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Community Service through Armenian Graphic Narratives: Preserving Cultural Identity and Collective Memory

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Armenian graphic narratives as resources for community service, cultural education, and collective memory. It focuses on diaspora publications, genocide-related visual representations, and later forms of Armenian visual communication. Using historical, visual narrative, and semiotic analysis, the study explores how graphic materials communicate displacement, identity, remembrance, and cultural continuity across communities and generations. The analysis indicates that visual narratives have functions related to connecting dispersed communities, preserving shared cultural symbols, communicating historical experiences, and supporting intergenerational learning. These functions provide a basis for community-service activities involving cultural literacy, historical awareness, archival engagement, and educational outreach. The study positions Armenian graphic narratives not only as artistic materials but also as community-oriented resources for preserving cultural identity, strengthening collective memory, and supporting sustainable cultural education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community service can support cultural education by connecting academic knowledge, historical resources, and community experience. Visual materials are particularly useful because they can communicate identity, history, and cultural values beyond conventional written forms. Graphic narratives combine images, symbols, text, and storytelling and can therefore support visual literacy and educational communication (Golding and Verrier, 2021; Pantaleo, 2019).

Armenian communities provide an important context for this approach. Migration and displacement created communities across different countries, where newspapers, illustrated publications, caricatures, and other graphic materials became instruments for maintaining cultural connections. Armenian graphic narratives communicated experiences of migration, identity, political change, and historical memory.

These materials also have potential for community-service activities. Historical graphic narratives can be used in cultural-literacy programs, archival engagement, intergenerational learning, exhibitions, and educational outreach. Community-based activities involving digital comics have shown how graphic media can connect cultural heritage with educational practice (Luthfa *et al.*, 2025). However, Armenian graphic narratives have rarely been positioned as resources for community service and cultural education.

This study examines diaspora publications, memory-oriented visual representations, and later Armenian graphic communication from this perspective. The novelty lies in repositioning archival graphic narratives as community-oriented educational resources while retaining their historical functions. The study asks: How can Armenian graphic narratives support community service for cultural identity, collective memory, and intergenerational education?

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to examine Armenian graphic narratives as potential resources for community service and cultural education. Three groups of materials were selected from the original visual corpus: diaspora graphic publications, genocide-related visual representations, and later Armenian visual narratives. The materials represent different contexts of displacement, memory, identity, and cultural communication.

Historical-context, visual-narrative, and semiotic analyses were used to identify the community functions of each visual material. The analysis examined symbols, image-text relationships, historical context, cultural meanings, and forms of communication. The findings were then organized into four community-service dimensions: cultural identity, collective memory, intergenerational education, and community communication (Table 1).

Table 1. Framework for community-service interpretation.

DIMENSION	MAIN FOCUS	COMMUNITY-SERVICE RELEVANCE
Cultural identity	Symbols and cultural references	Cultural preservation
Collective memory	Historical experiences and remembrance	Historical awareness
Intergenerational education	Transmission of visual narratives	Cultural learning
Community communication	Shared and transnational visual meanings	Community engagement

The study did not evaluate an implemented community-service program. Accordingly, the findings identify potential applications of the archival materials for community service rather than measured program outcomes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified four community-oriented functions of Armenian graphic narratives: cultural identity, collective memory, intergenerational education, and community communication. These functions developed across diaspora publications, genocide-related visual representations, and later forms of visual communication. The materials were not originally produced as formal community-service programs. However, their documented functions provide a basis for developing community activities centered on cultural learning, historical awareness, and public engagement. **Table 2** summarizes the findings and their potential community-service applications.

Table 2. Community functions of Armenian graphic narratives and potential applications.

VISUAL MATERIAL	MAIN FUNCTION	COMMUNITY NEED	POTENTIAL COMMUNITY SERVICE
Diaspora publications	Cultural identity	Cultural continuity	Cultural-literacy workshops
Diaspora publications	Community connection	Diaspora engagement	Intergenerational discussion
Memory-oriented graphics	Collective memory	Historical awareness	Memory education
Genocide-related visuals	Historical communication	Intergenerational transmission	Community exhibitions
Later visual narratives	Wider circulation	Transnational engagement	Digital cultural outreach

3.1. Cultural Identity and Diaspora Community

Diaspora Armenian graphic publications developed within communities separated geographically from their historical homeland. Newspapers, magazines, and illustrated publications consequently became more than communication media. They helped preserve language and traditions, represent collective experiences, and maintain cultural connections.

Figure 1 illustrates this diaspora dimension. The significance of such materials for community service lies in their ability to provide a shared cultural object around which learning and discussion can occur. Diaspora publications combined Armenian references with visual forms encountered in different cultural environments (**Table 3**). This produced a hybrid visual language capable of communicating across cultural boundaries while maintaining an Armenian perspective.

