THE DIASPORA EVOLVES:
YOUNG ARMENIANS FORGING IDENTITIES IN YEREVAN AND GLENDALE

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ABSTRACT

In 2020, amidst a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the global Armenian Diaspora engaged in activism while experiencing collective trauma. Glendale, the largest Armenian-American community located in Greater Los Angeles, spearheaded a transnational social movement in response to conditions abroad. Despite Glendale's significant presence of ethnic organizations and large Armenian population, some community members, including American-born diasporans in their twenties, expressed a desire for more meaningful engagement. This dissertation explores the reasons behind this crisis-driven desire to connect with the homeland and examines the limitations of long-distance ethnic connections. I focus on the role of ethnic organizations and enclaves in the Armenian Diaspora while addressing three research questions: 1) How do ethnic organizations shape ideas of identity, authenticity and belonging? 2) What influences participation in these organizations? and 3) How does a strong ethnic enclave affect locals' relationship with organizations and their identity?

Past scholarship on Armenians, including Bakalian 1993, concluded that American-born Armenians display "symbolic ethnicity" rather than direct action. I offer an alternative perspective centered on transnational action. Drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation, photography, and fieldwork in Glendale, California and Yerevan, Armenia, I rely on a transnational framework to further migration, urban and gender studies. By focusing on diasporans' experiences, I discuss their desire for new expressions of Armenian identity beyond traditional community expectations often tied to their ethnic organizations. I conclude by highlighting the internal calls from community members for inclusive goals and diverse participation in ethnic organizations and the broader community that have significant implications for facilitating stronger feelings of belonging and transnational mobilization.

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my parents who moved to the United States to provide me with the opportunity and freedom to pursue my education and doctoral degree. I also dedicate this dissertation to the 55 participants who willingly and openly shared their unique stories with me. In my attempt to learn more about you all, you have taught me so much about myself.

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CHAPTER 1: IMAGINING HOME: LONG-DISTANCE CONSTRUCTIONS OF PLACE

It is one of the special days in Armenia, specifically in the capital city of Yerevan, when the fog has subsided, and Mount Ararat (Ararat) is visible. In case I did not know myself from looking out of my temporary apartment in Garegin Nzhdeh, a neighborhood of Yerevan, it would not have been long until I discovered the news on my social media pages. Whenever Ararat is visible, it seems all of Yerevan shares its beauty on social media and peers in the Diaspora often express that they wish they were there. On the October day I am watching the mountain, I am three months into living in Yerevan (fig. 1.1). By this point, I have learned more about the *Hayastani* (local Armenian) culture and its relationship to diasporans.

Figure 1.1. View of Mount Ararat in Garegin Nzhdeh, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

Since arriving in Yerevan in July, I learned a few Armenian songs. It is common for the bars in the city's center, Kentron, to play popular diaspora music as this is where diasporans, especially the Birthright Armenia volunteers, often frequent. A common meeting place at the end of a volunteer week is Bak75, or Bak - a small bar where young Armenians dance to modern pop songs from across the globe and experience live Armenian music every Sunday night. For some Birthright volunteers (Birthrighters), going every week was a ritual. I attended one summer night when familiar faces I met in Birthright were entering through the door in a revolving manner. Upon entry, a large painting of Freddie Mercury is on display and conversations in English are heard among the groups of international friends. During this first time at Bak, I saw volunteers from the excursion bus, placement organization leaders, Armenians I have heard about who have become Armenian social influencers, and many new faces I met at the bar and introduced myself over the loud music. This is where I heard Tata Simonyan, Harout Pamboukjian, Reincarnation, and Lav Eli. The music heard on Sunday often included upbeat songs that led to running to the dance floor and seeing friends hold on to each other's hands, later transitioning to just the pinky, and moving their feet in unison creating an image of a modern diaspora replicating aspects of traditional Armenian dance through the Armenian shuffle, or the Armenian circle dance (*shourch bar*).

In the fall, however, a quieter Yerevan exists. The summer tourists and diasporans are fewer, I hear less of the local schoolboys kicking their soccer ball against the garage doors directly below my kitchen window as school has begun, and the windows are shut more as a chillier brisk and winds blow through the orange trees replacing the sweaty Yerevan summer. I decided to appreciate the view of Ararat and listen to one of the songs that was popular at Bak and on the excursion bus - Tata Simonyan's "Yerevan." In the song, Simonyan is singing about

how much he loves Yerevan, announcing *sirem qez* (I love you) and calling Yerevan his *savat tanem,* a popular phrase said by grandparents while pinching the cheeks of their grandchildren, which best translates to "I will take away your pain." In the song, Simonyan asks, *Inchem anum London u Los-Angeles* ("What am I doing in London and Los Angeles?"). Ultimately concluding that no place, including a major diaspora city, replaces his love for Yerevan, as he says, *im mihates* ("you are my one of a kind").

For many Armenians like Simonyan who find themselves outside of Armenia, their visualization of the homeland is tied to secondhand accounts from family members, textbooks, music, poetry, artwork, and film. At the core of these ideas that make one feel connected to place are symbolic meanings to landscapes, such as Mount Ararat, that provoke a long-distance emotional pull. When entering Armenian households, one may see Mount Ararat through paintings on the wall or souvenirs on the kitchen table. Popular Armenian diaspora fashion brands tap into this emotional link and create several apparel items with graphics of the mountain. When walking around Yerevan's famous flea market, Vernissage, local vendors are found selling jewelry, coffee makers, purses, and dishes that have an image of Mount Ararat signaling their awareness of what the common heritage tourist would want to bring back home as a memory of their trip. Even those who are living in their host society, such as Armenians in the ethnic hub of Glendale in Greater Los Angeles (L.A.), observe California mountains with an immediate connection of Armenia's mountainous landscape. The role of Mount Ararat in the global Armenian community is just one example of the emotional work diasporans do to assign meaning to references of a homeland that allow them to connect to their ethnic identity, remember the past, and inspire motivation for political and organizational participation.

Hence, there were many possibilities for beginning this dissertation, but Ararat serves as

a critical backdrop for an introduction to the Armenian Diaspora. Standing at the borders of Armenia, Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan, the mountain represents history, rooted in loss and tragedy, as well as the future, as many see it as site to fight for and preserve to prevent further demarcation. This connection to land begins at a young age among children of Armenian immigrants in the United States (U.S.) as they interact with images of the mountain in their household.

Vahan, a 23-year-old from Northridge in L.A., who I met in Armenia while he was completing his summer internship with the Armenian Youth Federation (AYF) remembered his childhood home with "pictures of Ararat everywhere," along with "the noor [pomegranate], the duduk [Armenian instrument], and Armenian books." For others like Vahan's friend, Razmig, a 22-year-old from Glendale, the most populated Armenian-American community in the U.S., an even more direct connection to Ararat was important.

When I first met Razmig, he explained his plans to climb Ararat while in Armenia that summer. He was so committed to this feat that he decided to quit Birthright Armenia shortly after joining because of the organization's rule of not leaving the country or traveling too close to its adversarial borders. At the time, Birthright volunteers were advised to avoid traveling to areas such as Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh due to the war in 2020 with bordering country, Azerbaijan. Even when asked about repatriating to Armenia, some respondents referenced Ararat. Martin, a 21-year-old recent graduate from UCLA from Glendale and volunteer with Birthright Armenia, explained that while he does not know if he will repatriate immediately, he feels "at home here [Armenia] thanks to the environment, always being able to see Mount Ararat and everyone being Armenian around you."

Symbolic connections to the homeland through historic images of *khachkars* (Armenian

crosses) and *noor* (pomegranate), landscapes of Ararat and mountains, food like *khorovats* (Armenian traditional barbeque), music from victory war music to modern diaspora songs like that of Simonyan's, and dance such as Armenians' *shourch bar*, *kochari* and *kertsi*, are common for Armenians. In 1993, Anny Bakalian's *Armenian-Americans, From Being to Feeling American* published the most commonly referenced sociological study on the Armenian-American community. Bakalian offered a mixed-methods analysis using data from 30 in-depth interviews and 584 mail questionnaire responses from Armenian-Americans involved in Armenian organizations in the New York and New Jersey metropolitan areas. Bakalian focused on assimilation frameworks exploring if a revival to one's ethnicity occurs for American-born generations. Bakalian concluded that for most Armenians past first generation, a "symbolic ethnicity" develops where elements of ethnicity, including language, eventually fade. Ethnicity eventually would be "sidestreamed" and no longer at the forefront of Armenians' behavior and decision-making.

Bakalian contributed to an important jumpstart in using Armenian-Americans as a case study for immigration and assimilation theory. Overall, Bakalian found that in her sample group, "American-born generations profess verbal allegiance to their ethnic heritage, but they are less likely to transform it into action" (426). Yet the actions from Armenian-Americans during the 44-day war in 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the contested region of Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh illustrates a different reality. Much has changed in the world and scholarship in the last 30 years. Amongst these changes, Armenian diasporans, particularly the present generation in their twenties, have embraced numerous globalization trends that have influenced their perception of self, resulting in the freedom to explore their agency to uphold profound Armenian emotional connections and engage in meaningful actions. Notably, this is achieved

through active involvement in ethnic organizations and ethnic hubs within their newly adopted communities. Therefore, this topic is worth revisiting and expanding to address some of the gaps in earlier scholarship within the current social climate of the world.

First, consideration for the impact of location, such as neighborhood, on identity can help add nuance on what *type* of Armenians are more likely to maintain an active sense of being Armenians, through organizational participation, language, and travel, and why it may be more symbolic for others. Second, due to the time period of Bakalian's study, this work did not critically engage with transnational scholarship that gained more momentum throughout the 1990s. Since then, scholars contributed important insight on the current Armenian population focusing on their ability to engage in their new host society and acquire ethnic capital (see Khachikian 2020) and on the creation of ethnoburbs such as Glendale (see Fittante 2017). My study adds to this existing Armenian scholarship in new ways by providing a lens inspired by transnational, urban and gender studies literature and focuses on multiple field sites via sending and receiving societies to understand the diverse social processes among immigrants, their social institutions, and local communities.

In this study, I offer an empirical approach that considers displays of Armenian identity through the reliance of symbols such songs, souvenirs, and apparel of ideas such as Mount Ararat, and ask what is this all really for? Why do those far away embrace, and want, such long-distance connections to the homeland? To explore these questions, there is specific group worth observing today within the Armenian Diaspora that does display levels of *active* "Armenianness" (Bakalian 1993) that is constant, in *and* outside of Armenia. Transnational Armenians volunteer, donate money, participate in diaspora organizations, speak Armenian, know the traditional dances, and have communities of Armenian friends and family abroad. For several of these

members, there were no past homeland ties as they were not first-generation but often second-generation and beyond. How do those who have never been to a place develop and maintain a strong connection to it, at times leading to actions of eventual physical travel or even repatriation?

Before scholars began researching the ambiguities and complexity of making sense of place and belonging, the idea of place was already fluid for Armenians. Yet, it remains one of the most important concepts to them, particularly in the current age of war with Azerbaijan and subsequent loss of land. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and photographs of Armenian-Americans, I explore the impact of place on maintaining one's ethnic identity past first-generation.

Research Questions

I consider the sites and locations for investigating ethnic identity and transnational behavior through two foci: the ethnic organization and the city. First, I explore the influence of a structured site with formal goals and missions through the lens of organizations in Armenia and the Diaspora. I consider the functionality of such organizations that are designed to purposefully strengthen Armenian communities and create opportunities for displaying "Armenianness" (Bakalian 1993). I argue that traditionally, these organizations have functioned as *place*, a location where members can meet and participate while facilitating boundary making and expectations of who is accepted for membership (see Chen 2017).

My second site of interest is the city where Armenian organizations and communities are found. When considering the city, primarily Glendale in Greater L.A., I explore its less structured influence and view it as a *space* that is more fluid and in turn, creates new possibilities for difference and changes among its members. Due to more diversity within a city, the

boundaries are less strict and membership is not formal but rather a given that one is Armenian just by being. Using this framework, I argue that a city represents more fluidity and new ways of being for Armenians than the traditional organizations it houses. As organizations in the Armenian community begin to take on a spatial focus, due to their evolution and virtual connections and activism on social media, I consider how the future of ethnic participation may change the expectations of who is considered an Armenian and result in a more acceptance and expansion on membership in the Diaspora and homeland.

