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THE VIOLENCE AGAINST ARMENIAN WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF CRIMES COMMITTED IN SOVIET AZERBAIJAN* (1988-1990)

Abstract

The protection of women's rights remains one of the most pressing challenges in human history, especially within societies that consider themselves progressive. Women, as some of the most vulnerable members of society, are disproportionately targeted in conflicts and crimes against humanity. In recent decades, we have witnessed alarming instances where women were specifically victimized during periods of mass violence, often in ways that are gender-based and dehumanizing ways.

This article examines the violence committed against women during the massacres of Armenians in the cities of Sumgait, Kirovabad (Gandzak), and Baku in 1988-1990. Despite the extensive documentation of these events, the gendered aspect of this violence, particularly the targeting Armenian women, has not been

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sufficiently studied. This gap in research is particularly evident when it comes to classifying such crimes under international criminal law. While much attention has been given to the broader ethnic violence during these massacres, the specific suffering of women—who were subjected to extreme forms of violence—has remained largely underexplored. Thus, the aim of this article is to present a deeper analysis of the violence perpetrated against Armenian women, drawing from survivor testimonies, legal documents, and human rights reports. Research indicates that nearly half of the Armenian victims during these massacres were women, with their ages ranging from teenage girls to elderly women in their 80s and 90s. Armenian women were not only killed or injured, but many were also subjected to horrific forms of violence, including torture, rape, public humiliation, and other acts intended to degrade their dignity and destroy their identity. By analyzing these crimes through the lens of gender violence, this article seeks to classify the violence against Armenian women as a specific form of atrocity within the broader context of ethnic conflict.

Key words: Armenian women, Azerbaijan, Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad (Gandzak), torture, rape, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict.

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**ՀԱՅ ԿԱՆԱՆՑ ՆԿԱՏԱՄԱԲ ԲՈՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ
ԱՂԻԲԵՋԱՆՈՒՄ ԿԱՏԱՐՎԱԾ ՀԱՆՑԱԳՈՐԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ
ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՈՒՄ (1988-1990)**

Ամփոփում

Կանանց իրավունքների պաշտպանությունը լուրջ մարտահրավեր է առաջադեմ մարդկության համար, քանի որ կանայք հասարակության ամենախոցելի անդամներից են ու անհամաչափորեն թիրախավորվում են հակամարտությունների և մարդկության դեմ հանցագործությունների ժամանակ:

Վերջին տասնամյակներում կրկին ականատես ենք եղել մարդկության դեմ հանցագործությունների, որոնք հատկապես թիրախավորել են կանանց: Այս հոդվածի շրջանակներում քննարկվում է 1988-1990 թվականներին Սումգայիթ, Կիրովաբադ (Գանձակ) և Բաքու քաղաքներում հայերի կոտորածների ժամանակ կանանց նկատմամբ կիրառված սպանությունների, բռնության ու նվաստացումների հարցը: Այդ հանցագործությունները դեռևս բավարար չափով չեն ուսումնասիրվել, մասնավորապես՝ միջազգային քրեական իրավունքի համաձայն հանցագործությունների դասակարգման տեսանկյունից: Ավելին, զգալի բաց կա նաև Սումգայիթում, Կիրովաբադում և Բաքվում տեղի ունեցած կոտորածների ժամանակ կանանց նկատմամբ բռնությունների ուսումնասիրության խնդրի շուրջ: Հոդվածի նպատակն է վերապրածների վկայությունների, իրավական փաստաթղթերի, զեկույցների վերլուծության միջոցով ներկայացնել ավելի խորը ուսումնասիրությունն հայ կանանց նկատմամբ իրագործված բռնությունների վերաբերյալ: Հետազոտությունները ցույց են տալիս, որ նշված կոտորածների ընթացքում հայ զոհերի գրեթե կեսը կանայք էին, որոնք ընդգրկում էին տարբեր տարիքային խմբեր՝ դեռահաս աղջիկներից մինչև 80-90 տարեկան տարեց կանայք: Հայ կանայք ոչ միայն սպանվել կամ վիրավորվել են, այլև շատերը ենթարկվել են սարսափելի բռնության, այդ թվում՝ խոշտանգումների, բռնաբարության, հրապարակային նվաստացման և այլ գործողությունների, որոնք նպատակ ունեին նսեմացնել նրանց արժանապատվությունը: Հոդվածի նպատակն է առկա փաստական նյութի հիման վրա որոշակիորեն դասակարգել հայ կանանց նկատմամբ իրագործված բռնությունները, դրանք դիտարկել էթնիկ հակամարտության համատեքստում որպես գենդերային բռնության ձև՝ նպաստելով պատմության այս ոլորեզական էջի ավելի ամբողջական քննությանը:

Բանալի բառեր - հայ կանայք, Ադրբեջան, Սումգայիթ, Բաքու, Կիրովաբադ (Գանձակ), խոշտանգումներ, բռնաբարություններ, Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի (Արցախ) հակամարտություն:

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НАСИЛИЕ В ОТНОШЕНИИ АРМЯНСКИХ ЖЕНЩИН В КОНТЕКСТЕ СОВЕРШЕННЫХ В СОВЕТСКОМ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНЕ ПРЕСТУПЛЕНИЙ (1988-1990 гг.)

Резюме

Защита прав женщин является серьезной проблемой в истории человечества, особенно для прогрессивных обществ, поскольку женщины являются одними из самых уязвимых членов общества и часто подвергаются непропорциональным насилиям во время конфликтов и преступлений против человечности. В последние десятилетия мы снова стали свидетелями преступлений против человечности, в ходе которых женщины подвергались целенаправленным нападениям. В рамках данной статьи рассматриваются убийства, насилие и унижения, которым подвергались армянские женщины во время резни армян в городах Сумгаит, Кировабад (Гандзак) и Баку в 1988-1990 гг. Эти преступления остаются недостаточно изученными, особенно с точки зрения их классификации, как преступлений по международному уголовному праву. Кроме того, сохраняется значительный пробел в научных исследованиях, посвященных женщинам, ставшим жертвами насилия во время резни в Сумгаите, Кировабаде и Баку. В статье всесторонне анализируются и сравниваются свидетельства выживших, юридические документы и отчеты о правах человека, представляется детальное исследование насилий и преступлений, совершенных в отношении армянских женщин в данный период. Исследования показывают, что почти половина жертв были женщинами широкого возрастного диапазона – от девочек-подростков до пожилых женщин в возрасте 80 и 90 лет. Эти женщины были не только убиты или ранены, но и подверглись ужасающим формам насилия, включая пытки, изнасилования, публичное унижение и другие действия, направленные на унижения их достоинства. Цель данной статьи - на основе имеющегося фактического материала классифицировать насилие и преступления, совершенные в отношении армянских женщин, рассматривая их в контексте этнического конф-

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лика, как форму гендерного насилия, тем самым способствуя более полному представлению этой трагической страницы истории.

Ключевые слова - армянские женщины, Азербайджан, Сумгаит, Баку, Кировабад (Гандзак), пытки, изнасилования, Нагорно-Карабахский (Арцахский) конфликт.

Introduction

Throughout history, during the crimes against humanity, and especially genocides, women have been the most vulnerable group in society, as they become victims of violence, slaughter, humiliation, and dishonor. Such atrocities were characteristic of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923, carried out in the Ottoman Empire, and were tragically mirrored in crimes committed against other peoples in more recent times. International crimes committed in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century - including the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, crimes against humanity targeting indigenous Black populations in the Darfur region of Sudan, and the genocide of the Yazidis in the Sinjar province of Iraq (Кочои, Хасан, 2016, 101; Unluoglu, 2015), were frequently accompanied by widespread violence and sexual abuse against women. Thus, under pretext of making efforts to suppress the uprising, the Sudanese government and the ‘Janjaweed’ troops brutally killed civilians and children, raped and killed women, stole property and livestock, and burned entire villages (Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, 2005, 121). In Rwanda many Tutsi girls were also raped before death. The majority of Tutsi women were attacked by Hutu radicals, however, among the victims were many moderate Hutu women who married Tutsis (De Brouwer, 2005, 13). In the UN report from 1996 it is said about the systematic nature of rapes and their use as weapons - the organizers of the genocide forced civilians to be present when they were committed. According to the testimony of one of the victims, she was periodically raped in front of local residents, high-ranking military officers and Hutu men. Even when she was guarded by a Hutu woman, she forced her to plow the field in between acts of violence (Ka Hon Chu, de Brouwer, 2009, 16).

