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AZERBAIJAN'S POLICY OF DESTRUCTION AND APPROPRIATION
OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE ARMENIANS OF ARTSAKH
IN THE CONTEXT OF VIOLATION OF CULTURAL RIGHTS*

ARMINE TIGRANYAN

Keywords: Artsakh, Armenian cultural heritage, cultural rights, Azerbaijan, heritage destruction, appropriation, forced displacement.

Abstract

The war unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh on September 27, 2020, and the subsequent developments (the transfer of Artsakh's historical territory under Azerbaijan's control and the complete depopulation of Artsakh of its Armenian population) demonstrate that the systematic destruction of Armenian heritage has directly violated the cultural rights of the Armenians of Artsakh—depriving them of the ability to preserve and pass on their heritage to future generations. These destructions continue to this day on an alarming scale, deepening the crisis and erasing the Armenian presence in Artsakh.

This article examines the extensive negative impact of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian actions on the realization of the cultural rights of Artsakh's Armenians through the destruction, desecration, appropriation, and functional transformation of Artsakh's cultural heritage. The analysis highlights the multifaceted challenges to the realization of cultural rights for the forcibly displaced Armenians of Artsakh following the six-week war of 2020 and the military actions of 2023 – such as the inability to access more than 4,000 historical monuments, the disruption of participation in cultural life, obstacles to celebrating holidays and performing rituals tied to monuments, the preservation of history and traditions, and the collective trauma caused by the loss of heritage.

Introduction

On September 19, 2023, as a result of Azerbaijan's wide'-ranged aggression assault included the targeting of Artsakh's civilian infrastructure, cultural sites, in common with the killing, captivity, intimidation, torture, and racially discriminatory treatment inflicted upon the civilian population – about 100.600

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ethnic Armenians in the region were forcibly displaced¹. This complete displacement was preceded and catalyzed by the six-week war in 2020, the forced displacement of the population from Shushi, Hadrut, and other regions of Artsakh after the signing of the November 9, 2020 trilateral agreement, the nine-month blockade of the Lachin Corridor², and the ongoing systematic destruction, appropriation, and various acts of violence and distortion toward unique cultural and historical monuments.

Through the implementation of this deliberate, state-driven policy, the Armenians of Artsakh have been severed from their social and cultural roots, stripped of the opportunity to engage with and pass down to future generations their knowledge connected to the natural landscapes, monuments, communities, and cultural heritage of their historical homeland, Artsakh. The forced removal from over 4,000 historical monuments in Artsakh, the direct threats to their existence, the numerous treasures already destroyed or desecrated, and the inability to live authentically according to their identity have created insurmountable challenges in preserving the rituals, beliefs, traditions, and festivals associated with ancient and medieval sites, churches, sanctuaries, and pilgrimage destinations.

As a result of the wars unleashed by Azerbaijan in 2020 and 2023, along with the destruction of Armenian heritage and the intolerant policies in the territories under its control, the forcibly displaced Armenians of Artsakh continue to face ongoing violations of their social and cultural rights. To examine this issue, we have analyzed the theoretical concepts of heritage

¹ The forced displacement of the Armenians of Artsakh occurred in two phases. During the 44-day war in 2020, approximately 41,000 Armenians from Artsakh – primarily from the regions of Hadrut and Shushi – were displaced. Of these, around 21,000 were temporarily settled in the Republic of Armenia, while approximately 20,000 continued to live as internally displaced persons within areas of Artsakh that were under Armenian control at that time [Letter from Mikael Virabyan, Head of the Operational Headquarters of the Artsakh Government in the Republic of Armenia (Information Headquarters of Artsakh in the Republic of Armenia), April 2023]. Following the military actions on September 19, 2023, an additional 100,600 people were forcibly displaced, raising the total number of Armenians forcibly displaced to Armenia to approximately 121,600. (Center for truth and justice. 2023). According to UNHCR's "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023" report, a total of 141,900 refugees relocated to Armenia in 2023. The majority of them arrived in September 2023 following renewed armed conflict in the South Caucasus region. This document does not mention that those who arrived in Armenia are forcibly displaced from Artsakh (UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2023, 9).

² The Lachin Corridor was the sole vital transportation route connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh. Its closure exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the region, resulting in severe shortages of food, medicine, and other essential supplies (UN experts urged Azerbaijan in 2023 to lift Lachin corridor blockade and end humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh).

preservation and cultural rights, using these frameworks to assess the long-term impacts of Azerbaijan's systematic destruction of heritage.

Fieldwork included monitoring³ cases of monument destruction, as well as direct testimonies from approximately 80 in-depth individual interviews⁴ and six focus group⁵ discussions with Armenians from the Hadrut and Shushi regions of Artsakh, who were forcibly displaced in 2020 and are now temporarily residing in Armenia's Syunik⁶, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor⁷, Kotayk⁸, Shirak provinces, and Yerevan. The examination is further grounded in international human rights documents, data from relevant government agencies in Armenia, and close collaboration with NGOs and cultural institutions dedicated to protecting the rights of Artsakh Armenians.

The Right to Culture within the Heritage Preservation System

At the core of clarifying the multi-dimensional consequences of the widespread destruction of Artsakh's unique cultural heritage during the wars unleashed by Azerbaijan lies the imperative to recognize the intrinsic connection and interdependence between the fundamental rights of the Artsakh Armenians and their heritage. This understanding is framed within a comprehensive concept of heritage, underscoring the essential link between cultural rights and the preservation of historical monuments.

³ For this study, materials from the "Monitoring of Artsakh's Cultural Heritage" section of the website Monument Watch (www.monumentwatch.org) were used.

⁴ The research was conducted in 2023 as part of the Short Term Armenian Research Grant provided by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. It was carried out under the project titled "Obstacles to the Realization of Cultural Rights and Preservation of Intangible Heritage of Artsakh Armenians Forcibly Displaced from Shushi and Hadrut as a Result of the 44-Day War".

⁵ The focus group interviews took place in Yerevan, at the "Dizak Art" and "Hadrut Creative Youth Center" NGOs, with individuals displaced from Hadrut. Meanwhile, interviews with residents of Shushi were conducted in collaboration with the "War Through the Eyes of Women" Harmony Shushi Women's Rights NGO, during four meetings.

⁶ According to a letter from the Chief Secretary of the Syunik Regional Administration of the Republic of Armenia, addresses to E. Martirosyan, dated May 25, 2023 (№ 04/03042–23), the Artsakh Armenians forcibly displaced in the Syunik region of Armenia are located in the communities of Kajaran, Tatev, Tegh, Sisian, Goris, and Kapan.

⁷ According to a letter from the Governor of Vayots Dzor Region, addresses to A. Grigoryan, dated May 4, 2023 (№ 01/103/3128–2023), the Artsakh Armenians forcibly displaced in the Vayots Dzor region of Armenia are located in the communities of Vayots Dzor, Yeghegnadzor, Vayk and Malishka.

⁸ According to a letter from the head of Nairi community in Kotayk region, addresses to Norayr Sargsyan, dated April 8, 2023 (N-E–1422), a total of 209 Artsakh Armenians, forcibly displaced, are temporarily residing in the Nairi community of the Kotayk region, with 118 residing in the city of Yeghvard and 51 in the village of Zovuni.

At the end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI century, the concept of heritage preservation underwent significant changes. It expanded beyond the protection of tangible values and also included the safeguarding of intangible elements⁹, combining these with the protection of both human and natural environments¹⁰. In this context, the scope of heritage protection began to encompass elements beyond strictly cultural assets, incorporating values, processes, and rights¹¹. Specifically, at the beginning of the XXI century, the international community integrated other domains into the heritage preservation system, including the concept of the right to culture, thereby committing to respect this right¹².

The idea central to the 2009 General Comment No. 21 of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) – that it is impossible to separate a people's cultural heritage from the people themselves and their rights¹³ – significantly transformed existing approaches by linking cultural heritage directly to its source of creation¹⁴.

In 2009, to ensure the international guarantees of Article 15(1)(a) of the aforementioned Covenant, a special mandate was created in the field of cultural rights, which began its operations in 2010. In the same year, the first report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights expanded the framework for guaranteeing cultural rights, emphasizing that cultural rights encompass self-expression, identity, education, accessibility to cultural life, access to heritage, contribution, participation, and the conduct of cultural practices¹⁵.

In the 2011 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Farida Shaheed¹⁶, the interconnection between the right to culture and cultural heritage was substantiated and argued. In other words, the concept of heritage preservation in the first half of the XXI century adopted the approach of cultural rights, shifting from direct protection to the safeguarding of heritage as a value of significant importance to a person's cultural identity¹⁷.

The rights-based approach to cultural heritage redefined the entire system of its preservation, surpassing the concept of material value. It primarily emphasized the rights of individuals and communities within a broader framework of protection. From a human rights perspective, heritage became

⁹ UNESCO. 2003, Preamble.

¹⁰ Jokilehto. 2005, 5; Waterton & Smith. 2010, 4–15; Harrison & Schofield. 2010, 229–242; Bandarin & Van Oers. 2012, 77–83.

