

Transformations of National Identities in Transnational Migration Networks Between Armenia and Southern Russia: Implications for National Identity Policy-Making

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Abstract

This article examines processes of national identity transformation in the context of long-established but evolving migration networks between Armenia and Southern Russia and how these processes may be integrated into national policy frameworks relating to social cohesion. The largest Armenian diaspora in southern Russia, numbering around half a million people as of 2022 (620,000 people), a significant part of whom were transnational labor migrants. Existing literature has examined changes in relevant identity narratives using qualitative methods. In contrast this article employs a novel procedure, combining social constructionist, transnational and network approaches with applied statistics methods. Drawing on international comparative sociological research conducted in Armenia and Southern Russia in 2021–2022, the paper traces the history and structure of these migration networks, as well as the new forms of national identity emerging within them. The project identified at least three varieties of networks that influence different understandings and lived experiences of national identity. The first relates to the old Armenian diaspora, formed in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, the second to communities formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the third to contemporary transnational communities, consisting mainly of labor migrants. The article also discusses the potential implications of these findings to policies of social cohesion in Armenia and Russia.

Keywords

labor migration, diaspora, transnational migration, demographic processes, national identity, ethnic identity, migration networks, social integration, national identity policy

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Introduction

Over the years, intensive migration flows have occurred between Armenia and Russia. The southern regions of the Russian Federation, where a significant Armenian diaspora has developed over time through multiple waves of migration, have been particularly attractive to Armenian migrants. Family and cultural ties with the historical homeland have been maintained, and migration facilitated by the migration networks that have evolved between Armenia and these regions.

Migration affects these countries differently. While Russia maintains a positive migration balance, the same is

not true of Armenia, with out-migration having become a significant phenomenon in recent decades. Between 1993 and 2024, the population decreased by 436,000 (although in 2021, a population growth of 4.5 thousand people was recorded for the first time since 1993). According to the

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World Bank's World Development Indicators, based on the UN World Population Prospects 2024 Revision, Armenia's net international migration in 2024 was approximately -29,966 people. According to publicly accessible forecasts (World Bank, 2024), Armenia's population is projected to decline to around 2.4 million by 2054 (United Nations, 2024). As such, the Armenian government is concerned to reduce migration outflow but also encourage return migration, and to implement "repatriation" programs, none of which can be accomplished without coordination with Russia. These concerns further highlight the significance of changes in personal and group identities in the context of cross-border movements and suggest that these changes may need to be taken into account in policy terms if diaspora Armenians are to return to and remain in Armenia.

The article consists of three parts. The first is devoted to the historical formation and current state of the Armenian diaspora in Russia and its southern regions, where the scale, direction and structure of migration flows between Armenia and Russia in recent years are also examined. The second part discusses how national identities have been transformed among Armenian migrant groups participating in different migrant networks. Finally, the article considers how the recognition of these diverse identities can be incorporated into policies aimed at promoting a more inclusive national identity.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on significant previous work on the history of Armenian migrations to Russia, particularly, to Southern Russia, which emphasizes the links between these migration waves and various crises in Armenia (Harutyunyan & Zaslavskaya, 2012; Petrov, 2004; Rakachev & Rakacheva, 2003; Savva, 2007; Shahnazaryan, 2008; Zaslavskaya, 2015a). Other work has explored the formation and development of diasporas, including the Armenian diaspora, in Russia (Harutyunyan, 2011; Ter-Sarkisyants, 1999; Tishkov, 2000), and ways in which different groups of Armenian migrants have adapted to living in Russia and how their ethnic identity may be transformed (Harutyunyan, 2010; Lurie, 2000; Poghosyan, 2005). Some of this work has also highlighted tensions between migrants and the host society (Poghosyan & Osadchaya, 2023; Rakachev & Rakacheva, 2021). For example, in the Krasnodar region, where the number of Armenians grew by 42% between 1989 and 2021 there has been conflict, mainly among youth groups. This tension is also reflected in public opinion: according to surveys in 2001, 42% of respondents noted that conflicts in the region most often occur between Armenians and Russians. In addition, 13.7% of respondents noted that they do not trust Armenians (Rakachev & Rakacheva, 2003, 108).

The issues of formation and development of diasporas (Baser & Swain, 2009; Brubaker, 2005; Cohen, 2008;

Safran, 1991; Tishkov, 2000), including the Armenian one (Chahinian et al., 2024; Gevorgyan, 2016; Harutyunyan, 2011; Kasbarian, 2015; Ter-Sarkisyants, 1999; Tölölyan, 1996) have been widely studied. A number of researchers have addressed the issues of preservation and reproduction of Armenian traditional culture in the south of Russia in the diaspora in a historical and ethnological context, and have identified the differences between cultural and everyday practices and traditional norms in Armenia itself (Kukuyan, 1993; Kuznetsov, 1995; Minasyan, 1990; Ter-Sarkisyanc & Hudaverdyan, 1993).

Studies devoted to the problems of Armenian identity have generally examined it in the context of diasporic consciousness, but works on the identity of contemporary Armenian migrants are also appearing (Zaslavskaya & Rakachev, 2022; Ziemer, 2010). Poghosyan, for example, noted that Armenian communities outside of Armenia initially sought to preserve and emphasize their ethnic identity, and to do so attempted to establish and maintain strong ties within the community, which helped to raise awareness of ethnic identity. To this end, various organizations and networks were created, in the form of unions, cultural groups, charitable organizations, etc. (Poghosyan, 2009). According to Pattie, in this they not infrequently took advantage of already existing institutions, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, which "provided primary identity along with relatives and place of residence... Today, the church remains a central symbol in the Diaspora and in the Republic, where it plays a powerful role in the new state-building policies and in creating and maintaining Diaspora networks" (Pattie, 2008).

