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Naming territories of conquest: colonies and empires

*Beneath and beyond the Exonym/Endonym opposition*

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Naming “open” or “virgin” lands, those of discovered islands, of settler frontiers. Naming conquered or annexed territories, of subjugated or colonized populations. The naming of conquered places is an activity that is part of the conquest, anticipating it, accompanying it or confirming it. Indeed, imperial or colonial conquest produces territory, either instead of, or superimposed on, or incorporating previous territorialities, which are erased or dominated. If we take Claude Raffestin’s (1986) definition of territoriality, this cannot be reduced to a raw political and functional appropriation of the territory (the exercise of hegemonic power over the exploitation of resources and populations); it involves a semiotization of space, a production of meaning that refers to a culture and to references and that participates in creating them. “*Territory is a reordering of space, whose order is to be found in the information systems available to a human being as a member of a culture. Territory can be considered as space informed by the semiosphere (semiosphere = the whole set of signs); all the mechanisms of translation, used in relations with the exterior, belong to the structure of the semiosphere*” (Raffestin 1986). Neotoponymy (or production of new place names) through the activity of naming and renaming is part of this production of territory through semiotization.

In the case of imperial or colonial conquest, it involves the use of specific and generic technologies. These include erasure, transposition and promotion, for the names used by power, but they can also use recognition, sanctuarization and toponymic appropriation for the places constituting the territoriality of the dominated populations, or even accommodate the controlled development of indigenous names. Works of linguistics document and analyse different colonial practices or attempt to decipher their logic, most often focusing on practices of European origin as a whole (Carter 1987; Van den Avenne 2012; Weber 2019; Lefkovich 2020).

Repertoires for the conquest of new spaces are in fact numerous and unfold over the duration of empires (Burbank & Cooper 2010; Deprest *et al*. 2011). The long-distance projection of a society in the form of settler frontiers was enacted spectacularly during the first European colonization, that of the islands of the South Seas and the New World, but it found its beginnings in antiquity, in particular through the colonization initiated by certain Greek cities in the Mediterranean. The conquering and annexationist empire is quite an ancient figure, represented in particular by the Roman model, which also used colonies projected over long distance, as a modality. In contrast, the Ottoman Empire represented, before its final drift, the practice of cultural autonomy and indirect exploitation. The modalities and repertoires of imperialism are thus numerous and evolve over the very long term. Therefore, it is not a question here of periodization, but rather of models, repertoires, variants, modalities and of course contexts, to identify typical *dispositifs* in their complexity and their hybridizations.

The proposal here is to present this set of imperial toponymic practices and to consider how they form different *dispositifs* according to context, and always introduce complex, dialectical relationships between names of external origin and names of local origin, between exonymy and endonymy – terms which it would be very simplistic to view as strictly opposed.

This chapter will begin by evoking two canonical models, that of long-distance colonial projection, based on the toponymic invention of the fictitious Mysterious Island and the colonization of Quebec, and that of imperialism by annexation, based on the toponymic condescension of the Ottoman millet and the Roman builder-empire. It will then consider the hybridizations, alterations and evolutions of these models (with many variations depending on the context). This makes it possible to discuss in detail the exonym/endonym opposition and its very relative value for understanding the complex processes of territorialization resulting from imperial or colonial conquests.

Toponymic colonization of settler frontiers (long-distance metropolitan projections): the fictitious model of the Mysterious Island and its extensions

Jules Verne’s work published in 1874, entitled *The Mysterious Island*, constitutes in its chapter 11 a veritable small treatise on colonial toponymy. A fictitious small troop of shipwrecked explorers find themselves dealing with a mysterious desert island. The island is quickly mapped from a high point; the operation is similar to the baptism and official naming of all the geographical figures that explorers, who have become settlers, recognize or invent (Tissier 1996; Dupuy 2011; Tort-Donada 2014; Jenkins 2017).

*****The Mysterious Island*, Jules Verne**, Extracts (**part 1, ch. 11, p. 125-139, pocket ed.)

“If Cyrus Smith was not mistaken in his assessment, the island was more or less the size of Malta or Zante, in the Mediterranean; but it was, at the same time, much more irregular, and less rich in capes, promontories, points, bays, coves or creeks. Its truly strange form surprised the eye, and when Gideon Spillet, on the advice of the engineer, had drawn its outlines, it was found to resemble some fantastic animal, a sort of monstrous pteropod which had fallen asleep on the surface of the Pacific.

Here, in fact, is the exact configuration of this island, which it is important to make known and whose map was immediately drawn up by the reporter with sufficient precision. […] (p. 128-129)

The exploration of the island was completed, its configuration determined, its relief calculated, its hydrography and its orography described. The layout of its forests and plains had been indicated in a general way on the reporter’s plan. There was nothing left to do but descend the slopes of the mountain, and explore the soil from the triple point of view of its mineral, vegetable and animal resources. (p. 133)

“This island is of little importance; it does not even offer a port which can serve as a harbour for ships, and it is to be feared that it is situated outside the routes ordinarily followed, that is to say too far south for the ships which frequent the archipelagos of the Pacific, too far north for those who go to Australia by rounding Cape Horn. I don’t want to hide anything from you about the situation...”

“ And you are right, my dear Cyrus,” answered the reporter quickly. “You are dealing with men. They trust you, and you can count on them. Is that not so, my friends?”

“I will obey you in everything, Mr Cyrus,” said Herbert, seizing the engineer’s hand.

“My master, always and everywhere!” cried Neb.

“As for me,” said the sailor, “may I lose my name if I grumble at work, and if you will, Mr. Smith, we will make of this island a little America. We will build cities here, we will establish railroads here, we will install telegraphs here, and one fine day, when it is well transformed, well arranged, well civilized, we will go and offer it to the government of the Union. Only, I ask one thing.”

“What?” replied the reporter.

“That we no longer consider ourselves shipwrecked, but as settlers who came here to colonize.

[…]

“One moment, my friends,” replied the engineer. “It seems good to me to give a name to this island, as well as to the capes, the promontories, the watercourses which we see before us.”

“Very good,” said the reporter. “This will simplify any instructions we may have to give or follow in the future.”

“Indeed,” continued the sailor, “it’s already something to be able to say where you’re going and where you’re coming from. At least we seem to be somewhere.”

“The Chimneys, for example,” said Herbert.

“That’s right!” replied Pencroft. “That name was already most convenient, and it came to me all by itself. Shall we keep the name of Chimneys for our first encampment, Mr Cyrus?”

