Identity Gerrymandering: How the Armenian State Constructs and Controls “Its” Diaspora

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

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Abstract
This dissertation examines the Republic of Armenia (RA) and its elites’ attempts to reframe state-diaspora relations in ways that served state interests. After 17 years of relatively rocky relations, in 2008, a new Ministry of Diaspora was created that offered little in the way of policy output. Instead, it engaged in “identity gerrymandering,” broadening the category of diaspora from its accepted reference to post-1915 genocide refugees and their descendants, to include Armenians living throughout the post-Soviet region who had never identified as such. This diluted the pool of critical, oppositional diasporans with culturally closer and more compliant emigrants. The new ministry also favoured geographically based, hierarchical diaspora organizations, and “quiet” strategies of dissent. Since these were ultimately attempts to define membership in the nation, and informal, affective ties to the state, the Ministry of Diaspora acted as a “discursive power ministry,” with boundary-defining and maintenance functions reminiscent of the physical border policing functions of traditional power ministries. These efforts were directed at three different “diasporas:” the Armenians of Russia, whom RA elites wished to mold into the new “model” diaspora, the Armenians of Georgia, whose indigeneity claims they sought to discourage, and the “established” western diaspora, whose contentious public
critique they sought to disarm. While numerous studies have noted states’ recent penchant for reframing their emigrant populations as “diasporas,” this research suggests a closer examination of precisely whom the state includes in that category, and for what purpose. Specifically, it suggests critical attention be paid not only to attempts to maximize diaspora financial contributions, but also, to encourage public deference to the home state.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Introduction

In October 2008, the Republic of Armenia inaugurated a new government ministry, solely dedicated to “the diaspora.” In March 2010, I sat down to interview Armenia’s new Minister of Diaspora, Hranush Hakobyan. While I approached the interview with plenty of questions about the ministry, some of the more poignant moments were when she turned the questions around on me. In addition to regularly correcting my grammar, the minister scolded me for not having gone to see her when she had first visited my hometown, Toronto.

Hakobyan: When I came to Toronto, you weren't there.
Cavoukian: No. I wasn't there.
Hakobyan: Well, how is it that you concern yourself with the diaspora and you didn't want to meet the Minister of Diaspora?
Cavoukian: Frankly, I wasn't focusing on this topic at the time. [A face-saving white lie, I actually hadn’t heard about the visit.]
Hakobyan: Ok, fine. But still, weren't you curious to meet your minister, to see what kind of person she was?
Cavoukian: Well, I'm here now. I came to you. Isn't it better that we meet here in Armenia?
Hakobyan: True, and those were big events with many people.1

The Armenian diaspora was replete with dedicated community organizers, historians, authors, artists, linguists, priests, scholars, and diaspora “experts” of all stripes. Hakobyan was not a diasporan, had seemingly spent little time outside the former Soviet Union, and had previously held government posts unrelated to the diaspora. She did not speak Western Armenian (the language spoken by most established diasporans), and had no diaspora-specific training (her education was in applied mathematics). In other words, she was by no means a diaspora expert. Minister Hakobyan may not have been as personally slighted as she feigned by my absence at her February 27, 2009 public

1 Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
event in Toronto. Still, her reaction to my non-attendance was telling. Hakobyan’s expectation was that, now that a state-appointed Minister of Diaspora existed, all members of the Armenian diaspora—and those who studied it—should attend her events and pay attention to her pronouncements. By virtue of her appointment as minister, she should now become the first mover on all things diasporic. So, what was this new Ministry of Diaspora, and what were its intentions toward ethnic Armenians abroad? More importantly, why would a state representative need to assert herself as a diaspora authority in the first place?

The Republic of Armenia (RA) has struggled, since independence in 1991, to both attract its established (Western) diaspora’s financial and lobbying support and simultaneously keep it at arm’s length, and especially, out of Armenian politics. After 17 years of ad hoc and largely reactive diaspora relations, a decision was taken to formulate a more coherent diaspora policy, its centrepiece being the 2008 creation of a dedicated diaspora ministry. While this government body did implement small projects, such as youth exchanges, its main focus was on reframing diaspora relations, and the most important reframing was the expansion of the category of diaspora to include Armenians living in post-Soviet states, especially the approximately 2 million currently residing in Russia, virtually none of whom saw themselves as “diasporans.” Unlike previous efforts to temporarily engage the diaspora, such as conferences, the creation of a new

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2 Following Panossian, this dissertation uses the term “established diaspora” to refer to Armenians abroad who were known, before the collapse of the USSR, as “the diaspora.” The majority of this population descended from survivors of the Ottoman Empire’s Armenian genocide (1915-1918), spoke Western Armenian (as opposed to the Eastern Armenian spoken in the RA), and lived throughout the world, but were especially numerous in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Most had never lived in, and had no relatives in, Soviet or post-Soviet Armenia. Panossian, Razmik. 2003. “Courting a Diaspora: Armenia-Diaspora Relations since 1998.” International Migration and Sending Countries: Perceptions, Policies and Transnational Relations. Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, ed. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 141.
government body – by a state lacking in material resources – must have been a deliberate and reasoned course of action. In other words, there appears to have been a specific moment when Armenia’s political elites decided that this would be the best way to put its engagement with Armenians abroad on a more positive footing.

Why would the government of Armenia decide on this particular approach? Relations with the established diaspora had been rocky since independence, especially with the diaspora-based Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnak Party, which had attempted to establish a foothold in the new republic. The RA’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan suggested that

the concept of national political parties which exist and function outside their country is unnatural. There will always be a mutual lack of understanding and trust, so long as the Diaspora leadership does not come to terms with the reality that policy is determined here, on this land.\(^3\)

Within a year, he had banned the Dashnak Party, its affiliate organizations and press from Armenia, and jailed ten of its leaders. And yet, even when relations simmered down under the next president, no specific mechanisms were put in place to “manage” diaspora relations.\(^4\) In 2008, when a decision was finally made to do so, it was a puzzling one. Since “the diaspora” had been a thorn in the side of RA elites since independence, why would they seek to enlarge the thorn (by two million)? Why create a diaspora ministry, and why do so at that particular point in time? How can we make sense of this particular policy choice?


\(^4\) The one exception was the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, an organization established in 1992 to channel diaspora charitable giving toward the RA government’s development priorities. However, this was a single-issue organization that did not address any other aspects of the state-diaspora relationship.
I argue that efforts to reframe state-diaspora relations were an attempt to exert more state control over the diaspora, and that the creation of a dedicated ministry, and that ministry’s discursive output, were intended to have differential effects on three separate “Armenian diasporas.” Specifically, RA elites wanted to court the large, influential, wealthy, and growing Armenian population in Russia, and encourage them to fashion themselves into the new, loyal centre of the global Armenian diaspora. At the same time, they wanted to defuse tensions with their immediate neighbour, Georgia, regarding its ethnic Armenian citizens, roughly half of whom lived as a compactly settled minority on land they saw as historic Armenian territory, by gently nudging them toward behaving less like a national minority and more like a diaspora. And finally, elevating Russia’s status, encouraging its Armenians to organize and behave in certain ways, and then holding this up as a model of “proper” diasporic behaviour was simultaneously an attempt to reduce the centrality of the established diaspora, and marginalize organizations that the RA perceived as most threatening.

The timing of this particular policy change can be understood in light of the upcoming event(s), which would bring into stark relief the most contentious issues of dispute between the established diaspora and the RA: genocide recognition and relations with Turkey. Specifically, in 2008 the RA was in the process of negotiating what would become known as the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, to normalize relations between the two states and, controversially, examine the historical veracity of the genocide. In the slightly more distant future, 2015 would mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide,

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5 While signed by both states, the Protocols were ultimately ratified by neither. However, at the time of their negotiation, they were seen as a way to finally open the border between the two states, which Turkey had officially sealed in 1993 in response to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Turkey’s kin state, Azerbaijan. This border closure (coupled with the closure of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border) had amounted to a crippling economic blockade of the landlocked RA.
an event that would focus increased attention on the RA’s policy regarding its recognition.

This policy choice actually consisted of two separate decisions. The first was to address the state-diaspora relationship by reframing it, by changing the conversation about it through a series of rhetorical moves. The second was the creation of the ministry itself. These choices are important to consider separately, but in practice, they are difficult to disentangle, because the Ministry of Diaspora’s primary function was discursive. I argue that the power of such a ministry lay in its ability to redefine the category of diaspora, and frame state-diaspora relations in ways that benefitted the state.

**Discursive Power Ministries**

While diaspora elites may have definitions and frames of their own, state resources and legitimacy allow official state bodies, such as ministries to infiltrate the diaspora discursive field with the state’s preferred renderings. Assuming a relationship between discourse and the construction of national identity,⁶ I suggest that this government body be viewed as a “discursive power ministry,” with nation-building and boundary-defining functions. Making sense of such a ministry requires us to look beyond its specific programs and instead, focus on what it *said* to and about the diaspora. As an official state body, the Ministry of Diaspora named, framed, defined, and delineated the state-diaspora relationship, and did so with a state-centric agenda. In short, its most noteworthy acts were “speech acts,” which did not describe, but rather, helped to construct reality.⁷

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⁷ Speech-act theory considers “the illocutionary force of the utterance (doing something by saying something such as, for example, making an assertion, promise, etc.)”. Kratochwil, Friedrich V. 1989.
The term “power ministries” has been used within the political science discipline to refer to those organs of government responsible for wielding coercive power, such as ministries of defence and interior. These ministries police the physical boundaries of the state, and maintain order within it. Appropriating this term and applying it to ministries dedicated to diaspora relations, implies that power is not always exercised coercively, and that boundaries are not always physical. Social identities, including national identities, are constructed, reproduced, and transformed discursively. Discursive power is the power to name and frame, to impose a perception of appropriate categories for action. As a “discursive power ministry,” a government body dedicated to diaspora relations can infiltrate the discursive field with the state’s preferred view of the diaspora and the proper state-diaspora relationship, the who and how of national belonging. Thus, it polices the (blurry) boundaries of the nation, and in doing so, is in some ways as vital for contemporary nation building as traditional “power ministries” have been for state building.

The RA’s decision to create such a ministry in 2008 was puzzling, because while the previous ad hoc, reactive approach to state-diaspora relations had not been a resounding success for the RA, neither had it been a spectacular failure. After the early years of tension between the RA and the diaspora-based Dashnak Party, relations had mostly stabilized. Established diasporans continued to criticize RA elites and RA

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9 Wodak et al., 2009: 4.
policies, especially those pertaining to the genocide and relations with Turkey, and they continued to engage in philanthropy, pro-RA lobbying, and tourism. A very small number “repatriated” to Armenia, and/or sought dual citizenship. RA citizens continued to leave for Russia in search of work and send back remittances, and wealthy Armenians in Russia increasingly engaged in philanthropy of their own. Armenians in Georgia continued to complain of mistreatment at the hands of the Georgian government, and they continued to be largely ineffectual in organizing to oppose it. Given this relatively stable state of affairs, we might reasonably have expected no change in policy at all.

Understanding the change requires a closer look at the importance of criticism. With all the material benefits they offer states, diasporas are also sites of potentially divided loyalty, exile-like opposition to the home state’s regime, vocal criticism of home-state policies, and “meddling” in home-state politics. In discussions with RA elites, and with ordinary citizens, “diaspora criticism” of RA policies emerged as a salient and contentious issue. While a putative democracy, which in theory should be tolerant of criticism of government policies, the RA’s elites—in power and even, somewhat more surprisingly, in opposition—saw public criticism of the RA by the diaspora as illegitimate. This criticism flowed freely in the established diaspora, at community events, in newspaper editorials, on television shows and websites. It was much less common, however, among ethnic Armenians living in the post-Soviet space, where public deference to the RA, and the unquestioned acknowledgement of its centrality as the “homeland” was the norm.

Such criticism was generally a moderate irritant to RA elites. However, in some foreign policy areas, diaspora criticism seemed to call into question the RA’s authority to
speak on behalf of the Armenian nation. Diaspora activity can have reverberations that impact a home state’s foreign affairs, and upcoming events would render Armenia’s relations with Turkey even more sensitive than usual. Reframing “the diaspora” to include post-Soviet Armenians abroad, especially the large population in Russia, would dilute the pool of critical diasporans, and recast state-diaspora relations in a more favourable light. By framing appropriate perceptions of diaspora problems and potential solutions, and by delimiting legitimate participation, the Ministry of Diaspora was exercising discursive power. The Republic of Armenia, by establishing such a ministry, mobilized discursive resources to tackle the problem posed by the existence of a diaspora.

**Trends in Diaspora Scholarship**

It should surprise no one that state elites have “national interests” (or indeed, their own personal interests) at heart when engaging with their compatriots abroad, or that they would use the tools at their disposal to try and harness diaspora finances and lobbying power while including them in the political life of the state only to the extent that it serves their, rather than the diaspora’s, interests. In recent years, scholars have documented the degree to which states attempt to manipulate diaspora emotional attachments to “the homeland” for their own benefit. Beginning in the mid-2000s, more and more states developed some form of diaspora engagement policy, and the International Organization

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10 In Armenia’s case, for example, Turkey was known to retaliate against states that recognized the 1915 genocide, an issue about which diaspora Armenians lobbied their host-state politicians. However, in 2000, in the wake of France’s genocide recognition, it also took punitive measures against the RA, imposing a restrictive new visa regime for RA citizens visiting Turkey. The visa restrictions were lifted in early 2002, in response to the formation of the Turkish-Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC), a track two initiative given tacit approval by both governments. Philips, David L. “Diplomatic History: The Turkey-Armenia Protocols.” March 2012 Columbia University Institute for the Study of Human Rights. http://hrcolumbia.org/peacebuilding/diplomatic_history.pdf. 16.

for Migration (IOM) began encouraging states to do so as part of their development strategies. That states should change their approach toward their compatriots abroad is also, by now, a well-documented phenomenon. States as diverse as China, India, and Mexico have “reframed” emigrants and their descendants, from stigmatized abandoners of the nation, to the beloved face of the nation abroad, and proud (willing) contributors to the homeland.

There have also been many good scholarly arguments made in support of labeling more and more classes of emigrants as “diasporas.” After a long tradition of associating the term “diaspora” with traumatic dispersal, the early 1990s saw scholars begin to expand the definition of diaspora such that it no longer required some sort of tragic exile event. There were important reasons to challenge the previously exclusive definition of diaspora, and its expansion yielded considerable theoretical and analytical insight. One of the downsides to expanding the category in this way, however, was that exile or some other form of involuntary separation from the home state had allowed diasporas themselves to engage in the sort of hybridized identity construction that has been explored so thoroughly in the literature. Their memories of, and longing for, the home state became key identity markers, but the home state itself was not a direct participant in

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constructing diaspora identities. In the case of economic migrants or other emigrants who keep in touch with an existing and willing home state, that home state has a great deal of power to engage in identity construction – deciding whom to consider a diasporan, and shaping expectations of behaviour from members of that diaspora. The home state, in this way, can use policy to supplant the role previously played by memory and longing, or to influence the kinds of memory and longing that are deployed. Bolstered by international legitimacy and significant resources, the home state becomes a major player – if not the major player – in the identity construction game.

**Identity Gerrymandering**

I argue that some instances of state-led identity and boundary construction beyond state borders constitute “identity gerrymandering.” The term “gerrymandering” refers to the manipulation of electoral districts in order to create a partisan advantage. By “identity gerrymandering” I refer to official, state-level manipulation of transborder national identity categories in order to further state interests. My focus here is on states targeting populations perceived as extensions of their national community (co-ethnics, co-nationals, emigrants, diasporas, compatriots) abroad. In other words, identity gerrymandering is a state strategy for managing populations the state perceives as its actual or potential (quasi-)constituents, but cannot control via the usual levers of

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14 In fact, the absence of “real” contact with the homeland allowed for the reconstruction of a “mythical” one in the minds of diasporans.
15 The term originated in the United States in 1812, when Governor Eldridge Gerry of Massachussets signed a law redistricting that state’s senatorial districts. Critics pointed out that one of the more egregious examples resembled a salamander when drawn on a map, which they then named after Gerry. Martis, Kenneth C. 2008. “The Original Gerrymander.” *Political Geography* 27: 836.
compulsion states have over their resident populations (compulsory education, policing, incarceration, etc.).

Like conventional gerrymandering, identity gerrymandering constructs a constituency. And, like the gerrymandering of an electoral district, whose purpose is to include constituents most likely to elect or re-elect a candidate, and exclude those least likely to do so, identity gerrymandering draws boundaries around and within the state’s quasi-constituency abroad instrumentally, with a view to furthering the interests of state elites (which may or may not be coterminous with the “national interest”). Some of these interests are tangible and material, such as the influx of financial contributions, or the reduction of diplomatic irritants or security threats. Others are less direct, such as the pursuit of a broader geopolitical (re)orientation, the reduction of criticism of state policy, or the feeling of reduced vulnerability due to the existence of larger, transborder “we.”

Electoral gerrymandering, which divides the population into those more or less useful to one’s electoral chances, is an exercise in slicing and dicing, ranking and prioritizing members of the broader public. Likewise, identity gerrymandering does not simply consist of building a national constituency that stretches beyond state borders to a known population of concern abroad, but of bringing that population of concern into being, and making differentiations among its members based on their utility for the achievement of state goals.

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16 I do not exclude the possibility that the term “identity gerrymandering” could be applicable to state strategies targeting domestic populations as well, such as the manipulation of census categories or the encouragement of new modes of identification, as long as these used means which differed from the usual levers of state control (i.e. did not rely on compulsion). This suggests an avenue for further research, but is beyond the scope of the present work.

17 States have considerable latitude in doing this. Unlike privileging some members of the domestic population over others, which is viewed as official discrimination, and thus as illegitimate behaviour, the non-compulsory nature of states’ relationships with non-citizen co-ethnics abroad subjects these relationships to far less scrutiny.
On the one hand, the notion of extended transborder nationness is an assertion of the “deep, horizontal comradeship” described by Benedict Anderson, a statement of equal national membership in an “imagined community” regardless of physical distance from the “homeland.” On the other, the prioritization of culturally “closer” co-ethnics, or those sharing a more recent common experience of statehood, signals that the nation abroad consists of layers of belonging, concentric circles of membership radiating outward, in which there is not only a differentiation between, but a preference for, some members of the transborder nation over others. Moreover, because shared culture is ultimately a historically-informed shared set of standards for appropriate behaviour, a hierarchy of national belonging based on conformance to these standards (as determined by the state) indicates that national membership, while partly ascriptive, is also, from the perspective of the state, partly achieved through performance.

The Armenian Case

In examining the Republic of Armenia’s discursive moves, what we see is not just a process of diaspora status adjustment, instances of which have been well documented, but an instance of identity gerrymandering: expanding the category of “diaspora” to include people not previously conceived of as such, to further state interests. Negotiating its relationship to Armenians abroad required the RA to consider two very different populations: a large, powerful, organized established diaspora in the West and the Middle East, most of whom had no ties to the Armenian state, and a population of “new

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Armenians abroad” in the former Soviet space. These Armenians were newly abroad in the sense that many had previously lived beyond the borders of the RA but within the boundaries of the former-Soviet Union, a region which was only newly considered “abroad.” Thus, they no longer shared a state with the inhabitants of the RA due to the movement of borders. Others were even more newly abroad. Since 1991, citizens of the newly independent RA had left in droves, with the vast majority relocating to Russia in search of employment. This steady exodus meant that by the late 2000s, the RA had lost up to one third of its pre-independence population, some permanently and others as legal or illegal temporary labour migrants. Neither group of “new Armenians abroad” identified as part of “the diaspora.” For most, the Soviet Union’s dissolution, even 20 years later, did not feel entirely “real,” and while they may have experienced the ramifications of the new borders and passports, post-Soviet Armenians continued to see these as artificial overlays, and to consider the vast post-Soviet space as, in a sense, theirs.

Reframing “diaspora” as an identity category that included both of these very different groups of Armenians abroad was anything but natural. In fact, I argue that extending the “diaspora” category to include post-Soviet Armenians abroad was counterintuitive for all involved. Crucially, however, this identity gerrymandering broadened the category to include Armenians abroad whose behaviour was conducive to

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21 In the case of labour migrants, many were still considered permanent residents of the RA.
22 This was a two-way sense of entitlement. As my interview respondents revealed, RA citizens still saw the entire post-Soviet space as one in which they were more or less entitled to live and work, and tended to see the rules pertaining to immigration and registration as being relatively malleable (or avoidable). Armenians living in other post-Soviet states saw the RA as “theirs,” and their relatively easy and frequent access to it (inexpensive flights, no visa requirements, relatives’ homes to stay in) as tantamount to “not having cut ties” with it, regardless of how long they had lived elsewhere.
RA interests, and who were only beginning to establish organizations. The newly minted Ministry of Diaspora not only offered a new vision of whom it considered diasporans, but also, how those diasporans should organize, and what those organizations should do. This dissertation takes an in-depth look at this reframing process, and examines how it was received in three different “diaspora” contexts.

Identity gerrymandering also served RA elites’ broader geopolitical goals, one of the most important of which was maintaining a strong, if vastly unequal, bilateral relationship with the Russian Federation. Since the overwhelming majority of Armenians in the post-Soviet space lived in Russia, recognizing Russia’s Armenians as the new diaspora “centre” and a model to be emulated reproduced, though in a form that acknowledged the new post-Soviet borders, their quasi-*domestic* status. Armenian elites thus attempted to create a “near abroad” of their own, one which reinforced, but also compensated for, the established diaspora’s cultural and political foreignness by reasserting the boundaries of the former Soviet space as frontiers of continued national relevance.

The Armenian case was especially fruitful for analysis, since it combined one of the “classical”, ideal-typical diasporas on which so much of the literature on diasporas has typically focused, with a new “incipient” diaspora. The state neither had a *tabula rasa* on which to mold its diaspora from scratch, nor—since its relations with its established diaspora had been so contentious—did it have an ideal model to simply extend to newer expatriates. Thus, the state was attempting to “fix” problematic diaspora relations with some Armenians abroad, while cultivating better ones with others. I argue that its discursive moves were intended to do both simultaneously, with mixed results.
This dissertation does not assume the necessary centrality of the state to state-diaspora relations.\textsuperscript{23} It does assume, however, that states will \textit{assert} themselves as central. While much has been made of “the decay of the Weberian state”,\textsuperscript{24} and the degree to which some states are unable to establish or maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of force on their territory, states remain natural monopolizers, extending their reach as far as is feasible. If members of the nation abroad are seen as an extension of the (nation-) state, then the state will attempt to exert authority over them in whatever way it can. Home states may lack the power to compel diaspora obedience, but as internationally recognized entities, they have a significant degree of authority to speak in the name of the extraterritorial nation. While in previous eras it was perceived as legitimate for states to expand their territorial reach via conquest, but a delicate matter for states to foster relationships with compatriots abroad, by the post-Cold War era the legitimacy accorded these activities had largely been reversed, leading Brubaker to suggest that “borders have become more ‘inviolable’, but they have also become more insignificant.”\textsuperscript{25}

While much of the diaspora literature has tended to grant diasporas a great deal of agency and license in the crafting of fluid, hybrid identities for themselves, I join some of the more recent scholarship, which challenges some of these “identity construction” assumptions, “bringing the (home) state back in” to the project of molding diaspora

\textsuperscript{23} While affective attachment to “homelands” has been seen as one of the defining features of diasporas, the actual attachment of specific diasporas to specific home \textit{states} should be investigated, not assumed.


\textsuperscript{25} Brubaker 2009: 477. This is not to suggest that annexation on the pretext of protecting ethnic kin no longer occurred. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was perhaps the most blatant example. However, Russian public opinion notwithstanding, this move was roundly condemned as illegitimate state behaviour.
identities. In the Armenian case, we see the home state as a diaspora activist in its own right, attempting to shape useful, pliant and compliant pro-regime diaspora identities and organizations, and prescribe activities seen as legitimate for those organizations. As a poor, peripheral state, and moreover one that Armenians were leaving rather than flocking to, the RA had little material power with which to entice the diaspora into compliance. It could not pour significant state funding into massive diaspora-oriented programs and public relations exercises. Yet, as the only legally recognized representative of the Armenian nation internationally, its discursive output was accorded significant weight. RA elites thus had the discursive power to reframe state-diaspora relations to suit RA interests. By “framing,” I refer to a political process by which elites attempt to impose their preferred reading of events, identities, and relationships, defining certain conditions as problems and suggesting appropriate solutions. In other words, framing is an attempt to assert a hegemonic definition of reality, marginalizing the definitions of rival actors.

Hakobyan’s assertion of herself as the new Armenian diaspora authority figure was an attempt to punctuate the diaspora discursive field with the state’s preferred renderings of the state-diaspora relationship. Her pronouncements, and the Ministry of Diaspora’s discursive output, were challenges to the existing visions of diaspora identity, the hegemonic organizational forms, and diaspora elites’ own views of state-diaspora-relations problems and solutions.

“Armenians:” A Caveat

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Finally, a word about ethnicity. This dissertation uses terminology that appears to essentialize ethnicity and accept, at face value, claims of ethnic “Armenianness.” However, it does not do so uncritically. I take seriously Brubaker’s cautions against “groupism,” or the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed…as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes.28

One of the more troublesome aspects of any “diasporization” project is that it operates on the assumption that people identified as co-ethnics abroad (by last name, parentage, etc.) are, by virtue of descent, either members or potential members of “the diaspora” of an original homeland.29 This is certainly the assumption made about Armenianness by virtually all RA state elites and citizens, Armenian “diasporans,” and many Armenian diaspora scholars that I have encountered, and it has troubling implications. If Armenianness were natural, primordial, and inalienable, then maintenance of ties with the territory of one’s ethnogenesis would seem to be virtually obligatory. Relatedly, this approach denies emigrants (or the traumatically dispersed) the agency to choose not to be Armenian. Assimilation, by extension, is not a reasonable strategy for success in a new society, or even an affinity for one’s “host state,”30 or society, but a betrayal or tragic loss of one’s true self.

In the field, I was very sensitive to the possibility that I would encounter “Armenians” who did not self-identify as Armenian. However, I did not meet a single

29 Diaspora population estimates are based on these assumptions, rather than on self-identification. 
30 This dissertation uses “home state” and “host state” to refer to states of origin and states of settlement, since they have become conventional in the discipline, but does so with the caveat that “home” and “host” are loaded terms. Indeed, in newly independent Georgia, the idea of “hosts” and “guests” was used to imply that ethnic minorities were merely tolerated, and did not have as much right as ethnic Georgians to feel at “home” in the Georgian state.
individual that fit that description. In the former Soviet space, Armenians tended to see themselves, and be seen by others, as a distinct ethnonational group. They were phenotypically distinct from the majority Slavic population, and in the South Caucasus, where they could perhaps have blended in physically, the narcissism of minor differences ensured that they did not. While there were differences of opinion as to what being Armenian meant (rights, duties, proper behaviour, and orientation toward Armenia), there was little confusion over who was or was not Armenian. Thus, while I subscribe to the notion that ethnic “groupness” should be investigated rather than assumed, in the Armenian case, at the moment of investigation, groupness held up rather well under scrutiny.

Approach of the Dissertation

This dissertation draws primarily on in-depth interviews with over 90 respondents conducted in 2009-10 in Armenia, the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), the Republic of Georgia, and the Russian Federation. In discussions with political elites, community organizers, activists, repatriates, and migrants, I sought to uncover both the

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31 Meeting interviewees using snowball sampling made it less likely that I would meet people who had nothing to do with other Armenians, though a small number of my respondents did have a rather ambivalent relationship with Armenian identity. See the Methodological Appendix for a more thorough discussion of this problem, and my approach to it.

32 Ignatieff, Michael. 1999. “Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Differences.” Theorizing Nationalism. Ronald Beiner, ed. New York: SUNY Press. 95. The thorough de-integration of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, who fled to “their” respective Soviet republics during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, is a case in point. Despite long lives as neighbours, no one had any illusions about who belonged to what group once the violence erupted. (Mixed-marriage families, for lack of options, fled to Russia or elsewhere.)

33 By contrast, in Chapter 8’s discussion of Ukraine’s “Eastern diaspora,” we see a population whose very “Ukrainianness” was in dispute.

34 In addition to phenotypical differences and the minor-difference narcissism mentioned above, Erik Scott offers an interesting take on the Soviet Union’s treatment of recognized nationalities living outside their titular republics, which would have reverberations for the salience of “groupness” in the post-Soviet era. Scott suggests that Soviet nationalities policy encouraged (some) groups to see themselves as distinct, and that members of these nationalities “tended to place greater emphasis on the outward performance of national difference, using otherness as a strategy to manage the terms of their imperial integration.” Scott, Erik R. 2016. Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of the Soviet Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 4.
intent behind the RA’s new approach to the diaspora, and whether and how it resonated with its target audiences. The Methodological Appendix details my general approach to the research, selection of field sites and respondents, and interview format, and situates me, the researcher, within both the process and the resulting insights. The rest of the dissertation proceeds as follows.

Chapter 2 traces the evolving and expanding scholarly definition of diaspora, from an exclusive term referring to a few “classic” diasporas who had experienced traumatic dispersals from their homelands (Jewish, Greek, Armenian),\textsuperscript{35} to approaches that include all co-ethnics living outside their country of origin who maintain some form attachment to their homelands, regardless of the reason for dispersal.\textsuperscript{36} Newer definitions have included “accidental diasporas,” or cross-border populations “stranded” by the movement of state borders,\textsuperscript{37} as well as the large and growing category of economic migrants.\textsuperscript{38} The discussion then shifts to diasporic behaviour, including organized community life in host states, identity construction and manipulation, “long-distance nationalism,”\textsuperscript{39} philanthropy and investment in, and repatriation to, the home state. Some of these

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Brubaker, 2009: 462-3.
\end{itemize}
pursuits reveal considerable “stateless power,” with some diasporas able to confront their home states almost as equals. Diasporas pose an interesting dilemma to home states: since they are simultaneously inside the nation but outside the state, home states perceive diasporas as part of their extended jurisdiction, yet lack the coercive control over them that they possess vis-à-vis their own citizens.

While many states have attempted to include diasporans into the political life of the state (dual citizenship, voting rights, special representation in government), others have cynically exploited them as a source of funds and expected them to “conduct services” such as lobbying in their host states for the homeland, while excluding them from the political process and paying little regard to their interests. An increasing number of states have sought to set diaspora relations on a particular trajectory by creating dedicated government institutions, a relatively costly signal that the diaspora is being accorded a measure of importance. However, both in form and function, there is a great deal of variety in these institutions across states, and little analysis of their efficacy.

The chapter then turns to a discussion of identity construction, framing, and discursive power, and shows the degree to which home states engage in “diasporization,” constructing co-ethnics abroad as diasporic. It then links these activities to new diaspora-oriented government bodies, and suggests that they be viewed as “discursive power ministries.”

43 Agunias, Newland, 2012: 90.
44 King, 1998: 12.
Chapter 3 provides a historical overview of the Armenia-diaspora relationship, both during Soviet times and since the RA’s independence. It traces the formation of the established diaspora, largely the product of the 1915 genocide, which dispersed Armenians from most of their historic territory in eastern Anatolia. Its particular institutional culture of competing, pan-national political-parties-in-exile came to structure diasporic Armenian life, while the tiny remnant of what Armenians considered their historic homeland was absorbed into the USSR. Orientation toward the Soviet Union came to be the defining feature of these parties, with the schism between the anti-Soviet Dashnak party, and the (relatively) pro-Soviet coalition of Hnchak and Ramgavar parties and their affiliated churches, charities and clubs, becoming a defining feature of diaspora life.

The chapter then examines the construction of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic as an Armenian homeland which, while sharply constrained by Soviet prohibitions against “nationalism”, benefitted from Soviet nationalities policies that nurtured a national elite, national language, and national institutions. With the in-migration of ethnic Armenians, and the out-migration of others (mostly “Tatars” or Azerbaijanis), Soviet Armenia became the most ethnically homogeneous union republic, even as significant numbers of Armenians migrated throughout the USSR. While Soviet authorities saw the Dashnak Party as a threat and sought to curb its power, they also marketed Soviet Armenia as the homeland to (non-Dashnak) diaspora Armenians. By the late-Soviet period, Dashnaks had resigned themselves to Soviet rule over Armenia, while nationalist undercurrents began to take shape in the republic, especially with the emergence of a movement to unite Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) with Soviet Armenia.
With the ignition of the NK conflict, the 1988 earthquake, and the collapse of the
Soviet Union, the established diaspora’s attention shifted from its own institutions to the
dire needs of the fledgling Republic of Armenia, and the thrilling, if daunting, prospect of
an independent Armenian homeland. This “family reunion” was immediately fraught
with mutual disenchantment and power struggles. An examination of the three RA
presidencies to date reveals more continuity than change in state-diaspora relations.
While consistently seeking their financial contributions, RA officials were hostile toward
attempts by established diasporans (and especially Dashnaks) to become involved in RA
politics, and sensitive to the diaspora’s public criticism of the regime.

Chapter 4 explores the RA’s new “discursive power ministry,” the Ministry of
Diaspora. Drawing on interviews with Minister Hranush Hakobyan and her staff, it
outlines the organization’s structure, stated goals, and basic approach to diaspora
relations, and provides a detailed analysis of its reframing project. These reframings fell
into three main categories: ones that redefined diaspora identity, preferred organizational
model, and appropriate activity. I suggest that the expansion of the term “diaspora” to
include Armenians throughout the post-Soviet space be seen as identity gerrymandering,
since it diluted the pool of contentious, critical diasporans with friendly and compliant,
culturally closer co-ethnics (some of whom were in fact temporary labour migrants still
considered RA residents). The ministry’s particular fondness for the new “diaspora” in
Russia was also reflected in its preferred organizational model: depoliticized,
hierarchical, geographically based “communities,” headed (and spearheaded) by
prominent businessman-philanthropists, whom I call “big-men.” 45 Finally, the ministry

45 Sahlins, Marshall D. 1963. “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and
Polynesia.” Comparative Studies in Society and History 5, 3: 289-291. This term was a good fit in the
sought to supplant the paradigm of diaspora as “benevolent giver” of material capital to an impoverished homeland with one in which it was the “needy recipient” of the RA’s spiritual capital, recast “noisy” (i.e. public) strategies of diaspora disagreement with the state as unpatriotic, and replace the inconvenient prospect of diaspora repatriation with a broad and vaguely-defined goal of diaspora “re-Armenianization.”

Chapter 5 introduces Russia’s large, growing, and influential Armenian population, and elaborates on its dominant “big-man” organizational model. While the Armenians of Russia were remarkably diverse in terms of citizenship, socio-economic status, and origin, billionaire businessman-philanthropist Ara Abrahamyan’s Union of Armenians of Russia (UAR), which increasingly monopolized Russia’s nascent Armenian organizational landscape, provided an overlay of uniformity and homeland-regarding unanimity. In contrast to the behaviour in the established diaspora, where philanthropy was often understated but public criticism of RA policies was common, this model coupled “quiet” strategies of dissent (solving problems via elite connections) with “noisy” (grand, public) gestures of home state philanthropy. While this model did little to address the problems faced by the most vulnerable Armenians in Russia (labour migrants), it was sufficient for the better established, who saw their problems in terms of community prestige and status in the ethnic hierarchy. The ministry portrayed Russia’s

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[47] I suggest repatriation was “inconvenient” in that a) RA elites had no intention of encouraging established diasporans to repatriate, but b) the lack of a repatriation policy, in light of the ongoing exodus of RA citizens, left them vulnerable to criticism that the RA’s corrupt elites were driving their own people away. In other words, any “repatriation project” had remained largely mythical, but its “failure” was nonetheless felt as a “real” shortcoming.

[48] Many community organizers in Russia noted that they were inspired what they saw as a long tradition of organized Armenian life in Russia, but given the long Soviet-era hiatus, in which virtually no Armenian organizations were allowed to exist outside Soviet Armenia, they were essentially starting over.
Armenians as the model diaspora “community,” but tended to equate that community with the UAR, effectively ignoring the many small grassroots organizations that also existed across Russia. In doing so, the ministry itself contributed to their marginalization and the centrality of the UAR.

If Russia was the “model” post-Soviet diaspora community, Georgia was the problematic exception. Unlike Russia, Georgia’s economy was not conducive to the emergence of billionaires, and its Armenian population was in decline. More importantly, interethnic mistrust in Georgia, and the degree to which ethnic associations of any kind were perceived as political by Georgian authorities, had produced an atmosphere in which diaspora development along the lines of the Russian model was virtually impossible. Chapter 6 explores the two very different Armenian communities of Georgia, the Tbilisi Armenians, who saw themselves as diasporans, and the Javakheti Armenians, who claimed to be “indigenous” to the region, and living on historic Armenian territory. The latter posed a particular dilemma for the RA, since their claims complicated bilateral relations with Georgia. With no rich elite, Georgia’s Armenians did not participate in any homeland philanthropy to speak of. Moreover, many who claimed to be the victims of ethnic discrimination expected the RA to intervene on their behalf, and engaged in “noisy” public criticism when it failed to do so. With both communities increasingly divided between pro- and anti-Tbilisi individuals and organizations, Georgia’s Armenian

49 There was no shortage of ethnic discrimination experienced by Armenians in Russia, but there, it tended to target ethnic minorities in general (and in fact, respondents noted that Armenians fared comparatively well in the ethnic hierarchy). In Georgia, Armenians felt discriminated against as Armenians, partly due to their historic socio-economic domination of Tbilisi and the two nations’ overlapping claims to historic territory, and partly due to their perceived pro-Russian orientation. A 2008 focus group found Georgian youth largely averse to members of ethnic minorities participating in government, and that the “hosts” and “guests” view of ethnic minorities had continued resonance. Elbakidze, Marina. 2008. “ Multi-ethnic Society in Georgia: A Pre-condition for Xenophobia or an Arena for Cultural Dialogue?” Anthropology of East Europe Review 26, 1: 48.
intercommunal tensions were reminiscent of the inter-party rifts that had characterized much of the established diaspora, a model the Ministry of Diaspora sought to discourage. Still, the Ministry “picked winners” by encouraging pro-Tbilisi organizations whose messaging was congruent with its diplomatic sensitivities, and leveraged the involvement of Georgia’s Armenians in inexpensive ministry projects, such as the “Come Home” youth exchange, as a way to refute accusations that RA officials were abandoning the Armenians of Georgia to their fate.

In Chapter 7, we find the established diaspora largely unimpressed by the Minister of Diaspora and her reframed understandings of diaspora identity, appropriate organizational forms, and activity. Established diasporans continued to see themselves as the only “real” diaspora, and reactions to the ministry, though generally negative, were rather predictably divided along Dashnak/non-Dashnak lines, with the latter slightly less cynical about the purpose of the new government body. There was no indication that the Dashnak Party would wither away (though the other two traditional parties, the Hnchaks and Ramgavars, had been substantially weakened), or that a “big-man” model could emerge, especially among Armenians in the US, whom RA elites appeared to effectively equate with the established diaspora. Two developments were noteworthy, however. First, generational change had brought about dissatisfaction with the traditional party system, and “new generation” organizations had emerged that focused largely on “voluntourism” and introducing young diasporans to the RA. Second, even the “old guard” organizations found the Ministry of Diaspora impossible to ignore, and their acknowledgements of the minister, if cursory, lent credence to her claim to being a legitimate authority figure where the diaspora was concerned.
Chapter 8 considers the “success” of the RA’s reframing efforts, and especially, whether its identity gerrymandering project was likely to result in a depoliticized diaspora. While encouraging the emergence of Russia’s Armenians as the new centre of the global Armenian diaspora may have lent prominence to those Armenians abroad who were culturally closest to the RA, there were signs that Russia’s powerful businessman-philanthropists were just as likely to “meddle” in RA politics as the traditional established diaspora political parties had been. In doing so, they were likely to bring their pro-Moscow orientations with them. The relative calm among Georgia’s Armenians in the few years after the creation of the ministry seemed primarily circumstantial, with any future ethnic conflict in Georgia (whether directly involving the Armenians or not) likely to flare tensions once more. In short, it was unclear whether the RA’s ability to “pick winners” from among Georgia’s Armenian organizations would have much impact, should conditions deteriorate. Meanwhile, developments in the established diaspora were mixed. The Dashnak Party appeared to be increasingly co-opted by RA elites, via its inclusion in coalition governments. However, nascent challengers were emerging from within the established diaspora (and key repatriates in the RA) that seemed motivated, in part, by that co-optation. In short, “noisy” strategies of dissent showed no sign of disappearing.

Chapter 9 compares the RA’s approach to state-diaspora relations with five other cases: Israel, a “classic diaspora” example, and four post-Soviet states, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, with whom Armenia shared a Soviet institutional legacy, and a particular international normative moment in which to emerge as independent states and begin the process(es) of nation- and state-building. In each of
these cases, the state saw its co-ethnic population abroad as consisting of two different “diasporas,” but only in Azerbaijan’s case did it engage in “identity gerrymandering” to dilute the pool of troublesome co-ethnics with more compliant ones.
Chapter 2
Theorizing the State-Diaspora Relationship

Interest in diasporas has grown considerably in recent years. Just a few decades ago, students of ethnicity, nationalism, and migration all but ignored diasporas,\(^1\) an omission Safran attributes to the narrow use of the term to refer almost exclusively to “the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion.”\(^2\) More recently, we have seen an expanded application of the term “diaspora” to include a wider variety of groups, the attribution of more positive connotations to the idea of diaspora, and an expanded scholarly interest in diasporas as significant political actors, with “Diaspora Studies” emerging as a scholarly field cutting across social scientific disciplines.\(^3\)

*What Diasporas Are (and Are Not)*

Most studies of diaspora begin from the ancient use of the term, widely attributed to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, whose original meaning was “to sow widely.”\(^4\) The application of this term to the Jews of antiquity had the effect of establishing their particular experience as an “ideal type” against which all other comparable cases were initially found wanting. However, other groups, such as Armenians and Greeks, were

\(^{1}\) Sheffer, 2003: 21.
\(^{3}\) Gourgouris (2005: 384) takes issue with nebulous nature of this field. “How does one ‘do’ Diaspora Studies?” Butler notes that diaspora has acquired a current “sexiness” in academia, such that scholars from various fields have rushed to recast their work to include it. Butler, Kim D. “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse.” *Diaspora* 10,2 (Fall 2001): 190.

ultimately recognized as sharing common features with the Jews, such that a “classic diaspora” canon emerged.\(^5\)

Safran’s 1991 study of diaspora built upon Walker Connor’s (1986) definition, “that segment of a people living outside the homeland,”\(^6\) and consisted of a list of characteristics, at least several of which an expatriate minority community should display in order to be considered a diaspora:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland to two or more foreign places;
2. A collective memory or myth of the homeland;
3. A partial alienation and/or insulation from their host societies;
4. An intent to return to their “true” homeland when conditions allow;
5. A belief in commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland;
6. Some form of continued relation to the homeland, which forms the basis of ethnic consciousness.\(^7\)

While Safran’s definition included the Armenians and Greeks, it excluded other “dispersed” minority groups,\(^8\) and led to qualifiers such as “classic” for diasporas that met all or most of the requirements, and “modern,” “incipient,” and others for groups that fell short of the ideal.

Robin Cohen’s (1997) approach, which sought to move beyond the Jewish- and victim-centred tradition,\(^9\) categorized diasporas based on the cause of their dispersion. Thus, his typology included “victim, labour, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas.”\(^10\)

The utility of such categorization has been critiqued, notably by Floya Anthias (1998),

\(^5\) Safran, 1991: 83-84. While the Armenian case “resemble[d] that of the Jews most closely” (pg. 84, emphasis mine), Safran did not go as far as to consider it on par with the Jewish diaspora experience, even though there was no particular aspect of the Armenian case that did not conform to his ideal type.


\(^7\) Safran, 1991: 83-84.

\(^8\) Safran 1991: 86-90. Safran also considered the application of the word “diaspora” to Black communities in the Americas problematic, since their homeland myths could no longer be focused on precise geographic areas, and saw this as leading to the ultimate failure of their return movements.


\(^10\) Cohen, 1997: x.
who questioned whether the cause of dispersal had any bearing on a group’s subsequent settlement patterns or identity, and called for such a relationship to be investigated, rather than assumed. Gabriel Sheffer (2005) has also suggested that the reason for migration has little bearing on whether it would be permanent, or whether migrants would engage in diasporic behaviour. Such behaviour, according to Sheffer, consists of highly developed (or developing) community organizational life promoting social cohesion around a retained ethnic identity, and the maintenance of exchanges of some sort—be they economic, social, cultural, or political—with the homeland, often creating trans-state networks to facilitate them, and risking conflict with home and/or host states.

The obvious problem with earlier definitions, which Sökefeld (2006) refers to as the “family resemblance or prototype approach,” was that because they restricted the number of true cases to compare, they were of limited scholarly utility. The current view is that, along with forced exile, diasporas can also result from voluntary migration or state formation and collapse, with the emphasis having shifted from socio-political explanations, such as regime change, to individual and small group considerations of political and economic factors. Scholarly definitions of diaspora now refer to co-ethnics living outside their country of origin for whatever reason, in one or more other states, who maintain some form of real or symbolic contact with their homeland, and self-identify or are identified as part of that homeland’s national community. The result,

15 Sheffer 2003: 22-23.
16 Merz et al., 2007: 2; Shain, Barth, 2003: 452.
coupled with the increasing number of people migrating for whatever reason in a world with fewer impediments to doing so, is that many more ethnic groups are considered to be diasporas.17

Some scholars recognize as diasporas those groups that live outside their homeland, but within the borders of a larger, multinational and/or imperial state that rules their homeland, as internal or “intrastate” diasporas.18 When such a state collapses, an intrastate diaspora may suddenly find itself living in new states, separated from the homeland by international frontiers. Brubaker has referred to similarly stranded cross-border minorities as “accidental” diasporas, since they come into being as a result of the movement of borders across groups of people, typically in sudden, involuntary, traumatic events. These groups tend to be territorially concentrated and have ties to the land on which they live.19 It has now become relatively common to refer to ethnic groups affected by the retreat of state borders, such as the 25 million ethnic Russians in former-Soviet successor states, as diasporas, even if their diasporic nature is qualified with the term “incipient.”20 The use of the term “diaspora” to refer to such populations is not uncontroversial, with Cohen, for instance, cautioning that the inclusion of “stranded minorities” who find themselves “living in ethnic enclaves inside a country or in nearby countries” could open “a Pandora’s box.”21

18 Tölöyan, 2007b: 222, n. 16.
20 Sheffer, 2003: 5.
21 Cohen, 1996: 514. Indeed, we now see “diaspora” used to refer to indigenous peoples. See for example Clifford, James. 1994. “Diasporas.” Cultural Anthropology 9, 3: 310. While the focus here has been on
The most important new additions to the expanded definition of diaspora are people previously considered “migrants,” a group that may include purely voluntary, economically driven departures. In many host states such migrants become “permanent established and organized diasporic entities,” like Turks living in Germany, Sweden, and other European countries since the 1960s, and indeed, the mantle of diaspora is now being taken up by migrants themselves, “perhaps in an attempt to invent for themselves a frame of reference different from the standard one that hearkens back to nineteenth-century immigration.” But while migrants may organize into communities with co-ethnics in their host states, full integration and assimilation continue to be options, sometimes attractive ones, in some host societies. The emergence of a diasporic consciousness may thus require an unusually strong attachment to the past, or a present impediment to integration, as well as a conscious effort by generations of people, especially elites.

Butler suggests that this temporal notion of intergenerationality is missing from many expanded diaspora conceptualizations. A group able to move back to its home state...
within a generation is lacking a crucial feature of diasporic consciousness: the
combination of individual migration experiences with “the collective history of group
dispersal and regenesis of communities abroad.” The “incipient” qualifier is thus an
assumption about the likely trajectory of a population, as though every migrant group
were a diaspora-in-waiting. In a world that also features temporary, cyclical migration
flows, the development of migrants into diasporas should not simply be assumed.
Moreover, the expanded category still assumes a level of homogeneity within a group
based on an essentialized identity, and risks masking differences within that category that
are as great or greater than those across categories.

For Sökefeld (2006), the focus must be on the construction of diasporic identities.
He asks why and how people are mobilized to accept and internalize such an identity, and
for what purpose. Rather than assuming mere maintenance of primordial identities,
Sökefeld draws on Benedict Anderson’s famous concept of the nation as an “imagined
community,” and describes diasporas as imagined transnational communities, since
despite their transnational dispersal, they clearly imagine themselves as sharing a certain
commonality. It is thus not the dispersal which creates the diaspora, but a new imagining
of community, which may take place years after the initial migration.

Traditionally, both diasporans and states have taken a negative view of the diaspora

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26 Van Hear is explicit about his inclusion of people regularly returning to the home state within the
category of diaspora. The implications of this approach include the fact that overseas field research for this
dissertation would have qualified me for membership in a “Canadian diaspora.” Van Hear, Nicholas. 1998.
Press. 6.
experience. However, the concept of diaspora has seen a reversal of fortune, not only due to its dissociation with victimhood, but also a weakened adherence to the ideal-typical nation-state model. In the era of globalization, national identities compete with de-territorialized ones, and states contend with multiple, overlapping allegiances, communities of interest, and trans-state networks, of which diasporas are perhaps the ultimate example. As Tölölyan has noted, “the chain of analogies that once joined the image of the safely enveloped individual body (the site of unique personal identity) to the homogeneous territorial community (the site of national identity) is no longer plausible.” Newer approaches have viewed diasporas’ multiple allegiances and identities as a source of adaptive strength, and have even posed diaspora as a possible alternative to the ethnic, state-centric narrative, and a banner under which to struggle against traditional political structures. This approach has been particularly common among scholars broadly focusing on the study of transnationalism, a term that has been used to reconceptualize activities that span territorial borders, including “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together

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30 This is true, for example, of Israel, whose founders chose Hebrew as its national language, marginalizing Yiddish, “to struggle against survivals from the past.” Bordes-Benayoun, 2010: 49.
their societies of origin and settlement.” The flurry of enthusiasm for all things transnational throughout the social sciences in the early 1990s was a challenge to the state-centric scholarship, or “methodological nationalism,” of the Cold War era. In the face of the once-canonical assimilation and ethnic pluralism models of immigrant adaptation, both of which saw the new host state as the singular site of (legitimate) activity, transnationalism has described modes of adaptation which retain homeland ties and include cross-border transactions. But it has also approached diasporas as communities transcending geography, and notwithstanding their displacement and mobility, attachments to states—both home and host—are essential elements of diaspora identity, reterritorialization is often an explicit goal of diasporic nationalisms, and diaspora networks act as bridges between distinctly local, even parochial communities. Transnationalism also describes a far larger field of actors and activities, including transnational capital and social movements. While it is useful to consider diasporas in the broader context of a world where transactions of all kinds increasingly cross state borders, given that more and more phenomena fall into this category it perhaps suffers from the same conceptual stretching that plagues the term “diaspora.”

Shain and Sherman suggest that, since diasporas also play a powerful role in the regeneration of national sentiment, we view diasporas as “endemic to a world order of...

nation-states, rather than anomalous anachronisms doomed to extinction.”41 If so, they
cannot be heralds of a post-nation-state era. Indeed, the same transnational processes
associated with globalization (and diasporization) may awaken and strengthen discrete
notions of national identity and difference.42 Anthias suggests that ‘diaspora’ is plagued
by the same problems as earlier notions of ethnicity (primordialism, the assumption of
natural group cohesion), which it has often come to replace, and that downplaying these
notions may lead us to underestimate the degree of continued attachment to the ‘ethnic
spectacles’ through which the world has so often been viewed.43

Ultimately, while the scholarly debate is intellectually interesting, the category of
diaspora is increasingly coming to be defined not by scholars, nor even by diaspora
communities themselves, but by states.44 King and Melvin suggest that the analytical
utility of the term be judged not by the degree to which a group measures up to some set
of objective criteria, but rather, whether the group and the home state “act as if a
diasporic relationship exists.”45 And as Adamson (2012) notes, diaspora has shifted from
a descriptive to a prescriptive label, used by political entrepreneurs to organize otherwise-
dispersed people for political purposes.46 I argue that these political entrepreneurs are
increasingly home states themselves, who seek to shape, rather than describe, relations
with co-ethnics abroad. As such, we now turn to an exploration of what diasporas, and
“their” states, do, and how they relate to one another.

45 King, Charles, and Neil J. Melvin. 1998. “Conclusion: Diasporas, International Relations, and Post-
Soviet Eurasia.” Nations Abroad: Diaspora Politics and International Relations in the Former Soviet
46 Adamson, 2012: 36.
What Diasporas Do

As Butler notes, scholarly considerations of diasporic behaviour are inherently bound up with the groups included in any given definition. And she suggests that many studies of “diasporas” have been case studies of a particular diaspora, with the activities associated with that group then generalized to others. A recurring theme, however, is that diasporic behaviour consists of highly developed (or developing) community organizational life promoting social cohesion around a retained ethnic identity, and the maintenance of exchanges of some sort – be they economic, social, cultural, or political—with the homeland, often creating trans-state networks to facilitate them, and risking conflict with home and/or host states. Werbner (2004) notes that while the ethnonational identity of people living in eponymous states is largely assumed, diasporans engage in public works, such as fundraising, artistic endeavours, and political lobbying, as demonstrations of their continued membership in the nation. In other words, their diasporic identities “can only be achieved through ‘doing,’ or, more broadly, through performance.” Much of this performed identity involves relations with the home state, where one exists, and Tölölyan suggests that it is the degree of general commitment to maintaining connections with the homeland and with kin abroad that differentiates diasporans from immigrant “ethnics.” Political disagreements within diaspora “communities” are not uncommon, and intra-communal divisions often lead to

the establishment of competing political movements or parties, which may engage in a high degree of social policing of their membership.\textsuperscript{51}

Because of the home-state focus of diasporas themselves, and perhaps also due to the state-centred nature of the international system, state-diaspora relations have been the dominant focus of diaspora studies, at the expense of diaspora-diaspora relations.\textsuperscript{52} Relations between states and diasporas are coloured by states’ recognition as the legitimate international actors, but also by the comparatively lengthy pedigree of some diasporas.\textsuperscript{53} While states appear to have the upper hand in terms of the ability to wield hard power and international legitimacy, well-organized and dedicated diasporas possess what Tölölyan has called “stateless power,” or the ability of diaspora elites to raise funds, provide services, and influence state policy through lobbying and other activities, some of which, like electing representatives to state bodies, are considered legitimate, while others, such as engaging in terrorism or arming militias, are not.\textsuperscript{54}

The diasporic condition is, by its very nature, an ambivalent one, and the disconnect between geographical location and identity has been depicted as allowing diasporans to “manipulate international images” and use identity to influence their host state’s foreign policy towards the home state, as well as their home state’s domestic politics.\textsuperscript{55} This ambivalence, captured well by Varadarajan’s characterization of diasporas as “the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{51} Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001: 227-8.
\bibitem{54} Tölölyan, 2007b: 217-9.
\bibitem{55} Shain, Barth, 2003: 451, 460.
\end{thebibliography}
domestic abroad,” has also situated state-diaspora relations in a “grey zone” between the comparative politics and international relations disciplines, resulting in a relative lack of adequate attention by either. Within comparative politics, the study of diasporas has drawn largely from the literatures on nationalism and ethnic politics, with diasporic behaviour often seen as “long-distance nationalism.”

Anthony Smith defines diaspora nationalism as “an ideological movement to secure for a self-defined ethnocultural population collective autonomy, unity and identity by restoring its members to their historic homeland.” However, the lack of secure attachment to the land can lead to the promotion of “imagined homelands” that bear little resemblance to the actual territory from which diasporas originated. And since their claims may compete with those of existing nation-states, such nationalist activity has included recruitment, arming, and financing for political, military, and terrorist operations. Diaspora involvement in homeland conflicts is troublesome, since groups brought into being by traumatic events tend to be less willing to compromise and, as they are physically removed, are less likely to bear the direct costs of protracted conflicts.

Others have taken a broader approach to diaspora nationalisms, including in this category attempts to intervene in the political, social, or economic life of the existing homeland (without necessarily “returning” to it), in order to strengthen a specific vision

60 Cohen, 1996: 516, 519; Kapur, 2007: 98; Sheffer, 1994: 65; Smith 2010: 4-5. Kapur notes that since the end of the Cold War, state support for insurgencies and terrorism has decreased, while diaspora support for such causes has increased. 2007: 100.
of national identity, often because the lot of diaspora communities in their respective host states is affected by the perception of the home state. These interventions can include involvement in home state elections, whether by voting, running for office, or financially supporting political parties, as well as lobbying their host governments to pursue home-state-friendly policies. Clifford suggests that many diasporic nationalist strategies—critiques, discourses, nostalgic visions—are essentially “weapons of the (relatively) weak,” and must be distinguished from state strategies of nation-building. However, much diaspora-home state interaction often takes the very material form of financial flows from one to the other.

Diaspora financial flows have attracted significant scholarly and political attention, and while these are not necessarily unidirectional, diaspora-state financial transfers have been the focus of most scholarship, likely because they are of most interest to states themselves. Shain and Sherman differentiate between financial flows intended primarily to influence national identities and support political causes, and other sorts of diaspora contributions, such as remittances, investment, and philanthropy. The first category is characteristic of the struggle to achieve or consolidate statehood, when funds tend to be channeled to nascent state bodies.

63 Kapur, 2007: 91. Naturally, these strategies depend on the legality of such behaviour in the home state.
64 Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001: 224.
65 Clifford, 1994: 307. Vertovec suggests that too much emphasis is placed on the conscious, rational, choice of strategies by diasporan individuals in pursuit their goals. While some conscious choice is evident, be it to reinforce a cultural boundary or to cross one, unconscious patterns of adaptive behaviour are also to be expected from people raised in a diaspora environment, and well versed in at least two social milieux. Vertovec, 1997: 293-4.
67 Diaspora financing of self-determination and sovereignty movements has been prominent since the nineteenth century, with examples such as the Northern Irish Fenian movement, the consolidation of statehood in Greece and Italy, self-determination movements in the Indian sub-continent and Palestine, in post-communist eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the Tamil Tigers movement in Sri Lanka. Shain, Sherman 6-7, 2001:18.
Once state viability is established, financial flows tend to be redirected toward non-state bodies and activities in the home state, such as civil society groups or opposition political organizations. Philanthropic giving reflects the motivation of the giver, and may consist of goods, services, investments, and less tangible transfers of knowledge, values, and access to networks. Since it often funds services expected to be provided by modern states (i.e. education, health care, disaster relief), its continued provision by “heroes abroad” risks encouraging government complacency in meeting the needs of citizens.

For members of “classic diasporas,” which predate the independence of their home states and may have few ties to them, the decision to financially support the home state, a potent symbol of the survival of the dispersed nation, may stem from the “desire to feel part of the homeland experience, to assuage guilt or to provide a focus for activity on the part of diasporic organizations.” For more recent emigrants, whose ties to the home state are much more immediate, remittances are the financial contribution of choice. These private resources, earned abroad and sent to relatives for private consumption, are a major source of income for home states, with financial flows often double the size of official development assistance. Diasporas also transfer ideas and skills from their host states and networks, which Levitt (1998) refers to as “social remittances,” that can have transformative effects on home states. Kapur notes that while these can be positive

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69 Philanthropy can defined as “private giving for public purposes.” Merz et al., 2007: 3.
70 Merz et al., 2007: 3, 13.
71 Suzy Antounian, 2006, qtd. in Merz et al., 2007: 3.
72 Shain, Sherman, 2001: 5.
73 Merz et al., 2007: 6-11. Remittances also have negative effects, since they contribute to inter-household inequality, and are generally used for consumption, rather than investment. Kapur, 2007: 93, 107.
(good governance, innovation, best practices, gender equality) they may also be negative
(violence, criminality, human trafficking).\textsuperscript{75}

Returning to the homeland remains a dominant theme in diaspora studies and the
diasporic imagination, even when it has assumed the status of myth and is impractical or
improbable. Impediments include the absence or inhospitable nature of the home state,
and the diaspora’s comfort level in its various host states. Permanent relocation, even to
one’s purported homeland, is a disruptive and often traumatic experience, especially for
the majority of members of long-established diasporas, who do not view their host states
as exile. As such, decisions to leave are more likely the product of discrete individual and
small group calculations than ideological movements or national longing.\textsuperscript{76}

When diasporans do repatriate, their experience in the home state may more closely
resemble a re-diasporization than a homecoming,\textsuperscript{77} and this feeling may be exacerbated
by the welcome repatriates receive. While many states officially allow or even encourage
repatriation with \textit{jus sanguinis} citizenship policies (e.g. Germany, Israel, Croatia),
repatriates may face a chilly reception if they come from host states with different
political values, or if their wealth is resented by current citizens.\textsuperscript{78} Repatriation, especially
in large numbers, can obviously have reverberations in the domestic politics of the home
state, but so can the decision not to repatriate. Kapur notes that the influence of diasporas
on home states is not limited to what diasporas do, but also extends to the indirect impact

\textsuperscript{75} Kapur, 2007: 94.
\textsuperscript{76} Safran, 1991: 91; Sheffer 2003: 24.
\textsuperscript{77} This phenomenon has been noted with respect to Moroccan Jews and the Bene Israel of India,
“repatriating” to Israel, but continuing to perceive their “host states” as their genuine homelands, and
engaging in diasporic pilgrimages to visit them. Bordes-Benayoun, 2010: 54; Safran, 2009: 77.
\textsuperscript{78} Safran, 2009: 96-97.
of their absence on home state development, such as through the “brain drain” and loss of human capital.\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{What States With Diasporas Do}

The ambivalent position of diasporas implies a relationship with both home and host states, and while much has been written about diaspora-host state relations, home state behaviour is the focus here. For home states, diasporas pose an interesting dilemma. They are often seen as quasi-domestic actors, since they occupy a space outside the state, but inside the nation.\textsuperscript{80} As part of the nation, they may remain engaged with the state in ways that make them both assets and liabilities. However, unlike the state’s citizenry, they are not subject to the coercive and socialization tools with which a state normally exerts influence over its population. According to Shain and Barth, the ability of diasporas to sway home state governments depends, on the one hand, on the degree of organization and unity of the diaspora, and on the other hand, the receptivity of the home state to diaspora demands, which depends largely on the degree to which it needs the diaspora’s financial and/or diplomatic resources.\textsuperscript{81} To this, one might add that their diplomatic value and ability to influence the host state (and the relative value of that host state to the home state) increases their status in the home state, and vice versa. In both home and host states, though, diaspora influence is stronger where the state is ‘weak’ or permeable. Such permeability may come in the form of democratic institutions, but also in the form of poverty and institutional disarray, where governments require diaspora support to survive.\textsuperscript{82} Even a desperate state, however, may take issue with interventions on sensitive

\textsuperscript{79} Kapur, 2007: 92.
\textsuperscript{80} Bordes-Benayoun, 2010: 52; Shain, Barth, 2003: 461.
\textsuperscript{81} Shain, Barth, 2003: 465.
\textsuperscript{82} Shain, Barth, 2003: 461-464.
national security matters. “Homeland leaders and publics may feel that their direct stake in the outcome of a conflict with their neighbors should trump any diasporic preferences.”

While paranoia regarding the alleged duplicity and fifth-column behaviour of people with dual state allegiances has largely subsided, it is still a source of concern that some diasporas “want to have their cake and eat it,” meaning they want access to the increased security and opportunity of their host states, without reducing their ties to their home states. Home states appear to be troubled by this seemingly instrumental use, rather than affective reverence, of the nation-state, but they also return the favour, a point, which has been downplayed in much of the diaspora scholarship. Home states may in effect use diaspora communities as a resource, soliciting funds without necessarily considering the diaspora’s interests or giving it a political voice in affairs of the state, a situation akin to taxation-without-representation. Home state governments often adopt a cynical attitude toward “their” diasporas, (reluctantly) intervening on their behalf only once the state’s own interests have been secured. Sheffer suggests that the attitudes and actions of home states’ leaders are often to blame for diaspora-home-state tensions, since they believe “that the raison d’etre of ‘their’ diaspora is to maintain continuous contact with the old country, express their unswerving loyalty…and conduct services for the homeland in the…host country, particularly over defence issues.”

87 Anthias, 1998: 570; Shain, Barth, 2003: 461. Fund solicitation can range from encouraging voluntary giving to charitable funds, to more coercive attempts to “tax” emigrants through embassies and consulates abroad.
88 Sheffer, 1994: 76.
89 Sheffer, 1994: 75.
Home and host states may use diasporas as pawns or mediators in their political and economic relations with one another, especially in situations where direct state-state negotiations are risky. In such cases, the needs of the diaspora community are not the primary focus of either state. In other cases, home states may encourage repatriation to meet certain domestic goals, such as populating a specific region, or altering the demographic balance in favour of the titular group.

Regarding diaspora-state financial flows, the general assumption is that home states are not only receptive, but desirous of such activity, and can create a governance and investment climate to encourage it. Some governments attempt to attract funds through diaspora-specific investment schemes and facilitating organizations, and active facilitation may be necessary, since these investments may be risky, with low returns, such that diaspora investors accept an “ethnic discount” by choosing to invest in their home states.

While generally receptive to financial flows, home states are more ambivalent with respect to “social remittances.” While some knowledge transfer is seen as benign or even beneficial, diaspora expertise in governance may be seen as threatening, especially when the diaspora promotes democratic reform, civil rights, or other institutions which home state elites are reluctant to adopt, or when diaspora hard-liners promote views at odds with the state elite’s foreign policy preferences.

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93 Merz et al., 2007: 6.
95 Merz et al., 2007: 11; Safran, 2009: 83; Tölölyan, 2007b: 221.
**Attempts to Manage the Diaspora**

States’ attempts to manage diasporas have been largely understudied. One exception to this general trend is the field of diaspora philanthropy. However, even attention paid to this phenomenon has, according to Sidel (2007), been overly simplistic when it comes to the key role played by the receiving home state, which has either been portrayed as “eager” to receive philanthropy, or “suspicious” of diaspora motives. While these ideal types do exist – the first characterized by supportive attitudes and policies, and the second by restrictions, hostility, and mistrust of diaspora motives, Sidel also notes the existence of “confused states,” whose policy actions lag behind the influx of philanthropy, “rent-seeking states” that seek to channel diaspora funds toward state priorities and institutions, and “inquisitive” states that demand information from diaspora donors, often for legitimate reasons such as preventing religious conflict or limiting support for terrorist groups.

Philanthropy displaces state influence, and a state may see this either as a loss of control over its citizens and territory, as a replacement or budgetary supplement for state provision of social services, or more ambivalently, as a combination of the two. Home states face diaspora donors, often allied with one another or with non-diaspora intermediary organizations, who “challenge receiving governments virtually as equals.”

Even when not explicitly criticizing the state for developmental failure, mismanagement

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or corruption, the very act of diasporic giving implicitly highlights the shortcomings of the state in meeting the needs of its citizenry.

Given the importance of a relationship with the home state to diaspora identity, states have the ability to control diasporans by withholding access to the state and its resources through citizenship restrictions, expensive and extensive visa requirements, land ownership laws, and conscription duties. They can also extend the usual methods of persecution, coercion, and incarceration to diasporans located within state boundaries. Regarding diasporans in situ, home states may attempt to assert authority in various ways. States may extend their coercive reach to discourage dissent abroad, via surveillance, seizure of passports, and harassment of relatives in the home state.\textsuperscript{100} More benign measures to attract support involve appealing to the diaspora by “accentuating the self-other divide to include diaspora members as part of the national collective”\textsuperscript{101} or deploying “affective capital.”\textsuperscript{102} Csergo and Goldgeier (2004) refer to “transsovereign nationalism,” a nation-building strategy that reaches out to embrace or influence ethnic kin across borders they wish to leave intact. They note that this strategy requires cross-border co-ethnics to see themselves as sharing a nation with the home state, and to see it as culturally and economically attractive.\textsuperscript{103} These perspectives shed little light on how a home state might make itself attractive to diasporans, and specifically, whether and how the state-diaspora relationship might be officially and explicitly addressed by state policy-makers.

\textsuperscript{100} Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001: 226.
\textsuperscript{101} Shain, Sherman, 2001: 9, 19-20. Where there are competing national projects, diaspora funds are likely to be divided accordingly, though in the face of external threats, the ruling regime is usually successful in monopolizing these funds.
\textsuperscript{102} Ionescu, 2006: 51.
**Dedicated Institution Creation**

According to Gamlen et al. (2013), the creation of a dedicated Ministry of Diaspora in Armenia is part of a global trend. While few such institutions existed in the early 2000s, by 2013 over half of all United Nations member states had some sort of dedicated diaspora institution, ranging from quasi-nongovernmental organizations (QUANGOs), to legislative bodies, to full ministries.\(^{104}\) Measures to incorporate the diaspora into the life of the nation-state have also included creating hometown associations (Mexico),\(^{105}\) reconceptualizing the diaspora as a quasi-geographical territory or province (Haiti and Chile), allowing overseas voting; creating diaspora seats in parliament, and providing dual citizenship.\(^{106}\) Such organizational activity is now recommended to states by migration-oriented international organizations, such as the IOM,\(^{107}\) even though there is little scholarly or other reliable assessment of the performance of these relatively new institutions.\(^{108}\)

No one institutional form has emerged as the preferred one among states with diasporas, but Agunias and Newland (2012) suggest that dedicated ministries signal an acknowledgement that other ministries (Foreign Affairs, Labour) cannot adequately manage the “expatriate portfolio,” that they tend to enjoy more consistent government funding and support, and that they demonstrate “that the government accords diaspora

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\(^{104}\) By 2011, 26 states had ministries with diaspora portfolios, while 12 of these were dedicated solely to diasporas: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Georgia, Haiti, India, FYR Macedonia, Morocco, Pakistan, Senegal, Slovenia, and Sri Lanka. The remaining 14 states had hybrid ministries with multiple portfolios, such as Serbia’s Ministry of Religion and Diaspora, and Tunisia’s Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, and Tunisians Abroad. Agunias, Newland, 2012: 72-74.  

\(^{105}\) Smith, 2003: 731. 


\(^{107}\) Gamlen et al., 2013: 4. 

\(^{108}\) Agunias, Newland, 2012: 90.  A good indication of the recent nature of this institutional development can be seen in comparing Agunias and Newland’s publication, produced for IOM, with Ionescu’s 2006 IOM report, which includes only a very short section on institutions, and is more focused on states’ *desire* to harness diaspora potential.
engagement the highest political importance...”

But trends aside, the creation of dedicated government departments does not necessarily follow from the perceived need to manage diaspora relations. In fact, rather than solving a problem, a new agency can often enlarge its scope. The creation of a new agency has an ambivalent effect on state autonomy, providing a clearer target for interest groups looking to exert pressure on a given issue, but also providing legitimate channels for group influence, which may enhance the state’s autonomy in implementing unpopular decisions.

Rather than viewing them as a sum of their programs and outputs, Christensen et al. (2007) suggest we view organizational structures as “the frameworks within which processes unfold,” and claim that such structures set limits regarding who can participate, what roles they should play, and what perceptions of a policy problem or solutions are acceptable or appropriate. Public organizations are also key to opinion-formation.

Public policy is just as much about discovering goals, identities and affiliations as it is about finding the best tools to reach given goals. This implies that the symbolic side of public organizations is of great importance. Politics is...about interpreting experiences in such a way that people’s goals, values, beliefs, attitudes and opinions are influenced and their sympathies and antipathies shaped.

The creation of a ministry—even an underfunded one—is a costly proposition for a state with few resources. Thus, it would seem reasonable to ask why Armenian elites

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109 Agunias, Newland, 2012: 74. They also note, however, the advantages of other institutions. Hybrid ministries (combining two or more areas of focus) can minimize “turf wars” arising from inter-ministerial conflict over diaspora policy, while subministry institutions (i.e. offices within existing ministries) “seem to follow the mandate and priorities of their mother agency”. Aguinas, Newland, 2012: 76, 79.
112 Christensen, et al., 2007: 16.
would choose this option. The attitude-, opinion-, and sympathy-shaping function suggested by Christiansen et al. brings us closer to understanding this choice.

**Identity Construction, Framing, and Discursive Power**

The phenomenon of diaspora has lent itself readily to the notion of constructed identity and imagined community.\(^{113}\) Located (literally and figuratively) in and between two worlds, adopting and resisting the influences of home and host societies, neither here nor there, doubly excluded, and bicultural, diasporas are seen as possessing a hybrid, pastiche identity that differs from that of the home state and the majority host society. The construction of this identity has been a significant focus of diaspora studies, with the founder of the journal, *Diaspora*, noting that its purview would be

the traces of struggles over and contradictions within ideas and practices of collective identity, of homeland and nation…the ways in which nations, real yet imagined communities (Anderson), are fabulated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on land people call their own and in exile…[shaping and] shaped by the infranational and transnational Others of the nation-state.\(^{114}\)

Not only is diaspora a constructed identity, it is also seen as being under continuous construction and reconstruction, with transnational linkages between diaspora sites and the home state being key to this process.\(^{115}\) In fact, as Østergaard-Nielsen notes, while diaspora consciousness is constituted negatively by uprooting, discrimination, and other victimization, it is constructed positively through identification with the homeland.\(^{116}\) As such, association with the home state can be a significant aspect of diasporic self-esteem.

