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ARSENY SAPAROV

THE ALTERATION OF PLACE NAMES AND CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN SOVIET ARMENIA*

Place-names are some of the most durable of national symbols. They can outlive most material artefacts of a civilisation. The material components of the cultural landscape may disappear or be destroyed, the civilisation that created them may also disappear but its place-names will most probably survive. In this capacity place-names are important features of national and territorial identity. According to D. W. Meinig, "Every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes. They are part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together."¹ Ethnic groups that have preserved their national identity are especially sensitive about the maintenance of the national landscape. Often the national toponymy is the only witness to the fact that a territory belongs to a particular ethnic group. Most definitions of any ethnic community — tribe, nationality, nation necessarily mention the common living space of that ethnic group. Within that territory a national toponymy has been formed — a system of geographic names in the native language of the indigenous population. "The existence of these names clearly defines the territory of that ethnic group and is one of the most important expressions of the national identity. The use of national toponymy ensures historical continuity, preservation of cultural traditions of a nation. [...] The native toponymy acquires special meaning for small stateless nations as it alone identifies their national territory."² It is therefore not

* This research would be impossible without the generous support of the Tweedy Exploration Fellowship (University of Edinburgh) and an RSS grant (Research Support Scheme, Prague, OSI). I am also grateful to Professor Nina Garsoïan and Dr. Alex Clayton-Jolly for correcting the final version of the text.

1. D. W. Meinig, "Symbolic landscapes," in *id.*, ed., *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979): 164.

2. E. M. Pospelov, "Natsional'naia politika SSSR i toponimiiia," in *Toponimika i mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia* (Moscow: AN SSSR, Moskovskii filial Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR, 1992): 3.

surprising that place-names and ideology are related. The conscious use of place-names by a state can be seen as an instrument to preserve the unity and uniqueness of the nation; to enforce in the national consciousness its moral right to inhabit a particular territory; to protect its land from the territorial claims of its neighbours; or to justify its own territorial claims. A recreated or artificially created place-name landscape is a symbolic part of national identity. Therefore, toponymy is an important part of a state's or nation's ideological system.

From the point of view of traditional onomastics all place-names undergo continual development within a language changing phonetically and semantically. The former type of change consists of primarily sound shifts in a language, and the latter changes occur from cultural transformation when some words are lost from common usage. Both changes eventually lead to the obscuration and substitution of the original meaning.³ The situation of languages in contact is much more complex as both languages exercise a mutual influence on the place-names, leading to a more complicated pattern of place-name changing which includes phonetic transfer from one language to the other, translation, folk-etimological transfer, and visual transfer. This often results in conflicting situations arising from different cultural and ethnic emotional attitudes.⁴ We have thus established that place-name alteration, be it within one language or between several languages is not an unusual phenomenon. The goal of this paper however, is not to trace the linguistic transformations and origins of the place-names in the Armenian SSR, but to understand the ideological and political motivation behind the place-name changes. This means that the classifications of place-names employed here reflect purely political perceptions rather than true origins of a place-name. To illustrate this point: a number of Turkic place-names are adaptations of the earlier Armenian place-names, however, from the nationalist Armenian perspective they remained Turkic.

Place-naming policy in the USSR

It is common for revolutionary regimes to create new state symbols to "remove evidence of the deposed regime and to establish an identity for the usurper."⁵ This is exactly what the Soviet Union did by destroying the churches, monuments, institutions and place-names of the Tsarist regime.⁶ The Bolsheviks undertook

3. George R. Stewart, *Names on the globe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975): Part I, chapters 6 and 8.

4. Ivan Lutterer, "Czech-German language contacts in the toponymy of Bohemia;" J. B. Rudnycky, "Names in contact: Canadian pattern;" G. F. Delaney, "Language problems in Canadian toponymy;" in Henri Dorion, ed., *Les noms de lieux et le contact des langues = Place names and language contact* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1972).

5. Peter G. Lewis, "The politics of Iranian place-names," *The Geographical Review*, 72 (1982): 99.

6. I would like to stress the important difference between the material symbols that affect primarily a visual perception and place-names that aim at embedding ideological and aesthetic values into the consciousness.

unprecedented place-name changing campaigns managing to replace up to half of all place-names in the USSR.⁷ To sum up, it is possible to say that any place-name changes in the USSR were directly related to the ideological, political and national policy of the authorities.⁸ The place-names policy was regulated at the highest Soviet level by the decrees of the Central Executive Committee, and the Supreme Soviet.

Place-names, demography and national identity

The South Caucasus was an arena of constant warfare between the Ottoman and Persian empires for some three hundred years from the fifteenth century. The character of those wars had a devastating effect on the region. Both sides implemented a scorched earth policy to deprive their adversary of resources and to impede their advance. To this end large-scale deportations of the indigenous population were carried out, particularly by the Persians who were predominantly on the defensive and needed to stop the advancing Ottoman troops.⁹ Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced in this manner; their villages remained deserted and after some time were inhabited by nomadic Turkic tribes. This situation of constant warfare had a profound impact on the place-names in the region and especially in Armenia. This situation closely matches the circumstances described by G. R. Stewart: "If the transfer of the territory occurred in haste and under stress,

7. Charles B. Peterson, "The nature of Soviet place-names," *Names*, 25, 1 (1977): 15-24; N. V. Podol'skaia, "Sviazi demografo-etnicheskikh i toponimicheskikh protsessov," in *Toponimika i mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia* (Moscow: AN SSSR, Moskovskii filial Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR, 1992): 24; John Murray, *Politics and place-names. Changing names in the late Soviet period* (Birmingham: Birmingham Slavonic Monographs No. 32, University of Birmingham, 2000): 1.

