

Bringing the Soil back to the Homeland. Reconfigurations of Representation of Loss in Armenia

In the spring of 1997 a Bostonian Armenian, acting on behalf of Florence Tayian, an American Armenian from Arlington (Massachusetts, US), brought a glass jar with 50 g of soil to Yerevan and donated it to the local museum of the Armenian genocide. The enclosed letter written by Tayian in the 1990s tells the story of the migrating soil and its long journey from an Anatolian village to an American town in New England (MA, US). In 1908 the soil was collected in the yard of the maternal house in Kharpet (today Turkey) and transferred to the US by Tayian's mother, Elmas Kavookjan (born in 1883). By "returning" it to its imagined homeland and by donating it to the local museum in Armenia, the 50 g of soil that had been family relic for nearly 90 years was transformed into collective property. The public event organised by Yerevan's museum of Armenian genocide celebrated the symbolic repatriation of "forgotten children" into the holy homeland of Armenia.

This event is only one piece of the mosaic that is the process of postsocialist reordering of the meaningful world, and one part of the symbolic localisation of the remembrance of Armenian loss (*yeghern*). However, the relocation and the arrival of small private objects and their adaptation to a new context reveal much about the construction of new collective symbols and their continuing reconstruction. This chapter is concerned with the increasing transnationalisation of local remembrance practices and the domestication of once "foreign" objects and persons, in particular the role that diasporic Armenians play in the reconfiguration of historic preservation projects in post-Soviet Armenia. Following the independence gained in 1991, the Armenian diaspora has been increasingly involved in the national project of the young independent republic in transferring and applying not only money, but also their own ideas of cultural order. The question is how cultural and political representations of the Armenian loss get transformed in the course of interaction with the new social order and new actors following the break-up of the Soviet empire. The central argument in this paper is: Having once been a taboo and an unauthorised representation of the past, today the symbol of the

loss and the trauma of 1915 is the collective property and symbolic capital of the new nation-state. This capital provides these domains with the central power for constructing a (trans)national community of loss beyond ethnocentric boundaries and a tool for establishing a new moral order in relation to the whole world. With the transfer of private “sacred objects” into a public place such as a museum, latent and hidden representations of memory of Armenian loss and trauma have received their material and visual manifestation. Moreover, the mode of transfer across national borders produces new forms of collective memory based on a specific nostalgic travelling culture with a strong global identification. To demonstrate this transformation of representations I will focus my description and interpretation on the area around the central site of the remembrance of Armenian suffering – the Yerevan Memorial of Armenian Genocide.¹

Since 1991 new mobilised transnational actors, diasporic Armenians, have been involved ideologically and materially in the process of remaking Armenian national identity.² From 1996 onwards in Armenia one can identify the dynamic revival of memory of collective death and its specific form of memorialisation, which is actively shaped by the increasing significance of connections with the Armenian diaspora

1 This paper is based on ethnographic data of my current research project at the Humboldt University of Berlin funded by the German Research Society (DFG). The project is part of the Collaborative Research Center “Changing Representations of Social Orders: Intercultural and Intertemporal Comparisons” (SFB 640). I am grateful to Lavrentiy Barsegyan, the director of the Museum of Armenian Genocide in Yerevan, for his support. I am mostly indebted to Levon Abrahamian and Elsa-Bair Gouchinova for their generous assistance, advices and fruitful discussions during my research. For reading of a part of this paper I am grateful to Stephan Feuchtwang who made an inspiring comment about the concept of this paper. For more detailed analysis see the forthcoming article by T. Darieva, *From Silenced to Voiced. Changing Politics of Memory of Loss in Armenia*, in: Ts. Darieva/W. Kaschuba (eds), *Representations on the Margins of Europe. Cultural and Historical Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, Frankfurt a. M. 2007.