Within international relations theory, Shain (2007) suggests that the theoretical space shared by constructivism and liberalism is best suited to the study of diasporas,

\(^{113}\) Anderson, 2006.
\(^{114}\) Tölöyan, 1991a: 3.
\(^{115}\) Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001: 221.
\(^{116}\) Østergaard-Nielsen, 2001: 221.
since both acknowledge the impact of identity and domestic politics on international behaviour, and while constructivism focuses on explaining how actors’ identities and interests arise, liberalism seeks to explain their subsequent actions. In the case of diasporas and states, there are (at least) two identities to understand – the identity of a state-with-a-diaspora, and the identity of the diaspora – and the interplay between them. Most diaspora scholarship, however, has focused squarely on the diaspora’s identity, how it is constructed, and what interests are generated as a result. Here, Shain and Barth suggest a corrective to the constructivist approach, which sees identity as leading to interests. In the case of diasporas,

sometimes identity is the interest. For some diasporas, the people's identity is not the starting point to be captured in order to influence interests, practices, and policies; identity is both the starting and the end point. In such cases, the only interest is to assert, through the homeland's foreign policy, a preferred version of kinship and national identity.

What is often left vague is the agency involved in diaspora identity construction, the mechanisms by which it is constructed (and reconstructed), and the ways in which these bits and pieces of identity are arranged in order to make sense of, and shape, the diasporic experience.

The idea of framing was initially developed by Erving Goffman (1974) and applied to social movements by David Snow et al. (1986). Snow and Benford (1992) suggest that a frame be defined as “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the
such that events are given meaning, and social conditions are turned into issues ripe for social action, through specific ideas that foster a shared understanding.\textsuperscript{121}

Martin Sökefeld (2006) has applied the notion of framing to the formation of diasporas, using a social movement approach. He suggests that a state of distant ancestry is framed as “home,” framing processes establish specific events as catalysts to the formation of diaspora communities, and that identity, roots, and the importance of history are master frames that “activate the imagination of diaspora communities.”\textsuperscript{122} Such communities contain varying degrees of commitment, from the full-time activist elite to peripheral members, though discursively they are constructed as coherent wholes in which all take part. Moreover, the imagination of community requires agents who produce and disseminate frames and discourse, and must be maintained and reproduced over time,\textsuperscript{123} notably with symbolic events and other moments when the imagined community is made tangible for its members. For Sökefeld, rather than a reflection of social unity, diaspora communities are a means for establishing it. Thus, while community is invariably constructed in essentialist terms, there is nothing primordial, natural, or “given” about migrants fostering diaspora identities.\textsuperscript{124}

But \textit{who} constructs or frames diaspora identities? In much of the literature, diaspora individuals, and especially elites, do. Töölöyan claims that “diasporas only come into being through conscious and organized effort by generations and networks of people, and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{122} Sökefeld, 2006: 270-71.
\textsuperscript{123} Sökefeld, 2006: 271, 276.
\textsuperscript{124} Sökefeld, 2006: 277.
\end{flushleft}
especially their cultural, social and political elites.”

This was certainly the case for the “classic diasporas,” exiled from a home state that no longer existed, but who collectively remembered or intended to return, who could select “from the rich ethno-histories...those concepts, ideals and symbols that would give meaning and coherence to the diaspora nationalists’ programmes.” Newer migrants, too, can decide whether to assimilate, or whether to form diaspora organizations and engage in diasporic behaviour. While the construction of their identities is home-state-regarding, diasporas are depicted as having a relatively free hand in relating to an imagined homeland, and they also become deeply tied to their host states, as reflected in their ambivalent attachment to both, and sometimes, to diaspora “centres” or “capital cities” abroad.

However, for King and Melvin, “diasporization” is “the process by which states attempt to construct ethno-cultural communities as diasporic,” a process motivated less by concern for co-ethnics abroad, and more by domestic interests. Tölölyan notes that with the creation of states, previously stateless diasporas, and especially their elites, must


127 Smith 2010: 8. Drawing on Thomas Schelling’s notion of “focal points,” Laitin suggests that elites or cultural entrepreneurs decide on points of coordination which, if they are successful, come to be accepted by the community as a fundamental part of their shared identity. Laitin, David D. 1998. Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 22-23.


129 Intra-diasporas divisions often hinge on the appropriate approach to the homeland. Esman, 2008: 105-6.

130 Tölölyan 2005: 144-5.

131 King, 1998: 12, emphasis mine.

acknowledge that their identities will now come to be shaped in the home state.\textsuperscript{133} If home states claim the right to speak for the entire transborder nation, however, they leave themselves open to criticism by the diaspora, who may object to being spoken for, and whose various organizations may see a given policy as antithetical to their specific interests.\textsuperscript{134} In spite, or perhaps because of this dynamic, many states, especially in recent years, have taken an active approach to cultivating their emigrants or co-ethnics abroad into “a diaspora,” rather than waiting for ethnic entrepreneurs abroad to do so, lending credence to the notion that “identity politics is often more about politics than about identity.”\textsuperscript{135}

The two processes of identity construction and framing are intertwined in the case of diasporas. Hinging, as they do, on a shared “consciousness,” of difference, uprooting, and belonging, and at the same time, lacking the physical and institutional features of the nation-state, which tend to fix and reproduce nationness, diasporic identities are historically contingent artifacts whose origin and maintenance beg explanation. While specific events may give rise to the imagination of diaspora community, such events must be framed as critical in order to be perceived as such. Frames, in turn, are deployed and maintained by agents, whether individuals or organizations.\textsuperscript{136}

\textit{Discursive Power}

If identity is constructed, and framing is a mechanism by which to construct it, then discursive power is key to understanding how certain actors are able to engage in

\textsuperscript{133} Tölölyan, 2007b: 226, n. 21. This holds even for the weakest of states and the strongest of diasporas. Jourde notes that, via framing, weak states with little material power can exert a degree of agency \textit{vis-à-vis} hegemonic states. Surely, this must also hold true for diasporans that live in those hegemonic states. Jourde, 2007: 485-7.
\textsuperscript{134} Shain, Barth, 2003: 455-6.
\textsuperscript{135} King, Melvin, 1998: 109.
\textsuperscript{136} Sökefeld, 2006: 275.
framing. Discourse is a term whose social scientific use has been plagued by “semantic fuzziness and terminological flexibility.”\textsuperscript{137} It has also often been avoided by political scientists due to its association with an exaggerated view of postmodernism and poststructuralism in which there is nothing “out there” beyond words and text.\textsuperscript{138} But as Schmidt notes, discourse is a vital concept, since it refers not only to ideas or content (i.e. “text”), but also the context in which, and the structure by which they are conveyed, and the agents who convey them.\textsuperscript{139}

While some approaches to discourse do have a postmodern, emancipatory aim,\textsuperscript{140} what is most important for our purposes is the degree to which discourse constitutes social practice. Stories about nationhood and belonging are produced, reproduced, and disseminated by actors, in and through institutions.\textsuperscript{141} As Wodak et al. note, “Through discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them.”\textsuperscript{142} By “discursive power,” then, I refer to the ability of an actor or institution to produce authoritative discourses. This includes both the resources necessary to engage in discursive output (staff, budget, time, equipment, knowledge), and the legitimacy to be considered authoritative.

Ministries dedicated to diaspora relations may be designed to implement particular policies, rather than being primarily oriented toward diaspora identity construction and

\textsuperscript{137} Wodak et al., 2009: 7.
\textsuperscript{138} Schmidt, Vivien A. 2008. “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse.” \textit{Annual Review of Political Science} 11: 304-5. Schmidt finds it regrettable that scholars have avoided the term, using “ideas” instead, even when they are in fact discussing discourse.
\textsuperscript{139} Schmidt, 2008: 305.
\textsuperscript{140} Critical Discourse Analysis, for example, seeks “to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use.” Wodak et al., 2009: 8.
\textsuperscript{141} Wodak et al., 2009: 23.
\textsuperscript{142} Wodak et al., 2009: 8.
framing the state-diaspora relationship. However, Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora’s primary purpose did appear to be discursive. While it had insufficient resources to realize grand state-diaspora projects, it did have sufficient resources to get a particular narrative about the Armenian diaspora into the public sphere, at events, online, and in the traditional media. And while diaspora organizations the world over had similar (and in many cases, greater) resources, not to mention public relations savvy the ministry often lacked, as an arm of the Armenian state, the Ministry of Diaspora wielded the international legitimacy to speak on behalf of Armenians, making its discursive moves authoritative. Discursive power is the power to delineate and promote appropriate categories for action, and as such, the Ministry of Diaspora is best understood as a “discursive power ministry.”

*This Dissertation’s Contribution: Rethinking What States With Diasporas Do*

Since home state institutions dedicated to diaspora relations appear to be a growth industry, they clearly merit closer study. In many cases, states are “creating” brand new diasporas by simply using the term to refer to their emigrants, without any previous conception to contend with. In the Armenian case, however, the established diaspora was in fact so established that it was considered one of the “classic diasporas.” As the following chapter will show, in 2008, “diaspora” was not simply a term available for RA elites to deploy to refer to any Armenians abroad, but a term already in use to refer to a specific population of Armenians abroad, and loaded with connotations specific to that population. “The Diaspora,” for Armenians in the RA and abroad, was the established diaspora, born of genocide, exile and trauma, mostly hailing from Western Armenia/Eastern Turkey, and possessing tenuous links to the RA. As such, the
“diasporization” of Armenians in the post-Soviet space was the gerrymandering of an existing identity category to include people who did not, in most cases, fit that description at all, and was an alien usage of the term to virtually all Armenians, in the RA and elsewhere. As such, the Armenian experience represents a particularly difficult case of “diasporization,” since there would have been a much higher degree of resistance to the ministry’s reframing than in other cases.

Approaching this institution as a “discursive power ministry” highlights its power and authority to construct diaspora identities and reframe state-diaspora relations. Furthermore, approaching the extension of the “diaspora” identity category to post-Soviet Armenians as “identity gerrymandering” lays bare the degree to which diaspora identity is as much a state interest as it is a diaspora interest. In this case, reframing and identity construction are examples of discursive policy change in lieu of more material or tangible policy change.

The following chapter delves into the historical developments leading to the Armenian state-diaspora relationship on the eve of the creation of the Ministry of Diaspora in 2008, and provides context for the perceived need to reframe it.

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143 Shain, Barth, 2003: 455.
Chapter 3
The Armenian Diaspora Landscape, Past and Present

In 2010, estimates placed the global Armenian population at 9-10 million,\(^1\) only 3 million (or less) of whom lived in the post-Soviet RA.\(^2\) It was thus unsurprising that the diaspora entered into virtually every Armenian political discussion, on the one hand cited as a strength and a “natural resource,”\(^3\) and on the other, blamed for either neglecting or meddling in Armenian politics. Most Armenians outside the RA were part of the “established” diaspora, the descendants of Western Armenians uprooted by the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Armenia,\(^4\) and their identity was deeply intertwined with the politics of memory and recognition of that event. Since their ancestors hailed from what is present-day eastern Turkey, they had no familial ties to the Armenian republic. While there had also been Armenians living throughout the Soviet Union, these were barely considered to be diasporans, and both Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian efforts focused on harnessing the economic force, and curbing the political power of the established diaspora.

**Constructing a Global Armenian Nation in Exile**

The Armenian diaspora did not begin with the genocide of 1915 and their expulsion from their historic territory in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire. Historically, there

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\(^1\) These figures were commonly cited, but relied on wild estimates. All attempts to enumerate “the Armenian diaspora” have used ancestry as a proxy for diaspora membership, a practice which Brubaker cautions is fraught with assumptions about boundary-maintenance. Brubaker, Rogers. 2005. “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28,1: 11.

\(^2\) Figures for the RA often included NK, whose population did not exceed 200,000.

\(^3\) The diaspora was cited as the only natural resource of this otherwise resource-poor state. A common expression claimed that “Azerbaijan has oil, Georgia has the sea, Armenia has the diaspora.”

had been a thriving Armenian merchant diaspora in as far-flung locales as Singapore, Venice, Isfahan, and Amsterdam, as well as a monastic order-based community in Jerusalem. Armenians had also moved to centres within the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian empires that ruled them.\textsuperscript{5} However, the massacres in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and the Genocide of 1915-1918, produced a large, forcefully displaced Armenian diaspora population scattered across the globe.\textsuperscript{6} Considered “Western Armenians,” since they spoke the Western dialect of the Armenian language, they differed linguistically and culturally from their ethnic kin living in the Russian and Persian Empires, who spoke Eastern Armenian. Initially, most genocide refugees were concentrated in the Middle East, but gradually spread to Europe, North and South America, and Australia, with the most prominent populations emerging in Lebanon, Syria, France and the US.\textsuperscript{7}

In the wake of the genocide, three pre-existing political parties followed the Armenians into exile, and began to compete for the loyalty of the newly forming diaspora communities: the socialist and nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF or “Dashnak” Party), the Social Democratic Hnchakyan Party (SDHP or “Hnchak” Party),\textsuperscript{8} and the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADL or “Ramgavar” Party).\textsuperscript{9} The strongest of the three, the Dashnak Party was founded in 1890 in Tbilisi, Georgia, and had “functioned between 1890 and 1920 as an Armenian ‘national liberation front’, participating in armed struggle in Ottoman Turkey, in Tsarist Russia and even briefly in

\textsuperscript{5} Tölöyan, 1991b: 170.
\textsuperscript{6} Cohen notes that, while the origins of the Armenia diaspora lay in trade and commerce, the overwhelming majority could be considered a “victim diaspora” because of this traumatic expulsion. Cohen, 1996: 512.
\textsuperscript{7} As will be discussed later, a significant population of Western Armenians fleeing late-Ottoman Empire massacres also settled in various parts of present-day Russia, Georgia, and \textit{de facto} independent Abkhazia, as well as to what would become Soviet Armenia. Since they were absorbed into the Soviet Union, they are treated as a separate category here.
\textsuperscript{8} Founded in 1887 in Geneva, Switzerland.
\textsuperscript{9} Originally the “Armenakan” Party (until 1921), it was founded in the Ottoman Empire in 1885.
It also formed the government of the short-lived independent Armenian Republic, from 1918-1920.

Diaspora elites had a rich set of building blocks with which to construct ethnic Armenian identity in exile. These included the myth of ethnic election, with Armenia believed to be the “first Christian nation,” the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) as a source of historic institutional unity in the absence of statehood, the unique Armenian language and script, and an ethnohistory spanning at least two millennia that combined the golden age of “Greater Armenia” with suffering and martyrdom at the hands of the ancient Persians and the Ottoman Turks. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the degree of identity construction that occurred in the established diaspora, and the obstacles faced by nationalizing elites. Not only had the genocide decimated and scattered the Armenians from their historic territories, but even before their dispersal, their villages and institutions had been characterized by poverty, disarray, and disunity. Armenian diaspora organizations were challenged by parochialism (regional and hometown affiliations), as well intense identification with, and even voluntary assimilation into, host societies. The secular elites also sought to curb the power of religious authorities who did not support nationalist ideologies. The leadership of competing pan-national organizations was ultimately able to mold Armenians the world

10 Tölölyan, 2007a: 111-12.
12 Smith, 2010: 12.
13 Parochialism extended to language as well, with Armenians in the diaspora initially speaking a wide range of dialects (some of these largely mutually unintelligible dialects were preserved, to an extent, among the Western Armenians in Southern Russia), and many fluent only in Turkish. Eventually the Istanbul dialect of Western Armenian became the standardized language spoken throughout the diaspora, with the notable exception of Iran, where Eastern Armenian was spoken. Panossian, Razmik. 2006. The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars. New York: Columbia University Press. 299.
14 Tölölyan notes that in select cases, diaspora communities formed deep attachments to their diasporic places of settlement, such as Thessaloniki, Greece, or Kessab, Syria. Tölölyan 2005: 140.
over into “a relatively coherent community with a collective consciousness as a diasporic nation.”

By the 1930s, the Dashnak Party had emerged as the dominant party, though the Hnchak and Ramgavar parties maintained strong and loyal followings as well. While each party had specific ideological leanings, these generally took a back seat to Armenian nationalism, identity construction and maintenance. As a result, diaspora Armenian national identity was intimately associated with membership in these parties and their associated community organizations. These included the Ramgavar-associated Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), a large, transnational philanthropic organization, and the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), a Dashnak-affiliated women’s philanthropic organization.

Once they had successfully instilled a cohesive, modern national identity among Armenians in the diaspora, the political parties became conservative forces, seeking to preserve and perpetuate what they had brought about. The Dashnak Party, for example, shifted from its original socialist, revolutionary leanings, toward community-insulating social conservatism and a pro-status quo, pro-Western political orientation. After the 1950s, they were characterized by ideological and political stagnation, which ultimately alienated much of the younger generation.

Much of the inter-party hostility in the diaspora hinged on the respective parties’ attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Dekmejian notes the ideological incongruities that

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18 The ARS was linked to the Dashnak Party, though it operated autonomously, and was a UN-recognized NGO. Tölöyan, 2007a: 113.
arose as the diaspora political parties divided along Cold War lines. The Ramgavars, officially liberal democratic and representatives of the Armenian bourgeoisie, found themselves supporting (or at least, tolerating) the Soviet Union, along with the social democratic Hnchaks, while the socialist Dashnak Party sided with Western powers. With the Dashnaks emerging as the strongest party, Ramgavars and Hnchaks became allied against it, effectively reproducing the Cold War within nearly every Armenian diaspora community, punctuated by rare moments of unity, such as the 1965 commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the genocide.

Among diaspora institutions, the AAC played a strong role in fostering diaspora unity, since over 90 percent of established diaspora Armenians were members. It was also of symbolic importance for Armenian nationalism, since its “complex discourse of martyrdom contribute[d] importantly to uniting the older discourse of Christianity with a more recent discourse of political sacrifice.” Nevertheless, the Dashnak anti-Dashnak rift translated into church divisions, with a Cold War rift dividing the two main seats of AAC authority, the Holy See of Etchmiatsin (in Soviet Armenia) and the Holy See of Cilicia, which had relocated from Sis (in the Ottoman Empire) to Antelias, Lebanon.

Two church-related events helped to solidify the rift. The first was the assassination, in 1933, of Archbishop Levon Tourian in New York by Dashnak party members.

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21 The ideological rift between the Dashnaks and anti-Dashnaks affected most diaspora communities, with the exception of smaller populations in Eastern Europe and East Asia. Bournoutian, 2002: 361.
23 Smaller numbers were members of the Armenian Catholic and Evangelical (Protestant) Churches.
24 Tölölyan, 2007a: 112.
members. Then, in 1952, after the death of the Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia, Dashnaks facilitated the election their preferred candidate. The Catholicos of Echmiatsin, under the influence of anti-Dashnaks and Soviet officials, refused to recognize the election. The Antelias See then expanded to found separate prelacies in regions with strong Dashnak support, including Iran, Greece, the US, and Canada.  

Dominated by three pan-diasporic political parties and the AAC, and united by their organizational structures and publications, Armenian diaspora communities had much in common despite their vastly different host states. Diasporan elites attempted to homogenize the imagination of “Armenia,” imposing “lexicological and ontological hegemony to govern the creative and re-creative diasporic imaginations of the homeland...through the instruments of ideological and organizational apparatuses,” a process which served their own interests as well as the putative good of the nation. Because of the centrality of the genocide narrative to these efforts, younger generations with no actual memories of their historic territory came to “view the Armenian homeland exclusively through the prism of ‘genocide recognition.’” In addition to distorting the diasporic view of the homeland, the intense focus on the trauma and injustice of the genocide created a “‘garrison mentality’ in which a self-critical attitude toward Armenian issues [was] often avoided.” Payaslian notes that annual April 24th commemorations of

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25 Bournoutian, 2002: 360-1. This led to some Armenian communities having two separate Armenian Apostolic churches, one loyal to Echmiatsin and the other, to Antelias.


the genocide were not only attempts to promote genocide recognition in host societies, but also lent legitimacy to the diasporan leadership within their respective Armenian communities.29

Despite these general commonalities, host states and societies did have a significant influence on the activities and cohesiveness of Armenian communities, with Middle Eastern states differing markedly from those in the West. In the Middle East, Arab states such as Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, welcomed Armenian efforts to provide services to their own communities. This led to the creation of Armenian-speaking enclaves with separate schools, colleges, hospitals, and old-age homes. In Lebanon there were also designated Armenian seats in parliament, for which the parties could compete.30 As such, Armenian communities in these states remained close knit, and assimilation into wider society was rare.31 Since the Arab states followed the Ottoman millet pattern, which viewed minorities as religious, rather than ethnic communities, the AAC became the primary identity marker, provider of services, and community hub.32

Divided by party and church, the region’s Armenians experienced serious intracommunal rifts, sometimes descending into violence. In Lebanon, for example, the Etchmiatsin-Antelias split divided the Armenian community against itself, with the Dashnaks and the Hncak-Ramgavar coalition fighting on opposite sides during the 1958 civil conflict.33 Nevertheless, the Middle Eastern communities became the focal point of diasporic life, especially that of Beirut, which, from the 1920s until the civil war of the

29 Payaslian, 2010: 126.
30 In Lebanon, the Dashnak and Hncak parties also formed their own militias, and fought one another during the first Lebanese civil war (1958). Tölöyan, 1991b: 182-3.
31 Dekmejian notes that, generally, the likelihood and rate of Armenian assimilation was lower in Muslim states than in Christian ones. Dekmejian, 1997: 436.
1970s, was effectively the diaspora Armenian “capital city,” a global centre of Armenian political leadership and cultural production.\textsuperscript{34} As such, the Middle Eastern communities’ version of diaspora Armenian identity became hegemonic, especially from the 1920s to the 1960s, and was spread via migration of Middle Eastern Armenians to the West.\textsuperscript{35}

By the 1960s Armenians had prospered economically in the Middle East, and in spite of their largely separate existence, considered themselves part of their host societies. By the 1975 Lebanese civil war, Kotchikian notes that Armenians were fully integrated into Lebanese society and politics. “The war itself and the determination of the Armenian community to remain in the country strengthened the establishment and consolidation of the Lebanese identity and belongingness in the local Armenian community.”\textsuperscript{36}

In spite of their relative prosperity and integration, a current of communal discontent simmered, due to the increasing realization that diaspora was a permanent condition, and the moral outrage at Turkey’s continued denial of, and global indifference to, the genocide.\textsuperscript{37} Hnchak and Dashnak youth, inspired by the PLO, wanted to engage in armed struggle for the “Armenian cause.” Rejected by their own party elites, they formed ASALA\textsuperscript{38} and other terrorist groups which, between 1975 and 1983, engaged in transnational terrorism and assassinations, mostly of Turkish diplomats in the West, but also of members of the Dashnak leadership.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{34} Panossian, 2006: 292.
\textsuperscript{35} Panossian, 2006: 305.
\textsuperscript{36} Kotchikian, 2009: 471.
\textsuperscript{37} Dekmejian, 1997: 420.
Compared to their ethnic kin in the Middle East, Armenians in Europe and North America found their community boundaries more porous, with a combination of host societal emphasis on integration and the desire by many Armenians to assimilate. In other words, there was both the opportunity and the willingness to ‘opt out’ of Armenian identity and community, and thus, the project of nationalizing elites was more difficult and less successful.\(^{40}\) With each passing generation, language use diminished, such that church affiliation often replaced language as a key cultural marker.\(^{41}\)

In the US, the founding diaspora generation consisted of approximately 100,000 Armenians fleeing the Ottoman Empire and immigrating before the 1924 imposition of a discriminatory quota system. By the post-war era, this population had prospered economically, but had also experienced a decline in communal solidarity, with over 70 percent of third- and fourth-generation Armenian Americans marrying outside the Armenian community.\(^{42}\) Bakalian describes these Armenians as having shifted from traditional to “symbolic” Armenianness. Whereas previous generations considered Armenianness to be ascribed, and dependent on linguistic competence and community immersion, newer generations perceived ethnic affiliation as a choice, “expressed in terms of pride in one’s heritage and strong feelings toward people and things Armenian.” Manifestations of Armenianness could now be relegated to voluntary, spare-time pursuits, and with each passing generation, fewer individuals sought out the socialization

\(^{40}\) Panossian, 2006: 296.

\(^{41}\) Panossian, 2006: 300.

\(^{42}\) Dekmejian, 1997: 439; Mirak, 1997: 398. This was also true of Armenians in Britain and France. Bakalian notes that, while intermarriage was seen as the greatest contributor to Armenian assimilation in the US, evidence suggested it was less significant than the passing of generations. Bakalian, Anny. 1993. *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. 393-394.
functions of Armenian associations. These symbolic Armenians imagined a symbolic Armenia, one that no longer resembled the land of their ancestors or commanded a strong sense of allegiance. “The imagined homeland, now rendered foreign, [was] kept at a comfortable distance, a destination to be visited at leisure and a place to dispatch charity.” Armenians in the US also constructed an Armenian identity that was ideologically congruent with their host society. During the Soviet era, the Dashnak party in particular presented itself as a counterweight to Sovietized Armenia, and many US Armenians hoped to remake Armenia in the American image, with a specific focus on capitalism and free enterprise.

After 1965, a second wave of Armenians arrived from the Middle East, fleeing various crises and wars in their host states. These new arrivals were generally young and well educated, and many community leaders saw their exodus from communities close to the historic Armenian homeland as a serious threat to national survival. With their higher fluency in the Armenian language and greater degree of communal solidarity, these new arrivals within a short time came to control the organizations built by the older generation of Armenians, and their “inflexible, Old World, hierarchical methods” were often a source of conflict between the two groups.

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43 Bakalian, 1993: 395, 421. Tölöyan has referred to Bakalian’s “symbolic Armenians” as “ethnics,” as opposed to diasporans, since their ‘home’ was definitively the US, while Armenian identity was one of many that competed for their attention. He reserved the term “diasporic” for the minority of community members who were committed activists, and whose activities were bi- or multi-local. Tölöyan, 2007a: 109-10.
44 Payaslian, 2010: 133-4. Bakalian suggested that “symbolic Armenians” prefer less demanding forms of Armenian socialization, including travel abroad summer programs and college courses, “because they are more congruent with their definition of Armenianness.” Bakalian, 1993: 396.
45 This tendency contrasts with the strong socialist leanings found among some segments of the Armenian populations of France and Argentina, and the more nationalist orientation in Lebanon. Dekmejian, 1997: 418; Payaslian, 2010: 125, 128; Tölöyan, 2007a: 111.
48 According to a 1995 AAC community survey respondent, “Immigrants treat those of us whose families
In 1975, smaller numbers of Soviet Armenians also began moving to the US, many of whom had been diaspora “repatriates” who never became accustomed to life in Soviet Armenia. Then, in 1988, the earthquake brought 11,000 Soviet Armenians to the US.\textsuperscript{50} Los Angeles, in particular, was the destination for the overwhelming majority of Soviet Armenians, and became “a sort of Mecca for traditional Armenianness.”\textsuperscript{51} There, their tendency to live off the welfare system offended the sensibilities of the economically established and self-reliant older generation of diasporans.\textsuperscript{52}

Alongside the system of “parallel organizations” including schools, churches, charities, and newspapers affiliated with the Dashnak or anti-Dashnak camp, in the US, powerful lobbying organizations arose to represent each “side,” with the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) affiliated with the Dashnak party, and the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) associated with non-Dashnaks.\textsuperscript{53} The two shared similar goals in the pre- and post-independence periods, including genocide recognition, support for Nagorno-Karabakh, Section 907 prohibitions on US aid to Azerbaijan, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Mirak, 1997: 399. The new influx of Armenian-speakers also buoyed the otherwise sagging fortunes of Armenian-language community publications, and led to an increase in parochial schools (Armenian private day schools). Mirak, 1997: 408; Payaslian, 2010: 130.
\item Mirak, 1997: 391-2.
\item Bakalian, 1993: 429.
\item Mirak, 1997: 399; Bakalian, 1993: 429; Pattie, 1999: 11.
\item The ANCA, which descended from the Armenian Independence Committee of America (ACIA), was the sole US Armenian lobby group until the emergence of the AAA in 1972. While the AAA claimed to be a pan-Armenian lobby, its leaders and primary funders were affiliated with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), an anti-Dashnak organization. Gregg, Heather S. 2002. “Divided They Conquer: The Success of Armenian Ethnic Lobbies in the United States.” MIT Migration Working Paper # 13. http://web.mit.edu/cis/www/migration/pubs/rrwp/13_divided.html
\end{enumerate}
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US aid to the RA.\textsuperscript{54} A third lobby group, founded in 2007 by philanthropist Gerard Cafesjian, the US-Armenia Public Affairs Committee (USAPAC), aimed to adopt a less anti-Turkish and more pro-American stance, but was only in existence for a few years, and never approached the prominence of ANCA or AAA.\textsuperscript{55}

Tölölyan has referred to the established diaspora worldwide as a “government of exiles” and noted its “tenacity, resilience, and success” at leading the nation, even if its claims often involved “an element of wishful thinking”.\textsuperscript{56} Much of this success was owed to the intracommunal conflict, which would have appeared to outsiders as disruptive of national unity, but was ultimately conducive to the production of Armenian identity and community. As Kasbarian notes, “by (re)creating the ‘Other’ within, each group has been forced to constantly define itself, assert and prove itself against the ‘Other,’ making for a creative momentum and activity.”\textsuperscript{57} Organizational pluralism made Armenians in the diaspora less legible to Soviet and RA officials, but the established diaspora, by and large, simply accepted and worked with this system, which had served them well over the years.

Diaspora Armenians imagining “Armenia” were increasingly faced with the permanence of the diasporic condition, and the impossibility of return to the Western Armenian homeland from which the vast majority had been forced to flee. However, the traditional parties “found it more difficult to relinquish ideologies of an eventual return to

\textsuperscript{54} The Section 907 prohibitions were removed after Sept 11, 2001, as US priorities shifted toward gaining allies in the “war on terror.” In spite of their division into two seemingly opposing “camps,” Gunter suggests the bipartisan Congressional Congress on Armenian Issues had historically facilitated the cooperation of the Armenian lobby. Gunter, Michael M. 2011. *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.: 92-95.

\textsuperscript{55} Zarifian notes that USAPAC was often considered Cafesjian’s own “private” lobby, and Gunter hints at personal differences with the other two groups leading to his decision to create a third. Zarifian, Julien. 2014. “The Armenian-American Lobby and its Impact on U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Society* 51: 506; n.16; Gunter, 2011: 94-95.

\textsuperscript{56} Tölölyan, 1991b: 166.

an autonomous homeland because their rationale for being would have been at stake.”

Relations between this diaspora and Soviet Armenia, and later the independent RA, were coloured by this dynamic. For the established diaspora, the only “Armenia” on any map was geographically, linguistically, culturally, and ideologically far removed from both their real and imagined homeland.

**Constructing a Soviet Homeland**

As Armenians were rebuilding their identity and institutions in diaspora, a parallel process was occurring in Soviet Armenia. Since its society and economy were being shaped according to Soviet principles, what emerged was a socialist Armenian identity.

In 1918, an independent Armenian Republic was established in what had previously been part of the Russian Empire, five hundred years after the fall of the last independent Armenian kingdom. Comprising only a small fraction of “Greater Armenia,” it was, after the emptying of Armenians from their historic lands in the Ottoman Empire, the only tangible “Armenia” left. However, as the Bolsheviks consolidated their rule over the former Russian imperial territories, they eventually overran the fledgling republic.

The borders of Soviet Armenia were established by early Soviet-era treaties with Turkey, as well as internal decisions regarding the administrative borders of the USSR’s constituent Republics. As Bournoutian notes, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan’s

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60 Depending on the extent of the “Greater Armenia” referred to, it has been described as between one-fifth and one-tenth of that historic territory.
62 Even Mt. Ararat, the symbol of Armenia but located in present-day Turkey, had been a Russian imperial possession, and was traded to Turkey in exchange for Batumi and parts of present-day Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe, all included in the Georgian SSR. Bournoutian, 2002: 312.
borders were carved so that all three gained and lost territory they claimed. Thus, while the Lori and Zangezur regions (claimed by Georgia and Azerbaijan, respectively) were given to Armenia, the majority Armenian Javakheti region was given to Georgia, and both the Nakhichevan region and Nagorno-Karabakh were given to Azerbaijan, albeit with autonomous status. These borders were immediately considered by Armenians to be arbitrary and unjust, especially since it was widely believed that the Soviets had awarded Nakhichevan to Azerbaijan to placate Turkey.

Armenians benefitted greatly from the economic and societal modernization they first encountered under Soviet rule. As the most economically undeveloped of the Transcaucasian Republics, Soviet Armenia had no major industry in 1921. It subsequently underwent massive industrialization and urbanization, with women increasingly joining the work force, and the population educated en masse. Like other nationalities, Armenians suffered Stalin’s forced collectivization of agriculture and waves of purges, but the average standard of living was eventually much higher than in pre-Soviet times. Armenians also benefitted from Soviet nationalities policies, which fostered an increasing sense of Armenianness within the new borders.

Lenin’s policy of “nativization” or korenizatsiia, intended to combat Russian chauvinism, encouraged the growth of an Armenian intelligentsia within Soviet Armenia, where the Armenian language was promoted and used in all newspapers, schools, and

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63 Bournoutian, 2002: 316. NK had a majority Armenian population, while Nakhichevan’s population was largely Muslim, though with a significant proportion of Armenians. Initially, all three Republics were united within a Transcaucasian Federated Republic, but after 1936 were declared separate Union Republics.  
64 Additionally, due to Lenin’s support for anti-imperialist movements in Muslim states, Soviet Armenia was forced to renounce its claims to territories in Turkey in the 1921 treaties of Kars and Moscow. Suny, Ronald G. 1993b. Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 221.  
theatres.\textsuperscript{67} In addition, as Georgia and Azerbaijan were being “nativized,” Armenians from Tbilisi, Baku, and elsewhere were encouraged to relocate to Soviet Armenia, as were some immigrants from the Middle East, while many Muslims living in Armenia at the time departed for Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{68} The AAC was targeted by anti-religious propaganda, but left largely intact until the Stalin era, in which churches were destroyed, many priests exiled to Siberia, and the Catholicos (Khoren I of Echmiatsin) murdered. While nationalism (as defined by Soviet authorities)\textsuperscript{69} was strictly forbidden and nationalists, including actual and suspected Dashnaks, were purged and arrested,\textsuperscript{70} the combined result of these early nativization policies was a more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally homogeneous republic; a more “Armenian” Armenia.

Along with Armenianization came a deep affinity to Russia and the Soviet Union, one which saw Armenians living anywhere within Soviet borders as a less foreign “internal” diaspora, and those outside as largely alien. As Pattie notes, this degree of Soviet enculturation was probably not fully understood by the diaspora living “in enemy territory in capitalist countries.”\textsuperscript{71} Of the three diaspora political parties, the Dashnaks were the most vehemently opposed to Soviet rule in Armenia. But while others may have resigned themselves to the reality of Soviet Armenia, most established diasporans

\textsuperscript{67} The language was also standardized (the Yerevan dialect became the new literary language) and, in a move that still rankles many in the established diaspora, a simplified orthography was imposed. Bournoutian, 2002: 317.

\textsuperscript{68} Bournoutian, 2002: 316-7. By 1979, 90 percent of the Armenian SSR’s population was ethnically Armenian, making it the most homogeneous Soviet republic. Panossian, 1998b: 82.

\textsuperscript{69} Some of the most prominent Armenian literary figures were deemed nationalist. Raffi’s novels were banned, then rehabilitated, and Zabel Yesayan died in a Soviet prison. Bournoutian, 2002: 319.

\textsuperscript{70} By 1923 the Dashnak Party had officially ended its presence in Soviet Armenia. Bournoutian, 2002: 318.

disapproved of, and were deeply embarrassed by, the Sovietization of what remained of the Armenian homeland.  

For its part, in addition to persecuting real and imagined Dashnaks within its borders, the Soviet government sought to neutralize Dashnak influence abroad. The KGB considered the Dashnak Party to be the most significant anti-Soviet force in the diaspora, and suspected it of spreading anticommunist propaganda, trying to control both the diaspora and the AAC, and assisting “imperialist intelligence services.” Even Dashnak moves that appeared conciliatory, like the party congress’s 1967 decision to support repatriation to Soviet Armenia, were interpreted as attempts to infiltrate the USSR and spread its ideology. There were significant KGB attempts to obstruct the Dashnak party worldwide, mostly aimed at disrupting planned activities that would tarnish the image of the USSR. This attention far exceeded efforts oriented toward other diaspora groups with corresponding Soviet nationalities, because of Armenians’ prominence outside the USSR, and because of the “image the Soviets had tried to create through the “repatriation” campaign.

One of the most significant events in Soviet-diaspora relations was the campaign to attract diaspora “repatriates” to Soviet Armenia. The Soviet government invited dispersed Armenians to settle in the Armenian SSR immediately upon consolidating its rule, and 28,000 refugees did so in the first decade, mostly from Istanbul, Greece, and Iraq.

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72 Suny, 1993b: 216.
76 Corley suggests that Armenians in the Middle East were recruited by the KGB not only to weaken the Dashnak Party, but also for their access to Western diplomats and spies. Corley, 2001: 11.
followed by 16,000 more between 1929 and 1937, mostly from Europe. However, after World War II, the Soviet Union launched a massive repatriation drive, known in Armenian as Nerkaght, that attracted approximately 100,000 diaspora Armenians, many of them genocide survivors, to Soviet Armenia between 1947 and 1949. Most were from the Middle East, but many also came from Europe and the US. The rationale behind the repatriation was the severe demographic effect of the war, after which the population of Soviet Armenia was so low that some in the diaspora were made to believe that Stalin was considering abolishing its Union Republic status and dividing it between the Georgian and Azerbaijani SSRs.

Originally proposed by the head of the AAC, Catholicos Chorekjian, it is unclear why Stalin approved this influx of foreigners, in an era of such paranoia that returning war heroes were sent to Siberia because they had had contact with foreigners as prisoners of war. Unsurprisingly in hindsight, up to one fifth of the repatriates were quickly exiled to Siberia, and those with Dashnak connections were the most vulnerable. It was also puzzling at a time when the local Armenian population had extremely meagre resources, which they now had to share with the newcomers. Repatriates faced enormous and unexpected hardship, coupled with a chilly reception by the overburdened locals.

In fact, many diasporans came to believe that the Nerkaght campaign was intended, in part, to weaken the Armenian diaspora, which the Soviet Union saw as threatening. Not only did it tear families and communities apart, but it made paupers out of those unsuccessful repatriates who had sold everything they owned, only to be left waiting on

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78 Suny, 1993b: 222.
piers for months for ships that never arrived. The other motivation was to settle historic Armenian provinces the USSR planned to demand from Turkey, demands that were quietly dropped after the repatriates had arrived.\textsuperscript{82}

During the Stalin era, there was no meaningful contact between Soviet Armenia and the diaspora. “Whatever limited knowledge there was of the other side disappeared in Stalin’s prisons.”\textsuperscript{83} By the mid-1950s, some diasporans had begun to study in Soviet universities.\textsuperscript{84} In the 1964s, however, the Soviet state sought to take a more proactive approach to “managing” the diaspora, establishing the Committee for Cultural Ties with Diaspora Armenians (Spyrkahayutyun Het Mshakutayin Kapi Komite) in Yerevan. Officially, its purpose was to promote patriotic activity among Armenian diaspora communities in the non-communist world, and to establish ties with the more “progressive” (non-Dashnak) organizations. It provided textbooks for diaspora schools, organized summer camps for diaspora children, arranged for Armenian artists, writers, choirs and dance troupes to visit Armenia, and distributed articles to the diasporan press. The Committee was the gatekeeper of Armenia-diaspora relations, facilitating, yet tightly controlling diasporan visits to Soviet Armenia. Unofficially, the Committee’s aim was to “harness” the economically and politically powerful diaspora to the Soviet Republic of Armenia, promoting it to them as \textit{the} homeland.\textsuperscript{85} This was no easy task, since most of the diaspora had no actual link to the Eastern Armenian territory that now formed part of the Soviet Union, and its limited appeal was reduced by Cold War ideological divisions.

\textsuperscript{82} Pattie, 2004: 117. On June 7, 1945, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov advised the Turkish ambassador to Moscow that the USSR demanded the formerly Armenian regions of Kars and Ardahan. This demand was rejected by Turkey, with the support of the US. Suny, 1993b: 225.

\textsuperscript{83} Panossian, 2006: 302.

\textsuperscript{84} PFA, 2010: 8.

\textsuperscript{85} Cavoukian, Kristin. 2013. “‘Soviet mentality?’ The role of shared political culture in relations between the Armenian state and Russia’s Armenian diaspora.” \textit{Nationalities Papers} 41, 5: 723, n. 10.
Meanwhile, latent Armenian nationalism began to emerge within the constraints of the Soviet system. On 24 April 1965, over 100,000 Armenians flooded the streets of Yerevan to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the genocide. This demonstration, unprecedented in Soviet history, protested Soviet rapprochement with Turkey and demanded that the authorities acknowledge the genocide in some way. While the official response included the arrest of many “bourgeois nationalists,” there were also some concessions, including a huge memorial in Yerevan to the victims of the genocide.  

Based on interviews with key Soviet Armenian leaders, Panossian suggests they were adept at paying lip service to official Soviet ideology, while manipulating the system for Armenia’s, and their own, benefit. By the 1970s, it was clear that Soviet Armenians had developed a strong national identity, rooted primarily in their own territory, but extending to the lost homeland in Turkey. Armenian scholars had “nationalized” their written history, and official ideology was “mostly a veneer covering the patriotic identity and nationalist impulses of the majority of the population, both at the elite and mass levels.”

Roughly coinciding with the US-Soviet détente, by the 1970s Dashnak opposition to the Soviet regime had begun to soften. The party came to see the USSR as necessary to defend Armenia from Turkey, and largely scaled back its anti-Soviet rhetoric. Since the anti-Dashnak coalition in the diaspora held a similar view, the idea of independence in the late-1980s “was not greeted with unalloyed joy.”

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89 Pattie, 1999: 12.
When Soviet Armenian intellectuals formed a “Karabakh Committee” and began demanding the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, and later, advocating independence from the Soviet Union, the three diaspora political parties issued a joint statement urging caution. In an October 1988 letter, they argued that without Soviet military protection, there was no guarantee that Turkey and Azerbaijan together would not attack Armenia, and even commit a second genocide. A number of scholars have pointed out the irony that these bastions of Armenian nationalism in exile should have rejected calls for independence and supported Gorbachev long after he had lost all legitimacy in Armenia. They have also considered this communiqué the ultimate indicator of the degree to which the established diaspora was out of touch with the realities of the republic.90

This particular moment of disillusionment should, however, be kept in context. Diasporans were caught entirely off guard by the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union, as was the entire world, and events would show that there was indeed sufficient reason to fear Turkey and Azerbaijan’s intentions, as well as Armenia’s ability to survive without Russian support.91 The established diaspora organizations had also come together in a rare show of unity to support the Karabakh movement, and, two months after their joint statement, began the massive task of providing relief to Armenia in the wake of the devastating earthquake that killed some 24,000 people and flattened several towns. Mirak

90 Panossian, 2006: 386; Tölölyan, 2007a: 119; Payaslian, 2010: 132. Interestingly, this supposedly foundational moment was only raised by one respondent in the over 90 interviews conducted for this dissertation. Levon Zourabian, who was active in Ter-Petrosyan’s Armenian National Movement around the time of independence and, in 2010, a leading figure in the Armenian National Congress, compared the diaspora organizations’ support for the Soviet status quo in 1988 with their support for the Kocharyan/Sargsyan status quo after the March 1, 2008 post-election violence. Zourabian, Levon. Interview, 15 January 2010.

91 In other words, an enthusiastic joint endorsement of Armenian independence, had events transpired differently, might have been just as heavily criticized in hindsight.
notes that, in 1988, “Armenia became the vital center of Armenian diaspora consciousness.”

In the early years of independence, there would be plenty of evidence that RA-diaspora ignorance, assumptions and misunderstandings were mutual. One of these misunderstandings stemmed from the Committee’s propagation of the myth that Armenia had been culturally and spiritually sustaining the diaspora throughout the Soviet period. This view, apparently prevalent in Soviet Armenia, was then reversed after 1988, as “the Diaspora began supporting and sustaining a wounded republic in crisis, ravaged by war and earthquake.” Another misunderstanding stemmed from the thoroughly Sovietized culture in the new Armenia. Even though the initial independence movement opposed Soviet rule, Soviet structures, culture, and elites were largely reproduced in newly independent Armenia. That the local Armenians would not only tolerate, but desire to maintain Soviet culture was jarring for the established diaspora, and the discrepancies between the Armenia they had imagined and the one inherited by the RA “led to the dissipation of the lofty rhetorics of return. It became patently clear that the myth of return was just that: a myth.”

Initially, in a brief “honeymoon period,” the RA’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, was very optimistic about the role the diaspora would play in the life of independent Armenia. As he told the Moscow News in June 1991, “The Armenian diaspora will assume the part of both a serious mediator and a large-scale investor.”

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93 PFA, 2010: 9.
94 Payaslian, 2011: 93.
95 Payaslian, 2010: 134. A very small number of established diasporans “repatriated” to the independent RA. See Chapter 7 for more on repatriation.
same year, one of the most astute observers of Armenian diaspora affairs suggested that the ability of diaspora Armenians’ “exile government” to influence Soviet Armenia had never been higher, since “the delegitimation of all things Soviet is so complete that the exile government is more confident of itself than it has been for decades.” The Dashnak party, in particular, saw its heroes rehabilitated and “demonstrators call for its full legitimization as a legal opposition party inside the Armenian SSR.”97 The dire needs of the new republic also prompted a significant degree of cooperation among the three diaspora parties, two churches, and other organizations.98 With a new democracy in which to participate, the three diaspora parties set up branches in the RA in order to compete in elections, though Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s ANM won an enormous majority. The ANM, in turn, sought to build its own constituency among diaspora Armenians.99

Along with a new state came a new state-linked diaspora. There had long been a centuries-old community of Armenians in imperial Russia, and a few had moved there during Soviet times prior to the 1960s, after which thousands of highly educated Armenian professionals sought career advancement in Russia’s cities (and elsewhere in the Soviet Union). Others had moved to Moscow and Leningrad illegally, and made a living selling products on the black market. After 1991, independent Armenia’s poor economic conditions prompted a massive wave of emigration, with the vast majority moving to Russia, such that, according to Bournoutian, “there are as many Armenians in Russia as there are in the Armenian Republic.”100

98 Dekmejian, 1997: 442.
99 Dekmejian, 1997: 442.
100 Bournoutian, 2002: 356. This may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but it probably comes closer to an accurate representation than official RA statistics. Officially, the RA’s 2014 de jure population was 3,010,600. While the National Statistical Service’s figures showed a steadily declining population since 1989, they were still likely far higher than the number of actual residents of the state, since untold
During Soviet times, Armenians living outside of Soviet Armenia but within the Soviet Union were occasionally referred to as the “internal diaspora,” and as Armenians began to relocate there in large numbers, they began to be spoken of in diasporic terms. However, while the established diaspora was produced by “violent removal from the homeland,” with the exception of refugees from the NK conflict, “Armenians in Russia and other CIS countries were there mostly by choice, more often motivated by economic and professional opportunities.” They also did not see themselves as diasporans, or consider their new state a foreign one, and by the late 1990s, very few diaspora-style organizations had emerged across Russia.

**Independent Armenia: A Tale of Three Presidents**

Many scholars have divided RA-diaspora relations into eras coinciding with each presidency. Since RA politics was a charismatic affair, dominated by individual leaders, rather than party ideologies or bureaucratic continuity, there is merit to this approach. The particularly hostile relations between Levon Ter-Petrosyan and the Dashnak party would indeed appear to have distinguished his presidency from those that followed, leading Shain and Barth to conclude that the Armenian case “offers a within-case variance” on state-diaspora relations. However, I argue that there was in many ways more continuity than change. Whether under Ter-Petrosyan, Robert Kocharyan, or Serzh Sargsyan, the RA tended toward an increasingly consolidated authoritarianism, concentration of

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101 The term was only used occasionally, since scholars and authority figures rarely had reason to mention these people. The only diaspora considered worthy of policy discussions was the “external,” or established diaspora, known simply as “the diaspora.”

102 PFA, 2010: 8, n.5.

103 Shain, Barth, 2003: 452.
presidential power, and lack of democracy, with opposition forces effectively marginalized from the legitimate political process. RA economic and political elites were successful in preventing the emergence of competing elites and alternative power bases, including, but not limited to, those in the diaspora.

With each president, the RA acquired a new constitution, all three of which have been seen as entrenching the president’s powers. While a putative electoral democracy, every election since the first one in 1991 violated the basic principles of electoral integrity. Instead of peaceful power transitions, the RA experienced “two situations that resembled military coups”, the first being the removal of Ter-Petrosyan from office in 1998 by Kocharyan, with the help of the military, and the second, in March 2008, when Kocharyan declared a state of emergency and ordered the violent suppression of protests to facilitate the assumption of the presidency by his chosen successor, Sargsyan, after an election widely viewed as fraudulent.

Under all three presidencies, RA citizens responded to deteriorating economic conditions, high unemployment, corruption, and increasing authoritarianism by voting with their feet. As many as one million RA citizens had emigrated since independence, and public opinion polls continued to show large numbers determined to leave. As Payaslian has noted, however, while mass emigration was viewed by most Armenians as

104 In the most recent iteration, Sargsyan’s new constitution, adopted in December 2015, changed the system from a semi-presidential to parliamentary one, with the (future) president’s powers greatly curtailed. However, most critical voices have suggested this would in fact enable Sargsyan himself to maintain power (as prime minister or as leader of the ruling party) after serving his maximum of two terms as president.
105 Payaslian, 2011: 114. It has often been said that Armenia’s first free and fair election (in 1991) was also its last.
107 Payaslian, 2011: 220. There were no reliable statistics on the number of emigrants, since many officially remained residents of the RA. However, scholars have tended to assume that the official (de jure) RA population statistics were much higher than the actual (de facto) population. Of the roughly 3.5 million at the end of the Soviet era, it is likely that only 2.5 million lived in the RA by 2010.
tragic and alarming, government elites may well have seen it as a “safety valve” allowing for the maintenance of stability without needing to engage in serious reforms.  

Neither Ter-Petrosyan nor Kocharyan was able to gain the confidence of the established diaspora, due at least in part to the repressive political climate depicted above. Sargsyan’s presidency, which began with electoral irregularity and civilian deaths, appeared even less legitimate than the previous two. The following section outlines the main elements of state-diaspora relations that characterized each presidency, showing that the main differences were a cosmetic, symbolic improvement in relations between the Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan eras, and the Sargsyan-era shift to a more formal organizational approach to state-diaspora relations.

**The Ter-Petrosyan Era**

The established diaspora began supporting Armenia with medical and humanitarian assistance even before its independence, and its organizations began to insinuate themselves into the republic’s political landscape. While the first was welcomed, the second was seen by many locals as interference. Ter-Petrosyan’s general approach to diaspora Armenians was that they should stay out of RA politics, and instead, devote themselves to “providing financial aid and ‘strengthening statehood,’ which meant more or less supporting the policies of the government.” Ter-Petrosyan’s insistence on the diaspora knowing its place was softened by the appointment of some diaspora Armenians to government positions. These included Gerard Libaridian as a key presidential advisor, Sebu Tashjian as Minister of Energy, and Raffi Hovannisian as

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108 For Payaslian, this was an example of Hirschman’s “exit” option atrophying “voice.” Payaslian, 2011: 220-1.
109 Payaslian, 2011: 133.
110 Tölölyan, 2007a: 119.
Foreign Minister.112 As Mirak notes, this was at once an attempt to foster positive relations with the diaspora, and also a pragmatic search for (English-speaking) political talent.113

Ter-Petrosyan’s foreign policy approach, known as “the new thinking,” aimed first and foremost to normalize relations with the RA’s neighbours, eschewing reliance on a “third force” (i.e. Russia) to defend it from Turkey, and instead rethinking Armenia’s traditional fear and hostility toward Turkey entirely.114 In practice, this meant a de-emphasis of genocide recognition. Not only did Ter-Petrosyan abandon all territorial claims against Turkey, he also depicted the NK conflict as one between the NK Armenians and Azerbaijan, in which the RA was no more than a guarantor of human rights, instead of a territorially expansionist state.115 Ultimately, however, Ter-Petrosyan misread Turkey’s willingness to normalize relations with the RA. Instead, it blockaded the fledgling state out of support for Turkic Azerbaijan. Astourian concludes that “what was at first a wise policy became, at least in the medium run, a “humiliating embarrassment for most Armenians.”116

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which predated the Soviet collapse and erupted into a war that lasted until a ceasefire in 1994,117 was a foundational event in the

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112 Mirak, 1997: 403; Shain, Barth, 2003: 470. Hovannisian was forced to resign in 1992 over differences with Ter-Petrosyan on pan-national issues. Libaridian, by contrast, shared Ter-Petrosyan’s general outlook and continued to defend his policies long after his time in government.
113 Mirak, 1997: 403.
114 Suny, 1993b: 239.
115 This essentially realist view of RA interests was shared by diasporan Gerard Libaridian, whom Ter-Petrosyan appointed as an advisor. According to Astourian, Libaridian “organized a carefully staged genocide conference” in Armenia in 1995, to promote a more moderate approach to genocide recognition. Astourian, 2000/2001: 25.
117 The conflict, often described as “frozen” due to the lack of a peace settlement, lived on in the form of occasional ceasefire-line skirmishes claiming the lives of soldiers and civilians, and in April 2016, a brief resumption of hostilities (referred to as the “Four-Day War”) claimed the lives of some 350 soldiers and...
formation of the independent RA. With its massive casualties, refugee flows, and
economic blockades by Turkey and Azerbaijan, it plunged the new republic and its
citizens into enormous difficulty. It also had significant effects on the established
diaspora and its relations with the new state.

First, established diasporans’ view of the conflict was shaped, in large part, by
comparisons with the genocide. They saw a territory that had formed part of “historic
Armenia,” whose majority Armenian population was at risk of being annihilated by
“Turks” (as the Turkic Azerbaijanis were known to Armenians). The diaspora response
was overwhelming support for the Karabakh Armenians and the conflict, in the form of
economic aid, as well as smuggled guns and other military materiel. In addition, a small
number of diasporan volunteers fought on the front lines. The most famous was
California-born Monte Melkonian, a former member of ASALA who had been evading
authorities in the 1980s before arriving in Armenia in 1990. Melkonian, who became a
commander in the Martuni region of NK, and was killed in 1993, “was a professional
warrior and an extreme Armenian nationalist who saw Karabakh as a sacred cause.”
While there were only a handful of these diaspora warriors, many of them associated with
the Dashnak party, they were lionized in the diaspora, and in the RA itself.

De Waal suggests that established diasporans’ distorted view of NK as “a
beleaguered outpost of brave besieged Christians” was troublesome, in that their support
for a hard line in NK came without personal consequences. “Perhaps they saw in

civilians on both sides. US Department of State. 2016. “Background Briefing on the Nagorno-Karabakh
118 de Waal, Thomas. 2013. Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and
119 M’her Tchouladjian and Vicken Zakarian, two Lebanese-Armenians killed in NK, were commemorated
continue to be remembered in Lebanon “as embodiments of the spirit of sacrifice that is a key element of
Nagorny Karabakh somewhere they could begin again in Year Zero, a Turk-free zone.**

Yet, the influence of the established diaspora on the actual conflict is debatable. The war was overwhelmingly fought and won by RA and Karabakh Armenians. In terms of diaspora contributions, the NK victory arguably owed much more to the efforts of the intrastate Armenian and especially, Karabakhi diaspora living throughout the Soviet Union. Armenians in Crimea, Moscow, Abkhazia, and Krasnodar sent money and weapons, but more importantly, the Armenian and NK armed forces were able to prevail over the more numerous Azerbaijanis thanks to Soviet Armenian and Karabakhi officers and soldiers who had fought in Afghanistan, and came to NK to mold rag-tag forces into effective armies.

In terms of the international reaction to the conflict, the established diaspora’s contribution cannot be underestimated. In the late-Soviet period, diaspora groups in France, working through the European media and the EU parliament, were able to apply pressure on Gorbachev to free the arrested members of the Karabakh Committee, including Levon Ter-Petrosyan. In the US, Armenian lobbying efforts, which had until 1988 focused almost exclusively on genocide recognition, now prioritized both the RA and NKR. An especially valuable achievement was Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act, primarily brought about by the AAA, which placed restrictions on US aid to Azerbaijan while non-military aid flowed freely to Armenia, to the tune of USD 80-105 million per year. These restrictions remained in place until Sept 11, 2001, and served as a

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120 De Waal, 2013: 260.
121 In my own interviews in the Krasnodar region, I met a man considered a hero by his community for running guns, and other supplies, to NK during the war.
remarkable symbol of US Armenian support for the NKR.123 As corruption eroded their image of the new RA, the struggle for Karabakh would come to be “more of a cause for Diaspora Armenians than Armenia itself”.124

Enthusiastic established diaspora support for the NKR translated into a hard line approach to peace negotiations. Ter-Petrosyan’s refusal to recognize the NKR’s declaration of independence, rejection of calls for its unification with the RA, and willingness to negotiate on its final status and territorial extent, were anathema to many in the diaspora who saw NK as the first Armenian military victory after centuries of territorial losses.125 Kotchikian suggests that, by embracing the Karabakh struggle, diaspora organizations were “renegotiating their own…identity by (re)introducing the concept of land and territory…into the equation of feeling and being Armenian.”126

Whether for the NK conflict, earthquake relief, or basic welfare, the established diaspora’s economic contributions served as a “critical lifeline” to the RA in the early years of independence, amounting to USD $50-75 million per year by the mid-1990s.127 The Ter-Petrosyan government’s Hayastan All-Armenian Fund (hereafter, the Fund), created in 1992, was intended to channel this largesse through a government-controlled structure, toward government priorities.128 Shain and Sherman suggest that, while the goal was allegedly to “keep politics out” of the new state’s development, it was actually intended “to neutralize the influence of traditional diaspora parties on it.”129 The Fund was generally effective at equating giving to the RA with patriotism, but was unable to

125 Shain, Barth, 2003: 469.
128 The creation of the Fund was a clear example of “rent-seeking state” behaviour. Sidel, 2007: 28-37.
de-link charitable giving from approval of the RA regime. Astourian notes that in 1997, after rigged elections and increased frustration with Ter-Petrosyan’s regime (and one year before his ultimate removal from power), donations to the Fund during the annual Telethon decreased dramatically, to a third of the total raised the previous year.\textsuperscript{130}

After a short rapprochement, relations between Ter-Petrosyan and the traditional diaspora political parties split along the old Soviet-era lines. When all three parties registered as political parties in the newly independent RA,\textsuperscript{131} the Ramgavars and Hnchaks supported the government, with some joining various pro-government RA parties, while the Dashnaks became an opposition party.\textsuperscript{132}

Ter-Petrosyan’s party, the Armenian National Movement (ANM), had stated that its fundamental position on the RA-diaspora relationship was “Recognition, realization and respect of the status of each other and exclusion of the interference of the Diaspora into the political affaires [sic] of Armenia.”\textsuperscript{133} And yet, the ANM’s efforts went beyond simply keeping the diaspora parties at arm’s length. According to Astourian, Ter-Petrosyan’s party actively attempted to cause rifts within the diaspora parties, and succeeded in doing so with the Ramgavar and Hnchak parties, though not with the Dashnaks, who became highly critical of Ter-Petrosyan.\textsuperscript{134}

The Dashnak Party, long perceived as the torchbearer of Armenian nationalism, challenged Ter-Petrosyan’s authority to represent Armenian foreign interests, especially

\textsuperscript{130} Only $1 million was pledged, an amount that was then matched by billionaire Kirk Kerkorian with another million. Astourian, 2000/2001: 42.
\textsuperscript{131} Dashnak party statistics tended to be closely guarded secrets. However, according to one index of RA political parties, the RA wing of the Dashnak party had a membership of 3,000 when first registered in 1990, and 7,000 in 2004. Foundation for Civil and Social Development, 2005. Political Parties of the Republic of Armenia: Directory. Yerevan, Gasprint. 57.
\textsuperscript{133} Foundation for Civil and Social Development. 2005. 97.
\textsuperscript{134} Astourian, 2000/2001: 39.
with respect to the NK conflict and relations with Turkey. As tension with Ter-Petrosyan’s government increased, Dashnaks abroad at times refused to contribute to the Fund.\textsuperscript{135} The Dashnak Party also invested heavily in newspapers, which they used to criticize Ter-Petrosyan’s policies, especially his willingness to make concessions in NK negotiations.\textsuperscript{136}

For his part, Ter-Petrosyan’s anti-Dashnak orientation reached dramatic extremes. In one speech, the president blamed the Dashnak party for provoking the 1915 genocide, while ANM publications frequently alleged that the Dashnaks were colluding with Moscow and the KGB.\textsuperscript{137} The animosity reached its peak in December, 1994, when Ter-Petrosyan accused the Dashnak Party of being a “foreign organization controlled from abroad,”\textsuperscript{138} outlawed the party, arrested over 20 of its members, expelled many others, and shut down its cultural organizations and newspapers. In a televised speech, the president accused the party of terrorism, espionage, drug smuggling, and even of attempting to assassinate him.\textsuperscript{139}

The Dashnak Party was banned only months before a referendum in July 1995 on a new RA constitution and presidential elections in 1996. Many accounts of this time period focus on the Ter-Petrosyan-Dashnak conflict, but in fact, other parties that had otherwise been supportive of Ter-Petrosyan were also increasingly upset by the regime’s concentration of power, and were particularly opposed to the constitutional changes Ter-Petrosyan had proposed (which would strengthen the presidency and tighten restrictions

\textsuperscript{136} Bournoutian, 2002: 362.
\textsuperscript{137} Qtd. in Astourian, 2000/2001: 26.
\textsuperscript{138} Shain, Barth, 2003: 470.
\textsuperscript{139} This move was condemned by the European Union as an attack on democracy. Payaslian, 2011: 116-7; PFA, 2010: 18.
on individuals and parties competing in elections), and expressed their opposition in mass demonstrations which were met with government violence.\footnote{Payaslian, 2011: 117; Shain, Barth, 2003: 470.}

Ter-Petrosyan saw no need to establish any specific diaspora-oriented agencies. He abolished the Soviet Committee, and relied solely on the Fund to manage the state-diaspora relationship. He not only refused to grant dual citizenship, a status desired by many diaspora Armenians, but included an explicit ban on dual citizenship in the 1995 Constitution.\footnote{Many established diasporans felt entitled to automatic \textit{jus sanguinis} citizenship in the new polity, and were deeply insulted by Ter-Petrosyan’s refusal to grant it.} While many reasons were given for this policy decision\footnote{One concern was that RA citizens would use dual citizenship to avoid army service, yet it was common knowledge that wealthy families could simply pay bribes to keep their sons out of the army. Another was that those living outside the state, who were not suffering the severe conditions associated with the economic transition and the NK conflict-induced blockade, should not be entitled to status equal to those who were. Of course, the thousands of RA citizens leaving the country every year for better conditions elsewhere were never stripped of their citizenship. Instead, as Pattie notes, it appeared to be a question of “Who really belongs?” Pattie, 1999: 13.} it was widely perceived that “[t]he real reason for forbidding dual citizenship was to secure the monopoly of the \textit{indigenous} ‘nouveaux riches’ on the Armenian economy, the political system (cf. the financing of parties), and the media.”\footnote{Astourian, 2000/2001: 41.}

After winning re-election in 1996, in an election marred by fraud, Ter-Petrosyan’s popularity began to plummet. Having appointed Karabakhi Robert Kocharyan to the post of Prime Minister,\footnote{The previous Prime Minister, Armen Sarkissian, had become seriously ill. According to Libaridian, Ter-Petrosyan sought someone from outside of Yerevan’s partisan circles, and hoped Kocharyan would come to see the NK conflict’s resolution from Yerevan’s point of view. Instead, he maintained a hard line and refused to accept an OSCE Minsk Group-proposed resolution to the conflict. Libaridian, 2004: 214-5, 237.} in 1998 he was forced by Kocharyan to resign.\footnote{Technically, the resignation stemmed from the simple majority needed for parliament to override a presidential veto (according to the 1995 constitution). A majority in parliament, including members of his own party, refused to accept a decision of the president. Libaridian, 2004: 220-1.} The role of the established diaspora (and especially, the Dashnak party) in Ter-Petrosyan’s downfall has varied widely in scholarly accounts, depicted as crucial by some scholars, while others...
make no mention of it.\textsuperscript{146} It is important to note that, in addition to the diaspora, Ter-Petrosyan’s willingness to compromise on NK was deeply unpopular throughout Armenia (and Karabakh itself), even causing resignations within his own party in large numbers.\textsuperscript{147} His democratic legitimacy was weakened by his 1996 re-election, largely seen as fraudulent, his family members benefited disproportionately from privatizations,\textsuperscript{148} he had unwittingly facilitated the rise of the ‘Karabakh clan’ in RA politics, led by future presidents Kocharyan and Sargsyan, which would ultimately unseat him,\textsuperscript{149} and there was such widespread criticism of his economic policies that his removal could easily be described as overdetermined.\textsuperscript{150}

The Ter-Petrosyan era was foundational in terms of resetting the RA’s relationship with an established diaspora whose identity had in large part been formed around its orientation toward the Soviet Union. After a brief “honeymoon” period, these relations deteriorated dramatically, and by 2010, had by no means recovered, especially for Dashnaks, who felt directly targeted by Ter-Petrosyan’s regime in ways that echoed their party’s expulsion from Sovietized Armenia. As Kotchikian noted with respect to the Armenians of Lebanon, after 1997, “Diasporan fatigue” began to set in, and

\textsuperscript{146} For the former view, see Shain, Barth, 2003: 466. For the latter, see Payaslian, 2010: 132. Astourian notes, but does not overly stress, the diaspora organizations and their media as only one of many sources of opposition to Ter-Petrosyan’s Karabakh policies. “…the Karabagh leadership, the Armenian defense ministry, the Guardians of the Homeland, the interior and national security ministry, the opposition, the intelligentsia, most diasporan organizations, and most of the Armenian media expressed their opposition to the president’s support for the proposed settlement.” Astourian, 2000/2001: 56.

\textsuperscript{147} Payaslian, 2011: 142.

\textsuperscript{148} In particular, the president’s brother, Telman Ter-Petrosyan, had become an oligarch controlling manufacturing and industrial concerns, the construction industry, the sale of petroleum products, etc. Astourian, 2000/2001: 17.

\textsuperscript{149} Astourian, 2000/2001: 48. During the 2008 election campaign, Ter-Petrosyan, who was once again running for president against Serzh Sargsyan, considered bringing Kocharyan and Sargsyan into his government among his “disastrous errors in judgment,” for which he apologized. Philips, 2012: 41.

\textsuperscript{150} It is telling that there were no popular protests at Ter-Petrosyan’s forced resignation, nor was there even resistance from the ANM itself. Astourian, 2000/2001: 3.
the community gradually came to view the existence of Armenia as just another component in the already complex formula of Lebanese-Armenian identity. In other words it seemed that the negotiation process was more or less complete and the duality between being Armenian and Lebanese was transformed into a hyphenated condition.  

**The Kocharyan Era**

The RA’s second president, Robert Kocharyan, made immediate moves that indicated a new, more cooperative era of state-diaspora relations. Within days of becoming Acting President in February 1998, he had reversed the ban on the Dashnak Party, freed most of its jailed leaders, and even appointed Dashnak party members to advisory positions. But while these grand gestures initially appeared to usher in a new era of RA-diaspora cooperation, the improvements in relations were largely cosmetic. Like Ter-Petrosyan, Kocharyan believed the diaspora’s role should be confined to economic assistance, and his pursuit of friendlier relations seemed geared largely toward encouraging massive economic investment, while minimizing the diaspora’s political influence. More than Ter-Petrosyan, Kocharyan recognized the diaspora's power and viewed it as a potential asset. He even brought some Armenian foreign policy priorities in line with the diaspora’s preferences, such as officially promoting genocide recognition by

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151 Kotchikian, 2009: 475.
152 31 members of the Dashnak party were tried and convicted in proceedings that fell far short of international standards. Many reported beatings and forced confessions, and one member, Artavazt Manukyan, died in custody of pneumonia, despite his lawyer’s pleas for medical treatment. Payaslian, 2011: 180.
153 Panossian, 2003: 145. These were RA citizens, not established diasporans. Libaridian suggests the appointment of Vahan Hovannisyan, head of the RA Dashnak Party, as an advisor temporarily co-opted the party. Libaridian, 2004: 251.
154 Key members of Kocharyan’s cabinet were also highly distrustful of the diaspora in general, and the Dashnak party in particular, including Defence Minister and later Prime Minister Vazgen Sarıyan. This would have made any genuine overtures to the diaspora unlikely. Panossian, 2003: 145-6.
foreign governments, though on the NK conflict, for example, diaspora priorities were aligned with Karabakhis—and many RA citizens’—own preferences.

According to Panossian, the Kocharyan-era improvements in RA-diaspora relations occurred almost entirely in the symbolic realm, with no change in the expectation that diasporans’ engagement with the RA would remain primarily economic – as philanthropists, investors, and tourists. No attempt was made to include diasporans in the state’s political process, though the appointment of Vartan Oskanian as Foreign Minister went some way toward softening the impression that they had been completely shut out of it. At the same time, Kocharyan prevented Armenia’s US-born Raffi Hovannisian, who had served as Armenia’s first Foreign Minister, from running for elected office by refusing to grant him RA citizenship. Meanwhile, the Dashnak Party was not only rehabilitated, but its RA wing could increasingly be counted on to support the government. This cooperation (described by some respondents as co-optation) reached its culmination in 2007, when the RA Dashnak Party formed part of the governing coalition, and a number of its deputies were appointed to ministerial posts.

Kocharyan continued to rely on the Fund as the main conduit for channeling diaspora largesse toward RA government priorities. But in addition to aid, he promoted diaspora investment, and believed the diaspora would engage in massive investment if it

156 Originally from Nagorno-Karabakh, Robert Kocharyan was far less willing than Ter-Petrosyan to make concessions in the interest of a final peace settlement. However, neither he, nor fellow Karabakhi Sargsyan, ever officially recognized the NKR’s independence.
158 Vartan Oskanian was the sole diasporan in Kocharyan’s government, as compared to Ter-Petrosyan’s numerous diaspora appointees.
159 PFA, 2010: 18, n. 24-5. See Ch. 7 for Hovannisian’s account of these events.
were treated properly. However, the Kocharyan government did little to facilitate the desired investment. Instead, the combination of state’s disinterest in establishing a transparent and legally navigable business environment with the unwillingness of oligarchic RA business interests to cede ground to potential rivals, created a business environment overwhelmingly hostile toward newcomers, diaspora or otherwise.

The Kocharyan administration’s approach to the diaspora was to “court” them without engaging in any serious institutional change to incorporate them into the state. It hosted three mainly symbolic Armenia-Diaspora Conferences, in 1999, 2002, and 2006, and maintained a small diaspora department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which did little other than maintain contact information for various diaspora organizations. Otherwise, it expected that diaspora Armenians would interact with other RA ministries (Education, Culture, etc.) regarding any issues they might have with the state, and decided against the creation of a dedicated agency or ministry.

However, while Kocharyan apparently saw no need for new institutions, his speeches already began to stress the fragility of the diasporic condition, and the dependence of the diaspora on the RA for its very existence.

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160 During a speech to the second Armenia-Diaspora conference, Kocharyan urged the diaspora to engage in “investment, investment, and more investment”. Panossian, 2003: 158. A number of scholars have suggested this expectation was unrealistic. Panossian, 2003: 146; de Waal, 2015: 216.
161 The Kocharyan-era creation of an Armenian Development Agency did not appear to have had any effect on diaspora investment. PFA, 2010: 17.
162 Panossian, 2003: 159. Instead of productive investment, Kocharyan presided over the steady sale of infrastructural assets (power stations, railways, etc.) to Russian companies in exchange for cancellation of debts. de Waal, 2013: 289.
164 See Chapter 4 for a discussion of these events.
165 Policy Forum Armenia considered the department to have “largely failed in building institutional bridges with Diaspora.” PFA, 2010: 17. According to respondents working within the MFA at the time, the department was not actually expected to do much in the way of bridge-building, but rather, only to maintain a directory diaspora organizations. Confidential informants.
166 A sub-committee report in the wake of the 2002 Armenia-Diaspora Conference “downplayed the importance of a single government office that would deal with diaspora communication, and advocated a more diffused and a civil society based approach.” Panossian, 2003: 158.
A diaspora separated from national statehood is condemned to be an extinguished historical memory…the diaspora can become an active, self-perpetuating and permanent national factor…if it has coordinated and harmonious relations with the reality of national statehood and the fatherland.  

The diaspora was considered “an aberration due to negative consequences” and the massive new wave of out-migration began to be depicted in similar terms, as a national tragedy that could be averted if the economy was improved via diaspora investment.  

Kocharyan had spoken favourably about extending dual citizenship to diaspora Armenians as early as 1998, even though others in his party, including then Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and his supporters, were staunchly opposed. Still, even after Sargsyan’s assassination in 1999, dual citizenship was not legalized for another eight years. While the Ter-Petrosyan-era objections to dual citizenship were reiterated, the broader concern seemed to be with devising a way to extend a limited form of citizenship to diasporans that would curb their political involvement in the RA. And indeed, over the years, a number of measures short of citizenship were devised in order to facilitate diaspora activity in the RA, from the sale of passports to 10-year residency permits.  

The law finally establishing dual citizenship was adopted in February 2007, supported by the Dashnak Party and the Republican Party, two of the three factions of the RA’s ruling coalition. However, it was reported that the Republican Party had initially

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172 The 10-year permit, also known as Special Residency Status, entitled the bearer to visa-free entry, and all the rights of citizens with the exception of political rights (voting, running for office, joining political parties). It exempted the holder from compulsory military service. Its associated passport was of a lesser grade than that of a citizen, since it did not entitle the holder to visa-free travel within the CIS. http://www.mfa.am/en/residency/
opposed, and only reluctantly supported the law.\(^{173}\) Political rights, which had always been the most controversial aspect of the dual citizenship debate, were significantly restricted for dual citizens under the new legislation, which required registered residency to vote, and minimum residency requirements to run for parliament or the presidency.\(^{174}\)

The eventual legalization of dual citizenship was seen by some as yet another way to encourage the flow of diaspora benevolence and, especially, to encourage the diaspora investment that had thus far failed to materialize.\(^{175}\) Perhaps in response to this perceived cynicism, enthusiasm for the newly legalized status was minimal in the established diaspora, with only 1,000 people applying for dual citizenship in the first year, most of whom were believed to be from Russia, Georgia, and Iran.\(^{176}\) The general established diaspora reluctance, and even indifference to dual citizenship once it was finally legalized reflected the fact that, through its denial, the symbolic damage had already been done. The reversal of the policy did not erase years of symbolic exclusion.

