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## Place Naming as *Dispositif*: Toward a Theoretical Framework

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### ABSTRACT

Recent critical toponymies have convincingly demonstrated that studying place names also reveals much about geopolitics and power relations. In this paper, we propose a theoretical framework for interpreting these toponymies, in order to better decipher, theorise, and compare the many very rich case studies in the field. Our first argument is that the focus of enquiry should be place naming *processes* rather than place names themselves. We then show that place naming is a *dispositif* in the Foucauldian sense. This allows us to build a framework that distinguishes between (a) four types of geopolitical contexts, from which place naming processes tend to stem; (b) four types of technologies that are commonly used; and (c) three types of actors. Lastly, we identify the preferential combinations and nexuses between these building blocks of place naming contexts, technologies, and actors.

Mohamed Bouazizi was the Tunisian fruit seller whose self-immolation on 17 December 2010 triggered uprisings in the Arab world. Very soon afterwards, he was commemorated in his hometown of Sidi Bouzid, in the capital Tunis, and in Paris, the capital of the former colonial power, by naming streets after him. While referring to the same person, and to the same event he inspired, the naming processes and the places named after him differed strongly in Sidi Bouzid, Tunis, and Paris. In his hometown, the main thoroughfare now bears the name of its most famous son. In Tunis, Bouazizi's name replaced the Boulevard du 7 novembre, which had celebrated Ben Ali's deposition of Bourguiba, as early as 17 February 2011. In Paris, a small section of the Avenue de la Sibelle (14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement) — where the sidewalk widens — provided a niche for the brand-new Place Mohamed Bouazizi,<sup>1</sup> which the Tunisia-born Parisian mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, inaugurated on 30 June 2011. The different natures of these places draw attention to the different contexts and objectives for naming a place after Bouazizi: The revolutionary context in Tunisia points to naming the town's main landmark after a local,

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internationally famous Sidi Bouzid hero. In Tunis, the renaming erased the previous regime's heritage from the capital city's toponymic landscape. By contrast, the context in Paris is more that of urban diplomacy, showcasing Paris as a progressive city on a global scale. The goal was to inscribe Bouazizi's name with many other international references in the big book of the Parisian landscape – a landscape registering revolution and “progress” through the ages. As such, Mohamed Bouazizi Square is an element among many others in Delanoë's (and his successor's) long-standing place naming policy.<sup>2</sup>

The different ways of commemorating Bouazizi point to place (re) naming being situated and political. Recent critical readings have convincingly argued that even seemingly apolitical place names reveal power relations and geopolitical issues.<sup>3</sup> However, while previous studies have shown how rich a critical analysis of place names can be for political geography, their very richness has produced a profuse, perhaps even confusing, landscape of interpretations. We believe that the field is mature enough for us to propose a more general framework for interpretation. In order to construct such a framework, we conducted a thorough investigation of the literature and of the place naming cases it analysed.<sup>4</sup> These cases mainly dealt with street names (secondarily with the names of new administrative territories, followed by the names of rivers and mountains). The identified places were categorised according to their location – where toponymic hotspots appeared – contexts, and theme.

Place naming reflects how power controls territory and, in so doing, maintains that control. As such, it calls for a Foucauldian analysis. His notion of *dispositif* seems the most suited: Its heterogeneity, which combines discourses, regulations, material artifacts, and actors' strategies, allows for grasping the variegated ways in which places are named. Foucault also insists on the historical grounding of a notion of *dispositif* that corresponds to specific needs and motivations. We therefore offer a framework based on understanding place naming as a Foucauldian *dispositif*.

We will first review existing work, highlighting the importance of the distinction between *place name* studies and *place naming* studies. We will then delineate a framework for interpretation that emphasises the political dimensions, practices, and rationales of place naming processes. Lastly, we will argue that opting for a general framework does not entail an oversimplified view of place naming processes, as the categories we use can be successfully combined to grasp the complexity of particular case studies and the preferential nexuses of place naming contexts and technologies.

## Place Names or Place Naming?

We believe that the distinction between studies dealing with place names and studies dealing with the processes of place naming is crucial for “theoriz[ing]

critically the polymorphous territorialities produced by the social, economic, political and technological machines.”<sup>5</sup> It is exactly this change of focus towards place naming processes that allows for a deciphering of power relations and actors’ motivations.

