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OIKONYMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN ROMANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Theoretical Premises

The renaming of places is a frequent practice in most geographical areas and, in the past decades, it has piqued the constant interest of researchers curious about the reshaping of sociocultural, ethnic and ideological identities. The change of settlement names is aimed at the cityscape rather than the landscape, as the reason for such modifications refers to individuals as entities of the territory where they live and engage in their daily activity. The theoretical framework of research into this matter has to be considered within the context of ideological discourses of history, social forces, political agendas and cultural values. "The naming of places is a key component in the relationship between *place* and *the politics of identity* in contemporary societies. In this sense, *naming* is a form of *norming*. Names are part of both a symbolic and a material order that provides normality and legitimacy to those who dominate the politics of (place) representation" (Berg & Kearns 1996, p. 99). As Azaryahu argued, "the effect of this is twofold. On the one hand, the landscape is invested with symbolic meanings. On the other hand, the commemorated past is reified by its integration into the physical environment and its subsequent identification with the 'natural order of the things in the world'" (1996, p. 320). Even if the twentieth century recorded an "inflation" of onomastic changes in public space, the practice of onomastic substitutions is millennia old. While in antiquity rulers' names appeared in designations of newly founded settlements (*Adrianople*, *Alexandria*, *Constantinople*, *Ulpia Traiana Sarmisegetusa*) as an acknowledgement of the rulers' historical role as conquerors and civilisers among others, modern age treats the transformation of anthroponyms into toponyms as a regular naming practice. "This commemorative practice has become a trait of the modern era that is independent of type and character of political regime. […] Toponymic commemoration involves both naming places and placing names. In principle the politics of toponymic commemoration involves two interrelated aspects: eligibility for commemoration and the status of the commemoration, evinced in the prestige of its location in space. In democratic societies public debates over who is eligible to be commemorated in the public domain articulate a struggle over moral values and ideological orientation" (Azaryahu 2012, p. 74).

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Of the multitude of onomastic changes that can be found in public space, most researchers have chosen to study hodonyms, associated with "structures of authority and the legitimation of power" (Azaryahu 1996, p. 311). Thus, linguists, historians and geographers have taken into consideration theoretical aspects (Azaryahu 2011, p. 28–33; Felecan O. 2013a, p. 143–151) or hodonymic changes in the context of nationalism, racism, multilingualism, (post)colonialism, post-communism and post-apartheid (Alderman & Inwood 2013, p. 211–233; Azaryahu 2012, p. 73–82; Azaryahu & Kook 2002, p. 195–213; Azaryahu, Rose-Redwood, Alderman 2018; Casagranda 2013, p. 291–302; David 2011, p. 214–228; Felecan O. 2013b, p. 318–328; Felecan O., 2015, p. 229–244; Matsyuk 2014; Neethling 2013, p. 19–34; Päll 2009, p. 790–794; Rateau 2011, p. 453–477; Shoval 2013, p. 612–626) or with respect to certain important cities such as Berlin (Azaryahu 1997, p. 479–493; 2011, p. 483–492), Bucharest (Light 2004, p. 154–172), Budapest (Palonen 2008, p. 219–230), London (Algeo 1999, p. 205–214) and New York (Algeo 1999, p. 205–214; Allen 1993, p. 219–227; Rose-Redwood 2008, p. 431–452). "The renaming of streets is a conventional manifestation of a stage of liminal transition in political history, when the need of the new regime for legitimacy and self-presentation is especially high" (Azaryahu 1996, p. 318). The process has direct effects on everyday life and inhabitants' interaction with the geopolitical space, socioeconomic environment and language itself[1]. State and local authorities see the change of hodonyms as a manifestation of power and legitimisation of the socio-political order; this is why hodonyms have captured the attention of so many researchers.

At the same time, although oikonyms can be associated with structures of authority and the legitimation of power, studies regarding these aspects are, paradoxically, less numerous. Notable examples include Craiu (2012, p. 115–132), Feldman (2005, p. 649–662), Felecan N. (2015, p. 478–487), Felecan O. & Felecan N. (2015, p. 131–143), Felecan O. (2017, p. 78–87), Reinsma (2009, p. 837–842) and Tomescu (2012, p. 353–364). The fact that most of these studies refer to Balkan space is understandable, as one can find there the historical-geographical and political premises that are favourable to the topic discussed: the gaining of independence and the establishment of national states, multilingualism and multiculturalism among others.

Oikonymic Changes: Socio- and Ethnolinguistic Aspects

From a diachronic perspective, the past century has provided complex causes for the changes of oikonyms, as will be discussed hereafter with reference to

[1] "Renaming a street has a substantial effect not only on the city but also on its human experience and cognition. A rude intervention in routinized practices and traditional relations between ordinary people and their habitat effects a cognitive dissonance and mental and communication disarray, at least temporarily" (Azaryahu, 1996, p. 317).