¹¹ International Criminal Court. 2021, §15, 7.

¹² UN. Human Rights Council. Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights. 2019; UNESCO. 1954; 1999; 1970; 1972; 1980; 2001; 2003; 2015; 2018.

¹³ Bennoune. 2016, 71; UN. 2016, A/71/317, § 53.

¹⁴ UN. 2011. A/HRC/17/38 and Corr.1, § 2.

¹⁵ UN. 2010. A/HRC/14/36, §9.

¹⁶ UN. 2011. A/HRC/17/38.

¹⁷ UN. 2016. A/71/317, § 16; Bennoune. 2016, § 53.

important not only in itself but also in its deep significance in the lives of individuals, groups, and communities, as well as its role in identity and development processes¹⁸. In this context, the principle of the interconnection between heritage and the right to culture enabled the protection, recognition, and respect for cultural rights to be linked to the safeguarding and integrity of heritage, while also deeply assessing the negative consequences of its destruction.

Thus, the right of access to cultural heritage and participation in cultural life is part of international human rights law¹⁹. This protection includes both individual and collective rights²⁰. While respect for cultural rights is also an obligation according to international legal norms²¹, and the International Court of Justice in The Hague has acknowledged that humanitarian rights apply as “lex specialis” and function as customary international law²², the reality is that Azerbaijan does not respect the rights of both heritage and the protection of the people who bear it.

Destruction of Cultural Heritage as a Violation of the Right to Culture

Apart from the interconnection of cultural rights and heritage, acknowledging the decisive role of human rights in the fight against the deliberate destruction of heritage, the international community unequivocally emphasized the importance of addressing the challenges posed by the destruction of cultural heritage within the framework of human rights²³. As a result, in many international documents, the destruction of heritage is considered a violation of human rights. Among these documents, a key one is the 2016 report²⁴ by the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Karima Bennouna, titled “Deliberate Destruction of Cultural Heritage as a Violation of Human Rights”, which highlighted the impact of heritage destruction on people. This issue was also systematically addressed in the context of the new strategy developed by the Human Rights Council in cooperation with UNESCO during its 31st session²⁵. The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights also discussed this critical issue in her report²⁶ reviewing the conceptual and legal framework of cultural rights. Additionally, the Human Rights Council, in its resolution “On the Protection of Cultural Rights and Heritage in Situations of Armed Conflict” (Human Rights Council 6/1), confirmed that the destruction of cultural values disrupts the

¹⁸ UN. 2011. A/HRC/17/38 and Corr.1, § 77.

¹⁹ Shaheed. 2011, § 58–76.

²⁰ Vrdoljak. 2011, 259.

²¹ Stone. 2015, 40–54.

²² Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck. 2005, rules 38–39, 127–132.

²³ Bennouna. 2016, § 69.

²⁴ UN. 2016. A/71/317.

²⁵ Stamatopoulou. 2015.

²⁶ UN. 2016. A/HRC/31/59.

process of exercising cultural rights²⁷. Furthermore, the 1998 Rome Statute unequivocally stated that attacks on cultural heritage violate human rights²⁸.

Heritage theorists also confirm that heritage should be protected as an integral part of human rights²⁹. The damage inflicted on monuments, not limited to material and non-material aspects and extending beyond their boundaries, also includes harm to the human environment³⁰. With this approach, the consequences of the destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage, going beyond the physical realm, deeply resonate within the domain of the identity of the Artsakh Armenians, being seen as a denial of their rights to self-determination and self-expression.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Karima Benoune, notes, "Attacks on heritage are primarily attacks on people and their rights"³¹. Former UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova argues that "there is no need to choose between saving lives and preserving cultural heritage. They are inseparable"³². Bokova further asserts that the destruction of heritage means "killing the people for a second time"³³. In this sense, the hostile treatment of Artsakh's cultural heritage is not merely an attack on heritage itself, but a manifestation of the denial of identity and the individual and group rights of its people. Therefore, to assess the impact of the destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage, we aim to go beyond the mere physical loss of value by also including the harm done to the collective identity of the Artsakh Armenians and their rights, which requires a substantive examination of cultural rights.

The substantive examination of the concept of cultural rights

Naturally, in order to deeply examine the negative consequences of the destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage by Azerbaijan, and the impossibility of communication with the surviving values due to forced displacement, a comprehensive analysis of the issue is necessary through the lens of cultural rights. This requires a substantive examination of cultural rights with a fundamental understanding through various international frameworks³⁴, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, several reports by the UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, the 2009 General Comment No. 21 on the

²⁷ UN. 2016. A/71/317, § 15.

²⁸ International Criminal Court. 2021, § 28, 10.

²⁹ This interdependence is also reflected in other normative texts of UNESCO. (See: Blake. 2001, 88–93).

³⁰ Jokilehto. 2005, 5.

³¹ Larsen. 2019, 89–90.

³² Bokova. 2015, 294.

³³ UNESCO. 2017.

³⁴ UN. 2016, A/HRC/31/59; UN. 2012, A/HRC/20/26; UN. 2015, A/HRC/28/57; UN. General Assembly. 2015, A/70/279; UN. Human Rights Council. 2013, A/HRC/23/34.

“Participation of everyone in cultural life” by the UN Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Committee³⁵, and various UNESCO regulations.

In particular, according to Article 5 of UNESCO's 2001 “Declaration on Cultural Diversity”, “Cultural rights protect the rights of every individual and community to develop, based on their beliefs, values, knowledge, arts, life forms, and more”³⁶. Following the logic of this article, all people (including the Armenians of Artsakh) have the right to express themselves and create, participate in cultural life, and implement their cultural practices³⁷.

Another tool for the protection of cultural rights is the 2007 “Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights”, adopted by the International Organization of La Francophonie and UNESCO in cooperation with the University of Fribourg, which highlights cultural rights related to identity, cultural heritage, and access to and participation in cultural life³⁸, among other things.

The comprehensive analysis of the negative consequences of the destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage by Azerbaijan, and the impossibility of communication with the remaining values due to forced displacement, naturally requires an in-depth examination of the issue through the lens of cultural rights. This necessitates a substantive investigation into cultural rights based on fundamental understandings from various human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights' reports, the 2009 General Comment No. 21 on “The Right of Everyone to Take Part in Cultural Life”, and several regulations from UNESCO.

Despite the variety of guarantees of rights, it should be noted that the first universal guarantee of cultural rights is Article 27 of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which states: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”³⁹. The commentary by UNESCO on this article has confirmed that the right to participate in the cultural life of the community also guarantees the right of every individual to access cultural heritage, participate in cultural practices, and enjoy them⁴⁰.

Another key source for examining cultural rights is Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which defines the right to culture in section 1(a) as “... the right of every individual to take part in cultural life”⁴¹. In attempting to understand the deeper meaning of

³⁵ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009, General Comment art. 15/ 1a.

³⁶ UNESCO. 2001, art. 5.

³⁷ Sh a h e e d . UN. Human Rights Council. 2010, § 7.

³⁸ Fribourg Declaration of human rights. 2007.

³⁹ UN. 1948, art. 27.1.

⁴⁰ UNESCO. 2024.

⁴¹ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, 3, 13; B e n n o u n e. 2016, § 7.

the three main terms used in this definition – “everyone”, “cultural life” (culture as cultural life), and “participate” – we turn to the explanatory document, General Comment No. 21 of the United Nations. According to this document, the term “everyone” as used in Article 15 (1) (a) of the Covenant can encompass both individual and collective subjects. Therefore, cultural rights can be exercised by a person both individually and in conjunction with others, within a community or group⁴².

According to experts, the term “cultural life” is closely linked to the characteristics of the term “culture”⁴³, as established in paragraph 11 of General Comment No. 21 of the relevant United Nations Covenant, which defines “culture” within the context of “cultural life” as a living, historical, dynamic, and evolving process with a past, present, and future.

In regard to the term “participation” in cultural life, it is essential to emphasize that it goes beyond passive involvement, implying the possibility of active engagement in the processes of cultural enrichment through heritage. It is a multi-layered process that includes interconnected components such as access to cultural life, direct participation, and the opportunity to contribute⁴⁴.

Access to cultural life is the right to follow the lifestyle of a community, to communicate with cultural heritage, and to receive education through information or communication⁴⁵. Furthermore, it includes the right to receive education in accordance with one’s own cultural identity⁴⁶. A component of this is also the right to physical access to cultural heritage and the ability to benefit from the goods created by heritage⁴⁷.

As for the process of participation in cultural life, it includes the right of every individual to act freely, either alone or with the community, to express their identity, to engage in various societal processes (including political, economic, social), and to participate in cultural practices⁴⁸. Participation in cultural life also includes the right of each person to search for, absorb, develop through, and create with cultural knowledge and expressions⁴⁹.

⁴² UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, § 9.

⁴³ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, § 11.

⁴⁴ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, §15.

⁴⁵ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, §15 b.

⁴⁶ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, §15 b.

⁴⁷ Bennoune. 2016, § 50.

⁴⁸ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, §15 a.

⁴⁹ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, §15 a.

