

**LONG-TERM DIASPORIC RETURN MIGRATION
IN POST-SOVIET ARMENIA:
BALANCING MOBILITY AND SEDENTARISM**

*Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

By

Nanor Karageozian

Oxford Department of International Development

Lincoln College

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Name: NANOR KARAGEOZIAN

Candidate number: 579015

College: LINCOLN COLLEGE

Supervisors of thesis:

OLIVER BAKEWELL

DAWN CHATTY

Title of thesis: LONG-TERM DIASPORIC RETURN MIGRATION IN POST-SOVIET ARMENIA: BALANCING MOBILITY AND SEDENTARISM

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ABSTRACT

Long-Term Diasporic Return Migration in Post-Soviet Armenia: Balancing Mobility and Sedentarism

This thesis examines the immigration to and long-term settlement in post-Soviet Armenia of Armenians from well-established diasporic communities — mostly from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Canada, and the United States. It argues that diverse levels and combinations of anchoring and floating co-exist in the diasporan returnees' return motivations, post-return integration experiences, and identity and belonging (re)conceptualization processes. They are manifested in the returnees' habitual dispositions, imaginative aspirations, and practical considerations, which develop within a particular sociohistorical environment. The study also considers the changes that occur over time in the structural context and in the ways returnees engage with it. It demonstrates that the inclination of returnees toward more rooted or more mobile directions depends, to a large extent, on their diasporic community background, the generation they belong to, and more immediate factors related to their life-cycle stages. Throughout the analysis, the important role of emotions in the return visions and experiences is highlighted.

The thesis makes an empirical contribution by studying the largely uncharted case of Armenian diasporic return in the post-Soviet era. At a more theoretical level, it promotes a balanced approach that goes beyond the overemphasis on mobility and the relative neglect of sedentarism that have characterized many works in the fields of diaspora and migration studies over the past few decades. Underlying this balanced path is the goal of recognizing the equal importance of and complex inter-relationship between human agency and objective structures. To this end, the thesis relies on a theoretical framework based primarily on some of Pierre Bourdieu's key conceptual tools, with certain modifications. Thus, the study frames the topic of long-term diasporic return migration within broader social theory. This way, not only does it link diasporic return to paradigms in migration and diaspora studies, but it also views it from a wider angle of social action.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS*

- ADLP:** Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramkavars)
- ANM:** Armenian National Movement
- ARF:** Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaks)
- AVC:** Armenian Volunteer Corps
- BMP:** Building Migration Partnerships
- BR:** Birthright Armenia
- CCRDA:** Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians
- CIS:** Commonwealth of Independent States
- IOM:** International Organization for Migration
- MODRA:** Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia
- MoLSIRA:** Ministry of Labor and Social Issues of the Republic of Armenia
- NSSRA:** National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia
- RA:** Republic of Armenia
- RAF:** RepatArmenia Foundation
- RA NA:** Republic of Armenia's National Assembly (parliament)
- SMS:** State Migration Service (of the Republic of Armenia)
- SSR:** Soviet Socialist Republic
- UNDP:** United Nations Development Program
- UNSD:** United Nations Statistics Division
- USSR:** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

* These acronyms are used in the main text and/or the references.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Hoghahavak (reclaiming of [lost] lands) and *hayahavak* or *hairenadartzutiun* (gathering or return of Armenians to the homeland) are long-established political and ideological goals in Armenian nationalist discourse. With the declaration of Armenia's independence in 1991 following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and especially with the de facto separation of the largely Armenian-populated neighboring enclave of Nagorno-Karabagh from Azerbaijan, it seemed to many that the first goal at least had begun to be realized. *Hayahavak* meanwhile encountered serious setbacks. For a multitude of reasons, the newly independent country witnessed the emigration of around 1 million Armenians. This has kept its total population hovering around the three-million mark¹ and has ballooned the size of the already large and well-established Armenian diaspora to approximately seven million.

At the same time, however, a small group of Armenians from the *long-established*, sometimes called "traditional," diaspora have moved to and settled in the Republic of Armenia (RA). They have come mostly from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Canada, and the United States. Their immigration and settlement have not been driven or organized by any large-scale state-sponsored policies, in contrast to the Soviet-era repatriation waves. Official statistics do not exist on this group, which forms the central focus of my thesis.²

¹ Besides emigration, low birth rates have also contributed to the population decline.

² See Fleischer (2012) for issues related to the lack of statistics on return migration (especially voluntary) in Armenia. The specific case of diasporan Armenians presents even more difficulties especially because of the circular migratory patterns adopted by some, the multitude of citizenships many of them hold, and the diversity in their residency status in Armenia.

Based on available statistics about the number of immigrants to the RA from non-CIS countries, issuance of RA residency permits (especially 10-year special permits), and the number of foreign and dual citizens living in the RA (see Appendix I, tables 2–6), a very rough estimation can be made about the number of diasporans who have established long-term settlement in Armenia.³ Of course, the numbers have fluctuated throughout the years, but relying on the above-mentioned existing figures, probably between 4,000 and 7,000 were living in Armenia at the time of my fieldwork in 2013, excluding the Syrian-Armenians who had come as a direct result of the ongoing war.

1. Research Objectives and Focus

This thesis aims to study the factors that have motivated long-established Armenian diasporans from diverse backgrounds to “return” to and establish long-term settlement in post-Soviet Armenia, a country that has otherwise experienced a large-scale migration outflow, in addition to various other socioeconomic and political problems. It explores how the concept of homeland is perceived and the decision to “return” is rationalized by diasporan returnees, shedding light on their diverse and multilayered interpretations and narratives. In addition, it examines the strategies and resources that returnees develop or use as they try to adapt to life in Armenia, in the absence of well-developed relevant policies and mechanisms in the homeland and the diaspora. Finally, it presents the implications that the return experience has on the returnees’ identity and belonging. The thesis relies on a qualitative research approach, based primarily on participant observation and in-depth life-history interviews with 104 main research participants.

³ There are also diasporans who run businesses, operate NGOs, or have houses in Armenia; they travel back and forth on a regular basis. These people were excluded from my research.

The term “diaspora” is often used by many Armenian individuals, leaders, and organizations — as is also the case with non-Armenian diasporic groups — without a clear definition; anyone who lives outside of the present RA borders is commonly referred to as “diasporan.” My study, however, focuses on the post-Genocide communities that settled outside of the Soviet bloc, plus the more than 400-year-old Armenian community in Iran. The return migration of more recent Armenian migrants does not form a part of my thesis. In addition, my study does not address the return of Armenians who previously lived in the former Soviet space. These communities are often referred to as “internal” diaspora, and largely consist of migrants from Soviet or independent Armenia. Not having lived in a diasporic state for a *longue durée*, recent Armenian migrants do not share the historical experiences and collective memories, at least not to the same degree, of diasporans who have been part of more well-established communities, sometimes for several centuries. Tölölyan (2014) categorizes the Armenians who left Soviet and independent Armenia after the 1970s (and their descendants) as “transnationals” and “not yet diasporic.” He provides the following explanation for the distinctiveness of this group:

Transnationals are emigrants who live in what some scholars call a “third space” between the country of origin and the country of settlement. Because globalization has made communication and travel so easy, they do not sever their relationship to those who continue to live in the homeland. Because of the density of settlement in some areas (Los Angeles is the most famous example) they are also in easy contact with each other. The “third space” in which they live is geosocial or geocultural and very different from the space in which traditional immigrants lived. The new transnationals receive cultural products from the homeland – they watch satellite TV, have their own TV broadcasts, internet contact, cheap phone calls; whereas an immigrant of 1914 waited for a letter that (s)he might get once a month, these people live in a space where daily contact with the country of origin is possible. Many travel back annually. When they think of who to marry or where to invest money, they think in terms of this transnational, cross-border space across which the Armenian society that matters to them is distributed. The way in which they will assimilate or settle into diasporicity is as yet uncertain.

Contrary to these more recent migrants (and their families), many long-established diasporans (hereafter, usually referred to as diasporans) are more distant culturally and socially from present-day reality in Armenia. Also, most of them do not hold Armenian citizenship. Although globalization has also affected the connections that diasporans maintain with Armenia, the long-term existence of such people in the diaspora has had an indelible impact on their collective memories and identities — an experience that more recent emigrants lack. The upbringing and socialization in families, schools, and/or other institutions of these two “groups,” notwithstanding some important internal differences and cross-group similarities, are quite different. Many diasporans had been raised with stories and images that depicted the homeland as an ideal place. Such visions are particularly dominant among generations raised when Armenia was still a Soviet country, because of the limited scope or regulated nature of contacts many of them had with the country, as well as the dominance of “exilic nationalism” in the diaspora, particularly between the 1940s and 1970s (Tölölyan 2002).⁴ Because of these romanticized visions, return to the RA is an emotionally loaded experience for many of them, which sometimes persists even after several years of settlement in Armenia. On the other hand, such affective aspects, even when present, are less likely to be as powerful and long-term among more recent emigrants returning to Armenia. The sparse coverage of emotional factors in the existing literature on first-generation Armenian return migration is an indication of this point.⁵ In addition, for first-generation returnees, emotionality is more likely to be related to how Armenia has changed from their pre-emigration years or, for

⁴ Though always present to a certain extent, such visions are less accentuated among younger generations, especially in North America.

⁵ This will be demonstrated in the literature review of the next chapter.

the second generation, from what they have experienced during short visits or what they have heard from their parents.⁶

Having said these things, I do not ignore the differences that exist among long-established diasporans. To the contrary, throughout my thesis, I aim at highlighting and elucidating intragroup variations in the way they (re)conceptualize homeland, return, home, identity, belonging, etc. For example, because of the longevity of the Armenian diasporic experience, and hence the evolution of the diaspora over the years, it is possible to discern how various generations of returnees present somehow different patterns when it comes to return motivations, integration processes, and post-return identity (re)definitions.

The use of the term “return” in the case of long-established diasporans is to some extent problematic. In the narrow, personal sense, the term might not be an accurate description of this migration, especially because the ancestors of many of these diasporans were born outside of the current RA borders. The vast majority were from the Armenian *vilayets* or provinces of the Ottoman Empire (the western part of the historical Armenian homeland, now in eastern Turkey), the region of Cilicia (southeastern coast of present-day Turkey), or, in the case of most Iranian-Armenians, the area of Nakhijevan (now an exclave of Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, bordering Armenia to the east and north, Iran to the south and west, and Turkey to the northwest). However, several reasons can justify the use of the term. Firstly, it makes sense for practical reasons, because of the lack of a better way to characterize these migrants and this kind of migration, without

⁶ Christou (2011), whose research focuses on second-generation Greek diasporan returnees to Greece, has found such feelings among her participants.

having to repeat long and awkwardly phrased descriptions, or to unnecessarily use double quotation marks around the words “return” and “returnees” throughout the text. Moreover, it is logical in the ideological sense, if the word “homeland” is understood as the place imagined by all Armenians as their land (including the territory of the current RA) since at least the 19th-century period of nationalism. It is also consistent with the emic perspectives of the majority of my interviewees, who regard post-Soviet Armenia as *a* or *the* homeland. Furthermore, the use of the term is justified because of its connection to diaspora literature, that is, to the importance of return (or its myth) in numerous conceptualizations of diaspora. Finally, other authors have adopted a similar approach of using “return” to denote migration flows of people who were not necessarily born in an area from which they had previously migrated. Christou (2006: 58-59), for example, provides some similar reasons for using the term “return migration” for the relocation of second-generation Greek-Americans to Greece, despite its “conceptual elusiveness.”

One last point I would like to make regarding the “population” of diasporan returnees covered in this thesis concerns the exclusion of those who have moved to Armenia to flee war situations in their countries of birth or former residence, more particularly in Iraq and Syria. My research targeted mainly the Iraqi- and Syrian-Armenians who expressed that the desire to immigrate to Armenia existed prior to the war. Some of them had indeed immigrated before the start of the wars in their respective countries of origin. In other cases, the security situation accelerated or consolidated their formerly made plan or decision. On the other hand, those who still identified themselves as refugees, or were staying in Armenia temporarily to seek asylum or a more permanent home in other

countries, did not form a part of my research. My interest in long-term self-initiated diasporic return rendered these cases peripheral to my project. Finally, given the recentness of the Syrian-Armenian refugee influx to Armenia at the time of my fieldwork, I chose not to address that case, except in the ways it has affected pre-war returnees.

2. Research Motives and Contributions

My interest in undertaking this research has been shaped by a number of motives. On a general scholarly level, the undermining of the importance of the homeland and the overemphasis on mobility that have characterized many diaspora-related studies over the past few decades have resulted in the blurring of the conceptual boundaries surrounding the term “diaspora.” In migration studies, “homecoming projects” have received increasing attention with the rise of transnationalism. However, the focus has been on temporary and circular return visits of mostly first-, and more recently, second-generation migrants. Thus, the presentation of diasporic return in most studies as utopian and transient has sidelined cases of actual long-term diasporic return migration. Also, while the term “diaspora” has increasingly been used to refer to many kinds of migrants, I support the argument that diasporic return has certain distinctive features that render its analysis worthwhile in its own right. Among other characteristics, diasporic return differs somehow from other kinds of return migration, because it can occur several generations after the initial scattering from the homeland, and it might involve a deeply emotion-laden process and lead to identity redefinitions and tensions — more so than the return of other migrants.

Return gives the opportunity and ability to diasporans to experience first-hand the homeland — an integral part of the triadic diasporic puzzle of homeland–hostland–diaspora that has been sidelined by many studies focusing on diasporic “routes” — and its dynamic transformations over time. Thus, the study of long-term diasporic return migration helps us to shed light on both movement and the “roots,” supporting a balance between approaches that fetishize the diaspora and mobility on the one hand, and those that idealize the homeland and sedentarism on the other.

Underlying the overemphasis on mobility and the relative neglect of sedentarism in the existing literature is an over-valorization of human agency and underestimation of the significance of objective structures and collective practices. As Tölölyan (2003: 60) points out, the “hypervaluation of mobility” in diasporic discourse is partly related to “the association of individualism and subjectivity with mobility as a privileged site of action, agency and the moral and political valuations which accompany them.” Thus, by acknowledging and examining the co-existence and inter-relationship of roots and routes, I also aim at looking for a way to bridge the structure–agency dichotomy. I attempt to achieve this by studying long-term diasporic return migration through the prism of broader social theory. More particularly, I use a framework relying primarily on some key concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu, with some additions mostly from the work of Mustafa Emirbayer & Ann Mische (1998). The application of a Bourdieusian approach to diasporic return migration is another contribution of my study. Bourdieu’s theory and vocabulary, with certain modifications, provides some useful analytical avenues and tools for *bringing together the contextualities and subjectivities of anchoring and floating in the situation of long-term diasporic return migration*. Relying

on this framework, I examine the diverse levels and combinations of anchoring/floating in the return motivations, post-return integration experiences, and identity (re)conceptualization processes of diasporan returnees, by looking at their habitual dispositions, imaginative aspirations, and practical considerations, within a particular sociohistorical environment. I also recognize that the structural context and the ways returnees engage with it change over time.

Moreover, this thesis adds to the growing corpus of empirical research that includes specific return migration cases, by covering a largely understudied group. Although several publications exist on the repatriation drive of Armenian diasporans to Soviet Armenia (See, *inter alia*, Carapetian Koundakjian 2012; Laycock 2009, 2012; Malekian 2007; Meliksetyan 1985; Mouradian 1979, 1988; Papazian 2014; Pattie 2004; Stepanyan 2010⁷), the post-Soviet era has not been extensively covered in the literature. The limited body of existing studies concentrates mainly on the challenges of integrating diasporan returnees, especially Iranian-Armenians, into the fabric of Armenian society (Abrahamyan 2010; Harutyunyan 2011; Mkrtchyan 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Mkrtchyan & Tsaturyan 2006, 2008). Some recent works have examined the short-term visits and temporary “homecomings” of diasporans, mostly focusing on American-Armenian youth (Darieva 2011a, 2011b, 2013). Finally, a policy-oriented research was recently published on a small group of long-term Middle Eastern returnees (Balayan et al. 2013: 84-86).

Furthermore, while many existing return migration studies focus on returnees from a single diasporic community or a specific generation/age group, my thesis draws on a

⁷ The latter (pp. 18-20) provides a list of other Armenian-language sources.

comparative analysis of the return motivations and experiences of Armenian returnees from different diasporic contexts and generations. Thus, my research provides additional empirical depth to the existing return migration literature, which is more thoroughly reviewed in the next chapter.

Besides these broader-level motives, the study also contributes to the field of Armenian diaspora studies. It particularly highlights shared and contested conceptions of space and place, homeland and home, as well as the evolution of contemporary Armenian national identity and nationalism among Armenian diasporans. The Armenian diaspora's diversity and evolutionary character has been widely acknowledged in the existing literature. More recently, with the rise of transnationalism in migration and diaspora studies, and an increasing leaning of scholars toward postmodern or social constructionist approaches, there has also been a growing awareness of the variety of Armenian diasporans' identities and perceptions of home, homeland, and diaspora. However, the different ways this is manifested in real life — that is, the heterogeneous, multilayered, and changeable nature of individual perceptions and identities — have not been extensively examined in studies of the Armenian diaspora. When addressed, such issues have mostly been dealt with from the perspective of those living in the diaspora, often focusing on the case(s) of a single or a few diasporic community(ies) (e.g., Bakalian 1993, 2001; Kasbarian 2013; Pattie 2004, 2013). In other works, Armenian identity issues have mainly been examined from a political science or historical perspective (e.g., Migliorino 2008; Panossian 2006). Studying these issues from the prism of long-term diasporan returnees, who experience and connect with the homeland in a more “solid” (Cohen 2009) and continuous manner,

adds another layer of complexity or intricacy to the analysis of perceptions of homeland, home, and identity.

Besides the above-mentioned reasons, the post-Soviet Armenian case can provide particularly valuable insights into the interplay of subjective and objective factors, and into the diversity and evolution of national identity, as well as conceptions of space and place, homeland, and home across several generations, because of the following five additional factors:

- 1) The return migration decisions are mostly self-initiated endeavors, and not reactions to a state-sponsored repatriation plan.⁸ This does not mean, however, that structural factors do not play a role in their decisions and value definitions. *Hairenadardzutiun* (return of Armenians to the homeland) occupies an important and deep-rooted role in Armenian nationalist discourse. Also, despite the absence of a state-led repatriation policy since independence, the Armenian government officially claims that it welcomes the return of diasporans;
- 2) Repatriation has a historical precedent in Armenia. During the Soviet period, the country experienced an organized repatriation campaign, marked by predominantly negative memories;

⁸ Many of the return migration cases covered in the literature involve state-funded programs that encourage return or provide returnees with integration assistance (Israel being an obvious example, but also other countries such as Greece and Germany with ethnic Greeks and Germans moving from the former Soviet Union).

- 3) The ancestors of most of the diasporan returnees were not born in the territory of the present RA, as explained above.⁹
- 4) The diasporic existence of post-Soviet returnees covers several generations — from a few children of Genocide survivors (second generation), and their descendants (third- and fourth-generation diasporans),¹⁰ to Iranian-Armenians who trace their diasporic past as far back as several hundred years; and
- 5) Besides their chronological diversity, the diasporic experiences of returnees also exhibit geographical differences. Not only do returnees hail from different communities, but many of them have lived in more than one community (country or city/village) before relocating to Armenia. This geographical diversity, including the internal migration within the diaspora, leads to multiple and complex pre-return socialization patterns, which in turn affect the diasporans' return motivations and post-return experiences.

In fact, two of these five issues are mentioned by King and Christou (2011: 460) as situations that could complicate analysis of diasporic return, namely, “when the diaspora has ‘shifted’ and the ‘homeland’ is more than one territory.” To illustrate the latter case, for example, they cite the works of Reynolds (2011) and Conway et al. (2009). Some

⁹ In Chapter V, I dedicate one section on the returnees' visions of the ancestral homeland, paying special attention to the pilgrimage-like trips many of the descendants of Genocide survivors have organized toward their ancestral villages and regions in present-day Turkey. Despite the rise in the number and frequency of such visits by Armenian diasporans in the last few years, there are no extensive studies on the experiences and feelings these trips evoke. A recent interview with Bakalian (2014) tackles some of these issues. The section I have written in Chapter V, though not very elaborate, is a modest contribution in that regard. Studying these issues from the perspective of returnees to the RA is particularly insightful in highlighting the multiple or multilayered visions of homeland.

¹⁰ There are also some descendants of Armenians who migrated from the Ottoman Empire before the Genocide, especially in the mid–late 1890s.

first-, 1.5-, and second-generation migrants studied by these two works have returned (for short or long periods of time) to different Caribbean islands from the ones they or their parents had left, because they regard the greater Caribbean region as their homeland. However, unlike my study, neither of these works is concerned with long-term ancestral return. The Armenian case bears more similarities to that of Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union who have “returned” to Greece but trace their genealogy and ancestral homes to the region of Pontus near the Black Sea (Hess 2008). The forced nature of various scattering waves (not only from Pontus but also within the former USSR) is also a fact that the Armenian and Pontic-Greek cases share.

3. Research Questions

Based on the above-outlined background and aims, the main research question that this thesis addresses is the following: *How are rooted and routed tendencies, as well as objective and subjective factors, manifested in the motivations, integration experiences, and identity-related processes of post-Soviet long-term Armenian diasporan return migrants?*

This overarching question involves the examination of the following three sets of more detailed questions:

- Why do Armenian diasporans from diverse backgrounds immigrate to and settle in Armenia? That is, what are the motivational factors affecting the decisions of these diasporans to relocate, and how do they rationalize their action? How are these return motivations inspired by habitual dispositions, imaginative aspirations, and practical considerations? How do various rationales relate to each other?

- How do returnees perceive their new sociocultural environment? What processes, strategies, resources, and institutional arrangements do they adopt, develop, or use to support them as they build lives in the new setting? In this process, to what extent do they reproduce or adjust their long-held ways of living and behaving? Do they experience different adaptation processes in various spheres and/or stages of life?
- How does long-term relocation affect the returnees' self- and group identifications, and conceptions of home? Are there similarities and differences in the ways returnees (re)assess and (re)define their identities and sense of belonging? How can we account for shared and contested approaches?

4. Breakdown of Subsequent Chapters

This introductory chapter presented the goals of my research and the main questions it aims to answer. It also clarified some key definitional issues. Moreover, it outlined the main contributions the research strives to make in the fields of migration, diaspora, and Armenian studies.

The potential contributions of the study are further elucidated in Chapter II, where I situate my topic within larger debates in the existing literature on migration and diasporas. There, I review the main literature gaps that are relevant to my research, lay out the theoretical perspectives that have informed and shaped my approach, and present the conceptual framework upon which I have built my analysis. More particularly, I demonstrate the usefulness of some of Bourdieu's conceptual tools — especially those of “habitus,” “field,” “capital,” and “hysteresis” — for framing the analysis of long-term

diasporic return migration. I show how a Bourdieusian approach, with certain modifications inspired from other scholars, serves as a framework for exploring the various linkages and interdependencies of mobility and sedentarism, as well as agency and structure, in return motivations and experiences.

Chapter III outlines the methodological and ethical issues that have shaped and affected the different stages of my research. It explains the qualitative data design and the methods based on which my fieldwork was carried out in Armenia. It also describes how I have processed and analyzed the collected primary data. A substantial part of this chapter sheds light on my position and role as a researcher, and the ways in which I have tried to manage my relationships with research participants and to cope with situations and sources of potential bias.

In Chapter IV, I describe the various waves of scattering and “de-diasporization” (Van Hear 1998) in Armenian history. The chapter focuses on the key historical developments that have given shape to the contemporary Armenian diaspora and that have influenced the evolution of Armenian national identity, particularly in the diaspora. Understanding the return trajectories of post-Soviet diasporan returnees is impossible without this historical background.

The next three chapters constitute the empirical core of my thesis. The two main aspects of diasporic return I have identified — envisioning and experiencing — are analytically divided into three chapters. Chapter V covers the first aspect. It presents the main factors that have motivated diasporan returnees to immigrate to and settle in Armenia. The next

two chapters address the second dimension of return. Chapter VI studies post-return integration processes. It examines the ways returnees perceive the new sociocultural environment vis-à-vis their expectations, values, and established practices. It also illuminates the strategies and resources that they adopt or create in order to reproduce and/or adjust their long-standing dispositions. Chapter VII focuses on the impact of these post-return experiences on the returnees' identities and sense of belonging. Thus, the three chapters address the three above-listed sets of research questions, respectively.

The concluding chapter summarizes the main arguments and accomplishments of my research. It also discusses its main challenges and gaps. Finally, I provide some thoughts on potential ways to address such shortcomings through further research, as well as some suggestions on future directions that could build upon my study.

CHAPTER II

Bridging the Mobility–Sedentarism and Agency–Structure Dichotomies in the Study of Diasporic Return: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This chapter frames my topic within conceptual debates in the relevant literature of migration and diaspora studies, and presents my theoretical framework for the study of the return migration of Armenian diasporans to, and their long-term settlement in, the RA. I show that diasporic return migration, especially the long-term relocation of well-established diasporans, has remained a relatively understudied topic. On the one hand, diasporic return has sometimes been presented as ideologically romantic or utopian, and practically speaking highly unlikely if not impossible. On the other hand, when its occurrence has been recognized and studied, the focus of most relevant works has been on short-term return mobilities and on the first and second generations. At various points throughout this chapter, I present some of the distinctive features of *long-term diasporic* return migration, a lesser-studied topic. My thesis aims at filling a part of that gap, by exploring the largely uncharted case of Armenian diasporans in the post-Soviet era.

While reviewing the migration and diaspora literature, I outline the debates between approaches that emphasize *either* the “roots” *or* the “routes” (Clifford 1994) often in a doctrinaire manner. I also examine some works that have called for a more balanced approach, or have recognized the possibility of their concurrence at individual or group levels. In my study, I favor such a balanced path. Fixity and mobility, sedentarist and

nomadic ideas co-exist among Armenian returnees. They are manifested — sometimes harmoniously and at other times incongruously — in the diasporan returnees’ motivations for relocation, post-return integration processes, and identity (re)conceptualization patterns. In order to adequately understand and analyze the co-existence of rooted and routed ideas in diasporic return trajectories, both the structural forces and agentic powers at play must be taken into account in a balanced and relational manner. My aim is to shed light on the dialectic between the contextualities and subjectivities of anchoring and floating in the situation of long-term diasporic return migration. I thus examine the various ways the seemingly binary opposites of anchoring–floating and structure–agency co-exist and relate with each other in the case of diasporic return. I strive to achieve this by relying, with certain modifications and additions, on some key conceptual tools developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In doing so, I offer an application of Bourdieusian concepts to the study of diasporic return migration. Thus, while exploring a specific case, I also frame the topic of diasporic return migration within broader social theory. I regard this in itself as another contribution of my study.

1. Major Themes and Conceptual Debates

1.1. Homeland and return as key characteristics of diasporas

The idea of return to the homeland is echoed in most definitions and studies of diasporas. However, its centrality varies depending largely on the place that the concept of homeland holds in these studies. Diasporas have traditionally been considered as having a strong memory of and an acute desire to return to their homeland, even when this commitment is more discursive and rhetorical than pragmatic and strategic. In his often-cited features of diasporas, Safran (1991: 83-84) assigned central importance to the

homeland. With respect to return, he stated diasporas' belief that their ancestral homeland is "their true, ideal home ... to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate." Focusing on the "ideal type," the Jewish case, Safran also listed the Armenian, Chinese, Cuban, Greek, Maghrebi, Palestinian, Polish, and Turkish diasporas.

In a later review essay, Safran (1999), critical of very expansive and "generous" definitions of diaspora, emphasized that neither minority status nor simple physical or forcible dispersion are sufficient for a group to be a diaspora. Instead, he stressed the importance of "an acute memory or image of, or contact with, the homeland," and considered "the myth of return" as one of the features that qualify a group as diaspora (Safran 1999: 262, 265). However, even in his early work, Safran (1991: 94, emphasis in original) stated that return can be viewed as a "largely eschatological concept: it is used to make life more tolerable by holding out a utopia—or *eutopia*—that stands in contrast to the perceived *dystopia* in which actual life is lived."

1.2. Postmodern critiques: Space, place, identity, nationalism, cosmopolitanism

Starting in the early to mid-1990s, scholars adopting postmodern or social constructionist approaches — mostly coming from anthropological or cultural studies backgrounds — launched a series of attacks on the limitations of defining diasporas through the listing of specific features or typologies (e.g., Appadurai 1993; Brah 1996; Clifford 1994, 1997; Hall 1993; Tsagarousianou 2004). They criticized what they saw as an idealized overemphasis on homeland and the diaspora's yearning for return. They argued that this romanticization of homeland and return is often associated with negative connotations

ascribed to the diasporic experience (displacement, exile, uprooting), usually deriving from the “prototypic” Jewish case. They shifted their analytical focus to the diasporic experience itself — the “routes” — highlighting diasporans’ multicultural and hybrid identities (Clifford 1994, 1997). They favored the “diaspora-as-diversity” as opposed to “diaspora-as-exile” ideal (McKeown 1999), that is, the “centrifugal” rather than “centripetal” visions of diaspora (Arakaki 2002). Through these works, the desire for homeland became “a homing desire and soon home itself became transmuted into an essentially placeless, though admittedly lyrical, space” (Cohen 2009: 119). Given that homelands were not central to these studies, they largely ignored long-term or permanent return. However, short-term visits, and in general, “the ‘to-and-fro’ movement of persons between homeland and diaspora” were emphasized in such works (Weingrod & Levy 2005: 19).

This distancing away from the “roots” orientation was also supported by other anthropological studies following social constructivist approaches starting in the late 1980s — e.g., Appadurai (1988), Gupta and Ferguson (1992, 1997), and Malkki (1992, 1995). Though mostly focusing on refugees, they criticized the territorialization and sedentarism dominant in discourses and certain studies of nationalism. According to Malkki (1992, 1995), such approaches “idealize the homeland,” consider migration as an anomalous condition, pathologize uprootedness, and regard return to the homeland as the only durable solution. She and other social constructivists, on the other hand, argued that places and cultures are socially, politically, and historically constructed. Thus, they called for disengaging culture and identity from territorialized, nation-bounded conceptions of place and space. They argued that the homelands existing in the migrants’

imaginations and memories might not correspond to the reality on the ground. For this reason, they pointed out, return often leads to disappointment and adjustment problems.

The centrality many postmodernists, poststructuralists, and feminists placed on mobility challenged the “sedentarist metaphysics” approach (Malkki 1992) not only of certain scholars of nationalism but also of some humanistic geographers of the 1970s, such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph (Cresswell 2002). These geographers stressed that to be human is to be “in place.” In their writings, they made a distinction between “authentic, meaning-laden, place and inauthentic, meaningless placelessness,” often adopting “a fairly idealist, essentialist and bounded turn” (Cresswell 2002: 12-13). Associating home, place, and roots with such concepts as involvement and commitment, their approach was to “insinuate transience and mobility to be morally ambiguous at best” (Cresswell 2002: 14). On the other hand, in the works of scholars following the “nomadic metaphysics” in the 1990s (including James Clifford, Edward Said, and Iain Chambers), “nothing is certain or fixed, and where fixity appears, it is as an illusion” (Cresswell 2002: 15-16). For Chambers (1994: 5), for example, migrancy involved a movement in which the points of both departure and arrival are changeable and uncertain. He conceptualized it as “a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility.”

Underlying this clash between sedentarists and nomadists is a debate regarding the potency of human agency, which is also manifested in studies of ethnicity and nationalism. On the one hand, there are scholars who view ethnic identity as primordial

(e.g., Geertz 1973), as a natural bond that is ascribed at birth and remains more or less static. Opposing this objective reality of a fixed belonging to a cultural or ethnic group are scholars who regard that the distinction between “us” and “them” is formed through social interaction. The work of Barth (1969) has been particularly influential in this regard. In the study of nationalism, Anderson’s (1991) work on the conception of nations as “imagined communities” has played a similarly leading role in challenging functionalist approaches to nation and nation-building that focus on objective factors. Instead, it emphasized the historical and social construction of nations and national identity. It heralded the rise of more postmodernist ideas about the fragmented and hybrid characteristics of national identity deriving from bottom-up subjective experiences, or more radically, the fictitious nature of national allegiances.¹¹

In a period marked by a postmodernist wave rejecting bounded cultures and nations, some scholars announced the rise of “light” and “liquid” forms of identification that transcend more “solid” structures (Bauman 2000). Within this surge, the idea of cosmopolitanism, whose origins can be traced to the Hellenistic era, was revived in the 1990s and became romanticized by some. Nussbaum’s 1994 article “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” sparked a renewed interest and debate in the issue.¹² She regarded a focus on patriotic pride as “morally dangerous.” Instead, she advocated an alternative

¹¹ The division between essentialist and constructivist theories of ethnicity and nationalism as if comprising two extreme poles is not that simple. More intermediate approaches do exist, but a thorough review of the vast corpus of literature on ethnic and national identity is not possible here. One such review especially pertaining nationalism is found in Smith (1998: 145-218).

¹² Her essay was republished in an edited book, together with responses from other authors (Nussbaum 1996). For a review of Nussbaum’s ideas and some of her major critics, see Naseem and Hyslop-Margison (2006).

form of cosmopolitan allegiance, where people are primarily loyal to the “worldwide community of human beings” (Nussbaum 1996: 4).

1.3. Transnationalism and development turn

The celebration of mobility and fluidity was further reinforced by the rise of the transnationalism approach and development discourse in migration and diaspora studies in the 1990s. Inspired by globalization, transnationalism rejected previously prevalent assimilationist perspectives in migration studies, especially dominant in US scholarly output. Instead, it highlighted the importance of “transnational social fields,” which are characterized by “fluid” and “hybrid” identities, “unbounded” and “decentered” cultures and practices (Basch et al. 1994; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Rouse (1995: 353-354) described how the “bipolar” framework of the 1970s–early 1980s, which assumed that identities are “localized” has been challenged by a recognition of the migrants’ “transnational social spaces,” where multiple, multilocal identities are treated neither as transitional phenomena, nor as “signs of pathology.” Transnationalists advocate a view of migration as an “open-ended process,” where movement is viewed as normal, rather than as an “event” that assumes a “normality relying on the stability of a permanent and original home” and on “the idea of authentic belonging” (Olsson 2004: 164-165). Despite the increasing interest in “homecoming projects” in the transnationalism literature, corporeal engagement with the homeland in the form of physical migration has not received primary attention. When such migration has been addressed, the focus has mainly been on temporary return visits and circular flows of mostly first-, and only more recently, second-generation migrants.¹³ As Stefansson (2004: 7) puts it: “Ironically,

¹³ See section 2 below for some examples of such works.

because of the current power of the narrative of transnationalism it may be that the structural invisibility of homecoming within migration studies is in danger of coming full circle, and permanent, one-way return migration may be ignored.”

In addition, perhaps because of the dominance of the transnational paradigm, many studies that do address long-term return migration focus on the transnational links that returnees maintain with their former countries after return. They highlight the “circularity” (Hess 2008) in returnees’ lives, which often create “reverse diasporas” (Hess 2008 © 2014) or a “diaspora of diaspora” (Erciyas 2008 © 2014). They attribute this mostly to the socioeconomic exclusion and disappointments returnees encounter in the homeland. Thus, the processes and efforts through which returnees look for anchors, become emplaced, and integrate in their new environment are often downplayed. This is perhaps related to the pitfall of “sampling on the dependent variable” (Portes 2001), that is, the higher probability of finding transnational practices among returnees by selecting informants who continue to identify themselves as different from locals or natives, and who are more likely to have preserved their bonds with their former countries.

Along with these developments, diasporas have been increasingly viewed as agents that can contribute to homeland development through their transnational activities (Cohen 2009: 122-124; Nyberg-Sørensen et al. 2002). Some recent studies therefore focus on the policies homeland governments adopt to engage diasporans and tap their development potential while they remain in the diaspora (e.g., Brinkerhoff 2006; de Haas 2006; Gamlen 2006; Ionescu 2006; Levitt & de la Dehesa 2003; Meyer et al. 1997). The long-term or permanent return of diasporans to the homeland has largely been sidelined in this

literature too. When return policies are mentioned, they mainly refer to temporary or circular return and to the experiences of first-generation migrants.

1.4. Calls for a balanced approach

In parallel with these developments in scholarly output, there were calls by some diaspora scholars to tame the current of the mobility paradigm and adopt a more balanced approach. They argued that place and locality are still important for diasporas, that “the logic of privileged mobility” must be somehow restrained by “a countering logic of the sedentary” (Tölölyan 2007), without however “neglecting the importance of past or present mobility” (Tölölyan 2005: 141). Even earlier, Tölölyan (2000: 112) stated that the idealization of diasporic mobility, porousness, cosmopolitanism, and hybridity can only be considered “a half-truth.” It should be complemented with the “indispensable” other side or “countervailing tendency” of power, institutionalization, nationalism, and a “stubborn” drive for location and reterritorialization.¹⁴ In terms of the concept of homeland, Cohen (2009: 121, 133, emphasis in original) argued that compared to the “*liquid* (a post-modernist rendition of virtual home)” conception of homeland, “*ductile* (an intermediate, more complex, idea of homeland)” notions remain important, and “*solid* (the unquestioned need for a homeland)” versions are becoming increasingly important as diasporas are playing a growing role in homeland and international politics as well as development processes. However, these works have not extensively touched upon actual, long-term return to the homeland.

¹⁴ Elsewhere, Tölölyan (2003: 60-64) reviews the tension between mobility and sedentarism in the American discourse of diasporas, and explains the reasons behind the predominance of the former.

The need to view mobilities and immobilities in a balanced manner that was stressed by some diaspora scholars has also been a subject of interest in works following the “mobilities turn” or “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller 2014; Sheller & Urry 2006). These works cover a wide range of topics that go well beyond the physical migration of people. Their approach “problematizes both ‘sedentarist’ approaches in the social science that treat place, stability and dwelling as a natural steady-state, and ‘deterritorialized’ approaches that posit a new ‘grand narrative’ of mobility, fluidity or liquidity as a pervasive condition of postmodernity or globalization” (Hannam et al. 2006: 5). They privilege neither theories that romanticize rigid, static roots nor perspectives that extol cosmopolitan or nomadic subjectivities (Cresswell 2002; Sheller 2014; Sheller & Urry 2006: 208-210). They state that mobilities are always accompanied by and cannot be understood without taking into consideration “moorings” or various kinds of “rhizomic attachments and reterritorializations” (Hannam et al. 2006: 3).

Applying this paradigm to the field of migration, Ahmed et al. (2003: 1, emphasis in original) employ the concept of “uprootings/regroundings” to argue that “[*b*]eing grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached.” One empirical illustration of this balanced approach is Fortier’s (2000: 1) work on the formation of belongings among Italian migrants in Britain, where she looks at the ways in which “cultural identity is *at once* deterritorialized and reterritorialized.” However, until the 2011 special issue of *Mobilities*, when return was addressed in the mobilities approach, works following this paradigm have paid little

attention to return migration.¹⁵ And even in and since that special issue, the focus has remained on short visits and on first- and second-generation returnees.

The dialectical approach to movement and sedentarism advanced by the new mobilities paradigm is also reflected in works that fall under the banner of “new cosmopolitanism.” They include, among others, such concepts as cosmopolitan patriotism and situated/rooted/vernacular cosmopolitanism (Appiah 1997; Calhoun 2007; Cohen 1992; Werbner 2008a). They distance themselves from advocates of “extreme” cosmopolitanism (e.g., Nussbaum) that present it as a form of righteous value or an emancipatory path from the perceived narrow-mindedness and flawed rootedness of locality, ethnicity, nationality, and other kinds of solidarities. Instead, they argue that cosmopolitanism is “not a view from nowhere or everywhere” (Calhoun 2007: 294). They build on Hannerz’s (1990: 250) earlier remark that “there can be no cosmopolitans without locals.” As Kendall et al. (2009: 38-39) eloquently put it:

No element of the population, not even cosmopolitans, should be seen as free-floating monads, but rather as inevitably linked to (if not rooted in) localities, embedded in some sense in social structures and institutions of the immediate environment. ... Cosmopolitans ought not to be expected to dwell in towers of abstract ideals but should acknowledge a sense of location and point of departure. Instead of a priori privileging of cosmopolitan or local, we should acknowledge their fruitful interdependency, constantly lubricated by the reflexive capacity of individuals to move between them.

This cosmopolitanism approach has inspired some recent works on diasporas and migration. For example, in their introductory piece to a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Glick Schiller et al. (2011) and several articles in that issue examine the

¹⁵ As King and Christou (2011: 462) point out, only three articles (Ali & Holden 2006; Conway et al. 2009; Gerharz 2010) had been published on this topic in the journal before 2011.

simultaneous occurrence of rootedness and openness in the daily practices and identifications of migrants and diasporans.

Finally, these attempts of highlighting the linkages and inter-dependencies between disembedding and re-embedding trends have been recently reflected in works that have turned attention to the complex relationship between integration and transnationalism, including studies that focus on return intentions and practices (Carling & Pettersen 2014; de Haas & Fokkema 2011; Morawska 2003; Snel et al. 2006). Many of them support a nuanced approach that does not view integration into the host country and transnational bonds with the home country as mutually exclusive, either/or processes. They adopt what Erdal and Oeppen (2013: 873) call a “pragmatic” position that recognizes the dynamic and complex co-existence of both processes. Most of these debates, however, examine first-generation migrants. Also, the focus of some of the studies that are specifically interested in return is on return intentions rather than actual return migration.¹⁶ Recently, King and Christou (2014) have extended these debates to the second generation, with a special emphasis on return. They argue that this shift adds more depth to the debate; because of the “reverseness” of second-generation return, integration and transnationalism happen in a two-way manner, both before and after relocation to the parental homeland.

My study sides with these calls for approaching mobility and sedentarism in a balanced manner. But before elaborating on the theoretical framework I have relied on to advance such an approach, let me first review the existing literature on return migration and point

¹⁶ See the review article of Erdal and Oeppen (2013: 873) for a list of such works.

out what I think are the distinctive characteristics of diasporic return migration in sections 2 and 3 below.

2. Review of Studies on Return Migration

2.1. Typologies: Level of choice, length of stay, generation

Numerous studies exist on the return of refugees and asylum seekers,¹⁷ and of various kinds of migrants (temporary, labor, student, highly skilled, and ethnic return migrants) to their country of birth or that of their ancestors.¹⁸ Various typologies have been devised in the literature to classify return movements by cause: forced, planned, and spontaneous (Koser 2000: 59); or by level of choice: voluntary and forced (Van Hear 1998).

Other scholars look at temporal dimensions: occasional, periodic, seasonal, temporary, or permanent return (R. King 2000: 10-11; Koser 2000: 58-59). To account for these differences in the returnees' length of stay, distinction is often made between the concepts of "return" and "return migration." The latter is defined as the "physical relocation of the migrant with the intention of staying for some time, maybe permanently, in the place of origin" (King & Christou 2011: 452). On the other hand, return is considered a broader term that also includes temporary visits and preparations for return (Oxfeld & Long 2004: 4). This is what King and Christou (2011) call "return mobilities." Many recent studies tend to adopt this broader conception (see *inter alia* King & Christou 2011; Oxfeld & Long 2004; Sinatti 2011). As mentioned above, this inclination is derived to a large extent by the dominance of transnationalism in migration

¹⁷ See *inter alia* Bakewell (2000), Bariagaber (2001), Cuny et al. (1992), Hammond (2004), and Long & Oxfeld (2004).

¹⁸ See Cassarino (2004: 270) for a list of some of these studies.

studies, which is more concerned with temporary and circular return than long-term relocation. The emphasis on flexible and short-term return is also reinforced to some extent by the debate on the migration–development nexus (Sinatti 2011).¹⁹ Although I sometimes use the terms return and return migration interchangeably for practical reasons, the main focus of my study is on long-term relocation.

In terms of the generational differences of returnees, many studies²⁰ examine first-generation migrants who were born in the countries they returned to, and could trace a local town or village there as their micro-location of origin (and birth) (King & Christou 2008: 11-12, 2011: 452). With regard to Armenia, specifically, there are a number of (mostly survey-based) studies covering various aspects of the return migration of first-generation Armenian emigrants to the RA, including rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants (Chobanyan 2012, 2013; ETF & CRRC 2013; Fleischer 2013; Gharakhanyan 2009; IOM 2002; Johansson 2008; Minasyan et al. 2008; MoLSIRA & NSSRA 2008).

But what about the return migration of second- and older-generation migrants, (co-)ethnics, or diasporans born and raised outside of the homeland of their parents or ancestors? Bovenkerk (1974: 19) called this phenomenon “ancestral return” but considered it as “‘return’ that is not return.” Similarly, King (1986: 6) characterized it as a “marginal” type of return migration that “can hardly be regarded as true return migration.” Such movements have been recognized in works that examine not only the

¹⁹ For a summary of how return migration fits within the migration–development nexus literature, see *inter alia* Black and King (2004: 76-77) and Sinatti (2011: 155).

²⁰ See *inter alia* Ghosh (2000), Long & Oxfeld (2004), and Markowitz & Stefansson (2004).

emergence and formation of diasporas, but also their “demise” and “unmaking” (Sheffer 2003; Van Hear 1998), in the form of “*regrouping* or *in-gathering* of migrant communities or dispersed ethnic groups” (Van Hear 1998: 6). Such examples of “reversing the scattering” or “de-diasporization” listed by Van Hear (1998) include the return of Armenians, Germans, Pontic Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Poles, and the Roma.²¹ In more recent works, this type has been given different names: “ethnic return migration” or (im)migration of (co-)ethnics (Hess 2008; Hionidou 2012; Kulu 1998; Kulu & Tammaru 2000; Tsuda 2003, 2009a, 2010), “migration of ethnic unmixing” or “ethnic affinity migration” (Brubaker 1995, 1996, 1998), “ethnically privileged migration” (Capo Zmegac 2005; Münz & Ohliger 2003), or “roots migration” (Wessendorf 2007). King and Christou (2010: 105) prefer the term “counter-diasporic migration because of its evident link to diaspora formations and theory.” They subdivide it into the return of second-generation migrants to their parental homelands and that of older generations to ancestral homelands, and choose to focus on the former (King & Christou 2008, 2010). Elsewhere, they list the return (both short- and long-term) of Armenians from the long-established diaspora to the newly independent RA as an example of “ancestral return,” along with the return of Jews to Israel, “Back to Africa” moves, and Brazilian-Japanese diasporans’ ethnic return migration to Japan (King & Christou 2011: 459).²² In general, recent years have witnessed a growing attention toward studies of return beyond the first generation, especially second-generation cases (Christou 2006; Conway & Potter 2009; King et al. 2011; Levitt & Waters 2002; Potter 2005; Reynolds 2011; Teerling 2013;

²¹ Van Hear’s book focuses on forced dispersal and regrouping, and therefore does not look into these predominantly voluntary movements.

²² In that article, they present a typology of returns that incorporates both temporal and generational differences: Short-term return visits, link between return visits and longer-term relocation, return mobilities of childhood, second-generation return migration as an adult, and ancestral return (both visits and definitive relocation).

Wessendorf 2007). Another evidence of the rise in scholarly interest in this topic is the publication of a recent (dated 2008, but published in summer 2014) *Diaspora* journal issue dedicated to the theme of diasporic return. Some of the cases examined in the above-mentioned works include the immigration of Jews to Israel, ethnic German *Aussiedler* to Germany, Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union to Greece, Japanese-Brazilian *nikkeijin* to Japan, ethnic Hungarians from Romania to Hungary, Greek-Americans and -Germans to Greece, British-born Cypriots to Cyprus, returnees from various countries to the Caribbean, Italians from Switzerland to Italy, Finland Swedes to Sweden, and West-Siberian Estonians to Estonia.

2.2. Factors affecting return migration

As a sub-process of international migration, return migration has been examined from the perspective of various, often contrasting, theories (Cassarino 2004). Neoclassical economics considers return migration as an *individual* decision of a migrant who *failed* to benefit from higher earnings in the host country. The new economics of labor migration (NELM) views it “as the logical outcome of a ‘calculated strategy,’ defined by the level of the migrant’s *household*, and resulting from the *successful* achievement of goals or target” (Cassarino 2004: 255, emphasis added). Structuralism focuses on the contextual or environmental (social, economic, political, and institutional) factors in the country of origin that affect the return motivations. Transnationalism explains the return decision from the perspective of “the migrants’ subjective perceptions of homeland and self-identification” shaped by “common ethnicity, common origin and kinship linkages” (Cassarino 2004: 262). As opposed to transnationalism, which focuses on “the commonality of attributes” such as ethnicity or religion, social network theory pays

attention to the “commonality of interests” and interpersonal relationships shaped in social and economic cross-border networks (Cassarino 2004: 265). Therefore, while neoclassical economics and NELM emphasize the economic (demand-pull and supply-push) factors affecting the return decision at the individual or household level, the other three approaches focus on the non-economic micro and macro dimensions motivating return (Cassarino 2004: 268).

The distinction between individual and more structural (micro and macro) dimensions is also reflected in studies that examine the making and unmaking of diasporas. Looking at more macro dimensions, Van Hear (1998: 49) explains that the “in-gathering” of diasporic peoples is shaped by changes in the global political economy (e.g., the collapse of the Soviet Union). It is intensified however by changes in the migration regimes — i.e., regulations, institutions, and policies — in the countries of origin (in the form of relaxing exit constraints) and in the homelands (where co-ethnics and governments are “ready to accept” returnees). Sheffer (2003) acknowledges that macro factors influence the demise (and emergence) of diasporas. However, he gives greater weight to “more immediate factors,” namely, the “cumulative decisions” of individuals and groups of migrants arising from their “own needs and inclinations at the time” (Sheffer 2003: 25). For him, the return of diasporans is “primarily based on a combination of primordial and psychological/symbolic factors” related to their “ethno-national identities” (Sheffer 2003: 30). Sheffer relates subjective factors primarily to ethnonational identity. In my study, I illustrate that subjectivity is not necessarily ethnonational; more cosmopolitan identities can also affect return decisions.

The factors identified in the return migration and diaspora literatures are very much mirrored in recent studies of second- or later-generation return migration. According to Tsuda (2009b, 2010: 617), the following factors are the major motivations behind ethnic return migration: economic (e.g., the move from less developed countries to more developed homelands in search for better jobs and higher earnings), ethnic (nostalgic attachment and transnational — often imagined — ethnocultural ties of diasporans to the homeland), and political (preferential immigration and nationality policies adopted by homeland governments). He adds that, in some cases, ethnic discrimination and persecution also push diasporans out of their countries of birth. From among these factors, Tsuda (2009b: 21, 30, emphasis in original) singles out economic ones as being the most influential triggers (i.e., *why* diasporans *emigrate*), and argues that ethnic factors and government policies act as push factors that direct or “channel” return toward the homeland instead of another place (i.e., *where* diasporans *immigrate*). In their recent *Diaspora* journal editorial on diasporic return, Olsson and King (2008 © 2014: 257-258) refute Tsuda’s argument about the centrality of economic motivators. The articles included in that issue demonstrate that “diasporic return entails a lot of economic risks and sacrifices and cannot be depicted as a largely rational-choice form of migrant behavior for most returning diasporics.”

In my thesis, I acknowledge the co-existence and inter-relationships of various objective and subjective motivating factors, as I explain in section 4.3 below.

3. Distinctive Features of Diasporic Return Migration

While the term “diaspora” has increasingly been used to refer to many first- or older-generation migrant groups and ethnic communities, often in an interchangeable manner, I support the argument that what differentiates diasporic communities from other groups is their “ongoing or re-awakened attachment and loyalty” to the homeland *even after several generations* (Shuval 2000: 46), and their ability to preserve a collective identity — though not entirely uniform everywhere and for everyone — over the *longue durée* (Bruneau 2010: 37, 47).²³ This is largely achieved through the discourse and operations of institutions and elites that often operate transnationally (Tölölyan 2000). Moreover, it involves the maintenance of relations with kin communities in a continuous and organized manner. Thus, on the one hand, diasporic return differs from other migrant return migrations, as Olsson and King (2008 © 2014: 257) argue, because the ancestral homeland is envisioned by many diasporans as “something sacred and desirable but also symbolic—mythical even—and thus to an extent unknown.” Because of the organized nature of diasporas, this leads to a collective “nostalgic discourse” around the importance of homeland and return that produces strong sentiments of “(be)longing” among their members. For the purposes of my study on the Armenian diaspora, the catastrophe factor also plays a key role in the perpetuation of collective memory and commitment toward the homeland — because of the forced displacement that initiated the diasporic existence for many of the ancestors of returnees. The nostalgic discourse does not only have an abstract emotional dimension. It is maintained generation after generation through embodied experiences and practices — by means of the production and circulation of

²³ See also Tölölyan’s (2007: 649-651) distinction between ethnic and diasporic communities.

books, photographs, artifacts, traditional and social media platforms, etc. — not only at the individual but, perhaps more importantly, also at an institutional level. On the other hand, while retaining their homeland orientation, diasporic communities often become autonomous, and the elements of their collective identity sometimes develop in quite different ways over time from those in the homeland (Bruneau 2010: 37; Tölölyan 2007: 649-650). In the case of many long-established Armenian diasporans, with the main exception of Iranian-Armenians, language (Western Armenian as opposed to the Eastern Armenian dialect that is spoken in the RA) is one such collective identity marker. In addition, because of the longevity that diasporic existence involves, shifts in homeland borders and major transformations in other homeland circumstances are more likely to have happened. Therefore, diasporic migration, and especially diasporic return, differs somehow from other kinds of return migration, because it can occur several generations after the initial scattering from the homeland²⁴ (which itself evolves not only in people’s visions and memories but also in more tangible ways), and it might involve or lead to integration tensions and identity redefinitions — often more aggravated, complex, and emotionally loaded than the return of other, more recent, migrants. The cultural values and homeland visions that lead to these identity-related tensions are much more deeply entrenched among long-established diasporans than among first- or second-generation migrants who have more immediate memories of the homeland and have experienced shorter periods of collective socialization in the host countries. As Oxfeld and Long (2004: 5) state, “ancestral and historical returns ... raise concerns about the continuity of

²⁴ Darieva (2013: 32), for example, has found that among American-Armenians, members of the second generation usually engage with Armenia transnationally without leaving the United States (e.g., by staying involved in and donating money to NGOs and community centers), while the third generation increasingly participates in short-term “homecoming” projects.

ethnic [and national, *I would add*] identities and boundaries across generations that are worthy of attention in their own right.”

As briefly mentioned above, another difference that Olsson and King (2008 © 2014: 257) point out between diasporic and other migrant return migrations is that diasporic return is motivated less by “the economics of rational-choice behavior” than the return of more recent migrants because of the “shared community-formation” qualities of diasporas. Though reluctant to make such a generalized distinction, I prefer to say that economic and other practical motivations remain important, as my study shows, but rarely can they sufficiently explain all the intricacies involved in return decisions. Although financial calculations are important in motivating, implementing, and sustaining the return decisions of many Armenian diasporans, they often act with several other non-economic factors. And, in general, an emotional attachment to the homeland — defined territorially and/or culturally — plays a role in the majority of cases, even among those with primarily economic motives. Some existing studies have found that emotional factors, such as nostalgia and homesickness, also loom large in motivating the return decisions of many first-generation Armenian return migrants, especially those who were not otherwise forced to move back to Armenia (Fleischer 2013: 9-10; Minasyan et al. 2008: 31-32; MoLSIRA & NSSRA 2008: 45). However, in their case, such feelings are usually related to their inability to adapt to the culture and accept certain social values in the host country, or perhaps more importantly, to the fact that they miss family members and relatives.²⁵

²⁵ Many of these studies are based on structured questionnaires. Thus, sometimes it is hard to assess exactly what is meant by “homesickness” or “nostalgia.” But their analyses seem to suggest that such feelings have a strong family-related component.

To continue with the last point, I would also add that immediate social networks (such as family relationships), especially in the homeland, often play a less significant role in the inspiration and implementation of ancestral return projects than first- and second-generation return, particularly for “pioneer” migrants. This is largely due, again, to the longevity of diasporans’ presence outside of the homeland and the organized nature of many diasporic communities around (often large-scale) institutions.²⁶ On the other hand, the family narrative of return is recognized as a powerful source of motivation for the relocation of many second-generation returnees, for example. Also, family and kin networks based in the homeland are often important resources such returnees draw on to organize and implement their return projects (King & Christou 2014; Reynolds 2008). The importance of family and kin on first-generation Armenian migrants’ return decisions and processes, re-integration patterns, and re-emigration intentions has also been highlighted (ETF & CRRC 2013: 60; Fleischer 2013). At least in my study, however, I did not find such great emphasis on the direct involvement of family in motivating and realizing return, especially among those who arrived in the early years after independence. The role of the family is less direct in the case of most Armenian diasporan returnees; it is in the form of having provided an environment where Armenian identity was maintained in the diaspora — usually with the help of other institutions, such as schools, the church, political parties and their sister organizations. Also, although many returnees have relatives based in Armenia who had repatriated during the Soviet years, their presence rarely encourages return decisions and their realization. Such kin

²⁶ Darieva (2013: 31) has made a similar argument about the importance of formal organizations as opposed to informal kinship ties in the transnational practices of American-Armenian diasporans. In the Armenian case, this is particularly accentuated because the diasporan returnees usually cannot trace an immediate genealogy in the territory of the present RA.

networks are usually helpful *after* return — and in many cases not in a very substantial and sustainable manner. The role of family is more apparent among later returnees, for some of whom family re-unification acts as an important motivation. There also seemed to be variations depending on the diasporic community returnees came from. Many Middle Eastern returnees, especially those from Iran, have close or extended family members in Armenia. Their presence affects return motivations and integration processes much more than in the case of many North American diasporans who often move to Armenia alone or with their nuclear families.

By highlighting what I believe are some distinctive features of diasporic return migration, I do not claim that this phenomenon does not have many similarities to other forms of migratory movements. A multitude of objective and subjective factors underpin decision-making in other kinds of non-diasporic migration too. In addition, the integration and identity (re-)assessment processes that unfold after relocation are also present among other kinds of migrants. For example, many of the differences Armenian diasporan returnees find between their former and new lives, and the disappointment that often accompanies such comparisons, resemble those observed in other typical immigration situations. Nevertheless, there are some other aspects of these experiences that are related to the returnees' diasporan, and more particularly the diasporic community (American-, Lebanese-, Syrian-, etc. Armenian), identities. This makes the various diasporic migration processes more frequently and heavily laden with emotional elements than other migration cases. Adaptation does not only involve the “culture shock” and socioeconomic issues that are experienced, in various degrees, by anyone who moves to or even visits a new place. It is also loaded with highly emotional

processes that often challenge long-held notions of homeland and national identity. In studies on first-generation Armenian return migrants, on the other hand, such issues are rarely mentioned. The main integration problems that are cited are related to employment problems and other socioeconomic re-embeddedness issues. Psychocultural issues are mainly linked to socioeconomic insecurities in Armenia, the inability to have a personal and family life away from the constraints imposed by relatives and the community at large, traumatic experiences when living in the host country, and language difficulties faced by their children (Chobanyan 2013; Johansson 2008; Minasyan et al. 2008).

4. Theoretical Springboards and Conceptual Framework

4.1. Building blocks: Dimensions of return

I have identified two main dimensions of diasporic return migration: envisioning and experiencing. In brief, the first dimension, addressed in Chapter V, covers the factors that have motivated returnees to consider relocating to Armenia and to subsequently take a decision in this regard. The second dimension encompasses their post-return experiences and emotions. These dimensions are similar to two of the three aspects of the return experience listed by Oxfeld and Long (2004: 7-13): “imagined return” and “repatriated return” (or long-term settlement).²⁷ For analytical purposes, I have divided the second aspect into two empirical chapters. Chapter VI tackles the tensions that returnees are confronted with when their expectations meet the realities on the ground, and the strategies they follow to deal with the mismatch. Chapter VII turns attention to the

²⁷ The third aspect they mention is “provisional return,” which involves return visits and the creation of other kinds of ties that help trigger or prepare for actual return. In my framework, I consider this last aspect as being a part of the motivational and decision-making process that envisioning return entails.

impact these post-return experiences have on identity and belonging. In a way, the material in Chapter VI corresponds to the “cultural,” “social,” and to a lesser extent, “structural” dimensions of integration, while Chapter VII focuses on the “identificational” aspect (Heckmann & Schnapper 2003). Nevertheless, the framework I rely on goes beyond a mere description of the level of integration of returnees *into* various arenas of Armenian society, as I will explain below.

As Oxfeld and Long (2004: 6) state about their three return aspects, the two dimensions I focus on and the way they are organized in three chapters “need not be exclusive or sequential.” In other words, return experiences are much more multidimensional and multidirectional than some of the main issues covered in this thesis. Also, although divided into different sections to make analysis possible, these processes constitute a much more seamless trajectory²⁸ of each returnee’s life. Thus, they may appear to coincide with some linearly conceived stages in the diasporans’ return pathways, but in reality their relationship is much more complex. The way returnees narrate their return motivations at the present, for example, is inevitably influenced by their post-return experiences.

In my analysis of these two return dimensions, what is underlined is the way the subjective and objective, symbolic and embodied, affective and rational, unconscious and conscious, intangible and tangible aspects are inextricably woven together into the

²⁸ Return trajectory connotes a continuously evolving process or story that is not without key anchoring nodes or defining moments. While it is lived, narrated, and analyzed at the present time, it involves imagination directed toward the future, and it also comes with a certain history. Goal-oriented plans are a part of it, but it is also affected by some more spontaneous decisions, unconsciously taken steps, and unexpected developments of endogenous and/or exogenous origin.

returnees' decisions and lives. Throughout the empirical chapters, although I look at the experiences and present the voices of individual returnees, I do not view them as isolated agents, entirely free to make personal choices. Their return motivations, integration experiences in Armenia, and identity (re)conceptualization processes are all affected by and situated within specific historical and social circumstances, reflecting the inseparability of agency and structure.

In addition, in the various inter-connected processes discussed in the empirical chapters, mobility and settlement — that is, physical, and more importantly, mental and emotional movement and sedentarism — are manifested or expressed in various fashions, levels, and degrees. I thus show how roots and routes, anchoring and floating, co-exist in return rationales and post-return experiences. As an extension, this points to the co-existence of these two trends in the Armenian diaspora.

While many scholars foreground the importance of either the roots or the routes, the concurrence of centripetal and centrifugal conceptualizations of homeland, home, and identity have been recognized in several studies of migrants and diasporans, as shown above. But how have scholars tried to explain the co-existence of these trends, as well as the prevalence of one or the other direction within specific migrant or diasporic groups? One notable framework has been that of “generations” (Berg 2009b, 2012; Brown 2011). For example, in her work on Cuban diasporans in Spain, Berg (2012: 40) has highlighted the importance of “generations,” perceived not in terms of the diasporans' biological age, but on their “historically situated trajectories.” She argues:

Understanding different ways of articulating relations to the homeland in a generational perspective helps us overcome the spatial fixation of some diaspora

literature and focuses instead on time and processes of change in both homeland, host country and within the diaspora. It brings out the relational and temporally contingent character of discourses and practices (Berg 2009b: 286).

