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NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF PUBLIC FUNCTIONS OF MONUMENTS IN THE YEREVAN'S CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Keywords- monument, interpretation, discourse, monumental function, public sphere

Introduction

After the collapse of the USSR, the urban landscapes of all newly independent countries significantly changed. New social realities relevant to new ideological and political paradigms were reflected in these changes. Public monuments always used to be good tools for supporting ideological systems given their informative and aesthetic educational functions. However, as we will see later in the article, neither the concept of “monument”, nor its functions are clearly defined for the public sphere.

Aesthetic, educational and informative functions are equally important for all types of monuments placed in public spaces¹, but the latest public discussions over the public monuments of Yerevan have shown that larger public activities around those monuments mostly occur when they are viewed in political and historical contexts. Public monuments can function as tools of (re)creation and (re)interpretation of historical-cultural values and social realities.

The analysis made in the framework of the current research has shown that this kind of interpretations of monuments not only generate active discussions among citizens (a widely common practice in the Soviet past), but they also suggest new roles and meanings a monument can have in a public space.

The main aim of the article is to analyze all those various public discourses over new monuments, their functions and new practices regarding the monument erection in post-Soviet Yerevan.

This article relies, for the most part, on the relevant discourse analysis, supplemented with interviews and the author's own observations. We have interviewed 62 people of different age, gender, occupation and educational level.

This article is theoretically and methodologically built on theories of discourse and discourse analysis. L. Phillips and M. Jorgensen propose a preliminary definition of discourse as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)². Discourse is a group of dictums, which provides language for a certain historical moment, to talk about a particular item. It refers to the production and organization of knowledge in a social context. A language system generally allows formulating an infinite number of dictums in each domain, creating an infinite number of meanings, though the number of dictums and meaning brought into circulation in a certain historical period is usually limited.

In his monograph “*Holocaust Monuments and National Memory. France and Germany since 1989*”, Peter Carrier argues that contemporary monuments should not be read as “national” historical documents, with one distinct meaning, but should be understood as open to meanings assigned to them by various interest groups. I will also try to consider some sociological views of deviance, which help me analyze and categorize the functions of public monuments³.

In this article, I define public sphere as an allegoric space, where, in a certain concrete time period, values and forms of a given society are developed. By public space I mean the memorial zones, where monuments established by the elites represent models of the society they belonged to⁴.

¹ Մարգարյան Ն., Հանրային տարածքներում կանգնեցվող հուշարձանների հարցի շուրջ: Ծիրակի պատմամշակութային ժառանգությանը նվիրված միջազգային VIII գիտաժողով, Գյումրի, 2010, էջ 49:

² Jorgensen M., Phillips L., *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, TJ international, Cornwall, 2002, p. 1.

³ Smith F., *Debating Memory*, H-German, 2005, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=11237>, 05.3.2015.

⁴ Масталерж Н., *Формирование концепции общественного пространства как структурного элемента городской среды*, http://archvuz.ru/2013_3/6, 15.03.2015.

“National” monuments and the (re)interpretations of their public characteristics

Visitors and viewers of monuments have become an object for research quite recently. The researchers have shifted their attention from symbolic forms and signs of monuments onto events connected with those monuments, such as opening speeches and ceremonies, ways in how they are publicly interpreted, praised or criticized, public events organized around the monuments or in the vicinity, local traditions connected with them, behavioral and communicative practices of viewers, etc.. Christophe Heinrich suggests that the “importance” of a monument is not what it refers to, but the impact it leaves on the viewer. He considers an ability of generating a “critical discussion” as the main function of a monument¹.

In post-Soviet countries, the tendency of erecting monuments which would stand for a single “national” interpretation of the past and the present, usually results in the formulation of official versions of meanings that monuments should carry to the public. This kind of monuments can be defined as “national” monuments. Peter Carrier, primarily interested in the political function and significance of monuments in terms of their influence upon memory cultures, suggests that in contrast to “national” monuments, “dialogic” monuments have the ability to be openly interpreted and to act as catalysts of debate and reflection as their primary and most important function².