In the past decade, migration and identity have become central themes in social science research. Numerous studies from different countries have examined these topics (e.g., Bayar, 2024; Kincal, 2025; Knott et al., 2020; Neocosmos, 2023; Sahoo & Maharaj, 2023; Yanakova, 2017).

Louise Ryan (2011) emphasizes the importance of analyzing how migrants access, maintain, and construct various types of social networks across different contexts and with diverse individuals. She argues that network analysis plays a crucial role in understanding both migrants' experiences and their evolving perceptions of identity.

In the current era of globalization, there is a growing need to reconsider traditional approaches to the study of migration-related identities. Earlier frameworks often fail to capture the complexity and contradictions of the phenomenon. In their influential work, Amelina et al. (2012) advocate for a systematic implementation of new research strategies in empirical migration studies. Their interdisciplinary approach integrates sociology, social anthropology, and history to better understand contemporary migration dynamics. The tension between integration and

transnationalism is further explored by [Erdal and Oeppen \(2013\)](#), who highlight how migrants navigate belonging across national contexts.

Methodology and Methods of Research

The primary objectives of this study were as follows:

- To identify the main structure and characteristics of migration flows between Armenia and southern Russia.
- To examine the key historical factors that shaped the development of these migration networks.
- To analyze the formation and transformation of migrants' national identity in relation to the type and structure of migration networks.
- To explore how the mechanisms of national identity transformation are related to national cohesion and nation-building policies.

Most existing work on this issue examines changes in migrant identities by analyzing narratives using qualitative methods. This paper employs an integrated procedure combining social constructionism, transnational and network approaches with applied statistics.

Within the framework of social constructivism, migrant communities and diasporas are viewed as social constructs shaped by discourse, identity, and symbolic meaning. Transnationalism enables the analysis of migration not as a linear process, but as a sustained field of multidirectional connections between countries, in which reciprocal flows of resources, norms, and symbols play a central role. Network theory provides a lens through which social ties can be examined as channels of information, trust, and capital that influence the direction, scale, and dynamics of migration flows. Finally, methods of applied statistics allow for the identification of major migration flows, their network configurations, and the transnational characteristics of particular trajectories.

In this study, an approach based on a synthesis of instrumentalist and constructivist ideas related to ethnicity, nation and nationalism ([Brubaker, 2004](#)) was employed, alongside theories related to diasporas and diasporic consciousness ([Cohen, 2008](#); [Safran, 1991](#)) to examine migrants' national identity. The integration of these theoretical approaches enables the conceptualization of migrant national identity as a dynamic, socially constructed narrative that emerges at the intersection of discursive formations, networked social relations, and transnational exchanges. It is embedded in specific configurations of social capital and shaped by the circulation of cultural symbols, normative frameworks, and material resources across national boundaries.

Relying on these concepts allowed to clarify the content of such categories as “nation” and “ethnos” and situate them

within unified conceptual scheme, where the concepts of ethnos and nation differ depending on the attribute underlying the social identity of an individual. Defining the concept of nation is complex, and can be approached in two ways: as an “ethnic community (ethno-nation)” or as a “state community (citizenship)” ([Zaslavskaya, 2015b](#), 362). Political terms such as the French “*état-nation*” indicate that the nation is inherently linked to the state's political system, uniting the state's citizens into a distinct entity ([Kola, 2001](#)). Nevertheless, a person's national identity does not necessarily match their formal citizenship. National identity, in our interpretation, is a social construct, potentially manifested through patriotism and related values. National identity captures an individual's “subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the nation-state” ([Umaña-Taylor et al., 2020](#)). Ethnic identity, in contrast, pertains to a self-constructed internalization of a person's group membership, based on their feelings toward their cultural heritage, ethnic background, and “racial” characteristics ([Phinney et al., 2001](#)).

The application of the transnational approach ([Erdal & Oeppen, 2013](#); [Glick Schiller et al., 1992](#)), which is a contemporary approach to the study of migration and its consequences, allowed to look at the migration flows between Armenia and Southern Russia as heterogeneous and to identify a separate category of trans-migrants, embedded in the social networks of both the country of origin and the host community, to identify and describe specific transnational identities, in particular national and ethnic identities, formed in the context of such movements. Drawing on the concept of transnationalism ([Erdal & Oeppen, 2013](#); [Glick Schiller et al., 1992](#)), in the study views migrant identities as fluid phenomena that are constantly being deconstructed and reconstructed as individuals respond to various challenges ([Jenkins, 2008](#); [Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008](#); [La Barbera, 2015](#)). This approach has proved most productive in studies of identity, where identity takes on new hybrid forms under transnationalism ([Amelina et al., 2012](#); [Brah & Coombes, 2000](#); [Hein, 2006](#)).

In the context of transnational migration in “fluid modernity” ([Bauman, 2008](#), 161), migration increasingly characterized by multidirectionality rather than unidirectionality or finiteness, and increasingly defined as “territorial movements of individuals and groups carried out in space, regardless of the pursued goal and duration of stay” ([Nowicka, 2020](#); [Portes et al., 2002](#)). The relative affordability and freedom of movement, and coupled with increases in temporary, cyclical, and return migrations, and the ability to stay connected to one's place of origin via new information technologies, enable migrants to form social networks that transcend geographic, cultural, and political boundaries. These developments underscore the significance of the idea of transnationalism ([Adams, 2013](#); [Glick](#)

Schiller et al., 1992; Kim et al., 2021) and transnational identities (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008; Park & Gerrits, 2021), as well as a network approach.

Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple family, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political relationships across state borders. Their public identities are formed through interactions with more than one nation-state. They have settled and integrated into the economy, political institutions, and daily life of the host country. Simultaneously, they nurture connections, establish institutions, conduct transactions, and exert influence on local and national events in their countries of origin (Siegelbaum & Moch, 2016; Portes et al., 2002). As such, they inhabit two or more places simultaneously, maintaining economic, social, symbolic, political, cultural, and other ties with their places of origin, while developing life strategies that encompass both their places of origin and their new places of residence.