Although I am also interested in the temporal and relational aspects of return visions and experiences, my study differs from such attempts in two main ways. First, it addresses the existence of both attachment and movement not in diasporic or migrant communities living outside of the homeland, but in the case of long-term diasporan returnees. It shows that even in the situation of return (which might often be perceived as going back to the roots especially in the case of diasporas that often have idealized visions of homeland), and under conditions of long-term settlement (which might be associated with stasis), mobility and fluidity can also be found in motivational, integration, and identity processes. Secondly, in order to explain *how* the rooted and routed trends co-exist and *why* one or the other prevail or overlap among different returnees, I draw on insights from theories of social action as the conceptual framing of my analysis. More particularly, I mainly use some concepts and ideas from the works of Bourdieu and Emirbayer & Mische, as well as insights from some other studies. Relying on this framework, I examine the various levels and combinations of anchoring/floating in the return motivations, post-return integration experiences, and identity (re)definition processes of diasporan returnees, by looking at their habitual dispositions, creative or imaginative aspirations, and practical considerations, within a particular temporal-relational structural environment, both before and after return. I also recognize that the structural environment changes over time, and the way returnees engage with it also varies over their life span.

Before delving into a discussion of the conceptual tools upon which my analysis is based, one last but important point I want to make is that emotionality is present at every stage and dimension of diasporic return migration. As explained above, the dominance of strong — and often ambivalent — emotions in diasporic return is related to some of the characteristics of diasporas, namely, attachment to homeland, development of collective identity and memories, etc. This dimension is touched upon in studies that recognize people’s “need to belong” (Baumeister & Leary 1995), and in social psychology works that view “attachment and affective commitment” and a sense of “interdependence or the perception of common fate” as important elements of collective identification (Ashmore et al. 2004: 90). Such issues are particularly relevant in the case of “victim” diasporas, such as the Armenian (Cohen 1997).

The interaction and co-existence of mobility and fixity in return visions and experiences are manifested through emotions. Ahmed (2004: 27, emphasis in original) explains:

[W]e can consider the relationship between movement and attachment implicit in emotion. ... [E]motions are what move us. But emotions are also *about* attachments, about what connects us to this or that. ... What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. ... [W]hat attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other, *such that we cannot stay removed from this other*, is also what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place.

Thus, by emotions I do not refer only to ethnocultural and nationally oriented feelings. Affective factors, for the purposes of my study, also include more universal and cosmopolitan values, because as Ahmed (2004: 36-37) argues, globality itself can become a form of attachment that can give rise to potent emotions toward those who share similarly cosmopolitan values and lifestyles.

The importance of emotional aspects, however, does not completely preclude the presence of rational or conscious decisions and actions by returnees. When explaining the factors that lead diasporans to take return decisions, as well as the processes they undergo when faced with their new environment, I account for both conscious and unconscious, both pragmatic and affective aspects.

4.2. Guiding theoretical perspectives and conceptual tools: Insights from Bourdieu and others

Guided by definitions and studies that stress the shared consciousness and collective identity that diaspora groups maintain generation after generation, as well as the role of elites and institutions in shaping and perpetuating these ideas (Tölölyan 2000), I believe that a study of diasporic return cannot focus only on individual experiences and micro-level decision-making, motivational, and identity processes. It also needs to be grounded in an analysis of the collective nature of ideologies, identities, and roles. In this regard, insights can be gained from social psychology theories and concepts, such as (social) identity theory or, in general, approaches that stress the importance of studying the personal self (i.e., individual cognitive and emotional processes), while also situating it within the collective experience (i.e., situational factors and social contexts related to child-rearing practices, socialization, peer group, community and social roles, culture, etc.) (See *inter alia* Deaux & Burke 2010; Hogg et al. 1995; Hogg & Williams 2000; Reid & Deaux 1996; Ryff 1987; Stryker 2007; Tajfel 1981). Thus, in my study of diasporic return in post-Soviet Armenia, I intend to look at both individual- and meso-level dimensions, where the self and society meet. As Deaux (2006: 637) explains:

The *meso* level of analysis is where social interaction takes place. ... [I]t serves as the vehicle by which the macro events in a society become represented in the individual psyches of its members and, from the other direction, it mediates the actions of individuals on the larger society.

Related to the above point is my inclination to promote a balanced approach between objective and subjective dimensions, accounting for both structure and agency when studying diasporic return. This partly stems from my effort to avoid a dogmatic approach to either relativism or realism, that is, get distanced from extreme versions of postmodernism and social constructionism, while not falling into the trap of radical positivism. This orientation bears some similarities to “new” (or “subtle” or “critical”) realist approaches,²⁹ which call for some kind of integration of subjectivist (e.g., interpretivist and phenomenological) and objectivist (e.g., structuralist) approaches to social theory (Robson 2002: 29, 35). Given the collective identity maintenance mechanisms that diaspora institutions, elites, and members employ and rely on over the years, it seems hard to meaningfully understand diasporic return motivations, experiences, and their effects on identity-related processes without studying structural factors. On the other hand, diaspora members have considerable agency over how they interpret and perceive ideologies, policies, cultural and family norms, and other situational factors that might motivate or discourage return, and that affect the way they adapt in the post-return environment, and embrace identity. Acting alone or in small (kinship or other) groups, diasporans have certain influence on how they use their available resources (namely, their financial means, knowledge, skills, family ties, and

²⁹ There are variations within critical realism. For example, Bourdieu, whose conceptual tools I largely rely on in my thesis, is viewed by some scholars as a representative of the rationalist wing of critical realism (Vandenbergh 1999). Thus, his work has been criticized by other critical realists, such as Archer (2010).

social networks) or create new ones, and how much importance they assign to them — before and after return.

The need to account for both agency and structure in migration theory has been recognized (e.g., Bakewell 2010). More specifically, with regard to return migration, Faist (2010: 26-27) has argued for the need to bring together these two aspects in further research on the topic. Commenting on King and Christou’s work on second-generation counter-diasporic return migration, he states:

[I]t may seem worthwhile to attempt analyses that pay attention to both the socio-cultural constitution of schemas and routines, on the one hand, and the use of resources, material or otherwise, by the individual and collective actors involved, on the other. In this way, diaspora and transnationalism studies could benefit from more general approaches in the social sciences that call for a link between agency and structure.³⁰

In this regard, some of the conceptual tools Bourdieu developed with the goal of transcending the dichotomies of micro/macro, subjectivism/objectivism, free will/determinism, and agency/structure can provide useful analytical lenses. One such key tool that Bourdieu introduced in order to link objective structures and subjective actions is his concept of “habitus.” He argued that a social agent’s habitus — that is, ways of thinking and behaving that have been internalized over time within every individual — plays a key role in defining how (s)he acts. He explained habitus as “[s]ystems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu 1977: 72, emphasis in original). Habitus provides an individual with a “practical sense” or “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990a: 61), where “game” is what Bourdieu (1990b) called the “field.” Fields are the different

³⁰ Faist gives the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens as an example of such an approach, whereas my study draws upon Bourdieu’s work.

arenas of social life, such as arts, education, politics, law, and economy. These multiple fields constitute the social space. Social actors struggle to occupy dominant positions in each field (and hence the social space), using various forms of “capital” in their social relations. Specifically, Bourdieu (1986) identified three main forms of capital, which are sources of power, and stressed that one form can be converted into another. “Economic capital” includes resources that can be easily changed into money. “Social capital” stems from an individual’s social networks, including the various kinds of resources that members of these connections possess. “Cultural capital” can assume three forms: “embodied” (which include “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body,” such as language and accent); “objectified” (physical objects such as photographs, paintings, books, etc.); and “institutionalized” (e.g., academic qualifications) (Bourdieu 1997: 47).

For Bourdieu, social action results from the complex inter-relationship between habitus and capital within a specific field. Practice viewed this way means that the social world is not “a world without inertia, without accumulation” (Bourdieu 1997: 46).

Bourdieu (1990b: 66) also used the concept of “doxa” to denote “the presuppositions of the game”: “an orthodoxy, a right, correct, dominant vision” which is “accepted by all as self-evident” and which “presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view” (Bourdieu 1998: 56-57, 67).

Focusing on the individual diasporan returnees’ “habitués,” that is, the ways they perceive, interpret, internalize, reaffirm, or challenge the more hegemonic or “doxic” ideas flowing from and across institutions and elites, as well as on the ways they use and

develop various forms of resources or “capital,” helps us highlight the micro and meso levels when analyzing diasporic return motivations, decisions, and post-return experiences.³¹ A focus on habitus highlights that “the subject is not the instantaneous *ego* of a sort of singular *cogito*, but the individual trace of an entire collective history” (Bourdieu 1990a: 91, emphasis in original). Or, as Oliver and O’Reilly (2010: 14) put it, habitus can describe “those internalised structures, dispositions, tendencies, habits, ways of acting, that are both individualistic and yet typical of one’s social groups, communities, family, and historical position.” The combination of collective history and individual trajectory is particularly appropriate for the study of diasporic behavior, including diasporic return migration, for reasons explained above. The internalization process through which the habitus is shaped takes place through socialization. In this regard, Bourdieu stresses the important roles of the family and educational institutions at an early age. In the case of many Armenian diasporans, other institutions are also involved in this process, including the Church; political parties; and cultural, philanthropic, and sports organizations affiliated with them.

Bourdieu’s theory and its application in migration studies are not without problems and gaps. In the next few pages, I outline some of those that are particularly relevant to my study and present the ways in which I attempt to address them, by using insights from other works.

³¹ Of course, these micro and meso processes do not exist in a vacuum. They are influenced by events and changes in the external environment, which, for the purposes of my study, include historical developments both in Armenia and in the countries where the diasporans come from. These macro factors do not form an integral part of my research, but provide the contextual frame for the rest of the analysis. Or, they are mainly tackled through the prism of how they have been perceived and discussed by returnees themselves.

One major criticism of Bourdieu's theory is that it is excessively structuralist or determinist (Yang 2014: 1523), and thus unable to transcend the very dichotomies that it claims to negate (A. King 2000). These criticisms — especially the overemphasis on structure, routine action, and social reproduction rather than on the possibility of change and agentic innovation — are partly based on his conception of habitus as “durable” dispositions (Bourdieu 1977: 72) that act “below the level of consciousness” (Bourdieu 1990b: 73). I agree with Atkinson (2010) that Bourdieu's critics in this regard sometimes present exaggerated points or base their arguments on a misinterpretation or a partial view of his work. However, I do share some of their concerns, and more particularly, the need to give more attention to conscious action and the possibility of transformation of habitual dispositions. For this reason, I favor Emirbayer and Mische's (1998: 970, emphasis in original) conceptualization of human agency as encompassing the “*interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment*” that “*both reproduces and transforms*” structural environments within which actors are engaged temporally and relationally. Through this definition, they take into consideration three dimensions and corresponding temporal orientations of agency that co-exist in diverse degrees: “iteration” or routine (past), “projectivity” or purposivity (future), and “practical evaluation” or judgment (present). Bourdieusian habitual action does occupy a place in this definition. It is not equated with structure. In fact, Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 975, emphasis in original) elaborate on how agency is an inseparable aspect of habitual action, because

actors selectively recognize, locate, and implement ... [routine] schemas [of action] in their ongoing and situated transactions. While this may take place at a low level of conscious reflection, it still requires attention and engagement on the part of actors in order to narrow the possibilities for action within particular temporal-relational contexts.

Therefore, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) acknowledge but also expand the work of theorists who have been primarily preoccupied with the habitual dimension of agency, including Bourdieu. They do so not only by shedding light on the specific ways in which social actors agentially engage with recurring patterns of action, but also by discussing how such schemas can be challenged, re-evaluated, and revised through the exercise of greater creative imagination and situationally based judgment. Specifically, Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 971, emphasis in original) define these two other dimensions of agency as follows:

Projectivity encompasses *the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future.*

...

The practical-evaluative element of agency ... entails *the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations.*

This brings us to the other criticism surrounding Bourdieu's theory: determinism. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 983) recognize and Hardy (2012) explains in more detail, the possibility of change is not absent from Bourdieu's works, unlike the claims or suggestions of some of his most ardent critics. Field structures, capital accumulation, and habitus all vary over time. Nevertheless, this recognition of gradual change is not elaborated extensively by Bourdieu, because it is "often taken for granted" in the interaction of field and habitus (Hardy 2012: 126).³² This results from the fact that the habitus feels like a "fish in water" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127) and its effects remain "invisible" (Bourdieu 2005: 214) when it is well-adjusted to the respective field.

³² This interactive relationship between habitus and field is what some of Bourdieu's critics miss, by often scrutinizing solely or primarily the concept of habitus.

But what about some more abrupt changes where this balance is disrupted? Bourdieu has recognized such situations too through his concept of “hysteresis,” which has nevertheless remained lesser-developed, -known, and -used. Hysteresis denotes a “mismatch” or “disruption in the relationship between *habitus* and the *field* structures to which they no longer correspond” (Hardy 2012: 129, emphasis in original). Although the *habitus* undergoes regular or gradual changes over time, hysteresis happens especially at times of flux or crises characterized by sudden and intense transformations in the field, and in situations when the *habitus* “is not the product of the conditions of its actualization (increasingly frequent as societies become differentiated)” (Bourdieu 2005: 214). The “time lag” that the *habitus* requires to reposition itself in the altered field is called “hysteresis effect” (Hardy 2012: 127-128).

The concept of hysteresis can be helpful in accounting for *habitus* change, but it has not received sufficient attention. For example, Yang (2014: 1530-1531) argues that Bourdieu did not go far enough to explain how people can depart from the resilient powers of their *habitus* even in situations when the field in which they exist undergoes changes. He adds that the potential of hysteresis to lead to innovation and transformation is particularly powerful when it is conceived not as a “structural lag” (Bourdieu 1977: 83), that is, as a change in a given social field, but as a situation when people enter an entirely new field (Yang 2014: 1531).³³ Migration, and for the purposes of my study, diasporic return migration, can be considered one such situation that can challenge or disrupt the

³³ Burawoy (2008: 26) differentiates these two hysteresis cases as “processual” and “situational” hysteresis. The first is when the *habitus*-field mismatch results from “temporal transformation of the field itself,” while the second is a consequence of “mobility between fields.”

returnee's conventional or entrenched ways of doing and thinking. As Mesny (2002: 65) argues, by examining cases where the alignment between people's habitus and their social contexts has been shaken, one "can demonstrate the constructed and constraining character of what generally appears as given and natural." In a similar vein, but without referring to Bourdieu's hysteresis,³⁴ Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 1007) propose that the likelihood of imaginative and deliberative dimensions of agency is higher when actors face changing situations, or are located in complex or multiple relational ("cultural, social-structural, and social-psychological") settings.

Where do the above-reviewed Bourdieusian concepts fit in the extant migration literature? Bourdieu's conceptual tools are quite abundant in migration studies, though not extensively in the case of return migration. One problem with the way Bourdieu's theory has been applied to migration research is the piece-meal use of his concepts. For example, social capital is often used on its own, without saying much about the other forms of capital, or the inter-relationship between different forms. The same can be said of the separate treatment of habitus and field.

But the main problem with the application of a Bourdieusian approach to migration is a continuation of the excessive determinism and structuralism his theory has been accused of. Most works have thus focused on the durability of migrants' habitus after relocation, and have highlighted the tensions between the migrants' habitus and the new

³⁴ They build their argument upon Swidler's (1986) distinction between culture's influence in "settled" and "unsettled" times, and Mead's (1932) concept of "emergent events."

environment, the challenges and emotions they generate, and the dualities that they often create in migrant lifestyles and identities.³⁵ As Noble (2013: 346) explains:

This focus on the dualistic nature of migrant experience, juxtaposing the migrant habitus with the conditions of the place of settlement, captures an experiential truth at the heart of migration, of course, but leaves the migrant in a perpetual state of disjuncture born of the original moment of arrival, as though the migrant's body never learns capacities for adapting to the new. It also does not acknowledge the extent to which the presence of the migrant reshapes the culture of the host country.

I would add that besides downplaying the agentic potential of migrants and the inter-relationship between habitus and field, such an approach also fails to recognize the changes that happen to the external environment beyond the initial period after migration and independent of the migrant's presence, as well as the evolution that takes place within migrants due to life-course developments, for example.

As a result of the dominance of this approach to the application of Bourdieu's concepts in migration works, habitus transformation among migrants has received less attention. More specifically, the *ways* in which migrants' habituses change, or do not, after relocation have not been studied extensively (Hyejeong 2013: 2; Noble 2013: 345). In the next few paragraphs, I will review the works of a few authors who have tried to address these issues and gaps.

Bauder (2005) has attempted to go beyond just pointing out the habitus–field mismatch after migration. He discusses how immigrants from South Asia and former Yugoslavia

³⁵ A comprehensive review of such works is not possible here. Guarnizo (1997), Marshall and Foster (2002), and Oliver and O'Reilly (2010) are some examples, as Noble (2013: 346) explains in more detail. This tendency even appears in Bourdieu's work, though migration has not been a central topic for him. For instance, even some of the examples of hysteresis found in a 1999 book by Bourdieu et al. are related to the difficulties of Algerian immigrants and their local neighbors in Paris as a consequence of the habitus–field mismatch.

respond to the barriers that they face in the Canadian labor market, because of the workplace conventions and hiring practices that are different from their habitus. He explains how such migrants mobilize ethnic networks or select particular occupational niches, and how these strategies depend on the immigrants' host-country background. However, his study is limited specifically to employment-related strategies. In a similar vein, Hyejeong's (2013) work focuses on immigrant mothers from seven Asian countries who, after an initial inertia in response to the highly competitive educational system they encounter in South Korea, often adjust their habitus — through interaction with local parents and gatekeepers in educational institutions. Her study is on first-generation migrants and addresses their dispositions with respect to a very specific aspect of life.

Other recent works (Noble 2013, but also Morrice 2014) have addressed habitus transformation by focusing on the learning that takes place after migration, that is, viewing change as a “pedagogical process” (Noble 2013: 346). This approach departs from many assimilation or integration studies that often imply an eventual fitting of the migrant's habitus to the new field, or a resolution of the initial disorientation caused by post-arrival hysteresis. Instead, it recognizes that differences between the migrant's habitus and the new environment do not necessarily disappear over time. But the persistence of differences does not mean that learning has not taken place, as Noble (2013) explains. He zooms into the personal story of a Lebanese migrant in his late 50s who has been residing in Australia for around 40 years and is quite well-integrated, but still feels different especially with regard to his English accent. This feeling, Noble (2013: 347, 355, emphasis in original) states, is not simply related to the efforts of “an outsider struggling to fit” or learning the differences of the new field; it is “an *acquired*

awkwardness beyond the initial experience of disorientation.” Noble is thus interested in examining how migrants “*learn* to ‘fit’ differently by inhabiting a consciousness of awkwardness.” That is, they feel at home in their new environment by virtue of their status as “inside outsiders” who have internalized the fact that they are different. Noble’s arguments are particularly insightful for my study, because his focus is on long-term migration too. Extending his work, I argue that learning to be different is a dual process in the case of many diasporan returnees. Both in the diaspora and in Armenia, their habitus has been shaped to become accustomed to differences. In both cases, many of them are integrated without being assimilated, as I explain in Chapter VI.

Other studies have focused on how the habitus is altered by changes in migrants’ various forms of capital. In her study of Turkish and Kurdish skilled migrant women in Germany and Britain, Erel (2010) calls for the need to view cultural capital not only in a “rucksack approach,” as resources that migrants bring with them from their old country and which do or do not fit in the new setting. Her goal is also to highlight the new forms of cultural capital that migrants create in the new environment, and the mechanisms they develop and rely on — including not only dominant institutions but also migrants’ networks — to validate their cultural capital. But she does not examine other forms of capital and the interactions of different forms.

Kelly and Lusic (2006), on the other hand, have attempted to provide a more holistic analysis, taking into consideration the interplay of different forms of capital. Also, Nowicka (2013) presents a more comprehensive application of Bourdieu’s concepts by integrating all three capital forms in her study of the life courses and cross-border

experiences of Polish entrepreneurs in Germany. She examines how they use the different forms of capital acquired in the two countries to position themselves transnationally. She identifies three types (“single space, bi-local and overlapping”) of “transnational social positioning,” which is defined as “the outcome of intersections and conversions of social, economic and cultural capital across national borders” (Nowicka 2013: 30).

Nowicka (2013) and Kelly & Lusia (2006) are interested in how the accumulation, transfer, and valuation of various forms of capital are related to the migrants’ social positioning and the structural power that underlies these processes. This way, they are using Bourdieu not merely to describe the various aspects of migrant integration. As Nowicka (2015: 14) states, by relying on Bourdieu’s conceptual tools, it is possible to highlight the “dynamic and intertwined change of migrant habitus and the field in which she or he begins to ‘play’” rather than the “integration INTO a group, a society, a culture” implied in many theories of assimilation, acculturation, and integration. Similarly, my aim in this thesis is not a simple discussion of whether or not, or how successfully, returnees are integrated *into* Armenian society. But my goal is to connect the analysis of capital usage, creation, and transfer to the *processes and strategies* of habitus transformation and/or reproduction in the new field, and indirectly, to the latter’s effects on identity (re)definitions. Thus, in my thesis, I try to present a multilayered and multifaceted analysis of the ways returnees change and/or reproduce their habitus in response to hysteresis. I strive to do this not only by discussing the strategies they adopt consciously and unconsciously, but also by relating these strategies to various forms of

capital and examining how the latter are linked to one another. Moreover, I look at intrapersonal variations, that is, changes within the same returnee over time.

As I mentioned above, by analyzing the returnees' reaction to hysteresis, I am also interested in how this affects their identities and sense of belonging. By identity, I refer to the representation and expression of who one views oneself to be, both individually and socially (in relation to other individuals and groups). The way I use belonging has a more place-oriented dimension; it encompasses feelings and meanings of home and homeness, or sociocultural positionality in a specific spatial context. My inclination toward a balanced approach between objective and subjective forces is also informed by works that view identity and belonging as neither completely fixed and innate nor entirely malleable and constructed individually. Following Jenkins (2008), I think that a clear-cut distinction between individual and collective identity should be avoided. Instead, they are "routinely entangled with each other" and "only come into being within interaction" (Jenkins 2008: 37-38). I also agree with Jenkins' view of identity as a process. For this reason, on many occasions, I use the terms "identity processes" or "identification," in order to signify the dynamic nature of identity. However, I do not think that fixity is entirely absent from identity. These ideas are aptly summarized in Hall's (2008: 347-348, emphasis in original) below statement:

I don't think identity is just a free-floating smorgasbord – you get up today and decide to be whoever you'd like to be: that's just a post-modern fantasy. Identity is always tied to history and place, to time, to narratives, to memory and ideologies. It requires material conditions of existence. You can't just move identity around as you choose. On the other hand, I think identity isn't inscribed, forever, in or transmitted by, the genes. It is socially, historically, culturally constructed. So in that sense, identity is always, to some extent, an open question, always, as they say, 'in process': not because it is entirely self-constructed, a mere self-fashioning of choice, and has no conditions of existence, but because, like meaning itself, it operates *ultimately* in relation to an open horizon, since it cannot be finally fixed.

Such an approach to identity and belonging is also expressed by scholars who lean toward “new cosmopolitanism,” that I have briefly reviewed above. Calhoun (2003: 536), for example, thinks that the view among certain advocates of cosmopolitanism that individuals are capable of choosing all their identifications is an “attractive illusion” that is “deeply misleading.”

Even the cosmopolitans most eager to declare themselves rootless depend in part on belonging to larger groups ... Everyone belongs, though some people belong to some groups with more intensity and often less choice than others belong to any. Such belonging matters not only as a subjective state of mind – not only insofar as it feels either good or bad to individuals. It matters also as a feature of social organization. It joins people together in social relations and informs their actions. (Calhoun 2007: 286)

The last part of his quote points to the way such scholars view cosmopolitanism as a form of “sociability” (Glick Schiller et al. 2011) or “disposition” (Kendall et al. 2009: 22), which brings us back to Bourdieu. They argue that cosmopolitanism is not simply assumed, and it is not the product of a purely individualistic project, but develops out of specific sociohistorical circumstances. For them, the cosmopolitan has the necessary resources or “capital” to work and live in diverse settings, and thus experience and consume multiple cultural products and lifestyles (Kendall et al. 2009: 25-26). In line with such approaches, for example, Berg (2009a) has shown how cosmopolitan ideas among Cuban diasporans in Spain derive from certain sociocultural contexts, which can even include nationalistic elements.

As an extension of my approach toward identity and belonging, I also view emotions not solely as individual sentiments but also derived from collective processes. They are not simply expressions of personal psychology, but are also shaped and expressed in encounters of the self with the social (Ahmed 2004).

[I]t is useful to regard emotions as dynamic processes through which individuals experience and interpret the changing world, position themselves vis-à-vis others, and shape their subjectivities... The self, in this perspective, is regarded neither as a closed container of passions nor as an entity that simply reacts to forces from outside, but rather as a mobile, multiple, relational being-in-the-world that is captured by his or her surroundings, engaging with past, present and future situations. (Svašek 2012: 3)

The situational aspects of affect have been tackled by recent works within the field of geography that pay increasing attention to emotions (Anderson & Smith 2001; Davidson et al. 2007). Such studies on “emotional geographies” focus on the feelings that develop as a result of dwelling in as well as mobility across places, affecting the way we understand our world and we experience our social relationships. They are concerned “with the spatiality and temporality of emotions, with the way they coalesce around and within certain places,” rather than viewing them “as entirely interiorized subjective mental states” (Bondi et al. 2007: 3).

The opposition between views that regard emotions as products of individual biology and psychology versus their socially and culturally constructed nature is also related to the dichotomy between emotion and reason. These two inter-related debates run deep in social theory. A review of these dichotomies, as well as attempts to overcome them and to stress the inseparability of their respective parts, is included in Emirbayer and Goldberg (2005: 473-493), who also examine Bourdieu’s position. Reed-Danahay (2005: 99-128) also discusses the role of emotions in Bourdieu’s work, especially how they are embedded in his concept of habitus. Bourdieu’s model gives the impression of a society where people interact with one another in a rather cold, practical manner, where social action takes place and reproduction happens because of the dominance of powerful people over less powerful ones. Nevertheless, emotional or affective factors do emerge in

his model, albeit neither very radiantly nor unambiguously, as shown in the two above-mentioned works.

In Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) definition of agency too, the role of emotions does emerge, though it is not an elaborated topic. Emotions appear to be present in all three dimensions of agency, such as in the form of a sense of "stability" and ease of mind that routine action by oneself and others inspires; the "dreams, wishes, desires, anxieties, hopes, fears, and aspirations" actors have when they imagine the future; and the "emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities" that actors respond to when faced with presently unfolding circumstances — all developed socially and relationally (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 971, 984).

4.3. Tying return dimensions to theoretical framing

In this section, I will briefly discuss how the above-presented guiding theoretical perspectives and conceptual tools fit into the two return dimensions — envisioning and experiencing — covered in my three empirical chapters. I will also present a summary of the main points of the chapters.

Chapter V addresses the *first dimension of return*, namely, the factors that have inspired and led returnees to make return decisions. What emerges from my analysis is that an all-encompassing and dominant return "reason" cannot be singled out. Instead, returnees are motivated by various combinations of subjective and objective circumstances, individual and collective memories, aspirations, and resources. Existing studies do acknowledge the diversity of micro and macro factors that affect return decisions, as reviewed above.

Nevertheless, they often do not go beyond a mere listing of main narratives. For example, King and Christou (2014: 89-91) outline six return rationales with regard to the return of second-generation American- and German-Greeks to Greece, which bear many similarities to the motivating factors I have identified in Chapter V: economic rationale (the least important, according to them), return to one's roots, Greek way of life, family narrative of return, return as escape, and return as life-stage event. But how can we move from such listings derived from empirical analyses to a more conceptual level? Although not dealing with diasporic return specifically, Cassarino (2004: 271) has proposed a conceptual framework of "return preparation," which integrates elements from different return migration theories (reviewed in pp. 32-33 above). According to him, return preparedness consists of the interaction between: 1) The returnee's preparedness (willingness and readiness to return); and 2) mobilization of tangible resources, intangible resources, and social capital. These are influenced by circumstances in the host and home countries. My framework has some similarities to Cassarino's but it is informed by insights from broader social theory. I argue that return decisions result from the complex interrelationship between habitual dispositions, imaginative and goal-oriented projects, and practical considerations (related to the use or creation of various forms of "capital") within a specific time period and structural environment, reflecting the inseparability of agency and structure. Throughout Chapter V, I show how these various rationales co-exist and relate to each other in individual returnee lives as they unfold within specific sociohistorical environments.

Although several of the return rationales I identify have also been mentioned in other studies of return migration, there is one aspect that has not been highlighted in many

other works. It involves a set of narratives revolving around universal or cosmopolitan values.³⁶ Such rationales are especially powerful among young North American returnees.

An important aspect of return motivations is the way diasporic returnees conceptualize homeland. Despite differences, an attachment and commitment to homeland, whether viewed as ideologically important or as a more neutral desire for placeness, is present among almost all the returnees. Even for those possessing more cosmopolitan outlooks, locality remains an inextricable aspect of life.³⁷ Also, even among returnees motivated by economic or other pragmatic factors, emotionality is not entirely absent.

The *second dimension of return* is covered in chapters VI and VII. There, I employ the Bourdieusian concepts of capital and hysteresis to explain the diasporan returnees' post-return experiences, integration processes, and, indirectly, also the patterns they adopt to (re-)evaluate their identities and belonging. As the homeland visions, as well as individual and collective expectations, encounter the more mundane or everyday pleasures and disappointments of life in Armenia, returnees often find their habitus in a hysteresis situation, that is, out of sync with the new sociocultural environment. The mismatch between habitus and field challenges some "doxic" ideas that were previously taken for granted or considered normal. Thus, the returnees' habitus needs to be re-

³⁶ When acknowledged in other studies, such rationales have been treated as one face of ethnocultural motivations. For example, King and Christou (2014: 90) link the desire of American- and German-Greeks to move to Greece in order to have a slower pace of life, a better work–personal life balance, or a more spontaneous lifestyle to "essentializing views of Greece and romanticized impressions of the Greek way of life."

³⁷ Darieva (2011a, 2011b, 2013) has reported similar trends of "rooted cosmopolitanism" especially among third-generation American-Armenians who undertake short-term "homecoming" projects in Armenia.

evaluated and often reshaped, and this also leads to (re)definitions of identity and belonging. Although I use the term “integration” sometimes in my thesis, it does not necessarily capture the complexity of the post-return experiences of returnees. It may also imply that returnees are unidirectionally changing in order to become a part of Armenian society that has a separate — and fixed — existence on its own outside of the lives of returnees. Though I recognize the inter-relationships of individual lives and structural arenas, and the dynamically evolving nature of the two, I often use the word “integration,” because it is one of the least problematic ones compared to other alternatives (Castles et al. 2002: 115-119).

Each returnee habitus responds differently and with a different time lag to the environmental changes taking place in field structures and capital accumulation because of spatial mobility. Yang (2014: 1531) argues that the possibility of transformation is greater when the gap is deep, because the sharper contrast is more likely to give rise to “conscious awareness and strategic calculation, which would then lead to a full transformation of the individual’s primary habitus.” At the same time, however, the greater the mismatch, the longer it will take for the habitus to change (Yang 2014: 1532). These two issues again support my above-made arguments about the distinctive characteristics of long-term diasporic return migration. Unlike short-term return and first- or second-generation return migration, the mismatch between returnees’ habitus and the new sociocultural field is more likely to be deeper for older-generation diasporans who establish longer settlement in the homeland. Even though the possibility of habitus transformation is higher, bending or completely changing sedimented dispositions does not happen easily and ubiquitously. Yang (2014: 1532) agrees with Bourdieu (1990b)

that “an individual’s primary habitus will continue to generate practices which are appropriate to the previous field, defined as the ‘inertia’ of a habitus.” These two processes of change and reproduction often co-exist, as I illustrate in Chapter VI with regard to post-return integration experiences, again showing the inter-relationship between agency and structure, transformation and stasis.

For Bourdieu, habitus transformation happens primarily in an unconscious manner in response to hysteresis. Here, again I depart from his position and agree with others (e.g., Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Erel 2010; Kerr & Robinson 2009; Yang 2014) who also recognize the possibility of post-hysteresis reflexive action. This is where Bourdieu’s concept of capital becomes particularly useful. I show that the projective and practical-evaluation aspects of returnees’ agency, which entail higher levels of consciousness than habitual action (Emirbayer & Mische 1998), are manifested in the way they maneuver existing capital forms (economic, cultural, and social), or develop new ones, to adjust or not their habitus, often selectively in different fields, in their new environment. Moreover, I examine the inter-relationship between various capital forms, a key point made by Bourdieu.

And finally, Chapter VII addresses the (re-)assessments and (re)definitions of identity and belonging that unfold upon relocation, as returnees try to deal with hysteresis. These processes are related to how returnees define and reconceptualize their personal identity, membership of a “group,” as well as ideas of home and belonging. In this case, too, mobility is apparent in the manifestation of cosmopolitan identities among returnees, which exist together with more roots-oriented alternatives. The majority of returnees,

however, exhibit ambivalent directions, where grounding in Armenia and Armenianness exist together with openness and empathy toward other places and cultures.

What makes matters more complicated when examining the two dimensions of return is that the new field that returnees encounter itself changes over time. Thus, the field experienced by diasporans who moved to Armenia in the early 1990s, for example, differs from the one that they themselves or later migrants have been exposed to. Besides global transformations in the past two or so decades, Armenia has also gone through transitions associated with the fall of the Soviet regime and subsequent independence, hence creating a particularly volatile field. Furthermore, the returnees' ability and willingness to adjust (or not) their habitus does not remain stable over their life course. These two evolving processes, that is, the changeability of social structures and of the ways actors relate to them have been acknowledged by Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 1004). These issues cannot be studied adequately when the emphasis is on short-term return, which again supports my inclination to focus on long-term settlement.

So far, I have discussed the way my theoretical framework is applied in order to show *how* anchoring and floating co-exist and inter-relate in the two dimensions of return. But *why* do we encounter variations among returnees? When trying to explain the prevalence of different levels or combinations of rooted and/or routed motivations, practices, and identities among different returnees, I refer to various factors, but I especially highlight the importance of the following three: the diasporic context returnees come from, the generation they belong to, and the stage of their life cycle. I argue that these three factors have an impact on the returnees' socialization and integration patterns, as well as capital

accumulation, prior to and after return, which in turn affect their dispositions, imaginations, and practical considerations when envisioning and experiencing return. In this way, I illustrate how spatial, sociocultural, and temporal factors interact in various ways in the manifestation of centrifugal and/or centripetal trends.

In general, my study differs from several other works on diasporic return migration by adding more empirical depth, through the inclusion of a comparative analysis of returnees from various diasporic communities and generations, as well as the consideration of changes that occur during long-term settlement. I have already demonstrated in the above literature review that the focus of most existing studies has been on short-term return and on first/second generations. As for the host-country context, many studies present in-depth analyses of returnees from a single diasporic community.³⁸ Thus, the impact of the diasporic context has sometimes been placed on the back burner. The multilayeredness and diversity of the diaspora — as manifested in differences and interactions between various communities, as well as their evolution — have often been ignored.

In the case of the Armenian diaspora, there are many shared ideologies and values among diasporans in different communities. In addition, some of these ideas and norms have remained dominant even with the passage of time. Nevertheless, important contextual and temporal differences also exist. Such similarities and differences can surface by examining returnees from different diasporic contexts and various generations. The internal migration within the Armenian diaspora (especially from various Middle Eastern

³⁸ When comparative analyses have been undertaken, they have mainly dealt with short-term return experiences and/or second-generation returnees (e.g., Vathi & King 2014).

countries to Europe and mostly to North America) makes matters even more complex. Such “multi-origin” returnees often exhibit an intermediate position or overlapping patterns. In this case, their age at the time of migration from one community to the other is an important factor.

Divergences that can be attributed to the specificities of diasporic communities are related to the way these communities have been formed and evolved over the years, the host country culture(s), as well as the development and functioning of diasporic elites and institutions in each context — conceived both spatially and historically.³⁹ For example, the importance of family and more private spheres of life were highlighted by many young North American returnees in their socialization processes while living in the diaspora. On the other hand, larger institutional structures were repeatedly mentioned by many returnees raised in the Middle East, especially in the 1960s–70s, as having been important incubators of Armenian identity. I recognize that making clear-cut distinctions between “North American” and “Middle Eastern” diasporic communities may ignore some more subtle differences between specific host countries and even cities/villages. In addition, such generalizations harbor a danger of inflating the importance of certain factors at the expense of others (such as class, gender, family status, etc.). As Vathi and King (2014: 62) acknowledge, the assumption that “the type and stage of social integration” of their participants in three different host countries and cities “determine, to some extent, their interpretations of their return-visit experiences ... risks a too-simple (and possibly false) zero-sum linear relationship between integration on the one hand and home-country identification on the other[.]” I do account for such nuances on several

³⁹ Some of these issues will be discussed in Chapter IV, where I present the profiles of the main Armenian diasporic communities returnees hail from.

occasions in my analysis. Nevertheless, some consistent overarching patterns do emerge related to the wider geographical regions returnees come from and generations they represent.

Conclusion

This chapter showed how my study aims to fill some gaps in the literature. It particularly demonstrated that most existing studies have either highlighted the illusory aspect of the longing for return, or focused relatively more on the return of the first and second generations, as well as on short-term return experiences. My research, on the other hand, addresses how return is envisioned and experienced by older-generation diasporans who have settled in the homeland for a long period of time. Throughout the chapter, I have highlighted the distinctive characteristics of long-term diasporic return migration that render its analysis worthwhile.

In this chapter, I also located my study within broader debates in migration and diaspora studies concerning space and place, culture, identity, belonging, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. I explained the appropriateness of adopting a balanced approach that accounts for both sedentarism and mobility, objective and subjective factors when studying diasporic return motivations and post-return experiences. Subsequently, I identified some theoretical directions and conceptual lenses that can help to bridge these divides. I argued that Bourdieu's conceptual tools offer a theoretical framing for considering agency and mobility not in isolation from structure and anchoring, but in tandem. At the same time, I outlined some problems in Bourdieu's model and its application in migration studies. Most importantly, I showed how Bourdieu has been

criticized for downplaying the importance of creative imagination and conscious or intentional, goal-oriented action. Although often exaggerated, I agree that such criticism is valid to a certain extent. For this reason, I have decided that Bourdieu's concepts can serve my analysis in a better way when tempered by an acknowledgement of a more multilayered conceptualization of agency, as outlined in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work. In addition, I demonstrated the overemphasis on habitus reproduction in Bourdieu's theory and application. Nevertheless, I argued that this can be alleviated by relying on a lesser-known Bourdieusian concept, namely, hysteresis. This denotes a mismatch between habitus and field, giving rise to the possibility of habitus transformation in post-return experiences.

In light of the theoretical framework presented in this chapter, I will turn to a discussion of my methodological choices in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

Methodology and Methods

1. Research Strategy and Plan

This study relies mostly on a qualitative design research strategy, based primarily on participant observation and in-depth life-history interviews to capture and explain how returnees live, experience, and make sense of their decisions and actions. This strategy is associated with interpretive and phenomenological approaches, which focus on the subjective experiences of research participants, that is, on interpreting social action from the participants' perspective (Bryman 2001: 14; Robson 2002: 195). Thus, such approaches seek to “discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tacit, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, motives and rules, which provide the orientations for their action” (Blaikie 2000: 115). This strategy is especially appropriate for the purposes of my thesis, given the individually initiated nature of post-Soviet Armenian diasporic return. It has allowed me to explore the motivations and decision-making processes underlying diasporans' return migration and to understand how returnees emically interpret their decisions and action of return. In addition, it has helped me elucidate integration processes in the new environment and identity (re)formation issues. At the same time, the subjective aspects of return visions and experiences have been contextualized through the following means: 1) By focusing on the way returnees reflected on their upbringing and socialization in the diaspora during the in-depth interviews; 2) By observing their social relations in Armenia; 3) By conducting some elite interviews in Armenia; and 4) By reviewing some secondary sources on Armenian diasporic communities and identity issues.

Primary data were collected through field research in Armenia between February and August 2013. The main location was in the capital city of Yerevan and its suburbs, the country's highest populated region, where the overwhelming majority of returnees reside and work. However, I also travelled to some other areas near Yerevan. My study excluded the region of Gharabagh, which is a de facto independent region known as Nagorno-Karabagh (or Artsakh) Republic, but has not been internationally recognized. Before starting fieldwork, I was already familiar with the field site to a certain extent. I had conducted my master's thesis fieldwork in Armenia in 2007. In addition, I had visited the country for six times (most of them lasting less than one month) over the span of 14 years, until my DPhil fieldwork. These previous experiences, as well as my network of acquaintances and distant relatives — whose families, incidentally, had repatriated to Armenia during the Soviet years — helped make my stay both educational and practically easier.

2. Data Sources and Research Methods

2.1. Participant observation and informal conversations

Participant observation and informal conversations were carried out in settings where returnees spend time or interact as part of their daily lives. I paid frequent visits to public social gathering places (e.g., restaurants, cafés, and pubs), where many returnees meet up on a regular basis, as well as to shops that belong to returnees. I also attended some events that I thought could be attended by returnees. These included, for example, exhibitions of hand-made products, where some returnees (especially Syrian- and Iranian-Armenians) had stands, as well as art exhibitions, performances, and other events hosted in venues owned by returnees and/or held by organizations founded or led by

returnees. Moreover, I participated in three RepatArmenia Foundation (RAF)⁴⁰ “Meet and Greet” events that took place on June 8, June 30, and August 13, 2013, respectively. According to the Foundation’s website, the goal of these regular gatherings is to “welcome new repatriates to Armenia and create useful contacts with existing repatriates to assist in socializing, adaptation processes” (‘Integration programs’ n.d.). These events were usually held in restaurants, cafés, or other venues owned or operated by returnees. Besides being networking and entertainment opportunities, they typically featured short talks or presentations about special projects that were run by returnees or diasporans, or that were considered by organizers to be of interest to attendees (e.g., fundraising campaigns; community and other development-related projects in the fields of IT, tourism, education; etc.). RAF also organizes “Imagine Armenia” forums in various diasporic communities. During these events, leaders and volunteers from the Foundation inform diasporans about the possibilities of repatriation to Armenia. In September 2013, I attended such a forum held in Beirut, Lebanon.

Participant observation and informal conversations were also undertaken in some more private settings. I attended several lunches and dinners with individual returnees, families, or circles of friends. Other occasions included home gatherings and special celebratory events. Sometimes diasporans visiting Armenia at that time were also present in these meetings, especially during the high season of diasporan tourism in the summer months.

⁴⁰ RAF is an Armenia-based NGO that promotes and assists in repatriation. See the next chapter, pp. 128-129, for details.

Through participant observation and informal conversations, my aim was to elicit the meanings returnees attribute to their decisions, actions, and experiences — often in a relational manner. These methods also helped me to identify potential candidates for in-depth interviews, as well as to validate or understand in a deeper manner the responses obtained in some previously completed interviews. During these visits, meetings and events, I adopted the dual role of an observer and a participant who tried to become to some extent a part of the group under study (Robson 2002: 317-318). I kept a diary of my reflections from these encounters. These notes were used to gradually refine the in-depth interviewing process over time. They were also useful later on, when I started identifying key themes during data analysis.

2.2. In-depth life-history interviews

The bulk of my primary data was collected through the in-depth life-history interviews I conducted in Armenia, which helped me gather detailed information about specific events, decision processes, and key transformations at different phases of the diasporan returnees' life cycles.

The relevance and usefulness of narrative or biographical interviews in migration studies have been documented in several works (see, *inter alia*, Apitzsch & Siouti 2007; Christou 2006, 2009; Iosifides & Sporton 2009; Olsson & King 2008 © 2014: 259-260; Thomson 1999). According to Thomson (1999: 28-29), for example, oral histories can provide valuable insights into the study of migrations and migrant lives, because they highlight “the complex weave of factors and influences which contribute to migration,” the importance of social networks, the gendered aspects and intergenerational dynamics

of migration, as well as the “knowledge, feelings, fantasies, hopes and dreams” that affect “the migration experience at every stage and ... [are] in turn transformed by that experience.” Iosifides and Sporton (2009: 104) add that biographical methods are particularly helpful when examining migration decision-making and motivational processes, integration issues, and identity (re-)assessment and definition, “because they place temporality, sequenciality [*sic*], trajectory paths, and personal and/or collective memory at the center of social inquiry.”

The use and comparison of life-history interviews with returnees from different Armenian diasporic communities have helped me gain a better understanding of the individual aspirations and strategies (agency) carved out of the larger community and social contexts (structure) in which returnees were positioned before and after return. This methodological approach has been in harmony with my general theoretical direction of accounting for both subjective and objective factors when explaining diasporic return, as I have outlined in the previous chapter. Thomson (1999: 34) argues that “[o]ral testimony reveals the interpenetration of collective histories and individual life stories, and can help us understand how collective motifs and myths might be resonant and meaningful for migrants.” Life histories highlight the multilayeredness, diversity, and subtleties of personal lives as they are experienced in specific sociocultural environments. “The bridge between personal biography and cultural history connects the internal world to the external world, the subjective and the objective” (Christou 2009: 144).

In general, I agree with the call of Iosifides and Sporton (2009: 103) for a “balanced position” regarding the use of biographical methods in migration studies. Such an approach is necessary in order to avoid “exaggerations as regards the role of agency and subjectivity in producing and reproducing social reality,” which could result in “neglect of broader structural factors, voluntarism and an almost total replacement of efforts to discover and analyze social causation processes with ‘interpretative understanding’ through lay discourses.”

With regard to the more technical aspects of the life-history method, overall, I interviewed 104 long-term returnees, almost all of whom had settled in Armenia for at least one year.⁴¹ I based this decision on the UN definition of long-term international migrant (UNSD 1998: 18). This was also justified in order to avoid including temporary returnees, mainly young diasporans who participate in volunteering or internship assignments that typically range between one month and one year.

The vast majority of these interviews were with individual returnees. In some cases, however, I interviewed family members or small groups of two or three people together, asking each person to tell his/her story and to provide answers to the same questions. These group interviews were productive in highlighting shared and contested views or narratives. The following charts provide a summary of the basic biographical characteristics of the 104 main research participants, which included 58 males and 46 females.

⁴¹ The only three returnees who had been in Armenia for less than one year, when I interviewed them, intended to stay for a long time.

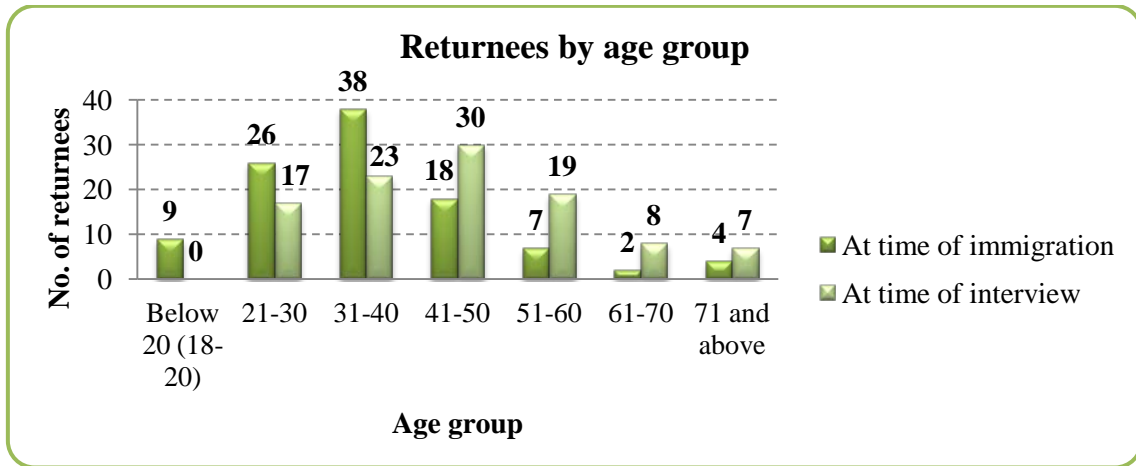


Chart 1

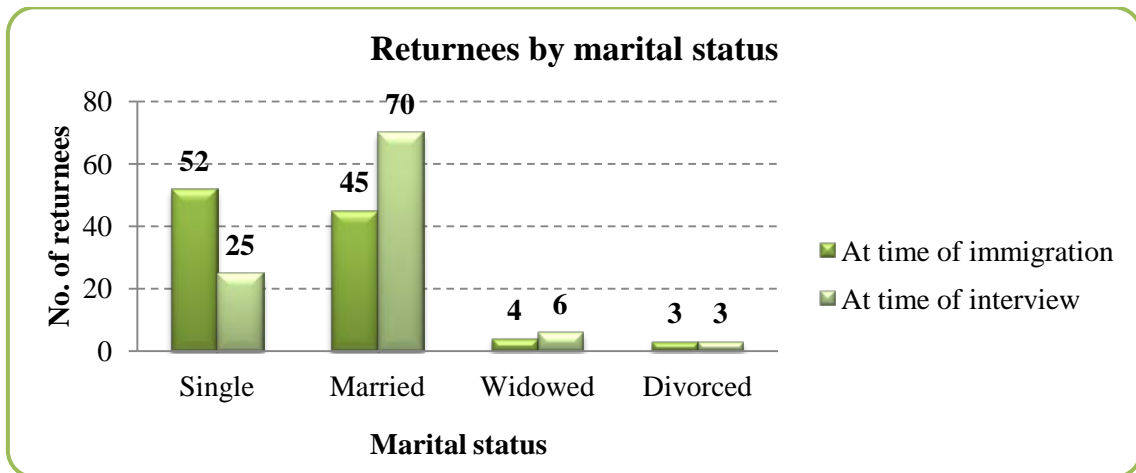


Chart 2⁴²

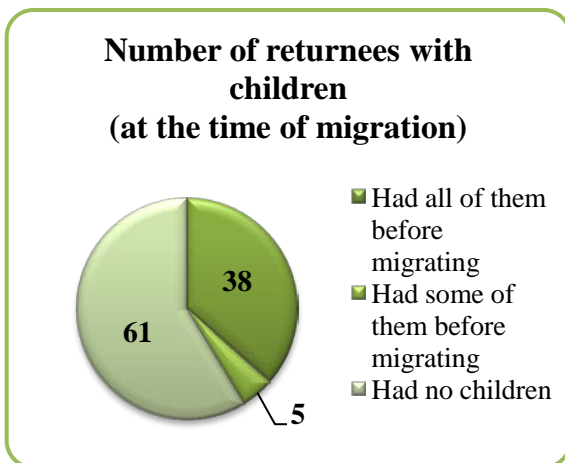


Chart 3

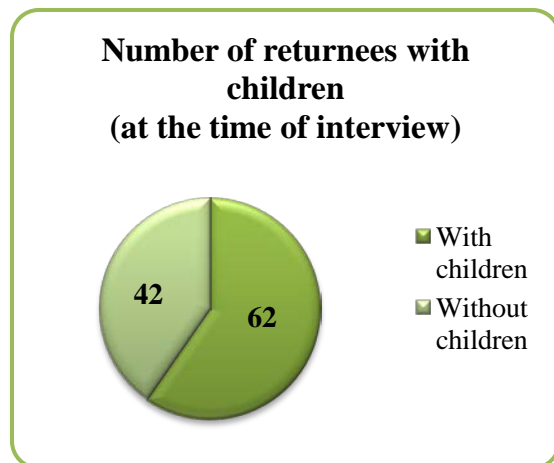


Chart 4

⁴² The spouses of the 79 non-single returnees at the time of the interviews had the following backgrounds: 14 were of Armenian origin born in Soviet or independent Armenia, 61 were Armenians born outside Armenia, and four were non-Armenians born outside Armenia.

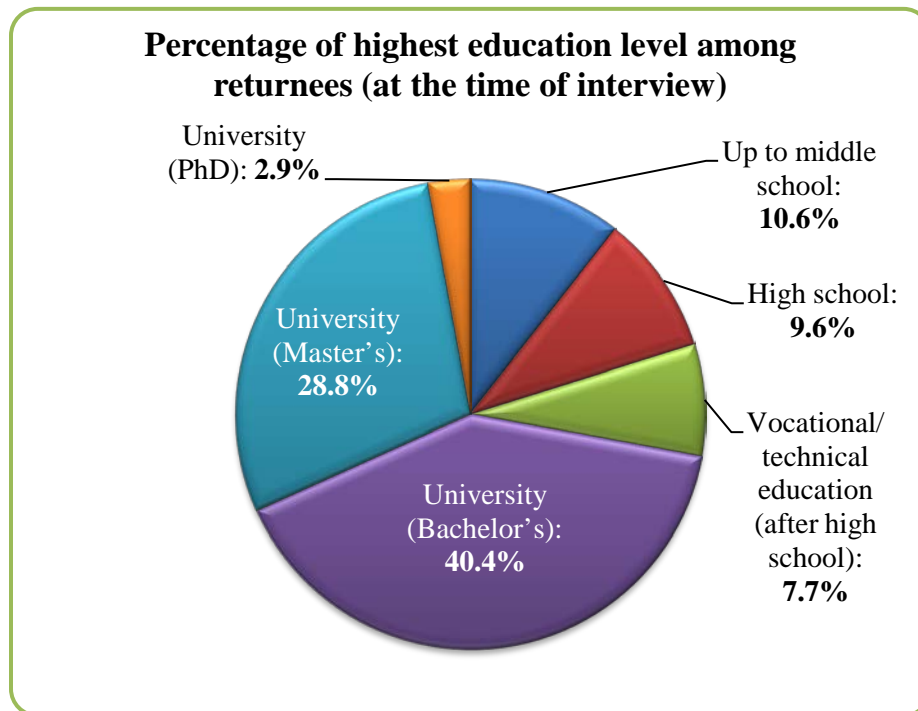


Chart 5

As shown in chart 5 above, more than 70 percent of my interviewees had university-level education. The vast majority of those who did *not* have university education had moved to Armenia from the Middle East. This was reflected in employment patterns. For example, almost all the skilled artisans, car mechanics, and small shop or business owners I interviewed had immigrated to Armenia from the Middle East. Returnees from this region were also quite active in the service sector. On the other hand, most North American and European returnees were entrepreneurs; university faculty or staff; leaders or employees in NGOs or special projects, freelancers (journalists/writers, translators, graphic designers), etc. These variations are also related to differences in Armenian language proficiency. Jobs that require more frequent or direct communication with local Armenians tend to be occupied by returnees born and/or raised in the Middle East. Also, returnees who are engaged in the fields of arts and culture are more likely to have come from this region.

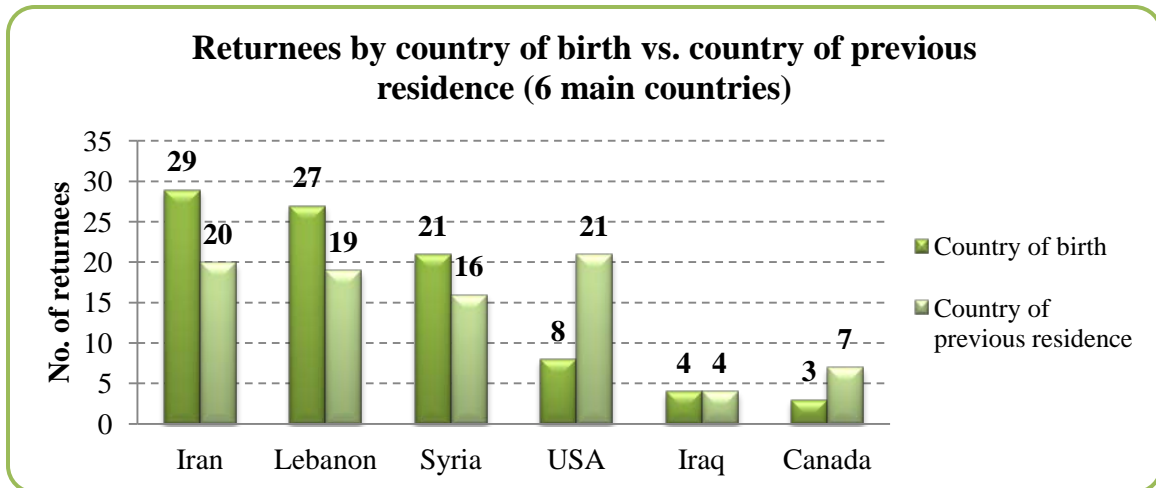


Chart 6⁴³

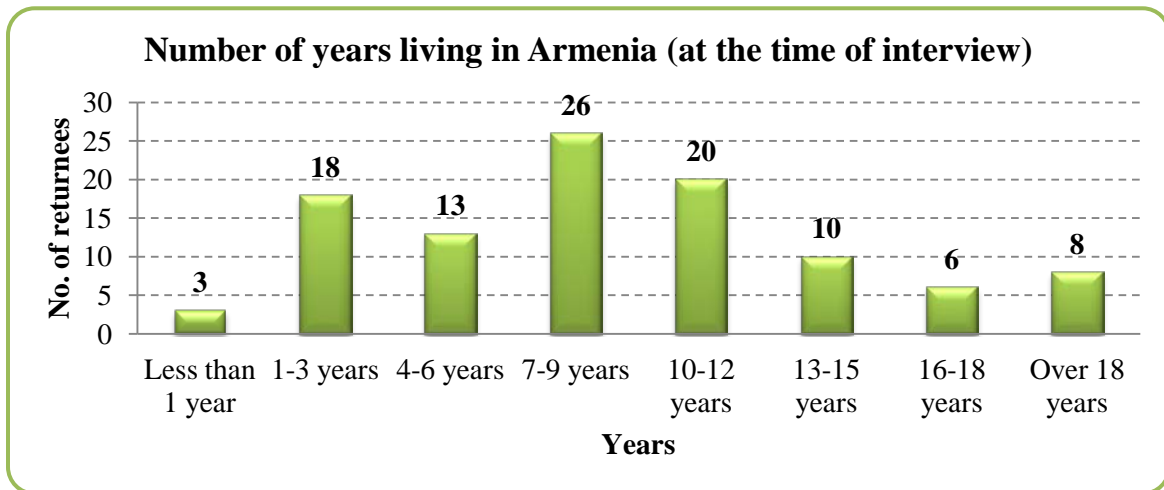


Chart 7

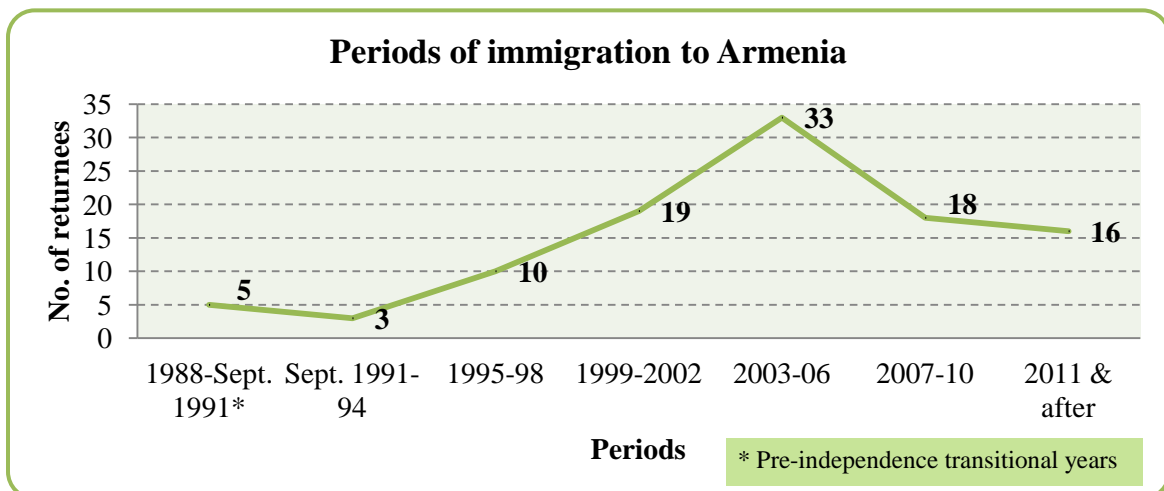


Chart 8

⁴³ See Appendix II for all interviewees' countries and regions of birth/former residence.

In the absence of reliable and comprehensive statistics on Armenian diasporan returnees, I identified and selected my main interviewees through snowball sampling. I started with those I already knew from previous visits to Armenia or whom I got introduced to via personal acquaintances. I then identified additional interviewees through these initial informants, as well as through contacts I established during participant observation. I also asked some relevant organizations to provide names. Finally, I reviewed magazine and newspaper articles, and online sources that included interviews with, information about, or personal testimonies by returnees to find potential interview candidates. While in the field, I was aware that the use of this sampling approach might result in biases, such as the potential exclusion of individuals who were not part of certain networks of returnees. For this reason, I tried to maintain the sample's representativeness as much as possible by targeting returnees with different characteristics and experiences, whom I met through various channels and in diverse settings. I tried to highlight different kinds of returnee "habitués" by interviewing participants from diverse backgrounds, including, for example, both returnees who had been active in diaspora organizations and community affairs, and what Kasbarian (2013) describes as "voices from the peripheries" or "on the edges of [diasporic] community."

Most interviews lasted around 90–120 minutes. However, some of them, especially group interviews, went on for up to five hours. Some of the lengthy interviews were conducted over two sessions. Others were interrupted or followed by lunch or dinner breaks, during which the conversation continued in a more informal manner.

All life-history interviews, except for two, were voice-recorded after obtaining the participants' oral consent (See section 6 below for consent-related issues). Voice-recording allowed me to give full attention to the interviewee's narration. Given the length of the interviews, it would have been practically impossible to make detailed notes of the responses during or after the interview if recording was not allowed. For the two interviews that were not voice-recorded, I took notes during the meetings, trying to keep the actual wording used by the interviewees as much as possible.

The interviews included a small structured element, with a few closed-ended questions, to collect some general background information on participants. But they were mostly administered in an open and often minimally structured manner. This flexible approach allowed participants to narrate in length their pre-return, migratory, and post-return trajectories and experiences. The closed-ended questions were asked in as much as possible subtle way, while the returnees were recounting their stories, if they did not already provide answers when narrating. Thus, in many of the interviews, I followed a procedure in line with the "narrative interview" method first developed by Fritz Schütze in the late 1970s, the main elements of which are summarized by Riemann (2003).

Given the lack of previous research on my topic, I embarked on the interview process without a rigid structure. I did not have a very elaborate and preset list of themes in mind. Even though I naturally had a set of questions when I started the interviews, I reviewed and revised them frequently, as necessary, while at the same time honing my general interview approach. Therefore, the interview process remained flexible throughout my fieldwork. In a way, my participants were involved quite actively in defining the

direction toward which each interview went. The issues that each participant brought up and the feedback (s)he provided during and after our interview influenced my approach toward subsequent interviews. Although I had a very general theoretical frame for my study before starting my fieldwork, I was quite open to challenge, refine, and/or revise it considerably. As mentioned above, the lack of previous research on my specific topic contributed to reducing the impact of preconceived analytical directions.