The analysis of a number of monuments placed in Yerevan allows us stating that municipal authorities generally prefer to erect “national” monuments, while, say, the “dialogic” type of monuments are placed rarely, mostly in “privatized public” places (monuments are installed by the owner of the space, not the authorities). The so called “Cascade” may serve as an example of a dialogic monument. The “Cascade” is a huge stairway in Yerevan with multiple levels ornamented with fountains and sculptures. The complex was privatized by the American businessman of the Armenian origin Gerard Cafesjian in the early 2000s, but the majority of residents of Yerevan consider Cascade a public place and most of them think that the municipality is the one responsible for all the new monuments placed in that area. However, it is noteworthy, that in active public discussions the “dialogic” type of monuments is referred mostly in the context of their fitting to the concept of the “national”. Thus, some statues by the Colombian sculptor Botero (like nude and smoking fat woman, or a nude Roman warrior with a tiny penis), placed in the “Cascade” park located in the very center of the city, are criticized for their “anti-national” character just because they challenge traditionalistic values.

The majority of our respondents considered “the ability to transfer own culture and history to generations” as the primary function of public monuments. The monument discourse in contemporary Yerevan is articulated generally in historical and political dimensions defining educational and informative functions of public memorials as the most important characteristics of a monument. “Monuments should educate and tutor our citizens and especially our younger generation, teach them about our heroes and important events of our history, help us learn who we are and where we are going to”, - said one of our respondents.

The Yerevan municipal decision on erecting one more memorial, this time to a famous Soviet politician of Armenian origin in 2014 caused a wide public response and, in fact triggered the public discussions on whether the contemporary Armenian society needs to revise the history of Soviet Armenia and what values and historical events the monuments erected in Yerevan transfer to the next generations³.

In 2014, the Municipality of Yerevan suggested placing a statue of Anastas Mikoyan, an ambiguous Soviet political figure of Armenian origin. The public feedback for this initiative considered it as the authorities’ intention of evoking positive emotions and memories on the soviet

¹ Колягина Н., Бюрократы, патриоты, аутсайдеры: стратегии взаимодействия с новыми российскими памятниками, <http://gefiter.ru/archive/13632>, 12.12.2014.

² Smith F., Debating Memory, H-German, 2005, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=11237>, 05.3.2015.

³ See Шагоян Г., Ставить ли памятник Анастасу Микояну? Опыт “социальной люстрации” в Армении //Материалы конференции “Правовые и социальные аспекты реабилитации жертв политических репрессий на постсоветском пространстве”, Научно-информационный и просветительский центр “Мемориал”, М.: 2014.

past, which would possibly promote a positive attitude towards the Armenia's preparing membership to the Eurasian Economic Union. The proposal to erect Mikoyan's monument was perceived as a part of a "re-colonization" of Armenia by Russia. In this discussion the contra group started to build a narrative describing Mikoyan as a "traitor of national interests" and a party functionary personally responsible for repressions¹.

All these discussions generated around the Mikoyan's statue led to the critical evaluation of other similar public monuments, placed in the Soviet times and their functions. As a result, the question of further maintenance or dismantling of those monuments dedicated to Soviet political figures of the Armenian origin were put up for public discussions. Following the case of the Mikoyan's statue, a number of Internet users raised the problem of revaluation and even dismantling of monuments dedicated to communist party activists of early Soviet times Stephan Shahumyan, Suren Spandaryan and Alexander Myasnikyan. The revaluation drew a number of questions over those monuments. Were the individuals who allegedly had a significant impact on the country's history and culture impeccable, did they not have negative sides or commit "immoral" deeds either? Do we intentionally or unintentionally falsify the history or misinterpret historical and cultural events by "canonizing" and making "heroes" out of those persons? All these questions are very important, as sometimes the fact of commemoration can be more influential and important for the community than the historical event itself².

For instance, rather intense discussions permanently arise over Suren Spandaryan's monument, which is located in the central square of the Shengavit commune of Yerevan since Soviet times. Since 1991 both the square after Suren Spandaryan and a station of the Yerevan Underground of the same name, located right on the square were renamed. They were given the name of Garegin Nzhdeh, a politician, army commander, hero of the Armenian resistance to the Sovietization and ideologist of the Armenian nationalism, who was declared a criminal and a traitor in the Soviet times. However, even after the renaming the square, Spandaryan's statue was not removed out of there. Over the years, some political parties and individuals expressed their disagreement over the controversy of Spandaryan's statue and the name of the square.

