

**Coerced Name Change as the Performance of State Power: The Case of Chinese Indonesians**

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*Note from the authors: This project is at its very early stages and we are still developing an empirical strategy. In addition to getting feedback about the framing of the question and our theoretical propositions, we would really appreciate ideas about a methodological approach and how to practically collect this data (i.e. particular archives, etc). Thank you so much for reading and engaging with our work!*

## Introduction

Starting from the mid-1960s, Chinese Indonesians were targets of forced assimilation policies, including a regulation that “encouraged” Chinese Indonesians to change their names to Indonesian-sounding names.

Existing scholarship has difficulty explaining important dimensions of this phenomena. The literature on state naming practices largely argues that forced name changes are driven by a state’s need to render their citizens legible (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002). Yet, the majority of Chinese Indonesians at the time were already documented by the state. The literature on nationalism sees such assimilationist policies as part of nation building processes (Wallem 2017). Although this approach has greater explanatory power for this phenomenon, the state’s actions towards the Chinese were highly paradoxical, consistently delineating the Chinese as being outside of the nation’s boundaries throughout the New Order regime. The contradictions of state policies suggest that the assimilationist reasoning is not sufficient for explaining why states force minorities to change their names.

Why did the New Order regime introduce this name change policy given its paradoxical nature and the vast resources needed to implement it? We identify two potential arguments. First, the name change policy enabled a strong mobilization of the bureaucracy as part of the New Order regime’s efforts to consolidate its power and resources. Second, the name change policy forced the Chinese Indonesian minority to directly interact with the state’s bureaucratic machine as a form of political subjugation. This direct experience with the state was not just a momentary show of force by the state, but the form this demonstration took—the changing of one’s name—acted as a quotidian reminder of the state’s power.

This memo is organized as follows. First, we give a brief historical overview of Chinese Indonesian name change within the context of New Order’s assimilation policies. Second, we provide a conceptualization of what we mean by “coerced name changes,” discussing how the Indonesian case fits into this categorization and situating it in a broader family of cases. Third, we outline the puzzle of the Chinese Indonesian case, suggesting that the existing literature on legal identity and nationalism has difficulty explaining key aspects of the Indonesian case. We then briefly outline our two propositions about how we might understand the logic underpinning forced named changes.

## The Changing of Chinese Names in Indonesia: A Brief Overview

The social construction of Chinese as non-*pribumi* (non-native) Others in Indonesia traces back to the colonial era. Article 109 of the Netherlands East Indies Constitution (*Regeringsreglement voor Nederlands Indië*) of 1854 distinguished Europeans from the “native” (*pribumi*) population; the revision of the constitution in 1906 further categorized the inhabitants into three groups according to “race”: Europeans (*Europeanen*), natives or

indigenous populations (*Inlander*), and “foreign Orientals” (*vreemde Oosterlingen*), the latter comprising Chinese, Arabs, Indians, and other non-European foreigners. While the term non-*pribumi* by definition theoretically describes anyone who does not belong to a community considered indigenous to the country, in practice it is almost always used to refer to the ethnic Chinese (Hoon 2006, Setijadi 2016). This usage is often derogatory in nature, given the role of many Chinese who acted as middlemen for the Dutch in trade dealings with the indigenous communities.

In both the independence movement and the post-independence era, Indonesia’s ethnic Chinese population were not considered full members of the Indonesian nation. Due to perceptions of their economic dominance and the political weakness of the community, the Chinese minority have frequently been easy targets of violence and racialized riots since the dawn of the modern Indonesian state. As Anthony Reid (1997, 55) argues, during the struggle for independence and the early days of the Indonesian Republic the position of the ethnic Chinese as foreigners within made them “one of the most important ‘others’ against which the new national identities defined themselves.”

The position of the ethnic Chinese as outside of the Indonesian nation was thus simultaneously a “problem” and a “solution” for Suharto’s New Order regime by the time they seized power in 1966. By solution, we mean that Chinese Indonesians were made easy scapegoats by the New Order during periods of economic and political instability. Periodic episodes of violence against Chinese Indonesians were comparatively widespread (e.g. riots in Bandung in 1973, as well as in Situbondo, Tasikmalaya, and Rengasdengklok in 1996-1997) (Purdey 2006, 106-141). These attacks were often unofficially encouraged by the regime (Cribb and Coppel 2009).