To explore the relationship of organizations and cities in sustaining an ethnic community, I ask three interrelated research questions:

1) How do ethnic organizations shape their members' concepts of identity, authenticity and belonging?

2) What influences participation in these organizations?

3) How does the presence of a strong ethnic enclave influence locals' relationship to organizations and their identity?

Guided by these three questions, I center this study on the diversity among members of the Armenian Diaspora. Focusing on organizational involvement offers insight on differences in participation based on various criteria such as generation of immigrant, place of origin, language skills, and gender. As Chen (2017) notes, "understanding an organization means observing it across its variety of levels and seeing how widely shared some perspectives are and how tensions among perspectives can create opportunities, as well as enormous challenges for organizations" (46). Recognizing these possibilities of difference has the potential to lead to better strategies for mobilizing members to advocate on behalf of their local and global community needs. Additionally, better understanding modern diasporas and what supports their sustainability not

only adds to academic scholarship, but benefits policymakers and research organizations when considering diplomatic policies and the political and economic impact migrant communities have on our major cities. Lastly, due to migration trends and globalization, "people and money, books and videotapes and digitized information move constantly, not just the concept of the Diaspora, but of the homeland and its people must change" (Tölölyan 2001: 3). The field of diaspora studies is not an ancient area of scholarship. I offer a modern lens to this area of research through an interdisciplinary approach aimed to further contemporary sociology theory.

Funding

The fieldwork for this research study was supported through funding from two sources. First, from July to December 2021, I relied on a U.S. Student Fulbright Graduate Research Fellowship for six months of fieldwork in Yerevan, Armenia that funded my travel, housing, research expenses, and other basic living needs. In my second phase of research, from January to April 2022, I relied on a university grant from the Michigan State University Global for Gender in the Global Context Women's and Gender Studies Dissertation Fellowship that supported three months of fieldwork in L.A. including travel, housing, basic needs, and qualitative software.

"I want to physically see it": Emotionally Ties to Place

While present-day Armenia recently celebrated its 31st anniversary of independence on September 21, 2022, Armenian history and its land date back as early as B.C.E. A significant portion of the Birthright experience involves travel outside of Yerevan on excursions every Saturday to learn about the country's historical landmarks and artifacts. This interaction with historic places is similar to the process of other programs that scholars have previously explored including Birthright Israel for Jewish Americans (see Kelner 2010) and the In Search of Roots Program for Chinese Americans (see Louie 2004).

As a volunteer, one of my most memorable excursions was when we traveled to Khor Virap Monastery and Areni cave complex, approximately two hours from Yerevan. All Birthright volunteers were expected to meet at the Birthright office and be on the bus to leave the city at 9:00AM. For every excursion, volunteers waited outside before loading the bus, catching up with each other and meeting the newcomers. I heard English, Russian, Armenian, French, German, and Spanish being spoken outside of the office as everyone arrived. Birthright volunteers come from several pockets of the world including L.A., Boston, Beirut, Paris, Buenos Aires, Hamburg, Sydney, Toronto, Tehran, and Moscow. After catching up, we were summoned by Birthright staff to get on the bus and find our seats, while looking out of the window to see a few stragglers running out of a taxicab and arriving late, often equipped with a story to share about the night before for us to hear on our way.

Being a participant allowed for me to observe the socialization on the bus and witness how friendships were made and what topics were discussed. This bus experience was in line with Birthright Israel that organizes similar tours for their participants (see Kelner 2010). Yet unlike Birthright Israel, the excursion bus rides with Birthright Armenia are one of the few times during the volunteer experience that all participants gather together in one place since the rest of the week involves completing individual volunteer hours at various organizations and volunteers live in their own apartments or with different host families, while Birthright Israel participants live in a communal environment.

Our excursion involved multiple stops. First, we arrived at Khor Virap, one of the most sacred remnants of Armenian Christianity. For many diasporans such as Nicholas from Silver Spring, Maryland, Armenian history is strongly rooted in Christianity, “One big thing that I take pride in is that it’s the first Christian nation, that’s one of the coolest things and people don’t

necessarily know that." Armenia was the first nation to officially to declare itself as Christian in 301 A.D. (Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church; see also Leon 1946) but monasteries such as Khor Virap show an even longer history. Khor Virap translates to "deep pit." This translation was evident as several volunteers, and I walked down to an underground area where it is said that Gregory the Illuminator lived for 13 years before bringing Christianity to Armenia (fig. 1.2). It was a typical hot summer day and we were all relieved to receive some cooling air in the underground space where I noticed Armenian khachkars (crosses) and candles.

After Khor Virap and taking our necessary photographs to send to family members and post on social media for friends back home to see, we sat back on to the bus to drive to Areni. During these excursions, Birthright often provided a tour guide to offer background knowledge about each site. Upon arriving to Areni, we were greeted by our guide. The first thing that was pointed out to the volunteers was the famous shoe - known as the oldest leather shoe from 5,500 years ago that was discovered during an excavation in 2008. We continued walking along the path to enter the cave, lowering our heads through parts of it, and receiving relief from the heat of the day. Walking through the ancient space, we listened as the guide provided us with facts such as the cave being dated as far back as 6,000 years ago (fig. 1.3).

Figure 1.2. Taking the steps down to the pit of Gregory the Illuminator, Khor Virap. Photograph by the author.

Figure 1.3. Inside the Areni Cave, Areni. Photograph by the author.

For decades, diaspora organizations such as the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) and Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), have been lobbying for U.S. legislation formally recognizing the 1915 Armenian Genocide and working with members of Congress to sponsor legislative bills that ask the U.S. to penalize countries that destroyed or did not properly preserve historical Armenian landmarks such as ancient churches in Turkey and Azerbaijan. In 2014, the Turkey Christian Churches Accountability Act was presented to Congress to ensure churches remained in Turkey in areas that were once occupied by Armenians. While these were of political importance and debate, the significance of the sanctity of land protection is apparent not only on a global level but for the sustainability of Armenian culture in

Armenia and the Diaspora. While walking around Khor Virap and Areni, I began to think differently about land and physical space. What was the significance of ancient land beyond archaeological preservation? What does a place like Khor Virap mean to a young second (and later) generation Armenian who is integrated in a new culture and immersed in Glendale, California and other communities in the U.S.? More importantly, how does Khor Virap maintain meaning and emotional responses from those who have never been to Armenia to experience it firsthand?

Angela, a 28-year-old second-generation Armenian born in Glendale, California has never been to Armenia but was in the process of planning a trip to visit when I first met her. While others in Glendale grew up with families that visited Armenia frequently, Angela's parents, who were both born in Armenia and emigrated as children, did not. Still for Angela, Armenia signified a homeland.

IM: *What does homeland mean to you?*

ANGELA: *I feel like homeland is a specific place. Like, Glendale is nice and all, but I don't consider this homeland, it's my home, yeah sure it's where I live, but it's not like having a whole country to yourself, it doesn't compare.*

IM: *When you say a specific place, do you think of Armenia?*

ANGELA: *I think of Armenia, I think of Ankara, I'd like to go to visit but I don't know that I'd be safe in Turkey. Homeland is a specific place because I can look at a place like Khor Virap and I can see the past, present in one place, like wow this Khor Virap that I'm standing in front of is the same Khor Virap that two generations ago stood in front of, the building is the same, I know it sounds silly but you can touch it, you can feel it the*

physical history that connects you. I want to physically see it.

This longing did not come from Angela's family. In fact, Angela's parents were disinterested in the idea of leaving Glendale.

IM: *So, your parents were born in Armenia, have they gone back since moving?*

ANGELA: *No.*

IM: *So, growing up there wasn't this idea of visiting every summer?*

ANGELA: *No, I know families that are like that but my family wasn't.*

IM: *Do you know why?*

ANGELA: *I think they just kind of assimilated. I feel like some diasporans don't even see it as worthy of visiting anymore. They're like et eench ban eh? Like "what's there for us?"*

For members of immigrant groups and diasporans who live away from a homeland, like Angela, nostalgia of the past, even if it is a place they have not yet been to, is common (see Glick-Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Gold 2002; Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Louie, 2004; Anzaldúa 2012). Scholars have identified that transnational social fields make it possible for those like Angela to have such strong feelings towards Armenia even with physical distance. Transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004) allow for migrants to maintain ties across borders through social networks and communication that does not have to be tied to the physical back and forth travel. Today, such long-distance ties are even more possible with the accessibility of interacting through technological advancements ranging from communication applications on our phones as well as social media accounts that display live videos and updates to reach millions across the globe. Yet, what is lost through these social fields that share ideas

without the physical interaction? In what ways will Angela's understanding of Armenia change when she arrives in today's Armenia? How will her experience in Armenia conflict with the imaginary idea of Armenia she has held on to while in Glendale and in what ways will it challenge her Armenian-American identity upon her return to the U.S.?

For some, the understanding of Armenian identity remains rooted in stories of those who visited on quick trips, or were raised abroad years ago, without much progression in what Armenia means today. Additionally, much of the transnational literature that arrived in the late 1990s and early 2000s arrived at a time when organizations such as Birthright Israel (established in 1999) and Birthright Armenia (established in 2003), two programs that encourage the physical return to the homeland to see its history and what is it today, were just gaining momentum.

Scholars of place such as Massey (1994) have pushed back on concluding that the "the whole notion of place is inevitably tied up with backward-looking nostalgia, with stasis, and with reaction" (114). In some ways, Birthright's structure, seemingly intentionally, is an example of Massey's request to view place with a balance of the backward and forward looking relationship, through the organization's emphasis on excursions to understand the past along with requiring volunteers to live in Yerevan and work with current organizations to not only understand the present but directly experience it. Often a Birthright exit interviews concludes with an ask for volunteers to always consider what their future contributions will be to Armenia and the Diaspora upon their return to their local communities. Here it seems that to undergo forward thinking, one must know about present-day Armenia.

Yet, focusing this study on merely the impact of Birthright and similar organizations to understand the transnational experience of Armenian-Americans today would lose sight of much of what creates the Diaspora. Angela's experience presents an important question to unpack.

Does growing up in Glendale's Armenian community, even without the transnational influence of parents, impact later generation of Armenian immigrants' understanding of Armenia and desire to experience it firsthand? Additionally, how does the Birthright experience compare with the expectations of Armenia that diasporans heard from friends and family?

While participation in Birthright is diverse, Lilit, the program's Administrative Specialist and Volunteer Coordinator, provided me with internal statistics of their volunteers. In 2021, the U.S. was the top country for sending volunteers and 50% of American volunteers were arriving from California with 80% of this group from Greater L.A. Additionally, half of the 2020 alumni from the U.S. were from California and all of the California volunteers were from L.A. The 2021 future participants that completed itineraries to arrive in Armenia by end of year included 64% from California with 40% of this group from L.A. The U.S. is not always the leading country of Birthright volunteers however it has consistently been in the top three along with some variation between Lebanon, Russia, and France in the past few years.

To better understand these numbers, I spoke to Birthright's Country Director of the past 15 years, Sevan Kabakian, who was born in Lebanon and later moved to L.A. in the 1970s before settling in Yerevan, Armenia in 2006. Confirming L.A.'s strong community, Sevan noted that due to L.A.'s high Armenian population, "we don't do advertisement in L.A., there's enough local familiarity." Yet, Sevan noted that simply high numbers of Armenian presence does not mean transnationalism.

SEVAN: *Your L.A. group… emotionally very much involved in Armenian clubs, organizations, Armenian activism and so on, but Armenia is not a real place of engagement. It's "yeah we want to support the U.S. Congress bill to provide more military aid to Armenia, less to Azerbaijan" but they*

haven't been to Armenia.