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Romanian space. In comparison with landforms – mountains, plains, hills, valleys, rivers and lakes –, which have firmly established names dating for millennia (macro-toponyms) or centuries (micro-toponyms), human settlements are subjected to socio-political arbitrariness. In Romania, as in other areas, naming and renaming have been strategies of power exerted to control public space socially and politically. "Place names are more than innocent spatial references or passive artefacts; they are embedded in social power relations and struggles over the identities of places and people" (Alderman & Inwood 2013, p. 212).

The first regulations on settlement names were recorded by the authorities in Dobrogea (Dobruja), which became part of Romania (again) only after the Independence of 1878. The intervention has a twofold component. On the one hand, new human settlements appeared as a result of the systematic dislocation of Romanians in the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea. For instance, in the 1920s, Aromanian colonisers were brought from Greece, while the mass emigration of Turks[2] occurred due to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's policy to encourage the settlement of Balkan Muslims in the new Turkish state. In numerous situations, the new localities were designated by means of commemorative, celebratory names, inspired by the history of a place from the antiquity until a certain age: *Carmen Sylva*, *Regele Carol* ('King Charles'), *Ştefan cel Mare* ('Stephen the Great') and *Traian* ('Trajan')[3]. On the other hand, many oikonyms of Turkish and Tartar origin were replaced with Romanian names either to confirm the Romanian character of the region, or to reflect the new ethnic configuration of a settlement. However, it should be noted that a large number of names of Turkish and Tartar origin were preserved, some of which underwent slight phonetic adaptations: *Adamclisi*, *Agigea*, *Babadag*, *Caraorman* (< *Kara-Orman*), *Enisala* (< *Yeni-Sala*), *Murfatlar* and others. The new Romanian names, inventoried by Tomescu (2012, p. 355–357), could be grouped under the following patterns:

– historically evocative names of neighbouring archaeological sites: *Capidava* (< *Calachioi*), *Istria* (< *Caranasuf*);

– names inspired by ancient inscriptions (*Casian* < *Seremet*) or pertaining to ancient peoples (*Valea Dacilor* 'the Dacians' valley' < *Endecarachioi*);

– names evoking historical figures of the Middle Ages (*Mihai Viteazu* < *Casap-Chioi*, *Mircea Vodă* < *Celebichioi*, *Ţepeş Vodă* < *Chior-Cesmea*) and the modern age (*Cuza-Vodă* < *Docuzol*, *Ferdinand I* < *Caramurat*);

[2] The territory between the Danube and the Black Sea has always been multiethnic and multicultural by definition, as Romanians (46.6% in 1899 and 56.8% in 1913) coexisted with Bulgarians, Turks, Tartars, Russians, Lipovans, Germans, Greeks, Jewish, Italians, Armenians and Gypsies (cf. Tomescu, 2012, p. 355).

[3] The examples refer to two Latin names – the pen name of Queen Elisabeth of Romania and the name of Emperor Trajan, conqueror of Dacia – and two of the most important figures in Romanian history, who reigned a long time and had a remarkable contribution to the fate of the Romanians.

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– names of political figures (*Vintilă Brătianu* < *Caramanchioi*) and cultural or scientific personalities (*Ovidiu*[7] < *Canara*, *Saligny*[4] < *Azizia*, *Vasile Alecsandri* < *Testemelu*);

– names that are commemorative of political abstractions or values, such as *Independența* ('the independence' < *Baeramdede*) and *Unirea* ('the union' < *Caugagia*). "Commemorations not only celebrate extraordinary moments of history, but are also instrumental in their reification. Their impact should also be measured by the way they affect rhythms of social life and settings of human activities" (Azaryahu 1996, p. 312);

– Romanianised names that are highly similar to the initial etymon: *Ciucurova* < *Cucur-Ova*, *Turcoaia* < *Turkoy*. On the one hand, Romanianisation facilitates the achievement of the aim set, *i.e.*, to alter the ethnic configuration of oikonyms in Dobruja. On the other hand, this process is the perfect way to establish a new name in the collective mentality, without losing the connection with the previous name;

– delexical names, based on the translation of foreign words: *Amara* (from *amar* 'bitter') < *Agigea*, *Corbu* ('the raven') < *Gargalac*, *Sărata* (from *sărat* 'salty') < *Tuzla*;

– foreign names replaced with simple or compound Romanian ones, without legitimate etymological or toponomastic motivation: *Luminița* ('the little light') < *Sahman*, *Poarta Albă* ('the white gate') < *Alacap*, *Valea Neagră* ('the black valley') < *Cogealia*;

– oikonyms reattributed in accordance with patronyms: *Costineşti* < *Mangeapunar*[5], *Domneşti* < *Cogealac*.

