The scalar geopolitics of place naming on the partitioned island of Cyprus

Steven M. RADIL[*] and Jack FELLMAN[†]

Critiques of the field of toponymy as overly empirical and poorly theorized have led to recent calls for more explicit engagement with the concept of place in human geography and a focus on the processes involved with place naming. This paper builds on these new directions in toponymy to introduce the idea of scale from human geography and apply it to the case of place name changes in the politically divided island of Cyprus. Politically partitioned along ethnic lines since the mid-1970s, Cypriot places have undergone two different types of place name changes; one connected with imperial, international, or supranational politics, and another with invasion and occupation. Name changes in the EU-member Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are discussed using the scale concept which draws attention to the very different and unique sets of geopolitical actors and contexts that are involved with making, at and times, resisting, new toponyms on the island. The use of scale to explore Cypriot name changes exemplifies the utility of matching a concern for toponymic process with appropriate theoretical concepts. Such an approach has promise to open new directions for toponymic studies and to invigorate a long marginalized field.

INTRODUCTION

While a self-evidently geographic subject, toponymy or the study of place names, has long been a marginalized field of study within the discipline of Anglophone human geography. Human geography, which is organized into thematic sub-fields (economic geography, cultural geography, political geography, etc.), has largely been a theory-driven field since the early 1970s while toponymy has been perceived as suffering from a lack of theory, largely focused on cataloguing lists of place name changes rather than emphasizing the causes of such changes. Whether entirely fair or not, such a perception has kept toponymy on the margins of human geography. For example, since 2010 roughly only 4% of all articles (10 in total) published in *Political Geography* (the most important journal for issues of politics in human geography) deal with toponymy.

[*] Professor, University of Idaho, U.S.A.
[†] Student, University of Idaho, U.S.A.

With this state of affairs in mind, this paper advocates for a new direction in toponymy in a twofold way. First, recent efforts that attempt to shift the emphasis in toponymy studies from place names per se to the processes behind place name changes are welcome in that it can create opportunities to theorize the process itself. Second, an emphasis on the process of place name changes creates opportunities to leverage key geographic concepts, like scale, which can stimulate more interest in toponymy within contemporary human geography. This twofold approach is illustrated in this paper using the case of Cyprus to explore how multiple scales are involved in ongoing place name changes there. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First is an introduction of a new approach to place name changes followed by a presentation of the geographic concept of scale. These ideas are applied to the case of Cyprus followed by a concluding discussion of the utility of this overall approach to other cases of place name changes.

PLACE NAMES OR PLACE NAMING?

The study of toponymy has been something of a scattershot field and the scholarship is spread across a handful of fields, including anthropology, legal studies, political science, linguistics, and geography (Zelinsky 1997). This diversity of has approaches has not lent itself to a clear theoretical framework from which to approach the subject matter. The result has been a long-standing discontent that "the study of names leaves much to be desired" (Zelinsky 2002, p. 246). This discontent is often grounded in a critique of the atheoretical nature of the field. For example, Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009, p.6, 9) argued that "toponymic research have typically adopted [a] theoretically (and politically) naïve empiricist foci on the nomenclatures of specific localities" and that researchers have avoided "theoretically grounded approaches." In other words, the field has been quite disconnected with trends in social science toward critical engagements with social theory and in dealing with issues of power.

This disconnect is telling when considering the content of the typical place name study, which Berg and Vuolteenaho (2009) assert is little more than a cataloguing of existing place names for whatever location is being considered. They advocate for a different approach, one that draws on the literature on place within human geography to understand place naming practices with the way in which places are made by human activity. Their argument drew heavily on the writing on place by theorists in geography like Doreen Massey (1991), whose emphasis on the social construction of places provides an inspiration to see place names as part of the way in which places are socially constructed and given social meaning.

This argument about drawing on geographical theory to reimagine toponymy studies has been reflected in recent calls to shift studies away from name cataloging and toward investigating the processes that lead to place name changes. For example, Rose-Redwood et al. (2010, p. 455, 458) detected a 'critical turn' in toponymy leading to producing a new wave of scholarship on the "critical interrogation of the politics of place naming" that is grounded in "an explicit engagement with critical theories of space, place, and landscape" in geography. Most recently, Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch (2016, p. 2) have taken this a step further by proposing a theoretical framework that emphasizes *place naming* processes in order to better grasp the "variegated ways in which places are named."

Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch (2016) argue that attention to place naming necessarily involves a set of three different elements at the center of which reside what they call the place naming process. The first element is the geopolitical context within which places are situated which broadly refers to concerns over the politics of control of a particular place. The second element is concerned with the specific actors that are involved in the naming process. The third element is concerned with what they call the technologies of naming, which has to do with whether names are being restored, replaced, or created altogether new. This is an interesting start towards a new theory of place naming as it is aligned with much of critical social theory in human geography on giving attention to agency and to the contexts in which human activity occurs.