For Sevan and the Birthright mission, travel to Armenia and engaging with locals is an essential request for the Diaspora. Without making Armenia a "real place of engagement," Sevan's qualm with the Armenian Diaspora is that it risks only operating in line with Bakalian's (1993) earlier conclusion of symbolic ethnicity. Bakalian noted that symbolic ethnicity involved a process where ties to one's ethnicity eventually become an "artificial commitment" (1993: 44). Birthright attempts to instead structure itself in line with Massey's forward thinking request for place as Sevan explains that time spent in Armenia with Birthright "is not just about volunteering…what's next?" Both within scholarship and on the ground organizations, the distinction between "real" and "artificial" engagement with the concept of homeland is clear. Does a community like Glendale ever replace a need to travel to Armenia and yet still function in a way that can help Armenia? What are the necessary characteristics within a city like Glendale and other ethnic enclaves to sustain such a community? This dissertation unpacks such questions.

Outline of Dissertation

I have designed this dissertation to respond to my research questions in the following five chapters. In Chapter 2, I introduce the scholarship that motivated my interest in this research area focusing on theories of immigration and assimilation, transnationalism, urban studies, and gender and sexuality. While rooted in a sociological perspective, I situate my theoretical understanding in an interdisciplinary framework to consider the variations of understanding diaspora and migrant identity. In this chapter, I present an overview of debates regarding how to define the term diaspora and the evolution of scholarship on this topic. I also discuss the canon of immigration studies centered on assimilation theories to set a foundation for the analysis and discussion of my findings. Additionally, I highlight transnational literature that recognizes

simultaneity in identity and a fluidity in being, and intersect this dialogue with gender and sexuality scholarships that further supports this approach. Lastly, this chapter provides important consideration for urban studies to provide insight on how to recognize the structure and influence of cities and neighborhoods, especially critical for my analysis of fieldwork and respondent data from Yerevan and L.A.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my methodological approach, field sites, sources of data, and data analysis process. A comparative, multi-sited ethnography is critical for illustrating the full scope of the migration experience and its impacts. This chapter provides context on my field sites and organizations of interest. I discuss my in-depth interview (n=55) process including recruitment strategies, my criteria for selecting respondents, and interview guides. I outline the process of conducting the interviews which included three stages, and began via Zoom due to COVID-19, followed by in-person interviews in Yerevan and L.A. I also address my photovoice stage with a discussion of visual sociology and the origins of photovoice, and how this approach was used by my research participants as well as my own experience as a participant observant capturing images (n=95). Lastly, I discuss my data analysis including my coding process using NVIVO software and highlight the demographics I used to create frequency distribution graphs and charts using Microsoft Excel to showcase variables including age, gender, education, city of residence, Armenian speaking skills, involvement in the Armenian community and others.

Next, in Chapter 4, I provide a chronological reflection and analysis of my fieldwork beginning with Yerevan, Armenia where I first began this ethnographic work from July to December 2021. I rely on fieldnotes, interview data, photographs, and observations as a Birthright Armenia participant to highlight themes of identity, community, the impact of war and generational trauma, gender relations and gendered ideas of "homeland," and patterns for place-

making among diasporans. This interview data primarily includes other Birthright Armenia volunteers. In addition to offering vignettes of interactions in Armenia, this chapter relies on a visual sociology focus. I include my own research photographs throughout this study to aid and offer insight to my written discussion of my findings.

This chapter offers important insight into the realities of the homeland and the lived experiences of those in Armenia. Through fieldwork, I spoke to repatriates and interacted with locals that showcased feelings of frustration towards those in the Diaspora and volunteers from the U.S. in a tone that challenges the role and influence of organizations. This chapter begins to critically integrate the positive impacts as well as the less desirable consequences of ethnic organizations and their processes for encouraging membership and influencing homeland and Diaspora relations. I highlight the limitations of transnational behavior while considering the importance of integrating gender and urban studies to create new possibilities of membership that expand ideas of who belongs and challenge previous boundary making processes. Through a focus on generational status, language skills, gender identity and sexual orientation, organizational involvement, and collective memory tied to war, I present a modern perspective to the impacts of transnational travel and affiliations.

Then, in Chapter 5, I discuss data gathered during fieldwork in Greater Los Angeles from January to April 2022. This qualitative data primarily includes findings from fieldwork in Glendale in addition to Hollywood's "Little Armenia." In this chapter, I provide an overview of the migration of Armenians to California and their current presence in traditionally established Armenian neighborhoods as well as the consequences of housing costs that are leading Armenians to less centralized areas including suburbs of The Valley. This interview data was gathered through interviews with local community members including small business owners,

elected officials including the Mayor of Glendale and Los Angeles City Council President, social influencers in the L.A. Armenian community, and grassroots activists. I also rely on photographs I gathered during my observations of the ethnic communities. Additionally, I expand on urban studies literature by discussing processes for recreating a homeland through memories and nostalgia, as well as how new cultural influences impact migrant identity, particularly for those of later generations (second-generation and beyond). This chapter contributes to a gap in transnational studies that is limited on exploring the behavior of second-generation and beyond and their involvement in homeland politics. One significant finding of this chapter is that several respondents from L.A. do not identify as White. In fact, my respondents highlighted emotional, and at times, physical ties to their Armenian identity even when fifth generation. I address what makes these respondents unique in the Armenian community and how location and the presence of diaspora organizations sustains their ethnic allegiance.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the visual data submitted by my participants through a discussion on photovoice methodology. In this chapter, I provide a visual lens to the voices of my participants. In this stage of research, 24 respondents participated in a second phase of research by capturing photographs of their experience in Armenia or L.A. that respond to two questions of interest, 1) *What does your local Armenian community look like?* and 2) *What does being Armenian mean to you?* After collecting 95 photographs, two major themes developed from my analysis of the submissions. First, I highlight the role of food in sustaining connections to ethnic identity. Second, I discuss the role of a physical concept of place in evoking emotions and a construction of ethnic identity. In addition to photovoice submissions, this chapter includes my own photographs as a participant observant highlighting my reflexive process of having insider status as an Armenian and outsider status as a researcher in the field.

Chapter 7 concludes with an overview of my major findings and highlights possibilities for sociological scholarship and Armenian organizations in Armenia and their diaspora cities. I bolster the recommendations of my research participants for internal community changes to ensure organization participation is inclusive and expansive. I conclude with a discussion on the implications of my research for the sociology community to incorporate diaspora and transnationalism in sections on city and community, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and international migration. I believe it is critical to have a resurgence in scholarship that offers a specific focus on migrant communities that includes variation in their members, specifically focusing on those who are past first-generation and their desires to reconnect with their ethnic roots in ways that challenge American categorizations of race and ethnicity.

Additionally, through my focus on Greater L.A., I highlight how ethnic enclaves influence the decision-making of city officials in urban spaces that rely on their migrant communities for small businesses and political engagement. The relevance of this study goes beyond the U.S., however, and has global implications for understanding foreign policy decisions and how local communities contribute to the development of their homelands through donations, tourism, repatriating, volunteering, and staring new businesses abroad.

CHAPTER 2: BEYOND ASSIMILATION: POSSIBILITIES IN MIGRANT IDENTITY AND PLACE MAKING

Immigration scholarship includes an extensive history in exploring a critical question that asks, what happens when people move? Scholars have explored the social process that individuals undergo when they migrate from their place of origin, their "homeland" or sending society, to a new environment, the receiving or "host society." Various explanations have sought to unpack this question and highlight different forms of adaption from theories including the seven stages of assimilation (Gordon 1964), metaphorical considerations of a melting pot and then concluding at beyond the melting pot (Glazer and Moynihan 1970), symbolic ethnicity (Gans 1979), forms of acculturation (Park; Waters et. al), and segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993).

Yet, even with the evolution of this dialogue surrounding assimilation, and consideration for ethnic retention, a binary distinction between possibly losing ethnic ties or maintaining them was present. Within these two possibilities, the undertone of many assimilation explorations still hinted at an eventual fade of ethnicity. Some variations of assimilation as an eventual prospect did exist. For instance, scholars made exceptions by noting the experience of immigrants of color would challenge assimilation even for those of later generations due to the racial structure in the U.S. Yet, for those deemed as ethnic Whites, it was assumed there would be some level of "Anglo-conformity" (Gordon 1964) eventually which was supported in other sectors of society including in the legal and political pursuit for grouping migrants into categories of Whiteness as evident in past court cases and our current U.S. Census racial and ethnic categories.

Today's field of migration studies finds consensus on several critical concluding factors from earlier scholarship. First, a straight-line process to assimilation is not a guarantee. Second, some forms of integration, such as language acquisition, can occur, while others, such as

acceptance in social institutions, may not thus complicating a monolithic assimilation experience. Third, a diversity exists in the immigrant child's experience as different variables impact their reasons for retaining ethnic ties that are at times voluntary and other times, involuntary, due to familial and community pressures. This conflicts with studies that predict second and later generation immigrants will choose to identify with the host society more closely. Few studies have gone beyond second generation to find strong ethnic behaviors and affiliations. Fourth, social networks and where one resides, such as an ethnic enclave, disrupt the sociological expectations of conformity. Fifth, the larger societal context is important to consider including the impacts of globalization and media that influence popular culture, communication, and travel abroad.

After finding consensus on assimilation, new studies began to evolve as migration scholars agreed that a unidirectional social process to explain integration in a new society is not only unproductive to consider theoretically, but more importantly, such theories do not exist empirically. Instead, new concepts built on words such as *fluidity, hybridity, difference,* and *simultaneity* entered the conversation giving new possibilities for immigrant life that were rooted more in the gray and blurry rather than a rigid black and white scenario. Scholars of transnationalism, specifically, began exploring how immigrant communities maintain their ethnic affiliations and are successful in the host society at a time when the world was also changing due to globalization, less travel restrictions, and new technological opportunities for connection.

Yet, one glaring gap in these debates has been the lack of consideration of a specific kind of transnational – the diasporan. The integration of diaspora, transnationalism, and globalization can aid in sociological conversation of immigrant identity and community. As Tölölyan (2017)

explained about the three, "the first term is nested in the next, larger term, and the second in the third, like Russian dolls" (52). Yet, one reason for the current stunted scholarship on diasporans may be related to an existing uncertainty on how to properly define and categorize what is a diaspora and who is a member of such a group, resulting in a misunderstanding if real diaspora groups even exist today in the U.S. To respond to this, it is important to highlight what previous conversations around this topic discussed and concluded until this point.

Defining the Ambiguous

In the early 2000s, the term *diaspora*, historically used to describe some of the oldest communities in existence, revitalized into becoming a point of debate in a range of fields including sociology, anthropology, gender studies, religious studies, and international relations and foreign policy. Along with its diverse usage came ambiguity and debates regarding when it is appropriate to label a community as a *diaspora*. Traditionally, "classic" or "old" diasporas described communities such as Jews and Greeks and later applied to Africans, Armenians, and the Chinese (see Sheffer 2009; Tölölyan 2005). These diasporas followed a set-criteria including elements of coercive removal or forced dispersion from a homeland, a collective memory that is often linked to trauma, and an organized community in the hostland, or new place of residence, functioning as a "collective" (see Tölölyan 1996, 2007; Brubaker 2005).

Earlier diaspora scholarship emphasized that a diaspora is rarely thought of without its binary relationship to a homeland (Tölölyan 2001), yet as concepts of home are changing due to generations of migrants within a diaspora, so too must our definition of diaspora and its people. With the rise of globalization and technology, and development of postmodern ideas of identity and belonging, determining what fits within and who constitutes a diaspora is becoming more difficult to define.

Modern adaptations of diaspora heavily build on past assertions that diasporas should be recognized as diverse, of difference, fluid and open to changes with time. Scholars such as Stuart Hall argued that members of diasporas should have the ability to contribute to their own cultural meaning-making as opposed to being fixed as "scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland" (Hall 1990: 235). Hall's viewpoint destabilizes certain criteria of diaspora that rely heavily on having roots in a homeland.

More recent developments within queer studies indicate a similar discontent with a rigid usage of the term as scholars noted that "unlike the tendency of the seventies and eighties to develop overly monolithic notions of identity and cultural politics, the concept of diaspora is suggestive of diversification, scattering, fracturing, separate developments and also perhaps of a certain glamor" (Watney 1995: 59; see also Fortier 2002). Such a shift away from the traditional criteria of diaspora can allow for diasporans to view themselves as more than coming from a "unidirectional idea of diaspora – the site of trauma" (Fortier 2002: 6) and instead, work to recreate a new, positive imaginary of their historic community.

