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

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The linguistic situation in Morocco

- Moroccan Arabic (Darija), the mother tongue;
- Standard/Classic Arabic (or Fusha);
- Tamazight, the indigenous and oldest language in Morocco—commonly known as Berber;
- French, the former colonial language;
- and to a lesser extent Spanish, another former colonial language now restricted to some Northern and Southern parts of Morocco.
Casablanca
Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā

• Previously called Anfa, (Amazigh; hill).
• Tadart, (Amazigh; house, home, dwelling).
• In the 15th century, the Portuguese named it Casa Branca (white house).
• During the French protectorate in Morocco, the Spanish variant Casablanca remained.
• In 1755, it was renamed Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā by sultan Mohammed Ben Abdellah.
• Locally known as caza/darbida
• Language is a vector for the appropriation of territories in the practice of territorial re-compositions.

• Since the 1970s, a postcolonial policy of Arabization strived to replace French.

• In the aftermath of the country’s independence, the re-Arabization of toponymy gradually restored its lost place to the Arabic language in the designation of places and spaces.
- A bilingual transcription of the place names
- The specific linguistic context influences the choice of the toponym variant.
Bilingual representation
This study uses mainly questionnaires in attempt to address the following aspects:

• The attitude towards the standardization of only one variant
• Variants and the city’s cultural heritage and significance
• Standardization of only one variant and the accurate representation of the place.
• Dual naming as a reminder of the multiple place histories vs dual naming as a mere case of language difference
• Moroccans and the etymology of the variants
Results

Will keeping both variants facilitate the preservation of the cultural significance of the place name?

77.9% agreed

Which variant best preserve the city’s cultural heritage and identity?

Both variants 76.9%

6.7% other variants (Anfa)
➢ The written form of a place name approved by a State is deemed to be an ‘official’ name, in this case, both Casablanca and Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā.

➢ The purpose of place names is primarily to provide unambiguous direction and reference in order to identify geographical entities.

➢ Both are widely used with some local variations.

➢ 97.1% stated that they could facilely recognize the place in question.

➢ However, foreigners do not usually associate both variants to the same place.
Dual naming as official toponyms

- 4.8% showed their disapproval,
- 39.4% had neutral reactions,
- 55.8% agreed.

For; both variants are significant components of the city’s history.

Against; can be hinged on notions of colonial exploration.
Supporting Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā is motivated by

- the attempt to remove colonially allocated toponyms
  - in order to eliminate the links to colonial history from the landscape, map, and community.

Other respondents saw that it was in the interest of the community that the variant Casablanca be retained along with Ad-Dār al-Bayḍā.

- ‘bidawa’ / ‘cazawa’
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.

The act of labelling places tends to dominate and instill space with distinct belief-systems and values.

Its meaning is disconnected from its historical anchorage and converted into an instrument of identity and means of historical memory.
Thank you!

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