

# Homeland Tourism, Long-distance Nationalism and Production of a New Diasporic Identity (Armenian case)

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## Abstract

*This anthropologically informed paper attempts to re-conceptualize the nostalgic concept of homeland and more precisely the changing meaning of homecoming – a key feature of any diasporic identity. I examine the phenomenon of contemporary homeland trips and homeland tourism in Armenia through the lens of long-distance nationalism and new cosmopolitanism.*

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The Armenian diaspora is considered to be a paradigmatic diasporic group associated with strong affiliation to ethnic roots forging long distance nationalism and political ethnocentrism. This ethnocentrism is reified in the notion of ancient culture, the uniqueness of the Armenian race and its history (as the first Christian nation). Much has been written about Armenian diasporic nostalgia, its diverse representations and manifestations of cultural memory concerning the Armenian massacre in 1915 and the ways this memory forms diasporic belonging across borders and generations that has not disappeared to this day. It is not new to draw attention to the variations in intensity and goals of the ways in which diasporic members can combine transnational ‘rooted’ and assimilative strategies. As noted by Peggy Levitt (2005), it reveals that transnational ethnic practices and assimilation are not diametrically opposed to each other. Instead, as this chapter shows, transnational ethnic practices and assimilation create diverse interconnectedness across different generations.

Armenians who comprise the diaspora call themselves *Spiurk* and Armenians from the Republic of Armenia are known as *Hayastantsy*. These two notions characterize differences between these two groups along political, social and cultural lines. Historians identify *Hayastantsy* as Transcaucasian or Russian Armenians and *spiurk* as Ottoman or Turkish Armenians due to the geographical and political divisions between two Empires in the nineteenth century. A significant number of diasporic Armenians were expelled from the former Ottoman Empire (today Turkey) and not from the territory of modern-day Armenia.<sup>2</sup> They settled in the USA and other countries at the beginning of the twentieth century not only as refugees, but also as labour migrants. In terms of identity transformation, by the end of the 1980s, Armenian-Americans were characterized by Anny Bakalian (1994) as ‘feeling’ and not ‘being’ Armenian anymore. Despite a high level of assimilation and social mobility, there is still a remarkable level of institutional completeness in terms of diasporic community organizations (schools, churches, media, museums, charity organizations) and political lobbying in the US.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on my previous publications (Darieva 2011, 2012) and a discussion after the lecture given at University of Kobe on 22.November 2012. I am grateful to my colleagues at Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, University of Kobe (Kazuko Iwamoto) for inspiring discussions and valuable comments, in particular to Shinnosuke Matsui, Kumi Tateoka and Takayuki Yokota-Murakami.

<sup>2</sup> I leave Iranian Armenians aside.

We get out of the plane... a smile runs across my face as I see Armenian writing and hear airport employees conversing in Armenian. Wait is it Armenian? It sounds like it, but I don't understand most of it. Oh no, my first feeling of culture shock. I get to the gate, fill out the paperwork and go straight to the immigration officer. I end up conversing him for 10 minutes! He looks through my passport and asks me the most thought provoking yet simple question: 'what has taken you so long to visit Armenia?' Indeed, why has it? I had vacation time, I had the money, and I have the stamina to survive a long flight, so why not?

(Armenian Volunteer Corps, spring 2007)

This interview excerpt describes the emotional experiences of a third generation Armenian-American when he embarked on his diasporic homeland trip in Yerevan. It draws attention to a growing intensity of transnational meaningful interactions beyond leisure and tourism (Basu 2005) between members of second and third generation Armenian-Americans and ancestral homeland, the Republic of Armenia.

In May 2007, during my fieldwork in Armenia<sup>3</sup>, I interviewed twenty young English speaking volunteers of ethnic Armenian background who had travelled to Armenia as members of the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC): part of a 'three month programme to move mountains'.<sup>4</sup> The Armenian Volunteer Corps, an international non-profit organization founded in 2001, 'calls on diasporic Armenians to volunteer their time, knowledge, and energy by living and working in Armenia to invest in the development of the homeland' and enjoy a meaningful exchange. There are many different activities included in this meaningful exchange program, for example working in Yerevan's public organizations, schools, hospitals, NGOs, helping to develop an impoverished village or to rebuild a church. Among them, one specific activity which attracted many volunteers was to plant trees in urban parks, neighbourhoods, tree nurseries and in the city of Yerevan and its suburbs, organized by the diasporic Armenian Tree Project organization in Boston.

