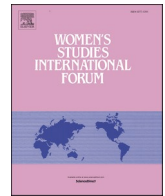


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“No woman’s land?” The gendered patterning of urban street names in Romania

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ABSTRACT

The gendered patterning of urban street names as part of the spatial production of broader male-centric memorial landscapes has been documented in a growing body of scholarship. Scholars from various cognate fields, such as cultural geography, gender and memory studies, and urban sociology, have unraveled the stark gender disparities favoring men inscribed into symbolic landscapes through place names, public monuments, and other memorial artefacts. This article sets out to overcome some of the limitations characterizing this strand of research – namely, the lack of statistical sophistication and the preference for case studies based on singular cities – by developing a multi-level modelling of gendered street nomenclature at the national level. The approach developed in this paper employs the complete collection of urban street names in Romania to assess the empirical adequacy of five hypotheses regarding the gendered structuring of the country’s urban namescape. This analysis highlights the factors underpinning the variation of gender disparities in terms of Romania’s historical regions, ethnic demographics and local ethnopolitics, city ranking within the national territorial administration and intra-urban stratification of the road network, as well as the effects brought about by postsocialist transformations.

Introduction

After World War II significant progress in gender equality has taken place throughout the world in terms of women’s legal rights, political participation, and economic independence. For example, the Gender Inequality Index (GII), a composite measure developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), indicates a global trend towards the reduction of gender disparity. From 1990 to 2021, the GII decreased by 20 % to a value of 0.465 (UNDP, 2023). This trend towards greater gender equality was observed in all countries of the world. In 2021, in Scandinavia, longitudinal data reveals that gender inequality has reached a historical minimum, with females almost on par with males in terms of health rights, political and educational empowerment, and labor market participation (UNDP, 2023). In Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, and The Netherlands, the GII ranged between 0.013 and 0.025 (where 0 indicates perfect gender equality). A similar trend emerged in Eastern Europe, where after the demise of state-socialism in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, gender inequality decreased significantly. Between 1990 and 2021, the GII decreased in Slovenia by 75 % (to 0.071), in Russia by 55 % (to 0.203), and in Romania by 45 % (to 0.282) (UNDP, 2023).

While changes in legal rights, economic opportunities, and political

empowerment have reshaped gendered relations of power across the Global North, a stark masculine domination continues to prevail in urban nomenclatures and memorial landscapes. Going against the grain of women’s emancipation, a major gender differential was institutionalized in public monuments, memorial plaques, and street names. The substantial shrinking of the gender gap in earnings, workforce participation, and political representation, coupled with male-dominated urban namespaces, reveals a toponymic lag in the symbols used in the public space.

Recent scholarship has underpinned the symbolic geographies of cities in increasingly gender-equalized societies. Ouali et al. (2021) charted the “topography of [women’s] minoritisation” in Brussels, Belgium. By examining the gender distribution of street names statistically, they highlighted the “androcentric bias” in the public space which rendered women invisible in urban toponymy (p. 2). Of the 5410 streets in Brussels, only 226 were named after women (accounting for 8.4 % of all streets named after individuals and 4.2 % of all street names). Their results revealed that “there are ten times fewer streets in [Brussels-Capital Region] named after female figures than male figures” (Ouali et al., 2021, p. 4). A similar gender imbalance characterizes street names of other European cities. According to the *Mapping Diversity* project, which covers 30 European cities (including 17 capital cities), 4779 (9 %)

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of the total 52,888 streets named after individuals honor women, 90.4 % commemorate men, while the remainder 0.5 % have non-binary or uncertain gender names. The share of streets dedicated to women ranges from 19.5 % in Stockholm, Sweden, and 18.7 % in Madrid, Spain to around 4.5 % in Athens, Greece and Prague, Czech Republic (European Data Journalism Network, 2023).

Scholarship on the gender politics of urban streetscapes has been fueled by three developments. Starting in the 1980s, the social sciences and the humanities have developed powerful feminist theories to unravel the male-centric politics of knowledge production and challenge the masculine domination entrenched in both social thought and social practice (Bourdieu, 2001; Butler, 1990; Walby, 1990). In spatial disciplines such as cultural and political geography, the gender turn has stimulated scholars to examine the gendered relations of power inscribed in the urban space. Gender-sensitive scholars associated with the *Women and Geography Study Group* (1997) and Linda McDowell (1999) showed that interactions between gender, identity, and place produce feminist geographies of spatialized asymmetric power relations.

With the rise of critical place-names studies (known as “critical toponymies”), geographers and other spatial sensitive social researchers no longer consider street names as ideologically innocent linguistic labels used for practical purposes of navigating the urban space but see them as power-laden means of inscribing territory with the legitimizing ethos, political values, and historical narratives of the dominant groups in society (Berg & Vuolteenaho, 2009; Rose-Redwood et al., 2010; Rose-Redwood et al., 2018). Within this critical place names studies, research grounded in the “social justice approach” highlights the importance of gender in the production of male-dominated memoryscapes through street naming practices (Alderman, 2022; Alderman & Inwood, 2016; Bigon & Zuvalinyenga, 2021; Rusu, 2021, 2022; Zuvalinyenga & Bigon, 2021).

In addition, the growing academic interest in the gender politics of urban namescapes was articulated under the pressure of social movements. Confronting the widespread sexism characterizing the city streetscape of Paris, France, the organization *d'Osez le féminisme!* (Dare to be Feminist!) plastered 60 street signs with the names of famous women, in a provocative “feminist stunt” (Gee, 2015). Resorting to similar tactics of “guerilla renaming” (Buchstaller et al., 2023: 12), in 2018 the feminist group *De Bovengrondse* (Above Ground) installed counter-plates honoring iconic women besides official plates in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Groningen, Utrecht, and other Dutch towns (Boffey, 2018). Such actions are not bound to Europe. In Jerusalem, Israel, activists pressured city authorities to rewrite the short biographical description of women commemorated in street names, as street plates labeled some female intellectuals as mere “wives and mothers” of prominent men (Ghert-Zand, 2017). In 2022, the Women's March Foundation launched the Feminist Street Initiative to redress the gender disbalance affecting 240 million streets in the United States, “more than three-quarters of [which] are named after men, leaving very few named after women” (Kravitz Hoeffner, 2022). In some places, the claims voiced by feminist activists were heard by city officials. In Copenhagen, the municipal committee for street names assigned the names of Danish and foreign female figures to several posh urban developments constructed in Denmark's capital (Rychla, 2016), and in Barcelona, Spain, on the 2023 International Women's Day, feminist organizations convinced authorities to rename 16 streets, squares, and gardens after women writers, activists, entrepreneurs, and sportspeople (Info Barcelona, 2023).

Despite insights into the gendered patterns of street names, the literature includes very few quantitative analyses. Some studies calculate the percentage of streets named after women and men, but few go beyond descriptive statistics (Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías, 2022) or develop multivariate analyses that would identify the factors that explain naming practices and gendered patterns. Except Mamvura et al. (2018) and Gnatiuk and Glybovets (2020), other empirical analyses focus on a single city. The few available comparative analyses include a

limited number of sites (Buchstaller et al., 2023; Walkowiak, 2018).

This study relies on a statistically sophisticated approach to analyze gendered streetscapes at the national level. Drawing on the complete collection of urban street names in Romania, it uses multi-level logistical regression to model the gender structure of the country's urban streetscape. It is through this innovative methodological approach that the article contributes to two strands of literature. First, it adds a missing gender dimension to the scholarship on “critical toponymies” in Romania (Crețan, 2019; Light, 2004; Light et al., 2002; Light & Young, 2014). Second, it contributes to the emerging literature on gendered urban namescapes by presenting Romania as a case study. The next sections discuss the hypotheses guiding this research and detail the data and methodology employed to test them. The article then presents the results, concludes by situating these findings within the broader literature on gendered streetscapes, and advances policy recommendations for gender mainstreaming the symbolic geographies of urban street namescapes.

Methodology

Research objectives and hypotheses

The article charts the gendered street names in urban Romania with the help of quantitative methods of spatial analysis and identifies the factors underpinning the gendered political geography of the country's urban street namescape. Based on the relevant literature, I expect to find a significant gender disparity in Romania's urban street names, similar to that reported in other European countries. More specifically, the present research is guided by five hypotheses.

The first hypothesis concerns the regional character of gendered street names. Previous scholarship highlighted the regional clustering of street name changes, indicating that the rate of street renaming was higher in the province of Transylvania than in the rest of the country (Rusu, 2023a). This is due to the political histories of the provinces which became part of Romania during 1859–1920: Transylvania was part of the Hungarian Kingdom and the Austrian Empire, whereas Wallachia and Moldova were under the influence of the Ottoman and Russian empires (Hitchins, 1996; Taki, 2021; White, 1999). As a result, Romanians believe that the territories that once belonged to the Habsburg Empire are more “European,” and those connected to the Russian and Ottoman Empires are “Oriental” and “backward” (Părvulescu & Boatcă, 2022). As such, the first hypothesis states that (H1) the gendered geography of Romania's urban streetscape is structured by the historical regions, with a greater likelihood of finding female street names in the north-western regions (Transylvania, Banat, Crișana-Maramureș, Bucovina) than in Wallachia (Muntenia and Oltenia) and Moldova.

The second hypothesis focuses on the relationship between ethnic diversity as a measure of a locality's demographic structure and the gendering of urban street nomenclature. Ethnic parties tend to exclude women from political representation, and “the subcultures of many ethnic minorities are often more patriarchal than the majority culture, and thus parties representing such groups may include fewer women” (Holmsten et al., 2010: 1179). Since Romania is a multi-ethnic country (Rotaru et al., 2023), I suggest that ethnically diverse communities, especially those where ethnic minority parties hold local political power, promote a stronger patriarchal identity which is also reflected in street toponymy. Therefore, using Alesina et al.'s (2003) formula for computing the index of ethnic fractionalization at the level of each locality based on the 2021 Romanian Population Census (INS, 2023), the second hypothesis states that (H2) street names honoring women are less likely to feature in the urban namescapes of ethnically diverse communities.

The third hypothesis investigates the presence of female street names as a function of the importance and administrative ranking of the city within the national urban system. Urban geographers documented that “large cities, and urbanity in general, have long been recognized as

centers of cosmopolitanism" (Warf, 2015: 927). As such, I expect that (H3) larger cities – especially those recognized as regional seats of political power, such as the county capitals (*reședințe de județ*) – include more women in their street nomenclature as compared to municipalities (*municipii*) and small towns (*orașe*).

Fourth, the article investigates whether the gendering of urban namescape is associated with intra-urban stratification. Scholarship suggests that in multiple cities and towns, streets commemorating women tend to be less prominent thoroughfares, while squares, boulevards, and central avenues are usually reserved for men (Novas Ferradás, 2018: 128; Rusu, 2019; Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías, 2022). As such, this research tests the hypothesis of a stratified gendering of urban street nomenclature at the national level, stating that (H4) the presence of female street names in Romania's urban areas varies in terms of the street's administrative status, with more women present in low-level thoroughfares (alleys and entrances) than in high-level places (squares and boulevards).

The fifth hypothesis investigates the effects of political change on the gender patterning of street names. The Revolution of December 1989 replaced the communist dictatorship with a liberal democracy (Siani-Davies, 2007; Stan & Vancea, 2015). As part of the reforms, gender relations were renegotiated to increase women emancipation (Massino, 2019; Voicu & Tufiş, 2012). Analyzing the changes in street names and the names of streets newly created after 1989, the last hypothesis states that (H5) the post-socialist transition increased women's presence in street names, in line with Romania's broader changes towards gender equality.

Data, variables, and method

Assessing the empirical adequacy of these hypotheses requires a comprehensive collection of toponymic data at the national level. Since such a data collection is not publicly available as official information provided by the Romanian authorities, a dataset was compiled using secondary sources. First, toponymic data from the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority's Registry of Polling Stations were drawn, cleaned, and systematized in order to obtain the list of all street names in Romania. The toponymic data thus gathered included information on the locality to which the street belonged. This allowed us to classify localities as cities, towns or other, and group them in historical regions. In addition, the toponymic data included information on the type of thoroughfare. This was used to recode the data into three road classes: a) squares/boulevards, b) streets, and c) alleys/entrances (Table 1).

Next, street names in rural areas were excluded from the analysis for several reasons. Many rural villages have no names for streets, but in urban localities street names are mandatory. In Transylvania the streets of many villages are nameless, but in Muntenia village streets tend to bear names. Keeping the rural settlements into the analysis would have distorted the regional analyses of the gendered streetscape. After removing the rural street names, the remaining dataset comprising all street names existing in urban Romania consisted of 49,459 entries.

The second step involved obtaining data on which streets were renamed after the regime change of 1989, and the names assigned to the new streets created since then. These lists were obtained via official requests made to the public authorities responsible for naming and renaming urban streets. These were the Prefectures during 1990–1992, the County Councils during 1992–2002, and the Local Councils since 2002. The data thus obtained, completed with information gathered from other sources, were then integrated into the consolidated dataset.

The entries were then coded along multiple dimensions in a multi-step process. First, eponymous street names (streets named after people) were distinguished from other street names. Then, the gender identity of each eponymous street name was assigned manually. In addition to gender, the entries were also coded in terms of the ethnic identity of the namesake in three categories: "Romanian," "Hungarian," and "Other."

Table 1

The description of variables.

Variable	Level	Description	Values	Measurement
Street name gender	Street	Binary dependent variable referring to the namesake's gender	0 = Male 1 = Female	Nominal
Historical region	Locality	The geographical region, defined in historical terms, to which the locality belongs	1 = Transylvania 2 = Banat-Crișana 3 = Maramureș-Bukovina 4 = Moldova 5 = Muntenia 6 = Oltenia 7 = Dobruja	Nominal
Ethnic diversity index	Locality	Score computed for each urban settlement using Alesina et al.'s (2003) formula based on the Romanian 2021 Population Census	Min = 0 Max = 1	Scale
City ranking	Locality	Type of urban settlement based on its administrative ranking	1 = County residence 2 = Municipality 3 = Town	Ordinal
Artery type	Street	Type of thoroughfare based on its importance	1 = Boulevard/Square 2 = Street 3 = Alley/Entrance	Ordinal
New street	Street	Binary variable referring to whether a street had been created after 1989	0 = No 1 = Yes	Nominal
Renamed street	Street	Binary variable referring to whether a street had been renamed after 1989	0 = No 1 = Yes	Nominal
Ethnic identity	Street	The ethnic identity of the person after whom the street is being named	1 = Romanian 2 = Hungarian 3 = Other (international)	Nominal

Given the structure of the data (with streets nested into localities) the five hypotheses were tested by employing a multi-level logistic regression analysis. Logistic regression has become a popular analytical strategy in the social sciences due to its capacity to model statistically the factors influencing the variance of the outcome (dependent) variable (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The dependent variable in all five hypotheses is the gender associated with the street name, which was measured dichotomously as either male or female (non-binary gender identities were not identified). The independent variables used to predict the gender associated with the street name in the multi-level logistic regression model are described in Table 1. Due to the clustering of streets into towns, this article employs a two-level logistic regression, where level I variables are street-level characteristics and level II variables are town-level attributes.

Findings

Descriptive statistics

In Romania, 620 streets are named after women and 15,001 honor men (N = 15,621). Street names evoking women represent only 3.97 % of the 15,621 streets named after people (eponymous street names). Eponymous names constitute 31.58 % of the names given to streets in

Romania's cities and towns (N = 49,459). When referring to this total number of streets, including those with non-human names (such as Flower Street, Central Avenue, December 1st Square), the share of streets named after women drops to 1.25 %, while those dedicated to men decreases to 30.33 %.

Regardless of how these percentages are calculated, the gender ratio of Romania's urban street names remains the same: 24:1 in favor of men, which means that there are 24 streets named after men to each street dedicated to a woman. Another indicator of the gender disbalance is the gender ratio of unique names, which delineates the culturally defined onomastic pool of women and men considered worthy of being commemorated in the public space. After removing duplicates, we are left with 268 unique female names (4.10 %) and 6272 unique male names (95.90 %) (N = 6540). Both the percentages and the gender ratio (23:1 it was 24:1 earlier) resemble those calculated for the overall dataset and indicate the bias towards males' visibility and females' obscurity in Romania's street names. What these various measures of gender disbalance show is that gender inequalities are deeply ingrained into the toponymic regime of Romania.

This stark gender differential characterizing Romania's urban namescape departs substantially from the situation reported in other European countries. In Spain, for instance, in a research based on a nationwide dataset of road names, [Gutiérrez-Mora and Oto-Peralías \(2022\)](#) found that the share of streets named after women was 12 % (p. 1793). From this point of view, Romania comes closer to Italy, where a study focused on the street nomenclatures of the 21 Italian regional capitals found that women represent only 6.6 % ([Gjergji, 2021](#)). In France, women give their names to only 6 % of all streets named after people ([Faure, 2018](#)).

Equally important is to identify who are the women evoked in street names. On the male side, the pantheon of the "Great Men" of the nation is dominated by poets and canonic writers (Mihai Eminescu, Vasile Alecsandri, Octavian Goga), pre-modern rulers (Michael the Brave, Stephan the Great, Constantin Brâncoveanu), and mid-19th and early 20th century monarchs and statemen (King Carol I, Mihail Kogălniceanu, King Ferdinand I) who contributed to nation-making and state-building ([Rusu, 2023b](#)). The female pantheon inscribed in Romania's street names also expresses a heroic core: the highest number of streets dedicated to women are named after Ana Ipătescu (1805–1875) and Ecaterina Teodoroiu (1894–1917), who fought during the 1848 Revolutions and the First World War, respectively, as well as Ecaterina Varga ([Hung., Varga Katalin, 1802–1852](#)), the leader of the Transylvanian miners' movement in the 1840s. All these women emerged as national heroines before World War II and were heavily promoted by the communist regime. Similar to other female figures from Poland, for example, these Romanian female personalities are long-lasting symbols of womanhood venerated for at least a century ([Walkowiak & Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska, 2023, p. 216](#)).

A second category consists of the mothers, wives, and lovers of prominent men. This includes Elena Cuza (1825–1909, the wife of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, who ruled the Romanian Principalities in 1859–1862), Doamna Stanca (d. 1603, the mother of Stephen the Great), and Veronica Micle (1850–1889, the lover of Romania's national poet, Mihai Eminescu). The category of women celebrated for their family relationships with important men rather than for their own accomplishments also includes Queen Mary (1875–1938, wife of King Ferdinand I) and Queen Elisabeta (1843–1916, wife of King Carol I). Finally, there are 26 names of female saints (Sfânta Maria, Sfânta Ana, Sfânta Parascheva) which celebrate Romania's Christian heritage and religious identity. Considering the 111 streets honoring male Christian saints, the religious field is one of the few domains where females are better represented, with a gender ratio of 4:1 in favor of males.

These descriptive statistics reveal a genderized urban street namescape characterized by the over-representation of male figures and the invisibility of females. The remainder of this article will identify the main factors that shape this gendered symbolic geography of masculine

domination. It will present statistical analyses that assess the empirical adequacy of the five hypotheses. [Table 2](#) presents the descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables (predictors), while [Table 3](#) specifies the results of the multilevel logistic regression model on street name gender around which the discussion of these findings will be organized.

Regional geographies of gendered namescapes

The first hypothesis advanced the idea that the north-western regions of Romania, whose histories have been largely shaped by Central Europe's cultural politics while part of the Austrian(-Hungarian) Empire, would have more names of women inscribed in the urban streets. The results indicated by the coefficients of the logistic regression model indicate otherwise ([Table 3](#)). Controlling for all other variables introduced in the model, these results show that it is statistically significantly more likely for female street names to feature outside of Transylvania, in Muntenia, Oltenia and Moldova.

When examined independently, the distribution of gendered street names across the historical regions reveals a similar pattern. [Table 4](#) points out that the least shares of female street names are to be found in Banat-Crișana (2.94 %), Transylvania (3 %), and Maramureș-Bucovina (3.35 %). These regions located in the north-western part of the country stand out in comparison to Dobruja (4.23 %), Moldova (4.71 %), Muntenia (4.81 %), and Oltenia (5.24 %).

This result is striking, considering that until the formation of the Romania state in 1859 Wallachia (Muntenia and Oltenia) and Moldova were under the control of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, which allegedly were less gender progressive than the Austrian Empire ([Schwartz, 2010](#)). Moreover, such a finding undermines the "internal Orientalism" ([Cercel, 2015](#)) which sees Transylvania as the hallmark of "European" identity and of Western civilization, and the south-eastern

Table 2
Descriptive statistics.

Variables	N	%	M	SD	Min-Max
Dependent variable					
Street name gender	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
Male	15,001	96.03	–	–	–
Female	620	3.97	–	–	–
Independent variables					
Historical region	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
Transylvania	3537	22.64	–	–	–
Banat-Crișana	2552	16.34	–	–	–
Maramureș-Bucovina	1136	7.27	–	–	–
Moldova	2337	14.96	–	–	–
Muntenia	3805	24.36	–	–	–
Oltenia	1260	8.07	–	–	–
Dobruja	994	6.36	–	–	–
Ethnic diversity index	–	–	0.132	0.131	0.000–0.593
City ranking	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
County residence	8486	54.32	–	–	–
Municipality	3467	22.19	–	–	–
Town	3668	23.48	–	–	–
Artery type	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
Boulevard/Square	464	2.97	–	–	–
Street	14,084	90.16	–	–	–
Alley/Entrance	1073	6.87	–	–	–
New street	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
No	12,158	77.83	–	–	–
Yes	3463	22.17	–	–	–
Renamed street	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
No	12,484	79.92	–	–	–
Yes	3137	20.08	–	–	–
Ethnic identity	15,621	100.00	–	–	–
Romanian	13,539	86.67	–	–	–
Hungarian	860	5.51	–	–	–
Other (international) (ref.)	1222	7.82	–	–	–

Table 3
Results of the mixed-effects regression, random intercept model with fixed slopes.

Dependent variable: street name gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	Coef.	Std. err.	t	p	Exp (coef.)
Historical region					
Transylvania (ref.)	0				1
Banat-Crișana	-0.124	0.177	-0.68	0.49	0.89
Maramureș-Bukovina	0.182	0.202	0.90	0.37	1.20
Moldova	0.351	0.164	2.14	0.03*	1.42
Muntenia	0.333	0.149	2.24	0.03*	1.39
Oltenia	0.393	0.185	2.13	0.03*	1.48
Dobruja	0.338	0.203	1.67	0.10	1.40
Ethnic diversity index	-0.318	0.474	-0.67	0.50	0.73
City ranking					
County residence	0.275	0.120	2.30	0.02*	1.32
Municipality (ref.)	0				1
Town	-0.062	0.141	-0.44	0.66	0.94
Street type					
Square/Boulevard	-0.254	0.263	-0.97	0.34	0.78
Street (ref.)	0				1
Alley/Entrance	0.592	0.127	4.67	0.00**	1.81
Street history					
New street	0.147	0.101	1.46	0.14	1.116
Renamed street	-0.053	0.114	-0.47	0.64	0.95
Ethnic identity					
Romanian	-0.733	0.122	-6.03	0.00**	0.48
Hungarian	-1.132	0.284	-3.99	0.00**	0.32
Other (ref.)	0				1
Constant	-2.914	0.200	-14.60	0.00**	0.05
Between-towns variation	0.020	0.029			
Observations	15,621				
Groups (towns)	296				

* $p < 0.05$.
** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4
Distribution of gender street names across Romania's historical regions.

Historical region	Female		Male		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Transylvania	106	3.00	3431	97.00	3537	100
Banat-Crișana	75	2.94	2477	97.06	2552	100
Maramureș-Bucovina	38	3.35	1098	96.65	1136	100
Moldova	110	4.71	2227	95.29	2337	100
Muntenia	183	4.81	3622	95.19	3805	100
Oltenia	66	5.24	1194	94.76	1260	100
Dobruja	42	4.23	952	95.77	994	100
Total	620	3.97	15,001	96.03	15,591	100

regions as the bulwark of Oriental backwardness. Our findings indicate the shallowness of regional stereotypes, at least in regard to women's visibility in the urban namescape. Although statistical data indicate some clear regional distinctions, the uneven geography of gender presence in Romania's street names becomes evident after plotting the toponymic data spatially (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 depicts the national map of Romania's gendered urban street nomenclature. In terms of the percentage of female street names computed for each locality, Romania's gendered namescape points out three significant aspects. First, it highlights the heterogenous nature of the country's gendered symbolic geography, which is characterized not only by regional differences, but also by substantial intra-regional variation. Secondly, it emphasizes several urban clusters where the share of women in the towns' street names exceeds 5 %; these are located in Moldova and, to a lower extent, at the border between Oltenia and Muntenia. Third, it indicates that in no major Romanian city female street names constitute over 10 % of all street names. Again, contrary to our expectations, the largest shares of streets honoring women are found in small-size towns with under 10,000 inhabitants (Huedin, 12.50 % and

Zlatna, 10.53 %), not in the largest cities, such as Bucharest (5.95 %), Brașov (2.98 %), Cluj-Napoca (3.46 %), Iași (6.36 %), or Timișoara (4.89 %).

A possible explanation for the fact that the highest share of female street names is found in small-size towns not large urban centers may be related to the size of the road network and, in particular, the limited pool of women worth commemorating in the public space in Romania. As already pointed out, the list of "exceptional" women is much more restricted than the list of men. These two factors jointly account for the small share of streets commemorating women in large cities.

Ethnic masculinization of commemorative landscapes

The second hypothesis claimed that in ethnically diverse communities, street names express an increased masculinization, as ethnic parties entrenched in the local political struggle tend to promote their collective identities mainly through the "Great Men" of history. Since ethnopolitical infighting is cast as rivalry between men, and each community seeks to inscribe in the public space their own ethnic male heroes, it is expected a decreased presence of women in the urban namescape.

The hypothesis is upheld by our data. The multilevel logistical regression, which takes into consideration the effects exerted by all the other factors introduced into the model, indicates no statistically significant relationship between the index of ethnic fractionalization and the street name gender. However, if we examine the relationship between a street name's ethnicity and its gender, the regression model indicates that, compared to "Other" (streets named after various international personalities), women are statistically significantly less present within Romanian and Hungarian eponyms, where male personalities are overrepresented in both ethnic groups.

Thus, for ethnic communities that coexist in a politically competitive context male street names are more important collective symbols and toponymic proxies for asserting ethnic identities and memories in the public space than female street names. Indeed, in Transylvania and other regions of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire incorporated into the Romanian Kingdom after World War I, Romanian authorities renamed streets with national symbols (Rusu, 2019). The toponymic Romanization was temporarily halted during the first decade of communism, only to be relaunched in the 1970s during Nicolae Ceaușescu's ethno-nationalist brand of state socialism (Verdery, 1995). The decentralization effected after the 1989 Revolution enabled ethnic minorities organized as political parties (in particular, the Democratic Union of Magyars in Romania, UDMR) to compete in local politics (Stroschein, 2011; Toró, 2018). In Transylvanian towns with a substantial Hungarian minority UDMR dominates local politics, and the urban street names were again changed after 1989 to reflect the Hungarian ethnic heritage (Rusu, 2024).

These findings partially suggest that, at least in ethnically diverse communities where local politics is structured along ethnic lines, women may not be commemorated in street names as an unintended outcome of the symbolic masculinization of local power struggles. Thus, future inquiries should investigate this intriguing hypothesis on the toponymic consequences of inter-ethnic relationships at the level of local politics.

Urban hierarchies of gendered street names

The third and fourth hypotheses deal with two interconnected aspects of hierarchical spatialities. They assert that female street names should be present in larger numbers in large urban centers than in small-sized towns, and that female namesakes are relegated to less prominent thoroughfares such as entries and alleys rather than being assigned to public squares, boulevards, and central avenues.

The findings of the logistic regression analysis support both hypotheses. Streets named after women are more prevalent in the

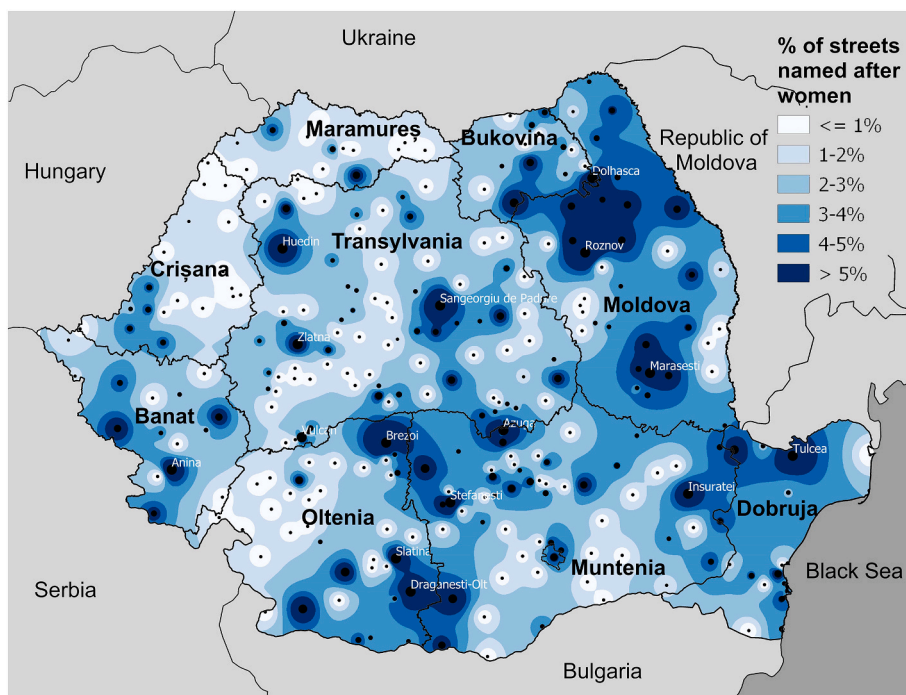


Fig. 1. Map of Romania's gendered urban namescape.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Note: The names in white represent the towns where female street names constitute over 10 % of the eponymous names.

administrative seats of the 41 counties of Romania. The results suggest a clear difference between county residences (large urban centers acting as county capitals) and municipalities (medium-sized towns) and towns (small-size urban settlements). Large urban centers are inherently more cosmopolitan, a feature also conducive to a broader representation of women in the public space. At the same time, there is a higher likelihood of finding women's names in marginal thoroughfares (side-streets, alleys, and entrances) than in prominent public spaces (boulevards and squares). This result echoes recent studies that pointed out the down-scaling of women in the stratified symbolic geographies of the city (Gutiérrez-Mora & Oto-Peralías, 2022; Novas Ferradás, 2018; Rusu, 2019).

The two hypotheses suggest that there are more numerous female street names in large urban centers but assigned to less important thoroughfares. These toponymic practices reproduce the gendered relations of power inscribed in the public landscape.

Masculine reproduction of postsocialist namescapes

The last hypothesis addresses the question of toponymic changes that occurred during Romania's post-socialist transformation. After 1989, the new authorities removed the statues and renamed the places commemorating the communist past and erased the Soviet symbols, values, and heroes from the public space. Around 12 % of the country's urban street names were changed (4565 of the 37,080 streets existing in 1989), most of which were important thoroughfares located in central areas of cities and towns (Rusu, 2024). The streets evoking communist leaders and Soviet values were renamed to assert symbols drawn from Romania's pre-communist period (the royal house, the nationalist intellectuals and politicians of the 19th and early 20th centuries, some medieval rulers, among others) or the memory of the anti-communist 1989 Revolution and its victims (Crețan & Matthews, 2016; Light, 2004).

Since then, Romania also experienced a real estate boom, as new residential areas have been developed throughout the country (Petrișor, 2012; Șoaită & Dewilde, 2021). These construction projects have

expanded the cities (Stanilov, 2007) and produced new toponymic spaces. After 1989, at least 9713 new streets had been created with the expansion of Romania's cities and towns. The renaming of communist-related streets and the naming of newly created streets provided authorities with the opportunity to address the male-centric structural inequality institutionalized in Romania's street names.

However, the percentage of streets named after women remained roughly the same during 1989–2023 in comparison to the period prior to 1989 (3.97 % and 4.03 %, respectively). Although their number increased from 420 before 1989 to 620 in 2023, when taking into consideration the overall expansion of the national street network, streets honoring women account for a slightly lower share of all street names. The data suggests two diverging processes that reproduce the male dominance of Romania's gendered street namescape. Male personalities are over-represented in the streets renamed after 1989 to an even higher degree than under communism (only 3.51 % of the streets renamed after 1989 refer to women, as opposed to 4.03 % of streets under communism). Second, slightly more room has been made for women's representation in the streets created after 1989. In these streets created after the fall of communism, 4.68 % of them were named after women, but the increase is too insignificant to offset the male dominance.

When controlling for other variables, the regression model points out that neither renaming nor neotoponymy exerts a statistically significant effect on predicting the gender of the outcome variable. In other words, the changes in the renamed streets and the newly created streets were too small to impact the overall gendered structure of the country's urban street names. The post-1989 political changes – including the ideological reconfiguration and expansion of the namescape – have reproduced the masculine default already built-in into Romania's toponymic regime.

Discussion and conclusions

Centuries of political naming of streets have produced starkly gendered urban landscapes across Europe and beyond. Although recently documented by academics and challenged by feminist

organizations, the gendered street namescapes of European cities remain places of masculine domination and platforms of women's public invisibility. Within Europe's male-centric symbolic geography of urban street names, Romania stands out as particularly misogynistic. As this analysis shows, <4 % of the country's streets named after people represent female figures, but 96 % of them are dedicated to men.

Without comparative data for other countries, we cannot say whether the gender ratio of 24:1 we found in Romania is significantly different from the ratio in other European Union member states. The scarcity of available toponymic data for other countries that would allow for meaningful cross-national comparisons might be addressed by future research. It is only by developing national datasets like the one produced for Romania that future inquiries could elude the limitations of "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002) and develop comparative, cross-national analytical frameworks.

Calculating the percentages of gendered street names at the national level is not enough. As this paper pleads, more important than descriptively charting the gendered power relations ingrained in symbol landscapes is to identify, via multivariate quantitative strategies of data analysis, the factors that explain the gendering of urban street names. By employing advanced statistical analyses, this paper identified some of the main determinants of gendered street namescapes in the Romanian context. These range from geographical and historical factors (regional location of the towns where streets are found) and ethnic and political factors (political competition between ethnic parties at the local level) to spatial hierarchies (city ranking and inner-city road stratification). It would be intriguing to find how these factors affect the symbolic landscapes of other countries.

The empirical findings reported here beg the practical question "What is to be done?" to redress the gender inequality entrenched in street names. Several European municipalities have introduced gender mainstreaming of urban namescapes. Taking stock of the official initiatives employed thus far, a rather diverse repertoire of tactics comes to the fore. The municipal stock of policies for gender mainstreaming the urban toponymies consists of four interventions. The first one consists of naming nameless public spaces such as gardens, parks, and passages after women. This gender redressive tactic of assigning female names to uninhabited places – carried out in Lisbon, Portugal (Banza, 2022), Milan, Italy (Pecorelli, 2023), and Warsaw, Poland (Walkowiak, 2022) – is a practical way of circumventing the administrative costs exerted upon the residents, who tend to reject street renaming proposals for practical reasons (to avoid the need to change their ID cards and other official documents). However, such gender mainstreaming relegates female names to less important places and reinforces the hierarchical division it aims at overcoming.

Other municipalities have named newly created spaces after female personalities. In Vienna, all streets of the Seestadt district were named after females. The municipalities in Valencia, Spain and Paris, France established gender quotas to specify a certain ratio for naming the new streets (O'Sullivan, 2016; Plummer, 2018). This strategy also risks producing "perverse effects" by marginalizing women names to streets located at the outskirts of the cities, where new developments take shape, either concentrated in pockets of all-female districts or scattered across the periphery of an expanding urban geography.

Occasionally, municipalities have resorted to festive naming. In 2018, recognized by Parliament as the year of the rights of women, several city councils in Poland adopted resolutions to increase women's visibility in urban namescapes. By 2022, 540 thoroughfares had been named after women, mostly in Poznań (46), Warsaw (28), and Wrocław (19) (Walkowiak & Rutkiewicz-Hanczewska, 2023, p. 214). Festive naming strategies are extraordinary events, usually bound to non-recurring commemorations. Given their one-time character and exceptional nature, this tactic risks reinforcing the traditional male-centric naming practices once the special commemorative contexts are left behind.

Finally, a more contentious tactic involves renaming male-named

places after women. After the Spanish authorities adopted in 2007 the so-called "law of memory" forbidding the commemoration of personalities and symbols related to the Franco regime, at the pressure of feminist civic organizations, numerous municipalities renamed the thoroughfares dedicated to compromised male-figures associated with the Francoist regime after female personalities. Town councils in Valencia, Oviedo, and Cádiz replaced the names of Franco-era generals and ministry officials (all men) with female lawyers, writers, teachers, and activist (Broncano, 2016). In Romania, a similar historic opportunity was lost in 1989, when communist street names were not erased to increase women's presence in the public spaces of cities and towns. Even today, the country is missing another opportunity to offset the toponymic scale. Large swaths of rural Romania remain unnamed. New laws require rural settlements to name their streetscape (Romanian Government, 2016), but they do not specify any guidelines on gender proportionality. This ongoing naming in rural settlements suggests that the male-dominated street namescapes inscribed in urban areas is replicated in villages. Thus, at least in Romania, it is easier to reproduce the gender inequalities in street nomenclature than to redress it.

Considering the extreme gender gap in Romania, the government's unwillingness to address it, and the partial success of gender mainstreaming conducted in other European countries, we could suggest that Romania needs a nation-wide coherent strategy that combines different strategies and adapts them to local contexts. As no single solution can get rid of the male-centric urban palimpsest developed over time, it is important to establish a national strategy that compels local councils to address the gender gap in street names while also allowing them to consider local solutions and avoid their unintended consequences. Centuries of male domination shaped the symbolic geographies of cities and towns. As such, numerical gender parity seems an unreachable objective, unless municipalities address the sharp gender inequalities structuring urban street names. Incorporating gender mainstreaming in official procedures for attributing street names is one promising means of achieving it.

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Mihai S. Rusu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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