Regarding the right to contribute to cultural life, it is the right of every individual to be involved in the creation of the spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional goods of a community. It is important to note that the process of contribution also involves the right to participate in the development of the community⁵⁰. Furthermore, the right to contribute to cultural life includes the rights to participate in the discovery, interpretation, preservation, and formulation and implementation of cultural heritage protection policies⁵¹, as well as the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, and religion⁵².

Through the study of the concepts of participation, access, and contribution in cultural rights, we can affirm that human rights, extending to all, also apply to each individual, including the 121.600 Armenians of Artsakh. Under conditions of non-discrimination by Azerbaijan, they could freely exercise their rights to participate individually and collectively in the cultural life of Artsakh.

The Systematic Violations of the Cultural Rights of Artsakh Armenians by Azerbaijan Through the Destruction of Heritage

As previously mentioned, the right to culture is a complex amalgamation of various rights, and violations against it can have multifaceted impacts on the realization of cultural rights for Artsakh Armenians, harming various aspects of identity and heritage. The 1998 Rome Statute asserts that crimes affecting heritage and infringing upon people's cultural rights can be multidimensional, impacting cultural, spiritual, economic, and educational spheres⁵³. For Artsakh Armenians, this right is further obstructed by actions such as the destruction of heritage, falsification of historical facts, appropriation, functional changes, and other similar activities.

Indeed, the 2020 44-day war was marked by acts of destruction, desecration, and appropriation of the irreplaceable cultural assets of Artsakh. Over the past four years, and even continuing to the present amid periods of non-active military operations, a systematic campaign against Armenian monuments, churches, historic cemeteries, and khachkars continues in Armenian territories under Azerbaijani control. Azerbaijan's destruction, deliberate targeting, and desecration of Artsakh's cultural heritage violate the cultural rights of Artsakh Armenians, obstructing their ability to participate in cultural life, visit these sites, use them for future education, and pass them on to future generations. Cultural heritage plays a critical role in cultural self-expression, education, and the transmission of knowledge between generations. Therefore, its destruction

⁵⁰ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009. General Comment No. 21, 15 c; UNESCO. 2001. art. 5, Fribourg Declaration. 2007. art. 7.

⁵¹ Sh a h e e d. 2011, § 79, UN. 2019, § 18.

⁵² UN. 1948. Art. 18, Arts. 26–27; UN. 1966, Arts. 18–19; UN. 1989. Arts. 28–29. Council of Europe. 1950, arts. 9–10; Council of Europe. 1952, Protocol 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, Arts. 1–2; Organization of American States. 1969, arts. 12–13, art. 26; UN. 1966, arts. 13, 15.

⁵³ International Criminal Court. 2021. § 26, 10.

deprive people of the access to their cultural heritage and undermines their future ability to engage in cultural practices, rituals, and traditions.

The obliteration of historical traces in Artsakh occurs along two main directions:

Destruction of Cultural Heritage – This includes the demolition of churches, khachkars, monuments from the Artsakh independence era, as well as memorials dedicated to the Artsakh Liberation War, the Armenian Genocide, and the Great Patriotic War. It also involves the destruction of historical cemeteries, entire neighborhoods and villages, museums, collections, and monuments or busts of prominent historical figures.

Appropriation of Cultural Heritage – This refers to the systematic albanization, islamization, azerbaijanization, turkification, and russification of Artsakh's cultural heritage.

The physical destruction of cultural heritage is a deliberate policy employed by Azerbaijan to completely or partially eliminate the Armenian heritage of Artsakh. By destroying churches in Artsakh, Azerbaijan severs the spiritual bond of Artsakh Armenians with these sacred sites, depriving them of vital spaces for rituals and prayers, thereby hindering their future ability to conduct religious practices. Clear examples of such heritage destruction date back to 2020, with the complete demolition of the Zoravor Surb Astvatsatsin (Zoravor Holy Mother of God Church)⁵⁴ in the town of Mekhakavan (Jabrayil), the Surb Sargis Church (Saint Sargis Church)⁵⁵ in the village of Mokhrenis, and the Green Chapel, Surb Hovhannes Mkrtich (Saint John the Baptist Church)⁵⁶ in Shushi. Additionally, the targeted shelling and dome destruction of the Surb Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots (Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral) in Shushi⁵⁷, along with the continued damage to it⁵⁸ – such as the erasure of inscriptions, destruction of

⁵⁴ BBC News. 2021, March 26, Nagorno-Karabakh: The Mystery of the Missing Church.

⁵⁵ Monument Watch. 2022. Azerbaijan destroyed St. Mokhrenes. Sargis Church.

⁵⁶ Monument Watch. 2021, June 4, Azerbaijanis Destroyed Shushi's Green Hour, the Dome and Bell Tower of St. Hovhannes the Baptist Church.

⁵⁷ Monument Watch. 2021, May 15, The Illegal Restorations of the Church of Saint Ghazanchetsots in Shushi.

⁵⁸ Extensive "restoration" construction activities are being carried out inside the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi. The dome has been dismantled, crosses have been removed from the gates leading to the courtyard of Ghazanchetsots, and the angel sculptures have been taken down from the gate's stone edges [See: Monument Watch. 2023. Azerbaijan continues the "restoration" of the Surb Ghazanchetsots (Holy All Savior) Cathedral in Shushi]. On October 7, 2024, a video was circulated by Azerbaijani media showing that the dome of the 19th-century church had been altered. The Armenian church, subjected to inadmissible construction interventions and destruction, was transformed into a different structure, which Azerbaijani sources claimed to be a Russian church. It is worth noting that an inscription above the southern entrance of the church stated that the cathedral was built with donations from the parishioners of Shushi; construction began in 1868 and

Christ's bas-relief, and obliteration of cross symbols under the guise of restoration – serve as stark evidence of this policy.

In 2023, Azerbaijan turned the historical layers of the Meghretsots Church (built in 1838 in Shushi) into a pile of debris⁵⁹, removed the cross from the VII century Vankasar Church⁶⁰, toppled the cross of the Stepanakert Cathedral⁶¹, and, through construction interventions, erased the unique inscriptions and cross engravings from the medieval churches of Surb Sargis (Saint Sarqis) and Surb Grigor (Saint Gregory) in Tsar⁶², among others.

Among the primary targets of Azerbaijan's policy of Armenophobia, alongside churches, are khachkars (cross-stones), which have faced widespread destruction. The khachkar, being one of the most characteristic and unique symbols of Armenian identity, is both a product and an indicator of its development⁶³. With their marvelous carvings, the symbolism of the cross representing salvation, and the enduring permanence inspired by the stone, khachkars have been and remain among the most revered and, due to their abundance and outdoor placement, the most accessible sanctities of the Armenian people⁶⁴. Having traversed over a millennium of historical development, they also represent a contemporary cultural manifestation, both through their historical presence and the installation of hundreds in Artsakh over the last 30 years⁶⁵.

Azerbaijan's systematic campaign in this regard is particularly underscored by the destruction of several significant cross-stones. Among these are the cross-stones of Arakel village in the Hadrut region⁶⁶, destroyed in 2020, those of the memorial complex dedicated to the Hadrut city's freedom fighters⁶⁷, the unique XIV century cross-stone of the Lachin historical cemetery, and several cross-stones dating from the XV–XVI centuries⁶⁸. Additionally, in 2022, the chapel of the “Union of Karabakh War Veterans” and the surrounding cross-stones in

was completed in 1887 (See: Monument Watch. 2024, October 07, The Church of the Holy All Saviour in Shushi has been defaced and desecrated).

⁵⁹ Monument Watch. 2023, November 24, Azerbaijan Turns the Historical Layers of the 19th-Century Meghretsots Surb Astvatsatsin Church of Shushi into a Garbage Heap.

⁶⁰ Monument Watch. 2024, February 10. Azerbaijan Removes Cross from Vankasar Church.,

⁶¹ Monument Watch. 2023, November 19, Azerbaijan Toppled the Cross in Stepanakert.

⁶² Monument Watch. 2024, February 27, It was the Tsar Settlement's Turn.

⁶³ Պեռնոյան. 2008, 9:

⁶⁴ Պեռնոյան. 2008, 9:

⁶⁵ The khachkars installed over the past 30 years have been dedicated to public, economic, and political figures, as well as heroes of the Artsakh Liberation War.

⁶⁶ RA MFA Spokesperson Anna Naghdalyan. 2021.

⁶⁷ Monument Watch. 2021. Destruction of the Memorial to the Soldiers in Hadrut.

⁶⁸ Monument Watch. 2023. Destruction of the Cemetery and Khachkars in Lachin.

Mataghis were destroyed⁶⁹, along with the unique XII-XIII century cross-stones of the Armenian-Greek old cemetery in Shushi. The cross-stones dedicated to the Artsakh Liberation War in Ukhtadzor, Hadrut region, and Vorotan city⁷⁰ have also been demolished. The cross-stone placed in the area of the Kavakavanq church in 1995 has disappeared. On January 7, 2024, it was revealed that the memorial cross-stone erected in October 2021 in memory of the heroes of the Artsakh Liberation War on Daniel Varujan Street in Martakert had been destroyed⁷¹, along with two cross-stones adjacent to the Aghanus village aghbyur (spring) in Kashatagh⁷².