At the same time as the use of diaspora was being reworked, some scholars previously challenged loosely applying the term to groups of people who do not have many similarities to the classic distinction of diaspora arguing that this approach can fall into the danger of losing the term's meaning. Rogers Brubaker originally noted that the problem is, "if everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora" (2005: 3). Tölölyan also previously confirmed this concern of a new age definition of diaspora noting that "the struggle to maintain distinction is lost, only to resume in another guise" (2007: 49).

A more fluid perspective on diaspora may necessitate a fresh approach to mobilizing its members, which historically revolved heavily around the concept of a homeland. Several ethnic organizations were historically created to mobilize strategies around discussions of remembering, protecting and financially aiding a homeland. Particularly for groups who lost a homeland, or parts of it, organizations often tap into a collective traumatic memory to organize its members around sentiments such as "Never Forget" related to preventing future war and genocide. If, however, the term diaspora is not so firmly linked to a homeland anymore, would diaspora communities lose their energy and desire for advocacy and organization? Or instead, does applying a new, looser definition of diaspora encourage more participation by including those who did not previously fit the typical criteria of the "ideal type" (Clifford 1994) giving room for more who are of later generations, lack language skills or do not have strong ties to, or visit, the homeland?

Moving Through the Changing Definitions

The word *diaspora* descended from the Greek word *diaspeirein* meaning to scatter, spread about (Merriam-Webster). The term was first used around 250 BCE by the Jews of Alexandria, Egypt to define their dispersion from the homeland (Tölölyan 1996, 2007) after the ruler of Alexandria requested a translation of the Torah. As a result, the Septuagint translation then referred to the "exile of the Jerusalem elite to Babylon from 586 to 530 BCE" (Tölölyan 1996: 11). This definition relates to many traditional understandings of diaspora that rely on certain must-have criteria points that include coerced movement. However, the Jewish diaspora was not only a result of coercion or *galut (*Tölölyan 1996: 11). Scholars have noted that early Jewish diasporan communities were formed when Jews willingly *chose* to migrate for better financial opportunities (Tölölyan 1996). Additionally, diasporan communities existed, even those formed

as a result of coerced removal, before a homeland nation-state existed, as in the case of Israel and Armenia which gained independence in 1948 and 1991 respectively. The young age of the physical place of "home" for both historic ethnic communities complicates the binary discussion of diaspora. Therefore, ambiguities regarding the term diaspora existed well before contemporary scholarship on identity.

Recognizing diasporans have different histories of migration can help reduce intragroup conflict and allow for diaspora organizations to be more inclusive of their diverse membership. Traditionally, diaspora included a sense of "oneness" or of similarity within a group (Hall 1990), yet this presented a static representation of its members. Scholars challenged these ideas by emphasizing the importance of recognizing that "the general diasporic phenomenon is heterogeneity" (Sheffer 2019: 497). Acknowledging historical waves of migration helps highlight differences among diasporas and its members. For instance, while the Armenian Diaspora in the U.S. grew significantly after the 1915 Genocide and existed under the old diaspora criteria, later waves of post-Soviet migration involved migrants voluntarily leaving the existing homeland of the Republic of Armenia. Therefore, even within one diaspora community, there are different *types* of diasporans and these differences are largely linked to where people came from.

In addition to the diversity within diaspora members, the structural changes in the global world also led scholars to question their own stance on the definition of diaspora. For example, Tölölyan's works reflect a recognition that there is difference within diaspora groups reiterating Hall's earlier stance. Tölölyan highlighted that the borders between the "Armenians of Armenia" and those in the Diaspora are becoming more porous leading one to ask, "now that constant migration is a common phenomenon, can we in fact think of the Nation as a fixed and bounded

entity?" (2001). While classic diaspora works reflected on history and the origins of diasporas, updated interpretations focused on the evolution of diaspora and where the term was headed next. As Tölölyan noted, focusing only on the historical aspect of the formation of diaspora, such as the forced removal and collective identity, is only "the beginning of debate, not the end" (2001).

Brubaker's later works also reflect Hall's notion that diaspora is something that the people within it can determine for themselves. In his follow up to a previous article, Brubaker suggested that scholars view diaspora as a practice. In fact, diaspora is no longer seen as a static identity but can be an act of doing, or a process. Challenging important earlier criteria points, Brubaker concluded that diaspora "is not just exclusively for those who were violently forced out and dispersed, it's a broader definition" (2017: 1557). Yet, both Tölölyan's and Brubaker's evolution, and their own personal tension with settling on criteria for the term, lack empirical evidence to support these conclusions. I will contribute to this gap in literature by providing an empirical approach relying on a contemporary case study of what this "broader definition" of diaspora looks like.

Armenians of the U.S.

The Armenian Diaspora serves as an example of the diversity within a diaspora and how it can be difficult for members to clearly pinpoint one common idea of homeland. This is because "the history of the Armenian nation is a history of migration" (Gevorkyan 2016). Armenian migration can be categorized into four migration waves beginning first 1) in ancient times to the 20th century with voluntary movement for education, commerce, and the arts, 2) a second wave of migrants moved as genocide survivors and refugees after the 1915 Genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire, 3) a third wave of Armenians began migrating from World War II to

Armenia's 1991 independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union both returning to Armenia and leaving again for employment and leaving other diaspora regions due to conflict for a safe haven in other parts of Europe and North America, and lastly 4) the fourth wave includes the most recent migrants coming from the Republic of Armenia since its independence to present day often for better financial stability (Gevorkyan 2016). Due to such a dispersed nature of Armenians, several diasporans today may have difficulty identifying present-day Armenia as a homeland and instead point to places across the map including Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Syria, Russia, France, and Iran. A complicated relationship to a homeland is common for other diasporas, as well, particularly the Jewish diaspora, for whom the term was first used (see Tölölyan 2007; Gold 2002).

In addition to the differences in homeland among the Armenian Diaspora, there is variation in generations due to the waves of migration. Several studies on migration have halted their focus on the existence of migrants who have strong ties to their ethnic identity and the homeland at the second generation. Some earlier migration studies noted that, "it is a good general rule that except where color is involved as well, the specifically *national* aspect of most ethnic groups as well rarely survives the third generation in any significant terms" (Glazer and Moynihan 1970: 313). Additionally, when referring to the religious education that children of Catholic migrants may receive, scholars have noted it will be an "imperfect one" and children of zealous parents "will not be able to tell what their religious principles are, and their grandchildren still less" (Glazer and Moynihan 1970: 313). On the other hand, others offer a different approach noting that by the third generation, migrants "could afford to remember an ancestral culture which the traumatic Americanization forced the immigrant and second generations to forget" that could lead to a possible "third-generation return" to reembrace their

ethnicity (Gans 1979: 4).

By focusing on a diaspora group as an example of cases with a less linear form of assimilation, I contribute to these frameworks by highlighting that integration in the host-land can be a choice and not just a phenomenon that inevitably occurs under certain conditions. I contribute to this discussion by offering empirical evidence and going beyond third generation migrants by including fourth and fifth generation migrants in my study. I highlight that forms of assimilation occur while diasporans simultaneously perform new ways of being to strengthen their ethnic ties and communities. By using diaspora organizations as a site for my research, I unpack the motivating factors that influence why certain migrants remain strongly tied to their Armenian identity.

How Did Armenians Become "Diasporans?"

The current population size of Armenia is approximately 2.9 million people compared to its global Armenian population of approximately 8 million people. While the estimates vary on the population size of Armenian diasporans in the U.S., scholars note that there are approximately 500,000 to 2 million Armenians in the country. Greater L.A. is the largest and one of the most diverse Armenian-American communities with approximately 200,000 Armenians living in the area. The homeland is of significance to Armenians not only due to it being a physical place where Armenians currently live but due to the unstable history of the country as well. When comparing Armenian communities' pre-genocide to the map of present-day Armenia, one immediately notices a harsh reality (see fig. 2.1). Armenia is much smaller than what it once was and for that reason, diasporans have an even greater allegiance to what remains. The change in the map reflects the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide that occurred in 1915. However, before the Genocide, the Armenian Diaspora already existed around the world.

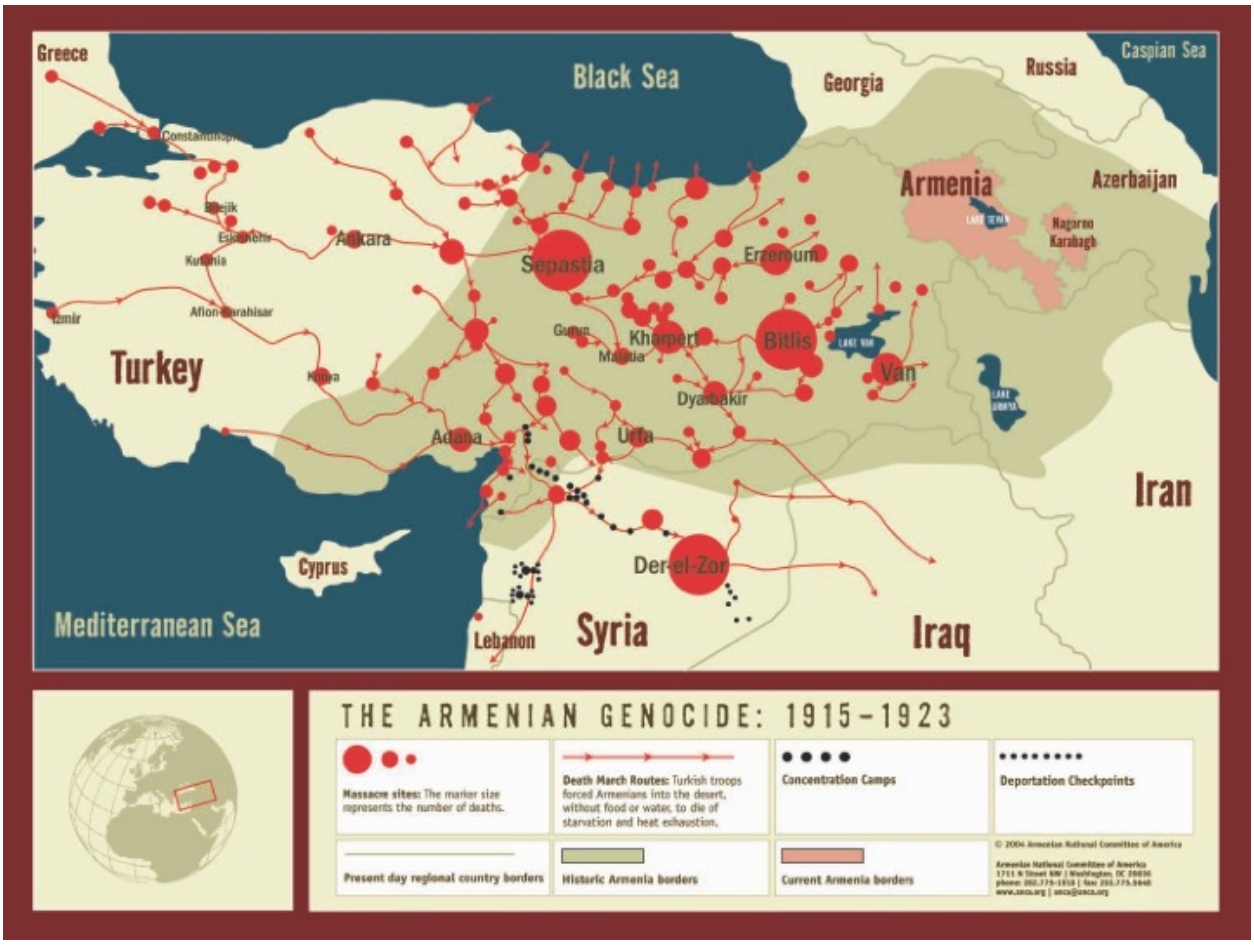

Figure 2.1. Map of the Armenian Genocide. *Source*: Armenian National Committee of America.

As mentioned earlier, while *diaspora* is often linked to violence and forced removal (see Tölölyan 2007), ambiguity on the use of the term existed even its in earliest stages.

