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THE MASSACRE OF THE ARMENIANS OF SHUSHI ON MARCH 23, 1920 AS A CONSEQUENCE OF IMPUNITY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE IN 1915

Since the end of May 1918, the Musavat government of the newly created Azerbaijan was striving to occupy Artsakh by all possible and impossible means. The Armenians of the region were uncompromisingly struggling to preserve their statehood and independence. Since January 1919, Khosrov bek Sultanov, the representative of Musavat government, formed in Shushi, with the assistance of the English was trying to carry out the Azerbaijani anti-Armenian extermination programs.

At the beginning of 1920 Sultanov demanded from the National Council of Karabakh to be totally subordinated to Musavat Azerbaijan. In the meantime, he ordered Musavat army to deploy and concentrate in positions of strategic importance in order to invade Zangezur.

From February 28 to March 8, 1920 the 8th convention of Artsakh Armenians was convened in the village of Shosh to discuss the current situation. Sultanov's demand was rejected and it was stated that the August 22 agreement had lost its force due to being frequently violated by Azerbaijan. The convention demanded from Musavat government to stop the massacres, otherwise «if such incidents were repeated, Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh would be compelled to take the relevant measures to protect their lives and honor¹. A centralized body for the defense of Karabakh was organized with its branches in regions².

In March a nationwide uprising broke out. Azerbaijani troops launched the assault in the evening of April 12, 1920. The leaders of the rebellion had misjudged the correlation of forces and initially suffered defeat.

The Turks, concentrating a great number of troops in Shushi, on March 23, 1920 set the Armenian district on fire and plundered it. A horrific massacre of local population followed.

Thousands of Armenians lost their lives, the Armenian district of the town was burned down and the goods and belongings of those Armenians who escaped the fire came the share of the Azeris. The slaughterers designed this massacre as they had already had the relevant experience and taking advantage of the favourable conditions and the atmosphere of impunity; they tried to condemn the Eastern Armenia to the same fate that had befallen the Western Armenia.

¹ Հայաստանի ազգային արխիվ (այսուհետ՝ ՀԱԱ), ֆ. 200, ց. 16, գ. 563, թ. 29–35:

² «Խորհրդային Ղարաբաղ», թիվ 257, 1989:

The organizers of the March 1920 slaughters proceeded in the wake of those predesigned by the Young Turk leaders and effected in April 24 1915. It is well-known that in April 24, 1915 more than 800 Armenian intellectuals, social and political activists, artists, scientists, doctors, and teachers were arrested in Constantinople and exiled under different pretexts. The execution of this plan aimed not only to eradicate the top Armenian intellectuals but also to deprive the nation of the capable forces to organize self-defense.

In March 22 1920, by the order of Khosrov bek Sultanov 400 prominent Shushi Armenians were arrested and sent to prison in the Turkish district. Grigor Minasbekyan, a witness to those events, wrote, «Poor Ivan Bek (in reference to Yeghishe Ishkhanyan – V.B.) became the first victim in the prison because he demanded to be taken to Khosrov bek Sultanov to find out why they had arrested those people who were not aware of anything and had no part in anything. Ivan Bek was killed on the spot then the rest of the prisoners were put to death. It is impossible to describe in words the atrocities and violence perpetrated by Turks³.

Once splendid Armeinan city of Shushi was barbarously destroyed. Hrachia Adjarian wrote, «... the Azerbaijani nationalists suddenly attacked the Armenians at night and set fire. It was a windy night. The wind spread the fire, dry grass and planks easily burned and the whole town became a victim of fire.... This is how Shushi was abandoned and died.

...A Georgian newspaper wrote about the fall of Shushi, «There was a diamond in the Caucasus and the Turks crushed that diamond.»

The people of Kharabakh have always been known as good warriors and could resist on that day as well, but as I said the attack was utterly unexpected and the Armeians were totally unprepared⁴.»