2 In the case of the Armenians we are witnessing a unique process of “re-gaining” the homeland when diasporic members scattered throughout the world and assimilated into the culture of host societies have started to look at the former Soviet Armenia as their new homeland. The homeland ceased to be an unreachable desire and a nostalgic myth for the diaspora groups and became a concrete, living and social reality. See also W. Kaschuba, *Politics of Identity: The Armenian Case*, in: A. Voskanian (ed.), *Armenia on the Way to Europe*, Yerevan 2005, pp. 413-420; S. Pattie, *New Homeland for an Old Diaspora*, in: A. Levy/A. Weingrod (eds), *Homelands and Diasporas. Holy Lands and Other Places*, Stanford 2005, pp. 49-67.

(*spurk*) in the US. It should be emphasised here that the Soviet period of the Armenian nation has been characterised by a deep political divide and profound split between the homeland and the diaspora.³ The majority of Armenian diaspora organisations were politically restricted during the Soviet period. The new politics of memory of Armenian loss came into play in Armenia with the second post-Soviet president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian. The rhetoric in the efforts to restore “justice” and to reveal the political dimension of Armenian pain was conceptualised in terms of a demand for global recognition of forgotten pain and proper memorialisation of loss of 1915, in which the determination of future politics concerning the neighbouring land Turkey comes to the fore. Interestingly, the revitalisation of the memory of loss does not necessarily imply a separation and turning away from the Soviet past. Rather, the issue of the “suppressive” character of the communist past and the Russian-Soviet political domination since 1920 is hardly discussed in official versions of history in independent Armenia. This specific configuration can be explained by the friendly nature of the post-Soviet Russian-Armenian political relations, but also by the illusiveness of the presence of memorialisations of Armenian loss during the Soviet period.

The Soviet past

The Armenian massacre of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire was hardly included in the official repertoire of national memory and commemoration during the Soviet period. Many people whom I interviewed in Yerevan in 2005 emphasised that in the Soviet time there was very little verbal and visual information about the violence and the expulsion of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia. Until the beginning of the 1980s it was hardly communicated in the school curriculum, and the schoolbooks included only some “unrememberable lines with complicated numbers and dates”. In the Soviet Armenia until at least 1965 the memory of the violent loss and expulsion of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia to Syria had been turned into a political taboo. Publicly the knowledge of the

3 R. Panossian, *Homeland-Diaspora Relations and Identity Differences*, in: E. Herzig/M. Kurkchian (eds), *The Armenians. Past and Present in the Making of National Identity*, London 2005, pp. 229-243; see also in R. Suny, *Looking Towards Ararat: Armenia in Modern History*, Bloomington 1993; G. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State*, New Brunswick 2004; A. Ishkanian, *Diaspora and Global Civil Society. The Impact of Transnational Diasporic Activism on Armenia's Post-Soviet Transition*, in: T. Atabki/S. Mehendale (eds), *Central Asia and the Caucasus. Transnationalism and Diaspora*, London 2005, pp. 113-139.

death and loss was restricted to a very limited space by being hidden “between the lines” of city guide books or in exclusive departments of the National Academy of Sciences and state archives with highly restricted access. As a result the art of remembering the Armenian genocide in Armenia took a fragmented and formulaic form in producing few academic books filled with dry official documents, which were far from the popular and personal practices of memory.

Moreover the Armenian loss and trauma were never publicly articulated in the language of victims, perpetrators, and symbolic recognition. It seems the memory of loss encapsulated in the socialist order has produced specific decontextualised, but quite paradoxical forms of memories. If we look at “silent disagreements”,⁴ so-called small acts of private remembrance of loss in Armenia, they are mostly encoded through social practice of knowing about the descent – an origin from the territories far behind the Armenian-Turkish border, in “Western Armenia” according to local expressions. At the same time the memory of loss, at least the symbol of Armenian loss, was present paradoxically on a much larger scale through official acts of “symbolic possession” of the lost landscape, which can be vividly seen in numerous pictures of the holy Mountain Ararat in private and public spaces.⁵ Moreover the mountain Ararat situated in the Turkish territory is well visible from the windows of many Yerevan residences. In the Soviet past the image of the mountain Ararat had been successfully incorporated into the legal Armenian iconography such as the heraldic figure on the Soviet Armenian coat of arms, the name of the Soviet Armenian soccer team or the brand name of the most famous alcoholic drink “Armenian Cognac”, thus producing rather a sense of possession of Ararat in the sense of symbolic cultural property, as in the sense of the divided Armenia extending through the closed border between Armenia and Turkey. Thus, the mountain Ararat depicted in school-books, calendars or in cook books such as “The Armenian cuisine” published in 1960⁶ has been symbolically (re)turned into the cultural landscape of Soviet Armenian identity. In that sense the memory of the traumatic past in both public and private spaces appears to be transmitted less interpersonally and more through formulaic,

