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# When places change their names and when they do not. Selected aspects of colonial and postcolonial toponymy in former French and Spanish colonies in West Africa - the cases of Saint Louis (Senegal) and the Western Sahara

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**Abstract:** The article aims at demonstrating that toponymy in colonial and postcolonial settings is a promising area for linguistically-informed research. On the basis of evidence drawn from erstwhile colonies of France (with a focus on Senegal) and Spain (with a focus on the Western Sahara) it is shown that, on the Atlantic coast of West Africa, the processes of naming and renaming places are conditioned by an intricate network of mostly social forces. The interaction of these forces may yield different results so that colonial toponyms are not necessarily doomed to disappear from the maps when decolonization sets in. The authors argue strongly for paying more attention to colonial and postcolonial toponymy especially from a comparative perspective.

**Keywords:** colonial toponomastics, linguistic place-making, French colonies, Spanish colonies, West Africa

The colonial era ended two generations ago,  
but colonialism has not really gone away.  
(Errington 2008: 1)

## 1 Introduction

In his seminal book *Linguistique et colonialism*, originally published in 1974, Calvet (2002: 141–150) dedicates a chapter to the fate of ethnonyms and toponyms under colonial and postcolonial conditions. Among other important things

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he observes that, for a historic interpretation, it is insufficient to assume that the earlier occupants of a given territory leave behind the toponyms they have coined before their language disappears from the scene. That this scenario tells but half of the story is obvious:

[...] dans une grande partie des situations coloniales modernes. Le colonisateur a souvent débaptisé des lieux pour leur donner des appellations plus conformes à sa tradition: *Brazzaville*, *Ferryville*, *Bône*, *Port-Lyautey*, *Fort-Lamy*, *Johannesburg*, *Porto-Novo*, etc. Et si, lors de la décolonisation, certaines villes ont été de nouveau débaptisées puis rebaptisées, il faut bien voir que le phénomène n'est pas général (*Casablanca* est restée *Casablanca*, malgré son nom arabe: *dar el beida*) et que ce rebaptême ne consiste pas toujours à revenir au nom d'origine (*Ferryville* devenant *Menzel Bourguiba*, par exemple).

[...] in a sizable segment of the modern colonial situations. The colonizers have often rebaptized the places to give them names which conform better to their tradition: *Brazzaville*, *Ferryville*, *Bône*, *Port-Lyautey*, *Fort-Lamy*, *Johannesburg*, *Porto-Novo*, etc. And if during decolonization certain cities have been rebaptized once more and then renamed again, one has to see that the phenomenon is not general (*Casablanca* has remained *Casablanca* in spite of its Arabic name: *dar el beida*) and that the rebaptism does not always constitute a return to the original name (*Ferryville* became *Menzel Bourguiba*, for instance).]

(Calvet 2002: 143–144, added italics)

Reading between the lines of this quote, we recognize the outlines of a linguistically inspired research program which revolves around the question of why colonial toponyms sometimes are replaced and sometimes are retained postcolonially. This question may not be of a genuinely linguistic nature in the first place. For colonial and postcolonial toponyms in particular, questions of historical settlement are of great importance for bringing into view the movements of populations, migrational shifts, and generally all forms of mobility including migration and traces of nomadic movements. In his study of Ugandan place names, Roden (1974: 78) already noted that “place-name analysis” is useful for “the tracing of major migrations and settlement of migrant peoples from the distribution of place-name elements characteristic of particular language groups”. However, according to our conception, colonial toponomastics is tightly intertwined with a properly linguistic issue, namely the study of the systematic aspects of place names or toponyms. It is exactly from this linguistic angle that we intend to look at colonial and postcolonial toponyms.<sup>1</sup> In this field of interest, there is already a plethora of isolated studies. What should be mentioned especially is the interest in African

<sup>1</sup> Our approach shares some common ground with critical toponymies (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009: 1). However, we emphasize that there are also significant differences, most importantly, in contrast to the top-down approach of critical toponymies, we do not start from critical theory – and more specifically from postcolonial theory – but propose a bottom-up approach which is data-driven. Accordingly, we first have to collect and systemize the empirical facts before a full-

ethnonyms and toponyms in the context of the *General history of Africa*,<sup>2</sup> as documented by the Unesco (1984). During the meeting that took place in Paris in 1978, plans were made to collect and publish African toponyms in a systematic fashion:

The proposed volume should be in three sections: toponyms, anthroponyms and ethnonyms. The following criteria were suggested as a basis for selection: first, all ethnonyms should be recorded; second, toponyms should be selected in accordance with their recognized importance in the history of the African peoples – there can obviously be no question of compiling a catalogue of all the toponyms in use throughout the continent; third, all anthroponyms should also be given a firm definition. (Unesco 1984: 134)

To our knowledge, this project has not been put to practice. A systematic project of postcolonial toponymastics remains yet to be realized – not only with respect to African toponyms.

That this is not only feasible practically but also makes sense linguistically (Avenne 2012) has been demonstrated recently, with reference to German colonialism, by Möller (1986), Lauer (2009) and Weber (2012) in their toponymic explorations of modern Namibia, former *Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, and *Kamerun*, respectively, as well as in a prior study of ours (Stolz and Warnke 2015) in which we focus on the structural and semantic properties of (entirely or partly) German toponyms introduced in the former overseas possessions of imperial Germany during the short-lived German colonial rule 1884–1914 in Africa and Oceania.<sup>3</sup> This area of research has been neglected completely to this date. The role that onomastics in general and toponymy in particular play in the creation and dismantling of language empires (in the sense of Ostler [2005]) has yet to be determined. Nevertheless, we are confident that it can be proved that toponyms are of considerable importance in this area. It is important for us to note here that toponymastics is not just an ancillary discipline for historical, geographical, and predominantly settler-historical inquiries; postcolonial toponymastics is rather a central concern of linguistic, language-based approaches to what Avenne (2012: 3) calls “le versant linguistique du processus colonial” [the linguistic cline of the colonial process]. Therefore, linguistics is not an auxiliary

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blown theory can be put forward. For further basics of our approach we refer the reader to Stolz and Warnke (2015).

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/africa/priority-africa/culture/general-history-of-africa/> (accessed 16 August 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Our toponymic project is embedded in the wider framework of a research program termed “Language in colonial and postcolonial contexts”, the foundations of which have been laid in Warnke (2009), Stolz et al. (2011), and Dewein et al. (2012).

discipline in researching colonial purposes and postcolonial effects but it has original epistemological interests.

Furthermore, it can be shown that the toponymic practice is by no means random but gives evidence of a restricted set of principles and patterns which render it possible to formulate generalizations with a relatively high degree of predictive accuracy. We argue that this overall uniformity is not the monopoly of German colonial toponyms. To our minds, the European focus in the maps of non-European areas (Berg and Kearns 2009: 30) can be described largely along the same lines such that it suggests itself to postulate that (probably only covert) common principles of the linguistic appropriation of foreign territory by way of place-making have been at work. Clear evidence for this are what Alexandre (1984: 52) calls “Eurafrican names”. We consider these principles to be a typical manifestation of language-based and language-generated colonialism although we emphasize that they are by no means exclusive to colonialism, certainly not in the narrow reading of European colonialism. According to our conception, the postcolonial mechanisms in connection to colonial toponyms can be understood as reactions to triggers which date back to the colonial period.