The destruction of cross-stones is a multifaceted violation of the cultural rights of the Armenians of Artsakh. As symbols of Christianity, they also embody deeply rooted historical and cultural values significant to Armenian identity. Moreover, cross-stones often serve as communal gathering places and sites for spiritual and cultural self-expression.

It should be noted that Azerbaijan's policy of systematic destruction of khachkars (cross-stones) has deep roots, which were executed in Nakhichevan. From 1998 to 2006, under the guise of "peaceful conditions"⁷³, the Azerbaijani army demolished and leveled thousands of carved cross-stones and tombstones with heavy construction equipment, converting the area – once home to unique historical and cultural cemetery artifacts – into a shooting range. H. Petrosyan mentions this in his article "The Iconography of Julfa' Khachkars": "In the 17th century, there were about 10.000 khachkars in Julfa. By the end of the 20th century, approximately 3.000 remained. By the end of 2002, the last khachkars of Julfa were eradicated due to organized barbarism by the Azerbaijani government"⁷⁴. This act of destruction was followed by the adoption of the European Parliament's resolution "On the Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh" (№ 2582)⁷⁵ on March 10, 2022, during a plenary session, which, in its 14th point, emphasized the catastrophic fact of the destruction of

⁶⁹ Monument Watch. 2022. Destruction of Khachkars Caused by Azerbaijan in the Occupied Territories of Artsakh.

⁷⁰ Medium. 2020, November 25, Church and Memorial Desecration in Post-ceasefire Nagorno Karabakh.

⁷¹ Monument Watch. 2024. Azerbaijanis Reportedly Damage Historical Khachkar Monument in Martakert City.

⁷² Monument Watch. 2023. Azerbaijan's Destruction of the Spring-Monument in Aghanus Village, Kashatagh Region.

⁷³ The deliberate destruction of cultural property is prohibited during peacetime as well as wartime under the Hague and Geneva Conventions, as well as by UNESCO conventions that hold a mandate for the protection of cultural heritage, including the 1970 "Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property" and the 1972 "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage".

⁷⁴ Պետրոսյան. 2004, 19:

⁷⁵ European Parliament Resolution. 2022 [2022/2582(RSP)].

thousands of Armenian khachkars in Nakhichevan over the past 30 years⁷⁶. The destruction of Julfa's khachkars was also documented in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) resolution (№ 2391)⁷⁷ on the humanitarian consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, adopted in Strasbourg on September 27, 2021. This resolution condemned not only the cultural vandalism policy carried out by Azerbaijan during and after the 44-day war but also the destruction or damage to churches and cemeteries over the past 30 years, starting with the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic⁷⁸.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that "The Art of Armenian Cross-stones: Symbolism and Craftsmanship of Khachkars" has been included in UNESCO's "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" since 2010, underscoring their status as a cultural asset of universal value⁷⁹. Consequently, the destruction of these values is a severe blow to the shared heritage of humanity, universal values, and is also a grave crime against all of humanity. In particular, the inclusion in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and thus the recognition of the khachkar culture as a unique value of global significance, provides additional enhanced protection for cross-stones under international laws for the protection of cultural properties during armed conflicts and in occupied territories.

According to the principles of the Second Protocol, adopted in 1999, to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, items included in UNESCO's Representative List, including the entire culture of khachkars, receive enhanced protection. Moreover, Article 4 of the 1954 Hague Convention binds warring parties to respect cultural properties located in both their own and the enemy's territory, prohibiting the use of such properties for purposes that could lead to their destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict and refraining from any hostile acts directed against them⁸⁰.

Additionally, according to the provisions of the First Protocol adopted in 1954 alongside the Hague Convention, an occupying state is obligated to prohibit, prevent, and, if necessary, to stop any theft, looting, or illegal appropriation of cultural property, as well as any acts of vandalism against it⁸¹. The 1999 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention reaffirms this requirement, classifying such acts as international crimes in its Article 15.

⁷⁶ European Parliament Resolution. 2022 [2022/2582(RSP)], art.14 (The resolution states that in the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, 89 Armenian churches, 20.000 graves, and over 5.000 khachkars have been destroyed by Azerbaijan).

⁷⁷ Council of Europe. 2021. Resolution 2391.

⁷⁸ Council of Europe. 2021. Resolution 2391, art.18.2.

⁷⁹ UNESCO. 2010, Armenian cross-stones art. Symbolism and craftsmanship of Khachkars.

⁸⁰ UNESCO. 1954, art. 4.

⁸¹ UNESCO. 1954, First Protocol of The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

In this context, any damage inflicted on the khachkar culture and cross-stones is considered a “serious violation” under Article 15(a) of the Second Protocol, which can be prosecuted as a war crime in international courts⁸². This assertion is further supported by Article 10 of the same protocol, which mandates enhanced protection for cultural heritage of great importance to humanity⁸³. Therefore, according to Article 12 of the 1999 Second Protocol, a state party occupying a territory, such as Azerbaijan, must ensure the inviolability of cultural properties under enhanced protection, refraining from making such properties the object of attack or reprisal⁸⁴.

Azerbaijan is systematically destroying monuments that commemorate the liberation struggle and victory of the Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988–1994) and the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. This represents a violation of the cultural rights of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Such actions erase elements of collective memory, undermine the community’s ability to honor and remember historically significant events, obstruct the transmission of heroic narratives to future generations, and diminish the sense of pride and unity. These actions constitute a deliberate attack on historical and cultural continuity, which forms the backbone of community cohesion⁸⁵. Prominent examples of this chain of destruction include the obliteration of the memorial complexes dedicated to the freedom fighters of Hadrut, as well as the memorials in Shushi commemorating the Armenian Genocide, the Nagorno-Karabakh War, and the Great Patriotic War⁸⁶.

Furthermore, the wave of destruction did not spare the monument adjacent to Surb Astvatsatsin (Saint Astvatsatsin) Church⁸⁷, constructed in 1904 in the village of Madatashen in the Askeran district, dedicated to the victims of the Artsakh Liberation War. In the village of Azokh in Hadrut, three separate monuments were destroyed, commemorating the victims of the Great Patriotic War, the First Artsakh War, and the Armenian Genocide⁸⁸. Acts of desecration were carried out in the villages of Zardanashen and Avetaranots, while monuments dedicated to the Artsakh Liberation War were destroyed in the villages of Talish, Karin Tak, and Mokhrenes⁸⁹.

⁸² UNESCO. 1999, art. 15/a.

⁸³ UNESCO. 1999, art.10.

⁸⁴ UNESCO, 1999, art. 12.

⁸⁵ Stone ed. 2011; Bennoune. 2016.

⁸⁶ Monument Watch. 2021. Destruction of the Memorial Devoted to the Genocide Victims in Shushi.

⁸⁷ Monument Watch. 2021. The Enemy Destroyed the School, the Cultural Center and the Memorial in Madatashen Village, and Endangered the Church of Surb Astvatsatsin,.

⁸⁸ Monument Watch. 2021. Destruction of the Memorial Complex in Azokh Village of Hadrut.

⁸⁹ Artsakh Monuments. 2021, February 17.

These destructions, beyond inflicting significant material losses, have deeply excited the Armenian community of Artsakh by violation on their cultural rights. The inability to connect with, visit, or maintain these cemeteries has inflicted profound psychological trauma upon individuals and communities, intensifying feelings of grief and helplessness. This erasure of cemeteries severs connections between generations, erasing family and cultural histories and disrupting the region-specific burial and mourning customs, thereby violating the community's ability to observe these rites.

The Azerbaijani campaign to erase Armenian heritage has not spared entire cities, historic districts, cemeteries, and villages. One such act of destruction was the burning⁹⁷ of the XVIII–XIX century Yere Bazar⁹⁸ district in Hadrut, Artsakh, and the complete demolition of the village of Mokhrenis. In April 2024, the village of Karin Tak in Shushi was also destroyed, including its khachkars and springs. The obliteration of entire cities and villages constitutes a violation of cultural rights, resulting in the erasure of cultural heritage, the loss of intangible traditions, and the distortion of collective memory.

The destruction of monuments and museums is being carried out at a tragic rate, violating the cultural rights of both the community and individual creators. In addition to the demolition of the historic XIX century Halivor Bridge, Azerbaijan has destroyed 51 sculptures located in the “Sculpture Park” adjacent to the Shushi State Museum of Fine Arts⁹⁹, damaged and dismantled the Shushi State Geological Museum named after Grigori Gabrielyants¹⁰⁰, the Avetik Isahakyan Library in Hadrut, the building of the National Assembly of Artsakh, and other structures¹⁰¹.

The Appropriation of Artsakh's Cultural Heritage

Azerbaijan's falsification and appropriation of historical facts about Armenian heritage, along with the alienation of identity and alteration of function, constitute violations of the cultural rights of the Armenians of Artsakh. Such actions sever the genuine connection to one's history, grounded in accurate knowledge, and impede the ability to pass it on to future generations, thereby disrupting the link to identity. Through this policy, Azerbaijan distorts the true history and authenticity of heritage. This process of appropriating Armenian cultural symbols and history includes the “albanization” of Armenian churches,

⁹⁷ Bakinskiy Nord. 2022, October 9.

