

THE FLOWERING OF NICKNAMES IN ARMENIAN JERUSALEM (1940s TO THE MID-‘60s)

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The article has been delivered on 24.07.2020, reviewed on 20.08.2020,
accepted for publication on 01.03.2021

Introduction: Nicknames Galore

Nicknames have been around forever. How and where they first became part of universal popular identification is unknown. It's not just people who have nicknames. Nations, cities, mountains, rivers, and even cars have them too. Americans are Yankees, Canadians are Canucks and the English are John Bull... The Land of the Rising Sun is Japan, Down Under is Australia, and Albion is England. City of Lights is Paris, Rome is the Eternal City, and New York is The Big Apple. The Himalayas are the Sacred Mountains and the Ganges is the Eternal River as is the Nile. The Cadillac car's nickname is Caddy and BMW is the Bimmer.

The name of the first woman, Eve, started as her nickname. Eve means "living" in Hebrew. A second and third possible meaning of Eve is 'snake' and 'life' (In Arabic, Eve's name is Hewa which is close to haya meaning life and hayyeh which means snake. The episode of the snake giving the apple to Eve strengthens the Hewa and hayeh connection). Adam is also a name and nickname. In Hebrew Adam means "someone [man] from the ground". Thus, both Adam's and Eve's names/nicknames described the most essential facts about them. In Hebrew, Adam's name/nickname means "red and represents the deity, in the form of the burning bush". In Arabic 'adem means bone while dam means blood.

Many Biblical names have their origins in nicknames... Abraham (high father/patriarch) is a nickname God bestowed upon the man who was to found the Jewish nation. Moses ("found in the river" in Egyptian), Yakov ("heel" or "to be behind"), Peter ("stone") and Thomas ("twin") are nicknames too. Christ,

meaning “Anointed One” in Greek, is a nickname of Jesus. The seven names Jews give God (Adonai, Jehovah, and Hashem...) are nicknames as well.

Prominent People and their Nicknames

In ancient Greece a couple had a boy named Aristocles. Because he had wide chest and shoulders people called the boy Platon (“wide”). The nickname stuck and Aristocles became Plato, the most famous student of Socrates and a philosopher in his own right. Plato’s best student was Aristotle who was known as the “Father of Logic”. Aristotle’s best-known student was Alexander of Macedonia who later became Alexander the Great. Nine-hundred years after his death, Alexander was given, in the Koran, the nickname Two Horned supposedly because he conquered the East and the West. “Great” is the most popular nickname of rulers. There are about 100 “Greats” including Armenian Kings Dikran and Drtad III. In medieval Europe there was Universal Spider King (Louis of Aquitaine), emperors Charles Stammerer, Charles the Fat, Charles the Simple, and Charlemagne of the Holy Roman Empire. A few centuries later England had a brave but rash king (Richard I) who was nicknamed the Lionheart. His second nickname was Richart Oc-E-Nom (Richard Yes and No in Occitan, the language of southern France at the time). No one used Richard’s Plantagenet last name.

While attaching nicknames to royalty was popular across Europe, the English seem to have had a special knack in affixing nicknames to their kings. There was Ethelred the Unready, his son Edward the Confessor, and William the Bastard who became William the Conqueror when he invaded England in 1066. The Hammer of the Scots and Longshank were the nicknames of King Edward I. The Bankrupt, King of the Seas, Our Comely Kyng, the Robber, the Arranger of Merchants, and the Tanner of Tamworth was King Edward III. Rose of Rouen was the nickname of King Edward IV while Edward VI was known as The Boy King. King Henry VII had several nicknames. He was known as The Accountant and The Huckster King. There was a Hunchback king (Richard III), Old Coppernose (Henry VIII), and Farmer George (King George III). Elizabeth I was the Virgin Queen while his beautiful cousin was Bloody Mary (Queen Mary of Scotland). Queen Elizabeth II’s nickname is Lilibet. That’s how

her sister Princess Margaret pronounced her name when they were children¹. It's almost impossible to find a British or English king who didn't have a nickname.

The people in distant Central Asia were not immune to nicknaming. From the steppes of China, Mongolia, and Central Asia came Timur the Lame and Timujin the Impotent. One of the Crusader kings of Jerusalem was nicknamed Leper and an early tsar was branded Ivan the Terrible [the nickname was mistranslated from the Russian: the correct translation is "awesome"]. A Balkan ruler was nicknamed Vlad the Impaler. He nailed to city walls soldiers of the invading Ottoman Turks. An Ottoman sultan was called The Grim while another was known as "The Sot" (drunkard). A late Ottoman sultan was Abdul the Damned aka Bloody Abdul. The country he ruled bore the nickname the Sick Man of Europe, compliments of Tsar Nicholas I. In the middle Ages there was the Armenian guerilla fighter Kogh Vasil (Vasil the Thief), Catholicos Nerses Shnorhali (Graceful Nerses), and Catholicos Krikor Dgha (Boy). There were any number of European kings who were called Mad. Ludwig of Bavaria is the best-known of the mad rulers. Napoleon had several nicknames, thanks to his British foes: Little Corporal, the Corsican Ogre, and Boney were some of the more popular ones. Charles de Gaulle's nickname was the Great Asparagus because of his body shape while the long-time Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was Comrade Nyet during the Cold War. Che was the nickname of Argentinean-Cuban revolutionary Ernesto Guevara. In more recent times there has been an Iron Lady (Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the UK), and Tricky Dicky (President Richard Nixon). Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton had the distinction of having the most nicknames of U.S. presidents (Reagan was Dutch, The Gipper, the Teflon President, and the Great Communicator while Clinton was Bubba, Slick Willie, the Comeback Kid, Big Dog, and America's First Black President. Dubya is the nickname of President George W. Bush.

The root of nickname is "eke name", meaning additional name in Middle English. By the early 17th century, the word had evolved to the current nickname. Epithet is a Greek word meaning added name². It came to mean "negative nickname" in the last century but in the last decade it has become a neu-

¹ Jones 2015.

