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*The renaming of public space
in Budapest:
The divided politics of contemporary Hungarian Identity*

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Abstract

My paper examines the changes to street names and squares in Budapest since 2011, and the significance of those changes. The changing of street names in recent history is not new to Hungary: notably during transition in the early 1990s many streets were given back names they had held before the communist era. In following with this tradition, in the most recent surge of name changing, which began in the spring of 2011, notable Hungarian names, preferably associated with anti-communist sentiments, were selected to replace the names of twenty-six streets and squares, with an additional nine in December of 2011. This is a continuing process.

These changes reflect, among other things, an opinion of the current administration. Both positive and negative public reaction to these changes have reflected a standing divide in Hungarian society, and the tension of the current political climate. The topics of national identity and the significance of public space in forming an identity will be examined in general, then as they apply in Hungary, and more specifically in Budapest.

Introduction

The new regime has also been busy renaming Budapest streets. Everywhere, old signs are crossed out; in their places are freshly painted signs proclaiming the streets' original names before communism. Almost all are the names of artists, writers, and political heroes who, even if they're long dead, in some way reflect the spirit of the new Hungary... Street by street, building by building, the Magyars are reclaiming their country.[1]

This excerpt comes from a letter written in 1993, making observations upon on a visit to Budapest. Considering Hungary had just switched from being a People's Republic through most of 1989, to the Republic of Hungary in October of 1989, the spirit of "reclaiming the country" and a return to pre-Communist street names was to be expected.

In 2013, twenty years after this letter was written, Budapest is yet again filled with old, crossed out street signs, the new names placed on plaques above plaques bearing the old names. These new signs were put in place either in 2011 or 2012, and they are meant to be kept up until some point 2013 as a reminder to people who might have otherwise forgotten the new names in the sake of old habit. It can be striking to see these signs, and as an observer, the image of the thick, red "X" seems to raise the question more of "What was wrong with the old name?" rather than "What is the significance of the new name?"

Though the 'higher-profile' name-changes will be discussed in the following sections, a more subtle, easier to overlook change should be noted. A walk in the 6th district of Budapest could lead to

1.   McCauley, Lucy (1993). "Letter from Budapest." Harvard Review. No. 3, p. 150

one to walk past what is now known as Németh László utca. It is a small street, spanning only two blocks, and would be easy to overlook if not for one striking detail on one corner.

The old name, Szalmás Piroska utca, crossed out as it should, with a thick red line, has been written on top of the new street-name, a subtle act of vandalism, but one that raises many questions. It shows a resistance, however small, against the newest surge of street name changes.

Photograph credit: Cécile Moore, 2013

Role of street naming

Besides the obvious, practical role of street names in aiding movement around a city[2], the significance of street naming has been studied significantly in the last decades on multiple levels. Research points to public space as an arena in which the past is pre-

2   Temple-Raston, Dina. "Street names intended to give Pakistani city new direction.". NPR. 30 December 2012

sented and political struggles are acted out.

> *Historical sites are dedicated to the cultural production of their pasts. Such cultural productions, whatever their ideological suppositions, take advantage of the common perception of history as being an intrinsic quality of the local landscape...Cultural productions of the past employ the agency of display to create an interpretive interface that mediates and thereby transforms that which is shown into a vision of history.[3]*
> *...the city-text is also a battleground for political control over space and symbols. Different political groupings are differentiated from one another (and differentiate themselves from one another) through evaluations of the national past.[4]*

Maoz Azaryahu and Kenneth E. Foote produced a study of 'spatial narratives' entitled "Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites.[5]" They speak of how the physical landscape is organized in order to tell a story: "such spatial narratives entail a configuration of locations and time in space. In some cases they involve little more than a brief caption on a marker positioned at a historical site.[6]" They emphasize the importance of sequentiality in a narrative, though they acknowledge that street names are not capable of following a linear narrative: "Commemorative street names refer to both national and local narratives of history and may be woven into narratives of the city, but as a presentation of history, their narrativity is limit-

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3   Azaryahu, Maoz and Kenneth E. Foote (2008). "Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites." Geo Journal. Vol. 73, No. 3, p. 179.

4   Palonen, Emilia (2008). "The city-text in post-communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration." GeoJournal. Vol. 73, No. 3, p. 219.

5   Azaryahu, Maoz and Kenneth E. Foote (2008). "Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites." Geo Journal. Vol. 73, No. 3, pp. 179-194.

6   Ibid, p. 180.

ed to their commemorative capacity to evoke 'significant moments' or 'significant heroes' of history.[7]" Though in terms of maintaining a sequential narrative, street names are lacking, they do play a role in creating the overarching narrative by emphasizing specific events or people.

The choice of who, or what, to commemorate when naming streets holds a great significance: it reflects something about the political or cultural identity of a people, and some argue that it is not only are a reflection of a current or past sentiment, but plays a role in influencing the future: "Street names reflect and manifest a certain political identity – they are indicators of political identity while at the same time being part of it. They also help form a desired political consciousness among the population.[8]" Also, "The assumption of new names not only signals a significant change in social direction for individual or collectivity, it also reveals much about the nature of the agency of that change.[9]"

As street names hold a great political significance, the act of changing the names, and the fluidity of street names throughout regime changes and other significant political events, have a special significance as "authorship can extend over decades, generations and centuries as the narrative is restructured...it means that the configuration of spatial narratives, more than others, can readily be changed as a result of social or political pressures.[10]" Each author reflects a strong point of view about the present and the future goals of a place by making specific choices on what, from the past, to commemorate.