Encouraging people to tell their stories without restraint or interruptions meant treating deviations from the main questions as natural occurrences that did not need to be “corrected.” In most cases, this flexible and open-ended interview approach proved to be effective. People appeared quite interested in my research and comfortable with sharing their narratives. On several occasions, just asking one introductory question was enough for interviewees not only to answer that specific question but to tackle all or most kinds of themes I had been planning to address and to provide responses to all the questions I had wanted to ask. One interviewee described the process as a “therapy session.” These therapeutic properties of narrative biographical interviews have been documented by other researchers too (see Elliott 2005: 140, who also cites other authors that have made such arguments). In the case of diasporic return migration, specifically, Christou (2006: 26) has also described a similar experience. Despite its advantages, the emotional and therapeutic nature of narrative-style interviews also poses ethical dilemmas, as Elliott (2005: 140) argues, which require a process of self-searching on behalf of the researcher (Christou 2006: 26). I will address such challenges in sections 5 and 6 below.

For other returnees, my flexible interviewing style was quite surprising. Some expected me to ask them a specific list of pre-defined questions or hand them a written questionnaire to fill up, even though I had informed them about my general approach prior to the interview. I realized that such interviewees found it particularly difficult to talk about their pre-migration lives, which often spanned a great many years. In such cases, my involvement was greater than in a typical narrative interview, in terms of probing into their stories, without however being too intrusive. Such meetings thus resembled in-depth interviews performed in phenomenological studies (Creswell 2007: 61; Moustakas 1994: 114-116).

2.3. Supplementary data sources

Although my thesis focuses on long-term diasporan returnees, in order to be able to read their narratives critically and gain additional insights on diasporic return migration in Armenia in general, I also held informal meetings and shorter interviews with several diasporans who had been in Armenia for shorter periods of time. Moreover, I conducted around 10 semi-structured interviews with government officials, people active in or close to policy-making circles, as well as leaders or members of organizations that deal with diaspora–homeland relations and homecoming projects, or that encourage repatriation as part of their ideology or mission. Through these “elite” interviews, my goal was to become more familiar with their etic interpretations of return and to grasp better the “doxic” ideas that are dominant among elites and institutions.

Finally, the primary data elicited through interviews and participant observation were supplemented by the collection of secondary sources about (return) migration in

Armenia, diaspora–Armenia relations, etc. These included, among others, the following documents:

- Newspaper articles, as well as posts/videos on blogs and websites (See pp. 366-367);
- Official policy documents;
- Speeches, statements, and interviews by key policy makers in Armenia and leaders of diasporan or Armenia-based organizations relevant on my topic;
- Publications and press releases by Armenian political parties and diasporan organizations on the issue of repatriation; and
- Other forms of primary material (such as statistical reports).

All these supplementary data sources helped me better understand the broader structural milieu within which long-term returnees make decisions and interpret their actions. They provided general contextual information (e.g., official discourse, policies, and organizational structures related to return).

3. Languages, Transcription, and Translation

Eighteen interviews were conducted in English, while the rest in Armenian (Eastern or Western Armenian), depending on the participant’s preferred language and dialect. Out of the 86 interviews in Armenian, around 28 returnees (mostly Iranian-Armenians) spoke in Eastern Armenian. Despite its differences from my own Western Armenian dialect (my mother tongue), I had no difficulty understanding, recording, and analyzing these responses. During interviews with returnees from Greece and the Arab Middle East, occasional use of Greek and Arabic sentences and words was also made. Given my

fluency in Greek and intermediate knowledge of spoken Arabic, I faced no problems understanding and translating these short foreign-language interview excerpts.

As with the interviews, I chose to do the entire transcription process myself, without the help of a research assistant, because I was convinced that it could help me engage more deeply with the narratives. Agreeing with Elliott (2005: 51), I viewed transcription as “more than a trivial, mechanical task”; rather, I considered it “as part of the analytic process.” In addition, I thought that assigning the transcription task, especially of the Armenian-language interviews, to an Armenian research assistant could jeopardize my interviewees’ privacy, given the relatively small community of returnees. Instead of summarizing the stories while transcribing, I deliberately made a point of transcribing everything in the interviewees’ words. Keeping their voices as intact as possible was important for me. For this reason, even though I did some editing in the transcribed text, I strived to keep that to a minimum. The large number of narrative-style in-depth interviews, and the fact that many of them were conducted in public places, with all the noises and interruptions they entail, made transcribing particularly excruciating and time-consuming. Subsequently, data analysis was a similarly lengthy endeavor. Nevertheless, I retrospectively found the entire process very enlightening and thought-provoking.

All translations of Armenian interview excerpts and other data sources used throughout the thesis are mine. When in doubt, I sought peer review from people fluent in Armenian and English. Because of phonetic differences between the two Armenian dialects, transliteration from Armenian to English can be done in different ways. For most words in my thesis (except for those that have a different widely accepted version), I have used

the *Armenian Review* Transliteration Key (n.d.), based on Eastern Armenian phonetic values.

4. Data Analysis

Given the large volume and length of the transcripts, and my gravitation toward more phenomenological and narrative research strategies, I found it impractical, unnecessarily time-consuming, and inappropriate to code all the gathered data in detail beforehand, and to separate the coding process from the more thorough analysis and write-up phases. Instead, I followed a more flexible and iterative process of some coding–analysis followed by some writing, then coding–analysis again and writing some more sections, and so on. In many cases, analysis and writing happened concurrently. A detailed and systematic coding process would have been required if I had adopted an “atomistic” research approach (Willis 2007: 297). In contrast, my research strategy and data collection methods called for a more “holistic” analysis approach. Although I did some data segmentation–categorization–themeing, as explained below, in general I was usually inclined to deriving meaning from “a contextual reading of the data rather than the extraction of data segments for detailed analysis” (Willis 2007: 297). For these reasons, although I uploaded all my data into NVivo 10 after transcription, I used this software for basic purposes, and did not undertake very elaborate functions with it.

More specifically, I followed the general principles of phenomenological analysis procedures (Creswell 2007: 61-62; Moustakas 1994), in combination with some of the coding procedures explained by Saldaña (2009). Initially, “attribute coding” (Saldaña 2009) helped organize background information about the research participants and

fieldwork settings. Next, I read all the transcribed interviews, fieldwork notes, and annotations made during transcription a couple of times to immerse myself even more into the data. During this review process, I identified important quotes, interesting story sections, and “significant statements” (Creswell 2007: 61) about two main aspects of returnees’ experiences — before migration and migration process, and after migration. Thus, using “structural coding” (Saldaña 2009), I gathered together key segments of the collected data which were directly related to my research questions. I then used a combination of more advanced coding methods, including “in vivo” (based on the participants’ actual language or voice), “process” (to capture action sequences related to return and settlement decisions), “values” and “versus” (to highlight the participants’ subjective perspectives, as well as explicit and tacit tensions or contested views among participants), and some elements of “narrative coding” (to map life-course developments) (Saldaña 2009). Subsequently, I grouped these key data parts together into wider themes, or “clusters of meaning” (Creswell 2007: 61). The themes that I identified and the data parts under each one of them were used to write “textural and structural descriptions” (Moustakas 1994) of the returnees’ experiences and feelings — particularly with regard to their return motivations, integration processes, and identity (re)definitions — as well as the contexts and situations within which these have unfolded. I also combined these two types of descriptions, and compared and contrasted the major patterns they pointed to. Moreover, I tried to look for connections between the various patterns and the different characteristics of participants and migration trajectories. The goal of these comparisons and connections was to make sense of and present the overall “essence” (Moustakas 1994) of post-Soviet Armenian diasporic return migration processes and experiences, especially in terms of shared and contested narratives. These various stages

and processes of data theming and synthesizing resemble the steps of biographical analysis of narrative interviews proposed by Fritz Schütze in the early 1980s, which are outlined by Apitzsch and Siouti (2007: 7-8). However, my study differs from that approach mainly because of the large number of interviews I conducted; instead of relying on a single or a few narrative interviews to make general arguments (Apitzsch & Siouti 2007: 11), my analysis encompassed a comparison of numerous cases. As Creswell (2007: 57) explains, “whereas a narrative study reports the life of a single individual, a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” In addition, while narrative methods follow “the key principle of sequentiality,” my study adopted more open coding–analysis procedures (Apitzsch & Siouti 2007: 11). This was necessary especially because not all of my interviews followed a strictly narrative format, as explained in section 2.2 above.

5. Reflexivity

I am aware that the personal and cultural baggage that I carry as well as the potential interviewee biases have influenced, consciously or unconsciously, all the phases of my research. From the onset of this academic endeavor, I was continuously alert about the inevitable impact of my personal, ethnic, social, and educational background on my research. Providing a non-partisan and well-rounded analysis while not jeopardizing the Armenian community’s trust has required a continuous process of critical self-scrutiny or “active reflexivity” (Mason 2002: 7). To deal with respondent and researcher biases, I have relied on a range of strategies, such as gathering of background information on participants, communication of research goals to participants from the beginning,

triangulation of sources and methods, peer debriefing and support, etc. (Robson 2002: 172-176).

My paternal and maternal great-grandparents had arrived in the Middle East from villages in Cilicia (southeastern coast of present-day Turkey) and Kharpert (in modern Turkey's Elazig Province), following the Genocide and subsequent influx of Armenian refugees in the region. As an Armenian diasporan myself, I was born in Beirut and spent most of my life in Lebanon and Greece, in addition to a short period of time in Canada as well as my DPhil-related stay in the UK. Preservation of Armenianness and involvement in Armenian community affairs have been important parts of the lives of both of my Lebanese-Armenian parents, as well as of my own experiences. At the same time, through my short- and long-term stays in multiple diasporic settings, I have met or befriended Armenians (from Armenia and the diaspora) with various backgrounds, perspectives, and future aspirations — on both personal and collective levels. During these encounters, the diversity and multilayeredness of the Armenian diasporic experience have always intrigued me.

This research was a journey of soul-searching and inner-reflection for me. I sometimes found myself questioning my own understandings of home, homeland, and identity. Encountering people and situations that presented diverse approaches to these concepts was in many ways enlightening to me, not only as a researcher but perhaps more importantly as an individual and an Armenian. In several cases, I was confronted with situations that required me to manage my emotions. My Armenian background sometimes made this endeavor quite hard. Staying in Yerevan for fieldwork for around

six months, I became to a certain extent a “returnee” myself, albeit temporarily. This experience brought me face to face with some ambivalent feelings — an inexplicable sense of comfort interlaced with a feeling of foreignness — not only among my research participants but also within me.

On the one hand, I believe that my fluency in Armenian, familiarity with Armenian culture and history, and previous research experience with a related topic have enabled me to have a nuanced and profound understanding of the different aspects of my study. My possession of “institutionalized cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) in the form of language, as well as some other elements of cultural capital, meant that my “habitus” and that of many of my research participants were — or were at least perceived to be — somewhat analogous. This in turn helped me build alliances and develop an atmosphere of trust among my participants. If I was an “outsider” (*odar* or foreigner, i.e., non-Armenian), trust-building might have probably been slower and more difficult. The fact that I was a diasporan who was living in Armenia often led my research participants to view me as one of their own. While sharing their stories, they often used “we” or “our” in such a way that I could sense they were including me in their “group.” This undoubtedly affected both their responses and their expectations of what I was going to, and should, publish later on.

It is most probably because of the level of comfort and atmosphere of trust generated by my background that all of my interviewees, except for two, agreed to have their interviews voice-recorded. Several of them were even surprised that I was “too worried” or self-conscious about preserving their privacy and confidentiality. “I am not hiding

anything” and “you can use my real name” were echoed by a considerable number of interviewees.

This kind of openness was not only related to the fact that returnees felt at ease sharing their stories with me specifically. In some cases, it was also caused by their previous experiences of having been interviewed about their return decisions and post-return processes. This became obvious when a few people expressed that they were already “accustomed” to giving interviews about their migration experiences. This was especially highlighted because of the relatively small number of diasporan returnees in Armenia. For example, some of them had been previously profiled on the RAF’s website. They had been featured in a TV program about returnees broadcast by Shoghakat TV. They had had their stories published in local newspapers. They had been invited to give talks organized by various organizations that promote repatriation or implement short-term “homecoming” projects. For this reason, while answering one of my questions, such people would sometimes ask a new question and continue with a response to that, assuming that I would be interested in it too. “You might also want to know this,” some of them said. Or, in a few cases, when listening to their taped answers after our meeting, I sensed striking similarities between my interview and a previously published one with the same interviewee, not only with regard to the ideas expressed but even the specific vocabulary they relied on. On the one hand, I viewed this as an advantage. It meant that to some extent the stories that these returnees selected to present to me were not merely one-time or incidental thoughts; they were not just haphazard reflections of passing attitudes or emotional states, which might have been largely affected by the interviewer and interview situation, among other things. Instead, they were “constituted by the

interweaving of socially prefabricated and given patterns of planning and interpretation [of] the ‘normal’ life, together with the biographically relevant events and experiences and their ongoing reinterpretations” (Rosenthal 1993: 3). Thus, these returnees were choosing to provide a coherent account of what was really meaningful to them, which in itself is a value judgment that is significant for my study. On the other hand, this issue also raised concerns about the gatekeeping practiced by returnees, that is, about the kind and amount of information that they were selecting to share with me. I tried to deal with these issues as adequately as possible by collecting information about an interviewee (including reading or watching previous interviews) before conducting an interview, asking follow-up questions during the interview, and triangulating the gathered information from different sources afterwards. For example, in the case of several families, I chose to interview members separately to verify certain facts.

Interviewing family members separately also gave me the opportunity to uncover some less hegemonic voices and ideas that could have been potentially suppressed if I had chosen group interviews. This strategy proved to be particularly helpful when studying cases of returnees who had moved to Armenia mainly motivated by family re-unification desires (see Chapter V, section 2.2.3). The meanings of home and the definitions of identity among these “secondary decision makers,” if we can call them as such, sometimes deviated markedly from those of “primary decision makers” or main return initiators. I could sense a sort of uneasiness or hesitation toward the interview among some of these “secondary decision makers,” especially in the beginning of our meeting. This attitude might have been caused by the assumptions they were making about what I wanted to hear them say. I became particularly conscious about this issue during one of

my very first interviews with a Syrian-Armenian returnee. She had moved to Armenia around 15 years earlier, following his husband's decision. As soon as I met her for our interview, she wanted to "warn" me: "Before we begin, I just want to tell you that I am not the positive 'role model' [of a repatriate] if that's what interests you, if that's what you're looking for. Until now, I am not convinced that I should stay here in Armenia. If it was up to me, I would leave tomorrow." She added: "If you ask my husband, you'll hear a totally different story. For him, everything is good and rosy."⁴⁴ To show how her perspective differed markedly from his, she explained that she had even advised her brother — who at the time of the interview had recently arrived to Armenia from Syria due to the war — "that if he wants to put firm roots somewhere, he'd better do it in a different country." Her initial reservations were somehow eased by my reassurances that I wanted to hear an account that reflected her sincere feelings and views, and that I had not come to Armenia to find a specific "type" of returnee or return experience.

Unlike this Syrian-Armenian interviewee, several other returnees were quite resolute in advocating and increasing repatriation. They thus viewed me as a potential long-term returnee, that is, as someone they could persuade or encourage to follow their steps in the future. "Have you considered moving to Armenia?" or "When are you moving to Armenia?" were questions I heard in many interviews. Perhaps some returnees adopted such an attitude in an attempt to further validate their own return decisions. For others, I could potentially contribute to promoting repatriation — through my research — among other diasporan-Armenians. I was told that perhaps I can help untangle the causes of the low rates of diasporic return, and find remedies to this puzzling "problem."

⁴⁴ Indeed, when I interviewed him separately later on, the differences in their narratives were striking.

All in all, being an “insider” had definitely many advantages, but at the same time presented some bias risks and ethical challenges because of the assumptions of my participants and prospective thesis readers about me. In his research on Armenian national identity, Panossian (2006: xiv-xv) reported a similar experience about his “closeness to the Armenian community” being “a mixed blessing.” This in-betweenness — as a researcher who is neither a complete “insider” nor an “outsider” — is also somehow similar to the situation anthropologist Peter Loizos (1994: 39) described regarding his research in his father’s village of origin in Cyprus.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were present at various stages of my research. From the beginning, I was aware that asking people to disclose details about their personal lives, family histories, and decisions to immigrate to Armenia — and to talk about such topics as their understandings of home, homeland, belonging, and national identity — might make some of them feel uncomfortable or emotional. In addition, I expected some people affiliated with certain political or civil-society organizations to feel compelled to provide answers and express ideas that conformed to the institutional goals or accepted rhetoric and that were not perceived as dangerous to national pride and unity. Therefore, to make participants feel more comfortable and be as transparent as possible, I often reminded them about my commitment to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of my interviewees and collected data. Moreover, I always made sure not to force people to talk about topics that clearly made them upset more than they were ready to share of their own free will. In general, the instances when the story-telling triggered visibly painful or distressing experiences were rare.

A related ethical issue involved asking participants to talk about their financial circumstances before and after migration. I always found that this was one of the most difficult topics to tackle during the formal and informal meetings. In many of the interviews, it was one of the subjects that returnees often omitted, consciously or unconsciously, from their stories. In such cases, even though having them provide details about their economic situation would have given me more insights about pre- and post-return dynamics, I chose to reach this information by asking them as delicately and indirectly as possible, or by gathering feedback from other sources. This meant that I was not able to obtain a comprehensive and well-rounded picture of the financial aspects of return for all cases. However, I believe that the large number of interviews I conducted somehow compensated my inability to gather details about some participants. And in general, I think that the openness that I encountered when returnees were describing many other aspects of their experiences could have been jeopardized if I had been more forceful in my attempt to uncover financial information. Invading the returnees' personal lives in this regard could have increased their resistance to sharing other kinds of information with me. This in turn could have led to even more gaps and biases in my research than those that inevitably exist now based on the approach I selected. Thus, although I may have forgone some important information, I believe the trade-off has been worthwhile.

When I went into the field, I was initially planning to use written consent forms to secure permission from participants to take part in my research project. Based on the feedback I received from some informants in the initial phases of fieldwork, however, I decided to follow an oral consent process. I found that approach culturally more appropriate and less

invasive in the case of my research. In Armenia, as in other neighboring regions (such as the Middle East), people are often suspicious of government or official authorities, legal paperwork, and forms requesting signatures in general. Thus, asking my potential interview candidates to sign a written consent form might have resulted in more rejections to participate. Also, it might have raised trust issues and might have negatively affected the outcome of many of my interviews. In order to secure the consent of participants, I instead adopted the following process: When I first approached potential interview candidates, I briefly explained (face-to-face or by phone) what my research is about. When they showed interest in participating, I emailed them or handed them a project information sheet, as well as a participant information document. These two documents, which participants could keep for their own reference, provided details about my research, and outlined their rights and my responsibilities with regard to confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, and other ethical issues. When they confirmed their participation in an in-depth interview, I then proceeded to seek their oral consent. Having secured a participant's verbal consent, I initialed and dated a copy of the "Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form," to which I appended the participant's name, for my own reference. In addition, I regularly reminded participants about their rights.

To protect the participants' privacy, pseudonyms have been used throughout the thesis. The age, marital status, and country mentioned sometimes next to a pseudonym refer to the participant's age and marital status *at the time of the interview*, and his/her previous country of residence — which, unless stated otherwise, is the same as the country of birth. In some cases, I have decided to leave out pseudonyms and other background details in order to make the argument or example flow in a smoother manner. I am aware

that in some of the examples in the thesis, where elaborate stories are provided on some specific cases, the presentation of a combination of characteristics and background information on the featured returnees might render their case recognizable by family and friends (Elliott 2005: 142). This is likely especially given the small number of returnees and the close networks many maintain with one another. In cases where there is a danger of identity recognition, I have tried to make sure that sensitive information is deliberately omitted from the examples. Alternatively, I have used two different pseudonyms for a given returnee in order to avoid revealing his/her identity.

During the interviews and more informal social gatherings with returnees, acting as naturally as possible and disclosing some details about my own life or ideas were important in order to secure their trust and not to appear aloof. At the same time, I felt that some sort of distance had to be maintained from interviewees in order to minimize respondent bias. Thus, I was constantly searching to achieve a balance between revealing too much and remaining excessively reserved. One case where this ethical dilemma was particularly accentuated was when returnees asked me about my personal view on repatriation, as mentioned above.

A related ethical issue was that of intrusiveness. Although observing how returnees existed in their private environments and interacted with their families and friends were research-wise insightful, I was cautious not to impose my presence in people's private lives. I thus conducted interviews in returnee houses, and attended family or small-circle social gatherings only when invited to do so. Whenever that was not possible, I negotiated a neutral location for the meeting. Moreover, I always made sure not to

exploit the participants' time. In general, however, I felt that time constraints were not a major problem in most interviews. In fact, I met several people who initially wanted the interview to end at a specific time, but ended up — without any request or suggestion from my part — extending that time. Once they started immersing themselves in the story-telling process, quitting it abruptly was difficult or undesirable for many.

CHAPTER IV

Scattering and “De-diasporization” in Armenian History: Diaspora, Nationalism, State Formation, and Return

Introduction

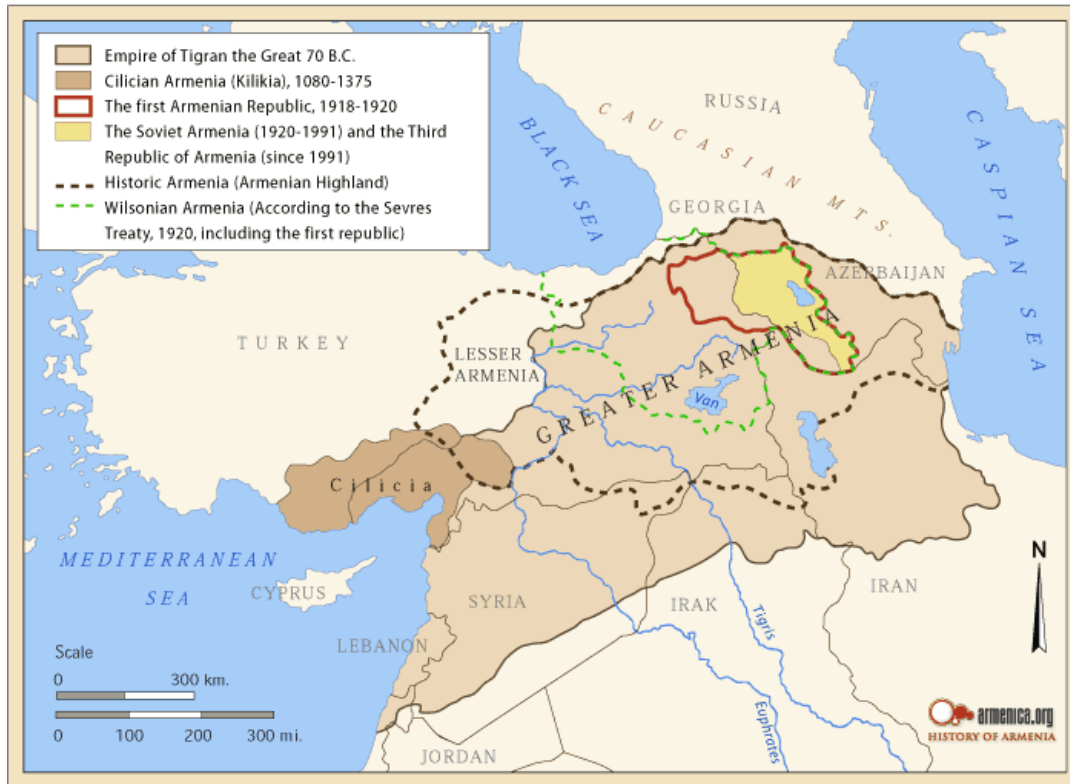
Scattering and return are not new phenomena in Armenian history. Adopting a chronological approach, this chapter reviews only the main waves of forced and voluntary migration of Armenians from and to their historic homeland (or parts of it) that are relevant to my thesis. It traces the evolution of the contemporary Armenian diaspora as well as “in-gathering” or “de-diasporization” movements (Van Hear 1998), dedicating a relatively large section to the Soviet-era repatriation drives.

The chapter also sheds light on the rise of Armenian nationalism in the 19th century, and on some key events that later affected the development of Armenian national identity, especially in the diaspora. The return motivations of post-Soviet diasporan returnees and their experiences in the RA after relocation cannot be adequately understood without considering these issues. At the end of the chapter, I also briefly present the profiles of the communities where the majority of post-Soviet diasporan returnees come from.

1. Ancient Times Till the Armenian Renaissance

Historically, the Armenian people lived in the area known as Armenian Highlands or Plateau, which stretched in-between the Euphrates River (west), the Pontic Mountains (north), the Kur River (east), and the Taurus Mountains (south). The current 29,743 km²

Republic of Armenia covers only a very small part of the historical homeland. The map below shows the evolution of the Armenian homeland at key historical junctures.⁴⁵



Map 1 – Evolution of Armenia’s borders throughout the centuries (‘Armenia through out the [sic] history’ n.d.). [Permission to reproduce this map has been granted by Armenica.org.]

Between around 585 BC and 1045 AD, a series of local dynasties (Yervandunis, Ardashesians, Arshakunis, and Bagratunis) ruled Armenia. Their rule was often interrupted by conquest by larger empires like Persia, Rome, Byzantium, and the Arabs. Perhaps the two most important historical developments during these centuries that have remained persistent features of Armenian identity are: conversion to Christianity (in 301

⁴⁵ The following two maps found online might also be informative while reading this chapter: 1) The map of the six Armenian *vilayets* (provinces) within the Ottoman Empire, with Russian Armenia to the east (‘Eastern Provinces of Ottoman Empire - Turkish Armenia - Western Armenia’ n.d.); and 2) the map of the current Republic of Armenia, with the bordering Gharabagh (de facto borders) and Nakhijevan regions (‘Map of Armenia’ n.d.).

AD, the first nation to adopt it as state religion) and the creation of the Armenian alphabet (around 405 AD). Geographically situated in a territory that throughout these centuries acted as a meeting point and often a battlefield among the different above-mentioned empires, Armenians were deported or, feeling hardship, voluntarily migrated to neighboring and distant places.

After the dissolution of the Bagratuni Kingdom, the massive devastation caused by Turkic and Mongol conquests resulted in the displacement and flight of many Armenians. The settlement of noble families, military leaders, and high-ranking clergy in the region of Cilicia (southeastern Mediterranean coast of present-day Turkey) gave rise to a “diasporic, reterritorialized Armenian state” (Tölölyan 2000: 117), the Rubenian Kingdom of Cilicia (1075/1199–1375). After Cilicia’s fall to the Mamluks of Egypt and then rule by the Ottoman Turks, many Armenian merchant elite and noble families settled elsewhere, but a considerable number of Armenians stayed in the region until 1921 (Panossian 2006: 65-66).

It is during the period of the Cilician Kingdom that the existence of diaspora received recognition in written works (Tölölyan 2004: 37), sparking the emergence of numerous words to describe Armenians living outside of the homeland (Tölölyan 2000: 119-120). As early as in the 13th century and especially after the fall of the Cilician Kingdom, Armenian poetry, music, and popular art became increasingly loaded with themes of exile, loss of country, and absence of leadership. Some writers, such as Bishop Stepanos Orbelian (c. 1250–1305), called on expatriates to return to the original Armenian homeland (see Orbelian 2002). Others, realizing the difficulty of actual return, focused

on the vulnerable and endangered condition of the exiled outside the homeland (Panossian 2006: 65-66).

By the early 16th century, Armenia's division between the Ottomans and the Safavid Persians brought further devastation. During one of the many Ottoman–Safavid wars, that between 1603 and 1618, and especially in 1604–05, Shah Abbas I of Persia forcibly uprooted tens of thousands of Armenians from their homes in Nakhijevan (Persian-ruled part of historic Armenia, now an exclave of Azerbaijan), to populate his kingdom, including New Julfa, a newly established suburb of his new capital city of Isfahan (Kouymjian 1997).

In the absence of a landed aristocracy, the Armenian Church leaders and a new class of merchants and traders were the dominant actors in the diaspora in the 17th and 18th centuries. The merchants emerged in diasporan communities in New Julfa, Constantinople (now Istanbul), and also outside the bounds of the Safavid and Ottoman empires — in Tiflis (now Tbilisi), India, Russia, and various European cities.

2. Armenian Renaissance and Other Historical Developments Preceding the Rise of Nationalism

The intellectual and cultural foundation of the Armenian renaissance (*Zartonk* or awakening) was laid between the 17th and mid-19th centuries. It evolved into modern, ethnic nationalism toward the end of the 19th century. During the “fermenting” years, schools, churches, and cultural institutions in various merchant diaspora centers (e.g., in India) had a very important contribution — consciously and unconsciously. Influenced

by the European ideas of the Early Modern Era, the traveling merchants and priests played key roles in the “enlightenment” of the nation. More importantly, beginning in the 18th century, the Mkhitarists, Venice-based Armenian Catholic monks, deliberately or not, “did nothing less than lay the foundation for the emergence of secular Armenian nationalism” (Suny 1993: 6).

This intellectual work in the diaspora was coupled with new developments in Armenia proper. From the mid-1500s till the early 1800s, a series of diplomatic and military attempts were undertaken by the Armenian Church hierarchy and the remnants of the medieval Armenian aristocracy to liberate Eastern (Persian) Armenia. They remained mostly isolated and short-lived initiatives.⁴⁶

Starting in the 18th century, the Russians advanced to the South Caucasus, and with the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchai that they signed with Persia, the eastern section of historic Armenia (previously under Persian rule) came under Russian control.⁴⁷ The western part remained within the Ottoman Empire. “[A]fter 1828, 30,000 people from various parts of (northern) Iran crossed the Arax river into now Russian Armenia (a ‘homecoming’ of sorts, 225 years after Shah Abbas’ forced migration of Armenians in the opposite direction)” (Panossian 2006: 121-122). There was also mass migration of Armenians from the Ottoman to the Russian empires after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29. Hence, Armenians became the majority in the Yerevan Province (reversing the previous

⁴⁶ See Panossian (2006: 110-119) for details.

⁴⁷ With this treaty, Nakhijevan also passed into Russian possession. During the Soviet era, the region was an autonomous republic within the Azerbaijan SSR. Since 1991, it is an autonomous republic within the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the Soviet period, its Armenian population shrank significantly. Currently, no Armenians live in the region.

state of Muslim majority). However, the Armenian leading classes settled in neighboring cities outside Russian Armenia, mostly in Tiflis and to a lesser degree in Baku (Panossian 2006: 122-124).

3. Development of 19th-century Nationalist Ideology

In the Ottoman Empire, Armenians (similar to other ethno-religious groups) were recognized as a distinct *millet*, a self-regulating community headed by the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople (Barsoumian 1997: 182-195).⁴⁸ Thus, the Armenian Apostolic Church leaders enjoyed significant powers as governors of the community's internal religious and administrative matters, while always remaining subject to the Sultan. The majority of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire comprised town workers and, to a larger extent, poorer peasants living in the interior Armenian provinces (*vilayets*) in the eastern part of the Empire. These peasants and their families were frequently battered by heavy taxation, second-class citizen treatment, persecution, and massacres in the hands of Turkish officials and Kurdish tribes (Barsoumian 1997: 188-191). In the late 1800s, increasingly large numbers of these peasants arrived to Ottoman urban centers, fleeing economic and political hardships. These *pandukhts* (migrant workers), as they were known, held low-paying jobs to support their families back home.

[They] maintained strong ties with their [*y*]erkir (an Armenian word denoting homeland), graphically reminding their better-off compatriots in Constantinople of the wretched and miserable conditions in which the Armenians in the provinces lived. They awakened in the hearts and the minds of the bourgeois and cosmopolitan Armenians in the capital an awareness, and even a concern, for the *gavar* (province, in the sense of homeland) that for a long time had been neglected, if not actually ignored. Some Armenian writers depicted in a vivid manner the grim

⁴⁸ Initially, all Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were considered members of the Armenian *millet*. In 1831 and 1847, respectively, Armenian Catholics and Protestants were recognized as separate *millets*.

and desolate life of the *pandukhts* and their *karot* (i.e., yearning or homesickness) for their families and homeland. (Barsoumian 1997: 191)

It is within this historical environment that the emergence of Armenian nationalism occurred. Panossian's (2006) work is the most detailed academic analysis published so far on this topic. He argues that modern Armenian national identity — as well as forms or manifestations of national(ist) ideology — developed in a heterogeneous manner through a “multilocal” process (Panossian 2006: 130-132). According to him, these divisions lie at the root of post-Genocide homeland–diaspora tensions, and still continue to affect Armenian national life. Most importantly, during the renaissance period, two vernaculars emerged: western and eastern Armenian (Panossian 2006: 133-137). According to Panossian (2006), in terms of the political ideology and activities of the Armenian nationalist movement, three approaches or positions developed, all of which influenced modern Armenian national identity and political thinking in diverse ways.⁴⁹

The first position that Panossian (2006) examines is liberal constitutionalism. This trend was dominant in the west, mainly among a relatively small group of Armenians in Constantinople who held privileged positions. It called for reforms *within* the Ottoman Empire. It was led by intellectuals influenced by French progressive ideas. Their main achievement was the adoption of the Armenian National Constitution (ratified by the Sultan in 1863) for the regulation and administration of internal matters within the Armenian *millet*. This document is an “example of a constitution of a nation without a

⁴⁹ It might be considered problematic to trace each of these three trends to one geographical region only, and to downplay the complex ways these trends co-existed and interacted with one another, from very early stages, among different individuals and political groupings. However, given the undeniable existence of these three threads in modern Armenian political thinking, the next four paragraphs are largely based on Panossian's (2006) description of these three positions.

state. It was not tied to any specific territory, but was based on community institutions and structures,” where power was concentrated in the hands of Constantinople-based leaders (Panossian 2006: 151).

The political ideology in the east relied on socialism merged with nationalism. It was spearheaded by young Russian-Armenian students, intellectuals, and activists (mostly based in Tiflis), who were influenced by Russian and German political thought. Even though a clear notion of the Armenian homeland and historic lands existed among this group, independence from the Ottoman Empire and the formation of territorially based statehood were not in its immediate agenda. Instead, it was centered on the notion of “*depi yerkir*” (going to the homeland) in order to alleviate the suffering of their compatriots in the Armenian *vilayets*. “Going to ‘*yerkir*’ meant going to Turkish Armenia to defend and free its oppressed Armenian population, with the use of arms if needed” (Panossian 2006: 155). Emphasis was placed on protecting all ethnic Armenians deprived of their rights (Panossian 2006: 157-158).

The third direction involved revolutionary drives coupled with a sense (and state) of victimhood, which emanated from the center of the Western (i.e., Ottoman) Armenian homeland. Resisting their increasingly hostile treatment by Turks and Kurds, Armenians in some parts of the interior provinces rebelled on several occasions. The Ottoman state’s response came in the form of massacres, which intensified particularly in the late-1890s. In 1895–96, under Sultan Abdul Hamid II, over 100,000 Armenians were killed and about 500,000 left destitute, many of whom were forced to leave their homeland and settle in other countries, including North America (Hovannisian 1997b: 224). The revolts

and massacres reinforced the themes of victimhood, exile, heroic resistance, and radicalization in popular folklore, literature, and political thinking and activities. At the same time, armed struggle and the defense of national rights through liberation and autonomy of the *territories* of the Armenian provinces became increasingly popular in these regions, through the work of such activists and intellectuals as Father Mkrtych Khrimian (1820–1907) and Mkrtych Portukalian (1848–1921). They “were instrumental in situating Armenia—the actual Armenian provinces of the Ottoman interior—on the map of nationalist thinking. They perceived the homeland not only as the subject of liberation, but also as its agent and contributor” (Panossian 2006: 173-174). This approach brought an intimate, *territorial* dimension to the abstract cultural-religious conception of homeland held by most Constantinople-based liberal intellectuals in the west, and to the diasporan-based nationalism in the east. As Libaridian (2004) puts it, the *azgasirutium* (love of nation) espoused by Constantinople-based bourgeois Armenians was complemented by the *hairenasirutium* (love of fatherland) felt by the Armenian peasants and town dwellers living on their own lands — or longing for them while being *pandukhts*.

Despite differences and contradictions, a pan-Armenian national identity emerged because of the following two factors, according to Panossian (2006: 178, emphasis in original): 1) The eastern form of nationalism, combining elements of the homeland-based nationalism and to a lesser extent some liberal ideas from the western approach, eventually became the dominant political ideology by the beginning of the 20th century; and 2) “[P]olitical ideology [subjective dimension] prevailed as a unifying force irrespective of linguistic and cultural differences [objective factors].”

The political ideology of Armenian nationalism was put into action through several political parties. The three most important ones were the Hnchakian party (founded in Geneva, 1887); the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF or Dashnaks, founded in Tiflis, 1890); and the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLP or Ramkavars, established in Constantinople, 1921).⁵⁰ During the despotism of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the parties worked to disseminate their ideas and mobilize the masses through publications and propaganda mechanisms, mass demonstrations, guerrilla warfare by *fedayees* (freedom fighters), arming and defense operations, and terror-inducing punitive acts. After the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908, they also made use of national institutions (such as schools) and community meetings. Although most of the revolutionary *depi yerkir* activities focused on Western (i.e., Ottoman) Armenia, resistance was also shown against the suppression of Russian-Armenian (*Kovkasahay* [Caucasian-Armenian]) identity and rights in the early 20th century.

After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and the deposition of Sultan Abdul Hamid II the next year, a general aura of unity and cooperation between the Turks and the ethno-religious minorities was spread in the Ottoman Empire. Hopes were high that the dark years of the “Red Sultan,” as Abdul Hamid II was called, were over. The ARF suspended its revolutionary activities, and allied itself (till mid-1912) with the Young Turks’ Committee of Union and Progress, which made promises for equal rights and reforms. Writing within this euphoric mood, activist and writer Edgar Agnouni (Khachadour Maloumian) (1911: 23-24, 30-31), an ARF member, called on *pandukhts* to return to the homeland:

⁵⁰ These parties still exist, with the most popular and organized one being the ARF.

The dreadful days are gone. The chains are broken. The tyrant-ruler is [now] a slave, [and] the throne belongs to the people's will. ... [T]he Garden of your Fatherland is waiting for you, for the longed-for return of its exiled sons, so they may come and bring life with them, bring knowledge with them, and bring song and happiness. ... *Depi Yerkir*... For years and years we went [there] to fight and die while fighting. Now let's return to ... live with joy.

Agnouni, along with hundreds of other renowned Armenian intellectuals, activists, and high-profile figures, was arrested by the Young Turks in Constantinople from 24 April 1915, and was subsequently murdered.

4. From the Armenian Genocide to 1920

The Genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire constitutes a major turning point in modern Armenian history and diaspora experience. Beginning in the late spring of 1915, between one and 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed or left to starve to death, after having been forced to abandon their historic lands in the Ottoman Empire. Most massacres and death marches were organized from 1915 to 1917. However, the elimination (by killing or deportation) of Armenians *en masse* from the Ottoman Empire continued even after the end of World War I. Following the signing of the Armistice in 1918, the Allies (first the British, then the French) assumed control over Cilicia and took measures to organize the repatriation of Armenian Genocide survivors. Some 120,000 returned over the next year, including some who were originally from other regions of the Ottoman Empire. With the Kemalist resurgence in Turkey, however, Cilicia became again under attack. Almost all the returnees fled the region again as the French troops retreated from Cilicia, ceding it to the Kemalists in late 1921. Moreover, the Armenian refugee crisis worsened with Smyrna's fall to the Kemalists in 1922; again, thousands of Armenians left their homes with the retreating Greek army. By 1923, the Armenian

provinces and Cilicia were emptied; Armenian properties were destroyed or confiscated. Almost all the remaining Armenians forcibly converted to Islam or clustered in Istanbul (Dadrian 1994; Panossian 2006: 228-237; Walker 1997). The diaspora was immensely transformed after the Genocide; new communities were created and existing ones expanded. Many of the survivors initially settled in neighboring areas and countries with existing Armenian communities, mostly in the Middle East (especially in French-mandated Syria and Lebanon), the Balkans, but also in France and the United States (Sanjian 2001: 152-153; Shirinian 2004: 7-33). Later, some of these refugees or their descendants traveled further to South America, Canada, and Australia.

Contemporary Armenian diaspora consciousness is inextricably linked to the Genocide. This traumatic event and its continuing denial by the Turkish state and its sympathizers have left an irremovable mark on the memory and identity of subsequent Armenian generations, especially in the diaspora. The Genocide took to a whole new level the already existing experience of exile and sense of victimhood in Armenian mentality and popular psyche, and gave a new meaning to the loss of and longing for the homeland. As Panossian (2006: 239) explains, after the Genocide, “the diaspora no longer consisted of “merchants, labourers, fortune seekers, intellectuals and political exiles,” but “of refugees, starving survivors and a deeply scarred people” that had lost their homeland. Thus, “[t]he diaspora condition was seen as a perpetuation of the Genocide: the loss of the homeland followed by the loss of identity through the dangers of cultural assimilation in foreign lands.” Moreover, unlike previous voluntary and forced migration waves, after the Genocide, the majority of the Armenians began to live outside the historically Armenian territories. In the pre-Genocide period, returning or going to the homeland was

possible — though often full of difficulties and imminent dangers — for the traveling merchants, for the *pandukhts*, and even for the *fedayees* after the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908. However, the massive scale of the Genocide-era deportations and destruction, the failure of subsequent treaties to provide an adequate and/or durable solution to the Armenian Question, the later consolidation of the Turkish Republic, the continuing persecution of Armenians in modern Turkey (Hofmann 2002), a set of draconian rules closing the avenues to recover properties confiscated by the Ottoman authorities, and the Turkish state’s systematic denial of the Genocide have rendered repatriation almost impossible for the survivors and subsequent generations.

In the meantime, however, other significant developments had happened in Russian (Eastern) Armenia. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian army withdrew from the Ottoman front. The Ottomans subsequently advanced in the direction of Eastern Armenia, the small part of historic Armenia that had been under Russian control since 1828. They were stopped at the “doors” of Yerevan, in the battles of Bash-Aparan, Karakilise, and Sardarapat. On 28 May 1918, the Armenian National Council in Tiflis declared the independence of Armenia. The country’s economic, security, and social conditions were dire. In addition to a myriad of other problems, the newly independent Republic was flooded by around 300,000 Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire (Panossian 2006: 244).⁵¹ At the same time, a number of political activists, professionals, scientists, and Armenians serving in the Russian Army settled in Armenia to participate in the (re)building of the country. The independent Republic led to “the territorialisation of national identity within a specific nation-state. The reality of independence

⁵¹ Many of them died during the famine and typhus epidemic that plagued the country in 1919.

transformed Armenian nationalism from its focus on communal rights and autonomy to independence and statehood” (Panossian 2006: 255). In the peace conferences held and treaties signed in the next few years, attempts to unite the Western Armenian territories to the Republic failed (Hovannisian 1997c; Panossian 2006: 246-250). In December 1920, faced once again with the threat of Kemalist Turkey’s advancing army, on the one hand, and the impending Sovietization of the country, on the other, Armenia’s political leaders chose the second option. Since the ARF had played a leading role in governing the First Armenian Republic, many of the party’s high-ranking members and other anti-Bolsheviks escaped to Iran, and then spread to the rest of the Middle East, France, and other diasporan communities, becoming key forces behind community organization and political mobilization in the diaspora in the next decades.

5. 1920–Early 1960s: “Reconstruction” and “Exilic Nationalism” in the Diaspora, State Consolidation and Repatriation in the Armenian SSR

Despite the lived trauma of the first-generation refugees, a “period of reconstruction” of various institutions began in the diaspora almost immediately, in the early 1920s (Tölölyan 2000: 119). Along with the victim mentality that the Genocide inflicted, the recovery years infused a sense of revival — based on perseverance and hard work — among many diasporans.⁵²

During these reconstruction years, an “exilic nationalism,” as Tölölyan (2002) describes it, emerged in the diaspora (especially in Middle Eastern communities). According to this

⁵² The co-existence of these two contradictory feelings was apparent among many of the diasporan returnees I interviewed, especially those who had lived with the generation of their grandparents or great-grandparents that had witnessed and survived the Genocide.

form of nationalism, “diaspora could not be *inknanpatak* — that is, an end in itself. Rather, it was to be thought of and lived as temporary and transitory: the eventual return to the homeland was declared essential and inevitable” (Tölölyan 2002: 8). This nationalist endeavor called for resisting assimilation (regarded as *spitak chart* or “white massacre”); return could only be possible some day if diasporans could retain their Armenianness (*hayapahpanum* or Armenian identity maintenance) outside the homeland (Sanjian 2001: 157-158). Subsequent “governments *of* and *by* exiles” were involved in political organization, cultural production, and the provision of various kinds of services to the Armenian communities (Tololyan 1991). They thrived particularly in close-knit “territorialized enclaves” in the Middle East, mostly in Lebanon (Tölölyan 2000: 119).

Meanwhile, with the consolidation of the mostly “Armenian-free” modern Republic of Turkey and the Sovietization of the short-lived first independent Armenian Republic, Soviet Armenia became the territory “where a part of the nation would strive to etch a place in the sun” (Hovannisian 2005: 111). However, Soviet Armenia–diaspora relations were characterized by tensions and cleavages, the intensity of which varied over time. According to Panossian (2006: 265), they reflected “the east/west schism within the Armenian nation [which] continued during the Soviet period [and was] ... manifested in terms of a clear-cut homeland/diaspora divide.” The tensions were also linked to and exacerbated by the international ideological clashes of the Cold War. The liberal Ramkavars; Marxist Hinchaks; their affiliated cultural, sports, and philanthropic organizations; the Armenian General Benevolent Union; and the Armenian Communists in the diaspora remained generally supportive of Soviet Armenian authorities throughout the years, claiming that the homeland must be supported regardless of its regime. On the

other hand, the ARF (with its sister organizations) adopted a staunchly anti-communist agenda at least until the 1970s–80s.

5.1. Soviet-era migration and repatriation

Soviet Armenia attracted Genocide survivors, Armenian migrants from other Soviet countries, and diasporan repatriates over the years, as a result of various immigration waves and organized repatriation drives (known as *nerkaght* or in-gathering). In this section, I will focus solely on immigration from outside the borders of the USSR. In the first years, the inflow of refugees, which had begun during the First World War and the short-lived independent Republic, continued. Starting in 1925, Fridtjof Nansen, as League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees, traveled across Soviet Armenia in an effort to develop a project for the irrigation and cultivation of lands (in some sparsely populated regions near Yerevan), where thousands of refugees would settle. He failed to secure the necessary international financing, however (Abalyan 2011). From 1929 to 1937, the Soviet government financed the arrival of an additional 16,000 refugees to Armenia (Suny 2005: 117). Overall, between 1921 and 1936, around 42,000 Armenians immigrated to Soviet Armenia, coming mostly from Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Greece, Bulgaria, and France (Panossian 2006: 358).

The Soviet-organized repatriation drive intensified and took a new turn at the end of World War II. Between 1946 and 1949, an estimated 100,000 Armenians — around 10 percent of the diaspora and 9 percent of the 1946 Soviet Armenian population of 1.2 million — arrived to the country. Around 90–95 percent of the repatriates were Genocide survivors or their children and families, whose original homes were in Western

(Ottoman) Armenia, and who had found refuge mostly in the Middle East and the Balkans (Mouradian 1979).⁵³ This constituted the largest *nerkaght* wave. Organized mass repatriation was practically halted between 1948 and 1962,⁵⁴ only to resume at a greatly reduced scale. Between 1962 and 1972, only 26,000 Armenians immigrated to Soviet Armenia, and the figures were even more modest for the following 15 years. The total number of repatriates from 1921 to 1982 is estimated to be between around 164,000 (Meliksetyan 1985) and 180,000 (Mouradian 1990). The next two sub-sections will focus on the *nerkaght* of the 1940s.

5.1.1. Historical context of the 1946–49 *nerkaght*

Even though World War II was not fought on Soviet Armenian territory, the country suffered from serious economic problems, material shortages, and a significant population reduction (12 percent drop between 1941 and 1945) (Sunny 1997: 366). Entering a post-war reconstruction period, the country was in need of manpower and resources. At the same time, as a member of the victorious USSR, which was on the threshold of one of the most intense periods of the Cold War, Soviet Armenia wanted “to demonstrate that the Soviet republic was the one and only fatherland of all Armenians” (Panossian 2006: 358) and “to consolidate a position as the center [of the Armenian nation] with a periphery [in the diaspora]” (Pattie 2004: 112). Soviet authorities also aimed to make their presence and influence felt in various countries with sizable Armenian communities (Mouradian 1979, 1988).

⁵³ Approximately 32 percent came from Syria/Lebanon; 20 from Iran; 18 from Greece; 12 from Egypt; 7 from France; 8 from Bulgaria and Romania; 3 from Iraq and Palestine; and 0.2 from the United States (Mouradian 1979: 87).

⁵⁴ In the 1950s, just 4,000 repatriates arrived in Soviet Armenia (Panossian 2006), mostly through private applications.

In the diaspora, particularly in the Balkans and some parts of the Middle East, many post-Genocide refugees still lived in poor shanty towns or refugee camps. Many had already started grieving the increasing imminence of *odaratum* (becoming foreign) and *apazgainatum* (denationalization) outside the homeland (Panossian 2006: 304).

During this period, repatriation calls were also coupled with Soviet territorial claims from Turkey, specifically with regard to the historically largely Armenian-populated regions of Kars and Ardahan (Panossian 2006: 358-360; Suny 1997: 368). However, the issue of land claims faced stiff opposition from Britain and the United States, and eventually subsided in 1949. It was officially dropped after Stalin's death in 1953.

5.1.2. Implementation of the repatriation campaign

An extensive propaganda campaign was launched by the Soviet authorities and the diasporan organizations supporting the repatriation drive. Through publications, fundraising events, and public meetings, repatriation was exalted as a patriotic act that would “save” Armenian diasporans from assimilation in foreign lands by bringing them where they “really” belonged to.⁵⁵ The propaganda machinery also highlighted some economic and political benefits of becoming citizens of the “powerful” USSR. These efforts were reinforced by the claims of some repatriates that they had found a new sense of belonging in a place that felt like home, as well as fearful rumors that Stalin was going to divide Armenia between the Georgian and Azerbaijan SSRs because of the country's small population size (Laycock 2012).

⁵⁵ See Laycock (2012) and Pattie (1999, 2004), who have adopted a constructivist approach to examine the use of discourse and symbols in this campaign.

Despite the rosy picture painted by official accounts, the repatriates faced numerous problems upon arrival, shattering their oft-romanticized image of the Soviet homeland. They encountered economic hardships, housing problems, and difficulties adjusting to the Soviet economic system. Many repatriates, suspected of being “Western” spies or “nationalist” ARF supporters, were politically repressed and, in 1949, some were deported to special settlements in Siberia, together with many natives of Soviet Armenia. The repatriation also resulted in social and cultural problems. Families were often split up, when some members were not accepted to repatriate, or when they were sent, upon arrival in the homeland, to different regions of the country. Differences in language, clothing, food, and other customs surfaced as visible separation markers between the *degatsi* (native) population and the *aghpars*⁵⁶ newcomers. The latter were often discriminated in educational, professional, and social settings (Pattie 2004).

Using various adaptive mechanisms, many repatriates managed to overcome these difficulties. Forming networks of family and friends, they maintained a sense of community. Over time, closer relationships developed between the “newcomers” and their “native” neighbors (Pattie 2004). Integrating into Soviet Armenian society, many became well-known figures in culture and science. A large number of repatriates, however, were unable to adjust to their new lifestyles, and chose to leave the country again as soon as the Soviet authorities relaxed the exit constraints starting from the late 1950s. Most of them — even many of those who had originally come from Middle Eastern communities — emigrated to the United States and, to a lesser extent, France.

⁵⁶ Local Armenians used this term to refer to Armenians from abroad who had repatriated to Soviet Armenia. It means “brother” (a mispronunciation of the Western Armenian word *yeghpayr*) but was used in a derogatory manner. It is still used, though less pejoratively, to refer to Soviet-era repatriates or more generally to diasporans.

6. Soviet Armenia and the Diaspora After the 1960s

In the post-Stalin era, contacts between Soviet- and diasporan-Armenians became more frequent. Many Soviet-Armenian artists toured diasporan communities, and increasing numbers of diasporan-Armenians started visiting and studying in the Armenian SSR (Dekmejian 1997: 419).⁵⁷ In 1964, Soviet Armenia created a new institutional mechanism, the Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians (CCRDA). The CCRDA sent Armenian books to diaspora schools, assisted diasporan students studying in Armenia, organized student tours and diasporan teachers' summer training courses in Armenia, held cultural events in the homeland and the diaspora, assisted in the publication of diasporan writers' works, etc. Panossian (1998: 160) argues that the CCRDA's activities led to a change in the roles of the homeland and the diaspora:

The homeland became the 'aid' provider, while the diaspora needed assistance for its national 'survival.' ... The homeland was now perceived to be the bastion of Armenianness, coming to help its culturally 'impoverished' brother in exile. The diaspora came to be viewed as an appendix to the kin-state, its long-term survival as an Armenian entity depending on the nation-state existent on the territory of the Armenian SSR.

From the 1960s and especially in the 1970s–80s, nationalist sentiments became more visible in Soviet Armenia; the Cold War ice had also started slowly melting. Thus, according to Panossian (2006: 372), “even the Dashnaks, toning down their anti-Soviet rhetoric, accepted that the Armenian SSR was *a*—if not *the*—homeland, albeit imperfect and territorially incomplete.”

⁵⁷ Indeed, several returnees I interviewed for my research, and/or their relatives, had studied in Soviet Armenia. Also, 36 of the 92 returnees who had visited Armenia prior to their relocation had come for the first time before the 1991 declaration of independence (20 of them before 1988, while 16 between 1988 and 1990).

At the same time, a period of *pahanjatirutiun* (demanding and regaining what is yours) began in some diaspora circles. The commemoration of the Genocide's 50th anniversary in 1965, both in the diaspora and in the Armenian SSR, marked a key turning point in this regard. *Pahanjatirutiun* was centered in the diaspora around three themes or goals: Genocide recognition, *hoghahavak* (gathering of the [Armenian] lands), followed by *hayahavak* (gathering of the Armenians [on these lands]).

During this time, a shift began in the Armenian diaspora, especially in the West, from “exilic nationalism” to “diasporic transnationalism” (Tölölyan 2000, 2010). Tölölyan (2000: 108) describes it as follows:

[T]he Armenian diaspora no longer consists of a series of exile communities, fragments of the nation awaiting real or even symbolic repatriation. Rather diaspora is, and is regarded by an ever larger majority of its members and of its contentious leadership as, a permanent phenomenon.

This also signified a shift in the meanings of “home” and “homeland.” The two were often the same for the first-generation Genocide survivors and “exilic nationalists,” because the host country was not regarded as home; the homeland was viewed as the center where diasporans wanted or had to return to. On the other hand, among many members of more recent generations of diasporans, especially in the increasingly larger Western communities, home is the country where they were born and reside. The homeland remains important but in a more subjective way (Tölölyan 2006: 5). In the case of American-Armenians, for example, Bakalian (1993) describes a shift “from being to feeling Armenian.” According to Tölölyan (2000: 108), this shift occurred in the diaspora “[i]n the wake of the contemporary transformation which is framed by and within globalization.” But the trend became more pronounced also as a result of the fact that the

nerkaght of the 1940s failed to meet diasporan expectations. Moreover, this shift has accelerated partly as a result of the gradual shrinkage and weakening of Middle Eastern communities since the 1960s–70s. Due to the declining economic conditions and increased political turmoil in the Middle East, Armenians have been migrating to North and South America, Western Europe, and Australia, leading to the expansion of the diaspora communities there.

7. Since 1988: New Opportunities and Challenges for Armenia–Diaspora Relations

The Armenian diasporic experience and homeland–diaspora relations entered a new stage in their long history during the waning years of the Soviet Union (especially after 1988) and subsequently with the creation of the independent RA in 1991. The outbreak of the Gharabagh movement in February 1988 marked the beginning of the end of the Soviet era in Armenia. Within a climate of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, what started as rallies protesting against environmental pollution quickly transformed into mass demonstrations and strikes to press for the return of Mountainous Gharabagh⁵⁸ to Armenia. In December 1988, a devastating earthquake struck northern Armenia, leaving some 25,000 dead and about 515,000 homeless. Humanitarian assistance from diasporan organizations and individual benefactors poured to assist the homeland with relief, reconstruction, housing, health care, and other projects in the disaster zone. In the meantime, after the collapse of

⁵⁸ Mountainous Gharabagh (Nagorno-Karabakh in Russian or Artsakh in Armenian) is a historically Armenian-populated territory, which was made an autonomous region within the Azerbaijan SSR by the Soviet authorities in 1921/1923. It declared its intention to secede from Soviet Azerbaijan and join Soviet Armenia in 1988. As the USSR was on the verge of collapse, it proclaimed its independence from Azerbaijan by referendum in December 1991. Though not *de jure* recognized internationally, the Republic of Mountainous Gharabagh is considered by most Armenians as a part of the homeland.

the USSR, tensions escalated quickly in Gharabagh and evolved into a full-fledged war in the next few years, until the 1994 ceasefire. This led to the death of around 10,000 Armenians and the flight of approximately 360,000 Armenian refugees from Gharabagh and Azerbaijan, many of whom found sanctuary, at least initially, in Armenia. Post-Soviet Armenia encountered a situation akin to the refugee flow into the newly created — and ravaged by numerous problems — First Armenian Republic following the Genocide. The anti-Armenian pogroms in the Azerbaijani cities of Sumgait, Kirovabad (Ganje), and Baku between 1988 and 1990, and the plight of the refugees, were particularly powerful in sensitizing diasporans, by bringing forward feelings similar to those of the Genocide and its aftermath — injustice, threat, insecurity, and struggle. These feelings were intensified by the fact that Turkey backed Azerbaijan in the war, and closed its border with Armenia in 1993, hindering the passage of material and energy supplies. Thus, during the years of war and acute socioeconomic crisis, the diaspora continued to send material and human resources to Gharabagh and Armenia.⁵⁹

With the end of the one-party Communist rule in 1990, all three diasporan parties, which had been expelled after 1921, “returned” to Armenia, officially announcing their

⁵⁹ Since 1988, the diaspora’s economic contributions have mainly been in the form of humanitarian assistance, infrastructure construction, and building and renovation of schools, hospitals, and cultural centers. One of the most important institutions involved in fundraising for such projects is the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, founded by presidential decree in 1992. Since 1998, calls have also been made to promote direct investment and business ventures by diasporans (Panossian 2003: 148-149); through development agencies and Armenia–diaspora economic forums, diasporans are introduced to investment opportunities in Armenia. However, barriers remain high: red tape, corruption, lack of transparency, high risks, and monopolistic tendencies in some sectors. Thus, many analysts view the overemphasis on humanitarian aid and construction financing as a way for the ruling economic and political elites to cling on their powers (Bremmer & Welt 1997; Freinkman 2001; Gevorkyan & Grigorian 2003; Manaseryan 2004).

organizational presence and soon opening their offices and press.⁶⁰ They joined efforts with the Armenian National Movement (ANM — the ruling party in Armenia), and other forces, to encourage voters to vote “yes” in the referendum on independence, although some initial reservation did exist regarding independence in the late 1980s. Soon, however, the ARF and ANM were in direct confrontation with each other, while the ADLP and the Hnchakians remained relatively more supportive of the government. President Levon Ter Petrosyan announced the expulsion of the ARF’s head from the country in 1992, and banned the party from Armenia in 1994, accusing it for having violated some RA laws. The party remained outlawed until Ter Petrosyan’s resignation and the rise to power of the second President, Robert Kocharyan, in 1998.⁶¹ The ARF and the ANM disagreed over several issues, including relations with Turkey, the Armenian Cause, the Gharabagh problem, political ideology, as well as dual citizenship and the role of diaspora.⁶² In general, the ANM emphasized realism, rationalism, and pragmatism over what it considered to be emotional nationalism.⁶³ It viewed “the ‘national’ to mean the sum total of the personal self-interest [and well-being] of *citizens*” of the Armenian *state* (Libaridian 1999: 85, emphasis added).

⁶⁰ In articles published in the ARF’s organ, *Droshak* [Flag] (“*Depi Yerki*” Special Issue 1990), this “*depi yerki*” move was presented as an important step in the long journey of achieving the ultimate goal of “free, independent, and united Armenia.”

⁶¹ Examining the evolution of Armenia–diaspora relations under Ter Petrosyan and Kocharyan, Panossian (1998, 2002, 2003) identifies the following stages: “reluctant embrace” (1988–91), “honeymoon” (1991–92), “period of schism and conflict” or “separation” (1992–98), and “beginning of reconciliation” or “courting” (after 1998).

⁶² See Panossian (2001: 160, 2005: 235-238) for a summary of the differences between the ANM, the ADLP, and the ARF over these issues.

⁶³ Gerard J. Libaridian (1999: 13), a diasporan Armenian who served as Ter Petrosyan’s advisor during the 1990s, presents this as the “two different worldviews” in Armenian political thought in Armenia and the diaspora: the “pragmatists” and the “visionaries” (or those following some form of “national ideology”). For works supporting the ANM, see Libaridian (1991, 1999, 2004) and Sardarian (1991). For critiques, see Astourian (2000-2001), Khurshudian (1999), and Melkonian (2001).

Since the 1999 parliamentary elections, the Republican Party of Armenia, a national conservative party, has gradually become the dominant power in the country. Since 2007, the party's chairperson has been the current RA President Serzh Sargsyan. He was first elected President in 2008 and re-elected in 2013.

Under presidents Kocharyan and Sargsyan, two key developments related to a further institutionalization of Armenia–diaspora relations have been the adoption of the RA Dual Citizenship Law and the establishment of the RA Ministry of Diaspora. The Ministry's activities that are relevant to my study will be summarized in the next section. So, I will end this section with a brief discussion about dual citizenship.

The 1990 “Declaration on Independence” included a clause which stated that “Armenians of the diaspora have the right of citizenship of Armenia” (‘Declaration’ 1991: 109). However, the 1995 Constitution — endorsed by the ANM and approved by referendum — rejected the provision of dual citizenship. Foreign citizens of Armenian descent could only receive a 10-year (renewable) RA Special Residency Status (RA NA 1994, 1995). According to Harutyunyan (2006: 288-290), the Ter Petrosyan administration defined the “state as a political community with bounded citizenship, where nationality and citizenship are tied to the territorial boundaries of the country,” and emphasized that “granting citizenship based on [the] ethnic criterion threatens state and national security in several respects.” Under Kocharyan, the constitutionally embedded restriction against the provision of dual citizenship was removed by referendum in November 2005 (as part of a larger package of constitutional amendments). In February 2007, the parliament passed the Dual Citizenship Law. The adoption of the law occurred

amid highly intense debates and firm oppositional voices, and even disagreements within the ruling coalition government (Gevorkyan 2006; Harutyunyan 2006; Ohanyan 2004). Since the adoption of the law, the number of diasporans who have applied for and received Armenian citizenship has not been too high, especially in the beginning when bureaucratic procedures were more unclear and cumbersome (Balayan et al. 2013: 81-83).⁶⁴ Since then, more amendments have been made to the Law on Citizenship, waving residency, language proficiency, and Constitution-knowledge test requirements for the naturalization of persons of Armenian origin (Makaryan 2011, 2013). Nevertheless, even among returnees I interviewed, around half of them did not have RA citizenship and had obtained a Special Residency Status to stay in Armenia.

