

## **The Formation and the Legacy of the Mtatsminda Pantheon as a Site of Memory**

In 2009, information started to circulate around Tbilisi about the closure of the old Mtatsminda Pantheon (MP from now on) and the opening of a new one near the Trinity Church. Tbilisi City Hall announced that there was no more space at the old Pantheon and that consultations about the creation of a new one were ongoing with the Patriarch of Georgia. In October of 2009, Mamuka Akhvlediani (Itv.ge, 2009), the vice-mayor of Tbilisi declared that: “a new place has to be selected, where a church can be erected and public funerals can be held. It is important to build the new pantheon at an especially good location, accessible for society and approved by society” (my translation. All subsequent translations are also mine). Despite the official closure of the old MP, in 2010, the City Hall made an exception and another recently deceased writer (Mukhran Machavariani) was buried at Mtatsminda. Additionally, in 2013, the newly elected government decided to reopen the MP for another writer (Chabua Amirejibi). This last case, as well as the initial closure of the old pantheon, caused some controversy. In the media coverage of the time there were questions about the appropriateness of such decisions, as well as a demand for a systematic approach to the question of who is qualified to be honored with a space at the MP, mixed with the occasional criticism for not taking up the suggestion of Catholicos-Patriarch, Ilia II, to open a new pantheon within the territory of the Trinity Church.

An instance undoubtedly attractive to any scholar working in the field of memory studies, the case of MP raises several questions: who are the decision makers who define the fate of this particular site of memory? What kind of cultural memory is produced at this site? And, what is at stake in defining the Pantheon either as a secular place of commemoration or a sacred one?

### *Conceptual framework*

First defined by Pierre Nora, the sites of memory are created as a result of the interaction between history and memory. The main function of such sites consists in stopping time, materializing the immaterial, and combating the process of forgetting (Nora, 1989). A site of memory can be any place where people seek meaning in history or connect their family stories

with some national or global idea. Brought into being to serve the nation-states, most of the time, such sites were ideologically charged and were 'far from being neutral or free of value judgments'(Nora, 2008, p.21). Unlike history (which was transformed into an intellectually objective social science), subjectivity and selective vision make up the major characteristics of memory. As Nora puts it: 'memory is blind to all but the group it binds' (1989, p.9).

In the modern age, France has originated the institution of secular Pantheons. In an attempt to establish a public/civic ritual, distinct from the Catholic Church, French revolutionaries transformed the church of Sainte-Genevieve into a secular Pantheon (Langlois, 1996). After the burial of Voltaire, the Pantheon or the "Grateful Homeland" was ready to receive and honor the "Great Men" of the country (*Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante*). However, the question is whether different groups can reach a consensus in representing history or as Jay Winter (2008, p.64) puts it, "there is always a chorus of voices in commemorations, some are louder than others, but they never sound alone". Pierre Nora, meanwhile, points out the struggle for representing history in this way:

Not even Paris was exempt from this battle of symbolic architectures. For more than a century the two sides fought over Soufflot's neoclassical edifice: Was it a church or a pantheon? The issue was finally decided by the death of Victor Hugo (1885), which came at the right moment to weigh definitively in favor of the latter choice, today's Pantheon (Langlois, 1996, p. 125).

What Nora hints at here, and what Jay Winter confirms (2008, p.63), is that commemorated dates or events are related to the establishment of a new regime or the rejection of an older one. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called "invention of tradition" was widespread for the European nation states (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This practice resulted in the creation of new commemoration dates and ceremonial activities. It is interesting that in an attempt to design "how to remember" a traumatic or glorious event, details from mythology or folklore could fill the gaps or embellish the new narrative (Huyssen, 2003). The fact that these attempts to design ways to remember, which are later turned into narratives provide a perfect reason to study such sites of memories as the manifestation of such narratives in space. The most common and efficient way to produce a particular public memory is via interventions in urban space and as per Huyssen:

This is only natural, because cities remain the main battleground on which societies articulate their sense of time past and time present [...]. Cities, after all, are a palimpsest of history, incarnations of time in stone, sites of memory extending both in time and space (2003, p.101).

I would consider the case of the Tbilisi MP as microcosm of the urban palimpsest of history described by Huyssen. However, in my analysis of the MP I will primarily lean on Jay Winter's tripartite classification of the stages in which sites of memory exist and develop.

Such sites of memory are topoi with a life history. They have an initial creative phase, when they are constructed or adapted to particular commemorative purposes. Then follows a period of institutionalization and routinization of their use. Such markings of the calendar, indicating moments of remembrance at particular places, can last for decades, or they can be abruptly halted. In most instances, the significance of sites of memories fades away with the passing of the social groups, which initiated the practice (Winter, 2008, p.61).

The first part of the paper will deal with the creation of the site itself by examining questions like: who were the social groups that initiated the creation and/or transformation of ordinary cemeteries into Pantheons, and how did the MP manage to acquire supreme status among other Pantheons. Second, the institutionalization process will be explored in detail according to the narratives produced by a series of commemorative publications about the MP. Specifically, five Soviet editions about the Mtatsminda Pantheon will be examined. Finally, the decomposition or the possible transformation of the site will be discussed along with the legacy that might survive the decomposition stage through an appropriation of the legacy of the MP by the Orthodox Church of Georgia. I will argue that, by transferring the cultural production of the space of the national pantheon into its sacral sphere, the Georgian Orthodox Church is posed to transform and appropriate the legacy of the MP, thereby gaining the power to represent Georgian national memory.

### *The Creation Stage*

Placing the creation of the MP in the historical context of the culture of Pantheons in Georgia allows us to see the MP not as a singular instance of spatialized memory but as consequence of larger historical and cultural forces.

Today, there are three Pantheons in Tbilisi under the City Hall's supervision: "Mtatsminda", "Didube" and the Armenian "Khojivank."

The earliest attempt to create a Pantheon in Tbilisi was the Pantheon of Kukia. The Dramaturgical Society of Georgia began work on a Pantheon to honor its artists as early as 1900, which had all but disappeared by 1950's. For example, in 1950, the Bolshevik revolutionary, Ioseb Imedashvili, wrote a letter<sup>1</sup> to two Soviet institutions of theater administration in order to inform them about the state of a statue at the grave of one of the first Georgian theater actresses, Nato Gabunia-Tsagareli. The author expresses concern about the devastating state of this particular sculpture as well as the disappearance of other tombs at St. Nino's cemetery, which he refers to as the Pantheon. According to him, only half of the sculpture was left and inscriptions were no longer visible. It became clear, that the author's previous attempt 10-15 years ago to attract government's attention to the same issue was left without response. Among the different arguments that Ioseb Imedashvili raises in order to gain the government's attention, we also find appeals to respect, honor, and the necessity to save the tombs of the founders of the national theatre for future generations.<sup>2</sup> The fact that a local community initiated the establishment of a Pantheon indicates the degree to which Georgian communities self-organized their own cultural life independent of any power structures, which would become much more involved in the cultural process of commemoration with the ascension of the MP. For example, in 1910, a local newspaper, "Sakme", would feature a message from the Dramaturgical Society, asking for donations for the deceased artist Nato Gabunia-Tsagareli fund (News, 1910), most probably for the installation of a sculpture at her tomb. Such public donations were a common practice in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgia. Educated people, who were a part of the nationalization wave, took active part in organizing different communities and producing the so-called "work of the enlightenment". The mourning woman at Kukia Pantheon was not the first and only memorial sculpture in Georgia, it was only the first sculpture placed in the so-called Pantheons (in 1911). Exactly one year after Ioseb Imedashvili's letter, another report (Archival material №2) was written, which informs us that there is no more trace of the sculpture to be found at the Kukia Pantheon. Additionally, Imedashvili's request to at least enclose the territory with a fence was also ignored. Finally, the Kukia Pantheon simply vanished (both literally and in the national memory of Georgia) without ever turning into a functional place of commemoration.

Although Kukia was the earliest attempt at creating a pantheon, the Dramaturgical Society was not the only one to organize such sites of memory in Tbilisi. More successful than the theatrical community, the "Society for

the Spreading of Literacy Among Georgians”[SSLAG from now on] managed to establish a relatively long lasting Pantheon (The Didube Pantheon) in 1915<sup>3</sup>. Nowadays perceived as a “second rung” Pantheon, the well-documented creation process of the Didube Pantheon site gives us a rare insight into the “reawakening” process of the Georgian nation state (Archival material №3). A closer look at the SSLAG community reports illustrates that Georgian intellectuals were eager to take part in the already mentioned European practice of “inventing tradition”. Several passages from a SSLAG council meeting reports reveal an explicit aim to locate local, Georgian, commemoration practices as within the parameters of European civilization. “The community to which we belong, today commemorates and mourns thousands of deceased heroes of the battlefield [...] but the vigorous agency of a people, which hopes to occupy a respectful place in international history should remain burning” (Archival material №3).

What follows this explicitly stated ambition to be a part of international history and to belong to a civilization where commemorative culture exists, is a contrived historical explanation, which makes this declaration coherent. Selectively shaping a brief outline from the country’s past, the authors recall the golden age of Georgian history. A time when the Christian Georgian state introduced the cult of worshipping heroes: “Similar to Athens, Georgia worshiped its heroes, building temples for their commemoration, and reflecting them in decorated frescos” (Archival material №3). Such a view of history also accounts for the centuries when commemoration culture did not flourish in Georgia. The reason cited in the SSLAG report is the misfortune attributed to the constant foreign invasions throughout Georgian history. Despite the devastating period in the history of Georgia, the authors believe that the practice of commemoration did not simply vanish but was given another form, mainly a verbal one, morphing into oral transmission. Once such a historical narrative of commemorative culture was traced, it was only logical to urge “newly enlightened” Georgia towards “re-adapting” and modernizing its ancient commemorative practices:

Nowadays, Georgia, which is on its way to enlightenment and, which is gradually absorbing new culture, has to defend its fabulous historical heritage, which includes the public worship of heroes. However, to the mystical character of this cult we should give such an external form, which will turn it into an outstanding educational tool for younger generations, along with the protection of religious aims[...] In order to celebrate the different epochs of our people, this form is his-

torically expressed not only by means of monuments, but in artistically decorated Pantheons as well... (Archival material №3, p.23).

In considering the above sentiment about the connection of Georgian commemorative culture and European tradition, it is important to note that sculpture as such has never been a part of Georgian art culture. Preference was typically given to icons and frescos due to the cultural dominance of the Orthodox Church. It was only under the Russian empire that the first public monuments started to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But, the general absence of a strong secular commemorative tradition, despite the Russian influence, is precisely the condition, which enabled the writers of the SSLAG report to envision the erection of sculptures at the tombs of prominent Georgian figures as a symbolic act of union with European space. Moreover, the writers of the SSLAG report mention, several times, the educational function of a pantheon, which indicates that the community was well aware of the role of memory in the process of identity formation. The idea of honoring “Great Men” had a concrete function, which was to unite future generations around those role models who were significant contributors in the nation building process.

Georgians! Do not deviate from the noble road of our ancestors; let's get united with a common feeling to honor the names of our brothers, who shed blood for our motherland. Let's erect monuments, which will remind our children that contemporary citizens appreciate their brother's contributions and that they will build a prosperous future based on their valor (Archival material №5).

We can at times observe an existing dualism regarding Georgian Statehood within conceptions of Georgian nationalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is essential to note that the notion of contributing to the “motherland” in this period did not contradict the idea of living under the Russian empire. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many political or cultural leaders<sup>4</sup> would strive for the prosperity of Georgia within a reformed and more democratic Russia, without necessarily considering the idea of an independent, sovereign Georgia. For example, the same report by the SSLAG articulates a desire for reforms in “our motherland,” which it claims are eagerly anticipated by “Russia” (Archival material №3).

Despite the dualism inherent in the idea of a Georgian nationalism within the parameters of the Russian state, if we examine the question of exactly who were supposed to be honored as “brothers” in the commemora-

tive narrative, it supports the case for the building of an independent nation. These “brothers” were described as people who acquired eternal respect and grace from the future generations by sacrificing themselves and their talent for the public good. One of the reports, dating from 1915, begins by classifying the recent passing of several persons as a terrible loss for the country. The list is mostly composed of Georgian intellectuals, the so-called “Tergdaleulebi”, who contributed to the cultural, economic, and political development of the country<sup>5</sup>. However, they were not the only ones to be commemorated. The SSLAG community highlights the heavy loss of Georgian warriors, fighting side by side with soldiers from other countries during World War I (Archival Material №5, p.45). As a result, we can see the delineation of two groups that can justify the arguments for the necessity of a site of memory like the Pantheon. On the one hand, the establishment of local “role models” was something that served the “motherland”, while the case of the warriors had a more global aspect. It was an international cause (with an international actor – the Russian empire), which the Russian government could not refuse. It would be a mistake to consider the dual understanding of “motherland” as an obstacle in the nation building process. Despite the fact that the production of Georgian nationalism was enclosed only in the frame of cultural and political boundaries of the Russian empire, it still provided a basic foundation for future claims on sovereignty.

After the Soviet occupation in 1921, cultural production was totally under the control of the Bolshevik party. Although, Lenin’s plan of commemorative propaganda existed to “honor the memory of the great revolutionaries, the men of science, art, and literature, through monuments, paintings and statues” (Voyce, 1956), it was not until the 1930’s that communists got interested in the Pantheons of Tbilisi. This is exactly the time when the Soviet Union declares itself as the inheritor of all of humankind’s traditions, while turning its gaze toward the past in order to integrate national forms into socialist content.

In 1929, the Soviet government decided to establish a new Pantheon on the basis of a former cemetery near the Mtatsminda Church. The opening of the Pantheon was dedicated to the 100 year anniversary of the Russian writer, Alexander Griboyedov, who was buried at Mtatsminda (in 1829) next to his Georgian wife, Nino Chavchavadze. The tomb of Griboyedov was not an ordinary one. In 1834, Nino Chavchavadze managed to erect a sculpture of a mourning woman in the sanctum of her husband’s grave. Sculpted by an Italian artist, Campioni, the sculpture was a typical piece of work for European cemeteries of that time<sup>6</sup>. However, by the time the Soviets decided to convert the cemetery into a Pantheon, Griboyedov was not the only popu-

lar figure with a commemorative site at Mtatsminda. Mtatsminda was also home to the grave of the Georgian writer, Ilia Chavchavadze. Often referred to as the founder of the Georgian nation, he was honored with a unique monument at his grave. Before the creation of the Didube Pantheon, the SSLAG community put years and resources (from 1907 until 1913) into installing Chavchavadze's monument at the Mtatsminda cemetery<sup>7</sup>. The decision to dedicate the opening ceremony to Griboyedov and not to the "founder of the Georgian nation" is an important detail, which was mostly seen as a symbolic manifestation of Russo-Georgian friendship,<sup>8</sup> which presumably could not have been highlighted with a dedication to Chavchavadze.

A closer look at the SSLAG materials (Archival material №7) documenting the creation of the Chavchavadze monument reveals the national importance that was attributed to this particular site. The community declared the importance of supporting Georgian artists and works of arts<sup>9</sup>. The Georgian sculptor, Iakob Nikoladze, was ready to leave Paris, as well as his job and offers from A. Rodin in order to honor Chavchavadze with his work. Moreover, there was a demand from the SSLAG council to add ornamentations of a national character to the sculpture. Quality was checked several times with the personal initiative of Ivane Javakhishvili through international cooperation with scholars from Petersburg University (Archival material №8). Donations were collected for several years in order to commemorate Chavchavadze, who was also the founder of the SSLAG community (Archival material №9). The result of this work was a symbolically national commemorative sculptural composition at Chavchavadze's grave, to which Akaki Tseretseli referred as "the mourning of conscious Georgians" (Kandelaki, 1955).

Under the Soviet rule, in the 1930's, the Didube Pantheon was nearly abolished<sup>10</sup>. In 1934, an order was issued to remove unknown or unimportant tombs from the Mtatsminda cemetery (Archival material №10), while transferring some<sup>11</sup> distinguished figures from Didube to MP. This reorganization marked the rise of MP as well as the end of the Didube's status as the top Georgian Pantheon. Furthermore, Soviet books about Georgian pantheons refrain from noting the contribution of the SSLAG community in the creation of the Didube Pantheon and Chavchavadze's memorial. Moreover, the practice of removing tombs did not end with the establishment of the Soviet Pantheon. Simon Jugeli, a prominent Bolshevik revolutionary who was buried at Mtatsminda in 1935, was removed in two years time as "an enemy of the people" on the orders of Lavrenti Beria. In 1937, the administration of the MP adopted regulations, where it was clearly defined that the decision-making council running the MP should mainly consist of government offi-



cials, party members and Georgian scholars (Archival material № 12). With the help of a totalitarian system, it did not take much time to accumulate funding and organize the management in order to create the impression of the MP as the most desirable place of rest for any citizen of Soviet Georgia; an impression, which persists to this day amongst contemporary Georgians.

### *The Institutionalization Process of the Mtatsminda Pantheon*

Communists did not spare the effort to mark historical and revolutionary places in Georgia, publishing numerous guides for tourists and different kinds of catalogues for propaganda purposes. They also erected numerous obelisks and placed memorial plates for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Georgia's integration into the Soviet state. Along with beautiful nature, tourists were encouraged to visit historical places, which were considered important by the party. Print media would explore hundreds of sites of memories and tell short stories related to each place. For example, among the 116 places of historical importance that were explored in "Historical-Revolutionary Places of Georgia", most were related to conspiracy apartments, public places, and railway and factory buildings. These were mostly places, where illegal publishing devices were hidden, conferences and revolutionary meeting were held and some leading Bolsheviks were hiding. Public places were commemorated based on what happened there, like demonstrations, rebellions or revolutionary combat against Tsarist occupants, Mensheviks and foreign interventionists. The intention of such editions was to describe events in a way as to create the impression that all of Georgian society was involved in the revolutionary protest against the oppressive government of the Russian empire from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 1921.

Despite the above-mentioned propaganda, and the fact that communists were keenly aware of the importance of representing history and creating Soviet heroes, public commemoration did not flourish the way it did in non-totalitarian states. As Jay Winter (2008) points out, an interaction of private and public spheres is essential to promote a commemorative practice. People commemorate events when personal and national histories overlaps. If family memories do not manage to find a place in global or local historical events, commemoration will never turn into a ritual inscribed in family life.

Public commemoration flourishes within the orbit of civil society. This is not true in countries where dictatorships rule, Stalinist Russia smashed civil society to a point that it could not sustain commemora-

tive activity independent of the party and the state. But elsewhere, local associations matter. And so do families (Winter 2008, p.72).

The search for Soviet institutionalization of sites of memories has to be found somewhere outside the commemorative family ritual. Most of the described obelisks or memorial plates did not encourage people to commemorate them, because they were state sponsored sites and were not necessarily inscribed in personal or communal experiences. The same can be said about MP, excepting the direct relations of the prominent figures buried there. However, Mtatsminda emerged as a place where the role models of Soviet Georgian society were gathered. A final resting place for the *Great Men* whose biographies cannot be questioned. Just how the communists managed to achieve a homogeneously positive attitude toward such diverse range of people (19<sup>th</sup> century figures, Bolshevik revolutionists and Soviet scholars) we can see in the Soviet editions about the MP. From the early stages, the administration of the MP inscribed in its regulations a mandate to release catalogues containing short biographies of those honored in the pantheon (Archival material №12, p.3). Such editions paint a clear picture of the way certain political or cultural groups were trying to adapt certain biographies to the dominant Soviet narratives.

Five Soviet books about the MP (Kandelaki, 1955; Enakolopashvili, 1958; Basilashvili, 1968; Chorgolashvili, 1979; Tkeshelashvili, 1980) should be classified as media prints which use relatively few modalizing elements. While in academic writing avoiding categorical modality is a fundamental principle, media, on the contrary, tend to offer categorical images, headlines and perspectives. According to Norman Fairclough: "Newspapers tend to offer sometimes contending (though often harmonizing) versions of the truth, each of which is based upon the implicit and indefensible claim that events can be transparently and categorically represented, and perspective can be universalized". The same can be said about these editions, which present short biographies with a certain absolutist narrative manner. Especially, when things are made explicit or left vague according to the political and ideological agenda.

Each edition displays a different list of Mtatsminda occupants. Just as the number of Mtatsminda occupants change across generations, (from 21 to 35, in the latest edition) the criteria for being honored with a burial at the MP also change in the years between 1955 and 1980. Most of the editions share the same structure: an introduction about the origins of Mtatsminda Church territory itself, followed by mostly identical short biographies with portraits. In the introduction, they mainly focus on the origins of the church,

its founder Father David, the state of the territory before the Soviet rule, and the list of prominent Russian writers who visited Mtatsminda or specifically Griboyedov's grave. However, the oldest edition (1955) offers a unique introduction in relation to the successive books about the MP. The author presents several arguments in favor of classifying Mtatsminda as a Bolshevik, historical-revolutionary site. He introduces the fact that among the illegal groups that Stalin was organizing, two conspiratorial reunion apartments were located down the slope of Mtatsminda hill. One conspiratorial apartment belonged to a student (Misha Davitashvili) from the Theological Seminary, while another one was rented:

Tobaccoworkers union was gathering at Litanov's house, located on the slope of the Mama Daviti<sup>12</sup> hill. Following Joseph's initiative, we rented a room for 5 Rubles per month, where we held illegal meetings once a week, sometimes twice, after lunch, before the list was read out"<sup>13</sup>. When the weather was good, the meeting could take place at Mama Daviti (Mtatsminda), at the Sololaki hill and other places (Kandelaki 1955, p.19).

Besides the conspiracy apartments and illegal meetings, several demonstrations organized by Funicular's workers, are also referred to as part of the revolutionary struggle: "Mtatsminda is one of the historical places of Tbilisi, which is related to the heroic struggle of Caucasian workers against the Tsar. This fight was inspired and organized by Joseph Jughashvili – a student of the Tbilisi Theological Seminary' (Kandelaki 1955, p.18).

The attempt to establish a relationship between Stalin's figure and the space of Mtatsminda resulted in the formation of a new title: *Stalin's mountain*. Stalin's mountain quickly turned (in 1938) into a recreational park also named after Stalin. Criticizing the Mensheviks for elitist restrictions imposed on the use of the park, the Soviet government was proud to offer a recreational space to any citizen: "The Soviet government inherited from the Tsar and the Menshevik government a dilapidated and backward economics. Mtatsminda plateau, as a recreational space was available only for a handful of privileged people, the vicerealty officers and merchants" (Kandelaki 1955, p.24).

However, labeling MP as a revolutionary site of memory did not succeed. The fact that none of the future editions repeat the story about *Stalin's mountain* might be related to the de-Stalinization process, which had been newly launched by the time of the second edition. The next edition, from 1958, obviously becomes a structural model for the future ones. By displaying short biographies with a picture, it offers stock formulations and narra-

tive perspectives, which are copied by other authors in an identical manner. This fact might have an explanation, especially if we recall that the author of this particular edition Enakolopashvili was a member of the MP administration from the very early stage, and was therefore considered an authoritative source on the history of Mtatsminda as it was perceived by the Soviet ideology, making it safe for other authors to copy his early work in the subsequent books on the MP.

In the Soviet period no single person was allowed to be honored without the permission of the Party. This is exactly why, sometimes, false narratives were used to integrate deceased figures in the approved list. For example, writers or publishers who did not contribute to the Bolshevik revolution were portrayed as the ones who not only sympathized with, but also took active part in this event. The verification of facts concerning every public figure is an immense task, which implies the detailed research of every biography. Therefore, I only offer here the typical narrative tendencies to be found in present editions:

1. Some figures are mentioned as being properly honored and appreciated only by the Soviet Government (Vaso Abashize, Vazha Pshavela, Akaki Tsereteli, Mose Janashvili and so on). Additionally, what is highlighted by the Soviets are the poor conditions these men lived under, and their mistreatment before Soviet power. For example, the death of Nikoloz Baratsashvili (the most famous Georgian Romantic poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) was attributed to his impoverished financial state: “He was forced to work hard for his bread in heavy conditions. He became ill and shortly died” (Enakolopashvili, 1958, p.29). Such a formulation is at least strongly biased, since Baratashvili dreamed of a military career, but because of his poor health and limited finances could not afford one. Finally, he started service in Ganja, Azerbaijan, where he died of malaria.
2. Another typical narrative concerns the Orthodox Theological Academy where Stalin used to study. Life in the Academy is presented as very oppressive and any protest against the harsh conditions of the Academy is integrated in the narrative of the revolutionary struggle against Tsarist Russia. Anyone who protested at the Academy for different reasons are shoehorned into a narrative analogous to Stalin’s path (for ex. Vasil Bar-nov, Mose Janashvili). In this instance the dualism between the “motherland” and the idea of independent Georgia is strong, since many Georgians protested or fought for reforms and democracy without directly being associated with Bolsheviks.

3. The urge to connect the *Great Men* with pre-revolutionary work. For instance, any author who sympathized with the peasants and wrote about a more democratic Georgia was declared to be a Revolutionary-Democrat (David Kldiashvili, Iakob Gogebashvili, Akaki Tsereteli are listed as such). Three different editions repeat word by word how a Georgian publisher (Zakaria Chichinadze) described himself as a “fanatic socialist”. The same can be said about the first theatrical troupe of actors who traveled around Georgia (in 1908) with their plays. Three of the five editions mention their contribution to the Bolshevik Revolution in an identical manner.
4. There are also a number of cases, when some individuals are referred to as those who were “delighted” by the establishment of the Soviet government (Galaktion Tabidze, Shalva Dadiani).
5. Finally, we find that Tsarist Russia is classified as an oppressive and violent order in contrast to the image of the Soviet Union. The details of the imprisonment of famous Bolshevik revolutionaries are frequently reiterated, as well as the dangers that Griboyedov faced because of his association with his Decembrist friends.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the deaths of two distinguished Georgian figures, Dimitri Kipiani and Ilia Chavchavadze, are systematically referred to as the brutal acts of the Tsarist Government. It is interesting to observe the strained effort of the authors, from all five editions, to “correctly” and identically formulate the cause of death for Kipiani and Chavchavadze. First, we read that Dimitri Kipiani was treacherously killed by the Tsar’s agents, which caused his funeral to turn into “a powerful demonstration against the Tsar’s regime.” Second, the charge of murder is maintained against Tsarist Russia in case of Chavchavadze. The writer is constantly mentioned as a “victim of the Tsar”, assaulted by “Okhranka agents,” “treacherously murdered by the agents of the Tsar” or murdered because of an “organized provocation by the agents of the occupant Tsar”. If in the case of Dimitri Kipiani, an explicit conflict (in the 1880’s) with the Exarch of Russia who cursed the whole Georgian nation can be considered public knowledge, the case of Chavchavadze is quite different. Despite their desperate attempts to avoid the blame, rumors widely circulated that it was precisely the Social-Democrats who were responsible for Chavchavadze’s murder. In 1941, a Social-Democrat (Philippe Makharadze), strongly suspected in organizing Chavchavadze’s murder, was buried directly in front of Chavchavadze’s tomb at the MP. The integration of Chavchavadze into a

Soviet narrative was an important task for the communists. Some scholars<sup>15</sup> even suggest that Stalin wanted to be considered as the savior figure from Ilia Chavchavadze's poem "Beneath the Lake of Bazaleti" as a means of turning himself into a symbol of Georgian identity, and a manifestation of a Georgian messiah.

Such integration into the Soviet narrative was necessary for those whose biographies predated the Soviet Union. By contrast, Soviet scholars, artists, writers and officials were already legitimized within the Soviet system through their high ranking positions as well as numerous official medals. In the five editions about the MP, such legitimation is typically achieved through the highlighting of an individual's connection (by means of medals or personal acquaintance) with Lenin.

The case of integrating Stalin's mother, and by extension Stalin's own nationality, into the Soviet narrative of the MP presented a particular challenge to the authors who were charged with detailing the history of the site. They were particularly careful to sidestep the representation of Stalin's mother, who was also buried at the MP, with as brief and delicately worded mention. A brief biography and the fact that she was Stalin's mother was the only data presented in all of the books. According to some scholars, the fact that she was buried at Mtatsminda, symbolically meant the nationalization of the messiah's mother,<sup>16</sup> which could be contrasted with the supra-national character of the messiah himself. It is interesting to note that the same artist (Nikoladze) who made Chavchavadze's sculpture, depicted as a symbolic figure of a mourning woman, called "Mourning Georgia", declared<sup>17</sup> his intention to create the sculpture of Ekaterine Jugashvili as the ultimate representation of a "Georgian mother". By having the sculptor of Chavchavadze's "Mourning Georgia" represent, almost forty years later, Stalin's mother, a kind of ideological cycle would come to a culmination. A cycle, which started with an abstract mother/nation mourning its great son, (Chavchavadze) and which presumably would have ended with the mourning of the mother of the greatest son of a nation, (Stalin) who transcended its boundaries to become a leader/messiah of all humankind. This initiative by Iakob Nikoladze never came to fruition. However a stone was erected at Jugashvili's tomb, which was still oddly referred to as "the symbol of a Georgian woman".<sup>18</sup> As the author of the 1958 edition (Enakolopashvili, p.70) states: 'the tour of the Pantheon ends with Stalin's mother's sculpture'.

### *Decomposition or Transformation?*

The third stage in the life of a site of memory is its possible destruction or transformation. In other words, the site of memory manages to survive only for as long as the commemorative practice or the narratives it produces are passed on from generation to generation. As we have seen, with the disappearance of particular social groups, the Kukia Pantheon faded away. But what happened in the case of MP and what function does it serve in Post-Soviet Georgia?

In the recent decades there has been significant fluctuation in the list of those interred at the MP. Removals of the remains of certain individuals, transfers and newly created tombs were all a part of ongoing attempts to reformulate the symbolic meaning of the Pantheon. When in the late 80's, the vandalization of the graves of important communist revolutionary leaders pushed the government to transfer three Bolsheviks into another cemetery it was a sign of upcoming political changes. The efforts of Mikheil Saakashvili's government, which included the transfer of the tomb of the first President of Independent Georgia (Zviad Gamsakhurdia) from North Caucasus to Georgia, the creation of a symbolic monument<sup>19</sup> to the victims of political repressions of 1937, and the return (from Paris) of the remains of Kakutsa Cholokashvili, a national hero who fought against the Bolsheviks, were obviously aimed at strengthening the national element in the MP. The drive to inter important national figures at Mtatsminda indicates that neither Shevardnadze's nor Saakashvili's governments were indifferent toward Mtatsminda. In 2002, the remains of another prominent Georgian scholar, Ekvtime Takaishvili, were transferred from the Didube Pantheon to Mtatsminda. It is noteworthy that the same year Takaishvili was canonized as a saint by the Georgian Orthodox Church. Of all the Mtatsminda occupants three were canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church as saints: in 1987, Ilia Chavchavadze, in 2002, Ekvtime Takaishvili, and in 2007, the Georgian statesman Dimitri Kifiani.

An incident in 2009, concerning a TV show titled "The Great Ten", which was broadcasted on Georgian Public TV, further illuminates the process of canonization as a means of controlling national memory. The show, which was analogous to the UK's "Great Britons," was organized around the premise of giving its audience a choice of selecting "top ten" Great Georgians of all time. However, the show did not manage to air according to its initial format. It was threatened with cancelation because the Georgian Orthodox Church declared it unacceptable. Protests from the Orthodox Church concerned the canonized persons, who were in the list of contenders for the top

ten spots. As Giga Zedania (2011) points out, representatives of the Orthodox Church wanted to maintain control over the power to define the legitimacy of the interpretations of national culture.

This tendency of the Orthodox Church to integrate national figures into its sacred, spiritual realm raises questions about the Church's claim to the status of the guardian and inheritor of the Georgian cultural and political sphere, represented, in an exemplary fashion, by the MP. We can understand the gradual transformation of the national, secular space of the MP into a space of sacred, religious significance in line with the Post-Soviet rise of the power of the Church. The emerging Orthodox character of the space of the MP is reflected not only in the fact that the most recent remains were interred with the sacral rituals of the Orthodox Church, but also in the fact that no more sculptural compositions were erected for the new graves, which conforms to Orthodox traditions.

The anonymous attempt, from 2014, to install a cross into Vazha Pshavela's sculpture, at his tomb at the MP, further illuminates the appropriation process. The incident caused a controversy in Georgian society (which was mainly played out in social networks). The City Hall worker in charge of Pantheon administration, Marina Davitashvili, denied the fact that this was organized by the City Hall itself (Davitashvili, 2014). Without naming the culpable person, she stated that this case was quickly closed after removing the cross. It is interesting to note, that 102 years earlier, a near exact inversion of this instance took place when the SSLAG community council decided to make various modifications to the Ilia Chavchavadze monument. Among others, one of the resolutions was to remove a cross from the sculptural composition (Archival material № 13). Obviously, in 1912, the council (which was based on international cooperation between artists and scholars) was consciously acting in a secular way, free from any religious influence.

In the modern context, a United National Movement party official, Mamuka Akhvlediani, has confirmed the existence of an initiative to open a Pantheon analogous to Mtatsminda at the trinity Churchyard, which come from the Catholicos-Patriarch, Ilia II, himself. Akhvlediani could not recall why this project never came to fruition. As he put it: "probably because of some ongoing political events at that time." (Akhvlediani, 2014). Meanwhile, another UNM party member, Nugzar Tsiklauri, remained skeptical about the necessity to build a new Pantheon at all (Itv.ge, 2009).<sup>21</sup> The project, though still technically under consideration (as of 2014) was eventually tabled, which demonstrated that contrary to the Orthodox Church, the UNM government lacked political will to create a new Pantheon or did not attribute that much importance to this project.



From the Orthodox Church's attempts at cultural and national appropriation we can see that, similarly to the Soviet system, the Church requires a complete integration of a public figure within its system in order to legitimate him or her for national consumption. This is why, in all of the cases analyzed above, the sacral aspect becomes a tool for the appropriation process managed by the religious institution. Much like Soviet power, the Orthodox Church is not ready to tolerate independent, secular civic initiatives – like the ones, which were fundamental in the cases of the Kukia and Didube Pantheons. The attempt to maintain exclusive power over memory sites is an obvious example of the tendency toward the appropriation of cultural memory in general.

In conclusion, I would suggest that no decomposition process occurred in the case of the MP, but rather we are witnesses to the ongoing transformation of this national site of memory, which is shifting to the control of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Church rushed to take ownership of precisely that space, which unlike civic communities was shaped by Soviet power structures. Therefore, the sacralization of the MP became a means of supplanting religious power in the vacuum left by the Soviet state, and in this process the policy of the church is analogous to the policy of the Soviet power in its attempts to represent Georgian nationality through carefully controlling the spatialized ideology of the MP.

### Notes:

1. The letter was addressed to the director of the Georgian State Museum of Theatre (G. Bukhnikashvili) and to the chairman of Georgian theatrical society (Shalva Dadiani). [See archival material № 1]
2. The mentioned artists buried at Kukia Pantheon are: Babo Avalishvili, Avksenti Tsagareli, Lado Agniashvili, Nato Gabunia-Tsagareli, Mariam Demuria, Kote Meskhi, Sophio Romanishvili, Shio Chitadze.
3. Similar to the Dramaturgical Society, all the resources, which were needed to establish the Pantheon were gathered through donations. The SSLAG community had a complex structure with several councils and decision-making bodies. It was successful in spreading literacy and undertook other important charity and educational projects, which depended on their subscriber's donations. Therefore, much like the Kukia pantheon, and unlike the Mtatsminda Pantheon, the Didube Pantheon was the result of a well-coordinated civic activity. The SSLAG community was grateful to the Exarch of Georgia-Piterim for allowing them to officially purchase land in the yard of the Didube Church with favorable conditions. The support of the Russian appointed Exarch consisted not only in the permission to build the pantheon but also in a considerable discount for the land. The community managed to buy the land 10 times cheaper (5000 Rubles instead of 50 000) with a 5 year period to pay off the price (1000 Ruble each year), [See archival material № 3]. As a result, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 1915, the community enclosed the Pantheon territory with a fence [See archival material № 4].
4. See for example: ლასხიშვილი, გ. [Laskhishvili, G.], 1992. *მემუარები* [Memoirs]. 2nd ed. თბილისი [Tbilisi]: საქართველო [Sakartvelo].
5. The list includes Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Archil Jorjadze, Vazha Pshavela, Niko Lomouri and Iakob Gogebashvili.
6. Same can be said about Nato Gabunia-Tsagareli's grave sculpture [See Scott, 2008].
7. Taking into consideration the invested effort into Chavchavadze's monument, It still remains unclear why the community would not anticipate opening a Pantheon exactly at the place where the SSLAG community's founder was buried. One possible explanation could be the difficulties involved in obtaining both permission to build and land at the Mtatsminda church. Documents show that negotiations with the Exarch of Georgia, Piterim, were successful in the case of Didube, but in general the relations between the Russian appointed Exarchs and the local gov-

ernment was not always easy. Especially if we take into account that the community refused to ask for help from distinguished Georgian nobles with close relations to the government [See archival material № 6]. Another possible explanation could be that the community did not consider Mtatsminda cemetery as the site of the future Pantheon at all. Since Chavchavadze was an exceptionally outstanding figure in Georgian history, they could have wished for him to reside in a prestigious location, with limited neighbors.

8. See Tkeshelashvili, 1980.
9. Before this initiative, mainly foreign artists were constructing such sculptures. The community took into account the nationality of sculptor I. Nikoladze as well as his professional achievements. See archival material №8
10. See Chorgolashvili, 1979.
11. Such as Vazha Pshavela, Nikoloz Baratashvili and Giorgi Tsereteli. See archival material №11.
12. Same as Mtatsminda (The Holy Mountain). Mamadavit is a name given to the church, which means father David, referring to St. David Garedji.
13. They probably refer to the list of students which was read out at the Theological seminary.
14. For instance see Basilashvili, 1968.
15. See Kiknadze 2005, p.42.
16. See Andronikashvili and Maisuradze 2004, p. 281.
17. According to დოდუჩავა Doduchava 1953, p.79.
18. It was referred as such by one of the authors from the five books. Namely, Chorgolashvili 1979, p.117.
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