DE GRUYTER

Research Article   **Open Access**

Bartłomiej Różycki*

Renaming urban toponomy as a mean of redefining local identity: the case of street decommunization in Poland[1]

Abstract: During and after democratic transition in Poland, the decommunization of urban toponomy became an important aspect of symbolic changes. Although the general course of street renaming was similar in the whole country, the pace of these changes as well as scope of tolerance towards the symbols of the past varied. In this article, the cases of three major Polish cities are analyzed. In Kraków, its long and rich history constituted a background of local identity and certain level of autonomy in defining the symbolic landscape. Warsaw on the other hand was a city whose extraordinary experiences related to the World War II resulted in commemoration of a whole new set of myths and figures through the street names. What is more, its status of the country's capital caused its identity to influence the canon of Polish history as a whole. This affected the third analyzed case, Wrocław, whose long history of links with German culture resulted in very little symbolic capital which would be compatible with this new patriotic canon. As a result, Wrocław accepted in its urban toponomy a vast number of symbols unrelated to its own memory, in the same time suppressing symbols linked to its local identity. Accepting external heritage turned out to be a strategy of avoiding conflict with the dominant narrative.

Keywords: communist Poland; contemporary Poland; street names; symbols; local identity.

Urban toponomy became a subject of interest for the memory investigators, especially as a result of growing influence of the famous Pierre Nora's term "lieux de mémoire", although this general concept is so versatile and embraces so many different aspects of commemorating the past, that using it to describe a particular phenomenon may be misleading. Nonetheless, street names, together with other "places of memory", physically visible in the public sphere, like monuments or archives, became an issue of undisputable importance for the researchers.

Street names constitute a mean of enforcing certain attitudes. They designate a set of values, embodied by particular events, dates, people and groups or by more general terms. These new names are usually established by the authorities.. Associating a street with a particular patron is a formal act which requires fulfilling certain procedures. Other political actors may nonetheless take part in the decision-making process and their capability to affect it depend on the existing political system. Eventually the decision still belongs to the authorities because, as Stefan Meyer stated: "street renaming is usually a political act, where the state manifests its authority and exclusive right to interpret its own history"[2]. The ability

2 S. Meyer, "Dwie drogi do alei Stalina. Zmiany nazw ulic w Warszawie i Berlinie Wschodnim (1945-1950)", in W połowie drogi. Warszawa między Paryżem a Kijowem, ed. Jerzy Kochanowski, 106 (Warszawa: Trio 2006), s. 106.

*Corresponding author: Bartłomiej Różycki, Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences,
E-mail: bartek.rozycki@gmail.com

to introduce one's own values into this commemoration practices depends on one's resources. As Russell Johnston and Michael Ripmeester, who investigated commemorative practices related to a Canadian war monument noticed, "what counts as popular or public memory will always emerge in the context of asymmetrical relations of power. Those groups with the greatest access to political, cultural, economic and discursive resources have greater opportunity to circulate the specific historical narratives that suit them best. Many such groups include what Jelin calls 'memory entrepreneurs', individuals who champion a particular version of historical understanding that serves their immediate purposes. Museums, archives and school curricula can never be viewed as innocent or objective. Rather, they promote narratives favoured by their sponsors. Memory entrepreneurs with sanctioned access to public space carve particular understandings of the past into the landscape via memorials"[3]. Pierre Bordieu argues that these "memory entrepreneurs" battle over symbolic capital. As he puts it, "in the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly of legitimate «naming» as the official — i.e. explicit and public — imposition of the legitimate vision of the social world, agents bring into play the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles"[4]. This capital constitutes an important factor in another big struggle: for legitimization of one's power. Johnston and Ripmeester refer to James Young to conclude that "the omnipresence and seeming geological permanence of memorials make them powerful mnemonic and didactic tools meant to champion selected values. In theory, they should naturalize the priorities of the powerful, encourage identification with an imagined community and ultimately motivate participation in civic affairs"[5], while Derek Alderman indicates that "named streets, like any place of memory, can become embroiled in the politics of defining what is historically significant or worthy of public remembrance as well as place names are part of 'larger struggles over social and political identity and are used for resisting the hegemonic order as well as reproducing it'. In this respect, a city's street naming system serves as a 'memorial arena', where the struggle for cultural distinction, or 'symbolic capital', is played out on a variety of different scales"[6].

If the question of assigning street names is considered a struggle, it results in benefits for the winners as well as losses for the losers, whose right to present and commemorate historical narrative is questioned and limited, if not completely restricted and forbidden. In this way, particular social attitudes are promoted by the victors, while other are silenced or condemned. This obviously results in exclusiveness of commemorated narrative. Reuben S. Rose-Redwood, who presents an interesting analysis of street renaming in nineteenth and twentieth century New York, refers to Alderman as well as to some other scholars in order to point out that when considering what is commemorated in the urban toponomy, it is also important to note what is forgotten in the process: "as Stephen Legg reminds us, the act of remembering is inseparable from 'active forgetting'. The social exclusions that pervade many historical narratives are often replicated and reinforced as 'materialized discourses' in commemorative landscapes". In the result, "street naming is a strategic element of an 'economy of practices' for marking geographic space as both a place of memory and erasure. The practice of symbolic erasure is most evident in the act of street renaming, where one name is officially replaced by another". However Rose-Redwood argues, that "the process of erasure extends much deeper than this to include most, if not all, acts of spatial designation. Places of memory do not exist in isolation but as part of broader networks of commemorative spaces. To understand the spatial politics of memory and forgetting, therefore, it is necessary to consider the intertextuality of

---

3 R. Johnston, M. Ripmeester, "Awake anon the tales of valour: the career of a war memorial in St. Catharines, Ontario", The Canadian Geographer / Le Geographe canadien 4 (2009): 406.