Studying *place names* focuses on the name itself – the actually existing toponym – as the main object of enquiry. It entails collecting place names, decoding their meaning, organising them into categories according to their nature (e.g., oronyms for the names of land relief, odonyms for the names of streets, hydronyms for rivers, regionyms for regions) or signification, tracing their origin and history, and so forth.<sup>6</sup> Such work has a long history in research and has been modernised by means of GIS databases. This modernisation has opened up new lines of enquiry, such as keeping track of place names over the *longue durée*, in spite of changes in transcription, or even language, through disambiguation, web extraction, and the building of GIS digital gazetteers.<sup>7</sup>

Place name studies often favour an *etymological* approach. In so doing, they tend to be encyclopedic, especially when they aim at producing dictionaries and gazetteers of local, regional, and national place names. Such an accomplishment must not be underestimated and is not devoid of political weight: When applied to subaltern or vernacular cultures, whether in a (post-)colonial context or not, place name studies can restore toponymic heritages that have been obliterated over time and bring other geographical knowledge to the fore. For instance, Kearney and Bradley’s<sup>8</sup> study of Indigenous Australian views, and especially those of the Yanyuwas, insists on the relational aspect of place and the emotional, even spiritual, geographies embedded in place names.

Place name studies have long had another – *archaeological* – dimension when they reconstruct settlement histories and identify the successive uses of space. An example of this archaeological approach can be found in one of the masterpieces of Vidalian geography, namely Gallois’s<sup>9</sup> outstanding study of French rural *pays* via their names. Lucien Gallois uses place names and the characteristics to which they refer to understand the *pays*’ overlapping topographies. Place names allow him to explain why the demarcations of the *pays* are not wall-to-wall, and to link these with the diverse logics at the time of their formation. For instance, there were *pays* that organised themselves around a small town, some along a valley, and others covered an agricultural *terroir*, or a type of landscape.<sup>10</sup> More recently, researchers have expanded this archeological approach by using GIS for a more rigorous quantifying and mapping of toponyms, even on an entire city scale.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, an archeology of vernacular toponyms has been used to track environmental change and reconstruct past land use in contexts as different as the Bolivian Andes and the Swiss Alps.<sup>12</sup> Archeological approaches do not shun the political dimension of place names. For instance, working with

maps, Monmonier<sup>13</sup> shows that derogatory toponyms reveal racial tensions and gender roles, as well as the changing social attitudes toward them.

By contrast, *place naming* studies focus on the procedures of and stakes at play when giving a certain name to a specific place. As such, the name, which is the end product, might be even less revealing than the processes that led to the choice of a particular name and not others. Analysing the place names that do not make it into the official nomenclature might therefore be especially fruitful for an understanding of the social and political stakes. Place naming studies thus logically scrutinise stakeholders, public debates on toponymy, and the wider political dimension of naming. Renaming (replacing an existing place name) and neotponymy (allocating a name to a new place, e.g., a new street, dam, airport, or even an administrative jurisdiction, such as a province or municipality) are obviously procedures of immense interest for place naming studies.

Place naming also has a classical *geopolitical* dimension. Various authors have analysed the use of nationalistic toponyms in international relations, the balance of power between nation-states and nation-building processes. For instance, Pelletier<sup>14</sup> has documented the various historical maps instrumentalised in the naming dispute between South Korea and Japan about the “Sea of Japan/East Sea” and has uncovered the competition for fishing zones that feeds the dispute. Israel has been particularly closely scrutinised.<sup>15</sup> For instance, Cohen and Kliot<sup>16</sup> have convincingly established that place naming was a very early tool in implementing the Zionist political project, and that place name types differed along political party lines.

More recently, this focus on place naming processes has been one of the key components of a remarkable *critical* turn in toponymic studies, insofar as it aims to uncover place names’ political dimension. This collective, and very productive, endeavour has combined extensive empirical case studies<sup>17</sup> and strong theoretical insights. In the process, three main directions have been profitably explored. First, the critical standpoint these studies have adopted has allowed for the introduction of ‘post-’ approaches and issues: Poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theories have been successfully applied to toponymic studies. The power relations embedded in place naming have also been deciphered. For instance, looking at subaltern<sup>18</sup> toponyms, in settler societies, has been especially fruitful.<sup>19</sup> Second, critical place naming studies have begun to pay close attention to place names’ commodification for branding purposes.<sup>20</sup> They have signalled a new, neoliberal, toponymic governance whereby private actors, especially business, contribute strongly to place naming. Cash-strapped municipalities, business associations, or even private property owners, might want to sell this exposure on the monetary market and expect dividends for selling, or just temporarily leasing, the naming rights of places geared to consumption, such as sport arenas, leisure resorts, and shopping malls.<sup>21</sup> Third, the naming of new institutional

territories, especially new local, metropolitan, and regional governments, has provided critical toponymic studies with a new, fertile field. Such studies are mainly found in Francophone literature, with new actors and new territorial constructs restructuring administrative and political geographies on various scales.<sup>22</sup> Place naming as a tool has been studied in countries as different as Canada (especially in Québec<sup>23</sup>), Chile,<sup>24</sup> China,<sup>25</sup> Finland,<sup>26</sup> France,<sup>27</sup> Mali,<sup>28</sup> Morocco,<sup>29</sup> and South Africa.<sup>30</sup>