Generally, this set of transnational activities and claims is identified as long-distance nationalism that connect people living abroad with a specific territory that they see as an ancestral home. They feel commonality with this land in terms of origin, history, identity and geographical distance and even other citizenship do not play any role in legitimization of their claims. Long distance nationalism is more likely to produce a specific ideology –not just nostalgic imaginations for the past, but politics designed to influence the political situation within the territory of the homeland. These actions are often related to repatriation programs regulated and funded by the nation state: Jewish Aliya, in-gathering policies in Germany (*Vertriebenegesetz* and *Aussiedlergesetz*), Kazakhstan (Law on Oralman), India, Italy and Japan. In Armenia, after WWII, between the 1940s and 1960s, Western Armenians enthusiastically participated in the state repatriation program known as *nerghakht*. Attracted by Stalin's campaign to repopulate the regions of Kars and Ardahan, which were contested with Turkey, about 100,000 Armenians from different countries resettled in Soviet Armenia. A formal territorial claim was made by the Kremlin to the

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<sup>3</sup> The ethnographic field work was conducted within the research project 'Identity Politics in Societies in Transition. Armenia on the Way to Europe?' (2006-2008) at Humboldt University, Berlin and funded by the German Research Society.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.armenianvolunteer.org>, last accessed 11 February 2012.

Turkish ambassador in Moscow, but it was dropped in 1949 with no border change (Suny 1993, Pattie 2004, Panossian 2006).

Mobility in these cases is seen to renew and reinforce bounded identities and social relations. In this paper I am concerned with one other perspective, the possibility and potentiality that these transnational projects can be inspired by, or produce multiple, overlapping identities and cosmopolitan aspirations and projects. My main argument in this paper is that travelling, homeland tourism and other ‘homecoming projects’ have increasingly less to do with a long distance nationalistic re-enactment of the past and vengeance for the past, but rather with a creative ‘journey to the future’ and to some extent naïve ideal of a more cosmopolitan and global grassroot player ‘*Weltverbesserer*’ (world improver).<sup>5</sup>

### Multiple forms of homeland attachment

One of the key features identifying members of a ‘diaspora’ is their continuing attachment to the homeland, regardless of whether it is an imagined or real country of exodus (Safran 1991, Brubaker 2005). Much has been written about the maintaining homogeneous ideals and ethnic paradigms of the diasporic identity, but there have been fewer investigations of the ways diasporic people practice this kind of attachment in the transnational age. Much has been said about the phenomenon of long-distance nationalism among diasporic activists (Glick Schiller 2005), but less has been studied the notion of diasporic cosmopolitanism. Real or symbolic attachment to the homeland can take many different forms and meanings. Cultural forms of homeland attachment go back to the production of ideas, symbols and images of an imagined ethnic community within a new homeland combined with the process of sacralization and worshipping the land of exodus visible in artistic expressions of nostalgic longing for home or in a simply hanging an image of the homeland in the living room. This sense of cultural repertoire is related to a more individual homeland attachment and transnational mobility is a less of importance. Other types of transnational homeland attachments recognize a growing mobility of diasporic people due to political and economic dimensions of their motivations. Activities related to financial investment, remittances, nostalgic trade, homeland and heritage tourism, temporal volunteer visits, civil society engagement among the first and second generation of diasporic people can be characterized as economic and social form of homeland attachment. In contrary, the political type of homeland attachment is associated with public activities of political diasporic associations which often based on practices of territorial claims or repatriation movements including in-gathering campaigns designed by national state programs in the home country. What is new for this type of transnational networks is an increasing role of mobility and travel within a specific trajectory and routs.

