

The Politics of Toponymic Continuity: The Limits of Change and the Ongoing Lives of Street Names

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Introduction

One of the tenets of critical place name studies is that urban toponyms are embedded within broader structures of power, authority, and ideology (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009). Place naming is thus one component of broader political projects concerned with governmentality, state formation, and nation-building (Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu 2010). Urban toponyms act to reify a particular set of political values in the urban landscape and in this way they “are instrumental in substantiating the ruling socio-political order and its particular ‘theory of the world’ in the cityscape” (Azaryahu 1996, 312). Furthermore, since urban place names are produced in particular political contexts, they are vulnerable to changes in the political order (Azaryahu 1996, 2009), which bring to power new regimes with different sets of political values and aspirations, with the result that names attributed by the former order may become discordant with the new agenda. For this reason, renaming the urban landscape is one of the most familiar acts (or rituals) accompanying revolutionary political change.

This process of “toponymic cleansing” (Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu 2010, 460) constitutes an unambiguous and public statement about the demise of the former regime (Azaryahu 2009, 2012a). Renaming streets is part of broader processes of “landscape cleansing” (Czepczyński 2008) through which the “official public landscape” (Bell 1999, 183) of the old regime is unmade through acts of “symbolic retribution” (Azaryahu 2011, 29), such as pulling down statues. Since shifts in political order produce a reconfiguring of the “known past” (Verdery and Kligman 2011, 9), the new names attributed to streets and landmarks introduce a new political agenda into the cityscape and, in theory, into the practices of everyday life (Azaryahu 2009; Rose Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu 2010). Such renaming draws a clear boundary between a particular past and aspirations for a new future (Marin 2012). The renamings that accompany political change have been a central

focus of critical toponymic scholarship (Azaryahu 2012a), particularly in contexts such as post-socialism (Azaryahu 1997, 2012a; Drozdowski 2014; Gil 2005; Light 2004; Marin 2012; Palonen 2008), the post-colonial (Nash 1999; Whelan 2003; Yeoh 1996), and post-Apartheid South Africa (Guyot and Seethal 2007; Swart 2008).

However, in this chapter we argue that a focus on renaming streets and other urban landmarks in the wake of political change has tended to neglect the issue of *continuity* in the toponymic landscape. Previous scholarship has been predominantly concerned with issues of change (through renaming) but we seek to highlight the importance of recognising that there are many instances of a significant *lack* of change; that is, where ideologically-charged street names from a previous political order persist within the urban landscape. As a number of authors have argued (Azaryahu 2012a, 2012b; Rose-Redwood 2008; Shoval 2013) the renaming of the urban landscape is not always immediate and thorough. Moreover, politically-inspired toponymic change can often unfold in a rather incoherent, inconclusive, spatially-diverse and protracted manner, and the actions of key urban actors are less systematic and co-ordinated than might be expected. All this means that it is important to recognise the *limits* of renaming the urban landscape following political change (see Rose-Redwood 2008).

Therefore, by considering a range of “left-over” toponymic landscapes we seek to open up an agenda focusing on the politics of continuity in the toponymic landscape and the limits to renaming. To do this, the chapter explores three broad themes: the limits to the political process of renaming; the effects of the actions of those urban managers and employees responsible for implementing the renaming of streets; and the responses among the urban populace to changes in street names. Our theoretical approach is twofold. First, like other critical place name scholars, we make use of political semiotics (Azaryahu 1996; Rose-Redwood *et al* 2010) in that we focus on street names as signs with multiple meanings within the urban landscape. In particular, we focus on the ways in which such signs demonstrate continuity with the past rather than a decisive break with it. Second, we focus on the agency and performances of key urban actors and the ways in which these can thwart official processes of renaming. We illustrate our arguments with a range of examples and case studies from post-socialist contexts. This is partly because our research interests focus on street names in post-socialist countries (particularly Romania) but also because the complex (and sometimes ambiguous) nature of post-socialist political change has produced numerous examples of continuity within the toponymic landscape (and here we seek to build on previous studies that have focussed on changes to urban toponyms in post-socialist contexts). The examples which we present are intended to be illustrative rather than paradigmatic (see Azaryahu 1996) and we recognise that the situation in other contexts (such as post-colonialism) may be quite different. We conclude the chapter by sketching out a research agenda for the “politics of toponymic continuity”.