² www.etymonline.com?word=nickname, Nickname (n.) Aug 24, 2020, 4 p.m.

tral synonym of nickname. Moniker, sobriquet, epithet, tag, handle, appellation, byname, pet name, nom de guerre, nom de plume, cognomen are all synonyms of nickname but applicable in different contexts. The study of names is called onomastics.

Why Nicknames?

Why do we need nicknames? Nicknames allow one to be informal and affectionate. They spotlight. A nickname gives us a chance to lighten the mood and show people we are ready for a laugh.

While around the world most nicknames are endearing, friendly, and affectionate, the reverse is true in the Somalia. That country has the distinction of coining nicknames which are almost always aggressively negative. The denizens of the East African nation have a grand time bestowing cruel nicknames which focus on physical defects. No Fingers is a typical nickname for someone who has lost his fingers during frequent Somali blood-letting of the past four decades. Hairlip, Baldy, Stutterer, Big Mouth, Scarface, Big Bottom, Cross-eyed, Deaf, Limpy, One-legged, and Shorty are other common nicknames in Mogadishu. The Somalis call the Chinese Small Eyes and Arabs Red Ears. Non-Muslims are Gaal (infidel). Someone who has his front teeth missing is Field Goal. In next-door Ethiopia, the erstwhile Armenian community had members nicknamed Kit Ohannes (Big Nose John), Esheg Avedis (Donkey Avedis), Kordzounim Mama (I've Got a Job, Mother); Oozoon Avedis (Straight Avedis), Snake Shaver, Blockhead, Asinine... It must be something in the air of east Africa.

Armenian Jerusalemites and their Nicknames

Another world-class-although unsung-nickname-minter was the Jerusalem Armenian community of the '40s, the '50s and the '60s. Although a community of fewer than 2,500 people at any one time, it had a "treasure trove" of more than 1,000 nicknames, many inventive, colorful and often mocking. Practically everyone and every family had a nickname. And in an unprecedented élan the community had coined nicknames which were phrases and sentences.

Our family nickname was Bedevi (Bedouin). We were "graced" by the nickname because, in the early '30s, my father had gone to a carnival ball dressed as a Bedouin. Why Bedouin? Because from the age of seven to 17 he had lived among the Bedouins of eastern Syria who had adopted him after the

Turks had slain most of his family. We considered the nickname insulting: after all, we were city folk, Christian and Armenian. Calling us “Bedevi” in our presence could result in “unpleasantness.” No member of my family heard the sobriquet although we knew it was our nickname. We had another nickname which was neutral. My siblings and I were also called Cecile’s Children. It made sense because my mother was the only woman in our community with that name. My two brothers, sister and I didn’t mind the cognomen.

In addition to the family nickname, the members of a family could also have individual nicknames. Thus, one of my brothers was known as Kevolig and Mahmud Beg. Kevolig was an endearing diminutive of his name, Kevork. The second nickname because at the age of ten he had imitated the ram-rod walk of Arab Legion soldiers and their commander Mahmud Beg. The gods of nicknames were not too harsh to my family.

While other Armenian Diaspora communities also had a tradition of nicknaming, what made the Jerusalem Armenian nicknames remarkable were their profligacy, originality, and their frequent emphasis on the derogatory. The obvious question is why were Jerusalem Armenians in a class by themselves? In the absence of scientific research there’s the temptation to speculate... an option of dubious use. Scientific research would have to find out a) Why were so many Jerusalem nicknames negative when around the world the opposite is true. b) Was the negative nickname a result of “familiarity breeds contempt”? c) Had two recent calamities-the Genocide of Armenians and the unending fighting between Arabs and Jews-infused into the community a free-floating anger, aggression, and cynicism? Was the profusion of nasty nicknames expression of their suppressed anger? d) Did the absence of Armenian newspaper result in word-of-mouth “wireless telegraph” gossip which could be enlivened by featuring characters with colorful names? Word-of-mouth meant subjectivity, bias, and invention.

While Somali nicknames’ focus is physical deformity, a great many Jerusalem nicknames extended that concept to include mental and behavioral shortcomings. Branding people with nicknames was a useful practice because it distinguished people who had the same name or profession. Some nicknames were ironic; others were abbreviations or were terms of endearment. A few were contractions of family names. Because our parents had come from Turkish-occupied Armenia, most of our last names were Turkish. Ottoman bu-

reaucrats decided the last name of most Armenians. In a typical abuse of their authority, these officials had given our great-grandparents mocking last names (Keuroghlanian is cross-eyed boy or one-eyed boy in Turkish, Topalian is lame, and Geuteboyoukian is big rear). Like most of our last names our nicknames were often Turkish. Perhaps people preferred Turkish nicknames because it was in the language of our centuries-old tormentors and thus the words sounded nastier and distant from our tongue. Turkish nicknames and curses were more cutting than Armenian nicknames and curses.

Nicknames as Distinguishing Aids

Cliff Cunningham, professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was a frustrated teacher because too many of his students had identical names. “We frequently have courses with over 500 students. With these numbers, we frequently get two students with the same name. When you are working in a grade book, or in Speedgrader, there is no way to confirm which student is which... For these reasons (and those maybe others) I would like to see a ‘nickname’ option for each student³. The point is also made by the BBC which claims nicknames were invented to differentiate people who had the same name⁴.

Because there were more than 10 Mariams/Maryams each had to have a nickname: Anoushig Mariam was an ironic moniker. Bengalakh Mariam had a big mole (beng is mole). Ghargha Mariam (crow in Turkish); Temeez Mariam (clean in Turkish); Ghavas Mariam (her husband was a dragoman of the Armenian Patriarchate. Ghavas is dragoman). Ouzoon Mariam (straight in Turkish), Geyikji Mariam (??? Mariam), Shash Mariam (cross-eyed), Mariam Baji (sister), and Mariam el-Adra (Virgin Mary in Arabic because this Mariam was supposedly unapproachable) were others who bore the name of Virgin Mary. Finally, there was Gayzdzag Mariam. It was the abbreviation of her last name meaning lightning. Like Bengalakh Mariam, there was a boy who had a large mole on his neck. His nickname was Bengalakh too. The origin of the “lakh” suffix remains a mystery.