### ‘Come move the mountains!’ Newcomers in Armenia and homecoming projects

Along with dozens of visible, larger non-profit organizations working in the education and health

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<sup>5</sup> Somewhere else I have raised the problematic of appropriating a language of environmentalism that resonates with the critique of cosmopolitan claims made by Zlatko Skrbis, Gavin Kendala, and Ian Woodward. As ‘politically naive and utopian drive to construct a new world of tolerance some cosmopolitanisms are not yet free of the risk of being seen as colonialism under another banner’ (Skrbis et al. 2004: 132).  
Skrbis,

sectors in Armenia, there are two quite successful homecoming target-oriented diasporic organizations, Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) and Birthright Armenia. Founded in 2001, both organizations are engaged in a kind of social and economic ‘homecoming project’ for young diasporics in a particular way. Both volunteer organizations share the mission of affording the diasporic youth an opportunity to contribute to local development through professional work. Their specific goal is to support volunteering activities in Armenia by those who grew up in Western countries and who have at least one Armenian grandparent. Between 2007 and 2009, more than 400 male and female volunteers from the US, Canada, France, and Australia between the ages of 21 and 34 went to Armenia for periods varying from three months to two years. The number is growing. The question how can we understand the ways second and third generation Armenian-Americans engage with their homeland in transnational age when the ideal of repatriation entirely lost its attractiveness and the number of those who visit Armenia with a specific ‘mission’ is growing? Admittedly, there is a new recent trend in diasporic-homeland relationships in Armenia. In 2008 the Ministry of Diaspora has been established in Armenia. A growing presence of the Armenian government and its strategic view on diasporic communities can reshape the ways diasporic Armenians engage with their homeland. This paper deals predominantly with non-governmental networks created by members of diasporic centers and individuals in the US.

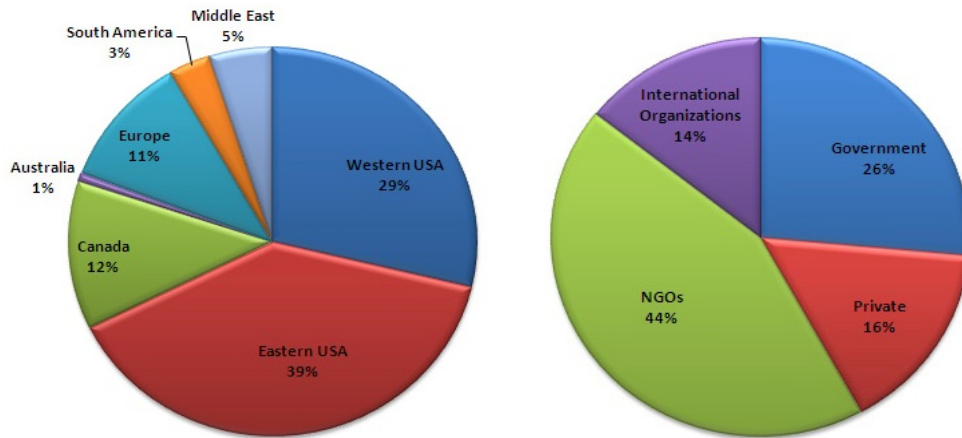


Source: [www.birthrightarmenian.org](http://www.birthrightarmenian.org)

Volunteer organizations (of particular interest to individuals under the age of 21)

- Birthright Armenia
- Armenian Volunteers Corps
- Land & Culture Organization
- Armenian Assembly of America
- Armenian Youth Federation
- AYF Western Region Youth Corps
- CYMA (Western Diocese)
- AGBU Yerevan Summer Intern Program
- Our Lady of Armenia Boghossian Educational Center

- Diaspora-Armenia Connection (DAC)
- The Fuller Center for Housing Armenia
- Ari Tun (Come Home) supported by the Ministry of Diaspora



Source: [www.birthrightarmenian.org](http://www.birthrightarmenian.org)

According to the charts above, more than 44 % of all volunteer organizations are based on the NGO level, and 70 % of the organizations are based in the US.