It is interesting that "the first change of village names in Dobruja began in 1912" (Tomescu 2012, p. 355), namely more than three decades after Independence had been obtained. It would appear that state authorities were not initially interested in oikonyms, as they had other priorities on the political-economic agenda. The situation changed along with World War I, at the end of which Romania became whole again through the union of Bessarabia and Transylvania with the mother country. Being under foreign rule for a very long time, these lands – mainly inhabited by Romanians – would experience oikonymic changes only a few years later, as a result of the administrative reorganisation of the country through a law of 1925, enforced in 1926.

As opposed to Dobruja, where oikonymic alterations occurred both for ethnic reasons and religious ones (Muslim names were replaced with Christian ones), in Transylvania ethnic considerations were predominant. However, the

[4] The engineer who built the first bridge over the Danube in 1895, considered the longest bridge in Europe and the third longest in the world, connecting Dobruja to the rest of the country.

[5] The name *Costineşti* was given after the name of a landowner at the end of the nineteenth century (*Costinescu*), but in 1840–1940 the German colonisers that had settled there also used the name *Büffelbrunnen* ('the fountain of the oxen') for the village.

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administrative intervention on this level of onomastics was not aggressive and numerous oikonyms were preserved. As Tomescu (2012) notices, "in Transylvania and [the] Banat, the settlements where the Hungarian, German, Slovakian or Serbian population formed the majority could keep their traditional names, sometimes modifying their spelling to adapt to the Romanian linguistic norms" (p. 354): *Abrud* < Hungarian *Abrudbánya*, *Aleşd* < Hungarian *Élesd*, *Ardud* < Hungarian *Erdőd*, German *Erdeed* and others. The "translation" of Hungarian names was also operated in the case of important cities, even if the majority of the population was not Romanian in the interwar period [6]: *Baia Mare* < Hungarian *Nagybánya*, *Carei* < Hungarian *Nagykároly,* German *Großkarol*, *Oradea (Mare)* < Hungarian *Nagyvárad*, German *Großwardein*, *Satu Mare* < Hungarian *Szatmárnémeti* and *Timişoara* < German *Temeswar*, Hungarian *Temesvár*. This attitude of the Romanian authorities is not only indicative of their conciliating nature, but also of their democratic tolerance concerning the use of names in agreement with the inhabitants' ethnicity. Nevertheless, to avoid the forced Magyarisation of certain names of villages in the west of the country, on the border with Hungary, some untranslatable names were employed (*Inand*, *Nojorid* and *Zerind*), thus compelling the Hungarian majority to use these names exclusively.

Major ethnically and politically motivated oikonymic changes were recorded in settlements in which the Romanians represented the majority but were unable, under the Habsburg rule, to name their home lands using Romanian designations. In such situations, one could talk about rehabilitating, rightful interventions, not about the enforcement of state policies. The examples are numerous and refer to:

– names inspired by the folk naming system operative in a given area: *Izvoru Mureşului* ('the spring of the Mureş river') < *Santatelec*, *Vânători* ('hunts(men)') < *Haşfalău*;

– names "created according to the Romanian toponymic pattern" (Tomescu, 2012, p. 255): *Brădeni* < *Hendorf*, *Secuieni* < *Uisechei*.

Certain oikonyms that contained an ethnic marker were simplified (*Cenad* < *Cenadu Sârbesc* 'Serbian Cenad', *Daia* < *Daia Săsească* 'Saxon Daia', *Homorog* < *Homorogu Român* 'Romanian Homorog', *Pruniş* 'plum tree grove' < *Silvaşu Unguresc* 'Hungarian Silvaş'), whereas in other situations the ethnic reference was either replaced with locative or qualifying determiners (*Bencecu de Jos* 'lower Bencecu' < *Bencecu Român* 'Romanian Bencecu', *Bencecu de Sus* 'upper Bencecu' < *Bencecu German* 'German Bencecu', *Beregsăul Mare* 'great Beregsău' < *Beregsău Român* 'Romanian Beregsău', *Beregsăul Mic* 'little Beregsău' < *Beregsău Nemţesc* 'German Beregsău') or vice versa: *Dileu Român* ('Romanian Dileu') < *Dileu Vechi* ('old Dileu'), *Dileu Unguresc* ('Hungarian Dileu') < *Dileu Nou* ('new Dileu'). The oikonymic changes reflect the fact that the new state was determined to own both the land and

[6] Before 1918, cities, in general, and their centres, in particular, were inhabited by Hungarians, Germans and Jews, and Romanians were the majority only in peripheral or rural areas.