8. Along with the establishment of ideologically motivated place-names there were place-name campaigns that can be seen as Russian nationalistic. For instance, Finnish place-names were replaced by the Russian ones on the territories annexed from Finland with the exception of Karelo-Finnish ASSR. (Charles B. Peterson, *art. cit.*: 23). Even before the Second World War the mass deportations of people accused of collaborating with the Nazis — Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans, Kalmiks, Balkars, Karachay — were followed by mass renaming campaigns, when Russian and Soviet place-names were imposed. The same tendency was revealed after the war in Eastern Prussia (present-day Kaliningrad oblast' of Russian Federation), when all German place-names were replaced in July 1946 by Russian and Soviet place-names. A similar fate befell the Japanese place-names in the Southern Sakhalin and Kuril Islands after the Second World War. The deterioration of Russian-Chinese relations in December 1972 resulted in the replacement of Chinese place-names in the border districts (Charles B. Peterson, *art. cit.*: 15-24). Up to 500 place-names were changed in the Far East. (B. A. Diachenko, "Pereimenovaniia v primor'e," in *Vsesoiuznaia nauchno-prakticheskaiia konferentsiia "Istoricheskie nazvaniia — pamiatniki kul'tury" 17-20 aprelia 1989. Tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii* (Moscow, 1989): 111. Russification policies were continued in the late Soviet period in Ukraine and Moldova. (S. G. Berzhan, "O tendentsiakh iskoreneniia istoricheskikh nazvanii (Na materiale natsional'nykh toponimov MSSR)," in *ibid.*: 112).

9. See: Dickran Kouymjian, "Armenia from the fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the forced emigration under Shah Abbas (1604)," in Richard G. Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian people from Ancient to Modern Times*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1997): especially 14-21.

during a warlike invasion, when some horde may have descended upon a district and slaughtered the inhabitants so quickly and so totally that killers learned no names we shall expect less care in rendering than if it took place during friendly and leisurely contacts of trading.”¹⁰ Under these conditions, the total replacement of the cultural landscape becomes possible. In the case of Eastern Armenia, deportations took the place of a massacre so that new arrivals would not be able to learn the original place-names. This argument is reinforced by the Russian nineteenth-century explorer of the South Caucasus Ivan Shopen who wrote that: “Geok-Chai magal [district] after the devastation of the previous century remained entirely empty so when the last Yerevan sardar Hussein-Khan undertook to resettle it with Karapapakhs in 1814 no one could remember the names of its destroyed villages, that have since received new names.”¹¹ Other indirect evidence pointing at forced migrations is that a number of Turkic place-names in Armenia have the Arabic-Turkic root *harab/haraba*, meaning ruins. Over the centuries, the highly unstable political situation in the region, the large-scale displacements of the Armenian population and the penetration of Turkic nomadic tribes resulted in a dramatic transformation of the ethnic composition of the region and its cultural landscape. The Armenian toponymic nomenclature partially survived, but is largely adapted, altered, or entirely replaced by the Turkic one.

The Russian Empire in the South Caucasus

The acquisition of the South Caucasus by the Russian Empire during the first three decades of the nineteenth century led to dramatic demographic changes in the region. The military and strategic designs of the Russian authorities required the establishment of a buffer zone inhabited by a friendly Christian population between the Russian territory and the Islamic Empires of Persia and Turkey. The colonisation of the South Caucasus by ethnic Russians proved impossible due to the high costs as well as the inhospitable environment. Therefore, the Russian authorities greatly encouraged the resettlement of Christian Armenians. Within a short period from 1828 to 1831, it is estimated that 105,000 Armenians arrived in the South Caucasus.¹² Their main destination was the newly created “*Armianskaia oblastʹ*” (the Armenian Province) made up of the Yerevan and Nakhijevan Khanates. The results of this policy can be seen from the fact that the population of the *Armianskaia oblastʹ* in 1831 was 49.7% Muslim, and 34.8% resettled Armenians while only 15.3% were indigenous Armenians.¹³ This process

10. G. R. Stewart, *op. cit.*: 53.

11. Ivan Shopen, *Istoricheskii pamiatnik sostoianiiia Armianskoi oblasti v epokhu ee prisoedineniia k Rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg, 1852): 446. In addition the author lists 1,111 villages of the *Armianskaia oblastʹ* and 359 of those were destroyed villages, *ibid.*: 485-508, 510-518.

12. M. A. Adonts, *Ekonomicheskoe razvitie Vostochnoi Armenii v 19 veke* (Yerevan: Academy of Science of the Armenian SSR, 1957): 496, 499.

13. Ivan Shopen, *op. cit.*: 639-642.

continued through the entire nineteenth century fuelled by the Russian-Turkish (Crimean) war of 1855-1856, the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, by the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and especially during the First World War as a result of genocidal policies carried out in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴ By the time of the declaration of independence in 1918 at the end of the World War I, there were some 400-500 thousand refugees in Eastern Armenia.¹⁵ Thus in less than a century (1828-1918) the demographic structure of Eastern Armenia changed in a most dramatic way — from a tiny minority at the beginning of the nineteenth century Armenians became a sizeable majority by the early twentieth century. These demographic developments had implications, which are clearly seen in the early Soviet population census (1926).¹⁶

The population of Armenian SSR in 1926				
District	Armenians	%	Azerbaijanis	%
Daralagiaz	23,959	79.6	5,941	19.7
Delijan	66,934	85.0	8,181	10.3
Zangezur	59,938	86.9	4,433	6.4
Leninakan	146,257	87.6	1,505	0.9
Megri	6,517	80.0	1,201	14.7
Nor-Bayazet	85,790	84.4	14,065	13.8
Pambak-Lori	106,911	80.2	10,616	7.9
Erivan	146,347	81.9	24,039	13.4
Echmiadzin	100,918	88.1	8,247	7.2
Total	743,571	84.4	78,228	8.8

This table shows that by 1926 the Armenian population formed an 84.4% majority in the republic overall (8.8% Turkic); 89.2% (149,183) majority in urban areas

14. Armenian refugees fled into Eastern Armenia even before the large-scale massacres began in the Ottoman Empire in spring 1915. Thus according to the data collected during the one-day census by the Erevan Statistical Committee on January 30, 1915, on the territory of Eastern Armenia there were more than 67,000 refugees — Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians. Armenians made up some 50,000 of this total. See: *Erevanskaia statisticheskaiia komissiiia. Odnodnevnaia perepis' bezhentsev iz Turtsii, Persii i iz mest pograniichnykh s Turtsiei (armian, aisorov, grekov i dr.) 1914-1915. Perepis' proizvedena 30-go Ianvaria 1915 goda* (Yerevan: "Luis," 1915): 38-39.

15. Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, vol. 1: *The first year, 1918-1919* (Berkeley - Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971): 48.

16. *Zakavkazskoe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie. Naselenie Zakavkaz'ia. Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1926 g. Kratkie itogi* (Tiflis, 1928): table 6, p. 13.

(3.4% (5,703) Turkic), and 84.8% (605,393) in rural areas (10.1% (72,525) Turkic).

National movement in Armenia

The “Armenian Question” was brought into the international agenda at the Berlin Convention of 1878, which obliged the Ottoman Government to carry out reforms in the Armenian provinces.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Armenian national ideology was under the strong influence of the national-liberation movement in the Balkans as well as of the ideas of the Russian socialists, the “*Narodniki*” in particular.¹⁸ The Armenian political parties that emerged in the late nineteenth century were mainly concerned with the liberation of Western (Turkish) Armenia. Their ideas were further fuelled by the demands for autonomy and reform for Armenia that were being made in the European and Russian diplomatic notes of the time. This rising Armenian nationalism was necessarily in sharp conflict with the emerging Turkish nationalist ideology. The Ottoman State under Sultan Abdul-Hamid II responded by carrying out the Armenian massacres of the late nineteenth century. This policy eventually culminated in the Armenian genocide of 1915, when almost the entire Armenian population was erased from Western (Turkish) Armenia, which put an end to all hopes of an independent Armenian state in Western Armenia. Given the importance of the notion of an independent Armenia, it is clear that the events of 1915 had the most profound and traumatic effect on the Armenian national identity.

Place-naming policy in Soviet Armenia

Having outlined the aspects of the Armenian national identity, demographic circumstances and origins of place-names in the Armenian SSR we can now turn to the ideological use of renamings in Soviet Armenia. This part will address four aspects of the renamings — the mechanism of renamings will unveil the Soviet bureaucratic procedures that led to the place-name renaming. The dynamics of renamings will address the relationship between the ideological and political developments in the USSR and renamings in Armenia. The scale of renamings will deal with the fluctuating numbers of place-names in Armenia and the spatial distribution of the renamings. Finally, the nature of renamings will be analysed in the last part.

17. J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in world politics. A documentary record*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged, vol. 1: *European expansion, 1535-1914*, compiled, translated, and edited by J. C. Hurewitz (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1975): 414.

18. M. R. Kochar, *Armiano-Turetskie obshchestvenno-politicheskie otnosheniia i armianskii vopros v kontse 19 — nachale 20 vekov* (Yerevan: Izdatel'stvo Erevanskogo Universiteta, 1988): 17-19.

Mechanism of renamings

The Soviet system of totalitarian control embraced all aspects of public life. Every minor decision had to be in accordance with the supervising authority. This was true for place-naming as well. During the Soviet period a special framework of laws and instructions was created to regulate a renaming policy. This mechanism was neither public nor uniform for all the Soviet republics. From a number of documents I will try to reconstruct the mechanism of renamings used in Armenia. Some of the decision-making aspects in Armenia can be seen from a 1927 law that reads:

1. The names of newly established places had to be approved by the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee [of the Armenian SSR]; a request for it had to be submitted by the district executive committee through the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. 2. The names of the new railway stations opening within the boundaries of the Armenian SSR, had to be approved by the Central Executive Committee of the Armenian SSR, with the [subsequent] approval by the People's Commissariat of Communications of the USSR.¹⁹

As we can see, the place-naming policy even at a local level was closely controlled by the Central authorities from the outset. Another element in the mechanism of renamings was a special commission which was appointed in 1933 to determine "correct" place-names in Armenia.²⁰ A number of sources allow us to reconstruct the process by which the "correct" place-names were approved at the different levels of authority. The first stage in this mechanism was the Geographic Commission of the Armenian Academy of Science that would accept the new place-names. The next stage was at the Presidium of the Academy of Science where the suggested place-names were reviewed. A further decision had to be made by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR.²¹ The final decision on renaming had to be "co-ordinated in every case [...] with the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. [...] According to the decision taken on April 15, 1938 by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR."²² Hence, there existed a four level

19. "Nor Kazmvoh Bnakavajreri Tomaragrman ev Anvanman Kargi Masin: 19. 01. 1927," *Haikakan SSR Orenkneri, Geraguin Soveti Nakhagahutian Hramanagreri ev Haikakan SSR Karavarutian Voroshumneri Zhamanakagrakan Zhohovatzu 1920-1938 tt. (Ar 1-i hulis 1963 t. popohutiunnerov ev Irtzumnerov)* (Chronological collection of the laws of the Armenian SSR, the decrees of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and decisions of the government of the Armenian SSR, 1920-1938) (Yerevan: Haipetrat, 1963): 241.

20. Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The impact of Soviet policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962): 80, 142.

21. *Haikakan SSR Ashkharagrakan Anunner (The Geographic Names of the Armenian SSR)* (Yerevan: Academy of Science of the Armenian SSR, 1951): 6, 9-10.

22. "Haikakan KhSH Varchakan-Teritorial Bazhanman Hartseri Lutsman Kargi masin. 14. 05. 1938," *Haikakan SSR Orenkneri...*, *op. cit.*: 361.

system of adopting decisions on place-name renamings, allowing Moscow control of the entire place-naming process:

I should point out that this mechanism was reconstructed through the analysis of a number of documents that cover the period from 1930 to the mid 1950's. So far, I have not discovered a single document that contains a direct reference to all the components of the process. Nevertheless, it is clear that the politics of renamings was under tight political control.