Similar to the Jewish diaspora that existed outside of conditions of violence, the Armenian Diaspora existed long before the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Armenians left Armenia as early as the late fourth century C.E. for education and military endeavors and were deported to live in less populated areas of the Byzantine empire (Tölölyan 2005). In addition to its long existence, the Armenian Diaspora has always been diverse with communities in Poland, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. Newer diasporas began to form during the Ottoman Empire in the mid to late 1400s when Armenian immigrated to Istanbul and nearby regions (Tölölyan 2005). Armenians experienced forced removal in Persia in the early 1600s. In the 1700s, Armenians

from Persian-occupied parts of the homeland joined the Russia army and by the late 18th century, Armenians began migrating to Russia. By the 19th century, Armenians could be found in the U.S., Britain, and France.

However, this lively progression of Armenian expansion and achievements in the arts and literature faced a deadly threat during World War I in 1915 when the Ottoman Empire enacted genocide against Armenians. The attempt at ethnic cleansing by the Ottoman Empire, a result of a larger anti-Christian discourse in the region, resulted in approximately 1.5 million Armenians massacres (Tölölyan 2005; Göçek and Naimark 2011). The term, *genocide,* was first coined in 1944, years after the Genocide by Polish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin who defined the term as, "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group" (Lemkin 1944: 79). Lemkin noted that the Armenian Genocide, what Armenians often call *Medz Yeghern (*the great crime) or *Aghet* (catastrophe), influenced his beliefs for the need to protect ethnic groups. Lemkin helped include the word *genocide* in the indictment against Nazi leadership and in 1948, successfully worked with the United Nations (UN) in their approval of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC). This event largely shaped the existing collective memory of Armenian ancestors alive today resulting in a sense of cultural pride among Armenians globally. Due to the past threat on Armenia's existence by the Ottoman Empire, present-day Turkey, the Armenian Diaspora now relies on the memory of the Genocide to ensure Armenia is independent and survives (fig. 2.2). Popular phrases such as "Turkey Failed" are directly dependent on the discussion of a homeland as Armenians note they will never again let history repeat itself and risk losing their land and culture. In turn, these phrases spark emotions that are strongly tied to nationalism and nationhood (Adar 2018).

Figure 2.2. Tsitsernakaberd Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

Collective Memory and Nationalism

In August 1939, during a speech to military leaders, Adolf Hitler said what would later become one of the most popular quotes among Armenians: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" (Ihrig 2016: 348). Hitler, referring to the 1915 Armenian Genocide, justified his plan of annihilation and extermination of the Jewish people by believing the event, and people affected by it, could be easily forgotten. That was not the case. Armenians repeat this quote to encourage the mobilization of generations to continue to highlight the tragedies of their past in hopes of preventing history repeating itself. The Holocaust against the Jews and the Armenian Genocide are both central foci for the establishment of strong diaspora communities that are politically engaged and mobilize their members to support their homelands. However, while homeland is important in understanding genocide, even in Lemkin's earliest conception of the term, there was more to unpack in its definition.

The history of the Genocide is largely tied to Armenian identity. Lemkin's definition of genocide explains that "genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor" (1944: 79). Lemkin went on to explained that prior to the development of the word genocide, "*denationalization* was the word used in the past to describe the destruction of a national pattern" (1944: 79), however, he disagreed with this criteria noting that among other reasons, this definition does not touch on the biological aspect of genocide and that focusing only on nationalization can also be interpreted as only deprivation of citizenship (1944: 80). Therefore, the impact of the genocide is a complicated one for an American-born Armenian— the harsh memories of what their ancestors overcame are not forgotten while their connection to present-day Armenia is mostly from imagination.

Even with its complexities and ambiguities, much of the success from the Armenian Diaspora mobilization resulted from a focus on the Genocide and in turn, a need for nationalism and pride. As Lorne Shirinian noted, "for Armenians, 1915 is always in the background" (1998:171). The Armenian Diaspora has historically mobilized around religion and traumatic historical memory (Alexander 2000: 24). Scholars have pointed to these two forces to highlight the constructionist explanation for the development of the Armenian ethnic identity (Alexander 2000). The Genocide, then, becomes a critical event for diasporans, including diaspora organization leaders, to mobilize around and create solidarity among community members, as this "group trauma" (Alexander 2000: 27) has affected every type of Armenian in some compacity. As a result, a shared collective memory can effectively mitigate potential divisions within the diverse Armenian Diaspora including factors of difference such as one's country of origin, language, and generational differences.

Religion can be a factor for group social cohesion as it allows for events to be centered around religious holidays and encourages socialization in church settings. In her in-depth interviews with Armenian elites, Rachel Anderson Paul found that leaders from Armenian-American interest groups, such as the AAA and the ANCA, emphasize that religious organizations create an "opportunity structure" for Armenian diasporans and that "individuals may mobilize for the purpose of political participation based on spiritual incentives provided by religion, the opportunity afforded by the organizational structure of religion, or because of solidarity incentives" (Alexander 2000: 27). The Executive Director of the ANCA, Aram Hamparian, even noted that the Armenian Church was "the 'central national institution'… and served as a 'torch bearer for Armenian nationalism over Ottoman rule'" (Alexander 2000: 37). However, when comparing the impact of the church and the collective memory of the Genocide, Alexander found that the Genocide mobilizes diasporans more than religion and church is instead more effectively used to "get the word out" (Alexander 2000: 36) regarding political events.

Memories play a crucial role in shaping the Armenian Diaspora. Films, poems, and art pieces in museums have served to highlight the experience of a genocide survivor on a transnational scale. Particularly for Armenian-Americans, remnants of survivor stories are found throughout monumental buildings in major cities including at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. (D.C.) and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City (fig. 2.3). Featuring such stories in major museums gives voice to the many who were massacred and educates the American audience about the history of the Armenian people living in the U.S. today. Therefore, the role of survivors and the need to document survivor memoirs

has been critical for highlighting the "truth" that has continued to be debated in American political history with the lack of the official recognition of the Armenian Genocide to this date.

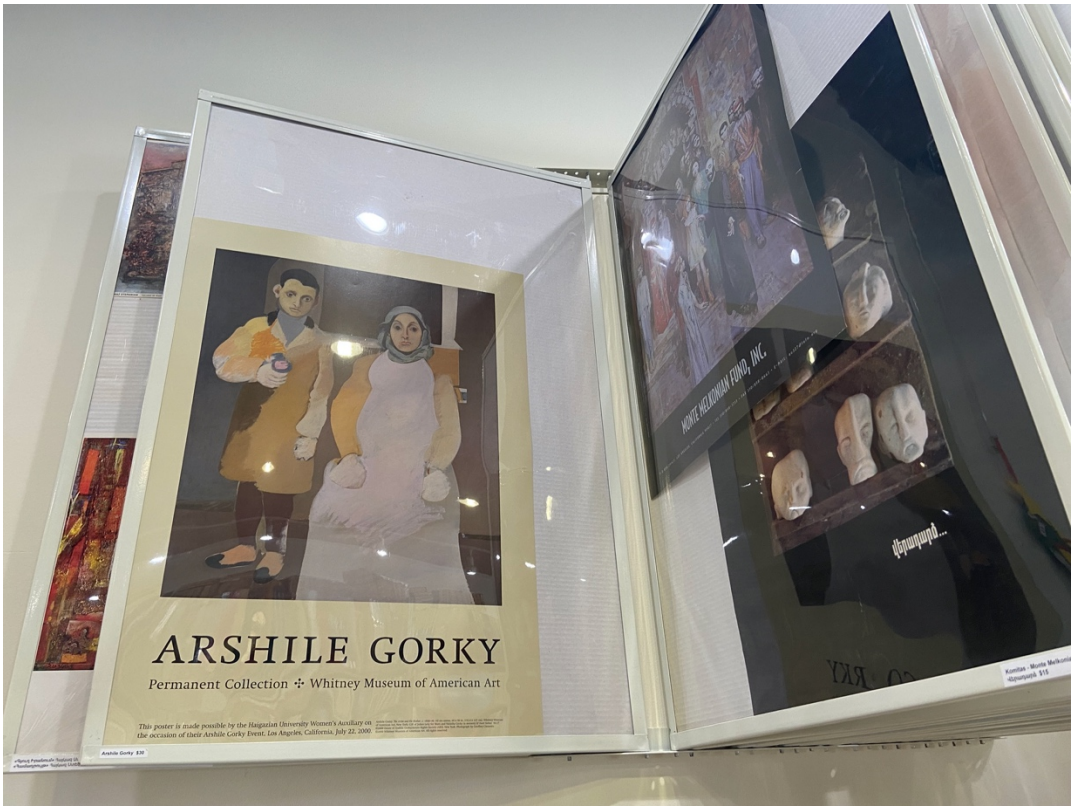

Figure 2.3. Poster replica of Arshile Gorky's painting at Abril Bookstore, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

The use of survivor memoirs to develop the Armenian-American identity has several implications for the Armenian Diaspora in the U.S. particularly. One of the ways that the Genocide has been used to create the cultural history of Armenians has been the focus of survivor memoirs "having a strong set of culturally provided categories such as Christianity and the American Dream" (Shirinian 1998: 168). More specifically, "much of the language of these texts describes the tragedy in religious terms" (Shirinian 1998: 168) and highlights survivor's gratitude for having religious freedom, peace and stability while living in the Diaspora. As the memory of the Genocide becomes more distant and survivors are no longer alive to share their stories with younger generations, memoirs then act as substitutes for memory (Shrinian 1998:

169). Additionally, within survivor memoirs, due to their testimonial nature, "there is inherent in the genre a claim to the truth" (Shrinian 1998: 169). Truth, and the act of seeking it, has been a crucial historical element of Armenian nationalism and community building. Not only has truth been an important force for Armenian leaders who campaign for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, but the seeking of truth, through reading memoirs as one form, serves as a complex phenomenon among Armenians searching for "home and self-discovery" (Shrinian 1998: 172).

Authenticity and Home

Through their collective memory, Armenians around the world, even if they did not live in Armenia, display a sense of pride by the rhetoric that Armenia is part of their "roots" (see Alexander 2007; see also Levitt 2009). For roots to exist, they inevitably must be planted somewhere. Here again we see that the development of a diaspora community and their motives often are, as earlier diaspora works emphasized, reliant on the existence of a homeland. There is a consequence, however, to the belief of the rooting of people that results in essentializing one's place in the world as well as one's purity (see Malkki 1992).

A few unresolved questions complicate the reliance on a physical place to give meaning to one's ethnicity. For instance, if you cannot trace back your roots to the current homeland, then does that make you less authentic? Are diasporans who have never been to Armenia less Armenian? An emphasis on authenticity also leads to a third criterion of diaspora in addition to dispersion of people and homeland orientation: boundary maintenance (Brubaker 2005). Through boundary maintenance, community members can problematically determine who is more authentic than the other leading to ideas of an "ideal type" (Clifford 1994: 306) of diasporan. Such purification tests can lead to community being a site of both support and

oppression (Clifford 1994: 314). To unpack authenticity, it was important to interrogate the meaning and importance of place in constructing one's ethnic identity.

Words such as *authenticity* and *originality* (along with *origin*) have commonly been linked to the development of a definition for *diaspora*. As mentioned earlier, coming from the "homeland" has been one of the most important criterions for what is specific about a diasporan. Scholars such as Tölölyan and Clifford have noted the emphasis within diaspora studies on the imagination of an "original place" (Clifford 1994: 309), a connection to the "homeland" (Clifford 1994), and how a diaspora may help and support the "homeland" (Tölölyan 1996: 7). In turn, these concepts can create a sense of essentialism, or the belief that there is a natural connection to a homeland. Several diaspora scholars have emphasized the importance of recognizing the construction of ethnic identities, moving away from discussions of a natural rootedness or *up*rootedness in a homeland and instead, a focus on institutional, political powers and the development of various communities. As others have highlighted, using the language of being "uprooted" when applied to groups such as refugees, for instance, requires one to view their loss of bodily connection to their homeland as a "loss of moral bearings…rootless" or not as pure (Malkki 1992: 32). Inevitably, such a concept can result in a diasporan feeling less authentic.

