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From Center to Periphery and Vice Versa: The Politics of Toponyms in the Transitional Capital

This paper discusses the politics of street names in Belgrade since the beginning of 1990s until today. Given the central place of the capital city in the symbolic geography of the nation, subsequent cultural influences of the capitals' "city text overcomes its actual scale. The past fifteen years of the "toponymical transition" are characterized by several phases and specifics in commemoration and de-commemoration of various public symbols, both in the contents and means of such identity re-construction. Being mostly consistent, the de-commemoration of themes and persons connected with the related historical period and ideology is usually achieved through revision (without restitution) of street names, and also through identity politics which initiate a politically opportune transfer of toponyms in the symbolic center-periphery relation of the city (and national) text.

Key words:

city text, urban toponyms,
streets, identity, Belgrade,
commemoration,
decommemoration, center,
periphery

Introduction¹

Identity politics with related discourses and actions in public arenas of political and social life (which consecutively vertically define identity and culture),² are partially being accomplished through creation and cessation of cultural connections between specific city spaces and citizens' identity. In this undertake, identity

¹ The paper is a part of the project *Anthropological research of communication in contemporary Serbia* (project no. 147021), which is supported and funded by the Serbian Ministry of Science and Technological Development.

² Jonathan Hill, Thomas Wilson, *Identity Politics and the Politics of Identities*, Identities 10, Routledge, New York 2003, 2.

politics influences residents' everyday discourses and notions regarding not only the surrounding space, but also the notions of the society they live in and themselves as constituents of the particular community that inhabits such symbolically marked (or unmarked) space. Every city is abundant in locations significant for representation and identification of its inhabitants; these locations could be marked as (anthropological) places, spaces marked as historical, connected with identity and rich in cultural values. On the other hand, "non-places" stand as opposition: the locations not experienced, in most discourses, as being connected with history and/or identity.³ The same way ideology and identity politics (and often, politics of identities) define certain spaces as significant urban places, similar mechanisms could lead to a reverse process – public derogation of a certain locality in cultural sense and its transfer from a symbolic public into a symbolic "grey" zone.⁴ Identity "destruction" is compensated by adequate identity "construction" when a certain anthropological place is being culturally degraded either through a symbolic conquest,⁵ or through creation of a new, alternative place of identification with similar/same context.⁶ Symbolic annihilation, opposing, and creation in the urban iden-

³ Mark Ože, *Nemesta: uvod u antropologiju nadmodernosti, XX vek*, Beograd 2005.

⁴ See Ermis Lafazanovski, *Skopje: Nostalgic Places and Utopian Spaces*, Ethnologia Balkanica 10, LIT Verlag, Berlin 2006.

⁵ An illustrative example for this could be the Belgrade "Kremlin", a complex of buildings located at both sides of King Alexander Boulevard (earlier Revolution Boulevard), surrounding Pioneers' Park (earlier the court's park). Before World War II, these buildings served as the royal court complex and Yugoslav assembly building. After the war, one of the first moves by the new government was to remove iron fences that surrounded the complex (with a proclamation that "the people's government has no barriers towards its people"), and to place stars on the top of the domes of buildings that became Federal Government and Presidency of Serbia headquarters at that time. Almost 50 years later, a similar logic was used by the newly elected Belgrade City Council (consolidated after the 1996 municipal elections) – among first decisions to be executed was the removal of the star from the top of the dome of so-called "Old Court" building, and later a placement/restoration of two-headed eagle at the same spot. Equally indicative is the process of the postponed symbolical destruction of an anthropological place which has previously been already symbolically conquered – by constructing a monumental Palace of the Federation, and later, a skyscraper for the use of mass political organization of the socialist era (including Central Committee of the League of Communists) in Novi Beograd (New Belgrade), a former historical power place of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in downtown Belgrade, was symbolically destroyed by partial removal of institutions of power (the already mentioned Federal Government, and Central Committee of the League of Communists, previously located in a near-by building located on Nikola Pašić Square, earlier Marx and Engels Square) towards Novi Beograd city borough, which was one of the central identity symbols of the post-war socialist renewal and development. Gradual dislocations of the institutions of power at a new location, new anthropological place, also carried a message that the proclaimed discontinuity of the socialist state with the former Yugoslavia, with additional message (accompanied with the accelerated process of de-centralization) of distancing itself from the pre-war unitary state by removing some of the federal institutions from the historical part of Belgrade into newly built "socialist" part of the city.

⁶ The creation of alternative, significant urban places that exist parallel to the established ones is elaborated anthropologically through studies of political struggles in transitional city capitals: a construction of opposition and anti-regime symbolic space at the main city squares, symbolic agoras of the post-modern time – hence, at the end of the 1980s, the Bulgarian political opposition has formed an alternative space of political legitimacy through gatherings at one of the central

tity is not achieved only within places of grandeur, localities with great identity and political capacities, but also through ideological/symbolic interventions of seemingly less importance: for instance, by a simple renaming of certain objects or appellations, such in the case of companies,⁷ restaurants⁸ or movie theatres.⁹ Discourse intervention within urban texture and toponyms that people regularly meet every day, is possibly the most efficient since it takes over seemingly marginal markings around the city which people (to whom symbolical communication through city's toponyms and appellations is directed) regularly encounter in their everyday lives. This is especially characteristic of streets and their names, where the symbolic "conquest" of the city's meanings through (re)renaming of public urban spaces is both the most prominent and most frequent.

Maoz Azaryahu¹⁰ was one of the first to extensively study changes in urban toponymy, making his case by studying Berlin street names during the 1980s, while the subject was initiated in South-Slavic anthropologies by Dunja Rihtman-

squares in Sofia, the Saint Alexander Nevski Square, which was constructed, through various symbolic practices and political activities, as symbolically equal political place with, till that time, the official symbol of political power in Sofia, in symbolical ownership of the political party in power, 9. Septemvri (September 9th) Square, now called Prince Alexander Batenberg Square: Radost Ivanova, *Zbogom dinosauri, dobrodošli krokodili!*, XX vek, Beograd 2000, 27.

⁷ Such as the mass renaming of companies and factories in former Yugoslavia after World War II: *Bata* to *Borovo* (international brand to place name), *Siemens* to *Končar* (private brand to the name of the partisan fighter), *Union* to *Kraš* (foreign brand-name to the name of the partisan fighter) etc. Such a process also linguistically disguised the fact the most of such establishments were in fact nationalized and confiscated private property. Interestingly enough, after the collapse of the socialist system, similar processes were not as frequent, possibly due to perception of the importance of retaining the brands' visibility among customers which would heavily suffer in case of renaming the company.

⁸ Almost an ideal example could be the renaming of the restaurant *Ruski Car* (Russian Tsar) in Belgrade's *Knez Mihailova* street (city's central commercial street) after WW II; the name presented an obvious ideological threat to the authorities trying to consolidate the newly established socialist system, in the midst of conflict with the Soviet Union. The restaurant was renamed *Zagreb*: such a name became equally disturbing for the government officials in late 1980s and early 1990s who promptly exchanged the earlier motto "bratstvo i jedinstvo" (brotherhood and unity) for war cry "All Serbs in one state" – hence the Russian tsar, under the current political circumstances, returned into his/its old premises.

⁹ Movie theatres, which represent spaces of substantial flux of people, are frequent targets of linguistic alterations. For example, all cinema halls in German-occupied Belgrade that carried "non-national" names (*Casina*, *Union*, *Rex*...) by 1943 got renamed, this time using "ideologically and nationally" appropriate names – *Nova Evropa* (New Europe), *Šumadinac* (deriving from Serbian region called Šumadija), *Morava* (after a river in Central Serbia) etc: see Olivera Milosavljević, *Potisnuta istina*, HOLJPS, Beograd 2006, 52. Under different circumstances, and as a sole and isolated case, similar happened in Zagreb after the first multi-party elections in 1990, with an indicative renaming of the theater *Balkan* into *Evropa*, which was in appropriate accordance with the publicly proclaimed distancing of Croatia from the Balkans, and symbolical accession/return to Europe: Stef Jansen, *Svakodnevni orijentalizam: Doživljaj "Balkana"/"Evrope" u Beogradu i Zagrebu*, Filozofija i društvo XVIII, Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, Beograd 2001, 47.