Still, even if the ethnic Chinese could be conveniently scapegoated by the regime, the population also posed a “problem” that the regime needed to “fix,” especially since Chineseness were also associated with communism in the wake of the abortive communist coup of October 1965 (G-30S/PKI) and the anti-communist purges that followed. Indeed, some of the New Order’s first major acts as a government included the passing of assimilation policies that purportedly intended to erase all traces of Chineseness and to both neutralize and naturalize the population. These laws and presidential directives included (among others) a ban on the use of Chinese languages, the shuttering of Chinese schools, the closures of Chinese presses and social organizations, and a ban on public expressions of Chinese culture (Purdey 2006, 21).

Amongst these policies to ostensibly assimilate the ethnic Chinese into the Indonesian nation was Cabinet Presidium Decision No. 127, passed in 1966. This instruction was targeted towards Indonesian citizens who used Chinese names, providing this target group the opportunity “to erase intergroup differences” by changing their names. The instruction

suggested that Chinese families consider taking up new, more Indonesian-sounding names. Exactly what constituted Indonesian-sounding names was unspecified and thus open to the interpretation and creativity of respective Chinese families. The result was that most Chinese families changed their surnames to Indonesian-sounding names that still retained their original Chinese surnames in part or in full (Setijadi 2023). For example, the Chinese surname Tan would be replaced with Tanuwijaya or Tanumihardja; Lim would be replaced with Salim or Halim, and so on. Furthermore, many Chinese Indonesians refused to assume local given names popular among Muslims, such as Ahmad, Abdul or Siti, and instead took Western names popular among Christians such as Johan, Andreas or Maria as given names. Consequently, despite changing their names to Indonesian-sounding names, Chinese Indonesian names continued to be recognizably distinct from indigenous names.

The New Order's assimilation policies were deeply problematic and paradoxical from the beginning. On the one hand, the whole justification for these policies was to solve the "Chinese problem" by absorbing the Chinese minority into majority *pribumi* society. Yet the very fact that the Chinese were deemed to be the only group requiring name-changing measures as part of assimilation efforts under the New Order singled them out as *the* problematic ethnic minority. An earlier law (Law No. 4/1964) was passed under Sukarno's Old Order regime gave all Indonesian citizens of foreign descent (including ethnic Indians, Hadhrami Arabs, etc.) the opportunity to change their names to Indonesian-sounding names. Nonetheless, the law was not widely publicized and the government did not actively promote it. However, by 1966, the New Order government's rhetoric around name-changing had changed to specifically target the ethnic Chinese, making it clear that the Indonesian government intended to accelerate the assimilation of the Chinese, and that changing their non-Indonesian names to Indonesian names was perceived as "one way to speed up the assimilation process" (Suryadinata 1976, 782).

It is important to acknowledge that it was not legally mandatory for Chinese Indonesians to change their names, though there was clear pressure from the state to do so. Many, like the student activist Soe Hok Gie and human rights lawyer Yap Thiam Hien, refused to do so. One year after the initial 1966 instruction, Suharto issued a decision (Decision No. 240/1967) that more explicitly urged "Indonesian citizens of foreign descent who still use Chinese names...to replace them with Indonesian names pursuant to current legislation" (Bailey and Lie 2013, 26). While name-changing was still not mandatory, the implication was clear: Chineseness was ideologically suspect, and those who did not voluntarily erase their Chinese identities risked being accused of disloyalty or—worse—political subversion.

### **Conceptualizing 'Coercive' Name Changes**

It is important at this point to operationalize what we mean by the term 'coercive' name changes and clarify how the Indonesian case fits into this categorization. After all, the phenomenon of changing one's name is relatively common, taking place in a wide range of

cases and circumstances. For example, many immigrants to the United States, Canada, and Western Europe who changed their names to better their social, political, and economic prospects (Khosravi 2012, Fouka 2019, Carneiro, Lee, and Reis 2020). The case of Israel in the 1950s is another example, with agents of the state frequently bestowing new Hebrew names to Jewish immigrants without consulting them (Stahl 1994). Finally, Turkey's Surname Law of 1934 required all citizens to adopt Turkish surnames or taken from Turkish words (Özgül 2014). Citizens had two years to fulfill the law's requirements (Türköz 2008). These examples suggest that changing of one's name can occur under varying levels of coercion.

