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## INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDE TO CULTURAL GENOCIDE PREVENTION IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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The present study is an attempt to examine the tragic consequences of genocides in general, with a particular focus on cultural genocides. Cultural genocide, though not explicitly identified in international law, represents a profound and insidious form of destruction aimed at eradicating the cultural, religious, and social foundations of a group. The cultural genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), the destruction of its cultural legacy, continues to demand urgent attention. Hence, we aim to highlight the true picture of cultural genocide through a prosodic and linguistic analysis of speeches – both written and spoken – by prominent American and European politicians. The purpose is to underscore the critical importance of preserving cultural identities and to advocate for the formal recognition of cultural genocide in international law. Acknowledging both physical and cultural genocides allows for a more comprehensive strategy for preventing and responding to the destruction of communities and their unique legacies. Combining historical research with prosodic analysis of political speeches delivered between 2020 and 2023, this article explores how vocal elements such as intonation, stress, and rhythm reflect global attitudes toward the cultural erasure of Nagorno-Karabakh. The findings reveal that these speech patterns often mirror geopolitical positions – some conveying urgency, others indifference – shaping public awareness and political engagement. The study calls for the equal recognition of physical and cultural genocides to ensure the full protection of vulnerable groups and stronger mechanisms for international accountability.

**Keywords:** *ethnic cleansing, cultural genocide, Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), Armenia, Azerbaijan, prosodic analysis.*

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## Introduction

Based on historical evidence, analysis, and documented facts, it can be asserted that the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict originated in 1918. At that time, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was established in the Transcaucasia region by the Ottoman Turkish government through the invasion of Transcaucasia by the Turkish army (Tigranyan, 2023; Hasan-Jalalyan, 2023). Notably, 107 years ago, Soviet Azerbaijan acknowledged Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Soviet Armenia and recognized the right of the Armenians of Artsakh to self-determination. However, despite this recognition, an unlawful decision by the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Russia on July 5, 1921, forcibly incorporated the territory of Artsakh into Soviet Azerbaijan, disregarding the will of the Artsakh people (Zakaryan, 2021).

The region of Artsakh has a long and complex history that has led to significant cultural tensions. Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) has been inhabited by Armenians for centuries, with numerous cultural and religious sites dating back to ancient times. During the Soviet Era, Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan SSR despite its predominantly Armenian population (Hasan-Jalalyan, 2023). As the Soviet Union began to collapse, tensions between Armenians and Azerbaijanis escalated into a full-scale war (First Karabakh War, 1988-1994). The conflict ended with a ceasefire in 1994, leaving Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas under Armenian control. In the Post-War Period for nearly three decades, Nagorno-Karabakh operated as a de facto independent state, known as the Republic of Artsakh, although it was not internationally recognized. In September 2020 (Second Karabakh War), Azerbaijan launched a military offensive to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh. The war lasted 44 days and ended with a ceasefire brokered by Russia. Armenia ceded control of several territories, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed to the region. Despite the ceasefire, tensions remained high (2022-2023). In December 2022, Azerbaijan imposed a blockade on the Lachin Corridor, the only route connecting Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh, leading to severe shortages of essential supplies. In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched another military operation, resulting in significant casualties and the displacement of about 120,000 Armenians (Klonowiecka-Milart, Paylan, 2023).

The deep historical connection of Artsakh has fostered a strong sense of cultural and ethnic identity among its predominantly Armenian population (Hakobyan, Minasyan, Torosyan, 2022). The cultural heritage includes a vast array of monuments, religious sites, and artifacts that reflect its Armenian Christian roots. These cultural elements are not just historical relics but are integral to the

community's daily life and spiritual practices. The preservation of these sites and traditions is seen as a way to maintain their unique identity and resist external pressures and conflicts.