The interesting point is that the Armenian volunteer work may speak of a desire to ‘serve to the nation’; their efforts are not solely encompassed by this nationalist type of motivation. Without nationalistic slogans its goal is empowerment of “human rights, women, minorities and ecology’ and a desire to join with those around the world who work to save the planet. This form of cosmopolitan ‘bifocality’ links the fate of the nation to that of all humanity. Politically, AVC statements differ significantly from the goals of nationalist diasporic Armenians who identify themselves as ‘Dashnaks’. In contrast to traditional Dashnak’s claims to annex lands in Eastern Anatolia inside Turkey and to establish an Armenian state on that territory, the AVC recruits young volunteers through a humanitarian rhetoric and focuses on the territory of the Republic of Armenia (Phillips 1989). Explaining his drive to settle in Armenia within the official AVC slogan ‘Come Move Mountains’, one 30-year-old male volunteer from Boston emphasized: ‘There are many things to change here. You know, there is a problem of poverty, infrastructure. There is a problem of corruption’. (Yerevan, on May 7, 2005).

A unique feature of the Armenian homecoming in the twentieth century is that instead of returning to the actual ancestral places, the hometowns and villages in the Eastern Anatolian plateau (Turkey), grandsons and granddaughters instead invest, engage and settle in Armenia and the land neighbouring Turkey.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Armenian-American diasporic visitors have no local dimension and intimate knowledge of a particular genealogy, place, or village in the territory of Armenia. It is not surprising that, unlike so many migratory transnational networks built on a foundation of individual informal ties of kinship and remittances to family members and an obligation to support

<sup>6</sup> A hostile attitude towards Turkey among the spuirk still keeps Armenian-Americans from visiting Turkey.

local households (Armenians in Russia, Indians, Chinese or Ghanaians in the USA and Europe), members of the US-American diaspora build homeland ties primarily through formal NGOs and international organizations. This tendency by some diasporic groups to invest in countries other than their 'source countries' (such as Croats from Serbia who invest in the newly independent Croatia) has rarely been studied by migration scholars. The question is whether this specific trajectory of travel influences the scope and intensity of engagement with the homeland and the tendency to combine ethnic parochial claims with globalized and universalist values.

According to my observations and interviews, there is a shift in intensity in the way Armenian-Americans engage with the Republic of Armenia. In the early 1990s, some second generation Armenian-Americans were interested in 'cultural' and emotional reconnection and individual homeland tourism, like visiting the country to touch materialized highlights of ancestors heritage (see Mount Ararat, visit medieval churches and monasteries), or for a symbolic act such as re-burying family members in the Armenian soil, or by bringing family relics to local museums in Yerevan (Darieva 2008). Here we can recognize different types of homeland tourism: rooted tourism, heritage tourism, cemetery tourism, and religious tourism.

My recent observations and interviews reveal today these diasporic Armenians donate and invest in infrastructure projects like roads, the greening of urban parks, programs for poverty reduction in villages, and environmental projects. This kind of transnational mobility is still combined with homeland tourism, but it takes a new form which can be recognized as social remittance, where diasporic people transfer resources, ideas and behavior from receiving to sending countries (Levitt 1998, 2002). However, in the case of the Armenian diaspora in the US, we are dealing with a specific pattern of social remittances, which are driven by ideals of social entrepreneurship and the American culture of philanthropy.

The number of contemporary diasporic newcomers in Armenia is not high, but it is generally believed that they have a significant political and economic impact in Armenia. Whereas, Armenia's neighbouring countries, such as Georgia and Azerbaijan, are considered to have been shaped by internal forces such as the effects of the Rose Revolution and oil businesses respectively, Armenia, as an impoverished and isolated country became a recipient of labour migrant remittances and of a large amount of donations and know-how input from diasporic networks in Western countries. Members of the third generation of Armenian-Americans are very heterogeneous with regard socio-political characteristics and their intensity of involvement in the activities of ethnic Armenian organizations. One feature that many American-Armenians share is their social status in the US, as they belong predominantly to the middle class.

Although the investment and remittances have not significantly reduced the level of poverty in Armenia, Armenia continues to be more dependent on remittances and international aid than other post-Soviet, South Caucasian societies (Caucasus Analytical Digest 2011). By transferring social and economic capital to help a poor country, Armenian-Americans gain a feeling of incorporation into their separate 'sacred homeland', but also the global issues of 'development' and 'democracy'. Today, they reclaim Armenian soil through activities that contribute to the global issues of human rights and the environment, issues that supposed to affect the entire planet and its inhabitants.

