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**Parliamentary Buildings as Contested Spaces in Georgia and Ukraine:
Power, Protest, and Legitimacy from the Soviet Era to Post-Independence**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the changing symbolic meanings of parliamentary buildings in Georgia and Ukraine. It focuses on how these spaces evolved from symbols of Soviet authority to main sites of resistance and political struggle through protest movements. The study offers a comparative analysis of Georgia and Ukraine through six key events that illustrate the symbolic transformation of the parliament buildings: the Georgian language protests and the Helsinki Group movement during the late Soviet era (1978–1988), the independence movements of 1989–1991 in both countries; the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004).

The thesis uses Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) to compare Ukraine and Georgia, two countries that share a common Soviet past and similar experiences with mass protests, although the state response and course of the events differ in detail. The analysis focuses on Henri Lefebvre's idea of space as socially produced and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, combined with discourse analysis methods by Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk. These theoretical frameworks allow a detailed analysis of how the discourse of the population, the language of protest, and the collective perception influence the change in the symbolic meaning of these spaces. By focusing on both the discursive and physical aspects of protests, the thesis emphasizes that these buildings are more than administrative centers and that during specific events, they change their symbolic meaning through the discourse and actions of the protesters.

Keywords: Parliament buildings, symbolic transformation, protest movements, post-Soviet space, Georgia, Ukraine, Soviet legacy, political symbolism, mass mobilization, discourse analysis, symbolic power, spatial theory.

Words: 16038

Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis
MSSD	Most Similar Systems Design
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UHG	Ukrainian Helsinki Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
RUKH	Ukrainian People's Movement (Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy)
KGB	Committee for State Security (Soviet secret police)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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1. Introduction

In the Soviet Union, parliamentary buildings in member republics such as Georgia and Ukraine functioned primarily as institutions of centralized power.¹ However, during the late Soviet and post-Soviet era, the symbolic meaning of the institutions started to change. In 1978, large-scale protests began in Georgia. This was connected to the new constitution, depriving the Georgian language of its official status. This was one of the first instances in a long time when tens of thousands of people went against the regime.² Similar events occurred in Ukraine in October 1990, when Ukrainian students held protests against the proposed union treaty and occupied the central square of Kyiv, very close to the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine.³ In both cases, citizens opposed the Soviet government by gathering around the spaces that once embodied this meaning. This shift raises a core puzzle: how did buildings once designed to represent centralized Soviet authority become central symbols of resistance and national identity?

Throughout time, various scholars have analyzed political processes in the post-Soviet countries.⁴ However, architecture and protest studies rarely explore the transformation of the parliament buildings, especially how their meaning changes in response to public contestation.⁵ This gap is even more evident in the post-Soviet context, as parliament buildings have been regarded as administrative institutions rather than evolving symbolic battlegrounds.⁶ This thesis fills this gap by analyzing how active protests change the meaning of political space over time.

Therefore, to analyze the transition of former administrative buildings into active sites of protests and mass mobilization, the thesis follows three main periods: the late Soviet era (1976–1978), the rise of independence movements (1989–1991), and the color revolutions

¹ Jay Bergman, “Was the Soviet Union Totalitarian? The View of Soviet Dissidents and the Reformers of the Gorbachev Era,” *Studies in East European Thought* 50, no. 4 (December 1998): 246–249, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20099686>, 252.

² See Chapter 2.1.1.

³ See Chapter 2.2.2.

⁴ Vladimir Gel'man, “Post-Soviet Transitions and Democratization: Towards Theory-Building,” *Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2003): 87.

⁵ See chapter 3.

⁶ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 134.

(2003–2004). Accordingly, the thesis argues that during protest movements, the parliament buildings in Georgia and Ukraine underwent symbolic transformation from passive administrative centers to active sites of mass mobilization.

This Thesis seeks to address the following question:

In what ways did the role of parliamentary buildings in Georgia and Ukraine evolve from administrative centers in the late Soviet era (1978–1988) to arenas of mass mobilization during independence movements (1989–1991) and colored revolutions (2003–2004)?

This symbolic shift is especially evident in the parliamentary buildings of Georgia and Ukraine. The early 1980s in both countries was a period when the momentum of identity and protest movements was particularly awakened.⁷ Although neither of these events took place directly at the parliament building, the events of 1989–1991 and the color revolutions that followed highlight the transition that both countries experienced.⁸ However, there are detailed differences between the course of events. This is related to the uneven response of the government to the protests, different forms of active mobilization, and the physical occupation of parliamentary space. For example, in the case of Georgia, the state's response to the protests was much more severe. On the contrary, in Ukraine, the symbolic change occurred more gradually.⁹ Therefore, the thesis follows Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) to compare the cases that have similar characteristics, but in certain areas, their results differ.¹⁰ This way, the analysis offers a broader understanding of the symbolic transformation of the parliament buildings.

To illustrate how institutions change their meanings, the thesis follows Henri Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power. These are complemented by Edward Soja's theory of the third space.¹¹ To analyze the discourse around these spaces, the thesis uses Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Teun van Dijk's political discourse analysis (PDA) to understand

⁷ See Chapter 2.1.

⁸ See Chapter 2.2.

⁹ See Chapter 6.

¹⁰ Todd Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 4, 73.

¹¹ See chapter 4.

how protesters used their discourse to connect personal experiences to the parliament buildings.¹²

The key concepts necessary to study the symbolic transformation of the parliament buildings relate to the interrelationship of space, symbolism, and discourse. Space is associated with the wider physical and social environment, which is socially constructed.¹³ Symbols, on the other hand, are the meanings that the population assigns to them through memory and lived experiences.¹⁴ In this thesis, the concept of symbolic transformation refers to the idea that the meaning of the parliament buildings changed during specific events through public discourse and actions. The symbolic transformation will be manifested through media and historical narratives, protestors' testimonies, and changes in public image. Through the actions and discourses of the population, the symbolic meanings of parliament buildings have been redefined. Accordingly, the thesis emphasizes their dual role as physical sites and as symbolic battlegrounds for democracy, resistance, and national identity.

1.1 Structure of thesis

Following the introduction, which has presented the research puzzle, question, and comparative rationale, the remaining chapters of this thesis are organized as follows. Chapter two provides the historical background by analyzing six key protests in both countries. The focus is on political developments from the late Soviet period to the independence movements and color revolutions. This historical analysis provides an essential context for the theoretical discussions, alongside understanding the shift in symbolic meaning of parliament buildings, the details about protest movements, and the state response.

Chapter three situates these developments within existing academic literature. It identifies the gaps in the existing literature and analyzes scholarly works about space, symbol, and discourse.

¹² See chapter 5.

¹³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26-33.

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7 (1): 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/202060>.

The fourth chapter develops the theoretical framework to fill the gap in existing literature. The chapter follows Henri Lefebvre's concept of space, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power, and Edward Soja's theory of the third space. Therefore, this section outlines the interrelationship between symbol, space and discourse through key theories necessary to understand the symbolic transition.¹⁵

The fifth chapter demonstrates the methodological steps necessary to explore the theory developed in the theoretical framework. It follows a multi-method approach and uses discourse analysis as its main method. As for the analytical framework, it includes Norman Fairclough: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Teun Van Dijk: Political Discourse Analysis, C. Wright Mills: Sociological Imagination and Systems Theory,¹⁶ which will be applied to specific data. At the same time, this chapter outlines the data selection, its rationale, and places them in appropriate categories.

The sixth chapter develops data analysis, which is divided into four categories: legitimacy narratives, protest framing, state rhetoric, national identity, and sovereignty. This overview will situate the research within a broader academic discourse. This chapter brings together key findings and demonstrates that the active protest movements challenged the existing regime and redefined the political space, thus changing its former symbolic meaning.

The conclusion answers the research question, summarizes the key findings from the data analysis. At the same time, illustrates the main differences between the course of the events in Georgia and Ukraine. The focus will be on how these cases contributed to the changing symbolic meaning of the parliament buildings.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4.

¹⁶ See Chapter 5.

2. Historical Context and Key Events

2.1 Parliament Buildings under Soviet Control (1978–1988)

2.1.1 Georgia: Language Protests and Early Resistance

The symbolic transformation of the parliament building in Georgia began with protests associated with the constitutional status of the Georgian language. In 1977, the Supreme soviet of Georgia adopted a new constitution, which deprived the language of its official status. This caused great discontent in society, which led to massive protests on 14 April 1978.¹⁷

Most of the protesters were students who actively prepared for the demonstrations. At the same time, representatives of the intelligentsia also supported them.¹⁸ Subsequently, on April 14, protesters marched from Tbilisi State University to the government building.¹⁹ This illustrates that people abandoned the fear of the Soviet troops being mobilized near the Parliament building and protested the legal status of the language. As tensions escalated, Eduard Shevardnadze, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia at that time, addressed the demonstrators and attempted to calm the situation. However, this gesture angered the protesters even more. Shortly after, it became known that the Georgian language would retain its constitutional status, and April 17 was declared “Mother Language Day.”²⁰

The 1978 Georgian language protests were a decisive moment that contributed to the beginning of the transition period. Participation in the protest movements and the struggle to defend the Georgian language united the population. Therefore, this created a common understanding of history among the participants, which led to victory. Although the protest movement for the Georgian language did not end in 1978, it became an everyday

¹⁷ Megi Kartsivadze and Anton Vatcharadze, “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978 and the Excerpts from the Western Press,” Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), April 14, 2020, https://idfi.ge/en/14_april.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Katie Sartania, 1989: *Protest Rallies and Their Influence on Georgian History* (Tbilisi: Heinrich Boell Foundation Tbilisi Office – South Caucasus Region, 2019), 4–5.

²⁰ Kartsivadze and Vatcharadze, “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978.”

reality.²¹ At the same time, the mobilization of military forces and the visible presence of Soviet troops around the parliament further emphasized the parliament's dependence on Soviet power. Although the parliament building was not a direct center of the protest action, the movement was around the institution, and through collective action and discourse, activists achieved victory and began the process of reframing the parliament building's former symbolic meaning, from a center of Soviet power to a site of active resistance.²²

2.1.2 Ukraine: Helsinki Group and Intellectual Resistance

Unlike Georgia, in Ukraine, the symbolic change of the parliament building began differently. This is associated with the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG) movement. In 1976, the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Accords, according to which the signatory countries had to observe basic human rights.²³ In 1976, the creation of a public group to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki Accords appeared in Ukraine. It was called the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (UHG).²⁴ The movement was founded by Mykola Rudenko, who was the head of the organization alongside like-minded people.²⁵

The members of the UHG believed that Ukraine should move to independence peacefully, according to the Constitution of the USSR. The group's main tasks were to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement and to report violations of basic human rights.²⁶ However, the works of Helsinki Group members were mostly circulated through unofficial channels. The main goal was to report these violations to the West, and then the letters were published in diaspora newspapers, such as *Svoboda*.²⁷ At the same time,

²¹ Sartania, 1989: *Protest Rallies*, 4–6.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Center for Civil Liberties, “The Ukrainian Helsinki Group Is 47 Years Old: We Talk about the Creation and Activities of the Human Rights Organization,” November 9, 2023, <http://ccl.org.ua/en/news/the-ukrainian-helsinki-group-is-47-years-old-we-talk-about-the-creation-and-activities-of-the-human-rights-organization/>.

²⁴ Ukrainian Helsinki Union, *Founding Documents of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union*, trans. Marta Skorupsky (New York: External Representation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, 1989), 5.

²⁵ Ukrainian Helsinki Group,” *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainianHelsinkiGroup.htm>.

²⁶ *Founding Documents*, 9–11.

²⁷ Timothy Snyder et al., *The Universe behind Barbed Wire: Memoirs of a Ukrainian Soviet Dissident* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2021), 106–108. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787448322>

the group's preamble emphasized that the Helsinki Group is not a political party and that its goal is not to seize power.²⁸ Thus, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group didn't have radical claims, however, these demands still conflicted with the existing totalitarian regime.²⁹

As a result, the group's actions were met with a strict response from the authorities, showing the Soviet government's low tolerance for public opposition. This included house searches, intimidation of the members, and banning of their work. In February 1977, many group members were arrested and sentenced to deportation or imprisonment for 7 to 10 years.³⁰ Although the actions of the Helsinki Committee members did not take the form of protests near the parliament building, the released documents of violations, as well as their subsequent arrest and detention, made it clear to the Ukrainian population and the wider world that the Soviet Union would not tolerate any deviation from its standards. These measures against group members were enforced through parliament, strengthening its symbolic role as the Soviet Control Institute.³¹

In both Georgia and Ukraine, the late 1970s are associated with a period of transition and disaffection with the existing regime. The Soviet forces in both countries touched on sensitive issues. In the case of Georgia, this was the ban on the Georgian language as an official language.³² On the other hand, in Ukraine, this was associated with the deportation and imprisonment of members of the Helsinki Group.³³ Consequently, in both countries, the population began to change the symbolic role of this space through their actions and discourse. Therefore, the following protest movements were expressed in the form of active resistance directly in front of the parliament building.

²⁸ Founding Documents, 10.

²⁹ "Ukrainskiy Khel'sinskiy gruppа." In *Istoriya Ukrainy ot destalinizatsii k neostalinizmu: Ukraina v seredine 1950-kh – pervoy polovine 1980-kh godov. Dissidentskoe dvizhenie*. StudBooks.net. Accessed May 6, 2025. https://studbooks.net/14435/istoriya/ukrainskiy_helsinskoy_gruppa.

³⁰ "Ukrainian Helsinki Group," Encyclopedia of Ukraine.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Megi Kartsivadze and Anton Vatcharadze, "Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978."

³³ "Ukrainian Helsinki Group," Encyclopedia of Ukraine.

2.2 The Shift Toward Contestation: Independence Movements (1989–1991)

2.2.1 Georgia: the events of April 9

The protests in front of the parliament buildings in Georgia and Ukraine during the late 1980s marked a critical point in changing the symbolic meaning of the parliament buildings. At the same time, the demonstrations around the institutions were caused by several factors. This shift was driven in part by Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). They were associated with the new ways of thinking, more specifically, economic reconstruction, transparency, freedom of expression, and information sharing. To some extent, this allowed people to feel that their actions could change the political situation.³⁴

However, the main reason for the renewed protest movements was connected to the ethnic issue. on March 15, 1989, the chairman of the Communist Party of Abkhazia, Boris Adleiba, signed a petition demanding that Abkhazia be granted the status of a Union Republic or be placed under direct subordination to Moscow. Accordingly, on April 4, tens of thousands of people gathered in front of the parliament building, and therefore the capital city, Tbilisi, was completely paralyzed, as workers went on strike and universities were closed.³⁵ Activists quickly turned demonstrations against Georgian separatism into demands for independence from the Soviet regime. This was followed by a hunger strike by protesters. As the situation escalated, additional military units were sent to Georgia

³⁴ Tsira Shvangiradze, "The Gorbachev Era: Glasnost & Perestroika Pre-Fall of the Soviet Union," TheCollector, February 20, 2022, <https://www.thecollector.com/gorbachev-era-glasnost-perestroika-fall-of-soviet-union/>.

³⁵ Tamara Ghambashidze, "9 April: Tragediis khronologia [April 9: A Chronology of the Tragedy]," On.ge, April 9, 2016. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://on.ge/story/505-9-%E1%83%90%E1%83%9E%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-%E1%83%A2%E1%83%A0%E1%83%90%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%98%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1-%E1%83%A5%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9A%E1%83%9D%E1%83%92%E1%83%98%E1%83%90>

from Moscow. Following the events, on April 9, without warning, peaceful protesters were violently dispersed, resulting in the deaths of 21 people.³⁶

We can consider the April 9 tragedy as an event that completely changed the former symbolic nature of the institution. In other words, cultural trauma has a lasting effect on public consciousness, which relates to the common sense of collective identity.³⁷ In addition, during the protests, not only did the fight for freedom happen, but the Parliament itself became a place of struggle.

In general, April 9 has a dual symbolic role for Georgia. It is the date when people demanded independence in front of the parliament building, which was strongly opposed by the Soviet forces, while two years later, on the same day, the president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, declared Georgia's independence from the same building. These two events, which are intertwined, create the ambivalent nature of the space. On the one hand, it is a tragic event that led to the loss of people; on the other hand, it is a symbol of victory, but both are united by the Parliament building. Therefore, the previous successful protest for the Georgian language and the declaration of independence transformed the cultural trauma and initially a symbol of Soviet power, into the embodiment of Georgia's independence and a symbol of resistance.³⁸

2.2.2 Ukraine: Revolution on Granite and Student Protests

Following the activities of the Helsinki Group, the parliament building began to change its symbolic meaning. Accordingly, the protests carried out in the 1990s continued in a chain reaction. In addition, after the release of the Helsinki Group members from prison, Viacheslav Chornovil³⁹ and Ivan Drach⁴⁰ actively engaged in political activity, which is directly related to the continuation of the transition initiated by the Helsinki Group. They

³⁶ Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), *April 9, 1989: Confidential Documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://idfi.ge/ge/idfi-confidential-april-9>, 3–5.

³⁷ Brian Steensland, review of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, by Jeffrey C. Alexander et al., *Social Forces* 83, no. 4 (2005): 1776–77, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2005.0082>.

³⁸ Mariam Kalandadze, *“The Upside-Down”: Ambivalent Affective Geography of the Georgian Parliament Building* (Master's thesis, Central European University, 2023), 21–22.

³⁹ Ukrainian dissident.

⁴⁰ Drach played an important role in the founding of Rukh.

laid the foundation for the people's movement, also called *RUKH* (Ukrainians for movement), and at the same time resumed the publication of similar documents, which had been stopped during the arrest of the Helsinki movement members.⁴¹

On October 2, 1990, Ukrainian students organized a campaign of large-scale non-violent civil protest. As in Georgia, Gorbachev's reforms in Ukraine paved the way for nationalist movements.⁴² Accordingly, students dissatisfied with the situation demanded changes, including the early dissolution of the communist-controlled parliament, the refusal to sign a new union treaty proposed to preserve the USSR in a more liberal form, the nationalization of communist property, the withdrawal of Ukrainian conscripts from foreign deployments, and the resignation of Prime Minister Vitaly Masoli.⁴³

The protests lasted from October 2 to 17, with the student hunger strike on October Revolution Square in Kyiv (today's Independence Square).⁴⁴ On October 15, a rally of thousands of people took place at the Verkhovna Rada, and the national democrats saw the declaration of sovereignty as a way to independence.⁴⁵ The "Revolution on Granite" (referring to the tents that were set up close to the parliament building) attracted the attention of the general public.⁴⁶ At the same time, several large marches, with tens of thousands of participants, were held in Ukraine in solidarity with the students.⁴⁷

In contrast to the violent suppression of protests in Georgia, in Ukraine, the protests were more peaceful. At the same time, the students partially achieved their demands. The Supreme Council adopted a resolution by which Ukrainians would no longer have to perform their military duties outside the republic, the parliament of Ukraine came to a

⁴¹ Olga Onuch, "The Legacy of the Revolution on Granite," *ResearchGate*, April 2017, 2–3, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324091059>.

⁴² Serhii Pyvovarov, "34 Years Ago, the Student Revolution on Granite Began in Kyiv. It Won, but Not Completely. Event in Archival Photos," *Babel*, October 2, 2024, <https://babel.ua/en/texts/111359-34-years-ago-the-student-revolution-on-granite-began-in-kyiv-it-won-but-not-completely-event-in-archival-photos>.

⁴³ Oleg Chupryna, "Ukraine's Revolution on Granite: A Prelude to Independence," *Geopolitical Monitor*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/the-revolution-on-granite-a-prelude-to-ukraines-independence/>.

⁴⁴ Kateryna Kalyta, "The Revolution on Granite in 1990: How Ukrainian Youth Defied the Soviet Ukraine," *EU Neighbours East*, May 27, 2024, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/young-european-ambassadors/blog/the-revolution-on-granite-in-1990-how-ukrainian-youth-defied-the-soviet-ukraine/>.

⁴⁵ Pyvovarov, "34 Years Ago."

⁴⁶ Kalyta, "Revolution on Granite."

⁴⁷ Onuch, "Legacy of the Revolution." 7.

conclusion that signing a new union treaty would have been immature, and the prime minister resigned, which directly meant a symbolic victory over the regime at that time. Even though the demand for independence was not met during the Granite Revolution, this decision was already implied.⁴⁸ Consequently, with the referendum held on December 1, 1991, Ukraine achieved its independence, thus forever changing its former symbolic meaning.⁴⁹

The parliament building, previously a symbol of the Soviet regime, has now become an arena of opposition and victory. Students who settled on the parliament premises were the ones reshaping its meaning. Therefore, active participation of the citizens, partial recognition of the demands of the protesters, and declaration of independence from the parliament building all culminated in the transition from the former symbolic meaning of the space.

2.3 Post-Soviet Struggles: The colored revolutions (2003–2004)

2.3.1 Georgia: The 2003 Rose Revolution

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia gained independence and began to build statehood. However, even after gaining independence from the Soviet Union, Georgians were dissatisfied with the existing political situation. More specifically, by corruption, economic stagnation, poverty, and electoral violations.⁵⁰ In reality, Georgia's current president Eduards Shevardnadze, created an almost analogue of the soviet system, which simultaneously controlled the state economy, private business, the social structure,

⁴⁸ Paulina Codogni, "The 1990 Revolution on Granite as Ukraine's New Beginning," *Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia*, November 10, 2023, <https://jordanrussiacycenter.org/blog/the-1990-revolution-on-granite-as-ukraines-new-beginning>, 15-16.

⁴⁹ Bohdan Harasymiw, "Ukraine's Declaration of Independence, 1991," *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, last modified 2023, <https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CU%5CK%5CUkrainehDAsDeclarationofIndependence1991.htm>

⁵⁰ "Twenty Years Since Rose Revolution of 2003: Gains, Losses and Lessons," *Civil Georgia*, November 23, 2023, <https://civil.ge/archives/571137>.

and the economy. As a result, corruption became completely uncontrolled, the government fell into a systemic crisis, and revolution became inevitable.⁵¹

The protests were sparked by irregularities during parliamentary elections, when the ruling party remained in power. At the same time, the election results were not recognized by international observers either. Accordingly, opposition parties demanded new elections and called for active protests in front of the parliament building. By mid-November 2003, mass demonstrations were taking place in Tbilisi. At the same time, rallies spread to various cities and villages across the country.⁵²

On November 22, demonstrators occupied the parliament building, where the first session of the newly elected parliament was taking place. As a result, the demonstrators interrupted the president's speech and forced him to leave the hall. This movement was called the Rose Revolution, because Mikheil Saakashvili (the leader of the opposition) and his supporters entered the parliament session with roses in their hands. This gesture can be seen as a sign of peace and an attempt to restore the legitimate significance of the parliament building as a representative power of the population. However, the president, Eduard Shevardnadze declared a state of emergency and ordered the police to protect his residence. It is noteworthy that the police no longer supported him, which directly indicated the loss of legitimacy from the regime and parliament. On the same day, the Supreme Council annulled the election results. Therefore, new presidential and parliamentary elections were held following the events. As a result, Mikheil Saakashvili and his party won the elections, consolidating the results of the Rose Revolution.⁵³

The occupation of the Tbilisi Parliament during the Rose Revolution can be regarded as a significant symbol of mobilization. This was the moment when activists and opposition leaders physically took over the parliament building. Thus, not only reconstructing it spatially, but also completely changing its former symbolic role and function. It was the

⁵¹ Giorgi Khutsishvili, Samokalako sazogadoeba da "Vardebis revolutsia" Sakartveloshi [Civil Society and the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia] (Tbilisi: ICCN and Cordaid, 2008), 14–15.

⁵² Adamianis Uplebata Saertashoriso Federatsia [International Federation for Human Rights], *Eklebi vardebis shemdeg – politikuri patimrebi post-revolutsiur Sakartveloshi* [Thorns After the Roses – Political Prisoners in Post-Revolutionary Georgia] (Tbilisi, 2009), 21–22.

⁵³ Ibid, 22.

culmination of a symbolic transition in Georgia, as the people, through their discourse and actions, took back the parliament building.

2.3.2 Ukraine: The 2004 Orange Revolution

Similarly to Georgia, the country was in a difficult situation after gaining independence. Ukrainians were fed up with growing corruption and economic instability. At the same time, internal faction conflicts and power struggles among political elites created additional obstacles to the nation's journey towards peace and prosperity.⁵⁴ Before the Orange Revolution, Ukraine was divided along pro-Western and pro-Russian sides. One of the opposition's leaders, Viktor Yushchenko, had closer relations with the European Union and NATO. In contrast, Viktor Yanukovich was pro-Russian, seeking to deepen ties with Moscow.⁵⁵

The rigged elections were followed by large demonstrations, the center of which was the parliament building, the Maidan. The opposition resorted to a relatively new form of protest. Therefore, the activists were provided with free tents, food, and even music, which gave the atmosphere a more peaceful look and motivated the population.⁵⁶ The color orange was a rather spontaneous, yet colorful expression of a desire for renewal, which was most likely associated with the fall season.⁵⁷

Due to the scale of the opposition movement's actions, the election results were annulled, and the Supreme Court of Ukraine agreed to hold a second round on 26 December 2004. Yushchenko was thus declared the winner, and the Orange Revolution culminated with his inauguration ceremony in Kiev on 23 January 2005.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ David Lane, "The Orange Revolution: 'People's Revolution' or Revolutionary Coup?," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 10, no. 4 (2008): 525, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2008.00343.x>.

⁵⁵ Kunika Khuble, "Orange Revolution," *EDUCBA*, accessed May 9, 2025, <https://www.educba.com/orange-revolution/>.

⁵⁶ Lane, "The Orange Revolution," 527.

⁵⁷ William Green Miller, *The Orange Revolution and the Maidan Parliament*, speech, January 18, 2005, Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-orange-revolution-and-the-maidan-parliament>.

⁵⁸ Kate Tsurkan, "It Was My First Revolution' — Ukrainians Look Back on the Orange Revolution 20 Years Later," *Kyiv Independent*, November 22, 2024, <https://kyivindependent.com/it-was-my-first-revolution-ukrainians-look-back-on-the-orange-revolution-20-years-later/>.

As a result, for both countries, colored revolutions were the culmination of the symbolic shift. Both countries were able to peacefully transition from the Soviet past through color revolutions and restore parliament to its legitimate role. With the new elections that were held because of the protest, the parliament buildings regained their rightful and legitimate status. Therefore, the symbolic transition was achieved precisely through the reconstruction of space, which the protesters were able to achieve through their discourse and actions.