4 R. Watson, An Introduction, in: R. Watson (ed.), *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism*, Santa Fe 1994, pp.1-20.

5 The term “symbolic possession” was mentioned by Nora Dudwick in analysing the issue of the 1915 genocide in Armenian collective memory at the end of the 1980s. See N. Dudwick, *Memory, Identity and Politics in Armenia*, Ann Arbor 1994.

6 A. Piruzyan, *Armyanskaya kulinariya*, Moscow 1960.

evocative indications such as the image of the holy mountain. The social remembrance of descent, the acts of singing songs in half Armenian and half Turkish, or the possession of a few household objects recalling the expulsion after 1915 existed in the Soviet past only in hidden spaces of remembrance which were suppressed, decontextualised and dissolved in the Soviet cult of the “struggle” against fascism and the post-Soviet economic struggle for survival.

But the most interesting point in the story of the Armenian loss is related to the fact that it had already been objectified in the late 1960s by erecting a monument for victims of the genocide in Yerevan, on the Tsitsernakaberd hill. This political artefact was the result of an extraordinary event in April 1965 in Yerevan, when thousands of city inhabitants gathered at the central Lenin Square and an unexpected public protest broke out around the Opera building. At that time a closed session of the Armenian Communist Party, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Armenian tragedy, was organised in the Opera House building. This anti-authoritative demonstration was interpreted by local historians as the first public expression against the forgetting of the Armenian tragedy and the fact of lost territories in Turkey. With the slogan “Lands, Lands!” the demonstrators demanded the recognition of the Armenian massacres by the central authorities in Moscow by allowing official mourning and grieving ceremonies for ordinary people in public places. In fact, subsequently and in a very short time, according to Party decision, the Genocide Memorial was erected in 1967 on a green hill of Tsitsernakaberd close to central Yerevan. From that point a public stage of controlled mourning practice has been constructed in the Republic of Armenia. Since 1967 the hidden and disordered practices of mourning were appropriated by the officials and taken into control and commemoration practices settled into the cyclical life of the city landscape, localised around the Genocide Memorial. Within the urban landscape the new monument is distinguished from other public commemorative places by its visible isolated location on the hill encircled by a natural barrier, the river Razdan, and in that sense by spatial separation from the lively streets. At this point the local authorities tried to take control over the recently tabooed memorialisation of Armenian loss.

After 1965 the remembering of the catastrophic event in Armenia was officially allowed but turned into a commemorative ceremony in a very specific manner. It was well incorporated into the Soviet model of national remembrance and the Soviet Union’s founding saga. The raising up of a new monument brought a “sacred” space in the iconography of remembering and urban memorial landscape, but this action did not

signal any radical change in the “universe of meaning” and politics of memory. As a result the Armenian collective desire to locate particular historical consciousness and cultural belonging in the period before the holy Soviet date of the beginning of the new world in 1917 did not conflict with the socialist cosmology. After considering how to regulate and to control the people’s spontaneous movements at the city square, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia decided to operate within the framework of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the victory in World War II, incorporating the atrocities of the Ottoman Turks towards Armenians into the abstract symbol of antifascist struggle of the Soviet people against Hitler’s aggression and expansion.

