

MEMORIALIZING THE EARTHQUAKE

Gayane Shagoyan

"When I was four, once I said that although I have not seen the earthquake I did remember it".

The author of these words was born seven months after the earthquake.¹

The present article deals with the problem of moralization of the devastating earthquake of December 7, 1988 in Armenia that took the lives of 25,000 people and completely or partially destroyed the cities Spitak, Leninakan (now Gyumri) and Kirovakan (now Vanadzor). I will focus on the processes of remembering and forgetting the earthquake on the example of one of the cities most damaged during the disaster – Gyumri (the second largest city in Armenia).

These processes will be analyzed in the context of correlation of two types of memories following the terminology of J. Assman: Communicative and cultural memories,² in other words living, everyday memory (story-telling, rituals of commemoration, and subject memory³) and official, monumental memory which has canonized the cultural text on the event. Of these two types of memories the communicative memory is evidently more emotional and aims to communicate the experience of the trauma to future generations.

According to one school girl from Gyumri, time does not heal but rather sharpens the perception of pain: *"The pain gets worse when the wound cools off"*.⁴ But this does not disclaim a certain flexibility of communicative memory.

¹ From the essay of the school student of tenth grade of Akhuryan school No 1. In order to investigate the perceptions of the city by generations who have not seen the Spitak earthquake in the upper grades of three schools – 4th, 10th (in Gyumri) and the 2nd (in Akhuryan), essays were written on the topic "What I know about the earthquake in 1988". The same students were assigned to write an essay on a related topic: "What happened on Dec. 7, 1988" with the help of their parents. The aim was to identify differences between the memory of the earthquake from eyewitnesses and a generation born after the tragedy. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to the administration and teaching staff of these schools for their assistance.

² Assman J., *Cultural Memory: Writing, Remembrance of the Past and Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity*, Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004, pp. 50-62 (in Russian).

³ On the subject memory, see *ibid.* p. 20.

⁴ Field ethnographic materials (hereinafter – FEM), Gyumri, 2006.

This kind of memory is easier to influence or change; it can be called “soft” memory.⁵

The cultural memory, by contrast, tries to “cool off” the event and attain the status of “historical fact” (that is, the maximum distance from the real) which does not easily admit variations and can therefore be called “hard”.⁶ The process of canonization is often accompanied by a hardening of memory, literally – the installation of monuments and the establishment of official texts (e.g., textbooks). Thus, our task is to trace how the hardening process of earthquake memory develops and which elements of “soft memory” transform into “hard memory”.

The memory of trauma somewhat differs from the more general problems of the anthropology of memory: here, obviously, we deal with not so much remembering but with finding ways to forget. Memory and trauma are special themes that in the scientific literature are mostly considered on the examples of genocides, wars, deportations and repression. According to Harald Welzer the notion of trauma has transformed in the same that the concepts of “identity” and “collective memory” did, in particular: *“no one knew exactly what they meant but they were used everywhere, so that one could use these concepts for anything”*.⁷ So ultimately we can speak only about the politics of the memory of the trauma. However, in the case of the memory of the earthquake we have a somewhat different phenomenon – different from the memory of historical events. The latter differs from the memory of a natural disaster in that it “strongly depends on how this memory is used in the present. Whether an event will be generally interpreted as traumatic often depends not so much on the event itself, but on what value it will be given later, in hindsight”.⁸ In the case of earthquake the memory has an importance that goes beyond the general political, namely social, consolidating and cultural importance (“a friend in need is friend indeed”, etc.). Therefore, based on this example it will be particularly interesting to consider the correlations between various components of the collective memory.

As the field materials for research, in addition to the school works I have used interviews with residents of the old city as well as of new districts, expert inter-

⁵ Etkind A., Hundred Years of Revolution: Anniversary of Beginning and the Beginning of the End // <www.strana-oz.ru/print.php> (30.10.06, in Russian).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Welzer H., History, Memory and Modernity of the Past. Memory as an Arena of Political Struggle // Neprikosnovennyi zapas (Reserved Rations), 2005, N2-3 (pp. 40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/vel3.html> (09.06.2006, in Russian).

⁸ Ibid.

views with architects, builders, sculptors and artists. Most of the informants are residents of Gyumri, but some of them are former residents who have moved to Yerevan or abroad. Of special importance are the materials (interviews, publications, exhibits) related to the Gyumri Biennale – International Festival of Conceptual Art held since 1998.

The family and official discourse of the earthquake in the article is presented in six paragraphs: in the first paragraph we will mainly discuss the official discourse and those related “traumatic” themes that frequently appear in the discussion of this tragedy (for example, the memory of the Armenian “genocide”); the second paragraph discusses the “characteristics” of events selected for “the main memory bank” that variously “strengthen” or “cool off” both individual and collective memories. The third section presents a wide spectrum of perceptions of the earthquake time period and various modern forms of ritualizing it. The fourth section refers to the different sound associations which evoke memories of the earthquake. The fifth section discusses attempts to overcome the memory of the earthquake and the loss of loved ones. Finally, the sixth section describes in detail how the places of memories are marked in the damaged city – from the ruins to man-maid memorials.

Memorialization of the earthquake: Official discourse

Let us first consider discourse such as “is it worth remembering” the earthquake at all: how are the “social” and “individual” facts articulated? In order to answer this question, let us consider the context in which the collective/individual memory is trying to comprehend the disaster. In many official texts, the very first association that is brought by the earthquake of 1988 is the Armenian “genocide” of 1915. One of the authors of the large-scale memorial to the victims of the earthquake in Gyumri is the architect Sashur Kalashyan who has designed (together with Arthur Tarhanyan) the renowned Memorial Complex in Yerevan in memory of victims of the genocide. S. Kalashyan at the time of the earthquake was working as the chief architect of Leninakan and at the very moment of the disaster he was in his office in the city council building.⁹

⁹ FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

The new memorial complex was planned to consist of two split geological plates that formed a crevice where the museum of the earthquake was supposed to be constructed;¹⁰ the complex is similar to the design of the memorial in Yerevan in the sense that it consists of the “path for the pilgrims” and the complex itself (which from above is seen as a cross).

The author claims that he is not a supporter of the formation of a new memorial ritual similar to the popular pilgrimage of April 24 – the Day of Remembrance for the victims of genocide – when thousands of people place flowers at the eternal flame in the memorial complex. In order to avoid the establishment of a new ceremony, the authors have not included an eternal flame and have not provided places for the flowers in the complex: *“We did not want to establish a similar ritual. We decided that it [the earthquake – G. S.] was more of a personal thing, and that we ought not present it as the all people’s tragedy and rather present it as an “episode”.*¹¹

At the same time, the authors have made a special place for candles, thus substituting one ritual (laying flowers) with another (lighting candles). So far only the foundation has been dug while there is no funding for construction of the monument itself, which was supposed to be built with public donations. The memorial in Yerevan was built on a similar scheme, when students and volunteers from across Armenia took active part in the construction efforts.¹² This was perceived as communion, “people’s duty before the victims”, “an act of national solidarity”.

