NAMING, ERASING, RE-NAMING: POLITICAL USES OF PLACE NAMES IN TURKEY

International workshop
11-12 September 2019

University of Geneva
UniBastions, room B214

Istanbul, 1927 (Pinterest)
In 1927, Osman Nuri Ergin hangs the street sign for «İstiklal Caddesi» (Independence Street) at the corner of Taksim square, on the Taksim water reservoir house.
Naming, Erasing, Re-naming:
Political Uses of Place Names in Turkey

The politics of place naming in Turkey have historically been dense and controversial. Naming and/or renaming places are political acts that affect daily lives, and often happen in conflictual terms and temporalities, through official and non-official mechanisms. This workshop brings together a multidisciplinary group of researchers and civil society actors to think the contemporary investment of the toponymical field in Turkey from a critical perspective.

Contemporary Turkey appears to be a hotspot in terms of political investment in the linguistic and semiotic fields. In a historical perspective, the politics of place naming in Turkey can be seen as a succession of periods characterized by radical or progressive ruptures with pre-existing orders through the mobilization of founding myths, new repertoires and figures. We are interested in historical and contemporary official top-down state orchestrated naming policies and mechanisms, as well as non-official or semi-official bottom-up practices used by individuals active in minority politics, and social and political movements. We feel the necessity to think contemporary dynamics in light of historical erasures, repetitions, attempts and failures at restitutions of older names, and/or intrusions of new forms that accompany political and economic developments in Turkey. We are interested in navigating between scales, times, and spaces; from regional district names to street names, train stations to forests, dams to bridges or airports, schools to prisons, hospitals or cemeteries.

This workshop builds on the contributions of participants in the fields of toponymy, semiotics, history, urbanism, architecture, and the political uses of patrimonial and historical references. In the context of Turkey, working on the politics of place naming, also implies to draw on works on memory, trauma, political and social activism, and art.

The first day of the workshop is open to the public. The second day is reserved to invited guests, with roundtable discussions on methodological issues particular to the Turkish context, efforts to sort emerging transversal issues, and comparative perspectives relevant to larger theoretical considerations in the field of toponymy and neo-toponymy.

Our collective work will be published in a peer-reviewed publication and aims to lead to the creation of a transnational observatory on toponymical transformations in Turkey.
Research questions in this workshop include but are not limited to the following topics:

- Promotion and erasure of toponymical repertoires;
- Processes of Turkification & modes of resistance;
- Ottoman, néo-Ottoman, national and post-national historiographies;
- Actors involved in place naming: National leaders and cults of personality, role of the bureaucracy & local administrations, private sector, civil society, political parties;
- Gender and naming policies;
- Geographies of trauma & archaeologies of violence in the politics of naming;
- Methodologies and sources: archives, oral history, official and alternative cartographies;
- Labelling, marketization, commodification;
- Technologies of power & regime change;
- Time scales, moments of change and transition in place naming
The politics of place naming in Turkey, Geneva 2019

Programm

Thursday 11 September 2019
(open to public)

9h30-10h  Welcoming participants

10h-10h45  INTRODUCTION
Çağla E. Aykaç, University of Geneva
The Challenges of Place Naming Studies in Turkey
Frédéric Giraut, University of Geneva
Theoretical Propositions on the Politics of Place Naming

10h45-12h30  PLACE NAMING IN TURKEY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGING MEMORY
Chair: Çağla E. Aykaç
Kerem Öktem, University of Graz
Place Naming & Social Engineering
Asena Günal, Anadolu Kültür, & Murat Çelikkan, Hafiza Merkezi
On the City that Remembers

12h30-14h  Lunch break

14h-18h  NEGOTIATING CONFLICTUAL CONTEMPORARY PLACE NAMING: ACTORS & PROCESSES
(1) Chair: Jean-François Pérouse, IFEA
Emrah Altınok, Bilgi University
Toponymy of Difference: Mapping the Social Space and the Toponymic Tapestry in Gülşuyu-Gülensu
Pınar Dinç, Lund University
Dersim Anatolian High School in Atatürk Neighborhood of Tunceli: Naming, renaming, and contingent openings in Turkey

(2) Chair: Kerem Öktem, University of Graz
Beril Çakır, University of Amsterdam
Urban Landscape and Politics of Place-Naming: Rebuilding Memory
Bülent Batuman, Bilkent University
*Claiming the Nation (-space): Toponymy and Islamist Nation building*

Cyril de Preux, University of Geneva
*Contemporary Place Naming Practices in a Strategic Neighborhood: Başakşehir*

19h30  
Dinner for participants at the Demi-Lune Café, 3 rue Etienne Dumont, Vieille Ville

Friday 12 September 2019  
(reserved to participants and guests)

9h30-10h45  
**CHALLENGING THE POLITICS OF PLACE NAMING IN TURKEY**  
Chair: Murat Çelikkan, Hafiza Merkezi  
Jean-François Pérouse, IFEA  
*Ce que veut dire ne pas nommer: rues anonymes à Istanbul*

Frédéric Giraut & Mélissa Wanjiru, University of Geneva & Kenyata University  
*Hotspots and Comparatives Perspectives in Political Toponymy*

10h45-12h  
**OPEN DISCUSSION:**  
SORTING EMERGING ISSUES AND RELEVANT COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

12h-13h30  
Lunch break

13h30-16h  
**ROUNDTABLE: RESEARCH AGENDA**  
Chairs: Çağla E. Aykaç & Frédéric Giraut  
Place (re)naming observatory: Monitoring what, how and why?  
On methods and sources  
Collective Publication and research agenda