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Building a New City through a New Discourse: Street Naming Revolutions in Budapest

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Introduction

Street names establish a particular discursive universe for those strolling through the city, locating themselves simultaneously in urban space and in local discourses. This chapter challenges existing research on urban toponymy, by a discourse-theoretical reading that explores the discursive and interconnected character of street names. Viewing street naming regimes as constituting a “discursive universe” draws attention to the fluid and contradictory qualities of street names as a “discursive set.” The chapter builds upon the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) to examine street names as discursive nodal points, or “guards,” and street renaming as an act of “changing the guards.” Changing this set of nodal points is essentially a political operation. Here “political” is understood in terms of relationality and (dis)association, the contingency of the decision on an undecidable terrain (c.f. Norval 2005), generating a common basis and/or a political frontier through the naming process, and an ontological connection or ethical investment in the name (Laclau 2005).

Beyond theory, the chapter discusses the changing city-text in Budapest from the nineteenth century to the present. This implies looking at the renaming of streets as transforming *sets of discursive elements*, where the identity of the names is entangled with the rest of the set, and marked by the past. In some street naming cultures, change in the street names takes place in an evolutionary manner through the vicissitudes of daily usage. In others, street naming is embedded in traditions of revolution, producing what we might call “street naming revolutions.” In Budapest, we witness a symbolic “changing of the guard,” when the new power-holders decide what aspects of the past deserve to be articulated in the new discursive universe of the city’s streetscape. This is enhanced by a feature of the city: a municipality composed of districts, where the same set of names repeat as nodal points of the street naming discourse. This occurred most recently in the 2010s, when, after two electoral periods in opposition, the right-wing parties had a landslide election victory with a two-thirds parliamentary majority, which offered possibilities for both law-making and changing street names.

Behind the discursive approach adopted here is an attempt to read the *city-text*—that is, examine the discursive act of street naming as constituting the landscape as a text. City-texts interweave meaning into the urban landscape and also offer a point of

identification and contestation. As Azaryahu (2009, 66) argues, “the city-text does not provide its readers with a chronological narrative, but rather with an authorized index of putative narrative, notwithstanding the lack of historical villains.” Commemorative street naming seeks to inscribe a particular vision of the past into the streetscape, thereby transforming “history into local geography” (Azaryahu 2009, 67). Naming arrests the potentially continuous interpretation of the past by offering a political reading of it that aims to establish this interpretive framing as a dominant and durable one.

Public memory-work is a political operation, a value-laden task that seeks to establish a hegemonic viewpoint. In other words, although street names are inherently part of cultural memory (Ferguson 1988; Alderman 2002), dealing with commemorative street names involves actually engaging in a street politics of the present, not just with the past (e.g., Azaryahu and Foote 2007). As Alderman (2002) maintains, street names can be seen as “arenas” for the politics of memory. As the metaphor “arena” entails battle, it follows Gillis’s (1994) observation that physical symbols of power offer an opportunity to identify oneself as being against the status quo: openness to contestation and rearticulation is the democratic asset of the city-text (c.f. von Henneberg 2004).

Street names speak to the past as a means of generating a vision for the future, captured in the moment when the mundane is transformed into something more historical and ideological. The understanding of time in this context can be cairiological rather than chronological: street names talk about the “now,” the simultaneous presence of the past, present, and future, in a Benjaminian way (c.f. Lindroos 1998), attempting in other words, to regulate their multi-layeredness for envisioning a future.

The poststructuralist discourse-theoretical perspective indicates how street names are relational and acquire their meanings through associations with neighboring elements and the urban milieu more generally. Street names may resonate with us and our beliefs, grow on us, or irritate us. The meanings of new names, introduced at a given moment, are shaped by the entire set of street names. The discarded names also gain their meaning from the other names and substitutes. Street names are important pointers in the cityscape but they also are a discursive set. Often we grow to know them without realizing we are subjected to a particular discourse, whether we endorse or reject it. As Levinson contends:

organizers of the new regime must decide which, if any, of the heroes of the old regime deserve to continue occupying public space. And the new regime will always be concerned if these heroes might serve as potential symbols of resistance for adherents among the population who must, at least from the perspective of the newcomers, ultimately acquiesce to the new order. (1998, 10–1)

Levinson shows how these commemorative figures have potential to remain accessible as political symbols of the past or the opposition. Officials decide what is changed, where, and why. Reading street names, we are indeed reading the political (K. Palonen 1993; also, see K. Palonen, this volume). Naming involves political choices in the public domain. However, the institutional process or struggles are not the only political aspects of street naming. As Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu (2010, 466) point out, “we must broaden our analysis by considering how the ‘political’ is related to other relatively unexplored questions in place-name studies.” In this chapter, I am concerned with how the political is related to the generation of discursive sets, nodal points, and frontiers, marking urban space with new decisions in the moments of (re)naming as well as all the

paradoxes which encompass the process of fixing meaning into an uneven discursive space. We will see below how, in the moment of renaming, not all the names will be changed and the new names do not necessarily constitute a harmonious set. They can be read differently and their meanings may change over time. Their existence or disappearance from the map enables public discussion regarding their values, which often draws attention to the contested politics of urban space.