So, remembrance of the earthquake begins to focus on an already existing model of “remembering” (commemoration)¹³ of the genocide.¹⁴ However, comparing it to the genocide raises doubts about the need to remember the disaster. The memory of the genocide is often seen in the context of restoration of historical justice,¹⁵ whereas in case of the earthquake the issue of the morality of the

¹⁰ According to the architect, the concept of this museum should be: “The lessons of the earthquake”. A similar museum is already functioning in Spitak, the epicenter of the earthquake.

¹¹ From an interview with S. Kalashyan. FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Memorializing is just a part of a more general phenomenon of commemoration. The latter includes not only the results (e.g., the monument, text), but the very act of “remembering” and especially rituals aimed at reviving the memory of the “historical facts”. See: Nora P., *Era of Commemorations // France-Memory*, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University Press, 1999, pp. 95-148 (in Russian).

¹⁴ See in details the chapter *Earthquake: The end or the beginning?* in the report of the study conducted in the framework of the Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office in 2006: *Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake*.

¹⁵ Marutyan A., *The Role of Memory in the Structure of National Identity. Problems of the Theory*, Yerevan: Noravank, 2006, pp. 84-85 (in Armenian).

“event” is usually not raised.¹⁶ That is why the memory, both individual and collective, is “rationalized” and the memory of the earthquake provides essentially “lessons” about the tragedy. In the case of individual memory, the rationalization leads not to a didactic clarity but rather to oblivion. Zaven Koshtoyan, the sculptor of the monument in Gyumri, to which official establishment lay wreaths on the anniversaries of the earthquake, opposes the project of a large monument dedicated to the earthquake because this tragedy is not comparable to the genocide: *“It was a natural disaster”*.¹⁷ One school student tries to perceive this issue rationally, noting that *“even though the earthquake has brought tragedy, we must not forget that this was a natural phenomenon that occurs in many places, and no one ultimately is immune from it”*,¹⁸ *that is why we must perceive this fact more “normally”*.

Forms of “cooling” and “heating” the memory of the earthquake

Discussions about the possibility of artificial reasons for the earthquake were common in the first years after the tragedy,¹⁹ and even now in almost every other interview doubts are expressed about the natural causes of the Spitak earthquake. Quite often the following “compromise” version can be heard: the earthquake itself was weak and it was the exploded (in one version by accident, on the other – on purpose) military arsenal near Spitak that resonated the tremors.²⁰ But it is interesting that these “suspicions” are not of a great emotional intensity. Perhaps the reason for this is not only the balanced relations with Russia (perceived as the successor of the USSR), but also the fact that this version (as far as we know) was never heard in official statements. However, the

¹⁶ In medieval Armenia similar disasters were considered primarily as punishment for one's sins. A. Sahakyan presented a paper on this topic (Perception of the earthquake in Medieval Armenia) at a conference on the fifth anniversary of the 1988 earthquake (Yerevan, 1993). On the perception of the 1988 earthquake in the context of guilt and punishment, see: Abrahamian L., *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 159.

¹⁷ From an interview with Z. Koshtoyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

¹⁸ FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

¹⁹ See: Safarian L. V., Piruzyan S. A., *The Causal-Investigative Chain of Resonance of Spitak Earthquake in Armenia* // *Bulletin of Social Sciences (NAS)*, 2002, № 1 (105), pp. 72-74 (in Armenian).

²⁰ Ibid; FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

official discourse contains the other concerns such as statistics about the victims of the earthquake. Although there are no direct accusations that the Soviet authorities concealed the true scale of the disaster and the media coverage of the events was in fact, unprecedented in the history of Soviet public, any indication of the number of victims is still accompanied by the obligatory reference to “official data”. These “data” in different sources vary between twenty-five and twenty-six thousand victims. Although the statistics on other consequences of the quake also have their inaccuracies (for example, different sources estimate the number of people left homeless between 514,000 and 530,000), but these data are never doubted or conditioned.

In general, actualization of the “statistical descriptions” of the earthquake can be considered as one of the attempts to “cool off” the memory, as the emotional details are replaced by “naked” figures unable to “heat” the memory. But not all the figures are so “impartial”. Some statistics, for example regarding persons with disabilities, were often discussed during the first years after the earthquake²¹ but today are totally excluded from the discourse. Indeed, the “naturalization” of such figures transfers them from the field of “historical” facts (meaning they have no continuation in the present) into the sphere of unresolved social problems that “heat” the facts. Thus, as we see, even “naked numbers” and “cold statistics” may be considered according to the scale of “heating” or “cooling”.

Another form of “cooling”, or the transformation of traumatic memory, is the accentuation of the positive events of those days. This theme in the cultural memory is the support from the international community to those affected by the earthquake. These developments are set out mainly in the form of the same “bare facts” that are adapted for a school history course: statistics of the support (how many countries and international organizations provided humanitarian assistance), the names of top officials who visited the disaster zone in the first days after the tragedy, etc.²²

The “cooling off” of the individual memory develops more slowly and in each individual case contains peculiarities. People try to suppress those memories and sometimes even to influence the cultural memory. For example, accord-

²¹ “Tens of thousands of people died under the ruins of houses. Tens of thousands more were injured. Four hundred and sixteen people lost limbs. Fifty four of them – children”. Balayan Z., Afterword // Azatyan V., Leninakan, Yerevan: The Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia Press, 1989, p. 168 (in Russian).

²² See the 8th grade textbook on the History of Armenia / ed. by V. Barkhudaryan, Yerevan: Luys, 2000, pp. 112-115 (in Armenian).

ing to the director of programs at the Tsayg TV station in Gyumri, in 1998 the channel's board made a decision no longer to display the images of collapsing buildings and ruins because of the numerous requests from TV viewers.

Memory of the time of the earthquake

Any form of memory, either individual or collective, operates in the space-and-time continuum and in its own way selects the “crystallization points”.²³

The time is a crucial element in the memory of the earthquake not only because the disaster broke out at a certain moment, fixing this date in the mind, but also because it marked the beginning of a new phase of life, a different reality measured starting from that moment.

“11:41”

The precise time was December 7, 1988, 11:41 a.m. Each year, the moment when the earthquake began gains increasing significance. Among the symbols of this tragedy, the clock affixed to the wall of a textile mill at Lenin Central Square frozen at 11:41 is particularly special. The clock was installed in 1966 and played the city anthem “Gyumri-Leninakan”, by V. Balian.²⁴ The city's main clock stopped immediately because of damage to its mechanism caused by the earthquake and thus became a symbol of the disaster.²⁵ For many who have lost relatives and homes, this moment of time meant a conditional stoppage of time of life as normal or of life in general.²⁶ Even today in the writings of school-children born after the earthquake its description is often accompanied by the

²³ Assman J., *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

²⁴ See: Gyumri, comp. G. Vardanyan. Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2006, p. 251 (in Armenian), interviews with clock-maker Varpet Ladik (Nikolay Matsakyan). FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

²⁵ The clock in Leninakan stopped at 11:41. It stopped as a sign of a big disaster. Sarkisyan A., Khatuntsev V., *From the Reports // Armenia, December'88 / Comp. L. F. Grigороva, A. A. Gasparyan, L. Kh. Manukyan*, Yerevan: Hayastan, 1990, p. 73 (in Russian).

