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The ideological function in names of public spaces in the city of São Paulo, Brazil

Brazil is a developing country that, unlike many, does not yet have toponymy committees. The urgency of other national basic issues (public health, safety, economy, education) has a strong impact on studies that do not offer “practical results” to the society, such as: vaccines, medicines, technological discoveries that would drive the industry, etc. This lack of public policies to place names or even better, specialized committees, makes the process (although relevant to municipal organizations) quite precarious from the urban point of view and to the preservation of the group’s memory.

This paper shows, through a historical and political process that is underway in Brazilian cities, the toponym as an ideological tool in the expression of the thought of certain dominant groups, which through places’ names, assure the maintenance of a specific political system in a subtle but effective domination.

The results of this study are part of the Project for the History of Paulista Brazilian Portuguese (PHPP), funded by the Foundation for Research Support of the State of São Paulo (FAPESP). It is a project that studies the refined varieties of the language spoken in the state of São Paulo. The other project to which this text refers is the Toponymic Memory of São Paulo, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, in its phase 4. This particular study is associated with the PHPP for providing, through the urban toponymy, a historical contextualization of the 20th century, highlighting in its second half the period known as the military dictatorship (1964–1985) and the process of democratization. In a previous study, which will be published (in CARVALHINHOS–LIMA–HERNANDES 2019), the authors analysed some documents referring to people captured and tortured during the military period, people who were forgotten to favour their torturers, the latter honoured during the military regime in numerous public places.

The particular interest in the theme comes from the current wave of toponymic substitutions in Brazilian cities. By recommendation of the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade, CNV),¹ one should erase from

¹ Established by law in 2011, the National Truth Commission (CNV) was created in 2012 and published the results of its investigations in 2014. Its objective was to “investigate serious violations against human rights that took place in Brazil between September 18, 1946 and October 5, 1988”. Information and reports are available at <http://www.cnv.gov.br/institucional-acesso-informacao/a-cnv.html> (accessed on June 20 of 2017).



the Brazilian toponymy the traces of the military dictatorship by changing the names of public places. Our object is, precisely, the group of streets of São Paulo that must change because of this standard. The discussion on the subject varies among the population: on the one hand, the indifference towards the change of the onomastic referential, only observing the question from the political point of view; on the other hand, the resistance towards change and attachment to old names, regardless of the honouree.

Another issue is stirred up in this debate: if the name of a place is a cultural heritage, it should not be changed, as it would cause a historical erasure. On the other hand, there is the ethical question: should “torturers” and collaborators of the military period be honoured?

It is worth recalling from the beginning what ALDERMAN (2002: 101) ponders, expressing Azaryahu’s thought: the tribute (or celebration, which involves a wider range of categories than just personal first names) memorializes in an urban denomination a vision of the present that will come to pass; to the detriment of this, another vision is no longer offered for the future.² A toponymic change in a city will therefore always oscillate between two historical views of the present to be preserved. Which present São Paulo intends to preserve as a memory for the future is the question that we intend to investigate as much as possible.

1. The current state of affairs

As mentioned before, Brazil does not have municipal authorities that are exclusively dedicated to the naming of public places like other countries have. The general orientation comes from the federal legislative power through laws and decrees, such as Law no. 6.454, of October 24, 1977, which is entitled *Providing names of public places, works, services and monuments, and other measures* (Brasil 1977). This law forbids the use of names of living persons in tribute, as well as of public people or favoured by public money in public places, works and monuments.

This same law takes a clearly political aspect and is aligned with the ideology of the parties in power in 2013, when it is modified by Law no. 12.781, of January 10, 2013. In that law (Brasil 2013: 1), the prohibition is extended to the person “who has been characterized by the support or exploitation of slave labour in any form, in public properties of any nature, belonging to the Union or to legal entities of the indirect administration”.

² “Street names are unique and potentially politicized memorials because of their geographic connectivity, their ability to touch diverse neighbourhoods and social groups who may or may not identify with the person or event being memorialized. Street naming is also controversial, according to Azaryahu, because, with the commemoration of one vision of the past, there is often a decommemoration of another.” (ALDERMAN 2002: 101).

These two examples show that there is no homogeneous policy regarding the naming of public places and other public elements: laws and decrees often change towards the political situation of the moment. States and Municipalities are responsible for establishing more specific rules and criteria for naming public properties.

In the city of São Paulo, these criteria for naming public places are regulated by the Decree no. 49.346, of March 27, 2008. Criterion number one establishes tribute to personalities (Article 9), provided that death is proven and that the honouree has been a person of merit and “has rendered relevant services in some field of human activity or knowledge” (São Paulo 2008: 1). The second criterion points to facts and historical dates. These two first criteria became popular in the late 19th century with the Proclamation of the Republic (1889) and with the growth of the cities. No criterion contemplates the formalization of spontaneous toponyms. The other criteria indicate the following motivations as possible toponyms: civic, cultural and sports events; recognized literary, musical, pictorial, sculptural and architectural works; folklore characters; celestial bodies; toponyms; geographical features; flora and fauna specimens.

Thus, the average naming of sites with anthroponymic motivation is between 50 and 60%³ of the approximately 65,000 public places. If on one hand, the anthroponymic criterion means a practically never ending source of options, on the other hand, its application represents a complete emptying (or desemantization) of denominations and references. Although the honouree is a popularly known figure, the referential factor is stronger than that of the tribute, and his name becomes detached from the human referential in the mind of the group and turns out to be just another street name.

The changes or substitutions of toponyms in the cities are proposed by the Municipalities. Each Bill that presents a toponymic change or replacement consists of committees formed by parliamentarians to review, issue opinions, approve or reject the Bill. The absence of a toponymy committee generates a great demand of parliamentarians to analyse these issues, representing approximately 60% of the activity of the councillors. As it can be noticed, there is a contradiction: considering the little importance that toponymy has in the country, why does the same point involve so many politicians at the municipal

³ This percentage comes from surveys made by undergraduate and graduate students in the Toponymy subjects offered at the University of São Paulo by Carvalhinhos. Similar numbers may appear in other surveys offered by print media. Check out <http://desacato.info/maioria-dos-projetos-nas-camaras-visa-a-trocar-nomes-de-ruas/> (access on June 30 of 2017), or <https://www.nossasaopaulo.org.br/portal/files/PLsSPTransparenciaBrasil.pdf> (access on June 30 of 2017). Moreover, the subject is frequently cited as a motto that criticizes the activity of the councilmen.



level? The answer can be found in another research (still unpublished)⁴ connected to this one, about “inflation” in the nomenclature of the São Paulo bridges: urbanonyms are, in fact, excellent exchange coins favouring vanities, making agreements and using the denomination as an exterior mechanism of ideological determination.

2. The ideological function of the names

The place name can be an instrument of an ideological imposition, because there is a direct connection between the name and the ideology that binds it. In the onomastic substitution, a movement can take place that forces the acceptance of this new ideology conveyed by the new toponym by simple accommodation and later desemantization, when the new ideas are already settled within the group.

Considering toponym as one of the elements of a text that is represented by the city itself, to therefore change an urbanonym for political reasons, either by the will of a councillor, by the determination of a commission or even by family reasons (tribute to other politicians in the family), would mean, in Greimasian semiotics (GREIMAS–COURTÉS 1989), to reproduce the real and constitute a simulacrum, as if from the surface structure one could get to the deep structure, linked to the ideology and change it, moulding it as stated by the will of the dominant group. According to some authors who dedicate themselves to the issue about name and ideology as ALDERMAN (in papers published in 2002 and 2008), AZARYAHU (in paper published in 2009) and GILL (2005), this is what in fact happens.

The name of a place has the purpose of expressing the world view and the ideology of the group that produces it, but the question in this case is *who* produces the name. For AZARYAHU (2009: 53), who comments on the issue especially with regard to urbanonyms, this official version presented to the public in the form of commemorative names or of tribute is nothing more than a “semiotics makeup”: “When used for commemorative purposes, street names and the version of history they introduce into the public sphere belong to the semiotic makeup of local and national identity and to the structures of power and authority. In their commemorative capacity, street names communicate official representations of the ruling socio-political order. In particular, they introduce an official version of history into networks of social communication that involve ordinary urban experiences that seem to be separated from the realm of political ideology.”

Creating bridges between the past and the present in the form of new connections would be the purpose of the toponymic changes. ALDERMAN (2002: 99), considers urbanonyms as “memorial arenas”, pondering that the past erupts in the present through commemorative names applied to the streets and roads of a city, naturally in construction process. He points out however, that not everything is appropriate or can be remembered: “Commemorative street naming is an important vehicle for bringing the past into the present, helping weave history into the geographic fabric of everyday life. Named streets, like any place of memory, can become embroiled in the politics of defining what is historically significant or worthy of public remembrance. I am interested in street names as ‘memorial arenas,’ public spaces for representing the images of historical figures and debating the meaning and relative importance of these figures to contemporary society.” (ALDERMAN 2002: 99).

In another work published in 2008, ALDERMAN (2008: 196) mentions Azaryahu (1992 in ALDERMAN 2008), who in a critical position on the subject demonstrates how toponyms are shaped in the construction of a nation and how they are “rewritten” during processes of ideological change, serving as a useful tool to the dominant elites, so far as they are vulnerable to manipulation: “These studies largely emphasize how government elites in countries such as Israel, Germany, Russia, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia have manipulated place names – particularly commemorative street names – to advance reinvented notions of national identity and history” (ALDERMAN 2008: 196).

AZARYAHU (2009: 54) makes it clear also to think, as we have already pointed out, that history becomes a semiotics reality. By sharing a cultural experience with a homage nomination, the ruling group (“authorities”) loses control over how these urbanonyms are used or evoked: “Individual responses are to a large extent governed by preconditioned ideological dispositions and political attitudes, and are also dependent upon the social and psychological contexts in which the evocation of a particular street name takes place.”

ALDERMAN (2002: 100) uses an interesting term, “reputation policy”, or an approach centred on a socially constructed and contested type of tribute to historical figures. In this process of memorialisation (creation of memory by naming), comes what is called “discursive rivalries in which the memorialisation of these figures is based” (2002: 100).

AZARYAHU (2009) mentions two toponymic functions: the primary, connotative and referential; and the secondary, symbolic and ideological. According to this view in the urban space, a toponym has an ideological function that is its second nature, as much as the singularization of the space and its role in localization.

Commemorative names symbolize, therefore, the story that is wanted by a group. In São Paulo, then, there is currently a tension between two stories to be



preserved: one, consolidated, fruit of the will of a dominant group established in power for a long time; another, a historical vision rewritten by another dominant group recently established in power. Two stories of power, however with different actors.

3. The substitutions happening in the city of São Paulo

In a previous work (CARVALHINHOS–LIMA–HERNANDES 2019, in press), we observed only one “desire” of toponymic changes that was a natural consequence of two legal provisions: a law of 2013 and the Streets of Memory Program, which was to be instituted in August of 2015 in the city of São Paulo with the objective of realizing the recommendations proposed by the National Truth Commission. At the time, we studied documents relating to the military period (1964–1985) in São Paulo in the archives of the State Department of Political and Social order of São Paulo (Departamento Estadual de Ordem Política e Social de São Paulo – DEOPS).⁵ It is interesting to note that many of the political prisoners of that time are in public life today. Both the prisoners and the tortured and killed, as well as others who would have suffered violence of any kind, would be the most indicated to be honoured in streets of São Paulo and Brazil, as recommended by the National Truth Commission.⁶ The text that served as guideline to the Brazilian municipalities in the toponymic changes was the following: “49. With the same purpose of preserving memory, the CNV [National Truth Commission] proposes the annulment of measures that honoured authors of serious violations of human rights during the period of the military dictatorship. Among others, measures should be taken to [...] promote the alteration of the names of public places, public transport routes, buildings and public institutions of any nature, whether federal, state or municipal, which

⁵ This Body has changed its name several times over the years since its creation in 1938, during the New State (Estado Novo), when it was designated Department of Political and Social Order of São Paulo-DOPS: “The Political and Social Order Office was responsible for supervising the manufacture, importation, exportation, trade, employment or use of explosive materials; to supervise the entry and stay of foreigners, to institute, to prosecute, and to finalize investigations relating to facts; to inspect newspapers, magazines and advertising companies in general; to inspect hotels, inners and similar; to inspect airports, railway stations and highways; to carry out investigations on suspected persons, places where any change or attack against the order is presumed political and social; to organize day by day information bulletins of all services performed in the last 24 hours; and finally, to identify and to pronounce individuals suspected of crimes and contraventions that threaten the political and social order, organized in an appropriate binder, ‘in order to facilitate the statistical work of your movement and any and all investigations.’” (Text of Decree No. 9.893-B, of December 31, 1938, creating the Body).

⁶ In the Final Report of the National Truth Commission (2014), there is a volume with Conclusions and Recommendations. Among these is “[28] Preservation of the memory of serious violations against human rights” (Brasil 2014: 974), to which we refer in this text.

refer to public agents or individuals who have been committed to the practice of serious violations.” (Brasil 2014: 974).

According to what we verified in that moment (CARVALHINHOS–LIMA–HERNANDES 2019), “One of the strategies used in the Brazilian dictatorial period for the exaltation of dictatorial control and of the national order was, according to information from the current Secretariat of Human Rights and Citizenship of the Municipality of São Paulo, precisely the attribution of names of personalities linked to this dictatorial movement to public places. These names remained unchanged for at least two decades without people realizing they were a negative memory.”

Such facts reveal two stories. The first one is already told and it is present in the streets of São Paulo and Brazil. According to the Secretariat of Human Rights and Citizenship of the Municipality of São Paulo, it was the story of the former municipal administration (which ended on December 31, 2016), which exalted and somehow controlled the desired order during the military government.

The story that is intended to be told from the 21st century onwards and especially from the work of the National Truth Commission is what supporters of the Brazilian extreme right call “the history of the defeated”, who, from persecuted by the military regime came to power after 1985. The names of streets and other public bodies (schools, sports centres, public buildings) must be replaced, generally, from the torturers to those who have been tortured in the streets of São Paulo. The usual speech found in these documents is that of “historical reparation” (see note 9). According to AZARYAHU (2009), however, it is a question of erasing what was already there and inscribing a new story in the vision that interests the group currently in power.

In reference to the actions of the government of the city of São Paulo in recent years regarding specifically about these toponymic changes (because it is a fact that many changes take place daily for a variety of reasons), we mention again the Streets of Memory Program (Secretariat of Human Rights and Citizenship⁷ of the City of São Paulo, 13 August 2015), located within the scope of the National Human Rights Program. In the words of one of those responsible for the Streets of Memory, in official news of the City Hall, is the definition of the program: “The Streets of Memory is a clear expression that we will not tolerate

⁷ Also, this Secretariat was created under the same administration, which was of the Workers’ Party, a party that is considered to be socialist that has been in the Federal Government since 2003 and is going through an unprecedented political crisis since 2015. In 2016, a candidate was elected to the office of the São Paulo City Council who was never a politician but, like the US President Donald Trump, he had a career as a successful entrepreneur and media communicator and was nominated by an opposition party that is considered conservative and of right wing.

more tributes to symbols of authoritarianism in sites of our city. The removal of these tributes from public space represents a fundamental symbolic reparation to the victims of the State”, said Rogério Sottili, former deputy secretary of Human Rights and Citizenship, who created the action.

The program is based on the understanding that, in addition to serious violations of individuals and groups of people, the military dictatorship has oppressively interfered in the public arena in order to contain possible resistance outbreaks by forbidding political demonstrations and meetings. They thus barred the right to use these spaces, transforming the city into a simple space between home and work. Along the same lines, public places and facilities were named after public and civil officials who supported the authoritarian politics in power and who committed crimes against humanity, thus praising symbols of repression and promoting undemocratic values as references to new generations who circulate daily in the city.

According to the survey made by the coordination of Right to Memory and Truth [...], “there are at least 38 sites associated with the dictatorship, of which 22 are directly linked to the repression: dictators, torturers and heads of security services who served the repression.” (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2015)

In the 2016 elections, a politician of the opposition party was elected mayor of São Paulo, who took office on 1 January 2017. What can be noted then is an urgency to approve a legal device that guarantees the naming criteria to be followed in this particular case, that is, in streets that have as their name figures linked to political persecution, torture or even military institutions. It was approved on December 27, 2016 (four days before the new party took office in São Paulo) an ordinance⁸ with these criteria, or better, with a list of names to be honoured as substitutions.

Although the recommendation of the National Truth Commission and the Municipal Truth Commission suggest replacing anthroponyms referring to military or civilian personalities linked to torture and political persecution by the tortured or killed, or even by supporters of the movement against military in power, that wasn’t what really happened. The list of anthroponyms in the Human Rights Reference Database (the official name of the anthroponyms’ list to be entered in the substitutions) is a list of categories that exactly correspond to the coordinates of the Secretariat of Human Rights and Citizenship (São Paulo), which are: gender equality (6 names), racial equality (8 names), LGBT population (7 names), children and teenagers (5 names), alcohol and drug policies (2 names), youth (6 names), memory and truth (the only one directly

linked to the issue, 18 names), right to the city (2 names), homeless population (13 names), immigrants (3 names), decent work (3 names), people with disabilities and reduced mobility (3 names), human rights education (3 names), culture (7 names). The Article 3 (São Paulo 2016: 7) clarifies that “The Human Rights Reference Database, built based on nominations from various municipal government and civil society departments, may be extended at any time”, but it does not detail their criteria or responsible bodies.

The *Human Rights Reference Database*, which is a database of toponyms to be used in specific substitutions in places whose honourees belonged to the military period, has some interesting peculiarities of which we highlight only one that perfectly illustrates our point: across all categories of honourees, much of it is composed of black and afro-descendant names. The “historical compensation”⁹ is a motto of the Brazilian socialist left wing and it seems that this history that wants to be written with the new denominations walks in this line of thought, overlapping a socialist vision to the militarist vision, implicit in the names to be replaced, which puts into practice what AZARYAHU proposes in theory.

The 22 toponymic altered areas in the Streets of Memory Program (August 2015) are: 3 avenues (*Avenida General Ênio Pimentel da Silveira*, *Avenida General Golbery Couto e Silva* and *Avenida Presidente Castello Branco*), 4 squares (*Praça Augusto Rademaker Grunewald*, *Praça General Humberto de Souza Melo*, *Praça General Milton Tavares de Souza* and *Praça Ministro Alfredo Buzaid*), 2 overpasses and one elevated road (*Viaduto 31 de Março* and *Viaduto Governador Abreu Sodré*; *Elevado Presidente Arthur da Costa e Silva*) and 12 streets (*Rua 31 de Março*, *Rua Alberi Vieira dos Santos*, *Rua Alcides Cintra Bueno Filho*, *Rua Délio Jardim de Matos*, *Rua Governador Roberto*

⁹ The Law of Historical Compensation is an inheritance of the Russian communist thought, linked (although indirectly) to Lenin and Trotsky, of whom C.L.R. James was a follower. According to BEILHARZ (1987), C.L.R. James was a philosopher and activist of the Soviet cause, having published in the decades of 30 and 40 several critical studies. He was also a political supporter of the Pan African movement, to which the concept is also linked. SMITH (2010) clarifies that the concept of the law of historical compensation came from an almost enchanted state from reading a notebook of Lenin, in notes to the *Science of Logic*, by Hegel: “Such were specific instances of what James called, with his tongue somewhat in his cheek, ‘the law of historical compensation’ (1980 [1948]: 136). He had been struck by a small piece of marginalia left by Lenin in his notebook on Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. The comment reads only: ‘Leap. leap. Leap. Leap.’. This, for James, was the most inspiring shorthand for that understanding, which I have described, that ‘the ideal’ is discernible as a ‘concrete negation’ of what already is.” (2010: 67). This seems to be connected, in Hegel, with the critique of cosmology: “[...] a major interest in this discipline was the establishment of the so-called ‘universal cosmological laws’ like, for instance, that there is no ‘leap’ in nature. ‘Leap’ here means the same as qualitative difference and qualitative change, which appear as non-mediatized, whereas that which is gradual (qualitative) presents on the contrary as something mediatized” (Hegel [1830] 1995: 97).



Costa Abreu Sodré, Rua Hely Lopes de Meirelles, Rua Henning Boilesen, Rua Dr. Mário Santalucia, Rua Octávio Gonçalves Moreira Junior, Rua Olímpio Mourão Filho, Rua Senador Filinto Muller and Rua Sérgio Fleury).

The former honourees and the honourees that are still present in the São Paulo toponymy, which was the reason for this change, have developed countless activities during the military period, whether military or civilian. These personalities worked on various organs and fronts:¹⁰ Former Information Operations Detachment of the Internal Defence Operations Centre (DOI-CODI), repressor body of the Brazilian Military Regime (1964–1985); and also members of the Brazilian Armed Forces. It's also possible to find personalities honoured as executive collaborators at various levels during the Military Period: in the Legal Medical Institute, in financing equipment and actions, in the way prisoners were dealt with (inquiries, taking statements and means to obtain them, such as coercion and torture). Knowing their biographies, one makes contact with the obscure side of this twenty-year period, but only at that moment of decoding: in the act of identifying the place, it is just another place name for the passer-by, anthroponymic toponym. In other words, as AZARYAHU (2009) has proposed and was already mentioned, the primary function is kept in these odonyms, denoted and utilitarian, which is superimposed on the secondary function, connotative and symbolic.

Until the present date (August of 2017), only 3 have been changed within this program: *Avenida General Golbery do Couto e Silva*, now *Avenida Giuseppe Benito Pegoraro* (changed by Ordinary Law 16.524/2016), *Rua Alcides Cintra Bueno Filho*, now *Rua Zilda Arns* (Law No. 16.628, April 11, 2017) and the most controversial of all, the current *Elevado Presidente João Goulart* (formerly *Elevado Presidente Arthur da Costa e Silva*), popularly known as *Minhocão* (which means, in English, “Big Worm”, a reference to the extension of this high-line).

We analysed the legal history of the names in these 22 places; only one of them does not present any data. It is interesting to observe that only few of them were named when the military period was at its peak (Figure 1), only 19%:

¹⁰ It is not our goal to describe each of the honourees in the denominations and determine their actions, so we suggest the interested reader to search the sites in São Paulo's Dictionary of Streets: <http://www.dicionarioderuas.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/PaginasPublicas/Introducao.aspx> (accessed on July 15 of 2017).

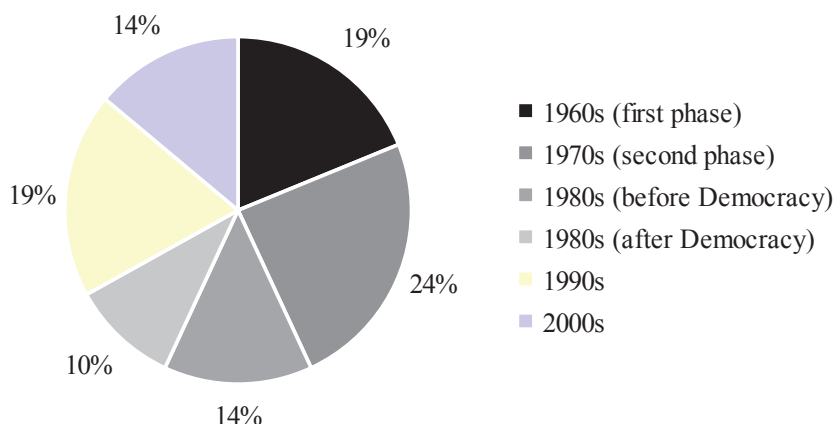


Figure 1: Year/decade of the naming of sites related to tributes to military personnel and sympathizers in São Paulo from 1964 to 2000

Considering the entire period of military government (1964–1985), the chart shows in black and grey (black 1960s, dark grey 1970s and grey 1980s before Democracy) 57% of denominations, but it is curious to note that even after the installation of democracy in 1985 (light grey, yellow and lilac), many denominations were made using the same personalities of the military regime in the tributes, making a total of 43% – a relatively high percentage. Obviously, the numbers refer only to this small sample and perhaps an overall analysis within the (65,000) public places may reveal other statistics.

Despite the progress in the discussion since the launch of the Streets of Memory Program, only 3 names (one of them of great impact, as previously mentioned) have been substituted and 2 are in the process of being processed in the City Council of São Paulo. 77% thus remain unchanged, as evidenced by Figure 2.

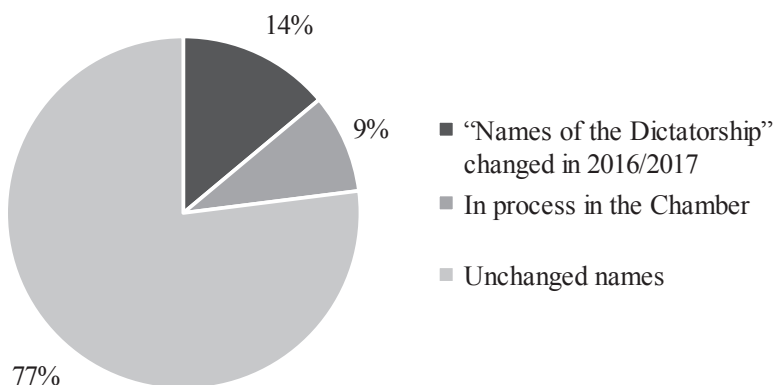


Figure 2: Status of the proposed amendments – names referring to personalities linked to the military period replaced by the tortured or anti-militarism activists

Another interesting data to consider is what kind of toponym was replaced when they paid tribute to militarism, both during the military period and after 1985. Of the 22 names analysed, one is difficult to identify in case of substitution because it is an express way composed of five avenues and popularly known as *Marginal do Tietê*. One of these avenues is in the replacement plan (*Avenida Presidente Castello Branco*); the great strength of spontaneous denomination seems to make the change innocuous.

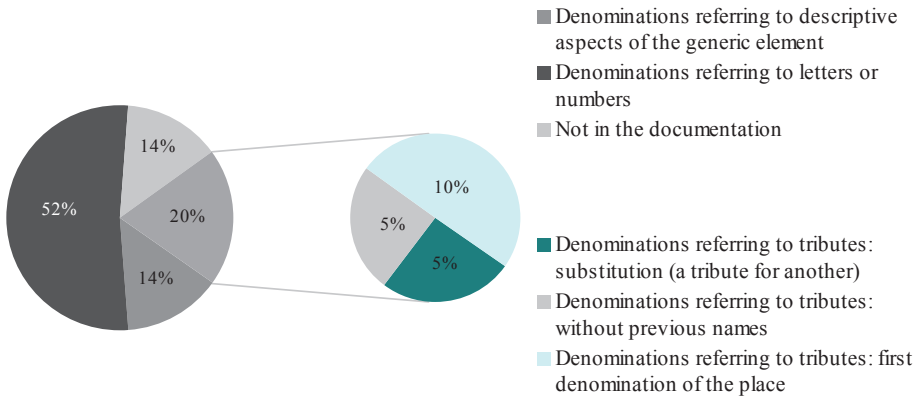


Figure 3: Previous motivations – public places replaced with names of tribute between 1964–2000

Most of the changes made in the period under consideration, including the period of military government, replaced alphabetic or numerical names (52%). It is worth remembering that the period is part of the time when the city of São Paulo had to establish criteria to regularize repeated or insufficient denominations for identification because of the high number of sites that were emerging and made official.¹¹ Some of the changes (only 14%) refer to descriptive names of the street (“Private Passage”, “Left Auxiliary Avenue of the Tietê and Ring Road”, “Left Marginal Avenue of the Tietê River”). The same percentage (14%) refers to unidentified changes in documentation and 20% refer to tributes. Of these,

¹¹ In 1973, a commission was created to solve the problem of 20,000 irregular or repeatedly named sites. A database of names was developed to meet this demand as well as the demand of the following years. Denominational options were listed from A to Z by the commission members and the trainees (who were given days off by the number of names suggested), who searched in libraries and other possible sources for names – songs, states, countries, cities, geographic elements, cultural objects, people. For further information about these facts please consult Prefeitura de São Paulo 2017 (references).

only 5% makes the substitution of a tribute for another: *Praça Pérola Byington*¹² (from 1964 to 1974) to *Praça General Humberto de Souza Melo*.

On the other hand, the current changes (those already in use and the proposals) have the purpose to replace old tributes by new tributes in 100%, which in the motivational plane maintains the denomination as anthroponymic – in the symbolic plane however, the militarism still persists in a certain way: the torturer is replaced by the tortured. Nonetheless, the intention of the program is to teach the “never again”. However, they forget that the primary function of the toponym is stronger than its symbolic function, at least on a day to day basis.

4. Final considerations

The dichotomous positioning of the Paulistanos regarding these changes reflects the clash between right and left wing that took Brazil about five years ago. The most striking toponymic change we referred to was the flagship of the Streets of Memory Program, which proposed to change at its launch the name of two important downtown areas: the *31 de Março* overpass and the *Elevado Presidente Artur Costa e Silva* (already changed in 2016).

In the Bill, the name *31 de Março* would be replaced by *Therezinha Zerbini*. The city has many important main avenues which motivations are historical or of important dates: *Avenida 9 de Julho*, *Avenida 23 de Maio* (which is one of the north-south axis), *Rua Sete de Abril* and *Rua 25 de Março* (an important popular shopping centre). On a daily basis however, the São Paulo citizen (or those who adopted São Paulo as a city, immigrants and migrants) does not know what is celebrated on those dates: the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932¹³ (in the figure of the avenues *9 de Julho* and *23 de Maio*, which are dates related to the revolution),¹⁴ the abdication of D. Pedro I in favour of his son D.

¹² We find ourselves in a mess here: there is today in São Paulo the *Praça Pérola Byington* in the *Bela Vista* borough (the *Praça General Humberto de Souza Melo* is located in the *Belenzinho* borough), because of the hospital of the same name (formerly named *Pró-Cruzada Infantil* Hospital, which was renamed in 1963 and is currently known by the spontaneous name of “Women’s Hospital”). This square, which besides the name has a bust in honour of *Pérola Byington*, is not included in the São Paulo Dictionary of Streets, nor did we locate the decree of 1963 for which it would have been named.

¹³ Being almost an echo of the current Brazilian situation, the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932 was an armed movement occurred in the state of São Paulo. In 1930, there was a coup: the legitimately elected president, Julio Prestes, was prevented from taking office and his defeated opponent, Getúlio Vargas, took over. The São Paulo revolution had the purpose of overthrowing Getúlio Vargas and establishing a constituent assembly for the drafting of a new Constitution.

¹⁴ The justification of the bill for naming the avenue *23 de Maio*, which extends itself over the Itororó Creek says: “The great date of 23 May 1932, which marked the reconquest of the



Pedro de Alcântara (Pedro II) on April 7, 1831) or the promulgation of the first Brazilian constitution on March 25, 1824. Similarly, the common Paulistano has no idea that the *31 de Março* Overpass celebrates the time of the installation of militarism in power in 1964. The replacement Bill was proposed by the former mayor of São Paulo (Fernando Haddad, 2013–2016) and is still in the City Hall. The text of the bill says it has the purpose of “[...] to pay a just homage from the city of São Paulo to the recently deceased Therezinha Zerbini, due to her brilliant and exemplary performance as a human rights activist, in the social movements of resistance to the dictatorship that followed the military coup begun on March 31, 1964, as well as in the fight for the amnesty of prisoners and political exiles due to the regime of exception established in Brazil at that time. [...] the present tribute intends to remove from the overpass in question the allusion to the date of 31 March of 1964, considered as the milestone of the coup that started the military dictatorship.” (HADDAD 2015: 1).

The former *Elevado Presidente Artur Costa e Silva* and current *Elevado Presidente João Goulart*, denomination that was changed in 2016, has always divided opinions because of the impact it caused. The high-line connects the centre of the city to the *Barra Funda* district and is more than three kilometres long, passing a few meters from the buildings around it.