The dynamics of renamings

The place-name renamings in the Armenian SSR became an indicator closely reflecting the internal political processes in the USSR. In the early years of communist rule, ideas of internationalism were particularly strong among Armenia's communist leaders. This is clearly reflected in the renamings of that time. There is no exact data on renaming policies for the period 1920-1934, but the number of renamings at that time can be estimated at no more than 80 from an analysis of indirect sources.²³ A characteristic of the early renamings is that the toponyms renamed were mainly of a religious nature, especially unacceptable for the Soviet authorities during the first decades of Soviet rule. Both Christian and Muslim place-names were targeted. For instance, such Christian and Muslim place-names as: *Mollalu* (*Aluchalu Verin*), *Kilisakend* (*Srashen*), *Hojakend* (*Kuzikend*), *Kodukhvank* (*Koturvan*),²⁴ etc. lost their religious element. Another category, consisting of place-names reflecting feudal relationships, was equally unacceptable: *Hussein Kuli Agalu* (*Narimanlu*), *Siltan Ali Kishlag* (*Janahmed*), etc.

23. This estimation is based on the following calculations: the very first edition of the administrative-territorial division of the Armenian SSR (1948) listed around 80 renamed place-names without the date of renaming. Having in mind that place-names renamings with the date of renaming began in 1935 it is possible to assume that 80 dateless renamings have occurred in the period of 1920-1934.

24. Place-name in brackets is a new one. The religious connotation here is as follows: *Mollalu* means Mullah; *Kilisakend* is Turkish for Church; *Hojakend* relates to a pilgrimage to Mecca; -*vank* in *Kodukhvank* is Armenian for Church.

The reason for these renamings is clearly stated in an official decree on renamings of 1935:

Resolution of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the SSRA
Taking into consideration that names of many populated places of the SSRA reflect relict religious, feudal-landowner relations and are alien to the Soviet consciousness, and [moreover] some have unstable and even derogative meaning, as well as that many place-names are repeated in two or more areas which creates postal and other inconveniences, the Presidium of TsIK [Central Executive Committee] SSRA complies with the opinion of workers and local organisations and has decided: 1. to change names of populated places, according to the following list: [list of place-names]

Secretary of TsIK SSRA — R. Dashtoiian
January 3, 1935²⁵

During the period 1941-1945 of the Great Patriotic War, there were no renamings in the Armenian SSR. The only exception was one renaming of a Russian village *Voskresenovka* into *Lermontovo*, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Russian poet Lermontov's death in 1941. This particular renaming also allowed the authorities to get rid of an undesirable religious toponym (*Voskresenovka* means Resurrection). The place-name renamings of 1945 occurred after the capitulation of Nazi Germany. The significant increase in the number of renamings between 1946 and 1950 was a product of both social and political processes. One of these was the mass repatriation of Armenians in the aftermath of the war. The Soviet government adopted a decision to repatriate Armenians into Soviet Armenia in November 1945.²⁶ The returning Armenians became Soviet citizens the moment they arrived in the USSR.²⁷ In the period 1946-1948 some 90,000 Armenians arrived from the Middle East, North and South America and Western Europe.²⁸ Another social-political process that apparently affected place naming in Armenia was the emigration of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR that occurred in that period. On March 10, 1948, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution

25. *Kommunist* (Yerevan), 5 (05.01.1935). The comparison of the list of renamings published in the *Kommunist* newspaper (104 renamings) with the list of renamings that appeared in the 1948 edition of the Administrative-territorial division of the Armenian SSR (97 renamings) shows that several place-names had disappeared from the map of Armenia between 1935 and 1948.

26. According to the decree of *Sovnarkom* of the USSR of November 21, 1945 the Armenian government received significant assets for the organisation of repatriation and for offering help to the repatriates. The plenum of the Armenian Communist Party held in February 1946 had discussed "Measures on preparation for admittance and settlement of Armenians returning from abroad." *Ocherki istorii kommunisticheskoi partii Armenii* (Yerevan: "Ayastan," 1967): 445.

27. *Sbornik zakonov SSSR i ukazov Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR 1938-1961* (Moscow, 1961). "O poriadke priobretenii grazhdanstva SSSR litsami armianskoi natsional'nosti, vozvrashchaiushchimisia iz-za granitsi na rodinu v Sovetskuiu Armeniiu," Decree of October 19, 1946, p. 99.

28. Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, "Population redistribution and the ethnic balance in Transcaucasia," in Ronald G. Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, nationalism, and social change: essays in the history of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996): 488.

entitled: "Planned measures for the resettlement of collective farm workers and other Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR to the Kura-Araks lowlands." According to this plan some 100,000 people had to be "voluntarily" resettled. The emigration occurred in three stages: 10,000 people were resettled in 1948, another 40,000 in 1949, and 50,000 in 1950.²⁹ The Azerbaijani authors M. M. Allahverdiev and A. K. Aleskerov provide the following explanation of the resettlement of Azerbaijanis:

The influx of the population from beyond the republic in the post-war years is also caused by considerable extension of irrigated lands in the Kura-Araks lowland and by transmigrating to the republics the Azerbaijanis from Transcaucasian, Central Asian republics and some other regions that was organized in connection with it (during the years from 1948 to 1952 from the Armenian republic alone approximately 58,000 people were transmigrated to Azerbaijan)³⁰.

These waves of emigrations of the Azerbaijani population and immigrations of Armenians were apparently one of the major causes for renamings in the Armenian SSR in the post-war period. We should also consider the general decline in Russo-Turkish relations in the aftermath of the Second World War, and Stalin's demands for the return of the territories seceded to Turkey in 1921.³¹ The post-war renamings campaign ended in 1950, and the annual number of renamings steadily declined until 1967-1968.