“Yes, Pencroft, since you baptised it so.”

“Good! As for the others, it will be easy,” resumed the sailor, who was in high spirits. Let’s give them names like the Robinsons did, whose story Herbert read to me more than once: ‘Providence Bay’, ‘Whale Point’, ‘Cape of False Hope’!…”

“Or rather the names of Mr. Smith,” replied Herbert, “of Mr. Spillet, of Nab!...”

“My name!” cried Nab, showing his sparkling white teeth.

“Why not?” replied Pencroft. ‘Port Nab’ would do very well! And ‘Cape Gideon’…

“I would prefer names borrowed from our country,” replied the reporter, “and which would remind us of America.”

“Yes, for the main ones,” said Cyrus Smith then, “for the bays or the seas, I fully agree. Let us give to this vast eastern bay the name of Union Bay, for example, to this broad southern indentation, that of Washington Bay, to the mountain which bears us at this moment, that of Mount Franklin, to this lake which stretches out before our gaze, that of Lake Grant, nothing better, my friends. These names will remind us of our country and those of the great citizens who have honoured it; but for the rivers, the gulfs, the capes, the promontories, which we see from the top of this mountain, let us choose denominations which instead recall their particular configuration. They will engrave themselves better in our minds, and will be at the same time more practical. The shape of the island is strange enough that we are not embarrassed to imagine figurative names. As for the watercourses which we do not know, the various parts of the forest which we will explore later, the creeks which will be discovered subsequently, we will name them as they present themselves to us. What do you think, my friends? “

The engineer’s proposal was unanimously accepted by his companions. The island was there before their eyes like an unfolded map, and they only had to put a name to all its inward or outward angles, as well as to all its reliefs. Gideon Spilett would write them down as they went, and the geographical nomenclature of the island would be definitively adopted.

First, the two bays and the mountain were named Union Bay, Washington Bay and Mount Franklin, as the engineer had done.

“Now,” said the reporter, “to this peninsula which projects to the south-west of the island, I will propose to give the name of Serpentine Peninsula, and that of Reptile-end to the bent tail that ends it, because it is truly a reptile’s tail.”

“Adopted,” said the engineer.

“Now,” said Herbert, “this other extremity of the island, this gulf which looks so singularly like an open jaw, let us call it Shark Gulf.

“Well done!” exclaimed Pencroft, “and we will complete the picture by naming the two parts of the jaw Mandible Cape.”

“But there are two capes,” observed the reporter.

“Well!” answered Pencroft, “we shall have North Mandible Cape and South Mandible Cape.”

“They are written down,” answered Gideon Spilett.

“It remains to name the point at the south-eastern extremity of the island,” said Pencroft.

“That is to say, the end of Union Bay?” Herbert replied.

“Claw Cape,” immediately exclaimed Neb, who also wanted to be godfather to some part of his domain.

And, in truth, Neb had found an excellent name, for this cape well represented the powerful claw of the fantastic animal represented by this island so singularly shaped

Pencroft was delighted with the turn things were taking, and their imaginations, somewhat overexcited, soon gave:

To the river which supplied the settlers with drinking water, and near which the balloon had thrown them, the name of the Mercy – a true thanks to Providence;

To the islet on which the castaways had first set foot, the name of Safety Island;

To the plateau which crowned the high granite wall above the Chimneys, and from which the gaze could embrace the whole vast bay, the name of Grand View Plateau;

Finally, to all that mass of impenetrable woods which covered the Serpentine Peninsula, the name of the Far West Forests.

The naming of the visible and known parts of the island was thus completed, and, later, it would be completed as new discoveries were made.

[…]

Everything was therefore complete, and the colonists had only to descend Mount Franklin to return to the Chimneys, when Pencroft exclaimed:

“Well, we are famously scatter-brained!”

“Why?” asked Gideon Spilett, who had closed his notebook and was getting up to leave.

“What about our island? Well? How have we forgotten to baptize her? ”

Herbert was about to propose to give to it the name of the engineer, and all his companions would have applauded, when Cyrus Harding said simply:

“Let’s name it after a great citizen, my friends, one who is now fighting to defend the unity of the American republic! Let’s call it Lincoln Island!”

Three cheers were the answer given to the engineer’s proposal.

And that evening, before going to sleep, the new settlers talked about their absent country. ”

