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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Defining Diasporic Philanthropy

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

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

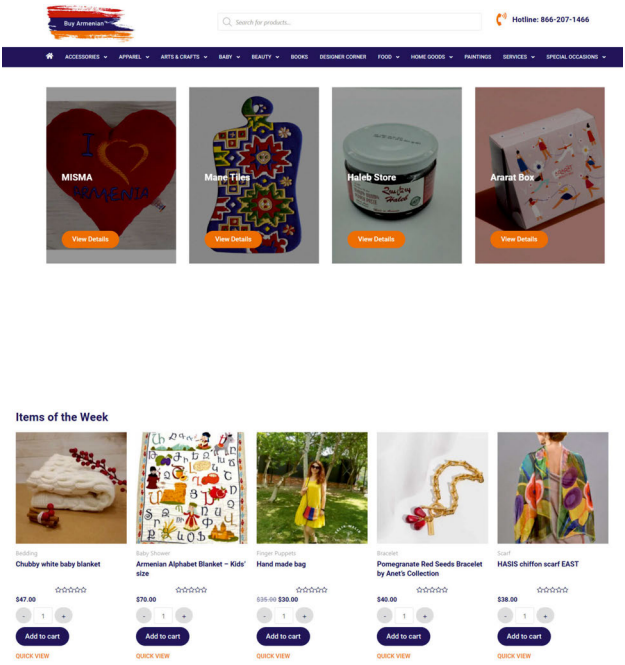
By referring to traditional small-scale societies beyond market economies, the above mentioned authors claim that philanthropy is dependent on reciprocal relations and "reciprocity in this sense involves gift and counter-obligation, it involves people tied to one another through the exchange of objects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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 2: Transnational Philanthropic Values

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

The Armenian Tree Project as Intermediary of Giving

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table 3: ATP Transactions 2012–2013

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

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

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

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

Figures of Diasporic Philanthropy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Tsypylma Darieva 2007.

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

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

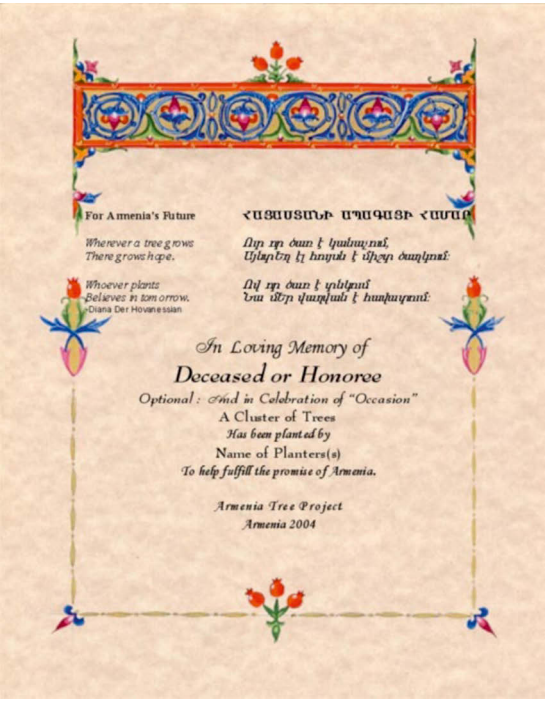
Between Spontaneous Gift and Strategic Giving

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

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

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

Figure 4.4: ATP Green Certificate for Donors from 2011



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: Tsypylma Darieva, 2023.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Values of Being Philanthropist

Hakopian couple

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Family Foundation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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