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# Gendering Urban Namescapes: The Gender Politics of Street Names in an Eastern European City

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## Abstract

The gender relations of power embedded within the urban landscape and materialized in street nomenclature remain an underexplored topic in place-name studies. This paper situates the gendered spaces of street names within the broader investigation of identity politics played out in the public space. Drawing on scholarship from "critical toponymies", this article diachronically examines the gender patterning of urban nomenclature in a city from Eastern Europe (Sibiu, formerly *Hermannstadt*, Romania). For this purpose, a dataset was compiled from the entire street nomenclature of the city across seven successive historical periods, from 1875 to 2020 ($n = 2,766$). The statistical analyses performed on this dataset revealed a "masculine default" as a structuring principle underpinning Sibiu's urban namescape for the two centuries investigated. As this analysis demonstrates, contrary to the overall democratization of the Romanian post-socialist society, Sibiu's streetscape continues to tell a patriarchal story informed by hegemonic masculinity.

**Keywords:** place-names, gender, Romania, street names, political toponymy

## Introduction

### *Place, Names, and Identity Politics*

Over the last two decades, a robust body of scholarship at the interdisciplinary intersection of cultural geography, political sociology, and onomastics has convincingly argued that place-names are more than orientational devices valuable only to the extent that they assist in efficiently organizing space (Oto-Peralías 2018; David 2011; Guyot & Seethal 2007; Azaryahu 1996). It is clear that "as icons, indexes, and symbols of space phenomena, place-names have enormous referential power" (Thornton 2008, 31). However, place/street names do more than merely indicate space. As those who conduct critical toponymy research have demonstrated, toponymy is also a powerful tool for constructing place by inscribing into the landscape the ideological ethos underpinning the political regime (Mácha 2020; Kaşikçi 2019; Saparov 2017; Kostanski 2009).

Together with other spatial practices, such as building monuments and erecting memorials, place/street names constitute important toponymic instruments in a political regime's toolkit of identity construction. Toponymy has critical value for the fashioning and refashioning of political identities across a wide variety of geo-cultural and historical contexts. It is routinely used in nation-making and state-building (Zelinsky 1986, 1983), colonization and decolonization (Yeoh 1996; Cohen & Kliot 1992), and post-socialist transformations (Czepczyński 2016; Light 2004). Place-names are an important symbolic resource because identities—individual as well as collective—are bound up with space. Just as a specific territory is a crucial component of the "imagined community" of the nation (Anderson 1983), socio-cultural and political identities may also be anchored in space. Utilizing this theoretical foundation, this paper takes as a basic premise that place/street names literally and symbolically inscribe into the landscape a society's dominant system of values, together with its historical memory (Rusu 2019a).

Within the scholarship that has explored geographies of identity as expressed in urban toponymy, street renaming has featured most prominently (Rusu 2020; Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch 2016; Gill 2005). Many scholars documenting street-name changes in the aftermath of significant power shifts have embraced the "city-text" model of urban names (Creţan & Matthews 2016; Palonen 2008; Azaryahu 1990). According to this theoretical framework, the cultural codes and political meanings inscribed onto the cityscape can be unpacked by reading the messages encoded in the street names (Ferguson 1988). This textual imagery of the city is a basic component of the political semiotics approach used in critical toponymic studies (Duncan 2019; Rose-Redwood 2011; Berg & Vuolteenaho 2009).

A parallel strand of research pursued within critical place-name studies is represented by the work of Alderman (2002a/b). In this body of work, place-names are conceived of as "cultural arenas" in which a multitude of social actors with divergent interests engage in an oft-contentious struggle for memorial justice, social recognition, and public visibility. It is within these cultural arenas that identity politics are enacted, negotiated, and contested, as different groups compete over the right to name the landscape. This interpretive lens has been employed in examining the racial politics behind the (re)naming of streets and schools after Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States (Alderman 2002a/b). This approach has also inspired research into the ethnopolitics of street names in a variety of multi-ethnic cities outside of the United States (e.g., Rusu

2019b, for Hermannstadt/Sibiu in Romania; Chloupek 2019, for Košice in Slovakia; Erőss 2017, for Nagyvárad/Oradea in Romania).

In a review article that surveyed modern developments in place-name studies, Rose-Redwood et al. noted the growing recognition that "the naming of places is implicated in the production of racialized, gendered, and commodified landscapes" (2010, 457). However, while there has been considerable research into the importance of street names and the politics of memory with regard to race (Brasher et al. 2018; Caliendo 2011), and while the commodification of space has been examined as the neoliberalization of toponymy (Medway & Warnaby 2014; Light & Young 2004), the gender dimension of place-naming has remained relatively neglected.

To help address this oversight, this study investigates the gender politics of street names in the Romanian city of Sibiu (formerly *Hermannstadt*). In the following section, we advance an understanding of urban space as gendered and shaped by hegemonic masculinity and review the scanty but valuable works that have examined the gendered dimension of street names.

# Gendered Urban Spaces and Topo-Hegemonic Masculinity

Sociologists have pointed out that "in homes, schools, and workplaces, women and men are often separated in ways that sustain gender stratification" (Spain 1993, 137). This structuring of gender relations across the public–private divide reinforces the masculine domination inscribed in the social system (Bourdieu 2001). Picking up this thread of critique, feminist geographers have shown that the spatial patterning of the modern city is "the concrete (and brick and steel) embodiment of conventional gender relations" (McDowell 1993, 167). However, it is not only the material aspects of the city—its concrete, brick, and steel structures—that are fraught with gendered relations of power. Street names, as well as urban spaces, are "gendered through and through" (Massey 1994, 186). Grounding our approach in this line of theoretical thought, we argue—at least for the European space for which data are available in the literature—that toponymy and urban nomenclature constitute an important gendered socio-spatial setting where hegemonic masculinity prevails.

Various strands of scholarship and feminist activist campaigns have underscored that the gendering of socio-physical space has also structured the urban texture of cities across the globe. Table 1a provides an overview of the gender distribution of street names in several major European cities, while Table 1b presents the percentage of eponymous street names in the overall street nomenclatures of these cities.

Table 1a. The distribution of eponymous street names in major European cities by frequency and percentage relative to the total number of eponymous street names

| City | Female | | Male | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| Bucharest | 96 | 6.06 | 1,487 | 93.94 |
| Hamburg | 415 | 14.13 | 2,523 | 85.87 |
| Paris | 166 | 7.70 | 1,860 | 91.81 |
| Rome | 580 | 7.11 | 7,575 | 92.89 |
| Vienna | 361 | 8.24 | 4,018 | 91.76 |
| Warsaw | 159 | 11.78 | 1,191 | 88.22 |
| Total | 1,777 | 8.70 | 18,654 | 91.30 |

Data Source: Bucharest (own calculation); Hamburg (Bake 2015); Paris (Franssen 2018); Rome (Toponomastica Femminile 2019); Vienna (genderATlas 2015); Warsaw (TERYT 2019).

Table 1b. The distribution of eponymous street names in major European cities relative to the total number of street names

| City | Freq | % | Total |
|------|------|------|------|
| Bucharest | 1,583 | 32.04 | 4,941 |
| Hamburg | 2,938 | 32.64 | ~9,000 |
| Paris | 2,026 | 33.77 | ~6,000 |
| Rome | 8,155 | 49.27 | 16,550 |
| Vienna | 4,379 | 64.40 | ~6,800 |
| Warsaw | 1,350 | 25.15 | 5,367 |
| Total | 20,431 | 41.99 | ~48,658 |

Data Source: Bucharest (own calculation); Hamburg (Bake 2015); Paris (Franssen 2018); Rome (Toponomastica Femminile 2019); Vienna (genderATlas 2015); Warsaw (TERYT 2019).

The toponymic data summarized in Table 1a show that the proportion of streets named after women, at least for the cities included in this sample, rarely exceeds 10 percent. In conjunction with the information provided in Table 1b, what these toponymic data suggest is that a higher percentage of eponymous names in a city's street nomenclature is not necessarily associated with a larger presence of female namesakes. For instance, although in Vienna eponymous names represent 64.40 percent of the total street nomenclature, female names constitute only 8.24 percent of eponymous street names. In contrast, female namesakes are more prevalent in cities such as Warsaw and Hamburg (11.78 and 14.13 percent), where eponymous names are less frequent (25.15 and 32.64 percent respectively).

Along similar lines, a study of eight cities in Slovakia found that female street names comprised only 5.00 percent of the eponymous street names included in the analysis. In the capital city of Bratislava, streets named after women were even less prevalent, while in Prešov and Trenčín, "female street names do not exist" at all (Bucher et al. 2013, 30). Other researchers have come up with similar results. For example, an extensive analysis of 64 Croatian cities found that "in only 9 [cities is] the percentage of streets named after women equal to or greater than 5 percent. In almost half of the cities analyzed, including some of the biggest cities in the country, less than 2 percent of streets are named after women. In 11 cities, there is not a single street named after women" (Perić & Kuzmanić 2018, translation by Rusu [2020]).

The comparison is made difficult by the fact that for the Croatian cities, the percentages are relative to the total number of street names. Considering that eponymous names usually constitute between 25 to 65 percent of the city's total street nomenclature (see Table 1b), the percentages of female street names reported by Perić and Kuzmanić (2018) are similar to those from Slovakia and other European cities.

