

MORE ARMENIAN THAN ARMENIAN: DIASPORAN TOURISM PROGRAMS
AND THE REBRANDING OF “ARMENIA” AS TRANSNATION

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Abstract

The following research aims to investigate how “Armenianness” is being redefined and rebranded through diaspora tourism programs – through the consumption of space to create a new narratives that include stronger connections between the Diaspora and the Homeland.

In the first theoretical section I provide the theoretical framework, outlining the three major tenets of the project at hand – national identity construction, nation branding theory, and tourism and diaspora tourism. In the second theoretical section the modern (and arguably postmodern) environment of diaspora is discussed, focusing on the tandem growth of technology and diaspora and the role of choice present in sufficiently multicultural/pluralistic societies. A chapter is dedicated to the genesis of the Armenian Diaspora, and the relations with the Homeland of the Republic of Armenia, that discusses the narratives of both and the divides that still play an integral role in understanding the “Armenian nation” today.

I examine in detail the representations of Armenian identity in diasporan tourism program literature available to prospective participants, using Birthright Armenia as a case study, through critical discourse analysis. The conclusions of which suggest that the branding narratives of Birthright Armenia seek to not to brand Armenia with the immediate goal of being competitive, but to create a new “Brand Armenia” that removes the negativity of the current narrative by supplanting it with a new narrative of the Armenian transnation in which both members of the Diaspora and the Republic are enfranchised.

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1. Introduction

Yergiry yergir che (this country is not a country) is an expression spoken in regards to the Republic of Armenia. It is a pessimistic view stemming from the failed expectations of the Republic's 1991 independence, the narrative of which glosses over the actual troubles of a post-Soviet republic. Armenian diasporan tourism programs operationalize nation branding processes by inviting participants to come and socialize themselves in the context of the Republic of Armenia – bringing closer together the imagined homeland and the reality of modern Armenia. They do so in an effort to redefine the Republic's narrative through active participation, promoting diasporan stake building in the territory itself, and departure to take with them the narrative of the “Armenian transnation” back to the Diaspora.

This study aims to investigate how “Armenianness” is being redefined and rebranded through diaspora tourism programs – through the consumption of space to create a new narrative – not branding Armenia with the immediate goal of being competitive globally, but to create a new “Brand Armenia” that removes the negativity of the current narrative by supplanting it with a new narrative of the Armenian transnation in which both members of the Diaspora and the Republic are enfranchised. It will be explored at the levels of national identity theory, nation branding theory, and diaspora tourism theory, and then will be followed by an empirical study of the Birthright Armenia case.

Diasporan ties to Armenia have been considered integral for the nation's survival – currently the population of the Republic of Armenia is estimated to be slightly less than 3 million, whereas the worldwide Diaspora is estimated to be over 10 million.¹ Conservative estimates in 2006 showed that the incomes of the Armenian population in California are upwards of 15 times higher than the GDP of the Republic of Armenia and represent a vastly underutilized resource.² “Armenian” as a

¹ “Basic Country Data | Armenian Development Agency,” accessed December 8, 2012, <http://www.ada.am/eng/about-armenia/general-info/basic-country-data/>.

² Victoria Anahi Minoian and Lev M. Friedman, “Armenia: What Drives First Movers and How

concept is at a crossroads of nationalism and transnationalism – the long isolated Republic is now capable of fully integrating into the lives of its thriving diaspora and reproducing itself and its role – and it is here where tourism is used as a diaspora-building tool to both construct and sustain transnational ties in the context of a shared “homeland.” The expansion of diasporan identification through tourism programs provides benefits to both sides, and is one of the key factors in the maintenance of the Republic of Armenia, both politically and economically. The common idiom in regards to the location of the wealth in the South Caucasus region states that Azerbaijan has its oil, Georgia has its sea, and Armenia has its diaspora.

“Diaspora”, in a time of globalization, promulgation, and fractionalization of identities where partial heritage is more and more frequent, has evolved to a postmodernist point where the theory of nation branding (or “competitive identity”³) is pushed to the forefront as a key tool in this era of competition. Nations may be reinvented and redefined in the gap between what the individual knows of the brand, and what the brand is in evidence. This is not to say that nation branding is an entirely new process; it is rather the reframing of nation building processes to include the efficiency, commodification, and marketability of identity granted by the growth of mass communications and globalization (see Aronczyk 2007, Jansen 2008).

Diasporan tourism as a field of study has found its roots in academia as of the 1970s, however a majority of this work has been done on the Jewish diaspora. In this thesis I would like to take some of these burgeoning fields of work and apply them to the Armenian case, which I believe would present a unique and understudied view at the junction of diaspora, tourism, and nation branding as the Jewish case is more about what the country can provide for the diaspora predicated on the guided tour structure, as opposed to Armenian volunteer tourism, where the diaspora contributes directly to the country.

Can Their Efforts Be Scaled Up?,” in *Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills: How Countries Can Draw on Their Talent Abroad*, ed. Yevgeny N Kuznetsov (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 129–149.

³ Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions* (Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

1.1 Research Question

1. How is the Birthright Armenia diaspora tourism program branding Armenian national identity in order to make it competitive in a global market?

1.2 Structure

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters, the first of which is a general introduction chapter followed by five core chapters and a conclusion:

- Chapter 1 presents the introduction, research questions, and methodology followed
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature in the area and the theoretical framework of the thesis
- Chapter 3 discusses normatively the conditions of globalization that affect diaspora and the shift from fixed to liquid modernity that grants diasporic actors greater agency in their identification
- Chapter 4 addresses Armenian Diaspora and Republic of Armenia relations through the lens of historical divides and nation-building processes
- Chapter 5 analyzes the construction of Armenian diaspora tourism programs in general and
- Chapter 6 contains the critical discourse analysis of Birthright Armenia materials
- Chapter 7 presents a summary of findings and conclusions, highlighting the transition from separate Republic of Armenia and Diaspora narratives to a singular, transnational narrative

1.3 Methodology

I will focus on Birthright Armenia programs based in the United States and Armenia. This is because Birthright Armenia is one of the only groups that has persisted for an extended duration (Birthright Armenia was founded in 2003), and is not a subsidiary of a larger institution and is therefore free to divine its own path. The focus on the United States is for two reasons: 1) The

largest Armenian distinctly diasporan population is located there,⁴ and 2) the Armenian American diaspora is responsible for the lion's share of external funding Armenia receives, thereby “feeding back” to the Republic. Considering that people have enrolled in these programs for a specific duration of time (on average 14-18 weeks) , it should be adequate to address them as a “group making a diasporan claim.”

The first step will be to discuss the intrinsic element of *choice* present in personal identification within the diaspora in a sufficiently pluralistic environment that comes along with assimilative and acculturative pressures. The American case accommodates a sustainable multiculturalism that allows for a pluralistic self-identification, or choice. It is this modern state that permits the transmutation of the “Homeland” and “Diaspora” relationship into one in which identities can be commodified in everyday practice, attributing some inherent value (brand equity that can be extended to cultural capital) to ethnicity. In deconstructing the sacredness of the “homeland orientation” perspective taken by academics and instead viewing it from the point of individuals provided choices of consumption, it becomes clear that from the plethora of options available, each must make its case to hold position in the personal hierarchy of social identification. Through the means of travel, the “homeland” is provided an opportunity to directly brand itself and vie for such a role.

Secondly, I shall *compare* and *contrast* the contexts of the Armenian Diaspora and the Republic of Armenia, to acknowledge the differing circumstances under which both were created and exist. Here, I construct a foundation of inquiry upon which I will hypothesize that there is a distinction between the two – as the majority of the Diaspora is Western Armenian in origin, and the Republic of Armenia is decidedly Eastern Armenian in origin. Thus it draws attention to the history

⁴ Russia may have categorically the most Armenians, but the government is repressive to the extent large-scale diasporic activity is limited, and therefore claims of diaspora are difficult to ascertain. Additionally, assimilation processes are expedited, often with a total change in one generation rather than a Gansian 2-3 generations. Panossian (1998) describes it differently, as a divide between “internal” (inside the U.S.S.R.) diaspora and “external” (outside) diaspora. In that case, the United States is the largest “external” by consensus.

of the en masse deterritorialization of the Armenian identity in the Western regions, and the history of the territorialization of Armenian identity in the Eastern regions in the early 20th century. This difference and how it is addressed is one of the most integral aspects of the tourism and branding processes used by these programs – it is the dyadic relationship of territorializing the culture and the identity within the current Republic of Armenia, and simultaneously deterritorializing the culture and making it portable for use within the Diaspora through use of myths, symbols, and narratives.

Third, I shall analyze empirically how these programs are structured to *socialize* participants with a new iteration of the Armenian collective identity through brief discourse analysis of the basic information recommended to prospective participants (official website, blog, Facebook page). This analysis will focus on how the programs represent the collective identity, in print and in practice. Due to time constraints, a longitudinal study including entry and exit surveys or participant observation was not possible, however an informal interview with the Birthright Armenia Country Director was conducted. As actors are not discursive fields in and of themselves, the singular interview shall only inform the discourse analysis rather than constitute it.

Finally, I will discuss the implications of the growth of Armenian *transnation* – discussing the transition from exilic diaspora to diasporic transnation that is evident in the practice of competitive identity in these diaspora tourism programs. In relaxing the rhetoric of diasporic return, these programs serve to socialize a tangible identification with the Republic of Armenia and to change its role in the individual's everyday life.

2. Literature Review and Theory

A great deal of work has been done in the field of nationalism studies on national and ethnic identity, and more recently, diaspora identity construction. In contrast, nation branding theory is relatively new to academia with little critical scholarship, transposing marketing and branding paradigms and applying them to the case of nations and nationhood. Much has been done on these individual facets of this work (both diaspora identity and nation branding), but there is a lacuna in the literature at the confluence of both. Building upon this extant body of literature, this thesis seeks to elaborate the use of nation branding in diasporic identity construction through tourism programs that create portable culture, using Armenia as a case study.

2.1 Nation and Identity Theory

Academia has produced many definitions of *nation*. However, within Anderson's (2006) *pièce de résistance* “*Imagined Communities*” we find a suitable definition: that nation is an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”⁵ Having developed due to what he terms as “print capitalism,” the Gutenbergian revolution of printed materials maximized the circulation of vernacular that standardized language and subsequently, national discourse. While claims of modernism may be laid against Anderson, the concepts of diaspora and transnation as categories of analysis are modern as well, and with this definition, the term *nation* supercedes the geographical boundaries of the state to encompass them. It is crucial also to fit the globalization of communications and travel into Anderson's “print capitalism” superstructure, understanding that the imagined geographical limits of nation have now been expanded – it is absolutely feasible that a child in Buenos Aires, Argentina had access to the text of Hovhannes Tumanyan's *Gikor*⁶ when growing up.

⁵ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

⁶ A novel written by Tumanyan, who is considered one of the greatest poets in the history of Armenia.

We must also take to the task of defining the scope of *nation*, and what the nation entails.

Whereas the social constructivist approach to national identity construction maintains as a popular one with a few detractors (see Motyl 2010), for the intent of this thesis, we must apply Anthony Smith's (1999) ethnosymbolic approach – that nationalism derives its power from myth and symbols that change over time. Effectively the nation consists at its core of an *ethnie*, and that nation is promulgated and perpetuated over time as these symbols and myths within the cultural milieu are operationalized and their meanings and inclusion are negotiated.

If we grant that within this Andersonian concept of nation that the symbols and myths exist and thus the nation exists because these symbols are imagined as what Bourdieu (1986) would consider “cultural capital” within this “inherently limited” nation, then focus must be drawn to the boundary maintenance of the entity. Barth (1979) argues the continual reinforcement of ethnic boundaries through external discourse is what should be analyzed; “If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion.”⁷ Thus if the cultural milieu encased within this semi-permeable Barthian membrane is of a nature akin to an *ethnie*, then we must examine these criteria by which these symbols are weighed and measured, and why they pass through the barrier.

Expanding further the symbolic ontological nature of this “community,” if the construction of Barth's boundaries can be considered divisions between nations in this case, then we may look to Cohen (1985). Cohen argues that these boundaries are not in and of themselves the division of “A from not A,” but instead the symbols included within the boundaries are what makes the collective distinct. He also acknowledges that within the group, the symbols do not directly hold meaning so much as are viable for being imbued with meaning – so within the group the symbols are shared, even if they do not mean the same for all. In short, a community maintains their identity not simply by the wall, but the symbols it protects, each in turn playing a role for the composition of the other.

⁷ Fredrik Barth, “*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries - the social organization of culture difference*. Edited by Fredrik Barth.” (Universitetsforlaget, 1970), 15.

These symbols are granted meaning through what Foucault (1986) would term discursive formation, that discourse itself can grant meaning to that which is otherwise meaningless. Discourse effectively negotiates the value of the symbols that are germane to the cultural body of the nation – through discourse each element has meaning granted or removed from it, and it follows that these symbolic elements can flow freely on both the collective and individual level of national identity.

Markowitz (1993) presents a study of a group of Soviet Jewish immigrants to New York, and their melding of old values and knowledge and the new realities of living. Markowitz's research points to the discursive element of identity formation – that this group is distinguished by its unifying symbols that are then debated and negotiated upon dialogically, reducing the necessity of homogeneity within the community to the necessity for group consensus on origins, hopes, etc. Reversing the flow of boundary maintenance to the discussion of what fits within it – identification is formed by interaction within the group – we see two areas of discursive formation. The first is external, between the bounded group and without. The second lies internally between those who identify with the group.

Rosenson (2003) takes this one step further, to focus on the “set of core issues” that members of the group find important. Rosenson points to divisions within the group as significant, and that cleavages can be discerned not by addressing the areas of consensus (as the group exists, general consensus will exist), but by examining the difference of opinion between constituent groups. She points to three salient aspects: (1) formative experiences; (2) encounters with other groups; and (3) the message of communal institutions. Those born into a culturally pluralistic Western society receive very different formative experiences than the ethnically homogenous South Caucasus republic, requiring amendments to the criterion of “input from outside groups” to reflect the aspects of social identity theory that are present in the far more interactionist diaspora, as well as the agency of the actors. This serves as a good starting point for discussion of diaspora. One tenet

of the central argument is that diaspora can persist as consensus is maintained, but the cleavages are what should be examined; if nation develops into transnation, then communal institutions based within the diaspora may carry a very different message than in the figurative “homeland.”

This theory, however, requires some qualification in terms of limits of “diaspora” and “nation” and how they can be applied as concrete ideas. These nations as we conceive of them are inherently limited in both time and space. As stated by Brubaker (2006), we cannot think in terms of “groups” as bounded, discrete entities, and instead should favoring viewing “groups” as events. Thus one should consider nations in terms of “groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable,”⁸ understanding that as groups may persist, they are not necessarily assumed to be permanent. Gans (1979) states that as ethnic networks dissolve due to assimilative processes, it would be more appropriate to describe them as “ethnic aggregates.”⁹ This follows our conception of nation, and the dialogical nature of symbolic interaction – every symbol or myth invoked under the auspices of being within the nation presents a putative claim to “groupness” that should suffice as the minimum criteria for constituting a category of analysis. This applies doubly to diasporic claims.

Brubaker (2005) provides criteria for the term “diaspora” which summarize effectively the works of Clifford (1994), Safran (1991), and Armstrong (1976): (1) dispersion; (2) homeland orientation; and (3) boundary maintenance. Diaspora as constituted by these criteria and tempered by the warnings of Brubaker (2005, 2006) do fit within the context of this work as diasporan tourism programs involve an event involving discrete, bounded groups with a discernible beginning and end, and requiring at minimum a diasporic claim to participate. Having described how the nation is constituted through boundary maintenance, and understanding, *ceteris paribus*, that these examined groups are in a state of dispersion, we must focus more on the second condition of

⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11.

⁹ Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America*,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1979), 16.

diaspora proposed by Brubaker – the relation to the homeland.

Ethnicity in a sufficiently pluralistic context is able to persist in spite of assimilative and acculturative forces, allowing for hybridity of identification. Gilroy (1993) rejects the monolithic view of nationality that he terms “cultural insiderism,” instead favoring the dual modality of “double consciousness,” of being able to maintain both identities at the same time. Gans (1979) shows that from the 3rd generation and onward ethnicity takes a symbolic form which informs daily life only as far as it does not interfere with it, showing a diminishing of and a more utilitarian purpose for ethnic boundary maintenance, due to secularization and individualization. What we may extrapolate from this is akin to Cornell and Hartmann's (2007) discussion of “thick” and “thin” identities – that the “thick” identity informs social life and action, whereas the “thin” identity is a less core designation. Both may coexist, and thus “double consciousness” permits a state of negotiating the “thickness” of each without the necessary assimilation of one.

There are many advantages to maintaining “double consciousness,” and it does not require a significant amount of effort in regards to social identity within pluralistic societies. Cohen (1996) shows that in an increasingly pluralistic and less state oppressed environment, there is an opening for sufficient individual plurality to take advantage of the country of settlement as well as the ties to their “country of origin.” Thus with the ability to do so, a person will tend to remain part of a category unless the group does not provide positive aspects, and thus the social actor aims for “maximum positive distinctiveness” (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Boundary maintenance here provides benefits to those able to utilize and operationalize their hybridity to mobilize as diasporans. Armstrong (1976) provides that mobilized diasporas will have elites that are more proficient in symbol manipulation than the dominant ethnic group, and that there are two fundamental roles that, when occupied, act as boundary maintenance mechanisms: communications specialization and role specialization. These elites are the subject of Tölölyan's (2000) study, which argues that Armenian Diaspora has made the transition from exilic nationalism

to diasporic transnationalism and that these elites are now the producers of culture. Tölölyan also provides a definition of transnation: transnation as the diaspora and the homeland, where importance has shifted to the culture-bearing institutions (of which the homeland is relegated to the role of one).

In summary, we find that the role of the homeland in the diaspora may diminish over generations, but that does not preclude the maintenance of a “double consciousness.” This duality allows access to two separate groups of cultural capital – that of the country of settlement and that of the “country of origin” - and is likely to persist to the extent that it remains beneficial to do so and does not place a burden on daily life. In this effort to “maximize positive distinctiveness,” elites are those who are proficient in manipulating symbols. Within a transnational context, these elites dictate what symbols are included and therefore how the boundaries are maintained in the diaspora. These elites, through symbol manipulation and discursive formation, are changing the contours of the boundary, effectively redefining and rebranding “Armenia” and “Armenianness,” pushing to thicken the Armenian identity. Previous works, however, have not gone so far as to consider the mechanisms of competition between identities, but simply the dialogical nature of identity.

2.2 Nation Branding Theory

Nation branding theory provides a suitable structure for analyzing this trend of redefining “Armenianness” and the Armenian nation. From a cultural perspective of nation branding, national identity is viewed as “a dynamic struggle and negotiation, shaped by various local and extra-local agents, over collective and individual meanings.”¹⁰ This is not the extent of nation branding's application, as it can provide favorable economic and political conditions on an institutional level, however, in the context of diaspora, identity is the primary impetus. Nation branding processes are

¹⁰ Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 127.

oriented toward reconstituting nations “both at the levels of ideology, and of praxis, whereby the meaning and experiential reality of nationhood itself is transformed in ways that are yet to be fully understood.”¹¹ The diaspora/homeland relationship is one in which the territory of the Republic of Armenia can, through the negotiation of the brand identity and brand image gap, become a stronger culture-bearing institution for the Diaspora and create value added for “Armenianness”.

Anholt (2007) calls nation branding “competitive identity,” which he considers to be a combination of brand management and public diplomacy that increases national competitiveness on the global market, just as brands exist to simplify thought and choice. While arguments can be made against Anholt's reliance on a global identity competition, it can feasibly be applied to situations of diaspora and transnational identity and politics because of the consumer choice that has come with postmodernism and technological advances, as well as the consideration that nation branding adds value to the exchange value of anything labeled with the national brand.¹² Aronczyk (2007) considers nation branding's improved role due to a transition to “postpolitical” representations of national identity, citing that “it is now possible to form allegiances with regard not to shared traditions and rituals, kinship and ethnicity, language or geographic proximity, but to the profit-based marketing strategies of private enterprise.”¹³

Brands are comprised of four parts (Anholt 2007; Dinnie 2008): (1) brand identity; (2) brand image; (3) brand purpose; and (4) brand equity. Brand identity is “the core concept of a product, clearly and distinctively expressed.”¹⁴ This is the understanding of the brand (nation) which is to be conveyed and accepted as truth. Brand image, however, exists as the manner in which the brand is perceived; this is what Anholt calls the “reputation” of the brand that exists outside of the direct

¹¹ Ibid, 118.

¹² Stanislav Olegovich Budnitskiy, *Lost Tribes of Nation Branding?: Representation of Russian Minority in Estonia's Nation Branding Efforts*, CEU Nationalism Studies Master Theses 2012/3 (Budapest: CEU, Budapest College, 2012), 11.

¹³ Melissa Aronczyk, “New and Improved Nations: Branding National Identity,” ed. Craig J. Calhoun and Richard Sennett, *Taking Culture Seriously* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 105.

¹⁴ Anholt, *Competitive Identity*, 5.

control of the brand owner, as it resides in the mind of the consumers.¹⁵ Brand purpose is the internal manifestation of brand image – whether or not all the parts of the whole are working towards that brand image.¹⁶ Brand equity is similar to what Aronczyk terms “monopoly rent”¹⁷ - the implicit value attached if the brand were to be exchangeable.

Public diplomacy is how the proprietor of the brand changes brand image to match brand identity. Brand identity (and national reputation) is conveyed to the consumers via various methods – a generally accepted basic framework that can be attributed to Anholt (2007), who provides a six-point approach to nation branding: (1) tourism; (2) branded exports; (3) governance; (4) investment; (5) culture; and (6) people. This requires a concerted effort of brand purpose on the part of the government, the commercial, and the private sectors to pull the nation in the same direction. Dinnie (2008) argues that the only form of nation branding that works is that which understands the core aspects of the national identity and utilizes them for branding.

Nation branding itself is a simple machine – it is the negotiation of brand identity and brand image that is paramount to how the nation is understood and differentiated.

“The imperfect knowledge – or often complete ignorance – that people all over the world have with regard to nations other than their own gives rise to what can become a damaging identity–image gap, where a nation’s true identity fails to be appreciated by external observers because of either indifference or overwhelming negative stereotypes.”¹⁸

Brands extend further than corporations or governments to include facets of national culture: religion, language, literature, music, sport, architecture, cuisine, *et al.* These are all integral aspects of nation branding: Russia is the land of Pushkin, despite the frequency with which he wrote about Crimea; who created hummus or dolma; competing narratives wage war not in brand identity but externally, in brand image.

¹⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹⁶ In the same way many former Soviet nations may espouse their democratic values and remain totalitarian in nature, thus no one believes in the brand identities.

¹⁷ Melissa Aronczyk, “New and Improved Nations: Branding National Identity,” ed. Craig J. Calhoun and Richard Sennett, *Taking Culture Seriously* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2007), 105–128.

¹⁸ Keith Dinnie, *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2008).

The failure to promote one's own national brand is to effectively allow others to promote identities for the brand. The 2006 film *Borat* is one of the most often cited examples of such an event – with little to no knowledge of the newly-independent Republic of Kazakhstan, comedian Sacha Baron Cohen created a Kazakhi journalist character that had a strong impact due to the lack of information about Kazakhstan available. It was largely considered offensive in Kazakhstan and was followed by a large propaganda campaign.¹⁹ Since 2006, however, Kazakhstan has experienced a tourism boom attributed to *Borat*,²⁰ and has been subsequently better able to draw interest in the country. While the result of the film has boomeranged in favor of Kazakhstan, the central point highlighted through this process is its lack of control of the image being projected.

Noting that within the divide of internal, external, and non-members of nation, external members are granted a modicum of choice, implicit in their status as external to the homeland. Thus, with options available as to affiliation, and even different representations of nationhood, the competition is for the right to articulate what constitutes “Armenianness.”

National brands need be communicated with the activation and invocation of culture, or simply the packaging of culture. One of Anholt's (2007) main focuses is tourism, which he views as the most potent branding mechanism since it has permission to brand the country directly, through the invocation of the “tourist gaze” - a socially ordered and systematized way of ascribing meaning to the experience of differences (Urry, 1990).

2.3 Tourism and Diaspora Tourism Theory

The most recent work in the field of diaspora tourism has been done by Kelner (2010) on the Birthright Israel programs. His findings show that these programs are not an attempt to provoke diasporic “return,” but in fact socialize diasporan identification, placing Israel as a territory more

¹⁹ “Kazakhstan Launches Propaganda Campaign Against Borat,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, September 15, 2006, sec. uknews, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1528944/Kazakhstan-launches-propaganda-campaign-against-Borat.html>.

²⁰ “Kazakhstan: Borat Behind Tourism Boom,” *CNN Travel*, accessed April 2, 2013, <http://travel.cnn.com/explorations/life/kazakhstan-thanks-borat-boosting-tourism-277915>.

towards the center of their identity. He terms identity built on these tourism programs as “consumerist”, however, participants find themselves in a dyadic and contradictory situation upon consumption. On one side, these programs territorialize the Jewish culture in Israel. On the other, they deterritorialize the Israeli-Jewish culture and make it portable so that participants return home with what Kelner (2010) terms as an exclusive “cultural toolkit”.²¹ It is this process that both creates the elites, and makes them indebted to the territory because the importance of this “toolkit” stems from that consumption of place – if the place loses relevance, then so does the “toolkit”.

Institutions that operate diasporan tourism programs seek to intertwine the narratives of the homeland and diaspora through collective involvement and mutual constitution, without focusing on the immediate goal but the possible future.

Tourism is defined by Shaul Kelner as “a medium through which people who do not live in a place can come to know it, and through a variety of practices, can actively position themselves in relation to it.”²² Thus it comes as no great surprise that of the main methods of branding, tourism is considered the most useful tool by academics of nation branding, as it is the only one that allows the branding of the country directly. Those that visit Kazakhstan due to *Borat* will have their perspectives indelibly altered through first-hand experience, a crash course in what Aronczyk (2007), borrowing a term from Schumpeter, terms “creative destruction”²³ - the use of branding techniques to deconstruct preconceived notions and reconstruct images more closely aligned with the brand identity, which effects change through the use of the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990).

Due to globalization and the growth of transport and communications technology, tourism and the study of tourism has risen dramatically in the past decades. While modernity has exchanged copresence with technology, it has not supplanted the urge for the intimacy copresence provides, thus there is a desire to close that gap. Boden and Molotch (1994) call this the

²¹ Ibid, 16.

²² Shaul Kelner, *Tours That Bind: Diaspora, Pilgrimage, and Israeli Birthright Tourism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

²³ Aronczyk, “New and Improved Nations: Branding National Identity.”

“compulsion of proximity” - that there is information effectively lost by not being ensconced in the proper context.²⁴ It does not serve simply to view a picture, but it is in absorbing through the closest contact possible the most intimate of details that grants understanding. And in an era where tourism is far more possible due to a myriad of reasons (e.g. relaxed visa regimes and the fall of the Iron Curtain; the advent of bigger, better, and cheaper planes; or even the ease in which one can find how to get somewhere and where to stay there that has reduced the need for Michelin guides), the world has become more open to tourism. Due to this massive influx of tourists, places have been involved heavily in reinventing themselves to accept tourists with a conscious effort that Urry (2001) calls “tourism reflexivity” - where a place utilizes self-reflective procedures to adapt and maximize their potential on the global scene.²⁵

There is, however, something functionally different about diaspora tourism and diaspora tourism programs. Briefly, I must problematize the use of the term “homeland”, so as to not overlook its shortcomings. Most of the common definitions of diaspora include the homeland orientation, however, it must be considered to what degree “return” is ever possible. From one angle, “homeland orientation” is to be directed towards a mythic place that exists only in the imagination of diasporans, even if one returns to the actual geographic location. However, as Brah (1996) asserts, the second definition of “home” is the “lived experience of a locality.”²⁶ It is this second iteration of “home” that diasporan tourism appeals to – that of the compulsion of proximity, the intimacy implicit in everyday lived culture.

For diasporan tourists, the distinction between “home” and “away” is far more oblique than in conditions of conventional travel.²⁷ This constructed “tourist gaze,” which colors how the social

²⁴ Deirdre Boden and Harvey L. Molotch, “The Compulsion of Proximity,” in *NowHere: Space, Time and Modernity*, ed. Roger Friedland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 259.

²⁵ John Urry, “Globalizing the Tourist Gaze” (presented at the Cityscapes Conference, Graz, Austria: Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK, 2001), 2.

²⁶ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1996), 192.

²⁷ Urry, “Globalizing the Tourist Gaze”, 6.

phenomena are experienced as an external observer²⁸ is how the brand is reconstituted through the consumption of space, but for diasporans it serves also as a way of connecting to and understanding the homeland. However the diasporan may relate to the homeland they are still viewing it through the Urryian “gaze,” and therefore are engaged in opposition as observing subject and observed object – unable to cross that threshold of the “gaze” into a full embrace of the nation,²⁹ instead engaged in an interplay of “feeling simultaneously 'at home' and alien.”³⁰

Diaspora tourism programs challenge the brand image of the diasporan tourist, and what it means to make a diasporan claim to that identity. They are actively engaged in the banal nationalism reproduction of nation through a “dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting, and of imagination and unimaginative repetition.”³¹ The tourists reinvent themselves using the cultural capital of the space,³² and in turn, reinvent the brand image.

What the tourist does come away with is a “righted” brand image – one that corresponds with the homeland's definition of itself (or the program's). It is this brand image that serves as a “cultural toolkit,” in which the consumption of place deterritorializes the culture, making it portable for use upon return to their ethnic communities. In reinvigorating diasporan networks with “homeland toolkits,” the culture is reified from the source, thus fighting what is largely termed a “white massacre” or cultural annihilation, while constructing transnational ties and increasing the commodity value of this culture.

Effectively, participants go to the “Homeland” on these trips without the intent to stay there. Rather, they go to claim elite status – to appropriate culture and to consume the symbols and myths offered there. In doing so, the homeland challenges preconceived notions of what the understanding of national identity among diasporans is and inherently is the catalyst of the

²⁸ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed, Theory, Culture & Society (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1990).

²⁹ Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 14.

³⁰ Ibid, 17.

³¹ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 1995), 10.

³² Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 198.

construction of a new identity with more rigorous homeland orientation, which propagates a transnational tie that allows the homeland to surpass state borders. When Boden and Molotch (1994) focus on copresent interaction as “‘thick’ with information”,³³ it is precisely in this “diasporan visiting homeland” context that the participant's Armenian identity can be “thickened”.

³³ Boden and Molotch, “The Compulsion of Proximity”, 259.

3. Diaspora, Modernity, and the Introduction of Choice

“Diaspora” as a concept has been subjected to the rigors of time – globalization has expanded what were once much simpler categorizations of identities into more complex interwoven threads involving hybrid narratives. Previously, “diaspora” referred to “classic” diasporas like the Jewish Diaspora. The general concept was straightforward: a violent rupture separated people from their lands, pushing them into exile, within which a diasporan state was maintained through an orientation towards the homeland and a rhetoric of return (see Clifford 1994, Safran 1991). The growth of the concept of nation state centralized the role of intrastate ties, and previously vague frontiers and regionalized identities, transformed by fixed borders, became to standardized state-level identifications. Thus it is in this age that we may view “diaspora” as one of the truly “transnational communities,” surpassing newly-solidified territorialized definitions of identity. Björklund (2003) argues that the expansion of communications networks has aided diasporas, making possible stronger transnational ties, and providing a counterbalance to the advantage of spacial proximity afforded to the nation-state. This does not intend to supplant the primacy of the territorialized nation-state identification, but instead confounds and complicates the relationship between the individual and their commitments (see Björklund 2003, Bauman 1992). Thus what follows is competition for commitments – as migration and communication becomes easier, and endogamy is less a circumstance of location, choice of confession is increasingly pluralistic in nature. Identification, as a result, which has always had the liquidity of variables, has become characterized by options.

In the past, diasporans chose ancestral ties to a homeland that they were removed from, or to the host country they resided in. As generations pass, however, exogamy may be practiced until an individual may lay ancestral claims to four, sixteen, thirty-two different identities; multiple migrations may form allegiances of individuals to the lands of either of their parents, their grandparents, and where they themselves were born, which may span the entirety of the globe.

Specific to the Armenian diaspora in America, exogamy is becoming increasingly practiced over generations as the population is rarely isolated enough or large enough to ensure enough interaction and matchmaking, and rates of endogamy are more prevalent amongst institutionally affiliated Armenian Americans (through the church or other organizations).³⁴ Bakalian's (2011) study shows a dramatic increase of mixed marriages among Armenian Americans, with 5% of people over the age of 70 having mixed parentage as opposed to 37.5% of those in their twenties; additionally, 80% of all endogamous marriages were related to the Armenian Apostolic Church.³⁵ Thus, we find that generational status does affect intermarriage rates, and we can assume that the diaspora as a whole does not remain a fixed and bounded group – the element of choice is introduced and the role of ethnicity and endogamy in the sphere of marriage has diminished.

In addition to intermarriage and exogamy, there are cleavages within the diaspora communities that compete over narratives and politics. Tölölyan (2000) asserts that “competition occurs at all levels: to control institutions and funds; to recruit loyal constituencies; to attract cultural producers to one vision or another of diasporic identity.”³⁶ Cultural producers are elites in the diaspora, and take a leading role in diaspora formation – the results of the 2013 Republic of Armenia's presidential elections were contested by Raffi Hovannisian, which drew fire on the incumbent Serzh Sargsyan from diasporan elites like Serj Tankian, singer of the band System of a Down. Tankian wrote a letter that was widely publicized, and elicited a response from Sargsyan³⁷ - illustrating the power that lies in the Diaspora and its elites.

³⁴ Anny P Bakalian, *Armenian-Americans: From Being to Feeling Armenian* (Somerset, N.J.; London: Transaction, 2011), 400-404.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Khachig Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 109.

³⁷ “Serzh Sargsyan Responds to Serj Tankian’s Letter | Armenia News - NEWS.am,” accessed May 27, 2013, <http://news.am/eng/news/142103.html>.

3.1 Salience of Ethnicity in the Diasporan Environment

The condition of diaspora does carry with it certain acculturative pressures from the host country. Herbert J. Gans would define acculturation as the adoption of the host society's culture and assimilation as the transition from ethnic associations and societal institutions to the non-ethnic equivalents in the host society.³⁸ While acculturation occurs much quicker than assimilation, both are subject to retention. This adds an element of choice to socialization upon removal from the primary context – actors are allowed to choose what practices they continue (subject to societal pressures to acculturate and assimilate). Thus the saliency of identity comes as a significant factor – if ethnicity is performative (as Brubaker suggests), then it matters when and where this performance occurs, as well as the context of the event and whether or not it can be avoided. For example, upon entering a store in Long Beach, California, a diasporan will experience shopping in a different manner than if he or she was in Yerevan, Armenia. If the actor is not acculturated to the shopping norms and practices accepted in the United States – for example, carrying out transactions in the English language, knowing the available brands and foods – then he or she will be positioned in the outgroup. There is no ethnic “Other”, no outgroup to erect a barrier against in the Yerevan context.

The question then is about the saliency of ethnicity – is it more salient when immersed within the native context (i.e. an Armenian in Armenia) or when contrasted (i.e. an Armenian in Long Beach)? It would be difficult to assume that first generation diasporans would assimilate enough to not feel groupness, or at least “Other-ness” in the Long Beach store, and therefore the ethnic identity would actually be more salient in the sense that it would be more central to the actor's cognitive state. Thus in the diaspora, ethnicity appears salient in everyday exchange, whereas in the homeland saliency of ethnicity does not appear in the forefront of these exchanges and it is likely the shopper would experience no challenge to their Weltanschauung (world view).

³⁸ Herbert J. Gans, “Toward a Reconciliation of ‘Assimilation’ and ‘Pluralism’: The Interplay of Acculturation and Ethnic Retention,” *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (n.d.): 877.

The extent to which cultural practices are retained is logically correlated with the ability to maintain the ethnic's prerequisite "shared history." When a person enters into diaspora, they invariably are acculturated in the context of the host country. Even brief tourism promotes change. Each time that diasporan returns to that shop in Long Beach, the saliency of ethnicity in the exchange diminishes – not simply because the cashier gets used to it, but also because the diasporan is in the process of socializing and acculturating. This creates distance between the diasporan and homeland identities within the actor. It would cause one to question why the actor would choose to retain cultural ties and practices if it behooves them to shed their ethnic identity and assimilate to gain ethnically-neutral treatment. The actor retains this identity because there exists certain benefits to maintaining ethnic boundaries or reifying ethnic identity both in the intragroup and intergroup senses.

As time progresses, and new diasporan generations are born, ethnicity trends towards an elective decision to take it on rather than subsume it. Gans (1979) refers to this form of ethnicity as "symbolic ethnicity" – after the diasporans have established themselves and theoretically gained upward social mobility to middle classes, the figurative cost of their ethnicity is reduced. Culture and ethnicity can turn into a medium that do not act as a detriment to their daily lives as ethnicity is reduced to "expressive" rather than "instrumental" function.³⁹ Ethnicity can thus be invoked in a passive fashion, by choice, abstracted and transposed as a set of symbols with which to interact allowing exclusive access to the cultural capital associated with Armenia. Suny (2001) says that in the Diaspora, "ethnicity is a voluntary affiliation, a selected sense of commonality and continuity."⁴⁰

This is not an irredentist movement, as this symbolic ethnicity is born out of the diaspora and used by the diaspora with no intention of rectifying any misapplication. A trip through Glendale, California would provide a great many examples of the use of symbolism to positively identify intragroup that are detached from the real-world source; "Sevan Dry Cleaners", "Ani

³⁹ Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity", 6.

⁴⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 4 (December 2001), 891.

Banquet Hall”, “Ararat Fish and Meat Market” bear these cultural markers that simultaneously display Armenianness as well as lacking a logical correlation with their namesakes that may appear otiose.

Of great import is the voluntary nature of this prosaic ethnicity; the idea that with each successive generation, diasporans become more detached from the homeland, and “neither need nor have much knowledge about”⁴¹ the homeland, and therefore some level of commitment is required of them to continue the maintenance of the boundary. Gans (ibid.) argues that this does not negate the processes of acculturation and assimilation – however, it is the reliance upon the maintenance of this symbolic exchange by successive generations that will maintain the relative “low-cost” of which Gans speaks.

It is this “low-cost” issue on the intergroup level I wish to address through the use of Henri Tajfel's social identity theory. Tajfel, in part, states that “when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct.”⁴² Tajfel stresses this concept of “maximized positive distinctiveness” that I believe to be integral to the maintenance of symbolic ethnicity. Assuming, *ceteris paribus*, the Armenian symbolic ethnicity factor of a social identity was a performative, non-essential Brubakerian event, as the margin of returned positive esteem from the act lessens, the actor will be less likely to be satisfied with their social identity. If less people practice the Armenian symbolic ethnicity or negative associations are added to it, then fewer will identify with it. For example, at some point lavash (a style of bread made in a tonir – traditionally made collectively by village women for their families) will lose its ethnic cultural capital as an identifiably quintessential Armenian practice associated with the Armenian ethnic aggregate, and simply be a delicious flat bread liked by individuals. Thus this “low-cost” is the maintenance (and subsequent maximization) of “positive distinctiveness.”

⁴¹ Ibid, 4.

⁴² H. Tajfel and J.C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1979), 40.

The easier it is to transform into a symbol or to practice, the more likely it is to survive,⁴³ but it is also important to acknowledge the willingness of the cultural plurality to accept it. Gans (ibid.) cites holidays and foodstuffs as the most likely “easy practice” symbols, but does not acknowledge the “positive distinctiveness” factor involved. Holidays like “Vardavar” (a water festival) and foods like “khash” (a traditional dish made from cow hoof) do not easily add to “positive distinctiveness” because distinction in social identity is only created through social comparison. If the other group perceives this feature as a negative distinction, then maximization of positive distinction comes at a much higher cost and would dissuade the symbolic ethnicity from adopting this into their structure of social identity, favoring the acculturative value.

Both the intragroup and intergroup aspects of diasporan maintenance of ethnicity in light of assimilative and acculturative forces stem from the usefulness of differentiation; and the “aim of differentiation is to maintain or achieve superiority over an outgroup on some dimensions.”⁴⁴ When differentiation fails to achieve that superiority, we may see the diaspora acculturate or assimilate (with errant neotraditionalist movements).

⁴³ Herbert J. Gans, “Symbolic Ethnicity”, 11.

⁴⁴ Tajfel and Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict”, 41.

4. The Armenian Diaspora and its Relation to the Republic of Armenia

“Armenianness” as a concept is thoroughly couched in historical continuity, linking the various iterations of “Armenia” over the past 4000 years. This linear Pan-Armenian narrative reaches as far back as August 11, 2492 BC – when Hayk defeated Bel at the Battle of the Giants near modern Lake Van, Turkey. The Armenian ethnē maintains this date as the birth of Hayastan (translated: “the land of Hayk”), and *in nomine* if not *in sanguine*, has existed since. Under Artaxiad King Tigranes the Great (95 BC – 55 BC), the Armenian Empire stretched from modern Baku to Damascus. “Greater Armenia” as a political concept has the homeland covering the area from present-day Eastern Turkey to the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in Western Azerbaijan. Armenians have been in diaspora since the collapse of the last Bagratuni kings in 1045 AD.⁴⁵ However, the Western Armenian diaspora is a relatively new concept, born out of the exile during the Armenian Genocide in 1915. The modern Republic of Armenia in reality is part of the former Eastern Armenia, and represents a small fraction of what would be considered the historical homeland. Separated by Soviet borders, the Republic of Armenia was cut off from the diaspora until it was opened in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, approximately 20 years ago. This allowed the diasporan Armenian population to more easily communicate with, visit, and migrate to their “ethnic homeland.”

The Armenian case fits within the structure of a “classic” diaspora, and similar to the Jewish diaspora, has gained a nation-state in which culture can be territorialized. The current numbers provided by the government of the Republic of Armenia state that a vast majority of Armenians live outside this titular state (some 10 million diasporans in comparison to 3 million resident citizens).⁴⁶ However, it becomes prudent at this juncture to understand that the diaspora is not necessarily uniform. While the rhetoric of return is an integral aspect of the diasporic claim, some authors

⁴⁵ Razmik Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 7, no. 2 (1998), 152.

⁴⁶ “Basic Country Data | Armenian Development Agency.”

argue that the Armenian Diaspora has turned from exilic diaspora to diasporic transnationalism (see Tölölyan 2000, Pattie 1994). This may be appropriate for some parts of the Armenian Diaspora, but not for all. Many diasporans in smaller communities do maintain a rhetoric of return, like the Greek Armenians, others may not consider themselves in diaspora at all, like the Armenians of Istanbul who reject the term *spiurk* (diaspora).⁴⁷ This argument does not descend into questioning the essentialization of categories like “Greek Armenians” and “Armenian-Americans”; the plurality of the contemporary choice of self-identification is a bar to such “groupist” thinking. However, this thesis does focus primarily on the diasporic transnation, which will be discussed further later.

It becomes important at this juncture to acknowledge the role of religion in the construction of the Armenian nation. Armenia does have a long period of historical continuity, but there is one specific event as to which historians consider the birth of the modern Armenian ethnicity-based nation – the Treaty of Berlin in 1889. Prior to the Soviet Union, Armenia had been subjugated under various rulers – Russian, Ottoman, Safavid, Qajar, Seljuk Turk, Mongol – however, the Armenian ethnies maintained its boundaries with the distinguishing factor of its Christian identity and its language, codified by Mesrop Mashtots in 406 AD (in this we see an interesting parallel to Anderson's concept of “print capitalism” and its role in the imagined community⁴⁸). The ethnic self-consciousness was not territorially based, as borders shifted. It was in 1889 that in Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, “Armenian” as an ethnicity gained political significance and was considered a claim to territorial sovereignty.⁴⁹

This is an important facet if we are to analyze along Brubaker's approach of religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena⁵⁰. For hundreds of years, Armenians have had two Catholicos

⁴⁷ Ulf Björklund, “Armenians of Athens and Istanbul: The Armenian Diaspora and the ‘transnational’ Nation,” *Global Networks* 3, no. 3 (2003): 337–354.

⁴⁸ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

⁴⁹ Michael A Reynolds, *Shattering Empires : the clash and collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, 1908-1918* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39-40.

⁵⁰ Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches,” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (January 2012): 2–20.

to which they maintained allegiance: one in Echmiadzin, Armenia (the Catholicos of All Armenians), and another in the “diaspora” (the Catholicos of Cilicia) now located in Antelias, Lebanon. Prior to Article 61, which only drastically affected the Western Armenians, religion provided “a way of identifying and naming fundamental social groups, a powerful framework for imagining community, and set of schemas, templates, and metaphors for making sense of the social world.”⁵¹ Brubaker's rubrics of religion as a) a mode of identification, b) a mode of social organization, and c) a way of framing political claims would show that the analogous structure of religion has largely disappeared in the North American diaspora which can be attributed to a multitude of reasons this thesis has not the space to explain, save the rise of Armenian as national identity, and further, transnational identity, which still involve cultural artifacts of the Armenian religious identity that are suitable for transnational use in the diaspora.⁵²

The Diaspora in and of itself constitutes a vague, semi-conscious body. All parts understand some connection to main Armenian narratives, to which they lay claim, however the divide between the Diaspora and the Republic of Armenia was solidified by the borders of the Soviet Union for almost 70 years, and where the diasporans would gather, communities would form independent of others. While most maintained the Armenian Apostolic Church as a secular hub or connection to the homeland from which they were displaced, they did not build global or transnational ties to any substantial effect. The Dashnaktsutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation- ARF) political party shows evidence of this – one of the two oldest Armenian political parties (the other being the Hinchakian Social Democratic Party) that can be found spanning the globe has no unified platform, and subsequently the global chapters do not move in concert. For instance, the 2012 firebombing of an LGBT-friendly bar in Yerevan was a point of contention between the various branches of the ARF. The two suspects were released with bail paid by MPs from the Republic of Armenia branch

⁵¹ Ibid, 2.

⁵² Gal, Leoussi, and Smith, *The Call of the Homeland Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, 29.

of the Dashnaktsutyun, while the U.S. Branch condemned the act.⁵³

The main, overarching narratives of “Armenia” as a concept sometimes widely differ. For instance, the Genocide, in some instances called “the single issue that affects all Armenians regardless of background or political belief”,⁵⁴ occurred in the Ottoman Empire millets of Eastern Anatolia. At the same time the modern Republic was under the control of the Russian Empire and was exempt from the purges and therefore saw less of the trauma. Yerevan, however, did receive a large number of refugees which turned it from a mostly Muslim city to one populated with Armenians,⁵⁵ but for the larger part, there exists a linguistic divide that requires speakers of Western Armenian to take language lessons during the tourism program that serves as evidence of a larger gulf between the deterritorialized narrative of the Western Armenians, and the territorialized narrative of the Eastern (during the time of the Soviet Union) that acts as a palpable and visible reminder. In 1946, a huge “repatriation” movement was made to get diasporans to move to Soviet Armenia – these diasporans were subject to discrimination by *hayastanci* (Armenians from Armenia), being referred to as *aghpars* (brothers – however in a denigrating form)⁵⁶; this discrimination is felt by other diasporan groups from outside the territory, most recently the Syrian Armenians who have fled from the Syrian crisis.⁵⁷⁵⁸ Voluntary “repatriation” movements from the Western Diaspora consisting of non-refugees have seen little success.⁵⁹

⁵³ “Hate Crime Targets Gay Friendly Bar in Yerevan, MPs Bail Out Assailants,” *Armenian Weekly*, accessed May 17, 2013, <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2012/05/15/hate-crime-targets-gay-friendly-bar-in-yerevan-mps-bail-out-assailants/>.

⁵⁴ Lorne Shirinian, *The Republic of Armenia and the Rethinking of the North-American Diaspora in Literature* (Lewiston u.a.): Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 15.

⁵⁵ Suny, “Constructing Primordialism.”

⁵⁶ Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion”, 156.

⁵⁷ Miriam Mughdusyan, “Disillusioned with ‘Homeland’ - Syrian-Armenian Family Leaves Yerevan for Tbilisi | Hetq Online,” accessed November 12, 2012, <http://hetq.am/eng/articles/20367/disillusioned-with-homeland---syrian-armenian-family-leaves-yerevan-for-tbilisi.html>.

⁵⁸ Marianna Grigoryan, “Armenia: An Uncertain ‘Homecoming’ for Syria’s Diaspora,” *EurasiaNet*, July 31, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/65728>.

⁵⁹ Liana Aghajanian, “Armenia’s Tough Sell to the Diaspora: Come Home,” *The Atlantic*, November 4, 2011, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/11/armenias-tough-sell-to-the-diaspora-come-home/247865/>.

This rupture presents a rather often understated division in the modern Armenian narrative. It marks the birth of the Armenian “diaspora in exile,” which does not maintain the positive self aspects of the Jewish concept of *galut*,⁶⁰ but instead holds onto these events (and the subsequent exile) as an intense trauma to their *ethnie*. Subsequently, the A.R.F. and the Diaspora in general are well-known for their support of recognition movements. The most hardcore Diasporans “are said to care less about the homeland's present and future than the past's dead.”⁶¹ In fact, all of the militants from the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (A.S.A.L.A.), responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks from the 1970s to 1990s, were of diasporan origin.⁶² It was really these attacks that brought to light the issue of recognition, which had fallen to the wayside in homeland rhetoric.

The political power of the Armenian Diaspora should not be underestimated. Anderson's (1992) concept of “long-distance nationalism” thoroughly applies to the Armenian case, in which the Diaspora can involve itself in “a politics without responsibility or accountability.”⁶³ After the independence of the Republic of Armenia in 1991 the first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, asserted that he would advance the Republic's interests, rather than the Armenian people's as a whole. In attempting to negotiate with the Republic of Turkey, he did not adequately satiate diasporan concern for genocide recognition and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The subsequent diaspora-led media onslaught forced him to resign, to be replaced by staunch Armenian nationalist Robert Kocharyan.⁶⁴

The power of the Armenian Diaspora also exists on the institutional level, in Armenian political lobbies, like the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), who work closely with the U.S. Congress. The current U.S. Armenian Caucus in Congress has 88 members,⁶⁵ and

⁶⁰ Howard Wettstein, *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 48.

⁶¹ Yossi Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution,” *SAIS Review* 22, no. 2 (2002), 121.

⁶² Khachig Tölölyan, “Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture,” in *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups*, ed. Leonard Weinberg (London [u.a.: Routledge, 2003), 8–22.

⁶³ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism : World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam, 1992), 11.

⁶⁴ Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution”, 122-123.

⁶⁵ “Armenian Caucus,” accessed May 24, 2013, http://www.anca.org/hill_staff/armenian_caucus.php.

recently issued its 2014 U.S. Foreign aid suggestions, which included funds for development in Nagorno-Karabakh, earmarking 10% of assistance to Georgia to go to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (predominantly ethnic Armenian), strengthening of restrictions on Azerbaijan, humanitarian aid to Syrian Armenians and other Christian groups from the Middle East, and Nagorno-Karabakh leadership participation in the O.S.C.E. Minsk Group negotiations.⁶⁶ Many of these issues are not predicated on Diasporan involvement – a miniscule amount of Diasporans (if any) are from Nagorno-Karabakh, but the collective memory of loss (of life and land) in the Armenian Genocide motivates fervent participation and involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁶⁷

4.1 Armenian Narratives

Panossian's (1998) work focuses on the divide of Armenian narratives in a different fashion – not directly on the lines of homeland and diaspora, but by “when” the nation is considered to have begun. These narratives of “when” the nation is can be operationalized to frame modern problems and issues, but also to negotiate the brand image and brand identity gap by connecting narratives to each other. The Armenian Genocide, the most prevalent of narratives has already been discussed above at some length. In adding to Panossian's original three that he details,⁶⁸ this thesis follows five main narratives that are operationalized in nation branding processes to frame “Armenia” within embedded conceptualizations⁶⁹:

1. *The 1915 Armenian Genocide*. Incorporates narratives of “victimhood” and defiance in the face of national destruction.
2. *301 A.D., Armenia as the first Christian nation*. The myth involves King Trdat converting to Christianity in 301 A.D. After being healed by St. Gregory the

⁶⁶ “U.S. Reps Support Aid for Armenia, Artsakh, Javakhk, and At-Risk Middle East Armenians,” *Armenian Weekly*, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2013/04/25/u-s-reps-support-aid-for-armenia-artsakh-javakhk-and-at-risk-middle-east-armenians/>.

⁶⁷ Shain, “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution”, 120.

⁶⁸ Razmik Panossian, “The Past as Nation: Three Dimensions of Armenian Identity,” *Geopolitics* 7, no. 2 (2002): 121–146.

⁶⁹ Suny, “Constructing Primordialism”, 868.

Illuminator; the reality was more likely that it occurred around 313 A.D., after the signing of the Edict of Milan, as a response to the encroachment of Persian Zoroastrianism. This narrative was continued through to the present, framing the 405 A.D. creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots as “God-inspired”, the 451 A.D. Battle of Avayr in which King Vartan Mamikonian lost but weakened the Sassanid Persians enough to solicit them to allow Armenians to practice Christianity, and the tracing of Hayk's lineage back to biblical Noah by Movses Khorenatsi. This is a core myth, even for secular Armenians.⁷⁰

3. *Pre-Christian Armenia*. Considering that “Armenia” has existed in some shape or another since 2492 B.C., there was a history that predates Christianity in which many points of salience can be found. Strident nationalists may subscribe to some level of racial superiority, along the line of Garegin Nzhdeh's *tseghakron* ideology, that were used in the 1988-1991 nationalist movements but have largely fallen out of common discourse.⁷¹ Other narratives involve connections to the Urartian empire⁷², which fell around 600 B.C., as well as other empires that constituted “Greater Armenia” (as all good nationalists have a “Greater” version of themselves). More recently archaeological discoveries have taken the forefront, giving the Republic of Armenia a claim to the world's oldest leather shoe⁷³ and the world's oldest “winery”,⁷⁴ both of which have become great points of pride within the Republic.

4. *The 1991 Independence of the Republic of Armenia*. Contrasting heavily with the deterritorialized Diaspora, the 70 years of Soviet rule included intense *korenizatsiia*

⁷⁰ Panossian, “The Past as Nation”, 127.

⁷¹ Ibid, 132-133.

⁷² Suny, “Constructing Primordialism”, 887.

⁷³ “World’s Oldest Leather Shoe Found—Stunningly Preserved,” *National Geographic*, accessed May 24, 2013, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/06/100609-worlds-oldest-leather-shoe-armenia-science/>.

⁷⁴ “Earliest Known Winery Found in Armenian Cave,” *National Geographic*, accessed May 24, 2013, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/01/110111-oldest-wine-press-making-winery-armenia-science-ucla/>.

(“nativization”) policies in the 1930s that went so far as to list “Armenian” on the fifth line of the internal passport.⁷⁵ By the 1970s, it was clear that Communist ideology simply masked the national impulses of the Armenian population – the Soviet experiment of ethnonational territories created a heavily homogenized state that all within the U.S.S.R could view as the definitive “Armenian Homeland”.⁷⁷ The narrative itself involves on one hand, downplaying the Republic's Soviet legacy, and on the other, emphasizing the newness of the nation.

5. *Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. The 1988-1994 (and still ongoing) conflict serves as a touchstone for both the Diaspora and the Republic. For the Diaspora, the conflict is a second iteration of the Armenian Genocide. For the Republic, it is a war that still requires soldiers and still takes lives. Indirectly, the conflict is responsible for the geopolitical isolation of the Republic of Armenia, as Azerbaijan and Turkey have closed borders. The two narratives are mutually constitutive because both the post-Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (the *de facto* leaders of which are considered the organizers of the Genocide) and the Azerbaijani government are Turkic in origin. The term *turk* is considered offensive as it is synonymous with “enemy”. This conflict also is being used to reproduce or diffuse the political weight of the Genocide – multiple massacres and site destructions have been colloquially labeled “Genocide” by the Armenian or Azerbaijani media; Sumgait, Khojaly, and Djulfa stand out as strong attempts at branding.

These diaspora tourism programs serve as one of the strongest methods of nation branding and diaspora socialization. While it is unlikely they can be used to indoctrinate any specific *logos*, all will actively participate in *ethos* construction, ultimately narrowing the gap of ignorance

⁷⁵ Mark Saroyan, “Beyond the Nation-State: Culture and Ethnic Politics in Soviet Transcaucasia,” in *Transcaucasia : Nationalism & Social Change - Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan & Georgia*. (Univ Of Michigan, 1996), 401–426.

⁷⁶ Suny, “Constructing Primordialism”, 872-873.

⁷⁷ Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion”, 155.

between brand identity and brand image. Upon return, these diasporans are now cultural elites, bearing the portable culture with them. In this way, the nation state surpasses its territorial constraints and forges new transnational ties by claiming its diaspora.⁷⁸ In a postmodernist period, where identity becomes competitive (especially in these Western spheres to which these diaspora tourism programs are oriented), the returning elites become envoys of the program's answer to the question “what is Armenia?”, who then further promote the brand identity within their respective communities, leading to stronger ties with the “homeland”.

⁷⁸ Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 4.

5. Diaspora Tourism Programs

While the diasporan tourism programs are available and open to all that can make a diasporic claim, certain characteristics affect its accessibility to potential participants. For instance, participation costs may be too great for some. Funding for participation only covers 50% of costs for any time under 14 weeks.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the concept of volunteering for low-to-no wages, is unfamiliar to people from former Soviet Republics, and is a deterrent for people from low to lower middle income backgrounds.⁸⁰ What we find is that these diaspora tourism programs are geared towards those who have the means and therefore can play a role in the transnational diaspora, where socialized elites are the purveyors and creators of culture, although often Western Armenian in style.⁸¹

These program participants return to the diaspora with the Kelnerian “toolkit,” and participate in reinventing the diaspora and redefining the role Armenia plays in the transnational web as not simply another culture-bearing institution, but one that plays a more central role, in identity politics, as well as political lobbying.^{82,83}

These tourism programs are structured to socialize diasporan identities, however studies have shown that it is not possible to do so with such a fixed intent – individuals will interpret and understand the experiences in a myriad of ways (see Kelner 2010, Louie 2000, Powers 2011), as oriented by the “tourist gaze.” Thus we see the downside to tourism program branding efforts – brand purpose must remain close to brand identity, otherwise the distinction will be overly visible. Thus the tourists are socialized within a strictly Republic of Armenia context, understanding that not all that is there applies to them, but somehow their lot is cast in with the resident citizens.

⁷⁹ “Birthright Armenia - How It All Works,” accessed April 2, 2013, http://www.birthrightarmenia.org/index.php?menu=1&al=how_works.

⁸⁰ “Armenia | Data,” accessed April 2, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/armenia>.

⁸¹ Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation.”

⁸² Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism*.

⁸³ Yossi Shain, “Marketing the Democratic Creed Abroad: US Diasporic Politics in the Era of Multiculturalism,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 85–111.

5.1. Birthright Armenia Overview

Birthright Armenia operates on regular fundraising and private donations (mostly from its founder Edele Hovnanian), it is not state or corporate funded operation. The prospective participant applies to a secondary volunteer organization (Armenian Volunteer Corps is their affiliate, but there are many others both diaspora and Armenia-based) concurrently with the application to Birthright Armenia. The volunteers must work 30 hours a week with their internship, and Birthright Armenia includes a more intensive cultural experience through additional program elements: homestays, excursions, language classes, and forums. The explanation of each will be addressed through critical discourse analysis later in this thesis.

6. Birthright Armenia Materials

I shall review the general discourse of Birthright Armenia materials using critical discourse analysis methodology, which is appropriate as it focuses on the linguistic analysis of discourse, rather than on the empirical observation of audiences and response. This thesis attempts to deconstruct the presented image of the Armenian collective identity visible upon applying to the diaspora tourism programs, rather than the multiplicitous outcomes from taking part in the volunteer work. By critical discourse analysis, I understand three levels – textual (the actual text), discourse practices (how it is presented), and social practices (the “prevailing order of discourse”).⁸⁴ The three facets that I have discovered that comprise Birthright Armenia's *modus operandi* (or what I will later term the *Transnation Narrative*) are:

1. *Travel to Armenia is a rite of passage.*
2. *The Diaspora and the Republic are incomplete without and responsible for the other.*
3. *Karabakh is Armenia.*

Birthright Armenia puts out a significant amount of media online – it has a main website, a blog, and accounts on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Flickr, tumblr, LinkedIn, and vKontakte that are all updated regularly. However, due to limitations of time and space, I cannot perform a fully comprehensive longitudinal study. Instead, I will focus chiefly upon instances of the three facets within the:

1. *Birthright Armenia* homepage (www.birthrightarmenia.org). This is the general hub, targeting all prospective participants. It includes namely the outline of the program, eligibility, newsletters, the program calendar, and the most recent news regarding the program. In examining this source, we seek to first demarcate where the Barthian boundary is – what constitutes Armenian for the program, and secondly, how they are branding themselves. On the first visit to the site, the brand image may vary greatly from the brand

⁸⁴ Kim Christian Schröder, “Discourses of Fact,” in *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research*, ed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen (London: Sage, 2002), 106.

identity. It is important to analyze how the brand is being manufactured and presented. For this, I shall specifically analyze the static advertisements on the home page, the “Our Vision and Mission”, “Guiding Principles”, and “Program Elements and Benefits” pages, as those are Birthright Armenia branding itself – special attention will be given to the Alumni section as well for a sense of where the program is intended to continue after the actual tourism is concluded.

2. *Birthright Armenia* Facebook Group (www.facebook.com/BirthrightArmenia). I will view posts for a six month period from December 2012 to April 2013. The time period was chosen for three reasons: 1) the financial support is granted 100% between 14 and 18 weeks, this is approximately 20 weeks and so will include more than the length of a normal tour; 2) it encompasses multiple holidays and days of remembrance – it is important to include the April 24th Armenian Genocide Remembrance day to view how that narrative is branded; and 3) it is the Winter period, in which prospective applicants would be looking ahead towards possible Summer participation. This Facebook group is integral, as it updates often and has the most direct connection with the prospective participants – while the website may be the body of the diaspora tourism program, this is the mouth with which it communicates. It links to the most Birthright Armenia external media – blog posts, videos, photos.

6.1. Birthright Armenia Website

6.1.1 Main Portal

Upon visiting the website, a few things about the Birthright Armenia's “Brand Armenia” are clear – the brand logo itself is an outline of the Republic of Armenia, with the Nagorno-Karabakh territory included, surrounded by the words *depi hayk* (toward Hayk⁸⁵). Birthright Armenia treats Nagorno-Karabakh as a *de facto* part of Armenia; volunteers can work there as easily as they can

⁸⁵ “Hayk” is considered the founder of Armenia in 2492 B.C., from which the name “Hayastan” comes from. The names can be used interchangeably in common practice.

work in the Republic. The majority of participants come from Western contexts, and, due to the age restraints of the tourism program, are likely to have little knowledge or little connection to the 1989-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh War or the current territorial dispute, yet this issue is strongly in focus.

On the textual level, the website calls on multiple Armenian narratives – in referring to Armenia as “Hayk”, it attempts to brand the territory shown on the map as “Hayk”, even though the original legendary battle for the land of Hayk took place near modern Van, Turkey. It draws the association between the territory and the legend – calling upon the pre-Christian Armenian narrative of historical continuity, granting a sense of connection to something age old to the modern conflict over the drawn borders of the logo, which shows not “Greater Armenia”, but the Republic of Armenia with the Nagorno-Karabakh region annexed and fully incorporated. Thus following the logical conclusion, “Hayk” and the geographical delineation with Nagorno-Karabakh included are one and the same.

The main moving advertisement on the site is a scrolling set of 29 images of former participants holding signs with phrases written on them: 12 are in Armenian, 9 English, 3 French, and one each in Spanish, Russian, and Arabic (numbers in brackets denotes their position). In looking at the choice of language, a few nuances become clear. There is a language prerequisite to participation: all Birthright participants provide proof of proficiency in the Armenian language, otherwise they have to take Armenian language courses (Eastern Armenian is taught). Granted, the terminology is simply “Armenian” language, making no distinction as to whether it is Eastern or Western – the labeling of linguistic divide is omitted from the program description outside of the “Eastern Armenian on-line language training”.⁸⁶ That stated, all participants that would have participated in this advertisement would have been competent to write in Armenian, thus there is an implicit decision in the word or phrase assigned to each person and whether or not to use the Armenian language to display it.

⁸⁶ “Birthright Armenia - How It All Works.”

In advertisement analysis, one of the strongest functions is that of de Saussure's (1966) “signifier” / “signified” dichotomy, wherein the “signifier” is the physical representation of the “signified” mental concept. “Signifying systems” operate on two levels – denotative and connotative. Denotative is a “first-order” system in which the meaning is objectively present in the advertisement; connotative is a “second-order” system in which the meaning is coded message that requires interpretation.⁸⁷ Connotation, in Pinson's (1998) assessment of Barthes, Dyer, Goldman, and others, is considered as operating similarly to ideology and myth.

Ideology thus shapes and colors the interpretation of the connotation not simply by the individual, but by the communal determinism of the collective interpretation.⁸⁸ As language is a semiological phenomenon it cannot be removed from its community of speakers,⁸⁹ and thus the choice of “signifier” in the case of the advertisement is not simply categorized by the actual text, but the connotative meaning granted by the operationalization of different languages, of which the speaker has the choice.

In looking at the terms used as “signifiers”, language use provides a clear category of analysis. Connotatively, the use of Armenian indicates that the person has taken part in the Birthright Armenia program, showing a command of Armenian language and therefore shows some level of elite status. The terms in Armenian reflect this elite status of having gained something in the course of the program – terms like *hay hpartutyun* (Armenian pride) [1], *arzhekner* (values) [15], *azgasirutyun* (patriotism) [19], *drakht* (heaven) [20], *yeraz* (dream) [22], *im apagan* (my future) [25] – are stated in the present tense, as if they were evaluative of the experience of Armenia and the takeaway. In English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic, the terms are more focused on the experience of travel and what it involves to consume place by external members of the nation – ambition [8], rollercoaster [13], compassion [5], *empathie* (empathy) [14], *sans frontiere* (without

⁸⁷ Christian Pinson, “Marketing Semiotics,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*, ed. Jacob Mey (Amsterdam ; New York: Elsevier, 1998), 541.

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 9.

⁸⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (LaSalle, Ill: Open Court, 1966), 77.

borders) [28], *ekteshaf altari kh* (searching for history) [4], *smelost'* (courage) [7] – these are terms that signify the conditions of members communicating outside the linguistic community of the Armenian language. This use of external members brings to light the way national identity must be couched – Armenian language is a requirement by these programs and is thus constitutive of the nation, but the diasporan tourism experience must be commodified to the extent that it still appeals to the “tourist gaze” of the external members.

Two further examples from this moving advertisement are of note – the first being textual, the second being a discursive practice. The first is the image of the woman who has the term *hayastanci* (Armenian) on her whiteboard in Armenian, and is holding her Republic of Armenia passport [17]. This is likely a misnomer and a Billigian “waved flag” - a banal reminder of nationhood.⁹⁰ On one hand, the term *hayastanci* is only used to refer to Armenians from the Republic of Armenia. All diasporan groups have their own moniker – *stambulahye* (from Istanbul), *parskahye* (from Iran), *beirutahye* (from Lebanon) – that denotes where they originated. Therefore, unless this participant is part of the post-Soviet diaspora (a newly originated term that has been disseminated through academia to refer to diasporans from the Republic of Armenia that left after 1991) and left the Republic before she was 12 years of age, she cannot be *hayastanci* – there is no process of “becoming”.

With the terming *hayastanci* in combination with the appearance of the “waved flag” of an Armenian passport, the distinction between ethnic (denoted by ancestry) and civic (denoted by citizenship) nation⁹¹ is being blurred. This appears as a denotative “signifier” - one that carries no interpretive burden, but is responsible for promoting an illusory outcome in which the participant is enfranchised in the civic sphere of the Republic of Armenia. The consumption of place that occurs during diasporan tourism programs is done without the direct intent to promote physical

⁹⁰ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 41.

⁹¹ S. Shulman, “Challenging the Civic/Ethnic and West/East Dichotomies in the Study of Nationalism,” *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 5 (June 1, 2002), 557-558.

“repatriation”⁹² (although they do have the Repat Armenia offices in the same building as the Birthright Armenia offices in Yerevan), but to *mentally* “repatriate”. Participants become socialized in the ethnic nation while coming to appreciate the civic nation, but are not openly solicited to move to Armenia on a permanent basis. Entry into the diasporan tourism program requires that the participant has one fully Armenian grandparent,⁹³ making the programs based solely on ethnic nationalism – there are no citizenship requirements.

The second example takes place on the discursive practice tier – in photographing the participants holding the signs, a choice is made as to the actual context of the photograph. One picture specifically stands out, as the participant is holding the sign away from his chest and revealing a cross necklace and shirt with the name *Monte* in Armenian and an image of Monte Melkonian, a famous diasporan commander from Fresno, California that fought with A.S.A.L.A. in Lebanon and died in the Nagorno-Karabakh War [25].⁹⁴ This subtly touches upon two of the main Armenian narratives – the first Christian nation, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

As the “signifiers” are governed by the ideology of the context they are situated in, they are subject to the regulations and taboos of that community.⁹⁵ Thus, discursively, the interjection of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict narrative must have been accepted by the institution on some level to be placed in the advertisement, and therefore included in the national brand. A different photograph in the moving advertisement [14] had a person wearing a t-shirt made by a well-known diasporan clothing company, Ara the Rat, and it contained a large amount of symbols from the cultural milieu of the Republic of Armenia – a pomegranate wearing sunglasses that reflect the peaks of Mt. Ararat and Little Ararat, surrounded by various outlines of easily recognizable landmarks. This was not

⁹² “Repatriation” is a misnomer, as these people are not “returning” to anything they were “patriates” of. Collectively, the Diaspora can “repatriate”, as it is an ethnic aggregate that has a narrative that includes “return”, but as individuals, the term is misused. Diasporans are not “expatriates” upon birth.

⁹³ “Birthright Armenia - FAQ,” accessed May 26, 2013, <http://birthrightarmenia.org/index.php?menu=1&al=faq>.

⁹⁴ Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden : Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 208.

⁹⁵ Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 9.

chosen to be shown in its entirety, all that was visible was the word *Hayastan* across the top.

If nation branding “limits the range of possible national identity narratives and shapes them for the benefit of external (Western) audiences”,⁹⁶ then discursively they have placed the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict into “Brand Armenia”, and subsequently demarcates it as a matter of both homeland and diasporan concern – especially since this diasporan [25] is holding a sign that says “my future” in Armenian. Meanwhile, the diasporan clothing company remains outside the brand – be this on purpose or not, it brings to light something easily recognizable as an artifact of diasporan culture that is not symbolically connected enough to solicit its inclusion in the advertisement as part of the projected brand identity.

6.1.2 Our Vision and Mission, Guiding Principles

The “Our Vision and Mission” page⁹⁷ highlights effectively and very clearly the branding campaign prerogatives. Birthright Armenia orients itself as a transnational institution, that accepts the permanency of diaspora and espouses the virtues of shared values.⁹⁸ However, as discussed earlier, competition for branding occurs also inside of the diaspora and should be examined (see Tölölyan 2000, Rosenson 2003). The narratives presented as Birthright Armenia's “vision” are some of the most clear, denotative statements that require little interpretation. Their first line establishes the goal of the Armenian transnation with travel to Armenia as a rite of passage, a liminal phase through which adulthood is achieved or status is granted - “Birthright Armenia envisions a powerful, broad-based network of organizations and individuals committed to making service to and experiences in Armenia an essential rite of passage afforded to all young Armenians across the world.”⁹⁹

The Birthright Armenia vision includes multiple facets of the rite of passage and the incompleteness narratives; textually their goals include that participants leave with “personal ties to

⁹⁶ Kaneva, “Nation Branding: Toward an Agenda for Critical Research”, 128.

⁹⁷ “Birthright Armenia - Our Vision and Mission,” accessed May 27, 2013, http://www.birtherightarmenia.org/index.php?menu=1&al=our_vision_inner.

⁹⁸ Tölölyan, “Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation”, 108.

⁹⁹ “Birthright Armenia - Our Vision and Mission.”

Armenia”, and to further “global participation in Armenia's development.” The program here casts the Republic as a troubled place that can be helped. Participants are to feel the pulse of Armenia, to understand its “issues and needs”. Conversely, Birthright Armenia also has goals for the locals – that the programs inspire commitment to Armenia and that they will take a part in nation building alongside the Diaspora. In effect, the discourse promotes a duality – that neither the diasporan nor the local are a complete unit, these programs intend to socialize on both sides by copresence. In doing so, in immersion of the tourist in the context of Armenia and the local in the immediate context of an Armenia in which the diaspora participates, the new “Brand Armenia” is made visible.

One major complaint always lodged against the Diaspora at the dinner table by locals is that they (the Diaspora) are willing to send money but they so rarely come to visit and see where their money goes. For some, it is a slightly more connected act of mindless Western archetypal charity – the All-Armenian Fund drives to build roads are similar in content to the commercials in which a charity offers to shod children for eighty-three cents a day. For others, they are donating for the reestablishment of a fictitious homeland to which they have no sense of return. However, the “mission” of Birthright is to provide opportunities to participate in “daily life”. These diasporan tourism programs intend to provide evidence of the change that can be made because the diasporans are the ones doing it in tandem with the locals in an immersive experience, rather than a fully articulated travel plan.

Birthright Armenia's “Guiding Principles” clearly state what are the beliefs of the program. If we return to Kelner's (2010) explanation of tourism as a “means of coming to know a place, and entering into a symbolic relationship with it”,¹⁰⁰ we see that many of these tenets are about building more than a symbolic relationship – in contrast to Kelner's (2010) study of Birthright Israel, this is far less transitive an endeavor, this is about branding intensely the image of place through the consumption of it and the contribution to it over a long period of time that reduces the ability to insulate participants from the challenges of place. In interviewing the Country Director of

¹⁰⁰ Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 18.

Birthright Armenia, he specifically corrected the use of “diaspora tourism programs” to “diaspora volunteer programs”. Tourism still applies as it fits the UNWTO definition of “a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment for less than a year and for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited”,¹⁰¹ however, the diasporan tourism program creates two simultaneous narratives in which the Republic of Armenia socializes the Diasporan, and the Diasporan develops the Republic of Armenia through volunteerism.

The critical discourse analysis of the “Principles” shows that there is a level of transitivity applied to most of the principles that requires some level of decoding. Firstly, Birthright believes that long-duration immersion leads to greater understanding of Armenian identity – referring to a singular ethnic identity that is “deepened” by the consumption of the Republic of Armenia. This focuses on the differentiation of place, in which the Republic of Armenia is being cast as a specifically unique place, that is different from all other culture-bearing institutions and cannot be replicated because it is there where “Armenian identity, people, and issues” converge.

Secondly, if we follow the previously discussed operative choice involved in modern identity, where the plethora of identities we find ourselves ascribed to can be quite numerous, “Diasporan” in and of itself constitutes a subjectivity – the diasporan, to make such a claim, requires a knowledge of their existence as part of a putative diaspora.¹⁰² However, it is evidence of the transnational narrative building that the rhetoric is framed in a fashion that makes “a journey of self-discovery of [the participant's] Armenian identity” one in which prior to the program, their Armenian identity was incomplete. This does not preclude the idea that going to the Republic completes the identity, only that being in Diaspora does not.

The repeated use of phrases like “commitment”, “strong ties”, “sustainable bridge between the Diaspora and Armenia” in each principle openly display the goal of building transnational

¹⁰¹ “2008 Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework” (UNSD, Eurostat, OECD, UNWTO, 2008), para 1.1.

¹⁰² Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion.”

linkages. The Kelnerian “cultural toolkit” is implicit in the discourse of Armenia as a “feeding ground” for future Diasporan elites. Critical discourse analysis shows a few other textual readings that are more connotative than denotative in reference to Armenian identity: similar to the aforementioned discussion of the terseness of applying the terms “homeland” and “repatriation” on an individual level, one can not (or should not) leave with a “renewed sense of identity” - semantically, to renew by definition would preclude the preexistence of the identity that has simply been refreshed. It is not the goal of the program to “refresh” the identity as if it were a webpage or a drink, simply by reconstituting it with the same parts, but to change the identity as the participants are at a “most impressionable” age. Thus, it becomes an artifact of rhetoric that appears that this identity has always been lurking under the surface, appealing more to primordialism and ethnosymbolism than modernism and social constructivism.

I would also like to note specifically the eleventh and final principle: “Birthright Armenia believes that the time has come to lay the foundation to encourage repatriation.”¹⁰³ In accordance with the building of the transnational narrative, the job of Birthright Armenia currently is to build the Diaspora-Homeland connection by righting the branding narrative that the Republic currently carries (that of the “newly independent state” with the failure of removing the post-Soviet system) that is widely disparaged and lends itself to disappointment in the Diaspora. Birthright Armenia seeks to brand the Republic of Armenia as “homeland” that is currently incomplete without diasporan engagement – they seek to “lay the foundation” so that when the narrative changes to that of the “Armenian transnation”, “repatriation” will be encouraged. In the interview with the Country Director, it was more about preparing the way and fixing the country than actually getting people to move there immediately upon completion of the program – these newly socialized diasporan elites with their Kelnerian “cultural toolkits” disseminate the brand identity (or at least their brand image) to the Diaspora at large, which ultimately has to be closer to the brand identity Birthright Armenia

¹⁰³ “Birthright Armenia - Guiding Principles,” accessed May 28, 2013, http://www.birthrightarmenia.org/index.php?menu=1&al=guiding_principles.

has vis-a-vis the Republic. Only after the narrative has been changed and the Republic of Armenia is seen as more of a hub in the transnation will “repatriation” be more easily done.

To what the commitment is is not mentioned, outside of a “longer stay”. Four of the eleven “principles” directly or indirectly discuss the duration of the diasporan visit – two mention that longer term visitation helps for better understanding and more personal and professional development, one mentions full “repatriation”, and one discusses overtly an economic aspect to the travel:

“Birthright Armenia believes by increasing the influx of Diasporan youth into Armenia through longer term stays, there will be a multiplier effect through consumption based economic development, which is a critical component for the short and long term stability of our developing nation.”¹⁰⁴

In having longer duration programs, the consumption power of Western diasporans will create a need for and sustain further infrastructure, leading to economic stability. This is the only principle that gives, albeit in a roundabout manner, a tangible goal – that the presence of diasporans will contribute to the Republic of Armenia's GDP.

6.1.3 Program Elements and Benefits

At this point, we look to the final section of the Birthright Armenia website - “Program Elements and Benefits”¹⁰⁵ - as it is here they outline what should be considered a “well-rounded experience”. It is comprised of five sections: Travel Fellowship and Host Family Arrangement; Excursions; Language Classes; Forum Lecture Series; and Customization.

The “Travel Fellowship and Host Family Arrangement” is one of the key sections – the entirety of international tourism serves to remind the tourist that they are outsiders to their immediate surroundings.¹⁰⁶ Thus it becomes a directive of the diaspora tourism program to ensure that the narrative of “outsider” is challenged, and the quickest way of doing so is to have a homestay. If the tourist is to be reminded that their home lies elsewhere, then to challenge that and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “Birthright Armenia - Program Elements and Benefits,” accessed May 28, 2013, http://www.birthrightarmenia.org/pages.php?al=program_elements.

¹⁰⁶ Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 117.

allow them some claim to the place they are remaking themselves in requires they feel a sense of home. That is why host families are so integral – they allow for intimacy and intimate ownership. Seeing the Hermitage Museum does not make you feel like “Saint Petersburg is home” like making the daily trudge through the snow to your host family's apartment and being greeted with a smile at the door does. Everyone can lay claim to a landmark, less can lay claim to an adopted family that they can return to and feel the warmth of being part of a collective.

Birthright Armenia couches the host family in a similar rhetoric – rather than a Spartan listing of features that home stays provide, the more primary issue is the family life: “It gives volunteers a unique chance to spend quality time with host siblings and parents at home or outside, sharing past experiences during tea, discussing the workday around dinner, or opening up about future hopes and aspirations during an evening stroll.”¹⁰⁷ The connotation that a host family brings intimacy and belonging is heavily present in the explanation of the homestay. These are things done with family, people one is close to, implying that there will be an automatic connection, that these people will be your family upon arrival. On top of that, the pressure to take a host family package is emphasized later in the fact that Birthright Armenia encourages the experience by subsidizing “an inviting home”, while participants are given the chance to turn down the offer and look and pay for an apartment on their own.

“Excursions” is an interesting section analysis in the fact that it deals explicitly with an aspect of the diaspora tourism program that can not be parlayed into “diaspora volunteer program”. For homeland tourism to be a successful enterprise, it requires place differentiation – the place must be shown to have some cultural resources unavailable to the participants in the diaspora.¹⁰⁸ This, in some ways, is an economic decision – if there is no difference, why would the diasporan dedicate months of their lives to free labor in Armenia and not elsewhere? The key to differentiation of

¹⁰⁷ “Birthright Armenia - Airfare Reimbursement and Host Family Living Arrangement,” accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.birthrightarmenia.org/pages.php?al=af>.

¹⁰⁸ Kelner, *Tours That Bind*, 89.

homeland, for Kelner (2010), is the overlapping of a space, a culture, and a people.¹⁰⁹ Thus it follows that tourist sites and tourist experiences need to be included into the program to satisfy the “tourist gaze” - to ignore the fact that these are at their core tourists and not simply volunteers is to leave Armenia unbranded. The participants are intended to gain an understanding of Armenia, requiring an active process of creation on their part that needs cultural input external to that of the daily life, because labor is general, experience is not.

The Birthright Armenia “Excursions” listing is brightly colored with photographs of diasporans enjoying cultural standards of Armenia – flowers, Noravank (an Armenian church in the Vayots Dzor region), skiing, part of a church, poppies, and another church. Each photograph was selected for a reason, and as none of the sites are identifiable (save Noravank, but that may be because due to my personal knowledge of it), the clear thread that ties the photographs together are the diasporans in them. During these excursions the diasporans experience the cultural milieu of Armenia as an aggregate – allowing for the exchange of ideas and the sharing of experiences. The alumni network is incredibly strong, and it is in these brief windows of togetherness that the diasporans are allowed to socialize *each other* in the narrative of transnationalism. Rather than it being a bilocal exchange, external member to internal member, this allows for multilocal relations; diasporans from around the world are presented the opportunity to network with other diasporan groups' future elites that, while playing an integral role in the present, also creates a relationship of collective memory that they themselves possess, and that may be of benefit in the future. Doing this on a weekly basis over a long course of time makes certain that the participants, as comfortable as they feel, are not natives but tourists.

On a textual level, we see many of the narratives strung together – ancient and modern Armenia, nature and history. However, one interesting facet of the analysis is that only one place in the entire passage is given a proper name: Shushi. When presenting a line of extreme opposites (e.g. ancient/modern, architecture and waterfall), Shushi's “remote host families” are mentioned as

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 90.

opposite “campfires”.¹¹⁰ It strikes as odd that Shushi be named, arbitrarily or not, as it is not only one of the largest cities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. It is also on the only major road into Stepanakert, the capital, and was considered an Azerbaijani city prior to the war. In invoking the name, it references the “Karabakh as Armenia” narrative that pervades Birthright Armenia's “transnational narrative.”

The “Language Classes” section, when critically analyzed, poses some questions as to how history is considered in Birthright Armenia's brand. The first line reads “A unique language with its own alphabet, thousands of years old. Giving rise to divine manuscripts, poetry and song.”¹¹¹ The Armenian language was codified by Mesrop Mashtots in 405 A.D. for the purpose of making manuscripts. This is a well-chronicled date, but little exists of the history prior, so to make a statement that Armenian existed as a language before the codification becomes a hazy distinction that appeals to the “Pre-Christian nation” narrative. Mashtots' time was characterized by Classical Armenian, which is unintelligible in comparison to Modern Armenian.

The “Forum Lecture Series” aims to familiarize participants with the public domain – meetings are held with various companies and organizations. It emphasizes the business aspect, but in checking the calendar, meetings are also held with “Repats” (diasporans who migrated to the Republic of Armenia), as well as political forums about Armenia-Turkey relations. For the purposes of branding, this portrays Armenian businesses and organizations with a very golden light, terming such operations as “successful” and “world renowned”. Questions arise as to the actual state of these companies, as the Armavia Air Company is listed among the participants and it just went bankrupt.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ “Birthright Armenia - Excursions,” accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.birtherightarmenia.org/pages.php?al=excursion>.

¹¹¹ “Birthright Armenia - Language Classes,” accessed May 28, 2013, http://www.birtherightarmenia.org/pages.php?al=language_class.

¹¹² “Armenia’s Flag Carrier Airline Armavia Launches Bankruptcy Proceedings,” accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/todayinthesky/2013/03/31/armenias-flag-carrier-airline-armavia-launches-bankruptcy-proceedings/2041175/>.

6.2. Birthright Armenia Facebook Group

The next section focuses on the five month period of Facebook updates, from December 2012 to April 2013. It will be conducted differently than the website analysis, solely due to the mass of information available. Each month will be summarized briefly in an analysis. Omitted will be the entries in foreign languages (they have infrequent “Sunday Español” and “Friday Français” posts) that should be acknowledged for the expanded audience, but as critical discourse analysis does not focus on the audience so much as the message, it is outside the scope of this study.¹¹³ Also omitted will be anything outside the purview of the narratives and nation branding.

The first image one is greeted by (outside of the Birthright Armenia logo) is the cover photo – a map of the world that reads “All Roads Lead to Armenia”, showing the origins of the participants and the claim that Birthright Armenia is “building a bridge to Homeland”. The location of the participants is highly concentrated – the United States (560), Europe and the Middle East (120), Southern South America (40), and two chains leading ostensibly to Brisbane and Auckland (10). This brands the Birthright Armenia program with a stark image – showing literal chains between diaspora and homeland, identifying this as a transnational organization.

Beginning in December, a heavy focus is placed on alumni – especially the ones who eventually moved to Armenia. “Repats” tell stories of the “real life” of living in Armenia – that it’s “just like any other city”. A repat and alumni chapter has opened in Yerevan, due to the 46 alumni living in the region. One facet apparent is the continuation of the Birthright experience – each post is tagged with (BR 20XX), noting the year the poster participated (if they did).

Additionally, an informal photography contest was held in which participants provided photos taken through the year all over Armenia. The selection included photographs that could be placed into a few different analytical categories – nature, daily life, tourism, and loss. Loss being the most interesting, as it appears the most out of place. Two photos distinctly stand out – one of the Museum of Fallen Soldiers, in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh, and one of the diasporans

¹¹³ Schröder, “Discourses of Fact”, 108.

sitting on a hillside overlooking the Armenia-Turkey border at the medieval capital of Armenia, Ani. Both incorporate narratives of loss – Ani was lost as a result of the Armenian Genocide, and the soldiers died in the Karabakh war.

One excerpt from a 2012 participant from Hawaii's blog posting¹¹⁴ describes the pre-program state of the Diaspora as “raised with the image of Genocide and Mt. Ararat”, but does not feel a connection to Armenia that provided impetus to delve any deeper than the surface. She attributes the discovery of “progress” and “progressive people” to the Birthright program. This follows earlier hypotheses that the immediate goal of Birthright is linked with destroying the old narrative and supplanting it with a new, transnational one.

January began with a new year's salutation from Birthright Armenia that included well wishing to Armenia, Artsakh (the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh), and the Diaspora, indicating the further inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh into Birthright's “Brand Armenia”.

A 2012 participant from Canada's blog excerpt¹¹⁵ explains that the Birthright Armenia experience taught him that identifying as Armenian means you have “a debt to pay to Armenia” - that Armenia is his “to fix, to take care of, and to shed sweat for”. This follows the narrative of Diaspora/Republic of Armenia transnational burden of responsibility for the other – if Armenia is supposed to be the Homeland, which represents the Diaspora, then the Diaspora is also responsible for its maintenance. Interestingly, a second thread appears in the excerpt - “It doesn't matter what we HAD, it is what we HAVE and where we are moving towards which will ensure the survival of Armenia” - this, in some forms, rejects the claim to “victimhood” presented by the narrative of the Armenian Genocide.

The weekly forum held the week of January 24th, 2013 had a speaker from the Public Journalism Club, an NGO that works on free speech issues that taught techniques “for making a difference.”

¹¹⁴ From December 24, 2012

¹¹⁵ From January 21, 2013

The final post of January¹¹⁶ invites prospective participants to “come and belong”, to “connect with their collective past and commit themselves to our national future”. This repetition of the term “commitment” invokes heavily the narrative of transnation that Birthright Armenia has built. However, interestingly, Armenia is always portrayed as not at its peak, but never is there mention as to what ails it.

One of the earliest posts of February¹¹⁷ features a picture of a 2013 participant from Brazil visiting the grave of Monte Melkonian, the Nagorno-Karabakh war commander who was killed. This reaffirms the connection to the “Karabakh as Armenia” narrative.

An excerpt from a 2010 participant¹¹⁸ emphasizes the use of the Birthright Armenia program as a way of getting to know Armenia. This underlines a lesser attended to issue – that Birthright Armenia is in competition for the right to Brand Armenia. While it may appear an idle statement, it is an open endorsement of Birthright Armenia's definition of Armenia.

On February 15th, 2013 a map was posted that displayed the origin of the current participants' great-grandparents. A few key points here display the flexibility of terminology that allows the bridging of the Diaspora-Homeland differing histories. By referring to the regions as “mostly historical Armenian lands”, the divide of Eastern and Western Armenia is nullified (even though the vast majority are from Western Armenia, if we were to acknowledge the divide). Additionally, in referring to the Republic of Armenia by its ancestral name of “Hayastan” and avoiding the geopolitical designation, the historical division between lands is ignored. The use of “reunite” is a misnomer in the context of the grandchildren “reuniting again as volunteers” because that again implies continuity, that the great grandparents acknowledged some connection between each other, or that the great grandchildren all knew each other. Viewed on an individual level, this is a misapplication intended to foster collective identity.

February 25th brings an “alumni success story” in which a “repat” created a start-up in

¹¹⁶ From January 31, 2013

¹¹⁷ From February 4, 2013

¹¹⁸ From February 12, 2013

Yerevan. Important is the focus on diasporan investment – he is quoted echoing Birthright Armenia's brand: “We believe that the long term success of Armenia and it's people will only come from innovation and using our intellectual capital.”¹¹⁹

The recent anniversary of the Sumgait massacres¹²⁰ was used as a moment to memorialize the atrocities perpetrated against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, despite Sumgait being on the Caspian coastline, miles from the Armenian plateau. It stresses solidarity with the “struggle for independence” of Nagorno-Karabakh.

On March 12th, there was a crosslisted blog post from a 2010 participant from California from the Birthright Armenia associate, RepatArmenia. He advises that people can only come to understand the primary context of Armenia through personal experience – advocating for diasporan travel.

March 16th brought an open solicitation in the form of a photograph of some diasporan tourists climbing over some broken stones fallen from a church, with the caption “Where you see a pillar missing, don't just look the other way, do something about it. Come be a pillar.”¹²¹ Using the imagery of a pillar, we see reiterated the narrative of responsibility to be part of the incomplete Armenian superstructure.

Birthright Armenia has a rhetoric that establishes the narrative of travel to Armenia as a rite of passage – it reenforces this narrative on March 25th, calling volunteering “a rite of passage, a significant milestone, a defining achievement.”¹²²

April brings on a host of posts about historicity of the times, as well as the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day on the 24th. The first post that delves into narratives is on April 10th, which focuses on the 1991 independence narrative, stating: “Armenia’s current independence is the longest in centuries, and Armenia’s prosperity and longevity is the focus of Armenians all over the

¹¹⁹ From February 25, 2013

¹²⁰ From February 28, 2013

¹²¹ From March 16, 2013

¹²² From March 25, 2013

world.”¹²³ This draws attention to a rare use of the 1991 independence narrative by Birthright Armenia – Birthright Armenia has often shied away from the independence narrative, as it is tied to the current “Brand Armenia” that has failed. However, Birthright Armenia does conclude the statement by proposing a diaspora tourism program to “understand the significance of these times”¹²⁴, suggesting that Birthright Armenia understands the power of the prevailing narrative, but wishes to rebrand the narrative in its own right, since at its core, it is a positive narrative; it has simply been co-opted.

The Armenian Genocide Facebook post on April 24th is one of the most fascinating posts – the Diaspora is characterized by the Genocide, Cohen (1996) calls the Armenian Diaspora a “victim diaspora” for the traumatic dispersal of the population under harsh conditions. The message by Birthright Armenia, however, attempts to transcend the Genocide narrative, suggesting that the trauma is linked to a lack of statehood, but in the Republic of Armenia, the Diaspora now has a state, and should focus its efforts there. “History reminds each of us to value, strengthen, preserve and give all to our 21 year-old Armenian statehood. Not in words, but in deeds.”¹²⁵ Birthright Armenia participants also participated the following day in recycling the flowers that were laid at the Armenian Genocide Memorial *Tsitsernakaberd*.

The final post of April, and the final one to be analyzed, regards the branching out of Birthright Armenia. Considering the success of the program, it has begun a follow up program - “Pathway to Armenia” - which is intended to “encourage that longer-term return and further engagement”.¹²⁶ Birthright Armenia clearly lays out some of its goals here – first, the diasporan tourism program is openly intended to “mentally repatriate” the participant, and the next step is actual physical “repatriation”. The “Armenian transnation” version of “Brand Armenia” that Birthright Armenia envisages is a two step process from mental to actual “repatriation”.

¹²³ From April 10, 2013

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ From April 24, 2013

¹²⁶ From April 29, 2013

7. Conclusion

Birthright Armenia has carefully crafted a new branding narrative for the Republic of Armenia – a narrative of the Armenian transnation, in which the Republic is a culture-bearing institution that acts as a hub on the transnational web. The Diaspora is responsible to the Armenian nation, made territorial in the Republic of Armenia, but not necessarily to the Armenian state. The narrative comprises multiple facets: that both the Diaspora and the Homeland are an incomplete picture of “Armenianness” and that there is a responsibility of all members external and internal to participate in “Brand Armenia”.

This reinvention of identity through the consumption of space on diasporan tourism programs is intended to socialize the participants in the Birthright Armenia version of “Brand Armenia” to the extent that they are “mentally repatriated”. This is not the extent of the Birthright Armenia narrative, but the immediate goal with the hope of future participation. By establishing volunteer tourism in the Republic of Armenia as a tradition, it begins a process of expanding the narrative through the Diaspora, that through successive years, has created an extensive alumni network and enough “repatriates” to create an alumni chapter in Yerevan.

Of further interest is a silence that pervades the program – there is little speech of the Armenian Genocide present outside of the context of Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day. Most mentions of it are made in passing and attributed to the brand image held prior to the program. In omitting one of the strongest narratives that unites Diaspora (see Shinirian 1992, Panossian 2002), “Armenia” is being rebranded with a weakened sense of the Western versus Eastern Armenian divide, and in some ways, leaving behind the “victim diaspora” label by looking forward.

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