¹⁰ Maoz Azaryahu, *Street Names and Political Identity: The Case of east Berlin*, Journal of Contemporary History 21/4, SAGE Publications, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi 1986.

Auguštin¹¹, using Zagreb as an example. The streets naming is, of course, in the first place an administrative action, with an aim to identify and differentiate certain streets and enable spatial orientation within the settlement.¹² Research of street names as a system of political symbols hence shows that the city toponymy, in an organized modern state, „never changes or constitutes spontaneously, but as a rule, depends on political ideologies and political power“.¹³ The goal, among other things, is to contribute to the establishment of a desirable political consciousness among the population.¹⁴ Commemoration in urban toponymy, that is, commemorative names (of persons or geographical and general notions) of city's toponyms (streets, squares and parks) enroll history and geography in “city text”, making them so an integral part of people's everyday life. So, engaged in colloquial language and communication, urban toponyms become active participants in construction and perception of social reality, transforming therefore history into an element of “natural order of things”, hiding at the same time, its induced and artificial character.¹⁵ Katherine Verdery argues that political and social power is being exercised through control of both history and landscape, so street names grow to be where they probably interlink the most.¹⁶ The level of influence of centers of social power, and the reverse influence of colloquial discursive practices, on the symbolic constitution of city's toponymy, is appraised differently. It could be assumed that an ideological and political influence of politics significantly overrides in (re)naming of streets and squares, certainly in national capitals. A capital city's text, as well as its entire architecture (especially so the segment most susceptible for frequent discursive re-construction, official street toponymy) is of greater importance (during the on-going process of nation-building) than street appellations in other cities, especially considering the significant place of a capital in symbolic geography of a nation. Hence a capital's toponymy becomes a unique *lakmoes* of an ideology and society's politics in a given historical period. Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin concludes that street renaming is just a part of the effort of molding a given nation, its ideology, culture and worldviews; renaming becomes so a contemporary magical practice,

¹¹ A paper originally published in the journal *Vijenac* no 23, 1995 (which later became a part of the book published in the edition *XX vek*), has largely inspired and initiated interest to write this paper. See Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, *Ulice moga grada, XX vek – Čigoja štampa, Zemun-Beograd 2000*.

¹² Maoz Azaryahu, *The power of commemorative street name*,. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. 14, 1996, 312.

¹³ D. Rihtman-Auguštin *op. cit.*, 48, 49.

¹⁴ M. Azaryahu, *Street names...*, 581.

¹⁵ Maoz Azaryahu, *German reunification and the politics of street names: the case of East Berlin*, Political Geography 16/6, Elsevier Science Ltd 1997, 481.

¹⁶ See Ketrin Verderi, *Šta je bio socijalizam i šta dolazi posle njega*, Fabrika knjiga, Beograd 2005, and Duncan Light et al, *Toponymy and the Communist city: Street names in Bucharest, 1948–1965*, GeoJournal 56, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dodrecht-Norwell 2002. 136.

where certain memories are sent into oblivion while others are being established.¹⁷ Taking arguments into account concerning ideological construction (and destruction) of meanings of elements of city text presented so far, pages to follow would try to shed a light on the basic characteristics of renaming of Belgrade streets and squares since the beginning of 1990s. At the time when the fall of the Iron Curtain caused changes of many street names in the cities of Eastern and Central Europe, the similar processes in the capital of Serbia/Yugoslavia inevitably showed certain particularities.¹⁸

“From working population to Serbian folks” (from Marshal Tito to Serbian rulers)¹⁹

The epoch during which the “working population” became gradually transformed into the Serbian folks (late 1980s and early 1990s), also witnessed the change in street names in Belgrade. The public identity politics of the majority elites have almost simultaneously formed public images that shaped “new” identity of the state and its citizens alongside with the new street map of the capital. The process of streets’ renaming began simultaneously with the final phase of restructuring of the national consciousness in Serbia, by turning a latent, nominal, national identity into an eruptive and exclusive category.²⁰ The turmoil of such politics acted openly, so the Serbian Assembly (on June 24th, 1991) recommended that Belgrade City Council (and other Municipal Councils throughout Serbia) commence an initiative to change the names of the cities, streets and squares that bore “the names of those responsible for the ripping off Serbian industry and for decades long economic policies that harmed Serbia.”²¹ “Those who ripped off Serbia” were numerous, among them a number of persons (and notions) from the recent Yugoslav his-

¹⁷ D. Rihtman-Auguštin, *op cit*, 60. More on politics of collective memory in contemporary Serbia see: Мирослава Малешевић, *Насиље идентитета*, Културне паралеле (ур. Драгана Радојичић), Етнографски институт САНУ, Београд 2008.

¹⁸ Tidal wave of changes of street names is not a characteristic of the recent transitional period in Belgrade or elsewhere. Even more so, the era in which the scale of street renaming was the most comprehensive, is thought to be the period when the Communist Party came to power. However, this is not entirely true for Belgrade, since the biggest alterations in Belgrade’s toponymy happened during the quisling rule of the city (1941-1944), when new names were given to 112 streets in central Belgrade alone, while the wholesome number of street name changes in wider city area (comprising then suburban, now urban, neighborhoods) rises to approximately 600: Олга Манојловић-Пинтар, *Културни живот Београда у време немачке окупације 1941-1944 у светлу писања београдске штампе*, Годишњак за друштвену историју 1/1, УДИ, Београд 1994.

¹⁹ The first part of the subsection’s title is borrowed (and translated) subtitle (*Od radnog do srpskog naroda*) from: Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika*, Biblioteka XX vek – Čigoja štampa, Zemun-Beograd 2000, 153.

²⁰ Мирјана Прошић-Дворнић, *Модели „ретрадиционализације“: пут у будућност враћањем у прошлост*, Гласник ЕИ САНУ XLIV, Етнографски институт САНУ, Београд 1995, 307.

²¹ Nebojša Dragosavac, *Masovno preimenovanje ulica u Beogradu (Mass renaming of streets in Belgrade)*, text in Belgrade daily *Danas*, March 2nd, 2004.

tory, who, only the day before, were political role-models and seniors of those same Assembly deputies who passed the recommendation. People and notions which “ripped off Serbia”, along with accidental collateral damage, were located and summoned, so an extensive campaign of street name changes has begun, Belgrade included (after 1940s, the biggest one).²² Azaryahu states the significance of ideological and symbolic contents of names/notions being removed (decommemoration) as well as those being installed instead (commemoration).²³ In the first half of the 1990s Belgrade’s topography saw the disappearance of the names of Josip Broz Tito (the streets in downtown Belgrade and neighborhood of Zemun), Edvard Kardelj,²⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Georgi Dimitrov, Ho Chi Minh, Emperor Haile Selassie, Stjepan Radić,²⁵ but also terms of “Brotherhood and Unity”, October Revolution, or in 1992, Fočanska street was renamed,²⁶ etc.²⁷ New street names bore names of “Serbian rulers”²⁸ Nikola Pašić,²⁹ Ilija Garašanin,³⁰ Arsenije Čarnojević,³¹ King Petar I,³² Field-marshal Bojović,³³ Žanka Stokić,³⁴ Milan

²² The biggest renamings occurred in 1906, 1908, 1909, 1930, 1940, 1943, 1946, 1947, 1948 and 1965: Марко Лeko, *Београдске улице и тргови: 1872-2003*, ЗУНС, Београд 2003, 85.

²³ M. Azaryahu, *Street Names...*, 581

²⁴ Unofficially “second man” of socialist Yugoslavia, and leading Marxist theoretician among Yugoslav communists.

²⁵ Leading pre-WW II Croatian federalist politician assassinated by a Serb unitarist deputy in 1928.