⁹⁸ In 2018–2019, the Hadrut Municipality undertook specific steps to transform the Yere Bazar district into a historical-cultural reserve. Efforts were made to delineate the reserve's boundaries, study building designs, and prepare preliminary materials.

⁹⁹ Monument Watch. 2021. Destruction of the Park of Sculptures of the State Museum of Fine Arts in Shushi.

¹⁰⁰ Ararathau. 2021, August 18. The destruction of the Grigori Gabrielyantsi State Museum of Geology in Shushi.

¹⁰¹ Tigranyan. 2023, 136–143.

the denial of Armenian identity, the renaming of cities, villages, and streets throughout the territory of Artsakh, the islamization, Turkification, and Russification of Armenian settlements, the falsified restoration of churches, the disruption of ritual practices, and more.

A theory of the “albanization” of Armenian churches, was established and solidified within Azerbaijani state policy since the mid XX century¹⁰². It pursued the aim to proclaim the long-extinct Christian Albanians as the ancestors of Azerbaijanis and to frame Armenian churches as the heritage of these alleged forebears. This falsification seeks not only to undermine the historical roots of the Armenian people but also to eliminate their historical right to live and create in the region. This theory, repeatedly condemned by internationally recognized scholars¹⁰³ and various organizations, is exemplified by Azerbaijan's enlistment of the approximately 2,000–3,000 Christian Udi people¹⁰⁴ within its borders in efforts to deny the Armenian identity of spiritual structures.

Notable examples include the “albanization” of the historic Armenian Dadivank Monastery¹⁰⁵, disregarding around 200 Armenian inscriptions, and the rebranding of the¹⁰⁶ Surb Khach (Saint Cross) Church in Hadrut and the XII century Surb Astvatsatsin (Saint Mother of God) Church in Tsakuri¹⁰⁷ as non-Armenian, with organized visits by members of the Udi community who

¹⁰² The theory of Albanization in Azerbaijan has deep-rooted origins dating back to the 1950s when Azerbaijani academician and father of Azerbaijani fake historiography, Ziya Bunyatov, strived to assert that the ancient churches of Nagorno-Karabakh were built not by Armenians, but by the now-extinct Caucasian Albanians. He claimed that their settlements encompassed the regions of Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh (Crombach. 2019; Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh. 2021), though they were limited to the left bank of the Kura River.

¹⁰³ According to Adam Smith, Professor of Anthropology at Cornell University, Armenian churches, particularly Dadivank, could not have been established by the kingdom known as Caucasian Albania, which had declined around the 8th century (See: K h a t c h a d o u r i a n . & S m i t h . 2020).

¹⁰⁴ Azerbaijan's approach was that the Udis, as the only Christian descendants of the Caucasian Albanians, were used as a “political tool” to claim a right to the Christian heritage of Artsakh as purported carriers of Albanian culture. By spreading this narrative, Azerbaijan claims itself to have a right to this legacy. Meanwhile, the destruction of Armenian heritage is framed as a so-called restitution for the “lost cultural rights” of the Albanian-Udi community.

¹⁰⁵ Monument Watch. 2021, May 15. Azerbaijan Claims that Dadivank Monastery Belongs to Udi Cultural Heritage.

¹⁰⁶ Monument Watch. 2022, August 11. On a new attempt of Azerbaijan to declare the monastery of Surb Khach in Vank village of Hadrut as Albanian-Udi.

¹⁰⁷ Through the rhetoric of the President of Azerbaijan, efforts are being made to deny the Armenian identity of the Tsakuri village church in the Hadrut region, instead declaring it as Albanian. The khachkars are claimed to have been affixed or installed during the period of occupation, while the inscriptions are asserted to be later additions.

continually desecrate the traditional Christian rituals of the Armenian Church¹⁰⁸. Azerbaijan has also declared the Surb Yeghishe (Saint Elisha)¹⁰⁹ Church in Mataghis and the Saint John (Surb Hovhannes)¹¹⁰ Church in Togh as “Albanian”. Representatives of the so-called “Albanian-Udi” community desecrated and damaged the unique shurf (underground burial niche) of the Armenian church Tsitsernavank in the Kashatagh region of Artsakh, performing anti-Armenian rituals. The threat of “albanization” also extends to the Armenian church of Kavakavank, which bears a unique 1742 inscription.

Recently, the wheel of “albanization” has also turned towards the Gandzasar Monastery complex, with its engraved khachkars, portals, and the entire church area rich in inscriptions being falsely labeled as “Albanian”. Furthermore, the Amaras Monastery, dated to the IV–V centuries, has also been declared “Albanian”. Moreover, Azerbaijan’s policy of appropriation is also manifested through Islamization, particularly affecting the entire heritage of Shushi¹¹¹. Since 2021, Shushi has seen continuous efforts to distort its historical and cultural identity, with various conferences aimed at presenting the city as solely Azerbaijani to the international community and organizations¹¹². Hadrut is also being Islamized, with mosques being built in the city and an official project to transform the Surb Harutyun (Saint Resurrection) Church in Hadrut into a mosque¹¹³, along with the establishment of an “Albanian” religious community.

Alongside declaring Armenian heritage “Albanian” and “Islamic”, Azerbaijan’s policy of appropriation also includes declaring Armenian churches as Russian Orthodox. Notable examples include the rebranding of the Armenian churches of Shushi – Surb Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots (Saint

¹⁰⁸ Məhəvi Dəyərlərin Təbliği Fondu. 2022, March 2. Xudavəng və Ağoğlan məbədləri.

¹⁰⁹ Monument Watch. 2022, July 17. Udi propaganda at the Church of Surb Yeghishe in Mataghis village.

¹¹⁰ Monument Watch. 2022, April 20. Another manifestation of Azerbaijani religious and national tolerance in the churches of Tsakuri and Togh.

¹¹¹ According to the press service of Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Culture, Azerbaijan has submitted documents to the UNESCO Secretariat to include the historically Armenian city of Shushi (declared Azerbaijan’s cultural capital following the 44-day war) in the “UNESCO Creative Cities Network” (See: Monument Watch. 2021. November 18. Azerbaijan proposes to include Shushi in The Creative Cities Network; Monument Watch. 2021. October 20. Azerbaijan is planning to declare Shushi cultural center of the Turkic world; Monument Watch. 2022. October 31. New Azerbaijani attempts to present Shushi as the cultural and spiritual center of the Muslim world and accusations against the Armenian Church from Baku and Shushi).

¹¹² Monument Watch. 2022, May 27. About the conference organized in Shushi. Monument Watch. 2024, May 13. New attempts have emerged aimed at the Islamization of Armenian cultural heritage.

¹¹³ Monument Watch. 2023, December 26. The alienation of the historical Armenian identity of the city of Hadrut in Artsakh and the creation of a new Azerbaijani identity.

Savior Ghazanchetsots)¹¹⁴, Surb Hovhannes-Kanach Zham (Saint John), and the Surb Amenaprkich (Saint Savior) Church in Togh – as Russian Orthodox. This process disrupts the spiritual and cultural practices of the Artsakh Armenian community, excluding them from eliminating practicing Christianity and participating in religious rituals, thus also hindering their right to cultural self-expression and religious freedom¹¹⁵.

Violations of cultural rights are evident during the defilement and alteration of heritage, deeply damaging its intangible elements such as rituals, stories, and traditions. Azerbaijan has desecrated the Church of the Kusanats Anapat (Kusanats Desert) in the village of Avetaranots in the Hadrut region, turning it into a place of disorder, and the monument in the village of Aknaghbyur, which was painted red¹¹⁶. Additionally, acts of desecration have not spared the monument in the village of Azokh, dedicated to the memory of the fallen in the Great Patriotic War and the First Nagorno-Karabakh War¹¹⁷, among others.

The alteration of function violates the cultural rights of the Artsakh Armenians, with a profound psychological trauma that exacerbates feelings of insecurity and marginalization. Notable examples include the transformation of the Kataro Monastery into an Azerbaijani military gathering place and a Muslim prayer site. Prayers (namaz) have been held, and the Surb Astvatsatsin (Saint Astvatsatsin)¹¹⁸ Church in the village of Jraghatsner in the Askeran region of Artsakh, as well as the Surb Astvatsatsin (Saint Mother of God) Church in Tsakuri, have been converted into Muslim prayer locations. Furthermore, in the Surb Yeghishe (Saint Elisha) Church of Mataghis, built between 1892 and 1898, Azerbaijani soldiers not only conducted namaz but also destroyed the icons¹¹⁹. The Surb Astvatsatsin (Holy Savior of the Saint Mother of God) Church in Karintak was also shattered¹²⁰, and the church was turned into a site for Muslim prayers. It is important to note that performing Islamic prayers in a Christian church or sacred space infringes upon the religious rights of the Artsakh Armenians. It represents a manifestation of cultural insensitivity, disrespect, a rejection of traditions and customs, and the desecration of the historical significance of the Christian church. It erodes the

¹¹⁴ Monument Watch. 2022. The Church of the Holy Savior in Talish; Азербайджанские Новости. 2021, October 4. Президент Ильхам Алиев поднял флаг Азербайджана в селе Талыш Тертерского района.

