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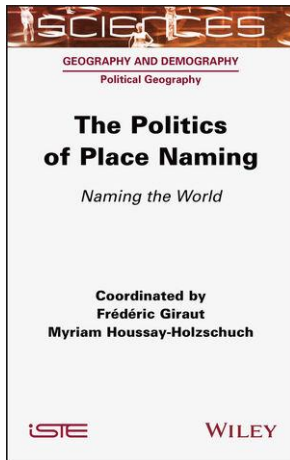
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The editors, both of them geographers, Frédéric Giraut holder of the “Naming the World” UNESCO chair in inclusive toponymy at the University of Geneva [Genève], Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch, professor at the Grenoble Alpes University, position the book with its 12 chapters as a work in political or critical toponymy (not *toponomastics*¹), also of “alternative toponymy” in the sense of focusing on the empowerment of groups not sufficiently represented in the namescape (“*toponomascope*”) and pleading for a just representation, or also of the “study of place naming”. Critical or political toponomastics (in the book: *toponymy*), alternative toponymy or the study of place naming is regarded as “an autonomous field, distinct and complementary to that of classical toponymy, which is a branch of

onomastics or the study of proper names in linguistics” (p. 3). This book is to outline its contours, issues, contributions and perspectives. “The study of place naming and its issues is also different from toponymy as an indicator of human occupation and environmental changes, allowing for an archeology of settlement and/or environment dynamics” (p. 3).

The series of thematic chapters is opened by Derek H. Alderman (University of Tennessee, USA), one of the ‘founding fathers’ of critical toponomastics, on commemorative urban names. He highlights as characteristics of commemorative naming that every new regime wishes to have its imprint on the namescape, that commemorative place names are part of people’s daily life (in contrast, e.g., to museums) and teaching them identity and history, “[...] but [that] their affective power is often non-spectacular or banal. This banality allows the memorialized name to appear ideologically innocent when in fact it is politically situated” (p. 34). He also emphasizes the importance of location with commemorative naming and that renaming can be a surrogate for more practical reconciliation and compensation actions. He pleads for the active participation of scholars in questioning the commemorative namescape.

¹ The reviewer prefers the term *toponomastics* to *toponymy*, when the study of toponymy is addressed, just to exhaust the capacities of language in discerning different concepts. When the term *toponymy* in general and in this book stands (also) for a set of place names, it is as a matter of clarity better to address the study of toponymy differently, also in analogy to *onymy* and *onomastics*. Thus, this review deviates in this respect from the book texts.

Sébastien Boillat (University of Berne [Bern], Bern University of Applied Sciences, and University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland) then focusses on toponyms as indicators of human-environment relations. He pleads for a “political ecology of toponymy that deals with the relations between the processes of naming, onomastics and the use of place names” (p. 49). He observes (like some other authors of the book) a cleavage between critical toponomastics and “classical onomastics focused on linguistics” and questions the capacity of place names to reflect settlement history and former land use quoting [Zadora-Rio \(2001\)](#). But a shift of scale from “classical toponymy” to microtoponymy makes it in the author’s opinion possible to regard place names as indicators of former and current land use. For the reviewer the question arises: Why should microtoponymy not be a part of “classical toponymy”?

In his chapter “Naming the Conquered Territories: Colonies and Empires – Beneath and Beyond the Exonym/Endonym Opposition” Frédéric Giraut discusses imperial toponymic colonization practices, cases from naming a so far unpopulated “virgin” territory up to exerting the power of a colonial empire. Which names are imposed? Very frequently names of the motherland and biblical names. He highlights the practices of the Roman and the Ottoman Empires and concedes the Roman Empire an in general integrative, but regionally different attitude and having been very active in developing regions. He regards the Ottoman Empire in contrast as “a more extensive enterprise”, a “delegating empire” with its millet system freezing community affiliations while recognizing them resulting in toponymic influence very much differing by region (p. 79). He concludes by identifying four models for colonial naming policy: discovery of tropical (unpopulated) islands, European creation of the New World, Roman Empire, Ottoman Empire, resulting in two principal naming modes: (1) naming “discoveries”, marking conquests; (2) renaming the colonized and their territories, usually occurring in combination. He concedes that a part of the toponymic colonial corpus comes from the “indigenous” corpus and observes hybrid naming of the same place ranging from purely indigenous names via names “borrowed” from indigenous languages up to purely colonial names regarding this as questioning the strict endonym/exonym divide.