In such contexts, multifaceted transnational identities emerge; individuals maintain constant connections with multiple communities and feel a sense of belonging to each (Portes et al., 2002). Migrant patterns of identification can range from identification with their country of origin, religion, or mother tongue to identification with the host country, with neither, or both (Berry, 1997). These complex identities of modern migrants have been characterized as “superdiverse” (Vertovec, 2007, 1024). Simultaneously, there are processes of “external identification” or “identification from the outside” by the receiving society (Brednikova & Pachnikov, 2002, 74) as the host state imposes its own categories, classification schemes, and methods of social accounting (Brubaker & Cooper, 2002, 86).

The identities of these modern migrants have been depicted as unique, and their migration characterized by an ongoing quest for belonging in response to changing demands for social recognition and acceptance (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008). Other writers refer to an ongoing state of “unfinishedness,” where the migrant does not yet belong to the receiving society but is no longer part of their country of origin. Their new state exists somewhere in the middle, on the border, or “in transit” (La Barbera, 2015, 10).

In this context, migrants face the challenge of conceptualizing “home” as a geographic, historical, and emotional space (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, 518). Indeed, the very notion of “home” is often questioned and defined in various ways—as the place of one’s birth or upbringing, or as one’s own or family’s or place of work. An individual can have multiple “homes” that only partially align with physical locations. Such questions and the desire belonging play a critical role in processes that shape and reconstruct migrants’ identities. The quest for recognition and a sense of empowerment have been found to be pivotal in the development of new identities among migrants (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008). Kim et al. (2021) analyzed 47 articles

published after 2010 examining various aspects of transnational migration. They concluded that more sophisticated approaches to operationalizing transnationalism are necessary to improve the quality of research outcomes. Their study further emphasized the importance of distinguishing between components of transnationalism, such as activity versus identification.

Also, a key research approach in analysis is migration network theory or synthetic migration theory (Massey, 1990; Ryan, 2011). Migration networks are ties between migrants, including friendship, kinship, marital relations, and similar connections. They are a significant factor of migration. They reduce the social, economic, and emotional costs of migratory movements, thereby supporting migrants. According to the network hypothesis, individuals who have social ties with migrants are potentially more likely to become migrants due to their access to social capital shared with those who have already migrated. Network ties reduce the cost and risk of movement, representing an important factor in migration decisions. Such ties, in turn, increase social capital in the country where the migration flow is directed. As a result, after a certain stage, which can be considered critical, migration networks and migration capital are themselves able to guide and regulate migration movements. In doing so, networks can act as both facilitators and constraints on migration decisions (Ryan, 2011). On the one hand, they facilitate migration by acting as a source of information on how to get to destination countries, the opportunities available there, and a vision of possible support in the initial adaptation process (Petrov et al., 2009). On the other hand, people are embedded in a certain web of social relations from which it can be difficult to get out.

In this sense, it can be assumed that each of the migrant network’s functions within a specific community are significant: for Armenian migrant networks this refers to the old and new diasporas. Accordingly, the circle of participants in the network (and wider diaspora group) determines the nature of interactions between actors, subjects, which in turn affects their awareness, self-perception, and identity. Therefore, it seems important to take into account cultural aspects in analyzing migrant networks (Butcher, 2009; Mok et al., 2007; Sahadeo, 2019), particularly their unique features, which may be intercultural. This leads us to the concept of cultural diversity, defined as the extent to which social ties within a network connect to different national-cultural groups, a measure proposed by several authors to assess cultural heterogeneity in migrant social networks (Mao & Shen, 2015).

To summarize, social constructionism provides the epistemological foundation by framing migration as a discursive construct—shaped by the ways people and institutions interpret and represent it. Network theory provides the structural lens through which the social ties that sustain, reproduce, or destabilize identity can be examined. Transnationalism, in turn, reveals the mechanisms by which

identity is maintained across multiple social and national contexts, without collapsing into incoherence. By applying this integrated framework to empirical data, the study analyzes national identity as a construct situated within migration networks and explores how transnational dynamics shape its transformation with respect to individuals' sense of belonging to particular countries.

In the course of the study, documentary analysis was conducted to examine the migration networks of Armenians in Armenia and Russia. This analysis focused on materials highlighting the structure of various transnational migration networks, as well as narratives related to the formation and maintenance of national identity in these groups.

This included assessing the dynamics of the Armenian diaspora in Russia overall and in the southern regions, as well as the scale and pace of migration flows between Russia and Armenia. The research draws on a variety of statistical data, particularly census data, as well as migration data from Rosstat, Armstat, the UN Population Committee and IOM. In analyzing these data, international standards, practical guidelines and calculation methods recommended by the UN, IOM (UNECE (2012); UNECE and UNFPA (2011), etc.) were followed.

The application of multivariate statistical and cluster analysis to statistical and demographic data allowed to identify regularities in the dynamics of the number and territorial distribution of diaspora groups of Armenians in the regions of Southern Russia, their structure, to identify key trends in the development of the Armenian diaspora in the country as a whole, to identify the main migration flows, which can serve as an indicator of migration networks.

It was conducted 11 expert interviews in Armenia and 23 in-depth interviews with key informants to analyze changes in national and ethnic identity narratives among various groups of Armenian migrants and the country with which they most identify. These interviews also discussed ways in which these identity narratives are constructed and how they might influence policies aimed at social cohesion and the integration of return migrants within society.

It was conducted 5 focus group surveys with representatives of diverse groups within different migration networks to identify national identity narratives. Respondents

were selected using the "snowball" method based on criteria such as gender, age, education and occupation. Focus group discussions by the Russian authors ($N = 3$) were conducted in the places of compact residence of the Armenian population in Russia, including regions as Krasnodar Krai, Republic of Adygea and Stavropol Krai. In parallel, focus group discussions were conducted by an Armenian partner research team in the Republic of Armenia ($N = 2$).

