TOPONYMY AND THE ISSUES OF MEMORY AND IDENTITY ON THE POST-SOVIET TBILISI CITYSCAPE

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Abstract. *The present article deals with the renaming of the toponymy of Tbilisi, Georgia, from as early as final years of Soviet rule in the country in the light of newly translated data from Georgian to English. It discusses the changes in the cityscape in relation to the national discourse that was built in the post-Soviet times, assessing how this discourse relates to the city history and the broader national context, which aspects were commemorated, and which were left out. The translated data consists of the Tbilisi City Council Decrees from both pre-Soviet and post-Soviet years and a book concerning Tbilisian toponymy and their history from the Georgian Encyclopedia tomes. With this data, an unprecedented database was produced, and from it the toponyms were cataloged accordingly. From the cataloging, the paper then describes and analyzes the toponymy replacements in-depth, mostly using qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, but hinting at some quantitative models, such as tables and comparisons between yearly renamings. The article brings a new understanding of how the national discourse is imprinted in the toponymy of the capital and its implications for the geopolitical context, also significantly contributing to the field, in the English literature, with the new data.*

Keywords*: political toponymy, cultural memory, memory studies*

Introduction

Studies on aspects of memory, identity, and culture can embrace a great scale of subjects, since they are part of everyone's life, in their realities and environments. These aspects are always prone to be controlled by institutions, such as governments, to be modified and molded according to a particular discourse or ideology. Although more easily identified in larger instances, such attempts can happen in micro scales, such as street naming, and that aspect is what I will discuss in this particular research—specifically speaking of the toponymy of Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia. As will be shown further, the post-Soviet country went through several renamings on the cityscape,

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all according to specific political events and shifts in power dynamics. Changing the name of a street does not only imply a simple modification of a marker in a city—it has a purpose, and an implication on a population's memory and identity. It can be used as a way of altering the cultural memory portrayed in an everyday place, reinforcing identity narratives that transform space into place by ascribing a certain meaning to a location (Assmann 1995; Connerton 1989, cited in Drozdzewski 2014: 67). A government can spread its political agenda by renaming streets, avenues, squares, or districts because this act works with the memory of the population. Giving places names of political figures, important political events, or historical peoples and places makes people remember and keep such concepts in mind individually and collectively, since toponyms like streets are used and referenced daily (Azaryahu 1996: 321; Drozdzewski 2014: 66). This is done to suppress possible threats to a regime's sovereignty and its political discourse (Sharp 2009, cited in Drozdzewski 2014: 66).

Around the fall of the Soviet Union, Tbilisi underwent a process of replacing the imposed toponymy by the Soviet regime by one that brought back its national figures, being significant on several aspects, such as religious, cultural, and historical ones. What is left for a research such as the present one is to analyze how the process of renaming was carried out, find patterns and see how the change of discourse took place, which figures got replaced, and which ones replaced them. To understand the commemorations placed on the cityscape, it is important to address the history of the city in question, making it possible to have an idea of which ethnonational and cultural aspects were chosen to be remembered and which ones were deliberately (or unintentionally) forgotten. Post-Soviet authorities had the power to choose which discourse they wanted to brand into Tbilisi's place names, for specific reasons and to evidence a certain national identity and ideology; in this work, I will assess which discourse was intended to be put forward and discuss the reasons for it in the light of the recent Georgian national idea of self. This is important to make sense of the recent political history of Georgia, how the most contemporary governments dealt with a reassertion of democratic power and how the Georgian national identity was built and commemorated.

It is important to mention the lack of data regarding the renaming of toponymy in Georgia on the academic literature in English; one of the few works on the subject in the language is an article by Elene Bodaveli, who drew her data from a book by Zurab Chelidze which is devoted to Tbilisi's street, avenue and square names—but is entirely in Georgian, with no translated version available. In the present work, the material gathered consists of decrees from the Tbilisi City Council and the aforementioned book about the capital's cityscape, and both sources had to go through translations into English to be used. These translations amount to a significant contribution to political science when it comes to the Caucasian studies, and one of the aims of this research is to bring them to light so that new knowledge can be reached by future works on the subject. As a way to start contributing, this work will take the data and make a first evaluation of what can be drawn from it, consisting of a general analysis of both sources followed by a division of the information present in them, so to make sense of the whole process of renaming and relate it to the building of the Georgian national discourse. The analyses are done to see how the Georgian identity came to be reflected in the cityscape of the country's capital

on the eve of its return to be a Republic after decades of Soviet rule, and whether it has followed political trends and national discourses.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Memory and commemoration on toponymy

To start making sense of how the cityscape can be used to work with political discourses and participate in the process of commemoration, it is important to define some concepts, such as memory. In his seminal work about memory and history, Pierre Nora says that memory remains in permanent evolution, always susceptible to manipulation and appropriation, forgetfulness and remembrance (Nora 1989: 8). He maintains that history is always an incomplete and problematic reconstruction of the past, and while it is a representation of what has been and no more is, memory is "perpetually actual"; it is always present. Memory, however, chooses the most suitable facts to its interests (it is, to the ones manipulating it), so its recollections can be out of focus or telescopic, global, or detached. Memory "installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again" (Nora 1989: 8–9).

> "Memory is related to the objective notion of "history" but is often a selectively embellished or mythologized version of events, people, and places that serves social or political ends" (Foote & Azaryahu 2007: 126).

When the placement of memory occurs in an external place, a *lieu de mémoire*, a memory site, is created, and, in a way, is needed, because memories are not spontaneous, thus the creation of archives, commemorative anniversaries, celebrations and eulogies—as like if not commemorated, memories would be erased by history (Nora 1989: 12). Public memory is part of a symbolic foundation of collective identity, inscribing shared elements in the public space. Place names are not only symbolic but are also functional: while serving as spatial orientation elements, they reproduce official versions of history into daily life in a detached way from ideological contexts or communal obligations (Alderman 2000, 2003; Azaryahu 1986, 1996b; Ferguson 1988; Gill 2005; Palonen 1993; Stump 1988; Yeoh 1992, 1996; Foote & Azaryahu 2007: 128–129; Foxall 2013: 172). Public memory is the interface where the past is represented in the present, through shared cultural productions and reproductions (MacCannell 1976: 23–24, cited in Foote & Azaryahu 2007: 126). Memory is a vital component of identity formation, working as "a structural component of social memory of a group identity". Cultural approaches to memory maintain that shared memories are not produced accidentally, but are a consequence of cultural mediation, and its character is shaped by all kinds of mediation channels (Tamm 2013: 461).

Toponyms are important while being a representation of elements of culture and history of a place, describing the "geographical, political, social-economic and demographic conditions, historical moment and traditional, ethnographic, religious and lexical properties of certain people" (Sartania, Nikolaishvili & Ujmajuridze 2017: 49). Toponyms "represent the construct of social and power relations through which the identity of the city and society is being formed" (Berg & Voulteeenaho 2009). When

political changes occur, politically motivated toponymy changes will be most certainly found (Azaryahu 1986, 1996; Bucher et al. 2013; Drozdzewski 2014; Foote & Azaryahu 2007; Kadmon 2004; Saparov 2003; Sartania et al. 2017). Toponyms express geopolitics of memory because they are palpable sites of contestation among competing ideologies; it is a process of determining "who gets representation, in what way and with what political outcomes" (Edkins 2003: 135; Yeoh 1996, cited in Drozdzewski 2014: 67). When people are subjected to multiple, overlapping geographies of history and politics, memories of past events may induce controversy instead of consensus; some renamings can generate "toponyms with contested pasts" (Wagner-Pacifi & Schwartz 1991: 376, cited in Foxall 2013: 176). Works on place and memory pertain to various fields of study and are especially useful in geographical studies. That is why I bring Drozdzewski's concepts and work on the geopolitics of memory, since her research done on Krakow's streetscape is very similar to the one in this work. The author points out that while totalitarian regimes had equivocal power of commemorative choice, even in autonomous governments a determined group's version of history is inevitably preferred over another; regardless of how democratic the choosing of the name is carried. This is related to the fact that memory is a social construction, and thus depends on the contexts of the groups it is recalled by—the ruling elite "use their power and resources to make and implement decisions about memorial landscapes" (Forest & Johnson 2002, cited in Drozdzewski 2014: 68). These decisions and the specific memories imprinted in the city of Tbilisi are, then, the main object of this research.

1.2. Building of the national discourse

The Georgian capital, to this day, retains a series of characteristics that make it largely a Soviet city. Most people live in Soviet-built neighborhoods, and in general the spatial structure, even the transportation network, was built in that era (Salukvadze & Golubchikov 2016: 43). The capital went through noticeable changes in the cityscape since the 1920s, experiencing waves of renaming to incorporate Soviet ideology. New names were assigned to both existing and Soviet-built streets, squares, districts, and eventually metro stations (Bodaveli 2015: 156–158). Up to this point, the toponymy of Tbilisi was not particularly nationalistic. Instead, it reflected the capital's diversity on a certain scale, and the imperial domination in a larger setting; most referred to Russian emperors and their family members, noblemen, governors of Caucasia, and generals of the Russian Army (Bodaveli 2015: 163).

At first, the policy in Tbilisi was to mix local and Soviet identity. Russian imperial names were symbolically replaced by Soviet statesmen and important authors for the communist ideology, such as Engels, Marx, and Lunacharski; a few cases saw commemorations of Georgian figures who fought against russification, but for Georgian independence (Bodaveli 2015: 170, 176). This first part of the renaming process occurred from 1922 to 1923, with a second one from 1930 to 1934, as divided by Bodaveli. The second part removed the names of people who succeeded during the Russian Revolution or the first years of the Soviet Union, deemed "enemies of the people" (Bodaveli 2015:

158). The process underlying this second trend was part of the bigger intention of "forgetting" local heroes, traditional elements, and evidences of past regimes.

By the last years of the Soviet Union, radicalizations on the anti-Soviet opposition led to the Tbilisi Massacre of 9 April 1989, a violent repression of a demonstration in the capital. The revolutionary movement led the Supreme Soviet of Georgia to vote for condemning the 1921's Bolshevik occupation as an illegal act and call for new elections (de Waal 2010: 131–132; Salukvadze & Golubchikov 2016: 44). In the next year, Zviad Gamsakhurdia's Round Table bloc won the elections for the reconstituted Supreme Soviet, and on April 9, 1991, full independence from the Soviet Union was declared. Becoming autonomous involved taking control of institutions and having the challenge of building a new discourse. In the emergence of the post-Soviet nationalism, the making or re-making of national histories turned into one of the most important instruments for corroborating claims of political legitimacy and strengthening, if not even "inventing traditions" of peoplehood (Hirsch 2005; Hobsbawm 1983; Ushakin 2009; Yurchak 2003, cited in Batiashvili 2018: 13).

Stephen Jones discerns between three models of post-Soviet Georgian nationalism, which are: a model of cultural assimilation upheld by president Gamsakhurdia (1991–1992), who took cultural and ethnical distinctiveness as threats to national unity; Shevardnadze's (1995–2003) policies of reconciliation between distinct ethnic and cultural groups and inclusive citizenship; and finally Saakashvili (2004–2013) with a mix of his predecessors (Jones 2013: 216, cited in Polese et al. 2017: 55). Saakashvili, the most symbolic representation of a renovated, very anti-Soviet discourse, was elected as president in 2004. Determined to restore the authority of the state, he symbolically erected the Saint George's monument at Liberty Square in 2006, where the Lenin monument used to sit until 1991 (Jones 2013). The Soviet past is a very important part of Saakashvili's discourse; it has to be anthetisized, be shown as "the other", a symbol of backwardness. From 2004 to 2012, there was an iconoclast fury towards Soviet-era monuments and symbols, replacing them by "national" ones or "Western" ones (Isaacs & Polese 2016). Religion is also prominent in the Georgian national discourse – the Georgian Orthodox church came to institutionalize an ethno-nationalist doctrine into its orthodox practice, making religion political; Georgia's nationalism has been emphasizing the rule of the country as a stronghold of Christianity in a hostile Muslim environment since the 1980s (Shnirelman 1998: 58, cited in Batiashvili 2018: 14).

Tbilisi, once a myriad of nationalities and cultures, became very homogenously Georgian with the changes it went through in the Soviet times and its independent era. One, however, can still see hints of the cosmopolitan past in its remaining churches, mosques, and mansions. With this setting as a backdrop, we will analyze and see how the national Georgian elements were commemorated in the capital's cityscape in the light of the national discourse developed in contemporary years.

2. Research methodology

As Drozdzewski (2014: 77) says,

> "[…] by investigating how, why, and when, names changed in the past, we construct better topographies for understanding the importance of geopolitics to everyday spaces, especially those which are silent witnesses to trauma".

One of the aims of this research is to analyze toponyms, paying special attention to those with contested pasts, to assess their importance, the political regime's process, and effectiveness in applying cultural and identity aspects to the toponyms and which instances of those were applied. Doing this is directly connected with the memory elements and concepts discussed before; the imprinting of historical elements in public places, as a form of commemoration—memory and its manipulation.

Bodaveli's 2015 work is an important one in this research, both because of the data and the inspiration it provides, so the exhaustive discussions and discourse analysis regarding place names are done similarly, as they are deemed essential for a thorough comprehension of the process. Since the bulk of the important renamings from Imperial Russian/First Republic of Georgia to the Soviet era are covered in her article, they will not be part of this research; however, whenever convenient, they may be part of the discussion – for example, when a street is returned to its pre-Soviet name or when a clear replacing of an undesired name from that time takes places instead of the replacing of a Soviet commemoration. Bodaveli decides to select a certain number of streets according to their location in Tbilisi, the time of their establishment or their significance because of the size of the material she works with; since the present article is dealing with all the renamings from 1988 to 2007, selecting this period is a sufficient measure to make the number of analyzed toponymy reasonable, and thus no place name was taken out of the research. It may be the case that more toponyms were indeed renamed in the selected time frame, and that such information was missing from the consulted sources. Since the portion of data analyzed here differs from that of Bodaveli's, different classifications were crafted so to group the streets; still, they are closely inspired by her work. Another important acknowledgment has to be made regarding Drozdzewski's 2014 work, from which the central theoretical ideas were drawn from and where the intention of analyzing the geopolitical implications of the renaming process came from (only transporting the setting from Poland to Georgia).