This may be justified when one refers to the [UNGEKN](#) as well as [ICOS](#) definitions of endonym and exonym, which are indeed related to language as the differentiating criterion between endonym and exonym (although he quotes the outdated [UNGEKN](#)² definitions of 2002 and not the amended of 2007, see [UNGEKN 2023](#), [ICOS 2023](#)), but not if one refers to the definitions resulting from intensive discussions in the [UNGEKN Working Group on Exonyms](#) and promoted by the author of this review in several publications (see [Jordan 2015, 2021, 2022](#)) regarding neither language nor officiality as criteria for the

² United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

endonym/exonym divide, but just the spatial relation between name-using community and the denoted feature as well as use and acceptance by the local community. So, an endonym can be any name that is used and found acceptable by the local community for internal (not with imposed authorities) communication. It symbolizes possession or responsibility and supports the attachment of the community to the place. In contrast, an exonym is a name (even in the same local language or with official status) not used in the above-mentioned sense by locals, but just by outsiders and differing from the endonym in writing. Vice versa, a colonial name, at first very likely only the official name imposed by colonial authorities and not used by the local community in internal communication and thus an exonym, may assume endonym quality, when locals start using it in internal communication. Any deviation in writing from the endonym, even the slightest, e.g., by an accent, even more so by script conversion or translation, generates an exonym, because it would not anymore be recognized by locals as ‘their’ name.

If the endonym/exonym divide is defined in this way, it draws a clear line between names used by insiders and outsiders under all circumstances and is also fully compatible with the situations of hybrid naming mentioned by Frédéric Giraut. It is a useful analytical device and could be recognized as a core topic of political or critical toponomastics, since it symbolizes the divide between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ and coincides with human territoriality – very political-geographical perspectives. Also the fact that in sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) – a not merely scientific, but also very political authority – exonyms arouse always the most heated discussions, may be taken as a proof for their political sensitivity.

If several communities co-inhabit a place, they may all have their own names for the place resulting in a place with several names. Of course, for each of them only one name is ‘theirs’, i.e., their endonym, perhaps two – a vernacular and an official version. But regarding the communities’ relation to the place, all these names are endonyms, because all these communities inhabit this place. By the example of the name for the Earth in all existing languages: related to the feature denoted they are alle endonyms, because we are all earthlings, but for the French-speaking community only *Le Monde* is ‘their’ name.

The late Reuben Rose-Redwood, University of Victoria, Canada, again a ‘founding father’ of critical toponomastics, together with Anton Tantner, University of Vienna [Wien], Austria, and Sun-Bae Kim, Chungju Girls’ High School, Republic of Korea, present an interesting genealogy of house-numbering systems, which are not only connected with the history of postal communication, but with the development of the state in the modern sense and with its attempt of exerting control over its citizens. It is thus very indicative of political regimes and contributes to a political geography of the world, although it is only indirectly connected with place names and place naming.

Jani Vuolteenaho, University of Helsinki/Helsingfors, Suomi/Finland, another pioneer of critical toponomastics, focuses on commercially motivated uses of thematic place naming (like *Legoland*, *Nike Town*, *BMW World*) and the selling of spatial naming rights (like *Allianz Stadium*, *United Airlines Field*). He illustrates this by examples from North America, Europe, and Asia. Prestigious English, Latin, French and Italian company names are applied concealing local culture and westernizing the place. The chapter shows how difficult it is to draw a line between the right of naming one's own place (as it is granted by the legislation of most countries) and the offensive use of commercial names for – by their function – public buildings like shopping centers or airports, when they have a private commercial owner.

At least as critical are situations, when for public space like streets or squares in new urban developments, but also for public buildings like sports venues the public owner has sold the naming right to a commercial enterprise resulting in a “‘quasi-privatization’ of publicly owned and communally used spaces” (p. 121).

Since commercial naming in general and selling naming rights in particular are rather short-lived, they mean frequent re-naming and in consequence problems for orientation. The author notes that this and the fact that commercial naming disregards at least with older features names as cultural heritage leads occasionally to local protests, but that they are not too many, since application of fancy and international commercial names seems rather to be estimated as an act of modernization and of ‘opening up a place to the big wide world’. The relatively fiercest protests come, the author adds, from soccer fan clubs when the traditional names of their stadiums are replaced. The author notices also a significant center-periphery gradient related to the frequency of commercial (re-)naming and prices paid for it.

Christophe Gauchon, University of Savoie-Mont-Blanc, Chambéry, France, contributes a chapter on the toponymy of tourism and leisure. Tourism is certainly a major agent of toponymic commercialization. With a focus on France, the author discusses new names of tourist places that can either be borrowed from pre-existing local place names and transferred to the tourist place, created ex nihilo based on signifiers or on sounds perceived as adding value, or remobilizing pre-existing place names by metaphorical transposition. He also highlights the evolution of place names from designators to brands and refers to touristic toponymy as a means of administrative-territorial restructuring. The creation of new names can result in a double (commercial and official), occasionally even triple (plus informal) toponymy.