In accordance with the general theme of this issue, we abstract away from our German database and skip the evidence from Oceania to address three equally important topics which are not directly associated with the purely structural properties of toponyms. On the basis of comparative evidence from the effects of the colonialism of two Romance-speaking countries (France and Spain) on the toponymy of contemporary independent countries in West Africa,<sup>4</sup> we keep the following issues in mind when we discuss the actual facts:

- the role of maps as a specific text and semiotic genre;
- the symbolic function of toponyms;
- the hierarchical order of toponyms as symbols of different degrees of importance.

We let ourselves be guided by the ideas expressed in Crampton (2001) which are summarized aptly by Higman and Hudson (2009: 18–19) as follows: “The naming of places directly reflects power relations within a community, and the maps and other documents which record place names are without doubt social constructions.”

This corresponds to what Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009: 1) refer to as “[e]xploring the power of naming in the construction of historical and

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<sup>4</sup> We consider the introduction of Romance-derived toponyms and Romance-inspired patterns of toponym-formation a further manifestation of linguistic Romancisation in accordance with the model put forward in Stolz (2008).

contemporary landscapes”. Maps are texts in the linguistic sense of the term because it is possible to lie with maps (Monmonier 1996), i. e. messages can be conveyed via maps which are meant to manipulate the minds of the user of the map. Toponyms are used to this end. They constitute linguistic signs which have meaning beyond their purely referential function (cf. Radding and Western 2010: 399–401). Of special interest in this regard are, furthermore, the orthographic standardization and phonological differentiation effectuated by maps, as has been pointed out especially with respect to colonial contexts (cf. Zwinoira 1984: 26; Alexandre 1984: 53): “There are many and varied examples of mistakes made in maps” (Comevin 1984: 70). More generally, maps are not in every aspect truthful replicas of reality but have functions in addition to that of allowing the users to get their bearings spatially. Foremost among these superimposed functions is laying claim to a place. In their anthropological study of *Space, identity, and the politics of difference*, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) have identified these functions as a general principle:

Representations of space in the social sciences are remarkably dependent on images of break, rupture, and disjunction. The distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures is based upon a seemingly unproblematic division of space, on the fact that they occupy “naturally” discontinuous spaces. The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies.  
(Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 6)

Moreover, we adopt and modify a proposal of Nash’s (2013: 31–32) in the sense that we conceive of the spaces which are delimited by administrative boundaries as the habitat of ecologically-organized systems of toponyms. In contrast to Nash (2013), we are not dependent upon the insular character of the bounded spaces and so-called pristine naming. Toponyms form the population of the ecological system with human actors (cf. Guillorel 2008: 2) determining the dynamics within the ecological system by way of coining, using, and obliterating toponyms in conformity to predominantly extra-linguistic functions and values which are associated with the said toponyms – cf. Shohamy and Waksman’s (2009: 314) concept of Linguistic Landscapes as “symbolisms within a broad ecology”. Different groups of human agents with different goals may give rise to competition of different toponyms which refer to the same coordinates on the geographic map.

In the introduction to an edited volume dedicated to *Toponymie et Politique*, Guillorel (2008) states that:

[...] [n]ommer l’espace consiste à produire du territoire: la dénomination, en tant qu’elle contribue à la création d’un ordre symbolique [...] constitue un acte «territorialisant» constitutif. Cette cohérence renvoie à une certaine vision du monde et traduit dans le

même moment un processus d'appropriation. L'émergence des territorialités passe presque toujours par ces actes de dénomination, actes de langage. Les pratiques de territorialité et les pratiques langagières des groupes sociaux constituent des manifestations premières, identitaires du «vouloir vivre ensemble»: dès lors la toponymie, prise dans son acception la plus large possible, en tant qu'elle implique des stratégies de marquage et de contrôle d'un territoire, dans une langue donnée, peut-être considérée comme un acte «politique».

[...] naming space consists in creating territory: the denomination inasmuch it contributes to the creation of a symbolic order (...) constitutes a constitutive territorializing act. This coherence refers to a certain world-view and at the same time reveals a process of appropriation. The emergence of territorialities is achieved almost always via these acts of denomination, language-based activities. The practices of territoriality and the linguistic practices of social groups are first manifestations of identity of the wanting-to-live-together-kind: since then the toponymy, in the widest sense of the term, in as far as it implies strategies of marking and controlling a territory, in a given language, can be considered a political act.]

(Guillorell 2008: 1)

The imminent political character of toponyms comes to the fore especially in connection with colonialism and postcolonialism. Adebani (2012: 661), in his programmatic paper entitled *Glocal naming and shaming: toponymic (inter) national relations on Lagos and New York's streets*, emphasized this particular aspect: “[T]he practices and dynamics of place naming create opportunities for engaging with and responding to power, contesting or affirming positions and locations, mobilizing consent or dissent, remembering or forgetting, (re)articulating values, and pursuing interests in the context of local and global socio-political and economic processes.”

The colonizers claim the *droit de nommer* ‘the right to name’ as defined by Calvet (2002: 80–85). In many cases, this erstwhile privilege of the colonial nomenclature was challenged by postcolonial forces after independence. The *droit de nommer* was reclaimed not only for purely symbolic reasons but also because it epiphenomenally engenders the *droit de créer* ‘the right to create’, i. e. the possibility to create a new entity by way of renaming an old one. Naming is thus a strategy of place-making (cf. Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009: 7–11). A good summary of all these aspects is provided by Radding and Western (2010: 402) when they state that:

[...] [t]ranslations and other instances of toponymic replacement are usually imposed on a society by a political, often colonial, authority. By taking advantage of the importance of toponyms to communities, governments ask how a society can use toponyms to its advantage for power and political control: for example, how adventitious power – frequently colonizers – can change names to gain control of a people, or how a new government can choose names that aid in the establishment and legitimation of a state.

Therefore, the study of toponymy has a very strong sociolinguistic component since it involves the differential behavior of socially-defined groups of

people in connection to linguistic entities – in this case: place names. Place names are far more than linguistic equivalents of local denotata, they are propositions with a declarative function. They too have what Searle recently has described more generally as *deontic powers*: “That is, they carry rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements, and so on” (Searle 2010: 8–9); they meet the “constitutive rules” of the form “X counts as Y in context C” (Searle 2010: 10). A toponym in colonial context counts as an equivalent of an existing denotatum, even though it is the specific colonial reference that brings forth this place through the toponym in the first place. This creates an obvious tension between assertive form and declarative function: “sometimes we just linguistically treat or describe, or refer to, or talk about, or even think about an object in a way that creates a reality by representing that reality as created” (Searle 2010: 13). It is exactly this mechanism that is operative in colonial place names. Their use is assertive, their primary colonial function is declarative.

Furthermore, we assume that the introduction of toponyms which are patterned structurally according to an external model or which are material borrowings from a foreign language constitutes an instance of contact-induced language change. As far as we have been able to ascertain, toponyms have not been studied comprehensively within the framework of language contact studies. If speakers of language A use an item of language B to refer to a geographic entity in the sphere of the speech-community of A, the B-toponym clearly is a loanword in the lexicon of A-speakers. If the B-toponym coexists with an older or younger A-toponym, we are dealing with toponymic synonymy which might be exploited by the A-speakers for stylistic or other purposes.