¹¹⁵ Frowe. & Matavers. 2019, 437–455.

¹¹⁶ Monument Watch. 2021, Desecration of the Memorial to the Victims of the First Artsakh War. Aknakhbyur.

¹¹⁷ Monument Watch. 2022. Memorial dedicated to the victims of World War II and the First Artsakh War was desecrated in Azokh village.

¹¹⁸ Ararathau. 2021, June 5.

¹¹⁹ Monument Watch. 2021, May 4. Cultural vandalism in St. Yeghisha Church of Mataghis.

¹²⁰ Şuşada kilsədə əhli sünənə qardaşımlla vəhdət azanı verərkən. 2022, March 2.

sanctity of the sacred space and undermines the spiritual experience of the Christian community.

The Impact of Forcible Displacement on Access to Heritage Sites

As a result of Azerbaijan's systematic strategy of anti-Armenian hatred, including war crimes, blockade, and the destruction of heritage, up to 100.600 Artsakh Armenians were forcibly displaced in 2023. Many experts regard this forced displacement as a form of ongoing warfare and violence¹²¹ that surpasses even the horrors of war itself¹²².

The forced displacement has obstructed the realization of cultural rights by making communication with around 4.000 historical and cultural monuments in Artsakh impossible, effectively denying access to these heritage sites. Considering that these monuments were inseparable from the identity of the Artsakh Armenians, their alienation has created a deep crisis, disrupting the connection between people and their cultural heritage. This has led to the suspension of the continuity of memory and the social remembrance of the past¹²³.

Today, approximately 121.600 Artsakh Armenians, due to Azerbaijan's discriminatory treatment, are deprived of the right to participate in Artsakh's cultural life, visit pilgrimage sites, historical and cultural places, pay respects at the graves of their relatives, and perform religious rites in churches.

As a result of the conducted research, those forcibly displaced from Artsakh have identified several historical and cultural monuments in their native region of access to the has left a profound mark on their lives. Among these valued sites they pointed out the Gandzasar Monastery, the Amaras Monastery, Dadivank Monastery, Gtchavank, the Kataro Monastery of Dizapayt, Kavakavank Monastery, the Spitak Khach (White Cross) Monastery in Hadrut, Yerits Mankants Monastery, Surb Sargis Church (Saint Serge) in Mokhrenes, Surb Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots (Holy Savior Cathedral Ghazanchetsots) in Shushi, Khanach Zham, Surb Hovhannes (Saint Green Church, Saint John) in Shushi, and other locations. For the Armenians of Artsakh, sacred sites also included the Markhatun Church of the Mets Tagher, the Okhty Drni (Seven Doors) Monastery, the Tsaghkavank in Tsakurri, Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin (Saint Mary Mother of God Church) in Hadrut, and other monuments¹²⁴.

Following their forcible displacement, Artsakh Armenians describe a profound emotional impact resulting from the loss of culturally and spiritually significant sites, such as Shushi's Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral. This cathedral was seen as a pan-Armenian sanctuary, embodying sacred memories

¹²¹ International Committee of the Red Cross. 2019, 22.

¹²² International Committee of the Red Cross. 2019, 6.

¹²³ Teijgeler. 2005.

¹²⁴ Yerevan, Focus group discussions on "War Through the Eyes of Women" at the Harmony Shushi Women's Rights Protection NGO, the "Dizak Art Cultural Center", and the "Hadrut Youth Creative Center".

that cannot be replaced, and its loss evokes a deep sense of breaking off identity, heritage, and even childhood – a void that no other place can fill¹²⁵.

A young woman from Hadrut's Arakel village recalls her childhood with sorrow, telling that her memories are closely connected to the Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin (Saint Mary Mother of God Church), now feeling as though her childhood has been taken from her¹²⁶. The XVII century Surb Harutyun (Saint Resurrection Church) in Hadrut also held great significance for the community, serving as the gathering place for all religious and secular celebrations¹²⁷. Another young woman reflects that her dreams remain wrapped in the beeswax of the Saint Resurrection Church symbolizing a profound attachment now lost¹²⁸.

The testimonies of forcibly displaced individuals highlight the significance of various natural springs and sacred sites in Artsakh. Special mention is made of pilgrimage sites, including the Tyaqi aghbyur (Tyak Spring, XIX century) in Tyak village, the Dizapayt springs – Meghraghbyur (Honey Spring) and Arjaghbyur (Bear Spring) – and the Aghababi aghbyur (Agabab Spring, a large stone from which “holy” water flowed). The Holy Tree of Tnjri, approximately 2.000 years old, and the ancient Jukhth Paravatsar (Prvatsar)¹²⁹ were also revered. The Gtchavank Church in Togh held significant importance, with frequent pilgrimages by Artsakh Armenians on both festive and regular days¹³⁰. Displaced individuals described the Spitak Khach Monastery (White Cross) in Hadrut as a symbol of Hadrut itself, serving as a center for community gatherings and religious ceremonies.

Another significant site was the Togh Cathedral Gtchavank, (XII–XIII centuries), where pilgrimages were frequent. Artsakh Armenians visited Gtchavank both on holidays and ordinary days. The White Cross Monastery (XIII–XVII centuries) in Hadrut was described by the displaced persons as a symbol of Hadrut, serving as a center for communal gatherings and religious ceremonies.

The restriction of access to cemeteries represents a severe violation of cultural rights and a profound psychological blow for the forcibly displaced individuals. Many have left behind the graves of family members who sacrificed their lives for Artsakh, symbolizing irreplaceable connections to their past, memories, and heritage. The feeling of loss is particularly intensified for those who were forced

¹²⁵ Yerevan, reported by Victoria Dallakyan (41, female), displaced from the city of Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023; Yerevan, reported by Mane Sargsyan (28, female), displaced from the city of Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023; Yerevan, reported by Mariam Vardanyan (25, female), displaced from the city of Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023.

¹²⁶ Vayots Dzor, Yeghegnadzor, reported by Karine Margaryan (45, female), displaced from the village of Arakel, Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023.

¹²⁷ Monument Watch. 2021. Holy Harutyun Church of Hadrut.

¹²⁸ Yerevan, Focus group research at the “Hadrut Youth Creative Center” with teachers displaced from Hadrut.

¹²⁹ Monument Watch. 2021. Tchokht Pervatsar Zuyg Paravazhar Monastery.

¹³⁰ Yerevan, reported by Vardan Asryan (56, male), displaced from the village of Azokh, Hadrut region, Artsakh, June 2023.

to leave abruptly, leaving ancestral graves unattended. Displaced individuals emphasize the significance of cemeteries in places such as Anapat in Togh, Karmrakuch, and Arakel village as crucial testimonies of the lives of their ancestors and markers of the Armenian presence in the region¹³¹.

Restricting access to historical districts and landmarks is a flagrant violation of cultural rights, as experienced by the people of Artsakh. Notably, Shushi's old neighborhood, with its distinctive streets and buildings, held a unique place in the lives of the Artsakh Armenians, as it embodied the essence of their historical and cultural heritage. Many of the displaced individuals particularly valued Shushi's picturesque sites, like the scenic Jdrdruz area with its captivating natural beauty¹³². This prohibition on visiting cultural landmarks and sites in Artsakh not only infringes upon the cultural rights of the Artsakh Armenians but also severs them from cherished memories, exemplifying the broader impact of their forced displacement.

Cease of Cultural Practices of Religious Rituals and Pilgrimages

The forced displacement has also infringed on the right to cultural life by interrupting the traditional rituals and practices of Artsakh Armenians. Many churches in Artsakh were the sites of pilgrimage, carrying profound religious and communal significance. One prominent example is the Kataro Monastery, recognized as a pilgrimage site since the earliest days of Christianity in the region, with documentation in numerous historical sources. Large-scale pilgrimages – including those by students, state officials, and community members – were regularly organized to this area¹³³. During these pilgrimages, people would often walk barefoot for an hour and a half up to the summit of Dizapayt Mountain (2,478 meters high). Many displaced individuals considered Kataro to be a sacred sanctuary endowed with divine power¹³⁴. For the people of Hadrut, ascending Kataro was seen as a sacred duty. The displaced emphasize their deep emotional and spiritual connection to Kataro, describing it as more than a church – it was the very essence of Artsakh, and its loss has left an enduring impact on them all¹³⁵. The elevated location of Kataro provided a panoramic view of Artsakh,

¹³¹ Yerevan, reported by Levon Hayriyan (72, male), displaced from the village of Mets Taghlar, Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023; Kotayk, Yeghvard, reported by Vanera Sargsyan (68, female), displaced from the village of Azokh, Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023; Vayots Dzor, Yeghegnadzor, reported by Karine Harutyunyan (63, female), displaced from the village of Togh, Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023.