Street names can be regarded as indicators of political changes or tools for sedimenting particular meanings and ideologies—or contesting them. Street names indicate a larger *discursive political change*, but also mark continuity and unevenness in the face of that change. The exclusion or inclusion of new commemorative elements to the list of street names may have crucial effects on the way in which meanings are made and sedimented more generally. Thus, the act of rewriting offers potential for a wider change and *discursive production of meaning*, even as the name changes signal a material transformation in the daily lives and landscapes of people (Alderman 2002).

The Making of a Discursive Universe and the Naming of the Guards

This study explores particular moments of street naming in the political history of Budapest. In particular, I consider street naming not only as indicative of the ideological transformations in that period (Azaryahu 1992, 1996) but also as generating a discursive universe. It is important to talk about discourse in the context of a universe. Past studies of street naming frequently treat revolutionary change in naming regimes as hard and fast breaks and transitions in power and discourse, and, of course, in a general way this is correct; however, as Yeoh (1996, 304) reminds us, revolutionary change in nation-building is “more akin to an uneven, negotiated process of constant mediations rather than a static consensual once-and-for-all translation of a monolithic ideology into material form.” Approaching the urban streetscape as a discursive universe does not discount the revolutionary quality of writing the city-text through renaming, but it does recognize that this renaming happens within broad, and ever expanding sets of multiple, sometimes contradictory, and sometimes allied, discursive meanings.

Alderman (2002) draws upon discourse analysis to study the production of meaning in the context of commemorative street naming. Specifically, he explores the engagement with particular street naming struggle and analyzes public dialogues associated with renaming. The approach I take here is slightly different although it shares the same premise of the relevance of discourses. For Laclau (1996), discourse is not reducible to public speech or writing. It is an articulated set of elements on a discursive field that is conflictual, fluid, and heterogeneous, and where discourses emerge to offer structure. The production of meaning takes place relationally through connections in space. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) see hegemony as the fixing of meaning on an undecidable, uneven terrain. In this process, particular understandings, relations, and contrasts are made commonplace. Street naming is precisely such an operation.

From this poststructuralist perspective, identities do not pre-exist the moment of articulation: the way in which we tie the name to a field of references leads to the identity of the name. Laclau (2005, 2014) has particularly explored the rhetorical dimension that he considers ontological: naming constitutes the named as an object. Names can work as “empty signifiers” that provide a reference point for many ideas and groups so that they

become overburdened and emptied out of particular meanings at the same time. This takes our attention to the process of naming, the contextual references of the name, and what identity or range of references is generated by (re)naming.

Street naming emerges as a hegemonic practice: an attempt to establish particular relations and orders of meaning. Hegemonic operations seek to provide fixation of a discursive field that is always in flux. For example, a naming process repoliticizes a seemingly smooth space, and reorganizes it, introduces new relations and meanings. Those naming streets also seek to establish closure and permanence in the names—perhaps to articulate the people or the nation. When there are numerous names to be introduced into a streetscape, we can try to trace the specificity of the particular discourses introduced into the city-text. The multiplicity of names also shows an attempt to regulate the whole terrain: to establish a new hegemony.

Following discourse-theoretical thinking, street names constitute a discursive set, and to be a set, there is always something outside it that for its part defines the set. Each street name constitutes one or multiple elements—as they may be carrying different and potentially contested meanings to the set of meanings or names attributed to the streets. Naming processes, and “the renaming of the guard” in particular, make visible the “in” and “out” of the set, calling forth the political frontiers dividing “us” and “them.” The set is also internally structured through nodal points that play the role of providing cognitive-historical references, or pointers. The psychoanalytical theorist Jacques Lacan considered that these *points de capiton* had a privileged role in the fixing of meaning (e.g., Stavrakakis 1999, 263-5). A set of new “guards” on the street names would offer pointers that would be subsumed to the everyday. Particular nodal points of the city-text are used in the discursive play of street naming politics. Some streets that have particularly celebratory, politicized, or commemorative names, which give a specific flavor to the city-text of the municipality or neighborhood. Key street names or themes introduced in the city-text also highlight a given historical era of the past as well as the ideological orientation of those making decisions in the present.