It was conducted 35 narrative interviews with Armenian migrants in Armenia and Russia, employing a biographical methodology to deconstruct the migrants' biographical experiences and identify markers of their national identity. The interviews were conducted by a Russian and Armenian team in the two countries. In the Russian Federation, the respondents were interviewed in Krasnodar Krai, the Republic of Adygea, Rostov Oblast, and Stavropol Krai. In the Republic of Armenia, the respondents from Ararat and Vayots Dzor regions, as well as Yerevan, were interviewed. The respondents were citizens of the Republic of Armenia or the Russian Federation, including those who had dual citizenship and were involved in migration movements or had experience of migration between the two states.

The sampling for these interviews was conducted using the snowball method and convenience sampling. The study relied on personal connections in the diaspora, recruiting some respondents through Armenian national-cultural societies, which in Russia are often associated with Armenian church communities, and on support from the church in establishing contacts with respondents. In the final sample, respondents were represented in the following typical groups (see Table 1):

Part I Brief History of the Formation of the Armenian Diaspora and Migration Networks in the South of Russia

South Russia has a rich history as a multi-ethnic and poly-confessional region. Alongside the indigenous peoples (Russians, Adygs (Circassians), and Chechens) various diasporic groups, and notably Armenians, have long been present in this region.

Table 1. Typology of Respondent Groups in the Sample Design

Basis of typology	Types
Type and timing of migration	- Migrants who moved before the collapse of the USSR - Migrants who moved after the collapse of the USSR - Circular (seasonal) migrants
Citizenship status	- Citizens of the Republic of Armenia - Citizens of the Russian Federation - Holders of dual citizenship
Country of residence	- Permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia - Permanently residing in the Russian Federation

The formation of the Armenian diaspora in Southern Russia is an important aspect in the study, as it allows us to trace when and under the influence of what causes diaspora communities were formed here, what migration flows shaped them, how special migrant networks emerged on their basis, and how migration within these networks determines the identity of the actors included in it.

A group of acculturated Circassian Armenians, (“Circassogays,” who now identify as Circassians), have lived in the Northwestern Caucasus since the 11th century. They lived among the Adygs (Circassians) and adopted the Circassian language, clothing, housing styles, and other elements of Circassian everyday life, while remaining affiliated to the Armenian Apostolic Church as a distinctive marker of their identity (Aksaev, 1976; Narozhny, 1992; Vinogradov & Ktitorov, 1995). While this was a relatively small group, it played a significant role in the economic life of the region.

In the 18th century, Armenians began to establish settlements in the southern territories of Russia, particularly along the Terek and Don rivers (in places like Nakhichevan, Chaltyr), as well as in settlements along the Caucasian line of fortifications built by Russia on its southern borders (for example, in the fortresses of Kizlyar and Mozdok). In the second half of the 19th century the Armenian population in southern Russia grew substantially. After the end of the Caucasian War in 1859, Russia actively encouraged Christian populations to settle in the newly annexed territories (Minasyan, 1977; Russian State Historical Archive, 1268; Tveritinov, 2009). Armenians, who were facing religious persecution in the Ottoman Empire, responded to this call.

Existing Armenian settlements expanded, and new ones were established. By the early 20th century, a significant Armenian diaspora had taken root in Southern Russia, playing an active role in the economic and sociocultural life of the region.

By the mid-1920s, the Armenian diaspora numbered more than 167 thousand people (86% of all Armenians in the RSFSR) (Rakachev & Rakacheva, 2021). The regions where the largest Armenian communities lived were the territories of the Don, Kuban and the Black Sea coast (about

80% of the total Armenian population of the south). However, by the end of the 1930s, as a result of repressions and deportations, the number of Armenians in the South of Russia decreased to 160,800 people.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the number of Armenians in the South and in Russia as a whole gradually increased. By the beginning of the 21st century their number in the southern regions exceeded half a million (580.9 thousand in 2002) (Rosstat, 2004). This growth was the result of migrations triggered by events such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the 1988 Spitak earthquake, the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent economic crisis, as well as pogroms in Sumgait, Baku and others.

The majority of these migrants settled primarily to the South: in the Rostov, Krasnodar and Stavropol regions. Even today, the largest Armenian diaspora communities are concentrated here. As of 2020, 211.1 thousand Armenians lived in Krasnodar region, 135.4 thousand in Stavropol region and 86.3 thousand in Rostov region.

In the following decade, growth gave way to decline: from 2010 to 2020 the Armenian population in Russia decreased by 20% (236.2 thousand people), and in the southern regions by 21.7% (130.2 thousand people) (Rosstat, 2013, 2023) (Table 2).

These findings reflect broader trends of depopulation, assimilation, and the migration of Armenians both to Armenia and other countries. In 2020, according to the census data, 468.6 thousand Armenians lived in the southern regions of Russia, which is 130.2 people fewer than in 2010 (Rosstat, 2013, 2023).

The current migration flow from Armenia to Russia is represented mainly by labor migrants (source: *Migration Profile of the Republic of Armenia in 2021, 2023*, 8), it is less connected to the diaspora, less oriented towards kinship ties. This economically oriented network mainly functions through migrants with prior experience of labor migration to Russia and is built on direct links with employers.

Currently, over half (58.3% in 2020 and in 2023 already 60.6%) of migrants from Armenia move to Central and Southern Federal Districts, notably Krasnodar (12.2%), Moscow (11.9%), Rostov (7.4%), Stavropol (5.9%), and

Table 2. The Size of the Armenian Population 1939–2020 (Thousand People)

Territory	Year							
	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010	2020
Russian Federation	218,2	255,9	298,7	364,6	532,4	1130,5	1182,4	946,2
Regions of the south of the Russian Federation	160,8	186,3	219,8	254,4	355,6	580,9	598,8	468,6

(Compiled by the authors based on Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (1939), Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (1963), All-Union Population Census of 1970 In 7 volumes (1973), Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (1980), Central Statistical Administration of the USSR (1989), and on Rosstat (2004, 2013, 2023)).