The years 1967 and 1968 were marked by a sudden increase in renamings when more than 50 place-names were changed. The explanation for this phenomenon could be the attempt of the local authorities to accommodate the resurgence of Armenian nationalism that occurred two years earlier. Let us assess the events of 1965 and their possible impact on the rise of renamings two years later. The unauthorized demonstrations took place in Yerevan in April 1965 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire. The event was not a totally unexpected one as there are indicators that it was anticipated. The local *Kommunist* newspaper published an article about one of the leaders of the Armenian liberation movement Andranik Ozanian whose very name was previously banned in the USSR several weeks before April 24. Immediately before the demonstrations the top official Soviet newspaper *Pravda* published an article about the Armenian genocide on April 24th — the day that is commemorated as

29. U. Barsegov, "Lozh' na sluzhbe ekspansionizma i genotsida," *Armianskii Vestnik*, 3-4 (1998): 138; Idayat Orudzhev (the state councillor of Azerbaijan on ethnic policy) during the 1994 conference also mentions a figure of 100,000 re-settled people and the following dates of decrees: December 23, 1947, and as already mentioned March 10, 1948. Open Society Archives. Soviet "Red" Archives / Fond 300 / Subfond 80 / Series 3 / Box 10 / Folder: "Armenia."

30. M. M. Allahverdiyev, A. K. Aleskerov, "Regularities of changes in the territorial distribution and occupational cross-sections of the population in the Azerbaijan SSR," in *Materials on economic history of Azerbaijan (To the Vth International Congress on Economic History)* (Baku: Elm, 1970): 131.

31. Bruce Robellet Kuniholm, *The origins of the cold war in the Near East; great power conflict and diplomacy in Iran, Turkey, and Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980): 255-275.

genocide day. The article was reprinted by the Armenian *Kommunist* the next day.³² The most unusual aspect of this event was that the Soviet authorities did not resort to violence as they had previously on similar occasions.³³ Even though the absence of violence could have been interpreted as Soviet tolerance of the Armenian national (anti-Turkish) sentiment, it was however clear that the unauthorized nature of the demonstrations could not pass unnoticed. These events eventually lead to the resignation of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, V. Zorobian in 1966. One of the official reasons for his resignation was: “shortcomings in the ideological work of the party organisations [and] especially with the youth.”³⁴ Once the issue was resolved with Zorobian’s removal the new Armenian communist leadership could make further concessions to Armenian nationalism to gain popular support. Indeed, the years 1967 and 1968 were marked by a set of symbolic gestures to nationalist sentiments.

One of the most notable consequences of the 1965 demonstrations was the construction and opening of the memorial to the victims of the genocide in Yerevan in 1967. This was clearly a concession to the national and especially anti-Turkish sentiments present in Armenian society. The new First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party A. Kochinian attended the opening ceremony, which shows that the communist authorities took the mood of Armenian society seriously. In order to highlight the role of the Communist Party and to downplay the nationalist component of the event, the opening ceremony took place on November 29th the day of the sovietisation of Armenia, instead of April 24th as one might have expected.³⁵ This ‘Solomon’ decision demonstrates that the local authorities needed to balance carefully the two tendencies — communism and nationalism, while trying to expertly combine them.

Yet another monument was opened in Armenia in 1968. This memorial was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Sardarapat battle of 1918. The battle between Armenian troops and the advancing Turkish army saved Armenia’s capital by diverting the Turkish advance. The first secretary A. Kochinian again attended the ceremony to highlight the importance and significance of the event. Again, the date was carefully selected — May 26th — the day the Sardarapat battle began, rather than May 28th — the day of victory and of the declaration of Armenian independence.³⁶ Along with these visible symbolic concessions to Armenian nationalism, a renaming campaign took place in 1967 and 1968. It is in this context that one should view the renamings of 1967-1968, as they were hardly accidental.

32. M. Nersisian, “Genotsid — tiagochaishee prestuplenie protiv peredovogo chelovechestva,” *Pravda* (24.04.1965); *Kommunist* (Yerevan) (25.04.1965).

33. For instance in 1956 in Tbilisi, or in 1962 in Novocherkassk. For a detailed summary of those events see: V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1999), chapters 5 and 12.

34. “K 23 s’ezdu KPSS, 16 marta 1966 goda,” Open Society Archives. Soviet “Red” Archives/Fond 300/Subfond 80/Series 1/Box 47/Folder: “Armenia KP2.”

35. *Kommunist* (Yerevan), (30.11.1967).

36. *Kommunist* (Yerevan), (26.05.1968).

Following the unauthorized demonstrations of 1965, the Zorobian leadership was more reluctant to make any concessions to nationalist sentiment, as from Moscow's point of view, that would undoubtedly look provocative and could lead to accusations of nationalism. It is clear therefore why during the years 1965-1966, there were no renamings or any other expressions of nationalism. Moscow's stance became clear with Zorobian's "punishment" for the lapses in discipline, and notably, the absence of explicit condemnation of Armenian (anti-Turkish) nationalism. The new Armenian leadership was free to make concessions to nationalist sentiments and as a result the years 1967 and 1968 were marked by such symbolic gestures as the construction of monuments and renamings. Following the rise of Armenian nationalism and the renaming campaign of 1967 and 1968, there were virtually no renamings for another decade.