3. Literature Review

The ongoing protests in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate how parliament buildings can change their symbolic meaning during specific events. However, understanding the symbolic transformation of these spaces requires a more thoughtful approach.

Political developments in both countries have attracted the attention of a lot of scholars.⁵⁹ Cold War historian Mark Kramer, in his work *The Dissolution of the Soviet Union: A Case Study of Discontinuous Change* (2022) describes in detail the historical context in both Georgia and Ukraine. The focus is particularly on the events that occurred after 1991, which radically changed the political trajectory.⁶⁰ For example, in his other work *The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union* (2004), he describes in detail the events that took place in Georgia during the April 9 tragedy, when the use of Soviet forces against peaceful protesters was not the order from the leader of the Soviet Union. On the contrary, the decision was made by Georgian officials and Soviet military leaders, which clearly indicates the union's structural problems.⁶¹ Although Kramer offers a detailed historical description of the end of Soviet power, he does not describe how these movements changed the symbolic role of the parliamentary buildings.

At the same time, several authors explored the change of symbolic meanings over time. For example, Andrew Wilson's *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (2005) explains that the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, in addition to political protest, was also a symbolic struggle for democracy and national identity. Based on this, the scholar often compared the protests with each other to analyze the strength of the resistance and the emotional intensity of the movements.⁶² Building on this narrative, the work of Della Porta Donatella, and Sidney Tarrow on *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (2005) adds

⁵⁹ Gel'man, "Post-Soviet Transitions," 87.

⁶⁰ Mark Kramer, "The Dissolution of the Soviet Union: A Case Study of Discontinuous Change," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24, no. 1 (2022): 201–216.

⁶¹ Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 2)," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 22–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925423>.

⁶² Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 30–33.

depth to the analysis. According to this theory, protest movements are directly associated with collective action that goes beyond the specific protest movements and therefore the dynamics share both material and symbolic meanings.⁶³

While these studies offer detailed analysis of Georgia and Ukraine's independence movements, political and economic situation, little attention has been given to how repeated cycles of protest redefined the symbolic and spatial role of parliamentary buildings. Therefore, this thesis fills the gap and connects these three key aspects together: the relationship between space and protest, the role of symbolic power in shaping the nature of institutional legitimacy, and the importance of discourse in changing the meanings of political spaces.

3.1 Spatial Theory and Protest

Space is a fundamental part of geography.⁶⁴ Although, for a long time, it was not sufficiently studied as a social product. However, scholars have changed this view. For example, Michel Foucault responded to earlier deterministic ideas and proposed a new understanding of physical space, in which buildings themselves can play a central role in the distribution of power. For him, space is not only a background, but also something that can control behavior, strengthen systems, and organize people.⁶⁵ Henri Lefebvre in his famous work *The Production of Space* (1991), took these ideas further and argued that social space can be considered as a social product.⁶⁶ According to this theory, space is not a neutral element. It is influenced by social practices, power relations, and, at the same time, by people's everyday experiences.⁶⁷ Understanding space from this perspective allows us to comprehend how spaces such as the Parliament buildings can be transformed through collective action and become active sites of protest. Anthony Giddens adds depth

⁶³ Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 51-52.

⁶⁴ Nigel Thrift, "Space: The Fundamental Stuff of Human Geography," in *Key Concepts in Geography*, ed. Sarah L. Holloway, Stephen P. Rice, and Gill Valentine (London: SAGE, 2003), 95.

⁶⁵ John Archer, "Social Theory of Space: Architecture and the Production of Self, Culture, and Society," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64, no. 4 (December 2005): 430, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25068197>.

⁶⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 11-14.

by focusing on how social systems work in time and space. According to his theory, institutions are not static, but are always being re-formed by human actions in a specific time and space.⁶⁸ Based on this, in protest studies, Sidney Tarrow's *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (1998) describes that the effectiveness of protests depends not only on the scale, but also on the strategic occupation of symbolic spaces. According to the author, movements have the ability to change the meaning of the place they operate in. In reality, the struggle between the government and the protest movements happens not only in the streets, but also within the meanings that these places previously had.⁶⁹

While these scholars make it clear how space reflects power and social relations, they do not fully explore how state buildings, like parliaments, are reinterpreted during protest movements.

3.2 Symbolic Power and Institutional Legitimacy

The legitimacy status of the institutions largely depends on the symbolic meanings associated with them. According to Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic spaces both reflect and strengthen the idea of who has legitimate power in society. According to him the perception of the social world is largely connected with double structuring. In other words, people's perception of the symbolic spaces, such as parliament buildings, are shaped and constructed by the objective social structures and by the way people subjectively perceive and understand the world.⁷⁰ Therefore, the building can serve as a symbol of Soviet power and later become a site of active mobilization, which is directly connected to its legitimate status. This is precisely what Graeme Gill argues in his work, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (2011). In this context, protests, or as the author calls them, "rituals," are symbolic collective actions that play a key role in changing the meaning of space.⁷¹ Accordingly, when people gather in front of the parliament building,

⁶⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Time and Space in Social Theory* (Hamburg: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1981), 92.

⁶⁹ Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511973529>.

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 20,

⁷¹ Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy*, 15.

they do more than express their discontent. They give space a new symbolic meaning, making it a legitimate arena for active resistance and national significance. Therefore, when citizens reinterpret and reclaim these buildings through protest, they also question and change the legitimacy of existing regimes. David Harvey takes this idea further and connects space to the system of governance. As he notes: “These [urban spaces] range from its use as a symbolic and material implement for the demarcation of class and the (re)production of capital, to its potential as a site of resistance”.⁷² According to him, if the parliament buildings were once Soviet symbols, the protests have changed these meanings and transformed them into spaces of mobilization and change.⁷³ However, while these authors are good at explaining the changing symbolic meaning of space and its connection to the legitimacy of governance, they largely overlook the role of discourse in shaping these spaces.

3.3 Discourse, Memory, and Political Spaces

Discourse is the essential element for changing social space and the symbolic meaning assigned to it by the population. According to Michel Foucault, discourse is more than just a language. He noted that “production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures.”⁷⁴ Therefore, control over discourse is important as it determines how meanings are created.⁷⁵ This is especially true about parliamentary buildings, as in both countries, the meaning of the parliament building started to shift according to the actions and discourse of the activists. Norman Fairclough deepens this analysis by arguing that discourse is shaped by social reality, which creates a dynamic relationship between language and social practice.⁷⁶ Van Dijk took this idea even further and discussed discourse as a form of political power. In his work, *What is political discourse analysis (1997)*, he states: “Much of political power may safely be operationalized in terms of the means and patterns of access and control of politicians, parties or political movements over public discourse”. According to this

⁷² Archer, “Social Theory of Space,” 431.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 216.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 224-225.

⁷⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 73.

theory, whoever shapes discourse shapes the public thinking, therefore making it a powerful tool when we refer to the symbolic meaning of the space.⁷⁷ Although political discourse analysis has been extensively applied to texts and speeches, its connection to spatial-symbolic contexts such as parliament buildings remains limited.

This thesis brings the literature together to explore how space, symbols, and language are closely connected and influence each other. This allows me to look at the parliament institutions not as simple administrative centers, but as symbols that change their meanings according to the ongoing political processes. Thus, the social world consists of the meanings that people attribute to them. However, these symbols are not fixed and are constantly modified. In other words, the actor selects, checks, doubts, rearranges, and transforms symbolic meanings of space according to the situation in which they find themselves.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Teun A. van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis?", *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11, no. 1 (1997): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1075/bjl.11.03dij>.

⁷⁸ "Simboluri interaktsionizmi" [Symbolic Interactionism], in *Samokalako Ganatlebis Lek'sikoni* [Civic Education Dictionary], National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, accessed May 17, 2025, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/gwdict/index.php?a=term&d=6&t=6711>.

4. Theoretical Framework

To better understand how parliament buildings shifted from Soviet administrative centers to active arenas of mass mobilization, this chapter illustrates the theoretical tools necessary for the analysis. To break this down, I use a spatial theory framework, based on Henri Lefebvre's theory of social space. To comprehend how space, symbol, and discourse interact, I analyze Pierre Bourdieu's definition of symbolic power and Edward Soja's theory of third space. While these theorists were introduced in the literature review, this chapter outlines how their ideas are used as analytical tools in this thesis. This chapter brings the theories together to create an overall theoretical framework that conceptualizes parliament buildings as a constantly changing political environment that could be reconfigured through public actions and protest.

Throughout history, space has been a subject of philosophical discussion. Therefore, different philosophical movements have considered it from different theoretical perspectives.⁷⁹ Henri Lefebvre was one of the first thinkers to attempt to free the idea of space from the established framework. He rejected the idea of “material” or “mental” space being separate entities. For him, space is not just a physical place, but a unity of symbols and material elements. According to Lefebvre, it is impossible to separate the material part, the buildings of parliament, from the idea of what they represent to people.⁸⁰ In his work *The Production of Space* (1991), he presented space as a social product. Thus, space is not static, but is actively reproduced through social practices, power dynamics, and ongoing political events.⁸¹ Lefebvre distinguished three dimensions of space: spatial practices, how people perceive concrete spaces, for example, during the Soviet Union, people saw them as administrative centers. Representations of spaces refer to the official meaning attached to space, which, until the protests, meant the symbolic meaning of central power. And, as for Representational Spaces, they are already perceived by people

⁷⁹ Felix Ó Murchadha, “Space, Time and the Articulation of a Place in the World: The Philosophical Context,” in *Spatiality and Symbolic Expression*, ed. Bill Richardson (London: Palgrave, 2015), 21–40.

⁸⁰ Stuart Elden, “There is a Politics of Space because Space is Political: Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 10, no. 2 (2007): 101–102.

⁸¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73.

as places that are symbolically and emotionally saturated, as they embody a new meaning.⁸²

While Lefebvre explains the nature of space as a social product that is constantly changing, Bourdieu's theory illustrates how these meanings become socially legitimate or, conversely, contested. According to Bourdieu, actors in the social field shape their behavior based on where they are. This is based on their “habitus”, which determines when they act or speak. At the same time, he argues that the concrete actions of protestors in the political field simultaneously reproduce and even transform the social space in some way. The reproducing field, in turn, provides agents with new possibilities for managing it. In other words, the discourse is shaped by person's habitues, which is formed through social experiences, and at the same time the nature of the current social field.⁸³

According to Bourdieu, “symbolic power is a power of constructing reality,” and therefore determines how administrators think and act about the social world.⁸⁴ In Georgia, as in Ukraine, during protests, activists not only physically took over buildings but also changed their symbolic meaning. According to Bourdieu's theory, dominant groups construct power through symbolic meaning. They construct spaces as legitimate and real. Accordingly, the parliamentary buildings are victims of symbolic violence, as the Soviet Union legitimized these institutions. Therefore, before the protests, the population accepted an unjust system without analyzing it.⁸⁵ In this context, space is not simply changed by social actions, but by symbolic power, which allows the dominant group to influence symbolic meaning. At first, it was the Soviet forces, although over time, protestants began to change this symbolic power through their actions and discourse.

Building on Lefebvre's idea that space is socially produced and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, Edward Soja emphasizes the activists' personal experiences and

⁸² Olusola Oladapo Makinde and Amao Funmilayo Lanrewaju, *Henri Lefebvre Theory of Space and Social Production Philosophy: A Critical Interpretation*, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January 2024): 70–71, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10577092>.

⁸³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 78-79.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 166.

⁸⁵ *ibid* 166-168

emotional attachments to these buildings during the protests. At the same time, he adds a new element, a third dimension, to Lefebvre's three spatial divisions, which analyses them not as separate parts, but as a unified way of understanding the space. All this is possible through a critical approach to "othering."⁸⁶ From the perspective of this theory, it is easy to understand that in both countries, the parliament buildings were symbolically and emotionally transformed within the discourse of the protesters. In practice, the historical protests have turned the parliament buildings into a third space. Therefore, by "othering" the protesters rejected the old understanding of space that gave them a new symbolic meaning.⁸⁷

Together, Lefebvre, Bourdieu, and Soja's theories provide a thorough understanding of how Georgian and Ukrainian parliamentary buildings have changed from passive institutions to places of protest and political contestation during specific events. At the foundations, we have Henri Lefebvre's theory that spaces are not neutral or static and are socially produced and always shaped by human actions, historical events, and current political struggles.⁸⁸ This is directly connected to how the people started to reimagine the meaning of the parliament building in the late 1970s. Building on Lefebvre's theory, Bourdieu brings symbolic ideas. According to him, space gains meaning not only due to the actions of the civilians but at the same time by the legitimacy and symbolic authority granted to them.⁸⁹ Therefore, due to the actions of the protesters, the symbolic power dynamics started to change, and therefore, the former meaning of the buildings. At the same time, the activist redefined spaces and gave them new ways of perceiving them through "othering" by detaching them from their former symbolic meaning.⁹⁰ These perspectives conceptualize parliamentary buildings as dynamic spaces that change their physical space and symbolic meaning due to the political events, and how people view them during a concrete timeframe.

⁸⁶ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 10.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73.

⁸⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 78–79.

⁹⁰ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 10.

5. Methodology

The purpose of this section is to present a clear methodological toolbox, combining in-depth descriptions of theoretical concepts with specific research approaches that will serve as the body for this research.

To explore the symbolic transformation of parliament buildings in both Georgia and Ukraine, this thesis adopts a qualitative research methodology. These methods allow me to analyze how media, political actors, and demonstrators use language about broader social and historical contexts. This will be important to understand the symbolic transformation of the parliament buildings and the interconnection between space, symbols, and discourse.

The research adopts a multi-method approach,⁹¹ which focuses on discourse analysis. Therefore, the data is collected from each event to support the analysis. The chapter explains the key approaches that will guide the discourse analysis of parliamentary buildings in Georgia and Ukraine. These theories are Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),⁹² Teun van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis,⁹³ and C. Wright Mills's Sociological Imagination theory.⁹⁴ With these theories, I will analyze how language and political discourse influenced social and political realities during important protest movements and demonstrations.

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be crucial for analyzing how media illustrated parliamentary buildings either as symbols of state power or centers of resistance, therefore, contesting or challenging their legitimacy. Fairclough explores both how discourse reflects and constitutes sociocultural change. He considers discourse as the use of language in oral and written speech and explains it as one of the forms of

⁹¹ A multi-method approach refers to the use of different qualitative methods, such as interviews, observations, or document analysis, within one study to capture different perspectives on the same topic. See Nanna Mik-Meyer, "Multimethod Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Research*, ed. David Silverman (London: SAGE Publications, 2020), 357–374.

⁹² Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*.

⁹³ Van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?"

⁹⁴ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

social practice.⁹⁵ According to Fairclough, on the one hand, discourse determines reality, and on the other hand, reality conditions discourse, which creates a dynamic relationship between language and social practice. He develops a three-dimensional conception of discourse and therefore, its simultaneously seen as “(i) a language text, spoken or written (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice.” Therefore, discourse can be seen as the mediator between social context and textual meaning.⁹⁶ In other words, CDA helps me analyze how the discourse of both government and opposition portrayed the role of parliament building, which is essential to understanding the symbolic transition.

If, for Fairclough, the connecting link between text and society is the order of discourse,⁹⁷ Teun van Dijk’s Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) explores how language works in political context, therefore, it connects individuals with broader social structures.⁹⁸ In his view, discourse creates the link between broader structures of governance and how the public uses the language.⁹⁹ Therefore, PDA allows me to explore the use of discourse by political actors, such as government leaders, and at the same time, protesters around the idea of the legitimacy of the parliament building. PDA focuses on how political figures and protesters use language to create or challenge authority, especially in times of crisis or conflict.¹⁰⁰ Through PDA, I will analyze how protest groups in Georgia and Ukraine used parliament buildings to express political resistance and their voices. To achieve my aim, I will investigate the language through political speeches that shaped these buildings as both symbols of government power and sites of oppression during important events.

At the same time, Sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that people are in a state of well-being as long as the values that are important to them are not threatened. In the case of a threat, they enter a phase of crisis and associate this "threat" with a personal or collective problem. Therefore, the historical and social environment influences political behavior, and the bigger the change is, the greater the reaction gets.¹⁰¹ With this theory, I will

⁹⁵ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 7.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, 97.

⁹⁷ *ibid* 11-13

⁹⁸ Van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?” 15-17

⁹⁹ *ibid* 26-28

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 7-10.

analyze how the efforts of protesters were part of a larger collective movement, which is influenced by and shapes the political contexts.

5. 1 Methodological Integration

The symbolic transformation of parliamentary buildings is explained in three interconnected areas: media narrative, political discourse, and collective experience. Using CDA, PDA, and Sociological Imagination together allows me to undertake a detailed comparative analysis. CDA focuses on media narratives, how discourses construct symbolic meanings, through which the legitimacy of the parliament building is either contested or challenged.¹⁰² However, a fuller analysis requires an understanding of political rhetoric. Examining the speeches of the political leaders and discourses of protesters through PDA makes it clear how governmental leaders framed protests and how the activists challenged the system through discourse.¹⁰³ At the same time, the transformation of the symbolic nature of parliament buildings and the questioning of the legitimacy status by media narratives requires a unifying theory. Sociological Imagination does just that, as it connects individual experiences with collective mobilizations, which is essential for both symbolic and legitimating status changes.¹⁰⁴

5. 2 Data Collection

To achieve the aim of the thesis, I gathered various types of data, including governmental speeches, official documents, media coverage, protest materials, and personal testimonies. The data is divided into two parts: primary sources, which include speeches of governmental officials and protesters, state archives, and media reports. The secondary data focuses on scholarly analyses and publicly available retrospective interviews collected from media reports and academic sources.

¹⁰² Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 54-70.

¹⁰³ Van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?", 37-39.

¹⁰⁴ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 7-10.

5.2.1 Primary Data

My attention is drawn to the official speeches delivered by political leaders in Georgia and Ukraine during the important events. This includes speeches during the Rose Revolution by Second president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze and Third president Mikheil Saakashvili. At the same time, second president of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma and third President Viktor Yushchenko during the Orange Revolution. At the same time, I have gathered official Documents such as state-generated documents and legislative records from the Soviet era to the post-Soviet period, especially those relevant to the debate over the functions of parliament and its powers.

I have selected the coverage produced by governmental and independent media, including television broadcasts, print articles, and online news platforms that reported on the protests and political activities taking place around the parliament buildings. This includes protest posters, banners, and leaflets, both digitized and from archival sources produced during significant protests. From the early 1980s, I have collected media coverage from state-run media and newspapers such as the Georgian public broadcaster. At the same time, in Ukraine: UT-1, the Soviet Union's Pravda, Soviet Press (Izvestiya). Also, the official speeches and documents.

At the same time, the data includes external media and newspapers that showcase the viewpoints from the protesters, such as New York Times coverage of Georgian language protests, Underground media (Voice of America), Radio Free Europe and Ukraine, Kyiv Post in Ukraine. Imedi TV and Rustavi 2 in Georgia.

5.2.2 Secondary Data

To make data analysis as detailed as possible, I have gathered published interviews, personal narratives, or archival documents of the participants in the movement that will assist and add depth to understand the perception of parliamentary buildings in those transformative times. Such documents include participants' viewpoints. For example, material by Project Muse in Ukraine, which focuses on a detailed analysis of the Helsinki

group movement reflections,¹⁰⁵ personal viewpoints of Levan Ramishvili¹⁰⁶ and George Kandelaki¹⁰⁷ who participated and witnessed the Rose revolution. At the same time, scholarly analysis written after the protests took place.

All this material is taken from credible sources. The official speeches of political figures and media narratives written during the protest movement are collected from the official archives of both countries. Also, the media reportage of the more recent protests, such as the Orange and Rose revolutions, is selected from the official pages. Regarding the scholarly analysis, they are obtained from the *Sage Journal*, *JSTOR*, the Institute for Development and Freedom of Information, and Project Muse.

Regarding Soviet-era materials, such sources could be biased. To avoid this, I use a strategy of cross-checking the sources. For each source, I will determine its origin, what type of newspaper it is, its political context, and which audience it is intended for. Then I will simply indicate whether it is governmental, oppositional, or neutral media, which I will also state in the analysis. In addition, I will analyze both the government and opposition discourse side by side. This means that I will compare these narratives, emotional tone, and discourse for each period. Through this comparative analysis, I will be able to avoid biases and maintain balance. At the same time, I will control quite radical statements. For example, if the parliament building is perceived as a "prison" in the opposition media or by protesters, it will be described in parallel with the material in international magazines to maintain the balance.

The selection of quotes for the analysis was based on four main analytical categories: legitimacy narratives, the protest framing, state rhetoric, national identity, and sovereignty and national identity. These categories reflect the main themes from the theoretical framework and were used to systematically filter and group relevant data. Although I did not use formal coding techniques, I referred to different types of sources: newspapers, media reports, official statements, Western media, pro-government media,

¹⁰⁵ Myroslav Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire: Memoirs of a Ukrainian Soviet Dissident*, trans. Zoya Hayuk, ed. Katherine Younger (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2021), 85–133, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/84843>.

¹⁰⁶ Levan Ramishvili was a prominent figure in the Liberty Institute and played a significant role in the Rose Revolution.

¹⁰⁷ Giorgi Kandelaki Georgia 's Rose Revolution a Participant

posters, and personal experience records of protesters. Accordingly, I selected quotes that expressed how the parliament buildings were characterized as government symbols, a place of protest, or a space that began to change its symbolic meaning. I looked for recurring language, metaphors, or frames that corresponded to specific themes.

Table 1, Quote Selection

expressions of institutional power or crisis	legitimacy narratives
calls for action and protest identity	protest framing
official narratives and state-related messages	state rhetoric
symbolic references to national struggle and for independence	national identity and sovereignty

This structured approach allowed me to connect theory and discourse in a coherent and meaningful way across the cases of Georgia and Ukraine.

These sources are crucial for determining active changes in political and public perceptions of parliamentary buildings during significant historical events in Georgia and Ukraine. The sourced material guarantees an integrated methodology to understand the changing role of the parliamentary building and how it shaped the public protest.

5.3 Methods to Practice

In this section, I will describe the theoretical frameworks of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Teun van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), and C. Wright Mills's Sociological Imagination and how they will be used to analyze the data gathered for this study. Each framework will serve as a tool to analyze specific political discourse and media around parliamentary buildings during three historical events in both countries: the late Soviet era (1978–1988), the independence movements (1989–1991),

and the colored revolutions (2003–2004). The method follows a three-step system: identifying discourse, categorizing recurring narratives, and analyzing shifts across protests.

For the analysis, the first step is to identify the discourse surrounding the parliament buildings in media reports and political speeches as well. CDA and PDA have key roles here. With CDA I will analyze how the media portrayed parliamentary buildings, whether the coverage legitimized or challenged the regime. For example, how the Soviet state tried to showcase the building as a legitimate institution in state controlled media. On contrary, during the protest period of 1990-1991, CDA will be used to investigate how demonstrators reinterpreted parliament as an active site of protest, thereby questioning its legitimacy.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, PDA will be used to analyze how political actors and protesters frame the parliamentary buildings. I will use Van Dijk's theory to analyze political speeches. Particularly, how activists respond to the injustice and how political leaders in Georgia and Ukraine use language to change public perceptions about the main institutions.¹⁰⁹

After identifying the discourse, I will divide it into three themes: legitimacy, protest, and sovereignty. These categories precisely explain how the narrative around the parliamentary buildings has changed.

The final step is to analyze the shift in narrative between the three main waves of protest movements. 1978-1988, which is associated with the late period of Soviet power, when the parliamentary buildings functioned as administrative centers. However, this period is also associated with the beginning of protest movements. 1989-1991, the rise of independence movements, when the former symbolic meanings were forever changed and the parliamentary buildings were transformed into spaces of active resistance, contestation, and the declaration of independence. All this leads to the color revolutions, where the parliamentary buildings were not only centers of protest, but also places for demanding democratic change.

¹⁰⁸ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*. 70-74.

¹⁰⁹ Van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?" 37-39.

5.4 Operationalization and Analytical Framework

To connect theories to empirical material, this section operationalizes key analytical categories. The discourse analysis is divided into four parts: Legitimacy Narratives, Protest Framing, State Rhetoric, National Identity and Sovereignty. By employing the chosen theories, I will try to show to what extent the role of parliamentary buildings in Georgia and Ukraine evolved from administrative centers in the late Soviet era.

The change in legitimacy narratives will be analyzed through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The data is divided into two groups. Internal narratives, which involve Soviet and local media. At the same time, this is complemented by external counter-narratives of the Western media. Examining the reportage of external and internal media adds depth to the analysis, as they showcase how each differently impacted the legitimacy of the parliament building over time.¹¹⁰

I will use Van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis to understand how the protest framing changed temporally. This section will be divided into three parts: Early symbolic resistance (1970s–1980s), Nationalist mobilization (late 1980s–1991), and Democratic reclaiming (Color Revolutions 2003–2004). By analyzing the speeches and discourse of the protestors, we can see how they challenged the authority that controlled the country and thus demanded political change. At the same time, I will use the individual experiences of the participants. For example, the participants' account of Giorgi Kandelaki, when he described the Rose Revolution events through his eyes.¹¹¹

I will use a combination of CDA and PDA to analyze the state's response to the protests. Through CDA, I will categorize government rhetoric into normalization, delegitimization of protestors, and threat framing. At the same time, I will support the categories through PDA. I will describe how people in power used language to counter the protesters' attempts who tried to minimize Soviet rule. I will carefully examine government speeches and state-run media to understand how the language they used tried to shape public

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 6.1

¹¹¹ See Chapter 6.2

opinion. To achieve my aim, my main data for this part will be government speeches, official statements, and state-run and opposition media.¹¹²

Ultimately, C. Wright Mills's *Sociological Imagination* will serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing how parliamentary buildings influence national identity and sovereignty. I will illustrate how the political systems of Georgia and Ukraine have shaped public perceptions of national identity, sovereignty, and state legitimacy. For this, I will analyze state and opposition-run media, relevant scholarly articles, and government publications that illustrate the role of parliamentary buildings.¹¹³

5.5 Limitations and Challenges

The main limitation I have faced while collecting my data was the lack of sources available online. Many relevant sources from the Soviet era (state-controlled media, official documents) can be accessed only partially or limitedly because of archival restrictions in both countries. This data limitation might affect the analytical depth, especially during the (1978–1988) when the parliamentary buildings remained under strict Soviet control.

A second concern is the biases. In Soviet and post-Soviet periods, state-controlled media used language to legitimize the government's position. On the other hand, for independent or opposition media, these buildings are the places of state control. Even though this difference will be vital for my analysis, it also creates a problem of neutrality.

Another limitation is my chosen methodology, discourse analysis. Although it offers a detailed explanation of the symbolic change of parliamentary buildings, it relies mainly on textual material, which results in ignorance of visual expressions, architecture, and other materials that may also be very important for this analysis.

As I will be focusing on three protest waves: the late Soviet era (1978–1988), the rise of independence movements (1989–1991), and the color revolutions (2003–2004), other

¹¹² See Chapter 6.3

¹¹³ See Chapter 6.4

political events or protest movements may be left out. For example, I won't be able to consider lesser-known events or developments that might also have helped shape the public's perception of these buildings. That limitation of the analysis means that the discussion will favor only the most important events in both countries.

In the long run, these limitations may affect the strength of my findings. I will not be able to make general statements about how all citizens see these buildings, and I may miss local perspectives that are not widely published. However, with the collected material, I will be able to describe the changing symbolic role of the parliament buildings.

6. Data Analysis

6. 1 Legitimacy narrative

During the late Soviet period and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the parliament buildings in Georgia and Ukraine became main spaces for disputed legitimacy. These buildings were once symbols of Soviet power, but through the voices of protestors, the media, and political leaders, their symbolic meanings started to change.

Language protests in Georgia and the formation of the Helsinki Group in Ukraine can be regarded as the beginning of a turning point. The active student movement in Georgia to preserve the language¹¹⁴ and the emergence of the names of the Helsinki Group members in Ukraine¹¹⁵ were the brave end of the “silence” that existed during the Soviet period. Therefore, protesters, dissidents, and independent media challenged dominant narratives. In order to understand the change in the legitimacy narrative of the parliament buildings, the comparative analysis between internal and external narratives in both countries gives us a bigger picture.

According to the historical background, in the late 1970s, in Georgia and Ukraine, protest movements had different forms, and the parliament building was not the central place of the demonstrations. Using CDA, in both countries, language and symbols were used in two ways: either to maintain power, to instill fear, or to challenge the regime.

6.1.1 Internal Narratives (*Soviet-controlled and local media*)

Following the second world war the USSR and the west became commercial partners and signed the human right act, including article 19 of the United Nations “Everyone has the

¹¹⁴ Kartsivadze and Vatcharadze, “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978.”

¹¹⁵ “Ukrainian Helsinki Group,” Encyclopedia of Ukraine.

right to freedom of opinion and expression”¹¹⁶ This statement, of course, allowed the Helsinki Group of Ukraine to expose the violations of the Soviet Union. Although activists in both countries have been actively working to achieve the change, the state-controlled media largely ignored the events.¹¹⁷

In Georgia, the protests began after the Soviet controlled newspaper *Communist* published an article about the removal of the official state status of the Georgian language from the constitution draft.¹¹⁸ Although the announcement was met with considerable protest, local newspapers ignored the events that followed. Some media outlets described the protest as “An event of historical significance”¹¹⁹ for Georgian unity. However, this approach reflects an attempt by Soviet forces to control the narrative through pressure.

Tamar Chkheidze, an active member of the dissident movement, recalled the actions of the Soviet forces. According to her, the KGB used intimidation and terror.¹²⁰ There were similar actions in Ukraine when the KGB began actively arresting and deporting members of the Helsinki Group, and banning the works of the group members. The arrest of the members were also published to instill fear in the population.¹²¹ However, the so-called rhetoric of appeasement and discursive warfare had a counter-effect, as a lot of people got involved in the events.¹²²

Using CDA, it is clear that the overarching goal of the Soviet-controlled media narrative was to ignore ongoing events.¹²³ However, during the political crisis, state media still managed to defend the regime's legitimacy. The coverage of the events of April 9 in Georgia is a clear example. As the situation escalated, the state media shifted to criticizing

¹¹⁶ “Ukrainian Human Rights Group That Helped Bring Down Soviet Union Turns 40,” trans. Christine Chraibi, *Euromaidan Press*, November 9, 2016, <https://euromaidanpress.com/2016/11/09/ukraine-helsinki-human-rights-group-soviet-dissident-gulag/>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Mikheil Gvazabia, “1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva – interv’iu Tamar Chkheidzestan” [In 1978, Society Defended the Georgian Language – Interview with Tamar Chkheidze], *Netgazeti*, April 14, 2021. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/535123/>.

¹¹⁹ *Gazeti Komunisti*, April 15, 1978, article title unknown, Original: “ისტორიული მნიშვნელობის მოვლენა”. Translated by the author from Georgian.

¹²⁰ Gvazabia, “1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva”.

¹²¹ National Security Archive, *The Moscow Helsinki Group 30th Anniversary: From the Secret Files*, Electronic Briefing Book No. 191, May 12, 2006 <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB191/>.

¹²² Gvazabia, “1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva”.

¹²³ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 70-74.

and humiliating the protesters. One such article in the newspaper *Tbilisi* was titled: “We Need Moderation, Calmness”.¹²⁴ Soviet press agency *Tass* in efforts to reinforce soviet control confirmed the death of the civilians and that the area was “under army control and several investigators of the unrest were detained.”¹²⁵

This collapse of the soviet union highlights the transitory nature of discourse. Although the Soviet media could no longer completely conceal the protests, they attempted to delegitimize the activists by portraying them as “disrupters”. For example, in the state-controlled media, we often read, “Everything that disrupts the normal life of the capital is unjustified.”¹²⁶ In contrast, the Granite Revolution in Ukraine proceeded much more calmly, and the policy of ignorance worked more successfully, as the population learned about the ongoing events from foreign media. “The most difficult were the first days when news about the protest spread very slowly”.¹²⁷ However, with the help of the western media, everyone heard what was happening, and “phone station installed in the tent camp was the main source of information about support for their protest.”¹²⁸ Ukrainian television even aired an hour-long broadcast, where the protestants were able to voice their needs.¹²⁹ We can see the same uprising in Georgia. An article published in the January 5, 1989 of *Tbilisi* newspaper: “We are delighted to see social activism among our youth. Just overnight and in front of our eyes the youth have shed their apathy and engaged in a revolutionary transformation and established democratic norms with great zest.”¹³⁰ This was a rare occurrence in a state ruled by Soviet forces, which highlights the difference in the severity of the protests, as when it comes to ethnic issues, the protest and response are much more intense, and the media narrative is stronger.

¹²⁴ *Gazeti Tbilisi*, 8 April 1989. Original: “გვესაჩივრებდა მშვიდობა და ზომიერება”. Translated from Georgian by the author.

¹²⁵ Esther B. Fein, “At Least 16 Killed as Protesters Battle the Police in Soviet Georgia,” *The New York Times*, April 10, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/10/world/at-least-16-killed-as-protesters-battle-the-police-in-soviet-georgia.html>.

¹²⁶ Irakli Iagorashvili, “Rogor Gaashuq’a 1989 tslis 9 Aprilis Tragedia Sabch’ot’a da Utskhourma Mediam?” *Myth Detector*, August 20, 2021, <https://mythdetector.com/ka/rogor-gaashuqa-1989-tslis-9-aprilis-tragedia-sabtchotha-da-utskhourma-mediam/>.

¹²⁷ Codogni, “The 1990 Revolution on Granite,” 14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 15

¹³⁰ Sartania, 1989: *Protest Rallies*, 11.

Even after reaching independence, the state-controlled media portrayed the occupation of the parliament as a dangerous rebellion. They reported, “We don’t want one more civil war, one more bloodshed.”¹³¹ While external narratives were largely driven by Western media during the Soviet era, by the 2000s, independent media in Georgia and Ukraine, such as Rustavi 2 and Channel 5, had emerged as powerful internal counter-narratives, showcasing the voices of protesters and discourse of democratization and sovereignty. Growing dissatisfaction among journalists led to resignations of journalists and the so-called discursive struggle.¹³² This division in media narratives shows how the parliament’s legitimacy was contested. The independent media saw the parliament as a space to reclaim democracy, while state media framed the protestors as a threat.

The activity of the independence media was crucial as the population first learned about the rigging of the 2003 parliamentary elections through the exit poll results of Rustavi 2. Accordingly, Rustavi 2’s coverage of the elections gave a push to the protests, which led to the Rose Revolution and the resignation of President Shevardnadze.¹³³ In other words, the media narrative symbolically changed the parliament from a tool of authoritarian power to a symbol of national sovereignty.

The legitimacy of the parliament buildings was further demonstrated when the protesters during the Color Revolutions rejected the unfair regime. For example, in Georgia, one protester said, “Saakashvili forced his way into the legislature.”¹³⁴ This moment, when Saakashvili enters the parliament, shows how he reclaimed the space on behalf of the people. Unlike Shevardnadze, who was protected by security and hidden behind closed doors, Saakashvili made himself visible, therefore the legitimate candidate was no longer hidden behind the large parliament building but a visible figure for the population.¹³⁵ Similarly in Ukraine, we can read in newspapers “It was a turning point when Ukrainians,

¹³¹ Nino Danelia, *Covering the Revolution of Roses: Differences and Similarities between Georgian State and Independent Television Companies* (master’s thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2005), 26.

¹³² Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolutio*, 129-131.

¹³³ Transparency International – Sakartvelo, “‘Gamardzhebuli khalkhis televiziashi’ – ‘Rustavi 2’-is istoria” [“The Television of a Victorious People – The History of Rustavi 2”], August 1, 2013, accessed May 11, 2025, <https://transparency.ge/ge/content/stub-528>.

¹³⁴ Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese, “American Boots and Russian Vodka: External Factors in the Colour Revolutions of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan,” *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 5 (2008): 97

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 94–98.

myself included, understood that if we are united, we have the power to bring about positive change in our country”.¹³⁶

The Color Revolutions in both countries signaled a changing political landscape. The words of independent media and journalists had a direct impact on whether institutions were perceived as symbols of the regime or as centers of active resistance and victory.

6.1.2 External Counter-Narratives

Unlike the Soviet media, which sought to suppress or discredit protest narratives, external media, including Western broadcasters, actively questioned the legitimacy of Soviet institutions in Georgia and Ukraine. In other words, western media gave voice to the protesters. Using CDA, it becomes clear that external discourse allowed for a new symbolic interpretation of parliamentary spaces as the active sites for protest.

Dedicated actions of the activists caught the eye of the Western media, which actively started broadcasting what was happening in the Soviet republics. For example, in Ukraine, “Thanks to Radio Liberty, Voice of America, the BBC, and Deutsche Welle, information about the creation of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, as well as the documents we were producing, spread quickly.”¹³⁷ Similarly, *The New York Times* actively broadcasted the events in Georgia, “demonstrators as many as 20000, gathered on the main street near the headquarters of the Georgian communist party to protest a new draft constitution”.¹³⁸ This shows how protesters physically moved closer to the parliament to challenge its authority.

By broadcasting dissident testimony and exposing contradictions between Soviet actions and their international obligations, these media outlets started changing the narrative that buildings such as the Verkhovna Rada or the Supreme Council of Georgia were not legitimate representatives of the people.

¹³⁶ Kate Tsurkan, “It Was My First Revolution,” *The Kyiv Independent*, November 22, 2024..

¹³⁷ Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire*, 108.

¹³⁸ Craig R. Whitney, “Soviet Georgians Take to Streets to Save Their State Language,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1978, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/15/archives/soviet-georgians-take-to-streets-to-save-their-state-language.html>.

The beginnings of the protests in Georgia and Ukraine were different. In Georgia, there were large-scale protests, while in Ukraine they took the form of open letters. However, while the Georgian protesters achieved their goal in 1978, “Soviet Georgians Win on Language.”¹³⁹ Ukrainian dissidents, especially members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, were systematically imprisoned, exiled, or silenced. As Matusiewicz wrote, “Every word was written in blood.”¹⁴⁰ In Georgia, the feeling was similar: “We are having a demonstration against the constitution, concerning language – we’ll be lucky if they don’t shoot us”.¹⁴¹ This shows how people were afraid of violence from their own government, and how the parliament building didn’t represent them. In Fairclough's view, this reflects the unequal power of discourse, where resistance can either transform reality or violently suppress it depending on the political context.¹⁴²

As one Ukrainian activist said, they wanted “to participate in burying the world’s last empire”.¹⁴³ At the same time, instead of going underground, they chose visibility. In the *Svoboda* article we can read “We are not building an underground—and this indicates that we intend to overthrow the Soviet order”.¹⁴⁴ This shift in language from secrecy to public declaration challenged Soviet power not just in words, but in space. In other words, moving the protest toward visibility, eventually toward symbolic buildings like the parliament.

As the Soviet Union weakened in the late 1980s, external media played an even more crucial role in reimagining parliamentary spaces as sites of active protest. During the Granite revolution in Ukraine, the foreign media was the first one who showcased the world and Ukrainians in general, what was going on in the country.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, similarly to Ukraine, in Georgia, the foreign journals were also influential for the local media. The *New York Times*, on April 10, 1989, published an article with front-page coverage of the events in Georgia. The publication is recorded in an interview with people

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire*, 104

¹⁴¹ Whitney, “Soviet Georgians Take to Streets.”

¹⁴² Jana Brandl, *Analysing the Exclusion of Discourses Within the Field of Working Time Regulation* (Master’s thesis, Lund University, Department of Political Science, 2017), 10–11.

¹⁴³ Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire*, 90.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 105-106.

¹⁴⁵ Codogni, “The 1990 Revolution on Granite,” 14.

living in Tbilisi, where it is explained that the demonstrators are bothered by the soviet troops during the days of protests. Although the situation was calm until the morning of April 9. From the same article, the publication recorded an interview with a Georgian protester, Lana Ghoghoberidze, who said: “My God, it is so tragic, young girls and boys are dead. The situation is very dangerous here”.¹⁴⁶

In Georgia, the end of the 1980s was marked as a tragic event that completely transformed parliament's role in people's minds. With this new symbolic meaning, the former legitimacy narrative was forever changed. The 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty marked a clear break from Soviet control. The media, including *The Washington Post*, framed this moment as a step toward self-determination. The article stated, "The sovereignty declaration by the Soviet republic's legislature is significant. Not because of Ukraine's size and importance, but because the declaration goes further than steps taken by some republics".¹⁴⁷ This framed the Verkhovna Rada as a place where Ukrainians could reclaim their sovereignty. This was a turning point for both countries. Similarly in Georgia, when the president announced: “long live independent Georgia”.¹⁴⁸ The discourse of the ruling party and also the civilians transformed the place of struggle and tragedy into the symbolic meaning of victory and independence.

In both Georgia and Ukraine, the media narrative significantly changed the legitimate role of the parliament buildings. Through CDA, we can observe how the Soviet forces used tactics of ignoring, destroying, and arresting the activists. However, these actions in turn, made the population more involved in the protests.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the Western media spread an alternative discourse and clearly encouraged the local, newly created media to work and provide valid information to as many people as possible. Overall, the media narrative allowed the population to doubt the legitimate nature of the parliament building and to actively protest in this very space.

¹⁴⁶ Fein, “At Least 16 Killed as Protesters Battle the Police.”

¹⁴⁷ Michael Dobbs, “Ukraine Makes Broad Statement of Sovereignty,” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1990, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/07/17/ukraine-makes-broad-statement-of-sovereignty/cf685b1a-afc1-401c-9b6d-53a7a5a1213b/>.

¹⁴⁸ Liza Akhaladze, “‘Gaumarjos damoukidebel Sakartvelos!’ – Rustavelze Zviad Gamsakhurdias istoriuli sitqvebi ismis” [“Cheers to Independent Georgia!” – Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s Historic Words Echo on Rustaveli], *Guria Nusi*, December 2, 2024. Accessed May 6, 2025. <https://gurianews.com/gaumarjos-damoukidebel-saqarthvelos--rusthavelze-zviad-gamsakhurdias-istoriuli-sitqhvebi-ismis/>.

¹⁴⁹ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 70-74.

6.2 Analysis of Protest Framing

The framing of parliamentary buildings by protesters and government agencies has varied over time in both countries. This section explores three stages of demonstrations: early symbolic resistance (1970s–1980s), nationalist mobilization (late 1980s–1991), and the democratic return during the Color Revolutions (2003–2004). Through PDA, each stage shows how people used the discourse to challenge the existing regime and therefore change the former symbolic meaning of the parliament buildings.

6.2.1 Early symbolic resistance (1970s–1980s)

Throughout the important events in Georgia and Ukraine parliament buildings became main spaces for resistance. During the 1978 Georgian Language Protests, protestors did not physically occupy the parliament building in Tbilisi, however, they framed it as controlled space. One of the protesters declared, “We are not your children.”,¹⁵⁰ rejecting not only Soviet rule but also the legitimacy of the institutions and the Georgian leader who aimed to silence the demonstrators. According to the PDA, through their discourse, they separated themselves from the ruling power, thus, the previous link they had with the institution was reimagined through discourse.¹⁵¹

Similarly to Georgia, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group also contested the Soviet system by framing the Ukrainian parliament as part of the oppressive Soviet structure. Though they didn’t yet directly target the Verkhovna Rada, Mykola Rudenko remarked, “We realized that an important and interesting struggle was about to begin.”¹⁵² This statement shows that the group recognized that, eventually, they would need to confront the main institution, therefore giving the current discontent a physical form.

¹⁵⁰ Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978 and the Excerpts from the Western Press,” IDFI.ge, April 14, 2020, https://idfi.ge/en/14_april. Originally citing The Times, April 17, 1978.

¹⁵¹ Van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?” 20–23.

¹⁵² Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire*, 90.

One protester in Georgia emphasized this point further, saying, “the issue of the native language was of higher importance for me and for the whole of Georgia.”¹⁵³ This quote shows that, despite not physically occupying the parliament, protestors used symbolic resistance to confront the building. Similarly, in Ukraine, a member of the Helsinki Group stated, “in the declaration there was an implicit critique of the Soviet system and assertion of its unacceptability”¹⁵⁴, which can be understood as discursive acts of resistance against the existing regime.

During the early protests, the activists framed the parliament building indirectly, however, their connection to institutions and structures of governance influenced the way they constructed a discourse of “us” versus “them.”. Which meant that the population was separate, and the state authorities were on opposite sides of the battle. Thus, they distanced themselves from the parliament building's former symbolic role.¹⁵⁵

6.2.2 Nationalist mobilization (late 1980s–1991)

On April 9, 1989, the Tbilisi Massacre marked a turning point in Georgia’s resistance against Soviet rule. The parliament, which had long been a symbol of Soviet power, became the direct point of the nation’s struggle for independence. One protester recalled, “Georgians are in danger from this evil empire that is trying to commit genocide against them.”¹⁵⁶ This directly indicates that the protesters are giving the regime a proper name and declaring their disobedience to it, thereby connecting them to a broader social structure, associated with protest movements. Another protester stated, “The arrests of curfew violators continue, as the authorities attempt to regain control over the city”.¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that these were taking place right in front of the parliament, which indicates that the population began a direct discursive attack on the building. Realistically

¹⁵³ Claire Bigg, “Georgia: Tbilisi Marks 30th Anniversary Of Language Protests,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 14, 2008, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1109567.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Marynovych, *The Universe behind Barbed Wire*, 105.

¹⁵⁵ Van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?” 33-34.

¹⁵⁶ Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), *Grifit saidumlo 9 aprilis shesakheb* [Classified Documents about April 9], April 7, 2016. Original: “ქართველებს საფრთხე ემუქრებათ ამ ბოროტების იმპერიისგან, რომელიც ცდილობს მისი გენოციდი მოაწყოს”. Author’s translation from Georgian. <https://idfi.ge/ge/idfi-confidential-april-9>, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 10. Original: “გრძელდება კომენდანტის საათის დამრღვევთა დაპატიმრება, რითაც ხელისუფლება ცდილობს აღადგინოს კონტროლი ქალაქზე.” Author’s translation from Georgian.

speaking, by being in front of the parliament, the protesters distanced themselves from the regime and their former symbolic meanings. Following van Dijk's theory, they phrased the parliament as an unfair, distant space and not truly representative of the people.¹⁵⁸

Similarly, in Ukraine, the Revolution on Granite in 1990 was a defining moment for Ukrainian independence. The Revolution on Granite began as a hunger strike and quickly gained momentum. One hunger striker recalled, "I was walking, then everything went black. My friend caught me before I hit the ground."¹⁵⁹ This quote reflects the intensity and sacrifice involved in the protest, as participants risked their lives to demand Ukrainian independence. Despite Soviet resistance, the protests achieved a symbolic victory, forcing the Soviet-backed chairman to resign.¹⁶⁰ One protester stated, "The Maidan was flooded with flowers"¹⁶¹ which can be regarded as discursive acts of resistance and transformation in both language and spatial practice.

A key moment during the protests came when one Ukrainian protester declared, "It is better to die than to live in the Soviet Union".¹⁶² Similarly in Georgia "Down with the rotten Russian empire", no to the Russian communist dictatorship".¹⁶³ These sentences highlight how the style of language and protests framing has changed and is now moving towards a demand for complete separation from the Soviet system. Using PDA, we see that this type of statement frames the Soviet regime as alien and illegitimate and showcases the protesters as part of a true national movement.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, the activists framed the protests as movements for liberation and segregation from the current regime.

¹⁵⁸ Van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?" 33-34.

¹⁵⁹ Tim Mak et al., *The Granite Revolution Sparked Ukrainian Independence*, The Counteroffensive, August 24, 2024, 2, <https://www.counteroffensive.news/p/the-granite-revolution-sparked-ukrainian>.

¹⁶⁰ Pyvovarov, "34 Years Ago."

¹⁶¹ National Memorial Complex of the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred – Museum of the Revolution of Dignity. *The Revolution on Granite*, accessed May 6, 2025, <https://www.maidanmuseum.org/en/node/361>.

¹⁶² Anastasiia Lapatina, "3 Revolutions That Helped Ensure Ukraine's True Independence," *Kyiv Post*, August 24, 2021, <https://archive.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/3-revolutions-that-helped-ensure-ukraines-true-independence.html>.

¹⁶³ Aprili Media. "Fragments of the Struggle Against Russian Regimes: From Treaty of Georgievsk to the Present Day." March 9, 2025. <https://aprili.media/fragments-of-the-struggle-against-russian-regimes-from-treaty-of-georgievsk-to-the-present-day/>.

¹⁶⁴ Van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?" 33-34.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, both Georgia and Ukraine moved toward independence, with their parliament buildings becoming symbols of active resistance. In Georgia, the first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia declared in 1991, “Long live independent Georgia! May God protect us!”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, in Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada declared independence, and a protester reflected in the newspaper: “it undoubtedly ‘was a turning point: since then, supporters of independence (secession) slowly but more clearly began to gain predominance.”¹⁶⁶ Both parliaments, once symbols of Soviet control, became the focal points for active resistance, which was mainly claimed by the discourse and the actions of the activists.

6.2.3 Democratic reclaiming (*Color Revolutions 2003–2004*)

After the tragic and positive events of the 1990s, which were associated with the loss of many protestors and the restoration of independence, the population turned to a different type of revolution. The beginning of the 2000s is associated with the restoration of order and a stable economic situation.¹⁶⁷ PDA shows how past events and emotions can impact people’s attitudes.¹⁶⁸ “Undoubtedly, the successful invasion of parliament on 22 November 2003 marked the climax of the Rose Revolution”.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, entering the parliament building was not just a political act, it was a continuation of symbolic transition. As Giorgi Kandelaki, a participant in the Rose revolution, stated, “Protesters in front of the parliament building maintained their positions in shifts throughout the day and night.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, in Ukraine one protester remarked, “Together, we are many! We cannot be defeated!”¹⁷¹ These quotes directly contribute to the changing symbolic

¹⁶⁵ Guria Niusi, "Gaumarjos damoukidebel Sakartvelos! – Rustavelze Zviad Gamsakhurdias istoriuli sitqvebi ismis" ["Long Live Independent Georgia! – Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s Historic Words Heard on Rustaveli"], December 2, 2024. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://gurianews.com/gaumarjos-damoukidebel-saqarthvelos--rustavelze-zviad-gamsakhurdias-istoriuli-sitqvebi-ismis/>.

¹⁶⁶ Codogni, *The 1990 Revolution on Granite*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ Laverty, Nicklaus. "The Problem of Lasting Change: Civil Society and the Colored Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine." *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 146–148.

¹⁶⁸ Van Dijk, *What is Political Discourse Analysis?*, 20.

¹⁶⁹ Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese, “American Boots and Russian Vodka: External Factors in the Colour Revolutions of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan,” *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 5 (2008): 97.

¹⁷⁰ Giorgi Kandelaki, *Georgia’s Rose Revolution: A Participant’s Perspective*, Special Report 167 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, July 2006), 4. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12267>.

¹⁷¹ Adrian Karatnycky, “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 2 (March–April 2005): 35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20034274>.

meaning of the parliament buildings. The Protestants gave it a new meaning through discourse and action, and in both countries, the parliament buildings became not symbols of control, but spaces where new democratic ideas and national identities could be formed. Protesters in Georgia echoed similar sentiments. As Levan Ramishvili, a key figure in the Rose Revolution, emphasized, “This is about modernization of Georgia”.¹⁷² The activists’ discourse points to a changed narrative. The techniques of alienation have made it seem as if the Soviet regime is a memory of the past for the population in both countries. In fact, the activists protested during the Color Revolution to restore the legitimate status of the parliament buildings. We can say that their discourse of “Us” versus “Them” worked and therefore, they transformed the former space of centralized power into arena where the population fought, replacing the former symbols with protest and discourse.¹⁷³ This was finalized by new elections, change of the government and returning the institutions their legitimate role.

The transition in both Georgia and Ukraine, as reflected in the statements of protestors, highlighted a shift in the political discourse surrounding the parliament. Originally seen as symbols of Soviet control and corruption, both parliaments became redefined as spaces for democratic change and national sovereignty.

6.3 State Response

One of the key factors in the transformation of the role of parliament buildings was the response of the state to the ongoing protests. In both Georgia and Ukraine, Soviet and post-Soviet governments have tried to maintain the former symbolic significance of parliament buildings. To analyze this, the data is grouped into the following sections: Normalization, Delegitimization of protestors, and Threat framing. By comparing Georgia and Ukraine and the difference in state response, we will see how state actions have changed the role of parliament buildings.