²⁶ “At the crossroads near the ruined house there is a large clock. It stopped at 11:41 local time. From that moment a new point of reckoning seconds, hours and days started. Before the tragedy and after.” Karriyev B., *Here It Came the Earthquake...* www.chelpress.ru/LANG=ru/newspapers/akcion/archive/05-12-1997/3/F1.DOC.html (10.06.06, in Russian).

phrase “time has stopped for a moment”.²⁷ There were practically no compositions where the date and time of disaster would not have been mentioned:

*“Of the numbers I hate seven,
Of the months – December.
Of the days of the week I do not like Wednesday,
And the birth of mountains – in nature.
Of the weather types I hate the mist,”²⁸
Of times – that ominous time,
That is called the “dark hour”
Eleven forty one, believe me!”²⁹*

Interestingly, many of the works of the schoolchildren written in class indicate the time of the earthquake as 11:40, while in those written at home with the help of parents (witnesses of the earthquake), the time is stated more precisely as 11:41.

Memory of the duration of the earthquake

When specifying the duration of the earthquake the influence of a particular perception of numbers was noticed. The duration of the earthquake is considered to be 40 seconds, apparently influenced by the semantic weight of this number:³⁰ it simultaneously carries the meaning of “many”, a round number, a complete cycle of time (the ritual quarantines: 40 days of remembrance after a funeral; the first 40 days of a baby’s life and of a marriage). In official statements and queries, the duration of the earthquake was often rounded up to “1 minute”.³¹ This is of course a symbolic minute, which is dramatized in the

²⁷ FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

²⁸ In the morning of December 7, 1988, a heavy fog was in Leninakan. That is why many have come to perceive it as one of the signs of the earthquake. For details, see the complete research of the author: Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake.

²⁹ From the homework essay of the school student of ninth grade from the school No.10, Luiza Stepanyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006 [my translation – G. S.].

³⁰ About the number “40” see: Abrahamian L., Ayrapetyan V., Arakelyan G., Gulyan A. A., Talk about Round and Absolute Numbers, Yerevan, 1981-1984, pp. 4-14 (manuscript in Russian).

³¹ Consider, for example, the question of the correspondent of the newspaper “Literaturnaya Gazeta” during a press conference in Yerevan on December 19, 1988: “Within one minute almost 400 villages in Armenia were damaged, and 58 were destroyed completely. Will all of these villages be restored?” // Armenia, December 1988, p. 62 (in Russian). The fact that the earthquake lasted for 1 minute is often found in schoolbooks.

sense of unity of “transience” and the temporal frontier from this very moment to all eternity. In one student essay, the times 11:40 and 11:41 are contrasted as two times: a time of happiness and a time of trouble; the difference between these units is just one notch on the dial.

*“1988, December 7, time 11:40, Leninakan – still a city full of life. 11:41 – the same city – now a pile of ruins. Just one minute later, one terrible minute later...”*³²

An altered refrain of this “1 minute” is the “half a minute” (30 seconds),³³ which, as a common approximate duration for earthquakes, may be more accurate in terms of describing the combined duration of the shocks themselves (there were small intervals between the shocks). There also exists a version that earthquake lasted only for 7 seconds;³⁴ this can be explained as the imposition of the symbolically significant number 7 on the perception that is associated with the date of the earthquake (Dec. 7).

All monuments in the city dedicated to the victims of the earthquake (including statues in private yards) indicate the time of the earthquake represented by the hands of a clock pointing to 11:41. It can be stated that the time of the earthquake (with variations in 1 minute: 11:40-11:41) has become a key component of the “hard memory”.

Ritualizing the time of the earthquake

At the anniversary commemorations of the earthquake, the moment when the clock indicates that fateful time is highly ritualized for many people who lost their relatives and homes. At 11:40 – 11:41, many relatives of the victims try to be at the graves of their loved ones.³⁵ Children born after the earthquake also

³² From the essay of the 8th grader of the School No.10 – Edward Khachatryan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

³³ For example: “In 1988 in Armenia the underground tremors of force of 7 on the Richter scale in 30 seconds virtually destroyed the city of Spitak, destroyed Leninakan (now Gyumri), Stepanavan, Kirovakan (now Vanadzor)” // www.mpa.ru/cis/new.php?id=30036 (14.07.06, Press Release of December 7, 2004, in Russian); “16 years ago, on Dec. 7, 1988, in Armenia, in the cities of Spitak and Leninakan a terrible earthquake happened; in just 30 seconds over 25,000 people were killed, about 100,000 were injured and maimed. Over half a million people were left homeless” // www.rossel.ru/archive/20041207/1/ (12.07.06, in Russian).

³⁴ “At about noon, five minutes before the end of lessons at schools, the strong shock followed that lasted for only 7 and a half seconds” // The 13th anniversary of the earthquake in Spitak and Yerevan Armenians / www.gtk.yaroslavl.ru/cgi-bin/m_news.cgi?year (14.06.06, in Russian).

³⁵ In the 7-8 years following the earthquake many people have celebrated the New Year's Eve at the cemetery – at the graves of their deceased relatives. This happened more often in case of lost children. The parents not only marked all the holidays there, but spent nights there as well; there was even a request to build a small house to live near the grave. Gulyan A., I Have Not Seen My Daughter // Stories on Poverty / ed. Kharatyan H., Yerevan: Lusakn, 2001, pp. 79-82 (in Armenian).

take part in this ritual, so for them the significance of this moment comes from their own ritual experiences.

The government is also involved in the ritualizing of “11:41”. At this time, the president of the country, government officials and opposition politicians try to be in Gyumri to lay wreaths at the central earthquake memorial (depicting a mother with child stuck between two tiles) and be present during the memorial service. Simultaneously, there are some attempts made to avoid the dramatization of the “11:41”. For this purpose, in 2006 on the 18th anniversary of the earthquake at 11:41 the opening of the Rescue Service Center for emergency situations took place. Perhaps partly to combat the notion of accuracy associated with 11:41 an attempt was made to determine the “right time” for the opening of the first international Biennale of avant-garde art in Gyumri in 1998. The organizers of the festival consulted with astrologists in Yerevan and accordingly the opening was planned at 19:20.³⁶ That is, any other exact time opposed to 11:41.

The paragraph on the earthquake in eighth grade textbooks on the history of Armenia³⁷ also begins with an indication of the exact start time of the earthquake. In such a way the “time of the earthquake” is reproduced in various discourses – from the family to the national discourses.

Memorializing the “sound” of the earthquake

In January 1992, the clock of the central square of the city was reconstructed according to the design of architect R. Yeghoyan. The dial was slightly modified, the mechanism was repaired by Ladik (Nikolai Mazakyan) and the clock started running again. This was perceived as a symbol that “life goes on”.³⁸ Only the musical chimes were not repaired in the new clock due to the lack of needed resources. But I think that the lack of chimes ticking at the rhythm of life for a city that has survived such a tragedy is an important element. In many

³⁶ See the documentary *Gyumri Biennale* by Garnik Sargsyan, TV studio Chirac, 1990.

³⁷ The 8th grade textbook on the history of Armenia, p. 112.