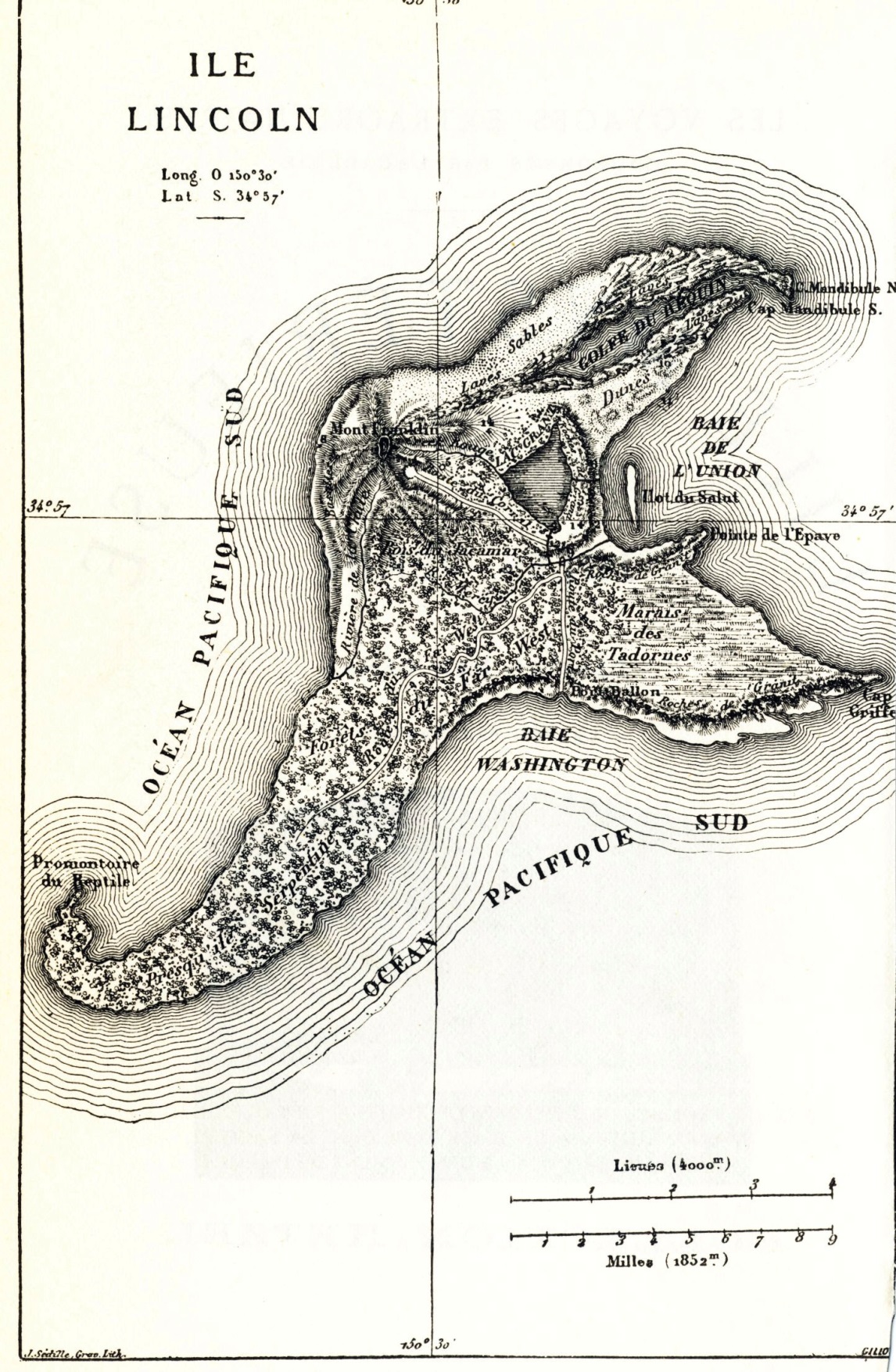


Figure 4.1. **Lincoln Island**, (illustrator J.D. Férat) in The Mysterious Island, Hatzel edition, 1875[[1]](#footnote-1)

Most of the resources of colonial toponymy, when it falls to European explorers, are presented here to constitute a real model:

* Transposition of their place of origin, of its founding myths and its great men (Lincoln Island; Union Bay; Washington Bay; Mount Franklin; Lake Grant; Far West Forests);
* Celebration of the “discoverers” or their relatives (Mr Smith; Port Nab; Cape Gideon eventually discarded here);
* Celebration of the topographical and historical highlights of the acquisition of the territory ( ‘Safety Island’; Mercy River; Chimneys camp; Granite House; Wreckage Point; Balloon Port);
* Presentation of exotic or extraordinary configurations of places (Serpentine Peninsula; “Reptile End”; “Shark Gulf”; North and South “Mandible Cape”; ”Claw Cape”).

The model is simple, inspired by European practices in the tropics and beyond in the South Seas (Douglas 2014; Sawday 2018) during the first colonization which began in the 15th century, continuing until the 19th. It would be reproduced later for new settler frontiers. The Alpine and Pyrenean peaks, having been climbed and recognized by the pioneer mountaineers of the peaks, are thus named after their conquerors (Neotoponymie 2019). On Mars, during the Pathfinder mission, NASA created many place names which borrow from a colonial register of transposition and give a potentially social dimension to this open space (Dittmer 2007).

In the case of the Mysterious Island , during these phases of discovery and conquest of “virgin” lands or peaks, the *a priori* absence of any human occupation makes the spontaneous operation of naming these new lands simple. This is already, metaphorically, an ingredient of colonial toponymy, which either largely ignores vernacular toponymy and considers it absent, if it is not imposed or remembered; or instrumentalizes it, recuperates it or relegates it (this fundamental aspect is linked to imperial practices of zoning space which will be discussed later). Because the matter becomes considerably more complicated when coming into contact with populations. It will therefore be necessary to add several essential elements to the model.

This is what another story already tells us, still relating to the tropical islands (of the South Seas); this time non-fictional, and following directly from the prototypical experience of the discovery of the mysterious island. This is the story of the naming of the Pacific Islands by French explorer travellers in the 19th century, studied by Hélène Blais (2005), which is more generally part of the cartographic enterprise of “discoveries” (Kent *et al.* 2019). The author deciphers this new phase of naming which aims to produce a territory on scientific and organized bases. It involves an ordered and clear nomenclature that borrows from several registers. The initial register of the nationalist repertoire, or even more the affective repertoire (linked to the circumstances of the discovery and its effects on the discoverers) (Rose 1997), is only partially extended during these phases of description and more systematic mapping. Borrowings from selected and interpreted indigenous references are then not only admitted, but promoted as a means of objectification in the creation of a conquered geographical reality. This is part of an objective ordering of a conquered land which thereby gains in specificity and whose domination is no longer based solely on the hazards of exploration and taking possession, but on a particular place and resources in a complex geographical and political *dispositif*, an empire and its possibilities in terms of exploitation. This powerful analysis is corroborated by the work performed for other Pacific islands in the English domain for Norfolk Island (Nash 2017), but also successively the Dutch, Chinese and Japanese at Orchid Island (Wu & Lay 2014). It is thus necessary to add a widely deployed modality to the initial model: *the partial recuperation and alteration of elements of the indigenous toponymic corpus.*

We must now add to this model of colonial motivations and practices the teachings of the practices of settler colonization, the steamroller that names its settlements, its places along the settler frontiers that it opens up. This happens in differentiated registers, depending on the cultures of the settlers. This is because their motivations differ from those of sailors and mandated explorers who initiate conquests by attesting to “discovery” and by preparing for eventual colonization by creating a coherent geographical framework. From now on, it is a question of “penetrating” a territory starting from bridgeheads, by discovering other realities and above all by creating colonial settlements, of inventing a new landscape by erasing or transforming the pre-existing order that is considered natural.

The “transposition of the places of origin” element of the initial model then massively translates into the reproduction and projection of numerous toponyms of the metropolises, with the addition of the qualifier “new”. This is part of a vitalist settler impulse to invent a new world from an external origin. Apart from the “New”s... Zealand, Caledonia and the other Hebrides of Oceania, the naming of American cities registers a large number of toponyms of European cities preceded, or not, by the qualifier “New” (Zelinski 1967). This is the case for New Amsterdam renamed New York, but also of the small towns called Paris to capture the prestige of a European capital, as highlighted in the film *Paris, Texas* by Wim Wenders (Reinhardt 2017). Analysis of the original denominations of plantations in Maryland in the late 17th and early 18th centuries also shows toponymic constructions modelled on the English countryside (Musselwhite 2020).

Another massive practice is *naming after biblical names* of the Old Testament, in particular for populations of Protestant origin (Box 2) in the United States or South Africa, and after the names of saints for populations of Catholic origin. Hagiography is thus dominant in Latin America and Quebec, a Catholic variant of the founding myths of colonial identity (Leonard 2010).

Wajdi Mouawad with his novel Anima (2012, Leméac et Actes Sud) goes beyond what words and names can say. Names are nevertheless constantly questioned in their derisory limits, but also in their evocative power and in their (in)capacity to give meaning. Extracts **which particularly deal with biblical colonial toponyms faced with the tragedies of war**

“His sister lives in Lebanon, a small town not far from Springfield, in southwestern Illinois. She keeps a *bed and breakfast* over there, The Sunrise. Her name is Ashleen. She is not married. She has kept her father’s surname: Ashleen Wolf Rooney (…)”

“Lebanon? Like the country?”

“Yes, why?”

He did not answer. He had lost himself in the depths of the clouds, over there, which had invaded the expanse of the sky. Something had stirred inside him. (p. 210)

[…]

“The name on the map intrigued me. Lebanon. I came to see it.”

“Further south, you’ve got Cairo. It’s worth the detour.” […]

They fell silent to listen.

“This region is called the Land of Egypt. The inhabitants, even today, call themselves Egyptians. The Mississippi is their Nile. In Cairo, you could admire the meeting of the waters, where the Ohio empties itself into the Mississippi. It’s like that. People here, like everywhere else on American soil, turned to the Bible to baptise their land with names that would bring them happiness. In Cairo, they hoped for the coming of a Moses who would save the people from famine, disease and floods. And still further down, men possessed by a real faith in their future, remembered the great thousand-year-old city of the Pharaohs and baptised their small town Memphis. Here, Lebanon, in homage to the country where Christ performed his first miracle by multiplying bread and wine during the wedding at Cana. For people who were starving, it obviously made sense.”

“And that saved them?”

“I would rather say that it doomed them. Calamities followed. Famines, floods, diseases and, finally, civil war. Many men died on the paths of their childhood. There’s a border here, the Mason-Dixon Line. During the War of Secession, it separated the northern states from the southern ones. We were at the crossroads. Illinois was unionist and Missouri, which is ten kilometres away, was a slave state. The Union army set up a fortification in Cairo. In Lebanon too, the civil war took its toll.” […]

“Many Americans have died in rivers named after them, because they were named by their ancestors. They died amid their flocks and in orchards which they should have ploughed during their lifetime. As for the French, they died far from home, helpless, lost in the midst of the Great American Civil War.” (p. 291-292)

In addition to the characteristic hagiography of toponymy in Quebec (Adam 2008), the famous novel by Louis Hémon *Maria Chapdelaine* (Box 3) expresses the affective and cultural burden conveyed by the toponymic landscape created by the settlers, in an existing context of linguistic colonial competition with the neighbouring Anglophones. Colonial microtoponymy thus borrows in French from the register of the description of sites, the environment and resources. The vain attempt to eradicate all indigenous toponymy seems to stem more from the hagiographic enterprise of the Catholic Church than from the motivations of the settlers who remained in contact with certain populations and could, despite everything, admit their toponymic presence.

****Louis Hémon, Maria Chapdelaine** 1914-1916,** [eBook](https://beq.ebooksgratuits.com/pdf/Hemon-Maria-illustre.pdf)**: Quebec Electronic Library**

When choosing between her two suitors who represent exodus to the big American city or persisting in the hard life of the settlers of the Lac Saint Jean region, Maria Chapdelaine hears a voice. This reminds her in particular of the value of a linguistic landscape which is that of her people, created by the settlers and the priests who came from France, opposed to the country of English names which also end up “seeming natural” but define a somewhere-else.

**Chapter XV, p. 241-243**

“ ‘It must be beautiful though!’ she said to herself, dreaming of the great American cities. And another voice rose as an answer. Over there was the foreigner: people of another race speaking of other things in another language, singing other songs... Here...

All the names of her country, those she heard every day, as well as those she had heard only once, awoke in her memory: the thousand names that pious peasants from France had given to the lakes, to the rivers, to the villages of the new land they discovered and populated as they went along…Eau-Claire Lake…la Famine…Saint-Cœur-de-Marie…Trois-Pistoles…Sainte-Rose-du-Dégelé… Pointe-aux-Outardes… Saint-André-de-l’Epouvante…

Eutrope Gagnon had an uncle who lived in Saint-André-de-l’Epouvante; Racicot, from Honfleur, often spoke of his son, who was a stoker aboard a boat in the Gulf, and each time new names were added to the old ones: the names of fishing villages or small ports of the St. Lawrence, scattered on the shores between which the ships of yesteryear bravely sailed towards the unknown… Pointe-Mille-Vaches… Les Escoumins… Notre-Dame-du-Portage… Grandes-Bergeronnes… Gaspé…

How pleasant it was to hear these names pronounced, when speaking of distant relatives or friends, or of long journeys! How familiar and fraternal they were, each time giving a warm feeling of kinship, making everyone dream while repeating them: “In all this country we are at home… at home! ”

Towards the West, as soon as you left the province, towards the South, as soon as you crossed the border, it was everywhere only English names, which one learned to pronounce over time, and which eventually seemed natural no doubt; but where to find the joyful sweetness of French names? ”

**Chapter XIV, p. 201-202**

A little earlier Maria had remembered that the official name of a locality might be given by the priests to the detriment of an Indian name, still in use among the settlers, but which she had to try to drive out of her vocabulary.

“From their home to the village of Honfleur, eight miles. From Honfleur to la Pipe, six. At la Pipe, his father would speak to the priest and then he would continue towards Mistook. She pulled herself together, ... From la Pipe to Saint-Coeur-de-Marie, eight more ... She got confused, and said in a low voice: It’s always a long way and the paths will be bad. “

With the evocation of these settler practices, their meaning and their appropriation, the model of the toponymic production of colonial projections can therefore be finalized. In addition to the urban and hagiographic variants of the transposition of places and myths of origin, there is a tendency to relegate indigenous place names by erasing or confining them to socially devalued indigenous and vernacular uses.