In May 2011, the board meeting of the Municipality of Yerevan considered the issue of dismantling of the monument of the revolutionary figure (Spandaryan), but the Communist party of Armenia expressed their discontentment by calling the idea of dismantling as "cultural vandalism". However, our interviews demonstrated that a large segment of the population does not even doubt that the statue is now representing Nzhdeh. Discussions over the Mikoyan's statue resulted in resuming the controversy around Spandaryan's statue.

Since the collapse of the USSR nearly all the monuments erected in Yerevan were criticized in the aesthetic context. The new monuments were compared with the ones placed in Soviet Yerevan and were always considered as poor works in the aesthetic terms³.

Modernist style of some newly erected monuments (the statues of Arno Babajanyan⁴ and William Saroyan⁵ especially), "national" by content seemed incoherent with previous classical style of the Yerevan statues. Some argued that the statues did not look like these persons really looked. For example, one of our interviewees considered the statue of William Saroyan as a "wrong" monument, substantiating that Saroyan was not that tall in real life. The other monuments, those dedicated to Garegin Nzhdeh and Hamazasp Babajanyan, an army commander of WWII, having the highest title of a marshal of the Soviet Union were harshly criticized as poor art works and were even compared with tombstones. However, in public discourse some discontent for ways Garegin Nzhdeh, Arno Babajanyan, William Saroyan, Hamazasp Babajanyan and other cultural and political persons are immortalized cedes to the general satisfaction that these personalities are finally

¹ Shagoyan G., *Between memory and Memorial: Anastas Mikoyan and "Social Lustration" in Armenia*, 2016, p. 5.

² Нора П., *Франция-Память*, Издательство С.-Петербургского Университета, 1999, с. 118.

³ Համազասպ Բաբաջանյանի արձանը համեմատում են «օրենքով գողերի»՝ գերեզմաններում տարածում ունեցող արձանների հետ. «Ժողովուրդ», <http://www.aravot.am/2016/05/25/696123/>, 10.10.2016.

⁴ A known Soviet Armenian composer.

⁵ A wordly known American fiction writer of the Armenian origin.

commemorated and the Armenian people can pay tribute to its heroes. The modern monument related discourse shows that people consider monuments and statues as one of the best ways to commemorate eminent historical persons. When a new monument dedicated to a certain historical figure is placed in Yerevan, people in most cases welcome it, even if it is criticized in the aesthetic terms. Thus, in post-Soviet Yerevan in most cases the aesthetic function of monument is subordinated to its other social functions.

The monument discourse shows that the educational and informative functions of a public monument are considered not less important when the viewer interacting with it is a foreigner (a tourist). City public monuments not only develop attitudes and an outlook towards the culture and history of a state, but also discover and present them to the global community. In the process of discussions over the Mikoyan's statue some citizens got concerned over the fact that his monument can create a negative image and perception of the Republic of Armenia for the international community. The statement given by one of the political parties represented in the Parliament of the RA mentioned: "Monuments are not only art works created to develop the aesthetic taste, but they are also tools for the propaganda of those national and moral values, which are of priority importance for the statehood strengthening and development. Even the most superficial study makes it clear that the statue is harming the international reputation of our state, placing it among the countries where dictatorial regimes and their statesmen are promoted and propagated"¹.

Our respondents preferred central parts of Yerevan as better areas to place monuments because of their accessibility for both citizens of Armenia and foreigners.

The "informal" practices and the new roles of public monuments

Sociologists distinguish between those features of society which promote stability (and thus are "functional") and those which disrupt stability (and thus are "dysfunctional"). But it is harder in practice than it appears to be in theory to specify what is functional and what dysfunctional for a society or social group². I will try to consider "functionality" and "dysfunctionality" of practices of interaction with monuments in this paragraph.

The "accepted" or "formal" practices of communication with public monuments are clearly visible in public discourses. Nearly all the events regularly held by the authorities in public places play a significant role in their (re)formation. A monument traditionally assumes a rather limited set of ways of interaction and participation by the audience. One can hear speeches at the opening of a certain memorial or learn about them through the media reports, put flowers at the foot of monuments on memorable dates, etc. Among the "informal" practices of monument communication there is photographing the monument and a person next to it, publishing the photos on social networks, as well as expressing a personal attitude to the monument on the Internet.