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7   Ibid, p. 183.

8   Azaryahu, Maoz (1986). "Street names and political identity: the case of East Berlin." Journal of Contemporary History. Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 581

9   Faraco, J. Carlos González and Michael Dean Murphy (1997). "Street names and political regimes in an Analusian town." Ethnology. Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 123

10   Azaryahu, Maoz and Kenneth E. Foote (2008). "Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites." Geo Journal. Vol. 73, No. 3, p. 192.

"The toponymic reworkings imposed by this community's succession of political leaders reflect the goals, tactics, and, indeed, the ethos of each new national government. Each regime in its choice of names not only eliminates toponymic references to political foes but also stipulates a particular kind of relationship between the townspeople and those who govern them, and reveals its distinctive mix of local, regional, and national orientations.[11]"

Because of the strong political connotation of street naming, it can be inferred that by studying the history of street names in a city, that one could arrive at a political history of the city, and also view the ideological political struggles that a city has faced[12].

The way in which memory is though of is also significant to the study of street naming.

"Fueling much of the analysis of memory is a recognition that the past—as we commemorate and identify with it—is a selective social and geographic construction. What memories are ultimately made visible (or invisible) on the landscape do not simply emerge out of this air. Rather, they result directly from people's commemorative decisions and actions as embedded within and constrained by particular socio-spatial conditions. All indications suggest that we are currently witnessing the revalorization of individual and collective memory at a time when historical amnesia appears to be at an all-time high.[13]"

Memory is examined in a seminole work by Pierre Nora entitled "Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire." Nora looks at how values are collectively remembered and retained in the past, and points out that there has been a "tremendous dilation of our very mode or historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of current events.[14]" It is difficult now to point to one interpretation of history, as history is mixed with memory, which is subjective and " ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestor to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth" which leaves memory to be " nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces.[15]" In modern times, Nora claims that there is increasingly a feeling of entitlement in being justified in altering public perception of the past.

Case of Hungary

What it means to be Hungarian is a question raised over and over. Simply due to the positioning of the country, falling between the East and West, Hungary has long been a country torn between different dualities. Budapest reflects this melded division, described in the article by Ashworth and Tunbridge (1999) about heritage planning in Central Europe.

Heritage in Budapest reflects the oscillation between national and supra-national roles: between the exclusive heritage of a distinct ethnic group, being used to define and separate Hungarians from neighboring peoples, and the more all-inclusive heritage of a multi-ethnic imperium which places Hungary with in much wider ideo-

11   Faraco, J. Carlos González and Michael Dean Murphy (1997). "Street names and political regimes in an Analusian town." Ethnology. Vol. 36, No. 2, p. 123

12   Ibid, p. 125.

13   Rose-Redwood, Reuben, Derek Alderman & Maoz Azaryahu (2008). "Collective memory and the politics of urban space ." GeoJournal. Vol. 73, No. 3, p. 16.

14   Nora, Pierre (1989). "Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire." Representations. Vol. 26. pp. 7-8.

15   Ibid, p. 8.

logical and cultural European contexts. These two contradictory trends are so intertwined that they have usually coexisted. Both the heritage of Árpád, the archetypical tribal Magyar warrior, and of Stephen, the equally stereotypical European Hungarian Christian saint, have survived through the vicissitudes of governments and ideologies[16]

On one hand, Hungary viewed itself as the Eastern-most Christian nation. When the Turks conquered the area, it marked a temporary end to a period of enlightenment and renaissance under Mátyás Corvinus, who had adopted the Renaissance from Italy (Farbaky and Walden 2011). This led to an attachment with the West, as there was a perceived «cultural void» until the Hungarian state was liberated with assistance from the west (Ashworth and Tunbridge 1999). It helped to develop an identity closely tied to Europe. However, there are still physical traces left that have been preserved, and even some of the monuments erected, including public baths and a couple tombs and memorials. Also, there has long been a following of people who share the belief that the Hungarian people have their origins in Asia, called Hungarian Turanism[17], which still has a significant and active following to this day. Though having been an imperial capital for many years, Budapest is also a city full with Hapsburg, Gothic, and art noveau construction as well, reflective of the West (Ashworth and Tunbridge 1999).

Ashworth and Tunbridge make the important point that, as Hungary has to resist being seized by numerous groups, from both the East and West, they had to develop a distinct 'Magyar' identity. "The theme of heroic resistance" was exploited in the interwar period as well as under communism until the present; "[t]he same historic events have featured prominently in the interpretations of

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16   Ashworth, G. J. and J. E. Tunbridge (1999). "Old cities, new pasts: Heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe." *GeoJournal*. Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 112.