Because there were several Dikrans, each needed a nickname. Arabaji Dikran (coachman), Ekbebeji Dikran (“boyrag” maker). He was also known as

³ Wikipedia. “Epithet”, Distinguishing aids.

⁴ Brett 2009.

Lahmajounji Dikran because he sold lahmajoun. The “ji” suffix is common in India, Iran and in the Arab Middle East. It means “doer”, “related to”. Msrtsi Dikran had come from Egypt (Misr is Egypt in Arabic). Leblebeji Dikran was so called because his last name was Leblebijian (leblebu is chickpeas). Several Dikrans were called “Dikko” to differentiate them.

Arab Tradition

‘Abu’ means ‘father’ and ‘Oum’ means mother in Arabic. Thus, “Abu Ahmad” and Oum Ahmad mean ‘Father of Ahmad and Mother of Ahmad.’ The nickname is an alternate way of identifying a person.

It is often presumed that a Palestinian will name his first son after his father. So supposing Mohammad has a son, he will presume that his yet-to-be born grandson will also be named Mohammed by his son. Thus his son would be known as Abu-Mohammed. Even if Mohammed’s son didn’t have a son, he would still be called Abu-Mohammad. The custom was less than helpful because too many people were named Mohammed and its variations (Ahmed, Hamid, Mahmud, Hamdan...). Since Palestinian Arabs applied the same honorific to non-Arabs, there were a number of Armenians whom Palestinians called Abu Yaghoub (Hagop), Abu George, Oum Garabed and Oum Khacho (Khachig).

Armenians had added a twist to the Arab custom by inventing names which were not related to their children. Thus there was Abu Laban (yoghurt-seller), Abu Shanab (a man had a prominent mustache), Abu Namleh (ant), Abu Holl (Sphinx because the nickname bearer was inscrutable), Abu Karagoz (Middle East version of shadow marionettes), and Abu Shbeir (Shorty). Shbeir is Arabic for the expanse from thumb to little finger and across the palm. Abu Farash (Father of the Sweeper) was the nickname of a man who was a gossip. There was the occasional kindly exception to the tradition. A man who had four daughters but no son was bestowed the honorific “Abu Ali.”

Nasty, Insulting, and Derogatory

The derogatory nicknames were mostly about people who had physical defects, behavioral problems or had committed a faux pas. A family was known as “Abyad” because most of its members were albino (abyad is white in Arabic). “Aghcheeg Seropig” was a double-barreled insult. “Aghcheeg” means girl and Seropig is the diminutive of Serop. Akhraz (mute in Arabic) was the nick-

name of a mute shoe-polisher. Archoog (little bear) was a teenager who had a shuffling walk. Another boy was called Khozig (piglet) because there was dry snot permanently lodged below his nostrils. Atlas was a big guy who lifted weights and had a rumbling walk. Keur Sarkis was blind (keur is blind or cross-eyed or one-eyed in Turkish). Despite his handicap, he could walk anywhere without getting lost. He played banjo and 'oud and taught playing of the two instruments. Keur Ghatr was also a double-barreled nickname. It means blind mule in Turkish. Ordag means bow-legged in Turkish. There was a man who was simply called Ordag. Topal Garabed and Topal Hagop limped. A jeweler who had one leg slightly shorter than the other was called Christ's Lamé Donkey. Sagh Takal means one good wheel in Turkish Tek Dabancha means a single pistol. The latter two are equivalent to "he's one card short of a full deck".

Sherep (ladle) was a nosy, interfering woman: a busybody. Ator Dzagogh (maker of hole in chairs) was an overweight deacon whose weight had broken the chair in a shop managed by a friend. Almost no one knew that his name was Krikor Sanossian. Atrash (deaf) was the obvious nickname of someone who was hard of hearing. Aydzee Morook was a man who had a struggling beard on his chin. In Turkish, Sakhaluh means bearded. A family-including the women- was called Sakhaluh because the father of the family bore that nickname. Khor-tlakh (skeleton) was a skinny man. Ash'ar was a blond man (in Arabic). Jinjo means freckled in Turkish. To differentiate, there was a Jinjo and a Jinjo Artin. Burr-Nose had a crooked nose. Osouran/Osourouk is Turkish for someone who blows wind. Another man suffering inordinately from the same affliction was called Tss-hano and Tssig (diminutive of the Arabic tess). A Kaklan can't control his bowel. There were two men called Kaklan but when one of them lost his mind, he became Khent Garo (Mad Garo). Kaku Oodogh (feces-eater) was also a nickname. No one knew the story behind the nickname.

Animal names were also popular nicknames. Chaylam (ostrich), Ent-soughd (giraffe), Khanzeer (pig in Arabic), Jermag Khoz (white pig), Khoroz (rooster), Teghin Ots (yellow snake), Moghez (lizard), Trchnig (little bird), Teghtsanig (canary), Pattig (duckling), and Tsoog (fish). The last one was attached to a man who referred to girls as "fish"). There were Ishkhanatsoug (sturgeon in Armenian). Janj (fly) was a slim man while Khlez was supposedly a man who always exceeded his welcome.

Esheg means donkey in Turkish. There was an Esheg Tavit, Esheg Ghaf-faluh (donkey head), and Esheg Kevo (Kevo is the affectionate diminutive of Kevork). There was a Moog (mouse) and Khntsorig (Little Apple) because he had red cheeks. Ghavn (zucchini in Turkish) was so nicknamed because of the shape of his face. He was later bestowed the nickname Aghves (Fox) because he was sly. There was a Moog (mouse) and Zrdats ("she hatched"). It was the nickname of a woman who seemingly became pregnant every other year. A man was nicknamed Barkho (goat in Kurdish) because it's the nickname the Kurds had given to him when he lived with them after the Genocide. His family members were also called Barkho.