In response to such ideologies, scholars including anthropologists (see Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004), geographers (see Massey 1994; Harvey 2001), transnational feminists (see Mohanty 1988, 2003; Yuval-Davis 2011; Parreñas 2015; Klapeer and Laskar 2018) and urban theorists (see Park, Burgess, McKenzie 1984; Soja 1989; Jacobs 1992) have focused on the meaning of space and place to offer a postmodern approach to identity which has greatly influenced migration studies within the field of sociology. A focus on the social imaginary, for

instance, is critical for the Armenian Diaspora as many may not have a direct connection to Armenia today when they discuss the homeland. These individuals may not connect to a physical Armenia but instead, imagine a home that has been comprised of storytelling from elders, literature, art, and film. For such diasporans, as the case for other groups such as Palestinians for instance, a return to the homeland becomes abstract as they see their home as an "inherently romanticized place sometimes likened to a lost lover" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 10).

Transnationalism and Diaspora Organizations

Several empirical studies that focus on diaspora and ethnic organizations have developed under the realm of transnational studies. Often, the terms diaspora and transnationalism are used interchangeably and in similar contexts. "Diaspora and transnational studies" are listed together as specialties of Sociology departments. The *Diaspora* journal is officially titled, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. One similarity among these two terms is that there is limited agreement on the technicalities of what exactly fits under their definitions and what are the major differences between these terms. As Thomas Faist previously noted, these terms can be seen as "two awkward dance partners" (2010). Yet, the very ambiguous relationship of these terms is why Faist and other scholars note scholars should be studying them.

One of the major differences of transnationalism and diaspora is that transnationalism is a broader concept, as it relates to processes, social fields, and global business transactions. To begin, transnationalism has been used well before the term gained popularity in fields such as anthropology and sociology. Scholars have noted that transnationalism was first used as early as 1862 in lecture by German linguist, Georg Curtius who believed that all languages were interconnected (Waldinger 2015: 13). However, its modern usage is largely seen in two cases.

First, transnationalism has been used to describe the international trade, investment opportunities, and large-scale corporations developed from a growing global market economy during the rise of globalization (Sassen 2019). This approach focused on companies as critical actors in transnationalism, or "transnationalism from above" (see Kivisto and Faist 2010; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). A second approach, or "transnationalism from below," situated people as actors and considered individual agency within processes of global migration. In 1990, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton Blanc presented on how to apply this perspective at a conference (Kivisto and Faist 2010: 131). This approach focused on the ability for migrants to participate in social fields, or "set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed" (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004: 1009) and a simultaneous commitment to the hostland and homeland.

While transnationalism speaks to processes and ways of connecting to the homeland and hostland, scholars traditionally argued that diaspora is narrower as it is often used to describe a collective identity such as a religious or ethnic group (Faist 2010: 21). However, as noted above, modern adaptions such as those of Brubaker's shifted to identifying diaspora as a process. This falls in line with transnational scholarship that understands transnational "not as a noun but as an adjective and, increasingly, as a verb" (Levitt and de la Dehsa 2017: 1520). Therefore, while a diaspora begins by existing on its own as a concept, the micro-level daily actions done by those inside a diaspora to sustain it often reflect transnational behavior. One example of where transnationalism is visible within a diaspora is a diaspora organization.

Due to transnationalism being a term used to study actions and behaviors, it has created opportunities for those interested in diasporas and other migrant communities to use empirical

evidence and case studies to form an understanding of what to measure. In some quantitative approaches, the measurement for transnational actions involved a strict focus on firsthand involvement in homeland politics and traveling to and from the homeland on a "regular basis" (Portes and Haller 2003). However, qualitative studies have offered an alternative perspective, shifting the focus towards migrant experiences within host countries, thereby reducing the emphasis on frequent travel. Examples of such studies include research on the establishment of diaspora and migrant communities in various locations, such as Mexican-Americans in New York City (Smith 2006; Moore 1981), Jewish-Americans in Boston (Levitt 2001) and Los Angeles (Gold 2002), as well as Chinese-Americans in San Francisco (Louie 2004). These qualitative studies offered examples of how immigrants utilize their clustered neighborhoods, or ethnic enclaves, to organize for global and local issues.

Armenian-Americans greatly benefited from their longstanding ethnic enclaves, particularly in areas like L.A. The significance of this ethnic enclave was evident during Armenians' mobilization and response during the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan as a result of the substantial Armenian population in the area. A large community provides diasporans with access to resources and social institutions that help establish social networks. However, as Armenians have dispersed across the U.S. and rely more heavily on social media to feel connected to the world and each other, the Armenian Diaspora evolved to showcase a decentralized form of organization (Castells 2010) that no longer relies as heavily on one major city to participate in political action. Diaspora organizations are taking advantage of this change by utilizing social media to inform those who do not live near the organization's headquarters or cannot attend an in-person protest in their local town. This ability to organize is a result of the

social fields that connect individuals even without being in the same physical place, presenting diasporans with a new opportunity to be transnational.

Organizations as Transnational

Diaspora organizations are transnational in nature. Many of their goals are intended to provide aid to those in the homeland. Armenian organizations in the U.S. such as the ANCA and AAA in D.C. lobby on Capitol Hill to encourage members of Congress to pass legislation that directly benefits Armenians in Armenia. A main goal of their organization historically has been to gain formal genocide recognition from the U.S. Therefore, while the actions of the organization are transnational, the root of this diaspora organization still fits within classic definition of a diaspora as it still holds on to the traumatic memory of genocide and uses it to encourage Armenians to mobilize on this important issue. As the current border conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is brewing, it is also opening past wounds and highlighting the importance of preserving this memory as diasporans are fighting to prevent history from repeating. The existing transnational organizations become even more useful for spreading political messages and streamlining information as well as donations.

At the same time as diaspora organizations are accomplishing their goals and strategies, they are also working towards inspiring a younger generation of the Diaspora to be transnational. The ANCA and AAA offer several programs for young adults to find internships or employment in D.C. to encourage Armenian involvement in American politics. Other organizations, such as Birthright Armenia, act as a resume booster, offering internship and volunteer experience while encouraging Armenian diasporans to spend several months in Armenia learning the language, living with a host family, and attending excursions to learn about the history of the country. Such organizations are just a few examples of several other opportunities presented to Armenian youth

to use both their American skillsets and Armenian heritage to be successful. Most importantly, these organizations appeal to youth that are beyond first-generations Armenians, complicating earlier studies that emphasized that migrants mostly experience a symbolic ethnicity (Bakalian 1993; see also Gans 1979). These organizations highlight that the U.S. does not become a melting pot but is "composed of a number of 'pots' or sub societies" (Gordon 1964: 130).

Are Armenians White?

The current language on the Census race question asks to select White for anyone that is "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa." However, it is widely recognized that individuals falling under this definition encompass a diverse range of lived experiences, physical traits, and cultural upbringings that set them apart from one another. Reviewing records of past Census race questions, there have been significant improvements that have acknowledged more options and offered a write-in for an Other category. Yet, for some groups that feel misrepresented, including Armenians, the Census still does not accurately categorize them. Other surveys also included a Caucasian option for those who identified as White. This option has phased out but has historically been a subject of confusion for Armenians who do not feel their experience is the same as others who may select Caucasian such as those from European countries as many Armenians argue they are the true Caucasians due to being from the Caucasus region. Given that these two options have historically been the default choices for Armenians, it led them to often opt for the most practical or viable option, even if they do not necessarily agree with their selection.

While some respondents from the current generation are at odds with this history and paving the way for new identity markers, through campaigns to write in Armenian, previous generations fought to be legally categorized as White. In 1909, the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of

Massachusetts specified that Armenians are to be admitted citizenship and officially classified them in the courts as White and Caucasian. The court decision that ruled this was *In re Halladjian et al*. and involved four Armenian petitioners from Turkey who wished to be considered "free white persons" for naturalization. The ruling argued that Armenians, though descendants of Turkey, have always been on the European side, speaking to their Christian religious beliefs and their skin complexion. An additional convincing argument for the acceptance of Armenians as White in the U.S. was their ability to assimilate,

"[if the court should inquire, as the United States suggests concerning Hebrews, May Armenians 'become westernized and readily adaptable to European standards?' the answer is Yes. They have dealt in business with Greeks, Slavs, and Hebrews, as well as with Turks, they have sought a modern education at Robert College and other American schools in the East, and they have pursued by immigration the civilization of Great Britain and of the United States" (In re Halladjian et al.).

In 1925, a similar court case questioning the race and naturalization of Armenians was brought forth in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon in *United States v. Cartozian*. In this case, defendant Tatos Cartozian, descendant from Turkey (Western Armenia), argued for the ruling that he is White and eligible for American citizenship. In this case, it was no longer simply agreed upon that the color of one's skin is enough to determine their citizenship. It was important in this case to distinguish Armenians as European and removed from the Asian race through the context of the social relations of Armenians abroad. Armenian organizations came together to highlight the experience of the Armenian people that is worthy of citizenship in the U.S. once again pointing to their Christian beliefs as well as their history of genocide and loss of land.

To portray Armenians loyalty to the U.S. and therefore deservingness of citizenship, it was highlighted that Armenians would have no country to return to, due to genocide and war, if not granted citizenship. Additionally, gender and religion were intersected and used to uphold Armenians' whiteness by claiming, "if you go to a Mohammedan house, you do not meet his family. His wife and children are kept apart. No Christian ever sees the face of the wife or daughter of a Mohammedan. But if you go to an Armenian home, you are received by his wife, by his children" (Craver 2009). To further prove this point, the Cartozian's well educated daughters came to court.

Similar to *In re Halladjian,* assimilation was an important factor in *United States v. Cartozian*. To highlight Armenians ability to assimilate into American culture, references to how frequently Armenians inter-marry and have "American wives" were made to strengthen the claim of Armenian's white status. Craver (2009) argues that this case may have looked different if ruled in California, where Armenian social circles were stronger and English language acquisition was less common than in Oregon where the Armenian community was small. Therefore, it was easier to argue that Armenians assimilate in a community where there were little other options for survival. To strategically protect this argument, Craver explains, "no witnesses were called from the neighboring state of California" although the 1920 Census highlights there were 5,046 adult Armenians over the age of twenty-one in that state while just 53 Armenians in Oregon. As a result, the court ruled that Armenians are White by the basis of 1) Armenians in Asia Minor are of Alpine stock, of European persuasion, 2) they are white persons, as commonly recognized in speech of common assuage, and as popularly understood and interpreted in this country by our forefathers, and by the community at large and 3) that they are

amalgamate readily with the white races, including the white people of the United States (Craver 2009: 50). The legal question of Armenians' white status has not been argued since.

These two court cases present an important historical context of the U.S. construction of race and categorization of deserving immigrants based on religious beliefs and the ability to assimilate. Yet, they also challenge the younger generations of Armenians' contestation with being viewed as White in society today by highlighting that Armenians *fought* to be White and it did not just happen to them by American society. In fact, these court rulings did not mean that Armenians were immune from discrimination in their host society. While this legal conclusion eased Armenians integration into American society and certainty presented privileges as Craver notes "their experience would not be comparable to that of the African American or the Asians," (2009: 51), Armenians still faced prejudice and a perplexing position in American racial categories. Relying on a case study of Armenians in California offers a more well-rounded discussion into how these rulings progressed into the lived experiences of those in Armenian communities such as L.A.

Moving Diaspora from Theory to Research

An empirical focus adds clarity to the confusion within diaspora debates. Additionally, an ethnographic approach highlights the differences within a diaspora as participant observation and interviews with diaspora organization leaders showcase the strategies to maintain the cultural and political functionality of the term *diaspora* within the Armenian community. While there are many positive outcomes of diaspora communities, by interviewing participants, this study uncovers other less desirable aspects of membership. As diaspora organizations work towards preserving "Armenianness" (Bakalian 1993), there also exists cases of boundary maintenance at work that discourage assimilation to the core culture (Gordon 1964).

By researching members of organizations, I explore how authenticity expectations and stereotypes of an ideal type of Armenian influence feelings of belonging and membership. In this process, I identify the actors who create boundary lines while highlighting those who feel less included in the community. I include alternative approaches for transnational participation that is not centered on formal membership including virtual connections on social media and connecting in local cities rather than through formal organizations.