For toponyms as a genuinely linguistic object we rely on Van Langendonck (2007) and more specifically on Nübling et al. (2012: 206–264). Our focus is on macro-toponyms, i. e. on the names of major geographic entities (especially names of cities, rivers, lakes, and coastal geographic entities) (cf. Weyers 2006: 14). We honor the orthographic conventions of our sources and present the examples in the written form in which they appear on maps and sundry documents (cf. Comevin 1984). The countries we look at more closely are Senegal (cf. Poltires 1964; Lespinay 1999), Mauritania (cf. Lewicki 1989), and the Western Sahara which form a neighborhood of independent states on the Atlantic coast of West Africa and share a colonial past in which France and Spain played an important role. We employ the Gizi map of Mauritania and neighboring countries (geographical, 1:1,750,000; published in 2009 in Budapest, Hungary) as our principal frame of reference throughout this article. It is referred to as “Gizi map” for short. For the toponymy of Senegal, we also make use of the revised map of the coastal countries of West Africa published in 2011 by the World Mapping Project in Bielefeld,

Germany (geographical, 1:2,200,000).<sup>5</sup> Since the field of colonial and postcolonial toponymy is vast and still largely terra incognita especially for Western Linguistics, we select two case studies to illustrate those aspects we want to highlight specifically. It goes without saying that there are many more equally interesting facets of our subject matter which, however, for reasons of space, cannot be touched upon in this study. It is understood that on the empirical side, too, this article can but scratch the surface. In practical terms this means that the toponyms to be discussed below cover only a small segment of the catalogue of place names of the countries under review. The gaps notwithstanding, we consider the cases which we are going to present to be representative of the general trends in the realm of colonial and postcolonial toponymy of the area we focus upon.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 looks in some detail at an example of the retention of a French toponym in the Senegal in postcolonial times. Section 3 widens the scope of our study in the sense that, on the one hand, it also involves evidence from a former Spanish colony in Africa and, on the other hand, focuses on a toponymic category which is different from that of the previous section. In Section 4 we present the conclusions that can be drawn on the basis of our data and outline possible follow-up projects.

For the sake of the argument, we formulate a somewhat naïve working hypothesis according to which both colonization and decolonization automatically trigger the replacement of established toponyms with new toponyms. From the subsequent paragraphs it will become evident immediately that this hypothesis is disproved easily. It is important, however, to highlight the dynamics which an examination of colonial and postcolonial toponymy should consider. Synchronic stocktaking alone does not take account adequately of the crucial characteristics of place-making dynamics and their geographical, historical, linguistic, and symbolic facets (cf. Batoma 2006: 1–2).

## 2 The saintly king's name

Our point of departure is a toponym which outwardly fits the pattern of eponymic toponyms referring to the hagiographic calendar of the Catholic Church as it is familiar, for instance, from the place-naming practice of the Spaniards in their

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is unnecessary to consult the two maps directly since all of the geographically crucial bits of information are given in the running text. Thus, we refrain from reproducing the maps in an appendix, not least because their size is incompatible with the format of the journal. Otherwise the maps would have to be downsized considerably for purely technical reasons so that their readability would be seriously impaired.



newly conquered colonies in the Americas (cf. Val Julián 2011: 74–78) where names of cities like *San Juan* (Puerto Rico), *San José* (Costa Rica), *San Miguel* (El Salvador), *Santa Elena* (Ecuador), etc. abound. These place names display the typical binary structure of colonial toponyms (Stolz and Warnke 2015). The toponym qua construction is made up of two constituents that give evidence of an internal hierarchical relation since *San/Santa* functions as modifier of the Christian name of the saint which in turn has internal head-status. Both of the constituents may be complex syntactically. The above cases are representative of exocentric constructions of the genitival/possessive type with a virtual external head which indicates the geographic class to which the entity belongs such as *Villa* ‘town’, *Puerto* ‘harbor’, *Ciudad* ‘city’, etc. That is why this external head is termed geo-classifier (Stolz and Warnke 2015). The construction type can be illustrated by bracketing as in e. g.  $[[[(Ciudad)_N]_{head} [(de)_{Prep} [San_{Adj} [Miguel]_N]_{head}]_{NP}]_{attribute}]_{toponym}$  with the indispensable elements in boldface, in the sense of “ $TA = N$ ” vs. “ $AN = N$ ” (Harris 1946: 180).<sup>6</sup> Structurally, the case we are about to discuss meets these criteria perfectly. The subsequent paragraphs, however, will reveal that our African example is special on other levels.

## 2.1 Two names for one

Let us examine the case of the coastal Senegalese city which goes by the name of *Saint-Louis*, located on the state boundary of Senegal and Mauretania marked by the Senegal River. Superficially the fact that the place name *Saint-Louis* is registered on maps does not seem to be worth remarking on – especially not from the standpoint of linguistics. However, as we will demonstrate shortly, the toponym *Saint-Louis* provides an ideal starting point for an in-depth discussion of crucial aspects of language in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

First of all, *Saint-Louis* is situated in a predominantly Wolof-speaking area of Senegal. Senegalese native speakers of Wolof declare that they normally would not use the toponym *Saint-Louis* (Mohamed Touré, personal communication) when they refer to the city which appears under this name on all of the maps we have consulted for the purpose of this study. What Wolof speakers

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<sup>6</sup> In this construction type, the geo-classifiers are not always purely virtual concepts. Frequently, long and short versions of the toponym coexist with the long version being used in ceremonially loaded situations. The short version however is in everyday use and typographically practical for being used in print on the maps. There is thus variation in correlation to the communication situation.

normally do can be gathered from example (1) in which the toponyms are marked in boldface.

- (1) Wolof (Malherbe and Cheikh Sall 1989: 73)  
*Ana woto yi jëm **Ndar**?*  
 where car which go **Saint-Louis**  
 ‘Where are the vehicles which go to **Saint-Louis**?’

In lieu of the toponym *Saint-Louis* which we know from the maps, the Wolof speakers employ the toponym *Ndar*. In reference to this Wolof toponym, two quotes are telling. First of all, Diop (1984: 104) mentions “the name of the Ndar Tut quarter in Saint-Louis”. Daff et al. (2006: 377) discuss the reduplicative construction *Ndar-Ndar* which in Wolof means the “Habitant [...] de Saint-Louis du Sénégal”. Impressionistically, *Saint-Louis* has a certain European flair about it whereas *Ndar* has not.

## 2.2 Exonym vs endonym

In connection to the toponymic ‘heritage’ or legacy of European colonialism in modern Senegal,<sup>7</sup> Malherbe and Cheikh Sall (1989: 85–86) note that:

[...] [l]es Portugais ont laissé quelques traces: les plus évidentes concernent **Rufisque** («rio fresco», la rivière froide) et **Sali Portugal**, village de la Petite Côte. Cependant Rufisque a aussi gardé son nom wolof de **Ten geej**. Les autres langues étrangères n’ont pas laissé davantage de noms de lieux: **Saint-Louis**, ainsi baptisé en l’honneur du roi de France, a gardé son nom wolof de Ndar et **Gorée**, dont le nom provient de celui de l’île néerlandaise de Goeree, s’appelle toujours **Bër** en wolof. Ainsi, la très grande majorité des noms de lieux sénégalais est d’origine africaine [...]. [original boldface]

[...]the Portuguese have left some traces: the most obvious ones are Rufisque (rio fresco, the cold stream) and Sali Portugal, a village on the Petite Côte. However Rufisque has also preserved its Wolof name Ten geej. The other foreign languages have not left more place names: Saint-Louis, named in honor of the king of France, has kept its Wolof name Ndar and Gorée, whose name goes back to that of the Dutch island of Goeree, is called Bër in Wolof today. Thus, the vast majority of the Senegalese place names are of African origin (...).]

