



Using history in the streetscape to affirm geopolitics of memory



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ABSTRACT

In the Polish city of Kraków, successive regimes have (re)named the streetscape to advance their influence and ideologies. This paper examines changes in street names under three different governmental powers – Nazi, Soviet and Polish – on five maps of the city centre (from 1934, 1943, 1964, 1985 and 1996). The work extends the current literature on toponymy by providing a temporal analysis of the street name changes to one bounded area over time, which demonstrates how a politics of memory is inculcated into streetscapes to reaffirm political control. By reference to one space, I show how the name changes proffer an intriguing insight into how two foreign regimes viewed their occupations and, in addition, how all three sought to strengthen their influence by using names that reinforced past examples of their power and alleged cultural superiority in the landscape.

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Introduction

During the 20th Century, street and town square names in the Polish city of Kraków were changed by successive regimes to demonstrate their power and historical connections to place. These name changes accorded with, and gave material expression to, the regimes' sanctioned versions of history and ideology by weaving narratives of historical longevity into Kraków's streetscape. This paper examines how history has been used as part of the spatial politics of memory of Nazi and Soviet regimes, inculcating their histories and traditions in the streetscape, and in a parallel process of (de)commemoration erasing those street and place names that did not support their invented histories. Unlike much other research on street naming, this paper's significance is its temporal analysis of the changes to one bounded area over time. Such analysis is important for political geographers because it shows how representations of identity and history have been (re)inscribed in the landscape in a process of politicizing space. For scholars in the field of toponymy and geographers alike, this paper exemplifies the street as a site of political contestation, where memory is manipulated and embedded within the ordinary landscape. I demonstrate how through the process of street naming the two foreign regimes have enacted a critical geopolitics, using territory and space as forms of control over an occupied Kraków streetscape.

This critical geopolitics pits the division and marking of space as a contest between 'us' and 'them', and as crucial in the mitigation of threats to sovereignty and to the security of discourses of political domination (Sharp, 2009).

In streetscapes, people (consciously or unconsciously) encounter semiotic reminders of cultural events, people and places. Street names are 'ostensibly visible, quintessentially mundane, and seemingly obvious' (Azaryahu, 1996: 311); simultaneously, they are sites of the manipulation of memories. Streetscapes are also more than just names on a map; in any settlement, one might walk along a street, have coffee in a town square, arrange a meeting, or visit a museum in a historical building. The street, town square and building could be named after figures of national importance, or to commemorate an important event, or to serve as a reminder of some traditional ritual. The remembered history of a settlement details how 'various historical events are remembered in the plan or layout of the city (or piazzas in small towns and villages) and its streets, buildings, and monuments' (Romanucci-Ross, 1995: 77). Unlike purpose-built commemorative monuments and memorials, street and place names 'have an immediate practical reality for the populace' as spatial and historical markers (Gill, 2005: 481). Moreover, as Azaryahu (1996: 321) has asserted, the potency of street names lies in 'their ability to make a version of history an inseparable element of reality as it is constantly constructed, experienced and perceived on a daily basis'.

In what follows, I undertake a textual and chronologically sequential analysis of historical maps, examining Nazi, Soviet and Polish governmental uses of the streetscape in Kraków. I explain the geopolitical purposes of the name changes in the context of each government's preferred version of history. As part of that

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process, it will become clear that attempts to uncover some particulars of these name changes are obfuscated by Poland's history of foreign occupation, and especially the destruction of lives and documents in the wake of the occupations. Thus, the focus here is not on the minutiae of specifically who nominated, approved and instigated changes, or on levels of local resistance to these changes, but rather the focus is on establishing a narrative that makes clear the sense of purpose in the actual name changes themselves. A significant strength of this paper is in tracing how history and geography gain expression in terms of power in the streetscape as a means of buttressing a given regime's authority and legitimacy to place. In the following sections, I first review the literatures on cultural memory and show how they relate to street naming. I then detail how I have used these literatures to inform the textual (de) constructions of Kraków's streetscape. I then discuss these readings of street name changes in chronological order, from the WWII to post-WWII to post-Socialism.

Geographies of memory (in and of the street)

Arguably, name changes in a streetscape are a means to alter cultural memories portrayed in everyday places. Cultural memories are informed by experiences, events and stories that are culturally specific – they reveal connections between past and present (Assmann, 1995; Connerton, 1989). Such memories can be personally and collectively remembered; they are (re)produced and transmitted – in part – to maintain narratives of (national) identity. They are multifarious and context specific and, heeding McDowell's (2004) post-positivist approach, their contextual specificity destabilizes notions of an ultimate authenticity in both personal and common histories. Remaining cognizant of the possibilities of multiple interpretations of history in place is important in landscapes like Kraków, where the streetscape has undergone successive (re)inscriptions.