Thus, unlike physical genocide, which aims to eliminate a population through violence, cultural genocide targets the symbolic and spiritual essence of a group, erasing its legacy and presence within a society (Luck, 2018). The concept of cultural genocide gained prominence in the mid-20th century, particularly in the context of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. It was originally proposed by lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” and advocated for the inclusion of cultural destruction in the legal definition of genocide. Although cultural genocide is not explicitly recognized as a crime under international law, it is often linked to broader acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Cultural genocide is relevant in today's world as it highlights the importance of preserving cultural diversity and protecting the heritage of marginalized and minority groups. In regions like Artsakh, where historical conflicts have led to attempts at erasing cultural identities, understanding and addressing cultural genocide is crucial for the reconciliation, justice, and the preservation of human rights. Protecting cultural heritage is not only about safeguarding the past but also about ensuring the survival of a community's identity for future generations. In the context of the ongoing Artsakh conflict, this study contends that the deliberate and systematic destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in the region amounts to cultural genocide. It aims to examine how international institutions, political leaders, and global media have addressed – or failed to address – these issues, and how linguistic strategies reflect, reinforce, or obscure the reality of cultural destruction in Artsakh.

This research adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that combines historical investigation with prosodic analysis to examine international responses to cultural genocide in Artsakh, particularly through written texts and the spoken delivery of political speeches and official statements. Thus, the present article is an attempt to explore international attitudes toward cultural genocide in Artsakh and analyze the linguistic strategies used in political speeches and media discourse.

### **International response to the cultural genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh**

Numerous Armenian churches and monasteries in Artsakh have been damaged or destroyed. The Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi was heavily damaged during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. Khachkars, which are traditional Armenian cross-stones, have been targets of vandalism. Reports indicate that many of these cultural artifacts have been destroyed or defaced (Petrosyan, Muradyan, 2022;

Sewell, 2023; Report 5 September 2023, Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention). There have been instances where Armenian cultural sites have been appropriated and renamed to erase their Armenian heritage. This includes the renaming of historical sites and the distortion of historical narratives (Tatoyan, 2022). The Republic of Artsakh has undertaken efforts to document and catalog its cultural heritage by creating a comprehensive list of monuments and establishing protection zones for many of these sites (Cultural Heritage of Artsakh, 2024).

Despite the challenges, there have been efforts to restore damaged cultural sites. Local and international organizations have been involved in restoration projects. These efforts highlight the ongoing struggle to protect and preserve the rich cultural heritage of Artsakh amidst conflict and political challenges (News & Events from AUA, 2022).

Prominent cultural and religious landmarks include:

- *Ghazanchetsots Cathedral* (Holy Savior Cathedral), located in Shushi, was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This cathedral is one of the largest Armenian churches in the region. It has been a symbol of Armenian heritage and resilience, especially significant during the conflicts in the area.
- *Gandzasar Monastery*, located near the village of Vank, was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is a masterpiece of Armenian architecture and has served as a religious and cultural center for centuries. It is known for its detailed stone carvings and historical manuscripts.
- *Dadivank Monastery*, located near the village of Dadivank, dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the oldest and largest monastic complexes in Artsakh. Dadivank is named after St. Dadi, a disciple of Thaddeus the Apostle, and is renowned for its intricate stone carvings and frescoes.
- *Amaras Monastery*, situated near the village of Sos and founded in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by St. Gregory the Illuminator, is one of the oldest Christian sites in the region. It is also the burial place of St. Grigoris, the grandson of St. Gregory the Illuminator. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian alphabet, opened the first school in Amaras, thus initiating the spread of the Armenian alphabet across the country. In a short time, the monastery became one of the main religious, cultural, and educational centres of Armenia.
- *Tigranakert of Artsakh* is an ancient, ruined Armenian city dating back to the Hellenistic period. It was founded in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC by the Armenian King Tigranes the Great. The site includes ruins of a fortress,

basilica, and other structures, offering valuable insights into the region's ancient history (Petrosyan, Muradyan, 2022).