Reflecting on urban space, we could consider how “street names designate locations and pronounce certain thoroughfares as distinct urban units” (Azaryahu 2009, 53), and how those major streets or boulevards, central squares, metro stations, or other nodes of transport that hold a privileged position in the city-text. As such, a city’s street names can indeed work as a set of elements, or as interconnected and overlapping sets. Typically, in the layered linguistic landscape of a city these would be sets according to the naming moment—often coinciding with the moment of (re)constructing an area. We could also explore which wider and potentially contradictory or conflictual discursive elements make up the discourse(s) in the city-text at a given time (e.g., Kearns and Berg 2002). When they are contested between political groups, we can view the act of street naming as producing a “political frontier” by through processes of spatial and temporal Othering. Over time, multiple discourses often come to inhabit a city-text, and the agonistic politics (Mouffe 2000) of naming is rendered visible through the streetscape itself.

Street Naming Revolutions as a Tradition in Hungary

In postcommunist countries such as Hungary, commemoration and public symbols have proved an important means of politicking, making ideological distinctions and constructing new identities, thereby repositioning Hungary after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Foote, Tóth, and Árvay 2000; Bodnar 2009). Attempts to build a new community by de/re canonization differ from one period to another. The contestation itself can be seen as constituting community and space (Massey 2005). These communities can also be multiple. Naming can be a conflictual process at different levels of governance (Palonen 2008). In the postcommunist era, as during other crucial historical moments, the transition from the old to the new was made tangible in the changing of street names: guards of the past and newly celebrated heroes. In Hungary, the “us” and “them” were symbolized in a deeply political process. Indeed, generating two opposing political camps, this oppositional framing of the political terrain became the dominant trend in Hungarian politics. Lately, however, the situation has fragmented somewhat but the governing political forces aim to produce a strong sense of national unity.

Foote, Tóth, and Árvay (2000, 329) maintain that Hungary was a forerunner in the matters of dealing with the past: “The causes and consequences of World War II and the Holocaust have been discussed for decades, but debate has hardly begun over the war’s legacy of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. The Hungarian landscape records the first steps in coming to terms with the postwar period.” Nevertheless, by the turn of the twenty-first century, the past was again in its place—at least in the street names. More recently, it has become clear that dealing with the past as a political operation was only beginning. A new phase could be added to the classification of eras of street naming. And it brought with it both new and recycled discourses.

Layering political discourses upon the Hungarian landscape is done by powerful social actors and groups with relational ties to past and future eras. I propose here that we try to discern the discourses over the whole history of street naming in Budapest, where renaming is more a reoccurring trend than a truly extraordinary event. The renaming process involves both aporias and nuances, since discursive operations always take place on an uneven terrain and discourses have incompatible elements.

Researchers are able to transform a seemingly smooth, yet layered, city-text into periodized classifications. Bodnár (2009), for instance, explores the history of street naming in Budapest. Similarly, Ráday (1998, 2003, 2013) has compiled a comprehensive encyclopedia of Budapest’s street names, which I draw upon in the current chapter. Others have considered postcommunist transformations thematically (Palonen 2008). In this chapter, I take a periodized perspective through the moments of major changes: from nineteenth-century Budapest under the Habsburg empire and during the formation of the Hungarian Kingdom as an autonomous area; the Interwar period that included the brief Soviet Republic and authoritarian era as well as the postwar state socialist period with its changes particularly around Stalin’s death, the 1956 revolution, and its aftermath; and the postcommunist period that witnessed changes in both the early-1990s and 2010s. The changes are visible in the histories of major streets and squares (Table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

In countries like Hungary, where the city-text transforms in a major way, street naming revolutions are, paradoxically, part of an established tradition (Palonen 2011). One thing that becomes tangible in the changing street names is the manifestation of a new, particular era. Given the way in which, in Hungary, names have often changed in the past, always in accordance with political trends, street name politics offers prospective salvation to those who do not identify with recent changes. They may think that one day these street names will change again. People do not simply identify with the street names and adopt them mundanely: we can see that the names offer a point of contestation from which to build an oppositional identity.

The Hungarian Nineteenth-Century Metropolis

The early street names and statues in Budapest were locative rather than commemorative. They were also more spontaneously named. Later, they gained political, celebrative, commemorative, and institutional value from the perspective of the power-holders. Budapest was a multicultural city with a German-speaking administration, and the urban toponyms on official maps showed German names irrespective of the usage. The locals in Budapest, however, used a number of different languages in their daily activities (Bodnár 2009).