This rapidly expanding literature has convincingly shown the relevance of a critical analysis of toponymy as an end product (place name studies) and as a process (place naming studies). But such an expansion has a drawback, as it might give the impression that the literature is overflowing with many detailed, in-depth, and fascinating, but discrete, case studies pointing to even more diversified research directions. It is becoming difficult to develop a more general understanding, chiefly regarding place naming processes, of whether to compare, interpret, or theorise. In the next section of this paper, we offer a first elaboration of such a framework. In so doing, we hope to contribute along one of the lines that Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu suggest, namely “expanding the conceptual horizon of critical place name studies,” thereby firmly positioning ourselves within critical toponymic studies focused on “the power structures that underpin the naming process”.<sup>31</sup>

### Interpreting Place Naming

Critically interpreting place names and place naming has shown that, intrinsically, toponymy incorporates a knowledge/power relationship: Every place name displays some knowledge about the place it designates, and the choice of a particular toponym reflects a certain power relationship that is maintained through the use of this toponym. As such, toponymy calls for a Foucauldian analysis, namely through the conceptual framework of governmentality.<sup>32</sup> While governmentality can be understood as historically specific, it also has a more general meaning that is more useful for our project, namely governmentality as an “analytics of government,” as coined by Dean.<sup>33</sup> An example of the latter is when such analytics “examines the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and are transformed. . . . Regimes of practices are institutional practices if the latter means the routinized and ritualized way we do these things in certain places and at certain times.”<sup>34</sup>

Place naming is the practice on which we focus. It could be analysed by means of various Foucauldian notions, for instance, toponymic landscapes could be termed discursive formations that are “set[s] of concrete discursive practices that have a specific kind of unity”.<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, maps and plans on which toponyms are recorded function as surfaces of emergence. This list



could be expanded. Nevertheless, translating particular steps, or objects, of the practice of place naming into a Foucauldian idiom does not allow for a more general, or even theoretical, grasp of these practices. Another Foucauldian notion, that of *dispositif*, appears the most fruitful: While discursive formations, grids of specification, or surfaces of emergence usefully designate steps in the place naming process, the *dispositif* notion allows for a more global grasp of this process, thus opening up promising theorising prospects.

Foucault famously defined the *dispositif* as “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions – in short the said as much as the unsaid. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements”.<sup>36</sup> We believe that place naming functions as a *dispositif*. The process of place naming involves a “set” of elements that are diverse in nature, but work together in order “to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings”.<sup>37</sup> Place naming thus comprises the elements that constitute a *dispositif*, because the former very obviously belongs to *l'ordre du discours* and implicates institutions, precise rules, and administrative procedures.<sup>38</sup> Place naming processes manufacture material objects (road signs, maps, etc.) that shape a toponymic landscape, and thus validate and sustain the results of the naming process.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, these processes reveal ideologies such as nationalism, colonialism, an ideology of “progress,” or a patriarchal bias.<sup>40</sup>

While the open-endedness of Foucault’s definition leaves space for debate, recent understandings of the notion help further unpack the place naming *dispositif*. Andreas Reckwitz’s analysis is especially useful in this regard. He identifies four main components of social *dispositifs*: “1) practices and everyday technologies guided by implicit and often tacit knowledge, 2) forms of discursive production of truth and imaginaries, 3) certain constellations of artefacts and lastly, 4) different patterns of subjectivation”.<sup>41</sup> Reckwitz’s reading feeds our analysis in two ways: First, by pointing to how banal and every day the technologies of the *dispositif* can be. Second, by building upon Foucault’s work on the genealogy of the individual subject, but adding “patterns” and a more collective dimension that allows us to fully expand the Foucauldian subject into plural, heterogeneous, and interactional actors.

This updated Foucauldian theoretical basis allows us to propose an integrative framework for the interpretation of place naming processes. Our generalising is not the first attempt: Tent and Blair<sup>42</sup> listed nine typologies to which they added their own. But our framework differs from previous ones in several ways. First and foremost, other authors aim at (and claim to be) producing typologies, while we adopt a theoretical and political