17   http://www.hungarianambiance.com/2012/03/zsolt-andras-biro-we-let-foreigners-to.html, http://kurultaj.hu/english/

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governments of widely different ideology.[18]"

Hungarian authors have long explored the concept of the Hungarian nation and identity, and Laszlo Deme explores Hungarian identity and nationality through Hungarian literary figures in the article, "Perceptions and Problems of Hungarian Nationality and National Identity in the Early 1990s." He speaks of István Csoóri, who relates the nation to a family in the sense that one can not choose their own family, so even if there are unattractive qualities, it still provides one with a community and with meaning. "In his view a cathartic experience of national self-discovery should have taken precedence even over the establishment of democratic government.[19]" Csoóri also acknowledges the fact that many ethnic Hungarians live outside of Hungary, something that further complicates the issue of a national identity, but provides a point of reference in the Greeks: "They did not live in a single geographically defined state either but altogether constituted the Greek nation. Their common culture and way of thinking united them. Hungarians too could become such 'a mosaic nation'.[20]"

Deme also speaks of the author Budai, who associated the the crisis of Hungarian identity with «the suppression of the past, both individually and collectively» and suggests that the concept of a Hungarian nationality must be discussed in order to recover from the crisis of identity.[21] In contrast with Budai's view, Peter Esterházy is a contemporary author who questions what it means to be Hungarian. "What is Hungarian? It interests me not. I couldn't

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18   Ashworth, G. J. and J. E. Tunbridge (1999). "Old cities, new pasts: Heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe." GeoJournal. Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 113.

19   Deme, Laszlo (1998). "Perceptions and Problems of Hungarian Nationality and National Identity in the Early 1990s." International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society. Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 315.

20   Deme, Laszlo (1998). "Perceptions and Problems of Hungarian Nationality and National Identity in the Early 1990s." International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society. Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 315.

21   Deme, Laszlo (1998). "Perceptions and Problems of Hungarian Nationality and National Identity in the Early 1990s." International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society. Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 315.

care less...I confess I become suspicious when I hear the word 'Hungarian' because nowadays it is often abused...We are not a great nation...We are a small, fantastic, insignificant country. It is in our vital interest to understand this and come to terms with it.[22]"

In the fall of 2012, from August 2nd until October 15th there was a controversial exhibition at the contemporary art museum of Budapest, the Műcsarnok, entitled "Mi a magyar?", or "What is Hungarian?" curated by Gábor Gulyás. It attempted to answer this question by exploring the legends and tales of the past, along side modern stereotypes. The name of the exhibition was taken from various works throughout the twentieth century that have examined the question of what is means to be Hungarian and of what is the Hungarian Identity. The exhibit explored aspects detailed in the exhibit's introduction below:

National identity has been one of the most prominent topics of Hungarian public discussions for more than two centuries now. Its questions appear in numerous works of art, particularly after the birth of historicism, the last great consistent stylistic trend of Romanticism. In the first part of the 19th century, in the so-called Reform Era, in the wake of German treatises on the character of nations, Hungarian national character also became the subject of various academic discussions. The time of the Millennium (1896) and the decades following the loss of Hungarian territories in the First World War witnessed the resurgence of these debates...The displayed works do not serve as illustrations of the fundamental questions of national identity or national fate, but rather create a general picture of the different ways art may represent various possible approaches to these issues. What is Hungarian now? The restoration of Hungarian democracy in 1990 after decades of communist dictatorship, the country's joining the European Union,

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22   Deme, Laszlo (1998). "Perceptions and Problems of Hungarian Nationality and National Identity in the Early 1990s." International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society. Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 316.

and the recent economic crisis have made these questions timely once again. The present exhibition does not intend to give definite answers: our aim is to give a comprehensive survey of contemporary artistic reflections on this topic for the first time in its history.[23]

The exhibit drew deep criticism and was even accused of "'blaspheming' the Hungarian nation[24]" by the current head of the Hungarian Academy of Arts, György Fekete. The exhibit explored identity in almost a playful way at times, and could be seen as making light of the question of identity. Though the question of identity in Hungary is one deeply examined, there is apparently a correct way to examine it so that it will be accepted on an official level.

In the article "Hungarian National Identity: Old and New Challenges" (2006), Antal Örkény delves into national identity in Hungary specifically following 1989. There were many positive changes that came with the negotiated transformations, but they did not come alone. A main downfall was that once independence and national liberation was achieved, there arose a "fetishization of the nation state.[25]" Religion and ethnicity emerged as two of the driving forces behind this newly emerged Hungarian identity, while economic and intellectual achievements were valued to a much lesser degree. Örkény also claims that "guaranteed civic rights" took a backseat to ethnicity and religion in defining national identity (Örkény 2006).

Örkény continues on to speak about macro-level identity versus micro-level identity. He classifies the 'micro-world' as being composed of one's more immediate surroundings, including one's residence and city or town. The 'macro-environment' extends to one's country or the continent. While the 'micro-world' "creates personal

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23   http://www.mucsarnok.hu/new_site/index.php?lang=en&t=679, accessed 21 December 2012.

24   "The lunatics have taken over the asylum." 27 November 2012. http://beyondeast.wordpress.com/, accessed 22 January 2013.

25   Örkény, Antal (2006). «Hungarian national identity: Old and new challenges.» International Journal of Sociology. Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 29.

identification, the 'macro-environment' can either facilitate or hinder the construction of a collective identity.[26"] As both environments contribute to one's sense of identity in general, we can see where a local policy of street names, if under a sort of national decree, could aid in either the creation or the reinforcement of a collective identity. Tying these thoughts back to Hungary specifically, Örkény concludes that "Generally, our findings imply that Hungarian public opinion today is infused by a very intensive spontaneous national identity. It is reflected not only in the fact that people feel their very close to their country, but also in their low willingness to migrate.[27"] Therefore, Hungary had been largely successful in forming a strong sense of national identity in the initial transition period following 1989.

As more time has passed, however, struggles have re-emerged in Hungary. The current identity crisis in Hungary is largely a result of the failures of the transition period. In an article entitled "The tunnel at the end of the light: the crisis of transition in Hungary", Ferenc Miszlivetz examines the failure of the transition period in Hungary and points to multiple shortcomings that contributed to this, and a key lapse of the government was, in various times, failing to deal with problems as they arose, not dealing with past issues, and failing to build the trust of the people, and therefore a strong civic society. Perhaps the main failure was the selective exposure of the past:

Today we can see the destructive effect of revealing the past drop-by-drop according to particular interests... The chief message of this strategy of disclosure is that the country is not the master of its own past, and therefore is unable to digest and come to terms with it. This way people become entangled with the past over and over again, inflicting more wounds and failing to heal

26   Örkény, Antal (2006). «Hungarian national identity: Old and new challenges.» International Journal of Sociology. Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 32.

27   Örkény, Antal (2006). «Hungarian national identity: Old and new challenges.» International Journal of Sociology. Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 32.

old ones[28]

Published in 2009, the article was written when the coalition governing Hungary was one which emphasized neo-liberalism and placed all the pressure of 'fixing' the country on the success of the market. The alternative view, which is held by the current coalition governing Hungary, is one which holds an "archaic vision of Hungarian-ness which is historically false and harmful in the political sense» with the ideal of a «homogenous, white and Christian European value system...focused on the national communities and the family.[29"] Hungary has been in a state between these two views, but appears to have largely shifted to the latter, which is reflected in various aspects of political debate, public discourse, and changes to public space among other things.

György Csepeli wrote a book discussing Hungarian identity, entitled National Identity in Contemporary Hungary. It was first published in 1992, and again in 1997. Csepeli writes a preface explaining some of the changes that occurred within those five years.

Five years have passed since the original publication of this book. As a consequence of state socialism's failure and defeat, all leftist ideologies have been discredited and an open identification with socialist values and the welfare state became impossible. The decline of leftist ideology has temporarily given rise to rightist and conservative ideologies. Due to the long lasting single party dictatorship the search for scapegoats failed to turn up 'Judases' as the boundaries between perpetrators and victims were blurred.[30]

While he sites some positive aspects of the transition, includ-

28   Miszlivetz, Ferenc (2009). "The tunnel at the end of the light: the crisis of transition in Hungary." Transition Studies Review 15, p. 13.

29   Miszlivetz, Ferenc (2009). "The tunnel at the end of the light: the crisis of transition in Hungary." Transition Studies Review 15, p. 15.

30   Csepeli, György (1992). National Identity in Contemporary Hungary. Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc, p. 241.

ing fist and foremost national sovereignty, followed by free elections and freedom of speech and travel, other controversial aspects were not openly discussed. The shift from a social system with a closed economy to an open market system led to sharp unemployment levels and lower incomes for a large portion of the population. "Positive expectations were soon supplanted by frustration. The benefits of liberty were seemingly not enough to compensate for the loss of economic security.[31]" People had become accustomed to certain benefits under the Soviet system, and were not prepared for extremely rapid privatization that took place in the 1990s.

The perception of the West also changed in these five years. As the idealization of the West was tied to the capitalist economy in addition to the Western way of life, the disappointments with the transition in terms of unemployment and lower income led to a disillusionment with the West on a larger scale as well. Also, some felt they "were undermined by an invasion of Western capital which awakened discontent and a sense of being colonized.[32]" Csepeli concludes that the economic and political problems are minor in comparison to what he calls a "moral deficit." This deficit was caused by "a split society which socialized people along the lines of values of the collectivistic system on the one hand, and the opposing values of a world of rugged individualism on the other hand.[33]"

One source of current political tension stems from the fact that some who had not been marginalized under communism were able to maintain a level of power during transition as well. A paper by Bojan Todosijević and Zsolt Enyedi (2008), entitled "Authoritarianism without Dominant Ideology: Political Manifestations of Authoritarian Attitudes in Hungary", points out that many who held positions of power under communism were able to maintain these positions even after the initial transition period:

31   Ibid 241.

32   Ibid, p. 242.

33   Csepeli, György (1992). National Identity in Contemporary Hungary. Atlantic Research and Publications, Inc, p. 242.

Hungary is a particularly good example of the discussed ambiguity, since in this country the communist leadership has managed to maintain widespread social support. Until 1989, Soviet features characterized the political system, but in everyday life citizens were given considerable autonomy, and the private moral was characterized by individualism and consumerism. The fall of communism was accompanied by the introduction of a multiparty system and formal rules of democratic political competition, on the one hand, and economic hardship, growing unemployment, and the partial dismantling of the social safety net, on the other hand. Indeed, the two processes have become intrinsically linked in the eyes of many, contributing to a relatively positive view of the earlier regime in the population.[34]

The further one ventures into the complexities of the Hungarian situation pre-transition, during transition, and 'post', or continuing transition, it becomes more clear why Hungary has not been able to successfully complete the transition period as of yet.