A most critical question in this context is under which conditions such names can become official, e.g., represented on official topographical maps. When do they have proved to be stable enough and are accepted and used by the local population not only for commercial purposes but also like ‘ordinary’ place names?

With administrative-territorial restructuring an obvious problem is not only the naming of (new) administrative units after tourist attractions but also the extension of the reference area of prestigious and touristically attractive names to areas that were not covered by the original meaning of the name thus contradicting the traditional name/space relation and traditional mental structuring of geographical space.

Lucas Destrem, independent geographer from Limoges, France, pretends that a “critical turn” in toponomastics had not taken place before the turn of the 21st century and that in the periods before the field had been left to a primarily encyclopedic treatment under the leadership of archaeologists and linguists. This overlooks that already in the later 20th century the very political questions of minority place names (see, e.g., [Ormeling 1983](#)), sea names (see [Kim & Ryu & Choo 2021](#)) or the endonym/exonym divide (see, e.g., [Back 2002](#)) had been discussed and elaborated by geographers, cartographers, cultural anthropologists, historians, and, yes, also linguists. It is, however, true that a major interest of geographers in toponymic studies emerged only in recent decades. This should, however, not result in a neglect of some pioneers.

The author then examines names of stops and stations of rail networks, both urban and conventional, as well as airports and terms them *stathmonyms*. Their names are largely based on pre-existing and nearby toponyms repeating them and augmenting their prominence. Also here a tension between place names for orientation and commercial naming arises. Sometimes metro stations and even more so airports are named after prominent places (cities) in some distance – in case of airports to attract customers. But also the choice of a pre-existing name of a feature good for orientation in cases of metro or railway stations can be politically motivated.

The author ends with demands for further research. Interestingly enough he addresses, although mentioning otherwise a plethora of (not or not sufficiently cultivated) research fields, only randomly the question why in many countries the official names of populated places in minority languages are not applied to, e.g., railway stations located in the minority region – as it is exceptionally so in the Scottish Highlands related to Scottish Gaelic and as it was a consequent practice already after 1867 in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with railway as well as tram stations. Another suggestion for completing the list of research demands is extending the comparative research of this reviewer (see [Jordan 2009](#)) on place-name use (endonym/exonym, majority/minority names) on road signs in Central Europe to other regions paying attention to practical as well as political aspects. From a political-geographical angle it would also be worthwhile to have a look at endonym/exonym use in railway timetables and airport schedules.

Melissa Wanjiru-Mwita, Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya,

highlights the naming of informal settlements, not necessarily slums, but characterized by a lack of visibility both on maps and in the urban landscape designs in the Global South, but with a strong focus on Nairobi, Kenya. Place names enhance their visibility. Naming occurs usually bottom-up, but place names remain informal, are not entering the official, ‘upper’ sphere. They partly co-exist with official names. Fluidity of informal settlements obstructs their naming and representation on maps, also the feeling of residents of being at home there. They have always to be prepared to be resettled resulting in a “sense of temporality”. Informal names remind either of conflict and oppression or of the kind of life the residents aspire to have, also by imported names from other parts of the globe (*Kosovo, Beirut* versus *Europe, Barcelona*); they reflect ethnic affiliation and languages of the partly very heterogenous informal settlements; they remind of founders, freedom fighters, local leaders or even (tactically motivated) of politicians to prevent demolition; they also reflect environmental conditions. Frequently the real significance of the name is only known to insiders.

Matthieu Noucher, Bordeaux Montaigne University, France, in his chapter on toponymy on maps recognizes “cartographic post-sovereignty” due to the emergence of several private and international players on the mapping scene besides official mapping agencies. Deregulation happens from above by international players and from below by “volunteered geographical information”. “It is necessary to deconstruct the power games associated with the regulation and control of the circulation of the various existing toponymic databases” (p. 192).

He presents the example of the French colony Guiana by reflecting its mapping history starting with colonial maps, which could *mutatis mutandis* certainly also be told about many other parts of the globe. It demonstrates that maps and place names have always been used by political actors for arguing their case. Thus – and this is now the opinion of the reviewer – what we see today is nothing very new. It is just so, that not so much public, but private commercial actors are dominant. French Guiana is obviously not a case shedding a glorious light on public actors, also in recent times. It just shows how important a well-regulated and sophisticated process of place-name standardization is – based on multidisciplinary expertise and close contact with the local indigenous community. And it also shows how important it is to know (and to get educated) about sources and processes including their political aspirations and views.

