**Competing ideologies, competing semiotics: A critical perspective on politically-driven renaming practices in Eastern Germany and Poland**. [484/500 words]

Cultural memory (Assmann 2010) is institutionalized and embedded in material objects and artefacts. While some of them are stored in archives, others - like buildings, monuments and memorials, but also the very mundane street names - can form implants of memory (Golka 2009, Fabiszak & Brzezińska 2016) and provide a “window” to the character of a society (Huebner 2006). Due to their symbolic value, public naming practices overtly display and embody political ideology by being “supportive of the hegemonic socio-political order” (Azaryahu 1997:480). As such, naming practices reify and normalise the ideological order they represent.

When ideologies change due to “ruptures in political history” (Arazyahu 1997:481), renaming of urban features (streets, neighbourhoods, areas, even whole cities) is often the consequence (Lefebvre 1991:54). Commemorative (re)naming is therefore the outcome of a complex interplay of forces, including the creation of memory, the indexing of officially sanctioned identity and ideology, all of which are performed by and in turn index state-hegemonic politics of memory (Scollon & Scollon 2003). Eastern Europe offers an unparalleled case study for transformations in representational politics as a result of changes in state-ideology. Having established their first democracies after WWI, these states were occupied and/or governed by Nazi Germany until the end of WWII. Post-1945, the USSR-aligned countries were ruled by communist/socialist regimes until the end of the cold war brought parliamentary democracy to most Eastern European countries. Unsurprisingly, the rapid succession of changes in state ideology has left its mark on the commemorative semiotics of these nations.

To date, however, there is a dearth of critical ethnographic work that attempts to sketch the historical dimension of urban renaming in Eastern Europe. We report on a project which explores the way in which material carriers of memory are (re)constructed for the ideological needs of the present. The mere fact that different versions of history exist – and are successively replaced across time – illustrates the subversive potential of street namings to create a “natural order of things” (Fairclough 2003:2). Therefore, “it is not surprising that [streets have been called] propaganda carriers [since] … major political changes are reflected in the renaming of streets” (Azaryahu 1986:581-7).

We explore the “relations of power, language ideologies and [users’] views of their own and other’s identities” (Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004:1-2) in Eastern Germany and Poland. Our interdisciplinary approach relies on spatiotemporal analysis and advanced visualisation techniques as input for ethnographic interviews as well as on critical discourse analysis of the mass media in order to capture the complex processes underlying ideologically-driven changes in commemorative street naming. This combined approach allows us to explore the “connection between power relations, public memory, identity formation and commemorative” naming (Azaryahu 2012: 388), focusing on the debates and discourses that surround the consecutive waves of semiotic erasure. The present study reports on two pilot analyses: the dynamics of street renaming in Annaberg-Bucholtz (1917 – 2017) and the press coverage of street renaming in Poznań (2000-2017).