We see two dimensions as necessary for determining whether name changes should be labelled as 'coerced.' The first dimension is if the name change is a result of an intervention by the state or its agents. Although we acknowledge that persistent discrimination—which can perhaps be conceptualized as coercion—can lead immigrants to change their name (Fouka 2019, 181, Scassa 1996), we argue that there is an important difference between an individual's choice to change their names for reasons of integration and a decision preceded by state intervention.

The second related dimension is whether state directives around name changes is reinforced by the threat of punishment. In the abovementioned case of 1950s Israel, state agents were involved in changing the names of migrants, but there was little enforcement of these name changes from the state itself (Stahl 1994). In contrast, the Jewish population in 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussia were forced by the state to adopt fixed, patronymic surnames. Jews in this area of the world would only receive citizenship rights if they cooperated with this directive (Bering 1992, Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002). Put differently, resistance to the state's efforts to standardize naming meant a denial of citizenship rights. It is important to note that the threat of coercion occurs along a spectrum. The threat of punishment, for example, can be uneven—even for members of the same group. For example, enforcement of these policies will likely affect individuals living in areas with greater state control than those in areas where state control is weak (15).

It is important to acknowledge that the level of coercion experienced by Chinese Indonesians as a result of the 1966 directive was not nearly as severe as those experienced by groups such as Jews in Prussia after 1833 (Bering 1992, Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002), indigenous communities in North America (Pearson 2021), or Armenians and Kurds in Turkey (Türköz 2008, Özgül 2014). In these cases, the aforementioned minorities were legally required to change their names. This was not the case with the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

Still, we argue that the case does fall within the category of coerced name change on the two identified dimensions. First, the origins of the directive lie in the state. Although

Chinese Indonesians did have a choice on whether or not to adopt more Indonesian sounding names, those who changed their names did so in order to conform to state expectations. Second, the state did exert some pressure on Chinese Indonesians to change their names in order to prove their loyalty to Indonesia and their commitment to becoming what was seen as “real” Indonesians (Suryadinata 1993, 91). Within the context of the anti-communist purges that were happening simultaneously from 1965-1967, there was also a clear element of fear involved in many Chinese’s decision to conform. Furthermore, it is notable the name change circular was issued alongside other policies forbidding the expression of Chineseness in the public sphere.

Certainly, the pressure exerted on Chinese Indonesians varied across the archipelago. Assimilationist policies in general were enforced at a higher level on Java while the enforcement in rural areas outside Java were much more lax (Heriyanto 2020). Along the same lines, the pressure exerted on high profile Chinese Indonesians, such as Indonesian athletes of Chinese descent was also immense. According to Tan Joe Hok, a badminton player who represented Indonesia in the 1950s and ‘60s, all Chinese badminton players were summoned by a military officer the night before the 1967 Thomas Cup. The officer presented them a list of Indonesian names. The next day, *Kompas* newspaper reported that the athletes had adopted Indonesian names (Tanasaldy and Palmer 2019).

### **The Puzzle of Coerced Name Changes**

States have long been involved in the regulation of names, paying particular attention to control over surnames, as they are often linked to issues of property and succession (Scassa 1996, 172). The ways that states govern names has been approached through two overlapping literatures: 1) the scholarship on legal identity and state formation; and 2) the scholarship on nationalism and national belonging.

For scholars writing from the perspective of state formation and legal identity, states force individuals to change their names in an effort to render populations legible. After all, states need to be able to “locate citizens uniquely and unambiguously” in order to carry out its basic functions (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, 10). Forcing their population to adopt standardized, fixed surnames allowed states to carry out tasks such as taxation, registering and preserving private property, and recruitment into the military.

The example of the imposition of Western naming conventions on indigenous nations in what is now known as North America is illustrative of how states standardize names for reasons of governance and/or control. One of the most significant acts governing indigenous peoples in the US is the Dawes Act (1887), which authorized the president to allot land to indigenous families as a means of assimilation. Under this law, each head of family would receive an allotment, which could only be transferred to a “legitimate” heir. To implement the Dawes Act, however, the state needed to render family relations in indigenous

communities legible, in order implement a system by which land could be transferred and inherited only to those allowable in the act (Pearson 2021, 84-89). For the American state, being able to trace the family lineage and the sex of individuals was important, but indigenous names rarely included such information (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, 19-20). Names also were not necessarily fixed, with a man's name changing several times in his lifetime (Pearson 2021, 87). To "resolve" the problem, the state imposed European surname customs—and consequently, the re-organization of the family—onto indigenous peoples (90).

