# University of Kent

**'Homeland', Belonging and the Contested Politics of the Armenian Diaspora**

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**Declaration**

I, **Kristina Vardanyan**, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

**"'Homeland', Belonging and the Contested Politics of the Armenian Diaspora"**

**I confirm that:**

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2. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.

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4. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.

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## Abstract


For over forty decades, the notion of diaspora has been discussed in the context of global processes of de-territorialisation, transnationalism, and hybridity. Thus, 'homeland' became de-emphasised by postmodern critics questioning ideas of rootedness and homeland orientation. However, the Armenian diaspora has been discussed predominantly as an example of a classical or 'victim' diaspora, where the memory of exile, trauma, and eventual return are its key characteristics. Yet, memory is not static, nor are diasporic groups or the 'homeland'.


Multiple migratory journeys, repatriation, 'homeland'-'hostland' relations, conflicts, inter-group dynamics, and memory preservation play a significant role in how homeland is perceived, re-created, and experienced. This is particularly the case for the Armenian diaspora due to intertwined historical and socio-political reasons including not only the Genocide and loss of ancestral homeland, but also over a century of diasporisation, multiple migrations, assimilation, Sovietisation, the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict, and the difficult socio-economic situation of the current Republic. These factors are of particular interest for this research, which explores the notion of the homeland for second and successive generations of diaspora Armenians in its multidimensionality – the homeland viewed as a physical space, shaped by dynamics of belonging and longing, affect and experiences, and the role these play in the negotiation of 'dislocated identities'.


Data were collected in the UK and the Republic of Armenia employing semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection. In addition, multi-

sited field visits in Armenia and the UK were conducted, and diaspora and repatriate virtual spaces were explored. The data highlights the complexities of diasporic experiences in the 'hostland' and the 'homeland', the shifting nature of diasporic engagement, group dynamics of 'otherness'. Focusing on the Velvet Revolution of 2018 and the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) war of 2020, this study explores diasporans' and repatriates' engagement in 'homeland' politics and conflicts.

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**Preface: Auto-biographical Reflections**

In this auto-biographical preface I attempt to set out the context of this research and elaborate on a personal experience of negotiating my identity through memory and longing, which has been an enduring process that has left me feeling, as Amal Treacher (2000, p. 98) reveals, ''out of my skin''. My preoccupation is with the memory of home in its widest sense, which includes a physical space, culture, symbols, belonging, attachment, language, comfort, purpose, emotions, senses and longing, and the role it plays in negotiating 'dislocated identities' like mine. Two scholarly works: Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989) and Amal Treacher's (2000) *Welcome home: Between Two Cultures and Two Colours* have been influential in framing my understanding of the concept of memory for migrant identities. Eva Hoffman's (1989) work is a reflection on dislocation, uprooting of a culture, the identity of an immigrant, transition to a new culture and most importantly to a new language. Amal Treacher (2000, p.97) using her autobiography explores "sameness/otherness, identification/distance, strangeness/recognition". Both authors elaborate on the concept of identity or rather the impact of dislocation on the construction of their identities. There is a sense of duality in their narratives that has risen from dislocation from everything that once made them who they were. This notion of duality is crucial in understanding and exploring 'dislocated identities': identities that for various reasons have been 'uprooted' from their country of origin, culture, symbols and language.

I am an Armenian born in Georgia. I lived in Armenia during my adolescence. Since I was 5 years old, I've been living between two countries, the Autonomous

Republic of Adjara (Batumi city) and the Republic of Armenia (capital Yerevan). Every year I used to spent three to four summer months in Batumi with my grandparents and the rest of the year in Yerevan with my parents. While Batumi is always my birthplace, I never had a desire to live there or even identify myself as part of Georgian culture. Furthermore, I have always experienced discomfort and a strong longing to return 'home' upon visiting there. Yerevan has always been the place where everything is familiar and clear, although life in Armenian was not without its challenges. I lived through the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia's declaration of sovereignty in 1990 and the difficult socio-economic conditions until late 90s. I went to the first Armenian class, although Russian remained the language of communication for me and my family, as it is for many from my generation. Thus, I am a mix of both Armenian and Russian cultures; I am the 'hybrid product' of my time.

When I was 24, I moved to the UK. Since immigrating, I have not been able to visit either Armenia or Georgia for almost a decade. I felt isolated; I had a desperate need to find the 'familiar' and this is when my journey of negotiating my own identity through memory and narrative began. The dislocation and re-collection of my 'self' from the excerpts of the past became interlinked complex forces of negotiating my 'new' identity. In other words, my memories, once silent and passive, became active agents of this process. Memory here "is taken to mean the human faculty of preserving certain traces of past experiences and having access to these – at least in part- through recall" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 29). Recall is something I still practice to preserve selected and filtered traces of pre-migration life, which is an ongoing process that depends on the demands of the present. The present demands fitting in; it demands to be here and now; it demands

"reinventing… [myself] every day" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 160). Thus, my memory is not mere storage but a "plurality of interrelated functions… a complex network of activities… [where the past] is constantly selected, filtered and restructured in terms set by the questions and necessities of the present" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 30). Sudden dislocation and discontinuity, brought about not only by geographical but also cultural and emotional movements, generate certain necessities and questions that in many cases are addressed through recall. For my immigrant self the notion of home is in my memory, in my enduring nostalgia, accordingly my "identity is a question of memory, and memories of home in particular" (Morley and Robins, 2002, p. 91).

In the contemporary society home is a complex theoretical concept due to the multiple experiences of home, constant flow of people and migration across countries. This complexity leads Lam (2005, p. 115) to argue that "[i]t is now easy to return, but impossible to go home" because we are travellers now or as Hoffman (1989, 274) reveals because dislocation is the norm in our time. Some may discuss it in terms of geographical or physical space, while others may associate it with "relationships or connections over space and time" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 1). These notions of home, however, are not mutually exclusive but constitute, as Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 2) argue, a "*special imaginary*": a relationship between a place and an imaginary, between a site and emotions. Finally, for my dislocated self, home is the feeling of being at home that is grounded in my memories and senses; it is the complex relationship between an imaginary, a place, feelings, and past and present. It is important to note that I do not aim to portray the concept of home as an ideal or a nostalgic memory that necessarily constitutes an illusion or escape from the present, after all my

memories are not exclusively positive, but to elaborate on the fundamental nature of memories of home as active and *vivid* agents, as a supportive structure that became palpable only after my move.

My move brought about the need to "feel 'rooted'" and grew into a state of longing (Demuth, 2000, p. 25). I long not to have a *mythical* home that is, as Brah (1996) explains, a place of desire in the diasporic imagination; I long not to be "in-between-homes" or at least to be comfortable with this position (Fenster, 2005, p. 251). In other words, I wish to be at ease with my "misfittings" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 164) and not to be "consciously of two worlds" (Antin, 1912; in Hoffman, 1989, p. 163). With the realisation of this duality as a persistent condition, I became interested in the very notion of homeland, particularly for successive generations of diaspora Armenians. In particular, I set to explore the role of 'homeland', how it is perceived and experienced, and how it is created and recreated in both the 'hostland' and the 'homeland'.

## Overview of the Thesis

'Homeland' for Armenians has been and still is a debated and flexible notion. Life under the rule of empires, the Genocide, and dispersion, concentration on survival, and independence of the Republic of Armenia has changed and created different conceptions and visions of a 'homeland' (Pattie, 1999, p. 80). However, 'homeland' and 'roots' have been central in the scholarly debate on the Armenian diaspora. The typological approach, for example, has been developed based not only on the Jewish but also on the Armenian case, where homeland and eventual return are amongst the key characteristics of what constitutes a diaspora (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 2008). The postmodern criticism of this essentialist view has been influential in acknowledging the complexity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and hybridity of diasporic experiences and criticising the discourses of fixed origins (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1994; Anthias, 1998). However, the scholarly work on the Armenian diaspora continues to be dominated by essentialist concepts of diaspora with key characteristics of exile, trauma and eventual return. This is not surprising, after all; the Armenian diaspora has been initially formed as a result of the Genocide of 1915 that led to the mass extermination of Armenians and their forced exile from what is the current Republic of Turkey. Yet, the Armenian diaspora is not static, nor is the diasporic identity or the collective memory of exile or trauma, rather it is an active "process of linking" (Bal, vii) and reimagining of the past that is dictated by the necessities of the present. This research sought to uncover the complexity of diaspora-'homeland' relations and contested ideas of belonging, rootedness, and up-rootedness.

**Chapter One** provides a detailed discussion of the notion of diaspora from typological and postmodern perspectives with particular attention paid to the building blocks of diaspora discourse: 'homeland', memory, and roots. Key scholarly debates are explored, including the typological approach and postmodern notions of hybridity and de-territorialised identities. In this chapter, I argue that although diasporas are often discussed in the context of 'homeland' memory, particularly in the case of Armenian and other 'victim' diasporas, this territorial logic limits our understanding of the complex nature of memory and its impact on the construction of diaspora identity. Memory is not a static phenomenon but a process of creating meanings and patterns of attachment that may not have a connection with the homeland. Diasporic memory, therefore, can transcend this territorial concept and become a new source of identity, particularly for the succeeding generations.

**Chapter Two** addresses the methodological underpinnings of this research, by introducing the research stance and methods used to generate data. The ontological and epistemological position will be explained, followed by a discussion of my research objectives and aims, the practicalities of conducting the data collection, and the types of methods used for data collection and analysis. In this chapter I address and explain the rationale for conducting multi-sited visits, using social media, and the main method of data generation: semi-structured interviews. The process of establishing rapport and its challenges, as well as my positionality as a researcher, will be discussed in detail.

**Chapter Three** explores the position of the Armenian diaspora in the UK. In particular, it explores how the Armenian diaspora continues to be 'hidden' or

'invisible' in the UK, despite various cultural, religious and educational organisations and centres in London and Manchester. This chapter examines how the lack of community density along with cultural traits and practices, diaspora dynamics, and migratory trajectories contribute to the 'invisibility' of Armenians as a minority group. The UK's official position on the Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: the lack of acknowledgment, understanding, the refusal to use the 'G' word, and close economic relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, undermine diasporans' collective memory and, therefore, their history, resulting in a sense of being 'hidden' or 'invisible' in the country where they have settled.

**Chapter Four** examines the organisational structure of the diaspora, with a particular focus on the experiences of diasporic participation and engagement. Diaspora organisations play a crucial role in maintaining the diasporic identity and resisting assimilation, particularly for the Armenian diaspora, which has been viewed as a historic global diaspora that exists for more than a hundred years. This chapter highlights that in addition to financial engagement, political activism, and pilgrimages to the homeland, diaspora participation, particularly for third and successive generations, is shifting towards personal experiences through volunteering, working, and living in the current Republic of Armenia. Although the church and the commemoration of the Genocide continue to be central to the diaspora engagement, comparatively new organisations which promote personal input in the development of Armenia through volunteering and working in the country become crucial in diaspora-'homeland' experiences.

**Chapter Five** addresses the complexity of diaspora dynamics that are intertwined with notions of origin, cultural heritage and migratory journeys, which create

boundaries and divisions amongst Armenians resulting in fragmented diaspora groupings. Although diasporans share a set of symbols of 'Armenianness', such as the Genocide, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian homeland, and language, their cohesion is complicated as a result of multiple migratory journeys and the multidimensional nature of being a diasporan. These differences are manifested particularly between diasporans and 'hayastancys' (Armenians from the Republic of Armenia) leading to boundaries and fractures not only amongst these two groups but also between diasporans and the 'homeland'. The chapter explores the impact of 'Russification' on diaspora and 'homeland' relationship with a particular emphasis on 'Soviet mentality' and the language, Western and Eastern Armenian, that separate diasporans from 'hayastancys' and the 'homeland'. Diasporans' and repatriates' experiences reveal that there is a sense of 'otherness' amongst 'hayastancys' and diasporans that is a product of complex historic developments, opposing realities and politico-ideological regimes.

**Chapter Six** explores repatriates' experiences of living and adapting to the 'homeland'. Although, 'homeland' has been the central notion of diaspora studies, for both typological and postmodern approaches, it continues to be a contested notion, particularly when applied to 'victim' or 'classical' diasporas. Indeed, there is no uniformity even amongst diasporas, which overall share similar experiences of trauma and forced displacement. In the Armenian case, the majority of studies that focus on the relations between the diaspora and the homeland, have been conducted in the diaspora or in the 'hostlands'. To fill this gap, this chapter addresses repatriation and repatriates' experience of living in Armenia. Their narratives reveal that 'hostland' experiences of non-belonging and detachment can be crucial in their decision to repatriate. However, this search for belonging is

not complete since repatriates negotiate and re-construct their 'Armenianness' to 'fit in'.

**Chapter Seven** expands on diaspora and repatriate experiences of homeland conflicts. Although the Armenian diaspora is far from being homogeneous and unified on socio-political issues in the homeland, these inter-group dynamics become secondary when there is a threat to survival. In this chapter, I will discuss the 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1990) of the Armenian diaspora during the Artsakh War of 2020. Considering the instrumental role of social media in political activism in 21st-century conflicts, this chapter examines diasporans' and repatriates' engagement in social media activism or 'cyber-activism'. Comparisons and parallels are drawn between the 'inactivity' during the 'Velvet Revolution', and much more active participation during the recent war. The chapter concludes that although the Armenian diaspora is heterogenous, the Artsakh war reaffirmed that 'essential' characteristics, in the Armenian case of 'victimhood', are mobilised in times of crises.

# Chapter 1: Conceptualising Diaspora

Since the 1980s, diaspora has become a widely used term that is associated with global processes of de-territorialisation, transnationalism and hybridity. Thus, once associated with the experience of trauma and forced dispersal, the notion of diaspora became linked to broad global processes such as 'transnationalism' and 'multiculturalism', as a result leading to a deconstruction of the key discourse of 'rootedness'. Changing the point of departure from a more 'rooted' forms of identification (a specific geographical location or nation) to a decline of 'locality' resulted in a conceptual confusion. The latter raised questions about the very notion of diaspora and even led scholars like Dufoix (2008, p. 107) to reject any definition of diaspora and claims that the term is "theoretically lifeless". This assertion, however, raises a substantial question: How do we differentiate diaspora from other migrant groups? This chapter aim to minimise this kind of imprecision, at least in the context of this study, by detailed discussion of the primary features of diaspora and the evaluation of the notion of diaspora within social sciences. The chapter explores the concept of diaspora and the key debates including typological approach and postmodern notions of hybridity and de-territorialised identities. The typological approach, in particular, is discussed in more detail since it has been based not only on the Jewish, but also on the Armenian, case. Particular attention is paid to the building blocks of diaspora discourse: homeland and memory.

## 1.1.    Defining Diaspora: Typological Approach

Until three decades ago, 'diaspora' was connected predominantly to the experience of exile following a catastrophic event. However, before the term has

been associated with forcible/traumatic dispersion, it was found in the Greek translation of the Bible to refer to "the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period (800-600 BC) … [thus, essentially it] had a positive connotation" (Cohen, 1997, p. 2). This argument is questioned by Tölölyan (2011) who suggests that the earliest application of the term 'diaspora' to Greeks can be dated to 1453, which is the period after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and was established only in the 1650s. Later the notion of diaspora became firmly grounded in the concepts of 'homeland' and dispersion and was concerned with paradigmatic examples of Jewish and later Armenian and Greek diasporas (Brubaker, 2005; Tölölyan, 2007; Cohen, 2008). Jewish traditions in particular played a central role in the construction of diaspora theory (Safran, 1991). Both Safran (1991) and Cohen (2008) consider the Jewish experience as foundational, "as the prototypical form" (Anthias, 1998, p. 562). Safran (1991, 84) views Jewish diaspora as an 'ideal type' suggesting that:

> "we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diasporas of the past, although none of them fully conforms to the "ideal type" of the Jewish diaspora".

'Ideal type', here, is an "exaggerated abstraction" used by Weber (1904; in Cohen, 2008, p. 17) that implies a contrast with 'real'. Jewish diaspora is an 'ideal' type that does not classify reality but provides an exaggerated model with which reality can be compared. Thus, the term is used to discuss the expected difference of 'real' diasporas from their prototypical ideal types, which reveals that although influenced by the paradigmatic case of the Jewish diaspora, Safran (1991) also recognises that other ethnic groups have/had similar experiences. The Armenian

diaspora has been classified a prototypical diaspora or as Cohen (2008) argues a 'victim' diaspora due to the massacres and forced deportation of 1.5 million Armenians from their historic homeland in Anatolia (present day Turkey) by the Turks in 1915-16 (see Nersisyan, 1985). As a result of this "'ethnic cleansing'" many Armenians fled to Syria, Lebanon, France, USA etc (Cohen, 2008, p. 3). The Armenian diaspora, therefore, is a prototypical or 'victim diaspora' because of its historical experience; because the victim origin is its "*predominant* character" (Cohen, 2008, p. 4). Thus, in this classical use of the term the emphasis was on the idea of dispersal forced by traumatic events in the 'homeland' and the Armenian diaspora, indeed, most closely resembles this 'archetypical' or 'ideal' diaspora of the Jews (Armstrong, 1982; Safran, 1991). Similar to the Jewish case, most Armenians live outside of their ancestral homeland because of a forced dispersal, which led to a creation of cultural and religious centres outside of the 'homeland' (Safran, 1991). (Safran, 1991, p. 84).

It is important to note that although Safran continues this list by introducing several other features, he does not discuss "the lack of taxonomical fit" between the Armenian diaspora and the Jewish ideal type (Mishra, 2006, p. 39). As it can be seen from this excerpt, in addition to the experience of exile and trauma Safran incorporates other characteristics that define diasporas. According to Safran (1991, pp. 83-4) diaspora can be classified as "expatriate minority communities" that share several of the following characteristics:

> "1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from
>
> specific original 'centre' to two or more 'peripheral', or
>
> foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory,
>
> vision, or myth about their original homeland - its

physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they

believe that they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully

accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly

alienated and insulted from it; 4) they regards their

ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the

place to which they or their descendants would (or

should) eventually return - when conditions are

appropriate; 5) they believe that they should,

collectively, be committed to the maintenance or

restoration of their original homeland and to its safety

and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate,

personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or

another, and their ethnocommunal   consciousness and

solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of

such a relationship".

These six defining principles were developed in an attempt to narrow both

Connor's (1986) and Sheffer's (1986) rather broad definitions of diaspora.

Proponents of this view emphasise the key features of groups, such as kinship,

collective destiny and ethnicity rather than individual experiences. Connor (1986,

p. 16), for instance, sees diaspora as "that segment of a people living outside their

traditional homeland". There are, however, conceptual problems with this

concept of diaspora simply as dispersion: it incurs a danger of "biologism"

(Tölölyan, 2007, p. 48). There is a possibility that the descendants of the first

generation of immigrants may not consider themselves to be a 'segment' of the

homeland's population, Connor's (1986) argument, therefore, is only based on the

idea of shared heritage that, indeed, entails a danger of biologism. For Sheffer

(1986a, p. 3) diasporas are "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins", living in host countries who maintain strong "sentimental and material links with their countries of origin". Although Sheffer's definition is not as broad as Connor's, it still lacks precision because it includes both forced and voluntary migration as key features of a diaspora. In contrast to these vague theoretical concepts, Safran's (1991) main characteristics were the first attempt to give a "social scientific contour" to the notion of diaspora (Cohen, 2009, p. 117). Furthermore, unlike previously developed definitions, Safran's theoretical formulation of diaspora positions host/'homeland' dichotomy at the centre of diaspora discourse. The latter, however, can be considered as one of the limitations of Safran's concept because he fails to capture other important factors such as time and memory (Boyarin, 1994; in Ignacio, 2005). Safran also overestimates the desire for a physical return to the 'homeland', which, indeed, may not be the case for later generations.

Return or rather "the frequent development of a return movement to the homeland" is also included in Cohen's (2008, p. 17) list of common features of diaspora, however, unlike Safran (1991) Cohen does not insist on 'eventual return' but accepts that "intermittent visits" may also be considered as a form of 'return movement'. Cohen (2008, p. 6) elaborates further on Safran's diaspora characteristics by proposing that a dispersal from an original homeland "is often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together". He adapts Safran's (1991, p. 6) fifth characteristic "to allow the case not only of the 'maintenance or restoration' of a homeland, but its very creation". In addition, Cohen (2008) offers four supplementary features:

> "*groups that disperse for colonial or voluntary reasons*.
>
> *...the positive virtues of retaining a diasporic identity... .*
>
> [D]iasporas often *mobilize a collective identity,* not only
>
> a place of settlement or only in respect of an imagined,
>
> putative or real homeland, but also *in solidarity with co-*
>
> *ethnic members in other countries.* Finally, ... in some
>
> limited circumstances the term *'diaspora' can be used to*
>
> *describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility even*
>
> *where historically exclusive territorial claims are not*
>
> *strongly articulated"* (Cohen, 2008, pp. 7-8).

Deriving from these characteristics Cohen (2008) developed his five ideal types in an attempt to refashion the old notion of diaspora, therefore, providing means for understanding new forms of transnational movements. Both Safran (1991) and Cohen (2008) acknowledge that understandably not every diaspora will possess all listed characteristics or features. However, there are two interlinked and intertwined notions, which constitute the core features of diaspora and differentiate it from other similar phenomena: a dispersal from and connection to the 'homeland' which encompasses the myths, memories, and desire for eventual return. These notions have been under scrutiny in the field of diaspora studies resulting in a conceptual confusion and obliteration of distinctions between diaspora and ethnic groups. The distinction, however, is important; after all, not all ethnic communities are diasporic, while all diasporic communities are also ethnic communities. In other words, "diasporas are a specific subset of ethnic minorities" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 649). To distinguish diaspora from an ethnic community, Tölölyan (2007) offers his view of the defining characteristics of diasporas. Accoridng to Tölölyan (2007, p. 649) while ethnic commiunities show a

"diluted form of biculturalism", diasporas have "a culture and collective identity that preserves elements of the homeland's language, or religious, social, and cultural practice, either intact or, as time passes, in mixed, bicultural forms".

There is also a notion of return and restoration that takes the form of organised commitment to maintain a close relationship with the 'homeland' and other kin communities, particularly for diasporas that were formed as a result of catastrophic events in the homelands. Return and maintenance of the 'homeland' can take the form of a cultural exchange, remittances, travelling and political lobbying (Tölölyan, 2007). Ethnic communities, however, cannot be characterized by this kind of sustained contact with their 'homelands'. Memory, commemoration and mourning, another core feature that can guide in defining the uncertain process of diasporisation, is also central for dasporas that were formed as a result of traumatic events, whereas communities formed as a result of individual or chain migration due to economic circumstances do not possess these characteristics. Hence, in comparison to diasporas, in such communities mourning and commemoration are less conspicuous (Tölölyan, 2007). These defining features suggest that diaspora is not simply a "fixed concept and social formation but ... a process of collective identification and form of identity" that manifests itself in relations of difference (Tölölyan, 2007, pp. 640-50).

Diasporans, according to Tölölyan (2007), see themselves as different from both the people among whom they have settled and the people in their 'homelands'. This sense of difference in the countries of settlement is maintained as a way of resisting assimilation. The nature and intensity of integration without assimilation depends on the policies of hosting countries. Diasporic communities do this by

encouraging bilingualism and endogamy, maintained communal boundaries, sense of loyalty to traditions and old and new identities (Tölölyan, 2007). Here, it is important to note that Tölölyan (2007) also acknowledges generational changes in diasporans' sense of difference and sameness. For the first generation of immigrants there is a sense of kinship and sameness with the people in the 'homeland', while for the subsequent generation this connection is difficult to maintain because with time both people in the 'homeland' and those dispersed change. In this transitional time when the dispersed lose the feeling of shared sameness and close connection with the people in the 'homeland', the process of diasporisation begins not because of personal memories of their relatives or a specific place of origin but "thanks to the collective work of memory and commemoration, the performance of difference, the cultivation of ideologies of identity, and the institutionalization of practices of connection to the homeland" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 50).

Hence, Tölölyan (2007, p. 649) also positions the notion of 'homeland' at the centre of diaspora discourse but he also asserts that it is much more appropriate to think about ""re-turn" without actual repatriation". Similar to Cohen (2008), Tölölyan (2007, p. 649) suggests that it is more common for diasporans to 're-turn' through "travel, remittance, cultural exchange, and political lobbying and by various contingent efforts to maintain other links with the homeland", rather than physical resettlement. The evaluation of the term diaspora, as developed and popularised by classical diaspora scholars (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2003; Cohen, 2008), reveals that the notion of 'homeland' that encompasses the myths, memories and desire for eventual return, constitutes one of the building blocks of diaspora identity. The role of memory, however, deserves particular attention,

since there is "[n]o diaspora without memory [after all] forgetting the trans-local diasporic connections means the ultimate disbandment of diasporic identity" (Baronian, Besser and Jansen, 2007, p. 12).

## 1.2.  Memory and Diaspora

The relationship between memory and diaspora may appear to be self-evident and natural, however, there is a certain ambiguity in this relationship that has to be explored. First, it is important to acknowledge that memory is not homogeneous but rather refers to a broad set of phenomena. Before the term has become the subject of considerable debates, it referred to the human capacity of preserving certain experiences and having access to these (at least in part) through an act of recalling (Jedlowski, 2001). In the contemporary scholarly debates, the term has been reformulated to mean more than simply an accumulation of past experiences that can be accessed through recall. Memory, from a theoretical point of view, is a

> "plurality of interrelated functions. What we call a
> 'memory' is a complex network of activities, the study of
> which indicates that the past never remains 'one and the
> same', but is constantly selected, filtered and
> restructured in terms set by the questions and
> necessities of the present, at both the individual and the
> social levels" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 30).

The latter implies and acknowledges the importance of recognising the temporal dimension of human experiences. These continuities and discontinuities of social life entail selecting and processing, recalling and forgetting the past. Thus, memory is not a storage of facts but an active process of creating new meanings and

understandings of both the past and the present (Giles, 2002; in Agnew, 2008).

Memory is the construction and reconstruction of the past influenced by desires,

needs and interests. It is a subjective and contextual process of selection and

interpretation which sites are collective as well as individual, belonging to one yet

also to others (Agnew, 2008, p. 198). Memory, therefore, is inherently involved in

the process of creating and recreating one's self, in the process of collective or

individual identity formation. Analysing the role of memory on national identity

and nationalism, Smith (1999, p. 10) notes the crucial "relationship of shared

memories to collective cultural identities: memory, almost by definition is integral

to cultural identity". "[O]ne might almost say: no memory, no identity" (1996, p.

383). This is particularly vital in relation to diasporas, after all memory is

considered to be a "carrier of diasporic identity" (Baronian, Besser and Jansen,

2007, p. 12), where its passing over generations can be viewed as the 'proof' of

diasporic status of a specific community (Butler, 2001). Thus, diasporas are multi-

generational; a dispersed group or population becomes diasporic if the memory of

their origin, culture and history is passed on over several generations.

The latter implies that diasporic memory is collective and not essentially a matter

of individual psychology. This is the most common approach adopted to discuss

the notion of memory in the context of diaspora studies. In comparison to

individual or personal memory, which is often based on first-hand experiences of a

single individual, collective or cultural memories are the shared knowledge and

representation of past social events that have been collectively constructed (Paez,

Basabe and Gonzalez, 1997). Collective memory is continuously (re)constructing

and changing through social interactions and is a collective recollection of a shared

past (Halbwachs, 1980, 1992). This process of recollection of a shared past is

widely discussed and analysed in relation to diasporas, particularly in the context of classical or 'victim' diasporas. For Safran (1991) and Cohen (2008), for example, collective memory constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of diaspora. It is through collective memory of homeland and past traumatic experiences of exile that classical diasporas maintain their diasporic identity.

For this classical conception of diaspora, including the Armenian, Jewish and African diasporas, the term exilic memory is often applied. Exilic memory refers to "a collective shared representation of the traumatic conditions that led to the dispersion of the group from the homeland" (Lacroix and Fiddin-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 687). This theoretical perspective, however, overemphasises memory of real or imagined place of origin; diasporic memory is considered to be "place bound" and stable space of identity (Fortier, 2005, p. 184). Although in most cases the imagined or real 'homeland' is pivotal, their existence depends on the preservation of the past: common history and identity. Thus, not the territory but the memory that is the "principle ground of identity formation in diaspora cultures, where territory is de-centred and exploded into multiple settings" (Fortier, 2005, p. 184).

Fortier (2005) criticises the essentialist notions of diaspora acknowledging the flexible and changing nature of the memory of homeland. Diasporans, indeed, are not passive recipients but have to negotiate and reproduce their identities, therefore continuously reinvent their existing diaspora. Thus, the postmodernist approach suggests that diasporic memory is the result of "a collective migratory trajectory, with the diaspora's sense of distinctiveness, and of forming a minority, having thus appeared throughout the course of their emigration" (Lacroix and

Fiddin-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 687).   Diasporic memory, therefore, is an active "process of linking" (Bal, vii), rather than a stable space of identity. The latter is crucial since it deconstructs the essentialist notion of diaspora. The postmodern perspective calls for an emphasis on diversity and hybridity because diasporas are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 1990, p. 235). It deconstructs the very notion of diaspora by proposing a new perspective of memory that is de-territorialised; that is "place based" and not necessarily "place bound" (Fortier, 1999, p. 47).

## 1.3.    'Homeland' and Diaspora: The Postmodern Approach

The postmodern approach challenges an essentialist 'homeland' orientation by emphasising hybridity, fluidity and syncretism. It is a critical overemphasising of 'homeland', as an essential symbolic, political and cultural centre since terms 'homeland' and 'land' do not necessarily overlap (Levy and Weingrod, 2005). A 'land' or a geographic territory can be considered to be a 'homeland' by several communities and in some circumstances "a "diaspora" begins to take on some of the qualities of a homeland" and vice versa. In this regard the "homeland" - "diaspora" pair is open to question and problematized" (Levy and Weingrod, 2005, p. 6). Criticising the discourses of fixed origins scholars like Hall (1990), Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1994) and Anthias (1998) sought to de-emphasise the notion of 'homeland' because it is less applicable to the diaspora reality than orientations and activities within the 'hostland' (Pasura, 2014). In other words, they see diaspora as a process rather than a category. Hall (1990, p. 402), for example, argues that diasporic experience is marked

"by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by hybridity. Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference".

Drawing his argument on the example of the people of the Caribbean, Hall (1990) rejects the imperialising views of the diasporic people, whose identity can be discussed only in the context of some sacred 'homeland'. A similar concept is proposed by Gilroy (1993, p. 155) who shifts away from "different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in 'racial', ethnic or national essences". Rethinking deterministic views of migrant histories, in particular the black diaspora, Gilroy presents "a transnational counterhistory" to the questions of memory, temporality and narrative (Mallapragada, 2006, p. 1997). Rejecting the Afrocentric viewpoint, Gilroy employs the concepts of 'routes' and 'roots'. African diasporic identity, according to Gilroy (1993), is not the product of 'roots' it comes from but the 'routes' it has adopted. He argues that it is necessary to "move away" from the classical model of diaspora and notions of "origins, purity and invariant sameness" because we cannot return to the point of original dispersal (p. 56). It is not possible to "rewind the tape of history" because the experience of slavery irreversably changed and transformed the identity of the African diaspora (Gilroy, 1993, p.56). The title *Black Atlantic, therefore, is a message that* "If this is a diaspora, then it's a very particular kind of diaspora. it's a diaspora that can't be reversed" (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 57).

Similar to Gilroy, Clifford (1997, p. 3) uses the roots/routes conceptualisation and challenges the view according to which "[d]welling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always proceed routes". He proposes an approach that is sensitive to everyday practices including dwellings and travelling, roots as well as routes (Gustafson, 2006). Clifford (1994, p. 306) sees diaspora as "a discourse that is travelling or hybridizing in new global conditions". He criticises Safran's strict or "centred" model suggesting that decentred lateral connections may be as important as those based on a shared geographical centre and desire to return to a real or mythical 'homeland':

> "Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both
>
> roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as
>
> alternate public spheres (Gilroy, 1987), forms of
>
> community consciousness and solidarity that maintain
>
> identifications outside the national time/space in order
>
> to live inside, with difference" (Clifford, 1994, p. 308).

He claims that neither many aspects of the Jewish experience, nor the experiences of African, Caribbean or South Asian populations can be applied to Safran's model. Discussing the South Asian diaspora, Clifford (p. 305) argues that they are orientated to "recreate a culture in diverse locations", rather than to roots in a specific location and a desire for return. Similar claims, however, have been criticised, for example by Missbach (2012, p. 18) who argues that one of the reasons for the postmodernists romanticised view of diaspora is in their "overwhelming concentration on imaginatory realities". Safran (Safran, 1999, p. 284) also acknowledges this limitation suggesting that the postmodern approach overemphacises "individual's own 'narrative'", "an idiosyncratic understanding and a 'mood' concerning a condition", rather than "objective reality or collective

definitions". With this logic, "a diaspora identity may be claimed by a person who is a member of the dominant ethnic or religious majority but who suffers from a feeling of alienation - of not being in tune with the prevailing culture and of suffering from discrimination" (Safran, 1999, p. 284).

Despite this criticism, the postmodern theorists have been influential in challenging the very notion of 'homeland'. Criticising the discourses of fixed origins, Avtar Brah (1996, p. 180) takes the argument further by making an important distinction between "the homing desire" and "the desire for a 'homeland'" (Brah, 1996, p. 197). Brah (1996, p. 192) refers to a 'home' as "a mythical place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit... the place of 'origin'". Home is also "the lived experience of a locality" (ibid). The term 'homing desire' is used to explain the desire for belonging to an identity that is rooted in a geographical origin. In other words, instead of considering diaspora in the context of a desire to return to a specific territory, the emphasis should be on the desire for belonging to a place of origin. Geographical territory has been positioned in the centre of diaspora discourse since diaspora was supposed to be eternally locked in the dual tension of home and away. However, as the movement from one place to another involves the loss of homeland, it also entails a process of establishing a home in the 'host' land (Dalal, 2011). In this regard, return to a 'homeland' might be challenging because of the fear of repeating the process of 're-rooting'. Thus, there should be a "distinction between 'feeling at home' and declaring a place as home" (Brah, 1996, p. 197).

Anthias (1998, p. 577) voiced her objection against using what she described as "absolutist notions of "origin"" and "true belonging" arguing that diaspora studies showed "lack of attention given to transethnic solidarities". Similar to Anthias, Soysal (2002, p. 138) claims that "the category of diaspora is an extension of the nation-state model, in that it assumes a congruence between... territory, culture, and identity". If for Soysal diaspora is an outworn analytical category, Axel (2002) suggests that it needs further clarification. Axel (2002, p. 425-26) criticises diaspora studies for conceptualising "the homeland as a place of origin and site of departure that constitutes a certain people as a diaspora". In Appadurai's (1996) view, in the contemporary global economy, where there is a fundamental disconnection between economy, politics, and culture, there is an altered relationship between communities and place, nations and states, and time and memory. "The past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory" (Appadurai, 1996, p. 30). Acknowledging this complexity of the concept of 'homeland' in defining diasporas, Cohen (2008) offers a compromise between "classical homeland-focused and "postmodern" homeland-deconstructing" notions of diaspora (Brubaker, 2015, p. 122).

According to Cohen (2009, p. 121) the deconstruction of the ideas of 'homeland' and community, gave rise to an "elastic notion" that can be characterised as "*solid* (the unquestioned need for a 'homeland'), *ductile* (an intermediate, more complex, idea of 'homeland') and *liquid* (a post-modernist rendition of virtual home)". A 'solid' is the more traditional concept of 'homeland' in the field of diaspora studies that is used to explain the role of diasporas "as agents of homeland development" (Cohen, 2009, p. 122). A 'ductile homeland' is discussed in the context of European and American Jews living in the diaspora that have

experienced the process of 'dezionization'. The 'liquid' notion of 'homeland' develops when migrants "can be thought of as having lost their conventional territorial reference points, to have become in effect mobile and multi-located cultures with virtual or uncertain homes" (Cohen, 2009, p. 128). Particular attention should be paid to a more recent rise of the 'solid' idea of 'homeland' as a result of the "enhanced role of diasporas as agents of [economic] development" (Cohen, 2009, p. 123). The Armenian diaspora can be explored to support Cohen's argument. For example, up to 1 billion USD was raised by the Armenian diaspora organisations to provide emergency relief for the victims of the powerful earthquake that struck northern Armenia in 1988 (De Waal, 2015). Furthermore, every year since 1992 a global fundraising takes place mostly among diaspora Armenians "for the development and strengthening of Armenian statehood" (The Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, 2017) and this is despite the fact that the majority of diasporans originate from Anatolia (present day Turkey) therefore, the Republic of Armenia is not their ancestral 'homeland'. The Armenian example also highlights the problem of locating "the diasporic's home in the ancestral homeland too easily" (Tölölyan, 2011, p. 11). Indeed, after several generations, personal memories, kinship links, and not being integrated into the host society, often the case for the first and second generations, may not play a pivotal role in the diasporans' commitment to their 'homelands'. After all successive generations are the citizens of their new 'home' country who have developed a "comfortable bicultural competence" and it is a set of decisions to continue to remain bi-local, to care about others with the same "ethnodiasporic origin" and also to care about the prosperity of the ancestors' 'homeland' that one is a diasporan (Tölölyan, 2012, p. 11). Thus, Cohen (2009, p. 133) criticises the proponents of the postmodern concept that attempt to completely dispense with the term and

argues for "empirical and historical support for any notion of home/homeland". Most importantly, Cohen suggests that the 'solid' notions of 'homeland' are getting increasing support as diasporas become mobilised to play a significant role in the socio-political development of their 'homelands' and international politics.

## 1.4.    Politics and diaspora: 'peace-makers' or 'peace-wreckers'?

Although diasporas have been important in international politics for many years, Zionism, Pan-Africanism, attempts to remake Greater Armenia (Cohen, 2009), it is after the Cold War that some diasporas became key players in the politics of their 'homelands'.  Recent studies (see Smith and Stares, 2007) on various diasporas in conflict show that diasporas can be considered as "'peace-makers'" or "'peace-wreckers'" (Cohen, 2009, p. 123).  In other words, they play significant and various roles in the conflict cycle. The majority of current research and literature, particularly in the field of international relations, is focused on the negative role of diasporas in 'homeland' conflicts (Baser, 2015). They are referred to as extremist and long-distance nationalist communities that do not experience the economic and socio-political consequences of their actions. Benedict Anderson (1992, p. 3-13) formulated the term 'long-distance nationalism' arguing that

> "[w]hile technically a citizen of the state in which he
> comfortably lives, but to which he may feel little
> attachment, he finds it tempting to play identity politics
> by participating (via propaganda, money, weapons, any
> way but voting) in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat -
> now only fax time away. But this citizenless participation
> is inevitably non-responsible - our hero will not have to

answer for, or pay the price of, the long-distance politics

he undertakes".

In contradiction, Shain and Cofman Wittes (2002) propose that whether 'stateless' or 'state-based', diasporas may be affected by 'homeland' conflicts economically, socially and even physically (threads against them by the groups in conflict with their 'homeland' kin). Furthermore, the negative connotations of the term long distance nationalism have been questioned by Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002, p. 173) suggesting that long distance nationalism

"does not exist only in the domain of the imagination and sentiment. It leads to action. These actions link a dispersed population to a specific homeland and its political system. Long distance nationalists may vote, demonstrate, contribute money, create works of art, give birth, fight, kill, and die for a 'homeland' in which they have never lived".

Thus, Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002) argue that long distance nationalism may also result in a unity of diaspora members and those who live in the 'homeland'; it may lead to a "transborder citizenship" (Baser, 2015, p. 32). Nonetheless, more often the term is used to describe the negative effect of diasporas' involvement in 'homeland' conflict. Anderson's proponents (Duffield, 2001; Kaldor, 2001) developed his argument further proposing the 'New War' hypothesis, which can be seen "as a form of non-territorial network war that work through and around states" (Duffield, 2001, p. 14). The latter implies that in addition to financial support to their 'homelands', diasporas also provide political and ideological influence, which is an important mechanism that is "fuelling 'new wars'" (Hall and Swain, 2008, p. 111). Thus, through remittances, expertise and new war

techniques, diasporas escalate 'homeland' conflicts (Kaldor, 2001). This is particularly the case for 'conflict-generated diasporas' such as the Armenian, Ethiopian, Irish and Tamil diasporas that are sustained in part by traumatic memories, thereby their position in the 'homeland' conflict is very often categorical (Lyons, 2007). The IRA, for instance, "traditionally financed itself through ... the Irish diaspora in the USA via organisations such as Noraid" (Jonsson and Cornell, 2007, p. 69-70). The role of the Tamil diaspora in the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in Sri Lanka is also discussed in this context. In order to support the war, the LTTE 'taxes' Tamils living outside Sri Lanka (Wayland, 2004, in Turner, 2010).

In addition, diasporas may also lobby host societies (governments, civil society organisations, NGOs, UNs) to gain support for their cause. The Armenian diaspora, in particular, has provided a substantial financial assistance and significant political lobbying in the case of secessionist Nagorno-Karabakh. They mobilised against the government of the first president of the Republic of Armenia, who aimed to build ties with the Republic of Turkey and negotiate a peace agreement with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that would have involved territorial concessions from Armenia (Shain and Cofman Wittes, 2002). The conflict is the result of the Soviet boundary redrawing in the 1920s and 30s, when Artsakh, which is the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, became an ASSR within Azerbaijan in 1923, although it has been populated mainly (80%) by ethnic Armenians and was part of the Ancient Armenian province of Artsakh (see Chorbajian, Donabedian and Mutafian, 1994; Hughes and Sasse, 2002).

In February 1988 and January 1990, organised massacres of Armenians in Sumgait and Baku took place. In 1991 Azerbaijan's independence was proclaimed as Azerbaijan declared itself the successor of Musavatist Azerbaijan (1918-20). It should be noted that the republic had never been de jure internationally recognised, nor its borders have been legally established. Three days later, September 2, the Nagorno-Karabakh Assembly, following the USSR Law of April 3, 1990, which states that in case of a succession of a Soviet Republic from the Soviet Union autonomies or settled ethnic groups can choose their political status, declared the autonomous republic's independence (Simonyan, Soghomonyan and Gharibyan, 2015). On 10 December 1991, a referendum on independence was held in Nagorno-Karabakh with overwhelming majority, 82%, of voters 'approved' Karabakh's sovereignty. In 1991 the conflict intensified leading to a full-scale war until the ceasefire was concluded in May 1994[1].

Recent research shows that by political lobbying in international organisations and their 'host' countries, and by providing financial assistance, diasporas are also playing a critical role in achieving compromise and promoting peaceful conflict resolution in their 'homelands' (Hall and Swain, 2007; Horst, 2007). Diasporas can have a positive impact by also raising awareness in their 'host' countries, advocating human rights, opening and maintaining communication between the host land peace-makers and 'homeland' officials, and participating as advisers in the 'homeland' peace-making initiatives (Baser and Swain, 2008). The Armenian diaspora, particularly in the US, has been an active agent in raising international awareness and recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 (see Panossian, 2002; Hughes and Sasse, 2002; and Terzi, 2010; Demirdjian, 2016). After the US

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[1] See Chapter 7 for a further discussion on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

military intervention in 2001-2002, the Afghan diaspora played a significant political role in the formation of the post-Taliban government (Cheran, 2004, p. 8-9; in Baser, 2015).  Another example is the Eritrean diaspora who had an influential role in stabilising political situation after the secession from Ethiopia in 1993: they helped to draft the first constitution (Mohamoud, 2006; in Baser, 2015).

As the outlined examples illustrate, diasporas can contribute to both peaceful conflict resolution as well as conflict escalation or extension. Furthermore, opposing groups define 'peace' differently and their positions may change towards a potential resolution of the conflict (Baser, 2015). Thus, considerable attention should be paid to the meanings of the notions of peace and conflict, particularly in the context of stateless diasporas who are oppressed in their respective 'homelands' (Baser, 2015). The latter, according to Baser (2015), is one of the limitations of studies in this field.

> "For example, if one takes stateless and state-linked diaspora groups, or two groups from a homeland where there is civil war and one group is the majority, it is possible to see that academics are usually interested in the disadvantaged group whose activism may involve violence. Thus, while both sides of the conflict make an effort to pursue their interests, the disadvantaged groups' efforts seem to be more visible as they tend to use unconventional methods " (Baser, 2015, p. 37).

Baser (2015, p. 37) discusses the Turkish and Kurdish diasporas to support this argument. For instance, the Turkish diaspora's attempts to restrain Kurdish

diaspora activism in a specific 'host country' is viewed as "'protecting homeland interests'". However, Kurdish diaspora activism is very often associated with "'getting involved in the homeland conflict'" (Baser, 2015, p. 37). Although both, Turkish and Kurdish diaspora groups, are only disputing each other's views about the 'homeland' conflict, their position is perceived very differently. Similarly, in contrast to a return of Turkish diasporans for military duty, Kurdish diasporans' conscription by PKK is viewed as "contributing to conflict and 'terrorist activit[y]'" (Baser, 2015, p. 37).

Thus, one cannot have a one-sided perspective of diaspora's influence on 'homeland' conflicts and politics, after all some diaspora groups can undertake counter-productive and contradictory actions that instigate both 'peace-wrecking' as well as 'peace-making' simultaneously (Brown, 2013). Furthermore, Koinova (2018, p. 1252) argues that it is important to go beyond the 'peace-makers' or 'peace-wreckers' dichotomy, after all diasporas have "*linkages to different contexts* beyond home-states and host-states", and their "embeddedness in these contexts [...] either shapes their mobilizations or is shaped by them". Diasporas very often mobilise in "translocal networks", which link the homeland to other territories across the world (Koinova and Karabegovic 2017; in Koinova, 2018, p. 1258). Thus, the complexity of diasporic experience, the influence that diasporas have on both 'homeland' and host-land, and the impact of any conflict on diasporas should be acknowledged in this context. After all, diasporas living across nation-states and having some sense of attachment or belonging as it were to more than one nation-state, challenge hegemonic ideas of loyalty and belonging (Turner, 2010). The latter leads to the question of transnational belonging that is closely associated with 'peace-making'. In this context diaspora is viewed as a

cosmopolitan group that can help to resolve 'homeland' conflicts. In other words, "conflict and oppression are associated with states and immobility while mobility is perceived to be emancipating; diasporas are seen as cosmopolitans who may help end conflict" (Turner, 2010, p. 101). Turner (2010), however, uses the concept of transnationalism to demonstrate the potential of diasporas in peace-building; therefore, questions related to the impact of diaspora actions on peace-building or conflict escalation still remain open. Similar perspectives, nevertheless, open conceptual debates on the very notions of diaspora and transnationalism which have become very difficult to distinguish from each other.

## 1.5.    Diaspora and Transnationalism

Over the past decades, diaspora has been closely associated with terms such as transnationalism and globalisation. This conceptual overlap has been increasing particularly between diaspora and transnationalism because both terms are applied in the context of cross-border processes; because both are extremely "elastic terms" (Faist, 2010, p. 20) that refer to "similar categories of persons involving forms of forced and voluntary migration" (p. 9). Diaspora, in particular, has been used to describe political refugees, economic migrants, travellers and cosmopolitan elites. As a result, "the dispersed diasporas of old have become today's "transnational communities" sustained by a range of modes of social organisation, mobility and community" (Vertovec, 1999, p. 448). Tölölyan (1991, p. 5), drawing distinction between the classic 'ethno-diasporas', or 'diasporas of old', and large-scale dispersed ethnic groups, considers modern diasporas "exemplary communities of the transnational moment". Thus, once used to describe forced dispersal of the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian people, today the term diaspora can be applied to almost any dispersed population, which by the

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late 1960s were viewed as "exile groups, overseas communities, ethnic and racial minorities, and so forth" (Tölölyan, 1991, p. 3). This theoretical confusion creates challenges for "defining a travelling term, in changing global conditions" (Clifford, 1994, p. 302). Even though, transnationalism, like diaspora, has become a popular term in social sciences, no one conceptual frame has emerged to define the shape of transnationality (Pasura, 2014). Basch et al. (1994, p. 7), for instance, see transnationalism as the establishment and maintenance of "multi-stranded social relations", which connect "societies of origin and settlement". These processes are referred to as transnationalism because many migrant communities "built social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Basch et al., 1994, p. 7).

Guarnizo et al. (2003, p. 1213) consider transnationalism as "the rise of a new class of immigrants, economic entrepreneurs or political activists who conduct cross-border activities on a *regular* basis". Similarly, Faist (2000, p. 189) suggests that

> "Whether we talk of transnational social spaces, transnational social fields, transnationalism or transnational social formations in international migration systems, we usually refer to sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from little to highly institutionalized forms".

Faist (2000) develops further his argument by introducing three types of transnational social spaces: transnational kinship groups, transnational circuits, and transnational communities, where diasporas are a specific type of

transnational community. Pasura (2014, pp. 9-10) also suggests that although

transnationalism is not "synonymous with diaspora, ... diasporas are regarded as

examples of transnational communities" (Pasura, 2014, pp. 9-10). The latter raises

important questions: How do we differentiate these two concepts? What are the

key characteristics or aspects distinguishing diasporas from transnational

communities? In response to these questions, Vertovec (1999) develops a

typological approach to transnationalism, distinguishing between social

morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of

capital, site of political engagement, and (re)construction of 'place' or locality.

According to Vertovec (2004) it is the continuing 'consciousness' of an imagined

connection to 'homeland' that defines diaspora and distinguishes it from

transnationalism.  Vertovec (2004, p. 282) suggests that transnationalism is the

continuous exchange of "information, money and resources – as well as regular

travel and communication" with those in the 'homeland' or outside of it. Although

all diasporas are formed as a result of migration, not all develop diasporic

consciousness, and similarly, although "all transnational communities comprise

diasporas, […] not all diasporas develop transnationalism" (Vertovec, 2004, p.

282).

In distinguishing diaspora from transnationalism, particular attention should be

paid to the relationship to places and territories. According to Bruneau (2010, p.

49), compared to transnational communities, diaspora implies a strong "anchoring

in the host country" and sometimes a break with the home country (if it is lost or

not accessible). Through creation of the places of memory and territorial markers

in the host country, diaspora compensates and/or attempts to fix the link

between the home country. In transnational territories and spaces of mobility,

however, this break does not occur and there is no need to be re-rooted in the host country. Thus, in comparison to transnational communities, "in a diaspora, identity pre-exists place and tries to re-create it, to re-model it, in order to reproduce it" (Bruneau, 2010, p. 49).

Three further important aspects that distinguish diaspora from transnationalism should be outlined. First, transnationalism implies prior existence of a nation state system, however there were small and "'wide-band'" ethnic and language groups before nation-states, which stretched across regions and continents (Vertovec and Cohen, 1999, xxi). Nation states emerged only in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, while, for example, Armenian and Jewish diasporas already existed a long time before that (Kastoryano, 2006; in Bruneau, 2010). Second, transnationalism is a broader term that connects various social formations. Diaspora, in comparison, implies ethnic, national and religious communities (Faist, 2010). And third, is the "time dimension" (Fiast, 2010, p. 22). Transnationalism usually refers to recent migration flows, while diaspora implies multi-generational patterns (Faist, 2010).

Thus, although both diaspora and transnationalism are often used interchangeably, diaspora has been adopted to refer to national and religious groups living outside their (whether imagined or original) 'homeland', whereas transnationalism has been used to denote immigrants' long-lasting ties across countries including various transnationally active networks, groups and organisations (Faist, 2010). Diaspora refers to the forced or voluntary movement of people across nation states, while transnationalism is the movement of goods, information, and capital across national territories (Braziel and Mannur, 2003).

Diaspora, therefore, "remains, above all, a human phenomenon - lived and experienced" (Braziel and Mannur, 2003, p. 8).

## 1.6.    Digital Diaspora

The definition of diasporas as place-bound groups has been challenged by globalisation and technological development, particularly digital media, as a result of which in contemporary society "the space of flows […] substitutes […] the space of place" (Castells, 1996, p. 375). Castell (1996) refers to new forms of interconnection where borders and places have been replaced by 'networks of flows'. Indeed, in the age of technological advancement and globalisation, even the concept of a nation is not bound to a specific geographical location but is viewed as a network (Bernal, 2014). Geographical or territorial boundaries are malleable now, as well as relations, which were once rooted in national territories. This is because of information technologies, which are changing the perceptions of time and space, where physical distance is shrinking leading to new forms of connection and belonging. For migrant communities and diasporas, the interlinked 'virtual' and 'real' worlds create "new possibilities for reinterpreting migration not as a mere territorial dislocation but as being part of imaginaries on the move" (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 982). Most importantly, the internet and social media created what Brinkerhoff (2009, p. 2) termed "digital diaspora – diasporas organized on the Internet" enabling a new form of communication and connection with the homeland.

Digital technologies open wider possibilities for diaspora engagement in the homeland whether in the economic, professional, or socio-political spheres. For

example, the Digital Diaspora Network for Africa was established in 2022 by technology companies, NGOs, and U.N. agencies to attract and mobilise African experts (El-Khawas and Ndumbe, 2006). For Ndebele diasporans, the internet is used to "negotiate and re-articulate" their identity through websites such as Inkundla.net (Moyo, 2009, p. 83; in Mpofu, 2017). Brinkerhoff (2009) discusses knowledge transfer through IT technologies using examples of Dutch-Ghanian doctors diagnosing patients in Accra, or diasporans organising virtual health policy trainings in Ethiopia. In the context of the Armenian diaspora, "Diaspora Connected" was launched by the Office of the High Commissioner to "maintain connections, identify and address problems, and deepen cooperation" (OHCDA, 2022). As it will be discussed in this thesis, Facebook groups such as Armenians in the UK, Armenians in London, Armenians in Manchester and RepatArmenia create opportunities for digital connectivity amongst diasporans and repatriates, as well as mobilise for a specific political aim, particularly in times of crises.

Indeed, for diasporas, which experienced war, genocide, and trauma, the Internet offers a platform for not only philanthropic work but also political activism. Increased user interconnectedness enables faster and wider participation and organisation of political activism: disseminating information, and organising online and offline protests and events (Earl, et al, 2010). For example, the 'Viva Kurdish' online forum and the Kurdistan Solidarity Campaign is an online platform that supports the "rights of the Kurdish people to freedom, justice and equality" (cited in Stacey, 2019, p. 97). Similarly, the Internet allows exiled Eritrean diaspora to mobilise and participate in national politics and become a political force, which would be very difficult in Eritrea (Bernal, 2006). For the second-generation Iranian American diasporans, digital platforms facilitated their mobilisation during the

Iranian election. Their collective action was focused on challenging the Iranian government, as well as the stigmatisation of Iranians in the U.S. (Yazdiha, 2022). Other examples of political cyber mobilisation include Cyber Yugoslavia (Stevanović, 2017), Chiapas, Tibetan, Tamil, Uyghur, and Burmese resistance networks (Candidatu, Leurs, and Ponzanesi, 2019). The Internet, therefore, becomes an "elastic political space" (Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 986) which is used for resistance and political activism, particularly during times of crisis.

The widespread use of the Internet created a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2009) that expands to all spheres including warfare. Thus, in contemporary society, wars and conflicts are not only taking place on the physical but also on 'digital battlefields". Citizens are exposed to and take part in warfare using digital tools such as sharing and posting, using hashtags, liking, and commenting on posts, etc. (Kuntsman and Stein, 2019). Examples of such "'participative war'" are the Syrian Civil War and the 2014 Gaza War, as well as the online engagement of and terror of the Islamic State (Merrin, 2019, p. 3). Exploring Israeli military rule and how Israeli Jews support the state's regime, Kuntsman and Stein (2019, p. 6) propose the term 'digital militarism', which refers to "the extension of militarized culture into social media domains". Through digital platforms diasporas become engaged in "global conflict infopolitics – a transnational competition for the production of knowledge about the conflict", where diasporas and state and non-state organisations seek to raise awareness about the conflict, as well as "get [… social media users] to trust, prioritize and censor some narratives rather than others" (Chernobrov, 2022, p. 636). Thus, online mobilisation is a new form of diasporic engagement in a conflict, which can reach global audiences and enables the

diasporas to "produce, circulate, evaluate and reshape narratives, influencing homeland politics and discourses" (Chernobroc, 2022, p. 636).

**Further Reflections and Concluding Remarks**

As various arguments and discourses outlined in this review illustrate, the notions of 'diaspora' and 'homeland' "are not absolute givens" but compound and contingent concepts (Levy and Weingrod, 2005, p. 6). The literature that explores these contingent notions is divided into two opposing camps. The proponents of the typological approach distinguish diasporas from other groups 'on the move' based on predefined characteristics. In other words, they first define 'diasporas' and then, analyse and explore a range of historical issues or contemporary groups that fit their definitions. More recent views, postmodern notions of diaspora, emphasise hybridity and deterritorialised identities, therefore, go beyond the 'homeland' orientation. The proponents of this anti-essentialist approach see diaspora as transnational communities that challenge nation state; therefore, their focus is on hybrid identities and multiculturalism. They emphasise historical and social contexts, and political-cultural processes, rather than try to fit a certain community into a predefined type. Thus, by deconstructing essentialist notions of homogeneous migrant groups scholars sought to propose new positive connotations indicating the benefits of hybridity, heterogeneity and multiplicity. They are particularly interested in symbols, meanings, narratives, aesthetics, interpretation of values and civil rights. They are interested in social and cultural practices resulting from displacements, as well as in understanding hybrid identity formations: in understanding the process of re/creation and re/invention of identities through hybridity (Missbach, 2012).

The postmodern theorists have been influential in challenging the perspective that diasporans are passive recipients of change. Proposing the opposite, they see diasporans as active agents in various transformational processes. In comparison to essentialists who see diasporas as static categories, the postmodern theorists emphasise individual experiences and subjective diasporic consciousness. Thus, as it was discussed, both approaches have limitations and fail to engage adequately with the constitutive relations among intellectual activity, diasporic culture, subjective consciousness, and political action. Stuart Hall (1990) moves the argument further by rejecting any definition and suggesting that the emphasis should be on the heterogeneity and diversity of diasporic identity, whereas Stéphane Dufoix (2008, p. 107) claims that the term diaspora is "theoretically lifeless". In spite of the conceptual issues, to completely omit the term will be premature, after all the above-mentioned critical arguments are so broad and abstract that they raise a problem of differentiating diasporas from other migrant communities. Thus, the postmodern approach makes an important contribution by acknowledging that diaspora is not a natural social formation, without difference and decision but rather a community of people that continuously (re)produce themselves socially, culturally and politically, therefore, it is a set of decisions and actions that one is a diasporan.

The role of memory is crucial in this process of decision making and identity negotiations. Furthermore, collective memory can be considered as the foundational characteristic of diaspora, after all it is through memory that one is diasporic. Here, however, agreeing with Redclift (2017, p. 514) I would like to emphasise that "performance and narration are not the automatic products of

history and memory" but rather they are socially constructed, therefore, are subjects to change and transformation. "Silences, erasures, or forgetting" are important in diasporic identification as they are components of politics of identity (Redclift, 2017, p. 514). Although diasporas are usually discussed in the context of 'homeland' memory, particularly in the case of Armenian and other 'victim' diasporas, this territorial and fixed logic limits our understanding about the complex nature of memory and its impact on the construction of diaspora identity. Memory is not a static phenomenon but a process of creating meanings and patterns of attachment that may not have connections with the 'homeland'. Diasporic memory, therefore, can transcend this territorial concept and become a new source of identity, particularly for the succeeding generations.

# Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter addresses the methodological underpinnings of this research, by introducing the research stance and research methods used to generate data. First, my ontological and epistemological position will be outlined, followed by a discussion of my research objectives and aims. In order to provide a clear introduction to the research process, I will outline the practicalities of conducting the data collection – the spatial and temporal contexts – and the types of methods used. The section on access and recruitment will discuss sampling techniques and the question of gate keepers. The section on participants will provide the demographic information on my participants in the UK and Armenia. To explain the process of data collection and data generation, I will discuss the research methods used - multi-sited visits, the use of social media, and the main method of data generation: semi-structured interviews.  I will also reflect on the process of establishing rapport and its challenges, as well as on my positionality as a researcher. The chapter concludes with an outline of the process of data analysis, in particular the thematic analysis technique.

## 2.1.    Methodological Framework

The aim of this study is to explore the notion of 'homeland' for subsequent generations of the Armenian diaspora. The preoccupation of this research is with the memory of 'homeland' in its multidimensionality – the 'homeland' viewed as a physical, but also symbolic, cultural and social space, as shaped by dynamics of belonging and longing, affect and experiences, and the role these play in the negotiation of 'dislocated identities'. Thus, the objective is to explore and

understand diasporans' perspectives and lived experiences which led me to adopt an interpretive paradigm. Interpretivism seeks to understand a range of subjective realities, the complexity of lived experiences and life histories from the perspective of those who experience them (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 2004). It presupposes that one's knowledge and experiences are social constructions, rather than objective, therefore the main interest of this paradigm is how the social world is interpreted by those who experience it (Creswell, 2013; in Brown, 2019). The emphasis of interpretivism is on a subjective, multiple, and socially constructed reality (Yamasaki, 2021). Furthermore, interpretivism reveals the importance of contingent and situated practices and identities since meanings, feelings and thoughts can be affected by one's situational context (Yanow, 2014). Indeed, context was very important for this study, as it sought to explore and understand the notion of 'homeland' in two different contexts: within the diaspora and 'homeland'.

I began my research with a presupposition that the social realities of my participants are situational and manifold, and that, consequently, the interpretations of their realities are shaped by their experiences, which in turn "are lived in the context of intersubjective meaning making" (ibid, p. 23). Taking this into consideration, I employed a social constructionist approach, which asserts that social phenomena are contingent on social and cultural contexts, and that meanings assigned to those phenomena are the product of social construction (Christie and Fleischer, 2009). Therefore, socio-cultural, and historical contexts are important because meanings attributed to social phenomena are created through interaction within a particular social, cultural, and historical context (Gergen, 1999). As discussed in the literature review, in the

context of diaspora, the notion of 'homeland' is a social construction that is contextual and multidimensional. It is the product of the lived experiences, collective memory, as well as the orientations and activities within the host-land (see Pasura, 2014; Anthias, 1998; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). The postmodern approach of diaspora has been crucial in deconstructing the essentialist notions of 'homeland', as an inter-subjective construction. Adopting this constructionist stance, I seek to understand the complexity of the notion of 'homeland' that is created and re-created in diasporic experiences in specific socio-cultural and historical contexts from personal, subjective perspectives.

## 2.2.    Research Objectives

The notion of 'homeland' is contested and complex. This is particularly the case for the Armenian diaspora due to intertwined historical and socio-political reasons: the Genocide, loss of ancestral homeland, over a century of diasporisation, multiple migrations, assimilation, Sovietisation, the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) conflict, and the difficult socio-economic situation of the current Republic. These complexities are of a particular interest for this study, which broadly formulated, aimed to explore the notion of 'homeland' for second and successive generations of diaspora Armenians. The following research questions have been developed to direct and inform the objective:

- What role does the idea of 'homeland' play in the lives and worldviews of the second and successive diaspora generations?

- How is the notion of 'homeland' created and re-created in specific socio-cultural and historical contexts?

- How is the Republic of Armenia perceived and experienced? What are the experiences of repatriation?

## 2.3.    Research Process

Given the exploratory nature of this research and its focus on personal experiences, it was important to adopt research methods allowing for an in-depth exploration of participant experiences from their own perspectives. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was employed as the main method of data collection. In addition, to inform and familiarise myself with the diaspora and repatriate spaces and places, I conducted multi-sited field visits in Armenia and the UK, as well as explored diaspora and repatriate Facebook pages. The data collection took place in the UK, Armenia and via Messenger video/audio call application, Zoom and Skype software. Overall, **fifty-six** interviews were conducted from July 2017 to December 2021.

| Data collection Timeframe | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| July        –  September 2017 | September 2017    -June 2018 | July        –  September 2018 | September 2018        –  February 2019 | October      –  December 2021 |
| Armenia  (Face-to-Face) | UK  (Face-to-Face) | Armenia  (Face-to-Face and Online) | UK  (Online) | UK  (Online) |

The data collection commenced in Armenia, in the capital city of Yerevan. Prior to both of my visits, I posted several calls for participation on Repat Armenia's Facebook page, which is the largest repatriation network that provides information, resources, and socio-cultural events to repatriated Armenians or

those who are considering repatriation. Out of twenty interviews, eighteen were conducted in public spaces such as cafés, restaurants, parks, and open spaces in Yerevan, in exception of two where I visited interviewees' workplaces. For convenience the choice of location was left to the interviewees. Two participants preferred online video interviews using the Messenger video call application. The length of interviews varied from one to two hours, depending on the participants' availability and whether mutual rapport has been developed.

In the UK my personal contacts and diaspora Facebook pages such as Armenians in the UK, Armenians in London, Armenians in Manchester, Armenians in Birmingham, Armenians in York and Armenians in Leeds, were used to recruit participants. In the first stage, I conducted ten face-to-face interviews: eight in London, one in Manchester and Sheffield. Due to distance, as my participants were living in different parts of the UK, and the participants' requests, the remaining nineteen interviews were conducted online via the Messenger application, Zoom and Skype software. During both stages of data collection, I made multiple trips to London and Manchester, where I visited Armenian churches, cultural events and activities.

An additional seven interviews were conducted from October to December 2021, after the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) war that broke out or rather resumed on the 27th of September 2020. This crucial time coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic; therefore, I was not able to travel to London, where a public demonstration condemning biased news took place in front of the BBC headquarters. Considering the magnitude of this event for Armenians, I decided to resume my data collection and conducted online interviews. Facebook was

used to recruit, and two diasporans from the UK and five repatriates expressed interest.

All interviews ranged from a quarter of an hour to two hours and were carried out in English, audio recorded and transcribed. Some of my participants used Armenian words or expressions during the interviews, which were also translated into English. When possible, during my travels I took and/or jotted down mental notes with further reflections on my experiences after leaving the site. I used field visits as a way of 'entering the field' and exploring diasporic and repatriate spaces and dynamics, while Facebook pages were used to inform and gain access to various events, particularly linked to the Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) War of 2020. The technique of the thematic analysis was used to gain insight, understand, and analyse the data.

## 2.4. Access and Recruitment

A combination of snowball and purposive sampling was used to recruit participants in the UK and Armenia. Being from Armenia myself and having been living in the UK for more than a decade, I had personal contacts and social networks in both countries, which I have used to gain access and recruit diasporans and repatriates. Purposive sampling was employed to select "information-rich cases […] from which one can learn great deal about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Purposive sampling is used when there is an orientation towards a specific case (Barglowski, 2018), which in this study consisted of two groups: second and

successive Armenian diaspora generations living in the UK, as well as second and successive Armenian diaspora generations who repatriated to Armenia.

As  with any sampling method, purposive and snowball sampling techniques also have their limitations. Crush et al. (2012) claims that snowball sampling in migration and diaspora studies can lead to a focus on sub-sets, such as diasporans from specific cities or regions. Furthermore, mailing lists are often used to recruit geographically dispersed diasporans, which are accessed through diaspora organisations that keep and are willing to share these lists. This, however, leads to a sampling bias because the data is skewed towards diaspora members who are involved in diaspora organisations (Crush et al., 2012). Agreeing with Crush et al. (2012), I propose that the combination of conventional and new methods can be used to limit the possibility of such bias. In this study the use of social media, Facebook in particular, was effective in engaging a heterogenous group of participants who *were and were not* involved in diaspora or repatriate organisation, events or activities.

Before conducting the data collection, I was already a member of several diaspora Armenian Facebook groups, therefore, was familiar with and had access to these platforms.  I posted several calls for participation on Armenians in the UK, Armenians in London, Armenians in Manchester, Armenians in Birmingham, Armenians in York and Armenians in Leeds Facebook pages.  Most active responses were from the first three groups, Armenians in the UK, London, and Manchester. It is important to note that members of these groups are not necessarily from specified cities, therefore, I had respondents from different parts of UK such as Wales, East of England, Manchester, London, Sheffield, and

Blackpool. Armenian Repatriated Network Facebook page was used to recruit repatriated diasporans, and similar to the recruitment process in the UK, I posted several calls for participation. Administrators of Facebook pages were identified as potential gatekeepers; however, I did not have any restrictions on posting participation calls. Initially, the parish priests of two Armenian churches and managers or directors of Armenian community organisations had been identified as possible gatekeepers. However, since I did not conduct data collection in any specific organisation and only attended public events and the church, I did not require their support to gain access to participants. In both the UK and Armenia, initial contacts were made via private messaging or email, information sheets were shared, and interview arrangements made.

## 2.5.    Participants

This study focused on second and successive Armenian diaspora generations living in the UK, and second and successive Armenian diaspora generations who repatriated to Armenia. Since the overwhelming majority of studies that focus on the relations between the Armenian diaspora and the 'homeland', have been conducted in the diaspora or in the 'hostlands', in this study, I sought to fill this gap by exploring repatriates' experiences of living and adapting to a "'relatively unknown 'homeland'" (Kasbarian, 2020).

In the UK, I made the decision not to restrict the data to participants born in the UK, after all, as I have explored earlier in this thesis, the Armenian diaspora in the UK is a heterogeneous group, which is shaped by multiple migratory journeys. A similar approach has been employed with the recruitment of repatriates, who

were a geographically diverse group. The age of participants ranged from eighteen to seventy years, with the average age of repatriates being thirty-six, while in the UK it was thirty-four.

**Diasporans in the UK**: I recruited **thirty-one** participants in the UK whose age ranged from eighteen to seventy years. Thus, the participants were a diverse group of students, working age professionals and pensioners. The majority of my interviewees, nineteen in particular, were living in London when the interviews were conducted. There were also participants from Manchester, Sheffield, Blackpool, Brighton, Reading, rural Wales, and Southeast England. Three participants did not specify their place of residency but rather gave broad indication such as living in the region of Southeast England. Only twelve were born in the UK, eight in London, one participant in Scotland, Manchester and Kent. The remaining nineteen diasporans were born in Cyprus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Only one of the interviewees was born in Armenia, however, his family migrated to the UK when he was five years old, and he strongly identified with being diaspora Armenian. Most of the participants' parents were both Armenian, so they identified themselves as Armenian, while eight interviewees as British-Armenian due to one of their parents being British. One of the participants identified as Italian-Armenian, as his father was Italian, and another participant as Dutch-Armenian, because her father was Dutch. Western Armenia, which currently is in the territory of eastern Turkey (former Ottoman Empire), was the ancestral homeland of the majority of my participants, with the exception of five, whose ancestors were from Iran, Jerusalem and Eastern Armenia (see Appendix I).

**Repatriates**: **Twenty-five** repatriated diasporans aged from twenty to sixty-seven were interviewed. Similar to participants in the UK, repatriates were a diverse group in terms of their occupation: students, entrepreneurs, professionals in different fields and pensionaries. Almost all participants were living in the capital city Yerevan when the interviews were conducted, with two exceptions who built their own homes in rural locations close to Yerevan. Participants were from different parts of the world, thirteen participants repatriated from the USA: New York, New Jersey, Glendale (LA), Washington DC, Boston and Wisconsin, remaining half were from Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Cyprus, Israel, Syria, UK, Germany, and Australia. Many of them had multiple migratory experiences prior to settling in Armenia. Western Armenia was an ancestral homeland for the majority of my participants, while a few had roots in Iran, Lebanon and Syria. Both parents of the twenty-two participants were Armenian, while the remaining four had one parent being German, Italian, Syrian and Irish. The earliest repatriation amongst the participants was the year 2001 and the latest was 2021 (see Appendix H).

## 2.6.    Multi-Sited Visits: UK and Armenia

I began my data collection with multiple site visits exploring diaspora and repatriate spaces or localities in the UK and Armenia. My particular interest was in diasporic sites, 'cultural traces', symbolic spaces, cultural events and activities as reproductions of 'Armenianness' and "substitutes for, and physical reminders of, the homeland" (Safran, 2004). Conventionally, this kind of inquiry was confined to a single-site or what is known as 'Malinowskian' enquiry (King, 2018). However, with globalisation, transnationalism, and global migration patterns it is difficult to

overemphasize the problems associated with single-sited data generation methods. In our globalised world the phenomenon of study is "inherently mobile and multiply situated", therefore it is necessary to move away or break from single-sited research (Marcus, 1995, p. 102). Multi-sited field work is closely associated with the work of George Marcus (1995) and his critical discussion on a one-sited 'Malinowskian' ethnographic approach, where the researcher conducts a one-sited study over a prolonged period. One of the main ideas here, is that many social phenomena cannot be explored by focusing only on a single locale, therefore, benefits can be found in travelling between multiple sites. Marcus (1995) acknowledges the changing nature of the social world with its complex processes such as globalisation, transnationalism, and mass migration; therefore, argues for a method that can address these challenges.

As it is with any method of data generation, critical arguments have been developed to also address the challenges of multi-sited research. Concerns were raised about achieving depth and quality in travelling across several sites (see FitzGerald, 2012; Falzon, 2009; Burawoy, 2003). The proponents of 'deep ethnography' with its emphasis on 'thick descriptions' raised concerns about the impact of "[b]ouncing from site to site" as it will lead to vague and superficial data (Burawoy, 2003, p. 673). Hage (2005) goes further to suggest that there simply cannot be multi-sited fieldwork because it is a 'delusion of innovativeness'. However, these critical arguments have been addressed and challenged. King (2018, p. 44) suggests that multiple sites do not imply "dilution" of research and the findings because the concept of single-sited fieldwork is problematic within itself. For example, what is known as a traditional ethnography of a village or a community consists of multiple sites, as the researcher observes people in

different locations such as their homes, workplaces, places of worship and leisure etc. Yet, one of the most important and relevant to this study criticism of sceptics' view is the assertion that "the critique falls if the objects of study are themselves mobile – as migrants and other mobile people" (King, 2018, p. 45). King (2018) suggests that this results in a new form – a mobile ethnography. Similar notion of mobility was developed earlier by Clifford (1992, p.101) who claimed that it is important to develop a fieldwork that is a "less a tent in the village or a controlled laboratory or a site of initiation and inhabitation, and more like a hotel lobby, ship or bus". He acknowledges the need for fieldwork as a 'travel practice', after all, cultures are not bounded or rooted, but they are rather hybrid, as well as displaced and in the continuous process of transformation (Clifford, 1992).

Indeed, diaspora communities, and the Armenian diaspora in particular, are not homogeneous and bounded in specific locations. Although London hosts the largest population of Armenians in the UK, the diaspora is geographically and socially dispersed. There are smaller communities in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, York and other parts of the UK. Furthermore, as the aim of the study was to explore the lived experiences of the 'homeland', not only from the diaspora but also from the repatriate experience, a multi-sited approach was considered the most appropriate. I argue that single-sited ethnographic field visits would limit the possibility of exploring and understanding the wider context of diasporic spaces and reproduction of Armeniannes. In the context of this study, it was important to understand how 'homeland' is reproduced across various groups, ages, backgrounds, socio-cultural positions, and migratory journeys. I was interested in understanding social practices that are not bound to one location but to the wider

contexts of these practices. In other words, the preoccupation was with exploring various symbolic spaces and how they reproduce the 'homeland'. Thus, site visits were used as a way of entering or seeing and understanding diasporic spaces, rather than conducting an ethnographic fieldwork with participant-observations as data generation tool.

I conducted multiple visits to London and Manchester, as well as to the capital city of Armenia, Yerevan. Mostly this included day trips and two visits to Yerevan each lasting two months. My site visits in the UK began in July 2017 in a form of 'back and forth' trips to London and Manchester until July 2018. London was the main location of my visits; however, I have also travelled to Manchester and once to Sheffield to visit and conduct an interview with one of the participants. In London and Manchester, I visited the Armenian Apostolic Churches - St Yeghiche Armenian Church in South Kensington, St Sarkis in Iverna Gardens, Kensington, and Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Manchester. Other sites and activities included the Armenian Summer Festival in North Acton Playing Fields and the Genocide Commemoration March. On several occasions I have also visited the Armenian Taverna in central Manchester.

My visits to Armenia took place in two stages: July-September 2017 and July-September 2018. The main location was Yerevan, as this is where the majority of repatriates work and live. I met my participants in various locations, however, due to the popularity of café culture in Yerevan, I would occasionally meet repatriates in cafes, pubs, and bars to have informal conversations. I took descriptive notes during the site visits to record and describe the details of, and my reflections on my visits. The notes contained the descriptions of

the sites, places, and spaces that I visited, as well as reflections of my experiences after conducting interviews and informal conversations with diasporans and repatriates.

## 2.7.   Multi-Sited Visits: Facebook

In addition to visits to various sites, I have also used Facebook to access the Armenian communities in the UK and repatriates in Armenia. It is important to emphasise that I did not conduct a digital ethnography, where the researcher analyses online data such as messages, comments, posts, video and audio materials, interactions, and communications by immersing in the virtual life of online participants (Grincheva, 2018; Jones, 1998). Facebook societies and organisational pages were used as a way of entering diaspora and repatriate spaces and familiarising myself with the community activities, including past events, projects, protests, marches, and other initiatives. Here, I would like to note that studying contemporary diasporas and migrant communities inevitably entails some form of interaction with social media. Brinkerhoff (2009, p. 51) suggests that the internet is a space or a place for diasporans "to consider the plight of their homeland, contemplate its future, and explore ideas for purposive activities".  Agreeing with this argument, I would like to add that it is social media, and Facebook in particular, which has been successful in providing a virtual space or cyberspace for communication and networking.

There has been a growing interest in what Castells (2003) refers to as "real virtuality", particularly for migrant and diaspora groups, who rely on transnational networks and communication (see Hosseini, 2020; Yu and Sun, 2019; Al-Rawi and

Fahmy, 2018; Karim and Al-Rawi, 2018). Indeed, as it is with many diasporas, the Armenian diaspora is also involved in these online social networks, particularly via Facebook. Armenians in the UK, Armenians in London, Armenians in Birmingham, Armenians in York, Armenians in Leeds, Caia Hayashen, Armenian Repatriates Network, and Repat Armenia Facebook pages were explored every day to be informed about the events, ideas and gatherings shared amongst the diaspora and repatriates. The role of social media became particularly apparent during the Velvet Revolution and the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) War of 2020. I used Facebook to observe and understand posts shared and reshared by group members, their political activism and mobilisation around events that are happening in the 'homeland'. Taking into consideration that the war coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, when restrictions on travel and mass gatherings were applied in the UK and Armenia, Facebook was the main platform of engagement and activism for diasporans and repatriates. Thus, it became an important platform for diaspora activism and mobilisation, and as I will discuss in the last chapter, a platform that reveals not only diasporic activity but also inactivity.

## 2.8. Semi-Structured Interviews

The emphasis of this research was on understanding the notion of 'homeland' from diasporans' and repatriates' perspectives; therefore, it was crucial to employ a method of data generation that focuses on subjects' voices and experiences. Qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to obtain detailed and in-depth understandings of interviewees' feelings, perceptions, and experiences from their own perspective (Gu, 2019; Turner, 2010). Thus, giving a voice to my participants

and their experiences was an important objective of this study. Agreeing with the assertion that social actors are "self-reflective, purposeful entities or objects of their awareness, situated in a socio-political, economic and historical context", I aimed to understand how these contexts shape diasporan and repatriate understandings of their positions, group dynamics, life experiences and their relations with the 'homeland' (Malinga and Modie-Moroka, 2020, p. 16). Semi-structured interview was selected as the main method of data generation to allow flexibility and at the same time maintain the focus on a set of topic-centred questions. The interviews were designed to explore a number of themes, including the history of migratory journeys, trajectories of migration, family history, life in the diaspora, integration, links with the 'homeland', and cultural practices. A set of broad open-ended questions were designed to explore these themes. By employing semi-structured interviews, I was not confined to a strict structure but was able to "seek both *clarification* and *elaboration*" on interviewees' answers, therefore, I was able to enter into a conversation with my participants (May, 2011, p. 134). This balance between reliability and flexibility (Franz, 2012, p. 29) was crucial for this study, after all lived experiences of migration, diasporisation, 'homeland' and 'hostland' are complex and multi-layered, therefore require a method of data generation that can capture these complexities.

Two interview schedules were developed: an interview schedule for Armenia and an interview schedule for the UK[2]. Both schedules contained themes on family history, lived experiences, involvement in diasporic organisations, connections with the Armenian community, links and connections with Armenia, perceptions

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[2] See Appendices F and G

of home and 'homeland'. In addition to these general themes, interviews with diasporans in the UK focused on lived experiences of being Armenian in the UK, including diaspora dynamics; cultural and religious organisations and involvement with them, links with the 'homeland' through travelling to Armenia and philanthropy. While the interviews with repatriates were also addressing their motivations for relocating to Armenia, processes of adaptation and integration into the Armenian society, group dynamics with repatriates and locals, and perceptions of their position in the 'homeland' were also explored. Interviews conducted after the Artsakh war of 2020 explored additional questions about the political situation in Armenia, the views on the 'Velvet Revolution' and the outcome of the war. Taking into consideration that there was no set timeframe for the interviews, they ranged from forty minutes to two-hours. It was important to ensure that each interview had its own pace, depending on interviewees engagement and the ability to established rapport. Both in person and online interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Twenty-four interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining were online. For in person interviews, both in Armenia and the UK, participants chose the locations. Two interviews in Armenia took place in participants' workplaces, as that was the most convenient location for them. Online interviews were conducted based on my participants' availability, which was usually after working hours.

Initially, I did not anticipate undertaking online interviews, however, several participants asked if interviews could be conducted online, due to their availability and convenience. There were various concerns about conducting online

interviews such as not being able to establish rapport[3], empathic communication, higher possibility of missing non-verbal cues (Skågeby, 2011) and technical problems (Lichtman, 2014). Indeed, I have experienced technical issues with internet connection, however, this was a short error that was resolved within a few minutes. One of the main limitations of online interviews, particularly in a few cases when my participants asked not to turn their video cameras on, was the limited access to important non-verbal cues (Gillham, 2005). I could hear the tone of their voice, however, was not able to observe non-verbal cues. Yet, in the context of this study, I would like to argue that there is also a benefit for audio interviews, after all, I was able to engage participants who would not otherwise take part in this study. If these participants were not willing to be seen, they would not have participated in face-to-face interviews, therefore, online interviews offered a greater flexibility for interviewees who, for various reasons, preferred not to be seen.

I was also able to reach participants who were geographically distant or had time constrains and could not meet me in person. For example, Varduhi expressed her interest in participating, however, she was living in a remote rural community in Wales and had family commitments and responsibilities, therefore, conducting the interview online at a convenient time for her, was the only way she could take part in this study. Several participants preferred online interviews because of a limited time and busy work schedule. Thus, by offering online interviews as a choice I was able to engage participants who would not otherwise have had the time, ability, and desire to take part in the study. Yet, one of the main

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[3] I address the limitations and advantages of online interviewing in the *Establishing Rapport* section

determinants of a 'successful' interview is the establishment of trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. The next section will address and discuss the process of establishing rapport with my participants in the context of both in person and online interviews.

## 2.9.    Establishing Rapport

Every qualitative interview, as a process of "a shared meaning-making partnership" and "a knowledge-producing conversation", requires a certain degree of trust and rapport (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 128).  Adopting this position, I aimed to ensure that my respondents felt safe, comfortable, respected, and valued by adopting active listening skills and showing my interest in their stories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Bartholomew, Henderson and Marcia, 2000). To ensure that participants are informed about the procedure of the interview, information sheets have been shared in advance. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the aim of the study, the nature of the interview, what topics will be covered, the approximate timing of the interview and that it will be recorded. After explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and how their anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured, I asked for their verbal consent to proceed with the interview.

As part of developing rapport, I started interviews with general questions about my participants' places of birth, age, and their family histories. In particular, questions regarding their family history and origins helped to create a climate of trust and "build a bridge of intimacy" (Holstein and Gulbrium, 1995; in Miller and Crabtree, 1999, p. 97). The latter were crucial for establishing and facilitating a

reciprocal relationship between me and my participants, after all, establishing rapport alone is not enough, and is often a prelude to building trust (Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2014, p. 120). Through active listening, expression of interest and empathy, and body language, I aimed to show that "I see and feel with the other" (Noddings, 1984, p. 30, in Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2014, p. 120). In this process of establishing a relationship, it is important to find the power-balance between the interviewer and the interviewee. To ensure that interviewees are collaborators in the interview process (Maykut and Morehouse, 2005, p. 93) I made every effort to reduce the power difference by asking less restrictive open-ended questions and being an attentive listener (Mishler, 1986). Thus, I approached the interviews as conversations or discussions, where the power is shared between the interviewer and the interviewee (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Very often my participants would also ask about my story of relocating to the UK, or where I was born etc., which allowed to create an open, "two-way, informal, free-flowing process" (Woods, 1986, p. 67). Furthermore, by giving my participants a choice of place and time, I aimed to give them "a sense of control and confidence" (Woods, 1986, p. 30). Online interviews were also conducted when they were convenient for the participants. On a few occasions, interviews were rescheduled and since they were online, there was minimal disruption.

I would like to note that before conducting online interviews via Skype and Messenger video/audio calls, I was apprehensive that I will not be able to establish that sense of trust and rapport. However, this experience has demonstrated that synchronous online interviews can minimise the possibility of power-imbalance because interviewees are given more personal space. Furthermore, several interviewees did not wish to turn their cameras on, and this

anonymity promoted a sense of intimate and honest conversation (Suzuki, et a.,
2007; in Lyons, 2015). Robinson claims that (2001; in Lyons, 2015) anonymous
synchronous online interviews can reduce the power-imbalance between the
interviewer and the interviewee because visible differences in identities and
status are decreased. Indeed, to certain extent it is the case, however, in the
context of this study I would like to emphasise that my identify was visible. For
example, during the interviews in the UK, my accent was a visible marker of my
identity i.e. I was not a UK-born diasporan or a diasporan who was born in an
English-speaking country, and very often my participants would ask where I come
from. The latter led to a process of reflection of my positionality, which is
addressed in greater detail in the next section.

## 2.10.   Dual Positionality

The notion of positionality has been a topic of academic discussions because the
multiplicity of the researchers' social and political positions can impact how
scholars conduct and interpret research (see Joseph, 2016; De Andrade, 2000;
Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Reflexivity has been recognised as the main
approach of reflecting on a researcher's engagement in the field; it is a "critical
reflection of how the researcher constructs knowledge from the research
process" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 275). This is particularly the case in
qualitative research, as researchers 'bring their selves' to the field (Reinharz,
1997), because from the phenomenological perspective, one cannot escape inter-
subjective elements such as their personal experiences, background, and pre-
existing ideas (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity, therefore, is a tool of a continuous self-
evaluation and a critical reflection on "what do I know" and "how do I know what

I know" (Hertz, 1997; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). In other words, it is an active construction of interpretations and the questioning of how these interpretations come about, rather than the description of social 'facts' (Hertz, 1997). Thus, acknowledging and agreeing with Gadamer (1975) I started my research with a perception that I should be aware and recognise my own values and background as a first step. In particular, I had to address my own interest in the Armenian diaspora as an Armenian woman who, as it was outlined in the preface, has had a personal migration experience. This was a crucial step for understanding my own position in this research and ensuring that I "take stock of… [my] actions and …[my] role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of... [the] data" (Mason, 1996).

First, I had to think about my positionality as a woman, and most importantly, an Armenian woman. Armenia is a traditional and patriarchal society, where Armenian women are expected to follow social, cultural, and religious traditions. They are expected to dedicate their lives to their families and households and not engage in the public sphere (Ghazaryan, 2020). The popular or traditional image of the Armenian woman is being subservient (Ziemer, 2011) and feminine, which is associated with "delicacy, obedience, decency, and a willingness to concede, loyalty, etc." (Ghazaryan, 2020, p. 134). Although during the Soviet era, the Soviet government adopted and enforced policies of gender equality, these were reversed back to traditional gender roles once Armenia became independent (Shahnazaryan, et al., 2016). However, for the Armenian diaspora, particularly in the West, gender perceptions changed with dispersion and adaptation to modern life in 'host countries' (Pattie, 2005). Being an Armenian woman, who was raised in Armenia with associated patriarchal gender roles, but also an Armenian migrant

who lives in the West, I can relate to both positions and contexts. Thus, I had to acknowledge and reflect on my positionality as a woman in the Armenian context, and how power relations could impact data collection and my understanding of the Armenian context. I am a young Armenian woman, who was raised in a traditional patriarchal society, however, did not conform to these traditions. I was never obedient nor subservient, quite the opposite, I wished to be independent and not conform to traditional gender roles. Initially, I had concerns that being a divorced Armenian woman, who does not accept traditional gender roles, may have an impact on the interview process with both male and female participants who were more traditionally orientated regarding gender roles. I also anticipated that amongst more liberal and non-traditionalist Armenians, I could have been viewed as an outsider due to my upbringing in Armenia. However, I was able to establish a trustworthy relationship with my female participants regardless of their cultural backgrounds. My gender helped me to establish rapport with my female interviewees, as they seemed more comfortable speaking to a female researcher (Van Maanen, 1988). With male interviewees, there was a certain distance with a few repatriates and diasporans; however, overall, I did not encounter any obstacles or challenges in the process of recruitment or data collection. I realised that my positionality as a migrant, who lives outside of Armenia, was what made me relatable to both diasporans and repatriates (see Berger, 2013).

As was outlined in the preface, I was born in Batumi city in Georgia, however, I have spent the majority of my life in Armenia, the capital city of Yerevan. I grew up in Soviet Armenia, although only for the first seven years of my life. The influence of the Soviet culture or Sovietisation did not end with the independence

of Armenia, as the majority of young people of my generation continued to study with textbooks of the Soviet era, watched films, read Russian and Armenian classics, and overall felt the shadow of the recent Soviet past. As it was with other former-Soviet states, the transition from a communist ideology to a democracy and free market was a long, and for many, a 'painful' process. I remember days, months, and years of power cuts, as a whole chapter of my life took place under the candlelight. There were shortages of water and food and overall, very difficult socio-economic conditions not only for my family, but for the whole nation (see Arakelyan and Kanet, 2012). My memories of childhood are interlinked with memories of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and mass migration from the Republic (ibid). I remember empty streets, cold nights, sealed with plastic windows to preserve the heat inside, smoke from wood burners coming out of almost every house and flat in Yerevan.

I lived through the crucial stages of this transition and only left the country in 2008, which was a time of comparative stability. Thus, my perception of Armenia, 'homeland' and my 'Armenianness' are influenced and shaped by these events and experiences. I had very little knowledge of diasporans, except the stereotypical views of disconnection from the reality of Armenians, and in turn, Armenia as a whole. For me, the diasporan presence in Armenian affairs were abstract and limited to financial contributions. I considered and continue to consider myself a 'hayastancy', an Armenian from Armenia, with all the characteristics that this identification implies. In other words, through this self-reflection I became aware of my position as an 'outsider'. I am not a diasporan, I speak Eastern Armenian and use Russian words interchangeably; I do not have a family history of living outside of the post-Soviet states; and my identity has been

shaped by the realities and experiences of living in Armenia. Furthermore, I was not living in London or Manchester where the biggest diaspora communities were and still are, I was not actively participating in diaspora or repatriate organisations and I was not a visible and active member of the community, both in the UK and Armenia.

It is important to note that my positionality as an 'outsider' is also the result of my participants', both diasporans and repatriates, reactions, attitudes, and questions. One of the most common questions from my UK participants was: "Where are you from?", while repatriates referring to their experiences of living in Armenia more often would say, "you know how it is" or "you might know better" etc. It was clear that my accent and Eastern Armenian dialect were strong identifiers of me being a 'hayastancy' amongst both diasporans and repatriates.

However, my "positionality was not a steady dimension" and after starting data collection, I came to realisation that I have a dual position of being an outsider as well as an insider (Lambrev, 2017, p. 107). Through interactions with my participants, I became aware of my insider position because I am an Armenian, though I may not be a diasporan, I am still Armenian. I speak Armenian, though it is not Western Armenian, it is still Armenian. My participants and I shared the history of exile and relocation, with one exception: my ancestors escaped to the territories of the current Republic of Armenia. My 'roots' are also from Van, in present day eastern Turkey, where Armenians were the absolute majority (Karagueuzian and Auron, 2009). I was an insider due to my understanding of exilic memory that was told and passed down by my grandmother and great-grandfather, a process that many of my participants could relate to.

I would like to note that my migration to the UK has been also a contributing factor in my sense of being an insider. Before starting my research, I had been living in the UK for almost a decade. I was, therefore, familiar with life in the UK, including cultural practices and expectations, and I was almost fluent in English. Amongst repatriates, I was also positioned as an insider because of my experience of living outside of Armenia. In the positionality of my 'insider' identity I found social media to be of crucial importance. Prior to starting my research, I was already a member of several diaspora and repatriate Facebook communities such as Armenians in the UK, Armenians in London, Armenians in Manchester, Armenians in Birmingham, Repat Armenia, and the Armenian Repatriates Network. Through participation in these social media groups, I was virtually connected with the communities, and was informed about the events and activities, of which I commented and participated in some discussions.

Thus, through reflexivity I became aware of my dual position as both an outsider and an insider. In other words, during my fieldwork I was simultaneously taking both positions or as Ergun and Erdemir (2010) suggest, I was in a "betwixt-and-between" position. Indeed, the distinction between an outsider and an insider has been disputed and remains problematic. Some scholars disagree with the insider-outsider distinction, suggesting that it claims "superior positionality for either position" (Swaminathan and Mulvihill, 2018). Agreeing with proponents of this view (see Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Hellawell, 2006), I argue that I was in a continuous process of in-betweenness, after all one's position as an insider or an outsider is relative and on-going (Bolak, 1997). Self-reflection, therefore, became

a tool of understanding and analysing my dual or "betwixt-and-between" position and how it is played out in the context of this study.

## 2.11. Ethical Procedures

In addition to considerations such as understanding my positionality, the code of ethical practice for research in the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent were followed and ethical approval from Student Research Ethics Committee was obtained prior to starting the data collection[4]. The following ethical measures were employed to protect my participants' rights: the research aims, and objectives were explained to the participants, permissions were obtained (verbal and written) before conducting the interviews, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality of my participants have been protected by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms, using pseudonyms in stored data, and not recording or removing unique data that can be linked to a particular participant (Wiles, et al., 2008). Ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality was particularly important for several reasons; first, some of the topics discussed were sensitive and several participants asked me to not include particular extracts in the study. Amongst those topics were the Armenian government and experiences of dealing with the corruption of specific people in power. Additionally, I noticed that participants who were interviewed after the Velvet Revolution and the Artsakh War of 2020, were quite careful about how they addressed and explained their views on the government and the political situation in Armenia at the time. Second, taking into consideration that snowball

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[4] See Appendix D and E.

sampling was used, some of the participants were connected and knew each other, therefore, it was important to ensure that any data that can reveal participants' identities was omitted from the study. Third, it was necessary to ensure that calls for participation on Armenian Facebook pages did not expose or reveal potential participants. I asked to reply to my posts through personal messaging, instead of directly replying to the post.

In addition to these macro-level ethical procedures, I had to make ethical judgements and decisions 'on-the-spot', because ethical guidelines or "'dutiful ethics'" are not sufficient in supporting "the values of human worth and dignity" (Etherington, 2020, p. 82). Thus, my ethical considerations were guided by 'ethics of care' that require close attention and going beyond the minimal ethical obligations (Ellis, 2017). Ethics of care require mutual trust, empathy, collaboration and openness, as well as avoiding harm when ethical considerations are made. Harm is defined as "a setback to a person's interests [including] any aspect of a person's life that that person regards as important" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 278). Prior to starting the data collection, I anticipated that some topics such as the Genocide and family history of exile, or multiple migrations could be sensitive for some participants. Thus, recognising the potential vulnerability of my participants, I maintained vigilance in my responsibility to protect them from emotional harm (Betz and Fassinger, 2012, 265) by approaching potentially sensitive topics with care and caution, showing compassion and empathy, offering to stop the interview, and asking whether they would like to withdraw.

For example, when explaining her journey to Armenia, one of my UK participants became emotional and started crying. This was unexpected, since the conversation was not about the topics that I anticipated to be emotional or sensitive. She was describing her first visit as a "pilgrimage", "a dream to see Mount Ararat" and this is when she started crying. In another interview with a repatriate, when she was explaining what Western Armenia is for her, and how she considers it to be "taken or stolen like a child that is taken from a mother", I saw how emotional this topic was for her. She started wailing up when she was telling me about her experience of visiting Western Armenia. There was a similar emotional response during another interview with a repatriate. The conversation was about the experience of traveling to Van, which is currently in the Republic of Turkey. She started tearing up when describing her travel to Western Armenia, which according to Gayane was "taken or stolen like a child who is taken from the mother". In both cases, I made every effort to show my empathy and compassion by asking whether they would like to stop the interview or avoid these memories and topics.

Thus, my ethical considerations were guided by both the requirements of the university's code of ethical practice and by an ethics of care which expand beyond 'formal' ethical procedures. Furthermore, ethical consideration regarding the anonymity and confidentiality, minimizing, or if possible, avoiding harm, do not stop with the completion of data collection. These ethical questions are equally important during the data analysis, write up and publication of the research (Sriram, 2009; in Brounéus, 2011). In the next section I will address the method of data analysis and other consideration that have been made during the process of data analysis.

## 2.12. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data, because a "theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Yet, thematic analysis is not limited to organizing and describing the data but is used to "assist the researcher in the search of insight" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 6). The aim of this study was to gain insight into diasporans' and repatriates' experiences and meanings of the contested and complex notion of 'homeland'. Therefore, it was crucial to employ a technique of data analysis that can depict rich detail and gain insight into the range and diversity of the experiences and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Being a 'contextualist method', which is positioned within essentialism and constructionism, thematic analysis acknowledges the meaning making of experiences, as well as how broader social contexts affect these meanings. Therefore, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis reflects the 'reality'.

There are two ways that themes can be identified in thematic analysis: inductive, which is the 'bottom up' way, and deductive, which is the 'top down' way (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My analysis was mainly inductive, where themes or patterns identified were linked to the data. Since this study is concerned with experiences and meanings, it was important to employ an approach of identifying themes that explore beyond the surface meanings. Therefore, an interpretive or latent level of thematic analysis was employed to explore and examine the underlying ideas, meanings and conceptualisations. The data analysis process was guided by Miles' and Huberman's (1994), and Braun's and Clarke's (2006) principles of thematic

analysis. Data analysis commenced with familiarizing myself with the data by listening, transcribing, reading, re-reading the transcripts and noting down initial ideas. For efficiency and time management, I started the transcription process after the first interview.

The second phase started with generating initial codes of emerging themes. Although, I initially planned to use only Nvivo, considering it sufficient for data analysis of a large number of interviews, I came to the realization that, indeed, computer applications "do not provide 'automatic' solutions to problems of representation and analysis" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 203). Nvivo was used as a supplement or an "adjunct", because understandings and interpretations are depended on the interactions between the researcher and the data, which cannot be replaced by "mechanistic substitutes" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 203). The third stage of data analysis commenced with searching for themes, where I created codes into initial sub-themes and themes. This was followed by an ongoing process of reviewing the themes, generating a theme map of the analysis, and naming the final themes, which were representative of the sample as a whole.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the methodological standpoint, the methods used and the practicalities of conducting this research. The methodological choices made in this study were driven by the research aims and objectives: what is the notion of 'homeland' for the second and succeeding generations of the Armenian diaspora? Both diasporans and repatriated

Armenians were recruited to uncover the complexity of a place and a space that does not constitute an 'ancestral homeland' for the majority of diaspora Armenians.

It was crucial to explore how the 'homeland' is perceived and re-created within the diaspora, as well as understand the lived experiences of repatriation. The main objective, therefore, was to explore personal experience from diasporans' and repatriates' perspectives. Accordingly, interviews were adopted as the main method of data generation, while thematic analysis was employed as the data analysis technique. The themes that emerged from the data reveal the multilayered, complex, and contested nature of the 'homeland' that is intertwined with diaspora's position in the 'hostland'; diaspora and 'homeland'-'hostland' dynamics; multiple migratory journeys; a sense of estrangement from the 'hostland'; search for belonging; 'homeland' politics and the continuous threat of a loss.

# Chapter 3: The Armenian Diaspora

The migratory journeys of the Armenian nation have been complex and multiple, particularly as a result of the 1915 Genocide, with the trails of survivors linking the Middle East to America, Asia and Europe, including the UK. Although the Armenian presence in the UK predates the Genocide, the bulk of Armenian migration to the UK was a result of both the massacres and later, the collapse of the Soviet Union. Various political parties and organisations were first established in Manchester and later in London due to a larger influx of Armenians, particularly as a result of political instability in Iran, Lebanon and Egypt. Although the diaspora is not limited to London and Manchester, but also includes cities such as Birmingham, Leeds and York, London remains to be the centre of social, religious and educational activities and events. In spite of this, the Armenian diaspora continues to be 'hidden', a rather invisible minority in the UK. This chapter will explore how the lack of community density along with cultural traits and practices, diaspora dynamics and migratory trajectories contribute to this relative invisibility. However, it is the UK's official position on the Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that can be considered the greatest contributor to this situation. The lack of acknowledgement, understanding, the denialist attitudes and close economic relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan deny many Armenians their collective memory and therefore, their history, resulting in a sense of being 'hidden' or 'invisible' in the country where they have settled.

## 3.1. Historical Context

The history of the Armenian people has been characterized by repeated invasions and massacres leading to the formation of diaspora communities around the world. Although, Armenian diaspora groups can be traced back to nearly 2000 years, the largest diasporic communities were formed during the Genocide of 1915. This large-scale dispersion of Armenians around the world differs from previous colonies that were formed in the 7th and 10th centuries (Tölölyan, 2005). During this period, the conflict between Arab Muslims and Byzantines led to the depopulation of parts of Cilicia, which is now southern Turkey. In particular, there has been an acceleration of such population movement between 1033 and 1071, when Seljuk Turks (originating from central Asia were ruling Persia) conquered most of the Armenian territory resulting in a formation of different diasporic groups. The first diaspora was in Cilicia persisting until 1375 when with the fall of Cilicia about 150,000 people had to relocate to Cyprus, Italy and the Balkans (Ajarian, 2003, p. 388; in Tölölyan, 2005).

The second diaspora was formed in Cairo where 30,000 Armenians lived for several generations. A pioneer of this diasporic community was an Armenian aristocrat who converted to Islam (known as Badr al-Jamali) and ruled the region followed by his son from 1073 to 1120. The third diaspora was formed in the Crimean Peninsula as a result of the invasion of Seljuk Turks and became the point of further dispersal to Eastern Europe. The latter led to the formation of diaspora in Poland, which consisted of around 200,000 Armenians. Further diasporas have been formed as a result of the Ottoman Turks' conquest of the Byzantine capital (Istanbul) encouraging the resettlement of Jews and Armenians within the region (after 1492). From 1603 to 1629 Persia's Shah Abbas repopulated the new capital

city Isfahan with around 100,000[5] Armenians whose place of origin was in Julfa (Armenian homeland). With the Russian conquest of its farthest to the south regions by the late 18th century, another wave of migration was formed. There was a policy to promote Armenian migration from the Kingdom of Georgia and Crimea as well as from the homeland to these new territories. In the 19th century, the Armenian diaspora was concentrated around Istanbul and Tbilisi, although some small diasporas had been already established by that time in Egypt, United States, Britain, France, and Bulgaria (Tölölyan, 2005). The largest Armenian diaspora, however, has been formed as a result of the Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. The survivors escaped to the Armenian provinces of the Russian Empire, which later (1918), for a short period of time, became the territory of the Republic of Armenia. In the 1920s it became part of the USSR (as the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) until the collapse of the Soviet Union (Chaloyan, 2017; Tölölyan, 2005).

According to Tölölyan (2000) since the Genocide, there were three main stages of the Armenian diaspora formations: 1923-65, 1966-88 and 1988 to the present. However, for him, it is the Genocide and the Treaty of Lausanne (where the borders of modern Turkey were marked) in 1923 that led to the emergence of "the new Armenian diaspora" (Tölölyan, 2005, p. 43; Tölölyan, 2000). Other authors provide similar chronology, for example Manaseryan (2004) who claims that the formation of the Armenian diasporas can be associated with the establishment of three Armenian Republics. Accordingly, he differentiates between old, new and the newest Armenian diasporas. Dallakian (2004) considers

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[5]The exact number of deported Armenians is unknown, however, in almost all sources the number ranges from 100,000 and above.

the first stage of Armenian diaspora formation after the Genocide to be the first half of the 1920s. The establishment of the Republic of Turkey meant that Armenians could not return to the 65% of their homeland territory, except for about 60,000 Armenians who are settled mainly in Istanbul. The Armenian population of Istanbul largely escaped the massacres, except 1,500 or so leaders of the Armenian community who were killed so as to deprive the community of its leadership, its intelligentsia. These were Armenians of various professions that, in many ways, held the community together including writers, composers (e.g., Gomidas Vartabed), artists, professors, teachers, lawyers, architects, medics and scientists. In the space of a day the Armenian nation lost its world-class poets such as Siamanto, Krikor Zohrab, Daniel Varoujan and many more (Press Reports, in Housepian, 1999). Those who survived, found refuge and created diasporic communities in various parts of the world. Thus, from 1923 to 1966 is the period of 'recovery' from trauma and the formation of diaspora communities (Chaloyan, 2017), although many Armenians (240,000), particularly those who settled in the Middle East, either converted to Islam or joined some form of bondage, therefore losing their ties with their Armenian heritage (Tölölyan, 2005). Others at first lived in the outskirts of cities such as Aleppo, Beirut and Mosul and later emigrated to Western Europe, North America, Argentina and Australia. Armenians in the U.S. sent remittances to help the families who survived, and this "work of survival and development was … a labor of memory more complex than the authoring of literary texts and nostalgic memoirs alone" (Tölölyan, 2005, p. 43).

This phase of community creation and identity maintenance was challenged in the period from 1966 to 1988, when awareness about the 'forgotten Genocide' was raised by the diaspora and the citizens of Soviet Armenia. In particular, in 1965

the remembrance of the Genocide was extended to a public sphere i.e., certain educational and political circles and in 1967 the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex was opened that became a place of pilgrimage for Armenians worldwide (Hovannisian, 1999; Ktshanyan, 2016). This was also the time when attempts were made to reestablish the interrupted relationship between diaspora and Soviet Armenia. The latter, however, produced more ideological fractures between the generations of Genocide survivors and the exiles from Soviet Armenia (Chaloyan, 2017). A number of organisations including the pro-independence National Unification Party were established; the Armenian Dashnak Party became an active agent in confronting Turkish 'denialism' and promoting the memory of the Genocide in North America, Europe and in other parts of the world (MacDonald, 2008). In 1973, a new wave of wider public discussions about the 'forgotten Genocide' arose from the assassination of two Turkish consular officers in California by an Armenian Genocide survivor.

The 1970s and 1980s is considered to be the period when the recognition process began as a result of the activity of groups such as the Armenian Revolutionary Army and the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA)[6], which began to lobby Turkey to admit and take responsibility for the Genocide (Bartrop, 2018). It is important to note that there were disagreements between these groups concerning relations with Soviet Armenia and the Soviet system in general. Thus, these and other ideological tensions led to divisions between the Armenian diaspora and Soviet Armenia, which were particularly evident in the cultural sphere that according to Manaseryan (2004, p. 6) created greater

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[6] There are various views among Armenians about ASALA and JCAG (The Justice Commandos for the Armenian Genocide). Some view these as terrorist organisations and others as guerrilla movements.

divisions between diaspora Armenians and Armenians in Armenia that still exist today.

In 1988, however, two important events became a source of solidarity and unification amongst the diaspora and Soviet Armenia: the devastating earthquake of December 7th and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Verluise, 1995). The diaspora, particularly in the US, France and Canada organised and provided substantial humanitarian and financial aid to the 'homeland'. 1988 was also marked as the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh[7] conflict that was financially and ideologically supported by the diaspora that adopted the motto "no more Armenian land be lost" (Shain, 2007, p. 147). The collective memory of exile and trauma has been crucial in this mobilisation and reestablishment of the relationship between the Armenian diaspora and the 'homeland'. Panossian (2005, p. 229) considers the time period of 1988 to 1991 the phase "when the two entities reluctantly embrace[d] one another", followed by a short 'honeymoon' period from 1991-92 when Armenia gained its independence. However, the latter did not last due to ideological and political differences that led to a six-year hostile relationship between the diaspora and the 'homeland' (Panossian, 2005, p. 233). This was the period of division and conflict as both sides came to the realisation that there is a wide chasm, both ideological and cultural, between them.

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[7]Karabakh also known Artsakh was an Armenian region passed to Azerbaijan by Stalin. Armenians constituted about 80% of the population of Karabakh but in spite of this there were complains of ethnic discrimination and inequality. In 1988 referendum the population of the region voted to become part of Armenia; however, these demands were denied, sparking a war. By 1993 Armenia controlled the territory and in 1994 an agreement on ceasefire has been achieved. Although there have been various short-term escalations since, on the 27th of September 2020 Azerbaijani forces conducted strikes on Artsakh and the civilian population using cluster munitions, Smerch and Grad rockets (HRW, 2020). On the 9th November 2020 a ceasefire agreement has been reached with Azerbaijan's control of approx. 75% of the territory. See Chapter 7 for further details.

Armenians in Armenia were considering the diaspora as "more talk than assistance, as condescending and arrogant, eager to dispense advice despite being culturally 'corrupted'", while the diaspora viewed Armenians in the 'homeland' as "lazy, opportunist, corrupted by Soviet rule - not at all the 'pure' Armenians they were expecting to find" (Panossian, 2005, p.  232). These frictions were also the result of political differences between the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), which was supported by a large segment of the Armenian diaspora, and the ANM (Armenian Pan-National Movement) that won the elections of 1991. Furthermore, these antagonistic relations reached their peak in 1994 when the ARF was banned by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, followed by mass protests in 1996 general election when the re-elected president was accused of electoral fraud. Mass protests led to an attack on the National Assembly and as a result, hundreds of people were arrested subsequently the ARF was accused of organising a coup (Panossian, 2005).

The relations began to improve after February 1998 when Robert Kocharian was elected as the Prime Minister. Panossian (2005) refers to this as the 'reconciliation' period. Both Kocharian's and ARF's approach was similar regarding Armenia's relations with Turkey, The Armenian 'Question', the Genocide recognition, dual citizenship, resolution of the Karabakh conflict, and diaspora and 'homeland' relationship. Kocharyan made attempts to build bridges between the diaspora and the 'homeland' by organising Armenia-Diaspora conferences in 1999 and 2002. There have been considerable investments from diaspora members to fund the renovation of Armenian roads and buildings, to invest in local businesses and encourage tourism. One of the largest projects is the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund (HAAF) that was established in 1992 and has since implemented around

1.300 projects including healthcare, social welfare, infrastructure, sports, and arts (HAAF, 2018). On October 1st 2008, the M'inistry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia was created by the decree of RA President Serzh Sargsyan "to completely and effectively develop, implement and continuously improve the state policy on development of the Armenia-Diaspora partnership and coordinate the activities of the state bodies" (Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, 2012). Various projects have been launched to encourage further investment and create connections and cultural ties between younger diaspora generations and the 'homeland'. However, the Ministry has been heavily criticised in the Republic and by the diaspora as being 'counterproductive'. With the creation of the Diaspora Ministry, the character of the relations of Armenians in the diaspora and the Republic became reduced to 'ministerial body' (Ghaplanyan, 2018).

Despite ambitious plans to build bridges between the diaspora and the Republic outlined in 'Concept Paper on Armenia – Diaspora Development', there was very little explanation on how this will be implemented. The Ministry has been criticized for not meeting the goals outlined in the Concept paper, in exception of small-scale projects such as Ari Tun, which was heavily criticized, and Pan-Armenian expert conferences. The appointment of Hranush Hakobyan as the Diaspora Minister was another criticism as she was not familiar with diasporic experiences of living outside of the 'homeland', but also had a communist background (Ghaplanyan, 2018). After the 'Velvet Revolution' in 2019, the decision was made by the new government to replace the Ministry with the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs which aims to focus on repatriation and integration, support of diaspora communities, maintenance and preservation of the Armenian identity, and strengthen diaspora's engagement in the

development of Armenia. It is still too soon to tell whether the objectives of this organisation will be met, particularly in relation to repatriation and identity preservation, after all "[n]ational identity in the diaspora has become far removed from the 'homeland', particularly from the idea of 'return' to it" (Panossian, 2005, p. 239).

The Armenian diaspora has a history of fluctuating relations with the 'homeland' not only as a result of political differences but also because the current Republic is geographically, ideologically and culturally distant. Moreover, there are two concepts of 'Armenianness' or what constitutes an Armenian nation: The Western perspective formed in Constantinople and the Eastern view of Tiflis and Russia. All the important elements of identity were and still are affected by this West/East division. For example, religious authorities were administratively divided between the Ottoman and Russian empires, and liberalism and constitutionalism were ideologies in Constantinople, while revolutionary activities and goals were more common in Tiflis. Formations of these elements, which constitute the Armenian identity, are one of the main causes of the 'homeland'/diaspora division. After the Genocide, this division became even more profound since the Western concept of the Armenian identity was dispersed in the diaspora and the Eastern point remained in the surviving part of the homeland, shortly influenced by the Communist ideology.

Throughout the 20th century, particularly during the seventy years of Communist rule, these two ideologically different groups of the same nation lived separate lives with very limited and mostly regulated contact with each other. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the RA, these differences

became more pronounced. Panossian (2005) claims that open conversations about these differences are still not welcomed by Armenians, however, the majority of the participants within my study reflect on these issues and differences. Furthermore, the recent 'Velvet Revolution' showed the diaspora's solidarity with the 'homeland', as for a long time there was dissatisfaction with the former government[8]. The losses that Armenia and Artsakh experienced in the war of 2020 and the peace deal signed by the PM Pashinyan, raised concerns about the revolution and the government amongst Armenians not only in Armenia but also across the diaspora worldwide. Thus, after the September 2020 agreement to end military conflict was signed with Azerbaijan's control of the majority of the territory including historic Shushi region, a new stage of diaspora-'homeland' relations began that have to be explored, after all this was another loss of a 'homeland'.

## 3.2. Migration to the UK

By the early 1900s, particularly after the Genocide, the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1922, Armenians around the world lost their homeland and with it, the hope to 'return'. These events also led to a larger migration of Armenians around the world, including to the UK. Although documented Armenian presence in Britain can be dated back to the 18th century predominantly in Manchester and later in London, a larger community was formed in the 19th century and continues to exist (ACCUK, 2015). The first migrants were textile merchants and businessmen, whose main market was

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[8] This solidarity was expressed through various platforms, particularly via social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Being a member of several UK Armenian Facebook groups, I have seen many posts from various members in support of the revolution.

Turkey, which at the time, lacked in technology so they favoured the cheap textile from Manchester. Smaller number of Armenians imported items such as iron and dried fruit from Constantinople (Istanbul). Thus, these Armenians were not low paid labourers, nor were they poor immigrants (George, 2002). By 1862, about 30 Armenians were running successful businesses in Manchester and by the end of the 19th century there were around 50 businesses mainly in Manchester and London (Պետրոսյան, Իսոյան եւ Խուդավերդյան, 1995). In 1863 the first parish was established in Manchester and already by 1870 the first service was held in the first purpose-built Armenian Church: Holy Trinity. Between 1847 and 1900, 65 Armenians took British nationality (Zenian, 2003). By the early 20th century, various organisations and political parties have been established in Manchester: the Hunchagian Revolutionary Party was formed in 1887 and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in 1890. Groups such as the Friends of Armenia was established in 1897, the Anglo-Armenian Association in 1893, in 1888 the Armenian Patriotic Association, the AGBU Manchester branch was formed in 1907 and the British Armenian Chamber of Commerce in 1920 (Zenian, 2003).

By the mid-20th century, there had been a larger influx of Armenians to London, particularly as a result of political instability in Iran, Lebanon and Egypt (Պետրոսյան, Իսոյան և Խուդավերդյան, 1995). Three main periods of Armenian migration to London can be identified (Holslag, 2018). The first period is from 1915 to 1923, was when a community of approximately 100 Istanbul Armenians founded an Armenian Church in London. By the 1950s, this group was comprised of 500 Armenians who also established several political parties (Pattie, 1997). Another small group of around 1000 Armenians returned to the UK from

India, following the Indian Independence. Between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s there was a second wave of migration, which was considerably larger, approximately 2000-2500 people (Holslag, 2018). The majority of Armenians migrated from Cyprus during the struggle for independence, in particular during the 1974 Cypriot coup d'état, when there was a fear of Turkish retaliation. The third wave of migration was the result of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975, the revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. About 1000 Lebanese and 5000-6000 Iranian Armenians migrated to the UK during that time (Holslag, 2018). Thus, in the 1980s there were approximately 10,000 Armenians living in London and the majority were first-generation immigrants from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Cyprus, as well as from Ethiopia, India, Egypt and Palestine (Talai, 1989). Already, by 1994 the number of Armenians in the UK was reaching 15,000 and only 350 were Manchester residents (Պետրոսյան, Իսոյան և Խուդավերդյան, 1995).

According to Holslag (2018) in 2003-04 the number of Armenians in London was reaching approximately 10,000-13,000, from which the majority were from Iran. London also has been a host to many Armenian organisations. In the late 1980s, there were about 22 Armenian organisations, as well as active political parties and movements such as the Navasartian[9] and the Armenian Youth Federation[10] that support the Tashnak party, and the Tekeyan and the AGBU that are linked to Ramgawar (Demirdjian, 1989; in Holslag, 2018). Holslag (2018) claims that the political activities and parties have been part of the community structure;

[9]Navasartian is a centre for formal and informal gatherings.

[10]The Armenian Youth Federation is the youth arm of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

furthermore, the Armenian community in London has always been politically active and involved (Demirdjian, 1989; in Holslag, 2018).

The Armenian diaspora in the UK is not, however, limited to London but also includes cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, York etc. Manchester continues to be a small community that consists of the old diaspora and post-1990s migrants. There are monthly gatherings at the Holy Trinity Armenian Church for a Badarak or Liturgy service followed by a Sunday lunch. Regular events and religious celebrations are organised such as Vardavar[11], Christmas and New Year. Comparatively younger Armenian communities in Birmingham and Leeds constitute mainly of new economic migrants who are in the process of establishing their communities. The Armenian diaspora in Birmingham organises regular Liturgy Services at St Peter's Catholic Church in Bloxwich area of Walsall, while the community in Leeds does not have a place of worship but arrange gatherings several times per year and attend larger events in London. Similar to Armenians in London, other Armenian communities in the UK are not clustered in specific locations and majority of the Armenian population is not actively involved in the wider community life i.e., regular participation and attendance to events and activities organized by diasporic organisations.

Historically, however, it is the Armenian communities in London and Manchester that have been the building blocks of the Armenian diaspora in the UK. They have contributed to the maintenance and development of the Armenian culture and identity for several generations but also were successful in integrating, whether economically or politically, into British society. One of the reasons for this success

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[11] The transfiguration of Jesus Christ (the Feast of the Transfiguration)

can be attributed to the socio-economic background of the earlier Armenian migrants. However, it is the Genocide that played a crucial role here since for the majority of Armenians their homeland was lost, therefore, there was a need to 'build a new one'. It is important to note that in spite of these shared experiences of loss and trauma, it cannot be claimed that the earlier Armenian diasporans share a uniformed identity or "codes of Armenianness" (Talai, 1986, p. 258). Moreover, since the 1990s the Armenian diaspora has been reshaped, transformed and extended to other parts of the UK by the economic migrants from the Republic of Armenia.

Due to the limited data on the Armenian migration to the UK, it is not possible to provide a much more detailed demographic account of the diaspora. For example, according to UNHCR (2018) from 2003 to 2018, 623 asylum seekers and refugees from Armenia have been recorded in the UK and 1,495 Armenian citizens were living in the UK from 1998 to 2005 (UN, 2015). The Armenian Community Council of the United Kingdom (2015) states that there are approximately 18,000 ethnic Armenians including British-born and of part Armenian descent living in the UK. Due to these varying estimates, it is difficult to provide a detailed data on the Armenian population in the UK. Furthermore, the heterogeneous and dispersed nature of the Armenian diaspora leads to a low visibility within the wider UK population. This 'hidden' nature of the Armenian diaspora will be explored in the next section.

### 3.3. A 'Hidden Community'?

As it has been outlined, information about the Armenian community in the UK is limited to estimates; therefore, further research is required to map the demographic data of Armenians in each region, as well as to explore the current developments and changes in the structure of the diaspora. The latter is particularly important because the larger migration from the Republic of Armenia since the 1990s has changed the characteristics and dynamics of this community. Today cities such as London and Manchester are home not only to the older or 'classical' Armenian diaspora but also to more recent economic migrants. In spite of the growing number of new economic migrants, I propose that Armenians in the UK remain 'hidden' from the wider UK population. By 'hidden' I suggest that the Armenian diaspora is 'out of sight' or not 'readily apparent', in spite of its long presence in British society.  In comparison to larger diaspora groups in the UK, Armenians do not constitute a rather small group; they are not clustered in specific locations; they are not visible business owners, their presence cannot be seen from signage in the Armenian script; they do not have a large number of services and shops that serve the Armenian community; and the churches are not built in a unique Armenian architectural 'tradition'. For example, although the Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Manchester is the first purpose built Armenian Apostolic Church in Western Europe, it is built in neo-Gothic style, therefore does not 'give away' that it is an Armenian Apostolic church.

Similarly, the largest Armenian Apostolic Church in Great Britain, St Yeghiche Church in London, was built as St. Peter's Anglican Church. Although, the design of the second Armenian Church in London, St Sarkis, is based on the 13th century free-standing belltower of the church of the Holy Sign within the monastery of

Haghpat in Armenia, it is tucked away in Iverna Gardens, Kensington, similar to 'Hayashen', Centre for Armenian Information and Advice. This small building is located in a residential area of Acton, which is not accidental since there is a larger concentration of Armenians in Ealing, particularly in Acton. However, this concentration is not large enough to leave a "visible ethnic stamp" on this residential area (Aghanian, 2007, 149), after all the majority of Armenian diasporans are dispersed across the UK.

Talai (1989) noted that this dispersion can also be ascribed to a desire to remain socially invisible. Dispersion leads to social invisibility, which results in greater freedom of movement within the 'host-country' (Talai, 1989). This argument, however, can be applied mostly to first and second diaspora generations since the majority of successive generations who were born in the UK, are integrated members of their 'host-countries', therefore, do not actively seek social invisibility to achieve greater freedom of movement. Talai's argument also does not address socio-economic factors or other circumstances that can lead to dispersion, particularly for recent Armenian migrants in the UK. For second- or third-time migrants remaining invisible is challenging since they are the carriers of two or more cultures. Furthermore, the pressure to integrate into the host society can have the opposite effect, leading to a stronger sense of tradition and a desire to stay together (Boutruche, Lyamouri-Bajja and Bourgeois, 2008). My participants did not express any desire to remain socially invisible but rather raised concerns about the scarceness of cultural traits identifying this as one of the reasons for remaining hidden for the wider UK population.

Indeed, there are very few stores and restaurants that serve the community, even fewer in Manchester and most of them are Middle Eastern and Eastern European businesses that serve wider diaspora communities such as Lebanese, Syrian, Eastern European, Russian etc. Practical aspects such as the size of the diaspora and whether it is economically viable to open Armenian businesses in the UK have been discussed by several participants. A thirty-five-year-old Vigen, from London emphasized that not only "London is a very expensive city so to open something in the centre" but also that "fourteen thousand Armenians, they cannot be significant in the British market, in the largest economy of the world, this is nothing".

Armenians in the UK, indeed, are not engaged in the host country's economy the way, for example, the Chinese or Indian diasporas are (Zhou, 2017; Rupa, 2017; Cheng and Katz, 2006). Discussing Armenians in the USA, Bakalian (2014, p. 183) emphasizes the importance of the "supply side of Armenianness" referring to the availability of grocery stores, restaurants, TV and radio programs, churches, schools etc., which is possible in areas with heavy concentration of Armenians. Although Bakalian's (2014) considers this "supply side" to be a stimulating precondition for sporadic participation, I suggest that consequently it also 'puts Armenians on the map' of their host countries, as cultural traits and facilitating institutions are important for the existence, maintenance and *the visibility* of any diaspora, particularly in multicultural urban settings. They, however, require "a demographic thickness – a sufficient number of diasporans to constitute a critical mass in urban settings" (Safran, 2004, p. 17), which the Armenian diaspora in the UK does not have, perhaps in the exception of London; but even there this concentration is limited. This lack of 'demographic thickness' in combination with

diaspora dynamics, diverse migratory trajectories and 'homeland' – 'hostland'

relations contribute to the invisibility of Armenians in the UK.

### 3.4.    Migration Trajectories and Diaspora Dynamics

The history of the Armenian diaspora's migration is "multi-faceted" due to

multiple relocations that led to the development of "multi-layered" diasporic

communities (Thon, 2012, p. 19; Aghanian, 2007). The complexity of migratory

trajectories was a recurring theme in my participants' stories, whose ancestors,

with two exceptions, originated from different parts of Western Armenia and

escaped from the Genocide to Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Cyprus, and later

they or their children migrated to the UK. These journeys of relocation create

cultural layers as diasporans begin to acquire some social and cultural standards

of their host countries. Thus, adopting some of the cultural practices and the

language of the host countries, each diaspora develops in a different direction

from not only the 'homeland' and other Armenian diasporas, but also within the

host-country itself. The latter leads to, what Bakalian (2014, p. 189) referring to

Armenian-American    community    terms    "semi-insulated    subcommunities",

suggesting that if a community is divided into small groupings or networks, then

wider community level mobilization becomes difficult. Similarly, a thirty-five-year-

old Vigen from London reflecting on the Armenians position in the UK suggested

that there are 'sub-divisions' amongst diasporans:

> "The community here is sort of sub-divided into smaller
>
> communities. […] The culture is different like Armenian
>
> culture, European culture [...]. Armenians in London they
>
> like to go for drinks, it's a pub culture, it's more

Anglicized. Armenians from Armenia, they more gather

in their houses and then the Europeans [Armenians from

Europe] are more kind of coffee so it's what people do

that makes them hang out with different people".

Indeed, the Armenian diaspora in the UK is not a monolithic group but a diverse

cultural mix. Furthermore, some of the participants have been 'twice' or

'secondary' migrants, like forty-two-year-old Hermine who was born in Baku and

lived there until 1988 when the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began[12]. Her family

had to move to Armenia because of the escalation of violence towards Armenians

in Baku. After settling in Armenia, which was challenging for Hermine due to

cultural differences, she met her British husband and relocated to the UK in 2009.

One of the characteristics of the Armenian diaspora are these multiple migratory

journeys that create multilayered and intertwined cultural identities and

belongings, where diasporans adopt and adapt some of the cultural practices of

their host-countries. It is exactly the latter that according to twenty-four-year-old

Liana, born in Lebanon but living in Sheffield since 2018 (married a British citizen),

makes the Armenian diaspora unknown to the wider UK population.  She

explained that the "*needs*" of the Armenian diaspora can be fulfilled not only in

Armenian shops, restaurants or other ethnic niches *"because … everybody's*

*needs, especially Armenians coming from different countries, for example, I am*

*cooking Armenian as well as I am cooking Iranian food so my needs mainly, I can*

*get them from Iranian shops or… the Arabic shops for different things"*. According

to fifty-six-year-old Anush, who was born in Ethiopia and moved to the UK when

she was a child (did not specify when), the complexity of migratory journeys and

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[12] The outline of the conflict can be found in Chapter 2, Politics and diaspora: peace-

makers or peace-wreckers?

cultural heterogeneity leads to lack of "cohesion". The latter, Anush suggests, is the main reason for the hidden nature of the Armenian diaspora in the UK:

> "…because for such a large community we don't have a centre, the school isn't what it used to be, there is nothing cohesive and I get it because we come from all over the world but so do they, I guess in the US, so do they in France. […] We don't have anything, do we? And I guess when you don't have a cultural centre, you know when we first came Hay Dun was this centre of the Armenian community. That's where we spent the whole of our Sunday and then, of course, the school and the school was very good. And you know I do see that friends who went to the school are still friends today, their children are friends, so it is fantastic but when all of that becomes fractured, then the whole thing falls apart. So, what is the point of, I guess, a grocery when you don't even have sort of a cultural place".

Anush also refers to the changes that happened with wider migration of Armenians to the UK. According to Anush, what was once a homogeneous diaspora mainly from Cyprus, has been changing and transforming, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union and escalation of conflicts and unrest in the Middle East. These transformations and changes are one of the key characteristics of the Armenian diaspora and the main reason why it is "difficult to coordinate their actions, let alone "unify" them" (Tölölyan, 2014). Although Tölölyan refers to the Armenian diaspora overall, this argument can be applied to the diaspora in the UK as well, since it is formed from primary and secondary diasporas created

by the dispersion of Syrian, Iranian, Cypriot, and other Armenian diasporas. This does not suggest that there are no connections between them, however, there are differences (political, ideological, based on the place of origin, denomination, social status) that create "semi-insulated subcommunities" (Bakalian, 2014, p. 189) that are difficult to coordinate and unify. The latter is in contrast to the Armenian diasporas in the Middle East that are considered to be more unified as they were able to preserve their cohesion through institutions and community density. For example, Armenians in Syria and particularly in Lebanon are more 'visible' because they have successfully established a variety of communal institutions and are also present in many other sectors of the society (Migliorino, 2008, p. 23). Most importantly, however, they remain a Christian minority in a Muslim country. My participants from the Middle East reflected on this suggesting that religion is the determining factor in the 'visibility' of Armenians in the Middle East.

Discussing the Armenian diaspora's position in Iran and the comparative success in maintaining their institutions and community connections, Gayane who was born and raised in Iran (lives in London), suggested that one of the main reasons is the "big difference between two religions". Gayane explained that being Christian is one of the defining characteristics of being Armenian in Iran and one of the features that is guarded by the community. For example, "if a daughter would get married to an Iranian man, you probably would get not banned but probably wished that you were banned from the community … so I think that's how our parents and grandparents kept it going [remaining Armenian in Iran]". In the UK, however, as it was explained by a thirty-five-year-old Vigen from London, there is

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no need "*to keep as strongly together*" because 'the UK is Christian', and is therefore, more "*accommodating*" for Christian Armenians.

> "UK is a very open country and very accommodating and most importantly a Christian country so compared to Armenians who live in the Middle East where they live in a Muslim community, they [Armenian in the UK] don't tend to keep as strongly together. So, they [Armenians in the UK] disperse more and they can become Anglicized a lot more because the English world, both in terms of religion open mindedness, opportunities, they're very open to everyone, they would not discriminate Armenians as you would be maybe in the Middle East so a lot of them disperse".

Indeed, in Muslim countries maintaining their Christianity, language and cultural practices are pivotal for the preservation of 'Armenianness'. For example, if in Western countries, the majority of the younger generation of Armenians do not speak Armenian, in Iran the problem lies in their knowledge of Farsi (Barry, 2019). Although forty-one-year-old Gayane from Iran spoke Farsi, she also mentioned that "*if you start speaking Farsi at home your parents will tell you off. They will say: Do you see any Farsi speaking person here?*". This effort to maintain their 'Armenianness' results in marginalization of Armenians in Iran, which is also manifested in their attitudes about consumption of alcohol and pork, or the Islamic dress code for women (Barry, 2019; see also Sanasarian, 2004). Most importantly, Armenians live in a physical but also social and cultural separation from the Muslim majority. Although, the latter leads to marginalisation, it also results in a sense of 'cohesion' and 'unity' amongst Armenians in Iran. The

physical isolation in particular leads to a community density in specific areas with well-developed and organized cultural traits, which contrasts with the Armenian diaspora's organisation in the UK. Most importantly, Armenians in the Middle East are 'known', while in Western countries including the UK, they are 'invisible', 'hidden' not only as a minority group but also as a nation. The latter is the result of various social, cultural and political factors that will be addressed in the next section.

## 3.5.    'Host-land' Politics and the Denial of Memory

The notion of 'hidden Armenians' or a 'secret nation' has been used by Hadjian (2018) referring to Armenians in Turkey who conceal or discover their origins later in their lives. Adopting this term, I refer to Armenians' position in the UK: their 'hidden' or 'invisible' status not only as a diaspora but also as a nation. This sense of not being known is part of the everyday experiences of Armenians living in the UK, of which some of my participants reflected on. For example, twenty-three years old Ani who was born in Lebanon and married in Sheffield, told me that the majority of the British population does not know where she is from or who Armenians are:

> "Sometimes, I can say twenty percent would go: 'Aw, Armenia, first nation adopted Christianity' and this and that but most of the times they'd say: 'Aw, Albania, yes'. No, no, no Armenia… Of course, they don't know where Armenia is, where I'm coming from, for them it doesn't matter if I am coming from Africa or Armenia. But I don't expect to be recognized because we're very small

country and hasn't put its foot down properly on the

map to be recognized".

This idea of not having "*its foot down properly on the map to be recognised*" is a recurring theme of conversations for Armenians in the diaspora and in the Republic itself. Being an ancient nation, Armenians have been under various occupations until the declaration of independence in 1991, and although, Armenians maintained their culture, language and traditions, this question of recognition continues to be relevant. Indeed, globalization and technological development accelerated this process, since compared to several decades ago, when for example, "In 1975 if you say Armenian, they would be confused and that was very often… the situation [has] actually changed" (Sixty-six-year-old Artavazd from London). Some of my younger participants explained that this change is due to celebrities and influential figures, particularly in the entertainment industry:

"I think what makes it much easier is there is a celebrity

called Kim Kardashian who most young people know...

So, it's not been a struggle recently but growing up it

was before there was Kim Kardashian. You know telling

everybody and people didn't know…" (Twenty-nine

years old Azat, London).

In spite of the changes, however, several participants emphasised the importance of recognition suggesting that they, as individuals, have a "responsibility" and a "duty" to "educate", "spread the information" and "fight for acknowledgement", whether it is by educating about who Armenians are and where they come from or by raising awareness about the Genocide. The recognition of the Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are the 'open wounds' of the Armenian nation, whether in the diaspora or the 'homeland'. The legalistic approach and political

and economic alliances with Turkey and Azerbaijan do not allow the healing of these wounds and indeed, this is the case with the British government's official position on both questions. Although, as it was outlined in the previous section, Armenians in the UK do not constitute a comparatively large diaspora, they do not have readily visible cultural traits and practices, and 'demographic thickness', for many it is the silence and the denialist position of the British government about the Armenian Genocide and their alliance with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that contribute greatly to this sense of 'invisibility' or the feeling of being 'hidden'. Despite long-term lobbying, British government continues to refuse the recognition and acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide (see ACCUK, 2020). Without expanding on a long history of this position, which Robertson (2010) analyses in great detail, I would like to outline that the British government takes the official position that "in the absence of unequivocal evidence to show that the Ottoman Administration took a specific decision to eliminate the Armenians under their control at the time, British governments have not recognised the events of 1915 and 1916 as 'genocide'" (in Robertson, 2010). In June 2006, in another debate Geoff Hoon, for the government, added to the previous statement:

> "The fact is that the legal offence of genocide had not been named or defined at the time that the actual atrocities were committed. The United Nations convention on genocide came into force in 1948, so it was not possible at the time of the events that we are considering legally to label the massacres as genocide within the terms of the convention" (Robertson, 2010, p. 120).

Leaving aside the legal or academic foundations of such a statement (see Robertson, 2010), or rather the lack thereof, this official position denies diaspora Armenians their memory. By memory I refer to the construction and reconstruction of the past influenced by desires, needs and interests of the present. Memory is a "carrier of diasporic identity" (Baronian, Besser and Jansen, 2007, p. 12) and in case of the Armenian diaspora, it is the exilic memory: "a collective shared representation of the traumatic conditions that led to the dispersion of the group from the homeland" (Lacroix and Fiddin-Qasmiyeh, 2013, p. 687).

Although, as I will suggest in the next chapter, participation in public commemorations of the Genocide amongst diasporans in the UK is not large, recognition of the past continues to be important for many of my participants, after all *"with the Armenian Genocide it's like a duty to know and spread this information and keep it alive and fight for acknowledgement"* (twenty-three-year-old Ani from Sheffield). Wolvaardt (2016, p. 111) made a similar argument regarding Armenian-Australians who consider lack of recognition and acknowledgement of the Genocide by the Australian government and the Australian society as "a failure to recognise the massive trauma suffered by Armenians which serves as a lack of recognition of Armenians living in Australia". Kupelian et al. (1998, p. 195) discussing the impact of the silence of the wider international community, particularly where a larger number of Armenian refugees have settled, argue that it leads to a feeling of being "alienated and dishonored".

My participants did not directly or indirectly express a sense of alienation, which presupposes a sense of isolation or estrangement, but rather a sense of being invisible and inaudible; being 'hidden'. Younger generation participants in particular expressed the need to "educate people on that day [commemoration of the Genocide, April 24th] who don't know about it" (Twenty-nine-year-old Azat from London). The need to "educate" is rooted in the silence and lack of acknowledgement of the memory that becomes even more prevalent with the denialist politics of the 'host-country'. The refusal to acknowledge this memory, therefore, leaves diasporans trapped in the past but also confined within the 'host-land' politics. The latter is particularly the case within the British context as not only is the diaspopra's attempts for recognition through lobbying and activism unsuccessful, but they are also complicated by the strategic partnership between the UK and Turkey (Parliament, the House of Commons, 2012). Furthermore, there is also a close partnership with Azerbaijan including UK's official response to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Although, official statements have been aiming to remain neutral, it can be argued that the British government has 'favored Azerbaijan'. This argument is based on various factors including some historical justification, the decision to open a British Embassy in Azerbaijan before opening one in Armenia and more importantly a large-scale commercial involvement of British companies in Azerbaijan (Parliament, Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1999). The frustration and dissatisfaction with this position has been particularly apparent during the most recent escalation of the conflict in September 2020[13].

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[13] The Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) war of 2020 is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7.

Being a member of some Armenian social groups in the UK, such as Armenians in the UK Facebook group, I was able to engage and observe the attitudes, opinions, concerns and overall, the reactions of the members since the first day of the war. Here I would like to note that this Facebook group is the largest online platform, with more than two thousand members, and was particularly active during the recent war. There was a common consensus and frustration within the group that the conflict was underreported in the UK. I had informal conversations with group members who were 'disappointed' with the underrepresentation or the silence of media in the UK. One of the group members told me "I need to do something! Something has to be done. They are not reporting on it and even if they do it is biased towards Azeris". Similar views have been shared by others on social media leading to an organised protest in front of the BBC headquarters that was attended by a few hundred people who were calling for fair reporting and stopping the pro-Azerbaijan bias. This protest was not covered by the UK media and received very little attention outside of the Armenian community, reinstating Armenians 'invisible' status within the British society.

Thus, there are indeed various reasons for the 'invisible' or 'hidden' position of Armenians in the UK, such as the size of the diaspora and availability of readily visible cultural traits, however, the official position of the British government on the Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains crucial here. The denial of memory reinforces this status of invisibility and the sense of being 'hidden', after all "[m]emory […] is the principal ground of identity formation in diaspora cultures" (Fortier, 2005, p. 184). The denial of the Genocide can be considered as the denial of the Armenian history (Wolvaardt, 2016) their victimisation (Kupelian,

Kalajian and Kas1998) or in other words continuing to reinstate their invisibility in the current society.


**Chapter Summary**

The history of the Armenian nation is closely associated with dispersal and migration, particularly after the Genocide of 1915, which led to a widespread 'diasporisation' of Armenians across the world. Events such as the creation of the Republic of Turkey and the Turco-Soviet alliance reinforced the need for establishing long-term communities outside the 'homeland'. The establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic resulted in a period of detachment and estrangement between the diaspora and the 'homeland', with few short periods of reconciliation. These ideological, cultural and political differences were not resolved even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Armenian independence in 1991. The latter, however, does not imply that the diaspora was not involved in the 'homeland' affairs; on the contrary, there were large investments and political involvement that aimed to rebuild the 'homeland'.

The diaspora has been continuously involved in the 'homeland' by providing financial aid, organising charitable events, and working towards the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the UK government and 'fair' representation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, these attempts have been so far unsuccessful due to the strategic partnership between UK and Turkey, and economic interests in Azerbaijan. This denial of history is a denial of memory that constitutes the building blocks of 'Armenianness'; it reinstates the invisibility of Armenians in the British context. Although, there are other reasons for this

'hidden' position such as lack of 'demographic thickness', visible cultural traits, the cultural context of the 'host-country', as well as complex relations and diaspora dynamics amongst Armenians from different parts of the world, the recognition of the Genocide, the silence on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and alliance with Azerbaijan continue to be crucial in how Armenians perceive their status in the UK.

# Chapter 4: Community Life

The Armenian diaspora has been researched predominantly as a historic global diaspora, similar to Jewish diasporas, with particular focus on community associations, migratory experiences and life in the host countries (see Bhat and Narayan, 2010; Thon, 2013; Bakalian, 2014; Davidjants, 2016; Dvatlov, 2016). Considerable discussions have been drawn on diasporic engagement in diaspora organisations that aim to maintain diasporic identity and fight assimilation. Studies that address diaspora-'homeland' relations mainly focused on financial engagement, political activism and pilgrimages to the 'homeland'. While the latter is still important to explore, I suggest that in the context of the third and successive diaspora generations, there is a shift in engagement: personal experience in the form of volunteering, working and living in the current Republic of Armenia. In this chapter, I will discuss the organisational structure of the diaspora, with particular focus on the experience of diasporic participation and engagement. The chapter aims to explore diaspora organisations and Armenians' experiences of engagement in various activities and institutions such as the church and the commemoration of the Genocide, but also comparatively new organisations that are promoting personal input in the development of Armenia through volunteering and working in the country.

## 4.1.    Organisations and Participation: A Fragmented Public Sphere

While the Armenian community is fairly spread across the UK, London remains the centre of social and political activities with almost all organisations and movements headquartered there, including the Armenian Community Council of

the United Kingdom (ACCC) and Centre for Armenian Information and Advice (CAIA) among many others[14]. CAIA is the main centre in London that for several decades supports various needs of the community including asylum support, immigration, housing, welfare advice, and health care. The centre also organizes social gatherings for the elderly to promote health, well-being and reduce long-term illnesses, as well as educational activities for the younger generation such as the Armenian Community Pre-school Group and Hayashen Armenian Youth Club. Similar to other migrant organisations (see Fauser, 2012; Lacroix, 2012), the Armenian centres in Manchester and London are the spaces for community gatherings, cultural events, and practical advice on integration into the host country.

However, they also aim to promote and maintain Armenian identity, particularly among the younger generation through youth clubs, social gatherings, sport, and other activities. The two Armenian Churches in London, St Yeghiche and St Sarkis, offer Sunday liturgy and special commemoration services, as well as organise frequent events and activities. There are also professional and charitable organisations in London such as British Armenian Lawyer's Association (BALA), The Armenian Medical Association of Great Britain (AMA-GB)**,** Ararat Heritage, Armenian Relief Society (ARS), Society for Orphaned Armenian Relief (SOAR, London Chapter), and Friends of Armenia etc. The Armenian Embassy works and cooperates with many of these organisations with the goal of "stimulating the

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[14] Navasartian Centre, AGBU London, Hamazkayin Publishing and Cultural Society, Music of Armenia, the K. Tahta Armenian Community Sunday School, Homenetmen London, and the Armenian Youth Federation (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, London Khanasor chapter).

Armenian identity" or հայապահպանում (preserving Armenianness) (Holslag, 2018, p. 90), creating links and maintaining 'homeland'-diaspora connections. My field trips and interviews, however, reveal that participation in these organisations and institutions is limited to a small number of Armenians, while annual events such as the Armenian Summer Street Festival London and commemoration of the Genocide attract larger participation across a wider demographic. The majority of my participants did not consider themselves to be involved in the community since they were either not attending any diasporic events or were doing so only once or twice per year.

Similar to the Armenian diasporas in large urban areas such as New York or New Jersey (see Bakalian, 1993), regular participation has been identified as challenging. Many participants, including those from London, explained that there are practical reasons for limited or occasional (a few times per year) participation among which long commute, financial constraints, time, and family commitments were the most common. Hakop, a forty-year-old, who was born in Lebanon, was involved in the diaspora in Lebanon through participation in Homenetmen and affiliation with Dashnaktsutyun party (The Armenian Revolutionary Federation), and a large social network of Lebanese-Armenians, but did not continue his engagement when he moved to the UK in 2007. Hakop explained that he has only visited the Church and the Embassy and saw Armenian dance performance once due to time constraints and family commitments. Hakop has also explained that although he has lived in the UK since 2007, this is a new country for him where he does not have a large social circle. However, even though thirty-four-year-old Arpi was born in Northwest London, she did not know any Armenian outside of her family until she was a teenager, and it was only after the Armenian youth club was

opened, she started attending. Arpi explained that she only attended the youth

club for two years and had to stop because of other commitments. Artak, a thirty-

six-year-old, had similar experience in Leeds, as he did not know any Armenians

when he arrived in the UK with his parents at the age of nineteen. His father is a

Lebanese-Armenian, while his mother was British born with "some Armenian in

her background". They moved to Leeds, where he has not met any Armenians and

it was only through a friend in London that he was able to attend the Church

once. Artak described this as a "flying visit" since that was the only time he was

"exposed to the Armenian community there". Indeed, participants outside of the

capital explained that being even a few hours away from London limits their

ability to participate, even more so when they live in remote areas. For instance,

Varduhi, a forty-four-year-old who was born in Syria and married in Wales,

described a sense of being "isolated from everyone" because she lives in a rural

community far from any social activity. Varduhi's family settled in Beirut when she

was fifteen years old and moved to Wales in 2010 to join her husband.

Throughout our conversation, Varduhi compared her life in Beirut, where

"Armenian environment [was] everywhere", to Wales, where "as an Armenian it

is more difficult […] there isn't that warm something.". Indeed, the difference

described by Varduhi is particularly felt by Armenians from the Middle East and in

particular from Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Lebanon was considered "a most ideal

setting" for Armenians not only because of the geographical location but also

because Armenians were present in Lebanon long before the Genocide

(Dekmejian, 1997, p. 426).

After 1915 the diaspora has transformed as a result of the influx of the Genocide

survivors leading to the establishment of "a second homeland" (Dekmejian, 1997,

p. 426), where one can "go from kindergarten through university in Armenian institutions" (Pattie, 2005, p. 134). It is important to note that compared to other large Armenian diasporas such as in North America and France, in the Middle East the Armenian language is retained beyond the second generation (Pattie, 2005), largely as a result of educational institutions. Furthermore, compared to the UK and other European countries (except France), larger Armenian diasporas do not concentrate in one location i.e., the capital cities. For example, in France, there are large concentrations of Armenians in Paris but also Marseille and Lyon. In the US, the largest diaspora group is in California, however, there are also sizable numbers of Armenians in Florida, Texas and Washington DC (Bakalian, 2014). In Russia, which has the largest Armenian diaspora[15], Armenians live not only in Moscow but also in Krasnodar, Rostov, St Petersburg, Vladivostok etc. (Cavoukian, 2013). In the UK, the number of Armenians is comparatively small and concentrated in London where the majority of organisations are.

Thus, for Armenians outside of London, diasporic participation is limited to occasional visits, if any. In relation to this, twenty-eight-year-old Hovsep, from Kent, described the Armenian community as "London-centric", suggesting that since almost all organisations and events are concentrated in London, it is quite difficult for those outside of London to participate and get involved. Furthermore, he explained that even for him, who lives currently in London, not being able to regularly participate led to the feeling of being excluded from the community: "I feel like I am not part of it now because I've not been for a while to Hayashen [The Centre for Armenian Information and Advice] and that's my only

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[15] According to Federal State Statistic Service in 2010 there were 1,182,388 Armenians in Russian Federation

connection". Some of my participants, like twenty-six-year-old Ofelya, who was born and raised in London, were not involved in "anything Armenian" during their childhood and even though they became more interested in their Armenian heritage later on, they were not participating or attending community events.

Those participants who had some kind of experience with diaspora organisations had to navigate through them, particularly if they originated from diaspora communities outside the UK. AGBU and Homenetmen London were among the organisations that were mentioned by a few interviewees. Homenetmen London was established in 1979, and since then has organised various scouting and sporting functions, and fundraising events. It is the only organisation that organises scouting around London, camping trips and Jamborees in Armenia. Only two participants had a personal experience of being a member of Homenetmen and both were born in the Middle East. Hakop, a forty-year-old, was a member of Homenetmen but in Lebanon, where he was born and raised. The role of the organisation seemed to be important because Hakop "grew up in an Armenian boy-scouts and in an Armenian Homenetmen" which defined his political affiliations with Dashnaktsutyun party. However, after moving to the UK, thirteen years ago, he has not been involved in the community because he "was so busy with work".

Similarly, forty-one-year-old Gayane, originally from Iran and now lives in London, explained that although, she herself was a scout in Homenetmen in Tehran, she found the way it is run in London to be quite 'boring' and that is why children "don't want to continue". Gayane told me that children are "pushed" by their parents to go to the scout group, and this is because it is organised and run in "the

old ways". Here, Gayane refers to the reluctance of older generations to find new ways of running the diaspora organisations like Homenetmen, although," nowadays that's not the way, you can't just keep carrying on doing the old ways". As a result of this "old ways" approach, membership and participation in Homenetmen is considerably low. Asatur, a sixty-three-year-old second generation diasporan who considers himself to be actively involved in the diaspora through membership, regular participation and organisational responsibilities, explained that participation in Homenetmen seems to be divided and in decline:

> "Homenetmen participation when it started in 1979, just
>
> the scouts there were 200 of them and now there are 30
>
> of them and then there are the mixtures of Cypriot-
>
> Armenians, Lebanese-Armenian, actually Armenian from
>
> Armenia they do come to that, few Armenian families
>
> closely take part. I have to also say that if the Armenian
>
> situation hasn't changed and it was still part of Soviet
>
> era, it would be shut by now".

According to Asatur, new migrants[16], particularly from Armenia participate in diaspora organisations more than third and succeeding diaspora generations do. Referring to youth organisations, he noted: "Schools really took off when Armenians from Armenia came, in every respect the language, the culture, the events even they took over". Tekeyan Trust in London, for example, has been embracing participation from: "older Armenians, younger Armenians, Armenian from all over do take part there because these are culture issues". By this Asatur means that Tekeyan Trust London was established as a cooperation between the

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[16] Economic migrants from the Republic of Armenian

diaspora and Armenia, therefore the main objective of the organisation is to unite Armenians worldwide through culture. "Hamazkayin [Armenian Educational and Cultural Society], however, is not the same, they remain in their old-fashioned ways, they put a brick wall around themselves".  Asatur suggested that if it was not for the larger migration of Armenians from other parts of the world and from Armenia in particular, the diaspora would be slowly diminishing both culturally and in numbers. According to Asatur, it is through participation of new Armenian migrants that the diaspora continues to exist with its various organisations and institutions. The latter, however, does not imply that new migrants are perceived as 'insiders' by older diasporans.

Although I touch upon these group dynamics in this chapter, more detailed discussion will be drawn about the tensions and divisions amongst 'them' and 'us' in Chapter 5. Here it is important to note that similar to larger diasporas in Los Angeles and San Francisco, new migrants are not included and not always seeking to be included in the American-Armenian community (Ishkanian, 2002). Although Ishkanian (2002) refers specifically to women migrants, her argument is applicable to Armenians, for example, in Switzerland who, according to Dahinden (2010), do not participate in the community life.  Those few who do, get discouraged and disappointed by cultural differences between them and the members of diaspora. Furthermore, these cultural differences are layered with generational differences that can determine younger generation's involvement and participation in diaspora organisations. Gayane, for example, expressed concerns about the future, particularly for the older organisations, as many are out of touch with younger generations, therefore, they are losing their popularity. Furthermore, she considers this to be the main problem for many Armenian communities:

"I don't want to be pessimistic, but I don't think it can carry on for many years […] when you come to the Armenian school and you see that there are these very outdated approach, the approach is still your grandmas style and then you see that children are not really blossoming because of it. You try and bring your voice forward but because the approach is very old, the governors are old, there is no way of really putting things forward […] so those things were always Armenians' problems and back home was the same".

Events that are more appealing to the younger generations were addressed by some participants. The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was discussed by several interviewees as an active organisation which attracts more diasporans, particularly in the last few years. One of the participants was Vigen, a thirty-five-year-old, born in Cyprus and moved to the UK to study in university when he was nineteen. After his graduation Vigen got involved in AGBU and reflecting on his experience, he explained that there is a rise in participation particularly in events such as movie nights, drinks, etc. Annual gatherings such as the Armenian Boat Party aim to attract younger Armenians in the UK, however, they reach a smaller audience and are not widely attended. The latter has been discussed by my participants who suggested that involvement and attendance to diaspora events requires 'effort'.

"I am not an organisation kind of person at all so I wasn't interested in joining organisations […] I thought I'd make an effort… I'd go to things I didn't enjoy; I'd go to things I didn't like, people I didn't bond with yeah, I've

experienced all of that" (Karapet, a forty-two-year-old

from London).

Similar to Karapet, a thirty-four-year-old Hasmik from Cyprus, explained that she

did not get involved much with the community throughout most of her twenties

when she moved to the UK and had to make an 'effort' because of her parents

who were active in the Armenian community in Cyprus. Hasmik's parents lived in

the UK for some time, and therefore had Armenian friends who became the first

point of contact with the community. However, as Hasmik became more involved,

she had to maintain this effort to navigate through different organisations as her

experiences were not always positive. Hasmik finds the relationships and the

dynamic amongst Armenians in the UK and Cyprus "sad", therefore she had to

make choices and "distance" herself from some people and organisations.

"I was only hanging out with the young ones […] I was

asked to join a couple of committees, a lot of arguing,

reminded me of Cyprus. All the lying, back-stabbing and I

have seen the traits that I don't really like, which is, you

know, for some reason we are always jealous of each

other, never happy with each other's successes. These

are things that I find very sad about us as a community

and you know, I distanced myself from some

organisations and joined other organisations 'cause I do

want to help".

It is important to note that Hasmik's experiences with the younger generation of

Armenians seemed to be much more positive. Tensions arose when she joined

organisations that are run by older diasporans and that are embedded in diaspora

politics. Narek, a sixty-six-year-old from London, told me that there were divisions

within the organisations for a long time since even his mother used to discuss this: "my mum used to complain a lot because at that time there were two committees, and they were all one against the other. There wasn't any unity". Narek also acknowledged that sub-groupings continue until this day: "Iranian-Armenians they all stick together […] and they help each other, and this is the problem with Armenian people they [other Armenians] don't help each other". These divisions can be provoked by opposing political views and affiliations, after all, as it was claimed by Holslag (2018) in the UK political parties and affiliations have been part of the diaspora. For example, the Navasartian[17] and the Armenian Youth Federation[18] were supporting the Dashnaktsutyun party, and the Tekeyan and the AGBU were linked to Ramgavar, The Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Demirdjian, 1989; in Holslag, 2018).

However, the divisions extend from politics to culture, after all the diaspora is diverse in its nature and this diversity is manifested through places of origin, cultural practices and different dialects (Ziemer, 2014). Although, these internal divisions into subgroups are not new or unique, as they have been addressed by Talai (1989) regarding Armenians in the UK, while Der-Martirosian, Sabagh and Bozorgmehr (1993) discussed divisions amongst Armenians in Los Angeles, Jews and Chinese in the USA or by Bhachu (1993) in relation to Sikhs and Hindus in the UK, they continue to be an important factor in affecting participation and engagement in diaspora organisations. A thirty-nine-year-old Bakur, who moved to the UK sixteen years ago from Turkey, explained that his attempts to join the

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[17]Navasartian is a centre for formal and informal gatherings.

[18]The Armenian Youth Federation is the youth arm of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

community were "*unlucky*" because he was not able to establish friendships or connections through organisations.

> "I would turn up at the church and you're on your own.
>
> […] I wouldn't be able to do much; I wouldn't be able to
>
> establish a friendship. The friendships came through
>
> friends who I had known from Turkey; their friends
>
> became my friends um. With my search I wouldn't be
>
> able to establish any friendships. It was a low point for
>
> me not having this network".

Bakur continued his efforts despite this experience that has left him at a "low point". He was involved, although briefly, with the church youth group because of the pastor who, as he described, "was the only positive I experienced in the community. Obviously, there are so many good and passionate people, but I was maybe unlucky at that sense". Gayane used the word "commitment" to explain her involvement as a parents committee member of the Armenian school. Although, she described her family commitments to be time consuming, Gayane makes conscious "commitment" to be involved in some of the organisations as she would like her daughter to be brought up with Armenian traditions and values. Gayane, like Hasmik, had to navigate through different organisations and was critical about some that are run by older diasporans. Gayane also discussed group divisions amongst Armenian sub-groups which she found discouraging. However, Gayane was certain that she will keep her "commitment" because as she told me: "it changed my life […] you talk to others, you talk in your language, we have Armenian coffee and we talk and at the end of the day you feel energised". Gayane was referring to the sense of "community" that she was missing, particularly after arriving in the UK from Tehran where she was actively

involved in Armenian organisations. The sense of fulfilment drives Gayane's commitment to continue her engagement and participation in the school. This notion of 'effort' was present in almost all participant discussions; however, it was far more conspicuous for diasporans who moved to the UK from diaspora communities around the world since they had to find and establish connections and relationships, choose from different diaspora organisations and institutions in an attempt to find the 'familiar'. One of the most 'visible' and accessible places for establishing this first point of contact and finding the 'familiar' seemed to be the church.  Majority of my participants attended the church as least once and for many it was their first contact with anything Armenian in the UK.

## 4.2.    The Armenian Church: Belonging without Believing

The Armenian Apostolic Church has a long and strong presence in the Armenian diaspora in the UK for decades. It was the main institution that maintained the diaspora through education, culture, and religion. According to Talai (1989) the Church was, and I suggest still is, approachable even by secular Armenians who, despite their openly atheistic views, would marry in the Church or attend events and activities in and around it. The church, therefore, was, and still is mainly for the second generation diasporans, an important 'institution symbolizing ethnicity" (Safran, 2007, p. 35) and a place of a 'recollection of diasporic origins'. Indeed, almost all second-generation participants confirmed that their connection with the diaspora was established during their childhood and mainly through the church. Fifty-six-year-old Anush, for example, was born in Ethiopia and moved to the UK when she was ten years old. Anush's grandparents escaped the Genocide and settled in Ethiopia where her parents were born. They moved to the UK in

early sixties and lived in North London where "there were an awful lot of Cypriots [Cypriot-Armenians]". Anush grew up with attending St Sarkis and "spent Sundays in Kensington" in Hay Dun (Armenian Home). Narek, a sixty-six-year-old was born in Cairo and moved to the UK when he was three years old. His mother was an Armenian from Beirut, while the father was Italian. Narek's grandparents from his mother's side were Genocide survivors. Narek, reflecting on his childhood, explained that he was "heavily involved the Armenian community" because of his parents' active engagement, particularly in the church. He attended "the Christmas, the Armenian parties in the hotels and then married an Armenian girl [in St Sarkis Church, Սուրբ Սարգիս in Armenian] and used to go to the Armenian dance parties [once a week] where the church hall was". Araks, a forty-four-year-old from Blackpool, was also regularly attending the church with her parents and she is among very few interviewees who continued their participation as adults. Araks' main connection to the community was through the church in Manchester since that was the closest location to reach from Blackpool. In contrast to Anush, a thirty-three-year-old Arthur's family from Manchester would not "necessarily […] go to the Armenian Church in Manchester but have a gathering". Although as Arthur explained, his family was not particularly religious, he attended the Sunday School, where classes of Armenian language and culture were organised in the church basement.

In Manchester, the church continues to be the main area for community gatherings and educational activities, while in London there has been a substantial increase in the number of institutions, organisations, and centres. In spite of this, the church still remains, or at least tries to remain, a multifunctional space for a small number of diasporans: not only a place of worship but also a space for social

gatherings, educational activities and celebrations. Similar to the Armenian diasporas in other parts of the world (see Siekierski and Troebst, 2016), in the UK the Diocese of the Armenian Church remains involved in the majority of events. For example, since 2011 the Diocese is organising an annual festival, the Armenian Summer Street Festival London, that has been widely attended by the diaspora across the UK. It started as a comparatively small event held on the Church (St Sarkis) grounds and later, in 2016, moved to North Acton Playing Fields. Each year the festival gains more attention though social media as it is advertised several months in advance. Data on how many people attend the festival is limited to my observational estimates and the information on social media. The Armenian Street Festival Facebook page shows that 321 people checked-in to this event on the 14th of July 2019, while in 2012 it was 181 people.

Indeed, the festival can be considered among a few events that are attended by hundreds of Armenians. It aims to promote Armenian culture through food, music, and dance, as well as various merchandise and publications. In 2019 the 9th festival took place at North Acton Playing Fields and was attended by both the older established diaspora and new migrants from the Republic of Armenia. Various stalls were set up with traditional food such as barbeque (khorovats) kebab, dolma (beef in stuffed wine leaves), baklava, dried fruit, wine, etc., as well as arts and crafts, books, publications, music, and dance. Only a few of my interviewees have been to the festival due to work and family commitments, and long commute. A forty-one-year-old Gayane from Tehran attended the festival once (she could not remember when exactly) and considered it to be "*not successful*" because "*it was not well organized*". Gayane explained that "*it was too crowded*" and not the best setting for socializing, and "*definitely not for kids*".

Despite the larger participation in the festival or other events that the diocese is involved in, participation in the church itself seems to be occasional and challenged by group dynamics and divisions. These group dynamics are discussed in Chapter 5, however, here it is important to note that they are rooted in the complexity of the Armenian history: escape and migration across the world, memory of homeland, cultural differences and the language i.e., Western and Eastern Armenian. Ziemer (2016, p. 49) refers to 'internal cultural divisions' in the context of the Armenian diaspora in Krasnodar Krai suggesting that they create internal hierarchies. In Chapter 5, I argue that these divisions create internal boundaries amongst Armenians, even in places such as the church, after all for the majority of my participants' participation in the church is symbolic or as it was suggested by Papageorgiou (2017, p. 73) when discussing Armenians in Thessaloniki, "the church offers a sense of belonging but not of believing".

The majority of my interviewees did not find the church and religion to be the defining features of their 'Armenianness', and therefore did not feel the need to attend regularly. Forty-two-year-old Karapet from London explained: "For me going to church meant nothing, it didn't make me more or less Armenian or anything else that we're meant to do that I don't care about" In spite of this, earlier in our conversation he acknowledged that "once you go out of the door there is nothing Armenian in Britain, unless you walk pass the Armenian church every day". Thus, although Karapet suggested that going to the church "meant nothing" for him, he sees the church as the marker of 'Armenianness' or, as Safran (2007, p. 35) argues an 'institution symbolizing ethnicity". Similar arguments were made by the majority of my participants who distinguish

between belonging and believing; they express a sense of belonging, through occasional and symbolic participation, without believing. Almost all my participants, except Ofelya, who "was baptised [when she was a child] in the Armenian Church but have never been back since [...] baptism", have been to the church, mainly St Sarkis in London and Holy Trinity in Manchester, at least once. Their attendance seemed to be occasional, particularly during Easter and Christmas celebrations, which Papageorgiou (2017, p. 73) refers to as "symbolic inclusion" rather than active participation. Furthermore, compared to second generation diasporans like Narek, Anush and Araks, many of the succeeding generation participants distinguished between their culture and religion, and expressed similar opinions to Vazgen's viewpoint:

> "I don't think religion plays much part in a sense of culture and identity to be honest. It's all kind of a very small part, it's our own beliefs so in a sense we sort of always believed that everyone's sense of religion and beliefs is within... it shouldn't sort of transfer into everything else you're doing, that kind of thing".

Thus, if for the first or second generation of immigrants the church was the unifying force that maintained the collective identity or their 'Armenianness', for the succeeding generations it has a symbolic function. Similar observations, that are still relevant, have been made about, for example, Hindus in Britain, where Hinduism has "a status of 'compartment'" that is remembered on special occasions (Knott, 1986, p. 46). Here it is important to note that for the participants who relocated from the Middle East, religion was a strong marker of difference from the Muslim majority of their country of birth; it was the defining and one of the most visible features of being Armenian. However, majority of my

participants, mainly those from Lebanon and Iran, explained that this changed when they settled in the UK. One of the main reasons was the differences amongst diasporans 'here' and 'there'. For example, comparing her life in Tehran and London, Gayane explained:

> "You cannot socialize as an Armenian outside because it
> is a different country, it is a different Muslim law and
> everything. You don't belong to that law, so everything is
> a community, all Armenians go to the Ararat club, so I
> tried to do the same thing, find the community here. Of
> course, it is not as big as it is in Tehran or America, so I
> think here they [Armenians in the UK] are not used to
> having that kind of a community".

By "that kind of community" Gayane means a large and consequently much more established, but most importantly a community that is united on the ground of their origins but also religion. Being a religious minority, Armenians for example in Iran, developed "self-prevention and non-assimilation" mechanisms such as not accepting non-Christian marriages and avoiding involvement in Persian or Muslim culture (Iskandaryan, 2019, p. 134). It is important to note that Iranian Muslims also do not welcome interfaith marriages and there is little interaction between the two communities (Iskandaryan, 2019).  In the UK, however, there is no urgency for such strict measures because Armenians are not a religious minority:

> "UK is a very open country, very accommodating and
> most importantly a Christian country. Compared to
> Armenians who lived in the Middle East, where they live
> in a Muslim community, they [Armenians in the UK]
> don't tend to keep as strongly together. So, they

disperse a lot more and they can be Anglicized a lot

more" (A thirty-five-year-old Vigen from London).

In an attempt to maintain 'Armenianness' and avoid what Vigen refers to as Anglicisation, the clergy, according to several participants, tries to unite and encourage participation and involvement with the church. Thirty-nine-year-old Bakur from Turkey, who lives in London, had a personal experience of involvement with the church youth group because of the newly appointed clergyman who "sort of reignited that community aspect of the church [because …] he was very passionate about Christianity, as well as Armenian identity". Bakur's participation, however, was encouraged by his desire to be involved in "that community aspect of the church", rather than for religious purposes.

Like Bakur, the majority of my participants below fifty years of age did not consider themselves religious and some did not find the church to be part of their Armenian identity, and therefore did not feel the need to attend services. Thus, although the Armenian Apostolic Church makes active attempts to maintain its position and connection through involvement in the majority of organisations and events, church attendance, particularly for the third and succeeding generations, is on decline. The latter, however, does not imply that the church lost its importance as an 'institution symbolizing ethnicity" (Safran, 2007, p. 35), after all the majority continue attending on special occasions and claimed that they would marry or christen their children in the Armenian church. In other words, participation in formal religious institution is less and less necessary for the maintenance of one's identity, particularly among immigrants (Mittelberg, 1999). Gans (1994, p. 578) refers to this as 'symbolic religiosity': "a form of religiosity detached from religious affiliation and observance". However, its importance as a

symbol cannot be understated because "[s]o long as there is a building in London [and Manchester] designated as the Armenian Apostolic Church and a resident priest, the church as an institution is seen to go on" (Talai, 1989, pp. 88). Similar to the church, the Genocide is seen to be one of the characteristics of the Armenian diaspora that ensures the continuation and the maintenance of the diaspora, in spite of the low participation in commemorative activities and events.

## 4.3. The Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide

The commemoration of the Armenian Genocide is held in the Republic of Armenia and in the diasporas across the world, particularly active in the USA, France and UK. Every April 24th, Armenians attend commemorative marches, walks, liturgies, gatherings, and protests that condemn Turkish denialism[19], calling for recognition. In the UK, the largest commemorative activities take place in London, however, events are also held in Manchester. Manchester community organizes liturgy services and gatherings on the church grounds. In London the event is attended by hundreds of Armenians and includes a commemorative march through Central London (including the House of Parliament and 10 Downing Street) and vigil in front of the Turkish Embassy. These marches are organized and attended by the representatives of the Armenian Council UK, Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, Homenetmen London and the Primacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the UK and Ireland. I attended the march in 2018 with a large group of Armenians, the exact number is difficult to suggest as there was a long line of people. Armenians across all ages, families with children, elderly and many young people, walked

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[19] Turkey officially denies that mass killings of Armenians in 1915 constitute a genocide. The official position states Armenian deaths were a result of war-induced causes (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

through central London, holding the Armenian and Artsakh flags, and posters that plea for recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the UK government and condemn Turkish denialism. The symbol of the centennial of the Genocide, forget-me-not, was on some of the posters with adopted slogan: 'we remember and demand'. Posters with family history and pictures of ancestors who were victims of the Genocide, and slogans such as 'Shame on Turkey', 'Turkey is a fascist state', 'Dirty Turkey tries to hide 1915 Genocide' were chanted. The march is also accompanied by a prayer and speeches by members of various organisations.

Only three of my interviewees confirmed that they took part in the march, one of whom was a regular participant. Anush, a second generation diasporan from London, attended the march twice "nearly forty years" ago but stopped going because as she explained it sheds a negative light on the Armenian community:

> "I don't think it has anything to do with the British public, they don't care and why should they care? [...] I think we should be talking about Armenia positively; we bring so much positive things to this country [...] it shouldn't be about recognise something that they don't even know about".

One of the main reasons for Anush's criticism was that it portrays Armenians as 'victims'. She was skeptical about the fight for recognition as it reinstates the notion of 'victim nation', instead of reinforcing a positive image of the community in the UK:

> "We shouldn't be victims, we shouldn't be. [...] Somebody says to me: Yes, you are right it was a Genocide. And? I know it was. Why do I need somebody

else to agree with me? […] Marching once a year is such

a negative, it does not give a positive view to the

average English person in London watching us march.

We would be far better holding banners saying we have

10000 doctors in this country, or I don't know, whatever

it may be, that's much more about us as a community,

what we give to this country would buy us more

friends".

Anush was the only interviewee who had this strong position on the negative attention that the march attracts. Hasmik, a third-generation Cypriot Armenian, considered recognition to be an important factor: "The things I feel passionate about, and I think this is because I am from Genocide family partially, is recognition of the Genocide. That's important to me". It seems that Hasmik's interest was developed through her upbringing and life in Cyprus, which led to writing a dissertation on this topic. Asatur, from London, was the only regular participant of the march since the 70s and had some organisational responsibilities for over 20 years. He explained that Armenian independence played a crucial role in increasing numbers of participation in commemorative events. Thus, according to Asatur, the numbers are increasing because of the new economic migrants' involvement and participation, while the third and succeeding diaspora generations are not involved in the march. Asatur's argument seems to be reflected in my findings as, with the exception of two third-generation diasporans, my interviewees did not attend the march or any other related event.

Some of my participants from the Middle East confirmed that they were involved in commemorative events in their communities in Lebanon and Iran, while in the

UK, they found it difficult to attend due to family commitments. For example, Gayane, as in the case with church attendance, draws a comparison between the Armenian diaspora in Iran and the UK, where Iranian-Armenian community appears to be "very strong" and that is why "every Armenian would go" to the march. Discussing further, Gayane explains that in Tehran Armenians have to unite because they do not and cannot "belong" to the Iranian community, therefore, they tend to "socialise" in the same clubs and organisations. Gayane seems to suggest that there is a lack of unity in the UK, which can also be one of the reasons for her reluctance to participate in gatherings outside of her small friendship group. The latter, however, does not imply that participants who are not taking part in the commemorative events, are not interested or do not continue the memory of the Genocide. The majority of my participants did not reflect on the importance of the march and their participation but told me how their families were affected by the Genocide. Furthermore, the younger generations seem to use other platforms, such as social media, to commemorate and educate.  Azat, a twenty-nine-year-old from London (born in Cyprus), explained that he prefers to acknowledge the day by sending messages but most importantly, by "educating" others:

> "Not so much as attending events or anything but you know I
> send messages to people who are Armenian, we send each
> other messages and I also make sure I educate people on that
> day who don't know about it. […]  so, if I'm with people I'll
> educate them like: Oh by the way today is this day, let me tell
> you about… I rarely participate in an event, it's just almost a
> commiseration with others".

For Azat, participating in a public event is "almost a commiseration" and he would rather educate and inform about the Genocide than be engaged in a "commiseration". Thus, for Azat and other younger diasporans, there is a need and desire to "turn to positivity" (Rigney, 2018, p. 370), which is something that was overlooked by memory studies. The Armenian diaspora is not unique in this shift towards a more hopeful framework. For example, exploring Tamils of Lanka: a Timeless Heritage exhibition Seoighe (2021, p. 169) demonstrates how the London Tamil diaspora attempts to reshape the commemorative practices of state crime and resistance. The exhibition was used "as an intervention into Tamil memory practices in London as […] a new space for community-based mourning rituals".

This shift in how commemoration is viewed seemed to be a recurring attitude amongst younger diasporans that I have spoken to, who are more interested in raising awareness than simply attending commemorative events once a year. Raising awareness takes different forms, for example Hasmik (Cypriot-Armenian from London) enrolled into Genocide studies, wrote her thesis on "Turkey and European Union accession, the Cyprus problem and the Armenian Genocide", while Hovsep from London conducted a multimedia project "on the Armenian… hundredth anniversary [of the Genocide]". These are among many ways of campaigning for recognition, preserving and protecting the memory that has become a powerful tool in maintaining Armenian identity (Kurkchiyan and Herzig, 2005). It is important to note that in the context of the British society, campaigning seems to be particularly important for most of the participants, as the UK government does not recognise and classify the events of 1915 as Genocide.

My participants stressed the importance of maintaining the memory of the Genocide through family histories of escape, survival and new life in the host country. Some even continued their exploration in Armenia and Turkey: "I went to Armenia myself to just find out you know who and what I am and try to understand my history cause unfortunately, I am ashamed to say, that I didn't know much" (Arthur from Manchester). A forty-two-year-old Karapet travelled to eastern Turkey to explore his ancestral homeland. He described his family history, where they come from, how and where they escaped, and how they reached the UK. Thus, like Arthur and Karapet, most of my interviewees were not attending public commemorative events, their engagement was through raising awareness, maintaining generational memories of the Genocide and ancestors' journeys of escape. In contrast to the institutional religion, the Genocide seems to have greater impact on what constitutes 'Armenianness', after all almost every family in Armenia and the diaspora either itself experienced a memory of trauma, death and loss, or knows others who have had (Pattie, 2005; in Kurkchiyan and Herzig, 2005).

These memories have been passed on from survivors of the Genocide to the next generations[20] and the consciousness of this event has become one of "the most important and distinctive factor[s] in Armenian identity" (Kurkchiyan and Herzig, 2005) or as Pattie (2005) argues has become the essence of 'Armenianness'. Furthermore, the memory is also reinforced by 'memory workers' (Seoighe, 2021), including various state and non-state organisations and individual activists,

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[20] For the testimonies of the Eyewitnesses see Svazlian, V. (2011) *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitnesses Survivors.* Yerevan: Edit Print Publishing House.

which play an important role in shaping future remembrance (Rigney, 2018).  As the story is retold, it becomes one of the main integrating forces for the Armenian diaspora and, as Becker (2014) suggests, the lens through which Armenians experience the world around them. Libaridian (1981; in Panossian, 2010, p. 136) argues that the Genocide was "the great 'equaliser' of identity" because being Armenian, particularly in the diaspora, meant being a survivor of the genocide, consequently a member of a community that was traumatised. Thus, Post-Genocide Armenians in the diaspora were not merchants or labourers anymore, they were survivors of the Genocide, thereby, members of a community of sufferers (Panossian, 2010).  Furthermore, since the 'homeland' was lost (except Soviet Armenia) and the diaspora did not have any option to return to this part of the historic 'homeland', diaspora and the 'homeland' no longer co-existed as two parts of one nation. This physical detachment from the 'homeland' and the sense of loss became essential dimension of Armenian diasporic identity (Panossian, 2010).

## 4.4.    Participation in the 'Homeland': Shifting Nature of Diasporic Engagement

As I have previously discussed within this chapter, the majority of my interviewees described their participation in diaspora events as either occasional, rare or inexistent. However, the interviews also revealed that almost all third-generation participants have regularly travelled to Armenia and created either professional and/or personal connections that take them back. In comparison to the second-generation interviewees, the succeeding generations seemed to be more focused on their engagement and participation in the 'homeland' through volunteering,

working and having a personal experience of living in the 'homeland'. Forty-year-old Davit, for example, explained that although he is not attending any community events in the UK due to family and work commitments, he has visited Armenia for more than 20 times since his first trip in 2016. Davit knew very little about Armenia and only after discovering the country for himself his "interest grew". The first visit was for business, but he returned many times to explore and met his wife there.

> "You know when we grow up in Lebanon, we were learning all these things about Armenia, everything about the Genocide. We didn't really learn anything about Armenia the country. […] During our childhood, I never knew anything about Armenia except the Karabakh war or the Earthquake in 1998, so by that time my interest grew […] I started studying more about the country. After that probably I went 20 times, I was like going monthly to Armenia".

Davit discussed the political situation in Armenia, economic challenges and was well informed about current developments. He considered the role of diaspora in the 'homeland' to be important; he himself made a contribution by providing professional workshops in the media industry: "Each one of us who wants to go to Armenia we have to look very thorough, look at the country and see what country needs business wise". Unlike Davit, Vigen, a thirty-five-year-old born in Cyprus, is involved in one of the diaspora organisations in the UK, where he is responsible for coordinating events. Vigen first visited Armenia in 2015 to take part in Pan-

Armenian Games[21] and since then he created connections by attending various events and getting involved with several organisations. Furthermore, Vigen was planning to "do a little project in Gyumri" as a way of helping and contributing to the development of the country because "once you go, you see that there are many areas to help or get involved". Being a Cypriot-Armenian, he drew parallels with the socio-economic situations in Armenia and Cyprus suggesting that he sees opportunities in Armenia because the country

> "is still at a point where it'll appreciate help from abroad
>
> […]. So, in Cyprus if you go to help, they will say thank
>
> you, we are under control, we rather you not help us
>
> and try influence anything, whereas in Armenia if you
>
> get involved, bring money in, yeah do whatever you
>
> want".

Nineteen-year-old Armenuhi from London had similar views about her role in the development of Armenia. She described herself as "very patriotic" and explained that she wants to use her skills to help: "The reason why I did my degree is that I wanted to go and help". Unlike Armenuhi, Ofelya, a twenty-six-year-old from London, was not involved in the Armenian diaspora in the UK and did not know any Armenian outside of her family while growing up. Thus, Ofelya did not have this interest to help before arriving to Armenia, rather it grew after her brother's visit, who was conducting research there. Ofelya wanted to stay longer than just few weeks but "it was such a joy to be involved in so many things" that she

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[21] Pan Armenian games have been established in 1987-88, because of a number of reforms in the USSR that opened a possibility that representatives of various Armenian NGOs, parties and sports organisations in the diaspora might be invited to Armenia. Due to the Karabakh movement and further instability and escalation of conflict in 1991 the initiative was postponed until 1999. From August 28 to 5th September 1999 the first Pan Armenian Games were held in Yerevan and became annual sports event where Armenians across the world take part. In 2019 diasporans from over 35 cities of the world competed in Armenia and Artsakh (Pan-Armenian Games, 2020).

extended her stay for two and a half years. She went to Armenia through Birthright in 2015 for "only two-three months" to volunteer for various projects "but ended up staying there for two and a half years".

Birthright Armenia (2020) was established in 2003 by Edele Hovnanian who visited Armenian twice a year since 70s and studied at the University of Yerevan from 1982-83 with study abroad program and currently resides in New Jersey. Birthright Armenia aims to encourage younger diasporans' participation in the 'homeland' and strengthen the relationship between younger diasporans and the 'homeland' through long-term volunteering, internships and working experiences. The mission is "to strengthen ties between the 'homeland' and Diasporan youth, by affording them an opportunity to be a part of Armenia's daily life and to contribute to Armenia's development through work, study and volunteer experiences, while developing life-long personal ties and a renewed sense of Armenian identity" (Birthright Armenia, 2020). Everyone of Armenian heritage (at least one grandparent must be Armenian) aged twenty-one to thirty-two can participate in the programme. Throughout the last decade the organisation has established strong presence within the diaspora and 'homeland' as a way of introducing younger generation of diasporans to the 'homeland'. Indeed, Birthright was the route to Armenia for many of my participants including a thirty-four-year-old Arpineh, born in London but lived in Sheffield at the time of the interview, who volunteered for a month in various regions of the country. This trip was the first visit to Armenia as she has been "putting it off for years [because it] just seemed too scary really [...] too bigger thing, you're going to the homeland". Arpineh did not want to travel as a tourist but was determined to go to Armenia with a "purpose", so she volunteered at "a women's centre in Yerevan".

Arthur, thirty-three years old, from Manchester, also travelled through Birthright in 2013 to volunteer in one of the universities as a "simulations engineer". Although this was not Arthur's first visit to Armenia, he had family connections there and visited with his family in 1999, he described his memories of this trip as "vague", so he had always wished to return at some point. Because Arthur "absolutely loved it" he "discarded [the] ticket and stayed for another three months and spent six months there". He went back again a few years later, however this time his experience was "a bit different" because he was there as a tourist and family connections were not there anymore. By "different", Arthur was implying that being a tourist and staying in a hotel was "wouldn't say hostile" but not a positive experience. In spite of this, Arthur suggested that he would like to go back at some point since he has diasporan friends who decided to settle in Armenia. After several visits as a tourist, twenty-six-year-old Gloria from London had similar thoughts about living in Armenia. Interestingly, Gloria "had absolutely no connection apart blood with Armenia", she was not involved or attended any Armenian event, organisation or social gathering in the UK and described herself as "quarter Armenian" since it was her grandmother who was Armenian. She could not explain why and how she became interested but described her experience as an "emotional pool […] I felt I need to see it". After a few visits, she decided that she should move to Armenia as Birthright was offering "a kind of introduction" to living and working there. Although she did not like the way the organisation was ran because "it's quite American oriented" and had to leave it after few months, she lived in Armenia for seven months. She met her future husband in Armenia, who was born and raised there, which led to developing long-term family connections through her husband. Gloria did not know what she

could do in the country after leaving Birthright since she was not fluent in Armenian. Not being able to work or volunteer, but also the socio-economic situation in the country meant she had to make a decision to return to the UK. In spite of this, she created a long-term connection with the 'homeland'; a reason or "duty to visit".

A few of my participants described the need for a sense of, what I refer to as, 'permanency' or 'continuous connection'. One of the ways to achieve that was through buying a house there, a permanent place to return to: "That helped us to have a place to go to, so we started travelling again, staying in that house and this is how the connection got stronger with Armenia" (A forty-four-year-old Varduhi, Wales). This sense of continuous connection was also established through regular visits for some of my participants. Karapet, a forty-year-old who was born in London, has been visiting Armenian every year at least once since 2010. Every year his visits became longer or more frequent and he even lived in Yerevan for 6 months. He created friendships and connections there and told me that he plans to continue visiting: "I will always go because I have friends there, because I enjoy exploring the country, because there is no reason not to go, even though I don't think there is anything special about it [laughs]".

As it can be seen, third and succeeding generations' participation or engagement with the 'homeland' is both a practical and personal experience. They engage in volunteering and working opportunities and prefer to travel not as tourists but as active members of the Armenian society. In comparison to the second generation who were providing financial help through donations and a pilgrimage to Armenia

once or twice during their lifetime, succeeding generations of participants have

been more interested in personally exploring life in the 'homeland':

> "Getting more involved with what's going on in Armenia
>
> and being more interested in how I can, as an individual,
>
> create a more positive impact, 'cause I don't believe in
>
> just throwing money on the problem.  I think our
>
> parents' generation would spend money, would send
>
> money to Armenia. It's like, yes, 1988 earthquake – let's
>
> send money, or what happened in Artsakh – let's send
>
> money. […] We have to have more hands-on approach"
>
> (Hasmik).

The latter seems to be a recurring phenomenon in other Armenian diasporas.

Darieva (2013), exploring the generational differences in the 'homeland'

engagement amongst Armenians in the USA, concluded, supporting Ishkanyan's

(2008) argument, that there is an awakening of patriotism and the myth of return,

particularly in the context of the third generation of Armenian-Americans.

Compared to the second-generation, which had transnational interaction with the

'homeland' i.e., sending remittances and supporting their children's mobility, the

third generation is increasingly interested and engaged in personal or face-to-face

participation in transnational social field. Darieva (2013) notes that there is a shift

in the "intensity" of 'homeland' engagement. In the 1990s the second-generation

was interested in long-distance cultural and social engagement such as burying

relatives in Armenia etc., and the third generation is financially and professionally

investing in the contemporary Armenia. Thus, through investing and transferring

the social and cultural capital into Armenia, diasporic 'return' becomes a "civic

'journey to the future'" rather than a return to a sacred homeland (Darieva, 2013,

p. 492). One of the main reasons for such as shift can be considered the independence of Armenia or the existence of the sovereign state. The younger generation has a much more "pragmatic attitude towards Armenia as the future of the nation", although the feelings and the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland are "ambivalent" and changing (Wilmers and Chernobrov, 2020, p. 539-40).

The role of NGOs and organisations such as Birthright is very important in this process of this transnational relationship. These organisations are involved in transnational activities that go beyond nationalistic political rhetoric and expand to humanitarian causes. Organisations such as Birthright and AVC (Armenian Volunteering Corps[22]) take a very different approach to previous organisations such as Dashnaktsutyun (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) that is based on the nationalist propaganda of gaining control over lost lands of Eastern Anatolia. Although, the memory of the Genocide and disputes over the lost lands continue up to this day, the relationship between the 'homeland' and the third and succeeding generations of diasporans is indeed transforming through transnational exchange and philanthropic activities that result in the symbolic 'homecoming'.

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[22] AVC is a volunteering organisation based in Armenia. Since 2001 it offers job placements for Armenians aged 21 and over across 53 countries with 900 active placement partners (AVC, 2020).

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the organizational structure and participatory patterns of the Armenian diaspora in the UK, mainly in London and Manchester. Although the findings suggest that the life of the community remains 'London centric' and regular participation is limited to comparatively smaller diasporic groups, the diaspora is 'alive' through "social and cultural practices… in mixed, bicultural forms" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 649). By bicultural forms I refer to a state of hybridity that is a reproduction of two or more cultural elements, after all the Armenian diaspora constitutes an ethnic group that "necessarily and inevitably developed local, host country-specific "ethnic" features" (Tölölyan, 2001, p. 2). Consequently, the needs of this heterogeneous group with differences in cultural influences from host countries, regional identity, religion (Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant) and language (Panossian, 1999) are difficult to address and fulfil. As a result, almost all third-generation participants explained that they had to 'navigate' through diaspora organisations and institutions. Furthermore, many reported that they had to make 'effort' to be part of the 'community'.

This effort was not only linked to tackling practical constraints such as family commitments and geographical distance, but (for those who were not born in the UK) also to the continuous comparison of their experiences in two diasporas: in the country of birth or previous residence and the UK. Indeed, each diaspora has unique cultural and social features and practices, and this heterogeneity is making the transition from one diaspora to another challenging. In spite of these differences, Armenians in the UK continue their participation and engagement in diaspora organisations and institutions, even though it is fragmented, selective or symbolic.

The church and the memory of the Genocide are two important features of the Armenian diaspora that are used by diaspora organisations, as 'memory workers' (Seoighe, 2021), to maintain the sense of 'Armenianness' or as Vertovec (1999) argues, a common sense of belonging to a group. Although regular church attendance is limited to a small number of diasporans, many of my participants made the 'effort' to attend on special occasions or suggested that they would marry and christen their children in the Armenian church. The latter, however, is not a new development but has been addressed in 1989 when Talai pointed to the decline in Church attendance amongst Armenians in London. Pattie (1991, p. 153) claimed that one of the reasons for this decline is linked to language proficiency: "language skills and familiarity with the rituals and hymns diminish". At the same time Pattie (1991, p. 161) acknowledges that the church as a national institution continues to provide "deep psychological links with the past".

It seems that the symbolic role of the church remains ingrained in diasporic life, after all, almost all Armenians are Christian, though this is in a sociological rather than a religious sense (McCollum, 2004, in Papageorgiou, 2017, p. 73). This 'symbolic religiosity' (Gans, 1994) continues maintaining "the collective work of memory and commemoration" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 50). The latter has a special place in the consciousnesses of the Armenian diaspora, as the majority of them are diasporans because of the mass displacement of their ancestors. The Genocide is one of the most influential "representative memor[ies]" (Ewing, 1990, p. 267), it is this shared past that offers a sense of 'unity'. Though participation in public commemorations of the Genocide were not widely attended, similar to that of church attendance, everyone I had spoken to knew about their ancestors'

journeys of escape. Although practices of maintaining those memories seem to have transformed from public commemorations to private, for the Armenian diaspora, the Genocide continues to be a "carrier of diasporic identity" (Baronian, Besser and Jansen, 2007, p. 12). In her exploration of Shri Lankan and Rwandan diasporas' genocide commemorations, Orjuela (2019, p. 439) emphasises the role of "initially 'meaningless' places" and how they are transformed into "self-referential sites for remembrance", which help in the process of adaptation and "home-making processes" in the 'hostland'. However, the succeeding generations in this study emphasized the need for continuous awareness not through attending or establishing memorials or marches once a year, but through 'educating' and sharing their stories with their social circles. This does not imply that places of memorialisation are not important in commemorative practices but suggests that virtual spaces reshape these practices.

Most importantly however, there is a shift in diasporic activity, which is directed towards active participation in change and transformation of the 'homeland'. In particular, the findings suggest that organisations such as Birthright are taking a much more proactive approach in mobilising the youth around the 'homeland'. In other words, institutions that encourage a long-term stay whether through volunteering or other initiatives, take part in "the institutionalization of practices of connection to the homeland" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 50). Indeed, in the context of this study, the interviews revealed that for all of my third-generation participants, engagement with the 'homeland' seemed to be the focus of their participation. In comparison to the first and second generations, for whom Armenia was a foreign Soviet territory that they could not or did not want to visit, the succeeding generations of my interviewees have been not only travelling to Armenia

annually, but some even lived there for few years. Many of my participants joined Birthright Armenia as a starting point of their involvement and few of them extended their employment, created professional and personal contacts, as well as purchased a property in order to have a place to return to. Thus, for the succeeding generations, a sense of permanency and continuous connection through personal involvement and contribution is an integral part of their participation and engagement with the 'homeland'. Therefore, the move from nationalist political ideology to a transnational exchange of professional and financial help to the Republic itself, seems to be more appealing for the younger generation. There has been a considerable discussion on financial engagement of various migrant and diaspora groups (see Gardner, 2007; Arthur, 2008; Vertovec, 2009; Lindley, 2010; Carling, 2014), while other philanthropic activities in the 'homeland', particularly of younger diasporans, have not been fully addressed. Organisations such as Birthright, Armenian Volunteering Corps and Teach for Armenia offer new connections and links with the 'homeland' through personal experiences. Going beyond *direct* nationalistic propaganda and remote participation, these organisations shift the "intensity" of 'homeland' engagement (Darieva, 2003) with an aim to encourage new waves of repatriation.

I will explore the experiences of those participants who did actually repatriate in this thesis, however, here I would like to emphasise that in the context of this study third and succeeding generations' involvement with the 'homeland' is transforming from symbolic engagement in the 'host-land' to symbolic presence in the 'homeland'.  The presence is symbolic because it is a temporal exploration of the unknown 'homeland'; because 'return' continues to be "subliminal, figurative and symbolic" (Cohen, 2008 p. 138).

## Chapter 5: Diasporans and 'Hayastancys'

Diaspora dynamics are complex and intertwined with notions of origin, cultural heritage and migratory journeys. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, these dynamics create boundaries and divisions amongst Armenians that result in fragmented diaspora groupings. The latter does not imply that they do not share a set of symbols, such as the Genocide, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian 'homeland', and language, that maintain their sense of 'Armenianness' (Aghanian, 2007). However, their cohesion is complicated as a result of multiple migratory journeys and the multidimensional nature of being a diasporan: diverse historical experiences, cultural practices, assimilation, and economic conditions. This heterogeneity has been a subject of limited scholarly discussions (see Bakalian, 2014; Aghanian, 2007; Sabagh, Bozorgmehr and Der-Martirosian, 1990) leading to an argument that "the illusion that they [Armenians] are one language, one culture and one church must be discarded" (Aghanian, 2007, p. 178). Adding to this, I suggest that these differences are manifested particularly between diasporans and 'hayastancys'[23] leading to boundaries and fractures not only amongst these two groups but also between diasporans and the 'homeland'. Hayastancy (Հայաստանցի in Armenian) refers to Armenians who were born and raised in the territory of the current Republic of Armenia, usually several generations, including Armenians who lived in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. The term 'Hayastancy' is used to not only distinguish an Armenian from the former Soviet Union and the current Republic from a diasporan, but also to highlight the differences between lived experiences, 'mentality' and culture. In

this chapter, I explore the continuous impact of 'Russification' on diaspora and 'homeland' relationship. My participants emphasize 'Soviet mentality' and the language, Eastern and Western Armenian, that separate them from 'hayastancys' and accordingly from their 'homeland'. Drawing on diasporans' and repatriates' experiences, I argue that there is a sense of 'otherness' amongst 'hayastancys' and diasporans that is the result of complex historic developments, opposing realities and political-ideological regimes.

## 5.1.    Fractured Dynamics

In the previous chapter, I have emphasised that participation in the diasporic life requires an 'effort' and this is not only due to practical constraints but also as a result of group dynamics that are rooted in complex migratory journeys. The Armenian diaspora has been shaped by multiple migrations as a result of the Genocide, and later the Soviet regime and socio-economic problems after gaining Independence. In other words, the story of the Armenian nation is one of "moving, rebuilding, moving again" (Pattie, 2004, p. 131); it is a story of multiple journeys since many diasporans who escaped the Genocide had temporary settlements, sometimes several, before finding their 'long-term homes'. Furthermore, with unrest in the Middle East and economic instability in some parts of Europe, many diasporans continued these journeys of migration to the USA and Western Europe. My participants were not an exception, since the majority of new migrants relocated to the UK from Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Cyprus. There is also comparatively larger number of migrants from the Republic of Armenia due to economic, political and social problems (Laçýner, 2001). These migratory journeys presuppose adaptation to the new environment and

the maintenance of shared 'hostland-homeland' cultures. Yet, this is a process of adaptation not only for the diasporans who relocate once again, but also for long-term 'settlers' because despite the shared ideology of 'Armenianness', there are internal cultural and political divisions that separate them, particularly between the East (former Soviet Union) and the West. Without expanding on the historic developments that led to these divisions, as outlined in Chapters 3 and 6, I would like to emphasise that this ongoing adaptation requires an 'effort'; continuous conscious attempts. From new migrants, effort is required to adapt to the new environment and the established diaspora of that locality, whilst for the receiving diaspora, effort is required to adapt to the changes that new arrivals bring.

Many of my participants described their participation in various events, activities, organisations and the church as an *"effort"* and a *"commitment"* because of their personal experiences of trying to join or connect with the diaspora. For example, Bakur who was born and raised in Turkey, explained that when he relocated to the UK he had hoped to "contact the community" through the church, which is the first point of contact for most new migrants, however, his experience left him at a "low point": "I would be on my own, looking around me, people with their families and stuff, I wouldn't be able to do much, I wouldn't be able to establish a friendship". Eventually, he "established friendships", however this was through his acquaintances from Turkey. Similarly, forty-one-year-old Gayane, who relocated to London from Tehran, used the word "commitment" to explain her several attempts to find her social circle since divisions between "Easterners" and "Westerners" left her feeling "like people are trying to ignore other Armenians, new Armenians, so you don't feel

welcomed… Some say this church only Westerners go, this church Easterners go, so I didn't know so I've tried all, and I didn't have a good welcome as an Armenian". Gayane found her social circle only through the Armenian dance club that her daughter attends. In comparison to Gayane and Bakur, Asatur, a second-generation diasporan, was and still is attending the church, however, he has also acknowledged that there are divisions and sub-groupings amongst Armenians. These divisions can be seen in the church, where there are groups of "Iranian-Armenians, Cypriot-Armenians or Lebanese-Armenians. Then you will see a group of Armenians coming in and going, coming in and going out, they are Armenians from Armenia, [laughs] I think that's a joke". Asatur implies that there are cultural differences of church attendance and participation between diasporans and 'hayastancys'. By "coming in and going out" he suggests that 'hayastancys' do not necessarily attend the mass from the start or stay until the end, which is what diasporans do.

These fractured dynamics, however, expand beyond the church into almost all organisations. For example, Gayane found her most comfortable environment after "try[ing] it all".  Thirty-five-year-old Hasmik, who was raised in Cyprus but lives in London, had to "distance" herself from some organisations and communities because of "a lot of arguing, reminded [her] of Cyprus, all the lying, the backstabbing". Similar experiences have been discussed by many participants who described differences that create sub-groupings and divide the diaspora into Cypriot-Armenians, Iranian-Armenians etc. These divisions are based on Armenians' migratory journeys or what Gilroy (1993) refers to as 'routes' because these sub-groupings are formed based on ancestors' journeys: the divisions are not linked to where the ancestors originate from, but where

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they escaped to and settled. Thus, it is the place of the long-term settlement or 'host-land', rather than the 'homeland' that is one of the defining characteristics of a particular Armenian diaspora, after all each diaspora has "developed in significantly different ways within the constraints and opportunities [as well as cultural practices] found in particular host cultures and countries" (Pattie, 2004, p. 131). Agreeing with the postmodern criticism of the essentialist homeland orientation (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1994; and Anthias, 1998; Pasura, 2014), I suggest that the Armenian diaspora in the UK is in the process of continuous change and transformation through adaptation, effort, commitment, difference, fractures and complex diaspora dynamics. Due to globalisation, international networks, and social, political as well as economic instabilities of the contemporary world, difference becomes the driving force of diaspora transformation. These differences include cultural practices, historic backgrounds, political affiliations and ideologies, the location, loyalty, and the degree of integration to the 'hostland', as well as the relations and connections to the 'homeland'.

Almost all of my participants discussed their experiences of adapting to these differences by making an 'effort'. The effort is made to adapt particularly to changes that 'hayastancys' bring because compared to the older diaspora, the majority of 'hayastancys' who are from the post-Soviet territories, do not share similar history of migratory journeys. Here, it is important to note that in spite of all the differences and divisions, the diaspora has a shared sense of 'Armenianness' and 'diasporic identity' that continues to be the main uniting force amongst diasporans. After all, being an Armenian diasporan implies shared memories of trauma, migratory journeys, experiences of adaptation to new

cultures, and experiences of similar threats to the collective. Although Armenians from Armenia also share the memory of the Genocide, their experiences of living under Soviet rule and later in the independent Republic led to ideological and cultural chasms between them and the diaspora. The classical or 'victim' Armenian diaspora originates from western Armenia (the Ottoman Empire), while the current Republic of Armenia (former Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) was formed in the borders of the Armenian provinces within the Russian Empire in 1828 (Pawlowska, 2017).

Western Armenian included six Armenian districts (vilayets) in the Ottoman Empire, as well as some populated areas in Persian and Russian Empires, Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), Nakhichevan, Georgian province Javakhetia and Eastern Armenia, which is the current Republic of Armenia. The latter is a "step-homeland" (Kasbarian, 2009, p. 359) for the majority of diasporans because it was established within the Russian Empire and was not affected by the Genocide. Furthermore, seventy years of Soviet regime widened the gap between the diaspora and 'hayastancys' as these two groups of one nation lived in opposing realities. The realities of diasporans were the adaptation to their 'host-countries' and preservation of their 'Armenianness', while for 'hayastancys' this was a time of socio-economic progress and the accelerated process of 'Russification'. Indeed, since the independence there have been substantial changes such as the revival of national culture and language, however, the shadow of the Soviet past continues to influence the diaspora – 'homeland' relationship. In the next section, I will address two important barriers, 'Soviet mentality' and the language, that divide and separate the diaspora and 'hayastancys'. Drawing from the data, I propose that through

divisions between Eastern and Western Armenian languages and what my participants referred to as the 'Soviet mentality', 'diasporans are the visible 'other' amongst 'hayastancys', while 'hayastancys' are the visible 'other' in the diaspora. These diaspora-'hayastancy' dynamics transfer to and add another layer of complexity to diaspora-'homeland' relations.

### 5.2.    "I speak Western Armenian; they speak Eastern Armenian"

The Armenian language is a distinct branch of the Indo-European language family, which became a literary language in the fifth century, and is divided into *grabar* or *krapar* (գրաբար)*,* which is the classical Armenian literary language that is used in Divine Liturgy within the Apostolic church, and the *ashkharabar* or *ashkharapar* (the vernacular; աշխարհաբար). The latter are subdivided by eastern and western dialects that emerged in the nineteenth century when the Armenian homeland was divided into Russian and Ottoman Empires. Dialectical differences between these two languages include phonological and grammatical, as well as variances in the vocabulary, morphology and syntax (see The Programme of Armenian Studies, 2021; Chaninian and Bakalian, 2015; Bakalian, 2014). Armenians living under Ottoman rule used Western Armenian with its different dialects, while Eastern Armenian was the variant spoken in the Tsarist Caucasus and within the Persian Empire. However, it was Western Armenian that became the standard language because of the economic, social and political importance of Constantinople, as well as because it was the centre of Armenian intellectual life. As a result of the Genocide, Western Armenian spread across the world becoming "the nucleus of the surviving authors and emerging voices of the "orphaned" generation in dispersion" (Chaninian and Bakalian, 2015, p. 40), while Eastern

Armenian remained the main language within the territory of the current Republic of Armenia. Russian influence has been crucial in the development of the Eastern variant as language reforms were undertaken during Soviet rule, widening the gap between Eastern and Western dialects. Although various concerns were raised and orthographical reforms were undertaken after independence, there is still a gap between the Armenian literary language and the reformed orthography. The outlined differences add to the West/East divide amongst Armenians and according to Bakalian (2014) make understanding each other more difficult. Adding to Bakalian's argument, I suggest that these differences create a discourse of 'otherness' or a sense of being the 'visible other': Eastern speakers, mainly 'hayastancys', are the 'visible other' for the diaspora, and vice versa. By 'visible other', I propose that language is one of the readily visible markers of difference amongst Armenians, particularly amongst diasporans and 'hayastancys', after all, one sentence is enough for identifying whether one is a Western or Eastern speaker.

Conversations about Western/Eastern Armenian accompanied my fieldwork in the UK and Armenia, as my participants discussed their experiences and the differences between these two dialects. Sixty-six-year-old Tigran from London, for example, found that "It's very difficult to understand Eastern Armenians", similarly forty-year-old Hakob experienced difficulties when he travelled to Armenia: "I was between the Western and Eastern Armenian, I could not understand, yes, it was difficult the first one-two days". Thus, "the way they ['hayastancys'] speak" (Artak, born and raised in London) was one of the most common difference identified by diasporans and taking into consideration that there is a larger number of migrants from the Republic and since 2010 Western

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Armenian is classed as 'definitely endangered' (Unesco, n.d.), some diasporans are resistant toward these differences, while others are more open to accept and adapt. For example, thirty-four-year-old Arpineh from London, chose to learn Eastern Armenian because although there are "more Western speakers here [UK], there are more migrants and every year it's more and more, so they bring Eastern. It's becoming more Eastern." Although, Arpineh identified herself as a Western Armenian, she "just thought on a practical level it makes more sense to speak Eastern. I know that there is a whole thing about Western being a dying language, trying to keep it alive and everything, but at the time that's what the decision was". Arpineh travelled to Armenia and thought that it would be easier to understand 'hayastancys' if she learns Eastern Armenian. In contrast, fifty-six-year-old Anush decided not to continue with her daughter's language classes in the Sunday school, when she was swapped from a Western to Eastern language class: "I don't understand what you are going to say, what's the point?". Furthermore, Anush did not speak Armenian with her daughter because she "wanted her to speak English without an accent", otherwise she will be seen as "different":

> "I think one of the ways to not feel an outsider or have
> any issues is to speak without an accent, that gets rid of
> how you look, how you dress, everything. You open your
> mouth, and you sound English or wherever you leave, if
> in France French, whatever, then I am a great believer
> that you get rid of prejudices, people don't see you as
> different".

Language is the marker of "difference" that according to Anush is more important than how one looks, as it evokes tensions "that give language much of its real and

symbolic force" (Salomone, 2010, p. 69). It is a force that creates insider/outsider

dynamics amongst not only native/non-native speakers but also, as it can be seen

in the context of this study, amongst speakers of different dialects such as

Western/Eastern Armenian. Similarly, Lary (2012, P. 164) explains how the dialect

has become a strong distinguisher between the migrants as outsiders and the

""real" Beijing people".

There are several mechanisms that 'outsiders' employ in reaction to this sense of

'otherness': adopting the local dialect or the language or resisting as much as

possible by maintaining their local dialect or native language. In the case of Anush,

speaking English was important as it will "get rid of prejudice" and secondly, she

did not welcome Eastern Armenian classes for her daughter, as she herself speaks

Western Armenian and strongly identifies as a diasporan. In contrast, thirty-six-

year-old Mushegh from London travelled to Armenia and "was a little bit

apprehensive… [about being able to understand Eastern Armenian] but after few

days we were starting to use their speaking style as well".  Mushegh adopted

"their speaking style" in an attempt to overcome this marker of difference, similar

to what for example, Bosnian Croats do when they are trying to adopt or

appropriate a local Croat dialect (Valenta, Mesic and Strabac, 2011, p. 290). In the

case of the Eastern/Western Armenian dialects, the differences are not only in the

vocabulary but also in phonology, grammar, morphology, and syntax. Many

repatriates describing their experiences of living in Armenia, identified language

as one of the differences between them and 'hayastancys'. Twenty-four-year-old

Arpi from Washington was "shocked about the language barrier because I didn't

understand people here… I was struggling with that for the most part". The

influence of the Russian language on Eastern Armenian, particularly for

'hayastancys' was discussed by many repatriates and diasporans. Lilit, who is forty-three years old and repatriated from the USA, found "a lot of Russian language, which was kind of strange because I thought I was in Armenia". Thus, like many of my participants, Lilit did not find her 'imagined' or expected Armenia and this sense of estrangement is not new, since during several repatriation movements to Soviet Armenia many who did not speak Eastern Armenian were "surprised and disappointed at feeling themselves "strangers in their own land"" (Pattie, 1999, p. 117). Even after thirty years of independence and some changes in attitudes towards Western Armenian (Karamanian, 2019), the experiences of being the 'other' continue to accompany their interactions.

Repatriated participants in particular discussed the difficulties they encountered in everyday communication: "It is hard (Eastern Armenian] and I think I'm getting it right and then just the look of incomprehension: What are you saying?" (In an informal conversation with a repatriate from USA). As a result, some of my participants find themselves in what Salomone (2010) refers to as "in-betweenness", when they mix Western and Eastern Armenian in an attempt to overcome that sense of 'otherness': "my Eastern Armenian is not fluent to I always use Western wards and pronunciation here and there... of course I can see that people get confused or look at me differently" (twenty one year old Pedros, moved to Armenia from Israel in 2017). Forty-eight-year-old Nune from Lebanon explained that she has been laughed at when she did not know Russian words or expressions that hayastancys use: "I didn't feel that they are Armenian even when they talk Armenian half of the words are Russian and they think this is Armenian and they laugh at you because you don't know". Nune was determined that being Armenian, means speaking the language without foreign words, in particular

Russian words, therefore she felt strongly about not adopting the dialect with its Russian influence. Similarly, thirty-four-year-old Hripsime from Iran, who speaks Eastern Armenian in the Iranian dialect, explained that even for Armenians from Iran there is that sense of 'otherness':

> "the way we speak... you can see the difference in us, they should start implementing the Western Armenian language at least not mandatory. When I go to the passport office, and I have the Armenian passport thank you so much for giving me the Armenian passport … but can you please respect the writing system that I have my name in. They correct me and say: 'You are writing your name wrong'. 'No, I don't write my name wrong because I was punished for my spelling when I was a kid. You need to understand that I have my name this way because of my past, because two different parts of Armenia, two different parts of the language. See, if you really want me to come you need to welcome me as I am, not make me like you are and losing my identity".

Despite such resistance and criticism, many Western speakers -particularly repatriates- try to adapt and adopt Eastern Armenian in an attempt to be accepted in Armenia. Everyday experiences of misunderstanding and confusion, as well as desire to 'fit-in' lead to the repatriates switching or learning Eastern Armenian (see Karamanian, 2019):

> "Terrible, there are some days when there will be language barriers and I can't communicate. I get really frustrated and it just feels like I don't want to talk to

anybody and just want to curl up at home and just like

sleep it off. Those days happen once every two weeks or

something, but it's just like knowing at the back of my

mind that like okay there is nothing I can do about it

right now, just has to pass and everything will be good

again… It's an encouragement to learn the language

because most of that frustration comes from not being

able to communicate properly" (Twenty-three-year-old

Tatev from Wisconsin).

Thus, despite larger repatriation movement and migration of 'hayastancys' to the UK, there are still linguistic barriers that position both groups as the 'other' distinguishing diaspora from 'hayastancys' and vice versa. I suggest that in the Armenian context, language, constituting a shared pattern of thinking and a shared culture, defines one's position in the past and the present, in the 'homeland' and the diaspora. I would not go as far to suggest that "[i]t is language, more than land or history, that provides the essential form of belonging" (Ignatieff, 1993, p), but argue that it is *also* language that provides the essential form of belonging, particularly to a 'homeland'. The sense of being the 'other' through language, therefore, continues to affect diaspora-'homeland' interactions; it continues to be the visible marker of difference between the 'homeland' and the diaspora. The lack of state support plays an important role in reinforcing this sense of otherness. Although some effort was made by the Ministry of Education and Science, and the former Ministry of Diaspora, there are no strategic initiatives and mechanisms to save this 'definitely endangered language' from disappearing (UNESCO, 2017; Khalapyan and Zorian, 2014).

For decades the survival of Western Armenian was one of the main diaspora objectives through the support and funding of diaspora organisations and philanthropists such as Galouste Gulbenkian Foundation that included the preservation and promotion of Western Armenian its first funding priority (Galouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2020). Most importantly, however, Western Armenian has been overlooked in the Republic itself. Although, the official language of the Republic is the Armenian language, which presupposes both variants, Western Armenian continues to be neglected (Karamanian, 2019). Western Armenian continues to be perceived by Eastern speakers, particularly from the Republic, as a language of the diaspora. Karamanian (2019, p. 137) claims that the vitality of Western Armenian in the Republic has been "severely reduced" due to the repatriates' experiences of "misunderstanding and less than frequent mockery". In order to avoid confusion and have better chances of integration, repatriates switch to Eastern Armenian, which is 'the legitimate language' that is "bound up with the state" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 45). Thus, the complexity of diaspora-'homeland' relations can be viewed in the context of these power relations, after all, language is an instrument of power and political domination (Bourdieu, 1991).

Here, it is important to note that linguistic adaptation and change is a continues process, therefore, further research is required to explore these patterns of change, 'in-betweenness', resistance, and adaptation. Yet what is evident, is that "language gives cultural access to diverse visions of the world" that goes beyond the personal and expands to national identity and national self-perception (Salomone, 2010, p. 76). Thus language, along with complex migratory journeys, being the mechanisms of developing and maintaining core ideological principles,

created a chasm and a sense of 'otherness' between, what my participants referred to as Western and Soviet mentality, that continues to affect diaspora-'homeland' relations. Therefore, the roots of this 'otherness' are in the historic divisions that took place after the Genocide between Armenians who escaped and settled in the Middle east, USA or Asia, and those who became the citizens of the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Seventy years of Soviet rule did not only affect the language but also led to cultural and ideological differences, which even after independence continue to be the main dividing force between 'hayastancys' and the diaspora.

## 5.3. 'Soviet Mentality'

The role of the Soviet rule and the status of Soviet Armenia as "an authentic homeland" for diasporans has and continues to be a topic of considerable dispute (Laycock, 2016, p. 124) because of the complexity of Armenian migration and historic developments, which meant that "there has been no single, clearly defined center" for all Armenians (Pattie, 1999, p. 85). For the majority of Genocide survivors, it is Western Armenia that constitutes their homeland. Therefore, for diasporans, Eastern Armenia is "a completely different territory" not only geographically but also symbolically (Powlowska, 2017, p. 96), after all, even before the establishment of Soviet Armenia, there were considerable cultural differences between Eastern and Western Armenians (Panossian, 2006). During the years of the Soviet regime, the Iron Curtain, and the diasporisation of Armenians across the world, these differences and divisions deepened. Although, there have been attempts to create an image of a "national home" in the "Soviet paradise", for many repatriates these promises were not materialised (Laycock,

2016, p. 124). In the next chapter, I will outline the organised repatriation movements and how these were far from the promised experience of returning to a 'homeland', as many repatriates faced poverty, repressions, or chose to leave Soviet Armenia. In this section, I would like to focus on the cultural and ideological differences that intensified during the Soviet years, which after thirty years of independence, continue to affect diasporans' perceptions about the 'homeland'.

These differences are combined into one term, 'Soviet mentality', which encompasses two categorically differing historic journeys of one nation, creating an ideological schism between the 'hayastancy' and the diasporan. In literature, 'Soviet mentality' is linked to a specific ideology of anti-individualism, self-sacrifice or the ability to cope with Soviet reality and high levels of corruption (see Cavoukian, 2013; Campbell, 1991; Mikheyev, 1987). In informal everyday interactions, the term is used to explain a 'mentality' that is shared by people living in other post-Soviet states (Cavoukian, 2013). Agreeing with Cavoukian (2013) that it is important not to overemphasise the existence of national mentality and 'Soviet mentality' in particular, I suggest that seventy years of Soviet rule have been influential in creating a shared culture that led to further divisions and a sense of 'otherness' between 'hayastancys' and diasporans. 'Soviet mentality', according to my participants, is a term that encompasses political views, attitudes, values, norms, cultural practices, language and even the architecture and the feel of the place that is 'other' than what diasporans would have imagined Armenia to be. This perception of 'Soviet mentality' is the result of socio-political and cultural influences of 'host countries'.

The majority of my participants in the UK and repatriates in Armenia described and attributed the feeling of being 'other' to 'Soviet mentality', as a result of which the imagined 'homeland' and their compatriots were "different" and "strange" (Gloria from London). One of my participants, twenty-six-year-old Gloria from London, described her first visit to Armenia as "a whole new world" that was "furthest East [she has] actually been" where "Soviet building were rising out of the gloom… and people seemed quite different that [she] was used to". Similar to Gloria, many participants found the current Republic and its citizens to not be what they were "used to" or how they "understood it":

> "There is a clear distinction between Western and Eastern Armenians… Republic of Armenia has a very different feel to Armenia, how I understood it growing up. Overall, it feels like an ex-Soviet satellite, you feel like you're in the Eastern bloc, but my perception is biased because I had a very warm-blooded Middle Eastern-Armenian upbringing" (Twenty-nine-year-old Arsen from London).

Arsen found Armenia and 'hayastancys' to be "less animated", which is in sharp contrast to how Armenians are in the Middle East (Lebanon): "waving their arms, talking very loudly, it's different, it's different, it's different, I think it feels more like an ancestral home". Arsen attributed being "less animated" to years of Soviet rule that resulted in a 'homeland' that is "different" from what he had hoped to find in Armenia. In contrast, thirty-two-year-old Hasmik from London, had a certain perception of Armenia and 'hayastancys', which she described as a "90s perception", such as having the "Soviet mentality, lots of corruption, lots of mafia dealings". She formed this idea from diasporans who travelled during the 90s and

used to say to her: "…don't go there, it's terrible…, it's a shithole, don't go there".

Hasmik was pleasantly surprised when she visited Armenia for the first time, as she "did not expect to like it as much" and, in contrast to Arsen, "found everyone to be warm, to be very friendly... very safe. … there are massive challenges but it's the warmth that gets me. I know that Armenians from Armenia get a bad reputation - a bit cold, Soviet and yeah, it's just the attitude". It is due to this attitude that according to Hasmik, there is "a clear distinction, you can clearly see, you'd know the difference between a Cypriot Armenian and an Armenian from Armenia". It is these differences that create a sense of 'otherness', as diasporans find that:

> "it's very hard to connect with local Armenians if you are
> not a local Armenian, partly it is a linguistic thing… but
> it's very hard to connect with hayastancys if you're like
> not an Eastern Armenian, … but I don't think it is just
> linguistics, I think it's an overhang from Soviet era, it's an
> Eastern Armenian cultural thing as well, Russian Empire.
> It's all these things" (Karapet, who was forty years old
> and lived in London).

It is important to note that these insider/outsider, sameness/otherness dynamics are also discussed by first generations who are born into the diaspora, whose parents emigrated from the Republic of Armenia. One of my participants, twenty-five-year-old Vazgen born in London, whose parents emigrated to the UK from the Republic of Armenia in the early 90s, explained that to "hang around and be close with [he] will be most comfortable with 'hayastancy' Armenians … because of the way we talk, and the mindset is a lot more similar than other Iranian Armenians or the Western Armenians". 'The mindset' refers to the cultural similarities, shared

history and experiences of living under Soviet rule that shaped a collective Soviet-Armenian culture. Indeed, during my fieldwork in the UK, I have noticed that 'hayastancys' create their own social circle and there is limited interaction with Western Armenians. Twenty-five-year-old repatriate Araik, who was born and raised in Glendale, California, suggested that this "divide" is also apparent in Glendale, California. Araik identified Western Armenians to be "culturally so different" explaining that there "is such a huge gap not only economic but also cultural gap… that also set them apart". Life in the Soviet period, therefore, shaped a specific culture and ideology that set two groups of one nation apart. In other words, the divisions into East/West, 'hayastancy'/diasporan, Soviet/non-Soviet 'mentality' created a sense of 'otherness' between diasporans across the world and Armenians who lived in the Soviet and later independent Armenia.

For seventy years, communist ideology, which had a "particular project of shaping citizens' attitudes" (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017, p. 3), was enforced in Armenia. This 'political socialisation' does not encompass only a specific political ideology but expands to everyday life, shaping a society that adapts and adopts certain attitudes, values, culture and traditions. The influence of the Russian language and the speedy modernisation of Eastern Armenians, which included modern concepts of development and progress; shaping certain concepts of culture, nation and national identity, resulted in a "hybrid constitution", a Soviet-Armenian mixture, where 'Soviet' and 'Armenian' are interlinked (Bayadyan, 2012, p. 201). Diasporans across the world lived through a different reality; they adopted and adapted to their host-societies and at the same time were trying to maintain their pre-Genocide culture. These two distinctively different experiences, transformations and changes were bound to influence the cultures

and accordingly, the 'mentality' because "one's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and 'original' in their immediate relevance" (Gramsci, 1995, p. 48; cited in Keshishian and Harutyunyan, 2013, p. 371).

Drawing on Gramsci's argument, it is important to acknowledge that almost thirty years of independence with its "specific problems posed by reality" did have an impact on Armenian society in the Republic. Values of self-interest, consumption, success, and competition were promoted in post-Soviet Armenia reshaping and transforming the culture, and consequently the 'mentality', after all; culture is the "exercise of thought, acquisition of general ideas, habit of connecting causes and effects" (Gramsci, 1917; cited in Jenks, 2003, p. 107). It is due to these changes that many of my participants expressed hope, particularly when referring to the younger generations: "the Soviet culture, which was like waiting for the government or somebody which is not okay … but the younger generation it's totally different, so when the old generation goes the younger generation will be better" (Narine, sixty-five-year-old repatriate from Istanbul). It is important to note that, as it is with other post-Soviet states, the transition was/is not smooth because of inequality, economic and political instability (see Keshishian and Harutyunyan, 2013; Tholen, 2012; Kennedy, 2002; Grusky, 1994).

Due to socio-economic insecurity and the constant threat of war, there is still "nostalgia", even amongst those who were born after the independence, about Soviet Armenia as an "ideal society" (Keshishian and Harutyunyan, 2013, p. 384) that was secure and stable. This 'nostalgia', however, is not shared by the diaspora and repatriates, because of differing lived experiences, but also, as it was

discussed earlier, ideological differences. Thus, these two opposing views, as well as different social, cultural and political experience set apart diasporans and 'hayastancys' positioning them as 'the other'. This sense of 'otherness', therefore, continues to impact everyday interactions, expectations and attitudes not only towards 'hayastancys', but also towards the 'homeland'.

## 5.4. Opposing Realities: Nostalgia, Memory and Discontent

The sense of 'otherness' that arose because of the opposing realities between diasporans and 'hayastancys', is partly maintained partly through nostalgia for the Soviet past. Hayastancys, similarly to many in other post-Soviet states, live in the shadow of a Soviet past which continues to impact their cultural, social, economic, political conditions and experiences. Yet, for 'hayastancys' this nostalgia is particularly prevalent because of the constant threat of war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as the complex relations with Turkey. Although the underlying cause of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the result of the decisions made by the Soviet leaders (Geukjian, 2012), during the Soviet rule these insecurities and territorial disputes were frozen. The Soviet empire drew borders by attaching Nagorno Karabakh to Soviet Azerbaijan, which was a strategic decision to secure their control over Azerbaijan and its oil ports in Baku on the Caspian Sea (De Waal, 2013; Geukjian, 2012). This has been a momentous decision for Armenians, as it meant a great national loss of the ancestral homeland. Despite some attempts to challenge this decision, the Nagorno-Karabakh question was supressed by Soviet authorities until late 1980s. Since 1988 Armenia experienced war, a devastating earthquake, blockade, and energy crises which led to labour migration, separation of families and economic

instability (Dudwick, 2003). Thus, this period of comparative stability and economic prosperity coupled with selective memory has led to a nostalgia for the Soviet-era.

By nostalgia I refer to the passed down selective memory, a "restorative discourse through which individuals express sentiments about inclusive citizenship and reclaim their dignity, respect and recognition by transporting themselves onto an idealised chronotope of the Soviet past" (Klumbyte, 2008, p. 30). For citizens of the former Soviet republics, this nostalgia is the reaction to economic deprivation, insecurities of the present and a lack of a uniting ideology of the post-Soviet regimes (see Dadabaev, 2020; Keshishyan and Harutyunyan, 2013; Klumbyte, 2008). In Lithuania, for example, this nostalgic sentiment is mostly experienced amongst the marginalised population (Klumbyte, 2008) because sudden changes that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union revealed a contrasting reality that was far from being secure or stable. Dadabaev (2020) criticises this focus on post-Soviet nostalgia as the reaction to complex socio-economic transition of post-Soviet states, suggesting that there is an overall understanding that it was not the time of fewer problems. However, it is important to emphasise that nostalgia is the reaction to the realities of the present, after all the root of nostalgic longing is "a sentiment of loss and displacement" (Boym, 2001, p, xiii) that leads to "a yearning for a different time" (ibid, p. xv). This yearning for the past is also the result of "the critical reassessment of the present" in CA states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (Dadabaev, 2020). The re-assessment of the new post-Soviet system or the "restorative discourse" (Ibid, p. 30) continues to shape the idealised image of the Soviet times even amongst the younger generation.

Research by Kasamara and Sorokina (2015) with a group of a hundred students from the leading Moscow universities revealed that the Soviet era is viewed as the time of moral ideals and strong social security. This view is the result of the 'restorative discourse' and "the mythologized consciousness of the past generations" (Kasamara and Sorokina's, 2015, p. 144), after all, the respondents had little knowledge and vague ideas about the totalitarian regime. Their perceptions stemmed from their dissatisfaction with contemporary Russia's weak cultural, educational, economic, and healthcare systems. Views of the younger generation (from thirty-one to thirty-seven years old) in three regions of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were explored in a study conducted by Tholen et.al. (2012). Respondents of all regions were dissatisfied with the scarcity of jobs available that led to labour migration of their relatives and family members. One of the findings was the sense of nostalgia for the communist past that derives from the hardships of the present. According to Tholen et al. (2012, p. 7), the younger generation "re-elaborate[s] this form of 'nostalgia'" from the older generation. Thus, nostalgia in post-Soviet states is linked to the discontent with the present which influences views about the past, and Armenia is not an exception.

When addressing younger generations' attitudes towards Soviet Armenia, Keshishyan and Harutyunyan (2013) concluded that although their participants did not live under the Soviet rule or were too young to remember, they too were nostalgic about social security such as free accommodation, job security, free education etc. Although, they were also "euphoric" about the benefits of contemporary Armenia (free speech, some degree of democracy, individuality, freedom to travel and access to communication technology etc.), they were

nostalgic about the collectivist society. Furthermore, these attitudes persisted amongst other age groups (older generation) as well, mainly due to the difficult transitional stage, because even after three decades of independence, Armenia is still in the state of in-betweenness, in the state of post-socialist transition. The Soviet past or rather the restorative discourse continues to impact perceptions and worldviews of 'hayastancys' as they reflect on their present. Diasporans' perceptions of the Soviet Union, and Soviet Armenia in particular, are substantially different as the Bolshevik's rule began with great sacrifices for Armenians. When Armenia became a Soviet state, many leaders escaped to Iran or were arrested. Artsakh (Karabakh) and Nakhichevan were given to Azerbaijan, whereas the Armenian provinces of Kars and Ardahan, that were captured by the Russians, were given to Turkey. Mt. Ararat, which had never been part of Turkish territories and has been a symbolic emblem to Armenians, was also handed to Turkey (Bournoutian, 1994).

These political decisions divided the diaspora amongst those who accepted Soviet rule (the Ramgavar and Hunchak parties) and the most popular, Dashnaktsutyun party, which had an anti-Soviet stance and was aiming for an independent and united Armenia (Pattie, 2005). The influence of the Dashnaktsutyun party was substantial as it was even considered to be 'a government in exile' that led, although briefly, the Republic of Armenian through independence after WWI (Tölölyan, 1991; Pattie, 2001). The influence of their ideology was maintained through cultural organisations such as the Hamazkaine and the Armenian Youth Federation that had the largest memberships in the diaspora (Pattie, 2001). Although, there has been a shift in the relationship between diaspora and Soviet Armenia in 1965, when the first commemoration of the Genocide was allowed by

the Soviet authorities (Shain, 2007; Bournoutian, 1994), there was an atmosphere of distrust towards the regime and Russia in particular. Since Armenia's independence in 1991 diaspora-'homeland' relationship had its challenges and attempts to bridge the differences. Diasporans and 'hayastancys' have contrastingly different experiences and therefore different views on the impact of the Sovietisation of Armenia. While Armenians in the Soviet Republic were focused on modernisation and progress, diasporans were preoccupied with maintaining their 'Armenianness' and resisting assimilation. These two opposing necessities widened the cultural and ideological gap between diasporans and 'hayastancys', leading to a sense of 'otherness' that continues to impact the relationship between these two groups of one nation.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature on diaspora studies and the Armenian diaspora in particular, has focused on the characteristics of what is known as a 'classical', 'archetypical' or 'prototypical' diaspora. When referring to the Armenian diaspora, the emphasis has been on the Genocide and the forced migration of Armenians around the world, who are joined by shared ethnic features, collective myths and desires, and a mutual desire of 'return'. The Armenian diaspora continues to be viewed as predominantly a 'classical' or 'victim' diaspora. This approach, however, undermines the complexity of diaspora dynamics within the diaspora itself, as well as between the diasporans and 'hayastancys', consequently between the diaspora and the 'homeland'. For Armenians, the notion of 'homeland' is ambiguous and contested not only because of the complexities associated with different places of origin, but mainly due to different historical developments

after the Genocide. As the majority of the survivors settled in different parts of the world, they became 'frozen' in pre-Genocide culture. I do not imply that the diaspora did not experience assimilation and adaptation to their host societies but suggest that their sense of 'Armenianness' was preserved in their pre-Genocide memory. Soviet Armenian society, on the other hand, went through socio-political, economic and cultural transformations that resulted in the notions of 'Sovetsky chelovek' (Советский человек - Soviet man), 'Sovetskoe obshestvo' (Советское общество – Soviet society) and 'Sovetsky narod' (Советский народ – Soviet nation). A new form of 'Armenianness', which was a mix of 'Armenian' and 'Soviet' developed, widening the gap between the diaspora and 'hayastancys'.

Language played an important role in this process, after all, while the Western Armenian language became crucial in maintaining the diasporic identity and resisting threats of assimilation, Eastern Armenian became heavily influenced by the Russian language. Explaining their experiences in the UK and Armenia, my participants emphasised this linguistic divide as a visible marker of difference that positions diasporans and 'hayastancys' as the 'other'. Russian language is viewed as a foreign influence or dominance that led to 'Russification' of the Armenian culture. Furthermore, the echo of the Soviet past continues to influence diaspora's relations with the 'homeland', because of categorically different ideological viewpoints that both 'hayastancys' and diasporans have developed during their lives apart. Participants of this study reflected on 'Soviet mentality' as a clear distinction between them and us, between 'hayastancys' and diasporans. Although, cultural and political differences amongst Armenians existed even before the Genocide, they deepened when Armenia became one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union. Since then, diaspora-'homeland'

dynamics have been fractured by different life experiences, and political and ideological viewpoints that position each group as the 'other'. Even after the declaration of independence, educational reforms, the establishment of the Ministry of Diaspora, and some collaborations and projects, diaspora/'homeland' relations continue to be characterised, at least in the context of this study, by this sense of 'otherness'. Here, I would like to propose that the notion of 'otherness' will persist due to the continuous instability in Transcaucasia, Russia's strong presence in the region and a complex geo-political situation, particularly after the recent war in 2020.

# Chapter 6: Repatriation - The Search for Belonging

 The notion of 'homeland' has been at the core of diaspora studies, seen as the central focus of diasporic life. The typological approach, for example, considers the homeland or the place of origin as the heuristic key to an understanding of diasporic dynamics (Cohen, 2008). Ancestral homeland is considered to be the "true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return - when conditions are appropriate" (Safran, 1991, pp. 83-4). Thus, 'return', as "an idealized destination of all diasporic odysseys", is viewed as an end point (Manalansan, 2013, p. 291). Yet, as postmodern criticism emphasising the complexity of the notion of diaspora and diasporic experiences suggests, there are many issues with this classical or typological view. In particular, and we discussed before, postmodern theory acknowledges the multidimensionality of the notion of 'homeland', the ambiguity and contradictions of diasporic belonging, and the continuous process of (re-)construction of diasporic identity - seen as hybrid and fluid (see Brah, 1996; Anthias, 1998; Hall et al., 1999). The postmodern emphasis is on an 'homing desire' that is distinct from a desire for a 'homeland' - after all not all diasporas maintain an "ideology of "return"" (Brah, 1996, p. 16).

Indeed, diasporic return has been questioned even in relation to victim, exilic, or displaced diasporas. If some, for example the Palestinian diaspora in Lebanon (Holt, 2015), sustains the ideology of return, the Armenian diaspora in the U.S, for instance, is there "to stay" (Bakalian, 1993). Thus, there is no uniformity even amongst diasporas that overall share similar experiences of trauma and forced displacement. In order to understand these experiences, however, it is important

to explore them not only in the diaspora but also in the 'homeland'. The overwhelming majority of studies that focus on the relations between the Armenian diaspora and the 'homeland', have been conducted in the diaspora or in the 'hostlands'. In this study, I sought to fill this gap by exploring repatriates' experiences of living and adapting to "relatively unknown 'homeland'" (Kasbarian, 2020). In particular, my repatriated participants' narratives reveal that 'hostland' experiences can be one of the main determinants of voluntary repatriation. Sense of non-belonging, detachment and estrangement from socio-political realities of the host-country have been crucial in their decision to live in Armenia. However, as repatriates' experiences show, this search for belonging is not complete upon the arrival to the 'homeland', since repatriates negotiate and re-construct their 'Armenianness' to 'fit in'.

## 6.1.  The Armenian Repatriation

Since Armenia's incorporation into the USSR, there has been considerably small repatriation movement or 'ancestral return' from the diaspora to Armenia. I use the term repatriation referring to '*nerkaght*' (ներգաղթ), which is used by the Armenian-speaking communities and means 'gathering in' (Laycock, 2012). It is important to note that terms such as 'repatriation', 'return', 'returnee' are not accurate in the context of the Armenian diaspora; after all it is not "a return in a literary sense" (Pawlowska, 2017, p. 97). Kasbarian (2009) proposes the term 'sojourning', which has been used predominantly refereeing to the Chinese emigration (Siu, 1952). According to Kasbarian (2009, p. 365) 'sojourning' is a "prelude to settlement, an experimental migration over a period of time", which is the most accurate explanation of diasporic experience of 'return'. The later

implies that diasporans' settlement in Armenia is temporary or at least it is conditioned by being in-between countries. Although, I do not question the dual position of being in-between, 'sojourning' seems to restrict diasporic 'return' to those who 'return' with their "secure blankets", which is the opportunity and the means to go back if their hopes of living in Armenia are not fulfilled (Kasbarian, 2009, p. 365). This, however, limits 'return' to only those diasporans who made an informed decision on their own terms, without considering recent forced repatriation, for example, of Syrian, Lebanese or now Ukrainian Armenians. It is important to note that for the Armenian diaspora, no term of 'return' can be fully applicable or accurate; therefore, accepting this terminological shortcoming, I adopt 'repatriation' to mean '*nerkaght*' i.e., 'gathering in'.

## 6.2. Waves of 'Repatriation'

The organised 'return' of the Armenian diaspora is linked to the establishment of Soviet Armenia in 1920. In particular, three waves of repatriation encouraged by the Soviet authorities are identified in literature: from the early 1920s to early 1930s, from 1946 to 1949 and the early 1960s (Payaslian, 2010; Kasbarian, 2009; Pattie, 1999). The first attempt was during the early 1920 to 1930s towards diasporas in the Middle East (Syria, Iran and Iraq), Constantinople, France, Greece and Bulgaria (Verjine, 2017; Payaslian, 2010). Although approximately 35,000 Armenians repatriated to Soviet Armenia (Payaslian, 2010, p. 124) during this time, it is considered to be the period of detachment and very limited contact between the diaspora and Soviet Armenia. This was the result of the 'iron curtain' and ideological-political differences, particularly regarding Soviet nationality policies that led to a loss of Armenian population and land. Akhalkalak,

Akhaltsekhe and half of the Lori districts (present-day Southern Georgia), which were mostly Armenian-populated, were handed over to Georgian administration. Nakhichevan, historically Armenian district, became part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, and Karabagh, mainly Armenian-populated, became an autonomous region under Baku's jurisdiction (Masih and Krikorian, 2005). The second and the largest wave was during the 1946-49, when between 70,000[24] to 100,000 Armenians living in the Middle East, USA and Europe arrived to Soviet Armenia (Laycock, 2012; Kasbarian, 2009; Ishkanian, 2005). This repatriation scheme was organised to compensate the population loss after WWII and develop the economy (Laycock, 2009, p. 143). In 1949, however, the repatriation of Armenians who were exiled by the Soviet authorities was stopped leading to further divisions among the citizens of Soviet Armenia and the diaspora (Chaloyan, 2017).

The third wave was between 1962 and 1965 and concerned mainly those from Iran, Cyprus and Egypt (Verjine, 2017). This was also a period of emigration of repatriates from Soviet Armenia as many who 'returned' "instead of being welcomed as returning compatriots, […] were mistreated, disparagingly referred to as *'aghpar'*" (ախպար), which was a vivid marker of difference and a way of distinguishing repatriates from locals. Furthermore, some were even suspected to be Western spies by the Soviet authorities (Ishkanian, 2005, p. 119). Thus, the experience of 'return' to a 'homeland' was 'traumatic' for the diasporans, even for those who embraced the Soviet regime. It is estimated that from 1956 to 1989

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[24] Kasbarian (2009), referring to Mouradian's (1990) estimates, suggests that the number of 'returnees' was between 90,000 to 100,000.

around 77,000 Armenians emigrated from the USSR, primarily to the U.S. (Heitman, 1991).

Armenian repatriation revealed fundamental differences between the 'imagined homeland' and the new Soviet Armenia that, according to diasporans, was 'Russified' (see Kolstoe, 1995). The latter is particularly the case for the established diaspora, which compared to the "near" diaspora, Russian-Armenian diaspora, does not share what is seen as a 'Soviet mentality' (Cavoukian, 2013; Graney, 2019, p. 293). The ideological and cultural differences continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Armenian independence in 1991. Although, some diasporans have been invited to work in and for the government, very few repatriated and even fewer applied for Armenian citizenship (Ishkanian, 2005). The majority of diasporans continued their ties with the 'homeland' transnationally because the 1990s, particularly the first half, in the newly independent republic was the period of socio-political instability due to the Karabagh conflict, shortages of food, electricity, gas and fuel. It is only by the end of the 1990s that the attitudes between diasporans, repatriates and 'hayastancys' started to shift.

Being in a hostile neighbourhood, difficult socio-economic position and being free from the Soviet propaganda to some extent strengthened the ties between these groups (Masih and Krikorian, 2005) or at least opened the doors for diaspora's exploration of their 'homeland'. The importance of the diaspora's contribution to 'homeland' development, particularly financial contribution, was identified and prioritised on a national level in the early 2000s. The Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia was launched in 2008 with an aim to "improve the state

policy on development of the Armenia-Diaspora partnership and coordinate the activities of the state bodies [… and] support the repatriation of Diaspora Armenians and pilgrimage of Diaspora Armenian youth to Armenia" (MDRA, 2012). Projects such as 'Ari Tun' (Արի տուն, Come Home), 'My Armenia Festival' and Diaspora Summer School Program were launched to encourage younger diasporans around the world to visit Armenia. For example, from 2009 to 2015 'Ari Tun' programme hosted over 6000 young diasporans with the objective of strengthening their ties with the 'homeland'. These projects, however, have been discontinued after the 'Velvet Revolution' in 2018[25]. Furthermore, the Ministry was replaced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, which was criticised by the diaspora across the world. Although, diaspora's attitudes towards the ministry were "lukewarm", because the minister Hakobyan was never linked or connected with the diaspora, its disillusion was received with criticism by the diaspora (Cavoukian, 2020).

There are many other organisations and NGOs that work to improve diaspora and 'homeland' relations, however, only two offer repatriation support from 2001: AVC and Birthright Armenia (Darieva, 2013). Those diaspora Armenians who have at least one Armenian grandparent can apply to take part in 'homecoming', which includes volunteering in various rural regions of Armenia. RepatArmenia Foundation, a non-governmental, non-profit institution, is another organisation that works towards "active repatriation promotion" by providing practical support and connecting repatriates through social events (RepatArmenia, 2020). In spite of these organised efforts, recent repatriation numbers are not high (Darieva,

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[25] The 'Velvet revolution' will be discussed in the next chapter.

2013), particularly from Europe. There is a very limited data on repatriation, in exception of very few sources on Armenian return from Russia, Middle East, Syria, and Iraq. In particular, in 2011, 4,449 Syrian Armenians fled the Syrian civil war to Armenia (MPC, 2013), while from the years 2012 to 2015 about 21000 migrated to Armenia (Hakobyan, 2016). However, for many diaspora Armenians, particularly for forced settlers, Armenia is a place of temporary residence: "a jumping off point for further travel to the West" (MPC, 2013, p. 2). Difficult socio-economic situation, constant threat of war and political instability add to the complexity of diasporic 'return' and result in multiple migrations.

Repatriation, whether forced or voluntary is a multi-layered and complex process that depends on various socio-economic, political and personal circumstances. Yet, the sense of belonging or rather the search for belonging seems to represent a key element of voluntary repatriation. Voluntary repatriation is a personal journey of discovering what is 'missing'; a journey of finding where one 'fits in', which results in a sense of continuous 'in-betweenness'. In the next section, I will address this search for belonging by exploring my participants' lived experiences in the 'host-land', the sense of detachment and the duality of their position 'here' and 'there'.

## 6.3. Repatriation: Longing to Belong

Earlier in this thesis, I introduced the complex notion of 'homeland' and interrelated concepts such as home, memory and belonging. The postmodern criticism of essentialist ideas of the homeland as fixed geographical locations has been particularly significant in critically unpacking the notion of 'roots' and in

exploring the themes of fluidity and hybridity (Anthias, 1998; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). For example, Avtar Brah (1996, p. 192) questioned the interchangeable use of home and homeland suggesting that home is "the lived experience of a locality". Indeed, diasporic or/and migratory movement involves the loss of a homeland, but at the same time it also entails a process of establishing a home within the 'host' land (Dalal, 2011). It can be argued that this is particularly the case for the first-generation diaspora, because for succeeding generations, home has already been established, after all, every diaspora generation adopts some socio-political standards of the 'host-country'. However, establishing a home is not a fixed process, but one that is continuously recreated through the "lived experience of a locality" (Brah, 1996, p. 192). Indeed, as my participants' experiences illustrate, establishing a home and a sense of belonging is dependent upon social, cultural, political, as well as personal circumstances and experiences. It is a continuous journey of searching and longing, that is dependent on the realities of the present and the 'myths' of the past. The realities of the present encompass the socio-political situation as well as economic conditions, being a minority, finding purpose, values, beliefs, attitudes, and senses, which can be determining factors for 'longing to belong' to a 'place' that can be considered as a 'homeland'.

Despite being from different parts of the world i.e.: the USA, Iran, Syria, Australia, Israel, Lebanon, Russia, and Turkey, many of my participants shared, although in their respective contexts and reasons, a sense of detachment from their 'host-cultures'. For instance, twenty-four-year-old Karén from New Jersey, explained that the American culture which he knew was "deteriorating and changing itself" and he was "sick of watching" how he, himself and his family were becoming

"stripped off…, swallowed by American culture […]. It's one thing when your culture is replaced by other culture, that's got its merits, but it's another thing when it's replaced with a culture that itself is in crises and fading in a way". Karén explained that even though there are traits of his personality that "America kind of invented in a lot of ways and there are parts of [him] that are very American, [he] didn't really feel like that was [his] life". He felt a sense of detachment from American culture because it was "going down this weird path and it seems that every five years it gets worse, it gets more totalitarian". Karén's disagreement with the current social climate in America was an important factor in his decision to live in Armenia because "the things that are cool about America like liberty, freedom, human rights, people matter, people have rights", they are "fading away". Karen felt that since the 90s America was getting "worse" and becoming "more totalitarian, it just becomes less America". In comparison, "Armenia is moving in a right direction. I would argue on every single front and in a lot of ways it's in spite of the government". Yet, what is interesting is that Karén, replaced America with Armenia because he found familiarity in the "energy" and ability to "take on everything, I love it, it's free. It's what America used to have you know before *we* became lazy".

If Karén found the familiar in Armenia, Aram from New York, who was thirty-eight years old when the interview was conducted, felt "comfortable" in Armenia because it felt very different from America. America for Aram was a place of his personal struggles, where he was "very-very unhappy with [his] life". He "made the conscious decision to not live in the United States anymore", because there was "nothing keeping me there […]. There is nothing left for me here, this is just a country that I don't agree with anymore, culturally and economically too. […]

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[W]hen I think of getting back to America, I just feel the tension, anxiety. Aram decided "to stay [in Armenia] forever […] after being here for couple of months". However, his move was not planned as a permanent one, as initially he wrote a list of countries that he would like to "explore and the plan was to go to each country for one year and then decide which country I would stay". Aram chose to come to Armenia first because he "had to see [his] ancestral homeland", although, his ancestors, as it is for most of my participants, were from Western Armenia, rather than what is the territory of the current republic. In spite of this, Aram referred to:

> "genetic memory because the second I've got off the plane, I've never been to this country before, I've got off the plane and like the energy from soil or like air, it just felt very familiar and then after I stayed for few months I've decided like no this is my country; this is where I'd stay".

What Aram termed "genetic memory" is the maintenance of "a collective memory, vision, or myth" about the homeland (Safran, 1991, p. 83), even if it is "a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (Brah, 1996, 192). Indeed, for repatriated interviewees their ancestral homeland is "a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory" (Ibid, p. 193) of Western Armenia. For Aram, therefore, repatriation was driven by his desire to find a place where he could "feel at home" (Brah, 1996), find the "familiar" and fit in. His move was brought about by a sense of non-belonging and disorientation in the 'host-land'.

Similar feelings of attachment and "fulfilment" were expressed by thirty-six-year-old Tamar from Glendale, California. Tamar was a first generation diasporan born

in the USA, as her parents migrated from Iran and Western Armenia. She explained that "American culture eventually kind of assimilated into our family, we ended up having several inter-racial marriages and relationships", considering all non-Armenian marriages as inter-racial. She referred to her and even her parents' generation being assimilated through cultural practices such as celebrating "Thanksgiving and Halloween, doing community work and community service […] eventually became part of [their] life". However, Tamar was also actively engaged in Homenetmen and AYF (Armenian Youth Federation) and travelled to Armenia in 1999 where she "was very moved by the experience […], I called my dad and I said: 'Dad, I want to stay, I don't want to come back'". Tamar returned to America to continue her education, met her future husband, who was also Armenian, and "one of the things that really brought us together that both of us were like, you know one day we'd move to Armenia". Their move was a process of several years of financial planning but as Tamar explained it rewarded them with:

> "this sense of belonging, there is this sense of fulfilment,
>
> there is kind of like everything falls into place, it's like
>
> you're here and that makes sense now. You know, all
>
> these things I was trying to figure out, these feeling that
>
> I wasn't really able to fully understand, I did".

In all three cases the sense of fulfilment, attachment, belonging or comfort have been nurtured in the diaspora: in Karén's and Aram's cases, it was through their family ties, the church, the language, and cultural practices, and in Tamar's case through diasporic organisations such as AYF and Homenetmen. However, it is memory as "a complex network of activities" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 30) that creates and re-creates the meaning of 'homeland' in the diasporic imagination. Through

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diasporic organisations and cultural practices, diasporic memory is "constantly selected, filtered and restructured in terms set by the questions and necessities of the present, at both the individual and the social levels" (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 30). Necessities and realities of the present seemed to be instrumental in my participants' search for belonging to the 'homeland'. In other words, their sense of detachment from the 'host culture', whether it is due to political and ideological differences or other socio-cultural factors, seemed to be the driving force of their search for belonging.

By detachment I do not imply indifference, but an absence of collective memory of a place and a time, which is both nurtured and maintained. As thirty-year-old Sargis from Tehran explained "I am interested in the development of Iran, I even encourage my friends to take part as much as they can because I am not indifferent to the fate of the country, that is important, but I don't find it to be a home, I am not missing [Iran]". For Sargis and the majority of repatriated participants, the 'host-land' was linked to their loved ones, to their families and friends, but there was no nostalgia about the place that was left behind: "the streets, sure they were familiar to me, but I wasn't missing the city, I was missing friends and family and that's all, that was really all" (Sargis from Tehran). Twenty-one-year-old Pedros, who was born and raised in Israel, "never felt obligated to the country, even though I was going to join the army. But then I decided why wait two years to come to Armenia and why waste then forever in Israel when I can come to Armenia". Pedros explained that he "came here to stay indefinitely, I mean I don't see my place anywhere else, even though let's say I go through the shittiest of times like at least I have to go through it in my country". Pedros referred to Armenia throughout the interview as his country, emphasizing the

difference between Israel, as the country of his birth, and Armenia as *his* country.

Similarly, twenty-five-year-old Mushegh from Paris, referred to the "historical homeland" almost like a place of refuge from the contemporary globalised societies such as France. For him it is the escape from the global space: "now I realise that I had this need of not being in a global place [...]. For Lilit and Arpi, it was also an escape but from being outsiders. Lilit, who was born in Iran, but lived in Los Angeles since early childhood, moved to Armenia in 2008. Despite having financial and professional stability in the U.S., Lilit felt "something is missing". That missing element was a sense of attachment and belonging to the American culture:

> "you always feel that you're an outsider. Everything is
> great about America but you know with our traditional
> values we don't belong there, it's very hard, you have to
> really be Americanised to go back there but if you want
> to stay Armenian... it's really hard to live up there".

She repatriated to escape Americanisation, which is happening "even in LA with all the Armenians... because most Armenians there are Americanised. They either can't speak Armenian or if they do, they won't, they've lost their values". For Lilit, this was a cultural genocide: "it's this [...] genocide that's taking place all over the world where Armenians live, it's not you know killing them, they're destroying their heritage slowly, every generation at a time". Lilit, and several other participants from America, refer to assimilation, or in the context of the U.S., Americanisation, which has been a topic of considerable scholarly discussion (Fittante and Wilcox-Archuleta, 2020; Biavaschi, Giulietti, and Siddique, 2017; Yang and de la Garza, 2017). Although Americanisation remains an ambiguous notion, there have been attempts to rethink what it entails. Traditional variables

such as language proficiency, duration of life in the U.S. and generational status, have been used to assess what it means to be Americanised (Yang and de la Garza, 2017; in Fittante and Wilcox-Archuleta, 2020). Furthermore, Fittante and Wilcox-Archuleta (2020, p. 225) conducted a study on Los Angeles Armenians (the largest Armenian diaspora in the U.S.) by introducing "symbolic" dimensions of Americanisation, such as attitudes or "feeling[s]" about "the importance of (1) language preservation, (2) identity preservation, and (3) maintaining cultural distinctness". They found that Armenians' cultural identities in Los Angeles are indeed becoming more American, but this does not imply that they do not participate in the development of their ethnic community.

Fittante and Wilcox-Archuleta (2020) suggest that compared to the Latin American community, Armenians in Los Angeles are less affected by discrimination, and prejudice because they have been viewed as a "white" minority. Although, the authors note that this categorisation is based on the "majority perceptions of marginalized status", I would like to emphasise the importance of avoiding homogenisation and generalisation of Armenians, especially as a 'white' group. The categorization of Armenians as 'white' has been a subject of discussion that reached the U.S. courts in 1909 and 1925, when four Armenian immigrants questioned the decision to reject their application for U.S. citizenship due to their 'Asiatic' origin (Jacobson, 1998, p. 231-33; in Garcia, 2012). The court overturned this decision with a definition of whiteness as "no darker than many west Europeans" (Ibid, p. 98). However, as the study conducted by LaPiere (1930; in Garcia, 2012, p. 100) showed, discriminatory attitudes towards Armenians continued amongst the dominant white population as Armenians were still perceived "of a different color". Similar argument can be made about other

ethnic groups in the U.S., for example the classification of Arab Americans (North African and Middle Eastern descent) as 'white/Caucasian' (Abdelhady, 2011, p. 20). Although 80% of Arab Americans identify as 'white/Caucasian', according to the 2000 census (De la Cruz and Brittingham, 2003), this does not stop their racialisation as 'other' (Abdelhady, 2011, p. 20). Compared to the Armenian Americans, Arab Americans' position is complicated further due to religion and how Muslims are portrayed in the media particularly after 9/11 (ibid).

With globalisation, multiple and mass migrations and mixed marriages, the experiences of living as a distinct ethnic minority have also shifted. Garcia (2012, p. 100) claimed that "Armenians' "European origins" and Christian beliefs opened the door for them to secure white privilege". For example, Bakalian's study conducted in 1986 showed that comparatively low level of discrimination and prejudice (5.3 percent) were experienced by Armenians in New York and New Jersey. The most counts of discrimination were reported by second-generation participants, although new migrants experienced prejudice twice as often as the second and succeeding generations born in America. Bakalian (2014; Second Reprint) notes that one of the reasons for lower level of discrimination can be linked to Armenians being an unknown minority in America, at least when the study was conducted. It was suggested that discrimination was not due to being Armenian per se but being "visibly… of foreign extraction" (Ibid, p. 234). Further research is necessary to understand the experiences of the contemporary Armenian diaspora, however, it is important to acknowledge that being an Armenian does not imply a homogeneous or uniform experience, even within the same country, city, or community. Although Armenians share collective symbols of their 'Armenianness', such as the church and the Genocide, they do not share

similar experiences of ethnic identity because personal circumstances, experiences before and after migration, external pressures and views are not uniform (Aghanian, 2007). For example, twenty-four-year-old Arpi from Washington experienced discrimination while growing up:

> "when I went to a public school it became very clear that
>
> I was a minority even through I was born and raised in
>
> America. I did face some racism in my childhood, there
>
> were a number of people who were constantly telling
>
> me to go back to my fucking country".

Arpi explained that this experience was due to her "white rich" surroundings and she eventually found her social circle amongst "the few culturally diverse people of the school". Arpi mentioned several times that she "grew up in a very white rich area" and the experiences of racial discrimination and being a minority, "of a different color" (LaPiere, 1930; in Garcia, 2012, p. 100), were particularly apparent in Arpi's narrative. Thus, the experiences of discrimination or prejudice are not uniform, however, they can affect and shape one's sense of (non-)belonging to a place, after all "to belong is to be accepted as part of a community" (Anthias, 2006, p. 21). Ethnicity, therefore, is not only a 'pull' factor that leads to a diasporic 'return', but also a 'push' factor that drives one out of the 'host-country' (Tsuda, 2013) in search of finding the place where one *fits in the most*.

For my participants from countries where the state religion is Islam ethno-religious identity was a determining factor in their decision to repatriate, particularly for Armenians from Iran. Anahit from Tehran explained that while growing up she did not have much contact with Iranians and it was only with starting her degree and working that she "[got] to know people, their culture".

Although Anahit's "good experiences were more", she has also experienced exclusion from the Iranian society because of her ethno-religious identity: "they say you are Armenian whatever you eat or touch it's not sacred, they say its dirty. It's coming from Koran, for example, they wouldn't eat whatever you've touched". Anahit refers to najãsat (impurity of non-Muslims) which non-Muslim minorities experience in Iran in everyday life that are also reflected in the law (see Sanasarian, 2004). The law in Iran is based on Islam, which is the only true faith, accordingly, legal equality cannot be achieved between Muslims and non-Muslims (Barry, 2019). This marginalisation has been addressed in scholarly literature, suggesting that post-1979 'religious nationalism' led to exclusion and "re-ghettoization" of Armenians in Iran (Barry, 2017; 2018). They have an officially recognised religious minority status, that gives permission to worship and autonomy in matters of personal status, although this has been changed to non-Muslim Iranian status under the Rouhani administration, along with the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, the Jews, and Zoroastrians (see Barry, 2017; Castellino and Cavanaugh, 2013;).

Whether officially recognised or not, the opportunities and rights of non-Muslims are restricted in Iran (Sanasarian, 2004; 2007). In the Armenian case, it has been suggested that eighty years of Islamic State created a society that excludes Armenians from wider Iranian society, what Barry (2017) termed "re-ghettoization". In this sense "re-ghettoization" refers to a "ghetto mentality", defined as a "voluntary separation from the society, as manifested in the growing tendency of Armenians to associate only with other Armenians" (Barry, 2017, p. 554). The exclusionary policies of the Islamic Republic led to mass exodus of Armenians from Iran (Babayan, 2019; Der-Mugrdechian, 2013). In 1979 around

250,000 Armenians were living in Iran (Pahlevanian, 1989), while in 2015 the population decreased to approximately 30,000 (Barry, 2017). Many continue to migrate to Europe and the U.S. and very few are repatriating to Armenia. Barry (2017) suggests that for his participants, repatriation to Armenia was not a financially and culturally feasible choice due to financial constraints and cultural differences between 'hayastancys' and Iranian Armenians. Indeed, my Iranian participants emphasise their sense of 'otherness' in Armenia, however, they also acknowledge that they felt much more isolated and detached from Iranian society.

Thus, adopting Rapport and Dawson's (1998, p. 10; in Ghorashi, 2003) argument, it can be claimed that "one is at home when one inhibits a cognitive environment in which one can undertake the routines of daily life and through which one finds one's identity best mediated". When this "cognitive environment is eschewed" a sense of detachment and "homelessness" (Ibid) develops, which can lead to further migratory journeys: "I think if Armenia doesn't work out for us for whatever strange reason, I would probably try maybe Spain or Italy or something, but I don't think I can go back to the US" (Thirty-six-year-old Tamar from Glendale). Thirty-four-year-old Hripsime did go back to Lebanon for a few months to "try and see if [she] can live there" because life in Armenia was challenging. She did not "like" the education system in Armenia, therefore, she returned to Lebanon so her child could attend school there. Hripsime felt strongly about the lack of Western Armenian or rather its non-existence in the primary and secondary education system. She wished to teach her son, as she suggested "my Armenian". Hripsime explained that there are various foreign languages offered in schools such as English, German, French and Russian, while "never […] the

Western Armenian language […]. The latter led to a feeling of distrust and lack of respect from Armenia and 'hayastancys' who disregard her past and her 'Armenianness':

> "Can you please respect my writing system that I have my name in and my last name in. They correct me and say: 'You are writing your name wrong'. No, I don't write my name wrong because I was punished for my spelling when I was a kid. You need to understand that I have my name this way because of my past, because two different parts of Armenia, two different parts of the language. If you really want me to come, you need to welcome me as I am, not make me like you are. Losing my identity, that's what I don't like".

However, after four months in Lebanon, "I realised that no, I cannot do this, I cannot stay and 2011 was the time when I finally decided on my own that I want to be in Armenia". Hripsime found Lebanon to be different than what she had left behind: "I was not part of the change; it was kind of not my place anymore". In addition to instability, political and economic pressures and insecurities, she did not find the familiar, but rather saw changes that she was "not part of" anymore.

In the context of this study, therefore, repatriation was a way of fulfilling or at least seeking to fulfil that sense of detachment that repatriates experienced in their 'host-countries'. For thirty-year-old Sargis it was finding an answer to the "questions of which is my home", because it was not Iran, where he was born. He found the answer when he visited Armenia for the first time: "I was thinking about it in Zvartnots [airport in Yerevan, Armenia], when I was about to depart, I

was thinking about it as the plane was moving into Iranian land". Similarly, thirty-seven-year-old Anahit from Iran, repatriated because she was searching for a place where she can feel "happy" and be in the right place. Although, she explained that her life in Iran was financially very secure, she was "not happy, you are not inside […] you are in a wrong place".

A similar sense of non-belonging was expressed by sixty-seven-year-old Araks who was born in Iran but married and lived most of her life in England. Araks repatriated in 2016 because "although I've lived in England more than I've lived in Armenia, yet it's just a limited life for me there […]. I will never feel British like the British would do". Despite living in England most of her life, Arak's connection to the country was linked to her husband and his "small" family. After his death "there isn't anything really taking [them] to England". For Narine, a sixty-five-year-old from Istanbul, moving to Armenia was "like a dream which has been realized". Narine travelled, worked and lived in several countries across East and West Asia as well as Europe. Because of travelling, "during 17 years I did not have a home, I didn't even have the keys to my home, so now this is my home, this is my place". Narine explained that she did not feel a sense of connection or belonging to any of the countries she lived in because "you feel like the citizen of the world but there is one place which is yours".

My participants' voluntary repatriation is driven by a longing to "feel at home" (Brah, 1996), because of this sense of 'otherness' and non-belonging to their 'host-lands'. My participants voiced various reasons for this detachment, for instance, changing social climate, political instability, the risk and the fear of assimilation, and most commonly a sense of being a foreigner or different.

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Although the reasons can be varied and context dependent, the experiences are similar as most of my participants felt that they were not in the 'right' place or what Bhabha (2001) refers to as "unhomed". Being 'unhomed' does not entail homelessness, but suggests a state of estrangement, in the context of this study, from the 'host-land', which seems to be the crucial determinant of the search for belonging and comfort. Repatriation, therefore, is not driven only by myths of returning to a place of origin, but by "desires and (im)possibilities of making oneself at home … mainly in the current place of residence" (Stock, 2013). However, this search for belonging does not always lead to 'feeling at home', as diasporans navigate through the tangled web of memory, belonging, attachment, senses, spaces, and places of here and there.

## 6.4.    Duality, Plurality of (Non-)Belonging

The notions of home and belonging have been at the centre of diaspora discourse, particularly amongst scholars who were influenced by postmodernism. They criticise the essentialist views, which understate hybridity, plurality, fluidity, and syncretism (see Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1994; and Anthias, 1998). The "absolutist notions of "origin"" and "true belonging" have been challenged (Anthias, 1998, p. 577), emphasising the distinction between 'homeland', home, "the homing desire" and "the desire for a 'homeland'" (Brah, 1996, p. 197). Criticising the "centred" model (Clifford, 1994), diaspora discourse shifted towards diasporic experiences in the 'host-countries' that entail complex processes of 'home making', adaptation, assimilation, and continuous negotiation of one's belonging. Thus, outsider/insider and belonging/non-belonging dynamics became amongst the key characteristics of diasporic life. The previous section,

aimed to highlight the importance of considering diasporic 'return' or 'repatriation' in the context of a desire for belonging, rather than a desire to return to a specific geographical location. Most importantly, however, it explored the role of "the lived experience of a locality" (Brah, 1996, p. 192) emphasising the need or longing to belong that can be the driving force for 'repatriation'. In particular, a sense of detachment and non-belonging to a 'hostland' can become the catalyst for voluntary 'repatriation', at least in the context of the Armenian diaspora.

Many of my participants 'repatriated' because of a sense of non-belonging or feelings of detachment from their 'host-cultures' and hoped to find 'what was missing' in the place that is called a 'homeland'. Yet what they found was also a sense of duality, and in a few cases, plurality, that continues to differentiate them from local Armenians. This sense of dual belonging and non-belonging to any place has been explored and addressed in the contemporary scholarly work, where insider/outsider and belonging/non-belonging dynamics are explored drawing from repatriates' experiences. Pilkington and Flynn (1999, p. 190) for example, found that Russian returnees from post-Soviet states experience isolation because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sakhalin[26] Koreans' 'return' to South Korea was a fulfilment of their life dream, however, many of them had a sense of longing and nostalgia for their life in Sakhalin (Balitskaya and Hyung Park, 2020). Abdelhady (2011) suggests that her Lebanese participants who migrated to Europe and the United States, felt a lack of belonging to any specific place, including Lebanon. Yet for them this non-belonging is a "desirable and somewhat

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[26] Russian island in the Pacific Ocean, north of Japan.

liberating position", and they did not wish "to conform to one society" (Ibid, p. 66).

Abdelhady (2011, p. 17), exploring the Lebanese diaspora in Paris, suggests that most of her participants remarked on a sense of being different or not fitting in not only in the French society but also in Lebanon because their relationship with the homeland "was based on the construction of "home" in ways that did not necessarily match social reality". In other words, years of living in the diaspora, change and impact one's perceptions and views leading to a realisation that ""one can never truly go home"" (Abdelhady, 2011, p. 17). Even in the case of aliyah of the archetypical Jewish diaspora, it would be misleading to suggest that all Jews who 'return' have that sense of belonging to Israel (Hahn Tapper, 2016, p. 58). Hahn Tapper (2016, p. 58) refers to the Iranian and Iraqi Jews living in Israel whose 'return' did not end the notion of exile but rather continued with a feeling of ""exile in Zion"". Safran (2004, p. 16) refers to this as "'internal diaspora'", when one "might be at home, yet in a sort of 'internal diaspora'". Thus, one's sense of belonging is complex, multi-layered and context dependent, therefore we cannot limit ourselves to an oversimplified idea of "homeland as the object of longing […] and hostland as the object of efforts to belong" (Fortier, 2000, p. 136) because it does not do "justice to the complex dynamics of longing for and belonging to multiple places in various ways" (Stock, 2013, p. 25). In this section I will attempt to explore exactly that: complex and intertwined senses of belonging and non-belonging.

Adaptation and integration into a new society, which is what Armenia is for repatriates, is a multi-layered process of an ongoing maintenance and negotiation

of one's identity, memory and a sense of (non-)belonging. In the autobiographical preface, I explained how my journey of migration brought about the need to feel at ease with my "misfittings" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 164). I was surprised to find that my repatriated participants found similar feelings of being "in-between-homes" (Fenster, 2005, p. 251), and hoped to be at least comfortable with this position, and not feeling "consciously of two worlds" (Antin, 1912; in Hoffman, 1989, p. 163). Thus, their 'return' to Armenia, did not resolve this sense of non-belonging, but led to a complex process of negotiation between where one fits the most, although with a clear realisation that "diasporans don't belong anywhere" (Lilit born in Iran and lived most of her life in America). Twenty-seven-year-old Anush from New Jersey described herself being "a guest" because her experience of living in Armenia revealed that she doesn't "have shared experience of growing up in Armenia, can't claim challenges that I didn't experience". Whilst Anush felt like she "will always feel like a guest" and "very American" in Armenia, she felt "foreign in a way or that I don't always connect with everybody" in America. Anush explained that she also "absolutely can't stand" the Armenian communities in the United States, because they:

> "are out to prove that they are more Armenian than you. 'Anush you don't look Armenian. Oh, your parents were born in New York?' or 'Anush you're half Armenian'. Like things that I can't control they pick on, but they don't pick on the fact that I have chosen to dedicate my career and my time actually understanding Armenia and not focusing on the superficial and often incorrect knowledge, propaganda that's spread in many communities in the United States".

The feeling of being not accepted, whether in the diaspora or Armenia, has been a recurring theme in repatriates' narratives. Forty-three-year-old Lilit expressed a sense of non-acceptance, that she "unfortunately would always have that feeling because I look different from them, we act different from them, you know, our standards are different from them". By 'them', Lilit was referring to local Armenians or 'hayastancys' who lived in a different "environment" from diasporans, as "people of my age grew up without electricity, without gas, you know. They've gone through a lot of hardships, so it's hard for them to change".

In Chapter 3, I explored the hidden nature of the Armenian diaspora, suggesting that Armenians in the UK are 'out of sight' or not 'readily apparent' due to a lack of 'demographic thickness', cultural traits, diaspora dynamics, diverse migratory trajectories, and complex 'homeland' – 'hostland' relations. Furthermore, it has been argued that Armenians occupy an ambiguous position in terms of their racial classification (Cacho, 2013). Although, Cacho (2013) refers to the Armenian position in the U.S., in 1989, Talai (p. 95) had already discussed how compared to the Armenian diasporas in the Middle East, Armenians in Britain have "*no reputation at all*" because of the absence of "certain identifiable features attributed by the majority population to the Armenians". And as it was proposed in Chapter 3, Armenians in the UK, indeed, continue to be a 'hidden' community. In Armenia, however, my participants explained that they are easily distinguishable from the locals because "we look different physically, the way we speak, you can see the difference in us. Whenever I went to a shop to buy something they know that I am an outsider […] and they judge me because I am from outside" (Thirty-four-year-old Hripsime from Iran). Similar to Hripsime and Lilit, the majority of my interviewees felt a sense of 'exposure' because they are

visibly different in the 'homeland'. Addressing the latter, Tölölyan (2007) claims

that diasporans see themselves as different from both the people among whom

they have settled and the people in their 'homelands'. Drawing upon the data I

collected, I would like to add that in the Armenian context this sense of difference

is emphasised even further with repatriation, partly due to what Tölölyan (2007)

refers to as generational changes in the diasporic sense of difference and

sameness. If for the first generation of immigrants there is a sense of kinship and

sameness with people in the 'homeland', for the subsequent generation this

connection is difficult to maintain (Tölölyan, 2007). Indeed, with time both

diasporans and people in the 'homeland' change, leading to a wider cultural and

ideological gap between these two groups:

> "I don't get Armenians in Armenia today. I don't see
>
> strong sense of values that I associated so much with
>
> Armenians growing up, which was like extreme
>
> generosity, extreme humility" (Twenty-four-year-old
>
> Karén from New Jersey).

Karén's sense of 'Armenianness' is the result of subjective and contextual process

of selection and interpretation of the past and the present i.e., a passed down

memory of pre-Genocide Armenian culture of a specific area of Western Armenia

(Tigranakert, currently known as Diyarbakir) and the lived experiences of the

'hostland'. Karén's and the majority of my participants' sense of 'Armenianness',

therefore, is maintained through the active "process of linking" (Bal, vii) the past

and the present. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, diasporans and

'hayastancys' experienced differing historic journeys, leading to further divisions

and a sense of 'otherness' between them. And although my participants explained

that they knew about cultural and ideological differences that separate them from

'hayastancys', many found adaptation to these differences challenging. Arpi from Washington who was thirty-nine years old when the interview was conducted, believed that she will "always be a diaspora in Armenia" and although she and her husband lived in America and in Dubai, she felt that they "were trying to be something else". Repatriating to Armenia to certain extent brought that sense of belonging and "feel[ing] at home. We might not be 'hayastancy' we might be diasporan that's not the part of equation for us […] I don't feel like an expat. I feel this is my home not necessarily like the people who were born and raised here during the Soviet times". At the same time, however, it has also highlighted the complexity and multilayered nature of belonging, as Arpi has to adapt to the cultural differences of the 'homeland'. For thirty-four-year-old Hripsime from Iran, adapting to Armenia posed a threat of losing her 'Armenianness', which was formed and maintained in the diaspora:

> "I feel that I am losing part of my identity, Armenian identity, because Armenia is not helping me to expand my Armenianness. I am trying to be an Armenian from Armenia rather than continuing my own identity. Parallelly I am saying let's not erase each other, but walk together until time fixes this population, even if it is going to come in 20, 30, maybe 50 years. We want to find new Armenian identity and then we are not going to feel that one is losing compared to the other".

By "time fixes this population" Hripsime refers to a time when there was no sense of otherness between repatriates and 'hayastancys', when no one was "losing compared to the other". In other words, Hripsime expressed a sense of hope that one day repatriates may be able to have a sense of belonging to the Armenia

society without compromising their own 'Armenianness' or being viewed as outsiders. Indeed, social exclusion and sense of otherness results in "disturbing in-betweenness of belonging nowhere" (Stock, 2010, p. 26). This is particularly the case for subsequent diaspora generations, as they do not have experiences and therefore memories of the 'homeland' and the time prior migration (Brah, 1996, p. 194). Rather, their memories are constructed, reconstructed, and reinterpreted through past down memories leading for some to a crucial question: 'Where do I belong?' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 217). Belonging, therefore, is ambiguous, contextual, and continuously changing, as well as dependent on past down memories, multiple places and spaces in the past, and the experience of the present.

## Chapter Summary

Armenian repatriation has been discussed mainly in the context of organised homecoming during the years of Soviet rule. The literature focuses on the waves of repatriation and the complexity of the relationship between the Soviet regime and repatriates' experiences. Diasporans' integration into their 'homeland' was challenging not only because of political and ideological differences but also due to the cultural distance between 'russified hayastancys' and diasporans. Indeed, for the majority diaspora Armenians the experience of repatriation was not the return to the 'imagined homeland' but a reality of everyday existence in a foreign system that was ideologically (which includes the socio-political system of the Communist regime and the culture that was becoming increasingly Russified) very different. As a result, many migrated from Armenia mainly to the U.S. With Armenia's independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new phase of

diaspora and 'homeland' relations were established. Although various organisations and NGOs have been launched to encourage repatriation, only a small number of repatriates seized the opportunity, while the majority continued their engagement with the 'homeland' transnationally. Due to a lack of quantitative data on 'repatriation', it is difficult to understand current trends; therefore, further research is required to map out the repatriation movement. Furthermore, while the Armenian diaspora has been widely discussed and theorised in literature, diaspora Armenians' 'repatriation', particularly from early 2000s, is still unexplored. There are few studies that discuss diasporic experiences of 'return' focusing also on the 'homeland-hostland' experiences and expectations, the motivations and experiences of diasporic repatriation, particularly for a diaspora group such as the Armenian diaspora, have a potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of not only contested and ambiguous 'homeland'-diaspora relations, but also reveal the intricacies of belonging and non-belonging to what is proclaimed a 'homeland'.

In this chapter, I explored diasporans' motivation to 'repatriate' and discussed their experiences of the 'homeland'. One of the key findings was the existence of a sense of disconnection, estrangement or non-belonging to the host-culture or host-society. Moving to Armenia reflected a desire to find where one "fits in" and where "everything falls into place". This notion of alienation from the host-society has been identified as one of the main features or characteristics of diaspora. The typological approach positioned alienation as one of diaspora characteristics suggesting that diasporans "believe that they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulted from it" (Safran, 1991, pp. 83-4). This categorisation, however, poses a

danger of generalisation, homogenisation and oversimplification of diasporic experiences. As it was discussed in this chapter, the Armenian diaspora is not a homogeneous group, and my findings suggest a wide range of diasporic experiences. Furthermore, Safran limits diasporans' sense of alienation to only a reaction to being not accepted by the host society.

 Indeed, while some of my participants experienced discrimination and non-acceptance, there were also those who did not agree with, for example, the socio-political developments of their host countries, while others had personal reasons such as deteriorating mental health. In other words, one's sense of (non-)belonging is a complex process of continuous negotiation and reproduction of one's identity through an active "process of linking" (Bal, vii). It is conditioned by socio-political but also personal circumstances and experiences; therefore, it is varied, complex and multi-layered. Voluntary repatriation is driven by "desires and (im)possibilities of making oneself at home … mainly in the current place of residence" (Stock, 2013).  However, as it was discussed in this chapter, repatriation does not always lead to 'feeling at home' or finding that sense of belonging but reveals cultural and ideological differences between 'them' and 'us'. Repatriated diasporans find themselves "in-between-homes" (Fenster, 2005, p. 251) and "consciously of two worlds" (Antin, 1912; in Hoffman, 1989, p. 163), which is a complex and continuous process of negotiation between where one fits *the most*.

# Chapter 7: Conflicting Politics of the 'Homeland'


The role of diasporas in international politics and 'homeland'' conflicts has often been discussed according to their potential role as "'peace-makers'" or "'peace-wreckers'" (Cohen, 2009, p. 123), engaged in 'long-distance nationalism' (Anderson, 1992). However, this approach can be limited since it tends to gloss over the multiplicity of diasporic attachments modes of belonging, and loyalty (Turner, 2010). Diasporas are far from being homogeneous and are rarely unified in their views on socio-political issues in the 'homeland' and as discussed throughout this thesis, it is clear that the Armenian diaspora is socially, culturally, and politically fragmented. Yet, these inter-group dynamics become secondary when there is a threat to survival because, for the diaspora, the preservation and territorial security of Armenia was and still is more important than the socio-economic conditions and internal politics. The diaspora's political activism is also linked and dependent on the 'host-land' politics and diaspora's position in the 'hostland'.


In this chapter, I will address the complex and contested nature of diasporic engagement and what is referred to as 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1990) drawing upon the analysis of two recent events: the 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018 and the Artsakh War of 2020.  Considering the instrumental role of social media in political activism in 21st-century conflicts, this chapter examines the diasporans' and repatriates' engagement in social media activism or 'cyber-activism'. Drawing on interviews and observations of social networking platforms, particularly Facebook, I explore comparative 'inactivity' during the 'Velvet Revolution', and much more active participation during the recent war. Thus, this chapter

addresses the complexity of diasporic engagement with the 'homeland' during a time of crisis, emphasising the sense of loss, disillusionment, and trauma. Finally, the outcome of the war intensified and reopened the trope of 'victimhood', which has been identified as one of the main characteristics of the Armenian diaspora. Although throughout this thesis, I have emphasised the plurality and heterogeneity of the Armenian diaspora, the Artsakh war reaffirmed that 'essential' characteristics, in the Armenian case of 'victimhood', are mobilised in times of crises.

## 7.1.    The Genocide and the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) War

The history of the Armenian people is characterised by multiple waves of invasions. Because of its strategic geographic position, Armenia was very often in the middle of powerful regional players. Turkic-Mongol invasions and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire were particularly devastating for Armenians leading to mass migrations and displacements (Migliorino, 2008). Thus, although a migration movement of Armenians can be traced back to nearly 2000 years, the largest Armenian diaspora has been formed as a result of the Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. Since then, the Armenian diaspora has been identified as a 'victim' or 'classical' diaspora that closely resembles the prototypical Jewish case (Safran, 1991). Furthermore, the Genocide initiated both the discourse and the narrative of victimhood, survival, and the threat of Pan-Turkism (Ghaplanyan, 2018), not only in the diaspora, but also in the communist and independent Armenia. There was a short period from 1920 to early-1960 when the Soviet authorities attempted to replace the nationalist ideas that rose after the Genocide with the communist ideology. However, the Stalinist regime that perpetuated

mass murders of thousands of Armenian intellectuals, was not able to eradicate the "national consciousness" (Matossian, 1962, p. 216; in Ishkanian, 2008, p. 7). The years of the Khruschevian thaw saw the re-wakening of this "national consciousness" when the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union "reluctantly agreed to allow the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide" (AGMI, 2021). 24th April 1965 was the first official day when the representatives of the Church, the diaspora, and public officials gathered to commemorate the Genocide (Ishkanian, 2008). In 1967 the memorial to the victims of the Armenian Genocide was opened at Tsitsernakaberd, Yerevan, where hundreds of thousands of people visit every year (AGMI, 2021).

I remember the 24th of April, the official commemoration day, as the day of mourning and 'togetherness'. It is a day that starts with the sound of duduk or tsiranapogh (Դուդուկ, Ծիրանափող) a double-reed woodwind instrument made of apricot wood, on almost all official television channels. The sound of duduk accompanies the flow of thousands of people, laying flowers at the eternal fire at Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex (see AGMI, 2021). Yet, Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex is not the only one, there are memorials across the world - in Paris, Marseilles, Bremen, Glendale, Las Vegas in the USA (Beech, 2009), and the UK[27]. The commemoration of the Genocide, similar to the Jewish Holocaust, is integral to the Armenian collective identity (Marutyan, 2014). However, there is also a considerable difference in how the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide

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[27] The memorial is located in Ealing Green, London, where an apricot tree was planted in 2010 with a commemorative plaque that serves as a memorial to one and a half million Genocide victims.

are remembered. If in the Armenian case, the role of being the victims has been the emphasis of the commemoration, in the case of the Holocaust, resistance was and still is an integral part of the collective memory (Marutyan, 2014). Interestingly, Marutyan (2014) focuses on "the disparity in memory preservation" by exploring its practices in the form of museums or monuments. He asserts that in contrast to the memory of the Holocaust, which is partly maintained through museums, memory preservation of the Armenian Genocide is conveyed through monuments, which have a narrow and limited "message-diffusion". Although monuments provide information about the origins of the dispersal of the specific group, they do explain how this history of massacres, exiles, and displacements is connected to the history of the states in which diasporans live.

In the case of the Holocaust, half of the museums are in Europe, and Germany in particular, which not only recognises "its guilt", but also implements the history into its education system, also through museums, acknowledging that "it has been a manifestation of racism, of violation of democracy and human rights, in particular, a manifestation of an inhumane ideology" (Marutyan, 2014). Yet, during the war and its immediate aftermath, the Holocaust was not considered or viewed as "in Durkheimian terms, a sacred evil" (Alexander, 2002, p. 27), and only "gradually became the dominant symbolic representation of evil in the late twentieth century" (Alexander, 2002, p. 5). According to Alexander (2002), through culture, institutions, and relationships, the "radical evil" (p. 44) had to be "dramatized as a tragedy" (p. 33) and "become engorged" (p. 44). For scholars like Alexander (2002) and Bartov (2010; in Shaw 2013, p. 20) Holocaust as a symbol of "evil" drew scholarly and public attention to other genocides, what Alexander (2002, p. 53) terms 'metaphorical or analogical bridging'. This includes Pontian

Greeks and Armenians who drew parallels with the Holocaust in their fight for recognition of genocides perpetrated by the Ottoman regime. Although, there are other perspectives on the social construction of the Holocaust, for example, Novick (1999) argues that Jewish identity politics was used to raise awareness and support in America, while Finkelstein (2003) considers it to be an ideological tool that supports Israeli state actions, it led to wider discussions and demands for recognition of subsequent genocides. Whether this 'analogical bridging' or transferability of the Holocaust is leading to wider recognition of the genocides that happened before or after the Holocaust is a topic of considerable debate. The Armenian Genocide, meanwhile, continues to be denied by the successors of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey. This denialist politics and the silence that was dictated by the socio-political situation, particularly during the Soviet years, meant that most of the scholarly work was and continues to be engaged in fighting for recognition and proving the fact of the Genocide (see Robertson, 2015; Marutyan, 2014; Bobelian, 2009; Smythe, 2001; Hovannisian, 1999; Boyajian, 1972).

The recognition of the Genocide was further complicated by another conflict that arose in the 1980s - the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although this conflict has 'historical roots', a detailed exploration of the earlier history goes beyond the scope of this thesis (see Kambeck and Ghazaryan, 2013; Chorbajian, Donabedian, and Mutafian, 1994). In short, however, it can be described as a history of numerous conquests and invasions that have been conditioned by the strategic geographical position of Armenia: a crossroad between East and West. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were particularly turbulent for this region: the Tsarist empire declined, Armenian and Azerbaijani national

movements were rising, and the Bolsheviks overtook the region in 1920 (de Waal, 2019). In 1921, Karabakh was placed under Soviet Azerbaijani administration by Stalin, and in 1923 the borders of a new autonomous region were drawn (see ANCA, 2021; de Waal, 2019). This "politics of Soviet boundary-making" laid the foundations for future conflicts (Hughes and Sasse, 2002, p. 29) because they disregarded several aspects: the majority of the population in Karabakh was Armenian (USIP, 1992) and the borders of Nagorno-Karabakh were close to but not reaching Armenia. There were several unsuccessful petition attempts from 1923 to 1988 for Karabakh to be united with Soviet Armenia (de Waal, 2019). Until the 1960s is considered to be a period of "quiet nationalism" (Suciu, 2018, p. 284), while since 1965 the scale of public engagement and mass demonstrations was rising.

The situation changed dramatically from the summer of 1987 to 1991, during the years of Gorbachev's policies of 'perestroika' (перестройка)[28] and 'glasnost' (гласность)[29]. In February 1988 the Artsakh (Karabakh) movement gathered an "unprecedented degree of popular mobilization at the republican level" that fuelled the Sumgait massacres: the systematic killings of Armenians by Azerbaijanis in the town of Sumgait (Suciu, 2018, p. 284). This put immense pressure on Soviet Armenian authorities to support unification with Nagorno-Karabakh (Suciu, 2018). On July 12 of the same year, the eighth session of the

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[28] Reconstruction policies

[29] Public openness and transparency

NKAO Council of People's Deputies of the 20th convocation declared the "withdrawal of Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region from Azerbaijani SSR" (MFA of RA, 2022). Although in 1989 the National Council of NKAO was recognised as the highest authority on the territory of Artsakh with the right to govern the official structures, there was an "explicit stance to suppress the expression of the will of the people of Artsakh" (MFA of RA, 2022). There were rallies and mass demonstrations against the decision to replace the Committee of Special Administration of the NKAO with the Organizing Committee, headed by Victor Polyanichko, the 2nd Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. A state of emergency was declared on January 15, 1990, due to the mass violence and massacres that were taking place in the capital city of Azerbaijan, Baku.

The situation changed in August 1991, when the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted a declaration on the restoration of state independence of the Azerbaijani Republic as a successor of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which existed from 1918 to 1920. In September 1991, the Nagorno Karabakh Republic proclaimed its independence; however, Azerbaijan responded with the "Abolition of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of the Azerbaijan Republic" classifying this decision as a "factor contradicting the national interests of the Azerbaijani people" (MFA of RA, 2022). Since Karabakh was in the category of autonomies, which in the constitutional law of the USSR had the right to self-determination, a referendum was held on December 10, 1991, in the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. The majority of the population voted 'in favour' of proclaiming Nagorno Karabakh Republic as sovereign (MFA of RA, 2022).

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the independent Republic of Armenia, and the declaration of independence of Artsakh led to an intensification of the conflict. The three-year war ended with a ceasefire agreement in 1994 with Azerbaijan's loss of control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. It is important to note that in solidarity with Azerbaijan, Turkey imposed a "unilateral and unsanctioned" embargo on Armenia (Ghazaryan, 2013). Relations between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey remained suspended over this conflict. In Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh has been at the centre of political life. The first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, was heavily criticised for his 'pragmatic' approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He was replaced by Robert Kocharyan, who resigned from the leadership position in Nagorno-Karabakh to become the next president of Armenia.

The third president (from 2008-2018), Serzh Sargsyan, was the Chairman of Nagorno-Karabakh's Self-Defence Forces Committee from 1989 to 1993. Despite the centrality of Nagorno-Karabakh in the Armenian political arena, the relations between the diaspora and Armenia were challenged by Ter-Petrosyan's Government's decision to suspend the ARF, the refusal of dual citizenships, and the views on Turkey-Armenia relations (see Herzig, 2002). Although there was a slow economic recovery, attempts to reduce emigration and improve relations with the diaspora (see Stronski, 2016; Herzig, 2002), Kocharyan's and Sargsyan's presidencies encountered socio-political dilemmas: the attack on the Parliament in 1999; violent protests and anti-government riots of the 2008 presidential elections; the Four-Day War with Azerbaijan in 2016 (Stronski, 2016); and the 'Velvet Revolution' in 2018. The relations between Armenia and the diaspora continued to be fragmented since independence. Pawlowska (2017, p. 100) refers

to this as a "relationship of mutual expectations and dependencies", where the diaspora is expected to 'help', whilst Armenia is to 'preserve' the 'homeland'. Furthermore, for the diaspora, the preservation of the Armenian state was and still is more important than the socio-economic conditions and the will of its citizens. For example, the diaspora organisations in the U.S. issued a statement condemning the violence and protests against the 2008 election results, which erupted in the capital city of Yerevan, urging the citizens to respect the law (Pawlowska, 2017). However, the preservation of the 'homeland' seems to be jeopardized by the 2020 war with Azerbaijan and the loss of the majority of Artsakh, which can have serious repercussions for the stability and safety of Armenia and its citizens. The start of this process goes back to the 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018 and the formation of the new Prime Minister, Pashinyan's government.

## 7.2.    The Velvet Revolution: Diaspora and Repatriate Engagement

The march across Armenia, which later became known as the 'Velvet Revolution' started on March 31, 2018. It was triggered by the constitutional change from a presidential to a parliamentary system of rule that was proposed by Sargsyan, who was approaching his final second term of presidency. This transition was widely criticised as a way of securing and extending President Sargsyan's position in power (Broers, 2020). The protest started as the 'My Step' (Իմ քայլը) movement, when Nikol Pashinyan, a few supporters and journalists started their walk from the city of Gyumri. Walking through cities, 'my step' reached the capital city, Yerevan, on the 14th of April with thousands of people joining him in Republic Square. Streets and roads were blocked in Yerevan and other cities

across Armenia; protestors were holding posters demanding Sargsyan's resignation and urging to 'make a step' (Քայլ արա), and chanting 'reject Serj' (Մերժիր Սերժին). Although this was not the first public disobedience since the independence of Armenia, the scale of this mass movement was unprecedented.

It is important to note that the first attempt of this public uprising dates back to March 2008, where Pashinyan, who was a political activist and the editor-in-chief of the Armenian Times (Հայկական Ժամանակ) newspaper, and Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia, were leading figures of the protest. Ten people had died, more than one hundred protesters were injured, and many activists were jailed, including Pashinyan, who was sentenced to seven years in 2009, which was later reduced to three years and eleven months (Mkrtchyan, 2022; Human Rights House Foundation, 2010).

There were other civic initiatives, such as 'Save Teghut'[30], 'Dem em'[31] (Դեմ եմ) and 'Electric Yerevan', however, they were mostly unsuccessful, or as Mkrtchyan (2022) claims, partially successful. Electric Yerevan, mass demonstrations against the rise in electricity tariffs, were particularly important in determining the strategy of the 'Velvet Revolution'. Despite the use of water cannons and detentions of civilians and activists, Electric Yerevan was a peaceful public

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[30] Save Teghut is a civil initiative against the Armenian government's decision to grant an exploitation license for a mine that later became the second largest copper-molybdenum mine in Armenia. This civil initiative was formed to protect the nearby villages and the forest with rich flora and fauna, including endangered species.

[31] Deme em (Դեմ եմ) was a movement against the rise in prices for transportation and mandatory pension component deposits.

disobedience that was "distinguished by a festive atmosphere", which was later repeated and encouraged in the Velvet Revolution (Zolyan, 2021, p. 63). Lanskoy and Suthers (2019, p. 90) consider the years from 2008 to 2018 to be "the experimental decade", when the opposition and other civil movements learned important lessons on public mobilisation in the Armenian context. Indeed, in comparison to Electric Yerevan, Velvet Revolution as a civil disobedience was well-organised and had a clear political leadership (see Paturyan and Gevorgyan, 2016; Zolyan, 2021). It had a clear message of peaceful protests, after all, the term 'Velvet Revolution' was borrowed from Czechoslovakia's non-violent protests against the communist regime.

The culmination of the 'festive atmosphere' was in the Republic Square and across the country on the 23rd of April 2018, when Serzh Sargsyan resigned. Two factors played a significant role in the success of this civil disobedience. First, it is the involvement of the younger generation, who did not have an experience of the Soviet past. This was particularly apparent during the Electric Yerevan initiative and later in the Velvet Revolution, where the majority of protesters were young people (Abrahamian and Shagoyan, 2018; Arshamyan, 2017) born after the 80s and are known as the 'Independent Generation'. Second, the dissemination of information through social media, and Facebook in particular, proved to be successful in mobilising the younger generation. Armenia is not the first to implement cyber-activism in organising mass actions. For example, Egyptian and Tunisian activists spent considerable time preparing the revolt in 2011 through different social media platforms (see Khamis, Gold and Vaughn, 2013; Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Yet, social media is also an enabling tool for reaching and engaging diasporas in political activism in the 'homeland'. For instance, Kurdish second-

generation diasporans in Northern Italy construct their attachment to the Kurdish cause through regular online political engagement (Costa and Alinejad, 2020). In the case of the Iranian second-generation diaspora in America, social media is used to mobilise solidarity with the 'homeland' (Alinejad, 2017). Although a similar argument can be made regarding the UK-Armenian diaspora's cyber engagement during the war of 2020, their online participation during the revolution was limited to a small minority and a few known public figures.

The majority of posts on the UK-Armenian Facebook pages were made by new migrants from Armenia, who were sharing information, video footages from Armenia and BBC, CNN etc. coverage of the revolution using hashtags #MyStep, #DiasporaStep, #RejectSerzh, and in Armenian #Իմքայլը, #ՍփյուռքիՔայլը, #ՄերժիրՍերժին. Facebook was also used to inform and generate interest, for example, in a protest that took place on the 21ˢᵗ of April in front of the Armenian Embassy in London, in solidarity with protesters in Armenia. It generated 247 responses on the 'Armenians in the UK' Facebook page, which has 2500 members, 168 interested and 79 going, with actual participation lower than 79 people. The majority of attendees were migrants from the Republic of Armenia, although one of the speakers was a repatriated known musician, Andre Simonian, who was born in Iran and lived in the UK for 11 years (MoA, 2020).

This lower participation and engagement level is also reflected in my participants' stories. Almost all of them suggested that they knew about the revolution mainly from the media but were not involved in it even online. One of my participants from Boston, Silva, who repatriated in 2021, told me that she was

> "surprised the diaspora wasn't involved in the
> revolution. Very few were participating in it, we all
> watched it, with goodwill, and we saw the results of it,
> but I was really surprised that I wouldn't say apathy -
> people were watching - but they were watching with the
> hand extended far away".

However, this seems to change with diasporans' repatriation to Armenia. Thirty-six-year-old Viktor from Lebanon, answered my question whether he was following the revolution with "actually, no", however:

> "now that I am here, for the past year I've been
> following what happened in 2019, how did 2020 end up?
> How did we get here? I started getting involved in
> politics, reading about different sides and what both
> sides say or what 10 sides say in the case of Armenia,
> and I don't have a side... I try to keep my distance, but I
> also try to be involved in more humanitarian ways,
> rather than in political ways".

If at first, diasporans and repatriates were "really impressed by the people and that they were able to voice their concern and do some change" (Satenik, a twenty-four-year-old repatriate from Lebanon), within a year after the revolution, the views started to shift, particularly after the war of 2020. This change is conditioned by their experiences of living in Armenia, because their perceptions in the diaspora are "skewed":

> "Looking at it today, I understand what I knew was very
> skewed. Watching how diaspora presents the local
> government is or local Armenians, I follow Diaspora

news, I understand now that they're completely on a different planet. What they think, how they present problems, social or economic issues, they miss the nuances" (Forty-six-year-old Silva from Boston, who repatriated in 2021).

By "nuances" Silva refers to the insider view and lived experiences of the political and social issues, which are not apparent to the diaspora. Living in Armenia, therefore, changed the views about the revolution and consequently, its outcome. For example, twenty-year old repatriate, Goqor from Washington, was sceptical about the socio-political change after the revolution because "the promises that were made, were not really upheld… and all of the promises that were made about restoring order and putting all these thieves into prison, kind of set in the back pocket".

Similarly, most of my participants interviewed after the war of 2020, raised concerns and distrust about the current Armenian government, which for many was a hope for a new start in 2018. I interviewed Margo, a sixty-one-year-old repatriate, who was born and raised in Lebanon, but later married and left for Boston, USA. She had two attempts at repatriation. In 2007 she moved to Armenia with her husband but had to leave because of the unrest in March 2008. The second time was in 2020 when she returned after her husband's death and was living in Armenia when the interview was conducted. As the majority of my participants, Margo was also supporting the revolution from Boston by following news and social media, however, after moving to Armenia, witnessing the war and the loss of the majority of Artsakh, she expressed frustration and criticism

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towards the current government. Moreover, she questioned whether that was a planned scenario and whether that was a revolution after all:

> "I was surprised actually that the revolution happened, especially during Sargsyan's regime. I don't know, maybe today KGB will come and take me to prison, but Sarkisyan was one of the strongest KGB... He was KGB, right? How did he allow this revolution to take place? I always ask this. It's not possible that he was afraid of Pashinyan. He wouldn't have done what Kocharyan did in March, but he would have done something. And a picture I cannot forget, when in Marriott Hotel there was this Sarksyan - Pashinyan meeting. Sarksyan is standing up and he is saying: 'you are right' and he leaves. Sargsyan does that? Everybody was happy, but part of my brain was like, yeah, that's good, but then what's happening in Armenia? Was this because in 2020 we had the war, and we lost the most of Karabakh? Was this an agreement that Pashinyan will come to the throne?"

Indeed, the war of 2020 played a crucial role in how the revolution is perceived, but most importantly, it brought the discourse of loss and trauma once again to the forefront of 'Armenianness'. Until the war, the revolution was perceived as a hope for a democratic society and the establishment of law, and although the diaspora was not actively involved, whether online or in-person, there was a recognition of the need for a change. With time, and particularly after losing the majority of Artsakh, this optimism was replaced with a period of silence or even

'apathy', after all, until the last day of the war, only one message was reinforced by the authorities: 'Հախթելու ենք' (We will win).

## 7.3. The Artsakh War of 2020

The war between Armenia and Azerbaijan broke out on the 27th of September 2020 and lasted 44 days, during which more than one hundred civilians were killed on both sides, with thousands of casualties amongst soldiers (The International Crisis Group, 2022). Various weapons, such as cluster munitions and artillery rockets, that do not discriminate military targets from civilians and civilian infrastructures, were used (Human Rights Watch, 2020; the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, 2020). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (2021) reported ninety thousand Armenians displaced from Artsakh during the war, and forty thousand people who lost their homes after Azerbaijani occupation. For Armenians across the world, the war was a reaffirmation of Turkey's hostile relations with Armenia and a reminder of the atrocities of 1915, as Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had been vocal in supporting Azerbaijan politically and militarily. The deployment and involvement of mercenaries by Turkey have been regularly documented and confirmed by international media, several foreign human rights organizations, and Governments of the USA, France, Russia, and Iran[32] (The Human Rights

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[32] "[O]n 6 October the European Court of Human Rights received a request for an interim measure lodged by Armenia against Turkey due to the latter's involvement in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through direct military presence and deployment of mercenaries. The European Court granted the request and called on Turkey to refrain from actions that contribute to breaches of the Convention rights of civilians, and to respect its obligations

Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, 2020). Although Turkey's engagement in this conflict was not surprising, after all since the Genocide, diasporans' consider Turkey to be directly responsible for this conflict[33], it reinstated Turkey as an 'enemy': a perpetrator of a Genocide. On social media and in conversations with repatriates and diasporans, Azerbaijan and Turkey were used interchangeably as perpetrators of 'another Genocide'. For example, news about Turkey deploying mercenaries, threat of a genocide by the Genocide Watch, petitions, and open letters to stop the aggression were shared and reposted on Facebook throughout the duration of the war. There were thousands of reposts of posters and video clips with calls to 'Stop Supporting Pan-Turkism with your Silence' and hashtags #Stopazeriagression, #Stopterrorism, #justice and many others.

Indeed, in contrast to the Velvet Revolution, the diaspora's engagement during the last Artsakh war was active and vocal. Humanitarian initiatives were organised, and funds were raised to support the displaced families and the soldiers on the frontline. For example, in the UK, "We are our Borders: All for Artsakh - Armenia and Artsakh Aid Appeal" was set up, where funds were raised and donations of critical items such as first aid kits, blood pressure machines, warm clothes, wheelchairs, ambulance minivans, etc., were organised by the Armenian Community Council of the UK, the Diocese of the Armenian Church in the UK and Ireland, and the Armenian Medical Association of GB. According to

under the Convention" (The Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, 2020, Section 2.2).

[33] See Chernobrov and Wilmer's (2019) study on the role of the Genocide and the Karabakh conflict on diasporic identity amongst the younger generation of Armenians in the UK, France and Russia.

Cavoukian (2021), the diaspora's engagement in 'homeland' politics has been limited to these kinds of financial investments and charitable work. However, this argument undermines the impact of social media on diasporic engagement in 'homeland' affairs. For example, Vietabroader and One Vietnam are social network channels, which offer the Vietnamese diaspora a space for communication and a platform to raise concerns to the Vietnamese government (Gribble and Tran, 2016). For the Syrian diaspora in Italy, Facebook was used as a political platform for organising protests, and a space for sharing concerns and information about the events in the 'homeland' (Al-Rawi and Fahmy, 2018). Turkish diaspora's engagement in social media was critical during the Gezi demonstrations in Istanbul in 2013, as it was the space where communication and connection to the 'homeland' were maintained, and opinions and attitudes about Turkey and its political situation were shared (Giglou, d'Haenens and Ogan, 2018). Thus, social media became a crucial space for diasporic activity, communication, connection, and maintaining cultural ties (see Karim and Al-Rawi, 2018), particularly in times of conflict escalations in the 'homeland'. The Eritrean diaspora, for example, "have mobilized demonstrators, amassed funds for war, debated the formation of the constitution and influenced the government of Eritrea" through the internet (Bernal, 2006, p. 162; in Brèant, 2015, p. 84). The Armenian diaspora is not an exception, and similar to diasporas outlined above actively used cyberspace to mobilise offline and online participation in political activism and humanitarian initiatives.

Protests were organised by the Armenian diaspora across the world, with particularly large numbers in California, USA. In the UK, there have been several demonstrations in central London, which were shared and reposted on Armenian

Facebook pages and YouTube channels. On October 10th, 2020, a mass demonstration took place near the residence of the Prime Minister in London, where slogans such as 'stop supporting Aliyev', 'shame on Turkey', 'stop Azerbaijani Aggression', 'we want peace', 'Armenia wants peace, Aliyev wants war' were chanted[34]. Protesters were holding Armenian and Artsakh flags and posters condemning Aliyev and Erdogan: "Aliev and Erdogan 21st Century Hitlers". The diaspora was fast to react to the first signs of unrest in July 2020, when young Armenians organised a protest against biased news in front of the BBC office in London. Earlier in July 2020, BBC's representation of the conflict was shared and reposted on Armenians in the UK Facebook pages, where concerns have been raised about BBCs reporting of the conflict. Comments and posts were shared about the biased nature of the reports, which was viewed by the Armenian diaspora as the result and demonstration of the UK's close ties with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Several other protests took place against BBC in October 2020, which were accompanied by letters of complaint and calls for boycotting BBC. It is important to note, that the war 'coincided' with the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, due to national restrictions, many were not able to participate in these demonstrations. As a result, the main arena of political activism was on social media and Facebook in particular: "During the war, people were posting, they were creating things on Facebook, Instagram, whatever, they felt that they could do what is in their control, try to come together" (Twenty-nine-year-old Maria, who was born and raised in Brighton, but lived in London when the interview was conducted). This

[34] Video material on the protests can be found on AGBU Facebook page and News AM YouTube channel (see Bibliography)

sense of "digital togetherness" (Marino, 2015, p. 6) was crucial in Armenians' mobilisation against the common threat, as well as against being 'invisible' or 'hidden' in the UK. Earlier in this thesis, I proposed that there is a sense of being 'hidden' amongst Armenians in the UK, which is due to the silence and the refusal of the British government to use the term 'Genocide' and their alliance with Azerbaijan and Turkey. The representation of the war on media, at least during the first month, contributed to this sense of 'invisibility' or the feeling of being 'hidden'. Social media, particularly during the Covid-19 restrictions, became the central platform of political engagement, where the Armenian diaspora in the UK was making attempts to overcome that 'hidden' position.

## 7.4.  'Social Media Wars': Cyber-activism'

Internet and social media were, indeed, enabling tools during the Artsakh war of 2020, after all, it was the main stage of diasporic activity and engagement with the conflict. Yet, it was also the space of 'exposure' and 'visibility' for Armenians who were engaged in 'cyber-activism'. By 'cyber-activism' I refer to the "use of new media to advance a cause which is difficult to advance offline" (Khamis, 2018, p. 4). Social networking sites enabled diasporas to contribute to 'homeland' conflicts and play various roles in the conflict cycle whether by disseminating information, organising petitions in the 'hostland', or condemning media's representation of 'homeland' conflicts. For example, there has been a considerable increase in the number of Kurdish social media groups, which are associated with the Kurdish independence theme. In the case of the Syrian diaspora, social media was used to share the stories of sufferings amongst civilians in Syria in November 2012 and May 2013, when the Syrian government

shut down the Internet connection in areas of high opposition forces (Fisher, 2013; and Anden-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013; in Seo, 2022). For the Afghan diaspora in the UK, social media increased diasporic activity and connection with the events in Afghanistan (Cretney, 2022).

For Armenians in and outside of the 'homeland', social networking sites were where online communication and conflict between Azerbaijani and Armenian social media users were taking place. The Armenian government and various media outlets used Facebook to disseminate information and daily updates about the situation in Artsakh. These broadcasts and articles were the main arenas of engagement with Azerbaijani Facebook users in the form of disputes, insults, direct threats, and hate speech. For instance, on the 28th of September 2020, the BBC published an article titled: 'Armenia and Azerbaijan fight over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh', with the link posted on BBC's Facebook page. This article was 'shared' five hundred and thirty-eight times and received four thousand 'thumbs up', one thousand and eight hundred 'crying', three hundred and forty-six 'surprised' and one hundred and thirty 'angry' emotive icons. It also generated nine hundred comments or rather instigated a dispute between Armenian and Azerbaijani English-speaking Facebook users. Azerbaijanis and their supporters' comments were referring to the UN resolution, Nagorno-Karabakh being part of Azerbaijan, and the Khojaly Genocide. Armenians and their supporters were providing arguments about the Shushi massacres, the historic presence of Armenians in Artsakh, the Armenian population being the majority in Artsakh, the referendum, and the right to self-determination. Along with a presentation of 'facts', and argument, both sides were accusing each other of being "brainwashed" and calling each other "stupid", "filthy", "idiots" etc. This is a

recurring theme for almost all articles about the conflict shared on BBC's Facebook page, with a particularly large number of online disputes on reports of violence and casualties amongst civilians. The article by BBC, 'Nagorno-Karabakh: Civilians hit amid Armenia Azerbaijan conflict', sparked more than six thousand comments, where both sides were accusing each other of misinformation and even justifying casualties by the 'right' to defend their territories.

The Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh (2020) raised concerns about hate speech against ethnic Armenians and "Armenophobia", particularly on social media networks such as Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter. Members of the Armenian Facebook pages that I was following were posting and reposting news, information, calls for funding, as well as humanitarian, political, civil, and financial participation. This active engagement positioned the users of social media platforms as targets of cybercrimes. The war sparked an increase in, for example, the hacking of Armenian social media accounts (Armenpress, 2021). Taking into consideration that there was a mass movement of adding 'frames' to Facebook profile pictures in support of Artsakh, the army, and with a slogan that was encouraged by the Armenian government: 'Հախթելու ենք' (We will win), Armenian Facebook users were an easy target. Warnings and calls to be cautious were continuously posted and shared on Facebook by Armenian information security experts. Similarly, there were also attempts by Armenian groups to answer with counteractions. Calls for uniting in the fight against Azerbaijani cyberattacks were posted and reposted on Facebook throughout the war. Being a member of several Armenian diaspora Facebook groups, I observed many calls of taking group actions towards hate speech and threats by reporting posts and comments or blocking them.

Thus, Armenian social media users were exposed and directly involved in this war, where media networking sites became the new space of the 'battlefield'. Similar conclusions are drawn by Chernobrov (2022), whose research focused on the online mobilisation of the Armenian diaspora during the 2020 Karabakh War. Using the Armenian case, Chernobrov (2022, p. 639) argues that his participants described themselves as "cyberwarriors", who are engaged in "'an information war'" due to three main reasons: cyberwars are important in modern conflicts and "essential to victory"; disseminating information can help in exposing misinformation and lack of attention from international media, as well as in mobilising global public; and a way of supporting the homeland from a distance. Acknowledging that the Armenian government used the diaspora as a "resource in global infopolitcs", Chernobrov (2022, p. 639) emphasises that for many interviewees the decisions were personal as there was a need to retaliate against misinformation.

Similarly, the findings of this study demonstrate that the Internet and social media in particular became a space of social visibility, resistance, social cohesion, and mobilisation against the main collective threat for an otherwise fragmented diaspora and nation. Diasporic mobilisation in times of crises, what is referred to as 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1990) has been discussed in the context of various diasporas, which temporarily unite by downplaying and simplifying their heterogeneity and identity. For instance, setting aside their disagreements and differences, even if temporarily, the second-generation Kurdish diaspora in Sweden united in their cause of improving the situation of Kurds in Kurdistan (Baser, 2015). Second-generation Lebanese diaspora in Sydney also employs

strategic essentialism to ""reassert their Lebaneseness in the face of structural disadvantage and racism"" in some contexts, while in others ""adopt and mimic the dominant images of them by others, and even erase their ethnic alignments"" (Noble and Tabar, 2002, p. 140-41; cited in Mitchel, 2008, p. 105). There are many other examples of employing strategic essentialism such as Hmong diaspora in Australia (Julian, 2013), Mapuche resistance movement in Chile (Bacigalupo, 2007), Tibetan (Houston and Wright, 2003) and Palestinian diasporas for whom "essentialism is a political necessity" because of the threat of "radical effacement" (Lavie and Swedenburg, 1996, p. 12). Similarly, despite social, political and cultural differences, the Armenian diaspora mobilised in times of crises of the Spitak earthquake, the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the armed conflict in Armenian-populated town of Kesab, Syria, and the Artsakh war of 2020.

Yet, if during the war of 2020 there were thousands of posts shared, petitions signed, letters, and formal complaints raised showing the diaspora's engagement and their active participation in the 'homeland', after the war, social media participation decreased. There has been a comparatively low level of diasporic engagement on social media since the triadic 'peace deal' between Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan was signed. My participants, who were interviewed after the war, also reflected on this 'silence':

> "From the people that I do know, it is not being spoken
> about as much anymore. I think people are kind of trying
> to move on with their lives and only, for example, when
> they invade Syunik people would go 'oh my god', start
> talking about it again. It depends, if you look at my mum
> and my mum's generation, they are a little bit more

> engaged, she still everyday reads the news to see what's
>
> going on. The younger generation, I don't know, not so
>
> much, no. I guess the younger generation is more social
>
> media focused, I think that's dropped off" (Twenty-nine-
>
> year-old Maria from Brighton, who travelled and lived
>
> several months in Armenian after the war).

And although Maria refers to the younger generation as more "social media focused", after the war, there was limited engagement and participation even amongst them. Few initiatives have been shared or organised, and among those few are posts and petitions demanding the return of Armenian POWs and supporting Armenian businesses in and outside of the 'homeland'. This comparative inactivity can be due to the loss of trust in the Armenian state and the complex dynamics between 'hayastancys' and the diaspora. In the next section, I will address the aftermath of the war and discuss my participants' experiences and reflections on 'moving on'.

## 7.5. Another Loss: The Aftermath of the Artsakh War

On the 12th of November 2020, the prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, addressed the nation announcing the signing of the 'peace deal' with Azerbaijan. This announcement was unexpected for the majority of Armenians, as even Pashinyan refers to this in his speech: "why was I so anxious about the safety of our soldiers at the time of signing the document, and why was I not so worried before that?" (The Office to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2022). Indeed, up until the last day of the war, the official message of the Armenian government was 'Հախթելու ենք' (We will win), which was disseminated through daily press

briefings by the Press secretary of the Armenian Defence Ministry, Artsrun Hovhannisyan (see First Channel News, 2020). Due to a high level of misinformation, every official briefing and other official sources encouraged and urged the public to follow only official news and updates. This message was continuously reposted on social media platforms, where any information about Azerbaijani advances was discarded as 'fake news'. The last media briefing took place on the 9th of November 2020, where the Defence Army of the Republic of Artsakh, Colonel Suren Sarumyan, reported that "the army will be able to defeat the enemy, suppress its invasive aspirations and fulfil its task unconditionally" (First Channel News, 2020). Unsurprisingly, the announcement about the loss of Shushi (Shusha, to the Azerbaijanis), a strategically important town, the 'peace deal', and the loss of most of the territories of Artsakh was unexpected for the majority of Armenians around the world. The realisation of this loss was complicated further by the collective memory of independent Artsakh, which, according to some historians, has been able to remain autonomous, even when Armenia was under the rule of different empires (Hovhannisian, 1988). In addition to the liberation of Artsakh in the early nineties, this notion of an independent Artsakh became a "consistent component of Armenian collective memory […], contributing to the perception of Nagorno-Karabakh as the last Armenian stronghold, the surrender of which will result not only in the physical loss of territory but also in the loss of a big part of Armenian identity" (Ghamaghelyan, 2019, p. 70).

Now, with Armenia's loss of control over the majority of Artsakh, further research is necessary to explore the formation, negotiation, and maintenance of diasporic identity, and the role of the 'homeland' as a physical place and a symbolic space

of connection. It will expand the understanding of the diaspora's engagement in 'homeland' conflicts, moving beyond the concept of diasporas being "'peace-makers'" or "'peace-wreckers'" (Cohen, 2009, p. 123). After all, as discussed in the literature review, the complexity and multiplicity of diasporic belonging and attachment, challenge hegemonic ideas of loyalty and belonging (Turner, 2010). Indeed, my participants' experiences and views throughout this thesis question these hegemonic ideas, emphasising the contested nature of diasporic belonging and engagement, and the complexity of diaspora-'hayastancy' dynamics. The outcome of the war reaffirmed and heightened these fragmented dynamics revealing fundamental conflicts between belonging, remembering, and 'moving on'. One of my participants, sixty-one-year-old Margo, who repatriated from Boston, reflects on her experiences of living in Armenia during the war, referring to the continuity of the notion of 'victimhood':

> "In my view, there seems to be relative silence after the war, but that's who we are as Armenians. We have this disease, I think, every year since the war happened, like the Genocide that happened. Biden now said 'Genocide'. Okay, next? How many months is it now? We like to cry, we like to be sad, we like to sing sad songs. Look at the Jews though, look at them! Ours was the first Genocide; Hitler said: 'nobody remembers the Armenian Genocide, so now I am going to kill 4 or 6 million Jews'. But there is a time for crying, and there is a time for replanting your dead soul, you know? We don't do that".

For Margo, this "relative silence" is due to the sense of victimhood, which is a characteristic of the Armenian nation. Throughout the interview, Margo

interchangeably used the Genocide and the Artsakh war emphasising the importance and the presence of the past. In other words, the war of 2020 reawakened the memory of past trauma, gaining new meanings in the present. Adopting the term "past presenting" (Macdonald, 2013), Chernobrov and Wilmers (2020) employ it to the Armenian case. In a study of the role of the Armenian Genocide and the Karabakh conflict on identity amongst diaspora youth in France, the UK, and Russia, the authors suggest that 'past presenting' "permeates diasporic conceptions of identity, evaluation of subsequent events, and everyday behaviours" (p. 917). Agreeing with Chernobrov and Wilmers (2020), I suggest that 'past presenting' can become an obstacle for moving forward, particularly after the loss and trauma of the Artsakh war. The continuous threat and insecurity reinstate the mentality of victimhood and the traumatic collective memory of the past.

Insecurity about the future of Armenia was the main fear or concern expressed by my participants. For more than two decades, Artsakh was the symbol of justice for Armenians across the world, even though, for many, it was a distant conflict (Chernobrov and Wilmers, 2020). However, the outcome of the war brought back this sense of injustice and insecurity:

> "People tell me, it's good, we have Russians on our side,
> four more years we have Russian soldiers, then? What's
> gonna happen? […] I know for sure that Artsakh is going
> to be Azeri enclave, this is what I see" (Sixty-one-year-
> old repatriate Margo from Boston).

For Viktor, a repatriate who was born in Lebanon and lived in America, the outcome of the war and that sense of insecurity resulted in disillusionment because he:

> "was as naïve as the majority. Holding that fort, that frontline for thirty years - we took it in 5, we drove it for 25 years, what is the worst that can happen? They can take the land? They can't, we have Russians backing us up. You know, all those years, all those naïve mentalities […] The result – we lost, we lost them [the land], and we are still losing".

As it can be seen, there is also a sense of disillusionment with Russia as a strategic partner who, it was believed, will intervene if Artsakh and Armenia are under attack. The discussion on Russia's role in this conflict is beyond the scope of this study, however, it is important to note that the outcome of the war led to disputes amongst Armenians regarding Russia's position on this conflict and the security of Armenia. This insecurity is due to the uncertainties of the present, as well as due to the disbelief in regulating the relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey:

> "My personal view is that nothing is going to change for the better unless there is some form of revolution that comes within Turkey. […] I don't know what the future holds. Currently, I think it will be chipping away as much as they [Turkey and Azerbaijan] can, and there isn't much we can do about that. Even if there was a change in political leadership, I don't see how anything could change. Maybe, the only thing could be the overthrow of

the dictators around" (Twenty-nine-year-old Maria from

Brighton).

There is a sense of fatality about the future of Armenia, particularly in the state's

ability to change the political situation. Although Maria was "in support of" the

Velvet Revolution and "the way that people came together", she suggested that

"the way that Pashinyan handled the situation divided the diaspora".

> "For me after the war is when people lost their heads in
>
> diaspora and Armenia. People take on each other, what
>
> was united effort seemingly just fell apart, people just
>
> started to rip into each other, they're divided. I think it
>
> divided the diaspora, it divided Armenia".

Similarly, for Viktor hayastancys are "in denial, it hurts. Not just them, even the

diaspora, first criticised the government and their actions, okay, so, what are you

going to do about it?". Questions on the diaspora's engagement and involvement,

as well as activity and inactivity in the conflict, were discussed by my participants,

who found themselves in a challenging position of in-betweenness. For example,

Maria from Brighton explained that:

> "I found myself in a strange positioning, particularly
>
> when I went last summer [2021]. A lot of diaspora
>
> friends there, I made friends when I went in 2019 and I
>
> also made with some locals, and found a kind of weird
>
> positioning, particularly after the war. Sometimes the
>
> diaspora community I found, my friends anyway, weren't
>
> really engaging in the local issues, they weren't worried
>
> about the situation so much. They were going out,
>
> drinking, having a nice time, while my local friends, some

of them went to fight and they were kind of dealing with

the trauma and the aftereffects of the war. I kind of

noticed the difference between the two, which I found

myself struggling to position".

Thus, the outcome of the war intensified the sense of in-betweenness and challenged the notion of belonging. Fractured dynamics between diasporans, hayastancys, and the 'homeland', a theme that has been discussed throughout this thesis, seems to prevail after the war. If during the war there was a unified attempt to take actions for the 'homeland' and against the common threat, after the loss of the majority of Artsakh, there is a "relative silence" (Sixty-one-year-old Margo). There are various reasons for this "relative silence" including a rising distrust in the Armenian government and its actions during the war, fractured dynamics amongst 'hayastancys' and diasporans, and the loss of the symbol of historic justice. Therefore, the outcome of this war brought back the narrative of 'victimhood', from which the younger generation were trying to 'move on' (see Chernobrov and Wilmers, 2020).

## Chapter Summary

Since the early 20th century, trauma and conflict play a central role in the Armenian narrative. For over a hundred years, the discourse of victimhood, survival, and the threat of Pan-Turkism have been the defining features of the diaspora and the Armenian nation in general.  One of the main reasons for this narrative is the denial of the Genocide by the successors of the Ottoman Empire, and a slow process of recognition by the international community. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict became the biggest challenge of independent Armenia;

however, it was also a fight for survival and a symbol of justice. The relative stability for almost thirty years was disrupted with the war in 2020, reaffirming Turkey's position on Armenia and the atrocities of 1915. Thus, for Armenians, the narrative of the Genocide resurfaced with a stronger emphasis on victimhood, injustice, and trauma. During times of crisis, whether during the liberation movement or the devastating earthquake of 1988, the Armenian diaspora has been united in its effort to support the 'homeland', and the War of 2020 was not an exception. In comparison to the involvement in the Velvet Revolution, the diaspora was engaged by raising awareness about the conflict and financially supporting displaced families and soldiers on the frontline. In addition to these common forms of diasporic engagement in times of crisis, this war has also emphasised the significance of media, and social media in particular, as the main stage of diasporic activity and engagement with the conflict. Social networking sites, and Facebook particularly, became the 'battlefield' of online wars between Azerbaijani, Turkish and Armenian social media users. During forty-four days of the war, social media was the main tool of diasporic activism, where thousands of posts, movements, petitions, official letters, and humanitarian initiatives were organised and disseminated. Most importantly, it was used in a symbolic fight for 'visibility' within a wider British context. In contrast, social media participation in the Velvet Revolution revealed a lower level of engagement in 'homeland' politics. There are various reasons for this 'inactivity', including concerns for the security of the state, strained relations with the Armenian government, and 'homeland'-diaspora dynamics. Fractured dynamics between diaspora groups, and between the diaspora and the 'homeland', have been particularly prominent after the war. Although a few humanitarian initiatives continue to raise funds in the aftermath of the war, overall, there has been 'relative silence'. The sense of in-betweenness,

disillusionment, and insecurity about the future of the Armenian state seem to be reoccurring themes amongst my participants. Furthermore, since the conflict is far from being resolved, the continuous threat and regional insecurity can be instrumental in furthering the mentality of 'victimhood' and the collective memory of past traumas.

# Conclusion

For the Armenian diaspora 'homeland' has been and continues to be a contested and contingent notion because of the Genocide of 1915, which led to a widespread 'diasporisation' of Armenians across the world. The loss of the territories of Western Armenia, the creation of the Republic of Turkey, and the Turco-Soviet alliance reinforced the need to establish long-term communities outside the 'homeland'. These long-term communities maintained their existence through "social and cultural practices… in mixed, bicultural forms" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 649). The latter implies a reproduction of two or more cultural elements, after all the Armenian diaspora constitutes an ethnic group that "necessarily and inevitably developed local, host country-specific "ethnic" features" (Tölölyan, 2001, p. 2). Thus, with this state of hybridity 'homeland' becomes a symbol that transcends the territorial concept, becoming a new source of identity, which is intertwined with the necessities of the present and the memories of the past. 'Homeland' for the Armenian diaspora is a process of a continuous (re)production and negotiation of one's memory, history, and the present. It is not a static phenomenon but a process of creating meanings and patterns of attachment, which are connected as much to the 'hostland' as they are to the 'homeland'.

In the 'hostland' the Armenian diaspora in the UK is 'hidden' as a minority group because of a lack of 'demographic thickness', visible cultural traits, and complex relations and diaspora dynamics amongst Armenians from different parts of the world. Agreeing with Bakalian (2014) that the "supply side" is a crucial precondition for sporadic diaspora participation, this study illustrates that

consequently it also positions Armenians 'on the map' of their host countries, as cultural traits and diaspora institutions are important for *the visibility* of any diaspora, particularly in multicultural settings. Most importantly, however, it is the official position on the Genocide and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict that contribute to this sense of invisibility or being 'hidden', after all, the denial of history is a denial of memory that constitutes the building blocks of 'Armenianness'. Through 'symbolic religiosity' (Gans, 1994) and "the collective work of memory and commemoration" (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 50), the Genocide remains the most influential "representative memory" (Ewing, 1990, p. 267) and, therefore, a "carrier of diasporic identity" (Baronian, Besser and Jansen, 2007, p. 12), which offers a sense of 'unity'. The refusal to officially recognise the Genocide, the silence on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the alliance with Azerbaijan continue to be crucial in how Armenians perceive their status in the UK. In these circumstances collective effort and engagement is directed towards not only large investments and political involvement that aim to rebuild the 'homeland', but also towards the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the UK government and 'fair' representation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, these attempts have so far been unsuccessful due to the strategic partnership between the UK and Turkey, and economic interests in Azerbaijan.

This denial of memory that reinforces the 'hidden' position, can be one of the reasons why the successive diaspora generations emphasize the need for a continuous awareness not through marches once a year, but through 'educating' and sharing their stories with their social circles. Thus, the practices of maintaining the memory of the Genocide seem to have transformed from public to private commemorations.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the private seems to be recurring whether it is in the content of Genocide commemoration, maintaining 'Armenianness' or connecting with the 'homeland'. For all of my third-generation participants, a sense of permanency and continuous connection through personal involvement and contribution such as travelling, volunteering, experiencing or even living in Armenia, was an integral part of their participation and engagement with the 'homeland'. Therefore, involvement with the 'homeland' is transforming from a symbolic engagement in the 'hostland' to a symbolic presence in the 'homeland'. The presence is symbolic because it is a temporal exploration of the unknown 'homeland'; because 'return' continues to be "subliminal, figurative and symbolic" (Cohen, 2008 p. 138).

However, the scholarly debate on this symbolic presence of the Armenian diaspora, is mainly built on diasporans' short-term travels to Armenia, while 'repatriation', particularly from early 2000s, is still unexplored. Yet, the exploration of diasporic 'return': the experiences, expectations, and motivations, have potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of not only contested and ambiguous 'homeland'-diaspora relations, but also reveal the intricacies of belonging and non-belonging to what is proclaimed a 'homeland'. In this research, I sought to fill this gap by exploring motivations and experiences of repatriation. For my repatriated participants, relocating to Armenia reflected a desire to find where one 'fits in' because there was a sense of disconnection, estrangement, or non-belonging to their 'host-culture' or 'host-society'. The reasons for this sense of estrangement or non-belonging were varied: non-acceptance, discrimination, disagreement with the socio-political developments of the 'host-country', or personal reasons such as deteriorating mental health. In other words, my

participants' repatriation was conditioned by "desires and (im)possibilities of making oneself at home" (Stock, 2013). However, repatriation does not necessarily lead to that sense of belonging or 'feeling at home', but in the context of this study, reveals cultural and ideological differences between 'them' and 'us'. Repatriates found themselves "in-between-homes" (Fenster, 2005, p. 251) and "consciously of two worlds" (Antin, 1912; in Hoffman, 1989, p. 163), which is a complex and continuous process of negotiation between where one fits the most. These cultural and ideological differences, however, are left aside in times of crisis when diaspora mobilises towards one aim. This strategic essentialism is particularly applicable in the context of the Armenian diaspora and the Armenian nation in general. Due to a long history of occupation and foreign rule, the Genocide, and the threat of Pan-Turkism, 'essential' characteristics of 'victimhood', historic trauma and survival are mobilised in times when the survival of the 'homeland' is under a threat. For example, during the liberation movement or the devastating earthquake of 1988, the Armenian diaspora has been united in its effort to support the 'homeland'. Yet, the biggest challenge of independent Armenia became the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while the recent war of 2020 raised concerns about the security and future of the Armenian state. The relative stability for almost thirty years was disrupted with this war, reaffirming Turkey's position on Armenia and the atrocities of 1915. Thus, for Armenians, the narrative of the Genocide resurfaced with a stronger emphasis on victimhood, trauma, injustice, and invisibility.

These narratives were particularly visible on social media, which became the central platform of political engagement, where Armenians were making attempts to overcome their 'hidden' position in the 'hostland'. Indeed, the official position

of the UK, alliance with Azerbaijan and Turkey, and UK media representation of the war contributed to this sense of 'invisibility' or the feeling of being 'hidden'. In addition to raising funds and aid, protests, and open letters to public officials, social media was used as the main tool of diasporic activism, where thousands of posts, movements, petitions, official letters, and humanitarian initiatives were organised and disseminated. Furthermore, this active engagement positioned Armenian social media users or those who were supporting Armenians as targets of cybercrimes, sparking an increase in, for example, the hacking of Armenian social media accounts. Thus, social networking sites, and Facebook particularly, became the 'battlefield' of online wars between Azerbaijani, Turkish and Armenian social media users. It became a space of social visibility, resistance, social cohesion, and mobilisation against the main collective threat for an otherwise fragmented diaspora and nation.

Engagement and participation whether online or in-person have declined rapidly since the end of the war. Although a few humanitarian initiatives continue to raise funds in the aftermath of the war, overall, there has been a 'relative silence'. The security of the state, strained relations with the Armenian government, dynamics between diaspora groups, and between the diaspora and the 'homeland' can be contributing factors to this relative 'inactivity'. Most importantly, however, the outcome of the war heightened the sense of in-betweenness, disillusionment, and insecurity about the future of the Armenian state, which seem to be reoccurring themes among my participants. Furthermore, since the conflict is far from being resolved, the continuous threat and regional insecurity can be instrumental in reinstating further the mentality of 'victimhood' and the collective memory of past traumas.

**Limitations**

This study gained insight into the notion of 'homeland': how 'it is perceived and experienced by the diasporans and repatriates. However, there are also limitations that should be addressed. First, although the data collection in Armenia took place over four months, it would have been beneficial to spend a longer time there. I travelled to Armenia in 2017 and 2018, where I spent two months per visit. However, due to a limited timeframe, I was not able to immerse myself in the organisational structure of the repatriate community. Yet, almost all of my participants either knew or were engaged with organisations such as Repat Armenia, Teach for Armenia, etc. Thus, gaining access to these organisations would add to the understanding of the organisations and their strategies of engaging diasporans and encouraging repatriation.

Second, the war that broke out in September 2020 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, due to the lockdown, I was not able to travel to Armenia or even within the UK. Although I conducted interviews via Zoom, Messenger, and Skype video/audio calls, I could not travel to, for example, London, where protests were organised. In-person data collection would have allowed me to gain a closer insight into these protests and the dynamics between groups. Travelling to Armenia during the war could have been critical in understanding the complexity of repatriates' lived experiences and their engagement in humanitarian, social and political initiatives.

**Contribution**

Despite the limitation, this research has contributed to the theoretical discussions on the notion of diaspora and homeland, particularly for what are known as classical or victim diasporas. These diasporas are viewed to be 'place bound' as their characteristics are directly linked to the place of origin and the desire for an eventual return. Although the postmodern approach criticises this essentialist perspective of diaspora, there is a gap in the literature on one of the prototypical victim diasporas, the Armenian diaspora. Furthermore, most of the literature is focused on the experiences in the 'hostland', while in this study I explored both, diasporic experiences in the place of settlement and in the 'homeland'. By exploring and analysing the experiences, expectations, and motivations of diasporic life and 'return', this research provides insight and contributes to the scholarly debate on the contested and ambiguous 'homeland'-diaspora-'hostland' relations, the complexity of diasporas' positionality, and the intricacies of (non-)belonging.

Although this research can be considered Armenia-centric, it can contribute to the wider diaspora literature. In particular, it invites further research into 'homeland-diaspora-hostland' relations in times of crisis. Taking into consideration recent socio-political instabilities and conflicts in for example Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Georgia, and the most recent, Ukraine, this investigation is crucial in understanding diasporic mobilisation. Most importantly, this study emphasises the importance of further research into the transformations and shifts in diasporic experiences, relationships, activism, and mobilisation in the age of digital technologies.

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# Appendix A

## INFORMATION SHEET (UK)

### Homeland, Belonging and the Contested Politics of the Armenian Diaspora

The purpose of this study conducted by Kristina Vardanyan from the University of Kent, is to explore the memory of homeland for the second and third generation of Armenians who were born outside of the Republic of Armenia. This research aims to understand the complex relationship between home, homeland and diaspora, with particular focus on the Armenian diaspora.

There has been a considerable literature on the Armenian diaspora, however, the role and the relationship between memory and homeland is still under researched. This project will fill the gap and gain insight in how different generations of one of the classical diasporas perceive the notion of homeland through performances of longing and memory.

If you decide to participate in this project, you will be asked questions relating to your family history, experience of living in the UK and your links with Armenia. You will only attend one interview that will last approximately an hour. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without the need to provide a reason. Your identity will be kept confidential. Your anonymity will be protected through a pseudonym. Additionally, your name will be changed, and other personal information will be anonymised.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study or if you wish to be sent a summary of key findings of the project**

Kristina Vardanyan, *School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Research*, University of Kent*, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NZ, UK; phone: 07806817860. Email: kv73@kent.ac.uk

# Appendix B

**University of Kent**

**INFORMATION SHEET (Armenia)**

<u>**Homeland, Belonging and the Contested Politics of the Armenian Diaspora**</u>

The purpose of this study conducted by Kristina Vardanyan from the University of Kent, is to explore the memory of homeland for the second and third generation of Armenians who were born outside of the Republic of Armenia. This research aims to understand the complex relationship between home, homeland, and diaspora, with particular focus on the Armenian diaspora.

There has been a considerable literature on the Armenian diaspora, however, the role and the relationship between memory and homeland is still under researched. This project will fill the gap and gain insight in how different generations of one of the classical diasporas perceive the notion of homeland through performances of longing and memory.

If you decide to participate in this project, you will be asked questions relating to your family history and experience of living in Armenia You will only attend one interview that will last approximately an hour. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without the need to provide a reason. Your identity will be kept confidential. Your anonymity will be protected through a pseudonym. Additionally, your name will be changed, and other personal information will be anonymised.

**<u>Whom to contact if you have questions about the study or if you wish to be sent a summary of key findings of the project</u>**

Kristina Vardanyan, *School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Research*, University of Kent*, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NZ, UK; phone: 07806817860. Email: kv73@kent.ac.uk

# University of Kent

## INFORMED CONSENT

### Homeland, Belonging and the Contested Politics of the Armenian Diaspora

### Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this interview

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study conducted by Kristina Vardanyan from the University of Kent, is to explore the memory of homeland for the second and succeeding generations of Armenians who were born outside of the Republic of Armenia. This research aims to understand the complex relationship between home, homeland, and diaspora, with particular focus on the Armenian diaspora. There has been a considerable literature on the Armenian diaspora, however, the role and the relationship between memory and homeland is still under researched. This project will fill the gap and gain insight in how different generations of one of the classical diasporas perceive the notion of homeland through performances of longing and memory.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:**

If you decide to participate in this project, you will be asked questions relating to your family history, experiences and links with Armenia.

With your permission, the interview will be **tape-recorded** in order to be transcribed and thematically analysed, and the researcher will take notes during the process.

**Time required:**

45 minutes to 90 minutes, with some extra time at the end for comments or questions about the project.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept **confidential**. Your anonymity will be protected through a pseudonym.  Additionally, your name will be changed, and other personal information will be anonymised. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed using pseudonyms. After the completion of the research, all audio-files, transcripts and lists of all connected names will be securely stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. The hard copy version of the list and transcripts will be destroyed after the completion of the study. The data will not be destroyed after the project is completed but will be kept securely (the data may be used for additional academic studies and outputs after the project is completed). **Your name or any information that can reveal your identity will not be used in the book or in any report or article.**

**Voluntary participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form, but you are also free to withdraw from the study at any time without the need to provide a reason.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:**

Kristina Vardanyan, *School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Research*, University of Kent*,* Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NZ, UK, email:  [kv73@kent.ac.uk](mailto:kv73@kent.ac.uk)

**Agreement:**

I have read the description of the research and what participation entails. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study and I have received a copy of this description and a project information sheet.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

University of Kent | School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research

**Student Research Ethics Committee
Reviewer Comments**

**Name:** Kristina Vardanyan

**Title of Project:** Homeland, Belonging and Contested Politics of Armenian Diaspora

**Reviewers Name:** Eddy Hogg

**Please clearly mark "X" in your decision for the outcome of this ethics application:**

**Proceed:** [ X ]

**Proceed with amendments:** [ ]
(This will not need to be re-approved by reviewers)

**Reject and resubmit:** [ ]
(This will need to be seen and approved by reviewer after re-submission)

**Comments regarding the application form:**

A clear and well written form where all of the ethical issues have been well thought through.

**Comments regarding the Research Instrument:**

Looks sensible and well thought through. 90 minutes is a long time for an interview, but in my experience people are happy to talk about themselves for that long!

For the interviews in Armenia, will they all be with people who have previously lived in Britain? If not, some of the interview questions in the Armenia schedule will need slight tweaks.

A comment from experience – it is good to let participants choose where to be interviewed so they are comfortable, but be prepared to give them a bit of s steer to make sure it is somewhere where you will be able to record the interview and hear it when you come to transcribe! Coffee shops and

anywhere with tannoy announcements or piped music are particular bad memories!

**Comments regarding the consent Form:**

Clear and includes all the necessary details.

**Comments regarding the Information Sheet:**

Clear and includes all the necessary details.

# Appendix E

## Student Research Ethics Committee
## Reviewer Comments

**Name:** Kristina Vardanyan

**Title of Project:** Homeland, Belonging and Contested Politics of Armenian Diaspora
**Reviewers Name:** Tina Haux

**Please clearly mark "X" in your decision for the outcome of this ethics application:**

**Proceed:** ☐ X

**Proceed with amendments:** ☐
(This will not need to be re-approved by reviewers)

**Reject and resubmit:** ☐
(This will need to be seen and approved by reviewer after re-submission)

**Comments regarding the application form:**
This is thorough application form.

**Comments regarding the Research Instrument:**
The research instruments seem appropriate.

**Comments regarding the consent Form:**
Clear and complete.

**Comments regarding the Information Sheet:**

Also, very clear and informative. It does not mention that this is part of a PhD project though, which I would propose adding unless there is a particular reason not to.

# Appendix F

## Interview schedule with Repatriates in Armenia

**Themes of the Interview:**

- Migratory journeys

- Family history

- Life before settling in Armenia

- Experience/trajectory of migration

- Integration in Armenia

- Links with the homeland and diaspora

- Cultural practices

- Diaspora

- Identity

### Life in the Diaspora

Can you tell me about yourself?  How old are you and where were you born?

Are both of your parents Armenian?

Where did you grow up? (If applicable)

Do you know your family's history of migration?

Can you tell me a little bit about your life in…?  Did you attend an Armenian school, church or any other organisation when living in …? Did you learn Armenian?

Did you follow any Armenian traditions in…?

What was your connection to Armenia?

Have you been to Armenia, for instance on holiday, prior to moving to live here?

**Life in Armenia**

When did you move to Armenia?

Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to move to Armenia?

Can you explain your first impression? Did it change with time? If so, how or in what way?

Please describe your experience of living in Armenia.

Are you involved in any events or diaspora organisations in Armenia? Why? Why not? What is the role of diaspora in Armenia?

How do you think people perceived you in Armenia? Has this changed with time?

Where is home for you? Where do you feel at home? What is homeland for you?


**After the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) War of 2020**

Have you been following how the 'Velvet Revolution' was unfolding? What are your views on the revolution and its consequences?

What do you think about the role of the current government in the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict?

Can you describe your experiences and life during the war?

What do you think about the government's actions on the conflict resolution?

How do you see the future of Armenia after losing the largest part of Artsakh?

# Appendix G

**Interview schedule for the Homeland, Memory and Contested Politics of**

**Armenian Diaspora**

**Interview schedule with the diaspora in the UK**

**Themes of the Interview**

- Migratory Journeys

- Family history

- Life in the UK

- Experience/trajectory of migration

- Integration in the UK

- Links with the homeland and diaspora

- Cultural practices

- Diaspora

- Identity

**Interview Questions**

Can you tell me about yourself?  How old are you? Where were you born?

Are both of your parents Armenian?

Do you know your family's history of migration?

Did your parents/grandparents talk about their lives prior settling in …?

Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood? How was it like growing up in …

as an Armenian? Did your family follow any Armenian traditions? Do you follow

any Armenian traditions now?

Did you attend Armenian Sunday school, clubs, events or the church?

Are you currently involved in any Armenian organisation/events?

Have you been to Armenia as part of visits or holidays for instance? Please, describe your experience/s.

Where is home for you? Where do you feel at home? What is homeland for you?

## After the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) War of 2020

Have you been following how the 'Velvet Revolution' was unfolding? What are your views on the revolution and its consequences?

What do you think about the role of the current government in the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) conflict?

Can you describe your experiences and life during the war?

What do you think about the government's actions on the conflict resolution?

How do you see the future of Armenia after losing the largest part of Artsakh?

**Appendix H**
**Background Information: Repatriated Participants**

| | Name | Age | Place of Birth | Gender | Prior to repatriation | Marital Status | Family background/ ancestors' place of origin | Mother's nationality | Father's nationality | Education | Year of repatriation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Anahit | 36 | Tehran, Iran | F | Iran | Married/husband is Armenian | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2005/ 2006 |
| 2 | Aram | 38 | New York, USA | M | USA | Not known | Diyarbakir/Istanbul | Armenian | German | Higher Education | 2015 |
| 3 | Ara | 28 | Sydney, Australia | M | Australia | Married/wife is Armenian | Western Armenia/Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2014 |
| 4 | Araks | 67 | Tehran, Iran | F | UK | Widow | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2016 |
| 5 | Anush | 27 | New York, USA | F | USA | Not known | Western Armenia | Irish | Armenian | Higher Education | 2013/2 018 |
| 6 | Christine | 39 | Los Angeles, USA | F | USA | Not known | Syria/Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2014 |

| 7 | Gayane | 37 | Germany | F | Russia | Not known | RA | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2017 |
| 8 | Lilit | 43 | Iran | F | USA | Married/Armenian husband | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2004 |
| 9 | Hasmik | 42 | Tehran, Iran | F | Iran | Married/ Armenian | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2010 |
| 10 | Nune | 48 | Tripoli, Lebanon | F | Syria | Married/ Armenian | Cilicia/Syria/Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2012 |
| 11 | Sargis | 29 | Tehran, Iran | M | Iran | Not married | Iran (Araks lake) | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2011 |
| 12 | Talin | 36 | Glendale, USA | F | USA | Married/ Armenian | Meghri/Zangezur/Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2016 |
| 13 | Tatevik | 23 | Wisconsin, USA | F | USA | Not known | Father: Lebanon | American/Irish/Italian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2015 |
| 14 | Araik | 24 | Glendale, USA | M | USA | Not known | Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2016 |
| 15 | Arpi | 34 | Washington DC, USA | F | USA | Not known | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2001 (1 year) 2002 |
| 16 | Pedros | 21 | Jerusalem, Israel | M | Israel | Not known | Lebanon-Father Syria-Mother | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2016 |

| 17 | Karen | 25 | New Jersey, USA | M | USA | Not known | Current Republic of Turkey (Mother's side) | Armenian | Syrian | Higher Education | 2016 |
| 18 | Aregnazan | 29 | Isfahan, Iran | M | Iran | Not known | Iran | Armenian | Armenian | Not known | 2017 |
| 19 | Hripsime | 33 | Cyprus | F | Cyprus | Married | Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2004 |
| 20 | Narine | 65 | Istanbul, Turkey | F | Turkey, Armenia, China, Turkey, Russia, | Not known | Current Republic of Turkey | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2017 |
| 21 | Heghineh | 23 | Lebanon | F | Lebanon | Not married/partner | Syria, Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | N/A | 2019 |
| 22 | Maro | 61 | Lebanon | F | Boston, USA | Widowed | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2017 |
| 23 | Viktor | 36 | Lebanon | M | America (5 years) Beirut, Lebanon | Married | Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2020 |

| 24 | Satenik | 24 | Lebanon | F | Lebanon | Engaged | Lebanon | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2012/ 2020 |
|----|---------|----|---------|---|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|------------------|------------|
| 25 | Silva | 46 | Boston, USA | F | Boston, USA | Single | Lebanon from 1915, Western Armenian | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education | 2021 |
| 26 | Goqor | 20 | Washington, DC | M | Washington, DC | Not known | Artsakh | Armenian | Armenian | Student | 2021 |

# Appendix I

## Background Information: UK Participants

| | Name | Age | Place of Birth | Gender | Prior to repatriation | Marital Status | Family background/ ancestors' place of origin | Mother's nationality | Father's nationality | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hakop | 40 | Lebanon | M | London, UK | Married/ Armenian | Mother - Sasun/Marash | Armenian | Italian | Higher Education |
| 2 | Araks | 44 | Dundee, Scotland | F | Blackpool, UK | Married/ Armenian | Iran | Scottish | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 3 | Armenuhi | 19 | London, UK | F | London, UK | Not known | Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Student |
| 4 | Arphine | 34 | London, UK | F | Sheffield, UK | Not known | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenian | Armenian/English | Higher Education |
| 5 | Arthur | 30 | Manchester, UK | M | Manchester, UK | Not known | Iran | Armenian-Iranian | Armenian-Iranian | Higher Education |
| 6 | Gloria | 26 | London, UK | F | London, UK | Married/ Husband is Armenian | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenian | English | Higher Education |
| 7 | Hasmik | 32 | Cyprus) | F | London, UK | Not married | Anatolia (Genocide | Iranian-Armenian | Cypriot-Armenian | Higher Educatio |

| | | | | | | survivors) Iran, Russia | | | n |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Hermine | 42 | Baku, Azerbaijan | F | Manchester, UK | Married/British | Nagorno-Karabakh | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 9 | Hovsep | 26 | Canterbury, Kent | M | London, UK | Not married | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 10 | Karo | 33 | London, UK | M | London, UK | Married/ Wife is English | Jerusalem | English | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 11 | Karapet | 40 | London, UK | | London, UK | Not married | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 12 | Luisa | 18 | Aleppo, Syria | F | Sheffield, UK-Qatar | Not married | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenian | Syrian-Armenian | Student |
| 13 | Ofelya | 26 | London, UK | F | London, UK | In a relationship with an Armenian from RA | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) | Armenia | British | Higher Education |
| 14 | Varduhi | 42 | Aleppo, Syria | F | Wales, UK | Married/ British | Western Armenia (Genocide survivors) After Genocide- | Armenian | Armenian | College |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | Syria | | | |
| 15 | Vazgen | 25 | Yerevan (Left Armenia when he was 5 years old) | M | London, UK | Not married | Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 16 | Bakur | 39 | Istanbul, Turkey | M | UK/Previousely lived in London | Married/not Armenian | Istanbul, Turkey | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 17 | Davit | 56 | Beirut, Lebanon | M | London, UK | Married/Wife not known | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 18 | Artavazd | 66 | Cairo | M | London | Married/the spouse is not Armenian | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Not known |
| 19 | Azat | 29 | Cyprus | M | London | Single | Western Armenian | English | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 20 | Ani | 26 | Lebanon | F | Sheffield | Married/British | Western Armenian | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 21 | Gayane | 41 | Tehran, Iran | F | London | Married | Eastern Armenian | Armenian | Armenian | Not known |
| 22 | Lusin | 25 | Bulgaria (moved to the UK 5 years prior the interview) | F | Reading | Not known | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher education |
| 23 | Ashot | 22 | Born in | M | London | Involved | Eastern | Armenian | Armenian | |

| | | | Georgia/ lived inGreece | | | | Armenia | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | Lilit | 28 | London | F | London | Not known | Western Armenia | Armenian | British | |
| 25 | Astghik | 70 | Cairo | F | South England | Widow | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 26 | Artak | error | London | M | London | Not known | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 27 | Mushegh | 36 | Lebanon, Beirut | M | London | Not known | Western Armenia | British/Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 28 | Anush | 56 | Ethiopia | F | London | Married | Western Armenia | Armenian | Armenian | Higher Education |
| 30 | Lusik | Pensioner | Sumatra | F | Southeast England | Married | Western Armenia | Armenian | Dutch | Higher Education |
| 31 | Marina | 29 | Brighton UK | F | London | Not married | Mother's side – Lebanon, prior 1915 Western Armenia | Armenian | English | Higher Education |