Metropolitan growth was accompanied by nation-building, culminating in the failed revolution of 1848/49. In the 1840s, some 37 names were translated from German into Hungarian and 20 additional streets renamed. Still, the physical street signs posted in German under Maria Theresa and Joseph II were not transformed overnight into Hungarian ones. The city constructed the Chain Bridge, the first permanent bridge between Buda and Pest in 1849, its corresponding tunnel under the Castle Hill, and an expanded railway network, turning Budapest into one of the most important points in Europe's trade network. It was also the fastest-growing city on the continent in the late-nineteenth century, with the total population doubling between 1869 and 1896 (Gerő and Poór, 1997; Bácskai, Gyáni, and Kubinyi 2000). This rapid transformation and modernization swept away much of the old Pest-Buda. Budapest became the third centrally-planned European capital, after Vienna and Paris (Nagy 1998), and the street naming authorities had not only to pay attention to translation but also needed to name a significant number of new streets. After the Compromise of 1867, Budapest became the official capital of the Hungarian Kingdom.

The independence fight (1848–49) brought with it revolutionary street names; already in 1846, officials in Pest named the first square after Szechenyi, a moderate Hungarian revolutionary leader and the initiator of the Chain Bridge. During the revolution of 1848, streets in the Castle Hill gained names after St. Stephen and two of the revolutionary leaders (Batthyány and Kossuth), and Pest got its Free Press Street (*Szabadsajtó utca*), Freedom Square (*Szabadság tér*), and 15th March Square (*Március 15. tér*) was named in honor of the Hungarian revolution. Additionally, the terms “Fraternity,” “Justice,” “National,” and “Unity” were included in the city-text, although the exact location of these streets remains unclear (Bodnár 2009).

When the revolution was crushed, pre-revolutionary names were restored and two more squares were named after the Habsburg rulers Franz Joseph and Elisabeth (“Sisi”) in 1858. Furthermore, city districts gained Habsburg names such as Leopold, Theresa,

Joseph, and Franz, later also Elisabeth. When the dual monarchy was restored in the Compromise of 1867, the Hungarian reformer Ferenc Deák was unofficially commemorated in the streetscape, and the name was officialized ten years later posthumously (Ráday 1998).

Street names were introduced in Budapest as sets (Habsburg, anti-Habsburg/revolutionary) to generate a basis for the new discursive universe and the establishment of the “guards.” Even today these names are present in the map of Budapest, as the late-nineteenth century was the set that was restored in the 1990s. They are the discursive and structuring nodal points of the city-text in Budapest, “floating signifiers” being replaced and restored time and again.

Interwar: From the Soviet Republic to “Berlinization”

The next political conflict that contributed to transforming street names took place in the aftermath of the First World War. During the short-lived Hungarian People’s Republic led by Béla Kun in 1919, old statues were wrapped and gypsum statues erected but street names were easier to change to a socialist vocabulary: Queen Elizabeth was replaced with Ilona Zrínyi (1643–1703), the mother of Ferenc Rákóczy II, an anti-Habsburg national hero, already commemorated in the 16th district’s street names in the 1910s. Commemorative street names celebrated local and national history (e.g., the Hungarian Jacobins), while the statues and memorials embraced internationalism (Palonen 2015).

One of the key traumas of the interwar period was the reduction of Hungarian territory by two thirds in the Trianon treaty of Versailles in 1921. There was another influx of immigrants to Budapest from the lost territories: now predominantly peasantry and unskilled workers to the overcrowded working-class areas or the suburbs. Political populism was emerging as a strong source of hope. During the interwar period, irredentist names began to appear on the streets of Budapest (Bodnár 2009). Irredentism here refers to the calls for returning the lost lands, as this was the ethos behind commemorative naming. This era of street naming was marked by former right-wing politicians like István Tisza—named once in 1920 and again in 1999 on different streets. The power-holding admiral Miklós Horthy also became a veritable nodal point in the interwar city-text, getting 23 mentions on the street map in 1929.

Commemorative street naming was *geopolitical*: like much of Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary was tied to the German economy, and the cultural links to the German-speaking world were strong. Characteristically, the square in front of Nyugati (Western) Railway station had been called *Berlini tér* since 1913, until it was renamed *Marx tér* in 1945 (a name which it retained until 1992). During the interwar period, the political direction was south-west: *Mussolini tér* was first proposed in 1928; the renaming took place only after Mussolini’s speech on November 6, 1936, in Milano, where he expressed a need to solve Hungary’s territorial claims. Afterwards, two more squares and two streets were named after Mussolini (Ráday 2003). Finally, the squares of Andrásy witnessed changes: *Oktagon* was named after Mussolini (1936), and *Körönd* (Circus, today *Kodály körönd*), the next central square on the same Boulevard towards the Heroes’ Square, became *Hitler tér* (1938). In contrast to the plethora of places named after Horthy, only one street throughout Budapest was named after Adolf Hitler. Interwar naming sought to produce a new hegemonic order in the discursive universe through the

establishment of discursive nodal points.