However, this framework is also incomplete from the perspective of human geography. Any interest in the processes of place naming must also consider the spatial complexity of the processes in question. For example, place naming may reflect the dominance of a group of actors or the salience of a specific issue within a given place but also may involve actors or issues that are external to the place where the name is to be assigned or changed. The idea that the social relations that help to make places what they are may not be simply contained by or present within the place or locality itself is an important window on this theoretical deficiency. As Massey (1994, p.120) puts it, such relations may be "contained within the place; others will stretch beyond it, trying any particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too." From this perspective, it is not sufficient to consider just the places itself where naming occurs but to consider how those places are connected to (or not) wider contexts. This lends itself to consideration of yet another geographical concept, that of scale.

SCALE

Scale is treated as a foundational concept in human geography and yet is also the subject of a great deal of contemporary debate. For example, in introducing scale in a volume dedicated to the concept alone, Sheppard and McMaster (2004, p. 256) wrote that "conceptions of geographic scale range across a spectrum of almost intimidating diversity." Scale primarily concerns space in geography, and this discussion will focus on spatial scale although there are other interrelated meanings of scale in social science, such as temporal or thematic scales (for a discussion of these related issues, see Montello 2001).

At its most basic, scale in human geography is a referent to the spatial size or extent, either relative or absolute, of some phenomenon or process (Flint 2012). Most often, the conceptualization of scale in human geography refers to a "nested hierarchy of differentially sized and bounded spaces" (Marston et al. 2005, p. 416-417; see also Delaney and Leitner 1997; Smith 2000). With this in mind, a typical classification of human geographical scales includes (but is not limited to) "the body; the household; the neighborhood; the city; the metropolitan area; the province or state; the nation-state; the continent; and the earth as a whole" (Sheppard and McMaster 2004, p. 4). This can lead to an understanding of scale as simply a list of analytic or observational levels with an implied spatial hierarchy. However, as Sayre (2009, p. 102) points out, much of the contemporary literature on scale in human geography involves questioning the "stability

of these categories . . . how they are produced, reproduced, or transformed . . . or [if] multiple levels interact."

The idea of scale as a spatial hierarchy undoubtedly rests on the work of Peter Taylor (1982) who introduced a three-tiered (urban, nation-state, global) scalar hierarchy onto Immanuel Wallerstein's notion of a single economic world system. Important to note is the primacy given to the global scale in Taylor's framework – he called it the scale that "really matters" reflecting the notion of a single global economic system that produced effects and phenomena observed at other scales (Taylor 1982, p. 26). Since Taylor's foundational work, human geographers in general (but mostly economic and political geographers in specific) have worked to expand and diversify the concept. Neil Smith's work (1993, p. 96) on the geography of capitalist production emphasized how particular scales are made by observing that scale is "produced in and through social activity." For instance, patterns of daily commuting helps to constitute the urban scale while capital circulation helps to constitute the global scale. This has led geographers to pay closer attention to the processes behind the creations of particular scales rather than to take any one scale for granted.

Although the ideas and debates of the scale concept are too voluminous to be adequately captured here, the current conceptualization (though not uncontested) of scale rests on the following principles which we have adapted following Sayre (2009, p.105). First, scales are made by human activity (as well as by biological and geophysical processes). Second, scales are relational in the sense that they are produced by people working in relation with and to each other and that scales simultaneously exists and can interact with each other. Third, there is no proper or correct scale to understand a given human activity or process; however, there may be certain scales with more relevance than others. Fourth and last, research on scale should reflect on the processes that make scales rather than by taking any given scale for granted.

From these principles, scale is a meaningful lens on the issue of place naming, especially given the recognition that place naming is a human process. Therefore, each case of place naming will have a spatial scale to it, one that reflects the full set of activities that constitute the specific process behind any place naming or name changes. Further, each case of naming will likely have a different scale to it; if this is not the case, it is a significant clue that multiple cases are caused or shaped by the same process that is operating at a large(r) scale. Consequently, tracing the scale of the processes behind a specific case should provide some clues as to the key actors that constitute the process and that are actively making the scale what it is. We use these ideas to reflect on the contentious politics of place naming and place names changes in the politically divided island of Cyprus.