Street Renaming and the Limits of “Top-Down” Political Power

The renaming of streets following political change might appear to be uncomplicated since the incoming order will usually have control of the necessary administrative and bureaucratic apparatus. However, there are various instances where a new regime has the ability to rename the urban landscape but does not see this process through to completion. This may occur for a range of reasons. In some cases, political change may not be accompanied by a desire to erase the symbolic traces of the former order. While a new regime might portray itself as representing a radical break from the past it may, in fact, have an ambivalent relationship to its predecessor (rather than simply being hostile to it). In such circumstances there may be limited concern to mark a decisive break with the past so that the new regime shows more

continuity with – rather than difference from - its predecessor. Such a position will be reflected in the approach to renaming the urban landscape created by the former regime.

One such example is post-Soviet Russia. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-91, Russia sought to dismantle the structures of state socialism (single-party rule and a command economy) and replace them with democratic rule and a market economy. However, Gill (2005) argues that many post-communist politicians had deep roots in the power structures of the Soviet regime and were not motivated by a burning desire to disavow the Soviet past (also, see Forest and Johnson 2002). For this reason, there was less concern to erase the symbolic urban landscape created by communism, with the result that many Soviet-era street names remained unchanged. For example, in Moscow many streets named after leading communist revolutionaries and Soviet politicians retained their names such as “Lenin Street” or “Red Army Street” (Gill 2005). Similarly, in St. Petersburg streets named after key events in communist historiography and the institutions of the socialist state have kept their original names (Marin 2012) such as “Dictatorship of the Proletariat Square,” “Communist Youth Street” or “Lenin Square”, while the *Oblast* which surrounds the city has retained the name of “Leningrad”.

Another example is the city of Minsk (Belarus) which also shows considerable continuity in Soviet-era street names. Between 1990 and 1993, only 14 streets and one square were renamed, because early in the 1990s former-Soviet nomenklatura gained positions in the new urban administration and opposed proposals to return streets to their pre-1917 names (Bylina 2013). Although pressure from political groups such as the Belarusian Peoples’ Front had achieved some changes, this ended in 1994 when Alexander Lukashenka came to power and forged strong links with the Russian Federation. Interestingly, the limited street name changes that did occur in the early 2000s—such as “Francysk Skaryna Avenue” becoming “Praspekt Nezalezhnasci” (Independence Avenue) and “Masherov Avenue” changing to “Praspekt Peramozhcau” (Victors Avenue)—were linked to attempts to cement Russian-oriented myths about what Russians call the “Great Patriotic War” (the Second World War) in the Minsk landscape and Belorussian identity (Bylina 2013). Here a realignment of state politics to ally with the Russian Federation (which itself had not pursued an aggressive renaming strategy) underpinned the continuity of Soviet-era street names in Belarus. These two examples thus illustrate the limits of renaming as related to political continuity and a lack of political will for change despite an apparently radical change in political order.

The limits to state power and the resulting lack of comprehensive renaming are also evident in the case of streets in Romania named after Vasile Roaita during the socialist era (1947-89). Romania’s socialist regime lauded Roaita as a teenage proletarian hero who was shot by the police during a strike in Bucharest’s railway yards in 1933. Consequently, streets, schools, collective farms, and a seaside resort were named after him: in 1954, there were 9 such streets in Bucharest alone (Light, Nicolae and Suditu 2002). However, this celebration of Roaita changed after Nicolae Ceaușescu assumed power in 1965. As he became the focus of an extravagant personality cult, Ceaușescu was presented as the foremost young activist in Romanian communism. Hence, Roaita swiftly fell from favor and was effectively airbrushed from the historical narrative (Boia 2002). The streets in Bucharest which commemorated Roaita were renamed and by 1973 only one remained (located right on the very edge of the city). This was renamed in 1990 after the fall of Ceaușescu’s regime.