A pale-skinned man was Mongol. There was Chopoor (poke-marked) Simon, Chopoor Yervant, and Chopoor Zaven, Dantsee Good (pear-seed because of the shape of his head), and Dzoor Khtta (crooked cucumber). Jermag Mazeroov (white hair) and Kankour Mazerov (curly) were other nicknames. Sevoulig was a skeletal man who had sallow skin. Sevoulig means black baby goat.

A boy who stuttered liked to imitate the Brilliantine-doused hair-style of the actor Tony Curtis. He was nicknamed Tony Tltees. His second nickname was James Dean because he seemed to be forever combing his hair. Judig (chick) had a long childhood story behind his nickname. Dallo was the nickname of a boy who couldn't pronounce "g" and "r". Since his name was Garo, he was nicknamed Dallo. When he grew up he still couldn't enunciate his name correctly. So he was still called Dallo. Logh-Logh was a young man who, because he mispronounced khagogh (grapes) "logh-logh". Hampartsoum's nickname was Ampagoum. Was it a diminutive or he couldn't pronounce his name when he was young? A little girl was called Manina because when she was a child she mispronounced her name (Mary). Likewise Harout became Atolla while Bochar was a boy who had pronounced vochkhar (sheep) as "bo-char." A boy named Aram, who stuttered, was given the Aghambig nickname. Likewise, Amillo (Armenag) and Babayout (Harout).

Setrag el-Bunce and Bunce Kaloust were heavy-set men. "Bunce" is fat in Arabic. Why someone was called Tmmag (lard) was a mystery: he was not overweight. Cholakh Hagop was left-handed. Yahoodi Artin meant Jewish Artin (abbreviated Haroutiun). "Shash" means cross-eyed in Turkish. There was Shash Garbis, Shash Mariam, and Shash Harout. Altn Dishli had gold teeth (Turkish). Apache had tan skin and straight black hair. Pylancho was a skinny fellow. There

was a man and a woman (unrelated) who were called Ghamboor (hunchback in Turkish). Chatlakh meant deformed, Tzoog (Dwarf) because he was short but Tllooz was a mystery. So was Hanoon which means nice, modest in Arabic.

Odun (lumber) and Odunag served as a family's nicknames. Supposedly every member of the family was hard-headed and obstinate. There was also its Arabic version-Hattab applied to one man.

"Khent" means mad in Armenian. There was Khent Dikko (diminutive of Dikran), Khent Manoushag, Khent Siranoush, Khent Garo, Khent Nourig, Khent Yeghsapet, and Khent Hagop. Khent Hagop's name was Hagop Alahverdian (God given in Turkish). He was not mad-merely unsociable. There was Khentuh (the Crazy) and Garmir Khent (Crazy Red). Most of the "khents" were not insane: they suffered emotional problems. Several had been emotionally damaged as a result of the Armenian Genocide. There was a Khm-khm. We assumed it meant imbecile, probably in Turkish. Panchoonee was not bright (the nickname came from a famous character in an Armenian satirical novel by Yervant Odian). Dmbeeg is little dummy. Khyar is Arabic for cucumber. It meant ignoramus. Sab'gha Leil means Leopard of the Night (Arabic). Was it an ironic nickname for a coward? Napoleon was a boy who was small for his age. A boy was nicknamed Ninna because his grandmother called him "Oh Ninna" when she sang lullabies to him when he was a baby.

We also had Kogh Bedros, Kogh Diran, Kogh Sako, Kogh Misag, and Kogh Aroush. Kogh means thief in Armenian. They were not professional thieves. What was there to steal? They were opportunists who had stolen a shirt, a pair of used shoes, watermelon, and bouquet of flowers. But even if they had stolen once, they were labeled thieves for life.

Mikrob/Microbji was a man who had a phobia of catching contagious disease. He washed his hands with soap after shaking hands. Ironically (maybe not) his father's job was to pour disinfectant in wells which contained rain water. The family's nickname was Sawabini (Arabic for soap-maker: their grandparent had been in that business). Because their last name was Ginivizian, they were also called Giniviz. It was believed the family was descended from Genoese merchants who had plied their trade in the Holy Land several centuries earlier. Havadarim Vartan (faithful) and Havadarim Sako could have been ironic obriquets. Hodadz Havgit was rotten egg (he took infrequent baths). A man who squirreled everything was called Antikaji (antique-dealer). Mananaji was a

man who had tried to seduce a girl by offering her the super-sweet man-na-the sticky candy that according to Exodus descended from the sky upon the starving followers of Moses. Ghopoukh (dog in Turkish) Zaven was the brother of a woman of questionable character. A swarthy man was called Ghbdi (Copt), a dark-skinned young man was called Sambig (little Sambo). Toghtchoon Anna was trembling Anna. She was delicate.

There was no hesitation about coining salacious nicknames. There were two well-known prostitutes. The elder was called Poz Osanna (whore in Armenian). The younger prostitute was called Anklet because she always wore a gold anklet. Despite the community's condemnation and jeering, the younger Jezebel always donned her whore regalia: stiletto fingernails, mascara, and eyeliner, skin-tight skirts, big hair teased, blow-dried and sprayed into a large orange halo that looked like sunset.

A man was called Dzidzig (small breast). The reason for the nickname was too private to inquire. Geutuh Boyook is "big buttocks" in Turkish. Hayeli (mirror) was a plain-looking woman who rarely left home. Her male version was Hovsep Keghetsig (Joseph the Beautiful from the Bible). He was a short man with a large bullet head and a face covered by scores of chick-pea shaped and sized warts. Another man was nicknamed Shash Billig (cross-eyed penis). Zmeli (razor) was a man who had accidentally cut a bit of his foreskin skin while shaving his crotch. Topji had three meanings: bomber; someone who emitted gas frequently, and homosexual. There was a Topji and a Topji Marie.