CHAPTER 3: INSIDE TWO WORLDS: METHODS TO A MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

Positionality and Motivation

My graduate studies and positionality as an Armenian-American motivated this research. Before discussing my research agenda for this study, it is important to note my insider and outsider status within my research community. First, I am a first-generation immigrant to Armenian parents that were impacted by the Baku-Sumgait Pogroms between 1988 to 1990. This family history shaped my identity and inspired an interest in migration studies. My ethnic background provides me with insider status due to a common understanding of a shared culture with my research participants (see Baca Zinn 1979). Additionally, being raised in Metro Detroit provided me with access to an Armenian community through various local ethnic institutions.

At the same time, as Stuart (2017) noted, "we are always outsiders in at least some fashion" (216). First, the Armenian community in L.A. surpasses the size of the Armenian networks in the Detroit area. Additionally, due to my parents' first-generation status and lack of various forms of capital including language skills and organization membership, I was not an official member of any formal Armenian organization. Lastly, prior to my fieldwork, I have never traveled to Armenia and had basic Armenian language skills. These factors contributed to a distance from my research participants and field sites therefore providing me with a level of outsider status to observe with a curious personal lens.

As an immigrant woman holding a specialization in Women's and Gender Studies, my research design relies on feminist epistemology. As feminist scholars have argued, true objectivity is not possible in qualitative research. Instead, practicing reflexivity and understanding my position within the community I am researching is a critical aspect driving the research design, execution, and analysis of this study (see Harding 1986; Haraway 1988). As a

result, I dedicate a section of this study on the gendered processes of being an Armenian-American from the perspective of women and LGBTQ respondents to highlight their intersectional positioning in the Armenian Diaspora (see Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000).

I first began focusing on the Armenian Diaspora in 2019 for my master's thesis a year after Armenia experienced a "Velvet Revolution" in 2018 that inspired several debates among diasporans regarding political opinions about Armenia's local government (see Lanskoy and Suthers 2019). During this time, I noticed several of my Armenian peers frequently posting on social media about the protests and political tension in Armenia. I was interested in the motivations of this younger generation, often those who were not first-generation, to display transnational behavior related to political conditions abroad. This social movement led to the election of a new prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, who promised democratic and transparent governance. I found individuals relied heavily on their social networks to receive news updates through social media. For this group of Armenians, that I identify as transnational, it was common for them to find information about Armenia on social media due to their social networks being predominantly Armenian. These social networks often developed from participation in ethnic organizations including volunteer organizations in Armenia such as Birthright Armenia. Additionally, I quickly found many of these individuals were from Greater L.A. as snowball sampling led to more participants from this area.

After completing my thesis, new questions developed. I identified a common theme from my in-depth interviews that highlighted respondents reflecting on a Birthright Armenia experience and referencing being members of the L.A. community. I was curious to then explore the influence of these two sites by traveling to Armenia and L.A. Travel allowed for me to understand the role of an ethnic organization and ethnic enclave in sustaining an Armenian

identity among immigrants who are of later generation, while completing participant observation on the ground to highlight any potential areas of conflict among members and limitations of long-distance transnationalism.

Research Field Sites

My research design involves a multi-sited ethnographic approach. While quantitative studies have provided important insight on transnational behavior (see Guarnizo, Portes and Haller 2003; Waldinger 2008), their findings often result in questions that cannot be fully addressed through measurable outcomes. As Levitt and de la Dehsa (2017) noted, transnational research requires "an optic or gaze, a way of asking questions that does not take the spatial or temporal unit of analysis as given" (1520). With this definition in mind, an ethnographic approach becomes necessary. An important question in transnational scholarship has been, to what extent do transnational processes remain important for second-generation and beyond? (see Levitt 2001). Through an ethnography, my research design offers deeper insight and context to explain how such communities function and sustain themselves through firsthand interactions with its members who are second generation and beyond.

This ethnographic study is also comparative to reveal the full scope of the migration experience and its impacts (see Fitzgerald 2006; see also Louie 2004; Waldinger 2015; Zhou and Liu 2016). Initially, my research design included three field sites: Yerevan, Armenia, L.A., California, and Washington, D.C. During the onset of my research, COVID-19 prevented in-person research for 2020 and part of 2021, and in turn, delayed the beginning of a U.S. Fulbright research fellowship abroad. This global pandemic led me to pursue virtual in-depth interviews with my research participants via Zoom.

The selection process for my geographic sites of research interest involved a literature

review, research on diaspora organization presence, and knowledge from my existing social networks. My research questions seek to understand the impact of participating in diaspora organizations on shaping Armenian ethnic identity for those currently in their 20s and 30s and potential future thought leaders and culture creators within organizations and in the larger Armenian-American community. Therefore, researching the history of diaspora organizations was a critical initial step in beginning my research. During my master's thesis, I strengthened my knowledge about multiple Armenian organizations in the U.S. To build on this, I completed additional online research to gain a stronger background on the goals of organizations and their membership and staff to help develop my research focus. This involved content analysis of organization websites and their social media pages on platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to gain an understanding of the type of content they post and their audience engagement.

Los Angeles, California: A Global City

Due to my existing knowledge on the Armenian Diaspora as mentioned earlier, I was already aware that L.A., specifically the ethnic enclave of Glendale, is the largest Armenian-American population. Therefore, I planned for L.A. to be a field site at the beginning of my research design. In doing more analysis of influential diaspora organizations, including the ANCA, AAA, Armenian Youth Federation (AYF), and Armenian Relief Society (ARS), I found their offices were often housed in L.A. In spending more time investigating the social media pages of these organizations and viewing who was engaging with their content, I identified several Armenian "social influencers" that engaged with these organizations online were also from and/or living in L.A.

Fieldwork in L.A. allows this study to localize global issues as I observe how Armenian-

Americans create an ethnic enclave to interrogate the concept of home (see Fittante 2018; see also Sandoval and Main 2014). As Sassen (2019) explained, the global city becomes a "strategic research site" for witnessing how global processes become localized (85). As a result of being a highly concentrated space with Armenian diasporans, L.A. can enable "partly denationalized environments" (Sassen 2019: 84) that support the types of transnational activities that my research participants partake in such as volunteering in ethnic organizations and participating in social movements. While Sassen noted that the formation of the network of global cities is largely a result of corporate economic globalization, and other scholars have shown the intersection of migrant networks in creating local economic opportunities (Smith 2006; Bashi 2007; Abdi 2015; Paul 2017), Sassen still emphasized that political and cultural processes are also localized and important to research (Sassen 2019: 85).

Previous studies on the Armenian Diaspora discussed transnational mobilization through a focus on post-genocide collective memory (Paul 2007) and the importance of ethnic capital in promoting high achieving education status (Khachikian 2019). Khachikian's study involved the L.A. community but rather than focusing on the significance of space in promoting capital, the goal of his study was to illustrate how ethnic capital achieved through participating in youth scouts helped students transition into college. In this study, too, I show how forms of capital rely on one another and specifically how the social capital obtained in an ethnic enclave can lead to cultural, economic, and political capital. However, my contribution to the discussion on organizations focuses on the location in which these diasporans. While Khachikian did not focus on the *transnational* characteristics of diasporans, I use L.A. to highlight what characteristics are necessary within a city to support transnational mobilization, political engagement, and ethnic awareness.

In addition to the influence of L.A. on the Armenian community, I was interested in the political and activist nature of diaspora organizations in D.C. Therefore, I completed virtual interviews with staff and volunteers of organizations that are involved on Capitol Hill, such as the ANCA and AAA. In comparison to L.A., the American-Armenian on the East Coast includes later generations of migrants including Armenian Genocide survivors who settled in the Watertown area of Massachusetts. Using L.A. and D.C. as locations for recruitment allowed me to have two cities in the U.S. as sites of comparison to explore the relationship of place on community formation and ethnic identity.

Yerevan, Armenia: The Homeland

While researching the role of diaspora organizations and reviewing literature on transnationalism, I was drawn to further explore the impact of organizations and the Diaspora on Armenia as I found several organizations included references to a "homeland" on their webpages or social media posts. My research questions made it important to include a fieldwork in Armenia to provide context on the reach of the Diaspora in influencing homeland politics, socialization, development, and culture, and to identify any disconnect that exists in the Diaspora with the realities of present-day Armenia. To complete this phase of fieldwork, I was granted a U.S. Fulbright Award and applied to volunteer with Birthright Armenia to be a participant observant during my research abroad.

Contextualizing the Timeline

The significance of the timeline and political context of my research is important to address. The research plan for this study began in 2020 during a war that began in September between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory at their borders known as Nagorno Karabakh/Artsakh. Throughout this study, interview data includes respondents often referring to

this region as Artsakh. First, the terminology is important to unpack.

In 1923, the Soviet Union established the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (Karabakh) as an autonomous region of Azerbaijan. The word Karabakh is a translation of the Turkic word "Karabakh" meaning "Black Garden" (Office of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic N.d.). In 1988, the local legislature in the region voted to join Armenia, as it had a population that was approximately 95% Armenian (see Center for Preventive Action 2023; Carley 1998). This political move caused conflict between both sides leading to war and the Baku-Sumgait Pogroms that resulted in thousands of Armenian refugees fleeing Azerbaijan. In 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh became an independent state although this has not been internationally recognized (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Artsakh N.d.).

Beginning in February 2017, the region has been referred to as the Republic of Artsakh (Artsakh) by Armenians. The name originates from the Armenian root "tsakh" meaning "woods" due to the region's topography (see Office of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic 2023; The Armenian Weekly 2017). This new terminology was adapted after local citizens voted in favor of a new constitution and renamed the region. As a result of the conflict over this region, there are often two political references to this region – Karabakh, by Azeris, and Artsakh, by Armenians. Several members of Congress in the U.S. that support Armenia have called for the recognition of Artsakh as independent from Azerbaijan (Congressman Adam Schiff 2023; Congressman Frank Pallone Jr. 2023). The current flag of the region includes the colors of the Armenian flag and an arrow that symbolizes a separate region that is pointing westward. I will refer to the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the contested region as the "44-Day War." Additionally, due to the decision by the local government to rename Nagorno Karabakh as Artsakh, and in line with the terminology used by respondents in this study, I will also apply this name when referring to the

region.

As a result of the tension in the region, the areas bordering Armenia and Azerbaijan have undergone warfare and several ceasefires have been attempted often encouraged by Russia. In September 2020, scrimmages began again in this region escalating to a war that involved over 6,500 causalities in six weeks (Al Jazeera 2022). The war developed shortly after the appointment of Nikol Pashinyan after the 2018 Velvet Revolution that caused then Prime Minister, Serzh Sargsyan, to resign due to large-scale protests. Both periods in modern Armenia history impacted members of the Armenian Diaspora, particularly those in L.A., by igniting a desire to be engaged in Armenian government and foreign policy.

First, the Velvet Revolution in 2018 served as an example of how social media can be a connecting force for the Diaspora to stay engaged in politics abroad and showcase virtual solidarity (Freedom House 2023). Several diasporans around the world took to social media to take part in digital activism, receive updates about conditions abroad in real time through live streaming, and participate in online debates regarding their political stance on Armenia's political restructuring.

Two years later, Armenia's war with Azerbaijan in 2020 led to more activist efforts globally as diasporans sought to bring awareness to conditions abroad in their host societies. This transnational social activism was specifically witnessed in Greater L.A. due to their large Armenian population. In October 2020, Armenian activists in the Diaspora engaged in grassroots protests. Protestors took to local L.A. streets to temporarily block traffic on the 101 Freeway (City News Service 2020). Members of the AYF Western Region took more extreme efforts by participating in a six-day hunger strike leading up to a march to the Azerbaijani Consulate in L.A. (Mkhlian 2020). Several social media campaigns began a call to boycott Turkish products

in local stores. Organizations such as the ANCA and AAA took to social media to encourage diasporans to call their members of Congress to take legislative action against Azerbaijan.

In addition to the transnational efforts of diasporans, the impact of the war led to thousands of causalities that triggered a traumatic collective memory tied to genocide and war, as I will discuss in further chapters. Therefore, this critical moment of social change in Armenia presents a timely opportunity to study how the Diaspora interacts with Armenia's development as well as crises and warfare that both agitate and strengthen one's identity.