Yet, in Voluntari and Jilava, two settlements just outside Bucharest, and in two villages in Transylvania, there are streets which have retained the name of Vasile Roaita. All survived both the decommemoration of Roaita after Ceaușescu’s rise to power, and the fall of the socialist regime. Moreover, in Voluntari there are a number of other streets which continue to commemorate minor Romanian Communist Party activists. The continued commemoration of Roaita is not an isolated case. For example, there are five streets in

Romania named “23 August”, a hallowed date in Communist Party historiography which commemorates the 1944 overthrow of Romania’s pro-Axis leader, an event for which the communist regime claimed the credit.

Why have these streets retained their names, despite a decree-law of March 1990 that called for the change of names which were no longer in concordance with Romania’s new political aspirations? Ilfov County, in which both Voluntari and Jilava are situated, has long been a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party (Gallagher 2005), a party that, in the post-socialist period, has been favored by former members of the Romanian Communist Party. Local politicians in Voluntari and Jilava probably hold a more favorable view of Romania’s socialist past and were, therefore, less concerned to erase its symbolic legacy. The significance of the case of Vasile Roaita is that it illustrates the limits of state-level political authorities to enforce changes to streets and other urban landmarks. Even if there is an “official” policy on which names are (or are not) ideologically appropriate, there is no certainty that such a policy will be uniformly applied throughout the country. As Verdery argues: “Policies may be *made* at the center, but they are *implemented* in local settings, where those entrusted with them may ignore, corrupt, overexecute, or otherwise adulterate them” (1991, 84). There is a danger of portraying the implementation of street name changes as reflecting the aspirations of a homogeneous political elite but this may not always be the case. This is probably the explanation for the four streets in Romania that still carry Roaita’s name: local administrators responsible for decommemorating Roaita neglected to do so, or did not consider it sufficiently important or urgent.

In other cases, a new political order may have the political will to rename the urban landscape but lack the material or financial resources to implement their policies. Renaming streets is often assumed to be relatively cheap (Azaryahu 2009) but this is not necessarily the case. A single new street name sign may not in itself be expensive, but if multiple signs are needed for an individual street (and multiple streets are to be renamed), the costs quickly mount. Furthermore, following a change in political order, the new regime usually has other more urgent financial commitments, particularly if radical political change is accompanied by major economic restructuring (which was the case in many post-socialist countries). While changing street names may account for a small proportion of urban budgets, it may be regarded by urban managers as a low priority at a time of budget constraints (see Light 2004; Gill 2005). Another consideration is the costs to citizens that result from changing a street name (in terms of changing addresses on identity documents). Indeed, such costs can be a major point of debate in naming struggles and have a major political effect on the (un)willingness of a government to impose a new name upon and through the landscape (e.g., Alderman and Inwood 2013). The result is that renaming streets can quickly cease to be a priority. In other words, the renaming of streets may be an early declarative and rhetorical act by an incoming regime, but seeing this process through to completion may be much less important (and can be delegated to lower levels of government who, in turn, may not carry it out).

In post-socialist Bucharest, for example, there are over 4,000 streets (many of which were named to reflect the agenda and priorities of state socialism), but less than 300 were renamed in the 1990s (Light 2004). Other studies of street renaming in post-socialist capitals have recorded similar figures (e.g., Azaryahu 1997; Gill 2005; Palonen 2008; Marin 2012). Moreover, in Bucharest the majority of renamings took place in the central part of the city: almost two-thirds of renamed streets were within 4 km of the city center (Light 2004), with similar findings reported in Moscow (Gill 2005). Although it had the opportunity to comprehensively reconfigure Bucharest’s toponymic landscape, Bucharest’s City Hall opted for a more restrained approach which concentrated on the most ideologically charged names and on the city center. No doubt City Hall was well aware of the costs involved in a more

comprehensive purging of socialist-era street names. In 2000, individual new name plates cost USD \$4 each (Anon 2000). Individually such a sum is trivial, but if applied to a comprehensive renaming campaign throughout the city the costs could quickly become a major burden for the city. Furthermore, the City Hall had other priorities, such as renewing the city's infrastructure and assuring the provision of services. Consequently, the street renaming process quickly ran out of steam and many streets outside the city center retain names with distinctly socialist resonances, e.g., "Street of the Worker," "Street of Concrete," "Street of Reconstruction" and "Road of the Cooperative Farm" (for similar examples, see Azaryahu 1997; Gill 2005; Marin 2012). Again, the ability of regimes to implement comprehensive change in the toponymic landscape can be limited and may founder on various practicalities. Indeed, regimes may actually play a strategic game and focus on the centers of capital cities.