Socialism

During the social period, both street names and other memorials witnessed a series of transformations. Póto (2001) divides the socialist period into three eras: the destruction of the irredentist memorials, the removal of the aristocracy and the Habsburgs, and socialist commemoration. After the Second World War, the irredentist statues and fascist, royalist, and aristocratic street names were replaced by new anti-fascist and later socialist ones. It started with the geographical-ideological nodal points in the city-text. The central squares commemorating the Habsburgs were renamed after the victors of World War II—adding the same vocabulary as elsewhere in Eastern Europe and even beyond. Budapest got its first Stalin square as early as 1946 when, in the heart of Budapest, *Erzsébet tér* (after the Habsburg Queen Elizabeth, “Sisi”) was renamed *Sztálin tér*, while *Frankfurter Allee* in East Berlin was renamed *Stalinallee* in 1949 (Azaryahu 1986). Roosevelt’s square also took over Franz Joseph in 1946, where the U.S. president was commemorated until recently. Churchill, the British war leader, lost his post as the Prime Minister during the naming process, and was never commemorated in Budapest (Nyysönen 1992).

In the political center of Budapest, *Grof. Tisza István utca* (Count István Tisza Street, 1925) became *József Attila utca* in 1945. Heroes of the 1848 revolution were considered progressive and took key positions in the socialist Hungarian canon, which was reflected in the street names. The poet Miklos Rádnoti was a suitable example as a victim of the fascists, as was Maxim Gorky. Martyrs of the Second World War, left-wing, anti-fascist resistance also became prominent. *Szabó Ervin tér* was named in 1948 after the nineteenth-century Hungarian socialist/social democrat intellectual. In most cases, these anti-fascists stayed on the map after 1949 when the Soviet-style administration was established. For example, Raoul Wallenberg’s street in the former Swedish quarter remains, while Wallenberg himself perished in Soviet Russia.

After the establishment of the Soviet-style system in 1949, the russification of names intensified (for a similar discussion in the context of East Berlin, see Azaryahu 1986). The aristocratic *Eszterházy utca* was renamed *Puskin utca* in 1949, and *Király utca* (King St.) gained a name after another Russian writer, Mayakovski, in 1950. Of this Russian culture, Pushkin still remains. Lenin replaced the female Habsburgs Theresa and Elizabeth on the *Nagykörút* (Great Circular Boulevard), but the male rulers *Ferenc* and *József* were allowed to remain. The Soviet military leader Molotov was commemorated on one street. The new “guards” were adapted well, as by the 1980s, 75 per cent of Hungarians were able to identify by name one or more members of the Hungarian resistance in a survey (Csepeli 1997).

The new elements came to define each other. Russian literature and social democrats were politicized. The postwar names were taken as one set, and this also contributed to the removals. As discussed below, between 1945–1989, the myriad renamings resulted in a city-text composed of a heterogeneous set. Following Stalin’s death in 1953, *Sztálin tér* was renamed *Engels tér*. The failed Hungarian revolution of 1956, led by Imre Nagy, demanded more national sovereignty and more Western socialism. The protests in front of the Parliament, and reversing the statue of Stalin, were crucial nodal points for the discourse of independence for the Hungarian state and

communism. *Andrássy* was again renamed twice during and after. Although the revolution was brutally crushed with Soviet tanks, the military leader Molotov's name was removed, and the original name *Vigadó* was returned in 1957.

The "counter-revolution's martyrs" who supported the status quo were subsequently elevated in the city-text. In 1968, Ferenc Münnich, the post-1956 era's first Minister of the Interior was also posthumously commemorated both in statues and street names as a symbol of the post-1956 era. He became a nodal point among the "guard": the revolutionaries in 1989 reversed his statue and in 1990 renamed his street. Some reconciliation can be seen in the commemoration of other left-wingers in the street names. The communist László Rajk, rehabilitated and reburied in 1956 during the failed revolution, was again rehabilitated and commemorated on the streets in 1969 by the Kadarist regime. Both the Marxist philosopher György (Georg) Lukács (1979), who took part in the 1956 revolution but remained communist, and perhaps surprisingly interwar "populist" writer László Németh (1978), were posthumously commemorated in the streets of Budapest during the late-1970s.