From a community-service perspective, these materials could therefore support cultural-literacy activities. Similar community-based approaches have been used to strengthen cultural preservation, social inclusion, and community learning in different contexts (Karmaker, 2025a; Karmaker, 2025b; Ademilua *et al.*, 2024; Daud, 2026). Participants could identify cultural symbols, discuss historical contexts, compare representations across generations, and relate visual narratives to experiences of migration and belonging. Community-oriented comics activities can connect visual communication with participation and cultural learning (Tsene, 2022). The original materials indicate three particularly relevant community functions: maintaining identity, representing displacement, and supporting

transnational solidarity. These functions are consistent with community-service approaches that emphasize cultural revitalization and diaspora inclusion (Karmaker, 2025a; Karmaker, 2025b; Karmaker, 2027; Daud, 2026). These functions can be translated into community-service activities without changing the historical meaning of the visual materials. Thus, the proposed community-service role does not depend on treating graphic narratives simply as artworks. Their value lies in using historical visual materials to facilitate participation, discussion, and cultural learning.



Figure 1. Armenian diaspora graphic publication, *Father Komitas: The Master Chef D'orchestre of Bolis (Istanbul)*, selected archival material from EVN Report Archive Mine.

Table 3. Diaspora visual narratives as resources for community service.

ORIGINAL COMMUNITY FUNCTION	PROPOSED ACTIVITY	COMMUNITY-SERVICE PURPOSE
Preserving cultural identity	Visual heritage workshop	Cultural literacy
Representing migration	Story-sharing session	Dialogue on migration and belonging
Maintaining community connections	Intergenerational discussion	Community cohesion
Combining cultural traditions	Comparative visual activity	Intercultural understanding
Transnational communication	Digital sharing project	Diaspora engagement

3.2. Collective Memory and Intergenerational Education

A second finding concerns collective memory. After displacement and the Armenian Genocide, visual materials increasingly functioned as instruments for remembering, documenting, and communicating historical experiences. Newspapers, posters, illustrated publications, and other graphic materials provided spaces through which experiences of loss, exile, and survival could be transmitted to later generations.

This function is represented by **Figure 2**. Memory-oriented graphics differ from earlier political satire. Rather than depending primarily on humor and exaggeration, they employ symbols, human figures, historical references, emotional expression, and representations of absence. The viewer participates in reconstructing meaning by connecting visible elements with collective historical knowledge.

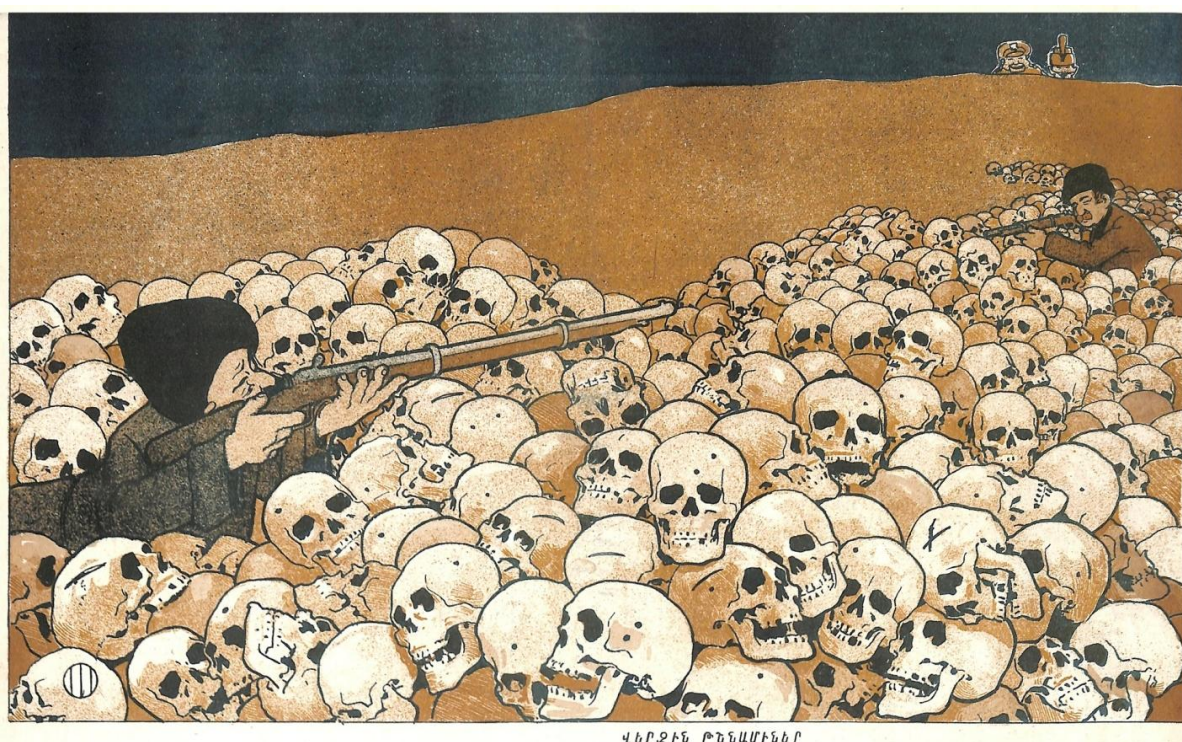


Figure 2. *The Last Enemies*, Armenian visual representation related to genocide memory, selected archival image from EVN Report Archive Mine.

