

## **The Reflection of Communist Ideology in the Street Renaming Policy in Soviet Yerevan (1921-1939)<sup>1</sup>**

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*Keywords: urban toponyms, identity, street renaming, Soviet ideology, Soviet Yerevan, communism, street names, commemoration*

### **Introduction**

Toponyms (*place names*) are not simply abstract names in the spatial structure of urban areas, but also serve as a system of social and power relations, through which the identity of a city and society is being shaped.<sup>2</sup>

The latest works in toponymy focus on “the relation of place-name analysis with the study of power.”<sup>3</sup> In his article “The power of commemorative street names,” Maoz Azaryahu (1996) asserts that naming streets as an administrative and political procedure is a vivid expression of power.<sup>4</sup> According to him, the renaming process itself is an act of political propaganda with a great declarative value and public resonance.<sup>5</sup>

Since many political regimes legitimize and reinforce their authority through their use of history, commemorative street names have the effect of

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<sup>1</sup> This research would be impossible without the support of Mr. Amatuni Virabyan - the Director of the National Archive of Armenia, and Mr. Dorvard Abisoghomyan - the Advisor to the Director of the National Archive of Armenia. We are also grateful to Mrs. Lusine Amirjanyan for multiple consultations

<sup>2</sup> Berg L., Vuolteenaho J., *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company. 2009:

<sup>3</sup> Myers, G., *Naming and placing the other: power and the urban landscape in Zanzibar* // *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografi e* 87, 1996, 237-46.

<sup>4</sup> Azaryahu M., *The power of commemorative street name* // *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14, 1996, pp. 311-30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138

canonizing and embodying a particular “official” historical narrative. Thus, it is not surprising that a change of political regime is often accompanied by the large-scale renaming of streets.

Many recent studies<sup>6</sup> underline the importance of place naming as a strategy of nation-building and state formation. They have demonstrated how governmental authorities construct new regimes of toponymic inscription to present specific ideas of history and national identity.

Aiming to reconstruct the symbolic infrastructure of society, the renamed places introduce the political change and ideology of the political order into the daily life of people. The renaming of places is a powerful message about the new regime’s control over a community’s symbolic infrastructure. This is most obvious in the case of totalitarian regimes where street names are frequently used in order to make statements of the regime’s agenda, thereby demonstrating the ideology in more concrete terms.<sup>7</sup>

When the Bolsheviks took power in Armenia, they launched a massive street renaming process. In order to institutionalize the new regime, they used urban landscape as an arena to proclaim communist ideology and values to Soviet Armenian citizens. Changing the capital’s street names was an easy way to introduce new principles, to declare the ideology and political orientation of the Armenian SSR.

In spite of the above-mentioned research, there has been little investigation made on the relation between power and toponymy in the Communist regime. The studies of the Socialist city were more inclined to focus on the formal and informative aspects of the Soviet toponymy (see for example the works of A.M. Selishchev,<sup>8</sup> V. P. Neroznak, M.V.

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen S., Kliot N., *Place names in Israel’s ideological struggle over the administered territories* // Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 82, 1992, pp. 653-80; Azaryahu M., *The power of commemorative street name* // Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 14, 1996, pp 311–30; Azaryahu M., Kook R., *Mapping the nation: street names and Arab-Palestinian identity: three case studies* // Nations and Nationalism, 8, 2002, pp. 195–213.

<sup>7</sup> Yeoh B. S., *Street-naming and nation-building: toponymic inscriptions of nationhood in Singapore* // Area, 28, 1996, pp. 298–307.

<sup>8</sup> Selish’ev A. M., *Iz staroy I novoy toponimii*, [From Old and New Toponyms] // Selish’ev A. M. Selected Works. M., 1968, pp. 45–96.

Gorbanevskiy,<sup>9</sup> E.M. Pospelov,<sup>10</sup> S.A. Nikitin<sup>11</sup>), and less attention was paid to street names as one of the major systems for implementing the Communist/Socialist ideology in the urban space.

This article examines the significance of street names as an expression of Communist power in Yerevan, Armenia during the early Soviet period from 1921-1939 (the era of a newly established government in Armenia, until World War II). The research depicts the picture of the Soviet authority's attitude towards the street renaming process. The analysis will answer the question of how, through the control of state government, the political elite promoted its ideology via the nomenclature of the street network.

Information on early Soviet Yerevan toponymy is rather scarce and incomplete. There is no systematized edition containing full information about the renamed streets. The basic picture on Yerevan's toponymic changes in the Soviet early period is given in documents saved in the Funds of the Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian SSR, the Executive Committee of Yerevan City Council, and the Central Executive Committee of the ArmSSR in the National Archive of Armenia (hereinafter, all references to the archives are cited as: NAA/Fund/List/Case/(Protocol)/Sheet).

This study is based on the comparative analysis of archival documents for street naming/ renaming cases in Armenia (legislative enactments, decrees as well as a selection of the press and clerical correspondence

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<sup>9</sup> Neroznak V.P., Gorbanevskiy M.V., *Sovetskiy «novoyaz» na geograficheskoy karte (o shtampakh i stereotipakh rechevogo mishleniya)*. [Soviet "Newspeak" on the Geographical Map (about the Labels and Stereotypes of Speech Thinking)] M.: Znanie, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Pospelov E.M. *Nazvaniya gorodov i sel*. [The Names of Cities and Villages] M.: Nauka, 1996

<sup>11</sup> Nikitin S. A. *Produktivnie osnovi rossiyskoy toponimii: "Krasniy" (1918-1930g)* [The Productive Foundations of Russian Toponymy] // *Yaroslavskie lingvisticheskie chteniya*. Yaroslav: Izd-vo YaGPU im. K.D. Ushinskogo, 2001, pp.66–69; Nikitin S. A. *Koncepciya sovetskogo toponima (po arkhivnim materialam pervikh let sovetskoy vlasti — 1918–1926 gg.)* [The Concept of the Soviet Toponym: Based on Archive Material from the Early Years of SovietRule] // *Toponimia i oronimia*. Krak4w: Wydawnictwo naukowe DWN, 2001, pp. 363–372.

between the provincial and central Party organizations responsible for street renaming) from the National Archive along with various maps and street plans of Yerevan and other documentary sources of this period.

In this study, we have used two basic methods of research. For the classification and systematization of the naming/renaming cases of streets and squares in Yerevan, we have applied a statistical method by which we quantified the data file (i.e. toponyms) and subsequently made an analysis based on theoretical considerations, while for the analysis of the renamed streets we used the interpretative method of decoding text.

The set of streets was classified into the following basic groups: the names of political figures, names of intellectuals, names that are symbols of Communism, social class names, important dates, USSR capitals, location names.

### **Toponyms of the Pre-Revolutionary Period**

In her article “The Characteristics of District and Street Names in the City of Yerevan” ethnographer Lusine Amirjanyan (2006) stated that the first mention of Yerevan streets and districts known in the literature dated back to the XVI-XVII centuries.<sup>12</sup> During Persian rule, functional importance within the city was given to the districts, thus the uniqueness of medieval Yerevan urban toponyms lies in the fact that naming preference was given to the districts,<sup>13</sup> while the construction and naming of regular streets was of no importance. Another characteristic of this period was that the districts were mainly assigned names of important places of social or domestic life and there was almost no district of anthroponymic names, i.e. streets carrying the names of famous people.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> That was a Persian Empire timeline and at that time Yerevan was called Erivan Khanate ( Persian: ایروان خانات *Khānāt-e Irāvān*)

<sup>13</sup> The Persians divided Yerevan into large districts (Persian: محله *mahlas*)- the Old Town or Shahar (Persian: شهر *šahar*), Kond (Armenian: Կոնդ) or Tapabash (meaning from Turkish: "top of the hill"), Qarahanq (meaning from Armenian- "rock quarry") or Damir-Bulag (meaning from Turkish - "iron source").

<sup>14</sup> Amirjanyan L., *Erevan qakhaqi tagheri ev poghocneri anvanumneri arandznahatkutyunnery* // Hay azgabanutyanyan ev hnagitutyanyan khindirner, v. I, Erevan

The first official names of Yerevan streets became known much later, during the era of Tsarist Russia rule. According to Amirjanyan (2006), the streets in urban areas were given the name and surname of house or land owners, the names of public buildings, and were also based on geographical place names, or the occupation or social strata of the people. In 1853-1958, the Russian official Nazarev drew the plan of Erivan,<sup>15</sup> including the official names of 30 streets.<sup>16</sup> Among the names preserved from the Persian era (Cholmakchi, Shariati, Sultanakan, Mzkiti) there were streets already carrying the names of famous people in the Russian timeline (Astafevskaya, Tarkhanovskaya etc.).