PLACE NAME CHANGES IN CYPRUS

The island of Cyprus is located in the eastern Mediterranean off the southern coast of Turkey (Figure 1) and is among the largest and most populated islands in the entire region. Cyprus has also been an arena for communal strife between peoples of Greek descent (~80% of the population) and Turkish descent (~20%) since the late 1950s. Cyprus has had a long history of external political domination. For example, despite the Greek heritage of its people, from the mid-1500s until the late-1800s Cyprus was part of the Ottoman Empire which introduced

Figure 1. Located in the Eastern Mediterranean,
Cyprus is near the coastlines of Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon.
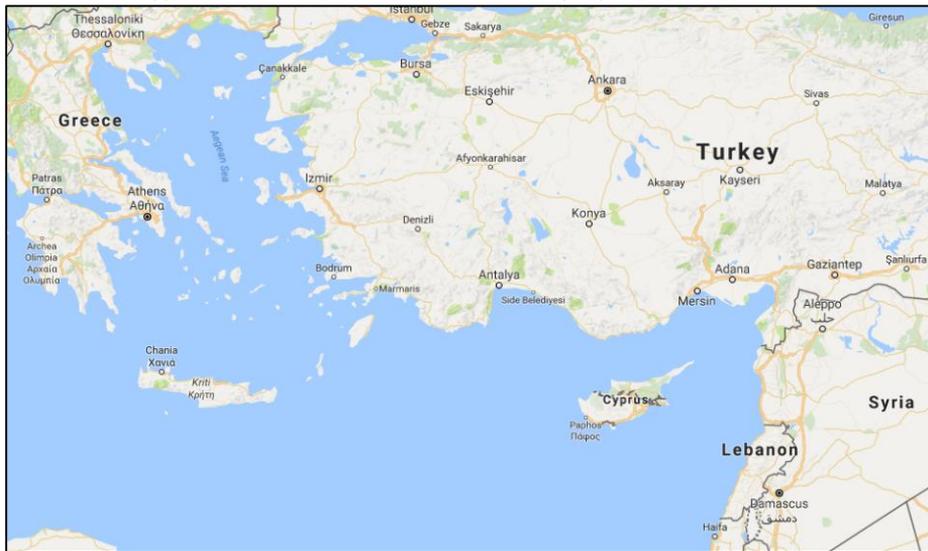
Source: Google Maps

Turkic people into the island. Greek Cypriots were politically restive in the 1800s as they closely identified with the efforts at the time of Greece to wrest itself free of Ottoman control. However, the Ottoman decline at the end of the 1800s did not result in Cypriot independence. In exchange for British support against Russia, the Ottomans ceded control of Cyprus to the British in 1878. It would remain part of the British Empire until formal independence was granted in 1960 (see Kliot and Mansfield 1997 for a thorough discussion of this period of Cypriot history).

At the time of independence, the dual ethnic nature of the population was formalized into a constitution which shared power between the two groups. Ethnic power sharing was later undone in a series of constitutional amendments in 1963 that reserved political power for Greek Cypriots alone. This was accompanied by waves of intercommunal violence between the majority Greek Cypriots and the minority Turkic Cypriots. These patterns of violence continued into the early 1970s and culminated in an attempted overthrow of the Cypriot government in 1974 by Greek Cypriots acting in conjunction with support from the military-led government in Greece itself. In response, Turkey invaded and occupied the northeastern part of Cyprus. During this period, most Turkic Cypriots fled to the Turkish controlled areas and vice-versa. The result was a de facto spatial split in the ethic patterns of residency on the island (see Figure 2).

In response to the attempted Greek–led coup and the invasion by Turkey, the United Nations established a buffer zone between the two sides which remains in place today. The United Kingdom also maintains two large military bases on the island, part of the deal struck in the process of independence in 1960. In 1983 the Turkish-occupied northern part of Cyprus proclaimed its formal independence from the rest of the island, calling itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Only Turkey has formally recognized Northern Cyprus and remains its only political and economic patron. The

Figure 2. Map of the current political and ethnic geographies of Cyprus.
The UN buffer zones and UK military bases are enduring features of the post-civil war political landscapes.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4810067
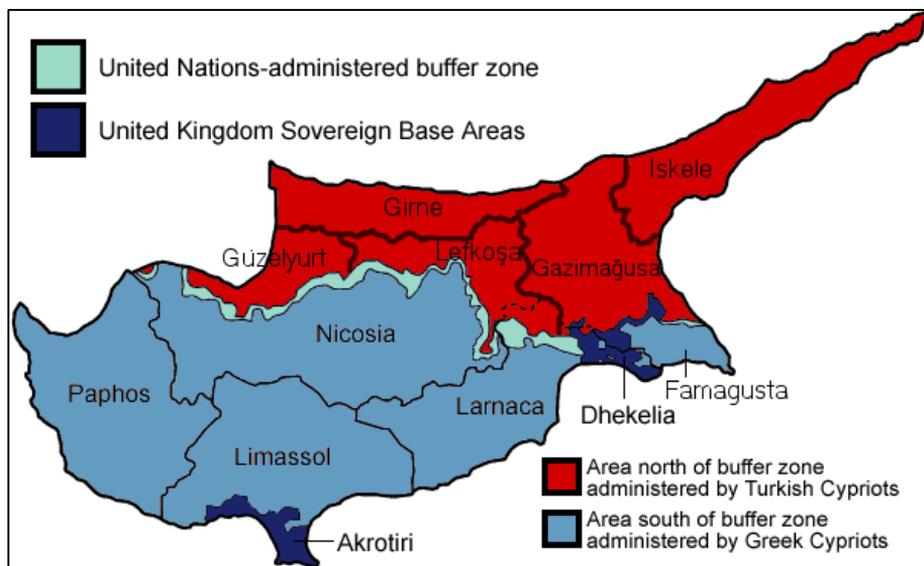
rest of the island is constituted as the Greek Cypriot dominated Republic of Cyprus and was granted membership into the European Union in 2004. The status of Northern Cyprus and Turkey's role in continued Cypriot political disunity remains an enduring obstacle to Turkey's interest in joining the EU (Suvarierol 2003).

As should be expected in a politically and ethnically partitioned landscape, place names have become the source of friction between the two Cypriot communities. But place names themselves have long been the source of confusion and political effort on the island. For example, traditional place names were the subject of several British-led 'standardization' projects beginning in the 1870s and continuing through at least 1967 (Georgiou 2011). This involved transliterating Greek names into English equivalents which introduced alternative spellings and pronunciations for nearly every town and village on the island. Beginning in the 1980s, a series of UN-led standardization naming efforts further complicated affairs leading to local protests and national political debate over naming conventions in the mid-1990s. As a result, many of the place naming activities in southern Cyprus have constituted what Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch (2016) would call restoration: returning to traditional Greek place names and rejecting the Anglicization of place names imposed by the British beginning in the late 1800s (Georgiou 2011).

Place naming has also been controversial in the context of Northern Cyprus. While some place names had Turkish roots, most in Cyprus did not, including in Northern Cyprus. Following the invasion and occupation, Turkish leaders there have replaced traditional Greek place names with Turkish language names. As reported by Ladbury and King

(1988), nearly every town or village in Northern Cyprus was renamed by officials shortly after the creation of the de facto state there. In this example, the issue of standardization was also problematic as many maps, atlases, and even road signs, used both the old and new names. However, this was a clear example of the 'technology' of using name replacement to reinforce the new political status quo on the island (Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch 2016).

DISCUSSION

These two different types of naming processes in Cyprus may seem superficially similar in that they both reflect efforts to spatialize political authority in the landscape. However, some attention to scale suggests very different types of processes at work. For example, the place names changes in the (southern) Republic of Cyprus are connected to the processes of geopolitical hegemony by the British empire in the 1800s and 1900s which itself had an enormous geographical scope. As part of the provisions of political domination and control of distant lands and peoples came the logics of standardization. Control entailed cataloging which connected not just to the needs of the British within Britain but to the needs of the empire more broadly. In other words, maps that displayed the Anglicized place names of Cyprus were of use to British efforts that moved people, goods, and capital all around the empire, particularly following the completion of the nearby Suez Canal (Hyam 2002). The alternative names of Cypriot villages were connected to similar processes elsewhere in the empire.

The attempt to de-Anglicize plane names in Cyprus also traces a much larger footprint than is suggested by a discussion of local or even national interpretations of such histories of external domination. In the same vein, the UN-led cartographic standards and membership in the EU create a particular set of scales at which place naming occurs. In such cases, the expression of Greek identity is also shaped by the demands of international membership in larger political bodies. The agents involved in the outcomes are more than just those in the places directly affected by such changes. To fully understand these processes, we must also look to New York and Brussels.