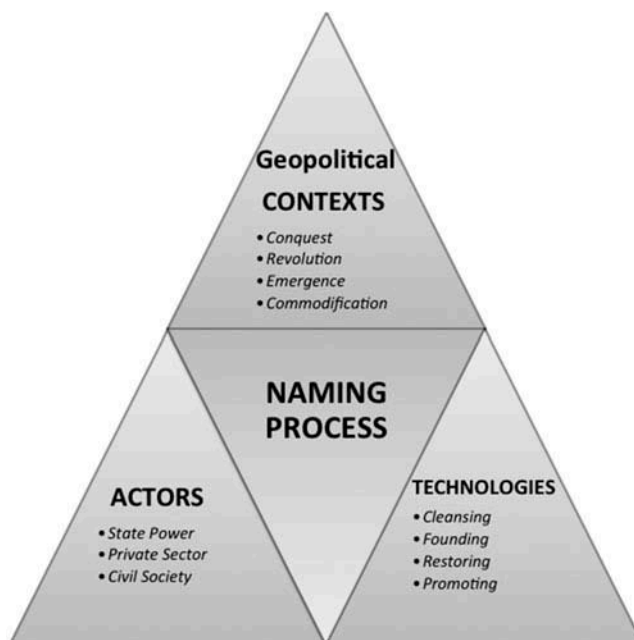
interpretation. Second, existing typologies focus on existing place names and their semantic components, while our framework gives pride of place to place naming processes (cf. *supra*). Tent and Blair evoke the importance of examining the “motivation,” “modus operandi,” or “mechanism” of the naming process. They define them primarily as the “description” and “association” (of a local feature). Conversely, our critical framework tries to address *who* names and *why* through an analysis of the actors, ideologies, and tools: We purposely focus on the political projects involved, on discourses of legitimation, and on the ways toponymic engineering is planned and implemented. Third, most of the typologies that Tent and Blair review, including their own, deal with actually existing place names at a given time, thus treating the toponymic landscape as a given and as an object in and for itself. By contrast, we identify the main categories of the contexts in which place naming occurs, and include place names that have disappeared, that are not yet in place, or that were a short-lived, but ultimately dismissed, option discussed during naming debates. Finally, Tent and Blair aim chiefly for a typology that covers all types of toponyms (exhaustivity) and for mutually exclusive categories; that is, a taxonomy. We aim for a framework that allows a combination of factors, whether they are contexts, technologies, or actors. Our analysis is less interested in designing place name categories to which certain cases could be assigned, than in offering tools to decipher the general logics underlying a specific naming process. In other words, typologies operate at the level of particular, even singular, elements of the naming process (especially the name given), while we try to grasp its totality.

Our framework (see [Figure 1](#)) distinguishes between three types of elements: (a) geopolitical contexts from which place naming processes tend to stem, (b) commonly used technologies, and (c) spheres of actors. We will now examine each of them in turn.

### **Context**

Foucault’s definition of a *dispositif* describes it as “a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment, that of responding to an *urgent need*”.<sup>43</sup> Interpreting place naming as a *dispositif* allows us to identify historical moments in which place naming becomes a political priority. In our framework, they are called geopolitical contexts. In existing corpuses of case studies on toponymy (cf. *supra*), we identify four main geopolitical contexts leading to (re-)naming:

- *Conquest*: the subjugation, or control, of a territory through force. Conquest can be imperial, colonial, or national. Other forms of political, or cultural, acquisition of, or claims over, territories (e.g., annexation, settler and frontier colonisation, ethnic cleansing, military occupation,



**Figure 1.** A framework for interpreting place naming processes.

and nationalist maps claiming long-lost pieces of land) can also be filed under the same conquest context.

- *Revolution*: a radical change in the political order. Examples of such revolutions include the fall of empires, or authoritarian regimes; in other words, regimes that have shaped society and space over a significant period of time.
- *Emergence*: new places are being produced and named, because they are newly developed (for either settlements or activities), or newly individualised. For instance, territorial restructurings and area-based initiatives turned into ad hoc institutional territories provide the context for intensive place name production, which we call neotponymy. The contemporary trend towards giving the local state more power (e.g., devolution, decentralisation, etc., as practised in various European countries and which the IMF and the World Bank promote internationally) offers an ideal typical case of *emergence*. Historical examples of *emergence* also abound, for example, the municipal incorporation process in the United States.
- *Commodification*: a term that covers all the contexts in which powerful individuals, or corporations, annex the toponymic landscape that forms part of the commons for their own (financial or symbolic) profit. While precapitalist merchants and craft guilds had their own street names in European cities, market capitalism in its current neoliberal guise has recently included the selling of place names to big brands.<sup>44</sup> Euergetism

– the sponsoring of one’s place of origin, in order to gain legitimacy for political or professional purposes – also left toponymic imprints during the Hellenistic period and the Roman Empire, as well as in the contemporary African neopatrimonial state.<sup>45</sup>

These categories are, however, not mutually exclusive and do overlap.