These sites are not only architectural marvels but also living expressions of Armenian identity. Their destruction, such as the razing of *St. Minas Church* in Hadrut and the desecration of *Tsitsernavank Monastery*, reflects a broader campaign to erase the Armenian presence in Artsakh.

International responses have varied. Some advocacy efforts have drawn global attention to the risk of cultural genocide. The UN has applied its Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has received warnings regarding Artsakh. The Lemkin Institute and Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART) have issued detailed reports highlighting red flags and urging preventive measures (Lemkin Institute, 2023; HART, 2023). The US Congress has discussed potential sanctions in briefings (February 2024).

UNESCO has also taken important steps. In 2020, it adopted a declaration to protect cultural property in conflict zones and proposed an independent mission to evaluate heritage sites in Artsakh. However, access remains a significant obstacle, and diplomatic negotiations are often required to enable UNESCO's involvement ("Safeguarding Armenian cultural...", 2023; "Rep. Schiff. leads letter", 2024).

The positions of global powers reflect broader geopolitical dynamics:

- The United States has expressed concern over human rights and cultural destruction.
- Russia, while acting as a mediator, seeks to maintain strategic influence.
- France has vocally supported the protection of Armenian heritage.
- Turkey has openly backed Azerbaijan and has downplayed allegations of cultural genocide.

NGOs and advocacy groups, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the All-Armenian Student Association, and others, have documented abuses, lobbied for intervention, and raised public awareness. The Armenian diaspora has also played a vital role through advocacy, lobbying, and international campaigns (Zovighian, 2022; Avedian, 2021).

Despite mounting evidence of cultural genocide, the international community has often remained passive, with limited action taken to hold perpetrators accountable or ensure the protection of Armenian heritage in Artsakh (Stepanyan, 2024).

### **International discourse on cultural genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh: a linguistic study**

The linguistic analysis of the international discourse surrounding the cultural Genocide in Artsakh reveals the strategic use of specific terminology and speech delivery in political, academic, and institutional rhetoric. Different terms are used by various official and legal circles to describe the de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh. The choice of wording – such as *genocide*, *ethnic cleansing*, *forced displacement*, *exodus*, *voluntary migration*, or even *resettlement* – often reflects a speaker’s ideological stance, legal positioning, or political interest. Stronger terms like *genocide* and *ethnic cleansing* are used to frame the situation with urgency and moral gravity, while euphemistic or legally diluted terms often function to minimize responsibility or avoid diplomatic tension (Tatikyan, 2024).

Reports such as the Lemkin Institute’s “Risk Factors and Indicators of the Crime of Genocide in the Republic of Artsakh” identify key genocidal actions including *blockade*, *cultural destruction*, *dehumanizing rhetoric* (e.g., referring to Armenians as *dogs*, *wild beasts*, and *jackals*), and *forced displacement*, all of which are linguistically framed with terms rooted in international legal discourse. Phrases like *deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to bring about physical destruction in whole or in part* (p. 5), echo the UN Genocide Convention, while others like *mass cultural destruction* or *environmental despoliation* (p. 5) use abstract bureaucratic language to mask violence. Similarly, President Aliyev’s rhetoric, documented in expert reports, contains expressions such as “*to put an end to separatism*,” which, when framed with exclusionary language and denial of genocidal acts, reveal a strategic manipulation of discourse to justify erasure.

The document titled “Expert Opinion: Genocide Against Armenians in 2023” by Luis Moreno Ocampo provides a legal and evidentiary account of alleged genocidal actions targeting Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Terms such as *genocide*, *deliberately inflicting conditions*, *material elements*, *ICJ* (International Court of Justice) *findings*, and *provisional measures* are repeatedly employed. These terms mirror international legal discourse, particularly those drawn from the Genocide Convention (1948) and jurisprudence from international criminal tribunals. The consistent reference to *Article II (c)* of the Genocide Convention highlights the focus on starvation and deprivation as genocidal methods.

Luis Moreno Ocampo, a former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), asserts credibility by drawing on historical precedents and legal expertise.

