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Maoz Azaryahu

Renaming the Past: Changes in “City Text” in Germany and Austria, 1945–1947

May 1945 marked the beginning of a process of change in the official culture of Germany. The collapse of the Third Reich and the emergence of the post-Nazi social and moral order had an immediate impact on the official culture, here defined as the reflections and representations of the ruling social and moral order in the semiosphere. This article intends to analyze aspects of these changes as manifested in the renaming of streets and squares in German and Austrian cities in the years 1945–47. Renaming was part of the effort to eradicate the Nazi version of the German national past from the semiosphere and to replace it with a modified version, adapted to the emerging new social and moral order. The pattern of change was not uniform, varying from city to city in accordance with local constraints and the prevailing balance of political power in the different municipalities. This article considers the various patterns of change, while devoting particular attention to the case of Berlin, the former Prussian and German capital city.

“City Texts” and Official Culture

The past is a basic component of the official culture. National or collective “past” is a cultural construct of primary importance, since the past is an effective strategy for legitimizing the ruling social and moral order. The “past” is designed in the form of a chronological narrative,¹ which is the conventional form found in textbooks. It is constructed of sequential and causal chains that lead inevitably to the present, which is identified with the status quo embodied by the ruling social order. This particular structure of the past is closely related to its legitimizing effect, since the structure of

the narrative of the past renders the present inevitable and therefore natural.

The past is constructed by the present. Nominated agents of the ruling order are entrusted with the task of selecting the version of the past from a given reservoir of “historical facts” (historical figures and events). These agents construct the sequential and causal chains that define the particular version of the past according to a prescribed set of ideological and moral guidelines. They determine the heroes of the past accordingly, those historical figures whose myths serve as a moral example and as a model for social action. At the same time, they condemn others to the role of anti-heroes, of enemies who threaten the moral principles represented by the heroes.

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In order for a particular version of the past to be part of the social realm, it must operate in the semiosphere, i.e., be part of the mechanisms of generating and distributing meanings that are constantly at work in the networks of social communication. The role of the past as a legitimizing factor is the reason why the official version of the past dominates the authorized public networks of social communication. Oppositional versions, which by definition challenge the official version and the order it legitimizes, are removed from those networks and function as suppressed versions of the past, and hence are not part of the official culture.

Street names, which serve as a vehicle for commemorating heroes and glorious events, are a conventional mechanism for inserting the official version of the past into the semiosphere. Any set of street names in a particular city, which I shall term the “city text,” is a representation of the past, but this representation is confined to heroes and glorious events alone. The “eternal life” guaranteed by street names is the reward rendered to those heroes who sustained the ruling order – the same order that reciprocally declared them worthy of the honor of immortalization. In this sense, the version of the past written on street signs is not identical with the version found in textbooks, which mentions anti-heroes as well. Moreover, because of their spatial structure, city texts give no indication of progression in time: they lack a time-arrow, and all heroes

and events (apart from the historical explanation attached to a selected number of signs) exist simultaneously, with no distinction between “before” and “after,” and hence between cause and effect.

It would seem, however, that street names have only minor significance as a vehicle for introducing the official version of the past to the community, especially when compared with the intensity of messages transferred in the course of commemorative events or during visits to historical museums. Street names are part of everyday life, and the individual's recurrent encounter with the past they represent is casual and mostly unconscious. But this apparent disadvantage is also a merit in its own right: this particular representation of the past operates in those dimensions of social life that appear to be the most detached from political contexts. Through street names (as in the case of banknotes and postage stamps) the past becomes omnipresent – but on such levels of human and social activities where it is hardly noticed. The past is interwoven with daily life and thus gains the appearance of naturalness, a most desired effect in light of the past's function as a legitimizing factor for the ruling order.

City texts, therefore, as an important component of official culture, are vulnerable to radical political reorientations of the ruling order.² This was seen during the French Revolution and the ensuing renaming of streets and squares in Paris: in 1792, for instance, Place Louis XV was renamed Place de la Révolution (later Place de la Concorde). The renaming that took place in Germany after 1945 was anchored in the particular context of the time, but the basic matrix is universal: any change in the ruling social and moral order is followed by a redefinition of the official culture in general and the official version of the past in particular. The renaming of streets is only one manifestation of the general process. An additional factor is the proclamatory value that renaming has: it serves as a political declaration in its own right, displaying and asserting the fact that political changes have occurred and that the “ownership” of the official culture and the media for its presentation has changed hands.

This study examines four patterns of the rewriting of the city text in Germany and Austria during the years 1945–47, i.e., in the period following the collapse of the Third Reich and preceding the establishment of the new bi-state order in Germany in 1949. These patterns represent different options for the post-Nazi national order, each associated with and supported by a distinct version of the “national past,” as represented in the modified city texts. The German case is peculiar in that the defeated version of the national past was not replaced by a coherent, all-national version, but by different versions, each characterizing a certain locality as well as representing an option for a coherent national version. However, no single version emerged as dominant. These competing options were later made official by a distinct political entity – a state: the different versions analyzed here were later to be identified with the different successor states that replaced Greater Germany and its one Nazified version of the national past.

A city text, as the term implies, is owned by the municipality. Its content reflects the power relations in city hall. It often mirrors the city’s distinctive political structure (unless the state intervenes directly in the process). Therefore, it is not surprising that local variations are at times substantial. The focus of analysis here is Berlin, whose role as the former Prussian and German capital city lends special significance to the editing of this most important city text. The Berlin pattern of renaming the past was not representative of the whole of Germany. This is true in principle of every city text, yet the distinctiveness of the Berlin case lies in its special political constellation (which was also found in Vienna): the former capital of the Reich was divided into four sectors, each governed by one of the victorious powers. This arrangement made Berlin a test case for the intentions of the Big Powers toward the emerging new political order in Germany. In 1948 Berlin became a pivot of the Cold War. The growing tensions led to the division of the city in November 1948 and the establishment of two municipal entities: East Berlin, comprising the eight districts of the Soviet sector, and West Berlin, comprising the remaining twelve districts of the

American, British, and French sectors. This pattern of administrative-political division repeated itself a year later on the national level with the foundation of the two German states.

In order to provide a broader perspective for the analysis, three other editing patterns – in Vienna, Hamburg, and Leipzig – will also be discussed. These three cities, which until 1945 were major cities of the “Grossdeutsches Reich,” were later, with the establishment of the new political order in conquered Germany, to be included within three different states: Hamburg in West Germany, Leipzig in East Germany, and Vienna, since 1955, the capital city of sovereign Austria. The analysis of these three patterns is schematic only, without reference to the decision-making processes.

Common Denominator: Denazification of City Texts

The collapse of the Third Reich had an immediate effect on German city texts. Prominent Nazi symbols were deleted from the texts soon after the military occupation and the establishment of a new, denazified civil administration were completed. The Nazis had edited the texts according to their own interpretation of the national past, and their monopoly of the official communications networks had extended beyond the radio, press and films. After the passing of the *Ermächtigungsgesetz* (Enabling Act) on 20 March 1933, there had begun a rapid *Gleichschaltung* of German city texts, which had been rewritten and adapted to the new ruling Nazi cosmology. Undesired elements had been eradicated from the texts and thus banned from the public realm. The process had been swift, indicating the regime’s awareness of the propagandistic value of these texts. As Willy Brandt wrote later in his memoirs: “In Lubeck on 20 March a large number of persons were taken into so-called protective custody. Soon after there began the renaming of streets (Horst Wessel instead of August Bebel!).”³ The Nazis had renamed 121 of Berlin’s streets. In December 1938 alone, 97 of Vienna’s streets had been renamed, an act which had led to the *Gleichschaltung* of the city text.⁴

The Allies themselves were quick to eradicate the symbols of the defeated Reich from the public realm. Swastikas made of bronze and stone were removed from public buildings, and the Nazi flag and anthem were declared illegal.⁵ However, purging the city texts was the task of the newly nominated local councils. The impact of such a step was well understood. On 24 May 1945, the first meeting of Berlin's new civil administration was held, at which vital topics, such as food supplies and the most urgent housing problems, were discussed: the physical existence of the city was at stake. Nonetheless, it is significant that during this first meeting the question of street names was also raised – an outstanding illustration of the importance that the new fathers of the city assigned to the symbolic realm. Many streets no longer existed as urban thoroughfares, but the question of street names was still of great substance. The purge was swift. According to a report of 22 June of the special department in charge of the operation, the removal of the undesired names had been completed and the old signs had been replaced by temporary signs made of wood and carton.⁶

The Austrian Option

Nazi segments of city text were deleted in all towns and cities of the former Reich, including Austria, which like Germany had been divided into four Zones of Occupation. However, in Austria, unlike in Germany, a central government was constituted, a fact that secured Austria's political unity. The Viennese text had already been purged of its Nazi elements by 27 April 1945, only one week after the city had been conquered by the Red Army.⁷ In Vienna, this action had a distinct significance: the rewriting of the text signaled not only the end of the "brown era," but also the restoration of Austria as an entity independent from Germany. The new version of the past was a clear manifestation of the Austrian-national orientation, which became dominant and replaced the Pan-German orientation that had been represented by the Nazis and accepted enthusiastically by large segments of Austrian society. The Pan-German option had become relevant

after the 1918 collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy; on 12 November 1918 the Austrian Provisional Assembly had unanimously voted a law, according to which “German Austria” was part of the German Reich.⁸ The Austrian socialists, for instance, had envisioned a unified and democratic Greater Germany, of which German Austria would be an integral part. Yet in the peace treaty of Saint-Germain, the Allies had explicitly vetoed the scheme, and the “state that no one wanted,” as Austria was often referred to, was born. It was the Nazis who had realized the old dream in 1937. Austria had become a province of a German Reich whose capital was Berlin, the historical rival of the Danube metropolis.

In 1945, the separation from the Reich was supported by a strange coalition comprising conservatives, socialists and communists: on 27 April 1945, representatives of the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ), Austrian Socialist Party (SPÖ), and the conservative People’s Party (ÖVP) signed a declaration of Austrian independence.⁹ Some of the ultra-conservatives dreamt of restoring the monarchy. Felix Hurdes, the conservative minister of education, enthusiastically supported the idea of a separate Austrian nation. The communists, who played a significant role in Austrian political life in the first few months after the liberation, coordinated their line with Moscow, which favored an independent Austria in Central Europe. The communist leaders advocated Austrian patriotism: on 27 April Ernst Fischer, the party leader flown to Vienna from Moscow, published an article in the communist newspaper in which he cited the Austrian national heroes who should represent Austria as a “Kulturnation” in its own right.¹⁰ On that very day the city text was rewritten: the separation from Germany was underlined by removing the names of not only Nazi but also Prussian heroes. However, Prussia had never been popular in the capital of the Habsburg monarchy since the historical rivalry between the two powers in the 18th and 19th centuries, which had culminated in the Prussian military triumph of 1866 and the consequent exclusion of Austria from the German Bund.

The new version of the past presented by the city text was profoundly Austrian. The new street names commemorated politicians, writers, benefactors, artists, and social reformers, all “local heroes” hardly known beyond the Austrian borders, yet – and that was the crucial point – all unmistakably Austrian. The capital of the Ostmark became an Austrian capital city once again, at least according to the city text, which after its editing presented a distinctively Austrian national version of the past.

Germany

Unlike Austria, Germany, west of the Oder–Neisse line, did not have an alternative national option. After May 1949 the process of redefining German identity within the older framework of the German nation began. “Democracy” was the key word in the political cooperation among the reemergent political forces after the collapse of the Third Reich. All the parties, including the communists, were firmly committed to the new, democratic Germany. They all understood a “democratic” order to mean the negation of the Nazi model, but they had different notions regarding the positive content of the term. In particular, developments in the communist doctrine severely affected the initial cooperation between the two large workers’ parties. In 1945 the German Communist Party (KPD) preached the “German road to socialism,” which meant a rejection of the Soviet model of communization. Later, the forced unification of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the KPD in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and the foundation of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) was part of a new policy aimed at securing communist political hegemony in Germany in general and in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in particular. After April 1946, the dividing line in the Berlin City Hall was between the communists, supported by the Soviets, and the non-communist parties.

The distinctive political characteristics of each city, which were often closely related to the policies of the Occupation Authorities, played a crucial role in the manner in which the various city texts were modified. The different political views

and power relationships were manifested in the degree of radicality in purging the text of its “undemocratic” elements. All the parties agreed that Nazi elements should be erased from the cityscape. However, there was no unanimity regarding other segments of the German national past, especially those related to Prussia and the Empire. In the 1920s the Berlin City Assembly had deliberated time and again the question of deleting these aspects of the national past from the city text. The question was reopened in 1945, but now there was also a real possibility of canonizing the heroes of the revolutionary political myth, which had been inconceivable before 1932, and even more so after the Nazi seizure of power.

1. Berlin

The Soviets were conscious of the supreme importance of the city administration for future political developments. Knowing that in a short time they would have to withdraw their troops from West Berlin, they made an effort to mold the city’s administration in such a way as to enable the communists to influence political developments in the future. At the beginning of May 1945, a pioneer group of communists headed by Walter Ulbricht (known as the “Ulbricht group”) was flown from Moscow to Berlin. Their task was to design a “democratic” city administration with modest yet influential communist participation.¹¹ Among the sensitive posts occupied by communists were the chief of police and the head of the municipal personnel department. The administration thus formed in May 1945 lasted until the October 1946 elections, and its functioning was relatively harmonious. In these elections the communists suffered a humiliating defeat, and this marked the beginning of the process that culminated two years later in the political division of the city into a communist-ruled part and a Western part.

Contrary to other cities, where the city’s “ownership” of city signs was self-evident, the new Berlin administration had to make a rule concerning this basic question. The source of the problem was a royal Prussian decree from December 1813,

according to which the Prussian State was the sole owner of the city texts of the three royal towns, Berlin, Potsdam, and Charlottenburg (which had been included in Greater Berlin since 1920). The objective of this decree was clear: it gave the Prussian State total control over the content of the respective city texts. After the Republic was proclaimed in 1918, the Prussian State was represented *de jure* by the Ministry of the Interior, and *de facto* by the Police Headquarters, which was a state, rather than a city, authority. This unique situation was the reason why, in the 1920s, despite the City Assembly's clear decisions to eradicate "reactionary" elements from the city text, no practical steps were taken to implement such a purge: the State of Prussia, led by the SPD, used the legal situation to block such modifications of the text.

With the surrender of the Reich and the factual liquidation of Prussia (announced officially by the Allies in February 1947), the legal status of the street signs had to be clarified.¹² This question was discussed at the very first meeting of the newly appointed city magistrate. Dr. Werner, the appointed mayor, who according to the criteria established by Ulbricht was a representative of the "progressive middle class," suggested that since the police had been hitherto responsible for street names, the police – now a municipal authority – should continue to be in charge of them.¹³ On 18 June 1945 this proposal was formally confirmed, and the Communist Chief of Police Karl Maron, who was among the central nominations of the "Ulbricht group," was officially appointed. Berlin favored decentralization: it was decided that each district would be responsible for its own text, while the role of City Hall was mainly to supervise and coordinate the decisions of the districts.¹⁴ On 20 June, at a meeting of the district mayors, Maron emphasized that the question of renaming streets should be coordinated by the central authority, meaning himself. He urged the districts to promptly deliver lists of those streets that had already been renamed, and also lists of streets that had yet to be renamed. Maron stressed that the districts were sovereign with respect to renaming, except for "the names of special main streets and squares, where City

Hall has the right to name them after significant figures of the present....”¹⁵

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There were two fundamentally opposing approaches regarding the objective of rewriting the city text. The first, which might be referred to as the “minimal approach,” was advocated by the representatives of conservative and moderate-liberal circles, organized in the Christian-Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Party. They wanted the purge of the text to be limited to Nazi names with the aim of restoring the previous, pre-Nazi names. This approach was clearly presented at the first meeting of the Berlin City Hall, held on 23 May, by Dr. Werner, the mayor of Greater Berlin: “We should submit proposals concerning the restoration of old names deleted by the Nazis.” The general idea was to restore the text to its pre-Nazi form. In a sense, this was a reactionary concept, because it meant a total disregard for the radically changed political conditions and the emergent power relations, assuming an illusion of continuity with 1932. On the other hand, restoring the old names had a clear symbolic message, being a declaration that the changes carried out on Nazi orders were null and void. In fact, this proposal was only a compromise, since the real objective of the conservatives was the total depoliticization of the city text. Thus, at a meeting of the district mayors held on 20 June, the mayor of Zehlendorf, a rich upper-middle-class district in south-west Berlin, proudly reported that all the new names in his district were apolitical, having been taken from the fields of mineralogy, geography, and botany.¹⁶

The “radical approach,” which had first appeared in 1920, aimed at a thorough “democratization” of the city text, i.e., a total purge of “reactionary” elements and the incorporation of the revolutionary myth. This radical attitude found expression in an article in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 27 September 1945, “Berlins Strassen – neu benannt,” whose anonymous author claimed that one tenth of Berlin street names did not represent the democratic, anti-fascist ideals of the new Germany. Among such names were those representing Prussian militarism and German imperialism – names of Prussian generals and fieldmarshals, such as Moltke and

Hindenburg, or those of German emperors, such as Wilhelm I. In accordance with this view, just a few days before the first elections to the municipal assembly, Karl Maron formulated the criteria that should direct the purge of the text: “the principle is: first, the fascist names should disappear, second, militaristic and imperialistic names, and third, one should get rid of names that appear several times.”¹⁷

This radical proposal was issued probably in the heat of the election campaign and was intended to delineate and clarify ideological and political fronts in the city. However, this particular formulation was most interesting because it was a repetition of a well-known formula that had been expressed in 1927 in the form of a resolution passed by the Berlin Municipal Assembly.¹⁸ There was, nonetheless, a significant difference between the 1927 resolution and its 1946 successor: the first paragraph of the latter dealt with fascist names, which had naturally not been mentioned in the former resolution. The administrative paragraph, third in Maron’s formula, had been the first in the 1927 resolution, followed immediately by the “political” paragraph (at that time the main issue). The revival of this formula indicates that the memory of those earlier heated deliberations (which had not had any actual effect on the text) had not been forgotten almost 20 years later, and that to some extent, especially for the communists, the new political situation in Germany presented an appropriate opportunity to accomplish what they had been unable to achieve at the time of the Weimar Republic, because of the negative attitude of the ruling SPD at that time towards a radical rewriting of the city text.¹⁹ At the same meeting it was reported that 1,795 out of Berlin’s 9,000 streets should be renamed, in addition to 89 squares, 9 parks, 17 bridges, and one neighborhood. According to this, almost one-fifth of the city text should be modified (the above-mentioned article in the *Berliner Zeitung* had claimed that “only” one-tenth of the text should be renamed).

Maron did not specify in his speech what new names should replace those that were to be deleted. The question of commemoration was as important as that of “de-commemoration” because the new names and the version of

the national past they represented were a part and parcel of the new democratic order in Germany. It was clear that the new street names should represent the “progressive” legacy of the German nation, but the crucial question was whether, and to what extent, representatives of the revolutionary tradition should be included in the text. In 1921 a delegate of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) had demanded that a square be named after Trotsky. Later, Karl Liebknecht became the representative hero of the left-wing revolutionary myth.²⁰ The article in the *Berliner Zeitung* defined three categories of “heroes” whose commemoration was essential: (1) anti-Nazis, heroes of the resistance; (2) representatives of the progressive national heritage, those who had preached an advanced and just social and political order, such as Marx, Gustav Stresemann, and Walter Rathenau (a very interesting juxtaposition of names that displayed just how much the years of Nazi dictatorship had distorted historical perspective: only the Nazi prism could present Marx and the two leading statesmen of the Weimar Republic as equal representatives of a social and moral order alternative to the Nazi one); and (3) the “humanists,” the progressive heroes of German culture, such as Heinrich Heine and Max Liebermann, in addition to the already canonized Goethe, Leibnitz, Bach and Kant. Neither the author of this article nor Karl Maron mentioned at this stage the heroes of the communist revolutionary tradition: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Ernst Thälmann, the outstanding martyrs of German communism.

City Hall interfered only minimally in the rewriting of the text. A rare exception was Maron’s proposal on 16 February 1946 to commemorate August Bebel and Franz Mehring, in honor of their birthdays: the Belle-Alliance-Platz in Kreuzberg (the American sector) was renamed after Mehring, and the Franz-Joseph-Platz, in the city center, after Bebel. This was a well-calculated choice: Bebel had been the admired leader of the pre-First World War SPD, while Mehring, the historian of the workers’ movement, had been among the founding fathers of German communism. After the death in an accident of General Bersarin, the Soviet military commander of Berlin, Maron proposed naming a square in Friedrichshain (the

Soviet sector) after him. Until the October 1946 elections, these were the only names ordained from City Hall. The Communist Maron was very cautious indeed in utilizing the power invested in him.

The main activity was carried out by the various districts. In September 1945, for instance, the department in charge of Tiergarten (the British sector) issued a list of (a) streets renamed by the Nazis; (b) streets renamed after May 1945; and (c) proposals concerning planned renamings. In the course of these activities the names of Friedrich Ebert (the first president of the Weimar Republic), Stresemann, Rathenau, and Paul Singer (the legendary leader of the SPD faction in the Berlin City Parliament in the times of the Empire) were restored to the text. By 1945 a few names of lesser-known anti-Nazi martyrs had already been commemorated in Tegel (north Berlin). Since the direct interference of City Hall was minimal, the question whether communist heroes would be commemorated or not was left to the different districts. As expected, on this subject there were radical variations among the districts.

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In 1945 Max Reichpietsch, a revolutionary socialist and a sailor in the Imperial Navy, who had been executed in 1917, was commemorated. Reichpietsch replaced Admiral Tirpitz, the commander-in-chief of the Imperial Navy, who had been inserted into the text by the Nazis. This exchange expressed a symbolic inversion, which in turn clearly signaled the direction of the political change. In August 1945 the Hohenzollernplatz in the working-class district of Neuköln (the American sector) was renamed Karl-Marx-Platz; in April 1946 the main thoroughfare of the same district was also named after Karl Marx. The Horst-Wessel-Platz in Friedrichshain, renamed by the Nazis in 1933, was renamed Luxemburgplatz. However, for a time the new name of the square was not clear. A city plan from 1946 gave its name as Liebknechtplatz,²¹ while according to a map of 1947 it was still named after Horst Wessel.²² When the new names were announced officially in 1947 it was presented as Luxemburgplatz. This choice was not accidental. Before the final Stalinization of political life in the Soviet Zone of Occupation in Germany in 1948, Rosa Luxemburg,

the Marxist theoretician, was the symbol of the “German road to socialism” and served as a worthy German alternative to Lenin and his revolutionary doctrines.

A list prepared for internal use by the department in charge of renaming streets in Tiergarten in September 1945 indicated that a street in Moabit, a profoundly proletarian neighborhood, had been named after Ernst Thälmann. Moreover, a city plan of 1946 showed that the Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee had been renamed Thälmannallee. Thälmann was a Janus-like political hero: on the one hand, he was the communist leader who had conducted the Stalinization of the party in the late 1920s and early 1930s and had been a bitter enemy of social democracy; on the other hand, his arrest and death in Buchenwald had made him a prominent anti-Nazi martyr.²³ However, there is contradictory information concerning his commemoration in Tiergarten: evidently the intention to insert his name into the text was not implemented in this district, nor in any other. Indeed, an internal letter from the District Council in the neighboring district of Charlottenburg indicates that the opposition of middle- and low-rank officials to the canonization of Thälmann played a role in postponing the commemoration.²⁴ With the growing political tensions in Berlin, the subject was taken off the agenda of West Berlin, and he was never commemorated in that part of the city. In East Berlin, however, he was a duly proclaimed hero. A square was named after him in the city center in August 1949, the fifth anniversary of his death.²⁵

2. Leipzig

The Saxon metropolis was captured by the advancing American army in April 1945. According to the agreements between the Allies, Saxony was part of the Soviet Occupation Zone. Hence, the American occupation was only temporary, and in the beginning of July West Saxony and Leipzig were incorporated into the Soviet Zone (at the same time the Soviets left West Berlin). Leipzig’s city text was edited according to the “radical approach” advocated by Karl Maron in Berlin. During the second half of 1945, 93 streets and

squares in Leipzig were renamed, dramatically changing the version of the past they presented.²⁶ The new version not only differed substantially from the version of May 1945, but also from that of January 1933. Prussian and German militarism and imperialism were almost totally erased from the text. Among the de-commemorated historic heroes were Manteufel, Roon, Moltke, Clausewitz, Mackensen, and Hindenburg. The names of some heroes of the Wars of Liberation, such as Gneisenau and Scharnhorst, were not erased, while those of others, such as Yorck and Blücher, were. Bismarck, the founding father of the Reich, was also de-commemorated. At the same time, the memory of the German ruling dynasties was eradicated from the text with the renaming of the Königsplatz, Kaiser-Friedrich-Strasse, Kaiserin-Augusta-Strasse, Kaiser-Maximilian-Strasse, and Kaiser-Wilhem-Strasse, to mention only some of the most significant examples.

The democratization of the text meant restoring the names of Rathenau and Ebert. Beyond that, the names of Marx, Engels, Lassalle, Bebel, and Wilhelm Liebknecht (Karl's father) made a rapid appearance on the street signs of Leipzig. Those in charge of the text demonstrated their historical awareness with a carefully selected set of exchanges that were of symbolic value: for example, Lassalle replaced Bismarck, and Bebel replaced Kaiser Wilhelm. The heroes of German communism – Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Mehring – were commemorated, along with heroes of the anti-Nazi resistance. Thälmann became part of Leipzig's text in 1945, as did Rudolf Breitscheid, the most prominent martyr of the SPD. Among other martyrs commemorated were the brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl, heroes of the Munich circle "The White Rose," who belonged to an all-German myth of anti-Nazi martyrdom.

The modified Leipzig text displayed a leftist-radical version of the national past. The editing, however, was not concluded in 1945: in a second wave that followed in the years 1946–47, twenty other names representing the militaristic and dynastic tradition were deleted from the text.²⁷ These included names of admirals of the Imperial Navy during the First World War, such as Tirpitz, von Scheer, Hipper, and von Schroeder, who

had been inserted into the city text by the Nazis. This second wave removed the memory of the Saxon Elector Johann Georg, of Prussian kings and German emperors, such as Friedrich Wilhelm and Wilhelm, and also of the Battle of Sedan, denoting the victory over France in 1870, which had been a popular symbol of the nationalist right in the time of the Second Empire. Among the most interesting names that appeared was that of Count von Stauffenberg, the hero of the attempt on Hitler's life known as the "July Plot." Leipzig was the only city in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (later East Germany) that included Stauffenberg in its version of the national past.

3. Hamburg

Hamburg, the important seaport in north-west Germany, was included in the British Zone of Occupation. Greater Hamburg (Altona had been incorporated into Hamburg in 1937) had a place of honor in the revolutionary legacy of German communism, as the center of the 1923 revolution and as the home city of Thälmann, and was noted for the vigorous anti-Nazi struggle in the city in the last years of the First Republic. The SPD was the hegemonial political power in Hamburg after the liberation (and for many years after) and enjoyed the sympathy and support of the British Occupational Administration. The editing pattern of the city text can be described as "social democratic": carefully considered modifications with clear limits. De-commemoration was not restricted to Nazi heroes alone, and commemoration was not extended to the major heroes of the communist myth of proletarian revolution. In this case the tempo, contrary to that in Leipzig, was moderate, even cautious. The purge began in October 1945 with the removal of the names of key figures of the Nazi pantheon, among them Hitler (who appeared in five districts) and Horst Wessel (in six districts).²⁸ Leo Schlagetter, who had been executed by the French Occupational Administration in the Ruhr in 1923 and had been hailed by nationalist and Nazi circles as a hero of national resistance (the communist attitude in the 1920s had been ambivalent),

was de-commemorated in Hamburg a week later.²⁹ In January 1946 the Francoallee was also renamed.³⁰

After a pause of one and a half years, the editing was resumed. The second stage of the purge began in September 1947. Its principal objective was to erase the militaristic tradition from the text.³¹ During this stage the following representatives of Prussian-German militarism were deleted: (1) the admirals of the Imperial Navy; (2) Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the outstanding representatives of reactionism and militarism; and (3) 19th-century Prussian and German generals such as Lützow, Blücher, Roon, and Wrangel.

The difference between the patterns in Hamburg and Leipzig reflects the different views of those in charge of the text in the respective cities regarding the desired version of the German national past. The similarities are evident: both versions were purged of reactionary elements, although the social democratic interpretation of “reactionary” was limited as compared with the radical interpretation. It is interesting to note that neither version considered Gneisenau and Scharnhorst as representatives of the reactionary tradition. On the other hand, the Hamburg version acknowledged Bismarck and the kings and emperors as national heroes.

The restoration of heroes whose names had been deleted by the Nazis was a natural option that was realized during the denazification of the text. The names of the leaders of the First Republic were reinstated, as were most of the Jewish names, such as Heine and Heinrich Hertz, though not necessarily to their previous places in the cityscape.³² A clear dividing line between the social democratic and the radical, revolutionary version of the past was the attitude to the heroes of the workers’ movement. The social democratic text included the names of Bebel and Lassalle and omitted those of Marx and Engels, and, of course, Liebknecht and Luxemburg. The only exception was Thälmann’s commemoration in Hamburg; but Thälmann was a “local hero” in his native city, and his incorporation into the city text signified the city’s tribute to its famous son who had been murdered in Buchenwald.³³ Hans and Sophie Scholl were honored by a street name in February 1947. These heroes

were common to both East and West German myths of anti-Nazi resistance and functioned as unifying elements of the two versions of the national past in East and West Germany.

Conclusion

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The Austrian pattern of editing in Vienna, the social democratic pattern in Hamburg, and the radical pattern in Leipzig represent three possible versions of the national past that were actually realized after 1945. The Viennese pattern signaled Austria's separation from Greater Germany. The Leipzig pattern foreshadowed the future East German version of the German national past. The Hamburg pattern, however, was not necessarily representative of the future Federal Republic because of its relative radicalism regarding representatives of the social democratic tradition; other cities should be analyzed separately in order to study other patterns of editing that were implemented in Western Germany after 1945. Yet the Hamburg pattern signified an option whose realization was possible in the relatively pluralistic framework of the Federal Republic, alongside more conservative interpretations and representations of the common national past. As for Berlin, despite the intense activity concerning the editing of the city text in the first months after the war, only 40 streets and squares had in fact been renamed by August 1947. In Leipzig, whose population was only a fifth of Berlin's, 113 streets were renamed in that same period. In Vienna, 37 streets had been renamed as early as April 1945. The unique political situation in Berlin was the reason for the relatively static state of the text and for the inconsistencies that make it impossible to define a specific "Berlin pattern." The Berlin city text displayed interesting contradictions: a radical-revolutionary version coexisted with the traditional Prussian-German version of the national past. With the division of the city in November 1948, the city text was also divided into two separate texts, each representing a different version of the German national past. Only then could the communists, who controlled the eastern part of the city, begin freely to remold the text according to their particular view of the past.

Notes

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- 1 Cf. R. Hodge and G. Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Oxford, 1988), 229–30.
- 2 On the dynamics of such processes, see my article, “The Purge of Bismarck and Saladin: The Renaming of Streets in East Berlin and Haifa. A Comparative Study in Culture-Planning,” *Poetics Today* (forthcoming).
- 3 Willy Brandt, *Links und Frei* (Hamburg, 1982), 80. August Bebel was the legendary leader of the pre-World War I SPD (Social Democratic Party); Horst Wessel was the supreme Nazi martyr.
- 4 *Amtsblatt der Stadt Wien* 44, no. 7 (1939).
- 5 In October 1945 the Allied Command in Germany issued the official order concerning the abolition of Nazi laws, among them the “Law Protecting the National Symbols” of 19 May 1933 and the “Law of the Flag” of 15 September 1935.
- 6 *Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Tiefbauamtes in der Dezernentenbesprechung am 22.6.1945 Berlin*, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
- 7 *Amtsblatt der Stadt Wien* 51, no. 28 (1946).
- 8 W. T. Bluhm, *Building the Austrian Nation. The Political Integration of a Western State* (New Haven and London, 1973), 25.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 10 *Neues Österreich*, 27 April 1945; cf. Bluhm, *Building the Austrian Nation*, 130ff.
- 11 This account is based on the description of a member of the group, Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (1957; London, 1975).
- 12 The legal question was solved only after the State of Prussia was dissolved in February 1947 by the Allies. This step paved the way for an official listing of all renamings that

- had occurred since May 1945. This list was published in August 1947.
- 13 *Protokoll der Magistratssitzung vom 24.5.1945*, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
 - 14 *Protokoll der Magistratssitzung vom 18.6.1945*, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
 - 15 *Protokoll der Konferenz der Bezirksbürgermeister vom 20.6.1945*, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
 - 16 Protocol of meeting of District Mayors, 20 June 1945, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
 - 17 *Protokoll der Magistratssitzung vom 28.9.1946*, Landesarchiv (West) Berlin.
 - 18 *Protokolle der Verhandlungen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Berlin*, session on 27 April 1927.
 - 19 Cf. my article, "What Is to Be Remembered: The Struggle over Street Names, Berlin 1921–1930," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 17 (1988): 241–58.
 - 20 *Protokolle der Verhandlungen der Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt Berlin*, session on 6 February 1930.
 - 21 *BAB Führer* (Berlin, 1946).
 - 22 *Silva-Stadtplan Berlin* (Berlin, 1947).
 - 23 In this capacity he was commemorated on one of a series of three postage stamps dedicated to "anti-fascists" that was issued in Mecklenburg in October 1945. Thälmann represented the supreme communist martyr; Rudolf Breitscheid represented the supreme martyr of the SPD; and Erich Klausener represented the legacy of middle-class political anti-Nazism.
 - 24 Letter from Charlottenburg District Council to Berlin City Hall and Tiergarten District Council, 17 October 1945, District Archive of Charlottenburg (signature unclear).
 - 25 West Berlin did not commemorate Thälmann, Luxemburg or Liebknecht, who were commemorated in East Berlin, on the basis of the legal-formal claim that since Berlin was considered to be one, undivided city, double commemoration was unnecessary.
 - 26 *Verzeichnis der in der Stadt Leipzig seit dem 19.5.1945 umbenannten Strassen, Plätze, Brücken und Wehre* (Leipzig, 1945).

- 27 *Amtliches Strassenverzeichnis Leipzig* (Leipzig, 1947).
- 28 *Amtlicher Anzeiger Hamburg*, 25 October 1945.
- 29 Ibid., 1 November 1945.
- 30 Ibid., 24 January 1946.
- 31 Ibid., 25 September 1947.
- 32 In Hamburg eight “Jewish” names were reinstated in their pre-Nazi places during 1945. In April 1946 a Senate Committee decided that the others would not necessarily regain their old places, although their names would be considered for other thoroughfares. This decision was implemented later. See *Antwort des Senats auf die schriftliche Kleine Anfrage des Abgeordneten Eduard Prosch, Bürgerschaftsdrucksache 11/2389*, Landesarchiv Hamburg.
- 33 The question of Thälmann’s commemoration arose again in Hamburg in spring 1985. The incentive came from the ruling social democratic faction and was accepted, despite the strong opposition of the conservatives, who maintained that Thälmann had been a profound opponent of the democratic ideal.