¹³² Yerevan, reported by Saro Saryan (52, female), displaced from Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023; Yerevan, reported by Mane Margaryan (31, female), displaced from Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023; Yerevan, reported by Mariam Vardanyan (25, female), displaced from Shushi, Artsakh, June 2023.

¹³³ «Համաբուհական բանալիում 2015» Արցախում. – YSU. 2015.

¹³⁴ Yerevan, reported by Vardan Dallakyan (41, male), displaced from the village of Togh, Hadrut region, Artsakh, June 2023.

¹³⁵ Vayots Dzor, Yeghegnadzor, reported by Armine Varosyan (42, female), displaced from the village of Karaglukh, Hadrut region, Artsakh, June 2023.

creating a deep sense of connection to the land. Displaced residents¹³⁶ remember it as a paradise-like sanctuary of divine beauty, where those hoping for children would make a pilgrimage in August, ascending the mountain barefoot and carrying a lamb as a sacred offering. This tradition highlighted Kataro's significance as a revered site symbolizing both personal and communal aspirations for the people of Artsakh.

Violation of Cultural Rights Through Suppression of Monument-Related Traditions and Customs

Excerpt from the 2016 report by UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennouna, which details the scope of attacks on cultural heritage during conflicts: "Experts have emphasized that there is an inseparable link between tangible and intangible heritage, and attacks on one inevitably affect the other"¹³⁷. Thus, it is not difficult to conclude that during wars, alongside monuments, other elements of cultural practices are also under attack, including religious customs, rituals, history, memory, and, indeed, the future.

Holidays held a significant place in the lives of Artsakh Armenians, including Victory Day on May 9, Labor Day on May 1, Artsakh Independence Day on September 2, Hadrut Day on August 15, Kharuyki or (Bonfire Day) on May 19, in common with the memorial days like Armenian Genocide Memorial Day on April 24 and Earthquake Memorial Day on December 7. Church holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Terndez (Tyarnydarach), and Vardavar, were also of great importance. Notably, these holidays were deeply connected with Artsakh's cultural sites, churches, and monuments. They were often celebrated with visits to these sites or held within their grounds, including such landmarks as Hadrut's Kataro and Spitak Khach Monasteries (White Cross), the Church of Surb Harutyun (Saint Resurrection), Surb Hovhannes of Togh (Saint John), the Karmir Vank of Tumi (Red Monastery), the khachkars of Arakel village, and other sacred sites.

Interviews with the displaced people highlight the deep interconnection between holidays and churches in Artsakh. Any celebration felt incomplete for many souls, without a visit to a church. For instance, on May 9 families would gather at the Hadrut Memorial Complex dedicated to fallen freedom fighters, and on Armenian Genocide Memorial Day, they paid their respects by placing flowers at a khachkar in Arakel village¹³⁸. This location, now

¹³⁶ Vayots Dzor, reported by Aram Gabrielyan (42, male), displaced from the village of Tsor, Hadrut region, Artsakh, June 2023; Kotayk, Zovuni, reported by Tatev Arzumanyan (41, female), displaced from the village of Tuni, Hadrut region, Artsakh, April 2023.

¹³⁷ UN. General Assembly. 2016, A/HRC/31/59, § 77.

¹³⁸ Kotayk, Zovuni, reported by Gayane Kirakhsyan (32, female), displaced from the city of Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023; Yerevan, reported by Liana Vardanyan (37, female), displaced from the city of Hadrut, Artsakh, June 2023.

bearing the scars of destruction inflicted upon generations, stands as a reminder of cultural loss. The desecration of this khachkar, dedicated to a loved one, has inflicted wounds not only on individual families but also on future generations, underscoring the profound impact of such cultural erasures.

Azerbaijan's Obligations to Respect Cultural Rights

The obligation to respect cultural rights requires refraining from any direct or indirect interference that hinders the right to participate in cultural life¹³⁹ or displays discriminatory attitudes that exclude identity¹⁴⁰. It also guarantees “access” to cultural heritage¹⁴¹ and institutional services and protects practices and lifestyles that allow for the free expression of cultural identity. Propaganda of discrimination or racial or religious hatred is legally prohibited under Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹⁴² and Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination¹⁴³. Additionally, Article 2 (2) and Article 3 of the United Nations Covenant prohibit any discrimination in the exercise of the right to participate in cultural life¹⁴⁴.

Respect for cultural rights also encompasses the right to protect all forms of cultural heritage. Heritage must be preserved, developed, enriched, and transmitted to future generations as a result of human experience and aspirations¹⁴⁵. However, as demonstrated in this article, the cultural heritage of Artsakh is not only being ruthlessly destroyed and forcibly appropriated, but also the creative capacity of the Artsakh Armenians is being denied. In this context, given the current geopolitical situation, it is crucial to protect and guarantee the cultural rights of Artsakh Armenians, including the creation of opportunities for “access” to monuments and communication with heritage, under international security guarantees.

Conclusion

The destruction of Armenian heritage during the war initiated by Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020, and the subsequent processes including the transfer of historically Armenian territories of Artsakh to Azerbaijani control and the complete ethnic cleansing of Artsakh directly violate the cultural rights of the Armenians of Artsakh by depriving them of the opportunity to connect with their heritage, preserve it with historical authenticity, and

¹³⁹ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009, § 48.

¹⁴⁰ UN. General Assembly 1990, art. 31.

¹⁴¹ UNESCO. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. 2001, § 8.

¹⁴² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. 1966, art. 19, 20.

¹⁴³ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. 1965, art. 4.

¹⁴⁴ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009, § 21.

¹⁴⁵ UN. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. 2009, § 50.

pass it on to future generations. These devastations continue on a large scale to this day, erasing the Armenian trace in Artsakh.

Azerbaijan's systematic genocidal policy of destroying the cultural heritage of Artsakh – including the demolishing of churches, khachkars (cross-stones), historic cemeteries, neighborhoods, and villages, as well as the wrecking of monuments, museums, collections, and other values dedicated to the Artsakh liberation struggle, its heroes, the Armenian Genocide, the Great Patriotic War, and prominent figures in literature, theater, and music – damages heritage physically and has a negative impact on the people and their exercise of rights. Moreover, the appropriation, desecration, and repurposing of medieval Armenian churches, their reattribution to other communities – such as the conversion to Islamic structures, distortion and alterations – not only falsify history and deny the historical Armenian roots of Artsakh but also disrupt the possibility of passing on these values with their true aspects to future generations.

Azerbaijan's prohibition of communication with centuries old heritage through forced displacement and the suspension of its potential development are gross violations of human cultural rights. Today, approximately 121,600 Armenians of Artsakh are deprived of their right to participate in their cultural communal life, access heritage sites, visit family cemeteries, conduct religious ceremonies, and pray in historical churches. Due to forced displacement, the Armenians of Artsakh remain deprived of the opportunity to access and develop the heritage created through their experiences, skills, and perceptions. Experts argue that this could lead to the destruction of entire cultural communities in the long term, erasing the collective identity of a people who have an unbreakable right to exist.

Approximately 4.000 historical and cultural monuments registered in Artsakh have already been destroyed, and hundreds of churches, chapels, bridges, khachkars, tombstones, castles, museums, cultural centers, theaters, and monuments are under immediate threat of destruction.

Thus, the Armenians of Artsakh, facing numerous obstacles to the realization of their fundamental human rights, are today in severe psychosocial conditions, facing the risk of the disintegration of their identity. The challenges resulting from the destruction of Artsakh's cultural heritage and forced displacement require international attention today, including the respect for cultural rights, heritage documentation, damage prevention, and the guarantee of access to heritage sites for displaced communities.

Armine Tigranyan – PhD student at the Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of History, Yerevan State University, a lecturer, and a research fellow at the “Amberd” Research Center. Scientific interests: preservation of cultural heritage, its promotion, cultural genocide, and cultural law. Author of two monographs and approximately 15 articles. ORCID: 0000-0001-5886-3667. armine.tigranyan@ysu.am

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Nairi hamaynapetarani hamayni ghekavar Norayr Sargsyani 2023 t.-i aprili 8-i №- E-1422 grutyun):

ՀՀ Սյունիքի մարզպետարանի գլխավոր քարտուղար՝ Է. Մարտիրոսյանի 2023 թ. մայիսի 25-ի №- 04/03042-23 գրություն (HH Syuniki marzpetarani glxavor qartuxar—E. Martirosyani 2023 t.-i mayisi 25-i №- 04/03042-23 grutyun):

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**ԱՐՑԱԽԱՀԱՅԵՐԻ ՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ԺԱՌԱՆԳՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ՈՉՆՉԱՑՄԱՆ ԵՎ ՅՈՒՐԱՑՄԱՆ ԱԴՐԲԵՋԱՆԻ
ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ՝ ՄՇԱԿՈՒՅԹԻ ԻՐԱՎՈՒՆՔԻ
ԽԱԽՏՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՏՈՒՄ**

ԱՐՄԻՆԵ ՏԻԳՐԱՆՅԱՆ

Ա մ փ ո փ ու մ

Բանալի բառեր՝ Արցախ, Հայկական մշակութային ժառանգություն, մշակույթի իրավունք, Ադրբեջան, ժառանգության ոչնչացում, յուրացում, բռնի տեղահանում:

2020 թ. սեպտեմբերի 27-ին Արցախի դեմ Ադրբեջանի սանձազերծած պատերազմի, դրան հաջորդած գործընթացներում (պատմական Հայկական տարածքի Ադրբեջանի վերահսկողության տակ անցնելն ու ամբողջական հայաթափումը) Հայկական մշակութային ժառանգության ոչնչացումներն ուղղակիորեն խախտում են արցախահայերի մշակույթի իրավունքը՝ նրանց զրկելով պատմական մշակութային ժառանգության հետ հաղորդակցվելու, այն պատմական իսկություններ պահպանելու, սերունդներին փոխանցելու հնարավորությունից: Պատմական արժեքների ավերածությունները մեծ ծավալներով չարունակվում են մինչ օրս՝ ոչնչացնելով Հայկական հետքն Արցախում:

Ադրբեջանի կողմից Արցախի մշակութային ժառանգության վերացման համակարգային քաղաքականությունը ոչ միայն ֆիզիկական վնասում է ժառանգությանը, այլև բացասական ազդեցություն ունենում մարդկանց և նրանց իրավունքների իրացման վրա: Իսկ միջնադարյան Հայկական եկեղեցիների յուրացումը, պղծումն ու գործառնությունից փոփոխումը, դրանք այլ հանրությունների վերագրելը՝ աղվանացնելը, իսլամացնելը, անօրինական վերականգնումներն ու վերափոխումները ոչ միայն կեղծում են պատմությունը և դրանով ժխտում

հուշարձանների հայկականությունը, այլև ցեղասպանական քաղաքականություն են հանդիսանում և խաթարում՝ այդ արժեքները ճշմարտացիորեն հաջորդ սերունդներին փոխանցելու հնարավորությունը:

Աղբբեջանի կողմից բռնի տեղահանությունը պատմական ժառանգության հետ հաղորդակցման արգելումը, դրանով զարգանալու հնարավորության կասեցումը մարդու մշակութային իրավունքների կոպիտ խախտումներ են: Այսօր շուրջ 121.600 արցախահայ գրկված է իր մշակութային բնականոն համայնքային կյանքին մասնակցելու, իր ժառանգության տարածքներ, պատմական եկեղեցիներում ծեսեր իրականացնելու և աղոթելու հնարավորությունից [արցախահայերի բռնի տեղահանությունը տեղի է ունեցել 2 փուլով. 2020 թ. 44-օրյա պատերազմի ընթացքում տեղահանվել է մոտ 41.000 արցախահայ (հիմնականում Հադրութի և Շուշիի շրջաններից), որից շուրջ 21.000-ը ժամանակավորապես տեղակայվել են Հայաստանի Հանրապետությունում, իսկ մոտ 20.000-ը՝ որպես ներքին տեղահանվածներ շարունակել են ապրել Արցախի՝ այդ ժամանակահատվածում հայկական վերահսկողության տակ գտնվող տարածքներում: Իսկ 2023 թ. սեպտեմբերի 19-ի ռազմական գործողությունների արդյունքում բռնի տեղահանվեց 100.600 մարդ՝ Հայաստանում բռնի տեղահանվածների ընդհանուր թիվը հասցնելով շուրջ 121.600-ի]: Բռնի տեղահանության պատճառով արցախահայերը մինչ օրս գրկված են իրենց ժառանգությանը հասանելիություն ունենալու հնարավորությունից, որը մասնագետների կարծիքով երկարաժամկետ հեռանկարում կարող է ոչնչացնել մշակութային ամբողջական համայնքները՝ վերացնելով գոյության անխախտ իրավունք ունեցող ժողովրդի հավաքական ինքնությունը:

Արցախում ցուցակագրված շուրջ 4.000 պատմամշակութային հուշարձանների զգալի մասն արդեն իսկ ոչնչացված է, իսկ հարյուրավոր եկեղեցիներ, մատուռներ, կամուրջներ, խաչքարեր, դամբարաններ, ամրոցներ, թանգարաններ, մշակութային տներ, թատրոններ, հուշարձաններ գտնվում են ոչնչացման սպառնալիքի ներքո:

Այսպիսով արցախահայերը, բախվելով մարդու հիմնարար իրավունքների իրացման բազմաթիվ խոչընդոտների, այսօր գտնվում են հոգեսոցիալական ծանր վիճակում, ինքնության կազմաքանդման վտանգի առջև:

Արցախի մշակութային ժառանգության ոչնչացման և բռնի տեղահանման հետևանքով առաջացած մարտահրավերների լուծումն այսօր պահանջում է միջազգային ուշադրություն՝ ներառյալ մշակութային իրավունքների հարգում, ժառանգության փաստագրում, վնասի կանխարգելում, ինչպես նաև տեղահանված համայնքներին ժառանգության տարածքներ մուտքի երաշխավորություն:

Արմինե Տիգրանյան – ԵՊՀ պատմության ֆակուլտետի մշակութաբանության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ, դասախոս, «Ամբերդ» հետազոտական կենտրոնի հետազոտող: Գիտական հետաքրքրությունները՝ մշակութային ժառանգության պահպանում, հանրահռչակում, մշակութային ցեղասպանություն, մշակույթի իրավունք: Հեղինակ է 2 մենագրության և շուրջ 15 հոդվածի:

ORCID:0000-0001-5886-3667. armine.tigranyan@ysu.am

ПОЛИТИКА АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА ПО УНИЧТОЖЕНИЮ И
ПРИСВОЕНИЮ КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ АРМЯН АРЦАХА
В КОНТЕКСТЕ НАРУШЕНИЯ КУЛЬТУРНОГО ПРАВА

АРМИНЕ ТИГРАНЯН

Резюме

Ключевые слова: Арцах, армянское культурное наследие, культурные права, Азербайджан, уничтожение наследия, присвоение, насильственное перемещение.

Уничтожение армянского культурного наследия в ходе войны, развязанной Азербайджаном против Арцаха 27 сентября 2020 года, в последующих процессах (переход исторической армянской территории под контроль Азербайджана и полное насильственное переселение армян) напрямую нарушает культурные права армян Арцаха, лишая их возможности контактировать с историческим культурным наследием, сохранять его историческую подлинность и передавать его поколениям. Уничтожение исторических ценностей в больших масштабах продолжается по сей день, стирая армянский след в Арцахе. Подобная политика Азербайджана не только наносит физический ущерб наследию, но и оказывает негативное влияние на людей и реализацию их прав. А присвоение, осквернение и изменение функций средневековых армянских церквей, приписывание их другим общинам, агванизация, исламизация, незаконные реставрации и преобразования не только фальсифицируют подлинную историю, тем самым отрицая принадлежность памятников к армянской культуре, но и являют собой геноцидальную политику, подрывающую возможность передачи этих ценностей будущим поколениям в исконном виде. Запрет со стороны Азербайджана на контакт насильственно переселенных людей с историческим наследием, приостановление тем самым возможности его развития являются грубым нарушением культурных прав человека. На сегодняшний день около 121.600 армян Арцаха лишены возможности участвовать в нормальной, культурной общественной жизни, совершать обряды и молиться в местах своего культурного наследия и исторических церквях.

Насильственное переселение армян Арцаха проводилось в два этапа. В ходе 44-дневной войны 2020 года около 41.000 армян Арцаха были переселены (в основном из Гадрутского и Шушинского районов), из коих около 21.000 были временно перемещены в Республику Армения, а около 20.000 жили в качестве внутренне переселенных лиц на территориях Арцаха, которые в тот период находились под контролем Армении. А в результате военных действий 19 сентября 2023 года из Арцаха были насильственно переселены 100.600 человек, в результате чего общее число насильственно переселенных лиц в Армении составило около 121. 600 человек.

Из-за насильственного переселения армяне Арцаха по сей день лишены доступа к своему историческому наследию, что, по мнению экспертов, в долгосрочной перспективе грозит уничтожением целостных культурных общин и коллективной идентичности народа, имеющего неотъемлемое право на существование. Значительная часть примерно 4000 историко-культурных памятников в Арцахе уже разрушена, а сотни церквей, часовен, мостов, хачкаров, гробниц, крепостей, музеев, домов культуры, театров и памятников находятся под угрозой уничтожения. Таким образом, армяне Арцаха, столкнувшись с множеством препятствий на пути реализации основных прав человека, сегодня находятся в тяжелейшем психосоциальном состоянии. Решение проблем, возникших в результате уничтожения культурного наследия Арцаха и насильственного переселения арцахских армян, на сегодняшний день требует международного внимания, включая уважение культурных прав, документирование наследия, пресечение наносимого им ущерба, а также гарантии возможности доступа перемещенных общин к территориям наследия.

Армине Тигранян – аспирантка кафедры культурологии исторического факультета Ереванского государственного университета, преподавательница, научная сотрудница исследовательского центра «Амберд». Научные интересы: сохранение культурного наследия, популяризация, культурный геноцид и культурное право. Автор 2 монографий и около 15 статей. ORCID: 0000-0001-5886-3667. armine.tigranyan@ysu.am