

Dual naming as a mechanism to recognize multiple identities; Casablanca or Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā

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Keywords: dual-naming, identity, toponymy

Introduction

For linguistic and toponymic research, a city is a heterogeneous place that provides linguistic (language), geographic (space), and historical (collective memory of people) implications. The toponym plays a crucial role as it is the easiest and most accessible way to locate a place on a map. Moreover, toponyms are indispensable keys for accessing information in our globalized digital world, and are significant factors of efficient communication worldwide.

There are, in North Africa, several toponymic layers having relation with the languages of the populations which have followed one another in this region; ancient and modern Berber, Phoenician, Punic, Latin, Arabic, French, and Spanish. Morocco undoubtedly has a rich toponymic heritage due to the diversity of referents and references used in the denomination of its places and territories.

Morocco displays a multilingual landscape; two mother tongues: Moroccan Arabic Dialect and Amazigh (Berber), and two non-native languages: classical Arabic and French. The presence of these two non-maternal languages can be explained from the historical and ideological point of view. That of classical Arabic being mainly motivated by the ideological options of the country in terms of cultural policy after its independence: an orientation towards an exclusively Arab identity which will be translated by virulent Arabization policies, conceived as a gesture of completion of national independence. Commonly, the modification of colonial names is driven by the desire to obliterate any prior colonial history implying the nonexistence, or unimportance, or unwelcomeness of that period. Tuan (1991: 688) has noted that "normally only a socio-political revolution would bring about a change of name ... the new name itself has the power to wipe out the past and call forth the new." Hence, the independence of the country will Arabize the names introduced by the colonial power while maintaining the Latin spelling in the transcription of local names.



Figure 1: Map showing the bilingual transcription of the place names

However, the city of *Casablanca* preserved both its colonial and Arabized variant as the official form; *Casablanca*/الدار البيضاء (Romanized: Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā). Toponymy's goal is essentially to provide a clear reference in order to distinguish geographical entities. Consequently, what would be the effect of dual naming? Several individuals of diverse backgrounds are unacquainted with the fact that *Casablanca* and *Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā* refer to the same place. Moreover, one would think that it would be more obvious for Arabic speakers, however, most Arabs do not relate *Casablanca* to *Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā*, unless prior knowledge existed.

Casablanca, the largest city of Morocco, and the only one to hold dual naming is founded by the Phoenicians and was previously denominated Anfa (meaning hill in Amazigh). Later, when the Portuguese ruled the city in the 15th century, they changed the name to 'Casa Branca' meaning white house. It then became *Casa Blanca* after the Portuguese were integrated into the Spanish kingdom. In 1755, it was renamed *Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā* after it was rebuilt by sultan Mohammed ben Abdellah.

Method

Questionnaires will target Moroccans, particularly the inhabitants of *Casablanca*. A sociolinguistic approach is also taken into account, targeting variants such as age, gender, and class, in order to investigate the attitudes towards the dual naming, and the choice of a superior or more appropriate variant. The foremost interest is on aspects such as;

What would be the reaction towards the standardization of only one variant? Which variant best preserves the city's cultural heritage and identity? Will keeping the two variants facilitate the preservation of the cultural significance of the place name? And will choosing one variant hinder the accurate representation of the place?

Toponymic identity (name) can exist in a similar way to place identity. Thus, is the dual toponym a symbol of multiple identities? Is the use of the two toponyms a reminder of the multiple place histories and cultural identities? Do these two variants hold two separate identities or is it just a matter of language difference? Are Moroccans aware of the etymology of the two forms, or do they see it merely as a case of translation? Is the choice of *Casablanca* biased in favor of mainstream usage?

Discussion and Conclusion

Toponyms individualize localities significant to the functioning of communities. Place names being centers of opposing denotations are observed across a series of historical and geographical contexts. An interpretation of the research data in regard to participants' attitude towards the dual naming can shed light on whether a toponym can hold multiple identities, and how can the use of two toponyms for one place be a reminder of the multiple place histories and cultural identities.

It is generally perceived that the act of labelling places tends to dominate and instill space with distinct belief-systems and values, thus the belief that *Casablanca* would act as a constant reminder of colonial history and ownership of the landscape. Nevertheless, mixed reactions were manifested behind the attempt to rectify or change the place name. This matter elevates the place name *Casablanca* from being merely markers of the colonial period to being active makers of place's heritage. Its meaning is disconnected from its historical anchorage and converted into an instrument of identity and means of historical memory. It performed more than its solely colonial cartographic perspective.

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