This characteristic is particularly relevant to intergenerational community education. Graphic narratives can provide an accessible starting point for conversations between younger participants, elders, educators, cultural organizations, and diaspora communities. Their purpose in such activities should not be to simplify traumatic history but to facilitate historically grounded interpretation and discussion.

Table 4 converts the findings into a concise community-learning model. The source material strongly supports this interpretation. It identifies loss and absence, displacement and survival, and cultural continuity as recurring themes, while describing visual narratives as means of connecting historical experience with contemporary audiences. Importantly, these

visual materials already circulated through publications, exhibitions, and educational contexts and contributed to shared Armenian memory. Community service can extend this existing communicative function through structured public-learning activities.

Table 4. Collective memory as a community-learning resource.

Visual theme	Community-learning question	Educational purpose
Loss and absence	What is represented or deliberately absent?	Historical awareness
Displacement	How is migration represented visually?	Understanding community history
Survival	How is continuity communicated?	Cultural resilience
Cultural symbols	Which symbols connect past and present?	Cultural literacy
Historical memory	How can this image be interpreted across generations?	Intergenerational dialogue

3.3. From Cultural Memory to Community Service

The third finding concerns the potential recirculation of historical Armenian visual materials within contemporary community-service contexts. This transition expands the possible audience for cultural education.

Figure 3 provides a historical example of Armenian visual communication that can be recontextualized through contemporary community-based educational activities. The original study associates later visual communication with continuing themes of memory, identity, migration, and cultural continuity. It also notes that broader circulation can connect Armenian communities, researchers, artists, and other audiences across geographical boundaries.

For community service, this creates opportunities beyond conventional lectures or exhibitions. Visual narratives can become materials for participatory workshops, community archives, intergenerational discussions, cultural exhibitions, and digital outreach. Community-extension programs have also demonstrated how structured educational activities can support learning among community-based and non-formal learners ([Arciosa et al., 2022](#)). Comics have been used as participatory media-literacy resources with marginalized communities, demonstrating their potential beyond conventional classroom settings ([Tsene, 2022](#)). Digital-comic activities have also been connected with cultural content and educational engagement ([Luthfa et al., 2025](#)).

The proposed model is summarized in **Table 5**. This model represents the main practical contribution of the study and aligns with community-learning approaches that position cultural resources, local identity, and participatory education as foundations for community engagement ([Ademilua et al., 2024](#); [Karmaker, 2025a](#); [Karmaker, 2025b](#)). It shifts graphic narratives from archival objects to community-learning resources. The approach also preserves the original materials: historical visuals remain evidence of their own contexts, while new community activities are developed around interpretation, dialogue, creation, and dissemination.

The distinction between the observed findings and proposed community service must remain clear. The archival evidence demonstrates cultural preservation, collective memory, identity formation, and transnational communication. It does not demonstrate the effectiveness of a completed community-service intervention. Therefore, **Table 5** represents a proposed model derived from the visual analysis rather than measured program outcomes.



Figure 3. *Christmas (January 1915)*, Armenian graphic narrative selected from the EVN Report Archive Mine.

Table 5. Proposed community-service model using Armenian graphic narratives.

Stage	Activity	Participants	Expected community contribution
Explore	Examine archival visuals	Youth, community members	Historical awareness
Interpret	Discuss symbols and narratives	Youth and elders	Cultural literacy
Remember	Connect visuals with community memory	Intergenerational groups	Collective memory
Create	Produce short visual narratives	Community participants	Cultural expression
Share	Exhibit or digitally disseminate works	Local and diaspora audiences	Community communication

Future implementation could evaluate participation, cultural knowledge, intergenerational interaction, and participants' responses to the visual materials. Such work would move the present framework from conceptual community-service interpretation toward an evaluated community-engagement program.

4. CONCLUSION

This study identifies the potential of Armenian graphic narratives as resources for community service through cultural education, collective memory, intergenerational learning, and community communication. Diaspora publications supported cultural identity

and connections across dispersed communities, while memory-oriented visual narratives contributed to the transmission of historical experiences between generations. Based on these functions, the study proposes a community-service model involving exploration, interpretation, remembrance, creation, and sharing. The model positions archival visual materials as resources for participatory cultural learning rather than passive historical objects. Future studies should implement and evaluate the proposed model with community participants to examine cultural learning, engagement, and intergenerational interaction.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper is free from plagiarism.

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