Unfortunately, there exists a vast and deeply disturbing body of testimonies that describe the rape, humiliation, and brutal mistreatment of Armenian women during the ethnically motivated massacres that took place in Soviet Azerbaijan during the late 1980s. These violent acts were not isolated incidents, but rather a part of a broader campaign of terror and dehumanization that accompanied the systematic targeting of Armenians. Women, in particular, were subjected to

especially cruel and degrading forms of violence, often intended to break not only the individual but the collective spirit of the Armenian community. For those who manage to survive such atrocities, the psychological aftermath is often profoundly damaging, leaving lifelong scars that are difficult - if not impossible - to heal. This is especially true for women, who bear the compounded trauma of both physical violence and psychological torture. Survivors are frequently haunted by harrowing memories of death, destruction, and inhuman cruelty, which follow them for the rest of their lives.

Thus, we aim to examine in detail the specific targeting of Armenian women during the crimes committed against the Armenian population in various cities of Soviet Azerbaijan. This study seeks to highlight not only the gendered nature of the violence but also its direct connection to the deeply rooted Armenophobia that has persisted in Azerbaijani society. To this end, particular attention will be paid to the documented cases of murder, torture, and sexual violence against women during the organized pogroms in Sumgait (February 27–29, 1988), Kirovabad (November, 1988), and Baku (January, 1990). These events serve as critical examples of the targeted brutality Armenian women were subjected to, and they offer irrefutable evidence of the calculated and cruel nature of the crimes. Through analysis of these cases, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how ethnic violence intersects with gender, and how these atrocities form a central component of the historical narrative of Armenophobia in the region.

The evolution of **Nagorno-Karabakh issue** since the 1960s grew into a nationwide movement in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) in 1988. The demand was for the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh (NKAR), an autonomous region in the Azerbaijan SSR with a predominantly Armenian population, with the Armenian SSR in accordance with the right of peoples to self-determination, which was also guaranteed by the USSR Constitution. The central authorities of the USSR, despite their declaration of a political course of ‘perestroika’ and publicity, showed intolerance towards the movement. The country's top leadership sided with the Azerbaijani authorities, since, in their opinion, the implementation of the constitutional right of nations to self-determination could pose a serious threat to communist totalitarianism.

It was no coincidence that on February 21, at the suggestion of the Azerbaijani leadership, the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee hastily adopted the resolution ‘On the events in Nagorno-Karabakh’, which qualified the movement as ‘extremist’ (Ագաճյան, 2009, 78), the result of the actions of a group of separatists. The authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan, convinced that it was impossible to stop the movement escalating in Nagorno-Karabakh by political

means, decided to grossly violate the norms of universal human rights, opposing the popular movement with force and violence.

1. The perpetration of the massacres and the issue of number of victims

On February 27-29, 1988, in Sumgait, where around 18,000 of the residents were Armenians (Խոջապետյան, 1991, 100), groups of Azerbaijanis chanting 'Death to Armenians' and with the undisguised support and participation of local authorities carried out massacres of Armenians. It was obvious that the massacre was organized according to a pre-developed plan and had a command center. The consequences of the massacre were horrific: people were tortured, tormented, and murdered, most of whom were burned alive; wounded, raped, among them minors. According to official sources of the Soviet government, the number of victims in Sumgait was 32 people, more than 400 people were tortured and seriously injured (Сумгаит. Говорят свидетели –азербайджанцы, 2018, 7), there were missing people. Despite the mentioned number, there are other accounts, unofficial data on the victims of Sumgait, in particular, that more than 110 people were killed in three days (Улубабян, 1990). British journalist, researcher Thomas de Waal also touches on this issue, noting that at least 115 deaths were registered in morgues during those days, provided that such a number of natural deaths is excluded, because no more than 72 deaths were registered in the previous two months (Де Ваал, 2014, 54). Moreover, in the spring of 1988, a document received by the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party states that more than 400 people were killed in Sumgait and about 1,000 were maimed and injured, including a large number of women, the elderly and children. In order to hide the traces, the bodies were moved to Baku, other cities of the republic, or thrown into the sea (Ուշիսիսյան, 1994, 283). The official incomplete list of the victims of Sumgait included 11 women: Avagyan Lola, Arushanyan Razmella, Babayan Elena, Grigoryan Emma, Danielyan Seda, Melkumyan Raisa, Melkumyan Irina, Melkumyan Piruza, Mekhtieva Tamara, Movsesova Yersilya, Sayan Arusyak (Улубабян, Золян и др., 1989, 32-33), that is, more than 35% of the officially declared victims. It is obvious that the official data on the number of victims is not reliable, as it was also evidenced by the mention of missing persons, therefore, it can be assumed that the number of women who fell victim to the massacres was also greater.

Another organized attack on Armenians took place in Kirovabad. On November 21, 1988, a rally was also organized in the second largest city of Azerbaijan, with the participation of students and employees of industrial

enterprises, where they chanted the same slogans as in Sumgait: ‘Death to Armenians’, ‘Armenians go away’ (Հոկտեմբեր, 1995). As during the massacres in Sumgait, the demonstrators in Kirovabad also had similar iron rods and stones in their hands. On the same day, the armed participants of the demonstration, accompanied by police, moved towards the Armenian quarter, beating the Armenians they met on the way. The mob began the massacres, but, encountering resistance in the Red Village area, retreated, burning down Armenian homes on the way. In the evening of the same day, the Armenian quarter of Kirovabad was surrounded by Soviet military units (Оганезов, Харатян, 2014, 37). The organized resistance of the Armenians, as well as the presence of the aforementioned military units, prevented the mass massacres in Kirovabad, but a number of murders and other crimes took place on the same days. In particular, 12 elderly Armenians were brutally killed in the nursing home, whose dismembered bodies were discovered only in the summer of 1990 on the outskirts of the city. The fact of this crime was first published by the Moscow newspaper ‘Komsomolskaya Pravda’ in one of the February issues of 1990. The report stated that ‘the Criminal Investigation Group of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs confirmed the fact of taking 12 elderly people of Armenian ethnicity out of the Kyapaz home for the disabled in Kirovabad and killing them. On the banks of the Kur River, 40 km northwest of Ganja, 12 buried bodies were found, including 11 women and 1 man’. Their names were: Vardush Aghajanyan, Armik Harutyunyan, Roza Barseghyan, Roza Gabrielyan, Roza Grigoryan, Siranush Gulyanova, Svetlana Danielyan, Varvara Manvelyan, Tamara Sarkisova, Artavazd Khachaturyan, Yevgenya Khachaturyan. On February 14, near the village of Hajikend, 20 km from Kirovabad, internal affairs servicemen and a criminal investigation operative group found another 6 bodies, riddled with wounds and disfigured (Մելիք-Շահնազարյան, 1998, 29).

On the night of November 22, 1988 the houses of Armenian residents living in the Azerbaijani district of Kirovabad were attacked, as a result, by the morning the yard of the Armenian church in the Armenian district was already full of beaten, stabbed, and wounded Armenians, among whom there were many women, girls, and children. As in Sumgait, the attackers knew the addresses of Armenians, especially in the Azerbaijani part of the city, where they lived separately from each other and could not organize their own defense. It was mainly in these districts that the defenseless Armenian families were subjected to mob attacks. On the very first day of the massacres, Roza Melkumyan was killed in her house. The attackers had entered her house, robbed it, and killed the lady by hitting her in the head with an iron bar (Խաչատրյան, 2015, 74- 97). The massacres of Armenians in the city continued until November 26, and their local manifestations went on until the Armenians completely left the city. There is no accurate data on

the number of victims in Kirovabad either. According to Grigory Oganezov, a survivor of the massacres, as of November 30, the number of people injured and severely beaten had reached 63 (Оганезов, Харатян, 2014, 40). Some international sources reported that the number of Armenians killed was 130 (Taubman, 1988).

As for the massacres in Baku, the attitude towards Armenians here also was changed after the attacks in Sumgait and Kirovabad. Due to their nationality, Armenians were often subjected to discriminatory treatment, and sometimes even physical violence. According to the data of the US Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services, all major monitoring organizations agreed that the situation of Armenians in Azerbaijan during the period under consideration was extremely difficult (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1993). The Armenians of Baku, realizing that they were not protected from the massacres, were forced to leave the city. Before the events of 1988-1989, out of 200,000-250,000 Armenians living in Baku, as a result of persecution, physical violence, mass dismissals from work and general interethnic tension, by the beginning of 1990, about 35-40,000 remained in the city, the majority of whom were elderly, single people, and representatives of socially vulnerable groups (Sharafyan, 2022, 103). In January, the actions against Armenians became clearly organized, coordinated and widespread. Murders, beatings, and rapes of Armenians took place without hindrance in public places, and ultimately they were forcibly expelled from the country. These organized criminal actions continued for a week, until January 19 (Де Баал, 2014, 54). Armenians who survived the massacres, leaving everything behind, found refuge in Armenia and other countries.

According to a report by the 'Human Rights Watch' organization, the number of people killed in Baku was 48, of whom 46 were Armenians, one Azerbaijani and one Russian, and 20 people later died from injuries sustained during the massacres, 6 of whom died of heart attacks or committed suicide. There were 5 cases of rape, 2,044 cases of housebreaking and 191 robberies (Human Rights Watch, 1991, 7). In contrast to official statistics, there is data that more than 400 Armenians (Մուսլун, 2015), including women, were victims of violence in Baku, many of whom remain completely unknown, and their burial places are also undisclosed. In the following days, many people died from severe injuries, mainly multiple fractures, concussions and mental anguish, including in Yerevan hospitals (Մուսլուն, Հովսեփյան, 1992, 111-114). The subsequent deaths of the people from injuries of varying degrees should certainly also be added to the number of victims.

2. The violence against women

In this article an attempt is made to record the main manifestations of violence against women that were recorded during the above-mentioned mass crimes committed against the Armenian population. It is noteworthy that in addition to murders, there were numerous cases of especially public violence, in particular, cases of brutal beatings with various wooden, iron tools and feet, as a result of which the victims received numerous injuries of various nature and degree. Such cases were especially common among the elderly. There are numerous details about these atrocities, found both in the testimonies of the victims' relatives and the deceased, as well as in the confessions of the accused and convicted individuals.

In particular, Vagif Gurbanov, a student from Kirovabad, who participated in the massacres, testified during interrogation that they were instructed to go and do whatever they could: to crush and destroy the Armenians, to demonstrate the supposed strength Azerbaijani people were capable of (Трагедия Кировабада, 2023). This proves that manifestations of hatred and Armenophobia were expressed at all levels, from the organizers to the perpetrators, the crowd, who willingly participated in the atrocities after receiving such instructions.

There are especially many testimonies of women about the atrocities. Siranush Arushanyan, an eyewitness of the Sumgait massacre, testified that she saw the killings of Armenian women, girls, men, old people, even pregnant women, the burnings them alive, throwing adults and children out of windows, and many other such atrocities (Աղաքսնյան, 2012, 449). Another eyewitness and victim of the Sumgait massacre, Arakelyan A. L., noted that when the crowd broke into Kozubenko's apartment, where they were hiding, she tried to protect her husband by standing in front of him, thinking that as a woman, they would not hit her. However, the woman was immediately hit with an iron object and dragged into the yard, after which she no longer remembers how her husband was attacked. In the yard, the woman was hit with sharp, piercing instruments and kicked, causing bodily injuries, and then set on fire. The woman tried not to move, as they approached her several times to check if she was alive or not (Геворкян, 1998, 12).

The other victim and eyewitness of the events of those days, Irina Khalapyan testifies that first of all, the gang stripped her 52-year-old mother-in-law, then dragged her down to the basement and began to beat her, and 12-13-year-old boys also participated in the beating. Then they stripped her daughter, Irina, and subjected her to violence, then poured gasoline on her and set her on fire alive (Մելիք-Շահնազարյան, 1998, 21).

There are also testimonies from non-Armenian eyewitnesses to the events. For example, Dobzhanskaya V. B. also mentioned a similar case when a naked woman was thrown down the stairs into the street, then continued to be beaten with feet and sticks (Геворкян, 1998, 18). Panteleimon Melikov, a Greek by nationality, who served in the Soviet army in 1988, also became an eyewitness to the Sumgait events. He testified that in front of his eyes a 16-year-old Armenian girl was caught in the market, raped by 4 people right on the street, and then dismembered with knives. Melikov added that on the Sumgait-Baku highway, buses were stopped, non-Armenians were ordered to get out, and those who remained on the bus were killed. He collected these bodies himself. Among the dead were women and children, in total: 7 people - 4 women and 3 children. He adds that there were rumors circulating in the city that women and children in maternity hospitals were being thrown out of the windows (Մուսկալիթ. սպանված սերունդ, 2018).

We consider that it is not appropriate to include more horrifying details of the testimonies of numerous witnesses, including A. P. Piriev, Yu. P. Ryzhkov and others, about the torture, humiliation, and torture of Armenian women in Sumgait, as well as the horrifying details of the forensic examination of the bodies of the murdered, and especially the female victims (Геворкян, 1998, 20-23), although they reveal the boundless hatred that prevails in Azerbaijan against Armenians, including women.

The torture was further corroborated by the testimony of Azerbaijani eyewitnesses to the massacre. In particular, M. Mamedov testified about how the Armenians were being taken out of the porch, then described in detail how the gang caught a young girl who had fled to the porch and tortured her. The girl was beaten with a shovel, clubs, then stripped naked, doused with gasoline and set on fire...(Геворкян, 1998, 13).

It should be noted that the bodies of some of the murdered were rendered unrecognizable by torture. One such example is the body of Avagyan Lola, which was discovered by her father in Mardakyan and identified by the finger of her hand. Avagyan Lola's father testified during the trial that while searching for his daughter's body, he saw more than 100 nameless corpses in the morgues (Улубабян, Золян и др., 1989, 32-33).

The memoir of writer and lawyer Anna Astvatsaturyan-Turcotte is dedicated to the atmosphere of Armenophobia and the massacres prevailing in Baku. The author, who was about 10 years old at the time of the events described, documents the real events that happened to her, her family, and acquaintances. The stories related to the days of the massacres were even more horrific. The author describes the incident with her friend's mother and grandmother, when mob broke into their apartment, beat till the grandmother unconscious, who was of Armenian descent,

allegedly sparing her daughter, whose father was Azerbaijani. The beating of a 65-year-old woman in front of her daughter led to the heart attack and death of daughter (Աստվածատուրյան-Թերթոթ, 2022, 179).

One of the survivors of the massacres, Mikael Hovhannisyan, recalls that his Jewish grandmother, who was eventually evacuated from Baku, was also subjected to violence. According to Hovhannisyan, Armenians were forcibly dragged out of their homes, brutally beaten, and in some cases, had boiling water poured over their bodies («Ծնողներին եռման ջրով ալյուրւմ էին, երեխաները տեսնում էին այդ ամենը. Բաքվի ջարդերի սկանաւտ», 2020). Another harrowing account from Baku describes the assault of 90-year-old Varvara Lazareva, who was thrown to the ground by a group of 8 to 10 attackers. She was struck repeatedly in the head and kidneys, resulting in her hospitalization in an unconscious state (Մոստսկա, Հովնանյան, 1992, 106).

Yu. Karmazin, the head of the Krasnovodsk City Department of Internal Affairs describes the events in Baku as follows: ‘What happened in Baku does not fit in the brain. 4 days have already passed since January 15, when the first ferry of refugees arrived... In the first days, it was terrible to look at the people who were beaten, tortured, and disfigured. Based on a number of facts, criminal cases were initiated in our country. Two people, an 85-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman, died from injuries sustained as a result of the beatings right on the ship, and several others were hospitalized’ (Խոփրդային Հայաստան, 1990).

It is noteworthy that especially the elderly were subjected to particularly cruel treatment in hospitals. The situation of Armenians brought to the Semashko hospital in Baku was especially cruel, many of them had to look for escape routes from the hospital itself, as it was surrounded by a crowd armed with sticks and rods, demanding that the Armenians be removed from the hospital. Moreover, the hospital staff themselves were no less filled with hatred towards the Armenians who ended up in the hospital with burns and numerous injuries. It was obvious that ‘Armenians in Baku hospitals could be saved only by escaping from there in time... so as not to become victims of the ‘mercy’ and highly ‘professional’ attitude of Azerbaijani doctors’, - as the witnesses have told (Մոստսկա, Հովնանյան, 1992, 118-119). It should also be noted that in addition to this attitude of medical workers, there is abundant evidence of the participation of young people, sometimes children and women, in the massacres (Մոստսկա, Հովնանյան, 1992, 220).

