social and cultural forms, codes and norms currently embodied in a (simplified) Western 'order' of the world. Regardless of the much greater complexity and disputed character of real historical processes, of the changing perceptions and self-perceptions of Europe and the West over time, of their fluid shapes, multi-centric growth and heterogeneity, the two *clichéé* toponyms have become central figures of global political imagination. This is an interesting case of place-name appropriation, where the names themselves, rather than the places to which they refer, provide the mental structures "through which people order their knowledge of the world" (Lewis and Wigen 1997, ix).
- 13 Balanced approaches to place naming, place-name reception and toponymic practices are rare. To the works already cited (Myers 1996; Kearns and Berg 2002; Ben Said 2010; Shoval 2013; Light and Young 2014; Crețan and Matthews 2016; Wanjiru 2018) can be added Yeoh (1992); González Faraco and Murphy (1997); Rose-Redwood (2008); Adebani (2012); Boumedini and Hadria (2012) and Brocket (2019). We are probably forgetting a few, but in any case, the list is short.
- 14 In late nineteenth-century France, Ernest Renan stated that forgetfulness and even "historical mistake" were critical factors for nation-building and that historical science could go against that aim (1982, 41). However, a consensus around amnesia cannot be decreed, as evidenced by the late rehabilitation of Mau Mau memory in the urban landscape of Nairobi. It, therefore, matters to confront the 'memory holes' of the official streetscape with other archives of collective memory (Bayart 2018b) – among which, in the case of African cities at least, are informal toponymies.
- 15 We return to street numbering in Chapters 2 and 4.
- 16 Moreover, in the identity cards of the residents, Israeli citizens since 1955, there is no indication of any address but their assigned extended 'tribe' instead. Information gained from our visit in situ (Al-Zarnuk unrecognised settlement), September 2019.
- 17 Or, more precisely, the realisation of the "conditions of acceptability" (Dean 2010, 3) that make regimes of practices accepted over a certain period of time.
- 18 The case studies in Topalov's are distributed as follows: two for West Africa (Oussouye, Abidjan), two for North Africa (Kairouan, Fes), three for Asia (Bombay, Shanghai, Tokyo), two for Latin America (Mexico City, São Paulo) and three for Europe (London, Livorno and a cross-sectional study of some other Italian cities).