Chapter 5. Making the Homeland – Creating Visceral Connections

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

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

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

Figure 5.1: ATP Flyer from 1994–2005

Source: Armenian Tree Project 1994.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Armenian Tree Project

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nature and Tree Planting as Moral Landscapes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apricot and Pomegranate as Symbols of the Homeland

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 5.2: An Armenian Stamp featuring Prunus Armeniaca

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Pfeifer 2015.

Vernacularisation of Nature

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

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

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

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

Trees and Forests as Diasporic Sanctuaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Translocal Trajectories

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

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

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

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

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

Political Life of Trees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Planting Flags': Between Monoculture and Biodiversity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pine Trees as Bearer of Memory

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 5.5: ATP Living Century Initiative 2015

Source: Armenian Tree Project 2015.

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

Table 4: Locations of the ATP Living Century Initiative 2015

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Legal Regulation

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

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

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

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

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

Field Encounters: Clash of Values

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

3 Compare with Abrahamian 2006 and Petrosian/Underwood 2006.

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

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

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