### **Technologies**

These four different contexts could lead to place (re-)naming in order to achieve different political objectives. Place naming is used to construct and maintain a collective identity, to define what constitutes the body politic, and to inscribe, sometimes forcibly, that particular, constructed, collective identity in a space. The state’s “motivations”,<sup>46</sup> would typically be those listed above, and it would implement them in either highly visible, or banal “everyday,”<sup>47</sup> ways. Other interest groups act in similar ways. These objectives can be understood as *technologies* in the Foucauldian sense of “a practical rationality governed by a conscious aim”<sup>48</sup> and can be organised into four main categories, but again not exclusively.

- *Cleansing* aims at discarding the toponymic imprint inherited from a culture, a language, and/or a previous political order. Cleansing an existing toponymic landscape can be done by erasing place names, renaming, or translating them, and removing them from all official language and legal documents.
- *Founding* inscribes cultural and political references in the toponymy in order to create, legitimise, and, ultimately, sustain a new political and cultural order at the local, or the national, level. Naming places after founding fathers, ideological values, or founding events shapes the toponymic landscape and helps “legitimate existing power structures by linking the regime’s view of itself, its past, and the world, with the seemingly mundane settings everyday life.”<sup>49</sup>
- *Restoring* strives to reinstitute ancient, or dominated, memories and cultures by deploying previous toponyms from such a culture in order to atone for (newly considered) historical injustices, or to legitimise territorial claims.
- *Promoting* is the way to brand a place, a development, a resort, a territory, or a city through its name (or nickname), which is used as valuable and marketable symbolic capital. It is an attempt to attract investors and consumers, and to be well placed in international, or national, rankings in the context of places’ fierce competition between places for economic and political gain. At its most extreme, promoting

technologies include speculating on a place name's economic value. For instance, private companies create a new toponym to market a leisure destination, or acquire an existing toponym by renting it temporarily, or by purchase. Whatever the case, *promoting* considers a place name as both symbolic and economic capital.

### **Actors and Processes**

Neither contexts nor technologies are abstract entities. They are enacted in specific ways by specific people in specific locations. As such, the actual actors of place naming are simultaneously multiple and situated in time, space, and social relations. Since actors function in articulation and tactical coalitions with one another, within specific contexts, and in order to implement certain technologies, this complicates the picture even further. Moreover, the various actors involved in a renaming process can follow diverse, sometimes even contradictory, objectives. Lastly, their respective standpoints and reasons for involving themselves in a specific renaming dispute vary wildly – to the point that their arguments and counter-arguments are sometimes not even congruent. For instance, arguments for restoring an indigenous place name might invoke moral and ethical values, while the counter-arguments about international visibility are squarely placed within economic rationality.

In turn, this multiplicity falls fully within the Foucauldian definition of the *dispositif* as “thoroughly heterogeneous.”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, following Reckwitz's deciphering of what a *dispositif* is, we recognise particular “patterns of subjectivation,” or *Subjektivierungsmustern*<sup>51</sup> within this multiplicity, which are part of the *dispositif*. Building on the work of Jones and Merriman,<sup>52</sup> we have identified three of these patterns:

- The first set of actors pertains to *state power*, and refers to the main and official producers of place names and of place naming norms. State power should, however, not be understood as homogeneous: At best, it comprises the central state, the various layers of the local state, and the state bureaucracy, all of which may act disjointedly.
- The *private sector* constitutes the second set of actors. It seeks to produce added value through place naming. Again, it is not homogeneous, as it includes territorialised stakeholders primarily interested in branding (e.g., the local Chambers of Commerce, tourist information offices, or shopkeepers coalitions), real estate developers, and transnational corporations, with the latter two seeking profits. Transnational corporations buy exclusive place naming rights (e.g., of sports arenas), sometimes for a set period of time, or sponsor places, thus associating

their brand name with those of schools, markets, and even neighbourhoods.

- Lastly, *civil society* engages in place naming processes in many ways, as it can be an actor in its own right, or the target of other actors' actions; can be proactive or reactive; or the agent through whom place naming matters become politicised. Civil society comprises activists, professional brokers (e.g., journalists, public intellectuals, etc.), and concerned residents, whether they produce spontaneous place names in an informal settlement, or oppose changes for fear of extra costs, or lower property values, or fear a change in their suburb's character.