Although it is certainly possible that the name change directive in Indonesia was implemented to increase the legibility of the ethnic Chinese population, this explanation arguably does not apply to this particular case for three reasons. First, at a more general level, the Indonesian state did not seek to render its population legible through the standardization of naming. Although the Dutch colonial government did pass a policy in 1925 around the adoption of patronymic surnames, patronymics are not widespread in the country (Kuipers and Askuri 2017, 33-34). Until today, many Indonesians still do not have patronymic surnames, and this has not created bureaucratic problems in regard to matters such as land and property inheritance.

Second, the ethnic Chinese were arguably quite legible to the state due to the contention over citizenship in the immediate post-independence period. In 1946, following the 1910 Dutch colonial policy on citizenship, the newly independent Indonesian state automatically accorded Indonesian citizenship to ethnic Chinese born in the country. What complicated the citizenship status of Chinese Indonesians was that this group was also entitled to Chinese citizenship. The governments of Indonesia and China eventually came to an agreement in 1955 where Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent could be released from Chinese citizenship. In 1962, when the treaty came into effect, Chinese Indonesians had to reject Chinese citizenship in a court of law and obtain official certification in order to acquire or retain Indonesian citizenship (Aguilar 2001, 514-516). About two thirds of Chinese Indonesians eligible for citizenship choose to do so (Purdey 2006, 9). As such, the Chinese Indonesian community were already quite legible to the state.

Finally, if it was about legibility, the name change policy could have been made mandatory or the state could have pursued the objective differently. For example, in 1979, the state required all individuals of Chinese descent—regardless of citizenship status—to reregister with the state (Aguilar 2001, 516). It is clear how the 1979 instruction may have been driven by legibility aims; it is less clear how the 1966 name change directive is explainable through the lens of legal identity.

If the scholarship on legal identity sees coerced name changes as an outcome of the state's desire to tame illegibility, then the scholarship on nationalism very much views coerced

name change policies as a tool of nation building. As Scassa (1996) argues, because names are often reflections of ethnic backgrounds, governments generally take two approaches to governing the names of minority groups in processes of nation building: exclusion or assimilation.

Governments may implement name policies with the intent of excluding groups from the nation in order to maintain and govern the boundaries of the nation. In these cases, minority groups are forbidden from changing their names to those that sound like the names held by the majority group. The Jewish population in Prussia, to return to an earlier example, were obligated to choose from a set of government-selected names (e.g. Hirsch, Rubenstein) and were not allowed to change their names to names not on the list (Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias 2002, 17). This was the approach to Chinese Indonesians prior to 1961, where the Chinese were only allowed to change their given names, but not their surnames. However, Law No. 4/1961 changed this to enable the Chinese and other “foreign Orientals” to change both their given and surnames.

States may also approach nation building through forced assimilation. Names are central to this project as erasing the ethnic differences signified by names is one dimension of erasing ethnic diversity more generally, sometimes also with the purpose of eliminating the ethnic identities of targeted groups. A notable example of this policy is Turkey’s Surname Law of 1934, which was introduced as part of Ataturk’s nation-building project and is often given as an example of forced assimilation practices. This law stipulated that every citizen acquire a surname taken from the Turkish language within two years. This law thus essentially banned names typically associated with minority groups in the country, such as Armenians and Kurds (Türköz 2008, 894-895).

This assimilationist approach to name changes can explain important dimensions of Indonesia’s approach to ethnic Chinese names. The government openly stated that the law’s intent was the acceleration of Chinese Indonesians’ incorporation in the Indonesian nation (Suryadinata 1976, 782). Still, even if the New Order sought to project the image of a united Indonesian nation through the names of its ethnic Chinese population, the regime’s approach was paradoxical. Once Chinese Indonesians began complying with the 1966 directive, thus rendering themselves less visible to the state, the Indonesian state introduced measures to keep the ethnic Chinese visible. In Jakarta, for example, the state added the letter “a” to the identity card (KTP) numbers of Chinese Indonesians (Siddique and Suryadinata 1981, 679). Another example was the requirement for all Chinese acquire a Republic of Indonesia Certificate of Citizenship (*Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia*, SBKRI) in order to prove they did not possess dual nationality with the People’s Republic of China. Only ethnic Chinese were required to have this citizenship document.



Ultimately, the contradictions of state policies suggest that assimilation was not necessarily the goal of the name change policy, given the active delineation of Chinese Indonesians as belonging outside of the Indonesian nation. What this suggests is that the nation building approach is not sufficient for explaining why the New Order Indonesian state wanted the ethnic Chinese to change their names.

### **Explaining Forced Name Changes: Two Preliminary Propositions**

If the introduction of the 1966 name change policy for Indonesians of Chinese descent was not motivated by legibility concerns and only ambiguously driven by concerns around assimilation, then why did the New Order regime introduce the policy given the resources needed to implement it? In this section, we introduce two hypotheses, inductively developed from preliminary secondary research.

*Proposition #1: The name change policy was part of the New Order regime's efforts to consolidate its political power and resources through bureaucratic mobilization.*

We propose that the Chinese name-change regulation of 1966 may be viewed as part of the New Order regime's efforts to consolidate its newfound political power and resources through bureaucratic mobilization. As scholars (e.g., Anderson 1983, Jackson 1978, King 1982, Shiraishi 2018) have analysed over the decades, one of the New Order regime's key methods for political consolidation and the pacification of opposition groups was through its mobilization of a centralized, streamlined, top-down, elite-led state bureaucratic machine. This was especially so since there were key areas such as home affairs where the military and the bureaucracy overlapped, and as scholars such as Dwight King (1982) argues, the military as an institution held power and exercised it through the bureaucracy and state civil service apparatuses. This exercise of autocratic power through the bureaucracy could be seen in almost all aspects of governance and political life, such as in the primacy of Golkar (*Golongan Karya*, Functional Groups), a government party supported by the military and the entire civil service under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the appointment of military elites in key cabinet and governmental positions.

The implementation of assimilation policies toward the Chinese was only made possible by the concerted efforts of the state's military-backed bureaucratic institutions. In his analysis of the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs (*Departemen Dalam Negeri*, DEPDAAGRI) in drafting and implementing the New Order's assimilation policies, Nobuhiro Aizawa (2010) argues that, when Suharto took power in 1967, the regime was confronted with a nearly collapsed economy, and achieving political stability and economic development quickly became a priority. To achieve these twin national goals, it was thus deemed necessary to mobilize the financial resources of economically powerful groups such as the ethnic Chinese. Because of this, the "Chinese problem" was not only a socio-cultural issue but an economic and political one as well. Assimilation was one way to subjugate the Chinese and their

economic resources, and thus under the coordination of Suharto and the presidium cabinet's political section, its implementation would be "tackled with the support of all agencies involved in political issues such as DEP DAGRI, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the military (including the national police), the intelligence agency, and the attorney general's office" (52).

Each of the state's bureaucratic institutions had their own tasks and methods in implementing assimilation policies such as the name-changing policy, and there were strict bureaucratic procedures that had to be followed to facilitate the name change, involving contact with various state agencies and officials. According to the 1966 regulations, ethnic Chinese wanting to change their name must first register their intentions to the local authorities (usually mayors or regents), a low fee would then be charged for the registration. The request would then be passed onto the Department of Justice, and if there were no objections from the local indigenous community, the new name would become legal in three months (Suryadinata 1976). In practice however, the procedure was often not straightforward and rife with potential intimidation and extra costs. In order to make the name change application, the Chinese applicant had to produce proof of home address, a birth certificate, and the SBKRI document mentioned earlier. If any of these documents are incomplete, the applicant was likely to be subjected to "extra fees" (that usually went straight to the pockets of the corrupt officials) and/or further intimidation. The name-changing procedure thus became a part of the state's efforts to bureaucratically consolidate, with the added benefit of tracking the movements of its economically important ethnic Chinese population.

It must be noted that the state's implementation of assimilation policies was also done with the cooperation of military-backed Chinese Indonesian organisations such as LPKB (*Lembaga Pengkajian Kesatuan Bangsa*, Institute for the Promotion of National Unity) and BAKOM PKB (*Badan Komunikasi Penghayatan Kesatuan Bangsa*, Communication Body for Organizing National Unity). These organizations were headed by ethnic Chinese leaders who voluntarily worked with the government since they saw assimilation to be the only way to prove the Chinese's loyalty towards the Indonesian state (Aizawa 2010). The cooperation of Chinese Indonesian organizations and individuals in implementing assimilation policies further demonstrate the complexity of the coercive nature of policies such as the name change policy.

*Proposition #2: The name change policy was a display of the New Order state's power to intimidate and subjugate the ethnic Chinese.*

It is possible that the primary motivation of the 1966 legislation was a demonstration of the state's power to reinforce the vulnerable and marginal position of the ethnic Chinese in the

Indonesian nation. By forcing members of the group to interact with the state's bureaucratic machinery and by coercing Chinese Indonesians to alter something as foundational as their identity, Chinese Indonesians experienced the power of the state in one moment and also carried with them a quotidian, daily reminder of the state's coercive abilities.

Directing members of minority groups to interact with the state's bureaucratic machinery meant that Chinese Indonesians experienced first-hand the power of the state. Encounters with the bureaucracy are important because they are the primary instantiations of the state for ordinary people (Hull 2012). Although interactions with the state can increase citizen trust in government even in weak states (Alik-Lagrange et al. 2021), the opposite effect is not uncommon. In particular, politically marginalized and vulnerable minorities often experience the state and its component parts (e.g. street-level bureaucrats) as coercive, surveillant, predatory, and disciplining (Soss and Weaver 2017, Tynen 2020).

Where minorities are politically subjugated, even routine interactions with the state can be experienced as a show of power. To take a more extreme example, Uyghurs experience their neighborhood *shequ* (the lowest level of government administration) differently from their Han counterparts. Even if services provided by *shequ* were banal and even helpful (e.g. employment training, vaccinations), these units were understood as manifestations of state power. While Uyghurs resisted the state in various ways, interactions with the state produced a perception of the larger state as arbitrary, powerful, and potentially violent. For Uyghurs, then, encounters with the state reinforce their position as outside of the Chinese nation (Tynen 2020).

Although the experience of Uyghurs in China is not comparable in severity with the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, a similar logic may be at play in this case. Part of the reason why a logic of domination may have undergirded the 1966 directive due to the form that forced assimilation took. Coercive name change is a policy that demonstrates the state's true reach: it's ability to influence something as intimate and foundational as one's name. After all, names are socially and personally significant to the individuals that hold them. Beyond being a part of one's identity, surnames can be a reflection of one's linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious heritage (Scassa 1996, 169). To quote Lie and Bailey (2017, 86): "[g]iving up one's family name could thus be experienced as tantamount to giving up one's identity and family." The ability of the state to so fundamentally alter one's name, then, is a real demonstration of the state's power.

It is important to note that it is not just the degree of power displayed by the state, but the duration of that demonstration. Coercive name changes are not a momentary show of force by the state, but a quotidian reminder of the state's power. As an important signifier of the self, individuals use surnames frequently throughout one's life. Certainly, name changes were negotiated by Chinese Indonesians who complied with the state's directive,

meaning that the new surname was not simply a reflection of state subjugation. Still, identifying with a new surname was a reminder of political intervention by the state and thus, a frequent reminder of state power and of the position of Chinese Indonesians in the New Order nation-state.

## Conclusion

This memo presents an early overview of a project on the politics of coerced name changes using the case of the ethnic Chinese in New Order Indonesia. Certainly, as inheritors of Indonesianized Chinese surnames, we are personally interested in the question of the logic underpinning the 1966 name change policy. Yet, this project is meaningful beyond the Indonesia case. As we have sought to show in this memo, states all over the world have coerced minorities into changing their names. While scholars have looked at individual cases, only Scott, Tehranian, and Mathias (2002)—to our knowledge—have sought to theorize this phenomenon comparatively. We hope to contribute to that conversation. We argue that understanding why names are such important sites of governance can yield broader insights on questions of state-society relations, nation building, and intergroup relations.

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