There is not much difference between official national mapping agencies and private commercial companies in this respect, between former and modern dominators of the scene. Official national mapping agencies have perhaps still the comparative advantage not only to dispose over a larger and well-trained staff, but also over institutionalized expert consultation and detailed manuals making the mapping policy including place names transparent for the reader. The interested reader can find there, whether, e.g., in bilingual areas only names

in the majority language are to be recorded or also minority names, and if so, of which feature categories and draw his/her conclusions; it can also be found to which extent dialect names are to be recorded. Public mapping agencies are also obliged to observe recommendations of international authorities like UNGEGN.

Michael Ben Arrous, Gaston Berger University, Saint-Louis, Senegal, and Liora Bigon, Holon Institute of Technology, Israel, in their chapter titled “What Africa Might Contribute to Critical Toponymy” set a focus on the existing diversity of toponymic forms, the lack of hegemony of official forms as it is typical for Africa. They show that Africa is different also in the field of toponymy and that toponomastic research and more specifically critical toponomastics would have to take this into account.

Reception of one and the same name can be different. There are “places without an official name, places named without being precisely located, places named differently depending on the context, toponymic manipulations that provoke no passion, cities without an addressing system and addressing systems that no one uses” (p. 221). On a continent, where half of the population lives in informal settlements, official place names play a very restricted role. Not the streets are named, but significant places that serve as landmarks. Multiple naming systems exist that are also rather fluctuating due to spontaneity (questioning the sense of place-name registers), mobility and heterogeneity.

The authors propose not to validate in Africa the pre-established grids of scientific analysis, but to accept from Africa constructive criticism of critical toponomastics. It would not put official naming practices into the foreground, while issues of reception and practical use receive marginal attention. Neighborhoods are in Africa primary spatial references and are always named, while street naming is a European practice imposed on (anyway only central parts) of African cities. Indifference to street names or numbers is in Africa a form of “decolonization of the mind” (p. 241). Sometimes also a collective reinterpretation of old (colonial) street names occurs.

Governments and their manipulation of place naming are too much in the focus of critical toponomastics from an African perspective. This could in the opinion of the reviewer partly be underlined also from a European perspective: In Europe, too, place naming – except commemorative naming in urban areas and partly naming of administrative units – is very much a bottom-up process and public authorities are just more or less standardizing and approving names in local use.

In their concluding chapter the editors admit that critical toponomastics has so far indeed too much focused on Western countries and the Global North as well as on urban situations (more precisely: of the Global North) and a double shift of interest would be necessary: from the Global North towards a truly global perspective, from official naming practices towards a comprehensive

view on all naming practices including informal. This should in the reviewer's opinion result in some rethinking of the basic conception of critical toponomastics as schematically illustrated by Figure 1.1 (p. 4), which defines state power, private sector and civil society as the actors in the place-naming process. Isn't this rather a Eurocentric, even etatistic perspective? Doesn't it convey the impression that the nation state was the only community producing place names. Aren't there several scales or levels of place-name production, from the family or household across the municipality, the sub-national unit, the nation state up to supra-national and global levels? Aren't already children producing their namescape, when they play in a wood or at an abandoned construction site? Are state power, private sector and civil society the (most) relevant actors in place naming at all scales and levels and in all parts of the globe? Wouldn't the label 'local community' much better and more flexibly reflect all the variants of community structures – vertically and horizontally? When the editors also admit that the dimension of scale has so far not been addressed sufficiently by critical toponomastics, when they demand that also name reception has to be studied and finally remark that “[...] critical toponymy would benefit from gauging the extent of state-centrism in the manner of approaching the process of naming” and ask the question “[...] what, precisely and concretely, is the naming state?” (p. 269) the reviewer can only applaud and finds his criticism of the research model confirmed.

In conclusion it can be said that the book presents several valuable inputs to critical toponomastics and onomastics in general but has its strongest and most innovative parts in its 'African chapters' (1) highlighting informal toponymy, (2) questioning the so far prevailing research focus of critical toponomastics on Western urban situations of the Global North and on official naming together with the research concept derived from this focus, as well as (3) addressing research fields that have so far largely been neglected by critical toponymists. To the list of such research fields also country names, maritime names, and names of other transboundary features as well as the naming practices of international authorities like the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) could be added.

The book constructs at least in some parts (although also the opposite opinion can be found, e.g., p. 262) an odd antagonism between “new”, “innovative”, “geographical” critical toponomastics and “traditional”, “classical” toponomastics and onomastics mainly conducted by linguists and historians, as if a tree would not need a sound, strong trunk to develop always new branches and produce agreeable fruits and as if a new branch may declare independence from the tree. Right as a geographer, well aware of the integrative character of this discipline much in need of inputs from and cooperation with other sciences, the reviewer regards profound linguistic knowledge and/or close cooperation with linguists as indispensable for any serious toponymic research (perhaps with the limited exception of research in commemorative naming) and all work in toponomastics,

even from a pronounced geographical perspective, in principle as interdisciplinary.

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