Eventually, socialist internationalism replaced Hungarian-Soviet friendship: *Hanoi park* (1968) was named during the Vietnam War, where, Hungarian troops also took part (Hajdú 2005; Lóderer 2008), although few know about it. Budapest got its *Allende park* in Kelenföld (1973) and *Nehru part* in 1987, during the visit of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to "validate the domestic credibility of the guiding political ideology" (Bodnár 2009, 145). The Goulash communism of János Kádár focused on the economy rather than nationalism.

In the 1980s, the discursive universe of street names in Budapest started to move in a different direction. With the return of one of the nodal points, the Habsburg Queen Elisabeth, Hungarians' favorite "Sisi," appeared again in Budapest's city-text in 1986. Her statue was also returned to the city in the 1980s, similarly to the rehabilitation of the "national" monarchy occurred in Berlin when Frederick the Great was commemorated in 1983 (Nyssönen 1992). Naming Elisabeth in the streets during the mid-1980s was a sign of a transition that had already begun before 1989. The guard on the street names was changing slowly through adding and removing some nodal points from the discursive universe. Despite the popular events and reversal of statues, there was no violent overthrow, sudden revolt or revolution but a negotiated transformation of the regime. The revolutionary character and the changing hegemony was nevertheless established by changing street names.

Postcommunist Street Naming in Budapest

The Hungarian tradition of street naming is intensive: bringing in a new "set" of discursive elements at a given time. The transition to democracy from a one-party system started in roundtable talks where the power-holding state socialist party met the opposition. This led to the articulation of the new system with a constitutional court, electoral laws, parliamentary elections, etc. The local term for the revolution is "system change" (*rendszerváltás*).

Since discourse refers not to textuality alone but also to practices, there were also discursive differences between the political forces in the ways in which the guards have been treated. The streets were changing in Budapest already before the parliamentary and

local elections in 1990. On January 23, 1990, the street in the heart of Budapest named after Ferenc Münnich, was renamed *Nándor utca* (Palatine St.). It was important to make the change visible. Still, it was not a homogeneous and smooth process. The Hungarian government and the Municipal Council of Budapest represented different political forces, and their actions generated further dispute.

In April 1990, the City Soviet (the municipality still in the Soviet-style institution) called for the citizens to be patient with the statues, which it regarded as “innocent.” It decided to change 38 street names in Budapest and urged those districts that were willing to change names to make their decisions about street renamings by the deadline of June 30, 1990. The subsequent two years witnessed a constant modification of the street names and ten moments of putsch, when the city council decided to change a great number of names at once. These did not remove all commemorative street names introduced during the years of state socialism. Many of the removed names were contested: defining the communist canon was not straightforward. “Ultra-left” as well as broadly-speaking leftist or anti-fascist names were decanonized and the changes were largely completed by 1993.

Hungarians were also divided over the preferred course of action towards the city-text (Foote, Tóth, and Árvay 2000). In 1988–89, three points of view emerged (Pótó 2003). The *radical position* of the minority consisted of socio-political critique. The “*preservationist*” or “*phlegmatic*” position, expressed in the surveys as the majority position, claimed that a change of statues would be too expensive and too complicated. The *museum position* was adopted by those who wanted to remove the statues but place them in a statue park. In short, there were (a) those who wanted to get rid of all the statues, (b) those who did not want to bother dealing with them, and finally (c) those who wanted to preserve statues in a museum of sorts (Boros 1998). Opinions on street names followed a similar pattern: removing all the communist-era street names; supporting minimal, if any, removals; or saving some of them by way of a layer of memory in the city-text.

The new power-holders could not simply remove unwanted names, they also needed an immediate substitute for them. The new names were marked by victimhood, commemorating the 1956 uprising, and the Holocaust—even though the underlying issues were not universally neutral. The late-nineteenth century was appropriated as the golden era (e.g., Pribersky 2003) as a way to avoid dealing with the present, since this was seen as the most neutral period in the Hungarian past with which to return, yet, at the same time, one both raising national feelings and a return to Europe (Palonen 2008).

The compromise, amnesia, and unwillingness to build a particular new era were visible in the return of the Habsburgs to the main boulevards of the city. After the pragmatically-chosen golden era of the late-nineteenth century, the Hungarian right turned to the celebration of the interwar period. Commemorating Admiral Horthy or Trianon were perhaps demands beyond the mainstream on the right. The postcommunist revolution was a negotiated one in Hungary, and the renaming of streets articulated a return to the nineteenth century as a commemorable past, even though there had been calls for returning to the era that had ended when World War II had begun.