The design of the Genocide Memorial was very much influenced by the monumental art of Soviet war memorial architecture, which was quickly spreading in the 1960s throughout the Soviet territory. At that time the Memorial in Yerevan consisted of two objects – a tomb and an obelisk. The massive grey stone mausoleum with 12 slabs and the eternal flame inside of the tomb took on the meaning of a collective grave, and a separate two-fold needle-thin stone obelisk located next to the tomb symbolised the rise of the Armenian people from the dead and its regeneration within the Soviet space. At the end of the 1960s the remembering of the Armenian suffering was put into the frameworks of a localised historical event, which was supposed to not challenge the ideals of the collective Soviet identity and Soviet power. What happened is that the Armenian suffering was represented in the same language and visual forms as heroic symbols of the Second World War. The Yerevan monument corresponds to the later design of Soviet war memorials from many points of view: in its being situated on a hill at a distance from the city centre like the memorial and museum for the defenders of Moscow, in its typical monumental design ensemble including a triumphal obelisk, long enormous mourning avenue and the memorial wall, in the Soviet art of mourning and remembrance of dead through officials placing memorial garlands around the tomb, and in the minute of silence.⁷ The surprising thing about monument symbolism is how successfully the “foreign” ideas were adapted to the local moral values and modes of commemoration.

In this sense the “bad” unnatural and unrecognised death of the people killed was converted into a performed ritual of remembering the

7 Compare with N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead. The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War in Russia*, New York 1994. Tumarkin shows how state and party authorities stage-managed a national trauma into a heroic exploit that glorified the Communist Party.

“hard past” and the martyr-like symbolism of a “good death” within the unity of the Soviet people. Further, the absence of a visualised death or killed body is conspicuous for visitors of the Memorial. Inside of the mausoleum, which looks like a famous tomb of the Soviet Unknown Soldier, there are no visible signs of a victim or a dead body, only the eternal flame in the circle reminiscent of the Soviet star. The most striking point in the whole design of the monument is the absence of any “ethnic” Armenian signs or traditional inscriptions in the Armenian alphabet on the slabs and walls, which are so omnipresent in the Soviet and post-Soviet architecture in Armenia. Over the years the political orthodoxy tried to pursue one historical interpretation of the Genocide Memorial that was to be accepted by all. Among Yerevanis it was supposed to be associated with the holy place of generalised memory of victims of violence, related to the symbol of struggle against fascism, the ability of Armenian life to regenerate under the Soviet rule, and the commitment to Soviet-Armenian patriotism. The inclusive interpretation of the struggle against fascism easily combined Hitler’s Germany with Turkey into a common image of enemy, since Germany built a political alliance with Turkey during WWII.

With the uneasy localisation of Armenian loss, the Soviet officials in Yerevan tried to restore the socialist order and to centralise the people’s memory in one manner and one place. But the relation between the dominant version of the history and the local engagements was more complex. Unlike the traditional narrative related to the symbol of regeneration of Armenian life within the Soviet space, the high two-fold obelisk spire generated a variety of alternative interpretations and associations among local people, which can be recognised as a “counter-mourning” response.⁸ In 2005 many locals and tourist guides interpreted the original idea of the slab in terms of an intimate relation to the traditional Armenian stone crosses *khachkars*. In contrast, German ethnographer Jürgen Gispert, in his analysis of the genocide monument, mentioned that in the mid-1960s for architects the idea of the pillars was to shelter the entrance into the tomb and in that sense they carried a primarily technical significance.⁹ The museum guide and the visitors to the Memorial used to say that the 12 pillars stand for 12 Armenian *vil-*

8 P. Homans, Introduction, in: P. Homans (ed.), *Symbolic Loss. The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century’s End*, Charlottenville 2000, pp. 1-40.

9 J. Gispert, *Monument as a Staged Dialogue. The Ethno-Philosophical Interpretation of the Memorial for Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire in Yerevan*, in: *Researches of Contemporary Problems at the Universities. The Conference Papers*, 25-26.11.1999, Yerevan 2000, pp. 66-89.

