To rename or not to rename …. Investigating commemorative street renaming in Eastern Germany

We report on a project which investigates the complex discourses surrounding changes in commemorative street (re)naming in Eastern Germany. The East of Germany is a good case study for analyzing transformations in representational politics due to the repeated changes in state-ideology that swept through Eastern Europe in the past century. We explore the resulting waves of street renaming in a small town, Annaberg-Buchholz (pop 22.250), compared to a big city (Leipzig pop. 560.500) over the past 100 years. Focusing on the debates and discourses that surround the semiotic erasure and subsequent (re-)instatement of personnages, values other ideological referents allows us to explore the "connection between power relations, public memory, identity formation and commemorative" naming (Azaryahu 2012: 388).

The moral-ideological arguments levelled in favour of commemorative street (re-)naming are well known, including the institutionalization of cultural memory (Assmann 2010) and the semioticization of officially sanctioned identity and ideology which index state-hegemonic politics of memory (Scollon & Scollon 2003). In this project, we juxtapose these discourses with arguments contra commemorative street renaming, which have been neglected in the literature on the topic (see Pöppinghege 2012).

Arguments against the ongoing recruitment of the "ideological robe of the city" for the needs of the current present (Zieliński 1994) can be grouped into broad ontological clusters:

(i) <u>Pragmatic-administrative</u>. The vast majority of arguments against street renaming in our Annaberg-Bucholtz and Leipzig data are of this type (including the cost of changing street signs - an imporant argment especially in smaller towns - the orientational aspects of changing street names as well as the pratical concern of changing addresses).

(ii) <u>Historical-factual</u> arguments can speak against or for street renaming but are difficult if not impossible to disentangle from

(iii) <u>Ideological</u> arguments, which include traditionalists, who see street names as quasi-archival records of the past.

Our project relies on critical discourse analysis of a rich data-set including sources such as the mass media, citizens' discourse captured in readers' letters and official petitions in conjunction with interviews with city officials and archivists over the past 100 years. Overall, our analysis allows us to uncover the complex interplay of forces, including hegemonic top-down discourses as well as grass-roots movements, resulting in a fascinating interplay of endorsement and resistance that underlies the ever-changing urban street-scape.

Assmann, A. 2010. Canon and Archive. A. Erll & A. Nünning. (eds). *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*. de Gruyter. 97-108.

Arazyahu, M. 2012. Hebrew, Arabic, English: The politics of multilingual street signs in Israeli cities. *Social & Cultural Geography* 13:1-19. ·

Pöppinghege, R. 2012. Geschichtspolitik per Stadtplan. Kontroversen zu historisch-politischen Straßennamen. Freese, M. (ed.). *Fragwürdige Ehrungen*. Ardey-Verlag. 21-40

Scollon, R. & S. Wong Scollon. 2003. *Discourses in Place*. Routledge.

Zieliński, F. 1994. "Szata ideologiczna miasta. O przemianowywaniu ulic i placów. E. Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska (ed.). *Miasta polskie w dwusetlecie prawa o miastach.* Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne. 189-199.

[493 Words]