Chapter 6

Border Commemoration in Contemporary Armenia

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ABSTRACT

By the end of 20th century, history manipulation had become the main tool for mobilizing masses. To create a societal identity, a nation-state uses collective memory and creates an idea of the past as the purpose of self-existence. In addition to the chronological pattern, collective memory describes the geographical framework of society by creating them. The chapter analyzes the practice of determining geographical boundaries of Armenia in the collective memory of Armenians. Using the concept of “places of memory” coined by P. Nora, this chapter determines markers and geographical points as defined in the collective memory of Armenia residents as their own. The chapter presents the results of observations carried out by the author during the research made in 2014, as well as discursive analysis of memorial places from Armenian travel site as data that represent collective memory to the outsiders as informational messages. In conclusion, the author raises the question of the effective model of collective memory adopted in the name of societal development.
INTRODUCTION

The rapid globalization led to seek a personal and collective identity, and nationalism with the collectivist idea of community and a sense of shoulder became an accessible haven for cosmopolitan individuals. The development of interregional integration, as well as international migration within the European space, has provoked further development of economic, social and institutional competition between societies, which has become a driver of the nationalism growth in the states throughout the European regions. In particular, the problem of search for identity has become popular in the peripheral states of Europe, which had to create them from a ‘zero’ level as anew and claimed the right to be placed in the European space and history. National self-consciousness is unthinkable without reliance on the societal vision of its past. The memory of the past allows integrating the society, but it can also provoke a split of a society in case of diversification of memories among different groups of the same society. The research of collective memory often focuses around an important/heroic event that gave rise to society; a tragedy a society has passed through and survived. However, it is necessary to single out another discourse, around which a collective memory is formed, namely an idea of geographic boundaries, which is often formulated in public discourse and official speeches as ‘Our fathers and grandfathers are buried here!’. Thus, dwelling nation as a political community in a certain territory is legitimized by the memory of ancestors i.e. a selected ethnic history.

At the end of the 19th-century nationalism as an idea overstepped the European frontiers, where it arose, and became a criterion for determining statehood for national entities throughout the world. As I. B. Neumann remarked (Neumann, 1998) pushing limits of Eastern Europe permanently allowed further political incorporation of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova into the European space. This process was legitimized in 2009 as the initiation of the Eastern Partnership. It should be noted that five of these states are currently experiencing a painful stage of collective memories consolidation. Since these memories are different for different ethnic groups, this process created a basis for mutual territorial claims and disintegrated societies during the 1990s. Among these five states Armenia is highlighted as a country with the predominantly mono-ethnic composition; according to the 2011 population census, 98.11% are Armenians (Population, 2011), with multiple Diasporas (spyurk, in Armenian) of about 7-8 million people as an integral part. On the one hand, the issue of a collective memory for the Armenian society seems obvious, since the process came from the same society and it may seem no disagreement about the reasons for the geographical split. On the other hand, different conditions of long-term dwelling in different geographic
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