What this quote suggests is that for Wolof-speaking Senegalese, the toponym *Saint-Louis* is not the first choice if they want to refer to the city under

<sup>7</sup> There is also evidence of Arabic toponyms in the Senegal the number of which does not seem to surpass that of the European toponymic relics in the same country (Malherbe and Cheikh Sall 1989: 85).

review.<sup>8</sup> For them, the toponym *Ndar* is the obvious choice evidently. However, on the above maps, no mention is made of this Wolof toponym. The absence of *Ndar* from the maps is the more remarkable since the cartographers who have drawn the Gizi map painstakingly list synonyms of toponyms in several languages (mostly Arabic and Hassaniya as, for example, *Aleg* = *Alak*, the administrative center of the Mauritanian province of Brakna) wherever they deem it necessary. On both of the above maps, *Saint-Louis* is marked as the capital of the Senegalese province of the same name, i. e. the toponym *Saint-Louis* may not only refer to an urban agglomeration but also to the much more extended northernmost Senegalese province *Saint-Louis* (formerly: *Fleuve* ‘River’). It is plausible to assume that the province has been baptized after the city – a practice which is very common in Senegal (e. g. the capital of the province *Louga* is the city *Louga*, that of the province *Diourbel* is *Diourbel*, etc.).

*Saint-Louis*, of course, is a toponym of French origin. According to Montagnon (1988: 43), French merchants and military forces sailed up the Senegal River for 25 km in 1658 where:

[...] ils prennent pied sur un îlot allongé, N'dar. Les indigènes ont déserté les lieux, persuadés que les mauvais esprits y séjournaient. Le souverain local concède volontiers l'endroit à bail contre une redevance annuelle [...]. L'année suivante (1659), les Français baptisent leur nouveau poste Saint-Louis en l'honneur de leur jeune roi, alors âgé de vingt ans.

[(...) they gained a foothold on an allongated island, N'dar. The indigenous inhabitants had deserted the place because they were convinced that bad ghosts haunted the place. The local ruler voluntarily ceded the place in exchange for an annual payment (...). The following year (1659), the French baptized their new position Saint-Louis in honor of their young king, who at that time was twenty years old.]

The toponym *Saint-Louis*, thus, is an undisputable product of French colonialism; the capital:

[...] de la Colonie du Sénégal constituée dans la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle par Faïdherbe et ses successeurs, capital de la Fédération d'Afrique Occidentale Française en 1895, Saint-Louis sera défaite, au profit de Dakar, de ses attributs d'autorité.

[Saint-Louis – (the capital) of the colony Senegal established in the second half of the 19th century by Faïdherbe and his successors, capital of the Federation of French West Africa in 1895 – would lose its attributes of authority to the benefit of Dakar.]

(Bonnardel 1993: 13)

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**8** For obvious reasons, we cannot check to what extent the pronunciation of the toponym Saint-Louis is subject to a process of Africanization. Kearns and Berg (2009: 171–172) argue that the pronunciation of toponyms may function as an indicator of linguistic appropriation, too.

The assumption suggests itself that it was meant to supercede and ultimately oust the traditional pre-colonial toponym *Ndar*. We know now that the intended replacement of *Ndar* with *Saint-Louis* has not been achieved since the two toponyms still coexist. Yet, the true nature of their continued coexistence needs to be determined.

As a matter of fact, we conceive of *Saint-Louis* as a paradigm-case of a category for which we adopt the label “exonym” as opposed to *Ndar*, which represents the complementary category of “endonyms”. Exonyms are place names which are coined by and/or used in communication with foreigners whereas endonyms are place names which originate within the community of people living at or near the place thus named. It should be taken into account that endonyms in their orthographic form are often shaped through a filter of European phonology; thus what sounds autochthonous or indigeneous is not always so.<sup>9</sup> This is a central problem of postcolonial toponomastics:

Variations frequently occur, however, in cases where a toponym is cited in the context of different languages, e.g. Muqdisho (Somali), Mogadishu (English), Mogadiscio (Italian), Mogdischu (German). At the same time, toponyms often become fixed in forms which are inaccurate. (Dalby 1984: 81)<sup>10</sup>

This problem also shows with ethnonyms such as indigenous<sub>1</sub> *Borooro* and indigenous<sub>2</sub> *Pullo Buruure* vs. French *Peul Bouroure* or anthroponyms such as indigenous *Aski Suleymaan* vs. English *Askia Sulaiman* and French *Aksia Souleymane* (cf. Diagne 1984: 15–16). The boundary between endonyms and exonyms can more easily be drawn etymologically than phonologically.

### 2.3 In a multilingual country

Today Senegal forms part of the Francophonie.<sup>11</sup> The state language of Senegal is French. Therefore, a French toponym does not seem to be at odds at all with the official linguistic doctrine of the country. From the standpoint of the

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<sup>9</sup> The external reviewers draw our attention to the fact that not only in other regions of Africa, European phonology does not always explain the reshaping of endonyms. It may be the case that all the sounds which form part of the phonological chain of the endonym also exist as such in the language of the colonizer. Still, the colonial administration changed the endonym at least slightly. This is a topic worthwhile studying more closely in follow-up studies on colonial and postcolonial toponymy.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the official German version of the toponym is *Mogadischu*.

<sup>11</sup> For an early critical account of the concept of Francophonie, we refer to Calvet (2002: 284–292).

Francophonie, what is striking is the fact that there are no other French toponyms on the Gizi map of modern Senegal.<sup>12</sup> However, Senegal is multilingual with six so-called national languages which enjoy official recognition alongside the state language French. The number of French native-speakers is relatively small. As a foreign language, French is said to be mastered actively by about 10 percent of the population (with passive knowledge of the state language being relatively widely spread among the Senegalese). In contrast, 40 percent of the inhabitants of the country speak Wolof natively. About 80 percent of all Senegalese are believed to have a decent knowledge of Wolof (cf. Malherbe and Cheikh Sall 1989: 22). In a demographic situation of this kind, it would make perfect sense to employ the Wolof toponym exclusively. On the other hand, it is by no means clear which of the two toponyms or perhaps which other toponym is employed by Senegalese native speakers of the other national languages Pulaar, Serer, Diola, Malinke, and Soninke.

