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WOMEN IN THE CONTEMPORARY POLISH STREETScape: MEMORY WARS

Abstract

As diversity, equity and inclusion policies gain momentum in the Global North, the strikingly low visibility of women in Polish public space is being addressed not only via bottom-to-top activism but also through initiatives by local governments. This, in turn, results in controversies over the very need for gender equality in urban naming, as well as over the commemoration-worthiness of particular personages. The present paper aims to assess the changes that have taken place in Poland since the beginning of 2018, when an analysis of the 12 biggest cities revealed a persistent under-representation of women as namesakes in street naming. We offer a quantitative analysis and then focus on four selected case studies, each exemplifying one type of situation: open conflict, covert tactics, and two combinations of surface vs core values relationship.

Keywords: female street names, gender equality, under-representation of women, Poland

INTRODUCTION – THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

There is a growing awareness in the Global North of the need for a balanced gender ratio in urban naming. Initiatives to achieve that balance abound, though at present, they seem mainly limited to Europe. Their roots might be sought in the years after the Second World War, a case in point being Berlin, where honouring representatives of the

women's movement was considered in 1945.¹ Demands to remove nationalist and militarist namesakes and replace them with the names of pacifist and feminist activists have been voiced by feminists and members of the anti-war movement Women in Black in the former Yugoslavia since the 1990s.²

One of the first such projects in this century was the French *Osez le féminisme!* movement,³ a feminist organisation established in 2009 and active until this day, which in the summer of 2015 launched a campaign dubbed *FémiCité*, aiming for a stronger female presence in public space, primarily in street names.⁴ On 26 August 2015, name plaques of 40 selected streets, squares and bridges in the centre of Paris were replaced with ones commemorating 70 women hitherto invisible in the city.⁵ A similar initiative in Italy, known as *Toponomastica femminile*,⁶ began as a group on Facebook in 2012 and was established as an institution two years later. Its actions are largely documentary and educational in nature, and they include creating women-centred guidebooks for Italian cities and informing the general public about women worthy of commemoration. A UK educational initiative, Women in Street Names, was launched in 2019.⁷

Among the practical projects to develop a model town with gender-balanced street naming, Seestadt Aspern, a newly developed district of Vienna, deserves a mention: until mid-2022, over fifty of its streets

¹ Dirk Verheyen, 'What's in a Name? Street Name Politics and Urban Identity in Berlin', *German Politics & Society*, xv, 3(44) (1997), 44–72. The idea, not implemented at the time, reappeared in 1991.

² <https://zeneucnom.org/images/pdf/30godina-neposlusne-eng.pdf> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

³ <https://osezlefeminisme.fr/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁴ <http://femicite.olf.site/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵ <http://femicite.olf.site/actions-campagne-femicite/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023]; see also: Radhika Sanghani, 'French Feminists Hijack Paris Streetsigns to Celebrate Women', *The Telegraph*, 28 Aug. 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11830018/French-feminists-hijack-Paris-street-signs-to-celebrate-women.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶ <https://www.toponomasticafemminile.com/sito/>; see also: Mark Bosworth, *Are Our Street Names Sexist?*, BBC World Service, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17203823> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷ <https://bfgw.org.uk/bfgw2/women-in-street-names/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

were named after women.⁸ Not much later did comparative analyses appear online, including a 2015 study of seven large cities (London, Paris, San Francisco, Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai, and Bangalore) by Mapbox developer Aruna Sankaranarayanan and her colleagues.⁹ In March 2020, an online project was started in Belgium by Barbara Trachte, the Secretary of State for Economic Transition in Brussels; the project used Open Data to create a map visualising the street names of a city by gender.¹⁰ As of December 2022, 49 world cities are included, with only three outside Europe – San Francisco, Cape Town, and San Pablo (the Philippines).

Print and online media in the EU soon took their cue as well, offering intellectual backing of the idea¹¹ or preparing analyses of urban naming broken down by gender.¹² On some occasions, there was a rather fine line between scholarship in the spirit of the ‘engaged humanities’ and social activism proper, as they both can obviously feed into each other. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that academia should follow suit, even if ‘following suit’ might be considered an oversimplification, as the seeds had already been sown as early as the 1990s in the form of critical toponymy writings, highlighting the fact that street names are ‘instrumental in rendering natural the official version of history’.¹³ Thus, the later work in the field could build on those findings.

Gender imbalance is also visible in urban naming in Poland. Taking as our point of departure the quantitative analysis of the

⁸ <https://www.diepresse.com/738272/seestadt-aspurn-stadt-der-frauen> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023]; https://www.aspern-seestadt.at/jart/prj3/aspern/data/downloads/DieSeestadtistweiblich_Sept2020_2020-09-09_0809634.pdf [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁹ Linda Poon, ‘Mapping the Sexism of Street Names in Major Cities’, *CityLab*, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-04/mapping-the-sexism-of-street-names-in-major-cities> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

¹⁰ <https://openknowledge.be/2020/03/03/equalstreetnames-brussels-launch-of-open-data-visualisation> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

¹¹ Rebecca Solnit, ‘City of Women’, *The New Yorker*, Oct. 11 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/city-of-women> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

¹² <https://www.lefigaro.fr/fig-data/rues-paris/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023]; <https://www.zeit.de/feature/streetdirectory-streetnames-origin-germany-infographic-english> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

¹³ Maoz Azaryahu, ‘The Power of Commemorative Street Names’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, xiv, 3 (1996), 311–30.

12 biggest Polish cities as of the end of 2017,¹⁴ our research objective was to assess the size and direction of the changes in the symbolic representation of women that – as we anticipated – had taken place since that time. We also intended to identify the politicised narratives and counter-narratives contributing to the conflicts over the processes of commemoration and decommemoration, seen through the lens of feminism and driven by female representation in public spaces, and placed in the historical perspective of feminist activism in Poland.

STATE OF THE RESEARCH

Our paper is theoretically positioned at the intersection of two disparate areas: critical toponymic theory and gender studies. The former, known and developed under its name only in this century, was nevertheless foreshadowed by a body of earlier research. The critical turn in the study of toponymy began in the 1980s, founded on the observation that toponymy is not ideology-innocent or non-political.¹⁵ A pioneer of the field, Maoz Azaryahu, observed in 1992 that “The shaping or reshaping of sets of toponyms is a profound example of the connection between political and cultural processes”, also underscoring the importance of “the relationships between the processes underlying the (re)construction of a city-text”.¹⁶ The twenty-first century saw the growth of what is perceived today as classic works in critical toponymy,¹⁷ raising the relevance of sociopolitical

¹⁴ Justyna B. Walkowiak, ‘Female Street Namesakes in Selected Polish Cities’, *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*, clx (2018), 331–50.