The Kocharyan-era approach to the established diaspora led one RA policy think tank to conclude that “For the past ten years the Diaspora was misled by Kocharyan’s promises to build bridges.” Changes in state-diaspora relations were largely symbolic, with a vast improvement in tone, but diasporans were still expected to contribute economically while being excluded politically. Kocharyan’s charm offensive failed to increase investment, but was relatively “successful in harnessing the Diaspora’s political support throughout most of his tenure.”\(^{177}\)

\(^{173}\) PFA, 2010: 11. This suggests that Dashnak pressure was key to the passage of the law.

\(^{174}\) PFA, 2010: 11.

\(^{175}\) Avetikyan, Hakob. Interview, 15 January 2010.

\(^{176}\) PFA, 2010: 11, n. 10. According to interviewees, the 10-year permit was sufficient for most practical purposes, and the application process was simply too onerous and opaque. See Ch. 7 for details.

\(^{177}\) PFA, 2010: 18.
The Sargsyan Era

Serzh Sargsyan was widely seen as the handpicked successor to his fellow Karabakhi, Robert Kocharyan. When he was declared the winner of the February 2008 presidential election (with 52% of the vote), handily defeating former president Ter-Petrosyan, the results were roundly condemned as fraudulent, and opposition activists flooded Yerevan’s streets in ten days of demonstrations. On March 1, police began forcibly removing protestors, and in the resulting clashes, ten opposition supporters were killed, hundreds injured, and over 100 opposition members arrested. Many blamed Kocharyan’s declaration of an official state of emergency, which gave police free rein to use whatever measures they deemed necessary.178

Established diaspora reaction to the March 1 events was mixed. While many individuals criticized the election and the subsequent government crackdown, reaction from established diaspora organizations combined tepid criticism with strong support for stability, security, and the status quo. In a joint statement signed by many of the leading diaspora organizations in the US, the entire issue of government culpability was notoriously absent.179

We join with all Armenians in reaffirming our people’s common commitment to the security of Armenia and Artsakh in a challenging and often dangerous region, and to cooperate toward our shared aim of strengthening an open and democratic Armenian homeland, based upon the rule of law, social and economic justice, freedom of expression and the media, and equal opportunity for all.180

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178 de Waal, 2013: 290-1.
179 The joint statement was signed by ANCA, AAA, AGBU, the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern/Western) and the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Eastern/Western). PFA cited a claim by an anonymous lobbyist that then-Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian had led efforts to harmonize diaspora organizations’ communications about March 1 with those of official Yerevan. PFA, 2010: 16, n. 15.
180 Qtd. in PFA, 2010: 16.
As a member of the governing coalition (assembled on February 28, one day before the violent crackdown), the Dashnak Party not only failed to condemn the violence, but considered it a legitimate response to what it described as the opposition’s attempted coup d'état.\textsuperscript{181} The Dashnak Party remained part of the ruling coalition until it pulled out to protest the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, announced on April 22, 2009.\textsuperscript{182}

The Protocols were the culmination of years of track-two and Swiss-mediated diplomatic meetings between the two states, but a more enthusiastic and focused process since Sargsyan had taken office.\textsuperscript{183} They provided for the normalization of bilateral relations and the opening of the Armenia-Turkey border, with no mention of the NK conflict or its resolution. However, they also announced the intention of the two states to establish a joint historical commission to conduct “impartial and scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate recommendations.”\textsuperscript{184} This stipulation predictably raised the ire of many in the established diaspora, who believed it would call into question the veracity of the genocide. It was also vehemently opposed by a number of opposition parties.\textsuperscript{185}

At the same time as the Protocols were being negotiated, Sargsyan announced the creation, in October 2008, of a new Ministry of Diaspora, a dedicated government body to oversee state-diaspora relations. One year after its creation, the Minister, Hranush Hakobyan, would accompany Sargsyan on a four-country tour to promote the Protocols –

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\textsuperscript{182} Philips describes Sargsyan as “less beholden to the Dashnaks” than Kocharyan. Philips, 2012: 41.

\textsuperscript{183} Philips suggests Turkish President Gul congratulating Sargsyan on his victory, reciprocated by an invitation by Sargsyan to Gul to visit Armenia to watch a football match between the two states’ teams (later known as “football diplomacy, since Sargsyan also visited Turkey to watch a second match), accelerated the process. Philips, 2012: 42.

\textsuperscript{184} Philips, 2012: 59.

\textsuperscript{185} In addition to the Dashnaks, these included the Armenian National Congress and the People’s Party. Philips, 2012: 60.
to the established diaspora in Paris, New York, Los Angeles, and Beirut, and to the Armenians of Russia in Rostov-Na-Donu. The creation of the ministry coincided with the formation of an established-diasporan-free government, with the last remaining diasporan, Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, replaced by Eduard Nalbandyan.

The following chapter will look at the creation of the Ministry of Diaspora in detail, and examine its attempts to reframe state-diaspora relations in ways that would benefit the state.

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186 These visits occurred one week before the signing ceremony on 10 October 2009 in Zurich.
Chapter 4
Armenia’s “Discursive Power Ministry”

Chapter 1 suggested that Armenia’s creation of a Ministry of Diaspora was puzzling. This chapter describes the ministry’s structure, functions, and its mission as seen by the minister and her staff. It then explores the government body’s discursive output, and specifically, its reframing of diaspora identity and state-diaspora relations in ways that reflected RA interests.

The RA Ministry of Diaspora was created in 2008, and was one of many similar ministries in other states (Georgia, 2008; Israel, 2009) whose purview was relations with “the diaspora.” Its purpose was puzzling. On the one hand, it claimed some form of authority over, or responsibility for, individuals who lived in and were citizens of other states, and its status as a ministry suggested that it – and the diaspora – was a high government priority. On the other hand, it was poorly funded and marginal to the regular functioning of government, and its activities ranged from tourism promotion to charity coordination, hardly the stuff of high politics. Its official functions often duplicated or overlapped with activities of other government ministries and diaspora organizations, it “acted” in jurisdictions over which it had no official control, and targeted beneficiaries who were (generally) not citizens of the state it served. Making sense of this ministry requires us to look beyond what it did, materially speaking, for and about the diaspora, and focus, rather, on what it said. As an official state body, this ministry possessed the

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1 On closer inspection, these government bodies were not all created equal. The Georgian version was an Office of the State Minister – a body of lower rank and funding than a full ministry; the Israeli version was not a single-portfolio ministry until 2015. See Chapter 8 for a more detailed comparison.
2 The Ministry’s 2012 annual budget was USD $1.9 million, out of a total USD $2.67 billion in state expenditures. Some Ministry-related projects were funded separately, such as diaspora teacher training, which fell under the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science. “Armenian Ministry of Diaspora 2012 budget to make $1.9 million.” 4 Nov 2011. News.am. Accessed 1 March 2012. http://news.am/eng/news/80650.html
3 Hranush Hakobyan, interview, 18 March 2010.
discursive power to name, frame, define, and delineate the state-diaspora relationship in a way that benefited the state. While diaspora intellectuals may have had definitions and frames of their own, state resources and legitimacy allowed the ministry to increasingly punctuate the diaspora discursive field with the state’s reframings.

Diaspora relations may be a legitimate and growing concern for states with significant diaspora populations. However, the creation of ministries (or other dedicated government departments) does not necessarily follow the perceived existence of such an issue area. As noted previously, many states have institutionalized their relationship with their diasporas without establishing dedicated ministries.

The specific impetus behind the creation of the ministry is difficult to isolate, but certainly, the perceived general failure, to date, of the ad hoc approach to Armenia-diaspora relationship management could have prompted a change in policy. However, given that the (relatively) dysfunctional nature of state-diaspora relations, and the ad hoc approach to them, were as old as the RA itself, policy dissatisfaction alone does not explain the specific timing. Instead, the catalyst may well have been the increased urgency for relationship management in the context of the Turkey-Armenia Protocols, negotiations for which had already begun in Switzerland in September 2007, and which

4 Nor is there much evidence to support Hakobyan’s insistence that the diaspora had asked for a ministry. Hakobyan, Hranush, interview, 18 March 2010.
5 Philips, 2012: 27-31. Opinions regarding the Armenia-Turkey Protocols and their approval was sharply polarized among my respondents, both RA citizens and diasporans. However, established diasporans were expected to be, and generally were, more hostile given the Protocols’ stipulation that the two countries would engage in a historical dialogue which appeared to be an opportunity for Turkish historians to refute the existence of the genocide. “Open Letter re the Protocols to President Sargsyan from Professor Roger W. Smith, Chair.” 30 September 2009. Zoryan Institute. Accessed 1 March 2015. http://www.zoryaninstitute.org/Announcements/Letter%20to%20Pres%20Sargsyan%20from%20R%20Smith%20re%20Protocols%20official%20version.pdf Interestingly, it was ultimately not this issue, but the (unofficial) linkage of the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan to the opening of the border, which resulted in the failure of the Protocols to be ratified by either Armenia or Turkey.
the established diaspora was largely expected to oppose. In 2015, the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide was also expected to thrust Armenia-Turkey relations into the spotlight, and preparations for this event would surely lay bare any disagreements between the RA and the diaspora on priorities, strategy, and tactics.

**Armenia’s Pre-Ministry Experience**

Attempts to manage state-diaspora relations began in Soviet times, when the Committee for Cultural Ties with Diaspora Armenians (*Spyurkahayutyun Het Mshakutayin Kapi Komite*) was established in Yerevan in 1964. Officially, its purpose was to promote patriotic activity among Armenian diaspora communities in the non-communist world, and to establish ties with the more “progressive” (or pro-Soviet) organizations. It provided Armenian schools abroad with textbooks, organized summer camps for diaspora children in Armenia, training programs for schoolteachers, and the placement of diasporans in Soviet Armenian universities. It arranged for Armenian artists, writers, choirs and dance troupes to visit Armenia, and its press division distributed articles about Soviet Armenia to the diasporan press. In essence, the Committee was the gatekeeper of Armenia-diaspora relations, facilitating, but also tightly controlling diasporan visits to Soviet Armenia. Unofficially, the Committee’s aim was to bind diaspora loyalties to the Soviet Republic of Armenia. This was no easy task, especially given Cold War ideological animosities.

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7 This selection among Armenian organizations effectively excluded all Dashnak-affiliated organizations from meaningful contact with Soviet Armenia.

8 Kozmoyan, Romen, interview, 20 March 2010.
The Committee was dissolved by independent Armenia’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who relegated diaspora affairs to a small desk within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).\(^9\) From 1991 until 2008 most diaspora affairs were handled by the MFA and its diplomats. According to Salpi Ghazarian, Special Advisor to then Foreign Minister, Vartan Oskanian,

> It didn’t do very much… it was a holdover from Soviet times. What it did do was try to maintain diaspora networks and contacts… it was a directorate of sorts, I suppose, but it didn’t at all try to be a mediator [between state and diaspora].\(^{10}\)

Ter-Petrosyan sought to build a nation-state free from outside political interference, with the diaspora relegated to a philanthropic support role. Relations were particularly strained under his tenure when he banned the diaspora-based Dashnak\(^{11}\) party and jailed some of its leaders, and included an explicit ban on dual citizenship in the 1995 constitution.

The next administration, under Robert Kocharyan, sought to improve relations with the established diaspora, who felt largely shut out of the state except where philanthropy was desired and/or expected.\(^{12}\) Attempts to placate them were primarily rhetorical, but included three Armenia-Diaspora Conferences, in 1999, 2002, and 2006.\(^{13}\) Organized by then Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, these conferences were scripted, top-down events dominated by RA officials, and favoured diaspora organizations (charities, lobby groups, clubs, churches, political parties) such that individuals with no organizational ties

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\(^{9}\) The division was known as the State Committee on Relations with the Diaspora.

\(^{10}\) Ghazarian, Salpi, interview, 5 November 2009.

\(^{11}\) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) was founded in Tbilisi in the late 1800s, served as the government of the First Armenian Republic from 1918-1920, and was the strongest of the three political parties active in the diaspora during the tenure of Soviet Union. It was outspokenly anti-Soviet until the late Soviet period. While it currently operates as a local political party in the RA, it continues to command significant allegiance among established diasporans.

\(^{12}\) Panossian, 2003: 140.

\(^{13}\) Panossian, 2003: 140.
were excluded. Each conference was a symbolic forum for the airing of grievances and for (pre-written) declarative statements, but little real change in relations occurred, nor did the major organizations in the established diaspora dramatically alter their form or function in response (though, as we will see, Russian Armenians responded favourably to these events). Relations between Armenia and the diaspora did improve somewhat under Kocharyan, but there is little evidence that the Conferences contributed to that improvement. Instead, some observers credited Kocharyan’s charm offensive, and his ability to be a shrewd manipulator of diaspora emotions.

Serge Sargsyan’s presidency, which began in 2008, featured a more formal organizational approach to “diaspora management.” According to the ministry’s Chief of Staff, strengthening the Armenia-diaspora link had been a pre-election promise. In October 2008, Sargsyan created the Ministry of Diaspora, a new arm of the Armenian government, headed by Minister Hranush Hakobyan. It elevated the existing diaspora department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the status of an independent (if underfunded) ministry. According to Hakobyan, the ministry was created at the behest of the Armenian diaspora, “wanting to protect its existence,” though it was unclear which

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14 “These three statements were pre-written, but went through the motion of being ‘prepared’ and unanimously adopted by the conference.” Panossian, 2003: 147.
15 This was the opinion expressed by nearly all my interviewees with whom the Conferences were discussed. One delegate confidentially described them as a “feel-good exercise.”
16 According to Matosian, unlike his aloof, scholarly predecessor, Kocharyan had deployed his love of basketball and jazz to “schmooze” effectively with established diasporans and Russian-Armenian businessmen alike. Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
17 Firdus Zakaryan, interview, November 15, 2009.
diaspora Armenians had requested it, and puzzled diaspora reactions to the ministry made the claim difficult to substantiate.\(^\text{19}\)

**Ministry of Diaspora: Mission, Structure, Functions**

The ministry’s vision, as expressed by the minister and her staff in interviews, was three-fold. First, it advocated *hayapahpanutyun*, or the protection of “Armenianness,” among diaspora Armenians.\(^\text{20}\) Second, it sought to harness and utilize the diaspora’s potential to help develop the RA. Its third priority was *hayadartsutyun*, or a return to Armenianness.\(^\text{21}\) This word, similar to the Armenian word for repatriation, suggested that the Ministry prioritized the “re-Armenianization” of Armenians *where they were over enticing them to move “home.”\(^\text{22}\)

The Ministry of Diaspora was divided into a series of geographical departments, each responsible for ties with Armenians living in a specific world region. These included

a) the Americas (and Australia), b) Europe, c) the Near and Middle East, and d) Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.\(^\text{23}\) Most of these departments were further subdivided into regional divisions. For example, the CIS department included

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\(^{19}\) None of my respondents or secondary sources suggested any diasporans had specifically called for the creation of a ministry. It is conceivable that some had advocated some form of diaspora representation in the RA government, but the Minister of Diaspora, an RA citizen appointed by the president, hardly met this criteria. Other RA government figures attribute the idea of creating a separate ministry to Serge Sargsyan. Arman Kirakosyan, interview, 19 March 2010.

\(^{20}\) According to the Minister, this “includes Armenian language, Armenian family, Armenian culture, Armenian faith. The Armenian home is built on those four pillars, the *hayapahpanutyun* home.” Hranush Hakobyan, interview, 13 February 2010.

\(^{21}\) “*Hayadartsutyun*” is a difficult word to translate, and could not be found in the dictionaries consulted by the author. It is a derivative of the Armenian word for repatriation, “*hayrenadartsutyun*,” but instead of connoting a return to the fatherland (*hayrenik*), it suggests a return to “Armenianness” (in the Armenian language, the ethnonym for Armenian is “*Hay*”). Ministry documents translate it as a “return to Armenian roots.”

\(^{22}\) An actual repatriation policy was seen as impractical at the time, given the inability of the RA government to provide financial help to repatriates. In the meantime, the Minister wanted diaspora Armenians “to integrate, but not assimilate” into their host societies. “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with heads of diplomatic representations of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2, 2009, Yerevan.” Armenia-Diaspora Partnership, 2009: 335.

\(^{23}\) The CIS department was more accurately the post-Soviet department, since it included non-CIS-member Georgia.
three divisions: a) Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and Moldova; b) Central Asia, and c) the Caucasus. In addition, the Ministry had departments dedicated to religious organizations and pan-Armenian programs, as well as legal, media relations, and administrative sections.

Of the 82 employees of the Ministry in late 2009 and early 2010, none were diaspora Armenians. While some had spent time abroad, all had been born in (Soviet) Armenia, and held RA citizenship. Most were career civil servants, and did not appear to have any diaspora-specific expertise. At Hakobyan’s behest, Yerevan State University had established a Diaspora Studies Department offering a Master’s program designed to train “diaspora experts”, and produce future employees for the Ministry. According to its program director, Yuri Avetisyan, the existing Ministry staff had no specialized knowledge of the diaspora. “It's as though we took a physicist and a mathematician and put them to work at the Ministry of Diaspora on diaspora issues!”

The Minister, Hranush Hakobyan, had no diaspora expertise either, and was considered by many to have been an odd choice by the president. Formerly a high-ranking priest at Etchmiatsin of diaspora origin had never heard of this aspect of the Ministry structure. Confidential informant.

Zakaryan claimed that there were at one time six diaspora Armenian employees, and that they were hired from time to time on a short-term, contract basis, e.g., if the Ministry needed a Farsi translator. While Nayiri Mgrdichian, originally from Syria, who worked in the Near and Middle East department, was described by the Chief of Staff as an employee, she referred to herself as an “inknapsaket,” or independent expert. One confidential respondent reported that the ministry occasionally took on established diaspora interns, but noted that their tasks, if female, were often limited to making coffee for their bosses. It is unclear whether such interns would have been counted among the six diaspora former employees claimed by Zakaryan. Mgrdichian, interview, December 10, 2009; Zakaryan, Firdus, interview, November 15, 2009; Confidential informant.

The head of the European department, for example, had moved to France in 2002, and now held dual citizenship, while the head of the Americas department had lived temporarily in the US. Aslanyan, Hratch, interview, 20 December 2009; Nikoghosyan, Arthur, interview, 18 November 2009.

Yuri Avetisyan, interview, 19 January 2010. Like the Ministry, the department expected its students to specialize geographically, rather than focus on pan-Armenian institutions such as churches and political parties.
Komsomol official, she had become a successful politician in the post-Soviet era, holding both elected and appointed offices. Her ties to Soviet institutions was especially troublesome to established diasporans, who saw this as evidence of a Soviet mindset, and a sign that the Ministry was not sincerely intended to represent their interests.

The Ministry’s projects included the printing and distribution of textbooks to diaspora schools, sending congratulatory letters to diaspora organizations to honour noteworthy events, organizing pan-Armenian professional conferences in such fields as law, banking, and architecture, and a program which brought young diasporans to Armenia in the summers. Its press section compiled a news webpage called Hayern Aysor (Armenians Today), which featured news about diaspora communities.

Whether due to its meagre budget or low prioritization, the Ministry’s publications and websites were of low quality, and rather than original material, consisted mostly of information compiled from readily available sources.

One of the primary functions of many of the Ministry’s staff was the “mapping” of diaspora communities: estimating their population size, charting their organizational makeup, and assessing their degree of “development.” In contrast to the more rigorous methods used to map population size and characteristics within state borders (censuses;...
tax, education, and other records), the Ministry relied upon community self-reporting, apparently by organizations such as churches, political parties, and community centres. It was unclear how diligently these groups collected statistics, but there were numerous reasons for groups to overestimate their own membership, including prestige and political clout, and in communities with competing and/or overlapping organizations, these margins of error could be expected to increase. The Ministry cited these (rough) statistics when comparing diaspora populations by country, and since its departments were organized by geographic region, it seemed plausible that resources (such as staff) were allocated at least partly based on community size. One of the Ministry’s often-touted numbers was that of “10 million Armenians” worldwide. This number was wielded as a symbol of Armenian strength, and juxtaposed to the (generous) official figure of the roughly 3 million citizens of landlocked, impoverished Armenia.

No matter how much the Turks and Azeri try to keep us in a blockade and pressure us with the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, they will not succeed because they are dealing with a nation of 10 million, and not only Armenia with a three-million population.

The Ministry also attempted to increase diaspora legibility through the promotion of “the self-organization of the disorganized sector of the Diaspora.” Specifically, it encouraged the formation of umbrella organizations which, in theory, would represent all...

34 This finding emerged from personal interviews with the heads of the various geographically-organized departments of the Ministry.
35 “Largest Armenian community is in the Russian Federation.”
36 Given Ministry staff’s frequent mentions of Russia’s “two million” Armenians, it hardly seemed a coincidence that the Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia division of the CIS department had one more staff member than other divisions, whose official title was “Chief Expert.” It was unclear how this employee’s duties differed from those of the division chief.
37 Hakobyan, Hranush, interview 18 March 2010; Nikoghosyan, Arthur (head of the Ministry of Diaspora’s Department of Armenian Communities of the Americas), interview, 18 November 2009.
the Armenians in a given host state. The Union of Armenians of Russia [Soyuz Armyan Rossii], the pet project of Russian-Armenian billionaire Ara Abrahamyan, received ample praise from the Ministry, and was seen as the model for other states to emulate.40

We must be able to consolidate communities in every country; try to create coordinating bodies such as the ones in Spain, Greece, France and Lebanon and spread them to other countries. We have the best experience in the sense of communities.41

Minister Hakobyan maintained a busy schedule of foreign visits, and had been in attendance on President Sargsyan’s Armenia-Turkey Protocols promotion tour of diaspora communities, which included Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Beirut, and Rostov-Na-Donu (Russia).42 In Armenia, the Ministry reviewed and made recommendations for legislation affecting diaspora Armenians, such as the laws pertaining to dual citizenship, which was legalized in 2007. Staff claimed that progress had been made toward streamlining the previously prohibitive documentation requirements and bureaucratic runaround between the police and various government offices that had discouraged potential applicants.43

Necessity and Efficacy

Many of the activities undertaken and given high priority by the Ministry of Diaspora were, in fact, similar to those already pursued by diaspora or international

41 “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with heads of diplomatic representations of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2, 2009, Yerevan.” Armenia-Diaspora Partnership, 2009: 335. The “coordinating councils” mentioned by Hakobyan fell far short of the sort of hierarchical organization the UAR had become. The French version, for example, the Conseil de Coordination des Organizations Armeniens de France, was in no way a replacement for the traditional parties, but rather, a loose roundtable of sorts which occasionally released a joint statement on a shared concern, such as a visit by the Turkish president to France. CCAF – Conseil de Coordination des Organizations Armeniens de France, Official website. http://www.ccaf.info
43 Nikoghosian, interview, 18 November 2009.
organizations, or other RA government bodies. The “Come Home” (Ari Tun) project, for example, was a low-cost program to bring diaspora youth to the RA for two weeks in the summer, where they would be billeted with local families. There were already a number of similar exchange programs run by diaspora organizations, such as “Birthright Armenia” (registered in Armenia as “Depi Hayk”), “Armenian Volunteer Corps,” and “Land and Culture Organization,” among others. The publication Handbook for Armenians Abroad (2010, 2012), was an International Labour Organization (ILO)-conceived and European Union-funded project, with apparently minimal input from the ministry itself. Many diaspora organizations already compiled pan-Armenian news digests in multiple languages, and while the ministry’s website did contain useful information, it was also riddled with “dead links” and missing sections. The ministry-organized Armenia-Diaspora Conferences in 2011 and 2014 were the fourth and fifth such events, the first three of which had been organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Coming to the aid of Armenians abroad regarding travel documents was typically the purview of consular officials, and the ministry ultimately turned to these officials to process the documents in question. The printing and distribution of textbooks was the

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44 Since the RA neither covered airfare (or other transportation to Armenia) nor accommodations, the main expenses were the administration of the program (requiring one full-time Ministry employee) and the organization of field trips to Armenian historic sites.


46 Examples included Horizon Weekly, a publication by Canada’s Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak party) Central Committee, www.horizonweekly.ca, Hairenik Weekly, an Armenian-language Dashnak-affiliated publication which claimed to be the longest running Armenian newspaper in the world (since 1899), www.hairenikweekly.com, and RAG Mamoul, published by the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar), www.ragmamoul.net.

47 One of the more conspicuous of these was the non-operational link to “Armenian Organizations,” listed under the heading “Information Corner” on the “Useful Links” page. Given that this would appear to be where one might find links to diaspora Armenian organizations, it seems a particularly glaring omission. (Note: while some information was missing in one language but available in another, this particular link did not work in any of the languages available.) http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/Useful_links
jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education,\footnote{Ministry of Diaspora staff tended to speak about the distribution of textbooks to diaspora communities as though it had fallen under their jurisdiction, but one staff member confidentially admitted, when pressed, that it his/her ministry had not been responsible for doing so (without naming the responsible ministry). Recipients of textbooks in Russia noted they had come from the Ministry of Education.} while the organization of cultural events duplicated the efforts of the Ministry of Culture.

Thus, none of the Ministry of Diaspora’s projects or day-to-day activities were particularly novel or unique, and in light of such duplication and overlap, it was difficult to judge the efficacy of its activities, especially at such an early stage in its existence. Ministry staff pointed to the numbers of people participating in its youth exchange program as a sign that hayadartsutyun (the return to Armenianness) had begun. They cited the distribution of textbooks to diaspora communities as a positive development, though there were no overall numbers or lists of communities available. They also cited anecdotal evidence of a family assisted in this community, a magazine published in that country, and ties formed with some cultural organization. One informant suggested that a visit by the minister to a community in one instance had \textit{resulted} in the opening of a community centre and a revitalization of the local school.\footnote{Mgdrichian, interview, 10 December 2009. This was the only instance in which a causal relationship between a ministry activity and an actual development was suggested, however, I was unable to obtain any further information.} These indicators arguably set a low bar for success, and in some cases, the degree to which the ministry itself contributed, or what would have happened in its absence, was debatable. However, these success stories also tell us little about the ministry’s discursive and framing strategies, and whether they resonated with their target audience. More telling in this regard were the critiques of the ministry.
Critiques

The Ministry of Diaspora encountered confusion, suspicion, and even hostility among RA citizens, former government officials, and diaspora Armenians regarding its mandate and personnel,\(^{50}\) and also a degree of resistance from diplomatic personnel, who were increasingly called upon to represent the ministry, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, abroad.\(^{51}\) A prominent opposition politician and member of first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s administration described the ministry as “a stupid thing,” that harkened back to the Soviet-era Committee, an organization he claimed had spied on diaspora Armenians when they visited Soviet Armenia. In a free country, he claimed, such control was unnecessary, which is why no such institution was created during Ter-Petrosyan’s administration.\(^{52}\) This view was echoed by Ghazaryan, who described the ministry as “useless, because it assumes that interaction between the diaspora and Armenian institutions has to somehow be mediated.”\(^{53}\)

Among established diasporans, there was significant confusion about the general purpose and the specific aims of the ministry, and there were frequent suggestions that it was a tool for manipulation or simply yet another mechanism for milking the proverbial cow. In Georgia, critiques hinged on the ministry’s claim of “jurisdiction” over the

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\(^{50}\) This hostility centred around such issues as the choice of minister – a non-diasporan with a communist (Komsomol) background, the ministry’s vague or misguided mandate, underfunding, lack of diaspora employees, and even the lack of French language on its website (in spite of France’s large and influential Armenian diaspora community). In 2015, there was still no French language version.

\(^{51}\) “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with heads of diplomatic representations of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2, 2009, Yerevan.” *Armenia-Diaspora Partnership*, 2009: 334. This point was disputed by Arman Kirakosyan, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), who claimed that RA diplomats answered to the MFA alone. Kirakosyan, Arman. Interview, 19 March 2010.

\(^{52}\) He also suggested the Ministry was redundant. “In my time, our Foreign Ministry spent 80% of its time and energy dealing with diaspora anyway, only 20% on non-diaspora foreign affairs. They were better at it; that was their job. Embassies dealt with communities abroad. Now there is duplication of work, sometimes embassies need permission from both ministries to do something or get competing directives.” Confidential informant, interview, 20 January 2010.

\(^{53}\) Ghazarian, Salpi. Interview, 5 November 2009.
Javakheti Armenians, and its apparent misperception of their plight. In Russia, however, while they resisted the application of the label “diaspora” to themselves, ethnic Armenians in Moscow, Krasnodar, and on the Black Sea coast, were generally much more receptive to the ministry.\footnote{One notable exception was the head of a small Armenian cultural organization on the Black Sea coast who felt snubbed by the ministry’s seemingly exclusive dealings with Union of Armenians of Russia.} This is hardly surprising, since the ministry praised their organizations and depicted them as a model for other diaspora communities to follow.

In spite of its mixed record of acceptance, which is perhaps not unusual for a new government body, the Ministry of Diaspora was quite successful in punctuating the discursive field with its framing of state-diaspora relations. The minister was increasingly quoted in the press, her visits and photo opportunities were considered newsworthy, and respected diaspora Armenian organizations increasingly acknowledged the ministry on their websites.\footnote{This was true even of organizations whose directors rolled their eyes at mentions of the ministry in person.} Even its detractors, rather than ignore it as an irrelevant force in state-diaspora affairs, felt compelled to respond to the ministry’s pronouncements.

A number of factors contributed to the ministry’s ability to infiltrate the discursive field in this way. First, in the established diaspora, RA independence had produced a significant crisis of purpose. Its numerous organizations, and their publications and websites may have been prolific, but there was no longer a mission of a free, independent Armenia to promote, a USSR to either support or oppose, or more than a trickle of repatriates. The stale ideological missions of the three traditional diaspora political parties had less appeal for the younger generation of diasporans, and while genocide recognition remained a salient issue (if not the salient issue), there was now a new, state voice advocating for it as well. Meanwhile, in the post-Soviet space, there was virtually no
Old Frames: The Hayastan All-Armenian Fund (Himnadram)

The degree to which the Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing of state-diaspora relations was a departure from the previous state vision is best appreciated when contrasted with the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund. Created in 1992 and headquartered in Yerevan, the Fund channeled diaspora donations from myriad sources toward centrally prioritized development projects, totaling over $235,800,000 USD by 2014. The most famous of its accomplishments was the Goris-Stepanakert Highway, completed in 1999, which linked the RA and NKR, and served as the isolated NKR’s lifeline. The purpose of establishing the Fund was to channel otherwise ad hoc diaspora generosity toward state priorities, and to mitigate the degree to which unscrupulous local partners were swindling gullible givers out of their funds. The bulk of donations to the Fund were pledged during the annual All-Armenian Fund Telethon in the US, the European Phonéthon, based in France, and in recent years, a private Fundraising Gala held in Moscow for prominent Russian Armenian businessmen.

Diaspora philanthropy had been of great significance to the RA, especially in its

56 ‘Projects.’ Hayastan online.
57 In 2010, a sign on the side of the highway read (in English), ‘Built with the participation of All Armenians.’ Another sign on the same road named a specific donor: ‘Built with the assistance of Vahe Karapetyan.’
59 Phonéthons were also conducted in Argentina and Uruguay, and consisted of volunteers telephoning members of the Armenian community to solicit donations. Hayastan online.
60 According to former Armenian Ambassador to the U.S., Arman Kirakossian, while institutions (churches, parties, clubs) dominate in the US, wealthy Russian businessmen are attempting to organize communities around themselves and their personal wealth. Kirakossian, Arman. Interview, 19 March 2010.
early years of independence, but more recently had been dwarfed by private remittances. Thus, the value of the Telethon (which had never exceeded $35 million annually) should be evaluated in terms other than its formal fundraising role. For diaspora Armenians, donating to the Fund had become an identity-affirming activity, in that ‘helping Armenia’ was seen as a significant aspect of being Armenian in the post-independence era. Fund Director Ara Vardanyan acknowledged this.

You know… if we speak about the money, then maybe we will end up saying that, ok, those ten or fifteen million dollars can be raised only in Armenia, and you don’t need to raise it from diaspora. But, I think that making donation to Armenia is one of the key factors of staying Armenian.

The Hayastan All-Armenian Fund clearly reinforced the diaspora-as-giver, RA-as-recipient roles, which increased the diaspora’s clout as a force to be reckoned with in Armenia. The power to give is also the power to withhold, and there is evidence that in the past, dissatisfaction with RA policy had contributed to a reduction in Fund contributions. The Fund’s emphasis on transparency and accountability portrayed it as an exceptional island of integrity, proving the rule that Armenia was a generally unscrupulous place for diasporans to do business. In addition, diasporans’ assumption that Armenia needed their charity was reinforced annually by 12 hours of intense focus.

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61 Annual remittances were estimated at between $300 million and 1 billion USD, or between 10 and 25 percent of the RA’s GDP. Roberts, Bryan W., King Banaian. 2005. “Remittances in Armenia I: How Big are Remittances Flows to Armenia and How Much Does it Cost to Send Them?” Armenian Journal of Public Policy 2, 1: 71, 84.

62 Shain and Barth (2003: 455) suggest that identity does not only lead to interests, as the constructivist approach posits, but can also be an interest in and of itself. In such cases, the diasporic goal may be to influence the home state in the service of ‘a preferred version of kinship and national identity.’


64 When then-President Levon Ter-Petrossyan banned the ARF (Dashnak) Party from participation in RA politics, jailing or expelling many of its leaders, ARF supporters responded by boycotting the Telethon that year. However, neither the 2008 Presidential elections, widely seen as fraudulent, nor widespread diaspora dissatisfaction with the Armenia-Turkey Protocols of 2009, resulted in similar boycotting. Manoogian, Ara K. 2011. “To Donate or Not To Donate.” 3 Jan 2011. Keghart.com. Accessed 5 Feb 2011. http://www.keghart.com/Manoogian_DonationsI . Raffi Hovannisian (Interview, 20 March 2010) suggested that RA authorities now had the ability to balance reduced donations from disillusioned ‘western’ diasporans with large gifts from Russian-Armenian benefactors, such that overall totals remained high.
As Steven Movsesian, who operated a microcredit organization in Armenia, suggested,

[W]e've had so much [philanthropy], that in the diaspora, we might think of Armenia as some place where you have to give money for a soup kitchen, or to feed an orphan, or to rebuild this school and this polyclinic. I think the time has come where we have to change the dynamic...There's companies here to invest in...And it's not investing with your heart. You should invest in Armenia...because it's a good business investment.  

New Frames

From 2008 to 2010, the Ministry of Diaspora made a number of interesting discursive moves that reframed state-diaspora relations. These reframing strategies can be grouped under three basic themes: diaspora identity, organization, and activity.

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<td>Diaspora as all Armenians outside RA and NKR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
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<td>Patriotism includes/requires outspoken critique of RA policies (“noisy” strategies of dissent)</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
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<td>Re-Armenianization</td>
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65 Movsesian, Steven. Interview, 14 October 2009.
**Diaspora Identity Reframed**

The Ministry expanded the definition of “diaspora,” from a term that was once understood to refer to the established diaspora—descendants of genocide survivors (located largely in the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas)—to include nearly all Armenians living outside the RA and Nagorno-Karabakh. The term was now applied to Armenians living in the post-Soviet states, most notably the roughly two million Armenians in Russia. Many of these were in fact recent emigrants from Armenia, returned to Armenia regularly, and might more accurately have been described as temporary economic migrants.

This broader use of the term, while consistent with recent trends in diaspora scholarship, was awkward for a number of reasons. In Russia, most Armenians had never considered themselves “diasporans,” a view expressed frequently in my interviews with Armenians in Russia, and a fact the minister herself acknowledged. “The Russian culture and environment are so familiar and perceptible that we still can’t perceive the Armenian community [of Russia] as part of the Diaspora.” Moreover, the fact that so many of the Armenians living in Russia were temporary economic migrants, rather than people who had actually relocated, meant that the “diaspora” in many cases actually permanently resided in the home state. Given how many RA citizens sought employment

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66 The exceptions were Armenians considered to be living on “historic Armenian lands” such as the Armenians of Javakheti, in southern Georgia, and the “hidden” or “crypto-Armenians” living in secret in modern-day eastern Turkey.
69 “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with the Armenian Union of RF...”
abroad, if carried to its obvious conclusion, this framing could consider large swaths of the RA population “diasporans.” Not only would this “identity gerrymandering” stretch even the most liberal scholarly conceptions of the term, but it would also amount to a grossly inaccurate depiction of these temporary migrants’ lived experiences.70

More problematic still was the ethnic Armenian region of Javakheti (Javakhk in Armenian) in neighbouring Georgia.71 Unlike the city of Tbilisi, home to another large population of ethnic Armenians, Javakheti, which bordered on Armenia, has been considered by most Armenians to have formed a part of historic Armenia, and the Armenians there were seen as an indigenous or native population living on its traditional lands. This was not an uncontroversial claim,72 but it was overwhelmingly accepted by Armenians in the RA and the diaspora,73 and became contentious for Armenians only in light of the RA’s relations with Georgia, which viewed the Javakheti Armenians as potential (if not actual) secessionists. Because of Turkey and Azerbaijan’s blockade of the RA’s borders, Georgian territory was seen as a vital lifeline to the Black Sea, to Russia, and to the outside world. Georgia’s threats to close its border with Armenia74 were taken very seriously by RA elites, who were keen to defuse any tension between the Javakheti Armenians and the Georgian state, and also to distance the RA from what they consistently described as an internal Georgian matter.75

70 See Chapter 5.
71 The official name, “Javakheti,” will be used here, except in direct quotations, with the caveat that this Georgian version of the regional name is not used by Armenian respondents, who prefer “Javakhk.”
72 See Chapter 6.
73 This was the view of nearly all of my respondents.
74 It was unclear whether this threat had ever been made publicly, but conversations with past and present government officials suggested a pattern of innuendos, if not actual threats, raised repeatedly by Georgian officials in bilateral meetings.
In this context, how one referred to the Javakheti Armenians took on added political significance. The general consensus among respondents was that the Armenians in Tbilisi (and Ajaria) were diasporans living on Georgian land but, as native inhabitants of historic Armenian territory, the Javakheti Armenians were not. This was, in fact, the expressed view of the Minister of Diaspora, who described diasporans as “All Armenians who live outside the Armenian Plateau [Lernashkharh],” a geographical designation that included Javakheti.

There is significant precedent for not applying the term “diaspora” to a compactly settled ethnic minority living just across the border from its kin state. Kymlicka (1995), for example, has referred to such groups as a “national minorities,” a designation implying a legitimate claim to territory and (generally) involuntary incorporation into a larger state. However, treating a cross-border minority as a diaspora population can also mitigate accusations of irredentism, since the diaspora label implies both the normalcy and permanence of the group’s existence outside the homeland. However, regardless of what it called them, the Ministry of Diaspora treated the Javakheti Armenians as its constituents. The Ministry’s “Caucasus” division, which theoretically covered the countries of the South Caucasus, de facto focused entirely on Georgia. This division

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76 The Armenian Plateau or Highland generally refers to a region considered to be historic Armenia, and includes much of Eastern Anatolia, all of the present-day RA and NKR, some of Northern Iran, Eastern Azerbaijan, and southern Georgia – namely, Javakheti. To clarify, I asked whether the Javakheti Armenians were diasporans, and Hakobyan replied, “Of course not.” Hranush Hakobyan, interview, 18 March 2010.


78 King, 1998: 11.

79 The division formed part of the CIS Department. The “third” South Caucasian state, Azerbaijan, lost virtually its entire Armenian population due to voluntary and forced population transfers during the Nagorno-Karabakh war.
was responsible for the Armenians in Abkhazia (figures ranged between 45-100,000), with which it had difficulties maintaining ties due to the difficulty of traveling to the *de facto* state; the Armenians in Tbilisi (who numbered around 83,000) and Ajaria (approximately 10-12,000 concentrated in Batumi and Kobuleti); *and the Armenians in Javakheti* (120-150,000). Not only did the Ministry of Diaspora devote considerable time and energy to studying the unique challenges faced by the Javakheti Armenians, it also sponsored publications about them. In other words, without calling the Javakheti Armenians “diasporans,” the Ministry of Diaspora appears to have treated them as it treated other Armenians that it did view as diasporans.

There was also a tendency among RA elites, including Hakobyan, to refer to the three components of the modern Armenian nation as “Armenia, Artsakh [NKR], and the Diaspora.”

The Armenian people are strong and undefeatable. Today Armenians are a victorious nation. Today we are united as one in *Armenia, Artsakh and the Diaspora*. We are no longer the poor, beaten nation of the 20th century that barely survived the genocide and the nation that was forced to spread across the globe.

The *Armenia-Artsakh-Diaspora* trinity is our virtual Homeland, that is, the Spiritual Armenia that is unknown, multifaceted and multi-layered. Will we be able to properly recognize ourselves, our national trinity and ascertain our common issues and objectives and, most importantly, plan and implement the nation-building projects?  

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80 “Javakheti” was shorthand for a larger region that included Samtskhe, Javakheti, and Tsalka, all of which contained significant Armenian populations, though the Javakheti region had the highest concentration. All population figures are estimated. Ministry employee, confidential interview. It is noteworthy that, according to these estimates, the Javakheti Armenian population was roughly equal to that of the NKR.


82 “Artsakh” was the historic Armenian name generally used to refer the territory known as Nagorno-Karabakh (a Russian-Turkish-Persian hybrid name). “Hranush Hakobyan’s address to the Armenian Community of Argentina, November 7, 2008, Argentina.” *Armenia-Diaspora Partnership*, 2009: 312-3, emphasis mine.

83 “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with the Armenian Union of RF...”, emphasis mine.
While this “trinity” shifted the focus from past tragedy to present geopolitical realities, it also had the rhetorical effect of erasing Javakheti as an Armenian region, and instead subsuming it, by default, under “diaspora.”

Clearly, the term “diaspora” was an ill-fitting one for Armenians in the post-Soviet region, and especially so for the Javakheti Armenians of Georgia. Moreover, even some of the Ministry’s projects seemed to be tacit acknowledgements that “the diaspora” still referred primarily to Western Armenians living outside the former-Soviet Union. For example, when describing the “Our Greats” [Mer Metsere] project, which chronicled the lives of prominent diaspora Armenians, Chief of Staff Firdus Zakaryan named Charles Aznavour (France), Kirk Kerkorian (US), and Alex Manoogian (US) as the subjects of these biographies, in spite of the large number of Russian-Armenian “oligarch” success stories that might have been selected. 84 Nevertheless, with constant qualifications, explanations, and exceptions, and with full acknowledgement of the ways in which the broader use of the term “diaspora” was problematic, the Ministry effectively extended the term to all Armenians beyond the RA and NKR.

Applying the term “diaspora” to post-Soviet Armenians effectively diluted the pool of often-critical established diasporans in the West and Middle East with “friendly” and supportive diasporans. 85 Moreover, since the Russian community was the world’s largest, at two million, framing these Armenians as “diasporans” allowed the RA to convincingly portray its diaspora relations as less antagonistic. This was evident during the Turkey-Armenia Protocols “promotion tour”, when Serge Sargsyan visited the U.S., France,

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84 Zakaryan, Firdus, interview, 15 November 2009.
Lebanon, and Russia to “sell” the diaspora on a controversial agreement to normalize relations with Turkey, which he intended to sign. Sargsyan was met with public opposition and street protests in New York, Paris, and Beirut, but not in Rostov-na-Donu, Russia, where Armenians appeared more supportive, and opposition was expressed privately. In portraying Russia as the new “centre” of diaspora life, a title once held by Beirut and more recently Los Angeles, RA elites situated that centre in a like-minded, deferential community, and promoted it as a model for other communities to emulate.

Georgia, however, was a troublesome exception to the general view of the post-Soviet space as containing the “right” diasporans. Not only was the term a bad fit in Javakheti, but ethnic identity in Georgia was so highly politicized that even purely cultural organizations were assumed by Georgian authorities to be political. In such a charged atmosphere, facing what they perceived as profound injustice, and receiving what they perceived as minimal support from the RA, the Armenians of Georgia were likely to have more in common with the politicized established diaspora, and to be a challenge for the Ministry of Diaspora.

The minister, her staff, and their publications emphasized the existence of diaspora “communities” (*hamaynkner*), each with its own unique location-specific situation and challenges, rather than speaking about “the diaspora” as a whole. While this may have seemed like a sound approach to ethnic Armenians living in such different locations as rural Lebanon, Buenos Aires, Boston, and Moscow, it also had the rhetorical advantage of disarming the concept of a major source of opposition to RA policies. In the

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established diaspora, the dominant form of organization had not been the “community,” as such, but membership in competing, pan-diasporic political-parties-in-exile (Dashnak, Hnchakian and Ramgavar), and competing patriarchates of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Etchmiatsin and Antelias). The Dashnaktsutyun (or Dashnak) party had had particularly strained relations with the Armenian government since independence, and continued to be one of its harshest critics, while the Antelias Patriarchate (in Lebanon) had been seen as a pro-Dashnak challenger to the Mother See of Etchmiatsin (in Armenia). Focusing on the differences between diaspora “communities”—and organizing the Ministry into departments responsible for geographic regions—minimized reference to the pan-diasporic sources of opposition to, and criticism of, the home state.

The use of the term “communities” was confusing, however, especially since in Russia the term “obschina,” or “community,” often referred to an officially registered community organization, and Ministry staff tended to deploy that ambiguity strategically, using the word “community” to refer both to all the Armenians living in one region and to officially registered groups claiming to represent them. They also used “community” to refer variously to the Armenians of a particular town or village (i.e. the Tuapse Armenian community), a region (the Krasnodar Armenian community), and an entire state (the Russian Armenian community). Given that there could, of course, be broad

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87 Though as a political party operating in Armenia, it elected members to the National Assembly, and was at one time a member of the ruling coalition.
89 Osipov notes that this dual meaning was also the case for the term “national-cultural autonomy” (NCA) in Russia. Osipov, Alexander. 2013. “National-Cultural Autonomy in Russia: A matter of legal regulation or the symbolic construction of an ethnic mosaic?” Managing Ethnic Diversity in Russia. Oleh Protsyk and Benedikt Harzl, eds. London and New York: Routledge. 63.
variation within one country, especially one as large as Russia, this seemed counter to its own aim of seeing individual communities as unique.

Thus, the Ministry engaged in a rhetorical double game of simultaneously expanding the term “diaspora” to dilute the pool of troublesome, meddling, culturally distant diasporans with friendly, supportive, culturally familiar ones, while also disarming it by focusing on its geographic specificities, and on what divided, rather than united, the diaspora.

**Diaspora Organization Reframed**

The Ministry of Diaspora displayed a clear preference for depoliticized forms of diaspora organization. Its staff praised the existence of churches, schools, language clubs, youth groups, community centres, choirs, and dance troupes in some communities, and bemoaned the lack of such organizations in others. The focus was clearly on the types of organizations that might stave off assimilation by facilitating the congregation of Armenians in a given location.⁹⁰

By contrast, political organizations were clearly frowned upon, though political activity seemed to be acceptable if limited to support for the RA and its current regime.⁹¹ The three established diaspora political parties (Dashnak, Hnchak, and Ramgavar) were considered especially problematic. Ministry staff did not criticize these organizations directly, which is unsurprising given how strong allegiances to them remained in the established diaspora. In fact, they rarely discussed them unless asked, and even then only

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⁹⁰ Venues that facilitated youth mingling (and hopefully, marriage) were particularly praised for countering the “problem” of mixed marriages.

⁹¹ Within diaspora communities, there appeared to be a similar understanding, in that support for the current regime in their host states was not seen as particularly political (but rather, a sound decision to ensure influence and access), whereas support for the opposition was. Zurabyan, Karen, interview, 25 June 2010.
in general terms, but there was a clear preference for organizations that promoted “national ideas, not party ideologies.”

In general, the types of diaspora behaviour the Ministry expected of “its” constituents echoed the activities deemed appropriate for nationalities in the Soviet Union. These national – but not nationalist – activities focused on language, folklore, poetry, domestic traditions, and the ubiquitous touring dance troupes that showcased the USSR’s multinational character at “Friendship of the Peoples” events. Expressly forbidden were politicized behaviours – those deemed threatening to the regime. These were also the diaspora-appropriate behaviours the Committee for Cultural Ties with Diaspora Armenians had promoted, and rewarded with contact, trips, funding, etc.

The main forms of organization in the established diaspora, as described above, had been pan-Armenian and international, with membership in countries across the globe. The Ministry’s reframing suggested a preference for a new model in which the diaspora would organize by country, with a clear hierarchy. This was touted as a way to make the diaspora more legible to the state. According to Zakaryan,

Today, in the diaspora, there are over 30,000 Armenian organizations operating. They are civil society, political, benevolent, cultural, educational, youth, religious, etc.…We work with all of these, and it is understandable that it is difficult to work with all of them, so we would like, in every Armenian diaspora region, for a community [hamaynk] to be formed, for that community in that area to have a leader, and for us to be able to work with that community leader…we have hopes that the Armenian organizations will come together and have a general sort of

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92 Petrosyan, Vardan, interview, 13 January 2010. Only one of these parties remained a force to be reckoned with, the Dashnak Party. The others had largely fragmented and faded into obscurity as political forces, though some of their spin-off philanthropic and media organizations remained vibrant.

93 Cavoukian, 2013: 711.

94 The suspicion of the diaspora political parties, and especially the Dashnak Party which was thoroughly vilified by Soviet authorities, was at least in part a holdover from Soviet times, when all Armenian “nationalists” were accused of being Dashnaks, and Dashnaks were portrayed, in literature and in films, such as The Saroyan Brothers (1969), as being national traitors.
council, so that it is easier to work with them.\textsuperscript{95} Zakaryan also suggested that it was within the purview of the Ministry to seek out “advisors” in the diaspora to establish such councils where they did not exist.\textsuperscript{96} This organizational model was not promoted in order to better address community concerns, but rather, to increase the legibility of the diaspora for the RA.

Not only did the Ministry prefer hierarchical organizations, but it appeared to also prefer a top-down organizational model to a more grassroots form of organizing. While the Ministry did not come out explicitly in favour of large benefactors founding and leading diaspora organizations, its glowing praise for such men was indicative of a preference for this style of community organization, which in many ways resembled a “big-man” system of leadership. I borrow this term from the anthropological literature, where it was used by Sahlins (1963) to describe the Melanesian chiefs.\textsuperscript{97} The “big-man” in Melanesian tribes achieved status through acts of generosity (acquiring and then distributing wealth), which elevated him above, and attracted the loyalty of, others. Lacking the power to compel, the big-man’s authority nevertheless produced compliance, and he was able to coordinate mass action, even among otherwise-fractured groups,

\textsuperscript{95} Firdus Zakaryan, interview, November 15, 2009. The phrase “work with,” or “cooperate with,” was used often by respondents at the Ministry, and in other government bodies. Its meaning was often vague. Obviously, the Ministry could not possibly be in close, regular contact with 30,000 organizations. Statements such as these often seemed aspirational, suggested the lack of any serious impediment to working together, or indicated theoretical responsibility for, or jurisdiction over, such groups. 

\textsuperscript{96} “And I'll say that the Minister of Diaspora, according to our charter, can have her advisors - this would be a civil society position, not a government one - in places where there are lots of Armenians. Such an advisor's concern would be to form such a council locally.” Zakaryan, Firdus, interview, November 15, 2009.

\textsuperscript{97} After deciding on the “big-man” descriptor, I found that Earle and Derlugian had used the idea of chiefiancies to refer to “key political actors within states, who operate in intermittent competition and cooperation with state structures.” While my use of big-men here is slightly different, there is considerable overlap. Earle, Timothy, and Georgi Derlugian. 2009. “Weak States, Strong Chiefiancies, and Elemental Power.” Center for Social Sciences. 15 Feb. Accessed 29 December 2015. www.ucss.ge/Earle-Derlug%20WEAK%20STATES.doc. 6.
largely due to his relations and with other, external big-men. This term was a good fit in the Armenian case, since Armenians frequently used the term “big man” (mets mard) to refer to important and influential people.

What were the qualities of a big-man, in the Armenian context? I define a “big-man” as a person who leverages his wealth, public generosity, and personal connections to other powerful elites toward attaining the status of legitimate community authority figure. Russia’s Armenian big-men were wealthy businessman-philanthropists presiding over vast organizations of their own creation, whose generosity was widespread and widely acknowledged. The direct financial support of these men, and their ability to attract financial contributions from others based on loyalty, accounted for a large percentage of the organized Armenian activity in Russia, which occurred via big-man organizations. According to one respondent, in the absence of other unifying factors, such as a strong church, these men were attempting to “gather the Armenian diaspora around themselves.” Additionally, their interpersonal relations with other big-men, and political elites such as Russian and RA officials, further increased their prestige and authority. These relations also enabled them to solve community problems privately through elite connections, rather than through public confrontation, or through lobbying (as seen in the established diaspora).

Big-men, who had acquired their wealth during the chaotic early post-Soviet period of economic upheaval, were generally assumed to have arrived at their success via

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99 In theory, female “big-men” were possible, but in the neo-patriarchal Armenian context, their emergence was unlikely. In the RA, politics and big business were not only male dominated, but seen as inappropriate professions for women. In Russia, a few women had become wealthy enough to be counted among the “oligarch” class, such as Yelena Baturina. However, these were rare, and none of them were Armenian.
100 Kirakossian, Arman, interview, 19 March 2010.
101 Petrosyan, Vardan, interview, 13 January 2010.
corrupt and questionable dealings. As Armenians, they also remained, to a certain extent, outsiders, never fully integrating into Russian hierarchies in spite of their affluence. Symbolic demonstrations of generosity, such as the construction of churches or schools, were a way to both legitimize their wealth in the eyes of Armenians, and compensate for their inferior status as elites in Russia.\textsuperscript{102} The fact that lavish philanthropy was the source of legitimacy for big-men ensured a steady stream of photo-opportunity-friendly gestures of benevolence, both in the RA and their own communities.

**Diaspora Activity Reframed**

The ministry’s framing of state-diaspora relations emphasized the ways in which “the diaspora”\textsuperscript{103} was spiritually lacking, its identity in jeopardy, and under threat of assimilation and disappearance. As a consequence, intimate experience with the homeland was vital to the diaspora’s continued existence.\textsuperscript{104} This was a reversal of the widely held view of the Armenia-diaspora relationship, in which the diaspora was the wealthy donor or benefactor, and the RA, the needy recipient of its largesse. It also moved away from a consideration of material need, toward a less tangible, identity-based, spiritual longing. In this new conception, the RA, as the locus of Armenian language,

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\textsuperscript{102} In the case of church construction, Antonyan notes that AAC officials usually “do not seem to be interested in the motives or the moral character of the donors or in the origins of their funds”, and that the church effectively “becomes a visible symbol for the divine approval and support for the person who constructed it.” Antonyan, Yulia. 2015. “Political power and church construction in Armenia.” *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*. Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke and Evert van der Zweerde, eds. London and New York: Routledge. 85-87.

\textsuperscript{103} On the issue of neediness, there appeared to be no objection within the ministry to generalizing about the entire diaspora. However, as Mgrdichian (interview, 10 December 2009) noted, unlike those in North America or Europe, Armenians in the Middle East (Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, specifically) were under no threat of assimilation or loss of religion, language, or culture. In 2009, their communities were thriving. Though the more recent war in Syria obviously put Armenians there in peril, theirs was a clear security threat, and not the sort of identity threat referred to here.

\textsuperscript{104} Hakobyan suggested diasporans “come step foot on this soil, come light a candle in Etchmiatsin, come wash your hands in Lake Sevan. Go be delighted and amazed by Ararat, and place flowers on the graves of our martyrs. After doing these five things, your average young person will grow up an Armenian.” Hakobyan, Hranush, interview, 18 March 2010.
family, tradition and culture, was the only salvation of dying Armenian communities.\textsuperscript{105} It had a sacred, global mission, which was to address all the diaspora communities’ needs, the world over. The strengthening of the Armenian spirit was a common theme in the minister’s speeches. “If there is no spiritual fatherland, there is no Armenia and Artsakh [NKR]. Let us strengthen this spirit…both in Armenia and Diaspora.”\textsuperscript{106} Ministry staff often emphasized the enormity of their task. According to Chief of Staff Firdus Zakaryan, “the ministry itself is oriented like a satellite dish toward the entire Armenian diaspora, and from there we receive all the inputs and gather the relevant answers to send back.”\textsuperscript{107}

In spite of this reversal of giver-recipient direction, there was no ambiguity about the direction in which material assistance continued – and should continue – to flow. The ministry not only expected and promoted a continued commitment among the diaspora to “helping” the RA, it equated such assistance with patriotism. However, unlike the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, which encouraged the diaspora to continue donating its funds to state-led projects, the ministry also promoted business investment in the RA as the next phase in diaspora assistance. Certainly, diasporans were a pool of potential investors willing to make high-risk, low-return business investments (the “ethnic discount”) that might be avoided by non-co-ethnics,\textsuperscript{108} but the RA had had little success

\textsuperscript{105} Hakobyan named language, family, culture, and faith, as the four “pillars” of protecting Armenianness. The idea that the RA had upheld these pillars was a contentious one. Religiosity had remained high in the established diaspora when Soviet Armenia was officially atheist, and Vardan Petrosyan, Chief Expert of the ministry’s Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia Division, believed that compactly settled Armenian communities in southern Russia had retained Armenian culture and traditions better than RA citizens. Hakobyan, Hranush, interview, 18 March 2010; Petrosyan, Vardan, interview, 13 January 2010.


\textsuperscript{107} Firdus Zakaryan. Interview, 15 November 2009.

\textsuperscript{108} Ohanyan, 2007: 295.
in redirecting diaspora philanthropic energies toward investment,\textsuperscript{109} and the minister made passionate pleas for such activity.

Diaspora Armenians’ big assistance to their homeland will be if they make investments here. The more investments are made, the more the economic strength of their homeland will be protected, and the more the homeland will be independent and secure. As much as Armenia becomes weak and poor, that is how much our enemies on both sides will eat us. So, I can't believe that there aren't 1000 Armenians that can't each create 100 jobs in this country...That is patriotism...The country’s president has said, ‘I don't want you to give us charity, come and make profits!’\textsuperscript{110}

While appeals for philanthropy had historically been quite specific, targeting particular development priorities, for example, these calls for investment remained vague. There were no specific sectors named by the minister, no staff dedicated to investment promotion, and no measures suggested to allay investors’ fears of corruption and cheating, stories of which were rampant.\textsuperscript{111}

The ministry expected diasporans to loudly trumpet their support of the RA, and lobby their home states to support RA-friendly policies,\textsuperscript{112} but clearly frowned upon any public criticism of the RA, all but equating it with aiding the enemy.


\textsuperscript{110} Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.

\textsuperscript{111} Ministry staff seemed to want little to do with actual diaspora investors. During one of my visits to the ministry, a diasporan business owner came in, loudly complaining that he had been defrauded by a local partner, resulting in a substantial financial loss. He was told that they were no measures and after he left, a staff member suggested to me that some people blamed their own lack of business acumen on anyone but themselves.

\textsuperscript{112} The degree to which the Armenian lobby in the US benefitted Armenia during its early days of independence cannot be overstated. The efforts of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee of America were crucial in securing US financial support for Armenia and condemnation of Azerbaijan’s role in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. US funds, as well as diaspora support, kept the Ter-Petrosyan government afloat during the first four years of the country’s existence. Alla Mirzoyan. \textit{Armenia, the Regional Powers, and the West: Between History and Geopolitics}. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 140-141.
…if we are talking about patriotism, if we are talking about protecting the homeland, it's not that we should wait for someone in the homeland to express something, and then we jump on them, destroy them, and put words in the mouths of the Turks, that's not our concern.\footnote{Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.}

Here, the minister echoed a common concern expressed by RA elites, namely that the established diaspora undermined the RA through its excessive public criticism.\footnote{Interestingly, the World Bank claimed quite the opposite, that diasporans tended to curb their criticism of the RA “out of concern for the government’s reputation.” “Growth Challenges and Government Policies in Armenia,” 2002: 9.} Instead of criticizing the RA, diasporans were encouraged to focus their efforts on lobbying their home states. Regarding the NKR, for example,

Let's turn that liberated homeland from \textit{de facto} to \textit{de jure}, and make it ours. And we can do that if the world powers agree, and those are countries in which we have very experienced diaspora. So, dear diaspora in Canada, America, France, England, Germany, put pressure on your governments…and allow the most important human right of all, that of national self-determination, to become a reality.\footnote{Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010. It is worth noting that Armenian diaspora organizations in the West already lobbied their host states regarding the NKR issue. Here, lobbying was juxtaposed to criticism of the RA, such that the Minister’s point seemed to be to delineate appropriate from inappropriate behaviour.}

Graeme Robertson (2011) has referred, in a different context, to the difference between “quiet” and “noisy” strategies of dissent. “Quiet” strategies refer to formal or informal intraelite bargaining, whereas “noisy” strategies are “those which involve public political pressure” such as demonstrations.\footnote{Robertson uses these terms in reference to the bargaining strategies available to regional governors in Russia, and suggests they are analogous to Hirschman’s (1970) concepts of “loyalty” and “voice,” in situations where notion of “exit” is inapplicable. Robertson, 2011: 79.} In the Armenian context, “noisy” strategies of dissent were typical of the established diaspora and its traditional political parties, who openly criticized one another and the RA, and frequently held demonstrations to protest policies of which they disapproved. Such strategies were unruly, and cast public doubt on the authority of RA elites to speak for the nation. Armenians in Russia, by contrast, were more likely to engage in “quiet” dissent, solving community problems via elite

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
\item Interestingly, the World Bank claimed quite the opposite, that diasporans tended to curb their criticism of the RA “out of concern for the government’s reputation.” “Growth Challenges and Government Policies in Armenia,” 2002: 9.
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\end{enumerate}
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interpersonal connections,¹¹⁷ and addressing disagreements with RA elites in private, while maintaining the appearance of solidarity and support in public. This was the strategy that most closely aligned with RA political culture, and was the one promoted and praised by the Ministry of Diaspora as patriotic and homeland-regarding.

The ministry’s focus on hayadardzutyun (a return to Armenianness), a term that was nearly identical to the Armenian word for repatriation, hayrenadardzutyun, was a discursive strategy that replaced a project the RA thus far failed to realize (or even seriously attempt since independence)¹¹⁸ with one that was relatively low-cost, and in theory, achievable. Confusingly, while it generally meant a reversal of assimilation in the diaspora, Minister Hakobyan also used the term to refer to all manner of activities undertaken by diasporans in Armenia. “We find that the meetings, projects, discussions and investments in Armenia are already a form of repatriation and we call [it] Hayadardzutyun...”¹¹⁹ With one syllable removed, the ministry rhetorically replaced failure with easy success, equating the “return to Armenianness” with diaspora self-interest, profit, and even mundane activities such as “meetings” and “discussions.”

...[B]y saying “Hayadarzutyun”...we understand the opening of the Argentinean school [named] after Mezadurian in Yerevan. By saying “Hayadarzutyun” we understand the work of all fellow Armenians making investments in Armenia and the profits of companies working in Armenia. Yes, I am talking about profit. This will create new jobs and new workplaces

¹¹⁷ Since “quiet” strategies rely on intraelite connections, they require a cohesive and well-connected elite.
¹¹⁸ There had been no official attempt by independent Armenia to encourage diaspora repatriation. According to Hakobyan, some small, context-specific repatriation-related initiatives did exist, such as assistance in the settlement and integration of a small number of Iraqi Armenians who found refuge from the Iraq war in Armenia. “Armenian Ministry of Diaspora 2012 budget...” The Ministry of Diaspora did not appear to be collecting statistics on repatriation. Employees admitted they did not know how many Armenians had repatriated from, say, the US or Canada (Nikoghosyan, Arthur, interview, 18 November 2009), but Hakobyan’s proud reference to “hundreds” of established diaspora repatriates suggested the numbers did not much exceed 1000. Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
and we will be very grateful for your help to avoid emigration, and, why not, in such a manner you will have your own profit.\textsuperscript{120}

Hakobyan’s public pronouncements also suggested that the ministry saw the perpetuation of the “traditional” Armenian family and gender roles as a component of hayadarzutyun, remarking in the press on the proper role for Armenian women (including modesty, motherhood, and knowing their limits),\textsuperscript{121} advocating large families (“Let’s sit at a table with at least three sons” was listed as one of the slogans of the ministry\textsuperscript{122}), and bemoaning the problem of mixed marriages in diaspora communities.\textsuperscript{123} These issues of community boundary maintenance had long been the concern of diasporans themselves, but by staking a claim to this issue area, the ministry signaled, first, that diaspora communities were in danger of disappearing, and second, that preventing this disappearance was the purview of the RA. While repatriation of diasporans was not a goal of the RA, the maintenance of the unassimilated diaspora \textit{in situ} was.

A discussion with the ministry’s Chief of Staff illustrated the degree to which the concept of a return to Armenian roots was conflated with repatriation.

\textit{Zakaryan:} The other primary issue is the issue of repatriation [\textit{hayrenadardsutyun}]…as we understand it. We understand it to mean two things. One is when they physically repatriate to Armenia, but this is in the long term. But today the much more pressing issue is that if Armenians living outside, who have lost their language and their culture begin to speak in their

\textsuperscript{120}“Hranush Hakobyan’s address to the Armenian Community of Argentina, November 7, 2008, Argentina.” \textit{Armenia-Diaspora Partnership}, 2009: 312-3.


\textsuperscript{123}“Opening ceremony of the third stage of the ‘Ari Tun’ program of the RA Ministry of Diaspora.” 11 Jul 2011. \textit{Hayern Aysor} [Armenians Today]. Accessed 1 Mar 2012. http://en.hayernaysor.am/1310379831 As one repatriate noted, the RA conceit about being family-oriented rang hollow in light of actual RA familial behaviour. “All this talk about family here is bull----, because all the men here have mistresses, and they're all screwing around, so what family are they talking about?” And “…a lot of the [domestic] abuse that takes place today in Armenia is woman-on-woman, the mother-in-law abusing the harse [daughter-in-law]” (Confidential informant). Anecdotally, it was also rare to encounter a family in the RA that had three sons.
own tongue, they can be repatriates right where they are.
Cavoukian: Right, so “hayadardsutyun” [return to Armenianness]?”
Zakaryan: “Yes, hayadardsutyun. One part of hayrenadardsutyun is
hayadardsutyun. You understood correctly.\textsuperscript{124}

\textit{Reframing Audience(s)}

There were at least four audiences for the ministry’s new framings of state-
diaspora relations. While the RA promoted “diasporization” in Russia as a way to
encourage and reward \textit{increased} national sentiment, and involvement with the RA,
it did so in Georgia in order to \textit{decrease} the indigenous or national-minority-like
demands of ethnic Armenians in favour of ethnic group-like claims, such as the
polyethnic rights discussed by Kymlicka,\textsuperscript{125} to discourage identity-based claims-
making, and lower their expectations of RA involvement on their behalf. For the
established diaspora, the expansion of “their” category to not only include, but
highlight the post-Soviet Armenians, especially those in Russia, was meant to
reduce the perceived power of uncooperative diasporans, and to provide a model of
RA-appropriate behaviour. In other words, in spite of the ministry’s insistence on
the uniqueness of communities, its overall reframing activity seems to have been
grounded toward encouraging a convergence in diaspora form and function.

Domestically, the fact that improved diaspora policy was an election issue
(though arguably a marginal one) suggests that diaspora relations had a significant
degree of salience among RA citizens. Anecdotally, the notion that the RA’s lack of
natural resources, especially compared to oil-rich Azerbaijan, were offset by its

\textsuperscript{124} Zakaryan, Firdus. Interview, November 15, 2009. The respondent seemed to be struggling with the
difference between the two terms himself, unsurprisingly since hayadartsutyun appeared to be a newly
invented term.

\textsuperscript{125} Kymlicka, 1995: 10-11. For Kymlicka, “ethnic groups” (immigrant minorities) are not entitled to
territorial autonomy or self-government, but rather, to the sorts of measures that facilitate integration and
full membership in society, such as religious accommodations.
diasporic resources, resonated with many Armenians who had good reason to fear a resumption of hostilities with their neighbour. In this sense, sound state-diaspora relations were an indirect security concern, since they allowed RA citizens to think of their tiny, poor, peripheral state as part of a larger, well connected, 10-million-strong nation. The new framing replaced failed diaspora policies and state-diaspora tension with successes, if small and partial. Additionally, ordinary citizens shared the general RA elite suspicion of the established diaspora and due in part to heavy Russian media saturation, felt much closer, culturally speaking, to Russia. Virtually every RA citizen had relatives who either lived permanently in Russia or temporarily migrated there for seasonal work. This new framing recast the temporary worker, from desperate or opportunistic employment seeker to “diasporan,” a status equal to the wealthy Western donors to the Fund.

Reframing Mechanisms

In addition to discursive strategies, including shifting terminology and the introduction of new vocabulary with which to discuss state-diaspora relationship, part of the ministry’s reframing function lay in the very structure of the ministry itself. The fact that the organization was divided into geographically specific departments, each responsible for certain diaspora “communities,” shaped the information that would be

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126 Beylerian noted, for example, that RA society was not receptive to the idea of a sizeable influx of established diaspora repatriates. Soviet-era anti-Dashnak and anti-Western propaganda had undoubtedly contributed to this suspicion. Beylerian, Onnig. 2008. “Participation of the Diaspora in the Political Process in Armenia.” Speech delivered at conference: “Policy Directions in Post-Election Armenia: A Public Roundtable Discussion.” Montreal, Canada (20 June).

127 Temporary workers in Moscow readily admitted to me that, as compared to the particularly lean 1990s, there were now employment opportunities in the RA, but that these did not pay as highly as those in Russia. The repercussions of this migration for higher-paying jobs on Armenian families cannot be overstated. In some RA villages, practically the entire male population was absent for most of the year, and it was not uncommon for Armenian men to start new families in Russia, abandoning their old ones in the process. McGuinness, Damien. 2011. “Armenia migration: The villages of women left behind.” BBC News. 10 August. Accessed 15 March 2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-1438647
sought and found by its employees, and the preferred patterns of interaction with diaspora interlocutors. Likewise, the ministry’s geographical divisions provided clues as to whom it considered, or at least equated with, diasporans. Without claiming the Javakheti Armenians were part of the diaspora (and in many cases explicitly denying this), the ministry was organized to “minister” to them as diasporans, or more specifically, as a “community” as unique as any other. This mixed and internally contradictory messaging allowed for sufficient “wiggle room” to deflect criticism that the RA was either not adequately supportive of the Javakheti Armenians, or minimized their “indigeneity.”

As James Scott (1998) has argued, states have traditionally sought knowledge of their subjects in order to exert authority over them, especially for the purposes of taxation, political control, or conscription.\(^{128}\) Mapping, as is pointed out in Anderson’s (2006) seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, is not simply an exercise in faithful depiction. Rather, at times during the mapping of nations and states, “a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent.”\(^{129}\) While techniques for amassing information have changed considerably, the political motives for doing so have remained constant. “Appropriation, control, and manipulation (in the nonpejorative sense) remain the most prominent.”\(^{130}\) Censuses and other data-gathering activities are carried out with a view to mapping, making legible, and controlling populations and territories to which the state lays claim. Diasporans pose a particular challenge to a home state that views them as its subjects, since it can neither gather data on them in the usual way, nor compel their allegiance. However, the ministry’s data-gathering functions,


\(^{129}\) Thongchai, qtd. in Anderson, 2006: 173.

\(^{130}\) Scott, 1998: 77.
however imprecise, should be considered attempts to increase the legibility of the diaspora, and by extension, the RA’s ability to exert control over it.\textsuperscript{131}

In her capacity as an official diaspora authority, the minister’s official visits were signals of state acknowledgement of the importance of the diaspora in general, and/or of specific diaspora communities. Apart from any pronouncements she herself may have made,\textsuperscript{132} her presence alongside the president at events, for example, was a symbolic nod toward the diaspora. Similarly, the ministry’s congratulatory letters, medals of honour, and other official acknowledgments of diaspora Armenians, however trivial, reinforced the notion that the centre – the Armenian state – was and ought to be the source of such acknowledgment.

The Armenian state’s reframing project included situating the Republic of Armenia at the centre of the Armenian transnation. While in a state-centric world this positioning seems, on the surface, uncontroversial, it had been an uphill battle, since independence, for the RA to be seen this way by the established diaspora. Armenia was a poor, peripheral state, located on a small remnant of historic Armenia, and moreover, not the portion from which most established diasporans’ ancestors fled. A visiting minister was a visible symbol of the RA in the diaspora. The ministry also distributed RA state emblems, including flags and coats-of-arms, to diaspora organizations worldwide.\textsuperscript{133}

Most such organizations had Armenian symbols and insignia of their own, but this activity ensured the visibility of RA symbols. Rather than encouraging a global network

\textsuperscript{131} In addition to references to the world’s “10 million” Armenians, ministry staff also frequently made mention of the “2 million” Armenians in Russia, and the fact that it was the world’s largest Armenian community outside of Armenia. These references often seemed to be deliberate attempts to shift the diaspora centre of gravity to Russia (and away from the US).