The case of the former Rue de l'Usine (Factory Street) in Carouge, near Geneva, exemplifies the entanglement of the different subjectivation patterns, or sets of actors, their articulation, and how they implement certain technologies within particular contexts. The street was renamed Rue de la Gabelle (the name of the *Ancien Régime* salt tax) in 1980.<sup>53</sup> Carouge was built at the end of the eighteenth century, a Sardinian Catholic stronghold facing Protestant Geneva, and a border town equipped with facilities to collect taxes, such as the *gabelle*. Incorporated into Switzerland in 1815, Carouge experienced classic nineteenth century industrialisation growth, which led to new streets, such as the Rue de l'Usine. When a 1970s developer, keen to profit from Carouge's ongoing gentrification, wanted to invest in the Rue de l'Usine, he asked for the name to be changed to a less working-class and more marketable street name. The then-mayor supported this application, but for very different reasons. He saw it as a means to support his attempts to give Carouge a territorial identity that would distinguish it from the Geneva agglomeration. To achieve this goal, he resuscitated Carouge's short-lived past as a Savoy border town, the "Sardinian city" (*cit  sarde*),<sup>54</sup> by choosing the historical-sounding name Rue de la Gabelle. The canton bureaucracy checked whether the renaming proposition conformed with the federal law governing such processes.

In terms of our framework, the developer's action (a *private sector* initiative) was inscribed in a *commodification* context, while the mayor's action (*local state*) was framed by *emergence*. Their actions converged regarding the use of *cleansing* technology, but simultaneously diverged: The developer used place naming with the goal of *promoting* his venture, while the mayor tried to *found* the town's identity under the pretense of *restoring* it.

## Beyond Exclusive Categories

By proposing this framework, we endeavour to offer a heuristic device insofar as it identifies features (contexts, technologies, and actors) that we believe are common to most place naming practices. Further, as an analytical

tool, the framework helps interpret place naming practices, even when they appear extremely variegated. Lastly, by identifying common elements and logics, this framework may allow for easier comparisons between diverse place naming cases.

As an analytical tool, our framework simplifies processes by categorising them<sup>55</sup> and, for the sake of clarity, distinguishes between phenomena that often overlap. Consequently, it is crucial to proceed in steps: First, as done above, by using the framework to identify place naming processes' different building blocks (e.g., revolution, commodification, restoring, bureaucracy...). Subsequently a specific case's complexity, which is embodied in the very particular arrangements of the building blocks we have just deciphered, is reintroduced into the analysis. Such arrangements – understood here as the generic association of building blocks – can be categorised as either combinations (combining different contexts *or* different technologies<sup>56</sup>) or nexuses (associations of some context/s *and* technology/ies *and* actors). Each category is now examined in turn.

### **Combinations**

The first type of arrangement between the framework elements is that of combinations between, for instance, the different contexts, or between different technologies.

Contexts often appear in historical succession, such as a revolutionary context putting an end to an empire born out of conquest. This happened in colonial spaces: During the colonial conquest, exonyms were imposed on the indigenous landscape, sometimes reflecting how the colonists viewed the 'exotic'<sup>57</sup>; later, national revolutions and independence challenged the colonial toponymic landscape. But contexts can also be combined and appear simultaneously: For instance, the contemporary *emergence* context often goes together with a *commodification* context, a combination typified by free trade zones. South Africa neatly exemplifies combinations of contexts, both successive and simultaneous.<sup>58</sup> The Dutch, followed by the British colonial conquest, and the Afrikaner push into the interior were all been expressed in toponymic terms through the naming of new human settlements (e.g., Pretoria, named after the Boer leader Andries Pretorius, and the Eastern Cape city of East London, named by the 1820 British settlers), or the renaming of natural landmarks (Table Mountain in Cape Town has replaced the Hoerikwaggo of the Khoisan). The later apartheid regime instrumentalised African toponyms in order to legitimise its Bantustan policy and simultaneously used street names, such as NY148 (for "Native Yard"), to dehumanise African urban townships. The "negotiated revolution"<sup>59</sup> of 1994 was, from a toponymic point of view, combined with the emergence of new, inclusive, local government jurisdictions. The later shift to more neoliberal

policies produced a combination of *emergence* and *commodification* through the demarcation and naming of metropolitan areas and development perimeters.

Different technologies can also be combined. The well-documented case of post-socialist renaming processes offers a striking illustration of a combination of *cleansing* and *restoring* technologies.<sup>60</sup> As these authors have pointed out, place names directly associated with the Soviet or communist regimes, especially with its Stalinist avatar, were “decommemorated”<sup>61</sup> or “decanonised”<sup>62</sup>; that is, erased. The toponymic landscape was thus “cleansed” – Marin<sup>63</sup> uses this exact term, borrowed from Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu<sup>64</sup> – and old, pre-Soviet era place names “restored.” Marin even points out:

In Russian the term used for name-change claims is usually *vozvrashchenie* (restitution) and not *pereimenovanie* (renaming) – the latter qualifying cases when Soviet era names are replaced by totally new ones, which seldom happened in Leningrad. The use of a term meaning “returning” or “come back to” has an important psychological and legal sub-text: *vozvrashchenie* also refers to restitution claims of the Orthodox Church, Soviet successor states and victims of cultural lootings.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, and as many of these authors point out, post-socialist place renaming processes make scarce use of the *founding* technologies, in spite of the often well-rehearsed discourses about democracy or Europe.

