

White Paper

Armenians as a Spatial and Digital Global Nation

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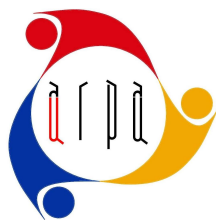


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Background

It is estimated that there are 3 million Armenians in Armenia and an estimate of 7 million in the diasporas. The reality of this Armenian Nation is that it is spread around the globe, with a major hub in Armenia and multiple hubs everywhere else. There are numerous spatial and digital bubbles housing these Armenians. Most of these communities interface with each other virtually, especially Gen Z and Gen A. In today's sophisticated, digitally interconnected world, Armenians of all such "Little Armenias" can be in touch with each other, tell stories, share cultural events, and challenge each other on various aspects of Armenian identity. This can bring a boost to Armenian presence and confidence in the future.

This White paper focusses on the realities of this global Armenian community and how well this Armenian Nation writ large can navigate in this new era where the virtual and the spatial worlds interact and evolve. Furthermore, how can this new existence contribute to innovative ways to define and preserve the Armenian identity in the future. Key question/challenge to be addressed: Should we think of this Armenian Nation in new ways?

Introduction

There are various ways to examine the multi-dimensional aspects of this Global Armenian Nation. Some are discussed in this White Paper.

The geographical aspects:

- A. How many Armenians are there in the Diaspora vs. Armenia; how many active centers around the world and what are they focused on (Los Angeles, Paris, London, Beirut, Moscow, etc.); how many social groups online; etc.?
- B. In his book, *Little Armenias*, Ruben Koukakezian writes, "In our globalized world, new generations of Armenians who grew up in Los Angeles, Sao Paulo, Montreal, Lyon, Buenos Aires, or Beirut can get in touch, get to know each other, meet each other, more than ever before." How do we facilitate this using the latest online tools?

The psycho-social, political, organizational, and spiritual dimensions:

- A. What is the concept of a virtually connected nation? Should it be in multiple languages? How can it promote social connectedness and cohesion?
- B. What is the purpose of being a nation? Preservation of culture and language for the sake of preservation and a sense of community?
- C. What are existing organizations bringing Armenians together around professional topics - The Armenian American Medical Society, Armenian Society of Fellows, ARPA, AESA, other...
- D. What is the role of Religious Institutions and their activities in this virtual world? Are we to assume by "spiritual values" we should understand the Religious Institutions? Do such Religious Institutions place limits and boundaries on our freedom to think and imagine identity and culture? How could such Religious Institutions become a source of spiritualism?

- E. Generational and geographical variations: What does it mean to be Armenian in this digitally interconnected world?
- F. How to communicate not only the critical importance of this for the future but also the uniquely creative aspect of such a globally connected nation.
- G. How to put together such an initial concept? Should anybody be in charge? Is that like a government or something else? How could it be legislated? What type of representative body can bring parts together? Role of the regular Armenia-Diaspora summits, Special Commissioners for diaspora affairs, other? Is the concept of the digital nation one that can dispense with leading organizations and individual leaders?

Bottom Line: WHY would Armenians want to form a global digital nation. Namely, what are the perceived benefits for a given Armenian to join, what needs and care-about such network could fulfill, and should it be ethnics vs value-based? Moving beyond an individual, what are the benefits to a given community wherever it exists and, furthermore, what are the benefits for Armenia at large.

The educational and linguistic dimensions:

- A. Can such virtual centers/platforms be a global guide to the Armenian language? The language is a critical factor in Armenian identity. Such center/platforms can have branching trees that would send people to whatever part of the language they are interested in, be that learning, studying the history of the language, storytelling, looking up etymologies, etc. It could encourage people to try on each other whatever Armenian they know.
- B. How do existing virtual colleges such as the AGBU AVC College and other similar educational programs contribute to such efforts? Is there a need for the effectiveness of such Programs?
- C. Is there a need for a Center for Diaspora Studies that accesses existing databases on various aspects of the diaspora and carries out multi-disciplinary academic studies in the social and political sciences, linguistic, finance, business, etc...? If feasible, where should such a center be housed?

D. The technology dimensions and information exchange

The role of Data Science, Cyber Security, AI, and Social Network Analysis and their implications to a healthy presence of Armenians in the digital space:

- A. How best to interconnect the Global Armenian Nation technologically? How to make these centers/platforms global hubs for talent, innovation, and freedom.
- B. How to coordinate with and take advantage of existing efforts, such as <https://insights.hyeconnect.org/> or www.rearmenia.com. They offer an environment with a rich toolkit and way to cooperate around ideas, projects, topic.
- C. How to advertise the concept and its website through channels that will reach Armenians around the globe (churches, clubs, cultural associations, schools, etc.).
- D. What does it mean to be a "nation" in this age of AI and related technologies that also affect the definition of terms otherwise considered to have accepted/assumed definitions?
- E. How to incorporate the latest bells and whistles from the world of AI. This will not only bring Armenian and Armenianness up to date, but it will also inspire and involve the younger generation to contribute and participate. That the young is habituated to an online existence is not news. However, an AI-based Armenian package can be the playground the young will be attracted to.
- F. How to avoid the mistake we and others have often made of taking the technology but not the essence of new inventions? And thus remaining behind, regardless of our sense of participating in the ever changing world?
- G. Armenians and the war of information in this Global Environment. What, who and how?

Executive Summary

Dr. Hriar Cabayan

The sections below briefly summarize each of the contributions. The summaries are primarily meant to entice the reader to read the full chapters and have intentionally been kept short.

In his article titled “Armenians as a Spatial and Digital Global Nation,” Dr. David Akopyan charts a path forward that envisions a harmonious convergence of two interdependent components of the Armenian nation: the homeland of Armenia and the globally spread diaspora. He advocates an approach that seeks to find a model of a digitally interlinked nation for the modern era, one that thrives within a shared realm of knowledge, creativity, and innovation. He goes on to state the symbiotic relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora becomes evident: both entities mutually empower each other for collective growth. By adopting proven approaches from successful integration models, Armenia can enhance its capacity to attract, retain, and integrate migrants and thus capitalize on the diverse talents thus fostering a stronger and more prosperous future for the nation. He concludes by stating that with a focus on nurturing innovation, adopting a forward-thinking military approach, and fostering a culture of open discourse and collaboration, Armenia can carve a path towards becoming an influential and resilient nation in its challenging neighborhood.

In her article titled “The Future of Armenian, the Language,” Dr. Hasmig Seropian makes a strong case for the Armenian language to charge forward with a new life fueled by a vigorous online presence in the context of creating a digital global Armenian community. She emphasizes the role of language in shared identity. She recommends taking advantage of the variety of languages spoken by Armenians in order to bring color and nuance to the digital presence of Armenian.

She advocates several approaches to bring this about:

1. Armenian needs a centralized and coordinated effort to bring the various splintered projects currently in existence into one place. This place clearly must be online.

2. A group of linguists, language teachers, and computer scientists have to be assembled to evaluate what already exists and to identify what needs to be developed for the future.

She goes on to tackle the often-raised question “Which Armenian,” and whether this is even worth asking. She points out there are signs the two standards are merging. The question is: Should this new emerging version of the language be left to its users to proceed with the changes haphazardly and for their own convenience or should there be a well-considered guide to establish the features of the newly emerging standard? She concludes by stating that a group of linguists, language teachers, should take the lead in this effort also.

In his article entitled “What is the Diaspora Thinking?,” Dr. Hratch Tchilingirian summarizes findings from an extensive Armenian Diaspora Survey conducted in 2022 and held in the United States and Ontario. He observes up front the Armenian diaspora is multifaceted, complex, and geographically spread around the world. Yet, the main subject around which virtually all themes in diasporic life orbit is “Armenian identity”. Some of his key takeaways:

1. Most Armenians sampled identify themselves as hyphenated Armenian with the three most significant defining aspects of Armenian identity being the family, Armenian language, and Armenian culture.
2. The data indicates there is a wide range of views on religion and religiosity.
3. A considerable segment of those sampled consider themselves “fluent” speakers of the Armenian language while the younger generations less fluent.
4. High-quality Armenian education and cultural activities are in demand amongst those surveyed.
5. There is a wide range of perceptions as to what the “homeland” is with Armenia considered an important point of reference.

In her article entitled “HyeConnect as a Digital Diaspora,” Ms. Roza Chibukhchyan makes the case that HyeConnect was created to be the Armenian nation online. She states the digital world has transformed how communications

occur for Diasporas displaced from their homelands which results in an active exchange of information. She describes the concept of a digital diaspora as interconnected, networked, and led by a nation in the digital space, and presents HyeConnect as the Armenian digital diaspora. She goes on to say that HyeConnect was created to be a professional environment where Armenians from all over the world can work together toward Armenia-centric initiatives. She quotes surveys that reveal many diasporans are willing to support the homeland not only through monetary means but also by providing their services, knowledge, expertise, and connections. She relates that HyeConnect emerged when experts from various fields gathered to actualize a platform that would connect all Armenians in one professional environment where they can confidently share their initiatives in a trustful manner. She relates that the current HyeConnect users are from various communities and the platform operates in five languages and remains invitation-based to maintain trust, ensure traceability and encourage initial quality content creation. She concludes by stating HyeConnect aims to be the digital space that facilitates multiple initiatives and acts as the digital home for Armenians and their communities.

In his article entitled “What if the Armenian Diaspora was a travel destination?,” Mr. Ruben Koulaksezian states up front that in our globalized world, new generations of Armenians from all parts of the world can interact with each other more than ever before. He informs the reader that he personally embarked on such a mission to get to know these communities that are spread across all corners of the world. The end product of this endeavor was a travel guide dedicated to the Armenian Diaspora. In the process he was able to see the diversity of the diaspora and the fact that the Armenian nation today is more globally connected than ever before. He makes the case that as a global nation, the more contacts there are the more the survival of the nation is guaranteed. He observes this awareness of sharing a common past and future drives the Armenian Nation to benevolence and mutual aid. He states the development of such tools that allow the development of these encounters is fundamental and concludes by stating Armenians from all over the world are currently more connected with each other than at any other time in their history.

In his essay entitled “Diasporic Strategies: Statelessness in Action,” Dr. Khachig Tölölyan states the concept of digital diasporas is not new and has been explored

for at least the last two decades. In this context, diaspora Armenians were digital pioneers who envisaged the possibility, the promise, and some of the problems of social media. He observes the full range of technologies that are currently available make possible a new Armenian cybersphere in which social media and more broadly digital media can coalesce. He points out that digital space increases connection – between individuals, as well as between individuals and organizations, some of which are constituted digitally while others emerged offline in the past, but now find it indispensable to maintain an online presence. He underscores that digital connection is immensely valuable if and only if it is seen as what it is: a first step. He points out the need to avoid “cyber-utopianism,” i.e., the conviction that digital connection automatically leads to cooperation and commitment. It may, but it may not do so reliably or predictably.

In his article entitled “reArmenia Collaboration Platform - National Unity Through Tech,” Mr. Gevorg Poghosyan states that reArmenia’s mission is to empower and unite Armenians to become a caring and collaborative community dedicated to transforming Armenia into a just and flourishing nation. He goes on to say by using modern technologies such as collaboration frameworks, comprehensive toolsets, and a dedicated platform, interested users receive the necessary support from Armenian communities across the globe. He further relates reArmenia maintains advisory boards across 14 diverse fields which play a pivotal role in platform development, community building, engagement with diaspora communities worldwide, and organizing communication campaigns. As an example, reArmenia will soon be launching non-fungible tokens featuring Armenian contemporary artworks created by various artists. In another case, an Expert Community tool was launched which enables every initiator or project creator to browse list of experts from across the globe and connect with them to get support in terms of knowledge and expertise.

In his article entitled “Democratizing Armenia-Diaspora Relations: Constituency-Building and the Need for a State-Centric Paradigm,” Dr. Nerses Kopalyan makes the case that the Velvet Revolution brought about a robust democratic political culture to Armenia that should result with a new configuration of the Armenia-Diaspora relations. This post-Velvet Revolution government has been actively attempting to engage in constituency-building in the Diaspora.

The democratization in Armenia-Diaspora relations, trust in the legal and political system, and de-monopolization of Armenia's economic climate allow tapping into the Diaspora's economic capabilities. He identifies several key areas:

1. Cultivation of professional and scientific networks to transfer expertise, technical knowledge, and scientific research back to the Homeland.
2. Offsetting the country's "brain drain," by initiating a "reverse brain drain" and inducing the inflow of highly-educated, professionalized experts.
3. Enhancing cultural relations by embracing history and identity, and the bond of Armenianness that connects the Diaspora with the Homeland.

He goes on to state Diaspora engagement must prioritize several important factors that result in a paradigm shift in Homeland-Diaspora relations:

1. The alignment of the interests of the diaspora constituents with that of the Homeland.
2. The recognizing the diverse inter-Diaspora interests.
3. The formulation of transnational structures that are conducive to both achieving such alignment as well as giving the diaspora-constituent agency.

He concludes by stating the formation of transnational diaspora structures must be the next stage in the evolution of Armenia-Diaspora relations.

Armenians as a Spatial and Digital Global Nation

Dr. David Akopyan

Description: A state that provides security for its people and ensures prosperity requires an innovative paradigm for nationhood, a model of an entirely new caliber of a digitally interlinked nation. Armenia must assume a pivotal role as a nucleus, with the diaspora emerging with a significant constellation of centers.

During my professional experience with the UN, which spanned many countries, I primarily focused on state and institution building, complemented by elements of nation building. Armenia presents an interesting case where the evolution of a nation has unfolded over centuries, unaccompanied by state building. Despite the absence of a nation-state, the Armenian nation has demonstrated unparalleled prowess in survival and, in some instances, prospered.

Armenia has made significant strides in the last few decades since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The country now has a functioning state system and national economy, although the results have been modest thus far. Despite facing many challenges, diaspora communities have managed to preserve Armenian identity over many generations while also acquiring many skills in high demand in Western countries. The diaspora has been one of the key driving forces behind the modest success of Armenian statehood. Over the years, several diaspora Armenians have settled in Armenia and have made significant contributions to state, institutional and business development.

This paper aims to outline a path forward that envisions a harmonious convergence of two interdependent components of the Armenian nation: the homeland of Armenia and the globally dispersed diaspora. Through a comprehensive and collaborative endeavor, the country and the nation broadly need to find a way to propel into the 21st century. This includes establishing a state that not only provides security for its people but also makes them prosperous. The key to achieving this is by finding an innovative paradigm for nationhood, which allows Armenia to assume a pivotal role as a nucleus, while the diaspora emerges as an equally significant constellation of centers. This approach seeks to establish a model of an entirely new caliber of digitally

interlinked nation for the modern era. Such a nation thrives within a shared realm of knowledge, creativity, and innovation.

The Armenian identity is a unique blend of attributes that have not only united Armenian communities but have also helped preserve our ethnic heritage in the absence of a state. Having spent considerable time in the Middle East, I've consistently witnessed a common reaction upon revealing my Armenian background – a genuine appreciation for the numerous Armenians who have left an indelible mark as dedicated professionals. From diligent tailors and esteemed doctors to skilled jewelers, architects, engineers, lawyers, scientists, and craftsmen, Armenians have consistently earned respect and admiration.

The profound sense of belonging, shared values, and a deep-seated trust among members has been pivotal in binding Armenian communities together. Our resilience stems from the value we place on generating and disseminating knowledge, nurturing, and harnessing talents, and our remarkable ability to self-organize.

Several notable observations about the Armenian character emerge. First, we appreciate the disparities between civilizations, allowing us to immerse ourselves in foreign cultures while preserving our own identity. Second, we aspire to broader horizons and have enthusiasm for exploration. Third, we blend competitiveness and adaptability, a testament to our flexibility. Collectively, these qualities encapsulate what it means to be Armenian. They not only underpin our survival but also position us as a distinctive and esteemed community.

One noteworthy contribution that Armenians made to the global landscape was our early efforts at globalization. Traders from Julfa and Isfahan pioneered the establishment of a network of diaspora centers that followed the Silk Road from Amsterdam to Singapore and beyond. This initiative created trade bridges across diverse corners of the world. It not only facilitated economic interactions, but also fostered connections between disparate societies, leaving a mark on the evolving world order.

Another defining characteristic of Armenians is their unwavering pursuit of freedom. Across generations, Armenians have navigated life under autocratic regimes such as the USSR, Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman empires. Despite the

totalitarian nature of these ruling powers, Armenians were recognized for their entrepreneurial drive and mobility, which often clashed with the restrictions imposed by these regimes.

The Armenian experience under the Soviet regime differed from the typical oppressive template. Soviet rule in Armenia was relatively less oppressive, and many Soviet Armenian leaders came to share core national values while navigating the constraints imposed by communist ideology. Armenians, both within Armenia and across the diaspora, share values of freedom, rights, entrepreneurship, innovation, and a profound respect for knowledge and science. These principles, influenced by the ideals of the European Enlightenment, have long positioned Europe and the Western world as a promised land for many Armenians.

Historically, Armenian family traditions have always placed great value on education, with a focus on acquiring and sharing knowledge. We had medieval universities like Gladzor and Tatev, at a time when there were very few in the world. The first phrase written in Armenian, which is often quoted is: “To know wisdom and instruction ...”

There are many examples from our recent history that support this tradition. During the Soviet Union, Armenians came in third after Russians and Jews in the field of science, and the Republic was among the most technologically advanced. In the last few decades, there have been positive developments in education in Armenia, including the establishment of the American University of Armenia (AUA) and United World College (UWC) in Dilijan. Both of these institutions are excellent diaspora initiatives. Other initiatives like TUMO Armenia or COAF (Children of Armenia Fund), are following their path and bringing new qualities to education in Armenia.

A turning point arrived with the Velvet Revolution in April 2018, ushering in a transformative era for Armenia. It served as a testament to the Armenian people's intolerance for the suppression of freedom. In the same year, The Economist acknowledged Armenia as the country of the year, generating widespread belief that it was time to elevate Armenia into a state of freedom, prosperity, and development.

Nevertheless, Armenia's nascent democracy has faced and continues to confront significant existential challenges. In September 2020, autocratic Azerbaijan initiated a war, posing an existential threat to Armenia. Despite a collective national effort and extensive support from the diaspora, Armenia was defeated in the war, and the challenge of securing the safety and well-being of its people remains.

The aftermath of the war continues to bring a profound sense of pain, even three years later. However, the current response is in stark contrast to that which followed the Yom Kippur war in 1973 in Israel, a nation with an established democracy and statehood. Israel demonstrated its capacity to confront the problem, engage in introspection, implement measures to prevent recurrence and move ahead even stronger.

Arguably, one of the most significant shortcomings of Armenian society has been the challenge of effectively harnessing the resources, knowledge, and networks of the diaspora. The diaspora is probably the key competitive advantage that Armenia possesses and is eager to contribute to Armenia's growth. It serves as a vital source for investment and trade networks, a repository of expertise and insight, and a source of knowledge and expertise in various fields.

To realize the full potential of the diaspora, innovative structures and institutions must be established to facilitate more robust and productive relationships. These structures should encompass diverse connections through youth engagement, business-to-business interactions, and various professional groups and networks. The symbiotic relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora becomes evident: both entities mutually empower each other for collective growth.

In this context, the term "network" signifies a cohesive framework in which a strong central state and robust periphery, represented by Diaspora units, collaboratively work towards a shared objective. This notion embraces the idea that Armenia's pursuit of a brighter future requires a comprehensive exploration of avenues, with the Diaspora positioned to play a pivotal role in unlocking the creative potential of the nation.

However, the core purpose of this paper goes beyond advocating for increased involvement of the Diaspora in Armenia's affairs. Instead, it seeks to champion

the establishment of a high-quality network nation that benefits not only Armenians within Armenia but also resonates with the global Armenian community.

A key lesson from COVID-19 is that physical distance no longer presents an insurmountable barrier to effective interaction. Humanity has swiftly adapted to conducting business, fostering professional growth, and building communities in a virtual realm. This proves that quality interactions and collaboration can transcend geographical constraints.

Before delving into the specifics of the proposed virtually connected network nation building, it's insightful to examine two pertinent examples of networked nations: Israel and Lebanon.

Lebanon has a population of 5 million within its borders and an additional 15 million in the diaspora, presenting a distinct profile. Its history, dating back to the Phoenician era of traders and interconnected cities like Carthage, underscores a long tradition of networks. In the modern context, Lebanon's diaspora includes prominent figures like Carlos Slim, the richest man in Mexico. These individuals are not only well-networked and successful but also maintain strong connections with their homeland.

However, despite the wealth and success of the Lebanese diaspora, Lebanon itself struggles with substantial challenges, including a prolonged civil conflict. What Lebanon seems to lack is a cohesive, long-term vision for harnessing the power of a network nation. This case highlights the importance of not just having a successful diaspora but also fostering strategic alignment between the homeland and its dispersed communities.

To bring about transformative change, a networked nation requires a shared vision, collaborative strategies, and effective mechanisms for channeling the expertise, resources, and networks of the diaspora towards national development. It's not only about individual successes but about orchestrating a collective effort that addresses the nation's challenges and opportunities in a coordinated manner.

Israel serves as a compelling example of a nation that has undergone a remarkable transformation and achieved great success, along with a well-

represented diaspora. For two millennia, Israel lacked statehood, and in the early 20th century, only a small number of Jews inhabited the region that is modern-day Israel. Most of the Jewish population was dispersed across the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and the Americas, totaling around 10 million worldwide. Both Armenians and Jews experienced devastating genocides in the 20th century, with Armenians losing around 1.5 million lives and Jews over 6 million. When the United Nations decided to establish the state of Israel in 1948, the situation of the two nations seemed relatively similar in terms of population sizes, territories, and economic circumstances. However, Israel's trajectory since then has been nothing short of remarkable.

Currently, Israel has a population of 10 million, compared to Armenia's 3 million. Israel's GDP stands at USD 450 billion, with a GDP per capita that exceeds that of France or the UK. Both nations have faced disputes and military conflicts with their neighbors.

Israel has successfully developed one of the world's most formidable military forces, coupled with a robust defense industry that produces for both domestic needs and export. This growth has been a result of strategic planning, effective governance, technological innovation, and a diversified economy.

While history may not have traditionally identified the Jewish people as warriors, Israel's development model serves as a reminder that nations can adapt to changing circumstances and adopt new qualities. One of the key success factors was the ability to bring so many Jews to Israel. Despite cultural differences, they have amalgamated into one culture, nation, state.

Israel's success is reflected in its robust business relationships with its diaspora, particularly in influential global hubs like Silicon Valley and New York. The large number of Israeli companies listed on NASDAQ, rivaling only that of the United States, underscores the profound impact of these connections. The ability to forge these networks and partnerships with diaspora-led enterprises has significantly bolstered Israel's technological and economic advancement.

In contrast, Armenia's experience with migration has been fraught with challenges. Migrants from Azerbaijan, Syria and now from Russia, seeking refuge in Armenia during critical periods, often departed for alternative destinations due

to limited economic opportunities. Armenia's ability to effectively absorb and integrate these migrants has been hampered by a combination of economic constraints and a lack of state-led policies to facilitate their successful integration.

To ensure successful integration, newcomers must be given opportunities to enhance their skills, contribute to the workforce, and engage with local communities. Providing a sense of belonging and inclusivity is also essential. By embracing newcomers and fostering a culture of acceptance, Armenia can create an environment where migrants feel valued and motivated to contribute. By tapping into the diverse skills and experiences that migrants bring, Armenia can leverage their contributions to boost innovation and productivity.

Armenia can enhance its capacity to attract, retain, and integrate migrants by adopting proven approaches from successful integration models. This can be achieved through targeted efforts that encompass education, employment, community support, and a sense of belonging. By capitalizing on the diverse talents of migrants, Armenia can foster a stronger and more prosperous future for the nation.

Building a robust and interconnected network marked by cooperation and collaboration holds the potential to magnify Armenia's endeavors on a global stage. Israel's success was born from the harmonious alignment of these factors, and Armenia stands at a juncture where it can seize the opportunity to cultivate a more vibrant, dynamic, and interconnected society by assimilating these invaluable lessons into its roadmap to prosperity.

Looking ahead, it's essential to recognize that the goal should not be to have all Armenians reside within the borders of Armenia. This approach reflects Israel's model, where a significant number of Jews live abroad while maintaining strong ties with their homeland. In Israel's case, over seven million Jews reside in the U.S., with millions more scattered across Europe, Latin America, and beyond. However, Israel's open-door policy ensures that those seeking opportunities can return to their homeland, contributing to a continuous flow of organized immigration.

Armenia has the potential to play a more proactive and impactful role in the broader region, utilizing its diaspora networks. One vital role that Armenia can assume is acting as an impartial mediator between Iran and Europe. Armenia's neutral stance and diplomatic credibility make it an ideal candidate for serving as a bridge for dialogue and negotiation, fostering understanding and collaboration in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Furthermore, facilitating trading corridors between Iran, Georgia, and Russia aligns with Armenia's geographical advantage and its potential to enhance regional connectivity. These corridors could stimulate economic growth and promote peaceful interaction among neighboring countries.

Armenia can contribute to regional stability, foster cooperation, and carve out a distinct niche for itself in international affairs by embracing these proactive roles. By positioning itself as a soft power for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond, Armenia can solidify its influence on the global stage. This proactive stance in complex geopolitics can elevate Armenia's role and status beyond its physical size, establishing it as a significant player in shaping a more stable and cooperative world order.

There are several lessons that Armenia can learn from Israel. First and foremost, how to turn geopolitical disadvantages into economic advantages. A nation's competitiveness can be greatly enhanced by fostering a culture of doubt and healthy argumentation, combined with assertiveness and informality. Israel's high concentration of innovation and entrepreneurship has created fertile grounds for the development of creative start-ups.

Remarkably, this spirit extended to their military, which became the most capable force in the region. The military also served as an incubator for high-tech start-ups and prepared future leaders for business. By studying and implementing these principles, Armenia can cultivate a dynamic society that embraces innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

Armenia's open access to the external world through its diaspora has made it an attractive destination also for non-Armenian talent as well, such as Russians and Ukrainians escaping the war. This sudden influx of talent has led to the interesting idea of positioning Armenia as a safe regional haven for talent, which may have

implications beyond the current conflict and offer a new economic niche for the country. It is important for Armenia to seize this opportunity and create an enabling environment that fosters businesses, and encourages innovation and entrepreneurship.

Additionally, it is crucial to address the challenges of integration and assimilation of incoming talent to ensure they can contribute to Armenia's development and feel at home in the country. The two waves of incoming talent (i.e. diaspora Armenians and non-Armenian) could complement each other, and both streams will benefit from the special relations the Armenia-diaspora channel offers for access to global knowledge, networks and capital.

The recent technological advancements raise the question of how to better interconnect the Global Armenian Nation technologically and make interactions more effective. Our efforts over the last two years with reArmenia (see the separate article on reArmenia in this report) offer a new tool for enhancing Armenian communities around local priorities, global thematic and professional topics, and business cooperation.

reArmenia provides an environment with a rich toolkit and a way to cooperate around ideas, projects. Here, project creators, supporters, funders, and implementers can find each other and achieve results that were not feasible for each of them separately. This is only the beginning, and rapid advancements with AI and related technologies surely will offer more.

Overall, it is important to stress that the 21st century can become our century if we mobilize our intellectual and other resources, build upon our roots, and embrace the best traits of our national character. By finding ways for all parts of the nation to contribute to our collective benefit, Armenia can become an influential and resilient nation in a challenging neighborhood.

To achieve this, we must focus on nurturing innovation, adopting a forward-thinking military approach, and fostering a culture of open discourse and collaboration. Our added value in the 21st century lies in innovation, networking, creativity, and bringing different worlds together.

Note: This report was recently published by EVN https://evnreport.com/opinion/armenians-as-a-spatial-and-digital-global-nation/?fbclid=IwAR2o_ITgnJI8W3H6AZHTKgqkAGbXe3fDcpmczj-Afm-9PWeMvnSFyyT6JGk

The Future of Armenian, the Language

Dr. Hasmig Seropian

Introductory

Armenian, the language, is at a critical juncture in its history. It can either become the victim of a self-fulfilling prophecy and die away or it can charge forward with a new life fueled by a vigorous online presence. This paper discusses the possibility of a giant first step for the second option.

The discussion below is in the context of creating a digital global Armenian community. The role of the language in this shared identity cannot be emphasized enough. Perhaps only just behind English, Armenian speakers can be found almost anywhere around the globe. What a powerful starting point that is, especially when the latest bells and whistles of high tech are applied to it!

What is imagined here is NOT one perfect standard of the language for everyone, no matter where they live and what other languages they speak. This dogmatic approach to the language viewed through a lens that is focused on its past is no longer viable. In fact, what is recommended here is to take advantage of the variety of countries and parallel languages spoken by Armenians to bring color and nuance to the digital presence of Armenian.

What needs to be emphasized more than anything is that the world in which a language, any language, is spoken or written has changed. Some of what will be observed is not unique to Armenian. French and German use as many loan words from English as Armenian does. There are many, many spelling errors in the English messages of social media as there are in Armenian messages. This is a fact that should be the starting point of the effort outlined below.

A Plan for the Future

What is then the way forward in creating a lively global existence for Armenian?
What does Armenian need to be alive and well online?

First and foremost, Armenian needs a centralized and coordinated effort to bring the various splintered projects currently in existence into one place. This place

clearly has to be online with a well-designed website that is a depository of links to all websites and Facebook pages that focus on some aspect of the language and attempt to promote its perpetuation. It would also include a list of all Armenian schools outside Armenia and of all universities/colleges that have Armenian language classes.

Perhaps most importantly in the design and execution of this website, a group of linguists, language teachers, and computer scientists has to be assembled to evaluate what already exists and to identify what needs to be developed for the future. While the details and the needs will be identified by this group, there are four goals that have to be uppermost in this effort.

- A. Use every relevant high-tech device to promote the successful learning of the language by future generations.
- B. Find every motivating social media device to encourage and reward the speaking and the writing efforts made by anyone who knows some Armenian.
- C. Develop well-researched and objectively written answers to questions people (Armenians or not) ask about Armenian.
- D. State emphatically, wherever possible, that spelling errors and the use of words borrowed from another language are normal and should not become a hindrance to writing and speaking the language!

Finally, while the above focuses on the language, it should also be noted that language and culture are inseparable! Thus, through the language projects outlined above, this proposed website will also be keeping alive the most essential elements of a unique culture expressed in the language. Examples of these are:

- Literature (prose and poetry)
- Songs
- Folk tales and legends
- Prayers and hymns

- And anything else that is language-based

Often, a single song or prayer can be the motivating factor to learn the details of the language that created it.

Which Armenian?

This is often asked in discussions of the present state of the language. The question should be: Is this even worth asking?

If one observes realistically and objectively, as a linguist would, the signs that the two standards are merging are not hard to find. No amount of insistence on “pure” forms of each standard will prevent this merger from moving forward. The speaker of either standard of Armenian should be cognizant of the other standard and have some passive knowledge of it.

The question is: Should this new emerging version of the language be left to its users to proceed with the changes haphazardly and for their own convenience? Or, should there be a well-considered guide to establish the features of the newly emerging standard?

The same group of linguists, language teachers, and computer experts mentioned above could take the lead in this effort also.

What is the Diaspora Thinking?

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The Armenian diaspora is multifaceted, complex and geographically spread around the world. Yet, the main subject around which virtually all themes in diasporic life orbit is “Armenian identity.” Unlike few decades ago, in contemporary times Armenian identity is largely self-defined, fluid and personalized. Armenians living in the same country or in the same state or city could have different perceptions and understanding of “Armenianness”, depending on multiple variables, such as family upbringing, community, personal preferences, so on.

Views and opinions on identity and related major themes, such as language, culture, community, and homeland, were studied as part of the Armenian Diaspora Survey (ADS) in 2022, which was held in the United States and Ontario, the second largest province in Canada. The fieldwork took place between May - July in both countries. This is the third in the three-rounds research project, initiated and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The previous rounds were successfully completed in 2019 (Argentina, Lebanon, Montreal, Romania) and in 2021 (Belgium, Paris, United Kingdom and Rostov on Don).

Highlights of the opinions in the 2022 study:

Armenian Identity

Nearly six in ten (58%) in the US and nearly half (49%) in Ontario think of themselves as hyphenated Armenians—for example, Armenian-American, Canadian-Armenian, American of Armenian origin, half or partly Armenian (Q1). Fewer respondents in the US (40%), but nearly as many in Canada (48%) think of themselves simply as “Armenian.” When asked in what ways do they define their Armenian identity (Q2), the three top responses are Family (US 84%, Ontario

81%), Armenian language (US 65%, Ontario 80%) and Armenian culture (dance, music, literature, etc.) (US 66%, Ontario 63%). These three were also the top responses in the communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021. Another defining element is “Pride in Armenian History” (US 57%, Ontario 52%). Interestingly, the younger generation is more proud of Armenian history, nearly seven in ten of the 18-24 years old (US 69%, Ontario 68%). Other elements noted—in order of preference—are “Armenian food” (US 60%, Ontario 49%), “The Genocide” (US 53%, Ontario 54%), “Being active in the Armenian community” (US 47%, Ontario 49%), and “Christian heritage” (US 43%, Ontario 47%).

Armenian Language Fluency

More than half (52%) in the US and nearly three quarters (72%) in Ontario assess their fluency in the Armenian language as “Fluent” (Q6). Nearly two in ten say their Armenian is “Intermediate” level (US 17%, Ontario 16%), while about one in ten (US 11%, Ontario 7%) has a “basic” knowledge of the language. Given that a large portion of the respondents in the Western part of the US are first generation immigrants, the number of those who consider themselves fluent speakers of Armenian is higher—six in ten (60%). Compared with the US, in Ontario a higher percent of fluent speakers are among the 35-54 and 55+ years old (69% and 77% respectively), while the percentage for the youngest generation of 18-24 years old in both communities is lower—in Ontario (60%) and lowest in the US (40%).

Community Challenges

In response to a multiple-choice question (Q8), “Lack of strong, visionary leadership in the Armenian community” is the top “challenge to the strength of the community” for nearly half of the respondents (US 46%, Ontario 43%). This is closely followed by the challenge of a “Divided or disunited community” (US 46%, Ontario 43%). Interestingly, higher percent of the younger generations indicated that divisions or disunity in the community is a top challenge to the strength of the community—18-24 (48%) and 25-34 (50%) years old. Other challenges among the top responses are: “Lack of events that interest young people” (US 37%, Ontario 39%) and “Lack of interesting/engaging Armenian community activities” (US 36% and Ontario 33%). These “challenges” were also common among the respondents of the communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021.

Activities Needed in the Communities

When asked “Which activities are needed in your local Armenian community?” (Q9), nearly six in ten (56%) in the US and nearly half in Ontario (47%) say “Lectures and activities on Armenian history, language, art, music, cooking, dance, etc.” This need is highest in the US South region (65%), where smaller Armenian communities are sparsely spread. Almost half in Ontario (47%) and 44% in US wish to see “Professional networks” in their community. Not surprisingly, such networks are more in demand for the 25-34 years old in both Ontario (62%) and the US (52%).

Demand for children’s activities and schools are also on top of the list. About four in ten wish to see “Children’s cultural activities, summer camps, scouts” (US 42%, Ontario 40%), “Armenian schools” (US 39%, Ontario 42%) and “Library, museums, other similar institutions” (US 38%, Ontario 31%). In the US South, the need for schools is indicated by nearly half (47%) of the respondents.

In follow-up questions about schools, a large majority of the respondents were positively disposed. When ask if they would send their children to an Armenian day school (Q14), six in ten say “Probably yes” (US total 57%, US West 62%, Ontario 65%). Only one in ten say “Probably no” (US 10%, Ontario 6%). A higher number of Armenians in the US South, about a quarter (24%), say they would probably not send their children to an Armenian school. Interestingly, more than a quarter of the 25-34 years old in the US (26%) are undecided. There is high interest in “after-school/weekend Armenian classes/programs” (Q16). About seven in ten say “Probably yes”, they would send their children to afterschool or weekend Armenian classes or programs in the US (68%)—a higher percent in the US South (75%). In Ontario—even as slightly fewer respondents (63%) than in the US said “Probably yes”—the interest for afterschool/weekend activities is highest among the 25-34 years old respondents, nearly nine in ten (89%).

Community and Political Engagement

The majority of the respondents in the US (72%) and Ontario (65%) are not “actively involved with any Armenian political parties or movements (including affiliated lobby organizations)” (Q10). However, this does not mean they are not politically active. About two in ten (16%) in the US and one in ten (10%) in Ontario

say they are “involved politically in Armenian affairs but outside of established parties/movements.” Involvement with the three Diaspora political parties combined is one in ten (12%) in the US and nearly a quarter (24%) of the respondents in Ontario.

There is high turnout for national elections: eight in ten in the US voted in the 2020 Presidential elections and seven in ten in Ontario voted in the 2021 Federal Elections.

Political views seem to be spread more or less evenly around prevalent political views in their respective countries and regions. In the background of the political party systems in the US and Canada, a quarter (26%) of the respondents in the US and one-third in Ontario (34%) say their political views are “Conservative”. In the US Midwest and the South, a slightly higher number of respondents say they are “Conservative” in their political views (29% and 28% respectively). About a fifth of the respondents say “Liberal” (US 21%, Ontario 22%), but a quarter in the US (24%) and nearly a fifth (16%) in Ontario say their political views are a “Mixture”. The least popular are “Progressive” views (US 17%, Ontario 8%). Interestingly, about a sixth (16%) of the respondents in Ontario did not wish to answer this question.

However, with some exceptions, the study suggests that Armenians in the US and Ontario tend to be open-minded about wider societal issues. For instance, a question (Q25) in the survey is related to views on LGBTQI. The large majority of the respondents in the US (73%) and Ontario (65%) say, “Yes, one can be LGBTQI and be a part of an Armenian community.” A higher percent (84%) of the 25-34 years old in the US were in the affirmative. About two in ten (US 16%, Ontario 21%) of the respondents said they do not have an opinion on the issue or “Don’t know”. Only about one in ten (US 11%, Ontario 14%) said, “No, one cannot be LGBTQI and be a part of Armenian community”.

Church and Religion

When asked about faith, religion and church, six in ten in the US (63%) and seven in ten in Ontario (70%) said “I believe in God” (Q19). A higher percent of the 55+ years old (70%)—as well as respondents in the US Midwest (72%) and the US South (71%)—say they believe in God, but only about half (51%) of the 25-34

years old. A smaller percent of respondents say they “believe in a spiritual force” (US 15%, Ontario 13%), while about one in ten say “Agnostic” (US 10%, Ontario 8%) and closely behind “Atheist” (US 8%, Ontario 6%). Interestingly, the distribution of responses (although not exact percentages) is close to that in the communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021.

When it comes to church affiliation (Q18), out of ten Armenians, eight are Armenian Apostolic (US 78%, Ontario 83%), one is Armenian Catholic (US 4%, Ontario 14%) or Armenian Protestant (US 12%, Ontario 10%) and one is affiliated with other non-Armenian churches or faiths. When it comes to “communication” with priests or ministers (Q22), more than half say it is primarily for “Church services and rituals (baptism, wedding, funerals)” (US 52%, Ontario 58%). Predictably, the 18-24 years old have the least “communication” with the clergy (29%), while 55+ years old has the most (62%). Less than two in ten communicate with the clergy for “Personal spiritual matters” (US 17%, Ontario 14) or “Family matters” (US 17%, Ontario 13%).

Views on ordination of women (Q20) is split: about a third of the respondents say “Women should have an opportunity to become Deacons” (US 30%, Ontario 31%), slightly fewer say “Women should have an opportunity to be ordained priests/ministers (US 26%, Ontario 22%). Interestingly, about another third of the respondents “Do not have an opinion on the matter” (US 31%, Ontario 34%). Only about one in ten say “No, women should not be ordained in Armenian churches” (US 13%, Ontario 13%).

Christianity in general is considered an important aspect of Armenian identity, however, half (50%) of the respondents in the US and a third (35%) in Ontario say “An Armenian can be of any faith or religion” (Q21), a higher percent of the younger generations in the US think so—18-24 years old (59%) and 25-34 (60%) years old. Fewer respondents in the US (20%) and Ontario (30%) say “An Armenian can only be Christian”. About a fifth of the respondents (US 22%, Ontario 22%) think “Religion is not important to being Armenian”—a higher percent (28%) of the 25-34 years old in the US.

Homeland, Armenia, Artsakh

In an open-ended question, when asked to share the geographic location that they consider part of their identity as an Armenian (Q4), about four in ten say “Republic of Armenia/Yerevan” (US 43%, Ontario 42%), while the figures for “Artsakh” is 6% in US and 7% in Ontario. In the 2021 survey, the responses in the communities in Western Europe were higher, nearly six in ten said “Armenia/Yerevan” (58%), “Artsakh” 10% and “Ararat” 8%.

When asked, in a multiple-choice question, to select what they consider their “homeland” (Q26), more than half in the US (52%) and four in ten in Ontario (40%) say “homeland” is the country where I was born.” However, nearly six in ten respondents in the US Northeast (59%), Midwest (58%), and the South (58%)—as well as the younger generations in Ontario, 18-24 (49%) and 25-34 (46%) years old—consider their “country of birth” as homeland. Similar proportions of 47% in the US and 56% in Ontario consider the “Republic of Armenia or Artsakh” their “homeland”. Other choices for “homeland” are “My ancestors’ place of birth” (US 42%, Ontario 33%) and “the country where I live now” (US 31%, Ontario 36%).

About seven in ten (US 68%, Ontario 76%) have visited Armenia once or more times (Q27) and more than half (US 52%, Ontario 54%) “have plans and intend to visit the Republic of Armenia within the next two years” (Q28). However, when asked whether they have “considered living permanently in the Republic of Armenia or Artsakh” (Q29), the majority of the respondents say, “No, I would not want to live there” (US 66%, Ontario 62%). Only about a third of the respondents say “yes”, they have plans or hope to move there one day (US 28%, Ontario 31%).

Diaspora Support to Armenia

Regarding Diaspora assistance to the Republic of Armenia, when asked in which “areas should diaspora communities support in Armenia” (Q30), the large majority of the respondents indicate “Economic development and job creation” as top priority (US 83%, Ontario 82%). This is followed by “Education” (79%, 66%), “Infrastructure” (69%, 65%), “Healthcare (67%, 65%), “Human rights, democracy building” (67%, 67%), and “Security” (66%, 61%). Here again, these choices are

close to the views of the responses in the communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021.

In response to a multiple-choice question about the kind of active connections they currently have in the Republic of Armenia or Artsakh (Q31), the top five responses are: “Donating” (US 58%, Ontario 53%), “Family” (49%, 44%), “Friends, social life” (47%, 47%), “Spiritual connection” (32%, 29%), and “Volunteering” (21%, 16%).

Key takeaways

- As in the previous communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021, the majority of Armenians in Ontario and the United States identify themselves as hyphenated Armenians—for instance, Armenian-American, Canadian-Armenian, American of Armenian origin, half or partly Armenian. The three most significant defining aspects of Armenian identity are the family, Armenian language, and Armenian culture.
- Personal belief, Christianity and church are important for being Armenian, however, there is a wider range of views on religion and religiosity. Christianity and the Armenian Church are generally valued for being part of the Armenian “cultural” —rather than purely religious—institutions. Indeed, for half of the respondents in the US, an Armenian can be of any faith or religion, and two in ten are either atheist or agnostic, or do not have opinion about religion.
- A considerable segment of Armenians in the US (about half of the respondents) and Ontario (three-quarters) consider themselves “fluent” speakers of the Armenian language, and about two in ten are intermediate level speakers. However, as expected, the younger generations are less fluent than their parents and grandparents.
- Armenian culture (food, dance, music, literature, etc.) is considered a significant part of being Armenian and is vital in community life. High-quality Armenian education and cultural activities are in demand in the US and Ontario—as they are in the other communities surveyed in 2019 and 2021.

- When it comes to the challenges for the vitality of the local community, the lack of visionary leadership is considered one of the major issues in both the US and Ontario—as well as in all other communities surveyed so far. Generally, more interesting cultural and educational activities (such as schools or after school activities) are in demand in the communities.
- As in the communities surveyed in previous rounds, the Republic of Armenia is not uniformly perceived as the “homeland”, but there is a wide range of perceptions as to what the “homeland” is. The responses are more or less evenly split between those who consider their “place of birth” and those who consider the Republic of Armenia as homeland. The data suggests that those who say homeland is their place of birth (among other options) is not limited to respondents who were born in the Republic of Armenia. The views on the concept of “homeland” seem to reflect the hyphenated self-perception of diasporans, as illustrated in the question on identity. The homeland is not only the land where ancestors lived or where grandparents were forced to flee, or the Republic of Armenia today, but equally important is the land where one was born and developed as a person. Nevertheless, Armenia is considered an important point of reference for the diasporans. A large portion (seven in ten) of the survey respondents in the US and even more in Ontario (eight in ten) have already visited Armenia. An equally large number intends to visit Armenia in the near future. However, there is less interest in moving to the Republic of Armenia permanently—nearly seven in ten in the US and six in ten in Ontario do not wish to live there permanently.

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HyeConnect as a Digital Diaspora

Ms. Roza Chibukhchyan

The digital world has transformed the methods, modes, and time rates at which communication occurs. This has been particularly vital for displaced-from-the-homeland communities, namely diasporas. The digitalization of intra-national communication between peoples with large diasporic communities has acquired a new look. With the right video and audio communication tools, many in the diaspora maintain a connection with their loved ones in the homeland. By partaking in this Internet culture, they form an instance of national connection, which, when scaled, produces an active exchange of information between the homeland and the diaspora. This new pocket of connection has the potential to become something much more significant that will facilitate discourse-sharing on a level beyond familial, that tunes into networked collaboration for national benefit.

Armenia's international standing and image are assessed also by the engagement of the diaspora in our national economy. In order to step into one's national potential and confidently exercise agency, mobilized and operative communities need to be at work. "In a networked world, power flows from the ability to make the maximum number of valuable connections," says Aikin, CEO of the Dublin Networking University. (2011) Subsequently, without an efficient network with relevant connections, this potential power is not exercised. If networks come to be due to active interconnectedness around specific topics, then providing a digital space where a nation, despite the locational proximity of its people, can continuously replicate these pockets of connection will result in what is called a digital diaspora.

There is no clear-cut definition of what a digital diaspora constitutes; some think of it as these sporadic connections people make with their homelands using digital media, and others think of it as purely national topics discussed in forums. These are surely encompassed in a digital diaspora; however, the consensus around its constant attributes is apparent; a digital diaspora should be internet-based, network-oriented, and operated by the members of a nation. (Candidatu et al. 2022) It is loosely defined as cyberspace, where people from the same heritage connect. However, connection alone does not bring national prosperity;

this requires proactivity and collaboration. Hence, for a digital diaspora to successfully benefit the nation, three main elements would be required: a digital space, people of the same heritage, so, connections, and collaboration tools in order to be proactive. And this is exactly the concept of HyeConnect. HyeConnect is meant to be not only a social network that connects but a professional environment where Armenians from all over the world can work together toward Armenia-centric initiatives.

When it comes to the Armenian diaspora, one of the largest and most historically prominent diasporas of the world, despite its long-standing merchant tradition and affluent image, in recent years, has been mostly defined in terms of loss and grief. However, the little research conducted, which studies the collective Armenian diaspora not only from the lens of the Armenian Genocide but to highlight the current attitudes of individuals in the diaspora, proposes a different idea about the reality of intra-diaspora and diaspora-homeland triangular relations. Namely, the 2015-2018 Armenian Diaspora Survey Online by Dr. Aleksandr Gevorkyan concludes that Armenians living abroad are concerned with their connectedness with the homeland on an individual level. (2019) The survey also reveals that many diasporans are willing to support the homeland not through monetary means but by providing their services, knowledge, expertise, connections, and so on. The survey report suggests a technological solution in the face of a diaspora portal on which Armenians will connect in interest-based communities. (Gevorkyan, 2019)

The concept of HyeConnect emerged when experts in their respective fields and devout Armenians Eric Esrailian, Serj Tankian, Alexis Ohanian, and Yervant Zorian gathered to actualize a platform that would connect all Armenians in one professional environment. Eric Esrailian stated, "Wouldn't it be amazing for people to know what the left hand and the right hand are doing across the world and in the Republic of Armenia as well?" Some renowned Armenians subscribe to the idea that their Armenianness has had a significant impact on their success, referring to themselves in similar analogies, such as the left and right hand of one body or branches of one tree, considering their Armenia-centric work as "watering the root of the tree."

As prominent Armenians of the Diaspora, the founders of HyeConnect, who are also its Board members, highly valued creating this trusted environment, where

other such diasporans can confidently appear on the platform and share their initiatives in a trustful manner. Armenians abroad are mistrustful when it comes to governments, corporations, or other centralized organizations related to Homeland-Diaspora affairs. (Gevorkyan, 2019) HyeConnect amends this mistrust by providing a decentralized platform that puts no intermediary between the initiators of the project and the audience they select, the supporters or participants, however, the tools enable each initiator to assign managers, moderators, and facilitators for running the project. Reflecting the founders' priority of trust, the platform allows for multiple levels of privacy control; public, private, and joined with request. The privacy factor is so elevated that private activities are not even searchable and do not appear in search results. Current HyeConnect users are from different parts of the world, from Chile to France, from the US to Australia. Some of the prominent communities established in HyeConnect are the Armenian Society of Fellows, the Armenian Jewelers Association, Teach for Armenia and so on. The platform operates in five languages: Western and Eastern Armenian, Russian, English, and French, some of the widely spoken languages within the Armenian Diaspora. Reiterating the value of transparency and traceability while in a pre-launch stage, HyeConnect remains invitation-based, where the administrators of the platform can observe the email chain of invitations and facilitate a trustworthy environment.

As a digital diaspora, it is essential to have a network-based community approach to this digital space, as the digital communities will replicate the real ones and optimize their workflow and communication. On the HyeConnect platform HyeCommunities are defined for people with similar interests, professions, and skills who want to collaborate, run their operations, and share discussions, projects, events, or surveys. Within the platform's ecosystem, these activities are referred to as HyeActivities; HyeProject, HyeDiscussion, HyeEvent, and HyeSurvey. These are the smallest units of HyeConnect and include a myriad of tool-specific features that any type of digitized operation may need. They can run independently, within a specific community on the platform, or in a HyeSociety, which within the platform is the largest organizational unit, where numerous related HyeCommunities are combined. This hierarchical structure of HyeConnect ensures that each activity is managed in an efficient manner and makes finding people and activities more convenient through search filters. The search filters on HyeConnect draw from the information the user inputs on their profile about their

occupation, professional fields, interests, hobbies, education, etc., and provide matchmaking for efficiently finding relevant people and activities. The platform enables users to communicate via chat and within the timeline of the activity and promotes professional endeavors by automatically connecting those participants within the same activities. Each of HyeConnect's HyeActivities encompasses numerous intricate features, such as milestone setting, converting a HyeDiscussion to a HyeProject, which inherits the whole content, including participants, imputing subevents in HyeEvent for creating an agenda, allowing for seven types of question formats for HyeSurvey and much more.

While in its initial phase, HyeConnect is heavily reliant on the feedback of our highly valued first members and communities. We are in continuous communication with them and even publicize noteworthy activities newly created on the platform by individuals. Currently, HyeConnect is in its repackaging stage. With an evolved concept and sophisticated tools, the presentation of the platform and its usability remains crucial. Prior to holding a public launch, thorough user and market research has been conducted in order to improve the usability of the platform and give it a final user-friendly look to reach bigger audiences.

HyeConnect remains invitation-based to maintain trust, ensure traceability and encourage initial quality content creation. As HyeConnect is not solely a social network, but a professional platform, enriching it with meaningful activities in its pre-launch stage is of high importance. This means that in order to join the platform an invitation link needs to be sent to the recipient's email from someone already within the platform. We encourage interested individuals to email a short introduction about themselves to info@hyeconnect.org to receive an invitation.

HyeConnect was created to be the Armenian digital diaspora that would leverage all Armenian genius and talent from around the world and concentrate it into one productive space where networked communities proactively operate their activities and reach tangible results. Holding Armenia-centeredness as a core value, HyeConnect aims to be the digital space that facilitates such initiatives and acts as the digital home of Armenians and their communities. HyeConnect was created to be the Armenian nation online.

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What if the Armenian Diaspora was a travel destination?

Mr. Rouben Koulaksezian

In our globalized world, new generations of Armenians who grew up in Los Angeles, São Paulo, Montreal, Lyon, Buenos Aires or Beirut can get in touch, get to know each other, meet each other, more than ever before.

These encounters can happen at any time of our life, in any country of the world. During a vacation or a business trip, we might notice an Armenian theater in Buenos Aires, an Armenian restaurant in Dubai, an Armenian grocery store in Marseille or an Armenian church in New York. We want to learn more. Who are the people here? What's their story?

I asked myself these questions many times during my early travels. I therefore embarked on a mission to get to know these communities dotted across all corners of the world. After visiting a hundred countries and collecting information from thousands of locals, I decided to publish a travel guide dedicated to the Armenian Diaspora. I'm also very active on social media, and 40,000 Armenians are following my daily videos about the diaspora on Instagram.

By traveling and exchanging, I was able to see the diversity of this diaspora, as well as, often, the lack of knowledge in each community, about the others, especially when the distance is important.

Very early on, the Armenian nation found itself in a diasporic situation, with the first communities forming in Cyprus, Greece or Italy during the Byzantine era, and later in Eastern Europe, Iran, Asia, the Russian Empire, before the great migrations that followed the extermination of the Ottoman Armenians. The Armenian nation today is more global than ever, but also more connected than ever. With new technologies, it is possible to say that an Armenian from Australia today is potentially more connected with an Armenian from Greece than an Armenian from Ani was with an Armenian from Constantinople a millennium ago.

These intensifying connections are already materializing, with partnerships between schools, such as school trips between AGBU schools in Los Angeles and Buenos Aires, or with sports competitions, such as the Navasartian Games, or even competitions in Armenia such as the Pan-Homenetmen Games or the

Pan-Armenian Games, not to mention all the individual initiatives, all these messages on Armenian Facebook groups “Hello, I am visiting your city and I need some advice. ”. I experienced this myself recently in Atlanta. I had a 15 hour layover at the airport and wrote a post on the Atlanta Armenians Facebook group. They invited me to share a khorovats in their cultural center, an unforgettable experience!

In a global nation, the more contacts there are, the more the survival of the nation is guaranteed. It is likely, especially in medium or small communities, that a young girl or a young man will not find the right fit when the time of the wedding arrives. However, a young Armenian from Rostov could perhaps find happiness in Buenos Aires or Barcelona, and a young Armenian from Boston, find happiness in Beirut or Paris. Many marriages are celebrated thanks to these connections that already exist, through the organizations of the diaspora, or more simply at a summer meeting in a café in Yerevan.

In Europe, the Erasmus program allows students to spend a semester in another country on the continent. Most likely, several hundred European students of Armenian origin are taking part and settling down for six months in a city they do not know. This is rarely the case, but contacting the local Armenian community should be their first step! To find accommodation, study the local language or simply get to know the city, it is always a good thing to have compatriots on site.

From my travels in these tens, perhaps hundreds of Armenian communities, I can say that I almost always had a great time, and above all, that there is real trust, a real bond that exists between Armenians who do not know each other. This awareness of sharing a common past and future drives us to benevolence and mutual aid. The development of tools for all outings in order to allow the development of these encounters is fundamental.

Little Armenias is an invitation to travel, an encouragement to seek out all of these “Little Armenias”. It’s a tool that allows us to realize the potential of our diaspora and to take advantage of its richness. Because today Armenians from all over the world are more connected with each other than at any other point in our history. Let’s look out for each other, learn from each other, and build upon a global diaspora!

Diasporic Strategies: Statelessness in Action

Dr. Khachig Tölölyan

I am not an expert on the digital, but on diasporas. As such, I have read half a dozen books and numerous articles on digital diasporas, a concept that is not new and has been explored for at least two decades. Even before that, the pioneering work of USC's Asbed Bedrossian resulted in the emergence in 1988 of Armenian News Network/Groong, which functioned as a digital medium for the dissemination of news about Armenian life around the world and led to the creation of an argumentative debate-space around it, long before social media.

Bedrossian's early digital space was driven by a vision that did not yet have available to it the full range of technologies that now make possible a new Armenian cybersphere in which social media and more broadly digital media have coalesced. Online analyses of "digital media" encompass videos, articles, music, podcasts, audiobooks, virtual reality and digital art, social media, and even advertisements and Zoom. This abundance leads to a conceptual and analytical chaos that I will try to avoid.

The remarkable Armenian-American journalist and media analyst Ben Bagdikian foresaw such confusion in 1989, when he wrote in his memorable article, "Lords of the Global Village," that "a more fragmented and unbundled social media landscape will arise in the years ahead." That was fifteen years before Facebook emerged, and eight years before AOL's Instant Messenger of 1997 appeared – an event to which many media scholars mistakenly trace the origin of the concept of "social media."

In other words, diaspora Armenians were digital pioneers who envisaged the possibility, the promise, and some of the problems of social media. They were still trying as late as 2019, when the multilingual INALCO international colloquium, "Digital Armenian," was held in Paris and was another attempt to focus on the issues that concern me here today. Non-Armenian diaspora scholarship has been slower and more expansive. Here the key date is 2009, when J. M. Brinkerhoff's *Digital diasporas: identity and transnational engagement* (Cambridge University Press) and A. Everett's *Digital diaspora: a race for cyberspace* (SUNY Press) appeared, quickly followed in 2010 by the eighteen essays collected in A. Alonso

and P. Oiarzabal's *Diasporas in the new media age* (U. Nevada Press). These volumes emerged out of and helped to anchor the proliferation of scholarly articles too numerous to mention here, except for key studies such as Ong's on the transnational Chinese cyber diaspora, Oiarzabal's work on the Basques, Tekwani's on Tamils, Axel's on Afghans, Bernal's on Eritreans, Parham's on Haitians, and many more. The issue for us now is whether useful insights can be distilled out of the mass of accelerated scholarly production on digital diasporas.

On one issue there is consensus: the digital space increases connection – between individuals, as well as between individuals and organizations, some of which are constituted digitally while others emerged offline in the past, but now find it indispensable to maintain an online presence. Many older, pre-digital Armenian diaspora organizations (and for that matter, some institutions of the Armenian government), maintain and cultivate a digital presence – but one that is carefully constrained, listing announcements and events, offering photo galleries and the like, while carefully avoiding open digital spaces in which rank and file members of these organizations might debate behavior or policy. Digital “democracy” is not usually welcomed, either in the Armenian diaspora or many others. This means that “connection” is limited to what links followers to an organization, not to each other. Digital audiences are not equal to, or synonymous with, digital community. Massive digital audiences are found on social media, be it Facebook or “boards/image-boards” like 4chan. In such digital spaces, conversation, debate, argument (including very ugly argument) happens, and connections are made between individuals who constitute groups.

Armenian diaspora leaders, especially those who do not emerge from traditional, legacy organizations, celebrate connection in ways that often appear naïve. They repeatedly speak in celebratory tones, seemingly assuming that digital connection will lead automatically or inevitably to cohesion and commitment. But there is nothing automatic about these processes. Armenians who connect on social media spend much of their time disagreeing with each other, displaying ignorance and sometimes disgusting prejudices. In this, we are of course no different from others. To come together and be connected digitally underscores and even accentuates division; debate turns into insult and reinvigorated distrust.

Similarly, the intensity of connection and debate does not always lead to shared commitment. This does not mean that no good results emerge from connection. It

may lead, for example, to a Go Fund Me type of pooled money and financial assistance to a struggling artist, a wounded veteran, or a village project in Armenia (significantly and regrettably, stricken diaspora Armenians in Aleppo and Beirut are far less often recipients of fellow diasporans' assistance, though their need is equally great). The point here is that an urgent desire for connection (either through or outside traditional Armenian organizations) has been manifested for decades by many diasporan Armenians, even before the promise of the digital could be realized. Anthropologist Susan Pattie inaugurated useful scholarship on this matter in 1999. But we must avoid "cyber-utopianism," the conviction that digital connection inevitably or automatically leads to cooperation and commitment. It may, but it does not reliably or predictably do so. Like all communication, digital connection may just as easily elicit anger, resistance, and fragmentation. It regularly does. That is no reason to avoid communication and connection, but it does call for skepticism, caution and a refusal to believe in automatic digital solutions. For too many people, the digital is a space of posturing where their commitment begins and ends. In 2010, the Indonesian journalist Ika Krismantari wrote about this phenomenon in her country's context: [Today], "being a patriot is something you can do with only a few clicks. Thanks to the Internet and social networking sites, people no longer need to wage war or be involved in patriotic organizations [in order] to be called nationalists. All [they] have to do is sit in front of a computer and post comments to their Facebook or Twitter accounts."

I would underscore again that digital connection is immensely valuable if and only if it is seen as what it is: a first step. It does not forestall or preclude the need for organization that builds on connection, and, above all, it cannot dispense with the need for leadership, which is even harder to accomplish online than in political life. Social media does produce influencers, of course, but the jury is out on whether the latter are the raw material, the first stage of leadership. What the digital sphere does enable is communication, the articulation of passions, interests and desires; individual and institutional leadership is still needed to transform this into engagement and commitment, in order to concentrate the dispersed energies of individuals into focused energy and power. And so far, while false digital leaders have fleeced people of their money and led them into digitally engendered hysteria, there has been little reliable evidence that leadership and sustainable collective action can emerge from the digital alone. Nikol Pashinyan

engendered a frenzy of emotion and digital connection on Armenia's Facebook that he was able to transmute into a force that led to Serge Sargsyan's resignation. But his very ardent digital following did not and could not prevent his subsequent failures. He may yet emerge as a chastened and wiser leader. Until he does and others do, digital connection will be potential, not kinetic energy in our diasporic life and homeland politics.

reArmenia Collaboration Platform

National Unity Through Tech

Mr. Gevorg Poghosyan

The Story

In the aftermath of the 44-day war in 2020, Armenia faced one of the most challenging periods in its history. The war reemphasized the undeniable necessity for Armenians to unite.

A hypothesis was put forward that unity can be attained using modern technologies.

The experiments began. Dozens of committed Armenians from various fields and countries came together and launched our collaboration platform, reArmenia, using these technologies.

The hypothesis was proven. In the first year alone, more than 10,000 Armenians joined forces, raising over 1 million dollars, and achieving success in nearly 40 projects.

Every significant project can only come to fruition through the effective collaboration of individuals and entities. reArmenia is diligently working to develop robust collaboration frameworks and a comprehensive toolset.

It seems like after many attempts by Armenians, we finally have a viable tool for our unification.

Foundation

The "reArmenia" Foundation was established in Yerevan, Armenia, in April 2021. The foundation is overseen by a board of five trustees, a CEO, three executives, and a core team comprising nine professionals primarily from Armenia. Following six months of intensive development, the reArmenia.com platform was successfully launched in October 2021. Also, the "reArmenia" non-profit organization is registered in the United States with 501(c)(3) status, greatly

simplifying the process of making donations for the Armenian diaspora in the U.S.

reArmenia's mission is to empower and unite Armenians to become a caring and collaborative community dedicated to transforming Armenia into a just and flourishing nation.

Mission

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Collaboration On The Platform

Projects aimed at addressing the challenges of Armenia and Armenians are showcased on the reArmenia platform, where they receive the necessary support from across the globe, primarily from the Armenian communities.

When we refer to resources, we mean knowledge, experience, networks, funds, and tangibles.

Actually, the project initiators/creators run fundraising and collaboration campaigns on the platform, involving other community members to join forces and collectively tackle these challenges.

Trust & Safety

Before a project is showcased on the platform, it undergoes a rigorous vetting process by reArmenia's Trust and Safety department. This department performs a thorough due diligence procedure, comprehensively assessing each project's legal and financial aspects. Following this, field experts evaluate the project against three key criteria: the problem, the solution, and the team. They assess if the problem exists, if the proposed solution is suitable, and if the team is capable of implementing it.

Only after thorough due diligence is a project added to the platform. This rigorous process gives peace of mind to supporters on the platform, assuring them that their contributions to projects on reArmenia are both safe and well-placed.

Advisory Boards

reArmenia takes great pride in its distinguished advisory team. We maintain advisory boards across 14 diverse fields, comprising advisors and experts who go above and beyond their duties. They not only conduct thorough due diligence on projects but also actively assist project creators in enhancing their initiatives, refining their campaigns, and even supporting project implementation.

In addition to these specialized advisory boards, reArmenia boasts a strategic advisory board. This board plays a pivotal role in platform development, community building, engagement with diaspora communities worldwide, organizing communication campaigns, and much more.

The remarkable efficiency and impact of these advisory boards serve as further evidence of the effectiveness of collaboration within Armenian communities.

Tech & PaaS

The technology behind reArmenia is developed in-house by a highly dedicated and talented team of young, enthusiastic engineers. Having exceptional advisors who are leading authorities in their respective fields, along with the CEO of reArmenia having over 20 years of experience in the tech business, provides a significant advantage to the product team.

Despite being only in its second year of operation, reArmenia's technology is already in use as a white-label solution for other platforms, including equity crowdfunding platforms and various collaboration platforms. In fact, reArmenia has ventured into selling its technology through a monthly licensing model, offering it as a Platform as a Service (PaaS).

The Future Of The reArmenia

reArmenia, as a tech solution aimed at nurturing the community, and in the future will be governed by the community itself. We are soon launching reArmenia NFTs, featuring Armenian contemporary artworks created by various artists. These NFTs will be allocated to community members based on their contributions and impact within the community. Over time, active members will accumulate a significant collection of reArmenia NFTs, actually, a collection of digital artworks from

Armenian contemporary artists. The size and the uniqueness of their collection will determine their weight within the community, granting access to exclusive events, databases, newsletters, and more.

As reArmenia evolves into a community-managed decentralized autonomous organization (DAO) in the future, these collections will also grant members voting rights, further empowering them in shaping the direction of the community.

The most rare NFTs can later be traded, and artists will receive royalties from every transaction involving their artwork.

The First Step to Engage With Armenia

In 2023, the Expert Community tool was launched on the reArmenia platform. Now, every initiator or project creator can browse a list of Experts from around the world and connect with them to get support in terms of knowledge and experience. This has proven to be an extremely effective way to facilitate collaboration, with 50 collaborations occurring in the first quarter of 2023 alone, compared to only 30 in the entire year of 2022.

Joining the Expert Community is the ideal first step for Armenians in the diaspora to engage with Armenia. Becoming an Expert requires minimal effort, and eases the process of supporting projects in Armenia. A diaspora Expert simply provides their name, area of expertise, the project category they wish to support, their weekly availability, and their expert card becomes accessible on the platform, complete with a “Connect” button.

This enables them to remain in their comfort zone, doing what they love and can, for the project they have chosen, at their convenience. It's the simplest way to engage with Armenia.

What's particularly rewarding is that they get to know not those in Armenia who are sitting still and asking for financial aid, but Armenians who are actively contributing to Armenia's development – the initiators who locate the problems, find solutions, and are open for advice.

Conclusion

It's time to engage the rest of the Armenian doers and magnify the impact.

You can also register on reArmenia.com and determine your role in our unity.

Democratizing Armenia-Diaspora Relations: Constituency-Building and the Need for a State-Centric Paradigm

Dr. Nerses Kopalyan

The Armenian Diaspora, both through necessity and lack of any tenable options, had no choice but to tolerate and work with the illiberal, systemically corrupt, patrimonial political system that defined the Armenian state until the Velvet Revolution. Contextually, Diasporan organizations, philanthropists, and benefactors were unable to develop institutionalized relations with the Armenian state, and as such, relied on personalized or ad-hoc relations to support and help the Armenian people to the best of their abilities. The marginalization of the state, as the core of Armenia-Diaspora relations, and the subsequent de-institutionalization of such relations, produced three decades of dysfunction, mistrust, and stasis. The non-democratic terms of engagement between the Diaspora and the regimes that ruled Armenia reinforced what has been an open secret for some time: the failure of the Armenia-Diaspora model.

As the Velvet Revolution brought about a robust democratic political culture to Armenia, and in the process, attempted to transition the state institutions from illiberalism to nascent democratic standards, the floundering Armenia-Diaspora model completely ruptured. The traditional organizations that had developed personalized working relations with given state and regime actors struggled to transition. Considering the amount of investment that Diaspora organizations had made in preserving the status quo, including the path dependency of their own Diasporan structures, a state of anomie enveloped the dominant representative structures of the Diaspora upon the Velvet Revolution. Having become accustomed to functioning with an illiberal system for three decades, the disruption in the status quo produced a negative residual effect. That the new democratic government also failed to develop and provide the guardrails that would accommodate the transitional needs of the Diaspora does not escape scrutiny. The new configurations of the Armenia-Diaspora model, to this end, must be constructed on recognizing the failed approach of the last three decades and the need for a new model that is defined by state-centrism and constituency-building.

The Logic of State-Centrism

Nation-states that encompass large Diasporas are faced with the wider responsibility of accounting for two types of members: citizens that live within the territory of the state and members of the broader nation that reside in the Diaspora. In the Armenian case, legally speaking, an Armenian is a citizen of the Republic of Armenia; but, at the same time, a diasporan Armenian is equally qualified as an Armenian, even if they do not live within the legal boundaries of the state. States with Diasporas, then, are required to formulate legal, institutional, and infrastructural mechanisms in accommodating its two types of members: citizens and diasporans.^[1] Responsibilities that are incumbent upon the origin-state, or Homeland,^[2] stipulate Homeland-Diaspora relations to be defined by state-centrism. Namely, the origin-state serves as the foundation upon which legal and bureaucratic institutions are built in accommodating and advancing the interests of the broader nation. Since a Diaspora is a stateless entity, it must rely on a state in order to be able to develop institutions and structures that strengthen and reinforce Diaspora-Homeland relations. From the lens of institution-building, regardless of a Diaspora's strength, resources, and organizational efficiency, it simply cannot function as a state, or develop the infrastructure that states do. Furthermore, when the origin-state is a burgeoning democracy, the development of infrastructure and institutional bridges also develop democratic characteristics.

Within this context, Diaspora-Homeland relations must be defined through state-centrism; the origin-state must develop, in conjunction with its Diaspora, legal and bureaucratic structures within the state, as well as transnational infrastructures that connect, collaborate, and govern Diaspora-Homeland relations. In the specific case of the Armenian state, this is a serious shortcoming in its relations with its Diaspora: Armenia-Diaspora relations are not so much defined and driven by institutional and state-sponsored infrastructural relations, but rather, through ad-hoc interactions that have placed much of the burden upon either the diasporic communities, or its cultural-philanthropic organizations. The relative absence of the Armenian state with respect to institution and transnational infrastructure-building has curtailed the potential of the Armenian state from tapping into the vast resources of its Diaspora, while, at the same time, complicating the Diaspora's desire of assisting and advancing the interests of the

Armenian state. This, unequivocally, is a byproduct of the non-democratic characteristics of the Armenian state prior to the Velvet Revolution, and more so, by the normalization of these non-democratic characteristics by certain Diasporan structures. In more blunt terms, the illiberal Armenian state had been quite negligible to its Diaspora. The underlying policy recommendation is that the newly-democratizing Armenian state needs to be brought back into Armenia-Diaspora relations.

The state-centered development of Diaspora-Homeland relations allows for the resolution of two broad problems common to the functional relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora communities. The first problem is structural, institutional, and state-centric. The second problem is ideational, transnational, and requires the active involvement of the Armenian state. In both contexts, then, the solutions to the problems require the active and constructive involvement of the Armenian state.

The first problem addresses the lack of alignment, or the relative disconnect, in the interests and views of the Diaspora and the Homeland. Specifically, the views and interests of the Armenian state and its Diaspora are not quite aligned, and for this reason, there is an observable disconnect between what the Diaspora wants and what Armenia needs. The second problem addresses the role, or the lack thereof, of the origin-state in guiding, supporting, and providing the structural and ideational support required in enhancing Diaspora-Homeland relations. Specifically, a conceptual disconnect exists between the Diaspora's immense nationalism and the traditional inactivity of the Armenian state. This disconnect has produced two diverging paradigms for the Armenian nation: the nationalism of the Diaspora and the patriotism of Armenia.

The reigning discrepancy between the Diaspora's devotion to Armenianness and the Republic of Armenia's vision for the Armenian world is the differentiation in the worldview of the two realms: Diaspora is nationalistic, while Armenia is patriotic. Untangling this inherent distinction is crucial to developing and building a functional relationship between the two that is conducive to longevity. Nationalism is loyalty and devotion to a nation (the Armenian nation), and more specifically, to the Armenian national identity. Patriotism, unlike nationalism, is not abstract, but rather, it is pragmatic and concrete: devotion to one's country or state, that is, the Republic of Armenia. These two conceptual frameworks have

always been conflated, which has puzzled most observers: how can the Diaspora, with its intense nationalism and a century of perseverance, not be as bound or devoted to the Republic of Armenia as one would expect? The answer is the paradigmatic disconnect: between the two world views, the nationalism of the Diaspora has not been aligned with the precepts of patriotism. Or put differently, the state is excluded from the Diaspora's notion of nationalism.^[3] This exclusion of the state has produced both ideational complications as well as limiting the development of transnational infrastructures. The absence of the Armenian state, then, is no longer tenable if Diaspora-Homeland relations are to grow and strengthen. This is why the relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora must be reconfigured into a state-centric model.

To strengthen the Armenia-Diaspora partnership, and to strengthen the Diaspora itself, Diaspora's nationalism must be reconfigured into a transnational form of patriotism. This is precisely what Israel has done: the Diasporic Jew is defined just as much by one's devotion to the State of Israel as they are to the Jewish identity. In the case of the Armenian world, this has not been attained. The diasporan Armenian is not defined to the same extent by one's devotion to the Republic of Armenia as by its Armenian identity. For many, the Republic of Armenia is either a secondary priority or an externality; the Armenian state is not perceived as being inherent to the diasporan's Armenian identity. Namely, in broad terms, the diasporan does not conceive the concept of loyalty or devotion to the Armenian state as having anything to do with one's Armenianness. Thus, whereas transnational Jewishness is state-centric, transnational Armenianness is identity-centric: the Armenian state is not part of the configuration. In this context, it is evident that the importance of state-centrism is not specific to only institution and infrastructure-building; it is just as crucial to guiding, formulating, and reproducing ideational precepts (ideals, values, norms).

The Logic of Formal Institutions

Origin-states have been developing formal institutions and structures to enhance and advance their relations with their diasporas, utilizing a range of ideological,

cultural and institutional mechanisms to formulate transnational infrastructures that enhance Homeland-Diaspora cohesion, collaboration, and resource-utilization. One of the more prominent institutions developed in the origin-state are diaspora institutions, which are broadly defined as formal state offices within the executive or legislative structures of government designed to enhance, collaborate, and formalize diaspora relations.^[4] Approximately 40% of all United Nations' member states have formed some variation of state-centric diaspora institutions, recent examples of which include Ethiopia's Diaspora Coordinating Desk, Poland's Diaspora Affairs Unit, Latvia's Diaspora Program, Indonesia's Diaspora Desk, Haiti's Diaspora Affairs Office, Bosnia and Herzegovina's Diaspora Department of Diaspora, Nigeria's House Committee on Diaspora Affairs, Hungary's Diaspora Council, and Armenia's Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs. Collectively, a broad scope of institutional and structural models have been developed to assist origin-states in developing and formalizing institutional arrangements that not only allow the Homeland to tap into the resources of its diaspora, but also to align the goals and interests of the Diaspora with the Homeland. Supplementing formal state offices are a broad range of non-governmental, quasi-non-governmental, or transnational philanthropy and religious organizations that coordinate and assist the Homeland in diaspora matters, but do so in ad-hoc, or non-formalized structures.^[5] These ad-hoc structures, while intermittently beneficial and having some diasporic effect, do not allow for the same level of systemic efficiency as bureaucratized institutions. ^[6]

The stipulation that diaspora-relations, or diaspora identity-formation, needs to be state-centric, that is, be qualified in some substantive relationship with the Homeland, is explained by four main factors. First, diaspora institutions transnationalize domestic politics by extending it beyond national borders. This allows the Homeland to project state power extraterritorially, thus conceptualizing its diaspora, which is not physically part of the Homeland, as being part of the Homeland.^[7] In the case of Armenia, for example, with the severe security crisis and the trauma of the fall of Artsakh, a clear disconnect has developed between the Homeland and parts of the Diaspora. Second, diaspora institutions formulate conceptual and ideational constructs that “spatially reconfigures states” so that these states no longer fit within territorially discrete boundaries.^[8] In the case of Armenia, for example, the concept of an Armenian nation is not defined by the discrete territorial boundaries of the Armenian Republic, but rather, the broader

Armenian world as a single ideational concept. State-centric diaspora institutions can provide institutional and organizational cohesion to further develop and advance such notions of “Armenian oneness;” an endeavor that cannot be cogently actualized by non-state actors. Third, diaspora institutions articulate and qualify the perception of diasporans as belonging and being an extension of the Homeland.^[9] This is an intrinsic part of constituency-building. The Homeland’s formal and legal recognition of its diasporans, by granting dual citizenship, or voting rights, or some form of representation in the legislature,^[10] are examples of integrating the diasporan’s identity and obligations into the Homeland. And fourth, specific diasporas that are either shrinking or unable to self-reproduce, rely on the Homeland for cultural replenishment, a process that is becoming formalized and implemented by diaspora institutions.^[11] In the case of Armenia, the sustainability of the Diaspora is becoming continuously reliant on the Homeland, which is requiring the expansion and allocation of resources by the state’s diaspora institutions.

Strategic Relations, Cultural Relations, and Constituency-Building

Strategic Relations

The sphere of strategic relations entails the organized and concerted efforts of the origin-state to utilize the vast resources of its diaspora, in a calculated manner, to enhance and advance the interests of the Homeland. Strategic relations are primarily pragmatic, resource-driven, and hinged on tangible and quantifiable outcomes. Conceptually, this is also known as “tapping” into the diaspora, with the underlying assumption clearly noting the Homeland’s endeavors of using and relying on its diaspora’s vast resources by “tapping” into such resources. General methods of tapping include diasporan investments, financial remittances, or “roots” tourism.^[12] In the case of Armenia, traditional tapping mechanisms in its strategic relations with the Diaspora have relied on three main areas: economic resources, human capital, and lobbying/political resources. From the strategic lens of the Armenian state, tapping into its Diaspora’s economic resources has been important to Armenia’s economy, relying on direct foreign investment from the Diaspora along with remittances and philanthropic donations. Research demonstrates that origin-state diaspora institutions are crucial in organizing and obligating diasporic groups or

communities to invest,^[13] remit,^[14] travel, and donate, especially in times of crises. Economic tapping, however, fundamentally requires a democratic playing field, where Diaspora investors trust the legal and economic system within which they are to invest and conduct business. Noting the corrupt and illiberal political system prior to the Velvet Revolution, the distrust that the Diaspora had in investing in Armenia exponentially diminished the tapping model. In this context, the democratization in Armenia-Diaspora relations, trust in the legal and political system, and de-monopolization of Armenia's economic climate allow tapping into the Diaspora's economic capabilities.

Tapping into the Diaspora's immense human capital is also an important component of the Armenian state's strategic outlook in its relations with its Diaspora. Considering the high proportion of Diasporan Armenian professionals in the economies of developed countries, tapping into such human capital is crucial for sector growth and knowledge-accumulation for Armenia. The underlying objective is to cultivate professional and scientific networks to transfer expertise, technical knowledge, and scientific research back to the Homeland.^[15] More specifically, the cost-efficiency of relying on the Diaspora's human capital is exponentially greater than developing domestic research-and-development programs from scratch.^[16] Another crucial component to the Armenian government's strategic approach to tapping is to offset the country's "brain drain,"^[17] or rather, to initiate a "reverse brain drain" by inducing the inflow of highly-educated, professionalized experts.^[18] An important element of this approach is to map the Diasporan communities, while constructing an extensive registry of professionals and experts, with the broader objective of tapping into such human capital to augment reverse brain drain.^[19]

Cultural Relations

The sphere of cultural relations entails the broad and specific civilizational precepts that give coherence to the concept of an Armenian nation. In this context, cultural relations pertain to historical, identity, educational, artistic, intellectual and all other forms of cultural variables that encapsulate Armenianness. Cultural relations between the Armenian state and its Diaspora are the foundational bedrock upon which its strategic relations are based. Cultural relations are defined by ideational precepts, the embracing of history and identity,

and the bond of Armenianness that connects the Diaspora with the Homeland. Cultural relations, as such, are not “tapped” into by the origin-state; rather, this relationship is inverse. It is the Diaspora that taps into the Homeland for cultural, linguistic, educational, and artistic replenishment. Considering the Diaspora’s limited ability (and in some cases inability) to self-reproduce culture, the Diaspora taps into the Homeland to sustain and qualify its identity of Armenianness. Cultural relations, in this sense, are extremely important to the Homeland, because this serves as the ideological framework upon which it is able to utilize and rely on the strategic resources of its Diaspora.

While Armenian state institutions have perhaps been more active in the cultural sphere, the scope of engagement could clearly benefit from better-designed structures to accommodate Diaspora-Homeland cultural relations. Collectively, the relationship is not cogently institutionalized; however, and at the same time, Diaspora organizations have had access and support from Armenian educational and cultural institutions. These interactions, however, are primarily ad hoc and contingent upon the requests of Diaspora organizations. A formal, transnational infrastructure does not exist, where the Armenian state designs institutional arrangements that systematically and continuously support and guide Diaspora-Homeland cultural relations.

Research shows that well-developed origin-state diaspora institutions can play a crucial role in enhancing cultural relations, and further re-entrenching diasporan interests in the Homeland. Serbia’s Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora, for example, undertakes policies that seek to preserve and develop the spiritual, national, and cultural identity of the Serbian people in its Diaspora.^[20] Institutionally, this includes a Diaspora Parliament that fuses administrative, organizational, and representational functions to enhance cultural relations. As another empirical example, Somalia’s Office of Diaspora Affairs undertakes a range of government programs that encourage and enhance diaspora participation in nation-building activities.^[21] The broader objective of such “embracing-the-culture” models is to encourage and accommodate repatriation.^[22] By enhancing cultural relations, “embracing” diasporans through cultural affinity, and offering diasporans opportunities to contribute or partake in nation-building, cultural relations models seek to make repatriation more conducive to

the diaspora. In more simple terms, the Homeland offers the Diaspora cultural capital.

Constituency-Building

The sphere of governance structures pertains to the institutional arrangements and formalized infrastructures that facilitate, guide, and govern the economic, cultural and political relations between the Homeland and the Diaspora.^[23] Governance structures may be both ad-hoc or fully formalized, but to secure longevity and sustainability, it is recommended that governance structures be developed as formal institutions embedded in the Homeland, serving to advance and align the interests of the origin-state with the Diaspora. The formulation of governance structures may take a multitude of forms, from institutional arrangements that promote economic investments, repatriation, educational programs, coordination of political/lobbying activities, diaspora advisory bodies, to any such formal infrastructures that are legally recognized in the Homeland for the purpose of institutionalizing and strengthening Homeland-Diaspora relations.

Diaspora governance is an exceptionally important concept because diasporas are no longer qualified as “fixed social groups” that reside in other states. Rather, diasporas are now specifically recognized as “constituency-building” processes designed to mobilize political, economic, social, and cultural activism, with the primary objective of integrating with the Homeland.^[24] The diasporan, in the eyes of the Homeland, is either a constituent, or a latent constituent that needs to be recruited. In this context, Diaspora outreach by the origin-state is an exercise in constituency-building. Complimenting constituency-building is the notion of “state-led transnationalism,”^[25] where domestic policies are developed and have resonance beyond the borders of the origin-state, thus affecting populations that reside both abroad and at home.^[26]

In the case of Armenia, two observations stand out. First, constituency-building within the Diaspora was done half-heartedly by pre-Velvet Revolution governments, since the fundamental objective was “tapping,” as opposed to “embracing” or “state-led transnationalism.” The post-Velvet Revolution government, however, has sought to reverse this process, actively attempting to engage in constituency-building in the Diaspora. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 War, the subsequent security crisis, and the recent

fall of the Artsakh Republic, constituency-building policies have neither been sufficiently developed nor implemented. However, the broader vision is quite apparent: the government considers all willing Diasporic Armenians to be its constituency. This vision, however, is in its nascent stages of being properly conceptualized. Second, while constituency-building is gaining traction, state-led transnationalism has not been cogently developed by the Armenian government. As such, one part of the puzzle is in its beginning stages, while the second part of the puzzle does not yet exist. This is where the development of diaspora governance^[27] structures would allow for the puzzle to be resolved. Between constituency-building and the formation of state-centric diaspora governance structures, Armenia-Diaspora relations will methodically become more aligned. This has not been the case since 1991 because while the Armenian Diaspora has been a transnational phenomenon, it was not incorporated into state-led transnationalism; the Armenian state was simply absent. Further, whereas the Diasporan Armenian was a member of the Armenian nation, the same individual was not a constituent of the Armenian state. Thus, by constituency-building in the Diaspora, and by developing state-centric diaspora institutions, Armenia can both give agency to its Diasporan constituents, as well as provide the mechanism for state-led transnationalism.

The Logic of Governmentality and Transnational Governance

Perhaps the most difficult question pertaining to the very concept of governance, and more specifically, institutional effectiveness, is the one concerning enforcement: how can the Armenian state, without legal jurisdiction or enforcement powers in the diaspora, effectively govern and implement the policies of its diaspora governing structures? This is inherently a complex question, since the issue of governance and enforcement lies at the heart of the debate in the Diaspora regarding both unity within the Diaspora as well as transnational unity. A great deal of discourse on this topic has been presented by both pundits and Diaspora leaders, expressing frustration with the inability to formulate governing structures. And quite obviously, governing structures simply lack potency and substance if such institutions lack enforcement powers. In more simple terms, the Armenian government can neither make nor demand anyone or any organization in the Diaspora to do what such an entity refuses to do. How can this collective action problem be solved, and what conceptual framework can the

Armenian government develop that can, if not fully resolve, at least mitigate such matters? The recommended solution is the concept of governmentality, and more specifically, in the case of Armenia-Diaspora relations, “transnational governmentality.”^[28]

The application of governmentality to Diaspora-Homeland relations is specifically modeled to allow governance without the requirement for enforcement. This theory contends that state-led policies and structures become dominant not through coercion but rather through the consent and self-discipline of those governed. The underlying assumption is that the Armenian state promotes and stimulates policy-development that advances the interests of its Diaspora constituents; by making the Diaspora constituent a stakeholder, the state empowers stakeholders by incentivizing policies that incorporate “self-management.” By providing the broad contours, and framing policy expectations, the Armenian state formulates governance and operationalizes such through transnational structures. On the receiving end, Diaspora constituents, as stakeholders, “self-manage” the diffusion and implementation of said policies. The critical component of governmentality, then, is not coercion, but rather, incentivizing the stakeholder: the Diaspora constituent becomes incentivized to being governed by the policies of the origin-state. In the case of the Homeland being a democracy, the role of Diasporan constituents becomes enhanced, for the constituent exercises agency by partaking in democratically-developed policies.

Recognizing the origin-state’s inability to rely on coercive powers beyond its legal jurisdictions, governmentality stipulates that the effectiveness of transnational policy diffusion remains contingent on the ability to construct a diasporan constituency that self-identifies as loyal, self-disciplined subjects of the Homeland. In the scholarship on value proliferation, especially on the propagation of democratic attributes, the constituent’s identification as a subject to a democratic state reinforces commitment and trust. Governmentality, fundamentally, reveals and formulates the nature of dominant ideas that shape and govern diaspora identities, and in this process of state-centric identity construction, the utilization of diaspora structures and institutions reinforce the origin-state’s capacity for transnational governance. Transnational governance, then, is the “management of distance,”^[29] and more specifically, it encompasses

the “home government’s efforts to create and control diasporas, to mobilize national identities and to institutionalize the links” between diaspora communities and their Homeland.^[30] Findings demonstrate that the “political-economy framework” and the process of transnationalizing “state policies” is best understood and implemented through the “governmentality framework.”^[31] Research notes the transitional powers exercised by origin-states^[32] as vital to some form of diaspora governance, entailing specific economic and political management.^[33] Such transnational governmentality, however, stipulates two important expectations: 1) de-territorialized practices of inclusion; and 2) the relatively liberal, democratizing nature of the origin-state. This notion of governmentality is also referred to as “disciplinary governmentality,” which revolves around population growth, policies of promotion of repatriation, and construction of cultural policies in the diaspora that seek to “awaken national consciousness and facilitate return.”^[34] The underlying evidence indicates that origin-states that qualify constituencies through de-territorialization (that is, not by the strict boundaries of the origin-state), and are thus inclusive, are more conducive to exercising some form of transnational governance. Further, the liberal or liberalizing course of the Homeland is also crucial; diaspora-constituents are less likely to agree to being transnationally governed by non-democratic regimes than they would be by liberal-democratic regimes. Collectively, considering Armenia’s relative headways in democratization, domestic liberalization, as well as de-territorial inclusiveness, the capacity of the post-Velvet Revolution regime to undertake transnational governance should be robust, even if considering the security environment that the country finds itself in. That is, the necessary indicators are present for the Armenian government to develop transnational structures, diffuse state policies transnationally, and undertake diaspora constituency-building. .

The Logic of State-Centric, Transnational Diaspora Institutions

In the development and formation of transnational diaspora structures and institutions, two important factors must be addressed. First, these structures can neither be formed too rigidly nor can they be heavily enforceable, hence the recommendation of transnational governmentality. Second, transnational diaspora institutions cannot be all-encompassing, single-umbrella structures. Since the formation of such structures is contingent on successful constituency-building in

the Diaspora, it is crucial to realize that the interests of the constituents are just as important as those of the Homeland. Further, whereas the interests of the Homeland are singularly defined by the government, the interests of the Diaspora cannot be gauged in a singular fashion. The wide-range of diaspora constituents hold a diverse range of values, goals, and interests. In this context, transnational structures must be designed in a fashion where they are conducive to the needs and demand of its constituency. Assuming that the Diaspora constituency is a single body, with broad, singular interests is simply inconsistent with reality. Diaspora engagement, then, must prioritize three important variables: 1) the alignment of the interests of the diaspora constituents with that of the Homeland; 2) recognizing and accommodating the diverse inter-Diaspora interests; and 3) formulating transnational structures that are conducive to both achieving such alignment as well as giving the diaspora-constituent agency.

The democratization of Armenia-Diaspora relations remains commensurate with the necessity of articulating a state-centric paradigm that is defined by constituency-building. As is evident to policy-makers, pundits, Diaspora organizations, and all stakeholders, the phenomenon of Pan-Armenianism is primarily an abstract, ideational umbrella. One that encapsulates the goals and visions of the broader Armenian nation. The actualization of Pan-Armenianism, however, into a singular, wide-ranging transnational structure has simply been untenable. The discussion of a Pan-Armenian organization that represents and encompasses all Diaspora organizations and constituents has primarily been that, a discussion. A single, Pan-Armenian body that is representative of the entire Diaspora is not a tenable policy option, nor can it be structurally coherent. Namely, one may be constructed for the sake of constructing it; but the operational effectiveness, the presumed efficacy, and the overall objectives of such a structure will very likely fail. To put it more bluntly, there simply is no empirical evidence to support the proposition of a single, Pan-Armenian structure. Noting the severe limitations of the Armenia-Diaspora model of the last three decades, a paradigm shift is in order: an alteration of how Diaspora governance is perceived, and the infusion of distinct, research-based propositions that are grounded in empirical findings. In this context, the most effective and efficient transnational diaspora institutions that can address and strengthen Armenia-Diaspora relations are quasi-governmental institutions. Research demonstrates that origin-states that have to coordinate and serve a large and diverse diaspora

constituency are better off developing and utilizing quasi-governmental institutions.

Quasi-governmental institutions are state-centric structures that incorporate into its decision-making and policy formulation non-governmental bodies, which can range from diaspora councils, to professional associations, to traditional diasporan organizations. Quasi-governmental institutions are designed to be compatible with transnational governmentality, offering the Homeland flexibility in addressing and accommodating the diverse needs and interests of its diaspora, while, at the same time, utilizing such quasi-governmental institutions to “tap” into its diaspora’s resources, as well as employ the diaspora to diffuse the policies, goals, and interests of the Homeland extraterritorially. Successful quasi-governmental institutions include South Korea’s Overseas Koreans Foundation, Peru’s Advisory Council, Mexico’s Consultative Council of the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, and more prominently, Israel’s Jewish Agency. The Armenian Diaspora has attempted, at some level, to model some of these organizations, yet what has been missing in the Armenian approach has been the state. In essence, instead of developing quasi-governmental organizations, the Armenian Diaspora, due to the non-democratic features of Armenia’s previous governments, have opted for pure non-governmental structures. The result, unfortunately, has been minimal, and in the broader scheme of things, it has failed to cogently serve either the aspirations of the Diaspora or the acute needs of Armenia. To this end, by transitioning from the non-governmental approach to a quasi-governmental model, the state, and its burgeoning democratic characteristics, will be brought back into Armenia-Diaspora relations.

Conclusion

The crisis of engagement between the Homeland and Diaspora is not a secret; as much as one loves the other, there still remain important and unresolved issues. That the blame, overall, may be placed on the former is perhaps an oversimplification; but not entirely untrue. The more important issue at hand, however, is not to engage in the discourse of the past, but rather, to undertake a paradigm shift in Homeland-Diaspora relations. The Diaspora’s perception of the Armenian state must not only be altered, but should further be aligned with Armenia’s perception of the Diaspora itself. These discursive assessments,

however, must also be concretely addressed by developing democratic institutions and infrastructures that alleviate the problems faced by the Armenian world. In this context, the formation of transnational diaspora structures, the need for constituency-building, and the utilization of these structures to exercise transnational governance must be the next stage in the evolution of Armenia-Diaspora relations. By adapting a state-centered approach to diaspora institution-building, identity-building, constituency-building, and transnational governmentality, Pan-Armenianism, as both concept and reality, will find efficacy in advancing the interests of the broader Armenian nation.

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Biographies



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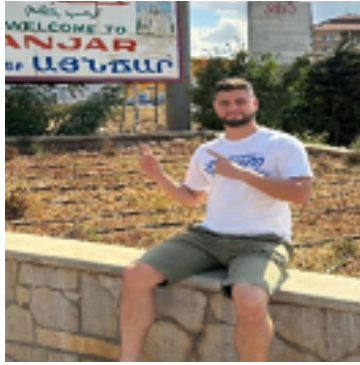
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Ms. Roza Chibukhchyan holds a BA in English and Communications from the American University of Armenia and is currently pursuing a TEFL Certification at the same institution. At its dusk, her career has taken her along three diverse paths: Public Relations, Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation, and Education. As a young professional her experience as a PR specialist spans over two years at HyeConnect Foundation. Some of the notable organizations that she has interpreted for include the RA National Assembly, the World Wildlife Foundation, AUA and many others. With a passion for teaching, English education has also been at the forefront of Roza's career for over two years. Her research interests are centered around language expression in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and its potential technological accommodations. Roza strives to see her academic and professional career unfold as an interdisciplinary communicator.



Dr. Nerses Kopalyan is an Associate Professor-in-Residence of Political Science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His fields of specialization include international security, geopolitics, political theory, and philosophy of science. He has conducted extensive research on polarity, superpower relations, and security studies. He is the author of "World Political Systems After Polarity" (Routledge, 2017), the co-author of "Sex, Power, and Politics" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and co-author of "Latinos in Nevada: A Political, Social, and Economic Profile" (2021, Nevada University Press), and the upcoming "Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War" (2024, Routledge). His current research and academic publication concentrate on geopolitical and great power relations within Eurasia, with specific emphasis on democratic breakthroughs within authoritarian orbits. He has conducted extensive field work in Armenia on the country's security architecture and its democratization process. He has authored several policy papers for the Government of Armenia and served as voluntary advisor to various state institutions. Dr. Kopalyan is also a regular contributor to EVN Report.



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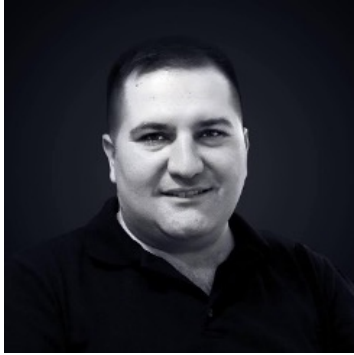
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