\textsuperscript{132} Some respondents criticized the minister not saying anything of note at such events.

nation where diaspora-diaspora ties were of equal importance, the Ministry of Diaspora’s focus, stated explicitly and reflected its projects, was harnessing the diaspora to Armenia, and its efforts to ensure the diaspora’s survival were clearly undertaken with a view to ensuring that diaspora continued to support the RA.

**Conclusion**

Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora, though newly established and poorly funded, possessed both the resources necessary to engage in discursive output, such as dedicated staff and a budget, and the legitimacy, despite its critics, to have its discursive contributions considered authoritative. It used this discursive power to name, frame, and delineate RA-appropriate categories for state-diaspora interaction. The ministry’s reframings of appropriate diaspora organization and action clearly favoured some “communities” – those that most closely approximated the new ideals - over others. Of these, the “big-man” model stands out as most important. The new reframings provided cover for rewarding those people able to monopolize organized Armenian activity and create compliant hierarchies in their locales. Meanwhile, “identity gerrymandering” shifted the diaspora centre of gravity to a region where this model was emerging. The following chapter will examine this “model” community: Russia.

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134 RA Prime Minister Eduard Nalbandyan was reportedly very supportive of this type of network model, which he called the “Armenian World” approach, and juxtaposed to the ministry’s transnational approach. Papazian, Pegor. Interview, 7 February, 2010.
Chapter 5
Russia’s Armenians: The New “Model” Diaspora

The Ministry of Diaspora had reframed diaspora identity, organization, and action in ways that reflected RA interests, and these discursive moves had produced an ideal typical “diaspora community” that the ministry praised and promoted as a model to be emulated. Ministry employees were explicit: the Armenians of Russia best approximated this model. The vast majority of their community organizations were depoliticized, and focused on precisely the sorts of activities the ministry would prescribe, such as preserving the Armenian language through schools and clubs, and making Armenian culture visible via politically innocuous choirs and dance troupes. And even when they found RA policies wanting, most were familiar with the expectation that the nation’s “dirty laundry” should not be aired in public, and preferred “quiet” strategies of dissent.¹

Many of Russia’s Armenians may have resisted being recast as diasporans, they did not unanimously and uncritically support the RA, and the ministry’s reframing attempts resonated only partially with some of the people most responsible for organizing “diaspora” life in Russia. However, the ministry’s expectations of what diaspora communities should consist of were met by what had become the dominant “big-man” model in Russia. Attempts by wealthy Armenian businessmen in Russia to establish organizations claiming the authority to speak for the region’s Armenians dovetailed nicely with the ministry’s reframing of the diaspora as a series of discrete communities, and its expressed desire to deal with hierarchical community organizations. Ara

¹ This could be attributed partly to a shared (Soviet) political culture, partly to the real consequences faced by vocal dissenters in both Armenia and Russia, where authorities were not known to take kindly to public critique. As will be discussed later in the chapter, however, it also appeared aimed at Russian society, where Armenians hoped the appearance of public unanimity would suggest to the Russian majority that Russia’s Armenians and the RA were united and mutually supportive.
Abrahamyan, the big-man that had come to centralize and dominate post-Soviet Russia’s organized Armenian life, not only managed the potential unruliness of what was, in fact, a very socio-economically and culturally diverse population of ethnic Armenians across Russia, but was also able to address its problems with seemingly limitless personal wealth and connections to Russia’s ruling elite. Thus, the Armenians of Russia made few demands of the RA, while being able to assist it with aid.

While newly arrived Armenians faced immigration-related problems that were not shared by long-time residents, community organizers saw most of the problems Armenians faced as related to their position in the ethnic hierarchy, which had improved substantially since the 1990s. In a state where anti-minority and anti-immigrant sentiment was widespread, these organizations sought to demonstrate that Armenians were a loyal, hardworking, and comparatively elite minority that “belonged” in Russia. Big-men were emblematic of the ability of Armenians to rise to prominence and be counted among the elite, even while a large number of the Armenians in Russia were struggling. Built on the money, connections, and prestige of the few, big-man organizations did not require mass participation or widespread consensus. Instead, they were top-down creations that imposed a veneer of seeming unanimity upon a population with diverse interests.

**The Armenians of Russia: General Overview**

According to the Ministry of Diaspora, Russia was home approximately two million Armenians, the largest number in any state outside the RA. They ranged from wealthy businessmen to vulnerable migrant workers, and while some were recent arrivals, others had been in Russia for generations. While Armenians could be found throughout Russia, this research focused on those living in the city of Moscow, and also in Krasnodar.

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2 Reliable statistics were not available, especially given the number of temporary and illegal migrants.
Krai (or region), including the city of Krasnodar, and the small Black Sea town of Tuapse. As the capital and Russia’s largest city, Moscow had attracted a significant number of Armenians in pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras, and had the largest Armenian population in Russia. It was home to both Russia’s wealthiest Armenian “oligarchs” and its most vulnerable illegal migrants. Krasnodar Krai contained a higher concentration of Armenians, who were a mixture of “native” (Western) and recently arrived (Eastern) Armenians. Unlike other parts of Russia, Krasnodar had been notorious for its official racism, sanctioned by xenophobic governors. Within the Krai, the city of Krasnodar was a medium-sized provincial town where many refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and economic migrants from the RA had settled, while the small, seaside town of Tuapse and its surrounding villages were home to compactly settled Hamshen Armenians with no actual ties to the RA. As such, these three locations provided a rich cross-section of Armenian life in Russia.3

Estimates placed the number of Armenians living in Moscow at 4 - 500,000.4 Of these, there were three general “waves” of migration to Russia, and my Moscow interviewees included representatives of each. The first were long-time residents of Moscow, who had moved during the Soviet era, were well integrated into Russian life, and often spoke little to no Armenian.5 The second wave moved to Russia in the early 1990s, and while many were refugees from conflicts in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, those I encountered in Moscow were generally Yerevan (or other South Caucasian urban) intelligentsia and their families, who had moved to find work in their fields. All

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3 See Methodological Appendix for more information on research site selection.
4 Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
5 My Moscow respondents in this category were exceptions, and spoke fluent Armenian. These included the principal of the Armenian school, and the head of an Armenian cultural organization.
were citizens of Russia, and many considered Russian to be their language of choice, but most still had relatives in the RA, and visited frequently. The third category were recent arrivals, including temporary legal or illegal labour migrants from Armenia (and to a lesser extent, Georgia), most of whom held RA citizenship, returned to Armenia on a regular basis, and were not fluent Russian speakers.

In the early 2000s, the Krasnodar Armenian population exceeded 240,000, and formed approximately 5% of the population of that region (Krasnodar Krai), as well as the city by the same name. It consisted of a well-established base of local or “native” Armenians, and a more recent influx of newcomers. The “native” (teghatsi) Armenians’ ancestors were originally from Western Armenia or Eastern Turkey, and they spoke various dialects of Western Armenian, though Russian was their language of day-to-day communication. Armenians hailing from Van, Artvin, Kars, or other Ottoman Armenian locales, not only kept their specific dialects but also compactly settled in the region, married one another, and retained their original hometown affiliations. This category

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6 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010; Nersesyan, Gevorg. Interview, 25 June 2010. “Garik.” Interview, 29 June 2010. The boundaries between these waves of migrants is reasonable, but arbitrary. Leonid Martirosyan* (Interview, 23 June 2010), who moved in the late Soviet period (1985), had more in common with this group than with earlier Soviet-era arrivals.

7 “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010. Most Armenians spoke enough Russian to get by, but their accents and poor grammar marked them as migrants. While illegal migrants were a regular topic of conversation, it is important to note that many Armenians moved to Russia legally, some actively recruited by Russia’s “Compatriot Program” which, since 2006, had sought labourers from post-Soviet states to work in under-populated Russian regions. Grigoryan, Marianna. 2012b. “Armenia: Labor Migration Program Causing Yerevan-Moscow Friction.” EurasiaNet. 23 October. Accessed 5 April 2013.


9 Some respondents referred to these Armenians as “indigenous.” Bishop Movses used the term “teghabnik” (indigenous to the area), while Tavadyan used the word “bnik” (indigenous) to refer to these Armenians, before correcting himself and calling them “teghatsi” (natives). Movsesyan, Bishop Movses. Interview, 6 July 2010; Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.

10 The desire to marry someone from their ancestral region persisted even among some Krasnodar Armenians currently in their 20s. Chenovaryan, Maria. Interview, 5 July 2010.
included a large population of Hamshen Armenians, who originated in the Black Sea region of modern-day Turkey, migrated to the Russian Black Sea region between the 1860s and 1920, and lived compactly in seaside towns and villages.\textsuperscript{11} They retained a distinct culture and dialect,\textsuperscript{12} and a degree of separateness from the region’s other Armenians. By the late 2000s, their population was estimated to be 170,000.\textsuperscript{13} Krasnodar respondents knew who hailed from what Western Armenian town. A local priest’s family was typical: “My mother's mother was born here. Our roots, both on my mother's and father's side, we are Trapizontsi [from Trabzon, in present-day Turkey]...”\textsuperscript{14}

Upon closer examination, many Armenians considered “native” were actually more recent arrivals. One respondent’s ancestors fled Artvin (in present-day Turkey), he was born in Abkhazia, and migrated to Krasnodar during the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{15} Though he had arrived as recently as many “recent arrivals” from Armenia, he was considered a “native” because of his Western Armenian roots, and because his family had settled in the general vicinity, which is to say, in the Black Sea region of the (former) Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{16}

The “recent arrivals” (nor yekoghner) came from the RA (and were fluent Armenian speakers), arrived as refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, or

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item The Hamshen migration to Southern Russia (and Abkhazia and Crimea) began in the 1860s, continued under Russian annexation of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi (1878), and increased dramatically during and after the Armenian Genocide (1915-1918). Kuznetsov, Igor. 2009. “Armenian Pontic Communities in the Kuban and Abkhazia.” \textit{Armenian Pontus: The Trebizond-Black Sea Communities}. Richard G. Hovannisian, Ed. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda. 402-408.
\item The Hamshen dialect was “one of the most deviated from standard Armenian.” Kuznetsov, 2009: 416. Kuznetsov estimated their population at 170-180,000, a figure that included an influx of Hamshen Armenians from Abkhazia, fleeing the Georgian-Abkhaz war. He noted, however that it was impossible to accurately disaggregate Hamshens from the general Armenian refugee population from the South Caucasus, which had also settled in Krasnodar region. Kuznetsov, 2009: 411-12.
\item Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010.
\item Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
\item Abkhazia was not generally considered by my Krasnodar respondents to be a separate state. They could easily travel to the \textit{de facto} state, whose population increasingly held Russian citizenship.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
migrated from Georgia. While many of those from outside the RA were fluent only in Russian, the Armenian they did speak was Eastern Armenian, as spoken in the RA. In both Moscow and Krasnodar, attitudes of long-time residents toward these newcomers were often less than positive, with emphasis placed on their embarrassingly low levels of education, class, tact, and respect for the law. “The newcomers…are the people who weren't able to make it in Armenia. It's clear that they aren't educated, of course they aren't developed people, so today, to turn them into pure Armenians, this is difficult.” Others suggested these criticisms were overblown, and that in spite of initial cultural differences, newcomers had adapted well to life in Russia.

Russia’s Armenian “Big-men”

A number of Armenian businessmen had become very wealthy in post-Soviet Russia, joining the ranks of Russia’s “oligarch” class. It was common for these businessmen to engage in ethnically oriented philanthropy, both in Russia and the RA. Some went further, however, creating institutions and translating their largesse into positions of ethnonational authority, according to what I described in Chapter 4 as the big-man model of diaspora organization. Ara Abrahanyan was the clearest example of a Russian-Armenian big-man, and claimed to speak for all the Armenians in Russia.

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17 According to a woman from Javakheti, Georgia, many of that region’s Armenians sought Armenian citizenship in order to be able to work in Russia. Once they got to Krasnodar, they apparently never returned, either to Armenia or Javakheti. Confidential informant.
18 While there were also many recent migrants from Abkhazia, these, like Tavadyan, were Western Armenians and were not considered “recent arrivals,” regardless of the date of their migration.
19 Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010. Every community organizer had multiple stories about newcomers who didn’t follow the relatively straightforward process of temporary registration, and ended up in trouble with the law, who were unemployed and expected small cultural organizations to help them out financially, or who refused to do work they considered beneath them (i.e. yard work).
20 Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010; Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010. Tavadyan suggested that the regional government and/or the FSB sought to sow discord and divide the natives from the newcomers.
Abrahamyan was not the first businessman to attempt to become the spokesperson for Russia’s Armenians. In the early 1990s, Serge Jilavian, one of the *nouveaux riches* who had become wealthy in the wake of the Soviet collapse, founded the International Armenian Congress (IAC). His lavish meetings were reportedly well attended, but the entire endeavour fell apart when Jilavian personally fell afoul of the law.\(^{21}\) After attending the first Armenia-Diaspora Conference, held in Yerevan in 1999, a group of Armenians businessmen from Russia, led by Abrahamyan, met in Moscow to create the Union of Armenians of Russia (UAR).\(^{22}\) Abrahamyan would become its first and only president to date,\(^{23}\) and like Jilavian’s IAC, the UAR would be a charismatic organization, revolving almost entirely around Abrahamyan.\(^{24}\) Born in Armenia, Abrahamyan made his vast fortune in post-Soviet Russia as the founder of investment firm Soglasiye, and in the Russian diamond industry.\(^{25}\) He was well connected to the Russian political elite, his money financed all the UAR’s major philanthropic activities, and he made all major decisions regarding its activities.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{21}\) Jilavian was reportedly part of “the class of shadow businessmen at the end of the Soviet Union, who, when the cooperative system was restructured, were able to legalize their activities as businesses.” Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.

\(^{22}\) For a more detailed description of the UAR and its history, see Cavoukian, Kristin. 2013. “‘Soviet mentality?’ The role of shared political culture in relations between the Armenian state and Russia’s Armenian diaspora.” *Nationalities Papers* 41,5: 709-729.


\(^{24}\) An indication of this was the UAR’s bare-bones head office in Moscow. Staffed by no more than five people, it consisted of a few half-empty, undecorated offices, had telephones but no computers, and seemed to have no space for receiving guests or holding meetings. The impression was of a place suitable only for receiving and placing phone calls.


\(^{26}\) Aghayan, Vladimir. Interview, 31 Jan 2010; Navoyan, 29 June 2010. Navoyan claimed Abrahamyan’s connections with Vladimir Putin were key to his success.
According to UAR Vice President Vladimir Aghayan,\textsuperscript{27} the UAR aided veterans and orphans, offered language classes, built churches, and used Abrahamyan’s personal connections to Russian elites to address local issues, such as ethnic discrimination against Armenians.\textsuperscript{28} The organization did not publish an official newspaper, but Abrahamyan appeared in the news regularly, and the UAR frequently held lavish events featuring prominent Russian politicians.\textsuperscript{29}

The UAR consisted of a hierarchical pyramid of national, regional, and local chapters across Russia, but staff members were vague about these branches, and the UAR website did not list them.\textsuperscript{30} Aghayan in fact suggested that “permanent membership” was a Western diaspora concept, inapplicable to his type of organization.\textsuperscript{31} Many of the UAR’s local branches had been pre-existing community organizations, and were persuaded to join.\textsuperscript{32} Others were created, usually with the help of local businessmen who became the new branch presidents.\textsuperscript{33} Local branches appeared to fund their own activities, but answered to regional presidents who, in turn, answered to Abrahamyan.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{27} The organization’s governing structure was as opaque as its membership, but as I discovered during field research, the UAR had numerous “vice presidents.” Aghayan was based in Yerevan, and oversaw implementation of UAR projects in the RA and NKR. Aghayan, Vladimir. Interview, 31 Jan 2010.

\textsuperscript{28} Aghayan, Vladimir. Interview, 31 Jan 2010. “[Tkachev], the regional governor, was against Armenians at one point. He said that those with Armenian last names should leave, until Abrahamyan talked to him. He spoke to him quite seriously, and then he changed his mind.” Zurabyan, Karen. Interview, 25 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{29} Doroga, 2005: 10.

\textsuperscript{30} One news article claimed that the UAR had 640 branches throughout Russia, but this information could not be verified. “Who is Ara Abrahamyan?” 2009. In 2015, the UAR website listed the regional branches of the UAR, but not the local ones. www.sarinfo.org

\textsuperscript{31} Aghayan, Vladimir. Interview, 31 Jan 2010.

\textsuperscript{32} In 2010, the UAR asked these groups to change their names to local variations of UAR (i.e. UAR-Krasnodar) “because that is more sensible, it is easier.” Zurabyan, Karen. Interview, 25 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{33} According to a confidential informant, “In such and such a town a community exists, and they say, ‘Starting tomorrow, you will be our branch’…If they don't [join], the UAR collects a few businessmen there, holds a meeting, establishes a separate organization and proudly proclaims that there is now a branch of the UAR there. So, the former leaders who were experienced, who had worked for so many years to build from nothing, they replaced most of them, they removed them, they pushed them out.” In Tuapse, where there was already a local community organization with no intention of joining the UAR, this had the awkward effect of creating competition between the two groups over the staging of community events.

\textsuperscript{34} Gevorgyan, Razmik. 5 July 2010.
The Tuapse local branch was established in 2001, and UAR-affiliated respondents there saw Armenian unity as reason enough to join. “For the people, there is order...The main thing is that they unite, there is strength in that.” When asked what the UAR-Tuapse did, members reluctantly admitted that there was often little to occupy their time. Indeed, the UAR’s regional and local branches appeared to be little more than extensions of Abrahamyan’s personal clout across Russia. According to Razmik Gevorgyan, local businessman and president of the regional UAR-Krasnodar Krai,

Ara Abrahamyan is my president, my president. Our organization is established that way...I work with Abrahamyan's trust...The population here elects me. But if I want to work with the authorities, I need to have Abrahamyan's given trust [dozennost']. That's what gives me the right to work in his name.

Since chapters funded their own projects, however, the president of each regional chapter was also “the type of man who has good financier friends and relations.” Rather than gathering money from ordinary Armenians, whom some conceded were not very community-minded, they solicited donations from a handful of local businessmen. In this sense, each regional chapter president became a lower-level big-man in his own right, relying not only on Abrahamyan’s trust, but also a loyal following of his own, attracted by his personal wealth, generosity, and connections.

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35 Tuapse was a medium-sized town, with a population of approximately 60,000.
36 Grigorian, Frunzik. Interview, 4 July 2010. While generally critical of the UAR, Pashyan agreed that, given the difficulties Armenians faced in Krasnodar Krai under Governor Tkachev, there was a need for some sort of leader. Pashyan, Olga. Interview, 4 July 2010.
37 “Well, we engage in, more or less [iper te], Armenian business.” Vareljian, Arshak. Interview, 4 July 2010.
38 It was unclear how Gevorgyan was “elected,” or whom he meant by “the population.” His explanation of the organization’s finances suggested that he needed to secure the confidence of a small “selectorate” of businessmen, rather than the general population. Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
39 Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
Critics saw the UAR as a “monopolist” attempting to dominate all organized Armenian life in Russia.\textsuperscript{40} Independent organizations claimed it pressured them to join, and attempted to marginalize those that refused.\textsuperscript{41} While most respondents had respect for Abrahamyan’s philanthropic gestures, even those who saw the utility of a more united Armenian community were often critical of the degree to which the UAR was centred around one man. Navoyan worried that “one person cannot, in this enormous territory, address all the Armenian issues, and it will unintentionally become a passively operating structure.”\textsuperscript{42} Critics also took issue with the quality of the UAR’s staff,\textsuperscript{43} and claimed that their events lacked authenticity and ignored expert ethnocultural advice.\textsuperscript{44}

In October 2003, Abrahamyan extended this model further, establishing the World Armenian Congress (WAC),\textsuperscript{45} an ambitious attempt to unite all diaspora Armenians under one banner, received with hearty skepticism by established diasporans and RA elites. While it, too, lacked a list of members,\textsuperscript{46} it was clear that the focus of the WAC was on the post-Soviet “world.”\textsuperscript{47} According to Karen Zurabyan, secretary to both the UAR and WAC, Abrahamyan faced a huge obstacle in the established diaspora, because here in Russia, there is one organization. In America [there are] 4,000. So, it is very difficult to unite them. If one of them attends, the other doesn't want to.

\textsuperscript{40} Confidential informant.
\textsuperscript{41} One Krasnodar region respondent claimed that, rather than try to incorporate her organization into the UAR, a new organization was set up instead, and she found out later that conferences were held in the region to which she was not invited. Pashyan, Olga. Interview, 4 July 2010.
\textsuperscript{42} Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{43} “So, the people complain that the officials are sitting at the UAR, they are called ‘Vice Presidents,’ and you walk in, and they are sitting in front of computers, playing games.” Confidential Informant.
\textsuperscript{44} Confidential informants in Moscow and Krasnodar.
\textsuperscript{45} It was unclear where the UAR ended and the WAC began. For all intents and purposes, they appeared to be the same organization, with the same president, vice presidents, staff, offices and business cards.
\textsuperscript{46} In 2010, the WAC shared a website with the UAR. In 2015, its minimally-operational website still did not list any member organizations. http://www.armcongress.am/AM/about
\textsuperscript{47} Aghayan claimed that 36 countries were represented, but could only list Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Rumania, and Bulgaria, all former-Soviet or Eastern Bloc states. Interview, 31 Jan 2010.
Ara Abrahamyan went to Los Angeles to talk to the communities, and it was impossible for him to gather them all. They don't want to be [gathered together].

In Krasnodar Krai, there was also a non-UAR-affiliated regional big-man of sorts. Reported to be half-Armenian on his mother’s side, Andrei Amosov had made his fortune in the construction business. He single-handedly founded and supported the entire “Khachkar” organization, which consisted of the glossy monthly *Khachkar* magazine and a cultural centre offering language courses, funded the construction of a new Armenian church in Krasnodar, and supported the one of the city’s Armenian community centres.

Many of Krasnodar’s community organizations relied on him as their sole benefactor, and this list appeared to be growing. In spite of his influence, however, Amosov maintained a low profile, and did not claim a leadership or spokesperson role in the region. In this way, he fell short of the big-man model discussed in Chapter 4. His muted public profile was in sharp contrast to Ara Abrahamyan’s attempt to unite all of Russia’s Armenians under his own personal leadership.

Among Russia’s wealthy businessman-benefactors, there were few true “big-men,” since most were not leveraging their generosity toward community leadership positions. For prominent Moscow businessmen Gevorg Nersesyan* and Leonid Martirosyan,* for example, funding the construction of a new church was their primary connection to Armenian life in Moscow. Neither was active in Armenian organizations. “We don't

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49 Barseghyan, Aleksandr. Interview, 7 July 2010; Dnoyan, Aleks. Interview, 6 July 2010; Karapetyan, Yerazik. Interview, 7 July 2010.
50 Some community organizers were more forthcoming about these benefactors than others, with respondents offering competing accounts of who funded what. Khachkar, according to its staff members, had ambitious plans to expand to provide an extremely wide array of services for Krasnodar’s Armenians. Barseghyan, Aleksandr. Interview, 7 July 2010; Karapetyan, Yerazik. Interview, 7 July 2010.
51 I was unable to determine whether Amosov and Abrahamyan were connected in any way, and whether, as potentially competitive big-men, there was any conflict between them, but given Amosov’s low public profile, he was certainly not in competition with Abrahamyan for the position of community spokesperson.
exactly gather in groups, but we are helping the church, that is being built - I don't know if you've seen it - a big one.” They did not aspire to be community leaders, and appeared to engage in philanthropy instead of community engagement.

Russia’s Armenian organizational landscape also featured plenty of small, independent grassroots organizations unaffiliated with big-men, whose organizers were inspired by the Armenian organizations that had flourished throughout Tsarist Russia. The Soviet era had seen these abolished, and since everything but purely “cultural” ethnic activity was branded as nationalist and chauvinist, the threat of exile to Siberia had kept new organizations from emerging. Glasnost’ and perestroika opened up limited space for ethnic expression, but it was the events in Nagorno-Karabakh that brought Moscow’s Armenians to the streets and spurred new national and nationalist activity, in spite of continued fear of the KGB. The early post-Soviet era saw the emergence of small civil society organizations, including compatriotic unions, professional associations, and cultural organizations. According to Bishop Yezras, these organizations proliferated because “Everyone wants to be the president of something.”

Examples of these small organizations could be found in Moscow, Krasnodar, and Tuapse. One of Moscow’s many registered organizations, Ararat Cultural Centre was a

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53 In this sense, they resembled established diaspora benefactors, i.e. Armenian-American Kirk Kerkorian.
54 Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
55 “They could do, for example, certain artistic exhibitions, [like the] Armenian culture Dekad in Moscow, in ’39, [but] if two people gathered and said, ‘we want to establish some sort of national organization,’ they would definitely be sent to Siberia.” Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
56 Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010; Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010.
57 In Armenian, “hasarakakan kazmakerputyunner.”
58 Navoyan notes that the compatriotic union model is very similar to the first organizations that sprung up in the now-established diaspora soon after the genocide, when people tried to locate and help their fellow villagers. Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
60 Such organizations were legally required to register, and submit quarterly financial reports to the state. Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
husband-and-wife-run affair established in 1999. It relied on private donations, and organized lectures, conferences, performances, and art exhibitions. In Krasnodar, the Pashkovka Armenian Cultural Centre was located in the Pashkovka region of the city, home to a large number of Armenians. Founded in 1992, largely in response to Cossack racism, it was modeled after an existing Armenian organization in the city centre, called Mashtots, and was known for its dance troupes, which performed and competed in multi-ethnic festivals. In Tuapse, the “Armenian Benevolent Cultural Educational Hamshen Community” (hereafter Hamshen Community) dated back to the Soviet period, having been founded in 1974 by a state-educated cultural worker [rabochaia kul’tura]. Registered in its current form in 1994, it was a “non-commercial” or civil society organization, which raised money from local Armenians and organized Hamshen-specific cultural events. By 2010, two of these three organizations claimed to have resisted significant pressure to join Abrahamyan’s UAR. The third, Pashkovka, was now funded by Amosov. In addition to these cultural organizations, Armenian students’ associations were springing up at colleges and universities across Russia, many of them attracting big-

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61 The organization’s official name (in Russian), was Kulturnaya Prosvititel’stye "Ararat." It was known colloquially (in Armenian) as “Ararat Union” [Ararat Miutyun]. Dolbakian claimed it was the oldest organization in Moscow, registered one year before the UAR. Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
62 Its official name was “Krasnodar City NGO, Pashkovka Armenian Cultural Centre” [Nekommercheskaya Krasnodarskaya Gorodskaya Obschestsnyaya Organizatsiia, Pashkovskiy Armyanskiy Kulturny Tsentr].
63 Most had relocated from Mikoyan village in Rostov-Na-Donu, had Western Armenian roots, and were thus considered “natives”. While there were “new arrivals” in Pashkovka as well, Serobyan claimed that “The brains in this community, they are all natives.” Serobyan, Gevorg. Interview, 6 July 2010.
64 Serobyan, Gevorg. Interview, 6 July 2010. Tavadyan, the local priest, and Gevorgyan all claimed to have led the “Mashtots” community organization in Krasnodar in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. Tavadyan left in the mid-1990s due to disagreements about its activities, and in order to start his own newspaper.
65 Dnoyan, Aleks. Interview, 6 July 2010.
66 Her ethnographic focus on Hamshen “national ceremonies and customs” (i.e. cuisine and marriage rituals), had been considered unthreatening by Soviet authorities. Pashyan, Olga. Interview, 4 July 2010.
67 Pashyan, Olga. Interview, 4 July 2010. Judging from Pashyan’s extremely modest apartment, she was not profiting from her work as head of the organization.
man sponsorship. 68 While these groups held social events to celebrate Armenian holidays, some of those organized by more recent arrivals also effectively operated as gender policing organizations, enforcing a traditional Armenian gender order in the midst of what they saw as an alien (and sexually promiscuous) Russian culture. 69

A number of community newspapers also existed in Russia, most of which were Russian-language publications. An independent monthly newspaper, Moscow’s Noev-Kovcheg [Noah’s Ark] was one of the larger examples, claiming a 140,000 print run, 70 while Krasnodar’s Yerkramas [Region] newspaper was geared toward a regional audience, and claimed a 17,000 print run. 71 Yerkramas also occasionally held conferences and meetings. “We work like an organization, we organize events, we have chapters, even though we are not registered.” 72

The Armenian Apostolic Church had always been a powerful organization in the established diaspora, and in post-Soviet Russia, it had begun to assume a similar role. As a national church, it served, even for the non-religious, as a symbol of Armenian national identity. Bishop Yezras (Nersissian) 73 was widely respected and considered to be an active community builder. In 2010, a large Armenian cathedral complex was under

68 Apparently, benefactor contributions to such groups dwindled substantially in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. “Garik.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
69 According to Garik, “Russia is slowly turning into a European or American state. Everything is going downhill.” Garik’s older cousin, Karen, a temporary labour migrant, reinforced his conservative views, and when in Russia, took it upon himself to police Garik’s sister’s behaviour, when she could leave the house and what she could wear. “Garik.” Interview, 29 June 2010; “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
70 Founded in 1997, Noev-Kovcheg was a relatively large, colour publication, and editor-in-chief Grigoriy Anisonyan claimed it was distributed to news stands in 85 cities and towns throughout Russia and the former Soviet Union. Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview 29 June 2010. One respondent confidentially claimed the print run figure was wildly exaggerated.
71 Published since 1996, Yerkramas did have a correspondent in, and news about, Moscow, but its editor, Tigran Tavadyan, claimed its primary focus was on Southern Russia (Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Rostov regions). Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
72 Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
73 Bishop Yezras presided over the Diocese of Russia and New Nakhichevan, which had jurisdiction over all of Russia (and much of the CIS) except for the southern Russian region of Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Rostov-Na-Donu, which formed a separate diocese.
construction in Moscow, amid a flurry of church-building in Armenian communities across Russia. The diocese had also organized various church-affiliated youth and educational organizations, some of which, like the “Hayortiats Tun” [Armenian Studies Centre], were widely praised by respondents.

Depoliticized Organizations and “Quiet” Strategies of Dissent

Russia’s Armenian organizations appeared, at least on the surface, to be avoiding politics wherever possible. Most styled themselves as “cultural” organizations, and generally saved their criticism of RA elites and their policies for private conversations. To the extent that the UAR wielded political influence in Russia, it did so through private channels, namely Abrahamyan’s personal connections to the political elite. Publicly, the UAR claimed to be a non-political civil society organization, and while it was staunchly pro-regime, its staff did not see pro-Putin statements as political, but rather, evidence of the UAR’s patriotic support for a strong, stable Russian state. But while organizations publicly shied away from politics, the very traits that made Russia’s Armenians the closest community to the RA also kept them involved in Armenian political affairs.

Because a lot of them have kept their Armenian passports, they go and vote, or they have an influence on their relatives, or the [Armenian] authorities have started to

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74 The Holy Transfiguration Cathedral was consecrated in September, 2013. It contained an educational complex, a diocese centre, an underground museum and exhibition hall, and was considered the largest Armenian church outside the RA.
75 The 15 new churches included some in cities such as Krasnoyarsk, Kaliningrad, Barnaul, Saratov, and Yekaterinburg, which had not previously had Armenian churches. Most of the existing churches had been seized or destroyed during Soviet times. Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
77 Respondents from smaller organizations stressed their purely cultural mandates, and would repeat this frequently in interviews when confronted with seemingly-political lines of questioning.
78 The UAR considered one of its main tasks to be the protection and promotion of ethnic Armenian businesses in Russia, and steered Russian politicians toward the “correct policies” in this regard, as well as with respect to Russia-Armenia relations. Oussatcheva, Marina. 2001. “Institutions in Diaspora: The Case of Armenian Community in Russia.” Oxford University Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Transnational Communities Programme, Working Paper Series. http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk/working%20papers/WPTC-01-09%20Marina.doc.pdf. 17-18.
work with those big benefactors and businessmen [from Russia], and they definitely have ties to the authorities.\textsuperscript{80}

According to powerful members of Russia’s Armenian business elite, many of their peers had attempted to become involved in RA politics over the years, including Ara Abrahamyan himself, but the RA political elite had thus far kept them at arm’s length.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, Abrahamyan was increasingly visible on the Armenian domestic political scene, having financially supported political parties (in contravention of RA law), and publicly criticized the RA government with respect to its stance on his organization(s) and investments.\textsuperscript{82} The fact that big-men entertained entry into RA politics suggested they were anything but politically inert. But RA elites’ apparent success in keeping Russian businessmen out of the RA political field, in spite of their wealth and connections, suggests they saw these men and their ambitions as manageable. To RA elites, big-men were legible figures, who exerted their authority according to mutually understood rules of the game, and could be rewarded or intimidated by the levers of power RA elites held. Unlike the traditional organizations of the established diaspora, they were \textquoteleft our kind of people.\textquoteright\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, it seemed that their lack of traditional diaspora political party affiliations (Dashnak, Hnchakyan, and Ramgavar), was often what was implied by \textquoteleft apolitical.\textquoteright

\textsuperscript{80}Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{81}Martirosyan suggested that RA elites refused to allow dual citizenship until recently precisely because it kept Armenians living abroad from running for office. Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{83}This common political culture tended to be referred to by Armenians in both the RA and Russia as a shared (Soviet) \textquoteleft mentality.\textquoteright For an in-depth discussion of the \textquoteleft Soviet mentality,\textquoteright see Cavoukian, 2013.
The Dashnak Party did in fact have a small presence in Russia, in Moscow and Krasnodar. Yura Navoyan, who headed the Moscow office, described the Dashnak impetus to expand into Russia as natural, given the desire “to have colleagues in the Russian political field.” But he stressed that the party was no newcomer to Russia, having been a political force during the late Tsarist period. Navoyan found the party attractive as “a model of internal Armenian dialogue,” because it had adherents around the world, but Moscow’s Dashnak office had a clear post-Soviet orientation, liaising with other socialist political parties throughout the CIS region, and attempting to familiarize Russian Duma deputies with Armenian issues.

In Krasnodar Krai, the party had limited appeal. An ex-party member, Tavadyan noted that there was a Dashnak chapter in Krasnodar that engaged in genocide recognition efforts as well as “everyday work to spread information, through propaganda-agitation in the villages, the districts, the regions.” Like many of the region’s “native” Armenians, he had been far more attracted to the general Dashnak ideology than the party itself, which he thought had become preoccupied with domestic concerns at the expense of the broader (pan-Armenian nationalist) struggle. In Tuapse, respondents spoke of an

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84 Originally from Yerevan, a trained historian and political scientist, and a former employee of the RA Ministry of Education, Navoyan had moved to Russia in 2003 to run the Dashnak party’s Moscow office. Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
85 Navoyan lamented the fact that the other two parties had no presence in Russia, since he wished to see more political and ideological pluralism. Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010. One respondent suggested the Ramgavar had attempted, but failed, to secure a presence in Russia, but I could not confirm this. Ghukasyan, Lusine. Interview, 25 June 2010.
86 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
87 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
88 Technically, the Dashnak party was socialist, and was a member of the Socialist International, though it was known more for its Armenian nationalism than its socialist leanings.
89 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
90 Navoyan conceded that the party had little appeal in the region. Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
91 Tavadyan refused to divulge its approximate membership, a figure he claimed was secret. Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
92 Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
existing, ancestral affiliation to the Dashnak *movement*, generally interpreted as the struggle for an independent Armenia. According to one respondent, “we don't need to become Dashnaks, because our ancestors already were Dashnaks…They were *Fedayeen*. They weren't party members.”93 Others identified with the semi-mythical Dashnak *idea*, especially during Soviet times when it had been taboo. “When I was young, we considered ourselves Dashnaks…But now I am not a Dashnak, because that which you would expect from their program, now those things are not there. They are not revolutionary at all.”94

These critiques highlighted the fact that the Dashnak Party was now a registered political party competing in RA elections, engaged in the mundane, day-to-day business of maintaining and increasing its support among RA Armenians, and had not only largely curbed its “revolutionary” character,95 but even formed, at times, part of the RA’s ruling coalition. Thus, the presence of the Dashnak Party in Russia did not signal an established diaspora bridgehead, but rather, a generally RA-oriented concern.96 Indeed, its only seemingly oppositional activity in Russia was promoting an alternative to the big-man model, and participating in events intended to foster dialogue among the city’s Armenian institutions, such as the 2010 “Forum of Armenian Organizations of Moscow.”

It's exactly this that we, as the Dashnaktsutyun in Russia, working in Moscow, would like to do: to cultivate a different organizational culture. And through our

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93 Bolodyan, Gevorg. Interview, 4 July 2010. Of Arabic origin, the term “*Fedayeen*” was frequently used by Armenians to refer to those resisting the Ottoman Turks or fighting the Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It roughly translates as “freedom fighter.”

94 Grigorian, Frunzik. Interview, 4 July 2010.

95 The party’s official name is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation [Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutyun]

96 One respondent noted that it was the RA Dashnak party that had set up a branch office in Russia, rather than the international Bureau. This mattered since, while the party in the RA was connected to the international ARF, they were not synonymous. I was unable to verify this information, or much else about the Dashnak Party, because of its members’ penchant for jealously guarding “secret” information about the party’s activities. Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
efforts, we want to demonstrate that community life must be built on lasting values, and not on a single individual, no matter how capable or well respected he is. We want to show that community life must be built on lasting values, and not on a single individual, no matter how capable or well respected he is.

Armenians in Russia had wide-ranging opinions regarding Russia and Armenia, but many thought it inappropriate to express critical opinions publicly. Like RA elites, they preferred “quiet” strategies of dissent that preserved the appearance of Armenian unity.

Tavadyan noted, for example, that he came under pressure to limit critiques of RA officials in his paper. 

[F]or example, we can't say anything critical of the [RA] president, not because we are afraid of the president, but since it's a Russian language paper, so that others don't read it and think that among the Armenians, there are disagreements between the diaspora and Hayastantsis [RA Armenians]. Of course, there are. Still, there was no shortage of private criticism of the RA and its elites, much of it off-the-record. A frequent accusation was that of indifference to Russia’s Armenians.

“When they want to, they hear us, when they don't want to, they don't…they forget that those problems that we have here, they can help us with...” Respondents also regularly attributed Armenia’s problems to the fact that it was a “closed country” [pak yerkir] with a “closed mentality,” so focused on survival that it could not think about progress and prosperity. Russian-Armenian businessmen lamented its low level of professionalism, lack of qualified experts, and falling education standards. They suggested that every

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97 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
98 Robertson, 2011: 79.
99 Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
100 Respondents were generally less worried about offending RA elites than they were about “internal” bickering strengthening the hand of Armenians’ enemies (Turks, Azerbaijanis).
101 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010.
102 Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
103 This closure was seen as a problem for journalists, since “they don't have an opportunity to meet others. They can associate only with each other.” Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010.
sector of the economy was monopolized, that lack of fluency in other languages was stifling innovation, and that life in the RA was becoming more and more insular.\(^{104}\)

We did a survey in the Armenian schools, interviews, and 7 out of 10 people couldn't name the countries bordering Armenia...Their heroes are the domestic oligarchs, or some rich guy in their neighbourhood. It's like an aquarium. The ocean is right beside it, but Armenia is in an aquarium.\(^{105}\)

As the most important Armenian foreign policy issue of the day, the Armenia-Turkey Protocols were a topic of much discussion in Russia. While staff at the Ministry of Diaspora had given the impression that Russia’s Armenians were overwhelmingly in favour of the Protocols, and some respondents did indeed support them,\(^{106}\) respondents often expressed views contrary to those of RA authorities. Anisonyan claimed to have presented both sides of the issue in his publication,\(^{107}\) Tavadyan’s paper “expressed our lack of confidence in the Armenian government,”\(^{108}\) and one respondent even suggested that majority Armenian opinion in Russia was against the Protocols, considering them a betrayal of Armenian interests.\(^{109}\) When the spotlight was on Russia’s Armenians, however, during Sargsyan’s visit to Rostov-Na-Donu, UAR president Ara Abrahamyan had taken centre stage and defended the Protocols publicly. According to one respondent, those opposed to the Protocols were prevented from speaking at that event, which was

\(^{104}\) As an example of this insularity, Nersesyan mentioned the opposition in the RA to opening a private boarding school (mostly designed to cater to wealthy diaspora Armenians) in Dilijan, Armenia, because the primary language of instruction would be English, and this was seen as an assimilation threat. The school, UWC (United World Colleges) Dilijan, opened in 2014. Nersesyan, Gevorg. Interview, 25 June 2010.

\(^{105}\) Nersesyan, Gevorg. Interview, 25 June 2010. “We” Nerseyan’s affiliation with the National Competitiveness Foundation in Yerevan, then headed by Pegor Papazian.

\(^{106}\) “Because Armenia needs it much more than Turkey, [and] they should stop linking the genocide problem with the economic situation.” Chenovaryan, Maria. Interview, 5 July 2010.

\(^{107}\) Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010. The May 2010 edition of Noev-Kovecheg featured a number of articles and editorials with competing views of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, from commentators in Moscow and Yerevan.

\(^{108}\) Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.

\(^{109}\) One respondent suggested that only narrow interests would be served by the Protocols. “For how many people are they opening the border? How many oligarchs and financiers are there in Armenia? It is for them that they are opening it.” Confidential informant.
organized by the Armenian Ambassador to Russia. In other words, he alleged that the “Russian-Armenian support” of the Protocols, praised by RA elites, had been engineered, rather than genuine, unanimity.\(^{110}\) For the Ministry of Diaspora, however, the “show” of support was what mattered, and the big-man model had delivered it.

The big-man model the Ministry of Diaspora sought to spread throughout the diaspora was in fact a feature specific to the “community” in which it originated. Russian authorities’ approach to managing diversity in their multi-ethnic state encouraged the rise of hierarchical, geographically based organizations to represent the interests of non-territorial nationalities.\(^{111}\) In general, the Putin regime cultivated a political culture in which informal networks and personal intercession circumvented official systems of representation and conflict resolution. Minority rights were kept vague and declarative, and legislation pertaining to NGOs was sufficiently opaque that it could be applied selectively against organizations the authorities found threatening.\(^{112}\) In particular, the state encouraged the emergence of registered “national cultural autonomies” (NCAs) at local, regional, and federal levels, vertically integrated and exclusive systems that theoretically spoke for all the members of a non-titular national minority with one voice. The NCA model assumed group homogeneity, and featured tenuous links between generally self-appointed leaders and ordinary people. Leaders were often driven by personal gain, such as career advancement and connections to the authorities, and thus

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\(^{110}\) One informant believed that individual members of the UAR were also opposed to the Protocols, even though the UAR officially expressed support. Confidential informant.

\(^{111}\) The Russian Federation included territorial regions seen as ethnic homelands (i.e. Tatarstan), but also encouraged the formation of organizations to represent non-territorial groups, or groups living outside “their” territories (i.e. Tatars in Moscow). Prina, Federica. 2016. *National Minorities in Putin’s Russia: Diversity and Assimilation*. London and New York: Routledge. 181.

\(^{112}\) Prina, 2016: 166-7.
tended to demonstrate loyalty to the state.\textsuperscript{113} NCAs provided no real “autonomy” to groups, and were expected to emphasize folklore and cultural activities reminiscent of stale, Soviet-era Friendship-of-the-Peoples events.\textsuperscript{114} While the UAR was not officially an NCA,\textsuperscript{115} it was entirely in keeping with the spirit of the model, one that reflected the specific institutional preferences of the state in which it arose.

\textit{Identity Gerrymandering: “Diaspora” and its Discontents}

As the big-man model of diaspora organization became the dominant one in Russia, it appeared to be facilitating the acceptance of the Ministry of Diaspora’s other reframings, especially the wider application of “diaspora,” to all Armenians outside the RA, and the emphasis on discrete “communities” instead of the diaspora as a whole.

Respondents in Russia had difficulty with the term “diaspora” [spyurk] being applied to them, with many respondents flatly denying that Armenians in Russia were diasporans.\textsuperscript{116} Recent arrivals and temporary labour migrants, of course, continued to see themselves as citizens of Armenia.\textsuperscript{117} For long-time citizens of Russia, the term implied either inferior status in a foreign host state or alienation from the home state, neither of which reflected their experience in a state they viewed as a “second homeland.”\textsuperscript{118}

They tell us we are diaspora...Armenia, the state tells us, they call us an ‘Armenian community’ [haykakan hamaynk]. But I do not call myself a diasporan. I am a Russian citizen. And I have all the rights that all citizens have.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{113} Prina, 2016: 180-7.
\textsuperscript{114} Prina, 2016: 190-1.
\textsuperscript{115} Respondents reported the creation and dissolution of various local Armenian NCAs over the years.
\textsuperscript{116} One respondent suggested, instead, that Russia’s Armenians were a different, and even perhaps superior, type of diaspora, because they had real connections to the RA. “I am real diaspora, in my opinion, because I was born in Armenia...because I have an emotional and historical connection with my motherland. Whereas [for] a lot of Armenians...Armenia is more like a symbol, but not a motherland.” Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{117} As one labour migrant noted, “A Hayastantsi remains a Hayastantsi.” “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{118} Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{119} Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
The rejection of the term “diaspora” was an attempt to distinguish Russia’s Armenians from the established diaspora, Armenians living outside the post-Soviet space, whom respondents considered “foreign” [ardasahman] Armenians.¹²⁰ In Krasnodar Krai, respondents suggested that only the region’s “native” Armenians could be considered diasporans since, like the established diaspora, they were Western Armenians.¹²¹ “Our homeland is a bit different, it's Western Armenia...If I were to return, I would return to Artvin, and there is no possibility of that.”¹²² This was the same established diaspora / RA emigrant distinction that the Ministry of Diaspora had tried to alter, one that considered only Western Armenians to be diasporans.¹²³ The few respondents willing to consider Russia’s Armenians diasporans (without qualification) were affiliated with the UAR.¹²⁴ Interestingly, however, they tended to prefer the Russian word, “diaspora,”¹²⁵ to the Armenian word, “spyurk,” even though they were direct translations, suggesting the Armenian version still had an established diaspora connotation that felt alien to them.¹²⁶

The term “community” [hamaynk in Armenian, obschina in Russian] was a source of some confusion in Russia, since it was used both in a general sense, to refer to people interacting with one another in the same geographical area, and also to a legally

¹²⁰ Dnoyan, Aleks. Interview, 6 July 2010; Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010; Grigorian, Frunzik. Interview, 4 July 2010.
¹²¹ In Tuapse, Grigorian referred to the local community as “diaspora,” though he preferred the term “Russahayer” (Russian-Armenians). Grigorian, Frunzik. Interview, 4 July 2010.
¹²² Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
¹²³ It should be noted that, while the majority of the established diaspora were Western Armenians, those in or from Iran were considered Eastern Armenians.
¹²⁵ The Russian and English words are identical. Hereafter, I use the italicized “diaspora” to indicate the Russian term, and unitalicized “diaspora” both to indicate its English-language use, and to translate the Armenian “spyurk.” My respondents were inserting the Russian term into otherwise Armenian-language conversation, and I often stopped to verify that they were actually distinguishing between “diaspora” and “spyurk,” rather than simply peppering their Armenian with Russian loan words (which was common).
¹²⁶ The following exchange was typical. When I used the Armenian word, they would switch to the Russian (while continuing to respond in Armenian). Cavoukian: “…do you use the word ‘spyurk’?” Zurabyan: “Yes, now we say ‘diaspora.’” Zurabyan, Karen. Interview, 25 June 2010.
registered *organization* that claimed to represent the more general sort of community.\footnote{For example, the “Sochi Armenian community” could refer to all the Armenians living in Sochi, or to an organization by that name. It was often difficult to determine which sort of community was being spoken about by a given respondent, requiring constant clarification, and I occasionally had the impression that respondents themselves were confused about the difference between them and conflated the two meanings.} Bishop Yezras clarified that when discussing the number of Armenian “communities” in Russia, he was referring to legal entities that could officially interact with the authorities.

So, for example, we Armenians live here in this city and we want to build a church and a school. To whom will they [the government] give that land? That's why there needs to be an organization, which requests that land, which is in a legalized field with the government, and can answer for it, ultimately.\footnote{Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.}

There were also reservations about these uses of “community.”\footnote{Navoyan suggested the Russian term, “obschina,” came with unflattering historical baggage, referring to a form of late-Russian-imperial communal peasant land ownership. The “obschina” had doubled as a convenient policing apparatus, with compulsory membership and the concept of collective debt. In this sense, it was similar to the *mir*. Kerensky, Alexander. 1945. “Russia on the Eve of World War I.” *Russian Review* 5, 1: 13. Navoyan was also one of a small number of respondents who used the term “colonies” or “settlements” [gaghtochakhner] to refer to the Armenians in a given town or region. When asked about the Ministry of Diaspora’s tendency to use the term “communities” to refer to Russia’s Armenians, he replied, “They don't recognize / understand us *mez chen janachum*.” Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.} For Tavadyan, it implied a Soviet-style monopolistic organization, resistant to organizational pluralism.

Here, it's a population with a Soviet mentality, where there was only one organization, the Communist Party, for everyone, and this turned into, ‘There needs to only be one organization for all Armenians.’ And they call that organization a ‘community,’ [hamaynk], but it isn't a community, it's an organization that wants to be the only one for everyone…and they are against any others being established.\footnote{Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.}

For some, however, this was a useful conflation. For the president of the UAR-Krasnodar Krai, “community” was synonymous with the (hierarchical) organization that served it.

“How that works is that in each of the 45 towns - like Sochi - we have a ‘community,’ it's structured, separate, from the bottom-up.”\footnote{Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.} Community organizations, meanwhile, often
featured very little real community participation, and discussions of the “strength” of the community tended to reference the wealth amassed by “oligarch” businessmen.¹³²

The big-man model was thus contributing to the gradual acceptance of the Ministry of Diaspora’s identity gerrymandering project, and smoothing over potentially unruly differences of opinion with a veneer of unanimity. Big-men were also well poised to tackle the specific problems faced by Russia’s Armenians.

**Group Status and Prestige**

With the worst days of ethnic violence behind them, few Armenians in Russia saw their collective situation as particularly precarious. Many of the issues independent community organizers and big-men alike sought to address were seen in terms of group status. Armenians generally saw Russia as a land of opportunity, in which the key to success was their place in the ethnic hierarchy. By highlighting their collective loyalty and prestige, Russia’s Armenians and their organizations sought to preserve or improve their reputation as a high-status ethnic minority.

Like other minority groups, Armenians had been targeted by the racism that accompanied post-Soviet Russian nationalism. However, racism was experienced differently in different regions of Russia, and by the various “waves” of migrants. In Moscow, it was downplayed by wealthier or more established Armenians, and considered a fringe societal, rather than an official, problem.¹³³ They stressed that racism was generally directed toward newcomers, whom many agreed were often badly behaved.¹³⁴

¹³³ Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
“But we, as long-time Muscovites...no one in this entire time has ever reminded us that we have eyebrows above our eyes.”\textsuperscript{135} These respondents were satisfied that Armenians occupied a reasonably favourable place in the ethnonational hierarchy. “I would say Russians are very tolerant in general...they don't like Caucasian people, but they are much more tolerant of Armenians compared to anybody [else] from the Caucasus.”\textsuperscript{136} Wealthier respondents saw their own success as telling. “[Moscow] is very welcoming. I can become a minister, I can become a big businessman, I can achieve a position, while in Armenia, for a non-Armenian, this is impossible!”\textsuperscript{137}

In Krasnodar, where there was a higher concentration of Armenians, discrimination against Caucasians or “blacks”\textsuperscript{138} by the majority ethnic Russians was more pervasive,\textsuperscript{139} and unlike Moscow, Krasnodar’s racism was seen as officially sanctioned.

Of course, [Governor] Tkachev, he's a racist....if he had more local power, maybe he would do something really bad for us...And there is informal direction from the governmental structures not to [hire] Armenians, Georgians, and so on...As far as I know, there are only two Armenians who work for the local government at all.\textsuperscript{140}

The violence in Krasnodar was also linked to neo-Cossack groups in Southern Russia who, in the early 1990s, had a distinctly Russian-nationalist agenda, and thus came into conflict with the region’s ethnic minorities, including Armenians.\textsuperscript{141} Respondents credit a

\textsuperscript{135} Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June, 2010. The remark is a reference to the dark, bushy eyebrows of Armenians and other Caucasians.

\textsuperscript{136} Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{137} Confidential informant.

\textsuperscript{138} Caucasians were often called “blacks” or “cherniye” because of their comparatively dark hair and skin.

\textsuperscript{139} With its warm climate, the Krasnodar region attracted a large number of formerly privileged pensioners from Russia’s far north (who tended to support “nostalgic” neo-communist and nationalist political forces). Also, because of its geographical proximity to North and South Caucasian war zones, it was a destination for non-Slavic refugees. Derluguian, Giorgi M., and Serge Cipko. 1997. “The Politics of Identity in a Russian Borderland Province: The Kuban Neo-Cossack Movement, 1989-1996. Europe-Asia Studies 49, 8: 1485-6.

\textsuperscript{140} Chenvaryan, Maria. Interview, 5 July 2010.

number of developments for improving relations between Armenians and Cossacks. Then RA President Kocharyan’s 2003 visit to Krasnodar was seen as particularly instrumental in raising the status of the region’s Armenians, since it illustrated that Armenians had leaders abroad who were monitoring their treatment, a message received by the Cossacks, the local authorities, and Armenians themselves.\(^{142}\) After the visit, “they began to see Armenians in a different light…Before, they were saying that Armenians were a migrant [yekatz] people, now they say that they're an indigenous [bnik] people in our Krai.”\(^{143}\)

UAR-affiliated respondents emphasized the organization’s use of interpersonal and inter-group ties, along with lavish ceremonies and monuments, to win over the previously hostile Cossacks. These efforts praised the Cossacks’ glorious past, and their common historic enemies – the Turks.\(^{144}\)

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\text{[E]very year we invite some Cossacks to Armenia…they stay with us for a few days there, the Armenian authorities receive them, and they have established brotherhood or friendship ties with various organizations. In Armenia…we erected a large statue in Kanaker, dedicated to the Cossacks…And this formed a bond, so that we were able to normalize Armenian-Cossack relations.}\(^{145}\)
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In Moscow, some respondents suggested that Tajiks and Uzbeks were now more of a target for police harassment than Armenians, since they were more visible in the city’s markets and the service industry, and came “by the hundreds of thousands.”\(^{146}\) Armenians had thus moved up in the ethnic hierarchy as lower status groups arrived. Others attributed their elevated status to the “hard working” nature of Armenians, with Russians’ respect for Armenian industriousness dating back to Soviet times, when “Armenians did

\(^{142}\) Serobyan, Gevorg. Interview, 6 July 2010.
\(^{143}\) Vareljian, Arshak. Interview, 4 July 2010.
\(^{144}\) In this narrative, the Cossacks of the late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries were depicted as having fought and died for Armenians, rather than just in the service of the Russian Empire.
\(^{145}\) Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010. Tavadyan mentioned a monument erected in Rostov-Na-Donu, honouring the Cossacks who fought the Turks in Western Armenia, and a new book on the subject by a Moscow author whose ancestors were Cossacks. Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
\(^{146}\) Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010; “Garik.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
the jobs the Russians didn't want to take [such as] construction in a kolkhoz, or building roads.\textsuperscript{147} Respondents compared themselves favourably to other nationalities, such as the Central Asians who were seen as more foreign; the Russians, who were thought to be lazy; and “the Georgians [who] bring more crime.”\textsuperscript{148}

The most acute concerns in 2010 were the residency issues faced by temporary labour migrants, who were often improperly registered and thus, illegally working in Russia. While they were able to make good wages, temporary construction workers complained about their precarious status in Russia, where not only were they subject to detention, deportation, police intimidation and abuse, but often defrauded by their employers. “You can work for them for three months, and then they can say, ‘Goodbye,’ without paying you. And you can't take them to court…nor can you do anything else, because you are a foreigner on this soil.”\textsuperscript{149} However, this problem was minimized by long-time citizens of Russia, whom it did not affect. Some noted that migrants were able to “solve those problems themselves” by paying bribes.\textsuperscript{150} Their co-ethnics’ failure to register was a source of embarrassment for many Armenians who saw themselves as law-abiding members of Russian society.


\textsuperscript{148} Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010. Interestingly, this hard working nature was also offered as explanation for Armenian victimization. “If a man sees that a foreigner lives better than he does in his own country, he is jealous. He doesn't think about the fact that he doesn't work and the other man does.” Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{149} According to Karen, an acquaintance had been waiting for months to be paid contract arrears “in the millions” (rubles). “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.

\textsuperscript{150} Nersesyan, Gevorg. Interview, 25 June 2010. Migrant worker Karen corroborated this, suggesting that a 500 – 1000 ruble bribe to the police officer could get one out of most immigration-related trouble. “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
That problem is not caused by this country, it is caused by that Armenian for himself. Everyday they come to me, and I say to them, ‘Son, why have you come here?...If you came here to try your luck...then why don't you get registered? You know that there are laws in this country.’

Since Armenian organizations were dominated by the “old guard,” the problems faced by new arrivals were often inadequately addressed. Independent cultural organizations reported that destitute Armenians regularly sought help (which they did not have the means to provide), claiming to have been turned away by the UAR.

Prestige was also the underlying motivation behind the proliferation of Armenian media in Russia, and “every Armenian with financial means wants to start his own newspaper, his own monthly, his television station, depending on how much he can afford.” While they delivered community news to Armenians, an equally important goal was showcasing the prestige of Armenians to Russians.

I think our paper has reached a level where it can represent our nation to others, including the Russians...because when they want to see us, they open our papers and say, ‘Let's see how the Armenians are living today, what they are doing, what level they have arrived at.’ And they look at the quality. If the newspaper is at a high level, then the Armenians, too, are high level, and the opposite too.

Wealthy Armenian businessmen saw the Armenian media as an embarrassment. “Yeah, we don't have good quality…it's done poorly, or at least, not at a level that we pretend to be ourselves.” This had prompted some to publish magazines of their own, such as Nersesyan’s Yerevan, a glossy arts and culture magazine published monthly in Russian.

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151 Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
152 One respondent estimated that he received one such phone call per day, and that while he regularly directed Armenians in difficulty to the UAR, they were repeatedly sent away and ended up turning to him for help again. Confidential Informant.
153 Because of the general lack of Armenian language skills, all of the “Armenian” media in Russia were published in Russian, though some had an “Armenian-language page,” designed to help the region’s Armenians learn the language.
154 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview 29 June 2010.
155 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview 29 June 2010.
156 Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
(for distribution within Russia) and English (for the North American market). While Anisonyan thought it lacked “serious” content, he considered it “praiseworthy because we can show others that we are an elite nation, we can produce an elite magazine, we are not lesser than any other nation, and perhaps even a bit better.”

Showing themselves to be worthy of inclusion in Russia also required demonstrations of historic Armenian loyalty and patriotism. Russian authorities had promoted moderate “patriotism” as an apolitical alternative to dangerous “nationalism,” and had fostered the notion of “patriotic centrism,” or support for a strong Russian state, blurring the lines between ethnic (рusskiy) and civic (rossisskiy) conceptions of statehood. In Krasnodar Krai, the “native” Armenians were concerned that their participation in the seminal Soviet-era event, the Great Patriotic War (World War II), was being written out of the region’s war history. “Nowhere are Armenians’ contributions acknowledged. When they write books about it, the locals, they include the names of the Russians, but the Armenians are not there.”

Given the continued salience of the war for citizens of Russia, this was no small detail. In 2010, UAR-Tuapse’s main project was erecting a monument to ethnic Armenian Admiral Isakov in the town, to remind the region’s Russians that Armenians had been equally patriotic contributors to the defence of the (Soviet) Russian motherland.

Prestige also played a significant role in church activity. While the AAC was engaged in numerous projects, the enormous new cathedral complex in Moscow was its

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157 The two versions were almost completely different, with subject matter geared toward the popular culture interests of Russian or American Armenians, which Nersesyan claimed were mostly incompatible, due to mutually exclusive celebrity cultures. Nersesyan, Gevorg. Interview, 25 June 2010.
158 Anisonyan, Grigory. Interview 29 June 2010.
159 Prina, 2016: 33-34.
160 Vareljian, Arshak. Interview, 4 July 2010.
161 Ivan Isakov was an ethnic Armenian (Hovhannes Ter-Isahakyan) who headed the Soviet Navy and was wounded in Tuapse during World War II. Vareljian, Arshak. Interview, 4 July 2010.
main priority. Seen partly as a way to bring Moscow’s Armenians together, it was also intended to showcase the community’s strength to others. Bishop Yezras boasted warm relations with Russian authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church, and noted the presence of the Russian Patriarch, Moscow’s mayor, and a representative of the president at the groundbreaking ceremony.162 “I can say that this complex here has no equal. This was our issue, that we wanted this sort of complex, and to centralize our national life here, and to *show* everything.”163 The church had mostly been funded by a small number of very wealthy people. As the Bishop noted, “not very many contribute to the church…Simply put, there are a few strong guys here [who] know very well that it is this structure, devoted and holy, that has safeguarded the Armenian nation in all times.164 Martirosyan, who did not consider himself religious, echoed this sentiment when explaining his support of the church. For him, it was a symbol of Armenian prestige.

Because it will help me...I want Armenia to be proud...I want people to come not to a cemetery - because there's only one church, in a cemetery...I want Armenians to realize that there needs to be a change in mentality from losers to winners...And I want my kids [to be] proud now of today's Armenians. Otherwise we will lose the new generation.165

If raising and maintaining their group status was perceived as the task at hand, big-men were well poised to be the providers of this prestige. As well-connected elites with money to fund lavish projects, they were well suited to raising the profile of the Armenian community in Russia. They also had plenty of money to lavish upon the RA.

162 Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
164 Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010. Of the 400,000 Armenians estimated to be living in Moscow, Martirosyan suggested only about 200 contributed significantly to the church. Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
165 Previously, the only Armenian church in Moscow has been a chapel located within the Armenian cemetery. Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
**RA Relations**

Respondents took pride in referring to themselves as the “closest” of any of the world’s Armenians to the RA, a closeness that, for them, consisted of understanding the state and having maintained their connections to it. “No matter how Armenian-loving [Hayaser] Lebanon may be, it still hasn't been able to really perceive the Armenian state, either its good or bad sides…[we are] the most Armenia-like [Hayastanyan] community...”166 With few exceptions, respondents spoke of the RA as their homeland,167 and saw it as having a vital role to play in keeping them tied to their Armenianness. In other words, they perceived that they “needed” Armenia in some sense, but this need was also tempered by disappointment with the RA’s shortcomings.

Armenians from outside, regardless of where, always look to the Republic of Armenia with hope…we forget that Armenia must do a lot for the diaspora, especially spiritually…It must always show that, ‘we are here, and we are beside you,’ rather than, ‘you are there, you are obliged to do this or that [for us].’168

“Spiritual” needs aside, respondents saw few practical ways in which the RA could help the Armenians of Russia. While Kocharyan’s visit had been crucial in raising the status of the Krasnodar Armenians in their struggle against Russian discrimination, respondents clearly saw the RA as the needy recipient, and themselves as the generous givers. As one respondent noted, “the question shouldn't be that Armenia should help us. The most important thing is that Armenia not get in our way [laughs].”169 There was certainly no anticipation of material assistance, aside from school textbooks. As Moscow Armenian school principal Galoyan noted, “Well, of course, when they come to visit,

166 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
167 Tavadyan (and some other Krasnodar Krai “natives”) felt more of a connection to their lost lands in Western Armenia, and saw the RA as a “rump” Armenia to which they felt little attraction. Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
168 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010.
they bring us gifts, books, Armenian albums, etc., but we are basically a wealthy school, we are not poor.” Since Armenia’s reputation was key to their own self-esteem, Russia’s Armenians saw “helping Armenia” as enlightened self-interest. “As much as Armenia is strong and developed, that's how much we will feel good about ourselves here...The weak don't sit at the table and get counted.” Echoing a common established diaspora sentiment, however, Anisonyan lamented that RA elites expected one-way diaspora contributions to the RA without involvement in Armenia’s affairs, and cautioned that it could not indefinitely dictate terms to a taken-for-granted diaspora.

There was no shortage of such contributions since, as soon as they were doing well financially, many of Russia’s Armenians began to give to Armenia. Russia’s wealthy Armenians engaged in grand, photo-op-friendly philanthropy, much of it consisting of “hometown” development, such as entrepreneur Levon Hayrapetyan’s extravagant investment in his home village of Vank, NKR. Likewise, Russia’s Armenian businessmen had begun contributing generously to the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, even as established diaspora contributions dwindled. This heroic businessman benevolence was a point of pride for many Armenians in Russia, linked by respondents to

171 Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
172 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010.
173 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
174 This was a point of pride for Russia’s Armenians, many of whom listed several examples. “Today, Samvel Karapetyan is building the Stepanakert hospital. Today, Vitaly Grigoryants...is building the entire water system in [NKR]....Sergei Hambartsumyan, is building the Matenadaran's [the RA’s museum of ancient manuscripts] new wing, which costs $10 million...They help Armenia with everything.” Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
175 Courtesy of Hayrapetyan, in addition to the usual schools and medical clinics, the tiny village was home to “Titanic,” a garish restaurant-hotel complex in the shape of an ocean liner.
the propensity for risk-taking and ambition, and juxtaposed to the perceived complacency of the established diaspora, especially in the US.

[Armenians in America] make a $100 donation, because it's shameful not to… and then in Russia, a few people give 5 or 10 million dollars. That's the difference… here the appetite for risk is greater. I'll give 10 [million], then work more.¹⁷⁷

The UAR’s philanthropy in the RA and NKR was perhaps the most visible, since much of it coincided with a yearly festival entitled “Days of UAR and WAC in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh,” marked by grand, press-worthy gestures of giving, such as the construction of churches, provision of computers for schools, apartments for families of soldiers killed in the NK conflict, and bicycles for orphans.¹⁷⁸

Some respondents, however, including those affiliated with the UAR, expressed severe donor fatigue not unlike that found in the established diaspora, due to the reluctance to foster a beggar mentality, and the realization that the aid would inevitably be stolen.¹⁷⁹ “[W]e know that half of what we give, they steal and take away. You know this very well. So why should we give when we know that they will take it?”¹⁸⁰

The ministry had attempted to reframe “helping Armenia” to include profit-oriented investment, and many of Russia’s Armenians had in fact made significant business investments in the RA. Martirosyan was skeptical, however, about the claim that one should expect to profit from helping the homeland. Lacking in infrastructure, professionalism, and enabling legislation, it made for an unattractive investment climate,

¹⁷⁸ Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010. These “noisy” gestures of philanthropy, which highlighted the giver’s lavish generosity, stood in contrast to both the quieter philanthropy, and noisier dissent patterns seen in the established diaspora.
¹⁷⁹ The established diaspora experience had clearly influenced Russia’s Armenians. According to a confidential informant, “I won't forget, in 2005, at a pan-Armenian conference, the American delegate stood up and said, ‘We have given you 100 million dollars, where is it?’ He asked the president [of Armenia], ‘Where is that money?’…I didn't want to also have to ask that question.”
¹⁸⁰ Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
and contrary to the claims made by the ministry, businessmen from Russia did not feel entirely at home doing business in the RA. They frowned on the extent to which economic sectors were monopolized, and claimed that, like established diaspora investors, they were treated as foreigners by RA officials. One businessman suggested their willingness to accept the “ethnic discount,” (a lower return on investment in homeland business ventures) had led RA officials to treat them as *de facto* benefactors, rather than businessmen, and noted that, in the long term, this approach was producing a class of people in the RA “living with the illusion that they are successful businessmen, but they are not.”

From a pure financial standpoint there is no reason to do business in Armenia. Return on investment is very small, risk adjustment is not workable, the size of the market is very small…I want to have a country which I will be proud of, which will be a success, which will have the right people, the right business model…That's why it's more of a diaspora decision, not a business decision.

UAR-affiliated respondents also acknowledged these difficulties. According to Gevorgyan, while very large businesses could succeed in Armenia by being virtually unassailable, small businesses – the very ones the Ministry wished to promote – were simply too vulnerable to predation. On the other hand, they tended to echo the Ministry’s reframing of investment-as-patriotic-benevolence.

…it, today, every good businessman, who is doing big business, takes 5% of that business and invests it in Armenia…that is thousands of people who will have jobs, and will have the possibility of working…The country will develop via those businesses, and will earn taxes from them.

While the grand, charitable gestures and business investments of Russia’s oligarchs and “big-men” garnered more media attention, remittances dwarfed philanthropy in terms

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182 Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010.
183 Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
184 Gevorgyan, Razmik. Interview, 5 July 2010.
of their impact on the day-to-day lives of RA citizens. Temporary labour migrants like Karen lived frugally in Moscow, often sleeping at their construction sites, and sending the majority of their pay to their families.\textsuperscript{185} Even many long-time residents were quietly supporting family members in the RA.\textsuperscript{186} However, respondents tended to gloss over these contributions, instead emphasizing the heroic benevolence of rich businessmen, whose good deeds, written about at length in publications they in many cases owned or funded, had translated into community prominence and respect.

In contrast to their strong ties with the RA, most of Russia’s Armenians had few, if any, links to Armenians outside the post-Soviet space, a lack of contact respondents generally attributed to the established diaspora not having come to them. Practical knowledge of the established diaspora was limited, with respondents expressing genuine curiosity about Armenians living in the West.\textsuperscript{187} Tavadyan claimed that the established diaspora had all but ignored Krasnodar’s Armenians, counting on one hand the number of people (most of them Dashnaks) who had visited. But he noted that, as Western Armenians themselves, the “native” Armenians had wished to emulate established diaspora organizations.

\begin{quote}
In our Soviet times, we were listening to Radio Free Europe, to Voice of America, news from the different communities, the kinds of events they would have. For us, this was a dream…We accepted the diaspora as Western Armenia in exile.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{186} Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Tuapse respondents said I was the first diaspora Armenian who had ever come to visit them. One jokingly referred to me as a “pioneer.”
\item \textsuperscript{188} Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
\end{itemize}
Some respondents saw the need to develop horizontal diaspora-diaspora relations, acknowledging similarities between Russia’s Armenians and the established diaspora, and - contrary to the ministry’s narrative - basic alignment when it came to pan-Armenian issues. “Those problems concerning Karabakh, the Genocide, etc….we see them the same way.” For Martirosyan, the “Armenian world” was a potential global “nationality network”. Navoyan suggested the established diaspora’s “legendary” organizational capacity could inspire Russia’s Armenians, while the “dynamism” of Russia’s Armenians could breathe new life into the moribund established diaspora. Yet these aspirations did not appear to be translating into the sort of bridge building they called for. The one grand attempt to “unify” the entire diaspora, Abrahamyan’s WAC, had been an unwanted attempt to impose the Russian big-man model on the established diaspora, and was rebuffed as such. Russia’s Armenians, for the most part, saw themselves as separate and different from the established diaspora, due to their largely pro-RA orientation.

Repatriation to Armenia was a realistic prospect for those who had moved to Russia from the RA recently and still had family and homes to return to. In fact, respondents suggested that a slow movement back to the RA had already begun, and that the huge wave of labour migrants had slowed, as there were now some (albeit lower paying) jobs to be had in Armenia. Wealthier Armenians bought apartments and opened businesses

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189 A local Krasnodar priest, for example, saw Armenians in France and Krasnodar as both living in fractured communities, though the fault lines differed in each case, party and church affiliation in the established diaspora, and origin and native/newcomer distinction in Russia. Interview, 5 July 2010.
190 Anisonyan, Grigoriy. Interview, 29 June 2010.
191 Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010. Martirosyan spoke fluent English, as did Nersesyan, which seemed to have made them exceptions to the general post-Soviet focus of Russia’s Armenians.
192 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
193 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010. For Armenians in Russia who traced their lineage to Western Armenia, or had come from Azerbaijan or Georgia, a move to the RA would be yet another migration.
194 Karen estimated that in Russia he earned three times what he would make in Yerevan, and spent less for lack of family and friends with whom to socialize. “For living, Armenia is preferable to here [but] getting
in Yerevan, and parents moved their families back to the RA when their children reached a certain age, fearing the Russian societal influence. Nearly all respondents claimed to know families that had repatriated, though these tended to be RA citizens moving home, rather than Armenians from elsewhere in the Caucasus and Central Asia, who appeared to be in Russia to stay. On the other hand, respondents noted that the scourge of rampant corruption in the RA led to a lack of opportunity, and thus poor prospects for emigrants to return. Along with their tales of returnees, many relayed anecdotes about investors in Armenia bankrupted by their honest efforts.

My godfather…was a Tbilisi Armenian …he went with a very big business, and he could have enriched both himself and Armenia. They snatched that business out of his hands. Now the poor man has fallen, and Armenia is not getting richer, because that business is doing nothing, and he's become poor.

Respondents drew attention to the role of state policy in attracting or repelling potential repatriates, often referring to Israel as the repatriation model to be emulated.

“Today, we are fleeing. And in Armenia, they are creating the conditions for the people to flee…in Israel, you go there, and right away they give you a little home…they give you a job, they give you something…” These critiques placed the blame for emigration (and the lack of repatriation) squarely with RA officials, rather than poor economic conditions. While stories of return were told optimistically, they stood in sharp contrast to ahead there is, in a word, very difficult…Because there are a few people in Armenia who hold all the power in their hands. Either you will work under them, or you will not work.”

Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.


Many refugees had made numerous “stops” before settling in Russia. One respondent, originally from NKR, was living in Turkmenistan when the NK conflict began. Fleeing to Baku after the looting of Armenian-run stores in Ashkabat, she then fled Baku for NK, then when the war began, fled again for Krasnodar. Interview, 4 July 2010.

Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010.

Local Priest. Interview, 5 July 2010.
the much larger continued movement of Armenians from the RA to Russia. Feelings of
affinity toward the Armenian homeland, in other words, coexisted with general cynicism
toward the RA’s ruling elites.