If anything, and despite the rhetoric of some post-Soviet leaders about the shift to a bright new future, the renaming suggests a harking back to the past rather than a leap into a new and different world. . . . Democracy was tarnished by the hollow nature it had possessed under the Soviet regime, while capitalism was widely distrusted, probably because of the effect of years of Soviet propaganda. The new rulers thus did not have a clearly expressed vision of the future, which could both sustain popular enthusiasm and generate new, revolutionary, symbols.<sup>66</sup>

This combination of *cleansing* and *restoring* is a frequent one. Renaming processes are often associated with *cleansing* on the one hand, and either *restoring* or *founding* on the other. By contrast, naming processes (i.e., the attribution of a first name to a new place or jurisdictions) tend to *sensu stricto* associate *founding* with *promoting*, as with the names of newly demarcated metropolitan areas.

### **Nexuses**

The elements, or building blocks, of the framework can be arranged in a different way by associating contexts *and* technologies, thus forming nexuses. While all arrangements between building blocks are theoretically possible, certain sets of technologies are preferentially linked to particular sets of contexts and mobilise specific sets of actors.



**Table 1.** Nexuses (for Contexts and Technologies) in Place Naming Processes

Contexts → Technologies ↓	Conquest	Revolution	Emergence	Commodification
Cleansing	**	***	*	*
Founding	***	***	**	*
Restoring	*	**	*	*
Promoting	*	*	**	***

To read the table: The number of asterisks denotes the frequency of the arrangement.

**Table 1** is based on our literature survey. It focuses on the interplay between contexts and technologies to introduce and start identifying nexuses.<sup>67</sup> Please note the following: First, asterisks identify preferential one-by-one arrangements of contexts and technologies (e.g., Revolution and Cleansing, Commodification and Promoting). Second, the shaded areas denote arrangements of several types of contexts and technologies often found together in the case studies (e.g., Emergence, Commodification, Founding, and Promoting); that is, nexuses.

A first nexus of, respectively, the *conquest* and *revolution* contexts, the technologies of *cleansing* and *founding* (shaded in dark grey in **Table 1**), and the *central state* and the *bureaucracy* as actors is commonly encountered. Imposing a new spatial, social, and political order (the systemic change we describe as *revolution*) after (mostly) a military conquest requires founding rituals through a toponymic appropriation of the landscape. In other words, the naming of new settlements, the renaming of impressive landscape features, and imposing the names of ‘great men’ on the landscape, which in turn require the cleansing of previous place names. Colonialism, imperialism, and nation-building through state expansion across its territorial margins belong to this nexus and are accompanied by “toponymical engineering”.<sup>68</sup> In his remarkable study on place naming processes in Turkey, Öktem specifically shows that a logic of *revolution* (putting an end to the dying system of the Ottoman Empire) and of *conquest* (of Greek-controlled areas) simultaneously characterised the early days of the Republic of Turkey. While “place names in the territory that was to become Turkey in 1923 displayed a high degree of diversity,”<sup>69</sup> Greek, Slavic, Armenian, Syriac, Kurdish, and other place names were erased and replaced by Turkish place names transliterated into the newly adopted Latin script, thus dragging away and anchoring the entire national territory in the modernity of the nation-state model.

Another identifiable nexus (shaded in light grey in **Table 1**) is the preferential arrangement of the *emergence* and *commodification* contexts, together with the *founding* and *promoting* technologies, and *local state* actors in conjunction with the *private sector*. It is especially visible in the contemporary processes of territorial restructuring and place branding under the joint pressure from metropolisation and globalisation. For instance, many small and medium-size municipalities in France are renaming themselves (without official endorsement) to emphasise and

advertise their role as local poles, reorganising their surroundings into a supra-municipal entity created by national public policies. This has happened, for instance, with St-Dié, advertised as St-Dié-des-Vosges to add the charm and resources of the Vosges Mountains to the bleakness of a rustbelt town. The former Châlons-sur-Marne, a name that conjured images of the muddy, foggy plains of World War I, is now officially glamorised as Châlons-en-Champagne. These examples show the importance of place naming as attempts to found, brand, and legitimise emerging administrative territories and to promote them (together with ailing small towns) in order to kick-start local development. Though not always successful, these strategies are related to the broader process of “hierarchical compensation,”<sup>70</sup> whereby local political and economic elites try to meet the challenge that global territorial competition, which favours bigger cities, poses. Place naming, together with territorial restructuring and spatial development initiatives, is one of the ways of trying to overcome hierarchical and geographical disadvantages.

## Conclusion

Place naming is a Foucauldian *dispositif*, a theoretical way to understand the very complexity of the situated combinations of discourses, actors, institutions, material objects, etc., that shape naming processes. Moreover, the framework we have built on this notion of *dispositif* offers a structured, comprehensive, and systematic approach to the great variety of place naming processes through the key notions of contexts, technologies, and actors. At the same time, more transverse readings of combinations and nexuses within the framework prove that it still allows a fine-grained understanding of their complexity. We have also shown that such transverse readings interact in complex ways with the actors’ diverse logics.

Returning to our introductory example of place names honouring Bouazizi, we can now identify the constitutive elements of our framework. The naming takes place within the contexts of Revolution (in Sidi Bouzid and in Tunis) and the frequent combination of Emergence and Commodification (in Paris, by developing post-decentralisation urban diplomacy and symbolic capital). The technologies used are those of Cleansing and Promoting (of little-known Sidi Bouzid), Cleansing and Founding (the combination for which the post-revolution Tunisian capital has opted), and Promoting (Paris as the global register of progressivism). Actors differ similarly: The local state and local civil society line up behind Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid; a revolutionary central state, infused with civil society actors is at work in Tunis; Delanoë, the globally influential mayor personifying a renewed local state in Paris. Further, Paris and Tunis, the two capitals that named a place after the same individual, situate themselves within two very different nexuses: Tunis in the revolution, cleansing/founding, and central state/civil

society; Paris in the emergence/commodification, promoting, and local state. While the end product (the toponym) is the same, the naming processes and their signification differ widely, which in turn explains the choice of place to be renamed: A major landmark in Tunis, a sidewalk whose renaming has little impact in Paris. In other words, across three cities, our framework has allowed us to identify and compare what is in Bouazizi's name.

Understanding place naming as *dispositif* has thus allowed us to identify nexuses that include sets of conditions (contexts), institutions and norms (actors), and ways of doing (technologies). What might be beginning to take shape here with nexuses might be reformulated as regimes of place naming, with regimes being understood as “system[s] of laws, practices and relations”<sup>71</sup> aimed at naming places. Further research could explore how such place naming regimes differ in terms of the main mode of action of the actors involved. Such regimes would thus insist even more on power relations and naming processes that have proven so crucial for critical toponymies. We can identify, among others, authoritarian or participative place naming regimes. Actor-centred place naming regimes can also be characterised according to certain actors' dominance, or the configuration of the place naming coalition in place – for example, in regimes where experts, or private developers, are decisive. Alternatively, since naming landmarks and naming ordinary places differ,<sup>72</sup> place naming regimes might vary according to the topographical, or cultural, location of the place in question. In short, thinking in terms of place naming regimes allows us to go 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 spatial order.

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## Notes

1. The street sign reads, “Place Mohamed Bouazizi 1984-2011, en hommage au peuple tunisien et à sa révolution de janvier 2011” [Mohamed Bouazizi Square 1984-2011, as an homage to the Tunisian people and its January 2011 revolution].
2. While, to the best of our knowledge, this policy has not as yet been studied academically, the press has widely reported on the demotion of certain names (e.g., Alexis Carrel, because of his eugenics and sympathies for Nazism) and the promotion of new

personalities (minorities, e.g., Romy Schneider in honour of women, Aimé Césaire and Rosa Parks for civil rights) and global figures (e.g., Nelson Mandela and Stéphane Hessel, whose book launched the *Indignés/Indignados* movement). See <<http://www.bfmtv.com/societe/romy-schneider-lustiger-cent-nouveaux-noms-rue-paris-469552.html>>, <<http://lelab.europe1.fr/bientot-une-rue-nelson-mandela-a-paris-11960>>, <[http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2011/01/20/il-y-aura-une-rue-aime-cesaire-a-paris\\_708721](http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2011/01/20/il-y-aura-une-rue-aime-cesaire-a-paris_708721)>, <<http://www.lejdd.fr/JDD-Paris/Actualite/Plus-de-cinquante-nouveaux-noms-de-femmes-dans-les-rues-parisiennes-595237>>, <<http://www.leparisien.fr/paris/la-rue-alexis-carrel-sera-debaptisee-12-03-2002-2002887941.php>>, all accessed 4 Nov. 2015.

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66. Gill (note 49) p. 494.
67. Actors are not represented here as a didactic choice: A table that matches actors and contexts, or actors and technologies, can be presented; however, a table including the three elements (contexts, technologies, and actors) would be barely comprehensible . Matching contexts and technologies is clearer and thus more effective when introducing nexuses.
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