Built in 1969, its popular denomination was installed even before its construction: *Minhocão*, a metaphorical allusion to its format and extension. There is currently a debate about its demolition. The toponymic change has caused much controversy, and the reactions on the news reflect how these changes are being viewed from a political point of view.¹⁵ However, the fact is that the Paulistano seldom used the old denomination or will ever use the current one, for *Minhocão* is a term so dear for being spontaneous and descriptive that it will not be abandoned. Perhaps this fact will soften the connotative function of the official name of João Goulart. According to GILL (2005: 480–481), the symbolic function is “help to locate people spiritually by linking geographical

autonomy of São Paulo in the face of the dictatorship, does not yet have in the city a just commemorative sign of a street, avenue or square. [...] *Avenida 23 de Maio* will be very well next to its twin sister, *Avenida 9 de Julho*, forming a vertex in *Praça das Bandeiras*, a V that will speak to the soul of São Paulo, symbolizing the victory of São Paulo” (dating from 1954) (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2017). On May 23, 1932, students who became involved in the confrontation were killed. From the acronym of their names (Martins, Miragaia, Dráusio and Camargo), MMDC, emerged the banner of the revolutionaries.

¹⁵ It is not our goal to explore these comments, but we would like to point out to the reader some news that may expose this dichotomy, such as the one entitled: “Law changing the name of *Minhocão* to *Elevado João Goulart* is sanctioned”, <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/07/lei-que-muda-nome-do-minhocao-para-elevado-joao-goulart-e-sancionada.html>, accessed on 30 of June of 2017.

location and space with the legitimating structures of that community and its regime”.

Considering the turbulent political moment in Brazil, the toponymic changes determining the substitution of names consolidated by others are seen by a portion of the population as a political retaliation and by another portion as a necessary action for the education of future generations.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that in 2017, in the administration of another mayor, there was a toponymic change within the proposed terms and one change that was at least strange: the *Ponte das Bandeiras* became *Ponte das Bandeiras Senador Romeu Tuma*. Contrary to the recommendations of the National Commission of Truth, the São Paulo bridge honours (although moderately, as its former name was kept)¹⁶ the ex-senator, who was also director of the extinct Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS), which was an organ of repression between the years of 1966 and 1983.

According to GILL (2005: 481), the replacement of symbols in a regime change is important as a problem in order to generate its legitimacy (in this case, the change of the party in power): “[...] commemorative place names help to legitimate existing power structures by linking the regime’s view of itself, its past, and the world, with the seemingly mundane settings of everyday life; [...] the regime’s legitimating symbols are interwoven with daily life in a routinized, almost unnoticed, fashion through place names. [...] Public space is given particular meaning by the names attached to it. [...] They turn the landscape into a world structured by the legitimating myths and symbols of the regime, projecting a particular view of the past and present onto that landscape. Collective memory is moulded and contemporary location defined by the symbolism of the regime reflected in commemorative place names. [...] This means that the symbolism of place names may be even more important than the other, and more commonly recognized, types of symbols: people come into direct contact with place names every day and they gain their orientation from those place names, which means that the symbols have an immediate practical reality for the populace in the way that, for example, flags and anthems do not. People’s geographic space is defined and structured in terms of the categories that the regime considers important and that help to legitimate the regime itself. In this sense, the symbolism involved in place names is fundamental to the successful restructuring of society.”

Only time will tell in Brazil if the ideological clash extended to the toponymic symbols will in fact shape a progressive collective memory that learns from the mistakes of the past or if it will only erase a period of its history.

¹⁶ About the compound denominations of this type, see LIMA-CARVALHINHOS 2018.

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Abstract

Important changes in urban toponymy have been taking place in recent years in many Brazilian cities. However, Brazil does not have toponymy committees, and members of the legislative power present bills, many of which have little logic, whereby toponyms are changed. São Paulo follows this pattern, and we will check how street names are replaced. This often happens so suddenly and without the foreknowledge of the population that it displeases the people. We will discuss the forced erasure of a difficult historical moment for Brazil, the military dictatorship of the 1960s. The National Truth Commission has been clarifying the crimes committed throughout the dictatorship period, and one of the results is the replacement the names of public spaces that were “paying homage” to figures connected to acts of torture by the names of those who were tortured or fought against the military dictatorship. Nevertheless, far from pleasing the population, these replacements have not been seen favourably. This paper discusses some of these alterations, the ensuing controversies, analysing the extent to which they interfere in the location of an individual in the city, and examines the use of the odonyms as a tool for slow, but permanent ideological manipulation.

Keywords: São Paulo toponymy, Brazilian urban toponymy, odonyms, politics and ideology