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certain names. The rebaptism of settlements is a process controlled by central authorities, not only as a manifestation of power, but also as an act of appropriation. Therefore, many new names of settlements have a gratulatory, celebratory or commemorative load, a characteristic that was common to several states in the past century. As Azaryahu (1996) remarked about street names, "the association of commemorative street names with nation building became paramount in the 20th century in numerous cases of successful ethnic revivals and postcolonial state formations" (p. 314). Commemorative names were picked especially for settlements in which important figures were born or lived: *Aurel Vlaicu* < *Binţinţi*, *Avram Iancu* < *Aciura*, *Papiu Ilarian* < *Budiu de Câmpie*. In these situations, the oikonyms are motivated and their choice is an homage paid to the persons that surpassed their condition and became role models for the villagers, in various fields of culture and science.

The proof that the choice of commemorative names is not related to nationalism or vindication lies in the attribution of these names in the period of the Romanian Kingdom, in which the ethnic configuration was monochromatic. The intervention of the authorities in naming certain villages increased as a result of the administrative reform of 1926 and referred especially to rural areas. According to Tomescu (2012, p. 357), the new commemorative oikonyms were based on:

– "historical figures, former rulers of the medieval Romanian provinces": *Alexandru cel Bun*, *Constantin Brâncoveanu*, *Mihai Viteazul*;

– names of World War I heroes: *General Dragalina*, *General Eremia Grigorescu*;

– names of famous politicians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: *I.C. Brătianu*, *I.G. Duca*, *C.A. Rosetti*, *Nicolae Titulescu*;

– names of renowned writers: *I.L. Caragiale*, *George Coşbuc*, *Ion Creangă*;

– names of landowners who played an important role in the socioeconomic context of the region: *Alcazi*, *Eliza Stoieneşti*, *Ileana Papadopol* and others.

All these oikonymic changes comprise features of democracy, of a society experiencing a period of peace, as well as social and economic development. The administrative reform did not occur immediately after the end of World War I, which coincided with the establishment of Great Romania, but granted enough time for the "waters to calm", so as not to inflame certain ethnic, religious or political spirits. As evidence that the change of place names was designed carefully, one can mention the survival of these names after the adoption of the Constitution in 1938, followed by a new administrative law, which only affected the organisation of the country but did not have an impact on names of villages and cities.

Concluding Remarks

As other countries, Romania experimented several processes of place-name changing in the first half of the twentieth century, which were indicative of social, political, economic, ethnic and cultural realities. By comparison with folk

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toponymy – which is motivated, spontaneous and descriptive –, official toponymy has an arbitrary, artificial character, which "ignores the relationship of motivation between a linguistic sign and a referent (the settlement designated)" (Moldovanu 1991, p. LII). The official system, continually changing and adapting to the political, socioeconomic and ethnic reality, considerably reduces the variety of folk oikonymy, which relies on the geography and history of the places designated. Encomiastic oikonyms (dependant on the ruling regime) and, sometimes, commemorative oikonyms (borrowing names of minor personalities or figures selected according to criteria that are valid for a brief period of time) are defined by ephemerality and establish purely conventional relationships between territorial units and their names.

From the perspective of the relationship with other systems of languages, official toponymy displays a markedly closed character. "When approached meta-linguistically (from the viewpoint of the subject's attitude towards a name), official toponymy is conscious in essence, as suggested both by its creations and by the numerous interventions in folk geographic nomenclature, which was subjected to a process of selection that was based on several frameworks (political, ethical, aesthetic and religious) and implied an actual linguistic strategy" (Moldovanu 2014, p. XVIII). Sociolinguistically, one can say that the official toponymic norm is restrictive; it is established through the force of the official act that underlies it and the social authority of civil servants.

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TRANSFORMĂRI OICONIMICE ÎN ROMÂNIA, ÎN PRIMA JUMĂTATE A SECOLULUI XX
(*Rezumat*)

Promovată din motive obiective sau subiective, schimbarea denumirilor de localități reprezintă o practică relativ răspândită în majoritatea zonelor geografice. În România secolului XX au existat mai multe valuri de modificare a numelor orașelor și satelor, ca urmare a creării statului național unitar român și a schimbărilor regimurilor politice. Se crede, adeseori, că prin intermediul oiconimelor, autoritățile impun anumite norme socioculturale, lingvistice, etnice și ideologice, în acord cu opțiunile politice ale majorității sau ale celor aflați la putere la un moment dat.

În studii anterioare, am abordat fenomenul menționat mai sus în ceea ce privește hodonimia sau transformările oiconimice din România în a doua jumătate a secolului XX. Oiconimele, datorită statutului lor mai însemnat în contextul toponimiei urbane, sunt mai importante decât numele străzilor. Prin urmare, modificările de tip oiconimic au un impact mai mare, deși au un caracter efemer uneori.

Cuvinte-cheie: *nume de localități*, *schimbare de nume*, *nume comemorative.*
Keywords: *settlement names*, *name change*, *commemorative names.*

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