It was only in 1978 that another significant increase in renamings occurred when 91 place-names were changed. Once again, the explanation for this increase in renamings may be Armenian nationalism. It appears that Moscow's attempt to limit the constitutional rights of the Union republics (in particular, with regard to the very sensitive language issue) produced a nationalistic response in the form of the renaming campaign. A major propaganda campaign was conducted in the central Soviet press in the wake of the replacement of the old, so-called "Stalin's Constitution" (of 1936) in 1977 and 1978. It was clear that the aim of the campaign was to prepare the general public to expect further limitations in the rights of the Union republics. Even the federate nature of the USSR was questioned in favour of a unitary state. The Kremlin's desire for higher centralisation of the state was evidently shown in the project of the USSR Constitution, published in 1977. For instance, even the formal right to have military formations in the Union republics was removed. It was also proposed that Russian should become the state language.³⁷ In addition to the imminent changes in the USSR Constitution, the individual constitutions of the Union republics were also expected to change. With the unmistakable trend to the centralisation in the USSR constitution, it was natural to expect further limitations of rights at this time in the republican constitutions. When the drafts of the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian constitutions were published in 1978, there was no mention in the local press of the state languages of the republics. The authorities apparently expected discontent over the absence of the state language article in the constitution and as a concession to the national feelings the drafts of the Armenian and Georgian Constitutions mentioned "state concern for the development of the language." This encroachment attempt generated resentment and protests took place in Tbilisi and Yerevan in April 1978.³⁸ As a result, the Soviet authorities opted for

37. Ann Shelly, "The non-Russian republics in 1977," Radio Liberty Research, RL 294/77 (December 27, 1977). Open Society Archives. Soviet "Red" Archives/Fond 300/Subfond 610/Series 0/Box 1515/Research Bulletin 1977 (Oct.-Dec.).

38. "Demonstrations reported in capital of Soviet Georgia," Radio Liberty Research, RL 8 /78 (April 16, 1978); and "The Georgian language and national pride prevail," Radio Liberty Research, RL 81 / 78 (April 18, 1978). Open Society Archives. Soviet "Red" Archives/Fond 300/Subfond 610/Series 0/Box 1517/Research Bulletin 1978 (April - June).

preserving the language articles not only in the Armenian and Georgian constitutions but also in the Azerbaijani one. The three South Caucasian republics were the only ones to retain the state language articles among all the Union republics. It seems that the renaming of place names intended to demonstrate the position of the local communist authorities towards the language issue by reinforcing the Armenian-ness of the republic. Therefore, the place-name replacements of 1978 in Armenia should be seen in the context of the changes in the Soviet constitution. The Chart 1 summarises the dynamics of place-names replacement.

Chart 1 – The dynamics of place-names replacement in Armenia

The scale of renamings

This analysis is based on the following sources: the earliest source on place-names is the large-scale map (1:200,000) of the Armenian SSR published in 1932³⁹ which gives a very detailed picture of Armenian place-names at that time. Other important sources of data were the six issues of the official publication *Administrative-territorial division of the Armenian SSR*.⁴⁰ These volumes were published primarily for local administrators and apparently contained a complete list of populated places in Armenia. To assess the scale of renamings it is necessary to establish the number of populated places in the Armenian SSR. Surprisingly, it is rather difficult to give a definite figure for the total number of place-names, as this was not constant. There are evidently two reasons for these variations. Firstly, the

39. Kh. A. Avdالبekian, *Karta Sotsialisticheskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki Armenii, 1:200,000* (Yerevan, 1932).

40. Haikakan SSH, *varcha-teritorial bazhanume ar 1 hunvari 1948 t. (Armenian SSR, Administrative territorial structure on January 1, 1948)*, (Yerevan, 1948); *ibid.: ...ar 1 hoktemberi 1955 t. (on October 1, 1955)*, (Yerevan, 1955); *ibid.: ...ar 1 marti 1964 t. (on March 1, 1964)*, (Yerevan, 1964); *ibid.: ...ar 1971 t. (on 1971)*, (Yerevan, 1976); *ibid.: ...ar 1976 t. (on 1976)*, (Yerevan, 1976); *ibid.: ...ar 1988 t. (on 1988)*, (Yerevan, 1988).

number of place-names differed significantly because of boundary changes with neighbouring Soviet republics.⁴¹ Overall, the total territory of the Armenian SSR diminished by more than 1,000 sq. km during the entire Soviet period. Also, social and political processes within the USSR such as industrialisation, urbanisation, deportations and resettlements also led to a constant decline in the number of place-names. The Soviet population census of 1959 showed that there were 1,026 villages in the Armenian SSR. This figure included 65 villages with a population between 5 and 50 people.⁴² The Chart 2 summarises the changes in the numbers of place-names in Armenian SSR.

Chart 2 – Number of place-names in Armenian SSR

It is clear that during the 1932-1988 period, the number of place-names in Armenia fluctuated by 15%. As the total number of place-names in Armenia declined, place-name renamings became more frequent. The decline in the number of renamed place-names only occurred between 1955 (489 renamings) and 1964 (483 renamings). The impact of the renaming policy is evident. By 1988 some 60% (598 out of 980) of place-names in the Armenian SSR had been renamed (see Chart 3). This figure exceeds the highest estimates of the Soviet place-name renamings which some authors place at around 50%.

41. The territory of the SSRA (Armenian SSR) in 1927 was 30,948 sq. km., it shrank to 29,697 sq. km. by 1932 and by the time of the dissolution of the USSR it had only 29,800 sq. km. (*Atlas Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, composed by A. F. Belavin, second, expanded edition (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928): 70; Kh. A. Avdalyan, *op. cit.*; I. A. Gogoverishvili, O. A. Khachalag, eds, *Armianskaia SSR* [Map]. (Moscow: Glavnoe upravlenie geodezii i kartografii pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, 1990).

42. *Itogi vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1959 goda. Armianskaia SSR* (Moscow: Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, 1963): 14-15.

Chart 3 – Proportion of renamings in Armenia

This unusually high figure reflects the total change of the cultural landscape of the Armenian SSR. If we also consider the spatial distribution of the renamed place-names up to 1988 (see Map 1), it is clear that the distribution of the renamings varied from 12% in some districts to nearly 100% in others. Place-name renamings were most numerous in the central valleys, whereas the fewest occurred in the mountainous and forested areas of the South and North-East of the country. The explanation for this is that the valleys of Armenia were badly affected by the Turkish-Persian wars of sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, with the loss of their cultural landscape, while the inaccessible areas of the North-East and South were relatively unaffected by those events.