8. Migration Situation and “Homecoming” Projects in Post-Soviet Armenia

An estimated seven million Armenians currently live outside the RA, mostly concentrated in Russia and the United States (Chindea et al. 2008: 23). This figure includes those who emigrated from the RA after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Until the late 1980s, Soviet Armenia’s population increased at a consistent rate, from

⁶⁴ The number rose recently, partly because of the increase in the applications by Syrian-Armenians (whether residing in Armenia or not) (Balayan et al. 2013: 83). In many cases, Syrian-Armenians have received RA citizenship to facilitate their travel to other countries. In Lebanon, the acquisition of dual citizenship was facilitated because, just like in the Syrian case, applicants were not obliged to travel to Armenia, at least once, but could complete the process through the local Armenian Embassy. In general, however, compared to the size of the diaspora (around 7 million), a very small number of people have acquired RA citizenship (less than 1.5 percent) so far. (See Appendix I, Table 7.) Moreover, only a small percentage of Armenia’s de jure population (10,845 people or 0.36 percent) holds dual citizenship, according to the 2011 RA census (NSSRA 2013c: 291).

approximately 881,000 in 1926 to around 3,287,000 in 1989 (NSSRA 2013b).⁶⁵ The ethnic homogeneity of the population also increased during these years: Armenians comprised 84.4 percent of the total population in 1926, 89.7 in 1979, and 93.9 in 1989 (Panossian 2006: 378-380). The most recent census of 2011 (the second since independence) reported the de facto population to be around 2,870,000 (NSSRA 2013d) — indicating an approximately 12.6 percent decline of the population size from 1989, and a drop below the three-million mark for the first time since the early 1970s. (See Table 1 in Appendix I for official censuses results in Soviet and independent Armenia.)⁶⁶

The two main reasons behind the population decline since the late 1980s have been the high emigration and low fertility rates (Levin 2011; UNDP 2009). It is estimated that 900,000–1,000,000 people emigrated from Armenia between 1988 and 2005. This included around 160,000 ethnic Azeris who left the country between 1988 and 1991, while the country also encountered the inflow of some 420,000 Armenian refugees and displaced persons (around 85.7 percent of whom came from Gharabagh and Azerbaijan, while the rest from other former Soviet countries).⁶⁷ This led to the population's further ethnic homogenization (Yeganyan 2006). The largest population outflow occurred between 1991 and 1995, when the country was facing an acute socioeconomic crisis due to the war, transportation blockade, energy crisis, and initial shock of transition from a socialist to capitalist economic system. Although the massive early emigration wave

⁶⁵ These numbers are based on official census data (de facto population). However, the reliability of the 1989 figure is questionable, because only less than two months earlier the massive earthquake had happened, and the census was carried out amid the Gharabagh refugee crisis (including the mass exodus of Azerbaijanis from Armenia).

⁶⁶ Some argue that the actual population size is considerably lower than the figures reported in the official post-Soviet censuses (see, for example, Astourian 2007: 196).

⁶⁷ Many of these refugees later emigrated to Russia and the United States (Bachmann et al. 2004: 31).

subsided especially between 2002 and 2007,⁶⁸ it has not been halted until now. To the contrary, recent years, especially starting in 2008 when the global financial crisis hit Armenia's economy,⁶⁹ have seen a renewed surge in emigration which remains unabated (Balayan et al. 2013: 18, 20). After the mass outflow of the initial post-independence years, more recent emigration flows have mostly been related to high unemployment, persisting poverty, family re-unification, and political tensions and uncertainties (Bachmann et al. 2004: 22-33; Balayan et al. 2013: 20-21; Yeganyan 2006). Most emigrants have settled in Russia, other CIS countries, the United States, and central and western Europe. According to some sources, between 2002 and 2007, return migration rates increased slightly. It is estimated that around 86,000 Armenian migrants returned to Armenia during these years (BMP 2011: 48). Most of them were first-generation labor migrants, who came back to Armenia only temporarily. There was also a small number of rejected asylum seekers and more permanent migrant returnees (Bachmann et al. 2004; Yeganyan 2006).

The alarmingly high emigration rates have led to various sociodemographic, economic, political, and moral-psychological problems, and have raised serious concerns about the future development of this small country landlocked in the South Caucasus and lacking the rich natural resources of some of its neighbors (UNDP 2009). In the face of these problems, the Armenian government and the international community rely greatly on the contribution of the large and influential diaspora through remittances, investment, transfer of skills, and so on. They do not emphasize diasporic return. The Armenian government does not have well-developed policies to encourage or support the "return,"

⁶⁸ The economy experienced stable growth during this period (Balayan et al. 2013: 23-24).

⁶⁹ The country also faced political instability after the 2008 presidential elections.

whether of recent emigrants or older-generation diasporans, to Armenia. Rhetoric and action in this regard were limited, at least until the establishment of the Diaspora Ministry in October 2008.⁷⁰ Soon after its creation, the Ministry organized a conference titled “The 1946–1948 Repatriation and its Lessons: The Issue of Repatriation Today” (December 2008). In her opening speech, Minister Hranush Hakobyan publicly apologized for the suffering of Soviet-era repatriates (Titizian 2008).⁷¹ The Ministry’s Department of Repatriation and Research also developed the draft Law on Repatriation, which was approved by the government in March 2011 but has not been ratified by the parliament so far (*‘Nakhagidz’* 2011; Yeghiazaryan 2011). Besides these initiatives, the Ministry’s activities with regard to return have mainly focused on organizing short-term visits and regular gatherings, where diasporans are invited to Armenia to share experiences, visit touristic and cultural sites, etc. These include the “*Ari Tun*” (“Come Home”) program of visits for young diasporans;⁷² pan-Armenian sports and other youth events; training seminars and conferences for teachers, journalists, and other professionals from Armenia and the diaspora; and so on.

The government’s involvement in the longer-term settlement of diasporans has been more visible in the case of Armenians fleeing the wars in Iraq and Syria, who have

⁷⁰ In most cases, the Ministry and the Armenian government in general define “diaspora” in a broad manner, referring to any Armenian who lives outside the RA borders.

⁷¹ But the fact that the *long-term* physical relocation of diasporans has not been a central focus of the Ministry is apparent even from the first few lines of Minister Hakobyan’s opening speech at that conference. She stated: “This academic conference signals the start of a process that concerns a new kind of repatriation — that of souls, minds, hearts, which we call *hayadartzutium* (return to Armenianness). It is a return toward national identity, roots, homeland, and history” (Hakobyan 2008: 3).

⁷² Within the framework of this program that has been implemented since 2009, diasporans between the ages of 13 and 18 visit Armenia for around two weeks in summer (“*Ari Tun*” Program’ n.d.).

sought permanent but more often temporary refuge in Armenia. The response to the relatively larger and more recent Syrian refugee flow has been more multidirectional and organized.⁷³

Besides the Diaspora Ministry's "*Ari Tun*" program, diasporan political parties and other diasporan organizations regularly organize various camps and short-term programs (usually lasting two–three weeks) for young diasporans to visit Armenia and sometimes get involved in community-service projects. The latter include, for example, the Hamazkayin Student Cultural Summer Forum and AGBU's Discover Armenia and Yerevan Summer Internship programs. More importantly for the purposes of my thesis, there are some NGOs, established and funded mostly by diasporans or diasporan returnees, that promote short-term homecoming projects as well as longer-term settlement of diasporans in Armenia. The four most prominent ones are the Land and Culture Organization, the Armenian Volunteer Corps, Birthright Armenia, and the RepatArmenia Foundation (RAF).⁷⁴ The first three promote young diasporans — many of whom come from Western countries, especially the United States — to be involved in short-term volunteering projects in Armenia, ranging from three weeks to one year (Darieva 2011a, 2011b, 2013). The RAF, established in 2012, seeks to “inform, initiate and actively champion the return of high-impact (professional, entrepreneurial) individuals and families to Armenia to secure the future development of the Armenian

⁷³ The initiatives of the Diaspora Ministry and other government agencies in this regard will not be described in detail, given that such refugees are not the focus of my thesis.

⁷⁴ Another organization that supports repatriation is the Yerkir Union of Non-Governmental Organizations for Repatriation and Settlement. In 2006, it published a draft law on repatriation in a booklet. Its focus is on “targeting” mainly diasporans in Middle Eastern countries, recent emigrants from these countries or Armenia to the West, as well as Armenians living in Russia and other CIS countries (Yerkir UNGO 2006: 14-16).

nation” (‘The RAF’ n.d.). RAF’s activities are divided into two main areas: repatriation promotion and integration assistance. With regard to the first area, RAF maintains a website and Facebook page that are constantly refreshed with profiles and success stories of repatriates, as well as job opportunities and news that could be of interest to potential repatriates. Repatriation is also promoted through events in various diasporic communities, media interviews, and meetings with diasporan organizations. The second set of programs includes employment and business launch assistance, legal support, networking initiatives, and language and cultural-integration classes.

9. Profiles of Main Diasporic Communities that Returnees Come From

The 104 people I interviewed resided in 15 and were born in 16 different countries before moving to Armenia.⁷⁵ But the majority of the interviewees immigrated from and were born in six countries: Iran, Lebanon, Syria, the USA, Canada, and Iraq. For this reason, in this section I will provide brief background information on the Armenian communities in these six countries, divided into three main sub-sections: Iran, the Arab Middle East, and North America.⁷⁶ Within each community, there are numerous internal differences along class, education, gender, generation, integration level, political affiliation, and other lines. Nevertheless, some generalizations can definitely be made especially regarding the genesis, evolution, and organizational make-up of these communities. These in turn have had an impact on the socialization of diasporan returnees.

⁷⁵ See Appendix II for details.

⁷⁶ This section is based on a review of several secondary sources (including Adalian 1989; Boudjikianian 2009; Bournoutian 1994; Dekmejian 1997; Mirak 1997; Pattie 2005b; Sanjian 2001; Tölölyan 2004; relevant country entries in Ayyvazyan 2003, among others), as well as the narratives of my interviewees about their lives in the diaspora.

9.1. Iran

Even before the Hamidian massacres and the Genocide, the Iranian-Armenian community was large and well-established. It mainly consisted of descendants of Armenians who, as mentioned above, were moved by force by Shah Abbas I in the early 17th century from the area of Nakhijevan and other regions of historical Armenia to Isfahan and other areas in Iran, or of much older Armenian settlements in towns (such as Tabriz) or villages in Iran's northwestern regions, which were a part of or geographically very close to historical Armenia.⁷⁷

Because of its geographical proximity to (historical) Armenia, the community has been affected by and involved quite closely in developments in the homeland for a long time. In the late 19th–early 20th century, the different Armenian political parties often used it as a launchpad or an important organizational center for many of their revolutionary activities in the Ottoman Empire, including military operations, and as a refuge when they were pushed back or persecuted. During this period, the community also received different waves of Armenian refugees from the Russian and especially Ottoman empires. A larger refugee inflow happened during the Genocide, as well as during the first decade after Armenia's Sovietization. The arrival of many exiled ARF leaders from Soviet Armenia in 1921 rejuvenated the community politically, and the ARF has long been the only Armenian political party in the community.

During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–79), the Armenian community flourished (Bournoutian 1994: 185). Urban areas in Tehran, Tabriz, Abadan, Isfahan, and Rasht

⁷⁷ These older settlements were mainly in Greater Armenia's Parskahayk province, situated on the western shore of Lake Urmia.

became key centers of Armenian life. Many Armenians amassed substantial wealth especially by working in the oil industry. Others attained important positions in the arts and sciences, as well as other technical professions. Moreover, the Armenian community enjoyed considerable autonomy in administering its internal affairs, although some restrictions were placed on Armenian schools (especially after the mid-1930s). The community's artistic and cultural life thrived during this period.

During the *nerkaght* of the 1940s, many Iranian-Armenians were pulled toward Soviet Armenia.⁷⁸ Besides affecting the community's size, the *nerkaght* drive (along with other factors) also had an impact on the community's internal population distribution, leading to the increasing concentration of Armenians in major cities, particularly Tehran (Pahlevanyan 2003: 239-240). When the Soviet Armenian authorities started making repatriation calls, many Armenians from villages and towns across the country sold their possessions and came to Tehran in order to head to the Soviet homeland. But when the campaign was suddenly halted,⁷⁹ they were obliged to stay in the city, sometimes going through a difficult integration process (Stepanyan & Sargsyan 2009: 48-49).

The 1979 Islamic Revolution led to some restrictions to communal life (e.g., on schools), especially in the initial post-Revolution years. After the Revolution and the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88), the community was also affected by an increasing emigration wave,

⁷⁸ There was also considerable repatriation from Iran after 1962, and it continued until the 1980s (Stepanyan & Sargsyan 2009: 49-51). Compared to returnees from other countries, a larger number of Iranian-Armenian returnees I interviewed said they have relatives in Armenia who had repatriated during the Soviet period and have stayed.

⁷⁹ During the 1946–49 *nerkaght*, Iranian-Armenians were able to repatriate to Soviet Armenia only in 1946. Afterwards, the Iranian government imposed restrictions (Stepanyan & Sargsyan 2009: 48-49).

mostly to the United States and Western Europe. Emigration was a persistent theme in my interviews with Iranian-Armenians, almost all of whom had experienced its effects on their personal, family, and social lives. Despite the decline in the community's size, Iranian-Armenians remain the country's largest Christian minority.

One point that was emphasized almost by all the Iranian-Armenian returnees (from different generations) I interviewed is the community's close-knit character. The level of self-containment that many described exceeded that of most other communities, perhaps with the exception of some Lebanese-Armenians who grew up during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90). For most Iranian-Armenians, close contacts with Persians remained at the level of university or professional life. Private homes and the Armenian cultural centers were the primary social gathering places for many. Almost all of them had gone to Armenian schools, and spoke Eastern Armenian at home and when interacting with other Armenians. Exogamy was limited and highly denounced, as described by a 29-year-old Iranian-Armenian returnee (female):

The Iranian-Armenian community even had an expression about an Armenian who had married a Persian. They would say that person was *Turkatsadz* [Turkified]. So, there was no need [for my parents] to explain that being close to Persians is bad. [It was taken for granted.] For example, we had a relative who was married to a Persian. Our entire extended family had severed ties with her, except for my dad. I remember that my mom and dad would occasionally visit her house, but they would never take us with them and would remain silent about their visits in order for the community not to criticize them. Lately she died, and there was no one, except for my dad, to take care of her burial arrangements. Nobody attended the burial ceremony from the Armenian community. And they did not allow her to be buried in the Armenian cemetery. In general, no places are allocated in the Armenian cemetery for Armenians who were married to Persians. ... When they are allowed to be buried there, usually no one visits their graves. In the Armenian cemetery where my grandparents had been buried, I remember seeing some neglected graves in an isolated area. My dad said they were of people who had married Persians. So, such people were automatically ostracized.

Many of my Iranian-Armenian interviewees highlighted two other points related to the community's low assimilation level. The first is the longevity of the community and the sense of pride for having managed to keep their Armenian identity for a long time. Another point is that the community's closed nature is not viewed with suspicion or contempt by Persians. To the contrary, many of them described the great respect that Armenians command in the country.

9.2. The Arab Middle East: Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria

Although Armenian settlements existed in the Arab Middle East for centuries, their size soared particularly after the Genocide. In Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria, many of the Genocide survivors congregated into poor camps, but subsequently moved out toward suburban neighborhoods in the late 1920s–early 1930s, sometimes under the pressure of landowners and municipalities. Despite the destitution and trauma many refugees had to endure, in many cases they were able to improve their socioeconomic situation within one generation, often by working as craftsmen, technicians, merchants, traders, administrative officials, and in the case of Iraq also as oil-industry workers. In this process of rebuilding their lives, refugees relied largely on their own intellectual, financial, and physical resources — which is “a source of pride for the present generation of Armenians living in Arab states” (Sanjian 2001: 160). Among many of the Middle Eastern returnees I interviewed, this sense of achievement co-existed with the deeply ingrained post-Genocide victim mentality.

In the Arab states that emerged after the partition of the Ottoman Empire, the *millet* system was somehow reproduced. Until now, religious groups are responsible for the

administration of matters of personal status of their members (e.g., marriage and divorce), as well as for the management of communal institutions, such as schools. “This persistence of the *millet* system, together with the emergence of refugee enclaves, reinforced the ability of the reorganized Armenian religious, political and social organizations to reconstitute old Armenian communities anew” (Sanjian 2001: 156). Churches were reorganized, and Lebanon became the seat of the Catholicos of Cilicia in 1930. Compatriotic unions were established and remained active especially in the first few decades after the Genocide. More importantly, the three Armenian political parties and their affiliated organizations set out to create a sophisticated institutional infrastructure, with its related elites, encompassing various aspects of communal life — arts, culture, education, sports, charitable activities, etc.

The number, diversity, and activity level of diasporan institutions in the Middle Eastern communities, especially in Syria and Lebanon, were particularly prominent, especially before the civil wars in the two countries, in 1975 and 2011 respectively. Their autonomy was especially accentuated in Lebanon. The country’s consociational politico-institutional system has allowed religio-cultural communities to enjoy great levels of freedom. In the absence of a strong central government that could implement a unifying cultural policy, such communities, including the Armenians, have been the bearers of many rights and duties for their members (Migliorino 2009). In Syria and Iraq, on the other hand, community organizations have suffered from some restrictions imposed by authorities, especially on political parties and schools (similar to Iran), most notably as a result of Arab nationalist movements in the late 1950s–early 1960s (Sanjian 2001: 164–165). The distinctive aspects of the Lebanese-Armenian community, along with other

factors such as its proximity to the historical homeland, contributed to the ascendance of its role in the diaspora. The community was often called “the heart” or “center” of the Armenian diaspora from the 1950s until at least the start of the Lebanese Civil War (Der Ghoukassian 2009: 415).

The self-sustainment in Middle Eastern communities has not however meant a total lack of integration into the “host” societies (Chatty 2010: 174). Many Lebanese-Armenians, for example, refer to Lebanon as a “second homeland” (Kotchikian 2009: 466).

Similar to Iran, waves of instability and emigration have hit these communities hard at various times, particularly as a result of the different wars, political upheavals, and revolutions — and the accompanying economic problems — that have shaken the region starting from the mid-20th century. The decline in the size of these communities has in turn adversely affected the capacity and vibrancy of their organizational infrastructure. A number of Armenians have chosen to move between these countries to flee such turmoil, or to relocate, usually for work, to nearby Arab states in the Gulf (especially Kuwait and the UAE). But the majority have relocated to more distant communities in the West. This has led to the rise in the size and mobilization of other communities, especially in North America.

9.3. North America: USA and Canada

The Armenian community in the United States has been shaped by various immigration waves (Mirak 1997: 389-392). A small group of Armenians immigrated to the United States in the second half of the 19th century, with the encouragement and support of

American missionaries who had established schools in the Ottoman Empire. But the first large wave of Armenians, mostly young men, arrived to the USA after the Hamidian massacres. Most of them, with the exception of farmers in San Joaquin Valley in Fresno, California, became factory and mill workers. Over the years, they also pulled some of their family members to their new country. This immigration wave intensified during and after the Armenian Genocide, and continued until the imposition of a quota system as part of the 1924 Immigration Act. By then, many of the early migrants had moved on to engage in small businesses. Many members of the second and third generations subsequently became involved in white-collar occupations and in such fields as medicine and engineering.

The existing community was replenished by another major immigration wave of Armenians from Middle Eastern communities starting in the mid-1960s. The 1965 lifting of the previous quota system contributed to this inflow, along with the successive political (and economic) upheavals in Palestine, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran. Starting about 1975, this wave also included Armenians from Soviet Armenia, most of whom had previously repatriated during the *nerkaght*. More recently, a large number of native Armenians from post-Soviet Armenia have also immigrated to the USA. Unlike the first-wave immigrants who were concentrated mainly in the East Coast, the migrants of subsequent waves chose primarily the West Coast as their destination. Currently, the USA boasts the largest Armenian diasporic community after Russia, with California, and particularly Los Angeles, being the area with the highest concentration of Armenians. As Pattie (2005b: 135) states, “probably this is the one Western city that most resembles the Middle East in possibilities for self-containment within an Armenian environment.”

These different immigration waves can help explain some of the differences that I noticed among the American-Armenian returnees I interviewed, particularly depending on their generation and region of settlement. Many of the returnees who are third- (or even older-) generation American-Armenians are much more assimilated than first-generation immigrants born and raised in Iran and the Arab Middle East. Poor or no knowledge of the Armenian language is the most visible manifestation, but also other factors, such as having a non-Armenian parent. On the other hand, first-generation American-Armenians exhibited socialization trends that resembled to a large extent those of returnees from the Middle East. The 1.5 and second generations — that is, the children of the immigrants from the Middle East who were (born and) raised mostly in the USA — were more similar to older-generation American-Armenians. In this regard, I agree with Bakalian (2001) that American-born children of immigrants from various generational cohorts share some common socialization and identity-related characteristics. More particularly, they often exhibit a “duality” between their Armenian and American selves, described by Bakalian (2001: 35-36) as follows:

They grow up in two social worlds; the first is that of their immigrant parents, the ethnic environment where the Armenian language and culture is idealized and social relations with co-ethnic [*sic*] are given preferential treatment. The second is the world of the larger society that seeps through in early childhood via the mass media, the public school, and the peer group in the neighborhood and ends up becoming a dominant, almost inescapable presence. This is the popular culture enmeshed with consumer capitalism. ... Even though the perspective of immigrant parents will vary, for the most part, their children’s generation will inevitably be characterized with a duality of forces and interests, sometimes complementary but often conflicting.

I have also found, however, that sometimes the 1.5 and second generations display even more hybrid identities than older-generation American-Armenians. They were usually

raised within an environment where American and Armenian cultural influences were complemented by Middle Eastern (sometimes covering multiple countries) elements.

These generational variations are often fused with regional divisions. Most older-generation American-Armenians I interviewed were from the East Coast, while those from more recent generations mostly came from the West Coast. The communities in the East and West coasts are quite different. Besides being older, the former are much smaller, but perhaps paradoxically are home to some important cultural, intellectual, and lobbying institutions. West Coast communities, on the other hand, are larger and more diverse (in terms of the origins of their members). All-day Armenian schools are bigger and more numerous in the West Coast, whereas the family environment and the Church seem to have played a more central role in identity-maintenance processes in the East Coast, at least among some of the returnees I interviewed.

Armenians started settling in Canada in the 1880s. But the Canadian-Armenian community grew especially after World War II. As in the case of the United States, the most significant wave of immigrants came from the Middle East starting in the 1960s. Some of the generational and regional variations mentioned above about the American-Armenian community also exist among Canadian-Armenians, mostly in the form of differences between the relatively older and smaller Ontario (mostly Toronto-based) versus the newer, larger, and more multi-origin Quebec (especially concentrated in Montreal) communities. In general, I agree with Pattie (2005b: 136) that although “ethnic politics and the state formulation of a plural society differ in Canada, generally there are broad similarities with the situations, issues, and attitudes found in the United States.”

Conclusion

A comparison of these six major diasporic communities reveals that there is often a tension between physical safety and assimilation, as Pattie (2005b: 142-143) notes, with the former remaining an important concern for many diasporans in the Middle East, and the latter being a more pressing problem in the West.

In many of the Middle Eastern countries, the status of the Armenians as a minority has also been shared by other ethnic and religious minorities who have similarly retained their distinctive cultures and identities, including Kurds, Assyrians, Christian Arabs, Iranian-Azeris, non-Sunni Muslim Arab sects (such as the Druzes and Alawis), etc. Unlike some of these other minorities, Armenians have often remained neutral in the internal political scene of these countries (Sanjian 2001: 161-162), and have been generally viewed as loyal citizens. In many cases, they have retained considerable autonomy and privileges to manage their internal affairs and community infrastructure. This fact, along with the large number of Armenians (over 100,000 in the cases of Iran, Syria, and Lebanon at least until the 1970s–80s) concentrated in certain (sub)urban centers, neighborhoods, and villages,⁸⁰ made these communities quite self-sufficient. Their close-knit nature has also been reinforced by religious differences from the largely Muslim population in these countries. Armenian schools continue to attract numerous children in these communities, especially at the primary level, though attendance to non-

⁸⁰ Among the diasporic communities relevant to my thesis, the existence of Armenian-populated rural settlements is unique to Middle Eastern communities. They include Anjar in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and Kessab in Syria (near the border with Turkey), and a number of villages in northwestern Iran. Some returnees had spent most or large parts of their lives in these rural areas before moving to Armenia. Others, especially some Iranian-Armenians, had no direct experience of living in villages but had (grand)parents who had been raised in rural areas.

Armenian schools has been on the rise, especially in Lebanon (Sanjian 2001: 170-171).⁸¹ On the other hand, the predominantly Christian, or similarly important, secular environment in the West, has left Armenians more tolerant to and more receptive of close interaction with non-Armenians. In addition, the emphasis of many European and North American governance systems “on the individual as the legal bearer of rights and duties vis-à-vis the state” differs markedly from the social and governance norms in various Middle Eastern countries, especially in Lebanon, where the role of communities is more central (Migliorino 2009: 481). Thus, assimilation has unfolded in a faster and more invasive manner in the West. Moreover, the multilingualism that is quite common in the Middle East versus the relatively more monolingual settings in many Western countries has meant that Armenians in the latter environments, especially in the USA, have had more difficulty retaining their language beyond the second generation (Pattie 2005b: 143). Unlike the Middle East, endogamy is also generally limited beyond the second generation in the West. In general, a form of “symbolic ethnicity” is much more widespread in North America, especially in the United States, as Bakalian (1993) shows relying on Gans’s (1979) work.

Unlike the relatively lower and slower levels of assimilation in the Middle East, political and economic problems have constituted serious blows to the physical survival and liveliness (both at an individual and institutional level) of the communities in this region.

⁸¹ According to Sanjian (2001: 172-173), recent years have seen increasing signs of assimilation in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon. I have not focused very much on these recent trends, because the majority of the returnees I interviewed from this region belonged to a generation that was raised in the relatively close-knit environment I have described. Or, in the case of younger generations, especially youth from Iran, their upbringing has taken place in families and social settings that have continued to be quite insulated from outside cultural influences.

For this reason, since the 1960s, many Armenian diasporans from these communities have migrated to more stable countries, particularly to North America.

Without disregarding other variations along such lines as gender, class, and specific host country/city/village, these differences between Middle Eastern and North American communities are reflected in the upbringing and socialization of diasporans. They in turn often emerge in the return motivations and post-return experiences of diasporan returnees, which are covered in the next three empirical chapters.

CHAPTER V

Visions of Homeland and Motivations for Return

Introduction

This chapter focuses mainly on the return motivations of Armenian diasporans from well-established communities, who have moved to and established long-term settlement in post-Soviet Armenia. In order to adequately comprehend how returnees rationalize their decisions to immigrate to Armenia — and the variations that exist among return motivations — their perceptions of homeland need to be understood, among other things. Therefore, before delving into the return rationales section, I will first provide an overview of how various returnees conceptualize the homeland.

1. Perceptions of Homeland

The majority of my participants regard the present RA as *a*, if not *the*, homeland or *hairnik* (meaning fatherland, it is the Armenian word for homeland) — whether they state it explicitly or imply it in a more tacit way. However, during my interviews and conversations with them, the ancestral homeland also came up in their narratives. Reference was often made to the territories considered as part of historically Armenian lands. In addition, at a more personal level, when talking about their families' roots or lineage, all interviewees could trace the specific town or village that their grandparents or great-grandparents had come from, or at least the region where their forefathers lived prior to the start of the diasporic existence. The emergence of these three visions of homeland in my interviews coincides with Pattie's (2005a: 55-56) argument that "at least three parallel constructions of Armenian homeland" co-exist among Armenians. They

include: 1) “the ancient kingdom, the old territories embedded with a 2,500-year-old history”; 2) the ancestral town or village of origin; and 3) the independent RA. The below sub-sections explain some of these visions, as well as differences that exist among returnees in the way they explain their perceptions.

1.1. What and where is homeland?

Perceptions of homeland among returnees range from more “solid” to more “liquid” versions (Cohen 2009), from visions centered around a single geographical area to more multilocal conceptualizations. The diasporic context that returnees come from and the generation they belong to seem to play a role in explaining some of these differences.

Among several returnees from Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and other Middle Eastern countries, present Armenia is homeland because it is perceived as a place where they feel a certain degree of attachment, comfort, and security by virtue of being surrounded by other Armenians. They contrast this to the sense of foreignness they felt while living as members of a minority group in their former countries. They highlight the linguistic, religious, cultural, and other differences they had from the majority of the population or other minorities in these countries, even though they admit they were welcomed and treated generally well by non-Armenians in the diaspora. For such returnees, *hairenik* is thus not equated with their former “host” countries. As one Iranian-Armenian, Meghedi (female, 42, single), explained:

When living in Iran, I would never say “our fatherland is Iran” — now, that [expression] is even more unlikely. Although we were raised and lived there for so many years, it is still very different. And you feel a distance; you do not belong there, to that environment. It doesn’t feel it’s yours [*harazat*]. To a certain degree,

it has to do with the religious differences. Even the way you mourn, for example, is different.

The homeland as a place where key elements of Armenian identity — language, culture, traditions, religion, etc. — are practiced by the majority of the population and can be more easily preserved or protected (for themselves and/or their children) is a widely held definition among a large number of my participants. As mentioned above, this is especially prevalent among returnees born and raised in the Middle East. But it is also common among returnees born in the Middle East who later moved to the West (Europe and mostly North America). Most of these participants were between their late 30s and mid-50s at the time of the interview. Even though they had spent a significant part of their lives in the West before immigrating to Armenia, their upbringing seems to have been influenced to a considerable degree by the close-knit character of the Middle Eastern communities — at least compared to their experiences in the West and with regard to the situation in the Middle East during the time they were growing up. Haykaz (married), for example, was born in Beirut in 1962. During the Lebanese Civil War, he moved with his family to the United States as a teenager. He stayed there until his relocation to Armenia in 2006. While in Lebanon, he was completely surrounded by Armenians; his parents were Armenian, all the neighbors in their building were Armenian, he went to an Armenian community school, he was a member of an Armenian scouting union, etc. “We were entirely in an Armenian island,” he stated. When he went to the United States, he became quite integrated in terms of learning English, attending an American school and then university, and finding a good job. But as regards to how he defined his identity and homeland, “the roots [of his ideas] were in a way planted,” as he put it, during his upbringing in the Lebanese-Armenian community. Thus, he added: “I

never gave myself up to the current of America or of being American. ... America was the country of the assimilated and assimilating [Armenians]. It was the country of English-speaking [Armenians].” The way he defined the concept of homeland was hence affected by his above-explained experiences and beliefs.

It is a place where you feel some kind of familiarity in terms of your identity. America was not a *hairenik* for me. Lebanon, for me, was not *hairenik*. (Now, I can notice among many young Armenians that Lebanon is in a way being transformed into a *hairenik* — which I understand.) [Homeland] is a place where you want to put an effort into, an environment where you want to contribute a part of yourself to, where you want to have an input into fostering its development, whose well-being and prosperity are important to you and you *really* want to be a part of. ... So, for me, this country [i.e., Armenia] is *hairenik*.

Even though identity-maintenance issues mattered to Haykaz, the last part of his quote points to a different approach to the conceptualization of homeland, which I observed in the narratives of other returnees from North America too, more prominently among second- and third-generation American- and Canadian-Armenians. They often regard present Armenia as a homeland because it is a place whose growth and development they want to actively participate in and contribute to. This conception is related to the spread of more cosmopolitan ideas among younger generations of Western diasporans (Darieva 2011a, 2011b, 2013).

The dissociation of the concept of homeland from the country of birth or former residence in the diaspora that is apparent in Meghedi’s and Haykaz’s cases is not accentuated among some returnees coming from other diasporic communities, mostly in the West, where assimilation into the “host” culture is deeper. Some of these returnees, for example, often have a dual vision of *hairenik*; besides Armenia, they also regard their former country as their homeland.

The conception of homeland also seems to be more complex and multilocal among younger returnees who were born and raised in culturally diverse societies in North America. Armik (female, 29, married) from Toronto explained her views as follows:

I don't think that somebody has to have necessarily one homeland. And I don't think it necessarily has a concrete definition. It's not specifically where you, or your parents, or your grandparents were born. It's the place that you feel at home, and I guess where you have some kind of ancestral connection. So, for me, Armenia is my homeland. Canada in a very real sense is my homeland. And even though I haven't been to Western Armenia [i.e., in present-day Turkey] yet, I feel that's also my homeland. ... And, I don't think that my concept of homeland changed after coming to Armenia.

Armik's conceptualization of homeland is in line with Panossian's (2005: 241, emphasis in original) argument that the "Western diaspora is no longer connected in any meaningful way to a specific homeland (least of all to one that was sovietized). It is not the diaspora of a concrete or 'existing' homeland but of an idealized homeland – a 'spiritual' diaspora of a 'spiritual' fatherland." Embracing a "hybrid identity," such diasporan-Armenians "can have more than one 'homeland' which can alternate between, or simultaneously be, the *host-land*, the current *home-land*, the *ancestral-land*, or the diaspora condition itself as *home-land*."

Finally, a few of my participants, again mostly representing younger generations born and raised in the USA or Canada, provide a more fluid definition or critical appraisal of the concept of homeland. The following two cases demonstrate these directions.

Sako (35, single) was born and raised in Toronto. His parents moved separately from Syria to Canada in the 1960s–70s. His early education was in an Armenian school. As a child, he was primarily surrounded by Armenians both at home and outside, and he only

spoke Armenian. This changed almost completely after he went to various non-Armenian schools, starting from around grade five. Although he became active in Armenian diaspora organizations during his university years, his interactions in Canada were mostly with people from diverse cultures and religions. His definition of homeland was based on global values and a celebration of universality: “Homeland is a place where [there is] clean environment, clean water, clean air, ... [and a] secure [milieu]. That’s what homeland is for me. [And it can be] everywhere and nowhere! I kind of feel lost maybe.”

Sandra (single) was born in Rhode Island in 1984 to Armenian parents who had migrated to the United States in the 1970s; they were originally from Syria, but then moved to Lebanon before eventually settling in North America. Similar to Sako, Sandra’s first language as a child was Armenian, but this changed over time. Although she did continue attending Armenian weekend schools and was involved in community organizations for several years, she went to an American school. Later on, while studying and working in various US cities, she continued being exposed to people from diverse backgrounds. Her approach to the concept of homeland was much more critical:

I don’t feel that [Armenia] is my homeland. I feel that it’s close but it’s not [my homeland]. ... The concept of homeland is anyways a myth. So it doesn’t matter. ... Once you realize it’s a myth, you really don’t feel there’s one place [for you]. Would I say that going back to Palu⁸² today would [mean returning to] my homeland? It makes no sense whatsoever. Even though my grandmother was a Genocide survivor, and that’s a huge part of my life and it tells who I am, I can’t go back there. What am I going to do there? What would that matter to me today for? ... So I think homeland is more of a political [term or project]. ... I think Armenia is just a part of my ethnicity, being Armenian, but being Armenian doesn’t really

⁸² Her father’s family was from Palu, a district and town with a large Armenian population located in the Ottoman Empire’s Diyarbekir province (now in Turkey). During the Armenian Genocide, they fled to Syria, where her father was born.

have one definition. ... And Armenia doesn't encompass [everything related to being Armenian] ... in its borders.

1.2. Ancestral homeland: Imaginaries and visits, visions and emotions

In the case of most Iranian-Armenian returnees, the region of Nakhijevan (now an exclave of Azerbaijan) was recognized as their ancestors' homeland. Given the centuries-old nature of their diasporic presence, most Iranian-Armenians gave quite vague and short descriptions of their ancestral lands or past. The stories of some young diasporans who were descendants of Genocide survivors exhibited a similarly hazy recollection of what they have heard in their families about the past. Some returnees from older post-Genocide generations, however, could recount more elaborate stories about their ancestors' town/village/neighborhood in the Armenian provinces of the then-Ottoman Empire (the western part of the historical Armenian homeland, now in eastern Turkey)⁸³ and the region of Cilicia (southeastern coast of present-day Turkey).⁸⁴ Sometimes, they gave details about properties left behind, their ancestors' occupation or status in society, or Genocide-survival stories. A number of returnees have taken trips to some of these regions. These journeys — often done with family members, friends, or organized tour groups — resemble pilgrimages, which have become more frequent and well-designed in the last decade or so (Bakalian 2014). These visits are very emotionally taxing experiences for most returnees, even when their itineraries do not include their specific ancestral town or village.

⁸³ My interviewees usually referred to these regions as Western Armenia (*Arevmtyan Hayastan*).

⁸⁴ These regions, that is, Western Armenia (and Cilicia), are considered a part of the historical Armenian homeland by the vast majority of my interviewees, even those whose families have no direct ancestors — at least known to them — from these areas, such as many Iranian-Armenians.

In 2008, Araks (45, married, US East Coast), visited (with a group) a number of cities with historically large Armenian populations on the western side of the current Turkish-Armenian border. The town her grandparents had hailed from near Kharpert (in modern Turkey's Elazig Province) did not form a part of the tour. She described her experience with a tremble in her voice and tears in her eyes:

It's very emotional in many-many ways. It's hard to see churches demolished, turned into mosques or barns. ... It's hard to see a land, which you know was filled with Armenians, not being filled with Armenians anymore. ... And it was our first time, so we were really emotional about going there ... [and] seeing some of the remnants of the community.

Such images revolving around loss, destruction, desertion, and deformation often dominate these pilgrimage stories. Born in Lebanon but raised in Canada, Sirun (47, married), who took a similar trip with her close family members and friends in 2007, described: "You walk in Ani⁸⁵ and you feel like thousands of years of your people's history are crushed beneath your feet! And you realize the monumental, *monumental* loss that we have suffered as a people."

In several accounts of such trips to the ancestral homeland, the presence of conflicting emotions is dominant. On the one hand, an attachment is felt to these regions; their extraordinary physical beauty and their significant role in Armenian history are highlighted. On the other hand, it is an experience many describe as discomfoting. These feelings often exist simultaneously in the same person. One returnee (64, married), who

⁸⁵ Ani is situated in the Kars region, near the current Armenia-Turkey border. Parts of it can be seen from the Armenian side. Called the "City of 1001 Churches" (most of which are partially or completely ruined), it was the capital of the medieval Bagratuni Armenian Kingdom (961-1045) and an important trading hub. It was subsequently captured by the Byzantines, Seljuk Turks, Georgians, Mongols, Safavid Persians, and the Ottoman Turks. Its prominence and glory declined over the centuries. It was entirely abandoned by the mid-18th century, and currently remains deserted.

grew up in the UK but moved to Armenia from Iran, had visited Turkey when she was 18, as part of a cultural project with some non-Armenian friends. She said it was an emotional experience, because as they went to some of the regions where Armenians had historically lived, she was constantly remembering the stories she had heard from her father and his friends while growing up. Her father had survived the Genocide as a child and ended up in an orphanage in Aleppo, Syria, before migrating to the UK. At the same time, however, “there was an uncomfortable feeling about it. In a comfortable way, it was uncomfortable.” The feeling that “this is ours; this is ours” was mixed with “discontent”: “Why am I here? ... I am not a tourist. *Our* people built this. Then, why are *they* [the current Turkish or Kurdish residents] being guides to me for something that I know well. ... You shouldn’t be a tourist in your own land.”

Such visits often present opportunities to re-evaluate the meaning and value of homeland and especially of the present RA. Araks, for example, described how her visit was eye-opening, as it made her understand even more the importance of the present Armenian Republic and the need to preserve it.

It was a really important reality-check for me to see who’s living on that land [i.e., in present-day Turkey], and how they’re living, and what’s there, and then come back here [i.e., to the present RA] and see what’s here, and know that this is what we have. [It made me realize that] this is what Armenia is. ... And I want to make sure that this place doesn’t look like *that* for my son — if he decides to stay here when he gets older — or for his generation.

In some accounts, this re-evaluation is linked with the juxtaposition of the images of loss and destruction seen “there,” on the “other” side of the border, with what is “left” or “saved” “here,” on “this” side. Such a contrast is apparent in Araks’s description:

You go and stand at our border [the Armenian side of the Turkey–Armenia border] and look at Ani. And when you turn around physically from that position and look

at the rest of Armenia, you say: “But *this* can’t become like *that* no matter what.” And it kind of seems like a slogan sometimes, but it’s so true. If this country becomes those dilapidated churches and institutions, [we’ll be left with nothing].

Besides observing the physical destruction of Armenian heritage traces in these areas, witnessing that these territories are also devoid of Armenian residents, unlike present Armenia, reinforces the connectedness of such returnees to the RA. Sirun felt this strongly on her way back from eastern Turkey to the RA, via Georgia, when she saw the Armenian patrol guarding the Georgia–Armenia border. “I wanted to go and hug them, and I wanted to say ‘thank you for protecting this little piece of homeland that we’ve been able to have, to *save*,’ because I saw all that we had lost. ... It made me value this homeland even more.” The figure of the Armenian soldier protecting the country’s borders is contrasted to the lost territories, providing a people-oriented (*home*) rather than territory-centered (*land*) vision of homeland. Partially for this reason, some returnees make reference to the high rates of emigration from the present RA as a dangerous situation, which could potentially lead the country to start resembling the ancestral territories.

At the same time, however, this re-evaluation of the importance of current Armenia is accompanied by further criticism of some of its flaws, which become even more visible when contrasted with the situation on the other side of the border. This is especially the case (but not exclusively) in some of the accounts of returnees (mostly Iranian-Armenians) who arrived to Armenia by land in the early 1990s, and who had to pass from Turkey — because of the lack of other routes back then — before entering northern

Armenia.⁸⁶ These returnees recounted the great distress that they had felt when noticing striking differences between the Turkish and Armenian sides of the border: the lights in the Turkish border towns versus the complete darkness on the Armenian side, the luxurious train in Turkey versus the old and ramshackle train in Armenia, the neatness of the public spaces in the train station on the Turkish bordering regions versus the uncleanliness of similar places on the Armenian side, the lack of jobs and goods in Armenia and the need for people to go to Turkey to bring stuff for personal use or trade, and (more recently) the touristic services and spots available in Ani versus the mining sites located on the Armenian side of the Turkey–Armenia border in that area. Returnees sometimes realize that the distress they feel about these contrasts is at least partly caused by the “[diasporans’] idealistic way of thinking about anything and anyone that is Armenian, which has to be good no matter what,” as one Iranian-Armenian returnee put it. Nevertheless, they continue to be annoyed by the contrasts.

Among returnees who have the urge or plan to visit their ancestral homeland, some envision it based on the stories they had heard from their grandparents or from friends who visited these areas more recently. They are often aware, however, that what they will discover in reality may be entirely different from the places that exist in their imaginations and the often nebulous stories they have heard in their families. Nevertheless, many of them believe that these places will captivate them, despite differences between the “imagined” and the “real.” Some returnees even fear getting over-attached to what they will find on the ground.

⁸⁶ This region had suffered widespread devastation by the massive 1988 earthquake, and therefore the contrasts were even more obvious. In general, the early to mid-1990s were years filled with numerous hardships for people in the then newly independent Armenia.

Others feel they are not emotionally ready to take such trips. For example, Dikran (44, married), born and raised in the United States, explained his reluctance as follows:

I think it's emotionally difficult to reconcile yourself to going [there] and seeing a church that's now a mosque, a [foreign] family living in your house. ... I've definitely not expended the emotional energy or effort internally to prepare myself to go. I think I should go one day. I guess I will go one day. ... But I also don't want to go there and then come back and be kind of shell-shocked.

Still others categorically reject the idea of visiting the ancestral homeland, at least in its present form. They argue that the thought of visiting a place they consider their own like "tourists" or "guests" instead of "owners" (terms used by several people), or seeing their ancestral properties (such as homes or what remains of them) "in the hands of others" makes them uneasy. One returnee (45, married), who was born and raised in Syria but moved to Armenia from Lebanon, thought it will cause her meaningless suffering to go and see that "tormented land [*tarapyal yerkir*]." She likened it to visiting a dying person who is in extreme pain; visitors, no matter how close they are, cannot do anything to help. It is a visit that will cause further suffering to both sides, she said.

1.3. The importance of present Armenia as homeland

As explained in the previous section, the ancestral lands are regarded by many returnees as homeland. Nevertheless, any hope to recover and return to these territories in the future is viewed by most of them, even by those politically and ideologically inclined, as utopic if the current RA is not preserved and strengthened. Therefore, for most returnees I interviewed, the present RA is considered as of utmost importance for current generations of Armenians (in Armenia and the diaspora). It is the homeland that is

physically available today, and the foundation on which the Armenian nation's future can realistically be built upon.

When expressing such thoughts, some returnees criticize those diasporans, especially descendants of Genocide survivors, who argue that their "real" homeland is the land of their ancestors (now in Turkey) and hence their return is conditioned by the repossession of those ancestral territories. Tying the concepts of homeland and return only to the ancestral lands is viewed as unrealistic. Armen, a 31-year-old Iranian-Armenian, for example, was critical of diasporans, especially Syrian- and Lebanese-Armenians he knows, who argue that they are waiting for their ancestral homeland in present-day Turkey to be liberated in order to repatriate. He found such an approach wrong for several reasons. First, it might take a very long time to achieve such a goal, he said. "Now we have this. Let us preserve this. If it grows in the future, that's even better; then we can preserve a larger country." But until then, he thought that such diasporans "should not stay fixated to a hope" that one day there will be a place to return to. He was also convinced that even if the ancestral territories are regained, these diasporans will not move there, especially that they have not found the "inner strength" to connect themselves to present Armenia. He elaborated as follows:

Those lands that you have heard about from your grandparents and that they have left behind definitely do not exist there now. They are not how you envision them. This [current Armenia] is also not how we envision [the homeland], but this is the reality now. I am still dreaming of a bigger homeland [too],⁸⁷ but if I don't play a role in the strengthening of what we have now, I will forbid myself to dream. You have to be awake [at some point] to be able to dream. You can't dream in your dreams. For example, if I never see a flower pot in my life, with my own eyes, how can I dream of a flower pot in my dreams? It is the same with *hairenik*. If you don't come and live here, you can't understand the words "*hairenik*" and "land [*hogh*]."

⁸⁷ As a member of the ARF, whose ideology revolves around socialism and nationalism, Armen is inclined to the idea of "free, independent, and united Armenia."

... After all, the land does not represent anything on its own, if you are not connected to it somehow. You will have to grow your children on the land. You will have to bury your loved ones in the land. You will have to learn that if there is a hailstorm today, you won't eat apricots tomorrow, and so on. It is only then that the land becomes really valuable for you.

American-Armenian Dikran made a similar argument. But he listed more practical reasons, including demographic factors, precedent availability based on how states have grown and shrunk throughout world history, and statistical issues related to the Armenian nation's evolution. He thought it is self-deceptive for some diasporans to dismiss today's Armenia "as the embodiment of homeland." He said he has not shut his eyes to the ancestral homeland; "conceptually," he has not been "reneging or revoking" it. However, "operationally," he thought Armenians do not "have the right to view the concept of homeland as anything but something that starts with what we have today." He explained:

You plant the seeds in the part of your garden with the best soil or with the best chance of the plant to grow, not just [*he continued with a sarcastic voice*] "it *should* grow there, no matter what. I'm going to just keep planting it in the desert where it won't grow and there's no water." ... So I think that the concept of homeland for me centers around *this day*, and a stronger state *tomorrow* than we have today, a stronger state than we had *yesterday*.

By drawing a distinction between the RA as *homeland* and the ancestral *homeland*, Armen advocated a people-oriented conceptualization of homeland, rather than a territorially inclined one. Along similar lines, Dikran, through his plant analogy, expressed his rejection of a purely roots-based understanding of homeland. The image of present Armenia he sketched as a potentially more fertile and prosperous environment than the ancestral homeland, which was portrayed as a deserted and barren location, is repeated in the narratives of several other returnees, especially those who have visited the ancestral homeland, as mentioned in the previous section.

2. Motivations and Rationales for Return

In the narratives of my interviewees, I have identified diverse return rationales or factors that have motivated them to immigrate to Armenia. More specifically, I have discerned three main orientations, which, based on my theoretical framework relying on Bourdieu's and Emirbayer & Mische's works, I have decided to term as follows: dispositions, imaginations, and practical considerations. These three orientations correspond to Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of human agency as consisting of three main dimensions: "iterational," "projective," and "practical-evaluative." Specifically, they define agency as:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 963)

As it is clear from the above definition, these three orientations are shaped and manifested within a specific temporal-relational environment. Events and changes in the external environment, such as historical developments in Armenia and in the countries where the diasporans come from, will sometimes be mentioned in my analysis of the various return rationales. However, given my focus on micro and meso factors, such issues related to the macro environment will not be tackled in detail. References to such macro factors will only be made to provide the wider picture within which subjective and objective factors become motivators for return.

For analytical purposes, I have grouped these three orientations into two main categories:

1) Dispositions and imaginations; and 2) practical considerations.

a) Dispositions and imaginations: Return rationales in this category are related to three levels of issues:

- Self: Who am I? Who do I want to be?
- Group: Whom do I identify myself with? Whom do I want to identify myself with?
- Environment: Where do I belong? Where do I want to belong?

On the one hand, the returnees' answers to these questions are shaped by their socialization and upbringing in the diaspora. That is — to use Bourdieu's terms — they are influenced by their "habitus" (internalized or entrenched dispositions) and the "doxic" ideas (deep-founded beliefs that are seen as natural or unquestionable) they had been exposed to. They are based on the individual agent's (in this case, a returnee's) inculcation of objective social structures into subjective dispositions. Or, as Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 975) put it, for this "iterational dimension," agency is primarily "manifested in actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions." On the other hand, the answers to the above questions are also affected by what Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 984, emphasis in original) call the "projective dimension" of agency, which is related to social actors' attempts to:

reconfigure received schemas by generating alternative possible responses to the problematic situations they confront in their lives. Immersed in a temporal flow, they move "beyond themselves" into the future and construct changing images of where they think they are going, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are at present.

Depending on the way they answer these questions, returnees lean toward more ethnocultural or more cosmopolitan motivations. Therefore, the internalized values and

worldviews, as well as the more future-oriented goals and aspirations, that engender a self-desire — that is, a personally or internally rewarding motivation — to immigrate to Armenia follow two major directions:

Ethnocultural and nationally oriented rationales, where return is viewed as one or a combination of the following:

- A journey of grounding the (Armenian) self
- A way to maintain or perpetuate Armenianness
- An ideologically imbued project: Participation in the long-dreamed independent homeland

Cosmopolitan and universally oriented rationales, where return is motivated by one or both of the following:

- A search for organic or non-standard existence
- A cosmopolitan endeavor of development and change

It must be underlined that these two directions do not strictly correspond to stasis and mobility. Attachment and movement, fixity and fluidity co-exist in both of these directions, though with diverse degrees of importance and strength, because as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue, actions that are largely based on past-oriented schemas are not devoid of human agency and the possibility of change. Also, as scholars of “new cosmopolitanism” advocate, cosmopolitanism is not a form of non-belonging or a purely subjectivist endeavor, but it too encloses certain dispositions arising from certain sociohistorical circumstances (Calhoun 2007; Kendall et al. 2009).

b) Practical considerations: Return rationales that are listed in this category are linked with more extrinsic aspects of motivations. They involve the “practical-evaluative” dimension of agency, which involves the “*contextualization* of social experience,” that is, the social actors’ efforts to respond to the “demands and contingencies of the present” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 994, emphasis in original). This is an inextricable part of the return decision-making process, because “[e]ven relatively unreflective routine dispositions must be adjusted to the exigencies of changing situations; and newly imagined projects must be brought down to earth within real-world circumstances” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 994). Return rationales in this category are usually related to attaining a more material goal or tangibly conceived outcome. They aim at preserving existing resources or gaining new ones, particularly economic and social “capital” (to use Bourdieu’s term). Alternatively, such rationales are associated with returnees’ responses to other structural forces, such as the avoidance of external pressures, threats, or undesirable circumstances. This set of factors also includes life-course transitions that motivate returnees to move to Armenia *at a specific point in time*. Therefore, rationales in this category encompass more instrumental matters, usually related to the *process and timing* of diasporic return motivations. Four such rationales predominated the narratives of the returnees I interviewed:

- Return as a life-course transition
- Return for job opportunities or business investments
- Return as family re-unification
- Return as an act of fleeing

The three orientations of return rationales — that is, dispositions, imaginations, and practical considerations — which have been grouped into two sets are not mutually exclusive kinds or categories of motivations. In fact, in the case of most returnees I interviewed, a single, clearly defined reason why the return decision had been made was often not identified.⁸⁸ Rather, a mix of factors seemed to come into play in the decision-making process. As Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 964) argued:

Since social actors are embedded within many ... temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented toward the past, the future, and the present at any given moment, although they may be primarily oriented toward one or another of these within any one emergent situation.

The coalescence of a few or several factors was usually required to crystallize and actualize the migration decision, by ensuring the matching of an internal *desire* often emanating from long-standing dispositions and/or future-oriented goals and aspirations (elicited from ethnonational or more cosmopolitan ideas) with the necessary *resources* and external circumstances at a specific point in *time*. These different factors act together with various levels of importance. In some cases, for example, practical considerations are the primary motivators, with dispositions and imaginative projects serving as supplementary catalysts. In other cases, deep-rooted beliefs seem to be playing a leading role in the migration decision, and so on. In all cases, however, some level of emotional attachment — defined territorially and/or culturally — is felt toward Armenia.

⁸⁸ A similar argument is also made by King and Christou (2014: 89), who list six return rationales. Many of them resemble those identified in my study. Nevertheless, they do not show clearly how various rationales are inter-related. In my below analysis, on the other hand, I shed light on how different factors can act together to influence the return decisions of individual diasporans. That is, I show how various rationales often co-exist in the return narratives of the same person.

Before explaining each return rationale separately, I will conclude this introductory section with a vignette, which illustrates some of the above-mentioned points. I will refer to this featured case in some of the sub-sections below.

Born and raised in Iran, Sarine, 55, decided to move with her family to Armenia in 1998. The middle child of parents she described as “strictly patriotic,” she was involved in various ARF-affiliated sports, cultural, and political organizations in the Armenian community of Tehran. She grew up in a neighborhood, near an Armenian school, which was filled with Armenians. “When I was a little kid, I used to think that I lived in Armenia. We had only one Persian neighbor; we thought *he* was a minority.” She explained that after the Iranian Revolution, and especially when the Iran–Iraq War started, she and her husband (also an Iranian-Armenian) felt that it made no sense for their family to stay in Iran. Sarine is an example of a person whose “habitus” had internalized the diasporic temporariness discourse in her community and other structural processes in her environment. The relevance of this wider discourse to her personal life became especially striking when she saw its manifestation in the form of the physical shrinkage of the Armenian community’s size — particularly in her neighborhood — because of emigration, mostly to North America and Europe.

We were always told that “one day, one day we will return [to Armenia].” And that feeling that we were there [i.e., in Iran] only temporarily was painful as a knife for me. What does it mean to be a temporary resident? Until when will we be in this temporary situation? At some point, you need to feel that your feet are set on a solid place [or on firm ground, *piti vodt ezkas pind mi tegh*]. That feeling influenced me greatly. I used to feel that I lacked something and I had a complex [*bartuit*], especially because the [Armenian] community had also started shrinking. The other Armenians in our building emigrated. I felt there was no hope and the future seemed uncertain.

When Armenia became independent, these feelings intensified, particularly as Sarine

visited the country several times with family members, prior to her relocation. She felt she could resolve the “complex” of identity that she was facing through a process of self-anchoring to another place where she found herself attached to during these previous visits. Her personal desire to mitigate or extinguish her “complex” was magnified by some other factors. Her own feelings of uncertainty fused with her concerns as a mother to preserve the Armenian identity of her two young daughters — the way her parents had done in the past — especially given the decreasing number of Armenians in their neighborhood.

My kids wanted to play in the playground, but all the other neighborhood kids were Persian. I was not used to the idea of letting my kids play with Persians. I didn't play with them when I was a kid; [my parents] didn't let me and I didn't want anyway, because I never had the chance. ... As a mother, what was I supposed to do? I knew that as children, they had the right to play, but I was afraid of the consequences. I thought that if I let them grow up like that, they would have friends and then partners from that environment. And that would have put an end [to their Armenianness].

Sarine and her husband also did not have other practical reasons that could have kept them in Iran, such as important family or other commitments, or a very comfortable financial position.

2.1. Dispositions and imaginations

2.1.1. Ethnocultural and nationally oriented rationales

i. Return as a journey of grounding the (Armenian) self

In this case, the diasporic self seeks to find an anchor in the imagined homeland. Though this is to a certain extent inspired by the “myth of return” (Safran 1991) that diasporas

often aspire to accomplish as a collective endeavor, here I refer more to a *personal* search for stability and permanent self-grounding, often in response to or as a result of internalized ideas about the transience and negativity of the diasporic existence. Such ideas have been dominant in rhetoric related to the Armenian diaspora among many elites and institutions, and their supporters, particularly (but not only) in the Middle East (Tölölyan 2002).⁸⁹ This return rationale was dominant in Sarine’s above-featured vignette.

One of the main themes in this return rationale is the distressing sense of foreignness (feeling like a stranger or *odar*) persistent in the diaspora, juxtaposed with the genuine comfort, warmth, familiarity, and fraternity (*harazatutyun*) felt in Armenia. This is related to the feeling of having been in a state of temporary residence (like a guest or *hiur*) and instability in the diaspora, versus the sense of ownership (being *ter*) and constancy in Armenia. A Syrian-Armenian returnee (male, 52), Sipan, explained:

I always had the desire to live in a place where I would feel like an owner [*ter*], and not a stranger [*odar*]. I always felt like a stranger in Syria. And I believe every person [i.e., Armenian] in the diaspora is condemned to feel like a stranger. That complex is like a destiny. You can’t escape it, because even in a country where Armenians are treated well, in essence that attitude is one aimed at the stranger. When they tell us “you, Armenians, are nice,” it means we’re different, we’re foreigners.

Sipan’s decision to move to Armenia had to do more with the fact that he used to feel like a stranger in the diaspora “than with patriotism.” He added: “Here, I feel the least foreignness of all.” In his case, this feeling was not only a result of his upbringing in Syria, but also his experience of socialization in Soviet Armenia, where he had spent six

⁸⁹ This “exilic nationalism” discourse (Tölölyan 2002) has been explained in Chapter IV (pp. 112-113) and will also be discussed on p. 173 (under “Return as an ideologically imbued project”).

years in the 1980s as a university student, prior to his relocation later on with his family. That experience had equipped him with some cultural and social “capital” (Bourdieu 1986) that made his relocation decision and process easier in 1998.

Another theme that emerges in this rationale is the sentiment of having been a member of a *minority* in the diaspora, especially in Armenian communities in the Arab Middle East and Iran. This is sometimes linked to having felt like second-class citizens. This term is used not necessarily to indicate direct or widespread discrimination, but to denote the state of having been “the other” within a majority population or among other minorities in the “host” country. Sarine brought this up in her explication of her “complex.” She stressed that although Armenians were highly respected in Iran, the sense of being a minority was still present — from both sides. The fact that the Iranian-Armenian community has not assimilated and has not fully blended into the majority, or become a part of it, leads to isolation, according to her. Hence, in the long term, “you lag behind, you become vapid,” she said. Her decision to move to Armenia was connected to her desire to distance herself from that path.

Besides the influence of the discourse about the diaspora’s transiency, the personal desire for grounding is often reinforced by the fact that many of the returnees faced existential issues related to their hyphenated or multiple identities while living in the diaspora; had transnational experiences of visiting or living in multiple places; and had attachments to different places because their relatives and friends had scattered in various countries. Return is thus viewed “as an act of resistance against hypermobility and dislocation,” where returnees seek “a final resting-place against their existential anxiety about their in-

betweenness and where they belong. ... [T]he plan is to relocate the dislocated self” in search of an “imagined stability and coherence” (King & Christou 2010: 109-110). Among many of the returnees I interviewed, the lack of a sense of stable or firm existence in the diaspora was especially accentuated by the dualities they experienced — in terms of their behaviors, social roles, language and nature of communication, etc. — in their country of birth or former residence. In the diaspora, the family house and time spent with Armenian friends were often reserved for all things Armenian (e.g., language, food, family feasts, and holiday celebrations). A similar atmosphere also pervaded the Armenian community centers, schools, and churches. Many returnees described how a sense of comfort, freedom, and frivolousness — but at the same time meaningfulness — embraced them when they entered or existed in those spaces. These feelings were contrasted to their more reserved and cautious, and often shallow, behavior outside of them — on the streets, in the workplace, in a non-Armenian school, etc. This inside–outside divide was manifested in different ways. Many spoke Armenian at home, which was sometimes requested (implicitly or explicitly) by parents. Besides language, in the case of many Iranian-Armenians, for example, Persians rarely visited their houses. For those who went to non-Armenian schools, mostly returnees from North America, the sense of duality while growing up was especially highlighted between their school self and outside-of-school self. Return was thus seen as a way to, if not resolve, at least alleviate these identity conflicts. Thus, several of my interviewees mentioned that there is a comforting *sense of steadiness* associated with Armenia, contrasted with the perplexed and perpetual search for answers to the questions: “Who am I? Where do I belong?” Such feelings are often awakened or solidified during short-term pre-relocation visits to Armenia.

Some of these points were apparent in the case of Houry, 36, who was born and raised in Washington, DC. Her Armenian parents had migrated from the Middle East to the USA in the early 1970s. Houry went to American schools, where she was the only Armenian among her classmates. “My life was split into two: I would go to school and be American, and then ... pretty much any time that I wasn’t in school, I was trying to spend my time with other Armenians.” Outside of school, her best childhood friend was Armenian. During weekends, she would go to the Armenian church. She was also active in Homenetmen, an ARF-affiliated scouting and sports organization. Later on, she became involved in the ARF youth federation’s activities. What reinforced her sense of duality and the feeling that she “never really fitted in” was the discrimination she said she faced in her school — showing how structural forces act together with more subjective processes in migration decision making.

I grew up in a somewhat racist area where I had my share of people telling me to go back to my country. I’d never even been to my country; I didn’t know how to go back [*laughs*]. There was always something different about me that *they* pointed out. ... Up until high school, and through high school as well, ... a lot of people made fun of me for being Armenian, even if they didn’t know anything about it. ... They would separate me in a way. ... So, I gravitated [more] toward the Armenian community than the American schools. ... It’s not that I didn’t have American friends. It’s just that I didn’t connect with them as much as I connected with my Armenian friends.

Houry’s “habitus” felt more comfortable in environments where Armenian presence was dominant. For this reason, after going to college in New York, she decided to move to Boston, because she was “drawn to” the bigger Armenian community there. “That way, I was sort of more on a search for my Armenian identity,” she said. That move, however, did not quench that desire to resolve her identity issues.

But the further I went, the further it kept leading me to Armenia. So no matter how much I dug into my identity, it was never enough, until I finally got to the point [by moving to Armenia] where I don’t have to search my identity. I just have to live. I

don't have to tell anybody where I'm from. Well, now I have to tell people that I came from America. But that's OK. I'll live with that.

