

**Longing and belonging: issues of
homeland in the Armenian diaspora**

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The Walnut Tree by Sylva Gaboudikian

There is a walnut tree
Growing in the vineyard
At the very edge of the world.

My people, you are like
That huge ancient tree---
With branches blessed by the graces

But sprawling
Over the small corner of land
Roots and arms spread out
And spilling your fruit
To nourish foreign soils.

This poem, written during the Soviet period in Armenia, does not mention the word “homeland” but it is understood and presented as a problem, being small, somehow isolated at the edge of the world, and connected with an inevitable sense of loss. Among other themes familiar to Armenian audiences is the walnut tree itself, symbolizing longevity and productivity, a long history and connections. The dispersion of fruit is rendered slightly more positively than is usual in such poetry, although it is still clearly far from ideal. By including both negative and positive elements, the poem is especially effective in conjuring up the range of feelings of Armenians for their diaspora, some of which will be discussed in this paper. In addition, I will introduce different visions of homeland and of diaspora and the changing relations with a homeland. This includes changing conceptions and symbolization of a homeland over time from life under the rule of empires through genocide, dispersal and a focus on survival to the recent independence of the Republic of Armenia. Over the last ten years, discussion of diaspora within the social sciences has proliferated and questions raised include the implications that diasporas have for their homelands and for the multi-cultural states in which they live. William Safran asks if it is possible that diaspora communities pose a more serious challenge to their host societies than do other minorities and test the limits of pluralism (Safran, 1991, 96-97). James Clifford (1997) with Paul Gilroy

(1987) and others, in a more positive vein, suggests that diaspora is not really about longing for another space but about an effort to be part of the host country on one's own terms. This is the fruit of the walnut tree mentioned earlier but we will also look, with Liisa Malkki, at the metaphor of rootedness and the importance given it in academic and popular thought, contrasted with the mobility of refugees and diasporan people (Malkki, 1992). This leads to a question that nationalists find extremely provocative, even blasphemous – is there a positive side to diaspora? These are some of the issues explored in this paper.

In so doing, I wish to argue that like identity itself, the concepts of Return, homeland, and diaspora are all continually in the process of construction. They interact with each other and other factors both within the Armenian world and the varied contexts within which Armenians live. The dominance or popularity of a particular attitude towards these ideas provides a backdrop against which many other opinions may be formulated, whether in simple rejection or more complex elaboration. These others may underline or undermine and some will themselves gain in importance and popularity as social and political contexts change. These minor voices are not difficult to find and form a significant part of the variation in identity around the Armenian world.

The Armenian diaspora

John Armstrong (1982) has suggested that the Armenian diaspora most closely resembles the “archetypal” or, Safran’s word, “ideal” diaspora of the Jews (Safran 1991), but there is great discussion over the concept of diaspora in terms of the definition of the word and the ways in which diaspora is experienced and whether, of course, there is an “ideal” diaspora. In attempting to define diaspora, Safran includes a belief in an eventual Return to the true homeland and, in the meantime, a commitment to supporting the homeland. Robin Cohen, in *Global Diasporas*, takes issue with the emphasis that Safran places on homeland and notes that the concept of homeland itself is problematic, that some people are diasporic though their concept of homeland was created after dispersion, and that there may be “positive virtues” in living in diaspora. He writes, “The tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one.” (Cohen, 1997, 24)

For Armenians, this tangled mass of approaches to the question of ethnic identity and diaspora/homeland relations is highly appropriate. Doing fieldwork in the diaspora, first in Cyprus and London and lately in the United States, I find examples to fit nearly any position offered and one has to conclude that the vitality of the diaspora itself must be due in great part to its complexity and flexibility. However, among these positions is a particularly vociferous one, found most often

amongst political activists, that the Armenian diaspora is entirely negative in its very nature, that is both in its reason for being in this century and in its dispersion from some version of the homeland. Cohen too describes the Armenians as an example of a “victim diaspora” (along with Jews, Palestinians, Irish, and Africans), people who have survived and been displaced by catastrophe, the memories of which continue to bind them together on some level (ibid, 31).

For many centuries, the Armenian world has been based on interconnected communities without an umbrella government of their own. The vast majority of people remained on the territory of their ancestors in what is now eastern Turkey and the Caucasus. From Byzantine times onwards, however, the forced transfer of Armenian populations and voluntary migration have continued to create new diaspora centers, including Iran, Istanbul (Constantinople), parts of Africa, India, Europe, and Russia. Rouben Adalian, in “The Historical Evolution of the Armenian Diasporas”, notes that progressive relocations from early times each “opened a new chapter in the history of the Armenian diaspora” (Adalian, 1989, 81). The clash and conflict of empires in and over the region brought new influences to be absorbed and following the end of the Byzantine world, Armenians found themselves in the midst of Islamic peoples, Arab, Turkish, Persian (after their own conversion). In the empires under which they lived, a sizeable number of Armenians became thoroughly integrated, to the point of taking on positions of power, for example, in the Byzantine empire, rising to commanders of military units and marriage into royalty¹. In addition to forced dispersion, the old Armenian diaspora was also formed by trade networks, by economic migration going on since at least the tenth century. Adalian believes that it is at this point that people living in communities in diaspora began to speak of themselves as living in exile.

Characteristics of the contemporary Armenian diaspora

Though the diaspora is indeed an old one, in this century it has been transformed entirely, in terms of numbers, geographically, and in its nature. The genocide and deportations at the end of the Ottoman Empire resulted in the deaths of well over one million Armenians and the near emptying of the old lands. The great dispersion of survivors that followed increased the size of some of the old diaspora centers and established new ones. Today there are roughly 7 million Armenians in the world and perhaps half live in diaspora, including the former Soviet Union outside the Republic of Armenia². The Los Angeles area has become the largest diaspora population center.

¹ Adalian lists several emperors of Armenian parentage including Maurice (538 –602, Heraklios (610) and Basil (867—886).

As in the past, the cement of diaspora communities, within and between them, is family. Networks of people related through descent or marriage remain of great importance, though the specific ways in which this is true have changed. The national church, from early times, and the political parties and cultural organizations that have grown up over the last hundred years provide an infrastructure and public face linking communities on a more formal level. The Armenian Apostolic Church has provided a primary identity alongside kin and locale and indeed, during the Ottoman years, through the Millet system, the church gained explicit political authority. Today the Church remains a central symbol in diaspora and in the Republic where it plays a powerful role in the new politics of nation-building and diaspora networking.

Though the Armenian diaspora is far more widely spread at this end of the century, modern innovations have made connections quicker, easier, and fundamentally different than in earlier times. Telephones, jets, fax machines, the internet, international banking and finance, and the various media all serve to pass information immediately but also reinforce the role of kin as a resource, wherever and however far away they may reside. The concept of “home” for many is mobile and nomadic, more synonymous with family than a particular place. The experience of place, whether present or known through memory, is always about people and their relationships as well as about the physical surroundings. Diaspora is “place” on a large scale, encompassing a wider range of relationships, a grander network of known and possibly knowable people.

Visions of Homeland(s)

As it is for other peoples, homeland for Armenians is and has been a contested and evolving notion. It is shaped by the personal memories and experiences, ambitions and hopes of people at particular times and by the desires and plans (and varying degrees of success of these plans) of intellectuals, teachers, priests, and political leaders. For centuries there has been no single, clearly defined center and periphery acknowledged by all Armenians. The question of return is equally ambiguous, as people have been haunted by the memories of the smells and sights of their old village or town while gradually becoming more at home in their new space, in diaspora. The confusion increases as political parties emphasize ideological notions of homeland, detached perhaps from personal experience but rooted in the past and in contemporary political events.

The land that is now the Republic of Armenia, or *Hayastan* as Armenians call it, was previously a small, relatively forsaken corner of the ancient homelands (to be defined below). It declared a brief

² This is often called the “internal diaspora”, in reference to the time when Armenia was part of the Soviet Union. Looking outwards from Armenia as center, Armenians residing in the rest of the USSR constituted the internal diaspora

independence between 1918 – 1920 and then became part of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has been independent. It is, however, one of at least three parallel constructions of Armenian homeland. For those who live there, and increasingly, for many diaspora Armenians, it is the homeland today. It is a place where Armenian is spoken on the streets and heard in the opera and on television. Armenian schools and the university, dance troupes and choirs, football teams are all pointed to with pride. It is regarded as a shelter and also, itself, as a delicate construction which must be protected. As Levon Avdoyan points out in the first issue of *Armenian Forum*, the importance of its survival is one of the few things that nearly all Armenians there and anywhere in diaspora agree upon.

A second homeland is also called *Hayastan*: the ancient kingdom, the old territories embedded with the 2,5000 year-old history, lands reaching from Dikranagert in Anatolia to Karabagh in the Caucasus. These have not been together under sovereign Armenian rule since 95 BCE but encompass the ancestral homes of most of those now in diaspora. This is the homeland for intellectuals, activists, and generally those more historically and politically inclined. A Return to at least some of these lands (in particular Mt. Ararat) forms a major plank in the platform of the Dashnak party and of the freedom fighters or terrorists who were active in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The third is a related but more intimate vision. Until recently the first question in a conversation between Armenian strangers was always “*Oor deghatsi ek?*” or “where are you native?” In diaspora the homeland is, or at least includes, an Armenian’s own town or village of origin. Now, of course, that usually means the village of their ancestors’ origin. This includes personal and collective memories of towns such as Kharpert and Adana, now in Turkey, and villages such as Kessab in Syria, places that people wonder and care about and long to see. A number of books have been written about these towns, collections of customs, memories, descriptions of their social life, accomplishments of the survivors. In the U.S. fellow villagers or townspeople have created their own telephone directories, children’s summer camps and annual picnics, all of which help to continue a sense of belonging to a certain place, already fostered within the extended family. One example, from the 1982 Kessabtzi Directory by Rev. Vahan Tootikian: “We, the Kessabtzis are the sons and daughters of an ancient and noble people... We are the indivisible and inseparable part of that little territory, that ‘Small Armenia’ in the vast ocean of the Armenian Diaspora, which is called Kessab... We are...(linked in family solidarity as kinsmen, rooted in the past). We have a bond with every other Kessabtzi no matter where or what (Tootikian, 1982, 184).

while the rest were the external diaspora.

Longing for Place

The varied customs and dialects found in different Armenian towns and villages of the Ottoman Empire have translated today into new differences of outlook, style, and linguistic ability in a more widespread diaspora. As in the past, Armenians often say they feel most comfortable and have to explain less when they are with Armenians from their own diaspora countries. While doing fieldwork with Armenians in Cyprus and London, people often reminded me that they had come from varied backgrounds and their ties continued to stretch in different directions. One day as I sat with a group of men at their club in Nicosia, someone began,

“This community is like a witch’s brew. Everything is in it. The people are from everywhere and they are trying to extend their roots here. Look at me. Half of my family is in Hayastan and half are in America.”

“Yes,” added his neighbor, “I’m from Kharpert but my wife is from Adana, you see...” and others added their stories. Cyprus is not considered a homeland but has become a well-loved home to its Armenian community – those who have chosen to remain. There, as in other places, Armenians have had to create a new community, and many elements, material as well as nonmaterial, go into this creation. The realm of the senses, the physical visual environment, foods, smells, and sounds help to cement and pass on an attachment. Poems, stories and anecdotes are also an important part of this mixture, helping to shore up and at times create a collective memory which serves to weave people together, at least for a time.

In this form, homeland is also often a utopian vision of paradise, something which might sustain a person in later years of insecurity and physical and psychological pain. The following is taken from one of the private memoirs that I read during fieldwork:

Zeytoon – Paradise Lost by Rebecca Hagopian

“Today I am hearing the call of the past. The years of childhood. It shines as a bright light in the darkness of the past years. There are moments I want to be free from this weary, weak and old body. In my thoughts I am back in my home town in Zeytoon.

...The mountains misty and grand, the valleys green, the river flowing, The flock of goats resting in the shade of huge solid rocks, the shepherd boy with his flute, playing a young lover’s song, ...There is the walnut tree, the rope still hanging in its branches for us to swing on. ...My sister Suran carving her initials on soft rocks (as if she knows she is going to leave her beloved homeland and die in an unknown place). “

Here again, there are issues of longing and belonging. Again the walnut tree anchors the scene, waiting for someone to come. There are references to both the author's own current physical distress and loneliness and to past communal terror and loss. For Armenians, one particular event has bound and preoccupied the personal and collective imagination in this century: the devastating deportations and massacres of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In Cyprus (and other places in the Middle East) Armenians have gone through more upheaval, loss, and displacement alongside their Greek and Turkish neighbors. The experiences of Armenians in Cyprus are also echoed in Renee Hirschon's portrayal of Greek refugees from Asia Minor settling in Piraeus. There the past is a reminder of tragedy and loss but also an emblem of pride, continuity, and strength (Hirschon 1989). In their own words, Armenians are people who not only have survived terrible pogroms but also can look beyond that to a glorious and ancient past, for example, the first Christian "nation", an early, distinct alphabet. Like the Asia Minor refugees described by Hirschon, Armenians in Cyprus and around the diaspora also found reasons for particular pride in their personal pasts or in the pasts of their old villages or towns. These histories embody behavior or values that they deemed worthier than those of their non-Armenian neighbors or even those of fellow Armenians from other areas.

People often brought up the subject of identity, both personal and communal. What does it really mean to be "Armenian"? They discussed how life had been, how it should be, and again, what was important to remember. One way in which my own work was understood was that of putting such memories on paper to preserve them for posterity, to keep them for the day when the next generation(s) might be ready to listen – as surely they would, eventually. While waiting for that day, older Armenians often voiced a wistfulness and concern similar to that witnessed by Jonathan Boyarin among Polish Jews in Paris. He noted a "shortage of cultural heirs" in the community. Like their Jewish counterparts, Armenian children do have some information about their parents' and grandparents' lives – especially those parts that form the political memory – but these younger people are selective, they are busy. Their interests and ambitions are aimed toward the future. In a comment that is as applicable to Armenians as it is to the Paris Jews with whom he worked, Boyarin adds, "Loss of homeland and family is a recurrent theme in Jewish popular memory, but the 'loss' of one's children to a different cultural world, common as it may be, remains in large measure an unalleviated source of pain." (Boyarin, 1991,11)

Young people are often a source of tension for older people, an extension of their dissatisfaction and uncertainty with their life decisions and the ways their own lives have unfolded. David Kherdian, an Armenian American poet writes on this theme.

For My Father

Our trivial fights over spading
The vegetable patch, painting the
Garden fence ochre instead of blue,
And my resistance to Armenian food
In preference for everything American,
Seemed, in my struggle for identity,
To be the literal issue.

Why have I waited until your death
to know the earth you were turning
was Armenia, the color of the fence
your homage to Adana, and your other
complaints over my own complaints
were addressed to your homesickness
brought on by my English.

Looking toward both the Near East and Europe, living in the interstices of a variety of societies, Armenians frequently compare themselves with their neighbors and with Armenians living in other countries. They note the “witch’s brew” mentioned earlier, ways in which different Armenian diaspora communities borrow from their host cultures. This latter is often the source of debate and tension as people despair of what they call “Jermag Chart” or assimilation.

Often Armenians asked me, or each other while we were talking, if they really had a culture. This was nearly always a rhetorical question, and the same person would answer, “Yes, but we in Cyprus are watered-down versions of the real Armenia (for example). And it’s worse in England.” When people spoke of “traditional culture”, I noticed they meant the vague but powerful and often idealized memory of the customs and habits of Armenians before dispersal and modernization. In this way, culture is popularly understood as a certain conjunction of traits and customs, and when these are seen to have changed, the culture is lost or in danger of being lost. Nationalists take this

further, as Kapferer points out, by reifying an idealized culture, extracting it from the “flow of social life”, and establishing it as an object of devotion (Kapferer, 1988, 2). Rather, as a learned system of ideas and ways of communicating and behaving, a set of symbols and associations at the very base of everyday experience, culture is constantly changing.

And thus various diaspora centers have, of course, developed in different ways. Each imagines the diaspora, the homeland, and the nation in particular ways. Similarly, the aims and methods of nationalism differ widely between them. Loosely connected, relying on each other, sometimes criticizing or mocking each other, each rationalizing a certain hierarchy of these centers (never the same), the diaspora centers share a common feature in that with each generation in place, diaspora becomes more comfortable and a home itself. Robert Mirak’s *Torn Between Two Lands* focused on Armenian emigration to America from 1890 through WWI. The great majority of the descendants of those people no longer feel torn and Anny Bakalian has entitled her contemporary study of American Armenians *From Being to Feeling Armenian*. Western diaspora Armenians have set priorities in their own lives which are not necessarily shared by their Middle Eastern cousins, or by the residents of Hayastan. Interestingly, this is not a one way street – that is, toward straight assimilation in one place and purity in the other and there are several areas in which this tension is played out.

The church itself, mentioned earlier, seen everywhere as a cornerstone and key symbol of Armenian culture, is highly contested. In the U.S. where generations have now worked to build edifices, congregations, and particular divisions of communities, new waves of immigrants from the Near East and Hayastan are insisting that the language of the church (and its organizations) must be Armenian – and that those American Armenians who do not speak the language (most) are not really Armenian. The following quote is from a 1995 community survey³ conducted for the Armenian Church in America. “Immigrants treat those of us whose families have been in the U.S. for a century as lesser people because we don’t speak the language and/or we are from mixed parentage. Who paved the way for these people? Who built the churches they now control? What gives them the right to discriminate against us?”

Such issues of legitimacy and contested membership permeate the arena of work as well. The same survey asked Armenian Americans how they described themselves, given a number of options. “Hard-working” was the highest scorer (86%), followed by ambitious (79%). This is taken as a

given and is the subject of many family stories. When new immigrants come and are given what is seen as a soft-ride by welfare – or worse, try to slip into the cracks and live off the black market, European and American Armenians begin to froth – these people are not really Armenians! Ex-Soviet Armenians in particular are seen as guilty of playing the system and not really working. The idealization of residents of Armenia prior to their emigration and the intense “disappointment” following their arrival in the West echoes Markowitz’s observations of changing mutual perceptions of Russian and American-born Jews in Brighton Beach (Markowitz, 1993).

Changing Views of Soviet Armenia, later the Republic of Armenia

A final contested area is the Republic of Armenia itself. Its independence has created a new focus for diaspora Armenians’ imaginations, dreams, hopes. In some ways it is a rejuvenating force – in others, maddening and frustrating as those who do visit or try to work there in some way discover just how different are the realms of ideas and patterns of daily life. Ten years ago when I asked a forty year old woman who had completed her university education in Hayastan whether she and her husband (another diaspora Armenian whom she met there) considered staying there – or emigrating when they lost their business in Cyprus in the war of 1974. “Oh no,” she said, “we love it there but they are very different from us - very Russian influenced. We are Middle Eastern”. She added that if the people there were ever able to travel freely, she would certainly consider it. They, like others, are still in London, with no plans to move and indeed many thousands of Hayastantis are emigrating, mostly to Los Angeles. Armenians call this a haemorrhaging, rather than a flow of migration.

Earlier the ideological basis of the Soviet Union complicated the position of Hayastan as a diaspora focus. Its primary portrayal in diaspora was that of a national repository of Culture and genes, waiting for an eventual release from foreign rule. The Soviet Union encouraged this, and used it to attract diaspora goodwill and some aid –and to attract new immigrants. In 1947 a number of people in Cyprus were packed and waiting to be part of the *Nerkaght* (gathering in) – but were bypassed for the poorer communities of Lebanon and Syria. One woman in Cyprus explained why her family had planned to go then – “It was not a question of left or right wing politics – we had both rich and poor, right and left. Whatever the regime is there, we would still be with Hayastan – because we sincerely believe that we have never had it so safe as we have it now (1985), simply because somebody is protecting us. ...Nobody can be without a country. Everything may not be ideal there

³ Issues and Answers” was an anonymous postal survey conducted in 1995 among Armenians living on the east coast of the U.S., targeting the 18-45 age group. It was commissioned by the Diocese of the Armenian Church in America with questions developed by lay members and the results tabulated by a professional independent research firm.

– but at least they are safe. We want to give too much importance to us in the diaspora. We are nothing.”

Someone who did emigrate in the 1962 *nerkaght* sent back a coded photo to warn other family members not to follow. One who later returned to Cyprus was bitterly disappointed by the experience and told me, “We were blinded by our love of Hayastan”. “The people who didn’t go can’t understand what we went through.” The experience was shattering for many but those who later left Armenia were shunned as traitors by many former friends whom they rejoined in diaspora. For these people, nothing could be so bad as to warrant abandoning what was left of the homeland. During my fieldwork, at a cultural event at the Armenian high school in Nicosia, (Melkonian Institute) the annual guest teacher from Soviet Armenia gave a speech in which he damned the day the diaspora was formed. He pointed to the Melkonian itself as a superior personal identity to local (not Kibratsi or Kessabtsi, etc), claiming that there was but one Armenian identity.

From the 1930s onwards, but becoming especially dramatic during the cold War years, the two major diaspora political parties remained on either side of the homeland fence. The Ramgavars’ attitude was generally one of admiration and condonement while the more popular Dashnaks who had ruled the brief independent state before the Soviets, were much more critical of Soviet rule, planning for a future independent, free and united Armenia. By the end of the 1970s, both sides had come to view Russia as a necessary protector and thus independence was not greeted with unalloyed joy. It took some time to accept that in fact the system had imploded and Armenians had not brought this on all by themselves. Then it became acceptable, even exciting, though worrying. The Dashnak side quickly warmed to the idea, especially as the new Republic adopted symbols that that party had kept alive from the earlier Republic, such as the tri-colored flag. Today, after a turbulent relationship with the previous administration, the Dashnak party has attained a strong position of power within the present government.

Daphne Winland, observes that the independence of Croatia in 1990 was a catalyst for a similar process of revitalization, divergence, and transformation. Activists claim that independence has strengthened the unity of the community but Winland adds that certain differences and schisms have been re-emphasized, taking on new form and meaning. “Boundaries are being re-sited, but not destroyed” (Winland, 1995, 13). Earlier in this century as Armenians became further dispersed, nationalist views on identity became insistent that there is a particular way to be Armenian, glossing over the multiple layers of identity which are taken for granted, indeed make possible daily life. This included the following features: one speaks the language, acknowledges the Apostolic Church,

marries another Armenian, seeks to be reconciled with history. With the birth (or re-birth) of a nation/state there is also the rapid shaping of the idea of one concrete homeland. Nationalism changes shape, both within and without the state and one can see a further narrowing and essentializing of identity. Again, Winland finds similar developments in Croatia where, she writes, nationalist ideology does not recognize the “multistranded relationships” across borders, nor the variety within the diaspora based on gender, generation, class, and regional affiliation (ibid). For Armenians, this has the effect of distancing many people who consider themselves part of the collective but “different”. There remain many ways of unofficial belonging – and people who drift between public and private realms. The shared memory of the genocide has united people and fed a certain sense of responsibility to the collective, to the past and to the future. Having been taught to behave as citizens of diaspora, with obligations to each other and to a collective past, in recent years diaspora Armenians are increasingly being urged by their political, religious, and intellectual leaders to also behave as potential citizens of the homeland, the Republic of Armenia.

Clifford Geertz has used the metaphor of culture as a guide and ideology as a map. Like the Israeli situation, Armenians growing up in diaspora have been shown the map and are now applying it to a new terrain, occupying perhaps the same physical location, but greatly transformed. In the most radical cases, new orthodoxies and fanaticisms are being bred away from the homeland and then transported there in a quixotic effort to “save” the homeland from itself and its neighbors. One can again compare Armenia and Israel, as well parts of Eastern Europe here. Does diaspora breed a particular kind of idealism without the constraints of responsibility and experience, a combination of naivete, “rightness” (or self-righteousness), and violence? Away from such radical cases, an equally important question lies: should people in diaspora be allowed dual citizenship, holding passports from the homeland-state and their host country? Who really belongs? Thus far the Republic of Armenia has required residency and exclusive citizenship, the previous government at pains to point out the differences between the living experiences of the diaspora (anywhere) and the Republic. The new administration, influenced itself by a diaspora political organization, has spoken of possible changes but as yet has not outlined a specific agenda.

For most in diaspora, the creation of an independent state does change the landscape, but symbolic identity, such as Bakalian describes in her book, and a looser self-definition and connection will continue as their foundation of “Armenianness”. This brings us back to an important corner of the triangular relationship – that of the diaspora people to the various host cultures. Clearly the state philosophies and legalities have a decided influence, leaving Armenians in France with quite different expectations and attitudes in comparison with Armenian Americans – or those living in

Lebanon or Syria. But equally clearly, in each country, a question remains – how to be a “good, loyal citizen” of a particular country with its own history and conjunction of peoples: an equal member of a pluralistic, democratic society and also a “good Armenian”. How to balance these roles – does one threaten the other? Can a democracy function with such fractured identities. Tololyan writes that diasporas should not “apologize” for their hybrid identity but instead, “at its best the diaspora is an example, for both the ‘homeland’ and the ‘hostland’ nation-states, of the possibility of living, even thriving in the regimes of multiplicity which are increasingly the global condition, and a proper vision of which diasporas may help to construct, given half a chance (1996, 7). Tololyan and Cohen (1997) find a close “fit” (not causal) between globalization –the mobility, detached mode necessary to succeed in the contemporary world– and the characteristics of diaspora. Diaspora identity perhaps provides a connection otherwise missing in the modern, mobile world but another problem emerges as “proper” belonging, as Malkki points out, is seen to be rooted, like a tree, in the ground, not in metaphor, symbols, history – or family. Thus, Malkki writes, refugees and diaspora peoples are seen as somehow inherently “wrong” by many (Malkki, 1992)

Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin question the other corner of the triangle, the state/homeland, stating the creation of Israel was a subversion of a Jewish culture and not its culmination. Zionists saw diaspora as a “problem”, as do some Armenian nationalists. The Boyarins see strength in the “diversity of communal arrangements and concentrations both among Jews and with our several others” (1992, 129). Indeed diaspora can be seen in this light as a borderless, stateless, free-floating – but nonetheless essentially meaningful source of identity. Writing in *Prospect*, a British journal, Susan Greenberg echoes the Boyarins’ concerns asking whether Israel is “good” for Jews? With them she answers a provocative (even blasphemous) “no” wondering whether ethnic nationalism attached to a homeland which is a state, runs the risk of essentializing identity to the point that, as above, the more fluid and flexible identities found in diaspora are considered negatively or, worse, not to be in the running at all. Greenberg, echoing Cohen, also notes the advantages in diaspora of being connected and being marginal, an Other, at the same time, a dynamic tension which encourages creativity. In an overwhelmingly mono-ethnic state, such as Armenia, the traditional multi-lingual skills and abilities to get along in a variety of other cultures will be lost. Greenberg worries that who is Jewish is being increasingly defined by those with particular plans for the state.

Conclusions

Armenians, like other peoples, disagree among themselves about interpretations and the relative importance of different components of certain issues – such as the homeland: where and what it is, how central it is, whether the myth of return is a sustaining dream or a practical if distant reality. In

the latest edition of the Kessabtz directory, an article was included in which the author urged his compatriots to donate generously to a “Community Center” for the Kessab Education Association based in Los Angeles. This would physically resemble the “Library” back in Kessab with its book-lined walls, canteen, and various social activities. The Kessabtzis may be an exception in the Armenian world in their continued tangible connections with the local homeland, but Armenians in diaspora continue to create new communities, on new terms, grounding themselves further in diaspora. A few are migrating to Armenia, but not many as yet. Thousands have left there for Los Angeles. Many Armenian homes bear a plaque with the following words by the California Armenian author, William Soroyan, “I should like to see any power in this world destroy this ... small tribe of unimportant people... When two Armenians meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia.”

Aram Veesser, writing in a new journal of debate, *Armenian Forum*, argues that “A fundamentally internationalist ethos enlivens the whole Armenian diaspora.” “The return serves as an alibi, not a real desire or real possibility, love of country increases in direct proportion to distance from it; exilic ties – competition and comparison with other Armenians—form the nation; and Armenians are most at home when they are farthest abroad” (Veesser, 1998, 57). The new homeland, by its mere existence, changes the dynamics of the diaspora and will continue to influence the ways in which Armenians elsewhere think about themselves. But the draw of internationalism, flexibility of diaspora, particularly in an era of increased ease of personal and financial mobility, is strong competition. The new homeland replaces the old, but so too, in a continuing process, does the new diaspora replace the old.

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