²⁶ Street named after a Bosnian town Foča got its new name in 1992 just as the city’s original name was changed to Srbinje (a newly designed coin deriving from the Serb ethnonym), a decision passed and forced upon by Serb para-military and political warlords which ruled the city at the time. New name of the street was Merošinska, after a town in Southern Serbia.

²⁷ The data on old and new street names until 2003 are taken from a detailed and comprehensive registry compiled by Marko Leko (M. Leko, *op. cit.*), while changes from 2003 onwards were provided from City of Belgrade Official Gazette (*Службени лист града Београда*) and city’s official web pages: www.begrad.org.yu.

²⁸ The Marshal Tito Street was not given its previous name (King Milan Street), but, based on the almost blueprint from Zagreb (renaming of the Victims of Fascism Square into Croatian Noblemen Square/*Trg hrvatskih velikana* was carried out on December 10th, 1990), the street was named Serbian Rulers Street/*Ulica srpskih vladara*. The parallels could also be found in purely practical motives of authorities initiating renaming in both cities – the Serbian Assembly, which passed recommendations for street name changes, probably did not feel comfortable at the address Marshal Tito Street (where Assembly’s building was situated), while the Victims of Fascism Square in Zagreb was the location of the headquarters of the then ruling HDZ party.

²⁹ Long-standing conservative Serbian Prime minister.

³⁰ Foreign secretary from the time of Principality of Serbia.

³¹ Serbian Patriarch who led the exodus of Serbs (mainly from Kosovo) in 17th Century.

³² King of Serbia (1903-1918) and King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1921).

³³ Military leader from the Balkan Wars and World War I.

³⁴ Serbian actress condemned during socialist era for her comic appearances during German occupation of Serbia.

Tepić,³⁵ Nikola Tesla,³⁶ the river Sava, peace³⁷ etc. By only glancing at the “off-the-map” list of names, one can read a symbolic *farewell* to the international workers’ movement and the Non-Aligned Movement, but also to multi-national socialist Yugoslavia. Persons (and to some extent also notions) after whom the streets were renamed were mostly taken from the national history before World War II. – the early 1990s saw a selected list of names that experienced indirect “rehabilitation” by this street renaming (Pašić, Garašanin etc), or witnessed their perceived historical role being emphasized in accordance with the current political mythology and political and war aims (Patriarch Čarnojević, Field-Marshal Bojović etc). However, the “street travesty” from this period did not aim for “restitution” of the street names, since, as a rule, the streets were not given their previous respective names (regardless of the epoch) but totally new ones.³⁸ In contrast with the majority of other postsocialist states, Belgrade and Serbia at this time weren’t experiencing the loudly announced symbolic return to “the old ways”, which were eradicated because of allegedly “non-historical” episode of communism (which was the common public narration in many postsocialist countries) – urban street (re) naming served the purpose of correction of memory, but without “revolutionary” discontinuity that would try to find its legitimization in the past, that is, in the previous street names.

Keeping that in mind, names of streets/squares that have kept their old names are equally interesting – although bearing the same (or similar) connotations like the de-commemorated names, Belgrade still had streets named after Lenin, Red Army, Yugoslav People’s Army, Revolution, General Zhdanov,³⁹ Ivan Milutinović,⁴⁰ Dimitrije Tucović⁴¹ etc. Substantial parts of the socialist pantheon and WW II partisan mythology were still present in urban toponymy. The ruling elite clearly distanced itself from the previous system, by taking the streets away from promi-

³⁵ Open symbolism is seen from the name removal of the street Stjepan Radić and change into the street of the Serb/Yugoslav Army officer who got killed in Bjelovar in 1991 during war in Croatia.

³⁶ Even though famous scientist of Serbian ancestry already had the street named after him, even during his lifetime, in 1925 (the present day Dr. Aleksandar Kostić Street).

³⁷ Almost ironically, in midst of wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, October Revolution Boulevard got the name Boulevard of Peace/*Bulevar Mira* in 1992.

³⁸ Except in few cases when, again, complete restitution didn’t occur- only a part of the July 7th Street (*Ulica 7. jula*, named after the date celebrated in Serbia as the day of the beginning of the anti-fascist uprising) was given back the name of King Petar I, and King Milutin Street was extended on the part previously named after Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. In the neighborhood of Zemun restitution of street names was somewhat more present, where certain streets (Kozara, Maxim Gorky, Marshal Tito, Georgi Dimitrov etc) in 1992 got the previous names back (Vasilija Vasilijevića, Pregrevica, Glavna, Dobanovačka etc), from the appropriate historical period, different in every street (that way the central Zemun street named after Marshal Tito did not become King Petar I Street, as had been its previous name until the war, but *Glavna ulica*/Main Street/, the way it was called until 1923).

³⁹ One of the Soviet commanders of the liberation of Belgrade from the fascists.

⁴⁰ Montenegrin partisan chief who died immediately after liberation of Belgrade in 1944.

⁴¹ Leader of the Serbian workers’ and social-democratic movement before World War I.

ment socialist leaders like Tito and Kardelj for example, but did not make a complete break away. The Serbian regime from the 1990s, which could be described as nationalist-authoritarian, kept its power also by means of nationalist rhetoric, but as many other postsocialist political structures, did not limit itself to schematic and consistent worldview, with an aim to maintain the widest possible support from the population.⁴² Ideological (mis)use of different names and terms from the distant and recent past was used as a tool by the representatives of power in different segments of public discourses, so during the whole decade the notions of Yugoslavia and *Yugoslav* were recycled and politically exploited in different ways⁴³ (parallel, and consistent with the self-proclaimed continuity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with previous socialist Yugoslavia); in the midst of Yugoslav wars in 1990s one's own side was often self-presented as "anti-fascist" in the conflict which was sometimes presented as a continuance of World War II⁴⁴ etc. Politically opportune ideological and symbolic eclecticism was manifested also on the streets of the capital, where, due to such ideological ambivalence, many of the street names that bear the reminiscence of People's Liberation War (1941-1945) and post-war history remained unchanged. At the same time, wider revision of urban toponyms reminiscing geographical places from other Yugoslav states didn't happen.⁴⁵ Renaming of streets in the first half of the 1990s do not witness, hence, a transfer to the wholly new system of symbols and signs in the city text – the aimed changes in names of certain central cross-roads had made opportune corrections in the segment of public commemoration of the post-war past that the ruling circles wanted to distance themselves from. At the same time, some street names that reflected war and post-war traditions were kept, with a goal to maintain an illusion of continuity for purely opportunist reasons. "Renaming the past" was appropriately done only half-way. That is how it was possible for one of central Belgrade streets to bear one name in its first part (King Petar street) and a second, different name in its other part (July

⁴² Erik Gordi, *Kultura vlasti u Srbiji*, Samizdat B92, Beograd 2001, 21-33.

⁴³ Where Yugoslavia served as a floating marker which meant different things to different people even without ideological interventions from the 1990s. Marina Simić, *EXIT u Evropu: Popularna muzika i politike identiteta u savremenoj Srbiji*, Kultura 116/117, ZAPROKUL, Beograd 2006, 117.

⁴⁴ Ildiko Erdei, *Medijska konstrukcija realnosti korišćenjem različitih vremenskih modela i perspektiva*, Kulture u tranziciji, Plato, Beograd 1994, 131.

⁴⁵ This was commonly the case in other countries of former Yugoslavia. Every capital city, through urban toponymy symbolically also marks the territories of a given state, so rivers, cities etc., are given street names, which represents a symbolic legitimization of authority over certain territories. In the 1990s, Belgrade was a metropolis of different entities: Republic of Serbia but also Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (self-proclaimed heir of the former Yugoslavia), and at the same time, spiritual and political center of "all Serbs", who, with more or less success, had under military and political control various parts of other former Yugoslav republics, with sometimes open and sometimes hidden aspirations towards unification into one state, where geographical space onto which Serbian/Yugoslav authorities claimed rights was variable, dependent on current war efforts or political aims. With a relatively undefined geographical frame of "national territory" and public proclaims of continuity of two Yugoslav states, a systematic re-configuration of the capital's topography which would assume wide renaming of streets and squares that bear names with geographical connotations did not happen.