## 2.4 Historic symbolism

In the above quotes the motivation of the early French colonizers to baptize their first foothold on the Senegal River *Saint-Louis* is given as an act of reverence to Louis XIV, the French king at the time of the foundation of the colony. However, we consider it more likely that *Saint-Louis* is a commemorative anthroponymic toponym which refers to the French king Louis IX aka Saint Louis (canonised as Catholic saint in 1297). The choice of patron for the newly established fortress is very telling ideologically. Louis IX (1214–1270) was the only Christian king to lead two disastrous crusades against Muslim states on the North African coast – the 6th crusade against Egypt in 1250 and the 7th crusade in 1270 against Tunisia (cf. Asbridge 2010: 577–610 and 639–641). With the name of the saintly French king implanted on African soil in an at that time already partly Muslim cultural ambient, the French made a very clear political statement, namely that it was their intention to continue the work initiated by their national hero of the thirteenth century, i. e. to claim parts of Africa for Christianity (and for France, of course). In this sense, the toponym *Saint-Louis* is rich with symbolic content. It is from this place that the French conquered the entire Senegal and adjacent areas in a series of campaigns initiated

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**12** In the province of *Saint-Louis*, there is also the city called *Richard Toll* which is a hybrid formation which involves the European proper name *Richard* and the Wolof common noun *toll* ‘garden’. Its compositional meaning is given as *Richard’s garden* (Malherbe and Cheikh Sall 1989: 86), although the normal word-order of head and attribute in possessive noun-noun constructions is exactly the opposite as can be seen from syntagms like *jabari borom kër* = {wife} {lord} {house} ‘the landlord’s wife’ (Peace Corps 1995: 19) which are clearly right-branching.

as late as 1852 under the leadership of Léon Faidherbe (cf. Montagnon 1988: 125–136). *Saint-Louis* remained the capital of the French possessions in the Senegal and Mauritania until 1902 when *Dakar* was made capital city of Senegal. It cannot be denied that the toponym carries a considerable historic burden insofar as it is a manifest symbol of the erstwhile French dominion in the West Atlantic region of Africa.

Given that the toponym *Saint-Louis* invokes associations of this kind, the question arises why it has survived the end of the colonial regime of France. With the Wolof toponym *Ndar*, there has always been an excellent candidate for replacing *Saint-Louis* in the postcolonial process of Africanization. Note also that *Guet N'Dar* ~ *Guet Ndar* is the name of one of the poorest quarters of *Saint-Louis*. There are several possible explanations which probably form a multi-causal network. On the one hand, for the communication within the Wolof speech-community, the need does not arise to replace anything because *Ndar* has always been the preferred option. It is an endonym par excellence, i. e. a toponym that is used largely with members of the local community. The toponym *Saint-Louis*, however, has developed into a handy exonym, i. e. a toponym that is employed in external communication (for instance, with foreigners). Evidence for this is the automatic substitution of *Saint-Louis*, *Region Saint-Louis*, *Senegal* for *Ndar Senegal*, when accessing Google Maps from a German location. Even though the database contains the Wolof toponym in the background, a corresponding mapping gets suppressed. In a way, *Saint-Louis* appears on the maps because these maps are made by and intended for people who do not form part of the in-group of Wolof-speakers. Thus, we can speak of a division of labor between the endonym *Ndar* employed locally and the exonym *Saint-Louis*, the domain of which is interethnic and international communication. One might object that the officialization of *Ndar* to the detriment of *Saint-Louis* would not have impaired international communication substantially since other Senegalese cities like *Kaolack*, *Mbour*, *Tambacounda*, etc. can be referred to only by their African names – a fact that does not seem to form an obstacle in international relations.

## 2.5 Beyond symbolic value

We assume that there is another reason for the retention of the toponym *Saint-Louis*. On the official website of this Senegalese city ([www.saintlouisdusenegal.com](http://www.saintlouisdusenegal.com)), several places of touristic interest are mentioned among which the bridge *Pont Faidherbe* is prominently featured. This is a dromonym which belongs to the class of micro-toponyms (cf. Nübling et al. 2012: 243–250) and thus falls outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, advertising Saint-Louis by way of

highlighting a bridge that commemorates the French conqueror of the Senegal is telling. With reference to the colonial and postcolonial history of street names in Dakar, Bigon (2008: 498) concludes that “[a]fter the independence, colonial paradigms regarding the naming of streets have tended to persist, though their contents were occasionally modified so as to correspond with post-colonial views in matters of paying homage to individual personalities.”

With reference to Bigon (2008: 479), it should be taken into consideration that “the physical landscape is, to a great extent, an outcome of representational and ideological realms of the involved interest groups, and a contested sphere of the memories and invented traditions of these groups.” Bigon also poses the (unanswered) question whether the persistence of French street names (and by extension, French toponyms in general) is a sign of “neglect and indifference on the part of the Senegalese government and people” or the effect of “the relatively peaceful decolonization process that characterized most of the countries of francophone West Africa” (Bigon 2008: 496). A not too far-fetched answer to these questions could be that the French connection is an economic asset that needs to be heeded. The French toponyms invoke the common past of Senegalese and French and at the same time they serve as attractors for not only historically motivated French tourism. Kostanski (2011) argues that toponyms can be an important factor in what she calls place branding, i. e. the creation of a label which can be used for economic purposes such as making a given place a destination for tourists.

The first case study is suggestive of a very complex situation. It is clear that decolonization does not blindly trigger the renaming of places which bear a colonial name even if there is already a toponymic replacement available which is identical to the pre-colonial toponym. The symbolic load of the toponym *Saint-Louis* notwithstanding, the ecological balance of synonymous endonym and exonym remains unaltered after independence. In the Senegalese toponymic landscape, apart from *Saint-Louis*, there are not many examples of cities which bear an entirely French name. This exceptional status might be invoked as one of the factors which safeguard the survival of the colonial toponym in the sense that the infrequency of cases like that of *Saint-Louis* does not challenge seriously the African character of the Senegalese map – at least for what concerns the toponyms of settlements.

### 3 On the margins

Saint-Louis is located on the *Grande Côte* of Senegal. In point of fact, on our reference maps, the major sections of the Senegalese coastline are identified with their French designations *Grande Côte* (which stretches from Dakar northwards to

Saint-Louis) and *Petite Côte* (to the South of Dakar). If we cast a glance further to the North to Mauritania and the Western Sahara, we notice that traces of the French and Spanish colonial past of these countries are still discernible especially from the coastal toponymy.<sup>13</sup> The constructions of these toponyms are of a type different from that discussed in the previous section. Toponyms like *Cap Manuel* and *Cap Vert* ‘Cape Verde’ (both near Dakar) represent endocentric constructions with an internal head. The constructions may be of the genitival/possessive type as e. g. [**Cap**<sub>N</sub>]<sub>head</sub> [(de)<sub>Prep</sub> [**Manuel**<sub>N</sub>]<sub>NP</sub>]<sub>attribute</sub>]<sub>toponym</sub> or of the property-assigning type as e. g. [**Cap**<sub>N</sub>]<sub>head</sub> [**Vert**<sub>Adj</sub>]<sub>attribute</sub>]<sub>toponym</sub>. In terms of linear order, the toponymic construction may be either left-headed (like *Cap Manuel*) or right-headed (like *Grande Côte*). Incidentally, all of the examples we are going to discuss below are left-headed.

### 3.1 Mauritania

Like its neighbor Senegal, Mauritania is a member of the Francophonie. On the Mauritanian coast, there are a number of capes whose denomination is very instructive for the issue at hand because there is variation as to which language provides the toponym. We find the following constellations of facts on the Gizi map:

- Monolingual French as in the case of *Cap Sainte-Anne*;
- Arabic/Berber<sup>14</sup> formations like *Râs Timirist*, *Râs Tafarit*, *Râs Iouïk*;
- Arabic-French doublets like *Râs Nouâdhibou* = (*Cap Blanc*) and *Râs Agâdîr* = (*Cap d’Arguin*) – in both cases the French version appears in brackets underneath the Arabic version;
- French-Arabic hybrids like *Cap Alzaz*.

The French geo-classifier *cap* ‘cape’ and the Arabic geo-classifier *râs* ‘cape; head’ are functional equivalents of each another. The constructions in which they appear above display largely the same syntactic properties (but cf. Section 3.2). It

<sup>13</sup> We pass over the fact that the name of the country *Mauritania* itself is an example of a European-made toponym as it reflects the transfer of the name of the two Mauritanian provinces of the Roman Empire (which happened to coincide with the northern Moroccan Rif-region) onto an African country which was never under Roman control.