During her first visit to Armenia at the age of 17, seven years before her relocation, Houry said she had felt "some sort of belonging" despite the culture shock, language difficulties, and lifestyle differences she had experienced. And while the trigger that led her to actually move to Armenia was a job she was offered (that is, a more practical factor), what seems to have really motivated her is the need to ease her personal identity search, through the act of self-grounding in Armenia.

ii. Return as a way to maintain or perpetuate Armenianness

This rationale resembles to a certain extent the previous one. However, in this case, the decision to move to Armenia, rather than being motivated by a more personally internalized desire emanating from a self-anchoring need, is more inspired by and loaded with images of the individual as a member of the Armenian nation. The *collective* aspect of maintaining one's own or his/her children's Armenian identity is thus important here. Identity maintenance is viewed as a commitment toward one's ethnic group, a moral obligation toward one's ancestors and/or future generations. Armenia is regarded as the most convenient or appropriate environment to secure the generational continuity of Armenian identity markers. It is the only country that is almost exclusively inhabited and governed by ethnic Armenians, and where Armenian culture and language are officially and widely practiced and used by the overwhelming majority of the population — albeit with some differences from many diasporans.

In this rationale, the perpetuation of the Armenians as a distinctive nation is often

envisioned as a linear process. The decision maker perceives his/her *present* life as some kind of “bridge” between *past* and *future* generations of Armenians. In these narratives, the past and future generations are often represented by the returnee’s own ancestors’ path and children’s journey ahead, but are usually also viewed more collectively. Return is considered as the successful completion of the returnees’ role as bridges. It is perceived as an act that not only helps maintain their own Armenian identity at the present, but also contributes to ensuring the continuity of Armenianness for their children and next generations. If left outside of Armenia, the bridge is viewed as doomed to become weakened and eventually to collapse, under the waves of assimilation in the diaspora.

Vatche (25, single, Syria), who moved to Armenia in 2006, illustrates this rationale. He said he does not consider himself a “citizen of the world.” Instead, he is “a bit of a nationalist, in a sense.” For him, it is important to live in a place where he is surrounded by people who belong to the same nation as himself: “I don’t want to be a Syrian of Armenian origin, or an Armenian who resides in Syria. I want to be an Armenian who lives in Armenia. That’s *a matter of national belonging*.” He explained the bridging role of his relocation decision as follows:

I must be the perpetuator of [the Armenian nation’s] history, which spans several thousands of years, in whatever way. Even if I don’t play a very significant role in that, [at least] through my existence, I must be a part of that chain. And if *I* leave from here [i.e., Armenia], a ring from that chain will break, and the old part of the chain might be lost. *We* must maintain that link. Our nation has stayed small because we have not been able to preserve that [link] well [over the centuries]. And if this continues for the next 50–100 years, we might even disappear. We might perhaps still exist as a nation, but we might lose the state. We might end up being like the Assyrians [i.e., not having a distinct nation-state]. And I would never want to see that, and neither would I want my children to experience that.

The alternation of the singular (“I” and “my”) and plural (“we” and “our”) personal pronouns in Vatche’s quote indicates how he perceives his immigration to Armenia not only as a personally motivated decision, but also as part of a more collective, national endeavor or duty — the perpetuation of the Armenian nation by means of preserving its unique identity in the homeland. Although this was a key factor that motivated his decision, more objective factors related to life-course developments and employment matters also played a role, especially in determining the timing of his immigration to and longevity of his settlement in Armenia. Vatche moved to Yerevan as a university student, after having graduated from high school in Aleppo. During a temporary break from his university education, he found a job in a field that interested him (though unrelated to his academic program). The fact that he was employed encouraged him to continue living in Armenia. When I interviewed him in June 2013, he was working and studying at the same time.

In the case of returnees with children, one key motivating element springs from the concern of ensuring their children’s Armenianness. In the narratives of such returnees, Armenia is perceived as the most appropriate or the only place where they can raise their children with an entrenched Armenian identity, with no need to exert the great efforts themselves (prior to moving) or their parents (and their grandparents before them) had to invest over the years in the diaspora. This, they feel, relieves them of certain duties and pressures. It gives them the chance to concentrate their and their children’s energy, time, and other kinds of resources on wider interests and activities than nationally oriented ones. The thoughts of Hagop (38, married), a Lebanese-Armenian who worked for several years in the UAE before moving to Armenia in 2011, are indicative of these

points. When he lived in Dubai's "more cosmopolitan" environment, he said he realized that it was possible for him to maintain his Armenian identity to a large extent, "because the roots were firmly planted" in Lebanon. However, ensuring the same for his son was harder. The "field" was so different that Hagop found it very difficult to provide the necessary cultural and social "capital" in order for his son's "habitus" to develop along the lines of his own dispositions.

Your children are lost [as Armenians] there [i.e., in Dubai]. ... I could see that the children of families who had come to Dubai before us, 10 or more years earlier, were dating Indians, had forgotten the [Armenian] language, or were totally detached [from Armenian life or affairs]. This made me think that this [i.e., trying to preserve his son's Armenian identity] was a lost cause, and thus we should create bonds to Armenia in some way. ... Here, I don't need to raise my children as Armenians. ... I know how much energy and potential my dad had invested just to keep me Armenian. Now, I can use that energy to make sure my son becomes a good human being, gets educated, loves his country properly, avoids wrongdoings...

And while Vatche's and Hagop's concerns have to do more with the future, others focus instead on the past. In this case, return to Armenia is regarded as being a responsibility or obligation toward the ancestors who struggled and endured so much to maintain their identity and pass it to the present generation. The son of an Armenian father and American mother, Sevag (46, single) was born and raised in California. His paternal grandparents had first arrived to the United States after surviving the Genocide. Sevag's use of the singular and plural personal pronouns in an interchangeable manner (similar to Vatche above), and the connections he draws between the present and the past in his narrative, evince the bridging role he feels his return decision has in the preservation of Armenian identity.

The link of Armenian history ... gives us standing in the world. We recognize that we're not a world power today. So we rely on the fact that we have a long history to show that we meant and still mean something, because we've been able to

maintain this identity so long. And sometimes when I look at [Mount] Ararat⁹⁰ today, I say it's a miracle that I'm here. And I say I came to Armenia to honor my grandparents, because I realized how much they sacrificed to maintain their identity. When you think of the Armenian Genocide, it was [an attempt to lead to] the ultimate forced assimilation. And they [his grandparents] struggled against that forced assimilation; they maintained their identity. And so many Armenians have been trying, have been struggling continuously to maintain their identity over such centuries of domination that who am I to give up on that identity in my own lifetime?

Certain experiences in the returnees' personal or family lives sometimes lead them to become conscious about their role in the maintenance of Armenian identity. Hearing — first-hand or through their parents — their ancestors' Genocide-survival stories is one such experience (which Sevag, for example, had). In the case of Iranian-Armenians, most of whose ancestors had been in Iran for several centuries, the longevity of their lineage's existence in that country is often stressed. Such Iranian-Armenians argue that their return to the homeland crowns their ancestors' efforts to remain Armenian in the diaspora for such a long time. Some returnees connect past events to developments in current Armenia in order to rationalize their decision to move to the RA at the present time.⁹¹ This fusion of past and present appeared, for example, in Sevag's narration of a pre-relocation trip he had taken to Gharabagh in 1997 (a few years after the ceasefire). Images from the past (his grandparents' Genocide-survival stories) and from the present (hardships faced by Gharabagh people due to the war) were blended in a convoluted manner, evoking emotions he eventually acted upon. Some returnees also mention the

⁹⁰ This mountain, where according to the Bible, Noah's Ark landed, has great symbolic value for Armenians. Since 1920, it is in present-day Turkey, but can be seen clearly from Yerevan.

⁹¹ This tendency of Armenian diasporans to superimpose historical events and memories onto present reality, that is, to "explain the present through the prism of the past," (Kotchikian 2009: 474) by giving material form to symbolic values, does not only apply to the rationalization of return. It has also been adopted, especially by elites and institutions, in other situations when identity is being renegotiated in view of new developments (See Kotchikian 2009: 473-474).

unsuccessful or short-lived attempts by their parents or grandparents to repatriate during the Soviet-era repatriation movement — hence leaving the fulfillment of that task to the present generation. In addition, the importance of identity preservation becomes even more accentuated or pressing, when returnees come face-to-face with the realness and personal relevance of assimilation in the diaspora. This happens, for example, when they see its effects (e.g., loss of language, lack of interest in Armenian culture and life) on their own family or diasporic community members. In Sevag’s case, his sisters and their children have assimilated. He thought that their connection to Armenia or Armenian identity was not substantive. Thus, what motivated Sevag to move to Armenia, according to him, was the desire to preserve not only his own identity, but also that of his family. Staying in the diaspora clearly seemed to have the opposite effect on his family members.

In the case of returnees who tend to follow this rationale (but also others), there is the often-made assertion that even if they or their children one day decide to leave Armenia, the experiences they would have had by then and the ties they would have created with the country can ensure the continuity of their efforts toward maintaining Armenianness. In this vision, once the “bridge” is fastened in the present generation, it will continue serving its purpose in the future (at least until the next generation). Staying in Armenia, even for a short period of time, will fill the identity-maintenance engines of their children with enough fuel, so to speak, to help them continue their journey forward of living as Armenians even in the diaspora, if they decide to go back — at least for a while.

iii. Return as an ideologically imbued project: Participation in the long-dreamed independent homeland

Narratives falling under this pattern are based on ideological expressions of patriotism or love of homeland (*hairenasirutian*). The return decision is explained as emanating from the natural duty of any Armenian — diasporan or not — who cares about Armenian matters to contribute somehow to national issues. Serving as an active participant in or contributor to the (re)building process of the homeland, which has reclaimed its independence, is viewed as one important way of fulfilling that collective responsibility. The importance of collectivity in this pattern is somehow similar to the previous return rationale. However, while the latter is more related to identity issues — that is, to more people-oriented concerns — the *homeland* and the *nation-state* — that is, more territorially driven perspectives — play a more pivotal role in the case of this pattern.

Though not exclusively, these thoughts abound especially in my interviews with diasporans that grew up when Armenia was still a Soviet country. The outlooks of this generation on national and world issues have been greatly influenced and shaped by historical developments and discourse during that period of time. “Exilic nationalism” Tölölyan (2002, 2010), which thrived particularly between 1945 and 1975 in Middle Eastern communities, especially in Lebanon, has left an important mark on many members of this generation. Also, during these decades, when Armenia was a part of the Soviet Union, traditional Armenian political parties and their supporters were divided in their approach toward and support for Soviet Armenia, reflecting the global-level Cold War schisms. Moreover, starting in the mid-1960s, the discourse and activities of many diasporan institutions and elites focused on *pahanjatirutian* (demanding and regaining

what is yours). This movement encompassed three main themes: Genocide recognition, reclaiming of the lost Armenian territories, and an eventual in-gathering of the Armenians. Thus, the dream of “free, independent, and united Armenia” remained pervasive throughout these years, especially among pro-ARF diasporan circles.

It comes as no surprise then that the ideologically loaded return rationale dominates the stories of most of my interviewees who decided to move to Armenia as soon as it declared independence or in the first few post-independence years. Some had even immigrated shortly before that, during the transitional years when the Soviet Union had already shown signs of collapse, especially after the massive 1988 earthquake in northern Armenia and the start of the Gharabagh Movement. These returnees included those who came specifically to participate in political developments in the country — Gharabagh war, the establishment of diasporan political parties in Armenia around 1990, appointments or recruitment of government officials or other experts from the diaspora, etc. Others (a very small number) immigrated alone or with their families, mostly from Iran.

For Sanan, a Lebanese-Armenian in her early 50s, living in Armenia was “a dream” since she was a teenager. She realized her aspiration in 1997. When she was young, Armenia was still a Soviet country. Back then, the questions of “Why isn’t Armenia free? If it was free, why would we live in a foreign country rather than in Armenia?” created “a daily anguish” for her, as well as her family and social circle in Lebanon. She explained that these thoughts and feelings resulted, to a large extent, from the “wall” that existed between Armenians and Arabs. When she visits Lebanon now, she sees that the

Armenian community is less “tight-knit,” in terms of mixed marriages, for example, than when she was growing up.

In those times, when the [Lebanese Civil] War had just started, Armenians and Arabs did not interact too much with each other in Lebanon. It was more like a ghetto-like setting. We were always surrounded by Armenians. The school was Armenian, the [ARF] club [i.e., center] was all Armenians, the history we learned was all about the stories of *fedayees*. ... All these things have influenced me somehow. And when Armenia became independent, then it reached a point when you ask yourself: “OK, now that Armenia is free, what am I doing here [in Lebanon]? Why should I stay here?” ... So, as soon as I had the opportunity, I moved to Armenia.⁹²

The Armenia that the “pioneer” returnees of the early 1990s experienced was very different from the one later immigrants found or what they themselves have seen evolve over the years. In the aftermath of the 1988 earthquake, and especially between 1991 and 1995, the country faced an acute socioeconomic crisis due to the war and related refugee flow, transportation blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey, energy crisis, and initial shock of transition from a socialist to capitalist economic system. For many of the people I interviewed from among those who arrived during that period and stayed, these “dark and cold years,” as they widely became known in Armenia, hold a significant place in their return stories. In addition, an important part of the narratives of the early comers (as opposed to later migrants) is the migration journey or process itself. Many told me about the difficulties they faced in getting a visa and/or a ticket, the hardships they went through to arrive in Armenia (e.g., taking a long land trip via other countries), the inability to bring heavy luggage or even necessities, and so on. Another major difference between these early comers and more contemporary returnees is the scarcity of other diasporans with similar return experiences they could rely on for advice or support,

⁹² Sanan’s first visit to then Soviet Armenia was in 1989. She then visited the country every summer until her final relocation.

especially in their first few years in Armenia. In such cases (as well as for many newcomers after the 1990s), distant relatives from the Soviet-era repatriation movement sometimes acted as bridges and support networks, particularly in their early months or years.⁹³ All of these difficulties that the early comers faced have become part and parcel of their return stories. Because of their ideological inclinations, such returnees perhaps sub-consciously elevate the importance of their return endeavor by highlighting the hardships they encountered to realize their “dream” (to use Sanan’s word) of return. Some are even nostalgic when reminiscing about these early years. Despite being tough, they are perceived as more interesting, replete with dynamic changes, closer social bonds, but also more positive outlooks on the future of the homeland-(re)building process.

One of these early migrants was an ARF member who moved to Armenia in 1991 to participate in the political party’s activities, as it had decided to establish bodies, open offices, and start implementing projects in Armenia as part of its “*Depi Yerkir*” call.⁹⁴ She described that in the initial years after independence, Armenia was in a continuous process of transformations. Life was “full.” In the beginning, she used to visit her former country to see her family once a year. After staying there only for a few days, she used to feel an urge to quickly return to Armenia. During her short absences, she used to call her Armenia-based friends — most of whom were party members from different diasporic communities who had also settled in Armenia — every day to ask about news and

⁹³ This issue will also be addressed in the next chapter.

⁹⁴ The ARF had been banned and its leaders exiled after the Soviet takeover of the short-lived First Republic of Armenia (1918–20), which was largely controlled by the party. In 1988, the 24th ARF World Congress adopted the “*Depi Yerkir*” (going to the [home]land) motto. Two years later, the party officially announced its organizational presence in Armenia.

developments. Now, she said, that is not the case. She organizes longer and more frequent visits back to her former country. And she said she would not even mind emigrating from Armenia. “Now, Armenia is not giving me anything,” she explained. Her days have become “empty” and dull. She is also filled with less optimism.

I had some idealistic thoughts back then that we would be able to build an ideal country from scratch. ... I was expecting [to find] a virgin country, which I naively thought we could build in the right manner. But I was wrong. We did not build anything. The mafia built it the way it wanted.

Besides the dynamic developments happening in the country in the early 1990s, another factor that has motivated some of these returnees to stay in Armenia despite the difficulties of the early days is the role that they envisaged or believed they were playing by having settled in the homeland at a time when a large number of locals wanted to or did leave the country. Several of these returnees recounted how they thought their willingness and determination to stay served as a morale booster for local people whose lives were plagued by so many hardships. Iranian-Armenian Tro, for example, who moved to Armenia with his wife and children in the early 1990s, believed their “presence was giving strength” to local families with whom they interacted to “withstand” their numerous difficulties. These locals were in such a “psychological state [that] they could see no way out.” In this desperate situation, meeting someone from abroad who had indeed taken the decision to immigrate to Armenia and “was sharing all these problems with them,” some locals were encouraged to think that perhaps there was light at the end of the tunnel. Tro was thus convinced that by having moved during these early years, they have had their contribution in that regard. Such contribution has engendered a sense of responsibility and a feeling of fulfillment that have further enhanced the desire of such returnees to stay in Armenia, at least to a certain degree. Similar emotions have also

motivated other returnees who have moved to Armenia in later years, and not necessarily for ideological reasons, to extend their stay. But the emphasis on the difficulties of the early post-independence years lacked or did not form a central part of the narratives of the later comers. For example, Nshan, who moved with his family from Canada to Armenia in 2003, explained: “Without seeming too arrogant, the impact that we are having on people around us, both my wife and I, and my children, is really important. ... We are generating a lot of energy and positive aura, which motivates people, which gives them hope, I think.” When sometimes he tells local friends and acquaintances of the possibility of emigrating from Armenia, the reaction he receives is “so immediate, that it is mind-blowing.” It makes him think: “the cleaning lady, the neighbor, the people who work for us, our clients, our partners, our friends, all of these people ... are emotionally dependent on the optimism that my family and I bring to them.” That signifies that he is “alive,” that he is part of the society. “It means that I am actually doing something that is ... meaningful.”

2.1.2. Cosmopolitan and universally oriented rationales

Nshan’s last point in the above paragraph about wanting to feel valuable and playing a meaningful role in society points to two somehow inter-related return rationales that are permeated with cosmopolitan ideas and universally oriented values. I will examine them in the next two sub-sections. These rationales differ from the more ethnocultural and nationally oriented motivations explained above and illustrated to a certain extent in Sarine’s introductory vignette.

i. Return as a search for organic or non-standard existence

This is often not a factor that acts alone in the migration decision-making process. However, it is a return narrative that was repeated by several interviewees, especially those from North America,⁹⁵ as at least one aspect that had pulled them to Armenia. The perceived shallowness, materialism, and individualism of “the West” is often contrasted in these narratives with the perceived more natural and organic existence, as well as firmer and more substantive family and social bonds, in Armenia. This is also closely associated with images of the “rat race” (a term repeated by many interviewees) vis-à-vis Armenia’s perceived slower, less stressful pace of life. Such a lifestyle is regarded as more attractive. Returnees feel that it can allow them to break free from predetermined or socially imposed (Western) norms or ways of life and work, and to draw a more unconventional life journey for themselves (and their families). In these narratives, a more tangible portrait is made by complementing the above-mentioned abstract aspects of life with references to some practical matters. For example, the pollution, traffic, overcrowdedness, long commutes, junk food culture, etc. of their former countries are juxtaposed with the healthier and more serene environment they feel Armenia offers, where they can enjoy clean air and water, city walks, organic nutrition, etc.

Those with children also blend physical safety concerns into this rationale; they perceive Armenia as a more secure environment for their children. They refer to such perceptions as lower (known to them at least) crime rates, trust in even total strangers because of the high intimacy of social relationships in a small country, etc. Such a lifestyle is hence viewed to be healthier and more meaningful. Anush, 41, a Canadian-Armenian returnee

⁹⁵ They include people born and raised there, but also those born in the Middle East who grew up or spent a considerable part of their adult lives in North America.

who moved to Armenia with her husband and two children in 2011, explained:

This is not a career move. ... This is not a financial opportunity. Absolutely not! ... It is an opportunity to run away from that individualistic and materialistic society [i.e., Canada], and to live in a more communal environment. ... This is [a move] for human values, and a desire for our children to grow up in this kind of environment, where they can value even the smallest thing (like uninterrupted electricity supply) ... and appreciate more the meaning of life. There [in Canada], you are spoon-fed. Everything is readily available to you. ... Also, the security that children have here is indescribable; it offers a certain level of comfort that I didn't have there. The crime rate, if any, is very low or not obvious to us in our everyday life here. There, I always had to watch my children very carefully to make sure nothing happened to them, no one hurt them. Here, I don't have these concerns.

This return rationale is also sometimes expressed by middle-aged American- and Canadian-Armenians, often male, who, after having worked for some time and reached a certain level of financial success, realized that they wanted a change in their personal and professional lives. The urge to look for something different is often not only explained as being the result of the nature or duration of their previous job, but also placed within a wider frame of discontent toward their previous Western lifestyle. In such cases, this return rationale is often enmeshed with more practical factors related to life-course developments.

People with this return rationale emphasize universally appealing or valuable ideas — such as peacefulness and physical safety — as key factors that have motivated their migration decisions. But in several of the cases, emotional reasons existed *why they chose Armenia* specifically as their destination. It is a place they considered a homeland or a country they felt some sort of attachment to. Some of them had also previously experienced life in Armenia by participating in short-term volunteering projects, working for a certain period of time, having a spouse who was originally from Armenia (but had often emigrated), organizing frequent family visits, owning an apartment, and so on.

During these former experiences, they had shaped their perceptions about how the lifestyle in Armenia differed from that in their countries of residence. In addition, the fact that many of these returnees are well-educated and/or financially comfortable allows them to afford to relocate to Armenia, a move that could have been riskier or highly difficult for others lacking such “capital.” Some of them, for example, have sold or still maintain properties, businesses, or other investments abroad to finance their relocation and/or stay in Armenia.

Karnig’s (51) case illustrates some of the above points. He was born and raised in Lebanon, but lived and worked for more than 15 years in California, and also spent shorter periods of time in other Western countries. He moved to Armenia in 2010. This is how he explained the timing of his decision:

I lived quite a long time in the States. And I kind of outgrew; I got what I could get out of the States, as far as the initial advantages that I saw of living in an American society versus the Lebanese. The romantic period was gone. I started seeing the downsides of that kind of life and society, Western society, which I didn’t see before — there is too much consumerism, too much materialism. ... I realized that if I kept living like that, I wasn’t going to be fully satisfied and happy for the rest of my life, [in terms of having a] quality life. At some point, you realize that, OK, you have a nice car and house, you’re living in a nice society, you’re respected, everything is fair and honest, but then other issues exist (such as too much, too fierce, too aggressive competition). In my opinion, that also dehumanizes you in a way. I felt I had to make a change.

The fact that Karnig’s divorce from his former wife — an important phase in his life course — was finalized around four years before his relocation meant he had fewer family commitments that could have prevented him from moving. The idea of relocating became even more pressing when the company he had been working for in California shut down following a merger, and he could not find a fulfilling job with the payment standards he was looking for.

I considered going to Australia, or even Africa or a Hawaii Island. I wanted a more natural, basic, simpler life form. ... So I hadn't settled on Armenia, but it was a desire to come to the homeland *if* I could make it work [by finding a job]. One idea motivated me: Then, I don't have to migrate again.⁹⁶

This return rationale shares striking similarities with what Benson and O'Reilly (2009a, 2009b) conceptualize as “lifestyle migration.” They define it as “the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful [for the migrant] because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life,” including “alternative lifestyles (the ‘good’ or ‘simple’ life), escape from individual and community histories, or from changing circumstances, and the opportunity for self-realization” (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a: 2). They list a number of social transformations that have led to the rise of this kind of migration in the last 50–60 years, including “globalization, individualization, increased mobility and ease of movement, flexibility in working lives, and increases in global relative wealth” (Benson and O'Reilly 2009a: 3).

Based on the above, certain features I observed among some younger (in their 20s or early 30s), again North American, diasporans, who had come to Armenia for short- or long-term settlement, are also in line with this rationale. Narek, a returnee who has had the opportunity to meet and work regularly with young diasporans as part of the various projects he has been involved with in Armenia in the past eight years, alluded to this — what he called pursuit of “alternative lifestyle” — when I was interviewing him.

There are some young people who come here from America and I feel that the reasons behind their move are related to contemporary developments in the Western world. Especially in America, the standard of living has reached such a

⁹⁶ This last sentence points to another motivational factor in Karnig's decision — the self-grounding need — discussed above.

level that young people feel they have the ability and comfort to decide in what kind of place they want to live. They might even move somewhere without having to work, or having found a job beforehand. ... They feel comfortable living an alternative lifestyle. ... Within that, Armenianness has a place, but it resembles more the decision of a Chinese-American, for example, who goes to live in China because it is fun [or interesting]. Some of these people stay for long periods of time, while others not. They feel very comfortable and special living here; they feel they have meaningful lives. Their reasons for moving are somehow different from why we [he and his wife] decided to come, for example, which was in search [of identity], to make sure our children are raised as Armenians.

The more ethnocultural factors that Narek expressed as having motivated his family to move to Armenia — identity search and preservation of children’s Armenianness — were elaborated above.

ii. Return as a cosmopolitan endeavor of development and change

This return rationale usually appears in the narratives of young diasporans from North America — mostly second- and third-generation American- and Canadian-Armenians — who are drawn to Armenia not because of identity-maintenance concerns, or nationalist or patriotic aspirations, but out of a desire to contribute to the country’s development as a place they care about that needs that kind of contribution. Similar to other rationales, this one also is often not the sole trigger of relocation. However, it was repeated by several returnees, meaning it plays a role in the decision to move, or to continue living in Armenia. Many of these people have come to Armenia for volunteering, internship, or short-term work assignments, with no preset plan to stay for a long time. Some of them, however, eventually end up staying for various reasons. Returnees following this rationale also include many of those who have jobs or are active in NGOs (often working on community-development, educational, gender-related, or environmental issues in Armenia), or those who participate in entrepreneurial activities or lead special projects

related to the country's development. Most of them are well-educated and come from quite comfortable socioeconomic backgrounds.

This return rationale is sometimes related to the aspiration of leading non-standard lifestyles, described above. In this case, however, the return motivation is less a matter of personal lifestyle; instead, it is based more on a desire to be an active member of society and community. For returnees with this rationale, it is fulfilling to contribute to a *collective* effort of development, while simultaneously working or being engaged in a field that they have a personal preference toward or interest in. Such thoughts were expressed, for example, by a 24-year-old American-Armenian who works at the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies.⁹⁷ By relocating to Armenia, he felt he could be of “benefit to people, to community at large,” while doing something that he loves. His return decision was therefore not based on, what he described, a “diasporan-Armenian” desire to come to Armenia “to save [it].”

A frequently mentioned point by such returnees is the feeling that they can make a real difference in people's lives and have an impact because Armenia is a small country. As several American- and Canadian-Armenian returnees explained, although opportunities are more abundant in North America, the impact they feel they can make there is much more limited or insignificant than in Armenia. “Here, we are medium-sized or big fish in a small pond. There, we are small fish in a huge pond,” was an argument I heard from

⁹⁷ The TUMO Center in Armenia provides a free-of-charge after-school learning environment for students aged 12–18, with programs centered around web development, digital media, animation, and game development. It was founded by US-based diasporan-Armenian entrepreneur Sam Simonian, and it is funded by the Sam and Sylva Simonian Foundation.

several people. In Armenia, exerting efforts and witnessing their immediate outcomes are not too far away from each other, they said.

Many of the returnees following this rationale have loose conceptions of homeland. Emotional aspects do play a role in the choice of the destination country for such migrants, but the motivation to move is not related primarily to ethnonational or patriotic issues. As one returnee, who had moved to Armenia in 2002 from the US East Coast at the age of 23, said, return should not be just this “emotion”-driven and “nostalgic” concept of “wanting to live in the homeland [or] motherland.” It needs to be motivated by “a commitment and a desire for an improved Armenia as a country, as a nation, from a globalized perspective, from an economics perspective.”

The various above-outlined aspects of this return rationale are more comprehensively illustrated by the case of Dikran, who moved from the United States to Armenia in 2000 at the age of 31. He admitted that he felt emotionally attached to Armenia and was somehow influenced by the “idealized” visions of homeland held by many diasporans he knew. However, his return rationale exhibited a different direction. It was not loaded with descriptions of ideological commitment to and preservation of the Armenian ethnos or homeland.

There’s nothing more fulfilling than contributing to society — even if it’s a tiny little corner of whatever it is you’re doing, or whatever it is you like to do in life. ... The society *I* want to contribute to is *this* one. So, to me, moving here was very natural. If I have a dream in my head of an Armenia that’s different from this [i.e., the present situation of the country], then I’ll work toward that. And hopefully everyone else on earth (forget Armenians) are doing that; if they’re in a position to go after their dreams, then I hope they’re all doing that in Alaska, or Cambodia, or whatever else people are dreaming [*laughs*].

Alongside his full-time job, Dikran has been “passionate about and actively involved in various discussions, programs, and calls for change or improvement” in Armenia, especially in the fields of education and sports. He thought that “anyone who has a passion about anything ... can really make a difference” in Armenia, because Armenian society is facing numerous problems and because the country is small.

You can find yourself in a leadership role almost in any realm. So I think it’s just a great opportunity to create and to get involved. ... This is an underdeveloped place, in many ways, not just economically, [but also in terms of] the social institutions. In a lot of ways, it is a reborn country, but it is newly born institutionally. There’s a lot to be done. It’s a great sort of fertile ground for entrepreneurial thinking, if I think of entrepreneurial in a broader context than just starting a new business.

This return rationale is in line with what Darieva (2011a, 2011b, 2013) calls “diasporic cosmopolitanism.” She defines it as “a kind of simultaneity of ethnic and cultural parochial closure, as well as openness to the world and global issues” (Darieva 2011b: 491). In this case, “[t]he idea and practice of homecoming ... is based less on regaining a lost intimacy and a place of origin, [and] more on the desire to connect a specific territory to the rest of the world by ‘developing the country’ in democratic ways,” by participating in “cosmopolitan practices framed as ‘progress’, ‘democracy’ and ‘global civic society’” (Darieva 2011b: 496, 499). Although Darieva’s research focuses on short-term volunteering projects undertaken by second- and especially third-generation American-Armenians in Armenia, my research indicates that this trend seems to also exist among longer-term returnees of similar generations, both from the United States and Canada.

This approach is related to a relatively recent trend in the Armenian diaspora, which Tölölyan (2014) describes as “a new set of fluid identities,” at a personal but also —

more importantly for my argument here — social, cultural, and political levels. He argues that this trend is dominant among well-educated Armenians of the 18–30 age group, particularly in diasporic communities in the West. He explains it as follows:

We have moved decisively towards a society of affiliation, not filiation. In filiation ..., identity is socially inherited from the family, and the choices are that one either adheres to familial and communal norms or moves away from them, towards assimilation. These options or choices are rejected by the young. ... They want to choose the nature and extent of their affiliations: so they can, for example, declare that they will not learn the language of their ancestors or follow their religious rituals, but nevertheless will join groups that do social and cultural or even ecological work in the homeland. Above all, young diasporic Armenians, even more than their elders, want to choose the area of their committed efforts and need to feel that by becoming involved they can be active agents in the development of their homeland and people[.]

In fact, some young returnees I interviewed described how their parents or elder members in their diasporic community could not entirely and accurately comprehend or appreciate their “affiliation”-driven (to use Tölölyan’s term) approach to connecting with Armenia.⁹⁸ Thus, by relocating to Armenia, these members of the younger generation challenge and depart from certain taken-for-granted values and practices, imagining a different future for themselves (and their children). The case of Dzovag, 29, illustrates some of these points. She was born and raised in Canada. Her parents were Armenians who had migrated from the Middle East to North America. She went to a Canadian

⁹⁸ Darieva (2013: 27) has also found that unlike young American-Armenians who participate in short-term “homecoming” projects aimed at developing Armenia, their parents usually engage with the homeland transnationally, without leaving their homes in the diaspora. Based on my research, the inability or reluctance of the older generation to understand or accept their children’s new mode of homeland connection is not only related to their inclination toward a “filiated” approach (Tölölyan 2014). In certain cases, it is also engendered by some practical issues, according to the descriptions of their returnee children I interviewed. For the older generation who had immigrated to North America from the Middle East, building a new life away from the political and economic problems they usually had escaped from or had left behind was a priority. They thus wanted their children to grow up and live in what they perceived as a stable and safe environment. For this reason, the decision of the younger generation to leave the United States or Canada in order to settle in a developing country plagued by numerous problems was considered as a kind of a “step backward” that they could not grasp or endorse.

school and was not active in diasporan community organizations and activities. Most of her friends while growing up were non-Armenians. In 2007, she came to Armenia as a volunteer with an organization that brings young diasporans for short projects. The fact that she had just obtained her bachelor's degree was an important life-course stage she was going through at that time. "I had no idea what to do in my life," she said. But she knew that whatever she did, she wanted "to dedicate it somehow to the development of this country [i.e., Armenia]." She described this feeling not as identity preservation, nationalism, or patriotism, but as a "passion," similar to Dikran, that she thought was shaped by two factors. The first was the way she was "raised to care about this place [i.e., Armenia]." The second was her personal interest "in development, and in being part of something that is moving and changing." As a 10-year-old, Dzovag had visited Armenia with other Armenian children on a group trip. It was an emotional experience, but as the years passed, she had not stayed up-to-date with the situation in the country. Thirteen years after that first trip, the volunteering project gave her the opportunity to explore the socioeconomic and political possibilities in Armenia. When she found a job in Yerevan after her volunteer work ended, and met her future husband (a fellow volunteer), she decided to stay.⁹⁹ Her parents have been "very supportive all along." However, her father's initial reaction, when she announced her decision to stay in Armenia, indicated how his ideas of connecting with the homeland were different. His approach leaned more toward an ethnonational and "filiation"-oriented (Tölölyan 2014) direction.

My dad is very patriotic and ... very proud of what I'm doing, bragging to his friends [about it]. [But,] when I first told him that I'm moving here, he said: ... "[Dzovag], you've done your duty. Now it's time to come home." ... In his eyes it was like "you come [to Armenia], and you do your duty as an Armenian; you

⁹⁹ Similar to other examples in different sections of this chapter, Dzovag's case shows how a number of factors were mentioned by returnees as having motivated their migration and long-term settlement decisions.

volunteer, you give to your homeland.” ... This idea of duty is something that is more [widespread among] my parents’ generation than mine. ... But to me it wasn’t even a matter of duty. It was just this is what I want to do.

Alongside her job, Dzovag has been engaged in activities related to environmental pollution and women’s rights in Armenia. These are issues she also cared about in Canada, but in Armenia they feel “more immediate,” because it is a small country. “Here everything is so much in your face ... that you cannot escape it. And whatever happens feels like it affects you more, and you feel whatever you do about it can have more effect.”

2.2. Practical considerations

2.2.1. Return as a life-course transition

Life-stage developments constitute key triggers for many diasporans to decide to immigrate to Armenia. Such changes include, among others, educational transitions (mostly from high school to university), career-related developments (e.g., entry into professional life upon university graduation, retirement), and personal-life events (e.g., divorce, death of spouse, marriage). Previous transnational links (such as short-term personal or family visits) may have connected these people to Armenia, and often essentialized notions of Armenianness and homeland may have abounded during their upbringing and socialization in the family and community life in the diaspora. Nevertheless, the factors that lead many to physically move *at the time they do* include key transitional phases or changes in their life-course path. Periods characterized by sudden transformations in one’s life elicit the need to (re)define one’s future direction. Relocation to a geographical place that is perceived to be familiar or close to heart is

considered as an appropriate strategy for the self to grab on, in search of some sort of stability and (re)direction. Life-course developments often lead to return decisions because they create circumstances associated with practical considerations. These are related to gaining, expanding, or losing various forms of “capital” (Bourdieu 1986), such as academic degrees (“cultural capital”), salary or pension (“economic capital”), family members (“social capital”), etc. Some of these life-stage developments are covered below.

Coming to Armenia for university-level education was an option for some young diasporans even prior to independence, attracting especially those from neutral or pro-Soviet Armenia circles. Some of my interviewees had just embarked on their academic programs or had been working toward their university degrees in Armenia when *glasnost* and *perestroika* swept through the Soviet space in the late 1980s, and the road was being paved for declaration of independence a few years later. Others, mostly Syrian- and Iranian-Armenians, decided to study in Armenia in the post-independence period. The most prominent reasons cited in their narratives include the following: The perceived equivalent or higher quality of education in Armenia (vis-à-vis their countries of residence); lower educational costs (compared to other potential destination countries in the West, for example); proximity to family; and difficulty entering into recognized universities in their countries, especially in such fields as medicine or engineering, often because of the sheer number of applicants and elevated admission requirements. A considerable number among such student immigrants constitute those interested in pursuing fields related to Armenian studies. “Where would I come to learn about Armenian history or literature if not ‘at the center or core’?” is an often made or implied

argument. Such an explanation is sometimes coupled with the fact that advanced levels of study in such fields have often been unavailable in the diaspora. It is also related to the existence of certain cooperation agreements between Armenian universities and diaspora-based educational institutions offering Armenian studies programs.

Another key life-stage development is graduation from university in the diaspora, after which many young diasporans decide to come to Armenia for short-term volunteering or internship programs offered by such organizations as Birthright Armenia (BR) and Armenian Volunteer Corps. The time between degree completion and career-life launch is regarded as the most appropriate period to earn some international experience, explore future directions, get involved in hands-on projects in the homeland, etc. Their attraction to Armenia specifically is induced by either ethnocultural or more cosmopolitan ideas. Such young diasporans rely on their education and skills obtained abroad — that is, primarily their “institutionalized cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) — to find relevant and stimulating projects in Armenia, which also allow them to share and expand their knowledge. But some of them extend their initially set placement duration, and often end up staying after finding a job or marrying a local Armenian or another returnee. Most of these cases are single diasporans hailing from North America. For example, Lucy’s (25, single) upbringing was almost completely American. The daughter of an American mother and a third-generation American-Armenian father, her only connection to Armenianness in the diaspora, according to her, was her last name that ends in –ian and some of the foods she would eat at her paternal grandparents’ house when she was younger. The idea of discovering more about her Armenian heritage had always been in the back of her head ever since, as a teenager, she went to an Armenian church event

with her grandparents. Finding herself surrounded by a large number of Armenians at that gathering, she became conscious of the extent of her disconnect from any distinctive Armenian identity markers. “I realized I wasn’t *really* Armenian. ... I didn’t know *anything* about the culture. ... I was ashamed. I felt like I had been so arrogant to call myself Armenian without knowing anything about it. And I sort of decided that some day I was going to do something about that.” It took Lucy more than a decade to act upon that idea, when she discovered about BR’s volunteering program as she was close to finishing up college in 2011. She was indecisive about her post-graduation plans, and was even uncertain about what kind of jobs she was going to look for. So, when she found out about the volunteering organization online, she quickly decided to apply. “I figured this is as good a time as any; this could give me a goal, something to do, *at a time when I was pretty confused. I was lacking a direction.* So I just sort of found the program by chance and chose it as something to pursue.” After extending her initial volunteering period from six months to one year, Lucy found a job and stayed.

At the other end of the career ladder, retirement is another major life-course event that emerged in the narratives of returnees. Having completed professional duties, and in the absence of family-related commitments (such as taking care of their single adult children), elderly diasporans, mostly from Iran and the United States, move to Armenia. The pensions they receive from other countries allow most of them to support themselves financially. Some of them join their children who have previously decided to settle in Armenia (see section 2.2.3 below), while others initiate the move themselves with the hope of pulling their children in the future.

More dramatic experiences in people's personal or family lives, ranging from marriage to divorce or death of a spouse, lead some diasporans to Armenia. Some move after getting married to a local Armenian or another previously repatriated diasporan-Armenian they met during a visit, while others (mostly men) come to Armenia to try to marry someone from Armenia. In such cases, the prime motivation is to form a family, but usually other factors also push them to migrate. Ani (53) illustrates the more tragic case when the death of a spouse creates a rupture in one's personal and family life, leading one to take drastic recovery measures. Born and raised in Iran, she spent most of her adult life in the US East Coast, where she studied, married an Armenian, and had children. When her husband passed away suddenly, she decided to move with her children to a new country where she did not have any previous connections. She described the rationale behind this decision as follows:

I needed to find myself and my small family. My goal was the well-being of my very young children and the search for my family [in the absence of a father figure]. I was now alone, with two kids. That was my family. In order to grasp that [new reality], I had to go to a place where I did not know anyone [personally or closely].

She thus ruled out going to other big US cities or back to Iran, as she had relatives in all these other places. "That would have defeated the whole purpose of why I was moving," she explained. Some European countries were harder to go to because of language issues. In Armenia at least she knew the language, and she had visited twice before as a tourist. She moved in 1999 initially for one year. But as she felt she was achieving her initial goal and even growing as an individual and professional, she decided to stay. Ani stressed: "I have not come to Armenia because it is the homeland. In my list of where to go and where to live, Armenia was in the last place." She said she did not want to give that "wrong impression." "*Life brought me to Armenia*, and I am very happy and grateful

about that, because this land has been very kind toward me and my children.” She added that “free and independent Armenia” always existed as a dream and ideal in their house, when she was young. Her father, who was politically active in the diasporic community in Iran, had visited Armenia soon after independence.

It’s not that these ideas had not surrounded me. But I think I view Armenia differently. As diasporans, we don’t feel we belong anywhere. ... I lived in the States for around 20 years, and when I go there today, I don’t belong there. I don’t belong here [either]. I don’t belong anywhere. That’s a weird thing.

Such issues related to the returnees’ sense of belonging after relocation will be addressed in more detail in Chapter VII.

2.2.2. Return for job opportunities or business investments

A number of diasporans have moved to Armenia motivated by practical reasons related to securing or expanding economic capital, namely, because of job or investment opportunities. With international educational and/or professional experience, but also knowledge of Armenian language and culture, some of them find high-paid positions in Armenia, compared to local standards. They are especially recruited by embassies, educational institutions, multinational companies, large infrastructural and cultural projects, international organizations, NGOs and think-tanks that are often created, funded, and/or run by diasporan or non-Armenian foreign investors or philanthropists. Lebanese-Armenian Garbis, 41, for example, used to work at a telecom company in Beirut. In 2005, he was offered a position in a sister company in Yerevan. Although he felt an ethnocultural attachment to Armenia, what truly motivated him to immigrate were more objective considerations.

To be totally frank, I had not thought about moving to Armenia before this offer. During a visit in 1991, some feelings were awakened in me toward Armenia. But whether you like it or not, there should be a trigger to make you move from one country to another. In my case, it was this job opportunity that led me to leave Lebanon. And it is good that it happened in Armenia. Otherwise, I could have ended up staying in Lebanon, or perhaps chosen to move to another Arab country, or to the States, where I have some relatives. Had it not been for this job, I wouldn't have come here, or I wouldn't have even considered the possibility. Armenia was not even in my list of countries where I had considered moving to or working in one day. But then, *you go wherever you get a job*.

While some diasporans, like Garbis, consider moving after receiving a job offer from an employer or a business/partnership proposal from an investor (usually a former acquaintance), others take the initiative themselves, seeking out employment opportunities or undertaking investment projects in Armenia. In both cases, however, their decisions are affected by structural factors in the broader economy (in Armenia or the country of former residence). In the initial post-independence years, recruitment of diasporans was needed in some fields or organizations in Armenia because of the lack of local experts with the necessary multilingual skills or multinational professional exposure. In addition, the existence of market gaps or niches in the poorly diversified but developing economy, which was opening up to the capitalist system, prompted diasporans to make investments, sometimes by partnering with locals. While many of these ventures have been unsuccessful or unsustainable, some have survived and even thrived. In a more recent era when global markets have been affected by the financial crisis, some young diasporans have chosen to look for job or investment opportunities in Armenia, in the absence of more lucrative options in their countries of residence. Born and raised in the US East Coast, Sandra (29, single) had been conducting a short-term research project in Armenia in 2012, when she came across an online advertisement of a vacancy in a Yerevan-based educational institution. She found it interesting and applied

for the post before completing her research and heading back to the United States. A year later, she was offered the job and decided to move to Yerevan. Her siblings have spread out in different North American cities to work. “The job market is extremely difficult even in the States. ... Education today doesn’t let you, even in the States, stay where you grew up, because you [often] don’t find the industry or the opportunities you’re looking for in that [specific geographical] area.”

For some of these returnees, the choice of the destination country is driven to a certain extent by an emotional attachment to Armenia — as a homeland to which they feel culturally connected. Others, on the other hand, reject cultural factors or nationalist ideas as being at the root of their decision. Sandra, for example, stated: “I’m here because of the job, not because ‘Oh, I have to live in my homeland’ or similar nationalistic [ideas].” She said she grew up with such ideas; she appreciated and respected them. However, she added: “But something I learned later in my life ... is that we need to be very critical of how we approach nationalism, because it can be really dangerous.”

Even in the cases where diasporic return was primarily motivated by past-oriented dispositions or future-directed imaginations, employment-related issues played an important role in materializing the migration decision or in influencing its timing, as mentioned in several of the examples I have provided above.

2.2.3. Return as family re-unification

In the case of some families, the primary decision maker who decides to move to Armenia is one of the spouses — most often the husband. Sometimes, the couple

continues to live apart; either the wife (and children) stay(s) in the diaspora, or the husband lives and works outside of Armenia. The focus in this section, on the other hand, is on people who join their partner in Armenia. These are usually wives who follow (together with their children, if any) their husbands in order to keep the family together in one place, that is, to preserve an important component of their social capital. In some of these cases, the wives go through depressing times, especially in the beginning. They often direct their negative feelings toward Armenia as the place to be blamed for the situation they are in. Over time, the misery subsides in most cases, often for the sake of the children or in order to save their marriages. Other family members of these women, and especially their mothers, are sometimes the people who encourage them to stay in Armenia and try to deal somehow with their dissatisfaction.

Family re-unification is also a key motivation among some elderly parents who decide to join their adult children, who are the primary decision makers. These people often move to Armenia after retirement or after reaching an age when they need their children's assistance or company. Some of these elderly people, especially mothers,¹⁰⁰ seem to have gone through or continue experiencing a difficult adjustment period, similar to wives who have joined their husbands. Such cases are thus indicative of situations when the "hysteresis effect" for the "habitus" to adapt to the changing "field" (to use Bourdieu's terms) requires much time and effort.¹⁰¹ In addition, these return narratives open up intricate issues related to gender roles and norms in migration, perceptions of family, but also intergenerational dynamics, which protrude in other return situations too (as also

¹⁰⁰ Whom I either interviewed personally or heard about from their children or their spouses.

¹⁰¹ Such adaptation processes will be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter.

mentioned elsewhere in this chapter).¹⁰²

The principal difference between these cases of secondary (so to speak) decision makers and those mentioned above under life-course events (specifically marriage and retirement) is that the main motivating force here seems to be the preservation of a unified family unit or extended family network already existing prior to return, in response to or following the return decision of another member. The other cases are triggered by the initiation of married life or a post-retirement life phase.

To illustrate some of these points, the following few paragraphs will present the story of Lucine, who was 36 when she decided to join her husband (the primary decision maker) in Armenia in 1999. He had moved there from Lebanon a year earlier, motivated mainly by ideological reasons. For years, he had been involved in projects led by one of the traditional diaspora-based political parties that had “come back” to Armenia since the transitional years prior to the 1991 official declaration of independence.

It was his [i.e., her husband’s] personal decision. He never asked me. He said that this is what will end up happening. And it was hard especially because we had children. That has hurt me a bit. It has hurt me. And I always remember, ever since we got married [in the mid-1980s], he used to say: “I will not stay in Lebanon.” And I used to respond: “Armenia is not independent yet.” And when he decided to move in the mid-1990s, I thought it was early. I was totally against the decision. Perhaps it is not right for me to say that, but that’s how I felt. I thought we’d better wait for the children to grow up, for Armenia to turn into a normal country, and then come here, get a job, etc.

For one year after her husband’s relocation, Lucine stayed in Lebanon with the children. But then she realized that her husband, whom she described as “crazily and extremely

¹⁰² Such issues have also been addressed in other studies of diasporic return (e.g., Christou 2011: 254).

patriotic,” would neither come back, nor be convinced to stay in Armenia for a short period of time. Her mother also encouraged her to follow him. “She would always tell me: ‘Go and join your husband. What would staying in Lebanon with your kids add to your life?’” When the following year Lucine came to Armenia, she and her children initially found it difficult to adapt to the new setting. When I met her in March 2013, she seemed to have coped to a large extent with her initial unease, which she described as follows:

I was suddenly cut off from my surroundings. I was a bit depressed. It was also hard for the kids, and that affected me too. So, during that depressing phase, I didn’t want to interact with anybody. I used to feel like a stranger [*odar*]; as if it [i.e., the new environment] wasn’t mine. The place we had rented had a view of Mount Ararat. I used to go out on the balcony and talk to Ararat. I used to swear at it [*laughs*].

Lucine went back to visit Lebanon three times just the first year. And she made daily phone calls to her parents. “But then I told myself: ‘You should get out of this situation.’ And I used to try to uplift myself psychologically, thinking to myself: ‘Where have you come? You have come to your homeland, no matter what has happened. You shouldn’t view everything in a negative manner.’” The ideological return rationale of Lucine’s husband was in some kind of struggle with her more practical and immediate concerns about the well-being of her children and preservation of the family nucleus. She tried to somehow reconcile the hegemonic, in this case male-dominated, conceptions of homeland and belonging with her role as a wife and mother. Although Armenia was important as a homeland for Lucine too, the primary factor that had led her to migrate was family re-unification. “I came to save my family,” she told me. Had she not followed her husband to Armenia, her family would become “dispersed.” It would have either resulted in divorce, or a split family, which could have potentially led to her separation

from her children. She “never wanted that to happen.” Thus, her case reflects how some gender roles and norms play out in the migration situation.

In some of these family re-unification cases, gender roles are inextricably linked to financial matters. The image of the self-sacrificing wife and mother in a family where the father figure protrudes as an autonomous or primary decision maker is compounded by the financial dynamics within the family. This is especially highlighted in families where the husband’s decision to move to Armenia in the first place is motivated by economic factors, such as finding a job, making an investment, etc. In several of these cases, I met women who had to stay home to take care of their children, at least for a period of time, while their husbands remained the sole or main bread-winners of their families. Lucine, for example, did not work for the first eight years of settlement in Armenia. Such differences in the motivations of men and women migrants have also been highlighted in other studies, as Thomson (1999: 29) shows, where women’s life stories emphasize “the significance of relationships rather than the sense of autonomous agency apparent in men’s stories.”

Unlike Lucine’s example, other cases involving a family’s migration to Armenia do not involve a male family member as the primary decision maker. In some families, the spouses seem to have made a joint decision, strategizing their move in a mutual manner. Still in other cases, the wife appears to have been the main initiator or the person more enthusiastic about the move. What is similar in the majority of the cases, however, is the male migrant’s preoccupation with finding and maintaining a secure income source for the family after migration. In some families, this derives to a certain extent from practical

considerations. For example, in the absence of close relatives that can help out with child care in Armenia, the wives often have to avoid or postpone working outside of the house, at least for long hours or until the children reach a certain age. However, it also results from certain gender norms, whereby husbands are expected to be tasked with bread-winning. For instance, one Canadian-Armenian returnee told me that she had been a more ardent advocate of her family's immigration to Armenia. She explained that she often found herself assuaging her more reluctant husband's hesitation, prior to their move. She argued: "That is normal, because he is a man, and he is more concerned about how he is going to bring bread to the table." His concerns were aggravated when, having left his high-paying job in Canada, he faced difficulties finding stable employment in Armenia after relocation. He is also worried that he might be unable to re-enter the Canadian job market, if they decide to go back one day. "So he has many doubts and I have to be, again, the person who motivates him, who demonstrates or reminds him of the positive aspects [of our decision]."

2.2.4. Return as an act of fleeing

Escaping or breaking free from an undesirable or disappointing situation in the country of birth or former residence is mentioned in some of my interviews as a reason for wanting to *emigrate*. Some of the situations that returnees cite about themselves or others as having triggered the push to leave their former environment include: personal economic problems or financial losses; family disagreements; compulsory military service (especially in the case of Iranian- and Syrian-Armenian men); involvement in fraud or criminal activity; war and its consequences (such as in Iraq and more recently Syria); discrimination; and undesirable social and political conditions or developments.

Examples of the latter include the inability of some American-Armenians to identify with certain US government policies after 9/11 in general, but also the way they are viewed by some Americans in their surroundings. Some Iranian-Armenians, and to a lesser extent Syrian-Armenians, also express dissatisfaction with the closed nature and tightly controlled way of social life in Iran and Syria, often associated with their religious differences from the majority of the population. For example, several young Iranian-, but also some Syrian-Armenian women, argued that the perceived more liberal lifestyle in Armenia offers them a way out of the more confined societal and family rules dominant in Iran and Syria.¹⁰³ In Armenia, they feel they have greater freedom especially in terms of clothing and social life. For returnees motivated by the escape rationale, the selection of Armenia as an *immigration* destination is based on a wide range of other factors: geographical proximity, ability to receive a visa/residency permit/citizenship more easily than elsewhere, emotional attachment, presence of previously repatriated friends or relatives, etc.

The disenchantment that Levon faced in Syria because of some financial and personal problems led him to look for a new beginning. Born in Beirut in 1974, he and his family moved to Syria in 1982. He stayed there until 2003, when he immigrated alone to Armenia. Two years earlier, he had a huge financial loss. He had bought a property from an Arab Muslim and had furnished it using a loan; it was meant to become his and his fiancée's future home and his workplace. He unexpectedly found out however that the purchase transaction was a scam. He ended up losing the property, and had to go through a very tough time to repay his loan. He also broke up with his fiancée. "In short, I was

¹⁰³ This gendered aspect of the escape rationale is also discussed by King and Christou (2014: 90-91).

disappointed from life there, from people, from everything. ... I just spit on everything and moved out. ... After paying back my loan, I bought a one-way ticket and came to Armenia.” Despite the, mostly financial, difficulties he initially faced in the new environment, he never wanted to look back. “I used to tell myself: ‘It’s better to stay here and beg money than to go back to Syria and see everything [i.e., that reminded him of his disappointments there] again.’ So, the only goal was to take myself away from that place.” What pulled him toward Armenia specifically seems to be related to an emotional attachment to an environment that was perceived as safe, “familiar,” and “comfortable” for Armenians. In this regard, he had been especially influenced by his father, who used to tell him: “Whatever happens, Armenia is your country, your land, where even the waste collector is Armenian. There, nobody can tell you ‘what are you doing here?’ In Europe, for example, it’s not like that. If you go to France or England, they’ll tell you ‘you’re not French or English.’”

The escape rationale is usually not an openly admitted return motivation. For obvious reasons, it was somehow difficult to obtain hard evidence or open confessions by interviewees about some of the above-mentioned escape factors, especially those related to unlawful backgrounds or traumatic personal experiences. In addition, diasporans who were motivated to move to Armenia primarily because of wars in their countries of birth or former residence, more particularly Iraqi- and Syrian-Armenians, were not the focus of my research, as explained in Chapter I.

Sometimes, the escape rationale is also viewed in a negative or condescending manner by people who have immigrated to Armenia for other, especially more ideological, reasons.

Thus, several of my interviewees emphatically dissociated themselves from the escape rationale, stressing that it was Armenia that had pulled them to migrate. In order to convince me of the credibility of their argument, some of them underlined the fact that they had stable and high incomes in the diaspora. Others highlighted that they were very well accepted and highly respected as Armenians and as individuals in their former countries.

In some cases, where the primary factor that has motivated a person to move to Armenia is related more to internalized dispositions or projective aspirations, an external threat or disillusionment in the former environment deepens his/her desire or makes it more pressing. I have alluded to this point in some previous examples, such as the cases of Sarine (Iranian Revolution and Iran–Iraq War) and Houry (discrimination by non-Armenian classmates).

3. Disentangling the Semantics: Repat? Migrant? Expat?

The terms used by my interviewees to describe their migration to Armenia depended to a large extent on their conceptions of homeland and their return rationales covered above.¹⁰⁴ My interviewees and I rarely used the words “return” and “returnee,” or their Armenian equivalents (*veradardz* and *veradardzogh*), in our conversations. Some returnees preferred the term “repatriation” (*hairenadartzutiun* in Armenian) to describe their move. This was especially the case with people whose primary motivations for migrating to Armenia were ethnocultural or ideological. The terms “repatriation” or “repatriate” (or their Armenian equivalents) are also commonly used by state agencies,

¹⁰⁴ Most of the returnees cited here were already introduced in previous sections.

non-governmental organizations, and political parties — including the RA Ministry of Diaspora and the NGO RepatArmenia Foundation¹⁰⁵ (See ‘Department of repatriation and investigations’ n.d.; ‘The RAF’ n.d.).¹⁰⁶ Some of my interviewees thus seemed to self-identify as repats not necessarily because of their ethnocultural or ideological motivations, but mainly because of the widespread use of the label by others, or for lack of a better alternative word to describe themselves. Canadian-Armenian Dzovag, for example, said she is reluctant to use the term “repat” because, according to her, it has the connotation of forced migration. In addition, the re- prefix implies return, which strictly speaking does not apply to her case. She explained: “I was not born here. So, I haven’t returned, technically.” Despite these issues, she uses it because it is “the most commonly used” word and she does “not have a better term.”

And while Dzovag did not refuse to use the term “repatriation” altogether in spite of her hesitation, a few of my interviewees explicitly rejected to describe their move as such. Some, such as Ani, argued that the term was too ideologically loaded, and hence it did not correspond to or reflect accurately the life-course factors that had primarily motivated her to migrate to Armenia. Others thought that it was more evocative of the Soviet-era *nerkaght* movement, which, by virtue of its chronology and state-organized nature, lacks resemblance to their own post-independence, self-initiated decision. Still others,

¹⁰⁵ The Foundation also uses the word “return,” as stated in its mission (‘The RAF’ n.d.). The organization’s official Armenian name is *Veradardz Hayastan* (Return to Armenia).

¹⁰⁶ The use of these terms by Armenian organizations and their leaders is sometimes driven by ideological motivations. It is also affected by the way they define the term diaspora. Many of these organizations adopt or favor, whether explicitly or implicitly, a definition that encompasses not only the descendants of Genocide survivors or of ethnic Armenians who had left historically Armenian territories before the Genocide (such as most Iranian-Armenians), but also more recent, especially post-independence, emigrants (and their offspring) from Armenia. My research, on the other hand, excludes the latter group, as explained in Chapter I.

especially some descendants of Genocide survivors, avoided it because the present RA is not the *patria* or land that their ancestors were deported from. As American-Armenian Sandra explained:

I would never call myself a repat. I'm not [a repat]. ... I came here because I could get a job. I'm not a patriot. I'm not a die-hard. And why am I *repatriating*? My ancestors did not grow up here. ... If I was to repatriate, it would be to Palu. But that doesn't even make sense today. Like, what does that mean? So, I don't even want to associate with that. ... It's not who I am.

Unlike Sandra's pragmatic (employment-related) return rationale, Syrian-Armenian Sipan's decision to move to Armenia was mainly driven by ethnocultural and identity-related factors. However, he too was dismissive of the term "repatriation." He considered that tying it to patriotism is problematic, and he preferred to describe his decision as "migration." He argued as follows:

I subconsciously consider that Cilicia or Western Armenia is my fatherland. Today, however, this geographical area [i.e., the present RA] plays the role of fatherland, because it is a place where I personally feel more comfortable living than anywhere else. But I never link patriotism to repatriation. ... In fact, the word that describes our case is migration. ... We just label it repatriation, "*Ari Tun*."¹⁰⁷ But in reality it has all the components and issues that come with changing places; it contains the issues of placement, job search, language, culture, history, adaptation. ... However, people often call it repatriation and falsely consider repats as heroes. That is very unfair, because if those who come to [live in] the fatherland are heroes, then those who do not are traitors? ... So, I think that this is just migration, movement from one place to another place, which we must not label [as repatriation]. ... Our case would be repatriation if our lands, from where we [i.e., his ancestors] had been forced to leave, were to be returned to us, and we were to go back there.

The emphasis on mobility or migration mentioned by Sipan was also highlighted in other ways that many of my interviewees described themselves or their decisions. Some referred to themselves as "Armenians who have come from outside [of Armenia]" (*drsits/dursen yekatz hayer*), or more simply "comers from outside" (*drsits/dursen*

¹⁰⁷ He refers to the RA Diaspora Ministry's program that brings young diasporan-Armenians to Armenia for short visits.

yekatzner). In daily conversations and during my interviews with them, the more common ways they identified themselves as were: “diasporans” (*spiurkahayer*) or “diasporans who live in/have moved to Armenia” (*spiurkahayer vor Hayastan k’apring/teghapokhuatz enq*). Such self-descriptions were particularly widespread among those who were primarily motivated by factors that are not closely linked to ideological rationales.

Finally, “expat” was a less common term used by very few of my interviewees, especially those who had decided to move to Armenia primarily for economic reasons. Arakel, for example, moved from the United States to Armenia, with his wife and children, after he got an enticing job offer in 2005. Ethnocultural factors, especially the preservation of their children’s Armenian identity, had played a role in their decision to move. However, the job opportunity had been the primary motivational factor. At the time of my interview with the couple, they were both earning salaries, which, according to them, were “very high compared to RA standards,” and even higher than the rest of their diasporan acquaintances who lived in Armenia. That gave them the “freedom” to make investments, travel frequently, afford to have household help, register their children at extracurricular activities classes in Yerevan, as well as send them to summer visits to the United States, etc. Thus, Arakel admitted that they have “many privileges” in Armenia, which are “comparable to other expats,” such as Americans he has encountered in Southeast Asia.

I think, in many ways, we have similarities to such expatriates, who go somewhere, feel comfortable, and decide to stay there — a place that is not related to their ethnic background or to their past. But there are probably also some important differences; the fact that an Armenian is going to Armenia and not Thailand, for example. ... I cannot know [exactly] to what extent [my decisions and feelings] are related to the fact that I am Armenian, and to what extent to the typical behavior of

an expatriate.

Making an analogy between their case and that of non-Armenian expats did not trouble Arakel. Some other returnees, however, especially those motivated by more ideological return rationales, denounced what they perceived as the overemphasis on the “*Oor hats, hon gats*” (“wherever there is bread, stay there”) mentality among those who had moved to Armenia because of attractive job offers especially in multinational organizations, embassies, etc. Others also criticized them for not trying to integrate into Armenian society, as shown in the below quote:

They have created a ghetto-like surrounding for themselves and their families — a very nice, pleasant bubble. ... *They are like expats* ... They are very happy here, because (and I have heard this from them) they would not have been able to receive [compensation and benefits] packages in other places (especially at the time they moved here), covering their rent, bills, car... They are surrounded by nannies and housekeepers, a comfort they wouldn't find elsewhere. But if they are offered a job with a similar package in a different place, perhaps in a more “civilized” country, they would certainly leave. ... So, their life in Armenia resembles more that of a diasporan tourist than that of a person who gets anguished and torments his mind out of concern for the homeland's problems. (Alik, female, 37, Lebanon)

Conclusion

After an introductory section about the returnees' conceptualizations of homeland, this chapter largely focused on their motivations for moving to Armenia. Although I have divided that part into various return rationales, I have done so mainly for heuristic purposes. I have argued and have tried to demonstrate that a number of factors — related to dispositions, imaginations, and practical considerations — influence, in various ways and directions, the immigration decision. For this reason, I have avoided descriptions that could falsely allude to the existence of a causal relationship between a specific factor and the return decision.