With regard to the examples in Northern Cyprus, scale is also present but in a very different way. The relative isolation of the north with its lack of connections to other places and other polities suggests a much smaller scale to the naming process and one that implicates largely only its Turkish patrons. Although the suggestion by some that the continued partition has stood in the way of Turkish integration into the EU may implicate larger scale issues, the politics of place naming in the north are largely the province of Turkish Cypriots and Turkey alone. That is not to say that the effects of these changes do not have a larger impact. For example, in 2013 the (southern) Cypriot government passed legislation banning alternative place names in response to the continued retrenchment of Turkish identity in the north. And yet, this process has not yet been linked to the wider relationships that Turkey itself is engaged in, such as NATO. In this sense, the scale of the process in the north much more limited than are those in the south and the agents less likely to be found elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Interpretations like this that draw not just on the nascent critical theorization of place naming processes but on the specific ideas and concepts of contemporary human geography can provide the foundation to revitalize scholarship in toponymy. For example, what are the key agents that are involved in the separate yet interconnected place naming processes in the divided island of Cyprus? Reflecting on scale helps to draw our attention to relationships and places outside and well beyond Cyprus in the one hand (British Empire, UN, EU) and to the a much more limited set of relationships in the other (Turkey). It also suggests that some types of naming technologies might necessarily involve larger scale processes than others. Restoring names implies a change in political control from beyond the places being renamed; this itself implies the presence of a geopolitics of external rather than localized control. However, place name replacement may operate at different and smaller scales for the opposite reasons.

Although drawn from a very particular case, this dual framework seems fruitful for other cases as well. Contested place names in East Asia (*East Sea/Sea of Japan*, etc.) are not just localized or even regionalized affairs; they also navigate the politics of US hegemony, the rising regional status of China, the historical geopolitics of empire, and so on. From this perspective, the optimism of many about the critical turn in toponymy studies seems warranted: there are a wealth of new questions and answers waiting for exploration. Doing so through the lens of concepts like scale promise to provide a richer appreciation of how place naming works and in the ways in which place naming practices in one setting are part of a variable set of other political practices, histories, and agendas.

REFERENCES

Berg, L. D., and Vuolteenaho, J. (Eds.) (2009). *Critical toponymies*: *The contested politics of place naming*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Delaney, D., and Leitner, H. (1997). The political construction of scale. *Political Geography*, 16(2), pp. 93–97.

Flint, C. (2012). *Introduction to Geopolitics* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Georgiou, V. (2011). Intended and unintended effects of language planning: insights from an orthography debate in Cyprus. *Language Policy*, 10(2), pp.159–182.

Giraut, F. and Houssay-Holzschuch, M. (2016). Place naming as dispositif: Toward a theoretical framework. *Geopolitics*, 21(1), pp. 1–21.

Hyam, R. (2002). *Britain's imperial century, 1815–1914*: *a study of empire and expansion*. New York: Springer.

Kliot, N., and Mansfield, Y. (1997). The political landscape of partition: The case of Cyprus. *Political Geography*, 16(6), pp. 495–521.

Ladbury, S., and King, R. (1988). Settlement renaming in Turkish Cyprus. *Geography*, 73(4), pp. 363–367.

Marston, S. A., Jones, J. P., and Woodward, K. (2005). Human geography without scale. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(4), pp. 416–432.

Massey, D. (1991). The political place of locality studies. *Environment and Planning A*, 23(2), pp. 267–281.

Massey, D. (1994). *Place, space and gender.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Meyer, W. B., Gregory, D., Turner, B. L., and McDowell, P. F. (1992). The local-global continuum. In: Abler, R. F., Marcus, M. G., and Olson, J. M. (eds.), *Geography's Inner Worlds:*

Pervasive Themes in Contemporary American Geography, pp. 255–279. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Montello, D. R. (2001). Scale in Geography. In Smelser, N. J., and Baltes, B. P. (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, pp. 13501–13504. Oxford: Pergamon.

Rose-Redwood, R., Alderman, D., and Azaryahu, M. (2010). Geographies of toponymic inscription: new directions in critical place-name studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34(4), pp. 453–470.

Sayre, N F. (2009). Scale. In Castree, N., Demeritt, D., Rhoads, B., and Liverman, D. (eds.), *A Companion to Environmental Geography*, pp. 95–108. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sheppard, E., and McMaster, R. B. (eds.). (2004). *Scale and geographic inquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Smith, N. (1993). Homeless/global: Scaling places. In Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G., and Tickner, L. (eds.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, pp. 87–119. London: Routledge.

Smith, N. (2000). Scale. In Johnston, R. J., Gregory, D., Pratt, G., and Watts, M. (eds.), *The dictionary of human geography 4th ed*, pp. 724–727. Oxford: Blackwell.

Suvarierol, S., (2003). The Cyprus obstacle on Turkey's road to membership in the European Union. *Turkish Studies*, 4(1), pp. 55–78.

Taylor, P. (1982). A materialist framework for political geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 7(1), pp. 15–34.

Zelinsky, W. (1997). Along the frontiers of name geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 49(4), pp. 465–466.

Zelinsky, W. (2002). Slouching toward a theory of names: A tentative taxonomic fix. *Names*, 50(4), pp. 243–262.