³⁸ See the telecast of December 7, 2006 of the journalist S. Hunanyan for the news program *Azdarar* of the Gyumri-based TV station Tsayg.

rituals time is expressed with the help of sound.³⁹ In some cases a culture can develop and reinforce a certain musical code for such moments.⁴⁰ On the first anniversary of the earthquake on December 7, 1989, at 11:41 all motorists in the city honked their car horns. This sound was joined by ringing church bells which also denote the time of the beginning and end of services, including memorial services. Therefore it is not surprising that some images of stopped time were accompanied by the “petrified” sound of bells. “The main bells of Armenian history in the belfry of the temple in Echmiadzin swayed only slightly at the moment when the subsoil in the mountains near Leninakan started to shift. For a long time the bells will have to mourn the victims of one of the strongest earthquakes in the second half of the 20th century. For whom the bell tolls!”⁴¹

The life of Soviet Leninakan was once measured by a siren which rang out six times a day to proclaim the start of different work shifts. Therefore it was this siren that was used by A. Sargsyan in his installation “The scar from childhood” at the Gyumri Biennale in 1998. Also at the performance of “Restoration” by students of the S. Merkurov Art School in Gyumri led by G. Gasparyan a clock face and a musical pipe was drawn on a set of ornamented boxes and cubes. As the main elements associated with the earthquake during the same Biennale, the conceptual artist Arco (Arkady Bagdasaryan) provided the land movement, noises and the familiar clock dial.

Alongside the siren, which became the “pulse” of the city and the aforementioned song “Gyumri-Leninakan”, the music by T. Mansuryan written for the film “A Piece of Heaven”,⁴² also can be called part of the musical code of the city. Filming took place in the old part of the city and in some scenes the various ethnographic realities of pre-Soviet Gyumri were reconstructed. Currently this melody is used as a background sound in “nostalgic” TV programs about Gyumri-Leninakan. In such a way this melody reproduces the “virtual sound memory” of the city.

³⁹ Consider: “The first day of each month was called calends (calendae, kalendae); it was declared by a younger pontiff according a certain magic formula, in which several times was repeated the word calo – “I am calling out” (from “calere” – to call out); and this gave the name to the first day.” Zlatkovskaya T. D., *The Historical Roots of the European Calendar // Calendar Customs and Ceremonies in Foreign Countries of Europe, Historical Roots and Development of the Traditions*. Moscow: Nauka, 1983, p. 31 (in Russian).

⁴⁰ As stated in the book by L. Ernjakyan and H. Pikichian, in Armenian culture the “sahari” melody was performed to mark the start of something important: Ernjakyan L., Pikichian H., *Hymn to the Sun: “Sahari” in Armenian Musical Culture*, Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1998 (in Armenian).

⁴¹ Armenia, December 1988, p. 71.

⁴² The Russian title of the film is: *A Slap*, dir. H. Malyan, 1980.

Another tune became a musical code for the earthquake – a song by the famous French singer Charles Aznavour, dedicated to Armenia to commemorate the disaster. It occupied a more of specific niche, symbolizing the “voice” of the international community rushing to help the victims. It is also used as a background melody when images of the quake are shown on TV.

Unlike many similar quakes which the residents of Armenia have had to endure from time to time, the witnesses of the 1988 earthquake heard the noise before they felt it. The earth broke apart with a loud roar that made it difficult to immediately identify that it as an earthquake. This noise was further “evidence” in favor of the theory that the quake was triggered artificially by an explosion.⁴³ This sound of the earthquake became a part of the family stories and has consistently occupied a place in communicative memories:

“A terrible moment... A long whining noise... A noise followed the heavy shaking, and then everything rocked: walls, floor, and furniture. Everything hissed terribly, crackled and creaked. Everyone thought that the earth was slipping away from under our feet. Within a few seconds the second fatal blow happened. Again the terrible rumble, the crazy crash of huge buildings... the billowing clouds of dust, the ruins, ruins, and ruins.”⁴⁴

This sound is recalled in the publications of Today's News also: “The clock showed 11:41 when the terrible roar of the ground hit Leninakan, and immediately the land shuddered. A new point for reckoning time has come – after the earthquake...”⁴⁵ Although the press fosters cultural memory, not all of its materials can become “favorites” of cultural memory. The reason is that the press often records and presents fixed individual memory which may qualify for longevity only in case of multiple repetitions and references to it. This cannot be said about the “geological roar” that was heard. Although the emotional and sensitive experience of this tragedy is an attractive topic for the media, it cannot be canonized. Therefore the memory of this sound/noise should be considered as a subject of communicative memory.

⁴³ From a personal diary, Gyumri, 1988.

⁴⁴ From the essay of the 8th grader of the school No.10 – Eduard Khachatryan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁴⁵ Arutyunyan Y., Account of Time in Gyumri // Voice of Armenia, 2006 (in Russian).

A more terrifying and more widely remembered “sound of the earthquake” is the groans and cries for help and the wails of mourners. Architect S. Kalashyan tries to reproduce this disturbing sound backdrop in his design for the memorial by constructing a metallic structure that resembles an organ and performs two simultaneous functions. The first function is more technical (a stand propping up a raised slab) and the second is symbolic – the screeching of the metal plates through the blowing wind is supposed to “sound not like music, but be the restless chord of the organ”,⁴⁶ to act as an alarm recalling the tragedy.

As the sound memory of the earthquake is characterized as difficult to “soften” along with the chimes and bells, which are more universal for cities, the modern urban discourse also allocates a few specific “sounds”: the siren indicating the working time, popular melodies which typically accompany television images of Gyumri, the “geological sound” of the earthquake, and finally, human voices and moans. The aim is to use all of these sounds, alongside bells, to fix in the “hard memory” (in the memorial complex) only the last sounds, which simultaneously sound as tocsin – remembrance of the tragedy.

Forms of overcoming the memory

Many interviews contain the stories how each family in its own way has “overcome” sorrow. One of the forms was the celebration of December 7 as a new birthday, because surviving this day is perceived as a miraculous second birth.⁴⁷ In cases where one’s birthday actually fell on December 7, celebrations were usually postponed until the next day since the real (not the symbolic and imitative) celebration still required true joy.

For example, one six-year girl who was born on the day of the earthquake (in 1988) without irony asked her mother: “Will my birthday cake also be black?”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ From an interview with S. Kalashyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁴⁷ “My husband and daughter were in the elevator of a high building, and when the building collapsed, they did not understand that this was an earthquake, it seemed that the elevator cables had failed. My husband was able to open the control box and save our daughter. Every year on December 7 we celebrate the birthday of my husband and daughter. I consider this day to be the second birthday of my husband and my daughter. On the first anniversary of the earthquake, when we were in a suburban house near Moscow, we received a telegram from my parents: Happy Birthday” – FEM. Gyumri, 2006

⁴⁸ TV program: Project of the Rebirth, Studio Gala (07/12/2004).