The analysis was made even more complex given the fact that when narrating their return decisions — which, in the case of my study focusing on long-term settlement, have usually been made years ago — their stories were often enmeshed with observations and examples from their lives in Armenia. Thus, the relationship between the different factors became even more convoluted, because migrants recounted their life stories and rationalized their return decisions in a retrospective manner. The returnees' post-return experiences which will be discussed in the next two chapters — that is, the realities they face, the choices they make, and perceptions they develop as long-term RA residents — affect their recollection of past events. Thus, the answer to the question “why and how did you decide to move to Armenia?” is often an *ex post facto* reconstruction. For this reason, the motivations outlined in this chapter should not be viewed as belonging to a spatially and chronologically distinct decision-making phase in a returnee's life, that is, a clearly defined point on a linear process. At the same time, however, the way returnees perceive their lives and identities in Armenia following return often depends on the initial factors that motivated them to move and the expectations they had before relocating. Therefore, the material presented in this and the next chapters should be understood as a part of returnees' life stories or trajectories that encompass pre- and post-return spaces, experiences, and identities. As Thomson (1999: 35-36) argues, this “retrospectivity of remembered oral testimony - so often the object of methodological concern - is in fact a unique opportunity. The migration experience continues throughout the life course of the migrant.” These “moving stories,” as he calls them, are “constantly evolving,” thus “presenting living histories in every sense of the term and a unique resource and opportunity for social and historical understanding.”

In general, however, regardless of the specific motivating factor(s) present in each case, some sort of emotional attachment to Armenia — though expressed in different ways and with various intensity levels — seemed to exist among if not all, at least the vast majority, of my interviewees. It is perhaps for this reason that, for most returnees I interviewed, the post-return experiences, integration processes, and (re-)evaluations of identity and belonging (to be covered extensively in the next two chapters) — and the hardships and disappointments they often give rise to — were not considered to be unbearable. Thus, they were usually not sufficient to make them regret their initial decision or push them to emigrate.¹⁰⁸ Those who were open to the possibility of future emigration, or had concrete plans to leave Armenia, stated that the reasons would be or were related to personal or economic issues, to the lack of educational or professional growth opportunities in Armenia, or to their distrust of the regime in bringing about the necessary changes and development they expected or wanted to see in the country.

¹⁰⁸ A similar conclusion has also been reached by a recent small-scale study (Balayan et al. 2013: 86) on 22 Armenian diasporan returnees from the Arab Middle East, particularly Syria (the majority of whom had moved prior to the Syrian conflict).

CHAPTER VI

The Habitus in the New Sociocultural Space: Reproduction, Adjustment, and Other Hysteresis-Management Strategies

Introduction

When Sirun, 47, and her husband were contemplating moving from Canada to Armenia in the mid-late 1990s, her husband had expressed concerns. As a “traditional Armenian man,” as Sirun described, he was worried that he might not be able to fulfill his “responsibility” of taking care of his family financially. Sirun, on the other hand, was very optimistic about her job prospects in Armenia. She was confident that she would be able to find a high-paying job in an international organization, relying on her academic degree obtained in Canada. “I had a very arrogant attitude that I come from the epicenter of the universe, I have a great education, and I have good knowledge. I’m going to come and I’m going to get a job at the UN.” In addition, having grown up in an environment where “notions of womanhood and feminism” were powerful, she was convinced that she would be capable to handle everything related to maintaining a household, even in a new environment. She was used to thinking “oh, I don’t need my husband; I can do anything,” because while in Canada, she was used to taking care of most household duties on her own.

However, when they moved to Armenia in 2001, she very quickly realized that her enthusiasm and confidence were overrated. The first two years after immigration were the worst period of the mismatch — or “hysteresis” in Bourdieu’s vocabulary — between her habitus and the new environment. She had an “intellectual, physical, and

spiritual breakdown,” even though she had been more enthusiastic about moving to Armenia than her husband. She felt she “could not function.” Her children were facing several adjustment problems particularly at school. She was upset that she was not always capable of assisting them with their homework. Even though she was fluent in Western Armenian, she had always studied school subjects in English and was not familiar with technical terms in Armenian, and especially Eastern Armenian. In addition, she soon realized that relying on her academic degree — or “institutionalized cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986) — to support her family financially was not as easy as she had initially thought. The role she had to play as a mother prevailed over her plans to continue working full time. She realized that she had to put her career aside and stay at home for a few years in order to help and take care of her children during the transition phase. She had no close relatives — or “social capital” — around to assist her with child care. She also found out that her academic degree was not sufficient to secure her a high-level job in Armenia. “You come and you realize that there is so much you don’t know, so much about the world [you are not aware of]. Because you’re from North America, ... you are so insularized; everything is about the United States or about Canada. [We think] we’re the best countries in the planet. Well, we’re not. OK?” The image of the self-reliant and dynamic woman she had built in Canada crumbled as she discovered she could not even handle simple chores. She would go to pay the household bills, and she would be stunned that people would not line up. Or, she would go grocery shopping, and she would be overwhelmed by how sellers would rush toward her in an attempt to market their products. She felt like a “scared child.” She would often return home without having completed any errands. The fact they had sold their house and

business in Canada before moving made her feel even more insecure. These initial experiences in Armenia were unexpected to a large extent. During two short visits to Armenia prior to relocating, Sirun had felt a strong “connection” to the country. Even though she had seen first-hand some of the difficulties during these visits, and her husband had warned her beforehand, romantic visions of *hairenik* had played an overwhelming role in motivating her relocation decision. “I came blindly,” she admitted. Confronted with the practical and emotional realities on the ground after immigration, her habitus went through a serious “hysteresis” situation, which she seemed to have largely overcome when I met her in June 2013.

Almost all the returnees I interviewed described “hysteresis” situations similar, though not always as grave or multifaceted, as the one faced by Sirun. These experiences are often caused by practical or objective factors that are related to the act of migrating per se. In this regard, they do not differ greatly from the adjustment problems of most migrants — diasporan returnees or not. Nevertheless, more emotional factors also come into play in the case of most of these Armenian diasporic returnees. These subjective experiences are associated with the homeland de-idealization that many returnees go through, as well as their perceptions of local Armenian (as opposed to diasporan) habitus.

In this chapter, I first describe this homeland de-idealization process. Then, I shed light on some of the main differences returnees feel they have from local Armenians, that is, on the way(s) they perceive and rationalize the deviation of local lifestyle, cultural practices, and values from their own diasporan habitus. Next, relying on another Bourdieusian concept, namely, “capital,” I decipher how returnees try to navigate or

manage hysteresis situations. How do they deal with their dislocated and disrupted habitus, that is, with the disturbed alignment between their long-standing dispositions and the new field structures in Armenia? I show how returnees use various forms of capital they already possess or have brought with them, as well as new capital they acquire, create, or amass in Armenia in order to position their habitus in the new environment. Following various strategies, consciously or unconsciously, they sometimes reproduce their entrenched dispositions. At other times, they re-evaluate and adjust them. More often, these two processes co-exist within the same person.

1. De-idealization Process: Visions and Expectations Meet “Real” Life in Present Armenia

By settling in Armenia, returnees are exposed to the daily developments and changes undergoing in the country. Many of them may have been somehow familiar with the situation in Armenia, because of previous visits¹⁰⁹ or because of their former involvement in certain diasporic organizations that maintained contact with or implemented projects in the country. Nevertheless, nuances and subtle details about life in Armenia emerge only after residing there for a long period of time.

Many returnees describe how the pre-migration visions of Armenia that existed in their minds and hearts had been shaped through their socialization while living in the diaspora.

¹⁰⁹ Out of my 104 main interviewees, 92 had visited Armenia at least once prior to relocation, whether during the Soviet or post-Soviet period. Summer visits for tourism, short-term assignments (volunteering, internships, job placements or investments, research projects, etc.), reconnaissance or trial trips to explore or prepare for future relocation, and previous longer stays as part of immigration attempts are some of the types of such visits.

Their perceptions and expectations of Armenia prior to their first visit, and especially before their relocation, had been influenced by their schooling, education from parents and other elders, involvement in diasporan organizations, as well as publications, photographs, paintings, and other objects they had seen over the years. For many of them, the “homeland” or “fatherland” (*hairenik*) and its inhabitants had an idealized existence. Besides its natural beauty, historical value, and cultural importance, it was supposed to be a depository of Armenians with certain national and pan-human qualities. The narratives of many returnees about their diasporic lives point to a self- and group-image that depicts Armenians as being bright, hard-working, respectable, trustworthy, honest, and well-mannered. The epitome of good Armenianness, at least to a certain extent, seems to have been molded around these perceptions for many of my participants. They thus anticipated the homeland to be a haven of these qualities. Describing her experience of being raised in the Armenian diasporic community in Canada, Sirun, for example, listed some of these self- and group-perceptions: “An Armenian had to be smarter, to have a better education, to be more honorable.” She expected to find this idealized version of Armenians in the homeland. To her surprise, she did not: “[And then] you come to Armenia and you realize that ‘oh my God, there is an Armenian prostitute; oh my God, there’s someone who’s corrupt, who’s killing and raping.’”

This idealization of the homeland is justified by many returnees as having been a necessary survival strategy adopted in the diaspora to ensure the preservation of Armenian identity among subsequent generations of diasporans. Living as minority communities in majority environments, they sought to minimize wrongdoings, avoid suspicious or disloyal attitudes, and refrain from unfavorable behaviors that could have

raised eyebrows among *odars* (foreigners). Others criticize such romantic visions. For Sirun, for example, they are “warped, demented preconceived notions of what *hairenik* or homeland is or should be ... that are a great dis-service.” They have created false expectations and hence bigger disappointment, for herself or other diasporans she knows, when they actually visited or started living in Armenia.

For many of those who had visited Armenia prior to relocation, including Sirun, the first (or subsequent) short-term visit(s) bring(s) to the fore a part of the dissociation between “imagined” and “real” Armenia. However, the reality check is highlighted especially once their status changes from that of an, often romantic, diasporan tourist to that of a long-term RA resident. The distinction between *hairenik* and *Hayastan* (Armenia in Armenian) becomes obvious.

This process of gradually casting aside romanticized images of the homeland sometimes involves placing an increasing emphasis on the *people* living in Armenia and their concerns, rather than on *territorialized* conceptions of *homeland*. As one returnee said, she now associates the idea of *hairenik* “first of all with the people [*zhoghovurd, mard*],” and less with “land [*hogh*].” She added: “Our symbol is not Mount Ararat. It is the people who believe in Ararat.” Similarly, another returnee, Alik, 37, who was born in Syria but grew up mostly in Lebanon, agreed that after moving to Armenia, her perception of homeland became strongly interlinked with the people living there, including the leaders who govern the country.

When I was living in the diaspora, fatherland was like a very beautiful vase, with gorgeous decorative patterns — its culture, literature, history, air, water...

Fatherland was Ararat, Vernissage,¹¹⁰ the churches. Now, all of these things are the spices of the fatherland that sometimes I don't even notice, because the essence, its deeper level, is the human being — the people, the army, the soldiers, the children, the elderly, as well as the leaders (as if) elected by the people, who speak and take decisions on behalf of all the above, and who can sell or purchase the fatherland with a mere movement of a finger, at the stroke of a pen.

In this process of placing increasing emphasis on the people and leaders living in the present RA, another point that is implied or explicitly expressed by some returnees is the importance of the state as an important element for the preservation of the Armenian nation. However, some of them caution that taking this idea to the extreme — that is, completely devaluing the diaspora's role and overrating the Armenian state's role — poses challenges too.

One point I would like to highlight related to this de-idealization process is that in many cases it happens gradually and its effects become much more obvious or powerful to the returnees, at least at a conscious level, several years after relocation. In addition, because of the dynamic changes happening in Armenia in the post-Soviet era, returnees continually define and redefine their perceptions of the new environment, their position in the rapidly changing fabric of the society, and their identity in the evolving social and cultural norms.¹¹¹ As Iranian-Armenian Aspet's account attests, for several years after moving to Armenia in 1996, he only gave heed to the positive aspects of Armenia and people living there, while being oblivious or immune to the negative. Initially, he had an

¹¹⁰ This is an open-air market in central Yerevan, which attracts a lot of tourists (including diasporans) who are interested in buying traditional artworks and jewelry, among other things.

¹¹¹ This is one evidence that supports my argument, outlined in Chapter II, that *long-term* diasporic return migration deserves more attention. Its study provides particularly valuable insights in the case of countries undergoing transitional periods or dramatic transformations, such as Armenia in the post-Soviet era.

optimistic perspective about everything. It was a period when romantic ideas and feelings were prevalent.

You speak Armenian all the time, everybody is Armenian around you. [You're breathing Armenia's] air, [drinking its] water. You're happy. ... I used to notice only the trees that were not cut.¹¹² In the first days, when we used to visit local friends and have drinks with them, we used to take great delight in the affectionate toasts they used to make: "Oh, miraculous; such beautiful words." ... I used to think: "What a wonderful people! They're so supportive."

In the beginning, he also thought that the only thing needed to improve the socioeconomic and political situation in Armenia was time and that there were some positive changes happening in the country. Over the years, however, his outlook was transformed. "Then, I gradually started seeing the trees that were cut and the illegal constructions. Things discolored little by little. I felt that the words [accompanying the drinks] were just being repeated; there was no real meaning in them." He also started realizing that creating a really independent and democratic society was not that easily and foreseeably achievable. He argued that this change in his perspective was not only an internal, subjective process, but also related to some objective changes Armenia has undergone as a country during the years. For example, he explained that socioeconomic polarization has become more accentuated over time, making him more pessimistic about the country's development.

This de-idealization process kindles potent emotions especially among returnees who belong to generations that were raised in diasporic communities when Armenia was still a Soviet country. They were temporally closer to the Genocide survivors' memories and

¹¹² The energy crisis that Armenia suffered in the early 1990s, mostly caused by the blockade that Turkey and Azerbaijan imposed, compelled Armenians to cut down thousands of trees for firewood.

visions of the ancestral homeland (currently in Turkey), and spatially detached from Soviet Armenia.¹¹³ Araks, 45, explained that especially for the generations of diasporans, including herself, that grew up with grandparents (or great-grandparents) from Western Armenia, the stories they heard were those of “a very different place from this place.” She was born and raised in the US East Coast, but she had the opportunity to hear the stories of her grandmother and great-aunt, who were both Genocide survivors. They both had a lot of memories of growing up in a rural area of Kharpert (now in Turkey). Thus, for Araks, *hairenik* was a “very sort of intangible, idealistic thing.” The “biggest challenge” when she visited the RA before moving, but also after immigrating, “was to come to terms with the reality in Armenia, and just realize that this is an actual country.” She explained: “[I became aware of the fact that it is] not *only* that picture that I had in my head for many years. It’s *Hayastan* and not only *hairenik*. It *is hairenik*, for sure, but it’s also a real country; it has streets, it has a police force, it has structures.” And even though Araks recognized this challenge, she thought that it still is and will probably always continue to be a struggle. The “vision” (as she called it) she was raised with is so deeply ingrained in her that reconciling it with the reality on the ground requires a long time.

Unlike Araks, the contrast between the “imagined” and the “real” does not constitute a major issue for those coming with fewer expectations of what Armenia is or should be like. This is especially the case with a smaller number of returnees whose connections to

¹¹³ Travel restrictions existed particularly for diasporans closer to ARF circles — a significant section of the diaspora. Even those who were allowed or had the opportunity to visit Soviet Armenia often could not freely experience the country. Surveillance by Soviet authorities was ubiquitous, as some of the returnees I interviewed described, based on their personal experiences of visiting Soviet Armenia.

Armenianness — in its various manifestations — had been loose in the diaspora. In addition, for younger generations of diasporans, the everyday realities of post-Soviet Armenia have been more accessible — if not fully, at least to a greater extent. The nostalgic attachment to homeland often formed a key part of their upbringing too. However, the faster and easier movement of people, knowledge, and ideas in the globalized and interconnected world experienced by this generation — where the internet and social media have assumed an increasingly important role in information provision and sharing — have helped shape more realistic expectations and more animate images of Armenia than the idealized and still conceptions of many members of former generations.

For some returnees such as Aspet, getting to know the “real” Armenia causes disillusionment and frustration, which does or does not fade away with time. Others value the experience of moving to Armenia even more because of it. For example, the process of getting to know the “real” Armenia has made Canadian-Armenian Dzovag more motivated and energized. She has become a “realistic idealist.” She said she has always been an idealistic person who wanted to make a positive impact in the world. However, she did not have a way to “frame her passions,” related to development and efforts aimed at making “the world a better place.”

Coming here has really helped me concretize my idealism, and actually put it to action. ... I always had these lofty ideas [that] weren't tangible, and [Armenia] is helping me make them tangible. Being here I definitely have some down times, but in that way, it's a recharge for me.

Others admit they have reached a middle ground. For instance, Manouk likened his experience with Armenia to a relationship or marriage, where “first there is infatuation,

then it's being in love, and then it's love." In the beginning, he said, what mattered most were Armenia and its well-being. Besotted with the positive sides of everything in Armenia, he used to turn a blind eye to its defects. Over time, however, "the relationship became more normal, more balanced. ... I started changing and saying: 'Wait a minute! Why should everything be about Armenia? No, let it change. It must change. We must work to change it too.'"

Usually (though not always), the process of de-romanticization of Armenia leads to greater disappointment and pessimism among those who have moved to Armenia primarily motivated by ethnocultural and ideological factors, such as Aspet. On the other hand, people driven by more cosmopolitan and universal values, such as Dzovag, often tend to be less (adversely) affected by the de-idealization process.

2. Interacting With "Locals": Differences Surface Between "Us" and "Them"

— Disillusionment and Acceptance

As mentioned above, the process of de-idealization of homeland gives rise to an increased emphasis on the people living in Armenia. As returnees immerse themselves into daily life and society in Armenia, they interact with Armenia-born Armenians (*hayastanadzin hayer*), more commonly referred to as *hayastantsis* (Armenians from *Hayastan*) or simply "locals" (*teghatsis*).¹¹⁴ Long-term return does not resemble previous visits, when many of them came as tourists or for other projects. During such short-term

¹¹⁴ Some returnees from the Arab Middle East also use the Arabic word *mahalli* (meaning local). This term is especially common in daily conversations (sometimes in a derogatory manner), or in contexts when they do not want locals to understand that they are talking about them. In the rest of this section, I will use the term "local(s)" or "*hayastantsi(s)*."

stays, they were not extensively exposed to daily relationships with locals. They often remained within the confines of their own family, circle of friends, or special project structures. After relocation, however, as these interactions become more frequent, diverse, and long-term — combined with the above-described de-idealization process — returnees come across certain perceived commonalities and differences with locals. The perceived differences predominate their narratives. Commonalities are most probably viewed as normal or expected, given that locals are considered members of the same nation or ethnic group. Differences are more difficult to rationalize or cope with. The values, traditions, attitudes, and behaviors returnees experience among locals are compared to their previous diasporic existence, to Armenians from their diasporic community (or the diaspora in general), or to the culture of their former countries.

In their accounts, returnees mention a large number of differences between their habitus — that is, what is familiar or comfortable to them — and that of locals. Differences noticed between the wider political, economic, educational, and other societal systems in Armenia and those in their former countries range from issues related to governance, rule of law, bureaucracy, and corruption to socioeconomic inequalities, unemployment, health care, education, and army-related issues, among others. I will not focus on these issues here, because they are related to the general environment or situation in Armenia; they do not affect only diasporan returnees but also other people living in the country. Other differences include cultural issues (language and orthography, cultural heritage and homogeneity, etc.), social and ethical values (gender relations, workplace interactions, individual versus collective concerns, etc.), lifestyle matters (cuisine, hospitality etiquette, etc.), religious practices and rituals (funerals, weddings, celebration of

holidays, etc.), and other behavioral matters and traditions. Some of these issues are also not necessarily unique to diasporan returnees, because they could have been experienced even by non-diasporan migrants to Armenia (or migrants to any country, for that matter). Thus, they are not usually loaded with the emotional and identity tensions that I am interested in examining further in the rest of this chapter and the next one. Therefore, here, I will provide examples of the most prominent or repeated perceived differences that are pertinent to diasporic return specifically.

As illustrated in some of the below examples, returnees try to rationalize these differences, regardless of how they view them — positively or negatively. They try to find explanations to justify why such differences exist or how they become perpetuated. Some resort to historical analyses to shed light on what they believe the root-causes of these variations are. The most commonly mentioned sources include: 1) The long history of differences between Eastern and Western Armenians because of the geographic separation and rule under different empires over the centuries (Eastern Armenia under the Persian and then Russian, while Western Armenia under the Roman, Byzantine, and subsequently Ottoman empires); 2) The impact of the former Soviet regime on the education and values of local Armenians; 3) The effect of the difficulties endured by local Armenians during the years immediately preceding and following independence; and 4) The influence of the diasporic experience and of the interaction with non-Armenians in the “host” countries on the returnees’ own behaviors and lifestyles or in general on diasporan culture. The majority of differences are attributed to the second (Soviet past) and fourth (diasporic existence) reasons, as shown in some of the following sub-sections. In many of these rationalizations, the differences returnees experience are

thus attributed to external forces. Environmental or historical factors are accused of having distorted the “true” character of Armenians or having deviated Armenian culture and identity from its “right” path or “unified” roots. This attitude is similar to the feelings Christou (2011) found among second-generation Greek-Danes with regard to their experiences when visiting or returning to Greece. As she explained, many of her participants expressed their disappointment that “‘Greece had changed’ and it was not exactly the place of their imagination or of their parents’ memories, or even of their own memories of ‘homecoming’ visits.” They lamented, for example, that “the homogenous, safe, authentic ethnocultural homeland of their childhood memories and their (grand)parents’ storytelling” had been “contaminated” and transformed into “a modernised, multicultural, expensive country of materialist consumption and fast-paced lifestyle” (Christou 2011: 252).

In the following sections, I also illustrate how the perceptions of differences from locals vary among returnees. The diasporic context or “host” society they came from plays a significant role in what and how they perceive local culture and lifestyles. Perceptions of local habitus are also influenced by temporal factors, such as the year of immigration to Armenia. In addition, many returnees recount that local culture and lifestyle have changed over their years of settlement in Armenia, leading to more or less disappointments.

2.1. Perceiving and rationalizing local habitus: Some specific examples

2.1.1. Social relations

One aspect of social relations that abounds in the narratives of many returnees is the extent to which local Armenian culture is individualistic or collectivistic. Here (as in the case of some other issues too), the perceptions of returnees differ widely, depending largely on the diasporic context they come from. On the one hand, returnees from North American countries usually perceive social relations in Armenia to be based on collectivistic values. Some of them are bothered by what they see as weak individual rights and invasion of privacy, personal space, and comfort. Others, however, find this perceived collectivism attractive. The “lack of indifference” by people around you or even total strangers, as one returnee described, creates a reassuring “sense of being a part of a larger environment,” which makes her feel valued. Such returnees often link the perceived collectivism in Armenia to images of local hospitality, for example, and contrast it to the perceived egocentrism and introversion they dislike(d) in Western societies, sometimes associated with images of the rat race. This is especially the case with returnees who were motivated to move to Armenia in order to lead more organic or non-standard lives, as explained in the previous chapter.

One of the reasons Canadian-Armenian Anush wanted to move to Armenia with her family was that it is not an individualistic culture. It is a “communal society,” where “people hold each other’s hands.” This gave her a sense of “security” and “trust” that she did not have in Canada.

Here, if I fall down while walking on the street, for example, I won’t be afraid, because 10 people will run to help me. Definitely! In Canada, no one will approach you, because they’ll be afraid that you might harm them or something. ... But here,

the idea of mutual help is present in your daily life. ... Or, in the case of relationships with neighbors, it is very common here to consider your neighbor as your friend or brother. In Canada, I didn't have that. Of course, depending on the neighborhood you were living in, you might have had that, but it was very rare.

Some of these perceptions about strong social bonds and the communitarian lifestyle in Armenia that some North American diasporan returnees find attractive are not as widely noticed or mentioned by returnees from Middle Eastern countries. To the contrary, many of them even express somehow different ideas: They miss the way they or their family members interacted closely with neighbors in their former countries, the warmth of people in their daily encounters, the way Armenian community organizations were organized around collective ideas and a spirit of volunteerism, etc. They feel that life in Armenia is more individualistic. Such narratives are especially related by women.

In her early years in Armenia, when Lucine, 50, had just moved from Lebanon, she expected people in Armenia to “be nicer, to love and respect one another.” She compared it to her neighborhood in Bourj Hammoud, a town in Beirut with a large concentration of Armenians.

In Bourj Hammoud, my mother's neighbors have been in the same building for 50 years. They just signal each other by hitting the wall dividing their apartments to ask about each other's well-being. It's a different sense of mutual support, respect, and love. But here, many of them [local neighbors] don't even greet you easily. ... That is strange for us. ... For us, [relationships with other] Armenians were a sort of a sacred thing. But here, it's as if they're one another's enemies. [Especially in the beginning,] I used to tell myself: “Are they Turks or what?”

Comparing local Armenians to the image of a Turk, as a repulsive figure, aims at highlighting the extent of Lucine's disillusionment with some local attitudes. Such comparisons of local Armenians to other foreign figures are often made to stress the gap or disconnect some returnees feel from locals. For example, another Lebanese-Armenian

returnee, again describing the perceived coldness and indifference of her local neighbors, exclaimed: “Sometimes I say: ‘Arabs don’t even do such things.’”

Another widely mentioned perceived difference related to individualism versus collectivism is the locals’ indifference toward collective initiatives that are aimed at promoting the common good. Locals are criticized for disregarding or not caring enough about matters that go beyond their individual interests and surpass the needs and concerns of their circle of family and friends. One Lebanese-Armenian returnee argued: “For them [local Armenians], what matters is their home, which excludes whatever falls outside the doors of their house. Whatever is inside is considered theirs, but what is outside is not.” This bothers many returnees especially because of the idealistic vision of homeland they often come with or cling to, at least to a certain extent, even several years after relocation. A frequently given example is the locals’ lack of interest in agreeing with neighbors on a cleaning arrangement for their buildings’ entrances or staircases.

In order to rationalize this perceived lack of concern about collective matters among locals, some returnees consider the Soviet past as the reason behind it. One Lebanese-Armenian argued that the Soviet regime has ingrained in local Armenians a disregard for collective thinking, by giving its citizens “certain forms of social security (free education and health care, for example) on the one hand, ... and on the other hand, not allowing them to meddle in how the country is governed.” It is a “psychology of always receiving but giving nothing in return for the common good.” Although that is not absent in the diaspora, it is incomparable with the degree at which it is widespread in Armenia, he added.

One possible way to account for the variation among the perceptions of returnees from different contexts is the existence of weak central government structures in some of the Middle Eastern countries, especially Lebanon, where people often rely on family, neighborhood, or community bonds as stable safety nets. In addition, the concentration of Armenians in certain neighborhoods — often around schools, churches, or community centers — and the existence of other minorities or sects (often with their respective close-knit areas) enhance the sense of belonging among people living in a relatively small and clearly defined geographical area. Furthermore, diaspora institutions play a more active and pervading role in defining, shaping, and maintaining Armenian identity in communities in the Middle East. The vast majority of the returnees from these communities, at least from those I interviewed, seem to have maintained a strong and frequent association with diaspora organizations, which are considered as valuable strongholds of Armenian identity preservation. These characteristics of Middle Eastern diasporic communities may be partly attributed to the legacy of the *millet* system in the states that were carved out of the Ottoman Empire, after its demise, as well as to the colonialist past in these states (Chatty 2010: 28-30, 45-48; Kasbarian 2013: 84-88).¹¹⁵ As Kasbarian (2013: 84) argues, “[t]he concept of community, stemming directly from the Ottoman millet system has had a profound impact on the diaspora such that it is considered almost impossible to define Armenian identity without an organized community.” Community life is also important in the West, because of the work of “transnational elites and institutions” in the Armenian diaspora (Tölölyan 2000), as well as the internal migration of people or circulation of ideas and practices among diasporic

¹¹⁵ Similar to the *millet* system of the Ottoman period, in many countries of the Arab Middle East, ethno-religious communities have retained considerable autonomy to govern their internal affairs, as explained in Chapter IV.

communities. Nevertheless, the connections many diasporans maintain to their Armenianness in the West, especially those belonging to younger generations, have a more subjective and individualistic nature. Their allegiance to community affairs is less accentuated than their “symbolic Armenianness” (Bakalian 1993, 2001). For several of the returnees from Western communities I interviewed, especially young people, Armenian identity maintenance seems to have been less of a communitarian process, and more centered around private and family or small-circle initiatives, especially in areas with small concentrations of Armenians. And more generally, in Western societies, governments provide certain “layers of protection,” as one American-Armenian returnee put it, thus making social bonds less substantive.

Regardless of their former diasporic context, however, several returnees regard the Armenian diasporic community as a friendly environment that they have not found in Armenia. Naturally, such feelings are especially expressed by those who were actively involved in diasporan organizations and activities. One American-Armenian returnee, 31, explained:

Growing up in the diaspora ... there's a bigger sense of family. ... There's a brotherhood which exists among Armenians. ... We help one another out. We're nice to one another, because we belong to this group of special people. And then you come here and it's not that way.

Others say they miss the atmosphere in the Armenian diasporic community and the sense of trust it inspired, similar to being in a small village. Living in Armenia, they feel they are deprived of that feeling of knowing and being known to “everybody.” However, some returnees, who were not very active in Armenian community affairs when living in the diaspora, express different views. They often characterize the diasporic community

life as “isolating,” similar to “a little clique” they did not feel they belonged to. This is especially the case among young people from Armenian communities in the West, where, as I mentioned above, Armenianness is often practiced and lived in a more individualistic manner.

The way that some returnees perceive the extent of collective versus individualistic lifestyle in Armenia also depends on the year of immigration. Moreover, perceptions change over time within the same person. Several returnees who had moved to Armenia in the early or mid-1990s, for example, bewail the decreasing strength and declining importance of social bonds and collective values in recent times, compared to their initial years. Their recollections of their early days depict a place where people lived under harsh circumstances, but where values such as friendship, fraternity, trust, empathy, sense of collectivism, and mutual assistance were abundant. Descriptions of current life in the country rupture their pleasant memories of earlier times. Such returnees argue that individualistic values, materialistic attitudes, consumerist-oriented lifestyles, and high levels of stress and anxiety have turned Armenia into an environment they feel alienated from or less attracted to. As one of my interviewees (female, 58), who moved to Armenia in 1991, put it: “Human relations have become less important here now as opposed to money. ... It has become like all other capitalistic countries. Humaneness does not exist.” The fact that several of these early migrants had moved for ideological reasons may help explain the extent of their disillusionment with such developments or re-evaluations.

2.1.2. Preservation of national identity and heritage

Certain perceived differences are related to the nature, quality, and preservation of Armenian national identity and heritage (language, endogamy, Armenian church, cultural heritage sites, etc.). Some of these issues will be discussed here.

Many of the returnees that have been able to preserve the Armenian language while living in the diaspora consider it an important achievement. They thus find it particularly upsetting when they encounter locals who do not understand their dialect¹¹⁶ or who regard it as an improperly used or impure version of the Armenian language. This is especially the case with returnees who speak Western Armenian, but not only. Even Iranian-Armenians, who speak Eastern Armenian, are often identified by locals as being non-natives, because of differences related to intonation, special expressions, use of Persian words, etc. One Iranian-Armenian returnee remembered how in her early years in Armenia in the late 1990s, she came across locals who would ask her: “Why are you speaking Armenian this way? Are you Persian?” Disconcerted by the question, she would try to explain: “No, I’m Armenian, but I just lived there [in Iran]. I’m Iranian-Armenian [*iranahay*], Persian-Armenian [*parskahay*].”¹¹⁷ Having exerted great efforts to maintain their language for generations while living in Iran, such Iranian-Armenian returnees are particularly hurt when locals make such remarks.

¹¹⁶ Armenians from Armenia (whether they live in the country or have emigrated) use the Eastern Armenian dialect. Western Armenian is mostly used by diasporan Armenians in long-established communities, with the exception of Iranian- and the smaller in number Indian-Armenians. The differences in the two branches of Armenian go back to the parallel development of two slightly different but mutually intelligible vernacular languages among the Armenians of the Russian and Ottoman empires in the 19th century.

¹¹⁷ Many Pontic Greeks who have immigrated from the former Soviet Union to Greece also experience distress when they are labeled as “foreigners,” “Russians,” or “Russian-Pontians” by local Greeks because of linguistic and other cultural differences (Hess 2008: 1534; Hionidou 2012: 110).

In terms of language preservation, another issue that is raised by several returnees is the use of the Russian language by locals in daily conversations and more formal settings. This is particularly emphasized by returnees who immigrated in the 1990s (when, they claimed, Russian was much more dominant than it is currently), but not exclusively so. Lebanese-Armenian Lucine (50, married), who had moved to Armenia in 1999, criticized the dominance of Russian among some locals. According to her, this happens at the expense of preserving the Armenian language and even leads locals not to care enough about Armenia.

Of course not everybody, but there is a class [of locals] who know nothing about our [i.e., Armenian] literature. They have read Russian books and are familiar with Russian literature. Russian literature might be very good, but if you don't know your mother tongue and literature well, what happens? Of course you'll leave your country and emigrate [referring to the high emigration rates in Armenia], right?

The use of Russian infuriates some returnees even further when contrasted with the inability of some locals to comprehend their Armenian dialect. Lucine, for example, was very annoyed when her neighbor's mother-in-law told her one day: "Speak Armenian so we can understand you," referring to her Western Armenian dialect. This had happened shortly after her neighbor had addressed her own children using numerous Russian words in an otherwise Armenian sentence. Yeran, a returnee (69, widowed) who had moved to Armenia from Iraq in 2006, recounted the difficulties she had faced in the beginning when communicating with locals in daily encounters. "I used to speak Armenian, but they wouldn't understand," she said. And she added: "In Baghdad, we were more Armenian than here. ... There, we used to struggle to preserve our Armenianness. And then you come here, and you see that they speak Russian, or they all say: 'This is not a country [good enough] to live in; let's get up and leave.'"

Similar to Lucine's above quote, Yeran also linked the use of Russian to the perceived weakening of Armenian identity among locals, and their insufficient desire to live in Armenia. This flow of thought indicates how such returnees have rationalized the importance of preserving the Armenian language while living in the diaspora. Thus, the language-related issues they encounter in Armenia disrupt their desire and ability to find a shared identity in Armenia. Their use of (Western) Armenian that had helped them maintain their distinctiveness in the diaspora paradoxically leads to the experience of differences in the homeland. The fact that such reflections are prominent especially among returnees from Iran and the Arab Middle East is not accidental. In diasporic communities of that region, Armenian language preservation is generally more widespread, for numerous reasons, than in the West.

The close-knit character of Armenian diasporic communities in the Arab Middle East and Iran (relative to communities in the West), at least based on several of my participants' accounts and experiences, gives rise also to the observation of other perceived identity-related differences compared to locals, besides language. Nazeli, a 33-year-old single Iranian-Armenian first came to Armenia in 1998 to study, and then, after pursuing an advanced degree in Europe, returned to Yerevan in 2009. Her reflections touched on issues related to interactions with non-Armenians in Iran and Armenia. She described that, as a diasporan-Armenian, she was raised and educated to have no close interactions with Persians. "By keeping ties with Persians very limited, we remained Armenian in the [diasporic] community," she explained. In her family, only her father had some contacts with his Persian colleagues. In the case of other Armenian families she knew in Iran, close relationships with Persians were rare too. Inviting non-Armenians into their homes

for visits, for example, was avoided. Interaction at a more personal level was not even open to discussion, she said. “If I were to marry a Persian guy, I would have been automatically disowned by my family. That would have been the worst thing I could have done to my parents.” To her surprise and “disappointment,” what she has experienced in Armenia differs from what she was used to in the diaspora.

And then you come here, and you see that [the effects of] globalization are present in Armenia too. You come here and you see that it makes absolutely no difference to them [whom they marry]: Armenian, Persian, Christian, Muslim. It is so hard for me to see that. Then, you wonder: “Why did we struggle for all these years [in the diaspora to keep our identity]?” I go to the Iranian Embassy [in Armenia] and I see Armenian girls with Persian husbands, and their children who are speaking Persian and know only a couple of Armenian words. I understand that such [mixed] marriages do happen. For Europeans or Americans, it is not a problem. But because we’re a minority, we’re a small nation, we need to at least keep that [i.e., endogamy] in order to ensure our preservation and survival. ... But you see that for these people [i.e., locals], it doesn’t matter; they interact and go out [with non-Armenians], and they’re very proud of it. All these things are upsetting.

Juxtaposing the closed nature of life in the diasporic community where she had been raised to the perceived cultural openness of local Armenians was distressing for Nazeli. She had lived in Europe for several years prior to settling in Armenia after her studies, and has travelled quite extensively throughout her life. Nevertheless, the way she conceptualized and approached cultural diversity, especially at a personal level, seemed to have been largely influenced by her upbringing and socialization in her family and in the Armenian community in Iran.

Nazeli and others with similar experiences rationalized these differences in Armenia and the diaspora by referring to the “dangerous” trend of globalization, but more commonly also to the “struggle” of diasporans to preserve a strong sense of Armenianness outside of

the homeland. In Armenia, however, that diasporan “fear of losing” your identity and heritage does not exist, as Arpi (female, 46, Lebanon) explained.

The impact of the diasporic context of returnees on how they conceptualize social and cultural norms, and hence what they accept or not in Armenia, becomes apparent when comparing ideas such as those expressed by Nazeli to those voiced by some other returnees born and raised in communities in the West. Having been more widely and consistently exposed to people from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, several returnees in the latter group lament what they perceive to be a lack of cultural diversity and an intolerance to ethnic and cultural heterogeneity in Armenia. Thus, their perceptions are distinctively different from the returnees quoted above in this section. One returnee from the United States, for instance, thought that “Armenia’s biggest challenge is that there is not enough interaction” with people who have various backgrounds and experiences. The “richness” of having a broader spectrum of exposure and interaction, which “helps individuals grow, but also helps the country grow” is lacking in Armenia, according to her. The concerns that a couple expressed, during the group interview I conducted with them, about raising children in Armenia are also indicative of my above-made points. Born and raised in Canada and the United States respectively, Armik (29) and Zaven (31) have a young son. They were worried that he will be affected by such “poisonous mentalities,” in Armenia, as Armik described, as “closed-mindedness,” “racism,” and “prejudice against different people.”

Zaven

[One] issue that I have [about raising children here] is the lack of diversity. Everyone is Armenian. ... Growing up in a place that’s very diverse, ... I had white friends, Mexican friends, Indian friends.

Armik

There is a lot you gain from that.

Zaven

Yes, absolutely! And the fact that you get to experience *their* reality too, and understand that they're just as much humans as we are is important. ... [But] the mentality here is very isolating; it's dangerous.

2.1.3. Behavioral differences

Many returnees also notice certain behaviors among locals that they find different, unfamiliar, and sometimes disconcerting. Among the most commonly mentioned ones include describing locals as more self-confident, assertive, rigid, uncompromising, and opinionated. Returnees contrast these behaviors to their self-images of being milder, more lenient, conformist, passive, and submissive. Locals are regarded as more blunt and grim, and even exhibiting such traits as brazenness, shamelessness, aggressiveness, and rudeness, as opposed to their own softer, warmer, more delicate, and polite qualities. The latter behavioral traits are looked down on by locals as signs of weakness, according to some returnees. Such perceptions are especially widespread among returnees from Middle Eastern countries. The sense of victimhood that has been pervasive particularly among post-Genocide diasporan generations has often been especially powerful among diasporans in the Arab Middle East, partly because of the existence of a quasi-*millet* system in these countries. Even though these communities have been granted considerable autonomy to govern their internal matters, the perpetuation of the *millet* legacy has also had some downsides (Migliorino 2009: 485-489). In the absence of strong central governments, these communities have often been left alone to protect their own rights and members. This has often resulted in an accentuated feeling of insecurity

among many diasporans from these communities, especially given the unstable political and economic conditions in the region.

Many of these perceived behavioral differences are explained, as in the case of other differences, as having been caused by the decades of introversion under the Soviet regime. Besides the Soviet influence, other factors, such as their own diasporic experience, as well as climate variations, are also mentioned to rationalize the gap between local behavioral traits and their own self-perceptions. Contrary to the milder climate of the Mediterranean, for example, the mountainous terrain and cold, harsh temperatures in Armenia are regarded as having affected locals, making them more “rigid” and “rough,” with a “black-or-white” or “yes-or-no” approach to things, as one returnee put it. With regard to the diasporic experience, some returnees consider their own “sense of shame,” as well as their more flexible or even docile attitudes, as having been shaped by the fact that their parents or grandparents and they had to endure the trauma of the Genocide and displacement. Hence, living as a minority among diverse “foreign” cultures, they had to be more careful and loyal, in order to be accepted in their “host” countries, and not to arouse suspicion or animosity. One returnee explained: “In the diaspora, we have lost our self-confidence a bit, especially because we have a feeling of being second-class citizens. ... We are afraid we might get kicked out of a place if we raise our voice too much, or become massacred if we talk too much.” A Syrian-Armenian returnee (female, 46) elaborated this point as follows:

[Locals] have a winner’s mentality, because they’ve remained on their land. That is why I think they are very aggressive, whereas we have a sense of loss; we are obedient, docile, and even a bit sheeplike, according to them. We knew that by having to live with so many different nations (Arabs, Kurds, etc.), *we* had to adapt and compromise with everybody. Locals don’t know that, because 99 percent of the time they have interacted with people of their own kind [meaning the same

ethnic group or nation]. For that reason, they don't concede, they don't change their opinions, and perhaps that's why they have continued living on their land.

A Lebanese-Armenian returnee, who had moved to Armenia at a very young age to study and has become well-integrated into Armenian society, gave a somehow different interpretation of the same perceived differences. He contrasted the “isolation” and “deprivation” endured by locals during Soviet times to the relative success that subsequent generations of Lebanese-Armenians have enjoyed in the diaspora after the initial suffering of their ancestors immediately following the Genocide. He argued that the “ambitious” newer generation of Lebanese-Armenians who “are used to a comfortable, spoiled life” can afford to look at everything “more lightly.” The degree of integration of returnees in Armenia, therefore, affects to a certain extent how they perceive and rationalize local values and behaviors. This, in turn, has an impact on how they (re)define their own identities after relocation. Such integration and identity-related processes issues will be discussed in the rest of this chapter and the next one.

3. Coping With Hysteresis: Strategies of Habitus Positioning and Uses of Various “Capital” Forms

Some returnees accept the perceived differences that they encounter between their habitus and that of locals as normal occurrences. They argue that they would have had similar experiences if they had moved to any other new place — not necessarily a different country, but even a different region or city within their former countries. They thus associate these experiences with the *act of migration* and the time it takes to adapt to a new environment. They often support their argument by mentioning that the

experiences of their children are already more “normal,” or will become so even more over time. A few returnees even consider these perceived differences as positive and enriching, as a source of diversity that makes life in Armenia more interesting. Others approach differences in a more negative manner.

Regardless of the kinds of feelings the perception of the new sociocultural space arouses, sometimes returnees consider differences between their habitus and that of locals as an inescapable reality that they cannot or are not willing to do much about. At other times, they try to cope with them or mitigate their intensity or effects. In both cases, they adopt various strategies to situate their habitus in the new environment — by reproducing and/or adjusting their long-held dispositions. The word “strategy” connotes some degree of agency on behalf of returnees. Indeed, I argue that they sometimes consciously follow one or more approaches to position their habitus in Armenia (Kerr & Robinson 2009). However, hysteresis management does not always entail a conscious process.

In order to become players in the “games” (to use Bourdieu’s term) that they encounter in Armenia’s sociocultural space, returnees reproduce certain aspects of their habitus, or adapt some of its other elements, by enacting or developing various forms of capital — “cultural” (“institutionalized,” “embodied,” and “objectified”), “social,” and “economic” (Bourdieu 1986). Those who are unable or unwilling to reproduce or alter their habitus try to deal with the hysteresis by temporary distancing themselves from the field, focusing on the habitus of their children, or abandoning the field altogether. The next few pages outline these five hysteresis-management strategies.

In the case of the **habitus alteration** strategy, returnees modify some of their long-held dispositions and preferences in order to conform to the “rules of the game” in Armenia. This is done by suspending or discontinuing certain attitudes or ways of living. Alternatively, new ones are adopted with the aim of reducing the variance between the returnee’s habitus and the perceived habitus of local Armenians.

While sometimes returnees are able or willing to change their habitus in order to adapt to the new environment, in other cases they are unable or reluctant to do so. They thus continue functioning with their long-standing attitudes and dispositions. **Habitus reproduction** is achieved by directing their efforts laterally (among people with “homologous” habituses) (Bourdieu 1990b: 55) or vertically (among people with heterologous habituses). In the first case, habitus reproduction occurs by consolidating or reinforcing similar or matching habituses. Specifically, returnees *network* mostly with their immediate families or with people who seem to have lifestyles and values resembling theirs. They also use other means to *segregate* themselves. And finally, they also *create institutions* to help them in this regard. Networking with people who have similar habituses is one of the most common habitus reproduction strategies. In this case, returnees create, consciously or unconsciously, pockets of “homologous habitus,” where long-standing practices can be preserved, partially or holistically. They surround themselves with people whose habitus they believe echoes theirs — other returnees, diasporan tourists, Soviet-era repatriates, and local Armenians who have lived abroad for some time or whose habitus bears similarities to their own lifestyle. Such communities or gathering opportunities offer a familiar milieu, where pre-return ways of behaving and living can be sustained at least to a certain extent for themselves and their families. In

some cases, such segregation breeds further alienation or marginalization from Armenian society, leading to the creation of ghetto-like communities or groups. More frequently, however, returnees are able to maintain some sort of balance, where they integrate successfully in certain fields of society (such as professional settings, for example), but maintain separated pocket communities in other fields (usually at the private, family, or social levels).

Habitus reproduction also happens by trying to affect or alter heterologous habituses, with the goal of *restructuring the relevant field(s) in Armenia*. In this case, returnees validate their long-held practices and lifestyles in order to try to influence, by their personal example, their immediate surroundings of local people. Presenting alternative paths of being and living to locals, returnees aspire to bring about field changes iteratively and incrementally, often at an individual or small-group level — among local acquaintances, friends, neighbors, etc. But some of them are also hopeful that these small-scale changes may in the long run translate into wider social transformations. Sometimes, they try to propagate their tastes and preferences among a larger number of local Armenians, by publicizing their preferences and tastes, such as through the establishment of restaurants or shops that offer dishes or sell delicacies or products that are usually consumed by diasporans. However, the majority of returnees acknowledge that they are a minority in Armenia. They thus recognize that aiming at broader dissemination and faster changes might be unrealistic or unreasonable. Moreover, they argue that sometimes restructuring the field is not even a calculated and pre-planned effort, but it happens automatically, as they interact with locals in their daily lives. In most cases, this strategy is employed in a careful manner, where returnees try to avoid

patronizing or antagonizing locals outright. Thus, many returnees argue that this strategy encapsulates the important goal of showing different ways of living and acting to locals not by chastising them in an arrogant and disdainful manner, but by upholding the manners and lifestyles they had in the diaspora. It is not a matter of being right or wrong, they say. But in some other cases, it involves an explicitly condescending approach.

Besides habitus alteration and reproduction, three other strategies exist to deal with the mismatch between the returnees' habitus and the new environment:

- 1) **Temporary distancing from the field:** Some returnees feel the need to detach themselves for a while from the new milieu. This is usually accomplished through frequent trips to the country of their previous residence or to other countries. This strategy is employed by people who have not altered their habitus considerably and are looking for a familiar environment to feel at ease, at least for a short period of time. It is also used by those who have modified their habitus but still feel nostalgic about their former tastes and preferences.
- 2) **Altering the future generation's habitus:** Faced with a disrupted habitus, some returnees choose to orient their efforts toward their children, trying to influence the next generation's attitudes and preferences in order to fix or improve the hysteresis situation. Focusing on their children's habitus is viewed as a more feasible strategy than modifying their own long-held dispositions, which might be difficult or time-consuming, if not impossible. In fact, in many cases, parents do not even have to exert much effort themselves to alter their children's habitus; by spending their formative years in Armenia, their children often automatically internalize many practices and tastes that match field structures in the new country, and develop

forms of capital that help situate them in Armenian society much more seamlessly than their parents.

- 3) **Field abandonment:** When unable or unwilling to sustain or alter their entrenched ways of acting and living in the new field structures, some returnees decide to quit the “game” altogether, by emigrating from Armenia. They either return to the country of their former residence or move to a third country.

Habitus reproduction and alteration often co-exist within the same person. Depending on the field, returnees selectively adopt or lean toward either one of these strategies to deal with hysteresis, preserving certain elements of their habitus, while changing others. Most of the returnees I interviewed are thus able to integrate in Armenian society without however becoming and feeling completely indistinguishable from the local population. They adjust to the new environment to a certain extent, but simultaneously maintain a distance or differences — which also translate into some inequalities — from local Armenians. For example, Nshan, 43, who moved to Armenia in 2003 from Canada, described his situation of selective and partial integration as follows:

I feel I’m integrated *as much as I want*. I know the language. I know the humor and the historic facts on which basis humor is made. I know how to run a business here. I know politics. I know names of streets that even the taxi drivers don’t know. I know where to pay my bills. I know where to do my shopping and how to do it. I know when to shop for what, like seasonal fruits. ... So, as far as many things in my daily life are concerned, I am a *hayastantsi*: the taxes I pay; the schools that my kids go to; the relationships I have with different local business partners, clients, staff, friends... But in a lot of ways, I’m still a diasporan: at home, the language [i.e., dialect] I speak, the points of views I have — such as shaking the hands of business partners regardless of their gender, or [advocating a] non-smoking

lifestyle.¹¹⁸ [So,] I do consider myself as a resident of Yerevan, [but that is] a little bit different than considering myself as a local.

Similarly, Sirun, to continue with this chapter's introductory vignette, seemed to have alleviated or resolved many of her initial adjustment problems, at the time of my interview with her. She had a full-time job she was satisfied with. She was also involved in community and political activities. She had some local colleagues and friends. She had become adept at running a household in Armenia — with all the interactions it entailed with locals. She was even contacted frequently for advice and support by friends or even total strangers who live in the diaspora but want or plan to relocate to Armenia. She told me that she considered moving to Armenia “the best decision” they had made as a family and that she was “very happy” with her life in Armenia. However, she thought there is a limit to the level of her absorption into local Armenian culture and into the wider fabric of society in Armenia. “I’m as integrated as I can ever be,” she said. At a family level, they did not “really interact” with locals. They gravitated more toward diasporan returnees. She explained the reason as follows: “We have a shared history. We have a shared existence in the diaspora. We understand each other’s language, body language, food. The *hayastantsis* are so different from us that we don’t understand their human relations.” At the same time, she felt disconnected from Armenians who live in the diaspora. She also did not consider Toronto to be her home anymore.

I argue that the upbringing and socialization many returnees have experienced in the diaspora have equipped them with the ability or tendency to selectively and creatively

¹¹⁸ Some returnees, such as Nshan, complained that some local men avoid shaking hands with women, regarding it as a sign of discrimination. Another issue about which some returnees expressed dissatisfaction was the difficulty of finding non-smoking public places, especially indoor areas, in Armenia.

adapt their habitus under different circumstances. They have learned to become accustomed to differences (Noble 2013). This has, in turn, become internalized and has allowed many of them to follow a similar path in Armenia. Integrating without assimilating has been the way many returnees were used to living while in the diaspora (Chatty 2010). As diasporans, maintaining a homeland orientation and cultural distinctions were not incompatible with high levels of integration, especially “structural integration,” into the “host” environment (King and Christou 2014: 96).¹¹⁹ While living in the diaspora, they were used to maneuvering their habitus by adopting, consciously or not, certain ways of living and behaving from their “host” society, while maintaining other practices and preferences as Armenians, and more specifically as diasporan-Armenians. For this reason, they are capable of or inclined to pursuing a similar approach in Armenia, consciously or unconsciously, sometimes for many years after settling in the country, and often without experiencing the deeply disorienting feelings that hysteresis caused in the initial period after relocation. This eclectic approach to habitus transformation is not necessarily a temporary state of mind, but often a persistent and prolonged way of behaving and living they consciously or unconsciously adopt. In Sirun’s case, that duality — of trying to integrate in the larger environment but always remaining or feeling somehow different — was striking ever since she was a child, even though she was raised in Toronto. Her “dual identity” was especially reflected in the form of a divide she felt between her home self and school self.¹²⁰ “At home, I was one

¹¹⁹ Heckmann and Schnapper (2003: 15) define “structural” integration as “the acquisition of rights and the access to positions and membership statuses in the core institutions of the immigration society: economy and labour market, education and qualification systems, housing system, welfare state institutions including the health system, and citizenship as membership in the political community.”

¹²⁰ These existential tensions sometimes motivate diasporans to move to Armenia in the first place. I have discussed some of these issues in the previous chapter.

person. I'd go to [Canadian] school, I had to be somebody different. I would *try* to be somebody different. But I [was] never [able to] fit in." The way she lived at home was distinctly incongruous with her wider cultural and socioeconomic environs. "The social strata to which I belonged and the strata where I was forced to exist as a child" varied starkly, she explained. Culturally, the language, food, and values she was exposed to in her family were also different from what she came across outside of her household, especially among her Canadian classmates at school. These cultural differences were especially powerful given the fact that Sirun's parents were originally from Lebanon. They had migrated to Canada in the late 1960s, just a couple of years after her birth. While Sirun was growing up, her parents were not well-integrated into Canadian society.¹²¹

The "clash of dual identities" that Sirun and others like her faced in the diaspora has persisted to a certain extent after moving to Armenia. This time, it has taken the form of a contrast to local Armenians. Besides cultural differences, economic factors have played a role in this case too. Sirun explained that the lower socioeconomic status of many locals she knows has prevented her and her husband to interact with them more closely — not because she does not want to, but because opportunities do not arise sufficiently and consistently.

¹²¹ The low level of assimilation among Armenians who had migrated to the USA or Canada in the 1960s–70s, mostly from the Middle East, was also conditioned by the lower, compared to more recent years, degree of diversity in the "host" country in the West. For example, Sirun described that the area where her parents settled and where she grew up in Toronto was a "WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant)-established community." The city "was not as multiculturally diverse as it is today."

In the rest of the chapter, I examine the different above-outlined strategies that returnees adopt to position their habitus in the new environment, by employing or creating various forms of capital. I consider the different capital forms separately, but also look at the interplay or relationships among them. Subsequently, I discuss the occurrence of intrapersonal variations. I thus illustrate how the same returnee often embraces different strategies over time. At the same time, the field itself often changes, especially given the transitions post-Soviet Armenian society has undergone since the country's independence. Therefore, further or multiple hysteresis situations may be experienced by the same returnee over time, to which (s)he may respond differently. Time is thus an important variable when studying the post-migration experiences of diasporic returnees, making the analysis of long-term return particularly insightful in order to shed light on some of these dynamic processes within the same person over the years.

3.1. Cultural capital

Cultural capital is perhaps the most widely used and most visible form of capital that returnees employ as they try to face the habitus–new field mismatch. An important type of “embodied” cultural capital that emerged in many of my interviews is language. Particularly in public settings or when communicating with local Armenians, many returnees make concerted efforts to learn Eastern Armenian (especially those who do not speak Armenian at all, or those who speak Western Armenian) and the Yerevan vernacular or colloquial Armenian used by locals (especially Iranian-Armenians who already speak Eastern Armenians). Armen, 31, an Iranian-Armenian returnee, for example, went to great lengths for a long time to make sure that his Eastern Armenian sheds its *parskahay* (Persian-Armenian) accent. He even consulted with a local university

professor of linguistics in order to become unrecognizable. He considered it “very insulting” when local people would “immediately recognize” that he is not a *hayastantsi*. He thought that acquiring new cultural capital — in this case, language with a specific accent — was necessary in order to position his habitus in Armenia. He said he had succeeded, citing the testimonies of several local Armenians who get surprised when they find out that he is originally from Iran. At the same time, however, he said he feels comfortable “switching from time to time” between the two accents, depending on the people he is interacting with. Nevertheless, he said that he had to “kill” the way he used to speak “Persian-Armenian [*parskahayeren*]” before migrating — that is, alter his old cultural capital — to be able to learn the new accent.

Unlike Armen, several other returnees admitted that no matter how hard they have tried, even after many years of settlement in Armenia, locals still spot their different accent. As soon as they speak Eastern Armenian, they often get asked: “Where are you from?” Many returnees complain that the inability to speak Eastern Armenian with a “local” accent, despite the efforts they exert, puts them at a disadvantage compared with locals. They often face problems communicating while shopping, riding a taxi, filling out bank documents, etc. The situation is further compounded by the fact that most returnees do not speak (at all or fluently) Russian, the use of which is quite prevalent in Armenia, both in formal and informal settings. Thus, lacking the linguistic capital of locals, they sometimes get “ripped off” or “cheated on,” some of them described. Their failure or unwillingness to adjust their habitus with regard to language, sometimes even more than a decade of having settled in Armenia, makes some returnees feel like strangers. When this is combined with other manifestations of cultural capital that are easily recognizable

— such as dress, hairstyle, or other aspects of physical appearance — the habitus feels particularly disrupted. This is sometimes an unexpected situation, and gives rise to strong emotions. Born and raised in Lebanon, Shahan, for example, moved with his family to Armenia in 2005 from Kuwait, where he had settled for around a decade to work. He described his experience as follows:

In the streets, while walking or shopping, everywhere, you can meet [local] people who question your Armenianness. Especially in my first years here, the fact that my hair was a bit long and that I had a goatee made them [i.e., locals] to compare me to Arabs, to Persians, to *odars* [i.e., strangers]. And when I spoke Armenian, they would say: “Gosh, look at this guy. He knows Armenian too!” Or, when I spoke Western Armenian — until today, I use that [dialect] — they would say: “Speak proper Armenian so we can understand you.”

While some returnees (like Armen) work hard to alter their habitus by adjusting their language, others (like Shahan) continue using their dialect, even in formal settings. Even though Shahan has not modified his language, however, he was pleased that his 18-year-old son, who was born in the diaspora but raised mostly in Armenia, is comfortable communicating in both dialects, smoothly and quickly switching between the two, when necessary, without “being recognized” as a non-native speaker.

The majority of my interviewees, however, adopt a balanced approach. Their language contains elements of different dialects, and even some foreign words. Or, they use Eastern Armenian (with a *hayastantsi* accent) selectively, in the fields where habitus alteration is viewed as important. For example, they speak it when they interact with locals, but maintain their diasporan dialect or vernacular (or at least a mixed version) when communicating with other diasporans or returnees. According to one Syrian-Armenian returnee, preserving both dialects even in Armenia is important, because all forms and vernaculars of the Armenian language constitute a cultural “wealth” that

should not be “lost.” Other returnees also argued that they wanted to maintain their dialect (in the case of Western Armenian speakers) or accent (in the case of Iranian-Armenians), especially in their private or family interactions, because that is a part of their “ancestral heritage linked to Western Armenia,” or a part of their “life history.”

Besides language, there are other forms of cultural capital that returnees deploy or develop as they try to position their habitus in Armenia. Adopting a habitus alteration strategy, whether consciously or unconsciously, some returnees change certain cultural markers, traditions, and behaviors they had in the diaspora or when they first moved to Armenia, and learn new ones from locals. Those who view perceived differences with locals as “normal” or “positive” consider that this is a natural or even desired process. Others think that it is necessary in order to “survive” in the new “game.” For example, Sirun, from this chapter’s introductory vignette, explained that she has adjusted some aspects of her habitus, sometimes acting in certain ways she said she “never used to do in Canada.” She gave the following example, referring to some perceived behavioral differences with locals.

I’m not a confrontational, aggressive person. But I’ve become that way, because you have no other choice [when you live in Armenia]. I remember once my son said to me: “Mom, you’re really scaring me. You’re driving like a *hayastantsi*.” I told him: “Well, son, either I drive like a *hayastantsi*, or they will run over me. I don’t have a choice” [laughs]. Or, now if somebody tries to cut in line in front of me ... oh no, wrong person [laughs]!

The ability to drive or act uncompromisingly is an “embodied” form of cultural capital Sirun said she has acquired in Armenia in order to be capable of staying a player in the new game. The way she seemed to have modified her habitus, similar to Armen who was cited above with regard to language, demonstrates the agency of some returnees to

consciously try to reduce what they perceive as differences between them and local Armenians.

As with the acquisition of language skills described above, using or acquiring other forms of cultural capital to position the habitus is no easy feat for everyone though. American-Armenian Sandra, for example, who had moved to Armenia in March 2013, just four months before my interview with her, seemed to be undergoing some internal struggles to decide how exactly she should behave with her local Armenian colleagues. When she tried to ask for something in a polite manner from locals that she supervised or worked with, she faced resistance. She has found out that her chances of securing their cooperation or assistance are higher when she “pushes” them. As with other perceived differences with locals, Sandra thought that this kind of attitude among locals was “part of the Soviet legacy.”

I’m thinking I should use my normal etiquette and my proper behavior. But if you say “please,” or if you talk in a certain [gentle] tone, that’s looked upon as weak in this culture. ... [So,] I thought: OK, maybe I should go learn how to be more confident and do more negotiation learning in this culture. And then I realized I will change myself. Why should I change my American-Armenian whatever identity? This is who I am. No matter what I do, I can’t change that. And then I find myself yelling. I have to yell at them, and then they listen to me because I yelled at them. But I’m not the person that yells at someone. I like to be calm. In my last four months of being here, I’m trying to understand: How do I talk to my coworkers? How do I get along with these people? How do I get what I want but not offend them and say “I’m American and I know everything?” I’m not saying that. I’ll never go in with that approach.

Sandra seemed to be grappling with these questions, most probably because she had not lived in Armenia for a long period of time when I met her. She was still unsure about the most effective strategy. She also seemed to be going back and forth between conscious and unconscious courses of action. She found it “frustrating” that the way she wanted or

planned to act, using the cultural capital that corresponded to her disrupted habitus, sometimes contradicted the way she actually behaved with locals. Entering the new field of her workplace in Armenia, her habitus was in a state of flux and turmoil, sometimes making her to conduct herself according to entrenched, internalized manners, while at other times in ways that fitted better the new environment she had come across.

While Sirun had adopted a habitus alteration approach with respect to some behaviors, and Sandra's approach fluctuated between habitus alteration and reproduction in her professional relations, in other cases returnees were more determined to use their cultural capital for habitus reproduction by trying to restructure the new field structure(s). They tried to influence locals in their surroundings by continuing to live and act according to their established habitus. By showing different tastes and preferences, they hoped that locals would understand, appreciate, and eventually embrace or at least be affected by them.