*layets*¹⁰ in Eastern Anatolia, symbolising territories lost after the expulsion and killing of Armenians in 1915. Similar to the re-interpretation of the Memorial concept, the other parts of the monument have also experienced alternative imaginings beyond the monologic historical explanation and fixed spatial contours of the Soviet Armenian representation. One interpretation was framed in the present political discourses of hierarchical relationships between Russia and Armenia, leaving aside the memory of loss. According to this interpretation the bigger part stands for the “big brother” Russia and the smaller one for the smaller Republic of Armenia. A decade earlier, after the Karabakh conflict, the spire was reinterpreted according to the current political order¹¹ and shifted far away from usual explanations. The smaller spire which had symbolised the Republic of Armenia was replaced by the image of self-proclaimed Nagorny Karabakh Republic, whereas Armenia was upgraded to the bigger part of the spire, pushing out the memory of the “big brother” Russia.

With reference to the above-mentioned examples it is obvious that in spite of the existing Soviet dominant representations of Armenian loss, the monument was implicitly producing a specific “hidden” meaning for the local people, a place of creative reinterpretations and of silenced protest against the suppressed memories of Armenian tragedy. In 2005 ordinary participants of the mourning march on the 24th of April told me that in the Soviet time not everybody attended the procession to the Tsitsernakaberd; it was a normal working day and was not supported by the authorities. “Before 1988, April 24th was not an official holiday, and people were penalised for leaving work to come to the memorial. People made the trek after working hours (or simply slipped away during work hours) with colleagues or family members”¹² People like intelligentsia, students and school children visited the memorial place on their own initiative. The Yerevan anthropologist Gayane Shagoyan told me that at the beginning of the 1980s in Gumri (Leninakan) in April many school girls followed their own private silent mourning practice by wearing black collars and black cuffs instead of white over the brown school uniform dress. These examples of expressing “silent disagreement” demonstrate the local attitude towards the official politics of representation of the past. The active constructions of popular imaginings and disagreements have contributed to a new way of memorialising loss

10 *Villayet* is the Turkish term for the administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire.

11 I have borrowed this specific interpretation, related to the Karabakh war from Gispert, Monument as a Staged Dialogue (see note 9).

12 Dudwick, Memory, Identity (see note 5), p. 80.

and of the post-Soviet representation of Armenian tragedy, which undergoes a deep transformation by reordering meaningful imaginations.

Post-Soviet visualisation of the loss

The most visible transformation of post-Soviet Armenian representation of memory regarding the massacres occurred in 1995 with the construction of a new holy place on the Memorial grounds – the museum of Armenian genocide. Dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the execution of Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul, the museum in Yerevan was built on the southern part of the memorial grounds like a second tomb beneath ground level inside of the Tsitsernakaberd hill. It looks at the holy Mountain Ararat which rises up on the “other” side of the closed border and which, like a monumental side scene, plays an enormously impressive role in the whole Memorial panorama. Attached to the National Academy of Sciences, the museum is today the leading centre in coordinating politics of memory and its representation. In contrast to the mausoleum, the museum has created an official visualised landscape of remembering with a specified topography of lost lands, total suffering and of the sacredness of death. In the “hot” period between April and September, Yerevan turns into a place of gatherings of global Armenian diaspora. One of the central organising points of the seasonal global encounters relates to the Day of Remembrance in the form of visiting the Memorial. On the 24th of April many participants of the mourning march include a visit to the museum in the dramaturgy of the “pilgrimage”.

Armenians who live on the territory of the Armenian Republic as well as in the diaspora have successfully “domesticated” and appropriated the Memorial from the Soviet period, turning it into one of the central holy places of ethnic history in a global sense. For example, the popular views have immediately transformed the Soviet symbol of the eternal flame, which played a significant role in the Soviet political culture as the memory of an “unknown hero”, into the traditional “sacred” symbol of Armenianness. The presence of the eternal flame today will be often associated with the maintenance of the ancient religious tradition of fire worship among Armenians. This tradition is based on the memory of pagan Zoroastrian beliefs and comes from “time immemorial”, before Armenians were baptised.¹³

13 See S. Platz, *The Shape of National Time. Daily Life, History and Identity during Armenia's Transition to Independence, 1991–1994*, in: D. Berdahl (ed.), *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, Ann Arbor 2000, pp. 114–139. Platz similarly describes the symbolic