Finally, elites with the power of renaming are not homogeneous. A variety of state institutions and political elites may have different (or even competing) agendas regarding renaming (Forest and Johnson 2002; Forest, Johnson and Till 2004). For example, many of Bucharest's metro stations were originally given names reflecting the ideological agenda of the socialist state and many of these survived the changes of 1989, such as "Square of Work," "New Times," "Peace," "1 May," and (until 2009) "Peoples' Army." Although allocated in a particular ideological context, these names are sufficiently ambiguous and can be reinterpreted in a way appropriate for a post-socialist state. Here another key elite actor—the company that owns the metro and its infrastructure—has taken a different approach to renaming from that of other parts of the state. Again, states and urban authorities are not all powerful and continuities in naming may reflect the actions of other influential actors.

These examples point to the limits of the political process of renaming streets after revolutionary political change. In many instances (and particularly in post-socialist contexts), such renaming is not comprehensive, driven by an ideological imperative to purge the urban landscape of the symbols of the former regime. Instead, the process is more pragmatic and the emphasis is on changing particular names (those that are most ideologically inappropriate) in particular places (the city center). The result is what we could call "leftover" or "residual" toponymies: street names allocated by the former regime which in some way reflect the values and agenda of that regime. More research is required to explore the extent to which there is a consistent geography to such leftover toponymies (for example, a greater likelihood for them to persist in the more peripheral parts of the city). That the new regime is prepared for such street names to remain "in place" indicates that the use of street names as proclamative ideological statements may be less powerful than is assumed.

Street Renaming and the Actions of Lower-Level Urban Actors

While we have identified above how elites with the political power to rename the urban landscape can fail to see the process through to completion, we know practically nothing about the role played by a range of lower-level actors and agents in the city who can, wilfully or unintentionally, subvert the attempts of political elites to introduce new place names. The role of such actors in implementing political decisions about changing street names has been almost completely overlooked in the critical toponymy literature (although see Azaryahu 2012c). This suggests a need to focus on the everyday mundane governance of street renaming and the labor required to achieve it, both of which can play a role in the limits of renaming.

For urban managers to implement top-down policies of street renaming requires the allocation of resources for the production of new signage, plus the labor costs of installing it. Following a period of political change, the allocation of funding may be uncertain (or

reduced). Furthermore, urban managers may have more urgent priorities in adjusting to the demands of the incoming political order. Consequently, in balancing financial priorities, urban managers may decide that they cannot immediately afford the costs of producing new signage in order to implement street name changes and so may elect to delay the process until appropriate resources are available. They may even ignore central directives about renaming streets in order to focus on more pressing issues.

In post-socialist Bucharest, well over a decade after the collapse of Ceaușescu's regime, there were many streets which retained their socialist names and signage, even though they had been officially renamed in the early 1990s. This can only have caused confusion for the people who lived there, who may now have been uncertain of their exact address. It also meant that taking a taxi to some parts of the city necessitated using a socialist-era street name, and such a simple performative utterance destabilizes official efforts to rename the urban landscape (Kearns and Berg 2002). Such a delay in introducing new signage into the urban environment following an official decision to change the names of streets has also been reported in a range of other contexts (see Azaryahu (1992, 2012c) and Shoval (2013)).

In other cases, new street name plates have been affixed alongside the old ones. For example in the city of Timișoara in western Romania (birthplace of the 1989 revolution) there are numerous instances where the socialist era street name (and name plate) remained in place (in April 2016) alongside the new names and plates (in a different format) allocated in the post-socialist era (see Figure 1). This apparently results from a decision by an official in the City Hall to retain the old signage in order to avoid confusion about addresses among the residents of those streets and to ease wayfinding within the city¹. In such instances, the role of a street name as a means of spatial identification and orientation takes priority over its semiotic role as a commemorative marker (Azaryahu 1996). The result is a curious and unresolved form of parallel toponymy which, once again, raises questions about the power and limits of ideologically-motivated street name changes.

