

INTRODUCTION: LAW, ACTIVISM, AND THE INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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The recognition of the Armenian Genocide stands at the intersection of memory politics, geopolitics, international law, activism, and education. More than a century after the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians, the question of recognition remains not only a moral and historical issue but also a profoundly political, legal, and pedagogical one. Although the facts of the genocide have been firmly established through an extensive body of scholarship, archival documentation, eyewitness accounts, and contemporary diplomatic reporting, the international community has acknowledged these facts unevenly, a dynamic reflected in the growing body of scholarly literature examining recognition processes (see the bibliography).

Crucially, the modern struggle for recognition emerged because of the persistent, state-sponsored denial by the Republic of Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, whose systematic policies of falsification and obstruction have shaped global responses for decades. This denial has not only impeded pathways to justice and historical accountability but has also compelled Armenians worldwide to mobilize for recognition as an act of truth-telling and dignity. For Armenian communities in the diaspora and in the Republic of Armenia, many of whom descend from genocide survivors, the pursuit of recognition is inseparable from broader struggles for justice, memory preservation, political security, and the ongoing need to confront the persistent effects of denialism.

The global recognition process has unfolded through a diverse array of legal and political mechanisms, including parliamentary resolutions, executive declarations, and, to a more limited extent, judicial decisions. These developments, shaped in significant ways by sustained activism from the Armenian diaspora and often supported, albeit with shifting policy emphasis in recent years, by the authorities of the Republic of Armenia, have largely been framed within the language of human rights and transitional justice. Each pathway reflects distinct national interests, geopolitical alignments, and evolving international norms concerning the prevention, condemnation, and redress of genocide.

This special issue, *Law, Activism, and the International Recognition of the Armenian Genocide*, examines the multi-layered dynamics that have shaped, and continue to shape, the struggle for recognition. It explores the ways in which domestic and international legal frameworks either facilitate or fail to enable formal acknowledgment; how memory politics influence the willingness of societies to confront or suppress the legacies of

mass violence; and how activism, in its various forms, sustains efforts aimed at securing justice. The articles collectively demonstrate that recognition is not a singular political event determined solely by geopolitical considerations. Rather, it is an evolving process shaped by legal interpretation, civic mobilization, educational initiatives, and the enduring resilience of survivors' memory.

This issue also highlights the broader implications of recognition for the contemporary world. In an era still marked by mass atrocities, denial and distortion continue to function as powerful obstacles to accountability, contributing to impunity and weakening prevention efforts. The case of the Armenian Genocide illustrates how unresolved historical injustices may reverberate across generations, shaping collective identities, informing foreign policy debates, and affecting regional and international security, as evidenced by recent developments in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh that culminated in the forced displacement of its indigenous Armenian population in 2023. Recognition, therefore, should not be understood as merely symbolic; rather, it constitutes a foundational element in the establishment and reinforcement of international norms aimed at protecting vulnerable communities and upholding the rule of law.

The contributions in this issue approach these questions from multiple disciplinary perspectives, with a central emphasis on legal analysis but extending into activism, history, political science, memory studies, and education. Rosa Ana Alija Fernández examines the ways in which states invoke the principle of non-retroactivity under the Genocide Convention to justify their refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide. She demonstrates that these legal claims are often overstated or misinterpreted and argues that the true obstacles frequently lie in states' reluctance to confront their own histories of colonialism or mass violence.

Thomas Hochmann turns to the French Law of 29 January 2001, engaging with debates over its alleged lack of "normativity." His analysis clarifies how declarative legislation functions within constitutional systems and argues that such laws possess significant normative value by shaping political expectations and public understandings of historical truth.

A shift in focus to the Southern Cone is provided through Federico Gaitán Hairabedian's analysis of Argentina's transitional justice processes, including the Junta Trial, the ESMA cases, and the 2001-2011 Armenian Genocide Truth Trial. His contribution demonstrates how domestic courts and civil society actors can influence global norms related to truth, imprescriptibility, and accountability for genocide. He shows how domestic legal activism can advance justice even without cooperation from the perpetrator state.

The discussion then moves to the Asia-Pacific region, where Melanie O'Brien offers a distinctive insider account of academic-activism in Australia. Tracing decades of advocacy for federal recognition, she explores the deep entanglement between recognition politics and Australian national memory, particularly the mythology of Gallipoli. Her analysis highlights how coordinated civic action, illustrated by the "Joint Justice Initiative," has

shaped policy debates and transformed public engagement with the Armenian Genocide.

Mathieu Soula situates the Armenian Genocide within the broader trajectory of France's official recognitions of genocides. By examining more than four decades of French legislative and political actions, from the 2001 Armenian law to more recent recognitions of atrocities against the Yazidis, Uyghurs, Tutsi, and Assyro-Chaldeans, he argues that the Armenian case served as a crucial precedent that helped shape France's contemporary memorial policy and its approach to confronting multiple histories of mass violence.

Finally, Sophie-Zoé Toulajian examines the 1979 Lyon March as a pivotal moment in diasporic activism. Her study demonstrates how French Armenian activists used public protest as a performative intervention that inserted the genocide into French public consciousness during a politically vibrant decade. She shows how overlapping local, national, and transnational identities shaped Armenian strategies for visibility and ultimately contributed to the broader recognition of the Armenian Genocide in France.

Bringing together scholars of international law, political science, history, memory studies, and education, this special issue deepens our understanding of the forces that advance or hinder recognition. It also illuminates how the Armenian experience continues to inform global debates on justice, reparations, memory, and state responsibility in confronting past crimes. Ultimately, the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is both a historical imperative and a contemporary challenge, one that exposes the intricate ways in which truth, power, and memory intersect in contemporary global politics.

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