This parallels or goes beyond the recuperation-alteration of certain native corpora already revealed with the enterprise of mapping colonizable island domains. We might also note a variant of toponymic exoticization with derogatory references to the other, to the indigenous, to the colonized. Thus Mark Monmonier (2006) gives the title *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow: How Map Names claim and inflame* to his essay on the conflictual dimension of toponymy. These practices of colonial toponymy can be translated by the following element of the model: the inscription in the colonial toponymy of a derogatory image of the other, of the native, of the colonized.

Here we find ourselves in the small factory of the colonial toponomascape, which is the fruit of the settlers’ activity of colonization and territorialization. It is not specific to the long-distance colonial projection that accompanied the first European colonization, which was inaugurated by the European “great discoveries”, their islands and stopovers on the routes to India, then subsequently the establishment of the triangular trade with its European outposts: marketplaces, plantation colonies and settler frontiers towards a Wild West. Indeed, here we find ourselves in practices which, in a different form, may merge with the toponymic colonization practised within the framework of the continental empires which conquer to annex or exploit peripheries and to ensure their “greatness”.

Conquering toponymic imperialism: the model of Roman super(im)position and Ottoman condescension.

The continental expansionist empire extends by progressive conquest of its peripheries, and not by long-distance projection. It conquers the territories of the other, the neighbour, dominated and defeated, but the groups thus brought into the empire have a place; certainly this is a subordinate and exploited one, but one in which their culture can be recognized or even protected and its cultural landscape possibly preserved, while integrating the influences and achievements of the imperial power, which are then marked in the language and the semiology of the centre. Here we enter into a wide range of repertoires or political technologies for the management of dominated diversity.

The “Romanization” of the Roman Empire took place in a progressive and differentiated way (Chambon 2002; Leroux 2004). Urban planning and spatial planning were at the heart of the enterprise, driven by an integrative project. Thus were created new centres, capitals and main towns, given equipment and infrastructures based on the technologies that the Empire was able to disseminate and transpose. These new centres were not only intended to impose a military and political order on conquered lands, as with the Alexandrias created during the Macedonian conquest, an attempt at superficial imperial unification of an empire carved out at a galloping pace. Much more than a simple technique of military control of vast foreign and culturally autonomous entities, in the case of Rome the project was integrative: it was therefore also administrative, economic and cultural, operating through language and religion. This consubstantial dimension to the Roman Empire was conveyed among other things by a Roman toponymy. This toponymy was imposed within these new cities and on all the related infrastructures, and spread more or less to their periphery through means such as centuriations or Roman settler colonies. A toponymic layer is therefore superimposed through the imposition of a network of centres, infrastructures and annexes, and through the administrative territorialization of the spaces of the empire. It is *the planning and naming of a network of centres and infrastructures according to the figures (political, military and religious) of imperial power*.

The period of the reign of Hadrian, a period mostly of pacification and planning between periods of trouble, offers a number of examples of the practices of a toponymic Romanization through superposition and the work of building. These include the famous walls and gate, both named after the emperor who designed the *limes* as well as the renovation of Athens; as well as the names of towns, temples and administrative divisions inspired by his young lover, his relatives or even famous Roman cultural references. This is also the case for the new city, Ælia Capitolina (in reference to the family deity of Emperor Hadrian, Ælius, and Jupiter Capitolinus, supreme god of Rome), designed to replace Jerusalem and which triggered a resistance that was terribly repressed. Beyond the cities, the long-term mechanisms of acculturation, very different from one region of the empire to another, ensured an always partial toponymic Romanization of certain countrysides.

*The Memoirs of Hadrian*, a book by Marguerite Yourcenar (1951), recognized for its rigour and its relevance in its account and analysis of Hadrian’s achievements, is very explicit about the toponymic practices and motivations of the emperor. Here are some excerpts:

“Antinoöpolis was about to be born: it would already be defeating death to impose upon this sinister land an all-Greek city, a bastion that would hold the nomads of Eritrea in check, a new market on the road to India. ”(*Memoirs of Hadrian*, location 2520 / p. 217-218)

“I undertook to make the administrative divisions of Antinoöpolis, of its demes, of its streets, of its urban blocks, a plan of the divine world at the same time as a transfigured image of my own life. Everything entered into it, Hestia and Bacchus, the gods of the hearth and those of the orgy, the celestial divinities and those from beyond the grave. There I placed my imperial ancestors, Trajan and Nerva, who became part of this system of symbols. Plotina was there; the good Matidie saw herself assimilated to Demeter; my wife herself, with whom I had fairly cordial relations at that time, figured in this procession of divine persons. A few months later, I named one of Antinoöpolis’s neighbourhoods after my sister Pauline. I had ended up falling out with Servianus’s wife, but Pauline, dead, found in this city of memory her unique place as a sister. This sad place became the ideal site for reunions and memories, the Elysian Fields of a lifetime, the place where contradictions are resolved, where everything, in its place, is equally sacred. ” (Disciplina augusta p. 237)

“We stopped in Jerusalem. I laid out on the spot the plan of a new city, which I proposed to build on the site of the Jewish city ruined by Titus. The good administration of Judea, the progress of trade with the East, required at this crossroads the development of a great metropolis. I foresaw the usual Roman capital; Ælia Capitolina would have its temples, its markets, its public baths, its sanctuary of the Roman Venus. ” (Saeculum aureum p. 202)

**Plotinopolis is due to the need to establish new agricultural marketplaces in Thrace** […]. **Hadrianotheres is intended to serve as an emporium for the foresters of Asia Minor** […]. **Hadrianople in Epirus reopens an urban centre within an impoverished province**: it stems from a visit to the sanctuary of Dodona. **Adrianople**, a peasant and military town, **strategic centre at the edge of the barbarian regions**, is populated by veterans of the Sarmatian wars; I personally know the strengths and weaknesses of each of these men, their names, the number of their years of service and their wounds. **Antinoöpolis**, the dearest, born on the site of misfortune, is compressed on a narrow strip of arid land, between the river and the rock. **I wanted all the more to enrich it with other resources: commerce with India, river transport, the learned graces of a Greek metropolis.** (*Memoirs of Hadrian*, location 1624 / p. 143-144)

“My African estates, inherited from my mother-in-law Matidie, must become a model of agricultural exploitation; the peasants of the village of Borysthenes, established in Thrace in memory of a good horse, have the right to relief at the end of a painful winter; on the other hand, it was necessary to refuse subsidies to the rich farmers of the Nile valley, who were always ready to take advantage of the emperor’s solicitude. ” (Patientia p. 304)