*Starvation as a method to destroy people was neglected by the entire international community when it was used against Armenians in 1915, Jews and Poles in 1939, and Cambodians in 1975/1976. (p. 1)*

This passage invokes historical precedence to build a logical and moral argument for recognizing the current crisis as genocide. The repetition of starvation as a key genocidal weapon serves to bridge historical narratives with contemporary events, urging accountability. The phrase *immediate dramatic change* in the following sentence *Without immediate dramatic change, this group of Armenians will be destroyed in a few weeks* creates a sense of urgency, emphasizing the temporal constraints of genocide prevention. The bluntness of the phrase *destroyed in a few weeks*, contrasts with legal euphemisms, reinforcing the moral imperative to act.

Logical arguments are built through structured evidence and references to ICJ rulings, historical parallels, and factual documentation. The International Court of Justice concluded that the blockade

*may entail irreparable consequences to those rights and that there is urgency, in the sense that there is a real and imminent risk that irreparable prejudice will be caused before the Court makes a final decision in the case. (p. 9)*

Repeated references to President Aliyev's public statements are analyzed linguistically for intent.

*He knowingly, willingly, and voluntarily blockaded the Lachin Corridor even after having been placed on notice regarding the consequences of his actions by the ICJ's provisional orders. (p. 2)*

The triadic structure (*knowingly, willingly, voluntarily*) intensifies the accusation, portraying deliberate and premeditated actions rather than incidental harm. These adverbs mirror legal language found in international legal frameworks, reinforcing the culpability of state actors in genocidal actions. The accumulation of intentionality markers highlights a subjective element central to genocide definitions. The juxtaposition of denial rhetoric (diversion through accusations of smuggling) against the blockade's humanitarian consequences highlights attempts to obscure intent. The use of phrases like *deprivation of food*,

*medical care, and shelter* echoes genocidal narratives that reduce groups to expendable entities.

President Aliyev's statements attributing the blockade to *smuggling activities, including iPhones, cigarettes, and gasoline* exemplify rhetorical strategies often used to trivialize the suffering of the targeted populations. His alleged justification for the blockade as preventing smuggling activities is framed as a rhetorical strategy to deflect accountability. This deflection frames the issue as one of security rather than survival, downplaying the genocidal consequences of the blockade. Linguistically, the focus on consumer goods reduces the crisis to mundane economic violations, contrasting with the stark reality of starvation. Sentences are often structured to link deliberate state actions to their consequences for the Armenian population: *The regime's actions are designed to render conditions in Artsakh unsustainable, leading to forced displacement and loss of identity*. This sentence exemplifies causal coherence, where deliberate state actions (blockade) are linked directly to their consequences (displacement and identity loss).

This linguistic structure emphasizes intentionality and systemic harm. Luis Moreno Ocampo highlights that President Aliyev stated his motive, which is to *put an end to separatism*. He said he is "not organizing ethnic cleansing" but he proposes that Armenians in Karabakh could live as a minority in Azerbaijan, ignoring the discrimination and the Genocide, or they have to leave.

In the formulation *Deprivation of resources indispensable for survival*, the term *deprivation* is used as a euphemism. It abstracts the violent and destructive nature of the act and sanitizes the description of genocidal acts, which, without legal and linguistic scrutiny, may obscure the gravity of the offense. Linguistically, this reflects how official discourse can both reveal and obscure accountability.