To present as complete a picture of the renamings in Armenia as possible, I will also briefly address the question of physical-geographic toponyms. The main source for this analysis is a book *Geographic names of the Armenian SSR*, published in 1951. The publication contains names of “all mountain ranges, plateaus, most mountain passes, major mountains and peaks, large rivers and tributaries, and 1/4 of the lakes”⁴³ i.e. the list of names of physical features is not a full one. The new (i.e. renamed) and old place-names are listed in one list in alphabetical order, which makes it impossible to make any comparison between renamed and old toponyms. Therefore, I had to compose the list anew. The limited resources for this analysis do not allow one to determine whether there was any temporal or spatial pattern to the distribution of the renamings. It is therefore clear that this analysis has some limitations but it should suffice as a general illustration for the major trends.

43. *Geograficheskie naimenovaniia Armianskoi SSR* (Yerevan 1951): 11.

Hydronyms

There are 107 hydronyms in the list, 71 (66%) of which were renamed. There were a number of hydronyms, each with a distinctly Turkic stem relating to water: *-çay* (river), *-göl* (lake), *-bulağ* (stream, spring), *-su* (water meaning river). There were 26 of these toponyms, most of which were changed for their Armenian equivalents. Thus *-gel* was changed for *-lich* (out of 12 stems *-göl*, 11 were changed into *lich*), *-bulağ* was substituted by *akhbiur* (out of 4 stems *-bulağ*, 2 were changed into *-akhbiur* and one into Russian *-rodnik*), the only Turkic stem *-su* was changed into its Armenian equivalent *-djur*. The situation with 9 Turkic stems *-çay* was different as only one was replaced by an Armenian equivalent *-get* while in the remaining 8 cases the stem was dropped completely in the new name. If one considers the method of renamings, it is possible to distinguish four categories. 1. Loan-translation or calque when the entire place-name is fully translated, for instance: Turkic *Karagöl* into Armenian *Sevlich* (black+lake); *Balihli* into *Dzyknaget* (fish+river). 2. Semi-calque or hybrid renamings: *Şorbulağ* into *Mushakhbiur*; *Karagöl* into *Karilich* (in these two pairs only the second part of a toponym is translated). 3. Linguistic adaptation: *Kafan* into *Kapan* (*Hapan*), *Ertapın* into *Artabun*. Finally, the fourth category is a complete substitution: *Basut* into *Tsav*; *Çayzami* into *Kashuni*. These four categories are distributed rather unequally as there were 5 cases of loan-translation or calque, 12 cases of semi-calque or hybrid, 27 cases of adaptation, and 29 cases of complete substitution. Thus, more than half of the renamed hydronyms have retained continuity with the old ones.

Oronyms

Out of 315 listed oronyms, 164 (52%) were renamed. Following the pattern established for hydronyms we can apply the same four categories here as well. There were 8 instances of loan-translation or calque, for instance: *Akdağ* into *Spitakasär* (white+mountain); *Damurli* (*Demirli*) into *Erkrasär* (iron+mountain). There were 14 cases of semi-calque or hybrids: *Murad-tapa* (*-tepe*) into *Muradsär*, *Kamarkaya* into *Kamarkar*. Adaptation was the most widespread method of renaming, being used in 98 cases. For example: *Hartinlar* into *Hartinler* (Turkic plural ending *-lar* substituted here by Armenian word for mountain *-ler*), *Işihli* into *Ishhansär*. The second most common way of renamings was complete substitution (44 cases), such as: *Maman* into *Tsahkadzor*, *Boğutlu* into *Ardeni*. In the case of oronyms, the number of Turkic stems for mountains is insignificant: *-dağ* (mountain) — 17 cases, *-tapa* (*tepe*) (hill) — 9 cases, *-kaya* (rock, cliff) — only 4 cases. These Turkic word-formants were changed in the following way: out of 17 words *-dağ*, 10 were translated into its Armenian equivalent *-sär*, 6 out of 9 *-tapa* were changed either into *-sär* or *-blur*, and all 4 *-kaya* were changed into *-kar*. As was the case with the hydronyms a large proportion of renamed oronyms maintain continuity with the old toponyms (120 out of 164 or 73% to be precise).

This short overview of the renamings of natural features demonstrates that the general trend in the Armenian SSR was to replace Turkic toponyms with Armenian ones.

The nature of renamings

This paper addresses the role of place-names in the national identity, and it is the “national” aspect of place-names that we are interested in. One approach is to sort place-names according to their “national connotation.” However, from the point of view of traditional onomastics this is difficult. Nearly every place-name contains elements from different linguistic layers and from different periods, so it is impossible to speak of the “national connotation” of a place-name. We deal firstly with an artificially created toponymic landscape. The origin of a place-name is well known, its etymology is completely clear, and the circumstances that led to and the timing of its emergence are known. Then it is the symbolic role and meaning of a place-name that are more important than its actual etymology. It is how a particular place-name is being perceived by a population rather than what it actually is that matters for the assessment of its role in the national identity. Therefore, we can speak of the “national connotation” of a place-name when it is necessary to understand its role in the national identity. Having said that, we can distinguish four major place-name categories of the new place-names in Armenia. *Armenian* place-names; *Turkic* place-names, *socialist* place-names; and *other* place-names (see Chart 4).

Chart 4 – The nature of renamed place-names in Armenia

From this chart it can be seen that the majority of the renamed place-names were Armenian, followed by “socialist” place-names, “Turkic” place-names and finally an insignificant number of “other” place-names. If the categories of “Armenian” and “Turkic” place-names are self-explanatory, then the category of “socialist” place-names deserves more explanation. The famous Soviet ideological formula “national by form, socialist by content” was widely applied in place-naming policies within the Union republics. Several methods were used to implement the formula. One method was to use the names of the local communists. In Armenia there were *Stepanavan* and