Another factor that complicates the situation in Hungary is that it was unique in the way communism worked, and even was given a special nick-name dubbed Goulash Communism. Heino Nyyssönen examines Goulash Communism in his article: "Gyoulash Communism and Political Culture in Hungary." A leading factor in Hungary being able to maintain more autonomy was that the Hungarian state was not viewed by the people as being the same as the communist rule:

The state with a glorious past had existed through centuries. The historical continuity of the Hungarian State was essential as well as the role of the Hungarian nation within that state. In addition, the Hungarians retained a strong sense of their national and ethnic

34   Todosijević, Bojan and Zsolt Enyedi (2008). "Authoritarianism without Dominant Ideology: Political Manifestations of Authoritarian Attitudes in Hungary." Political Psychology, Vol. 29, No. 5, p. 767.

uniqueness which was most obviously felt in the isola-tion of their language in the region.[35]

Indeed, the uniqueness of the Hungarian language set it apart from other communist nations in Eastern Europe, but also the fact that it was able to maintain a certain level of control under the communist system allowed it to be known as the most Western, or modern of the Eastern Bloc. Due to this, the lines between the Communist regime and post-communist politics remained more blurred than in other places.

The legacy of the uprising in 1956 is a topic that divides contemporary Hungary. In the book Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt, Charles Gati explains some misconceptions about the uprising in 1956. First and foremost, that the goal of the uprising was not to abolish the system, but rather to reform it. They wanted to gain independence from the Soviet Union, so while they were nationalists and anti-Soviet, they were not antisocialist. The closest thing they had to a common political platform was a "mix of independent communism as seen in Tito's Yugoslavia, West European social democracy, and, perhaps, what came to be known twelve years later in Czechoslovakia as 'socialism with a human face.[36]" He claims that recent divisions in the political scene have distorted what happened in 1956, as "most Hungarians have yet to come to terms with the complexities of what they did or did not do and what actually happened in 1956. Words like 'defeat' or 'failure' or 'loss' seldom appear in public discourse because in the popular imagination the revolution was victorious—until it was betrayed by an uncaring world.[37]" Views on the reality of what happened, and why, in 1956, are subjective and shift according

35   Nyyssönen, Heino (2006). «Gyoulash Communism and Political Culture in Hungary.» Cahiers du Monde Russe, Vol. 47, No. 1/2 , p. 157.

36   Gati, Charles (2006). Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, DC. p. 4.

37   Gati, Charles (2006). Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, DC. p. 19.

to one's political leaning. Gati says that while current socialists identify with Nagy, anti-communists try to de-emphasize Nagy's communist past and deny that the revolution merely wanted to reform the system, keeping elements of socialism.

Even János Kádár's role in the 1956 uprising is a complex one to understand. While he was successful in crushing the revolution along side the Soviets, his role in the years that followed "introduced goulash communism and de facto unified Hungary in many ways.[38]" It seems that, for the most part, important figures in Hungarian history have more than one possible interpretation. As put here, in context to a journalistic photo that became emblematic of the1956 revolution: "Again, memory and interpretation are related to context, as the same picture is used in the context of very different accounts of the revolution over time between East and West.[39]" But the statement could stretch even further, to cover most historical events from Hungary's past.

An interview of Peter Nadas, a contemporary Hungarian author, by the New York Times sheds more light onto the aftermath of 1956 in Hungary. Nadas is quoted as saying that "The failure of that revolution [uprising in 1956]...taught most Hungarians to feel powerless and also abandoned by the West, fostering a suspicion of foreigners that in the post-Communist era and thanks now to the splintering of European opinion over American relations, has bred a dangerous nationalism, which is obviously spreading throughout the former Soviet countries and elsewhere.[40]" Given that the feeling of left behind is one of powerlessness, it explains why some would not want to dwell on the failure of the revolution. In continuing the theme of abandonment by the West, Nadas says that "The era of so-called peaceful coexistence, during the cold war, compromised everyone's morals, and words—issued by Hungarian authorities, or

38   Nyyssönen, Heino (2006). «Gyoulash Communism and Political Culture in Hungary.» Cahiers du Monde Russe, Vol. 47, No. 1/2 , p. 167.

39   Cox, Terry (2006). «1956: Discoveries, Legacies and Memory.» Europe-Asia Studies. Vol. 58, No. 8, p. xv.

40   Kimmelman, Michael (2007). "A writer who always sees history in the present tense." New York Times.

shared among friends who couldn't help suspecting one another or being informants, or coming from the West, which promised help but didn't give it—no longer meant what they were supposed to.[41]"

Ashworth and Tunbridge discuss the question of forgetting, or ignoring, the past in a public way in the article "Old cities, new pasts: Heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe." They suggest that "an official policy of collective amnesia...may aid recovery from past trauma and also permit the healing of social divisions[42]" though they also point out that this is a short term solution, as the past is likely to resurface in a future moment. They comment that "The easiest option would be to return to pre-communist nationalist interpretations and to use the heritage of the built environment principally to support and foster a sense of national identity: historically in Western as well as Central Europe its dominant and generally most successful function.[43]" In this sense, Hungary did fulfill this to an extent as many of the changes to street names in the early 1990s was reversing the names to what they had been before the communist regime.

While in the initial transition period following 1989, Hungary was looked on as being one of the strongest emerging nations, problems have emerged. In part due to the strong duality, it has been torn between various ideologies that look to use the same moments from the past with different aims.

An article entitled: "Hungary after 1989: Inscribing a new past on a place" focuses on monuments and how regimes remove or add commemorative symbols in order "to impress their own vision of history on the landscape and social life...Research conducted in the past fifteen years hints that political iconoclasm should be treated as part of the general process through which nations build com-

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41   Kimmelman, Michael (2007). "A writer who always sees history in the present tense." New York Times.