Volgograd regions (4.5%). Conversely, in 2020, the largest numbers of migrants to Armenia returned from the Moscow region (14.0% of the total number of those who left), and the Krasnodar (11.0%) and Stavropol Krai (6.7%), Rostov (5.4%) and Kaluga regions (5.0%) (Rosstat, 2021). In summary, the most attractive regions for Armenian migrants are territories with well-established Armenian diasporas and high levels of economic development and dynamic labor markets (Rakachev & Rakacheva, 2021).

At the same time, more than 77% of the Armenians who migrated to Russia in 2023 subsequently returned to Armenia. This clearly demonstrates the transnational nature of much of the current migration between Russia and Armenia (Zaslavskaya, 2015a). But it can also be seen that there are slightly fewer returns from the southern regions of Russia (61% of this year's arrivals), indicating a somewhat different type of migration in this direction, involving more kinship networks, resettlement and refugees.

Indeed, in 2020–21 and 2023–24, the migration flow from Armenia to Russia was supplemented by refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, who tended to transit through Armenia. This is evident, for example, from the data of 2021, when 70.1 thousand people arrived in Russia from Armenia and only 24.8 left in the opposite direction (International migration of the Russian Federation in 2015–2020, 2023).

This analysis points to a significant rise in temporary labor migrants and underscores the cross-border character of much of the movement between Russia and Armenia.

The analysis also revealed the existence of at least three primary migration networks in southern Russia, shaped by different factors and constructed over varying time intervals. The first migration network formed during the USSR could be described as a network of old diasporas in Russia. The second network emerged during the collapse of the USSR, encompassing flows of refugees from ethnic conflict, the Spitak earthquake, and the movement of labor migrants affected by disintegration of the Soviet economic system. In recent years, the migration flow from Armenia to Russia has taken on the characteristics of primarily seasonal circular labor migration, and is increasingly transnational in nature (Zaslavskaya, 2015a). In the second part of the paper, the development of ethnic and national identities within these migration networks is explored.

Part II: The Ethnic and National Identities of Armenian Migrants in Different Migratory Networks in South Russia

The situation of Armenian migrants in the southern regions of Russia is mitigated by the presence of a substantial and well-established diaspora within the host society that maintains strong familial and business connections with Armenia. Additionally, modern information technologies

enable them to stay connected with Armenia, facilitate their interaction with the host society, and exert a strong influence on the formation of migrant identities. The qualitative study involved Armenian migrants from various migration waves, identified different migration networks and the emergence of new forms of national identity within these.

As a result of open, axial and selective coding of data, it was found that the respondents' national identity narratives often emphasized the significance of the *territory* perceived as "home," which is closely associated with values such as patriotism and a personal sense of responsibility for the fate of the "motherland." In contrast, for some groups of migrants this component was more utilitarian in nature, relating primarily to economic opportunities and living conditions in a particular place. Another important component is the internalized sense of security and protection (absence of armed conflicts, economic stability, etc.) provided by the country. The greater the level of awareness and trust, the deeper the sense of national identity.

A third key component of respondents' national identity narratives concerned to *temporal orientations*. Notably a shared sense of *past* rooted in the history and collective memory of the nation. Here, the mobilizing role of the image of the enemy (most often associated with the Genocide), proved significant. At the same time this temporal dimension also includes an idea of the *future*, with which migrants connected their personal plans.

Finally, national, *state symbols* (coats of arms, flags), cultural practices and rituals were also emphasized. These correspond to Hobsbawm's "*holy icons*," which he describes as "rites, rituals or general collective actions," "images or practical actions," "images having their own name and identified with territories," "periodic festivals or competitions that link together disparate groups" (Hobsbawm, 1990, 115).

Several commonalities can be identified across the identities of these migrants. Irrespective of their time of relocation, they all maintain a strong ethnic identity as Armenians. It is important to acknowledge that the collective memory of the traumatic events associated with the 1915 Genocide is highly significant here and provided a fundamental element in the preservation of a stable ethnic Armenian identity among nearly all migrant groups. In essence, many migrants developed a distinctive traumatic identity, marked by heightened attention to discourses of "historical justice."

At the same time, although language, rituals, and historical memory are significant components of the self-identification of Armenian migrants, it is also important to recognize the relative nature of some of these markers, and that many migrants are not aware of specific ethno-differentiating markers. For instance, many Armenian migrants from the second or 1990s migration network often attend Orthodox churches, and engage in Orthodox rituals.

Thus, migration may lead to a transformation in religious identity, which among these Armenian migrants is often dual (combining Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic confessions) perceived by them as representing a broader Christian dimension.

I was baptized in Armenia, and my son and daughter were also baptized there. However, my youngest son was baptized in Russia, specifically in the Orthodox Church. We don't see any issue with this. We share the same faith, both Russians and Armenians.

(woman, 60, Russia, RF citizenship)

I wouldn't call myself a strictly religious person, ... but I go to church, and for me it makes no difference whether the church is Orthodox or another. When I was in Italy, I could freely go into a Catholic church... for me, a church is a church, Christianity is Christianity, etc.

(man, 35, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia)

We go to church. Both to the Armenian church and to the Russian church.

(woman, 48, Russia, RF citizenship)

To any church [the informant goes to church in Russia]. For me it makes no difference ...

(man, 39, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia)

Several distinct features can be observed in the identities of Armenian migrants living in South Russia, depending on the migratory network to which they belong. Many migrants exhibit a hybrid ethnic identity, which encapsulates both their Armenian heritage and experiences related to their own and previous generations' migration. Overall, a dominant "binary identity" narrative can be observed among Armenian migrants, in which the civil (national) identity of the host society (Russia) is combined with an Armenian ethnic and confessional identity that is in turn influenced by Russian conditions. Expressions of ethnic identity are thus frequently multi-dimensional, shaped by the interplay of essentialist and constructionist elements, and encompass factors such as ethnic origin (blood), current place of residence, and various sociocultural constructs.