Moreover, linguistic elements such as *repetition, imagery, and appeals to shared moral values* serve rhetorical purposes in speeches by international figures. For instance, describing the destruction of cultural heritage as *genocide* rather than *conflict* shifts the discourse to a more urgent and morally charged tone. US Senator Bob Menendez in his 2023 Senate speech said:

*Of course, to be an honest broker means we need to tell the truth about Azerbaijan's atrocities. We need to call out those individuals perpetrating this campaign of ethnic cleansing. We need to target them – including President Aliyev – with sanctions. We need to be cutting off their access to the wealth and oil money they have stashed away at financial institutions*



*around the world, to their yachts and mansions across Europe. The evidence is there, and we must preserve it so that Aliyev can be held accountable for these atrocities.* (Menendez, 2023)

In this passage, we come across emotionally charged words (*atrocities, ethnic cleansing, accountable*) alongside vivid economic imagery (*yachts, mansions, oil money*) and repetition (*We need*) to build urgency and rally action. Terms like *President Aliyev, wealth, oil money, financial institutions, yachts, and mansions* provide concrete images and targets, making the accusations specific and tangible. The repetition of the phrase *We need to* at the beginning of multiple sentences creates a rhythmic pattern and emphasizes the urgency and multiplicity of actions required. The use of evidence (*The evidence is there*) aims to reinforce the legitimacy of the claims. The speech appeals to the audience's sense of justice and morality, aiming to elicit an emotional reaction and a sense of urgency to act against perceived injustices. The use of specific terminology has significant legal and moral implications. Labeling actions as *genocide* can trigger international legal obligations under conventions like the Genocide Convention, whereas *ethnic cleansing* might emphasize systematic atrocities without necessarily invoking legal consequences (Conversi, 2006).

This choice of language not only defines the severity of the crisis but actively shapes public and institutional perceptions of justice, responsibility, and intervention. In parallel with lexical and rhetorical analysis, the study also investigates the international discourse through prosody, focusing on how intonation, stress, rhythm, pauses, and pitch variation reflect the speaker's emotional engagement and geopolitical positioning. Using some oral speeches delivered by American and European leaders from 2020 to 2023, a qualitative prosodic analysis was conducted based on suprasegmental phonology, revealing how voice becomes a carrier of both meaning and intent.

A compelling example of this is found in the speech of Senator Bob Menendez, whose impassioned delivery illustrates the power of prosody to convey moral urgency. Throughout his address, he skillfully uses vocal emphasis, pacing, and intonation to highlight the gravity of the crisis and appeal to ethical responsibility. His declaration, *We need to call out those individuals perpetrating this campaign of ethnic cleansing*, carries deliberate and forceful stress on key terms such as *need, call out, perpetrating, and ethnic cleansing*. The falling intonation of the sentence not only lends finality to the message but also conveys disgust and ethical resolve. It becomes clear that the senator frames this not merely as a political issue, but as a moral imperative.

The gravity intensifies as he states, *Aliyev and his regime are trying to starve these people into death or into political submission*. Here, the slowing pace and heavy emphasis on *starve*, *death* and *political submission* reflect the depth of the humanitarian crisis. A well-placed pause after “death” compels the audience to dwell on the horrific reality before acknowledging the broader political manipulation. This contrast is heightened by the speaker’s prosodic choices, lending emotional tension and rhetorical power to the statement. His chilling forecast – *This group of Armenians will be destroyed in a few weeks* – is delivered with minimal inflection. The flat, restrained tone on *will be destroyed* offers no emotional cushioning, making the message more disturbing. Its starkness becomes a form of moral indictment, forcing the audience to confront the horror directly.

With solemn determination, Menendez pronounces, *You will pay a price. You will face justice*. These parallel lines, delivered with a steady rhythm, repetition, and descending pitch, evoke the finality of a judicial verdict. The strongly stressed words *will*, *price*, and *justice* reinforce a tone of unwavering accountability. Toward the close, he appeals to a sense of transformation: *This time must be different*. A slight pause before the word *must* emphasizes the emotional weight of necessity, with rising-falling intonation highlighting a call for change. The simplicity of the sentence contrasts with earlier declarations, yet it marks a pivotal moment in the speech – urging a shift in collective response.