42   Ashworth, G. J. and J. E. Tunbridge (1999). "Old cities, new pasts: Heritage planning in selected cities of Central Europe." GeoJournal. Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 108

43   Ibid p. 108.

memorative traditions, rather than as exceptions or anomalies.[44]" An interesting point is how historical differences in different countries affect commemoration:

> Nations with relatively stable political histories...have developed commemorative traditions that stress continuity over long periods of time. Nations like Hungary, Germany, and others face disjunctures, breaks, and gaps that must be ignored or bridged. For Hungary this has meant assembling commemorative traditions from a variety of national, religious, and ethnic sources and linking together events from many different centuries.[45]

With moments in history that need to be overlooked in order to build an identity that citizens can have pride in, the time-line of commemoration becomes less rigid, and creates a tradition where forgetting can become normal.

Miguel Angel Centeno points to this same issue in an article referring to Latin America. "Among nations who at least attempt to construct an unbroken link to some pre-national ethnic group," he states, "references to these forebears are also common. The Hermannsdenkmal in Germany was one prominent example as were Fascist Italy's Roman pretensions. The continuing popularity of Joan of Arc as a symbol in France is another.[46]" Hungary is a country which has broken links which gives the assignment to politicians and key figures to fill in those gaps by re-remembering important moments.

It is not easy to pick at a dominant ideology. Currently, right-wing parties associated with with Christian nationalism and anti-communist sentiments, while left-wing parties associated with so-

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44   Foote, Kenneth E., Attila Tóth, and Anett Árvay (2000). "Hungary after 1989: Inscribing a new past on a place." American Geographical Society. Vol. 90, No. 3 , p. 307.

45   Ibid, p. 329.

46   Centeno, Miguel Angel (1999). "War and Memories: Symbols of State Nationalism in Latin America." European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, No. 66, p. 80.

cial-communist legacy and cosmopolitan orientation. Cultural elements have become more important than economic issues, with an emphasis on Christianity being directly tied to being Hungarian. The political climate is extremely polarized, with the left viewing the right as: «antidemocratic, nationalistic, and, sometimes, even fascist" and the right associating the left with communism and constantly questioning their allegiance to the country (Todosijević and Enyedi 2008). "Thus, under these conditions it is difficult to speak about a 'dominant ideology.' Instead, there is a strong competition of mutually exclusive ideologies.[47]"

Most recent changes

In Budapest, heroes of the current order are commemorated, street names are replaced regularly in line with the changes in the political climate.[48]

As Palonen states in the above quote, from the article "Canonisation and recanonisation in Hungarian street names," changes to street names in Budapest have long been following in line with political changes in the country. Considering this, it can be assumed that by looking at the changes to street names, one can gain an insight into the current political climate. In the spring of 2011, twenty-six street names and square names were changes, and an additional nine in December of 2011, adding up to thirty-five changes total in 2011. Some names were given to previously unnamed streets or squares, so in those cases, decision to commemorate a name with the addition can be looked at, while in the other cases, of a removal

47   Todosijević, Bojan and Zsolt Enyedi (2008). "Authoritarianism without Dominant Ideology: Political Manifestations of Authoritarian Attitudes in Hungary." Political Psychology, Vol. 29, No. 5, p. 769.

48   Palonen, Emilia (2003). "Canonisation and recanonisation in Hungarian street names." Reading the political (Eds: K. Palonen & T. Parvikko). Tampere: Finnish Political Association, p. 149.

plus an addition, or a return to a previous name can provide a greater insight into the current political climate.

Hungary has struggled with who and what to commemorate in building it's history and national identity. They have been too many times on the losing side of wars and tend to have national heroes who could be interpreted in more than one way. An important connection can be drawn with struggles of street naming in Moscow:

But in looking at the pattern of new and old street names, a number of distinctions need to be borne in mind. First, not every street name introduced during the Soviet period had direct and obvious symbolic connections only with the regime. For example, streets named after Great symbolic connections only with the regime. For example, streets named after Great Patriotic War military [leaders, scientists, writers, or the space pioneers] carry the names of figures associated with great national achievements that, while they may have occurred under the Soviet regime, could be disconnected from their Soviet context. These people could be claimed as Russian heroes as well as Soviet heroes, and therefore are in a very different category to many of those that follow. Many of these names on Moscow streets were not replaced.[49]

A major difference is that Budapest has almost completely removed any names associated with the Soviet regime, though we must consider that many Hungarian figures have verged on issues, changes viewpoints on issues, and also being commemorated in different ways by parties with mostly opposing views. It is perhaps why the Hungarian Scientific Academy (MTA) released the list of names in 2013, with controversial names and a decision on whether these names were either: acceptable, not recommended, or prohibited. It was a way to standardize how the names included on the list will be remembered. Because there were indeed people who deserve to

be recognized, but due to having lived in the period of the Soviet re-gime, and automatically associated with communism and therefore not deemed appropriate because of that.