**Ministry of Diaspora**

From the UAR, there was nothing but praise for the Ministry of Diaspora, and
Abrahamyan’s positive, if vague, depiction of their working relationship closely echoed
the minister’s regular talking points.

> We do quite a lot of work with the Ministry of Diaspora—I must specifically thank
the Minister of Diaspora, Mrs. Hranush Hakobyan. Over the last five years,
together...our work has become much easier. When we come, we have a home, a
place, authorities to share our wishes with, and our problems, if we have any, we
can solve them together.200

Bishop Yezras had seen no tangible difference in relations since the ministry’s creation,
but claimed its importance was “undeniable,” since it was “an authorized entity with
whom you can address all the issues that can be solved at the state level.”201

Other respondents voiced concerns about the ministry’s mandate, size, budget, or
staff, and doubts about its efficacy.202 While some gave Hakobyan the benefit of the
doubt (“I don't know fully what she is doing, but at least she is very active.”203), critics
viewed the ministry as yet another way to collect diaspora money, and suggested its staff
had little real interest in what Armenians in Russia were doing. “By coming here, they

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199 In 2012, Grigoryan estimated that 1.1 million RA citizens had left the country since 1991, and claimed
RA authorities faced domestic criticism for the exodus. It is widely agreed that Russia was the destination
of the overwhelming majority. Grigoryan, 2012b.

200 “Ara Abrahamyan: Russian President always gives highest mark to our work.” Speech on the subject of

201 Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.

202 Seroby, Gevorg. Interview, 6 July 2010; Anisyan, Grigory. Interview, 29 June 2010. Anisyan
thought the Ministry of Diaspora should be second only to the Ministry of Defence in importance.

203 Martirosyan, Leonid. Interview, 23 June 2010. When I asked if he thought Hakobyan was on the right
track, Martirosyan replied, “I didn't say that, I said I think she's very active...On the right track and active
is very different...”
don't want to know who works or doesn't work, all that matters is that they be welcomed, put up at a hotel, given bread and honey, and sent on their way.”

Navoyan expressed concerns that the ministry was too focused on organizing events (in the RA), and not enough on the creation of institutions (in the diaspora). Some worried that the minister did not act as an independent voice for the diaspora in the RA administration. On Serge Sargsyan’s tour to promote the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, Tavadyan was disappointed to see the minister quietly “sitting beside him. If you're the Minister of Diaspora, you should speak your words, too. Say what the diaspora's expectations are. She silently assists [the President] with these issues.”

Unlike the UAR and the AAC, both of which boasted good relations with the ministry, smaller, independent organizations claimed to be largely ignored, and felt slighted by the ministry’s seemingly sole focus on the UAR and its affiliates. Many saw the RA-diaspora relationship as being too heavily focused on what I have called big-men. “Look, we are working with a threadbare model…with corporate shahs, in other words, with one businessman recognizing another.” One informant suggested the ministry should actually be doing the opposite, giving voice to smaller groups who were “able to withstand” the UAR’s attempts to absorb them.

[W]e told them, that if you decide that the only organization the newly established ministry in Armenia is going to keep ties with is the UAR, then you will not establish ties with the real Russian Armenian community…Because the UAR has

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204 Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
205 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
206 Tavadyan, Tigran. Interview, 3 July 2010.
207 Dolbakian noted that when the Ministry first opened, he twice received a form letter requesting his organization’s contact information, but was not contacted afterwards. He claimed the Ministry ignored his announcement of Ararat’s 10th anniversary. Apparently, the expectation was that the Ministry would send a letter of congratulation, which they did not. Dolbakian, Manuel. Interview, 27 June 2010.
208 Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010. This comment referred to the business connections of most RA political elites.
209 Confidential informant.
an advantage, it is run by a rich man. If someone from the ministry says, ‘I want to come and familiarize myself with your work,’ they say, ‘Yes, we'll buy you a ticket, come, fly here tomorrow.’ Right?\textsuperscript{210}

When it came to specific ministry projects, respondents had mixed reviews. Bishop Yezras had praise for its children’s programming and teacher training, and for the textbooks the ministry had apparently printed for the church’s youth organization.\textsuperscript{211} And indeed, ministry staff in Yerevan had frequently mentioned the delivery of Armenian textbooks to schools as an important achievement. However, Galoyan claimed that her school’s textbooks came not from the Ministry of Diaspora, but directly from the RA Ministry of Education,\textsuperscript{212} and according to Karapetyan, the textbooks the RA did deliver were held in customs for months, costing her thousands of dollars in duties to retrieve.\textsuperscript{213}

For temporary migrants, the existence of the ministry often came as a surprise, and they seemed to have no knowledge of it acting in any capacity on their behalf. “If I can speak plainly, no, I haven't seen anything that they have done. Well, Armenians [laughs] fundamentally work for their own rather than to help others. The authorities are apparently like that, too.”\textsuperscript{214}

\textit{Conclusion: A Model Community?}

Russia’s Armenians had a wide range of views of the RA, including plenty of criticism of its elites and policies. On the ground in Moscow, Krasnodar, and Tuapse, the “model community” portrayed by the Ministry of Diaspora was complicated by a significant degree of organizational pluralism and criticism of the RA. However, given the general unwillingness to air criticism or disagreements in public, the UAR’s

\textsuperscript{210} Confidential Informant.
\textsuperscript{211} Nersissian, Bishop Yezras. Interview, 23 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{212} Galoyan, Seda. Interview, 28 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{213} Karapetyan, Yerazik L. Interview, 7 July 2010.
\textsuperscript{214} “Karen.” Interview, 29 June 2010.
increasing domination of the organizational landscape meant that, at least from a
distance, there was an illusion of RA-friendly unanimity. Moreover, much of the criticism
of the RA now focused on its promotion of, and relations with, Russia’s most prominent
big-man, with the effect that respondents paid less attention to RA foreign policy, and
even less to its domestic politics. Within Russia, wealth and connections had translated
into Ara Abrahamyan arising as a \textit{de facto} spokesperson for all of the country’s
Armenians, a behind-the-scenes problem-solver, a generous doer of good deeds in the
“homeland,” and a public embodiment of the reframed state-diaspora relationship
promoted by the Ministry. As the next chapter will show, however, not all post-Soviet
Armenian communities approximated the model. The Armenians in Georgia, in
particular, posed perhaps the greatest challenge to the ministry’s reframing project.
Chapter 6
Georgia’s Armenians: Decline, Division, and Disillusionment

Unlike Russia, Georgia’s Armenian organizational environment was not characterized by “big-men.” Given that the state’s economy had been weak since independence, and hardly improved by two civil wars (and their re-eruptions in 2008), there were few spoils to divide among businesspeople of any ethnicity. Moreover, in contrast to Russia where, in spite of stereotypes, enterprising Armenians had been able to attain material power and prestige in the post-Soviet era, they had not been upwardly mobile in Georgia, had found few economic opportunities, and the Armenian population, at perhaps 250,000,¹ had shrunk substantially as people left to find work, mostly in Russia.

While Tbilisi’s Armenians were receptive to the “diaspora” label, those in Javakheti were vehemently opposed, and saw themselves as “indigenous” people with an inherent right to historic Armenian territory, claims that were highly problematic for the RA in its relations with Georgia. With divergent histories, identities, and to some extent interests, there was little to unite the Tbilisi and Javakheti Armenians, and there do not seem to have been many serious attempts by organizations or “ethnic entrepreneurs” to do so. Within Tbilisi and Javakheti, too, Armenians and their organizations were sharply polarized, trading accusations of recklessness and disloyalty.

In sum, Georgia’s Armenians were not generally receptive to the Ministry of Diaspora’s framing of Armenia-diaspora relations, and did not organize or behave in ways the Ministry would have preferred. In fact, the unruly, fractured, mutually antagonistic nature of Georgia’s Armenian organizational culture was reminiscent of the inter-party rifts that had characterized much of the established diaspora’s post-genocide history, and arguably presented the biggest challenge to the RA from within the post-Soviet space.

For RA officials, and Ministry of Diaspora staff in particular, none of this would have come as a surprise. They were well aware of the unique problems faced by Georgia’s Armenians, and under no illusions regarding the RA’s inability to address them given its foreign policy predicaments. The Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing efforts were never seen as fully applicable to Georgia, nor can officials have thought they could “diasporize” Georgia’s Armenians, especially not those in Javakheti.² Instead, the ministry’s efforts seemed focused on two areas. First, its ability to “pick winners” from among Georgia’s Armenian organizations, rewarding those whose messaging was congruent with its own, and marginalizing others, would arguably have given it more leverage over the Armenians in a diplomatically sensitive region. Second, the involvement of Georgia’s Armenians in some of the Ministry’s inexpensive, yet highly visible projects, such as the provision of textbooks and participation in the “Come Home” youth exchange, gave RA officials a way to refute accusations that they were “doing nothing” to help the Armenians of Georgia.

² Ministry staff themselves did not view the Javakheti Armenians as diasporans, and largely accepted their indigeneity claims. When asked whether she thought the Javakheti Armenians were diasporans, Minister Hakobyan replied, “Of course not.” Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
The Armenians of Georgia: General Overview

Ethnic Armenians were found in all corners of Georgia, though the vast majority lived either in the capital city of Tbilisi or the Javakheti region, and it was in these two locations that most of Georgia’s Armenian organizational activity was concentrated. Cotter described general majority-minority relations in post-Soviet Georgia as rife with “cultural security dilemmas” in that efforts by one group to preserve its group identity were perceived by other groups as offensive and threatening, prompting a response in kind. The tone was set by the alarmingly xenophobic first president of independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, known for his inflammatory statements about Georgia’s minorities. Even milder approaches to ethnic diversity in Georgia from this era assumed a nation of generous Georgian “hosts” and less-than-grateful foreign “guests.” While Gamsakhurdia’s extremism was tempered significantly by subsequent Georgian authorities, ethnic minority relations remained a contentious issue throughout the Shevardnadze and Saakashvili presidencies, and the Armenians of Tbilisi and Javakheti were no exceptions to the general minority mistrust of Georgian authorities.

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3 According to the Ministry of Diaspora, 10,000 also lived in the Black Sea town of Batumi and 45,000 in de facto independent Abkhazia. http://hayernaysor.am/
5 In 1990, Gamsakhurdia said that non-Georgians “should be chopped up, they should be burned out with a red-hot iron from the Georgian nation, these traitors and venal people.”Gamsakhurdia, Zviad, qtd. in Cotter, 1999: 9. Original quote in Izvestia, 10 November 1990, translated in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 42, 45 (12 December 1990): 9.
6 Research conducted among Georgian youth showed that the “hosts and guests” attitude toward ethnic minorities was still prevalent in the late 2000s. Elbakidze, 2008: 48.
7 Georgia’s Armenians were generally supportive of Saakashvili. However, not only was Saakashvili’s rise to power replete with nationalist symbolism, he also invited key Gamsakhurdia supporters into his government, and amnestied and pardoned Zviadist militants. George, Julie A. 2008. “Minority Political Inclusion in Mikheil Saakashvili’s Georgia.” Europe-Asia Studies 60, 7: 1163-4.
8 Many observers have noted that Armenians in fact faced more hostility than other groups, such as Georgia’s Azerbaijani population. Rotar, Igor. 1998. “Tbilisi has only partial control over Georgia’s Armenian regions.” Jamestown Prism 4, 10 (May 15). Accessed 4 Nov 2015. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=7398#.VjootEuQn8E.
There was plenty of everyday anti-Armenian sentiment in post-Soviet Georgia, much of which, as Suny notes, could be traced back to the revolutionary Marxist era, in which the Armenian merchant middle class was scapegoated as the new enemy of the Georgian proletariat (or more commonly, peasantry). While Georgian political elites had been more rhetorically inclusive under Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, societal discrimination was widespread, and anti-Armenian articles still appeared regularly in the Georgian press. Everyday forms of discrimination included the use of “Armenian” as a slur, and it was even common, during elections, for Georgian politicians to discredit their opponents by suggesting they had Armenian roots. Most discriminatory activity consisted of stereotyping and exclusion – from employment and positions of political power – but stopped short of actual violence. Incidents were not unheard of, however, and Armenians seemed quite fearful of reporting them to the authorities.

As the most important symbol of Georgian nationalism, the resurgent Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) was a significant contributor to general societal discrimination, with adherents to other branches of Christianity (let alone other religions) increasingly branded as heretics. This was a jarring experience for Georgia’s Armenians, given the

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10 Mikaelyan claimed to have collected one large folder of articles per year, except in 2009, when he noticed that these articles declined to about one per month, a change he explained with reference to the war with Russia and the existence of an external enemy. Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
11 Elbakidze, 2008: 41. Mikaelyan claimed that most of these accusations had merit, and that public figures like Zurab Zhvania, Vano Merabishvili, Gela Bezhuashvili, and Mikhail Saakashvili all had Armenian ancestors, though most of them denied this. Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
12 One established diaspora respondent, who had lived in Javakheti for one year, confidentially equated the discrimination experienced by Armenians in Georgia to that of African Americans in the United States.
13 Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010. Respondents described an incident in which, when an ethnic Armenian from Tbilisi was severely beaten while serving in the Georgian army, his parents were too fearful to tell the doctors how he had sustained his injuries.
lengthy presence of their Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) in Georgia.\textsuperscript{15} Given that the GOC had become synonymous with the Georgian nation, religious discrimination was experienced as ethnic discrimination by Armenian respondents.\textsuperscript{16}

One of the most contentious religious issues was whether Armenians or Georgians were the rightful “owners” of contested ancient churches confiscated by the Soviet state. Distinguishing between the two could be difficult, given the historical presence of both Armenians and Georgians on the territory of modern Georgia, the striking architectural similarity of their churches,\textsuperscript{17} the fact that, prior to the 7\textsuperscript{th} century Council of Chalcedony, there had been no confessional distinction between them,\textsuperscript{18} the presence of inscriptions and gravestones that were often more recent than the churches themselves, and the wholesale “return” of all of these churches to the GOC Patriarchate in the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{19} Until 2011, the GOC was the only legally registered religious entity in Georgia,\textsuperscript{20} meaning the AAC (and other religious organizations) could not legally own property, a policy seen by Armenians as evidence of the GOC’s considerable power in independent

\textsuperscript{15} A significant portion of the Javakheti Armenians were adherents to the Armenian Catholic Church, but their experience was apparently no different.
\textsuperscript{16} Regardless of their political leanings, all respondents depicted a GOC that had, under the control of Patriarch Ilia and other radical clergy, descended into xenophobic madness and was actively encouraging its believers to shun members of other religions. They also described a Georgian political elite unwilling to risk offending the GOC in any way.
\textsuperscript{17} Suny, 1993a: 58-9. It was nearly impossible to get a straight answer from most Javakheti Armenian activists regarding what distinguished an Armenian from a Georgian church apart from the inscriptions, though most, like Shirak Torosyan (Interview, 31 Jan 2010), suggested it had something to do with the altar, and with the entrance facing a particular, if unspecified, direction.
\textsuperscript{18} Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview, 12 Feb 2010. Bishop Vazgen (Mirzakhanyan) was the primate of the 1,200-year-old Georgian diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
\textsuperscript{19} The GOC was the only religious organization to have property returned to it in the post-Soviet era, and the lack of restitution of seized religious properties to other denominations was widely criticized by intergovernmental organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Commissioner for Human Rights. Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2014: 19-20. See also Hakobyan, Julia. 2009. “Religious Freedom 2009, Georgia: report criticizes Georgian government for appropriation of churches of other denominations.” ArменiаNоw 29 October. Accessed 21 August 2015. http://www.armenianow.com/news/10738/religious_freedom_2009_georgia_re;
There were well-documented cases of vandalism and destruction of Armenian inscriptions, symbols, and gravestones, which Armenians attributed to Georgian Orthodox priests and their followers. In other cases, centuries-old churches not returned to the AAC were left unrepaired and slowly crumbled into ruin.

Given that both Armenian and Georgian churches were “national” churches, each an “effective ‘brace’ for reinforcing ethno-national myths,” whether a church was Georgian or Armenian was more than an ecumenical matter. Instead, it was evidence of ancient tenure on the territory of modern Georgia, and as such, a source of extreme tension between the Georgian majority and the Armenian minority. The church restitution issue was the most prominent theme raised by respondents in both Tbilisi and Javakheti, and was described in one report as “one of the most important hurdles in civil integration.”

21 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 13 Jan 2010. Many respondents noted that Mikhail Saakashvili had at least made rhetorical moves to placate minorities, such as referring to “citizens” rather than “Georgians” in speeches (Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview, 12 Feb 2010), but that he seemed unwilling to stand up to the enormously popular Patriarch Ilia II. The 5 July 2011 law allowing other religious organizations to register as legal entities appeared to be just this sort of stand, and was vehemently opposed by the GOC (and accompanied by protests), precisely because of the possibility of the AAC being able to claim church properties. Janelidze, 2015: 72. Even with the AAC’s eventual registration in 2011, however, as of early 2016 not a single disputed church issue had been resolved.

22 Local Priest. Interview, 12 Feb 2010.


24 The AAC maintained a cautiously moderate tone in the debate, raising the issue privately with Georgian secular and religious authorities and asking for the return of certain churches (only six, five in Tbilisi and one in Akhaltsikhe). Regarding the 30 churches throughout Georgia that he claimed had been “Georgianized,” Bishop Vazgen’s main objection was to their vandalism, rather than their appropriation. “We could perhaps have not been very opposed if our churches were preserved the way they are, with their inscriptions and their appearance, and for some time, used as Georgian churches, but not destroyed.” His larger concern was with the GOC policy of “rebaptizing” those originally baptized in the AAC, a practice he claimed was exceptional in the Christian world, where baptism was recognized interdenominationally. Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview, 12 Feb 2010.

25 Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2014: 18. The religious property restitution issue affected other religious denominations as well, including Jews, Muslims, Catholics, and Lutherans.
The history of Armenian presence in Tbilisi dates back to the late 6th century, and reached its culmination in the early 19th century, when Armenians formed a majority (75%) of the city’s population, and dominated the city’s economic, cultural, and political life. Tbilisi was also a historic Eastern Armenian intellectual and cultural hub, producing many well known literary figures, and was the birthplace, in 1890, of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF or Dashnak Party). The Armenian population of Tbilisi declined over the Soviet period, and after Georgia’s independence in 1991 and the emigration that followed, Armenians comprised only 7.6% (82,600 people) of the city’s population.

Financial decline had accompanied demographic decline, as Tbilisi’s wealthier Armenians sought better conditions abroad in Russia, Europe, and the United States. Still, the physical and institutional remnants of their once-dominant position in the city stood as daily reminders of the Tbilisi Armenians’ lost status: formerly grand churches in various states of disrepair, destruction, and appropriation; a dwindling number of Armenian schools, an increasingly Georgian-populated “Armenian quarter” in the Havlabari neighbourhood; the tiny remnant of Khojivank, the hilltop pantheon of

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27 According to the 2002 census, Tbilisi was home to one third of the 248,900 Armenians in Georgia, though this included neither South Ossetia nor Abkhazia (thought to be home to as many as 50,000 ethnic Armenians). Mkrtchian, 2009: 301; Gahrton, 2010: 29. The Ministry of Diaspora suggested a much higher number of Tbilisi Armenians (150,000), and claimed the city had six working Armenian schools, and 27 civil society organizations.


29 The St. Gevorg of Mughni church in fact collapsed into a pile of rubble in November 2009, just months before my trip there to conduct interviews. In 2012, the belltower of another Armenian church in Tbilisi, St. Nshan, collapsed. Both events were attributed to heavy rain.
prominent Armenian historical figures (bulldozed to make way for an enormous Georgian cathedral); and perhaps most hopefully, the still-functioning Petros Adamian Tbilisi State Armenian Theatre.

**Javakheti**

The Javakheti region of Georgia, which shared a border with the RA, consisted of the districts of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, and was itself part of the larger province of Samtskhe-Javakheti (created in 1994). In the post-Soviet period, the population of Javakheti was overwhelmingly Armenian (over 90%), while Armenians formed approximately 55% of the population of Samtskhe-Javakheti. While there were some towns in the region (Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, Akhaltsikhe), the population was predominantly rural, most living in majority (if not entirely) Armenian villages. According to the Ministry of Diaspora, the Armenian population of Samtskhe-Javakheti was approximately 125,000, and the region had 118 Armenian schools, as well as

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30 One respondent indicated that her activism was prompted by the bulldozing of Khojivank, and described her horror at seeing human bones left protruding from the soil, and broken tombstones seemingly thrown in the garbage. This was seen by many Tbilisi Armenians as a humiliating erasure of their past.
31 When discussing “Javakheti” (or “Javakhk” in Armenian), respondents and Armenian scholars often included ethnic Armenian villages in the Samtske region, as well as the neighbouring Kvemo Kartli region, especially in the Bolnisi and Tsalka districts.
33 In the late 2000s, Ninotsminda had the look and feel of a large village (including sod-roof houses and dirt roads).
34 These were interspersed with a declining number of Russian Dukhobor villages (whose members were emigrating to Russia), a few exclusively Georgian villages, and several mixed Georgian-Armenian villages. Hertoft, Michael. 2006. “Javakheti: The Temperature 2005.” ECMI Georgia Occasional Paper #1. Tbilisi: European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/upload/publications/occasional_paper_hertoft.pdf. 13-14. Before their deportation under Stalin, the region also contained a number of Meskhetian Turkish villages. According to local Armenians, most of these were in Samtske, rather than Javakheti, and were repopulated predominantly by Georgians. While the Georgian state had committed to facilitating their repatriation, very few Meskhetian Turks had returned by the late 2000s. For more information, see Pentikäinen, Oskari, and Tom Trier. 2004. “Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian Turks.” European Centre for Minority Issues Working Paper 21. Flensburg, Germany: ECMI.
numerous clubs, community centres, libraries, churches, television channels and newspapers.\footnote{This figure included Tsalka, in neighbouring Kvemo-Kartli Province. The ministry’s description of Georgia’s Armenian community only mentioned one newspaper in Georgia by name, Van Baiburt’s Tbilisi-based Armenian-language Vrastan weekly, generally seen as a pro-regime publication. http://hayernaysor.am/}

Known as “Georgian Siberia”, the Javakheti region’s inhospitably cold climate and terrible roads drew few visitors, and heightened its sense of isolation from the rest of Georgia. Its strategic significance, however, ensured a great deal of official interest in its stability. Not only did the region border on Turkey and Armenia, but it was the location of three major regional projects linking Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey (and bypassing Armenia): the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzrum gas pipeline, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railroad.

Javakheti’s Armenians often referred to themselves as “bnik”, or indigenous, and claimed to be living on territory they considered their “hayrenik” or homeland. This claim referred to the fact that, from as early as 185 BC until 387 AD, the region formed part of “Greater Armenia”, after which time it became part of Persian-controlled Georgia, was conquered by the Mongols (13\textsuperscript{th} century), formed part of the Ottoman Empire (16\textsuperscript{th} - 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries), and the Russian Empire in 1829 after the Russo-Turkish war.\footnote{Ishkhanyan, 2004; Karapetyan, 2011: 12.} What was noteworthy about the Armenian claim to indigeneity was that the vast majority of Javakheti’s present-day Armenians traced their lineage to towns and villages in the Erzrum region of the Ottoman Empire, and ancestors who migrated to the region beginning in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, founding 60 villages and building 50 churches.\footnote{Hertoft, 2006: 13-14; Ishkhanyan, 2004; Karapetyan, 2011: 13-14. It is telling that, while referring only to presently-functioning churches, of the 51 Armenian Apostolic Churches outside Tbilisi listed on the Georgian Diocese website, none predate the early 1800s. http://armenianchurch.ge/en/the-diocese/history} After the Bolshevik Revolution, Javakheti, which Suny described as one of the “Armeno-Georgian...
“marchlands” claimed by both Armenians and Georgians, was included in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921, despite having at that time an Armenian majority.  

Unlike the Tbilisi Armenians, those in Javakheti reacted to the upsurge of Georgian nationalism in the late-Soviet era with a nationalist social movement of their own, centred around an organization called Javakhk. In the early 1990s, in the absence of effective central government in Tbilisi, this movement staged minor confrontations with the authorities and, later in the decade, unsuccessfully demanded political autonomy for the region. By 1998, Javakhk was reported to have “virtually ceased to function,” some of its former members formed a similar organization, Virk. While it, too, called for autonomy, Shevardnadze managed to co-opt some of the region’s clan leaders and appoint them to local government and police positions. By the mid-2000s, Virk seemed to have been overtaken by United Javakhk, an organization with a similar mission, but more muted in its demands.

Given its overwhelming Armenian majority, its shared border with the RA, and its

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38 Suny, Ronald G. 1994. The Making of the Georgian Nation. 2nd Ed. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 202; Karapetyan, 2011: 14. The term “marchlands” denotes territory on either side of a border, and implies that, due to border movement back and forth (as between two competing states or empires), it had a mixed population and frontier character. Suny notes that this Armenian population was further bolstered by the arrival of refugees fleeing the Armenian genocide of 1915-1918.


43 It was difficult to find concrete information about these organizations, such as their membership or leadership. None had a head office, a stable online presence, or readily available print material, and in the tense atmosphere following Chakhalyan’s arrest, it was difficult to find any member of Virk or United Javakhk to interview. Nonetheless, it appeared that Javakhk and United Javakhk were different iterations of the same organization, had personnel in common, and would have appealed to the same membership. United Javakhk’s debut appears to have been its organization of a March 2005 rally to oppose the removal of the Russian base. Socor, Vladimir. 2005. “Risks in Georgia’s Javakheti province can be defused.” Eurasia Daily Monitor 2, 65 (4 April). Accessed 4 November 2015. http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30206&no_cache=1#.VjoxNEuQn8E
demands for autonomy, Javakheti, unlike Tbilisi, was seen by Georgian authorities as a potentially secessionist region, and as a result, virtually all Javakheti Armenian assertions of rights or complaints of mistreatment were viewed as inflammatory. The population’s support of the Russian 62nd Military Base in Akhalkalaki (transferred to Georgia in 2007), which had been a major employer and was also seen as a source of security, was similarly considered evidence of ethnic Armenian disloyalty on the one hand, and Russian support for Armenian separatism on the other. Likewise, the RA-Georgia border crossing in Javakheti was reported to be a choke point, where Georgian officials (unofficially) impeded the flow of people and information between Javakheti and the RA, a move seen by many Javakheti Armenians as intended to isolate them from their ethnic kin. The most contentious practice was the reported seizure of any Armenian-language print material coming from the RA (i.e. books, newspapers, magazines, religious material), none of which was officially illegal in Georgia.45

Javakheti’s Armenians also spoke virtually no Georgian, and many were hostile to official Georgian attempts to have Georgian taught in the region’s schools, a move they saw as a tool of assimilation, especially given that Georgian public schools had been unofficial sites for GOC proselytization, and Georgian history textbooks did not teach

44 Respondents suggested Russian troops were a bulwark against Georgian encroachments, but also, against Turkey’s designs on the region. One report suggested Russian media were stirring up fears that a Russian withdrawal would result in Turkish troops moving into the region. Socor, 2005. In the early 2000s, the base employed over 3,000 people in the region. Corso, Molly. 2002. “For Javakheti Armenians, home is where the base is.” EurasiaNet. 27 September. Accessed 10 October 2002. http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav092702.shtml.
45 Armenian Catholic clergy reported being prevented from bringing Armenian-language religious calendars into Georgia, and being forced to go through prohibitive customs proceedings to import them. While the incident was reported in 2014 (after the research for this dissertation), it lent credibility to the claims made by respondents who reported similar border seizures of Armenian-language printed material. Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2014: 64-5.
toleration of different faiths. On the one hand, Javakheti Armenian activists complained that they were discriminated against in employment, public service, higher education, and the justice system because of their insufficient command of the language, and on the other hand, they claimed they were being “forced” to learn Georgian, a language they did not claim to need. In this highly charged, zero-sum-narrative-laden environment, Armenian activists portrayed virtually any change in government policy as an attempt to de-Armenianize the region. This left the Georgian government in a no-win situation, accused of neglecting and marginalizing the Javakheti Armenians on the one hand, and assimilating them on the other.

**No Big-Men: A “Community” Devoid of Elites**

To the extent that Georgia’s Armenians could be considered a community, theirs was a community in decline. With no wealthy class of Armenian businessmen, it is perhaps unsurprising that the “big-man” organizational model was not present in Georgia. Instead, Georgia’s Armenian organizational landscape consisted of small-scale, poorly-funded grassroots organizations in Tbilisi and larger, social movement organizations in Javakheti. There appeared to be no philanthropy funded by Georgia’s Armenians, with the funds for any large projects in Georgia coming from outside the country. Where local Armenian businessmen had funded the construction of a grand cathedral in Moscow, the

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46 While Georgian law (Article 13.2 of the Georgian Law on General Education) prohibited the use of schools for the purposes of promoting religious doctrine, GOC influence in schools was often welcomed by Georgian teachers and directors. There were alarming reports of students of other faiths (i.e. Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims) taken to GOC services, and even (re)baptized, without their parents’ knowledge. Tolerance and Diversity Institute, 2014: 52-56.


urgently needed renovation of the central Saint Gevorg church in Tbilisi was funded not by Armenians in Georgia, but primarily by a major donor from Russia – wealthy businessman Ruben Vardanyan.\(^49\) Nor were local big-men “solving problems” via connections with ruling elites, as they did in Russia. Whether in Tbilisi or Javakheti, this was a serious handicap, as personal relationships with Georgian officials were key to addressing community issues.

If I have some problem, if I were from Akhalkalak, and studied with my Georgian friends who, after 15 years, one was Minister of Agriculture, the other, Minister of Justice…and I call and say, "Vazha, my friend, there is this or that problem in Akhalkalak," and he knows that I am the Akhalkalak judge or director, of course every single problem in the region would be resolved 1000 times better, because there are personal relationships.\(^50\)

The Tbilisi Armenians had plenty of past glory with which to compare their current conditions.\(^51\) While a small cultural elite remained in the city, this intelligentsia was not wealthy, with most Armenians of means having emigrated, primarily to Russia.\(^52\) In the case of Javakheti, social activists and organizers – indeed, virtually all members of the intelligentsia - were more often found in Yerevan, where many of them had studied, where they claimed they could more easily promote the cause of the Javakheti Armenians, and where life was generally less difficult, such that some Georgia-oriented


\(^50\) Baiburt saw the lack of Georgian language skills (and hence, the inability to study at Georgian universities) as part of the problem. Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010. “Akhalkalak” is the Armenian pronunciation of “Akhalcalaki.”

\(^51\) Tbilisi was so replete with Armenian historical lore that, according to the Bishop of the Georgian Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, “here, in Georgia, in Tiflis, I have found Armenian history.” Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview 12 February 2010.

\(^52\) According to Gennady Muradian, president of the organization Union of Georgian Armenians, “unfortunately, there are no significantly wealthy Armenians any more. The rich Armenians have all left Georgia.” Deheryan, Khachatryan, 2004.
groups were more reminiscent of compatriotic organizations\(^{53}\) or grassroots organizations-in-exile.\(^{54}\) Likewise, to the extent that there was funding or support for organizations in Georgia, it was often external. Some support – both moral and financial – appeared to come from the established diaspora,\(^{55}\) while much of it originated in the RA, where there was plenty of societal concern for the plight of Georgia’s Armenians, in spite of Yerevan’s extremely cautious approach.

Also missing in Georgia was the optimism found among Armenians in Russia regarding the establishment of ethnic organizations and relations with “the homeland”. Instead, the general mood among respondents was that of deep disillusionment about their life in Georgia, and a sense of abandonment to their fate by the RA. The centuries-long history of Armenians in Georgia, and especially the widely held view that the Javakheti region constituted part of historic Armenia, only contributed to this disillusionment. With little enthusiasm for them among Armenians, many organizations existed in name only or were the brainchild of a single individual, with little actual membership or event attendance.

**“Pro-Regime” vs. “Oppositional” Organizations**

In 2009, Mkrtchian described the Tbilisi Armenian community as lacking any sort of “umbrella structure” or “central governance.”\(^{56}\) While there was an AAC presence in the form of the Georgia Diocese, and numerous small organizations, there did not appear

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\(^{53}\) Compatriotic organizations, like “hometown associations” are organizations in which people originally hailing from the same town or village (in the original homeland) maintain ties and render assistance to one another in their host states.

\(^{54}\) Days before his arrest, Vahagn Chakhalyan connected the dearth of intelligentsia in Javakheti with the lack of popular “will to struggle” against the authorities. “Sadly, today we are in such a state that we need others, we need outside support.” Chakhalyan, Vahagn, 21 July 2008 – Yerkir Union video. www.yerkir.eu

\(^{55}\) Apparently, Georgian church officials visited established diaspora communities (including Dashnak-affiliated organizations) to fundraise for church renovations. Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010.

\(^{56}\) Mkrtchian, 2009: 302.
to be one institution around which the city’s Armenians tended to gather. Instead, organizations were poorly funded and short-lived. Karapet Mikaelyan’s *New Tbilisi* newspaper was a typical example, seemingly a one-person affair with occasional contributions by others. Many such organizations appear to have arisen out of frustration with the inactivity or corruption of existing organizations. The Armenian Community of Georgia (Vrastani Hay Hamaynk) was larger, and claimed to have three sub-organizations, two of which were youth groups, and the third, the Armenian Cooperative Centre of Georgia (Vrastani Haykakan Hamagortsaktsutyan Kentron). A visit to the group’s headquarters during a meeting revealed a low-budget gathering space with mostly youth in attendance.

When describing their mission, some of Tbilisi’s community organizers referred directly to “Hay Dat” (the Armenian Cause), and aimed to address what they claimed was an alarming lack of awareness, among Tbilisi Armenians, of genocide related issues, as well as of Armenian (or RA-specific) holidays. Their activities seemed geared toward public demonstrations, especially on April 24th (genocide memorial day).

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57 A Georgian language paper in existence for five years (in print for one year, then online only), New Tbilisi also organized events. Its stated focus was on “national minority themes,” and according to its editor, “differs from other Georgian papers because there is no obvious self-censorship, and it is clear that it is objective, because the others write only the Georgian point of view, and many times, that is very subjective.” Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.

58 It was unclear what this third member organization did, or the degree to which any of these three was an independently functioning organization in any real sense.

59 The atmosphere at this centre was quite fearful. I met a young member of the organization in a public place, and was led up and down many side streets before arriving at the building. Inside, I was treated with plenty of caution by the group, who agreed to be “on record,” but then would not give me their names. Here, I refer to them collectively as “Armenian Community of Georgia”. Interview, 12 February 2010.

60 While this phrase generally implied genocide recognition and an orientation toward the lost Armenian lands now in Turkey, it was also commonly associated with the Dashnak Party.

61 Mikaelyan mentioned meeting many Armenians who had never visited the RA, and some that seemed not to understand the significance of April 24th (the day the Armenian genocide is officially commemorated by Armenians around the world). He attributed this to the majority of Tbilisi Armenians in Soviet times sending their children (himself included) to Russian schools, where Armenian history was not taught. Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010. The Armenian Community of Georgia’s activities...
While both of the aforementioned Tbilisi organizations were “oppositional,” in the sense that they regularly expressed displeasure with the Georgian authorities and their treatment of Armenians, there were also “pro-regime” Armenian public figures, organizations, and publications. Van Baiburt, a former Georgian parliamentarian, and a special advisor to then President Saakashvili, was an example of the latter. An ethnic Armenian, he was a successful Georgian politician, and the editor-in-chief of the Armenian-language *Vrastan* (Georgia) newspaper. Pro-regime Armenians, with whom both the Georgian and RA authorities preferred to interact, were portrayed by oppositional activists as sell-outs and collaborators.

In Javakheti, the post-Soviet era had seen the rise of three prominent organizations: two in the 1990s, Virk and Javakhk, and later, after their decline, United Javakhk Democratic Alliance. These organizations were all oppositional, sought regional autonomy and language rights within a federal Georgia, and resembled social movement organizations, political parties and – at times – insurgent movements. Living in majority Armenian territory, they had typically been more confrontational than the small Tbilisi organizations, and appeared to have larger membership, though no figures were available. For these Javakheti activists, Armenians who held local or regional government posts were described as collaborators, pursuing their own interests at the expense of their ethnic kin. But according to respondents, the vast majority of Javakheti seemed more oriented toward genocide recognition than addressing the problems of Armenians in Georgia. Mkrtchyan, Samvel. Interview, 13 February 2010.

62 United Javakhk came into existence in 2006, and reportedly had ties to the previous Javakhk organization. Another, more militant organization, Varents, was mentioned on occasion, but it was difficult to find any reliable information on its size, scope, activities, or membership. It was unclear whether it still existed in 2010.

63 It was common, among Armenian respondents in Georgia, and also in Armenia and Russia, to shy away from giving organization membership figures. I was left with the impression that “card-carrying” membership was rare, and few individuals were involved in day-to-day operations, but that organizations gauged their size and strength by the ability to mobilize people for demonstrations.
Armenians were not members of any organizations, nor were they politically active. Given the degree to which the region was rural and characterized by unemployment and economic hardship, it seemed plausible that most focused their efforts on their own families’ subsistence, with little spare time or energy for less tangible pursuits.

While Javakheti’s Armenian organizations had historically shown a propensity for confrontation with the Georgian authorities, in 2010 there was a marked chill among activists, most of whom would not agree to interviews (except those temporarily or permanently in Yerevan). This was apparently prompted by the July 2008 arrest of Vahagn Chakhalyan and his subsequent imprisonment in Tbilisi. Previously the director of an Armenian sports club, Chakhalyan had been an outspoken critic of the Georgian authorities, and his arrest, after a raid of his home in which police claimed to have found weapons, was seen by many Javakheti Armenians as a warning to others. His plight quickly became a cause célèbre, with Armenians in the RA and the established diaspora demanding his release and contributing to his legal defence. Yerkir Union, an umbrella NGO with membership in Europe, the RA, and NKR, was particularly supportive of Chakhalyan, hiring a French lawyer to defend him. Chakhalyan’s arrest catapulted him

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64 Many Javakheti Armenians in fact described Georgians as “good friends and neighbours.” Corso, 2002.
65 While such conditions can be conducive to unrest and motivate political action, the ability to emigrate in search of employment acted as a safety-valve in Javakheti, ensuring the outflow of unemployed young men and the inflow of funds to sustain families in the region.
66 The Javakhk Youth Sports and Culture Union (Javakhi Yeritasartakan Marzamshakutayin Miutyun, or JEMM).
67 Ministry of Diaspora staff were hesitant to discuss the Chakhalyan issue, but one confidential informant noted that they had absolutely no involvement in the matter, and saw the case as an individual legal case, rather than something with larger implications.
68 While the title “Yerkir” (land or country) could suggest an association with the Dashnak party, some of whose affiliated institutions, like “Yerkir Media” shared that name, the organization apparently had no Dashnak connection. Artsruni, Sevak. Interview, 15 Jan, 2010.
69 This lawyer was then rejected by the court, which required all legal proceedings to be conducted in Georgian, prompting further accusations of linguistic repression by Chakhalyan’s supporters.
into a leadership position as the spokesperson for United Javakhk, a role viewed cynically by pro-regime figures.\textsuperscript{70}

\textit{Diasporic vs. Indigenous Identities}

In general, Tbilisi Armenians understood their community to be part of the Armenian diaspora. However, the use of this term was almost always qualified in some way to distance themselves from the established diaspora,\textsuperscript{71} and these qualifications generally hinged on the lengthy tenure of Armenians in Tbilisi. Having contributed to the creation of the city and historically played a prominent role in it, Tbilisi Armenians felt as though the term “diaspora” did not adequately capture their experience. To them, there was nothing foreign about Tbilisi, and rather than expressing longing for some part of Armenia, Tbilisi Armenians had their own culture and history to which they referred.\textsuperscript{72} While Tbilisi was not foreign, respondents conceded that Armenians no longer truly felt as though they belonged there, and were ambivalent about their identity.

The specificity of this place is that the majority of the Armenians are Russian speakers. And the majority don't feel themselves to be either Georgian or Armenian…they think and speak in Russian, the majority have no ties to Armenia, they can't integrate into Georgian life, they are really outsiders.\textsuperscript{73}

In Javakheti, there was no such ambiguity. Armenians there were adamant about the fact that theirs was historic Armenian territory, and as the Armenians inhabiting that

\textsuperscript{70} Baiburt claimed that Vahagn Chakhalyan was barely literate, and had been thrust into the leadership role because oppositional Armenians had needed a martyr-like leader figure. Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010.

\textsuperscript{71} Some respondents were particularly offended by attempts to equate them to “a gaghut [diaspora colony], like Canada’s gaghut”. Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010. Others, however, saw that Tbilisi’s Armenians had the potential to be useful to Armenia in the same way the established diaspora was. “It can do lobbying, the way it does in Europe and America. It can build a bridge for good, normal, friendly, neighbourly relations. Javakhk or Tiflis. For most people today, the Tiflis Armenians are just a headache. In reality, we can become a friendship bridge, we can breathe new life into relations.” Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.

\textsuperscript{72} For example, the symbol most frequently invoked in the established diaspora, Mt. Ararat, had little appeal in Tbilisi, where the local bard, Sayat-Nova, buried at one of the city’s Armenian churches, had more symbolic resonance. Mkrtchian, 2009: 309.

\textsuperscript{73} Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
territory, they claimed to be “indigenous” (bnik). This was a puzzling claim since, while it is likely that some Armenians living in Javakheti could trace their lineage back to historic Greater Armenia, the majority’s ancestors appeared to have arrived in the 19th century from the Ottoman Empire, and when asked about the claim to be indigenous, respondents conceded that they themselves were not. Relocated to Yerevan, head of the Javakhk Compatriotic Union, and member of the RA parliament, Shirak Torosyan’s response was typical.

Cavoukian: Your parents’ ancestors’ ancestors’ ancestors, have they all been Javakhtsis [Javakheti natives]?

Torosyan: Ah right. Well, the Armenian population of Javakhk has two segments. The first segment is the indigenous [bnik] Armenians who, from ancient times, have lived there. And the other segment is the Armenians who migrated from Erzerum.

Nevertheless, indigeneity and historic territorial claims were made regularly, not only by Javakheti Armenians themselves, but also by RA Armenians and diasporans alike, when they spoke about Javakheti. Historic territory was seen to differentiate Javakheti’s Armenians from the similarly numerous Tbilisi Armenians who, despite having a centuries-old presence in that city, were generally referred to as part of the Armenian diaspora. “Javakhk is a historic Armenian territory, and Armenians have lived there from the beginning…If circumstances, like the decisions of Stalin and others, made it part of Georgia, that doesn't mean it turned into a diaspora.”

Many Javakheti Armenians claim such people existed, but on three trips to the region, the author never met anyone whose family had not originated in Ottoman Armenia, or who personally knew anyone whose family had deeper roots in the region. Respondents often expressed discomfort with this line of questioning.

76 Even the Ministry of Diaspora’s own news website, Armenians Today, described Javakheti as a region inhabited by Armenians “since time immemorial,” though it did note that most of the present population arrived from Erzrum from 1828-1830. “Vrastani Hay Hamaynk” [Armenian Community of Georgia]. Accessed 13 October 2015. http://hayernaysor.am/

77 Torosyan, Shirak. Interview, 13 Jan 2010.
historical roots which would make it apparent as Armenian native land, so to speak.”

“We have, in Georgia, indigenous [bnik] Armenians, Armenians that live in their homeland, and we have Georgia’s diaspora [spyurk] Armenians, for example those in Tiflis...because it is Georgian land.” In contrast, “Here [in Javakheti], we are the hosts on our land.”

**Inter- and Intra-community conflict**

In addition to fundamental identity differences, there seemed to be little contact or cooperation between the Tbilisi Armenians and those living in Javakheti. While they had a common experience of discrimination and were both emigrating in large numbers, the two groups were otherwise quite different. The urban, educated Tbilisi Armenians, primarily Russian speakers who were reasonably fluent in Georgian, lived in a majority-Georgian city where most had daily contact with Georgians. In Javakheti, the compactly settled, predominantly rural population lived in remote Armenian villages and small, majority-Armenian towns, many had little contact with Georgians, and most spoke no Georgian at all. There was little reason for most Tbilisi Armenians to journey down the country’s worst roads to visit the remote, inhospitable region, and Javakheti Armenians were more likely to visit Yerevan than Tbilisi, with many having never been to Georgia’s capital. With little in common and little contact, there appeared to be no serious attempts to unite all of Georgia’s Armenians, and no single organization claimed, with any

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78 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 Jan 2010.
79 Karapetyan, Samvel. Interview, 19 Feb 2010, emphasis mine.
81 By the late 2000s, the roads were being repaired, but there was nothing to be done about the climate, and Javakheti experienced cold weather year-round. One woman in Ninotsminda complained that she always picked her tomatoes green, since they would never ripen before the frost.
credibility, to represent them all. There was, in other words, no Georgian equivalent to the Union of Armenians of Russia.\footnote{While the Armenian Community of Georgia (Vrastani Hay Hamaynk) had a similar name that implied a pan-Georgian orientation, the organization was entirely Tbilisi-based. Other similarly-named organizations (i.e. Union of Armenians of Georgia) were similarly small and limited in scope.}

In fact, the interests of the two communities were to a certain extent at odds. Since the Javakheti Armenians were seen by Georgian authorities as potential separatists,\footnote{One indication of this was that the Javakheti Armenians were \textit{de facto} exempt from compulsory army service, whereas the Tbilisi Armenians were drafted along with their Georgian neighbours.} most respondents suggested that they felt a degree of repression not experienced by the Tbilisi Armenians,\footnote{The Javakheti Armenians were seen as “not directly brought under the Georgian state's absolute influence. For that reason, the Tiflis Armenians are not an Armenian factor today, but Samtskhe-Javakhet-Tsalka is an Armenian factor.” Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.} and several respondents noted that the Javakheti activists’ autonomy demands could have negative repercussions for the Tbilisi Armenians’ physical security.\footnote{This point was also made by observers in the late 1990s, who portrayed the Tbilisi Armenians as potential “hostages” that Georgia could use as leverage against a separatist threat. Rotar, 1998.}

While inter-community divisions seemed to have prevented the emergence of a united Armenian population in Georgia, there was also little unity within each geographical locale. Not only was there no hierarchical “community” association in either place,\footnote{The Russian word for community, “obschina” (or the Armenian, “hamaynk”) was often used to refer to an organization representing a community.} and no leader who claimed to represent it,\footnote{A confidential Ministry informant portrayed this as a problem for the Ministry, having to deal with different organizations and individuals. “One person will say, ‘These Georgians, they are our brothers, we have no problems whatsoever,’ and another will say, ‘These Georgians create problems for us, etc.’”} there was also significant infighting \textit{within} the Tbilisi and Javakheti communities, between individuals and groups who opposed the Georgian authorities and those perceived to be pro-regime. This feature set Georgia’s Armenians apart from their co-ethnics in Russia, where Armenian organizations had generally eschewed politics, styling themselves as cultural organizations or clubs, and there was no obvious Armenian opposition to the Putin-
Medvedev order.\textsuperscript{88} Not only were many of Georgia’s Armenian organizations explicitly political,\textsuperscript{89} some even attempting to register as political parties, many were openly hostile to the regime.

Among these “oppositional” Armenians, there was widespread resentment and mistrust of the Georgian authorities, and they framed their grievances in terms of human rights and their violation by the authorities.\textsuperscript{90} From their perspective, “pro-regime”\textsuperscript{91} individuals and groups – the few Armenians holding government posts\textsuperscript{92} and organizations that appeared less hostile to the Georgian government – were considered to have “sold out” to the Georgians for their own personal (or extended familial) gain, and could not be trusted to represent the needs of “their” community.

Well first, we don't have any deputies. We don't consider them our representatives. I am always explaining this to people. That he isn't obligated to defend your rights…If Armenians don't elect him specifically, then he is simply a member of the Georgian parliament, not a community representative…the authorities use them, so that they can speak now and then on behalf of the community, in the name of the community.\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{88} In Krasnodar, there may have plenty of disdain for Governor Tkachev, but his behaviour was never linked by any respondents to Putin (while Medvedev was the president of the Russian Federation at the time, respondents all considered Putin, not Medvedev, as the real locus of power).
\textsuperscript{89} Admittedly, the distinction between political and “cultural” organizations was difficult to draw in Georgia where, due to “cultural security dilemmas,” even seemingly benign cultural preservation attempts by ethnic minorities were often interpreted by the majority as threatening. Cotter, 1991: 1.
\textsuperscript{90} Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
\textsuperscript{91} Sometimes “pro-regime” Armenians were accused of nothing more than portraying interethnic relations in Georgia in a positive (or neutral) light.
\textsuperscript{92} In the late 1990s, contempt for such people was expressed violently on occasion, with local Javahketi Armenian authorities known to be loyal to Tbilisi beaten up by their compatriots. Rotar, 1998.
\textsuperscript{93} Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010. This sentiment was echoed in Elbakidze’s research among Armenian youth in Georgia. In focus groups, her subjects suggested that the handful of Armenians holding official positions in Georgia “were not ‘genuine’ Armenians: they had become like Georgians and were simply ‘working for the Georgians’. If this were not the case, it was argued, they would not have been able to make such headway in their careers.” Elbakidze, 2008: 47.
One respondent suggested Georgian authorities created or sponsored compliant Armenian organizations to counter the emergence of “genuine” oppositional ones. 94 Many of these state-sponsored organizations were reported to do little except appear at opportune moments to endorse the Georgian government’s claims about inter-ethnic harmony. 95 Others were accused of slowly brainwashing Armenian youth into “Georgianizing.” 96

The people are completely broken, none of them have any hope, they cannot defend their rights because they are not organized...they regard selling out as the right thing to do, because the Georgian side, in every way assists those collaborators, in every way it helps them. 97

For pro-regime Armenians, in turn, oppositional groups were misguided extremists. While they privately admitted that many of the problems faced by Georgia’s Armenians were real, they saw the very public oppositional approach as threatening to worsen the plight of Georgia’s Armenians, rather than ameliorate it. Baiburt acknowledged the church ownership issue, and admitted that “beginning in 1995, certain Georgian priests behaved very, very incorrectly.” However, he saw this as something best glossed over in

94 According to Mikaelyan, a small Armenian nationalist organization emerged in the late Soviet era called Kanch (Call), which collected aid from Georgia’s Armenians for the Nagorno Karabakh war effort. Apparently in response to this, the Union of Armenians of Georgia (Vrastani Hayeri Miutyun) emerged in the early 1990s. According to Mikaelyan, “all the directors were chinovnicks [officials, bureaucrats], members of the Raikom or the Party, I don’t know, chinovnicks. It was clear from the start that the government decided to establish an Armenian organization in the name of its bureaucrats, to theoretically work on Armenian issues.” Mikaelyan claimed that the three major figures in this organization, Gennadiy Muradyan, Van Baiburt, and Armen Banduryan, retained close ties to one another. Muradyan still headed an NGO, Baiburt (interviewed for this dissertation) served as an advisor to president Saakasvhili, and Banduryan was the director of the Armenian State Theatre (Tbilisi) and a member of the Georgian parliament. Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010

95 Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010. Mikaelyan claimed that the youth group Nor Seround (New Generation) was created as a counterweight to a youth group he helped organize, and was largely defunct except when a pro-regime press statement was needed.

96 Such organizations tended to be seen as the work of the Georgian Orthodox Church or the “Georgian KGB.” Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January, 2010. It was not possible to substantiate these claims, but it was an interesting corrective to Cotter’s “cultural security dilemmas” argument that purely “cultural” Armenian organizations were even seen by Armenians as threatening.

97 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
his newspaper, rather than accurately reported, because of the risk to interethnic relations and, implicitly, Armenians’ physical safety.

Of course, it would be good if the Georgian church said, ‘These are yours, take them’…But when this isn't happening, what should we be inclined to do? There are nearly 300,000 or more, 400,000 Armenians living here. Why would we [risk] our nation’s…Maybe I am overly cautious, but…writing and talking about [these issues], first of all, doesn't help to solve the problem, and second, can further inflame the situation.98

According to Baiburt, many Armenians also blew interethnic problems in Georgia out of proportion, assuming malicious intent where none existed. He insisted that claims that Armenians’ political rights were being violated hinged on comparisons with the quota-rich Soviet era,99 fervently denied the existence of any ban on Armenian-language print material entering Georgia, and suggested that stories about Armenian textbooks being rejected at the border were blatant fabrications. He saw oppositional groups as beholden to foreign, and especially Russian, interests, with Moscow attempting to divide Armenia and Georgia in order to keep both in check, and jeopardizing Armenian interests in the process, in spite of its strategic alliance and close relationship with the RA.100

Political Parties, Old and New

Pro-regime respondents also alluded to established diaspora support for oppositional groups, though Tbilisi respondents active in oppositional organizations claimed they were not supported – financially or otherwise – by external parties, and given the extremely low-budget nature of their operations, this seemed plausible.101

In Javakheti, numerous observers have linked the two most vocal Armenian

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99 This remark concerned political representation. He noted that in Soviet times there were 18 ethnic Armenian deputies in the Georgian Soviet, and only three in the current parliament, but insisted this did not indicate a violation of any rights.
100 He portrayed these machinations as only the latest in a long history of Russian betrayals of Armenian interests, dating back to the 19th century Russo-Turkish wars. Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010.
organizations, Javakhk and Virk, to established diaspora support, some vaguely pointing to “the Armenian Diaspora,” and others naming the Dashnak Party specifically, though even these claims fell short of suggesting Dashnak financial support or control, only “influence” over these activists. Baiburt suggested that Dashnaks were among the “selected forces” in Armenia with particular disdain for Georgia, and claimed Dashnaks were convincing Javakheti Armenians not to educate their children in Georgian, since the region would eventually become part of Armenia.

Such claims must be qualified throughout the post-Soviet space, however, where the Soviet-era vilification of the Dashnak Party and association of any Armenian “nationalist” activities with Dashnaks survived as a knee-jerk post-Soviet association, especially by authorities who feared the rise of Armenian separatism. Additionally, many Armenian activists appeared to be inspired by the general – and vague – Dashnak ideology (the need for a free, independent, and united Armenia) without being actual party members. But while the Dashnaktsutyun originated in pre-Soviet Georgia (Tbilisi, 1890), it had no official presence in post-Soviet Georgia, and while the unification of historic Armenian territories had been the party’s general raison d’etre since the genocide, its official position regarding Javakheti, according to the head of the party’s International Secretariat in Yerevan, was that it should remain a constituent part of a

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102 Øverland, 2010. The nature of such “support” was often left unspecified in such reports.
103 Guretski, 1998. No mention was ever made of the other two traditional diaspora political parties, Ramgavar and Hnchak. They appeared to have no presence at all in Georgia (or in the post-Soviet space, more generally).
104 Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010.
105 Guretski (1998) claimed that outlandish media claims in this regard were likely influenced by official Tbilisi fears of Armenian separatism, and that Tbilisi newspapers reported, with alarm, meetings between Javakheti activists and Armenian officials which were unlikely to have ever happened.
106 There is an unofficial presence, however. The Dashnak party in Yerevan has ties with the Georgian Socialist Party, and has representatives of some sort in Tbilisi. Navoyan, Yura. Interview, 29 June 2010.
federal Georgia. As a party competing in RA elections, the Dashnak Party’s occasional statements regarding the Javakheti Armenians’ rights within Georgia were arguably aimed at the roughly 100,000 Javakheti Armenians living – and voting – in the RA, and in any event, none of the Javakheti organizations had pressed their case for autonomy with Georgian authorities since 2006, even after the closure of the Russian military base. In other words, there was little evidence to support the oft-cited claims of a radical diaspora-influenced separatist agenda.

In fact, some oppositional Armenians complained bitterly that they were all but invisible to the established diaspora, claiming for example that “the diaspora isn't even aware of Javakhk's existence, that there even is a Javakhk…they aren't aware of the aggressive actions of Georgia.” Rather than joining traditional diaspora parties, some Javakheti activists were attempting to form political parties of their own. Specifically, Virk attempted to register as a political party several times between 1998 and 2006, and was denied registration by Tbilisi, because of a Georgian law prohibiting the formation of regionally based parties – a law intended to prevent the emergence of parties representing geographically concentrated minorities. Meanwhile, in spite of claims to the contrary

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107 Manoyan, Giro. Interview, 28 November 2009. Manoyan claimed this had been Dashnak party policy for the past several world congresses, held every four years.
108 As well as being a traditional diaspora political party in exile, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) or Dashnak party was a registered political party that competed in RA elections, and had at times formed part of the ruling coalition. Supporters and critics of the party alike tended to confl ate the RA-based and international wings of the party.
110 Överland, 2010.
111 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
112 Apparently, Virk claimed to have support beyond the Javakheti region, but this argument was rejected by Georgian authorities. Nodia, Ghia, and Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach, Eds. 2006. The Political Landscape of Georgia: Political Parties: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects. Delft, Netherlands: Eburon. 46.
by oppositional Armenians, some organizations in the established diaspora with no ties to political parties were helping the Javakheti Armenians, some quite visibly, as with Yerkir Union’s very public advocacy for Vahagn Chakhalyan.

In the RA, too, transplanted Javakheti Armenians were forming compatriotic organizations, think tanks, and political parties that appeared to advocate for Javakheti’s Armenians more than organizations in Javakheti itself. Their characterization of the Javakhetsis depicted a population so unaware of its rights that it could not defend them, with the implication that the predominantly rural Javakheti Armenians were essentially uneducated and leaderless. Eduard Apramyan, head of the Yerevan-based Neo-Conservative Union, repeatedly stressed the Georgian authorities’ violation of rights the Javakheti Armenians didn’t even know they possessed.

Karabakh was a separate political entity in the Soviet Union, it had institutes, people knew the laws. Javakhktsis are villagers, you see. From where do they get those laws? They are already oppressed from the start, and the Georgians use that in the most extreme ways…You know what I'm saying, they are their land. A man who lives on his land doesn't think about himself much. You can do whatever you like to him and he will suffer it.

Importantly, pro-regime Armenians in Georgia saw this sort of émigré activism as threatening, not only because of what they saw as exaggerated claims of oppression, but also because of the Georgian authorities’ tendency to attribute any Armenian pro-autonomy views to all Armenians in Georgia. Baiburt went further to suggest that, while blaming the Georgian government for Armenian emigration, Javakheti émigrés

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113 Apramyan described his organization as a proto-political party. Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
114 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010. This characterization was often pejorative, suggesting an almost primitive people, innocently unaware and exploited by a cunning adversary. The implication was that, given the right information (or perhaps, external leadership), Javakheti Armenians would become more assertive in defending themselves against the Georgian authorities.
115 Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
were themselves facilitating mass emigration from the region. He cited the example of one outspoken Javakheti Armenian living in Yerevan.

[He] came to Armenia…studied for free in Yerevan, only so that he could return to Javakhk and become a lawyer. He didn't go back. Besides the fact that he didn't go back, he helped his relatives and friends go to Yerevan to study for free and they stayed too. Nearly 11,000 people…have come since the 1990s from Javakhk to Yerevan to study for free…and they don't return. Is that love of one's nation?¹¹⁷

**Relations with the RA: Disillusioned, Ambivalent, Instrumental**

Despite considerable Armenian *societal* interest in their plight,¹¹⁸ most respondents in Georgia – and their compatriots in Armenia – were disappointed by the seeming lack of official RA action, and the prioritization of its own interests over theirs.¹¹⁹ Many suggested that the problems they experienced were best addressed bilaterally, but believed RA officials saw Georgia’s Armenians as a liability and, as such, refused to intervene on their behalf.

Their position on all of this is that we are a big headache for them. They need to have normal relations with Georgia, for the road to remain open, so that they, supposedly for Armenia, but in reality for their own pockets and their own businesses, can comfortably bring in goods.¹²⁰

This criticism tended to minimize the degree to which RA officials *did* engage bilaterally with their Georgian counterparts to discuss issues pertaining to Georgia’s Armenians. Some of these meetings seemed specifically geared toward stifling the Javakheti Armenians’ unrest, such as a 2005 meeting between presidents Saakashvili and Kocharyan in response to Javakheti Armenian protests against the planned closure of the

¹¹⁸ Apramyan suggested pro-Javakheti groups had succeeded in educating the Armenian public about the region since 2005, and thus, generating this interest. Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
¹¹⁹ Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010.
¹²⁰ Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010. Mikaelyan claimed that the Armenian Apostolic Church was likewise too “passive” regarding the return of Armenian church properties.
Russian base, but RA and AAC officials claimed to take advantage of every opportunity to raise ethnic and religious minority rights issues with Georgian authorities, and to be frustrated by the lack of progress on these files.\textsuperscript{122} Given the RA’s considerable disadvantage in terms of bilateral leverage, most respondents readily admitted they did not know what more the RA could do on their behalf, even if they exasperatedly wished it would “do something.”\textsuperscript{123}

Grassroots organizations in Tbilisi described being “ignored” by “inert” RA officials and the Embassy, whose behaviour they contrasted with what they perceived as Azerbaijan’s active intervention on behalf of Georgia’s Azeri population.\textsuperscript{124} Instead, such groups accused RA officials of cherry-picking pro-regime groups with whom to liaise. “There are normal forces, and there are sell-out forces…Many times [RA officials] talk to people whom they know represent the Georgian government. Why? Because that is comfortable for them, because that is what they need.”\textsuperscript{125} Baiburt agreed with this assessment, suggesting that RA officials generally disagreed with oppositional groups (and by implication, agreed with him). The one exception he saw was with the RA’s stated position that Armenian should be a regional official language in Javakheti, a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{121} According to Danielyan, this meeting resulted in a change of rhetoric, with United Javakhk no longer demanding the base remain in Javakheti, instead focusing on road repair and other economic issues. Danielyan, 2005; Anjaparidze, 2005.

\textsuperscript{122} Kirakossian, Arman. Interview, 19 March 2010; Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview, 12 Feb 2010.

\textsuperscript{123} There were exceptions, however. Some Javakheti activists saw the Armenian fear of border closure as overinflated. “Today we are in a position of being oppressed…because Georgia is very good at political bluffing with Armenia. If you don't do this, I'll close your road. If you don't hand over your activists, we'll close your road. Hinder my repressions in Javakht, and I'll close your road. Meanwhile, they have [effectively] closed the road already.” Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.

\textsuperscript{124} Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010; Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010; Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.

\textsuperscript{125} Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
\end{flushleft}
position promoted by oppositional groups. As observers have noted, the RA’s primary interest in Georgia was avoiding any conflict between Georgia’s Armenians and Tbilisi, and its choice of interlocutors appeared to reflect its interest in reducing the number of proverbial fires it would need to put out.

Beyond the desire for increased RA involvement on their behalf (coupled with the understanding that this was unlikely), there was little Georgia’s Armenians expected of Armenia’s foreign policy. While many of Georgia’s Armenian organizations agitated for recognition of the genocide, there were, according to respondents, plenty of Armenians in Georgia who were barely aware of it. There was also no generally held position on the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, the most pressing RA foreign policy issue at the time.

Coupled with this ambivalence on foreign policy was a general lack of affect toward the state itself. While most respondents felt some affinity for the RA, very few spoke of it as their “homeland.” Already living on what they claimed as their historic homeland, the Javakheti Armenians did not long for a homeland elsewhere, and with their lengthy history in a city largely built and at one time dominated by their ancestors, the Tbilisi Armenians were not particularly RA-regarding. In fact, while some sought higher education and/or better lives in the RA, for many Armenians leaving Georgia, Armenia was often no more than a temporary stop on the way to Russia. Since Georgian citizens had difficulty securing work permits in Russia, Georgia’s Armenians regularly

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126 Baiburt opposed this policy on the grounds that it would discourage Georgia’s Armenians from learning the state language. Baiburt, Van. Interview, 12 February 2010.
127 These efforts date back to the first president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Rotar, 1998; Nilsson, 2009: 141.
129 Some respondents saw the Protocols as a way to break the Georgian stranglehold on Armenia’s trade routes, and thus, a way to increase the RA’s leverage in addressing Armenians’ ethnic minority concerns in Georgia. Others opposed them out of general mistrust of Turkey, and due to the historical commission tasked with investigating the genocide issue.
130 Even though most Javakheti Armenians appeared to trace their ancestry to the eastern Ottoman Empire, most of their “homeland talk” referred to Javakheti.
obtained RA citizenship for the sole purpose of gaining entry into Russia. In 2010, Øverland estimated that up to 80% of Javakheti Armenians had at least one family member in Russia, sending up to $4,000 home in remittances per year.

Tbilisi Armenians, too, predominantly relocated to Russia. Mikaelyan suggested that, in addition to better economic prospects there, this was due to their fluency in Russian (and lack thereof in Armenian), and stereotypes they held about the lower-class nature of RA Armenians (and their purported disdain for Tbilisi Armenians). “It remains the same today. If you gave Armenians here the choice to go to Armenia or Russia, 90% would go to Russia.” Thus, unlike the huge flow of remittances and philanthropy from Russia to the RA, Georgia’s Armenians did not generally send funds to the RA, and instead, were the recipients of remittances from Russia themselves.

The general disappointment with RA officials extended to the Ministry of Diaspora. Many objected to its claim of jurisdiction over the Armenians of Georgia since, while most conceded that the Tbilisi Armenians were more or less accurately described as diasporans, the term was roundly rejected with respect to the Javakheti Armenians. Respondents also questioned the activities and efficacy of the ministry. While some thought its existence symbolically elevated diaspora relations to a higher level, they tended to believe it lacked efficacy. Among the grassroots Tbilisi organizations, most

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131 Since Georgia did not allow dual citizenship, doing this would effectively nullify their Georgian citizenship, all but ensuring any “temporary” labour migration would be permanent. Some respondents hinted, however, that there were ways of procuring an RA passport without obtaining actual citizenship.
132 Øverland, 2010. Hertoft (2006: 16) suggests that approximately 10% of Javakheti’s population had relocated to Russia, and a survey conducted in the Ninotsminda village of Eshtia found that 1700 of the 4000 villagers had left for seasonal employment in Russia. Wheatley, 2004:10.
133 Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
134 In 2005, it was estimated that 20,000-30,000 Javakheti Armenians sought seasonal employment in Russia each year. Danielyan, 2005.
135 One Yerevan-based activist described this as an insult to the Javakheti Armenians, and suggested another ministry should be formed with jurisdiction over Armenians living on their historic lands. Karapetyan, Samvel. Interview, 19 February 2010.
knowledge of the ministry was second-hand, since it had never made contact with them. Some interpreted this as yet another instance of RA authorities wanting nothing to do with Armenian organizations perceived by Georgian authorities as remotely oppositional.\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{quote}
For five years we have been organizing various things, sending materials, doing interviews…In other words, they know we are operating here. Not a single time has someone come from Armenia and said, “Come, let's cooperate,” or “come, let's help you with something,” or “what is your cause?” Nothing. Nothing from the Ministry of Diaspora.\textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

Privately, ministry staff (and other RA officials) spoke at length about the ethnic and religious discrimination faced by Georgia’s Armenians. They decried the vandalism of churches, claimed Armenians were being pressured to Georgianize their last names and assimilate, and discussed what they saw as linguistic discrimination.\textsuperscript{138} Publicly, however, Ministry officials tended to echo the Georgian authorities’ framing of the Javakheti Armenians’ problems as primarily economic, and urged Armenian businessmen to invest in Javakheti in order to provide employment and stem the tide of out-migration. Deputy Minister Stepan Petrosyan suggested that “There is no problem of Armenian’s [sic] preservation, but migration problem, that is economic problem as well,” but simultaneously noted that Georgian authorities were refusing to allow Armenian printed material into Georgia. “We hope the problem will be solved. There is no Armenian literature in Georgia. What is the ban aimed at?”\textsuperscript{139} While the ministry urged the diaspora

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010; Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
\item[137] Mikaelyan, Karapet. Interview, 11 February 2010.
\item[138] Confidential Ministry of Diaspora informants. Claims of linguistic discrimination were accompanied, however, by an insistence that learning Georgian would be beneficial to Javakheti’s Armenians.
\end{footnotes}
to invest, Georgia’s oppositional Armenian organizations hoped for the established
diaspora’s attention, moral support, legal assistance, press coverage, and lobbying (of
their host states), rather than financial assistance. 140 This sort of activity, which would
effectively bypass the official RA, 141 was clearly not what the ministry sought to encourage.

Armenian Church authorities in Georgia had a more positive view of the ministry,
perhaps unsurprisingly given the ministry’s prioritization of relations with church
officials. 142 Bishop Vazgen considered it insufficient to address community’s problems,
but nevertheless an important symbolic development.

They are aware of the issues facing our Georgian Armenians. But simply, it is
natural that they do not have the levers to solve these problems…But now, the
status of the diaspora has been raised…and probably the day will come when it will
be possible to productively work with our Minister of Diaspora. 143

Given the general poverty among Georgia’s Armenians, and their proximity to the
RA, it was no surprise that many participated in ministry programs, such as the “Come
Home” (Ari Tun) summer youth program, whose costs, other than transportation, were
covered by the RA. In fact, ministry staff noted that most of the participants in that
program were youth from Georgia, for whom the program amounted to a “free trip” to
Armenia. 144 Similarly, Ministry of Diaspora staff were quick to cite the number of

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140 Armenian Community of Georgia. Interview, 12 February 2010.
141 Apramyan indicated that he would prefer diaspora assistance bypass the RA entirely, and implied that
RA intervention was discouraging such direct contact. Apramyan, Eduard. Interview, 14 January 2010.
142 In 2011, after the research for this dissertation, a new church-run centre, “Hayartun,” was established in
Tbilisi, and its website mentions that the Ministry of Diaspora provided traditional instruments for its
143 Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen. Interview, 12 February 2010.
144 Exact figures were unavailable. This program billeted “diaspora” youth with families in the RA for two
weeks, during which time they participated in trips to historic sites and various cultural programming.
Unlike participants from farther afield, many of Georgia’s Armenian participants were not coming to the
Armenian textbooks sent to the Javakheti Armenians for use in their schools – 32,000 in 2009. But when pressed, they clarified that while these textbooks were sent by the RA, it was not the Ministry of Diaspora, in particular, that sent them.\footnote{Confidential ministry informant. Apparently, the textbooks were a general exception to the Armenian literature ban.}

\textit{Conclusion}

The Armenians of Georgia presented a sharp contrast to those living in Russia. They were divided geographically, with divergent interests in each locale, and into mutually antagonistic pro-regime and oppositional groups, the latter seen as threatening to the RA’s interest in stable Armenia-Georgia relations. With no Armenian “big-men,” there was no unifying hierarchy to mitigate these divisions and, at least publicly, present a coherent “community” position on any issue.

Financially, no big-men meant no philanthropy, either within Georgia or flowing to the RA. Instead, Georgia’s Armenians were a financial liability, with money flowing in from abroad (with potentially troublesome implications if the money were to come from the “wrong” diaspora groups). No big-men also meant there were no high-level, private alternatives to the “noisy” public airing of grievances, and no local alternatives to official RA involvement on the behalf of Georgia’s Armenians. From the perspective of the RA, relatively pro-regime\footnote{In order for a pro-regime big-man to appeal broadly enough, he would have had to use his private contacts to at least partially address the issues at the heart of oppositional grievances.} big-men would have been highly desirable in Georgia, however Georgia’s socio-economic situation was simply not conducive to their emergence.

The specific problems experienced by Georgia’s Armenians also made them less susceptible to the ministry’s reframing attempts. While they were happy to participate in RA for the first time, which seemed to be the general aim of the program. Azizyan, Zhenya. Interview, 29 January 2010.
RA-subsidized “diaspora” programs (like “Come Home”), the Javakheti Armenians in particular could not have been more opposed to the suggestion that they were diasporans. Faced by significant ethno-religious discrimination coupled with a lack of economic opportunity, their grievances were unlikely to be assuaged by cultural centres and language classes. Increasingly emigrating, primarily to Russia, they were unlikely to be convinced by hayadardsutyun (re-Armenianization in situ) arguments. And while Javakheti Armenians were inclined to pursue post-secondary education in the RA, and to stay after the completion of their studies, once there, they tended to agitate for the region’s autonomy, raising its profile among RA citizens and the established diaspora alike, and potentially undermining the RA’s attempts to maintain stable relations with its neighbour.¹⁴⁷

Because there was significant domestic and diaspora interest in the plight of Georgia’s Armenians, neither the ministry nor RA officials generally could afford to be seen as dismissive of their concerns. Nor could they be seen to be rhetorically reducing the Javakheti Armenians – widely perceived to be an indigenous group living on historic Armenian territory – to a “mere” diaspora community. This sheds light on the ministry’s apparently contradictory approach to the Javakheti Armenians, on the one hand denying they were part of “the diaspora”, while on the other hand, structuring its organization to treat them as if they were.

In short, Georgia’s Armenians were a known liability to the RA in its attempts to reframe Armenia-diaspora relations and craft friendly, RA-regarding diaspora

¹⁴⁷In spite of official Georgian concerns, and the potential for secessionist activity in the 1990s, by 2010 it seemed highly unlikely that any popular Javakheti movement would arise and attempt to secede from Georgia. Instead, Georgian and (especially) Armenian officials seemed to fear the possibility that the actions of a few individuals could be inflated into an international incident by oppositional groups, with negative repercussions for the RA. The Chakhalyan arrest was the perfect example of such an incident.
communities in the post-Soviet region. However, the ministry’s inexpensive projects, arguably of less significance in other, wealthier or geographically more distant regions, were of greater importance in Georgia. Textbooks and youth exchanges gave RA officials an inexpensive way to counteract accusations that they were “doing nothing” for the Armenians of Georgia. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the ministry’s ability to “pick winners,” raising the profile of organizations whose messaging it preferred simply by liaising with them (and ignoring those of which it disapproved) was an asset in terms of exerting influence over ethnic kin in a diplomatically sensitive region.

The Ministry of Diaspora sought to encourage the rise of an organized Armenian diaspora in Russia, and simultaneously curb the contentious behaviour of Georgia’s Armenians. The following chapter will explore the Ministry of Diaspora’s approach to the larger, and historically most contentious population of Armenians abroad, the established diaspora.

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148 It was difficult to discern whether anyone was convinced by these claims, but they would presumably have bolstered the claims of pro-regime Armenians in Georgia (i.e. respondent Van Baiburt) that oppositional Armenians were generally being unreasonable, and ignoring the good things both the Georgian and RA governments had done for Georgia’s Armenians.
Chapter 7
The Established Diaspora’s Slow Generational Shift

If the Ministry of Diaspora’s reframings of state-diaspora relations sought to highlight and reward the “big-man” model emerging in Russia, and to discourage the more troublesome nationalism in Georgia, what was their intended effect on the established diaspora, and how was this project received by the only Armenians known, until recently, as “the diaspora?”

This chapter explores developments in the established diaspora around the time the ministry was created in 2008, and the reactions to its existence and pronouncements. It shows, first, that the RA concern regarding the established diaspora in general tended to be, in fact, specific to Armenians in the US, whose critical and political inclinations RA elites sought to curb. Thus, the juxtaposition of the (good) Russian model of diaspora organization with the (bad) US one reproduced the Cold War-era stereotypes that had informed the worldviews of the current generation of RA officials.

The traditional established diaspora organizations showed no signs of disappearing, but shifting priorities within these institutions made the caricatures assumed by RA elites increasingly inaccurate. A “new generation” of organizations was also emerging, mostly oriented toward “voluntourism,” which increasingly situated the RA at the centre of diasporic identity and activity. However, there was virtually no chance of the “big-man” model emerging in the established diaspora. Despite the existence of very wealthy businesspeople engaging in philanthropy, there were no individuals seeking to translate this activity into community leadership. The big-man approach was also the solution to a “problem” not perceived as such in the established diaspora. While intercommunal rifts based on party or church affiliation were often lamented, those same rivalries had in fact
brought about a vibrant diaspora culture, and had arguably been key to the success of the US Armenian lobby. In short, there was no impetus for replacing diaspora pluralism with a unified hierarchical structure speaking with “one voice” for established diasporans.

Established diaspora criticism of RA elites had tended to all but ignore domestic corruption and human rights issues, focusing instead on foreign policy, especially relations with Turkey. This critique was scathing with respect to their negotiation of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, whose historical commission was perceived as having the potential to cast doubt on the veracity of the Armenian genocide. Criticism extended to the ministry, which established diasporans saw as specifically geared toward them, but inadequate to address the problems they saw in state-diaspora relationship. Many saw the government body as yet another cynical RA attempt to reduce their political influence and increase their financial contributions to the state. Attitudes toward the existence of the ministry divided rather predictably along partisan lines, with non-Dashnak organizations expressing more favourable positions.

Thus, the existence of the ministry did not, at least initially, appear to be reducing either the established diaspora’s partisan divisions, or its tendency for “noisy” critique of the RA. However, the ministry was able to gradually infiltrate the discursive field via the minister’s official appearances and speeches. In spite of Hakobyan’s questionable (Soviet) credentials and style, well respected and influential diaspora organizations increasingly, if reluctantly, acknowledged her as a legitimate authority figure. At the same time, established diaspora resistance toward the RA as the new “centre” of Armenian life was also gradually being tempered, in no small part thanks to a small, yet influential group of established diaspora “repatriates,” who were crucial sources of
information to their host state communities, and to a new generation of diaspora organizations that encouraged and facilitated diaspora engagement with “the homeland.”

The Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing of the state-diaspora relationship met a mixed reception. Its rhetorical replacement of repatriation with a “return to Armenianness,” while deeply offensive to actual repatriates, dovetailed nicely with both the traditional organizations’ de-emphasis of repatriation and the newer organizations’ focus on voluntourism and homeland experiences. The minister’s attempt to promote investment in the homeland as favourable to philanthropy, however, mostly fell on deaf ears. Her frequent pleas to invest in (and profit from) the homeland simply could not overcome the stereotypes of corruption and thievery that RA elites had themselves helped to perpetuate via the discourse of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund.

In short, the ministry’s attempt to provide an RA-appropriate model of behaviour for the established diaspora appeared to be successful only insofar as it was reflecting generational changes already underway in the established diaspora. It did not mute criticism of the RA’s foreign policy, increase investment, or spread the big-man model. However, the minister was an increasingly visible authority figure in the established diaspora, punctuating the otherwise sealed echo chamber of established diaspora discourse, and informing the old discussions with a new vocabulary of frames for consideration.

*Established Diaspora as US Diaspora.*

While established diasporans lived all over the world, respondents – RA officials and diasporans alike – nearly always equated the established diaspora with Armenians in
The Armenian-American “community,” whose population Zarifian estimated at approximately 1 million, was “the largest Armenian community outside of Armenia” in the late-1990s, before being overtaken by Russia. It was the product of at least three waves of immigration, the most recent being a substantial number of Armenians from the RA and other post-Soviet states. In fact, by 2009, Douglas and Bakalian concluded that “the latest influx of newcomers from the Republic of Armenia is now the single largest Armenian immigrant subgroup.” Portrayals of the established diaspora as a “monolith,” even in one host state, glossed over this diversity.

The US experience was in no way representative of the established diaspora experience. Host states in post-Ottoman Islamic world, “where the idea of religious or ethnic communities with identity and self government has some continuity and tradition,” differed markedly from Western secular democracies “which maintain a secular framework of unitary citizenship, allowing for some cultural expressions of community life.” In Middle Eastern states the AAC played a dominant role in the provision of social services, and the active involvement of Armenians in community life there differed

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1. References to Los Angeles, and to the heavily ethnic Armenian suburb of Glendale, were the most common. Interestingly, an increasing proportion of the Los Angeles-area Armenian community consisted of recent migrants from the RA, such that equating it with the established diaspora obscured this diversity.
2. Minimalist figures (such as the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2010 figure of 447,580) only included US citizens who declared Armenian ancestry, while maximalist figures included non-citizens, both legally and illegally in the US. Zarifian, 2014: 505. In 2009, the Ministry of Diaspora estimated the US Armenian population to be 1,600,000, with 1,200,000 in Los Angeles alone. Nikoghosyan, Arthur, interview, 18 November 2009.
4. Los Angeles was considered the top choice of emigration destination, though visas to the US were difficult for RA citizens to acquire. One respondent confidentially suggested that, if given visas and plane tickets, 99% of RA citizens would leave for Los Angeles, never to return.
sharply from North America where perhaps only ten percent of ethnic Armenians attended an Armenian church or were active members of Armenian organizations.

The US-focus of RA elites reflected the visibility of Armenians from the US in RA politics since independence, with three US citizens appointed to prominent posts: Gerard Libaridian, advisor to President Ter-Petrosyan, and Raffi Hovannisian and Vartan Oskanian, both highly regarded Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The contentious dual citizenship debate and its prohibition (until 2007), often appeared directly oriented toward keeping particular US citizens out of RA politics. Hovannisian described his “great odyssey” to obtain RA citizenship, in which both the Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan administrations withheld citizenship from him, even once he had officially renounced his US citizenship. “[I]nstead of making a positive example of that precedential act, the authorities wanted to show me my place, in opposition or in civil society, and they kept me stateless. I wasn't able to travel, including to my godfather/uncle's funeral.”

The suspicion of US Armenians reflected the lingering Cold War ideological rivalry, and the resentment RA citizens felt about the political and economic upheaval of

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8 Devejian considered Armenians in Canada more “actively” involved than those in most parts of the US, due to their more recent arrival from the Middle East. Devejian, Fr. Ktrij. Interview, 18 February 2010.
9 Devejian suggested that it was only in former Soviet communities that the church played virtually no role, though he admitted this was changing. “I can easily imagine, you walk into an Armenian home in Moscow and say, ‘Where's the Armenian church in Moscow?’ and they'll look at you and say, ‘I've never been there.’” Devejian, Fr. Ktrij. Interview, 18 February 2010.
10 Hovannisian suggested his appointment as first MFA was intended, in part, “to offer a formula in the nascent Armenia-diaspora relationship that would be based on national unity and integrity of the nation, and a grand national plan to harness all of our resources the world over.” Hovannisian, Raffi. Interview, 20 March 2010. Oskanian suggested that “the diaspora was also happy with the appointments, that they saw their representation in the state.” Oskanian, Vartan. Interview, 16 February 2010.
11 Before dual citizenship was legalized, one had to renounce one’s previous citizenship in order to be eligible for RA citizenship, however, the process for doing so was unclear. According to a confidential informant, certain celebrities, major diaspora donors, and Olympic athletes were granted RA citizenship without going through this process.
the Soviet collapse. Many associated the general naiveté of ‘the West’ about the former Soviet Union, “[thinking that] all of a sudden these countries are on the path of freedom and democracy and human rights,” with the established diaspora, and especially Armenians in the US. Early encounters with US-Armenian visitors, philanthropists, and investors, encouraged the proliferation of stereotypes about diaspora Armenians’ gullibility, wealth, and obliviousness to local custom, and made RA society resistant to the diaspora’s inclusion as an integral part of the nation.

**Diaspora Organizations: Continuity and Change**

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the RA’s independence, the traditional organizations faced a crisis of purpose, and many struggled to remain relevant, combining their deeply ingrained diaspora-oriented structures with the new reality of statehood. The Dashnak party remained a cohesive institution, and respondents noted that it was highly structured and disciplined, held regular meetings, and commanded the loyalty of its members. The Cold War schism that had divided Dashnak from non-Dashnak diasporans had outlived the Cold War, and for many people who had grown up in Dashnak circles, Dashnak affiliation was more of a movement or way of life than membership in a political party. Even its critics noted that this formula had been highly effective in preserving and promoting Armenian national identity.

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13 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
14 One manifestation of this loyalty was Dashnak – and even former-Dashnak – respondents refusing to divulge party “secrets,” such as membership figures.
15 Membership in the Dashnak party was considered membership for life, and there was no procedure for leaving the party. Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009. That said, many of my respondents considered themselves former members, who still adhered to the basic party ideology, but wished to distance themselves from its current activities.
16 One confidential respondent used the term hayapahpanutyun (protection of Armenianness) to describe this Dashnak party achievement. As noted in Chapter 4, hayapahpanutyun was also listed as one of the three main goals of the Ministry of Diaspora.
The Dashnaksutyun has a hierarchy of their Bureau, their supreme body, and then they have the regional bodies, and…local committees. And through this structure, they are able to organize, they are able to disseminate information, they are able to politicize people, they are able to organize themselves, and so forth. And they are very disciplined. Whereas the other organizations, they don't have that.\textsuperscript{17}

The Ramgavar and Hnchak parties, once significant forces in the established diaspora, had become increasingly incoherent entities, characterized by schisms, leadership struggles, and ageing membership.\textsuperscript{18} One respondent colourfully suggested that “The Hnchaks are three seventy-year-old men living in California right now.”\textsuperscript{19} Organizations with ties to these parties remained strong in the established diaspora, including the Ramgavar-affiliated Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), but their priorities had shifted so sharply toward projects in the RA that individual diaspora communities feared losing their own community infrastructure, such as schools, due to redirected funding.\textsuperscript{20} As one respondent suggested, the future of diaspora organizations (and diaspora identity) was inextricably tied to the new state, and those that were not adjusting were “probably dwindling away.”\textsuperscript{21}

While all three established diaspora political parties had attempted to establish themselves in the independent RA, the Ramgavar and Hnchak presence in Armenia was no more than symbolic. There were numerous small political parties bearing variations on those names in the RA, but it was unclear what their actual link was with the international entities, which had themselves undergone schisms, with notable confusion over their

\textsuperscript{17} NGO worker, NKR.

\textsuperscript{18} Aghanian suggests that as Soviet ideology was discredited, the ideological legitimacy of pro-Soviet diaspora parties was also undermined. Aghanian, 2007: 117.

\textsuperscript{19} Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.

\textsuperscript{20} Kasbarian, 2009: 102.

\textsuperscript{21} Merdinian, Shushan. Interview, 17 October 2009.
structure and leadership in 2009-2010. Some RA citizens had been attracted to these parties due to ideological leanings or, perhaps more often, opportunism, while others noted that the association with the diaspora suggested they were “clean” parties, not marred by the usual corruption associated with RA politics.

Far more than the other two, the Dashnak party held symbolic significance in the RA for having formed the government of the First Republic, and then having been vilified as nationalist by the Soviet government. Some Dashnaks had fought on the front lines in the NK conflict as well, contributing to their reputation as heroic nationalists.

[T]he Hayastantsis, they had still their memories of Andranik and Dro, who fought on this territory...[it] was a party that was forbidden during the communist times. So...for them it was the only nationalistic party...in those years of Karabakh war and all that, of course this was such an emotional thing.

The Dashnak party was seen as having had the potential to effect change in RA politics, as the only party “with a true ideology [and] a coherent policy on the Armenia-Turkey issue, whether we agree or disagree.” Once the Dashnak party established an RA wing, an actual political party competing in RA elections, failure to live up to this

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22 Yeritsian, Gevorg. Interview, 27 November 2009. In 2009, the only member of any of these parties who held office was Ernest Soghomonyan, head of the Social Democratic Hnchakyan Party of Armenia, and a member of the National Assembly (where he was elected as a member of the “Prosperous Armenia” bloc). His rival, Lyudmila Sargsyan, claimed to head the Social Democratic Hnchakyan Party, which was a member of Ter-Petrosyan’s opposition coalition, the Armenian National Committee (ANC). Both claimed to have been chosen as leaders by the international wing of the party, and neither was forthcoming about the size and membership of “their” party in the RA. Hakob Avetikyan, Editor-in-Chief of the Azg Daily newspaper, was also the Chairman of the Ramgavar Azatakan (Liberal) party in Armenia, though he, too, had a rival claimant: Harutyun Arakelyan. Avetikyan, Hakob. Interview, 15 January 2010. Soghomonyan, Ernest. Interview, 23 December 2009. Sargsyan, Lyudmila. Interview, 9 February 2010.


25 Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009. In fact, there were very few established diasporans of any political stripe involved in the conflict, but the contributions of some, especially Monte Melkonian, achieved the status of legend. Melkonian’s biography (written by his brother) mentions only a handful of other diasporans on the front lines, many formerly associated with ASALA. Melkonian, Markar. 2005. My Brother’s Road: An American’s Fateful Journey to Armenia. London and New York: I. B. Tauris. 241-248.

26 NGO worker, NKR.

almost mythical status disappointed RA citizens and established diasporans alike.28

“They say it sold out to the government, to the authorities. And many in the diaspora also feel that way…that they are only for position and power.”29 Respondents reported discontent within the traditional ranks,30 and disagreement between the international Bureau and the RA wing of the party.

The RA wing was seen as increasingly embroiled in the same corrupt dealings that characterized the other RA parties.31 In other words, the Dashnak party was no longer regarded as oppositional. Other opposition party members noted that the Dashnak party had only disagreed with the authorities – and left the ruling coalition – over the Protocols issue, but had failed to speak out against corruption, monopolies, or human rights violations in Armenia.32 It had not only failed to condemn the March 1, 2008 government crackdown, but had even defended the regime’s response to what it described as an attempted coup d’état.33 Some respondents suggested that even their opposition to the Protocols was not taken seriously, and that the RA Dashnak party served as a convenient source of toothless opposition, giving Sargsyan the ability to claim opinions were being

28 The RA Dashnak party and the international Bureau (in Yerevan) were seen as separate, but linked, organizations. The RA wing consisted primarily of RA citizens, and many respondents claimed they were businessmen with ties to the ruling authorities. In elections, the RA Dashnak party remained marginal, with the support of perhaps 10% of the electorate. As one respondent noted, “it's the attack dog that lives nextdoor, but many people don't feel comfortable putting them in power.” Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
29 NGO worker, NKR.
30 Partly in response to disappointment with the Dashnak party’s (no-longer-oppositional) role in the RA, by 2013, a nascent organization, Armenian Renaissance, had formed in the established diaspora, with numerous chapters worldwide, which appeared to be primarily oriented toward supporting Founding Parliament, a new RA opposition movement led by established diasporan and NK war hero, Jirair Sefilian. www.armenianrenaissance.org.
32 Levon Zourabian, Headquarters Coordinator for the Armenian National Congress, then the largest political opposition bloc/coalition in the RA, described the leaders of the RA wing of the Dashnak party as corrupt businessmen, no different from the members of party in power. “[T]hey are all engaged in corrupt businesses, and nobody actually distinguishes them from other oligarchic groups in Armenia…they also have, how to say, clanbish kind of family connections, for instance, Van Hovannisyan has a very close relationship with Serge Sargsyan.” Zourabian, Levon. Interview 15 January 2010.
freely expressed in the RA, and making his own position appear more moderate. In short, while the Dashnak party remained a force to be reckoned with, its legends and stereotypes were increasingly inaccurate representations of the organization’s activities.

“New Generation” Diaspora Organizations

Increasingly, younger generations of established diasporans felt marginalized by the traditional institutions that had effectively acted as a sort of “diasporic government,” and were choosing to channel their energy toward new organizations, or “forging a direct and real-world relationship with Armenia.” This gave rise to what Tuncel has called “new generation diaspora organizations,” which sought not only to rise above “unproductive partisan controversies,” but also to pursue a new agenda focused on the RA and fostering diaspora-RA ties. Organizations such as Armenia Volunteer Corps, Birthright Armenia, and Land and Culture Organization were US-based “voluntourism” organizations focused on bringing young diasporans to the RA to “establish strong linkages between Armenia and the diaspora, aid the development of Armenia and contribute to the construction of the extra-territorial Armenian ethno-

34 Yeritsian claimed that while the international Dashnak party was a source of serious opposition to the Protocols, its link to the RA wing of the party kept such opposition from becoming a serious impediment to RA plans to sign on. In his view, RA authorities retained a crucial trump card in any conflict: the ability to threaten Dashnak party members with imprisonment on corruption charges. Yeritsian, Gevorg. Interview, 27 November 2009. This was also the view of Zourabian. Zourabian, Levon. Interview, 15 January 2010. Kasbarian, 2009: 82-83.
35 Other new, non-traditional diaspora organizations included those appealing to previously marginalized diasporans, such as the Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society (GALAS). It did not appear to have an RA orientation, and instead, focused on LGBTQ issues among Armenians in the US. http://www.galasla.org The organization was clearly inspired by Birthright Israel.
36 While Land and Culture Organization (LCO) was founded in France in 1977, it registered a US affiliate in 1987. http://www.lcousa.org/about-lco/our-vision
37 Other new, non-traditional diaspora organizations included those appealing to previously marginalized diasporans, such as the Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society (GALAS). It did not appear to have an RA orientation, and instead, focused on LGBTQ issues among Armenians in the US. http://www.galasla.org
38 The organization was clearly inspired by Birthright Israel.
Birthright Armenia’s RA Country Director, Sevan Kabakian, described its purpose as “incentivizing” volunteer opportunities, by covering the airfare and many of the other expenses of young diaspora Armenians volunteering with one of its partner organizations (Armenian Volunteer Corps, Land and Culture Organization, etc.). 40 These organizations arranged volunteer opportunities in the RA and NKR, ranging from teaching English to renovating historic monuments.41 Kabakian described the impediment to RA-diaspora cooperation as one of “too many silos,” of entrenched and isolated positions between which there was too little communication and understanding. 42 The goal of these organizations was to facilitate longer-term43 contact with RA citizens, and increase the feeling among diaspora Armenians that they were stakeholders in the wellbeing of the RA. And indeed, many people who had repatriated had originally come to the RA as volunteers in similar programs, and noted the importance of these experiences to their future involvement. “[W]hether it's the way that you see life in Armenia, the way that you view politics in Armenia, the way that you view...institutions outside of Armenia, it changes because you've had an opportunity to be part of life here.44

Not only were these “new generation” organizations a departure from the organizations that had dominated established diaspora life, but they were often most

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40 To be eligible, participants were expected to have at least one Armenian grandparent, and be between 20 and 32 years of age. Kabakian, Sevan. Interview, 18 October 2009.
41 Land and Culture Organization, which organized the restoration of Armenian heritage sites, had also sent volunteers to Northern Iran and Kessab, Syria. http://www.lcousa.org/campaign/completed-projects/12-historiacal-armenia
42 Kabakian, Sevan. Interview, 18 October 2009.
43 As compared with short holiday visits of one or two weeks, in which established diasporans were likely to stay in a Yerevan hotel and engage primarily in sight-seeing.
44 Merdinian, Shushan. Interview, 17 October 2009. This was exactly Minister Hakobyan’s vision for the ministry’s “Come Home” (Ari Tun) program. “I want to call on all our diasporans, especially those parents who spend money, hire teachers, and send their children to Armenian schools, etc., and want them to grow up Armenian, spend a portion of that money on a ticket and send your children to me. I'll do the rest. All they have to deal with is the cost of the ticket. I'll return Armenianized children to their parents.” Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
meaningful for those who had been the least “actively Armenian” in their host states. According to a number of respondents, diasporans who were only part Armenian, did not speak the language, and had few connections to Armenians in their host states were sometimes better able to connect with the RA than full-blooded, “fully entrenched” members of diaspora communities, who arrived with preconceived notions of “their” homeland. One such Birthright Armenia volunteer in fact found socializing with her established diasporan colleagues more of a culture shock than life in the RA. Aghanian has suggested that these “more professional task-oriented non-partisan associations” were part of a shift that signaled the “liberation of previously marginalized Armenians who experienced a renewed homeland orientation and were able to by-pass the traditional cleavages in establishing relations with the Armenian homeland.” Thus, despite Minister Hakobyan’s alarmist rhetoric around mixed marriages, language loss, and assimilation, it was these partly “assimilated” diaspora youth that were visiting and “discovering” an Armenianness associated with, and framed by the RA, rather than by their diaspora parents and their traditional political institutions.

No Established Diaspora “Big-men”

The hegemony of the traditional parties may have been waning in the established diaspora, but a confluence of factors made the “big-man” model of diaspora organization an unlikely replacement. First, political culture among established diasporans involved adherence to programmatic parties, rather than charismatic leaders. There was extreme

45 Kabakian, Sevan. Interview, 18 October 2009.
46 Bissell, Chelsea. Interview, 6 November 2009.
47 Aghanian, 2007: 120. While she does not explain this point, Aghanian also suggests that the RA government had a policy of “favouring non-traditional Armenian organisations, particularly in America…” Aghanian, 2007: 162.
48 The lack of understanding of personality-driven politics was, according to one respondent, one of the primary established diaspora misunderstandings of the RA, where “politics right now, and for the past
loyalty to the traditional organizations, but so little focus on their leadership that the names of such figures were almost never mentioned in interviews. Wealthy US Armenian philanthropists were a much more salient topic of conversation, but they did not appear interested in becoming spokespeople for their communities. In fact, the most prominent of these major donors, Kirk Kerkorian, whose Lincy Foundation funded over $230 million of projects in Armenia from 2001-2008, was known for “insistent avoidance of public recognition of his efforts.” And unlike the new community organizations in Russia, the new generation organizations in the established diaspora sought to diversify their sources of funding, rather than relying on a single patron.

Second, the wealth-power nexus that gave rise to Russia’s “big-men” was a poor fit with stable liberal democracies such as the US, where ethnic groups, and other interest groups, were expected to wield influence through registered lobbyists, rather than personal connections and backroom deals. These sorts of deals may still have occurred, of course, but would have been seen as a subversion of legitimate process, rather than the usual way of doing business.

several years, has been driven by three men, the first president, the last president, and the current president...It's not about parties, it's not about platforms, it's about people and personalities, in a negative sense...at least [the Dashnachtsutyun is] a real political party, grassroots, bottom-up, in structure and in form. Whether you like it or not, it's true. Here it's just the opposite...it's all top-down, there's no bottom-up.”


49 Kerkorian famously refused to allow any project he funded to be named after him. “Kirk Kerkorian: Profile of a generous billionaire and people’s hero who has made a lasting impact.” 2009. Armenian Reporter. 23 October. The smaller Tufenkian Foundation was named after wealthy founder James Tufenkian, and was almost entirely single-donor-funded, but the organization did not attempt to represent US Armenians in any way, nor did it have any political inclinations in Armenia. Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.

50 Birthright Armenia was founded by Edele Hovnanian, who in 2009-2010 remained a significant financial contributor to the organization. But according to Kabakian, “we moved beyond the point of being a single-financial-source organization, because for the long-term health and vitality of the organization, you really need to diversify.” Kabakian, Sevan. Interview, 18 October 2009.

51 Oskanian emphasized this basic difference. “Well, there's no [Russian] lobbying tradition, the mechanisms there are not in place, and the political system does not allow it. It's more individualistic; maybe you get more out of knowing the president or somebody in a high place, and get results, rather than do grassroots as it is in the United States.” Oskanian, Vartan. Interview, 16 February 2010.
Finally, there was arguably no perceived need for unifying community leaders. The intracommunity rift between Dashnak and non-Dashnak organizations was accepted as a normal, if sometimes regrettable, aspect of established diaspora life. It was fodder for jokes, rather than serious hand-wringing.\(^\text{52}\) In fact, while the Ministry of Diaspora portrayed established diaspora partisanship as an undesirable impediment to efficacy, Gregg suggests that in the US, the existence of an inter-community rivalry and competing lobbying organizations (ANCA and AAA, respectively) actually increased Armenians’ lobbying efficacy, since it led to a doubling of projects and a “hyper-mobilization” of resources.\(^\text{53}\)

In various established diaspora locales, “coordination councils” had sprung up to facilitate joint action by competing groups, but these loose arrangements in no way resembled the hierarchical Union of Armenians of Russia. In Los Angeles, the United Armenian Council for the Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, formed in 2010, was clearly a limited, single-issue collaboration, and coordinated action on the least controversial issue among established diasporans.\(^\text{54}\) Likewise, France’s *Conseil de Coordination des Organizations Armeniens de France* had a rotating presidency among the traditional organizations, and seemed to do little other than issue occasional joint statements on commonly agreed topics.\(^\text{55}\)

In short, no new model seemed likely to replace the contentious political party system that had been the mainstay of established diasporic life. However, the rise of “new

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\(^\text{52}\) One joke (referencing the Cold War-era rift between the Catholicosates of Etchmiatsin and Antelias), suggested that if a single Armenian washed up on a desert island, he would build one church on one side of the island, then build another one on the other side so he would have a church not to go to.

\(^\text{53}\) Gregg, 2002.


generation” institutions, and their popularity among younger diasporans, suggested that slow, generational change would ultimately curb the influence of the old parties.

**Criticism of RA elites and politics**

The established diasporan penchant for “criticism” of the RA was so widely bemoaned that it had virtually assumed the status of national myth. Hakobyan had not only expressed exasperation at such “noisy” strategies of dissent, she even elevated them to the status of security threats.

That sharp commentary, those…hurtful, dirty comments that are made about our state, our country, they really sting. And I am of the mind that diaspora Armenians [have] to be useful to their state. Inside Armenia, please, go ahead and say whatever you like…But if you write these things in France or Canada…who profits from that? The Turks. We don't live in peaceful conditions…think carefully.”

There were plenty of editorials and kitchen table complaints about the level of political and economic corruption in the RA, and more specifically, about the theft and misuse of diaspora charity, but little direct or *organized* diaspora criticism of this behaviour, let alone demand for reform. To the contrary, according to some observers, even some established diasporans considered public criticism of Armenian domestic politics shameful. At the second Armenia-Diaspora Conference in 2002, for example, when diaspora Armenians from France spoke out against the lack of democracy in the RA, “The reaction among many of the diasporan participants was, *amot* [shame]! Don't say that, *amot*! Which to me, the reaction was more interesting than the actual criticism.”

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57 Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009. Aharonian confirmed that, living in diaspora, there was enormous pressure to emphasize only the positive aspects of Armenianess. Aharonian, Lara. Interview, 17 October 2009.
One respondent suggested that established diasporans reserved critique because, while they followed the letter of the law in their host states, many abandoned their own scruples when it came to their dealings in the RA. “…I think they become so emotional…and so thrilled by the idea of shaking hands with a president or a prime minister, that all of a sudden, all their standards drop.” Others suggested that diasporans, who payed little interest to domestic RA politics, were incapable of effective critique. According to one repatriate’s description of the 2006 Armenia-Diaspora Conference,

you had gangsters in suits speaking to the diaspora, where local Armenians and people like me who live here knew who the bad guys are, but most of the diasporan guys were clueless…You had Hovik Abrahamyan, the Speaker of Parliament - he's the biggest gangster in the country, and not very good at hiding it - as one of the keynote speakers. But, I mean, no one knew in the auditorium, if you will.59

Collectively, the established diaspora had not imposed conditionality or standards when making financial contributions. One respondent claimed they “could have acted as a checks and balances system,”60 and used their position of financial power to criticize the oligarchy and insist on democratic standards of government.61 Instead, one respondent noted that when foreign governments or international organizations decried RA corruption, the established diaspora tended to close rank, and defensively support the regime with more charity, much of which would continue to be siphoned off. This vicious cycle was not only failing to help needy Armenians, it was “spoiling this country.”62

58 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
59 Confidential informant. This finding echoes Jourde’s (2007: 485) assertion that “Leaders in weak states do hold a crucial advantage over hegemonic states [and their citizens]: they have a better understanding of ‘what is going on’ in their country.”
60 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
61 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
62 Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010.
Established diaspora organizations also tended to pay little attention to the RA political opposition, or to human rights concerns, such as abuse in the army, women’s equality or the scourge of gender-based violence. While individual diasporans often did support civil society initiatives, they avoided issues that would bring them into direct conflict with the RA government. This seeming unwillingness to rock the proverbial boat was often attributed to the established diaspora’s traumatic origins, leading to “an ingrained traditional agenda based on human survival and political stability,” and a penchant for “verticality” in its political parties, organizations, and churches. But the fact that the RA remained so peripheral to diasporan identity also helped explain the general disinterest in conditions inside RA borders.

The Genocide and the Armenia-Turkey Protocols

With their continued focus on history and the genocide, established diaspora organizations seemed little more than distant observers of present-day RA politics. The Armenia-Turkey Protocols (hereafter, the Protocols), signed in October 2009, brought this dynamic into stark relief. Following closely on the heels of the March 1, 2008 events, in which authorities attempted to suppress protests following an election widely

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63 This disinterest may have reflected the traditionalism and conservatism among diasporans themselves, including adherence to traditional gender roles. Douglas, Bakalian, 2009: 69.

64 Apparently, diaspora organizations that had opposed the cutting down of forests to mine copper had run into “problems” with the government afterward, and had ceased their activity related to that issue, leaving only poorly funded local groups to protest the mining. Confidential NGO worker.

65 Hovannisian, Raffi. Interview, 20 March 2010. Likewise, Kasbarian (2009: 85) noted that “Armenian diaspora institutions have traditionally seen the shepherding of the Armenian flock as their foremost mission, often resulting in a top-down prescriptive approach.”

66 Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009. RA authorities, too, lamented the apparent detachment with which the established diaspora viewed the RA, but certainly would not have welcomed increased scrutiny of democracy and human rights, which they perceived as “criticism” of Armenia.

67 As one Yerevan-based think tank report suggested, “Perhaps, this is the reason why during a research often a general feeling appears that one is dealing with archives.” Noravank. 2014. Diaspora’s Standpoints on Republic of Armenia Geopolitical Orientations. Yerevan: Noravank.
perceived as falsified, killing 10 protesters and imprisoning hundreds of opposition members, the established diaspora’s fever-pitched attention to the Protocols was juxtaposed to its lukewarm reaction to the March 1 events.

Many in the established diaspora felt blindsided by the Protocols process which, given its inextricable link with the memory and consequences of the genocide, was no simple bilateral negotiation. As one commentator noted, “This is why the sudden and poorly thought out Armenia-Turkey protocols touched such a raw nerve. Simply stated, diaspora Armenians telegraphed that they wished to contribute to any epochal developments that concerned everyone…”

The RA government’s approach to the diaspora’s anticipated hostility was perceived by many as disingenuous. Sargsyan’s four-country tour to promote the Protocols – one week before signing them – was undertaken too late have been a genuine attempt to solicit opinions or feedback, but was instead an opportunity to present and justify a fait accompli. The hostility he encountered in Beirut, Paris, and New York, including large public protests, was to be expected, but the noisy opposition (much of it from Dashnak-affiliated groups) was portrayed as the response of the established diaspora, even though a substantial number of “influential but less visible organizations, including the AGBU, the AAA, and the Apostolic church, all backed [Sargsyan] and the Protocols, only more quietly than the opponents.” Opposition hinged on the historical commission which would engage in “impartial and scientific examination of the historical records and archives to define existing problems and formulate

69 de Waal, 2015: 230. The AGBU’s support was reiterated by a confidential informant affiliated with the AGBU. Interview, 16 March 2010. Likewise, in Rostov-Na-Donu, Russia, the response to the Protocols was described as supportive, though my respondents had indicated a much more diverse set of views.
recommendations.” This response was described by RA elites and the press as hostile and “emotional”, even though doubts about the wisdom of the historical commission were shared by many well respected scholars.  

Many respondents linked the entire Protocols process, which garnered a huge diaspora outcry, to domestic political corruption, which barely registered. One suggested that RA officials were “desperate for a foreign policy success, because of the internal lack of legitimacy [especially] March 1st and the post-election crisis.” Aharonian described the established diaspora’s approach to the March 1st events as “disinvolvement,” with one organization, ANCA, even decrying Chinese police brutality in Tibet that same month, while voicing their support of the RA’s election results and refusing to condemn the RA police crackdown that killed 10 protesters. Compared to the subsequent outcry about the Protocols, “[W]here were they with the same vocal criticism regarding March 1st and the killing of Armenian citizens? I mean we're not talking abstract here, we're talking about innocent people being killed.”

While many established diaspora respondents understood the RA’s foreign policy conundrum, they saw “Eastern Armenians” as unable to fully comprehend the magnitude of what they appeared willing to trade away for normalized relations. Meanwhile, the

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70 Scholarly responses did not question the intentions of the RA government (unlike some of the protesters, who suggested they were “traitors”), but rather, felt that RA authorities, so keen to open the border, were walking into a diplomatic trap. Mouradian, Khatchig. 2009. “‘Leave It to the Historians’: Scholars from the Diaspora Reflect on the Commission.” The Armenian Weekly. 19 October. Accessed 4 January 2015. http://armenianweekly.com/2009/10/19/leave-it-to-the-historians-scholars-from-the-armenian-diaspora-reflect-on-sub-commission-on-the-historical-dimension/


72 Aharonian, Lara. 17 October 2009.


74 Kassouny, Vrej. Interview, 10 January 2010. Nearly all diaspora critique of the Protocols pertained to the historical commission, and almost none to the economic or social implications of opening the border. One exception was Shirinian’s concern that the economic opportunities to be gained from opening the border would in fact only benefit the RA’s “economic tycoons” in search of “lucrative business deals,” thus advancing “antisocial and antidemocratic monopoly capitalism.” Shirinian, Razmig B. 2010. “Reflections
established diaspora’s seemingly myopic focus on the genocide was seen by those in the RA as desperately out of touch. Yet, in addition to the established diaspora organizations that had supported the Protocols, opposition parties in the RA had opposed the historical commission aspect of the agreement, considering it an unacceptable “question mark on the veracity of the genocide.” In other words, at least on this issue, the RA-diaspora dichotomy was exaggerated to the point of caricature.

The established diaspora was often portrayed as the main impediment to normal interstate relations with Turkey, but ultimately, neither of the most important post-war developments between the two states had hinged on diaspora support or lack thereof.

First, as de Waal notes, while Turkey had never officially established relations with post-Soviet Armenia, the ultimate closure of the Turkey – Armenian border came on April 4, 1993, in the wake of the 1993 Armenian seizure of the Kelbajar region of Azerbaijan, as part of the ongoing NK conflict. Turkey sealed the land border out of support for Azerbaijan.

Second, the ultimate failure of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols had nothing to do with diaspora opposition. Both the RA and Turkey signed the agreement, but once again, the NK conflict proved to be “the fatal issue”. Out of allegiance to Azerbaijan, which insisted on issue linkage, Turkey failed to ratify the agreement. This pattern suggests that established diaspora criticism, while certainly an irritant to RA authorities,
was not the most important impediment to the state’s foreign policy priorities. In fact, given the dramatic results of established diaspora lobbying since independence, especially in the US, it would be reasonable to conclude that it had been a net foreign policy benefit to the RA.  

Ministry of Diaspora

For many respondents, the Ministry of Diaspora was an ill-conceived attempt to placate a diaspora increasingly characterized by donor fatigue. They noted that its mission was unclear, and that the services it appeared to provide were unnecessary. In other words, established diasporans saw the ministry as an institution created for them, and it fell far short of their expectations. Many perceived the ministry’s biggest shortcoming to be its inability to communicate effectively. “They don't know how to do PR…If you are a Ministry of Health, maybe you can live without that, but when you are the Ministry of the Diaspora, you need to have those PR skills.”

You're the Ministry of Diaspora, [but] all your press releases are only in Armenian. Secondly, you don't know how to use email…If you want to bridge the diaspora, you have to use Facebook, Twitter, I mean, reach out…What, are you going to send a letter, or a fax?

The ministry’s online output was considered amateur, with one commentator noting that its online Virtual Museum of the Armenian Diaspora “resembles a hastily concocted high school homework project rather than something emanating from a government ministry.”

Critiques also extended to the minister, whose Soviet past (as a Komsomol
official)\textsuperscript{84} was reflected in her communication style. As one scholar has noted, Hakobyan’s hyperbolic speeches to diasporan audiences were “full of agitation.”\textsuperscript{85} Even when interviewed, Hakobyan seemed to be addressing her remarks to a large audience of would-be adherents.\textsuperscript{86} While some suggested she be given the benefit of the doubt, others viewed Hakobyan’s community visits with cynicism, questioning whom she would meet and for what purpose.\textsuperscript{87} “[I]f her role is to shake hands with diaspora organizations and participate in the opening of this and the opening of that, in my opinion, [there is] not anything beneficial with that.”\textsuperscript{88}

Established diaspora repatriates, too, were critical of the ministry. One respondent noted that its budget reflected the degree to which diaspora relations were a government priority. “The fact that a Ministry of Diaspora was formed, on the one hand, could be seen as the government being serious about the diaspora, but the fact that it’s underfunded gives the opposite message.”\textsuperscript{89} According to another,

It would be different if it was a diaspora ministry with a whole lot of resources, to use the authority of the state to protect some diaspora assets that need protection,

\textsuperscript{84}According to Giragosian, appointing a Komsomol official “Sends the wrong message. In fact, my advice to Sargsyan, before he became president, when he was a candidate, was give it to [Vartan] Oskanian…. because he didn't want to keep Oskanian as Foreign Minister, and doesn't like Oskanian. I argued that would be perfect, a diasporan head of the Diasporan Ministry, and someone of that stature, to take it seriously.” Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.

\textsuperscript{85}Tuncel, 2014: 102, n. 237.

\textsuperscript{86}In the midst of an answer to my question regarding what role the diaspora could play in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Hakobyan began passionately addressing her remarks to the entire diaspora. “So, dear diaspora in Canada, America, France, England, Germany, put pressure on your governments.” Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.

\textsuperscript{87}Concerns included the photo opportunities which would inflate the egos certain prominent diaspora Armenians. Some notable diaspora critics of the RA reined in their criticism once they were asked to be on the minister’s advisory board. Confidential informant.

\textsuperscript{88}Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.

\textsuperscript{89}Papazian, Pegor, interview, 7 February 2010. Papazian was, at the time, the CEO of the National Competitiveness Foundation, a 50-50 partnership between the RA government and a group of prominent Armenian businessmen.
Venice, Jerusalem, Vienna, [etc.] … But that’s not what this diaspora ministry is supposed to do, that’s not it’s mandate.90

The organization’s services also seemed ill-suited to the needs of established diasporans, who often required help with visas, business registration, customs issues, and the dual citizenship process. Respondents reported that those seeking help with such matters left disappointed, and felt that the ministry’s existence did not in fact signal a state policy encouraging repatriation, which they felt was sorely lacking.91 As one repatriate suggested,

I think they're just there to say to the diaspora, you know, we acknowledge you, that's why we created the ministry, but we're not very serious...because if they're really serious, then they'll start...creating strategic plans to bring Armenians from abroad to live here.92

This concern was echoed by Giro Manoyan, Director of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak party) International Secretariat Bureau in Yerevan, who argued instead for a Ministry of Diaspora and Repatriation.93

There was considerable resistance to the ministry’s reframing project. Established diaspora criticism of the expanded definition of “diaspora” was scathing, with one commentator citing, as a serious flaw with the ministry,

[t]he inability to draw a distinction between the Diaspora as a political entity that was borne as a result of being forced to settle in foreign lands due to deportation, massacres and Genocide and the communities that have popped

90 Ghazarian, Salpi, interview, 5 November 2009.
91 Maria Titizian, interview, 14 January 2010. The process of applying for dual citizenship, ten-year residency status, or even visa renewal, required a visit to OVIR (Office of Visas and Registration), an institution whose staff were famous for being rude, arbitrary, and maddeningly slow to process applications (unless bribed). The Ministry of Diaspora’s existence did not change the need to interact with this dreaded institution. According to Titizian, “the way they treat people at OVIR would signify that the government really doesn't want any diasporan Armenians here, otherwise they would fix up that institution in a second.” In fairness, non-diaspora businesses also found dealings with government unhelpful and cumbersome, and noted an overall lack of consultation regarding legislation pertaining to them. “Growth Challenges and Government Policies in Armenia.” 2002. 6-7.
92 Lara Aharonian, interview, 17 October 2009.
93 Giro Manoyan, interview, 28 November 2009.
According to Avetikyan, the genocide was the seminal event that united all diasporans, and the existence of a post-Soviet “diaspora” troubled the otherwise solidly defined category. \(^95\) Likewise, the ideal of “one nation, one homeland” was viewed with skepticism by many established diasporans. As noted by historian Talin Suciyan, while the RA was probably “dear” to all Armenians, it could not be a common homeland.

There exists a diaspora which doesn't belong to Armenia: it was created before the independence of Armenia... It is the diaspora of western Armenians. There is also a diaspora formed after Armenia's independence that's comprised of individuals from Armenia. The approach of official Armenia to somehow link these two realities and call them one diaspora is a figment of the imagination. \(^96\)

Likewise, the ministry’s focus on discrete “communities” was rejected as a strategy that “diminishes our Diasporan reality to nothing more than pockets of Armenians living in different worlds.” \(^97\) One respondent suggested this portrayal was a thinly veiled attempt to diminish the diaspora’s power. \(^98\) And as one respondent remarked, the attempt to elevate certain diaspora groups over others was blatant. “For example, with this Armenia-Turkey business, they are giving more weight to those organizations that say ‘ok’ to the Protocols...” \(^99\)

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\(^95\) Avetikyan, Hakob. Interview, 15 January 2010.


\(^97\) Khachatourian, 2012.

\(^98\) Kassouny, Vrej. Interview, 10 January 2010.

Established diasporans often stressed that the Ministry of Diaspora did not amount to diaspora political representation in the RA.\(^{100}\) This was considered to be yet another form of symbolic exclusion from the polity. Despite Hakobyan’s insistence that “the diaspora” had wanted such a body, the general consensus was that the ministry was aggressively dictating a mission that did not correspond in any way to their needs.\(^{101}\) The result was, according to one respondent, worse than no ministry at all, because its appearance as a token gesture insultingly implied that the government did not take the diaspora seriously and was not interested in genuine engagement.\(^{102}\)

Critics of the ministry, it should be noted, tended to also be critical of the pre-ministry status quo. According to Beylerian, for instance, the ministry’s predecessor, the Diaspora department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, implied that “the Diaspora was a foreign entity”.\(^{103}\) The ministry had its institutional supporters, including the Armenian Apostolic Church and the AGBU.\(^{104}\) But since the AGBU was traditionally a non-Dashnak institution, the existence of the ministry did not appear to be smoothing over the differences between the two camps. Nor did it appear to be blunting the established diaspora’s penchant for “noisy” critique. In fact, it was now often a new target for the same public criticism Hakobyan and other RA officials frowned upon.

\(^{100}\) Suciyan noted that, as an RA government appointee, the Minister of Diaspora represented the government, not the diaspora. Suciyan, Talin, qtd. in Martirosyan, 2014; Beylerian, 2008. When a diasporan had been Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hovannisian, Oskanian), diasporans seem to have felt there was at least a nod to the diaspora in government. Under Sargsyan’s administration, there were no diasporan ministers at all.

\(^{101}\) Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009. Respondents were virtually unanimous in their disapproval, and often did not mince words. One respondent confidentially referred to the ministry as “a waste of time and space.” Another sighed, “Oh god, what a nightmare, what a disappointment.”


\(^{103}\) Beylerian, 2008.

\(^{104}\) Confidential informant affiliated with the AGBU. Interview, 16 March 2010. In spite of the church’s support, there were individual priests who confidentially took issue with its mission and efficacy.
Punctuating the Discursive Field

Early established diaspora impressions of the Ministry of Diaspora were generally skeptical. However, while she may have had few “converts,” Hakobyan had been able to punctuate the diaspora discursive field by insinuating herself into diaspora events as an official representative of the Armenian state. In just her first year as minister, Hakobyan made 12 official foreign visits, each of which involved meeting with numerous diaspora organizations and making multiple public speeches. She also officially welcomed visiting organizations and addressed their conferences. As such, she became a familiar figure in conference proceedings, photos and videos. Beginning in 2009, Hakobyan even began appearing in diasporan couples’ wedding photos, as part of the “With the Blessing of My Homeland” wedding initiative. Prominent established diaspora organizations, such as the Zoryan Institute, published Hakobyan’s letters of congratulation on their websites, and regularly named her in lists of dignitaries and event attendees. The minister was appointed to various advisory boards (including that of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund). And the Ministry of Diaspora’s own website, while often criticized for its amateur appearance, produced daily content translated, if poorly, into multiple languages.

105 The visits were as follows (in chronological order): Syria, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, USA (California), Canada, USA (Washington DC), France, Spain, USA (New York), Italy, Poland. She also accompanied President Serge Sargsyan on his four-country Protocols promotion tour (2-8 October 2009), and five other official presidential visits. Armenia - Diaspora Partnership, 2009: 341-353.
106 According to a ministry affiliate, her one-week visit to France included 60 different meetings. Mgrdichian, Nayiri, interview, 10 December 2009.
107 Diaspora Armenians getting married in the RA could apparently register for this program, in which the minister would attend the wedding and give her official best wishes to the couple. At one such wedding, Hakobyan advised the couple to have at least three children and preserve Armenian family traditions. She also presented the bride with a watch and reminded the couple “to return to the Homeland on time.” “Wedding with the Blessing of my Homeland.” 2010. Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia. 12 January. Accessed 18 January 2016. http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/News/595
Hakobyan’s speeches were flamboyant, full of emotional appeals and grand, sweeping generalizations. She described a diaspora desperate for connection with its lost homeland, and a mother country willing to protect its children, wherever they may be.\textsuperscript{109} She regularly made use of domestic “home” and “hearth” metaphors to invoke the warmth and intimacy of kith and kin,\textsuperscript{110} and spoke of the spirituality and sacredness of the homeland.\textsuperscript{111} She instructed diaspora Armenians in proper behaviour, not only toward the RA, but even within their own families. A proponent of “traditional Armenian family values,” Hakobyan advocated large families and advised women to know their limits.\textsuperscript{112}

As a former Komsomol official with no diaspora-specific training, Hakobyan’s authority to speak as a diaspora expert derived entirely from her position. And yet, while she and her ministry remained targets for criticism, they were at least not ignored as irrelevant. As a legitimate representative of the Armenian state, and with (albeit meagre) state resources at her disposal, the Minister of Diaspora became an authoritative voice able to infiltrate the diaspora discourse with the RA’s preferred renderings of the state-diaspora relationship.

\textit{Repatriation}

For established diasporans, the idea of “repatriation” to the RA involved, as Aghanian has suggested, “a process of double imagination as the majority of Armenians

\textsuperscript{110} Hakobyan explained her frequent use of these terms to me, noting that the “home” referred to Armenia itself, while the “hearth” was a small corner of that home “where you try to keep and defend Armenian traditions, customs, and language, most importantly.” Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010.
\textsuperscript{112} “Traditional Armenian Woman is Good Mother, Daughter, Wife: RA Diaspora Minister.” 2010. Epress.am. 8 October. Accessed 8 October 2010. http://www.epress.am/FNew.aspx?nid=5721 This was interesting advice from a successful politician and one of the two female ministers in the RA.
in the Diaspora do not originate from the Republic of Armenia.”113 It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of the Jewish repatriation to Israel on the Armenian “double imagining.” The Zionist ideological mass repatriation movement of Jews to Israel loomed large in all discussions of Armenian repatriation, and served as the ideal typical model against which the failure of diaspora Armenians to flock to the post-1991 “homeland” was judged. Within established diaspora scholarship, it was common to find references directly applying the Jewish repatriation model to Armenia. “Can we remain effective in exile—vis-à-vis our motherland? Should half of the Diaspora consider returning to Armenia in a final Aliyah (ascent in Hebrew, when referring to the immigration of Jews to Israel)?”114 Yet, as Suny has noted, the story of the formation of Israel more closely resembles the founding of Soviet Armenia, “a part of the ancient ‘homeland’… reconstituted as a national state to which dispersed Armenians could return under the protection of a great power.” During the Soviet era, it had been “demographically Armenized with the in-migration of Armenians and the sometimes involuntary deportation of Azerbaijans.”115

Unlike Israel’s law of return, which granted people of Jewish heritage instant citizenship on arrival,116 the RA did not do so, but its 1995 citizenship law did allow people of Armenian descent to bypass the three-year residency requirement, language

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113 Aghanian, 2007: 166. It is thus important to qualify the word, “repatriate” in the context of established diasporans. Though many “repatriates” themselves downplayed the relevance of the distinction between Eastern and Western Armenia, those choosing not to repatriate tended to consider it a salient issue.
114 Kéchichian, 2010: 18. Respondents often made the Israel-Armenia comparison. “If you take Israel for example, where they have a very good strategy to bring people from outside, here they don’t have that, they don’t care.” Aharonian, Lara. Interview, 17 October 2009.
115 Suny, Ronald Grigor. 2001. “Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations.” The Journal of Modern History 73 (December): 885. This distinction matters since, already full of Armenians, the newly independent RA did not require in-migration in order to become an ethnically Armenian state.
test, and constitutional knowledge demanded of non-Armenians seeking RA citizenship (though it still required a vague term of residence in the state). Before 2007, dual citizenship was against Armenian law, and few diasporans were willing to renounce their existing citizenship, especially those in stable Western democracies. Since its legalization in 2008, dual citizenship had been available to ethnic Armenians without a residency requirement, though political rights (voting and holding office), were contingent on residency.

In addition to citizenship, Israel offered new Jewish immigrants substantial settlement benefits, such as assistance finding employment, Hebrew lessons, housing allowances, and health insurance. Armenia provided no such assistance to repatriates, and also did little to assist them with the labyrinthine bureaucratic processes required. The Minister of Diaspora claimed to have worked to simplify these procedures, but in 2010 my respondents still described a maddeningly opaque, corrupt, and seemingly arbitrary system. Few diasporans thought the RA could afford to offer settlement benefits, but many felt that the removal of formal and informal bureaucratic obstacles to repatriation would have amounted to a credible signal of welcome.

The RA had seen very few established diaspora repatriates since 1991, despite the traditional diaspora political parties’ promotion of return to a free and independent

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117 See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the dual citizenship controversy.

118 According to many respondents, the process for renouncing other citizenships and then obtaining Armenian citizenship was vague and circuitous, such that most considered doing so a risky proposition. Most repatriates had made do with temporary residence permits.


120 Segal et al., 2010: 232.

121 Moreover, they felt RA state officials specifically discriminated against, as established diasporans, demanding larger bribes than they did from locals, and according to one confidential informant, refusing to allow the use of Western Armenian when filling out forms (even when spelling one’s own legal name).

122 When I asked state officials about repatriation policy, they consistently indicated that the RA was unable to encourage repatriation because it could not afford to do so (i.e. offer settlement benefits). In this way, they framed the issue in terms of an inability to provide services most diasporans did not expect.
Armenia as an ultimate goal. One respondent estimated that 8-10,000 established or “classical” diasporans resided in the RA, most spending only part of the year there, but most suggested the numbers were much lower. As noted in Chapter 4, Hakobyan’s assertion was that “hundreds” had repatriated. In 2009, there seemed to be two categories of established diaspora repatriates in Yerevan: Armenians from the West, most of whom had come to Armenia for employment with international organizations, established diaspora organizations, or civil society groups; and those from the Middle East, most of whom had either come to study in Armenia, or to open small businesses, such as bars and restaurants.

Of the repatriates from the West, few had been “Armenian Zionists,” ideologically committed to moving to the RA. Instead, most were “accidental” repatriates, who had come for limited term employment contracts, and then put down roots when they found more permanent employment or gotten married. Alex Sardar, who had moved from the US to work on a USAID project, was typical.

I didn't come to Armenia because I had always wanted to move to Armenia…I feel very fortunate that I haven't had to make a decision between my now-fairly-sophisticated love for Armenia…and my professional ambitions. [I would not have stayed] in Armenia for the sake of staying in Armenia, to do just anything that came up. I didn't go to school for that long to do that...

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125 Nearly all repatriates lived in Yerevan. A handful had moved out of the city (usually within commuting distance), often after living in Yerevan for a few years, and a small number had moved to the NKR.
126 Since many of the “Western” established diasporans had been born in Middle Eastern states and migrated, and many of the “Middle Eastern” established diasporans spoke English or French, there was much cultural similarity between them, and they tended to form a cohesive “repat” social group.
127 Four of my respondents seemed to have made ideologically motivated decisions to move to the RA with their families. Others had had inclinations, but had waited to move until employment became available.
128 Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010.
Most repatriates were satisfied with their lives in the RA, but with few exceptions, they were able and willing to leave for better job prospects or their children’s education, and in fact, a number of people considered repatriates during my field research in 2009-10 had already moved away by 2015. Others spent large portions of the year abroad. Thus, the notion of “repatriation” was a slippery one, and the diaspora experience of mobility and transience had translated into an approach to the RA as one of many potential destinations. As one repatriate noted, “not any more there is this issue of forever. As long as Armenians decide to live here for a part of their life, I consider them as a repatriate.”

Repatriates felt increasingly alienated from the established diaspora, but not entirely “at home” in the RA either. Many noted they had been considered “crazy” by fellow diasporans for repatriating, and those who came to the RA expecting to be “change agents,” were disillusioned by local resistance. Some found acceptance as full members of RA society elusive. One repatriate noted that, even after over a decade living in the RA, he was reluctant to discuss domestic politics in public, since it was frowned upon for diasporans to express criticism of the authorities.

For repatriates raised in an ideological environment that encouraged “repatriation talk,” the dearth of established diasporans “returning” to the RA was a source of deep

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129 Giragosian estimated that most diasporans moving to the RA took a “50-60% pay cut, and that’s if you’re lucky.” Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
130 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
131 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009; Devejian, Fr. Ktrij. Interview, 18 February 2010.
132 “They try to impose change, and obviously I’m generalizing here, but the imposition of change is what gets rejected here very quickly.” Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010.
133 Kassouny, Vrej. Interview, 10 January 2010.
134 The Dashnak party’s “To the Homeland” slogan, (“Depi Yerkir,” or “Tebi Yergir” in Western Armenian) was a case in point. Dashnaks were taught to see themselves as future repatriates to a united, free, and independent Armenia.
disappointment. They saw the commonly cited reasons for not repatriating—that the RA was not the Armenia from which most established diasporans’ ancestors fled and, for Dashnaks, the hostility of the Ter-Petrosyan era—as feeble excuses.

I tell you, there are many people I know [who] were always very gung-ho, [and now] they say, well that's not really Armenia...I think it's a cop-out, I think they just needed something to say to make themselves feel better, so they can convince themselves of why they didn't actually fulfill the promises and the pledges they made in the 1970s and 80s. [But] how can you be standing in Etchmiatsin and say this isn't Armenia?

Some respondents suggested a critical mass of repatriates would catalyze positive change in the RA. Others saw repatriation as an alternative to sending money to the authorities, or suggested diaspora generosity should fund the repatriation of those willing to move, rather than other charitable activities. Some had even started organizations and websites dedicated to promoting repatriation to Armenians from the West. Nevertheless, there was an understanding that most people living in developed states would not willingly relocate to a developing one, and that, for most established diasporans, life in their host states was no longer experienced as exile.

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135 Raised in France, Armen Rakedjian (who preferred to be called Armen de Shushi since relocating to the town of Shushi), claimed he was one of only ten repatriates in all of NKR, and claimed to be living a life diaspora Armenians dreamed of (though he also complained that he had been bankrupted by local authorities when he attempted to start a business).
136 One Soviet-era repatriate noted that, ten years after Ter-Petrosyan left office, Dashnaks had still failed to repatriate en masse. Yeritsian, Gevorg. Interview, 27 November 2009.
137 Devejian, Fr. Ktrij. Interview, 18 February 2010.
138 Respondents offering figures ranging from 25,000 to 50,000. Merdinin, Shushan. Interview, 17 October 2009; Yeritsian, Gevorg. Interview, 27 November 2009.
139 Rakedjian, Armen. Interview, 5 February 2010.
140 Kassouny, Vrej. Interview, 10 January 2010.
141 One group, started by repatriates, hoped to convince 3500 Armenians from the West, or “AFW” to pledge to move, then do so en masse once they had gathered the requisite number of pledges. https://armenia3500.wordpress.com Another group did not appear to distinguish between Western and post-Soviet repatriates, portrayed RA natives who had spent a few years abroad and returns as “repats,” and sought primarily to provide information to potential repatriates. http://repatarmenia.org/eng/
142 Devejian, Fr. Ktrij. Interview, 18 February 2010.
Instead, the bulk of established diaspora repatriates were likely to come from the Middle East\textsuperscript{143} because of a perceived closeness of “mentality” that made adjustment to the RA less jarring,\textsuperscript{144} and pressing economic and security reasons for Armenians to consider leaving these states. Respondents mentioned high unemployment (Syria and Lebanon), declining education standards (Syria) obligatory military service (Syria), restrictions on personal freedom (Iran), and war (Iraq) as motivations to move to the RA. However, they lamented that it was “not being facilitated,” the implication being that the RA government ought to in some way encourage repatriation.\textsuperscript{145}

Deteriorating host state conditions had in fact prompted a small, yet significant, influx of Armenians from Iraq to the RA, during and after the Iraq war.\textsuperscript{146} Shortly after the field research for this dissertation, Syrian citizens began leaving that state in large numbers due to the carnage of civil war. Many of Syria’s Armenians fled to the RA, but like their counterparts from Iraq, they did not find the RA to be a particularly welcoming environment, and few were able to find work.\textsuperscript{147} Aside from authorizing its consulates to fast-track citizenship and passport processes, there was reportedly little assistance granted to them by RA authorities,\textsuperscript{148} including the Ministry of Diaspora,\textsuperscript{149} and many left for

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesubscript{143} Confidential informant affiliated with the AGBU. Interview, 16 March 2010.
\footnotesubscript{144} Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009. Respondents indicated factors such as the lack of democracy and free speech, lower levels of economic development, and entrenched patriarchy.
\footnotesubscript{145} Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009; Kassouny, Vrej. Interview, 10 January 2010. There was reportedly a village in NKR that had been populated by Syrian Armenians, but I was unable to find any information on this group, or travel to the village (due to heavy snow and bad roads).
\footnotesubscript{146} Giragosian, who estimated they numbered 800-1000 families, suggested that dual citizenship became significant in enabling their migration to the RA, but also, that they had difficulty integrating into RA society due to linguistic differences and inability to find employment. Many of the Iraqi-Armenians, having acquired dual citizenship, had moved onto other destinations.
\footnotesubscript{147} Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
\end{footnotesize}
other states where they hoped for a better reception. By July 2015 it was estimated that, of the 17,000 Syrian citizens that had fled to Armenia, 5,000 had since left. 150 The lack of RA assistance was a shock to some. As one refugee told a reporter, “We helped Armenia when it needed [us]…Now it’s time Armenia supports us.” 151

**Repatriates as RA-Diaspora Mediators**

Repatriates were often critical of both RA corruption, economic monopolies, government priorities, and general lack of capacity, 152 and the established diaspora’s seemingly myopic focus on the genocide and Turkey at the expense of RA domestic politics. They were deeply resentful of established diaspora “criticism” from afar, and most expressed the view that the privilege of criticism should be reserved for those who lived in the RA (locals and repatriates). One respondent described diaspora criticism, even of everyday interactions, as a way to assert power and privilege over RA citizens. 153

They complain for the sake of complaining, and I really honestly believe…that it’s a power play...when a diasporan sits in a restaurant and complains about the service, they are in a position of power, because they have the money…the passport


150 Hakobyan responded defensively to questions about what her ministry was doing for the Armenians of Syria, saying “Who says the ministry should publicize all its activities?” Grigoryan, 2012a.


152 Papazian described the lack of basic capacity inside government ministries as “catastrophic,” with most staff unable to write a basic paper, and institutional structure utterly lacking. He saw the situation as only marginally better in the private sector, since most businesses faced little real competition, and believed it was exacerbated by out-migration. As the director of a public private partnership promoting targeted sectoral investment, he based this view on extensive dealings with both sectors. Papazian, Pegor. Interview, 7 February 2010.

153 Aghanian notes that the power struggle has been a mutual one. In their relations with members of the established diaspora, RA citizens “have a strong desire to assert what they have and what they know but what they have and what they know is very limited, by international standards.” Aghanian, 2007: 167.
or the accent or the hair colour [that] allows them to be in a more powerful or authoritarian position than the server, or the manager, or whoever else.\textsuperscript{154}

Some suggested that repatriates themselves were overly critical of the RA. One even admitted to avoiding other repatriates because of their incessant complaining.\textsuperscript{155} But regardless of the opinions expressed, whether and how much the established diaspora ought to “criticize the RA” was as much a central theme in repatriates’ thinking about the state-diaspora relationship\textsuperscript{156} as it was for RA elites.

Many repatriates questioned the validity of the diasporan/RA Armenian dichotomy, feeling that neither label accurately applied to them. Avetikyan, who had moved to Armenia from Lebanon in 1991, considered himself a Western Armenian living in Armenia.\textsuperscript{157} Merdinian was “an Armenian, first and foremost…I just happen to have been born in the diaspora,”\textsuperscript{158} and Kabakian considered “divisions, even definition divisions [as] detrimental to us moving forward as a people.”\textsuperscript{159} Yet, in a sense, repatriates reproduced the domestic-diaspora divide by considering presence inside the RA a prerequisite for appropriate critique.

With a foot in both camps, repatriates often acted as a conduit for relatively balanced information about the RA to their host state communities. Many blogged, posted regularly on social media, wrote editorials to the diasporan press, and gave

\textsuperscript{154} Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010. Many of these critiques were specific to tourists (and more specifically, Armenian-American tourists). While most tourists in the RA were ethnic Armenians, it was not uncommon to hear non-Armenian tourists and NGO employees also complaining about the service in Yerevan’s bars and restaurants.
\textsuperscript{155} Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
\textsuperscript{156} Repatriate respondents raised this theme themselves in nearly every interview, and tended to be very animated when discussing it.
\textsuperscript{157} Avetikyan, Hakob. Interview, 15 January 2010.
\textsuperscript{158} Merdinian, Shushan. Interview, 17 October 2009.
\textsuperscript{159} Kabakian, Sevan. Interview, 18 October 2009.
interviews in which they offered their unique insider/outsider perspectives on potentially divisive developments in the RA.

One example pertained to a 2014 incident during a domestic violence trial in the town of Gavar, Armenia, in which an RA social movement leader by the name of Robert Aharonyan\(^{160}\) accused the victim’s supporters of trying to destroy the traditional Armenian family by spreading European values. He accused them all of being diasporans (only some were), and told them to “Go the --- back to your country…go back to your diaspora…the day will come when we will deport you...”\(^{161}\) In an interview the following day, Maro Matossian\(^{162}\) stressed that this was an isolated individual whose offensive views did not necessarily reflect those of RA society toward the diaspora, but also encouraged diaspora Armenians to pay closer attention to human rights issues in the RA.

The issue is that we, as a community, Armenians all over, it’s enough [of building] churches and buildings. I think it’s time to address social issues. We want to have a country that’s somewhat in the line of international or universal human rights.\(^{163}\)

Some of these repatriate “letters home” were more closely aligned with official RA discourse. In the wake of the 2008 presidential election which brought Sargsyan to power, widely considered to have been fraudulent, one repatriate noted that Armenians living in the US criticized the authorities using “language bordering on the hysterical and offensive,” and he cautioned them that “Armenia is not the United States,” and that

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160 Aharonyan was reported by the press to be the head of a marginal political party called Armenian-Russian Union, which had no apparent links to the Union of Armenians of Russia.  
http://en.aravot.am/2014/05/09/165119/  
162 Maro Matossian was also known as “Mary” Matosian. The interview, in English, was clearly targeted toward an established diaspora audience.  
163 While Matosian decried the man’s comments about the diaspora, she also lamented the lack of Ministry of Diaspora attention to the matter. Matosian, Maro. 2014. “Bigotry in a Small Town.” Interview with Maria Titizian, CivilNet. 8 May. Accessed 14 January 2016. http://civilnet.am/2014/05/08/maro-matossian-struggling-against-discrimination/#.VpfO40uQn8E
“every Armenian, whether in Armenia or in the diaspora, has a solemn responsibility to support and encourage the maintenance, strength and endurance of our statehood.”\textsuperscript{164}

Despite the potentially invaluable role played by such repatriates, the Ministry of Diaspora did not appear to prioritize its relations with them. It did not collect statistics on the number and origin of repatriates, it had no repatriate-oriented programs, it had no repatriates on staff, nor did Hakobyan seem to have seriously consulted with them about the ministry’s structure and priorities.\textsuperscript{165} This lack of official attention was surprising given the minister’s claims to the contrary.

And if there is so much as one [repatriate], we have to manage our relations with that person. So we have to have policies, repatriation related laws. We need to establish projects, funds, the conditions for their education, health, work-related questions, to protect and support the state.\textsuperscript{166}

\textit{From Repatriation to “Return to Armenianness”}

The Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing efforts shifted the conversation from repatriation (\textit{hayrenadardzutyun}) to a “return to Armenianness” (\textit{hayadardzutyun}).\textsuperscript{167} Even though the ministry had a department officially dedicated to “Repatriation and Investigations,” its actual output was unclear. In interviews and speeches, the minister and her staff focused more on the impediments to repatriation than on ways to facilitate it,\textsuperscript{168} and it was clear that there was no state policy to encourage established diasporans to

\textsuperscript{165} According to Giragosian, Hakobyan met with him once to tell him, rather than ask him, about some of the ministry’s projects. Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
\textsuperscript{166} Hakobyan, Hranush, interview, 18 March 2010.
\textsuperscript{167} See Chapter 4 for a discussion of these two terms.
\textsuperscript{168} In a speech during a conference on the ill-conceived Soviet-era repatriation initiative known to Armenians as \textit{Nerkaght} (see Chapter 2), Hakobyan’s focus was on how Soviet Armenia was “not ready to receive” the large number of repatriates, and how even though “Newly independent Armenia is a mother to all Armenians and will be the protector of its children,” the RA had “no right to make mistakes again.” She implored diasporans to engage in a “return to Armenianness” as a “new type and new quality of
repatriate to the RA. While few established diasporans may have been willing, the RA’s reluctance was interpreted as symbolic exclusion akin to the resistance to granting dual citizenship.\(^{169}\)

Yet, the ministry was not the only institution shifting the conversation away from repatriation. Traditional established diaspora organizations, too, appeared to have quietly de-emphasized the pre-independence emphasis on repatriation as a long-term goal. While the Dashnak party’s official goals still included the “gathering of worldwide expatriate Armenians on the lands of United Armenia,”\(^{170}\) repatriation had largely fallen off the party’s agenda, and was not discussed at meetings and conferences.\(^{171}\) On the one hand, it was apparent that, for some established diasporans, any Armenia that did not include “their” historic regions (i.e. Western Armenia) would never amount to “the homeland.” On the other hand, while the concept of return from exile to a homeland may have “legitimize[d] the role of various Diasporic organizations by giving them the ‘task’ of preserving the nation…until it is time for return,”\(^{172}\) once conditions in fact allowed for that return, it was not in the interest of traditional organizations to see their communities, and the source of their authority, gradually disappear.\(^{173}\) Thus, there was no established diaspora outcry about the ministry’s reframing, and its only serious detractors were the very small number of established diaspora repatriates themselves.

\(^{169}\) One repatriate suggested the RA did not want established diaspora repatriates, since they would reveal the state’s corruption to other members of their host state communities.


\(^{172}\) Kotchikian, 2009: 467.

\(^{173}\) Aharonian noted that reactions to her decision to move to (and stay in) the RA had been incredulous. “And there's no help if you move, it's more this attitude of discouraging you than encouraging you, starting from the family to the community…” Aharonian, Lara. Interview, 17 October 2009.
Helping Armenia via Investment vs. Philanthropy

In 2009-10, there were numerous examples of prominent established diaspora investors in the RA, such as Argentina-Armenian billionaire airport mogul, Eduardo Eurnekian, who operated Armenia’s Zvartnots International Airport. For most established diasporans, however, calls for a shift from philanthropy to investment in the RA tended to fall on deaf ears. The aversion to investment stemmed partly from the experience of early investors in the 1990s who were regularly swindled out of their property by unscrupulous local partners, but also included more recent cautionary tales. Respondents in the RA tended to offer the same few examples of successful small diaspora-owned businesses, but even those running comparatively successful operations (i.e. restaurants and bars) complained of harassment by RA authorities (often over vague legal “violations”) and gangsters running protection rackets.

As much as the unscrupulous locals fleecing innocent established diaspora investors had assumed the status of legend, the RA had itself helped to perpetuate this stereotype via the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund. The Fund, which channeled diaspora giving to state-controlled priorities, presented itself to diaspora Armenians as a rare island of integrity amidst a sea of corruption. As Executive Director Ara Vardanyan noted, even other charitable organizations in the RA could not be trusted.

They would want to repair a school, but then they would come for the opening and they would see that the school is half renovated and the money’s gone. We are here to secure the amounts provided to us; we are the only one who undergoes financial and physical audit…Whatever others do, it’s not

174 One repatriate from France to the NKR, claimed to have started a small business and gone bankrupt due to the arbitrary enforcement of “regulations.” Rakedjian, Armen. Interview, 5 February 2010. In 2009-10, some RA locals admitted to/bragged about charging established diasporans more for services and cheating them out of their money. While other locals expressed shock at such discussions, there did appear to be a general consensus that it was “less wrong” to cheat a diasporan than a local.

175 Square One, an American-style restaurant chain owned by two established diasporans from Lebanon and Cyprus, was mentioned frequently as a success story.
audited and nobody knows the quality and the quantity of money spent on a project.\textsuperscript{176}

These messages served to reinforce the notion that the RA was a dangerous place for diaspora investors. And, moreover, as noted in Chapter 4, the Fund’s primary focus on basic infrastructural development (roads, water, etc.) suggested an Armenia still grappling with basic needs, rather than an attractive investment climate.

Respondents offered differing opinions on the dearth of established diaspora investment in the RA. Most agreed that the investors, who were much more numerous in the 1990s, left “because most of them were robbed!”\textsuperscript{177} Others, though, suggested that established diasporan businesspeople contributed to their own demise by forgetting “the rules of the game.” Led by their emotions, they failed to hire lawyers or accountants, do background checks on potential business partners, or sufficiently research their potential investments.\textsuperscript{178} Many also felt that RA political and economic elites were intent on keeping established diasporan contenders at bay, in order to preserve their own power within the state.\textsuperscript{179}

Respondents also saw the established diaspora as having squandered an opportunity to exert pressure on the RA via its charitable giving, which had been vital to the RA during the late-Soviet and early independence era. By the late-2000s its comparative volume and impact had drastically diminished, dwarfed by remittances, largely from

\textsuperscript{176} Vardanyan, Ara. Interview, 23 December 2009. For a dissenting view on the transparency and accountability of the Fund, see Manoogian, 2011.
\textsuperscript{177} Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
\textsuperscript{178} Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009. Staff members at the Ministry of Diaspora tended to (confidentially) stress this point.
Russia. Second, its RA-official recipients were now wealthy themselves. One NGO worker described her own experiences disbursing diaspora money in the RA.

I remember in the '90s, when I was to go to a ministry or to a government body, my God, we were kings! Now...through corruption, they have become tremendously rich, so in other words, if I come with a project, a hundred thousand dollar project, they say, ‘Ugh, what is that’?

Sardar described RA elites as “warlords,” who “manage power like in a war zone. It's a turf war, and it's about how you consolidate your power through material means…” With all the established diaspora’s money, their emotional preoccupation with charity and humanitarian assistance made them unable to assert power (or demand conditionality) in an economic “war zone.” In the vacuum left by the established diaspora, the RA government “asserted its own agenda, and unfortunately I don't think that that agenda always revolves around national or state interest, it revolves around individual economic and financial interest.”

Russia’s Armenians were eager, it seemed, to fill any voids left by the established diaspora. Armenian businessmen from Russia had invested and opened businesses in the RA, and the result, according to established diasporans, had been a weakening of demands that the RA authorities tackle corruption, “because the situation in Russia is, like here, oligarchic, corruption-ridden ...these are people who are more used to operating in...the shadow economy.” And by the mid-2000s, in times of reduced established diaspora giving, total Fund contributions remained high because of the

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180 Giragosian estimated that established diaspora giving accounted for only 10-15% of the money coming into the RA. Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009.
181 Matosian, Mary. Interview, 16 December 2009.
182 Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010.
183 Sardar, Alex. Interview, 24 March 2010.
184 Giragosian, Richard. Interview, 21 December 2009. Established diasporans assumed Russia’s Armenians were comfortable with corruption in the RA, but my respondents in Russia suggested the RA was too corrupt even for them.
participation of a handful of Moscow businessmen attending their own pre-Telethon gala.\(^ {185}\) Billionaire businessman Samvel Karapetyan, for example, gave $15 million in 2008, matching the total raised the previous year from all Telethon donors,\(^ {186}\) and in the Fund’s 2013 list of pledges by country, for example, Russia’s figure of USD $12.3 million dwarfed the $3 million from the United States.\(^ {187}\) These massive contributions displayed the wealth and power of Russia’s Armenians, both to the RA and to the established diaspora. This growing influence was acknowledged by the Fund, whose 2011 Annual Report devoted a special section to Russia’s ‘Pivotal Solidarity’.\(^ {188}\)

**Diaspora as “Needy Recipient”?**

The Ministry of Diaspora had tried to reframe the diaspora as “needy recipient” of the RA’s spiritual and national resources. However, even when diaspora needs were material, charitable assistance remained unidirectional. Not all established diaspora communities were wealthy, and especially in Latin America, some were in desperate need of assistance with their Armenian-language education programs. Yet despite the ministry’s expressed concern for the state of Armenian education abroad, it was illustrative that its own initiative to improve the Armenian education system in Latin America could not be implemented in 2009 because of the reluctance by RA elites to spend funds raised by diaspora Armenians on diaspora projects.

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185 Ordinary Armenians in Russia did not participate in the Fund, whose activities in Russia were specifically geared toward wealthy businessmen. In the established diaspora, a range of contributions were typical, including modest amounts from middle class individuals. Widespread, non-elite participation had been the original goal of the Fund. It “was supposed to be the instrument for inclusive contribution of national dues, or participation of Armenian citizens and Armenian people around the world”. Hovannisian, Raffi. Interview, 20 March 2010.


Sadly, we were supposed to receive funding from the budget, from the All-Armenian Fund, and from private donors, but the All-Armenian Fund reneged, saying we collect money from Armenians all over the world to help Armenia and Karabakh, not for that money to go back where it came from. Fortunately, we have received funding from the state budget this year, so we will try to implement [it].

More alarmingly, at the height of the civil war in Syria the annual Fund Telethons made no mention of helping Syria’s Armenians, either those remaining in Syria or those coming to, or already in, the RA. From 2011-2015, its campaigns focused squarely on projects in the NKR. Even in its hour of greatest material need, it appeared the RA was still willing to offer little more than “spiritual” resources to the established diaspora.

**Conclusion**

In sum, the ministry’s reframing attempts were treated skeptically by the established diaspora, and did little to mute criticism of the RA, promote investment, or spread the “big-man” model of diaspora organization. The minister was, however, an increasingly visible figure in the established diaspora, and was able to insinuate herself, and by extension, the RA, into the diaspora’s discursive space. Attempts to provide an “appropriate” model of diasporic behaviour were not well received, but the ministry was well poised to claim credit for, and promote, generational changes already taking place in the established diaspora. And while few established diasporans were willing to uncritically accept the post-Soviet Armenians as part of “the diaspora,” they were made increasingly aware that their own financial power over the RA was waning in favour of Russia’s wealthy and willing businessman philanthropists. In other words, the RA’s

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189 Nikoghosyan, Arthur. Interview, 18 November 2009.
190 “Annual Telethons.” Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, http://himnadram.org/index.php?lang=1&id=78 There were many established diaspora initiatives to help the Armenians of Syria, including programs to privately sponsor and resettle them in diaspora communities. “Hundreds of Syrian Armenian”, 2015. None of these, however, would have had the same symbolic pan-Armenian significance as the Fund.
identity gerrymandering project put the established diaspora on notice that they were neither indispensible nor irreplaceable.
Chapter 8
Conclusion: Identity Gerrymandering and its Discontents

This dissertation began by noting the Minister of Diaspora’s attempt to insinuate herself into the diaspora discursive field as the new, authoritative voice in state-diaspora relations. It proceeded to ask why official RA punctuation of this field was seen as necessary. Created in 2008, the new Ministry of Diaspora seemed to do little, if judged by the sum total of its programs and services, many of which duplicated the work of other ministries and the diaspora’s own organizations. Viewing the government body as a “discursive power ministry,” brings us closer to understanding why the RA government brought it into being. The Ministry of Diaspora’s primary output was discursive; it delineated appropriate diaspora identity, organization, and activity, in ways that benefitted the state. Most importantly, the ministry engaged in identity gerrymandering, expanding the category of diaspora to post-Soviet Armenians living outside the RA (even temporarily), most of whom had never conceived of themselves in those terms. This expansion allowed the RA to dilute the pool of established diasporans, whose ideological, pan-diasporic organizations and “noisy” critique were both foreign and threatening, with culturally closer Armenians, whose shared Soviet institutional legacy, “quiet” strategies of dissent, and proclivity for vertical, geographically based organizations led by “big-men” were more legible and, at least in theory, more compliant.

The ministry’s other reframing strategies all served to situate the RA at the centre of the global Armenian nation, and to rhetorically reduce the power of those Armenians abroad who the RA found most contentious. Reconceptualizing “the Diaspora” as a series of geographically specific “communities” focused on what divided, rather than united diasporans, thus disarming the troublesome notion of a united diasporic source of
opposition to the state. Highlighting depoliticized, “cultural” activities and frowning upon “party ideologies” elevated those organizations that engaged in Friendship-of-the-Peoples-type dance troupes and folk pageantry over rights-oriented “oppositional” organizations in Georgia, and the political-parties-in-exile whose competing ideological programs, ironically, had done the work of preserving Armenian “culture” in the established diaspora for nearly a century. Rhetorically reversing the giver-recipient roles by seeing the diaspora as spiritually needy elevated the status of the materially poor RA, since only it could act as the provider of these vaguely defined spiritual resources. Likewise, reframing profit-oriented investment as the ultimate form of diaspora patriotism elevated those who were more likely to invest (billionaires in Russia with a significant appetite for risk) above those whose 1990s investment misadventures had made them wary of future risk-taking (the established diaspora). Finally, rhetorically replacing the idealized notion of repatriation (hayrenadardzutyun) with “re-Armenianization” (hayadardzutyun) substituted a malleable concept—used to refer to everything from diasporans taking language courses to investing in homeland businesses—for a project RA elites had no intention of pursuing, but did not want to appear to be discouraging. The RA was thus reaffirmed as a symbolic (or spiritual) homeland for diasporans, but not a physical one.

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1 The degree to which any of the three “diasporas” were convinced by this reframing is difficult to gauge. Russia’s Armenians, but also to the established diaspora’s “new generation” organizations, tended to speak about “the homeland” in spiritual (and in the latter case, life-changing) terms, and to see the RA as indispensable to the experience of being Armenian. They did not, however, see themselves in the desperately needy way the Minister depicted them. Most Armenians abroad seemed utterly unconvinced by the reversal of the giver-receiver roles. As noted in Chapter 3, however, the Soviet-era Committee for Cultural Ties With Diaspora Armenians seems to have convinced many Soviet Armenians that they had served as the diaspora’s cultural and spiritual lifeline, a view that was sharply reversed by the diaspora’s aid in the wake of the 1988 earthquake. PFA 2010: 9. As such, it seems plausible that this particular reframing of the state-diaspora relationship had a domestic audience. At the time of research, however, there was no evidence of whether it resonated domestically.
Unlike many states, which chose to re-engage with their emigrants or co-ethnics abroad as diasporas, the newly independent RA did not have the luxury of deciding whether to have a diaspora or not, since a very large, well-known, and well organized one—the established diaspora—already existed. However, its identity gerrymandering extension of the term “diaspora” to post-Soviet Armenians brought a new, larger diaspora into being, and its organizational and behavioural preferences shaped the properties of that diaspora.

**Alternative explanations**

This dissertation has assumed conscious decisions by RA elites to develop a Ministry of Diaspora, tasked with reframing state-diaspora relations in ways that benefitted the state. However, it is only fair to consider the possibility that no conscious deliberation was involved. Could the Ministry of Diaspora simply have been the whim of a new president looking to try something new? Could the choice of Hakobyan simply have been a patronage appointment?² Perhaps, but there were certainly other patronage positions available to be invented, and other potential patronage appointees. Moreover, aside from being intellectually unsatisfying, this explanation might have been more convincing had the Armenia-Turkey Protocols not been on the government’s near-term agenda. The eve of major bilateral negotiations seems an unlikely time to engage in whim-led institution creation.

Another reasonable possibility is that the ministry was initially designed to be more program-oriented, but did not function as intended. Certainly, it would not be the first poorly run ministry that had little “output” to show for its funding and staff inputs. However, the high level of commitment and morale among ministry staff suggested that

² A knowledgeable established diaspora acquaintance mentioned a rumour to this effect.
they believed they were performing effectively, and I found no indication that programs had underperformed, or that the ministry had otherwise fallen short of RA officials’ expectations.³

Was the decision to create a ministry to manage diaspora relations simply a return to the Soviet-era Committee model? There were considerable similarities between the Ministry of Diaspora and the Committee for Cultural Ties with Diaspora Armenians, from the nearly identical logo,⁴ to the emphasis on cultural organizations, to attempts to marginalize diasporans critical of the regime. It is possible that Serge Sargsyan and Hranush Hakobyan, both of whom had Communist Party ties in Soviet times,⁵ had either deliberately or unconsciously reverted to a model perceived by them to have “worked.” Yet, there were also significant differences, the most important of which was the ministry’s identity gerrymandering, which would not have been necessary in the Soviet context. The Soviet-era Committee had accepted the established diaspora as the diaspora, and sought only to “harness” it to the state, thereby curbing its ability to act as a fifth column, anti-Soviet force abroad. It did not appear to encourage some organizational forms over others. Instead, it worked with the political parties of which it approved (Hnchak and Ramgavar) and excluded Dashnaks from its programs. Moreover, the Committee did not encourage financial contributions of any sort from the diaspora, and in fact had significant funding itself from Moscow to sponsor cultural exchanges and other activities, both domestically and abroad. In other words, the Ministry of Diaspora’s

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³ External critiques of the ministry did not suggest poor implementation, but rather, misguided goals.
⁵ Both Sargsyan and Hakobyan had been Komsomol officials, Hakobyan in Yerevan, and Sargsyan in Stepanakert, NK. Sargsyan had also served as Stepanakert City Committee Propaganda Division Head, NK Regional Committee Communist Organizations’ Unit Instructor, and held other Communist Party posts. “Serzh Sargsyan: The President of the Republic of Armenia.” Accessed 29 March 2016. http://www.president.am/en/serzh-sargsyan/
reframing project went well beyond what the Committee had been intended to do, with only a fraction of its budget. But to the extent that the ministry did resemble its Soviet-era counterpart, what was it about the Committee that RA elites would have wanted to replicate? After all, it had done nothing to curb Dashnak opposition to the USSR (KGB operatives worked separately to undermine the Dashnak Party). It was also perceived quite negatively by established diasporans, who reported being spied on when visiting Soviet Armenia. Returning to a Soviet institutional form also begs explanation given the timing of the ministry’s creation, right before a crucial bilateral negotiation likely to upset the established diaspora.

Was the Ministry of Diaspora, as some critics assumed, simply yet another way to increase diaspora financial contributions? Harnessing the diaspora’s “potential” to develop the RA was, after all, one of the ministry’s three stated priorities, and the potential referred to was invariably financial. Yet, there were a number of reasons to suspect this was not the ministry’s main goal. First, by the late 2000s, private remittances (mostly from Russia) were the most important “diaspora” financial contribution, of much greater importance than philanthropy and charitable giving. With a steady stream of labour migrants, there was no shortage of remittances, and their ebbs and flows had nothing to do with political dissatisfaction with the RA, and everything to do with fluctuations in the Russian economy. The ministry may have considered labour migrants part of the diaspora, but it appeared to have no programs geared specifically toward them, or toward facilitating their remittances. Second, the ministry’s calls for investment remained vague. No concrete investment plans were put into place, no industries were

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6 By contrast, the ministry seemed far less interested in what have been described as “social remittances.” Levitt, 1998: 927.
singled out for attention, and no institutional mechanisms were created to channel investment toward state priorities, as the Fund had channeled charitable giving. There was no equivalent, in other words, to the “State of Israel Bonds” that had encouraged diaspora Jews to invest in Israel.

In the Armenian case, the desire to exert control over an unruly diaspora was clearly not solely about maximizing financial contributions, though this was no doubt on the minds of RA officials. Instead, the primary motivation was curbing “noisy” dissent and criticism, and fostering the emergence of hierarchical, geographically based organizations led by “our kind of people.” Respondents’ frequent invocations of mutual misunderstanding between the state and the established diaspora, and mutual understanding between the RA and Russia’s Armenians, were telling. RA elites sought to increase the legibility of the diaspora, by promoting the emergence of leaders whose motivations they understood.

“Big-men” were *nouveaux riches* who had left Armenia, made sizeable fortunes elsewhere, and sought recognition as legitimate Armenian elites.7 Both RA officials (many of whom were also wealthy businessmen) and big-men themselves understood that their legitimacy derived from their generosity (especially in the form of homeland philanthropy) and elite connections. Unlike ideologically committed established diasporans, RA elites understood what motivated these men, and also, how to manage them via praise, threats, bribes, tax laws, and “quiet” intra-elite bargaining. Since many RA elites were themselves “oligarchs,” or at least had sizeable business holdings, they

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7 According to Antonyan, the RA’s “oligarchs” shared this quality with what I have described as Russia’s Armenian big-men. “The paradox of the situation is that none of them really need legitimacy to exert power, but all of them want to be justified in the eyes of society, they want to be respected, honoured, and memorialized for something they and their descendants would not feel ashamed of.” Antonyan, 2015: 92.
must have seen such levers of control as crucial. Big-men had the potential to become competing political figures in the RA if not pandered to or guided toward the “correct” behaviour.

**Measuring Policy “Success”**

The Ministry of Diaspora’s framing efforts targeted three different “diasporas.” RA elites wanted to encourage Russia’s growing Armenian population to emerge as the new, loyal, and home-state-regarding centre of the global Armenian diaspora. In Georgia, they sought to encourage ethnic Armenians to curb their indigenous minority-like claims to rights and territory, which were so troublesome to Armenia’s relations with its immediate neighbour. And, by praising Russia’s Armenians as the model diaspora community, they sought to put the established diaspora on notice that they were no longer the only, or the most important, game in town, and provide a template for “constructive” interaction with the home state.

How successful were these discursive moves? Since the Armenia-Turkey Protocols were the major foreign policy “event” following closely on the heels of the creation of the ministry, they served as an early indicator of whether the ministry’s approach was gaining traction, especially in the established diaspora. On the one hand, the Protocols were successfully signed. There were protests and “noisy” expressions of dissent, to be sure, but no disruption large enough to derail the process. The degree to which the ministry or its approach had any effect on established diaspora public opinion is questionable, however. Most were unimpressed by the minister (still a barely recognizable figure) silently accompanying President Sargsyan on the Protocols promotion tour, where he essentially presented a *fait accompli* to diasporans. However,
the inclusion of Rostov-Na-Donu on the tour schedule, where Ara Abrahamyan’s UAR provided a veneer of unanimous pro-RA sentiment, allowed RA elites to claim one “successful” public relations exercise, and to suggest that “diaspora” opinion was divided, rather than overwhelmingly opposed to the Protocols. It also provided a clear juxtaposition between what the ministry promoted as “proper” diaspora behaviour and the kind it wished to discourage. Ultimately, the Protocols were never ratified, the main obstacle being issue linkage with the NK conflict. While this linkage was not mentioned explicitly in the Protocols, Turkey, having already signed, refused to ratify without some movement to settle the conflict between Armenia and Turkey’s ally, Azerbaijan.  

April 24, 2015 marked the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. The commemoration of this anniversary occurred without much controversy, largely due to the enormous effort made by the RA to mark the event. There was, in short, nothing with which to take issue. One activity did threaten to derail the April 24, 2015 events in Yerevan. A new opposition political movement, Founding Parliament (also known as Pre-Parliament) had arisen to oppose what it called Sargsyan’s “criminal” regime. Led by Lebanese-born Karabakh war hero Jirair Sefilian, it had planned a rally on April 24 in a suburb of Yerevan. Despite having official permission to hold the rally, RA police arrested the Founding Parliament leaders in early April and held them for a month, ostensibly for trying to overthrow the government, before finally releasing them under pressure from Human Rights Watch. To the extent that Sefilian was a repatriated established diasporan—denied RA citizenship for many years on an assortment of

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8 Arguably, Ankara gained significant foreign policy “points” by signing the Protocols, and since international attention predictably shifted to other issues, it did not lose these points by failing to ratify.
9 April 24, 1915 is commemorated as the beginning of the genocide. On that day, Ottoman officials arrested hundreds of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul, who were later murdered.
pretexts—this episode could be viewed as a thwarted established diaspora attempt to disrupt the narrative of state-diaspora unity on the genocide issue. However, it is important to note that aside from Sefilian, the majority of the movement consisted of RA citizens, and that, regardless of their support for the movement, its decision to hold a rally on the actual 100th anniversary was deeply unpopular with RA citizens and diasporans alike.10

Chapter 5 noted that the ministry’s reframing project was generally well received in Russia, unsurprisingly since it praised the process of diaspora organization already underway in Russia as the model to be emulated elsewhere. But in encouraging and praising his leadership, RA elites gambled that Russia’s big-man, Ara Abrahamyan (and other Armenian billionaires) would uphold his implicit end of the bargain by keeping critique “quiet,” and effectively staying out of RA politics. On that level, the ministry’s approach was of questionable utility. Despite shared norms regarding “quiet” strategies of dissent, Abrahamyan had on occasion publicly criticized the Armenian government when it expressed insufficient enthusiasm for his diasporic pursuits (especially his grand designs for a World Armenian Congress) or his business investments in the RA.11

There was also ample evidence that Abrahamyan was involving himself quite extensively in RA politics. Even before the creation of the ministry, he had contravened

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RA electoral laws by financially supporting RA political parties,^1^2 and in 2015, he spoke of returning to Armenia to found a political movement or party of his own.\(^{13}\) In other words, he appeared to be preparing to follow the Bidzina Ivanisvili precedent. An ethnic Georgian billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, Ivanishvili returned to Georgia, led the winning Georgian Dream coalition and served as Prime Minister from 2012 to late 2013, when he officially left politics but “spoke of his intention to control his government from within civil society.”\(^{14}\) Compared to his predecessor, Saakashvili, Ivanishvili’s government adopted a markedly more conciliatory tone toward Moscow, which may have reflected his many years in, and affinity for Russia.\(^{15}\) Nor was Abrahamyan the only Armenian businessman-philanthropist in Russia thought to be entering the RA political field. In the wake of Ivanishvili’s political turn, journalists began asking financier Ruben Vardanyan, among others, whether he was planning to run for president.\(^{16}\) In short, encouraging the rise of big-men was a risky gamble that they would remain controllable.

Treating Russia’s Armenians as a diaspora also risked encouraging the many thousands of temporary labour migrants there to grow comfortable with the title.\(^{17}\) Given the propensity for “temporary” labour migration to become permanent,\(^{18}\) and the degree to which Russia was already an attractive destination, a discourse that effectively

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\(^{13}\) Abrahamyan was vague about whether it would be a movement or a party, or what, if any, government post he would personally seek. Babayan, 2015. http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27316968.html


\(^{15}\) Aprasidze, 2014: 70. Since he did not offer political concessions (i.e. any softening of Georgia’s pro-Europe orientation), Ivanishvili was unable to achieve any real rapprochement with Russia, despite this change in tone.


\(^{17}\) Cavoukian, 2013: 721.

considered Armenians a permanent feature of Russia, and encouraged the growth of diaspora institutions such as churches and schools, risked facilitating more, and more permanent, out-migration from the RA.

The degree to which the ministry’s efforts were effective in Georgia is difficult to gauge. Its reframing attempts seemed to have little resonance, since few Armenians in Georgia, and especially in Javakheti, accepted the ministry’s implicit inclusion of their communities in “the diaspora.” But whether Georgia’s Armenians were placated by the ministry’s claims to be concerned with their plight, combined with the opportunity to participate in its low-cost diaspora programming, was difficult to assess, as was the efficacy of the ministry’s attempts to “pick winners” by focusing its attention on pro-regime organizations. There did appear to have been a decline in protests and other contentious politics in Javakheti, but this had begun before the creation of the ministry, and may simply have reflected domestic political developments. Without the Russian base in Javakheti, many Armenians in the region may have come to the realization that their anti-Tbilisi efforts were no more than bluster, and resigned themselves to working with Georgian officials, or simply emigrating in search of work. The relative quiet there may have been temporary, since another ethnic civil war in Georgia (with potential Russian involvement), regardless of whether it concerned Armenians directly, might prompt either a mass exodus or an insurrection. Ultimately, there was little the RA could do for Georgia’s Armenians that was not already being done via bilateral talks.

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19 Whether RA citizens and other diasporans were convinced by the ministry’s seeming concern with the plight of Georgia’s Armenians was also unclear. There had been little press about Javakheti in the years following the creation of the ministry, but that might easily have been explained by there having been little unrest to report.
Were established diasporans avoiding politics, or trading their “noisy” strategies of dissent for quieter ones? There was little evidence of this. While most respondents agreed that the Dashnak Party had been effectively co-opted by the Kocharyan and Sargsyan governments, a handful of non-Dashnak established diasporans remained political forces to be reckoned with.\textsuperscript{20} US-born Raffi Hovannisian, the RA’s first Minister of Foreign Affairs, founded the Heritage Party in 2002, and ran for president against Sargsyan in 2013.\textsuperscript{21} And Lebanese-born Jirair Sefilian and Alec Yenikomshian (the latter a convicted former member of the ASALA terrorist organization) were key members of the oppositional Founding Parliament movement, formed in 2012 and known to engage in “noisy” public critique of the RA.\textsuperscript{22}

The vast majority of established diasporans preferred symbolic inclusion to physical membership in the Armenian state. Most had no intention of repatriating, and had apparently desired dual citizenship as a symbol of belonging, rather than as a legal status to facilitate deeper involvement in the RA economy, society, or politics.\textsuperscript{23} The RA’s pre-Ministry of Diaspora efforts at symbolic inclusion were clearly experienced by the established diaspora as insufficient. The arguments presented by opponents of dual citizenship were easily refuted, and were thus perceived as excuses for denying diaspora

\textsuperscript{20} “Dashnaks” remained convenient bogeymen for RA elites, on whom all manner of “criticism” could be blamed, even though the RA wing of the party had been largely co-opted.
\textsuperscript{21} Hovannisian attempted to run for president in 2003, but he was declared ineligible on the basis of not having been an RA citizen for ten years. See Chapter 7 for more information on Hovannisian’s “odyssey” to obtain citizenship. He also staged two hunger strikes: the first in 2011, to protest government corruption, and the second in 2013, in the wake of the presidential election in which he officially came in second but accused the authorities of flagrant electoral fraud.
\textsuperscript{22} Established diaspora support for the Founding Parliament movement (including a nascent organization called Armenian Renaissance with small chapters throughout the established diaspora) seemed to be at least in part a reaction to the disappearance of the diaspora-based source of genuine opposition to the RA’s governing elites (i.e. the co-optation of the Dashnak Party).
\textsuperscript{23} Most would have preferred visa-free entry, but this might have been achieved in other ways, such as by granting visa-free entry to citizens of the handful states where the vast majority of established diasporans lived, such as the US, Canada, France, Syria, Lebanon, Argentina, Australia, etc.
Armenians inclusion in the polity. *Ad hoc* measures to engage in dialogue, such as the Armenia-Diaspora Conferences, were perceived as “merely” symbolic, since they were scripted, RA-dominated affairs with pre-written declarations of unity. Moreover, these measures were seen as cover for further efforts at diaspora resource extraction, as institutionalized by the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund. With the well thus poisoned, could a different sort of Ministry of Diaspora have set state-diaspora relations on a more amicable path?

One can easily imagine that a ministry designed to appeal to the sensibilities of established diasporans would have differed in important ways from the one created in 2008. It would, first and foremost, have been headed by, and staffed with, *diasporans*. It would have had an elegant and credible online presence, and prioritized effective communication. It might have reach out to diasporans and attempted to gauge *their* expectations for state-diaspora relations via surveys and other fact-finding efforts. The Ministry of Diaspora created by Serge Sargsyan, and headed by Hranush Hakobyan, was in many ways a reversion to an old pattern, exemplified by the Soviet-era Committee, which was both patronizing and partial (prioritizing pro-regime diasporans), and promoted delusional thinking about the centrality of the RA and the neediness of the diaspora. Under Hakobyan, who embodied much of what established diasporans found uncomfortable about relating to the RA, staffed with bureaucrats with virtually no diaspora expertise, and focused more on disseminating information at, rather than listening to, the diaspora, the Ministry of Diaspora was simply too Soviet in style and substance to be a credible tool of engagement with those who did not share the Soviet Union’s institutional legacy.


“Westphalianism Plus”

A consideration of the reframing project must also look back at the RA itself, since RA elites were constituting their nation-state’s own identity along with that of their “paradigmatic Other,” the diaspora. If the home state attempts to construct the diasporic identity as home-state-centric, then it simultaneously constructs itself as that centre. RA elites constructed their state as the undisputed “spiritual” Armenian homeland, the sole legitimate voice of the nation, the arbiter of national culture and values, and the locus of all legitimate diaspora activity. In the process, they discursively constructed a nation-state larger than its actual size, one whose “real” population was the “10 million” Armenians around the world, and not the paltry 3 million (if that) official population. This approach might best be described as “Westphalianism plus.” RA elites sought to build a state insulated against diaspora (and other external) “meddling,” but with transborder quasi-constituents, lobbyists, and financial contributors. Despite florid, familial-metaphor-laden language of home and hearth, and claims to be attending to the diaspora’s “spiritual” neediness, the Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing strategies aimed to bring into being a diaspora that was more legible and more useful to the home state. Affective ties to the diaspora for its own sake, or attentiveness to the diaspora’s own needs came a distant second to instrumental use of the diaspora in the service of the state. In this sense, it was state elites that sought to, as Cohen suggested, “have their cake and eat it”.

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25 Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s “new thinking” approach to domestic and foreign policy in fact sought to build as Westphalian a state as possible, responsible to and for its citizens alone. This approach was roundly rejected, not only by the established diaspora and NK Armenians, but by RA citizens themselves, for whom the NK conflict served as a foundational moment, and to whom Ter-Petrosyan’s willingness to compromise on the NKR’s final status was unacceptable.
Moreover, this construction of the RA as the legitimate focus and locus of
diasporic activity allowed authorities to explain away state failings as the result of a
meddlesome or insufficiently generous established diaspora, one that did not recognize
the RA’s legitimate centrality. Poor economic prospects “forcing” RA citizens to seek
employment abroad could be attributed to a dearth of diaspora investment, while the
inability to negotiate an end to the Turkish blockade of Armenia could be blamed on the
obstructionist and out-of-touch established diaspora. These explanations, which
suggested RA elites had little agency over these issue areas, were easily refuted.
Numerous respondents throughout Armenia, Russia, and Georgia, and many established
diasporans, saw the RA’s economic problems as stemming instead from government
policies, corruption, or monopolist oligarchs. Meanwhile, the initial closure of the
Turkish border, and the ultimate failure of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, could both be
traced to the NK conflict, the real foreign policy hurdle to be overcome, and an issue on
which RA elites themselves were unprepared to compromise. The Protocols process, and
the RA’s signature of the agreement over the strenuous objections of the established
diaspora, was ample evidence that diaspora “balking” actually mattered very little.

**Normative Implications**

With diaspora as a concept increasingly *en vogue*, it is now becoming an
assumption that states will (and should) engage their diasporas in some way, and that
diasporas will (and should) maintain affect-driven homeland ties. This is clearly assumed
by policy makers, more and more of whom have attempted to institutionalize relations
with diasporas, promoted by migration organizations such as the IOM, and not
sufficiently interrogated by scholars, who have tended to focus on the details of state
policy toward diasporas at the expense of their normative implications. In other words, the fact of states “hailing” their diasporas\textsuperscript{27} has been increasingly normalized as an aspect of modern-day nation-state building. Yet states engaging in identity gerrymandering of their co-ethnics abroad are exhibiting deeply manipulative behaviour that is worthy of investigation as such.\textsuperscript{28}

Nations and states have often been conceptualized as families, writ large.\textsuperscript{29} While the most obvious state-diaspora metaphor, and the one states seem to encourage, is that of a benevolent parent maintaining ties to his/her children, it is not clear that we should accept this particular family metaphor at face value. In other words, we should heed Brubaker’s caution against accepting this category of practice as a category of analysis.\textsuperscript{30} Parent-child relations, after all, are not the sum total of familial interaction. Instead, consider an eldest brother still living in the family home, who has fallen on hard times. He “guilt trips” his extended family into sending money, and perhaps visiting occasionally, but cannot tolerate their criticism of his lifestyle. He plays one relative off against another, and blames his poverty on lack of support from relatives, all the while claiming to be the family patriarch (who gets insufficient respect) by virtue of being the eldest sibling. If viewed in this way, a state attempting to “harness the potential” of its diaspora is not a nurturant parent but a manipulative opportunist.

\textsuperscript{27} Varadarajan uses the term “hailing” in the Althusserian sense. Varadarajan, 2010: 9.
\textsuperscript{28} While the term “manipulation” has negative connotations, I do not intend to imply that all attempts to manipulate diasporas have nefarious intentions, only that they play to affective ties in order to elicit behaviour that might not otherwise be forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{30} Brubaker, Laitin, 1998: 446.
While it is likely that most state behaviour fits neither metaphor perfectly, that is precisely the point. Home states’ attempts to frame state-diaspora relations in ways that serve state interests are not simply ways to “smooth over” relations or maximize financial contributions (even if those motivations are the most immediate). Instead, they are attempts to impose a template for conceptualizing national membership and behaviour, and as such are profound statements of belonging and nationhood.

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31 As Lakoff notes, while many people assume that framing is about “selling policy,” moral framing in fact precedes policy. Lakoff, 2008: 68.
Chapter 9
The Armenia-Diaspora Relationship in Comparative Perspective

Thus far, this dissertation has compared the effects of RA discursive strategies and reframing efforts on three different Armenian “diasporas.” In a world where states’ emigrants and co-ethnics abroad are increasingly seen, by both scholars and states themselves, as “diasporas,” these findings ought to have broad applicability, but within the wide universe of comparable cases, what is the appropriate basis for comparing the Armenian case with others? 1 Armenian officials claimed to have studied the efforts of other states when planning the Ministry of Diaspora. According to Hakobyan, “we read about other countries that have diasporas - Israel, Greece, India, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, etc. We studied what they had tried.” 2 The emulation of specific programs, however, is not an indication of comparable identity construction projects, especially given the dramatically different “diasporas” these states attempted to engage with.

This chapter explores the existing literature on other state-diaspora relationships that both echo and diverge from aspects of the Armenian case. 3 Given that the (established) Armenian diaspora has been considered one of the “classic diasporas,” the experience of Israel and the Jewish diaspora emerges as an obvious comparator. Armenia’s emulation of the Israel-Jewish-diaspora experience was apparent in the kinds of programs the Armenian ministry chose to emphasize, such as youth exchanges

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1 One respondent’s spouse, a trained political scientist, was particularly vociferous in her disdain for my intent to compare the Armenian case with others. Her argument resembled linguistic enthusiasts’ (of seemingly every language) passionate references to “untranslatable” words or expressions that, in their view, make their native language unique.
2 Hakobyan, Hranush. Interview, 18 March 2010. The actual extent to which RA officials “studied” other cases was unclear, and Hakobyan did not elaborate on what insights were gleaned from them. During our interview it also seemed as though she was pulling examples out of thin air, rather than deliberately mentioning particular states whose examples had been fruitful.
3 The case selection here is not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, one of the drawbacks of the expanded definition of “diaspora” is that nearly every state on earth can now be considered to have one.
reminiscent of Birthright Israel and other programs offering short-term youth visits to Israel. However, the centrality of the migration paradigm to the Israel-Jewish diaspora relationship largely dictated Israel’s framing (and re-framing) of “its” two (Jewish and Israeli) diasporas. This paradigm, entirely absent from the RA’s approach to the diaspora, and all but abandoned by the established diaspora once there was an Armenia to repatriate to, stands out as a crucial difference between these two cases. Founded deliberately as a viable migration destination, the extent to which the state of Israel became an actual homeland for many diaspora Jews made it a much more effective and legitimate symbolic homeland for others. By contrast, the RA’s attempt to achieve symbolic homeland status in the absence of a comparable offering had limited resonance for the established diaspora.

It also makes sense to consider the Armenian case in its post-Soviet context, given the apparent continuity of Cold War-era affinities, political culture, and the obvious pro-Russian turn in the RA’s diaspora policy. Having achieved independence at the same time, post-Soviet states shifted their gaze toward transborder co-ethnics at a particular shared moment, no small matter given the degree to which shifting international norms regarding territoriality, migration, and appropriate state behaviour toward co-ethnics could shape a fledgling state’s approach to “its” compatriots abroad. Specifically, by 1991, concern for cross-border ethnic minorities was seen as legitimate, while the

4 In a speech, Minister Hakobyan cited Israel’s “similar project for 70,000 people a year.” “Hranush Hakobyan’s speech at the meeting with heads of diplomatic representations of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 2, 2009, Yerevan.” Armenia-Diaspora Partnership, 2009: 336.

5 The discussion of Israel as a home for the Jewish diaspora here is not intended to discount the degree to which it was already home to Palestinians and others, or the interethnic (and interstate) violence that has plagued Israel and its neighbours. The legitimacy of the “Jewish state” project cannot be adequately addressed here (nor is there a lack of scholarly attention to it elsewhere). Like this dissertation’s analysis of the RA (and NKR), which does not explicitly critique the ethnic project at the heart of the NK conflict, or the mutual population transfers, killings, and so-called “ethnic cleansing” perpetrated by both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, I effectively bracket these major issues to hone in specifically on state-diaspora relations.
revision of state borders to include them was not. As compared with the interwar and postwar periods – which also saw imperial retreat and the recognition of new states – Brubaker describes the institutional and normative environment into which the post-Soviet states were born as one in which “borders have become more ‘inviolable’, but they have also become more insignificant.”

Armenia shared an institutional legacy with its fellow post-Soviet states that reflected the ideal of ethnically based territorial nations fostered by the Soviet Union, but also the relative heterogeneity and mobility of Soviet citizens throughout the union. In 1991, 43.4 million people, or 17 percent of titular ethnics, were living outside of their putative homelands—now independent states. This meant the vast majority of post-Soviet states were “ethnically heterogeneous yet conceiving of themselves as nation-states…Their explicit raison d’etre in the Soviet scheme, was to serve as the institutional vehicles for [titular] national self-determination.”

Most post-Soviet states began reaching out to “their” compatriots abroad almost immediately, adopting what Bonnenfant has called “homeland stances,” or discourses “emphasizing ethnic, historical and cultural ties with ‘their’ respective ethnic groups residing outside their political borders.” Many states, including Azerbaijan, Ukraine,

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6 Brubaker 2009: 477.
9 Brubaker 1996: 45. Armenia stood out as the least ethnically heterogeneous.
10 Bonnenfant, Isik Kuscu. 2012. “Constructing the Homeland: Kazakhstan’s Discourse and Policies Surrounding Its Ethnic Return-Migration Policy.” Central Asian Survey 31, 1: 31. The exception to this general trend was Uzbekistan, which made so little contact with its Uzbeks in neighbouring states that it “seemed to ‘forget’ about the very existence of Uzbek co-ethnics abroad.” Fumagalli, Matteo. 2007. “Ethnicity, state formation and foreign policy: Uzbekistan and ‘Uzbeks abroad.’” Central Asian Survey 26,
Kazakhstan, and Russia, held co-ethnic “World Conferences” (similar to the RA’s Armenia-Diaspora Conferences) in the 1990s and early 2000s, at which they attempted to set the agenda for relations with their ethnic kin. Like Armenia, many of these states also faced co-ethnics abroad whose nationalistic and irredentist leanings complicated their relations with their immediate neighbours, and attempted to craft diaspora policy to curb those troublesome impulses, as seen in Ukraine and Azerbaijan.

The degree to which demographic reality corresponded to the ideal of nation-statehood helped shape each state’s policies with respect to compatriots abroad. As the most ethnically homogeneous post-Soviet state, the RA did not have to choose between relatively civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood, and could thus craft policy toward ethnic Armenians abroad without considering the influence of domestic ethnic minority groups. This, as we will see, was not the case for Ukraine or Kazakhstan, both

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1: 108. Instead, the Uzbek government appeared to embrace a territorial conception of the Uzbek state and focus on protecting “Fortress Uzbekistan” from external instability, and especially the threat of regional conflicts and Islamic extremism. While this stance did not preclude Uzbekistani interference in the affairs of its neighbours (i.e. Tajikistan), Fumagalli concludes that the presence of cross-border minorities does not help one make sense of these events. Fumagalli, 2007: 111-4.


12 I use the word “relatively” to indicate that both elements appear to be present in most constructions of nationhood. In the post-Soviet context, tension between the two related to the degree to which the “titular” nation was perceived as the legitimate “owner” of the state (Brubaker, 1996: 5), and whether ethnic minorities were considered equal, not only legally, but substantively. For a thorough critique of Hans Kohn’s civic/ethnic nation dichotomy, see Kuzio, Taras. 2002. “The myth of the civic state: a critical survey of Hans Kohn’s framework for understanding nationalism.” Ethnic and Racial Studies 25, 1: 20-39.

13 After the population exchanges accompanying the NK conflict, ethnic minorities accounted for less than 3 percent of Armenia’s population. The largest ethnic minority, the Yezidi, numbered approximately
of which had significant ethnic Russian populations.\(^{14}\) Russia’s conspicuous “homeland nationalism” claimed the right, and duty, to protect Russians abroad as a matter of foreign policy.\(^{15}\) Moreover, as the regional power that viewed its neighbours as its “near abroad,” and as the destination of so many of the region’s labour migrants,\(^{16}\) relations with the Russian Federation loomed large for all the Soviet successor states, and coloured their relations with their compatriots in Russia.\(^{17}\) While RA elites saw Russia as a partner and ally with whom they had relatively good, if vastly unequal, relations, Ukraine and Georgia were the most obvious cases of poor relations, while Azerbaijan’s case reflected its more ambivalent relationship with Russia.\(^{18}\)

The remainder of this chapter considers five comparators with a view to highlighting their similarities to, and divergence from, the experience of the RA: first, from the post-Soviet space, Armenia’s immediate South Caucasian neighbours, Georgia,  

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\(^{14}\) Brubaker notes that Ukraine’s and Kazakhstan’s ethnic Russian populations were the largest among the successor states, at 11.4 million and 6.2 million respectively, and were also “the most deeply rooted, and the most significant from the point of view of the Russian state.” Brubaker, 1996: 47.

\(^{15}\) Brubaker, 2009: 476. These assertions often deployed the internationally normative rhetoric of human rights to justify intervention in states of the “near abroad” on behalf of ethnic Russians, and were regular features of both government and opposition political discourse. Thus, they were assertions of national authority both within Russia and without. Brubaker 2009: 479-80.

\(^{16}\) While Russia was the primary destination for post-Soviet labour migrants, after the August 2008 war, Georgian migrant flows to Russia diminished in favour of Turkey. Enhancing the Role of Georgian Migrants at Home (ERGEM) Project. 2014. Georgian Diaspora and Migrant Communities in Germany, Greece and Turkey: Transnational realities and ties with Georgia. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development. http://migration.commission.ge/files/full_version_web_en.pdf. 13.

\(^{17}\) Considerable attention has been paid to Russia’s policy toward the Russian “diaspora” in post-Soviet states (e.g. Laitin, 1998; Brubaker, 2009; King, Charles, and Neil J. Melvin. 1999. “Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia.” International Security 24, 3: 108-138.). Russia is not considered a reasonable comparison case here, since its muscular policy vis-à-vis Russians abroad appears to have been an artefact of its imperial legacy, size, and military might, such that its approach could hardly have been reproduced by other post-Soviet states. Instead, it seems more reasonable to consider how other post-Soviet states negotiated their relationships with their compatriots abroad on the one hand, and Russia on the other.

\(^{18}\) Azerbaijan’s conflict with Armenia, in which Russia was perceived to be siding with Armenia, was at the heart of this ambivalence, as was Azerbaijan’s attempt to seek international markets for its oil which bypassed Russia.
and Azerbaijan, then the larger and more heavily Russian-populated Kazakhstan and Ukraine, and finally, the Israeli/Jewish diaspora case. In spite of its established diaspora similarities to Israel and Ukraine, (and likely to the chagrin of many Armenian readers) the Azeri case most resembles that of Armenia in terms of both states’ use of identity gerrymandering to dilute and defuse troublesome populations abroad.

**Georgia’s Diaspora “Discovery”**

Georgia had not historically been associated with the existence of a large diaspora, but in February 2008, its government established the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on Diaspora Issues (hereafter, the Diaspora Office) whose mission was broadly described as “deepening relations with compatriots, residing abroad.”\(^{19}\) A cursory look at Georgia’s equivalent to the RA Ministry of Diaspora revealed a similar organization, though the Diaspora Office was lower in rank than a full ministry. Like RA officials’, its use of the term “diaspora” was broad, encompassing “all Georgian migrant communities, including the Georgian historical diaspora, temporary and circular migrants, emigrants, expatriates, and Georgians who took on another citizenship and who were naturalised in their country of destination.”\(^{20}\) The Georgian Diaspora Office had no firm statistics on Georgians abroad, but estimated that, in addition to 3 million “historic” (pre-Soviet-era) diasporans living in Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey, 1.5 million Georgians had emigrated after 1991. These numbers suggested a “diaspora” that was roughly equal to Georgia’s official population of 4.47 million.\(^{21}\) While many had settled in Western Europe and

\(^{19}\) According to Resolution N18, this Office was to have 20 staff members. The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues, official website. Accessed 1 March 2012. http://diaspora.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=45

\(^{20}\) ERGEM, 2014: Executive Summary (n.p.).

North America, Georgians lived throughout the post-Soviet region as well, and like Armenia’s, Georgia’s post-Soviet migrants were remitting significant amounts of money to their relatives in the home state, estimated at 8-10 percent of GDP.\textsuperscript{22}

Georgia’s Diaspora Office supported the establishment of community centres, distributed books, organized visits by Georgian public figures, promoted youth visits to Georgia, and maintained a website on Georgian activities worldwide.\textsuperscript{23} It also reportedly offered \textit{ad hoc} assistance to cultural organizations holding events, and businesspeople interested in investing, but did not have a concrete listing of services, or provide an actual directory of organizations abroad.\textsuperscript{24} In other words, like its Armenian counterpart, it was difficult to take inventory of the Diaspora Office’s activities or assess its impact. It had no diasporans on its Public Advisory Council, but unlike the RA’s ministry, many of the Diaspora Office’s council members were academics with expertise in migration and diaspora affairs,\textsuperscript{25} and the Georgian Diaspora Office appeared to be augmenting the little information it had on Georgians abroad by actively studying them.\textsuperscript{26} Regarding the use of diaspora potential to develop the homeland, Tbilisi’s Diaspora Office seemed less focused on increasing the flow of diaspora money, whether via philanthropy, remittances,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Figures are for 2011-2013. ERGEM, 2014: 13.
\item \textsuperscript{23} The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues, official website. http://www.diaspora.gov.ge.
\item \textsuperscript{24} ERGEM, 2014: 21. By January, 2016, there was a small number of organizations listed by country on the website. The Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues, official website. http://www.diaspora.gov.ge.
\item \textsuperscript{25} The Office of the State Minister, official website.
\item \textsuperscript{26} In partnership with the Danish Refugee Council and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, the Georgian Diaspora Office and other ministries participated in the Enhancing the Role of Georgian Migrants at Home (ERGEM) Project, which conducted migrant surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups among Georgian migrants in Germany, Greece, and Turkey. The research aimed to collect demographic information about migrants, document their experiences abroad, and glean their expectations about interactions with the Georgian state. ERGEM, 2014. There were no comparable RA studies, and Ara Vardanyan, head of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund made note of the dearth of actual knowledge of the Armenian diaspora. “I can definitely tell you, hundred percent sure, that no one has ever done a survey, professional survey, within [the] diaspora, on any topic.” Vardanyan, Ara. Interview, 23 December 2009.
\end{itemize}
or investment, and more oriented toward enticing recent labour migrants to return to Georgia, bringing their newly acquired skills and expertise, especially in the hospitality, tourism, and agricultural industries.  

The Diaspora Office engaged in discursive construction of what it meant to be a member of the Georgian diaspora. Since emigration had historically been viewed very negatively by Georgians, both at home and abroad, its activities seemed geared toward rehabilitating the idea of emigration by reframing emigrants as a “diaspora,” with its more positive connotation. For example, it introduced diaspora “identity cards,” which allowed the bearer to enter Georgia without a visa, access government scholarships, and join national sports teams. According to then Deputy Minister Nadiradze, the identity card was meant to be more than just a visit facilitation scheme. “There is also a sentimental moment...we believe that they will be highly honored to have this document.”

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29 This shift would bring Georgia in line with a global trend, whereby the discourse about diasporas has shifted from accusations of duplicity and bad faith toward home and host states, to an appreciation of their cosmopolitanism and their transcendence of borders. Bordes-Benayoun, 2010: 52.
30 The identity cards were introduced on 1 March 2012, and since Georgia did not allow dual citizenship (at least in part due to fears the status could be exploited by the Russian Federation, which might use Russian-speaking minorities as a fifth column) appear to have been a way to increase the access of Georgians abroad to the republic without granting them citizenship. To qualify, a person had to prove ties to Georgia through birth, marriage or ancestry as far back as five generations, and would presumably apply through an embassy or consulate, though little information was available on this process. Corso, 2012; Gugushvili, Alexi. 2012. “EUDO Citizenship Observatory Country Report: Georgia.” European University Institute. September. Accessed 29 June 2016. http://apps.eui.eu/Personal/Researchers/AlexiGugushvili/EUDO_Georgia.pdf. 4-5.
31 Deputy Minister Nadiradze, qtd. in Corso, 2012.
Similarities among these countries’ diaspora ministries were no accident. Rather than “reinventing the wheel,” Georgia’s Diaspora Office sought to emulate techniques used by other states with significant diaspora populations, including Armenia, which was seen as a model for stimulating diaspora involvement with homeland events. Of course, interest in Armenia’s diaspora relations was more than just academic for the Georgian government, considering the large population of ethnic Armenians living in Georgia, and their occasionally tense relations with the authorities.

Georgia’s tense relations with Russia were also reflected in its official diaspora institution. While it was clear that many thousands of Georgians lived in Russia in 2015, the Diaspora Office’s website listed twelve states with Georgian diaspora populations, and Russia was not one of them. More interestingly, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues had taken up the cause of the Circassian diaspora. The Minister met with Circassians abroad, and in February 2012, founded a Circassian Cultural Centre in Tbilisi. While the connection between Circassians (from the North Caucasus) and Georgia (in the South Caucasus) was not immediately obvious, in light of the Russian-Georgian war and ongoing tensions with Russia, and Minister Papuna

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32 Smith (2003: 728) notes that states have emulated each other’s institutional arrangements in the past, such as Portugal’s 1970s “Program for Portuguese Abroad,” which served as a model for Mexico.
33 Deputy Minister Nadiradze, qtd. in Corso, 2012.
34 Corso, 2012.
36 The Circassians (also known as Adyghe), are a North Caucasian ethnic group, many of whom were displaced during the 19th century Russian conquest of the Caucasus, and settled throughout the Middle East.
Davitaia’s depiction of the massacres and deportation of the Circassians as “genocide by the Russian Empire,” it was clear that the Georgian Diaspora Office’s expansion of its area of interest to include the Circassian diaspora was politically motivated.

Like the RA, Georgia decided to institutionalize its relations with Georgians abroad. But rather than taming and managing an unruly diaspora, Georgia’s “discursive power ministry” was a first mover, attempting to mold a diaspora out of negatively perceived emigrants. While it claimed a “historic” diaspora, judging by the dearth of information available about this group of ethnic Georgians abroad, they were not an organized force to be reckoned with, but rather, a community to be discovered. Georgia’s Office and its project of diaspora discovery also “discovered” the Circassian diaspora, broadening the republic’s community of concern to non-Georgians with a common experience of Russian aggression, yet appeared to conveniently gloss over the Georgians living in Russia (one of the largest populations of Georgians abroad), whose very presence in Russia complicated the Russian aggression narrative. Thus, Georgia was reframing its relationship with a constituency of (mostly) Georgians abroad, but via a different sort of identity gerrymandering than the one seen in the Armenian case.

Azerbaijan and its Gerrymandered “Diaspora”

Like Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan was home to a minority of the world’s ethnic Azerbaijanis. In 2013, 8 million Azerbaijanis reportedly lived in the republic, 15 million in Iran, 2 million each in Turkey and Russia, and roughly 700,000 in the US.

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38 “Meeting with the Circassian Diaspora.”
39 Also referred to as Azeris.
Upon independence, Azerbaijan’s government immediately made relations with Azerbaijanis abroad a symbolic priority, declaring December 31, 1991 the first annual Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis. From this early moment, however, Baku’s orientation toward “its” compatriots abroad was intended to channel their energies toward Baku-approved nationalist goals, and away from those that threatened what the elite perceived as the republic’s interests.

In the late Soviet period, Azerbaijani nationalism had centred on two general projects. The first was retaining/regaining control over Nagorno-Karabakh, while the second was (re)uniting with the ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran. In terms of the modern understanding of statehood, these goals were incompatible, one claiming strict adherence to the notion of territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders, the other essentially an irredentist project (and seen as such by Iran). Since Heydar (and later, Ilham) Aliyev opted for the former foreign policy approach (unsurprisingly, since the NK conflict had become a foundational trauma for the new state), the government implicitly abandoned the “Southern Azerbaijan” project in favour of a discussion of what role the “Azerbaijani diaspora”—a category now expanded to include the Azerbaijanis in Iran—should play in the new republic. His public pronouncements “frequently diluted the prominence of

USLU-Sinan-KOCAMAN.pdf. 47. The authors cite a global figure of 50 million, far higher than those offered by other scholars.

42 While this occurred during the presidency of Abulfaz Elchibey, the initiative was first proposed by Heydar Aliyev, then the chairman of the Majlis of Nakhchivan, and later, the president of Azerbaijan. Astourian, 2005: 98.

43 Azerbaijan’s second president Abulfaz Elchibey’s vehement anti-Iranian rhetoric contributed greatly to this mistrust. A secularist who openly despised Iran’s theocracy and criticized its treatment of its Azerbaijani minority, Elchibey had referred to Iran as a “doomed state,” and openly discussed the idea of a unified Azerbaijan. Cornell, Svante E. Azerbaijan Since Independence. Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe. 321.

Iranian Azerbaijanis by highlighting the existence of numerous diaspora communities, and making the Iranian community sound as if it were just one of many. According to Brown, by reframing the issue as one of state-diaspora relations, Aliyev was also able to deflect allegations of irredentism, since the expanded category included multiple populations, some of them non-contiguous, such as those in the US and Turkey, which Azerbaijan could hardly be accused of attempting to annex. This reframing encouraged Iranian Azerbaijanis to remain proud Azerbaijanis but loyal citizens of Iran, and Azerbaijanis the world over to lobby their host states for policies favourable to Azerbaijan, as the Armenian diaspora famously did on the RA’s (and NKR’s) behalf. Aliyev’s reframing made what amounted to a major territorial concession palatable for many Azerbaijanis at home and abroad. There are obvious parallels to be drawn between this treatment of a cross-border minority and the RA’s approach to the Javakheti Armenians, which was to implicitly include them in the category of “diaspora,” all the while maintaining enough of a rhetorical commitment to their “indigenous” status to deflect criticism that it was abandoning their cause.

Brown, 2004: 591. This strategy seems to have been largely effective, with the Iranian Azerbaijani question having largely disappeared from public view since 1993. However, Azerbaijan tolerated the presence of Iranian Azerbaijani liberation groups on its territory, as long as they remained relatively quiet.

Brown, 2004: 590. Technically, Turkey is a neighbouring state, at least to the Nakhichevan portion of Azerbaijan, but Azerbaijanis are not compactly settled near the Nakhichevan border. Thus, Turkey’s Azerbaijanis are a non-contiguous population.

Brown, 2004: 596.

There are obvious limits to this analogy, including the sheer size of the Azerbaijani population of Iran, which far exceeded that of the republic, and Iran’s regional power status. It is difficult to conceive of a scenario by which the Republic of Azerbaijan could have annexed a large portion of northern Iran without a large-scale war. Georgia’s Javakheti Armenians lived on a small, undesirable parcel of land within a small, vulnerable, partially dismembered state. While the RA was preoccupied with maintaining its open border with Georgia at all costs, some Armenian nationalists may have imagined a scenario in which Javakheti could be annexed, most likely with the help of Russia. Moreover, while conditions for Iranian Azerbaijanis (i.e. linguistic and cultural freedom) had improved since 1991, those of the Javakheti Armenians were seen to have deteriorated. This may explain why fewer Armenians seemed willing to accept the Ministry of Diaspora’s subtle (and plausibly deniable) reframing of the Javakheti Armenians as part of the diaspora.
Reframing all Azerbaijanis outside the republic as “diasporans,” a clear instance of identity gerrymandering, may have addressed the problem of irredentism. Yet encouraging them to organize in their host states generated another problem: the possibility of groups emerging which Baku did not control. Some of the emerging Azerbaijani diaspora organizations, such as those in the US, were dominated by Iranian Azerbaijanis who made claims that complicated Baku’s relations with Tehran. In 1997, a number of these groups established a World Azerbaijani Congress in Washington DC, whose main focus was the unification of “Northern” and “Southern” Azerbaijan. By 2005, it had branches in 36 states.

In an attempt to rein in the claims of such groups and effectively steer the diasporic agenda, Aliyev held the first Forum of World Azerbaijanis in Baku in November 2001. Like the Armenia-Diaspora Conferences, this forum achieved little other than joint declarations on Azerbaijani solidarity and the NK conflict. However, there were protests from Azerbaijanis living in Georgia and Russia about the chosen delegates from their regions, and particularly harsh criticism from Iranian Azerbaijanis, who had

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50 In the US, the president of the US-Azerbaijan Council suggested that one of the problems causing divisions among Azerbaijanis there was that “Many of these Azeri-Iranians may identify themselves culturally with Azerbaijan but their identification does not translate into support for our political or national causes such as for example over Nagorno-Karabakh.” Mollazade, Jeyhun. Qtd. in Astourian, 2005: 102.
51 Astourian, 2005: 101. Grebennikov notes, however, that few Iranian Azerbaijanis living in Iran supported unification with “Northern Azerbaijan” since, by the 1990s, they were well integrated into Iranian society and politics, many had become members of the business elite, their language was increasingly used in public, and their situation was considered stable. Grebennikov, 2013: 74.
52 The names of these conferences appeared to be quite fluid. The Forum of World Azerbaijanis (in Baku) was often referred to on websites and in articles as the World Azerbaijani Congress (a name identical to the conference held in Washington DC in 1997). This confusion no doubt served Baku’s interests, since it intended to situate itself at the centre of diaspora affairs and marginalize independent initiatives.
apparently not been represented at all.\textsuperscript{54} In the wake of the forum, Aliyev issued a 2002 decree establishing the State Committee on the Affairs with Azerbaijanis Living in Foreign Countries, a body intended to “centralise the activity of Azerbaijan Diaspora on implementation of national interests.”\textsuperscript{55}

Baku also sought to control the increasingly large (over 2 million) Azerbaijani population in Russia, most of whom had direct ties to the Azerbaijani republic, and in 2001, organized the first All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress. Held in Moscow, it was attended primarily by pro-Aliyev delegates, and excluded dissenting voices. It was seen as an attempt to harness the potential of Azerbaijans in Russia to play a positive role in the relations between the two states.\textsuperscript{56} However, despite these early moves, parallel organizations began to take shape in Russia, which were suspected of being pro-Moscow. Specifically, the emergence of a Union of Azerbaijani Organizations of Russia (UAOR), also known as the “Billionaires’ Union” due to the extraordinary wealth of some of its members, was troubling to Baku in that it included some businessmen known to be Kremlin loyalists,\textsuperscript{57} and had been formed by former members of the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress, an organization seen as reliably loyal to Baku.\textsuperscript{58} Given the RA’s close relations with Russia, the pro-Moscow sentiment expressed by Armenian respondents in Russia and Armenia, and the well-known links between Ara Abrahamyan

\textsuperscript{54} An estimated 70 percent of the world population of Azerbaijanis lived in “Southern Azerbaijan.” Not inviting delegates from this region was seen as a concession to Tehran, which was wary of the potential secessionism of this compactly settled minority on its northern border. Astourian, 2005: 100. Iranian Azerbaijanis also comprised the majority of the Azerbaijani diaspora abroad. Grebennikov, 2013: 73.
\textsuperscript{55} In 2008, its name was changed to the State Committee on Affairs with the Diaspora of Azerbaijan Republic. “The State Committee on Affairs with the Diaspora…”
\textsuperscript{56} Astourian, 2005: 101. It was also undoubtedly an attempt to counterbalance the influence of Armenian organizations emerging in Russia, given Moscow’s key role in the ongoing NK negotiations.
\textsuperscript{58} In October, 2012, the State Committee on Work (or Affairs) with the Diaspora denounced the UAOR on the grounds that it risked dividing Russia’s two million Azerbaijanis. Abbasov, 2013.
and Vladimir Putin, it seemed unlikely that the Union of Armenians of Russia could face competition from a more pro-Moscow rival. But to the extent that they ingratiated themselves to Russian elites, Armenians in Russia were seen to be serving RA interests, not undermining them.

Despite the many parallels between the Armenian and Azerbaijani experiences, Astourian notes the importance of sequence, in that the Armenian diaspora was well established long before 1991, whereas Azerbaijan’s took shape in the context of the existence of an independent Azerbaijan.  

Even among the Iranian Azerbaijani diaspora in the US, many of whom had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, the establishment of diaspora organizations gained momentum only after Azerbaijan’s independence. Still, Azerbaijan struggled to be the first mover in state-diaspora affairs. While its identity gerrymandering was relatively successful at silencing irredentist claims regarding Iranian Azerbaijan, it seems to have been less successful at securing the loyalty of Azerbaijanis in Russia where, having established its own pro-Baku umbrella organization, it failed to prevent the rise of competing oligarch-run groups.

On these issues, the Armenian “identity gerrymandering” project’s results were reversed. It was less successful in convincingly reframing the Javakheti Armenians as part of the diaspora, while it was far more successful in Russia, where RA authorities were not only satisfied with the emergence of a pro-Moscow Armenian organization, but in fact promoted it as a model to be emulated.

*Kazakhstan’s Demographic Imperative*

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60 Uslu, Kocaman, 2013: 47.
Among former Soviet states, only Kazakhstan’s relationship with its co-ethnics abroad was dominated by a migration paradigm approaching that of Israel. Unlike the RA, Kazakhstan inherited an ethnically heterogeneous population in which the titular group, ethnic Kazakhs, formed a minority.\footnote{Upon independence, ethnic Kazakhs barely formed a plurality, at roughly 40 percent of the population, with Russians at 38 percent. In 1997, after considerable Slavic out-migration, as well as an influx of \textit{oralmans}, ethnic Kazakhs finally constituted over 50 percent of the population. Cummings, 1998: 147.} Russians, who constituted the second largest ethnic group, were especially numerous in the northern regions of the state, bordering the Russian Federation. This demographic “imbalance” lay at the heart of the state’s diaspora policy, unique in the post-Soviet space, which consisted primarily of an active appeal to Kazakhs abroad to move “home.”\footnote{Cummings, 1998: 133. While unique among \textit{de jure} states, the \textit{de facto} state of Abkhazia, whose titular group was also a minority, had promoted diaspora repatriation since breaking away from Georgia in 1992. While it generally had difficulty attracting repatriates, in May 2012, a small number of ethnic Abkhazian refugees from Syria had begun to arrive in Abkhazia (490 by March 2014). Rimple, Paul. 2014. “Syrian Refugees Grapple with Adapting to Life in Abkhazia.” \textit{EurasiaNet}. 26 March. Accessed 1 March 2016. http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68194.}

Historic Kazakh dispersion, due to nomadic expansion, the movement of imperial frontiers, the imposition of internal Soviet borders, and a large movement of political refugees during the early Soviet era, had resulted in significant ethnic Kazakh populations in China’s Xinjiang-Uigur autonomous region, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey.\footnote{Cummings, 1998: 134-6. In the 1950s, many Kazakhs in China who had rebelled against the communist government fled to Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Kashmir. Some of those in Pakistan and Iran then accepted a 1952 invitation to settle in Turkey. Many of these re-diasporized Kazakhs traced their ancestry to East Turkestan, such that they considered Xinjiang, rather than Kazakhstan, to be their original homeland. Cummings, 1998: 139.} The Kazakh state’s repatriation initiative, announced in 1992, legally recognized the right of all ethnic Kazakhs to repatriate, invited them to do so, established an annual immigration quota, and offered modest financial incentives for repatriates, including specific incentives to settle in the
heavily Russian north. This demographic project, which specifically targeted Kazakhs living in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Mongolia via bilateral agreements, sought to increase the Kazakh ethnic composition of the state, and was also an attempt at cultural “Kazakhification,” since most repatriates (or oralmans) spoke no Russian, and had preserved Kazakh traditions that were seen to have been lost in the Sovietized republic. In 1992, Kazakhstan also established a quasi-NGO, the World Kazakh Association, nominally headed by President Nazarbaev, to manage relations with the Kazakh diaspora, but its activities were dwarfed by the focus on repatriation and settlement, which were managed by a variety of government ministries.

Between 1991 and 2011, 860,400 ethnic Kazakhs repatriated to Kazakhstan. Many were rural, poor, and unskilled, and thus did not constitute a potential power base, nor were they represented in the Nazarbaev government. Many repatriates from outside the former Soviet Union experienced a high degree of culture shock and difficulty integrating into Kazakh society. Especially for Mongolian Kazakhs, who were the most likely to “repatriate,” idealized ethnic return myths promoted by the Kazakh state gave way to the harsh reality of their political, economic and social marginalization within a largely russified society. Tensions often flared with local Kazaks, who in some cases

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64 Many of the promised incentives never materialized. While Kazakhstan generally had an adequate legal framework for oralman integration, it proved difficult in practice, at least partly due to corruption. Bonnenfant, 2012: 39; 65 Bonnenfant, 2012: 34.
66 Established at the first World Congress of Kazakhs in 1992, WKA (also referred to as the World Association of Kazakhs) attended to strictly cultural and linguistic matters, such as the provision of teaching materials, with a view to temporary cultural preservation (until diasporans could repatriate). Bonnenfant, 2012: 36.
blamed the newcomers for crime, and in others, considered the oralmans “too Kazakh,” in other words, traditional bordering on anachronistic.\footnote{This disillusionment led many repatriates to attempt to return to Mongolia. Cummings, 1998: 145.}

Kazakhstan’s diaspora policy was cautious with respect to contiguous states, with which it did not want to risk enflaming tensions, and especially its most powerful neighbours, Russia and China. Its initial repatriation drive only included agreements with non-contiguous states, and did not extend to Russia’s and China’s much larger Kazakh populations. Moreover, Kazakhstani authorities refused to intercede on behalf of their ethnic kin in Russia and China regarding cultural, linguistic, and political rights.\footnote{Kazakhstan feared Chinese irredentism stemming from dissatisfaction with having ceded land during the “unequal treaties” with Imperial Russia, and was keenly aware of Beijing’s sensitivity to anything resembling separatism in the Xinjiang region (where most Kazakhs lived). Cummings, 1998: 145-7. The presence of a substantial Russian minority made Kazakhstan vulnerable to Russian intercession on behalf of its diaspora. Bonnenfant, 2012: 35. In spite of Kazakhstan’s preferences and bilateral agreements, most repatriates came from Uzbekistan (60.5 percent) and a significant proportion from China (12.4 percent) and Russia (5.3 percent). \textit{Special Report}, 2012: 9.}

To avoid alarming its large population of ethnic Russians (and by extension, Russia), Kazakhstan balanced its repatriation drive abroad with a cautious nationalizing policy at home, acknowledging Russian as an official language alongside Kazakh, and deploying ambiguous cultural strategies, such as Nazarbaev’s focus on “Eurasianism,” in which Kazakh identity was depicted as part of a larger, continental mosaic of cultures.\footnote{Schatz, Edward A. D. 2000. “Framing strategies and non-conflict in multi-ethnic Kazakhstan.” \textit{Nationalism and Ethnic Politics} 6, 2: 72, 78.}

Bonnenfant notes that the state’s initially optimistic view of repatriation was revised as its difficulties became apparent, and by 2005 the official rhetoric had shifted somewhat, from what Kazakhstan could offer returnees to what returnees could do for their homeland. Grand designs of enticing the entire Kazakh diaspora to repatriate were also adjusted downward, with the government more realistically focusing on the
conditions faced by Kazakhs in diaspora, and considering the Kazakh diaspora *in situ* a vehicle for improving relations between Kazakhstan and their host states.  

Kazakhstan’s approach to Kazakhs abroad illustrates the importance of perceived ethno-demographic balance to repatriation policy, and like the Israeli case, suggests why the unusually homogeneous RA, where the titular nation exceeded 95% of the population, would not have promoted diaspora repatriation, even as steadily high emigration left it with a dwindling labour force, tax base, and number of military conscripts. Unlike Kazakhstan’s diaspora, the established Armenian diaspora constituted a wealthy, potentially rival power base, and from the point of view of RA elites, was thus best kept at a distance. Kazakhstan’s large, geographically concentrated Russian minority, bordering on Russia, was both the cause of its perceived demographic imbalance, and the biggest impediment to nationalizing policies in Kazakhstan. The Russian factor was, as we will see, complicated further in the Ukrainian case by the large population of ethnic Ukrainians in Russia.

**Ukraine’s Reluctance to “Diasporize” its “Eastern Diaspora”**

Like Armenia, Ukraine had two “diasporas.” The Western diaspora, located predominantly in North America (and to a lesser extent, Western Europe), was seen by Ukrainian authorities as having nationalist views and generally being out of touch with the realities facing the Ukrainian state. The Eastern diaspora consisted of more recent departures from Ukraine, and “accidental diaspora” populations due to shifting borders, living in former-Soviet states (predominantly Russia and Belarus), and former-Communist East European states, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and

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72 At the 2005 World Congress of Kazakhs (or *Qurultay*), Nazarbaev referred to the diaspora as a “golden bridge” between two states. Qtd. in Bonnenfant, 2012: 35.

Romania. All shared a communist past, and were considered culturally closer to Ukraine than the more distant Western diaspora. They were also less organized, and had a weaker sense of Ukrainian identity.

Similarities between the Ukrainian and Armenian cases are striking. Like Armenians, Ukrainians had briefly experienced independent statehood in 1917-1919 before absorption into USSR. While they were granted their own Union Republic, its Soviet-era borders did not encompass all of what was claimed as Ukrainian territory, leaving out the Kuban, for instance. By the 1990s, the Western diaspora, which was formed by a number of “waves” of migration beginning in the 1800s, was well integrated, characterized by language loss and intermarriage, and resembled Bakalian’s “symbolic Armenians” in the US. The 1986 Chornobyl nuclear catastrophe, like the 1988 Armenian Earthquake, galvanized the Western diaspora to respond with massive concern and relief. And, like its Armenian counterpart, in 1991 the Ukrainian Western diaspora shifted its orientation sharply toward the independent homeland, in some cases at the expense of properly funding its own institutions. Diaspora donors became disillusioned with corruption on the part of Ukrainian officials, into whose pockets much of their aid

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74 Figures on the size of the Eastern diaspora were contentious, and many scholars claim that official figures have been gross underestimates, especially in Russia and Belarus where there have historically been pressures to self-identify as a member of the titular majority. Isajiw notes that while the 2002 All-Russian census listed just under 3 million Ukrainians, unofficial estimates placed the Ukrainian population at over 10 million. Isajiw, Wsevolod W. 2010. “The Ukrainian Diaspora.” The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present. Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, and Anthony D. Smith, eds. Studies in Judaica, 9. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 290.


22 While the last Soviet census (1989) claimed few Ukrainians in the Kuban region, Cipko reported that up to 70 percent of the population was thought to have some ethnic Ukrainian background. Cipko, Serge. 1994. “Ukrainians in the Former Republics of USSR Outside Ukraine.” Ukraine and Ukrainians throughout the World: A Demographic and Sociological Guide to the Homeland and Its Diaspora. Ann Lencyk Pawliczko, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 139.


77 Bakalian, 1993: 395, 421.

78 Isajiw, 2010: 309.

79 Isajiw, 2010: 317.
seemed to disappear, but also actively lobbied their governments for Ukraine-friendly policies, including accepting new Ukrainian immigrants. The diaspora-homeland reacquaintance revealed the vast differences between the two, and perhaps as a result, diaspora Ukrainians were largely unwelcome in Ukrainian politics, and Western diaspora repatriation was “negligible.”

But in contrast to RA authorities, Kyiv did not enthusiastically embrace the culturally closer Eastern diaspora. The impetus for doing so came, instead, from the organizations of the Western diaspora (and domestically, Ukrainian nationalists), who saw their Eastern counterparts as victims of denationalizing policies, and were critical of Kyiv’s timidity with respect to Ukrainians in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Ukrainian authorities made early attempts to temper and counterbalance the nationalist tendencies of the Western diaspora, and those efforts cautiously incorporated Eastern diasporans. One of the more concrete manifestations was the 1993 creation of the Ukrainian World Coordinating Council (UWCC), a Kyiv-based, state-sponsored body with representatives from both the Eastern and Western diasporas. The UWCC appeared

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81 Once in North America, however, the new Ukrainian immigrants often clashed culturally with the established communities of Western diasporans, who often characterized them as Homo sovieticus, and bristled at their preference for the Russian language. Satzewich, 2002: 193-6.
82 Satzewich, 2002: 12.
83 According to Wilson, Western diaspora repatriates only occupied “middle-ranking and advisory positions” in the Ukrainian government, and that their political party, the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, has had little electoral success. He describes the party as “a pale shadow of the Armenian Dashnaks.” Wilson, 1998: 122.
84 Vishnevsky, 2003: 167. There was no state policy encouraging diaspora repatriation. In 2002, Satzewech suggested that no more than a few thousand Ukrainians from around the world were living and working in Ukraine at any given time, and that, as in Armenia, many of the more permanent “returnees” were in fact accidental repatriates, having come temporarily for work and stayed. Satzewich, 2002: 203.
85 Most of the Western diaspora hailed from western Ukraine, left when it was ruled by the Habsburgs, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, and were influenced culturally by generations of life in the West. The Eastern diaspora consisted of migrants from southern, central, and eastern Ukraine during the late Russian Imperial and Soviet periods, and as members of Communist states, they shared an institutional legacy with citizens of Ukraine. Wilson, 1998: 122.
to be an alternative to the Western diaspora-dominated Ukrainian World Congress (UWC), originally founded in 1967 as the World Congress of Free Ukrainians, and after 1991, expanded to include Eastern diaspora organizations.\textsuperscript{86} According to Satzewich, the UWCC quickly became “a creature of the Ukrainian government” whose “Soviet-style authoritarian methods” offended Western diasporans and caused considerable strain between it and the UWC.\textsuperscript{87}

Perhaps the most salient difference between the Ukrainian and Armenian diasporas was their orientation toward Russia.\textsuperscript{88} Unlike Armenians, many of whom saw Russia and the Soviet Union as their only protection against the Turkish threat, in the eyes of many Ukrainians, Russia and the Soviet Union were the primary threat, and had been responsible for their great national tragedy, the 1932-33 Holodomor. And while Soviet Armenians had largely benefited from Soviet nationalities policies, the similarities between Ukrainian and Russian language and culture had been stressed over their differences, and Ukrainians in the Soviet Union had often found themselves subject to assimilationist measures.\textsuperscript{89} Thus, unlike the Armenian established diaspora, which was divided with respect to its orientation toward the USSR, the Ukrainian diaspora in the

\textsuperscript{86} Satzewich, 2002: 135; Wilson, 1998: 121-22. Based in Toronto, Canada, the UWC’s website cites the Congress’s mission as representing Ukrainian interests, strengthening Ukrainian culture, strengthening Ukraine-diaspora bonds, promoting democracy and human rights, and “helping Ukraine become the natural epicentre for Ukrainianism throughout the world for the benefit of Ukrainians both in Ukraine and abroad.” http://ukrainianworldcongress.org/index.php?id=260

\textsuperscript{87} Satzewich, 2002: 135.

\textsuperscript{88} To be sure, there are plenty of other notable differences. Unlike the Armenian established diaspora, most Western diasporans hailed from territory in present-day Ukraine (predominantly Western Ukraine), and many had relatives there with whom they reestablished contact once glasnost and independence created the conditions for doing so. Isajiw, 2010: 308. There was also no enormous wave of Ukrainian “victim” diasporans. Instead, each wave combined labour migrants with political refugees, though the Ukrainian famine/genocide of 1932-33, known as Holodomor, arguably came to define diaspora activity even if it was not the precise cause of its dispersion. Prymak, Thomas, cited in Satzewich, 2002: 13; Satzewich, 2002: 10.