Shaumian (both places named after an ethnic Armenian Bolshevik, Stepan Shaumian), *Mikoyan* and *Anastasavan* (named after another Armenian Bolshevik Anastas Mikoyan). In Azerbaijan there were *Azizbekov*, *Narimanabad*, *Hanlar* (all named after local communists). In Georgia there were *Tshakaya*, *Ordzhonikidze*, *Tsulukidze*. Another group of Soviet toponyms originated from the standard figures of the Soviet pantheon “Lenin” and “Stalin.” The base word was modified by adding the local place-formant — *Leningrad* (RSFSR), *Leninakan* (Armenian SSR), *Leninabad* (Tadjik SSR), *Leninzholi* (Kazakh SSR), *Leningori* (Georgian SSR), *Stalingrad* (RSFSR), *Stalino* (Ukrainian SSR), *Staliniri* (Georgian SSR). Yet another category of Soviet toponyms was derived from words that were important to the Communist regime, such as “October,” “May,” or neologisms “*Soviety*” and “*Komsomol*.” Thus in the Armenian SSR there were *Sovetashen*, *Mayisian*, *Hoktemberian* and *Noyenberian* (the Sovietisation of Armenia occurred in November 1920) in Azerbaijan there were *Oktjabriabad*, *Birmay* (1 May), etc.

Hence, within the ideologically motivated Soviet place-names, it is possible to distinguish the national markers. In the case of Armenia there were three sub-categories of socialist place-names — “Armenian-socialist,” “Azerbaijani-socialist,” and “neutral-socialist.” Examples of “Armenian-socialist” have already been mentioned *Shaumian* and *Mikoyan*. *Azizbekov* was an “Azerbaijani-socialist” place-name (named after Meshadi Azizbekov, an ethnic Azerbaijani and member of the Baku Commune). Another category of socialist place-names was “neutral-socialist.” Unlike the first two categories of place-names which had clearly distinguishable ethnic markers, the “neutral-socialist” place-names were free of Armenian or Azerbaijani connotations. For instance: *Fioletovo* (after Ivan Fioletov an ethnic Russian member of the Baku Commune) or *Kalinono* (after Mikhail Kalinin the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR). The distribution of these sub-categories of “socialist” place-names in Armenia can be seen from Chart 5.

Chart 5 – “Socialist” renamings in Armenia

“Armenian-socialist” place-names once again made up the majority, followed by the “neutral socialist,” and “Azerbaijani-socialist” place-names. The nature of the changing cultural landscape of Armenia can be seen by comparing the maps showing Turkic and Armenian place-names in 1932 (Map 2), with a later map from 1988 (Map 3). It is clear that the place-naming campaigns that took place in the Armenian SSR succeeded in largely replacing the Turkic place-name landscape with an Armenian one.

One more aspect of renamings in Armenia also deserves mention. Renamings have always reflected the demographic circumstances on the ground. Thus, Armenian place-names only replaced Turkic place-names if the population of the place was Armenian. If the population was Azerbaijani, the new place-name would either be Turkic or Azerbaijani-socialist. The *Zangibasar* district was created on December 31, 1937 from parts of the *Echmiadzin* and *Artashat* districts. It was the smallest district in Armenia with an area of 160 sq. km. The majority of its 31 place-names as well as its population were Turkic. All of the 11 renamings that occurred in the district were mere replacements of one Turkic place-name by another. The district was abolished sometime between 1948 and 1955 (probably in 1949 as a result of the Soviet policies of Azerbaijani resettlement). After 1948, several renamings occurred there from Turkic into Armenian, which indicates the changes in ethnic composition of the district. In fact, the creation of this small district with its mainly Turkic population and the nature of renamings there during the decade 1937-1948 indicate that the Azerbaijanis received unofficial cultural autonomy. By late 1980's there were 152 Azerbaijani villages in the Armenian SSR all with Turkic place-names. The renamings of the Azerbaijani villages always retained the Turkic character — *Karakoyün* (*Azizlu*), *Karaçanta* (*Azizbekov*), *Canahmed* (*Günasli*), *Itkran* (*Gülستان*), *İlanli* (*Çaybasar*).

Similarly, unacceptable to the Soviet regime Russian place-names were replaced by Armenian ones if there was little or no Russian population left, for instance *Elenovka* was renamed *Sevan*. However, when the Russian population was present the renaming would reflect the ethnic character of the place, for instance: *Russkie Gergeri* — were renamed *Pushkino* (after the Russian writer A. S. Pushkin); *Voskresenovka* (an unacceptable religious name meaning Resurrection) was renamed *Lermontovo* (after the Russian poet Lermontov); *Vorontsovka* (after the Caucasian Viceroy Count Vorontsov) was renamed *Kalinino*, and finally *Nikitino* (after the Tsarist officer) was renamed *Fioletovo*.

Conclusion

“The man-made landscape - [...] provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and in the process of becoming. In other words, the culture of any nation is unintentionally reflected in its ordinary vernacular landscape; people will not change that landscape unless they are under very heavy pressure to do so. We must conclude that if there is really a major change in the look of the cultural landscape, then there is very likely a major change in one national culture at the same time” writes Pierce F. Lewis.⁴⁴ The place-naming policy in Soviet Armenia demonstrates that even under the totalitarian communist regime a conscious policy

44. Pierce F. Lewis, “Axioms for reading the landscape,” in D. W. Meinig, ed., *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes*, op. cit.: 15.

directed at the creation of a national cultural landscape was possible. Several factors made it possible:

- The decline of the initially strong communist ideology in the USSR and the rise of nationalism in the Soviet society especially after WWII.
- The ideological trends of the USSR took place in Armenia as well. In the Armenian SSR they acquired a unique direction determined by the specific features of the Armenian national identity.
- The events of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire have created a strong anti-Turkish sentiment, which eventually influenced the policy of the Armenian communists.
- This policy was only possible under the following conditions: the Soviet authorities were always anxious about separatism and therefore the anti-Turkish direction of Armenian nationalism was perceived as less dangerous and was tolerated.
- In the course of the 70 years of communist rule, the Armenian communists contributed greatly to the formation of the Armenian national identity. The destruction of the Turkic cultural landscape and the re-creation of the Armenian one has been a symbolic way to overcome the traumatic experiences of 1915.

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