On June 30 1920, a meeting was convened in Tbilisi to provide relief for the surviving refugees of the Shushi massacre left without shelter and it was decided to delegate Doctor Rouben Yuzbashyan to Artsakh. Ruben Yuzbashyan, accompanied by two English lieutenants reached Shushi and being well acquainted with the town walked around observing dreadful scenes. «There are piles of destruction everywhere – Ruben Yuzbashyan told – and it makes a very heavy impression from the very first moment. The surviving structures can be counted on fingers; the military barracks, the royal school, churches and a few delapidated houses in various districts. In the demolished districts he met people, of course Armenians, who were searching for their belongings in the rundown houses and seeing him they approached and one of them, recognizing him, started to complain and express his deep discontent cursing those who brought misfortune upon people. This man was followed by others and they told him how they had been unaware, sleeping peacefully in their homes and all of a sudden everything had turned upside down and houses caught fire one after another, people running out of their houses frightened and in dismay, many of them were killed and those who managed to escape found refuge in the village of Karin Tak and many people were taken prisoner.

³ Իշխանեան Եղիշե, 1999, 579:

⁴ Աճառյան Հր., 1967, 255:

They told that the families having no relatives in villages were in terrible conditions deprived of the means of existence. Those who had family members working in Tbilisi or Baku received support or moved to their relatives. On the whole the situation is more than disturbing and depressive; it is beyond description by a word or letter. ...The Turks had become enraged running amok and raping women and girls⁵»

The newspaper «Slovo» published in Tbilisi wrote in April 16, 1920, «No stone was left unturned in the Armenian district of the town.»⁶

A partaker of the Armenian massacres of Shushi and sergeant of the Azerbaijani army Alimardanbekov wrote in a letter to his brother, «The Armenian Shushi that you have seen is completely destroyed.»⁵

Only 10 houses remain. Over a thousand of Armenians are taken prisoner. We have assassinated all men and even the khalif (Vahan bishop, V.B.), all rich and famous people. The Muslims have stolen innumerable treasures of Armenians and getting so rich they have become impudent.⁷»

In January 21, 1936 during a meeting with the Azerbaijani delegation in Kremlin, S. Ordzhonikidze recalled the Shushi massacres saying, «Even today I can remember the horrifying scenes that we saw in May 1920. The beautiful Armenian town was destroyed, completely devastated, and we saw corpses of women and children in wells.»⁸

Why did the Musavat government residing in Baku choose Shushi as the main target of its blow? There were a number of reasons.

At that period Shushi was the capital of the second Armenian state where political institutions and leverages governing the country were centered. To cancel it all meant to decapitate the state and to leave the population without statehood. The Musavatians thought that destroying the capital will make the Armenians of Artsakh desperate and they would surrender to the mercy of Azerbaijan, so that it would absorb the Armenian land and would eventually resolve its major problem.

It was not accidental that following the massacres the meeting of Musavat party council on 30 March and then on 1 April Azerbaijani assembly adopted resolutions where they gave approval to those horrible events and planning to take more violent actions if the Armenians did not surrender⁹.

- b. At the period in question Shushi was one of the leading posts of the Armenian cultural and educational life, the pioneer of liberal spirit and a breeder of heroes and prominent figures of art, literature, and science, playing unique roles in the Armenian civilization. Destroying that pearl, Musavatians and their chieftains – Turkish felons obsessed with ideas of Pan-Turkism, instigators of the 1915 Genocide – thought that in that way the vital pulse of historic Armenian mission would be cut off and the people would be cast into servility and disappearance.
- c. Shushi was not only the center of Artsakh but geographically it was the main link connecting the Armenian territory to the RA. By the destruction of Shushi,

⁵ Իշխանեան Եղիշե, 623:

⁶ «Слово», 16 апреля, 1920.

⁷ Արցախի պետական պատմաերկրագիտական թանգարան, ֆ. 2, գ. 5, 107:

⁸ «Ազատ Արցախ», 23 մարտի, 2000:

⁹ «Азербайджан», 2 апреля, 1920.

the connection of the Armenian territory with the motherland would become almost impossible. Of course the villages of Berdadzor subregion continued the struggle but they had been defeated many times and their existence was undermined by the absence of the Armenian Shushi. On the other hand, obliterating those villages the Turkish tribes inhabiting the lowlands of Karabakh received an opportunity to get in touch with the Kurds – their fellow Muslims – who had invaded the Armenian Kashatagh / then Haji-Samlu/ at an earlier period.