## Homeland trip motivations: From nationalistic to global motivations?

Regarding their motivations, diasporic people arrive in Yerevan not just to see the holy Mount Ararat (*Agri Dagi*), but rather to ‘develop Armenia’. Temporary visits with a duration of three months to two years are often described by these young volunteers as a kind of philanthropic ‘giving’ or individual adventure, as well as a symbolic act of reuniting with the ancestral homeland. In both cases, the motivations and aspirations of volunteers and of the institutions that mediated their travel have been framed in discourses of an ‘exchange’ of skills and know-how between developing and developed societies.

Conducting a group interview with eight young volunteers in Yerevan on 5 December 2007, I posed a question regarding the direct and indirect motivation to participate in this program. All the respondents stated that their travel was not necessarily related to a ‘natural’ behaviour of diasporic decedents. A volunteer from Australia explicitly emphasized the individual and pragmatic dimension of her goal:

I came here primarily as a volunteer...it was not so much about Armenia as it was about me coming here to help people, as I had no real links with my homeland before I came ...My travel is kind of giving me a big kick, showing me where I want to be...

Another informant stressed his aspiration of engaging with Armenia as a ‘perfect time’ for a life-stage event and as a good place for collecting life experience. Similar to the experiences of other European second generation transnationalists (Turkish Germans, Swiss Italians, Greek Germans or British Pakistani) the ‘homeland trip’ was made in a quest for personal freedom and self-realization (Wessendorf 2009, King and Christou 2011). Victoria from Washington DC talked of her decision to travel to Armenia:

I am not tied down with family, with a career, with all these things and it is a perfect, perfect time to travel. And I always knew that it was the place where I would want to go. There are a lot of life experiences that I think are necessary to gain right now and it is a great time to do that.

Australian-born third generation Serena, who travelled to Armenia for nine months, talked of the adventurous side of her ‘homeland trip’:

I am trying to make my everyday life like an adventure, because I am not in Australia now, and do not have to stick with this or that job, do not have any responsibilities.

Finally, many interview respondents emphasized the cultural heterogeneity of the social environment in which they grew up. This aspect is related to the fact that at least four of the interview respondents identified themselves as being half-Armenian and having grown up in ethnically mixed families. Many of the volunteers explained that their motivations were not influenced by their parents’ ambitions, but rather their decision to come to Armenia was independent of their parents. Moreover, the majority of the volunteers I talked to during my field work viewed their transnational activity and behaviour in a different way to their parents, the latter seemingly following a ‘sedentary’ pattern

of interaction. Lucia (26 years old), whose father is of Armenian descent and mother Austrian, explained her experience in this way:

My father has never been to Armenia. I was hoping that I would get him to come to Armenia during my stay, but unfortunately he is not going to come. I suppose he is scared to come to Armenia to see how ideal it is not...It is not the utopian ideal society that he kind of wants it to be.

Only a few of the volunteer's parents had actually travelled to Armenia before their children visited the 'sacred land'. Thus their transnational engagement with the homeland differs in character and intensity, but it does not mean that they do not participate in transnational social connectedness. As mentioned previously, some parents prefer to support transnational organizations by donating and investing money in their children's travel or in maintaining transnational projects.

#### Armenian Tree Project: Between metaphors of ethnic rootedness and cosmopolitanism?

One of the areas where long distance notions of attachment to the homeland is pronounced in a less nationalist framework and rhetoric, is that of social remittance which stresses the value of individual engagement, global development and ecological harmony on humanitarian values. In the following section, I give some insights into this practice which was developed in Watertown (Boston area, MA) by the *Armenian Tree Project*. Though, the idea of this project has been inspired by the Jewish Zionist nationalistic Tree planting campaign in the 1960-70, it has significant differences.