The other modes of monument communication that have been officially characterized as "dysfunctional" by authorities, may also be grouped under the model of "informal" communication practices and considered as permanently redefined and reinterpreted range of actions. Actions meant to harm or transform public monuments, such as "street art" or "vandalism" are not so widespread in Armenia nowadays, but the analogous actions may be used as a specific way to show the attitude towards some policies of the post-soviet political regime.

In Soviet times, some schools of Yerevan and other cities of Armenia (especially those with the Russian language of learning) were named after famous Russian cultural or political figures (like Lenin's wife N. Krupskaya, Russian writers Pushkin, Chekhov, Mayakovsky, Gorki etc.). According to the tradition, busts or small monuments of those figures were often installed in front of schools bearing their names. In late 80-ies and early 90-ies, during the nationalist movement most of these busts and small monuments were removed or vandalized even before the principal statue of Lenin was removed from the central square bearing his name, in 1991. However, the fight

¹Հայ Յեղափոխական Դաշնակցության Երևանի Քաղաքային կոմիտեի հայտարարությունը, <http://mamul.am/am/news/51846>, 15.03.2015:

² Backer H. S. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. N.Y., The Free Press, 1963, p. 5.

against monuments in Yerevan had only an episodic anti-Russian focus and did not involve enraged mobs. On the contrary, these monuments usually disappeared in secrecy, without spectators¹.

Some actions of vandalism were made against the monument of Stephan Shahumyan, a Bolshevik political figure of Armenian origin, also meant to have an anti-Russian (anti-Soviet) political message. “Some groups didn’t like it and were painting the statue every day, demanding the municipality to dismantle it”,-said the advisor to the Yerevan mayor Gagik Beglar in one of his interviews².

The perceptions of the “sacred” nature of monuments and formal communication practices of “national” monuments coming from the Soviet period have been mostly preserved and are continuously being redefined. However, recently placed monuments and especially discussions over the to-be-erected Mikoyan’s statue, generated actions of reevaluation and new modes of communication with other similar monuments practically unknown previously. The perception of the Mikoyan’s statue as a pro-Russian and anti-national symbol led to active public discussions aimed to cancel the erection of the monument, and if it is erected anyway, then to devise ways to the demonstrative disrupt demolition or transformation of the monument in order to send a message to the municipality and authorities.

There were also opinions, that the erection of this kind of monument would have the opposite effect for the authorities. The monument may be interpreted as a symbol of their negative image and the failed political regime and due to the “dysfunctional” actions by the citizens the negative interpretation of that period can continuously be maintained. In one of his interviews, Arkmenik Nikoghosyan, a philologist, mentioned that “the installation of the monument would enable people to spit on it”³. There were also promises from other citizens to paint and damage the statue in case of its erection as the act of a protest against the government’s pro-Russian policy.

It is worthy to note that the idea of memorializing the undesirable past through monuments as a didactic reminder had precedents in history, although such cases have not been as widespread as those intended to erase dramatic experiences from the memory of generations by excluding them from the written and visual annals of the national history. In Hang Zhou (China) a monument dedicated to Yue Fei, a mid-twelfth century victim of a treachery was erected together with those who betrayed him. The traitors were shown kneeling, as if they were asking his pardon. In Hang Zhou, a statue of Qin Gui, the principal villain of this story, was especially erected to give every Chinese a chance to spit in the face of the nation’s traitor. In parallel to the “eternal” worship of a national hero we have here the “eternal” disgrace of his antagonist⁴.

The heated debates around Mikoyan’s monument together with deep anti-Russian sentiments led to public discussions over the appropriateness of keeping the statues of other Soviet political figures of Armenian origin in Yerevan.

Anthropologist Levon Abrahamian suggested organizing a park-museum of totalitarianism, which would gather all the visual and documentary memory of the Soviet past of Armenia. The dismantled principal statue of Lenin together with his numerous minor statues as well as statues and monuments of other communist leaders gathered from different corners of Armenia would form the monumental part of this park-museum. It would remind future generations of the dramatic past of their country to prevent repetitions of this experience⁵. The similar project was made in the Budapest Sculptural Park-Museum. Almost the same idea was expressed by historian Arayik Harutyunyan during the debates around the Mikoyan’s statue, who also suggested gathering all monuments erected during the Soviet times in one place.