<sup>14</sup> Many of the autochthonous toponyms are probably of Berber origin or contain a Berber component. To keep the discussion within reasonable bounds, we do not differentiate the Arabic stratum from the older Berber stratum since this would require an expertise which we cannot pretend to be equipped with. What can be said nevertheless is that the Arabic layer of the Mauritanian toponymy is also an example of toponymic colonialism.



is therefore easy to translate word by word from one language into the other. Given this structural and semantic equivalence, it strikes the eye that not all of the French toponyms have been replaced with Arabic/Berber toponyms after independence. In the case of *Cap Sainte-Anne*, religious reasons might be responsible for why a formation like \**Râs (Sainte-)Anne* is impossible. In this fictitious toponym, the name of a Christian saint functions as attribute of an Arabic geo-classifier so that a clash of the language associated with Islam and the language associated with Christianity is created. However, why is there no entirely Arabic substitute for *Cap Sainte-Anne* which excludes any reference to the Christian saint? Moreover why are some French toponyms kept as secondary designations of places which otherwise are referred to with Arabic/Berber toponyms?

On closer inspection, we recognize that (partly) French toponyms are at their very strongest exactly in the coastal regions of Mauritania. We take note especially of the following toponyms:

- Islands: *Île d'Arguin*, *Île Arel*, *Île Tidra*, *Île Kiji*, *Île Cheddar*.
- Peninsulas: ***Presqu'île du Cap Blanc***; *Presqu'île de Thila*.
- Bays: ***Baie de l'Étoile***, ***Baie de Saint-Jean***; *Baie de Tanoudert*, *Baie d'Aouatif*.

Those of the toponyms which appear in bold are entirely French. There is again the name of a Christian saint involved in the formation of monolingual French toponyms. In all of the above cases, the geo-classifier is French. The attributive noun is Arabic/Berber in eight out of eleven cases. However, in four of these bilingual formations, these Arabic/Berber elements come as the complement noun of an attributive prepositional phrase headed by the French preposition *de* 'of'. This means that the matrix language which provides the morphosyntactic template for the formation of the toponyms is basically French. On the Gizi map, there are only two Arabic/Berber toponyms of bays which do not also involve French elements, namely *Dakhlet Nouâdhibou* and *Dakhlet Agâdîr*.

Outside the coastal region, French is also employed in the realm of hydronyms insofar as the geo-classifier *lac* 'lake' is consistently combined with an Arabic/Berber attribute as in e. g. *Lac Rkîz*, *Lac de Mâl* and *Lac d'Aleg*. In addition, we find toponyms like *Barrage de Foum Gleïta* and *Marais de Toumbos* with the French geo-classifiers *barrage* 'reservoir' and *marais* 'swamp', respectively. In contrast, rivers and wadis are registered on the map with the Arabic geo-classifiers *gorgol* 'river', *khatt* 'ditch' or *oued* 'wadi', etc. as in *Gorgol el Abiođ*, *Khatt el 'Ogol*, and *Oued Katchi*. In the mountains, French provides the geo-classifier *passé* 'pass' for the vast majority of passes as e. g. *Passe de Ouarardra*, *Passe de Djouk*, *Passe de Soufa*, etc. The bilingual designation of *Khang Acheft* (= *Passe d'Acheft*) is exceptional. Mountains as such normally bear Arabic/Berber names frequently involving the Arabic geo-classifier *tarf* 'endpoint, peak' or *guelb* 'hill'. Once more, what should be

considered here are the difficulties of codification practices on the part of colonial officials, whose toponymic codifications are not unproblematic. Martonne (1930: 400) gives an account of colonial difficulties in searching for landscape landmarks, and provides a striking example of orthographic confusion: “Parmi ces point, la Mauritanie proposait *Guelb-el-Abd* comme particulièrement important à son point de vue, et le Sénégal tenait pour un point d’eau désigné sur les cartes des cercles par *Galibalabidi*” [Mauritania put forward *Guelb-el Abd* as one of these points of particular importance from its point of view; whereas Senegal insisted on a water-hole shown on the route maps as *Galibalabidi* (translation from Cornevin 1984: 70)]. These toponyms seem to be very different but on closer inspection it turns out that they are not: “le second mot ayant exactement les mêmes syllabes que le premier, ou du moins les mêmes consonnes suivies de voyelles de liaison qui, étant toujours assez sourdes dans la prononciation indigène, avaient été notés différemment” [the second word has exactly the same syllables as the first, or at least the same consonants followed by linking vowels, which are always indistinct in the local pronunciation and has therefore been written down differently (translation from Cornevin 1984: 70)] (Martonne 1930: 401). In reference to this report, Cornevin (1984: 70) concludes that “[i]n the example given by Lieutenant-Colonel de Martonne, the French officials in Mauritania and the French Sudan had written down the same place-name differently.” However, isolated cases like *Aiguille de Mzarellit* with French *aiguille* ‘needle’ can be found in several districts of Mauretania. Salt flats, deserts, mountain ranges, water wells, etc. give evidence exclusively of Arabic/Berber toponyms.

This holds also for the vast majority of cities and villages. Two notable exceptions to this rule are *Cansado* on the *Presqu’île du Cap Blanc* and the city *Jreïda* = (*Coppolani*) situated at a short distance to the north of the capital city *Nouakchott*. *Cansado* stands out from the cases discussed so far as it is of Spanish origin (< *cansado* ‘tired’). The second case, i. e. the double toponym *Jreïda* = (*Coppolani*) is interesting because the bracketed version commemorates the French conqueror of vast parts of Mauretania, Xavier Coppolani, who died on duty in 1905 (cf. Montagnon 1988: 352–353). Thus, a hero of the French colonialism is enregistered on the map of independent Mauretania albeit only as a secondary alternative. From the point of view of postcolonialism, the retention of this toponym seems to be a paradox especially since, once more there is already an Arabic/Berber toponym available. There are several precedents for getting rid of the names of colonial heroes. The namesake of the Senegalese *Saint-Louis* in northwestern Algeria changed its French name *Saint-Louis* to *Boufatiss* in 1962 when Algeria gained its independence from France (cf. Room 2002: 26). The capital of Tchad was formerly called *Fort-Lamy* after Amédée François Lamy, the leader of the French military expedition which

claimed the Tchad for France. Thirteen years after independence, the new name *N'Djamena* of doubtful Arabic origin has replaced the French-derived typically colonial toponym (cf. Guillourel 2008: 7–9).

The idea might arise that the many toponymic traces of the French past of Mauritania have a purely practical explanation. Since the Gizi map is made in Hungary, we can rule out the possibility that we are dealing with a map produced by French cartographers. However, the possibility remains that the map addresses a French public specifically and thus caters to their linguistic expectations. This hypothesis is most probably erroneous, too, because all additional, touristically crucial information on the map is in English. The N3, for instance, bears the French name *Route de l'Espoir* for which an English parallel version *Route of Hope* is given in brackets. Where ferries cross the *Senegal River*, we sometimes find the information *Not for vehicles* in English. Further English snippets on the map are *B2 Beach*, *Religious centre*, *Old town*, *Ancient ksour*, *Iron ore train*, as well as the identification of the minerals which are exploited in a given area such as *Copper*, *Gold*, *Phosphate*, etc. To our minds, this is sufficient evidence of the Gizi map being intended for an international readership – not necessarily a French-speaking audience. What this also means is that the Gizi map considers the (partly) French toponyms to be the actual toponyms of the places they indicate. Postcolonial toponomastics, therefore, has to include an analysis of mapmaking, for the cartographers have also produced numerous problems in official place-making. Alexandre (1984) observes this with respect to African ethnonyms:

Close examination of an ethnic map of Africa reveals the presence of a number of non-existent peoples, and likewise the absence of existing peoples. A great many mistakes and a variety of solecisms by early cartographers have been perpetuated with the result that some peoples have ended up by getting used to two names: the one by which they call themselves and the administrative or official name.