Beyond the empirical difference, another indicator of the stark gender hierarchy is the portrayal of men as autonomous, while women are framed predominantly in relation to men. In this sense, scholars have pointed out how the street names honoring women celebrate a dependent model of femaleness in that the women are recognized for being the mothers, wives, daughters, and mistresses of prominent men (Zuvalinyenga & Bigon 2020; Niculescu-Mizil 2014, 83–84). From Bucharest to Sofia and beyond, researchers have pointed out how a woman's place is usually confined within "the family and lineal history", and women's lives are conceived of as "as supplement[al] to the biographies of their [male] relatives" (Nazarska 2013, 48).

Eponymous street names that commemorate people by inscribing their legacy onto the urban nomenclature are certainly "signpost[s] to history" (Gilpin 1970). Together with other commemorative toponymies such as places named after historical events and dates, street nomenclature that cultivates the memory of certain people enables a geography of public remembrance to become materialized in the landscape (Foote & Azaryahu 2007). However, streets named after people are more than signposts to history and cultural vectors of collective memory. They are also—and this is the argument underpinning this paper—political signposts to the gender regime materialized in the urban public space.

Drawing on scarce but valuable efforts to unravel gender politics in urban nomenclature, in this paper we set out to intersect the preoccupation with decoding political meanings written and re-written in urban nomenclature (the "city-text" perspective) with the attempt to chart and untangle the power relations fought in the cultural arenas of street names (the "cultural arena" model). Such a hermeneutical task will be accomplished by examining the gender politics of urban streetscapes with a longitudinal approach to their making and remaking in the Romanian city of Sibiu (formerly *Hermannstadt*).

# Sibiu: Geographical Location and Historical Background

The current investigation was conducted in Sibiu (population ca. 150,000), a Romanian city in Transylvania (Institutul Național de Statistică 2011). Sibiu's historical development is embedded in the broader cultural processes, power struggles, and political forces that shaped the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The city, originally called *Hermannsdorf*, was founded in the twelfth century by Saxon settlers. Since 1366, the town has been called *Hermannstadt*. Throughout the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, the city streets bore vernacular names that were intrinsically connected with the particular topographic conditions of the place. It was only in 1832 that the municipality started to regulate the urban namescape and officially assigned names to the streets (Sigerus 1930).

The year 1867 saw the restructuring of the Habsburg Empire into the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary (Judson 2016). In other parts of the empire that fell under Hungarian domination, urban streetscapes, such as in the Slovak city of Košice (Chloupek 2019), were thoroughly Magyarized. The municipal authorities of the Saxon city of Hermannstadt, however, resisted this pressure and kept the city's Germanic identity inscribed in its toponymy. In 1872, the local authorities enacted the first street name changes, and several of the main arteries bearing descriptive denominations were renamed in honor of Austrian imperial figures (e.g., Joseph II, 1741–1790, ruler of the Habsburg Empire). The city also used that occasion to commemorate its own political notables (mayors, governors, and councilors from the city's long tradition of self-government) (Rusu 2019b).

The end of the First World War brought about a major overhaul of the political map of Europe. With the dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Transylvania was incorporated into the Romanian Kingdom to form Greater Romania (Hitchins 1994). In this context, *Hermannstadt* was officially renamed *Sibiu*, and its street nomenclature underwent a similar toponymic (but also demographic) process of Romanianization (Rusu 2019b).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the *Kingdom of Romania* became the communist *Romanian People's Republic (RPR)*. King Mihai I was forced to abdicate on December 30, 1947, and the country was thoroughly subjected to a structural reform along Soviet lines (Deletant 2019). The transformations in the country's political economy were accompanied by a toponymic revolution that removed the legacy of the former monarchical regime, replacing it with the symbols of the new socialist order (Light et al. 2002; Nicolae 2000). The remaining traces of Germanic identity written into the city's streetscape that survived the Romanianization process during the interwar period were thoroughly scraped off the landscape. Instead, the urban nomenclature was re-ethnicized, giving prominence to Russian political, military, and cultural figures.

By 1980, Romania had distanced itself from the Soviet Union, a process which started during the mid-1960s. In the first post-war decade, the communist doctrine of proletarian internationalism set aside nationalism as the official state ideology. The 1970s brought about a resurgence of nationalism, which resulted in the curious ideological mixture of national-communism (Petrescu 2009; Verdery 1991). Urban namescapes accurately reflected these geopolitical and ideological developments. For Sibiu's streetscape, this translated into a further Romanianization of urban toponymy, achieved through a new wave of renaming.

The regime change that followed the anti-communist revolution of 1989 marked another remaking of the urban nomenclature. By 1993, most streets bearing political names associated with the former communist regime had been changed (Light 2004). Eventually, after experiencing the costs of a decade of post-socialist transformations, the city emerged as one of Romania's thriving regional centers. In 2007, Sibiu was designated the European Capital of Culture, a status that further consolidated the city's path of development (Dragoman 2008). Such a rich history including multiple political transformations and intricated ethnic relations render Sibiu an ideal place for examining the politics of toponymy in general and the gender dynamics of street names in particular.

# Data

Toponymic data regarding Sibiu's street names were collected from five different types of documents: archival materials, historical maps, city guides, town plans, and local monographies. Using this material, the city's complete street nomenclature was reconstructed for seven successive periods, corresponding to four different political regimes, as follows: (1) the period of the Habsburg Monarchy (1282–1918), for which Sibiu's complete street nomenclature was reconstructed for 1875; (2) Greater Romania (1918–1947), during which toponymic data were taken from 1921 and 1934; (3) the country's state-socialist period (1947–1989), for which the city's street nomenclature was reconstructed for 1948 and 1980; and (4) the post-socialist period (1989–onwards), for which the street names were taken from 1993 and 2020.

The coding procedure involved several steps. For each period, street names were first coded as either eponymous or not. Next, eponymous street names were coded according to the gender identity of the namesake. Then, the area of each street, measured in hectares (1 ha = 10,000 square meters), was obtained from official documents solicited from the municipality. The resulting integrated dataset included a cumulative sum of

2,820 street names collected for seven successive politically relevant moments (1875, 1921, 1934, 1948, 1980, 1993, and 2020). These years were selected based on the availability of toponymic data in the materials used to reconstruct Sibiu's changing street nomenclature.

# Findings

The presentation of the empirical results obtained in the study is organized along two lines. We start with detailing the frequency distribution of Sibiu's street names according to gender, before presenting, from a longitudinal perspective, how the gender patterning of the city's street nomenclature developed. Next, we focus on the spatial analysis of the topographic features and give the findings regarding the size of Sibiu's streets, measured in hectares, according to the gender of the namesake.

## Frequency Distribution of Street Names According to Gender

The historical evolution of Sibiu's street nomenclature in terms of the gender distribution of names relative to the total number of eponymous street names is presented in Table 2a. The frequencies in parentheses indicate the number of gendered street names that were changed in the following period. Whereas "(0)", for instance, indicates that no street named after women was changed in the subsequent period, the sign "(.)" was used to highlight that no changes could be recorded after 2020, since this is the last temporal interval of our analysis. For a better contextualization, the proportion of the eponymous namesakes and their historical variation in the total volume of street names are given in Table 2b.

Table 2a. The gender distribution of eponymous street names in Sibiu, 1875–2020

| Year | Female | | Male | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| 2020 | 4 (.) | 1.67 | 235 (.) | 98.33 |
| 1993 | 4 (0) | 2.31 | 169 (1) | 97.69 |
| 1980 | 6 (3) | 3.80 | 152 (11) | 96.20 |
| 1948 | 16 (10) | 6.81 | 219 (88) | 93.19 |
| 1934 | 10 (10) | 6.45 | 145 (117) | 93.55 |
| 1921 | 5 (0) | 9.09 | 50 (10) | 90.91 |
| 1875 | 4 (0) | 14.29 | 24 (2) | 85.71 |

Table 2b. The distribution of eponymous street names in Sibiu, 1875–2020 relative to the total number of street names

| Year | Freq | % | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | 239 | 33.19 | 720 |
| 1993 | 173 | 31.51 | 549 |
| 1980 | 158 | 30.92 | 511 |
| 1948 | 234 | 55.06 | 425 |
| 1934 | 155 | 60.55 | 256 |
| 1921 | 55 | 32.54 | 169 |
| 1875 | 28 | 20.59 | 136 |

Overall, after considering the cumulative sum of Sibiu's street names from 1875 to 2020, we found that 4.70 percent of the city's eponymous names have commemorated females. Read in conjunction, these two tables

reveal that, as the city's road network developed, and the proportion of eponymous street names rose from 20.59 percent in 1875 to 33.19 percent in 2020 (Table 2b), the presence of female namesakes decreased progressively, from 14.29 percent in 1875 to 1.67 percent in 2020 (Table 2a).

In the early nineteenth century, the urban namescape included only three references to people, all of whom were saints, as opposed to civic and political figures. Two were female saints (St. Elizabeth and St. Mary), while the other toponym referred to St. John. Because these eponymous namesakes are too scarce to be rendered statistically, they were not included in the tables, which begin with 1875 onwards. In the following historical periods, only a couple of new female additions were made. By 1875, a street had been renamed after St. Anne (*Anna Gasse*), and a newly opened avenue was dedicated to Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780) (*Theresien Gasse*).

It was only in 1908 that a woman's name, other than that of a religious or imperial figure, was inserted into the city's street nomenclature. The city chose to commemorate the memory of Johanna Balk (*Johanna Balk Gasse*), a young widow who committed suicide in 1611 to prevent herself from being raped by the Prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Báthory (1589–1613). After 1875, when the city authorities politicized the urban namescape by replacing the old vernacular and descriptive toponymy with honorific street names, significantly more men were commemorated. By 1921, when Sibiu became a Romanian city, more than 90 percent of the eponymous street names honored important male figures such as rulers and statesmen, writers, and scientists.

Until the communist overthrow of the monarchical regime in the aftermath of the Second World War, only three other royal female figures were inscribed onto the city's streetscape. One was Queen Marie of Romania (*Str. Regina Maria*), whose name replaced that of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria (*Franz Josef Gasse*), to whom the main street was previously dedicated. The second female namesake was Carmen Sylva, whose name is the literary pseudonym of Queen Elisabeth of Romania. The street named after her was *Str. Carmen Sylva*. The third and final namesake in this group of recognized women was Despina Doamna, the wife of Neagoe Basarab (1459–1521), a pre-modern ruler of Wallachia. The street which bears her name is *Str. Despina Doamna*.

After the war, communist authorities introduced several female names into Sibiu's street nomenclature. The new regime resorted to a dual process of de-commemorating the political, cultural, and historical figures associated with the old regime (e.g., Mihai Viteazul and Despina Doamna) while replacing them with a female pantheon drawn predominantly from the communist movement's political struggle. In doing so, they sought to combine female figures from the Romanian Communist Party's tradition of political activism (e.g., Elena Pavel, Lilli Paneth Gottlieb, Haia Lifşiţ, and Susana Pârvulescu) with representatives of the Soviet movement in Russia (e.g., Nadeja Krupscaia, Sevţova Liuba) and beyond (e.g., Dolores Ibárruri, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin). Another strand came from the Romanians' historical struggle for freedom and emancipation, as personified in the historical figures of Ana Ipătescu, Ecaterina Teodoroiu, and Ecaterina Varga. A brief biography for each of these women is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Women commemorated in Sibiu's streetscape before and after 1948

| Kingdom of Romania (before 1948) | | Romanian Popular Republic (after 1948) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Street name | Description | Street name | Description |
| *Fingerling* | Descriptive toponym meaning 'fingerstall' (a protective covering for a finger) | *Elena Pavel* | Romanian Communist activist (1915–1943) |
| *Joagărului* | Descriptive toponym meaning 'sawmill' | *Lilli Paneth Gottlieb* | Romanian Communist activist (1911–1941) |
| *Stephan Ludwig Roth* | Transylvanian Saxon intellectual, Lutheran pastor (1796–1849) | *Ana Ipătescu* | Romanian heroine of the 1848 Revolution (1805–1878) |
| *Mihai Viteazul* | Pre-modern ruler of Wallachia (1558–1601) | *Dolores Ibárruri* | Spanish Republican heroine of the Spanish Civil War (1895–1989) |
| *Tranşeului* | Descriptive toponym meaning 'trench' | *Ecaterina Teodoroiu* | Romanian heroine during the First World War (1894–1917) |
| *Despina Doamna* | Wife of the pre-modern ruler of Wallachia, Neagoe Basarab (1459–1521) | *Haia Lifşiţ* | Russian-born Romanian Communist who died on a hunger strike while in detention (1903–1929) |
| [August Ludwig von] *Schlözer* | German historian (1735–1809) | *Bucura Dumbravă* | Hungarian-born Romanian novelist (1868–1926) |
| *Lutsch* | Named after several mayors of Hermannstadt from the Lutsch family | *Ecaterina Varga* | Hungarian-born fighter for Romanian peasants' rights in Transylvania (1802–1858) |
| *Lt. Victor Comşa* | Romanian officer who died in the Second World War fighting against the Red Army (1911–1941) | *Susana Pârvulescu* | Romanian communist activist (1898–1924) |
| – | – | *Nadeja Krupscaia* | Russian Bolshevik revolutionary, the wife of V. I. Lenin (1869–1939) |
| – | – | *Liuba Sevţova* | Russian Soviet partisan and member of the Young Guard (1924–1943) |
| – | – | *Rosa Luxemburg* | Polish Marxist philosopher and revolutionary socialist (1871–1919) |
| – | – | *Olga Bancic* | Romanian Communist activist who fought in the French Resistance (1912–1944) |
| – | – | *Clara Zetkin* | German Marxist theorist and women's rights advocate (1857-1933) |

Table 3 presents the female namesakes inscribed in Sibiu's street nomenclature before and after 1948, the year when the *Kingdom of Romania* became the *Romanian People's Republic*. The 16 female street names existing in 1948 represent the highest number of women's names ever recorded in the city's streetscape, a record also visible in Figure 1. Notwithstanding the measures taken by communist authorities, female street names still comprised less than 7 percent (6.81%) of the total number of streets named after people.

By 1980, the street names honoring female communist activists were changed to politically neutral ones. For example, *Olga Bancic Street* became *Telephones Street/Strada Telefoanelor,* and *Zetkin Clara Street* was turned into *Tourism Street/Strada Turismului*. This process of depoliticizing the urban landscape was not restricted to women, as many prominent men associated with the communist movement and especially with the Soviet Union suffered a similar toponymic fate. In this regard, *Andrei Jdanov Street*, named after the Soviet Communist Party leader and cultural ideologist, was renamed *Philharmonic Street/Strada Filarmonicii*. Similarly, in 1970, the central square that commemorated I. C. Frimu (1871–1919), a "martyr" of the Romanian Socialist movement, became *Goldsmiths Square/Piața Aurarilor*.

During the post-socialist period, the percentage of streets named after women continued to decrease (2.31% in 1993 and 1.67% in 2020). Only three female street names without communist connections survived the aftermath of the 1989 regime change. They were named after Ana Ipătescu, Ecaterina Teodoroiu, and Ecaterina Varga. To this list was added the street named after Doamna Elena Cuza (1825-1909), the wife of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the ruler of the Romanian Principalities. These historical patterns of the gender relations inscribed on Sibiu's street nomenclature are presented in Figure 1.

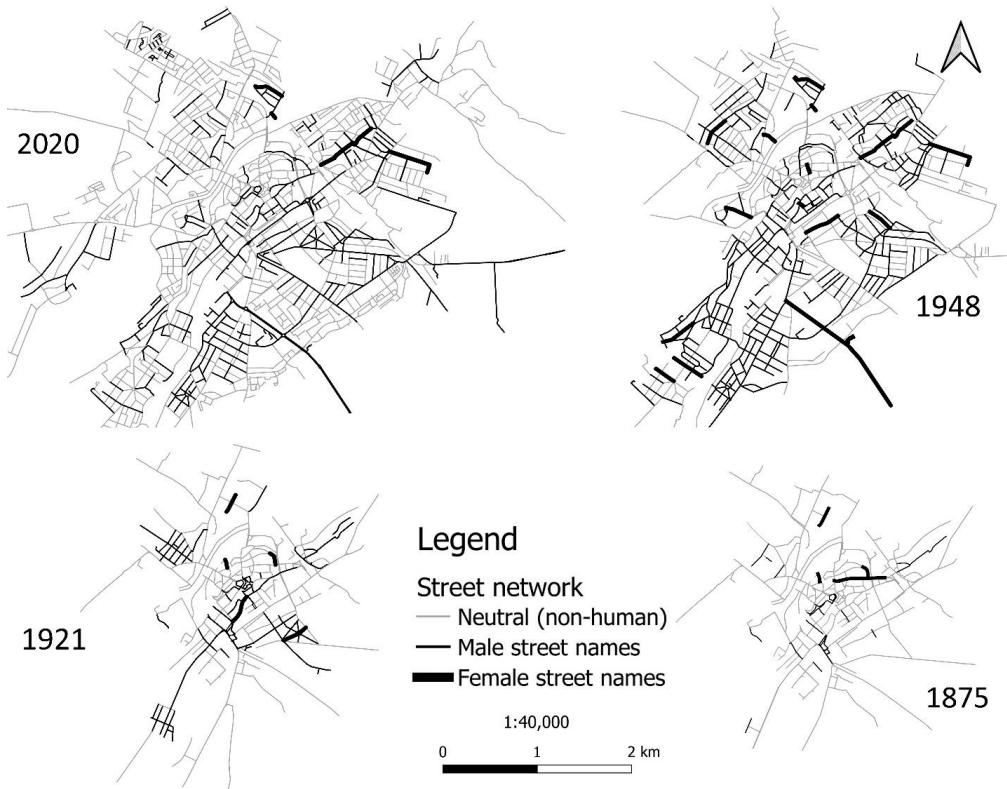Figure 1. Gender patterning of Sibiu's urban street names in 2020, 1948, 1921, and 1875

Figure 1 provides toponymic snapshots of the gender relations materialized in Sibiu's namescape in four moments (1875, 1921, 1948, and 2020). What these graphics reveal is that, with the sole exception of 1948, female namesakes were scarcely present in the city's street nomenclature.

Table 2a also provides insights into how females were gradually written off from Sibiu's city-text through successive practices of street renaming. In this regard, all 10 women present in the city's street nomenclature in 1934 had been renamed by 1948. Of these, only two were renamed after other females (*Str. Despina Doamna* became *Str. Olga Bancic,* and *Str. Ioana Moldovan* was renamed *Str. Donca Simu*).

However, as pointed out earlier in Table 3, the communist authorities compensated for this renaming by re-assigning the names of women to other streets, including streets that had been previously named after prominent male figures. German ethnics constituted one category that was targeted for such renaming. In this regard, the street named after the German historian August Ludwig von Schlözer was changed in 1936 to *Str. Bucura Dumbravă*, a Hungarian-born Romanian novelist. Similarly, after 1948 *Str. Lutsch*, dedicated to a former Saxon mayor, was renamed in honor of Ecaterina Varga, another Hungarian-born Romanian who fought for the peasants' rights in Transylvania.

Other toponymic victims of the communist authorities' effort to insert female namesakes into Sibiu's street nomenclature were masculine figures such as Mihai Viteazul, a premodern ruler who unified the territories inhabited by Romanians in 1600, and Lt. Victor Comșa, a Romanian officer who died in the Second World War fighting against the Red Army. These streets received the names of Dolores Ibárruri, a communist politician and republican fighter in the Spanish Civil War, and Susana Pârvulescu respectively, a Romanian communist activist. During the same period, the communist authorities renamed 117 of the 145 streets named after men (80.69%), most of which were given the names of other men.

Similarly, 62.50 percent of female street names existing in 1948 were renamed by 1980 (10 out of 16), while only 40.18 percent of those honoring men were changed (88 out of 219) for the same period. The imbalance was accentuated after 1989, when half of the streets dedicated to women were renamed (3 out of 6), in contrast to merely 7.24 percent of the streets bearing the name of male figures (11 out of 152).

In addition to these renaming patterns, neo-toponymic practices in Sibiu also reflect the city's gendered politics of urban street naming. In the three decades following the fall of state-socialism in 1989, for example, 210 new streets were built in Sibiu. Of those, 66 (31.43%) were named after people. Of those newly named streets, all of them honored men. Within this circle of honorees, 32 (48.48%) commemorate military men (generals, officers, and soldiers who fought in Romania's world wars).

## *Spatial Analysis of Street Names According to Gender*

The frequency distribution presented in the previous section highlights a stark gender differential toponymically inscribed in Sibiu's streetscape. Other factors that shape the gender patterning of urban street names are topographic characteristics such as a street's geographical location and its size. Regarding the former factor, all four streets presently named after women are located well outside the old city center, toward the industrial outskirts (see Figure 1). The size factor of streets named after male and female figures in a historical perspective is documented in Table 4a, while the area occupied by eponymous streets relative to the total size of Sibiu's public road system is presented in Table 4b.

Table 4a. The gender distribution of eponymous street names in Sibiu, 1875–2020, in terms of the street area in hectares (ha)

| Year | Female | | Male | |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| | ha | % | ha | % |
| 2020 | 2.10 | 2.47 | 83.07 | 97.53 |
| 1993 | 2.10 | 2.80 | 72.97 | 97.20 |
| 1980 | 2.74 | 4.55 | 57.46 | 95.45 |
| 1948 | 8.28 | 9.70 | 77.04 | 90.30 |
| 1934 | 5.56 | 8.29 | 61.48 | 91.71 |
| 1921 | 1.71 | 7.94 | 19.85 | 92.06 |
| 1875 | 1.72 | 23.39 | 5.62 | 76.61 |

Table 4b. The distribution of eponymous street names in Sibiu, 1875–2020, in terms of the street area in hectares (ha) relative to the total area of the urban street network

| Year | ha | % | Total (ha) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | 85.18 | 29.89 | 285.00 |
| 1993 | 75.07 | 30.00 | 250.22 |
| 1980 | 60.20 | 25.15 | 239.32 |
| 1948 | 85.32 | 43.31 | 197.00 |
| 1934 | 67.04 | 53.38 | 125.60 |
| 1921 | 21.56 | 22.32 | 96.60 |
| 1875 | 7.34 | 9.03 | 81.31 |

Table 4a further demonstrates this gender asymmetry by summarizing the results of the spatial analysis focused on determining the area occupied by streets named after females and males, respectively. It shows that the area of streets named after women did not increase with the expansion of Sibiu's network of streets over the last century and a half. While the streets commemorating men increased exponentially from 5.62 hectares in 1875 to 83.07 hectares in 2020, the area of streets dedicated to females remained approximately the same (1.72 ha in 1875, and 2.10 ha in 2020). The findings correspond closely to those provided in Table 2a and show that, throughout the period under investigation, the streets named after women represent 6.03 percent of the size of Sibiu's public road network.

Starting with 1875, Sibiu's public space toponymically occupied by women was considerably less than that attributed to men. After the city authorities introduced more eponymous street names in the second half of the nineteenth century, the area occupied by streets named after females constantly decreased from 23.39 percent in 1875 to 9.70 percent in 1948 and 2.47 percent in 2020 relative to the total size of eponymous streets.


## Discussion

The longitudinal data presented in the previous section tell the tale of an increasingly pervasive masculinization of Sibiu's public space. The gender patterning of the city's street nomenclature along masculinist lines constitutes an integral part of the process of politicizing the cityscape. The latter started during the second half of the nineteenth century and consisted of assigning honorific names to streets. Women were not among the prominent individuals associated with glorious historical events (i.e., rulers and politicians, in particular), after whom the streets were renamed. The genderization of Sibiu's streetscape is intrinsically bound to this wider process of politicization.

The thorough masculinization of the city's street names was partially held off in the post-war period when the communist authorities took active measures to rebalance the gender differential. Their efforts were driven by the regime's ideological commitment to equality, which was extended beyond the class struggle to include the question of gender relations. The renaming of streets after women in Sibiu echoes the developments of the nomenclature of other cities throughout socialist countries. Researchers have pointed out similar outcomes in post-war Sofia, Bulgaria's capital city, where "after 1944 a great number of names in memory of women participating in the communist resistance and [serving as] political figures entered the toponymy of the city" (Nazarska 2013, 50).

However, this feat of gender balancing performed by the communist authorities in Sibiu and other places withers away when considered against the wider gender politics of street naming implemented during the same socialist regime. In percentage terms, despite reaching a historical high, females still constitute less than 7 percent of those to whom Sibiu's eponymous street names are dedicated. This indicates the relative, partial, and ultimately failed attempt at implementing a politics of gender equality in the urban landscape by the communist regime.

It is indicative of the *masculine default* underpinning the city's politics of street naming that none of the new streets that have been built in Sibiu after 1989 were named after a female. Women's invisibility in the urban nomenclature, documented in the Romanian city of Sibiu, is also echoed in other post-socialist settings. For instance, a study of Belgrade, Serbia, concluded that 17 out of the 51 streets previously named after women no longer have an official name, while 11 now bear the names of famous men, and only 7 received the names of other females (Subotić et al. 2013, 87–88). Both of these street-naming practices, that is, the exclusive masculinist neo-toponymy in Sibiu and the writing off of women from Belgrade's city-text through male

renaming, highlight the various toponymic means employed in post-socialist cities to bolster and reproduce the gendered relations of power inscribed onto the urban space.

## Conclusions

Street names are powerful means of signifying space with the dominant values embraced by a particular political community. Gender relations and the power differential they encompass are also toponymically inscribed into the urban nomenclature, alongside other contentious features of identity politics such as race, class, and ethnicity. In this paper, we have charted diachronically the gender politics of street names in the Transylvanian city of Sibiu, Romania. Statistical analyses have revealed the profound masculinity institutionalized in the urban namescape, with women almost completely missing from the city's toponymic picture.

Despite engendering an overall democratization process, which has also touched upon gender relations, post-socialist transformations have not brought about signs of a reconfiguration of the traditionally ingrained masculinity of Sibiu's street names. On the contrary, the longitudinal perspective embraced in this study indicates an increasing marginalization of women in the urban toponymy, which renders them socially irrelevant and spatially invisible. In terms of gender relations, the post-socialist development of Sibiu's street nomenclature largely echoes Bucur's (2018, 48) conclusion for the overall history of women in Romania, which went "from invisibility to marginality".

If "naming is norming", as Berg and Kearns (1996, 99) have argued, it follows that what these toponymic developments observed in Sibiu's urban namescape suggest is the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchalism. As such, the masculine ethos inscribed upon the city's street names further enforces the traditional gender lines of spatial demarcation between a masculine public sphere and a feminine private realm.

These gendered power relations also suggest a toponymic lag between the city's progress in promoting gender equality and its androcentric policy regarding the urban street nomenclature. Sibiu was the European Capital of Culture in 2007 (together with Luxemburg) and, since 2014, it has been governed by a female mayor (who also served as a deputy mayor between 2008 and 2014). However, these cultural and political developments have done little to open up "avenues of change" (Spain 1993, 137) in the city's urban toponymy. As such, it remains a thoroughly conservative bastion of hegemonic patriarchalism.

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