- d. The existence of a Turkish district in the town was a factor of no little importance in organizing the Armenian massacres of Shushi.
- e. For decades the Armenian business class of Shushi thanks to its zeal, entrepreneurship and purposeful labour had gained control of commerce, production and trades accumulating a substantial capital. All that was invested in the prosperity and development of the Armenian district. The Shushi Armenians created a town of European quality and a unique architectural image unwittingly exciting the aversion, anger and hatred of the retarded and vengeful fanatic Turks living next door having Asian mentality and primitive way of life.

They were the ones to perpetrate the genocide of the Armenians of Shushi in partnership with their fellow Muslim and closely related regular troops of Ottoman Turkey.

The property and possessions of the Shushi Armenians were seized and looted by the newly arriving Tartar population. A contemporary of those events Abraham Kisibekyan wrote in his «Memories»: «He gave us an address of a teacher called Murtuza and told us to go and receive our salary from him. We found his house and went up through the gates and wiping our feet at the porch entered the room. The floor and the walls of the room were covered with carpets. There were Armeian letters woven on the edges of two or three carpets. Obviously this 55-year-old Turk with 20–25 years' experience as a teacher had also taken part in pillaging the Armenian houses. I had known him before the Soviet rule.¹⁰»

There was another curious fact. After murdering the Armenians of Shushi, the Turks began to feel like the hosts of the town. After the tragedies of March 1920 they buried their dead in Shushi. Prior to that, since the times of Panah Khan until March 1920 they knew very well that they were visitors in Artsakh and held their funerals beyond the Artsakh borders.

Several months after the destruction of the Armenian district of Shushi the Armenian intellectuals D. Anan and T. Nazaryan tried to raise money to rebuild the Armenian houses and to resettle the survivors of genocide in their houses.

In 1921, 400 citizens of Shushi applied to the President of the Central Executive Committee Armenak Gharagyozyan for permission to return to their hometown, to restore their houses and reside there. The puppet of the Soviet Azerbaijan rejected the request. Instead Muslims from the neighboring Turkish and Kurdish villages were

¹⁰ Կիսիբեկյան Աբրահամ, հ. 2, 2011, 97:

relocated to Shushi and permitted to occupy 800 half-destroyed two-storied Armenian-owned houses¹¹.

After completely dispossessing the Armenians of Shushi, the authorities of the Soviet Azerbaijan prohibited to make Shushi the main city of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh.

Moreover, Mir Jafar Baghirov, a member of the committee for streamlining the borders of Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh in October 8 1923, announced to the AC/b/C Central Committee that it was necessary to include the Turkish-inhabited villages of Khalpalu, Jarslu, and Musulmanlar located between Berdadzor and Stepanakert and town of Shushi into the region of Kurdistan¹².

Shushi, the pride of the Armenian nation, with its Armenian spirit and flavor, throughout all the Soviet period until its liberation, since the Armenian massacres of March 1920 until 9 May 1992 became a concentration camp for the Armenians of Artsakh and a symbol of horror and miserable, purposeless and hopeless future.

A witness to an incident that occurred in January 1921 in Shushi wrote: «Me and Lambaron were standing in the balcony and talking when we saw a large group of people surrounded by askyars brought to a large area next to the spring called «Khanen aghjik». Besides askyars, there were also Turkish mob surrounding them and beating with sticks and stones those people with tied hands. Me and Lambaron were terrified of this scene happening in front of our eyes. ...the crowd drove those people toward the prison.

About 60–65 people brought from the village of Ternavaz were drawn into the ancient castle and beaten to death with stones, bats and swords. Several people who lay wounded under the corpses after recovering their consciousness came around at night and escaped¹³.

In Shushi the Soviet authorities established a «Revolutionary Court» or as it was better known «troika» which executed Armenians brought to the fortress-town without trial. And later in 1960s an agronomist from Berdadzor was assassinated in the center of Shushi by the brother of the Chairman of Central Executive Committee J. Begyarov who went unpunished. The warden of the Music Technicum and his son were killed in the town. The driver of Stepanakert Forestry Suren Ulubabyan was shot dead in Shushi only because his surname sounded like that of Bagrat Ulubabyan.

In 1960s thousands of Armenian-owned buildings and relics were destroyed in the drive to completely wipe the Armenian district off the ground and to demolish unique architectural structures. After that they demolished the Christian graveyards – 6 Armenian, 1 Russian and 1 Armenian-Russian.