(Alexandre 1984: 64)

### 3.2 The Western Sahara

Similarly, the remnants of Spanish names on the mapped territory of the Western Sahara must be understood as those which the Gizi map takes to be the “real” names of the places.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to see that, in the Western Sahara, we find a distribution of (partly) Spanish and Arabic toponyms which closely resembles that

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<sup>15</sup> The Gizi map shows the Western Sahara as a distinct independent country. However, presently, the territory of this country is still occupied by Moroccan forces. We ignore whether or not the Moroccan authorities have interfered with the toponymic system of the Western Sahara. It is equally unclear to us to what extent the Gizi map might take account of any

of (partly) French and Arabic/Berber toponyms in Mauritania. During the Spanish colonial regime (1885–1976),<sup>16</sup> the bulk of the territory of today's Western Sahara was referred to as *Rio de Oro*. The Arabic equivalent *Oued edh Dheheb* 'River of Gold' is given as the name of the southern region of the Western Sahara. This name resounds also in the contemporary Arabic *Khlij Oued edh Dheheb* 'Mouth of the River of Gold' (Spanish *Bahia de Rio de Oro*) which designates the huge bay near the headland on which the important port of Hassaniya *Dakhla* = (Arabic *Ad Dāḥlah*) '(The) Entrance' is situated. In Spanish times, this city was baptized *Villa Cisneros* after the Spanish cleric Gonzalo Jiménez de Cisneros. This Spanish toponym is loaded symbolically because it not only invokes the Spanish claim to the territory but also gives rise to associations with the Christian faith. It is unsurprising therefore that this Spanish toponym has disappeared from the map of the Western Sahara<sup>17</sup> like practically all other Spanish-derived names of settlements (which were never very numerous anyway). *Playa* has been replaced with *El Marsa*, *Las Huertas* has become *Nouayfadh*. An exception is *La Guera* the southernmost city of the Western Sahara situated on the *Presqu'île du Cap Blanc*. As to the names of settlements, the map of the Western Sahara has been de-Hispanicized completely.

It comes as a surprise though that the Gizi Map of 2009 offers a plethora of Spanish names for segments of the shore without indicating any equivalent Arabic toponym. The situation is reminiscent of that reported for the (partly) French coastal toponyms in Mauritania. Among other cases, we find names such as:

- *Cap Boujdour Nord*, *Cap Barbas*, *Cap Corbeiro*, *Cap Dubouchage*.
- ***Punta Siete Cabos***, *Punta Durnford*.
- *Puntilla de las Raimas*, ***Puntilla Negra***.
- ***Golfe de Cintra***.
- ***Morro Falcon***.

Boldface marks out those toponyms which are entirely Spanish. All of the toponyms of the above list reflect the binary structure to which we have referred

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toponymic changes introduced by the Moroccan administration. Not only for this article we conceive of the Western Sahara as an independent country of its own.

<sup>16</sup> Originally, the Spanish possessions were divided in two distinct entities, namely the *Rio de Oro* properly speaking and the northern region of *Saguia el Hamra*. In the short period of Spanish rule, the colonies underwent several administrative reforms such that ultimately they came to be united under the designation *África Occidental Española* (Besenyó 2010). The regions of *Sidi Ifni* and *Rio Juby* temporarily constituted separate administrative units. For the particulars of the history of Spanish colonialism in the Western Sahara we refer the reader to the account given by Vilar (1977).

<sup>17</sup> One of the Saharai informants interviewed by Tarkki (1998: 274) continually uses the Spanish toponym *Villa Cisneros*. This elderly man shows that he knows the origin of the toponym and its equivalence to the modern toponym *Hassaniya Dakhla*.

repeatedly in the previous paragraphs. Eight of the ten cases are names of capes, spits of land, headlands. In six out of the ten cases, the geo-classifier is a bona fide Spanish word, namely *golfe* ‘gulf’, *morro* ‘rock’, *punta* ‘point’, and *puntilla* ‘little point’ all of which are employed for toponymic purposes throughout the Hispanic world. Strikingly, in four cases, the French geo-classifier *cap* ‘cape’ occurs in lieu of the expected Spanish *cabo* ‘cape’. In our opinion, the use of the French item is probably not the deliberate attempt at de-Hispanicizing the Western Saharan map but the effect of the cartographers’ overgeneralization of the French *cap* ‘cape’ which is employed repeatedly for points on the Mauritanian and Senegalese coast (cf. Section 3.1).

The attributes in the above complex toponyms are Spanish in the case of *barbas* ‘beard’, *cintra* ‘curve, sweep’, *falcon* ‘falcon’, *negra* ‘black’, and *siete cabos* ‘seven heads’. There are proper names such as *Dubouchage*, *Durnford*, and *Corbeiro* which are of French, English, and Portuguese origin, respectively. The pluralized noun-phrase *las raimas* is opaque to us as we have not been able to identify any Spanish word *\*raima(s)*. *Boujdour* = (*Bū Jaydūr*) is the Hassaniya/Arabic name of the nearby city. The specification of the compass direction which accompanies this toponym cannot be Spanish otherwise we would expect to find *Norte* ‘North’. It is likely that *Nord* ‘North’ is again an overgeneralization of French components of toponyms.

Discounting the etymological uncertainties – which do not decrease, considering the problems of frequently flawed records and difficulties of transcription, as sketched out above – what we can state is that toponyms which are associated with the language of the former colonizers are concentrated on the coast. This corresponds with the analysis of African state names by Sales (1991), who shows “how coastal and island states, because of their early contact with the Europeans had European names bestowed upon them, in contrast to the landlocked countries, most of which had kept their African names” (quoted after Batoma [2006: no pagination]). In the interior of the country, no toponymic traces of the Spanish dominion are discernible on the Gizi map. Settlements bear names which can be classified as Hassaniya, Arabic, or Berber. Like in Mauritania salt flats, wadis, and mountains have non-European names such as *Sebkhet el Kourziyât*, *Oued Assaq*, and *Gleïb Ayouerat*. In a way, the Spanish toponymic relics can be found in the region where the Spaniards first set foot on Western Saharan ground. Much the same holds for the French toponyms in Mauritania. They occupy a section of the periphery of the space which hosts the ecological system of toponyms of the countries under inspection. However, what matters is not only their location in the geographic sense of the term. There is also a difference of oiconyms vs anoiconyms (cf. Nübling et al. 2012: 206). Toponyms which refer to inhabited places are treated differently from those which refer to uninhabited places. In contrast to

categories of the coastal topography, urban agglomerations, villages and settlements in general seem to rank higher on the socio-psychological hierarchy and thus are primary candidates for being re-baptized. Settled places are of high social importance because potentially huge numbers of people inhabit them and the powers that be have to interact with them on a regular basis. Therefore, it makes sense to exert at least some kind of symbolic control over them by way of imposing a toponym – either in the process of colonization or in that of decolonization. Oiconyms are thus in the focus of attention of those who are in charge of toponymic planning whereas anoiconyms are relegated to the background where they may survive for a very long time.