A more detailed plan of Yerevan was drawn in 1906-1911 by municipal technician B. Mehrabyan,<sup>17</sup> who completed the naming process of Yerevan streets and districts, which had started in the previous century. Later, Alexander Tamanyan used this while designing the plan of Yerevan in 1924.<sup>18</sup> Thus, at the beginning of the 20th century within the Russian Empire, Erivan appeared as an administrative center with more or less constructed streets, and its Eastern and Armenian traits.

### **The Bolsheviks Took Power**

On 29 November, 1920 the Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) of Armenia, headed by Sarkis Kasyan and accompanied by the Red Army, entered Armenia and proclaimed it the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia. On 1 December 1920, Prime Minister Simon Vratsian ceded control of the country and the next day on December 2, the agreement

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2006 [“The Characteristics of District and Street Names in the City of Yerevan”, Issues of Armenian Ethnology and Archeology].

<sup>15</sup> Erivan was the name of Yerevan within the Russian Empire.

<sup>16</sup> Amirjanyan L., *Erevani poghocneri anvanumneri rusakan tirapetutyun shrjanum* // [The Names of Yerevan Streets During Russian Rule], Hay joghovrdakan mshakuyt, v. XII, Erevan 2006, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Map of Yerevan, by B. Mehrabov, 1906-1911* // Ashkharhagrakan atlas [Geographical Atlas], Geodeziayi ev qartezagrutyun kentron, Erevan, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Hakobyan T., *Erevani patmutyuny* [The History of Yerevan], 1879-1917, E, 1963, p 295.

signed between the RSFSR and Armenian Republic announced the establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

The newly assembled government took the course of total fidelity to the RSFSR. The results of that policy loyal to Soviet Russia were a series of reforms which effected the economic, social and political transformation of the country. The Soviet government immediately launched a socialist “modernization” of the country, taking new steps in the political, financial, economic, cultural and especially ideological directions.

This process did not face serious obstacles as the people, exhausted by wars (World War I, the Turkish-Armenian war, the undeclared Dashnak-Musavat war, the little civil war in the South of Armenia – Zangezur) and also having a huge number of refugees after the Genocide in Turkish Armenia, were dreaming about peace and the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the territory of Soviet Armenia.<sup>19</sup>

This is probably one reason why the implementation of socialist transformation into urban toponyms, which had a direct impact on such a delicate phenomenon as *identity*, did not cause social discussions or major tension.

### **The Street Naming Policy in Yerevan from the First Years of Soviet Armenia’s Declaration till the Beginning of the 1930s**

In the first year following the declaration of the Armenian SSR, over 50 names of streets, parks and squares in Yerevan were renamed. The official documents preserved in the National Archives of Armenia assert that the decision regarding the first renaming of Soviet Yerevan streets was made in 1921 by the Council of People’s Commissars of the Armenian SSR. In the first round, a list of 32 streets and parks was approved on

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<sup>19</sup> Later, when “planned” repressions were launched, people were frightened by the Red Terror of the first years of Soviet power and the establishment of the Communist Party. They had already known about the strict ideological principle of social relations and a single form of relationship with the Party and government- i.e by approving and welcoming the decisions of the Party. Basically the “toponymic policy” of the first 20 years of the Soviet regime took place precisely in such circumstances, and the population was thus not troubled about toponymy issues on the whole.

August 31, 1921 at the session of the Small Presidium of the Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian SSR (proposed by the People's Commissariat for Education of Armenian SSR).<sup>20</sup>

The first changes were publicized in the Armenian Communist Party newspaper *Khorhrdayin Hayastan*<sup>21</sup> ("Soviet Armenia") in September 1921. In 1922, additional reports of the departments of Workers' and Peasants' city militia in Yerevan announced the renaming of 19 streets. In these lists, there were about 28 names of the streets, districts which had not been renamed yet at that time.<sup>22</sup> All of these would receive their Soviet names later, during the period of observation (up to 1939). Almost all the streets changed in 1921-1922 preserved their names until 1939, except 4 street names, which would get their more Soviet colors later.

The nature of street renaming in the first period (1921-1932) permit us to classify them into several groups. In the first group, there are names assigned to the streets in honor or in memory of famous political figures. This group involves the names of the founders of socialist ideology (theorists), the revolutionaries, leaders and activists of the Revolutionary movement, the founders of the Communist Party, Bolshevik leaders, French revolutionaries, etc.

Thus, in 1921, to worship the founders of Communist ideology, Gubernskaya Street was renamed after Lenin in honor of the Russian communist revolutionary, politician and political theorist Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), Bazarnaya Street was renamed after Marx to commemorate the theoretician of communism and philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883), and Arkhitektorskaya Street was renamed after Plekhanov (Russian revolutionary and Marxist theoretician Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918)). Similarly Aptechnaya Street was renamed after Engels to honor the philosopher and communist theoretician Friedrich Engels (1820-1895).

The international leaders of the Communist Party were glorified when the former Uchilishnaya Street was renamed after Liebknecht, in honor of the German politician and one of the founders of the Communist Party of

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<sup>20</sup> NAA / Fond 122 / List 1/ Case 56/ Sheet 56

<sup>21</sup> "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" newspaper, 1921 / N 177

<sup>22</sup> NAA / Fond 133/List 1/ Case 2357

Germany, Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919). The same occurred with Millionnaya Street which was renamed after Luxemburg, in honor of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), the German Social-Democratic movement activist, and a co-founder of the Communist Party of Germany.

To memorialize prominent revolutionaries (both local and international) Sudebnaya Street was renamed after Marat – in honor of the French revolutionary and writer Jean-Paul Marat (1743-1793). Tarkhanovskaya Street (named after academician Ivan Tarkhanov (1846–1908) in Russia) was renamed Knuni/Gnuni after a prominent figure of the Bolshevik party and professional revolutionary Bogdan Knunyants. For the same purpose Doctorskaya Street was renamed Alaverdyan to honor Stepan Alaverdyan (1888-1920), one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution in Armenia, shot after the suppression of the Bolshevik armed uprising in May 1920. Behbutovskaya Street (named after Vasily Bebutov (1791-1858), one of the noble military leaders in the Caucasus of an Armenian origin. The head of the civil administration and the chairman of the Main Directorate of the Transcaucasian region)<sup>23</sup> was renamed after A. Rubeni (an Armenian revolutionary, who fought for the establishment of the Soviet regime in Shushi. He was killed by Musavat rebels). Tsarskaya Street was renamed after Suren Spandaryan (1882-1916), an Armenian literature critic, publicist and Bolshevik (in January 1912, he was a member of the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks). Tserkovnaya Street was renamed Zurabyan, in honor of Arshak Zurabyan (1873- 1920), a revolutionist.

Bekskeya Street was renamed after Ghazi Mamedi, an Islamic scholar and ascetic, who was the first Imam of the Caucasian Imamate (from 1828 to 1832). He facilitated a *jihad* against the invading Russians.<sup>24</sup> Duqanli Quchasi was renamed Sattari Street, in honor of Sattar Khan (1866-1914), a central figure in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, considered by many Iranians to be a national hero. Rustamkhan Quchasi (named after Rustam

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<sup>23</sup> Old Yerevan Project. More at [http://www.iatp.am/old\\_yerevan/](http://www.iatp.am/old_yerevan/)

<sup>24</sup> It was obviously a reverential gesture towards the Muslim part of the population of Yerevan, while at the same time a form of a denial of the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia, with a hint of the fact that the Soviet government of socialist Russia differed radically from Tsarist colonialists.



Khan (1588 – 1643), an Iranian Safavid military commander, prominent in the service of the Shahs Abbas I and Safi, loyal to Russian empire, was accused of treason and executed under Shah Abbas II) was renamed after Yeprem (1868–1912), an Iranian-Armenian revolutionary leader and a leading figure in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, a national hero in Iran.