¹⁵ Doğuş Düzgün, ‘The Death of the Author in Place Names: A Barthesian Intervention into Critical Toponymy’, *Geography Compass*, xv, 11 (2021).

¹⁶ Maoz Azaryahu, ‘The Purge of Bismarck and Saladin: The Renaming of Streets in East Berlin and Haifa, a Comparative Study in Culture-Planning’, *Poetics Today*, xiii, 2 (1992), 351; Düzgün, ‘The Death of the Author in Place Names’, 367.

¹⁷ Lawrence D. Berg, Jani Vuolteenaho (eds), *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming* (London–New York, 2009); Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu (eds), *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place* (London–New York, 2017); a German contribution that deserves a mention is Nicole Eller, Stefan Hackl, and Marek Lupták (eds), *Namen und ihr Konfliktpotential im europäischen Kontext – Regensburger Symposium, 11.–13. April 2007* (Regensburg, 2008).

phenomena in naming geographical objects of all types (which reveals the former implicit *depoliticisation of naming*).¹⁸ These phenomena range from border shifts and changes of political regimes via post-colonial re-readings of city-text to identification of the unequal power relations that underpin *banal naming practices* and, finally, to the neoliberalisation of urban spaces.¹⁹

Papers on urban naming written within the framework of critical toponymy originally used to focus chiefly on racial minorities,²⁰ on colonialism,²¹ on the successive waves of commemoration and de-commemoration in public space related to fluctuations in power relations,²² and, in particular, on the fall of communism and the changes to city-text in its wake.²³ In these texts, women were not seen as a minority, although the very idea of treating them as such in scholarly analyses is not novel but at least a few decades old, with its declared purpose “to apply to women some portion of that body of sociological theory and methodology customarily used for investigating such minority groups as Negroes, Jews, immigrants, etc.”²⁴

Very recently, however, a body of research has appeared that strives to document – using various methodologies – the low visibility of women in the cityscapes of countries as diverse as Spain,²⁵ Italy,²⁶

¹⁸ Reuben Rose-Redwood and Derek Alderman, ‘Critical Interventions in Political Toponymy’, *ACME*, x, 1 (2011), 1–6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Derek H. Alderman and Joshua Inwood, ‘Street Naming and the Politics of Belonging: Spatial Injustices in the Toponymic Commemoration of Martin Luther King, Jr.’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, xiv, 2 (2013), 211–33.

²¹ Krzysztof Górny and Ada Górna, ‘Street Names in Dakar-Plateau: A Colonial and Post-Colonial Perspective’, *Planning Perspectives*, xxxv, 5 (2020), 849–72.

²² Emilia Palonen, ‘The Politics of Street Names: Local, National, Transnational Budapest’, in Marnix Beyen and Brecht Deseure (eds), *Local Memories in a Nationalizing and Globalizing World* (Basingstoke–New York, 2015).

²³ Duncan Light, ‘Street Names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: Exploring the Modern Historical Geographies of Post-Socialist Change’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxx, 1 (2004), 154–72.

²⁴ Helen Mayer Hacker, ‘Women as a Minority Group’, *Social Forces*, xxx, 1 (1951), 60–9.

²⁵ María Novas Ferradás, ‘Commemorative Urban Practices and Gender Equality: The Case of Santiago de Compostela City’s Urban Toponymy’, *Hábitat y Sociedad*, xi (2018), 109–29.

²⁶ Barbara Belotti and Maria Pia Ercolini, ‘Il femminile dalla famiglia allo spazio pubblico’, *Economia della Cultura*, iv (2019), 547–58.

Romania,²⁷ Ukraine,²⁸ South Africa,²⁹ Zimbabwe,³⁰ or India.³¹ This is obviously merely one of the many facets of women's low visibility in public life in general;³² its ubiquity means that the conclusion by Liora Bigon and Dorcas Zuvalinyenga, who stated that this phenomenon is “a consequence of the (post-)colonial experiences of many Southern cities”,³³ was somewhat hasty, considering the fact that the cities of the affluent Global North also display gender imbalance in street naming practices.

The emergence of this new research into ‘female’ street names might be attributed not so much to critical toponymy *per se*, but, rather, to the transformations of social awareness, associated, among others, with such phenomena as #MeToo movement, which gained momentum in the autumn of 2017. The convergence in timing calls for some explanation in retrospect. It might be surmised, for instance, that the removal of the name of a sex offender from a University of California biology school and central science library³⁴

²⁷ Diana Elena Neaga, ‘Doing and Undoing Gender in Urban Spaces: The University Square Bucharest’, *Analyze: Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, iii, 17 (2014), 28–49; Mihai S. Rusu, ‘Gendering Urban Namespaces: The Gender Politics of Street Names in an Eastern European City’, *Names*, lxx, 2 (2022), 11–25.

²⁸ Oleksiy Gnatiuk and Victoria Glybovets, “‘Herstory’ in History: A Place of Women in Ukrainian Urban Toponymy”, *Folia Geographica*, lxii, 2 (2020), 48–70.

²⁹ Caili Forrest, ‘What’s in a Name? A Feminist Reflection on Street Name Changes in Durban’, *Agenda*, xxxii, 2 (2018), 53–61.

³⁰ Zvinashe Mamvura, Itai Muwati, and Davie E. Mutasa, ‘Toponymic Commemoration Is Not for One Sex’: The Gender Politics of Place Renaming in Harare’, *African Identities*, xvi, 4 (2018), 429–43; Dorcas Zuvalinyenga and Liora Bigon, ‘Gender-Biased Street Naming in Urban Sub-Saharan Africa: Influential Factors, Features and Future Recommendations’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, lvi, 3 (2021), 589–609.

³¹ Tania Sebastian, ‘Invisibility of Female Street Names in India: Exploring the Intersection of Culture, Law and Social Situations’, *McGill GLSA Research Series*, i, 1 (2021), 1–19.

³² Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London, 2019).