Halbwachs (1992 [1926], 1980 [1950]) has contended that remembering is an inherently social process of refining the past through present day contexts and its anchors to places, especially streets, town centres and homes. His work has immediate relevance to toponymy because changes to street names influence what people remember in individual and collective acts of selecting and spatialising memory. Of the latter, as Chang (2005: 248) has argued, collective memories are 'built on the shared experiences of a people or community'. Nora's (1989) work on collective memory has also drawn attention to the iteration of national memory in public spaces where memory is publicly portrayed and performed. In public spaces, memory narratives are articulated through 'sites of memory' – monuments, memorials, commemorative rituals and street names. Through a process of cataloguing '*lieux de memoire*' (sites of memory) throughout France (Nora, 1989; 1992), Nora was concerned with asking how national '*lieux de memoire*' become 'landmarks of a remembered geography and history [which] ... form the intersection between official and vernacular cultures' (Johnson, 2002: 294). These remembered geographies and histories have increasingly been the focal point of research on street naming and toponymy (Alderman & Inwood, 2013; Azaryahu, 2011, 2012a; Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood, 2011; Rose-Redwood, Alderman, & Azaryahu, 2010).

Street naming involves the dual process of shaping memory and the shared space of everyday life (Hebbert, 2005). This 'everyday' focus is important because streets are basic elements of orientation in and through everyday landscapes; the everyday takes the form of the 'ordinary landscapes in our daily routines', such as street names, shopping centres, parks and public squares (Winchester, Kong, & Dunn, 2003: 35). Yet, street names are often taken for granted even while exemplifying power in the landscape. Recent

scholarship on street and place naming has drawn attention to naming as a 'contested spatial practice' (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood et al., 2010: 455). Streets also express geopolitics of memory in the streetscape because they are palpable sites of contestation among competing ideologies, revealing struggles for the control of public and social spaces (Yeoh, 1996).

The geopolitics of memory is a complex process to determine 'who gets [representation], in what way and with what political outcomes' (Edkins, 2003: 135, original emphasis). Yeoh (1996) identified three chief toponymic implications of changing place names. First, an important past public figure is honoured. Second, the new names commemorate and reinforce a national (and hegemonic) identity. Third, the ideology of that hegemony is invested in the streetscape. Here, the negotiation of geopolitics of memory in Kraków's streetscape is examined via the manipulation of street naming by different regimes whose proponents have sought to refer to the past to reaffirm their existence in the present. As in Kraków, changes to street names reveal how memory is mobilized to serve political purposes (Edkins, 2003). This mobilization propels political agendas into the streetscape. Thus, geopolitics of memory (of the street) relates to whose version of a nation's past is made more visible in the public arena. As a potent force for popularizing political agendas, street names are visible and accessible to large audiences and extensive geographic scales (Alderman, 2003). The power of commemorative choice is therefore tantamount to controlling the consolidation of memory in public spaces. Moreover, control of the street is more straightforward task for an occupying regime who may instil a fear of reprisal as an instrument of reinforcement of new names.

Memory is a tool for those in power, used to decide what is represented materially, determine how such material culture is portrayed, and influence which memories are deemed acceptable for public discussion. Said (2000: 179) has argued that for pragmatic reasons memory should not always be considered as genuine and reliable, but also 'rather useful'. He has also suggested that 'they' decide what 'we' remember. 'They' commonly refer to occupying governments and/or regimes who, in this context, use street names for two primary purposes: to be representative of the nationalist ideals of the ruling hegemony, and as spatial semiotic markers (Azaryahu, 1996). A new regime will seek to assert its version of national identity in public landscapes 'through the creation of an urban landscape which demonstrates and affirms the values and ideology of the regime' (Light, Nicolae, & Suditu, 2002: 135). The successful transference of ideology to the street involves 'signification' using semiotic markers and, as Baker (1992: 4) argues, is associated with a 'quest for order', 'an assertion of authority', and the projection of 'totalisation'. In Yeoh's (1992) example of street names in colonial Singapore, such a quest for order and imposition of a particular vision for the city had implications for the spatial segregations of European and Asian communities in the city. Patently, such activities are profoundly geopolitical.

Geopolitical inquiry has increasingly focused on the (re)production and transmission of public memory discourses in post-war and post-totalitarian states, and on the use of repression, suppression and power (Argenbright, 1999; Foote, Toth, & Arvay, 2000; Forest & Johnson, 2002; Forest, Johnson, & Till, 2004; Nagel, 2002; Till, 1999; Ward, Silberman, & Till, 2012). Interestingly, within this work less attention has been paid to the role of non-totalitarian governments in changing street names back to their pre-totalitarian names, or the inculcation of new names, democratically selected or otherwise. More often writers have been especially concerned with how memory narratives in post-Soviet states have been (re)defined and publicly articulated following a return to autonomy. These new narratives of identity are drawn from the previously repressed or under-represented personal and experiential narratives of

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