Tsypylma Darieva

MAKING A HOMELAND

Roots and Routes of Transnational Armenian Engagement

[transcript] Global Studies

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Map of the South Caucasus

Geopolitical Map of the Caucasus Region

Source: Jeroenscommons, Wikimedia Commons. *Artsakh* is the Armenian term for the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Transliteration Note

There are various transliteration systems for the Armenian alphabet. Since Armenian terms, names, and geographical locations have been used and published in English, they are presented without commonly used transliteration systems of the Armenian alphabet. For Russian, I used the English transliteration system provided by the Library of Congress. For terms such as "Armenian Americans", the spelling does not include a hyphen.

Introduction. Exploring 'Roots' Mobilities and Making a Homeland

> "We get out of the plane… A smile runs across my face as I see Armenian writing and hear the airport employees' converse in Armenian. Wait is it Armenian? It sounds like it, but I don't understand most of it. Oh no! My first feeling of culture shock. I get to the gate, fill out the proper paperwork and go straight to the immigrations officer. I end up conversing with the immigration officer for about 10 minutes!!! He looks through my passport and asks me probably the most thought-provoking yet simple question; 'What has taken you so long to visit Armenia?' Why has it? I had vacation time, I had money, and I have the stamina to survive a long flight, so why?"
> *(AVC Volunteer, 2007)*

This emotional statement describes the long-distance 'homecoming' experience of a young volunteer, a third-generation Armenian American from the Boston area, who arrived in Yerevan at the Zvartnots International Airport in June 2007 to 'discover' his 'ancestral homeland' and to 'move mountains' in modern Armenia. This was not a journey along a pilgrimage tour. However, the perception of encountering the 'holy' land, which has never been the country of his grandparents' exodus, is comparable to the meaningful experiences of a pilgrim making a long journey to a sacred site. Armenia as an imagined homeland, merged with the iconic symbol of sacred Mount Ararat to become the mythical land of one's cultural roots, appears to be a tangible place: a territory marked by immigration officers and national borders that one can hear, smell and interact with.

Post-Soviet Armenia is usually perceived as a region of out-migration, with a large number of labour migrants moving to Russia, sending remittances that are important to the Armenian economy. In this book, Armenia is conceptualised as a destination country for descendants of post-migrants commonly

referred to in the Republic of Armenia as *spiurk* – the Armenian diaspora. Over the last two decades, a new migration process from the North to the South has been gaining ground. This is the arrival of Armenian post-migrants from economically more developed countries (the US or Canada) in post-socialist 'developing' Armenia. Studies of post-socialist migration usually deal with immigration from Eastern Europe and the Middle East to Western countries, while overlooking the fact that Eastern Europe and Eurasia became a destination for diasporic people.

Particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new generation of US American diasporic organisations and individuals have emploed a variety of mechanisms to engage with the 'ancestral homeland': travelling, volunteering and investing money. This new generation of diasporic Armenians claims to 'feel' connected to the 'homeland' despite a century of living outside, mainly in the US or Canada. Due to the challenging political situation in countries like Turkey or Iran, they do not engage with the actual homeland of their grandparents. Instead, they turn their desires and activities to neighbouring post-Soviet Armenia. The Republic of Armenia, once the Erivan Governorate of the Russian Empire, existed from 1918–1920 after the collapse of the Russian Empire and was then a Soviet republic until it became a sovereign nation-state in 1991.

The origins of diasporic travellers include multiple places and experiences that originate in numerous diasporic centres in the US, Canada, Brazil, France, the UK, Australia and Russia. However, the majority of diasporic volunteers and travellers in Armenia come from North America (the US and Canada). Many descendants of Armenian migrants live in these areas, building a strong network of visible and invisible ethnic communities (Bakalian 1993; Panossian 2006). The Boston area and California serve as the main generators of transnational networks and translocal bridges linking global diasporic individuals with the imagined homeland in Armenia.[1]

According to official statistics, between 1995 and 2021, approximately 2.300 'roots' migrants from the United States, Canada and Western Europe entered Armenia and settled temporarily for one or two years in the Republic of Armenia including the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, an unrecognised state in the South Caucasus. While this would appear to be an insignificant number, if we include those who settle for businesses and work at numerous non-governmental and charity organisations, recent Armenian refugees from Syria, and online visitors to the websites offering to 'discover Armenia', then the picture changes.[2] Each year, hundreds of young people of Armenian de-

scent from North America, Europe, Australia and Brazil travel to Armenia in order to contribute their labour and skills to the country's social and economic development.[3] Their contribution and activities in the field of philanthropy, volunteering and knowledge transfer are considered to play a vital role in Armenia's economic, social and political development. However, there is an imbalance in power and expectations on both sides.

Drawing on a long-term multi-site ethnographic fieldwork in Armenia and the United States (2007–2015), this study highlights diasporic perceptions, desires and activities in relation to the 'ancestral homeland' and examines how post-migrants generate a variety of bonds to that homeland and in this way create new pathways for return mobilities and transnational engagement. More precisely, I discuss the ways in which migrants' descendants create and practice different levels of social and political attachment to the homeland – a phenomenon that sometimes conflates with homeland and heritage tourism.

In this study, I identify and outline 'roots' mobility as a pattern of voluntary journeys to the 'ancestral homeland' among those who enjoy the freedom of mobility. With 'ancestral homeland' I mean the notion of belonging and attachment to a real or imagined place of origin, which is not always conceptualised as a specific location with one specific place, a neighbourhood or a house (Sigona et al. 2015: 25). 'Roots' mobility, a global phenomenon of voluntary movement to construct bonds to the homeland and to 'engage' with the homeland, is becoming attractive for members of transnational diasporic communities and ethnic migrants' descendants as part of their social and cultural identity. However, the issue of 'roots' mobility remains unspecified and under-theorised in anthropology and the social sciences. Much has been written in the 1990s and 2000s about the ideals, narratives and paradigms involved in diasporic nostalgia (Safran 1991, 2004; Tölölyan 1991; Cohen 1997; Levy/Weingrod 2005; Sigona et al. 2015), but there have been few anthropological investigations on how diasporic people practice transnational attachment and generate new bridges and itineraries between 'homeland' and 'diaspora' throughout generations. I refer to the interactions between 'here' and 'there' that go beyond banal cultural nostalgia and state diaspora policies. Most of the literature is focused on the formation of diasporic identities outside the homeland within a single nation-state. I examine a variety of interactions and interventions that build an intermediary translocal arena between diasporic agencies and the homeland. This perspective emphasises the role of the diasporic post-migrants themselves and

less of the homeland as an engine of geographical mobility and loyalty that may link specific people to a specific space.

This study seeks to contribute to understanding cross-border 'roots' flows and mobile practices of homeland attachment that are framed within emotional metaphors of getting 'rooted' and shaped by routes of 'discovering oneself' in the twenty-first century.

'Roots' and 'uprootedness' may be frequent leitmotifs in diasporic lives. Similar to Cohen, I use the botanic metaphor as a conceptual tool to capture the elusive domain of diasporic engagement and transnational scholarship (Cohen 2015). The 'roots' migrants in this study are volunteers, philanthropists, young professionals, and diasporic activists of Armenian descent, mostly living in North America and interacting with the Republic of Armenia transnationally and temporarily. An 'engaged' attachment and a 'meaningful' trip to Armenia can last more than two months, two years or longer. It can be seen by the travellers as an act that is not only associated with personal and family memories, but also with the opportunity of an individual powerful contribution to the transformation of social, political and economic life in the homeland. This is an important feature of engaged 'roots' travellers. Another important feature of the actors is that the majority of transnational diasporic travellers who claim to 'move' the homeland's future belong to the middle and educated classes in Western societies.

Diasporic *making* a homeland is the term that demarcates a proactive conceptual space, as a place of opportunities and start-ups, a meeting point for diasporic activists and travellers. The key figures of 'roots' mobilities differ from typical returnees and new migrants, as they do not intend to stay in the homeland. This book aims to highlight a new generation of diasporic organisations and individuals that address the issue of 'roots' mobility towards the homeland without a centralised bureaucracy. More specifically, it illuminates emerging pathways of transnational engagement among descendants of Armenian migrants in North America and elsewhere. Below, I begin with an outline of the different forms of 'roots' mobilities and return 'flows' to provide a broader framework for understanding the phenomenon of making a homeland and the ways this form of human mobility can be explored from the perspective of anthropology. Following this, I discuss the emotional dimension of 'roots' mobility as a specific fuel of transnational activities performed by diasporic post-migrants. As part of the Introduction, I also reflect on my experiences with multi-sited ethnography and the research methods I used in this study.

A Small Nation with Large Issues

Issues of migration and mobility have shaped Armenia's history. Armenians are worthy of special attention by scholars studying diasporas and cross-border mobility because of their rich history of transnational migration, displacement and diaspora worldwide. As Susan Pattie pointed out: "Ours, is a story of moving, rebuilding, moving again" (Pattie 2004b: 131). Along with Jews and Greek, diaspora literature considers Armenians as one of the three paradigmatic diasporic groups (Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1991). There are an estimated eight million ethnic Armenians around the world. Only up to three million of them live in post-Soviet Armenia, an impoverished post-conflict state in the South Caucasus with limited resources. There is a fundamental difference between the lines of global Armenianness: *Hayastantsi* (term for Armenians who live in the Republic of Armenia or those who recently migrated from the country) and *Spyurkahay* (Diaspora Armenians), which has led to the creation of different modes of being and feeling Armenian.

Most of the diasporic Armenians live scattered across Russia, the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Middle East, and relations between the global Armenian diaspora and the Armenian homeland are complex and ambivalent. The formation of Armenian diasporic communities worldwide has a long history and there is extensive research and literature on multiple Armenian communities in the US, Canada, France or Russia (Mirak 1983; Panossian 2006; Dyatlov/Melkonian 2009; Kaprielian-Churchill 2005). Historically, Armenian migration to Northern America involved their arrival as traders, merchants and students at the end of the nineteenth century. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of Armenian Americans perceive themselves as survivors of forced migration and the effects of expulsion and genocide on the territory of the Ottoman Empire during World War I (Mirak 1983).

Until the end of the 1980s, the connections between the Soviet Republic of Armenia and Armenian diasporic communities in North America and Western Europe were irregular. Over the twentieth century, diasporic organisations in the US and Canada were predominantly active in the development of local communities in Boston, Washington, Fresno, Montreal and elsewhere. These successful efforts involved the establishment of ethno-cultural centres, museums, churches and schools, which serve as local platforms for cultural and political debates on Armenian immigrants from different countries (Turkey, the Middle East and Iran). The Soviet Republic of Armenia was not at the centre of diasporic Armenian cultural and political identities and attachments in this

period. For a considerable time, western Armenian communities showed little interest in any political nation-building project within the territory of the Soviet Union.[4]

Throughout the twentieth century, diasporic elites, intellectuals and wealthy members of Armenian communities gathered around three political parties in exile such as *Dashnaktsutyun*, *Ramgavar* and *Hnchak* (Bakalian 1993; Phillips 1989; Panossian 2006), which developed an ambivalent and hostile attitude towards Soviet Armenia. Their activities were oriented more towards achieving the cultural and political advancement of ethnic Armenians in the host society. These centres successfully provided a voice and a lobby for Armenian migrants within the US American public sphere in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, by the beginning of the 1980s and in particular in the 1990s, a special emphasis on attaining political recognition for the expulsion and genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire emerged, which became the vital global identity marker among the heterogeneous and well-integrated Western diasporic Armenian communities (Tölölyan 2000).

It was the 1988 earthquake, which triggered one of the clear emotional outpourings and active responses to Soviet Armenia among members of North American diasporic communities. This dramatic event led to a rise in worldwide humanitarian aid activity for Armenia (Ishkanian 2005, 2008). Following Armenian independence in 1991, diasporic Armenian communities explicitly shifted their attention from the societies in which they reside towards the effort to 'discover' and support their 'ancestral homeland', which became idealised as a repository of ethno-cultural origin. This 'heritage turn' led to a reorientation of significant parts of Armenian diasporic activism from local to transnational forms of engagement with the 'homeland'.

In the 1990s, many members of the second and later generations of Armenian Americans and Armenian Canadians continued to donate to Armenia's impoverished economy (Dudwick 2003; Pearce et al. 2011), and a few of them occasionally undertook tourist trips to post-Soviet Armenia on an individual level. Since 2001, systematic trips to Armenia have become increasingly popular among diasporic Armenian youth for the purpose of volunteering and developing their own transnational engagement with post-socialist Armenia. A number of diasporic people of Armenian descent have become a visible part of everyday life in Yerevan (Abrahamian 2006; Marutyan 2009; Darieva 2011), forming a counter-movement opposed to the emigration of the local population of the Armenian Republic.

A Short Overview of Diaspora Scholarship

Conceptualising 'roots' mobility I confine my overview to the central definitions of 'diaspora' and outline the specific nature of Armenian experiences in the context of forced migration and identity formation. Deriving from the Greek verb διασπειρειν/diasperein (to sow out) the term 'diaspora' involves dispersal and displacement through expulsion and violence (in the Jewish and Armenian cases), or through colonisation and trade (in the case of the Greeks). There was an explosion of interest in diaspora studies that occurred in the late 1980s, when scholars started to theorise ethnic minorities' issues, effects of multiculturalism and migration processes worldwide (Vertovec/Cohen 1999; Brubaker 2005).[5] For a long time, the term 'diaspora' had been exclusively used for defining three groups: the Jewish, Greek and Armenian diasporas (Clifford 1994: 305; Cohen 1997: 507–508).

The early theoretical discussion on diaspora and migration studies elaborated two models of diaspora: a paradigmatic and a modern one. In the paradigmatic model of diaspora, the Jewish and Armenian models, William Safran (1991) argued that six of the following characteristics apply:

1) A history of dispersal and expulsion (in the distanced past or more recently);
2) Collective memory, a vision of and/or myth of homeland;
3) A feeling of alienation/insulation in the context of residence;
4) The idea of returning to the homeland;
5) Engagement/caring for the homeland;
6) Relating to the homeland is central to defining collective identity when 'abroad'.

By leaving aside the criteria like victimised identity and collective memory of expulsion, Clifford and Brubaker later on identified just three core elements that remain widely understood to be constitutive of any modern diasporic community:

1) Dispersion in space;
2) Orientation to a homeland;
3) Boundary maintenance.

The discussion on defining diasporic communities continued in the 2000s between 'old' and 'new', or 'bad' and 'good' diasporas (Brubaker 2005). While some scholars see ethnic diasporic groups as social formations that can bring potential benefits, others see them as inherently disruptive to national society and regional security. Throughout the past two decades, it has become clear that 'old' and 'new' diasporic groups are increasingly involved in diverse flows of international and transnational relations that provide a model for global politics, regional powers and mobilities within a specific trajectory.

Rogers Brubaker (2005) criticised the treatment of diasporas as unitary actors (*the* Kurds, *the* Tamils, *the* Russians). Similar to Clifford, he proposed to perceive diasporic groups as a claim, an idiom or a stance, as a way of "formulating the identities and loyalties of a population" and instead of using the adjective 'diasporic', he proposed to speak about diasporic projects, diasporic claims, diasporic religion, and so forth (Brubaker 2005). As a result, the meaning of diaspora underwent a shift in social sciences and moved away from being identified as a bounded localised nostalgic minority. Instead, the term diaspora is now associated with diversified transnational movements of people, with the global mobility of capital, commodities and cultural iconographies (Brah 1996). The use of the term 'diaspora' has proliferated massively after the collapse of the Soviet Union and has entered the academic, political and public discourses and everyday vocabulary as a keyword.[6] Commenting on this proliferation in the 2000s, the then director of the Moscow Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology, Valery Tishkov, has spoken of the "diasporization of the whole country" (Tishkov 2003: 467). The then editor of the Russian journal 'Diasporas' Natalia Kosmarskya (2006) recognised a "passion for diaspora" (*diasporal'noe pirshestvo*) in Eurasia.[7]

Following the debates in the early 2000s and the passion for studying 'diaspora' across disciplines, anthropologists and some sociologists rejected the term 'diaspora' as an analytical tool for its overuse and oversimplification. The reasons given for this included the 'blackboxness' of the term and the way it could be used in a conceptually vague manner, resulting in the obscuring or distortion of social processes. In response, these scholars turned their focus on the study of transnational social fields, translocalities, and mobilities 'from below'. This grounded research perspective puts more emphasis on the actors themselves, 'everyday' local practices of mobility and movement, cross-border exchange and transfer as lived experiences (Smith 2011; Stephan-Emmrich/Schröder 2018; Délano/Mylonas 2021). This perspective makes possible to access to non-state actors, individuals, social practices and contradictions.

In reference to the transnational paradigm and the rise of the debates on developmentalism, political scientists captured diasporic organisations under the notion of governance and diffusion (Délano/Gamlen 2014; Adamson 2016; Gamlen et al. 2017). Political scientists predict a rising power of global ethnic diasporas as a significant player in the international arena: on one hand, as a co-builder of nation-states and on the other hand, as an alternative to the nation-state model. Although this approach remains at the level of state regulations and legal discourses in the host countries, viewing diaspora from the top-down perspective as a bounded entity and an object to be governed, we should not overlook the multiple and dynamic character of diasporic identities and post-migrant engagement with the homeland 'from below'.

Following Roger Brubaker's (2005) critique of treating diasporic communities as unitary actors, I use the adjective 'diasporic' to de-substantialise a monolithic concept of 'diaspora' and understand it not as a reference to a bounded group, but as a category of practice, imagination and claim-making. Thus, in this book, I deploy the notion of 'diaspora' in reference to Armenians not as a unit of analysis, but rather as a metaphor and as a lived practice: historically complex social constructions and self-perceptions based on the transmission of imaginaries and distinctive identities across generations. Anthropologists are aware of the 'reification trap' and avoid treating diasporas as unitary actors. Their interest in deeper insights and micro-dynamics of social, cultural, economic and political relations reveal the complexity of the relationships at play. In this context, my aim is to de-essentialise the term by exploring the complexity and dynamic nature of migrants' descendant' identities and belongings. This book aims to examine the aspirations and practices of homeland tours that not only bind and attach individuals to the homeland but also promote a certain detachment, and imbalance and can contribute to the emergence of ambivalence within cross-border networks and belongings.

'Roots' and Return Mobilities: Moving Back and Moving Forward

Until the 1980s, studies of different migrant groups usually described the life and identification of displaced people from the perspective of the receiving society, without paying much attention to the role of migrants' links to their countries of origin. Consequently, throughout the twentieth century, migrant communities have been seen as a static phenomenon on the level of an isolated ethnic neighbourhood, on one hand, and as a transitional stage on the way to

assimilation into the mainstream society (the so-called melting pot ideology), on the other hand. This was one of the pitfalls of migration studies; scholars rarely addressed the middle way: a situation where migrants may claim to return to their homeland countries without completely giving up their ties to the residential land. The recent 'mobility turn' in anthropology and social sciences has criticised 'sedentarist metaphysics', a tendency to locate people in particular places with particular boundaries (Malkki 1992; Salazar/Jayaram 2016; Frello 2008).

Diasporic homeland engagement is rarely recognised as part of transnational mobility, as it may be 'invisible' or politically contested. However, an increasing number of second- and later-generation diasporic people of different descents undertake 'heritage' trips to their imagined or real 'ancestral homelands' (Basu 2007; Reed 2014; Kelly 2000; Brettel 2003; Stefansson 2004; Wessendorf 2013; Schramm 2010; Mahieu 2019). Susanne Wessendorf studied the relocation to the parents' country of origin and defined second-generation transnationalism among Swiss Italians as 'roots' migration, when the second-generation members migrate to a place where they originate from, but where they have never lived (Wessendorf 2007). The Armenian experience of individual homeland trips may be similar to the phenomenon of 'roots tourism' and 'genealogical journeys' made by people of Scottish descent ordinarily living in the United States and Canada (Basu 2007; Ray 2001). However, engaged travellers of Armenian descent do not perceive themselves as tourists in the Republic of Armenia and they are not involved in the intimate search for grandparents' graves.

It is not surprising that until the 2000s, return and homeland trips have been seen as structurally 'invisible and latent movements' and have been treated as part of individual biographies informally organised within family circles. Individual homecomings and even forced and voluntary mass return migrations are, indeed, areas with weak statistical evidence in both receiving and sending countries (Gmelch 1980; Markowitz/Stefansson 2004; Tsuda 2009; Darieva 2005, 2011). This situation started to change by the end of the 1990s with the emergence of transnational paradigms in understanding migration and multiple linkages to the homeland (Glick Schiller et al. 1995, Levitt 2001). At the same time, the transnational turn coincided with the development of modern technologies that technically provided better opportunities for global communication, as well as facilitating travel remittances to one's home country. What is crucial in this debate is that the global transnational paradigm questioned the notion of return as a one-way movement and instead sug-

gested the notion of circular and temporary migration modes. Studies of real return experiences have found that those who return still remain in transnational social fields. People often go back and re-emigrate to the host country (Cassarino 2013; Vertovec 2013; Abashin 2015).

Furthermore, a more dynamic perspective was developed by Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2008, 2012), who rightly appeals to flexibility in the types of returns by identifying short-term, circular models and virtual returns. In this context, the traditional notion of eventual return as a one-way movement cannot be applied to 'roots' mobilities. Most homeland travellers do not envision their homeland visits as permanent, and at the same time, the movement towards the homeland entails more than mere travel. In this regard, the term 'mobility' fits better than 'migration' as this book aims to take into account processes that go beyond migratory policies and includes social imaginaries, self-ascribed meanings and reflections on how 'people are moved by movements' (Svasek 2010; Elliot et al. 2017).

By looking at post-migrants' connections from these perspectives, we need to develop a more flexible understanding of diasporic engagement with the homeland. While scholars have paid more attention to labour and forced return migrations because these often occur during larger economic or political crises in the host- or homelands, less has been said about 'roots' mobilities and travel that can be organised in times of peace and relative stability (until 2022).

What's more, studies on return migration were predominantly focused on first-generation migrants, who can refer to a clear experiential one-way trajectory between host and home countries, as the latter is the birthplace of their parents (Cassarino 2013). George Gmelch (1980) who studied why people return and what the return means for them offered the following classic definition of this migration type: "Return migration is the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle". Interestingly, Gmelch noted that pull factors (the attraction of the place destination) are far more significant than push dimensions in promoting return migration. At the same time, the author found that patriotic and family-related reasons have a greater influence than economic-occupational factors. Some scholars observed that family ties and obligations to elderly parents belong to the classic motivation and explanation of the return to hometown communities, especially in rural areas and among labour migrants (King/Kılınc 2014; Abashin 2015). Nevertheless, we should be cautious with these findings, as family and economy are entangled spheres of social life, which are not easy to separate from each other. In their interviews, returnees

usually do not admit to the economic dimension and financial incentives of their return process.

The anthropology of transnational migrants' networks has consistently focused on the voices of subalterns, working-class people, poor urban dwellers, peasants in the city, transnational villagers and refugees. Prominent scholars of migration studies such as Glick Schiller have pointed out that migrants and displaced people create transnational social fields 'from below' (Levitt/Glick Schiller 2004). Similarly, Levitt identified the mode of 'transnational villagers' who envision their cross-border networks and social remittances within local family and kinship networks. These influential studies focused on less privileged first-generation migrants between two concrete geographical places, usually the city of residence and a native village. Some scholars have argued that the hostile attitude in the residence society and negative experiences of diasporic people influence post-migrants' 'return to the homeland' (Potter/Phillips 2006; Mazzucato 2008; Ankobrey et al. 2022). The issue of second- and later-generation well-educated post-migrants of multi-cultural backgrounds as a social group has been rarely discussed.

Many studies show that transnational attachments continue to be maintained among all types of migrants and the central question is to what extent migrants maintain and reproduce their (grand)parents' identifications (Glick Schiller 2005; Levitt/Jaworsky 2007; Mahieu 2019). The diasporic activists I met and interviewed in Armenia and the Boston area are predominantly educated, middle-class American or Canadian citizens, are assimilated into the North American culture and have experienced little hostility from the mainstream society that surrounds them. I aim to examine middle-class transnational behaviour with the anthropological intention to 'study-up' and look closely at the post-migration phenomenon that creates new transnational and translocal 'privileged' intermediary zones between two and more poles. This entails looking at a group of people who, through education and economic success, have achieved a social status in their residence society that enables them to practice a generous trip and transnational philanthropy culture as a form of 'roots' mobility. Similar to what Noel Salazar identified as a 'momentous mobility' (Salazar 2018) as an indicator for social status, this is a temporary valued movement that can be a central element structuring the modern biographies of diasporic youth.

By looking at variations of movements related to the homeland, I argue that 'roots' mobility can be understood more broadly as it includes later generations of post-migrants, diasporic members who develop new connections and pat-

terns of attachment to the homeland. It is this 'floating roots' perspective that I address in this book. However, it is not my intention to define it as the essential characteristic of all diasporic second- and later-generation Armenians.

As a global phenomenon, 'roots' mobilities are encouraged and driven by a variety of factors. Further, I suggest to take into consideration new dimensions of transnational mobilities that are empowered by external actors and aspirations beyond family and community associations. This is not just about economic reasons and the call of improved living standards (Knott 2010). First, it is a welcome policy launched by nation-states introducing legal frameworks for attracting and binding former citizens through dual citizenship, and admission programmes for co-ethnics living abroad (Germany, India, Croatia, Armenia). I hereby mean the role of the homeland state's ideology, affects and sentiments promoting the myth of return to a specific territory based on the idea of roots, blood connections, territory and the legislative right to return, which can be a main reason for resettlement with political implications. Diasporic expatriates are increasingly viewed by nation-states in Eastern Europe and the Global South as 'untapped' resources for a country's development and for solving demographic problems. The metaphors of expulsion, suffering, flight and famine are embedded in mass-migratory discourses and may become the key symbols in national resettlement programmes. After World War II, the calls for repatriation and 'diasporic return' became more prominent. Take for instance, the Israeli Law of Return (Markowitz 2004) and mass repatriations of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, Russia and Kazakhstan to Germany according to the *Vertriebenen- and Aussiedlergesetz* (Darieva 2005; Ipsen-Peitzmeier/Kaiser 2006). Similar to these movements is Kazakhstan's recent resettlement programme for ethnic Kazakhs *oralman* in Eurasia (Genina 2015; Finke et al. 2013), which grants millions of people the right to residence in the 'historical homeland', which is in compliance with the UN Conventions on Universal Human Rights (Article 13).[8] In this context, 'return' became possible not only to the parents' countries, but also to the countries of ancestral origin after living outside their homelands for generations (Tsuda 2009).[9]

Ironically, now in the age of transnationalism, the list of nation-states introducing the right of 'ethnic' return is growing. What began in Israel and Germany can now be found in other nation-states such as Ireland, India, Greece and Sweden, as well as in post-socialist countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Armenia. All these countries are engaged in encouraging the feelings of ethnic diasporic members to strive for reunion with the kin state. In official national discourses, newcomers are usu-

ally represented as a reproductive force, as a 'national good', helping to combat demographic problems. In October 2017, the then Armenian minister of Diaspora, Hranush Akopyan, announced that 2018 had been designated the year of repatriation for the Republic of Armenia and appealed to ethnic Armenians living abroad to return to their 'ancestral homeland'. Since 1991, the inter-ethnic military conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan and the energy crisis have caused a high rate of emigration in Armenia, mostly in the form of labour migration. Scholars warned that if current trends continue, the depopulation of Armenia may reach 1.5 million by 2050 (Poghosyan 2017). The then president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, was predicting that in this way Armenia's population would reach 4 million by 2040, not through increased birth rates, but through the return of diasporic Armenians. The repatriation law, which was designed to be in force for five years, has not been adopted, mostly due to the political changes in 2018 when the former President Serzh Sargsyan was forced to step down after weeks of mass protests. Following the Second Karabakh War (2020) with neighbouring Azerbaijan, the new Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has called the diasporic youth to return to the homeland. According to Pashinyan's speech, he gave in December 2018 following the 'Velvet' Revolution in 2018, the Armenia diaspora and the Republic of Armenia should form a single unit.[10] What is significant about these performative homeland calls is that it is not straightforward to engage a powerful and heterogeneous Armenian diaspora 'from above'. I describe in Chapter Two the calls of the Armenian nation-state to conceptualise a notion of 'flexible citizenship': a moral and legal framework for the symbolic repatriation of diasporic Armenians to create a sense of mutual belonging.

The second factor contributing to the mobilisation of diasporic attachments is the changing political discourse on migration, development and their effects on the homeland country (van Houte/Davids 2014). Some scholars have essentialised the bonds between diasporic members and the homeland by arguing that there is a growing sense of unity among diasporic people that leads to creating and maintaining linkages to the homeland, and, consequently, to increased investment of foreign aid in the development of the homeland (Merz et al. 2007).[11] This ascription of fixed belongings and teleological thinking was soon picked up in development discourses (Orozco 2005). As a result, international organisations have found 'the diaspora's activities' to be a potent (out)source of development, education, and to function as 'agents of peace-building' within conflict regions (Faist 2007, 2010; Hoehne et al. 2011; Brinkerhoff 2008).

These actors bring us to the third trendsetters in shaping diasporic homeland attachments and 'roots consciousness': international organisations. Global institutional actors promote return movements as a tool for the development of the Global South, as instruments for migration policy, which need to be managed, controlled and regulated (Skeldon 2008; Brinkerhoff 2012). Scholars of ethnic communities and diaspora studies have often overlooked the role of international organisations (International Organization for Migration) and global programmes (Volunteer Corps, World Bank) in supporting diaspora engagement with the homeland. International organisations are partly responsible for the worldwide proliferation of diasporic institutions (Gamlen et al. 2017) and contemporary Armenian experiences clearly demonstrate this trend.

The Emotional Dimension of 'Roots' Mobilities

What drives 'roots' flows and homeland attachments on an individual level? If it is not the desire for improved living standards or political repressions and negative experiences in the residence country, then what moves diasporic descendants towards the 'ancestral homeland'? These questions should be considered to understand the conditions, operation, and intensity of such movements.

Affects related to the possession of personal genealogies and parents' memories of belonging may play an important role as a crucial starting point and as a driver of mobility. Maruška Svasek and other scholars innovatively pointed out that "emotional processes shape mobilities, and vice versa" (Svasek 2010; Boccagni/Baldassar 2015; Elliot et al. 2017: 2). There is an increasing interest in the role of emotions and affects in transnational social fields, however the emotional dimension in the studies of return migration and 'roots' mobilities has been mostly overlooked (Wise/Velayutham 2017). Identifying an emerging field of research, Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham argue that studies of transnational communities need to focus on not only material flows and institutions, but rather on the circulation of emotions and affect for a better understanding of the viability of long-distance transnational social fields. This book draws on these concepts of transnational affect and suggests that the emotional dimension is linked to the capacities of return and 'roots' mobilities.

From an anthropological perspective, homeland travel and return mobilities can be seen as an emotional moment in a migrant's life based on ethnic

and cultural ties to their kin and ancestors (Markowitz 2004; Holsey 2004; Basu 2004a, 2004b). It is expected that members of a delocalised religious or ethnic minority will eventually 'go home' to their former community or nation-state from which they migrated. Anastasia Christou and Russell King (2011, 2015) characterise return and homecoming among members of the second generation as an 'existential journey to the source of the self', 'a desire, an imagination', a journey in which 'sacred sites' are claimed by the returnee. What these characterisations have in common is the view of the homeland journey as a sensual and to some extent as a ritualised activity. In this context, I elaborate on the emotional dimension of 'roots' mobility as an impetus for participation in diasporic transnational behaviour.

Attachment to the homeland can take many different forms and meanings, from real to symbolic, from static to dynamic, and from cultural to political. In its more simple form, it can include just hanging an image of the homeland in the living room. In a broader sense, attachments can be expressed in the construction of a diasporic neighbourhood, community centre or a museum with a 'sacred' place reserved for 'worshipping' the symbols of the land of exodus, or through developing economic activities of remittances including public activities of political associations (hometown associations) in the residing country.

By looking at different practices and imaginaries, this book draws attention to the affective dimensions of mobility that foster a willingness and intensity to engage with the 'homeland'. Recently, anthropologists have highlighted the relevance of emotions as an important dimension of identity and belonging, as a top-down policy through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world (Svazek 2010; Boccagni/Baldassar 2015). The memory of certain events in the past, traumatic events and commemorations of loss may become central to a group's identity politics. Armenians have produced highly emotional discourses that construct their 'ancestral homeland' as a holy lost homeland and a landscape of violence, grievance and hope. Once located in family stories and suppressed by the Soviet regime, the remembrance of the Armenian loss became a visible part of the public recording and global morality in the twenty-first century (Levy/Sznaider 2002; Darieva 2008).

The emotional dimension of attachment to a lost homeland may fuel the descendants of migrants to mobilise the willingness to reach out and touch the homeland, thus rejecting the idea of an inaccessible and lost homeland and producing a powerful force for change. Moreover, I argue that nostalgic ties to the past may acquire a new future-oriented dimension. This process may expand the old-fashioned parochial ethnic understanding of diaspora, which

is more about the past and static, into a new trend that opens up new relational features, feelings of belonging and routes to the homeland.

In addition to official, state-regulated mass return migration, we need to consider an alternative 'invisible' and 'softer' form of transnationalism and homeland tours that takes place at a micro-level. Mainly developed in the context of tourism studies, some scholars highlighted the phenomenon of 'roots'-seeking among different groups.[12] Prominent examples of this modern form of short-term mobility include transatlantic African American pilgrimage tourism to Ghana (Schramm 2004; Santos/Yan 2010; Reed 2014), or the flourishing 'homesick tourism' among ethnic Germans to Poland or the Czech Republic (Peleikis 2010; Powers 2011; Marschall 2015). Pilgrimage tourism among African Americans is not just limited to travel, but it is something deeper and more meaningful (Reed 2014:18). African Americans undertake tours to the imagined homeland as an important trip in their lifetime, which are essential for the enactment of stories of 'victimisation' such as the slave trade in Ghana.

Such travel experiences seem to play a significant role in modern self-identification processes and lifestyle mobility. Scholars, who studied pilgrimage tourism and symbolic homecoming among African Americans identified the impact of a powerful heritage industry in the US mediated through popular books, TV channels and the internet.[13] Indeed, there is a contemporary global fascination with roots searching and in particular among members of the middle-class as a form of individual lifestyle expression. My studies refer to these findings, however, they only partially bear out these generalisations.

Paul Basu studied the 'spiritual' migration experiences of genealogy search and discussed heritage tourism in Scottish Highlands that was developed in the 1980s in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. What is characteristic for this form of mobility is that tourists claim a Scottish heritage in a modern age characterised by rootlessness (Basu 2007: 218). I agree with Basu's understanding that 'roots' tourism creates the practice of worshipping specific places in the 'ancestral homeland' and objects containing sacred substance, which 'roots' tourists carry back to the diasporic centres. In this sense, attachment to fixed locations can drive people and social groups to move. All these studies deal with short-term tours to ethnic homelands generated by a commercial infrastructure, the genealogy industry in the US and in Europe, as well as governmental efforts to promote diaspora tourism.

What Paul Basu has left out is the possibility of conceptualising homeland travel as an act with political meaning. An interesting example of modern

'roots' mobility with political implications is the Jewish American homeland trip to Israel. By examining the effect of 'Birthright Israel' youth trips to Israel, Shaul Kelner rightly identifies the 'rational' side of diaspora pilgrimages, their strategic and instrumental character employed by Israel to encourage young people to "be more inquisitive and concerned about their identity …to appreciate and remain in the Jewish fold" (Kelner 2010: 45). In contrast to Basu's approach, Kelner revealed that political socialisation is central to the 'tours that bind'. In this regard, I argue that renewed pathways to the homeland range from social to political one and create a new itinerary of desires, hope and pride, a trajectory of geopolitical claims in peripheral regions intertwined with the politics of emotions.

This opens up an innovative view on 'doing diaspora' between emotional adventures and political claims. When we consider 'heritage' and 'roots' movements among migrant descendants such as Irish Americans, African Americans, British Arabs and Armenian Americans, the parents' birthplace in one specific village or one specific town for most remains largely symbolic, but may be turned into a powerful metaphor, which mobilises new diasporic generations for a long-distance trip and civil engagement. The question to be explored here is: how and under what circumstances do second- and later-generation post-migrants construct new spaces of engagement and legitimisation beyond state institutions? To what extent and under which circumstances do 'roots' travellers claim their right to belonging and (re)possessing the homeland, thus participating in the making of a homeland? Which tangible and emotional infrastructures emerge that facilitate these interactions?

Reflections on Research Methods

Addressing the issue of methodology, I rely on a mix of qualitative research methods and anthropological tools of a long-term and multi-sited ethnography between the Boston area and the Republic of Armenia. More precisely, *Making a Homeland* is based on a set of empirical data gathered during several fieldwork trips undertaken in these two countries over almost ten years between 2007 and 2015. These long-term frameworks enabled me to return to my fieldwork again and again to observe the changing dynamics of homeland attachments among Armenians in the diaspora and the ways this relatively small country is vividly connected to different parts of the world.

Methodologically, I used different techniques for tracing and following geographically dispersed persons, Armenians in North America and in the Republic of Armenia. My multi-sited research included selected localities in the US and Armenia with two central sites: Yerevan in Armenia and the Boston area in the US. Embedded in two completely different political, economic and cultural environments, these places are two separate poles, yet connected by cultural ties– diaspora-homeland relations, which are not necessarily personal and intimate. The methods and tools I used during my fieldwork were predominantly qualitative, anthropologically informed and based on participant observations, expert and biographical interviews and informal talks with key informants and diasporic members. However, during the course of the project, I have noticed a need for additional materials such as texts and online data. For instance, valuable data was found in the application forms of volunteers, museum and NGO guest books, and organisations' narratives, as well as through systematic long-term online research in websites and Facebook entries.

Overall, the collected data includes 27 in-depth interviews with homeland travellers, mostly young volunteers I interviewed in Yerevan and suburbs. The volunteers were usually English-speaking young men and women between the age of 21 and 35. Additionally, I collected and analysed written sources gathered from diasporic organisations, such as 72 motivation letters of young volunteers recruited by Armenian Volunteers Corps and Birthright Armenia between 2005 and 2008. Furthermore, I rely on the analysis of fifteen interviews I conducted with experts in both countries and ten biographical interviews with Armenian Americans in the Boston area that donate to the homeland on a regular basis. These interviews are supplemented with the results of participant observation in Yerevan and the Boston area (Watertown), diary notes from informal conversations, including those with local Armenians, from gatherings and email correspondence between the United States (Boston), Armenia and Germany. These ethnographic field notes helped me reflect on what I had heard in the interviews and seen in online research materials and visuals. English, Russian and Armenian were my languages of communication in the field. Finally, I had a chance to collect a set of guest book entries at museums and diasporic volunteers' centres that provided insightful sources and references for understanding the emotional views and individual experiences of homeland travellers. Although diasporic travellers identify their tours to the homeland in different ways, they generally tend to see themselves as 'roots' pilgrims with a meaningful destination, specific motivations shaped by a 'mission to improve' life in post-Soviet Armenia.

Reading about the research methods, one may ask what is anthropological about these two settings of research and the application of qualitative and ethnographic methods. Perhaps, the best way to describe my long-term study experiences is by the term 'translocal research', coined by Ulf Hannerz (2003). Multi-sited ethnography is sometimes criticised for its 'thin character' and fragmented data. Karen Fog Olwig noted that for those who study migrant family networks claim to implement an in-depth multi-sited ethnography, which is in fact a difficult task that results in 'jet-set ethnography' (Olwig 2002). During my research, I did not follow travellers and volunteers physically on their tours, but conceptually through online research, travelogues, and online data stretching across continents. Additionally, I tried to keep a double gaze on the field sites. This is a challenging task for anthropologists who used to locate their issues in small places. Researchers studying mobility, global transnational and translocal connections should aim to simultaneously capture local lived practices and macro processes that structure the world we study. To do this, we need a transdisciplinary view on the issues and phenomena we study, bringing together different discussions, analyses, and large-scale perspectives in neighbouring disciplines (political scientists and economics) such as the debates on diaspora, return mobilities and political regimes. This double gaze was not always systematic; rather it depended on continuous interactions and adjustments of research questions.

During my fieldwork, case studies of significant individuals and situations were relevant to understand the actors' inner motivations and the logic of strategies, in particular the role of a key person. Anthropologists use those techniques, such as following a key person and key informant, which can counteract the fragmentation of multi-sited research. As Marcus suggests, field studies, although framed in multi-sited imaginary, should remain 'site-specific and intensive' (Marcus 1995). My case study involves long-term observation of one specific organisation in a specific place, with longer breaks in between. Following the same person over different periods means an attempt to continue having relations even after finishing the research. Anthropologists do share their experiences with other social scientists by 'entering the field' and gathering information, but we do not necessarily share the same rule of 'departing the field' as non-anthropologists usually do. For instance, the continuous effort to monitor the sustainability of Armenia-oriented transnational engagement among Armenian American diasporic organisations required not only a systematic updating of online data, but also a physical return to the field for participant observations and face-to-face contact with a 'key person'.

This approach provided a valuable source for testing hypotheses and obtaining reliable data for understanding the dynamics of diasporic mobilities and the changing logic of their motivations.

The Outline

Chapter One, 'Repositioning the Homeland', starts with a discussion of multiple homeland geographies and the issue of ambiguous relations between the diaspora and the homeland. Over the twentieth century, global diasporic Armenians did not consider the territory of former Soviet Armenia as their homeland. However, after gaining independence in 1991, many diasporic Armenians whose actual roots are in Turkey and the Middle East started to collectively view the former Soviet Republic of Armenia as their 'ancestral homeland'. In discussing this shift in relations between diasporic communities in North America and the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia, I emphasise the centrality of cultural icons in the reconfiguration and production of homeland attachment. These affective imaginaries, which take material form in maps and museum artefacts, are focused on reviving the memory of loss and its global performance. The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan evolved as the central 'iconic place' of Armenian loss and pain. I show how the unspoken idea of loss and pain was transformed over two decades into a material world of politics of (re)possessions. Representations of loss make up the core of contemporary global diasporic Armenian identity politics and the emotional framework for mobilising diasporic 'roots' mobility.

Chapter Two, 'Discovering the Homeland', traces emerging transnational infrastructures facilitating the modern diasporic engagement with the 'ancestral homeland'. Through the lens of an ethnographic approach and interviews with stakeholders, I identify a new generation of diasporic organisations that differ from conventional ethnic hometown associations in political, social and geographical dimensions. I describe a variety of diasporic civil initiatives and cultural techniques established in the 2000s, some of which are explicitly homeland-oriented and employ travel and volunteering as instruments to forge new cultural and political connections between diasporic centres and the Republic of Armenia. The organisations that best represent this tendency are Birthright Armenia, Armenian Volunteer Corps and RepatArmenia.

Researching the institutionalisation of homeland trips also involves examining legal frameworks of cross-border mobility and state diaspora

programmes developed by the Armenian nation-state. The post-socialist Armenian state is an important actor in attempting to attract the powerful Western Armenian diaspora and is increasingly interested in the strategic use of diasporic investment to assist with the development of its impoverished economy. Based on the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy, the Armenian governmental authorities have developed the concept of 'spiritual repatriation' as a regulatory form of immigration. However, these policies have a limited effect on Western diasporic members and their political integration into the Armenian nation-state.

In Chapter Three, 'Travelling the Homeland', I develop my arguments by shifting the focus to the individual narratives of travellers. I analyse the concepts and practices behind a 'meaningful trip' among young professionals of Armenian descent who claim to come to Armenia to 'move mountains'. The chapter deals with the question of how diasporic youth 'discovers', 'travels' and 'makes' the 'ancestral homeland' as a destination and a place of opportunity in the twenty-first century. In reference to these observations, interviews and written documents, I outline the ways in which the Republic of Armenia is perceived, experienced and incorporated into the modern biographies of post-migrant activists. To do this, I delve deeper into cross-border motivations and youth's aspirations. This material is exemplified though three different portraits of ordinary volunteers and their ways of 'making a homeland'. In this sense, the chapter highlights the temporary dimension of 'roots' mobilities that produce different pathways for 'journeys to the future' among diasporic youth.

Chapter Four, 'Constructing Bonds to the Homeland', examines the most popular and important way of 'doing diaspora' that exemplifies the culture of diasporic philanthropy, which contributes significantly to constructing and maintaining bonds to the homeland. By focusing on motivations, structure and techniques of giving among Armenian Americans in the Boston area, I discuss diasporic culture of giving, cross-border monetary transactions, between the Western type of instrumental NGO giving and the spontaneous emotional notion of giving.

Chapter Five, 'Making the Homeland', addresses the notion of long-distance 'visceral' connections by examining why and how diasporic Armenians were 'getting rooted' within the 'ancestral homeland' despite the lack of intimate (family) links to the Republic of Armenia. I apply an ethnographic approach to gain insights into the formation of modern 'visceral connections' through examining new materialities of diasporic 'sanctuaries', such as the idea of tree planting and reforestation projects on selected territories. Nature

and the idea of 'roots' are used as a metaphor and instrument for a tangible intergenerational connection. The main actor in this section is the non-profit organisation Armenian Tree Project. Based in the Boston area and inspired by the global idea of reforestation, the Armenian Tree Project creates a new emotional power for maintaining philanthropic culture and emerging diasporic patriotism. Finally, the Conclusion summarises the key mechanisms behind 'roots' mobilities identifying new research opportunities for the study of 'roots' mobility.

Notes

1 There is a solid literature on the life of French Armenians and their relationships to the homeland in Armenia. This study is focused on English language literature and does not claim to cover all Armenian diasporic networks.

2 According to the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of Armenia, in 2019–2021, 27.000 foreign citizens have received citizenship of Armenia, around 5000 others have received a permanent or special residence status. Since the full scale war in Ukraine (February 2022), Armenia witnessed a large flow of Russian citizens to Armenia, many among them are of Armenian descent. See armenpress.am/eng/news/1092958.html.

3 According to Birthright Armenia, during the pandemic in 2020–22, even though the number of volunteers and homeland travellers has diminished, the trend remained constant.

4 There was a number of Western Armenians who were repatriated to Soviet Armenia in the 1940s after Stalin's call to repopulate the lost territories to be reclaimed from Turkey (Mouradian 1979; Suny 1993a; Stepanyan 2010; Pattie 2004a; Ter Minassian 2007; Melkonian 2010; Lehmann 2012). In fact, Soviet repatriation campaigns started in the early 1920's and continued during the interwar period, and after Stalin's call around 100.000 Western Armenians arrived in Armenia in 1946–48, representing around 10% of the Armenian population. During the thaw period and in the 1970s, Western communists of Armenian descent organised visits to Armenia for the younger generations. In this sense, the emergence of the diasporic return idea and practice is observable even before the end of the Soviet Union.

5 At the beginning of the 1990s, discussions of diaspora began to include many other cases, and as Tölölyan argued, the term diaspora "now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic community and minority", even as they have been largely assimilated into the host community (Tölölyan 1991). This rather broad conception has led to a kind of devaluing of the term 'diaspora' and demands for further clarifications. Cohen tried to clarify global diaspora as a sociological category (Cohen 1997) and proceeded to distinguish among various types of diasporas, such as 'victim diasporas' (Africans and Armenians), 'labor diasporas' (Indians), 'imperial diasporas' (British), 'trade diasporas' (Chinese and Lebanese). However, given that diasporic communities demonstrate high levels of internal heterogeneity and that various types of diasporic categories can be applied to one group, this definition did not advance theoretical discussions. Some scholars refrained from providing a definitive list of criteria and preferred to stress social and cultural dimensions of the term diaspora. Steven Vertovec (Vertovec/Cohen 1999) proposed "diaspora as a social form", "diaspora as a type of consciousness", and "diaspora as a model of cultural production".

6 Putting the term 'diaspora' into the Russian search engine Yandex resulted in 82 million hits as of January 2019. Google gives over 5.9 million hits for 'Armenian diaspora' and over 350.000 for new diasporic communities in Eurasia such as Kazakh or Uzbek diasporic communities.

7 Natalia Kosmarskya suggested to use the term *dvizhenie protiv techeniya* (counter-movement) for those ethnic Russians in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) who decided to 'go back' to Russia after the decline of the Soviet Union.

8 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states in article 13 that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

9 The destination of the 'homeland' is rarely questioned, although the homeland may appear diffuse and diverse, as in the case of ethnic Jews, Armenians, Kazakhs, or Germans. For instance, Jewish immigrants in Israel can become Israelis with a relative ease, Russian Germans in Germany experience difficulties and disillusions, while Brazilian Japanese emigrants remain Brazilians, a marginalised social group known as *nikkejin* in Japan.

10 The Ministry of Diaspora, which was launched in 2008, should be abolished as part of wider government reforms in order to achieve more effective governance and exchanges. See in: https://armenpress.am/eng/news/958743.html"\l"_blank". Last accessed on 16.01.2019.

11 The meaning of economic and social remittances for migrants and their families in sending countries has been widely discussed in the literature (Levitt 1998, 2001; Lacroix et al. 2016).

12 Such as Jewish Americans (Kelner 2010), Chinese Americans (Louie 2004), Lithuanian-Americans (Kelly 2000), Greek and Scottish heritage homecomings (Basu 2007) or recent pan-African pilgrimage tourism in Ghana (Schramm 2004; Reed 2014).

13 The most prominent among them is perhaps the television series "Roots: the Saga of an American Family" (Haley 1976), which captured the imagination of Americans of all ethnic backgrounds (Reed 2014) and opened up a space for Americans to search for their identities beyond their living rooms.

Chapter 1. Repositioning the Homeland

> "It is normal to find an event of great loss at the foundation of a nation."
> *(Feuchtwang 2007:17)*

In this chapter, I highlight the issue of multiple homeland geographies that may lead to ambiguous relations between the diaspora and the homeland. This includes the recent shift in relations between two poles. For a long period over the twentieth century, Western diasporic Armenians did not view the territory of the former Soviet Armenia as the object of their homeland desires. After Armenia's independence in 1991, this situation has changed and many diasporic activists with roots in Turkey now view the territory of the Republic of Armenia as the site of their 'ancestral homeland'. As a result, with the onset of the twenty-first century, an abstract notion of the homeland associated with a 'cultural heritage' has been transformed into a more tangible homeland, one conceived as a destination. Razmik Panossian, a Canadian political scientist is rather sceptical about the euphoric shift in diasporic perceptions of the self and space, and identified this new quality of the diaspora's attitude to the independent Armenian Republic as related to the "drunkenness of statehood" (Panossian 2015).

In this context, I begin by briefly describing the historical background of the formation of diasporic communities in North America and the notion of multiple geographies of the homeland. The second part of the chapter highlights the shift in self-representations of Armenian loss (*yeghern*) and globalization of memory on Armenian genocide. As a result, this turn offered a unique opportunity for diasporic people to participate in a new field of transnational activities. The chapter addresses this issue and examines the ways diasporic activists re-conceptualise the former 'stepmother' homeland into a new diaspora space. As a result of the memorialisation of the Armenian loss in Yerevan, the capital city has become the focal point for Armenian identifications, lead-

ing to the creation of one uniting force for global Armenians (Ter-Ghazaryan 2013; Kasbarian 2015). By focusing on the central 'iconic place' of Armenian loss and pain manifested at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute in Yerevan, I show how, in the 2000s, the unspoken idea of loss and pain was transformed into a powerful material world of museum artefacts. The most striking feature of this interaction is that the representation is empowered by the incorporation of international actors.

Formation of Armenian Diasporic Communities

Figure 1.1: The Image of the Homeland

Source: Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA), Watertown, US, Darieva 2009.

The formation of Armenian diasporic communities worldwide has a long history and there is extensive research and literature on representations and identity formation in multiple Armenian communities in the United States, Canada, France, Russia and the Middle East. The establishment and evolution of each of these communities was inevitably shaped by specific social and political contexts in which they found themselves. My discussion in this chapter

is limited to English- and Russian-speaking literatures and does not pretend to be exhaustive in the field of Armenian diaspora activities and self-representations. Below, I provide a general overview of different pathways of migration, experiences of integration into societies where Armenian migrants and their decedents reside, and a complexity of homeland geographies.

Exile and dispersion, forced and voluntary, have shaped de-territorialised identities and led to a multiplicity of Armenian self-representations. Along with Jews and Greeks, Armenians are associated with the 'paradigmatic diaspora' (Cohen 1997; Tölölyan 1991). The Armenian diaspora called *spyurk* emerged in Western countries over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through forced and voluntary migration to a number of destinations, resulting in the creation of a multiplicity of diasporic communities across a range of countries –especially in the United States, Canada, Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Bakalian 1993; Panossian 2006; Siekierski/Trobst 2016). The term *spyurk* (diaspora), which is largely used by Western diasporic Armenians, was adopted from the Greek *speirein* (to scatter) as well as the Hebrew word *galut;* in Armenian *gaghut* (colony) (Suny 1993b: 214; Dyatlov/Melkonyan 2009).

Dispersed Armenian migrants usually articulate own collective claims and hopes around the Apostolic Church, cultural festivals, commemorative practices regarding the violent past (the Armenian genocide of 1915); the erection of memorial stones at community centres (*khachkar*); and the recent trend to create voluntary associations on the level of NGOs that led to the building of religious and secular diasporic institutions in different cities in the United States, Canada, South America and Europe.[1]

With their different stories of migration, forced or voluntary, diasporic Armenians make up relatively small ethnic minorities worldwide, however they seem to be building a vivid part of contemporary multi-ethnic urban populations in America and Europe. Second, many scholars highlight internal diversity that Armenians demonstrate in the diasporic context. They are usually divided into two or three different groups characterised by various political narratives, different histories of exodus, different strategies of integration, and different constructions of 'we' identities in regard to the host society.

According to Armenian American discourses, more than 1.2 million diasporic Armenians reside in North America. A larger group of Armenian diasporic communities live in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe with different levels of self-organisations (Dyatlov/Melkonian 2009; Siekierski/ Trobst 2016; Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017). The Armenian migration to Central and East-

ern Europe in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries is considered to be a voluntary migration as it emerged as a result of trade and labour migration. Konrad Siekierski and Stefan Trobst (2016) noted a visible rise in Armenian communities across post-socialist Eastern Europe, who now make up a new vivid part of the contemporary urban population in Eastern Europe. Armenians in Russia and Eastern Europe make up the largest group (Dyatlov/Melkonian 2009), around two million. In contrast to Western diasporic Armenians, they show strong links to the homeland in the Republic of Armenia.

Second, internal diversity is a primary concern among scholars of Armenian diasporic studies (Payaslian 2010; Panossian 2015; Gorman/Kasbarian 2015). As Hakob Matevosyan (2016) highlights, for instance, Armenians in Hungary are divided into two different groups characterised by two different ethnic narratives, at least two histories of exodus, different strategies of integration, and different constructions of 'we and they' images in regard to the host society. The fundamental difference between *Hayastantsi* (Armenians who live in Armenia or recently migrated from the country) and *Spyurkahay* (Diaspora Armenians) is crucial leading to the creation of two main modes of 'Armenianness' (Payaslian 2008, 2010).

The organisation and specific features of Armenian diasporic associations in Western countries and in the former socialist world seem to differ from each other in terms of how they mobilise cultural and social capitals to achieve status within host and home societies. The Armenian Apostolic Church and related community institutions do not play a crucial role in Russia and Eastern Europe, which is in contrast to the role of religious organisations in the preservation and mobilisation of diasporic identities in the United States, Canada and in the Middle East (Ter-Matevosyan et al. 2017). Konrad Siekierski rightly observed the weak presence of pan-Armenian social and cultural charity culture in post-socialist Europe, especially in comparison to the North American case, where Armenian diasporic organisations have developed strong ethnic and philanthropic infrastructures.

Armenian migrants in Europe and in North America have often been quick to drop their language, leading to high levels of cultural assimilation and integration into the host society. Consequently, the dominance of individual choice in ethnic belonging marks the identity of diasporic Armenians, in particular American Armenians (Suny 1993b: 216; Dyatlov 2016: 37).

Generally, Armenian homeland-diaspora relations are characterised by a relatively low level of political engagement with the homeland and a weak direct collaboration between diasporic organisations and governmental struc-

tures of the Republic of Armenia (Panossian 2015; Payaslian 2008). For Western diasporic Armenians, the remote homeland was never a crucial source of power, either in political or economic terms. As Suny (1993b) outlined, except for a small group of leftist sympathisers, a large part of the diaspora in North America and in Europe maintained a political and cultural distance from Soviet Armenia.

After arriving in the United States and Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century, Armenian migrant communities shared many features with other immigrant groups in North America. Initially, assimilation into mainstream society was prioritised – a process considered unavoidable and irreversible. However, this did not entail the erosion of cultural identity or of the ties to one's ethnic community; from the 1960s onwards it meant carving out a legitimate place for Armenians in the host country, ensuring the community's political recognition in American and Canadian society. Consequently, the original Armenian diasporic organisations devoted themselves principally to strengthening local communities – in Boston, Washington, Fresno, Montreal and elsewhere. This involved the establishment of cultural centres, museums, churches and schools, all of which served not only as vehicles for the preservation and promotion of Armenian culture, but also as platforms for political lobbying and participation in the public life of the mainstream society. From the 1960s to the 1990s, for instance, much political activity was invested in seeking and eventually achieving the official recognition of the 1915 Ottoman genocide of Armenians, which has become the main marker of identity and status for the Armenian community in the host societies both in North America and in Western Europe.[2]

From the early 1980s until the end of the 1990s, 'multiculturalism' in North America became the dominant ideological and policy framework through which liberal democracies started to negotiate identity politics, especially in relation to race and ethnicities. Paradoxically, the multicultural turn led to a considerable rise in significance of the folk concept of ethno-cultural heritage, resulting in an almost industrial-scale boom in both individual and collective quests for 'roots' and genealogy among North Americans more generally (Glick Schiller 2005; Reed 2014). The 'transnational turn' in migration studies in the mid-1990s and new technologies again strengthened paradigmatic diasporic communities in their consolidation and provided a new platform for diasporic elites to 'come back' to their roots via travel to the 'ancestral homeland'. One of the consequences of this has been that the original emphasis that immigrant communities placed on securing and strengthening their position

within the host society now shifted towards efforts to reconnect with their homelands, which are idealised as repositories of ethno-cultural origins. It was this 'heritage turn' that began to re-orient significant parts of Armenian diasporic activism and local charity culture into mobile transnational forms of engagement with the 'ancestral homeland' in Armenia.

Multiple Geographies of the Homeland

One feature that is often overlooked in the studies of diaspora and homeland relations is the idea of the 'ancestral homeland' can consist of more than one specific territory and one nation-state. For instance, those 'paradigmatic' global diasporas (Jews, Armenians and Greeks), which emerged after the decline of multi-ethnic imperial formations such as the former Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia can refer to more than one nation-state and territorial landscapes. The unravelling of two Empires (Ottoman and Russian) and the growing nationalism in the Balkans, the Caucasus and in the Middle East were both cause and consequence of World War I and resulted in multiple relocations and the death of millions (Reynolds 2011). Armenians have been scatted throughout the world. As a result, at least three geographical areas can be delineated as the Armenian 'ancestral homelands' relevant for diasporic Armenian identity today. Among them: the territory of the former Ottoman Empire (mostly Eastern Anatolia, today Turkey), the Middle Eastern states of Iran, Lebanon and Egypt where Armenians still make up visible religious minorities, and the Republic of Armenia, the post-socialist nation-state in the South Caucasus.

Over the course of the twentieth century, as part of their diasporic imaginaries, diasporic Armenians have developed a complex, ambiguous and controversial geography of these 'homelands'. In her study of these imaginaries among first- and second-generation Armenians living in the United States, Greece, and Cyprus, Susan Pattie has identified at least three parallel constructs of the Armenian homeland (Pattie 2005: 55). A sketch of these complex imaginations are important as they shed light on the dynamics of diasporic identifications and the changing metaphorical diasporic space that produces the notion of 'distinctive spatiality' (Knott 2010).

The first notion of the Armenian homeland, termed *hayrenik* (fatherland), refers to the emotional image of a grandparent's birthplace, and tends to be identified mostly with the villages and towns of the 'Western Armenian'

provinces (*Kharput, Mush, Kessab, Antep* and others) – areas, which were once part of the Ottoman Empire and are today located in Turkey. In practice, however, the notion of *hayrenik* tends to extend beyond the Anatolian Plateau to the Ottoman Empire more generally, which becomes in itself conceptualised as the Armenian's diaspora's 'exodus land' as well as 'fatherland'. Consequently, *hayrenik* is often made to include other areas in the former Ottoman Empire, such as parts of Syria or Egypt, where Armenians used to be a prominent Christian minority. This homeland is predominantly associated with the past and rarely considered as a place of modern diasporic desire and travel destination. The second and third imaginaries of the Armenian 'homeland' are both called *Hayastan*, but refer to very different constructs.

The second homeland imaginary is an assemblage of mythical landscapes and romantic narratives about the past glories of an ancient land – *Mets Hayk* (Greater Armenia or Armenian Highlands). The term Greater Armenia mentioned in the ancient Latin historiography is used to refer to Armenian kingdoms throughout the classical, late antique and medieval periods. The Kingdom of Cilicia, is considered to be a separate Lesser Armenia, especially since the Armenians from the Eastern provinces were displaced in the seventeenth century by the Persians and the Ottomans, before returning after the Russian conquest. The mythical kingdom *Mets Hayk*, which dates back to 585–200 BC is supposed to have stretched from the Black to the Caspian Sea. More specifically, the kingdom's boundaries were located between the Kura River, the Pontic mountain range, the Euphrates River, and the Taurus Mountain (Panossian 2006: 34). However, neither this medieval *Hayastan*, associated with ancient history, nor the more intimate *hayrenik*, associated with Ottoman violence and expulsion, have clear-cut political borders in the present. The amorphous nature of these two 'homelands' means that they partially overlap and fuse with one another in the diaspora's cultural self-representations and collective memory.

The third construct of 'homeland', also dubbed *Hayastan*, contrasts the above two in that it refers to a territory with concrete political boundaries – namely, the present-day Republic of Armenia, although it usually includes the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, or *Artsakh* in Armenian, which, while technically still part of Azerbaijan, is currently an unrecognised quasi-independent state. According to Pattie (2005), the relationship of Western Armenians in the diaspora towards this Eastern *Hayastan* has historically been quite ambivalent. The Armenian Republic has been viewed as at best a 'small corner' of the greater *Hayastan*. It is certainly never identified with the glories

of the ancient Armenian Highlands nor with the heartland of the country, known as *Yerkir* in Armenian (country), which was mainly in the Ottoman Armenian provinces. In fact, it is usually marked off as separate from the diaspora (*spuyrk*), and is often relegated to being merely a 'backyard' and 'stepmother' of the Armenian World (Payaslian 2010: 132; Gorman/Kasbarian 2015). This goes hand in hand with a somewhat condescending attitude that many diasporic Armenians based in Western countries display towards the *hayastantsy*, the population of Armenia itself (Pattie 2005). Aside from bearing the taint of ideological otherness during Soviet times, this *Hayastan* is also identified as the land of the 'Eastern Armenians', who speak a different dialect to the diaspora and who have had a very different history to that of the 'Western Armenians' (Mouradian 1979; Suny 1996; Payaslian 2010). Having said that, the main nationalist political organisation in the Armenian diaspora, the *Dashnaks*[3] have long campaigned for the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh to join Eastern Anatolia in Turkey in order to create a new Armenian nation-state where the diaspora could start to resettle, just like the Jews had done in Israel (Phillips 1989; Suny 1993b).

As a result, connections between the Soviet Republic of Armenia and the Armenian diasporic communities in North America and Western Europe were weak and irregular until the late 1980s.[4] Politically, there was little interest among diasporic members in the Armenian nation building that went on in the Soviet republic within the distinctive framework of the Soviet nationalities policy (Suny 1993a; Suny/Martin 2001). A major turning point then took place in the wake of the 1988 earthquake, which prompted an emotional outpour among North American diasporic communities. This was perfectly in line with the perestroika era rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the West under Mikhail Gorbachev. During the 1990s, after the Republic of Armenia gained its independence, many diasporic Armenians continued to donate money to this new country's impoverished economy (Dudwick 2003). A few even undertook individually organised tourist trips to Armenia, which included a visit to the Armenian Genocide Memorial complex in Yerevan, an iconic place for the Armenian world.

An Iconic Place in Yerevan

The memorialisation of the Armenian genocide is central to contemporary global Armenian identity. During my first field trips to Armenia in 2005–2006, many local experts and ordinary people emphasised that in Soviet times, there was very little verbal and visual representations of the Armenian trauma and expulsion in public spaces. Until the beginning of the 1980s, it was scarcely communicated in school books and included only some lines with complicated numbers and dates. In contrast, according to diasporic writers and historians, the memory of the genocide was an integral and continuous part of diasporic identification and everyday life (Kasbarian 2018).

The Soviet Union promoted another dominant, powerful collective memory of violent loss: commemoration of the victory and remembrance of the fallen soldiers in World War II, called the Great Patriotic War. One particular feature this central element of Soviet collective memory was the way it was homogenised and perpetuated through numerous monuments, texts, memorialising practices, the latter of which saw a shift to the notion of struggle with geopolitical rivals.[5] As a result, according to Tumarkin (1994: 121), the political theatre of glorifying the unknown fallen hero of the Soviet Union left little space for individual, local and ethnic expressions of pain and loss.[6] In my view, however, this statement needs to be discussed more carefully as it seems that alternative ideas of commemorating the past on the periphery of Soviet Empire remained hidden and have been overlooked by historians.

At first glance, an Armenian collective desire to mark a particular historical memory and reinforce cultural belonging did not conflict with socialist cosmology. It seems that the Armenian memory of loss encapsulated in the socialist order had produced specific de-contextualised and quite paradoxical forms of memory. Until 1965, in Soviet Armenia the memory of the violent loss and expulsion of Armenians was almost a political taboo. Publicly, the knowledge about death and loss was restricted to a very limited space hidden between the lines of exclusive departments of the National Academy of Sciences and state archives with highly restricted access. As a result, the art of remembering the Armenian loss in Armenia took a fragmented and formulaic form in the production of academic books filled with official documents, which were far removed from popular practices of remembering.

Dissent with Soviet versions is, however, recognisable through social acts of mourning the wounded history. If one looks at existing 'silent disagreements', so-called small acts of private remembrance of loss in Soviet Armenia

are mostly encoded through social practices of knowing about descent, which tended to find their origins in the territories beyond the Armenian-Turkish border, in 'Western Armenia'. This could include private acts, such as singing songs half in Armenian and half in Turkish, or the possession of a few household objects recalling the expulsion after 1915, most of which existed in the Soviet past predominantly in hidden spaces that were suppressed and merged with the Soviet cult of the struggle against fascism. Thus, in spite of the political silence during the Soviet period, the memory of violent loss (*yeghern*) was a part of Armenian social identity that found its first public articulation in Yerevan in the mid-1960s during Khrushchev's political thaw. Anti-authoritarian demonstrations in 1965 in Yerevan are seen by local historians not only as the expression of sentiment against forgetting the Armenian tragedy, but also as marking a claim for territories in Turkey (Abrahamian 2006, Kaufman 2001; Suny 1993b).[7] Just shortly after this event, in December 1967, a Communist Party resolution led to the erection of a genocide memorial on the hill of Tsitsernakaberd, close to central Yerevan. From the moment the monument was built, hidden remembrance practices became publicly staged and controlled by the Soviet authorities in Yerevan. From the mid-80s onwards, an annual mourning ceremony on 24 April has become a commemorative event. On that day, a mourning community, including officials, local residents and tourists, gather at the bottom of the hill and slowly move to the top towards the Genocide Memorial, pilgrim-like, carrying red tulips and white carnations to lay down at the eternal flame typical for the official socialist commemoration culture.

After 1965, the remembering of the catastrophic event was thus officially allowed in Armenia, although it was converted into a commemorative ceremony of a very specific kind. The construction of a monument brought a new sacred site into the iconography of Soviet Armenians and the urban memorial landscape, but did not signal a radical change in the politics of memory, as the commemoration of the Armenian loss became strongly incorporated into the Soviet model of national remembrance and the Soviet Union's foundation myth of World War II. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia set out to incorporate the atrocities of the Ottoman Turks toward the Armenians into the framework of the antifascist struggle of the Soviet people against Hitler's aggression and expansion. Thus, the Armenian pain suffered during World War I was merged with the common suffering in the course of the Great Patriotic War against Hitler. The inclusive interpretation of the struggle against fascism easily combined Hitler's Germany with Turkey into a com-

mon image of the enemy, since Germany had built a political alliance with the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Explicit ethnic connotations of the loss were quite invisible during that time, with the sole exception of the presence of Armenian Christian mourning music by Komitas[8], which was played at the top of the hill during the ceremonies. In this way, the site was invisibly and implicitly 'filled' with a specific sound that converted it into a sacral place with a deep emotional resonance.

Promoted by Hakob Zarobian, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, the Armenian Genocide Memorial complex was erected in 1967, to the 47th anniversary of the Soviet Socialist Armenian Republic. Over the years, political Orthodoxy demanded one historical interpretation of the Genocide Memorial as a symbol of the Soviet struggle against fascism and a symbol of the regeneration through the 'rising from the ashes'. As for the design of the Genocide Memorial, it was influenced by the monumental architecture of Soviet war memorials. Visual forms of the Soviet representation of sacred World War II memories can be traced on many levels. These include: 1) the memorial's location on a grassy hill at a distance from the city centre and beyond everyday life infrastructure; 2) typical monumental stone design including a triumphal obelisk; 3) an enormous mourning avenue without any signs or inscriptions; 4) the Soviet tradition of mourning and remembrance of the dead by having officials and soldiers place memorial garlands around the tomb of Unknown Soldier during a minute of silence. The massive grey stone mausoleum, composed of twelve slabs with the eternal flame inside of a round construction, took on the meaning of a collective grave. Another part of the monument, a separate needle-shaped stone obelisk located next to the tomb officially symbolised the rise of Armenian people from the dead and their regeneration within the Soviet space. The monument did not show death as such, and, until the Karabakh war at the beginning of 1991, had never played a role of a place for burials and tombs.[9]

The most striking feature of the whole design of the monument was the absence of any ethnic Armenian signs or traditional inscriptions in the Armenian alphabet on the slabs, which are otherwise omnipresent in Soviet Armenian and post-Soviet architecture in Armenia. Indeed, working on this project in the 1960s during the thaw period, the architect Sashur Kalashyan followed a constructivist style and cosmopolitan dimensions in architectural and visual forms. In an October 2007 interview, he emphasised that the monument was no longer "monumental" nor "socialist" in its content nor "national" in its form. The Soviet authorities rejected Kalashyan's first draft of the memorial with an

Armenian chapel on the hill, an explicit ethnic religious sign. Unlike post-Soviet modifications and museum representations, Armenian pain in the Soviet period was represented in a cosmopolitan language of death and regeneration. More precisely, the architectonic cosmopolitan language of the memorial site in Yerevan was articulated in a specific code of 'modernism'. In the words of Kalashyan: "The memorial taken as a whole must be understandable for every visitor, irrespective of his or her nationality or religion." One interesting point here is the international character of the architecture, which was very much influenced by the modernist architecture of the twentieth century, in particular by Kenzo Tange, the Japanese architect known for his new architecture of structuralism and modernistic style.[10] It produced a kind of 'secular sanctity' in the national landscape. As Eric Hirsch (1995: 8) outlined in his studies on landscapes, "it is interesting that sacred sites and places are sometimes physically empty or largely uninhabited, and situated at some distance from populations for which they hold significance."

Figure 1.2: Construction of Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex;
Figure 1.3: The Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex in Yerevan

Sources: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/Description_and_history.php. Last accessed on 15.09.2022 (Figure 1.2); Rita Willaert 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armenian_Genocide_Memorial_-_Yerevan_(2903020364).jpg. Last accessed on 29.11.2022 (Figure 1.3).

The spatial and aesthetic orders of the monument, as conceptualised and designed by the Soviet authorities, aimed not only at the creation of a memorial place, but also at maintaining political control over protests by the local population. In this way, the 'bad', unnatural, unrecognised death of the victims was converted into a performed ritual of generally remembering the vicissitudes of the past, drawing upon the martyr-like symbolism of 'good' death through regeneration in the Soviet style.[11] Furthermore, the absence of visualised death or dead bodies is conspicuous for visitors of the memorial. Inside the mausoleum, which looks like a tomb of the Unknown Soldier, there are no visible signs of victims as such, dead bodies or bones, or other traces of dead individuals or families. Instead, we find only the sky and the eternal flame in a circle reminiscent of the Soviet five-cornered star, an image that powerfully produced a local notion of secular sanctity.

The pureness and the emptiness of the Soviet Memorial for the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan allowed for an easy 'appropriation' and proper 'filling' of it in the post-socialist period. In the 1990s, after toppling down the Lenin monument at the central Republic square, the Genocide Memorial has been turned into a central terrain for Armenia's new moral history on the scale of world history. As an example, popular views have immediately transformed the Soviet symbol of the eternal flame, which played a significant role in Soviet political culture as the memory of the unknown hero, into a traditional sacred symbol of 'Armenianness'. Today, the presence of the eternal flame is often associated with the ancient religious tradition of fire worship among Armenians—a tradition based on the memory of pagan Zoroastrian beliefs rooted in ancient times, before Armenians were baptised.

Instead of Loss: the Museum

Considering Armenia's unstable post-1991 position and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, it is not surprising that after the independence, we can observe an increasing activity to forge a new moral and victimised past. Similar to Katherine Verdery's post-socialist "reorganisation on cosmic scale" (Verdery 1999: 33), or the German way of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), I use the term 'moral past' to refer to the process of reinterpreting the past in ways that form not only discourses and public metaphors, but also shape the materiality and emotionality of places. In Armenia, the frames of reference to the past are less marked by concern or critique of the communist

era or the post-Soviet 'return of the repressed,' accompanied by a respective anti-Kremlin critique (Watson 1994). Soviet past and Soviet Russia are not viewed in Armenia as an imperial or colonial past (Shirinian 2017). Instead, the focus is on a pre-Soviet event related to Armenian massacres during World War I. In the 2000s, rhetoric in efforts to restore 'justice' and to reveal the political dimension of Armenian pain was conceptualised in terms of demands for a global recognition of forgotten pain. More precisely, popular narratives and memory work toward a proper memorialisation of a 'forgotten genocide' presented the Armenian loss as human suffering in terms of global morality. Similar to the concept of global morality discussed by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002) in their work on the cosmopolitisation of the memory of the Holocaust, the Armenian reference to the violent past became part of a global concern over the last decade. One of the principles of global morality, as a result of the universalisation of the memory of the Holocaust in the world, is the real or symbolic expectation of moral and economic compensation of former victims by the perpetrators. This process includes the efforts to keep the past 'alive', different modes of accountability, the ways of making somebody responsible. The term 'global morality' here is helpful not only in the sense of understanding the moral universalisation of local and ethnic sufferings, but also in the sense of the iconographic formation of memory of loss as a symbolic value. The representation of the abstract Soviet style loss has been transformed into a new sacred icon becoming a source of creative refashioning the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland. This period constitutes a turning point in the institutionalisation of the term *tsagaspanutyun* (genocide) memory unifying local and diasporic Armenians. The local term *yeghern* (grief and mourning) have been largely replaced by the new Armenian term *tsaghaspanutyun*, which is a literal translation of the English word 'genocide' (Darieva 2008).[12]

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, one can trace a dynamic revival of the remembrance of the Armenian tragedy. The new politics of memory of Armenian loss came into play with the second post-Soviet president of Armenia, Robert Kocharian, born in Nagorno-Karabakh. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the principal change in the politics of the memory of loss in Armenia was that it is shifted from silent, abstract mourning to voiced and visible practices of representing injustice and violence, which over the time reached a high level of standardisation. Annually, numerous memorial artefacts and events were and are produced by official institutions, by individuals and, in particular, by artists in the city. This includes traditional Armenian

stone monuments (*khachkars*), posters, texts, books, souvenirs, rituals at pre-schools, schools and universities, vivid museum exhibitions, internet websites, concerts, films, and new public gatherings of remembrance. The spectrum of standardisation spans from tropes used in academic conferences to aestheticised forms of consumer objects such as T-shirts, tourist souvenirs, and 'genocide music' CDs.

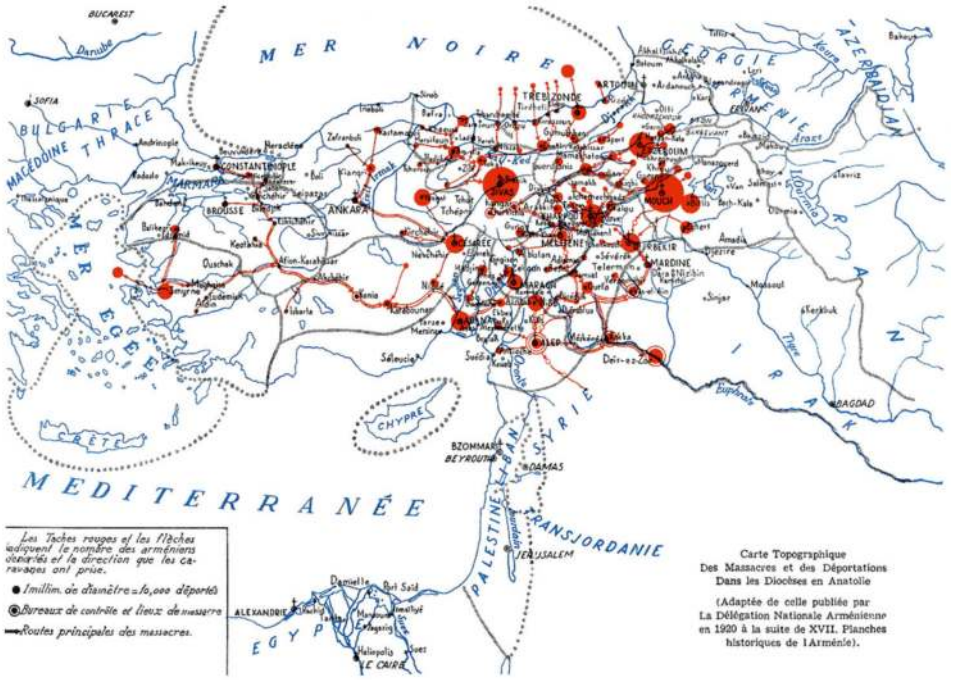
Figure 1.4: The Entrance to the Museum of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan

Source: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/museum_info.php. Last accessed on 15.09.2022.

Figures 1.5-6: Permanent Exhibition in the Museum of Armenian Genocide

Source: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/permanent_exhibition-old.php. Last accessed on 15.09.2022.

Figure 1.7: Mapping Deportation in Anatolia

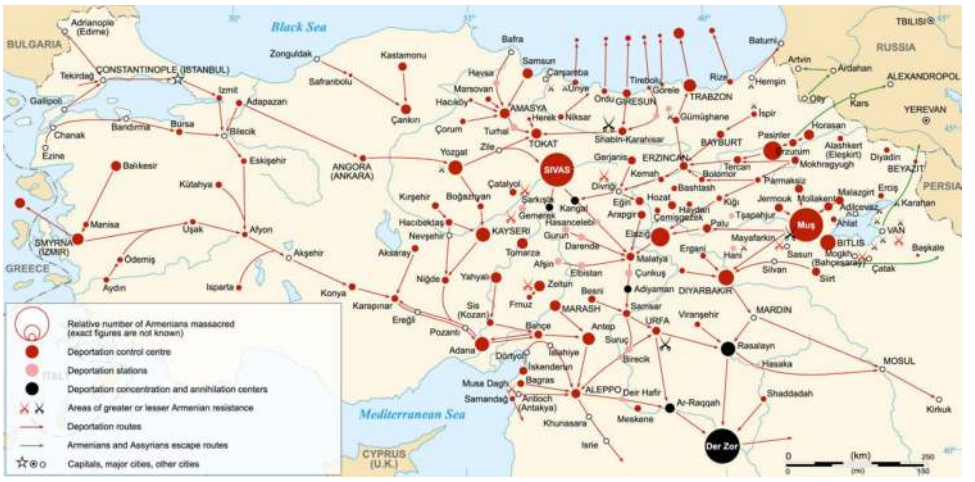


Source: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/mapping_armenian_genocide.php. Last accessed on 15.09.2022.

The most visible transformation of the post-Soviet Armenian representations regarding the massacres took place with the construction of the Museum of the Armenian Genocide in 1995. The Museum of the Armenian Genocide was created as an exhibit hall that doubled as a research centre, both of which were explicitly engaged in visual and documentary representations of the violent past and providing material evidence of Armenian death, all of which was in marked contrast to the abstract and silent Soviet-designed monument. The museum contributed significantly to the construction of a 'tangible' landscape of violence as a distinct inscription of memory in the detailed language of ethnic history and political claim. Like a sanctuary, the Museum of the Armenian Genocide is, on the one hand, essentially timeless in its ways of addressing the dead, and its dedication to the preservation of history. On the other hand, it hosts functioning archives and serves to re-enact public memory. Like a granite tomb inside of the hill, the museum also looks out to Mount Ararat. The memory work is focused on the documentation of the ways vio-

lence was experienced, organised, and remembered, but also of Armenian life 'before' on the territory of the lost provinces in Turkey and thus, lies in the process of reordering landmarks, photographs, street architecture, and names of places. At the same time, the inscription of memory is integrated into the social production of a new 'iconic place'. The ideological and material involvement of the Armenian diaspora in the work of the Museum of the Armenian Genocide was essential in many different domains of 'filling the empty space', such as co-shaping the museum's collection, creating the museum's web site, or producing and funding museum leaflets, deliveries of objects and documentations. In 2002, the incorporation of diasporic Armenians into the national sacred landscape was marked by a small monument erected on the territory of the memorial complex on Tsitsernakaberd hill. A medium-sized sculpture, titled 'Mother Arising Out of the Ashes', depicting a scared woman running, yet at the same protecting a small child, symbolises Armenian victimhood *per se*. Stationed somewhat apart from the museum and the monument, in an open space, the sculpture is a copy of the original statue located in Los Angeles in the Ararat Eskijian Museum.

Figure 1.8: Mapping the Genocide



Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5c/Armenian_Genocide_Map-en.svg. Last accessed on 07.02.2023.

One important aspect of the changing memorialisation in Yerevan is the explicit sacralisation of the site, which had a strong secular Soviet-style mode of commemoration. The sacralisation of victims is manifested using explicitly Christian symbols in the architecture of the museum. A significant part of the museum is barely illuminated; the daylight from outside penetrates through museum's small, narrow windows, which are shaped in the form of a Christian cross. The exhibited articles, mostly oversized photographs representing a cult of death and Armenian martyrdom in the Ottoman Empire, have become a part of worship with a strong emphasis on the exclusivity of the Armenian pain. The voices of other ethnic groups who suffered during World War I, such as the Kurdish minority in Eastern Anatolia, who also identify themselves as victims of the Ottoman and Turkish nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, are hardly heard in the national politics and practices of memorialisation.[13] As a museum guestbook entry reads:

> "I, as a researcher of Assyrian folklore, would like to see in this museum also materials devoted to the genocide of the Assyrian people being destroyed along with the Armenians. By doing this, the world will know that the Turkish state committed genocide also against the Assyrians, who together with the Armenians, were fighting the nefarious Turkish policy." (Nina Vasilian 07.09.2000)[14]

The 50 Grams of the Homeland. Social Production of Moral Past

In the spring of 1997, a Bostonian Armenian, acting on behalf of Florence Tayian, an Armenian American from Arlington (Massachusetts, United States), brought a glass jar with 50 gram of soil to Yerevan and donated it to the Museum of the Armenian Genocide. An accompanying letter, written by Tayian in the 1990s, tells the story of the migrating clump of soil and its long and complex journey from an Anatolian village to an American town in New England (MA, United States). In 1908, the "dirt scooped up in a small cloth bag"[15], was collected in the yard of the maternal house in Kharped (present-day Turkish Elazig) and transferred to the United States by Tayian's mother, Elmas Kavookjan (born in 1883). For about 80 years of Turkish-Armenian immigrant life in the United States, "dirt scooped up in a cloth bag" was serving as a family relic. In 1995, the piece of soil was transferred to Armenia, donated to the local museum and placed under a vacuum glass of an exhibition stand, which were

constructed to show a lived memory of Armenian homeland regions in Eastern Anatolia: Van, Erzerum, Mamuretülaziz (Kharperd), Bitlis, Diyarbekir and Sivas.[16] By exhibiting six transparent plexus-glass containers with a handful of soil inside, the museum has inscribed significant markers of the Armenian landscape of loss. The homeland regions in Eastern Anatolia are known in Armenian discourses as "six Armenian vilayets", a widely used term among diasporic Armenians to identify the Armenian lands on the territory of former Ottoman Empire claimed by diasporic Armenians, six provinces where the bulk of the Armenian population lived during the Ottoman period.

The 50 grams of transported soil, upon arrival, were poured by museum workers into a glass container and added to a row of five other containers with soil. As one tour guide in the museum explained to me in April 2006: "This homeland soil has been taken by survivors and guarded by them like relics. When they learned about the opening of the museum, people from all over the world sent their relics here."

The arrival of the small bag of soil in the 'ancestral homeland' and its place in the Museum for Genocide in Yerevan marked a new era of relationships between Western diaspora and the Republic of Armenia. Moreover, with this emotional transfer, we observe how a private piece of memory has been transformed into an 'affective energy' symbolizing a collective property of the global Armenian community of mourning. With 'affective energy', I refer to what Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012: 133) identified as "affective interactions" – the transmission of emotions that allow the private realm of the individual to enter public and political domains. Within this transfer story, the soil loses its utilitarian meaning, becoming instead a museum treasure as an evocative object and as tangible, material evidence of the collective pain and geography of expulsion. In this way, the soil gained a new sacred meaning: once serving as a relic of a family's migration history in a small-scale private domain, it has been transformed into a larger context of a public place as a common representation of the lost homeland and the violent past.[17]

In an interview in May 2006, the former museum's director Lavrenty Barseghyan, emphasised how the soil came to be exhibited in sealed containers. Until the late 1990s, the soil was exhibited without the protection of glass containers, simply placed in six bowls without any glass covering. The reason why the soil was transferred into containers was that many museum visitors would take a pinch of soil with them. Moreover, while viewing the museum exhibit, some visitors would covertly eat a pinch of dirt from the bowl. This physical act of eating is an illustration of individual sentiment toward a visible

manifestation of a common lost homeland. It concerns a symbolic incorporation of the past that effects the personal identification of a visitor with the common past, demonstrating how powerful the symbol of earth can be in establishing a community of suffering. The later form of presenting places of expulsion by sealing the dirt in containers serves to establish an untouchable sacred site.

At the same time, the symbolic act of individual 'return' to the 'ancestral homeland' can also be read in terms of the sacred sense of pilgrimage, since within the process of passing through the museum halls we observe a kind of the 'immediate contact' between sacred pieces and people that turn the museum visitors into pilgrims. Below, a museum guestbook entry outlines the sacral dimension of a material piece:

> "My ancestors were from Van, and I saw here the first time the soil brought from my fatherland's lands. I am very touched and swear I will never forget the year 1915 till the end of my life." (Robert Khachatryan, sixth-year student, Agricultural Academy)[18]

In the field of cultural anthropology and mythology, profound explanations can be offered for the meaning of soil. Albrecht Dieterich showed in his book "Mutter Erde" that the universal meaning of soil is an eschatological notion of elementary power and is presented as the symbol of the origin of life in many religions and cultures (Dieterich/Wünsch 1905). Simon Schama's study of landscape and its meaning for memory analysed three grand categories based on the very materials of its subject: wood, water, rock (Schama 1996). Ina-Maria Greverus, a German folklorist, in her study of the rituals and memory culture among German expellees from Eastern Europe who resettled in Western Germany, focused on various functions of the powerful symbol of soil or earth in political sentiment and the popularisation of new rites and identities (Greverus 1972). Similarly, Reinhart Koselleck (Koselleck/Jeismann 1994) emphasised in his studies of war memorials that the earth is symbolically related to both the religious and profane domains as part of monuments and memorial sites.[19] Anthony Smith theorised that the central meaning of nature and earth in nationalist ideologies was as a symbol of national homeland and of the nation as possessor of a particular land (Smith 2003). Commemorative practices and the custom of transporting soil from a remote land and introducing a specific dynamic of 'treasuring soil' and visualising violence is closely related to the social production of historical evidence of a 'moral past'. The treasured soil symbolises not only a familial past and previous history of dispersion; but also a rela-

tionship with the present. A public ceremony, organised by the state sponsored Yerevan's Museum of the Armenian Genocide in 1997, celebrated this event not only as a transfer of objects from one place to another, but also as a day of a symbolic repatriation of 'forgotten children' into the holy homeland of Armenia. The arrival of external private objects and their adaptation into local collective narratives at the end of the 1990s revealed much about changing identity boundaries and memory politics in post-socialist Armenia.

Symbolic (Re)Possession of the Homeland

"I want to stand on the top of Mount Ararat
I want to shout, I want to be heard
I want the world to condemn the barbarous crime
Against the nation called Armenian."[20]

These anonymous poetic lines are part of guestbook entries at the Museum of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan. In contrast to numerous other entries, which are rarely left anonymous but rather extensively identify the author by family name, place of origin, gender, and age, this entry brings to the fore collective grief and Mount Ararat as a particular moment of the embodied memory of loss and as a natural feature related to the ethic past.

An interesting element of social production of moral past can be traced in guest book entries. These small narratives should not be underestimated or understood only in the context of individual experience. An analysis of more than 420 museum guestbook entries in the period between 1996 and 2000 shows another layer of social production of moral past. The majority of the entries left in guest books reflect a sense of a sacred tour to the ancestral past made by visiting the museum as a 'pilgrim'. A few contributors identified themselves as direct descendants of expellees. Here is one example, which can be identified as a standardised narrative of a duty to remember and to 'return':

> "We have made a pilgrimage to Armenia to restore our souls, to get spiritual strength from it with the aim of confronting the bitterness of a foreign country. One can have such a cast of mind only if a strong and well-organised motherland exists. Respect to our martyrs." [21]

Museum guestbook entries written by local and diasporic guests reveal private rites of commemoration that articulate the relation of younger generations

to the collective past, thus filling 'emptiness' and 'silence' on the past. Functionally, museum guestbook entries represent a kind of establishing of a social landscape of loss, because in contrast to an abstract monument official rituals, or collective images of death in the museum, they reveal a polyphonic medium for the construction of social memory. They create a space for the expression of popular visions and sentiments that set up not only a dialectic between past and present, but also a dialectic between past and future. It is in these particular moments that both local and diasporic Armenians, in their longing, find their routes to Armenia and the holy Mount Ararat by making unapproachable places temporarily accessible, imaginary approachable, or indicative of a purpose of (political) orientation. Indeed, Mount Ararat, the highest peak of the Armenian Highland, a dormant volcanic cone located in the eastern part of Turkey, plays an enormous role in the production of the Armenian narratives of longing (Abrahamian 2006; Herzig/Kurkchiyan 2004).

Looking at mnemonic culture among diasporic visitors, it becomes obvious that Mount Ararat has a larger meaning as a strong emotional image than as an actual landmark on a map. Mount Ararat itself, located outside of Armenia at a distance of 50 kilometres from the capital city of Yerevan, is clearly visible from many residential windows in Yerevan.[22] Like a natural silent guarantee of the permanence of a memory, it appears as an active immobile figure in popular narratives. During my first fieldwork in Yerevan in March-June of 2005 and 2006, a local colleague of mine told me that "...its height of 5.165m makes Mount Ararat the highest mountain in the world". To my sceptical reply, he continued that Mount Ararat is the only mountain in the world that, being located in a valley, is separated from other mountain ranges and can be visually grasped as a whole piece from the very foot to the peak of the mountain (March 2005).

Indeed, Mount Ararat, the main symbol of the Armenian 'territorial loss', is continuously present on a much larger scale as one could expect. Considering the closed border between Armenia and Turkey, striking is not only the notorious visibility of the mountain in the everyday life of the city dwellers, but also its omnipresence in many images and pictures displayed in private, public spaces and touristic guidebooks. This memorial culture was paradoxically institutionalised in the Soviet period. The image of Mount Ararat had been successfully incorporated into the legal Armenian iconography, such as the depiction of the mountain on the Soviet Armenian coat of arms[23], the name of the Soviet Armenian soccer team, or the brand name of Armenia's best known liquor Ararat Cognac. In the Soviet period, Armenians established a rich sense of symbolic possession of lost homeland by turning the Mount Ararat into a

holy public marker of the Armenian national landscape. Following Nora Dudwick (1999), I term these relations between a geographical icon and the sense of commodity as acts of 'symbolic possession' towards the lost landscape.

Mount Ararat, as a natural mark in the iconographic formation of memory of the Armenian loss has been turned by Armenians into a symbol of the Armenian cultural property. This quality can also be traced in the continued presence of the image of Mount Ararat on everyday consumer goods. In spite of the post-socialist privatisation of the Cognac factory, which was sold to a French corporation, the same liquor continues to be produced under the same trademark. Additional to the existing Ararat Cognac brand name, the trademark repertoire has been expanded by the inclusion of new Armenian brands referring to geographical points of the memorial landscape in 'Western Armenia'. The names of Armenian places beyond the Armenian-Turkish border like Ani, the old Armenian capital located in Eastern Anatolia, and the mythical Isle of *Akhtamar* in the Lake Van (Eastern Anatolia), are incorporated into the business of cultural commodities similar to the process described by John and Jean Comaroff (2009) in their recent volume on ethnicity and commodity. The inscription of lost territories in the Armenian consumer's everyday life includes cookbooks published among diasporic members (Petrosian/Underwood 2006). In this way, Mount Ararat, as depicted on calendars, cook books, and consumer goods, has been symbolically (re)turned to the cultural landscape of Armenian identity.

Individuals of younger generations seem to express their relation to the violent past in relatively formulaic forms. As an example, fifth-grade students state that they "are sure that [they] shall hold parties on the slopes of Mount Ararat and shall light candles in […] Ani".[24]

"[…] a sacred day is to come /
And this procession will take up arms /
And will enter Van, Kars and the fortress of Dvin."[25]

Beyond Mount Ararat, other natural and geographical points come to the fore of diasporic and local memorialisation. It becomes clear that representatives of the older generations, both among locals and diasporics, express their notion of memory by displaying attachment to certain places and localities in Eastern Anatolia.

"I did not see my father, I saw him a bit
I was a child when we reached the gorge of grief,
From Moush to the fortress of Kars lay our way
On which the old enemy spread its massacres like thunder out of a blue sky."
(Ashkhen Sogh 24.04.2001, p. 34)

> "It is obvious that a great and accurate work has been done which helps to completely understand the genocide. However, as a son of an Armenian from Mush, I am angry because the massacres of Mush are not reflected in the exhibition. I hope that my remark will be worth your attention." (H. Yekhiazarian 24.04.2000, p. 289)

This indicates that many of the museum visitors not only keep in memory an abstract loss expressed in the centrality of the mythical Mount Ararat, but also keep a geographical scope of original homeland alive by fashioning it into a tragic landscape. This particularly applies to villages and towns in Eastern Anatolia, which became Turkish territory after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in March 1918 by Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the Central Powers (Entente), marking Russia's exit from World War I. The inscription of memory into the museum guestbook stimulates a new frame across time and leads to demands for acts of commemoration focused on future accountability. In this way, we see that the landscape of loss can be turned into a landscape of accountability and empowerment. Sokrat Khanian, a poet from the region of Karabakh, claimed in his entry that "[t]he responsibility for the Armenian genocide is not only on Turkey's shoulders but also on the shoulders of world's all big states" (11.10.1996, p. 88).

Guardians of the Moral Past, Ancestral Protectors

On the territory of the memorial complex, between the monument and the museum, stands a 100-meter-long basalt mourning wall, referred to by Armenians as the 'Road to Golgotha'. Engraved on one side are the names of geographical places of Armenian expulsion, inscribed on the wall in 1997 after the opening of the museum, and corresponding to the names on the six glass containers with soil. On the other side of the wall are eleven small containers with urns, symbolising miniature graves of dead prominent persons who have made historical contributions to revealing the Armenian genocide. Their names are inscribed

on the stone containers in Armenian and English. According to the museum's administration, handfuls of earth were taken by museum employees from different graves all over the world and transferred to the Yerevan Museum of the Armenian Genocide. Among those reburied persons, we find a row of prominent international names, like the Austrian writer Franz Werfel, the German soldier and photographer Armin Wegner, the British scholar and ambassador James Bryce, and the American politician Henry Morgenthau. In April 2006, the director of the Yerevan museum explained to me:

> "Armin Wegner was in Yerevan in 1987. He said that after his death he wanted to be buried here on the hill. In 1997, his son Misha brought the urn with the earth from his grave. Have you seen our mourning wall? We buried the urn of Wegner inside of this wall [...] Similarly, we took the earth from the cemeteries of Johannes Lepsius, Anatole France, and Lord James Bryce and brought it here, because they belong to the eleven friends of the Armenian people. The last reburial was of an Arab lawyer, who in 1916 wrote a book about Armenian pogroms in Aleppo and in doing so helped the Armenian people to survive."

This aspect of memorializing loss in post-Soviet Armenia has a meaning similar to the case of 'repatriated' dead bodies in Eastern Europe in terms of returning 'cultural treasures' to their proper national homeland (Verderey 1999). Yet, at the same, the practice of transferring earth from the graves of non-Armenians with significant symbolic capital indicates a global turn in the Armenian politics of memory. In another interview, on 3 May 2006, Lavrenty Barseghyan, the then museum's director emphasised:

> "Among the friends of the Armenian people we have an Estonian Mother Boel, who organized an orphanage for Armenian children expelled from Western Armenia in Aleppo. Once I visited Aleppo and met a person who introduced himself as a pupil of Mother Boel. For a long time, we could not find her grave in Aleppo. Later we discovered that she was buried in Germany, so we sent our colleague to Germany and he brought the earth from her grave to Tsitsernakaberd."

The notion of a shared memory of collective death is articulated less in terms of local revival, but rather on a broader scale, signalling the global embeddedness of memory through the inclusion of international names into the national pantheon. There is obviously a parallel to the Israel's experiences, where Oskar Schindler was buried and honoured as a 'righteous Gentile' at the Yad Vashem

Memorial. This change creates strong links to a global morality by bestowing a new social status of 'friend' and 'protector' upon certain non-Armenians and creates a new genealogy and politic of Armenian suffering. Like displaced and lost ancestors, they are worshipped and relocated to the proper site of remembering; in this sense, we observe how Armenians convert an ethnic notion of loss and death into a global memory of forgotten human loss. I argue that these practices, which began in 1996, have enabled a ritual departure from the past, creating a means for a creative conversion of the dead into cosmopolitan ancestors of a single violent event. In this sense, the soil from remote cemeteries in Europe contributes to the extraterritorial quality and to a globalization of the Armenian loss and memory of violence.

The act of bringing soil from the graves of non-Armenians, persons of a different religion, nationality, and ethnicity, constructs a global genealogy of Armenian loss. This process of converting the local and ethnic notion of tragedy into global issue through the transfer of soil from remote cemeteries in Europe, the United States, or the Middle East, involved ceremonies of domestication at the arrival of the newly discovered ancestors. Once again, the soil and the reburials are given an explicitly sacred character by being incorporated into a religious liturgy. The representatives of the Armenian Church were invited to each reburial ceremony. In the course of the ceremony, the head (*catholicos*) of the Armenian Apostolic Church consecrated the newly arrived earth in the miniature graves inside the mourning wall according to traditional Armenian funeral rites; the Jewish, Catholic, and even Muslim religious backgrounds of the dead persons played no role in their new, displaced memorial life. What is striking here is that non-Armenians are given the status of 'Armenian treasure,' adding significant symbolic capital to national narratives. The symbolic capital provides these domains with the crucial power for constructing a (trans)national community of loss beyond ethnocentric boundaries and a tool for establishing a new moral order in relation to the whole world. The reburial of prominent 'outsiders' is a way in which the new politics of loss is articulated, demonstrating the universal significance of a suffering that might otherwise be minimised and forgotten.

With the transfer of private sacred objects into a public place such as a museum, latent and hidden representations of the memory of Armenian loss and trauma have received their material and visual manifestation. In this act, the meaning of soil receives a powerful 'affective' energy for combining both ethnonational naturalised symbols of belonging and a political sense of responsibility. We observe a process that could be called as a 'filling loss', organised into

moral duty politics: the imaginary rights of possessing lost objects and people as they relate to names, places and localities. It is a particular quality of the relationship between different victims who attempt to make the memory of violent loss public, not only in their adopted homeland societies such as the United States, but also in Armenia, by claiming responsibility through refreshing and reframing losses on a transnational level.

Thus, the main point in the politics of remembering the violent past in Armenia was the 'proper' representation of a big loss through the inclusion of transnational actors, the mobilisation of social memory and the expression in a cultural production of material evidence that includes various acts, signs and performative sites across national borders. Instead of a relatively silenced mode of remembrance and the 'emptiness' of the Soviet-style memorial, in the 1990s an explicitly victimised and 'voiced' memory of the *ethnic* loss and suffering come to the fore of politics bringing together scattered diasporic members and the Republic of Armenia. This process included visualisation and popularisation of metaphors of loss, death and expulsion used in the production of a new meaning at existing commemorative sites. They modified local sites and their meaning into a new, shared sacred site. Simone Gigliotti's comparative study of the memorialisation of different genocides (Jewish, Ruanda, Cambodia) emphasises the centrality of inclusion of external protectors into the Armenian pantheon of loss. This act functions as evidence aimed at convincing the International Community and creating an obligation to recognise the violence and loss among Armenians during World War I as genocide (Gigliotti 2016).

Over the 2000s, political debates about defining the meaning of loss and political crime experienced by Armenians during World War I have intensified far beyond Armenian borders, in Europe and the United States. Starting in autumn 2006 with the French parliament passing a bill criminalising the denial of the Armenian genocide, the global political scale of the debate around the Armenian loss culminated in 2015. The centennial commemoration 'boom' in 2015 was widely discussed in diasporic media and literature as a culmination of cultural production (Kasbarian 2018) on a transnational scale. Pop referred to this event as the 'first' genocide in the twentieth century, the European Parliament adopted a resolution to urge Turkey to recognise that event, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris went dark on 24 April 2015 in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide.

Similar to the Holocaust Memorials in Israel and the United States, or to the Warsaw Ghetto Monument in Poland (Young 1989), Yerevan's Memorial

for the Armenian Genocide became a distinct Armenian martyrised icon on a global level. The pre-existing abstract Soviet-style Armenian Genocide Memorial complex, erected in 1967 on Tsitsernakaberd hill, has been successfully turned into a visualised place of symbolic consolidation, a new site of diasporic belonging.

In this sense, the mnemonic culture unfolds as a process of incorporation of the hallowed, 'uninhabited' and silenced past into a new moral presence with materialised and voiced evidences and a geographical framework. Different to the fate of the memorials dedicated to other Soviet heroes and individuals, which have been questioned because of their communist past (Abrahamian et al. 2001; Shagoyan 2016), the Memorial at Tsitsernakaberd provides a continuous contact zone between diasporic and local Armenians.

Conclusion

The remembrance of loss, once located in fragmented diasporic family stories dispersed all over the world and suppressed by the Soviet authorities, has been transformed into public recording on a global level. In the process of creating a new 'iconic place', we observe the active involvement of diasporic members and the appropriation of international names. They all contribute to the creation of a tangible space of the 'sacred homeland' for diasporic members. Overlapping with modern national representations of the independent Republic of Armenia, these imaginaries provide moral frameworks and legitimation for engaging with the homeland. Referring to the appropriation of the design and functions of the monument in Soviet times as a secular sacred site, I bridge it to the context of contemporary changes in its visual and physical aspects. For this purpose, I referred to the Museum of the Armenian Genocide, which plays a significant role in repositioning Armenia as the 'ancestral homeland' on symbolic geography of multiple homelands among diasporic people. Gaining independence in 1991 and the Armenian diaspora lobbying in the United States for the global recognition of the Armenian loss and expulsion as genocide correlated with the process of symbolic repositioning the homeland to the independent Republic of Armenia. I argue that the political and affective meaning of natural landmarks and objects such as 'soil' have empowered the iconography of commemorative practices among Armenians in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 More recently a number of ethnic Armenians originating from Syria and Iraq were among the one million individuals who journeyed along the Balkan migration route in 2015, but recent refugees are not the focal point of this book.

2 Armenian Assembly of America (Washington D.C.) is the leading diasporic organisation promoting public awareness of Armenian issues and seeks "universal affirmation of the Armenian Genocide" via "research, education and advocacy". See in https://armenian-assembly.org/. Last accessed on 24.03.2018.

3 The term *Dashnaks* dates back to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation *Dashnaktsutyun,* the Armenian national-socialist party, founded in 1890 in Tiflis, now Tbilisi, Georgia.

4 It should be mentioned that there were some Western diasporic Armenians who were repatriated to Soviet Armenia in the 1940s after Stalin's call to repopulate territories reclaimed from Turkey (Mouradian 1979; Suny 1993a; Stepanyan 2010; Pattie 2004a; Ter Minassian 2007; Melkonian 2010; Lehmann 2012). Actually, the Soviet repatriation campaigns started as soon as the early 1920's and were carried on during the inter-war period, and after Stalin's call around 100.000 Western Armenians arrived in Armenia from 1946–48, which is around 10% of the population of Armenia. During the thaw period and the 1970s, Western communists of Armenian descent organised visits to Armenia for the younger generations. In this sense, the emergence of diasporic homecoming was observable already before the end of the Soviet Union.

5 Compared to the Baltic, South Caucasian and Central Asian post-Soviet societies, in contemporary Russia there is striking continuity of the Soviet style commemorations of the World War II. See in Gabowitsch 2017 and Oushakine 2009.

6 The heroic dimension of remembering the World War II was dominant during the Soviet period even among citizens with Jewish background who were soldiers in the Soviet Army. Many of them lost relatives during the large-scale massacres of the Jewish population in Belarus and Ukraine had not explicitly developed any 'traumatic memory' of the Holocaust, an explicitly victim identity; in contrast, many Soviet Jews perceive themselves as a part of the big nation-state that defeated fascist Germany. In the Soviet Union, the Jewish genocide and suffering was

not particularised as the ultimate suffering of a specific group. For a long time, the official discourse refused to memorialise Jewish Holocaust victims. During my fieldwork in Berlin, which was conducted within the research project on transmission of grievance led by Stephan Feuchtwang (LSE, London), one of the interviewees complained about his 'ignorance' of the Jewish suffering during World War II. Nina Tumarkin noticed that in "Khruchshev's cosmology, to admit the reality of the Holocaust – the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people – meant to deprive the larger Soviet polity of its status as super victim, par excellence, which was touted as a major source of legitimacy".

7 With the slogan "Lands, Lands!" the demonstrators demanded the recognition of the Armenian massacres by the central authorities in Moscow, in this way reminding of Stalin's promise to 'return' the eastern territories in Turkey and Azerbaijan (Mountainous Karabakh) to Armenia. See also Kaufman 2001 and Suny 1993a.

8 Komitas Vardapet is a composer and musicologist of Armenian Christian music. He was born in 1869 in Kutahya, Ottoman Empire (now Turkey) and he died in 1935 in Paris, France. Arshile Gorky is an Armenian American painter who was born in 1902 in Van (now Turkey) and who committed suicide in Connecticut, United States, in 1948.

9 In my article "The road to Golgotha", I describe and analyse the place of remembrance in more detail. See in Darieva 2008.

10 The abstract design of the Armenian Genocide Memorial complex is reminiscent of the final design of the Holocaust Monument in Berlin, which remained controversial because of its very abstractness, which seemed open to a different restaging of the past.

11 The anthropological approach in identifying the death as 'bad' or 'good', see also in Bloch/Parry 1982 and Tumarkin 1994.

12 The official Day of Remembrance on 24 April created a fixed point in time and space in the public order of Yerevan but at the same time became a basis for the development of new commemorative culture. I have written elsewhere about the establishment of a new public procession, a youth march in Yerevan that has brought forth a loud rhetoric of dissent and politicised demands for the recognition of the cataclysmic event on a global level. See in Darieva 2008: 92–108.

13 At the conference that took place in Yerevan in April 2005 and was dedicated to the commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, the leader of the Kurdish-Yezidi community in Yerevan tried

to attract public attention to his claims. His intention was to articulate a concern about the exclusion of non-Armenian victims from the contemporary mnemonic culture in Yerevan by omitting the cruelties inflicted upon other ethnic and religious groups, such as like Kurds and Yezides, by the Ottoman authorities. His claims for the inclusion of Kurdish victims living on the territory of the Armenian Republic into the national memorial pantheon are still hardly heard by Armenian intellectuals, politicians, and museum workers in Yerevan.

14 Assyrians belong to an ancient Christian population in the Middle East (Upper Mesopotamia, modern Irak, Iran, Caucasus, Turkey) and in terms of congregation are known as Nestorian and Chaldean Assyrians.

15 This quotation is from my e-mail communication with the Bostonian Armenian American in autumn 2007. She brought the earth from Boston to Yerevan, 17.09.2007.

16 The homeland regions in Eastern Anatolia are known in Armenian discourses as "six Armenian vilayets", a widely used term among diasporic Armenians to identify the 'Armenian territories' on the territory of former Ottoman Empire where the bulk of the Armenian population lived during the Ottoman period.

17 According to archival documentation, more than half of these handfuls of earth were gathered by the former director Lavrenty Barsegian, who travelled to these places himself. Some of them have been brought by members of the Armenian diaspora.

18 The museum guest book entry is from 09.06.1996, p. 49.

19 For a profound insight in the studies of symbolic meaning of earth and soil in national rituals see also Alzheimer-Haller (2005).

20 This museum guestbook entry has no name, no signature, from 26.04.2000, p. 317.

21 Zepyur and Simon Mahtesian from Paris, 22.04.2000, p. 284.

22 The view of the mountain is an important factor in the Yerevan real estate business; along with its meaning as a 'mythological map', it served as an orientation for prize making at the private real estate market. The value of apartments with a view on the mountain is higher than without it and they are better marketed, in particular among diasporics.

23 The independence in 1991 led to a slight reordering of the image of Mount Ararat on the coat of arms of the Republic. The explicit depiction of the Mount Ararat has been replaced by a small image of Noah's Ark on

Mount Ararat in reference to the symbols of the First Armenian Republic 1918–1920.

24 An entry in the museum guest book from 25.04.2005. For similar entries see 23.06.2005. More about Yerevan's museum entries see in Lehmann 2006.

25 An anonymous entry in the museum guest book from 24.04.2001, p. 159.

Chapter 2. Discovering the Homeland – A New Generation of Armenian Diasporic Organisations

Over the last two decades, each year, hundreds of young people of Armenian descent from North America and Western Europe have been travelling to the former Soviet Republic of Armenia in order to contribute their labour and skills to this country's social and economic development. The trips, framed as forms of diasporic 'homecoming' are powered by a new generation of diaspora-based non-governmental organisations that use travel and volunteering as a means of forging distinctive, twenty-first century modes of diasporic socialisation among second- and later-generation diasporic Armenians. This chapter aims to highlight a new generation of diasporic organisations addressing the issue of temporary 'diaspora engagement' with the homeland without a centralised bureaucracy. Elsewhere, I have already reflected on the notion of homecoming by focusing on young diasporic volunteers themselves, their motivations and practices of 'return' (Darieva 2011, 2017). This chapter illuminates different aspects of diasporic mobility by focusing on agency activities and the response of the Armenian state to recent diasporic interventions.

Key to this is the building of a closer relationship between the Armenian diaspora and the Republic of Armenia. However, as will become evident in what follows, this is done in ways that tend to sidestep the 'weak' Armenian nation-state itself. Instead, Armenia is being appropriated as a more vaguely conceptualised 'homeland' in the Global South that, in both physical and symbolic terms. It is through building a 'meaningful relationship' between diasporic youth and the Republic of Armenia, that Armenian diasporic identity is being re-forged in an attempt to shore up diasporic bonds and to counter the threat of cultural assimilation, while at the same time adapting this identity to the dynamics of an ever-globalising world. This chapter sheds a new light on contemporary diasporic dynamics by describing and analysing three different bottom-up patterns of re-creating bonds and re-engaging the homeland, in

this case a weak nation-state in the South Caucasus. Young diasporic people, who seek to volunteer in Armenia, can make use of intermediary institutions, non-state organisations, which operate, using Gamlen's (2014) terms, in a 'grey zone' between international organisations and community agencies.

There are numerous diasporic non-governmental organisations active in Armenia. This study is focused on the analysis of three exemplary diasporic organisations focused on promoting 'roots' migration in the form of homeland trips and volunteering to the Republic of Armenia: Armenian Volunteer Corps, Birthright Armenia and RepatArmenia. Two of them are managed from the United States and one from Russia. Usually, diasporic organisations are registered as charitable bodies in their home countries, and they rely primarily on philanthropic donations from wealthy Armenians from the diaspora.[1] They also receive funding from large international development and aid organisations, such as the International Volunteer Corps and USAID (Ishkanian 2008). The latter are part of a growing number of transnational bodies, including the World Bank and the International Organisation for Migration (Gamlen et al. 2017), which are increasingly supporting rapprochement between 'diasporas' and 'homelands' as a strategy for stimulating development and investment in those parts of the world that are not already attracting more significant amounts of global capital. These intermediary organisations are crucial for taking decision among diasporic youth to make a long-distance homeland trip within volunteer programmes, which offer transportation and provide networking to local institutions, bureaucracies and local communities.

The concept of 'homecoming' and the desire to 'return' seems to be the main feature of any diasporic imagination (Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1991; Cohen 1997). However, actual 'diasporic homecomings' can take very different forms of attachment, mobility and meaning, depending on the historical and political context. For instance, in the late twentieth century, nation-states such as Germany, Israel and Japan instigated elaborate repatriation programmes that framed the 'return' of their historically 'displaced' ethnic populations in politically significant ways (Darieva 2005; Ipsen-Peizmeier/Kaiser 2006; Tsuda 2009; Remennick 2011). Also, Soviet Armenia started this kind of programme as soon as the early 1920s and carried on in the aftermath of World War II. Twenty-first century 'homecomings' of young diasporic Armenians present a very different example. This temporary mobility can be identified as independent grassroots 'root' or 'heritage' temporary migration, a movement from economically more developed to a developing economy. They allow us to start unpacking certain new modes of transnational interaction between 'diaspora'

and 'homeland' – interactions that have a social-movement-like dynamic, are driven by a new type of homeland-oriented diasporic organisations[2], and are underpinned by different kind of de-centralised diasporic politics, meanings, agendas and effects of which are still in the making. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, I use the adjective 'diasporic' to de-substantialise a monolithic concept of 'diaspora', understanding it not as a referring to a bounded group, but as a category of practice, imagination and claim-making.

Ethnic belonging and blood ties are critical for the membership in diasporic organisations, but not for all. What is relevant for these diasporic organisations funded by wealthier diasporic members is a new way of constructing individual identity in relation to the idea of 'serving for the nation' in a global context. They cannot be associated with state-instigated programmes for engaging the diaspora tourism – of the kind instituted by Israel, India or Ghana, for instance (Coles/Timothy 2004; Kelner 2010; Reed 2013). They seek to frame their activities as 'non-governmental forms' of an alternative 'exchange' between 'diasporic' people and the 'homeland' society. The services offered by these organisations include subsidising and coordinating air travel, finding accommodation with host families, providing volunteer work placements in local organisations, offering language courses in Eastern Armenian, and sometimes facilitating long-term stays, including permanent resettlement to Armenia. Volunteer's individual projects that these organisations claim to support are concerned with many aspects of social work, raising education levels in provincial parts of the country, civic engagement supporting women's rights, protecting the environment and struggling poverty. Considering Armenia's post-socialist economy, which is suffering from a significant 'brain drain' and dependent on labour migrants' remittances from Russia, one can expect significant impact of Western diasporic engagement for local economy. However, it seems that Western diasporic presence is still less visible in comparison to the size and meaning of family remittances and the donations made by local oligarchs in local infrastructure and villages (Pearce et al. 2011; Antonyan 2016). 'Other Armenians' have become often to the bemusement of the local population, who are trying to reconcile this exotic phenomenon with their country's continued economic decline, depletion of rural areas, political isolation, and closed borders with neighbouring Turkey and Azerbaijan (Dudwick 2003; Darieva 2011). Nonetheless, the arrival of the newcomers and the setting up of their projects has at times been controversial, resulting in tensions, mostly in their interactions with local bureaucracies.[3]

In what follows, I shall first compare the practices and ideologies of 'engagement' of three main organisations that have been coordinating the 'homecomings' of global youth of Armenian descent to the Republic of Armenia during the 2000s and 2010s. US-based diasporic Armenian philanthropists run two of these, the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) and Birthright Armenia; the third, RepatArmenia, is run by Russian-based Armenians. It was only from the early 2000s, however, that one sees the rise of more systematically organised trips to post-Soviet Armenia, principally by members of the second- and later-generation of Armenian Americans or Armenian Canadians and mostly for the purposes of volunteer work. According to official figures, between 1995 and 2021, approximately 2.300 diasporic travellers, especially from the United States and Canada, but also Europe and the Middle East, have been registered as staying in Armenia between three months and two years.[4]

In the remainder of the chapter, I will examine the dynamics of positioning the Armenian state in interactions with the diaspora. The Republic of Armenia has, indeed, started to re-engage the global Armenian diaspora for its own political and economic purposes, using the bureaucratic means available to it and developing its own ideology of homeland-diaspora relations. As I shall argue, the approach of the Armenian state is by no means in contradiction or conflict with the ideologies of 'meaningful exchange' developed by the above-named non-governmental organisations from abroad. However, being articulated from a radically different position, that of the would-be 'homeland', it represents a *parallel* model, which frames the 'homeland' and the relationship that the diaspora is expected to develop with it in quite different terms.

Beyond Diasporic Homeland Tourism

Both those running these organisations and their 'clients' are second- and later-generation diasporic Armenians, aged 21–35, highly educated and well-integrated urbanites, born and raised in multi-cultural metropolitan environments.[5] The operations of these organisations are dependent on the latest digital technologies, on dynamic communication infrastructures, and on increasingly more efficient transportation networks. Mobilisation is facilitated through the use of slick professional websites and enrolment is carried out primarily through online applications, although there is often also a personalised interview process that probes the applicant's motivations and professional skills in greater depth. Detailed family history and genealogy narratives are

usually not required for a successful application, but the application process is often framed as in itself the start of a journey back to the applicant's ancestral 'roots'.

The young Armenians enrolled in those programmes are expected to not see themselves simply as 'tourists' going on a heritage tour, travelling to acquaint themselves with ancestral history and improve their cultural understanding of their 'roots'. Nor are they, strictly speaking, going on a modern-day 'pilgrimage' (Basu 2007; Schramm 2010), in order to merely 'set foot' on 'sacred' 'ancestral land'. At the same time, according to my observations and interview with volunteers, these visits are hardly experienced as a 'return home' in the literal sense of the word. Rather, the young diasporic travellers mobilised in this way are incited to think of themselves as 'pioneers' who are seeking out their 'homeland', and also as 'volunteers' who are effectively building their 'homeland'. Such activities are framed both as a form of 'adventure' and as a form of 'doing good'. This diasporic homecoming is less associated with a journey into an ancestral past, but rather with a journey into a diasporic future. For the young travellers, such a trip serves as a rite of passage that confirms their identity not simply as young volunteers, but also as 'diasporan' travellers[6] who may have a meaningful relationship with the homeland. With the term 'meaningful relationship' I mean a development of cultural identity with political implications that diasporic travellers are then expected to continue to carry for the rest of their lives, to share with others in the diaspora, and to pass on to the next generation. What is distinctive about this diasporic identity is that it is to be forged in relation to a 'homeland' that is, effectively, yet to be discovered and yet to be made into a homeland territory. This 'discovering' and 'making' of the homeland is precisely the purpose of the journey that is being undertaken and of the good work that is being carried out as part of it.

Crucial in all of this is that the destination of these organised homecomings is not the location of the actual family origins of the vast majority in the global Armenian diaspora, especially those based in North America and Western Europe. The latter's ancestors came predominantly from Eastern Anatolia, formerly a territory of the Ottoman Empire and now part of Turkey. The young diasporic Armenians that are being incited to travel to the Republic of Armenia therefore usually have neither family nor property links to this country. This situation raises intriguing questions about the political meanings and long-term implications of this project, which is, despite the above, consistently framed as the facilitation of 'diasporic homecoming'. This is the question that this chap-

ter will seek to unravel by focusing its attention primarily on the work of the homeland-oriented organisations that have over the past decade been mobilising young diasporic Armenians to engage in transnational activism.

A New Generation of Diasporic Organisations

The Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC), established in the United States in 2001, was the first organisation to focus on connecting young diasporic Armenians living in Western countries with the Republic of Armenia in the way described above. Funded by philanthropists from Boston, AVC was established by Father Hovnan Demerjian, a religious activist from the Diocese of the Armenian Church in the United States. Building on his personal experience in Armenia as a member of the US Peace Corps in the 1990s[7], Father Hovnan sought to create a version of the latter organisation that would mobilise volunteers specifically from the Armenian diaspora – "ethnic professionals" keen to "turn good intentions into meaningful action-service that transforms the world".[8]

AVC funds and organises travel to Armenia and places volunteers in public organisations, such as schools and hospitals, or human rights and other NGOs, both in the capital, Yerevan, and in the provinces. According to AVC's own internal assessment, between 2007 and 2010, AVC supported more than 450 male and female volunteers from the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Australia. More recently, AVC has also started to offer shorter, two-week, summer trips, calling this "voluntourism". Such trips are being marketed to "adventurous" youth who want to "be more than just another tourist", who prefer to "explore and discover a whole new world and do well at the same time".[9] Thus, AVC promotes Armenia both as an exotic adventure playground and as an impoverished society, so that those from wealthier parts of the world have a moral obligation to assist.

While AVC originally aimed its programmes at applicants of Armenian heritage, in 2013 it opened them up also to non-Armenians "of all backgrounds from across the globe".[10] Since then, ethnicity has been of relevance to AVC's project only implicitly, in that young people of Armenian heritage are still more likely to apply than others. Otherwise, AVC's promotional material is not ethnically specific, often looking more like an advertising campaign for United Colours of Benetton. If there is a significant distinction that AVC's advertising highlights it is not between Armenians and non-Armenians, but between the providers and the recipients of aid – between the 'global people' and the 'lo-

cal people'; between the young self-conscious do-gooders from the West and the grateful and welcoming citizens of Armenia. This cosmopolitan turn in AVC's strategy distinguishes it from both Birthright Armenia and RepatArmenia (discussed below). AVC operates much more like a generic development NGO, albeit focused specifically on Armenia. In other words, for AVC, the Republic of Armenia is significant less as a 'homeland' strictly speaking, and more as an exemplary site in which young 'global people' are given the opportunity to realise their more general humanitarian aspirations. The young Armenians, who are still likely to form the majority of those enrolling on AVC programmes, are certainly expected to establish a stronger emotional bond with the country in the process, but they are to do so not only because of their heritage, but even more so because of their contributions to Armenia's socio-economic development. Moreover, their volunteering experience is even more important as means of developing themselves, as human beings, or indeed as professionals. The latter is certainly flagged in AVC's promotional strategy, as evidenced in its abundant use of volunteer testimonials.

Enthusiastic verbal snapshots, which flow across AVC's homepage, speak of opportunities that their travel programme offers to those who join: "I wanted to see what kind of teacher I could be. I did it in Armenia"; "I'm 54, have 30 years' experience in publishing. I wanted to try something new, and I did it in Armenia"; "I passed the bar and wanted international law experiences and I did it in Armenia".[11]

Birthright Armenia (*Depi Hayk*) offers a very different model, one focused first and foremost on strengthening ethnic bonds within the diaspora itself. This organisation was established in the mid-2000s thanks to funding from the Hovnanian family – highly successful Armenian American real estate developers and philanthropists from New Jersey.[12] Until December 2021, 2.300 diasporic Armenian youth, aged 21–32, have participated in long-term volunteer programmes.[13] Birthright Armenia was inspired and informed by the practices of the Zionist Taglit-Birthright Israel, which is a state sponsored Israeli homeland tourism organisation. [14]

Concerned about the erosion of ethnic identity and ongoing assimilation into the cultural mainstream, Birthright Armenia looks to support a "powerful, broad-based network of organisations and individuals committed to making service to and experiences in Armenia an essential rite of passage afforded to all young Armenians across the world"[15]. Ethnic origins are crucial here and only applicants who can prove that they have an Armenian grandparent are admitted on the programme. Like AVC, Birthright Armenia pays for a round-trip

airfare, provides accommodation in a local family, and secures an internship in a local organisation or company. Similar to AVC, it blends the volunteer's own self-development with the socio-economic development of Armenia as a country. However, in contrast to AVC, it frames both 'developments' as the 'discovery' of 'roots', applying the latter metaphor equally to the young, second- and third-generation diasporic Armenians, and to the 'young' developing Republic of Armenia itself. As a Birthright Armenia flyer claimed in 2004, "[y]oung adulthood is a critical time for nourishing roots, not only for young people, but also for our developing country – the Republic of Armenia". Thus, Armenia here becomes a 'homeland' that still needs to rediscover itself as a 'homeland'; and it is expected to do so precisely through its engagement with the young travellers who are discovering it as a 'homeland' for themselves.

Figure 2.1: Armenian Volunteer Corps' Homepage

Source: https://armenianvolunteer.org/. Last accessed on 07.02.23.

Furthermore, as the leader of Birthright Armenia, Sevan Kabakian, emphasised in 2013, these volunteering trips are critical for the Republic of Armenia to become 'owned' by the diaspora as much as it is 'owned' by its citizens. As he put it:

"We need an equal right of ownership. The Republic of Armenia does not belong only to those who live here. Outsiders of Armenian descent can also be the owners. It is a great platform for Armenians all over the world, including those in Armenia. All of us should circulate together, work together, think together. With Birthright you have the right to be here and inscribe Armenia on your mental map."[16]

Figure 2.2: Armenian Volunteer Corps' Homepage

Source: https://armenianvolunteer.org/. Last accessed on 07.02.23.

What is being promoted here therefore is the 'diasporic right' to experience the 'homeland' on equal terms with its citizens; and this is arguably less about making newcomers feel they 'belong' in Armenia, and more about giving them the sense that Armenia 'belongs' to them. In Kabakian's own words: "Armenia is not just a page in the history book, not a romantic image of a pomegranate and wine grapes, not just what you eat, or just your last name, or the language that you may know or whatever, but it is much broader, and it definitely includes the state, the Republic of Armenia."[17]

This is why Birthright Armenia also offers a cultural programme that is designed to build a form of patriotic attachment to the country. These include not just standard tourist activities, such as city sightseeing, visits to historic churches or a hike to the lake Sevan; they also include tours of sites of Armenia's more recent military conflicts, such as the battlegrounds of Karabakh or those on the border with Turkey. In addition to the obligatory visit to the Armenian Museum of Genocide in Yerevan, strongly promoted are patriotic song evenings performed by local professionals. The repertoire includes Armenia's

national anthem *Mer Hayrenik* (Our Fatherland), folk and even Soviet era patriotic songs. Although this repertoire can hardly be described as part of the direct heritage of diasporic Armenians, it is presented as essential to the process of their 'rooting' in this historically, geographically and politically concrete place. What is important, however, is that this 'rooting' at the same time works as a form of appropriation of present-day post-socialist Armenian repertoire by the Western travellers of Armenian descent, if only as a vital locus on their mental maps.

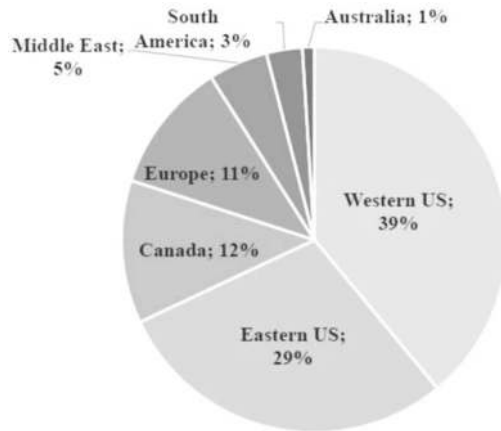
Given the aim to 'root' the diaspora in this new 'homeland', Birthright Armenia is encouraging long-term stays. While most young volunteers are expected to return to their home countries to resume their life there, the aim is also for them to maintain a durable connection with the Republic of Armenia. This is why there are also a few exemplary cases that demonstrate just how strong the connection with the 'homeland' can become. A model story is provided by the experience of the leader of the Armenian Tree Project, a 30-year-old Armenian American from California, who, after marrying one of the other volunteers, decided to stay and settle in Armenia as a founder and manager of an NGO.[18]

However, Birthright Armenia is even more interested in strengthening bonds among the young volunteers themselves. Indeed, the key ambition of their project is to create out of its volunteer network a new generation of the Armenian diasporic elite. Generating symbolic capital (i.e. honour and prestige for those taking part in such activities) is crucial to this. These trips are also expected to serve as something of a 'training ground' for subsequent diasporic community building (regardless of whether it focuses on activities in Armenia or not). Most important, however, is that this young diasporic elite bonds, and this is achieved through a set of shared bodily experiences and emotions provided in the various activities organised by Birthright Armenia – namely those of discovering one's 'roots' and building one's 'homeland'.

Table 1: Characteristics of Homeland-oriented Diasporic Organisations

Organisation	Purposes	Targets/ Volunteers	Relationship to the homeland
2001 **Armenian Volunteer Corpse (AVC)** US non-profit	Humanitarian aid, aspirations to 'transform the world'	Mixed, ethic and cosmopolitan professionals Adventure No age limits	Less nationalist, Armenia is part of the Global South
2004 **Birthright Armenia** US non-profit	Homeland trips, ethnic tourism strengthening ethnic bonds within the diaspora, 'Rooting' young diasporic elite	Young volunteers (21–35), ethnic background is strictly observed Only for those who grew up in diasporic communities	More patriotic, acceptance of the Republic of Armenia as a new homeland Armenia as a 'training ground' for diasporic elites
2011 **RepatArmenia** Russia-Armenia	Repatriation as a tool against assimilation Brain gain, new patriotism	Well educated returnees living in Russia and West, no age limits, refugees from the Middle East	Armenia is the real homeland and alternative territory, Soviet style homeland with a 'slow' landscape

Figures 2.3-4: Birthright Armenia Volunteers' Countries of Origin and the Sectors of Internship

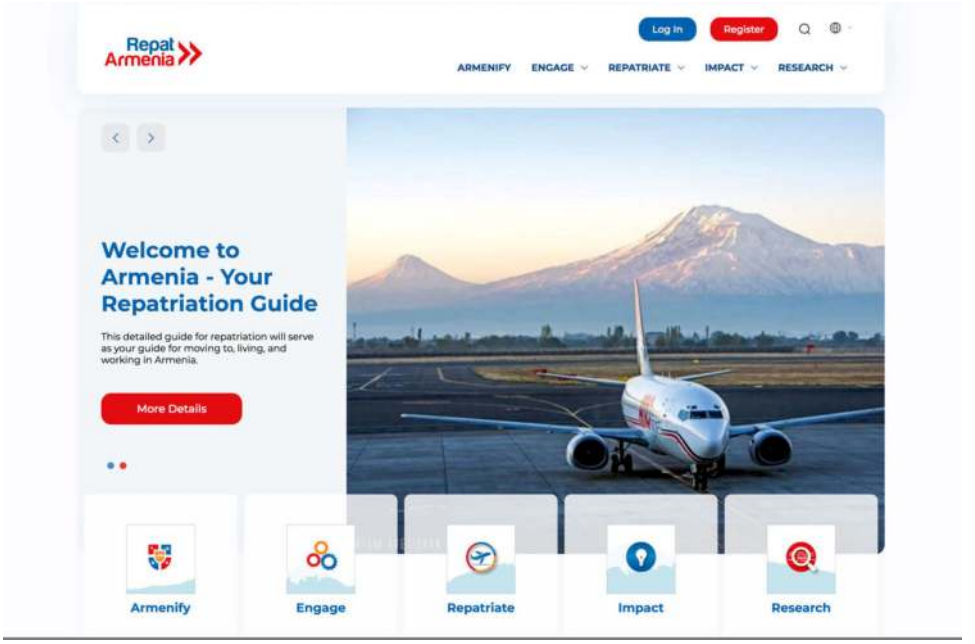


Whereas the primary form of diasporic engagement with the 'homeland' facilitated by AVC and Birthright Armenia are temporary stays that revolve around voluntary work, the goal of RepatArmenia is to bring about the permanent settlement of Armenian co-ethnics in the Republic of Armenia. RepatArmenia is the most recently established one of the three organisations discussed in this article. It is run by Armenians based in Russia, who, therefore, do have actual heritage links with the Republic of Armenia via its Soviet predecessor. They nevertheless belong to the same class of well-educated globally oriented urbanites as their North American co-ethnics, and their project explicitly targets the worldwide Armenian diaspora: they position the Republic of Armenia as a repatriation site irrespective of the would-be repatriate's family origins and current country of residence.

Moreover, according to the head of RepatArmenia, Vartan Marashlyan, a second-generation Armenian-Russian from Moscow, the people whose repatriation is being facilitated by this organisation include not only those who have never lived on the territory of present-day Armenia, but also those who used to be its citizens in the past but have emigrated over the last 25 years and have in the meantime become citizens of another country. In fact, the most important characteristic of 'repats', for Marshalyan, is not where they come from or where they live now, or what generation of diasporic Armenians they are, but the fact that they have, for one reason or another, "lost their native culture" by assimilating into another culture and have now consciously decided to "come back home".[19]

In the interview that I conducted with him in September 2013, Marashlyan acknowledged that for Western Armenians, who form the bulk of the diaspora in North America, the Republic of Armenia was not straightforwardly considered "home". Yet he dismissed their imaginary of "historic Armenia" as nothing more than a "mythic homeland". He, furthermore, presented the idea of 'Western Armenia' itself as merely a hypothetical construct without historical or political substance. Instead, he argued, those of 'Western Armenian' descent needed to come to the realisation (precisely through the kind of promotional work and mobilisation carried out by RepatArmenia) that their "real homeland" was the Armenian state, "a territory of 42.000km^2 [including Karabakh] protected by Armenian soldiers, where people speak Armenian and children go to Armenian schools, and the adults work at the Armenian Academy of Sciences". This last point is telling: it was in the Soviet Union, as a part of its distinctive nationalities policy, that National Academies of Sciences became key institutional markers of autonomous (or rather titular) nationhood.

Figure 2.5: RepatArmenia's Homepage



Source: Taken from http://repatarmenia.org/ on 07.02.2023.

Such unwitting hints at the Soviet legacy aside, given that RepatArmenia's mission is to attract not temporary volunteers but permanent repatriates, this organisation is far more positive than its competitors about Armenia as a place where a modern person can live comfortably. Indeed, while AVC and Birthright Armenia tend to foreground Armenia's socio-economic underdevelopment and need for support, RepatArmenia is keen to show that Armenia is by no means as 'backward' as is often portrayed. In fact, it goes even further: it presents the country's supposed underdevelopment as precisely what makes it attractive to live there. The main benefit of resettling in Armenia is that the country offers precisely what those stressed and saturated by their pressured urban lives in megacities, such as Moscow or New York, are craving for – a "refuge", an "alternative form of being", a "good life" in a "slow landscape".[20]

Furthermore, according to Marashlyan, resettling in Armenia does not require one to disengage completely from one's previous life in order to create a brand new one in the 'homeland'. This is mostly because twenty-first century life is understood to not be tied to a specific geographical location anyway: it takes place in a world of internet-based communication, social media

networks and global travel. Marashlyan stresses that Armenia's communication infrastructure has improved vastly in recent years and that internet access (in terms of coverage, speed and affordability) is on a par with most developed countries. This 'digital lifeline' ensures that repatriates can stay fully connected to their societies of birth and maintain personal, professional and cultural ties with these, even while living permanently in the Republic of Armenia.

As an organisation itself, RepatArmenia relies heavily on the latest technologies: it bases its entire mobilisation strategy on new forms of connectivity offered by the brave new world of social media. Much of its energies are, indeed, spent on forging 'social networks' in the diaspora – networks that are expected to serve as a form of social infrastructure underpinning their project of diasporic repatriation. The organisation is ambitious in this respect and envisages the incorporation into this infrastructure of official institutions, including the Armenian Church and Armenian state structures, such as embassies, although this plan is still in development.

RepatArmenia's does not focus specifically on providing 'aid' to Armenia, nor does it act as a development NGO. However, it does justify 'repatriation' partly as a means of creating 'brain gain' for Armenia. Repats are sometimes compared to 'colonists' that bring cutting-edge professional skills and expertise with them. For example, Marashlyan suggested in his interview that RepatArmenia's project could be viewed as analogous to the so-called 'Myasnikyan project' – the 1920s' efforts of the Armenian Bolshevik and Soviet Commissar Alexander Myasnikyan to repatriate Armenian 'national cadres', i.e. to bring to the newly formed Soviet Republic of Armenia members of the Armenian professional and cultural intelligentsia scattered across the former Russian Empire. Myasnikyan did this as a way of rapidly modernising what at the time was a backward isolated region.[21]

So far, the realities of 'repatriation' orchestrated by RepatArmenia have been rather different to the ones this organisation had originally envisaged. Since 2012, as many as 400 people from different parts of the world have submitted an application to RepatArmenia. However, not all of these applicants have been the highly skilled urbanites seeking a good life in the 'slow' city of Yerevan. Instead, and especially since 2014, over half of the applicants have been Syrian and Lebanese Armenians seeking refuge from the war raging in the Middle East. Moreover, only a small minority of these seem genuinely interested in settling in Armenia for good.[22]

Thus, Western diasporic organisations stand here as an example of the rise of a new generation of homeland-oriented non-governmental diasporic

forces that seek to be engaged in public domains outside of their country of residence. A variety of diasporic and migrants organisations that have previously run exclusively within the boundaries of local ethnic communities in the United States, Canada, or Russia, have expanded their spaces transnationally by claiming to "serve to the nation" in Armenia without giving up their identity of being American or Canadian. Instead of investing time and money exclusively to maintaining the structures of local community life in the Boston area or in California, these actors started to look toward the 'ancestral homeland' on the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

While the attitude of diasporic organisations driving these volunteer projects cannot be described as either pro or anti the Armenian state, both their rhetoric and their practice tend to downplay and side-line the Armenian state's relevance in the building of the relationship between diaspora and homeland. The metaphors that they use in their promotional materials prioritise a vaguer notion of post-territorial land (*Hayastan*, 'soil') and a broader idea of common ethnic history and culture ('roots'), rather than the institutional realities of a modern, sovereign, state-bound nation. The development that they foster is framed as contributions to building a *civil society*, rather than the return and strengthening of a nation-state. The politics of these organisations is therefore quite different to the previous politics of the Armenian nationalists in the diaspora, such as the *Dashnaks*, whose ultimate goal was the formation of a (greater) sovereign nation-state on the territory of Eastern Anatolia and the South Caucasus (Phillips 1989). Rather, the motivational slogans of these other organisations – for example, "come move the mountains", "because we can", "journey to the future" – match those used by international development programmes, and reveal a neoliberal globalist political model that transcends and by-passes nation-state structures.

Organising homeland trips for diasporic youth is not unique to Armenians, of course. There are similar movements and related activities among other immigrant and diasporic groups in the United States, Canada, Europe and elsewhere (Kelly 2000; Brettel 2003; Stefansson 2004; Wessendorf 2007; Tsuda 2009; Schramm 2010). The design of Armenian diasporic homeland trips resembles, for instance, the Israeli ten-day "tours that bind", which have been analysed by Shaul Kelner (2010) specifically as a medium of diasporic political socialisation and recently by Yehonatan Abramson (2017) as means of 'producing diaspora'. Tourism more generally has been used by the Israeli state to foster state-diaspora solidarity, targeting especially the American Jewry (Gal 2010). However, Armenian homeland trips are different in that they are or-

ganised independently from state initiatives and entail, in fact, a degree of ambivalence towards state involvement. This results in the development of alternative kinds of mobilisation infrastructures as well as a greater variety of ideologies framing the engagement between diaspora and homeland. In other words, these organisations are actively developing a new diasporic subjectivity of what a 'homeland' is, where it is located and of what functions it serves for the diaspora. As I have mentioned, these examples offer three different models of a new mode of transnational activism.

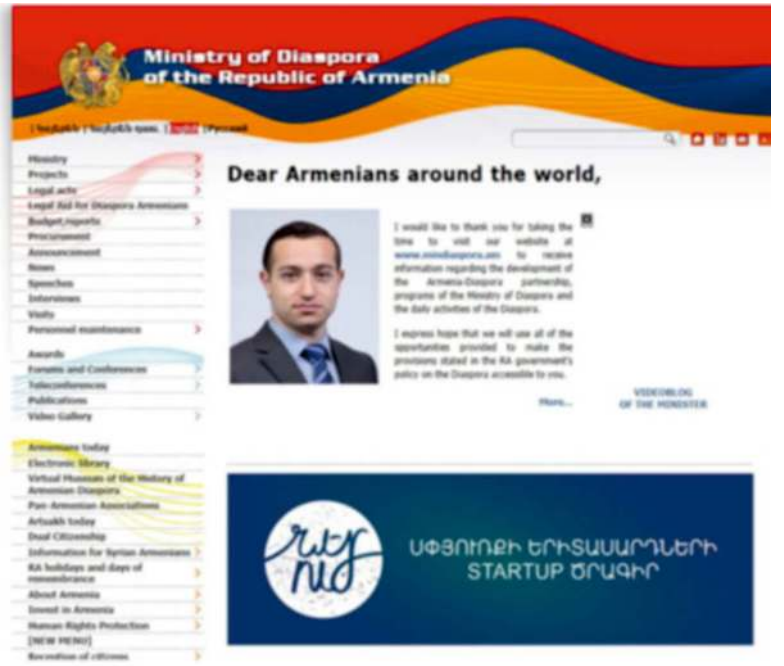
The Call of the Homeland and 'Spiritual Repatriation'

Parallel to the above-described activities of external non-governmental organisations, the Armenian state has increased, its own efforts at engaging the global Armenian diaspora more systematically. Since rejecting a measure allowing double citizenship in 1998, the Armenian government has fundamentally changed their attitude toward its diaspora and emigrants over the last two decades. Starting with organising a number of pan-Armenian conferences in Yerevan, introducing the law for double citizenship in 2006 and forming a new governmental body in 2008, the Ministry of Diaspora, the transformation ended up in October 2017 when the Armenian Minister of Diaspora, Hranush Akopyan announced 2018 to be the year of repatriation for the Republic of Armenia. The Ministry for Diaspora appealed to ethnic Armenians living abroad to return to the 'ancestral homeland'. At the same time, the President of Armenia, Serzh Sarkisyan, predicted that in this way Armenia's shrinking population would reach four million by 2040, not through the increase of birth rates and life expectancy, but via the return of diasporic Armenians.

In some respects, this is neither surprising nor unique: a great many states, including a number of other former Soviet republics, have been turning diaspora engagement into a prominent part of their international relations strategies (compare with Esman 2009; Gamlen 2010; Délano/Gamlen 2014). More and more countries focus their policies to tap resources coming from external actors such as emigrants and members of diasporic ethnic communities. Political sciences and international relations scholars argue that the origin states establish their diaspora institutions as they seek to 'tap' the material recourses and see their diasporas as a state category (Gamlen 2014). In post-communist Eastern Europe, the diasporic population has been increasingly recognised as

valuable resource and as a state category transgressing the Soviet era hostility towards exiles.[23]

Figure 2.6: Homepage of Armenia's Ministry of Diaspora (2008–2018)



Source: Taken from http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/index on 17.12.18.

What is significant about the case of the Republic of Armenia, however, is that its relationship with the global Armenian diaspora has historically been weak and ambivalent, and that its claim to be the 'homeland' of this diaspora has always been tenuous and controversial.[24]

The result is that today Armenia needs to invest greater amounts of political and symbolic labour in order to turn Armenian communities worldwide into *its* diaspora. This aspect is often overlooked in the studies of diaspora-state relations. The work that this involves is not only about forging links (pragmatic, symbolic or emotional) with communities and individuals in the diaspora; nor is it simply about trying to attract members of the diaspora and make them perceive the Republic of Armenia as their diasporic 'homeland'. Equally important to the Armenian state is to develop this (relatively new) identity of be-

ing the only 'homeland' of a well-established, prosperous and powerful global diasporic community *for itself*. In particular, this requires the Republic of Armenia to imagine in what way, as a nation-state, it embodies 'Armenianness' that extends beyond its own body politic, and how those who are Armenian by descent, but are not Armenian nationals, might then form loyalties and allegiances to it as a sovereign body. In what follows, I shall describe some of the affective ways in which the Armenian state goes about doing this.

Figure 2.7: Homepage of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs (since 2019)

Source: Taken from http://diaspora.gov.am/en on 24.01.2023.

For Armenia, a post-conflict state with limited resources and little international clout, to engage with a wealthy diaspora based in more developed parts of the world is not straightforward. Nonetheless, in 2008, the Armenian government formed a new body, the Ministry of Diaspora, which has been allocated the task to develop "the relationship between Armenia and the Armenian diaspora" and "to organise immigration, preserve Armenian identity, implement language policy, as well as collaborate with diplomatic services within the framework of Armenia-Diaspora relations".[25]

Some of top-down instruments that this Ministry is deploying to reach out to the diaspora seem rather old-fashioned. The Ministry has, for example, created a series of special state medals to reward individuals and organisations

that have made a substantial contribution to the "preservation of Armenian identity abroad" and to the strengthening of the partnership between the diaspora and the Republic of Armenia. Designed by the Ministry of Diaspora itself, these medals have been given the names of historical cultural figures and diasporic activists from the past, none of whom, however, have direct biographical connections with Armenia itself, since they were all born, lived and died elsewhere. These are "The William Saroyan Medal", "The Phogos Nubar Medal", "The Komitas Medal" and "The Arshil Gorky Medal".[26] What the Armenian state does is, first, to appropriate figures from Armenian cultural history in the diaspora into a national cultural history; then, to instrumentalise this history in the form of an official state medal; and finally, to use this material-cum-symbolic object to performatively turn the contemporary 'diaspora' into an extension of the nation that the Republic of Armenia represents as an internationally recognised political body.

Another, rather different, way of connecting an ethnically defined global diaspora with the Republic of Armenia as a sovereign nation-state has been the creation of what can be described as a form of 'limited citizenship' for ethnic Armenians. There is no law that grants ethnic Armenians in the diaspora automatic access to Armenian citizenship purely on grounds of ancestry.[27] However, since 1994, diasporic travellers can apply for Special Residency Status (hereafter SRS), which, according to the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website, "is granted by the President of Armenia to the foreign citizens of Armenian ancestry" (those who have at least one Armenian grandparent).[28]

The SRS is significant in that it permits ethnic Armenians from the diaspora to convert their feeling of being Armenian (i.e. their loose, de-territorialised, notion of 'heritage' and 'ancestry'), into something tangible that comes close to political citizenship – i.e. a complex of rights and obligations which place the applicant into a legally binding relationship with the Armenian nation-state. From the perspective of the Armenian government, the SRS is expected to facilitate the process of the newcomers' social, economic and cultural integration in the Republic of Armenia. Crucially, it stops short of enabling political integration. Indeed, the SRS entitles its holder to all the rights of an Armenian citizen except the right to vote, hold office or become part of a political organisation. Relatedly, the SRS does not entail the obligation to do national service in the Armenian army, which is otherwise mandatory for local (male) citizens. Holders of the SRS receive a special passport that differs little in format from the ordinary passport issued to Armenian nationals. However, while

one can use it as proof of one's rights in Armenia, it does not work as a travel document outside Armenia's borders.

In practice, travellers and volunteers of Armenian descent tend to view the SRS pragmatically – less as a symbol of 'citizenship' (partial as it might be) and more as a bureaucratic document that provides them with limited practical advantages: the SRS eliminates the need for an entry visa and serves as a ten-year residency permit that applies to the territory of the Republic of Armenia as well as Nagorno-Karabakh. The application fee for an SRS is not small – around $500, and there is inevitably a bureaucratic process to go through. Consequently, the SRS is not something that diasporic Armenians worldwide are rushing to acquire unless they have a specific reason to do so. Applying for it are principally those who intend to stay for considerably longer than three months (the length of stay permitted by the standard visa) and those who are travelling to Armenia more regularly. In fact, many of the young volunteers from North America said in their interviews that, even when staying in the country for longer than three months, they preferred not to go through the process of applying for an SRS, finding it more convenient to make a quick trip to the border with neighbouring Georgia and simply get a new three-month visa at a check-point.

Being first and foremost a bureaucratic document that has practical value in certain circumstances but is otherwise 'nonessential', the SRS has hardly been decisive in prompting large numbers of diasporic Armenians to convert their ethnic heritage into demonstrations of allegiance to the Armenian state. One of the reasons for this is that the Armenian state is itself treading carefully in this respect and is clearly not ready to invite foreign citizens of Armenian descent from across the world to become part of the Republic's polity in the full, constitutional sense, simply on the basis of ancestry. Indeed, proof of mere 'heritage' is not enough: further conditions need to be fulfilled – specifically, what the Ministry of Diaspora has framed as the development of a deeper, spiritual, connection with Armenia of those considered members of the 'diaspora'.

What is required, in fact, is a form of 'spiritual repatriation', which the Ministry of Diaspora encapsulates by the concept *hayadardzutyun* – meaning 'return to Armenian roots'. In her speeches, the Minister of Diaspora, Anush Hakopyan (who in Soviet times used to be the First Secretary of the Armenian Komsomol) has defined *hayadardzutyun* as an alternative to actual (physical and legal) repatriation and has also presented it as a form of flexible but

patriotic connectedness that must precede a person's acquisition of full (politically meaningful) citizenship.[29]

Hayadardzutyun is expected to go to the core of the individual's understanding of the world around him or her, and therefore assumes a fundamental transformation of the self: by 'returning to the roots', by 'reuniting' with Armenian culture and traditions (which one has forgotten, given that one has been physically and spiritually severed from the 'homeland' as the place in which this culture and traditions have been kept alive), the 'diasporan' is expected to form a new, properly Armenian relationship to the world, a different understanding of life, which includes a different experience of time, of happiness, and so forth.

This transformation of self is to be achieved through what the Ministry of Diaspora envisages as a form of re-socialisation that it expects all future repatriates to undergo. There is, in fact, something very didactic in the Ministry's approach to the inculcation of *hayadardzutyun* among diasporic Armenians. This is evident, for example, on the pages of the Ministry of Diaspora's multi-lingual online magazine *Hayeren Aysor* (Armenians Today). This publication is strewn with injunctions to its readership in the diaspora, who are treated rather like schoolchildren that keep forgetting to do their homework: "Speak Armenian at home!", "Draw your family tree!", "Spend your vacations in the homeland once every three years!", "Every Armenian must see Armenia!", "Let us sit at the table with at least three sons!", "Open a bank account in the homeland!", "Every Armenian must exist and we must grow in number!", "Return a part of your talent and gifts to your homeland!".[30] Local Armenian scholars even view a circular model of migration as the future pathway of development: "living in Armenia and working abroad", "living in the diaspora and working in Armenia" (Poghosyan 2017).

The key target of engagement here are, indeed, relatively young people, namely those who belong to the most recent generations (just as in the case of the diaspora-based organisations discussed above). However, the Armenian state's presentation of the 'diaspora' as somehow 'young' and of Armenia as, in fact, 'old' is a distinctive feature of the Ministry of Diaspora's figurative rhetoric. Some of the more 'poetic' metaphors that it uses to frame the engagement of 'diaspora' and 'homeland' cast the Republic of Armenia as a (kindly) 'grandparent' and Armenian American or Armenian-Russian citizen as (prodigal) 'children' who are being bidden to (finally) 'return home', having exhausted themselves on the busy 'playgrounds' of the globalised world. This 'return' implies that 'the child' is 'reuniting' with the home, which it had left

behind, and that it can now benefit from the wisdom of the 'grandparents'. However, there is also the implication that this 'grandparent' might also need to be 'taken care of' by the returning 'child'! The speech by Serge Sargsyan, former President of the Republic of Armenia, at the pan-Armenian youth gathering in Yerevan in 2008, offers the most explicit example of this rhetoric:

> "I am confident that the warm memories of the childhood, the kind and smiling eyes of familiar and unfamiliar grandpas, are calling you home. I know the madness of the Parisian bohemian life, your achievements in New York, the respectful glances of your Moscow friends and your own complacency constantly bring you back to your grandma and grandpa, who are telling you to 'Come home, boy'. It all comes back to the sunny smiles of your mom and dad, to your exhaustion from playing on the children's playground, all of these call you – 'Come home, boy' [...] You need your roots, to build your well-being upon them, and your maturity, and the life you've created. You need that bond tying you to your childhood, tying you to your birthplace, to your backyard, to your old grandma and grandpa, to your concerned friends and family."[31]

It is not surprising, therefore, that minors – whose self-identity is expected to be the most malleable – are particularly targeted by some of the Armenian state's more systematic programmes of diasporic 're-socialisation'. The main programme of this sort, sponsored by the Ministry of Diaspora, is the *Ari Tun* (Homebound) homeland tours, which are devised very similarly to the Israeli patriotic "tours that bind". Over the past ten years, around one hundred 13- to 16-year-old Armenian descendants have been sent by their parents from a range of different countries on special two-week trips to Armenia – tours that include visits to the major cultural, but also political hotspots in the Armenian national landscape. Indeed, they include a visit to the military barracks on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with a day spent observing the life of soldiers, eating in their canteen, and singing patriotic songs.[32]

Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the most prominent modes of engagement and reset through which connections between the newest generations of Armenians in the diaspora and the Republic of Armenia are being built and made meaningful. The focus of the analysis has been the work done by a new gener-

ation of different stakeholders to turn the Republic of Armenia into a legitimate 'homeland' of the global Armenian diaspora, the location of its 'roots' and the 'really existing' (sovereign) guardian of the diaspora's ancestral heritage and cultural traditions.

Currently, the most active and successful drivers of engagement between modern young urbanites of Armenian descent and the Republic of Armenia are the philanthropically funded non-governmental organisations based in the diaspora itself – especially those run from North America, but also some run from elsewhere, including the Russian Federation. While there are many similarities and overlaps in the ways these intermediary organisations are mobilising young professionals to travel to Armenia and engage with it in both practical and emotional terms. Each of them has developed its own distinctive set of agendas, its own ideologies and purposes of engagement, thus constructing a de-centralised grey zone of 'exopolity' (Dufoix 2002), which is growing dynamically.

The priority of the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) is the socio-economic development of an impoverished homeland that appears to be in great need of this support. For Birthright Armenia, crucial are the strengthening of social solidarity in the diaspora itself (primarily among the newest generations), the building of a new diasporic elite specifically by 'rooting' this solidarity in volunteering and other shared experiences in a physically concrete 'homeland'. RepatArmenia's ambition, on the other hand, is the dream of 'resettlement' in the 'homeland' – a 'resettlement', however, that operates mostly as the individual's response to the pressures and opportunities of life in the twenty-first century.

These brief summaries are, of course, merely heuristic simplifications; there is much more to these organisation's programmes, as the analysis above has endeavoured to show. All three organisations, which are clearly focused on mobilising an elite, combine in interesting, but different ways the romantic and the neoliberal, the nostalgic and the pragmatic, the individualist and the collectivist. They all also contain traces of ideologies that derive from other times and contexts: the US Peace Corps mission emerges as a template for AVC's project; the Zionist Taglit movement is an explicit inspiration for Birthright Armenia; certain Soviet era understandings of ethnic-based 'titular' nationhood and some early Soviet models of 'resettlement' appear to be underpinning aspects of RepatArmenia's project.

Thus, engagements between the global Armenian diaspora and the Republic of Armenia have been structured in a wide variety of frameworks through-

out the twenty-first century. This is not surprising given that these engagements have taken the form of independent, impermanent and largely fragmented movements. This certainly contrasts the more strategic state-driven projects prevalent elsewhere (compare with Zerubavel 1995; Braverman 2009; Payaslian 2010).

The Armenian state itself has also become involved, seeking to imitate some of the programmes of engagement tried and tested by other states, especially Israel. Ultimately, however, the Armenian state has been able to contribute just one more model for developing post-territorial 'meaningful' diaspora-homeland relations – a model that needs to be distinguished from those developed in the diaspora, as it is shaped by the priorities of this would-be 'homeland' as a state. Moreover, one could say that, just as diasporic Armenians have remained ambivalent towards the modern Armenian state, so is the Armenian state showing some ambivalence towards the co-ethnics abroad. The Armenian state's priority remains strengthening itself as a sovereign nation-state, specifically in a set of geopolitical projects positioned in a complex way between Russia, Turkey, Iran and the United States.

As should be clear from all of the above, the connections that are being established between the newest generations of Armenian diasporic activists and the Republic of Armenia are still very much in the making. For now, the *meanings* that are shaping modern diasporic engagement with the homeland are plural, ambiguous, and de-centralised. The ways, in which diasporic organisations 'discover' their homeland, are non-strategic and the reasons for this are multiple. The fragmentation of agendas driving this engagement is due to a complexity of historical legacies, the 'weakness' of the Armenian state, and the grey zone where these diasporic organisations operate. The politics of engagement between Western diasporic communities and the Republic of Armenia are likely to remain disparate and pluralistic for those same reasons. The above analysis of the different agents, however, should provide a useful basis for observing future developments and making sense of new directions in which this engagement might evolve.

Notes

1 The US ones are registered as 501 (c) (3) NGOs, i.e. organisations that are exempt from federal income tax because they pursue charitable, educa-

tional, religious and scientific purposes and that are allowed to conduct such activities outside of the United States.

2 Compare with Gamlen et al. (2017) observation of the rise of diaspora institutions worldwide.

3 Many of those interviewed indicated their frustrations in dealing with local officials and having to negotiate around various corrupt practices that they encountered in Yerevan's everyday life.

4 This figure was cited by Sevan Kabakian, the leader of Birthright Armenia in the interview conducted in September 2014. There is a considerable number of informal non-registered short-term stays of Western Armenians with the aim to volunteer in Armenia.

5 For a closer analysis of motivations expressed by these volunteers, see Darieva 2017.

6 The term 'diasporan' is a self-definition widely used by diasporic organisations and individual activists who see themselves as members of the Armenian diaspora (*spuirk* in Armenian). As for a numerous group of Armenians in Russia, who have been leaving Armenia over the last twenty years mostly as labour migrants they do not use this term and build a separate group of transnationals with a relatively weak diasporic consciousness.

7 The US Peace Corps was initiated by John F. Kennedy for students to volunteer in developing countries.

8 See https://www.armenianvolunteer.org/index.php/who-we-are/team. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

9 See https://www.armenianvolunteer.org/index.php/voluntourism. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

10 See https://www.armenianvolunteer.org/index.php/our-process. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

11 See https://www.armenianvolunteer.org/index.php/programs/professional-corps. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

12 Like other families established in the diaspora, Hovnanian who is from Iraq and arrived in the States in 1948 also had conducted many charities for internal purposes within the Armenian community in the United States (the Armenian Church related to Antelias, Dashnaks youth associations) before helping the Republic of Armenia after the earthquake.

13 See in https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/12/03/celebrate-international-volunteer-day-on-december-5-with-birthright-avc/. Last accessed on December 28, 2022.

14 The Armenian Birthright Program (since 1999) differs from the Birthright Israel Program in the statistical dimension of the participants and in the length of the programme. While Birthright Israel (over 750,000 participants) has a very high number of participants, Armenia has a relatively long program duration (minimum of two months). In comparison, the Birthright Israel program runs for 10 days. See https://www.timesofisrael.com/birthright-israel-begets-an-armenian-offspring/.

15 See https://www.birthright.am. Last accessed in 2019.

16 Interview carried out by the author in September 2013.

17 Ibid.

18 From the interview with the leader of the Armenian Tree Project, carried out on 05.09.2013.

19 Interview with Marashlyan conducted by the author on 02.09.2013.

20 Ibid.

21 The most prominent names among builders of the early Soviet Armenian nation are Alexander Tamanian, architect and author of the first general plan for the modern city of Yerevan, and Martiros Saryan, the founder of a modern Armenian school of painting.

22 Armenia's own official welcoming policy towards Syrian Armenians includes resettling refugees on the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to Ministry of Diaspora, approximately 20.000 Syrians of Armenian descent were received by the Armenian government.

23 To name some examples, in the 1990s, Croatia was a trendsetter to extend the ethno-national self through a post-territorial citizenship policy (Délano/Gamlen 2014), while post-Soviet Kazakhstan encouraged the in-migration of ethnic Kazakhs from surrounding regions to increase the titular nationality's proportion of the population. Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Georgia turned their interest towards migrants living abroad (Darieva 2005). For that the President of Azerbaijan proclaimed 31 December to be the Day of Solidarity for Azeris across the world. Both countries set up their own Ministries of Diaspora, attempting to impose a better control over co-ethnics abroad and expatriate cash flows.

24 It was the Soviet regime, which was suspicious towards ex-territorial co-ethnics and the 'diaspora engagement'. See in Mouradian 1979 and Ter Minassian 2007. I am grateful for this note to one of anonymous reviewers of this paper.

25 See https://www.birthright.am. Last accessed in 2019.

26 William Saroyan is an American writer of Armenian descent, who was born in 1908 in California, United States into an Armenian family that emigrated from Bitlis in, then, the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey) and who died in 1981. Poghos Nubar was born in 1851 in Alexandria, Egypt and died in 1930 in Paris, France. He founded the influential international organisation Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Cairo, Egypt in 1906. Komitas Vardapet is a composer and musicologist of Armenian Christian music. He was born in 1869 in Kutahya, Ottoman Empire (now Turkey) and he died in 1935, in a mental hospital in Paris, France. Arshile Gorky is an Armenian American painter who was born in 1902 in Van (now Turkey) and who committed suicide in Connecticut, US, in 1948.

27 It is worth noting that between 1995 and 2006 Armenians were not allowed to hold dual citizenship. However, the latter has been reinstated in 2006, enabling Armenians who live abroad and acquire alternative citizenship also to remain citizens of Armenia.

28 One should note, however, that the SRS is also awarded to 'other distinguished individuals, who have provided significant services to the Armenian state and nation and/or are engaged in economic and cultural activities in Armenia'. See http://www.mfa.am/en/residency/. Last accessed on 15.09.2022.

29 See http://www.mindiaspora.am/en/Programs. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

30 See https://www.hayernaysor.am. Last accessed on 15.09.2022.

31 See http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-mesages/item/2008/07/14/news-7/. Last accessed on 09.03.2017.

32 I am grateful to Eduard Melkonian, Armenian historian and expert in the issues of the Armenian diaspora, who shared this information with me in Yerevan, in September 2013 and in November 2017.

Chapter 3. Travelling the Homeland – Diasporic Youth

> "Armenia is not just an ideal of a homeland, a land of churches and mountains to be put up on walls and book covers. It is not a fictional country caged in a historical showcase. It is a real country with real people that needs real engagers to help move it forward. No matter where you now live, you can be one of those engagers."
> *(Birthright Armenia 2014)*[1]

Until the end of the 1980s, the connections between the Soviet Republic of Armenia and Armenian diasporic communities in North America were weak and irregular. It was the 1988 earthquake in Armenia that caused emotional response among North American diasporic communities and a rise in humanitarian aid activity (Ishkanian 2005, 2008). In the 1990s, after the Republic of Armenia gained its independence, many members of Armenian diasporic communities continued to donate sporadically to Armenia and its impoverished economy (Dudwick 2003; Pearce et al. 2011), and a few of them occasionally undertook tourist trips to Armenia on an individual level. In the early 2000s, the popularity of homeland trips through volunteering in post-socialist Armenia has grown, especially among third-generation Armenian Americans or Armenian Canadians. Hundreds of Western volunteers of Armenian descent, mostly young professionals, travel from the West to Armenia rejecting the label of a 'tourist', aiming to carry out a specific mission. Third- and later-generation diasporic Armenians claim to come to the homeland not as passive tourists, but as volunteers to invest in local development through social work. It is worth noting that much of the itinerary for these diasporic

travels centre on the key tourist attractions of Armenia, including sacred sites such as the holy Mount Ararat[2], the medieval Armenian Church in Khor Virab, the Memorial for the Armenian Genocide on Tsitsernakaberd Hill, and Lake Sevan. Nonetheless, many young volunteers emphasised that their journeys were about more than mere tourism; they understood their activities in a broader context. Their movements constitute a new type of transnational behaviour that challenges the relative immobility of traditional diasporic communities, who tend to fixate on the internal development of local community centres in the United States, Canada or Western Europe. In doing this, I do not claim to offer conclusions applicable to all diasporic Armenians.

This chapter continues exploring an emerging form of temporal return in the context of transnational 'roots' migration.[3] Whereas the previous chapter discussed how a new generation of non-governmental diasporic organisations established pathways and channels for contemporary diasporic migration and mobilised Armenian 'roots', this chapter develops these arguments and shifts the attention to the travellers themselves, demonstrating how the holy homeland is perceived, experienced and incorporated into modern biographies of diasporic youth.

There is a growing academic interest in transnational homeland engagement by foreign-born nationals and second- and later-generation diasporic people (Tarrow 2005; Levitt/Waters 2002; Potter/Phillips 2006; Wessendorf 2013; Jain 2013; Mahieu 2015, 2019). Until recently, these movements have been theorised in migration studies as an 'ethnic return' (Tsuda 2009), as a relocation in terms of repatriation, or as a 'counter-diasporic migration' (King/Christou 2010; Wessendorf 2013). In addition, homeland trips are often viewed as the result of nostalgic longing for the lost homeland and in this context have been defined as a 'genealogical journey' into the past (Markowitz/Stefansson 2004; Basu 2007) or as 'ethnic pilgrimage' (Kelly 2000). This type of transnational exchange among second- and later-generation members of diasporic communities and the homeland draws attention mostly to the investigation of family contexts, where transnational involvement is perceived as an essential part of everyday lives (King/Christou 2010; Wessendorf 2013). In this sense, the existence of relations between second- and later-generation diasporic youth and the 'ancestral homeland' is considered a given.

Recently, some other social scientists (Lyons/Mandaville 2010; Gamlen et al. 2017) have emphasised the effects of state-sponsored diaspora policies, which influence the transnational behaviour of diasporic descendants 'from above' and strategically target young members of diasporic communities.

Studies have addressed an increasing number of state-sponsored possibilities of organised educational travel to the 'homeland' as a strategy to use established diaspora members for their economies and political stability (Kelner 2010; Mahieu 2019). Although the loyalties of subsequent generations to the homeland may remain strong and their homeland imaginations vivid, scholars have revealed that loyalties are not static, change over time and should be viewed as substantially different from those of the first generation (Levitt/Waters 2002; Kibria 2002; Mahieu 2019).

There are different criteria for identifying the transnational behaviour of second- and later-generation diasporic people. The range of studies has focused on the frequency of homeland contacts, visits, the scope of social and political remittances, property ownership and voting (Levitt 2009; Lacroix et al. 2016; Ahmadov/Sasse 2016). By diasporic transnational behaviour, I mean a border-crossing homeland-oriented engagement which forges social and cultural bonds and connections to their (grand)parents' ancestral country, be it real or imagined. A number of young Armenian-Americans undertake trips to the Republic of Armenia and feel obliged to 'give back' by volunteering in different sectors of Armenian society. This encompasses those domains for social and cultural contact that produce not only knowledge and awareness of the 'ancestral homeland', but also create first-hand experiences of the homeland through travel and interactions. They may play a prominent role in the everyday hyphenated identification of those second- and later-generation Armenian Americans who do not necessarily associate themselves with the Armenian state. Alongside the official state-regulated repatriation policies of the Republic of Armenia, we should take into consideration alternative forms of homeland engagement, which seem to be popular among Western Armenian diasporic individuals. With 'alternative forms of engagement', I mean those forms of transnational behaviour, which are based on 'soft', small-scale, and semi-informal homeland-oriented activities at grassroots level. They lie beyond the prevalent ethnic family contexts and state-sponsored collective programmes with political implications.

Thus, I take a closer look at varying lived experiences of 'being engaged' with the 'ancestral homeland' among young professionals with an Armenian American background. I argue that these 'roots' travellers create their own pathways of transnationalism within a specific trajectory of routes and range of subjectivities. One of my primary research finding is the multiple, overlapping, and often competing and contradicting narratives that participants of homeland-oriented programmes reveal in their understanding of being

diasporic Armenian and ways of 'getting rooted'. By analysing the individual experiences and motivations of young professionals of Armenian descent, this study sheds light on the following questions: How do volunteers perceive their remote 'ancestral homeland' and opportunities to be engaged with the homeland in a tangible way, and whose future is at stake in these imaginaries? How do they justify their willingness to do unpaid work? To what extent ethnic ties and 'rootedness' remain crucial for taking decision to move and volunteer?

What follows bellow, is an analysis of ethnographic data related to inspirations and subjectivities on 'doing diaspora', collected in Yerevan 'on the ground' by using a mixed approach to the field. In order to embrace roots' volunteers' experiences more comprehensibly, I decided to use three different approaches that produced three different materials: text narratives before the relocation, group interviews with volunteers after relocation inside of the diasporic organisations and finally, qualitative biographic interviews with individual volunteers. Regarding text narratives: I did this by looking closely at the written statements expressed by young volunteers in their application letters, submitted to non-state diasporic organisations (AVC and Birthright Armenia) in the period between 2007 and 2013. After having interviews with the leaders of Birthright Armenia at their office in Yerevan, I asked them to help me in approaching volunteers, providing me with a list of volunteer names and emails. After our correspondence, they agreed to meet me and shared their experiences in Armenia personally. The conversations took place at different places in- and outside of the Birthright office: in Yerevan's local cafes, at my apartment and in a city park. I am very grateful to the leaders of Birthright Armenia for their support in approaching young diasporic volunteers and in this way I was able to provide a deeper understanding of social, economic and political backgrounds of engaging with the homeland. My intention was to 'go native' by getting closer contacts to volunteers and their activities by participating at events and excursions. However, I did not feel welcomed in this domain and the programme leaders seemed not to be interested in including an outsider in their programme activities. In this sense, we are dealing with a limited access to 'ethnic' and 'socially' closed youth groups, a community in the making. My experience as a non-Armenian researcher was definitely different to Shaul Kelner's experiences that describe the effectiveness of "tours that bind" in Israel from the insider point of view. Another possibility to meet volunteers and inspire them for a biographic interview I gained through using the classic ethnographic method of 'hanging around' in a space. Indeed, I spent several hours each week at the Birthright gathering room waiting for those who just have fin-

ished language courses or were entering the office because of appointments. It turned out that I spent more time in the lobby with reading and investigating volunteers guest books then with 'chatting the volunteers'. Whereas many of Birthright programme participants were hurrying up to their next appointments in the city, a few young people, however, were very interested not only in sharing their own stories, but also in showing their places in Yerevan to me.

Differing Motivations for Homeland Trips

Figure 3.1: Birthright Armenia's Advertising Poster

Source: https://www.birthrightarmenia.org. Last accessed in 2011.

The desire of the Armenian diaspora to engage with the homeland is perceived by the leadership of these non-state organisations as natural. More precisely, Birthright Armenia and the Armenian Volunteer Corps frame these trips and youth experiences in the 'ancestral homeland' as a collective moral act of 'giving back'. In this sense, a trip to Armenia is mediated as a performative action of 'doing diaspora' and as an obligation, one that is expected to bring about social and cultural transformation. In this way, the temporary relocation is conceptualised as a semi-formal rite for the building a closer 'tangible' relationship between the Armenian diasporic youth and the Republic of Armenia. The non-profit organizations attract young educated travellers not only in terms of 'a symbolic return to the ancestral past', but also in a search for professional experience and with the concern of doing unpaid 'meaningful' work in a specific place for the benefit of future generations.

Exploring ethnic and non-ethnic reasons for a temporary settlement in Armenia, I have analysed text materials in terms of phenomenological research. The text materials comprise 76 individual statements formulated by AVC and Birthright volunteers in the period from 2007 to 2013. Each of the selected samples is a statement of 500–700 words in length written in response to the prompt: "Explain reasons for wanting to volunteer in Armenian, how these reasons are related to your past experience and how they might fit in with your future goals". The application accounts differ in style and organisation of contents, as well as in their quality of English, although they follow the same application instructions focused on motivations and cross-cultural experiences. My interpretation of these narratives is based on variables that have been classified under the following categories: cultural attachment; timing; expected effect of a temporary trip; and the image of the homeland.

Between 2001 and 2010, more than 850 volunteers of Armenian descent from Western countries, mostly from the United States and Canada, arrived in Armenia.[4] According to the statistical data I received from Birthright Armenia, the volunteers comprise a wide range of nationalities; more than 30 countries have been registered by receiving organisations in Armenia. Among these countries, 75 percent of volunteers stem from the United States and Canada and the rest come from Western Europe, Brazil and the Middle East. In the last decade, there has been a slight growth in the numbers. Whereas approximately 70 volunteers arrived in Yerevan each year during the period of 2004–2008, in the following two years 85 men and women were registered by Birthright Armenia. During the period of 2012–13, more than 110 people arrived as volunteers in Armenia per year. Two channels of information are particularly important when it comes to the ways in which young candidates learn about AVC and Birthright Armenia. These are (1) personal and family networks, including social networks at community churches or community centres in California, Massachusetts, Chicago, Toronto (just to name a few), and (2) detailed information that is available on Facebook. Volunteers come to the Republic of Armenia as independent individuals and not in a group.

The average age of young adults is 25 years; they are single and unmarried young women and men. One striking point is the gender difference among the volunteers. According to the statistical data, two thirds of volunteers are female. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine whether the drive to relocate to Armenia and the motivations to volunteer are affected by gender-specific life expectations. During my fieldwork, I met volunteers of both sexes,

although female volunteers dominated the receiving centres in Yerevan and the majority of my respondents were also female.

In terms of ethnic heritage, applicants defined themselves in two different manners: as 'assimilated' into the culture of their country of residence and having lost their 'Armenian heritage', or as a person who still preserves the Armenian identity in the diaspora. Here we should distinguish between different countries of origin. The aforementioned characteristic of 'being assimilated' is more likely to be relevant for those applicants who grew up in the US, the UK, Western Europe, and Russia, and less relevant for volunteers from Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and the Middle East (Syria and Lebanon). This difference has implications for how the applicants formulate their point of legitimisation. Indeed, a variation can be traced among those few applicants who applied for a volunteering placement in Armenia from the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria, and Kuwait). Citizens of these nation-states, both female and male, often emphasised the centrality of patriotic feelings in their motivation to visit Armenia. They represented themselves as ethnically 'pure Armenians' based on growing up in a traditional Armenian neighbourhood in a city like Beirut. This difference in argumentation can be explained by the fact that urban societies in Canada, South America and in the Middle East are very much shaped by the policy of multiculturalism or by traditional ethnic and religious segregation of neighbourhoods. Some of the second- and third-generation Armenian Americans and Armenian Canadians started their explanations with the fact that they developed a sense of feeling Armenian by being involved in a local community infrastructure (school, cultural centres, shops and media) along with the Canadian or American one.

One male Armenian Canadian volunteer who grew up in Syria explained his attachment to Armenia as emotional and emphasised his bounded solidarity with Armenia's people:

> "Living in Syria for many years and now in Canada permanently, Armenia has always been a place where I and my community have cherished and longed for. During our family gatherings we always discussed issues and matters that deal with the Armenian people, its social life, educational system and politics. I want to volunteer in Armenia because I believe that every Armenian has something special and unique to offer to Armenia. Armenians living in diaspora helped and supported their home country and the people since its independence. Now, that I have the opportunity to go, live, work and expe-

> rience the everyday life of the people is a chance I don't want to miss." (Aram from Montreal)

Another male Armenian Lebanese from Beirut expressed his strong sense of ethnic attachment by identifying his belonging to a 'chosen nation': "I was born in Armenian family and been to an Armenian school, Armenian scouts and *Hamazkayin*, the Armenian cultural centre. This atmosphere has given me a rich background, when it comes to my roots, my culture, my literature and my history." However, only a few letters explicitly mentioned a patriotic background and the desire to be reunited with the ethnic homeland as the main reasons of applying. Mostly diasporic Armenians from the Middle East and Canada have formulated these parochial statements of being 'deeply rooted' in ethnic culture. These volunteers give a high priority to the homeland attachment. Indeed, a significant number of second-generation Armenian Canadians' parents came from the Middle East (Lebanon, Egypt, Iran) in the 1960s and 1970s (Phillips 1989). In contrast to the Armenian Lebanese sense of ethnic origin, a third-generation male Armenian American from the Boston area points out his 'assimilated' background, his 'uprootedness' in the following manner:

> "While my grandfather was an immigrant to the US, growing up I was not raised in a very Armenian household. No one ever spoke Armenian to me, nor was I taught much about my family's past. I have over the years become close with my Armenian family in France, yet I am not able to converse in Armenian with them. I want to learn more about Armenian culture, language, and history, and to me, there is no better way to do this than by living in Armenia."

In both cases the references to ethnic capital, as a 'lost' or a 'preserved' one, legitimise one's application to the programme. In other words, this trip is associated with strengthening individual Armenian identities. However, one should not overlook the centrality of the multi-cultural background among volunteers that shapes the transnational behaviour of second- and later-generation diasporic Armenians. Volunteers are heterogeneous in terms of social and cultural backgrounds; the majority of applicants are urban educated young professionals. The interesting point is that many applicants as well as group interview respondents indicated the cultural heterogeneity of the social environment in which they grew up. At least 50 percent of the interview respondents identified themselves as being half-Armenian and having grown up in ethnically mixed families:

> "My mom is half-Armenian, her mother is from Lichtenstein. She was born in India and brought up in Switzerland. My dad is Armenian from Iran. I do not know exactly where they were from. What I know is that they went from Baku like through different countries, India and Iran." (Victoria from Canada)

Diasporic Youth's 'Journey to the Future'

There is a variety of motivations explaining why respondents undertook their volunteer trip to Armenia. For diasporic young professionals, a border-crossing journey to the 'homeland' was primarily associated with a complex and non-ordinary event. This event entails many different aspects such as individual self-discovery, the adventure of travel in a remote place and the desire to 'improve the world' through the philanthropic act of 'giving'. Furthermore, they sought to exercise skills in a new environment and, with the symbolic act of helping the sacred homeland they had heard about in childhood, gain the opportunity to become a 'better person' and contribute to the future of the Armenian nation. However, looking more closely, we can classify diasporic volunteers' desires as attempts to achieve two main goals: improving one's individual career and a quest for personal freedom.

In December 2007, during my fieldwork in Armenia, I interviewed 20 young English-speaking volunteers who had travelled to Armenia as members of the Armenian Volunteer Corpse (AVC). The meeting took place in the AVC seminar room in central Yerevan. The majority of the volunteers came from the United States, Canada, Australia and France. Conducting a group interview, I asked about their direct and indirect motivation for participating in this programme. All the respondents stated that their travel was not necessarily related to the 'natural' behaviour of diasporic decedents and referred to the individual and pragmatic dimension of the trip. A female volunteer from Australia explicitly emphasised in her statements: "I came here primarily as a volunteer…it was not so much about Armenia as it was about me coming here to help people, as I had no real links with my homeland before I came… My travel is kind of giving me a big kick, showing me where I want to be…"

In this sense, similar to the experiences of other European second-generation transnationalists (Turkish Germans, Swiss Italians, Greek Germans or British Pakistani), the motivation of making a 'homeland trip' was articulated as a quest for personal freedom and self-realisation (Wessendorf 2013; King/

Christou 2011). For instance, Victoria from Washington D.C. talked about her decision to travel to Armenia in this manner:

> "I am not tied down with family, with a career, with all these things and it is a perfect, perfect time to travel. And I always knew that it was the place where I would want to go. There are a lot of life experiences that I think are necessary to gain right now and it is a great time to do that."

Australian-born third-generation Serena, who spent nine months in Armenia, talked about the adventurous side of her 'homeland trip' and 'learning experiences' in an unfamiliar space:

> "I am trying to make my everyday life like an adventure, because I am not in Australia now, and do not have to stick with this or that job, do not have any responsibilities. You could exploit your boundaries and see your capacities, to see how much you can accept and how you can learn out of it."

This and other accounts consider the centrality of pragmatic dimensions of homeland trip motivations among young professionals of Armenian descent. However, the practical timing of doing unpaid work in a remote place is combined with a romantic ideal of travel and adventure that generally is very much comparable with classical motives of any other young non-ethnic volunteer. One common theme is to explain one's motivations with reference to Armenia as a 'developing country'. 'Self-discovery and freedom before settling down into the career of my choice' is the expression of a practical view on the homeland trip's benefit. Based on the functional approach, Gil Clary and Mark Snyder (1999) claim that career benefits are one of the most important reasons when volunteering for non-profit activities in the United States. It appears that the sense of location among young professionals of Armenian descent is likely to overlap with the sense of time. I suggest that this attitude is shaped by the North American middle-class sense of time focused on the present and future, rather than on the past. Ninety percent of applicants justified their desire to travel 'now' by citing the fact that they had just finished school, college or received a bachelor's degree. Thus, individual aspects of motivations are very much shaped by rational frameworks of one's regulated biography.

> "A few weeks ago, I finished my first year of graduate…After graduating this coming year, I will have entire year-off before beginning law school." (Aram, 23 years, Boston area)

Though some of the participants arrive in winter, the majority of volunteers travel to Armenia just prior to or during the summer season, the period that overlaps with 'the end of college'. The average time of volunteering is usually related to an individual's period of time between finishing school or college and starting a new level of education or another important turning point in their life course. More precisely, about 90 percent of applicants justified their desire to travel by pointing to the fact that they had recently finished college and received a bachelor's degree. For example, one informant stressed that the age of 24 was a 'perfect time' for a life stage event for gaining work experience and enhancing one's academic biography: "I study in a business school in Paris and I just have finished my second year. We have to do an internship, and in this year, we can organise it within an NGO", argued a 25-year-old male volunteer from France.

From an anthropological perspective, the subjectivities around the settings, timing of transfer from one place to another and the expected rewards from an internship can be interpreted according to the Turnerian notion of pilgrimage, in other words as a liminoid phenomenon. The term 'liminoid' is close to the notion 'liminal', however it differs through the experimental, 'individualised' and creative character. Turner highlighted the optative character of 'liminoid' as form of symbolic action in industrial societies resembling some found in 'tribal society' (liminal rite of passages) (Turner 1974: 65). The merit of this approach is in its consideration of transient, however fragmentary change from one social status to another. Liminoid phenomena mean developing apart from the central economic and political processes, along the margins, in interactions and in interstices of established institutions (Turner 1974: 85). Indeed, applicants emphasise the 'perfect' timing during the intervening period and in this way stand at the 'threshold' between their previous ways of constructing personal identity, career and a new opportunity of 'self-discovery'. However, as Coleman and Eade outlined in their volume on reframing pilgrimages, "it is not made clear how the processual, set-apart character of the institution can feed into structural change" (2004: 4). In this sense, the imaginaries of homeland volunteering as an act of transformation and growth seem to be limited to personal rewards expectations and individual perspectives in a globalised world.

In explaining third- and later-generation motivations to undertake an 'ancestral homeland' trip, one should not forget the financial aspect of such a journey. Twenty-seven–year-old Anna from California was sceptical about how popular Birthright Armenia and AVC would be without the financial

incentives they currently provide for young volunteers. Her comments echoed some of the opinions of volunteers whom I interviewed in Yerevan in 2013:

> "They come here for two months or longer and enjoy spending their pocket money because it is so cheap here! Without Birthright's assistance it have been much harder, financially at least… So, if you did not have a financial support of having place to live, having your flight paid for, if you are going to come for a year for unpaid work, eventually you are going to run out of money! It is crucial that there is financing in place."

Obviously financial incentives are significant in shaping candidates' motivations to travel to Armenia with Birthright Armenia and the AVC for a longer period of time. At the same time, by placing unpaid work within the framework of a 'heritage homeland', the act of volunteering can gain a specific spiritual dimension, which merges the notion of work with emotional narrations, experiences of hardship with subjectivities and cultural aesthetics. In this context, the act of transnational diasporic volunteering can be patterned as a form of personal sacred journey or secular pilgrimage. However, it is the rational dimension of motivations to volunteer in Armenia that shapes an expected individual reward and moral incentives. The majority of motivation letters explicitly refer to modern benefits such as improving one's CV for a future career path. One male applicant from Canada expressed this very directly: "My primary reasons for wanting to volunteer in Armenia are to improve both my Armenian language skills and to increase relevant work experience on my CV." About two thirds of applicants explicitly mentioned that Armenia is a 'proper' place not only because of traditional interest in the heritage homeland, but also the place where a 'transfer' of Western skills and know-how can be implemented in a part of the world associated with the Global South. The motivations were often reframed in terms of global issues and a 'noble' mission to 'move mountains' through physical engagement with an impoverished and 'backward' society.

Armenian American or Armenian Canadian volunteers in particular gain a sense of incorporation into the remote 'sacred homeland' through the rhetoric of NGO work, engaging with the moral issues of 'development' and 'democracy' in a post-communist society. The desire to 'help poor people' is perceived by Western diasporic Armenian volunteers as a crucial argument that provides the application with a positive legitimisation to sponsor his or her trip to Armenia. This type of reward expectation shows the ways in which the moral logic

of the diasporic mission is constructed and how global inequality shapes imaginaries of diasporic 'roots' volunteers.

> "As a second-generation Armenian Australian, I have many reasons for wanting to volunteer in Armenia. Firstly, I would like to contribute in a positive manner to the development of Armenia, especially in the fields of human rights and poverty." (24-year-old male applicant from the United Kingdom)

The majority of volunteers admitted having no experience with living outside of the United States or Canada. Given the fact that the content of motivation letter statements entailed explanations of personal cross-cultural experience, applicants provided some examples that should illustrate their ability to interact with 'unfamiliar', 'other' and 'different cultures'. Some volunteers referred to having experience in work with gangs, drug abuse, rampant homelessness, and violent people to support their application. Only very few application statements explicitly linked the motivation to go to Armenia with a romantic and intimate vision of the homeland, as expressed here by a volunteer from California in 2007: "Armenia is an old country, a mystical land with lush forests, sparkling water, and jumbo-sized fruits and vegetables. My grandfather swore that the cabbage there weighted up to 80 lbs!"

Instead, more than half of the volunteers implicitly compared Armenia with the notion of the ultimate 'other', 'backward' country. Some applicants categorised their expectations of Armenia as a poor Middle Eastern country. Global conditions and income differences between the United States and Armenia provide an easy moral argumentation for moving to and even possibility staying in Armenia. As highlighted by Zygmund Bauman (1998), the capacity to move, its timing and the conditions in which the movement takes place, represent a marker of social difference which highlights the many inequalities under which mobility as 'socially produced motion' is constituted (Cresswell 2006; Salazar/Graburn 2016). In this context, diasporic cross-border mobility and diasporic motivations to volunteer in the 'ancestral homeland' are similar to any other Western volunteering to help people in a remote 'poor' place.

Providing moral and sometimes financial support, parents of young diasporic members are only implicitly involved in the intercontinental cross-border mobility in this context, and the volunteers' embeddedness in family networks seems to only partly influence their decision to go to the 'ancestral homeland'. Many of the volunteers claimed their decisions were not directly linked to the ambitions of their parents, but asserted it was 'their idea' to come to Armenia. The majority of the volunteers I interviewed during my fieldwork viewed

their transnational behaviour in a different way to their parents. To my question whether their parents visited the ancestral place in Armenia or Turkey, the real homeland territory, the majority of young volunteers denied. The generation of the volunteers' parents seemingly followed a 'sedentary' pattern of interaction with the homeland. Lucia (26 years old), whose father is of Armenian descent and whose mother is Austrian, explained her experience in this way: "My father has never been to Armenia…I suppose he is scared to come to Armenia to see how ideal it is not…It is not the utopian ideal society that he kind of wants it to be."

Among the volunteers I met in Yerevan, only few had parents who had travelled to Armenia before their children visited the 'sacred land'. In total, volunteers' parents rarely visited the Republic of Armenia. They also refrained from visiting the land of exodus of their parents, Turkey, arguing that the threatening and hostile attitude towards Armenians among Turks kept them away from real homeland trips.

Experiencing the Homeland

One of my primary research interests is in the multiple, overlapping, and often competing narratives that participants of Birthright programme reveal in their understanding of being Armenian and the ways of 'doing diaspora'. In the following section, I describe individual views and narratives of experiencing the homeland after temporary relocation to Armenia as told by descendants of Armenian diasporic communities in the United States. I provide three different portraits of Birthright volunteers, US citizens with ethnic Armenian background. Their trips to Armenia took place at the same time, but produced contradictive narratives that may shape their relationship to the homeland and produce different implications for their individual pathway to the homeland.

I have chosen these three individuals as 'protagonists' of diasporic youth travel who enact 'momentous mobility' and illustrate the formation of new frameworks for diasporic motivations to 'engage with the homeland' on a micro level.

Jeff

When I met Jeff in an Armenian street café on a warm autumn afternoon, Jeff was 29 years old. He was dressed like a typical office worker: black trousers and

a long-sleeved shirt of a yellowish colour. His haircut was neat and conventional; he wore metal-framed glasses and carried a black leather bag. Born in Baltimore, Jeff had arrived in Yerevan as a volunteer in 2012 and, having finished his work with Birthright Armenia, was unexpectedly offered a job at USAID in Yerevan. This was central to his decision to stay in Armenia for another year. It was not clear whether he would get a contract extension and extend his stay in Armenia by another year.

We began our conversation on his background as a descendant of the 'old Armenian American diaspora', a topic he was happy to discuss. Growing up in a lower middle-class family, Jeff said his parents and grandparents never left the United States because they were 'very American' and had run a variety of small- and medium-sized businesses, such as a pet salon: "Since I am from the old diaspora, people are more American now and they don't know Armenian anymore." Jeff vividly described the complex geography of his grandparents' displacements in the Ottoman Empire in the period from 1909 to 1923, before they ended up in Baltimore. Both grandparents were born in Turkey (*Malatia, Sevas, Arabkir*); one of them arrived in America before the genocide, the other afterwards. Nobody from his family had visited either Armenia or Turkey after leaving. Though he had learned some Armenian, mostly reading skills but not speaking, Jeff didn't have Armenian friends until the age of 14 when he entered high school.

Having studied history and fascinated by his family's genealogy tree created by his maternal uncle, Jeff was very keen to travel to Turkey and see the real homeland of his ancestors. He mentioned that he felt "a bit disconnected" in Armenia. When I asked about the reasons and circumstances that brought him to Armenia as a volunteer, he described how friends and family encouraged him to join a trip to Armenia by a church group in 2007, and later to become a Birthright volunteer in 2010. He emphasised, however, that the decision to travel to Armenia was his own; members of his family had never travelled outside of America. At the same time, he admitted that travel had become easier by the beginning of the twenty-first century: improvements in transportation and the incentives provided by Birthright were important factors in his decision.

Jeff's main motivation, however, stemmed from a period of unemployment, which seemed to be the 'perfect time' to 'depart' for the 'ancestral homeland' and make a 'journey to the future'. Whereas graduation from high school had been an opportune moment to travel to Armenia in 2007, in 2012 it was his temporary unemployment, a difficult phase in the life of any young

professional. After earning a degree in history, he had managed to find a job in finance, but subsequently lost it in the turbulent years following the 2008 financial crisis. In this context, uncertainty at a critical life stage was a factor in his pragmatic decision to depart. Jeff was not that interested in 'cultivating' his ancestral heritage in Armenia, as he was already well informed about his own family genealogy in Turkey. He was more interested in the long-term entrepreneurial effects of the programme, both on Armenian society and on himself:

> "I will go back to United States, but this doesn't mean I'm done with Armenia, it's all…you see where it takes you, and that's Birthright's idea. These people that often come, they just come for summer or for a few months, there's no expectation that they stay here and repatriate, because they came with the Birthright programme. The idea is to get them familiar with Armenia, so it feels like another home**,** and down in the future… Their whole plan is not necessarily that you have to come here and never leave, it's that you come here, you make connections, you get to know it, you learn your homeland and then you go home, you remember that, you help it as you can back home or wherever you are and then if there's an opportunity, or you feel ready and you want to do it, do it! If you don't want to do it, you don't, there's no pressure."

His pragmatic attitude towards Armenia was very much shaped by the material consequences of being a volunteer. In coming to Armenia as a Birthright volunteer, Jeff was able to find his community and an affordable start-up position. He became quite emotional when he described the opportunities Birthright Armenia had offered him as an American. Beyond the fact that it became affordable for him to "live on his own for the first time in his life", Jeff stressed his new feeling of safety, being part of a real community.

> "I didn't know anybody here. But coming with Birthright, you have a group [of people] around you who are in the same situation. They are new to Armenia, they are learning about the country, and they are from America, or another country, they are not from here, they are also kind of a stranger. Birthright and Repat do help you to find jobs here."

The 'safety' and 'success' that come with economic opportunities in a new place are essential to understanding the process of 'doing diaspora'.. When I asked Jeff how newcomers can do business without connections to local society and in a country where the post-socialist economy is defined by the informality of laws and corruption, his answer was completely confident: "I think there is

more potential for business in Armenia than in America." Jeff stressed the importance of know-how in modern and fashionable small- and medium-sized businesses, for instance in the high-tech sector, start-ups, banking or tourism. On the other hand, he did not underestimate the power of local oligarchs in traditional branches, such as food production, supermarkets and restaurant businesses. Jeff's sense of being a 'pioneer' in the country of his ancestors was supported by the idea that he was facilitating a transfer of specific know-how from the United States to this remote country.

> "[…] Once they (oligarchs) didn't have the knowledge to do it well, like there is a cell phone company Vivacell, which was founded by a diaspora person, and they didn't know how to do that so they left it alone. Now it's the biggest one in Armenia. (In 2015, Vivacell became part of the Russian MTS communication holding. TD). […] No, of course when you have a small business, someone can show up and say: 'if you don't give us half of the business then we're going to do something bad to you'. It's possible. And that's the scary thing. It's not a perfect situation, but meanwhile there are people here proving that it's possible. And especially for a diasporan, it's hard to mess with that person, because if this Green Bean down the street, on Amiryan, which is a diasporan business and it's doing so well, if they came and tried to take over Green Bean, it would be just because of all the foreigners there, all of the diasporans, all of them. And if they tried to get involved in that and tried to make trouble for them, that wouldn't go very well. I don't say it's impossible, everything is possible, but meanwhile at Green Bean they say: 'It takes more money, we have to spend more money to do it, but we do everything legal, we don't take any shortcuts.' (Green Bean is a successful coffee and snacks chain in Yerevan providing free wifi. TD)"

Miriam

Twenty-five years of age, Miriam came to Yerevan from Washington D.C. in 2012. I made an appointment to meet her at the Birthright Armenia office in Hanrapetutyan Street, where she was attending an Armenian-language course. Wearing a pastel-coloured dress over blue jeans with long blond hair, she presented herself as "75 percent Armenian, a fourth generation Armenian American descendant from a typical emigrant family". Born in Michigan, she grew up in Philadelphia in a middle-class American family. Miriam's grandparents ran small businesses such as dry-cleaners and ice-cream shops. Her

parents went on to work as managers and clerks in a large coffee company. Her multicultural background included Russian and Italian blood, although Armenian heritage dominated her identity. Miriam came to Yerevan as a Birthright volunteer for six months and, at the time of our interview, was working in a recording studio called Ask Armenian Audiobooks.

From the outset she emphasised her membership to the old Armenian Apostolic Church. Moreover, she was proud of having early experiences in singing chorus during Sunday services and learning Komita's *Patarag*[5], a divine liturgy in the Armenian Church and the ancient Armenian language *Grabar*.

> "I think when I was growing up the main identification of being an Armenian was to be a part of the Armenian Orthodox church, because I knew that my church was different from other people's church, because it was in a different language, but I also saw this cultural connection when I got a little bit older. I think everyone eats rice '*plav*' at home, everybody eats shish-kebab. When I grew up I saw there were certain parts of my life that are different from the typical American, but we were very Americanized, super Americanized…My parents did not grow up speaking the language, and my grandparents could speak Armenian, but they always tried to assimilate and to blend in."

Neither her parents nor her grandparents, whose parents arrived in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century from Istanbul and Sebastia as refugees after genocide, have ever been to Armenia. When asked about her family origins, Miriam answered:

> "I think even though we're technically from Turkey, I say 'technically', because it depends on how you define 'Turkey' today – it's Western Armenia. So, if there is a desire to go somewhere, it was to Eastern Armenia. Because this is the place where our language is spoken and this is where our culture exists."

She started to think of Armenia as a travel destination after graduation from college because "I did not know what I was going to do next, I did not have a job yet, I was freelance teaching a public-speaking course over the summer, so I had to do something". Similar to Jeff, job uncertainty was a crucial factor in Miriam's motivation to 'relocate' for the 'ancestral homeland' and make a 'journey to the future' on the territory of an unknown homeland. She found herself in a liminal situation shaped by two sudden events: her parents' divorce, which led to the disintegration of the family core, and her resignation from her job: "Everybody kind of spread out, my brother moved to Minnesota, my sister

was still in Pennsilvania , now she is in Chicago for college, and my parents divorced." She became more reflective when talking about how her parents' divorce coincided with a demanding job with an aggressive boss and seemed relaxed when describing her decision to quit the job and join the Birthright and AVC programmes instead.

> "So since I was working longer and longer, I felt like I needed to do something different, but my boss had that type of personality, when she knew you're going to leave, to go to a different job, she'd call your future employer and would try to tell him not to hire you…I quit and I volunteered, since going to my homeland was something I always wanted to do. I also knew that she (the boss) couldn't follow me there. But, I really wanted to come, so Armenia was an excuse to quit my job and vice versa. It worked out very well."

The story of escaping a difficult situation gracefully is somewhat reminiscent of classical pilgrim narratives of a personal reunification with a Promised Land after a long trip. And Birthright Armenia turned out to be a kind of therapeutic 'ceremony master', guiding Miriam successfully on her journey to herself in a remote place. She believed that her sense of being human and Armenian had been strengthened, even it was based on a vague awareness of being connected to sacred music and to a country with an ancient culture. The diasporic form of 'innocent yearning' found its expression in individual way of finding one's self with healing effects.

> "Though, I don't look Armenian, I like that I'm doing something, I'm part of the movement in Armenia, I'm part of the growth of Armenia in whatever way it is. It's not necessarily a big way, but I like that I'm a cog in a wheel. I really like being a part of the machine here, because it's a good machine, it's a machine that gives me extra fuel to work."

In contrast to Jeff's pragmatism, Miriam's understanding of her 'journey to the future' is shaped by a nostalgic, patriotic feeling of being connected to the land of desire. Having a connection to the local society via a homestay family play an important role in forming a personal relationship with the Republic of Armenia. Miriam's positive experiences around her trips and her stay with a homestay family derive from her everyday experiences of feeling part of a larger family, which often contrasted with her sense of family and working life in the United States. When describing the ways in which she was incorporated into Yerevan life, she is enthusiastic about the special sense of sociability in Armenia:

> "It was so anticlimactic, I didn't know, for example, if Armenia had tall buildings or not. I always used to being in a vertical city, and Yerevan is a horizontal city. So first I was kind of shocked. But then I was getting into a *marshrutka* (microbus) with my host sister. This is so different, but I loved it, because I was like: Wow! This girl is offering to put my bag on her leg because I have to stand on the bus right now."

Anna

Anna called me on my cell phone and asked me if I was Bulgarian because of my surname. She was very interested in giving me an interview and suggested meeting up in a café on Abovyan Street, one frequently visited by expats, tourists and diasporic Armenians. The 25-year-old came in with her dog, dressed in a black miniskirt, a hooded T-shirt and sneakers. At the time of our interview, she had already spent two years in Armenia and was preparing to leave for the US.. She had planned to arrive in Yerevan in summer 2011 and spend six months as a Birthright volunteer, but stayed longer on her own after receiving many job offers. In September 2013, she was working as a camera operator for a diasporic charity organisation. . Unlike Jeff and Miriam, she had a good command of the local language and seemed to be quite independent from other volunteers in Armenia: "For me, it was important not to allow Birthright to be my only avenue for engaging with the place and people here."

Born in Sofia (Bulgaria) and raised in San José, Anna is a citizen of both the United States and Bulgaria. She visited Bulgaria twice before coming to Armenia. Unlike Jeff and Miriam, Anna did not view her ethnic heritage through the lens of the genocide discourse, but saw herself rather as a descendant of the Ottoman Armenians from the Edirne area, a region located on the border between Bulgaria and Turkey. Three generations, including herself, were born in Sofia, but in the 1990s her parents decided to leave Bulgaria for the United States as tourists, because "after the fall of communism living in Bulgaria was impossible and my father has always hated communism". She felt different to other volunteers as she was born in Bulgaria and her parents spoke English with an accent. Though her multicultural background included three different languages and cultures – Bulgarian, Armenian and American English – Anna emphasised that the Armenian element was very dominant in her life in San José, despite the fact that her mother is ethnic Bulgarian. She went to an Armenian school, visited the Armenian Church and was a member of the Dashnaktsutyun Youth Federation.

Anna explained her decision to travel as a volunteer to Armenia in professional terms as it gave her the opportunity to do a PhD in comparative literature with Armenian and Bulgarian. Without denying that she has 'always' wanted to come to Armenia, Anna took the 'pragmatic' decision to apply for the Birthright programme in her final year of college when her application for a Fulbright scholarship was unsuccessful. Anna's 'perfect time' to depart for the homeland coincided with a gap year between finishing college and preparing for a PhD thesis. Besides the fact that the Birthright volunteering programme included incentives (free flight ticket and free homestay), it was her friends and contacts in the Los Angeles Armenian community who encouraged her to apply.

Although it was clear that she was passionate about the Armenian language, culture and landscape, after arriving in the homeland Anna became quite cynical and even frustrated about the Birthright programme. In particular, she disliked the way Birthright Armenia positioned itself vis-à-vis Armenian society. Another source of disillusionment was related to the visible social inequalities between wealthier diasporic travellers and poorer locals. While she admitted that Birthright was a good resource for coming to Armenia, she was disappointed by the one-sidedness of the programme, what she described as their "naïve and selfish mission of self-discovery":

> "[...] the organization does a very good job of ushering you into certain experiences that keep you away from understanding the serious destraction taking place here. Because then you'd see that you feel the same way the people who live here feel. It is absolutely hopelessness. And that is not Birthright's goal. They want you to stay. So, they'll do their part to make sure that even if you witness unfortunate things, you are still able to take it and flip it and make it into something positive, to not lose hope. I do not think that it is a bad thing, I just think it's very one-sided.."

After living for two years in Armenia, Anna distanced herself from both the community of Birthright volunteers and from Armenia as her homeland. Proud of her multicultural background, she saw her ability to form an independent and critical opinion on the Birthright programme as a source of strength: "I was always hybrid and I was able to exist in many places at the same time. The idea of returning to Armenia is a silly one, because this sentence makes no sense, my family is from Bulgaria." At the same time, she became quite emotional when describing her own ambivalence and how she unexpectedly came to see herself "first and foremost as an American" in Yerevan.

> "I think that the power structure, the power dynamics between the local population and us as often privileged, wealthier white foreigners, because I think my American-ness makes me quite "white" here, it is something that has to be attended to. And Birthright has been very afraid of touching this subject. […] I am not perceived here as a woman, I am perceived here as a representation of the money that comes from the US and from the West. To me that is whiteness, absolutely! When I was in Africa, it was absolutely the same thing! People would respond to my skin colour, and the second thing they would say was money. You know, whiteness is synonymous with capital."

Anna seemed to be aware that her new identification as 'white' American was shaped by situational factors in one specific place and time. She immediately reflected on the opposite experience of being less 'white' in the American context:

> "I've never felt more foreign than when I came to Armenia. In the US as a kid I always felt like I was different, because I was Armenian. Because I had a different face and my parents spoke with an accent. But now when I go back to the US, I feel completely at home."

She became very serious when I asked her what she means by the 'one-sidedness' of Birthright's mission. In contrast to Jeff and Miriam's positive experiences of 'doing diaspora' in the homeland, she emphasised the limits of interactions with Armenian society and the persistent gap between the Western diaspora and local Armenians:

> "There was an interesting situation. Somebody in Birthright and AVC organized a world anti-tobacco day to promote no smoking here in Armenia. And the ways they represented it, the initiative, made it sound like: 'Come on foreigners! Let's get together and teach the Armenians how they shouldn't smoke!' And somebody responded to this email: 'I am tired of AVC trying to tell me how to teach people here, that is not why I came to Armenia'. Nobody from the BR spoke up. But I said that this is a problem and needs to be talked about. I immediately got a call from Birthright […] and I said: I am sorry, guys. I do not regret what I said, because I said it's better we talk about this instead of partying every night and going to the same bar every night in Yerevan, getting drunk and vomiting everywhere', which is the reputation that the Birthright volunteers had for a while in Yerevan. They come here for two months or longer, spend all their money because it is so cheap here,

> they party, have sex with each other. So Birthright was very offended by this comment that I made, but unfortunately it's the truth…"

She expressed her solidarity with the local population and smart young people who, like herself, want to receive a good education, do a PhD in Western universities, and leave Armenia.

To sum up, these three portraits show different ways of 'doing diaspora' on an individual level by volunteering in the homeland. The choreography of the volunteers' journey involves a movement from one centre to another, from one home place to the iconic space of the homeland. The decision to make such a journey is very much shaped by individual biographies embedded in the Western system of education and career paths. Moreover, the 'perfect' time for departing and moving to another place often coincides with a gap year in one's studies or career, in other words with a liminal phase between leaving one post (high school, university) and taking up another. Pragmatic, naïve, emotional and painful experiences of travelling the homeland show that the notion of improving one individual career does not necessarily intersect with the desire to discover their ancestral heritage, but rather contributes to a varying degree of self-discovery.

Regardless of the level of assimilation and the resources, social and cultural capital, diasporic youth's 'making a homeland' involves the notion of journey, which is structured by three main overlapping motivations: a journey to the past, a journey to the future and a journey to the self. The journey to the past is a metaphoric understanding of a return to the lost culture of ancestors, a belief in traditions, which existed in some prior time 'before the genocide' kept in memories of young people. However, these memories are limited to the names of the places where grandparents come from and few cultural traits learnt at school. This journey to the past, however, is a motivating factor to the desire to establish a link to a cultural 'timeless heritage' with 'an imagined homeland' that has been re-activated not by family and relatives but diasporic organisation leaders. The notion of a journey to the future coincides with Birthright's cultivation of the links to the iconic place, Armenia, with individual visions of a future career path in a society where volunteering is a requirement for graduation and for the promotion of a global cosmopolitan's career. This notion is very much related to the third individualised motivation, a journey to self, which takes a form of symbolic action. These latter values of journey are perceived as an elevation in status for volunteers that emerge in the form of experimental social capital valuable within the society where volunteers grew up.

While Birthright and AVC organisations may speak of a desire to 'serve the nation' and claim to 'develop the homeland' with volunteer work, the 'journey to the future' should not be understood as purely 'collective' form of Armenia-centred political socialisation. Many of the volunteers are attracted by the idea of 'saving the planet' as well as looking for something useful for their individual professional future via a homeland trip. A considerable argument in support of a long-distance 'homeland trip' is the possibility of finding personal career pathways in a developing country, especially in an 'adventurous location' of the new Global South.

Conclusion

This insight in the experiencing the homeland as 'roots' migrants in Armenia among Western volunteers of Armenian descent reveals a significant phenomenon of temporary 'homecomings' among young professionals and underlines the growing popularity of cross-border diasporic mobility. For Armenian Americans or Armenian Canadians, homeland trips and volunteering in the 'ancestral homeland' have not (yet) evolved into a mass phenomenon, however this 'structurally invisible' mobility shapes a new pattern of attachment to the homeland. Generally, homeland trip motivations among third-generation diasporic Armenians are diverse and they organised neither along kin and family networks, nor by state-centred institutions, but activated within international and informal civic diasporic organisations. US-based intermediary organisations, which were described in the previous chapter, reclaim Armenian soil through the rhetoric of a temporal 'journey to the future' and play an important role in creating a 'grey zone' of transnational activity for youth beyond state bureaucracy. I argue that through these trips diasporic identity is materialised and reproduced for a specific social group, i.e. young diasporic elites and individuals from a multi-cultural background.

Imaginaries play an important role in envisioning the sacred homeland. Similar to Salazar's notion of migration trajectories (2011), the Armenian diasporic 'journey to the future' is very much about imaginaries that came to be turned into a physical movement from one locality to another and back. The fact that the homeland trip is emotionally represented as a 'sacred journey' is reminiscent of a sort of modern secular pilgrimage. This is a way to combine liminal practices with subjectivities of young urban middle class, who enact 'momentous mobility'.

State-based authorities may claim homeland trips are political in nature yet other factors emerge on the level of the individual. These include an understanding of one's career path, the social status of being a part of a middle-class educated volunteer's community, and financial incentives. In this sense, one can say that an emerging form of diasporic mobility moves away from certain aspects of conventional homecoming and ethnic repatriation movements[6] such as a one-way-destination, the centrality of ethno-national attachments and the ideology of blood (Glick Schiller 2005; King/Christou 2011). The specific features of contemporary diasporic 'homecoming' differ from classical return migrations significantly, as they include the temporariness of mobility, the voluntary and pro-active character of relocation, the lack of a hostile attitude from the side of the mainstream society where the travellers reside, and the fact that the travellers are not foreign-born returning nationals (Bakalian 1993; Kaprielian-Churchill 2005). Though the ideology of 'roots' plays a significant role in mobilising motivations to travel, the homeland volunteering can hardly be called a linear way of the 'counter-migration' and 'counter-diasporic' movement identified by scholars on the studies of return migration in Europe (King/Christou 2011). Moreover, the aspirations of young people differ from those of second-generation returnees who return to their parents' houses and lands relying on their specific cultural capital (Wessendorf 2013). Similar to what Noel Salazar identified as a "momentous mobility" (Salazar 2018), this is a temporary movement that can be a central element structuring the modern biographies of diasporic youth. Volunteers perceive the remote 'ancestral homeland' not only as a nostalgic memorial landscape, but rather as a place for opportunities and 'start-ups' related to personal future career plans.

Many predicted that diasporic 'roots' migrants predominantly renew and reinforce bounded identities and social relations as such movements pull people in specific destinations (Clifford 1999; Glick Schiller 2005). My main argument in this chapter is that among third- and later-generation diasporic Armenians from the United States, Canada or Australia, diasporic mobility is shaped less by long-distance, nationalistic urges for vengeance in regard to the past, but rather by individual career plans and a middle-class activists' romanticism. It is in this way, rather than on notions of a bounded community, that resources of individual power and status are constructed. As this examination of motivations for embarking on a 'journey to the future' reveals, diasporic volunteers remain very much conscious of a global understanding of mobility as an individual marker of social status within the society in which they grew up.

Young professionals and highly skilled migrants take advantage of career opportunities and chances to improve their CVs, which are valued in the Global North. What is on display here is a variety of imaginaries among members of the paradigmatic diasporic group such as Armenians, which shows how second- and later-generation diasporics take advantage of their multi-cultural background to become transnational global actors.

Notes

1 Source : http://repatarmenia.org/eng/why-move/. Last accessed in 03. 2014.

2 The holy Mount Ararat is located approximately 50km eastward of the Armenian capital Yerevan behind the Turkish border.

3 More generally, some research has been done in the field of transnational homeland trips among foreign-born returning nationals and second-generation root migrants. See Levitt/Waters 2002; Potter/Phillips 2006; Wessendorf 2013; Jain 2013.

4 See more about the life of Armenian migrants and their assimilation into the North American societies in Bakalian 1993 and Kaprielian-Churchill 2005.

5 Patarag (Badarak) is a classical Armenian word used to define the celebration of the Eucharist or Divine Liturgy in the Armenian Church. The word is a translation of the biblical Hebrew and Greek words that mean 'animal' and 'offerings'. Komitas, an Armenian priest and composer of sacred music (1869–1935) created Patarag in 1933 as a polyphonic version of Armenian sacred music that was innovative for that period. He named it "Polyphonic Sacred Liturgy for Men's Chorus".

6 For example, the Armenian repatriation campaign in the 1940s. See Mouradian 1979.

Chapter 4. Constructing Bonds to the Homeland – Diasporic Culture of Philanthropy

In April 2005, during my first field trip to Armenia, the taxi and mini-bus drivers of Yerevan often drew attention to the surprisingly good quality of roads in post-Soviet Armenia, in particular, the mountainous 80km highway connecting the Republic of Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh (*Artsakh*), the disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The quality of the renovated roads in this area was associated with a single name – the Armenian American Kirk Kerkorian, a casino billionaire of Armenian descent from Los Angeles (1917–2015). On 17 June 2015, after Kerkorian's death, the online media platform *Azatutyun* (Freedom) described the meaningful nature of this economic transaction in the following manner:

> "Kerkorian visited Armenia for the first time in 1998. Over the next decade, his Lincy Foundation financed more than $200 million worth of infrastructure projects in his ancestral homeland, making Kerkorian its number one Diaspora benefactor. Roughly $150 million of that money was spent between 2001 and 2004. It was mainly channelled into the repair and construction of 430 kilometres of major highways, bridges, tunnels as well as 3.700 new homes in the Armenian regions still reeling from the 1988 earthquake. Lincy's funds were also used for the renovation of dozens of Armenian museums, theatres and concert halls. The lavish aid led then President Robert Kocharian to give Kerkorian Armenia's highest state award: the 'Order of the Fatherland' carrying the title of 'National Hero'. The media-shy tycoon received it during his second and last visit to the country in May 2005."[1]

Within a very short period after the earthquake in 1988 and the energy crisis at the beginning of the 1990s, post-Soviet Armenia emerged as the target of a variety of international humanitarian aid programmes and charitable giving,

many of which were organised by members of Armenian diasporic communities in the US. Material resources and money were spontaneously given to Armenia for rebuilding facilities, infrastructures and social services at hospitals, schools, orphanages, and domains, those services that were usually performed by the former socialist state. The unexpected financial support provided by those of Armenian descent from abroad resulted in euphoric expectations for national mobilisation among the post-Soviet Armenians (*Hayastantsy)* and the Western diasporic Armenians (*spuyrk)*.

In this chapter, I focus on the role of financial transactions from second- and later-generation diasporic individuals to Armenia, as an informal and de-centralised dimension of giving in the process of 'making a homeland'. According to the sociologist Avtar Brah, people's sense of belonging in diasporic contexts emerges in the interplay with the 'host' society and places of origin, so that identity may become fluid and is constantly in the making (Brah 1996; Sigona et al. 2015). In the following, I draw attention to the specific tools of transfer that provide a tangible sense of individual attachment to the 'ancestral homeland'. Under conditions of political change and economic crisis in Armenia, the sense of cultural belonging among second and later generations of diasporic Armenians has received a new dimension. This meant a shift in the scope of diasporic attachments that went far beyond the boundaries of the numerous local urban neighbourhoods and ethnic communities of Boston, Fresno, New York or Montreal, stretching out into a new locality on the Eurasian continent.

Donations from diasporic communities for public works among Armenians have a long history; what is new is the way individual energy and money are sent to a remote homeland rather than to the immediate ethnic neighbourhoods in which they reside. Under these circumstances, the vague cultural notions of the 'ancestral homeland' with fuzzy boundaries, which was until recently associated with a 'remote island' and mythical landscape, have been reconsidered. Members of established Armenian diasporic communities in Western countries received a rare opportunity to re-imagine the notion of homeland as a real location with national attachments. This chapter discusses how this sense of attachment received a transnational dimension through fiscal processes and facilitated the pathways for homeland trips that generate 'roots' mobility. In this way, I draw attention to the influence of diasporic philanthropy transactions and transnational giving practices for creating a homeland attachment, when emotional attitudes towards the homeland are translated into economic actions.

By diasporic 'attachment' I mean a degree of individual or collective belonging and a form of exchange between homelands and different diasporic communities in their respective 'host' societies. As Dan Lainer-Vos (2013) argues in his book on "sinews of the nation", attachment can be viewed as a more flexible and resilient category than the notion of identity in the understanding of modern national and transnational variations of bond constructions. The notion of attachment seems to carry less baggage than identity and loyalty (Lainer-Vos 2013: 169). I argue, based on my ethnographic encounters in Yerevan and Boston that performative acts and affective body engagements are crucial techniques for re-imagining the homeland (Abramson 2017) and that intermediary organisations channel the flow of diasporic donations in order to generate a sense of place for the diaspora. In the case of the afore-mentioned Armenian American tycoon, the development of infrastructures and reconstruction of national roads became a performative action in the public domain of homeland-diaspora national discourses. The act of bringing money into the post-socialist Armenian economy was highly demonstrative in style and represented symbolic power of Armenians as an old trans-nation, which was able to build an important modern high way road binding the territory of the Republic of Armenia with the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.[2] As an award to Kirk Kerkorian's long-distance giving to the homeland, since 2005 the portrait of Kirk Kerkorian is displayed as part of Armenia's national heroes' pantheon in Yerevan's Mother Armenia Military Museum.

This example marks a new era in the creation of diasporic attachments in the homeland, encouraging diasporic decedents towards the idea of supporting the Republic through transactions, symbolic returning and transforming it into a 'desired' homeland. The arrival and visibility of prominent diasporic newcomers have become an integral part of pan-Armenian politics and discourses in contemporary Armenian society (Ishkanian 2008; Dyatlov/Melkonian 2009). Right after gaining independence, the Armenian government under the then President Ter-Petrosyan invited a number of prominent Armenian Americans to serve in ministerial posts and as governmental advisers.[3] In 2001, the construction of Saint Gregory the Illuminator Cathedral in central Yerevan marked the spiritual re-unification of two different poles, an act that symbolised a new pathway of pan-Armenian attachments. However, the mode of interactions between the Republic and diasporic organisation remained complex, in particular during the Ter-Petrosyan government of 1991–1998 (Payaslian 2008: 205) and Nikol Pashinyan's rule. In addition to political disputes on sovereignty and the foreign policy towards Russia, geo-

political economic backgrounds immediately challenged Armenia's fragile sense of common identity and belonging.[4]

In terms of creating new financial ties to the homeland, investments and donations from Western countries to Armenia are usually described in local discourses as a predominantly anonymous, generous moral gift from the diaspora to the homeland. The organisers of the fundraising usually declare diasporic investments as a 'pure' and 'free' gift to the 'ancestral homeland', as an act of 'giving back' without expecting a direct reward or immediate reciprocity. Within this encounter, Western diasporic Armenians have become associated exclusively with the figure of a wealthier 'giver' and 'provider' who occasionally turns his or her interest to the impoverished economy of the homeland. Diasporic gift transactions differ from economic remittances in that they do not form part of migrants' normal wages or family incomes.

There is a conceptual looseness in understanding the notion of 'diasporic gift' as an economic, social or moral transaction between two different places – homeland and diaspora. While some scholars declare diasporic philanthropy transactions as a form of global post-national economy and as complementary to migrant remittances (Hilber 2008; Espinosa 2016), transnational private giving for public goods is empirically and conceptually under-studied by scholars of migration and transnationalism. There is a vague understanding of the context of giving, the role of the state and the public effect of transactions. According to the literature, the state does not play any significant role in the organisation and transmission of philanthropic transactions. Indeed, state agencies may remain hidden, and they are not involved in the circulation of flows between two places. However, financial gift flows sent by individuals are often framed in ethno-national sentiments. My suggestion is that we look carefully at how giving actually takes place, practised and celebrated in the diasporic context. Thus, I examine the motivations behind 'giving', including the organisation of donations as well as the structure and techniques developed by intermediary organisations in crafting homeland-oriented philanthropy. I unpack 'diasporic giving' from the perspective of diasporic actors as social practice in the context of global inequality, a perspective that has been rarely studied. I will trace the logic of popular donations to the distanced homeland as a specific technique of exchange and means for a possibility to re-produce social status not only for wealthier 'visible' investors but also by 'ordinary', less 'visible' middle-class donors. Within this context, the social figure of the diasporic donor is significant in shaping the transnational behaviour of migrant's descendants, facilitating new conditions for 'roots'

mobility and emotional attachments across borders without involving state agencies directly.

By focusing on the 'figure of donors', the practices of giving and their motivations on a micro-level, these ethnographic insights reveal the values of being a donor and how emotions shape the routes of diasporic engagement. This includes the logic of the destination of transactions, the expectations of rewards for giving, and the relation of the donor to the homeland. The description and analysis here are based on in-depth interviews and informal talks conducted with donors in November 2013–2014, who give money on a regular basis and the managers of the Armenian Tree Project, an intermediary organisation in Watertown.

Defining Diasporic Philanthropy

> "Mrs. Virginia Ohanian is one of the Armenia Tree Project's most active ambassadors. Whenever a birthday or holiday comes around, she asks friends and family to direct gifts to the ATP to plant trees in Armenia. They often make such gifts, and do so in her honour too. In fact, Mrs. Ohanian has more trees planted in her honour than any other person in the ATP community. Years ago, she helped the ATP take major step in expanding its education programs by donating $ 100,000 to establish the Michael and Virginia Ohanian Environmental Education Centre at the site of the ATP nursery in Karin Village (Armenia)." (ATP Newsletter, spring 2009)

Philanthropy is a well-known social phenomenon, and it can take variety forms that incorporate diverse aims, channels and practices. The etymology of the word 'philanthropy' goes back to the Greek words, philos (love) and anthropos (humankind), and refers to an ethical form of generosity through gift practices, which can be embedded in the national legal frameworks where philanthropists reside, or in informal culturally valued frameworks. Ilchman, Stanley and Edward (1998: 10) discussed philanthropy in different cultural traditions, viewing this activity as a "valued act of voluntary giving and sharing beyond the family that exists in many cultures in different forms and in most historical periods". According to this approach, philanthropy should be studied as a universal cultural phenomenon reflecting 'people's conception of a good society'. Individual donors and donor organisations usually claim their 'engagement' encourages the growing well-being of a larger society.

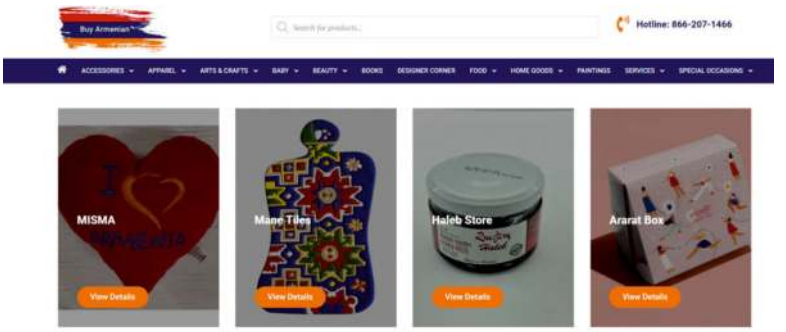
By referring to traditional small-scale societies beyond market economies, the above mentioned authors claim that philanthropy is dependent on reciprocal relations and "reciprocity in this sense involves gift and counter-obligation, it involves people tied to one another through the exchange of objects which established a relationship deeply embedded in social values" (Feierman 1998: 9). Apparently, this ideal type of reciprocal giving goes back to Mauss's classical gift theory he employed when studying exchange in small-scale societies (Mauss 2000).

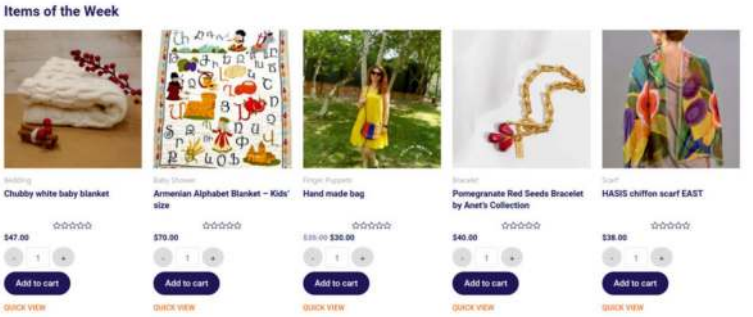
Furthermore, philanthropy is rarely associated with the domain of state and governmental institutions' activities. It is considered that philanthropy in Western societies performs an important element of civil society by functioning between family obligations and state tax regulation (Bornstein 2009; Hanson 2015). One important characteristic of American philanthropy is that it usually should provide public benefits: building schools and health institutions in a city or in a town, the domains that, in Europe and in the former socialist countries, are regulated by the state. Additionally, Frumkin emphasises the transformative and 'engaging' character of American philanthropy by defining it as a 'strategic giving' opposing it to spontaneous and unregulated transactions and gifts. "Common arguments about the function of philanthropy focus on the ability of donors to use private funds to create social and political change in communities and societies" (2008: 11).

The concept of migrants' philanthropy appears in the literature related to development studies and NGO activities, but only recently started to attract attention in the research community, not yet forming a distinctive discourse within migration, mobility and diaspora studies. There is some literature highlighting the role and impact of 'diasporic philanthropy' on the transnational economic development in the Global South (Merz et al. 2007; Newland et al. 2010; Verhezen 2009; Mehta/Johnston 2011). According to this view, it is the diasporic philanthropist who is a non-governmental actor from the private sector who donates directly or via an intermediary to specific initiatives in the homeland country (Merz et al. 2007). Recognising a longer history and established traditions of charitable engagement among different communities in the US and Canada, activists and researchers on the 'growing impact' of diasporic forces on homeland development define the practice of transnational giving as an essential feature of migrant culture. They view community fundraising campaigns as a 'tradition' relevant for any migrant culture and religious communities by confining the meaning of economic

transactions with the notion of 'social investments', 'social remittances' and 'collective obligations' (Goldberg/Pittelman 2007).

Figures 4.1-2: Website of the 'Buy Armenian' Initiative





Source: Taken from https://buyarmenian.com/ on 18.01.2022.

An Indian activist of a non-profit diasporic organisation defined Indian diasporic philanthropy as a religious activity among pious believers in the following manner:

> "Individual and unorganized giving have existed in various forms from time immemorial. The concepts of *daana* (giving) and *dakshina* (alms) in Hinduism, *bhiksha* (alms) in Buddhism, and *zakat* (prescribed offerings) and *sadaqaat* (voluntary offerings) in Islam have been a part of Indian culture of many centuries. It was however with Buddhism, through the

> order of monks (*sanghas*), and later with Christianity that serving the needy first became an organized institutional concern." (Viswanath/Dadrawala 2004: 263)

Likewise, the sociologist of religion, Chaim Waxman views the American Jewish identity through the centrality of religious philanthropy (*tzedakah)* that goes back to the Jewish tradition and obligation to provide for needy fellow Jews across various borders (Waxman 2010: 83). Thus, the practice of charity is explained through the lens of specific religious and cultural tradition like the Chinese Confucian concept of *jen* (roughly, benevolence, compassion,) and *shu* (reciprocity), the Indian concept of *daana* or the Buddhist monastic charity called the 'circuit of giving' (Geithner/Johnson/Chen 2005: 13–14). The main point of these statements is to position the practice of diasporic philanthropy as a by-product of pre-existing cultural and religious sentiments that shape the sense of 'free diasporic gift'. In doing so, these authors claim diasporic giving and charity transactions are associated with the moral ethnic obligations of migrant and their descendants as migrants maintain strong familial, economic and political ties to their homelands. However, I argue that gift practices and diasporic generosity towards the homeland cannot be reduced to cultural ethics.

The existing 'ethnicised' discourse on diasporic philanthropy puts more attention on the expected effects of migrants' donations to the homeland and less on its organisational process. Moreover, according to these statements, diasporic giving is ascribed to be a morally obliged activity *unregulated* by external institutions. This aspect should be reconsidered and need further research.

The main problem is that the existing literature on migrant transfer of resources, social remittances and diaspora philanthropy does not differentiate these transactions from each other (Geithner/Johnson/Chen 2005: 13). Some scholars define giving to the homeland as part of 'social remittances' that include the transfer of values, know-how, social and cultural capital, attitudes, and practices. Peggy Levitt coined this concept by identifying a specific pattern of transnational interactions with the homeland among migrants-villagers from the Dominican Republic in Boston. Levitt (2001: 59) noted that, although migrants' pathways and social remittances have not been defined as such, Poles, Italians, and their mutual aid societies in the US shaped numerous returnees and assisted with the transfer of new ideas, skills and reforms to the homeland (Thomas/Znaniecki 1927; Levitt 2001). These important discussions in the 2000s contributed to the understanding of the role of social remittances

among recent migrants, tracing the flow from the host country to the 'homeland' on family grounds. Speaking directly to family members left behind in towns and villages, social remittances are usually communicated intentionally to a specific *individual recipient* (Levitt 2001: 63). Remittances in this context are again seen as part of the traditional model of giving and transmitting, as an obligation to support family or community members. However, the destination of transactions cannot be limited to family boundaries and to the interactions among recent migrants. Levitt does not differentiate financial flows from the transfer of ideas and social capital, moreover, the role of external institutions has been mostly overlooked. Against this background, this chapter highlights that though modern diasporic philanthropic ideas and practices of giving among second- and later-generation diasporics are also intentional in terms of a specific destination (homeland), these transactions are communicated in a multi-vocal context of the whole country, create different organisational processes. These transactions are increasingly shaped by modern digital technologies.

Another important aspect of diasporic giving that has not been systematically discussed is the changing character of diasporic financial practices across generations. Ilchman et al. (1998) have recognised the selectivity of geographical destinations of investments and their scope among first and second-generation migrants. Whereas first-generation migrants prefer to give to their regional towns, linguistic or religious co-ethnics, second-generation diasporic people engage with less intimate, larger domains of attachment such as the 'nation' (Ilchman et al. 1998: 16). This statement may explain a potential motivation of philanthropic behaviour among different generations, however, the notion of 'giving to the nation' still depends on the ways transactions are organised and degrees of connectivity between diaspora and homeland.

In sum, there are two ideal types of diasporic giving transactions to distinguish: first, the 'traditional' archaic form of giving or 'charity' and second, the 'instrumental' strategic type of giving. The table below shows the main characteristics of the transactions, which can provide a systematic framework for studying the organising process and its hybrid nature. This distinction can be helpful in understanding the multi-vocal logic of diasporic attachments to the homeland.

Both of these two distinctive models of contemporary transnational philanthropy are relevant for Armenian transaction activities, yet I agree that in some cases and parameters it is not easy to draw a clear line between these two types of giving. Diasporic actors can simultaneously see them as an in-

vestment and as a 'pure' gift. By unpacking different elements and motivations of philanthropic transactions, I demonstrate how the logic of giving is mixed and blurred and what levels of interactions seem to bring a dynamic change that moves the diasporic people. What comes next is an in-depth case study of Armenian American experiences of giving from the Boston area to Armenia. In addition to a variety of parameters for funds movements, the following chapter highlights the meaning of external institutions such as the US tax system and intermediary organisations combined with individual informal motivations to give, that shape the diasporic philanthropy as a flexible form of exchange and belonging.

Table 2: Transnational Philanthropic Values

Philanthropy transactions	**Donations as a 'pure' gift**	**Donations as strategic giving**
Participants	Recent migrants, poor and rural migrants, less educated people, all ages	Elite and 'new wealthy', educated middle class, second- and later-generation, post-migrants
Regulation	'Un-regulated', impulsive, spontaneous	Regulated by external systems (tax deduction), intermediary institutions, specific time (towards the yearend)
Destination	To specific villages, towns, family and individual ties	To the whole nation, anonymous recipients, NGOs
Reasoning	Cultural (collective) tradition, pre-existing religious merits, non-instrumental	Individual decision of 'doing well', keeping status within a class, instrumental gift
Purposes	For prosperity of family members, the chosen group or place, religious community, satisfy immediate needs	Shaped by NGO rhetoric: for sustainable development, human rights, to reduce poverty, achieve equitable development, for the nation
Areas of support	Disaster relief, houses, trade, infrastructure in the town, temples or other visible sacred places	Health, social projects, education, development of public sectors

The Armenian Tree Project as Intermediary of Giving

Since the 2000s, a number of generous donations have been collected and celebrated on a wide platform of Armenian American communities for the green well-being of the 'ancestral homeland'. Among them, the Armenian Tree Project (ATP) a transnational non-profit organisation founded in 1994 in Watertown, US, by Carolyn Mugar, a wealthy second-generation Armenian American. Mugar's father and uncle were Ottoman Armenians who left the village of Kharpet in Anatolia in 1906 to settle in a new land. Later on, in the period between the 1940s and the 1960s, the first generation of Mugar's brothers became very successful in his business selling fruit and food and establishing one of the largest US supermarket chains, Star Market. In 2005, Carolyn Mugar, the second-generation of Armenian Americans, whose family name 'Mugyrdichian' was changed in the 1950s in favour of the more easily spelled version 'Mugar', described her mission in the Republic of Armenia as a 'gift'. The following expression demonstrates the emotional spectrum of diasporic activities based on the transnational gift economy that shapes the interactions between contemporary global diasporic Armenians and the Republic of Armenia.

The Watertown ATP office brings a large amount of capital into its Yerevan location, used for establishing tree nurseries, planting trees in urban parks, reforestation, and educational programmes. Along with renewing and planting green in urban parks, the ATP expanded its activities to larger projects such as the reforestation programme in the Lori region in the northern part of Armenia and in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh).

For seasonal work at tree nurseries, the ATP employs people from local borderland villages that are populated by a high percentage of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan. In line with other diasporic NGO rhetoric, ATP was established to support villagers and small communities in Armenia directly, enabled through the absence of efficient state institutions.

Regular donations supplied by a number of middle- and upper-middle-class diasporic Armenian individuals finance tree planting activities in Armenia. Additionally, as a non-profit organisation, the ATP receives financial support from a cluster of American Armenian family foundations that donate annually $100.000 and more. Further support comes from international organisations such as Conservation International (CI), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and other European public institutions promoting global green developments and the protection of nature. However, the main and regular

financial source is wealthier and ordinary individuals, who may or may not be active members of Armenian diasporic communities. The act of giving to the 'heritage homeland' was popular in the 2000s not only among wealthier diasporic Armenians but also among middle-class Armenian Americans.

According to the office database of the ATP (2010–2013), over 250.000 Armenian Americans, mostly from the Boston area, are involved in different forms of philanthropic activities. Among them, more than 11.000 diasporic Armenians are directly involved with ATP activities. The majority of donors live on the East coast and are both second- and third-generation Armenian Americans. Donations usually originate from aged Armenian Americans, often declared in memory of dead family members. In many cases, these are people with a multi-ethnic background, who could be, for example, Armenian-Irish, Armenian-Italian or Armenian-Jewish. Whereas many donors view themselves as 'normal Americans', the ATP puts much emphasis on the issue of post-migration and transnational identification in the way they 'cultivate' the Armenianness of donors. The head of the ATP office in Watertown emphasised in November 2013 that a difference in behaviour and attitude between second- and third-generation American Armenians is observable. Further, this difference comes into play in public fundraising campaigns among wealthier donors, the second generation, who prefers face-to-face communication with the intermediary organisation. According to the office manager, members of the second generation donate to honour their parents who came to the US as poor migrants. However, according to my observations and the analysis of the ATP newsletter lists of donors, there was no significant difference in diasporic giving practices (number and frequency) between the second- and later-generation Armenian Americans.

Table 3: ATP Transactions 2012–2013

Donations	**Amount**	**Number of donors**	**Generation**
Individual	50$/2-3 times/year	most popular	2–3
Individual	100+ $	4.000	2–3
Individual	1.000+$	520	2–3
Family Found	100.000	5	2

The most popular individual donation to the ATP is $50, which is given by individual donors several times a year. Around 4000 donors from Massachusetts donate more than $100 annually and over 520 records of those who regularly donate over $1.000 a year. According to an interview with an ATP activist in Watertown in March 2012, donations are mostly made at the end of the year around the time when US tax declarations need to be made. This donation pattern is not unique to Armenian Americans: the same techniques can be observed in 'giving' behaviour among other diasporic and migrant communities in American society (Indian, Chinese, African).

Among Armenian American channels of philanthropic transnationalism, tax-deductible donations from private family foundations, well-offindividuals and grassroots donors are usually collected by intermediary and non-state organisations, which then transfer the funds to the homeland. The ATP office in Massachusetts is responsible for moving the capital to recipients in Armenia, in this case, the Armenian Tree Project Charitable Foundation in Yerevan. Originally registered as an NGO, in 2008 the ATP office in Yerevan was re-named as a charitable organisation. This tactic was a response to US tax laws, which allow donors to claim tax advantages in exchange for donating to public charities. The recipient organisation "must be legally defined as a publicly supported charity under a section of the US tax code"[5]. By renaming an NGO in to a charitable organisation, the ATP was able to protect the financial flows from numerous unexpected taxes from corrupt local authorities in Yerevan.

In this context, the flow and regulation of diasporic donations are influenced by external formal institutions and can be understood as a form of instrumental *strategic giving* to a specific group and not as a spontaneous act of gift giving. However, the study suggests that the boundaries between strategic giving and charity transactions are not clear-cut. Some Armenian American donors declare donations as an obligation to 'give back' without demanding an immediate return. This is important in order to understand the hybrid pragmatic-emotional nature of fiscal processes between migrant descendants in American society and the homeland in Armenia. In the following, I look at these transactions more carefully in terms of channels, destinations, purposes, and expectations of reward, thus analysing the types of transactions according to the table above.

Figures of Diasporic Philanthropy

> "As a true Armenian, my father had a special love for trees. For that reason, he planted four trees in his backyard garden and named them after his four children. He nurtured those seedlings with so much love, and his trees have a beautiful harvest of fruits… My parents never returned to their homelands, but they always wanted to see their beautiful native-land. I am sorry that they are not here today to see this marvellous nursery, because it combines everything that they loved so much – the mountains, trees, and programs in Armenia."[6]

When we look at 'figures' of modern diasporic engagement with the homeland, individual donors enjoy a distinguished social positioning as real persons who embody a public arena of interactions. One important aspect is that the donors are rarely interested in the incorporation of Armenian state institutions in the official regulation of donation flows. In this sense, one can define these actors as semi-informal figures of diasporic engagement who act in a 'grey zone' of transactions between intermediary non-profit transnational institutions (NGOs) and local community networks in the diaspora.

I suggest defining the 'figure' of the donor not as an institution or the 'diasporic people' with a fixed identity, but as a social position and spectrum of interests that motivates individuals to invest under certain social conditions of modernity (Nail 2015: 235). I use the term 'figure' in reliance to Johan Lindquist (2015) who identified the 'figure' as "a real person who is a symbol embodying the structure of feeling of a particular time and place" (Lindquist 2015: 163). Though, donors may and may never visit the homeland; they feel part of a specific geography of ethnic belongings enabling them to experience a sense of regaining the 'heritage' outside of the country where they reside. Moreover, the ATP managers encourage their donors to move and make a homeland trip to see tree nurseries or participate in volunteering programmes.

The act of donations in tree planting in Armenia is a result of fundraising campaigns organised by ATP managers in the US. A successful fundraising drive depends on community events, public celebrations, or on specific individual and familial events. A large number of successful fundraising events take place during small and larger cocktail parties and 'happy hour' gatherings in larger cities such as New York or Boston and during the week. Some donors host informal parties in their homes and invite guests of Armenian descent.

ATP systematically printed reports and newsletters to inform their readers and donors about ATP's annual programme goals, current investments, and to offer a visual documentary of tree planting missions in Armenia, announcing achievements in community tree planting, in nurseries, acquisition of new green spaces in Armenia alongside images of a green homeland.

Figure 4.3: An Armenian Couple from Istanbul Planting Seedlings in Karin Nursery, Armenia, 2007

Source: Tsypylma Darieva 2007.

An important part of all ATP annual reports and newsletters comprise the last three pages of newsletters, which are filled in with lists of individual donor names and only a few entries indicate that money comes from institutions and private companies. Among them are the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Centre ($250-999), AGBU (Armenian General Benevolent Union), Manoogian-Demirjian School, the Amgen Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York ($250-999), or the HSBC Bank Armenia CJSC ($10.000-24.999). However,

the sizeable number of listed names are individual donors. The list of donor names[7] is hierarchically structured according to the amount of donations made by individuals, families, and institutions, starting with $100.000 at the top. The list does not include those donors who gave less than $100 as "it would extend the report another four pages which we do not believe is the best use of our natural and financial resources", mentioned the ATP report in January 2012. According to this report (2011/2012), the list of names in January 2012 included 313 donations between $100.000 and $250, followed by a long list of those who supported ATP with $100-249. An additional 1.300 donors were in the $1-99 category and were not included in the memorial arena of supporters[8]. Social media and modern facilities of online transactions play an important role in circulating regular donations and getting new virtual anonymous donors. By simply clicking, the green button 'donate' one is able to 'support' the development of Armenia. However, in November 2018, the Armenian Tree Project still seems to depend on a number of traditional givers and hierarchically organised 'visible' philanthropic transactions, rather than the digital anonymous 'per-click' type of philanthropy.

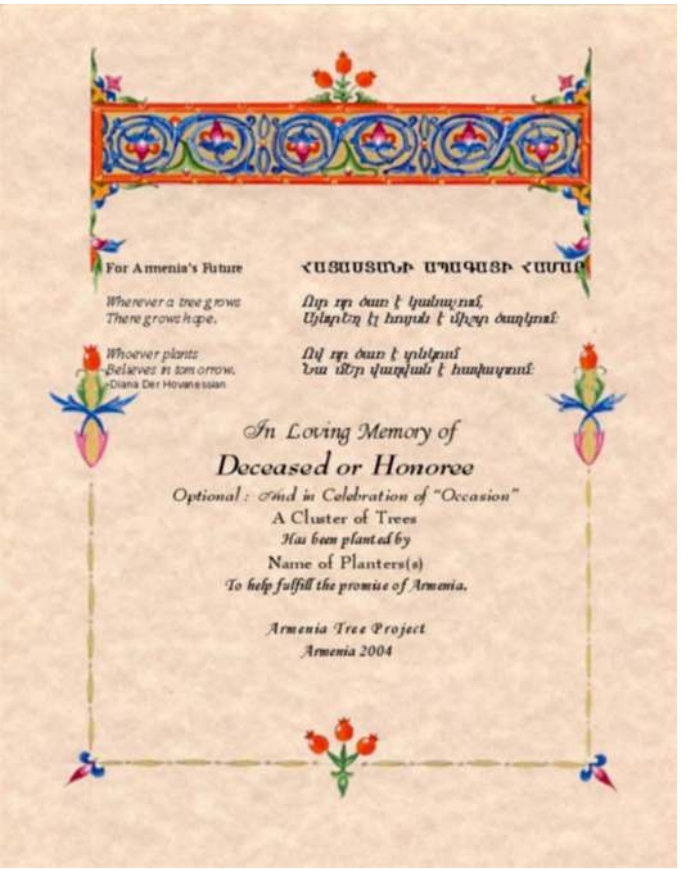
Between Spontaneous Gift and Strategic Giving

There is a set of different techniques to award donors. This could be a postal confirmation of the investment on a green certificate, a public announcement of the donor's name in the ATP newsletter or being featured in a story of donations linked to the homeland landscape. Like the Kula exchange system (Mauss 2000), donations and rhetoric of these non-profit organisations can be viewed as a prestigious act reinforcing the status and power of community members, an important point considering the internal differentiation and public celebration focused on the wealthiest donors. The right to participate in this meaningful exchange is not automatic. One has to confirm the membership by buying a certificate for planting a tree, orchard or forest.

The most popular way of reciprocating a donation is sending a 'Green Certificate' confirming the sponsorship of a tree planting campaign in Armenia. Green Certificates have been designed to cultivate and increase individual donations, which are collected throughout the year but in particular by the end of the fiscal and the calendar year. For an amount of more than $5.000, donors receive a souvenir in the form of a small silver metallic tree. Another reward has a long-distance character as it is a memorial stone or a plaque with the inscrip-

tion of donor's name on it, which can be installed at the Tree of Life in Karin nursery in Armenia, or at the fence of planted orchard or memorial forest in Armenia.

Figure 4.4: ATP Green Certificate for Donors from 2011



Source: https://www.armeniantree.org.

Giving to Armenia has a particular impact on life circle rituals and family events among Armenian Americans. Receiving a 'Green Certificate' has become popular as an alternative birthday gift for family members or as a memorial card in the case of the death of a family member. The composition of Armenian Americans' life circle events such as birthdays, anniversaries and deaths take on a transnational dimension. It is usually parents or grandparents who buy certificates for their sons and daughters, who live in the US or Canada. After

purchasing the trees, the name of a gift receiver is printed on the certificate paper identified as the 'planter of trees'. No specific information is provided where in Armenia or which species, or when and how the tree was planted. Taking into consideration the fact of multiple Armenian homelands without clear boundaries (such as the 'greater historical Armenia' stretching from Constantinople (Istanbul) to Iran, to *Heirenik* in Anatolia and finally the small territory of the Republic of Armenia and the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh), each donor has an opportunity to imagine his or her own 'place-making' in Armenia.

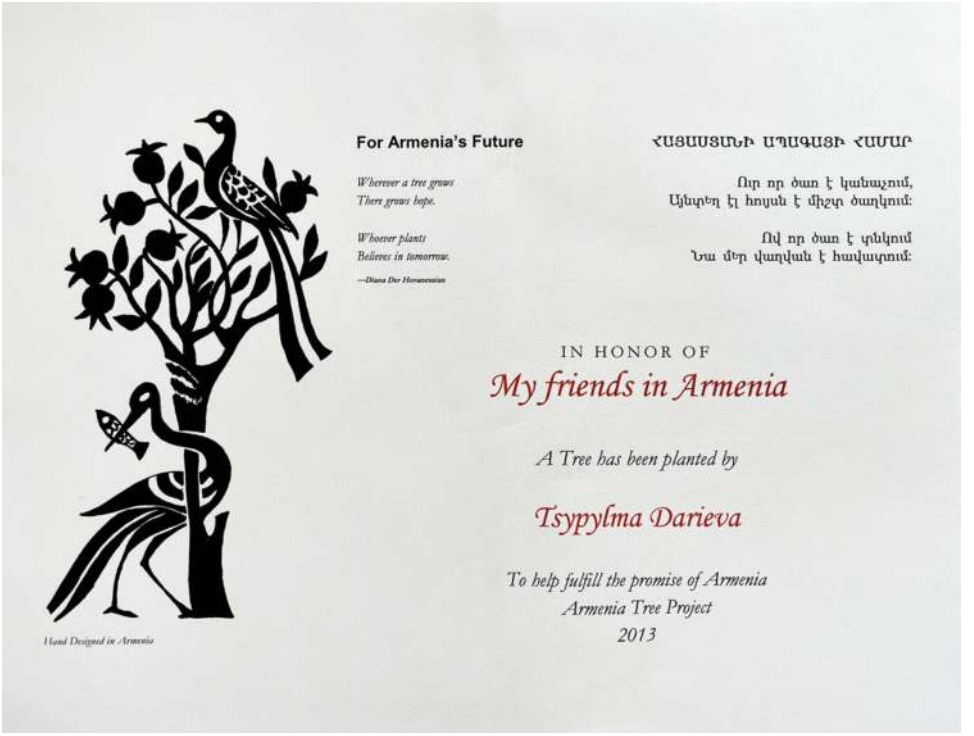
An Armenian American couple from Arlington performed their giving to Armenia by stressing a specific life circle event within their family:

> "You know for instance, last Christmas we said to our children: Don't buy us Christmas gifts, there is nothing we really need. We had just lost our parents last year: So our daughter decided to buy trees to ATP in memory of her grandparents instead of buying us gifts. She was 24 last year. We have taught our kids this giving and thinking of the people who are more in need. We have done a great job. With fifty dollars you can buy a tree and get a certificate. And they have done it several times. And they have done that for their grandparents." (Watertown, November 2013)

In November 2012, during my fieldwork in Watertown, I, myself, donated $20 to plant a single tree in Armenia. Immediately, in return for my donation, I received a hand-designed black and white certificate with the inscription that my donation was made in honour of my friends in Armenia. The text of the inscription has been carefully discussed with me before the certificate was printed. The ATP manager was concerned about the proper formulation of 'reasoning' my donation to the Armenian Tree Project. As being a non-Armenian without 'the legitimised attachment' to the 'ancestral land', and as a non-US citizen, I did not belong to a typical donor of the Armenian Tree Project.

The design of certificates can differ from each other by reflecting a hierarchy of donors in terms of donation size. In 2012, four different types have been developed by ATP according to different amounts of money that people invest in the campaign of greening the ancestral land. The range of donations is quite high and potential donors can choose between $20 and $5.000. The most popular type undertaken by donors is the $100 level. To make things easier and to secure, online donations with a credit card have been introduced by the ATP.

Figure 4.5: The Author's ATP Green Certificate from 2013



Source: Tsypylma Darieva, 2023.

The certificates issued are usually decorated with traditional cultural symbols of the Armenian homeland: with a bird, a garden or a pomegranate fruit. For a larger event, the decoration of the certificate is adapted to the theme of the event. In 2011, to make the act of tree planting more attractive and tangible, a new advertising campaign used a sticker, a physical artefact – a 20-dram copper coin. Like a relic emanating from the distanced Armenia, the copper coin has been associated with the 'real life' of the 'ancestral homeland' and simultaneously visualised a need and a 'tangible' way to help. This advertising statement claimed 'two of these coins will plant a tree, two 20-dram coins will pay a village farmer to plant and acre for each tree that he is responsible for.

The Armenian certificate is designed as a non-state subject, a timeless cultural symbol of being Armenian in the form of a medieval garden. An important component of this fictive garden is the red pomegranate and an impressive image of Oriental birds featured at the corner of the certificate. The images are strongly connoted by links to Armenian reliquaries and traditional artefacts to

be found in Christian manuscripts. Re-enacting the colours of the Garden of Eden, the abstract vignettes and artefacts do not necessarily remind the concrete geography and the modern Armenian state in the South Caucasus. Rather they confirm an attachment to a romantic image of the traditional image of the homeland (Greater Armenia) and a general willingness to 'fulfil the promise of Armenia' as a 'dream'. Thus, on this level, the language of certificates offers rather an abstract journey to the past as to the future and remains within traditional frameworks of the ethnic diasporic community.

In May 2006, the ATP local community planting manager emphasised that delivering documentaries of sponsored sites and making a set of before-and-after photographs for newsletters was crucial for the charity organisation and explained the difference between Armenian Americans and local Armenians in gift exchange:

> "Since we work with the members of the Armenian diaspora, and you know how much money they donate in this project, of course we have created specific donor's sites. Actually, we do not have this public tradition in the Armenian culture to look for the merits of your donation and good will: We have even a proverb which says that once you made a good thing and made a gift, throw it into water, in order it can be returned to your children (*Lavutyun ara gcir jure, vor barin veradarna zavaknerid*). Donors from the US want local people and tourists immediately know who revived or greened this or that piece of park, that it was sponsored in honour of their relatives or a family member. That is why we look after about seventy donor sites. At all these sites we have to install metallic plaques with names. This plaque usually says that 'This orchard is planted in honour of our children's wedding ceremony' or 'in memory of our grandmother', or 'to my husband's seventieth birthday', or 'in honour of our granddaughter's birthday'."

The local manager in Yerevan was surprised about expectations of an immediate gift reward among the Armenian American givers, in particular regarding the practice of naming the orchards and gardens after concrete individuals. On the demand of the Watertown donors' office, the Yerevan local office started at the end of the 1990s marking public green spaces in the city with open access with metallic plaques containing English text indicating the names of the Armenian American donors. A few days later, the plaques had been removed from the green places by force. According to the ATP local community planting manager, the American donors were surprised to find out that the locals interpreted these signs as symbolising the unpopular process of privatisation of

public spaces. As a result, the plaques were relocated to 'protected areas' such as local administrative offices responsible for governing the public spaces. Here we can observe two different cultures of giving and expectations. Local Armenians view diasporic external sponsorship of greening Armenia as a 'pure' gift. In this sense, they compare it with the Armenian traditional understanding of reciprocity within a family circle without any specific marks of transaction and time frameworks of reward. Transnational external actors may use the same rhetoric of family story; however, for them it has a different context and a different causality. Although diasporas tend to characterise their charitable donations as a 'free' and 'pure' gift for the 'homeland', their behaviour shows a high expectation for immediate reciprocity including a visible circulation of signs of reward. Most donations have a component of local status enhancement through obtaining a Green Certificate, or a plaque installed at the parks sponsored by them or a family foundation in Armenia, something that provides accountability for how the money was used.

Values of Being Philanthropist

Hakopian couple

In response to my request to help me with contacting regular ATP donors in the Boston area, the ATP leader suggested I meet with two donors – one Armenian American couple, who just recently joined the fundraising campaign and an ATP board member, who is an established honourable donor and the head of a Family Foundation. The donors differ in terms of age, gender, economic status and education, but shared some important features. When talking about their motivations to donate money to homeland-oriented organisations such as the non-profit ATP, the donors expressed an emotional rather than a strategic sense of giving. In line with the family's story of being a 'poor migrant' and 'genocide survivor', the destination of the donations to a remote mythical homeland, has framed the emotional and affective context stretching far beyond the boundaries of everyday life.

Paul and Anna Hakopian, an economically well-off retired couple, both around 65 years of age, began explaining their donation motivations by presenting themselves as 'typical' Armenian Americans. Both spouses emphasised that their grandparents left the territory of the Ottoman Empire (Sivas and

Kharpet) at the beginning of the twentieth century, because of "the genocide, the common marker if you are a Western Armenian".

> "We're both Armenian Americans, second-generation born in America. Our grandparents were Genocide survivors. They came to America in the early twenties. I'm a retired technology company executive; I worked in a mass storage industry for many years and retired several years ago. We have two childrenand we've been active in the Armenian community all our lives. We were brought up in the Armenian community. and we met through an Armenian dance… We grew up with a great affinity for Armenia. It was a mystical thing to us, something that our grandparents taught us, you know, the maps of Armenia, the pictures of Ararat, they're everywhere."

During the interview, Paul proudly referred to his family (his spouse and two daughters) as an integral part of the Armenian American community in the Boston area, where "all kids were educated in the church, in AYF (Armenian Youth Foundation)[9] and were dreaming for a free Armenia". An important feature of the family's identification was belonging to the Armenian American diasporic group. This hyphenated identification, however, did not generate a sense of being different from the mainstream US American society or ethnically excluded in the US. On the contrary, the couple was very proud of being Americans of Armenian descent, which was conceptualised at the level of having a 'heritage' and a 'free time ethnicity', such as being a member of the Armenia folk dance group in New England. Paul described the attraction of being 'free-time' Armenian in the following manner:

> "It's not unusual for Armenians to get excited when they meet another Armenian. Years ago, I was travelling on business somewhere to America. We got to the hotel and my colleagues wanted to go to the bar and have some drinks and listen to music. And I said I'm going to go to my room and call my wife and then I'm going to look in the phonebook whether there is any Armenian community activity here. They said: 'What's the matter with you?'. My friend was Irish he said: 'I don't go to towns and look up Irish names!'. I said: 'Well, this is something I look up'. There was a church at the community centre, I went there and talked to some people, you know. But this is what Armenians do."

Paul and Anna's symbolic interest in their 'exotic' origin reflects the findings of a previous empirical analysis on transformation of Armenian Americans' identity in the 1970s and 1980s conducted by Anny Bakalian. She identified the no-

tion of symbolic ethnicity in the United States as "a by-product of the particular post-industrial economic system they live in today" (Bakalian 1993: 433). According to Bakalian, affect and convenience have replaced ethnic action, and the "ties of Armenian Americans with fellow Armenians are more expressive than instrumental" (ibid: 434). This pattern of 'feeling Armenian' seems to serve as a good basis for celebrating a new attachment to the homeland with 'less baggage'. Not surprisingly, this manifestation of 'ethnic heritage' as a noble motivation to donate was relevant for the couple, in spite of the fact that both interview partners and their parents do not speak Armenian and have never visited their homeland in Turkey. Even both sides' parents never visited Turkey because "of the political situation".

Paul and Anna justified their giving to Armenia with the 'natural' compassion of well-situated American citizens after visiting this 'poor land'. None of the donors spoke about a specific obligation through being Armenian. However, the Hakopian family started to give to the ATP after their first visit to Armenia organised in 2011 to celebrate their daughter's graduation. They had previously donated to the local church in Arlington and other benevolent organisation in the Boston area. "You know, our kids are raised, we are retired, we're not worrying about things we did in our 30's. We're now able to say what we can do to help our heritage, our homeland". It is clear that donors have leisure time and the target of their philanthropic activity are in 'need':

> "When you see that (Armenian village) and you come back here, where none of us worries about his next meal, we drive our cars and have our homes and we're blessed with that, you say: 'How can we not help?', if we care about these pictures of Ararat and Armenia and the culture all our lives, how can you not now help to do something?!"

The strong sense of doing well through giving is very much related to the awareness of one's social position within the American society. In the narratives about their first trip to Armenia, which was directly related to their decision to start supporting a non-profit organisation such as ATP, it became clear that visiting the homeland as part of a group of other middle-class Armenian Americans on a non-touristic route to 'see people, not buildings' regulated their motivations of giving.

> "We structured our trip so that we went to a lot of places that are not on a typical tour. We went to two remote villages, one on the Azeri border and one on the Turkish border, south of Gyumri. One of the men in our group

> from California, he went to this village about seven years ago as his ancestors were from there. His grandfather was born there, and then immigrated to the US. So, he went there, maybe there is still some family in the cemetery he could see. So, he build relationship with the people here and found an organization, that renovates Armenian schools in Armenia, he started working with them and renovated the school. So, we went back on a follow-up visit and we met this people, the school children, the town leaders and we spent a day with real village people, really wonderful!"

Another important issue that concerns this social type of philanthropy is accountability. It is the sense of a personal connection to an anonymous place that creates accountability and guarantees a receipt of diasporic's gift. Although Paul and Anna were aware of the anonymous character of their gift, they experienced a specific atmosphere of trust and connection by encountering the receivers on their homeland tour.

> "We went to the ATP nursery in Margahovit[10] in Dilijan and we met with the people there, who just had gone two or three years ago to Karin nursery outside of Yerevan…. We were looking through the fields, seeing what they do and visited the orchard afterwards, which is mature now. Areg, the ATP local manager was with us on the way back to Yerevan, he wanted to show us when they actually give the fruit trees to villagers and they create this micro-economy, he wanted to show us an example of how it works. So, this orchard was built on a church land, so it was a common land for the villagers. We went and the priest there came out and showed us…all the villagers were working, there were several acres of beautiful fruit trees. And the priest came up to us and said: 'Where are you from?'. We said America, he asked where, I said Boston, he said: 'Did you know this bishop who has passed away? Archbishop Ashchyan?' I said: 'Yes, because he used to be a prelate in this country, I knew him personally, I served under him'. He said: 'That tree was his favorite tree; he used to pick cherries from there'. So, this is how Armenians are, they make this very emotional connections. He called over one of the village guys, had him climb the tree, pick some cherries and give them to us; from the tree, which this Archbishop loved. We fell in love with ATP and what they're doing."

This is an example of how the visit to the nursery in Margahovit produced a sense of a direct gift that is typical for traditional gift accountability. Here we deal with a specific social context, where the ideal type of hospitality is experi-

enced on a micro-level. Both donors were excited about the 'immediate return' of their giving from the side of the recipients, the villagers. In this way, the act of giving became a relational and not anonymous process.

> "The children prepared some song just to sing to us. We had a beauuuutiful, beautiful lunch they prepared in one of the larger classrooms and it's so sad to see the conditions in the village, the physical conditions. But yet, the warmth in receiving us and the lunch, it must have been a community effort! …And there was an elder woman, who was standing outside of her home, there were some food trees, she had picked some fruit, and she was trying to flag us to stop, because she wanted to give us the fruit for our ride."

This case exemplifies the hybridity of modern diasporic philanthropy, which combines elements of instrumental NGO philanthropy with impulsive practices of giving. In doing so, donors feel that they are seeking and finding something that enhances and reinforces their social positioning and affirms a sense of cultural identity (Reader 1993: 8). The feeling of making a gift in a reciprocal manner became the essential element of the diasporic emotional homeland trip, a journey that had far more emotional impact than an ordinary tourist trip.

The Family Foundation

The ATP regularly publishes features on wealthier donors living in the US and their giving to Armenia. The voices of donors are very important in the continuation of giving activities as they provide evidence of maintaining links to the homeland with expected outcomes. By publicly announcing the amount of generous giving, the intermediary non-profit organisation demonstrates its special commitment to private aspirations of giving and provides the donors with a kind of 'initial receipt'. In this way, the local media confirms the personal status of givers, achieving a greater legitimacy within the Armenian American community. For instance:

> "Arlington, MA. In late 2005 just as Armenian Tree Project was putting the finishing touches on its plans to establish a large-scale reforestation tree nursery in the Lori region (northern Armenia), Paul called the Watertown office to discuss the family's interest in supporting a new program. The family agreed to support the start-up and fund the operation costs of the nursery

> for the next four years with a generous pledge of $ 260,000 to Armenian Tree Project."

In the following, I highlight another diasporic motivation to give, which can be defined as a form of elite philanthropy. I met a representative of the Family Foundation, in the Boston area in November 2013. The interview partner was involved in the established philanthropy sector and has been a member of the ATP advisory board. The donor belonged to a group of entrepreneurs, whose grandfather and father owned an automobile selling company and real estate business in Massachusetts. The Family Foundation was established in the 1960s as a charitable institution. This foundation remains active in the financial support of local public institutions in the Boston area, including museums, churches and other cultural institutions. In the 2000s, the foundation shifted a significant part of their donations to Armenia as they "felt like that's where the greatest need was". The interview partner explained me that it was the family's visit to Armenia that moved the Foundation to relocate part of their donations towards the 'homeland':

> "When my grandfather was in the charge of the foundation, he would give a little bit of money to a lot of different organizations. And when my father took it over and especially after coming back from Armenia, I said: 'You know we only have a limited amount of money to give away. Instead of spreading it out among all of this different ones, why don't we pick a couple of organizations that we really feel do good and give them a substantial amount of money so you can really make a difference in some way?'. I mean, helping to save the environment over there is vitally important and there aren't many people doing it."

Armenia received a strong emotional and social dimension after the third-generation Armenian American adopted a baby from Yerevan's orphanage. The donor declared this act as a 'giving back' because her grandparents were in orphanage before they arrived in the US.

> "My grandparents were both orphans of the Genocide. My grandfather became a fairly successful businessperson here. He always felt like now that he had some measure of success, it was his duty to give back. He said that the only reason he was successful was because of the charity of other people who took him in, took care of him, so now it was his responsibility to give back… He focused mainly on charities here, in the town, because that is where his business and home were."

Through the adoption of a child in Armenia, the donors established personal ties to the homeland and the destination of the giving received tangible character of exchange. Similar to Hakopian's experiences visiting 'their recipient village', the donor's giving became relational and no longer anonymous. "My grandmother was an orphan from Armenia and now she has a granddaughter from an orphanage!" In this way, affective ties to a particular moment and place challenge the traditional utilitarian character of Western-type philanthropy. The interesting point is that for the donor it was very important to not hide the geographical place of a child's origin. The interview partner told that when the child was eleven, the family took her to a homeland trip.

> "There were thirteen children in her grade, so thirteen children went with a parent. And that was so exciting; they can all speak fluently Armenian, read and write. They teach it at Saint Stephen's school in Watertown, so I can't speak, but she can! They were so excited to be there, they finally got to see all the things they learned about. They learnt a lot of history and they got to see a lot of churches, old buildings and things they have learnt, all this history, they finally got to see it. They're very nationalistic, they're very proud! We were in Yerevan on Armenia's Independence Day, we went to the ceremony and then they got up and they sang, they climbed up these buildings and sang songs in Armenian. That was great! They were very-very proud!"

This homeland trip underlined the emotional dimension and intensity of experiencing the homeland, highlighting social emotions such as pride.

Generally, American Armenian practices of giving[11] may mirror the American culture of voluntary sectors, which is associated with the 'American way of life' and has become a mark of civility and economic progress in the twentieth century (Bornstein 2009: 628)[12]. However, diasporic philanthropy seems to be more complex than its rhetoric, which locates philanthropy between instrumentally regulated transactions (Mauss 2000; Weber 1978) and less instrumental practices of giving (Bornstein 2009). Using the anthropological framework of 'gift' and looking more closely at self-perceptions of individual donors, the culture of contemporary giving appears simultaneously in line with American philanthropic norms and with the form of giving that is popular among first-generation migrants directed towards prosperity of family and kin networks. I argue that diasporic Armenians combine these practices without sharply contrasting the type of 'strategic giving' with religious and culturally regulated gifts. Financial support seems to play an important role

in the variety of constructing bonds and intensifying emotional attachment to the homeland.

Conclusion

Maintaining a real or symbolic membership in diasporic networks enjoys a long history among Armenian Americans. Making a donation has an enduring relevance across generations. It is not my intention to claim that every Armenian American is involved in diasporic charitable transactions. Being assimilated and having an economically comfortable position in the society does not necessarily lead to giving on a regular basis within diasporic networks, but it could.

Armenian American philanthropic culture is regulated by the American system of 'strategic giving' that depends on accountability and the utilitarian and instrumental model of combining tax deduction with philanthropic values. However, diasporic philanthropy includes some elements of 'direct' giving shaped by social and cultural factors. This chapter has contextualised the diasporic attachment within broader discussions of material and financial giving, and critically reflected on the clear-cut distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' types of giving. John Hanson, who observed how elite charity culture is perpetuated in North America, believes that philanthropy and giving are an expression of class solidarity or even an obligatory part of status preservation (Hanson 2015: 6). Utilising Mauss' idea of the 'total social fact' and the Trobriander cycle of the kula, Hanson argues that the purpose of modern elite donors is not to redistribute the wealth, but rather to reaffirm and to consolidate status. I would agree with Hanson on this point: diasporic philanthropy resembles American elite charity culture and it forms a significant part of modern elite philanthropy networks. The Armenian American gift transaction is an important tool to maintain social status in American society.

However, I disagree with those scholars who, inspired by Mauss' and Weber's theories of economy and primitive exchange, see transnational diasporic monetary transactions as a totality of strong moral reciprocal obligations between homeland and diaspora, emphasising pre-existing intimate or obliged relations across borders and generations. As a result, global diasporic transactions, flows of people and capital, are still associated with 'traditional' homecoming and intimate, 'narrow' forms of transnationalism. Those kind of views

lead to reductionist explanations of transnational engagement that should be overcome.

By examining the practices of diasporic gift transactions in this chapter, I have provided an understanding of the modern diasporic culture of philanthropy from an anthropological perspective; those humanitarian fields of transactions and attachments, which lay beyond the practices of social remittances. Based on empirical observations and a case study, I scrutinised the culture of giving as a fiscal process on an individual level by demonstrating the motivations and practices of giving among middle- and upper middle-class Armenian Americans from the Boston area. To this end, I looked at the symbolic economy of diasporic giving transactions that emerged in the context of a non-profit organisation, in particular through the case study of a tree planting campaign on the territory of Armenia. I argue that the expansion of the geographical scope and trajectory of giving and public rituals, from local to inter-continental, has changed the scope and the meaning of belonging. A group of Armenian American donors locate themselves largely within the context of the US institutions and culture, while simultaneously incorporating a number of cultural symbols from the 'ancestral homeland'.

On the theoretical level, I have analysed the notion of giving beyond the romanticised image of diasporic and migrant altruistic obligations that sustain the discourse on direct gifting and spontaneous giving. This takes us beyond the tendency to idealise the 'moral economy of diaspora', assuming that economic transactions are spontaneous and tightly knitted to social norms and commitments that reduce the effect of insecurity (Sidel 2004). The classical and modern anthropological theories of gift (Turner 1978; Eade/Sallnow 1991; Silber 1998; Bornstein 2009; Hanson 2015) provide different illuminating explanations for the mechanisms of circulating voluntary donations, allowing us to understand the differences between the notions of 'free gift' culture and Western type of philanthropy that strengthen individual status and community belonging.

Further, different kinds of giving are shaped by specific moments. Examining diasporic transactions from the point of critical heritage studies, one can define the act of giving as a "second life to dead sites" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7; Reed 2014:19). The issue of preserving specific cultural identity by remembering a dramatic experience of expulsion and 'lost culture' is highly relevant for diasporic fundraising campaigns and philanthropic channels as it provides the sense of giving to the right cause (to the most in need) by the right people. The discourse of 'lost culture' and 'gained culture' provides an emotional

and spatial dimension, which guarantees the continuity of Armenian diasporic giving. There is a specific effect of these transactions; the Republic of Armenia, once an unfamiliar mythical 'island', can be transformed into a 'mainland' of individual and family desires.. At the macro level, philanthropy does not link the place of value production with the place of consumption, but links the place of tax deduction with the place of consumption.

What is new about contemporary philanthropy is the diversification of actors and the individualisation of transactions through modern communication channels and social media. They seem to keep their informal character and operate semi-formalised in the domain between family and the intermediary institutions rather than operate through state authorities and larger international organisations. What diasporic organisations and members of intermediary NGOs emphasised in interviews was their willingness to avoid any direct cooperation with local state organisations in Armenia. Instead, these nonprofit organisations seek to work directly with recipients in public domains such as nurseries, hospitals, orphanages, residential homes for elderly people and kindergarten. By going into villages and smaller towns in Armenia, diasporic philanthropic organisations offer means of avoiding state institutions and corrupt bureaucracies, while obtaining a receipt and a sense of accountability. It is a tangible and personal link to one specific orchard, orphanage or tree nursery that enables one to maintain informal emotional ties between two poles.

Notes

1 See in Danelyan, Emil (17.06.2015). 'US-Armenian Tycoon Kirk Krekorian dies', https://www.azatutyun.am/a/27075950.html. Last accessed on 01.12.2022.

2 Along with the Russian military support, such a highway had the benefit of enabling Armenia to maintain its military gains after the Karabakh war (1991–1993).

3 Among them were: Raffi Hovannisian, the first Minister for Foreign Affairs of independent Armenia; Vardan Oskanian, a later Minister for Foreign Affairs; Gerard Libaridian, senior adviser to the President; Sebouh Tashjian, the Minister of energy (Payaslian 2008: 201).

4 The initial rejection of the Law for double citizenship in 1998 has caused a long debate around the notion of Armenian citizenship and diasporic belonging.

5 These tax-exempt entities are referred to as '501(c) (3)' organisations. 501(c) (3) organisations is the US tax code for tax exempt organisations ranging from foundations, universities, churches and public charities.

6 Source : https://www.mirak-weissbach.de/Travel/Tree/Tree.html. Last accessed on 01.12.2022.

7 The office manager mentioned that there are only a few wealthier donors who seek to act completely anonymously. The majority is interested in visibility and public recognition.

8 Since spring 2018, the earlier editions of ATP Newsletters are not available online anymore, only for the time period 2012–2018. The online versions of the newsletter do not entail the list of donors. See in: https://www.armeniatree.org/en/news.asp?i=03020. Last accessed on 04.01.2019.

9 AYF is the youth organisation of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), socialist-nationalist party Dashnaktsyutyun. AYF was founded in the US in 1933 as a scout camp for children of Armenian migrants.

10 Margahovit is a result of the renaming of place names in the Armenian Republic, a process that started in the early 1920s and continued in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The former Azeri name of Margahovit village is Hamzachiman. The politics of place names alteration is profoundly reflected by Arseny Saparov (2003).

11 There is a long history of Armenian American philanthropy and charity culture developed at the beginning of the twentieth century with the arrival of new immigrants, refugees and orphans from the Middle East in the US. The most famous philanthropic and aid organisation goes back to Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), which was founded by Middle East Armenians in Egypt, Cairo and was moved to the US after the World War I (Melkonian 2010). Though major contemporary charity organisations are still associated with these early institutions, there are many different initiatives in different sectors and they may include various political missions such as the Armenian Assembly of America or the Armenian Cultural Foundation.

12 During my fieldwork in the Boston area, I did not come across any specific term used to differentiate American Armenian operations from US American regular charity engagement. Some interview partners referred to the Christian tradition of giving alms to needy people, without using

the Armenian term for almsgiving (*nviratvutyun*). Along with the Christian virtue of giving alms, there is Armenian term *mardasirutyun*, which means philanthropy and an act of giving without expecting any rewards back. However, my interview partners did not refer to this Armenia word, preferring instead to use the English word 'giving'. This is not surprising as the majority of second- and later-generation Armenian Americans do not speak Armenian.

Chapter 5. Making the Homeland – Creating Visceral Connections

In spring 2005, the English language homepage of the Armenian Tree Project, an US-based non-profit organisation, announced to its readers the plan to plant 1.5 million trees in memory of the victims of the Armenian genocide. A flyer depicted a beautiful blue sky over a plain green landscape and a large deciduous tree growing in the middle of a crop field. On the horizon of the landscape was a strip of dark green forest. Those who are familiar with the Armenian mountain landscape would not recognise the plain wonderland landscape shown on this flyer. The flyer included lines of poetry floating down from the blue sky to the earth:

> "For every tear of sorrow, plant a seed of Life;
> For every fallen son and brother, grow a tree that stands for Truth
> For every widow's wail mourning, play the dawn's sweet symphony;
> For stolen daughters torched to dust, give us Beauty for their ashes;
> For every footprint swept beneath the desert sands, raise a tree of Hope."

Together with these melancholic poetic narrations, the advertising visual is an act of Armenian diasporic mourning and reflecting the centrality of the notion of death in diasporic discourses. The notion of death is related to the production of a set of different mourning rituals, maintaining the memory of ancestors who died during World War I as the civil population of the former Ottoman Empire, remembering the loss of former homeland territories in Turkey, and ethnic culture in the diaspora. These issues were discussed in the previous chapters. However, at the same time, a new symbol is constructed in antithesis to the image of the 'bad' death: the symphonic composition of the flourishing field, the blue sky, and the prosperous green tree. All these elements are supposed to stand for the vision of a diasporic 'good' future, not a 'bad' past.

Figure 5.1: ATP Flyer from 1994–2005

Source: Armenian Tree Project 1994.

Conflated with an intimate sense of a lost family member (brother, son, daughter, and widow), the violent past is metaphorically expressed through the image of a void space represented by 'dust', 'ashes' and 'desert sands', the sense of the lost homeland and the notion of a remote place. The vision of a tree body fills the entire landscape, which can be understood as a powerful regenerative symbol with a capacity to heal a 'bad' death.

A decade later, in January 2015, the Armenian Tree Project (ATP) continued to claim it was conducting environmental programmes in Armenia's underdeveloped lands. More precisely, the ATP claimed to have created a secure and green landscape in the Republic of Armenia by "planting fruit and shade trees in every community, reversing the loss of our forest cover, educating children about their environment, and advocating for the sustainable use of natural resources". In his letter sent to thousands of donors in the US and Canada, the managing director of the ATP, Tom Garabedian, emphasised:

> "We are grateful that you are a part of this story, and we hope that you will continue to sponsor trees with us today. A cluster of trees is $100, a grove is $200, and a single tree is just 20$. Please give generously so that we continue to create a green future for Armenia."

In addition to the ATP's environmental education programmes, such as at Mkhitar Sebastatsi in Yerevan, where the schoolyard was redesigned with the idea of a 'green future', there is a large-scale materialisation of ATP's presence in Armenia for the period of 1994–2015: 4. 4 million trees were planted within these years, the ATP has donors in all 50 US states, 3.7 million pounds of fruit were harvested, and in 322 cities/towns 52 different kinds of trees were planted during 41 seasons. In Simon Schama's words (1996: 18), this is done to support the claim that the trees embody social and political memory. The 'trees of hope' in Armenia have become enduring memorials of a historical event and a new destination in the diasporic search for identity.

These examples represent how Armenian Americans symbolically visualise and reclaim the homeland, which has been lost and remained a sacred site of diasporic trauma. It also illustrates, how a specific location, the territory of the Republic of Armenia, becomes a potential resource and a healing destination in the regeneration of diasporic identity. The concept of regeneration seems to be articulated through the act of filling 'an empty space' in Armenia with a new life and establishing a 'diasporic mission' to improve the land through the act of 'doing diaspora', in other words, the materialisation of homeland attachment and a sense of ethnic rebirth. In this specific case, the 'ancestral homeland' is vi-

sualised as a green tree, which is akin to an 'ancestral shrine' to which the souls of lost sons and widows can return. Trees are projected as new sites for repositories of ethnic remembrance, and as already noted in the poetic and spiritual language above, souls of dead bodies can find their new 'homes' in the bodies of future trees. This narrative demonstrates how diasporic work produces a particular knowledge of the 'future' that may shape contemporary identifications of diasporic Armenians and their future attachments to the Republic of Armenia.

This chapter draws attention to the growing popularity of tree planting as a new diasporic inspiration contributing to the intensification of diasporic desires to 'being rooted' in the homeland. In the following sections, nature, and the idea of 'roots' play an essential role as they are used as a metaphor for a tangible trans-generational organic force linking members of scatted diasporic communities with the remote homeland.

A discussion of the 'arboreal' attachment to the homeland is presented in the following, along with why trees are used in the formation of this development among diasporic Armenians, and why these trees may become culturally and politically meaningful for the second and third generations shaping their sense of transnational belonging. The processes by which trees and tree landscapes are effectively re-imagined, incorporated and mobilised by descendants of migrants in their 'ancestral homeland' have not been discussed in the literature on mobility studies, homecoming and homeland tourism. By focusing on a new form of political agency that mobilises long-distance nationalist inspirations, I address this research gap, without claiming to be comprehensive.

I start with particular practices of tree planting and cultural technologies of belonging elaborated by the non-profit organisation the Armenian Tree Project, a transnational agency operating between Boston and Armenia. I then examine the idea and practices of 'getting rooted' processes by placing trees and nature within broader social and cultural theories. I include a comparison with other cases in the world, notably in Israel, which helps to outline the specific and global character of the diasporic tree planting culture among Armenians. Specifically, I will discuss how trees as non-human agencies and the notion of regeneration are connected in terms of constructing bonds to the homeland and to what extent trees gain the ability to 'cross borders' and link different places and generations.

The Armenian Tree Project

Until the summer of 2014, three triangular coniferous trees constituted the ATP's official logo design. Resembling graphic ornaments of Oriental *kelim* rugs, this symbol was in line with the traditional image of Armenian culture focusing on the holy Mount Ararat. The mountain and the tree are symbols of nature and canonised elements of the Armenian cultural repertoire. In October 2014, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the ATP, the Watertown office re-branded the organisation's logo. To make it modern and 'more effective', the image of three triangular conifers was transformed into a single green leaf plant merged with the company name letters. According to a public relations manager at the Watertown office, a single plant indicates a more 'modern' and 'global' understanding of tree planting mission, fitting the ATP's aim of making the company more attractive to young people. Unlike the mountain or the Oriental rug, which are associated with a particular Armenian longing for the past and loss of territory, a single leaf represents new qualities of a healthy future, such as vitality, cultural universality, and a powerful orientation towards the human's future.

Along with the 'green slogan', the ATP appeals to the notion of reconstructing a ruptured world of ethnic Armenians, among which two main narratives are recognisable: the need to strengthen the impoverished homeland and the struggle towards the cultural assimilation of diasporic members. By incorporating the dominant Armenian narrative on the genocide into the tree campaign rhetoric, activists represent Armenia as an 'endangered environment' comparable with 'ecocide' (The Armenian Reporter International 2005: 17). A campaign designed to reach a broad audience among diasporic Armenians has defined potential donors as those uprooted 'givers' who can 'adopt' trees as they stand for "uprooted Armenian victims on the death march through the Syrian desert" (The Armenian Observer 2005: 6). Depending on the context, implicitly or explicitly, the idea of 'roots of renewal' is effectively connected to the willingness to restore the ethnic roots of assimilated Armenian Americans.

According to ATP founding narratives, the idea of planting trees began with the practical goals of preventing topsoil erosion and supporting fruit production among villagers after the Karabakh war. The next step was focused on restoring green spaces around typical tourist sites and church territories, such as the Genocide Memorial Park in Yerevan and Khor Virap Church in the Ararat valley. After renewing urban parks and community tree planting (Park of Victory, Nor-Sebastia, Bangladesh), the ATP expanded its activities to

larger projects, such as the reforestation programme in the Lori region in the northern part of Armenia.

In April 2006, during my fieldwork in Armenia, I participated in a tree planting ceremony in the village of Karakert (Armavir region), located about 80km southeast from Yerevan in an arid climate zone with limited water supply. Razmik, a 60-year-old Armenian Tree Project employee, agreed to show me his work site. On the road to the tree planting site, Razmik explained that he actually holds a PhD, which he received at the end of the 1980s at Moscow State University. However, in the 1990s, he was not able to find any appropriate position in the field of sciences. At the time of the interview, Razmik had already been working ten years at the Armenian Tree Project Yerevan office. His responsibility was to monitor planted areas by checking the level of adaptation and the survival of trees in urban and rural communities. On that day, his mission was to distribute 400 apricot trees among the villagers of Karakert, including a set of thuja saplings for official participants of the planned tree planting ceremony at a school. The small town of Karakert is a by-product of Soviet-era industrialisation and comprises approximately 980 households. It was founded in the 1950s as a satellite town to supply the city of Yerevan with meat products. Along with cattle breeding farms and the railway station, the main job provider was the factory for livestock fodder production. At that time, Karakert was populated by Yezidis and Armenians. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the socialist economic structure, the town population suffered dramatically. As a result, a large number of Yezidi families emigrated to Ukraine and Russia. Similarly, in the search for work, young male Armenians left the town for Russia.

Among the representatives of several Armenian American NGOs in operation, the most active organisation in Karakert was the American COAF (Children of Armenian Foundation), which was engaged in the economic and social support of low-income families and local women. The tree planting ceremony took place on the territory of the kindergarten 'No1' and at the local school. After Razmik distributed the apricot trees among nine local men, who were keen to obtain as many as possible, the tree planting ceremony was opened by the school principal, a 45-year-old lady in high-heels who seemed to be wearing her best clothes that day. The event was attended by a group of high-ranking guests: the leader of COAF, an Armenian American lady from Washington D.C., the *guhapet* (mayor) of Karakert and the neighbouring village, spouses of a variety of ambassadors to Armenia, and a representative of the Armenian minister for Foreign Affairs. The female group of international guests wore black

sun-grasses and light elegant clothes. Thuja, a decorative Mediterranean evergreen, was used to demonstrate their intention to help the local schoolchildren. At the moment of the ceremonial tree planting at the schoolyard, it turned out that there were not enough saplings to hand out to each high-ranking guest. Instead of each guest getting a separate sapling, small green branches of broken thuja were used and symbolically inserted into the earth in the school's backyard. Each scene in the performance, from digging a pit in the earth to inserting the green into the earth or pouring the planted sapling with water, was photographed for a later report. The ceremony did not take a long time, and after taking photographs, the guests immediately left the village.

In this way, activists aimed to show the material presence of diasporic aid on the territory of impoverished post-Soviet Armenia. Whereas the apricot trees (in Armenian *tsiran*) distributed among local households can be recognised as a tangible source of community and family food supply, the thuja saplings symbolically planted in the school backyard by international guests can be interpreted as a sign of Armenia's global orientation. The thuja plant was introduced as an ornamental plant to Armenia in the 1990s and has been valued by members of international NGOs and urban planners for its aesthetic evergreen characteristics. However, it does not grow fast and needs wet soil. Both types of trees, the decorative 'global' evergreen thuja and the local fruit tree *tsiran*, become key actants in the formation of a place, an arena for demonstrating the 'fruitful' and 'rooted' ties between the diaspora and the homeland. Embodying visible and tangible objects, these trees symbolically marked the arrival of Armenian Americans in the 'ancestral homeland'. This example demonstrates the encounters between local communities and diasporic aid organisations whose subjectivities and imaginaries are organised along hierarchical interaction between poor locals and wealthier newcomers.

Nature and Tree Planting as Moral Landscapes

In his book on the making of 'chosen people', Anthony Smith (2003) outlined a general model in which a sacred landscape and the notion of a sacred nature remain a central source of national identity, and the notion of naturalisation of history may relevant for many national cultures.[1] Cultural forms of homeland attachment include the production of an ideal canon and core symbols of an imagined diasporic community within the host society, combined with the process of sacralisation and worshipping the lost land of an exodus, which

became visible in artistic expressions of nostalgic longing for home or in the simple hanging of an image of the homeland landscape in the living room. For instance, the Armenian image of the holy Mount Ararat is omnipresent in community centre buildings, diasporic periodicals, school certificates, churches, neighbourhood food stores and private houses. This sense of cultural repertoire may relate to a more individual homeland attachment, and mobility is less important in this context. Long-distance nationalism is more likely to produce a specific ideology and not just nostalgic visualisations of the past, but politics designed to influence social orders across borders.

The cult of trees can be observed in many traditional and modern cultures. Trees shape people's conception and perception of space and place. In Western civilisations, "no living things have had more impact on human sensuality than trees" (Hayman 2003). It is commonly recognised among anthropologists that trees can be identified with humans and communities, and are usually admired for their potency, old age and energising morality (Turner 1974; Rival 1998). Beyond the evident economic and ecological roles of trees, there are other approaches to the tree and its symbolism. As Rival noted, "what comes out from the ethnographies is that trees are used symbolically to make concrete and material the abstract notion of life and that trees are ideal supports for such symbolic purposes precisely because their status as a living organism is ambiguous" (Rival 1998: 3). From a critical anthropological perspective, trees and tree landscapes can be considered and interpreted to be transformative agencies in specific locations and to contribute to societal change. As Cloke and Jones (2002: 20) explained:

> "It was argued that all landscapes carried symbolic meaning, and that the analysis of landscape was best done through an 'iconographic approach' which not only understood these symbols and their context but also, in a postmodern sense, understood how contemporary interpretation itself reconstructed and reframed this symbolic structure in its own context."

My theoretical approach is to see forests, woodlands and trees and their functions as means and strategies for grounding the attachment. In particular, I am interested in the political dimensions of tree planting in contemporary societies and how trees may transform existing landscapes into new spaces of diasporic belonging and continuity. Trees may play different roles in different contexts, from creative to disruptive one. On the one hand, there is extensive literature on theorising trees as passive plants by emphasising the value of human authority (Turner 1974; Bloch/Parry 1982; Rival 1998). On the other hand, schol-

ars only recently suggested to theorise trees as active agencies (Jones/Cloke 2002). Trees may act as a symbol of an individual or group's vitality, as an object of religious worship (sacred trees), as evidence of genealogical connections, as an instrument for maintaining social order (Humphrey 2005), but also as a tool for territorial claiming (Braverman 2009). All these different representations involve human interventions and the emotional power of trees. The emotional power of trees can provide tools for treating the land as sacred and mark specific geography of belonging related to intimate memories.

I argue that in this way, trees may become responsible for the (re)construction of a moral landscape feeding the diasporic conscience. Emotional attitudes to trees and treescapes seem to play an essential role in affective reimagining, reconfiguring and relocating the 'shrines' of the ancestors. If a land will be transformed into a landscape, this process involves a multi-layered stage of maps, memories, visions of the homeland, and interpretations. Social geographers have argued that a specific location expressed within cultural topography and morality – such as maps, museums, and genealogies – denotes a certain portion of space (Smith 2003: 45). This includes the idea that 'roots' and 'branches', not humans, can be re-imagined and re-settled into the world of the 'ancestral homeland' so that trees and territories can be perceived not only as a 'renewal' but also treated as a new concrete place for 'ancestral shrines' shaping the heritage of common values. "Trees locate us in time and place" (Sinden 1989, cited in Rival 1998: 19) and the central motive of the Armenian diasporic desire is focused on the visualisation and materialisation of re-creating a homeland, a collective sanctity suited to all diasporic Armenians living in different countries.

Traditionally humans can use the act of tree planting for many different purposes, be they economic, social or cultural. Modern tree planting can also be linked to another important theoretical framework, which should be considered in this study. Social anthropologists have conceptualised relationships between nature, material culture and ideology in modern societies. Trees and tree landscapes can be shaped from 'above' and be a powerful tool in modernisation and other political projects. There is a body of work, particularly in the post-colonial and post-socialist fields, which identifies trees' function and technologies in the authoritarian and post-modern contexts beyond the traditional view of trees as part of the natural environment and its spiritual, mythological and utilitarian dimensions. Authors draw attention to trees as an agency of control and tree planting as a specific tool of political order (Humphrey 2005; Harvey 2005; Darieva 2015). For instance, trees are used as a

crucial element in the production of public space and urban planning culture. The socialist era has increasingly used trees and 'cultured' nature as an instrument of modernising traditional societies and, thus, promoting the ideology of a new type of human beings being created in Eurasia. Public spaces, such as mundane urban parks, open-air recreational zones and gardens, were considered to be a place regulating Soviet-type 'cultured leisure', an important aspect of Soviet life with its aesthetic vision of a progressive society. Humphrey outlined the meaning of greening in the Soviet urban courtyards for the urban ideology of Soviet Russia's residential areas, where inhabitants were expected to cultivate a sense of collective well-being in a microclimate by spending hours doing voluntary work, such as planting trees, gardening and watering (Humphrey 2005). Production of fruit trees and planting of urban trees should contribute not only to the maintenance of the socialist economy but also to the cultivation of a specific collective work spirituality transforming the identity of working-class people and peasants into one unity. Thus, trees can be used as a tool (symbolic capital) in building a new political order and creating new aesthetics. In this way, the act of tree planting is separated from and made superior to the biological understanding of the natural environment.

It is difficult to point out when and how tree cult and its perception have changed among diasporic Armenians in the context of migration. It is quite relevant to state that since the middle of the 1990s, Armenian American tree activism in Armenia has been inspired and shaped by two modern doctrines used in the global nationalist and environmentalist movements: the Zionist construction of the 'Promised Land' and the green movement that seeks to halt the destruction of tropical rainforests and the accumulation of greenhouse gases (Escobar 1995). Additionally, one should bring into the discussion the fact that ideologically speaking, knowledge about the imaginative power of trees in restoring community life goes back to a long-term commitment to a tree planting culture, which has been widespread in North America and Europe since the founding of the Arbor Day movement in the 1870s. Within these frameworks, the idea of planting Armenian American trees is distinguished by the use a variety of conceptions shaped by folk and global discourses on trees.

Apricot and Pomegranate as Symbols of the Homeland

There are many references to the meaning of specific species of trees in Armenian folk culture. Like other ethnic groups around the Middle East and

the Caucasus, Armenians appreciate and venerate fruit trees in daily life, especially pomegranate, apricot, wine grape, walnut, and deciduous trees such as plane, oak, and willow trees (Armenian legends 1985). Over many historical periods, these types of trees have been differently mythologised and incorporated into religious and national narratives. The terms 'walnut', 'apricot' or 'pomegranates' sometimes overlap with the notions of 'home' or 'life' and in this way, may symbolise Armenian longevity, vitality, and national belonging (Pattie 2005).

For instance, there is a variety of fruit metaphors in the production of imaginaries and practices linking and separating the Armenian diaspora from the homeland. In reference to the poem "The Walnut Tree" (1985) written by Silvia Kapoutikian, a Soviet Armenian poet, Susan Pattie, a diasporic Armenian intellectual observed that the walnut tree can be associated with the sense of loss, isolation of the homeland and dispersion of the Armenian people in the twentieth century:

"There is a walnut tree
Growing in the vineyard
At the very edge of the world
My people, you are like
The huge ancient tree-
With branches blessed by the graces
But sprawling
Over the small corner of land
Roots and arms spread out
And spilling your fruit
To nourish foreign soils."

Two prominent fruits, the pomegranate and the apricot, have been 'branded' by the Soviet Armenian intellectuals and artists (especially by the filmmaker Sergey Parajanov) becoming an important part of popular modern representations of Armenian culture. Competing with the pomegranate, the apricot (*prunus armeniaca*, *armeniaca vulgaris*), with its yellowish-pinkish skin, is traditionally seen in Armenia as the unquestioned Armenian symbol associated with national prosperity, health, eternity and vitality. As an example of practising these beliefs in popular narratives, one can refer to a story about the Armenian apricot's mythical role in the world's history. Irina Petrosian and David Underwood emphasised the centrality of fruit tree metaphors for Arme-

nian self-identifications. According to an Armenian Encyclopedia, Alexander the Great who took the apricot from Armenia, its birthplace and introduced it to Greece, calling it *armeniaca*. Armenian sources support their claims by referring to a 6.000-year-old apricot pit found in an archaeological site near Yerevan (Petrosian/Underwood 2006: 139).[2]

Figure 5.2: An Armenian Stamp featuring Prunus Armeniaca

Source: https://www.armenianstamps.com/product_info.php/cPath/22/products_id/424 Last accessed on 22.11.2022.

Another important cultural component of the Armenian national identity branded and promoted during the Soviet period is the orange colour of the Armenian tricolour, which served as a metaphor for the national unity inside the Soviet community. In line with Alexey Yurchak's allegory of pink and purple as the true colour of communism for the late Komsomol activists, Maike Lehmann identified the apricot colour as the true colour of the Armenian socialist national identity. She assumes that the allegory of the apricot colour refers to a hybrid expression between red communist and national Armenian elements (Yurchak 2005; Lehmann 2015: 11). After gaining independence in 1991 and during the war over Karabakh (1989–1993), the national colourful element came to the fore in Armenia, filling the daily reservoir of emotional attach-

ments. As Ronald Suny, an US American historian, reflected on the construction of primordialism in Armenia: "*Haiutiun* (the Armenianness) was everywhere in Armenia: in personal relations, in bargaining at the market, in bureaucratic inefficiency, in the tastiness of the fruit" (Suny 2001: 91).

Moreover, apricot tree planting was enthusiastically used by political elites in Armenia in their election campaigns.

> "As people say, every man should plant a tree, build a house and bear a child. Guided by that saying the Armenian Nik Aparan patriotic union groups went to Siuniq region where thousands of eternity symbolizing seedlings/young plants should have been handed over to mother earth to strike roots and to get implanted at schoolyard as a symbol of wealth. By planting young apricot seedling with his son, Aghvan Hovsepyan, the honorable president of Nik Aparan patriotic union has his expectations: 'one day our grandchildren will sit under this implanted apricot and will taste the fruit sweetened by Meghri sun'." (*Unity Tsaratunk starts*, Avangard 2006: 5)

Similarly, the apricot is widely used by the diasporic organisation Armenian Tree Project as the symbol associated with reunion and an eventual return to the homeland. A material attribute of an imagined re-unification and revitalisation of Armenian roots can be found in the office of the Karin ATP Nursery and Education Centre. Fixed on the wall inside of the centre is a large construction of the 'Tree of Life'. One can see a two-meter-long metal tree with many small metallic leaves separate from each other. The leader of the nursery centre identified this Tree of Life as a *tsiran* – the apricot tree used by Armenians to symbolise national prosperity and folk wellness, an important component of the Armenian cultural repertoire. The leaves on the diasporic Tree of Life in the Karin nursery serve as small plaques for engraving numerous individual names of diasporic donors and tourists who visited the centre and left an entry in the guest book. The names are written in Latin script, not in Armenian letters. On the left side of the wall, brass shafts of sunlight are fixed over the Tree of Life. They represent those diasporic family foundations that donated more than 100.000 dollars to the development of tree nurseries in Armenia. Individual names are inscribed on the symbolic brass shafts of sunlight. The rays represent the unity of those who donate while also highlighting those who have donated significantly above the norm.

If the apricot remained as a symbol of Armenian prosperity, rural stability and homeland, the pomegranate was transformed in the 1990s into a ritualised affective sign of post-Soviet Armenia associated with a broad scope of

emotional meanings: from loss, blood, flight, loneliness to hope.[3] For a long, the image of the pomegranate was used as a decorative element in Armenian medieval Christian manuscripts; however, it reappeared in the twentieth century in Soviet Armenian narratives and films. Almost at the same time, it was William Saroyan, an Armenian American novelist from California who used the pomegranate as a metaphor for home and loss in his short story "The Pomegranate Trees" (1938).

The pomegranate began to transform into a national symbol in Soviet Armenia in the middle of the twentieth century[4] (Pfeifer 2015). It was reinforced by Sergey Parajanov, the Soviet non-conform filmmaker, who employed the pomegranate as a powerful aesthetic tool in his famous film "The colour of pomegranate" (1969). In particular, the image of a cut pomegranate and blood-red juice spilling into a white cloth, giving a shape of the ancient Armenian kingdom, created a new symbol of non-conform Armenian culture and its survival in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Modern Armenian intellectuals and artists made the pomegranate prominent for the dramaturgy of national folk sentiments. After 1991[5], in searching for their ways and identities in a market economy, Armenian souvenir makers turned the shape of pomegranate into a variety of local souvenirs and, in this way, invented a new commercial tradition in Armenia.

However, it would be wrong to reduce the circulation of cultural meanings of the apricot and the pomegranate only to Armenian narratives. Both species grow in the Caucasus, in the large area of Southern Europe, Minor Asia, the Middle East, China and are widely used in local cultural representations as an aesthetic sign or source of national revival. In particular, in the regions of the Caucasus, Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia, the image of the pomegranate is shared by different ethnic groups, a common symbol associated with folk fertility, love, rebirth, vitality and with a protector against the evil eye.[6]

Much has been said about the Tree of Life, a universal symbol of fertility, eternity and continuity for peasant and aristocratic societies that is by no means unique to Armenian culture. Various tree species have been used as the 'Tree of Life'. According to the medieval Armenian mythology portrayed in Armenian Christian manuscripts, it is a willow or a mulberry tree, an apple or fig tree symbolising human development, peasant community and roots going deep into the earth (Abrahamian 2005; Petrosyan 2001). Among the folk images associated with the Tree of Life, the willow tree and the apple are the most popular objects associated with fertility and birth.

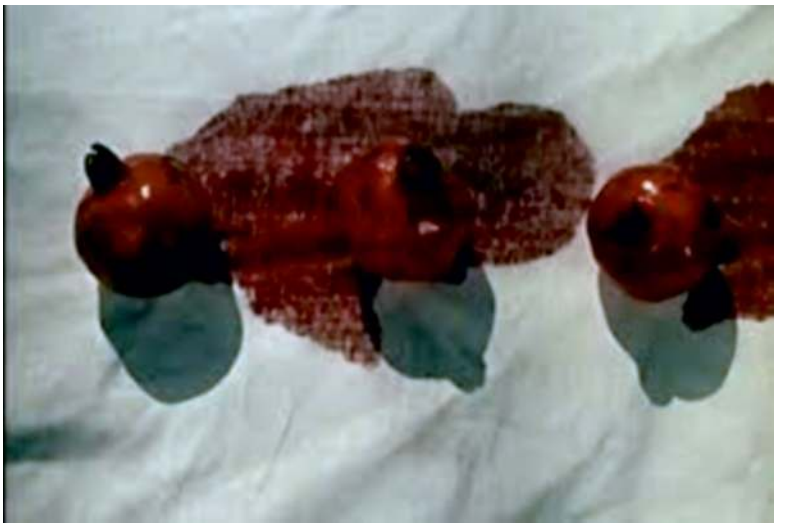
Associated with different objects throughout different periods, however, the central image of the Tree of Life among Armenians is the pre-Christian symbol of the garden. In his paper on the Armenian world as a garden Hamlet Petrosyan, an archaeologist from the National Academy of Sciences in Yerevan, identifies the vineyard's centrality in understanding the notion of a garden. The ideal garden among Armenians is "...the symbolic world which is organised by [the] endlessly arching, grape-filled vine, representing the Tree of Life..." (Petrosyan 2001: 25). The word *aygi* which now means 'garden' in the modern sense, meant 'vineyard' in Old Armenian (ibid: 27–28). Numerous illustrations of a vineyard (brunch with grapes) are found in the annals of medieval Armenia, on sculptured stone reliefs, in miniature manuscript paintings, and in engraved inscriptions (ibid: 25). One prominent image of the world as a 'garden' of grapevines is illustrated in a relief encircling the Holy Cross Temple on the island of *Akhtamar* (Akdamar Adasi in Turkish; Ախթամար) at Lake Van (Eastern Anatolia), which was designed and built in the tenth century on the order of King Gagik Artsruni (ibid: 25). Grape-filled vines surround an old man or priest symbolises the Tree of Life in the Armenian Christian sense (ibid: 27) and the fruits of paradise at the same time. A significant form of the Armenian Tree of Life is shaped by medieval Christian iconography, which does not contain any gardens, but focuses on the image of saints, angels, animals, and Christian architecture.

The symbol of the vineyard seems to be prominent among kings and royalty in the Sothern Caucasus of the medieval period. A legendary figure perpetuated in contemporary narratives on the Armenian forest nature in museums and ecological movements is King Khosrov II, who ruled AD 330–337, and planted a forest that he called "a temple of cedars". The image of a heavenly garden was part of the language of Armenian cross-stones architecture, later on in popular Soviet Armenian secular artefacts such as jewellery, iron panels and stairs, or tourist souvenirs. The garden as a world symbol is not unique for Armenia, as Petrosyan rightly emphasised; similar symbols can be found in medieval Persia and other Islamic cultures of the Middle East. According to Petrosyan, the vineyard and the pomegranate are rooted in the pre-Christian cultures of the Middle East.

When we consider the modern diasporic perception of trees and tree planting, we find a syncretic form in its aesthetic and cultural dimensions. At the same time, we can highlight strong relationships between environmental romanticism and nationalism that have existed in the world since the middle of the nineteenth century (Lekan 2004). The modern diasporic projection of the

Armenian homeland as an evergreen landscape is built on a mix of European, and North American romanticised images of nature and the Middle Eastern traditional perception of the 'world as a garden'. The question here is how diasporic activists use Armenian tree mythology strategically.

Figure 5.3: The Image of a Pomegranate from Sergei Parajanov's Film "The Colour of Pomegranate"



Source: Pfeifer 2015.

Vernacularisation of Nature

This section draws attention to the relations between nature and politics, and to the ways selected species of trees are vernacularised in Armenia that contributes to the emotional consolidation of a patriotic identification. I argue that while contemporary fruits and tree metaphors may refer to local nature and environmental protection discourses, a daily celebration of the 'apricot' language and tree planting activities indicate their capacity to provide justification in mobilising people for political purposes. Second, a mundane physical act of tree planting may reproduce and create affective moments related to a phenomenon of 'planted flags'. With 'planted flags', I mean what Irus Braverman (2009) ethnographically showed in her studies on the Israel-Palestine conflict and how natural landscape, specific tree species and law can be used in the

war between Israelis and Palestinians. The Armenian case of politics of nature and its aesthetic differs from the Jewish one in many aspects. However, one can identify some parallels in the ways the national territory of the homeland can be re-inscribed and (re)claimed across borders.

Many forms of daily patriotism reflect how national ideals and norms are perpetuated and circulated. Michael Billig's work on banal nationalism (1995) can be reasonably used for understanding the mechanism of appeal to national symbols in modern everyday life. With the term 'daily' Michael Billig means a routine usage of ideological signs and symbols associated with a specific nation. Not only do annual appeals for tree planting made by politicians and paradigmatic school textbooks provide a rich arsenal of symbols for banal nationalism, but also daily practices in the form of TV programmes and social media on the proliferation of national cuisine food or advertising tabloids of drink industry. The notion of "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995: 7) creates a daily reservoir of emotional attachment to the state that can be mobilised and manipulated "without lengthy campaigns of political preparation". Similarly, Löfgren (1995) exemplified how the national aesthetic can be indicated and 'flagged' in the life of citizens in Europe: decorating and marking cheese pieces with the colours of mini national flags. The recent volume edited by Mkhitar Gabrielyan and younger scholars in Armenia revealed practices of banal Armenian nationalism as a component of daily life, a subject which has not been yet studied in Armenia (Gabrielyan et al. 2015).

Popular Armenian narratives on worshipping trees are usually focused on one specific type or on an individual tree, which belongs to local woodland species like the *chinar* (plane tree), the walnut, the oak, and the willow tree (Ganalanyan 1979; Petrosyan 2001; Asatryan 2012). Whereas fruit trees are appreciated for their fruits, taste or colour, deciduous trees are worshipped for reasons other than their leaves and branches or the shadow tree provides. Rather than appreciating the tree as such, it is often the tree's specific and unusual shape, age, the form of roots or location that is the focus of folk culture. For instance, a large trunk with a huge hole at its base, a divided trunk, or even burnt rests of a trunk build up positive 'sacred' associations among the local population. In the Caucasus, people may consider them key cultural icons in local narratives and conservation projects. Very often, these kinds of old trees are considered to possess specific power and energy, so that people start to incorporate the quality of the tree into the broader context of folk narratives, Christian mythologies, and modern politics.

Trees and Forests as Diasporic Sanctuaries

Several old plane trees in Northern Armenia are known as 'sacred trees'. They are associated with local 'shrines' and with the notion of being an ancient 'heritage' of the Armenian people. In all probability, the 'ancient trees' were able to grow to this extent due to the availability of sufficient moisture or their location next to a monastery yard. As a single tree, such trees usually stand in a visible place, composing a central landmark of the local landscape such as the shrine tree of Gosh, the walnut trees of Goshavank Monastery and of Haghartsin Monastery, or the plane tree of Sarigyugh; all of which are located in the northern part of Armenia between the cities of Ijevan and Dilijian (*marz* Tavush[7]). Incorporated into a shrine or monastery complex and its local cultural discourses, the trees become bounded up with specific names of Christian saints, local heroes and national events. For instance, the walnut tree at Goshavank monastery is associated with the legend that the tree was planted by Mkhitar Gosh (1120–1213) in the twelfth century, who was a scientist and the author of the medieval "The Code of Law". Another walnut tree at Haghartsin monastery is worshipped in the region as a sacred tree, especially by childless women who used to come to the tree believing that "fertility will be gifted to them once they squeeze through the trunk hole" (Asatryan 2012: 41). As a result, the area near the tree hole is usually polished like at any other sacred stone hole or a sacred cliff venerated all around Asia Minor and the Caucasus including neighbouring Azerbaijan.

According to local popular beliefs (Asatryan 2012), the most important sacred tree in the northern part of Armenia is on the road to Ijevan-Noyemberyan at the village Sarigyugh. Different functions are ascribed to the old plane tree of Sarigyugh. The plane tree has a huge cavity with a diameter of up to four meters with spring water underneath providing sufficient moisture. The tree hole is filled with Christian parochial attributes, such as candles, hand-made icons or photocopies of Jesus and Maria, wooden crosses, and pieces of cloths bound at the tree branches. Apparently, the tree was turned into a folk shrine, most likely during the Soviet period. In the 1970s, another two pine trees were planted next to the old one and in 2003 local visitors and priests erected a small church at the location.[8]

Regardless of whether the tree is part of a larger wood composition or whether it stands as a single tree in the landscape, the tree 'position' is a matter of different interpretations. Two different legends circulate around this specific tree, and both make references to medieval Armenian heroes.

According to the first version, it was the Armenian King Ashot Yerkat (Ashot II the Iron 914–928 AD) who planted the tree; another story goes back to the general Vardan Mamikonyan who planted the tree during his travel after a battle with the Persians in 450 AD.

Trees can be transformed into an agency, which seeks to bind the past with the present. For example, it can occur by elevating the position of trees into the status of 'natural monuments' 'witnessing' specific events of the national history and in this way, they can be included in the Natural Monuments of Armenia list, such as was the case with the walnut tree in the village of Sarigyugh. Another strategy of using trees as an agency and political instrument relates to the practice of incorporating existing trees or tree landscapes into modern politics and highlighting national history. Similar to planted trees in an urban public space around a monument, these sacred trees are marked as particular bodies, which become triggers of collective memory and the subject of public ceremonies. In this context, sacred sites and their later interpretations are very much person-centred. The striking point is the 'mobile' quality of such tree names as they can appear in different geographical settings and translocal stories.

Armenian anthropologists have revealed hundreds of graves and trees in Armenian territory associated with the single name of one hero (Siekierski 2010: 276; Haratyan 2003). The Vardan Mamikonyan's oak tree in Akhnaghbyur, which recently became a translocal symbol of Armenian heroism, is another of the many sites associated with this medieval political figure. The origin of Vardan Mamikonyan's oak tree is difficult to clarify, however, there is a place associated with a particular oak tree in the village of Akhnaghbyur close to Ijevan, in Tavush Marz, located on the contested borderlands between Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to the narrative, people associate the tree trunk and a big hole inside of it with the name and the grave of a human being. Until the 1990s, local villagers worshipped the large fallen oak tree predominantly as a sacred site. Like any other sacred place, the oak tree attracted villagers who came to the place to receive a blessing and drink pure water. It was considered that the old fallen oak tree and the cold spring water under the tree roots possess healing capacity and magic power to protect people from different diseases, death and bad energy. Young couples used to come to the tree to ask for children and family prosperity. It became the place for performing the folk Christian ritual of *matagh* among local families, when an animal, usually a sheep or a chicken is sacrificed for a specific purpose or desire within the family. Apparently, the sacred tree has been turned into a local shrine as

pilgrims used to walk around the tree trunk three times before the animal was sacrificed. As churches has been closed or removed during the Soviet period, people kept their folk religious traditions and used the big hole inside of the tree as a natural prayer room by putting inside candles and small images of Jesus.

Figure 5.4: Image of Vardan Mamikonyan and the Battle of Avarayr

Source: https://old.hayernaysor.am/en/archives/37370. Last accessed 29.11.2022.

Throughout the last 40 years, and in particular during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the site has undergone significant physical and ideological changes: vernacularisation of nature has turned the tree into a secular pilgrimage site on a larger scale. In the winter of 1975–1976, the oak tree was knocked over by thunder and burnt down by lightning. After this event, the rest of the fallen tree trunk was worshipped by the local population, however in a slightly different manner. The trunk was then transformed into a symbolic grave of Vardan. It was the Soviet Armenian Marshal Hovanes Bagramyan who visited the village in 1976 on his regular visit to his homeland in Dilijian area. He planted another three oak trees next to the fallen one and in this way marked the masculine power of the tree trunk. According to the later version of Vardan Mamikonyan tree legend, the planted sapling sprouted and grew up into a big tree, which has been associated not only with healing capacity, but also with the Armenian masculine power and heroism, strong fighting spirit and finally

with the regeneration of the nation. Thus, beyond the traditional folk perception of tree's healing power, it became to be associated with the national hero figure, Vardan Mamikonyan (Vardan Zoravan), a medieval Armenian general who heroically defeated Persian troops in the battle of Avarayr, dying a martyr soon after his visit to the area. Along the way home from the Avarayr battle site near Kazakh (today Azerbaijan), Vardan and his troops stopped for a rest in a beautiful place lying in the basin of the river Aghstev. Inspired by the victory over the Zoroastrian Persia and being healed by the spring water, Vardan planted an oak tree at the place by "cutting in the wet soil at the outlet of the spring" (Asatryan 2012: 53).

In his valuable ethnography of the transformation of worshipping the Vartan tree in Armenia, Konrad Siekierski described how then the tree legend has been incorporated into contemporary politics of the Armenian nation (Siekierski 2010). In the 2000s, the site around the Vardan tree experienced the next step of upgrading by the process of 'nationalisation' of local cults and including the place into the 'pantheon' of the national identity. A local sacred place has been transformed into a regional and national natural monument venerated by state authorities: in 2005–2006 a fence was pulled down around the tree, the access to the water spring was 'modernised' and a new chiselled image of Mamikonyan was added to the fallen trunk. In 2007, similar to the case of the plane tree in Sarighugh, a small church called Saint Vardan Church was erected sponsored by a local businessman. The first official festival of masculinity was organised and performed in November 2005 as local officials celebrated the departure of 40 young recruits from the Tavush region leaving for military service at the borderland between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ranges of other political events have followed this 'initiation' rite of young recruiters. Annually, the tree is celebrated by a military procession and by the official ceremony of anthem singing with young recruiters. During these events, Christian crosses merge with national banners. Thus, the Vardan tree became the place where local folk worshipper meets representatives of official institutions. It became the place for officially orchestrated events on both secular and religious levels: elections, the day of the Armenian Army Service and Christian festivals. Finally, in 2008, Serge Sarkisian, the former President of Armenia, participated in the festival and planted another oak tree in order to mark his commitment to the national history and national values. According to Siekierski's studies, it was actually a journalist who, in 2004, came up with the idea of celebrating the tree at the national border with Azerbaijan. This act of inventing tradition was conceptualised after the journalist read an ethnographic book on traditional Armenian

beliefs and discovered the story of the Vardan tree. According to the journalist: "we started to think about how to protect the tree because it is located very close to the border, where our soldiers fight and we needed to maintain the soldiers fighting spirit" (Siekierski 2010: 284).

The point in this modern story of tree's power transformation is that a traditional belief in healing energy was almost replaced by a new meaning associated with the figure of Vardan Mamikonyan the Brave. Being a general who defeated regional enemies, the non-Christian Persians, the figure of Vardan fits well into the Armenian pantheon of national heroes who were helpful in maintaining a separate regional identity from Iran. One should also take into consideration the fact that according to the Armenian narratives the battle is considered to be the first historical example of military actions to protect Christianity against non-Christians in the Caucasus. It is not surprising that the figure of Vardan Mamikonyan and his 1036 soldiers was canonised in the 2000s by the Armenian Church with the introduction of the religious day *Surb Vardanank* and the use of Vardan as a central and compulsory element in modern Armenian school history textbooks.

Translocal Trajectories

Over the last decade, some local trees in Armenia have been incorporated into narratives and agencies marking out new lines of the transnational sacred geography. Beyond the localised folk cult of trees and the recent transformation of the Vardan oak tree into the national icon, the tree and its place have received a translocal meaning. In May 2010, Paul Yeghiyan, an ATP manager in Watertown wrote in his press release:

> "Vartan Mamigonian (Western Armenian spelling of Vardan Mamikonyan) performed a notable act. He planted an acorn to celebrate the recent victory. The deed represented his unwavering commitment to a free and prosperous Armenia. It symbolised the hope that lies within all Armenians who believe in the future of our homeland. Vartan Mamigonian, who was politically savvy, knew that the odds for Armenia were grim, and as a soldier, he must have also known that he would not live long enough to see that acorn turn into an oak tree. Today, the border village of Akhaghbyur is struggling to survive. Under the constant threat of violence coming from the Azerbaijani border, the villagers eke out a living through subsistence farming. The

> mayor of the village, Karen Domazian, approached the ATP requesting fruit trees be donated to the village."

This quotation above offers a good example of how 'meaningful trees' are used in constructing bonds to the remote homeland and demonstrates how one specific location and a tree can be turned into a new geography of belongings. As the ATP explained in its press release, distributing ten fruit trees from ATP tree nurseries for each family in the village of approximately of 180 households would directly "improve the lives of villagers in Akhnaghbyur" (2010: 3). Immediately after spreading information about the Vardan tree and the poor villagers of Akhaghbyur, an Armenian American organisation "The Knights and Daughters of Vardan" decided to donate 1.800 fruit trees to the villagers. "The Knights and Daughters of Vardan" is a charitable Armenian American organisation established in 1913 in the US with an explicitly religious flavour to its identification with Armenia. It unites a group of middle-class and second-generation conservative Armenian Americans around the goal of protecting Christianity and the Armenian nation.

In this way, trees and nature have been used to 'bridge' the diasporic world with the 'ancestral homeland' on a local level. The main strategy was to project modern inspirations to the mythical past. The significance of ancient Armenian history in the long-distance nationalist project finds its expression in the way donations are regulated by the ATP. Though the villagers were interested in fruit trees, it was the story of the Vardan oak tree which became attractive for diasporic members in appropriating the location into their narratives of 'giving' and to the assemblage of linkages between Western diasporic organisations and the homeland in Armenia. The symbolic value of the figure of Vardan and the iconic oak tree trunk have been projected and turned into translocal cultural capital circulating inside of Armenian American diasporic discourses and networks. The old oak trunk served as evidence of ethnic history that can meet local economic needs. Thus, in this way, diasporic aesthetics and local place characteristics are performed and celebrated as a tangible act of coming together.

Political Life of Trees

Whereas single trees play an important role in folk narratives and the cultural imaginations of Armenian intellectuals and politicians, the act of tree plant-

ing is something different in terms of its social and political meanings. I argue that it may be turned into an instrument for marking territory and power on a larger scale. Tree planting in the Armenian diasporic vision can be associated not only with the timeless image of a single fruit or oak tree, but rather with a bunch of trees and tree landscapes configured within a historical framework. In this sense, trees and their 'positions' should be conceived not only as elements of local community nature and cultural constructions, but also as flexible means in creating a powerful symbol for maintaining 'roots' and heritage on a global scale. Whereas a singular tree can be turned into a 'shrine', forests may achieve political messages and become the Promised Land. Further, I argue that nature and 'treescapes' may become 'active' and 'mobile' linkages to the homeland. They may offer a powerful instrument for claiming membership to the nation and encourage the development of a transnational ideology of rootedness. Thus, on the one hand, forests reproduce and strengthen the diasporic identity while, on the other hand, they provide a mechanism to control a new land.

On 23 June 2005, after the ceremonies dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, a local newspaper called 'Armenia Life' reported the "addition of more than 1.100 new donors to the programme, which was already more than twice the number of new donors attracted in the previous year" (2005: 13). An ambitious project to plant 90.000 trees in 2005 in observance of the ninetieth anniversary of the Armenian genocide and loss, and to plant 1.5 million trees in the following decade as "evidence of the eternity of the Armenian spirits", shows that, in this case, trees serve as a powerful marker of a long-term vitality and resistance. This technique can mobilise the sense of belonging and generate the willingness to donate and to 'move' among diasporic members. More precisely the act of planting large-scale green spaces on the homeland territory may produce a sense of securing future.

In the view of the Armenian Tree Project, the afforestation project in the northern part of Armenia is aimed at reconstructing and regenerating the country's green spaces that existed since time immemorial and were 'ruptured' by the post-Soviet period of economic crisis that followed independence. A map constantly used by ATP activists in their pamphlets highlights Armenia's vanishing green space. The vanishing space in marked by two historical dates: "Extent of Armenian forests in 1000 BC" and "Armenian forests in 1998". In doing so, the visualisation turns to the forest as an iconic marker of Armenia's ancient culture.

In bringing a moral interpretation to the paleo-botanical green, the ATP made Armenia rich not only in churches and other material artefacts of the ancient culture, but also in 'antique forests' that seem successfully to evoke collective sentiments among diasporic communities' members. The loss of green territories is frequently used by the ATP managers as evidence of a rapidly changing climate in Armenia leading to significant deterioration of living standards in the country and to the 'ecocide'. Indeed, in the 1990s the country faced a heavy energy crisis, during which a large number of trees were cut down to heat houses and flats. Additionally, valuable trees have been removed in the Northern Lory region illegally by business operations. A specific example of dramatic losses in green is associated with the lack of tree composition around the Opera House in central Yerevan. A large portion of green was cut down in favour of building profitable cafes and restaurants. However, the tree declines in the city actually started already in the 1960s due to poor irrigation systems (Osipyan/Sarkisyan 2004).[9]

Attempting to mobilise diasporic emotions, the activists reduce homeland green space to a stage, which appears to be an empty space 'damaged' by the past. Simultaneously, the notion of the forest is turned into a cultural motif of ethnic vitality. Green and forests, however, are not the only type of landscape in Armenia. The country is featured by mountains, rocks, stones, cliffs and juniper sparse wood- and bush lands, landscapes that represent a significant part of modern Armenia. For centuries, four central objects shaped the vision of nature fixed in traditional Armenian culture and folklore: mountain, stones, water and individual (sacred) trees, as opposed to the forest as unified entity that was revered in German, Greek or other cultures (Petrosyan 2001).

In his novel, "Travelling through the Empire" written in the 1970s, Andrei Bitov (2000), the Soviet-Russian writer, emphasised the severe beauty of the Armenian landscape and admired her people's ability to create fertile valleys by removing stones and rocks from the fields. If the Armenian landscape was described as a green place, then it was as a man-made orchard or a garden. Referring to earlier European travellers' impressions by the end of the nineteenth century, the area around Yerevan was described as a dusty dry landscape with plain, mulberry trees and fruit gardens refreshing the arid and hot air of Armenia (Lynch 1901). The image of a traditional Armenian homeland is that of a high plateau with fertile plains and hills, which rise into snow-capped mountains and dip into valleys. According to authors studying the folk arts, culture and symbols within the Armenian identity, this is "a dramatic and rugged en-

vironment that has always shaped the conditions of life for Armenians and influenced their systems of thought" (Abrahamian et al. 2001: 23).

Theories of tree cultures and nature-culture dialectics have asserted that "nature cannot be seen as a passive, blank sheet on which cultural formations are simply inscribed" (Jones/Cloke 2002: 30). Trees can be seen as agents that co-constitute places and cultural identity in relationship with human activities. Armenian diasporic trees are used in different ways. As I have already noted, single trees planted in the ethnic soil and the visualisation of treescapes may become a new dynamic arena, which helps to make the territory of Armenia into an object of long-distance attachment. Making a green landscape is perceived by diasporic members as a cultural and social process with a sacred connotation that is observable in diasporic discourses as trees are supposed to materialise the ideal notion of rootedness and ethnic closeness.

In January 2015, the ATP celebrated the recruitment of the Canadian actor David Alpay, who started his career with his role in Atom Egoyan's film "Ararat", as an ATP donor of Armenian descent. After visiting several of the project sites in the Republic of Armenia, David Alpay defined his new emotional relationship to the remote homeland in explicit blood and soil terms:

> "Trees stop soil erosion [...] the soil in Armenia, soil to which Armenians around the world feel a visceral connection. The ATP helps prevent the erosion of this soil. Is it also, in a way, helping to fight the erosion of a nation? By planting fruit trees, it literally puts food on the table. But their mandate runs deeper [...] it's nation building in its most sacred form. When you plant a tree with the ATP you spread roots in the ground. You nourish a dream of so many of our parents, grandparents, of a free and independent Armenia and Artsakh, and you protect it from eroding, and becoming dust. Because too many before us fought too hard, and sacrificed too much for us to squander it on our watch."

In these statements, trees are seen as figurative embodiment of three generations of Armenian Americans and become the material support for inter-generational continuity. The striking feature of this statement is the emotional veneration of the ATP activities in Armenia as heroic, something which relates strongly to moral questions over Armenia's particular geographic borders including the arbitrary borders of the Karabakh region (*Artsakh*). The diasporic perception of Armenia's nature turns the land into a stage of threat and endangered nature that can easily be associated with the central discursive symbol of loss. By referring to the slogan "after twenty more years of deforestation,

the forests will have almost disappeared", the ATP creates a dramatic arena for emotional nexus through which Western diasporic presence becomes legitimised on the Armenian soil. In this way, the forest appears as a multi-layered symbol of relationships that can be posed between past and future, between memory and reality, a place to view and a route to take for the future. There is a number of related concepts of afforestation, which are presented as the creation of a place of self-discovery beyond of the everyday, as adventure and luxury, and in a more utopian sense, as a means of developing homeland tourism in Armenia. This latter is often imagined as a vital necessity in (re)civilising a country with a long history.

In showing the complex interweaving of imaginative and material in approaches to making the homeland landscape 'tangible', in the following section, I discuss how Armenian trees are planted for specific purposes with political implications.

'Planting Flags': Between Monoculture and Biodiversity

During an interview in September 2013, the director of ATP's office in Yerevan and the manager of the Karin nursery emphasised the centrality of cultivating 'native' trees in Armenian nurseries. ATP classified tree species according to their historical 'belonging' into three different categories: native, semi-native and alien. The use of native trees to restore the homeland is considered to be precious and valuable as they are 'local' and they are 'Armenian'. Emphasising the intimate essentialised meaning of native trees, they have been chosen with reference to their utilitarian character: in combating poverty they are useful for the livelihoods of local farmers and villagers. Moreover, native trees are supposed to have a high level of survival. Indeed, ATP native trees, such as fruit and nut trees including apricot, peach, and walnut are deeply embedded in local economic and cultural formations.

Other valuable sorts of trees are defined by ATP managers as semi-native trees or *introduzenty*, those leaf and coniferous species which were introduced and adapted a century ago for different utilitarian, industrial and decorative purposes, after Eastern Armenia became part of the Russian empire. The list of this type of tree species is rather long, as the boundaries of the ecosystem in which they are integrated go far beyond the territory of modern Armenia, stretching to the North Caucasus, from Sochi to Iran. Crucial to this classification is the fact that the ATP has identified a third group of trees, which should be treated as 'alien' trees for Armenia as they demonstrate 'aggressive' and 'in-

vasive' characteristics, dangerous for the development of local plants and tree landscapes. According to Yerevan's tree planting manager, these species can actively 'occupy' and destroy other trees due to their botanical features.

The diasporic activists determine cultural images of the endangered Armenianness by referring to the environmental catastrophe in Armenia. These stories are framed in explicitly ethno-botanical terms based on the sense of native purity and indigenousness. The vitality of Armenia and its green landscape should be restored by appealing to the importance of defending native plants and combating the danger coming from invasive non-native trees. Organised around a division between native and non-native species, the list of trees and shrubs warns the Armenian future:

> "There are many non-Armenian tree species (non-native species), which are invasive and can aggressively occupy an area by crowding out and eventually replacing native, indigenous species of trees. Unfortunately, in Armenia, after the massive tree-cutting period of the early 1990s the planting of invasive species became a common practice, mostly due to lack of awareness of the ecological detriment that planting of invasive species can cause. We generally recommend planting only species that are labelled as 'native'. Any species labelled 'invasive' should never be planted and actually should be removed whenever possible. These invasive species have a particular ability to produce thousands and thousands of seeds that can germinate, grow and eventually shade out native species." (Acopian Center for the Environment 2019)[10]

Among 84 species of trees and shrubs registered on the list, only 32 were identified as native plants for the territory of Armenia. The rest is classified as non-native organic bodies. Three of them are identified by US Armenian Americans as 'invasive' or 'extremely invasive'. This 'native-non-native' classification of trees provided emotional instruments for demonstrating the importance of tree campaigns in Armenia.

Such intertwining of biological metaphors, environmental discourses and national security reflect the logic of diasporic interventions and the arboreal aspect of contemporary diasporic patriotism in Armenia. For instance, in the summer newsletter from 2016, the Armenian Tree Project emphasised their linkages to the mission of defending the nation, in particular during the recent armed conflict with Azerbaijan in May 2016. The Executive director, Jeanmarie Papelian, described how Andranik Hovsepyan, an ATP driver in Yerevan immediately volunteered to help defend Armenia: "We are so grateful for his service.

Andranik is a veteran of the Artsakh war in the 1990s. He began work with ATP as a driver in 2006 and he was never late for an appointment."[11]

Within this story, the mundane status of a driver was evaluated and transformed into the image of a patriotic soldier, whose body was depicted in a military uniform standing alone in a field. The newsletter explained that after returning home safe, the driver was elevated as a monitor of the ATP forestry team. It is so to say a way how trees and forests can be equated with the body and the notion of a 'planted flag'.

In April 1998, the Armenia Tree Project initiated a ceremonial event to mark Earth Day and Arbor Day at ATP nurseries and in Armenian villages. The 21 or 22 April are special dates as they coincide with the traditional day for volunteer work (*subbotnik)* developed by Soviet authorities in Armenia in the 1920s. A *subbotnik* in April was usually connected to Lenin's birthday on 22 April. This day, which was observed among all Soviet institutions, schools, and enterprises by cleaning the grounds around the organisation's site and then planting trees, has been transformed by the ATP into a new event associated with the global Earth Day on Armenian soil. The executive director of ATP, Jeff Masarjian, referred to the 37th anniversary of Earth Day by stating that in the US, the environmental movement became a global phenomenon by the early 1990s, when 200 million people around the world started celebrating Earth Day. The community planting in Armenia again received a political dimension as official members of US institutions and international NGOs were invited for the celebration of Arbor Day. These actors demonstrated their presence by scattering the seeds of fruit trees into the earth around local schools or by planting a sapling of an evergreen thuja tree on a plot of an ATP nursery. As reported in an ATP newsletter in 2007, the celebration at the ATP nursery in the village of Karin "united Armenian officials, US ambassadors, NGO representatives, and the local population for a ceremony to raise awareness of ecological issues and emphasise the need to solve them together" (2007: 5).

Pine Trees as Bearer of Memory

The pine tree, an evergreen plant, represents another modern cultural instrument of diasporic regeneration. Although the pine tree is rarely defined as typical native species in the Armenian ethno-botanical classification of the landscape, they appear to be popular in diasporic reforestation discourses due to its utilitarian character and symbolic status. Along with localised species like the European black pine (Crimean pine) and Turkish pine found in the northern

part of Armenia, new types of conifers were introduced and planted in Armenia during the Soviet period. The blue spruce (*golubaya el*), an evergreen conifer, is widely used as an ornamental 'political' tree in state-controlled parks and at urban green stripes in front of Soviet-style public and administrative buildings (Darieva 2015).

The ATP started the afforestation programme in 2003 by establishing backyard nurseries in the villages of the Getik River Valley and land purchased for a five-hectare nursery in Margahovit village. In 2007, after the assassination of the Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul, a group of wealthy Armenian American philanthropists, suggested planting a memorial forest of 53.000 trees – 1.000 trees for each of Dink's 53 years. In this sense, trees are planted as a commemorative ritual for the dead. Isolated from its environment by a high metal fence, the eleven-hectare memorial pine forest in Margahovit stands like an evergreen 'shrine' in a new environment. The Hrant Dink is located in a heterogeneous place between two settlements: the mixed Armenian village of Margahovit and the Russian village of Fioletovo. In 2013, another memorial forest-shrine was planted: the Sose and Allen Memorial forest in Stepanavan. After the fatal car accident of a young Armenian Canadian couple who had repatriated to Armenia as volunteers with Birthright Armenia, the ATP management decided to create a 'living memorial' by planting a pine forest. It was reported: "One of our most sacred sites is the Sose and Allen Memorial Forest in Stepanavan where we are planting another 30.000 trees in memory of Sose Thomassian and Allen Yekikian" (From the director's desk, November 2014).

'Trees of hope' planted on the Armenian soil become not only the enduring guardians of the historical event, but also mark a new source and part of the larger process, what I call, long-distance 'arboreal' nationalism. One most interesting aspect in this self-identification process is that it is a special tree, namely, the pine tree (*sochi tsarr*), which seems to take a prominent place in the new national landscape. To exemplify how dead bodies are symbolically turned into a 'living' forest landscape, where a power of planting act points to maintaining the *Hayutuin* (Armenianness) I provide another example in the following.

In June 2015, a new initiative, the Living Century Initiative has been launched by the Armenia Tree Project in order to celebrate life and perseverance by remembering migrants' roots and symbolically replanting them on the territory of Armenia. More precisely, the establishment of ten forests in Northern Armenia was planned that should remember the major Western

Armenian communities that left the territory of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The aim of this long-term campaign is to recreate ancestral regions (such as Bitlis, Kharpet, Constantinople, Kars) on the territory of modern Armenia, and repopulate them with green. In the newsletter, the ATP director explicitly invites to select 'your ancestral region' and to make a generous donation to these planting sites. The main logic of these diasporic imaginaries is focused on the central metaphor of territorial loss and its symbolic regaining.

Figure 5.5: ATP Living Century Initiative 2015

Source: Armenian Tree Project 2015.

The lines of a new geography of 'rooted' forests coincide with the border regions such as the region Lori in Northern Armenia, and Shirak on the borderland between Turkey, Armenia and Georgia. The most striking point is that it is the pine tree, which serves as a new symbol and metaphor of pan-Armenian solidarity, ethnic continuity and trans-generational organic force. The pine tree is rarely defined as a typical 'native' tree in the Armenian ethnobotanical classification of the vegetation landscape. Environmentalists and experts identify it as 'non-native', more precisely as a 'semi-native' specie introduced in the nineteenth century from Crimea and Russia.

Table 4: Locations of the ATP Living Century Initiative 2015

Ancestral region in Turkey	Forests to plant in Armenia
Aturpatakan	Vahramaberd (Shirak)
Bitlis	Keti (Shirak)
Cilicia	Gogaran (Lori)
Constantinople	Ghazanchi (Shirak)
Diyarbakir	Arevshat (Shirak)
Erzurum	Lusagkbyur (Lori)
Kars	Saralang (Shirak)
Kharpet	Arevashogh (Lori)
Sepastia	Akunk (Kotayk)
Van	Basen (Shirak)

Source: https://armenianweekly.com/2015/07/01/atp-honors-genocide-centennial/. Last accessed on 22.11.2022.

The meaning and the role of pine trees in structuring the Armenian treescape should be discussed in the context of the Jewish model of afforestation of the Promised Land. Along with the maple tree, the pine tree is the main specie used in the Armenian Tree Project's afforestation project. The programme was modelled closely on the Jewish National Fund's afforestation programme in Israel, which placed very much emphasis on the pine tree (Braverman 2009). Shaul Kelner, an Israeli sociologist and the author of the book "Tours That Bind" confirmed during our informal talk that Armenian American activists were in intense contact with the Jewish organisations in New York before they launched the afforestation programme in Armenia.

The strong connection between the Zionist planting of pine trees in Israel and the US-based Armenia Tree Project becomes obvious in terms of its concepts and implementations, by which land and its natural features become part of a political fiction of a unified history. Thus, the forest is conceptualised as a repository for diasporic investments in the future of a 'regained' homeland. In other words, this example reveals current ideas of ethnic solidarity on the 'territory of hope' rooted in tree metaphors. In comparing Armenian reforestation programmes with Jewish Zionist programmes, similar argumentations for the pine tree can be found. The Zionist construction of the Jewish landscape has

been well documented and critically analysed (Braverman 2009; Bardenstein 1999). According to Braverman, the Jewish National Fund has performed two crucial roles in the Zionist project since its foundation in Basle in 1901: a national and an environmental one, by acquiring and settling lands in Palestine and by serving as Israel's afforestation agency (Braverman 2009: 52). It was the Jewish National Fund that since 1961 was responsible for the most visible project of the Zionist movement and the massive transformation of the Israeli/Palestinian landscape. According to Braverman, the striking point in Israel's tree planting project, which differs from the Armenian case, is the dominant monoculture promoted by JNF in spite of acknowledging biodiversity as the central issue of any sustainable afforestation programme (ibid: 88). Moreover, planting pine trees in Israel can be interpreted as a tool of the 'Jewish occupation' of the Holy Land in opposition to the Arab-speaking population and Arabic olive groves. At the same time, planting pine tree forests in Israel must be considered within the historical framework of time, more precisely the pine tree is related to the creation of a nostalgic image of a distinctly Eastern European landscape in Palestine, brought by exilic Jews from Eastern Europe and Germany (ibid: 89). A small green pine tree is depicted on numerous advertising flyers and the ATP homepage demonstrating the act of planting. According to my observations, the specie is rather taken as granted by Armenian managers and donors. The pine tree is perceived as a neutral plant, which can 'save the planet' and generate the Armenian self-production. In addition to conifers, two other tree species (maple, oak) are planted in ATP nurseries and community backyards. This again raises the question of why pine, of all trees, a 'non-native' conifer, occupies such a prominent place in the rhetoric and diasporic environmental interventions.

In his interview in September 2013, the manager of the nurseries in Margahovit emphasised the pragmatic value of the pine tree. Without emphasising its 'semi-native' belonging, in the foreground was the fact that the tree belongs to 'evergreen' specie that makes the forest image effective. The most important reason for using pine trees in the afforestation programme is the fact that the tree grows fast in a dry and cold climate and is easily recognisable in the landscape.

> "You know, our donors already want to see the results of their investments after two years, and this demands a fast greening landscape. To plant and to grow the local plane tree or the Caucasian oak is a very time consuming

> and hard process. We need to show our temporal results and the pine tree is perfect for that." (12.09.2013, Yerevan)

The appreciation of the pine tree as a symbol of the Armenian future is highlighted in numerous pictures used by the Armenian Tree Campaign. The fact that the Armenian landscape is shaped by diverse plant societies is acknowledged by the ATP management, however, it is coniferous trees, and fewer oak or plain tree which are cultivated in nurseries and community backyards. The notion of 'biodiversity' seems to be acknowledged by viewing Armenia as part of a larger region in the Caucasus, however, the situation is ambiguous and contradictory. The ATP activists refer to this metaphor during fund-raising campaigns by explaining that biodiversity needs protection with the help of international organisations. Being connected to international organisations through funds, the Armenian tree planting project claims to be linked to the commitment of biodiversity, which is made explicit in the curriculum for environmental education published in English and Armenian:

> "There is biodiversity within a forest. Forests contain many communities that support diverse populations of organisms. Different forests have different levels of biodiversity. Armenia has a complex relief, as a result of which the regions have strongly differing natural climatic conditions (e.g., precipitation, temperature, topography, etc.) These variations lead to different forest communities with differing species, thereby contributing to Caucasian biodiversity. Armenia is considered part of the world's 25 most ecologically diverse ecosystems by the World Wild Fund for Nature." [12]

However, similar to the Zionist project characterised by the homogeneous use of the pine tree, the Armenian planting of pine trees promotes an ethnically driven security agenda. This can be observed on the level of donation techniques, visualisation and in acts of greening the landscape. These issues are important in differentiating the ways tree policies have been conceptualised and implemented in Armenia and Israel. The tree activities have created a notion of 'diasporic forest', which represents its symbolic 'return' to the ruined ancestral landscape and simultaneously replacing the actually absent body of diasporic Armenians in the homeland. Forests stand rather for material representations of diasporic life and less for the regeneration of Armenia's declined economy after socialism.

In the ATP newsletter from the spring of 2007, one can read the official slogan in regard to the twofold vision to Armenia: "We will use trees to improve the

standard of living of Armenians and to protect the global environment" (2007: 2). This quotation indicates that planting trees simultaneously brings to mind a naturalised, ethnicised connotation, based on the typical diasporic search for 'roots of renewal', but this time incorporated into broader global frameworks. By positioning actions within a movement to sustain and protect the planet, the act of tree planting in Armenia shapes the ambiguity of diasporic identities between ethnic parochialism and global cosmopolitanism. Again, as the newsletter states: "We are proud to join the international effort to plant trees to fight climate change, which is worsened by rampant deforestation around the world. The ATP has joined in 2006 the worldwide tree planting campaign launching by the 'Billion Tree Campaign'." (ibid.).

Legal Regulation

Whereas Jewish National Fund works closely with Israel's state officials and possesses significant power in the local society, the ATP remains relatively marginal in the governance of natural resources in Armenia. Though the ATP's activities in establishing tree nurseries and creating new educational centres for school children are not prevented by the state. Legally the ATP is a charity organisation, independent from the state as it does not acquire lands in the sense of property. Being the main regulator of land and forests, the Armenian state generally refrains from selling fields and large tracts of land to private organisations. Forests are regulated by laws and the state authorities, which include three different ministries: Armenian Forest Service, the Agricultural Ministry and the Ministry of Nature Protection. The Forest Code of the Republic of Armenia, adopted on 24 October 2004, defines the 'Armenian' forest in explicitly scientific and technical terms as:

> "Forest is interconnected and interacting integrity of biological diversity dominated by tree-bush vegetation and of components of natural environment on forest lands or other lands allocated for afforestation with the minimal area of 0.1 ha, minimal width of 10 m and with tree crowns covering at least 30% of the area, as well as non-forested areas of previously forested forestlands." (General provision, Chapter 1, article 3 of the Forest Code: 1)

At the same time, regulated by Chapter 2, article 4 of the Forest Code, the right to property in relation to forests is formulated in a relatively liberal form, which states: "Forests and forest lands can be under state, community and private

ownership" (p. 3). The contemporary law on forests allows the allocation of state forestlands for use free of charge and for afforestation purposes (Article 33). The legal basis of ATP activities in the region is provided by Article 45, which addresses "the activity of the chief of a community in the sphere of natural and environment protection". However, after discussing the implementation of this law with members of other NGOs dealing with environmental issues in Armenia, it appears that the forestlands are state-owned and the law on privatisation issued in 1991 did not have an effect on forest ownership at all.

According to an UN FAO document from 2007, "Armenia is not in a position to give definitive indications on policy directions in relation to privatisation of existing forest resources…So, forests and nature sanctuaries are definitely under the state control and property"[13]. The socialist legacy of preserving forests for communal usage still prevents a large-scale privatisation process in Armenian forestlands, at least on paper.

Field Encounters: Clash of Values

The continuous effort to monitor the sustainability of Armenia-oriented transnational engagement among Armenian American diasporic organisations required not only systematic updating of online data, but also many trips to the field for anthropological 'participant observations' and face-to-face contacts with 'local key informants'. This approach provided a valuable source for testing hypotheses, as well as producing reliable data on the dynamics of diasporic attachments and the changing logic of individual activities.

What follows is a reflection based on two different interviews with the managing director of Armenian Tree Project, in April 2006 and in November 2013. Both interviews took place in Watertown near the ATP office. This experience helped me understand the dialectic of diaspora-homeland relationships in the case of Armenians that brought to the fore the clash of values and resentment.

In April 2006 the managing director enthusiastically explained that he feels a great sense of attachment to the homeland in Armenia in spite of the fact that his grandparents came from Istanbul and Aleppo. The main belief in his 'new homeland' in Armenia was connected to "a strong sense to make a change, to give economic opportunity to make something for the nation and Armenian families":

> "What our project does [is that] it provides a better place for holidays. (Laughing) [Now] to be realistic: I see Armenia like a country of the Middle East with mountains. They have limited natural resources, but Armenia is beautiful, it is an outdoor museum. It needs to have more trees; they should make it more beautiful. When you plant trees you clean the planet's environment. And you civilize the land." (Watertown, 28.04.2006)

In a 'missionary' and enthusiastic mode, he continued to explain that reducing poverty in rural regions is the most important task and the best way to reach goals is to develop small businesses among local villagers:

> "You have to plant trees; you have to do environmental education to raise awareness. What I hope, actually, people are making money growing trees and selling to us. I would like in future to raise their income, to turn into the Fund, this organisation or some other organizations will double or triple their incomes. Thus, then they will be able to afford to buy gas. By making money growing trees and reforesting they will reduce their dependency on cutting down the trees and they will have opportunity to purchase gas." (Watertown, 16.10.2006)

Seven years later, in November 2013, after experiencing the homeland for more than ten years of intensive 'diasporic' work (2002–2012), he left his position as the ATP managing director. To my question whether he would have time to meet me seven years later, he agreed by saying that many things have changed in the ATP and in his understanding of Armenia. During our conversation in November 2013, he emphasised that his organisation unfortunately did not achieve the results that he expected.

Before my trip to Boston in November 2013, I had the chance to visit two ATP places in Northern Armenia in Lori and Tavush provinces: the Tree Nursery and Educational Centre in Margahovit sponsored by the John Mirak Foundation and the village Avaghnavanq. In this project, the ATP engaged the local population to participate in a micro-economy of backyard nurseries. Up until 1978, the Soviet village Margahovit was known as Hamzachiman populated by Azeris and Russian Molokans. Today the village is populated by Armenian refugees. Avaghnavanq, another former ethnic Azeri village was known as Sallakh, a small village in Northern Armenia (Lori marz) close to Azerbaijan's border, an area with a long cold winter and hot summer. During the Soviet period, the population of these two villages was predominantly occupied in cattle breeding and, to some extent, tobacco production. After the First Nagorno-

Karabakh War, there was an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan to transfer and exchange the population living in the borderlands. The Azeri population in both villages had to leave Armenia and the area was re-populated by Armenian refugees from Baku.

In 2007, more than ten refugee households (about 280 people) were hired by the ATP in Aghavnavank to grow seedlings of pine and maple trees in their home backyards. In November 2013, my aim of visiting the 'backyard-nursery-households' was to ask villagers about their experiences with planting seedlings in their backyards. It was the harvest season and members of the households were very much prouder about showing their vegetable gardens and baskets full of ripe vegetables, beans, lentils and fruits than they were about the small pine and maple seedlings. I asked a 38-year-old man, who was quite successful in growing and selling the seedlings to the ATP, whether he and his family are going to expand their backyard nursery. He looked at me and said that he actually prefers palm trees and it is his dream to plant at least one palm tree instead of a pine tree because the palm is "so beautiful and so expensive".

The Avaghnavanq school director, the main ATP cooperation partner in the village, expressed mixed feelings about the backyard nurseries as a future project for this village. According to her observations, many households were complaining that the plants do not grow as fast as they wish and they do not make as much money as they need. At least one member of the household was working as a labour migrant in Russia. The majority of households therefore were much more interested in the implementation of new rules for getting Russian citizenship among Armenian migrants in Russia. The sceptical views of the villagers and the mode of disinterest regarding tree planting and its effects on Armenian forests were in line with the deep disillusionment expressed by former managing director in November 2013:

> "I was very naive. I have tried to bring global ideas to Armenia. People told me that it is difficult, but I could not believe the ways culture in Armenia has evolved, maybe because of socialism or because of feudal relations and it is continuing be feudal. There is a culture of mistrust, deceit and lies."

He explained, the loss of his enthusiasm and trust towards local Armenians in the Republic of Armenia because of their weak sense of collaboration on a communal level:

> "Everybody is a boss in Armenia and everybody wants to be a leader, not followers. Historically, Armenia was invaded by the Mongols and since that everyone has to take care of their own house. They value only family units and the state and nothing in-between, (there is) no community sense. [...]you bring money,teach them and they kill the trees."

To explain the change in his perceptions of the homeland, he used two examples describing his deep frustration about the project in the 'homeland':

> "In 2009, we received a million of dollars from philanthropists to plant trees in Lori and we paid our local staff according to the number of trees they planted. Five different species: pine trees, ash, some oak tree and wild apple. They sent people up to the mountains and each worker took twenty samplings, dug the hole and put all trees inside of this one hole, asking to be paid for twenty holes! What does this mean? Infuriating. Only five percent of the plants have survived [...].People do not understand that it would be their trees and their forest, they do not think that they will profit from it, instead they say that some time the mayor of the village would be rich, but not them. [...] Planting trees is not that complicated, it just needs some care. Our nursery staff got paid people who actually did nothing for the project. I do not trust their words, they believe only in big cars and want make money immediately."

After the interview, I had an opportunity to talk to the office manager who emphasised that corruption and a clash of values remain the main problems for expanding the project in these places. However, the ATP is existing and diasporic Armenians continue to donate for the NGO on the basis of US tax deduction system. The non-profit organisation continues to plant trees in Armenia with hope for the future and economic opportunities to the people in Armenia.

Conclusion

Arboreal metaphors of regeneration such as 'trees of hope', 'seeds of remembrance' and 'roots of renewal', are used by the non-profit organisation 'Armenian Tree Project' in Watertown (MA) in successful fundraising campaigns in the US and Canada. The fundraising campaign to plant a tree on the territory of the Republic of Armenia (not at a community centre in Boston, Watertown or in Glendale) became synthesised with different diasporic hopes and missions,

whereby the diasporic desire of a journey to the homeland moved to the fore of diaspora-homeland relations. In this form of diasporic desire, an obligation to fill a 'void space' is performed, which has been immediately turned into a target of development and a concrete destination of transnational engagement.

The striking point of this green campaign is the re-enactment of migrants' ancestor's presence in a new location, whose 'ghosts' can be revitalised into affective bodies of seeds and 'trees of hope'. The strategy of the campaign has the aim of planting trees for the diasporic future and making bonds to the homeland meaningful by a production of new common space in the sense of territory. Political scientists theorised territorialisation as a political technology that delimits a certain space as a territory and links a space with society. The strategy of making diasporic space follows similar tactics described by Abramson (2017) as it demonstrates how historical narratives, performative rituals and bodily engagements can develop a sense of place 'on the ground' among members of scatted communities. In this way, the case of diasporic experiences with tree planting campaigns on the territory of the homeland can be seen as a cultural technology of territorialisation.

Diasporic images and concepts of tree planting are manifested in Armenia as civilising 'missions' emphasising a 'patronised' relationship between the 'ancestral homeland' in the Republic of Armenia and the Western Armenian diaspora. Different species of trees are used to represent homeland and diaspora visceral connectivity. However, they are limited to a set of certain 'working' trees that can explicitly demonstrate cultural roots, spatial distribution and the embodiment of diasporic 'patrons' of Armenia. The ATP is actively engaged in the construction of a new sacred geography of 'tree shrines' and 'memorial forests'. The complexity of connections driven by diasporic forces include tree planting as an act of symbolic rootedness binding different generations, as an instrument of creating an ideal destination, and as a performative act in gaining symbolic capital through global politics of environment.

Tree planting is also linked to another important theoretical framework, which should be considered in the studies of patriotism and conflicts. Social anthropologists have conceptualised relationships between nature, material culture and ideology in modern societies. In both authoritarian and post-modern contexts, the emotional power of trees can treat the land as sacred and mark issues of a specific geography, and in this way become responsible for the construction of a moral landscape feeding the diasporic longing for the homeland. Emotional attitude to trees and treescapes seems to play an important role in reimagining, reconfiguring and relocating the 'shrines' of the ancestors.

The emotional power of trees marks issues of specific geography and strong visceral connections, and in this way becomes responsible for the construction of a moral landscape feeding the long-distance nationalism. In this sense, I argue that fruit trees and forests should be conceived not only as elements of local nature and harmless green, but also as flexible means for political messages. Whereas a singular tree can be turned into a local 'shrine', forests may become the Promised Land as it occurs in Israel with its conflict between the Jewish pine tree and the Arabic olive tree. Botanic species can be turned into 'natural monuments', which can be ideologically claimed as being exclusively Armenian. Nature and forests may become 'active' and 'mobile' guardians of the national homeland and can serve as fences for disputed territories.

Notes

1 Compare with the notion of *deutscher Wald* (German forest) for oak leaves on the German Knight's Cross and military units.

2 Along with, the authors admit a complexity of the Armenian apricot lineage: "...Armenia is referenced in this (apricot) name not because it was its birthplace, but that it was introduced to Greece by Armenian merchants" (Petrosian /Underwood 2006: 140). The mobility of Armenian merchants seems to be of great significance for the proliferation of *tsiran* in the language of Armenian national identity. According to Petrosian and Underwood, the native term for the apricot fruit, *tsiran*, goes back to the medieval Armenian term *tsirani* used to define red, yellow, purple, rainbow and any pleasant colour. The four-volume Armenian language dictionary of word roots (*Hayeren Armatakan Bararan*, Yerevan 1971) by Hrachia Atcharian served as a source of interpretations for the authors.

3 Compare with Abrahamian 2006 and Petrosian/Underwood 2006.

4 Pomegranate and grape motifs are used as decorative elements on the building of the governmental houses at the Republic Square in Yerevan, which was completed in the 1960s. Moritz Pfeifer (2015) mentioned in his essay that the pomegranate fruit appears in the early Armenian films such as "Pepo" (1935), "Anahit" (1947) as an aesthetic reference to express the idyll peasant life in Soviet Armenia.

5 Armenia's post-Soviet transformation coincided with traumatic experiences of radical economic decline, war with neighbouring Azerbaijan, the energy crisis in the 1990s and mass emigration of young people.

6 Pomegranate served as a source for the Azerbaijani promotion of the official mascots (Jeyran and Nar) during the first European Olympic Games in 2015 in Baku.
7 Marz is the Armenian word for an administrative unit, a province.
8 See more about local beliefs and folk sacred sites in Armenia in Abrahamian et al. 2018.
9 The conception of vanishing green proposed by ATP is different from the Armenian state assessments. According to the Statistical Yearbook of Armenia, in 2009 the forests cover about 10.4 percent of the republic's territory; oak, beech and hornbeam are defined as the main tree species of these forests (Asatryan 2012). Whereas two-thirds of the forest cover is located in the northeast of Armenia, the other one-third is in the south.
10 See https://www.acopiancenter.am/data/docfiles/trees-and-shrubs-of-armenia.asp. Last accessed on 17.11.2022.
11 See https://www.armenaintree.org. Last accessed on 17.11.2022.
12 See in ATP's teachers manual "Plant an Idea, Plant a Tree" written by Karla Wesley in 2005.
13 See http://www.fao.org/docrep/w7170E/w7170e06.htm. Last accessed on 17.11.2022.

Conclusion

The world has changed since 2020. The effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency and the war in Ukraine brought another level of uncertainty and crisis to Eastern Europe. For the South Caucasus, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (October-November 2020) brought far-reaching regional consequences including a change in the political and military balance. We see this in the rise of Turkey's influence in the region, in Russia's military presence in Nagorno-Karabakh and in the waning of US influence. Disappointment in Armenia over its defeat in the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War may have long-term effects on Armenia's relations with the diaspora. Over the past thirty years, both sides have had high expectations for better cooperation and the fulfilment of common goals. Adapting to the new reality after the 'Velvet' Revolution, in 2019 the Ministry for Diaspora was replaced by the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs of Armenia "for the future and prosperity of Armenians living in Armenia and in the Diaspora".[1] However, despite large donations and prominent supporters, the political and economic influence of the Armenian diaspora on the Armenian economy and society has remained relatively low and relations between Armenia and Western diasporic communities remain complex.[2]

Armenian diasporic people in the US are ambiguous about the Republic of Armenia as a place for effective and large-scale investments. Many second- and later-generation diasporic Armenians consider themselves ethnic Armenians, but many do not feel politically connected to the Republic of Armenia and define themselves beyond the parameters of one nation-state. The lack of trust in pro-Russian Armenia, with its widespread corruption, leads diasporic Armenians in the West to prefer 'soft' engagement and distanced support over repatriation.

However, the intensity of diasporic emotional bonds to the homeland and the war cannot be ignored. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was accom-

panied by a rise in diasporic engagement and public protests. In California, a highway was temporarily closed due to a demonstration by pro-Armenian protestors. In 2020, Armenian Americans raised over $170 million for humanitarian and medical aid for the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and some even joined the Armenian army as volunteers. During the war, the initiative 'Buy Armenian' was founded to support the homeland in Armenia. Approximately 5.600 Armenian products and 800 businesses are now represented on the platform.[3]

Moreover, the bitter experience of the conflict may prompt youth in the diaspora to redefine their relationships with the 'homeland' in Armenia and develop more centralised and effective networks for a sustainable future. There is a new rise in emotional patriotism that can drive 'roots' mobility and underpin the idea of a united Armenia. As one contributor to a US-based blog discussion[4] optimistically summarised: "[We need] a government which reflects the opinion of all Armenians in the world, by encouraging everyone to take ownership of their identity and have [an] Armenian passport and have the voting right to elect from worldwide candidates."

Such a call does not represent the opinion of all ethnic Armenians living abroad but reflects new ideals in times of crisis. Activists in well-organised Armenian communities in the US, Canada and France have started to appeal for more effective homeland engagement and cooperation, which, they argue, should go beyond ad hoc charity, lifestyle mobility, homeland tourism, and social media activism.

Consequently, a variety of new initiatives facilitating 'roots' mobility towards the homeland have been launched. The *I Gortc* programme (Arm. 'for the cause'), for example, was launched in 2020 with the aim of encouraging diaspora Armenians residing abroad to contribute to the work of the Armenian government. The programme aims to stimulate a new wave of immigration of highly qualified specialists. Another programme, 'Step Toward Home', launched in 2021, aims to preserve and develop Armenian national identity among diaspora youth.[5] 'Future Armenian' is a public initiative launched by individuals in Armenia and worldwide in order to develop a unified pan-Armenian agenda and help Armenian families repatriate to Armenia.[6]

The long-term effects of the 2020 war and the future role of the Armenian diaspora in Armenian politics are difficult to predict. The Republic of Armenia continues to count on moral and financial support from the diaspora, and many Armenians abroad will most likely demonstrate their solidarity and long-distance engagement. Diasporic members may play a role in post-conflict re-

construction through funds and the transfer of ideas and values. In doing so, they may contribute to stabilising and strengthening civil society, thus supporting democratic development in Armenia.

This book reflects on a variety of 'voices' and transnational diasporic behaviours in a situation of political change. What factors, imaginaries and infrastructures encourage or dissuade migrants' descendants to engage with the 'ancestral homeland' in the twenty-first century? In reference to the 'paradigmatic' Armenian case, I set aside all conventional interpretations of the diaspora as a bounded ethnic unity shaped by the 'top-down' politics of nation-states and offer a fresh 'bottom-up' perspective on twenty-first century aspirations for cross-border 'roots' mobilities between diaspora and homeland. Drawing on long-term multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Armenia and the United States (2007–2015), my intention has been to highlight a variety of constructing bonds to the 'homeland' from the 'North' to the 'South'.

This study has shown that in the visions of Armenian Americans the notion of the 'sacred homeland' is ambivalent. On the one hand, it may take the shape of a Promised Land dotted with sacred sites. On the other hand, Armenia as the 'ancestral homeland' is perceived as the diaspora's backyard, a peripheral and corrupt land on the Eurasian continent, where newcomers encounter unexpected difficulties in everyday life. The appeal to strengthen national unity remains relatively weak even after the 2020 war; rather, Armenia is sometimes seen as difficult terrain for larger investments and political cooperation. Thus, I argue that a growing number of travel and volunteering programmes, donations and homeland-oriented investments have opened up a variety of opportunities for diasporic people, but they have not yet led to a greater sense of unity between diasporic people and the local population.

Simon Payaslian noted that the collapse of the Soviet Union did not reduce the discrepancies between a diasporic imagined Armenia and the Armenia inherited by native Armenians, but rather magnified them (Payaslian 2010: 131). In many regards, the relationships between locals and diasporic Armenians are shaped by conflict and misunderstanding. Not surprisingly, diaspora centres did not get involved in the 2018 mass protests in Armenia that eventually forced President Serge Sargsyan to resign. The political influence of diasporic centres on the Republic of Armenia was marginal at that time, despite emotional celebrations of the arrival of 'big names' such as the American rock musician of Armenian descent Serj Tankian (System of a Down) and the French singer Charles Aznavour, who joined the mass protests.

I have sought to explain the notion of 'roots' mobility, a 'silent' type of movement, a pattern of voluntary journeys to the 'homeland' among those who enjoy freedom of mobility. 'Roots' mobility is not a new phenomenon; however, its form and intensity have changed. Based on ethnic memories, this specific type of mobility is a global phenomenon of temporary and circular movements that transcends one-way classical return migration (Cassarino 2013), counter-diaspora movements (Christou/King 2015) and short-term homesick tourism (Marschall 2015). Constructing and practising bonds to the homeland has become increasingly popular in this time of crisis among second and later generations of Armenian diasporic people.

'Roots' mobility can take different forms, which are shaped by global inequalities and geo-political context. Along with forms of forced return migration and labour return migration, 'roots' mobility may emerge as a lifestyle migration resulting from relative privilege, as a meaningful journey to a specific place conceived of as a homeland (Benson/O'Reilly 2016). In studying this form of long-distance mobility, I provide an in-depth analysis of the concepts, motivations, stories and practices of 'discovering', 'travelling' and 'co-making' the homeland, when migrants' descendants perceive themselves as independent actors who are simultaneously 'rooted' in specific places. I unpack certain modes of interaction and intervention among diasporic individuals, intermediary organisations that have a social and political dynamic that tends to sidestep the 'weak' Armenian state. And, in this way, the study contributes to our understanding of the plurality of transnational engagement that combines ethnic and cosmopolitan moments.

Diasporic 'roots' mobility is an analytical lens that may explain an assemblage of belonging, movements and claims. With assemblage, I mean what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described as a multiplicity of lines and speeds of emerging de-centred fields, in this context an intermediary arena of civic engagement, which includes different bodies, signs, events and utterances. These phenomena can produce a number of contradictory configurations rather than a tightly organised ideological unit.

Diasporic Armenians from North America have developed an assemblage of interactions that allows them to view and appropriate the Republic of Armenia simultaneously as an ideal, a desire, and a space for social action and identity-making. A new generation of US-based diasporic non-profit organisations employ 'soft' tools to engage with the homeland: philanthropy, travel, volunteering and civic engagement.

Certainly, other responses can be given to the questions posed at the beginning of the book. I described and analysed a variety of those diasporic attachments, movements and cultural techniques of reconnecting that explicitly present themselves as homeland-oriented. While I have concentrated on a limited range of Armenian American interpretations of a 'journey to the future' and disregarded numerous other cases in Europe, the Middle East or elsewhere, there is sufficient material here to put contemporary debates on homeland and diaspora in a wider perspective.

Images and perceptions of the 'ancestral homeland' are very changeable, and the process of appropriating the homeland is selective. The homeland is not a site of certainty but complexity, with an ever-growing multiplicity of overlapping ideals and expectations challenging the homeland ideal. The essentialising notion of the 'ancestral homeland' can centre on one iconic place (Genocide Memorial with Mount Ararat as a backdrop) or associated with one specific landscape, and yet it is the relevance of multiple homelands that lends a degree of flexibility and porosity to homeland boundaries.

The relocation of diasporic volunteers and activists can be driven by a variety of imaginaries, emotional family memories and subjectivities. The emotional dimension of 'roots' mobility is a powerful construct that animates personal memories within the larger context of collective catastrophes. It is also related to a desire to counter the threat of cultural assimilation post-migrants experience in North America, while at the same time adapting to the dynamics of an ever-globalising world.

Although a diasporic route 'from the centre to a periphery' goes hand in hand with the emotional metaphors of 'to serve the nation' or 'going back to the roots', 'roots' migrants are less likely to be engaged in terms of eventual return, repatriation, or an 'act of resistance against supermobility' (Christou/King 2014).

This implies a *temporary form* of 'roots' mobility based on tours and cross-border activities on the territory of a homeland without permanently changing one's country of residence. Such a perspective highlights the fragmentation of return mobility and the growing variety of connections between places that can form a circle. The concept of making a homeland thus challenges studies of counter-diasporic movements that view homecomings and second-generation transnationalism as a one-way street.

This form of temporary diasporic mobility opens up different avenues for 'making a homeland'. It encompasses the interplay of internal and external actors who shape the culture of diasporic transnational behaviour. Different ex-

ternal forces have shaped contemporary Armenian diasporic engagement with the homeland and its strategies. By challenging traditional views on diasporic networks, I have described a new generation of diasporic organisations supported by international organisations rather than local ethno-national agencies. International and US-based organisations, in particular the World Bank, Volunteers Corps or USAID, play an important role in mobilising, facilitating and targeting diasporic communities, enticing them to travel to the homeland. As Alan Gamlen has noted in his recent study, we should not overlook the role of these powerful international organisations in advocating diasporic engagement and even in the creation of diasporic organisations (Gamlen et al. 2017). This results in the development of alternative kinds of infrastructures that frame 'roots' mobility and the engagement between 'diaspora' and 'homeland' beyond nation-state institutions. By observing and examining the materiality and sociality of diasporic 'sanctuaries', such as the idea of tree planting and reforestation projects on specific territories, we gain deeper insights into the process of forming modern 'visceral connections' across borders. Global nature and the idea of diasporic 'roots' are successfully used as a metaphor for a tangible transgenerational organic force with political implications, nurturing the rise of diasporic patriotism.

Without claiming to have covered the full spectrum of young diasporic travellers, I have analysed the expectations and experiences of diasporic youth in the 'ancestral homeland' using the example of a group of volunteers of Armenian descent who came to Armenia through the Birthright Armenia and Armenian Volunteer Corps programmes. Individual and collective motivations for travelling to the 'homeland' and working unpaid in a remote place are framed in the context of global engagement fuelled by the universalist and humanitarian ideals of aid, environmental protection and human rights as well as neo-liberal developmentalist assumptions of 'one world'. Moreover, a close analysis of the motivations behind volunteering trips undertaken by young professionals demonstrates that travel is a performative act within the aesthetics of global cosmopolitanism. With the term 'global cosmopolitanism', I mean a metaphor, a goal and a social vision of those individuals who wish to travel across national borders and are considered to be open to the unknown. I have outlined elsewhere that global cosmopolitans represent a specific milieu and lifestyle that can be practised predominantly by elite groups, intellectuals, politicians, and those with the necessary resources to travel, learn other languages and absorb other cultures (Darieva 2015). At the same time, the motivations for homeland trips among second- and later-generation diasporic

Armenians are marked by a strong sense of individual status and life cycle events.

Furthermore, this study has revealed that the notion of diasporic giving may be a source of inspiration for tracing a route to the homeland. Philanthropy is recognised as an important element of diasporic life; however, the motivations to donate private resources for public goods in transnational and translocal contexts have been largely overlooked. I suggest taking a closer look at the notion of the 'diasporic gift' as a social practice, locating it between the Western pattern of NGO rationality and the 'traditional' understanding of a spontaneous gift. A clear division of this transactional field into two separate types of giving, 'spontaneous' and 'strategic', may work at the level of metaphor, but in reality they are intertwined and feed into each other. I hope that these observations contribute to a more differentiated understanding of the philanthropic culture of migrant descendants, without exaggerating the 'missionary' aspect of the diaspora's impact on a country's development. The findings show that diasporic philanthropy is embedded in different value frameworks. From the perspective of donor activities and motivations, it became clear that diasporic homeland-oriented philanthropy focuses on the construction and production of a symbolic capital to elevate the social status of Armenian Americans within the country of residence. While social and cultural activities, among them environmental programmes, tree planting campaigns and other social projects, are physically implemented and performed on the territory of Armenia, the expectations of rewards and effects circulate within the territory of the country of residence. This point leads me to one of my critical observations: anthropologists should remain sceptical about the transformative potential of diasporic engagement for the homeland's development. In this context, diasporic Armenians cannot be identified as the hardy rebuilders of the Armenian nation-state in the South Caucasus. A significant number of those diasporic people are not engaged in these activities and do not pursue integrative aims.

More research is needed on real encounters in the homeland that may challenge received views on the role of diasporic actors in the homeland. This multi-sited study has highlighted the possibilities and limits of entanglement, as well as the disillusionment felt by diasporic activists after travelling through and engaging with the homeland. A comparative study of different diasporic groups in different countries would yield further knowledge about universal mechanisms and trajectories of 'roots' mobilities in the future.

The state-sponsored government measures and state-supported ethnic tourism policies observable in many other countries, including Israel, India

or Ghana (Kelner 2010; Coles/Timothy 2004; Schramm et al. 2012), are not replicated in Armenia. The engagement of the Armenian diaspora with the homeland relies rather on individual, informal grassroots aspirations supported by international NGOs and private initiatives. This point should be emphasised, as diasporic organisations centred on the homeland in Armenia do not (yet) rely on government support, and recent efforts on the part of the Armenian state to attract diasporic investments may remain limited.

The design of Armenian diasporic homeland trips is modelled on the classic Israeli ten-day "Tours That Bind" (Kelner 2010), which were developed specifically as a medium of diasporic political socialisation aimed at transmitting particular state values to American Jews in particular (Gal 2010). The Israeli state has generally used tourism to promote state-diaspora solidarity (Gal 2010; Abramson 2017). Armenian diasporic homeland engagement is different in that it is organised independently from state initiatives. In answer to the question of whether the practice of Armenian homeland trips can be defined as a form of future political socialisation (Kelner 2010), I would say that Armenian diasporic engagement with the homeland is less strategic.

This book argues that a new generation of diasporic organisations is creating a variety of ideological diasporic mobilisation frameworks that contrast with the Armenian state's own modes of 'rooting' the diaspora. The politics and poetics of rooting through transnational and translocal engagement between Armenian diasporic communities and the Republic of Armenia is likely to remain pluralist and decentralised given the disparate and diverse nature of Armenian diasporic communities, as well as the relative weakness of the Armenian state. What follows from the study is the finding that the metaphor 'to serve the nation' can take on a political dimension, but it is still a far cry from counter-diaspora migration. In this context, routes to homeland engagement may exist side by side with discrepant perceptions of the homeland.

Thus, making a homeland gives rise to specific possibilities to forge a variety of linkages to the homeland: locating it as a sacred destination; discovering the homeland as a place of desire; travelling to the desired place; building bridges to the homeland between optimistic brain-gain euphoria and emotional adventure; creating visceral connections and claiming a co-belonging with the right to the place. The contemporary rise of diasporic activism for the 'sacred homeland' can be read as a form of elite translocality and 'diasporic consumerism', which is intertwined with modern notions of travel and emotion, reinforcing the social status of people from multi-cultural backgrounds. Although diasporic forces have successfully channelled pathways of 'roots' mo-

bility towards the homeland, the transformative potential of their efforts may remain limited and, in fact, has not yet been realised in Armenia.

Notes

1 See armenpress.am/eng/news/1092958.html. Last accessed 05.01.2023.
2 See https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ARM/armenia/poverty-rate. Last accessed 05.01.2023.
3 See https://buyarmenian.com. Last accessed 05.01.2023.
4 See https://armenianweekly.com/2021/02/03/our-useless-diaspora-our-future-armenia/. Last accessed 05.01.2023.
5 See http://diaspora.gov.am/en/programs/24/qayl_depi_tun. Last accessed 05.01.2023.
6 See futurearmenian.com. Last accessed 05.01.2023.

Glossaries

Glossary of Foreign Words and Abbreviations

AGBU	Armenian General Benevolent Union; Armenian multinational non-profit organisation, which was established in 1906 in the Egypt city of Cairo, located in the US-city of New York; *AGBU* advocates for the preservation of Armenian identity and culture.
Akhtamar	The second largest islands of the four in Lake Van in Eastern Anatolia; the location of the Holy Cross Temple; the official Turkish denotation for the geographical island entity is Akdamar Adasi.
Ani	Ruined old capital of medieval Armenia in Eastern Anatolia.
Ari Tun	Armenian term, literally meaning 'homebound' or 'come to home'; a special programme launched by the Armenian Ministry of Diaspora offering children and teenagers of the Armenian diaspora two week homeland tours.
Armeniaca	Latin term, literally meaning 'from Armenia'; referring to the most commonly cultivated apricot species (See *Armeniaca vulgaris* and *Prunus armeniaca*); according to an Armenian Encyclopaedia it was Alexander the Great who took the apricot from Armenia, its birthplace, and introduced it to Greece, calling it *armeniaca*.
Armeniaca vulgaris	Latin term, literally meaning 'Armenian Common'; alternative term for *Prunus armeniaca*.
Artsakh	Armenian term for the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, respectively the quasi-independent Republic of Artsakh.
ATP	*Armenian Tree Project*; a transnational non-profit organisation, founded in 1994 in Watertown.

Aturpatakan	Region of Ancient Armenia (See *Mets Hayk*) and later Sasanid Empire, which today is almost congruent with present day Iranian Azerbaijan.
AVC	*Armenian Volunteer Corps*; voluntary organisation, which was established in the year 2000 in the US; the organisation offers trips to the Republic of Armenia for young Armenians living in diaspora.
AYF	*Armenian Youth Foundation*; an Armenian non-profit organisation, founded in 1933, advocating for the preservation of the Armenian heritage.
Bhiksha	Sanskrit term for 'alms' or 'begging', which, in the Buddhist context, refers to receiving alms.
BR	*Birthright Armenia;* voluntary organisation which was established in 2003, offering trips to the Republic of Armenia for young Armenians living in diaspora.
Catholicos	Head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.
Chinar	Originally Persian term for 'Plane tree'.
CI	*Conservation International*; a non-profit environmental organisation, founded in 1987 and located in the US-county of Arlington, State of Virginia.
Constantinople	Capital of the former Byzantine Empire until its capture by the Ottoman troops in 1453; today the city is known as Istanbul.
Daana	Sanskrit and Pali term, which refers to the Hindu practice of cultivating generosity, charity and giving alms.
Dakshina	Sanskrit term for 'diligent', 'righteous', 'right hand', 'right arm' or 'south', which refers commonly to the Hindu practice of giving donations or alms to a monastery or temple.
Dashnaks	Term for the members of the party of the *Armenian Revolutionary Federation* (known as *Dashnaktsutyun*), a nationalist and socialist party, which was founded in 1890 in Tbilisi; the party was essentially involved in the foundation of the First Republic of Armenia in 1918.
Genocide Memorial	Memorial site on the hill of Tsitsernakaberd in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, established in 1967, dedicated to the Armenian Genocide between 1915 (See *Tsagaspanutyun* and *Yeghern*).
Global North	Antonymous to Global South, the term subsumes the Western developed countries.
Global South	Umbrella term for the group of non-Western developing and threshold countries.

Golgotha According to the Gospels, a hill outside ancient Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified.

Golubaya el Russian term for the tree species of 'Blue Spruce'.

Goshavank Monastery Abandoned monastery in the Armenian village of Gosh.

Grabar An ancient Armenian liturgical language.

Guhapet Armenian term for a governor of an Armenian province (*marz*), an administrative unit within the Republic of Armenia.

Haghartsin Monastery Abandoned monastery near the Armenian town of Dilijan.

Haiutiun Term literally meaning 'the Armenianness'.

Hamazkayin short for *Hamazkayin Armenian Educational and Cultural Society*; a major cultural organisation of the Armenian diaspora that runs cultural centres in many places of the Armenian diaspora worldwide.

Hayadardzutyun Armenian term, literally meaning 'return to native roots'; a special kind of a spiritual repatriation programme developed by the Armenian Ministry of Diaspora.

Hayastan Armenian term for an imagination of homeland, with a mythical-romantic as well as pragmatic dimension; it can refer to the nowadays modern Republic of Armenia, the territory of the ancient Kingdom of Armenia between 585–200 BC (see *Mets Hayk*), which stretched from the Black to the Caspian Sea, as well as the Armenian Highlands.

Hayastantsi Derived from the Armenian term *Hayastan*, the term refers to Armenians living in the nowadays Republic of Armenia or who recently migrated from there.

Hayeren Aysor Armenian expression, literally meaning 'Armenians today'; a multilingual online magazine by the Armenian Ministry of Diaspora, with members of Armenian diaspora as target group.

Heyrenik Armenian term for 'fatherland' or 'homeland'; refers to a grandparent's birthplace, and tends to be identified mostly with the villages and towns of the Western Armenian provinces (Kharput, Mush, Kessab, Antep and others), which are part of nowadays Turkey; it can also include other parts of the former Ottoman Empire, where many Armenians lived, like places in nowadays Syria or Egypt.

Introduzenty Russian term literally meaning 'the introduced ones', which is used by the *ATP* to refer to semi-native Armenian tree species introduced and adapted a century ago for different utilitarian, industrial and decorative purposes after Eastern Armenia became part of the Russian Empire.

Jen	Chinese term, which refers to the Confucian concept of benevolence and compassion.
Kelim	Word of Turkish origin, which refers to a special kind of tapestry-woven carpet or rug, widespread in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.
Khachkars	Cross stone, the traditional Armenian Christian stele with cross and rosette motifs.
Khor Virab	Medieval church in the Armenian province of Ararat, close to the Turkish border.
Komsomol	Acronym of the Russian expression *Kommunisticheskiy soyuz molodyozhi*, literally meaning 'Communist Youth Union', which was the youth league of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its offshoots in the single union republics.
Mardasirutyun	Armenian term for 'Humanism'.
Marshrutka	Shared taxi vans, which are part of the public transport in Eastern Europe and the successor states of the former Soviet Union; the term is derived from the German word 'Marschroute'.
Marz	Armenian term for an administrative unit.
Matagh	Armenian Christian-pagan ritual in which a rooster or lamb is sacrificed to God for healing purposes.
Memorial for the Armenian Genocide	See Genocide Memorial.
Mets Hayk	Armenian term for the ancient Kingdom of Armenia, which existed on the Armenian Highlands between 585–200 BC.
Nviratvutyun	Armenian term for 'commitment'.
Patarag	A divine liturgy in the Armenian Church and the ancient Armenian language *Grabar*.
Plav	Widespread rice meal, mainly prepared in Western- and Central Asia.
Prunus armeniaca	Latin term meaning 'Armenian Plum', which is the most commonly apricot species; Armenian symbol associated with national prosperity, health, eternity and vitality.
Russian Empire	Empire in Eurasia between 1721 and 1917, which arised from the Tsardom of Russia (1547 – 1721).

Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) First socialist state in the world, which existed as a sovereign entity between 1917 and December 1922; after 1922 the *RSFSR* was a member state of the Soviet Union, and ceased to exist with the dissolution of the latter one in 1991.

RSFSR See Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

Sadaqaat Plural form of the Arab term *Sadaqah*, which means 'charity' or 'benevolence'; the term refers to voluntary donations and charity in a Muslim context, and is therefore to differentiate from the mandatory practice of *Zakat*.

Sanghas Sanskrit and Pali term for 'community', 'association', 'company' or 'assembly', which mostly refers to Buddhist monastic communities of monks (*Bhikkus*) and nuns *(Bhikkunis)*.

Shu Chinese term, which refers to the Confucian concept of reciprocity.

Sis-Masis Armenian term for the Mount Ararat.

Sochi tsarr Armenian term for 'Pine tree'.

Soviet Armenia Conventional term for the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (Armenian SSR), which was founded in 1920; since 1922 the Armenian SSR was a member state of the Soviet Union and ceased to exist with the dissolution of the latter one in 1991; predecessor entity of the nowadays Republic of Armenia.

Soviet Union Former socialist one-party state in Eurasia, which existed between 1922 and 1991.

Spyurk Armenian term for 'diaspora', derived from the Greek word *speirein*, which literally means 'to scatter'.

Spyurkahay Derived from the Armenian term *Spyurk*, the term refers to Armenians living in diaspora.

SRS *Special Residency Status*; a citizen-like status for members of the Armenian diaspora; the *SRS* is granted by the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to foreigners, who have at least one Armenian grandparent; people with *SRS* enjoy the same rights as Armenian citizens, except the right to vote.

Subbotnik Derived from the Russian word for *Saturday*, the term refers to the practice of unpaid voluntary work in the former socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc.

Surb Vardanank Religious day in Armenia, introduced in 2000 by the Armenian Church, dedicated to the national figure of Vardan Mamikonyan.

Tsagaspanutyun	Literal Armenian translation of the word 'genocide'; the term largely replaced the term *Yeghern (mourning* or *grief)* and refers commonly to the Armenian Genocide between 1915 and 1916.
Tsiran	Armenian term for 'apricot'.
Tzedakah	Hebrew term for 'charity' or even 'justice' or 'righteousness', which refers to the Jewish commandment *(Mitzwa)* of giving alms.
UN FAO	*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*; a special branch of the United Nations to combat hunger.
USAID	*United States Agency for International Development*; a governmental development and foreign aid agency, located in Washington D.C.
Vilayet	Widely used term of Persian origin among diasporic Armenians to identify the 'Armenian provinces' in Eastern Anatolia on the territory of former Ottoman Empire and nowadays Turkey, namely: Van, Erzerum, Mamuretülaziz (Kharperd), Bitlis, Diyarbekir and Sivas.
WWF	*World Wildlife Fund*; an international environmental non-governmental organisation; located in the Swiss city of Gland, Canton of Vaud.
Yeghern	Armenian term for 'mourning' and 'grief'; the term commonly refers to the Armenian Genocide between 1915 and 1916; the term was later replaced by the term *Tsagaspanutyun* (genocide).
Yerkir	Armenian term for 'homeland'; refers mostly to the parts of the former Ottoman Empire, where many Armenians lived.
Yugoslavia	Former socialist one-party state in South Eastern and Central Europe, which existed between 1963 and 1992.
Zakat	Arab term for 'that which purifies', which refers to a form of giving alms, treated in Islam as a religious obligation or tax; *Zakat* belongs to the fife pillars of Islam, which represent the deeds considered mandatory by and for Muslims.

Glossary of Geographical Terms

Aghstev	River in the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Akdamar Adasi	Official Turkish denotation for the isle in the Lake Van in Eastern Anatolia, which is known in Armenian language as Akhtamar.
Akhnaghbyur	Village in the Armenian province of Tavush; close to the province capital of Ijevan.
Aleppo	Major city and formerly most populous city in Syria; capital of the Aleppo governorate; home to a large Armenian diaspora community until the battle for the city in 2012, which took place in the context of the Syrian civil war.
Anatolian Plateau	Geographical term for the westernmost part of Asia, which makes up the majority of modern-day Turkey.
Antep	Short form for the nowadays Turkish province of Gaziantep in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Arabkir	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Arlington	Town in the US-state of Massachusetts, not far away from the city of Boston; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Armavir	Province in the eastern part of the Republic of Armenia.
Armenia, Republic of	Country in the South Caucasus, which became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991.
Armenian Highlands	See Mets Hayk.
Avarayr	Plain in nowadays north western Iran, where the Battle of Avarayr happened in 451.
Baku	Capital and largest city of Azerbaijan.
Beirut	Capital and largest city of Lebanon; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Bitlis	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia, located in the west of Lake Van; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Boston	Largest city of New England and capital of the US-state of Massachusetts; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.

Brest-Litovsk	City in Belarus, where the treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed in march 1918 between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and the Central Powers (German Empire, Ottoman Empire, Kingdom of Bulgaria and Austro-Hungarian Empire); the treaty marked the withdrawal of the RSFSR from World War I and caused the loss of almost one-quarter of its territory in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.
California	US-state at the West Coast.
Central Asia	Geographical term for the region, which consists of the post-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.
Chicago	Third-largest city in the US, located in the state of Illinois; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Cyprus	Island in the Mediterranean Sea.
Dilijan	Town in the Armenian province of Tavush.
Diyarbekir	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Dvin	Ancient large commercial city, 35km south of modern Yerevan, and capital of early medieval Armenia.
Eastern Anatolia	See Anatolian Plateau.
Eastern Armenia	Geographical term for the part of the historical settlement regions of the Armenian population, which was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1829.
Erzurum	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Eurasia	Portmanteau for the interconnected continental landmass of Europe and Asia.
Fioletovo	Russian Molokane village in the Armenian province of Lori.
Fresno	City in the US-state of California; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Getik	River in Armenia and a right tributary of the river Aghstev.
Gosh	Village in the Armenian province of Tarvush; location of the shrine tree of Gosh, the walnut trees of Goshavank Monestary.
Greater Armenia	See Mets Hayk.
Gyumri	Second largest city of Armenia and capital of the Shirak province.

Istanbul	Most populous city of Turkey, located at the edge of Asia and Europe; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Ijevan	Capital of the Armenian province of Tavush.
Jerusalem	Capital and largest city of Israel.
Karabakh	See Nagorno-Karabakh.
Karakert	Small town in the Armenian Armavir province.
Karin	Village in the Armenian province of Aragatsotn.
Kars	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Kazakh	District in Azerbaijan, bordering the Republic of Armenia.
Kessab	
Predominantly	Armenian inhabited town in the nowadays Syrian governorate of Latakia, close to the border of Turkey, which belonged to the former Ottoman Empire (See Western Armenia).
Kharpet	See Kharput.
Kharput	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia, home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Lake Van	Lake in Eastern Anatolia and location of the mythical isle of Akhtamar.
Lori	Province in northern part of the Republic of Armenia.
Los Angeles (LA)	Second largest city in the US, located in California at the west coast; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Malatia	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Mamuretülaziz	
(Kharperd)	See Kharput.
Margahovit	Village in the Armenian province of Lori.
Massachusetts	US-state in the north eastern region at the East Coast.
Michigan	Northern US-state.
Minnesota	US-state in the Upper Midwest.
Montreal	City in the Canadian province of Quebec; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.

Mount Ararat	With 5.137 meters the highest mountain of the Armenian Highlands and associated to the heritage from the Book of Genesis, in which the Ararat is described as the resting place of Noah's Ark; national symbol of Armenia and of the Armenian 'territorial loss', because of its nowadays location in eastern Turkey, Turkish denotation: Ağrı Dağı; Armenian denotation: Sis-Masis (for Little Ararat and Greater Ararat).
Mush	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Nagorno-Karabakh	Landlocked, mostly mountainous region in the South Caucasus, which is disputed between Armenia and Azerbaijan, currently controlled by the non-recognised but de facto independent Republic of Artsakh.
New Jersey	US-state in the Mid-Atlantic region.
New York	City in the eponymous US-state and largest city in the US; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Noyemberyan	Town in the Armenian province of Tavush.
Philadelphia	City in the US-state of Pennsylvania; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Sarigyugh	Village in the Armenian province of Tavush; location of the plane tree of Sarigyugh.
Sebastia	See Sivas.
Sevas	See Sivas.
Sivas	Turkish province in Eastern Anatolia; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Sofia	Capital and largest city of Bulgaria; home of a small Armenian diaspora community.
South Caucasus	Geographical term for the area of the southern watershed area of the Greater Caucasus, composed of the states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Stepanavan	Town in the Armenian province of Lori.
Tavush	Province in north eastern Armenia.
Tsitsernakaberd	Hill in the Armenian capital of Yerevan, which is site of the Armenian Genocide Memorial complex since 1967.
Toronto	City in the Canadian province of Ontario; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.

Van	Turkish province with Kurdish majority in Eastern Anatolia, laying mainly between Lake Van and the Iranian border; home of a large Armenian community during the times of the former Ottoman Empire.
Washington (D.C.)	Capital of the United States.
Watertown	City in the US-state of Massachusetts; home of a large Armenian diaspora community.
Western Armenia	Term used by Armenians living in diaspora for the parts of the former Ottoman Empire, which were home of a large Armenian community and nowadays belonging to Turkey (see Eastern Anatolia).
Yerevan	Capital city and largest city of Armenia.

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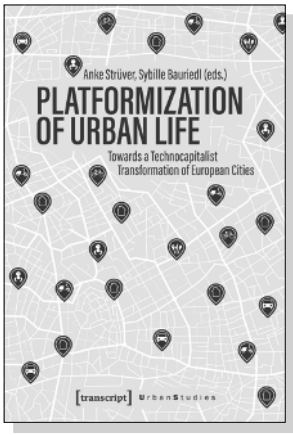

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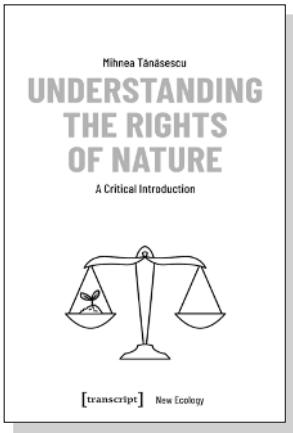

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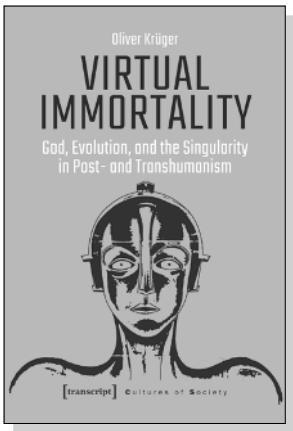

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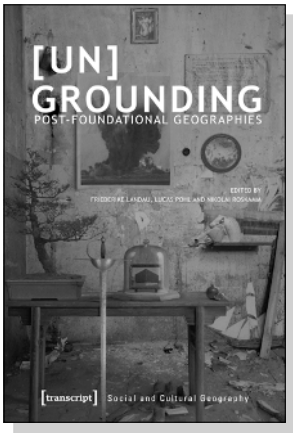

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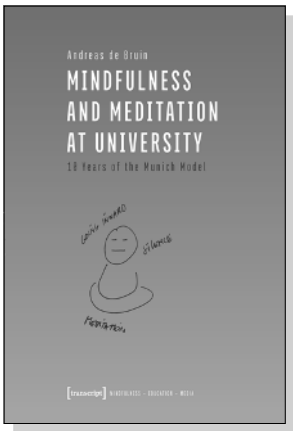

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