7th street): the symbols that were seemingly ideologically confronted (a 20th Century Serbian king and date of communist uprising in World War II) were in fact in complete accordance with the identity politics and aims of the ruling establishment of that time – an ideological “buffet” serving elite’s purposes was being spread through Belgrade’s topography – something for everyone, everything for someone.

However, since 1997, the above mentioned street was solely named after King Peter the 1st. In 1997, when the opposition came to win the ruling power in the capital, yet another wave of renaming took place, but this time with different characteristics and goals. Limited in its reach (due to regulations that dictated also verification of renaming at the national level, where foe parties held power), the new renaming was also a significant mean of resistance against the ruling regime, and contrary to the pervious renaming, this one most commonly represented the ‘restoration’ of older street names, mostly in central Belgrade.⁴⁶ New/old names were given exclusively to the streets that previously commemorated People’s Liberation War and international and Serbian socialist movement.⁴⁷ So, Revolution Boulevard becomes King Alexander Bld., Red Army Bld. – *Južni bulevar* (Southern Bld.), *Đure Strugara* Street – *Carigradska* (Constantinople str.), *Filipa Filipovića* – *Sazonova* (after Sergey Sazonov, imperial Russian foreign secretary), *Ivana Milutinovića* – Princess Zorka str., *Moše Pijade* – *Dečanska* (after medieval Serbian monastery), *Save Kovačevića* – *Mileševska* (after another monastery), Dimitrije Tucović Square – Slavija Square, etc. The principle of “restitution” which took its legitimacy from the previous (pre-socialist) state of urban toponomy, still was not (nor could it be) automatic or ideologically neutral – hence Lola Ribar Street did not gain back its most recent pre-war name (Georges Clemenceau str.), nor the one that came before it (*Bitoljska ulica*, after a town in present-day Macedonia), but the appellation that the street carried until 1922, *Svetogorska* (after Mount Athos in Greece containing an orthodox monastic state). In a similar way, the General Zhdanov Street did not become *Ulica Zrinskog i Frankopana* (after Croatian nobility), the way it was called during the whole inter-war and war time, but *Resavska* (after a river in Central Serbia), which had been that street’s name until 1921. The symbolic commemoration (de-commemoration along side) in the period 1997-2000, in contrast to the previous one, was not taking its legitimacy in the current political will, but allegedly in the history. However, it was inevitable that “the return to the past” also assumed an intervention in history, since “looking back” means drawing a certain border line – that border-stone, after all, was not a period “before communists came to power” or “pre-war”. It was obvious that certain street names from the period of Kingdom of Yugoslavia (commemorating French Prime minister, Croatian feudalists/national heroes etc), in contrast with some other, were seen as inadequate in the contemporary context, so the ideological choice was the more “traditional” or “older” names, very likely because of strong nationalist ideologies present among

⁴⁶ Except in the case of Lenin Boulevard in Novi Beograd, named after Mihailo Pupin, and a few streets in Zemun.

⁴⁷ Except in the case of the Serbian Rulers Street, now given back the pre-war name King Milan Street.

all political parties in Serbia of that time. Even in the attempt of restitution of public symbols, skewed choice is inevitable, since simple “rewinding” of history backwards is not possible considering that the symbols of the past are transcending into the contemporary time, outside their previous context. In this way, the restoration of urban toponomy also assumes an ideological intervention and selection of history, that is, a subsequent writing of the (city’s) history, molded in this way under the motto “return to the old”, with an actual aim to serve the contemporary purposes.

From a People’s Hero to a Mountain Fairy

After large-scale political changes in Serbia in 2000 and interlinking of political power at the city and the national level, the renaming of the streets continued in the new political constellation. Committee for monuments, names of squares and streets of the Belgrade City Council (*Komisija za spomenike, nazive ulica i trgova Skuštine grada*), with eminent public persons as its members, began to work on March 15th, 2001.⁴⁸ The Committee announced that “we should return to the established and long lasting spiritual values of the Serbian people also by giving the streets their old names back, the names that were wrongly suppressed due to a simplistic appraisal of the history after 1945.”⁴⁹ In 2002, the Committee passed a suggestion for 33 changes in the street names in central Belgrade municipalities of Vračar and Stari Grad, with a supposed aim, as it was announced more than once, to restore the names of the streets from the time before communists came to power, and with “a basic principle to give the streets, whenever possible, their original names back.”⁵⁰ One of the criteria was to “restore the original names of the streets, which reflect the times when the respected streets were formed, and for the historical nucleus of Belgrade that would mean the names from the period 1896-1914.”⁵¹ However, the suggested names showed a totally contrary situation – from the 33 new street names, only nine were actually old (from any given period of the Belgrade history), while all the rest were totally new appellations, including the names of recently deceased contemporaries or the members of the Committee.⁵² Instead of

⁴⁸ Prominence of the Committee’s members wasn’t only characteristic for Belgrade – committees of the similar caliber were founded in other transitional capitals, like in Sarajevo and Berlin. All of them had different administrative powers but also different directions and results of activities. See M. Azaryahu, *German reunification...* and Guy M. Robinson et al, *Remaking Sarajevo: Bosnian nationalism after the Dayton Accord*, Political Geography 20, Elsevier-Pergamon 2001.

⁴⁹ И. Вушковић, *Имена опет као некад (Names as they once were)*, article in Belgrade daily *Danas*, April 6^h 2002.

⁵⁰ *Називи по делу, а не идеологији (Names given because of deeds, not ideology)*, text in Belgrade daily *Glas javnosti*, April 10th, 2002.

⁵¹ *За преименовање користити универзалне вредности (Universal values should be used to rename the streets)*, text of the news-agency *Tanjug* published in Belgrade daily *Glas javnosti* on January 8^h 2002.

⁵² That way, the suggested renaming included General Mahin street becoming a street named after Mića Popović (who died in 1996), Vladimir Nešić street named after Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz (died in 1997), Djura Salaj str. becoming Desanka Maksimović (died in 1993) str, Malajička be-

the announced restoration (which was mostly executed in the earlier, 1997-2000 period), “a revision without restitution” was suggested, a correction of urban toponymy that resembled more the one that happened in early 1990s, but which was presented as a “return to the old street names”. It was more a case of an aimed symbolic marking of the city center rather than actual renaming with the old street names, and the duplicated commemoration of the streets (November 29th Street becoming Despot Stefan Boulevard, even though the despot already had a street named after him for more than a century just a kilometer away)⁵³ testifies to this, as well as renaming the part of the street *Tadeuša Koščušskog* into *Venac Slobodana Jovanovića*, with an explanation that “the street named after Slobodan Jovanović already exists, but in an unsuitable part of the town.”⁵⁴ The suggested toponymic commemoration (multiplication of street names, rare appearance of the old street names etc.) that wasn't altogether, if at all, trying to reinstall old street names as it had been suggested earlier, appeared as hiding the real goal of de-commemoration – according to this proposal, for instance, at the location of the municipality of Stari Grad (English: Old Town), the historical nucleus of Belgrade, there would be not one single street name that associates to People's Liberation War and the post-war history (except for one street named after brothers Baruh) – geodetically correct, from the part of the town perceived as the oldest and historical, the heritage of the WW II and socialism was being expelled, while at the same time new names were being inscribed onto space, not the pre-war, “traditional” urban toponymy, but new street names with the appropriate political and ideological contents, with an aim to represent Serbian history and/or culture through the urban text of the oldest part of the city capital.

A prominence of a city nucleus and downtown, in the wholesome symbolic city text is regular, so the research has shown that the citizens perceive as the symbols of their city some elements of the city architecture which belong to the historical heritage more than some others,⁵⁵ and this also appears to be the case in Belgrade. That is, it appears that the citizens of Belgrade appraise more urban values to

coming Borisav Pekić (died 1992) str. Almost all names and notions that were to be changed were connected with People's Liberation War, workers' movement and post-war era, with a few collateral victims: the village of Malajnica, Tadeusz Kosciuszko (Polish national hero), Dragoslav Jovanović (pre-WW II dean of the Belgrade University) and Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (a famous Serbian 19th Century poet) in a part of the street named after him after the war.

⁵³ *Ulica Visokog Stevana* (Visoki Stevan Street) in Dorćol neighborhood – the despot, under his colloquial pseudonym (*Visoki Stevan* – Stephen the Tall), had a street since 1896 – М. Леко, *op cit* 312, and Бранко Цига Миленковић, *Београд: људи и улице*, Беостар, Београд 1998, 27.

⁵⁴ *Називи по делу, а не идеологију* (*Names given because of deeds, not ideology*), text in Belgrade daily *Glas javnosti*, April 10th, 2002. „The unsuitable part of the town“ in question is the Belgrade outskirts called Višnja. A confusing proposal was also the suggestion to rename *Maršala Birjuzova* street into *Stara Kosmajška* (Old Kosmajška street) even though Kosmajška street already existed in the neighborhood of Žarkovo (Kosmajška was the old name of the street later renamed after a Soviet general that took part in the liberation of Belgrade in 1944).

⁵⁵ Ognjen Čaldarović, *Suvremeno društvo i urbanizacija*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1987, 217, 218.

the downtown than to outskirts.⁵⁶ A symbolic “conquest” of the center metaphor, also through the city’s toponyms, has a strong discursive power in shaping identity, so the initial focus on renaming the streets in central boroughs of Belgrade should not come as a surprise. This also meant the proposal to rename the central city square (*Trg Republike* – the Republic Square), which would also produce the strongest political effect. Bojan Žikić states that in a frequent cultural conceptualization, “city” and “downtown” are being identified with a city with capital C, that is, Belgrade itself, and that The Republic Square carries, more than any other places, a symbolic connotation of the city representation as such – given that, symbolically, this location represents the whole, acquiring power over the part, it assumes also symbolic power over the whole – at the same time, a symbolic control over the square means having a control over what it represents (Belgrade), but also over what the image of the capital connotes in our socio-cultural context, and that is the image on the state and image of its society and culture.⁵⁷ The suggested renaming of the Republic Square, which signifies republican post-war political system (location named *Knežev spomenik*, Prince's Monument, got this name after WW II), to (since 1896 not in use) *Pozorišni trg* (Theatre Square), had a potential communicative power of considerable effect, since the renaming of the symbolic center (which is not only center of Belgrade but to some extent of the nation as well) would mark a clear discontinuity, even so a symbolic annulment of the effects of the war and post-war history. At the same time, it would represent a political declaration with strong proclamatory value which would signal significant changes.⁵⁸ A complete “eradication” of the “undesirable” names and notions from urban toponomy of a capital downtown, which is a metaphorical center of the nation, and which is perceived as an authentic, historical part of the town, with simultaneous markings with “desirable” (but not necessary older) names and notions, does not shape just the “city text” but indirectly also the perception of the national history and culture.

The focus upon the symbolic center is not accidental, since it connotes history, authenticity and tradition. Consequently, “the Committee decided to 'move' the changed street names of central zones of Belgrade to the parts of the city built after WW II, where they belong considering the appropriate time period.”⁵⁹ “The appropriate time period” of certain people and/or notions, combined with the urban symbolic geography of the Center and Periphery (where both categories appear totally arbitrary) make a part of the process of “re-configuration” of time and space which follows the change in political order.⁶⁰ A metaphorical example is arguing for the “movement” of the street named after professor Slobodan Jovanović (famous Serbian anti-communist jurist and emigrant), with all the subsequent connotations,

⁵⁶ Бојан Жикић, *Когнитивне „приче за дечакe“: урбани фолклор и урбана топографија*, Етноантрополошки проблеми 2/1, О. за етнологију и антропологију ФФ, Београд 2007, 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

⁵⁸ M. Azaryahu, *German reunification...*, 481.

⁵⁹ I. Vušković, *Imena opet...*

⁶⁰ Duncan Light et al, *op. cit.* 136.

from the city's outskirts to the downtown, and, at the same time, “eviction” of the street named after professor Dragoslav Jovanović (pre-WW II communist-tolerant University dean), with all of its symbolic luggage, from the city's center to some suburban area, one day, if then. At the same time, this is about the transfer of a political symbol to the center, and not only of the city text but also to the center of history, and the opposite, sending the other to periphery, of the city and of national discourse.

However, the two Jovanović professors did not switch addresses after all. “The proclamatory value” of the suggested changes was too evident and in substantial discordance with the public opinion, so the set of new names, among which some carried a lot of controversy,⁶¹ were greeted with complaints from various segments of the public. In spite, the Committee, with changed membership, approved in the next year most of the suggested changes (26 out of 33),⁶² hence the process of renaming continued without manifest “epochalism” and open political proclaims, but with a faster tempo and greater volume of street naming/renaming. From the beginning of 2004 until April 2008, the urban area of City of Belgrade territory has witnessed 126 streets, squares and parks officially being renamed (not counting the streets or squares that bear numerical or descriptive markings, such as *Altina 1*, *Nova 2*/New 2, *Kružni put 6*/Circular road 6 etc). Out of these, only 45 new names are actual old names (from any historical period).⁶³ When we compare this number with 153 street name changes in the administrative area of Moscow counting 10 million inhabitants, Bucharest (288 changes), which is twice larger than Belgrade, and administrative areas (*Bezirk*) that incorporated former East Berlin, approximately the same size as Belgrade (less than 80), in the period from the beginning of transition until 1997,⁶⁴ it appears that the Belgrade street renaming was

⁶¹ The suggested changes included naming two little streets in Vračar municipality, by that time numerically marked with 501 and 502, after officials of the quisling regime in Nazi-occupied Serbia, Svetislav Stefanović and Vladimir Velmar-Janković.

⁶² Renaming of the Republic Square was too big of a bite to chew, as well as naming streets after Stefanović and Velmar-Janković. Other changes were postponed too, with different explanations: see *Нових 26 имена (26 new names)*, text by D. Radeka in Belgrade daily *Вечерње новости*, April 3rd, 2003. Although not received too well by the general public, most of the new names were implemented, which points to the power of the public sphere and centres of power upon this segment of urban (re)construction – Azaryahu states that, however it might seem that citizens dislike some proposals (or the other way round, that it is a mass endorsed proposal), the final process of selection and renaming is in the end determined and dependant on a political will. – M. Azaryahu, *op cit*, 481.

⁶³ Out of 2500 streets in Belgrade, since February 2004 until the first half of 2006, more than 500 streets changed their names (Z. Vuković, *Честе промене остаје улица збуњују грађане /Frequent changes of street names confuse citizens/*, Belgrade daily *Danas*, August 15^h 2006.); however, those were the streets in Belgrade metropolitan area, with both renaming and new naming of streets that bore no names (or bore descriptive and numerical designations) until then.

⁶⁴ See: Robert Argenbright, *Remaking Moscow: New Places, New Selves*, Geographical Review, Vol. 89, No. 1, American Geographical Society, New York 1999, 14; Duncan Light, *Street names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: exploring the modern historical geographies of postsocialist change*, Journal of Historical Geography 30, Elsevier Science Ltd 2004, 160; and M. Azaryahu, *op cit*.

of a great magnitude in the past four years. Already in 2004, 192 streets were (re)named, most of them in Belgrade *in stricto sensu* (the territories of the ‘city proper’ municipalities), out of which 95 streets got their commemorative names for the first time, such as streets previously designated as 45. *nova ulica* (45th New Street), *Nova 4* (New 4), etc, while the rest of the streets (almost a hundred) were renamed.⁶⁵ The last wave of renaming (from 2004 until now) is consistent with previous ones, with red line being de-commemoration of persons and notions connected with World War II, post-war history and socialist movement (from 126 streets in the city proper that changed names, only 18 did not have a direct association with this historical period and most were named after geographical locations). The process was open, considering that the return of the old names was not the rule, on the contrary, and that even streets that, since their creation had names connected with the “proscribed” period and ideology, got renamed (19 of them until April 2008). Even though it was not so publicly acknowledged as in the previous periods, de-commemoration of People's Liberation War and socialism as one of the aims of renaming was not kept hidden,⁶⁶ even that the explanations for renaming included other motives such as duplicated street names etc.

The renaming of this period is characterized furthermore by revision of the post-war appellations without the restitution of the previous street names, done even when old names were not present in the present/actual urban toponymy, sometimes with a comical outcome⁶⁷ and due to the nature of the process also with arbitrary

⁶⁵ This was the largest renaming of the streets in Belgrade in this century, while in the next years, naming the non-designated streets was more emphasized, mostly in the Belgrade satellite suburban settlements (such as Batajnica, Sremčica, Ostružnica etc.), while renaming, although numerous, was less than in 2004.

⁶⁶ The then current president of the Committee stated in an interview for Belgrade daily *Danas* on July 22nd 2003 (by journalist Jasmina Čolak – *Nije nam mandat da završavamo građanski rat/We don't have a mandate to finish the civil war*): “My personal opinion, not necessarily shared with the other members, but I believe many of them do share it, is that a hero of the civil war is the one who refuses to participate in the war and who saves human lives from raging ideologies. That is the reason I will use every effort that, soon, one street in Belgrade gets the name of Toma Maksimović, regardless of what the gentlemen from SUBNOR (WWII Veterans' Association) think about it. All of my youth, I've been listening to these war rentiers, whether I wanted or not, and now, for a change, I would like to hear the anonymous citizens who place flowers and candles on the grave of this great man on daily basis, in *Novo Groblje* cemetery”. And so be it. In 2004, a street in Vračar municipality, previously marked as *Nova 4* (New 4), was named after Toma Maksimović, commissioner for refugees of Serbian quisling government during Nazi occupation.

⁶⁷ The street named after Veljko Lukić Kurjak (people's hero from WW II) did not get its previous name (*18. oktobra*) but was named *Pavla Jurišića Šturma* (after a World War I Serbian general), even though, only half of kilometer away, a street named after the general had already existed (*Generala Šturma*), and still exists. Street name duplications that were supposed to be solved by new renamings, were actually multiplied because of the authorities eagerness and hurry to de-commemorate certain persons and terms, so in 2004 (except medieval despot Stefan, who got yet another street named after him) the street named after Janko Lisjak (another WW II fighter) in Zemun changed the name into *Josipa Kulundžića* street, only to find Josip Kulundžić get another street named after him next year in a different Belgrade neighborhood (Mali Mokri Lug). The duplicated street names were only an excuse for removal of certain street names out of urban

criteria.⁶⁸ The arbitrary choice was inevitable also through the process of restoration of previous street names which was also carried out (with randomly chosen historical periods from which old toponyms were chosen), when, for a swift decommemoration of certain people and/or notions, it was even appropriate to return to the toponymy and street names that existed during the German occupation of Belgrade: hence street *Milana Ilića Čiče* (named after a World War II hero) became street *Vile Ravijojle* (after a mythical creature, mountain fairy sometimes present in Serbian folk epic poetry) which was its previous name from 1943-1946, but not *Ninčičeva*, as it was called until 1943; the same way, *Moslavačka* street (named after a region in continental Croatia) became *Kamenorezačka* (Stone carvers' Street), the way it was called only during the occupation. What differs the most between the recent renaming and the previous ones is mass changes of names of the streets that had been carrying those names from the beginning – hence even the neighborhoods built in “the appropriate time period”, previously envisaged as a “retreat” for “communists and others” who were to be “cleansed” from central and historical parts of the city, were not seen as suitable for carrying such name-plates any more. Original street names in quarters built after WW II were also the subject of revision, which went as far as changing the street names commemorating fighters against fascism killed in battles, with newly coined vernacular designations – so for instance, *Partizanska* street in Vidikovac neighborhood was named *Vidikovački venac* (Vidikovac Wreath), and street *Franje Ogulinca* in Zvezdara municipality was named *ulica Zvezdarskih jelki* (Firs of Zvezdara Street). Ideological context of renaming is excellently illustrated by the name change of street *Alije Alijagića* in 2005, renamed after Milorad Drašković – a historical irony that the street in question, named after an assassin changes the name into his victim's (Alija Alijagić, activist of the communist terrorist organization “Red Justice”, shot dead Milorad Drašković, Interior Secretary of the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in 1921), testifies on fragility of the official versions of history and also on the aim of streets' renaming, to twist and mold the image of history and nation through such process. This is also the case in the recent times, and clearly it is not the case of giving back the old street names and correcting the “toponymic vio-

toponymy: most often, the issue of the duplicated names is not questioned unless those names are connected with a certain historical period or geography: for instance, there are two streets named after medieval Serbian emperor Dušan, one in Dorćol neighborhood, the other in Zemun, both carrying identical names (*Ulica Cara Dušana*), as well as two streets named after Karadjordje (19th Century Serbian military leader and popular hero) which are also identical in appellation (*Karađorđeva ulica*) – none of these street names are disputed, although they are obvious and confusing doubles in different parts of the city, and even though all four of them have previous, more “traditional” names.

⁶⁸ In 2004, in Zemun, many streets changed names; some got their previous, old names back, while some didn't – along certain persons who, for some reason, did not deserve to gain back the street name, pre-war street names that undoubtedly point out to the former inhabitants of German ethnicity in Zemun's borough Novi Grad (German: Franztal) also weren't restored, and those streets got completely new names: street *Mladena Stojanovića* so did not become *Štracova* (*Straz Gasse*) but *Atanasija Pulje*, *Ognjena Price* becomes *Djordja Čutukovića* instead of *Badenska* (*Baden Gasse*, Baden street), *Petra Drapšina* becomes *Živka Petrovića* and not *Vendelinova* (*Wendelin Gasse*, Saint Wendelin street) etc.

lence” of the previous rulers. This is illustrated by the case of a street named after another assassin in the downtown Belgrade, after whom the street was named by communist authorities in 1947, but whose name is not on a waiting list for change – following the previous logic, Gavriilo Princip Street should be called Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria Street.⁶⁹ Restoration of toponyms is obviously not the aim of street renaming, considering that street names with “appropriate” historical or symbolic contents are being kept even if they were introduced into the city text by “inappropriate” rulers. It is more the case of tailoring of architecture by removing or marginalizing the currently “unsuitable” names or notions, and by installation of politically and symbolically more “suitable” appellations, already seen in previous historical periods, with such practice being equally politically instructed and motivated as previous street renaming practices which are allegedly presently being “corrected” and judged.

Even though de-commemoration *per se* represents a symbolic and discursive quality, it is worth mentioning what is being commemorated by new street names. And while the list of names and notions which disappeared from the street-map more or less clearly shows what is attempted to be removed/forgotten through changes in the city toponyms, the recent identity strategies appear not to reveal what is being written in the urban text instead of socialist and WW II heritage and occasional place-names from former Yugoslavia. Some traits can be spotted though, after careful examination of the hundreds of new street names being introduced in this century. The streets were mostly named after many respected pre- and post-war Serbian and foreign public persons who are mostly politically neutral and with respectable professional biographies. However, among numerous new street names (hundreds of them), some were shyly “smuggled in”, experiencing so a unique “toponymic” rehabilitation and legitimization of their bearers, before they underwent eventual legal/judicial or historical rehabilitation.⁷⁰ A fact that certain controversial names are being installed in the city text quietly, without open symbolic

⁶⁹ That it is not a question of a symbolic distancing from the violent methods in politics or “raging ideologies”, testifies also the undisputed presence of several street names connected with pre-WW I *Mlada Bosna* terrorist organization (whose member was the above mentioned Gavriilo Princip), which were mostly introduced by the communist authorities after WW II. Also, naming of a street after Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis (Serbian military officer engaged in the coup and murder of the Serbian dynastic couple in 1903, and leader of the organization *Black Hand* involved in the murder of Austrian-Hungarian heir to the throne) in 2004, who was sentenced to death for treason by the Serbian military court in the so called *Thessaloniki trial* in 1917, and later judicially rehabilitated by the communists in 1953, illustrates that consistency and principles in “rewinding history” rarely can be present, and that opportunistic selectivity is more often its characteristic.

⁷⁰ That way, many individuals, whose historical and public roles are perceived by the most as controversial, got the streets named after them: Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović, both Serbian orthodox theologians usually considered as rigid conservatives and with dubious ties with fascism; Dragiša Vasić and Grigorije Bošković, pre-war intellectuals engaged in collaboration during WW II; Jovan Rašković, Milošević backed Serb leader in Croatia; previously mentioned Toma Maksimović etc. The lack of substantial public reaction to these renamings (in contrast with some previous cases) could also be connected with the fact that most of these names were given to the streets in low frequent suburban area of Altina on the outskirts of Zemun municipality.

demonstrations which often accompany name changes, speaks up on insecurity of these recent alterations of the urban text – identity politics are being realized both non-intrusively and indirectly, and political “package” is being written in the urban appellations almost secretly in such cases, most often through street tables at the city’s outskirts. Contrary to the previous renaming, and not only in Serbia, the last wave of commemoration in urban toponymy could not be characterized as so-called “ritual of revolution”,⁷¹ considering the lack of open proclamatory effect of re-configuration of the city’s text. Azaryahu so states that interventions in urban toponymy are being implemented easily and openly by authoritarian government or in the case of general social consensus. In converse cases, changes in appellations could meet opposition and often become a political battlefield. It is possible that a consciousness of the lack of general, or at least major support for significant part of the new commemorative symbolism (and considerably so of de-commemoration also) conditions the lack of an open proclamation on introducing new identity elements in architecture, and actualization of “indirect” strategies during reconfiguration of urban symbolic space, such as a transfer of meaning to a new toponym/name,⁷² or quiet commemoration on spatial (and symbolic) periphery. Similar to the process of transferring toponyms being de-commemorated from the center to periphery (both spatial and symbolical), during the commemoration of persons or notions that are not currently publically undisputed symbols, the process does not take direct inscribing in the generally visible urban (and symbolic) space of the center (or near it), but in less prominent space of periphery, often not so that they would stay on the periphery, but with a possible intention to, such as the suggested transfer of Slobodan Jovanović from Belgrade’s outskirts to the downtown (and from the margins of the national mythology into its center), start to approach both spatial and symbolic center in the appropriate moment.⁷³ Even without a trans-

⁷¹ M. Azaryahu, op cit.

⁷² Such as the renaming of street *Proleterske solidarnosti* (Proletarian solidarity) into *Antifašističke borbe* (Anti-fascist struggle), which was also explained (not taken into account misunderstanding or gaps in knowledge of the notion being de-commemorated) by “a need to emphasize liberation traditions of our people which aren’t ideologically colored.” – *Ulica antifašističke borbe* (Street of the anti-fascist struggle), news wire of *Beta* news-agency, published on the internet portal B92.net, archive for October 19^h, 2007.

⁷³ In the capital city’s topography, an important aspect in symbolic space markings is a relation between center and periphery; the same could be said to be true at the national level. A public reaction and recognition of certain de-commemoration depends also on the part of the city in which de-commemoration takes place, central or peripheral – the more a vanishing/emerging symbol is further away from the, primarily symbolic, center of the city (but also the nation), weaker is the reaction/recognition of the process. The same applies to the society as a whole – for instance, the naming of squares in Serbian towns of Arandjelovac and Smederevo, after Milan Nedić and Dimitrije Ljotić (leading quislings during World War II) was met with a weak reaction (at least in the capital city) also because of strong marginalization of most towns in Serbia’s interior in general cultural perception of Serbia as a whole. Disputes over naming of streets after Mile Budak (writer turned quisling official during WW II) in Croatia testify on the importance of physical and symbolic locations of certain toponyms closer to the urban and symbolic center. Difficult arguments took place over in the cities where streets in the center or close to it were named after Budak, while the argumentations almost did not happen in Zagreb where Budak silently and non-

fer to the center, a silent commemoration indirectly means also a silent normalization and legitimacy – if we accept that “the street table is the cheapest form of statue”,⁷⁴ the fact remains that a monument is erected to someone or something regardless how visible it is and where it is placed.

Instead of Conclusion

(De)commemoration in Belgrade’s urban toponymy in the past years reveals several aspects of identity politics in the society experiencing intensive changes, where some of them are, due to the limited scope of this paper, only briefly mentioned or are yet to be examined (symbolic presence/absence of the marks of minorities in the urban text,⁷⁵ reading in of symbolic geography of the nation in the capital’s toponymy⁷⁶ etc.). They are also a part of the broader process of

pompously got a small street on the edge on the capital, in semi-rural neighborhood of Sopnica, unknown to the most citizens and invisible in general conceptualization of the urban space. Similar things happened in Serbia, with squares and streets dedicated to Zoran Djindjić (Serbian prime minister assassinated in 2003) – both naming and removal of his name from the streets in smaller towns happened mostly in silence and without loud reactions. However, renaming of *Bulevar AVNOJ-a* (commemorating WW II supreme anti-fascist council of former Yugoslavia) in Novi Beograd into *Bulevar Dr Zorana Djindjića* has become a primary socio-political topic in 2007, also due to the fact that the boulevard is one of the main traffic routes of the Belgrade’s quarter which functions as a secondary city center (on national level as well, with increasing concentrations of institutions of political, social and economic power in Novi Beograd) which was recognized by some political players also as symbolical act (which previous renamings elsewhere didn’t provoke; meanwhile, the act of de-commemoration of *AVNOJ* for the majority was not problematic in itself) – and at the same time as an act that could be used in political struggles – the whole case, whose context and long lasting (until today – in May 25th 2008, posters and flyers with words “Street of Slobodan Milošević” were put all over the boulevard: see *Žele da izazovu sukob DS i SPS*, on internet portal Blic.rs, archive for May 26th 2008) demands a separate analysis; the case brought into light, in stripped and radical form, political foundations of politics of streets renaming in the transitional Serbia.

⁷⁴ Duncan Light et al, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ For example, the mentioned avoidance of re-commemoration of the streets in Zemun, which refer to its previous inhabitants, the Germans, is simultaneously accompanied by commemoration of a number of streets within city, named by ethnonyms from the distant past (*Keltska ulica*/Celtic Street, *Tribalska ulica*/Tribali Street etc), which reveals what kind of ethno-historical image of the city is being constructed through urban toponyms. Except for the gap in the place of considerable part of the 20th century history, a gap concerning the recent city’s history in relations to various ethnic groups’ presence in Belgrade is being created to good extent – through toponyms, long lasting city’s history is being emphasized, while many historical episodes are being left out. A symbolic emphasis on Belgrade’s ancient roots goes as far as simultaneous distancing from the most recent past and finding a link with the most ancient: paradoxically, the city text in the 21st century does not connect the city space with, for example, WW II partisans (after the renaming of *Partizanska street* and *Partizanski put*), while there is a symbolical connection with Roman legions (recently renamed *Ulica Četvrte Flavijeve legije*/Street of the 4th Legion Flavia).

⁷⁶ Where a geographic commemoration of the capital’s streets is almost everywhere a symbolic mapping of a national territory – in this sense, a mass street naming (mostly in suburban and satellite settlements, at the margins of the city text) after toponyms from Kosovo in the past few years was quite indicative. This assumed a suggestion (from 2005) that almost every street in

re-configuration of architecture which is being established also by renaming of objects and institutions all over the city, interventions in memorial heritage etc. – it could be argued that different alterations of parts of the urban text jointly lead to decomposition, modification and construction of certain aspects of the city's identity as a whole, where the change of urban toponyms stands as the most frequent and most common segment of such transformation. Since the beginning of 1990s, the identity building through urban space testifies on introduction of new, in the first place national symbols in the beginning of this period, along with elements of identity restoration in second half of the decade, and fast tempo and range of renaming after 2000 show even more diverse cluster of symbols that are being encoded through urban appellations. And while the content of the commemorative fund is variable, de-commemoration shows a considerable consistency regarding themes being wiped out from the street tables: initially partial process of removal of the toponyms connected with WW II and socialist ideology and system, became encompassing in time – firstly international, and immediately afterwards, or parallel, also mutual Yugoslav notions and individuals with such context vanish from the city text, so that at the end, the process definitely extends to the designations of local, Serbian origin. “The red line” of the de-commemoration is clear, more or less – a creation of an extensive identity gap in regards to WW II and post-war history. However, the “gap” is not filled with historical toponymic “package”, or it is being done only sporadically and in certain phases of this period, in difference with many other postsocialist cities where restoration of the pre-communist city text was performed most of the time with consistency, and with an aim of a symbolic “over-lap” of the post-war period through establishment of continuity with the time before socialism, also through renaming of the streets. Identity restoration in Belgrade is lesser in magnitude and not a rule, and entirely new symbols are usually being written in the city toponymy which cover a wide range of notions and names – de-commemoration clearly shows what is “unwanted”, while commemoration shows that maybe it's not really clear what is being “wanted”, or, the new commemorative symbolism is still not being implemented openly. It appears that the directions of commemoration are hidden through a set of toponyms emerging from new political mythology which is not installed in the center of the city text, but carefully and in silence at peripheries. Toponymic revision (without restitution) is being actualized with a lesser dosage of epochalism and public proclamation, and seemingly without visible radical actions, hence the impression of a symbolic ratification of political and social changes is not present. Even more so, often careful and publicly non-aggressive politics of the city's toponyms testifies more on insecurity of these kind of identity politics – thus, such interventions in public spaces can be characterized not so much as a symbolic public announcement of changes and re-configuration of a new national view on history and geography, but more as a political means in creation of an identity change to come, through spatial legitimization of certain values and symbols, whose encoding in the city text aid to the potential, future, legiti-

Belgrade's satellite settlement of Sremčica be named after towns and villages in Kosovo, which provoked considerable hostile reaction of its inhabitants.

macy and regulation of a certain cultural construction of the nation through other broad channels of communication with the public.

The processes of de-commemoration and commemoration are totally complementary and mutually dependent. Writings of new elements of identity in space are not possible without erasing old toponyms from that same space. Similar to other transitional capitals, from the beginning of the 1990s, Belgrade has experienced street renaming (most often without restitution of “pre-communist” appellations), that aimed at de-commemoration of particular individuals and notions which were in discord with the political and national ideology of the most recent times. With the beginning of this century, this process becomes even more systematic considering the volume of de-commemoration of toponyms that bear any direct connection with 50 years of WW II and post-war history – mere association with this historical period or socialist ideology qualifies certain notions/individuals for removal or marginalization in the public space. This kind of politics of city toponyms points out to a symbolic public “amnesia”, being done by general cleansing of space from symbols connected with certain epoch – de-commemoration is often appearing as an aim for itself, even regardless of contents being written in the place of previous symbols. The vanishing of the signs representing one historical era from the city space gradually becomes all-more encompassing, firstly by a systematic de-commemoration of the epoch from the city’s center, wiping out of symbols of the certain historical period from the city’s core which is perceived as authentic and historical, where, in time, “de-commemorated center” actually becomes wider and wider, covering more and more parts of the city; by doing so, the notions and names that could associate to certain historical period or value-system are gradually being marginalized or totally removed. This trend, where certain appellations vanish from the center of the city text, and gradually become removed from the city’s periphery as well, leads not only to marginalization, but also to complete removal of certain identity markers from the urban identity, and also indirectly, from national identity as well, considering the central place of the capital’s symbolic text in the imaginary symbolic geography of the nation – by repressing particular appellations in the capital city, as a part of cluster of identity politics in the society, certain epoch and its symbolic luggage are being pushed to margins, or into total oblivion, also at the level of the national identity. In this case, an old motto “We build the city, while the city is building us” also appears as true, considering that identity reshaping of the space considerably aids to the construction of the population’s identity, reaching far beyond the capital. Through politics of toponyms, the capital’s city text reshapes the image of the nation and history, and in the recent times, that image is greatly lacking WW II and socialism, which sends out a message much farther away than the pavements of the city streets. New streets tables are being hanged today, as it has always been the case, with the intention to be “carved in stone”, but history reveals that such kinds of identity interventions face materials more fragile than stone.

Срђан Радовић

Од центра до периферије, и обратно: политика топонима у транзицијској престоници

Кључне речи:

градски текст, урбани
топоними, улице, идентитет,
Београд, комеморација,
декомеморација, центар,
периферија

У раду се разматрају карактеристике политике (пре)именовања уличних топонима у Београду од почетка деведесетих година до данас, која се посматра као део идентитетских политика у транзиционом друштву којима се историја и географија уписују у „градски текст“, чинећи их интегралним делом људске свакодневице. Културно формативни карактер градског текста (и архитектуре) престонице превазилази оквире самог града с обзиром на централно место главног града у симболичкој географији нације, те он утиче и на обликовање „националног текста“ и сведочи о садржају и стратегијама *nation-building*-а у одређеном периоду. У току преко петнаест година „топонимске транзиције“ у Београду уочавају се различите фазе и особености уклањања и инсталирања различитих јавних симбола, како у смислу садржаја, тако и начина овакве иденитетске (ре)конструкције. При комплементарном процесу истовремене комеморације и декомеморације симбола у урбаном тексту, од самог очетка деведесетих година до данас, као константа се јавља углавном конзистентна декомеморација појмова и особа повезаних са конкретним историјским периодом и идеологијом, док комеморација показује варијабилност у смислу вредности и порука које новоуспостављени топоними носе са собом. За разлику од већине других транзицијских престоница, у главном граду Србије не долази до свеобухватне „рестаурације“ пресоцијалистичког уличног називља – нити у једном од таласа преименовања, симболички повратак на (претпостављено) старо/традиционално се не показује као политички довољно опортун, и иако се интервенција у градску топонимију најчешће легитимише прошлошћу, она заправо представља савремени израз политичке воље која топонимску баштину обилно редукује, рециклира и селективно реинсталира. Прекрајање овог сегмента градског текста углавном се врши преко ревизије (најчешће без реституције) одређених топонима, и кроз идентитетске политике које иницирају политички пригодан трансфер топонима на симболичкој и

просторној релацији центар – периферија градског (и националног) текста – „ревизија без реституције“ топонима циљано „чисти“ централне и историјске делове престонице од неподобних јавних симбола потискујући их ка периферији, где се временом новоозначени центар просторно све више шири и симболички потиरे проскрибовану баштину на маргине и градског и националног текста у симболичку „сиву зону“ и невидљивост. Одсуство епохализма при увођењу нових/старих симбола у јавни простор града убрзава процес просторно/историјске реконфигурације с обзиром да се конструише представа о рутинском и техничком карактеру овог процеса, али и сведочи о несигурности оваквих идентитетских политика које избегавају прокламативну обзнану „промене“ и увођење препорних симбола у централни/видљививији део града (који се, могуће привремено, смештају у рубне квартове градског подручја) – пре него симболичко потврђивање већ реализоване друштвене и политичке промене, најрецентнија преиначавања (бео)градског текста представљају један од агенаса идентитетских политика које кроз просторну легитимизацију одређених вредности и симбола придонесе потенцијалној, будућој, легитимизацији и нормативовању одговарајуће културне конструкције нације кроз друге канале културног комуницирања у друштву.