Several women who had distinctive regal looks or pompous walk and arrogant carriage were tagged Dalida, Parantsem Takouhi (after an Armenian queen), Srpouhi Mayrabad (saint nun) and Esmahan (a famous Egyptian singer).

Nicknames without Mockery

There was a boy whose name became his nickname. He was born during the Second World War when Joseph Stalin was flying high. His father (who was blind) had named him Stalin. In the early '50s, when the Jordanian government was pathologically anti-Soviet, the father changed the boy's name to Hovsep (Joseph) but everyone continued to call the boy Stalin. Around the time Stalin became Joseph, a boy named Messiah had his name changed. His

father, who was produce-seller, had named his son Messiah, just as Hispanics who name their sons Jesus and Domingo while Europeans use variations of Christ's name... Christopher, Christine... However, people complained that it was sacrilege to name the boy Messiah. The father changed the name to Mesrob. People continued to call the boy Messiah.

Red Dzeron wouldn't go out without including something red in his clothing. Whether it was his shirt, socks, or underwear, or comb, he had to have something red in his ensemble. The habit was especially strange because he belonged to the Tashnag Party which was fervently opposed to the "Red" Soviet Union. Dzeron didn't need the "Red" nickname since his name already made him unique. There was no other Dzeron. No one had heard of the name elsewhere. We didn't even know whether it was an Armenian name.

One day Dzeron explained that he wore red because in ancient Armenia there was a worm which produced the best red dye in the world. People thought he had made up the story: how could a worm produce red ink, they asked. But Dzeron's story was accurate. "Dyers also put a premium on Armenian red, which was made from the insect *Porphyrophora hameli*, a parasite on the roots and stems of certain grasses in Armenia... Armenian red was difficult to harvest. The insects obligingly surfaced from their underground hideout each autumn..."⁵.

Harking to Place of Birth

Messiah's father, who overpriced everything, had an oleaginous approach to customers. With an obsequious smile dripping with phony camaraderie, he called all his customers Hayrenagits. It means compatriot: a person from your hometown: in this case towns in Western Armenia. Thus, someone from Van, Zeitoun, and Moosh would call another person born in these towns "Hayrenagits". People did not appreciate the produce-seller's unsolicited appropriation of the title. His nickname became Hayrenagits. Nicknames derived from place of origin are called demonym, from the Greek *demos* (people, tribe) and *onuma* (name).

⁵ Greenfeld 2006, 48.

Some families were identified by the family head's hometowns in Armenia and Cilicia: Mshetsi (from Moush) Mayrig, Zeitountsi (Zeitoun) Garabed, Sasountsi (Sassoun) Mayrig, Urfatsi Garabed, Hayasdantsi (from Armenia), Adanatsi Hagop (from Adana in Cilicia), Sghrtsi Marie (from Sghrt) and Nseibintsi (from Nseibin). Some people were named after cities they had lived in briefly before moving to Jerusalem: Ramletsi Aroush was from Ramleh in Palestine. Aroush is short for Haroutune. "Anjartsis" were several families who had come to Jerusalem from Anjar, a town in Lebanon. Salti was born in the Jordanian town of Salt. Ammantsi was from Amman. Yafatsi was from Jaffa and Halabtsi Artin (Aleppo-born Artin. The name is short for Haroutune).

It's interesting to note that from the 15th century to the early 20th century, the majority of Jerusalem Armenian patriarchs were identified by their hometowns: Abraham Misirisi ("Egyptian"), Abraham Periatzi (Aleppo), Hovhannes Misirisi, Mardiros Brusatsi (Bursa) Hovhannes Telgurantsi, Hovhannes Kilitsi, Asdvadzadur Mardintis, Antreas Mardintis, Tavut Mardintis, Krikor V Kantsagetsi, Adsvadzadur Daronetsi, Yeghiazar Aintabtsi, Mardiros Khrimetsi, Hovhannes Bolsetsi, Kalusd Amasiatsi or Zeytountsi, Minas Amtetsi (Dikranagerd), Avedis Yevtogiatsi (Tokat), Minas Hamtetsi, Avedik Yevtogiatsi, Mardiros Yerzingatsi, Mikael Kharperetsi, Sahag Abuchekhatsi, Hovhannes Zmurnatsi, Hovhannes Kantsagetsi, Krikor Shirvantsi, Teotoros Khorenatsi, Garabed Kantsagetsi, Boghos Vanetsi, Hovagim Kanakertsi, Bedros Yevtogiatsi, Teotoros Vanetsi, Kapriel Nigomitiatsi (Izmit), Boghos Adrianabolsetsi, Zakaria Gopetsi, Hovhannes Zmurnatsi (Smyrna), Yesayi Talasti, Haroutiun Yekibdatsi (Egyptian) and Giragos Mnatsaganian (Yerousaghematsi-Jerusalemite). [There were only two or three Jerusalem-born patriarchs because of an edict forbidding Jerusalemites from becoming patriarch. The edict was intended to prevent patronage/nepotism that a local-born patriarch might extend to his Jerusalem family and relatives.] The other patriarchs were Hovhannes Zmurnatsi (Smyrna), Yesayi Talasti, and Haroutiun Yekibdatsi (Egyptian)⁶.

Mostly in Mockery

There was a young jeweler who was smooth on the dance floor. He came to be known as Valentino and later Passa Doble. His brother was called Balek

⁶ Krikorian 2005, 30-48.

(fish) after their last name. Because their father played the oud (“dm-dm” in slang) he was called Balek el-Dmdmji). Kassar (Arabic) meant a person who breaks/drops things because of clumsiness. Ramgavar is an Armenian political party whose members believe in democratic capitalism. Thus, some of its members passed for what was considered middle class in economically-depressed Jerusalem. Thus, a man with big belly was called Ramgavar Por (belly). It meant he was affluent. An Assyrian woman, whose husband was Armenian, was called Sooryanee (Assyrian). One of her sons was called Sryaneeeyee Krdink (Assyrian sweat). A boy was called Brisht. It was another nickname with an unknown origin. Khalil is the Arabic version of Hebron, a town south of Jerusalem. Because the residents of the town were considered uncouth two rough-and-tumble Armenians were nicknamed Khaliltsi.

Unrelated to the play or to the student’s character or looks, a teacher bestowed the nickname Hamlet upon one of his students. The teacher was called Paghnikji (sauna-bath worker) because when he raised his voice, one could hear it from blocks away.

Nicknames Originating in Professions

After insulting nicknames, perhaps the most widespread were nicknames connected to professions, trades, and crafts. Unlike the time-honored tradition of converting the trade/nickname into a last name (Carter, Cook, Cooper, Baker, Brewer, Butcher, Weaver, and Wright)⁷, these nicknames were not inherited by their offspring. Sa’atji Karnig was a watchmaker whose name was Karnig. Sayaji Dikran was shoemaker. There were several taxi drivers: Chauffeur Levon, Chauffeur Siragan, and Chauffeur Yervant. There was Uztaz (teacher in Arabic) Sarkis, Uztaz Yeghia, and just plain Uztaz. Zibilji Aroush was a garbage collector. Zibil means garbage in Arabic). Artougji Serop ironed. Ashji means cook in Turkish. There were Ashji Bedros and Ashji Vartan. Baborji fixed mostly Primus stoves. Badanaji Kapo painted houses (Kapo was short for Kapriel and badanajis painted house walls) Svakhji Hovsep was a plasterer. Boxer Hagop had been a boxer. Boyaji Hagop polished shoes. “Chourji” means water-seller: there was a Chourji Artin and two Chourji Haygs-boyj drank.. The second Haig was also known as Sakran (drunk in Arabic) Haig or Gondzogh which

⁷ Powell 2019.

means the same thing. Fsdkhji Hagop sold peanuts. There was also a boy who was called Fsdkh for no apparent reason. Froonji Avedis ran a bakery (Fouron is bakery in Arabic). Ghalaji Haroutune and Ghalaji Waness glazed pots and pans (Wanness is a variation of Hovhannes/John). Katib Garbis was the Patriarchate's secretary. Katib is writer/secretary in Arabic. Ghalamker was an etcher on gold. Hallaj fluffed the tired wool of mattresses usually once a year. Hambal Hagop and Hambal Levon had been porters. Halvaji Vartan sold sweets. Zinvor Garbis was a soldier. Kekji made cakes and Kebabji made kebab. Madzounji Sarkis owned a dairy. Madzoun is yoghurt in Armenian. Oghiji Karnig ran a bar (oghi/arak). Singer Jirair was a salesman at the Singer sewing-machine agency. Photo Elia was a photographer, for many years, owned by a man named Elia/Yeghia. Oudji Haygaz and Oudji Minas played the 'oud Middle Eastern musical instrument. Sylvana was the nickname of a family which manufactured chocolate bars named Sylvana. They made the only locally manufactured chocolate. There were Moukhtar Hanna Nazar (Reeve John; Nazar was abbreviation of Nazarian), Police (policeman) and Volta (electrician) were also descriptive names. Soufiji Ibrahim (Apraham) sold wool. A man who hollered "Osmanli Shakarlee" (Osmanian Sweets) when he hawked sweets was called Osmanli Shakarlee. Pervaz (frame-maker) Vartan didn't make frames. He was a carpenter.

Nickname Abbreviations of Last Names

Nicknames derived from last names also have a long tradition. Paul Gascoigne, the British football star was known as Gazza... President George W. Bush's nickname was Dubya after the initial of his middle name, and the last name Alexander often becomes Xander in England. Alexander has also evolved into Alex, Alec, Lex, Sandy, and Sandi.

In Jerusalem the shift from last name to nickname often meant the elision of the Armenian "ian" suffix. Thus there was Tanash, Abaj, Balek, Chapadar, Menesh, Gazmarar, Glllo, Jrnaz, Kawee (Kahvejian), Kzeer, Kolchak, Mandoss, Mazloom, Sefer, Shkli/Shklig/Shklan, Tahaan, Terjoom, Terzibash, Bourouj, Zarats, Chakr, Koushdoor, Lepej, Matoss, Kaplan, Demir, Del-Del, Ingleez, and Tootoosh. The Chapadarian family had three nicknames: Chapadar; Chapee, and Chap. Kallagozz was a corruption of Karagozian. Kallagozz had a second nickname. Long ago Karageuzian Senior had boasted that he was

“khash Ermeni” meaning solid Armenian in Arabic. Thus the family’s nickname had become Khash Armani.

Complimentary Nicknames with a Twist

There were ironic nicknames about people who had flashy style or carried on as if they lived in the lap of luxury: Conte (Count. He dressed well and was always clean-shaven), Shampanya (Champagne), Millionadaire (millionaire), Kravatli (cravat-wearer), Mandoub (ambassador in Arabic), Hazarnots (thousand-dinar bill), and Lord. Hayr Haygasser was a priest who had a wondering eye. His nickname was Severgasser (sever means ‘he loves’ in Turkish).

First-name Abbreviations

Most people don’t realize that often first names were originally nicknames. Chris is a nickname derived from Christopher, Christine, Christian, and Greta is a nickname derived from Margaret⁸. Racing car driver “Niki” Lauda’s was Andreas Nikolaus. In Jerusalem this meant Asso emerged from Assadoor, Aposh (Apraham), Ashko (Vazken), Koko (Krikor), Bedo (Bedros), Eftig (Yevkineh), Jiro/Jiroug (Jirair), Sako (Sarkis), Hago (Hagop), and Ohig (Ohan), Pennig was Penyamin Torosian. There were two stories as to why Pennig had lost his mind: he had gone mad because he had witnessed the Armenian Genocide or a man whose daughter Pennig loved forbade their marriage after Pennig had rescued her from the clutches of a Turkish bandit. The girl’s wealthy father had promised to Pennig that if he rescued his daughter, Pennig would become his son-in-law. When the man had reneged on his promise, Pennig had gone mad.

Complimentary Nicknames

Occasionally, there were complimentary nicknames: Kach (brave), Kayl Vahan (Wolf Vahan, after a 5th century Armenian military hero), Sako Beg, Kwatlee (strong), George el Rayess (George the chief), Hanoon (tender and caring in Arabic), Hikmat Mihiyar (an Arab general), Scaramouch, Varbed (master), Pasha, Aryouds Mher, and his older brother Tarazan (not Tarzan) who had shiny and slick black hair like that of Lex Barker who played Tarzan in the early ‘50.

⁸ W.bounty.com>baby-names-news-and-trends>nic.

Unknown Origins

There were many nicknames whose pedigree was unknown. Perhaps the nickname had originated in the previous generation and there were no survivors to tell how the nickname came about. Why a man was called Zankag (bell), another Tayarji (pilot), a third Chanakh (china plate) and a fourth Mr. A? There were scores of similar nicknames of unknown pedigree: Abianco, Sinssilato, Shogi, Kawchuk (Rubber), Abu Habib (the father of Habib, although he didn't have a son), Abu Galango, Abu Yango, Jurbano (socks in Arabic), Chapaneh, Costa, Markoosh, Bloot, Bashmig, Ballar, Aba, Brisht, Dnglig, Za'ataroneh, Pantesspanya, Chooklala, Kagool, Garagello, Glleeg, Googy, Bebo, Sefo, Fsdkjih, Tahaan, Hayga, Yoyis, Mbbayed, Tsisti-Kat, Tsim-Tsimo, Zkhmig, Jlkx, Katanasho, Yerem Got, Papar, and Zinguh-Zinguh. Many of these nicknames were derived from Arabic or Turkish. Dbseeg is little molasses in Arabic. Bedah is egg in Arabic. What did Jlkx mean? Lay lagis Turkish for too tall. There was a Middle Eastern bias against tall people: they were supposedly not bright. Laylag Hmayag had fled Soviet Armenia by swimming across the River Arax. An excellent soccer player, he began to lose his mind and in his last years of his life became grave-digger and general laborer at the Armenian Convent where most Armenians lived in rooms and cells that in previous centuries had provided accommodation to pilgrims from Armenia. Unlike modern pilgrims and tourists who stay a few days in the city, in the old days, some Armenian pilgrims stayed in Jerusalem for six months – Christmas to Easter. Hmayag's son was nicknamed Gdouts "Beak" because of the shape of his nose. Dye-Dye (uncle) and Hokees (my soul) were also nicknames. A man whose last name was Keossian had reportedly changed his name to Xanthos and then had been abbreviated to the nickname Kintos.

Miscellaneous

A woman who lived in a wooden barracks was called Varaka Vartoug. Varaka was a corruption of barracks. Ghaymakh is "cream of milk" in Turkish.

A teenage boy was nicknamed Ghaymakh because he loved the cream. Alex Bargir was another unusual nickname. Alex, a bachelor who had too many drinks at a stag party, would do whatever party goers told him to do. One of the orders was "Alex, bargeer" (sleep, Alex in Armenian). He obeyed and lay on the ground (it was an outdoor party). Because he was drunk, he didn't get

up. He slept on the grass. At sunrise, he came to be known as Alex Bargir. During the 1948 War a boy had found live bullets which he had thrown into the fire unaware that they could explode. His nickname became Kapson (caps). A shopkeeper had an unkempt store. His nickname was Pinty Vaness (Messy John).

Ghallas derived from Garabed and Gabbosh from Garo-Garabed. But where did Garrouj and Harouj come from? What were the stories behind those nicknames? I could never figure out the stories behind Keton, Taxi, Utility Vartan, Au Petit Panam, and Heydig Hanna Youhanna. I also had difficulty keeping apart Keton and Kintos.

In the 19th century, when American missionaries had been active in Armenia, they called themselves “Brother”. To Armenian ears it sounded “Biradar”. A person who wore his faith on his wrists and preached “born again” incessantly was tagged Biradar.

There were two further remarkable facts which made Jerusalem Armenian nicknames unique. One was the family whose members had collectively 12 nicknames and the other was the Jerusalem stroke of genius which coined nicknames that were phrases and sentences.

While most families had one or at most two nicknames, there was a family which had at least 10 nicknames. The two main nicknames of the family were Ebbe (midwife) and Topal Hagop (Lame Hagop), the head of the family. Topal Hagop was an enterprising man who had tried various trades to look after his large family's expenses (he had seven children). Thus, he was also known as Tell-Tell Hagop (Angel-hair Hagop because he made the fluffy candy), Chemenji Hagop (chemen is a fenugreek spread which he sold). One of his son's was called Enken and Enken Dbesh. The family was also called Touramji Injill, and while the father was Attar Dootar Matar (“he throws, he catches, and airport” in Turco-Arabic). The nickname was related to an incident in the late '50s when an Armenian clergyman (Bishop Diran Nersoyan) was grabbed by Jordanian soldiers, taken to the airport and exiled because he led a clerical faction opposed to the king's favorite-Bishop Yeghishe Derderian. Attar. Dootar, and Matar referred to the clergyman's arrest (Attar is chased, dootar is grabbed and matar is airport). Hagop was no fan of Bishop Nersoyan. He had two further nicknames: while wiping the dust off the piano at a sports club (assuming there was no one else in the club), he had tinkled a couple of the ivories. But there was someone in the club: he had noticed Hagop's “piano playing.” He tagged him “Chopin”. The nickname was

corrupted to Shbein. But Hagop's ultimate nickname was almost a sentence: "Baykaruh Baykar eh!" ("The struggle is a struggle") because he would refer to his political party's interminable struggles as "Baykaruh Baykar eh!").