On the day of the 1988 earthquake in Gyumri and in the surrounding villages, 26 babies were born. This number was also symbolized because of its similarity to the number of victims, which for this reason was “rounded up” to 26,000 people. As mentioned above, there are certain doubts about the “official information” regarding the number of victims, therefore shifting the “official numbers” by one unit did not bother anyone. Moreover, some “unofficial” sources indicate the familiar round numbers of 40,000 and even 60,000 victims. The tragic combination of 26 births and 26,000 deaths was the main topic of a discussion programme on Noyem (Gala) TV on the 17th anniversary of the earthquake, when the children were brought together. They were presented with the issued passports in a stately manner and their short bios were presented. During the show an attempt was made to present the children born after the earthquake as the symbols of life, the victory of life over death, the survival. The performance by M. Bagdasaryan showing the photos of children born after the earthquake was a similar attempt during the Biennale in Gyumri (1998). Children born after the ill-fated day to the families who had lost the children in the earthquake became the symbols of life. They were born with a special mission – to replace the loss of their departed siblings. Having inherited their names,⁴⁹ these children have to live not only their own lives, but in part the lives of those tragically killed. The fate, education and daily life of these children is different from the lives of ordinary children not burdened by legacy of being a “living memory”. Even children born after the earthquake who did not receive the names of killed relatives still feel the dramatic weight of their birth. Many of them are the later children of parents who lost elder children in the earthquake. A couple of years after the earthquake, in 1990-1991, there was a population explosion – even women over forty were giving birth. Among the school students who wrote essays about the earthquake, many were aware of their “unordinary” origin:

“I was not yet born when the earthquake happened in 1988, and would have not been born at all if my brother and sister had not been killed in the disaster... My parents are older than the parents of my peers. I used to feel uncomfortable because of this, but now that I am grown up... My father's hair is completely gray.

⁴⁹ About the first names given after the 1988 earthquake, see: Margaryan N. M., Choosing the First Names Among the Eastern Armenians (XIX–XX centuries), (An ethnological study), PhD thesis, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, 2000, chapter 2.2.

*I often ask myself: why did this all happen to me? But I must live and take care of my parents so that they do not feel the loss of their beloved Arshak...*⁵⁰

*“Gyumri has its own specific features associated with the earthquake. I cannot say that these children [born in the families having the victims – G. S.] are spoiled, but they are pampered. At the same time, all of them can be distinguished by special sadness, if you look into their eyes you immediately understand that this child is from a family that has lost people. They are different, very different. At least because these children’s parents are old, sometimes even very old. The children feel uncomfortable because of this fact. Parents of these children are people who lost loved ones during the earthquake, and I do not want to say that these children were born to replace the dead, but that is often the case”.*⁵¹

It is not always the case that the loss of a child entails naming a new baby after the lost child or the perception of new children as “substitutes” for previous ones. Sometimes the reverse is the case. Among my informants there was a mother who confessed that she could not forgive herself or child born after the earthquake for the death of elder children. That is, irrespective of what the relation to the generation born after the earthquake is, to some extent conditioned by the memory of the victims. Here the potential of operational capabilities of communicative memory becomes obvious, as it can influence the raising of the children, who are perceived as a “second chance”.

Memorial sites

Memorial sites are one of the central themes of the discourse of cultural memory.⁵² Identification and registration of these places are among the most discussed issues in the field of communicative memory, because usually these choices are made by people who realize that they are the “creators of history”. And the most important task is to define the concept of those memories to “bequeath” to future generations.

⁵⁰ From the school essays. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁵¹ Teacher at school No.10, FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁵² On the difference between “memorable places” and “places of memory”, see: Nora P., *Between Memory and History. The Problems of Places of Memory // France—memory*, pp. 17-50.

Ruins

In the case of a natural disaster, memorial sites are frequently selected spontaneously, as opposed to the cases of historical events where the actors are people; nature itself “creates” certain areas that fall in the category of “favorites” of the city. As in the case of forming a symbolic landscape where mountains, rivers, and lakes can play the role of social objects, also the ruins or the remembrance of them may occupy a special place in the collective life of the city inhabitants and, on the force of this “remembrance”, define the new face of the city.

“First the monument to victims of the earthquake was erected and then the school was built besides it. Actually our school building is at the site of the old one [destroyed in the quake]. There were small houses in this place then. The director made sure that these houses were removed so that the school could be built in its previous place. They wanted to build our school in the 58th district, and he [the director] was very concerned about the fact that on the spot where the people died and their blood was spilled, there might have been, say, bathrooms or any other houses. ‘Our children were crying in this place’, he said. And he managed to win this place going through various institutions”.⁵³

It has become a common practice in Gyumri to erect khachkars (“cross-stones”)⁵⁴ at places where children died to serve simultaneously as a monument and a “tombstone”. Sometimes, depending on the number of children killed at a location, the parents set an appropriate number of decorated springs either near the cross-stones or combined together with them. A continuation of an old medieval tradition, the cross-stones are places of pilgrimage and are considered to be a sacred space that requires special treatment.

The first earthquake monuments spontaneously emerged at the sites of

⁵³ Teacher at school No.10, FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁵⁴ About the importance and functions of khachkars (cross-stones) in Armenian culture, see: Petrosyan H., Khachkar: The Origins, Functions, Iconography, Semantics, Yerevan: Printinfo, 2008 (in Armenian); Petrosyan H., The Khachkar or Cross-Stone // Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity / ed. by L. Abrahamian and N. Sweezy, Bloomington, Indianapolis: IU Press, 2001, pp. 60-69; Sahakyan A. S., Cult-Memorial Monuments in the Armenian Medieval Folk Culture // PhD thesis, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 1986 (in Russian); Sahakian A. S., Khachkars – Ethnic and Cultural Monuments of Medieval Armenia // Historical and Ethnographic Studies of the Folklore, Collection in the Memory of Sergei Tokarev. M.: Vostochnaya literatura, 1994, pp. 214-237 (in Russian).

great destruction, especially public institutions, first and foremost schools. When the memorial stone of High School 16 (where numerous children were killed) was removed for the new prosecutor's building, this fact was perceived so negatively that the night guards of the building reportedly began to "hear" the crying voices of the children. Almost all my informants told me about this story.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, the ruins of High School 16 became one of the "natural" monuments of the earthquake included in the "reserves of hard memory". An important role in this process was likely played by the location of the school, which is in the central Independence Square (called Lenin Square at the time of the quake).

The school's ruins sometimes can be identified on the gravestones, though the gravestones, together with the clock, represent conditional ruins, sometimes accompanied by an image of a broken tree symbolizing interrupted life.

Among the "memorable ruins" without doubt the first place belongs to the ruins of the temple of the Savior (Amenaprkich). The reason is that this temple became a symbol of the city. It is depicted on the new municipal coat of arms (adopted in 2001). The temple, which was the highest building in the region, according to experts, in fact was not an architectural gem because of flaws in its construction by its self-taught builder. It was not included in the list of monuments secured by the state.⁵⁶

But its restoration for the residents of Gyumri and especially for the city mayor⁵⁷ was not only a matter of honor, but also a symbol of the rebirth of Gyumri. According to the mayor, "only then when Amenaprkich is restored can we say that Gyumri is restored".⁵⁸ In the discussion revolving around the concept of restoring this monument, a number of possible approaches to the reconstruction of Gyumri were announced. Regarding the Amenaprkich, the following tactics were discussed: 1) breaking down completely and clearing the area; 2) freeing

⁵⁵ "It was a cloven stone. I perceive it as a symbol of a split life. Now it is removed and in its place the prosecutor's offices stands, that building stands in the place of the 16th school building. And, they say that in the building of the prosecutor every night the voices of children are heard. The guards constantly have to be replaced; one of them even became mentally ill. They say that since they removed the stone and built a prosecutor's office, the souls cannot be at peace". FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁵⁶ From an interview with the architect S. Kalashyan. FEM. Yerevan, 2006.