The "international principle" of Bolsheviks found its way to the toponymic nomenclature of Yerevan through the anthroponyms of the 26 Baku Commissars, awarding them special places in the first round of street renamings. In commemoration of the 26 Baku Commissars, Krepostnaya Street (it started from the Northern Gate of the Castle and its name translates to Castle street<sup>25</sup>) was renamed after Stepan Shahumyan (1878-1918), a Soviet revolutionary and a political leader of Armenian origin, Commissar Extraordinary for the Caucasus, and one of the 26 Baku Commissars,<sup>26</sup> the head of the Baku Commune. Similarly Pana Khan Square (named after a ruling khan of the Erivan Khanate) was renamed after Meshadi Azizbekov (1876-1918), a Soviet revolutionary of Azerbaijani origin, leader of the revolutionary movement in Azerbaijan, one of the first Azeri Marxists, Provincial Commissioner and Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, gubernial commissar for Baku, also one of the 26 Baku Commissars. There was also an Azizbekov Square constructed and named after him in 1932. Pana Khan Park was also renamed after Azizbekov. Ananun 4<sup>th</sup> Street was renamed after Fioletov, in honor of Ivan Fioletov (1884-1918), a Russian Communist activist, one of the Bolshevik Party leaders in Azerbaijan during the Russian Revolution, and one of the 26 Baku Commissars. Sargis Street gave way to the name of another commissar among the 26 Baku Commissars, Japaridze (1880-1918) - a Communist activist, and one of the Bolshevik Party leaders in Azerbaijan. Nazarovskaya Street (named after Ivan Nazarov, the general of the Russian Empire, and also a governor of the Erivan Governorate 1849-1859)<sup>27</sup> was

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<sup>25</sup> More at [http://www.iatp.am/old\\_yerevan/TEXT/Street/krepostnaya.htm](http://www.iatp.am/old_yerevan/TEXT/Street/krepostnaya.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Shahumyan and the other 26 Baku Commissars were killed by British troops in 1918 on the Trans-Caspian railway.

<sup>27</sup> More at [http://www.iatp.am/old\\_yerevan/](http://www.iatp.am/old_yerevan/)

renamed after Arsen Amiryan, an Armenian and Russian revolutionist, and one of the 26 Baku Commissars. Pachtovaya Street was renamed 26, to commemorate the 26 Bolshevik and Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) members of the Baku Soviet Commune who had been killed in 1918.

In the second group, we included the names of intellectuals - composers, poets, writers, actors, and artists. In the archival materials, we have repeatedly come across a cliché of “matching with the spirit of the time” i.e. place names should connote the exact political overtones of that period.<sup>28</sup> If the place-name does not speak to “the heart of the proletariat,” if the value of its components is interpreted as “obsolete” or “not having logical roots,” then “that place name needs to be replaced.” With this and only this model of renaming, the Soviet authorities also chose the names of intellectuals.

Sadovaya street was renamed after Mesrop Mashtots, an early medieval Armenian linguist, theologian, statesman and hymnologist (362 - 440 A.D.), who invented the Armenian alphabet c. 405 AD. Kozerski Street was renamed after Frik,<sup>29</sup> an Armenian poet of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In his works, Frik criticized the clergy for hypocrisy. Staro-Tserkovnaya Street was renamed after Nahapet Quchak, an Armenian medieval poet.

Tifliskaya Street was renamed after Sayat-Nova, the Armenian poet, musician and bard Harutyun Sayatyan (1712-1795), who had compositions in a number of languages, and Khorum Bulag was renamed Sayat-Nova *Rodnik*. Astafyan Street (named after Mikhail Astafiev - a general of the Russian Empire and also a governor of Erivan Governorate in 1860-1862) was renamed after Abovyan (1809) in honor of the famous poet and an advocate of modernization, the father of modern Armenian literature.<sup>30</sup>

The selection of names of Armenian intellectuals from the Early, High and Late Middle Ages (Mesrop Mashtots, Frik, Nahapet Quchak) was a

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<sup>28</sup> NAA/Fond E1/List 2/Case 12

<sup>29</sup> Frik is considered a social poet, and of course his image corresponded to the principles of the anti-religious Bolsheviks.

<sup>30</sup> On April 14, 1848, Abovyan left his home for an early morning walk, and was never seen again; his mysterious disappearance remains unresolved. Abovyan's name became suitable for the Party as he was in disgrace with the Armenian Apostolic church and Tsarist officials.

gesture, a “tribute” to the ancientness of Armenian culture, the bare minimum effort which would somehow try to compensate for the pressure on “Armenian nationalism.” Actually, the whole pre-revolutionary millennium of Armenian culture presented in this image of “Yerevan toponymy” confined itself to the names of these three persons. The honoring of “Pro-Russian” Abovyan and “Caucasian internationalist” Sayat Nova was a compliment to the constellation of “historical Armenian cultural” personalities. It was indeed a very circumspect choice, and besides, there were no other names from the abundant resources of the Armenian public and political figures.

Damirbulag<sup>31</sup> Ploshad (Square) was renamed Saadi, in honor of Saadi Shirazi, one of the major Persian poets and literary figures of the medieval period. Mirjafarskaya Street (in honor of Mir Jafar bin Mir Hasan Dasni, a Yezidi leader who in 838 launched an uprising against Abbasid Caliph al-Mutasim in the area north of Mosul) was renamed after Rumi, in honor of the 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic. Nakhichevanskaya Street was renamed after Hafez, in honor of the prominent Iranian medieval poet. Shariatskaya Street was renamed after Omar-Khayyam, in honor of the Persian medieval mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and poet. Tapabashskaya Street was renamed after Rustaveli, to commemorate Shota Rustaveli, the 12th-13th-century Georgian poet. He is one of the greatest contributors to Georgian literature, and the author of the Georgian national epic poem).

Ananun 3rd street (Anonymous 3-rd street) was renamed after Vardges Surenyan, an Armenian painter, sculptor, illustrator, translator, art critic, and theater artist, the founder of Armenian historical painting (1860–1921). Sultanski Pereulok was renamed after Yekmalyan. Makar Yekmalyan (1856-1905) was an Armenian composer, conductor, teacher and folklorist. Dagirman Qucha was renamed Paronyan Street, in honor of Hagop Baronian (1843-1891), an influential Ottoman Armenian writer, satirist, educator, and social figure in the 19th century.

Honoring an Armenian prominent writer and playwright, the founder of modern Armenian drama Gabriel Sundukyan (1825-1912), Armyanskaya

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<sup>31</sup> Turkish: “demir” - iron, “bulağ” - source, meaning “iron source.”

Street was renamed Sundukyan. The plays of the truly talented writer Gabriel Sundukyan are rich in descriptions of oppression of the working class by the petty bourgeoisie, and the choice of his name in Yerevan toponyms matched the class ideology of the Bolsheviks.

The same considerations probably played a role in choosing the name of another writer - Ghazaros Aghayan (1840-1911) when renaming Ananun 1st street (Anonymous 1st street). Being an Armenian writer, educator, folklorist, historian, linguist and public figure, Ghazaros Aghayan wrote a lot about class relations and the class oppression of the peasantry. Ananun 2nd street was renamed after P. Adamyan – in honor of the outstanding Armenian actor, poet, writer, artist and public figure Petros Adamyan (1849-1891).

Qarvansarayskaya Street was renamed after Raffi (1835–1888), an Armenian author and an outstanding figure in Armenian literature. Perhaps in the ardor of the first years of the toponymical revolution, Raffi was still perceived as a “revolutionary” because of his historical novels praising the national liberation struggle. Less than ten years later, he would be perceived as a “nationalist” and a source of ideological fuel for the “enemies of the people.”

Bannaya Street was renamed after Maxim Gorky, in honor of the proletarian writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936). Ter-Ghukasovskaya Street (after the Russian general, a hero of the Russo-Turkish war, 1877-1878) was renamed after Mikael Nalbanyan (1829-1866), an Armenian writer, philosopher, and revolutionary democrat. Malyarskaya Street was renamed after Teryan (1885-1920), an Armenian poet, lyricist and public activist, a participant in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and Russian Civil War.<sup>32</sup>

In the second group of our classification, there are the names that are symbols of Communism. By rejecting the symbols of the old regime, toponymy requires the construction of a new model. As Selishev stated:

*"After the Great October Revolution, the toponymy of the past should be updated and reflect the main features in the modern era of the*

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<sup>32</sup> After the Revolution, Teryan became the representative of Armenians in the Ministry of Nations, personally working with Lenin and Stalin. Teryan was a member of The All-Russian Central Executive Committee.

*dictatorship of the working class, new techniques and the creation of socialism.*"<sup>33</sup>

The aim of the new toponymy should be the strengthening of the new ideology through abstract names. The main priority here was given to socio-political names. Various symbolic toponyms or names derived from abstract concepts represent an extremely important component of Soviet toponymy. One of the most important symbols of the new government became the color red. Red was not only a symbol of revolutionary struggle (dating back to the Canut revolts in the 19th century), but it also became the color of the flag of the new state; for instance the concept of the Red Army where "red" acted not only as a symbol but as a pointer of belonging (loyalty) to the new state power."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Molokanskaya Street and its new name, Karmir Banaki (Red Army) and Kotanovsky Pereulok with its transformed name Karmir Pereulok, were based on Russian origin ethnically.<sup>35</sup> Another symbolic specification is seen in new name of Angliakan aygi (English park) to Communarneri (the Baku Communards i.e. the 26 Baku Commissars). Since the massacre of 26 Baku Commissars was associated with British military authorities in Baku, this case of renaming is the brightest example of de-commemoration of the "bad" past and the legalized proclamation of the "good" present by the Communist leaders. On the other hand, on February 18, 1921 in that exact same park, the Bolsheviks buried the prominent members of the former government and intellectuals of the first Republic of Armenia whom they had brutally axed the previous night,<sup>36</sup> and

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<sup>33</sup> Selishev, A.M., *Iz staroy i novoy topomiiii // Izbrannie trudi*, Moscow, Prosveshenie, 1968, p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> Nikitin S. A., "Produktivnie osnovi rossiyskoy toponimii: 'krasniy'" (1918-1930) // *Yaroslavskie lingvistichiskie*, Yaroslav, 2001, pp. 67–68.

<sup>35</sup> It is noteworthy that the given symbolism was based on ethnically Russian origin as if confirming that the Bolshevik revolution has in fact its "ethnic owners" – the Russians and that the continuity of these symbolic characters must take place in the ethnic environment.

<sup>36</sup> Markosyan R. *A Senseless Murder: Remembering the 21 Victims of February 18, 1921* // *Hetq*, February 18, 2014; <http://hetq.am/arm/news/32605/i-hishatak-kacnaharvatsneri.html> (accessed 30.09.2014)

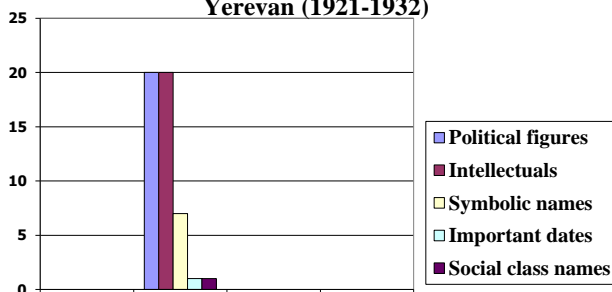
thus the renaming of that park in honor of the Communards clearly demonstrated the power and victory of the Communards.

The renaming of Novotserkovnaya Street as Khorhurdneri (Soviets), the political organizations and governmental bodies, primarily associated with the Russian Revolutions and the history of the Soviet Union, was another striking case of showing an ideological orientation via urbanonyms. The same can be seen in case of the Kolebyakinski Square (in honor of Nikolai Kolyubakin, a governor of Erivan Governorate in 1862–1863) which was renamed after 3rd Internatsionali, in honor of the international revolutionary labor organization (1919-1943). Targovaya Ploshad was renamed as Ashxatanqi Hraparak (Labor Square). In this case we see a direct denial and the opposed conflict of the ideas “trade” and “trader” as the negative symbols of class society, and “work” and “worker” as the positive symbols of the power of the workers’ dictatorship.

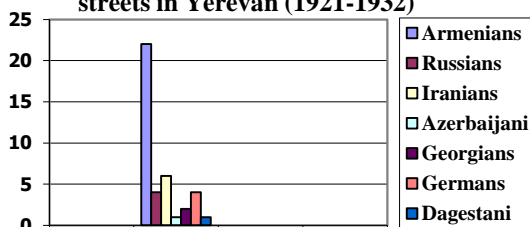
Another group consists of names declaring the important dates of great achievements. In honor of the 1st of May, the Day of International Workers, Dashli Qucha was renamed Mayisyan. In case of Armenia, the name of “May” also had an undeclared value, a reference to the uprising of the Bolsheviks in Alexandrapole in May, 1920, initially suppressed by the Armenian Dashnak government.

The third group also includes street names denoting a social class category. In 1921, Marukhovskaya Street was renamed Tpagrichneri Poghots (Publishers’ Street).

**Chart 1: Classification of renamed streets in Yerevan (1921-1932)**



**Chart 2: The nature of renamed streets in Yerevan (1921-1932)**



From Chart 1 and Chart 2, it can be seen that according to the Yerevan street renaming process in 1921-1932, the street name changes in Yerevan presented the following picture: of 52 names, 39 were anthroponyms, consisting of 22 Armenians (8 professional revolutionary, 14 social-class intellectuals), 8 Muslims (6 Iranians/Persians - 2 revolutionary, 4 intellectuals, 1 Azerbaijani revolutionist and 1 Dagestani anti-Tsarist imam), 4 were Russians (3/1), 4 Germans (polit. figures), 2 Georgians (1/1).

Most of the new street names were anthroponyms, representing public/revolutionary activists either of the international level, or from the “Caucasian nomenclature” mainly - Armenian, as well as the representatives of culture and art having the distinct characteristics of socio-class protests and revolutionary tendencies. Another specific feature was the curtailing of the Armenian historical past, a consistent policy rather typical for the Bolsheviks of the pre-WW2 period, underling the thinking pretending that the entire history and culture of the nations and regions began with the Bolshevik Revolution.

It is seen that the first renaming cases for the period 1921-1932 aimed to eliminate the symbols of Tsarist Russia. “Topographical names carrying the imprints of the tsarist regime were discarded, church names were rejected” and finally, “the names having a relation with the pre-revolutionary policy of colonization in the national republics and non-Russian regions during the pre-revolutionary period were dropped.”<sup>37</sup> Even such neutral names as Aptechnaya Street, Sadovaya Street, Pachtovaya, etc.

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<sup>37</sup> Selishev, A.M., *Iz staroy i novoy toponimii // Izbrannie trudi*, Moscow, Prosveshenie, 1968, p. 88.

(streets bearing the names Pharmacy, Garden, Post-Office) were removed and replaced by the names of leaders, international communists and revolutionaries, on the one hand, and the “national revolutionaries” of Armenian origin, on the other.

We must assume that, in the first round, the limited number of Yerevan streets made it impossible to deploy a new power and so almost all street names had been changed. The “revolutionary fervor” of renaming, by keeping “the revolutionary resource of anthroponyms” also included the names of representatives of other ethnic cultures, considering the ethno-religious composition of the city and trying to balance the number of Muslim-Christian names. And besides, this process maintained a certain historicity in Muslim place names - the choice was mostly from Iranian culture, as a tribute to “the Iranian past” of Yerevan and the local Shia Muslim population.

Almost all streets renamed during 1921-1922 preserved their new names until 1939, and only 4 streets got their “more Soviet names” later, in 1933.<sup>38</sup> Factually, in this period the major part of central Yerevan was recreated, with new Soviet names on its landmarks. The new center of the Armenian capital maintained its loyalty to the Soviet ideology through long period of socialist government (See the Table 1 below).

*Table 1. Name transformation of the central streets, parks and squares in 1921-1922 (using English names)*

| <b>Former name</b>  | <b>New name allocated in 1921-1922</b> |
|---------------------|--|
| Astafyan street     | <i>Abovyan street</i>                  |
| Nerkakarneri street | <i>Teryan street</i>                   |
| Tsarskaya street    | <i>Spandaryan street</i>               |

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<sup>38</sup> In 1933, Ruben Street was renamed after Sverdlov (in honor of a Bolshevik party leader and chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee Yakov Sverlov (1885- 1919)), Raffi Street was renamed after Tumanyan (an Armenian writer and public activist. He is considered to be the national poet of Armenia), and similarly the street named after Hafiz changed into Kolkhoznikneri street, Yepremi street was renamed Metaghagortsneri (in honor of the metal industry workers).



|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Behbutovskaya street      | <i>Sverdlov street *</i>               |
| Nazarovskaya street       | <i>Amiryan street</i>                  |
| Qarvansarayskaya          | <i>Tumanyan street *</i>               |
| Tarkhanovskaya street     | <i>Gnun street</i>                     |
| Doctorskaya street        | <i>Alaverdyan street</i>               |
| Ter- Ghukasovskaya street | <i>Nalbanyan street</i>                |
| Krepostnaya street        | <i>Shahumyan street</i>                |
| Gubernskaya street        | <i>Lenin street</i>                    |
| Pana Khan square          | <i>Azizbekov street</i>                |
| Pana Khan's park          | <i>Azizbekovi park</i>                 |
| English Park              | <i>Komunarneri park (26 Comissars)</i> |
| Armyanskaya street        | <i>Sundukyani street**</i>             |
| Bazarnaya street          | <i>Marxi street</i>                    |

\*These street names changed twice: in 1921 and 1933.

\*\* Armyanskaya street was renamed to *Sundukyani* in 1921, then renamed after *Stalin* in 1939.

Thus, by the mid-20s, the central government not only subjugated the renaming process, but also became interested in toponymy as a new genre of propagandist practice.<sup>39</sup>

### **Street Name Changes in Yerevan during the Period 1933-1939**

From the 1930s, the implementation of dictatorship by the Politburo and Stalin's personal power became quite obvious. This process was accompanied by the practice of diversifying the toponymic nomenclature with the anthroponyms of Politburo TsK KPSS members along with current names of "Communism builders." Thus, the surnames of high-ranking

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<sup>39</sup> Nikitin S. A., *Revolutiya i geografiya, Stanovlenie sowetskoy toponimiki v 1918-1930 godakh* [Revolution and Geography, The Establishment of Soviet Toponymy]/Otechestvennie zapiski, 2003, №2, <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/2/revolyuciya-i-geografiya>

government officials such as Kalinin, Molotov, and Voroshilov<sup>40</sup> became actively involved in urban toponymy.

The popularization of lifetime denominations became “planned” and symbolized the direct subordination to the “person.” For example, Armenia from 1922 until 1937 was a part (together with Georgia and Azerbaijan) of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) and practically had two Politburos, namely the Politburo TsK KPSS and the one of the Transcaucasian Regional Committee CPSU/AUCP(b), a permanent governor of which was the infamous Laurenti Beria (from 1932-1937).

In 1953, as a response to the accusations<sup>41</sup> about spreading the cult of Beria in Armenia, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Armenian SSR (1937-1953) Grigory Arutyunov partially agreed that during his administration he had named one street in Yerevan and a suburban district after Beria. However he also pointed out that “the exaggeration of Beria’s authority as a recognized leader of the Transcaucasian Bolsheviks had received a wide audience in Armenia long before he had moved to Armenia. Many organizations and institutions, and a number of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes* had already been named after Beria.”<sup>42</sup>

In fact, the practice of using the names of the “highs and mighties of socialism” had reached its ugliest forms. For instance, two months after the murder of Aghasi Khanjian, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia (1930-1936) by Laurenti Beria (in July 1936), the city park of Leninakan (nowadays, Gyumri) was renamed after the “beloved and wise leader” Beria.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Nikitin S. A., *Koncepciya toponima v Italii i Rossii v XX veke* [The Concept of the Toponym in Italy and Russia in the XX Century] // Romaniya I antichnost. M.: MGU, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> “Postanovlenie prezidiuma TsK KPSS o bivshem 1-m sekretare TsK KP Armenii s prilozheniem predlozheniya KPK pri TsK KPSS i otdela partorganov i lichnogo obrasheniya Arutinova G.A. 12 sentyabrya 1954 g” in “Delo Beria. Prigovor objalovaniyu ne podlejit: dokumenti”, M., MFD, 2012, 530; [http://istmat.info/files/uploads/27101/delo\\_beriya.pdf](http://istmat.info/files/uploads/27101/delo_beriya.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 532.

<sup>43</sup> “Khorhrdayin Hayastan” newspaper, 1936 / N 231 (4829), 1; <http://armeniatotalitaris.am/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/1936-009.pdf>

The harder the repressions of “the protagonists of socialism in the USSR” toward the nation, the more actively people glorified them publically. This example demonstrates the legitimacy of the Soviet concept of the “socio-ideological toponimization of the geographic and social landscape.” According to archival materials we studied, the decisions for the Yerevan street naming or/and renaming cases of this period had been made in the Presidium sessions of the Executive Committee of the Yerevan City Council.<sup>44</sup> In 1933, the Presidium of the Executive Committee of Yerevan City Council<sup>45</sup> approved the list of the street names<sup>46</sup> which still bore the mark of Tsarist Russia and for some reasons had evaded the renaming process in 1921. Among 15 streets, only 4 had been changed in the first round, and some were still proposed to be changed in the second round.

By applying the same method of classification as the previous period we end up with the following result. In 1933, the names of revolutionaries, leaders and activists of the Socialist movement, as well as political figures were still “praised” in Yerevan streets. Thus in 1933, Ruben Street was renamed after Sverdlov (the Bolshevik party leader and chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee Yakov Sverlov (1885- 1919)), similarly Gharibanots was renamed after Narimanov (in memory of Nariman Narimanov (1870 –1925) - the head of the government of Soviet Azerbaijan, a chairman of the Union Council of the Transcaucasian SFSR, Party Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union). The renaming of Naib Qucha to Mustafa Subkhi Street (to commemorate a

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<sup>44</sup> NAA/ Fond 1/List 2/Case 6/Protocol 649/26/sheet 131; Fond 1/List 2/Case 6/Protocol 61/23/sheet 206

<sup>45</sup> According to the archival data (1933) the Workers' and Peasants city/regional militia, real estate state industrial enterprises and also house owners were involved in the process of the street renaming decree implementations. A document preserved in the Fund of the Yerevan City Council in 1933 testifies that the action of street naming (numbering the houses and the placement of street signs) had been carried out by the real estate state industrial enterprise, and house owners were obliged to follow the same changes for their own places, and the regional militia was authorized to monitor the whole name-changing process and to punish anyone for disobedience to the law (More at: NAA/ Fond 1/List 2/Case 8/Protocol 26/5/sheets 46-47).

<sup>46</sup> NAA/ Fond 1/List 2/Case 7/Protocol 14/4/sheet 34.

founder of the Communist party of Turkey 1883-1921), was rather humiliating for the Armenians, since the Turkish-Armenian war in 1920 (in September-November) had started exactly under the guise of Bolshevism.

This period was known in history as the time of the Great Terror in the USSR, and in Soviet Armenia almost all the repressed (in addition to the charges of “anti-Soviet,” “Trotskyism” and “Dashnakism”) were accused *en masse* of nationalism.<sup>47</sup> And all governmental structures started demonstrating “anti-nationalism” and an ardent devotion to the Soviet authorities. “Armenian internationalism” had to reveal itself primarily in assigning place names of Turkish Bolshevik heroes.

In 1933, there was a definite change in the “approved list” of intellectuals “matching the spirit of the time”. And Bolsheviks had certainly changed their attitude towards the “nationalist Raffi” and Raffi Street was renamed after Tumanyan (an Armenian writer and public activist. He is considered to be the national poet of Armenia). Maxim Gorky was commemorated in the former Davayatagh (camel district) which was renamed Gorku Shrjan (Gorky district).

The renamed streets of this period contained new “Soviet symbolism” such as the names of USSR capitals and Soviet heroes. Thus, in 1933, Mamur street was renamed to Moscow Street. The symbolic “Red” again appeared in the renaming of Khoja Meydan (Grand Square) into Karmir Partizanneri (Red Partisans). Another trace of this socio-political concept was seen in the change of St. Sargis 2nd street into Komeritmiutyun (named after the youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). Similarly, Salakhchar street was renamed into Sportinterni Poghots (named after the International Association of Red Sports and Gymnastics Associations), while Prospekt Yujni (South Avenue) was renamed Prospekt Komintern (in honor of the International Communist Organization).

The renaming of Shafirbekovski Street into March 8 Street (in honor of International Women's Day) may be classified into the group of “important dates” and similarly the group of the “location names” was

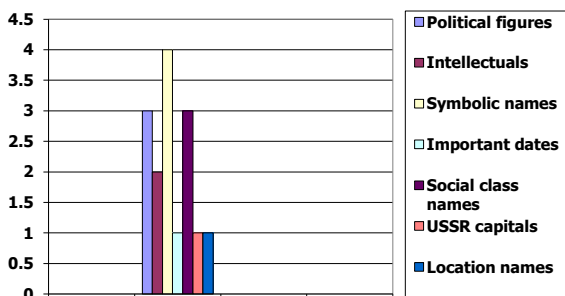
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<sup>47</sup> Manukyan A. Qaghaqakan brnatchnshumnyery Hayastanum 1920-1953tt., [Political Repressions in Armenia, 1920-1953] “Aresum-Ani”, Erevan, 1999, p. 39.

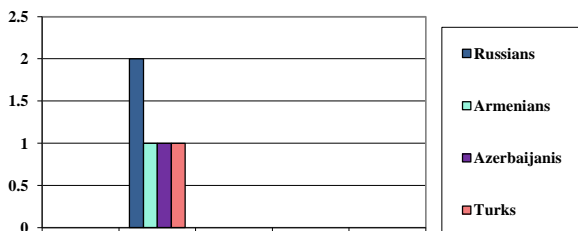
complemented by the former Gharadaghlu, which was renamed 4-rd Shrjan (4th district).

Above all, the 1930s was a time of industrialization of the country which was also reflected in the urban toponyms. The praising of the Soviet working class received particular attention. Thus, a street named for Hafiz changed into Kolkhoznikneri Street, Yeprem Street was renamed Metaghagortsneri (in honor of the metal industry workers). Similarly Mechidski Street was renamed into Karoghneri Poghots (Tailor Street), etc.

**Chart 3: Classification of renamed streets in Yerevan (1933)**



**Chart 2: The nature of renamed streets in Yerevan (1933)**



In 1933, from the whole list of 15 street names only 5 were anthroponyms, the others reflected typical Soviet symbols. From the 5 anthroponymic names 1 was Armenian (an intellectual), 1 was Azerbaijani (a Communist leader), 2 were Russian (intellectuals), 1 was Turkish (a

political figure). Here we can see a strict internationalism with an obvious pressure on the “Armenian nationalism.” The latter is also demonstrated in the homogenization of the historic past of the USSR people and in the concentration of history on the Soviet epoch.

A specific characteristic of this process was the fact that along with the dropping of Tsarist Russian symbols from the streets of Yerevan, the government also removed all foreign (Persian) names from the city toponyms. All the streets carrying the mark of Iran were replaced by different names featuring Soviet symbolism. The dramatic result was that in this renamed list of the streets there was no public figure of Persian origin (while in 1921 the names of public figures of Persian origin comprised 11.5 % in the list of the renamed streets).<sup>48</sup>

In 1933-1934, the significantly extended borders of Yerevan made city management difficult. For this purpose, by the decree of the Central Executive Committee of the ArmSSR (13.10.35 No. 23/4), the Yerevan City Council divided the capital into two districts (*raions*), forming 2 district councils (*raisovet*) for their management – the Industrial and Urban. Later, in 1936, due to industrialization and construction works, the Central Executive Committee of the ArmSSR (27.07.36) and the City Council published decrees (26.11.39) dividing Yerevan into 3 main *raions*. This territorial organization of the capital city led to the direct importation of the terminology of Soviet urban planning: Kirovi Raion (the district was named after a prominent Bolshevik and Politburo member between 1930-1934, the head of the party organization in Leningrad, Sergey Kirov who had been killed in 1934), Stalinyan Raion<sup>49</sup> (the district was named after Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union), Spandaryan Raion (the district was named after Spandaryan, a prominent Bolshevik, revolutionist, and Stalin’s comrade)

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<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that in January-February 1938 a deportation and arrest campaign against Iranian subjects was ongoing in the USSR (see. Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of All-Union Communist Party Bolsheviks about the Iranian citizens 19.01.1938 (<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/61271>))

<sup>49</sup> By the Central Executive Committee's decree of 14 October 1935 it was called the Industrial District, then later the Lenin district, and in 1936 it was renamed in honor of Stalin. : NAA/ Fond 1/ List 2/ Case 24/ Sheet 39

were formed. Again, a clear indication of the regime's ideological orientation can be seen through the urbanonyms (see Table 2).

Table 2. The names allocated to Yerevan's *Raions* and their ideological significance

| <b>Name</b>                   | <b>Ideological significance</b>  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Iosif Visarionovich Stalin    | Leader of Soviet Communism   |
| Sergey Mironovich Kirov       | First Secretary of the Leningrad City Committee of the Party of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) |
| Suren Spandarovich Spandaryan | Prominent Bolshevik, revolutionary of Armenian origin  |

In 1934, the honoring of the prominent revolutionaries still continued.<sup>50</sup> The Bannaya Street was renamed after Ghorghanyan (in honor of a revolutionary, Bolshevik, and one of the leaders of the Baku Commune, Grigori Korganov), another street previously called Fahla Bazar took the name of Schmidt (to commemorate Pyotr Petrovich Schmidt (1867-1906) - one of the leaders of the Sevastopol Uprising during the Russian Revolution of 1905). "Armenian nationalism" was suppressed by the destruction of the cultural markers of the early Middle Ages (the Soviet peoples were equal and some could not have any distinctive cultural layers). This could be seen in the renaming of the Mashtots 2nd Street into Kamo Street (in honor of a revolutionary and a companion to Joseph Stalin). The leader of the Communist Party of Germany, Ernst Thalmann, was lionized in the street formerly called Mashtots 1st. In the same way, Qatanyan Street was renamed after Mravyan, one of the Communist leaders of Soviet Armenia.

A newly constructed street was named after Armenian proletarian poet Hakob Hakobyan, and another new street was given the name of Valery Bryusov, a prominent Russian writer. In December 22, the upper

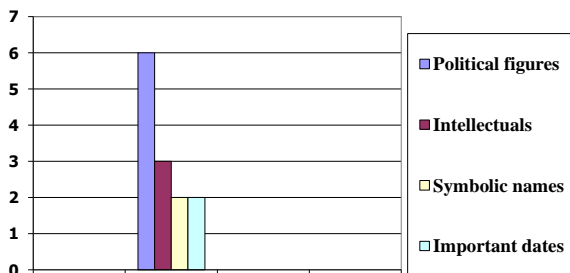
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<sup>50</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/Case 11/ Protocol 35/6/ Sheets 90-91; NAA/Fond 1/List 2/Case 12/ Protocol 48/5,6/ Sheets 65-66; NAA/Fond 1/List 2/Case 12/ Protocol 49/ Sheet 86

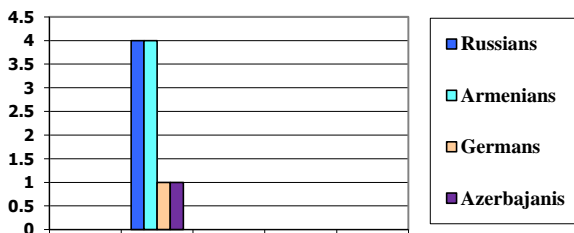
part of Abovyan Street was named Pushkin Square in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the great Russian writer’s birth.

Among the “symbolic names”, it is worth mentioning the renaming of the street Fantazia into MOPR (the Russian acronym for an international social service organization that provided material and moral aid to radical “class war” political prisoners around the world). Names derived from other ideological stems - October/hoktember, November/noyember - were seen in the following cases: Gabristan Street turned into Hoktemberian Street (the Armenian word for October), and another one named after Gorky was renamed Noyemberyan Street, in memory of November 29 – the proclamation of Soviet Armenia.

**Chart 3: Classification of renamed streets in Yerevan (1934)**



**Chart 2: The nature of renamed streets in Yerevan (1934)**





In 1934, among the whole list of 14 streets 9 were anthroponyms, the others were names that were symbolic of Communism. Of 9 anthroponyms, 4 were Armenians (3 intellectuals), 4 were Russian (2/2), 1 was Azerbaijani (1 Communist leader) and 1 German.

*“Life has improved, comrades. Life has become more joyous. And when life is joyous, work goes well. Hence the high rates of output. Hence the heroes and heroines of labor”.*

This famous speech by Iosif Stalin given at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites on November 17, 1935, seemed to be immediately mirrored in the urban toponyms after 1935. Showing an “elevated spirit and the enthusiasm of the era” many streets were renamed in order to demonstrate the ideology of the Communist regime, the others aimed to show the fidelity and admiration of the Armenian SSR towards the achievements of the Soviet Union. The result was the representation of the First Heroes of the Soviet Union (1936) among the capital’s streets.<sup>51</sup> This included the heroes who were recipients of the order of Lenin - pilots Vasily Molokov and Mikhail Vodopianov, who participated in the successful aerial search and rescue of the crew of the steamship *Cheliuskin*, which sank in Arctic waters, crushed by ice fields, on February 13, 1934.

Thus, in honor of this heroic Soviet event in 1934, Shilachi Street was renamed Cheliuskin, and in 1936 Azizbekov 3rd Street was renamed in honor of Vodopianov, while Azizbekov 2nd was renamed Molokov Street.

Other heroic Soviet pilots’ names took their places in the streets too, declaring the great achievements of Soviet people. The street named after Ghazi Mamedi was renamed Chkalov Street (in honor of the Russian aircraft test pilot Valeri Chkalov (1904-1938)), and Paronyan 1st Street was renamed in honor of Belyakov (to glorify the Soviet flight navigator who, together with command pilot Valeri Chkalov and co-pilot Georgy Baydukov, set a record for the longest uninterrupted flight in 1936 and made the first non-stop flight across the North Pole, flying from Moscow to Vancouver, Washington). A new street in the outskirts of the city was

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<sup>51</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/Case 24/ Protocol 23/25/ Sheets 146-149

named after Baydukov (a Soviet aircraft test pilot). These namings contained an educational function similar to the perception of literature and art in the Soviet Union as a whole, when even art would function for educational purposes.<sup>52</sup> Naturally, “the Caucasian heroes” gave way to the “Russian heroes,” and “Soviet internationalism prioritized “Russian internationalism” over the “Caucasian.”

Along with the celebration of Soviet heroes, the honoring of prominent revolutionaries and political figures continued. Thus, a new street was named after Mkhchyan, a famous Armenian revolutionist, who died in the February uprising and was buried in Komunnars Park (26 Baku Commissars). 3rd Shrjanayin (3rd District) was renamed after Kirov (in honor of Sergey Kirov the Bolshevik, a Politburo member between 1930-1934, who was the head of the party organization in Leningrad, and was killed in 1934).<sup>53</sup> 5th Ananun Street was renamed after Chapaev, in honor of Vasily Chapaev - a Red Army commander during the Russian Civil War. Tpagrichner Street was renamed after Alexander Miasnikyan (1886 –1925) - an Armenian Bolshevik, revolutionary, Party and state leader, and the head of the Communist Party in Belarus.

The theme of industrialization development was still relevant to the ArmSSR.<sup>54</sup> Many industrial factories were built and equipped with modern tools. The modernization of industry started in the first five-year plan (1928-1932) and successfully continued in the second five-year plan (1933-1937). In Armenia there were 18 industrial enterprises built and put into operation during the first five-year plan, and in the second five year plan, the number of industrial enterprises reached 26.

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<sup>52</sup> Nikitin S. A., *Revolutiya i geografiya, Stanovlenie sowetskoy toponimiki v 1918-1930 godakh* [Revolution and Geography, The Establishment of Soviet Toponymy]/Otechestvennie zapiski, 2003, №2, <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/2/revolyuciya-i-geografiya>.

<sup>53</sup> The murder of the first secretary of Regional and City Committee of the Communist Party, the secretary of Northwestern bureau of All-Union Communist Party Bolsheviks, the secretary of All-Union Communist Party Bolsheviks Sergey Kirov in 1934 gave rise to a range of renaming cases of naming and renaming in his honor throughout the whole Soviet territory.

<sup>54</sup> Putevoditel' po Armenii, 1939, Erevan, [Guide to Armenia, 1939] Armengiz, 6-12 pp.

The priority of the second five-year plan was given to the development of heavy industry. And an important role was allocated to Grigol Ordzhinikidze, who was the People's Commissar for Soviet Heavy Industry. With his support on May 11, 1933 and through Decree N 931 of the Armenian Government, the construction work commenced for a synthetic rubber factory. In general, in the 1930s, a prominent role in the industrial area was given to mechanical engineering and metalworking.

All these industrialization and modernization achievements and the State contributors were glorified in Armenian urbanonyms. In 1936, to pay a tribute to Grigol Ordzhinikidze, Gortsaranayin Street was renamed Ordzhonikidze Street.

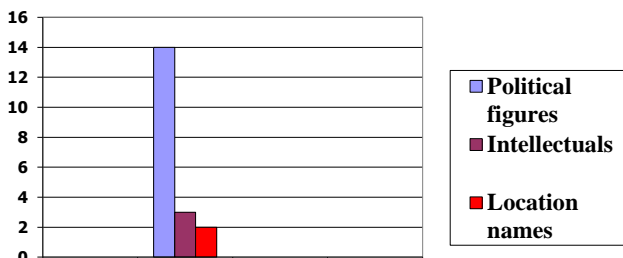
From the functional perspective, an interesting trend emerged. In order to maximize the number of commemorations in a given area, main roads were divided into smaller units to accommodate multiple commemorative names. This happened in the case of Yerevan street renamings in 1936, when Azizbekov Street was divided into 3 streets – Molokov Street, Azizbekov Street, and Vodopianov Street. Another case saw two streets, named after Narimanov and Mirjafar, emerged from the previously undivided Mirjafari Street. Similarly Paronyan Street was separated into 2 units, one named after Belyakov and the second continuing to bear Paronyan's name.

It is obvious that the commemorative function in these cases was prioritized over the orientational one, weakening the utilitarian function of the toponym. These changes, however, caused many inconveniences<sup>55</sup> and confusion while navigating the city, and later in 1938, one sees a reverse process of street systematization, when many small streets were merged to constitute one main road.

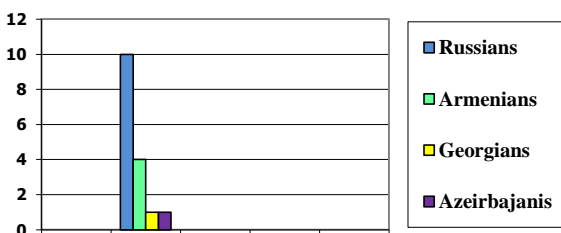
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<sup>55</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/ Case 32/ Protocol 13/8/ Sheet 213, 220-224; NAA/Fond 1/List 2/ Case 36/ Protocol 13/8/ Sheet 88-93

**Chart 3: Classification of renamed streets in Yerevan (1936)**



**Chart 2: The nature of renamed streets in Yerevan (1936)**



In 1936, from the whole list of 19 streets, 18 were anthroponyms: 10 - Russians (4 political figures, 5 Soviet Union heroes), 4 - Armenians (2/2), 1- Azerbaijani (a Communist leader), 1- Georgian.

The charts demonstrate that in 1936, the renaming process still favored political figures.

In 1937, a newly built street was named after Perch Proshyan, in memory of the writer whose real name was Hovhannes Ter-Arakelian (1837-1907).<sup>56</sup>

The period from 1936 to 1938 is known as the climax of Stalin's repressions. As a campaign of political repression in the Soviet Union, it involved a large-scale purge of the Communist Party and government

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<sup>56</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/ Case 28/ Protocol 76/59/ Sheet 160

officials, the oppression of peasants and the Red Army leadership, and widespread police surveillance, suspicion of “saboteurs,” “anti-Soviet elements,” and “enemies of the people.” All this was reflected in the policy of Yerevan street naming.

In 1938, there were two avenues in the Stalinyan Raion named after the leaders of the Great Purge. In 1938, the main road in Butania was named Voroshilov Avenue, after the prominent Soviet military officer People's Commissar for Defense of the Soviet Union from May, 1934, and one of the central figures of Stalin's Great Purge (one street in Yerevan had been already named in Voroshilov's honor in 1936). Another was Mikoyan Avenue, in honor of a Soviet statesman, Politburo member, and ethnic Armenian, who had exerted great efforts for the territorial reduction of Soviet Armenia in favor of Azerbaijan and the direct participant of political repressions in Soviet Armenia. This process climaxed with the renaming of Sundukyan Street after Stalin in 1939.

In 1938, the Presidium of the Yerevan City Council approved a list of 44 street renaming cases.<sup>57</sup> This process was involved in the approaching Population Census of 1939.<sup>58</sup> There was an official request to define the borders and the names of all the streets in Yerevan in a very short time. As we have already mentioned, the functional specification of this process was that in contrast with the actions of 1936, in 1938 two or more streets were merged to form one. Thus Marat and Sattar Streets, along with Furmanov Street, were merged to constitute a single street named in honor of Marat. Similarly Sayat-Nova 2nd Street was linked with Kuchak Street and was called Tapabash Street (a street with the same name was rejected in the renamings of 1921). Belyakov Street and Karoghneri Poghots formed a single Belyakov Street; Karmir Partizanner Street and Mustafa Subkhi Street merged with Paronyan Street; Vodopianov Street was joined with Molokov Street; Telman Street merged with Kamo Street.

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<sup>57</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/ Case 32/ Protocol 13/8/ Sheet 213, 220-224; NAA/ Fond 1/ List 2/ Case 36/ Protocol 13/8/ Sheets 88-93;

<sup>58</sup> NAA/Fond E1/List 2/ Case 36/ Protocol 18/ Sheet 76; NAA/ Fond E1/ List 2/ Sheets 36, 47

In the meantime, the commemoration of other figures from Russian culture through street name changes was still in progress. Thus, in the Stalinyan Raion, a number of streets were renamed after Russian writers (Tolstoy, M. Sholokhov, Furmanov, Gorki, N. Ostrovski).