¹⁷² Vicken Cheterian, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution: Change or Repetition? Tension between State-Building and Modernization Projects,” *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 4 (2008): 689–712, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990802230530>.

¹⁷³ Van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?”, 33-34.

6.3.1 Normalization

At the beginning of the first wave of protests, the Soviet government attempted to normalize the situation. In Tbilisi, some of the state-controlled media tried to keep everything as if nothing was happening, despite the ongoing movements. A Soviet-controlled *Tbilisi* newspaper wrote: “School hours have been disrupted” and called on citizens to “remain calm” as the government took measures to suppress the protests.¹⁷⁴ This rhetoric tried to legitimize the use of force by the government and maintain the perception that the parliament was a stable institution. When the protests reached their peak, the authorities tried to calm the students with the words “My Children, what are you doing?”,¹⁷⁵ which led to a change in the discourse and approach of the population, and in response, the protesters said: “We are not your children”,¹⁷⁶ as the activists framed the buildings as similar to the alien power.

In Ukraine, we can see the same rhetoric. The activists used similar methods in both states. As a response, the government declared “literacy” war against the Helsinki Group leaders who did not hide their identity. “On August 13, 1976, his [Oles Berdnyk’s] books were removed from all libraries and bookstores and destroyed... by the main administration for the Protection of National Security in Print”,¹⁷⁷ which emphasized that the state perceived the literature of dissidents as a threat to the state and, accordingly, everything by these authors had to be banned so that the population would not have the opportunity to do something similar.

By using the CDA, it is clear how the state tried to normalize protests and thereby maintain the symbolic authority of parliament. In reality, in both countries, the “preventive” measures and panic of the authorities informed all segments of the population about the wave of protests.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, instead of normalization of the

¹⁷⁴ *Gazeti Tbilisi* [Tbilisi Newspaper], April 14, 1978. Original: “სკოლის საათები დაირღვა, გვესაჭირობა სიმშვიდე”. Author’s translation from Georgian.

¹⁷⁵ IDFI, “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978.”

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Snyder et al., *The Universe Behind Barbed Wire*, 85.

¹⁷⁸ Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*. 91-110.

situation, it was the response of the Soviet forces to the protests that, to some extent, caused this turning point.

6.3.2 Delegitimization of Protestors

After the public's reactions to the constitution change in Georgia, the authorities resorted to the well-known method of delegitimization and intimidation of protesters. As we saw in the media analysis in both countries, the Soviet controlled media tried its best to portray students as naive, irresponsible, or manipulative.¹⁷⁹ The Soviet Union used a combination of intimidation and delegitimization of the protesters. The KGB officers were after everyone without exception. They addressed students from various faculties and threatened to arrest them. By April 14, they had achieved some results, and some of the students had backed down. However, in the end, it was thanks to the KGB's activity that the information spread very quickly and reached those parts of society who might never have heard about it.¹⁸⁰ In Ukraine, the Helsinki group members were experiencing psychological intimidation: "I spotted a car that turned on its headlights when it saw me... So, is this when I'm going to be arrested, or are they just trying to frighten me?"¹⁸¹ recalled a Helsinki Group member.

Accordingly, the symbolic role of the parliament began to change, and the state response escalated. As the protests intensified, the government's response became harsher, along with the activists being declared as a threat. In addition to maintaining the power, state newspapers published information about the arrest of members of the Helsinki Group¹⁸² and continued intimidation of Georgian activists¹⁸³ which should have alarmed the citizens, but the transition had already begun, which could not be reversed.

The state's use of particularly harsh measures to suppress protesters was evident in Georgia on April 9, 1989, when Soviet forces intervened, resulting in the deaths of peaceful citizens. The response from the Georgian Communist party central committee,

¹⁷⁹ Sartania, *1989: Protest Rallies*, 11.

¹⁸⁰ Gvadzabia, "1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva."

¹⁸¹ Snyder et al., *The Universe Behind Barbed Wire*, 91.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, 99-103.

¹⁸³ Gvadzabia, "1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva."

Republic's highest committee and Cabinet of ministers to the tragic events was: "We regret to inform you about the tragic events that took place on the 9th of April in Tbilisi in the square of the government building. Anti-governmental manifestations resulted in unfortunate human casualties. 16 citizens died, some have been injured".¹⁸⁴ This rhetoric was aimed at delegitimizing the population, emphasizing that this was an anti-government protest, to which an appropriate response was given.

In both countries, the protest and the response of the state were a uniting experience. Months before the tragedy, the demand for the secession of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia from Georgia and its accession to Russia had united the Georgian public.¹⁸⁵ In Ukraine, the hunger strikers made the following appeal to Ukrainian youth: "Friends! The time has come to make a choice: we will either win an independent and democratic Ukraine, or we will continue to remain a colony of the empire... We call on everyone to support our action. The fate of our homeland depends on all of us. May god help us!"¹⁸⁶ Therefore, it was evident that the tactics of the Soviet Union did not work and, on the contrary, it made the movements even stronger.

6.3.3 Threat Framing

When tactics of normalization and delegitimization failed, the state shifted to threat framing. It can be argued that the protesters in Georgia and Ukraine had similar goals, but the response of Soviet forces was different. As mentioned before, in Georgia, on April 9, 1989, peaceful demonstrators outside the parliament were met with deadly force, especially compared to the language protest, the state rhetoric changed from listening to the public to the active use of force. Soviet troops attacked with tear gas and rubber bullets, killing 21 people and injuring hundreds.¹⁸⁷ Eyewitness Shota Zhvania recalled: "Russian soldiers were hitting women and children in the head with shovels... I was standing in a pool of blood".¹⁸⁸ JAMnews noted that "3,500 people were poisoned by

¹⁸⁴ Sartania, 1989: *Protest Rallies*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Maka Khaziuri, "9 Aprili – tragedia, romelmat shecvala istoria" ["April 9 – The Tragedy That Changed History"], *knews.ge*, April 9, 2025. Accessed May 11, 2025. <https://knews.ge/?p=70253>.

¹⁸⁶ Codogni, "The 1990 Revolution on Granite," 14.

¹⁸⁷ Tengiz Verulava, "9 Aprili – Tragediis Tskhovrebis Gmirebis Mogenebani" ["April 9 – Memories of the Living Heroes of the Tragedy"], *BURUSI* (burusi.wordpress.com), April 2, 2010. <https://burusi.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/the-april-9-tragedy/>.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

gas,”¹⁸⁹ which shows the scale of the repression. In contrast, the Granite Revolution in Kiev in 1990 ended peacefully and did not result in state violence. Students went on hunger strikes and occupied public spaces, and the government eventually responded with concessions. As Pauline Codogni writes, “Apart from fulfillment of some of their demands, a success of the participants in the Revolution on Granite was also prevention of the use of violence against them”.¹⁹⁰ This contrast illustrates how Soviet authorities approached civil resistance. While the events in Ukraine were more or less peaceful and the demands of the protesters were partially met, Soviet forces went against the peaceful population in Georgia. It is also interesting to note that the crackdown on peaceful residents by the Soviet forces was not an order from Gorbachev. The decision was made by Georgian officials and Soviet military leaders. This fact already indicates the loss of control by the Soviet Union. In this regard, the events in Tbilisi are associated with the Soviet Union's inability to manage nationalist movements and demand greater autonomy within its borders.¹⁹¹

In Georgia, the parliament became a site of violence before the people were able to reclaim it. In Ukraine, the parliament was partially occupied by peaceful protests. In both countries, the symbolic role of the buildings changed in different ways, but the 1980s were a turning point when the state's response took a decisive role and forever changed the former meaning of the buildings. Therefore, it is clear that the threat framing has transformed the parliament from an administrative center into an active site of mass mobilization. In addition, two years later, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia and Ukraine declared independence, right in front of the buildings where the tragic events took place.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ JAMnews, “36 Tseli 9 Aprilis Tragediidan da 34 Tseli Aghdgenili Damoukideblobidan” [“36 Years Since the April 9 Tragedy and 34 Years Since the Restoration of Independence”], *JAMnews*, April 9, 2025. <https://jam-news.net/ge/9-aprilis-tragedia/>.

¹⁹⁰ Paulina Codogni, *The 1990 Revolution on Granite as Ukraine's New Beginning* (New York: Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia, 2023), 19, <https://jordanrussiacenter.org/blog/the-1990-revolution-on-granite-as-ukraines-new-beginning>.

¹⁹¹ Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism (Part 2),” 25-33.

¹⁹² Russian Aggression in Georgia and Ukraine,” *Boundless World History*, Lumen Learning, accessed May 6, 2025, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-worldhistory/chapter/38-1-2-russian-aggression-in-georgia-and-ukraine/>.

However, the early 2000s were difficult enough for the post-Soviet states. The transition from permanent control to full independence was extremely difficult. The current government could not fulfill its functions, and the population lived in constant hardship and poverty.¹⁹³ Accordingly, after the rigged elections, people in both Georgia and Ukraine took to the streets to protest, however, the response of the authorities was different.

In Georgia, during the Rose Revolution of 2003, President Shevardnadze tried to keep the people in power by warning them about the risk of violence. He said: “I was elected by the Georgian people and I do not intend to resign at the demand of individual politicians and a few dozen young people waving flags. I cannot allow people who would destroy and devastate everything to come to power.”¹⁹⁴ Although the threat was serious, many protesters refused to retreat. What changed everything was that even part of the state turned against Shevardnadze.¹⁹⁵ As one report says, “The people in those forces made up their minds and said we are not going to defend this government.”¹⁹⁶ In the end, the protesters, led by Saakashvili, stormed the parliament, and Shevardnadze was forced to flee. Therefore, the parliament was the epicenter of this peaceful event, as a legitimate institution and a place of active protest. At the same time, after the April 9 tragedy, the parliament building was the epicenter of the peaceful rally, the so-called Rose Revolution.¹⁹⁷

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine has the same shift. The state was prepared to use force. However, similarly to Georgia, the police and soldiers refused to attack. One report states that “Ministry of Interior officials made clear that they would refuse to attack their own people”.¹⁹⁸ This moment of resistance gave people more courage to stay on the streets. They blocked roads and stood in front of the parliament, waiting for justice. Eventually,

¹⁹³ Marek Dabrowski, Thirty Years of Economic Transition in the Former Soviet Union: Microeconomic and Institutional Dimensions, *Russian Journal of Economics* 9 (2023): 2–5, <https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.9.104761>.

¹⁹⁴ Chloe Arnold, “Shevardnadze Confronts Hostile Demonstrators,” *The Independent*, November 10, 2003, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/shevardnadze-confronts-hostile-demonstrators-77615.html>.

¹⁹⁵ Ó Beacháin and Polese, “American Boots and Russian Vodka,” 98.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 94-99.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 103.

their peaceful pressure worked, and the court ordered new elections. Accordingly, Yushchenko was declared the new president of Ukraine. The massive crowds proved that the public had confidence in him.¹⁹⁹ As the report states, “Nobody, not even the most optimistic opposition leaders, had expected such a massive mobilization of people”.²⁰⁰

Accordingly, the ruling forces in both countries first began to normalize protests, but the results were different. Even after delegitimization of the protesters it did not lead to an abundance of the demonstrations. Accordingly, the authorities turned to force.²⁰¹ Georgia experienced this in a difficult way, as for Ukraine, the revolution on Granite ended in partial success.²⁰² We can say that the events of April 9 were based on ethnic lines and were associated with a much more sensitive issue.²⁰³ Even though in the late 1980s there was an uneven response to protest actions in the countries, however, according to the data, during the Color Revolution, a more or less similar trend was observed. In Georgia, the leadership quickly fell when the security forces stepped in and physically occupied the parliament.²⁰⁴ In Ukraine, the system came under pressure, but did not collapse. Accordingly, with these revolutions, like the Declaration of Independence, the parliament building acquired a new colorful role, symbolizing victory. At the same time, state forces themselves taking the side of peaceful protesters was an important turning point in both countries.²⁰⁵ This is directly related to the change in state response, which moved from brutal methods (as in the case of Georgia) to peaceful changes.

6.4 National Identity and Sovereignty

Throughout the protest’s movements, the symbolic role of parliament buildings in Georgia and Ukraine has evolved over the time. C. Wright Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination helps us to understand how individual actions are shaped when protests occur. According to this theory, people get into a mode of crisis when the values they care about are threatened.²⁰⁶ In the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, each protest and

¹⁹⁹ *ibid*, 100-104.

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, 104.

²⁰¹ Gvazdabia, “1978 tsels sazogadoebam kartuli ena daitsva.”

²⁰² Codogni, “The 1990 Revolution on Granite,” 14-20.

²⁰³ Khaziuri, “9 Aprili – tragedia.”

²⁰⁴ Ó Beacháin and Polese, “American Boots and Russian Vodka,” 94-98.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 103-105.

²⁰⁶ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 7-10.

discourse around the parliament buildings was deeply connected to the fight for freedom, identity, and legitimacy.

By protesting the Georgian language, students began to change the symbolic role of the parliament buildings.²⁰⁷ At the same time, the form of the protest differed in both countries. In Georgia, it was associated with active protests near the parliament building,²⁰⁸ while in Ukraine, it was associated with the actions of the Helsinki Group, which had a written form and was aimed at exposing the ongoing violations in the Soviet Union.²⁰⁹ However, in both cases it was a unifying moment when people actively, collectively expressed their dissatisfaction. For Georgia, it was the fear of losing one of the main parts of identity, the language, and in the case of Ukraine, the fight against injustice.

However, as the “critical” situation continued, the protests became bigger and moved closer to the Parliament building. During the Revolution on Granite in Ukraine, students set up tents on the October Revolution Square in Kiev to express their position.²¹⁰ The participants of the protest addressed the parliament directly: “The fate of our homeland depends on all of us, God save us!”.²¹¹ Accordingly, the students not only loudly stated their dissatisfaction, but by moving the protest closer to the parliament building, they started transforming the former symbolic meaning. The protest leader, Alexander Donyi, later named it as “the most successful youth campaign in the post-Soviet space”.²¹² Based on Mills's theory, individual resistance, the setting up of tents, and active struggle constructed a collective memory,²¹³ which was later linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A similar transformation happened in Georgia. Unlike in Ukraine, Georgian society was united by a common trauma. The collective memory was built on the tragic events, which gave populations a collective purpose. At that moment, the parliament’s former meaning

²⁰⁷ Kartsivadze and Vatcharadze, “*Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978.*”

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ Snyder et al., *The Universe behind Barbed Wire.*

²¹⁰ Codogni, “The 1990 Revolution on Granite,” 11.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹³ C Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 42.

changed: from a space of Soviet violence to a space of national revival.²¹⁴ Zviad Gamsakhurdia's, (Georgia's first president) speech reflected this shift: "It is symbolic to declare on April 9 the restoration of Georgia's independence, after the fate of Georgia was being decided".²¹⁵ Therefore, the building that had once embodied Soviet rule now echoed Georgian voices. Repeated acts of gathering of activists in front of the parliament building have turned the parliament building into what Pierre Nora defines as *lieux de mémoire*, also known as, symbolic spaces where collective memory forms. In Nora's words, these buildings became "moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned".²¹⁶ Therefore, no longer representatives of the centralized power, but as active sites of protests, collective identity and fight for freedom.

The transition period and the process of awakening national identity were especially visible during the Rose and Orange Revolutions. In Georgia, protesters again marched towards the parliament, this time demanding the resignation of the president after rigged elections. The Rose Revolution was a unifying event for the Georgian population, as the protesters achieved their goal peacefully. We can say that it was not only about politics, but also about who held legitimate power. The protesters did not ask where to hold the rally, they instinctively went to the parliament building.²¹⁷ Taking over the parliament building by the opposition leader, Mikheil Saakashvili, was a huge symbolic moment. It was the return of the parliament building to its true meaning. In other words, from an active protest center to a legitimate institution.²¹⁸ "Shevardnadze, who was addressing the new assembly, was whisked away by security as a defiant Saakashvili forced his way into the legislature."²¹⁹ The Orange Revolution in Ukraine followed a similar path. A

²¹⁴ Jimshire Rekhviashvili, "Sakartvelos Damoukidebloba - Ori '9 Aprilis' Pirmsho [Georgia's Independence – The Offspring of Two April 9ths]," *Radio Tavisupleba*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/საქართველოს-დამოუკიდებლობა---ორი-9-აპრილის-პირმშო/29870412.html>. Original "სიმბოლურია საქართველოს დამოუკიდებლობის აღდგენის გამოცხადება 9 აპრილს, ვინაიდან ამ დღეს გადაწყდა საქართველოს ბედი." Authors translation from Georgian

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Volume 1: Conflicts and Divisions*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 7.

²¹⁷ Ó Beacháin and Polese, "American Boots and Russian Vodka," 96-99.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 97

significant change occurred when Interior Ministry officials made it clear that “they would refuse to attack their own people”.²²⁰

Each wave of protests was a key indicator of the formation of a collective identity. The population united against a common desire, trauma, injustice, and most importantly, the regime. The Rose and Orange Revolutions can be considered the culmination of the identity formation, when in the early 1990s the parliament buildings in both countries lost their former symbolic significance and became centers of active protest, while the events of the early 2000s transformed these buildings from protest sites into centers of national identity and sovereignty. In other words, through sociological imagination people reinterpret political structures to align them with their collective values.²²¹

²²⁰ *ibid*, 103.

²²¹ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 7-10.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to analyze how the symbolic meaning of parliament buildings has changed during major protests in Georgia and Ukraine. Rather than simply viewing these buildings as administrative centers, the analysis presents them as dynamic spaces where symbolic meaning is created, contested, and redefined.

This thesis draws two central conclusions. First, the symbolic meaning of parliament buildings in Georgia and Ukraine has changed during three waves of protest: the late Soviet resistance, the early independence movements, and the color revolutions. Therefore, these buildings were transformed from the spaces of centralized Soviet power into active sites of protest and resistance. The thesis illustrates that this transformation was not spontaneous but was formed because of the dynamic interaction of spatial practices, symbolic power, and protest discourse.

Second, a comparative analysis between Georgia and Ukraine clarifies this view by showing that although both countries experienced similar symbolic changes and achieved their goals with the protests, the transition from the former meaning of the parliament buildings occurred differently. In practice, compared to Ukraine, in Georgia, the transformation was much more acute. The protests were related to highly sensitive issues such as depriving the official status of the Georgian language²²² and the ethnic problem related to the April 9 tragedy.²²³ The protests reached their peak in 2003, when protesters physically stormed the Georgian parliament during the Rose Revolution, forcing the president to resign.²²⁴ In contrast, in Ukraine, the symbolic transition has been more gradual, involving dissident writings,²²⁵ student protests,²²⁶ and long-term discursive disputes. Accordingly, we can say that Ukraine followed the chain reaction more quietly than Georgia, starting with peaceful protests and a shift in the symbolic meaning of the

²²² IDFI, "Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978."

²²³ Khaziuri, "9 April – tragedy."

²²⁴ Ó Beacháin and Polese, "American Boots and Russian Vodka

²²⁵ "Ukrainian Helsinki Group," *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*

²²⁶ Codogni, *The 1990 Revolution on Granite*, 19.

regime and the parliament building. This difference highlights the importance of national context and current realities in understanding how political spaces are redefined.

Although the protests did not begin directly at the parliament buildings, any movement needed a symbol to associate with governance, and that was precisely what the parliament buildings were. The institution, which had for years carried the symbolic meaning of fear, terror, and centralized Soviet power, began to change.

The developed theoretical framework emphasizes these conclusions. As we have already mentioned, the transitions of the meaning of the parliament buildings are possible precisely through the interaction of symbol, space, and discourse. Accordingly, Lefebvre's spatial theory is helpful for interpreting these changes. It is clear that the protesters used spatial practices that are associated with demonstrations, student hunger strikes, and setting up tents in front of the parliament buildings. With these actions, the activists protested dominant representations of space, order, and state narratives of obedience. Therefore, through their actions, they created living spaces that were associated with emotional meanings and resistance.²²⁷ According to Lefebvre's theory, space is always socially produced, and in these cases, it was reproduced through cycles of protests associated with repression and resistance.²²⁸ Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power helps us to explain the transition of the space, which is associated with the transfer of "control" from the state to the protesters. When thousands of people gathered and expressed their dissatisfaction, they undermined the symbolic influence of the state on space.²²⁹ According to Bourdieu, critical events allow habitus to be activated.²³⁰ Therefore, the political crises in Georgia and Ukraine allowed people to engage with the space and redefine the symbolic order. Soja's concept of the "third space" is particularly relevant. Through data analysis, the parliament buildings have become a third space, a hybrid environment where spatial practices and representations collide. They were not only sites of protest, but also symbolically charged spaces that allowed residents to interpret, remember, and symbolically transform.²³¹ In other words, people invested their

²²⁷ Soja, *Third space*, 103.

²²⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 73

²²⁹ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 78-80.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 78-79.

²³¹ Soja, *Third space*, 10.

narratives, identities, and frustrations in these buildings, turning them into contested arenas of meaning and purpose.

The symbolic transformation of the parliament buildings cannot be understood without analyzing the discursive context surrounding them. Through CDA and PDA analysis, the thesis argues that space is not only materially constructed but also linguistically produced.²³² This was illustrated in protest slogans such as “We are not your children”²³³, which rejected paternalistic state narratives and asserted civic autonomy. In other words, this was a significant turning point, when the Georgian population somewhat rejected their former past and continued to fight for a new reality. By analyzing protest speech, media statements, and memoirs of the activists, the thesis illustrates how symbolic transformation is not only visual or spatial but also deeply discursive. In both countries, people’s framing of protest movements helped reassign new meanings to the political spaces.²³⁴

Both countries experienced this transition and were involved in three waves of protests that transformed the symbolic role of the Parliament building. However, the interconnection of space, discourse, and symbols was different, which is connected to the intensity of the demonstrations and the response from Soviet forces. Accordingly, it is in these differences that the strength of the comparative method is revealed. As noted above, protest movements in Georgia have emerged in response to immediate and existential threats, particularly around issues of language and identity. The use of state violence in April 1989 deepened the symbolic change of the building, from an institution once associated with Soviet power to a place connected with sacrifice and national will.²³⁵ In other words, this demonstrates how symbolic space can be rapidly transformed through cultural trauma.²³⁶ In Ukraine, by contrast, the changes were more gradual. The dissident writings of the Helsinki Group laid the groundwork for the discursive struggle,²³⁷ while

²³² Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis*. 70-85.

²³³ IDFI, “Tbilisi Events of 14 April 1978.”

²³⁴ Van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?”. 37-38

²³⁵ Khaziuri, “9 April – tragedy.”

²³⁶ Steensland, review of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1776-77.

²³⁷ Ukrainian Helsinki Group, “*Encyclopedia of Ukraine*

the Granite Revolution of 1990 gave it physical form and led to its transfer to the parliament building.²³⁸

At the same time, in both cases, the protests in the late Soviet period are associated with an ambivalent meaning.²³⁹ Protest movements have led countries to independence. In the case of Georgia, on the same day, two years later, the president declared Georgia's independence from the parliament building.²⁴⁰ In Ukraine, the Granite Revolution ended with a similar result.²⁴¹ In both cases, it was a turning point when the population replaced collective trauma²⁴² (especially in the case of Georgia) with a declaration of independence announced from the parliament buildings. Thus, its former symbolic meaning was forever changed.

However, even after reaching independence and abandoning the Soviet legacy, both countries had difficult economic and political conditions.²⁴³ In both states, color revolutions occurred due to fraudulent elections. Therefore, the population attempted to restore institutions to their legitimate purpose in different ways.²⁴⁴ In the case of Georgia, the protesters and opposition leaders achieved the final symbolic change by physically occupying the parliament building. This can be regarded as the culmination of the symbolic reconfigurations of the space, as protesters entered the building, thus forcing the second president to resign.²⁴⁵ While in Ukraine, activists achieved their goal through active protests.²⁴⁶ At the same time, the data illustrate how the significance of these buildings changed during the color revolutions. In contrast to the painful memories associated with the regime, the atmosphere during the color revolution was positive. Therefore, the protesters' discourse also changed. Through data analysis, it's evident that activists contrasted past trauma with the optimism of the Rose and Orange Revolutions, and the space around the parliament building became a space for victory. Therefore, with

²³⁸ Codogni, *The 1990 Revolution on Granite*, 19.

²³⁹ Kalandadze, "The Upside-Down," 21–22.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Harasymiw, "Ukraine's Declaration of Independence."

²⁴² Steensland, review of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 1776–77.

²⁴³ Civil Georgia, "Twenty Years Since Rose Revolution"; Lane, "The Orange Revolution," 525.

²⁴⁴ Adamianis Uplebata Saertashoriso Federatsia, *Thorns After the Roses*, 21–22; Lane, "The Orange Revolution," 527.

²⁴⁵ Kalandadze, "The Upside-Down," 21–22.

²⁴⁶ Codogni, *The 1990 Revolution on Granite*, 19.

the positive attitude of the protesters, whether it was with roses in their hands or with orange emblems, they managed to give the parliament building the status of a peaceful change.

Accordingly, in Georgia and Ukraine, parliament buildings throughout the key protest movements transformed from passive administrative institutions into active sites of mass mobilization. This process can be regarded as a chain reaction starting from the events associated with language protests and Helsinki group actions, which gave the push to the symbolic change of the political space. Although, according to the thesis, both countries achieved the symbolic transition of the parliament building in different ways, the results were still similar. In Georgia, this was more pronounced following the cause of the protests and the intensity of the Soviet Union's reaction, while in Ukraine, as already mentioned, it was more stable. However, comparative analysis demonstrates that severe trauma is not a requirement for the population to unite and achieve this change. When we talk about the changing role and meaning of parliament buildings, it is precisely possible through the interaction of space, symbol, and discourse. This thesis shows that during specific events, people begin interacting, invoking, and reinterpreting the space with their actions and discourse, which leads to the symbolic change of political space. Therefore, in Georgia and Ukraine, parliament institutions are no longer just buildings. They are sites of memory, protest, and identity.

At the same time, the conclusions of this thesis can be regarded as the foundation for future research about the symbolic transformation of political spaces. While the analysis provided detailed information about the process and transitions in Georgia and Ukraine, future research could deepen this analysis through interviews with protest participants to explore how personal narratives shape spatial meaning. At the same time, comparative analyses in other post-Soviet countries that have also experienced protest movements against the regime would further strengthen the results. This would make an even stronger comparison, as it is very interesting how the symbolic meaning of political spaces changes in different conditions.

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