In an article about the city-text of Budapest, Palonen (2008) goes through the administrative technicalities of changing street names. She states that the system is a closely guarded one, in which district councils propose street names to the Municipal Assembly who then has the power to approve or decline it. She points out that before the official end of the socialist regime, in the 1980s chang-es were being made in the city-text towards post-communism. A post-communist act passed in 1990 separated Budapest from oth-er towns in Hungary by including a separate Budapest Municipal Act which decentralized the power granting individual districts (twen-ty-two total in Budapest) more power with a governing municipal body[50]. Budapest was never fully centralized in the communist pe-riod, so each district has street nomenclature characteristics of a town, with names repeating throughout the city in different dis-tricts; «Budapest is simultaneously a national capital and a munici-pality composed of districts.[51]»

A subtle chaos emerged in 1989 when people took it upon themselves to take down statues on their own, and the municipality requested that people wait until official decisions had been made on the removal of monuments. Once they decided to change a number of street names, they requested that the districts make the chang-es should they be willing. Changing statues and memorials however took longer due to financial reasons (Palonen 2008).

On October 10, 1991, the Minister of the Interior requested that all the mayors of Hungary change street names in their dis-tricts that commemorated the communist regime, with a timeline by October 23, in time for the anniversary of the 1956 revolution.

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50   Palonen, Emilia (2008). "The city-text in post-communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration." GeoJournal. Vol. 73, No. 3, pg 222-223.

51   Ibid, pp 222-223.

In an article by the newspaper, Magyar Hírlap, this request was crit-icized due to a number of factors, including the short time-frame and the cost to make the changes, also "raising questions concern-ing whether a Minister of Interior should give in order to remove statues that did not suit the reigning ideology of whether such an order would constitute a step backwards.[52]"

Issues concerning street names were also discussed on a na-tional level for certain issues. A suggestion was put forward to re-turn a Trianon memorial to Szabadság Tér (Freedom Square) first in 1990, then again in 2001. In 1990 it was proposed to the Hun-garian Parliament by what was then the conservative government with the indent of keeping an important part of history fresh in the mind of the nation, while the liberals feared it could provoke con-flict with neighboring countries. When the discussion resurfaced in 2001, Fidesz, who had been on the liberal side pushing against the commemoration previously, had changed to the conservative side and was pushing for the memorial to Trianon. A representative of the Fidesz government, Imre Szakács, argued that the nation had not been able to discuss Trianon for the decades between 1950 and 1990, and it was important for the youth of today to remember his-tory and acknowledge what the country had lost. He insisted that it was not a return to the politics of the interwar period, and not revisionist to remember Trianon, but merely a piece of the histo-ry of the nation. (Palonen 2008). As Palonen points out, "these de-bates show the importance of Budapest's memorials for national politics, especially in the making of political boundaries and identi-ties in post-communist Hungary.[53]"

Palonen also points out examples of conflicts between the municipality and the districts. One example was in 2000, when the eleventh district proposed naming a street after Miklós Horthy. The municipality reviewed this and eventually declined, but said the dis-

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52   Ibid, p 224.

53   Palonen, Emilia (2008). "The city-text in post-communist Budapest: street names, memorials, and the politics of commemoration." GeoJournal. Vol. 73, No. 3, p 225.

trict could choose a smaller street to name after Horthy.

A main theme of street renaming in post-communist Hungary was the revolution of 1956. Players on both local and national levels wanted to commemorate the revolution, but there were different ways of interpreting the revolution and therefore failed to build national unity. «[T]he problem was that the claims concerning the memory of 1956 were so diverse, contradictory and particularistic that the revolution itself did not manage to accommodate all the significations and thereby failed to function as a uniting force containing various claims about revolution and nationhood.[54]» Some conservative parties regarded Imre Nagy, the leader of the 1956 revolution, as a possible communist and therefore did not want to commemorate Nagy too soon in the city text.

The example mentioned in the introduction of Szalmás Piroska street being renamed as Németh László is an interesting case when the two figures are studied. Szalmás Piroska lived from 1989 to 1941, and was a composer and conductor. She joined the workers' party in 1928, and in 1929 the Social Democrat Party of Hungary. Due to association with the communists, her choir was eventually banned as they were accused of singing 'worker's songs'. As in Hungary, there is still today a push to eliminate any ties with the communist past, the removal of the name is not so surprising, but it is rather the addition and commemoration of Németh László which is more controversial. Németh László lived from 1901 to 1975 and was a writer, essayist, and play-write. What he is perhaps most remembered for today was a comment he made during a speech in 1943 arguing against the 'colonization' of Budapest by Jewish intellectuals. [55] "...the revengeful Jewry, lacking self-criticism, must have grown extremely strong during the last four or five years as opposed to the shy respecters of culture, and whoever must be deaf for knife wheting...fails to hear that it is the heart that Shylock wants."[56] This was not even one year before

54   Ibid, p 226.

55   "Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past." 2001. Center for advanced Holocaust studies, United States Holocaust memorial museum.

56   Nemeth, Laszlo (1943). "Masodik szarszoi beszed." http://www.okm.

the Germans occupied Hungary. Hungary has been, and continues to be associated with a certain degree of anti-semitism, but it seems like something that on an official, commemorative level would want to be distanced from.