The streets in the peripheral areas in 1938 were renamed after Woodworking, Cotton, Soap, and Rubber factories or after Carpet Weavers, Bricklayers, Railroaders, Carriers, Workers, Brickmakers, Tobacco Growers, etc. indicating additionally the areas of residence of these laborers.<sup>59</sup>

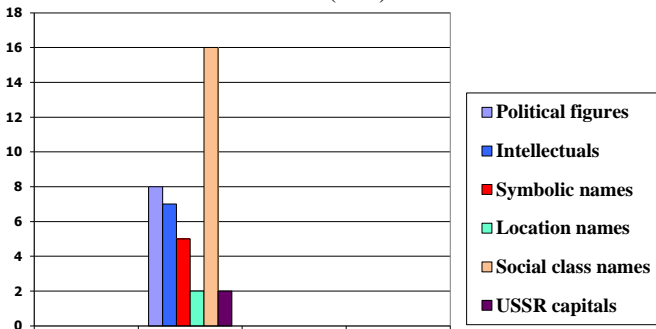
In the group of streets named after USSR capitals, one could consider Kiev Street (formerly called Gorki 2nd Street) and Baku Street (a street in the 3rd district). The following street names can be classified in the group of symbolic names: Pionerakan, Azatutyun (Liberty), Internatsionalni, and Andrfederatsia Streets. Another ideological stem, *sovetsk*, emerged in the name of the street Sovetashen (former Nubarashen). In general, the stem *sovetsk* came into wide use only from the 1930s to the 1950s.<sup>60</sup>

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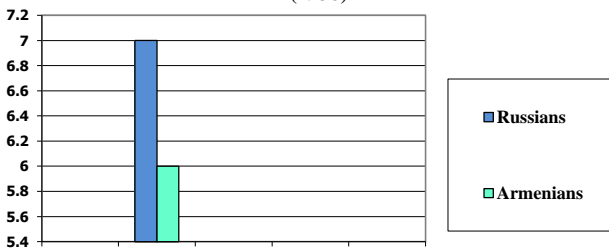
<sup>59</sup> Initially, in the city design by Alexander Tamanyan, working-class apartments were to be situated far from factories in the outskirts of the city. According to the chief architect of Yerevan, such a connection between workplace and home would affect the health of workers and their families. For this purpose, in his letter (12 January, 1929) written to S. Ter-Gabrielyan, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian SSR, Tamanyan explained that "the idea of simply industrial communities was unacceptable for socialist reality," and "by his construction plan he provided the whole city with its finest parts meant for the working class." (in Tamanyan A., *Pastatgteri ev nyuteri joxovacu* [Tamanyan A., Documents and Materials], Erevan, HH GAA «Gitutyun» hratarakchutyun, 2000, p. 429).

<sup>60</sup> Nikitin S. A., *Revolutiya i geografiya, Stanovlenie sovetskoy toponimiki v 1918-1930 godakh* [Revolution and Geography, The Establishment of Soviet Toponymy]/*Otechestvennie zapiski*, 2003, №2, <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/2/revolyuciya-i-geografiya>.

**Chart 3: Classification of renamed streets in Yerevan (1938)**



**Chart 2: The nature of renamed streets in Yerevan (1938)**



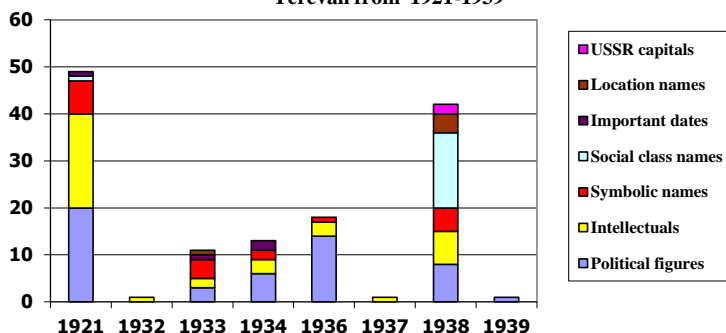
In 1938 from 43 renamed streets 16 was anthroponyms (6 Armenian, 7 Russian)

In 1939 there was only one renaming case <sup>61</sup> - the Sundukyan Street was renamed to Stalin Street. <sup>62</sup>

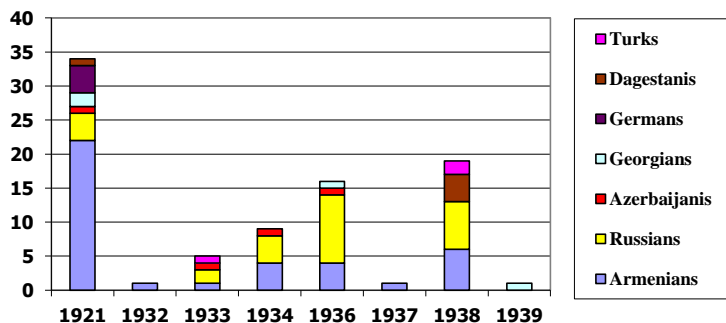
<sup>61</sup> NAA/Fond 1/List 2/ Case 49/Protocol 10/6/ Sheet 22

<sup>62</sup> It was the smallest thing after an attempt to rename Moscow into Stalinodar in 1938 (Nikitin S. A., *Revolutiya i geografiya, Stanovlenie sowetskoy toponimiki v 1918-1930 godakh* [Revolution and Geography, The Establishment of Soviet Toponymy]/Otechestvennie zapiski, 2003, №2, <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/2/revolyuciya-i-geografiya>)

**Chart 4: The scale and the classification of street renamings in Yerevan from 1921-1939**



**Chart 4: The nature of renamed street in Yerevan from 1921-1939**



### Conclusion

Street names offer highly revealing insights into the nature of ideology and national identity in the Soviet state. The efforts of the Soviet Armenian Government to bring about drastic changes in society led to ideological transformations in the capital's toponymy. Street names with political connotations soon became one form of propaganda for the Soviet regime.

By destroying the pre-revolutionary names associated in any way with the former regime, a wide range of symbols and characters were incorporated into the urban area aiming to erase the history of the “bad past” and to strengthen the ideology of the “good present” - the Communist Power. Thus, the Party used



strongly expressed “Soviet symbolic names” such as, for example, Soviet ideological names, social class names, the names of Soviet heroes, the dates of great Soviet achievements, as well as the names of the USSR capitals, etc. Along with the names of public figures - Communist leaders, revolutionaries, Soviet heroes and a list of carefully chosen Intellectuals “matching the spirit of the time” - the symbolic names became long-lasting stamps in Soviet urban toponymy.

The commemoration of important events or personalities of the Soviet era via urban toponyms played an essential role in the construction of a common national history, and - since history is an integral component of national identities - the urban toponyms were also a significant factor in the nation-building and state formation processes in Soviet Armenia.

By introducing the personalities and events of Soviet and Armenian communism into the everyday lives of the residents of Yerevan, propagandist street names represented one of the ways in which the Communist authorities institutionalized the new regime and embedded it into the everyday life of Armenian people. Thus, a Yerevan resident who found himself or herself living on, for example, Voroshilov Avenue in the Stalinyan Raion would have rather little opportunity to question the nature of the state in which he or she lived.

The analysis of archival documents allowed us to divide the street naming/renaming process from 1921-1939 into 2 conventional periods: 1921-1932 and 1933-1939. This division was accounted for the fact that, during the first period, the number of Armenian personalities among other nationalities in anthroponymic group was large, in the anthroponymic nomenclature of Yerevan streets.

Yet, starting from 1933, political transformations occurred inside the Party, culminating with Stalin's repressions, which were instantly reflected in Yerevan street names also. Thus, for instance, the Armenian Government demonstrated its “anti-nationalist” nature hiding behind the notion of “Soviet Brotherhood” and assigned place names of Turkish Bolshevik heroes and/or Azerbaijani political figures.

From 1933-1939, in the approved list of Yerevan streets, the Armenian and Russian anthroponymic names, however, were leveled off, indicating that “Armenian internationalism” revealed itself also in the urban toponyms of this particular time.

**Կոմունիստական գաղափարախոսության արտացոլումը  
Խորհրդային Երևանի փողոցների  
անվանափոխության քաղաքականության  
մեջ (1921-1939)**

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Փողոցների անվանումները մեծապես արտացոլում են Խորհրդային երկրի գաղափարախոսության և ազգային ինքնության էությունը: Տեղանվանաբանության վերջին հետազոտությունները, թերևս, սակավ են անդրադարձել այն միջոցներին, որոնցով Կոմունիստական իշխանությունը պետական կառավարման վերահսկողության պայմաններում խրախուսում էր իր գաղափարախոսությունը փողոցների անվանացանկի միջոցով:

Այս հոդվածը վերլուծում է փողոցների անվանումների կարևորությունը՝ որպես Կոմունիստական իշխանության արտահայտություն վաղ խորհրդային շրջանում՝ Երևանում՝ 1921-1939թթ.: Հայաստանում բոլշևիկյան իշխանության հաստատմամբ փողոցների անվանափոխության լայնամասշտաբ գործընթաց սկսվեց: Նոր ռեժիմը ինստիտուցիոնալացնելու նպատակով իշխանությունը քաղաքային լանդշաֆտն օգտագործեց որպես կոմունիստական գաղափարախոսությունն ու արժեքները Խորհրդային Հայաստանի քաղաքացուն ներկայացնող ասպարեզ: Քաղաքական ենթատեքստ պարունակող փողոցները շուտով խորհրդային վարչակարգի համար քարոզչության մի ձև դարձան: Փողոցների անվանափոխությունը դարձավ Խորհրդային Հայաստանում պետականաշինության և ինքնության կազմավորման գործընթացների հիմնական գործիքներից մեկը: