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THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL IN THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE MEMORIAL

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Memorials are one of the most common forms of memorialization and may be understood as symbolic reparations for the victims and survivors of mass violence. They acknowledge the suffering and grief of the victims and pay tribute to the dead. At the same time, the memorials epitomises not only history but also teaches contemporary lessons of local and global character. The Armenian Genocide Memorial as a symbol of grief and revival of the Armenian nation serves all these aims.
This article aims to address some points of history of the construction of the Armenian Genocide Memorial, its local and global implications, the issue of absence of names in the Memorial, as well as the feelings of patriotism and statehood embedded in the Armenian Genocide Memorial.

Keywords: memory, memorials, Armenian Genocide, Karabagh Movement, national identity.

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Introduction

Globalization and, particularly, cultural globalization is creating a borderless world. As a result, many phenomena that had narrow, national implications are being re-evaluated and re-interpreted to stress their universal and democratic features and be presented to the world within the context of more understandable concepts.

Each generation must acquire the knowledge and skills needed to build the private and public dispositions necessary to support democratic values and understand the importance of respect for human rights. They should be used to combat discrimination, hate speech and other violations, being built through texts, studies and the power of example, consciously constructing and reproducing democracy, one generation after another. Traumatic past experiences, memorials and museums accumulating the people's memory thus gain new meanings and roles in civic education in the age of globalization.

Memorialization - understood as the practice of remembrance by commemorations, writing history textbooks and establishing memorials. Memorials as one form of memorialization, may be understood as symbolic reparations for the victims and survivors of mass violence, since they acknowledge their suffering and grief and pay respect to the dead. Therefore, after mass violence, memorials can be understood as the physical loci of recognition and the imperative of not forgetting the atrocities of the past.[1]

Public memorials such as historic sites, monuments and museums, certain public art or conceptual art projects and commemorative events have become critical elements in the current struggles for human rights and democracy. Communities, in vastly different contexts, see public memorialization as central to justice, reconciliation, truth-telling, reparation and embracing the past.[2]

Recognizing the power and potential of memorialization, NGOs, victims' groups, and truth commissions in various countries have advocated that memorialization be a key component of reform and transitional justice. Such initiatives, for the victims of violence, are the second most important form of state reparation after financial compensation.[3]

Memorials exist to tell us something about the past while seeking to affect the future. They and museums are embedded in local sites and function as nodes around which the fabric of remembrance unfolds in multifaceted and organic ways. Some are sites where atrocities occurred, while others represent more abstract and conceptual places and can be constructed and placed anywhere.[4] Memorials are often seen as being established for the forming of collective memory, meaning and identity, with those of a difficult past being

1 Julia Viebach, "*Alétheia* and the Making of the World: Inner and Outer Dimensions of Memorials in Rwanda," in *Memorials in Time of Transition*, eds. Susanne Buckley-Zistel & Stefanie Shafer (Cambridge-Antwerp-Portland: Intersentia Publishing Ltd., 2014), 69.

2 Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Ševčenko, Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Memorialization-Democracy-2007-English_0.pdf, accessed 12.02.2020.

3 Ernesto Kiza, Corene Rathgeber, and Holger-C. Rohne, *Victims of War: An Empirical Study on War-Victimization and Victims' Attitudes toward Addressing Atrocities* (Hamburg: Hamburg Institute for Social Research, 2006).

4 Judy Barsalou, "Reflecting the fractured past: memorialization, transitional justice and the role of the outsiders," in *Memorials in Time of Transition*, 47-68.

symbolically enacted and recounted at their sites. This symbolism is not, however, limited to the geographical site of the memorial site itself. Through various processes and agents, these local memories and memorial sites are transformed into transnational spaces. Even though memorials have always been present, they are becoming globalized as memories are released and shared.[5] A perfect example of this is the Armenian Genocide memorial.

Aspects of the History of the Construction of the Armenian Genocide Memorial

It seems that memorials are only meant to embody the memory which they are built to preserve and pass on, but actually solve immense problems. Civic education of future generations is carried out through them, conveying basic values, some of which will be addressed below, using the Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum as an example.

It should be noted that the story of *the construction of the Memorial itself is an example of a struggle against violations of human/national rights and the result of civil disobedience and courageous civic behavior*. What is meant by this statement? The point is that from the mid-1920s until the mid-1950s the Armenian population of Soviet Armenia was deprived of the right "to grieve."[6] I do not know which article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights embodies the right to "remember," but being deprived of it was a reality for Soviet Armenian citizens. This thirty-year period is known in history as the "Stalinist era." During that time, talking about Armeno-Turkish relations, massacres of Armenians, the fate of the Armenians in Western Armenia, even hints of the need for the return of the Armenian occupied lands by Turkey were qualified as manifestations of nationalism and anti-Soviet sentiment and were punished by execution, imprisonment or exile to Siberia.

It was only during the "Khrushchev thaw" (from the mid-1950s to 1964) that historians, writers, and artists were allowed to reflect on the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the experiences of individual Genocide survivors and their later activities etc. Armenian writers' works, who were victims of Stalinist repression; Armenian classic writers, who were labeled as "nationalists" and the "enemy," were gradually returned to the people and were seized upon, as were editions of books by Western Armenian writers that were published in tens of thousands of copies.[7]

Perhaps it was due to inner political changes as well as a certain liberal approach toward the issue of the Genocide, brought about by literature and art, that fomented, on the 50th anniversary of the Genocide, the mass demonstrations that occurred in Yerevan in April 1965. This was an unusual phenomenon in the Soviet state of those times, with tens of thousands of people taking to the streets to commemorate the memory of the innocent victims of the Genocide and to demand reparations.[8]

5 Annika Björkdahl, Stefanie Kappler, "The Creation of Transnational Memory Spaces: Professionalization and Commercialization," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32 (2019): 383-401.

6 Vardges Petrosyan, "On the different sides of the 'psychological barbed-wire'" in *Մեր ժողովուրդն իմն է՝ ինչպես իմ վիշտը* [Our people are mine - as is my grief] in *Collection of Articles*, ed. Levon Ananyan (Yerevan, Hayastan, 2003), 132.

7 Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity. Volume 1: The Memory of Genocide and the Karabagh Movement* (Yerevan: Gitut'yun, 2009), 38-39.

8 Avag Harutyunyan, *Հայոց ցեղասպանության 50-րդ տարելիցը և Երկրորդ հանրապետությունը* [The 50th

The Soviet Armenian leadership (having received the Kremlin's permission in advance) marked the anniversary of the Genocide in a solemn session in the Opera House. Thanks to the people's request and the patriotic stance of the Armenian Soviet leadership, the Armenian Genocide Memorial was built in 1965-1967. It is noteworthy that during the construction of the memorial there had always been a concern that the Moscow/Kremlin leadership of the Soviet Union may suddenly change its mind and stop construction. The memorial was therefore built quickly, without any reports being published in the press.

Roads leading to the memorial pass through a large park. The complex itself occupies an area about half a hectare and consists of three main structures: a one hundred metre long memorial wall with the names of the Armenian settlements in the Ottoman Empire where major massacres took place inscribed on it, the open air memorial hall and the obelisk symbolizing "Resurrecting Armenia." The circular open-air hall, 30 m in diameter, built of 12 huge basalt pylons inclined towards the eternal flame in the centre, symbolize the perpetual memory of the Genocide victims. The 40 m high obelisk is the stone embodiment of the sprouting of two leaves that ascend with each other and symbolize the revival of the Armenian people (pic. 1).

Pic. 1 - The Armenian Genocide memorial: a general view.

Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and the Second Republic] (Yerevan: Noravanq, 2015). By becoming acquainted with the roots of the Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex and also with the history of the construction of the monument itself, one may learn the essence of totalitarian/authoritarian systems and the need to struggle for fundamental human rights and freedoms, as well as the potential negative effects of hate speech. This information will educate a conscious citizen, whose role in building of a healthy society is of the greatest importance.

The Local and The Global in the Genocide Memorial

Being situated on top of a hill and separated from the urban environment, the memorial complex is, at the same time, in harmony with the scenery, particularly with the outline of Mount Ararat in the far distance (pic. 2, 3). In fact, two of the most important symbols of the Armenian identity - made by nature and by man - are brought together in one place. The panorama of Yerevan from the heigh monument site should be added to this, the symbol of the Armenians who survived the Genocide and as a symbol of the revived and resurrected Armenian people.

Pic. 2 - The Armenian Genocide Memorial and Mount Ararat.

Pic. 3 - The Obelisk "Resurrecting Armenia" with Mount Ararat in the background.

The existence of Mount Ararat has another implication. In Noah's time a *global catastrophe* - the Great Flood - befell the world with the consequent salvation of mankind. Noah's Ark grounded on Mount Ararat. The Armenian Genocide was also a *global catastrophe* in its local coverage - when an attempt was made to exterminate an entire nation that had been living in its homeland for centuries. The remnants of the Armenian nation have, however, spread throughout the world and regained the power to regenerate itself from ashes like a phoenix and has built a new life, the proof of which is Armenia's capital Yerevan, spread before Mount Ararat and below the Armenian Genocide Memorial. Thus, *even the location of the Armenian Genocide Memorial relates to several global events*.

The memorial epitomises not only history but also teaches contemporary lessons. Even though the Armenian Genocide has been recognized by genocide and holocaust scholars[9] and the abundance of evidence, the Republic of Turkey, the perpetrator state and successor of the Ottoman Empire, has denied the fact of the Armenian Genocide at the state level for more than a century. Therefore, it is quite natural that the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide is perceived by the Armenians as the *establishment of moral and legal justice*. The presence of the *world* in the memorial, the recognition of the Armenian Genocide as a *global catastrophe* and its consequent remembrance by the world is visualised in the memorial spruce garden (pic. 4, 5) where the presidents and prime ministers of more than 40 countries, as well as statesmen, politicians and representatives of international organisations have planted more than 210 blue spruce trees in memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Not all the states who have planted a spruce have recognised the Armenian Genocide - which is a foreign policy issue for them - but planting a tree is a way of paying tribute to the memory of the innocent victims. Every year in the second half of April, the "world" again "materially" appears near the memorial close to the spruce garden. It takes the form of a large sign showing the flags of the states that have officially recognised the Armenian Genocide (pic. 6).

The effect of this Soviet modernist-style monument on the visitor is due to the total lack of any decoration and the spiritual music permanently heard there. It is a unique example of a combination of architecture and music in the art world showing the limitless possibilities of stone to create a perfect structure by simple, strict and impressive means. In 1995 the Genocide Museum was added to the complex area (pic. 7) and was enlarged in 2015 without affecting the memorial in terms of its volumetric-spatial aspects.[10]

20th century world history shows that victims of Genocides, as a rule, experience tremendous hardship in overcoming the calamities that have befallen them. But they also try, by remembering the bitter past, to learn lessons and build new lives. It is natural that the process of surviving and building a new life is a positive challenge.

9 Statement by 126 Holocaust scholars, holders of academic chairs, and directors of Holocaust research and studies centers, https://www.armenian-Genocide.org/Affirmation.21/current_category.3/affirmation_detail.html, accessed 12.02.2020.

10 Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 39-46; Idem, "Formation, Development, and Current State of the Armenian Genocide Victims Remembrance Day (Part 2)," in *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 7 (2) 2018: 108-110.

Pic. 4 - The Memorial Garden.

Pic. 5 - The Memorial Garden with its blue spruces: individual plaques indicate who planted each of them and when.

Pic. 6 - The special sign with the flags of the states that have officially recognized the Armenian Genocide on it.

Pic. 7 - The Armenian Genocide Memorial and Museum with Yerevan in the background.

The Issue of Presence or Absence of Names

Most monuments and memorials are structures dedicated to the victims of war. Every nation-state considers it a sacred duty to remember and commemorate victims who have died for a just cause - the defence of the homeland. Memorials dedicated to the victims of war are often built in cemeteries and, if possible, have the names of those buried there inscribed on them. The names of the victims are also recorded on cenotaph-memorials dedicated to the residents of a particular region who went to war and never returned. Similar memorials started to be built in Armenia after the 20th anniversary commemoration of the Great Patriotic War (World War II), that is - since 1965. Although they don't have a particular pattern, memorials of national importance have the names of all the victims inscribed on them (such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington).

Memorials dedicated to the victims of other catastrophes are slightly different. Thus, many memorials built in Europe and devoted to the Holocaust also have the names of the victims of the crimes perpetrated in a particular location or state. This is, of course, natural, as people initially remember the victims of *their* region or state (fatherland or country).

The case of the Armenian Genocide memorial differs somewhat. Like the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide also happened during a world war. As in the Jewish case, the Armenians, although not a belligerent people, suffered the largest number of people killed - about 1.5 million - comprising both civilians and those conscripted into the Ottoman Army (the latter however, were not engaged in fighting), which was higher than the number of French killed at the front and twice as many as the number of British soldiers killed (including those from the colonies). If all the victims of WWI constitute 4.0-4.4% of the population of Germany or France, 75% of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire were victims of the Armenian Genocide. The majority don't have graves, while the places where mass graves exist are within the territory of modern Turkey. The names of the people buried there are unknown or are simply forgotten.

The Holocaust was recognized by the perpetrator-state and the world in general and memorials were built in many countries where the Holocaust was perpetrated. The Armenian Genocide is not recognized by the perpetrator-state, the Republic of Turkey, which is the successor of the Ottoman Empire. There are no memorials there, and their specialists-archivists are not interested in revealing the names of the victims.

Thus, the descendants of victims of the Armenian Genocide are deprived of the opportunity to build memorials in their ancestors' fatherland and engraving the names of those deported from a particular region or massacred there on them. So, there are no memorials with a particular territorial or local coverage and, most probably because of that the names of the Armenian Genocide victims are not engraved on any memorial. Instead, there is another reality: hundreds of big and small memorials not only in the Republic of Armenia, but also in many foreign cities with the Armenian communities. This is because the existence of the Armenian Diaspora is a direct consequence of the Armenian Genocide, while nearly half the population of the Republic of Armenia is made up of the descendants of Ottoman Armenians.

According to Armenian historiography, genocidal acts were also perpetrated in Eastern Armenia, in other words the current Republic of Armenia. The names of quite a number of Armenian Genocide victims are known from written and oral sources. In order that those names don't disappear over time and to uncover those that are unknown, it is necessary to collect them in an online database. The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute has declared the creation of the online database to be one of its primary projects and, in this way, to attempt to uncover the names of Armenian Genocide victims; in other words, to create a *virtual database-memorial* with the names of the victims of the Armenian Genocide being recorded. A similar task was carried out and results achieved to a great extent by Holocaust scholars. Thus, there is an attempt to create a *new type of memorial* - a virtual one, with the help of the *internet as medium for the birth of its globalization*.

The Memorial and the War Factor

In the mid-1960s, when a project was created to build a memorial dedicated to the Armenian Genocide victims, there were no (even ideologically) similar memorials in the Soviet Union. The existing ones were devoted to well-known party, state, political and military leaders. Meanwhile, the program of the construction of great memorials dedicated to the victory in the Great Patriotic War was launched, among them the Piskaryovskoe Memorial Cemetery in Leningrad (1956-1960), the Memorial Complex in Mamaev Kurgan dedicated to the heroes of the battle of Stalingrad (1959-1967), the Tomb of the Unknown Hero Memorial in Moscow's Red Square (1966-1967) and the Katyn Memorial Complex in Belarus (1966-1969), etc. It was necessary to find a "place" within Soviet ideology to justify the erection of a monument that would be devoted not to *victory* but to the *victims* of the Armenian Genocide during WWI. This was also "odd" because of the absence of any connection with Communist ideology. Thus, there had to be something greater than Soviet ideology or a narrowly Armenian connotation. The solution was found. In his letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in Moscow, the First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, Yakov Zarobyan[11] put the issue into a *global* dimension, stressing the need to remember not just victims who had died for victory in the war, but *war* in general as being the greatest evil, killing millions of people. In this context, through using the name of Turkey, a universal formulation that "a similar tragedy must never happen in history again" was put forward, which was also acceptable to the Soviet ideology. The opinion is that through this formulation the Armenian Genocide was been taken from being a purely Armenian tragedy and placed in the realm of world history.[12]

The next important ideological concept in the above-mentioned letter was the following: To erect a monument devoted to the *Armenian martyrs of World War One* in Yerevan. The monument should symbolize the rebirth of the Armenian people (Author's emphasis). The formulation "World War One" was not only a time indication but was also aimed at

11 While still a child, Yakov Zarobyan and his family was forced to leave the Armenian city of Ardvin (Kars region, now in Turkey).