The changed political order gave the old silenced mourning ceremonies a new meaning of “textualised” memorialisation constructed to evoke deep emotion and the memory of the collective death of Armenians as a specific group. One can observe materialised results of the ideological involvement of the Armenian diaspora in reconfiguring the holy place, such as in producing the museum’s web site and leaflets, which was assisted by the American Armenians from Boston-Watertown. In 2002 another visible sign of changed regimes of relationships between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora was the erection of a new sculpture “Mother arising out of the ashes” on the grounds of the Memorial complex symbolising the Armenian victimhood *per se*. Set up a bit aside from the museum and the monument, the sculpture is a copy of the original statue located in Los Angeles in the Ararat Eskijian Museum.

The museum exhibition begins with a stoned relief map of the “historical Armenia” and oversized photographs of Armenian life in Ottoman *villayets* at the beginning of the 20th century. The images of Armenian churches, schools and local orchestras in different provinces express a sense of lost paradise and the past of Armenian “good life” in Western Armenia. The scenes of cultural renaissance are followed in the neighbouring hall of the museum by the images of “ultimate death” and starvation shown on huge photographic¹⁴ reproductions between bright narrow windows stylised in a form of the Christian cross. The emotional exhibition creates a new topography of Armenian death with a sacral religious connotation. And this is one of the crucial points in reordering the meaningful world and the memorialisation practices – the revealing of the sacredness of the martyr’s death in Christian tradition, which provides visitors with a new sense of memory and an emotive man-made representation of death. The death once constructed as an “unknown death” in common graves in terms of a good “Soviet struggle” has been reconfigured into a new moral logic beyond melancholic silenced and localised mourning practices. The new iconography of death and loss introduces a way local people and global tourists should “share the memory” with the help of materialised images such as documents of

meaning of fire and light among Armenians in the period of economic and energy crises and how people linked the fire with ethnic belonging in their mythicised story telling.

14 The pictures were taken by Armin Wegner (1886–1978), whose photographic collection documents conditions in Armenian deportation camps in 1915–1916 and who was sent to the Middle East as a member of the German Sanitary Corps. See more in www.armenian-genocide.org (accessed 21.02.2006).

Armenian suffering and photographs of starving bodies. In the museum we finally find the highlight of visualised representations of the Armenian death – female bones and a skull inside of a crystal vase covered by a transparent white lace cloth with an embroidered golden Christian cross. According to the statements of the museum director, the bones and the skull have been transferred to Yerevan by the previous Armenian religious head *catalicos* Garegen II from the Der-Dzor desert in Syria – the Armenian “Auschwitz”, the place of Armenian expulsion and death. The emphasis on the female gender of the bones that represent any and all bones of collective death brings a new identification of the Armenian massacre and loss with a symbol of a totally defenceless victim.

In the room with the vase filled with bones and a skull, visitors find 6 small transparent vessels containing sacred earth from the regions in Anatolia where Armenians lived such as Kharpet, Erserum, Kars, Sebastiya, Malatya, Bitlis.¹⁵ “This homeland soil has been taken by survivors and guarded by them like relics. When they learned about the opening of the museum people from all over the world sent their relics here,” explained a tourist guide in the museum. This import of relics and the transfer of soil across international borders signified the new political order of memory of loss in post-Soviet Armenia.

Each of the vessels is identified with the Armenian name of the place of origin, but there were no references providing visitors with the information about the ways the soil from six provinces of the Ottoman Empire had appeared in post-Soviet Yerevan. The museum had started to exhibit the sacred soil as an object by putting it on simple plates without any protection. After a while the museum workers noticed that the soil on the plates was gradually reducing. According to the vice director of the museum, visitors used to take a pinch of the soil home or even ate it while visiting the museum. The soil, an uneatable materiality, is associated by visitors with a specific sacral energy which should be received like the Lord’s sacraments. In this way one can be symbolically linked to the lost homeland. “Perhaps they never move there, but in this way they learned the smell of the earth and the smell of its flowers and women,” added the vice director of the museum. Today the plates with sacred soil are properly covered by hermetically sealed glass. In sum, the crucial point in the contemporary transformation of representation of

15 Still this example very much recalls the tradition of the Soviet post-war monuments, such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow, which is surrounded by marble blocks with sacred soil from each of six “hero cities”. See also Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead* (see note 7).

the Armenian loss lies in its emotional visualisation and symbolic materialisation.