Armen from Iran described how his sister had succeeded in demonstrating to her neighbors the importance of taking turns to clean their building's staircase.¹²² She had convinced them, by her personal example, that all the housewives should pitch in to mop the floors up on a regular basis. Initially, the neighbors could not understand why her sister would clean the staircase alone every day. They would tell her: "Let it stay like that. It is the government's responsibility to take care of it. During Soviet times, they [government-appointed people] used to do it." Armen then described how her brother-in-law's approach of arguing with the neighbors was unsuccessful, whereas her sister kept

¹²² This is related to the perceived indifference of locals toward communal good, described in section 2 above.

living according to her habitus and eventually persuaded them to help out by dividing the work every day. “So, they needed to see a different mode of living,” Armen argued. He contrasted (albeit implicitly) the self-image of Iranian-Armenians, as people who care about their wider environment, to that of local Armenians. Participation in collective efforts — in this case, cleaning a common section of their building — was regarded as a quality Iranian-Armenian returnees could relay to their local neighbors in Armenia. “It is only by correcting and helping each other that we can begin to become a unified nation again, after centuries” of having segments growing apart from each other, Armen concluded.

Returnees often pay special attention to refrain from displaying condescending or antagonistic attitudes toward locals. Thus, the majority of my interviewees favors a more balanced — preserve-and-adjust, give-and-take, or teach-and-learn — approach to situate their habitus in Armenia through the use of cultural capital. A smaller number of them, however, lie at the other extreme. They not only avoid or disapprove of adjustments to their own cultural markers, habits, and behavioral characteristics, but endorse such ideas as “teaching,” “correcting,” or “improving” locals.

3.2. Social capital

Interaction with local Armenians is necessary and inevitable for long-term returnees. For daily shopping, payment of bills, official transactions, public and taxi transportation, health care services, educational institutions, and other activities, they have to communicate and negotiate with locals, exchanging and sharing spaces and experiences. Especially for returnees who live in rented or privately owned apartments or houses that

are surrounded by local Armenian residents, contacts with local neighbors or landlords, even if limited, is a part of daily life in Armenia. Moreover, relationships with locals in workplace environments remain important for most returnees. Besides such interactions, many returnees have established close friendships with local Armenians. In addition, a number of them who are married to locals maintain relationships with their in-laws and their spouses' local relatives and friends.

Despite the above-mentioned spaces and opportunities for interaction, most of the returnees I interviewed admitted that their close personal and family circles consisted largely of other returnees, not necessarily from the same or similar diasporic communities or backgrounds. Sometimes these networks have existed in the past, but often become more powerful or important after moving to Armenia. In fact, in several cases, such previously existing networks have motivated the decision or reinforced the desire to move to Armenia in the first place, or have facilitated the process of relocation. For example, the existence of close family members in Armenia leads some diasporans to immigrate as well, motivated by family re-unification goals. Others are encouraged by diasporan friends or acquaintances to join them in Armenia in order to establish a business or realize an investment project together, or to work in their company or organization. In other cases, new networks with other returnees are formed in Armenia after relocation. These relationships often help returnees to deal with the hysteresis or discomfort they feel as they try to adjust to life in Armenia. Sirun, for example, said she relied on her husband and children to be able to overcome the stress and depression she was engulfed in especially during the first couple of years after immigration. Besides their immediate families, others also seek some sort of comfort among other returnees

they befriend in Armenia. American-Armenian Zaven, for example, explained that he highly valued the relationships he and his wife have developed in Armenia with other returnees from North America. Given that they and many of their other returnee friends do not have close relatives in Armenia, they “have become sort of surrogate families.” He added: “We lean on one another. We talk about the things that bother us, which are usually the same [issues]. So, we become a support group for one another. And these structures really help keep us somewhat sane.”

In some cases, the networks of returnees are also enhanced by the fact that a number of them live in buildings, residential complexes, or neighborhoods that are owned by or where the majority or a large number of their neighbors are diasporans or other returnees. Similarly, a considerable number of returnees work in organizations or businesses owned or run by themselves, diasporans, or other returnees, where often other returnee coworkers are employed or partners are involved.

Moreover, a number of returnees have close or distant relatives who had settled in Armenia during the Soviet-era repatriation drive. For many post-Soviet returnees, these networks are (re-)established or revived upon relocation, and sometimes remain sustainable and strong over the years of their stay in Armenia. These former repatriates (and/or their descendants) are often differentiated from other local Armenians. Many returnees perceive them as a kind of intermediaries between them and locals, because the cultural practices (such as language, cuisine, etc.) and values of Soviet-era repatriates sometimes exhibit traces from multiple influences. Networks with these old repatriates were especially important for returnees who had moved to Armenia in the years

immediately succeeding independence. Their Soviet-era repat relatives were, in many cases, their sole or most significant tangible link to Armenia when they first arrived, given the rare or limited nature of ties many of them had maintained with Soviet Armenia, and the small number of other returnees in the initial post-independence years. Regardless of the year of migration, connections with Soviet-era repat relatives are usually stronger during the first years of a returnee's settlement in Armenia. They seem to decline in intensity and frequency over the years.

Even returnees who have local Armenian friends or spouses sometimes point out that the latter are not the "typical locals." They have either lived abroad for some period of time, have travelled frequently, have a job that keeps them in regular contact with diasporans or returnees, or are children or grandchildren of Soviet-era repats, who have retained some of their pre-repatriation traditions.

Many returnees leverage their existing social capital or create new relationships to preserve at least some elements of their habitus through networking and segregation. By forming and sustaining relationships in a selective manner, returnees manage to adjust their habitus in certain (mostly public) fields of Armenian society, while reproducing it mainly in private and family settings. Their home gatherings, holiday celebrations, personal or family outings and recreational activities usually involve other returnees, whether relatives or friends. They speak the same or a similar dialect (often using foreign words or expressions), enjoy certain conversation topics, exchange mutually understandable jokes, cook or prefer common foods, etc. Lebanese-Armenian Garbis described that when he and his family moved to Armenia, other families or people he

knew from Lebanon or Canada (some originally from Lebanon) had immigrated to Armenia before them and were already well-settled. So, when he and his family arrived, they “did not feel like strangers.”

Especially when we formed or started expanding our families around the same time, and had children of similar ages, who started spending time together, ... I did not feel the need, and I’m saying it in a positive way, to integrate, because we started living our Beirut life here, together with our friends. [So, now,] I don’t want to say [it is like a] ghetto, but 96 percent of my friends are diasporan-Armenians [i.e., returnees]. The remaining 4 percent are [locals] from my workplace. So, I am living a Lebanese life in Armenia. ... I haven’t even forgotten my Arabic. ... Sometimes we speak Arabic with ... our friends when talking about things that we don’t want others [i.e., locals] to understand.

By developing social networks consisting largely of other returnees, such people are able to maintain certain cultural practices. Garbis, for example, has managed to preserve his Western Armenian and Arabic, showing how social capital can be transformed into or facilitate the maintenance of cultural capital.

In turn, cultural capital shapes social capital. Many of the perceived cultural and behavioral differences that returnees notice between their habitus and that of local Armenians were often mentioned as factors that hinder or limit the establishment of closer, deeper, and more sustainable relationships with local Armenians. Differences in past experiences, as well as personal and family interests and preferences, also play a role. Canadian-Armenian Armik (29, married) explained:

There is a level on which I can be with somebody who has grown up in a similar situation as me, but I just can’t with someone else. In the early 1990s, when I was playing videogames and eating candy, people my age [here] were going through a really, really difficult, traumatizing time. Every circumstance in our lives has been so different. ... [So] it’s great to learn from each other, but I think there’s a limit to the closeness you can have with that person. ... It even comes down to very basic, surface-level [differences]. For example, we [referring to herself and her husband] don’t like to go to places where there’s a lot of smoke. So, when we go out, we tend to go to the one non-smoking café that there is [in Yerevan], or other places

where there is very little smoke. And those places just happen to be where all the expats or repats or diasporans are.

Because of their preference for a non-smoking lifestyle, Armik and her husband frequent cafés and restaurants where other returnees or diasporans regularly visit. This way, their social capital becomes fortified, which in turn leads to the reproduction of their habitus, at least to a certain extent. This is a loop that is often hard to break. In fact, over time, it may widen the gap between returnees and locals, producing further detachment and alienation. Lebanese-Armenian Sanan, for example, who had moved to Armenia in 1997, said that her network of friends consisted almost entirely of diasporan returnees. She has no interaction with local Armenians at a family level, mostly because of mentality, cultural, and financial¹²³ differences with locals. Thus, together with her family and other returnee friends, they have “drawn a circle and live within that.” She admitted that “it might not be right, because we have come here, and we have to interact. But the reality is that ... if we were a *gaghut*¹²⁴ there [in Lebanon], here, in the homeland, we have turned into a *gaghut* [too]. That’s our destiny.”

Besides networking largely with other people with “homologous” habituses, such returnees often feel the need to temporarily distance themselves from the field. For example, they regularly travel to their former countries to visit family and friends, enjoy some of the cultural practices they have grown up with and still feel familiar to, etc.

¹²³ Economic factors will be discussed in the next section.

¹²⁴ *Gaghut* (meaning colony or settlement outside of the homeland, cognate to the Hebrew *galut*) is another frequently used word in Armenian, along with *spiurk* (diaspora), to refer to diasporic communities.

Embracing diversity, others opt for a more integrationist approach in Armenia, and criticize those who “live in a small island,” by networking mostly with other returnees. “It is dangerous when the same people keep interacting with each other. [It’s as if] we’re bringing the Glendale ghetto [in California] to Armenia,” exclaimed one returnee. Having spent most of his adult life in the West, this returnee valued cultural diversity, and stressed the importance of heterogeneity in his relationships and in society at large. His views were also affected by the fact that his wife was born and raised in Armenia (in a family of Soviet-era repatriates who had later moved to the USA).

Some returnees use their social capital not only to reproduce certain elements of their habitus, but also to try to influence their new environment. Shahan, for example, has adopted such a field restructuring strategy. He said that when the families of his returnee friends gather in his house for lunch or dinner, he often invites some local families from the neighborhood too. “I want them to come and see how we treat each other, our etiquette and manners, the way we sit around the same table and eat and sing in a cozy atmosphere,” he explained. His ultimate goal is to somehow influence or modify the habitus of these locals.

Besides networking with other returnees, many try or want to expand their social capital by encouraging or assisting friends or relatives from the diaspora, and sometimes even people unrelated to them, to establish more solid and frequent bonds to Armenia, and if possible to move to the country too. Many of my interviewees expressed a strong desire to see more diasporans visit or immigrate to Armenia. Expanding their social capital with the addition of more diasporans — with “homologous” habituses — is seen as a means to

facilitate the preservation of their habitus as much as possible. Furthermore, it is regarded as a way to restructure some field structures in Armenia more easily and quickly. As some returnees argued, the efforts of a small number of people can snowball and lead to a cumulative effect or more widespread mentality transformations over time. And the larger the snowball, the higher the possibility of an avalanche in the field, so to speak.

In order to strengthen and multiply diasporans' links to Armenia, many returnees find themselves presenting Armenia in a certain way, consciously or unconsciously, when having discussions with diasporans. More specifically, they try to highlight some positive sides of life in Armenia, and sometimes deliberately filter out negative points — or, as some described, to provide a more “balanced,” “objective,” and “realistic” perspective. When they meet some diasporans who complain about certain aspects of life in Armenia, they often find themselves justifying or elucidating what they believe are the sources of these practices or lifestyles.

Other returnees take a more active role, purposely or not, in serving as bridges or liaisons between diasporans and Armenia. They act as guides to diasporans who visit Armenia. They offer advice or assistance to diasporans who have plans to make investments in or to move to Armenia or who express interest in doing so. They create blogs or special social media pages to disseminate their return stories or share their experiences of starting a new life in Armenia. Or, they agree or want to be featured in interviews or articles published or broadcast in local or diasporan newspapers, magazines, websites, or TV programs.

A group of them have even established an NGO, the RepatArmenia Foundation, to institutionalize the assistance provided to potential returnees. Several of the founders, leaders, and volunteers of the organization that I interviewed told me that their goal was to use the lessons they have acquired from their own return experiences in order to make future returnees' immigration and settlement processes smoother. This is particularly important, they argued, given the absence or fragmented nature of help and information available by government agencies. Such efforts aim, consciously or not, to expand and consolidate the returnees' social capital in order to help them position their habitus in Armenia in a better or firmer manner. Institutionalization also involves a process of labeling and promotion, whereby the social capital that is being created or reinforced through the institutions gets legitimized both among returnees and others (locals and diasporans). The term "repat" in the Foundation's name as well as its abundant and consistent use in its online platforms, events, and projects serve that purpose. Furthermore, the promotional efforts of the institution's leaders — including, for example, tours to various diasporan communities, and interviews given to local and diasporan news outlets — contributes to that process.

3.3. Economic capital

Returnees differ in the availability, access, and use of economic capital. These differences are sometimes quite visible; in other cases, they are not as palpable. The ways in which returnees use and develop their economic capital impact the lifestyle they adopt in Armenia. While some are able to maintain a lifestyle similar to their pre-return environment, others experience a downgrading or upgrading in their standard of living.

Some returnees maintain businesses abroad, deal with clients or partners residing in other countries, or have foreign-based investments, one of the most common of which is renting a house or apartment owned abroad. As a result, they can have stable and diversified income sources not tied to the relatively smaller market, as well as the riskier and more volatile socioeconomic situation in Armenia. The economic capital they thus derive from such activities allows them to maintain a certain lifestyle in their new environment. Many of these people are motivated to move to Armenia to have non-standard lifestyles, as explained in the previous chapter. Artak, 38, is a typical example of this case. He was one of the owners of a successful IT business in the United States, which had allowed him to make real estate investments there. A couple of years before moving to Armenia, he sold his shares in the company, paid off all his outstanding loans, and purchased more properties in the United States. Since relocating to Armenia in 2009, he has been living off the rental income from the properties he owns in the States. Although he has invested some money into a venture in Armenia, he has not been making any income from it yet. He is not worried though. His Armenia-based investment is just a project he is interested in as some kind of a pastime or experimentation, and not an income source he really needs in order to survive. In fact, thanks to his US-based income sources, he has managed not only to maintain a comfortable lifestyle, but even improve his quality of life after migration, according to him.

I prefer the lifestyle here. Quality of life, I think, is better here, if you have the income to live off. First, if I were in the United States, I would still have to work 9–5 every day to pay my mortgage, live comfortably, raise a family. But here, living expenses are lower. My apartment here is paid off, and it cost me one-fifth of the price of my house in Los Angeles. ... My car here is paid off, whereas in America every two years you lease a new car. [There,] you're always in a cycle of making payments, and you have to keep a well-paying job in order to survive. Whereas here, I have [some] set expenses and I survive based on my income over there.

Similar to returnees like Artak who rely heavily on their investments or businesses outside of Armenia, some retired returnees — mostly coming from Iran, Iraq, and the United States — continue benefitting from overseas-based pensions. The foreign currency they regularly receive helps them reproduce at least certain elements of their habitus. However, currency fluctuations and economic instabilities in some of the source countries, especially in Iraq and Iran, leave some of these pensioners with a certain level of financial insecurity. Nevertheless, many of them have adult children who live in Armenia or abroad, and who support them financially when necessary.

In Artak's case, the existence of foreign-based income sources has been sufficient not only to provide him with a comfortable life, but even to improve his quality of life. On the other hand, some other returnees have not been as successful (for various reasons) in leveraging their economic capital. For some of them, settling in Armenia has led to a downgrading of their living standards, compared to their habitus in the diaspora, sometimes temporarily. Nevertheless, a considerable number of these returnees continue to live under more favorable circumstances relative to many locals in their surroundings. Tro and his wife Knar immigrated to Armenia in the early 1990s from Iran. Knar first settled with their children, while Tro continued working in Iran for one year, before joining his family. Their lifestyle was significantly affected after moving. From a comfortable and "financially quite secure" life in Iran (in Tro's words), they found themselves in a country where power cuts, water supply problems, and food shortages, in addition to other problems, abounded. In Iran, Tro had a managerial position in a company, which secured him a high income. He was also quite active in the Armenian community, enjoying both recognition and respect. Their financial status allowed them to

travel frequently to Europe, where they had some relatives. “Materially, we used to have a much better life. All that gradually melted away after moving to Armenia,” Tro admitted. The worst times he remembers were in 1993 and 1994, when in their rented apartment in Yerevan they had around one hour of water every three days, and around 45 minutes of electricity every day. The water and power supplies had to happen to coincide so they could take showers. Cooking was impossible on normal gas- or electricity-powered tops. They had to rely on some other paraffin-like material, which spread a terrible smell both in the house and the food. Although these kinds of living conditions were experienced by many families in Armenia during these years, they were unheard of for them in Iran. In order to situate their habitus in the new environment, Tro and Knar relied, especially in the beginning, on Tro’s income. It continued to come from Iran initially when he was still working there, and for quite some time afterwards when he was employed in a company with Iranian links. Their relatives in Iran and Europe also used to send them certain food supplies and clothes that were difficult to find or get hold of in Armenia during these years. Their economic capital was thus closely intertwined with their social and family networks.¹²⁵ Based on their economic capital, they fared much better than many local families. Knar admitted: “When I looked around me, my condition was way better [than that of many locals], because after all we had foreign currency, which allowed us to buy certain things. Many people in the country had no money at all.” They were however cautious not to abuse or show off this economic advantage they had over many locals. That was “educationally important both for our

¹²⁵ Their social networks inside and outside of Armenia did not only help them go through these difficult times financially. They also supported them psychologically and assisted them with practical matters. In this regard, Tro and Knar particularly emphasized the support they received from some of their distant relatives, who had repatriated during the 1940s Soviet *nerkaght* drive.

children and the people who interacted with us,” said Tro. They avoided using their money to buy certain assets or secure benefits that would have put them at a more visibly privileged position. They were especially careful not to resort to unlawful methods, such as bribing, to buy electricity or to secure passing exam grades for their children when they were studying at Armenian universities, for example. But their reluctance to reveal their higher economic capital to locals was not only restricted to illegally obtainable benefits. For instance, Knar made sure that her children did not wear jewelry at school or even take chocolates or other delicacies with them. Compared to many locals, “our opportunities during that time were better. But I never succumbed to the ostentatious attitude of ‘we have,’” unlike a small number of nouveau-riche-style locals who were able to quickly amass wealth, through various sources or means, during these difficult years, explained Knar. This tendency of some returnees not to draw too much attention to their economic capital, in order to avoid potentially widening the gap between them and many locals, was present among later comers too. It was however especially highlighted among those who had moved to Armenia in the early 1990s. Many of these early comers, including Tro and Knar, were ideologically motivated to move to Armenia, as explained in the previous chapter. This fact most probably explains, at least to a certain extent, the prevalence of this inclination among them — namely, their desire to conceal, downplay, or avoid pretentious manifestations of their economic advantages.

In Artak’s case, described above, the use of foreign-derived economic capital played an instrumental role in positioning his habitus in the new environment. Tro and Knar also relied to a large extent, especially in the initial years when hysteresis was at its peak, on economic capital related to sources outside of Armenia. For other returnees, on the other

hand, a considerable part (if not all) of their income derives from Armenia-based sources. In such cases, the lifestyle they adopt or the way they position their habitus after immigrating depends to a large extent on the economic capital they amass in Armenia, or, conversely, on the losses they encounter. The former is clearly illustrated by returnees who receive special compensation and benefits packages, by working in certain multinational companies, international organizations, embassies, and NGOs. The economic capital they gather in Armenia provides the opportunity to some of them to climb up the socioeconomic ladder, giving them an edge over many local residents as well as other returnees. Social mobility in turn affects their habitus, because they afford to have a more privileged lifestyle than in the countries of their former residence. Garbis, for example, moved from Lebanon to Armenia in 2005 at the age of 33, after being offered a job position with a number of benefits, including the coverage of rent by his company. The organization he works at employs several other diasporan returnees in leading positions. His Lebanon-born Armenian wife followed him to Armenia, and they had three children. Garbis admitted that he would have been unable to have the lifestyle he and his family currently maintain in Armenia if he had stayed in Lebanon, where his financial situation was not very bright. At the age of 18, he had lost his father. Garbis and his then 16-year-old sister were left with “an inheritance that was not big.” He thus had to “start from zero” and “work hard.” In Armenia, he and his family have a “comfortable life,” which he admitted is “not like [the life of] a *hayastantsi*,” because he “gets compensated differently [i.e., higher].” A few years after moving to Armenia, Garbis bought a piece of land as an investment. A year or so later, he purchased a summer house, and lately, he also bought a new apartment for his family, where they were planning to move at the time of our interview. He, his wife, and children afford to travel

for at least once or twice yearly. His children “are not deprived of anything.” To the contrary, he provides them with various kinds of comforts besides education. The economic capital he has accumulated in Armenia has also allowed him to enhance his children’s cultural capital. They partake in several extracurricular activities, such as music and sports classes. When he was in his children’s age growing up in Lebanon, he had neither the opportunity nor the encouragement from his parents to be involved in the arts, which were considered “a luxury (not necessarily in financial terms).” In his case, the focus was on the development of more practical skills and formal education — particularly in the fields of business, commerce, and economics — because “you could make a living only with that [kind of knowledge].” That was the “sole reliable and secure” potential source of income in Lebanon, he argued. In Armenia, on the other hand, “playing an instrument or reading music notes is a necessity. In all homes, at least some of the children are involved in such activities, ... whether as a means of earning an income or [a source of] personal fulfillment.” That is why, he and his wife “are pushing” their children to be more active in that regard. In this case, Garbis and his wife had realized that learning to play a musical instrument or being involved in other artistic activities are highly valued forms of capital in Armenia. The strategy they had adopted in this regard was directed toward their children. Thanks to their economic capital, they were making sure that their children develop these kinds of skills in order for their habitus to better match the new field.

The last part of Garbis’s example shows the interplay of economic and cultural capital as he tries to position his habitus in Armenia. Economic capital is also closely linked to social capital. This was mentioned in Tro’s and Knar’s example above, but will be

further elaborated upon in the rest of this section. The relationship between economic and social capital is especially evident in two situations, both of which contribute to habitus reproduction: the importance of returnees' social networks in the workplace, and the impact of their socioeconomic status on their interactions with locals.

Several examples illustrate the former. Some returnees operate privately owned businesses that attract or cater specifically to returnees or diasporan tourists. Such businesses thrive mostly in the services, tourism, and entertainment sectors, where returnees have opened hotels, travel agencies, pubs, cafés, restaurants serving foreign dishes, etc. They often employ other returnees. Others are active in the construction sector, where they partner with or employ other returnees who are architects or interior designers, for example. Or, they construct buildings or houses that they advertise among and sell primarily to other returnees or diasporans who are interested in buying a property in Armenia. Some returnees are employed at the offices of traditional diasporan parties that operate in Armenia, or in organizations affiliated with such parties. Others work in organizations or as part of projects dealing with or addressing returnees, diasporans, or foreigners (such as Birthright Armenia, Armenian Volunteer Corps, RepatArmenia Foundation, etc.), or funded by them (TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, the American University of Armenia, the mobile operator VivaCell-MTS, the environmental NGO Armenian Tree Project, etc.). Consequently, such employment structures and institutional arrangements, where returnees have the opportunity to interact with other returnees or diasporans, contribute to the preservation of certain elements of their habitus. For example, they can continue using their dialect to communicate with employers, coworkers, or customers. In addition, by maintaining such workplace

environments, some returnees argue that they also purposely try or automatically manage to transmit certain cultural practices or values to the local Armenians who work with them or come in contact with them as clients, that is, to restructure the field structures in Armenia. Some widely mentioned examples of such values are the perceived higher level of professionalism, discipline, work ethic, egalitarianism, and entrepreneurship these settings nurture and project.

The inter-relationship between economic and social capital forms is also shown in the way the disparities in the socioeconomic status of returnees and local Armenians affect the social networks that returnees are able to create or maintain in Armenia. Besides differences in traditions, preferences, tastes, and past experiences, some returnees argue that there are also financial discrepancies that hamper deeper interaction with locals. They realize or sense that some of their local acquaintances cannot afford, at least not as regularly or easily as they can, to socialize in certain ways they want or like to. This in turn creates an uneasy situation and hence less frequent interactions, because both or one of the sides avoid(s) highlighting or aggravating such financial gaps. Consequently, many returnees keep close contacts primarily with other returnees, leading to habitus reproduction. American-Armenian Sandra, for example, described her experience as follows:

I can go to certain cafés. It's not that they [i.e., locals] won't. It is something they won't do often. I would go there because I want to get an American cup of coffee and it's normal for me to pay a dollar for it. ... I can afford it because that's how much I would pay for it in the United States. ... Because they [i.e., locals] don't have that [ability], they're always going to look at you differently. ... Not that you feel bad. It's just you don't want to do that in front of them. You don't want to show them that. So, ... you want to find a balance where you're not like "I can afford it; I'm doing it," and you know what they're struggling with. So, it's hard. I think that my relationships with them can't go past a certain point [because of this].

Similar to Tro and Knar, Sandra was careful not to put a spotlight on her higher economic capital when interacting with locals. Nevertheless, her caution had less to do with the pedagogically and ideologically driven concerns of Tro and Knar. Having migrated to Armenia in 2013 primarily because of a job offer, Sandra was more worried about the practical aspects of her financial differences from locals.

4. Explaining Intrapersonal Variations Over Time

The way individual returnees try to position their habitus in the new field through the use or creation of cultural, social, and economic capital varies over time. This happens because of personal re-evaluations or because of field changes.

With regard to cultural capital, Iranian-Armenian Aspet's reflections on the stages he went through, since his relocation to Armenia in 1996, are indicative of the changes some long-term returnees experience over time. In the first five years of his settlement in Armenia, he altered some elements of his habitus by acquiring new cultural capital (language, spelling, ways of making toasts, etc.), because local Armenian culture — by virtue of its relation to *Hayastan* — was considered more superior than “*gaghut*-ized”¹²⁶ culture. Initially, he used to think as follows: “If one of us is to be [considered] the real Armenian, that should be the Armenian of Armenia, and not the Lebanese- or Iranian-Armenian. We were mutilated there [in the diaspora]. This is the [real] Armenian.” Thus, in the beginning, Aspet had “the desire to resemble” local Armenians. “You start making toasts like them [locals], using words that they use here. You even change your spelling

¹²⁶ See footnote 124 (p. 258) above for the meaning of this word.

[so that it conforms] to the official spelling [in Armenia],¹²⁷ because you think you will become more *Hayastan*-ized if you do so.” Aspet’s initial efforts to appropriate certain cultural and behavioral features that he perceived as “authentically” Armenian resemble the attitudes of some African Americans who while visiting their ancestral homeland in Africa aim at “performing African” by “mimicking” locals as a way to adopt a perceived shared identity or “collectivity motivated by a desire to ‘belong’” (Ohrt Fehler 2014: 144-145).

After a few years, however, Aspet reversed his course. He started attributing many of the differences between his and local habitus to the Soviet legacy in Armenia.¹²⁸

Who decided to call this spelling [used in Armenia] “new” and discard the other one? So, I methodically started to restore the [classical] orthography (but of course, I still use their spelling [i.e., “new orthography”] for official paperwork).¹²⁹ Thus, [I reconsidered] that duality of “who is the [real] Armenian? The Soviet-Armenian or the *gaghut*-ized Armenian [whose upbringing has happened] in the closed environment of the diaspora?” Some things have been preserved in the diaspora because Armenians have lived in communities resembling a ghetto, a colony, a closed environment. [But] Armenia has been through a lot, including the Soviet propaganda machine and ideology. So, is this what we should copy? Is this what we should all turn into? They [i.e., locals] are convinced that we should. We should eat like them, speak like them, have a lifestyle similar to theirs, carry out a funeral the way they do.

The re-evaluations Aspet has made over time are, to a large extent, related to the process of de-idealization of homeland he experienced, similar to many other returnees. Aspet

¹²⁷ Eastern Armenian speakers in Iran, along with Western Armenian-speaking diasporans in other communities, primarily use the classical Armenian orthography, and not the simplified version (sometimes called “new orthography”) adopted in Armenia during an orthography reform first devised by the Soviets in 1922 and partially revised in 1940.

¹²⁸ This is a point that I referred to in section 2 above, when explaining how returnees rationalize the fact that they feel different from locals.

¹²⁹ The way Aspet intentionally switches his orthography, depending on the field he is in (private versus official settings), once again highlights the agentic ability of returnees to use capital selectively when positioning their habitus.

had moved to Armenia primarily motivated by ideological reasons. In the initial years of settlement in Armenia, he “used to see everything through rose-colored glasses.” Over time, however, his attitude changed, as demonstrated in section 1 above (pp. 217-218), where he was also featured as an example.

American-Armenian Astghik’s habitus-positioning strategies, on the other hand, followed the opposite direction.

I came probably thinking “I’m the American who’s going to teach everyone, give everything, bring feminism, [etc.]” ... But I’ve realized that it’s 50-50. I have just as much to learn. ... [For example,] I’m extremely liberal. But there are some things that I learned are not appropriate in public [because of] the importance people place here on family and the people in their environment. ... It has changed me. ... I think I’ve become more family-oriented [and a] better person because of that. ... I’ve learned various things: language, cooking, wonderful ways of disciplining kids, being nice to and caring about your neighbor, caring about your relatives. ... I [thus] opened myself up to learning and being. I learned that it wasn’t just about coming and changing; it was about taking what’s wonderful here and incorporating it into my life. And I think that’s why it has worked in my case, because I’ve gone local *to an extent*.

Astghik said the fact that she has adopted a “flexible” approach over time has helped her to feel that she is “an important part of” and “a player in this culture.” This feeling has been reinforced by the way she has formed her social capital in Armenia, mostly due to certain life-course developments. After moving, Astghik got married to a local Armenian man (who previously lived in the States), and she has maintained close contacts with his parents and relatives in Armenia.

Aspet’s and Astghik’s cases show how personal re-assessment leads to changes in the way(s) returnees decide to make use of existing or new cultural capital to situate their habitus in Armenia. In other cases, transformations experienced by the field itself

generate new situations that lead returnees to feel the need to change their course of action. Returnees who have been residing in Armenia for a long time notice that, throughout the years, the possession or lack of certain forms of cultural capital has acquired different meanings or has assumed various levels of importance. For example, some of those who had moved to Armenia in the 1990s, when Armenia had just come out of the Soviet Union, described how their lack of Russian language skills caused much more serious communication problems for them in the early years than lately, because Russian has declined in prominence, although it remains important. Similarly, they explained how certain clothing styles, which were rare or were considered inappropriate or strange by locals in the early years, have become more widespread or mainstream in more recent times. Thus, the need to learn Russian or change their dress styles was more acute in the beginning. In more recent years, they do not feel that they need to adopt that course of action with the same degree of necessity or importance. Of course, this difference is also related to the fact that having adapted, consciously or unconsciously, their habitus with time at least to a certain extent, long-established returnees do not experience or feel the disruption between their habitus and the new environment with the same intensity or frequency as before.

With regard to social capital, the intensity, frequency, and importance of returnees' relationships with local Armenians often change over time too. As they become better and more deeply integrated into Armenian society, some of them develop a larger number of, as well as closer and more sustainable, ties to locals. In parallel, this is sometimes accompanied by a distancing from other returnees. For example, returnees with children start developing relationships with parents of their children's local

classmates. However, for others, integration is not always a linear process running from more to less separation from local circles over time. Thus, perhaps surprisingly, the opposite direction has been experienced by a number of my interviewees. Often, when they first moved, they had the desire or tendency to have more local friends, driven either by ideological considerations or by a predilection for cultural diversity. Over time, however, they realize that their initial approach is unnecessary, unsuccessful, or infeasible. They gradually start networking more with other returnees. Such people argue that interacting with locals should not be considered a “duty” that requires special or artificial “efforts,” but should happen organically in a way that makes one “comfortable.” This re-evaluation, as that made by Aspet mentioned above with regard to cultural capital, is sometimes associated with the de-idealization of homeland that returnees go through after settling in Armenia. Canadian-Armenian Armik (29, married), who had been raised in a multicultural setting where tolerance toward diversity was highly valued, described how her experience regarding social capital has changed over the years:

When I first moved, I really wanted to make it a point for my circle of friends not to ... [consist] only [of] diasporans, not to sort of live in that bubble. And I really made a point of reaching out and trying to make not just as many local friends as possible, but also meaningful relationships with local people. And I have those. It's not that I only talk to diasporans. *But*, I eventually found that no matter how much you don't want to live in your little bubble, in the end, wherever you are, you are drawn to people who are like you. ... [So, now,] I don't think it's a bad thing that a lot of my friends are people who have come from similar circumstances. I mean, that's kind of human nature, and I've come to accept that. It has to happen naturally.

But the development and maintenance of social networks with other returnees also ebb and flow over time. For instance, one challenge that was mentioned by a number of my interviewees, mostly younger returnees and especially those who interacted mainly with

circles of volunteers,¹³⁰ is the temporary or unstable nature of such links. The fact that many diasporan-Armenians, such as volunteers, move to Armenia but end up returning to their former countries or relocating to a third country renders long-term relationships very difficult. This causes frustration among some returnees, because of the multiple or renewed — though not uniformly intense — hysteresis situations their habitus faces over the years. American-Armenian Lucy, for example, who initially came to Armenia as a Birthright Armenia volunteer but then found a job and decided to stay longer, said that one thing she “struggled with” was that her circle of friends in Armenia was “very transient.” Living with this volatile social capital “could be very hard,” she said, adding: “I’ve seen probably hundreds of people (friends of mine) come [to Armenia] and then leave. So, my community is pretty small [now], because after a while, you kind of learn not to even try with the people who aren’t going to stay here. You learn to choose [your friends] more carefully.” Lucy’s selective use of social capital hints once again at the agentic strategies returnees employ as they try to situate their habitus in Armenia’s sociocultural space.

Besides intrapersonal variations related to the use of cultural and social capital, the way individual returnees use or create economic capital to situate their habitus in the new environment changes over time too. These changes are related to personal choices and life-course developments, such as changing or losing jobs, making new investments, entering the job market after university studies or quitting it after retirement, etc. They are also affected by more contextual factors, especially given the quickly and frequently changing nature of post-Soviet Armenia’s socioeconomic and political landscape. For

¹³⁰ As mentioned in Chapter IV, there are a number of organizations in Armenia that implement volunteering or internship programs for young diasporans.

example, those who moved to Armenia during the first post-independence years recounted how their experiences in this regard varied over the years of long-term settlement. In the early years, the war, the energy crisis, and the transition from the Soviet economic system, among other problems, had left the country's economy in ruins and many locals destitute. Araz, for example, who had lived quite a privileged life in a European country,¹³¹ came to Armenia in 1991. In these early years, the economic capital she possessed allowed her not to stress very much over financial difficulties, unlike many locals. For such early comers, the magnitude of these financial differences became glaringly apparent during visits back to their former country of residence. When Araz returned to her former country for her first Christmas holidays after moving to Armenia, she was frustrated when she saw a TV advertisement of a children's toy that cost the equivalent of \$100. In Armenia, "an entire family could live with \$100 for a whole year. Shame on you! Shame on you!" she thought. Similar to some other early comers I interviewed, her attitude was to try to modify some elements of her habitus instead of using her higher economic capital to accentuate the mismatch.

I went shopping and got some potatoes, cabbage, onions, lentil, and beans. Those were the only things available to eat back then. So, I said: "OK, we'll live with that. We won't die." Of course, I shouldn't exaggerate. Those of us who had come from abroad had a bit more money [than locals]. ... So, to be frank, I felt comfortable because I had money.

Araz and some other early comers emphasized that, especially in their initial years, they were cautious not to splurge on expenditures that would be regarded as normal for them but luxuries for locals.¹³² As Araz put it, she "never wanted to abuse that [economic advantage] or to show off." For example, even though she loved works of art and could

¹³¹ The country of origin will not be specified in order to prevent the potential revelation of her identity.

¹³² This was also mentioned in the above sub-section.

easily afford to buy paintings or traditional carpets that sold for very low prices back then, she did not think of doing so. Arts had been placed on the back burner. Transforming her economic capital into “objectified” cultural capital was regarded as an indulgence that could further amplify the chasm between herself and many locals in her new environment. When these difficult early years passed, however, her habitus was reoriented toward its former (pre-return) direction. When I visited her house in July 2013, it was adorned with numerous beautiful artworks, mainly paintings, that she said she had bought after the country’s socioeconomic situation started gradually improving in the late 1990s. Again, this shows how economic capital is employed differently at different times by the same person while situating his/her habitus in Armenia. Initially, when Araz experienced a mismatch between her habitus and the new environment, the strategy she adopted was to withhold her desires or long-standing cultural practices. Over the years, as the field changed again, this time due to the improvement in the country’s economy, the suspended habitus returned somehow to its pre-existing state. Araz told me, however, that this time, her economic capital could not be used as easily as in the early years to maintain her former lifestyle or preferences, because of the increase in the prices of artworks in Armenia. It had taken her quite a long time and careful financial planning to be able to acquire the “objectified” cultural capital she desired.

5. Abandoning the Field: Renewed Hysteresis

The trajectory that returnees pass through in Armenia becomes an unbreakable part of their life histories. The ways in which they modify their cultural practices, acquire knowledge, develop new tastes and preferences, create or expand social networks, and increase or lose economic capital leave their indelible mark on their habitus. Thus,

returning to their former countries of residence, whether for a short visit or long-term settlement again, often creates new hysteresis experiences. Getting temporarily distanced from or abandoning altogether the fields in Armenia are often problematic too. The habitus does not acquire its pre-return state completely or automatically by going back to the former country and environment. Faced with such an, often unexpected, situation, returnees try, once again, to make sense of the fields they are confronted with and to embark on a new journey of habitus position-taking. The following concluding vignette of this chapter aims at shedding light on this continuous cycle. Despite the initial difficulties Arsen (46, single) had faced when he moved to Armenia in 2004, he seemed to have quite a comfortable and gratifying life when I met him in August 2013. The adjustment problems he had encountered in the early years of settlement, and the stress or anxieties they had caused, were either resolved or at least alleviated. However, Arsen told me that he had decided to go back to the United States a few months after our interview, in order to take care of his elderly parents, who had gradually become less self-reliant. With a tearful voice, he described how nervous, “afraid,” and “confused” he was that he had to return. “I feel that I am going to be lost,” he exclaimed. His habitus was quite well adjusted in Armenia, at least professionally, which was a significant part of his life. He felt he had a fulfilling position in his career-related field. As a university professor, he had developed a social network of colleagues, and especially of current and former students, among whom he enjoyed recognition and respect. On the other hand, he felt quite alienated from the US society, especially because he had maintained limited ties — besides his family relationships — with his birthplace.

I have a lot of connections here [i.e., in Armenia]. ... And that is a factor of who I am. ... My relationships are a part of my identity. [So,] what I’ve realized lately is that in the United States no one really knows who I am, because who I am is these people that I relate to here. So I think I’m going to be a stranger [there].

In addition, by familiarizing himself with and understanding better the outlooks, perspectives, and social contexts of his local students, that is, by gaining new cultural capital in Armenia, he thought he had become a better teacher over time. He felt he had been able to continuously adapt his American-style teaching method and course material to local needs, which do not resonate with preferences in the States. He was upset that he had to relinquish this social, cultural, and symbolic¹³³ capital. He explained:

I don't want an average life. Maybe I feel that my life here is special. ... I feel appreciated here. ... [On the other hand,] I realize that in the United States everyone teaches like me. So in the United States, I don't want to be a teacher, because I'm just going to be a normal teacher.

In order to prepare himself psychologically for the upcoming phase of his life, Arsen had decided to give himself around one year before moving back. One of his friends was going to visit him a few months after our interview. "It's to help me transition, because I need to have someone who knows this reality, or sees me in this reality," he explained. Moreover, he expressed a strong desire to maintain his tangible connections to Armenia even after emigration. "I'm keeping them as part of my life," he said. He planned to visit every year and, if possible, offer short-term courses. He wanted to keep the piece of land he owns in Armenia, and even to build a house on it in the future. He was not closing his bank account in Yerevan. He was also waiting to receive his RA citizenship at the time of our interview, and was not planning to leave without getting it. He explained: "I invested nine years of my life [in Armenia], and I'm choosing to have citizenship as the crown. ... If I'm going to leave, ... I want to take something with me to tie me [to this place]."

¹³³ In Bourdieu's work, "symbolic" capital "refers to [the] degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour" (Johnson 1993: 7).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how returnees perceive their new environment. The homeland de-idealization process that many go through is particularly important to understand, because it makes adjustment to life in Armenia particularly emotional for diasporan returnees. I have also shown how they consciously and unconsciously respond to the disruption and dislocation of their habitus, when they find themselves in field structures that feel unfamiliar or different. Bourdieu's concepts, especially those of "hysteresis" and "capital," were particularly insightful for the analysis of this aspect of return. They helped me examine the ways in which returnees adapt to their new environment over time, using or creating various forms of capital. I have argued that, faced with "hysteresis" situations, many returnees adopt habitus-positioning strategies selectively. This often results in a habitus that is more or less integrated in the new environment, but at the same time not entirely merged into it — culturally, socially, and financially. Returnees change certain aspects of their habitus. But because of the durability or inertia of their entrenched dispositions, reproduction is also quite widespread. This selective and partial integration thus perpetuates somehow the way these diasporans used to live and behave in the diaspora. This pattern resembles the two-way co-existence of integration and transnationalism that King and Christou (2014) have noticed among second-generation American- and German-Greek returnees to Greece. By focusing on long-term diasporic return, my study extends their argument to older-generation diasporans and also sheds light on temporally relevant issues associated with this pattern. For example, it highlights the shifts that have occurred over time both within the Armenian diaspora and in the homeland, as well as in the returnees' life cycles. Furthermore, by linking the debate on the integration–transnationalism nexus to wider

social theory, and especially to Bourdieu's concepts, I examined the *processes* through which such nexus unfolds over time. I showed the inter-relationship of subjective and objective factors — both before and after return — involved in these processes.

The way and degree at which returnees experience hysteresis in Armenia, as well as the manner in which they deal with it, impact their identity and sense of belonging, as I will thoroughly analyze in the next chapter. They translate into (re)considerations and (re)definitions of their self, place, and group perceptions: Who am I? Whom do I identify myself with? Where do I belong? In the case of Sirun (from this chapter's introductory vignette) and others like her, the continuity of dualities in Armenia results in an oscillating sense of belonging, or alternatively, a feeling of liminal homelessness. On the other hand, some younger returnees, mostly born and raised in the West to parents belonging to Sirun's generation, do not feel this duality, at least not to the same degree. Their identities are marked by more cosmopolitan, globalized tendencies. The appearance of this cosmopolitan identity among young Western diasporans is related to the generational evolution of the Armenian diaspora, but also to the transformation of the "host" societies they come from. Thus, although rising assimilation and wealth levels among diasporans may account for the development of this cosmopolitan trend particularly in the West, the increasing diversity and multiculturalism of host countries has also contributed to it.

CHAPTER VII

(Re-)assessing and (Re)defining Identity and Belonging

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how returnees conceive their new environment, and try to deal with the differences or mismatch they feel between their habitus and the new field structures. Going through these previously explained different post-return experiences and processes, returnees try to come to grips with such self- and group-scrutinizing questions as: Who am I or what is my identity? Which “group” do I feel a part of? Do I belong anywhere? Where do I belong? What and where is home? Is the sense of attachment I feel to a given place strong enough to be permanent and sustainable? As Christou (2006: 15-16) argues with regard to second-generation Greek-American returnees to Greece, “[r]eturn migration challenges, translates, defines, narrates and constructs new meanings of the *who I am* in connection to the *where I am*.” This chapter engages with these experiences and processes of (re-)assessing and (re-)imagining identity and belonging.

Four major patterns or inclinations exist, based on the analysis of my fieldwork data, in the way returnees (re-)evaluate and (re)define their identities and sense of belonging: lopsided anchoring, oscillation, liminal homelessness, and cosmopolitan floating. The pattern that a returnee is inclined to at a particular point in time is mainly affected by:

- 1) the personal background and stage in the life cycle, including their age, marital status, the diasporic context (both spatially and temporally) they come from, etc.; and
- 2) migration-related factors, such as the year of their relocation to Armenia, the length of

time they have been residing in the country, return motivation(s), and post-migration experiences related to habitus positioning. These factors exist in a specific temporal-relational environment. Thus, identification involves a subjectively engendered process that is also affected by structural developments. In addition, a sense of attachment and movement, sedentarism and mobility co-exist in all patterns, though in various combinations and degrees. Over time, the same person may experience changes in the intensity levels as well as shifts in patterns.

Of these four patterns, oscillation, and to a lesser extent, liminal homelessness, are the most predominant ones. Their prevalence is related to the ability and willingness of most returnees I interviewed to integrate in Armenian society to a certain degree, without however altering their habitus completely, as explained in the previous chapter. The majority of the returnees who exhibit these two patterns have moved to Armenia motivated if not primarily, at least to a considerable degree, by ethnocultural and nationally oriented rationales. Returnees who have immigrated or have decided to stay for more practical or objective issues usually (re)define their identities and belonging in a lopsided manner (either toward Armenia or toward their former environment). Finally, those driven by more cosmopolitan and universally oriented motivations tend to follow the cosmopolitan floating pattern of identity and belonging.

1. Lopsided Anchoring

In this pattern, a returnee feels more comfortable in one place or environment. *Home is either Armenia or the country/community in the diaspora* (birthplace or country of

former residence). However, in both cases, some sense of attachment is also felt toward the other place.

1.1. Home is Armenia

Some well-integrated returnees feel firmly grounded in Armenia and consider it their home. It is a place characterized by “strong,” “reassuring,” and “long-term” emotions, as one returnee put it, “that makes you feel you don’t have to adjust; you don’t have to make an effort to feel comfortable, or to feel a sense of belonging to.” For people with such feelings, Armenia is not so much a *homeland* in an idealistic way (though they do consider it their and the Armenian nation’s *hairenik*), but more like a *homebase* that is or has become a part of their lives. If and to the extent that it is still experienced, the process of de-idealization of homeland (discussed in the previous chapter) does not or no longer cause much distress among these returnees. Even though people with this pattern are quite well-established in Armenia, they also often maintain some sense of attachment to the diasporic environment or country they have come from. There is a certain degree of fondness or familiarity toward it too. However, such people often identify themselves more closely with local Armenians, and a few even use the words “*hayastantsi*” (Armenian from Armenia) or “*teghatsi*” (local, native) when referring to how they feel. When asked to reflect on their sociocultural and lifestyle differences from local Armenians, they consider them insignificant or natural. They are not bothered by them very much. Their “habitus” seems to have overcome the “hysteresis” caused by spatial mobility. They have used existing or created new cultural, social, and economic capital to successfully and satisfactorily situate their habitus in Armenia, often by adjusting several or most of its elements. Returnees inclined toward this pattern are usually people who

have settled in Armenia for a long time (alone or with their families). They include, for example, returnees who moved during the transition years (1988–91) or shortly after independence. In Armenia, they have experienced major developments in their personal lives. They have also witnessed historical events (such as independence, Gharabagh war, etc.) and the dynamic changes that the country has gone through over the past few decades. These experiences have created particularly strong memories and emotions — joys and predicaments — that have attached them to Armenia. Having moved to Armenia, or having spent a prolonged period of time in the past, at a young age also seems to be a factor. This is especially the case with people who came to Soviet or independent Armenia to study. Having arrived in Armenia at an important life stage and having been socialized in Armenian universities during their formative years, such returnees often have had less difficulty integrating into the larger fabric of society later on. Thus, they often felt more at ease staying in Armenia upon graduation, or returning to live there after a while. The university years in Armenia have played an important role in the development of their personalities, cultural preferences and practices, as well as social bonds in the country, helping them take such decisions more easily in the future. Another factor that facilitates or accounts for the adoption of this pattern is the formation of family in Armenia — again a key life-course event. Returnees who have gotten married and started a family (or expanded their family) in Armenia create memories and acquire experiences that tie them and their family members to Armenia as a homebase for their family unit. These also include some returnees with local spouses, through whom an expanded local family network provides a supportive environment. Thus, the process of feeling at home in Armenia is far from being a purely endogenous or subjective process; various objective factors also contribute to its development.

The memories and experiences that contribute to the transformation of Armenia into a homebase for these returnees are not only cognitive and emotional processes. They are also embodied in more material ways. These returnees become increasingly distanced from their former countries, as their tangible ties with those environments diminish or disappear with the passage of time. For example, the sale of their house (or in the case of single people, their parental house) and other physical belongings in the diaspora often accelerates this process. The feeling of detachment from their former environments is especially acute among returnees from societies or communities that have undergone dramatic transformations after their own migration to Armenia. Many Iranian-Armenians find a totally different spatial setting when they visit their former neighborhood in the quickly changing urban landscape of Tehran, where houses get demolished and rebuilt frequently. Returnees from Middle Eastern communities feel detached from their former countries over time, because of the emigration of many of their close family members and friends to other countries (mostly to North America), after their own relocation to Armenia. Thus, especially during visits to their former country, such returnees realize that life there is not like before, because of the loss of these physical and social ties.

At the same time, the creation, expansion, and diversification of tangible ties with Armenia attach them more to their new environment. They solidify individual and family memories, making Armenia a part of their daily existence, rather than a distant, or romantic, homeland. Such tangible connections to Armenia include purchasing property, land, or house; owning a business; having graves of parents or other family members; marrying a local and having local extended family members; having children who are attached to their classmates, school, extracurricular activities in Armenia; etc.

Tangible ties seem to be especially important for female returnees. For example, many of them described how their attachment to Armenia increased after they purchased a new house. The experience of one female returnee, who lived in a rented apartment in Armenia for around 12 years after emigrating from Lebanon in 1997, is indicative of this point. During our interview, she explained how her tangible ties to her childhood house in Beirut — with the memories and family history attached to it — made it difficult for her to detach herself emotionally from Lebanon, until she forged new kinds of material bonds by purchasing a house in Yerevan.¹³⁴ Till then, there were times she used to “dream” of her Beirut house and neighborhood. The fact that she had not brought her furniture with her also led to the continuation of her “memory threads.”

[Having] all that [in Lebanon] provided some kind of peace of mind, because as long as it was there, you knew you could go and visit, and revive your [old] memories. ... So, as long as we had kept our house [in Lebanon], it was more difficult [to adapt to life in Armenia], because you know that your home is there, your memories are there, everything [is there]. Even though I loved it here, when I used to go to that Beirut home [for short visits], coming back to Armenia was hard (until returning to my normal routine here again). ... But after you burn the bridges behind you, it becomes easier. When you close that page of your life, it kind of stays only in your mind and memories. The material aspect no longer exists. It is gone, [especially] when you start building a new home [in Armenia] from scratch, with renewed enthusiasm...

I will conclude this section with the example of another female returnee, whose case illustrates many of the points discussed above about the pattern of lopsided anchoring to Armenia. Lori was born and raised in the village of Anjar, Lebanon. In 1990, at the age of 22, she came to Armenia, which was still a Soviet country then, to study. In Armenia, she witnessed such significant transformations as the collapse of the Soviet system, the declaration of independence, the Gharabagh war, and the subsequent ceasefire. On a

¹³⁴ She also got married (to another diasporan returnee) a few years before our interview, and they were living in the new house when I met her. This important life-course event has also contributed to her detachment from her former environment and (re)conception of home.

more personal level, the past two decades or so were replete with life-changing experiences and powerful memories for Lori. She got married in 1993 to another returnee, and had children. Her husband died a few years later, but she continued to live and work in Armenia, and more recently was joined by her mother who moved from Lebanon to stay with her. Lori's early years were quite difficult in terms of adjusting to a new lifestyle and coping with the cultural and mentality differences she noticed among local Armenians. Now, however, she remembers those years with special fondness and nostalgia. Lori is well-settled in Armenia now and considers it her home. She still has a sense of attachment to Lebanon, and especially to her village there, but when she occasionally visits it, she knows she is "just a tourist." She said that when she began "understanding the problems and complexes of the people in Armenia, and the reasons that have made them the way they are," she "started loving them." Now, she has more local than diasporan or returnee friends. She does not "differentiate anymore," and she even gets saddened when other returnees, who have difficulties adapting to life in Armenia, start criticizing *hayastantsis*. During our interview, throughout which she spoke to me in Eastern Armenian,¹³⁵ she described her feelings as follows:

Even though I have come from outside, I have lived half of my life here. ... So, this [environment] is sort of mine, especially that my home, my children are here. I'm from this place; I feel that I am completely a native. ... I am already a *hayastantsi*. ... The feeling of my "home, sweet home" is in Armenia now. ... I consider everything here — the people, the nature, and even the clothes hung on the washing line in the building across the street — to be mine. If you asked me the same question a few years after my relocation, my answer would have been different. ... Sometimes I laugh at the expectations I had back then. ... But [then I realized that] this is a normal country too, with its bad and good sides. ... So, that idealization was shattered. ... Now this is how my life has come to be, and I am really happy I live here, despite all the difficulties I have been through. I live a more conscious life here. Perhaps I have found myself, my identity. Now I can't imagine leaving this country. ... I am already rooted here.

¹³⁵ The fact that she had altered her dialect, an "embodied" form of cultural capital, shows the level of her integration in Armenian society.

The process of de-idealization of Armenia that Lori experienced in her initial years has subsided and has given rise to realistic thoughts. Armenia has been transformed from an ideal homeland to a “normal country” where Lori feels fulfilled living and happy to call “home.”

1.2. Home is the birthplace or country of former residence

The lopsided pattern is also observed among returnees who regard the environment or country that they have left behind as their (main) home. Even though they live in Armenia, many of them know that they want to return to their homes in the diaspora one day, if and when they have the opportunity or ability. They have the frame of mind of temporary sojourners. Some of them enjoy their life in Armenia for the time it will last, while others agonize over their stays. The habituses of many of these individuals have taken a longer time to deal or have faced more difficulties grappling with the post-migration hysteresis situation. As in the case of those who have a strong sense of belonging toward Armenia, returnees with feelings tilted to the opposite direction do also have some kind of attachment to Armenia. In terms of identity, these returnees often identify themselves as hyphenated Armenians (American-Armenians, Lebanese-Armenians, etc.) or just as Americans, Lebanese, and so on, meaning that the country of birth or former residence constitutes an important part of who they feel they are. The degree of assimilation into the diasporic society before moving to Armenia and the degree of disillusionment with life in Armenia play essential roles in the adoption of this belonging and identity pattern. Returnees who have been largely assimilated in the diaspora feel more comfortable in their pre-return setting; it feels more familiar culturally and socially. In addition, those who have faced major disappointments in Armenia —

including intense culture shock, financial problems, etc. — and have not managed to overpower them feel closer to their former environment, not necessarily because they are more emotionally attached to it, but because they view it as more tolerable or acceptable in comparison to their life in Armenia. The fact that many of the returnees embracing this pattern are single and have moved to Armenia alone seems to further accentuate their inclination toward their pre-return environment. The presence of close family members in the diaspora pulls them further away from Armenia. In addition, some of my interviewees who have moved to Armenia at a late age (after 60) also exhibit certain aspects of this pattern. Having spent most of their childhood and adult lives in the diaspora seems to have bonded them inextricably to their pre-return setting. Their habitus has been shaped and has remained deeply ingrained in that environment. Moreover, many of these elderly people were motivated to move to Armenia to join other family members (usually their previously repatriated adult children). So, in a way, they were secondary decision makers, as described in Chapter V. The following examples illustrate how this pattern was manifested in two very different cases.

Lucy, a 25-year-old single woman born and raised in the United States, decided to come alone to Armenia in 2011 as a Birthright Armenia volunteer. Her case was also featured in Chapter V, where I had described the degree of her detachment from Armenianness until her arrival to Armenia. After completing her volunteering project, Lucy found a job in Yerevan and decided to stay, at least for the near future. When I interviewed her, she described herself as a “temporary repat.” For her, home is the United States, because she said her family is all there. She added: “In Armenia, I’m an American more than I am an Armenian.” As for her feelings toward Armenia, she had the following reflections:

I [now] do consider Armenia a home though, *one* of my homes. [But] it's not my homeland; it's not *necessarily* where I belong, where I should be. ... I think that is a very objective opinion, because ... I had no conception of [Armenia before moving]. I didn't even think about Armenia before I came here. ... I couldn't even picture what *anything* would look like [here]. I didn't know if Yerevan was a big city, or if it was going to be like a little village. And I hadn't seen a lot of pictures. I hadn't grown up with [pictures of Mount] Ararat on my wall. ... What I mean is that I didn't come with all these ideas of "the homeland," expecting to love it, feeling like I needed to help or save my country. ... It was a totally new thing to me. It was as new as China, or Poland, or any [other] country would be! So, I just liked [it] for what it is. ... [It is not] where I need to be. I stay because I like it, and when I don't like it anymore, I'll go. I keep it very simple.

Several aspects of Lucy's lifestyle and practices indicate that she has been unable or unwilling to integrate into Armenian society in a deep way. For example, her knowledge of Armenian was still very limited. The majority of her friends in Armenia were short- or long-term returnees. She worked in an organization where she was surrounded by many other returnee coworkers.

The second case is 67-year-old Talin. I met her and her son at a café on the outskirts of Yerevan. Born in Egypt, she moved to Lebanon as a teenager. She married there to a Lebanese-Armenian and had two sons. She moved from Lebanon to Armenia in 2010, together with her older son and his family, a few years after her husband's death and her younger son's relocation to Armenia. Her sons were in their late 30s and early 40s, respectively, when they moved, and both have local Armenian wives. Talin's conception of home and sense of belonging differed significantly from her sons' views. In the presence of one of them in the beginning of our meeting, she seemed quite reserved. Sometimes, she even seemed annoyed by the occasional comments he had been making while she was telling me her story. However, as soon as she and I began speaking separately, she became very emotional as she talked about her life in Lebanon. "My sons

don't feel the way I do; they can forget [that life] very easily because they were younger [when they moved to Armenia] and built new homes, new families here," she exclaimed. "But every person has different feelings and mentality depending on their age." With tears in her eyes, Talin then shared some of her memories from Lebanon:

It is a pleasure for me to stay here. But I lived in Lebanon for around 50 years. I can't forget [my experiences there]. ... I grew up there. My children were born and raised there. I have memories from my husband. We invited people into our house [for gatherings]. We celebrated New Year's Eves, birthdays. My neighbors were very nice, which was very important too. ... Even though we didn't own that apartment (it was rented), it was mine for so many years. I invested so much energy in it. It had no golden walls, no silver pillars. And its location was very bad; it was very noisy and not very appropriate as a residential area. We also spent very difficult years there — extremely bad times — during the [Lebanese Civil War] bombings. But inside the house, the walls talk to me. ... Here, in Armenia, the churches, the history, the historical sites mean a lot to me. The homeland means a lot to me. That's how my parents had raised me. ... But when I say "home" or "I want to go home," I feel differently [she means, she does not feel home is Armenia]. ... When I go to Lebanon now to visit, [I feel] it's home, even though there are difficulties like water shortages, power cuts, noisiness...

Talin and Lucy moved to Armenia at very different ages, under disparate circumstances. They came from very dissimilar backgrounds, and have divergent future plans. While Lucy plans to go back to the United States one day, Talin knows that at least as long as her sons live in Armenia, she will stay too. However, what unites them is their strong sense of belonging toward their former country, which in Lucy's case is also her birthplace; they consider it as their main home. For Talin, Armenia is more important in an ethnonational, idealistic way, as a homeland, but Lebanon is emotionally important as a home on a personal and family level. For Lucy, the idealistic aspect is even looser. Talin does not seem to have gone through a full-scale homeland de-idealization process. For her, Armenia is still largely equated with "the churches, the history, the historical sites" — what she had heard or learned from her parents when growing up in the diaspora. And when confronted with some of the realities on the ground, she has

experienced disillusionment. During our interview, she made reference to some aspects of local lifestyle or sociocultural norms that she found strange and often unacceptable. For example, she perceived locals to be less religious and more individualistic than herself. In Lucy's case, on the other hand, the homeland was not idealistically conceived in the first place. So, her emotional links to Armenia were quite weak in the diaspora, and have remained pretty much so even after immigration.

2. Oscillating Belonging: Divided or Dual Identity

What characterizes this pattern is an oscillation between the two above-described lopsided versions. Upon migration and settlement, many returnees realize that they cannot become or feel fully grounded in Armenia. Both their new environment and the old one feel like home in one way or another — sometimes simultaneously, and at other times interchangeably. This pattern resembles what Edward Said (2000: 186) has described as “contrapuntal” identity, an “awareness of simultaneous dimensions,” where “both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual.” This sense of duality has more to do with identity issues — that is, an oscillation between “we” and “you” — than a sense of attachment to a physical place — that is, a divisiveness between “here” and “there.” It is an “ambivalent experience” similar to that of second-generation American- and German-Greek returnees to Greece studied by King and Christou (2010: 115), where return seems “to hover uncertainly between the closure of a definitive return ‘home’ on the one hand, and an expression of ongoing transnational identity on the other.” Sometimes this ambivalence is a constant state of mind; in other cases, it happens less frequently. Some returnees argue that experiencing such ambivalent feelings is normal.

For others, it is an unexpected, and even discomfoting, experience. While living in the diaspora as Armenians, they often felt as strangers in a non-Armenian majority environment. By leaving their physical diasporic existence behind, they thus expected to find an anchor in Armenia, a place where they could feel they fully belonged. Experiencing a certain degree of alienation again, this time in the homeland, is therefore unanticipated.

At the same time, ambivalent feelings continue governing their retrospective view of their former sociocultural space. Communication with people left behind, and especially visits back to their former country, often give rise to mixed emotions. On the one hand, they are opportunities to reconnect with relatives and friends who live in the diaspora, enjoy some of the foods and comforts they were used to prior to their move to Armenia, etc. On the other hand, norms and lifestyles — among Armenians or non-Armenians — that had previously been unnoticed or caused no major inconvenience often become more visible, intolerable, or frustrating. Conversely, some returnees start to view certain cultural practices in the “host” country in a more “natural,” positive, or acceptable manner.

A re-evaluation of life in the diaspora, and the role of the diaspora in general, is a process many of these returnees experience after relocation. They gradually realize that the concerns they had as Armenians while in the diaspora have changed. For example, their daily worries are now connected more to infrastructural, economic, political, and social developments in Armenia — similar to other RA citizens or residents — than to the preservation of the Armenian community in the diaspora, through schools, churches,

sports teams, scouting and other organizations, etc. A certain level of disconnect is felt from the Armenian diaspora. Many returnees criticize diasporans and diaspora organizations for not being deeply involved in Armenia's life and for not contributing sufficiently and effectively to the country's development. The perceived introversion and localization of diaspora activities, organizations, and interests are denounced. Some of them even argue that many diasporans are overly preoccupied with such activities as Genocide recognition and lobbying efforts.

According to many returnees, these issues are in turn related to the existence of stereotypes and false or unrealistic expectations from both sides. They are also linked to the inability or unwillingness of diaspora and homeland elites and institutions to systematically or consistently mobilize the diaspora, because of scarce resources on both sides, as well as the fear of losing their status and leverage in their respective settings.

Several of the people following the oscillation pattern criticize other returnees, diasporans, or local Armenians who identify themselves only or predominantly with their group and have a biased attitude toward those not belonging to it. They bemoan the gap that such a lopsided approach causes. "I do not want that abyss to exist" between diasporans and locals, exclaimed one returnee. Identifying themselves with both sides, such returnees often have the desire or feel an obligation to act as bridge-builders or intermediaries between diasporans and locals.