\textsuperscript{89} Wilson notes that since the union of East Slavic peoples was the “cornerstone of ‘Soviet’ identity,” Ukrainians living within the USSR but outside Soviet Ukraine were never recognized as a Ukrainian diaspora. Wilson, 1998: 108.
West was much more anti-Soviet, and in the post-Soviet period, this translated into a generally anti-Russian orientation. In the post-independence period, the degree to which Russian was spoken in Ukraine, and resistance (even by ethnic Ukrainians) to learning Ukrainian rankled Western diasporans, who continued to view Russian as the language of the oppressor. This also strained relations between established members of the Western diaspora and recent “fourth wave” migrants from Ukraine, who often identified more closely with other post-Soviet migrants (including Russians), and preferred to form their own organizations rather than join those established by the “old guard.”

Within newly independent Ukraine, political forces were divided with respect to views of the Ukrainian nation. The Ukrainian right tended to embrace ethnic nationalism, and to view the “diaspora” in ethnic terms, though it was ultimately willing to consider a broader view that combined ethnicity with territorial origin. The left, including the Communist Party, continued to espouse the Soviet myth of the fraternity of East Slavs—Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians—and saw the Ukrainian nation as part of a broader ‘Slavic-Orthodox civilization’ if not a component of the ‘Soviet People.’

90 Like the Armenian diaspora, however, there were ideological/religious differences among Ukrainian diasporan organizations (In Canada, these were Catholic, Orthodox, Liberal Nationalist, and Nationalist), each of which built up a system of parallel affiliate organizations. There were pro-Communist Ukrainian organizations, like the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians, but by the end of the Cold War they were very much in the minority. Isajiw, 2010: 296.

91 Satzewich notes that at the 1997 World Forum of Ukrainians, the Ukrainian World Congress proposed that the government of Ukraine hold a “Second Nuremberg” where former Communist leaders would be tried for crimes such as “forced starvation, terror, deportation, genocide, and penal servitude.” Satzewich, 2002: 10. More recently, in 2015, Paul Grod, Chair of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress sat on the board of Tribute to Liberty, the foundation sponsoring the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to build a colossal (and controversial) Memorial to the Victims of Communism in a prominent location in Canada’s capital city. Satzewich, 2002: 198.


Ukraine’s ethnic composition was perhaps the largest complication in forging relations with ethnic Ukrainians abroad. Independent Ukraine was a multiethnic state in which Russians were the largest ethnic minority. In fact, the Russian population of Ukraine at independence, 11.4 million or 22.1 percent, constituted the largest segment of what came to be seen as the post-Soviet Russian “diaspora.” Additionally, ethnic identity in Ukraine was somewhat fluid, such that ethnic Ukrainians, especially those living in Eastern Ukraine, were often Russian speakers (ruskoyazychnye), and had both a cultural and (to a degree) political affinity to Russia. In contrast, there were few ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking Ukrainians in Western Ukraine, which also tended to lean politically toward Europe and away from Russia.

Mirroring the vast population of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, two thirds of the Ukrainian “Eastern diaspora” lived in Russia. As such, taking a keen interest in the well-being of Ukrainians abroad meant taking a keen interest in Ukrainians in Russia, and this risked a Russian quid pro quo, especially if Russian ethnic identity was perceived as under threat in Ukraine. Thus, Kyiv considered the Western diaspora’s (and Western Ukrainian nationalists’) desires for de-russification in Ukraine on the one hand, and an increased interest in Ukrainians in Russia on the other, to be radical and potentially destabilizing, and evidence of a failure to appreciate the sensitivity of the situation on the ground. In short, for Kyiv, state-diaspora relations were a dangerous game.

96 These differences have at times been overstated. During the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas, it became clear that, while they may have supported pro-Russian policies within Ukraine, most Russian speakers had little desire to actually join Russia.
99 This assessment, in light of the events of the 2014 Russian annexation of majority ethnic Russian Crimea and sponsorship of pro-Russian rebellion in the Donbas, appears to have been remarkably accurate.
In addition to the risks involved, engaging Ukraine’s Eastern diaspora was no easy task, since many did not self-identify as Ukrainian. In this sense, the Eastern diaspora differed from Armenia’s post-Soviet “diaspora.” Regardless of the degree to which they had integrated into Russian society, their fluency in the Armenian language, or the extent to which they saw themselves as connected to the RA, ethnic Armenians in Russia knew themselves to be, and were known as, ethnically Armenian. They were phenotypically distinct, and were seen as belonging to a separate ethnonation.\textsuperscript{100} The Ministry of Diaspora’s reframing of the Armenians in Russia as “diasporans” did not require a reframing of their ethnic identity as Armenians. By contrast, many of the people claimed by Ukrainians to be part of the “Eastern diaspora” did not consider themselves, or were not considered by their host societies, to be ethnic Ukrainians. As Slavs living in Slavic host societies, their ethnic, religious, linguistic, and phenotypical similarity made assimilation possible, and in some locales, sub-ethnic identities such as Rusyn and Ruthenian competed with the “Ukrainian” identity preferred by Ukrainian ethnic entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{101} In non-Slavic Soviet and post-Soviet republics, Ukrainians tended to consider themselves part of a Slavic, “Russian-speaking” diaspora and see their interests as aligned with those of Russians.\textsuperscript{102} In Russia, ethnic Ukrainians were largely Russian-speaking, and generally had a weak sense of national identity. Those trying to cultivate Ukrainianness there faced the difficulty that Ukrainian historic territorial claims, myths,

\textsuperscript{100} Indeed, this obvious ethnic difference had made them the targets of ethnic discrimination and violence, especially in the 1990s.
\textsuperscript{101} Ukrainians have claimed, for instance, that the Ukrainian population figures for the former Czechoslovakia were artificially reduced by the authorities’ promotion of a “Ruthenian” identity and a corresponding Ruthenian Uniate church. Wilson, 1998: 118.
\textsuperscript{102} Wilson, 1998: 112.
and symbols had to compete with overlapping Russian ones, with both nations claiming, for example, the Cossack lineage in the Kuban.\textsuperscript{103}

Still, after 1991, and in the wake of Kyiv’s All-World Forum of Ukrainians held in 1992, Ukrainian organizations began to form throughout the post-Communist region. Ukrainians in Russia established a number of organizations to represent their interests, including a “national-cultural autonomy”\textsuperscript{104} in 1999, as well as the 1993 Union of Ukrainians of Russia, an umbrella organization which, in addition to cultural concerns, “supported the Ukrainian line in disputes with Russia, criticizing the Russian Duma for its stance on Crimea and condemning the demands of the Russian diaspora in Ukraine.”\textsuperscript{105} These organizations became casualties of deteriorating bilateral relations. In 2010, both were de-registered by authorities for supposed anti-Russian sentiment, and when a new Ukrainian Congress of Russia was formed in 2012, Russian authorities refused to register it after multiple requests.\textsuperscript{106} In 2015, in the wake of the Euromaidan, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and the war in Donbas, it was reported that certain members of Ukrainian organizations in Russia who had left the country were refused re-entry without explanation. Meanwhile, Russian authorities had apparently established their own pro-Moscow Ukrainian organizations, such as Ukrainians of Moscow.\textsuperscript{107} These

\textsuperscript{103} Wilson, 1998: 109, 113.

\textsuperscript{104} Prina, 2016: 180-7. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of NCAs as the preferred mode of non-titular ethnic minority representation in Russia.


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developments seem to have vindicated Kyiv’s caution with respect to encouraging 
organization in the Eastern diaspora.

Despite the deep similarities between the Ukrainian and Armenian cases, strained 
relations with Russia, the presence of large “mirror minorities” in Russia and Ukraine, 
and the weak Ukrainian identity in the Eastern diaspora precluded Kyiv from identity 
gerrymandering to dilute its pool of problematic Western diasporans, whose nationalism 
was perceived by Kyiv as threatening its stability, with culturally closer Eastern 
diasporans. Instead, it resisted Western diaspora pressure to “diasporize” the Eastern 
diaspora, a process which would not only have been risky, but would have required a 
much deeper project of “Ukrainianization.”

Israel and the Centrality of the Migration Paradigm

Compelling parallels exist between the Jewish and Armenian cases.108 Both Israel 
and the RA were preceded by, and coexisted with, strong and influential “classic” 
diasporas. Both had powerful American lobbies that helped secure significant US aid for 
their respective states, with the exceptional influence of the Jewish lobby owing to 
Israel’s specific geopolitical significance.109 Consequently, both tended to effectively 
equate their established diasporas with those living in the US, often precluding an 
accurate portrait of diaspora identity and interests.110 As polities, both the RA and Israel 
faced the burden of historic traumas from which foreign policy could not reasonably be

108 Some scholars continue to insist on the unique and incomparable experience of the Jewish diaspora. 
Citing John Armstrong, Sandler takes issue with Gabriel Sheffer and the “school of comparative diasporas,” which sees fit to compare the Jewish case to others. Sandler, Shmuel. 2004. “Towards a 
Conceptual Framework of World Jewish Politics: State, Nation and Diaspora in a Jewish Foreign Policy.” 
Israel Affairs 10,1: 302.
110 “When the Diaspora is mentioned, especially in Israel, the term ‘American Jewry’ would probably be a 
more accurate description of what is being discussed.” Ben-Moshe, Danny, and Zohar Segev. 2007. 
“Introduction: World Jewry, Identity and Israel.” Israel, the Diaspora and Jewish Identity. Danny Ben-
dissociated. Sanders notes that Israel’s “Jewish foreign policy exceeds the normal national traumas that influence collective decision-making processes or decision-makers.”\footnote{Sanders, 2004: 306.} In the RA, Ter-Petrosyan’s attempt to formulate a foreign policy that avoided this set of obligations was ultimately unsuccessful.\footnote{In Ter-Petrosyan’s party’s own Declaration of Independence, the Preamble acknowledged the state’s general “historic responsibility” in achieving national aspirations and justice, while Article 11 stated that “The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.” Armenian Declaration of Independence. 1990. The Government of the Republic of Armenia. 23 August. Accessed 13 February 2016. http://www.gov.am/en/independence/ While Ter-Petrosyan had objected to this inclusion in the Declaration, this amounted to a shift in the ANM’s position (though not that of its base), since three of the 13 goals listed in its original election platform had related to the genocide and territorial claims. Astourian, 2005: 85.} Finally, like the RA, Israel saw itself as the homeland of both a pre-existing\textit{Jewish} diaspora, with no necessary experience of, or ancestral ties to the state, and an \textit{Israeli} diaspora, consisting of emigrants from the state.

The defining difference between the Israeli/Jewish and Armenian cases was the centrality of the migration paradigm to Jewish state-diaspora relations. While other states have been content to serve as symbolic homelands for their diasporas, from its inception, Israel sought the physical in-migration of Jews and considered this the fundamental basis for nation building.\footnote{Gold, Steven J. 2007. “Israeli Emigration Policy.” \textit{Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration.} Nancy L. Green and François Weil, eds. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 283.} However, as noted in Chapter 7, Suny suggests that the formation of Israel is more accurately compared to the founding of \textit{Soviet} Armenia, to which hundreds of thousands of dispersed Armenians, reeling from the trauma of recent genocide, were invited to settle, demographically Armenizing the territory of the republic.\footnote{Suny, 2001: 885.} The independent RA, already a highly homogeneous Armenian state, never
sought to attract Armenian repatriates from abroad as a matter of state policy, and in fact, its elites described mass repatriation as impractical at every opportunity.

To attract repatriates, Zionists reframed “diaspora,” transforming it from the accepted reality into a negative condition of exile, or golah. Those who left this base experience for Israel were making aliyah, an “ascent” to a higher place. Zionism considered Israel the homeland of all Jews, regardless of actual ancestry, and accordingly, Jews migrating to Israel were considered “returnees,” entitled to instant citizenship and resettlement benefits. Notwithstanding the Zionist ideological movement, most “repatriates” to Israel after 1948 came from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, motivated by deteriorating conditions in their host states, the Israeli offer of asylum, and a dearth of other options. These were joined in the late 1980s and 1990s by approximately one million Jews from the former Soviet Union.115 Far fewer left their affluent and relatively secure North American and Western European lives for an uncertain future in Israel.116

The centrality of the migration paradigm produced considerable tension between Israeli elites and diasporans who chose to remain in their host states. The continued “categorical imperative demanded by the state” and its denial by diaspora elites and masses “invited both sides to participate in a choreography of mutual rejection, and not…to rethink the paradigm itself.”117 For those who chose not to “make aliyah,”

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philanthropy emerged as the default trade-off, and tended to respond to “vivid images of the needs of the recipients, and the weaknesses of Israeli society, thus defining Israel as a place to support but not to join.”\(^{118}\) With the likelihood of aliyah from the West steadily declining, the moral one-way migration imperative was increasingly replaced by appeals to engage in round-trip travel and heritage tourism. The creation of Birthright Israel in 1999 (followed by other “homeland visit” programs, such as Oren and Otzma), began a massive experiment in connecting young Jewish diasporans to their (homeland-based) identity. By 2007, 72,000 college-aged Jews from over 28 countries had participated, 50,000 from North America alone. In the wake of these visits, like their Armenian counterparts, participants reported an increased importance of Jewish identity in their lives, and the centrality of Israel to that identity.\(^{119}\)

Israel adopted a dramatically different approach to its own emigrants, or the “Israeli diaspora.” Given the centrality of the immigration paradigm to Israel’s self-conception, and the perception that population growth was necessary for Israel’s military security and economic survival, the emigration of Israelis presented a major ideological and psychological dilemma. Rates of emigration remained relatively low,\(^{120}\) but were perceived by Israeli elites and the public as having the potential to create a demographic emergency, given the significant population of Israeli Arabs in the state.\(^{121}\) As such, Israeli emigrants were seen as undermining the process of aliyah, and were labeled pejoratively as yored, or “descenders”.\(^{122}\) In the 1970s and 1980s, the Israeli government

\(^{118}\) Mittelberg, 2007: 43.
\(^{119}\) Mittelberg, 2007: 35-42.
\(^{120}\) Between 1948 and the end of 1992, 438,900 Israelis were considered to have left permanently. Israel Bulletin of Statistics 6 (1994), qtd. in Gold, 2007: 285-6.
\(^{121}\) Sobel, Zvi, qtd. in Gold 288-9.
\(^{122}\) Gold, 2007: 291.
was particularly hostile to emigrants, with Yitzhak Rabin referring to them as “moral lepers,” and “the dregs of the earth.”\(^{123}\) It also pressured Jewish diaspora organizations to withhold aid and services from Israeli emigrants.\(^{124}\) By 1991, Israel had adopted a more conciliatory approach to its emigrants, reframing them as potential candidates for re-aliyah, a shift Gold attributes to demographic and economic changes that made it better able to tolerate the loss of human capital, and a realization that, after the massive wave of post-Soviet aliyah, the Israeli diaspora was the most likely source of future returnees.\(^{125}\)

This condemnation, followed by rehabilitation, of Israeli emigrants differed markedly from the RA approach since independence, which was to view its own citizens’ emigration as a perhaps regrettable, but economically necessary activity, with the associated benefit of remittances sent to families in the republic.\(^{126}\) RA elites also viewed emigrants and other post-Soviet Armenians in a more positive light than the established diaspora due to their shared culture and their acknowledgement of the RA as the undisputed, authoritative homeland.\(^{127}\) The reframing of post-Soviet Armenians as “diasporans” was not a rehabilitation of their status, but rather, an indication that they were the example for established diasporans to emulate.

Since 1999, Israel has had a ministry responsible for diaspora affairs, but unlike Armenia’s, it combined diaspora relations with various other portfolios, and underwent six transformations between 1999 and 2015, from the Ministry of Social and Diaspora Affairs, to the Ministry of Diaspora, Society and the Fight Against Anti-Semitism, the

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\(^{123}\) Qtd. in Gold, 2007: 292.
\(^{125}\) Gold 287, 297-8.
\(^{126}\) As mentioned in Chapter 3, elites may also have seen emigration as a “safety valve,” alleviating domestic unrest in the absence of meaningful reforms. Payaslian, 2011: 220-1.
\(^{127}\) Like Israel, RA elites saw RA emigrants as the most likely (and most desirable) repatriates, though it did little to attract them to move home.
Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, and the Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs, before finally becoming the fully dedicated Ministry of Diaspora Affairs in 2015. For much of this time, the ministry appeared to focus less on diaspora affairs and more on “public diplomacy” and Israel’s international reputation. In 2012, its website was almost entirely devoted to training Israelis to be ambassadors for Israel and its achievements, whether abroad, or when meeting foreigners in Israel. According to then Minister Yuli Edelstein’s message to travelers:

Every single one of you has...the power to defend both the state’s image and the Israeli people’s honor. You can do it through advocacy...by giving people the facts and the right messages, and through proper behavior that shows respect both for the people and places that you visit, and for the place that you come from.

While the minister spoke out against instances of anti-Semitism abroad, where it would affect the Jewish (and Israeli) diaspora, he consistently linked these to anti-Israel or anti-Zionist sentiment. This ministry bore little resemblance to the Armenian government body, except perhaps to the extent that it was a small, peripheral affair characterized by jurisdictional overlap with other ministries and agencies.

128 Little was known about the activities of this newest iteration at the time of writing.
132 Maltz described the then Ministry of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs as “a pretty small operation with an annual budget of NIS 10 million” and noted that the Jewish Agency and a special desk at the Foreign Ministry were also responsible for diaspora affairs. Maltz, Judy. 2014. “Meet the Reason That Big Israel-Diaspora Initiatives Are Going Nowhere.” Haaretz. 10 Nov. Accessed 21 Feb 2016. http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/premium-1.625753.
Despite the seemingly instrumental, realpolitik approach to the Jewish diaspora, and the degree to which Israel became “the civil religion of Diaspora Jews”, Sandler cautions that Israel has generally not been able to advance its interests at the expense of the diaspora. Instead, “Jewish policies and the Jewish agenda have traditionally been debated and the decisions which have emerged were the results of a bargaining process which Israel did not always dictate.”

Conclusion

As a nation with a “classic diaspora” Armenians tended to see Israel and the Jewish diaspora as the state-diaspora model to be emulated, and against which their own experience should be weighed. Most of these comparisons were unfavourable, with respondents bemoaning, for instance, the lack of diaspora repatriation, and the military weakness and economic underdevelopment of the RA, as compared with what they perceived as the thriving and formidable state of Israel. But these comparisons overlooked the degree to which Israel, from its inception, had been intended as a physical homeland for diaspora Jews, and whose population was composed, in large part, of repatriates. The RA Ministry of Diaspora may have looked to Israel for potential solutions, but it was clear that the two states faced dramatically different problems. In the Israeli/Jewish case, homeland round-trip tourism was the solution to the problem of a stalled one-way migration imperative, a second-best way to engage with diasporans who were unlikely ever to answer the state’s call to repatriate. For the RA, which had never encouraged diaspora repatriation, and indeed, whose established diaspora largely viewed

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134 Sandler, 2004: 308.
it as an incomplete or second-best homeland,\footnote{As noted in Chapter 3, the vast majority of established diasporans’ ancestors hailed from present-day eastern Turkey, and not from what is now the RA. Combined with the RA’s Soviet legacy, this has generated serious resistance to established diasporans viewing the RA as “the homeland.”} it was instead seen as a way to circumvent the traditional diaspora institutions and establish unmediated (or differently mediated) interactions with the “homeland.” If in the Israeli/Jewish case, the diaspora was not the highest priority portfolio of a multi-portfolio ministry, this ministry also did not need to harness the diaspora to the homeland, since the homeland was already the “civil religion of Diaspora Jews.”\footnote{Ben-Moshe, Segev, 2007: 1. This is not to suggest there was any lack of contentious and vigorous debate among “World Jewry,” but rather that Israel’s status as a symbolic Jewish diaspora homeland was supported by its existence as an actual, physical Jewish diaspora homeland.} To the extent that the established Armenian diaspora viewed the Ministry of Diaspora and its pronouncements with cynicism, this reflected the degree to which the “civil religion” case had yet to be convincingly made, and that the ministry’s rhetorical embrace of the diaspora was contradicted by the government’s legacy of taking the established diaspora’s money while keeping it at arm’s length.

Armenia may have been the only post-Soviet state with a “classic diaspora,” but its approach to that diaspora in many ways resembled other post-Soviet states’ instrumental approaches to their ethnic kins abroad. For post-Soviet states, ethnic diasporas were their diasporas. Originally designed as Soviet homelands for their titular nations, it became the default position that every newly independent state would cultivate a relationship with its co-ethnics abroad, that the state would speak for the nation, and that the diaspora existed to serve the interests of the state. Where lip service was paid to the state protecting or nurturing the diaspora, the ultimate goal of such assistance was the diaspora’s future ability to aid the home state. Where relations with diasporas threatened to exacerbate relations with regional powers, they were quietly shelved. Problematic diasporas, which
acted as independent power bases and challenged the state’s authority, were to be
harnessed to the state but kept out of its politics, and, where possible, de-emphasized by
focusing on more compliant compatriots abroad. In other words, notwithstanding
approaches that see diasporas as wanting to “have their cake and eat it”137 in terms of
their attachments to the relative safety of host states, and their affective bonds with the
home state, it was home state elites who clearly wished to have it all: the territorial
sovereignty and non-interference promised by the Westphalian nation-state model,138 and
the added benefit of quasi-constituents abroad. As members of the nation, diasporas were
claimed as the rightful concern of “their” home states, but as citizens of other states, they
could conveniently be excluded, discursively or physically, when they were troublesome.

The particular patterns of state-diaspora relations in these newly independent states
reflected their ethno-demographic composition, their relations with Russia and other
regional powers, and their perceived need to stifle nationalist elements. In just these few
cases, we see many state attempts to reframe diaspora relations in some way, whether to
expand the category of diaspora to dilute “noisy” dissenters (Armenia, Azerbaijan), to
upgrade or downgrade the status of the diaspora identity category (Georgia), to shape the
diaspora organizational landscape (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine), or to re-envision the
role of diasporas vis-à-vis the home state (Armenia, Kazakhstan). In some cases, the state
had the advantage of being a first mover, whose independence preceded the emergence of
a cohesive and organized diaspora (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia), while in others,
the state faced a sizeable pre-existing organized diaspora, specifically in the West

138 Of course, the Westphalian ideal had come under considerable challenge by 1991, but the elites of
newly independent states, especially smaller or weaker ones, considered the international norm a bulwark
against external meddling in their affairs.
(Ukraine, Armenia). In all of the cases examined above, we see the creation of some form of home-state-controlled, diaspora-oriented organization, be it an official ministry or state agency (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), a quasi-NGO (Kazakhstan), or an alternative to an existing diaspora-based diaspora coordination organization (Ukraine). Given the vast differences between these organizations, in terms of size, structure, and function (and the dearth of scholarly literature about them) it is difficult to compare their roles in the reframing of state-diaspora relations. But at least symbolically, each state’s version was an attempt to institutionalize a vision of the state-diaspora relationship, both physically and symbolically situated in the home state. In other words, it was a discursive assertion of the centrality of the home state to the transborder nation.
Methodological Appendix

This dissertation adopts the approach of scholars who have preferred question-driven research methods to dogmatic ontological and epistemological convictions that preclude one type of investigation or another.\(^1\) Ontologically, I remain agnostic with respect to positivism and post-positivism, and epistemologically, with respect to positivist and interpretivist research, with some qualifications to be explored below. While clearly neither a “hard” positivist nor interpretivist, I could easily be described, on any given day or issue area, as a “soft” adherent to either. Thus, in addition to seeming like the approach least likely to generate knowledge silos, question-driven research appeals to my own methodological ambivalence.

This research topic might have been approached in any number of ways. It concerns material state interests, but also ideas and identities. It involves the malleability of identity categories and the transcendence of borders on the one hand, and assertions of Westphalian sovereignty on the other. However, given the discursive nature of the subject matter—the reframing of identity categories, the use of words, and the meaning and interpretation of those words for both the speakers and the intended audiences—an approach that relied on interpretive methods\(^2\) revealed itself as the most fruitful.

\(^{1}\) Soss, Joe. 2006. “Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice-Centred View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research.” *Interpretation and Method*. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. New York: M. E. Sharpe. 131. The term “question-driven” implies that the research question determines the methodology (the general logic of inquiry), and methods (the specific techniques employed), rather than strong commitments to the the latter leading the researcher to effectively exclude certain questions from inquiry based on their incompatibility with the preferred scholarly toolkit. It is of course to be expected that the relationship between questions and methodology will never be completely unidirectional.

\(^{2}\) Generally seen as an alternative to “positivism,” interpretivism views knowledge as historically situated and bound up with power relationships, sees the world it studies as socially constructed, tends to reject rational-choice, behaviour-maximizing assumptions about agency, and is particularly focused on language, semiotic practices, and what is often described as “culture.” Wedeen, Lisa. 2009. “Ethnography as Interpretive Enterprise.” *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Edward Schatz, ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 80-81.
“Diaspora” was a growth industry at the time of writing, both in terms of the scholarly extension of the term to more and more groups (with less and less in common), and the number of states engaging in some form of “diasporization” of their compatriots abroad. For precisely these reasons, while there were ever-larger numbers of “diasporas,” it was unclear whether a large-N study of diasporas and diaspora policies would in fact be comparing comparable phenomena.\(^3\) This was especially the case since, as noted by Agunias and Newland (2013), there had been little research (either single-case or comparative) on the reach, efficacy, or impact of diaspora-oriented state institutions, many of which were only created in the mid-2000s. “Evaluations rarely exist; those that do are typically not available for public consumption. The limited discussions in both academic and policy literature usually employ a descriptive, nonevaluative tone.”\(^4\)

As such, it seemed that an in-depth look at one state-diaspora case was of considerable scholarly (and policy) utility.\(^5\) Of course, referring to Armenia and the Armenian diaspora as one “case” implies that states-with-diasporas are the proper units for analysis, rather than, say, specific state policies and their changes over time, or multiple “diasporas” with ties to a single home state (whether differentiated by host state, tenure, reason for migration, or any number of socio-economic factors). This work

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\(^3\) Indeed, I would argue that some of the policy papers generated by the IOM and other migration organizations (see for example Ionescu, 2006) suffer from precisely this sort of apples-to-oranges comparison, masked by broad brushstroke approaches that say very little about any one case. The danger is that large-N studies may even distort findings by employing inappropriate simplifying assumptions to include a larger universe of cases.

\(^4\) Agunias, Newland, 2013: 71. One interesting book was published between the research and the completion of this dissertation, which studied Armenia’s Ministry of Diaspora in depth, although it relied primarily on the minister’s speeches and the ministry’s online presence, and focused almost exclusively on the established diaspora. Tuncel, 2014.

\(^5\) Ragin problematizes the dichotomy between case studies and qualitative research on the one hand, and quantitative research on the other, since, depending on the level of analysis, a single-state study could be considered a study of one state, or of numerous individuals. He suggests that the dichotomy “can be maintained only by allowing considerable slippage in what is meant by ‘case.’” Ragin, Charles C. 1992. “Introduction: Cases of ‘What is a Case?’” *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Ragin, Charles C., and Howard S. Becker, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2-4.
explores changes in policy over time, the effects of three different administrations’ approaches, and the effects of reframing efforts on three “diasporas,” all within one state-diaspora relationship. Whether this amounts to within-case variance or a study of multiple cases depends largely, I would posit, on the uses to which this scholarship is put by future researchers.

There were also practical reasons why an exploration of Armenian state-diaspora relations would lend itself to interpretive approaches. The entire field was stubbornly non-quantifiable. There were no reliable diaspora population data, with the differences between official census data and scholarly estimates differing wildly. There were no surveys. There were no directories of organizations. There were no phone books. There were no reliably maintained websites. Moreover, since much of the RA’s diaspora-oriented policy consisted of discursive moves, there were often no policies with readily measurable effects. In a state with a policy encouraging repatriation, for example, one might count the number of returnees per capita. One might estimate the diaspora’s financial contributions with reasonable accuracy. But discussions of framing and discourse, of interpretation and resonance, do not readily lend themselves to measurement, as such.

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6 Shain, Barth, 2003: 452.
7 This lack of “hard data” is frustrating even within an interpretivist research framework, since population statistics and the like are crucial for acquiring the “lay of the land” before determining how research will proceed.
8 I point out these limitations, knowing that doing so risks portraying this research as what McKeown has described as “prestatistical,” or “undertaken because of the infeasibility of statistical methods”. Instead, I provide this information as important background for the reader of any epistemological persuasion, since it provides insight into the specific choice of methods (versus methodology), and the obstacles encountered even with the methods chosen. McKeown, Timothy. 1999. “Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview: Review of King, Keohane, and Verba’s Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research.” International Organization 53, 1: 165.
Interviews

My previous knowledge of the terrain informed my primary choice of research method: semi-structured, in-depth interviews, mostly with elites, using snowball sampling to access interview subjects. I conducted interviews during six months spent living in Yerevan, Armenia (September 2009-March 2010), during which time I made trips to NKR and Georgia. The Russia portion of the field research was conducted during June and July 2010.

In Armenia, all my respondents lived or worked in Yerevan, home to one third of the RA population and virtually all of its elites.9 Given the importance of the NK conflict and Karabakh elites to any discussion of Armenian politics, I decided to conduct a small number of interviews in Stepanakert, NKR. I did not end up using much of this data directly, but it provided useful background information, and filled in some gaps in my knowledge of the diaspora impact on the NK conflict, and the differences between RA and NKR perspectives on the diaspora.10

In Russia and Georgia, there were field site choices to be made, but in Georgia, given the roughly even split, population-wise, between the Armenians of Tbilisi and Javakheti, and their very different experiences, it made sense to interview respondents from both locales.11 There were more options available in Russia, but I chose three field sites—Moscow, Krasnodar, and Tuapse—in order to capture as broad a cross-section as

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9 One respondent split her time between Yerevan and Stepanakert, NKR, but our interview took place in Yerevan.
10 In general, NK Armenians held a higher opinion of the Dashnak Party than RA citizens, and this may have contributed to Karabakh Robert Kocharyan’s rehabilitation of the party upon assuming the RA presidency.
11 Had access been possible, I would have jumped at the chance to conduct research among the large Armenian community of Abkhazia, but its borders were effectively closed to foreigners.
possible of the Armenian communities across Russia,\textsuperscript{12} given time constraints, limited finances, and the availability of contacts from whom I could “snowball” to others.

Members of the established diaspora regularly made their way to Yerevan, so I was able to interview many of them there. While conducting diaspora interviews in Yerevan clearly biased my respondent sample in favour of those interacting with the RA in some way, and away from those who had never and might never visit, it was not my intention to arrive at anything like a representative sample. Established diaspora \textit{elites}, in general, did visit relatively frequently, and their perceptions of the state-diaspora relationship were communicated to their community members “back home” in their host states. Also, unlike RA and post-Soviet Armenians, established diasporans did not shy away from discussing contentious issues in public, so op-eds, blogs, public lectures, and news coverage of events were reliable gauges of opinion with which to augment interviews.

\textbf{Respondents}

Most of my interview respondents fell into the category of “elites.” In addition to the Minister of Diaspora and nine of her staff, my interview subjects included high-level political figures from all three RA administrations since independence, including Foreign Ministers and other Foreign Ministry appointees, National Assembly deputies, political party leaders and functionaries, people serving in special presidential advisory roles, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the \textit{de facto} NKR. I also felt fortunate to have met and interviewed a high-ranking member of the Soviet-era Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians,\textsuperscript{13} a former member of the ASALA terrorist organization now

\textsuperscript{12} See Chapter 5 for descriptions of these communities.
\textsuperscript{13} This was undoubtedly one of the more interesting and enjoyable interviews I conducted. Romen Kozmoyan’s stories about the goings-on in Soviet embassies in the Middle East, though tangential to my research, were fascinating.
living in the RA, an influential member of the late-Soviet Karabakh Committee, and a diaspora Armenian who had fought in the NK conflict. I also interviewed the heads or high-ranking members of key RA institutions with diaspora-relations functions, including the directors of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, the National Competitiveness Foundation (a public-private partnership), the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, the Diaspora Studies department at Yerevan State University, and the two officials at the Holy See of Etchmiatsin most responsible for external affairs and relations with the diaspora. I also interviewed the directors or high-ranking employees of think tanks, diaspora philanthropic organizations, NGOs, and foundations in the RA and NKR, many of which relied on diaspora funding or produced diaspora-oriented publications.

Many of my interviews were with “ordinary” people (non-elites), though the boundary between these two groups was relatively porous. For example, among my “repatriate” interviewees were NGO workers that fell into the elite category, but also others that were self-employed, unemployed, and at least one stateless person whose position was quite precarious. I would also include in the “ordinary” category established diasporans participating in homeland “voluntourism” programs.

In Russia, my elite interview subjects included two prominent “oligarch” businessmen, various members of the Union of Armenians of Russia (regional and local chapter presidents, at least one “vice president,” and two employees in the Moscow head office). I also interviewed the leaders of smaller, independent Armenian cultural organizations, two Armenian community newspaper editors, the principal of an Armenian school in Moscow, two archbishops, and a local priest. Non-elite subjects included

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14 The term “vice president” seemed to be used rather loosely within the UAR, so it was unclear that these were indeed people second in status only to the president.
temporary labour migrants, refugees from ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and ordinary people with varying degrees of involvement (ranging from extensive to virtually none) with “the Armenian community” in their respective cities and towns.

My interviewees in Georgia15 included one high-level ethnic Armenian political figure (a special advisor to the president, who had also served as a member of parliament), a bishop and a priest, the heads of Armenian cultural and civil society organizations, newspaper editors, rank and file “activists,” and ordinary Tbilisi and Javakheti Armenians. Especially in Javakheti, few would speak on the record. Aside from the high-level political figure, it was much easier to locate interview subjects I have described in this dissertation as “oppositional,” and much more difficult to find “pro-regime” Armenians willing to talk to me. This was not surprising, given the in-group shaming of people seen to be collaborating with the Georgian government in some way. While this was an obvious drawback, I attempted to compensate for it by relying rather heavily on my one interlocutor representative of this position (who provided a great deal of detail), assuming the silent agreement of others, looking to scholarly and news sources that cited interviews with pro-regime Armenians, and taking the more bombastic claims of “oppositional” respondents with a rather large grain of salt.

**Recruitment**

Armenia was not a country in which it was easy to locate people systematically. In 2009-10, there were no telephone directories, and most people had abandoned barely-functioning land lines for cellular phones, the numbers of which could change regularly.

15 Many of my interviews with respondents from Javakheti were conducted in Yerevan, where people were less fearful and more easily found via snowball sampling. At the time of my field research, the recent arrest of Javakheti activist Vahagn Chakhalyan had resulted in a considerable chill among Armenians in the region, and unlike my field research experience overall, few people were willing to give interviews to a foreigner, even an ethnic Armenian one.
The internet was often of little help either, since many elites did not have functioning email addresses, nor were email communications responded to in a timely manner, either by elites or their staff. Websites, where they existed, were rarely updated, and did not always contain reliable contact information. Cellular telephone was the preferred method of communication, and of setting up face-to-face meetings. That said, I did “cold call” a small number of respondents, either by phone or email.16

As a researcher, this presented a number of challenges. First, there was the obvious problem of locating and contacting interview subjects already known to exist. However, there was the additional problem of knowing in advance whom to consider interviewing. Even with substantial initial research (in Canada), I was often completely unaware of the existence of people who ultimately proved vital to my research until I had spent months in Yerevan, and many of these discoveries happened quite by accident.17 Snowball sampling18 was an excellent solution to both of these problems since, not only were interview subjects far more aware of the terrain of potential interviewees than I was, they were also remarkably well connected to one another (even members of rival political parties had each other’s cellular telephone numbers), and were more than happy to share this information,19 and even to make initial calls and set up meetings on my behalf.

This willingness was invaluable since, even when I was able to locate potential interviewees at their places of business, secretaries were a persistent obstacle to speaking

16 Political elites were least likely to respond to cold calling, while businessmen, journalists, and academics were more likely to do so.
17 The importance of being in the field for long stretches of time cannot be overstated, since doing greatly increases the likelihood of fortuitous “accidents.”
18 I use the term “snowball sampling” with hesitation. First, the reference to “sampling” implies at least a nod to the statistical method, which I do not pretend to employ. Second, the phrase suggests a more active approach on the part of the researcher to locating subjects, when in actual fact, subjects often “bump into” the researcher in the field. I prefer the more humble, and perhaps more accurate, “word of mouth.”
19 The concept of privacy did not seem to exist in Armenia. Elites never hesitated to give one another’s contact information to me, a virtual stranger.
with them. Rather than facilitating communication, secretaries in the post-Soviet space frequently acted as gatekeepers, restricting access to those they worked for, often without the knowledge or intention of their employers. Messages left with secretaries were rarely if ever relayed, letters handed to secretaries sat undelivered, and attempts to arrange meetings through secretaries were almost always unsuccessful. Without a direct cellular telephone connection to the individual in question, I almost never secured an interview.

In Georgia and Russia, I expected a similar set of constraints, and for the most part, conducting research was similar in all three states. Russian elites, however, especially those in Moscow, were on average more likely to have an online presence than those in Armenia, Georgia, and Southern Russia, and I was able to secure interviews with very prominent Moscow businessmen by emailing their offices. Still, snowball sampling, beginning with initial contacts secured in Armenia, was once again the appropriate way to meet most interviewees. In Southern Russia, I was also greatly assisted by Dr. Nona Shahnazaryan, who helped me locate and contact interview subjects in Krasnodar and Tuapse.

Since snowball sampling relies on existing networks, it inherently biases the researcher’s sample in favour of those who are networked in with one another. An Armenian community organizer in Georgia or Russia was unlikely to have contact information for those who had no interest in community organizing, did not attend events, etc. This was a manageable problem in light of my research goals since, rather than trying to determine the average opinion, my focus was on those who were establishing and participating in Armenian organizations, and how they responded to the
RA’s reframings.\textsuperscript{20} Still, I attempted to compensate by starting with different
“snowballs.” From previous time spent in Armenia, I knew some “ordinary” people who
had contacts among Russia’s Armenian labour migrants. I also found local priests to be
an excellent resource, since they tended to know a wide variety of people in different
socio-economic circumstances.

\textit{Objectivity}

While largely agnostic with respect to the distinction between (soft) positivist and
interpretivist methods, I situate myself squarely within the interpretivist camp where
notions of the impossibility of researcher objectivity are concerned. As Soss notes, “All
research activities yield evidence that is partial—‘partial’ in the sense of being
fragmentary and incomplete, ‘partial’ in the sense of being ripped out of a more holistic
context, and ‘partial’ in the sense of being prone to some bias or another.”\textsuperscript{21} However,
within the interpretivist camp, there are differing views of what to do with this
understanding, between “monists” who advocate a thorough acknowledgement, and
indeed, an embrace of researcher partiality, and “dualists” who believe researcher effects
can be estimated and, perhaps, minimized.\textsuperscript{22} I approached this dissertation with a
relatively “dualist” sensibility, treating objectivity as both a claim to be treated with
scepticism, and a goal to nevertheless strive toward. I made no attempt to “remove”
myself from the research, but took comfort in feedback that suggested I came across to
my respondents (in aggregate) as impartial.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} These more community-oriented Armenians were also the RA Ministry of Diaspora’s focus.
\textsuperscript{21} Soss, 2006: 140.
Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power}. Edward Schatz, ed. Chicago and
London: University of Chicago Press. 15.
\textsuperscript{23} I saw it as a good sign, for example, that when I asked tough questions and challenged people on points I
found unsatisfactory, Dashnak subjects assumed I was anti-Dashnak, and vice versa.
Still, I arrived in the field with a particular worldview, a set of assumptions, an age, a gender, an ethnic identity, a passport, and a set of mismatched baggage gleaned from a lifetime of questioning my own relationship to Armenian identity. According to Soss, since interviews consist of one-on-one conversations, compared to other research methods, “the researcher’s identity and self-presentation are central to the data produced.” The best way to reconcile this tension was to be honest about my potential effects on the subjects and data in question, including acquired and involuntary traits that might facilitate or impede the process of data collection.

**The Interview Process**

According to Berry, good elite interviewing is less a matter of asking the right questions, and more about being a good conversationalist. This means allowing the subject matter to roam considerably before corralling it back toward the interviewer’s agenda, and in general, simulating “a good talk among old friends.” This was my general approach to interviews. They were semi-structured, in the sense that I had a list of prepared, mostly open-ended questions with which to stimulate conversation, but tended to follow the lead of my respondents in directing the conversation, every so often reeling them in. Interviews generally happened over coffee, either in the respondent’s office or at a café. Some interviews occurred in the respondent’s home, and occasionally, Armenian hospitality took over and I became a dinner guest. Many of these interviews were genuinely enjoyable experiences, both for me, and it would seem, for my

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24 It was obvious that my respondents and I often had different “starting points,” different sets of ontological assumptions, especially with respect to ethnic identity. Where the overwhelming majority of my interlocutors appeared to adhere to a generalized primordialism and essentialism, I tend to assume constructed and (slightly more) malleable identities.

25 Soss, 2006: 140.


27 Over-caffeination was a serious occupational hazard, especially if I had scheduled more than one interview in a day.
respondents, who were given an opportunity to discuss things that were important to them, with a slightly exotic interlocutor who gave them her undivided attention.

Since so much of creating space for good conversation involves bringing down a respondent’s guardedness, I often opened with a question most found utterly exasperating: “How would you define the Armenian nation?” This was an effective icebreaker. Once respondents had thrown up their arms, sighed and laughed, their guard was down. The following discussions were relatively open-ended, and facilitated respondents discussing themes they thought were important. One significant drawback of this approach was that interviews (intended to last one hour) often went on too long. But this was a blessing in disguise, since respondents often began with stock answers, only to reveal more personal viewpoints later on. Some began to trust me enough to divulge “off-the-record” information, which often shed light on their on-the-record comments.

Perhaps the most important consideration, in conducting interviews, was the degree to which my interview respondents had agendas of their own. According to Berry,

Interviewers must always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth...Consciously or unconsciously, they’ve thought about what they want to say in the period between the request and the actual interview. They’re talking about their work and, as such, justifying what they do. Indeed, respondents that were affiliated either with the RA government or opposition often seemed to be trying hard to persuade me of the rightness of their policies, as though my research would sway the opinions of large swaths of the diaspora. Some lower-level bureaucrats appeared to be blatantly inflating the importance of their work, as if my

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28 Respondents often began by asking me to narrow the question, but I suggested they answer it in whatever way they saw fit. The point of the question, besides inducing frustration, was to elicit an answer that either established a boundary (i.e. who is/is not a member), or suggested how that boundary might be arrived at. It was meant as a jumping-off point to discussing how the diaspora fit into their conception of the nation.

29 Berry, 2002: 680.

30 Minister Hakobyan, in particular, tended to switch into “speech mode”, and at one point began addressing her remarks to “dear diaspora,” even though we were alone in her office.
research were a performance review. On one occasion, I had scheduled an interview with a high-ranking member of an organization (in Moscow). It was not until halfway through the interview, when I asked to verify his title, that the man I was interviewing told me he was not the person I had assumed I was interviewing. At times, it seemed to me as if my subjects suspected some ulterior motive behind my seemingly benign research.

Interview subjects in Georgia and Russia were generally more reluctant to be interviewed than those in Armenia. Fear of the authorities seemed to be higher in both of these locales, and many either outwardly questioned my motives or hesitated to be interviewed. Once I had secured an interview, many preferred a setting in which they were accompanied by another person, especially in Russia. Rather than discussing this with me in advance, most interviewees simply brought a trusted person along (ranging from an administrative assistant to a family member). As such, I rarely spoke to anyone in Russia alone. It was difficult to discern how this affected the information relayed to me, except that respondents’ companions at times interjected and provided commentary of their own, almost always in agreement with the respondent, and sometimes adding more detail or an additional example of what was being discussed.

31 It was uncommon for middle-aged or older Armenian men to introduce themselves in such settings. The assumption was that a (presumably lower-status) visitor to their office knew who they were, and would be the one making introductions. The man did not appear to be engaging in a deliberate impersonation, judging by the matter-of-fact way he told me his name and title. His boss, in other words, may have instructed him to do an interview with a researcher, and failed to mention that I had requested a specific interview. He was rather apologetic when I pointed out the discrepancy.

32 It is still not uncommon for Western researchers in the post-Soviet space to be suspected of being spies, and more than one person asked who “sent” me to Armenia to do interviews. Rivera et al. describe the way in which their own interview respondents in post-Soviet states often had generalized suspicions of researchers. In other words, without suspecting that a specific person or agency had sent the researcher as a spy, they feared that “someone wanted to learn about their views.” Rivera, Sharon Werning, Polina M. Kozyreva, and Eduard G. Sarovskii. 2002. “Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons from Russia.” PS (December): 684.

33 During the research for this dissertation, I never got the impression that people were self-censoring due to the presence of a third person. Having conducted an interview in the RA for a previous project in which I did feel as though the interviewee was subtly censoring his answers due to the presence of my driver/our
Since respondents were on their own turf, and tended to have their own agendas, some of them social, my best laid interview setting and format plans were occasionally subject to change without notice. In Tuapse, for example, my intention was to interview the president of a local Armenian organization in his office, but I arrived to find a “group lunch” at an outdoor café, at which I met multiple members of the community over a meal. While I later had the opportunity to speak with my intended interviewee during a car ride (and get to know some of the other attendees), I did not know at the time whether this would be possible, so I treated the luncheon as the sole opportunity to “interview” him, and this descended into an animated group discussion which I did my best to steer back onto the topic from numerous tangents. The format was less than ideal for in-depth discussion with my respondent of choice, but it was fortuitous in other respects. First, I was introduced to community elders and others with fascinating stories about Armenian life in Tuapse. Second, the group discussion generated a different type of data, one that was largely missing from my in-depth interviews. As Soss notes, “social processes of meaning making—patterns of conflict and collaboration that produce shared conceptions of reality…are singularly difficult to observe with a one-on-one interview.” As such, I treated these occasional curve balls as blessings in disguise, which added texture to my account, rather than as sources of potential error and bias.

In general, I was able to gain unbelievable access to elites. Much of this was luck, but language proficiency, ethnicity, and gender also played a role in my ability to appear unthreatening, yet interesting enough to talk to, as did cultural familiarity with the region, mutual contact, I was keenly aware of this possibility, and was on the lookout for such behaviour. This is, of course, no guarantee that it did not occur without my knowledge.

34 Soss, 2006: 139.
resulting from time spent in the field.\textsuperscript{35} As a female, ethnic Armenian from Canada, with an Armenian last name and a command of the Armenian language, I was uniquely positioned to conduct this research. Below, I describe how I believe each of these traits influenced the research process.

\textit{Language Proficiency}

Having grown up speaking (Western) Armenian, and lived in Armenia for one year in the late 1990s, I was first and foremost able to communicate with most interviewees in their first language (though some interviewees chose to speak English to me, and I did not discourage this, as it made my transcribing task easier).\textsuperscript{36} The exception to this was my field research in Russia. While I have enough of a command of Russian to live in a Russian-speaking environment, I am not proficient enough to conduct interviews in Russian. Most of the ethnic Armenians with whom I spoke were more comfortable communicating in Russian. Many, in fact, could barely speak Armenian, and/or were very self-conscious about their dialect or lack of fluency.

Linguistic fluency is, of course, relative. As a native English speaker, and moreover a Western Armenian speaker in an Eastern Armenian milieu, there were times when I confused the two dialects, or grappled with unfamiliar vocabulary. While a source of frustration, this often gave the interviewee a chance to consider more carefully the point she or he was trying to get across, and the resulting use of analogy, synonyms, and translations (Russian or English) enriched, rather than detracted from, the conversations.

\textsuperscript{35} Previous non-research-related time spent in the former Soviet space not only increased my familiarity with field conditions, but also increased my credibility with respondents. The fact that I had spent a year living in rural Armenia in the late 1990s, when electricity and running water were intermittent at best, meant that I did not fit the stereotype of the wealthy, pampered, out-of-touch diaspora Armenian.

\textsuperscript{36} I transcribed and translated all interviews. When my own knowledge of Armenian and my dictionaries failed me, I looked to two professional translators for advice, Adrineh Der Boghossian and Nairi Hakhverdi, to whom I am eternally grateful for their occasional insights.
we had. I am only aware of one instance in which my choice of words was found mildly offensive by a respondent, but humility, retraction, and restatement of my question seemed to resolve the matter. On a positive note, my linguistic blunders were both a source of comic relief at times and, in my view, an important part of shifting the power dynamic of the interview in favour of the interviewee, who usually had a fluent command of the language in which I was struggling to make myself understood. When interviewees for whom Armenian was not their first language were embarrassed at their inability to converse freely, the fact that I, too, was grasping for words was a useful way to both ease their discomfort and find common ground. This was especially important among the Hamshen Armenians of Tuapse, who speak a dialect of Armenian, but often have difficulty communicating in “standard” Armenian.

Knowledge of both Western and Eastern Armenian was an undeniable asset, as the difference between these major dialects is significant. As the official language of Armenia, Eastern Armenian was of course invaluable. While well-educated Armenians can usually understand some Western Armenian, the fact that I had bothered to learn “their” Armenian was both a topic of icebreaking conversation and an indication that “language politics” was not immediately on the table. My knowledge of Western Armenian (the Armenian I learned as a child) was indispensible when interviewing diaspora “repatriates” in Armenia. Even though these interviews were nearly all conducted in English, respondents peppered their language with “Armenianisms,” especially at emotional moments. In Russia, my command of Western Armenian made the Hamshen dialect, a Western Armenian dialect, far more comprehensible than it would have been had I spoken only Eastern Armenian. I must admit, too, a certain pleasure in
trying to decipher this, and the Nagorno-Karabakh dialect, and enjoying the interesting conversations that ensued about language.

Finally, a word about Russian. Even though I did not intend to conduct interviews in Russian, without a limited knowledge of it I could not have hoped to understand much of what my respondents said. Nearly all Armenians living in the RA, NK, Georgia, and Russia, pepper their Armenian with Russian words, or Armenian terms and phrases which are direct translations from Russian, and at moments, simply launch into Russian mid-sentence without realizing they have switched languages. Knowledge of Russian was indispensible for logistics, both in Russia and in Georgia, where Russian remains the lingua franca for communication with non-ethnic-Georgians, but was also a confidence-builder in my conversations with RA Armenians. Animosity toward, or distrust of, the Western diaspora often hinged on their lack of familiarity with the Russian language and the post-Soviet cultural space more generally. Being able to demonstrate that I held no ill will toward Russians or Russian culture, and could even pepper my own Armenian with Russian loan words, seemed to alleviate much of the tension that may have existed, and at the same time, increased my clout as a regional “expert.”

*Ethnicity, Citizenship, Gender*

That being “Armenian” was instrumental in getting me access to interviewees became clear after conversations with non-Armenian scholars conducting research, with less success, among Armenians in the region. Being a diaspora Armenian made me an object of curiosity in Georgia and Russia, where few established diasporans traveled, but also made me a partial member of the “in group,” and thus a less threatening interviewer.
Along with increased access, in-group status came with associated pitfalls. Judging by the “we-talk” (interviewees almost always referred to “us,” including me in that category, even when I did not include myself), most respondents assumed a certain degree of shared values, history, context, or culture between us. I felt the need to occasionally ask respondents to elaborate on concepts they assumed I understood, or to be explicit about their significance, in order to be sure I actually knew what they assumed I knew. More troublesome was the assumption that, as an Armenian, they could “trust” me with negative information about Armenia or Armenians. When I reminded them about their confidentiality options, many suggested that they were relating certain things to me “off the record” because I was Armenian (without specifying what those things were), and that it would not be proper to “air ‘our’ dirty laundry” to non-Armenians. My strategies for dealing with this were to, first, be exceptionally clear about what information was to be kept confidential, second, to be open about the fact that I was only “half” Armenian (only one of my parents is ethnically Armenian), and third, to frequently question information that respondents assumed I would agree with.37

Being a Canadian citizen affected my access to interviewees in the sense that Canada was seen as less threatening than the United States, especially in Russia where suspicion of Americans was still quite pronounced, but even in the RA, where I was often told that American Armenians were “the worst” type of diasporans (the rudest, the most critical of the RA, etc.). People’s lack of concrete knowledge of Canada meant they had few specific grievances to associate me with. Other than being frequently asked about

37 I revisited this dilemma later on, while analyzing my interview data. In situations where, in retrospect, there was some lingering ambiguity about whether comments were really and truly on or off the record, I decided to anonymize those particular passages.
Armenian-Canadian Atom Egoyan’s opaque filmmaking style, I found that my citizenship was generally an asset.

As a (relatively) young woman, I was generally seen as unthreatening by my respondents, the majority of whom were men in a very patriarchal culture. The fact that I was 34, unmarried, with no children, was a regular topic of conversation in all three states, and a cause of no shortage of anxiety on the part of my respondents, who worried I would end up a lonely spinster. 38 My lack of anxiety about my marital status stood out as a source of difference, as a way in which I was “foreign.” 39 I often felt this was an asset, in that it reminded respondents that I was only a partial member of the Armenian “in group,” and that they should not assume we shared a set of values. 40 Also, given that many of my respondents were powerful men, the fact that it marked me as different from “local” women most likely discouraged unwanted advances. 41

Additional Sources

In-depth interviews were a rich source of data, but one that I supplemented with others to compensate for the shortcomings of interviewing, and to add richness and

38 A common worry in the Caucasus region more generally, Armenians tended to treat unmarried women over 25 as a national tragedy, and go to great lengths to rectify the matter. Unsolicited matchmaking attempts became a (somewhat amusing) occupational hazard.
39 The fact that I had grey hair (which I did not dye) compounded the matter. I was “old,” single, and had clearly “let myself go.”
40 Much has been made of the idea of Western women researchers being considered a sort of “third gender” in Middle Eastern states. This status has been perceived as advantageous, since they are able to speak with both men, who accord them respect not given to local women, and women, with whom foreign men would not be permitted to interact (see for example Schwedler, Jillian. 2006. “The Third Gender: Western Female Researchers in the Middle East.” PS (July): 425-428.). Gendered behavioural norms in most of the post-Soviet space are not nearly this strict, and thus, I do not equate my experience with what these “third gender” discussions describe. However, Armenian social norms do cast suspicion upon women and men meeting behind closed doors, and given the degree to which malign gossip could derail local women’s marriage prospects, I certainly felt I had the luxury of not having to take those ramifications into consideration.
41 In all my travels in the South Caucasus, I only once had to deflect an unwanted sexual advance. My experience differed dramatically from those reported to me by a) younger women, b) local women, and c) foreign women with blond hair, who regularly found themselves the objects of unwanted attention.
contextual depth to my account. To round out my pre-field work review of the existing literature on Armenians in the region, I sought out scholarly literature while in the field, some of which was unpublished and available only from scholars themselves. I also made good use of materials available at the Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, where I was a visiting scholar. Additionally, I considered speeches, newspapers, and public events to be relevant “texts” to be analyzed.

I found speeches complementary to interviews in that they were usually scripted moments that briefly encapsulated the speaker’s outlook or worldview, in a setting in which the speaker’s authority was already assumed. In the interests of persuasion, the speaker could make major generalizations and sweeping statements that were unlikely to be immediately challenged (i.e., by an interviewer). However, the audience and context of any single speech mattered in terms of what was prioritized. A speech by an RA official during the All-Armenian Fund Telethon, for example, would obviously prioritize charitable giving, whereas the same official might prioritize investment or tourism in another setting. By studying multiple speeches, I was able to detect commonly recurring themes, and the use of certain metaphors and analogies, which I was often able to probe later in interviews. Aside from the content, at times a speaker’s “tone” was itself a vital part of the text. Speakers could be patronizing, condescending, overly ingratiating, or a combination thereof. Minister Hakobyan’s perceived “Sovietness,” for example, was

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42 I found such sources useful for filling in missing historical detail.
43 Speech collections (and autobiographies, and combinations of the two) were common among RA officials, and were regularly given to me by respondents. Speech transcripts were often available on government websites.
partly a reference to her Komsomol background, but also a commentary on her tone of voice, mannerisms, body language, and delivery.\footnote{It is difficult to put this general impression into words, but in Hakobyan’s demeanour and mannerisms, especially her enthusiastic repetition of dogmatic statements in an almost scolding, schoolteacher tone, she seemed to fit the description of what was sometimes referred to as a \textit{Sovetskaya zhenshina} (Soviet woman).}

Initially, I had intended to use newspapers extensively as a source of information, and there was certainly no shortage of print news in the RA, or in Armenian communities abroad. However, my general sense was that, at least in Armenia, television was the average person’s primary news source. Newspapers seemed more important in Armenian communities abroad, in terms of reporting community-specific news, but most Armenians in Russia and Georgia were able to access RA television channels for news in Armenian, or about Armenia. That said, I sought out news articles (increasingly available online) and editorials that discussed the state-diaspora relationship. While in the RA, I also followed \textit{Hayastani Hanrapetutyun}, the government’s official newspaper, for news related to the Ministry of Diaspora, or diaspora relations in general, but I found that most of the reporting simply gave bare-bones accounts of what minister had spoken where, when, and on what broad topic.\footnote{Speech transcripts, often available on websites and in published collections, proved much more useful than these basic accounts.} More important for my purposes were speech transcripts themselves, as well as “think tank” publications, such as those put out by Noravank, Armenian Centre for National and International Studies (ACNIS) Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA), Civilitas, Neo-Conservative Union, etc. These were readily available online, as well as at bookshops, and tended to contain more analysis.

Attending public events, such as lectures and scholarly panel discussions, was useful for gleaning the scholarly currents in the region. It was common, for example, to find discussions of Javakheti in Yerevan, but there were seldom discussions of
Armenians in other parts of the post-Soviet space. Such events also revealed who the perceived experts were in a given field, and it was illuminating that many of the general population’s primordialist, essentialist assumptions about ethnic identity were reproduced at the scholarly level. Cultural events, such as folk dance and music performances, were also of significant research value. The quality of such events varied widely, from the excellent to the very amateur, but especially outside the RA, I considered it important to see some of these, since “friendship-of-the-peoples”-type pageantry was the topic of so much discussion pertaining to the proper activity of diasporas. As community events, which Armenians either were attracted to or felt social pressure to attend, they were also an interesting opportunity to observe community social dynamics (gleaned by watching people mill about), and gauging their reaction to strangers (me).

**Time “in the Field”**

There was significant data gathering and analytical leverage to be gained from being “in the field” for an extended period of time. While my visits to Russia and Georgia were much shorter, the ability to spend six months in the RA was invaluable. From taxi rides, to homestays, to political rallies, to experiencing the frustrations of daily life (applying for visas, extensions, etc.), to getting a general sense of things by watching the news and having daily conversations with people, the vernacular experience of cultural immersion yielded tremendous insight. While I did not engage in any deliberate participant observation, there were certain aspects of the state-diaspora experience that I became privy to by default. In the late-1990s, I had personally experienced the culture shock of diasporans visiting and adjusting to the RA. The late-2000s version of this culture shock was quite different (thanks to electricity, running water, cellular phones,
and rebuilt infrastructure), but even with a general sense of what to expect, re-immersion was shocking all over again. My discussions with established diasporans about their experiences were undoubtedly informed by my own.

Time spent in the field enabled me to adjust to the culture of talk before beginning to conduct interviews. Among Armenians, long-winded, florid, speech-like passages were part of everyday conversations, and it took some time to get over my instinct to assume they were always a diversionary tactic. I was also able to get acquainted with the running jokes and current pop cultural references, and to adjust to the pervasive cynicism with which all government endeavours and interactions were treated.

In the process of conducting ten interviews at the Ministry of Diaspora, I became a regular visitor. Repeat trips allowed me to see its employees in regular “work mode”, and get a sense of the institutional culture there. My initial impression of the ministry had been that it differed from typical RA government institutions. Its open-concept layout, modern furniture, and (perhaps most shockingly) no smoking signs suggested an attempt to emulate Western work culture. Six months’ worth of visits offered plenty of opportunities to chip away at that veneer. The ministry’s female employees were still expected to make coffee, and its secretaries ran interference for their bosses, as they did in other government offices. By my final visit, my revised impression was of a typical RA ministry that had lucked into modern office space.

There was also considerable utility in what can only be accurately described as “hanging out.” Being at an Armenian church at the right time in Krasnodar (after services, when people were milling about), resulted in a fortuitous introduction to Sveta,*

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*In fact, one of the more interesting aspects of culture shock was that, given how much conditions in the RA changed from year to year, one’s “knowledge” of it was out of date even after a year away.
an Armenian refugee from Central Asia, whose experience raising a family in Russia as an “undocumented” migrant broadened my perspective considerably, since I had inadvertently become accustomed to thinking of unregistered migrants as predominantly male construction workers. I found that engaging in “local” activities built credibility with locals, and also helped me to normalize a place in my own mind. Moscow was not just a place where Armenians were trying to preserve their culture or do illegal construction work, but a huge, vibrant city where people from across the post-Soviet space worked long hours, walked through endless miles of subway tunnels in high heels, went out in the evening to see rock bands, and spent summer afternoons swimming in the Moscow River. This gave me a backdrop against which to situate my respondents’ experiences. In Armenia, I met a number of interview subjects through social acquaintances, and gained insight into the difficulties facing diaspora business owners by patronizing their restaurants and bars.

Striking up friendships in the field came with its own research-related risks. In Armenia, I became well acquainted with many established diaspora “repatriates” who spoke of their love for the RA and the benefits of repatriation eloquently and persuasively. After months of exposure to this sort of talk, I found myself quite drawn to the idea. It took distance from the field to gain perspective on this experience, and to realize that I had, to some extent, been allowing the views of repatriates (a very small number of people) to shape my perceptions of the broader state-diaspora relationship.

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47 Swimming across the river and back (which was not terribly difficult; I am not a strong swimmer) gave me significant “bragging rights” with Muscovites.
48 I cannot overstate the importance of these interactions, or the hilarity of some of the anecdotes relayed to me regarding their dealings with RA officials.
49 I began to jokingly suggest that I had been stricken with a form of “Stockholm syndrome,” the condition in which hostages begin to sympathize with their captors.
List of Interviewees

I conducted over 90 in-depth interviews for this dissertation in 2009-10. The following list includes those who agreed to be named, as well as those who agreed to the use of an alias (marked by an asterisk). Omitted are any references to five individuals who requested complete anonymity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Description, Location</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abrahamyan, Gayane</td>
<td>Principal’s Assistant, School #1110 (“Eastern Languages School), Moscow</td>
<td>26 June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aghayan, Vladimir</td>
<td>Vice President of UAR/WAC, Yerevan</td>
<td>5 March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aharonian, Lara</td>
<td>Director, Women’s Resource Centre NGO, Yerevan</td>
<td>17 October 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anisonyan, Grigory</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief, Noev-Kovcheg newspaper, Moscow</td>
<td>29, June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apramyan, Eduard</td>
<td>President, National Neo-Conservative Movement, originally from Javakheti, Yerevan</td>
<td>14 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenian Community of Georgia</td>
<td>Young activists, members of Armenian organization, Tbilisi</td>
<td>12 February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artsruni, Sevak</td>
<td>Chairman, Yerkir Union of NGOs for Repatriation and Settlement, Yerevan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aslanyan, Hratch</td>
<td>Head of Department, European Countries, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>20 December 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avetikyan, Hakob</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief, Azg Daily newspaper, Chairman Ramgavar Azatakan Party in Armenia, Yerevan</td>
<td>15 January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avetisyan, Yuri</td>
<td>Director, Diaspora Studies Program, Yerevan State University, Yerevan</td>
<td>19 January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azizyan, Zhenya</td>
<td>Head of Department, Pan-Armenian</td>
<td>29 January 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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50 I conducted one additional interview in 2012, when I happened to be in the same city as a respondent I had intended to interview earlier.
51 A small number of respondents gave their patronymic, as well as first and last names, but in the interest of uniformity, I have listed only first and last names here. When respondents only provided their first names, these are given in quotation marks.
52 I have listed the positions as declared by the interviewee at the time of the interview (including former positions, where relevant, and in some cases, place of origin). Titles (such as Director, President, Vice President, etc.) tended to be used fluidly, and may not always have translated into exact equivalents in English. Because of the lack of official directories, it was difficult to confirm the titles given by respondents. At times, some seemed slightly inflated.
53 Small group of young activists, interviewed in a group, no names given.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Badalyan, Nune</strong></td>
<td>Tbilisi resident, nurse, part-time Armenian activist, Tbilisi</td>
<td>11 February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barseghyan, Aleksandr</strong></td>
<td>Employee, <em>Khachkar</em> magazine, and Armenian Cultural Centre, Krasnodar</td>
<td>7 July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bayburt, Van</strong></td>
<td>Special Advisor to President of Georgia, Former Member of Georgian Parliament, Editor, <em>Vrastan</em> Newspaper, Tbilisi</td>
<td>12 February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bissell, Chelsea</strong></td>
<td>Volunteer from US, Birthright Armenia, Yerevan</td>
<td>6 November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bolodyan, Gevorg</strong></td>
<td>Tuapse resident, UAR-Tuapse member, Tuapse</td>
<td>4 July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chenovaryan, Maria</strong></td>
<td>Employee of a foreign company, Krasnodar</td>
<td>5 July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Devejian, Fr. Ktrij</strong></td>
<td>Foreign Press Secretary of the Catholicosate, Etchmiatsin</td>
<td>18 February 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Demoyan, Hayk</strong></td>
<td>President, Armenian Genocide Museum and Institute, Yerevan</td>
<td>30 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dolbakian, Manuel</strong></td>
<td>President, “Ararat” Cultural Union, Moscow</td>
<td>27 June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dnoyan, Aleks</strong></td>
<td>Cultural Director, Pashkevska Centre, Krasnodar</td>
<td>6 July 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Galoyan, Seda</strong></td>
<td>Principal, School #1110 (“Eastern Languages” School), Moscow</td>
<td>28 June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“Garik”</strong></td>
<td>College Student, member of an Armenian Students’ Club, Moscow</td>
<td>29 June 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gevorgyan, Razmik</strong></td>
<td>President, UAR-Krasnodar, Krasnodar</td>
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<td><strong>Ghazarian, Salpi</strong></td>
<td>Director, Civilitas Foundation, Former Special Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yerevan</td>
<td>5 November 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ghukasyan, Lusine</strong></td>
<td>Chief Editor, <em>Armenia i Mir</em> newspaper, Vice President, UAR, Moscow</td>
<td>25 June 2010</td>
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<td><strong>Giragosian, Richard</strong></td>
<td>Director, Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan</td>
<td>21 December 2009</td>
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<td><strong>Grigorian, Frunzik</strong></td>
<td>Elderly Tuapse resident, amateur historian, member of UAR-Tuapse, Tuapse</td>
<td>4 July 2010</td>
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<td><strong>Hakobyan, Hranush</strong></td>
<td>Minister of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>18 March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hovannisian, Raffi</strong></td>
<td>Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Former Director, Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, Member, Heritage Party, Founder Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan</td>
<td>20 March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kabakian, Sevan</strong></td>
<td>Executive Director, Depi Hayk, Country Director, Birthright Armenia</td>
<td>18 October 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Karapetyan, Samvel</strong></td>
<td>President of Armenian Office, Research on</td>
<td>19 February 2010</td>
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</table>

54 Devejian resigned from the priesthood for personal reasons in November 2010, but has remained on good terms with the Catholicos and the Armenian Apostolic Church.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Location/s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karapetyan, Yerazik</td>
<td>Employee, <em>Khachkar</em> magazine, and Armenian Cultural Centre, Krasnodar</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Karen”</td>
<td>Labour Migrant from Yerevan, Moscow</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Kassouny, Vrej</td>
<td>Repatriate from Syria, self-employed artist and political cartoonist, Yerevan</td>
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<td>Khazaryan, Valyera</td>
<td>NKR Project Director, Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, Stepanakert</td>
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<td>Kirakossian, Arman</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Former RA Ambassador to Greece and US, Yerevan</td>
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<td>Kivirian, Armenika</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief, News.am, Hamshen Armenian repatriate from Abkhazia, Yerevan</td>
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<td>Kozmoyan, Romen</td>
<td>Director, Momjian Benevolent Foundation, Former Director, Eastern Countries Division, Committee For Cultural Ties With Diaspora Armenians (1973-1991), Yerevan</td>
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<td>20 March 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Priest*</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5 July 2010</td>
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<td>Local Priest*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manoyan, Giro</td>
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<td>Martirosyan, Leonid*</td>
<td>Prominent Russian-Armenian businessman, Moscow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matosian, Mary</td>
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<td>Melkonian, Sharistan</td>
<td>Executive Director, Armenia Volunteer Corps, Yerevan</td>
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<td>Merdinian, Shushan*</td>
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<td>Fr. Mesrob</td>
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<td>Repatriate from Syria, Contract Employee (Independent Expert), Ministry of Diaspora, Journalist, <em>Horizon</em> Newspaper (Canada), Yerevan</td>
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<td>Mikaelyan, Karapet*</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief, New Tbilisi* Newspaper, Tbilisi</td>
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<td>Minasyan, Sargis*</td>
<td>RA civil servant with South Caucasus experience, Yerevan</td>
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<td>Mirzakhanyan, Bishop Vazgen</td>
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<td>Director, Aregak Universal Credit Organization, Yerevan</td>
<td>14 October 2009</td>
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<td>Nalci, Aris</td>
<td>Editor, <em>Agos</em> Newspaper, Istanbul (Interviewed in Yerevan)</td>
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<td>Navoyan, Yura</td>
<td>Dashnak Party representative in Russia, Moscow</td>
<td>29 June 2010</td>
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<td>Nersesyan, Gevorg*</td>
<td>Prominent Russian-Armenian businessman, Moscow</td>
<td>25 June 2010</td>
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<td>Nersissian, Bishop Yezras</td>
<td>Primate, Diocese of the Armenian Church of New Nakhichevan and Russia, Moscow</td>
<td>23 June 2010</td>
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<td>Nikoghosyan, Arthur</td>
<td>Head of Department, Armenian Communities of the Americas, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>18 November 2009</td>
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<td>Oskanian, Vartan</td>
<td>Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yerevan</td>
<td>16 February 2010</td>
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<td>Papazian, Pegor</td>
<td>CEO, National Competitiveness Foundation, Former Head of Project Development, USAID Armenia, Yerevan</td>
<td>7 February 2010</td>
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<td>Pashyan, Olga</td>
<td>Founding Director, Armenian Benevolent Cultural Educational Hamshen Community, Tuapse</td>
<td>4 July 2010</td>
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<td>Petrosyan, Giorgi</td>
<td>Minister of Foreign Affairs, NKR, Stepanakert</td>
<td>5 February 2010</td>
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<td>Petrosyan, Vardan</td>
<td>Chief Expert, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>13 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rakedjian, Armen (de Shushi)55</td>
<td>Repatriate from France, Shushi</td>
<td>5 February 2010</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Sardar, Alex</td>
<td>Country Team Director, Counterpart International NGO, Yerevan</td>
<td>24 March 2010</td>
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<td>Sargsyan, Armen</td>
<td>NKR representative, Tufenkian Foundation, and member of NKR National Assembly, Stepanakert</td>
<td>10 February 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sargsyan, Kamo</td>
<td>Head of Department, Pan-Armenian, International and Church Structures, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>26 January 2010</td>
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<td>Sargsyan, Lyudmila</td>
<td>President, Social Democratic Hnchakian Party, Yerevan</td>
<td>9 February 2010</td>
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<td>“Sebouh”</td>
<td>Stateless person, originally from Lebanon, seeking RA citizenship, Yerevan.</td>
<td>17 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sefilian, Jirayr</td>
<td>Founding Member, Sardarabad Movement, Former Military Commander, NK Conflict, Yerevan</td>
<td>9 February 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serobyans, Gevorg</td>
<td>Council President, Pashkova Centre,</td>
<td>6 July 2010</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

55 The respondent’s legal name was Armen Rakedjian, but he had adopted the more colourful “Armen de Shushi” since moving to Shushi, NKR.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Soghomonyan, Ernest</td>
<td>President, Social Democratic Hnchakyan Party of Armenia</td>
<td>23 December 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sveta*</td>
<td>Refugee, Krasnodar</td>
<td>4 July 2010</td>
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<td>Tatoyan, Robert</td>
<td>Project Coordinator, Yerkir Union, Yerevan</td>
<td>15 January 2010</td>
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<td>Tavadyan, Tigran</td>
<td>Editor-in-Chief, Yerkramas Newspaper, Krasnodar</td>
<td>3 July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Titizian, Maria</td>
<td>Journalist, Member, Dashnak Party, Vice President, Socialist International, Yerevan</td>
<td>14 January 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Torosyan, Shirak</td>
<td>Chairman, Javakhk Patriotic Union, Member of RA National Assembly, originally from Javakheti, Yerevan</td>
<td>13 January, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tufenkian, Jeffrey</td>
<td>President and Co-Founder, Kanach Foundation NGO, Environmental Branch Manager, Tufenkian Foundation, Portland</td>
<td>27 August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vardanyan, Ara</td>
<td>Executive Director, Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, Yerevan</td>
<td>9 December 2009</td>
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<td>Vareljian, Arshak</td>
<td>President, UAR-Tuapse</td>
<td>4 July 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yenikomshian, Alec</td>
<td>Former member of ASALA, Director of Melkonian Fund, Yerevan</td>
<td>25 February 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeritsian, Gevorg*</td>
<td>Freelance historian and editor, Yerevan</td>
<td>27 November 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zakaryan, Firdus</td>
<td>Chief of Staff, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>15 November, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zohrabyan, Anahit</td>
<td>Head of Department, CIS/Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus Department, Ministry of Diaspora, Yerevan</td>
<td>19 November, 2009</td>
</tr>
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<td>Zourabian, Levon</td>
<td>Headquarters Coordinator, Armenian National Congress, Yerevan</td>
<td>15 January 2010</td>
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<td>Zurabyan, Karen</td>
<td>Secretary, UAR/WAC, Moscow</td>
<td>25 June, 2010</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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