12 Harutyun Marutyan, "Museums and Monuments: Comparative Analysis of Armenian and Jewish Experiences in Memory Policies," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 3 (2014): 65-66.

transferring the event to the "global" realm. On the other hand, Soviet ideology, following Leninist interpretations had, for decades, presented WWI as an "imperialist war," with only the Soviet Union, leading the world's socialist block, resisting "world imperialism" by all possible means.[13]

The Issue of Patriotism and Statehood

Visiting to the Armenian Genocide Memorial, different feelings arise in each and every Armenian. Initially there is a feeling of loss, as well as of *patriotism*, which is very important. To state that it is manifested unambiguously and very directly might not be right. US President Donald Trump in his speech at the 74th UN session particularly emphasized:

> Like my beloved country, each nation represented in this hall has a cherished history, culture, and heritage that is worth defending and celebrating, and which gives us our singular potential and strength.
> The free world must embrace its national foundations. It must not attempt to erase them or replace them.
> Looking around and all over this large, magnificent planet, the truth is plain to see: If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first.
> The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique.[14]

The memorials dedicated to the victims of wars, in one way or another, have a function: to strengthen statehood. In the Armenian case, the Genocide memorial built during Soviet times, through its rising obelisk, was promoting the idea of a peaceful life built by the efforts of Soviet forces and within the large and powerful Soviet state. After Armenia regained independence, the accents on statehood were altered and the idea that the absence of a state and army assisted in the perpetration of Genocide was endorsed in different forms. Consequently, to face the modern challenges of the global world, a powerful state and a strong and efficient army is needed.

If, within the area of the Genocide monument and memorial in general only the idea of victimhood was stressed and heroism as a role model had no place there until 1990, then as a result of the First Karabagh war, the idea of heroism showed itself by the burial of five freedom-fighters in the vicinity of the memorial. Those graves directly emphasize the idea that the only way to avoid genocide is to struggle, and when necessary, to resort to arms (see details below).

13 Ibid.

14 Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/, accessed 23.06.2020.

In this sense "patriotism" and "democracy" are directly linked. The sense of patriotism among the Armenians visiting the memorial is probably reflected in the view that just one hundred years ago the nation lost Western Armenia, with about two-thirds of its people being killed. Surviving Armenians found refuge in one-tenth of historic Armenia and have built and are building a new, free and independent country that needs protection in order to prevent the repetition of the past.[15]

A vivid proof of what is said is the strong connection between the past and the present at the memorial. The point is that over the past half-century, the developments and challenges faced by Armenia and its citizens have, to some extent, been reflected in the memorial's area. This connection is indicated by two other things: the khachkars (cross-stones) dedicated to the victims of the Armenian pogroms (1988-1990) in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku (pic. 8) and the graves of the five freedom fighters killed in the Armenian-Azerbaijani border battles (1990-1992) (pic. 9).

Pic. 8 - Khachkars (cross-stones) devoted to the memory of the victims of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Baku, and Kirovabad (1988, 1990).

15 Measurement has not been made of the prevalence of this idea through quantitative or qualitative research, percentages, or interviews; such thinking has come from years of personal conversations by the author with various people.

Pic. 9 - The graves of five Armenian freedom fighters killed during the Armenian-Azerbaijani border clashes (1990-1992).

The above-mentioned cities are in Azerbaijan. However, the massacres of the Armenian population of those cities were the response of the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities to the events that took place many kilometers beyond those cities. As early as in 1921 Nagorno-Karabakh (94.6% of the population of which was Armenian then) located in the former Elizavetpol district of the Russian Empire (which became one of the constituent territories of the newly formed Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918) was, by the decision made by the Caucasus Bolsheviks and with the direct involvement of Stalin and Lenin, transferred to Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous region, instead of being joined to Armenia. Over the next six and a half decades, due to the policies followed by the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities, the Armenian population decreased substantially to 75%. In 1985 Gorbachev proclaimed the political policy of "perestroika" (restructuring), which also implied changes in national affairs. On February 20, 1988, the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region decided to apply to the USSR Parliament with a request to unite the region with Armenia. Mass demonstrations took place in the capitals of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Yerevan and Baku). On Gorbachev's request, they were suspended on February 26. Starting on February 27 and for three days on, in the presence of Soviet army units, "mass disorders" took place in Sumgait during which, according to official data, "26 citizens of Armenian origin were

killed." The method of killing was the same as used by the Turks during the Genocide of Armenians at the beginning of the twentieth century: they were beaten, tortured, raped, and thrown out of windows, slain with metal rods and knives, chopped up with axes, beheaded and burnt alive… The aim of these criminal actions was to block any possible solution of the issue, to terrorize Armenians and, in particular, to alarm the central Soviet authorities with the threat of further bloody actions and to force them to forego the demand for a just solution to the Karabakh issue.[16]

In commemoration of the Armenian victims of Sumgait, a monument-khachkar (crosstone) was erected in front of the Genocide memorial on April 24 1988. Another is dedicated to the massacres of Armenians in Baku on January 13-20, 1990, in which according to unofficial data, 200-400 people fell victim. The third khachkar is dedicated to the Armenians of Kirovabad (the second-largest city in Azerbaijan) who were killed or expelled. These crimes were regarded by the Armenians as a manifestation of genocidal policy and were compared to the Armenian Genocide, the memory of which immediately came to the fore. It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijanis share the same ethnic origins with the Turks.