Thus, the Roman Empire, a builder-empire, can be seen as an integrative imperial enterprise, working intensively on the conquered territories. In this it differs from a more extensive enterprise, such as that of the Ottoman Empire, a delegating empire, and of its millet system which freezes community affiliations while recognizing them. Each group and each territory was assigned to a culture defined by religion and potentially to a language (Bruneau 2015). In a periphery of the empire like Algeria, the imperial layer of Turkish toponymic influence is reduced to a few bridgehead cities and a possible influence on the so-called Maghzen lands (of the Empire, in other words in the possession of local dignitaries who have pledged allegiance and can serve as relays, especially for conscription). On the other hand, the territory known as the bled Siba (rebel, not truly conquered) and the collective village and tribal lands known as Azels, and more generally the mobile space of the tribes, are not intended to undergo a toponymic influence. So, the French found themselves in the 19th century faced with a territorial and toponymic situation that was unreadable for them (Blais 2014). Elsewhere, in the non-Muslim parts of the Empire, such as present-day Bulgaria, a certain progressive Islamization was accompanied by a partial Turkification of the toponymy of the countryside (Kiel 1992). In general, Henri Georgelin (2008) specifies that Turkish as *lingua franca* of the empire could be appropriated everywhere in the empire, including at the toponymic level, without it being an imperial imposition, but rather a convenience claimed for the purpose of existing within a larger whole. In other words, opting for the vehicular rather than reproducing the vernacular.

Two empires, two approaches therefore: one integrating, the other delegating, but non-linear and non-continuous practices, also featuring convergences. Two new elements of models thus appear with respect to the dominated and dominant cultures of the empire, which complete the panoply and the extent of the conquering toponymic techniques*: the toponymic sanctuarization of conquered cultures* (particularly developed by the Ottoman Empire before its final nationalist drift), and *the promotion, appropriation and toponymic extension of a dominant imperial linguistic and religious culture* (Roman and Ottoman empires, depending on the period and the region). Both apply to modern European settlements in their territorial phase, whether in Latin America with the relegation of indigenous cultures outside the scope of official territoriality; in North America, Australia and South Africa, with the practice of towns and domains with a very large colonial majority on the one hand and reduced “native reservations” on the other; or even in Algeria and in certain protectorates, with a majority indigenous domain outside of the towns and regions of agricultural colonization.

Thus, four key moments and modes of conquest: the “discovery” of tropical islands, the European creation of the New World, the Roman Empire as a builder, the Ottoman Empire’s delegation, experimented with a wide variety of toponymic practices linked to the logics of imperial conquests, and provided a grammar that was widely reused through combination of the elements. The exemplary cases analysed so far therefore make it possible to formalize a kind of general model in the form of a set of standard practices vis-à-vis the places and territories conquered and vis-à-vis the territoriality of the colonized.

Typical elements of imperial and colonial toponymic practices

a) Naming “discoveries”, marking conquests:

Transposition of the places of origin, of its founding myths and of its great men

Celebration of the important topographical and historical sites of taking possession

Presentation of exotic or extraordinary configurations of places

Celebration of “discoverers” or “settlers” and their loved ones

Planning and naming of a network of centres and infrastructures after figures (political, military and religious) of imperial power

b) Renaming the colonized and their territories

Partial recuperation and alteration of elements of the indigenous toponymic corpus

Relegation of indigenous place names through deletion or cantonment

Toponymic sanctuarization of conquered cultures

Inclusion in colonial toponymy of a derogatory image of the other, of the native, of the colonized

Promotion, appropriation and toponymic extension of a dominant imperial linguistic and religious culture

Who’s in, who’s out? Colonial hybridizations and relativity of the concepts of exonym and endonym

The combination of these standard practices is ultimately the norm in enterprises of conquest: it is a question of the unfolding of evolving cultural and territorial projects and adapting to power relations and complex situations. Indeed, the imperial and colonial toponymic factory is not only a matter of imposition, but is also determined by the culture and knowledge of the conquered societies and by their resistance, reception and appropriation of external toponymic contributions, even imposed ones. Indigenous populations and their toponymies are far from being passive in the process of colonial neotoponymy, for several reasons.

First of all, part of the toponymic colonial corpus comes from the “indigenous” corpus, through transcription or translation. This is because indigenous topographical knowledge is often essential for the settler, like the “indigenous” scout who guides the settler troop. Its knowledge is therefore recuperated, and imposes itself in a certain way in the new cartography and in the toponomascape in forms that may vary from the re-applied use of the toponym with a more or less faithful transcription, or a translation, or even by the creation of a tautological toponym, composed of two nouns with the same meaning in the colonial and colonized languages (Tent & Blair 2019). In his classic work, *Names on the Land,* George Rippey Stewart (1945) identifies these different types in the United States, as they were later identified and analysed by Wilbur Zelinski (1967) and Christian Montes (2008), respectively for the names of cities and of state capitals . In South Africa today, advocates of the Afrikaans language can argue[[2]](#footnote-2) that “their” toponyms are in some way indigenous compared to those derived from English, insofar as they would much more frequently be translations of original toponyms, mainly San and Khoisan on the territory of the former Cape Colony, but also in Bantu languages in the centre (former Orange Free State) and in the north of the country (former Transvaal Republic).

But the toponymy considered as indigenous by the colonial administration may also be systematically translated into the vehicular language considered as indigenous. Various practices of arbitration for the benefit of a regional language that is more highly valued for political reasons in situations of linguistic plurality may result in a simplification and a homogenization of the official toponomascape; a true colonial creation, even though arising from an engineering based upon the cultural substrate of the colonized while reinterpreting it. Thus, the cartography and then the administration of Algerian territory by the French initially experienced a phase of perplexity, with the perceived complexity of territories with variable geometry organized in communal areas (*azals*) and common grazing areas, and relating to historical and cultural allegiances. Soon the temptation of simplification and categorization in a framework of modern territorialization is required. This includes a certain indigenizing unification based on Arabic as the indigenous dominant language, and some territorial normalization based on the fixity of administrative entities at the expense of the fluid space of the tribes, while the colonial domain of direct exploitation by the settlers extends.