Another process that several of these returnees go through is a re-assessment and re-appreciation of the non-Armenian culture they used to live in prior to their move. Having

been distanced physically, as well as emotionally at least to a certain degree, from that “host” environment, many argue that they have acquired a better understanding of its meaning and value. One American-Armenian said he “actually enjoy[s] being American here [i.e., in Armenia] a lot more than being American there [i.e., in the United States],” because he can “pick and choose” the parts of that identity or culture that he really wants to preserve.

I listen to whatever news or music that I want to, and I take advantage of all the stuff that I love about America. And I don't have all the stuff that I really dislike about America in my face. [For example,] the super-consumerism and the over-the-topness of everything in America don't exist for me here. And it's such a great feeling.

This process is especially common and accentuated among returnees from Middle Eastern countries, where diasporic communities (at least the diasporic experience of many of the returnees who made such statements) are more insulated from close interactions with non-Armenians. Lebanese- and Iranian-Armenians, for example, begin to listen to Arabic or Persian music more frequently in Armenia — a habit they did not have in the diaspora. While living in close-knit diasporic communities, such returnees often equated the preservation of Armenianness with creating a cloistered world with an impenetrable self, family, and community membrane, impervious to “other,” “foreign” cultural markers. Some returnees coming from such backgrounds argued that establishing long-term settlement in Armenia has freed them from that shell. Now that they are away, the “boundaries” that were used for perpetuating cultural difference from the surrounding non-Armenian groups or society at large in their former country (Barth 1969) are no longer present. They thus feel they can appreciate and recognize more the richness of the “host” countries’ non-Armenian cultures; they are more tolerant and open to interaction with Arabs or Persians, for example. Such returnees explain that their immigration to

Armenia has mitigated their identity insecurities or “complexes” (as some call them). These feelings had indeed motivated some of them to decide to move to Armenia in the first place, as explained in Chapter V. The process of re-evaluation and re-appreciation of their former countries’ cultures, that the self-grounding in Armenia often results in, does not usually mean that such returnees start identifying themselves as Lebanese or Persians, for example. But it leads them to become more comfortable with these cultures. This process resonates with some studies — though not dealing with return migration specifically — that hypothesize or show how successful integration boosts the confidence or self-esteem of migrants, leading them to become more involved in transnational activities, and vice versa (Erdal & Oeppen 2013: 873).

This re-evaluation of the former country culture is often associated with a *process of self-healing*, a kind of an emancipative journey from the sense of victimhood that is ingrained among many diasporan-Armenians, especially in post-Genocide diasporic communities (Panossian 2006: 239). One of my interviewees, Manouk, 38, who was born and raised in Cyprus but also lived in Lebanon, described how moving to Armenia in 2003 was a healing process for him. It alleviated the sense of victimhood that had made him over-protective of his Armenianness, and hence resistant or intolerant toward non-Armenian influences, while living in the diaspora.

[After moving to Armenia,] the feeling of being a massacred, miserable people was [mitigated] a bit. I cannot say it healed 100 percent, because at the age that I moved, the wound had already been too deep. Through our parents and the elders, that sense of being a victim had [already] left a very big scar on us [that cannot disappear completely]. But here [in Armenia] when the healing [process] gets underway, you understand that you’re Armenian, nothing is going to endanger your Armenianness, and you don’t have to prove it by shouting: “Look, I’m Armenian.”

Similar feelings were also echoed by Akosua, an African American featured in Ohrt Fehler's study (2014: 143-144), who visited Ghana after tracing her ancestral roots to that country through DNA testing. Though not specifically dealing with long-term return, in the case of that "victim diaspora" (Cohen 1997) too, return was perceived as a "reconciliation" with the tragic past, as a "'liberation project' from the negative legacies of slavery."

Returnees exhibiting dual or ambivalent feelings while living in Armenia are people who have adjusted their habitus to a certain degree or in some fields. Nevertheless, they have simultaneously maintained or reproduced other deeply ingrained aspects of their lifestyles, tastes, and values. They are able to employ or develop cultural, social, and economic capital, often selectively, in order to adapt to life in Armenia, while concurrently maintaining ties to their former environment. This dual or ambivalent identity was often entrenched in the habitus of these returnees during their upbringing and socialization in the diaspora, as also discussed in the previous chapter. Armenian schools and other institutions had played a key role in that process. For those raised in small diasporic communities with fewer or weaker diasporan institutional structures, families had been instrumental in perpetuating such an approach.

Returnees with an oscillation pattern of belonging often express a baffling sense of entrapment or suffocation when they stay in Armenia for prolonged periods without traveling. Those coming from seaside countries, for example, often miss the sea. They yearn for the "sense of freedom" it provides as opposed to the "scary sense of imprisonment that the lack of a blue horizon creates" in a landlocked country such as

Armenia, as one returnee, originally from Lebanon, put it. Another Lebanese-Armenian returnee described how, 16 years after having settled in Armenia, she still reveled every morning in the view of Mount Ararat from her living room window. At the same time, she missed the sea, reminiscing about the Mediterranean coast where she had grown up. “When Ararat is covered by fog, I sometimes feel the sea is behind it,” she explained — an optical illusion she was fully aware of.

Although such returnees do not necessarily want to settle elsewhere, they feel the need to travel regularly for short periods of time to their countries of former residence or other places. This desire to travel frequently is not necessarily related to an overwhelmingly strong attachment to their pre-return setting, but is seen more as a way to replenish energies, to restock homesickness power, so to speak, that will help them go through another cycle of ambivalent home-ing. This temporary distancing from Armenia is one of the strategies that some of these returnees adopt in order to deal with the mismatch between their habitus and the new field, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Moreover, several of my participants who have children notice or hope that their children do not or will not have this sense of duality. Some of them exert efforts to ensure this. They provide their children with the resources required for a better fitted habitus in Armenia. This was also addressed in the previous chapter.

Some of the above-explained points about the oscillation pattern will be illustrated below through the cases of two returnees coming from different backgrounds.

Ishkhan, 37, was born and raised in Lebanon. Even though he had gone to a non-Armenian school in Beirut, he never had any close Arab friends when he lived there. During his school and university years, he always tried to interact with Armenians, because he felt like a stranger when he was among non-Armenians. This feeling was one of the factors that had motivated him to immigrate to Armenia in 2001 at the age of 25. With another returnee friend, he soon established a business, which they have since expanded and diversified. Ishkhan got married to a local Armenian girl, and they have two children. When I met him at his office in March 2013, he seemed quite satisfied with his life in Armenia and had no plans to emigrate. However, he visits Lebanon frequently for business or family-related matters.¹³⁶ During these visits, he feels his attitude toward Arabs has transformed significantly. Now that he lives in Armenia, in his “natural environment,” he has “started understanding better who Arabs are,” and who Armenians are. Settling in Armenia has provided him with “a firm base.” Now, “I am standing on a rock,” he said. If an Arab contacts him, he “can have a relationship” with him/her, because he is “more comfortable” with himself. For example, he now has many Arab friends, and he feels “very much at ease” with them. At the same time, although he is well-established in Armenia both on a personal and professional level, he still does not feel that his sense of belonging is unidirectionally and exclusively toward Armenia. After having lived in the country for more than 12 years, he identified himself with both *hayastantsis* and diasporan-Armenians.

Now, I feel more comfortable interacting with *hayastantsis*, and I also miss diasporan-Armenians. But I don’t feel I understand any of them 100 percent. For example, when a diasporan-Armenian comes to Armenia and starts complaining about the country, I feel strange. I don’t understand why they [i.e., diasporans] are like that. [I realize that] Iranian-Armenians have been affected a lot by Persians, French-Armenians by French people, etc. So, I view them from the perspective of

¹³⁶ His parents and some other relatives live there.

hayastantsis. At the same time, I also don't understand 100 percent the way *hayastantsis* view diasporan-Armenians. So, I feel I'm 50-50. ... I'm actually in the middle. ... In Armenia, my sense of belonging can at best reach 80 percent. The remaining 20 percent always looks for the Mediterranean — the humor of that place, the food, the climate, the sea. ... They're all ingrained in me ... [but] are things that people here [often] find uninteresting or very unusual. For example, after coming here, I realized that I love listening to Fayrouz [a renowned Lebanese singer]. In Lebanon, I didn't like it. I came here, and I realized that I am oriental in many ways.

Born and raised in California, Sevag, 46 (single), is half-Armenian. His father's parents were Genocide survivors who arrived to the United States after the deportations. His mother is American of English descent. As a child, he went to an American school, but also attended some Armenian community events and language classes. In high school and college, he always felt more comfortable associating with minority students. He was later also involved in internship and Armenian-language programs organized by an Armenian organization. After visiting and staying in Armenia for some short-term projects on four different occasions, he eventually moved in 2004.

Even though I can easily pass for the majority in the United States, I've always felt like a minority in terms of my perspective and my mentality. ... [So,] I felt like I had a split personality or identity. ... I was tired of feeling like an outsider in my own country, so to speak. And I wanted to feel being part of the whole, like being a majority. ... Then I came here, and after all these years, ... I can associate myself with locals in terms of their perspectives on certain issues. ... [But] now my identity is even more complex, because ... when I use "we" or when I say "they," sometimes I include myself in a group and sometimes I exclude myself from a group, depending on the issue and my perspective on that issue. So, sometimes I say "we" and I start talking about myself as a local, as compared to a diasporan. Sometimes I include myself as a diasporan, and sometimes I'm talking as an American, because I realized that I have some basic values, perspectives and outlooks that I grew up and was socialized with, that are different from here.

3. Liminal Homelessness

This pattern entails a state where returnees feel that *nowhere is home*. In the absence of a strong sense of belonging toward either one or both places — that is, Armenia and the pre-return society — they view themselves in a state of homelessness or rootlessness. Some of these returnees perceive the homeland (and their belonging to it) in a more idealistic, ethnonational way, than as a home. Returnees embracing the liminal homelessness pattern usually identify themselves as diasporan-Armenians (*spirkahays*) and often avoid highlighting their former country in their hyphenated identity. For instance, Sanan had moved to Armenia from Lebanon, primarily motivated by an ideological commitment to the homeland. Return has led her to redefine her identity as follows:

In terms of identity, I don't feel I am a *hayastantsi* ... because I don't have that kind of mentality. ... We are different. But I can't even say I am Lebanese, because I don't feel Lebanese either. I am Armenian. I am a diasporan-Armenian; that's as far as I can go [in terms of identifying myself]. I have neither become a native of this place, nor of that [i.e., Lebanon]. I'm something in-between; you can call it "diasporan-Armenian," because in reality I don't have a Lebanese-Armenian mentality anymore either. I'm not talking about the lifestyle, but the way of thinking, reasoning.

In this pattern, there is often an explicitly or implicitly expressed negativeness associated with the state of in-betweenness. Liminality is seen as a sign of deficiency, incompleteness, or emptiness — a destiny these returnees feel they have to inevitably face as diasporans, as descendants of people exiled and uprooted from their "authentic" roots and "original" homeland. This feeling of no-forward-no-return, which leads them to always, or in most cases, feel as "strangers" (*odars*), is thus viewed as an unavoidable part of their diasporan-Armenian identity. Instead of resolving the sense of foreignness and liminality experienced in the diaspora, which was believed to have been caused by

the lack of the homeland in their lives, return to the homeland gives rise to a renewed liminal identity. This time, the feeling of being “others” is in the form of a contrast to or differentiation from “local” Armenians, for reasons explained in the previous chapter. This is considered a mutual feeling, according to many of my interviewees; they feel that locals often view or treat them as *odars* or “guests” (*hiur*) as well. It is not only a subjective matter of self-representation but also an externally ascribed identity. Some try to rationalize this continual alienation — an endless loop they feel they have to endure as diasporans — by mobilizing an exilic discourse based on the “initial” scattering.

Similar to those who have oscillating feelings, returnees with the liminal homelessness pattern are integrated to a certain extent in Armenian society. They have adjusted their habitus to the new environment, often because not doing so might have rendered life in Armenia unsustainable or unbearable. At the same time, however, they have maintained their distinctiveness from locals. However, unlike people with an oscillating belonging pattern, who, after relocating, feel at home in Armenia or their former country at some time, these people almost always feel alienated from both environments — leading to more persistently negative feelings. Or, they start feeling homeless after experiencing oscillation for some time. In addition, some people, who usually express an oscillating sense of belonging, sometimes feel (usually shorter) periods of homelessness. These temporary bursts of homelessness among returnees with ambivalent emotions are often caused by disappointing moments they experience or upsetting encounters they have in Armenia. Thus, these two patterns are sometimes related to each other and co-exist within the same person, manifesting themselves in different contexts or times. In other cases, returnees feel homeless in the initial period after relocation. Faced with a

hysteresis situation, they feel out of place. This often happens among people whose relocation was, at least partially, motivated by ethnocultural factors. Such people surprisingly find themselves faced with similar emotions to those that had triggered their relocation to Armenia in the first place — identity complex, strangeness, minority feeling, etc. For example, Iranian-Armenian Armen (31), expected to find an inner stability and to put an end to his feeling of foreignness by moving to Armenia in 2005. Instead, he experienced a sense of alienation in the homeland too in the initial years. One of the first challenges he faced in Armenia was the “disappointment” he felt that he was “a stranger” there too. This is how he described the thoughts he had in his early years after moving:

I was escaping from certain attitudes in Iran — being different, being subjected to finger-pointing, hearing such comments as: “The way you are speaking [Persian] is so strange! Aren’t you Persian? Aren’t you from here [*hosteghatsi*]?” But I encountered the same problems here. “Are you Persian-Armenian? Have you come from abroad? Why have you come here?” So, these attitudes used to make me think: I have left everything behind, I have abandoned an environment where I was much more integrated¹³⁷ ... [to come here and realize that] I was more often identified as a stranger. My long hair, my dressing style, the way I spoke, everything [were seen as odd here].

In certain cases, such returnees overcome this initial phase and some even become quite well-integrated after some time. Armen, for example, now feels at home in Armenia to a large extent. He is integrated not only “structurally,” but also at the “social,” “cultural,” and “identification” levels (Heckmann & Schnapper 2003). One indication is the way he has adjusted his language.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Here, he refers mainly to his family, friends, and the Armenian community in Iran.

¹³⁸ This was explained in the previous chapter, where his case was featured on pp. 247-248.

The main characteristics of the liminal homelessness pattern will be further demonstrated through the stories and reflections of two more returnees, who also exhibit some differences.

Aspet (53) moved from Tehran to Armenia with his wife in 1996, motivated mainly by ideological reasons. Even after 17 years, he still feels he is not a “full citizen of Armenia,” although he is “loved and respected.” He felt the same in Iran. He said that people who move to Armenia from outside, regardless of where they come from and how long they stay, “do not integrate.” Even though they are generally well-treated, and despite the interaction that exists with locals, in terms of mixed marriages, for example, “they always remain strangers.” Thus, “the comers from outside remain comers from outside.” In his case too, he felt:

There is a barrier that separates us from locals [in Armenia]. I don't feel 100 percent comfortable [in Armenia] because it's not my kind [of people]. But I also don't imagine returning to Iran, where I was born, raised, and educated. That is alien for me too. I also don't imagine [I could feel at home in] any other country. ... In general, when someone migrates ... [it is as if] you're getting a cut tree and taking it to another location.¹³⁹ It never grows any roots [no matter how long it stays] — neither in 40 nor in 100 years. ... So, when someone is displaced ... the former bond can never be restored again. Thus, I am not sure if that [bond restoration] will happen if [the descendants of] Armenians displaced from Western Armenia [i.e., present-day eastern Turkey] return there one day. Once you remove someone from his home, there is no return; even though [that person might establish some connections to certain places] mechanically, these connections remain highly problematic. ... So, in my case, too, I obviously *don't feel comfortable [or at home] anywhere*. I stay in Armenia motivated by political-national-patriotic reasons.

Aspet was quite negative and critical of this state of not feeling a sense of genuine belonging to any place. He attributed it to a certain extent to the Armenia–diaspora “gap”

¹³⁹ He alludes to the forced migration of the ancestors of Armenian diasporans from historically Armenian territories.

that was created during the Soviet years, which, he argued, has led people in Armenia to become “intolerant” to whatever is “not their own.” However, he also recognized that rootlessness is inherent in the quality of being “displaced” as a diaspora. The sense of homelessness he now feels in Armenia was not always as poignant though. In fact, his first years of settlement in the country were exhilarating, especially because of the impact of the romantic ideas that had led him to the long-dreamed homeland only a few years after its independence. Initially, he even made concerted efforts to become fully integrated. But as realities on the ground hit Aspet harder, his attitudes changed.¹⁴⁰ The homeland de-idealization process that he went through resulted in a deviation from the initial path of (albeit incomplete) lopsided anchoring (toward Armenia). This shows how patterns of belonging may change over time within the same person. In Aspet’s case, the shift was in the opposite direction compared to that experienced by Armen.

Manoushak, 46, immigrated from Syria, where she was born and raised, to Armenia in 1998, following her husband’s decision to relocate their family of four. She had to quit the job she loved in Aleppo and become a stay-home mother until her children grew up, as she had no one to assist her with them in Armenia. Instead of being freer in a “more open, Christian country,” as her husband had promised her, she found herself confined to her house. When she expressed her desire to return to Syria with her children to her parents, her mother’s response was harsh: “I will cut your legs [if you come]. You stay wherever your husband is.” When her children grew up, Manoushak started working, but her job is not related to her educational background and interests. After going through years of depression, marked by a strong sense of attachment to Syria and her

¹⁴⁰ This transformation was explained in the previous chapter in section 4, where his case was also featured.

relationships there, Manoushak now feels she has reached a stage of homelessness. Neither place feels like home. Now, for her, home is where, she said, she can secure her family's happiness, stability, and self-sufficiency. Thus, similar to Armen's and Aspet's examples, Manoushak's experience also involved a shift in patterns. In her case, it has been from lopsided anchoring (toward the country of former residence) to liminal homelessness. Unlike Sanan and Aspet, in her case, this feeling did not seem to be necessarily related to diasporan identity, because she used to feel quite a strong sense of belonging toward Syria when she used to live there and during her initial years in Armenia. Instead, it was most probably a result of the way she had moved to Armenia. The immigration decision was not initiated by her, but she relocated to and stayed in Armenia in order to keep her family together. In addition, her feeling of homelessness became even more highlighted recently, when she realized that because of the Syrian war, there was no return for her and her family, at least in the foreseeable future. Moreover, when interacting with Syrian-Armenians who have come to Armenia recently to flee the war, she has realized that now she is different from them too.

Today, I don't feel I belong anywhere. I recently told my husband: "You removed me from my roots there, brought me here, and asked me to become adjusted to this soil. I'm standing [now]; I'm not withered. But I'm not growing any roots. I don't feel I have put down roots here." ... When someone here asks "where are you from?" I say: "I'm from here," especially ever since I obtained the RA citizenship. But I don't really believe that I'm from here. ... And even though I speak Eastern Armenian very well now ... they [locals] also feel that [I'm not from here], despite having lived here for 15 years. ... I recently also realized that I don't belong there [in Syria] either anymore. That [place or environment] is also not familiar to me [now].

Some returnees with this pattern of belonging who lamented their homelessness were more positive and hopeful about their children's identity — an optimism also shared by those in the above-described oscillation pattern. Sirun from Toronto, who was

prominently featured in the introduction of the previous chapter, said she was now happy with her decision to move to Armenia and with her life there. Nevertheless, she expressed her regret about the “in-between” state she still felt. She explained: “I think it is the *curse of my generation* of being Armenian, of being this nomadic tribe, never feeling [at home] ..., [and of being in] this constant movement.” But she was more optimistic about her (now adult) children. They went to Armenian universities, have local friends, and have started forming families in Yerevan. They are more likely to feel Armenia is home, she said. Thus, such returnees regard themselves as kind of doomed to be in a state of homelessness, but are happy they have given their children a better chance of emancipating themselves from this “nomadic” fate. They view their decision to move to Armenia as a step toward breaking that “curse” for the future generations. Such thoughts are especially expressed by returnees who were, at least partly, motivated to immigrate to Armenia by ethnocultural and ideological factors.

4. Cosmopolitan Floating

The last pattern is manifested among a relatively smaller number of returnees who feel that *home is everywhere*. In this case, returnees view positively their ability to straddle multiple cultural worlds and identities. Thus, unlike in the previous pattern, in this case there is often a celebration of not having a specific home or a single identity. Returnees exhibiting this pattern are usually young (most of them in their 20s or early 30s) and well-educated Armenians, mostly coming from the West. Many of them were not involved, at least actively or for a long time, in the traditional diasporan organizations of their communities prior to return. They have some sort of emotional or subjective attachment both to Armenia, as a country which is an essential element of their heritage,

and to their pre-return society, as a key part of their upbringing and past. Nevertheless, they do not feel they completely and solidly belong to any of the two places. In fact, they argue that they feel comfortable living anywhere, building a home wherever they want or choose to, and changing homes, if and when needed or desired, without facing too many difficulties. Most of them coming from multicultural environments,¹⁴¹ they do not identify themselves with a particular “group.” Instead, they embrace a cosmopolitan or globalized identity, of which Armenianness remains a quite important part though. They regard diversity not only as tolerable but even desirable.

This pattern of cosmopolitan belonging and identity does not entail a total lack of rootedness and an eternal state of non-belonging (Calhoun 2007; Werbner 2008b). However, it is characterized by a powerful sense of movement and floating. California-born Hovsep (24, single) described this point as follows, based on a conversation he once had with his father¹⁴² about Armenian identity: “Our roots are not in the ground; they’re floating. So, our roots are intact but they float. Therefore, it doesn’t matter where you are; your identity is your decision.” Sometimes this sense of mobility is just an emotional state, but it is often also related to an urge or desire to physically move in a frequent manner. The up-to-date and high-level education and skills these returnees possess equip them with the necessary “capital” not only to survive but even to thrive in multiple settings. In addition, they can often financially afford to travel and move frequently.

¹⁴¹ In some cases, this multicultural influence is not only generated from the culturally diverse physical setting(s) they grew up and lived in before their relocation, but also from the fact that their parents had come from different backgrounds, as mentioned in the below examples.

¹⁴² His father was born in the United States. His father’s father, who was also born in the United States (a few years after the Genocide), was half-Armenian. Hovsep’s mother was born in Syria to Armenian parents, and moved to the States in her 20s.

This pattern is observed mainly among returnees who have moved to Armenia motivated, at least to a certain extent, by more cosmopolitan and universally oriented rationales, described in Chapter V. Many of these returnees do not view their move to Armenia as everlasting. Even though they admit they might end up staying for a long time or even permanently, they are open to the idea of going back to where they had come from or of moving elsewhere. The fact that their future country of settlement remains undecided or vague does not seem to bother most of them. This flexibility is not unsettling. To the contrary, for many of them, it is a favored lifestyle. Such returnees consider it enriching not to feel they have a concrete or single home in one geographical place, unlike the more negative approach of some returnees embracing the liminal homelessness (and, to a lesser degree, oscillation) pattern(s). There is something attractive or adventurous about it. Therefore, such returnees are usually dismissive of traditionally negative conceptions of the diaspora, associated with images of uprootedness, forced displacement, and a state of exile. They do not advocate “exilic nationalism” (Tölölyan 2002). A few of them were even reluctant to use the term “diaspora” when describing their life before immigrating to Armenia. Furthermore, their conception of homeland does not usually have an ethnonationally idealistic basis, and some even reject the idea of homeland altogether. Thus, some of the returnees mentioned in the beginning of Chapter V, where I discussed multilocal and fluid perceptions of homeland, are also featured below to illustrate this cosmopolitan pattern.

Traces of diverse cultures amorously appear in the daily lives and interactions of such returnees. For instance, while many of them are comfortable communicating primarily in English, their language often includes an amalgamation of Western and Eastern

Armenian, as well as other foreign words (such as Arabic and Russian). Although many of them are eager to raise children in Armenia, they usually make concerted efforts to “keep them open to the world,” as one returnee said. They take them to frequent trips to their former place of residence or other countries. Some of them even encourage their children to get educated abroad, perhaps to return to Armenia in the future. They think that exposing their children to multiple settings and diverse ideas can help equip them with the capital (particularly cultural) necessary to smoothly position their habitus in diverse environments later in life. They consider this important, particularly given the increasingly globalized world we live in.

Sandra (29) was born in the United States, but her parents, who were born in Syria and then moved to Lebanon, had immigrated to the USA in the 1970s. While growing up, Sandra identified herself as an American-Armenian, but also felt close to the Middle Eastern culture, because of her parents’ backgrounds. She studied (she has a master’s degree) and worked in various cities on both US coasts before moving to Armenia alone in early 2013. Her main motivation was a job she was offered in Yerevan; she considered it interesting as it matched her academic background and personal interests. Answering the “who am I?” question was confusing and often frustrating for her, especially when she was younger. However, she “embraced everything” and accepted the fact that she “came with a mix of everything,” similar to many other American-Armenians and other Americans she knew. When she came to Armenia, she “desperately looked for connections anyway.” It is “normal” for people to “look to connect to a community,” she said. But once she realized and accepted that her identity and sense of belonging were

always going to be multidimensional and multidirectional, no matter where she went, she “felt at peace.” She described her feelings as follows:

I don't feel there's one home. ... I don't fit in America and I don't fit in Armenia. ... I am a citizen of the world. I'm American. I'm Armenian. I feel Syrian, Lebanese, Armenian from here. ... I could feel Palestinian or Ukrainian. Or, I can say I'm also African-American or Ghanaian. I could feel anything ... because my friends have been [from all] those backgrounds, and I could understand them. ... And that's who I am. So, I'm a citizen of no country. That's what really it should be, because ... I don't think a border should tell you who you are; that's very political. ... I think you take who you are everywhere you go, no matter what.

Sandra's perception of homeland was also quite loose and critical. She considered it a “myth.” Moreover, she did not call herself “diasporan.” According to her, that term implies that a person is escaping from or is forced to leave his/her homeland, country, or home because of a political or some other kind of dangerous situation. To further explain her definition of diaspora, she added:

My parents escaped the civil war in Lebanon, so you might call them diasporans. My ancestors were subjected to the Genocide ... [and] were displaced. But does that mean I'm still a displaced person? I don't think so. I grew up with a “normal” lifestyle. So I'm not running from anybody. I'm not a diasporan anymore.

Sako's parents were also originally from Syria. He was born and raised in Toronto. The multicultural environment Toronto offers, where “it's almost like the whole world [is] shrunk up into one city,” has led him to “kind of understand what the global situation is like, appreciate it, and build tolerance to it.” This exposure to diversity “has created who I am in some ways, because of all this different variety of stuff that I've learned about: different cultures, races, religions, foods, music, and art,” Sako said. He avoided characterizing himself as a Canadian-Armenian, or Canadian, or Armenian, or diasporan in an exclusive or holistic manner. “In truth, I just feel human. It doesn't matter where I am,” he asserted. For this reason, he explained:

Home is my body, I guess. Anywhere I go is home. At the moment, home is here. [But] in the future, I don't know. Wherever I go I guess is home. I don't have a specific place as home. I do feel a connection to this place though, ... to Ararat ... maybe because as a child, I saw paintings ... or heard stories. ... I think Canada also feels like home in a sense. ... I can associate myself with the cottages, the trees, the lakes, the fresh water, the mountains, and all that Canada offers.

Zaven (31) and his wife Armik (29), born in California and Toronto, respectively, had studied and lived in a number of European and North American cities, both separately before their marriage and afterward as a couple. Their parents also came from diverse backgrounds.¹⁴³ During a group interview I conducted with them in August 2013, Zaven and Armik shared similar perspectives on what they regarded as home and what they thought about their diasporan identity:

Zaven:

It seems like I feel comfortable wherever I go. The United States has been home. When I lived in Canada for an extended period of time, I also felt at home there. I can conform pretty quickly to wherever [I go]. When I was living in France [where he completed his undergraduate studies], I loved France. That could be home. And now this place [i.e., Armenia] is home. So, I'm OK with different sort of settings. I guess that's one of the things that as a diasporan you get used to: not really having a home, and then everywhere is your home.

Armik:

I feel the same way. Home is not necessarily a concrete and tangible thing. It's the people you surround yourself with. ... Diasporan identity is [often] seen as a negative thing, where you don't quite belong here or there, and you're kind of in-between. But in my experience, it has always been a positive thing. I have this *sense of movement* in me and of not feeling attached to a specific place. That's sort of engraved [in me] ... not only because of [how] my life [has been], but [also because of] ... where I come from, where my family comes from, and the kind of experience that my ancestors¹⁴⁴ even have had.

¹⁴³ Their parents had been born and raised in various Middle Eastern countries and had moved independently to North America in the 1960s–70s.

¹⁴⁴ Her father's side is from Musa Ler (or Musa Dagh, currently in southeastern Turkey, near the Mediterranean coast), and his mother's side from Urfa and Beredjik (in southeastern Turkey).

For Zaven and Armik, it was important to transmit their cosmopolitan identity to their son. Even though he is still very young, they thought that their frequent family trips to Canada and the United States could help ensure he would not be exposed to “a singular experience” while growing up, as Armik said. During such trips, his interactions with children of relatives who were married to non-Armenians were highly valued by Zaven and Armik. Such experiences will hopefully make sure he does not have a “closed-minded understanding” of the world, Zaven added.

Similar to Sandra and Sako, Zaven and Armik generally viewed in a positive way the sense of mobility that their diasporan identity encompassed. However, unlike the former two, the couple also expressed a desire to attain some sort of physical stability in the near future.

Armik:

But I kind of feel we’ve just been nomads for [a] very long [time]. ... We just [have] never felt that we’re rooted anywhere. ... We have boxes of things in our parents’ houses and here [i.e., in Armenia]. ... For example, we’ve never actually hung a painting on a wall, because we never felt like we were permanent enough [to do so]. We’re both craving that, I think. ... So, I spend my days looking at furniture online. I feel a need to settle down. And that’s sort of related to Armenia, but [also] sort of related to growing up.

Zaven:

I’d like to have a place here eventually, where we can comfortably call home and hang up our boots, just say “this is where we’re going to live,” and really just sort of stop being nomadic, because that certainly isn’t sustainable in the long term.

For the time being at least, this yearning to “stop being nomadic” seems to be motivated more by practical reasons than by an emotional need to belong to one geographical place; with the recent birth of their son and plans to further expand their family, they both felt they wanted to become more firmly established. However, in the long run, such a desire

might lead to further identity (re-)evaluations and even perhaps a shift in their pattern of belonging.

Certain aspects of this cosmopolitan pattern are also exhibited by returnees who have lived in multiple countries, including those who were born and raised in the Middle East but spent extended periods of time in Europe or North America. Born and raised in Iran, Martik, 57, left for France a few months after the Islamic Revolution. He and his wife, also an Iranian-Armenian, lived in Paris until 2003, when they decided to move to Armenia. His wife had expressed her desire to relocate to Armenia as early as their first visit in 1994, which was a highly emotional experience. Martik's initial reaction to that idea has remained the same throughout the years, even after living in Armenia for around a decade: "We are diasporan-Armenians [*spiurkahays*]. Wherever we go, we will be diasporan-Armenians; we will be foreigners [*odar*]. Even in Armenia we are foreigners. ... Perhaps they [locals] don't call us '*aghpar*'¹⁴⁵ that much anymore, but now *they* call us 'diasporan-Armenian.'" His words indicate that identification is not solely a subjective state of mind, but also a result of structural-relational processes. The way Martik described his identity and sense of belonging contained some temporary bursts of mild negativeness and even anger, reminiscent of the above-explained liminal homelessness pattern. This is perhaps related to the fact that he grew up in Iran, but lived for a long time in Europe. His habitus has internalized both roots-based and more pluralistic ideas. Overall, however, he said he was "proud" and quite positive that as a *spiurkahay* his "country is the diaspora." He explained: "That means that *my country is the globe*. Wherever you throw me, I work my way out, I can handle it." He added that he and his

¹⁴⁵ Meaning "brother," the term was used in a derogatory manner to refer to Armenians from abroad who had repatriated to Soviet Armenia during the *nerkaght* drive.

wife have a house both in Armenia and in France, and even their graveyards are ready in both places. “We don’t have any problem [i.e., preference]. We can live or die in either place, wherever it happens.” He said that when he first visited Armenia and saw Mount Ararat and various historical sites, he was “naturally” emotional. But that was because he realized that all the stories he had heard from his parents “really existed here” and were “not virtual.” So, “[I cried] for that reason, not because it’s my roots. ... My forefathers were from Nakhijevan. They were displaced and driven to Isfahan by Shah Abbas [more than 400 years ago]. ... That’s the history that I’ve been told, and that’s our reality. So, I can’t say I’m a *hayastantsi*.”

Conclusion

As they try to (re-)assess and (re)define their identity and belonging, returnees often navigate through turbulent and challenging emotional waves. Diasporic return reaffirms or alters previously existing experiences and feelings of homeness and foreignness but also creates new fissures and fixtures. It sometimes fosters inclusion into a specific cultural “group” or environment, while in other cases it engenders exclusion and intensifies alienation. Thus, emotionality emerges once again as a key aspect of diasporic return in the identity and belonging issues discussed in this chapter — similar to the return processes covered in chapters V and VI.

Similar to the returnees’ perceptions of homeland discussed in Chapter V, their conceptualizations of home, identity, and belonging, described in this chapter, also range from more essentialist to more relativist views. In this chapter, I have specifically identified that four inclinations exist among returnees: a strong feeling of anchoring or

grounding toward a specific place and a sense of identity with a particular “group;” a sense of alienation from both; dual or ambivalent experiences; and a looser and more fluid approach reflecting a globalized, mobile existence. They cover “purist,” “hyphenated,” and “hybrid or creole” identities (Eriksen 2010: 207). In all cases, sedentarism and mobility co-exist, though in diverse combinations and degrees. As Werbner (2000: 6) argues, “[d]iasporas, it seems, are both ethnic-parochial and cosmopolitan.” She adds: “The challenge remains, however, to disclose how the tension between these two tendencies is played out in actual situations.” In my research, this tension is manifested in the process of return to and settlement in the homeland. I have tried to address the challenge that she mentions by examining how personal characteristics and life-cycle stages (age, marital status, etc.), contextual factors (diasporic community, “host” society’s culture, etc.), migration-specific processes (return motivation, de-idealization of homeland, habitus positioning in the new field, etc.), and time considerations (immigration year, length of stay, etc.) factor in the manifestation of identity and belonging (re)definition patterns.

Some other structural factors, such as class and level of education, most probably play a role too in determining the pattern toward which a returnee gravitates at a specific point in time. For example, people inclined toward cosmopolitan floating tend to be well-educated and financially quite stable. Calhoun (2007: 286), for example, talks about the inequalities “that make ethnically unmarked national identities accessible mainly to elites and make being a comfortable citizen of the world contingent on having the right passports, credit cards, and cultural credentials.” Such “differential capacities and potentials for mobility” have also been mentioned by Sheller (2014: 794), who refers to

the concepts of “motility” and “mobility capital” (Kaufmann et al. 2004) in her article. Even though I have not elaborated on such issues, I have occasionally pointed out such objective factors throughout the three empirical chapters. For instance, I have argued in Chapter V that people who are primarily motivated to move to Armenia by cosmopolitan or universally oriented values usually have a high level of education and belong to a relatively high socioeconomic class. The more systematic study of how such factors affect identity-related matters can constitute a topic of future research.

Finally, another issue that has not been adequately covered in this chapter is related to the returnees’ legal status in Armenia and “official” forms of membership, including dual citizenship, and their impact on identity and belonging. I recognize that this issue may be important. One dimension that may potentially be explored in future studies, for example, is the gendered aspect of citizenship and belonging. In this regard, several returnees with male children explained that they have avoided applying for RA citizenship, for fear of the obligations it will impose on their children in the future in terms of compulsory military service. I have decided not to focus on issues of legal status in this thesis, partly because most of the returnees I interviewed did not elaborate on such topics on their own, and when asked, they often commented on them briefly and superficially. I acknowledge that this lack of emphasis is in itself a point that needs to be further investigated.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

In this brief concluding chapter, I will summarize the main points made in this thesis, providing a review of the research goals, theoretical framework, methodological choices, and empirical findings. I will subsequently wrap up the thesis with a discussion of some of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical shortcomings or gaps in my research, as well as the directions that further studies can take to address them.

1. Research Summary and Main Arguments

This thesis examined the immigration to and long-term settlement in post-Soviet Armenia of diasporan-Armenians. It focused on returnees from post-Genocide communities outside of the Soviet bloc (mostly Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Canada, and the United States), plus the more than 400-year-old Iranian-Armenian community.

While reviewing the relevant literature on diasporas and migration in Chapter II, I showed that long-term diasporic return migration has remained relatively understudied. Return has often been viewed as illusory and infeasible. Moreover, existing studies have usually focused on short-term return and have examined mostly the cases of first- and second-generation migrants. I subsequently discussed the distinctive characteristics of diasporic return migration. Most importantly, these are related to the nostalgic view of the homeland that diasporic communities often maintain, and their ability to preserve a collective identity (achieved largely through the efforts and practices of elites and institutions) over several generations. For these reasons, I argued that an analysis of the “routes” that have dominated many studies on diasporas, especially since the mid-1990s,

cannot adequately explain diasporic return migration motivations and experiences. It needs to be counterbalanced with an examination of the “roots,” and the various ways mobility and anchoring co-exist and relate to each other.

Recently, some threads in the existing literature have recognized the need to follow such a balanced approach that acknowledges the co-existence and dynamic interaction of roots and routes among diasporans and migrants. Such ideas have been advanced by some diaspora theorists, advocates of the “new mobilities paradigm,” scholars of “new cosmopolitanism,” and studies highlighting the inter-relationship between integration and transnationalism. My study drew on some of these works. However, less attention has been given to devising conceptual frameworks and tools that could allow the study of this dialectic relationship between mobility and sedentarism in real-life situations. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that such a relationship can be examined by relying on broader social theory, and more particularly, on approaches that strive to integrate and harmonize agency and structure-centered approaches. This way, I also sought to tackle the agency–structure debate that is interlaced through the routes–roots dichotomy. I argued that Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social action, with certain modifications to mollify its sometimes structuralist tendencies, provides us with the tools to disentangle the *inner workings and processes* through which mobility and sedentarism, with their underlying agency and structure undertones, are manifested in the visions and lives of diasporan returnees. It also contextualizes these processes within a wider, dynamically evolving, sociohistorical environment. Connecting the study of diasporic return migration to wider social theory and providing an application of Bourdieu’s concepts are key contributions of my study. Bourdieu’s conceptual tools (habitus, field, capital, doxa,

and hysteresis), with some additional insights from the works of other scholars, especially Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (projective and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency), allowed me to conduct a more nuanced and elaborate analysis of *how* anchoring and floating, agency and structure co-exist and relate to each other in the case of long-term diasporic return migration. Furthermore, in order to explain *why* there are variations among returnees, I highlighted the role of three main factors: the diasporic context returnees come from, the generation they belong to, and their life-cycle stage.

In cases when diasporic return is organized and/or facilitated by states, demonstrating that return is not a purely self-motivated and -experienced process, but takes place within and is affected by objective structures — both before and after return — is relatively easier and less likely to question. In the post-Soviet Armenian case, however, well-developed repatriation and integration policies have been absent at the state level. Thus, showing the interconnectivity of agency and structure makes my argument even more compelling. It also highlights the meso-level dimension, and more particularly the role of non-state actors in the structural environment, including the family, communal groups or other social networks, as well as educational, political, religious, corporate, cultural, charitable, and other non-governmental institutions.

As explained in Chapter III, I adopted a qualitative research design, which relied mostly on participant observation and life-history interviews with 104 long-term diasporan returnees in Armenia. In line with my theoretical framework, the use and comparative analysis of in-depth narratives highlighted how the returnees' individual aspirations,

decisions, and experiences affirm and challenge collective memories, “doxic” ideas, and practices.

With this theoretical and methodological backdrop, the next four chapters focused on the case of Armenian diasporic return. Before embarking on the three empirical chapters (V, VI, and VII), Chapter IV provided a historical background. Next, my main objective in the empirical chapters was to study how “rooted” and “routed” tendencies, as well as objective and subjective factors, are manifested and expressed in two dimensions of return: envisioning and experiencing. The first aspect referred to return motivations and rationales, while the second encompassed post-return integration and identity-related processes. Chapter V covered the first aspect. It showed that diasporan returnees’ conceptions of homeland range from more “solid” to more “liquid” (Cohen 2009), and from more singular to more multilocal, versions. These are in turn reflected in their return motivations. Beyond a mere listing of main return rationales found in some other studies, I demonstrated how, in most cases, a number of objective and subjective factors act together to motivate diasporic return. Based on my theoretical framework, I found that return decisions are usually affected by a combination of dispositions, creative imaginations, and practical considerations. Dispositions and imaginations exhibit two directions: ethnonational/cultural and cosmopolitan. They are mainly related to the shaping of a more intrinsically developed desire to return. On the other hand, practical considerations are usually associated with the timing and process of return. They include life-course transitions, job/investment opportunities, family re-unification plans, and escape from undesirable or dangerous situations. Regardless of the combination of

dispositions, imaginations, and practicalities, an emotional attachment to Armenia — though expressed differently and with diverse degrees — existed in almost all cases.

The next two empirical chapters turned attention to post-return experiences. Thanks to a more holistic application of various Bourdieusian concepts, I did not just discuss the mismatch (or “hysteresis”) between the returnees’ new sociocultural environment and their long-held dispositions (“habitus”), or their level of integration *into* the new society. Instead, in Chapter VI, I analyzed *how* returnees try to address hysteresis, by using existing or creating new forms of cultural, social, and economic “capital.” I identified the following strategies in this regard: habitus alteration, habitus reproduction, temporary distancing from the field, altering the future generation’s habitus, and field abandonment. I demonstrated that in most cases, returnees — whether consciously or unconsciously — reproduce certain elements of their habitus, while retaining some others. I also argued that this co-existence of fixity and change, of preservation and transformation, is often a continuation of the way many returnees used to live in the diaspora, where they were integrated to a certain extent in the “host” society, without however having lost their distinctiveness.

Chapter VII extended the analysis of the post-return experiences to the realm of identity and belonging. It identified four major patterns in the way returnees (re-)assess and (re)define their identities and sense of belonging upon relocation: lopsided anchoring, oscillation, liminal homelessness, and cosmopolitan floating. As in the case of return motivations and post-return integration experiences, sedentarism and mobility co-exist — though in various degrees — in all these patterns. Moreover, subjective and objective

factors affect the inclination of returnees toward either one of the patterns at a specific point in time. Over time, shifts in patterns may occur within the same person. Such intrapersonal variations also happen with the habitus-positioning strategies covered in Chapter VI. Such changes are related to the evolution of the external environment (“field”) and/or personal re-evaluations (resulting from life-cycle developments, for example). These dynamic processes can only be studied if the focus is on *long-term* return migration, which hints to another contribution of my research.

Throughout the analysis of return visions and experiences, I argued that the role of emotion is particularly important in diasporic return migration, compared to other types of return migration. The post-Soviet Armenian case has been especially insightful in highlighting affective factors, given the “victim” origin of the “traditional” diasporic communities that I focused on. The emotional potency of identity-related tensions is also especially accentuated because of the shifts that have occurred in the Armenian case both in the borders and conceptualization of the homeland, and in the nature, size, and distribution of the diaspora.

A final point I would like to make is that by looking at both subjective and objective factors, I have tried to avoid instilling a normative dimension in my analysis. I have refrained from viewing or characterizing cosmopolitan ideas and practices as more superior, progressive, meaningful, and emancipatory than such forms of solidarity as nationalism (Cheah 2006). Instead, I have tried to explain their occurrence as being the result of internalized dispositions shaped within specific temporal-relational environments.

2. Research Gaps and Future Directions

At a general theoretical and methodological level, there are three major shortcomings or gaps that I would like to discuss. Firstly, one challenge with the use of the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus and field that has been quite difficult to address in this study is their multilayered character. On the one hand, dispositions can encompass a wide variety of individual- and group-level ways of thinking and behaving. On the other hand, field structures exist in different arenas of social life. I admit that I have often used these concepts without specifying their boundaries. It has been very difficult to define their scale and level,¹⁴⁶ especially in such a study that covered various aspects of the return experience and included people from very diverse personal and collective backgrounds. I am aware that such vagueness is problematic. Nevertheless, I believe that foregoing such refinements is justified for the sake of making a more general point about the usefulness of these concepts for the analysis of long-term diasporic return migration in a way that accounts for both structure and agency. Further studies can seek more in-depth analyses of particular scales of returnee habituses and/or specific fields.

Secondly, some recent migration-themed studies with a Bourdieusian orientation have recognized the need to capture the transnational dimension of habitus and capital accumulation. They have analyzed, for example, how various forms of capital are valued, used, created, exchanged, and transferred across national borders, well after the initial relocation (Kelly & Lusia 2006; Nowicka 2013, 2015). Such an approach would have required a different methodology than what I have chosen for my thesis. Thus, some

¹⁴⁶ A similar difficulty, with regard to habitus, has also been noted by Kelly and Lusia (2006: 835, 845-846).

might argue that I had to conduct multi-sited fieldwork to be able to understand more adequately and accurately the environments from which returnees come from. Although that kind of research might have definitely been valuable, it was practically impossible, given the limited timeframe within which I had to complete my DPhil. Such work could have been easier if my research focused on the return migration of diasporans from a specific diasporic community, a path chosen by many researchers studying other cases of diasporic return. For me, however, the richness that the narratives of diasporans from diverse diasporic contexts provided, and the insights I have gained by comparing them, have been more important than presenting a detailed ethnography of a very specific group (if we can use that term) of returnees. Therefore, in order to frame my study within the larger structural environment, I mainly relied on how returnees themselves perceived and described their pre- and post-return fields. The way they presented and the meanings they attributed to these environments were in line with my focus on the returnees' internalized dispositions. Additionally, I analyzed some secondary sources in order to supplement the accounts received from interviewees. Most importantly, this included a literature review of previous studies of a single or multiple Armenian diasporic community(ies). Furthermore, my understanding of the countries and contexts of origin have been shaped by my personal experiences of living or visiting various diasporic communities throughout my life. Nevertheless, research in the communities of origin can definitely enrich my study if I or other researchers decide to pursue and further build up on this topic in the future.

Thirdly, an important aspect in Bourdieu's theory that has not been systematically tackled in my study is power. The position of a person's habitus in a specific field and

the general social space is inextricably linked to power differences, and it often perpetuates imbalances and inequalities among people. Thus, an issue that arises when studying habitus transformation, for example, is whether or not, and to what extent, the adjustments to long-held dispositions actually lead to changes in the general positioning of returnees vis-à-vis locals and other returnees in the new environment, as well as compared to their positioning in their former settings before relocation (Hyejeong 2013: 36). Such issues related to social mobility have been mentioned in my analysis of post-return experiences (especially in Chapter VI), but they have not been the focus of my study. A well-rounded examination of these power dynamics again would require engagement in transnationally oriented research. It would also entail a greater emphasis on the perceptions and practices of local Armenians in order to reveal the relational dimension of power. Finally, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of power dynamics, I would have had to dig deeper into the economic conditions of returnees before and after migration. As explained in Chapter III, this was a particularly difficult topic to tackle during my fieldwork.

At an empirical level, given that the case of post-Soviet Armenian diasporic return migration has largely remained uncharted so far, this thesis contributed to the growing corpus of studies on specific return migration cases, serving as an exploratory research project and laying the groundwork for more comprehensive analyses in the future. For various reasons explained in Chapter I, the way I defined the terms “diaspora” and “return” in this thesis excluded the following groups, which could be covered by future studies to draw some comparative analyses of return motivations and post-return experiences:

- Diasporans who moved to Armenia primarily because of the security situation in their former countries (e.g., Iraq and Syria);
- Short-term and circular returnees;
- Armenians returning from the countries of the former Soviet bloc; and
- First-generation migrants who had emigrated from the RA in the past couple of decades, and their children who were born/raised outside of Armenia.

For reasons similar to my above-explained inability and unwillingness to conduct multi-sited fieldwork, I also did not address “failed” cases of return, where returnees lived in Armenia for a while, but later emigrated again, by going back to where they had come from, or by relocating to a third destination. Given my interest in long-term settlement, I focused on diasporans who continue living in Armenia. But I did interview people who admitted they wanted or planned to emigrate. Some aspects of these cases were discussed in Chapter VI. In order to gain more insight into such cases, I also had some brief informal discussions with a few Lebanese-Armenians who had previously resided in Armenia but then returned to Lebanon. I cannot claim that these people are representative of the population of such former Lebanese-Armenian returnees, and more so of former returnees from other communities. Thus, “re-return” (or perhaps “real” return) to the diaspora can be yet another topic of future research.

Moreover, my current study has not focused on the migration experiences and perspectives of children of returnees. I did conduct short interviews with some children of returnees who grew up in Armenia, are now adults, and have decided to stay in the country. These meetings provided opportunities to validate or question some information

received from older generations. They also allowed me to paint a wider picture of the impact of diasporic return on families. In some cases, when interviewing parents, their adult or underage children were present, especially when the meetings were held in their houses. Occasionally, these children made supplementary comments or offered their views, thus enriching my understanding of intergenerational relationships and tensions. In general, however, the accounts of 1.5 (children of returnees who were born in the diaspora but brought to Armenia at an early age) and second (children of returnees born in Armenia) generations, who had not been actively involved in the decision to move in the first place, were tangential to my main focus on return motivation(s), decision making, and initiation. Future research should explore this aspect of diasporic return in more detail.

These last two points (“failed cases” and future generations) give a cue to a question that continues to preoccupy my thoughts: In a globalized era marked by challenges to nation-states but simultaneously characterized by their persistence and continued salience, to what extent can the decisions of individual diasporan returnees to immigrate to and settle in Armenia become sustainable (for themselves and their children) and contagious (to other diasporans) without some kind of institutionalization and policy development at the state level?

The role of the state becomes a particularly relevant issue to consider if we bring development and social change into the discussion, that is, if we were to examine the following questions: How do/will the presence and practices of these diasporan returnees affect the daily lives of people living in Armenia and the country’s overall development?

How do/will they impact social change? A recent video, produced as part of an initiative titled “Be Armenia,”¹⁴⁷ features Armenian professionals who have moved to Armenia from the diaspora (“Be Armenia” video’ 2015).¹⁴⁸ The video opens as follows: “How do you change the narrative of a country? In Armenia, a group of professionals are leading the ideas which will define what is possible.” The returnees then all describe how living and working in Armenia is an opportunity to contribute to “something real,” to alter the “status quo,” to “do big things,” to depart from the “polarized ... black-and-white” narratives of Armenia and to “operate a little more” in “the middle, in the grey area” where reality lies. To what extent can such efforts have a widespread and prolonged impact on diverse arenas of the “field” itself? Can these returnees really “be Armenia” without the “general social and economic reform[s]” that are necessary “for creating a fertile ground for development” and that require “active state intervention” (de Haas 2010: 255-256, 258)? Probably not. But the size of the diasporic return inflow will also play an instrumental role in determining the extent of individual returnees’ development potential and impact on society. As one returnee says in the above-mentioned video, “we can change history. It’s exactly the right time. So we need more people.”

¹⁴⁷ The initiative is sponsored by RepatArmenia Foundation, IDeA Foundation, and Yerevan Productions.

¹⁴⁸ They include people born and raised in the diaspora, as well as some who were born in Armenia but emigrated after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: STATISTICS ON RA MIGRATION FLOWS, POPULATION SIZE, CITIZENSHIP, AND RESIDENCY PERMITS

Table 1 – Official censuses results in Soviet and independent Armenia

Years	De facto population	De jure population
1926	881,290	-
1939	1,282,338	-
1959	1,763,048	1,765,297
1970	2,491,873	2,492,616
1979	3,030,747	3,037,259
1989	3,287,677	3,304,776
2001	3,002,594	3,213,011
2011	2,871,771	3,018,854

Source: NSSRA (2013d).

Table 2 – Immigration to the RA from non-CIS countries (1995–2011)¹⁴⁹

Year	Immigrants from non-CIS countries
1995	100
1996	100
1997	100
1998	0
1999	300
2000	400
2001	100
2002	600
2003	500
2004	300
2005	200
2006	300
2007	200
2008	200
2009	200
2010	200
2011	200
Total	4,000

Sources: NSSRA (2001: 36, 2004: 43, 2007: 44, 2010: 45, 2012: 45).

¹⁴⁹ These figures are based on data compiled during people’s registration and its cancellation at the territorial passport services of the RA Police. In its yearbooks, NSSRA mentions that this information is “not complete” and does not reflect the real picture of migration flows.

Table 3 – Number of RA residency permits (temporary, permanent, and special)¹⁵⁰ issued to foreigners, by citizenship (2006–09)*

Citizenship	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
France	91	164	125	78	458
Iran	931	1,452	1,186	856	4,425
Iraq	116	162	278	136	692
Lebanon	167	184	179	67	597
Syria	569	448	363	134	1,514
USA	463	509	433	231	1,636
Total	2,337	2,919	2,564	1,502	9,322

Sources: BMP (2011: 30); Manke (2010: 81-82).

Table 4 – Number of RA special residency permits issued to foreigners, by citizenship (2006–10)*

Citizenship	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
France	91	118	84	54	75	422
Iran	922	640	378	249	582	2,771
Iraq	116	148	266	132	30	692
Lebanon	167	146	127	51	43	534
Syria	568	316	194	100	95	1,273
USA	462	332	226	191	256	1,467
Total	2,326	1,700	1,275	777	1,081	7,159

Sources: BMP (2011: 30); Galstyan et al. (2011: 42); Manke (2010: 81-82).

* The above two tables provide figures only for non-CIS countries with the largest number of permits issuances during the covered years.

Table 5 – Number of RA residency permits issued to foreigners from non-CIS countries (2012–14)

Years	All types of residency permits	Special residency permits
2012	4,184	684
2013	4,294	833
2014	4,017	673
Total	12,495	2,190

Sources: SMS (2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

¹⁵⁰ Temporary, permanent, and special permits are issued for one, five, and 10 year(s), respectively. They are all renewable. For more details about these permits, see SMS (2014).

Table 6 – Number of foreign citizens in the RA (2001 and 2011 censuses)

Country of citizenship	2001 census	2011 census
Iran	595	1,527
USA	343	546
Other*	2,136	2,970
Total	3,074	5,043
Dual citizens	–	10,845

* Excludes: Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, as well as stateless people.

Sources: Manke (2010: 79); NSSRA (2013c: 291).

Table 7 – Citizenship acquisition in the RA (1997–2012)

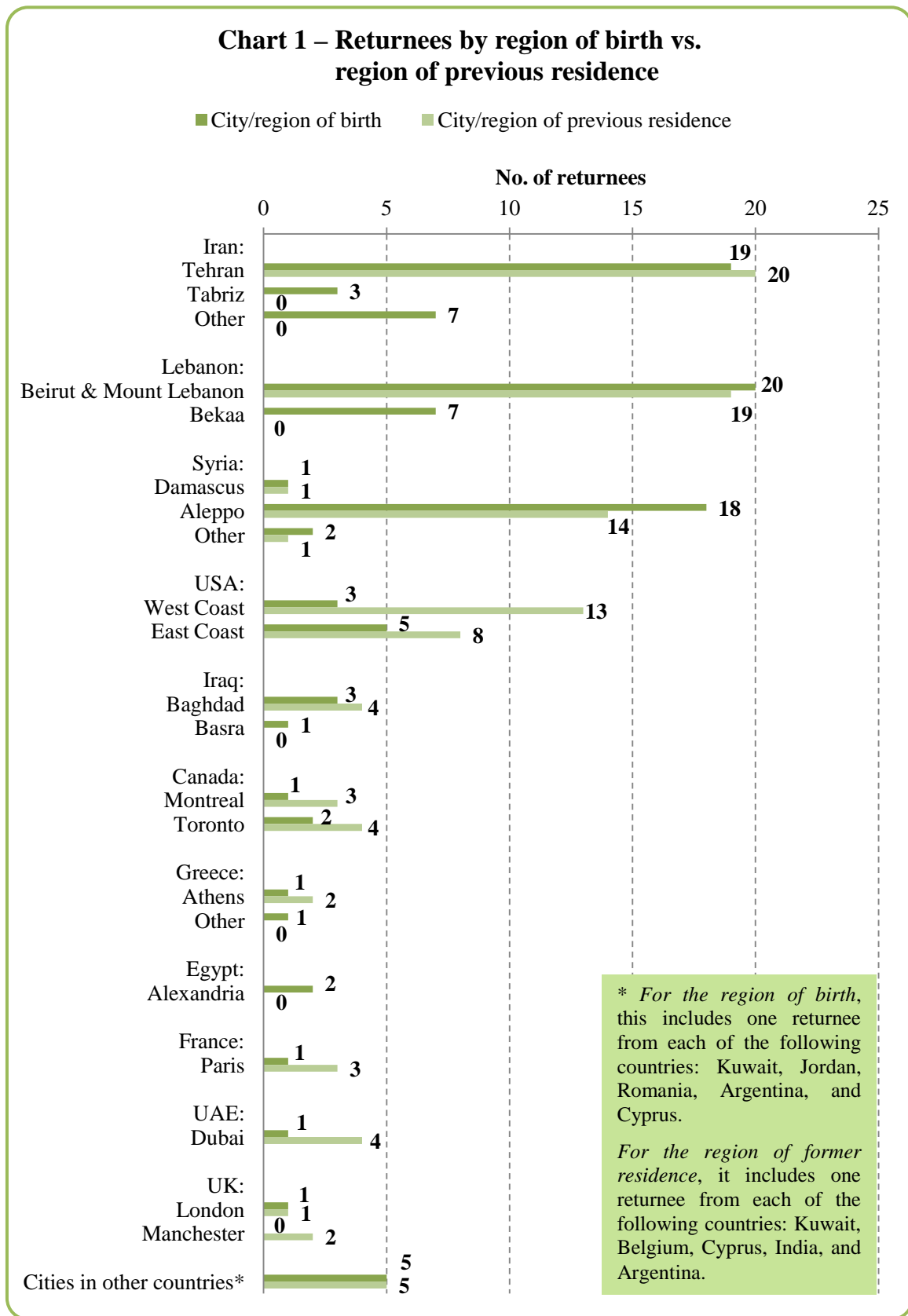
Years	Number of people who have acquired RA citizenship**
1997–2007	1,735
2008	1,554
2009	4,323
2010	9,588
2011	14,980
2012***	14,994
2013	30,844
2014	11,775
Total	89,793

** The numbers include stateless applicants. They also cover all citizenship acquisitions, whether by long-established diasporans (as defined in this thesis) or others.

*** According to SMS (2015a), the number for 2012 is 14,693.

Sources: For 1997–2012, MODRA (2012: 4); for the rest, SMS (2015a, 2015b, 2015c).

APPENDIX II: ADDITIONAL STATISTICS ON RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



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INTERVIEWS

- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Alik, Yerevan, 10 June 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Ani, Yerevan, 1 July 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Antranik, Yerevan, 2 April 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Anush, Yerevan, 14 and 16 August 2013 (two sessions).
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Arakel, Yerevan, 8 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Araks, Yerevan, 6 April 2013 and 10 June 2013 (two sessions).
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Araz, Yerevan, 18 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Armen, Yerevan, 11 June 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Armik, Yerevan and Ashtarak, 8 and 11 August 2013 (two sessions).
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Arpi, Yerevan, 13 June 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Arsen, Yerevan, 16 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Artak, Yerevan, 13 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Aspet, Yerevan, 19 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Astghik, Yerevan, 29 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Babken, Yerevan, 14 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Dikran, Yerevan, 5 April 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Dzovag, Yerevan, 8 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Garbis, Yerevan, 25 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Hagop, Yerevan, 15 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Haykaz, Yerevan, 20 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Houry, Yerevan, 14 June 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Hovhannes, Yerevan, 29 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Hovsep, Yerevan, 8 April 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Ishkhan, Yerevan, 18 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Karnig, Yerevan, 29 August 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Knar, Yerevan, 27 June 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Levon, Yerevan, 6 March 2013.
- Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Lori, Yerevan, 3 April 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Lucine, Yerevan, 28 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Lucy, Yerevan, 5 July 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Manouk, Yerevan, 18 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Manoushak, Yerevan, 8 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Martik, Yerevan, 12 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Meghedi, Yerevan, 19 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Nare, Yerevan, 7 April 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Narek, Yerevan, 8 August 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Nazeli, Yerevan, 19 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Norayr, Yerevan, 8 April 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Nshan, Yerevan, 23 and 26 June 2013
(two sessions).

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Patil, Yerevan, 2 August 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sako, Yerevan, 12 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sanan, Yerevan, 11 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sandra, Yerevan, 22 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sarine, Yerevan, 21 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sevag, Yerevan, 16 August 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Shahan, Yerevan, 15 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sipan, Yerevan, 27 March 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Sirun, Yerevan, 27 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Talar, Yerevan, 14 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Talin, Ashtarak, 23 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Tro, Yerevan, 27 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Vatche, Yerevan, 20 June 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Yeran, Yerevan, 15 August 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Zaven, Ashtarak, 11 August 2013.

Life-history interview with long-term returnee, Zvart, Yerevan, 13 June 2013.

SELECTED ONLINE SOURCES ON DIASPORAN RETURNEES¹⁵¹

Blogs:

- Home base Armenia [<http://homebasearmenia.blogspot.com/>].
- Living *Hye* [Armenian]: The political, social and economic discourse of a person torn between Armenia and America [<https://livinghye.wordpress.com/>].
- Motherhood, repatriation and other fictions [<http://larajan.blogspot.com/>].
- My nation: The trails & trials of an Armenian repatriate¹⁵² [<http://arkreative.wordpress.com/>, not available anymore].
- Notes from *hairenik* [homeland]: A journal of one man's observances and experiences in Armenia [http://noteshairenik.blogspot.com/2015_04_01_archive.html].
- Notes from Yerevan [<http://notesfromyerevan.blogspot.com/>].
- Notes of a *spurkahye* [diasporan-Armenian] finally come home [<https://tamarnajarian.wordpress.com/>].
- Things I want to say [<http://midk.blogspot.com/?view=flipcard>].

Other articles and interviews:

- Repat stories on The RepatArmenia Foundation website [<http://repatarmenia.org/eng/category/cat-1/>].
- Various articles and interviews published on Armenia- and diaspora-based newspapers, such as *Asbarez* (<http://asbarez.com/>), *Hetq Online* (<http://hetq.am/eng/>), and *The Armenian Reporter* (<http://www.reporter.am/>, now defunct).

YouTube videos:

- Shoghakat TV “*Depi Tun*” [Toward Home] series of documentary interviews with various returnees, available on YouTube.

¹⁵¹ These online publications and videos have provided me with some valuable background knowledge while preparing for and conducting my fieldwork, and subsequently during the data analysis and write-up stages. However, I have not analyzed their contents systematically. For this reason, I have decided to list them separately.

¹⁵² An identically titled photography book has also been published (Khachikian 2008).

- YouTube interviews with returnees, academics, and other relevant parties on the theme of diasporic return. Available at:
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDYXFCCDbBc&feature=relmfu>
 - o http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=py_idz_m5vk&feature=relmfu
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4CnayPh5-U&feature=relmfu>
 - o http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IpZO-qRSyU&feature=relmfu
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlNLR7awlcs&feature=relmfu>
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XypGpH8FfJk&feature=relmfu>
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1qNcL51tzk>
 - o <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqhAhZXL1-8>