Starting as far back as the 1950s some newspapers of Baku published «letters from workers» calling for demolition of the Armenian graveyards. To this effect in 1966 an article by a so-called architect K. Saidov was printed in the newspaper «Stroitel» in Baku

¹¹ *Կիսիբեկյան Արթուր*, հ. 1, 2011, 7, նույնը, հ. 2, 143:

¹² WWW.irs-az.com/100331140534plf, *Բալայան Վ.*, 2012, 178:

¹³ *Կիսիբեկյան Արթուր*, հ. 2, 158–159:

entitled «The dead eat the living» where the author suggested to demolish 7 cemeteries out of 8 in Shushi leaving open only the one for the Azerbaijanis¹⁴.

Soon that wild project was fulfilled in a major layout of Shushi put forward in 1974. It was planned to erect multi-storied towers and a park in place of the Armenian cemeteries. Across the cemetery located in the northern part of Shushi a new road was built which was absolutely unnecessary for the town. The Russian cemetery was turned into a cowhouse.

It was due to the efforts of the Armenians of Artsakh¹⁵ that it became possible to salvage some section of the cemeteries where the preserved tombstones with Armenian letters bare a silent witnesses to the glorious history of once marvelous Armenian town that today has once again been resurrected from the ruins by the hands of its true hosts.

Marieta Shahinyan wrote rightly: «But years will pass, maybe even decades, and tourists will visit Shushi not for its beauty and climate but rather for the instructive lesson for all Transcaucasus that it bears, for the lesson like those we saw in Pompei and Herculaneum. Whereas if in the latter cases the actor was a blind element of nature, this time it was a blind element of the beast teased by the mob and a sordid human word¹⁶.

In 1921 Shushi was visited by S. Orjonikidze who saw the remnants of the Armenian town and wrote: «Last year, before the Soviet rule was established, saw the shameful devastation of the Armenian town of Shushi, the raping, massacres and throwing children and women into pits. It was the infamous period of the rule of nationalism in the Transcaucasus. Time will pass, the senses will calm down and our generations will remember with cursing those who would have been to blame of those abominable acts¹⁷.

Unfortunately, the Bolshevik party and the Soviet regime did not give a legal assessment of the massacres of the Shushi Armenians, nor did they take appropriate steps to punish the criminals. Moreover, some perpetrators of those atrocities were promoted to high posts and became the pillars of the Soviet Azerbaijan. Khosrov bek Sultanov became the governor of revolutionary committee two months after the Shushi massacres. The organizers of the massacres later became the governors of the regions neighboring Artsakh. A contemporary wrote, «I have been living in this region – in Aghdam, and lived both under the Tsar and under Azerbaijani rule. I have to note with pain that nothing has changed. Mamedov is in the place of Sultanov and Gadimov is in the place of Mekhmandarov. The actors have changed while the roles have remained the same. ... The famous Turkish communist M. T. Bek residing in Aghdam is the same person who was the right hand of Sultanov during the battles for Karabakh and who personally pillaged Shushi during the massacres. When I suddenly saw those carpets with Armenian letters woven «Shushi» on them he blushed of shame.¹⁸»

¹⁴ «Строитель», н. 9, 2 февраля, 1966.

¹⁵ In summer of 1960 the Catholicos of All Armenians Vazgen I accompanied by Victor Hambardzumyan and Sero Khanzadyan visited the town of Shushi. After seeing the unmaintained condition of the Armenian cemeteries the Catholicos rebuked the Turkish authorities of the town.

¹⁶ Մկրտչյան Շ., 2001, 175:

¹⁷ Օրջոնիկիձե Գ., 1950, 75:

¹⁸ Խաչենցի, Դարաբաղի դրությունը, «Դիտչակ», հմ. 12, 1928, 333–334:

The century-long creations of the Shushi Armenians were not only burned down and destroyed in a matter of hours but a part of it came into possession of the Turks. It was an encouragement for them. Years later a writer Rasul Rza during a foreign session of Azerbaijani writers described the Armenian massacres of March of 1920 as a glorious feat of Azerbaijani nation noting that, "the Azerbaijani nation has written the most glorious page of its history here in Shushi and you are obliged to never forget it.» And the poet Nabi Khazri called poetically to his tribesmen, «On your way to Shushi know well your friend and your foe.¹⁹⁾»

Several years after the destruction of the town Marieta Shahinyan was in Shushi and wrote in the book «Nagorno Karabakh». «I saw the skeleton of Shushi. Two mounds stood in front of me covered with skeletons of destroyed buildings. Nothing was left except for stones; no roof, no door, no window, no floor, no iron, no tree, no plank, no groundwork, no nail, only stones, stones and stones as the gnawed and cleaned bones of autopsied skeleton.

In 1930 Osip Mandelstam, during his stay in Shushi, described that heartbreaking scene in his poem «Cabman». Nadezhda, the poet's wife, later wrote, «...the image of destruction and massacre was obvious in that town which apparently once had been rich and beautiful...they say that after the massacres all the wells were full of corpses. And those who survived escaped the town of death...²¹»

Thus, the Musavatian government of Azerbaijan, taking advantage of the atmosphere of impunity created after the Great Genocide of 1915 and adopting the methods of the Young Turks party in March 1920 devastated the Armenian town Shushi with the same violence. Once flourishing Armenian town – «small Paris», as many used

²⁰ Шагинян М., 1930, 41–42.

²¹ Мандельштам, т. 1, 1990, 107.

to call her, was completely destroyed adding a new unhealing wound on the heart of the Armenian nation, while remaining a stigma of disgrace and barbarism on Azerbaijan.

It is hard to find another town like Shushi through the centuries of history of the Armenian nation that would have such a controversial or fatal role in the life of the nation. On the one hand it became a divide in the multifold biography of the Armenians conveying new energy to the creative spirit of the Armenian nation; on the other hand it became a Golgotha of losses and struggle.

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**1920 Թ. ՄԱՐՏԻ 23-Ի ՇՈՒՇԻԻ ՀԱՅՈՑ ՋԱՐԴԵՐԸ
ՈՐՊԵՍ 1915 Թ. ՀԱՅՈՑ ՑԵՂԱՍՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ
ԱՆՊԱՏԺԵԼԻՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔ**

ՍԵՂՄԱԳԻՐ

1918 թ. մայիսի վերջերից սկսած նորաստեղծ Ադրբեջանի մուսավաթական կառավարությունը բոլոր միջոցներով ձգտում էր տիրանալ Արցախին: Տեղի հայ բնակչությունը անգիշտում պայքար էր մղում՝ պահպանելու իր պետականությունն ու անկախությունը:

1919 թ. հունվարից մուսավաթական կառավարության ներկայացուցիչ Խոսրով բեկ Սուլթանովը, հաստատվելով Շուշիում, անգլիացիների օժանդակությամբ փորձում է իրագործել Ադրբեջանի հայասպան ծրագրերը:

1920 թ. սկզբին Սուլթանովը Ղարաբաղի ազգային խորհրդից պահանջում է լիովին ենթարկվել Ադրբեջանին: Միևնույն ժամանակ նա հրամայում է մուսավաթական զորքերին տեղակայվել կարևոր ռազմավարական կետերում՝ Չանգեզուր ներխուժելու մտադրությամբ:

Մարտին համաժողովրդական ապստամբություն բռնկվեց: 1920թ. մարտի 22-ին ադրբեջանական զորքերն անցան հարձակման: Քանի որ ապստամբության պարագլուխները ճշգրտորեն չէին հաշվարկել ուժերի հարաբերակցությունը, սկզբնական փուլում նրանք անհաջողություններ ունեցան:

1920 թ. մարտի 23-ին թուրքերը մեծաքանակ զորքեր կուտակեցին Շուշիում և կրակի ու ավարի մատնեցին հայկական թաղամասը: Խաղաղ բնակչության սարսափելի սպանդ իրականացվեց:

Հազարավոր հայեր սպանվեցին, քաղաքի հայկական թաղամասը կրակի մատնվեց, իսկ տներից փրկված կահ-կարասին թալանվեց թուրքերի կողմից: Թուրքերն, արդեն ունենալով բավարար փորձ, ցեղասպանություն կազմակերպեցին՝ օգտվելով բարենպաստ պայմաններից և անպատճելիության մթնոլորտից. նրանք փորձեցին Արևելյան Հայաստանն արժանացնել Արևմտյան Հայաստանի նակատագրին:

1920 թ. ջարդերի կազմակերպիչներն առաջնորդվում էին այն նույն գործողություններով ու նախապես մշակված ծրագրով, որը գործի էր դրվել 1915 թ. ապրիլի 24-ին Երիտթուրքերի կազմակերպած ցեղասպանության ժամանակ: Ցավոք, Բոլշևիկյան կուսակցությունն ու սովետական կառավարությունը երբեք իրավական գնահատական չտվեցին Շուշիի հայ բնակչության նկատմամբ իրականացված կոտորածներին և ոչ էլ համապատասխան քայլեր ձեռնարկեցին՝ պատժելու հանցագործներին: Ավելին, կոտորածի հեղինակներին շնորհվեցին

բարձր պաշտոններ ու նրանք դարձան նորաստեղծ Խորհրդային Ադրբեջանի հիմնապուները:

Անպատժելությունը նոր հանցագործությունների ծնեց: Եթե Խորհրդային իշխանության արշալույսի օրերին ավերվեց մեր մայրաքաղաք Շուշին, ապա նույն ռեժիմի մայրամուտին կազմակերպվեց Բաքվի, Սումգայիթի, Գանձակի և այլ հայկական քաղաքների ու գյուղերի հայ բնակչության կոտորածը:

Ակնհայտ է, որ հայ ժողովուրդը ի գորտ է դիմագրավելու նման աղետների միայն ազգային պետականության առկայության պայմաններում:

Մուսավաթական Ադրբեջանը, օգտվելով 1915 թ. Մեծ Եղեռնից հետո ստեղծված անպատժելիության մթնոլորտից և առաջնորդվելով երիտթուրքերի գործելաոճով, 1920 թ. մարտի 23-ին նույնպիսի դաժանությամբ ավերեց Շուշին: Ծաղկող հայկական քաղաքը, որին ինչպես շատերն անվանում էին «փոքր Փարիզ» հիմնահատակ ավերվեց, ինչն ավելի բորբոքեց հայ ժողովրդի անբուժելի վերքը:

Ինչ վերաբերում է Ադրբեջանին, ապա այս իրադարձությունները նրա վրա միշտ կմնան որպես ամոթի ու անպատվության խարան:

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ПОГРОМЫ АРМЯН ШУШИ 23 МАРТА 1920 Г. КАК СЛЕДСТВИЕ БЕЗНАКАЗАННОСТИ АРМЯНСКОГО ГЕНОЦИДА 1915 Г.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Начиная с конца мая 1918 г. новообразованное мусаватистское правительство, всеми способами, пыталось завладеть Арцахом. Местные армяне бескомпромиссно боролись за сохранение своей государственности и независимости. С января 1919 г. представитель мусаватистского правительства Хосров бек Султанов, утвердившийся в Шуши с помощью англичан, пытался реализовать планы Азербайджана по уничтожению армян.

В начале 1920 г. Султанов потребовал от Национального Совета Карабаха полностью подчиняться Азербайджану. В то же время он приказал мусаватистской армии сосредоточиться в стратегически значимых пунктах с целью вторжения в Зангезур.

В марте началось общенациональное восстание. Атака вооружённых сил Азербайджана началась в ночь на 22 марта 1920 г. Первоначально руководители восстания неверно рассчитали соотношение сил и потерпели неудачу.

Сосредоточив на подступах к Шуши большие силы 23 марта они сожгли и разграбили армянский квартал, вырезав мирное армянское население.

Турки организовали этот погром следуя опыту геноцида 1915 г. в Османской империи, и, воспользовавшись выгодными условиями и атмосферой безнаказанности, пытались удостоить Восточную Армению судьбы Западной Армении.

К сожалению, большевистская партия и советские власти не дали правовой оценки армянским погромам, не приняв никаких мер для наказания преступников. К тому же, некоторые из организаторов преступления получили высокие должности и стали основателями новообразованного Советского Азербайджана.

Безнаказанность стала причиной нового преступления: если на заре Советской власти был разрушен «Маленький Париж» – процветающий город Шуши, то на закате этого же режима были жестоко убиты армяне Баку, Сумгаита, Гандзака и других городов и сёл.