Such practices of pseudo-recognition at the price of simplification, and parallel relegation to reserved spaces, may find their climax in the ideology and practice of apartheid or separate development in South Africa. Far from being erased, the indigenous toponymy was used there to the benefit of the policy of homelands or bantustans. In the context of the continent’s decolonization, the invention of these bantustans was intended to concede pseudo-independence to the majority African populations on the basis of the transformation of reserves into pseudo-states, thereby ridding themselves of the “problems” of the civil rights of the majority. This, while maintaining control over all resources and access to labour. The numerous parcels of land that constituted the indigenous reserves were grouped together to form “national” combinations dedicated to the different ethnic groups referenced, or even created by the regime for this program and intended to become “independent nations.” Indigenous toponymy was evoked for the naming of the entities thus produced, many becoming “the land of …,” modelled on the neighbouring British protectorates, which served as a reference for this policy: (Basutoland became Lesotho; Swaziland recently became eSwatini; Bechuanaland became Botswana; Nyasaland became Malawi). The toponymic simplification then intervened in two ways. On the one hand, the territories thus reconstituted did not correspond to the former territories of pre-colonial political entities to which they might refer (in particular Zululand or KwaZulu once reindigenized), basing their legitimacy on this pseudo-continuation. On the other hand, there was a forced regrouping by proximity of reserved parcels of land in order to constitute territories considered to be ethnically homogeneous (Christopher 1994), as well as operations of simplification during which a single language was assigned to or recognized for effectively cosmopolitan or multilingual populations and places. The townships, or reserved and segregated neighbourhoods, of South African cities would then sometimes be Africanized toponymically. This was not the rule; on the contrary, generic European-language denominations (Soweto is originally the acronym for South West Townships) and dehumanizing numeration were used to differentiate roads and sectors (Pirie 1984; Giraut *et al.* 2008; Guyot & Seethal 2007). With the policy of Grand Apartheid, it was a question of potentially placing certain townships within the perimeter of a nearby bantustan and thus of assigning to their inhabitants the nationality of this homeland without carrying out massive relocations (as was the case in a number of situations). Thus, in Durban, the large townships of KwaMashu and Umlazi gave Zulu toponymic visibility over a vast portion of the agglomeration, while being only peripheral localities in an ocean of toponyms of European origin. Around Bloemfontein, populations considered to be Sotho were grouped together at the end of the 1970s in a vast township called Botshabelo and intended to join the bantustan of Qwaqwa and possibly be integrated into neighbouring Lesotho on the basis of ethnic regrouping (Tomlinson & Krige 1997). Thus, this vast new locality of Botshabelo, isolated not far from the enclave of Thaba-Nchu (part of the bantustan of Bophuthatswana) was well separated from it, including toponymically, given its different ethno-national “destiny”.

The use of indigenous or indigenous-inspired toponymy by the colonial power is therefore often made after simplification, transcription or transliteration to clearly mark, or even promote, the territories to be relegated in a system of domination and spatial segregation. But another aspect of the presence of colonized toponymy in usage, including in settler territories, is that of counter-toponymy or the use of non-indigenous vernacular toponyms. In the new post-apartheid South Africa this time, the recent practice of renaming agglomerations with names of African origin has drawn heavily on the repertoire of this counter-toponymy with the names given by the populations of African origin in the outskirts of colonial cities. Thus Tshwane (name of a river and reference to black cows in seTswana) for Pretoria (capital named after the Afrikaner figure of Jacob Pretorius), eThekwini (reference to the figure of the bay or the power of the bull in Zulu) for Durban (named after Benjamin d’Urban, British military administrator) (Koopman 2007), while the agglomeration of Bloemfontein (fountain of flowers in Afrikaans, presented today as the translation of an indigenous toponym) has taken by metonymy and reversal of polarities the name of Mangaung (reference to the cheetah in seSotho), after the name of the principal township of the agglomeration. The use of a counter-toponymy or unofficial double toponymy may of course be part of a process of resistance to colonization or of dual territorial claims in an asymmetrical context, as may be the case in the occupied territories in Palestine ( Cohen & Kliot 1992, Azaryahu & Golan 2001; Masala 2015).

Finally, unofficial vernacular toponymy in a colonial context can be used and appropriated by the settlers themselves. We have seen an exemplary case in an excerpt from Maria Chapdelaine, when the heroine from the shores of Lac Saint Jean in Quebec spontaneously refers to Mistook, “the old Indian name that the locals still use,” before recovering to give “to the village its official name, the one with which it had been baptised by the priests: Saint-Coeur-de-Marie”. The practice of the settlers, which borrowed from indigenous toponymy, was thus thwarted or overtaken by the religious colonial administration, which imposed its own references *a posteriori.* Such a process leaves a certain amount of performative existence to indigenous toponymy in the hybridization of colonizing and colonized cultures.

Conversely, encounter and hybridization may also come from an indigenous toponymy which claims the space of colonial origin. Colonial urbanization engendered processes of polarization and migrations, initially limited during the colonial era, then often massive, of the (ex)colonized towards exogenous colonial towns. This urbanization, once it results in the establishment of indigenous neighbourhoods, generates its own toponymy, often informal and therefore vernacular, which borrows from indigenous languages and their cultural repertoire in a great creativity linked to colonial urban life and its landmarks. The chapters by Michel Ben Arrous and Melissa Wanjiru in this book give a particularly good account of this phenomenon in contemporary African urban toponymy. We thus have a hybrid toponomascape with several toponymic and odonymic layers which overlap and succeed one another (Bigon  2016). In official toponymy, there is a strong contrast between the centre, where the odonymy very often retains traces of the colonial heritage in the same way as its architecture (Yeoh 1992; D’Almeida-Topor 1996; Goerg 2006; Bigon 2008; Snodia *et al.* 2010; Giraut & Antheaume 2012) and peripheries with increasingly marked indigenous references, particularly in the names of neighbourhoods. But the vernacular toponymy in use everywhere, often unofficial, often mixes references of contrasting origin, abandoning the linear markers of the roads to attach itself to landmarks which are notable from a practical point of view.

Considering these dynamics of toponymic hybridization of different natures which inevitably mark the conquered spaces, it is the relevance of the exonym/endonym distinction in these contexts which is in question. The distinction, at the international level, is well codified and serves to standardize uses from a conventional perspective. It thus opposes names designating the same geographical object, the exonym doing so in an external language foreign to the context of the toponym, and the endonym doing so in the official context and language of the toponym (Ormeling 1993; Bartos-Elekes 2008; Woodman 2012). Peter Jordan (2015) and Drago Kladnik (2009) address the double notion in multilingual contexts where the simple opposition is equivalent to giving a patent of indigeneity to a language in a multiple toponymy and settlement. Official definitions[[3]](#footnote-3) given by the Genung (United Nations Group of Experts for the Standardization of Geographical Names) to the notions of exonyms and endonyms make it possible to take these difficulties into account. But in the case of spaces marked by colonization, the distinction between exonyms/endonyms made by linguists makes a distinction between names according to their colonial or indigenous origin (Stolz & Warnke 2016). However, this distinction, in many cases, is debatable as we have seen, with the many processes of hybridization. We can try to make the distinction on a semantic or etymological or even phonological basis, which would allow us to associate transcribed or even translated toponyms in the category of endonyms. But this does not take into account the encounter or the hybridity of which these names, their writing and their pronunciation are the fruit.