⁵⁷ Gyumri mayor Vardan Ghukasyan, reelected twice to this position, began his campaign under the slogan "Hope, Love and Faith". It is significant that the first word is "hope". Also he commissioned a film about Gyumri called City of Hope. Faith also played an important role in the political motto of the mayor – in the TV political advertisements during his campaign one of the scenes used was him putting up a cross on the temple of the Holy Sign restored with his personal financial support.

⁵⁸ Quotation from the film of S. Kakhzvantsyan – City of Hope (2003).

up the facade and the remaining parts and rebuilding it with stone of a different color, so that whole additional part can be seen; 3) “it was proposed to replace the destroyed part of the church, including the dome, with a glass carcass, thus keeping the dim memory of its past transparent”;⁵⁹ 4) restoring the former look of the temple, with a minimum of technically necessary changes (for example, because of concrete lining, the walls of the temple were to have been condensed, slightly altering the interior of the building).

It was chosen to restore the building, allow it to function and not turn the ruins into a “natural” monument (as would have been the case with the second and third versions)⁶⁰. “Ruins that look like they are sinking into the ground are valued everywhere for the emotional feelings one gets by viewing them... But at the core of the emotional satisfaction there is a heightened sense of the passage of time”.⁶¹

However, the city was so familiar with death and had its “own account” over time, that it tried not to preserve the “destruction” but to revive “life”. Thus, the choice to restore the destroyed temple arose from the perception that its ruined architecture was a living person:

*“After the earthquake, during the meetings I always said that the wounded should not be executed. I often explained to then Marzpet⁶² – Ararat Gomtsyan that one should not distort, humiliate, and demonstrate a disability. In the end, by doing so you’re saying: “You are not a normal human being, one half of you is there and the other is not”, – or you repaint this half. It is one organism, one structure, one idea, one piece of art that was born at once. Well, then once Gomtsyan told me: ‘If you’re so sure, go and do it’”.*⁶³

The anthropomorphism of the city received literal embodiment also during the Biennale in 1998. For example, one interpretation of the Gyumri restora-

⁵⁹ Abrahamian L. A., The Life and Death of Monuments in Post-Soviet Yerevan: Myths, Heroes, Anti-Heroes (manuscript in Russian).

⁶⁰ According to the architect Rafael Yeghoyan, these options were also rejected because they require precise and high-level technical implementation, which in the years when the projects were discussed, was unrealistic considering the level of construction in Gyumri. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁶¹ Lynch K., The Image of the City. M.: Stroizdat, 1982, p. 152 (in Russian).

⁶² Marzpet – the name of the governor of various provinces in modern Armenia.

⁶³ Interviews with the architect, the designer of the restoration project of the Amenaprkich temple – Rafael Yeghoyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

tion concept by sculptor A. Vardanyan made an “operational intervention” by sewing up a crack on one of the houses with the iron wires. The same human attitude towards the “wounded walls” of Gyumri during the same Biennale was demonstrated by Daniel Filippov, from Moscow, who presented the installation “Acupuncture of the Walls”.

As for the other approaches that have emerged during the discussion of the fate of the temple of the Savior, some of them had an unexpected sequel: the idea of a building from glass and metal was incarnated differently.⁶⁴ Beside the second Church of the Holy Virgin facing the same square (former May Uprising Square), the son of the architect restoring the temple of the Savior, architect G. Yeghoyan, designed a building of glass and metal grate to store technical equipment. The new building inside the glass simulated the block of the neighboring October Cinema that has spared destruction in the earthquake and was later restored.

As a result, the architect in this way embodied the project of the “building-display” to demonstrate the old (in this case – simulation of the old building). Transforming the idea of encasing the Church of the Savior in glass into a glass model of the past (continuation of the building of the October Cinema) is a very clever solution well-illustrating the idea of “temporary collage” in the architectural semiotics of Kevin Lynch:

“To enhance the current values and a sense of the flow of time, I would use the ‘temporary collage’ – a creative compound of a destruction and an addition; and in those cases where the personal relationships enter the game, I consider as natural the preservation of the fingerprints as selectively and unstably as it does the memory itself.”⁶⁵

As the continuation of this kind of attitude to the past, a special construction trend in post-earthquake Gyumri took shape; the main feature of this trend was an attempt to make a new building similar to the old one (for example, a new building beside the old textile factory building; or the new shopping center being built on the same place and in the shape of the former center of the district).

⁶⁴ This parallel was noted by the artist V. Pahlavuni-Tadevosyan.

⁶⁵ Lynch K. Op. cit., p. 163.

Memorials to victims of the earthquake

Near the Church of the Savior is the main monument – a mother with child. The “mother with child” theme is often found in small monuments to the earthquake victims. Many such monuments are installed by the neighborhood communities, by relatives in their backyards or along the streets. Interestingly, in a newly built district of Gyumri (58th district) the first joint event neighbors held was the installation of a new monument commemorating the victims of the earthquake (the archaic tradition of blessing the place by transfer of relics or some symbols from previous places of residence).⁶⁶ As a result, some yards have taken on a fairly organized and comfortable appearance, neighbors gathering around a central monument – most often a decorated source. And despite the fact that relatively poor people settled in this neighborhood in the early years of its existence, collecting money for the establishment of the monument was never a problem and no one refused to do so.

The project of building a large monument to the victims of the earthquake by sculptors and painters in Gyumri is perceived as a threat to the existing monumental landscape of the city. They think that a big monument to the victims of the earthquake may create the image of a dark place associated only with the earthquake, which does not suit Gyumri. This is well understood by the designers of the new monument; so in the concept of the monument they tried to underscore the idea of “memory of the lessons of the earthquake” more than the grief for the victims. Although the monument – quite interesting in terms of architectural and aesthetic decisions – carries the danger of “suppressing” other sites in the city, this “suppression” can be directed also to the communicative memory of the citizens, “cooling” and transferring the individual traumas into a bank of historical memory. After all, “there are too many memories where there are few monuments”.⁶⁷

Although in our case the number of monuments is impressive enough, they do not serve as a general commonplace of the memory (as it was the case, e.g., with

⁶⁶ Kharatyan L., *The Panda Day: One Case of Origination of a New Place of Pilgrimage // Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archaeology II. The materials of the 10th republican conference of young scientists on the 50th birthday anniversary of Zaven Kharatyan*. Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2003, pp. 71-77 (in Armenian). See also: Kharatyan L., “New” Images of “Old” Space (models of cultural opening up the “alien” space on the example of Armenian refugees living in Vardenis district of Armenia) – in the collection.

⁶⁷ Etkind A., *Op. cit.*

the memorial complex for the genocide victims in Tsitsernakaberd).⁶⁸ These monuments resemble tombstones that had been transferred from a cemetery having moved to the “battlefield”.⁶⁹ So far, the communicative memory allotted to specific places of deaths, prevails over the cultural memory. This situation was best described by a schoolchild in his work: *“Although many monuments are established for the memory of the victims of the earthquake, we still remember this tragedy”*.

The memory of this event spontaneously became a part of school activities. Children in their own way ritualize this day, writing poetry and preparing displays.⁷⁰ It is known that poetic design is often used for mnemonic purposes.⁷¹ That is why the poetic inscriptions on the various monuments are fairly common. The most common are the poetic epitaphs carved on the gravestones,⁷² which are not made for the purpose of interpreting the monument (as, for example in the “sculptural literariness”⁷³), but are rather spiritual appeals to God or to the victim.

Lines from the “Book of Lamentations” by Armenian medieval poet Grigor Narekatsi have found their place on the back side of the monument to victims of the earthquake by sculptor Z. Koshtoyan. While designing the monument, Koshtoyan expected that the Church of the Savior would be restored and its visitors would also read the back of the monument. From this perspective one can see a woman’s head turned upwards, expressing the hope for salvation. The same is expressed by the poems, which in this case combine the interpretation of the monument (literary) with the epitaphic Armenian tradition epitomized by the inscriptions on khachkars. Poetic coding of the trauma combines personal experience with a certain pathos, allowing one to both express emotions and comprehend them. It is not coincidental that I have used many poetic quotations – selected from a wide variety of such poetry – in my study.

⁶⁸ Marutyan A. Op. cit.

⁶⁹ Memorial for the Yugoslavian pilots whose plane crashed en route to the disaster zone to rescue the injured. Their monument, assembled from the remains of the aircraft, was erected at the site of the crash near Echmiadzin and has become a place where people and officials from the nearby communities, including Echmiadzin, commemorate the earthquake.

⁷⁰ From an interview with the director of secondary school No 4. FEM. Gyumri, 2006.

⁷¹ Assmann J. Op. cit., p. 59.

⁷² On the epitaphs carved on the gravestones at the Gyumri cemetery, see: Hovannisyan R., Sahakyan K., On the Artistic Inscriptions on Tombstones // The Shirak Center for Armenian Studies, Scientific papers III, Gyumri: Gitutyun, 2000, pp. 161-164 (in Armenian).

⁷³ Paperny V., Moscow (Diary of a Foreigner). In: Paperny V., Mos-Angeles, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004, pp. 153-254 (in Russian).

Conclusion

The presented material illustrating the memory of the earthquake and attempts to forget it allows us to select two parallel discourses: family – personal (“communicative”) and official (“cultural”). As we have seen, these two discourses often influence each other, interfere with each another, and often also contradict each other and raise completely different issues. Let us try to summarize the themes of these discourses and draw a basic outline of their intersections.

As a “great tragedy”, the earthquake has an “official” place among the “lamentation dates”; and its “cultural” (official) commemoration tends to follow the remembrance model of the Armenian genocide (April 24). But in contrast to that date, December 7 is not an official holiday, although in the de facto “disaster zone” it is considered so. The “politics of memory” of the authorities on the subject shows an obvious inconsistency: on the one hand, the authorities contribute to the commemoration of this day (the special paragraph on this date in the textbooks, the official wreath-laying at the “central sites” in the disaster zone on the anniversaries of the tragedy), and on the other hand they are trying to encourage its “oblivion” by excluding the date December 7 from the list of “events” of the national calendar in an attempt to reduce its dramatic and funerary content.

Contrasting this tragedy with the tragedy of the genocide in the communicative memory is justified by different “rationalization” of the memory: the genocide should be remembered for the sake of restoration of historical justice and the earthquake – to derive “lessons” from the tragedy (the quality of construction, the danger of improvised alterations of flats, behavior during an earthquake, evacuation, the availability of specialized rescue services, knowledge of first aid, etc.).

According to the logic of the “cultural memory”, the transformation of dramatic events into “distant historical facts” usually retained only as dates and numbers (represented in textbooks) and devoid of emotions can contribute to the process of forgetting the tragedy (by depriving them of the details of the communicative memory). But not all the figures are “impartial”: while the number of victims can be perceived as a “fait accompli”, the number of people with

disabilities and the homeless, by contrast, has the potential to become “activated” as something that requires urgent socio-political intervention.

Another form of “forgetting” is the activation of “positive” memories of the tragedy: on the official level it is the selection of information on international aid, and at the level of communicative memory – it is the stories of “miraculous escapes”, and second births. A peculiar compound of the forms of communicative and formal memories is the monuments with epitaphs where the personal experience gains the status of “eternal, solid” evidence.

“The memorial landscape” of the city largely is determined by the disaster itself. As a result, some parts of the city have turned into the mass graves and the ruins have become “living monuments”. In this sense, the communicative memory allotted to specific places of mass deaths prevails over the cultural memory. However, on the other hand, the administrative stratification of urban space has defined a hierarchy of these ruins – only the memorials adjacent to or facing the town square (especially schools) have become common public memorials. And this “official” division of the city has been reflected in some expressions of private memory (mainly the “central” ruins are depicted on the gravestones in the cemeteries of the city).

Sometimes the attitude towards the damaged buildings recalls the way people look at a wounded man.

Anthropomorphism of the city has characterized official as well as the folk discourses (recovery strategy of the Church of the Savior, works of the avant-garde artists in the Gyumri Biennale).

I would like to conclude the article with a “memorable” quote from the new monument to the victims of the earthquake instead of an explanatory note. It was written by one of the authors of the project, S. Kalashyan. He confesses that he is proud of these lines more than the memorial itself, since he managed to convey what he felt witnessing this tragedy himself. The architect in his own way solved the problems of an individual traumatic memory. It is astonishing how the intimacy of the communicative memory in such a way penetrates objects of seemingly exclusive cultural memory. For me, the description below is the sum of all the “memorable” characteristics I managed to record during the course of my study. In this explanatory note for the future monument, the reader will find reference to almost all details of communicative as well as cultural memories we have discussed in the text above.

SONG OF GRIEF AND ODE OF RESURRECTION

– Grandpa dear, over there, in sight, why is there a broken plate?

– My dear grandson, that plate is not broken at all. And it's not ruins, but an open
wound and

a sharp wedge in there, as the bitter memory of the departed souls, as well as a lesson meant no doubt for all of us survivors. The chapel is a cross and altar, a symbol of our Holy Trinity, awaked by the sound of a gust of wind, the Church for the salvation of lost souls and, ultimately, of the dying city, the call to mercy.

Handsome was Gyumri, in the serene quietness, friendly and cheerful, full of art, with beautiful old houses,

with a love for traditions, for churches and belfries, for music, not ready for the coming fate.

But the day has come, foggy and dark, and the sky is hidden behind a veil.

Suddenly everything has swollen, strained, swayed slightly and trembled with great power and evil.

The roar reverberated with terrifying thunder.

Then a deafening silence came, under a cloud of dust – a lull for a moment. Then the sound of a muffled groan came, screams from all around, from different corners, from alleys, from driveways, from under the ruins and destroyed houses. Then the outstretched hands from neighbors, from countries, from the peoples of the Globe. Then makeshift huts and tents. Then the fires and candle flames in nightmarish nights. Then

the gloom, a groan of despair, and then falling down,

falling further down,

Everything like in dream,

But time will pass and the years will pass. Through the generations working hard

Gyumri will rise up again from its sleep, perhaps in a different environment.

But in order not to forget, and not to stumble on the stone again, beneath the huge splinter-plates

the museum is located. Through its arches hundreds and hundreds of sad eyes are looking at us.

There, with pain in our hearts, we will sometimes blame each other: how then could we not hold vigil to

the very familiar, insidious and dangerous Disaster of Earth!

So give me your hand, my dear grandson. And we'll move forward. Along the black scar,

along the edge of the wedge, descend to the plate. We'll look up in the sky, look at God

and at all the angels. Then, through the singing chorus, turn slightly to the right.

Through the sounds of the wind we'll lay a wreath at the commemorative wall, light sacred candles,

and from the depths of our souls send prayers to

Lord God

for the sake of his creatures.

References:

1. Assman J., Cultural Memory: Writing, Remembrance of the Past and Political Identity in the High Cultures of Antiquity, Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2004, pp. 50-62 (in Russian).
2. Etkind A., Hundred Years of Revolution: Anniversary of Beginning and the Beginning of the End // <www.strana-oz.ru/print.php> (30.10.06, in Russian).
3. Welzer H., History, Memory and Modernity of the Past. Memory as an Arena of Political Struggle // Neprikosnovennyi zapas (Reserved Rations), 2005, N2-3 (pp. 40-41), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/vel3.html> (09.06.2006, in Russian).
4. Nora P., Era of Commemorations // France-Memory, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University Press, 1999, pp. 95-148 (in Russian).
5. Shagoyan G., Leninakan Has Gone Away, Gyumri Has Remained: Images of the City Before and After the Earthquake. The study conducted in the framework of the Scholarship Programme of the Heinrich Boell Foundation South Caucasus Regional Office, 2006.
6. Marutyan A., The Role of Memory in the Structure of National Identity. Problems of the Theory, Yerevan: Noravank, 2006, pp. 84-85 (in Armenian).
7. Abrahamian L., Armenian Identity in a Changing World, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006, p. 159.
8. Safarian L. V., Piruzyan S. A., The Causal-Investigative Chain of Resonance of Spitak Earthquake in Armenia // Bulletin of Social Sciences (NAS), 2002, № 1 (105), pp. 72-74 (in Armenian).
9. Balayan Z., Afterword // Azatyan V., Leninakan, Yerevan: The Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia Press, 1989, p. 168 (in Russian).
10. History of Armenia (The 8th Grade Textbook) / ed. by V. Barkhudaryan, Yerevan: Luys, 2000, pp. 112-115 (in Armenian).
11. Gyumri, comp. G. Vardanyan, Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2006, p. 251 (in Armenian).
12. Sarkisyan A., Khatuntsev V., From the Reports // Armenia, December'88 / Comp. L. F. Grigорова, A. A. Gasparyan, L. Kh. Manukyan, Yerevan: Hayastan, 1990, p. 73 (in Russian).
13. Homework essay of the school student, ninth grade, school No.10, Luiza Stepanyan. FEM. Gyumri, 2006 (translation – G. Shagoyan).
14. Gyumri Biennale (the documentary film) by Garnik Sargsyan, TV studio Chirac, 1990.
15. Karriyev B., Here It Came the Earthquake... www.chelpress.ru/LANG=ru/newspapers/akcion/archive/05-12-1997/3/F1.DOC.html (10.06.06, in Russian).
16. Abrahamian L., Ayrapetyan V., Arakelyan G., Gulyan A. A., Talk about Round and Absolute Numbers, Yerevan, 1981-1984, pp. 4-14 (manuscript in Russian).
17. Gulyan A., I Have Not Seen My Daughter // Stories on Poverty / ed. Kharatyan H., Yerevan: Lusakn, 2001, pp. 79-82 (in Armenian).

18. Zlatkovskaya T. D., The Historical Roots of the European Calendar // Calendar Customs and Ceremonies in Foreign Countries of Europe, Historical Roots and Development of the Traditions, Moscow: Nauka, 1983, p. 31 (in Russian).
19. Ernjakyan L., Pikichian H., Hymn to the Sun: "Sahari" in Armenian Musical Culture, Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1998 (in Armenian).
20. A Slap directed by H. Malyan, 1980.
21. Arutyunyan Y., Account of Time in Gyumri // Voice of Armenia, 2006 (in Russian).
22. Project of the Rebirth (TV program), Studio Gala (07/12/2004).
23. Margaryan N. M., Choosing the First Names Among the Eastern Armenians (XIX–XX centuries), (An ethnological study), PhD thesis, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, 2000, chapter 2.2.
24. Nora P., Between Memory and History. The Problems of Places of Memory // France–memory, pp. 17-50.
25. City of Hope directed by S. Kakhzvantsyan (2003).
26. Petrosyan H., Khachkar: The Origins, Functions, Iconography, Semantics, Yerevan: Printinfo, 2008 (in Armenian).
27. Petrosyan H., The Khachkar or Cross-Stone // Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity / ed. by L. Abrahamian and N. Sweezy, Bloomington, Indianapolis: IU Press, 2001, pp. 60-69.
28. Sahakyan A. S., Cult-Memorial Monuments in the Armenian Medieval Folk Culture // PhD thesis, Yerevan: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, 1986 (in Russian).
29. Sahakian A. S., Khachkars – Ethnic and Cultural Monuments of Medieval Armenia // Historical and Ethnographic Studies of the Folklore, Collection in the Memory of Sergei Tokarev. M.: Vostochnaya literatura, 1994, pp. 214-237 (in Russian).
30. Abrahamian L. A., The Life and Death of Monuments in Post-Soviet Yerevan: Myths, Heroes, Anti-Heroes (manuscript in Russian).
31. Lynch K., The Image of the City. M.: Stroiizdat, 1982, p. 152 (in Russian).
32. Kharatyan L., The Panda Day: One Case of Origination of a New Place of Pilgrimage // Problems of Armenian Ethnology and Archaeology II. The materials of the 10th republican conference of young scientists on the 50th birthday anniversary of Zaven Kharatyan. Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2003, pp. 71-77 (in Armenian). Also: Kharatyan L., "New" Images of "Old" Space (models of cultural opening up the "alien" space on the example of Armenian refugees living in Vardenis district of Armenia) – in the collection.
33. Hovannisyan R., Sahakyan K., On the Artistic Inscriptions on Tombstones // The Shirak Center for Armenian Studies, Scientific papers III, Gyumri: Gitutyun, 2000, pp. 161-164 (in Armenian).
34. Paperny V., Moscow (Diary of a Foreigner). In: Paperny V., Mos-Angeles, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2004, pp. 153-254 (in Russian).
35. Shagoyan G., Field Ethnographic Materials, Gyumri, 2006.
36. Shagoyan G., Field Ethnographic Materials, Yerevan, 2006.