In addition to the amplitude of nicknames, what made the Jerusalem nickname tradition unique were the nicknames which were sentences or phrases. Achen-Tsakhen (from the right and the left); Anounuh Gah, Inkuh Cheegah (his name is here but he is not); Boudjen Chee Nerer (the budget doesn't allow); Chooruh Bagh eh (the water is cold); Inchoo Hos Khadzar? (Why did you bite here?) Seruh Gouyr eh (love is blind); Hokisee-Janisee (my soul - in Armenian and Turkish); Jara ma Jara (If it happens or it doesn't); Ag-hem Vor Chhodees (Let me sprinkle salt on you so you do not smell", "Mammeh Youreh?" (Where's mother?), "Mammess Keenah" (my mother would know); "Oor eh Katche?" (Where's the hero?), and "Hey Baron, Dzo Dgha! Tsouguh Ousgits Guh Logha? (Hey Mister, Hey Boy! From where does the fish swim?)

Sometime in the late '50s, an Armenian-American woman visited Jerusalem to stay with her long-lost relatives. She spoke broken Armenian. One day, looking at the poverty and the dull life around her, she commiserated with one of the locals: "Took hoss happy yek?" (Are you happy here?). It became her nickname during her Jerusalem sojourn.

...And Their Neighbors

Armenians of Jerusalem were made up of two communities which lived side by side: Vanketsis (residents of the St. James Convent) and the Kaghakatsis (City Dwellers) whose neighborhood hugged the convent in the east and the north. Vanketsis (more than two-thirds of Jerusalem Armenians) were survivors of the Armenian Genocide and their offspring while Kaghakatsis were Armenians who had lived in Jerusalem for centuries. Because of their long association with Arabs, many of the Kaghakatsis had a better command of Arabic than of Armenian. Kaghakatsis had also coined a resentful nickname for the recent arrivals: "Zwar" (visitor, tourist in Arabic). The Kaghakatsis liked to believe the newcomers would eventually leave thus power would revert to Kaghakatsis. Following the local Arab custom, Kaghakatsis identified each other by "Mn DarcMeen?" ("from the house of" in Arabic). Thus, if their last name was Hagopian, they identified themselves as being from "Mn Dar el Hagopian".

They also coined nicknames some of which are in this article. Because of political conflict and insecure economic conditions, most of the young Kaghakatsis like the Vanketsis began immigrating to the oil-rich Arab countries and later to North America and to Australia. One Kaghakatsi Armenian who lives in Australia says there are more Kaghakatsis in Sydney than there are in Jerusalem. Total Armenian population (Vanketsis, Kaghakatsis, and Armenians who live elsewhere in Jerusalem) is estimated to be about 1,200.

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ՄԱԿԱՆՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՏԱՐԱԾՎԱԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԵՐՈՒՍԱՂԵՄՈՒՄ (1940-60-ԱՎԱՆՆԵՐԻ ԿԵՍ)

Ժիրայր Թութունջյան (Կանադա, Տորոնտո)

Ամփոփում

Երուսաղեմի հայ համայնքը երբեք չի ունեցել երկու հազարից ավելի բնակիչ, սակայն հայերը ավելի քան հազար կեղծանուն են հորինել նույն անուններն ունեցող, բայց տարբեր մասնագիտությունների տեր կամ այլևայլ քաղաքներից եկած մարդկանց միմյանցից տարբերելու համար: Մականունների մեծամասնությունը բացասական երանգավորում ուներ: Գրեթե յուրաքանչյուր ընտանիք, բացի ընդհանուր կեղծանունից, ուներ նաև անհատական մականուն: Ուշագրավ փաստ է, որ մի ընտանիքում կար ավելի քան տասը մականուն: Ինչն էր այդ ամենի պատճառը: Երուսաղեմի հայերի՝ բացասական մականուններ ստեղծելու հակվածության ուսումնասիրությունը կարող է պարզել, թե ինչու են մականունները մեծ քանակությամբ եղել, և ինչու են դրանցից շատերն ունեցել բացասական իմաստ:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Երուսաղեմ, հայկական համայնք, մեծամասնություն, մականուններ, ընտանեկան մականուններ, անհատական մականուններ, բացասական մականուններ:

РАСПРОСТРАНЕННОСТЬ ПРОЗВИЩ В АРМЯНСКОМ ИЕРУСАЛИМЕ (1940-Е – СЕРЕДИНА 60-Х ГОДОВ)

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Резюме

Армянская община Иерусалима, население которой никогда не превышало 2000 человек, использовала более тысячи прозвищ с целью различения людей с одинаковыми именами и людей, имевших разные профессии либо приехавших из разных городов. Однако следует отметить, что большинство прозвищ было негативным. Практически каждая семья, помимо общего прозвища, имела также индивидуальные, к примеру, одна из семей имела более 10 прозвищ.

Ключевые слова – Иерусалим, армянская община, большинство, прозвища, семейные прозвища, индивидуальные прозвища, отрицательные прозвища.

THE FLOWERING OF NICKNAMES IN ARMENIAN JERUSALEM (1940s TO THE MID-'60s)

Jirair Tutunjian (Canada, Toronto)

Abstract

The Armenian community of Jerusalem, which never had a population of more than 2000, was responsible for the creation of more than a thousand nicknames. The nicknames were invented to differentiate people who had the same name and people who had different professions or came from different cities.

However, the prevalent tone of the majority of the nicknames was negative. Almost every family had a nickname in addition to individual nicknames. One remarkable family had more than 10 nicknames. Why so many nicknames? Why so many were negative? A study of the propensity of Jerusalem Armenians to invent negative nicknames might discover why there were so many nicknames and why so many were negative.

Key words – Jerusalem, Armenian community, majority, nicknames, family nicknames, individual nicknames, negative nicknames.