Well, I am Armenian after all, of course, we have a proverb in Armenia: "Blood... water... blood will not become water..." somehow it is translated like this, and of course I consider myself Armenian. But we live in Russia, and naturally, we speak Russian. ... I am Armenian, of course, and a citizen of Russia. And this means a lot!

(woman, 54, Russia, RF citizenship)

I am Russian because I am a citizen, yes. Well, I am also Armenian. Well, that is, I feel myself, I identify myself as both a

Russian and an Armenian who lives in Russia. Both an Armenian and a Russian.

(woman, 48, Russia, RF citizenship)

No, it is very important! [to feel like an Armenian] It is just a question of what it means to be Armenian, to feel like an Armenian. Of course, living in Armenia, you still want everything to be in Armenian. Of course, I am not against other cultures, but it is very important to feel like an Armenian while living and being in Armenia, to feel that you are in Armenia, and not in Venezuela, for example. Therefore, yes, it is an important moment for me to feel like an Armenian.

(man, 40, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia)

One intriguing observation is that for members of the first or old Armenian diaspora (descendants of Armenians who moved to Russia in the late 19th-early 20th century from the Ottoman Empire as a result of genocide), Armenian ethnic identity holds particular significance and symbolic weight; being Armenian is a source of status and pride. Old Armenian diaspora in this case is in contrast the national (civil) identity of this older Armenian diaspora is very much Russian. The analysis indicates that those who had migrated to Russia during the Soviet era often perceived their homeland as the entire Soviet Union. Although they expressed patriotic sentiments about Armenia in their interviews, their narratives prominently featured discursive elements of Russian civic identity. It is noteworthy that these migrants from earlier waves who have long resided in Russia often identify themselves as "Russian Armenians."¹ In other words, they see themselves as Armenians by blood and birth, but Russia as where they live and a second homeland. This group is also more positively externally identified within Russian society as hard workers and entrepreneurs (but less so within Armenian society because of their accents or poorer command of Armenian). These narratives correspond with broader theoretical accounts of the transformation of ethnic identities in contemporary societies. Moreover, the constant influx of migrants from Armenia and the maintenance of connections with historical homeland help to preserve Armenian identity and to introduce subsequent generations to the national culture (Harutyunyan, 2011).

The research revealed distinct patterns in the intergenerational transformation of both ethnic and national identities among migrants. By the third generation, the internalization of ethno-differentiating and, to an even greater extent, national-differentiating markers substantially weakens. This generation demonstrates a stronger orientation toward local ethnicity and a greater propensity to embrace a local national identity, particularly among those actively engaged in community life. Members of this generation whose families maintain active interaction with the Armenian community exhibit a more resilient ethnic

identity, expressed through a desire to identify with Armenianness, uphold traditions and rituals, and support ethnic symbols. In contrast, the younger generation of families less involved in the Armenian community tend to identify more with the local ethnic group and to absorb its cultural patterns. Even in this group however, young people mainly identify themselves as Armenians, even though their Armenian ethnic identity is relatively weak. This pattern does not extend to national identity, as young people in this group primarily identify as Russian citizens.

The role of language as an identification marker among Armenian migrants is characterized by considerable complexity. Many respondents consider their native language to be the one in which they think. Those who have long resided in Russia and have a strong command of the Russian language, may perceive Russian as either their sole native language or a second native language. Others may see Armenian as the language of their ancestors, a “historical” language, even if they do not actively speak or use it in their everyday lives.

Well, of course, Armenian [the informant considers the language his native language]. But, however, having lived here [in Russia] for so many years, the Russian language, of course, is in first place, because we live here ... I am proud that I am Armenian, and if they ask me... And God willing, in my next life I will also be born Armenian, so to speak.

(woman, 48, Russia, RF citizenship)

Well, of course, my native language is Armenian, but Russian is also like my native language, because we almost always speak Russian at home.

(woman, 43, Russia, RF citizenship)

Both languages [Russian and Armenian as native languages], since I consider both countries my native language, since I get the greatest pleasure from being there and there. I get pleasure from being there and here. And from both languages. I recently thought about writing a book, no, not a book, sorry, but a story, and it was written in Russian, regardless of me... When I communicate with a Russian person, Russian thinking is switched on, and when with an Armenian, Armenian thinking is switched on.

(woman, 44, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia)

Russian [the informant considers it his native language]. In fact, now, it's hard to answer: initially, Russian was my native language, but now both languages.

(man, 35, Armenia, Armenian citizenship)

Armenian migrants from later migratory waves, who are more closely tied to Armenian culture and Armenia in general, sometimes label Armenians from the old diaspora as “Russified.” Within the diaspora, distinctions are

therefore drawn between migrants from different waves, forming an identity based on “us” versus “them,” where “we” are considered the authentic Armenians, and “they” are not. Conversely, the settled older diaspora views themselves as better integrated into Russian society than the most recent wave migrants. This further division between “them” and “us” also carries status and class connotations, as members of the “old” Armenian diaspora in Russia are generally highly educated, occupy high-status positions in academia, government and the public sector, and enjoy better material living conditions. In contrast, the most recent wave of migrants tends to work in unsafe, unskilled or low-skilled temporary jobs in companies owned by Armenians from the “old” diaspora, who may also be their distant relatives.

It is also worth noting that there are status differences between individuals from different nationalities in Russian society. Notably, Chechens, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians each occupy specific and different roles. Being Armenian is often associated with positive attributes in Russian society, such as hard work and entrepreneurship, contributing to a special status for Armenians in Russian society.

Upon returning to Armenia, Armenian migrants from the middle migration generation of the 1990s often observe a transformation in their identity and perspectives on life linked to the cultural experiences and advantages they gained during their time in Russia. In essence, these migrants often develop a hybrid identity, assimilating cultural elements from both their home and host countries.