The data concerning the subject of this paper, being it, Tbilisian street and place names (old and new), the year of such renamings, and the location of the places in the city is very scarce (if not nonexistent) in the English scientific literature. It was possible, however, to obtain such data in Georgian, in the book by Zurab Chelidze—The "Georgian Encyclopedia—Tbilisi: Streets, Avenues", published in 2008. Additionally, in the Tbilisi City Archives under the Georgian National Archives, it was possible to find an extensive list of renamed toponyms, with all their old names, and the correspondent districts; the list does not include the year of the renaming, though, whereas the book includes them. It was necessary to combine both sources to get a full, comprehensive list, which could be used for the present work. In the archives, it was also possible to find some of the decrees regarding the renamings, some of them explicating the reasons for that and the

people responsible. The chapter on toponymy from Chelidze's book, due to its extensive nature, was translated by a translation office. The City Council Decrees were translated with the help of academics fluent in Georgian, nationals or not.

With such material in hand, it is possible to make a general, previously non-existent database. In that sense, a table was crafted out of crossing the available data from both sources. It includes streets with their current name and the previous names, according to the list provided by the National Archives of Georgia. Then, based on the translation of the renaming section of Chelidze's book, it was possible to assess the year of each renaming, when possible to find – unfortunately, some of the streets or the year of their renamings sometimes were not included in the book. With such a table in hand, it is possible to start separating toponyms by district, year of renaming, and other patterns that may be found during the research. From the patterns and the decrees, it will be possible to make conclusions regarding the political implication of the renamings—not only what is being commemorated on the toponymy, but also what has been forgotten, or rather chosen to be. The analyses, from the general to the individual scope, are all made having in mind the historical background of Georgia as a whole and Tbilisi, not only paying attention to the removal of old names but to the renaming itself, for example, if the new names imply on a direct antithesis to the old name or if the removal itself is what matters. This historical correlation is what leads the categorizing of renamings, as it places the figures of importance that are commemorated in the context of the imprinting of a national discourse in the cityscape. The goal of the analyses is, then, to make sense of how selective the process was, mainly concerning the national discourse built in the past decades, through discourse analysis. It is important so to understand how the cultural memory of Georgia is represented and make a clear map of the geopolitics of memory in the Caucasian post-Soviet environment.

To begin with, since the Renaming Policy Decrees provide the most concrete set of data for this research, a section will ensue to evaluate the information it can provide regarding the process, the reasons (when mentioned) and what can be drawn from those—an analysis of the whole operation and its outcomes. The first part of the section will be dedicated to a general analysis of documents, what they tell us as a whole and what inferences we can make regarding the renaming process based on them. According to the relevance of the information and to structure a more in-depth survey of the data, it was divided into subsections: Districts, with thorough explanations of their renamings and the meaning of it; and Streets, with a likewise dedicated unraveling.

Later on, another section will turn to the scrutiny of the table put together for this research. There, the toponyms will be divided by district and year of renaming. Then, another set of divisions will take place, dividing the names according to their role; since the majority refers to people, the division refers mostly to the activity that made them relevant. The categories, classified according to the names found rather than being pre-made to fit the data, are: Artists; Historical figures; Religious themes and people; Sportsmen; Scientists; Politicians; Foreigners; Geographical places; Concepts; and Unknown. The Artist category includes poets, writers, composers, singers, painters, sculptors, ballet dancers, actors, and directors. The Historical figures include people who

were part of Georgian history like kings, princes, important military commanders, and also people who are commemorated because they took part in key events, like martyrs from civil wars and national symbols of resistance. The Religious themes and people include priests, bishops, patriarchs, saints, theologians, and more rarely, religious concepts (like "Transfiguration" or "Trinity") and names of churches or monasteries. Sportsmen include footballers, rugby players, chess players, cyclists, tennis players, and athletes in general. The Scientist category groups together linguists, philosophers, historians, psychologists, electrochemists, architects, political scientists, biochemists, physicians, and doctors. Politicians include people with contributions that made them famous in a specific area, like presidents, congressmen, and sometimes revolutionaries who became part of the government. Foreigners include the few instances when non-Georgian people were commemorated in the toponymy, and it overlaps with other categories, like politicians, artists, or even religious people. Geographical places include all references to cities, villages, countries, and other toponyms in general, like the names of mountains or gorges. Concepts is a self-explanatory one—it brings concepts deemed important enough for Georgians that they are commemorated, like "Freedom", "Friendship", and also important historical dates. The unknown category, as the name indicates, includes all the streets which names were not possible to be assessed, due to lack of information available.

Structurally speaking, the categories were presented in order of perceived importance, apart from the division based on the source materials, so more evident or even bigger toponymy like the names of entire districts and stations come first. When it comes to why certain patterns were chosen, they reflect the tendencies that were found to be intentionally considered for the renaming process, like the categories discussed above. When none were found, broader scopes were applied, like the analyses by year and district, so to make it easier to look at. Information about the commemorated people is drawn mostly from Chelidze's book, where there is a chapter dedicated to giving information about the names inscribed on Tbilisi's cityscape.

The final part of the research will be composed of a concluding section, bringing the findings of the present work and making sense of them as a whole, the impact they have on providing a better understanding of the subject – so to say, the impact of renaming practices on the geopolitical arena, specifically on the post-Soviet context, and the efficiency of this ideological battle.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Renaming Policy Decrees

General Analysis

The Renaming Policy Decrees provide a very unique and interesting source of data. First of all, they come with a heading and stamp which specifies the entity responsible for the issuance and official character of the decree. This is important because through it we can already start making inferences regarding the political implications of the renamings: while most of the decrees analyzed here refer to the "Executive Committee of Tbilisi City Council (Soviet) of People's Deputies", evidencing that they were produced

during the agonizing stages of the Soviet Union in Georgia. There are two decrees from as early as August 1991 which claim to be issued by the "Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Georgia"—the government of the newly independent Republic of Georgia. Interestingly, those last two decrees are the ones treating directly with the end of the Soviet Rule in the country. It follows directly on the president's decision to call off the Soviet rule 3 days before, and demands that the responsible committees evaluate the worth of all property belonging to the Communist Party. Four days later, the second decree, this time issued by the City Hall of Tbilisi, calls for a similar action to take place, along with an *inventarization* of the belongings of the Communist Party and its bodies, but also giving the responsibility to the district prefectures and assemblies.

When Georgia and, consequently, Tbilisi as well were still part of the Soviet Union, the city administration was already changing the names of the local toponymy. The phenomena can already be assessed from as early as 1988, with the decree that changes a square and a street from their previous denominations to the name of the Georgian painter Lado Gudiashvili; it can be seen as a challenging act since Gudiashvili acted in opposition to the Soviet ideology in 1946 when painting religious motives in the Kashveti Church, which brought his dismission from the Academy of Arts two years later. Even though he was awarded the title of Hero of Labor of the Soviet Union in the 1970s, the fact that a "Georgian Hero" (as stated in this words by the decree) was being deliberately put on a square and street name meant that the administration didn't condone anymore with the creation of a "Soviet identity" (Bodaveli 2015: 157) and its expression in Tbilisi, and such a renaming can be seen as a way to protest. Feeling more confident to oppose Soviet rule, the administration of Tbilisi started to rename more toponyms in the city—the year of 1990 is particularly prolific in terms of issuing renaming decrees, comprehending nine of the documents present and investigated here. This evidences how the influence of the Soviet Union was waning throughout its republics. The renamings resonated with the events carried on the streets of Tbilisi and the councils; as commented on the historical background section, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was leading the revolutionary national movement, and it is certain to infer that this incentivized the reactions evidenced by the decrees, the rejection of the enforced Soviet elements branded in plain sight.

The decrees contain information that couldn't be directly found anywhere else in this research. They cite the renaming of entire districts, metro stations, and, on rare occasions, comment on the political situation of Tbilisi as the capital. One of them, from May 1990 states that:

> "[…] as advised by workers, unions and students, and also by the institution's advisory council, decides to rename Shaumian Street to Ketevan Tsamebuli Street […]".

Another one, from August 30th, 1990, brings very interesting information: it mentions that people were unsatisfied because the process was being carried out too slowly, and seeing the first renamings, the own population wanted to bring back their cultural elements on the city namings, with all its aspects included—historical, religious and national figures. It is another solid evidence of how the liberation movement was resounding very loudly through the country and especially at the capital; the historical and religious character of

the renamings was also, according to the narrative, being constructed for years, as aforesaid. Heeding the call of the populace, the City Council requests the district councils of Lenin and October (still to be renamed) to propose renamings which bring important historical names back, in collaboration with the residents—which is very interesting. It is possible to note that the "practice of returning historical names to Tbilisi districts and streets" does not refer directly to bringing back old street names, but rather historical figures on the toponymy, as none of the streets mentioned on the decree returned to their previous names. After all, before the Soviet renaming practices, the first independent Georgian Republic had a very limited time-frame to name its toponymy, and before that the imperial rule would not focus on commemorating distinct national Georgian elements, so there was not much to bring back from previous times. Some other streets, however, got their previous names back, as well as the majority of districts.

The decrees also include the names of the City Council Chairman and the Secretary, giving crucial information about who issued the decrees. Although not including all the renamed toponymy in Tbilisi, they include a significant amount of those which underwent such process from 1988 to 1991, *ergo*, the period that is pertinent to this research. Other decrees from further and previous years could not be found in the research made in the Georgian National Archives.

Districts

On the Decree from the "Executive Committee of the Tbilisi City Council (Soviet) of People's Deputies" issued on April 26th, 1990, it can be read:

> The ECCCT has decided […] that the following districts will be renamed:
>
> First of May District – Didube District
>
> Kalinin District – Mtatsminda District
>
> Kirov District – Krtsanisi District
>
> Orjonikidze District – Vake District
>
> Factory District – Samgori District
>
> 26 Commissars District – Isani District […]

On another decree from November 7th, 1990, two other districts go through renaming: "[…] Lenin District – Nadzaladevi District […] October District – Chughureti District […]". It is not known, why there was a span of months between the renaming of those last two districts, and they were part of a decree that was most worried about renaming streets; it also included railways, medical and engineering institutes. One assumption we can make is that due to the sensitivity of times, some elements were deliberately kept due to their importance—after all, Lenin's name is still remembered and commemorated even nowadays in some post-Soviet places and is sometimes detached from the totalitarian nature of the later years. Nevertheless, it was to the Council's interest to remove that too. Since most of the districts had older designations, they were returned to those toponyms. It is possible to see traces of the rich history of Tbilisi on the names,

given that many of them carry an etymology related to the language of the various peoples who were part of its formation.

Namely, the first decree was signed by the ECCT's Chairman I. Andriadze and Secretary V. Japaridze, and the second one, by N. Lekishvili.

Stations

A decree from November 7ᵗʰ, 1990 (issued the same date of the second decree changing the district names) asks the metropolitan leadership of Tbilisi to change the metro station names, as follows:

> Tbilisi City Council Presidium decides to change the names of Tbilisi Metropolitan Stations' names in collaboration with its advisory council workers of the capital, as well as the labor collective of the metropolitan workers.
>
> Stations: "October" to "Nadzaladevi"
>
> "Komsomol" to "Medical Institute"
>
> "26 Commissars" to "Avlabari"
>
> "Lenin Square" to "Freedom Square"
>
> "Polytechnical Institute" to "Polytechnical" […]
>
> The City Council Chairman signature is from N. Lekishvili.

Streets

Since there is a large number of streets being referenced in the renaming decrees, the present analysis will be limited to choosing the ones which represent the whole process, instead of making a detailed and probably repetitive commentary on each one of them. A very symbolic renaming is from May 24ᵗʰ, 1990: "The Executive Committee of the City Council of Tbilisi, as advised by workers, unions and students, and also by the institution's advisory council, decides to rename Shaumian Street to Ketevan Tsamebuli Street (Ketevan the Martyr)". Shaumian was a Bolshevik revolutionary, leader of the Baku Commune that became the famous 26 Commissars, also commemorated on toponymy around the Soviet Union (and previously mentioned in this piece) (Chelidze 2008: 342). His name was replaced by Ketevan the Martyr – this is very significant because it is a religious expression, as evidenced by the name.

Another decree, from September 7ᵗʰ, 1990 concerns renamings done specifically in the district of Mtatsminda:

> Changes for the following streets located in Mtsatminda area […] The street names should be changed as:
>
> 1.   A. Lunacharski st. – as Levan Laghidze st.
>
> 2.   P. Makharadze st. – as Geronti Kikodze st.
>
> 3.   M. Tskhakaia st. – as Vukol Beridze st.

4.   A. Oboladze st. – as Vakhtang Kotetishvili st.

5.   S. Kirovi st. – as Giorgi Leonidze st.

6.   G. Leonidze st. – as Brother Sargi (scientist) and Davit (artist) Kakabadzeebi st.

7.   A. Japaridze st. – as Paolo Iashvili st.

As can be seen, it is posterior to the renaming of districts, since the district is not called "Kalinin" anymore. The fact that the renaming is not done at random, but focused on Mtatsminda, is most probably because the district is located in Old Tbilisi, rendering it an important location to include important historical figures from the Georgian pantheon. As for the streets, they replace names of Bolshevik revolutionaries for Georgian figures, in short; they either were opposed to the Soviet regime, or had no relation to it and represented important figures for the Georgian national consciousness, from painters and poets to scientists. The fact that they were all markedly ethnic Georgians is already a transgression to the "Soviet citizen", ethnic-free ideology.

On November 7th, 1990, yet another decree concerns the renaming of several streets located in different parts of the city. It is possible to see many very distinct names related to the Soviet ideology being replaced, like "Marx Street", "Kooperatsia Street" (Cooperation), "October Street", "Pioneris Street" (Pioneers), "Lokomotivi Stadium" (Locomotive) and "S. Ordzhonikidze Institute", for example. The names replacing them were once again of distinct Georgian people, also religious icons; Azizbekovi Street became Betlemi Street (Bethelem) and Cherniakhovski Street became David Gareja Street (after a monastery complex). A particularly important one is the renaming of Volodarski Street to Haidar Abashidze, a Muslim Georgian who was a key figure to keep Batumi under Georgia by the fall of the Russian Empire (Chelidze 2008: 249).

3.2. Toponymy Renaming Table

General analysis

Differently from the City Council Decrees, the table resulting from the combination of the data sources does not give us descriptions or direct information about the renaming process. On rare occasions, Chelidze's book gives a short commentary on it, usually when it is talking about streets named after people who lived in it or naming processes related to events, which happened on the toponym. Otherwise, there are no explanations. This requires that we make our conjectures based on what is possible to draw from the raw data, like the number of names commemorated on the same year or district, or nature of the names as a group. Let us have a look at sheer numbers first, then. There are 1,070 toponyms in the resulting table, out of which 244 were renamed between 1988 and 2007. It is relevant to mention that some of the renamings were applied to the same object, e.g. a street that was renamed in 1996 and, later, received a new name in 2000. This happened eight times, which amounts to a total of 251 renamings in 19 years. When talking about numbers, there are some assortments that we can make to have a clear view of the patterns. First, in Table 1 below, we see the nature of previous, replaced names.

Table 1. Number of renamed toponyms by category

Non-Soviet	Soviet	Previously unnamed or new street sections	Toponyms renamed twice	Toponyms renamed three times	Toponyms renamed four times	Toponyms renamed five times	Toponyms that returned to the old name
107	99	36	74	47	21	6	32

Total number of commemorated names (1988–2007)	242

The table makes it evident already that most of the names that were taken out didn't contain ideologically Soviet elements. This grouping includes, among Georgians and foreigners, people who weren't connected to the Communist Party in any way, sometimes being detached completely from the period when the Soviet revolution took place. Since the vast majority of streets in Tbilisi were first named during Russian imperial times (as we can see in Chelidze's compilation) or at least included in city plans from the period, there were still instances when the most recent renamings were directed at them. Soviet instances, however, do not fall behind too much, with only 8 occurrences short of non-Soviet ones. However, as will be discussed further, even when the renamings were not directed at a Soviet toponym, the new names they carried were almost always Georgian (at least 90%), and thus serving as a way to reinforce the national narrative to the detriment of any previous ideology put forward in Tbilisi's cityscape. The remainder of substituted toponyms were previously unnamed streets or also unnamed stretches of old streets that were deemed to deserve a different name. When two names were given to different sections of the same street, but were still replacing an existing name, both occurrences were included separately in the first two categories of Table 1—this causes the number of commemorated names to be different from the total number of renamings as presented on Table 3. The renamings counted in the columns to the right (the ones indicating how many times the toponymy was changed) include renamings that occurred before 1988, but on toponymy that got renamed again in the 1988–2007 period. It is useful so to understand how contested some toponyms are. The toponyms that returned to old names do not include some famous names like Rustaveli or Vakhushti Bagrationi, but are mostly geographical and with minor national references, not following a particular pattern regarding their location or function of the commemorated aspect; they just seem to be what the name states, a geographical return to a previous denomination. Regarding the themes present on the new names of the toponyms, a subsection follows to explore them.

Renamings by theme

Jumping now to an analysis of the new imprinted names, we arrive at Table 2, where we can see a classification of the commemorated names according to the groupings mentioned in the methodology section.

Table 2. Commemorated people or concepts by theme and their percentage

Artists	Scientists	Historical Figures	Unknown	Religious	Geographical places	Sportsmen	Foreign people, concepts or places	Politicians	Concepts
69	47	42	19	17	16	13	13	7	7
27.6%	18.8%	16.8%	7.6%	6.8%	6.4%	5.2%	5.2%	2.8%	2.8%

Here some clarifications are needed. The concepts, first of all, do overlap sometimes, since it is possible for a foreign artist to be commemorated on a toponym, or a religiously relevant geographical place (for example, Jerusalem, which is also foreign). In this case, a decision was made to only include names in two categories when they are referring to foreign people, concepts, or places that already fall into other categories. This is done to make a better separation of the number of commemorated people on other categories, so for example, a medieval patriarch is included in the Religious category and not on the Historical figures one, according to which characteristic is more important or most salient. Another important note is that some names occur more than once in the namings, so they were only included once in the table. This makes it difficult to calculate a percentage of renamings that fall into a bigger group, like how many renamings commemorate certain people or concepts in absolute numbers; but we can have an idea of the proportion by just looking at the numbers and making general calculations.

The first inference we can make is the high number of local ethnic references, since the bulk of new names indicate Georgian people, places or related concepts, with an aforesaid number of at least 90%. Only 13 renamings refer to any kind of foreign people or place, and even then, some of them have relation to Georgia or at least the Caucasus. As can be seen, the most populated category refers to artists, who are praised for their contribution to cultural production and their representations of national symbols, sometimes even revered internationally, and thus is an important expression of a national, independent regime. The second-biggest category, scientists, also play an important part in a country's development, materially and culturally speaking. Since the category includes historians, philologists, and professors, it also represents certain people who help the country to understand itself and pass that knowledge forward, being an integral part of a national identity's development. Historical figures, the third category, are all about a representation of the past, an integral part of one's perception of her group and its characteristics. A few of the later renamings in this category refer to more recent developments too, since they refer to people killed in the civil war in Abkhazia, in the early 90s. The fourth category includes all naming which meaning couldn't be assessed, it is, people whose information couldn't be found anywhere. It probably means that they commemorate local people from the neighborhood or street itself, with no big national importance; they are only known in the said neighborhood. The next category, Religious representations, is deeply tied to the revival of ethnic Georgian expressions, since the Orthodox Church is very important in the country and is in direct opposition to the atheist Soviet state. Geographical places also mostly refer to cities, villages, or mountains in Georgia itself, with only a couple of foreign references. The sportsmen category is made entirely from Georgian players or competitors, and most of the Politicians too. The

concepts are tied to things deemed important for the Georgian culture, including "Freedom" (Square), "Artist" (Street), "Fighters for Georgia's Freedom" (Street), and "Rose Revolution" (Square). This category also groups important dates commemorated, like "26th of May" (Square), referring to Georgia's Independence Day.

Renamings by year

As aforesaid in previous sections, renamings as a political act against the Soviet regime in Georgia already started before the end of the Soviet Union, most probably connected to the movements of national liberation. Here, a subsection is in order to analyze the renamings per year thoroughly, with investigation of the patterns found and the commemorations, along with reflections on the findings. The number of renamings per year can be consulted in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Renamings according to year

Year	Number of renamings
1988	4
1989	5
1990	49
1991	17
1992	30
1993	12
1994	14
1995	21
1996	9
1997	6
1998	6
1999	17
2000	6
2001	8
2002	0
2003	18
2004	3
2005	6

2006	12
2007	8
Total number of renamings	252

It started with a shy number of four renamings in 1988, but they already carried a Georgian symbolism: Besides Lado Gudiashvili, as seen in the City Council Decrees section, other people commemorated on those renamings were Elene Akhvlediani and Davit Aghmashenebeli (David the Builder). Akhvlediani is revered as an important Georgian painter, and David the Builder (the medieval king) is one of the best-known Georgian figures of all time, both as a very successful ruler and as a religious character (Chelidze 2008: 277). 1989 had only one renaming more than the previous year, but they also carried symbolism: three of the renamings referred to important medieval Georgian kings (Tamar, Teimuraz, and Pharnavaz) and another one to Merab Kostava, one of the most important Georgian revolutionaries who died in the same year (Chelidze 2008: 298), his commemoration on a street name makes it probably the most significant of all other renamings done before 1991. Along with these figures, the first foreign name appears: Alexandre Dumas, a French writer who visited the Caucasus, including Georgia, probably the reason for the commemoration (Chelidze 2008: 280). Dumas' name also replaced Zheliabov, who was a Russian revolutionary, one of the organizers for Tsar Alexander II's assassination (Chelidze 2008: 318).

Then we come to the most prolific year of renamings of all: 1990, with no less than 49 names changed. While some of them were carried so to name previously unnamed streets and new sections of existing ones, the majority of the renamings took out distinctly Soviet names, such as Lenin, Marx, Herzen, Ordzhonikidze, Perovskaya and Volodarsky. They were replaced by Georgian people, which compose all of the anthroponyms of this year. More direct religious names also start to come up on the year, such as Anton Catholicos (a Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church), Transfiguration (of Christ), Bishop Gabriel, Ketevan the Martyr and Jerusalem (although being foreign, it is also important for the Orthodoxy). Geronti Kikodze, one of the members of the Constituent Assembly of the First Republic of Georgia, is commemorated in this year (Chelidze 2008: 336). It is also markedly the year when the main square of the city, Liberty Square, replaced Lenin Square, with an incredibly high symbolism. One medieval Georgian figure is present, too (Bagrat III). The next year, 1991, hosted way less renamings, 17. They were still following the trend to replace Soviet markers, though, and streets like "Communist Labor", "Tsiteltsqaro" (Red Spring), "Mogilevsky", and "Engels" were gone. Once again, predominantly Georgians names were brought back. "Dedoplistsqaro" (Queen's Spring) replaced Red Spring, since the name of the city commemorated also returned to that name (Chelidze 2008: 59), and Mogilevsky became Saint-Petersburg (before Mogilevsky, the street's name used to be Leningrad), a very political statement since it was also adhering to an old name of one of the most important cities in the late Soviet Union. Two medieval figures also appear (King Archil and Queen Tamar). A different kind of commemorated people (included in the Historical

categorization) appear: the ones who died in the 9th of April protests or were directly related to it. Eka Bezhanishvili is one of these, who was only 16 when she died, in 1989 (Chelidze 2008: 263).

In 1992 the first year after Georgia's Independence, the renamings raised in number, almost doubled, with 30 occurrences—it can be seen as a renewal in the effort now that the country was free to express its cultural elements without any fear of reprisal. Other Soviet names were erased, with this trend now consolidated definitely. Streets such as "26 (Baku) Commissars", "Pravda", "Paris Commune", "Collective Agriculture", "(Rosa) Luxembourg" and "Matrosov" disappeared, to give way to a myriad of ethnic Georgian names, such as Erekle II, a historical king from the 18th century (Chelidze 2008: 281). Particularly important is the naming of a square as 26th of May, the aforementioned Independence Day of Georgia, and the anniversary of the massacre at Rustaveli Avenue. In 1993, the number of renamings dropped again, to less than half of the previous year: only 12. Soviet commemorations were starting to become rare now, with only a few of them removed, like "Traktor", "Grizodubov" and "Lunacharsky". All of the replacements were Georgian anthroponyms. 1994 kept it around the same number, with 14 renamings, but this time only two Soviet commemorations were erased—"Komsomol" (Leninist Young Communist League) and "Kakhovka", the city in Ukraine, which itself is not a great symbol of the Soviet Union, but the commemoration of another Soviet city can be seen as an ideological act. Georgian anthroponyms were the majority, with a few geographical places (one religiously relevant, Jerusalem Square) and a medieval king (Peter the Iberian, from the historical Georgian Kingdom of Iberia). Spiridon Kidia, a prominent figure during the First Republic, is commemorated as well (Chelidze 2008: 294). Another unique kind of commemoration, under the Historical theme, appears, with Koka Kldiashvili, a young man who died during the war in Abkhazia (Chelidze 2008: 295). 1995 had a small spike in numbers, with 21 changes, taking out names like "Labor", "Deputies", "Pioneers", another "Lenin" and "Stakhanov". All the replacements, like 1993, were Georgian anthroponyms. One of them was Sergo Ksovreli, who died in the Abkhazian war in 1993 (Chelidze 2008: 337); other was Gia (Giorgi) Chanturia, who along with Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava, was a prominent figure of the national movement, leader of the National Democratic Party (Chelidze 2008: 352).

The year 1996 saw the beginning of a decline in the renaming process, as the Soviet commemorations were becoming more and more scarce. Only nine streets were renamed that year, and only one of the renamings carries the former regime's ideology: "Leninasheni". All the replacements are Georgian anthroponyms once again. Rostom Muskhelishvili is one of them—he was a colonel, Chief of Military Intelligence during the First Republic (Chelidze 2008: 308). 1997 dropped even more, with only six instances, with two of the replaced ones being heroes of the Soviet Union, "Shirshov" and "Voronin" (Chelidze 2008: 285). All the names that replaced the previous ones were of Georgian people in this year, too. In 1998, once again six toponyms were replaced; only one Soviet commemoration, however, "Budapest", which referred to a fellow Socialist country's capital, at the time. The only non-Georgian name to figure in the new commemorations was Hermann Gmeiner, a famous Austrian philanthropist (Chelidze 2008: 270). In 1999 a sudden spike on the renaming activity happened, with 17 instances. Nevertheless, it only

got rid of three Soviet names, "Pisarev", one of the authors who influenced Lenin (Chelidze 2008: 316), "Gagarin", the famed first man to go to space under the Soviet Union and worldwide (Chelidze 2008: 268), and "Kurnatovsky", a revolutionary (Chelidze 2008: 298). One of the names of those years, which replaced a previously unnamed street, was "Fighters for Georgia's Unity", a very ethnically and politically Georgian name, very expressive of the national discourse. As expected, the other names are Georgian anthroponyms.

On the turning of the millennium, 2000, the practice decreased again, to six replacements. Two distinct Soviet names were put out, "Tchernichevski" (a revolutionary writer who influenced Lenin) (Chelidze 2008: 343) and "Kaludin", a famous revolutionary worker, and a symbol of labor (Chelidze 2008: 293). The totality of new names amounts to all of them being Georgians again. 2001 saw only two more streets than the previous year, eight, but with only one Soviet toponymy replaced, once again a street name commemorating Gagarin. The only name which is not a Georgian anthroponym is Ochamchire, a city on the coast of Abkhazia (Chelidze 2008: 138). In 2002, for unknown reasons, there are no renamings registered. They were revived in 2003, with a good increase in numbers—18 renamings, out of which only one Soviet commemoration was erased: "Kerch", the strait in the Black Sea, where many Soviet Georgians fought and died in combat during World War II (Chelidze 2008: 178). The majority of the names put in the toponyms were Georgian people, apart from "Artist" Street, rather a concept. Four of them were naming previously unnamed parts of existing streets, including "Artist" Street. Zurab Abuladze, one the commemorated people, was a young man killed during the war in Abkhazia (Chelidze 2008: 251); another street was named "Student Heroes" (Gmiri Kursantebi), a reference to the students of the police academy who died in Abkhazia (Chelidze 2008: 46). In 2004, only three renamings were carried, but one of them is quite relevant: it replaced Stalin Embankment by Zviad Gamsakhurdia Embankment, figuring the first president of Georgia for the first time and removing the most infamous Georgian of the Soviet Union from the toponymy. It was part of Saakashvili's anti-Russian, self-affirmation drive (de Waal 2010: 135, cited in Isaacs & Polese 2016: 32). Likely, removing Stalin's name from the embankment took so long because he was still revered by a good number of people and still is to this day, as evidenced very strongly by the street named after him in Gori, his hometown, and his museum there (Asatiani 2007, cited in Isaacs & Polese 2016: 31, 38). Another renaming put the name of Anatoly Sobchak on the commemorations; he was a prominent figure in the Soviet Union and demanded that the responsible people for the 9th of April massacre to be punished (Chelidze 2008: 324). Yet one more important name is Noe Zhordania, who had an important role in the socialist movement in the Russian Empire, becoming the prime minister of the First Republic. He is the only declared Georgian Menshevik to be commemorated in the post-Soviet renamings (Chelidze 2008: 318). Only a bit more renamings were carried in 2005, six, and only one was replacing a Soviet element, "Atarbegov", a member of the Cheka at the time of the Soviet Occupation of Georgia. Notably, new streets were named George Bush (the American president at the time, named after he visited Georgia) (Chelidze 2008: 264), Rose Revolution Square, commemorating the recent developments in the country, and Europe Square, showing Saakashvili's Western orientation very clearly. Another one was

renamed after Zurab Zhvania, the only Prime Minister of Georgia who died while in office, in 2005 (Chelidze 2008: 318).

In the penultimate year included in this research, 2006, there were 12 renamings. Three of them replaced streets bearing the same name, all of them after Gagarin, like in previous years; and all but three of the new names weren't Georgian, namely, Picasso (the Spanish painter), King Solomon (the biblical figure) and Peking (the Chinese capital, also known as Beijing). One of the new names was after Natia Bashaleishvili, another 16-year-old protester who got killed in the 9th of April events (Chelidze 2008: 263). Another was Kote Apkhazi, a General-major of Artillery during the First Republic (Chelidze 2008: 259). One more figure from the First Republic commemorated on the year is Giorgi Kvinitadze, the commander-in-chief of the army (Chelidze 2008: 295). An interesting name with a contested past commemorated in 2006 is Meliton Kantaria—he is the junior sergeant who (along with M. Egorov) raised the flag over the Reichstag in 1945, but his name was still chosen to be inscribed in the toponymy. It was part of Saakashvili's "nationalization" of Georgian war heroes, detaching the "Georgianness" from the "Sovietness". Later, in 2011, Saakashvili named a school after him as well, lamenting that "Kantaria is the most classical example of the tragic fortune of our country" (president.gov.ge 2011e, cited in Isaacs & Polese 2016: 31) because he was a Georgian living in Abkhazia and ended up his life as a refugee; in fact, Kantaria was expelled from Abkhazia and even found refuge in Russia, making Saakashvili's act a selective appropriation and manipulation of history, confirming his narrative of Georgian victimhood and stressing its resilience (Isaacs & Polese 2016: 31). In the last year, 2007, eight renamings figured, and again, two Soviet names stand out for how long it took for them to be removed from the toponymy; Stalin and Red Army Street. All but one name is not Georgian on the new names, Heidar Aliyev, Azerbaijan's former president, who was one of the most important post-Soviet figures in the country (Chelidze 2008: 254). It is probably a representation of the friendship between the two post-Soviet Republics, but also a commemoration of the liberation of the Soviet times since Aliyev was an important figure on the consolidation of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

From this set of information about the years and their commemorations, we can draw some conclusions. As made clear in other sections and reinforced here, the renaming process echoed the political events in Georgia. Starting slowly with an oppositional movement, it grew to become a big mobilization, as made apparent by the renamings carried in 1990. A decrease during the year of Independence is probably due to the political turmoil that took the country by assault. Even though it contributes to political freedom, which lets the process carry on without censorship, the abrupt change on the power structure is traumatic and the City Council must have had other priorities. As with other projects of nationalistic revival, it kept steadily going, and even if decreased in number, renamings were constant and most of the time substituting the previous regime's ideology. And when not doing so, still reinforcing cultural, ethnic, and nationalistic elements, as evidenced by the fact that the bulk of new names commemorated Georgian people. Odd years, like the renamingless 2002, are an exception, and it will only be possible to know whether the process of renaming stalled after 2007 if we get a grip of

a new, updated set of data. Now, a more geographical kind of analysis will be carried in the next part.

Renamings by district

In this ensuing subsection, we'll take a look at the spatial distribution of the renaming process, dividing it by district and year. A compilation of this data can be seen in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Renamings by district and year

		District					
		Didube-Chughureti	Gldani-Nadzaladevi	Isani-Samgori	Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi	Old Tbilisi	Vake-Saburtalo
Renaming Year	1988	1	0	1	0	2	0
	1989	0	0	0	0	3	2
	1990	7	7	4	0	26	6
	1991	1	3	1	0	10	2
	1992	3	3	3	0	13	8
	1993	0	3	1	0	2	6
	1994	1	1	4	0	2	6
	1995	1	8	4	0	3	5
	1996	0	2	1	0	5	1
	1997	3	1	2	0	0	0
	1998	0	0	0	0	2	4
	1999	2	3	3	1	3	5
	2000	0	2	0	0	4	0
	2001	0	1	1	0	2	4
	2002	0	0	0	0	0	0
	2003	0	2	6	0	2	8
	2004	0	0	0	0	1	1
	2005	1	0	2	0	2	1
	2006	2	0	1	0	2	7
	2007	1	1	1	0	1	4
Total renamings by district		23	37	35	1	85	70

The district which bears the highest number of toponyms renamed is Old Tbilisi, with 85 names being replaced there. The high concentration on the district certainly has to do with its historical significance, as made obvious by its name. It is very symbolic that the oldest neighborhood in town sees the majority of the new names, almost all Georgian, put there. There also seems to be a deliberate effort to rename streets in the Vake-Saburtalo area. Both districts combine to form the famed part west of river Kura, where many universities are located, as well as a lot of bars and hotels and where the more economically active population lives; they were home to the "red intelligentsia" and the Communist Party nomenklatura (Jones 2013). One of the lines of the Tbilisi metro covers the most extension of Saburtalo and is named after the district. As for the other districts, they keep a constant number of renamings through the years and in total, so there does

not seem to be a concerted effort to rename them. They are located in more peripheral areas of the city. The one exception is Mtatsminda-Krtsanisi, which recorded only one renaming, done in 1999. Though it is not known why the district received so little attention in the process, one possibility is that it felt victim to geographical disagreements. The National Archive's list only includes one street in the district, but if we consult the City Council Decrees, one of them places several renamed streets in Mtatsminda in a decree from 1990, which would put more commemorations on the neighborhood. This research is not a place to dwell into demarcation of districts in Tbilisi, and since the National Archive's list is the most comprehensive record of renamings done systematically, preference has been given to this source.

4. Conclusions

In the past 200 years, Georgia has only been an Independent Nation for 31 of them, having only a few decades in hand to assert its sovereignty in recent times. Marks of past regimes can still be seen in its cities, and particularly in the capital; most of them are from the Soviet period, the most recent former regime to assert its power in it. Along with the national liberation movement, the revamping of the cityscape of Tbilisi carried on with a process of commemorating elements associated with the rich Georgian history, running in an opposite direction from the Soviet ideological imprinting; Bodaveli (2015: 177) comments that more than 90% of their place namings were anthroponyms, with an almost total absence of Georgian historical people and events—while the post-Soviet Republic filled the capital with more than 90% of anthroponyms, almost all of them referring to Georgians, historical, religious, and cultural figures altogether, as evidenced by this research. It is paradoxical, however, that the Soviet nationality and development policies ended up incentivizing the "Georgianisation" of the capital (in detriment to other nationalities) and fueling the national discourse. While the Soviets only left Tbilisi with cultural aspects of identity, the Independent Republic revived national, religious, and ethnic aspects to the cityscape. Analyzing the data brought into this research shows clearly that the renamings intended to make the city a portrait of a homogenous Georgia, an assertion of a regained sovereignty over totalizing efforts. Branding memory in a place requires choosing elements from a real or even imagined past, and such choice was made—the capital, once famous for its diverse and cosmopolitan culture, now is more Georgian than ever. The Armenians and Azeris, once teeming in population and influence, were gone, and the toponymy is not the place where they are remembered. A lack of the own city's past is evident, when it comes to the representation of the city culture and the participation of others in the urban space.

This research intended to unveil the process of inscribing the geopolitical landscape of the post-Soviet Tbilisi and its intentions—and what has been found is that the function of the capital turned a lot more to the commemoration of national figures and aspects, mostly disregarding local figures and the urban identity, with only a few foreign mentions. The city shows only shy signs of its diverse past, mostly in derivative names of old neighborhoods and metro stations, a few survivors from the Russian imperial rule. A nationalistic discourse is the rule when it comes to toponymy now, not only

downplaying the Menshevik nature of the First Republic, but also ignoring national minorities and a broader, shared Transcaucasian history—the city now displays broader national themes instead of a particular city history and culture. The cityscape reflects the politics of Gamsakhurdia and Saakashvili, most of all, in their effort to consolidate Georgia as a united, homogenous country and solidify this claim by etching it in shared, public elements. From 1988 to 2007, old names were returned or undesired names were renamed so to achieve such objectives (with a particular vigor on the first years of the free republic), and although no specific patterns were perceived, the commemorations were mostly after famous Georgian people and, after the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, "martyrs" of the civil conflict. One thing that can be said for sure is that the naming process is consonant with the Georgian national narrative, adapting throughout the years to major political events and ideological changes, has been shown by the analysis of the data presented in this research. The public memory inscribed in the cityscape draws from history, but a specific and detached part of Georgian history, carefully sewn together so to reinforce the territorial and cultural claim.

The selective nature of the process, picking only the intended historical aspects in the memorial commemoration, is very clear. It is not only evident through the names, aspects, and events chosen but also the ones not chosen, and the ones which choice is deliberately oriented. There are important people from the First Republic present on the renamings, such as Noe Zhordania, and these commemorations, along with important dates from the time, are primarily concerned with bringing about the first democratic expression of power from the Georgian nation; it glosses over the Socialist, Menshevik nature of the First Republic, though, in a desire to forget everything related to the Soviet Union, even if sharing a few ideological traits. All other commemorated aspects from the First Republic were not party leaders or relevant participants, except for Zhordania, certainly only because he became president—a perfect example of the selectiveness of the process. These contested elements of the commemorative process express the troubles of Georgian people in dealing with the conflicting past they have—"toponymy with contested pasts", clearly seen in Zhordania's case and in other instances like the aforementioned commemoration of Meliton Kantaria, where the appropriation of the Georgian character of the historical figure is done while stripping him of his "Sovietness". This is all part of what Assman calls cultural memory, the cultivation of which stabilizes and forms a society's self-image; and according to Bucher et al. (2013), it is an indivisible part of the formation of group identity, in what is called social memory. Whatever memorialization concept we choose to apply, what is been looking at in this work is the expression of a shared history and culture in the toponymy, filtered by institutions and for the sake of a particular national discourse.

As we can see, a predominantly Georgian presence in the population and the naming of Tbilisi is a very recent thing—only the past few decades have seen it. With its regained sovereignty, the Republic of Georgia is now tasting a full-blown commemoration of its culture, its heroes and martyrs, its religion, and its history. The etching of its national elements in the capital serves a reminder of these very elements so that the population gets reminded every day of who they are, which history they are intended to share and which fellow countrymen they can look up to in the journey to contribute themselves to

the Georgian Nation's progress. In retrospect, nevertheless, this stressing eliminates the signs of a shared past with other Caucasian peoples, and even if not completely intentionally, erases their participation in an essential era of the city's development. There is no evidence that the reason for such disregard of the foreign influence on Tbilisi's history should be other than simply the reinforcement of the national, homogenous Georgian discourse. For instance, in discourses like Gamsakhurdia's, one can see nationalistic ideas that downplay the significance of national minorities, like Abkhazians and Svans, in favor of a uniquely Georgian nation; doing the same with other nationalities is just the next step. There are no xenophobic connotations to this lack of foreign representation, historical or not, but it would be interesting to analyze the impact this has on the population—whether they are aware of such shared past, what their opinion on the nations in question is, and other related questions. While we know that in their overall national discourse Armenians and Azeris also downplay the participation of others in their historical journey, it would be interesting to conduct similar research in their capitals to see how their discourse deal with commemorations of the past—they may be just like Tbilisi, or maybe not. Identifying such tendencies in blooming nationalistic revivals (or even births) like the post-Soviet ones might show us interesting things about political processes as a whole.

The influence of the renamings on the people, however, is the subject of other researches, probably through interviews. The present work's intention was not only to show how the independent Georgian regime has reinforced its narrative on the cityscape but also to bring data and knowledge to the international academic world and audience, so that more people can access and produce such kinds of work, letting us better understand how political and historical processes are carried and how they cope with it. I do not claim that this research has brought all the knowledge on the renaming process even on the period here discussed—many of the streets present in the City Council decrees lack information, especially on the year of renaming. Perhaps in the future more sources (especially archival ones) will be found, more accurate and complete, and the understanding of the process will be even bigger. Further studies could also try to correlate Soviet policies with the process of renaming and building of the national identity (like the indigenization policy), and apply the same analysis to other Caucasian republics. This serves as an invitation for more research and memory work to be done and new conclusions be made from the data presented here and eventually other data, sharing the rich Caucasian history which we have still much to know about.

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