The ATP was founded in 1994 in Watertown and in Yerevan by Caroline Mugar, a second-generation Armenian-American, whose father left the village of Kharpet in Anatolia in 1906 to settle in Massachusetts. Later, between the 1940s and the 1960s, Mugar's father and his brother became very successful businessmen, establishing the popular US supermarket chain, *Star Market*. The Watertown ATP office brings a large amount of capital into Yerevan, opening nurseries, planting trees and starting projects in surrounding villages. The local office's activities in Yerevan are divided into three main tree-planting sites: community sites in the city, nurseries, and impoverished villages with a high percentage of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan. Soon, Armenian Tree Project expanded its activities to larger projects such as reforestation and environmental education programs in the Lori region, in the northern part of Armenia. The economic resources derive mostly from public fundraising ceremonies organized by the ATP in the Boston area and elsewhere among Armenian-Americans. Memory of the Armenian losses in 1915 has become a powerful symbol for successful fundraising campaigns within diasporic networks in Massachusetts. However, the ATP has not only received generous support from a cluster of US Armenian family foundations, but also from international such as *Conservation International* and the *World Wildlife Fund*.

The projection of the homeland as an evergreen landscape, which has been created by the ATP, is built on European and North American romanticized images of nature. In its aesthetic design and combination of colours, the tree landscape differs from the traditional representations of the Armenian garden, which uses vineyard metaphors (Petrosyan 2001). The ATP's official logo design is three triangular green trees, which is similar to the design on oriental rugs. Flyers, Websites, newsletters, and donation certificates are identified by an image of three evergreen trees without any



specific mountain images. Both the mountain and the trees are essentialising symbols of nature. But unlike the mountain, which is highly associated with a particular historical longing for a past and the Armenian territorial loss, a tree represents social qualities, such as vitality, cultural universality, and a powerful orientation towards the future. At the same time there have been strong connections between environmental romanticism and nationalism since the end of the nineteenth century (Lekan 2004, Rival 1998). Thinking in terms of roots and trees reminds us of the yearning of nations in the search for their roots in an ethnic past (Smith 1986, Malkki 1997). The trees are the physical evidences of the Armenian attachment to the heritage and provide a unique emotional bond established through the act of tree planting between the past and the present. It is true that the emotional power of tree planting action are reinforced by the ecological assertion that trees can be good for the environment. The trees and their images are intermediaries between past and present, death and birth bonding the diasporic place with the holy Mount Ararat. However, unlike the Zionist forestation campaign in Israel (Bardenstein 1999, Braverman 2009), which pursued the aim of putting down roots in a new place and reclaiming the territory to the exclusion of others, tree-planting actions in Armenia serve as a social marker of a new transnational bond between the homeland and the diaspora, and between a small corner of the world and global issues.

There are specific techniques of cultivating donors among the Armenian-Americans. The most popular individual donation is 50 US \$ given several times in the year. More 11.000 diasporic Armenians are involved in this activity. In the US over 250.000 Armenian-Americans, around 4000 donors from MA donate more than 100 US \$ and over 520 record of those who regular donate over 1000 US \$ per year. According to the ATP office in Watertown, donations are made mostly at the end of the year close to the fixed day of tax declaration.

Tree-planting in Armenia has had a particular transnational impact on life circle rituals (birthdays, anniversaries and deaths) within the Armenian diasporic organizations in the Boston area. Increasingly, diasporic people donate to the ATP in commemoration of a family member. Another transnational technique developed by the ATP is a 'Green Certificate' that can be presented to donors confirming their sponsorship of tree planting in Armenia. Increasingly, donors also make pilgrimages to the sites where sponsored trees were planted and to nurseries in Armenia.

In the Armenian case, national imaginaries can stimulate a simultaneous inclusive globalism so that universal and cosmopolitan ideas and practices are implemented within redefinitions of homecomings and transnational narratives of reconnecting the diaspora with the homeland. The rhetoric of the Armenian Tree Project tries to create a new dimension for envisioning a mutually acceptable future that diminishes the tensions between 'us – *spjurk*' and 'them – *Hayastantsy*' via global issues. In 1998, for example, the Armenia Tree Project jointly initiated an event to mark Earth Day and Arbor Day in Armenian villages. The date, 22 April, coincides with Vladimir Lenin's birthday; the traditional day for celebrating volunteer work initiated by the Soviet authorities. In the soviet period, everyone (Soviet institutions, schools, enterprises, etc.) was required to mark this day by cleaning the immediate area around which they worked or studied and then plant a tree. This day has since been transformed into global Earth Day.