I'm an Armenian with a Russian engine, probably... I'll tell you frankly – my mentality, my worldview is different from the mentality, worldview of local Armenians (in Armenia – authors). Definitely different

(man, 39, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia).

“No, it is very important! (to be Armenian – author) I consider myself equally Armenian and Russian. Although no, I lied – I am more Armenian than Russian, but as soon as the plane crosses the border between Russia and Armenia, I feel such boundless freedom. What I say is that I have fun in Russia – it is a fact, but in Armenia I live as if in shackles – these are familiar and understandable to me, my native shackles.”

(woman, 44, Armenia, dual citizenship of RF and Armenia)

This group has a more pronounced Armenian national identity than members of the old diaspora and often perceives itself as being closely connected to the destiny of Armenia, especially after the Velvet Revolution of 2018, which inspired increased return migration to Armenia. However, after Armenia's defeat in the 2020 Karabakh war, some of this group of respondents began to emphasize a desire to distance themselves from Armenian national (civil) identity at least:

“I am a citizen of Armenia, firstly... Since my life has developed in Armenia, I am an Armenian, I love my homeland and want to live in my homeland, but there are times when I do not agree with the decisions of the government and I also want to leave”

(man, age, Armenia, Armenian citizenship).

As markers of ethnic identification, 1990s migrants emphasized language, place of birth, ethnic origin (“blood”), family connections with their historical homeland (notably having relatives in Armenia, which is also common among descendants of migrants from the early waves, even if they themselves have never been to Armenia), a shared ethnic history, and religion. 1990s Armenian migrants also exhibit a distinctive ambiguity in their perceptions of their homeland. Often, the concept of “homeland” is associated with the place where their family or clan resides. For some, this association is purely instrumental and defined as the place where life is better. It is noteworthy however that religious affiliation (Christian in the broadest sense), is particularly significant to these migrants, and often considered more important than many other aspects of their lives:

... Armenians are just not like Russians: they will just sacrifice the state, they will sacrifice everything, but they will strive to preserve their identity, mainly their faith. That is, faith is more important for Armenians.

(man, age, Armenia, Armenian citizenship).

As such, migrants from the 1990s still maintain a strong ethnic identification, alongside a hybrid and transitional form of national (civil) identification.

For migrants from the most recent wave, who engage in cyclical labor migration between Armenia and South Russia, this strong ethnic identification takes on a protective function. Within migration networks, there are labor migration communities that function as quasi-societies, preserving the migrant’s familiar social and cultural patterns of behavior and contributing to the stability of ethnic identification among migrants. In conditions where migrants have only limited access to social and economic guarantees in the host country (such as healthcare, education, pensions, and social benefits), ethnic structures within migration networks play a role in safeguarding well-being, from preserving their ethnic value system and psychological health to providing physical protection. Given the historically challenging context of labor migration takes place and various situational factors in receiving countries, including discrimination, migrants often perceive threats to their ethnic identity. As a result, ethno-differentiating markers tend to deepen within these functioning migration transnational networks. At the same time, important distinctions emerge. Migrants with higher levels of education are more likely to adopt a hybrid national identity. In contrast, migrants with lower

levels of education tend to exhibit a stronger Armenian ethnic identity coupled with a civic identity that is primarily tied to their immediate community and the locality where their families live.

Based on a study of 1273 representatives of the Armenian diaspora in Russia (from all waves) conducted between April-June 2021 (Poghosyan, 2022, 68), the following conclusions can also be drawn regarding their future aspirations. Approximately 50% of respondents envision themselves as Russian citizens in the future, with their professional and personal aspirations linked to Russia (48.4%), while about one-fifth (20.1%) consider themselves citizens of both Russia and Armenia, and associate their professional and personal aspirations with both countries. Roughly 10% identify as Armenian citizens and see their professional and personal aspirations as tied to their historical homeland (9.4%), while approximately 8% are citizens of other countries and envisage their professional and personal aspirations as there. Geographic location within Russia appears to shape these aspirations: Armenians in the Krasnodar Region more often associate their future with Russia, those in the Stavropol Region envision their future in both Russia and Armenia, while those in Moscow are more inclined to consider relocation to third countries (Poghosyan, 2022, 68).

Part III: Relating Findings to Policies around Citizenship and Identity. Fostering More Proactive Approaches to Citizenship and Identity in Armenia and Russia in the Context of High Levels of Migration

According to Muir (2007, 17), writing in the multicultural UK context, the “state should see its role as setting the structural framework that makes it more likely that shared identities will develop.” The term “identity” entered into academic discourse in the late 1970s, and by the early 2000s was firmly established in constructivist analyses of socio-political changes (Bourdieu, 1993) in the wake of movements for the rights of discriminated social groups. The promotion of shared, civic identities is “increasingly interpreted as one of the most important areas of state policy for constructing the image of the nation, the state, uniting citizens, ensuring the unity of the population, which guarantees the stability of the political system and political regime” (Achkasov, 2013, 89). As Verba notes, “If individuals who are physically and legally members of a given political system (i.e., citizens) do not feel that they belong to this system in a psychological sense (that is, when support is not expressed in ‘we-feeling’, in identification with the national community), the possibilities for orderly change of the system are small” (Achkasov, 2013, 76). As such, the mechanisms by which the state is able to form an effective national identity for its citizens, and others connected with

the country in one way or another, are of particular importance. In this connection, Touraine highlights that the notion of the nation-state appeals to a unity of citizenship and, accordingly, to patriotism, as opposed to all social, professional and geographical differences (Touraine, 1998, 97–98).

Issues relating to the cohesiveness of civic/national identities are of particular importance to both Russia and Armenia given that migration is so significant to each country's population.

Hobsbawm (1990, 20) also emphasizes how important it is that these icons be internalized:

nationality and nationalism, although they are constructed 'from above', cannot be fully comprehended unless they are approached 'from below', in terms of beliefs, prejudices, hopes, needs, aspirations, and interests of the common man, which are not necessarily national, and even more so – nationalistic in nature.

In Armenia, issues of social cohesion are now acute given significant emigration flows, the influx of Russian emigrants after February 2022 due to military action in Ukraine and economic sanctions, and of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh following war in 2020 and September 2023. Failure to harness the enormous potential of emigrant labor communities through the development of policies to foster cohesion could lead to severe depopulation and dire economic consequences.

There is therefore a need to develop policies to foster stronger civic identities and to reevaluate traditional, nationalist concepts of identity politics. Harutyunyan (2021) argues that Armenian society has embarked on a process of accelerated globalization since the Velvet Revolution of 2018, which has inevitably influenced national and civic identities.

In Russia, policies of social cohesion are of significance due to the large inflows of labor migrants entering the country and the multi-ethnic and multi-faith composition of its population. Consequently, there is currently an active "process of establishing identity politics as an independent dimension of the sociocultural policies of the Russian state" (Avksentiev et al., 2017, 32).

However, several unresolved issues complicate the implementation of policies of integration in the present context, and notably the question of the basis for the identification of the community that stands behind the Russian state. The question of whether this community constitutes a nation, multi-ethnic populace, civilization, or other entity remains unanswered. Another significant question pertains to who can and should be included in this community. Again, there is a lack of clarity since, in addition to the primary and evident criterion for inclusion—citizenship—other potential criteria for belonging exist. In various documents, for example, this community is defined

as "compatriots," as the "Russian world," implying and encompassing those who are outside the country but maintain some connection to it, primarily through language and cultural ties. The absence of a clear understanding of these issues results in uncertainty in this dimension of policy-making (Malinova, 2017, 15). Numerous studies in Russia indicate a significant proportion of individuals who identify their civic identity as Russian (75–80%), but this may be less important to them than identification with their generation, settlement identity, income identity and profession (Drobizheva, 2017).

As this study has demonstrated, there is a long and continuing history of migration between Armenia and Russia that significantly transforms the identities of migrants. The national identity of Armenian migrants in Russia assumes hybrid forms, which can provide valuable guidance for the development and implementation of new policies of social cohesion in both countries in an era of transnational migration. The dual, hybrid consciousness of migrants, who are simultaneously part of both sociocultural environments, rules out assimilation (promoting the complete integration of migrants into the host society), whether in Armenia or Russia, nor differential exclusion (providing temporary admission of migrants with certain restrictions) as optimal mechanisms for adaptation and inclusion within the host society.

In any case, the strong presence of the Armenian diaspora, especially in the southern regions of Russia, would hinder the full assimilation of Armenian migrants, as Armenian culture remains well preserved, enabling them to maintain their identity. Given the limits of assimilation, migrants may come to be regarded as "quasi-Russian," which does not offer a long-term solution to the issue. If the situation follows a differential isolation scenario, a significant number of migrant workers are excluded from the community of those potentially belonging to and identifying themselves with nation.

Conclusion

The presence of a large and well-integrated Armenian diaspora in Russian society shapes the migratory networks and the structure of migration flows from Armenia to Russia. Contemporary diasporan migration is predominantly transnational, with migrants simultaneously embedded in the social networks of both their country of origin and the host society. Migrants constantly move between different ethno-cultural spaces, participating in the economies, politics, and everyday life of both countries. Consequently, migrants develop hybrid identities that emerge through interactions between different cultures and vary depending on particular social circumstances and the type of interactions.

Both Russia and Armenia face numerous economic, political, and regional challenges, and share common

problems in fostering shared identities. For both Russia and Armenia, questions about the foundations of identity and the criteria for inclusion in the national community remain pressing and unresolved. In Russia, there is generally broader acceptance and shared understanding of various criteria for national identification, albeit with some uncertainty. In contrast, in Armenia, diversity is often perceived as a threat to traditional identity without providing clear benefits in return.

The liminal position of migrants, constantly “on the move,” entails a lack of a “home” traditionally defined in terms of family, city, social network, or nation-state. This situation directs them to seek new symbolic and material identities. National states must take this into account when developing and implementing policies of social cohesion given the importance of national identity to consolidating society and fostering development. In this paper, we have argued that the development of effective policies in this domain requires the adoption of a four-dimensional conceptual framework of national identity, as outlined above. Without such a framework, identity politics may remain overly abstract or even risk provoking social unrest.

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Ethical Considerations

Our institutions do not require ethical approval for reporting individual cases or case series.

Author Contributions

Both authors conceptualized the study and conducted data analysis in their respective countries. They both contributed to data collection and drafting the manuscript. V. Rokachev created the map. Both authors provided critical revisions and finalized the manuscript.

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The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Note

1. This version of Armenian ethnic self-determination is evident in the data from the 2010 and 2020 population censuses. These censuses document individuals' identities based on their self-reported responses. In the 2020 census, there are various double self-definitions, such as “Russian-Armenians,” “Russian-Armenians with the Armenian language,” as well as other combinations like “Armenian-Bulgarians,” “Armenian-Greeks,” “Armenian-Georgians,” “Armenian-Kazakhs,” “Armenian-Karachai,” “Armenian-Koreans,” “Armenian-Lithuanians,” “Armenian-Russians,” “Armenian-Tatars,” “Armenian-Ukrainians,” “Armenian-Chuvash,” “Armenian Tats,” “Artsakhians,” “Assyrian Armenians,” “Baku Armenians,” “Georgian Armenians,” “Don Armenians,” “Yerevanians,” “Crimean Armenians,” “Kuralya,” “Nakhichevanians with Armenian,” “Russian, Turkish Armenians,” and “Chardakhlins.” These diverse self-identifications showcase the multifaceted and complex nature of Armenian identity among the population (page 23).

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