

## Conclusion

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

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

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

panied by a rise in diasporic engagement and public protests. In California, a highway was temporarily closed due to a demonstration by pro-Armenian protestors. In 2020, Armenian Americans raised over \$170 million for humanitarian and medical aid for the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and some even joined the Armenian army as volunteers. During the war, the initiative 'Buy Armenian' was founded to support the homeland in Armenia. Approximately 5,600 Armenian products and 800 businesses are now represented on the platform.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

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