The first postcommunist government and city council were strongly involved with renaming. This renaming effort was led by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the umbrella party of the national opposition forces. They were eager to change the street names. During the mid-1990s and 2000s, the left-liberal governments and Budapest

Municipal Council did not carry out many political renamings. The next elections in 1994 were won by the Socialists, who joined government with the liberal Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz). In 1998, the elections were won by the national right, Fidesz, focused on architecture and urban space (Palonen 2014). In 2002, Fidesz narrowly lost to the Socialists who again formed government with SzDSz. Politics was marked by polarization and the government changed at each elections, from one side of the political spectrum to the other—until 2006, when the Socialists won but riots broke out when the PM admitted to lying. Under the new right-wing government, renamings began again in 2010.

A New Revolution Against Communism

In 2010, the population was dissatisfied with the previous Socialist-led governments and the right-wing government won in a landslide. The party leader of Fidesz, Viktor Orbán, a young rebel politician of the 1989/90 generation and later a fan of Berlusconi, called for a “revolution at the polls.” It was enacted in the Hungarian fashion when in power: the symbolic “guard” on the streets was changed. On November 19, 2012, parliament passed law CLXVII, which decreed that the names referring to the “20th century dictatorships” must be changed. Indeed, not all street names related to the Workers’ Movement and not all the personalities who were celebrated during the period of 1948–1989 had been removed in the early-1990s. The Academy of Science introduced a list of names to be removed. Heroes such as Endre Ságvári and Anna Koltói, who had become part of the socialist canon of street names, were now to be replaced.

Nevertheless, well-established names may continue to persist through the inertia of habit (Light and Young 2014): in the district of Óbuda, where a citizen consultation was conducted, the locals did not want to remove the former names. Among those to be removed were the Square of the Republic, *Köztársaság tér*, which was renamed after the Polish pope John Paul II. Religion replaced republicanism, it seemed, but in fact “republic” was tied to communist discourse—particularly as the headquarters of the Communist Party was there. This was one of the key locations of the bloody 1956 revolution. Additionally, Hungary’s official name was shortened by removing “Republic.”

One of the most visible renamings was that of *Moszkva tér*, a major transport hub in Budapest (Hungarian exonym for Moscow). The name of the square and its metro station bore witness to the era of its naming in 1951 and when the Soviet-style metro lines were built in Budapest in the 1960s. Finally, by 2016, the square was refurbished, so the surroundings would also evoke a sense of a new era rather than post-war heritage. It was renamed in 2011, by “returning the guard”: the pre-WWI politician Kálmán Széll’s name was restored to the square. Széll, a prime minister and minister of finance, became the hero of the Orbán government to the extent that it named the national austerity package after him. The new “guard” in the city-text would be absorbed as a nodal point into the public discourse by becoming a household name. The central transport junction would simultaneously promote the austerity package.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

The government has adopted an anti-liberal populist stance. Populism featured in different forms in the list of new street names (Table 2). On the Budapest map, other types of names were also visible. In the Lower Banks of Buda and Pest were personalities active in saving Budapest Jews during the Second World War and the Nazi occupation, including Carl Lutz, Jane Haining, and Raoul Wallenberg, among others. Another example is that of Count János Eszterházy, a Slovak Hungarian-Polish interwar politician who voted against expelling the Jews and remains controversial figure in Slovakia. Lacking in the new street names were Jews themselves. This amnesia could be seen in the memorials: the state-funded German Occupation Memorial gained a counter-memorial by the active citizens focusing on the victims of the Holocaust in 2014. First on the building site and then in making the now permanently-maintained counter-memorial, protesters asserted that the Hungarian Holocaust was not just a consequence of foreign occupation but also a tragedy with which Hungarians themselves were on both sides.

Politicians and religious activists were also commemorated: the first interwar PM József Antall Sr. (an interwar small-holder politician, minister in 1945–46, and father of József Antall, the first post-communist prime minister), and Margit Slachta (the first woman to be elected in the Hungarian diet in 1920 and a strong Protestant activist). The religious-rebellious discourse was strong overall with different nodal points or “guards,” including pope John Paul II—a Polish Roman Catholic priest and activist in the Solidarity movement, and the Protestant, Wittenberg-educated reformer and translator of the Hungarian bible, Gáspár Károli.

Other key sites were Hungarianized: the American president Roosevelt had to go in 2011 to be replaced by István Széchenyi, “the Greatest of Hungarian,” a moderate nineteenth-century reformer and a hero of the power-holding Fidesz, whose heritage is visible in the Chain Bridge, which starts from the square and heads to the tunnel passing through Buda Castle Hill. His life had been made tangible in 2002, in a state-sponsored costume drama.

As always, Fidesz communicated a new era through symbolic politics. They had promised a “revolution at the polls” in 2010. When in office in 1998–2002, Orbán’s government focused on memorials and architecture (Palonen 2014). Orbán gained another victory in the elections of 2014. Fidesz, as populist party did not have a clear ideology or vision for the future, but reacted to political strife by generating a counter-discourse. Still, heterogeneous elements and interwar nostalgia have been brought to the fore with the surroundings of the parliament being restored to their pre-1945 condition, including a reproduction of a large statue of Tisza. Orbán has claimed to introduce an “illiberal democracy,” and the government has among other things introduced controversial media laws and restricted activities of foreign-sponsored foundations. Immigrants have emerged as the new “Other.”

Removing the past was a way to name an enemy, generate the political frontier, and constitute a political “us” of the nation. Nationalism in Hungary has been transforming into a set of subcultures (Feischmidt 2014), and this seems to fit the logic of the city-text, too. Thus far, the Fidesz government has not offered a ready set to implement in every district and town. It has mainly recognized the Other through the set to be removed, those beyond the limit of the government’s discourse.

Conclusion

There are multiple overlapping discourses that inhabit the city-text. Rose-Redwood (2016, 372) has recently asked: “what *effects* do our discourses and practices have in constituting the worlds in which we live, and how might we reconstitute them to foster a more equitable co-existence?” Laclau’s point about the way in which discourses include disparate elements is concretized in the naming of streets. Treating street names as a set enables us—surprisingly perhaps—to consider them as a fluid, incomplete, transforming, and contradictory set. The “political” in street naming may be about making visible what is past and what is now, or to offer points of contestation, as something ultimately democratic (Mouffe 2000).

In Budapest, there are both ideological and spatial nodal points: for example, the naming of the main squares after the WWII victors or religious leaders, the main Boulevard Andrásy, sections of the Ring Road, and ultimately the stations and squares became significant focal points of renaming. The renaming of the *Moszkva tér* metro station, and its long-planned refurbishment, demonstrates how certain names and places hold a special value for both citizens and politicians. On the other hand, the names of the banks of Danube, which are seldom used for postal addresses but can be made visible on the map, offer another angle to the discursive universe of Budapest’s street names.

Although the power-holders of a city may have planned to establish a hegemonic reading of the past through the naming of streets, the interpretive act of *reading* the city-text need not abide by the officially-sanctioned narrative of the past. In pluralist societies, introducing many different claims and heritages in the streets may very well enable the new set to better resonate with a larger population. Following Laclau (2005), we might say that, in the moment of naming, the inherent multiplicity of the “people” becomes one—if only temporarily.

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TABLES

Table 1: Different eras brought changes to main streets and squares

The locative period	Salz Platz, 1804; Salzamts Platz, 1809; Auslade Platz, 1812; Zimmerer Platz, 1812; Oberer Donau Zeile, 1840s; Kettenbrücke Platz, 1850	Maurer Gasse, 1840s;
Habsburg period	Franz Josefs Platz, 1858	
Autonomy	Ferencs József tér, 1867	Sugár út (Radial Strasse), 1882
Hungarianisation		Andrássy út 1886
Soviet Republic	Október 29. tér (1918-19)	
Interwar period	Ferencs József tér, 1919	
Postwar	Roosevelt tér, 1946	Sztalin út, 1950
Revolution of 1956		Magyar ifjúság útja (Road of the Hungarian Youth), Oct 1956
Kádár era		Népköztársaság útja (Road of the Republic, 1957
Postcommunism		Andrássy út 1990
Orbán period	Széchenyi István tér, 2011	

Table 2:

Commemorated	Characterization (type of populism)
Bauer, Sándor	anti-communist martyr, sim. Jan Palach (anti-communism)
Bibó, István	dissident political theorist (anti-communism)
Dalnoki, Jenő	Hungarian footballer from the 1950s (popular culture)
Domján, Edit	actress (popular culture)
Görgey, Artúr	a hero of the 1849 revolution (revolutionary)
Illyés, Gyula	as interwar populist writer (literary/political populism)
Kocsis, Sándor	Hungarian football's "Golden Team" of the 1950s
Mansfeld, Peter	hero of 1956 revolution (anti-communism)
Nemeth, László	populist writer
Presley, Elvis	American musician (popular culture)
Romhányi, József	actor (popular culture)
Zakarias, József	Hungarian football's "Golden Team" of the 1950s
Antal, József (sr.)	interwar politician Small-holder

Table 2: Different "populist" elements of Budapest's city-text in the 2010s.