Throughout the address, Menendez skillfully aligns prosodic strategy with rhetorical aim. His stress placement, particularly at the beginning and end of key phrases, amplifies moral clarity. Rising intonation in rhetorical questions, such as *Really? You’re blaming Armenia for this?*, reveals frustration and disbelief, while flat tones in declaratives like *The shelves are empty* communicate solemnity and grief. Strategic pauses, especially after impactful clauses like *a threat to brave Red Cross workers*, offer space for reflection and resonance. Meanwhile, tempo shifts – slowing during accusations, accelerating during itemizations (*yachts, mansions, oil money*) – mirror the emotional pacing of the speech and flow of righteous indignation.

In summary, Senator Menendez’s voice becomes a moral instrument. Through pitch, rhythm, stress, and silence, he channels urgency, sorrow, judgment, and resolve, intensifying the seriousness of the genocide warnings and reinforcing the ethical imperative to act. Taken together, both the lexical and prosodic analysis reveal that language is never neutral – neither in word choice nor in vocal delivery. Whether consciously or subconsciously, speakers construct narratives that amplify, downplay, or obscure the reality of cultural genocide. Thus, what is said and how it is said becomes essential to understanding the global rhetoric surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the international discourse on cultural genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh is shaped not only by legal and political frameworks but also by the powerful role of language, both in lexical choice and prosodic delivery. The terminology used to describe the situation, ranging from *genocide* and *ethnic cleansing* to more mitigated terms like *migration* or *resettlement*, reveals the ideological and geopolitical orientations of various actors. Simultaneously, the prosodic features of spoken political statements, including stress, pitch, rhythm, and pause, reflect the emotional stance of the speaker and often determine whether the message elicits moral urgency or bureaucratic detachment.

The findings underscore that linguistic choices and prosodic strategies are never neutral; they can either amplify the visibility of atrocity or obscure it behind legalistic or evasive rhetoric. Through the analysis of key speeches and official documents, particularly the emotionally charged statements of Senator Bob Menendez, this research illustrates how vocal delivery and lexical framing together construct the global response to cultural genocide.

As the erasure of Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) continues, the world's reaction, expressed through its language, assumes considerable significance. Recognizing cultural genocide as a distinct and prosecutable crime is not merely a legal necessity but a moral one. Only through the acknowledgment and preservation of cultural identity can justice, reconciliation, and the protection of humanity's shared heritage be truly realized.

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ԼԵԶՎԱԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԴԻՏԱՐԿՈՒՄ**

**Մարիամ Խաժակյան**

Սույն հոդվածում նպատակ ունենք ամերիկացի և եվրոպացի հայտնի քաղաքական գործիչների գրավոր և բանավոր խոսքի առօրյա քաղաքական և գործառական վերլուծության միջոցով վեր հանել ցեղասպանության տարբեր դրսևորումների և մասնավորապես մշակութային ցեղասպանության ողբերգական հետևանքների իրական պատկերը: Թեև մշակութային ցեղասպանությունը միջազգային իրավունքով բացահայտորեն ճանաչված չէ, այն կործանարար մի գործընթաց է, որը նպատակաուղղված է իրականացնելու որոշակի էթնիկ խմբի մշակութային և հոգևոր ժառանգության, լեզվի ու ինքնության համակարգված ու հետևողական ոչնչացում և միտված է ջնջելու տվյալ հանրության պատմական ներկայության փաստը տվյալ աշխարհագրական տարածքում: Արցախի մշակութային ցեղասպանությունը և ժառանգության ոչնչացումը դեռևս հրատապ և դիվանագիտական մեծ ջանքեր պահանջող խնդիր է: Ինչպես ֆիզիկական, այնպես էլ մշակութային ցեղասպանությունների ճանաչումը ապահովում է առանձին էթնիկ խմբերի և նրանց եզակի ժառանգությունների ոչնչացման կանխարգելման և դրանց դեմ պայքարի ավելի համապարփակ մոտեցում:

**Բանալի բառեր`** էթնիկ զտում, մշակութային ցեղասպանություն, Լեռնային Ղարաբաղ (Արցախ), Հայաստան, Ադրբեջան, առօրյա-նական վերլուծություն: