

**Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation**

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The sun never sets on the Armenian diaspora. Its constituent communities include—in a descending order that reflects population and not cultural, political, or economic importance—communities in Russia (nearly 2 million), the United States (800,000), Georgia (400,000), France (250,000), the Ukraine (150,000), Lebanon (105,000), Iran (ca. 100,000), Syria (70,000), Argentina (60,000), Turkey (60,000), Canada (40,000), and Australia (30,000). There are some twenty other communities with smaller populations, ranging from 25,000 down to 3,000, in Britain, Greece, Germany, Brazil, Sweden, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, the Gulf Emirates, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Venezuela, Hungary, Uzbekistan, and Ethiopia.

Distinct and heterogeneous as these communities are, three generalizations can be ventured about them and the global diaspora they constitute. First, communal elites, along with the diasporic institutions, organizations, and associations<sup>2</sup> they lead, have been unusually important to them for an unusually long time. These institutions and elites have always done work that is simultaneously philanthropic, cultural, and political. This work has required material resources and communal hierarchies, and has combined selfless voluntarism with socially coerced participation, all in the name of the nation-in-exile. Second, this diaspora is undergoing an accelerating transition from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism. And, third, this transition is challenging the agendas, discourses, and resources of existing institutions, causing changes and occasionally leading to the creation of new organizations.

This essay will narrate the Armenian diaspora's shift from exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism, both because the change is interesting for its own sake and because it may offer a demonstration of the importance of institutions, elites, and material resources to other conceptualizations of diaspora. To acknowledge that importance entails a rethinking of the place and role of categories such as leadership, the exercise of power, and the mobilizing potential of nationalism, within actual diasporas

as well as in the theory of diasporas. In addition, attending to such factors may also inculcate a certain attentiveness to currently neglected categories such as the sedentariness of diasporas and the impulse towards reterritorialization, as well as to their political practices.

The process of transition in the Armenian diaspora process is not synchronized. It began at different times and proceeds at different speeds. Nor are its urgencies felt and responded to uniformly. The factors that influence the pace and shape of the transition in each diaspora community include its past history, its relation to the “host” nation-state in which it is situated, the extent to which transnationalism and globalization penetrate that state, and the material and institutional resources available to each community. Of necessity, this article neglects much of the detail, variety, and texture of the passage out of exilic and into transnational diasporism. Instead, it offers an overview of some persistent structures and processes that govern both past and current transformations in the Armenian diaspora. Unfashionably, I will emphasize the role of the communal elites and the institutions they develop in the precarious conditions of diasporic existence. I will argue that organized, institutionally mobilized and sustained connections, combining material and cultural exchange among diasporic communities as well as between the diaspora and the homeland, are key components of a specifically “diasporic” social formation, one that is not only a renamed ethnic group.

In the wake of the contemporary transformation, which is framed by and within globalization, the Armenian diaspora no longer consists of a series of exile communities, fragments of the nation awaiting real or even symbolic repatriation. Rather, diaspora is, and is regarded by an ever larger majority of its members and of its contentious leadership as, a permanent phenomenon. This global Armenian diaspora is made up of communities that have necessarily and inevitably developed local, host country-specific, “ethnic” features.<sup>3</sup> Each is organized, though not to an equal degree, and each develops institutions to address local needs. While largely locally oriented, a few of these institutions—religious, philanthropic, political—also retain explicitly transnational agendas and seek to foster shared, multilocal, and therefore properly “diasporic” values, discourses, ideologies, orientations, and practices. Individually or taken

together, these formations encompass multiple social, cultural, and, on more rare but disproportionately important occasions, political identities that coexist, clash, seek accommodation and consensus. When they succeed in achieving these goals, success rarely proves sustainable over long periods of time, except where ghettoized diasporic forms prevail. In a sense, then, the diasporic community sustains a paradoxical combination of both ethnic and diasporic cultural identities and political practices; the struggle between them strains but also helps define the diaspora as such. Some of these identities are traditional, purist, and parochial, while others include cosmopolitan commitments that entail not a wholesale but, rather, a selective relinquishing of the national (nation in exile) imaginary.

In each of these heterogeneous communities, the specifically diasporic faction of the economic, political, and cultural elites shares a commitment to maintain institutionalized, transnational connections and exchanges with other segments of the diaspora and with the homeland: money and political advice, books and newspapers, disks and videotapes, paintings and films, information and propaganda, priests and party activists circulate through the Armenian transnation.<sup>4</sup> In all but a few communities, there is division, competition, and struggle, conducted across a range of forms of semiotic and political representation. Competition occurs at all levels: to control institutions and funds; to recruit loyal constituencies; to attract cultural producers to one vision or another of diasporic identity (each entailing specific cultural and political commitments of both the local and transnational varieties); and to deal with the challenges produced anew at the margin, where new identities are continually elaborated as older ones are criticized or abandoned. Such elaboration takes place in verbal, musical, and visual media, as well as through new modes of display, consumption, even philanthropy. In a very few but disproportionately striking instances, the new political and identitarian practices have even been so radical as to result in intracommunal violence.<sup>5</sup>

In a diaspora such as the Armenian, as within nation-states, the (re)production of culture and of contesting visions of collective identity is a quotidian, persistent, and costly activity, conducted not just by a few individual aesthetic producers but also by larger groups of journalists, intellectuals, teachers,

scholars, activists, artists, performers, and entertainers, some of whom are associated with—or, in the case of most teachers, dependent upon—organizations and institutions that offer material support and make ideological claims. These institutions constitute a diasporic civil society that nurtures and sustains the public sphere of debate and cultural production.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas, for Antonio Gramsci, State and Civil Society usually share a common language and a nationality, the diasporic public sphere—particularly its substantial Armenophone component—has until recently remained distinct from the larger, allophone public sphere of its host societies; understandably, it could neither expect nor receive much sympathy or economic and cultural assistance in its efforts to sustain that distinctness from the host society and state. Especially in the Middle East, where, for a long time, Christian Armenians stood quite apart from Muslim society, much of the Armenian diaspora has participated at best variously and unevenly in the culture and politics of the host society. Like other diasporics, even as they resist prejudicial treatment and desire acceptance and some forms of inclusion, the communal elites of the Armenian diaspora, on certain occasions, seek out an exclusion of their own in order to set themselves apart, to some degree, in an enclave created by conscious cultural territorialization. Like some other diaspora elites, they exhibit a preference for a carefully chosen and circumscribed exclusion on their own terms and for the right to draw some communal boundaries, to nurture and maintain certain differences, to imagine and produce autonomously at least some of their identities rather than accepting a collective diasporic subject position assigned wholesale by the host society's dominant regimes of representation. This preference requires the institutionalized counter-production of identities through both aesthetic and mass cultural practices.

Such production and contestation are conducted in old media and new, in the astonishing proliferation of newspapers and books, in radio and television programs, in concerts and commemorative events, in philanthropic and patronage activities, on stages and in exhibition and lecture halls, and recently also on the Internet, as well as in community-funded schools and gatherings ranging from the celebratory to the disputatious. The tone and content of the majority of such Armenian productions has

until recently been parochial,<sup>7</sup> elaborating a form of exilic nationalism. However, individual diasporan voices advocating an opening to host societies have long existed, and such voices are now more insistent and influential than ever. Both kinds of production lend themselves to analysis as texts, some as specifically aesthetic texts. But their very accessibility as texts can mislead and has misled scholars into regarding the semiotic and aesthetic as, in effect, autonomous of the material, which is almost always to say also institutional, forces at work in the diaspora. In fact, these institutions are crucially involved in attempts to direct diasporic cultural and political “modernization,” or, since that term has so much unwelcome baggage from neocolonial discourse about the Third World, to shape Armenian late modernity in the transnational era.

## **2. Structures and Themes**

This article examines the ongoing transformation of exilic nationalism into diasporic transnationalism, both in order to offer an overview of the changes reshaping an old, far-flung, complex, and often institutionally saturated diaspora and in the hope of contributing to the restoration of a certain balance to the wider general discourse on diaspora today, by giving the institutional and material factors involved in this transformation their due. The discourse produced *by* the Armenian diaspora has no difficulty in acknowledging the importance of these factors; but the scholarly discourse produced *about* diasporas in the United States does not readily engage them and, indeed, becomes almost evasive when confronted with the necessity of talking about the themes of nationalism, power, and the drive towards territorialization<sup>8</sup> within diasporic settings. These themes and issues are woven throughout the following discussion of diasporic structures and transformations.

A schematic outline of my claims, which can be only partially elaborated and nuanced in the space of an article, must begin with the observation that a justified criticism, when sustained and elaborated by an ever more avid group of scholars and intellectuals, sometimes constructs a caricature of

the object it criticizes. Neil Lazarus has pointed out that anti-Orientalist critiques of the West increasingly run the risk of turning that “West” into a caricature. Similarly, critiques of the nation-state and of several (actually quite different kinds of) nationalisms have become so routinely vehement that advocates of diaspora seek to purge and absolve diasporas of all vestiges of their nationalism. Whether nationalism, and especially diasporic nationalism, is problematic is best discussed on a case-by-case basis. Even now, in the increasingly transnationalized Armenian diaspora and at the often-announced twilight of the nation-state, nationalism remains a potent force. Struggles over its nature and desirability as a positive, mobilizing force divide the membership of some diaspora institutions while animating and even invigorating others; criticism and rejection of such nationalism preoccupies a small but audible group of scholars and intellectuals. Like any long-lived social formation, the Armenian diaspora is best understood as composed of those who passionately share the conflicts that divide it about the nature of their local, national, and transnational commitments and identities. The institutions of diasporic civil society provide material support to (and often try to censor or guide or “direct,” in Gramsci’s sense) the public sphere that conducts these debates and conflicts, engaging in a range of cultural productions and political practices, defining, reproducing, and producing the diaspora in the process.

Such conflict—usually, though not in all circumstances, nonviolent—involves the exercise of power: discursive, social, cultural, economic, and sometimes explicitly political. Scholars of diasporas have been reluctant to admit the existence of “stateless power” (Tölölyan, “Exile Governments”), a form of power that is both productive and prohibitive and that operates even in those diasporic social formations where personal voluntarism and not communal compulsion is, or appears to be, the general rule. Such reluctance has been common in some of the best—and perhaps especially in some of the most influential—theorizing about diasporas. “Power,” like “nationalism,” is a phenomenon from which the scholarly celebration of the diasporic has averted its gaze. Instead, scholarship has come to imagine diasporas as anti-state, antination(alist), and innocent of the exercises of power that stain so many national histories. Diasporas have been idealized as open, porous, circuit-based, cosmopolitan not parochial,

deterritorialized, exemplary communities of the transnational moment, and therefore capable of offering—not of ascribing to or imposing upon, as nation-states do to their citizen-subjects—flexible, multiple identities.

There is considerable truth in these accounts, but it is really a half-truth whose neglected other side is that power, institutionalization, and the constraints they entail persist in diasporas. While rightly pointing to textuality, mobility, aesthetic work, and hybrid identity as characteristic producers and products of diasporic cultures, scholarship has come to neglect and even to abject coexisting factors such as the previously mentioned exercises of power and nationalism, as well as the stubborn logic of the sedentary, the drive for location and reterritorialization, that constitutes a countervailing tendency that is the indispensable other of diasporic mobility and porousness. Especially within such quasi-territorial diasporic relocations, but also outside them, impulses toward institutionalization, along with the creation of organizations that claim the privilege of representing their communities and can loosely be termed political, persist. In general, diasporic cultural identities are rarely wholly autonomous from these organizations in the community. Along with the Jewish and the Cuban, the Armenian diaspora offers a salient example of their continuing, albeit constantly evolving, importance.

The transformation of exilic nationalism to diasporic transnationalism involves many institutions and does not happen evenly, nor is it equally observable in all the communities of the Armenian diaspora. The change is happening over time at an uneven pace, depending crucially on location. To invoke Raymond Williams's terms, some Armenian diaspora communities—for example, in Ethiopia—are now *residual*: declining in numbers, situated in polities riven by their own difficulties, they respond to changing local conditions through emigration rather than by adapting and developing new institutions, cultural and social practices, or identities. Others are *emergent* diasporas: for example, in Sweden, in which emigrants from the various (and quite different) Armenian primary diasporas of Turkey, Iran, and the Arab Middle East, alongside very recent arrivals from the former Soviet Union, have begun to develop ways of coexisting and cooperating as a religio-political collectivity; the first Swedish-Armenian



has just been elected to that country's Parliament. Then there are several large, *dominant* Armenian diaspora communities in which the multi-directional transformation is hardest to characterize briefly: within each, many individuals assimilate, while others cling to some aspects of old, tested, and readily available ethnic identities, even as new diasporic ones develop alongside them. Many abandon contact with all Armenian institutions, even as some segments of the community mobilize around well-funded organizations and institutions. Some of these function locally (in one city, say), some translocally (across a whole host country), while a few key diasporic institutions operate transnationally. The United States above all, but also France, Canada, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, each have diaspora communities in which such institutions remain important. Finally, there are huge new dispersions of Armenian refugees and migrants who have fled the wars and economic collapse of Transcaucasia; these now number over 2 million in the Russian Republic and across the former Soviet Union, where a diaspora is in the process of emerging beyond the reach of most observers located in the West.

Very little can be said that is equally true of all of these diasporic groups. Nearly all consist of four categories of people who exist at different levels of integration into the host society: the assimilated or nearly assimilated; the comfortably ethnicized; the new migrants and refugees who still hold on to, or are in the grip of, traditional homeland identities; and the diasporic element (see note 1). These categories are not "stages" in a unidirectional historical trajectory; while often there is a tendency, over time, to move from immigrant to diasporic and then through ethnicity to assimilation, intermediate stabilities and even reversals are possible; the rate and direction of assimilation are neither predetermined nor inexorable. In particular, the diasporic category both loses adherents (to ethnicization and assimilation) and gains them from several sources: from the ranks of recent immigrants who begin to settle in the new country; or from ethnics who respond to the stimulation of increasingly facilitated transnational connections with the homeland; or, indeed, from among those who respond to the work of the transnational institutions whose mission is explicitly theorized as *diasporic* rather than only ethnic and local-communal. In the Armenian diaspora, as the associational bonds provided by older groups,

especially those sustained by bonds of village and regional origin, fade, and as many consequently assimilate, a few seek out commitment, status, and the opportunity to be connected to a larger, multilocal network of people and arena of action.

But no communal elite with transnational ambitions can aspire to succeed unless it also addresses local issues. As in the nation-state, so in the diaspora: all politics is local, in the sense that even the most expansively transnational organizations must have a local component and address.<sup>9</sup> For example, a transnational organization such as the Armenian Apostolic Church marks the duality of its concerns by a duality of personnel and structure. Its married priests serve local parishes for decades, sometimes over an entire career, even when they do not come from those localities. In contrast, its celibate priesthood acts as a mobile religious bureaucracy of robed executives; they serve as a transnational cadre, characteristically moving from one post to another. Bishops aspiring to the top positions of the diasporic church must typically serve in communities in both the Middle East and North America. In general, and paradoxically, the more successful a transnational diasporic organization is, the more it is likely to have developed local branches and services (Tölölyan: 1991).

This may seem counterintuitive. But in the Armenian diaspora the local is not just the site where only the leadership of local constituencies develops; it is also the site from which many—though not all—of the transnational leaders are recruited. The most successful demonstrate an ability to address local needs in a practical manner, as organizers of the community, contributors to philanthropy, articulators of its views, and middlemen between it and sources of power (usually the host state) and “big” money (that the state or wealthy co-nationals who are otherwise remote from the local community can be induced to contribute). These local leaders are adept at speaking as representatives of the community from various legitimate sites of enunciation, often because they have attained prominence in the host society, have brought “credit” to the Armenian community but have not severed their links to it. The most skilled, those who emerge as transnational leaders as well, always remember to speak of their local community as

simultaneously *rooted* in the host society and *routing*, a node of the transnational diasporic network (see Clifford: 1997).

Within this structure, cultural producers who create works that provide a positive representation of diasporic life, and that are welcomed by the gatekeepers of the larger representational regimes of the host society, are ardently recruited by diasporic elites. When they withhold their allegiance, as aesthetic producers often do, their attendance and support for events organized by specific institutions is nevertheless sought and publicized, both because it can facilitate fundraising and also because diasporic elites usually recognize the value of cultural legitimization, however oblique, of organizational positions,<sup>10</sup> both vis-à-vis the host society and as a way of recruiting constituencies and sustaining their loyalty and adherence within the community. To offer a recent example, the rock band System of a Down, whose members are young Armenian-Americans, consists of independent cultural producers who have succeeded in the larger society on their own merits and with no assistance from diasporic institutions. The band gave a concert and donated the proceeds as a way of demonstrating its support for ANCA, the *Armenian National Committee of America* (emphasis added), one of two Armenian-American lobbies in Washington, DC, that is engaged in demanding US recognition of the Genocide of the Armenians. Writing about the concert, an anonymous journalist noted that “genocide isn’t usually the stuff that inspires concerts, but for System of a Down, it’s more than a cause, it’s a crusade” (N.A.). Given the importance that some of the major diasporic institutions attach to cultural production and performance, it is no coincidence that most major political and philanthropic organizations support in-house organizations (for literature, theater, dance, and music, as well as for sport and social assistance) whose leaders simultaneously hold middle- or high-level positions in parent organizations and are often cultural producers in their own right—journalists, most commonly, but also poets and writers of prose.<sup>11</sup>

More than ever, institutions aspiring to leadership now use globalization—with its efficiencies of communication, travel, funds –transfer, and the exchange of data, ideas, and cultural products—to stay in touch with like-minded groups elsewhere in diaspora and in the homeland, to recruit new constituencies

and contributors to their discursive practices, and to adapt and sustain shared transnational agendas. But their agendas differ significantly from their predecessors'. The latter had regarded their diaspora as a nation in exile, awaiting return to the homeland,<sup>12</sup> whose culture they labored to preserve in local enclaves wherever these were available or could be sustained. *Azkabahbanoum*, literally nation-preservation, was a key slogan. A few organizations functioned transnationally, to the degree that finances and technology permitted: chiefly the Church, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktzutiun (ARF), the Armenian Democratic-Liberal Party (ADL), and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). The journals they supported sustained a literature that was multicommunal and multilocal, though some communities did not produce but only consumed such works.

Today, diasporic elites have begun to view the totality of diasporic communities as the *permanent Armenian transnation*, in which the watchwords are, simultaneously, greater engagement with (1) the "host nation," in the older parlance of diasporic discourse, in which the diasporas were still regarded as temporary and tolerated guests; (2) the homeland, easily accessible after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and (3) the global, be it in the form of the UN or NGOs or the Internet and satellite TV. Empowered by the bourgeoisification of the majority of the Western Armenian diaspora communities and the consequent institutional prosperity, as well as by technology, and motivated by a steady shift of ideology and representational practices, the transnation can sustain many of these endeavors. Interestingly, the global moment is marked by a renewed and sophisticated, even intensified, commitment to thorough engagement with the local, in ways that overcome the sense of being exiles in ghetto enclaves.<sup>13</sup> Along with new forms of involvement with the local, and tactical engagement with select aspects of the global, commitment to a concept of the *nation* endures: even as an exilic nationalism has lost ground to diasporic transnationalism, the "nation" concept, like the word itself, persists, remaining folded inside transnationalism and retaining continuing, if changing, significance within the Armenian diasporic public sphere.

### **3. The Historical Development of Diasporic Communal Elites and Institutions**

The emerging Armenian transnation is viewed by its members as having a territorialized state sector in the homeland; a quasi-state sector in the contested, Armenian-inhabited region of Nagorny-Karabagh, which international law places within Azerbaijan but which, *de jure*, is now a secessionist statelet; and diasporic communities everywhere else (see note 4). The diasporic sector has a complex history that, not surprisingly, remains unknown to most non-Armenian scholars.<sup>14</sup> It is essential to consider its watersheds at this point, in order to form some idea of the continuity of problems the diaspora faces, the conservatism of some of the sociopolitical and cultural elites' responses, and the institutional solutions that have been devised. Discontinuity and change become all the more meaningful when viewed from within the matrix of what Fernand Braudel called the *longue durée*: the historically relevant period stretches back to the turn of the last millennium.

#### **1) 1045–1453: The first great period of dispersion.**

During this time, invasions of Armenia by various Central Asian conquerors of Turkic and Mongol origin devastated the land, destroyed the Armenian state, and forced many to flee. Refugee Armenians settled in two regions: around the Black Sea, in what is now the Ukraine and southern Poland, in largely artisanal and mercantile communities subject to indigenous rulers; and in the region of Cilicia (now the southeastern strip of Turkey's Mediterranean coast), where most of the emigrating feudal nobility and highest clergy settled (along with their client populations), achieved domination over the fragmented native peoples—mostly Greek and Syriac, with no single dominant majority—and founded a state that lasted nearly three centuries (roughly 1075–1375). Along with Singapore, this is a rare case of a diasporic minority achieving territorial hegemony and creating a state.<sup>15</sup> The diasporic, reterritorialized Armenian state's success demonstrated the relative portability and adaptability of some homeland institutions—churches, scriptoria, courts, manuscript culture—as well as the impulse toward reterritorialization that

remains a characteristic strain in many diasporas. At the same time, settlement in coastal areas brought the highland Armenians, for the first time in their history, into contact with maritime peoples; this accelerated the development of a merchant diasporic elite that learned a great deal from Venice and Genoa, rulers of the Mediterranean.

## **2) 1453–1604: The period of diasporic adaptation to the great imperial urban consolidations in the Middle East.**

In 1453, the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. The Sultan Mehmet Fatih invited various Christian and, later, Jewish communities to settle in the sparsely populated area, and many dispersed Armenians (from Cilicia, western Anatolia, and the Black Sea littorals of present-day Bulgaria, Romania, and Southern Ukraine/the Crimea) responded. In or around 1461, their community was given new shape as a *millet* by imperial edict. It became a partially self-regulating entity (though, in the last instance, always wholly subordinated to Ottoman power), endowed with a Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, who, assisted by notables, functioned as the titular leader of a collective ethnarchy and whose authority extended eventually over Armenians and some other Christian minorities throughout the Ottoman Empire.<sup>16</sup> In the Persian Empire, the designation of Isfahan as the new dynastic capital was accompanied by the forcible uprooting of tens of thousands of Armenians from their homeland in 1603–1604; they were marched to and settled in New Julfa, a suburb of the capital. Around this urban center, Armenian villages were also established, and all were led by the notables of the capital, while retaining close contact with the Church in Armenia proper.

## **3) 1605–1784: The domination of the merchant diaspora.**

In this period, the Armenian merchant diaspora flourished, especially in Iran and India but also as far west as the Netherlands and as far east as Java.<sup>17</sup> The encounter of Armenian merchant capital with French, Dutch, and especially British capital (the East India Company) eventually led to the defeat of Armenian

capital, which was smaller in quantity and not backed by a homeland's state apparatus (Libaridian). Both prosperity and defeat had political implications, as members of and allies of the mercantile notables, such as individual clergymen and the first lay intellectuals, began to formulate nationalist views in print culture: defeats are often stimuli for cultural mobilization, in diasporas as well as in homelands. Thus the first Armenian newspaper was published by a clergyman in Madras, India, in 1794, some sixty years before a newspaper was published anywhere in the homeland.<sup>18</sup> Also during this period, the Armenian Catholic order of monks named the Mkhitarists, by an oddity that requires a lengthy analytical narrative not possible here, emerged as intellectual pioneers of the germinating nationalist tendency, producing dictionaries, poems, and historiographic and pedagogic texts that introduced German, Italian, and French nationalist ideas and practices to the Armenian diaspora,<sup>19</sup> much as the Madras and Calcutta intellectuals, a cadet branch of the merchants installed in those cities, had imported British and American concepts of the nation into that same diasporic discourse (Tölölyan: 1999).

#### **4) 1784–1923: The emergence of a nationalist leadership and its mixed record.**

The Armenian diaspora, starting much earlier than the homeland but in eventual alliance with it, and led by its own economic, intellectual, aesthetic, and political elites, elaborated, funded, and staffed a full range of institutions that slowly framed a more secular, linguistic, and national form of “unity.” This pedagogically oriented system first supplemented, then challenged, and finally displaced (without fully eliminating) the earlier system developed over the previous seven centuries, in which the Church and the notables who funded it held the leadership position of first among equals. Some segments of the leadership elites of the institutions of the new cultural nation—schools, press, print media, libraries, political parties, and philanthropic organizations—eventually sought to commit that diaspora to the political emancipation of the greater part of the Armenian homeland from its rulers. Such attempts were repressed by Ottoman Turkey, as well as by czarist and Communist Russia. Between 1915 and 1918, the Ottoman state genocidally massacred 1.5 million of its 2 million Armenian citizens. Half the survivors

joined their co-nationals in a tiny segment of historical Armenia that remained under Russian, later Soviet, domination and which in 1991 became the Republic of Armenia after the collapse of the USSR. The other survivors created a new diaspora: some settled in territories where there had been a small, old Armenian diaspora (e.g., Syria, Egypt, and the USA; there were some 50,000 Armenians in the latter before World War I).<sup>20</sup> Others joined an older, well-established settlement (in Iran, where Armenians had lived since 1604), while still others settled in areas where there had been no significant Armenian populations (such as Argentina, today home to a community of 60,000). In each post-Genocide diasporic community there was a varying but, on the whole, impressive level of commitment to rebuilding institutions that had existed in the prosperous old diasporic communities of the great imperial centers, especially Istanbul. No major *new* diasporic institutions were created in this period, or, indeed, until after 1972.

#### **5) 1923–1965: The period of reconstruction.**

Armenian identity remained national-exilic as major efforts were made by various sectors of old and new diasporic elites to establish, direct, and dominate all the reconstructed institutions—from the religious to the athletic, aesthetic, and philanthropic. Of course, many refugees sought relief in assimilation or ethnicization, while others—depending on locality—either chose to remain or were given no choice but to remain in territorialized enclaves where all political and much of aesthetic representation, including the printing presses and the exhibition halls and stages where such efforts could be funded and enacted, were still largely directed by institutions. The Bourj-Hammoud district of Beirut, still home to 75,000 Armenians today, remains the least transformed of such enclaves, though even it began to change at the end of the second Lebanese civil war of 1990.

#### **6) 1965–1988: The period of challenges to the regime of reconstruction.**



During this time, the laboriously and expensively reconstructed post-Genocide exilic nationalist order was tested, found wanting, and has since remained under relentless transnational challenge. Some of the challenges had existed in muted form in different spheres of diasporic life for decades; others are more recent. Each initially emerged from the internal dynamic of its own domain, but they converged and began to influence each other even as they also challenged the old diasporic, institutional order. They determined—indeed, in the Althusserian sense, over-determined—the transition that has become a transformation. As this article does not narrate a full history of the Armenian diaspora, these challenges can only be enumerated and annotated, not discussed in detail. At a minimum, they involved the following phenomena:

(a) *The discursive turn from exile to diaspora.* The Armenian language has for centuries had a number of words for migrants and their dispersed communities, as well as concepts and structures of feeling associated with migrancy. The relations among them are a topic for a separate philological article, but the proliferation is worth noting. In addition to *spurk* (diaspora), the most noteworthy is *gaghut* (from Hebrew *galut*, meaning settlement or colony outside the homeland), whence the verb *gaghtel*, to migrate, *gaghtagan*, migrant, and *gaghtashkhar*, literally “*galut*-world” or diaspora. There is also the more recent *arderkir*, “outside the homeland,” used with a particular political inflection for “diaspora”; the high-cultural *tz’ronk*, the “scattering,” which is descriptive, privileging no particular cause of the dispersion; and, finally, *gharib*, which refers specifically to peasants migrating to urban areas as laborers. The lexical proliferation is one mark of the diachronically layered complexity of thought and feeling concerning coerced and voluntary migrancy in the diaspora. In some communities, few of the listed terms were used for self-description. It is worth noting that what was for a couple of centuries the largest and most important Armenian diasporic community, that of Istanbul, rarely thought of itself as diasporic; except when persecuted by the Turkish state, it regarded itself as “at home” in an ancient, superbly organized, and institutionally saturated community (*hamaynk*) that was accommodated by the composite society of Istanbul.

The point is that not just the material reality of diaspora but also concepts of it, as articulated by ordinary members of the diaspora or by artists, intellectuals, and propagandists, have been heterogeneous, unstable, in conflict. Often, changes in the discourse have anticipated institutional recognition,<sup>21</sup> as in the 1959–1965 period. The founding in 1959, in Beirut, Lebanon (a community of over 200,000 Armenians), of a weekly named *Spurk* (“Diaspora”) by Simon Simonian formally marks the beginning of a re-turn to diaspora. Its self-nomination perhaps helped to launch, and certainly accelerated, a discursive shift in both ideological and aesthetic production. This predated the full-scale political and institutional acknowledgment of the shift that began after 1965.

(b) *The shifting relationship between the diaspora and the homeland.* There was a constantly evolving interaction between the diaspora’s Middle East–based and Euro-American communities and the homeland’s government, which, though Armenian in personnel and name, worked—after Sovietization in 1921—entirely as a subaltern of Moscow. This government drew both on the Communist sympathies of working-class Armenians in diaspora (especially France) and on powerful sentimental attachments to the one portion of the homeland that had survived the Genocide, in order to recruit political supporters and financial aid but also to divide and conquer, to combat what it explicitly labeled diasporic “bourgeois nationalist” tendencies. Each twist of Soviet nationalities policy, from Lenin to Stalin to Khrushchev and beyond, had its consequences in the diaspora, creating tensions between nationalist loyalty to the homeland and an equally nationalist rejection of the Communism that dominated it. In 1958, violence broke out between allies and opponents of the Soviet Armenian regime in the Lebanese-Armenian diaspora, and at least thirty Armenians were shot dead by fellow Armenians.<sup>22</sup> Before and after that year, communal conflict was marked by fierce and sometimes hysterical rhetoric, involving many cases of coercion and several assassinations, which took place in Greece, Iran, and even the United States. After 1965, a policy of hesitant rapprochement between homeland and diaspora slowly developed and has continued, with many reversals, in the post-Soviet period. The policies of post-Communist Armenian governments have sometimes been problematic for many diasporan organizations unwilling to challenge

them openly. That they have proved problematic even after the fall of the Soviet Union indicates that earlier difficulties were not caused entirely by the nature of the Communist regime but, rather, are inherent in the struggle between the homeland's desire to direct organized diasporic life and the resistance such direction by the diaspora's institutions and leaders.

*(c) The generational struggle in diaspora.* The first generation of the leaders of the post-Genocide diaspora had been divided among those who had survived Turkey's Genocide of its Armenian subjects and those who had fled the Soviet purges of Armenia's nationalist and socialist leaders in 1921.

Curiously, as a result of the internal dynamics of the community and especially of the Cold War, after 1945 the Genocide and Turkey were neglected as rallying points for diasporic political activity; instead, two orientations towards the homeland regime, one servile and one hostile, divisively dominated such activity. A critical stock-taking began in 1965, the fiftieth anniversary of the launching by Ottoman Turkey of the Genocide that had led to the creation of the new diasporas mentioned earlier (see point 4 above). Initiated by young people who were the first post-Genocide generation in diaspora to be well educated in large numbers, and versed in both Armenian and non-Armenian traditions of art, thought, and politics, the stock-taking was marked by a rejection of the anti-Soviet stance of the older leadership and by a return to the challenges a post-Genocide diaspora faced—challenges no longer figured as *azkabahbanoum*, the preservation of national traditions in exile, but, rather, as the full-scale rethinking of Armenian identity in a diaspora acknowledged as permanent. The discursive and organizational struggle that ensued affected many institutions, in particular the ARF, and contributed to the emergence of Armenian terrorism (carried out between 1975 and 1983) directed against Turkey and, on occasion, against fellow Armenians.

*(d) Changes in the homeland, the result of internal dynamics, that nevertheless influenced the diaspora.*

Also in 1965 (see section (c) above), the *annus mirabilis* of recent Armenian history, for reasons that diplomatic history has not yet clarified, the Soviet regime then ruling the Armenian homeland decided to permit rituals of national memory and commemoration that it had banned for decades, though they were

routine in the diaspora. Demonstrations involving nearly a million people were permitted in Yerevan, the homeland's capital, where the Genocide and the seized territories that were once Armenia and are now in Turkey were publicly recalled. A Genocide memorial was authorized, constructed, and became a site of pilgrimage, drawing homeland visitors and diaspora tourists, whose numbers increased annually after 1965. Another monument was constructed at a spot where, in 1918, a ragtag Armenian army had stopped the advancing, massacring Ottoman Turkish troops bent on completing the Genocide. These two memorials—the Yad Vashem and the Masada of Armenia, so to speak—address diaspora nationalism as much as they speak to homeland discontents.

(e) *The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965*. This legislation altered the US immigration quotas for many countries, including those in western Asia, where a number of the diaspora's largest and best-organized Armenian communities existed: Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Turkey. Migration to the US began to increase and, after a decade, grew very rapidly as the devastating civil war in Lebanon (1975–1990) and the Islamic Revolution of Iran (from 1979 on) shattered existing polities.

The conjuncture of events and conflicts that unfolded in the period from 1965 to 1988 is characteristic of the intricate challenges that face the scholar of the Armenian diaspora. They involve the internal dynamics of the homeland; the discursive and institutional struggles of the diaspora; the multinational states and societies of the USSR, Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, and the US; and the Cold War and its profoundly divisive effects on the Armenian diasporas of the Middle East and the US. Narration and analysis of these diasporic phenomena is deeply complicated by the fact that diasporas penetrate, and are penetrated by,<sup>23</sup> a variety of nation-states. This interpenetration is a material fact—diasporic Armenians live with and among others, shaping their lives by daily contact with the host society, culture, and state, and above all with its economy, which is never distinct from their own economy and quotidian concerns. Consequently, many of the institutions of diaspora, especially its media, constantly take note of, “spin,” ideologically inflect and reflect upon events that take place locally and globally and that may affect the Armenians. The cliched phrase “but is it good for the Jews?” has its Armenian analogue, which embodies

the penchant of Armenian discourse to take note, sometimes in cosmopolitan and thoughtful, sometimes in alarmed fashion, of events in homeland, host lands, and throughout the globe. Much of the diasporic public sphere is devoted to reflection on such issues.

### **7) 1988–present: Independence and the struggle among the new transnational elites.**

The slow collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it its constituent Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, accelerated the effects of globalization that were already being felt in the diaspora. Fifteen new republics emerged from the collapse. The Republic of Armenia is one of these. This small state (whose population numbered roughly 3.7 million in 1988) was shattered by an earthquake on 7 December 1988 that killed 25,000 people and left 520,000 homeless. It was further devastated by an undeclared war over the secession and independence of the Armenian-inhabited enclave of Nagorny-Karabagh in Azerbaijan, which, between 1988 and 1994, killed some 15,000 Armenians (and 15,000 Azeris) and turned 300,000 other Armenians (and some 650,000 Azeris) into homeless refugees. The persisting misery has led nearly 2 million Armenians to emigrate from their long-awaited independent homeland (a have a million Azeris from Azerbaijan).

These events galvanized and challenged diasporic discourse, philanthropy, and politics. Not since the Genocide has the location and population distribution of Armenians worldwide changed so abruptly, with a sudden increase in contact between the very different traditions of the homeland and the diaspora. That difference had its most pronounced effects after the ARF and the two smaller diasporic political organizations, the ADL and the Hnchag “Party,” “returned” to Armenia, from which they had been expelled after the 1921 Sovietization of the first independent Republic of Armenia (1918–1920). Funded by the diaspora, these organizations—and especially the ARF—were able to establish offices, start recruiting members, publish newspapers, and run (initially largely unsuccessful) candidates for public office, competing with the local, post-Soviet leadership, whose members had rapidly developed a profitable monopoly on state power. The result was state violence against the ARF, several as-yet-

unsolved murders, and a general bitterness and disillusionment that is being (partially) addressed only now and which will remain a major issue for some time to come (Panossian) as homeland and diaspora leaderships both recognize that the transnation's different segments, though temporarily united by crisis, do not share the same political goals and principles.

One consequence of these wrenching changes was a conference that took place in Armenia in September 1999, when 800 diaspora delegates from fifty-two countries—some elected, some appointed from the ranks of communal elites—joined 250 officials from Armenia in a conclave to discuss the future of the Armenian transnation, whose quasi-official recognition was marked by this conference. Though this conference was potentially of great economic and political consequence, it is worth emphasizing that many of the diaspora representatives to the conference were, still, journalists, scholars, and writers—producers of discourse.<sup>24</sup> They, along with the clergymen and businessmen-philanthropists who were present in large numbers, have since 1784 constituted the diasporic elites that founded, funded, staffed, and ran the institutionally saturated Armenian diaspora, managing (and sometimes mismanaging) its public sphere and the civil society with which the diasporic social formation has been endowed.

#### **4. Current Discourse, Cultural Production, and Institutional Politics**

This article's emphasis on the transnation, on the institutional leadership of diasporic communities, and on issues of nationalism, power, and discursive production may strain the credulity of sociologically and anthropologically versed readers who are acutely aware that, in diasporas as elsewhere, daily life for the vast majority of people is not so much a matter of attending meetings and performances staged by organizations as of earning a living, raising a family, enjoying entertainment, and so on. That is, of course, true. As in every national society, so also in every diasporic community, the majority of the population is *not* routinely and directly involved in the discursive and political life of its institutions, nor engaged actively in the production of culture (unless consumption is regarded as an indispensable part of

the circuit of production). Studies of the representational regimes of all societies may focus on the meanings ascribed to and extracted from daily life, quotidian objects, and routine behavior; or on special representational practices, ranging from commemorative events, rituals, dances, or TV to literature and journalism; or they can reflect on that other kind of representation that involves politics, where the few, sometimes elected, sometimes self-nominated, emerging by virtue of skill, service, devotion, and political entrepreneurship, come to speak for the many from legitimized and privileged positions of enunciation, from podiums that address both the diaspora and the host nation. In the Armenian diaspora, the minority who dominate institutions and both kinds of representational regimes (semiotic and political) have been more numerous than in most diasporas (and many nations), and more committed. The most extreme and very rare commitment has manifested itself in a militancy that led to terrorism between 1975 and 1983. The common manifestation of the engagement of ordinary Armenians has been a high per capita willingness to contribute self-taxed income and self-imposed free labor to sustain the stateless power of their diasporic institutions. The rest of this article will reflect on the mutual imbrication of the material and the discursive in the institutional and ideological production of the culture of new diasporic transnationalism.

Cultural production in the contemporary Armenian diaspora results in a range of cultural artifacts: (1) literary works with an explicitly articulated and theorized aesthetic, largely but not wholly Western in orientation, both in Armenian and in certain dominant languages, such as English, French, and Spanish; (2) sophisticated intellectual and crude polemical discourse, the latter often ad hominem and widely read, in all the languages in which Armenian diasporic constituencies are competent; (3) scholarly discourse in Armenian, English, French, Russian, and, increasingly, in Spanish, German, Arabic, Turkish, and Farsi, that is variously addressed to scholarly colleagues and elites in the dominant society but which is also projected as a pedagogy for Armenian constituencies; and (4) the production of images in photography, painting, church decoration, and videography and film, often with religious and especially national themes, iconic images, and motifs (increasingly, the producers who deploy this national vocabulary

compete with and are being edged out by artists who aspire to an international audience and who either use the ethnic and national with a lighter touch, as a resource subject to an international aesthetic,<sup>25</sup> or move towards abstraction and non-Armenian modes that often reference homeland rather than diasporic Armenianness as a marker); (5) the composition and performance of Armenian or Armenian-inflected music that combines lyrics, melodies, and instruments drawn from homeland and old diasporic traditions with styles ranging from French cabaret singing to jazz and rock and on to Russian and Middle Eastern idioms that only experts can name with accuracy.

In addition to these dominant modes of cultural production, which have large constituencies, there are others, ranging from folk dance to the digital, that, again, are variously residual or emerging in different communities. In the United States but also globally, the major Armenian Web site—cum—listserv in English, Groong@usc.edu, has become very important as a source of information and as a shaper of informed opinion. In the typical month of September 2000, it had 2300 subscribers from fifty-four countries (fifty-four diaspora communities, many with only a few hundred members detached from other diasporic institutions, and Armenia), who received its postings automatically via e-mail. In that month, 1119 individual items were posted, ranging from political news (the majority) to summaries of lectures given by Armenian professors in sites ranging from Los Angeles to Beirut, to two essays of Armenian literary criticism. There were 202,000 unit-pages read (this does not include those who receive the e-mail, but only those who log on to the Web site; one article/posting read is counted as one unit in this reckoning).<sup>26</sup> Explicit political ideology on this site is discouraged, but it is nevertheless discernible in some postings. For example, articles discussing the recent elections in Lebanon, in which the dominant Armenian diasporic political organization, the ARF, was defeated for the first time in decades, included many analyses that were informative but hardly objective.

I have taken it for granted that discursive production encompasses not just high culture but also the rhetorical tropes of the vigorous polemic that characterizes the Armenian diaspora and its extraordinarily numerous newspapers; and, equally, that it includes not just the paintings of Arshile



Gorky or the films of Atom Egoyan, both cultural producers of Armenian origin and diasporic consciousness, but also the stereotypically nostalgic photographs of Mount Ararat in the lost homeland that adorn Armenian homes and restaurants and act as a marker of ethnodiasporic identity, as the Pantheon does for Greek identity. Stereotype and polemic mark Armenian representational regimes in diaspora and are nurtured by their mutually sustaining alliance with Armenian institutions, including those with explicitly political—often nationalist—aims.

In mature yet ever-changing diasporas such as the Armenian, politics is manifold. On rare occasions, it involves the exercise of force and coercion, normally modalities restricted to state power. In recent decades, the important Armenian diaspora of Lebanon and, in particular, its ARF and Hnchag organizations have maintained organized confessional militias, above all to protect the community in a time when the state was weak and civil war ruinous (first in 1958 and then in the second, vastly more destructive, Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990), but also to enforce their will in armed clashes that sometimes involved Armenians killing other Armenians. In the sphere of nonviolent state politics that still involve the exercise of power, by law Armenians are allowed to elect specified numbers of members to Parliament in Lebanon and Iran; until recently, transnational political organizations such as the ARF dominated these elections, triumphing over occasional independent Armenian candidates. That is beginning to change, slowly, in favor of independents and smaller political groupings. Lebanon has had Lebanese-Armenian ministers in the cabinet for most of the last sixty years, while French-Armenian and Armenian-American politicians and Americans sympathetic to the interests of the Armenian diaspora have been elected with the financial and campaign assistance of diaspora institutions.<sup>27</sup> Similar assistance has led to the emergence of diasporic political organizations, above all the ARF, as significant political actors in independent Armenia. In addition, the partial success of such organizations in the homeland has begun to alter personnel and policies everywhere as the diaspora organizations try to balance the commitments and interests of a transnational constituency—in the homeland, in Karabagh, and in specific diasporic communities with widely differing population, economic resources, cultural prestige, and local

interests. Few American national organizations, or most diasporic ones, need contend with this level of complexity.<sup>28</sup>

Armenian diasporic politics often involves status, persuasion, the courting of constituencies into joining community institutions, and the shaping of the consciousness, commitment, and loyalty of both militant cadres and lukewarm supporters. Such support or commitment is demonstrated largely by voluntary donations of time, labor, and money. Only rarely do such activities involve repressive diasporic apparatuses; but they always, and predominantly, involve ideological diasporic apparatuses.<sup>29</sup> The contestations and conflict can involve wholly local and ethnically enacted issues, such as control of a church or Armenian school board in a particular city; but they can also entail struggle for the right to lead major transnational organizations. The largest of these has an endowment of over \$300 million (the AGBU, which is led by a woman philanthropist); all others are dwarfed by it and normally have endowments in the \$1–10 million range but, in at least one case, a committed membership of some 7000 who, in certain countries, can rally many times that number of supporters to vote in local elections. Others are tiny independent organizations active in some region of the transnation. Their impact is felt in areas that are specific and manifold and that can include, for example, the subvention of schools and publications in local diaspora communities; the funding of health programs for women and children, including vaccination, in post-Soviet Armenia, where the infrastructure of health is in near-collapse; subventions for artists in Armenia left impoverished by the passing of the Soviet state that employed them; and the construction of water mains, or of roads that have both economic and military importance in a territory that is several thousand miles away from the contributing diasporic community, in Karabagh, the struggling region that is neither in the diaspora nor in Armenia but is regarded as part of the transnation (see discussion on p. X and note 4).

As the range of such services indicates, diasporic institutions engage in both cultural and political work. Some diasporic institutions have power in the narrowly political sense; they influence political events in the host nation and dominate major communal institutions. To paraphrase Foucault, they have

both productive and prohibitive power. Many more have productive power in the sense that they are involved in extending social services, on the one hand, and the discursive production of meaning and identity, on the other. The question of separating the political from the non-political is always complex in advanced societies, be they diasporic or national. Is politics in the United States real when it involves the Presidency, say, but unreal or less real when it involves, for example, election to the board of the Lutheran Community Hospital or the local school board? Is Black History Month an exclusively cultural or also a political commemorative event?

Only a few of the major institutions of the Armenian diaspora consistently work in one arena. The Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America, the two successful Armenian-American lobbies operating in Washington, DC, do not routinely interact with cultural producers, except in a rare case involving fundraisers, such as the concert, mentioned earlier, with the rock band System of a Down. These lobbies are professionalized and peculiarly US-American organizations that represent the political interests of their constituencies. On the other hand, the largest and second-oldest political organization in the diaspora, the ARF, has branches that work in numerous spheres of quotidian diasporic life<sup>30</sup> and has always had many intellectuals in its leadership and ranks. The best-known Armenian poet of the diaspora, Vahe Oshagan (1922–2000), was an ARF member and a columnist for its newspapers; several past members and one present member of the ARF Bureau, which leads the global organization, have also been writers of aesthetic works, and many more have been editors of the newspapers this organization funds (including what is currently the sole Armenian-language daily in the US). Even if culture is regarded as primarily a matter of entertainment and information, illustrations of the imbrication of culture and politics in that guise are not lacking. In Los Angeles, there is an ongoing struggle over an Armenian channel franchise on cable TV: the right to address a growing community (both a political constituency and an economic market) of several hundred thousand can not be situated exclusively in either the economic or the mass cultural realm. That right/license became politicized when a major political organization successfully bid for control of the franchise. This domination of a mode of

access to the community by a political group is *not* illegal under American law because the organization that won control is not only political but demonstrably immersed in supporting cultural production in newspapers, journals, radio, and TV.

In host states where Armenian diasporic political activity of any sort is forbidden and punished by imprisonment or worse, such as Turkey, diasporic life becomes primarily religious, but it still remains deeply involved with language, discourse, and culture. To give a current example, the 55,000 Armenians of Istanbul support two daily newspapers in Armenian (each with a circulation of 2,000) and a pioneering bilingual weekly in Turkish and Armenian with a circulation of 7,000; few American small towns with that population manage to support more than one weekly. In larger communities, such as those of Paris, Beirut, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Toronto (or Cairo and Aleppo in the past), similarly numerous daily, weekly, and periodical publications sustain a lively intellectual debate and have published, in feuilleton form, some of the most important Armenian novels, as well as most diasporic poetry. Such papers depend not just on subscriptions and advertisements but also on subventions, which mostly come from organizations with loyal and largely nationalist constituencies.

The long history of Armenians in homeland and diaspora has so often been precarious that the reproduction of the group's identity has ceased to be just a normal matter of quotidian existence—the very fact of endurance and persistence against forces of extermination, in some places, and assimilation, in others, had become a politicized cultural symbol by the nineteenth century. Only in the past two decades has there been an emerging notion of Armenian identity that is differential without being conflictual and so directly political—and this notion, still embryonic, is yet again the invention of scholars and cultural producers, resisted by many in the traditional leadership.

It has been impossible in the space of this article to give a full account of the material resources, numbers, and intensities involved in the struggle over the direction of diasporic Armenian civil society. But there can be no doubt that its aesthetic and intellectual production is dependent on the institutions and elites of its civil society, groups and individuals who have both sincerely philanthropic yet also political

motives and who have contributed most of the resources that sustain the spaces where cultural producers publish and perform, as well as the schools where cultural producers and organic intellectuals eke out a living.

Currently, new and widespread prosperity is combining with the increase in the number of individuals who have double or multiple cultural competences, as well as those who have hybrid identities, to contribute to the emergence of a new class of cultural producers who have gained independence from communal institutions (and have thereby entered into a new relationship of dependency with agents and distributors of cultural products who replace Armenian organizations as gatekeepers of access to larger forums and markets). Predictably, deviation from institutionally preferred and prescribed cultural norms of the past is also on the increase. Indeed, the Armenian institutions themselves are internally divided and uncertain as to whether to continue to insist on these traditional norms or whether to encourage the exploration of discourses, artistic practices, and entertainment that shed such norms, thus gaining some influence over their positioning within an overarching discourse of Armenian identity and diasporic culture.

The struggle over who will produce what new forms of transnational and diasporic Armenian identities is also shaped by the independence of the Republic of Armenia from Soviet rule. While some of its artists—shaped in Soviet times by an odd combination of hidden nationalism and an aspiration to learn from global Western aesthetic norms—still cling to forms of the national imaginary that are intelligible to most diasporic consumers, many more are engaged in the production of hybrid forms, including, for example, Armenian ballads crossed with forms of Russian urban working-class music unknown both to the West and to the Armenian diasporas there. Such innovations are denounced in many diasporic forums, but they are gaining increasing popularity among the formerly largely captive audiences of the diasporic institutions that produced culture. Some of the new non-institutional practitioners represent hope for a newly innovative diasporic culture, but they will not soon replace, and may yet be appropriated or co-opted by, the institutions of the diaspora's civil society. Since the independence of Armenia and the new

transnation, these institutions have had to adapt to many wrenching changes, but the long history of Armenian communal, diasporic, and transnational institutions and elites, as stubborn as it is protean, suggests that they will continue to survive, gain new recruits in the homeland and in Karabagh, and pursue the policy of sustaining their vision and project of an Armenian transnation.

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## Notes

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2. These three are not equivalent, and a different article would discriminate between them in terms of size, agenda, field of action, the kinds of demands they make on members, and the rewards they provide. Since, in this article, the “institutional saturation” of the Armenian diaspora is at issue, I will usually let “institution” stand for “organization” and “association.”



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3. The distinction between “ethnic” and “diasporic” is an important one that is frequently neglected in contemporary scholarship, as other related distinctions (between these two terms and exile, expatriation, minority, migrancy) are also overlooked. I have discussed the terminological and definitional problems elsewhere (Tölölyan:1991, particularly 16–9). In the excessively loose sense in which “diaspora” has come to mean “all people who are dispersed for whatever reason and live away from the homeland of their ancestors,” ethnic groups are a subgroup of diasporas so conceived. But in a sociologically exact sense, a given community (Cuban-Americans or Armenian-Americans, say) consists of fractions: there are the assimilated, who are counted only for the purposes of inflating the figures of the community, for consolation; there are the ethnics, who retain some demonstrable, persistent, and symbolic connections with one or more communal institutions and identities; and there are the diasporic members, strictly defined, who evince consequential efforts to sustain organized, and perhaps institutionalized, connections with other diasporic communities and with the homeland, when possible.

4. “Transnation” is not a synonym for “diaspora.” The former includes all diasporic communities *and* the homeland, no longer imagined as a nation centered on a state but as a transnation that acknowledges both the permanence of its dispersion and the importance of interconnectedness. Thus the populations of the diaspora, of the Republic of Armenia, and of the Republic of (Nagorny) Karabagh, whose very name and status remain disputed as this Armenian-inhabited enclave of Azerbaijan struggles to secede, are together considered the Armenian transnation. Averill uses the term in a comparable way for the Haitian people and culture in homeland and diaspora.

5. There are virtually no published studies in English of intracommunal Armenian violence in the Armenian diaspora; Schahgaldian and Sanjian are partial exceptions. Armenian terrorism directed at Turkish officials and originating in diaspora has been a complex phenomenon involving culture and politics, and it has been studied in detail (Tölölyan:1987; 1991; 1992).

6. I wrote the first draft of this article before I had read Pnina Werbner’s “Diasporic Political Imaginaries” (1998), in which she uses the term “diasporic public sphere” in reference to British Pakistani Muslims. She defines it as “a space in which different transnational imaginaries are interpreted and argued over, where aesthetic and moral fables of diaspora are formulated, and political mobilization generated” (11). This exactly applies to some of what goes on in the long-standing and strongly institutionalized Armenian diasporic public sphere. For more detail, see “Exile Governments in the Armenian Polity,” in which I distinguish between the traditional government-*in*-exile and the diasporic Armenian government-*of*-exile, in which institutional practices and discourses construct a deeply divided yet functioning public sphere.

7. And largely patriarchal, as well, though in a paradoxical manner. Many prominent Armenian women work in cultural production (as journalists, poets, artists, and academics) as well as in advocacy and philanthropic organizations (some of the latter are specifically defined as women’s groups, and three are led by women). Nevertheless, like the nation, the transnation consolidates its gender differences into a totality whose sign is masculine. Men and women experience, express, and bear the burdens of diasporicity differently, but the erasure of those differences is a general practice, except in the arts.

8. By “territorialization” I mean the emphatic preference of some diasporic individuals and groups for settling in areas where they can be with kin and compatriots; where they can be a substantial minority or a majority; where their religious institutions, schools, shops and restaurants, clubs, and old-age homes can draw on a

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population base; where geographical but especially cultural borders can be established and symbolically patrolled; and, sometimes, where a power base for electoral and lobbying politics can be developed. All these tendencies coexist with an equally or more powerful tendency to disperse, to move up and out, from ghetto or neighborhood to suburbs. As I have argued (Tölölyan: 2001), the logic of diasporic mobility is acknowledged, embraced, even celebrated; the logic of the sedentary, of a localization that amounts to stubborn reterritorialization (see also Goldschmidt: 2000) and which resonates with nations and boundaries, is not received with the same enthusiasm. “The local” as resistance to the global is welcome; “the local” as a quasi-national rejection of assimilation and embrace of the territorialized enclave is not. William Safran has also written of the ways in which liberal criticism of multiculturalism implies that diasporic territorialization sins against the rights of individuals, especially children, “insofar as [the enclave is assumed to] prepare children less well than an immersion in the majority culture, and to impede the individual goal of upward mobility” (2000).

9. How local activity takes place differs enormously. Thus membership in the lay structures that work alongside the clergy (and have a substantial influence) always begins at the parish level, but it expands and can eventually send parish delegates to national and homeland conventions, enabling participation in the election of bishops and the work of the Church at the highest levels. There are a few organizations, such as the Armenian Assembly of America, in which the early affiliation is often not local and consists of contributions of funds to the Washington, DC-based lobbying organization, but that is changing, as the Assembly has discovered the importance of what it explicitly calls “grass roots.”

10. Of course, this is not to say that diasporas are inherently more interested in culture than nations. But in certain cases—the Armenian emphatically among them—the absence of a nation-state has made those who elaborated and sustained the *concept* of the nation in diaspora very important. In such elaboration, artists and intellectuals have played an indispensable role.

11. This is no exaggeration. The boards and executive secretariats that run major Armenian organizations such as the AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union), ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), and ARS (Armenian Relief Society) have, in the past decade, included journalists, essayists, a scholar, and a translator. They used to include many more. Traditionally, philanthropic donations, organizational skill, status in the Church, or an ability to write well while deploying the rhetoric of diaspora nationalism have been the four ways of qualifying for diasporic leadership. Only the board of the Armenian Assembly of America, the first major organization invented in the United States (1972), includes no significant intellectuals and is dominated by business executives and lawyers, with major philanthropic support.

12. So intense was the yearning for return that in 1946–1947, some 105,000 Armenians, then over 10% of the diaspora’s population, accepted an invitation from Stalin’s Soviet government to repatriate to Soviet Armenia. This was not a true repatriation, in the sense that these returnees were in fact born not in the portion of Armenia that had been under Russian/Soviet rule since 1828 but in the part of Armenia ruled by Ottoman Turkey and were survivors, or children of survivors, of the Genocide. However, they wanted to live in whatever Armenia was available, and thus permitted themselves to believe that the economically devastated and politically oppressive post-war Soviet Union could accommodate them. Sorely disappointed, many of those who lived on, and their children, left between 1957–1988, settling primarily in California, where they form a distinct community of around 150,000.

13. The engagement with the local is both easy and complicated in the larger diaspora communities: easy because there are so many groups and causes, complicated because the local is so absorbing and feels so representative of the world community of Armenians that it makes the unified transnational effort feel superfluous. Some communities are so large, and draw from so many other sites of migration (Southern California in the 1990s, Beirut in the 1940s–1970s, Istanbul before 1915), that they develop a parochialism of

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their own (“we are the Armenian world here,” or “we are the citadel, *michnapert*, and capital, *mayrakaghak*, of the Armenian diaspora”). What New York is to the world’s Jews, Los Angeles is becoming to the world’s Armenians, a very important but in some ways parochial world within the diasporic world.

14. Adalian (1989) offers a helpful survey of the history of the Armenian diaspora in English, with slightly different periodization and a very different perspective concerning the nature of politics in diaspora.

15. This “rarity” decreases if we include in the category of diaspora the colonizing minorities that arrive, settle, and come to dominate territories inhabited by larger yet technologically less sophisticated populations. Some scholars (Cohen:1997) are willing to speak of these as diasporas (because they are dispersed and are distant from and anxious about their links to the homeland), while others (Safran; Tölölyan, 1996) continue to maintain that minorities that have clear advantages of power over the majorities they rule as colonials should not be thought of as diasporas. This view assumes that a disparity of power is an essential factor in the definition of diasporas. In Cilicia, the Armenians fleeing the advancing Seljuk Turks arrived as a refugee minority, technologically and economically disadvantaged, but were able to dominate the Greek cities and Syriac peasants, who lacked communal coherence and had lost the Byzantine Greek state that once ruled them. Issues concerning the diasporic/colonial nature of settling minorities become particularly complicated when such groups are backed by a powerful diaspora, as was the case of the Jews settling in Palestine between about 1880 and 1948.

16. The Ottoman and Persian empires, and later the Russian and Western colonial empires, played a significant role in nation-making, from Armenia and Kazakhstan to Algeria and Rwanda. Minorities, tribes, diasporas, and small but territorialized nations commonly develop new institutions and political identities not just through their own efforts but under the shaping impulse of imperial edicts. This is a fact neglected by primordialists and perennialists (who advocate the pre-modern origins of the nation) and misused by constructivists (Gellner, Hobsbawm, and, to some extent, Anderson), who attribute nation-construction to the past few centuries at best and play up the formative role of imperial rule while overlooking the existence of social and cultural formations, endowed with political and religious elites, that were reshaped, not created ex nihilo, by imperial rule.

17. By far the best study of the power and problems of this merchant diaspora in its Persian-based headquarters is to be found in McCabe (1999).

18. The emergence of “print culture” (Anderson: 1991) and the form of nationalism that may accompany it were almost exclusively diasporan phenomena for Armenians at this time. The small towns and agricultural regions of the homeland, divided between and ruled by the Ottoman and Romanov Empires, did not develop an active, indigenous print culture until the mid-nineteenth century.

19. Bardakjian (1976) offers a compact overview of the cultural achievements of this extraordinary group, which began as a localized monastic brotherhood on the tiny island of San Lazzaro in the lagoon of Venice and then became a transnational group that did cultural and religious missionary work wherever there was a significant Armenian diaspora community.

20. For population figures, see Mirak (1980, 1983), “Armenians”; *Torn Between Two Lands*. For a rapid survey of the changing literary culture of the old and new Armenian diasporas in the United States, see Tölölyan: 1996.”

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21. For a helpful discussion of this sort of discursive creative anticipation operating in a wholly different context of migration, in the British “diaspora” of the American colonies, see Armstrong and Tennenhouse, especially chaps. 4 and 5 on “The Work of Literature” and “The Vanishing Intellectual.”

22. I owe this figure, and the names and dates of those who were killed and, when known, by whom, to Professor Ara Sanjian of the History Department of Haigazian College in Beirut, Lebanon. The 1958 killings so shocked the Armenian community, unaccustomed to more than occasional intracommunal violence, that the events have taken mythic proportions. Figures of 150–300 deaths are often given, but there is no evidence of so many victims’ names in the public record. As a boy of fourteen, I, when accompanying my father, a noted and polemical intellectual in the community, survived an attempt to kill us both in Beirut. In the second, prolonged civil war of 1975–1990, Armenians again killed other Armenians, though in smaller numbers.

23. I borrow the term from Brown, who applied it to Lebanese society as a whole, always weak and “penetrated” by competing political powers such as Syria, Israel, the USA, and the USSR. In using it for the Armenian diaspora in particular and diasporas in general, I underscore the nature of most diasporic spaces as neither totalized by a single national ideology nor comfortably hybridized, but, rather, penetrated and characterized by the co-presence of ideologies, discourses, and cultures or by the uneasy coexistence of unintegrated practices of diverse national origins.

24. This author was one of the delegates, charged with writing a report on Homeland–diaspora relations that was distributed to all participants and was one of six such reports to structure two days of general debate on the nature of those relations.

25. Like other diasporic artists, Armenians are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they may still depend psychologically and financially, especially at the beginning of their careers, on the approval of a community audience that demands what Ruth Wisse, a specialist in Yiddish, calls “a tribal art” (qtd. in Rothstein: 2001). On the other hand, the existence of a far larger, high-status art market in the host nation and, indeed, in the global ecumene invites them to produce an art that can cross over, that can make claims to “universality.” In this sense, diasporic artists and those who produce in small nations, from Haiti to Guinea to Lebanon, are in similar situations. Wisse properly distinguishes two versions of the “universal” in the responses to this bind of Jewish (and, by implication, other) diasporic artists. There is an aspiration to *universalism*, which involves the elimination of tribal traces from the art, or to *universality*, which continues to fashion artifacts marked as “tribal” or “national-diasporic,” but designs them to resonate with the aesthetic preferences of the larger art markets. Among Armenian diasporas, it is the French one, aesthetically centered in Paris, that has succeeded best in producing artists with one or both sets of qualities (the singer Charles Aznavour, the visual artists Carzou, Asadour, and Janssem).

26. Personal communication from Asbed Bedrossian, who established an earlier Internet community in 1992 and developed and has maintained Groong since 1994. I am grateful to him for his assistance in obtaining this and other information.

27. George Deukmejian, the Republican governor of California in the 1980s, was of Armenian origin. Currently, sixteen elected officials at the state level are of Armenian origin and self-identified as Armenians, as well as two more congressional representatives, one a Republican and the other a Democrat. A more striking testimony to the political skills of diasporic organizations may be the fact that, of the 435 members of the US Congress, 89 (24.5%) are members of the Armenian interests caucus, while Armenians, numbering 800,000, make up around 0.3% of the US population.

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28. The debate as to the degree to which homeland political groups set the political agenda of their diasporic kin, and to what degree the reverse is true, remains unresolved and probably can never be fully resolved. For a review of the debate concerning the Sikh transnation, see Singh, who argues that the homeland's agenda remains determinative in that particular case.

29. I refer to the two terms popularized by Louis Althusser, which have been instrumental in cultural studies. Applied to diasporas, "repressive" apparatuses can have only a relative meaning—in this essay, they mean the forms of organized coercion that, in the Middle Eastern communities, have sometimes entailed violence. The "ideological state apparatuses" are far more generally applicable to the Armenian diaspora than the term "state" may lead one to suppose, since precisely what Althusser argues is that "state" is more encompassing than the government and may include most producers of organized ideology. The diasporic institutions I have been discussing are active as producers and disseminators of art, discourse, ideology, and representation in the Althusserian sense. That activity is predicated largely upon institutional control of the material resources of the community.

30. The ARF is itself an avowedly political organization whose origins go back 110 years to the socialist and nationalist movement that fought to protect Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Turkish and Czarist Russian empires. Its other branches include, in the US, the Armenian Relief Society or ARS, the Hadassah of the Armenians, made up almost entirely of women; the *Hye Marzakan Enthanour Miyootyun* or HMEM, an athletic organization that has its own scout movement and is arguably the ARF's most popular organization worldwide; the Armenian Youth Federation, AYF; the *Hamazkayin*, a cultural organization that runs bookstores and mobile book centers and stages plays, dances, arts events, and lectures; one daily newspaper in Armenian; one weekly in English; a now-faltering but once very important periodical; a television program; and the Armenian National Committee of America, its lobbying arm in DC (see p. X). The ARF's members form a majority of the boards of almost half the church parishes and school districts in the US. There are more than 100 churches and some twenty-six day schools, as well as countless Saturday and Sunday schools, in the US. Their budgets are raised entirely through communal self-taxation and amount to several hundred million dollars, though specific accounting to the public has always been evaded by the secretive leadership.