¹ Abrahamian L. Armenian identity in a changing world // Armenian studies series, N.8, L. A., Mazda press, 2006, p. 281.

² Ես հպարտ եմ, որ հայ ժողովուրդը Միկոյանի նման գործիչ է ունեցել. Քաղաքապետի խորհրդական, <http://www.panorama.am/am/news/2014/05/09/baghdasaryan/291487>, 12.11.2016:

³ Անաստաս Միկոյանը՝ դահիճ, թե՛ պատմական բարդ կերպար. կարծիքներ Երևանում նրա արձանը տեղադրելու առաջարկի շուրջ, <http://www.tert.am/am/news/2014/05/05/anastas-mikoyan/1078029>, 15.03.2015:

⁴ Абрамян Л., Борьба с памятниками и памятью в постсоветском пространстве (на примере Армении) // Acta Slavica Iaponica XX, 2003, с. 35.

⁵ Abrahamian L., Armenian identity in a changing world // Armenian studies series, N.8, L. A., Mazda press, 2006, p. 288.

In various public discussions, a lot of people found that there were no unimportant statues in Yerevan and their dismantling could not be a solution. On the contrary, the presence of those statues in public places would help Armenians not to forget the past and not repeat the same mistakes. The majority of our respondents shared the same opinion. One of them even stated that she would not even mind to keep Lenin's statue, if it was not placed in the Republican square.

An example of a dysfunctional practice was demonstrated within the framework of the public debates over the statue of Suren Spandaryan, an ambiguous political figure of the early Soviet times. As Manvel Kostandyan, a leader of a nationalist NGO "Tseghakron ukhter" stated, they had been repeatedly raising the issue of dismantling of the statue and added that they were planning to take drastic actions like dismantling the statue by themselves in case there would be no changes in the situation¹.

As we see, though the dismantling of a monument can officially be classified as "cultural vandalism", the threat of vandalism can be viewed as a public political message to authorities, even if, as in cases described above, such kind of a "dysfunctional" type of public behavior does not go beyond the discursive level. On the other hand, all these public discussions are gradually contributing to formation of new functions of monuments. In post-Soviet Armenia, especially after the debates around the Mikoyan's to-be-erected statue, the public definitions of monuments as "reminders" of historical eminent events and "preservers" from historical mistakes are getting strengthened after the erection of an every next controversial monument in Yerevan, which keep growing in amount.

Conclusion

The new policy of the monument placement in post-soviet Yerevan generates new discourses in the public sphere, which in their turn, lead to a synthesis of old and new ways of monuments' functioning and interpretations.

One can observe obvious changes related to the interpretations of functions of the monuments dedicated to cultural and political figures in public discourses.

The intense debates around Mikoyan's statue triggered the recent critical reevaluation of the other monuments devoted to the Soviet political and cultural figures of the Armenian origin by reviewing the content people want to transfer to future generations through those monuments.

The monument discourse in post-Soviet Yerevan articulated a possibility of some previously unpracticed things like intentional vandalism, practices of disrespecting the statues like spitting on them, dismantling them, etc. However, all these possible attitudes have never been practiced in reality, they only exist in the discursive space, however they may be seen as markers of new characteristics of public monuments as "reminders" and "preservers" of the controversial historical past.

Գարիկ Աթանեսյան, Հուշարձանի հանրային գործառույթների նոր մեկնաբանությունները արդի երևանյան հանրային դիսկուրսում,- Հոդվածում քննության են առնվում խորհրդային և հետխորհրդային շրջանում Երևան քաղաքի հանրային տարածքներում տեղակայված հուշարձաններին առնչվող արդի պրակտիկաները և հուշարձանային գործառույթների արդի հանրային մեկնաբանությունները:

Արդի հանրային դիսկուրսում, մի կողմից, ավանդույթի ուժով շարունակում են վերարտադրվել խորհրդային շրջանին բնորոշ՝ հուշարձաններին վերագրվող «ազգային» գործառույթները, որոնք բացառում են այլ դիսկուրսներում դրանց մեկնաբանությունը, մյուս կողմից, սակայն, ակնհայտ են որոշակի նորահայտ միտումներ՝ հուշարձանային գործառույթները «երկխոսության» հարթություններում ձևակերպելու, որտեղ հուշարձանը հանդես է գալիս որպես քննարկումների և մտորումների կատալիզատոր: Նորահայտ այդ միտումները ենթադրում են հուշարձանների հետ հաղորդակցվելու արմատապես տարբեր սցենարներ և պրակտիկաներ, որոնց հանդես գալը հատկապես

¹ Ս. Սպանդարյանն ու Գ. Նժդեհը միևնույն հրապարակում, <http://taghinfo.am/archives/2419>, 17.03.2015:

խթանվեց Երևանում, տեղի քաղաքային իշխանությունների կողմից խորհրդային Միության նշանավոր պետական գործիչներից մեկի, ծագումով հայազգի՝ Ա. Միկոյանի արձանի տեղադրման շուրջ ծավալված հանրային քննարկումների շնորհիվ: Ա. Միկոյանի արձանի շուրջ սկիզբ առած քննարկումները իրենց հորձանուտի մեջ «ներքաշեցին» խորհրդային շրջանում Երևանում՝ հայազգի այլ խորհրդային պետական գործիչների պատվին կանգնեցված հուշարձանների աղեկվատության հարցը, ինչը տեքստային ու ենթատեքստային հարթությունում զարգացող դիսկուրսը բարձրացրեց մետատեքստի մակարդակի:

Հետխորհրդային Երևանի հանրային դիսկուրսում քաղաքային հուշարձանների գեղագիտական գործառույթը հիմնականում ստորադասվում է հուշարձանների կրթադաստիարակչական եւ տեղեկատվական գործառույթներին, հատկապես, երբ Երևանում տեղադրվող հուշարձանների «լսարանում» զբոսաշրջիկների դերը սկսվում է մեծապես կարևորվել՝ նպաստելով հանրային դիսկուրսում ապագա սերունդներին և գլոբալ հանրությանը ներկայացվող ցանկալի հուշարձանային բովանդակության վերանայմանը:

Երևանում տեղադրված որոշ հակասական հուշարձանների շուրջ նոր հանրային քննարկումները նպաստել են հանրային հուշարձանների նոր դերերի և բնութագրերի շրջանառությանը, որոնք սակայն առաջմ մնում են միայն հանրային ոլորտի մակարդակում և գործառնական դրսևորում չեն ստացել:

Քանալի բառեր՝ քաղաքային հուշարձան, մեկնաբանություն, դիսկուրս, հուշարձանային գործառույթ, հանրային ոլորտ

Гарик Атанесян, Новые интерпретации общественных функций памятников в современном Ереванском публичном дискурсе. - В статье рассматриваются современные общественные интерпретации функций городских памятников и современные практики коммуникации с памятниками, возведенными в общественных местах города Еревана в советское и постсоветское время.

Современный общественный дискурс с одной стороны продолжает воспроизводить “национальные” функции памятников, типичные для Советской эпохи, с другой стороны, обнаруживает некоторые новые тенденции восприятия функциональности памятников. Памятники - “диалоги” выступают как катализаторы дебатов и размышлений, что может рассматриваться в качестве их основной и наиболее важной функции. Новые тенденции предполагают радикально отличающиеся сценарии и практики коммуникации с памятниками. В частности, общественные дискуссии возникшие по поводу объявленного властями строительства памятника одному из известных государственных деятелей Советского Союза Анастасу Микояну, подняли также вопрос адекватности памятников в честь других советских деятелей армянского происхождения, поставленных в советском Ереване, что превратило частный дискурс в метатекст.

В общественном дискурсе постсоветского Еревана эстетическая функция городских памятников утрачивает свой приоритет перед информационной и образовательной функцией памятников, особенно в контексте повышающейся роли туристов.

Новые общественные обсуждения вокруг некоторых спорных памятников поставленных в Ереване способствовали артикуляции новых ролей и особенностей городских памятников, которые, однако, остаются на уровне публичного дискурса, без конкретных практических проявлений.

Ключевые слова: городской памятник, интерпретация, дискурс, функция памятников, публичная сфера