### 3.3 Mixed messages

Our second case-study corroborates the findings of the previous case-study, namely that decolonization does not affect all kinds of colonial toponyms to the same extent. There are colonial toponyms which escape being replaced for a considerable time span. In contrast to the Senegalese case of *Saint-Louis*, however, the examples from Mauritania and the Western Sahara cannot be explained as strategies of economically-motivated place-branding. Place names may go unnoticed because they belong to a category which is by no means as prominent as that of oiconyms. Stretches of land which are underpopulated if at all are not in the centre of attention of politicians especially if these areas also fail to offer any economic advantages. The lack of mineral resources seems to be general in the coastal districts of Mauritania and the Western Sahara. *Saint-Louis* is privileged insofar as it is one of the biggest urban centres of Senegal with a high potential as touristic destination. It is thus visible and valuable. For the *Morro Falcon*, for instance, no such advantages can be argued for. It is almost invisible and largely devoid of value. The French and Spanish toponyms can be tolerated in the ecological system of Mauritanian and Western Saharan toponymy because they are not important enough to put a threat to the overall character of these systems. In sum, the two case-studies are indicative of diametrically opposed factors which nevertheless may have similar effects on the toponymy.

## 4 Little white lies

To prepare the ground for drawing conclusions from the above presentation, it is necessary to answer the crucial question of whether or not the maps to which we refer are lying. The answer is that the maps do not really lie but they do not tell

the whole truth, either. As a matter of fact, the maps pass tacitly over some aspects of African reality. We agree with Monmonier (1996) who argues that:

[...] [n]aming can be a powerful weapon of the cartographic propagandist. Place-names, or *toponyms*, not only make anonymous locations significant elements of the cultural landscape but also offer strong suggestions about a region's character and ethnic allegiance. Although many maps not intending a hint of propaganda might insult or befuddle local inhabitants by translating a toponym from one language to another [...] or by attempting a phonetic transliteration from one language to another [...] and even from one alphabet to another [...], skillful propagandists have often altered map viewers' impressions of multi-ethnic cultural landscapes by suppressing the toponymic influence of one group and inflating that of another. (Monmonier 1996: 110–111, original italics)

The Gizi map is certainly not meant to do anybody's propaganda. It is a goodwill attempt at representing the African geography as objectively as possible. The objectivity however is achieved only to some extent.

The existence of the well-established though unofficial Wolof toponym *Ndar* is ignored by the maps. Nash (2013: 82–87) makes a distinction between official and unofficial toponyms the former being associated frequently with a colonial situation. The official toponyms are gazetted, i. e. they occur in print in governmental registers and on maps whereas the unofficial toponyms often belong to the sphere of oral communication in situ: “The colonial powers gave names to places on maps and in official gazettes which were not always the same as the indigenous names” (Cornevin 1984: 77). The coexistence of the two categories of toponyms (in Jamaica) is described by Higman and Hudson (2009) as follows:

Very often, official names are used alongside local and informal names, the two combined into a system of reference that does not need to respect or recognize any difference in the validity of one or the other. [...] [I]nformal place names, not inscribed on any map, can easily find their way into the public record and as a consequence come to possess an “official” or legal status through their customary role in spatial reference. (Higman and Hudson 2009: 258, original inverted commas)

We assume that the cartographers of the Gizi map are dependent upon the availability of official registers of toponyms, i. e. gazetted place names. Accordingly, the map hosts overwhelmingly those names which reflect governmental toponymic decisions. Top-down language policy in the realm of toponymy may be superimposed on the toponymy as used in everyday communication by members of a country's society. Superimposition means that there might be a huge gap between what the government wants to be registered on the map and what the map would look like if unofficial toponyms had been taken account of. At the same time, governments might direct their toponymic activities towards places which enjoy a certain prominence because of their social, economic, and/or political importance



so that new official (= postcolonial) toponyms for less important places simply have not been created yet. What manifests itself in the toponymic structure is what has been raised as a fundamental question of the places of postcolonial spaces: “To which places do the hybrid cultures of postcoloniality belong?” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7). In case unofficial toponyms are not accessible to the cartographers, the best they can do is resorting to the official toponyms of the colonial period.

There are thus different reasons for the retention of colonial toponyms on the maps. Sometimes they are conserved deliberately because of economic or other advantages associated with their retention. In other cases they are retained by some kind of “oversight” caused by exactly the opposite of the prior factor, i. e. by the lack of prominence or importance. There seem to be no strictly linguistic reasons which favor or inhibit the retention of colonial toponyms just as there are no strictly linguistic reasons which trigger or block the creation of postcolonial toponyms.

The results of our above case-studies are still preliminary. It is clear that the ultimate answer to some of the questions of the colonial and postcolonial toponymy of the countries under scrutiny is achievable only if the socio-historic and cultural background of the multilingual societies is studied comprehensively. We have not addressed the possibility of the language of the former colonizer functioning as a neutral language in an otherwise multilingual setting in which giving precedence to one of the competing ethnic languages in the realm of national toponymy is bound to create political problems for the postcolonial government. Similarly, the socio-political context may be a factor to take account of, too, insofar as the replacement of an erstwhile colonial exonym with an endonym is associated with an ousted political regime so that the new government re-establishes the colonial exonym in order to delete all traces of the previous regime. These are topics for more comprehensive follow-up studies.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore it is insufficient to discuss the toponymic history of only selected individual places. To understand what has been going on in ecologically-organized toponymic systems, it is a must to widen the empirical scope to cover a country’s toponymy in its entirety, better yet, not only to cover individual countries but different colonial power areas. Moreover, the evaluation of colonial and postcolonial toponymies becomes especially valuable if it is conducted in a comparative perspective which extends over as broad a range of cases as possible. Previous studies by Mota (1950) and Metzeltin (1977) demonstrate that Portuguese colonial toponyms in West Africa can be studied systematically. We are confident that the same holds language-independently for all kinds of colonial situations. The survey of African toponyms provided by Kirchherr (1987), Mückler’s (2015) inventory

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**18** We gladly acknowledge that these ideas about the missing pieces of our typology of colonial and postcolonial toponymy are inspired by the comments of our anonymous reviewers.



of place-name changes in Oceania, and our own overview of German colonial toponyms (Stolz and Warnke 2015) support this hypothesis. We therefore intend to continue our project by way of testing the preliminary and superficially contradictory results of our above case-studies against the evidence not only from other examples of French and Spanish colonialism in Africa but also from the toponymic practice of other Romance-speaking colonizers such as Belgium, Italy, and Portugal. We take up the discussion about African toponyms which had been initiated already in the 1980s in the larger framework of the UNESCO project of the *General history of Africa* and which has not resulted in the desired and planned systematic research; we thus refer to a desideratum that has long been formulated but has found surprisingly marginal response. Further follow-up studies are meant to transcend the Romance sphere and also go far beyond the boundaries of Africa to include the toponymic effects of and the postcolonial reactions to the linguistic colonialism of countries such as Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, the UK, and the USA in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. To this end, it is paramount to take stock of the colonial and postcolonial toponyms in the first place.

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