In an ATP newsletter from spring 2007, one can read the official, twofold vision and pledge to Armenia: '*We will use trees to improve the standard of living of Armenians and to protect the global environment*' (2007: 2). This quotation indicates that planting trees simultaneously brings to mind a naturalized and ethnicized connotation based on the typical diasporic search for roots of renewal,

and is also re-conceptualized within broader global frameworks. By positioning actions within a movement to sustain and protect the planet, the act of tree planting to help Armenia is transformed into a form of creative cosmopolitan discourse. The newsletter also states:

We are proud to join the international effort to plant trees to fight climate change, which is worsened by rampant deforestation around the world. In 2006, the ATP joined the worldwide tree planting campaign launched by the ‘Billion Tree Campaign’ (2007: 2).

There is a tendency to compare contemporary Armenian diasporic inspirations and mobility experiences with the Jewish case, but the Armenian engagement with the homeland should not be equated with the Jewish Zionist movement. In contrast to the Jewish Zionist project and its relationship to Israel, the Armenian diaspora does not have an ideological foundation for supporting Armenia as there is with Zionism. In spite of its continuity, the ties between the homeland and the diaspora are relatively weak and the diaspora’s support for Armenia is less institutionalized and less ‘strategic’ (compare with Braverman 2009), but more individualistic and project-specific. There is no such a state funded repatriation program and a strong ideology of Zionism. Until the end of the 1980s there were only weak and irregular connections between the Soviet republic of Armenia and the US Armenian diasporic communities. But, today it seems dreams to be united with the homeland became real and there is a new interest towards the holy place and that leads to a growing mobility among diapsoric Armenians.

Whereas the Zionist project is characterized by a mono-cultural use of the pine tree (and a physical occupation of the land through planting pine trees) promoting an ethnically driven security agenda (Braverman 2009), the Armenian Tree Project, in both donation and landscape greening techniques, is not fixed to the ecological symbolism of any particular tree. Instead, it emphasizes Armenia’s biodiversity in a global context and sees Armenia as part of a larger region – the Caucasus.

Having started with planting fruit trees for villagers, the ATP now plants a wide range of decorative trees as well as forest trees: North American and Eastern Asian thuja, Crimean wild rose, Chinese magnolia, etc. As a part of an international project, ATP tree planting is linked to a commitment to biodiversity, which is made explicit in the curriculum for environmental education published in English and Armenian:

There is biodiversity within a forest. Forests contain many communities that support diverse populations of organisms. Different forests have different levels of biodiversity. Armenia has a complex relief, as a result of which the regions have strongly differing natural climatic conditions (e.g., precipitation, temperature, topography, etc.) These variations lead to different forest communities with differing species, thereby contributing to Caucasian biodiversity. Armenia is considered part of the world’s 25 most ecologically diverse ecosystems by the World Wild Fund for Nature (Wesley 2010: 16).

Thus, the idea and practice of engaging with the homeland among second- and third-generation Western diasporic Armenians in the Republic of Armenia is based less on regaining a lost intimacy and a place of origin, but rather on the desire to connect a specific territory to the rest of the world

by 'developing the country'. The question is to what extent this specific trajectory of travel gives trend to combine ethnic parochial claims with globalized and universalist values.

Cosmopolitanism is often equated with the experience of mobility in the modern world (Cahloun 2002, Appiah 2006). I am against making teleological connections among mobility, transnational networks and cosmopolitanism. In this sense, it would be wrong to assume that diasporic people and the nature of transnational networks develop evolutionally from ethnic/national members of the first generation, to transnational members of second generation Armenian-Americans and finally to cosmopolitan members of the third generation. It is rather an overlapping process, with a temporal modus and embedded in different local contexts.

In my mind, the anthropological approach to understanding diasporic cosmopolitanism and diasporic social activism is not only to analyse the ethnic roots and regularities within which migration takes place, but also to study how social change is affected by migration, to study the transformations in both host and homeland societies and generational change. In this case 'rooted' cosmopolitanism means simultaneity of ethnic parochial closure and openness to diversity and global human ideas where rootedness and openness cannot be seen in oppositional terms but constitute aspects of creativity.

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