4 P. Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991): 239 Quoted from: Reuben S. Rose-Redwood, "From number to name: symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City", Social & Cultural Geography, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 2008: 434.

5 R. Johnston, M. Ripmeester, "Awake anon the tales of valour: the career of a war memorial in St. Catharines, Ontario", The Canadian Geographer / Le Geographe canadien 4 (2009): 406.

6 D. Alderman, "Street names as memorial arenas: the reputational politics of commemorating Martin Luther King Jr: in a Georgia county", Historical Geography 30: 99 (Quoted from: Reuben S. Rose-Redwood, "From number to name: symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City", Social & Cultural Geography, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 2008: 432).

spatial inscription as well as the relationality of placemaking more generally". He continues this analysis by stating that "an exclusionary politics of symbolic erasure can be found in both elite attempts to rename streets as a means of converting symbolic capital into economic capital (e.g. increasing property values) as well as among historically marginalized groups that seek cultural recognition yet in the process privilege one subset of the group over another. The exclusionary dimension of street renaming is most evident not at the scale of the individual street name change but in relation to the 'city-text' as a whole. The cultural meaning of a toponym differs greatly depending upon the socio-spatial context within which it is placed". As a consequence, one should be very cautious when distinguishing between commemorative and non-commemorative toponyms. "If the streetscape can indeed be seen as a 'memorial arena', it is also a space in which 'public forgetting' is inscribed into the very texture of the landscape itself (...)Traditionally, scholars have made a distinction between commemorative and non-commemorative toponyms, (...) Such a toponymic classification system certainly has its practical uses, yet it underestimates the commemorative dimension of all naming practices and thereby elides the inseparable relation between memory and place naming". Rose-Redwood argues though, that "the very act of place naming is an attempt to discursively reconfigure a given space as a place to be remembered. Naming a place, therefore, is itself a commemorative practice, whether those names are descriptive, possessive, or otherwise"[7]. In order to notice the traditions erased from the toponomy, one should read it not as a sum of particular names which refer to the history, but as a whole: "relation between street naming and memory is more complex than most traditional accounts of commemorative street names would suggest. The distinction between commemorative and non-commemorative street names limits our understanding of the symbolic power of toponymy in constructing places of memory and oblivion"[8]. I'll make note of this observation, as while analyzing the process of decommunization of streets in particular Polish cities I'll consider the "neutral" names of the streets as meaningful as well: they were used to fill in gaps which could have been taken over by the symbols that purposefully have not been included in the urban toponomy.

Street names aren't usually expected to be an astonishing carrier of symbol, emanating with intensive persuasion on anyone who engages them. Instead, they serve as a mean of everyday, repetitive influence, which affects the recipients in a soft manner. They also serve as a reservoir of memory which can be used at appropriate time. While analyzing the monuments of Stepan Bandera in Ukraine, Andre Liebich and Oksana Myshlovska pointed out that "what is most striking about monuments is namely that one does not notice them. There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments. They are undoubtedly erected to be seen, indeed to attract attention, but, simultaneously, something immunizes them against attention (...) By occupying space, monuments, even when they are not noticed, objectify memory, pre-empt alternative conceptions of the past, and offer, when required, a rallying point for shared cultural practices. Monuments may be invisible, at times, to some people. This does not mean that they are not there or that they can be wished away"[9]. In comparison to the monuments, which are nevertheless less frequent and more eye-catching than a plaque with a street name – the same can be said about urban toponomy with even more certainty. It has been well put by Wilfried Speitkamp, according to whom street names (together with different symbol carriers like money or post stamps) constitute a secondary form of monuments, which nonetheless influence everyday life much wider than monuments in their most typical sense. They constitute element of life that concerns every member of the society, which cannot be escaped or ignored[10]. Rose-Redwood refers to Maoz Azaryahu, who "contends that commemorative street naming is a practice which aims to 'introduce an authorized version of history into ordinary settings of everyday life'. To the extent that commemorative street names are incorporated into the taken-for-granted world of daily

---

7 Quoted from: Reuben S. Rose-Redwood, "From number to name: symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City", Social & Cultural Geography, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 2008: 432-435.

8 Ibid: 447.

9 Andre Liebich and Oksana Myshlovska, "Bandera - memorialization and commemoration", Nationalities Papers, 2014 Vol. 42, No. 5: 751.

10 W. Speitkamp, "Denkmalsturz Und Symbolkonflikt In der modernen Geschichte. Eine Einleitung", in Denkmalsturz. Zur Konfliktgeschichte politischer Symbolik, ed. W. Speitkamp (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997): 5-21. Przytoczone za: Stefan Meyer, dz. cyt., s. 106.

life, their everydayness serves as a strategy for reifying and legitimating hegemonic discourses of public remembrance"[11].

In the context of contemporary Poland, which is to be discussed on the following pages, it is worth refering to Lech Nijakowski, according to whom the dominating historical discourse, which refers especially to the period of World War II, is shaped almost exclusively by the memories from the *Generalne Gubernatorstwo* (General Governorate – Polish territories occupied but not annexed by Germany during World War II), while different discourses, belonging to the inhabitants of the lands directly incorporated by either the III Reich (where different policies than in *Gubernatorstwo* were executed) or the Soviet Union, are often ignored. It is even more visible regarding lands which didn't belong to this country before World War II, but as a part of the post-War retributions were handled to Poland at the expense of Germany. As Robert Traba, whose research is strongly based on this regional perspective, stated „when looking at the cultural distinctiveness of Warmia and Masuria, I feel that were being noticed as a curiosity, whose peculiarity is not to be understood, but rather to be forced into artificial, countrywide canon of history interpretation. Perhaps it would be worthy to do something reverse – to enhance the national cultural canon with values and experiences of regions, whose past was often very different from those of Kraków and Warsaw"[12].

When discussing the importance of symbols of the past it should be mentioned as well, that symbolism related to a certain object can acquire different connotations, related to specific layers of symbols which are developed over time. Dacía Viejo-Rose, who investigated the historical landscape of Spain, argued that "symbols are objects invested with abstract meaning that come to represent something else, even if the meaning evoked is not the same for different people", as well as that "cultural heritage is intrinsically political and symbolic, as such it gets drawn on in attempts to construct a sense of historical continuity or public memory which contribute to the definition of an «imagined community». It can also serve a mnemonic purpose: memory triggers in the landscape associated with particular historic events"[13]. When analyzing particular renaming strategies it will be important to remember that the same names may serve different purposes depending on the context.

In another paper[14] I compared the existence of communist symbols in urban toponomy in different regions (voivodships) of Poland. It turned out, that in the parts of the country which were taken away from Germany as a result of World War II and in general experienced dominance of German culture in the recent centuries, are now more tolerant towards symbols of communism. Based on these findings, I argued that a low level of traditions directly related to Polish history resulted in wider acceptance of any symbols that constitute links between these lands and the country they currently belong to. As in their cases symbols of belonging to Poland almost exclusively date to the period of communism, tolerance towards this heritage, elsewhere rejected, can be explained. In this article I propose a deeper insight into particular cases of some of the biggest Polish cities, which due to their different history are now able to refer to different local traditions, which represent different levels of compatibility with the core of Polish history. I argue that distinct symbolic capital of these regions contributes to different renaming strategies, however it doesn't simply mean that these divergent experiences are commemorated on the same scale. It rather seems that in a situation of possessing large symbolic capital which is incompatible with the dominating canon, the local strategy may be based on rejecting its own history and opting for neutral, outwardly non-symbolic solutions.

In the analysis, three examples of major Polish cities will be investigated: Kraków, Warsaw and Wrocław. Each of them represents different context. Kraków, as a city relatively undamaged during World War II, focused on restoring its rich traditions, which during communism had been replaced with people

11 M. Azaryahu, The power of commemorative street names, Environment and Planning D 14: 312 (Quoted from: Reuben S. Rose-Redwood, "From number to name: symbolic capital, places of memory and the politics of street renaming in New York City", Social & Cultural Geography, Vol. 9, No. 4, June 2008: 432).
12 B. Szacka, Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit (Warsaw: Scholar 2006): 57-58.
13 Dacía Viejo-Rose, Reconstructing Spain. Cultural Heritage and Memory after Civil War (Brighton-Chicago-Toronto: Sussex Academic Press 2014): 8-9.
14 B. Różycki, "Przemianowywanie ulic w Polsce 1989-2016. Charakterystyka zagadnienia", in Mity i stereotypy w wyobrażeniach zbiorowych, ed. A. Dubicki, M. Rekść, A. Sepkowski (Łódź: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego 2018).

and values representative for the new authorities. Warsaw, whose history as the capital of the country had the biggest impact on the core of the history of Poland as a whole, not only restored some of its traditional street names, but had a whole new set of patrons to commemorate: resistance of World War II, especially the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and its members and units engaged in the most famous operation: the Warsaw Uprising. In Wrocław the situation differed a lot: the city's toponomy has been reshaped during communism not only in accordance to the dominant ideology, but also due to the fact that the city was taken away from Germany and many of its streets referred to the history and heroes of this country, which was perceived as the biggest enemy by the official propaganda and large part of society.

The analysis will focus on decommunization performed in the early years of transition. The vast majority of streets were renamed in early nineties, with just some cases left to have their fate decided in further years. Although the current discussions about this process in Poland usually concern the new law which was passed in 2016 and forces all local authorities to remove the remaining streets related to communist ideology, this perspective is of little interest for my investigation. As frames for this late decommunization are shaped by the interpretations issued by a central institution – the Institute of National Remembrance, it constitutes an attempt of imposing a general, country-wide narrative, which ignores different experiences and peculiarities of various parts of the country and aims at strengthening the official canon of Polish history[15]. As such, it doesn't constitute an interesting basis for investigation of particular local identities. I'll refer to this new factor only regarding one question: the number of streets whose possible renaming is being discussed in each city. This information will serve as an indicator of level of acceptance represented by the local authorities and citizens towards names related to the communism, as they were able to persist in public sphere for over a quarter of century since the most intensive decommunization process took place.

Kraków

After World War II, Kraków experienced an intense replacement of its traditional symbols with those of communist origin. In the Old Town, several traditional street names which referred to Catholic saints were renamed, although the new names were part of rather "soft" indoctrination and didn't refer to the core of Stalinist propaganda of that time: the All Saints Square (*Plac Wszystkich Świętych*) now commemorated the revolutionary struggles from the middle of nineteenth century (*Wiosna Ludów*), St. Getrude Street (*św. Gertrudy*) honored Polish socialist thinker Ludwik Waryński, while St. Thomas Street (*św. Tomasza*) was renamed in name of a stage actor and theatre director, still active in that time – Ludwik Solski. One could suspect that the intention of these changes was rather to remove the explicitly religious names from the historical center of the city, an area of strong symbolic importance.

More direct propaganda was proliferated on streets whose patrons belonged to the recent Polish history, especially its independence struggle. The former Józef Piłsudski street – the main symbol of the prewar Poland – was replaced with the commemoration of symbolical beginning of the communist regime (*Manifestu Lipcowego*), while his Legions (*Legionów Józefa Piłsudskiego*) was removed in order to make way for a minor local socialist figure (Stanisław Cekiera). Significant figures from the history of Kraków, like its presidents Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz and Władysław Belina-Prażmowski or the rector of the Jagiellonian University Julian Dunajewski were replaced by other core symbols – the Battle of Lenino, Julian Marchlewski and the 1ˢᵗ of May respectively. Also names related to the past, conservative and hierarchical social structure were to be changed – such was the fate of the *Jabłonowskich* street, which commemorated past proprietaries of the lands located directly behind the city walls, who were replaced in urban toponomy by a local commu-

---

15 The new law passed in the middle of 2016 interferes with the competence of local authorities regarding urban toponomy, enforcing the removal of all remaining names which refer to communist ideology. In case of not taking any action, since autumn 2017 the regional representative of the government is authorized to issue a decree renaming a particular street. What is more, the state Institute of National Remembrance is indicated as the consultant body, whose opinions become obligatory during this process. All in all, this reform constitutes unification of policy regarding political symbolism throughout the country.

nist activist Stanisław Ziaja. In similar fashion, other names which referred to the local history of Kraków or the Polish independence struggle were removed, replaced by more and more numerous patrons of the communist origin. Such people became commemorated also on many of the newly constructed streets, which appeared in the urban toponomy as a result of the expansion of the city. The most important of all these was the main avenue of Nowa Huta. As the researcher of the history of this new district puts it, it was "initially intended as a separate town on Kraków's doorstep, the country's first model socialist town. The motive behind its construction was to «modernize» the country through industrialization, urbanization, and the creation of a new socialist working class"[16]. The avenue which linked Nowa Huta with the rest of Kraków originally honored the "shock workers" (Przodowników Pracy) but after 1958 was renamed to Lenin Avenue.

After 1989, the decommunization process in Kraków focused on restoring traditional names, which had existed until World War II[17]. Symbolically, the earliest decree of the city council on that matter, which dates from June 1990, decided on restoring the name of All Saints Square. Less than three months later, an extensive law was passed which decided on renaming twenty-five names of the streets, twenty of which returned to their traditional names. Further changes were made in the following year, when 133 streets were renamed, with seven of them given back their prewar names. What deserves special attention, the local authorities were so strongly oriented towards restoring traditional names, that they decided on such changes even when the removed patron wasn't actually an explicit symbol of communism and their right to be commemorated in the urban toponomy was generally accepted. Three such examples were clearly distinctive: already mentioned Ludwik Solski, a notable person from the prewar period who shared the same profession – Stefan Jaracz, as well as Antoni Stawarz, a military man who played a role in liberation of Kraków at the end of World War I. They were all given their own streets in the historical center of Kraków during the communist period. Although respecting historical or artistic contribution of these figures, the local authorities opted for renaming streets dedicated to them and the restoration of traditional names instead, yet also they searched for a solution to commemorate them in another way. As a result, one of these patrons (Stawarz) was honored in 1991, replacing a minor historical figure from seventeenth century, exploited by communist historiography (Marcin Radocki), while the other two had to wait until 1995, when new residential estates were constructed, which resulted in raising demand for patrons for the recently constructed streets. Similarly, two street patrons were brought back to their traditional locations. During communism, Student Street (Studencka) and Marshall Józef Piłsudski Street were renamed and given new, strongly propagandistic meanings (*Manifestu Lipcowego* and *Karola Świerczewskiego*), while the same names were used – in order to weaken their symbolic impact – to name less prestigious streets on the outskirts of Kraków. When dealing with the decommunization of streets in 1990, the city council decided to bring these names back to their previous locations, while finding names of lesser symbolic importance to the streets that they had abandoned. Also streets constructed during the communist period and assigned strong symbolic names where given equally strong counterparts: the most distinctive examples were Lenin Avenue, renamed to Solidarity Avenue, as well as Six-year Plan and Cuban Revolution Avenue, combined together and renamed John Paul II Avenue. Apparently, political actors who contributed greatly to the collapse of communism replaced its icons in the urban toponomy as well.

Kraków turned out to be one of the cities that used the opportunity given by the street decommunization to commemorate its own history. Out of 148 cases identified as part of the process between 1990 and 1993 (Kraków is one of the examples of smooth and accurate decommunization in opposition to some other Polish main cities, where this process was resumed many times in the following years – for instance in Poznań a number of strongly symbolic names was removed only in 2002 and in Kielce in 2005), half of them were commemorating persons important for the history of the city: with almost fifty percent of them being intellectuals, like scientists, usually related to the Jagiellonian University (the fact that the city

---

16 K. Pozniak, "Generations of memory in the ‚model socialist town' of Nowa Huta, Poland", Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 66 (2013): 59.

17 All information about streets renamed in Kraków since 1989, if not referred to other sources, were obtained from the archive of the City Council and provided by its functionaries.

council commission was chaired by a professor from this university might have had a significant impact here[18]), or artists, while the rest was composed of social activists, benefactors, military men, as well as members of the local anti-communist resistance. In comparison, less than one-fifth of the streets have been renamed to commemorate persons with no direct link to the history of Kraków, who would be rather considered as part of general Polish history.

It should be noted, that Kraków turned out to be one of the least tolerant cities regarding patrons whose connotations with communism were a controversial subject or whose symbolic impact was considered as rather "soft". Various patrons who were left present in many Polish cities, here were removed as unwanted. Such were cases of Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, Russian writers Alexander Pushkin and Maxim Gorki, already mentioned socialist thinker Waryński, as well as the date 1st of May, and the popular nickname of Polish volunteers in the International Brigades during Spanish Civil War, "*Dąbrowszczacy*". All these names, although could be considered as symbols of either human achievements in science and art or struggle for social rights and liberties, here were judged primarily as tools used by the propaganda of the communist regime. Among them even some very questionable renaming occurred. During the massive campaign in 1991, Bolesław Macudziński, an interwar activist dedicated to the promotion of tourism and skiing, was removed without any appropriate justification.

The thoroughness of the decommunization process in early nineties resulted in very few cases being discussed as part of adjusting to the new law from 2016. Only six names were approved for change (twenty-one more were indicated as dubious, but their disputable symbolism combined with strong resistance of the residents put an end to these efforts – it was agreed that attempt of their renaming overextended the intention of the legislators). These six street patrons all belonged to the pro-Soviet Polish army (one of them was also famous before the war as a poet) and as such contributed to the defeat of Germany in the World War II – nevertheless given the strong anti-communist approach of the new law, they have been sentenced for removal. Despite some additional arguments which have been taking place until this moment, the decision of the city president to replace them with people related to Kraków gained popular approval. New patrons, in similar fashion to those honored in early nineties, are mostly intellectuals and social workers. It is also worth adding, that among patrons who were discussed as well but eventually were left intact, a few owed it to the fierce defense of the representatives of the academic institutions to which they had belonged[19].

As a side note, it is worth mentioning that in the recent years an exceptional attempt of restoring communist heritage took place in Kraków: in 2006 a square in Nowa Huta district has been dedicated to Piotr Ożański – one of the workers who took part in the construction of this part of the city and was used as an icon of "shock labour", that is a super productive, enthusiastic approach to work, which was an emblem of communist propaganda. This obviously made him a person, whose efforts unwillingly legitimized the oppressive regime. Ignoring this political aspect, the supporters of the idea of paying tribute to Ożański highlighted the genuine contribution of his and his fellow workers to the development of the city. This concept lasted only for some time though, as three years after dedicating the square to Ożański, the city council composed of people representing different political visions decreed a removal of this name[20].

---

18 To aleja łącząca ateizm z chrześcijaństwem, http://lovekrakow.pl/aktualnosci/al-jana-pawla-ii-to-polaczenie-starego-z-nowym_5643.html (accessed 20 August 2017).

19 Nowe nazwy ulic: Szymborska zamiast Szenwalda? Są wątpliwości, Magdalena Kursa, 19 August 2017 http://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,22249247,nowe-nazwy-ulic-szymborska-zamiast-szenwalda-sa-watpliwosci.html (accessed 22 August 2017).

20 Kogo uwierał człowiek z marmuru, Ryszard Kozik, http://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/1,35798,6401136,Kogo_uwieral_czlowiek_z_marmuru.html (accessed 20 August 2017).

Warsaw

Ruined after World War II and a particularly devastating uprising in 1944, Warsaw became an object of intensive street renaming. The necessity of restoring demolished parts of the city accompanied by its rapid expansion allowed for a massive-scale indoctrination. One of the most remarkable avenues – *Aleje Ujazdowskie*, was dedicated to Stalin, while others were to commemorate the victorious communist (both Soviet and Polish) forces – the part of *Nowowiejska* street demolished during World War II was reconstructed and called the Avenue of Liberation (*Aleja Wyzwolenia*), while *Aleja Szucha* (which commemorated an important architect for eighteenth century Warsaw) was renamed to the Avenue of the First Polish Army (*1. Armii Wojska Polskiego*). These three streets constituted an emblematic part of Warsaw – relatively undamaged during the war, where many institutions and organizations, as well as foreign embassies were located[21]. Many streets with traditional names as well as those referring to the interwar period were renamed: Piłsudski square, where the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is located, was converted into Victory Square (*Plac Zwycięstwa*), while Piłsudski street – dedicated to the Popular Army (*Armii Ludowej*), Polish armed forces dependent on USSR during the war. *Twarda* changed into *Krajowej Rady Narodowej* (State National Council – the first parliament of communist Poland).

Not only were many streets of the capital renamed, but the necessity of reconstruction and rapid modernization opened possibilities of commemorating communist values and heroes in the names of the newly constructed streets. These objects, on their own being symbols of a new, modern city, built on the ashes of the old one, were linked with the most relevant elements in the ideological hierarchy. Streets dedicated to Karol Świerczewski, Julian Marchlewski and the October Revolution (*Rewolucji Październikowej*) were particularly emblematic. Some old streets were intentionally demolished during the implementation of new urbanistic projects. One of the examples was *Chmielna*, perceived by the communists as a breeding ground for private, local enterprises, which were treated as an ideological enemy. Because of that, the street was divided and its eastern part received a new name of a distinctive communist figure Henryk Rutkowski[22]. It should be noted, that the order of renaming was strictly hierarchical – huge attention was paid to the rule that appropriately significant figures had to be commemorated on bigger and more prestigious streets than less important persons[23].

The democratic transition resulted in a revision of this toponomy[24]. While for streets constructed during the communism new patrons were sought, restoration of traditional names became the most typical solution. Some of the cases didn't require attention, as they were already reviewed during communism: *Aleje Ujazdowskie* reclaimed its name in 1956 while the street of Yugoslavian Youth (*Młodzieży Jugosłowańskiej*) was renamed back to *Foksal*[25] in 1950, when the conflict between Tito's Yugoslavia and the USSR started. The decommunization process was actually quite dispersed and limited. While in Kraków 133 streets were renamed through a single legal act decreed in 1991, in Warsaw throughout the whole nineties the number of renamed streets didn't exceed seventy, with a few changes made each year between 1989 and 1998. Apart from the restored traditional names (one-fifth of all the renaming), the new urban toponomy was dominated with names that referred to World War II, both patrons that could be considered as part of the countrywide historical canon, as well as particular military units or persons whose actions were limited to Warsaw. Those related to the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 received special attention. Another popular category of patrons were those related to the history of prewar Poland. This category obviously overlapped a lot

---

21 S. Meyer, "Dwie drogi do alei Stalina. Zmiany nazw ulic w Warszawie i Berlinie Wschodnim (1945-1950)", in W połowie drogi. Warszawa między Paryżem a Kijowem, ed. Jerzy Kochanowski, 106 (Warszawa: Trio 2006): 106.

22 J. Wendlandt, "Nazwy historyczne – ochrona wartości niematerialnych", in Śladami nazw miejskich Warszawy (Warszawa: Muzeum Historyczne m.st. Warszawy, 2012): 216.

23 S. Meyer, "Dwie drogi do alei Stalina. Zmiany nazw ulic w Warszawie i Berlinie Wschodnim (1945-1950)", in W połowie drogi. Warszawa między Paryżem a Kijowem, ed. Jerzy Kochanowski, 106 (Warszawa: Trio 2006): 142, 160.

24 If not quoted otherwise, information about street decommunization in Warsaw comes from the City Council's archive, additionally consulted with semi-professional internet Fandom project http://warszawa.wikia.com/wiki/Ulice.

25 Note that just five years before the war *Foksal* was renamed in honor of a politician who was killed on that street: Bronisław Pieracki.

with traditional street names given in that period, like in the case of Piłsudski square. Additionally some people who made special contributions to the city were honored. On the other hand, almost no streets were renamed in reference to persons unrelated to Warsaw[26] and very few were given neutral, non-symbolic names. Also the number of commemorated persons that were not involved in any armed conflict, that is intellectuals, artists and social workers, was – contrary to Kraków – very small. Regarding anti-communist opposition and victims of the regime, the new commemorations referred almost exclusively to the greatest actors of this struggle: John Paul II, prelate Stefan Wyszyński, Solidarity and Kazimierz Pużak (one of the most distinctive politicians sentenced by the communists). All in all, although lengthy, the decommunization process in Warsaw was consequently ornamenting the Polish capital with symbols of its recent glorious, yet harsh past, shadowed by continuous political violence and military conflicts.

The intention to commemorate the patriotic independence struggle didn't interfere with another interesting aspect: a wide tolerance towards pluralism. Many names whose existence would be unthinkable at the same time in Kraków, were left intact in Warsaw. The Avenue of the Popular Army (*Aleja Armii Ludowej*) prevailed, in a symbolic manner connected with the street of Independence (*Niepodległości*)[27], as well as with the street of Waryński – another figure excluded from the toponomy of Kraków. The Polish Spanish Civil War Veterans street (*Dąbrowszczaków*) was left out as were the Gagarin and the communist youth organization (*Związku Walki Młodych – ZWM*) street. What is more, in the process of decommunization one of the communist functionaries was given a patronage: the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the fifties Stanisław Skrzeszewski replaced Rosa Luxemburg. Another person who held the same function – Zygmunt Modzelewski – remained as a street patron due to loud protests of the residents against his removal (the case of *ZWM* was similar).

This diversified, pluralistic approach resulted in a wide range of streets, whose removal is demanded as a result of introducing new law in 2016. Around thirty names were indicated as inappropriate. A few of them have been recently removed in a way which is least likely to provoke protests: by dedicating them to different people of the same surname. Discussions about removing the rest of them still generates controversy, including Modzelewski, as well as Teodor Druacz and Józef Balcerzak – two members of the communist underground resistance, who were killed by the Germans[28]. Among collective patrons, the street of *Dąbrowszczacy* gains the biggest support – the association of sympathizers of this group actively advocates preservation of their patronage by collecting declarations of support and addressing petitions to the authorities.

Wrocław

In Wrocław, imposing new names after World War II differed a lot in comparison to the same process in Warsaw or Kraków. Although plaques with German street names were left by the occupants in all these cities, both present and former Polish capital could easily replace them with their prewar Polish names (unless the communist authorities intended to avoid this for ideological reasons). The situation of Wrocław was different: the city – always existing on the borderline of countries and cultures – for the previous centuries was under the dominant influence of Germany, belonging first to the Habsburg Monarchy, then Prussia, then Germany. Because of that, not only were all of the pre-war streets named in German, but also many of them were dedicated to people and facts important for German historiography and focused

---

26 Surgeon Ludwik Rydygier, related mostly to Kraków and Lviv could be indicated as such, but it should be noted that his name was chosen as a convenient option – he replaced a communist of the same surname, Juliusz Rydygier.

27 The term Independence (*Niepodległość*) is used in reference of restoring sovereign II Republic of Poland in 1918, while Liberation (*Wyzwolenie*) is used for bringing to an end German occupation in World War II. Expression "Victory" (*Zwycięstwo*) was also used in the latter context.

28 Mała dekomunizacja ulic zrobiona, ale ma być większa. A gdzie ulica Lecha Kaczyńskiego?, http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,22307786,mala-dekomunizacja-ulic-zrobiona-ale-ma-byc-wieksza-a-gdzie.html (accessed 2 September 2017).

on German achievements and triumphs. Such names constituted even bigger symbolic threat than names commemorating prewar Polish traditions, therefore the renaming process had to be way more intense and profound. Because of this, the renaming process in Wrocław was dispersed, spontaneous and prone to errors and confusion – like translation mistakes, duplicating names assigned to the same street or similar names given to different streets[29]. These problems were gradually handled with the passage of time, although for some it took many years to resolve[30].

The objective of these massive translations was not only to adjust urban toponomy to the conditions of a city now within Polish borders, but also to prove that Polish history and achievements were as equally glorious as their German neighbours. In order to show this, the removed patrons were replaced by new ones of a similar rank: German politicians and military commanders were replaced by Poles who held the same roles, similarly streets commemorating German armed forces were replaced by Polish units etc. (although it didn't prevent dedicating some of the main streets to the core symbols of the communist ideology, with Stalin becoming the central commemorated figure). Within this process, even German actors, scientists and artists were removed, leaving field for Poles of the same profession[31]. The toponomy of Wrocław was to be transformed into a clearly Polish as well as a communist set of symbols. While there was a certain level of tolerance towards names related to Catholicism, which after translating from German were preserved as traditional names, there was no place for symbols of the German past of the city. Obviously, in Wrocław the communists didn't need to worry about any toponomy with reference to the prewar Poland.

After 1989, decommunization of the streets occurred like in other cities. A few particular facts to mention here. First of all, not only several questionable names remained in the public sphere, but two of them have been added on the eve of the democratic transition: in May 1989, the city council eventually pushed forward concepts raised already in seventies, where in order to clarify urban toponomy two strongly ideological street names were to be replaced by different ones. In this manner, former Red Army (*Armii Czerwonej*) street was replaced by much more accepted Popular Army (*Armii Ludowej*), while one of the commanders of the Polish communist army, Zygmunt Berling, replaced May 1st Street[32]. These streets remained in the toponomy of Wrocław for over twenty years, until the next phase of decommunization process was initiated. In similar fashion, the street of the National Unity (*Jedności Narodowej*), dedicated to Stalin until the middle of fifties, was left intact.

Secondly, the process of decommunization was focused on the restoration of the traditional names, clearing up existing mess in toponomy with duplicated names, streets of similar names, or patrons who were impossible to identify. The new attitude consisted of three aspects: firstly, restoration and preservation of traditional names whenever possible (apart from situations when the meaning of the traditional name was questioned – it was not always possible to identify the patron of a particular street); secondly, attempting to collect names of a similar category within certain area (i.e. by naming a set of nearby streets after people of the same profession); thirdly, whenever it was required to find a new patron, it was common to refer to patriotic values, the dominant core of Polish history: the independence struggle, interwar period and World War II. It should be noted though, that given city's experiences from the first half of the twentieth century, such commemorations weren't really compatible with its local history.

Eventually, many replacements for the removed communist patrons were neutral names, which referred to other cities, countries or general terms, not associated with any ideology or historical period. This was the case in significantly larger scale that in Warsaw and Kraków. It seems that because of lack of deep symbolic capital that would be closely related to the Polish history, local authorities opted for using neutral, non-symbolic names. Also names from the communist period, related to the opposition towards the regime were scarcely used as replacements of the communist names (actually only in two occasions: Jan Palach, a Czech who set himself on fire in protest of the communist invasion replaced Czech communist Julius Fučík, while prelate Stefan Wyszyński took over the street of Józef Wieczorek). Similarly to Kraków,

---

29 K. Kędziora, Nazewnictwo ulic Wrocławia w latach 1945-1989 (Warszawa, IPN 2012): 15-16.

30 Ibid: 23-24.

31 Ibid: 26-32.

32 Ibid: 133.

Table 1: Comparison of the most common categories of patrons replacing communist names in urban toponomy.

		Warsaw		Kraków		Wrocław	
1	**Independence struggle & interwar period**	7	10%	15	10%	9	12%
2	**World War II**	21	30%	15	10%	11	14%
3	**anti-communist oposition**	6	9%	9	6%	2	3%
4	**local activists**	10	14%	47	33%	10	13%
5	**restored traditional names**	13	19%	15	10%	9	12%
6	**patrons unrelated to the city**	1	1%	15	10%	10	13%
7	**new patron related to the communism**	1	1%	0	0%	2	3%
8	**neutral, non-symbolic names**	7	10%	22	15%	17	22%
	aggregate	**66**	**94%**	**138**	**94%**	**70**	**92%**
	Core of contemporary Polish history (aggregate of categories 1-3)	34	49%	39	26%	22	29%
	Number of patrons to be removed according to the Institute of National Remembrance in 2016/2017	around 30		6		7	

a number of streets were dedicated to Polish artists (especially musicians) or intellectuals (researchers), but unlike Kraków, these patrons were not related to Wrocław, but to other cities and parts of Poland. It appeared that referring to the prewar history of the city, clearly separate from the history of Poland, was a problematic question, prone to raising conflicts and difficulties, therefore avoided[33].

Curiously then, the multicultural experiences of the city didn't result in a multitude of patrons related to local history. As a result of decommunization, Wrocław was filled with names related to the canon of contemporary Polish history, although during all this time Wrocław didn't belong to Poland, therefore wasn't engaged in these events and unlike Warsaw or Kraków - didn't aspire to liberation from an occupying, foreign power. Additionally, contrary to expectations, Wrocław didn't appear to be particularly tolerant towards communist heritage. The street renaming process turned out to be quite profound – after the new decommunization law was passed, only a very few streets were discussed in Wrocław. Seven have been selected for investigation (including the street of Gagarin), but eventually only four have been renamed: two implemented in 1989 – Berling and Armia Ludowa, the 9th of May (the end of World War II as it was celebrated in Soviet Block – although in Wrocław this date was interpreted as the day of liberation of the city) and Kujbyszewska – which turned out to be a reference to the city Kuybyshev, where NKVD school was located[34].

Conclusions

Summarizing the decommunization of toponomy in three distinctive Polish cities, certain differences when it comes to both the tolerance towards communist heritage and renaming strategies can be indicated. I summarized this analysis in Table 1.

In all three cases a similar percentage of renamed streets concerned the restoration of traditional names, that were in use before World War II. In case of Wrocław, obviously the restored names were trans-

---

33 Kamila Kędziora recalls a quarrel which took place during City Council session over the subject of dedicating a square to German mathematician Max Born, when accusations of nationalism and prejudice towards German-related names were used, Ibid: 142.

34 Koniec z ulicą Berlinga. Które nazwy ulic mogą być jeszcze zmienione?, Magdalena Kozioł 22 September 2016, http://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/1,35771,20727161,koniec-z-ulica-berlinga-ktore-nazwy-ulic-moga-byc-jeszcze-zmienione.html (accessed 23 August 2017).

lations of those of German origin. Apart from that, in Kraków the dominant strategy was to honor persons with significant contribution to the city. Warsaw authorities focused on commemorating the contemporary history of struggle for independence in the whole of the twentieth century – from World War I until the collapse of communism – especially all kind of military efforts, with special attention paid to the Warsaw Uprising. All these commemorations correlate with the core of Polish history which is present in the official school education, state holidays as well as public discussions. Such tendency coincided however with a persistence of many streets related to the communist military tradition, which resulted in a vast number of streets, whose further existence is now questioned due to the new law. In Wrocław, despite some anecdotal cases of dedicating a street to a communist patron even in 1989, the decommunization process of early nineties was quite profound, although there was no dominant tendency in associating streets with new patrons. Some of them similarly to Warsaw commemorated the military struggle for independence of Poland which actually had very little to do with the history of Wrocław. It appeared that in the early democratic period there was no readiness to commemorate what really composed the heritage of the city: people and facts related to German culture and history. Because of little symbolic resources which would be compatible with both tendency of seeking Polish patriotic references and those related to the local history, significantly more streets were given neutral, non-symbolic names or were dedicated to persons completely unrelated to Wrocław.

This brings us to a classic discussion about history and memory. In Wrocław, contrary to Warsaw, the history of World War II was incompatible with the memory of place, the number of available symbolical references to the patrons appropriate for commemoration was limited. In current scientific literature the topic of relation between memory and history is often discussed, with various authors either confronting these terms or defining them as complementary to each other[35]. From the analysis of the cases researched in this article it seems that under certain circumstances – when memory related to a particular place is incompatible with the dominant narrative – symbols of this memory may be suppressed and replaced with either symbols of dominance or, what is more interesting, symbolic void, where empty space is filled with non-symbolic, neutral elements, simply because it is necessary for practical reasons – on this occasion the requirement of finding a name for every existing street.

Additionally it turns out, that such suppression is not limited to authoritarian regimes only. On the contrary, it can very well occur in a democratic system. Walter Hatch noted while comparing narratives of World War II museums in China and Japan that "we can go too far, however, in asserting that democracy produces a rich diversity of approaches to remembering the past. Powerful groups in even the most pluralistic (and militaristic) society can stifle dissenting historiographies"[36]. Similarly Tomoko Hamada discussed various attitudes towards shaping official historical narrative in Japanese textbooks and fierce competition between them[37]. On the other hand, Hatch also made note of the fact that the justification of using nuclear bombs against Japan became a dogma of American collective memory, thus preventing attitudes that would revise it from spreading out. The post-communist democracies aren't free of such restrictions as well, with split of national and civic model of historical socialization and narratives as a typical illustration of this problem[38]. Various manifestations of symbolism in public sphere, such as urban toponomy, are subjected to certain restrictions, which may suppress autonomy of the local identity and memory in relation to the dominant, hegemonic discourse.

---

35 The former is the classic distinction made by Jacques Le Goff, the latter – for instance by Patrick H. Hutton. B. Szacka, Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit (Warsaw: Scholar 2006): 19-20.

36 W. Hatch, "Bloody Memories - Affect and Effect of World War II Museums in China and Japan", Peace & Change, Vol. 39, No. 3, July 2014: 391

37 T. Hamada, "Contested Memories Of The Imperial Sun - History Textbook Controversy In Japan", American Asia Review, Vol. XX, No. 4, Winter 2002: 34-37.

38 Radoslaw Poczykowski, "Building The Past, Forgetting The Future - Is Poland A Historical Knowledge Based Society", LIMES: Cultural Regionalistics, 2008, Vol. 1, No. 1.: 29.