Transnational reburials

By establishing a research institution with around 30 researchers, the museum became the central guardian of the registers of Armenian memory and the politics of recognition. Explaining the museum's central significance for post-Soviet Armenia, the museum director Lavrentiy Barsegian proudly told me about the new results of the museum activity in which some socialist names of the Yerevan's streets were renamed and reconverted to fit the new moral order of the Armenian trauma.

“We have now streets and schools named after the names of the friends of the Armenian nation – Anatoly France, James Bryce. Nobody knows James Bryce in Scotland in his native Edinburgh, but here we remember him in Yerevan and each year on his birthday we put flowers on James Bryce street. Not only streets but also Yerevan's schools have been renamed, one school has recently received its new name of Henri Morgenthau, and another the name of Franz Werfel...”¹⁶

The postsocialist political regime created a powerful instrument in making a new landscape of memory by transmitting the memory of loss into the body of the modern city, in particular by renaming city streets and administrative institutions. The interesting point in this renaming process is that the restructuring of places of the national memory is conceptualised on a much larger scale than before, namely it occurs beyond the regional and national boundaries. Here I would like to draw attention, as mentioned above, to the increasing emergence of global linkages between the localised loss in Yerevan and the whole world, which today shape the logic of the politics of the memory of loss. We are witnessing a shift to a new form of representation of Armenian loss and death tran-

16 Henri Morgenthau (1891–1967) was the US ambassador in Constantinople during WWI and famous for his memoirs “Ambassador Morgenthau's Story”, published as a book in 1918. The work was a damning indictment of Ottoman leaders for their entry into WWI and the Armenian massacres. James Bryce (1838–1922) was a British historian, statesman and professor of law in Oxford. In 1876 he took an explorative trip to mount Ararat, found wood on Great Ararat and entitled the book about his adventure in Transcaucasia and Ararat, which was published in 1878. Franz Werfel (1890–1945) was an Austrian writer of Jewish origin. He is known for his famous novel “Forty Days of Mus Dagh” about the drama of the Armenians, published in 1933. The book was first translated into Russian and Armenian at the beginning of the 1960s.

scending ethnic and national regional boundaries by including famous international names into the pantheon of Armenian beliefs.

Paradoxically, the transfer of relics in the form of soil to the homeland, transnational reburials, and the repatriation of dead bodies across borders seem to be constitutive forces in the contemporary national project. Between the memorial and the museum there is another political “stage” of reordering of the Armenian loss – a 100-meter-long basalt mourning wall. On one side the visitor sees the engraved names of villages and towns where the Armenian population was killed. On the other side the wall includes 11 small containers with urns symbolising miniature graves of dead prominent persons who contributed to the history of revealing the Armenian genocide. Their names are inscribed on the stone containers in Armenian and English. After the museum was established in 1995 the handfuls of earth were taken from different graves in different places of the world and transferred to the Yerevan Museum of Genocide. Among the names of the “reburied” persons we find the prominent names of the Austrian Franz Werfel, the German Armin Wegner, the British James Bryce, the American Henry Morgenthau.

“Armin Wegner was in Yerevan in 1987. He said that after his death he wants to be buried here on the hill. In 1997 his son Misha brought the urn with the earth from his grave. Have you seen our mourning wall? We buried the urn of Wegner inside of this wall... Similarly, we took the soil from the cemeteries of Johannes Lepsius, Anatole France, and Lord James Bryce and brought it here, because they belong to the 11 friends of the Armenian people. The last reburial was made with an Arab lawyer, who in 1916 wrote a book about Armenian pogroms and in doing so helped the Armenian people to survive...,” the director of the museum explained to me.

This aspect of memorialising acts in post-Soviet Armenia has a logic and meaning similar to the case of “repatriated dead bodies” in Eastern Europe¹⁷ in terms of return of “cultural treasure” to its proper national homeland.¹⁸ The practice of transferring the soil from personal graves of non-Armenians with significant symbolic capital, as well as the above-

17 K. Verdery, *The Political Life of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, New York 1999.

18 Levon Abrahamian mentioned the case of symbolic “return” of famous diaspora Armenians dead abroad, such as the ceremony of reburial of Andranik, the Armenian national hero during the first Armenian Republic 1918–1920, who died in Paris. See L. Abrahamian, *Borba s pamyatnikami i pamyaty v postsovetском prostranstve (na primere Armenii)*, in: *Acta Slavica Iaponica* (2003), Tomus XX, Sapporo, pp. 25–49.

mentioned practice of renaming the city streets, indicate the changing frame of Armenian politics of memory and its representation. This change does not necessarily produce strong emotional sentiments of personal or ethnic death, but by bestowing a new social status of “friend” to a foreigner it creates a new genealogy of Armenian suffering. Like displaced lost ancestors, they are worshipped and “returned” to the localised site of remembering and in that sense we observe how Armenians convert an ethnic notion of loss and death into a global memory of forgotten human loss.

“Among the friends of the Armenian people we have an Estonian mother Boel, who organised an orphanage for Armenian children expelled from Western Armenia in Aleppo. Once I visited Aleppo and met a person who introduced himself as a pupil of the mother Boel. For a long time we could not find her grave in Aleppo. Later we discovered that she was buried in Germany, so we sent our colleague to Germany and he brought the earth from her grave to Tsitsernakaberd.”

At the same time the process of converting the local and ethnic notion of tragedy into global loss through the transfer of soil from remote cemeteries in Europe, the US or the Middle East to Yerevan’s holy place involves the acts of “domestication” which mark the arrival of “ancestors” and the dramaturgy of each transaction. According to the museum director, the Armenian church was invited to each reburial ceremony. During this ceremony the head of the Armenian church *catalicos* consecrated the newly arrived earth in the miniature graves inside of the mourning wall according to traditional Armenian funeral rites. The Jewish, Catholic and even Moslem religious backgrounds of the dead persons play no role in the new displaced memorial life. The ability to give non-Armenians the status of “Armenian treasures” is tied to the idea initiated by the state authorities that they represent bodies of the persons who have contributed something very significant to the national history.

Conclusion

Remembering the lost territory and making history public at the museum with the help of the visual materialisation show a specific significance in the representation of the modern Armenian identity. The changes in the meaning of commemorations of Armenian loss lie in the emergence of a new set of visualised and emotionalised objects of evidence of expulsion, which is related to the ideas of moral compensation and global responsibility. Unlike previous commemorative practices, the museum brings powerful media for the vivid expression of collective belonging

to one specific moral community – the descendents of victims. My description of this here brought out a twofold shift in the representations of Armenian loss, a political one from “forgotten” to “remembered” that started in the mid-1960s with the spontaneous movement from below during Khrushchev’s political thaw, and a spatial one – from “local” to “transnational” forms of memorialisation. The new tradition is obviously linked not only to the rapid transformation of the political and social order, but also to the rapid transnationalisation of the politics of identity with the growing quantity and quality of the ways in which the Republic of Armenia is connected with diasporic Armenian communities in the US. New actors, such as the formerly forbidden diasporic organisations, religious leaders, and visible “returnees” who visit the Armenian homeland, enable the framing of the Armenian loss in a global context. What I want to stress here is the changed space of acts of remembrance where the notion of a “shared memory” of collective death is articulated on a broader scale, resignifying transnational borders of memory. The new form of memorialisation radically modifies the past, in particular the tabooed moments of the past, and is re-described in order to shape the moral landscape of a common future for all Armenians both in the homeland and in the diaspora. This revitalisation of the past takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from personal, fragmentary recall, to hidden nostalgic de-contextualised longing for what is lost, to the strategic use of the past to reshape the national present and future in the global age.