

STOPPING ARMENIA'S IMMIGRATION HEMORRHAGE

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Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Ph.D., Los Angeles, 26 December 2018

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the absolute principle of self-sacrifice."

Woodrow T. Wilson (1856-1924)

Poland is a large country with a vibrant population of 38 million, a low unemployment rate, and a fairly robust economy. Despite these attributes, sociologists have been baffled at the rate of young Polish men and women leaving the country to settle in Europe, Canada, the U.S. or elsewhere. The most frequently cited reason for leaving Poland is to seek better economic opportunities. This is, of course, inconsistent with the bright conditions in Poland. After agonizing for years to find the cause of the exodus, sociologists have concluded that young Poles lack patriotism.

The Republic of Armenia is also plagued by a perennial brain drain. Next to Moldova, Armenia has the highest rate of immigration in Eastern Europe. Most of the people who leave also cite better economic opportunities despite the fact that Armenia's economy is comparatively doing well. Armenia's population hemorrhage has continued in bad and good economic times. So, what could be the real reason?

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Patriotism is one of a large class of words that are linked to the virtues of membership. To participate in relations of, for example, friendship, community, nationhood, or citizenship, implies normative rules. That is to say, there are value expectations built into such memberships. One important dimension of any membership relation is an expectation of "loyalty". Loyalty to a nation, community,

citizenship, state is thus implied in the practice. To participate, therefore, in any of these membership practices involves adherence to loyalty-based virtue. In this context, the term *patriotism* usually denotes a specific loyalty virtue, consequent upon membership of a country.

Patriotism also signifies a personal identification with a country including a concern for the well-being of that country. Furthermore, it entails a readiness to make sacrifices for its defense or safety. Most importantly, it expects a member to remain in the country to improve conditions for the greater good, namely "loyalty". It also provides for some people the grounds for all moral action, predicated upon patriotic membership. Patriotism also indicates a special affection, feeling, or emotive response that is commonly designated as a "love of country."

Love means "devotion." It means that one's energies are directed at improving conditions in one's country. Love means "protection," to fight against the enemy, to preserve the sovereignty of one's country. Love means "loyalty," to stick to one's own country through thick or thin or when one comes to a boil over one's participation or contributions to society. Let us take a young Armenian who has left Armenia to seek a better life elsewhere. Is he (or she) patriotic? By evaluating against the definition of patriotism as "love" with its elements consisting of devotion, protection, and loyalty, let us assess the situation:

This young Armenian living in the Diaspora can be considered a "devoted" Armenian if he extends a helping hand from the Diaspora to improve conditions in his homeland for the common good. When Armenia is in harm's way, he may choose to return to "protect" his homeland against aggressors, provided his job and responsibilities to his family permit him to return to Armenia. So, when it comes to "protection," it would be conditional rather than voluntary.

But as far as "loyalty" is concerned, he fails to meet this crucial criterion. By leaving Armenia, by definition he had breached his loyalty to his native country. Is he unpatriotic or is he engaged in false patriotism? Most would say both. If he left his country to seek better life, yes he is unpatriotic even if he shows his "devotion" by helping Armenia from the Diaspora. Is he unpatriotic? Yes, even if he returns to "protect" his country against the invader. But by leaving his country to seek greener pastures and failing on the criterion of loyalty, I would say he practices "incomplete" patriotism rather than false patriotism. "Loyalty" means to stick to one's country, no matter how bad conditions are. "Loyalty" means to "sacrifice" one's self by investing in his country to gradually improve it for better days ahead.

Throughout history, patriotism has been regarded as love of country in general terms and as loyalty to one's country in specific terms. Without loyalty patriotism would be nationalism, jingoism, chauvinism, philanthropy, etc. In the calculus of patriotism, "loyalty" is the heart and soul of the concept. If it is missing, in a sense if someone abandons his birthplace and lives in another country, patriotism becomes "false". I prefer to say, incomplete.

Patriotism is the love and loyalty we feel towards the country we live in as our birthplace. It is the

duty of citizens to be a patriot, especially in its time of need. Without patriotic citizens a country cannot succeed. If the soldiers of a country did not love their homeland, then it would be hard for that country to win against a threatening enemy. Countries that had to fight for their independence were established by patriotic men and women: without their patriotism, neither Armenia nor any other country would be enjoying freedom and independence today.

A citizen must take pride in his/her country's achievements, both in the past and in the present in order for the nation to achieve greater prosperity in the future. As we have needed patriots to be free from foreign domination in the past, we need patriots in Armenia right now, to hold on to what we have achieved and make further progress.

If the average Armenian lacks true patriotism, how can we enhance loyalty to country in the new generation? One way has been the classic approach in classrooms. Teachers must present history of the nation, the state, the country to young students. A nation's heroes responsible for its independence should be admired. Scientists, artists, writers, journalists, businesspersons who have advanced the country to a higher level of success should be praised. Armenian teachers already do a great job of that, but doing more would reduce the future "disloyal" members of the Armenian society.

A second way would be to have role models lecture or speak to inspire young and old on the virtues of patriotism. Motivational speakers can make the subject a "sexy" topic. Famous athletes, chess players, entrepreneurs, writers, actors, teachers, media personalities, journalists, and politicians would drive home the importance of patriotism into the consciousness of young listeners.

A third way is to bestow Outstanding Citizen Awards to those who have stayed in the country and are contributing to its progress. Take Ms. Z. M., the curator of a popular museum in Yerevan. She had many opportunities to move to the U.S. Yet, she chose to remain loyal to her country. She stayed in her beloved Yerevan and becoming a cog in the wheel of Armenia's cultural legacy.

A fourth way would be to criticize those who lack patriotism. We need to expose the negative image of those disloyal to Armenia. For example, Armenia is erecting a statue of General Dro in Aparan, as a hero and a patriot. But some may propose that we need to criticize the "disloyal" act of his entire family who had moved to the U.S. Some may question "Where is their loyalty to Armenia?" When loyalty is breached, does it mean it is a sign of selfishness? You be the judge.

A fifth way would be to advise the media not to dwell constantly on negative news. The media is responsible for bringing to the attention of the citizenry the faults, corruptions, evils and shortcomings of a state and it helps citizens understand the situation within the nation. But, in its quest for the truth, the media far too often highlight the negative aspects of a state while neglecting the progress and achievements the nation is making.

A nation can never be free of all its negative aspects, but if the media constantly hammer on what is wrong with the country, the younger generation will find it hard to develop patriotic feelings. If we do

not have patriots left within our country and also do not allow our children to develop patriotic sentiments, who is going to stand up against corruption and fight for our country and what we believe in?

No Armenian wants to see the realization of former Azerbaijan president's (Hydar Aliyev) dream that Azerbaijan would not need to fight the Armenians for the country is bleeding from massive abandonment by its population. One day soon, he envisioned "Armenia will be empty; in no time we shall go to Yerevan and celebrate the re-annexation of it to Azerbaijan where it belongs."

Remedies are sought only when a problem is acknowledged. We should bite the bullet and raise the specter of lack of patriotism among some young Armenians (although wanderlust has been Armenia's problem for centuries). Let us ride on the slogan from kindergarten to college to instill the message: *For True Patriotism, Invest Yourself in Your Country!* Fostering patriotism in our young generation may be the best measure to stem immigration and have enough young Armenian patriots who would turn Aliyev's dream into unfulfilled great expectations.