FIGURE 1 HERE

In Bucharest, there are many similar instances of socialist-era signage remaining in place but the explanations appear to be different. For example, in the center of the city one of the principle arteries - "Boulevard of the Republic" (named in the first months of the socialist era) - returned to its pre-WWII name of "Queen Elisabeth Boulevard" in 1995. Yet, while many of the name plates with the socialist-era toponym were removed, there were several that remained in place throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. One survived until late 2006 (when it was removed during the preparations for Romania's accession to the European Union). Other examples of isolated socialist-era name plates can be found in many parts of the city. A similar situation is apparent in Tbilisi, Georgia, where new street names, particularly in the central parts of the city (those most likely to be encountered by tourists), are bilingual in Georgian and English. These have replaced older street name signs in Russian. However, not far from the city center, there are numerous surviving Soviet-era signs in Georgian and Russian, even on renovated buildings. In some cases, workmen have decided to simply spray pebble-dash over the Russian language sign rather than taking it down, leaving a ghostly remnant of the previous regime.

This points to the role of another important group of urban actors: the workers who are responsible for affixing new street name plates and taking down the old ones. The actions

¹ We are grateful to Remus Crețan for this observation

of this group play a vital role in implementing broader political decisions about renaming streets: they are responsible for literally putting the new names “in place.” However, there is the possibility that they can also thwart the process in a variety of ways. In the case of Bucharest we can only speculate about why city workers neglected to remove the socialist-era signage. It may be that they did not notice the old signs, or that the old signage is physically difficult to remove due to the way that it is fixed to buildings. Alternatively, workers may have chosen not to remove the old name plates if they were not given explicit instructions to do so. The ideological fervor which drives state-led, top-down renaming strategies may mean little to workers who have to actually physically implement these changes (some of whom may decide that it is more practical not to remove the old names and signs). Indeed, by the time the new names had been chosen and were ready to be installed, many of the workers were probably entirely indifferent to the remnants of the socialist era which remained in the city. Here the mundane practices and attitudes of city workers and the materiality of the old signage combine to underpin the persistence of toponymies in the urban landscape. The materiality and “agency” of old nameplates can thus also play a role in the limits of top-down political renaming projects.

Another important group of urban actors is those responsible for making the new signage. In the context of a broader confusion about the changing names of streets, they may misunderstand their instructions. This appears to be the only explanation for cases in central Bucharest where new signage was produced and affixed to buildings which still displayed the socialist-era name. For example, *Strada Mândinești* in the historic center of the city was renamed *Strada Sf. Dimitru* (after a nearby church) in 1993 but signage installed in the 1990s listed its original name with the “changed” name in brackets (see Figure 2) and some of these signs remained in place in December 2015.

FIGURE 2 HERE

In the case of post-socialist Bucharest, the managers of apartment blocks represent another group of urban actors who operate independently from the city authorities responsible for street naming and whose actions undermined the process. In Bucharest, the address of the block is painted above each entrance and many blocks also display small metal plates indicating particular entrances and the apartments which can be accessed from them. If a street changed its name in the post-socialist period, then it was the role of each block manager to change the signage. However, many block managers (who have found their role diminished in the post-socialist period) were slow to do this or did not even bother. They may have lacked funds to have the address repainted; they may have been unwilling to change a name to which they and the residents were accustomed; they may not have thought it important; or they may have simply forgotten about it. The outcome is that socialist-era names can still be found on blocks, even if the street signage displays the correct name (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 HERE

The sometimes conflicting actions of city governments and the committees responsible for implementing changes in street names can also play a role here. It is well known that urban administrations are complex, and sometimes characterised by political disagreement or poor communication between departments. This appears to explain a rather confused approach to renaming a metro station in Minsk. In 1992 the former “Lenin Square”

was renamed “Independence Square”, as was the nearby metro station. However, the toponymic cleansing was far from thorough as the name “Lenin Square” remained on signs within the metro system (in addition to a surviving monument of Lenin) (Bylina 2013). In 2003 the city authorities decided to reintroduce the name “Lenin Square” to the metro station. Public protests followed and the street names commission within the city’s Executive Committee proposed to reinstate “Independence Square” as the name for metro station. This was never implemented with the commission citing public protest against the name change. Thus the Soviet-era toponym “Lenin Square” has reappeared and persists due to disagreements within the city authority.

The toponymic traces of a former regime can thus survive for a wide variety of reasons, including a lack of resources or political will to replace them; misunderstanding of what changes are to be implemented; a possible unwillingness among workers to do any more than instructed; a lack of interest in the renaming of streets; or simply a failure to recognize it as important. A political decision to change a street name does not necessarily mean that the name will be changed (at least not immediately) or that the material signage which marked the former name will be removed. These examples illustrate how the projects of political elites can be compromised through the mundane actions of a wider range of lower-level urban actors (both within and outside the administrative apparatus of the local state). For these reasons top-down projects to rename the urban landscape can be much less immediate, visible, and effective than is sometimes supposed. Again, this points to the limits of the process of renaming the urban landscape after a period of political change.

Everyday Popular Responses to Street Name Changes

Although there has been considerable academic interest in the renaming of streets following political change, most researchers have focused on the top-down, political-administrative process of renaming. However, the responses of the urban population to such renamings have received only scant attention. Indeed, the wider issue of how people use urban place names is an area where more research is required (Azaryahu 2011; Light and Young 2014). Among political elites there seems to be an unstated assumption that renaming the urban landscape for political ends will be *effective*; that new names will be accepted by the inhabitants of the city and will be quickly absorbed into everyday life. However, street name changes do not necessarily enjoy popular support and can be contested or resisted (Azaryahu 1996; Kearns and Berg 2002; Alderman 2008; Rose-Redwood, Alderman and Azaryahu 2010; Alderman and Inwood 2013; Light and Young 2014) so that new names attributed to the urban landscape can fail to gain widespread popular acceptance (de Soto 1996; Myers 1996; Rose-Redwood 2008; Marin 2012; Shoval 2013; Light and Young 2014).

Urban residents can oppose street name changes for a number of reasons. They may feel an attachment to the old name and this can be especially important following radical political change when residents may look for the reassurance offered by the familiar (Gill 2005). Here it is important to acknowledge that ideologically-imposed street names may undergo a process of “semantic displacement” (Azaryahu 1996, 321) through which the name becomes detached from the person or event which it commemorates. To the inhabitants of the city, a name may be understood as just a name (rather than a proclamative ideological statement). Indeed, many urban dwellers may not even know the significance of what or who is commemorated by a street name but still form mundane attachments to it as the place where they live or socialize. Therefore, they may be unsympathetic to top-down attempts to change it.

Alternatively, residents may contest a new name because they do not identify with who or what is commemorated by it. While the incoming regime may seek to impose a new

hegemonic narrative of national history, not everyone in the population will necessarily agree with the choice of new names. Furthermore, residents may distrust the motives behind the attribution of a new name. A further reason why residents may oppose street renamings is for the personal inconvenience it causes them. To understand this we only have to think of the number of people, institutions, and organizations that we need to inform if we move house and change our address. Changing the name of a street places a burden on the residents of that street to change their identity papers, and inform employers, banks, utility companies, and friends of their new address. This all involves time and expense and for this reason renamings can be unpopular (particularly if there is a delay between a political change and the subsequent changing of street names).

The actual practices (or “tactics” following De Certeau [1984]) of resistance to a new toponym that has been imposed by political elites can take two forms. First, citizens can simply refuse to use a newly allocated name (Yeoh 1992; Myers 1996; Shoal 2013). For example, in Bucharest in 1997 the Christian Democratic National Peasant Party, which controlled the City Hall, elected to change the name of “1 May Boulevard” to “Ion Mihalache Boulevard” (after a pre-WWII politician who was a member of the party). This renaming was deeply unpopular with many in the city who argued that 1 May represented an international day of worker’s solidarity that did not have exclusively socialist associations. The renaming was also interpreted as a rather clumsy attempt by the ruling party to foreground one of its “own” people (Light and Young 2014). Consequently, many Bucharesters deliberately do not use the “official” name (preferring to continue to use “1 May Boulevard”), and a group of residents of the boulevard submitted a formal request for it to return to its original name (Anon 2002). Shops and businesses located on the boulevard frequently use both names in their publicity in acknowledgement that there are many who do not know the boulevard by its official name. Thus toponyms can continue in everyday practice even if officially removed, further illustrating the limits of renaming practices.

A second way to oppose a change of street name is to seek to intervene in the administrative process, either to prevent a new name being attributed, or to seek to reverse a previous renaming. The rationale for this is often a mixture of the ideologically-laden nature of street names with more mundane and prosaic considerations, such as confusion among urban residents, concerns with the cost and inconvenience associated with having the street where they live renamed, or popular attachment to long-established names. For example, in Moscow in the early 1990s the Presidium of Moscow City Council began a renaming process during which it changed about 70 street names. However, public opposition to this process grew, particularly linked to the confusion caused in everyday life by the renamings, with the result that the City Council halted the renaming process, ensuring the survival of names which were due for removal (Vakhrusheva 1993). In one particular case, that of renaming “Ulitsa Pushkinskaya” to “Bolshaya Dmitrovka”, Muscovites opposed renaming on grounds of the cost to local government at a time when it had other priorities and the fact that Pushkin’s name was strongly associated in their minds with that location.

A further example from Moscow illustrating this complex mix of political opposition and more mundane considerations is that of what is now “Alexander Solzhenitsyn Street”, which was renamed in 2008 from “Big Communist Street” (Harding 2008). This change of name was the subject of political opposition by the communist Left Front youth organization which mounted a legal challenge. However, residents also opposed the change because of the cost and inconvenience of altering essential documents. Here Muscovites signed a petition by the hundreds and residents of the street took more direct action, physically tearing street signs from buildings (Harding 2008). In the Siberian city of Irkutsk, architects and historians petitioned the city to halt renaming proposals on the grounds of protecting the historical value represented by the toponymic landscape and fears that residents would become confused

(Goble 2013). However, counter-examples can be found. Bylina (2013), for example, reports that the public, mass media, and intellectuals in Minsk express discomfort with the continuity of Soviet-era street names in the post-Soviet period, illustrating that public responses to renaming processes will be highly varied in different contexts.

However, it is possible to expand the terms of the debate here by recognizing that the use of old toponyms can persist even when officially and materially they have been changed, simply because of everyday practices and habit. Geographers, and those studying the politics of toponymic change, have perhaps been too keen to focus on resistance. While the contestation of new street names is important, we also have to recognize that it is not the only popular process which subverts the imposition of the new names. We also need to consider a range of unreflexive practices and habits among urban residents that are often overlooked (though see De Soto 1996; Rose-Redwood 2008; Light and Young 2014). Elsewhere, for example, we consider the case of “Moghioroș Market” in Bucharest, a socialist-era toponym that commemorates Alexandru Moghioroș (1911-69), who was a senior member of the Romanian Communist Party (Light and Young 2014). After 1989, Bucharest’s City Hall changed the name to “Drumul Taberei Market”, reflecting the name of the neighbourhood in which it is located. However, the name “Moghioroș” remains in daily use, sometimes instead of the new name and sometimes in parallel to it. The name is largely devoid of its original meaning (few people remember who it commemorates). Local people continue to use the original name because they have always done so, or they hear others use it, rather than because they are resisting the de-Communization strategies of the post-socialist Romanian state. Businesses also use the old name so that people understand where they are located. In this case, it is simply mundane, habitual practices that keep the old toponym in current use.

This section has explored a little understood aspect of the politics of toponymic continuity and the limits to political power when it comes to renaming strategies, namely public responses to renaming. For a variety of reasons, reflecting a complex mix of the political and the practical, residents may actively oppose renamings, seek to reverse them, or choose to ignore official renaming practices. These can be political actions but can also be due to habit or even apathy. These points also raise the question of the extent to which people in their everyday lives pay attention to, or connect with, street names and changes. Publics may not share the importance attached by political elites to new names, which highlights the performative limits of street names as political statements.

Conclusions

The study of toponymic cleansing has rightly established itself as a prominent and popular theme within the critical toponymy literature. Such studies will continue to be important, not least because they reveal the significant role of street renaming in the interplay between ideology, power, identity, urban governance, and landscape change. However, in this chapter, we have argued that critical toponymic studies should go beyond examining the issue of street renaming as part of regime change to also consider the “politics of toponymic continuity.” To conclude this chapter we identify three areas which we consider central to developing this research agenda.

First, more research could address continuities in ideologically-charged toponyms, from the scale of individual streets to the toponymic landscape of entire cities. Previous studies have tended to focus on which streets are renamed and why, but more investigation is required of why some streets are not renamed. This is not so much about a quantitative evaluation of how many streets retain their names—after all, it is unrealistic to think that an urban administration would seek to change all street names—but about the politics of which are deemed to not require eradication. Such a choice is value-laden and inherently political

and may involve retaining (or ignoring) street names which may, from external perspectives, seem appropriate for changing. However, historical figures and events are ambiguous and are always socially and politically constructed. Hence, while it might seem obvious that a new regime would want to remove ideologically inappropriate names, implementing this process may be considerably less straightforward and people can have all kinds of complex relationships to place names. The politics of such relationships and choices—by states, urban authorities, and urban populations—require much more thorough investigation. This needs to be done in the context of carrying out more nuanced analyses of the comprehensiveness of renaming, which considers the more complex geographies of renaming and continuity as part of the same process. The issue of geographical complexity in the thoroughness of renaming, from the intra-urban scale to looking across the urban hierarchy outside capital cities, requires much more consideration, and such studies could also be more sensitive to any temporal dynamics.

Second, a focus on the politics of continuity also demands a greater appreciation of both the messy politics of renaming and the potentially incoherent strategizing and implementation that follows. Previous research has perhaps tended to draw too neat a link between regime change and street renaming, implying a straightforward political process. However, political tensions and in-fighting (not just between political viewpoints and parties, but within urban administrations or between state- and urban-scale administrations) require greater attention (see for example Palonen 2008). Further down the line, what is really lacking is an understanding of how lower-level actors within and outside of urban administrations (committees, urban managers, block managers, work units, and workers) influence this process. In particular, it may be the case that the fate of particular street names rests on mundane decisions around budgets and resources, or the approaches of the workers detailed to actually take down old nameplates and put up new ones.

Lastly, a major research lacunae is the ways in which various publics form different relationships to street names, beginning with the question of the extent to which street names (and changes) actually do resonate in any way within people's everyday lives. The assumption that changing the toponymic landscape actually has an impact on citizens requires much more critical investigation. Clearly in some places people do react to changes to street names, but this may not necessarily constitute political opposition, and may be informed by much more mundane and prosaic considerations (like cost and inconvenience). Alternatively, urban residents may be happy to continue living with street names which incoming regimes might consider ideologically inappropriate because they have developed long-term personal and even emotional relationships with those names. Engaging with the issue of residents' emotional and everyday lived geographies of street names and how they impact upon continuity and change is a major challenge for our proposed "politics of toponymic continuity," which itself suggests a new direction for critical toponymies.

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Captions for Figures

Figure 1: Old and new street names in Timișoara, Romania (September 2015). *Strada Turgheniev* commemorates Ivan Turgenev, a 19th century Russian writer. The street was renamed in 1993 to commemorate a senior figure in the Romanian Orthodox Church

Figure 2: A street name sign in central Bucharest (2005). *Strada Mândinești* was renamed *Strada Sf [Saint] Dumitru* in 1993. However the signage gives the former name with the new name in brackets.

Figure 3: Old and new street names on an apartment block in Bucharest (September 2009). During the socialist era the street was named *Strada Furnirului* (Street of the Wood Laminators). It was renamed *Strada Vintila Mihăilescu* (after a Romanian geographer) in 1992. However, the old name remains on a number of the apartment blocks along this street