Nor does it account for the complex linguistic landscapes in which several languages coexist and/or are in competition, including one or more languages of colonial origin, and for which the simple opposition exonyms/endonyms is much too simplistic, the endonym of some being the exonym of others. Algeria again constitutes an exemplary case here. Slimane Zeghidour (2015) notes in his commentary on the book by Hélène Blais (2014): “The French transplant onto Algerian soil remains so significant that Arabic place names made French by the occupier and transcribed into Latin letters ignoring the gutturals have been maintained as they are by the Algerian administration, despite a tireless effort of frenzied Arabization.” We thus see how the acceptance of supposedly indigenous toponymies by the colonist operates an alteration by transcription, which is then the foundation of an inherited hybrid toponomascape which does not fit into the dual categories of exonyms and endonyms.

At the antipodes, in the Norfolk archipelago to the east of Australia, a borderline case of chronological reversal between corpora in European, Creole and regional languages is documented by Joshua Nash (2017). The names of topographic elements in Norfolk (the creole language of the archipelago, derived from English and Tahitian) of Phillip Island (one of the two uninhabited islands of the Norfolk archipelago, making three with the eponymous main island) were given from 1856 onwards. This is the date of the settlement of the main island by a group entirely relocated from the island of Pitcairn (Central Pacific) and considered to be descendants of the crew of the *Bounty*. The author who has studied and historicized the toponymy of the archipelago believes that the English microtoponyms of Phillip Island, considered less authentic, date from the first explorations and the settlements of convicts. They would therefore be older and, according to the author, closer to the topographical and environmental realities of the island. As for the Melanesian names in the Mota language, they would in fact constitute the very last toponymic layer, promoted by the Melanesian Mission and its school installed on the archipelago for five decades straddling the 19th and 20th centuries. In New Caledonia, the origin of settlement and the origin of the toponymy are not directly linked. This is explained by the recuperation of Melanesian names to name certain settler settlements and by the toponymic work carried out by the missions in contact with the populations (Chatelier 2007). The New Caledonian toponymic paradox therefore sees Christian European names used to name separatist areas, and Kanak names naming Caldoche areas, with referents that have become territorial and community-based independent of their origin.

But it is perhaps the question of the status of the toponyms designating or having designated the current Greenland, marked by colonial toponymy (Schuster 2019), which is most telling about the confusion around the notions of endonyms and exonyms in a colonial context. The name, however exogenous and old, of Greenland could thus appear at the end of the 20th century as an inclusive alternative to the name Kalaallit Nunaat (“Kalaallit country”) which imposed itself from the 19th century as the indigenous name of the country before the Norwegian name of Greenland (Kleivan 1977). A double appellation had already been in operation during the phases of Viking and Norwegian colonization prior to Danish colonization. Greenland is a nomination attributed (from sagas written later, the thesis is therefore debated) to the Viking Erik the Red, in a possible attempt at toponymic promotion of these lands dedicated to colonization among the peoples of Iceland. During the subsequent phases of Norwegian colonization, the name Nunarput functioned in parallel to designate “the country of the natives”, so called in relation to foreigners and therefore for external purposes. The shift to the expression Kalaallit Nunaat in the first part of the 20th century, during the Danish colonization, took place in a context where colonization involved the South and the West but much less the East and the North and their populations. The term Kalaallit for Greenlanders is thus an ethnic reference to South Greenlanders alone, who would have imposed this reference in the colonial context through the school and the catechism introduced by the Europeans, but within which they exercised a hegemonic cultural influence as the indigenous people. Inge Kleivan speaks of an example of cultural imperialism exercised among the Greenlanders themselves (1977 p. 199). The expression “Nunaat Inuit” referring to all the Eskimo peoples would have been, according to the author, more inclusive and therefore acceptable by all the indigenous people of Greenland. But this would be an extensive designation likely to apply to all Inuit lands. far beyond Greenland or Kalaallit Nunaat. Since then, the autonomous territories of Canada and Quebec dedicated to the Inuit peoples have been called Nunavut (“our land” in [Inuktitut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuktitut)) and Nunavik (“the big land” in [Nunavimmiutitut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nunavimmiutitut), a dialect of [Inuktitut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuktitut)).

In conclusion, we might say that the numerous cases, which testify to an almost systematic hybridization of the toponymy of conquest, should in no way lessen the diagnosis of colonial dispossession. This, based on a set of recurring practices that may operate in combination or successively (Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch 2016), is similar to the imposition of a cultural hegemony that destroys culture, rights and knowledge (Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009). On the other hand, the study of hybridizations from a relational, pragmatic and procedural perspective makes it possible to grasp, beyond a primary opposition, the historical power of the colonial fact, a major transformer of culture for all the societies involved, dominated and dominant, victims and authors, and for those later on who issue from and are heirs to these stories. It also serves to underscore the urgency and importance of policies of restitution and recognition, particularly in situations of settler colonization, while historicizing the colonial cultural fabric more broadly.

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1. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27%C3%8Ele\_myst%C3%A9rieuse#/media/File:Ile\_Mysterieuse\_03.jpg](#/media/File:Ile_Mysterieuse_03.jpg) originally drawn by Jules-Descartes Férat (1819–1889?) — This image was originally featured in the Hetzel edition of Mysterious Island, and has also been featured in more recent editions (this particular instance was scanned from a recent edition). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Arguments heard in 2019 during a presentation and discussion at the *International Symposium on Place Names*, held in Clarens (South Africa), whose theme was “Recognition, Regulation, Revitalization: Place names and indigenous language”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The [Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/docs/pubs/Glossary_of_terms_rev.pdf), published in 2002 in four languages by the United Nations gives the following definitions:

   Exonym: Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated.

   Minority name: Toponym in a minority language.

   Endonym: Name of a geographical feature in one of the languages occurring in that area where the feature is situated.

   Standardized endonym: Endonym sanctioned by a names authority. (Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)