It should be said that the Armenian Genocide is not a very distant story; but the massacre and exile of Armenians, seven decades after the Genocide, in 1988-1992, is a repetition of it on a small scale. Everything should be done to prevent it happening again.

Indicators of this mentality are the graves near the memorial wall, which forms part of the memorial. Five freedom fighters are buried near the Genocide memorial who, in the absence of Armenian armed forces, defended the borders of the country from Azerbaijan in 1990-1992 at the cost of their lives. In this way, the slogan "*Never again*" acquires a second meaning within the confines of the memorial, going beyond the boundaries of the Armenian Genocide (the purely historical past) and being closely linked to present-day reality. Some of the actions linked to the "Never again" slogan are the annual visits to the Genocide memorial by Armenian army conscripts and high school students. Such visits are also aimed at strengthening the rarely-mentioned but very important element of civic education - patriotism.

The *ideas of Genocide memory, concerns for the future of the country (in other words, patriotism) and democracy* in the memorial complex were strongly intertwined three decades ago during the years of the First Armenian Revolution (Karabagh Movement) in 1988-1990. In particular, rallies were banned in Yerevan in 1988 and the spring of 1989. In both cases, however, on April 24, Armenian Genocide commemoration day, mass marches were held at the Armenian Genocide memorial with hundreds of thousands of people participating. The marches were not only dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, but *directly linked the future of the country's democratic development and the Armenian Genocide topic of 70-75 years ago*. That is, the citizens relied on the past in their verbal and visual attitudes but were discussing the present and looking to the future. All this happened at the Genocide memorial, which became a political platform. So, in the posters and banners that were displayed in those days, the following several things were stressed:

16 Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 93-94.

- The Soviet Union was criticized for not officially recognizing the Armenian Genocide but, according to civil society, if it did, it would pose as a barrier to massacres on the ground of ethnicity in a multinational country;
- The Armenian Genocide and Sumgait massacres were put on the same level, as ideologies of Pan-Turkism, Stalinism, Fascism and Nazism;
- The Soviet authorities were required to make a political statement on the Sumgait events;
- A demand for condemnation of the perpetrators of the Sumgait massacres, who were perceived by demonstrators as enemies of perestroika (restructuring). Some expressed doubts that the organisers were among the USSR leadership and in the Kremlin;
- The absence of punishment was interpreted as the inability of the Soviet courts to hold a trial impartially and fairly, which was perceived as an overall weakness of the Soviet system;
- The conviction was that the citizens of Armenia should protect themselves, and not rely on the Soviet Union, the Soviet army or the Russians;
- It was highlighted that there was no need to mourn, but to resist, to fight and, for that purpose to have an army of its own;
- Finally, the prevention of future genocides or massacres was seen in the consolidation of Armenians and the establishment of a democratic and independent Armenia.

During the First Armenian Revolution/Karabagh Movement (1988-1990) the Armenian Genocide memorial became one of the places used for the expression of revolutionary ideas. Ideas that eventually appealed to the citizens of the country not only to remember the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide and to claim justice for the solution of the Armenian issue, but also to fight for democratic freedoms; fight against national and legal discrimination; fight for the country's independence from the Soviet Union; fight for the restoration of national dignity; demand implementation of the constitutional provision of equality before the law envisaged by the constitutions of the USSR and Soviet Armenia.

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Every year, from early in the morning till late night on April 24, nearly a million people visit the Armenian Genocide memorial. They lay flowers at the Eternal Flame dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide as a sign of respect for the memory of the 1.5 million innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) and bow in gratitude before the martyred and surviving heroes who struggled for their lives and human dignity, reiterating the commitment to achieve worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide, the restoration of rights, the establishment of historical justice and the elimination of the consequences of the Genocide.