In Sumgait, pronounced atrocities were also committed against pregnant women, in particular, one of the eyewitnesses testifies that the crowd rushed to the city's maternity hospital, forced to show the rooms where Armenian women were staying. After that, you could hear how pregnant women scream in pain. Their

bellies were torn open, and newborns were thrown onto the asphalt. Some were left alive, but their noses, ears and lips were cut off (Шахмурадян, 2015, 195).

Thus, it becomes evident that during the orchestrated acts of violence against Armenians in the cities of Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku, women of all ages were subjected to particularly brutal and inhumane treatment. The nature of these attacks went far beyond mere physical aggression; they involved deliberate and systematic acts of torture that inflicted excruciating physical pain and deep psychological trauma. The violence against women included not only physical beatings and assaults but also acts of sexual violence, public humiliation, and other forms of degradation intended to terrorize both the individual victims and the wider community. These extreme forms of abuse often resulted in long-lasting, if not irreversible, physical and mental harm. In some cases, the suffering endured by the survivors was so severe that it ultimately led to death - not only from the injuries themselves but also from the long-term consequences of trauma, displacement, and lack of adequate medical or psychological support in the aftermath of the violence.

3. The rape and humiliation of women

Forms of sexual violence against women are punishable under international humanitarian law. Article 27 of the Geneva Conventions on 'The Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War' states that women shall be specially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular rape, forced prostitution or any other form of outrage upon their morals (The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949). The massacres of 1988-90 were accompanied by sexual assaults against women, often rape and humiliation. The Sumgait massacres in particular were accompanied by gang rapes of women, and sometimes even young girls (Շարաֆյան, 2022, 70; Ուրության, 1994, 9). Even the leadership of the USSR was forced to admit the brutality of what happened in Sumgait. On February 29, 1988, when M. Gorbachev asked how they were killing, the USSR Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov replied: 'They cut off the breasts of two women, cut off the head of one, and skinned a girl...' («Սուղապիթ. սպանված սերունդ», 2018).

According to official data, 12 out of 16 women who reported brutal rapes in Sumgait became victims of such incidents (Улубабян, Золян и др., 1989, 9). It should be noted that the reported numbers likely underestimate the true scale, as many victims of mass rapes did not report to law enforcement agencies, and the majority of those who applied were forced to do so, as they needed medical attention as a result of the acts committed with particular cruelty. The evidence in the criminal cases itself testifies to the numerous rapes committed during the

Sumgait massacre. Based on the materials of the interrogations of eyewitnesses of the Sumgait events by the investigative group of the Armenian SSR Prosecutor's Office, it is recorded that the testimonies of 71 witnesses mention numerous cases of rape, stripping women, taking them out into the street in this form, and other acts of violence. A. I. Kondratov, a senior investigator of the USSR Prosecutor's Office and head of the investigative group investigating the events in Kirovabad, testifies that, as they found out, women were brutally raped here too, by 20-30 people (Kirovabad (Gandzak), 2021). In this regard, the Baku massacre was no exception (Մոստունվա, Հովնանյան, 1992, 111). Interviewed witnesses indicated that in many cases gang rapes took place in the presence of the victims' relatives and friends. Cases of rape, stripping of young girls and elderly women, beating, cutting off their breasts, and burning of the victims were recorded. Many rapes ended in murder. Two cases were also described where women threw themselves out of windows and balconies to escape rape and torture (Обзорная справка по материалам допросов свидетелей-очевидцев сумгаитских событий, 1988).

It is self-evident that for women who survived the horrors, the psychological consequences of rape were much more severe than those resulting from physical injuries. As for overcoming the psychological consequences of the massacres in general, they had different ways of expressing themselves. While for some this was manifested by constantly recalling, recounting, and publicizing the events, others preferred to forget the tragedy or not speak out about it (Մոստունվա, Հովնանյան, 1992, 128).

Conclusion

The massacres of Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku - marked by targeted violence, torture, and the brutal murders of civilians, including women and the elderly - remain a deeply painful chapter in modern Armenian history. These atrocities, committed between 1988 and 1990, have not only left an indelible scar on the collective memory of the Armenian people but also continue to play a central role in the Azerbaijani authorities' policy of denial.

The Sumgait massacre, which occurred in February 1988, was one of the first large-scale anti-Armenian pogroms in Soviet Azerbaijan. Although some trials were held during the final years of the USSR, including the establishment of investigative groups within the military prosecutor's office and the Committee for State Security to address the events in Baku, justice was far from served (Շաքաֆյան, 2022, 118). These measures were largely superficial and failed to result in meaningful accountability. Crucially, independent analysis and

testimonies suggest that the acts committed against Armenians during these massacres aligned with offenses prosecutable under international criminal law (Շարաֆյան, 2022, 149). In fact, in the case of Sumgait, even the Supreme Court of the Azerbaijan SSR recognized the existence of national hatred as a motive in its verdicts (Приговор судебной коллегии по уголовным делам по I инстанции верховного суда Азербайджанской ССР, 1989.). Nevertheless, these admissions did not translate into systemic or international legal consequences for the perpetrators or for the state's role in facilitating or enabling the violence.

The analysis of the atrocities across Sumgait, Kirovabad (1988), and Baku (1990) reveals a consistent pattern: they were not isolated or spontaneous outbursts of violence but rather coordinated attacks that specifically targeted the Armenian civilian population in its entirety. As such, Armenian women - ranging from adolescents to elderly individuals in their 80s and 90s - suffered disproportionately and in profoundly horrific ways. These women were not only subjected to physical violence but also endured sexual violence, including rape, public humiliation, and psychological torture, which is condemnable from the perspective of international humanitarian law even during conflicts (The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949). These crimes were committed with the apparent aim of degrading the victims, both as individuals and as representatives of their ethnic community. However, in the case of the Armenian massacres in Azerbaijan, there has been a notable absence of international condemnation or legal response. Despite ample witness testimony, journalistic reporting, and scholarly documentation, the crimes have remained largely unaddressed by the international community. This silence has not only denied justice to the victims and their families but also set a dangerous precedent: that ethnically motivated violence, particularly when directed at women, can go unpunished when it is politically inconvenient to confront. The atrocities also set a precedent for the impunity that contributed to the further escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The continued denial or neglect of these atrocities only heightens the risk of similar events being repeated in the future.

It is important to note that in all three cases, it is impossible to determine the exact number of victims, as the available official data is severely deficient and incomplete. However, a comparison of the available facts suggests that nearly half of the Armenians who fell victim to the massacres were women, all of whom perished due to brutal beatings, torture, and deliberate killings. Furthermore, it is evident that in almost every case of a woman's death, there was a deliberate intention to humiliate, degrade, and dishonor her before her murder - this included even elderly women. Furthermore, the gender-specific aspects of the violence remain one of the least addressed dimensions of these events. Armenian women bore a dual burden: as members of a targeted ethnic group and as women subjected

to gender-based violence. Their suffering has been underreported, their stories marginalized, and their trauma has been largely ignored in both legal forums and public discourse. Recognizing and acknowledging their pain is essential not only for historical justice but also for creating mechanisms to prevent such atrocities in the future.

Արմեն Յ. Մարության – 60-ից ավելի գիտական հոդվածների, հայերեն, ռուսերեն և անգլերեն 10 գրքերի հեղինակ է և փաստաթղթերի 4 ժողովածուների կազմող: Գիտական հետաքրքրությունների շրջանակում են Հայկական հարցի և Հայոց ցեղասպանության պատմության հարցերը և Հայոց ցեղասպանության հետևանքների հաղթահարման հիմնախնդիրները:

Իսկուհի Ն. Ավանեսյան – հեղինակ է շուրջ 30 գիտական հոդվածների: Գիտական հետաքրքրությունների շրջանակում են՝ Արցախի ազգային-ազատագրական պայքարի, Արցախի Հանրապետության սոցիալ-տնտեսական և սոցիալ-քաղաքական զարգացումների խնդիրները, նաև՝ Ադրբեջանի կողմից Արցախի Հանրապետության դեմ իրականացված ռազմական հանցագործությունների ուսումնասիրությունը:

Արփինե Ռ. Բաբլումյան – ավելի քան 30 գիտական հոդվածների և մեկ մենագրության հեղինակ է: Գիտական հետաքրքրությունները ներառում են՝ Արևմտյան Հայաստանի պատմական ժողովրդագրության խնդիրները, մասնավորապես՝ հայ բնակչության թվաքանակի, արևմտահայության տեղաշարժերի խնդիրները, Հայոց ցեղասպանության պատմությունը:

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