³³ Liora Bigon and Dorcas Zuvalinyenga, ‘Urban Pulse – Gendered Urban Toponyms in the Global South: A Time for De-Colonization?’, *Urban Geography*, xlii, 2 (2020), 226–39.

³⁴ <https://news.uci.edu/2018/06/28/uci-proposes-new-name-for-school-of-biological-sciences-science-library-after-internal-investigation-substantiates-sexual-harassment-claims-against-signature-donor/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

might have come to be perceived as parallel to the removal of, for instance, colonialist figures from Berlin streets.³⁵ Actions of high media visibility, such as street marches, manifestations, and Internet campaigns, sparked further interest of scholars and laypeople alike in the gender ratio of urban names, and Poland was no exception to that trend: a few scholarly contributions to the topic concern Polish urbanonymy as well.³⁶ In brief, some synergy effects might have been occurring.

The other area that our research touches upon is gender studies. Thus conflicts concerning female streets are merely one of the many aspects of numerous and long-standing conflicts over women's subjective construction in Poland in general.³⁷ Some scholars situate the beginnings of the Polish feminist movement as early as the turn of the nineteenth century,³⁸ though other researchers suggest later dates, e.g. 1905.³⁹ Periodisation proposals vary as well, though there seems to be a consensus about the two world wars, the year 1989, and sometimes also 2007 (the founding of Partia Kobiet, The Women's Party) or 2008 (publication of the Polish translation of Judith Butler's seminal *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*) as pivotal points. In any case, the national, political, religious and cultural entanglement of Polish feminism in history is generally emphasised as the factor differentiating it from its Western European or North American counterparts⁴⁰ (though the country's apparent backwardness might

³⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/02/campaigners-celebrate-changing-of-colonial-street-names-in-berlin> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

³⁶ Walkowiak, 'Female Street Namesakes', 331–50; Artur Gałkowski, 'Feminine Urbanonymy in Polish and Italian Linguistic Landscapes', *Lege artis*, v, 1 (2020), 2–53; Oliviu Felecan, 'Feminine Names in Current Romanian Hodonymy', *Onomastica*, lxxv, 1 (2021), 271–87; Krzysztof Górny, Ada Górna, Jan Szczepański, and Aleksandra Sienica, 'Patriarchat nazewnicy – zmaskulinizowany krajobraz symboliczny polskich mniejszych miast', *Prace i Studia Geograficzne*, lxxvii, 1 (2022), 25–44.

³⁷ Anna Wróbel, 'Problem podmiotowości politycznej kobiet w polskim życiu publicznym', *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio K, Politologia*, xvi, 1 (2009), 201–17.

³⁸ Sylwia Witkowska, 'Polski feminizm – paradygmaty', *Dyskurs: Pismo Naukowo-Artystyczne ASP we Wrocławiu*, xxv (2018), 194–241.

³⁹ Sandra Tomczak, 'Feminizm szuka korzeni – przyczynek do poszukiwań i przemian w historycznej narracji polskiego ruchu feministycznego', *Meritum*, viii (2016), 403–16.

⁴⁰ Witkowska, 'Polski feminizm – paradygmaty', 198–200, 203–4.

also be seen as an asset).⁴¹ This separateness of feminist activism in Poland appears to be reflected in many current narratives, too, resulting in contemporary absences, reticences and exclusions,⁴² which may thus be countered with the state narrative.⁴³

OUR RESEARCH

Taking as its point of departure the female ratio in the names of streets in the 12 biggest cities of Poland, the present study updates the research, exploring the changes that have occurred between 2018 and 2022.⁴⁴ The choice of 2018 was intentional since that year marked the centenary of the acquisition of voting rights for women in Poland. The celebration involved cultural events such as thematic expositions⁴⁵ but also the Parliament's decision to declare 2018 as the year of the rights of women,⁴⁶ which resulted in several top-to-bottom initiatives targeted at honouring women, including the resolutions adopted by city councils in several Polish municipalities, such as Poznań,⁴⁷ Tarnów,⁴⁸ and Wrocław.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, 2018–23 is the

⁴¹ Magdalena Grabowska, 'Pomiędzy Wschodem i Zachodem: problem tożsamości polskiego feminizmu w kontekście współczesnych debat', in Bogusława Budrowska (ed.), *Kobiety. Feminizm. Demokracja* (Warszawa, 2009).

⁴² Elżbieta Sala, 'Przemilczana historia polskiego feminizmu', in Alicja Pałęcka, Helena Szczodry, and Marta Warat (eds), *Kobiety w społeczeństwie polskim* (Kraków, 2011), 233–50; Joanna Mizelińska, 'Odkrywanie zapoznanego? Polska demokracja wobec kobiet i feminizmu', *Studia Socjologiczne*, iv, 199 (2010), 267–83.

⁴³ Agata Młodawska, 'Konnicca świętej wojny feministek przeciwko rządowi RP – analiza dyskursu antyfeministycznego w prasie polskiej', in Budrowska (ed.), *Kobiety. Feminizm. Demokracja*, 219–38.

⁴⁴ For reasons related to the publication timeline, we used the data recorded in the database until Sept. 15, 2022.

⁴⁵ <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/aktywnosc-ministrow/konferencja-stulecie-uzyskania-pelni-praw-wyborczych-w-polsce-przez-kobiety,11023> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁴⁶ http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc8.nsf/uchwaly/1536_u.htm [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁴⁷ <https://bip.poznan.pl/bip/uchwaly/kadencja-2014-2018,23/lvii-1057-vii-17-2017-z-dnia-2017-11-21,72095/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁴⁸ <https://kt24.pl/15-kobiet-bedzie-patronkami-tarnowskich-ulic/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁴⁹ https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwj-oN2X_ez7AhVNXosKHVHpAg4QFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Ffedzienniki.duw.pl%2FGetActPdf.ashx%3Fyear%3D2019%26book%3D0%26positio%3D6103&usq=AOvVaw1nzyGqAn2vSrMhQ39b2dbO [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

time when the first effects of the state-implemented historical policies become visible.

In our research, we set ourselves three goals: first, to establish whether the gender ratio in street names had increased since the beginning of 2018, and if so, which cities contributed the most to the increase (the quantitative objective); second, to determine whether and how the female pantheon had changed in that period (the qualitative objective); finally and most importantly, to identify, describe, and interpret – focusing on selected case studies – the agents involved in the naming wars, as well as the driving forces responsible for the inner dynamics of the debate (the ideological objective).

THE QUANTITATIVE ASPECT: PROGRESS OR STAGNATION?

Caution is necessary when comparing the ratio of female urban names reported by various researchers or the media due to the incompatibility of data. Percentages may be calculated in relation to the total number of streets, or only of those with a personal namesake, or only of those whose personal namesake is a historical person (to the exclusion of literary characters, mythological personages, fairy tale heroes and heroines, animals, etc.). Also, plural commemorations are problematic and therefore variously categorised. Finally, some studies analyse street names only, while others encompass all urban names, including those of bridges, city parks, individual buildings, and even schools, colleges, libraries or museums.

The 2018 study that served as a point of departure analysed all urban names registered synchronically in the TERYT database: names of streets, alleys, squares, roundabouts, bridges, parks, and garden squares. Its professed objective was diagnostic – especially that it was, to the best of our knowledge, the first of its kind with a focus on Poland. Our present research, limited to the 2018–22 period, also has the TERYT database as its source of data. We identified 540 female bestowals, mostly individual – only 12 of them were collective commemorations.

Our findings indicate that within the past five years, newly named parks had the highest female ratio, while the new names of bridges were the most masculine; streets, and especially garden squares, had relatively many female names (Fig. 1). It might be surmised – albeit with due caution – that bridges and roundabouts are essential in transport,

while parks and garden squares play a more decorative and facultative role. Another aspect is the stunning recent phenomenon of garden squares in Poland as objects fit for naming⁵⁰ – they provide a cost-effective alternative to streets (whose availability is limited by the slow spatial development of cities), though the fact that they are not used in addresses, and therefore are hardly noticed, diminishes their prestige.

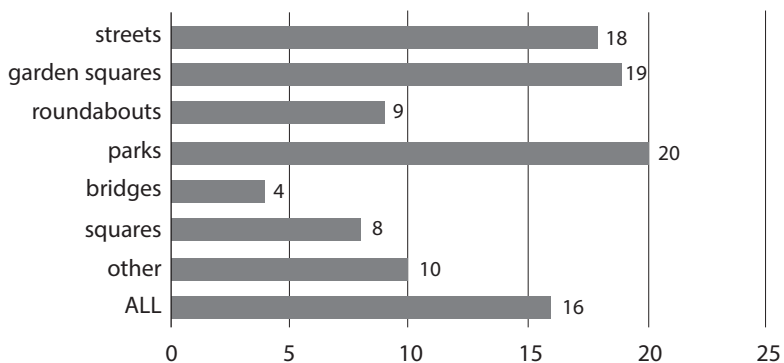


Fig. 1. The percentage of female names in various urban locations (2018–22).

Data source: Own work.

The overall ratio – 16 per cent (Fig. 1, bottom bar) – is markedly higher than that for the period until 2017, which stood on average at 11 per cent for the twelve analysed cities (calculation for the entire territory of Poland was not feasible, as this would involve a too large dataset), and varied, depending on a city, from 5.7 per cent (Bydgoszcz) to 13.5 per cent (Szczecin). In that respect, there seems to be a slight increase.

The cities where the female bestowals in the 2018–22 period were the most numerous were Poznań (46) and Warsaw (28), with Tarnów and Wrocław tied for the third place (19); they were followed by Łódź (11), Białystok and Cracow (10 each), Szczecin (8), Bydgoszcz (7), and Konin (6) (Fig. 2).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Justyna B. Walkowiak, 'These Garden Squares are Made for Naming: New Onyms in Polish Urban Space', in Oliviu Felecan (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Onomastics "Name and Naming"* (Baia Mare, 2022), 559–70.

⁵¹ In order to assure compatibility with Fig. 2, we decided to present only ten highest-ranking towns or cities, therefore Kutno – where the number of new bestowals equaled that in Konin – has not been included in Fig. 1.

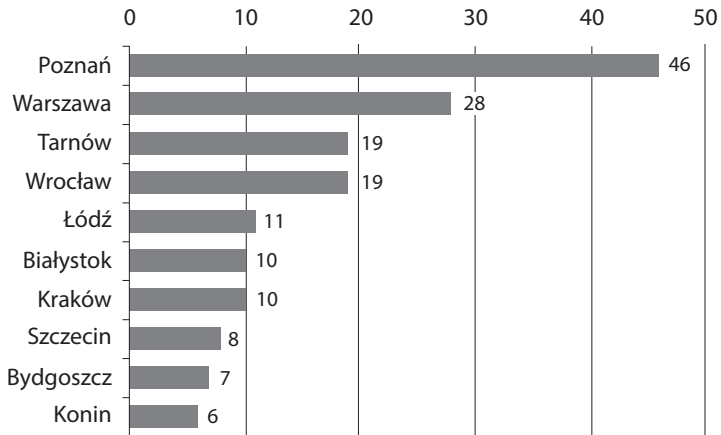


Fig. 2. Polish cities with the highest number of new (2018–22) urban locations named after women – absolute values.

Data source: Own work.

However, when these numbers are juxtaposed against the overall number of streets, squares, bridges, etc., in each city, the ranking of the cities relative to their size is somewhat different (Fig. 3):

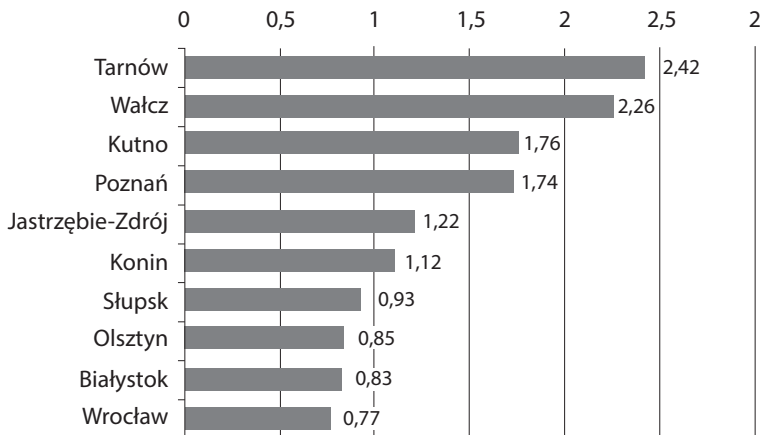


Fig. 3. Percentages of new female names between 2018 and 2022 – top ten cities and towns.

Data source: Own work.

Interestingly, the percentages of newly bestowed female names are the highest in towns outside the twelve biggest centres analysed in the 2018 article. Only three of the ten cities and towns in Fig. 3 (Poznań, Białystok, and Wrocław) are among the biggest twelve in Poland. This might indicate that nowadays, the idea of gender parity in urban naming is popular not only among the big city dwellers – to put it differently, the idea appears to have been, albeit rather slowly, ‘trickling down’, as also indicated by the magnitude of recent feminist protests (marches, demonstrations, pickets) in smaller towns.

THE QUALITATIVE ASPECT: THE NEW PANTHEON, OR THE CONTINUATION OF THE OLD ONE?

A comparison of the top ten women most frequently commemorated in cityscape across Poland until the end of 2017 with the ranking list of new 2018–22 bestowals offers ample proof of the ‘long life’ (*longue durée*) of the time-honoured national namesakes: eight out of the former top ten women with streets (squares, roundabouts, parks, etc.) named after them can also be found on the new list; five of them represent the literary profession and their continuous presence is probably due to the presence of their works on the required reading lists in schools. Among these, the rise of Wisława Szymborska was without doubt caused by the Nobel Prize she received in 1996 – a considerable time had to pass for her to climb to a spot in the ranking comparable with that of the other traditionally revered women of letters. The remainder of the common core of both lists is made up of two rulers and a single scientist – Maria Skłodowska-Curie, the only Pole awarded a Nobel Prize in science and the only Pole who ever received this prestigious award twice.

Among the newcomers to the top ten, marked in bold, there are three Catholic saints, three Polish queens, two poets (Agnieszka Osiecka, Halina Poświatowska), one writer of children’s literature (Wanda Chotomska), one pop-singer (Anna Jantar), and one medal-winning sportswoman (Irena Szewińska). Most prominent, however, are two figures linked with WW2 and its aftermath: Irena Sendlerowa, known for having saved many Jewish children by smuggling them out of the Warsaw Ghetto, and Danuta Siedzikówna, a young medical orderly tortured and sentenced to death by the communist authorities in 1946.

Table 1. The all-Polish female pantheon until 2017 and the new bestowals between 2018 and 2022.

No.	Before 2018	2018–2022
1.	Maria Konopnicka	Wisława Szymborska
2.	Eliza Orzeszkowa	Irena Sendlerowa^a
3.	Queen Jadwiga	Agnieszka Osiecka
4.	Maria Curie	Danuta Siedzikówna
5.	Maria Dąbrowska	Eliza Orzeszkowa
6.	Zofia Nałkowska	[Queen] Anna Jagiellon , Queen Jadwiga
7.	<i>Emilia Plater^b</i>	Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Konopnicka
8.	<i>Gabriela Zapolska</i>	Maria Curie, Saint Rita
9.	Princess Doubravka of Bohemia [Dąbrówka]	Princess Doubravka of Bohemia, Maria Dąbrowska, Irena Szewińska, Wanda Chotomska, Queen Marie Casimire de la Grange d'Arquien [Marysienka], Queen Bona, Anna Jantar, Halina Poświatowska, Saint Anna, Saint Barbara
10.	Wisława Szymborska	

^a in bold – namesakes absent from the older (before 2018) top ten list.

^b in italics – former top-ten namesakes absent from the top nine for the years 2018–22.

A closer inspection of the newcomers to the female pantheon uncovers a fissure in the qualities evidently desired – and rewarded – by the namers. Some new heroines embody conservative values and the state narrative dominant in the 2018–2022 period: one that values sacrifice in the service of the ‘Nation’. On the other side of the spectrum, there are feminist figures that had never before been honoured in the city space, such as Maria Dulębianka (1858–1919), activist and women’s suffrage campaigner, known also for being a lifelong companion of writer Maria Konopnicka (see below).

One of the less obvious choices among the recent female commemorations, however, turned out to be St. Rita, a hitherto relatively little-known Catholic nun of Italian descent – out of ten nominations in Poland, five came between 2018 and 2022. Her cult in the city of Bydgoszcz has been growing only since 2013.⁵² The saint is credited

⁵² <https://bydgoszcz.wyborcza.pl/bydgoszcz/7,48722,28262953,skwer-w-bydgoszczy-ma-nosic-imie-swietej-rity-obok-bedzie-sanktuarium.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

with providing help in apparently hopeless cases (“the advocate of all those whose requests seem impossible”).⁵³ It is also deeply disturbing that she was an exemplary suffering wife of an abusive man (“her husband was a man of violent temper [who] often mistreated Rita verbally and physically”)⁵⁴ and a mother of two violent sons. As such, she is a rather peculiar role model for contemporary women, and her cult might be seen today as the embodiment of old-fashioned patriarchal attitudes towards domestic violence.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are women whose selection for street commemoration seems independent of any official or conservative nation-building narratives and might be attributed to grassroots initiatives. The proportion and diversity of one-time bestowals is considerable, with the women thus honoured ranging from contemporary local activists to little-known and, until recently, not widely commemorated historical figures.

MEMORY WARS – OPEN CONFLICT. THE CASE OF ROMAN DMOWSKI

The first case is related to explicit commemoration of Roman Dmowski (1864–1939), and similarly explicit was the ensuing war waged between the supporters of his presence in the city space and those for whom it was unacceptable. This conflict escalated slowly. When, in 1995, the nameless but very prestigiously located roundabout at the intersection of Marszałkowska Street and Jerozolimskie Avenues in the very centre of Warsaw was formally dedicated to a right-wing pre-war Polish politician, few expressed their concern. Poland was a budding democracy at the time, freshly emerged from the collapse of communism, and the cultural wars of today were yet to come. Even as late as 2016, Mateusz Kijowski, an activist otherwise radically anti-government, associated with the Polish civic organisation Committee for the Defence of Democracy [Komitet Obrony Demokracji, KOD], in all earnestness promoted Dmowski on Facebook, emphasising his contribution to Poland’s independence. That time, however,

⁵³ <https://stritaparish.org/the-story-of-st-rita/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵⁴ https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=205 [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

an immediate rebuke from his own political allies was unexpectedly strong and even forced him to issue an official apology.⁵⁵

The protests were vocal, when, in November 2020, the railway station Warszawa Wschodnia in Warsaw was named after the controversial nationalist. The protesters carried placards saying “Dmowski to the dustbin of history”, and “An anti-Semite and a misogynist is not a hero”, as well as a quote attributed to Dmowski, stating that “a woman studying at university is absurd, and women’s gainful employment is an anomaly”.⁵⁶ The new nomination did not involve the erasure of the previous namesake – if not for any other reason than the fact that the latter, neutrally topographical in its character, was retained alongside the new one; the official new name of the station, Roman Dmowski Warsaw East Railway Station [Warszawa Wschodnia im. Romana Dmowskiego], remained unchanged despite the protests.

Shortly before that, in March 2019, a petition appeared on Facebook demanding that Dmowski Roundabout be changed to Women’s Rights Roundabout.⁵⁷ As more and more people signed it on the internet,⁵⁸ in December 2021, Warsaw City Council raised its own petition with the same postulate. A heated debate ensued. Even Polish PM Mateusz Morawiecki took part, saying that “Roman Dmowski is and will forever be the father of the independent Poland [...], no matter whether the leadership of the Civic Platform likes it or not”.⁵⁹

In response, on 15 April 2022, the Polish President signed a bill that retroactively (effective from 1 January 2022) introduced a ban on the renaming of streets that commemorate certain categories of historical figures. These included the founding fathers of Polish independence,⁶⁰

⁵⁵ <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10029806/awantura-o-dmowskiego-kijowski-przeprasza-nie-bylo-moja-intencja-wspieranie-ksenofobii-rasizmu-mizoginizmu-czy-faszyzmu.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵⁶ <https://tvn24.pl/tvnwarszawa/najnowsze/warszawa-dworzec-wschodni-nazwano-imieniem-romana-dmowskiego-4747410> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/ogolnopolskistrajkkobiet/posts/3096219120404065/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵⁸ <https://naszademokracja.pl/petitions/apel-o-zmiane-nazwy-ronda-dmowskiego-na-rondo-praw-kobiet> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁵⁹ <https://oko.press/rondo-dmowskiego-warszawa-chce-zmienic-nazwe-prawica-oburzona-co-pisal-o-zydach> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶⁰ A category of Polish politicians and activists of the WW1 period, recently invented and intensively promoted by the authorities, loosely modelled on the Founding Fathers of the United States. For criticism of the parallel, cf. Jakub

saints, and the potentially all-embracing category of those who “contributed to the building and strengthening of the Polish State, the identity of the Polish Nation, or the development of Polish society”.⁶¹ The bill, passed by the lower house of the Polish parliament, was subsequently vetoed by the upper house as legally flawed, but the Senate’s veto was rejected. As noted by a leading Polish daily,

The bill was initiated by the Law and Justice Party⁶² MP Paweł Lisiecki. He openly admitted that it was a reaction to a single event: the fact that the Warsaw City Council adopted a petition on renaming the Dmowski Roundabout in Warsaw as the Women’s Rights Roundabout (which in itself is not enough to officially change the name of the roundabout).⁶³

Roman Dmowski, while included in the recently created category of the so-called ‘fathers of Poland’s independence’, was a controversial figure, known for his nationalist, anti-Semitic, politically and socially conservative views that included, among others, a refusal to grant voting rights to women. Little wonder that he was the perfect candidate for a very symbolic replacement with an invocation of women’s rights:

In defence of the Dmowski roundabout, a coalition was formed, from brave nationalist boys, through Professor [Jan] Żaryn, the Institute of National Remembrance and the PiS mainstream, to the conservative senator of the democratic opposition, Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski. The right wing behaves as if the decision of the capital’s local government was an attack not only on Dmowski, but on Polish history itself, on independence, and on the right wing’s right to public space.⁶⁴

Majmurek, ‘Dmowski – toksyczny ojciec niepodległości’, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 14 Dec. 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/majmurek-rondo-praw-kobiet-dmowski-toksyczny-ojciec-niepodleglosci/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶¹ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,173236,28355806,identity-politics-in-poland-president-duda-signs-ban-on-removing.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶² Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [PiS], a right-wing party, in power from 2005 to 2007 (as part of a ruling coalition), and independently from 2015 to 2023.

⁶³ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,173236,28355806,identity-politics-in-poland-president-duda-signs-ban-on-removing.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶⁴ Jakub Majmurek, ‘Dmowski – toksyczny ojciec niepodległości’, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 14 Dec. 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/majmurek-rondo-praw-kobiet-dmowski-toksyczny-ojciec-niepodleglosci/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

As we are writing these words, the Dmowski Roundabout retains its 1995 name.

MEMORY WARS – UNDERHAND TACTICS. THE CASE OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Streets and other urban locations dedicated to women's rights were not the primary focus of our research, as our methodology required a namesake to be a female (an actual or literary person, individual or plural) and not an abstract concept. However, because of the great symbolic and emotional power of women's rights power their inclusion in this section appears expedient, especially that it provides a good illustration of certain mechanisms of the conflict.

Commemoration of women's rights in Polish public spaces is a recent phenomenon. It may be linked directly⁶⁵ to a series of street protests known as the All-Poland Women's Strike [Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet], initiated in 2016 in protest against the rejection by the lower house of the parliament of the 'Save the Women' [Ratujmy Kobiety] bill, intended to liberalise the right to abortion (as opposed to the Law and Justice's bill, banning all abortion).⁶⁶ As of December 2022, there are 25 urban locations in Poland with that namesake.

Apart from the open conflict that involves calling in the legislative 'big guns', trench warfare occasionally breaks out with its costly territorial gains and elaborate schemes to outwit the opponent. Thus, when faced with a request for dedicating a nameless roundabout in Konin to the rights of women (as chosen by citizens), conservative city councillors countered the proposal, suggesting a different namesake: Ewa Bugno-Zaleska,⁶⁷ a Solidarity member, engaged in anti-government activities, interned twice under martial law in the 1980s, later a religion

⁶⁵ Earlier initiatives laid the groundwork for the increase in the visibility of women in urban space. See e.g. Ewa Furgał (ed.), *Szlaki kobiet. Przewodniczka po Polsce emancypantek* (Kraków, 2015). Among later initiatives, the petition 'Ulice dla Kobiet' [Streets for women] should be mentioned (<https://www.naszademokracja.pl/petitions/ulice-dla-kobiet-apel-o-upamietnienie-kobiet-w-nazwach-warszawskich-ulic> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023]).

⁶⁶ https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-sejm-odrzuтил-projekt-komitetu-ratujmy-kobiety-liberalizujac,nId,2279607#crp_state=1 [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶⁷ <https://www.lm.pl/aktualnosci/rondo-praw-kobiet-czy-ewy-zalewskiej-komisja-podzielona-radni-zdecyduja-w-srode> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

school teacher. Ironically, her candidature had been put forward earlier but had been rejected by the same party that later wanted to use her as an alternative to women's rights.

The proposal to name a roundabout in Chorzów after women's rights was met with a counter-idea (outvoted) from a conservative politician to devote it to "The Rights of Women *and Unborn Children*".⁶⁸ In Koszalin the same suggested moniker eventually turned into 'The Centenary of Women's Rights Roundabout'.⁶⁹ In Szczecin, the (rejected) counterproposal was 'The Rights of Women *and Men Square*'.⁷⁰ Such dampening of the force of the original message, either successful or not, is one of the subtler ways to combat the namesake; downright rejection was also an option, as evidenced by the case of a garden square in Kielce⁷¹ and of a roundabout in Kołobrzeg.⁷²

MEMORY WARS – DIFFERENT SURFACE, SAME CORE. THE CASE OF 'INKA'

It could be argued that commemoration in city space has two levels: the surface (i.e. what is formally commemorated – it might be hardly more than formally paying lip service to the demands of feminists that the number of 'female' streets should be comparable to that of the 'male' ones) and the core (i.e., which values are in fact represented, regardless of the appearances). In theoretical categories, such tactics are tantamount to reappropriation and *de facto* distortion of the feminist narratives by right-wing activism.⁷³

⁶⁸ <https://www.eska.pl/slaskie/rondo-praw-kobiet-w-chorzowie-radni-pis-chcieli-dodac-dzieci-nienarodzone-aa-P2wW-WikL-Gqdx.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁶⁹ <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/inwestycje/koszalin-buduje-nowo-rondo-bedzie-nosic-nazwe-100-lecia-praw-kobiet,258947.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷⁰ <https://szczecin.se.pl/reprezentacyjne-miejsce-z-nowa-nazwa-w-szczecinie-bedzie-plac-praw-kobiet-aa-44C4-QbFF-FGjF.html> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷¹ <https://kielce.tvp.pl/53435822/skwer-przy-dworcu-autobusowym-przyjmie-imie-architekta-spodka> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷² <https://okkolobrzeg.pl/petycja-o-nadanie-rondu-w-centrum-miasta-nazwy-praw-kobiet-uznana-za-bezczasna/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷³ Cf. Magali Della Sudda, *Les nouvelles femmes de droite* (Marseille, 2022), a book which "addresses the shift in women's political participation in favour of radical-right wing movements and anti-gender equality" in France, <https://mdellasudda.hypotheses.org/928>, [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023]. See also: Bogna Kociolowicz-Wiśniewska, 'Medialne strategie autoprezentacji działaczek nacjonalistycznych organizacji kobiecych', *Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna*, xv, 2 (2019), 115–30.

Translating this into practical terms: the increase in the number of women in urban toponymy does not have to equal introducing feminist ideals of genuine gender parity as such. On the contrary, a closer analysis reveals that many women from the new pantheon are either simply female embodiments of the basically patriarchal-cum-national message or, alternatively, personages not memorable by their own merit but due to the fact of being some man's mistress, wife or daughter.⁷⁴

A case in point is Danuta Siedzikówna, code name 'Inka', medical orderly and member of the anti-communist underground, tortured to death by communist secret police in 1946, commemorated in recent (2018–22) urban names 10 times: she was a woman, yet the values she stood for were traditional and patriotic. Also, some, if not all, religious bestowals might fall in that category – among the 540 recent commemorations, 40 related to individual female saints, 9 related to beatified women, and 6 to nuns (5 individual ones and one collective name), with 8 additional references to Virgin Mary. Jointly, nearly 12 per cent of all recent female namesakes in Polish streetscapes naming have religious connotations.

The second type mentioned above, that of a famous man's spouse or life partner, is exemplified by Aleksandra Piłsudska – a social and political activist, best known, however, as a mistress and later the second spouse of Chief of State Józef Piłsudski, and First Lady of Poland (2 name bestowals). It has also been argued that pilot Janina Lewandowska would never have been commemorated in city space had she not been the daughter of a famous general. Other similar examples are Queen Anna Jagiellon (6 bestowals), or Barbara Radziwiłł, royal mistress and the Queen of Poland for five months (2 bestowals). In total, 16 bestowals explicitly reference queens, and 9 – princesses.

⁷⁴ Interestingly, opposition to mainstream feminist movement (however we decide to define it) may also come from a seemingly left-wing position (e.g. Magdalena Piekara, "Trylogia autobiograficzna Moniki Jaruzelskiej, czyli o "feminizmie" w świecie celebrytek", *Autobiografia Literatura Kultura Media*, ii, 15 (2020), 123–37). An even greater paradox is that – as succinctly demonstrated by Piekara – Monika Jaruzelska, who describes herself as distrustful of women's street protests, deeming them pointless, and is reluctant to approve of pro-equality campaigns such as Rainbow Friday [*Tęczowy Piątek*], in fact, owes her position in the media to family ties, being the daughter of General Wojciech Jaruzelski (*ibid.*, 127–28).

MEMORY WARS – DIFFERENT CORE, SAME SURFACE.
THE CASE OF MARIA KONOPNICKA

Maria Konopnicka, until relatively recently, was a household name topping the lists of street namesakes in Poland⁷⁵ as a paragon of patriotism and social conscience.⁷⁶ The writer became immensely popular in her lifetime. It was no coincidence, for instance, that on the 25th anniversary of her literary career, she received a manor of her own as a ‘gift from the nation’, purchased from a public collection of money; it was an honour bestowed upon very few individuals at the time (Nobel-prize winning Henryk Sienkiewicz being one of them). Nor was it accidental that Konopnicka’s funeral in 1910 was reportedly attended by no fewer than 40 thousand mourners – even if somewhat exaggerated, the number was staggering. Her popularity did not wane in the interwar years, especially given that her works became a staple of obligatory reading lists in schools. After the Second World War, her social activism and interest in the plight of the poor was readily accepted by the communist authorities, who liked to pose as defenders of the common people. To this day, more than 300 schools, children’s homes and libraries are named after her.⁷⁷

It was more recently, however, that Konopnicka became reappropriated for the public discourse as an icon of feminism⁷⁸ – a kind of Wittgensteinian ‘rabbit-duck’ ambiguity. In 2011, Internet memes began to appear, mockingly admonishing right-wing activists that by singing ‘Rota’⁷⁹ they actually honour the literary output of a feminist,

⁷⁵ <https://culture.pl/en/article/polands-most-popular-street-names-an-adventure-in-statistics> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷⁶ <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-writers-with-a-social-conscience-from-boleslaw-prus-to-maria-dabrowska> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷⁷ <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/konopnicka-dulebianka-wnm/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁷⁸ Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki* (Kraków, 1999); Krzysztof Tomasik, *Homobiografie. Pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX i XX wieku* (Warszawa, 2008); Lena Magnone, *Maria Konopnicka: lustra i symptomy* (Gdańsk, 2011); Marcin Romanowski, ‘Biografia kobieca. Przypadek Marii Konopnickiej’, in Katarzyna Bałżewska, Dobrosława Korczyńska-Partyka, and Alicja Wódkowska (eds), *Kobiety i historia* (Gdańsk, 2015), 227–248.

⁷⁹ Written by Konopnicka in 1908, and beginning with the verses “We won’t forsake the land we came from / We won’t let our speech be buried / We are the Polish nation...”, the patriotic poem *Rota* [The Oath] was a protest against

lesbian and icon of the LGBT movement.⁸⁰ A conservative politician, Artur Zawisza, vocally opposed that opinion in 2012, claiming Konopnicka's alleged queerness to be a lie of the feminist propaganda, and putting forward the proposal that 'Konopnicka denial' should be punished as severely as Holocaust denial. This, in turn, resulted in even more memes⁸¹ but also more serious comments from journalists and historians, who were pointing out that the actual character of her relationship with Maria Dulębianka cannot be established with certainty today. The backdrop of this situation might be the proposal of Grzegorz Gauden, director of the Polish Book Institute, to commemorate both Konopnicka and Dulębianka by naming a bill on civil law partnership after the couple.⁸²

CONCLUSIONS

Both overt and covert wars over who and what is to be remembered or forgotten in urban space have been waged in Poland for many years. The metaphor of war is an apt one with regard to street names, since they can easily be used in their symbolic function to claim territory. As proposed above, diverse tactics are employed while waging naming wars. For instance, the surface (i.e. the name in its present shape) may be preserved intact at the expense of reinterpreted deeper core values. Thus, Maria Konopnicka is still the most popular namesake in urban naming in Poland, though in the light of the discussion recapitulated above, this fact raises doubts as to who exactly should be commemorated today: a patriot or a feminist. Conversely, the deep values honoured in the name may be retained while the outer layer (the name itself) ostensibly changes. This takes place when the ratio

Prussian oppression in partitioned Poland. Inspirational for many Polish freedom fighters, especially during the Second World War; before the First World War it was even considered a likely candidate for the Polish national anthem. See <https://culture.pl/en/article/polands-most-popular-street-names-an-adventure-in-statistics> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁸⁰ <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/konopnicka-dulebianka-wnm/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁸¹ <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/gruba-kreska-siec-sie-zagotowalaws-lesbijstwa/jtz1n> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁸² <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/konopnicka-dulebianka-wnm/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

of female street names rises, as postulated by feminist movements, but the new namesakes, in fact, embody anti-feminist values.

An argument is sometimes advanced that the names of streets are, in fact, of no relevance to contemporary life:

Street names are present in the collective unconscious in the literal sense of the word. The memory of their origin is lost over time. [...] Who still remembers past war heroes to whom a street name was dedicated? And besides, who cares? [...] Since street names are sociological objects with no value other than historical significance, let us leave them where they are and get on with other tasks.⁸³

The present research shows clearly that this is certainly not the case. Street names are reviewed and changed due to the involvement of their namesakes in activities and ideologies today found morally unacceptable, such as involvement in Nazi or communist regimes, holding racist beliefs, or taking part in colonial atrocities. Decommunisation excepted, this occurs mostly in Western Europe and the USA; however, a recent controversy over President Woodrow Wilson, today considered to be a racist, as a namesake of a square in Warsaw⁸⁴ proves that this trend has reached Poland too.

Moreover, in demands for a balanced ratio in street naming, probably more is at stake than merely labels: appreciation for women in general as legitimate participants in public life (as symbolically manifested by (re)claiming public space); a manifestation of power; a reappraisal of history as herstory, with its heroines on equal footing with the heroes of history; providing a space that one could call her own; righting the wrongs of the past; and, last but not least, striving for an inclusive society.

Sometimes urban renamings may be perceived in terms of *symbolic retribution*;⁸⁵ the term, derived from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, literally

⁸³ <https://www.intotheminds.com/blog/en/feminisation-street-names/> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁸⁴ <https://tvn24.pl/tvnwarszawa/najnowsze/warszawa-plac-wilsona-powinien-zmienic-nazwe-po-oskarzeniach-prezydenta-o-rasizm-4625858> [Accessed: 20 Sept. 2023].

⁸⁵ Maoz Azaryahu, 'The Critical Turn and Beyond: The Case of Commemorative Street Naming', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, x, 1 (2011), 28–33.

suggests that punishment is proportionate to the size of the wrongdoing. For instance, replacing the commemoration of a colonial mass murderer in a street name with one of an anti-colonial resistance fighter would qualify as such. Nevertheless, only one of the four mini-case studies presented above – the case of the roundabout dedicated to Roman Dmowski and the proposal to rename it after the rights of women – appears to match that description.

As Sylvia Walby aptly noted several decades ago, “Women have entered the public sphere, but not on equal terms”.⁸⁶ Commemorative naming of urban spaces, merely one thread in a larger narrative people weave about themselves and the world, might become one of the ways in which women’s presence in the public sphere is reinforced. Street names are a unique sign of inclusion and exclusion from specific spaces and, therefore, an arena of power struggles. Female street names distinctly reflect a fight for hegemony, or rather a fight for the truth, for restoring a woman’s rightful place in history, the place which had so far been denied due to gender inequality in street naming practices.

proofreading Krzysztof Heymer

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⁸⁶ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1990), 180.

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