Perhaps the most evident controversy was caused by the changing of Köztársaság tér to II. János Pál pápa tér. Köztársaság means republic, and the new name commemorates the late pope, John Paul II. János Pótó, a researcher at the Hungarian Acadamy of Sciences, spoke about this in Octber 2011, in a lecture entitled: Terek és nevek: Köztérelnevezések a szimbolikus politika tévútjain ("Places and names. The naming of public places in the wrong ways of symbolic politics."). He raises the point that the square is situated in a rather run-down area of the city and that there is no church, let alone a Catholic church in the near vicinity. But the main concern, he says, it not as much with the addition of the new name, but with the removal of the old name. It is a square that knew many names, and was given the name Köztársaság in 1946. Since Hungary is still a Republic, he asked the question of why was it necessary to change the name[57]. A member of parliament commented on this issue during a voting session about the renaming of streets and squares in 2011 by saying that "amikor valakiről nevet kap egy terület, akkor a régi neve elvész, szerinte ez a Köztársaság tér esetében a legproblémásabb.[58]" It is a warning that when a place receives a new name, it is important to keep in mind what is lost in the absence of the old name, and that this is most problematic in the case of Republic square.

gov.hu/letolt/retorika/ab/szoveg/szov/nemeth.htm, accessed 14 February 2013.

57   Pótó, János (2012). "Terek és nevek: Köztérelnevezések a szimbolikus politika tévútjain." Törtöténelmi szemle. Vol. 1. p. 171.

58   "Széll Kálmán tér lett a Moszkva térből." 27 April 2011, available: hvg.hu.

Photograph credit: Cécile Moore, 2013

One change that drew a significant amount of international media attention was the naming of Elvis Presley tér[59][60]. Presley famously recognized the struggle of the Hungarian people during the revolution in 1956 by dedicating the song, "Peace in the valley" as a tribute, when he appeared on the Ed Sullivan show in 1957[61]. The mayor of Budapest, István Tarlos, was quoted as saying that the motivations for naming the square after Presley were indeed political, rather than sentimental.[62] In combination with the removal of the name of Roosevelt from a prominent square of the city it is a strange combination, as the removal of Roosevelt to honor a Hungarian figure fits in with Hungary wanting to strengthen itself by distancing itself from foreign influence. In comments under an online article and video about Elvis Presley square, an anonymous user wrote in the comment section: "Nincs elég MAGYAR tudós, író, költő?" (Are

59   "Elvis remembered, honored in Budapest." Two-way blog. Wright Bryan. 2 March 2011, accessed 20 January 2013.

60   http://www.elvis.com/news/detail.aspx?id=5410, accessed 20 January 2013.

61   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZyX04HMi-4, accessed 23 January 2013.

62   http://metro.co.uk/2011/03/03/elvis-presley-to-become-honorary-citizen-of-budapest-642207/, accessed 20 January 2013.

there not enough Hungarian intellectuals, writers, poets?) and goes on to say that although she likes Elvis's music and films, in Budapest it does not make sense to have a square named after him. This reaction fits in to a larger theme of a subgroup of Hungarians who are rejecting the West, or foreign influences, in favor of strengthening a unique Hungarian identity. However, the case of Elvis is unique in the sense that he was one of the few internationally famous figures who brought attention to the struggles of the Hungarian people during the revolution in 1956.

Each of the changes to street names was reviewed and voted on by members of parliament. Jenő Kaltenbach, the leader of the LMP parliamentary group voted against changes made in 2011 and was quoted as saying: "egy város identitását a hagyományai adják meg, s ha egy városban 20-30 évente átnevezik a közterületeket, annak a városnak nem lesz identitása.[63]" He points out that the identity of a city is acquired by tradition, and if every 20-30 years the names of public areas change, then there won't be an identity for the city.

The question left, which could be the most difficult to grasp, is how residents of Budapest interact with the city-text, and to what extent their identity is shaped and altered as the street names are altered; whether the change be consciousness, unconscious, or perhaps they remain unaffected. Though studies that analyze public space and city-text do write about 'society' and how the 'society' is affected, I would suggest that a number of people do not consider their identity to be primarily composed of the larger scale societal identity. In furthering research on this topic, I would push for semi-structured interviews with residents of Budapest of different generations in order to attempt to gain an understanding of this question.

63   "Széll Kálmán tér lett a Moszkva térből." 27 April 2011, available: hvg.hu.

Conclusion

By examining the changes to street names and squares in Budapest since 2011, together with the significance of street naming and city-text and the complexities of the Hungarian identity, I hope to have provided some insight into what the most recent changes say about the current political climate in Hungary and how it is reflective of the modern, divided Hungarian identity.

Though some of the changes followed past patterns of street naming in Budapest, there were also changes made in 2011 that are distinct and provide a deeper insight into the current political climate. Though these choices largely reflect an opinion or ideology of the current administration, looking at mixed reactions from the public has shed light onto how residents of Budapest view these changes in relation to their view of Hungarian identity.

The transition in Hungary was not completed. Street names are a part of that. People were disappointed by capitalism, by the European Union, and many feel attacked and misunderstood by the Western media. These factors add up to a deep feeling of uncertainty, which has lead to the desire to solidify the nation's identity. Looking back to the past provides a delusional sense of reassurance that the nation will overcome any obstacles. There is certain level of fear of the unknown that is natural and makes it easier to group people together: anyone with a slight link to socialism or liberalism is deemed a communist, just as the Western media is quick to group conservative groups together, increasing their resentment of the West. Street-names will continue to be a reflection of the politics of Hungary, and the reaction of the public will shed light onto how those changes are interpreted. The attempt to complete the transition is being attempted through changing the street names, so while it is a reflection of the ideal national identity, it does not seem

to prove to be enough to correct mistakes of the failed transition.

In continuing research, I would be curious to examine further the personal relationship that individual residents feel when confronted with these changes in order to attempt to bridge the gap between academic discourse about national identity and city-text and how changes are felt on a more personal level.

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