Sources of Data

This study draws on three main sources of data including 1) in-depth interviews, 2) photographs, and 3) observations. I rely on these different elements of qualitative research to offer methodological triangulation to highlight my findings and identify major themes and patterns. Such an approach offers several benefits to my research.

First, by comparing the findings from three different data sources, I identify important themes through the consistencies in what is found in my data. At the same time, I consider any contradictory findings to showcase that while in some instances, such as interviews, participants express certain themes, there are different findings that arise from photographs and observations. Additionally, as Chen (2017) explains, "understanding an organization means observing it across its variety of levels and seeing how widely shared some perspectives are and how tensions among perspectives can create opportunities, as well as enormous challenges for organizations" (46). In line with this recommendation, I interviewed staff members and participants of Birthright Armenia and other organizations in Armenia and Greater L.A. It is important to locate contradictions to identify how my research participants see themselves and what their beliefs are and compare this with what they actually *do* in their daily lives which the observations and

photographs illustrate.

In-Depth Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with 55 Armenian-Americans. Each respondent was asked to complete a consent form prior to appearing for the interview. The consent form included language for the permission of audio-recording during the interview. These audio-recordings were first stored on my personal password protected phone and later transferred to my laptop and saved in a password protected folder. I later returned to these recordings to transcribe them during and after fieldwork. Each interview was approximately 1 to 1.5 hours long. Each interview involved one session per participant.

I relied on three semi-structured interview guides. First, I created an interview guide for individuals that were in Armenia on behalf of Birthright Armenia as volunteers or visiting for other reasons. This was used as my Armenia interview guide. The questions in this interview guide involved a chronological explanation for all past and current involvement in the Armenian community ranging from organizational participation, Armenian schooling or language tutoring, and Armenian sport groups, what inspired them to participate in Birthright, past travel to Armenia, what they believe the pressing challenges are to the Armenian community, how they were active, if at all, during the 2020 war, what their community looks like back home, how they define home and homeland, and what they hope for the future of the Diaspora.

Next, I created an interview guide to be used for interviewing organization leaders. In this interview guide, I asked leaders of organizations to discuss their roles, the organization's mission and goals, what type of membership they have, what they did during the 2020 war, and their goals for the future.

Lastly, I created an interview guide for my L.A. phase of research where I asked several

similar questions as my interview guide for Birthright Armenia and removed specific questions about living in Armenian and volunteering for Birthright.

These in-depth interviews were completed in three phases. 1) The first set of interviews (n= 21) were conducted virtually via Zoom during COVID-19 between January to June 2021; 2) the second set of interviews (n= 25) were conducted in-person in Yerevan from July to December 2021; 3) the third set of interviews (n= 9) were conducted in-person in L.A. from January to April 2022.

Sampling and Recruitment Strategy

Through following organizations' social media pages, I identified Armenians who were sharing or commenting on content and made note of the types of people that the organizations were highlighting on their pages to label them as leaders in the Armenian-American community. When seeing certain Armenians gain attention on a social media platform, I visited and reviewed their social media pages if they were public accounts and contacted the individuals whose pages consisted of a heavy focus on Armenian issues. This was identified by the individual having several posts about Armenian issues including photos at a protest, in Armenia, encouraging donations to Armenian organizations and charities, and/or sharing Armenia-related infographics. I relied heavily on this social media strategy to begin recruitment during the virtual phase of research during COVID-19.

The 55 research participants for this study were recruited through diaspora organizations, social media, and snowball sampling. During the virtual phase of interviews, an email was provided to diaspora organizations to assist with my recruitment. I provided language about my study and contact information to the ANCA and AAA to circulate to their interns and alumni to seek out interest in participation. I interviewed the Western Region Director of the AAA and

received responses from the ANCA's D.C. and Glendale offices including names of their current and previous interns who wished to participate.

I utilized several social media pages to find "active" Armenians, or those who were commonly posting publicly available content about Armenian issues. Once these individuals were identified through social media, I sent them a direct message with my recruitment language. Lastly, when completing in-person fieldwork, I attended events and frequented social spaces in Yerevan and L.A. to meet potential participants. Through these interactions, I recruited interested individuals for an interview session. Upon completion of each interview, I asked each participant if they knew of anyone else who would be interested in participating. Several respondents provided me with names and contact information for their peers who were candidates for interviews, resulting in snowball sampling.

The criteria for recruitment involved Armenian-Americans that were of various immigrant generation status. This variety in immigrant status was important for comparing the experiences between first-generation immigrants and those who were a later generation. Additionally, my goal for this study was to identify the current thought leaders and potential future influencers of the larger Armenian-American community. Therefore, I was primarily interested in a modern generation which is highlighted in my age range of 20 to 58 (see Appendix, table A.11 and fig. A.11), with most participants clustered in the age cohorts of 22 to 25 years old and 26 to 29 years old.

Additionally, my criteria involved a geographic goal in understanding the experiences of Armenian-Americans in highly populated Armenian spaces where participation in activism and political involvement was possible due to the density of Armenian organizations in one area. Therefore, I recruited several respondents from the Armenian ethnic enclave of L.A. – Glendale.

I also recruited several respondents from the D.C. area including nearby areas of Maryland and Virginia (DMV). My goal with this geographic population was to better understand and compare the experiences of Armenian activism in an area with Armenian organizations and exposure to political powers. Lastly, I recruited individuals who were Armenian-Americans temporarily living in Yerevan, Armenia. Many of the interviews completed in Yerevan were with Birthright Armenia participants, with a few individuals who were volunteers for other organizations and had connections to Birthright participants.

The research participants were not offered any incentives for their participation in this study. For this reason, it was critical to build a rapport with participants and the community, as well as a knowledge of the activism that is done through my own social media engagement. By following certain social media accounts, I developed an understanding of the trends and important items for discussion for Armenian activists in the Diaspora. This context also assisted me during the interview stage when participants referenced events or controversial debates that occurred within the community in online spaces. Additionally, my positionality as an Armenian-American may have eased the concerns of some of my research participants (see Baca Zinn 1979). As a member of the greater community, I had some connections to the individuals I requested to interview. For instance, when recruiting on social media, some of the participants I requested to follow may have seen that someone they knew was following me. In the case that we had no mutual connections on social media, the participant could also see my last name indicating I am Armenian. Additionally, being a participant of Birthright Armenia greatly helped with building rapport with participants and allowed for me to introduce myself and create social trust by attending excursions, forums, and social gathering with other volunteers.

As a participant observant, I also was able to diminish a Hawthorne effect (Berg 2017) as

participants knew that some topics were understood by me without explanation due to our participation in the same organization. During my time in Armenia, I held the roles of a Fulbrighter and Birthrighter simultaneously for three of my six months of fieldwork. If only in Armenia on behalf of my Fulbright award, the recruitment process would have been more difficult as I would not have an existing community to recruit individuals from or a knowledge of the events and establishments they attend in Yerevan.

Organizations

Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) (L.A. and Washington, D.C.)

I contacted the ANCA for assistance with recruitment. The ANCA was originally known as the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA) and was founded by Armenian-American diasporan, Vahan Cardashian. Cardashian's initial mission was to gain U.S. support for Armenia's independence. In 1941, the organization became known as ANCA and currently serves as "the largest and most influential Armenian-American grassroots political organization" (Armenian National Committee of America). The organization's mission is to "educate, motivate, and activate." The ANCA headquarters are in D.C. in addition to a Western Region office in Glendale and an Eastern Region office in Watertown.

The ANCA lobbies members of Congress on a diverse set of issues that affect Armenia and Armenian-Americans. The organization consists of staff members who work on drafting legislation that they hope members of Congress will cosponsor and support. As a result, the ANCA works closely with the Congressional Armenian Caucus which consists of 117 bipartisan members. The ANCA's website also features report cards on Congressional members to help Armenian diasporans know their representatives' stances on Armenian issues. This can be useful for Armenian diasporans who may choose to vote more on this single-issue matter rather than

partisanship. During the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the ANCA along with the AAA initiated a grassroots political campaign approach largely through social media to circulate templated letters and call alerts for community members to contact their members of Congress to urge U.S. sanctions on Turkey and Azerbaijan (fig 3.1). The ANCA worked on legislation to bring these matters to Congress through House Resolutions including H. Res1165, intended to stop U.S. military and security aid to Azerbaijan.

Figure 3.1. ANCA Political Action Campaign Message. *Source:* Armenian National Committee of America.

In addition to ANCA's domestic and foreign policy goals, the organization offers opportunities to encourage the next generation of Armenians to become involved in U.S. politics. The ANCA offers political internships for college students or recent graduates including the ANCA Leo Sarkissian Internship which began in 1968 and houses interns during the summer months in D.C. This internship allows for Armenians to network with each other and gain experience on Capitol Hill. The ANCA also offers the Capitol Gateway Fellowship that assists

young professionals with gaining employment in D.C. area. The regional offices also offer political internships.

Birthright Armenia (Yerevan)

I also interviewed volunteers and staff of Birthright Armenia, translated to "Depi Hayk" in Armenian. Birthright Armenia was founded in 2003 by Edele Hovnanian, an Armenian-American. Hovnanian is currently the president of the H. Hovanian Family Foundation, an organization started by her parents Hirair and Anna Hovnanian who met in the U.S. – Hirair emigrated from Baghdad, Iraq and Anna was born in Queens, New York. The Foundations funds several NGOs including Birthright. The Birthright organization includes two office locations in Yerevan, Armenia and Tinton Falls, New Jersey. Most Birthright staff members work in the Yerevan office and are locals from Armenia. The Yerevan staff participate in program tasks including recruitment, reviewing applications from volunteers, coordinating a placement organization and a host family for volunteers, planning and attending excursion trips, planning and participating in forums, coordinating Armenian language courses, and social media marketing.

Birthright's mission is "to strengthen ties between the homeland and Diasporan youth, by affording them an opportunity to be a part of Armenia's daily life and to contribute to Armenia's development through work, study and volunteer experiences, while developing life-long personal ties and a renewed sense of Armenian identity" (Birthright Armenia). To do so, Birthright offers volunteer and internship opportunities for diasporans interested in traveling to Armenia. Since the first set of 32 volunteers arrived in Yerevan in 2004, Birthright has grown in numbers. As of 2023, Birthright has over 2,000 alumni from 56 countries and has worked with 1,372 volunteering sites placing volunteers with local organizations.

The requirements to participate in the Birthright program involve 1) Armenian heritage (at least one grandparent must be fully Armenian, 2) between the ages of 21 and 32 years and must have graduated from high school, 3) born outside of Armenia, or if born in Armenia, prove by official documentation that they left Armenia before the age of 12, and 4) Applicants who have primarily resided in Armenia for longer than the last 3 years are not eligible.

Participants are reimbursed for 100% of their airfare to Armenia if they complete 14 or more weeks of volunteer service and 50% reimbursement if they complete 9-14 weeks of volunteer service. The minimum volunteer service length for all applicants is 9 weeks and the maximum length is one year. For volunteers who cannot commit to a longer period of volunteering, an alternative option exists in "Birthright Lite" which is designed for working professionals or students that can only volunteer for 4-9 weeks in the country.

Participants are provided with housing arrangements with a host family. Those who do not wish to live with a host family organize their own housing arrangements. Unlike Birthright Israel, the participants in Birthright Armenia do not live together during their stay although some participants who choose to arrive together organize being roommates or eventually find housing together after forming bonds. Unlike other programs such as Birthright Israel and In Search of Roots Program, Birthright Armenia involves a longer period of immersion in the country and requires volunteering. The Birthright Armenia structure is intended for participants to have a living experience similar to a local in Armenia rather than a tourist.

Applicants must complete an application that includes an essay, letters of recommendation, and a discussion on potential organizations they would like to be placed with upon arrival. Applicants also must complete a virtual interview process. After applicants are selected, they are placed with an organization to gain experience related to their stated interests.

The type of organizations where volunteers can be placed vary from local clinics and hospitals for volunteers interested in medical school, the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, the Human Rights Defenders Office, and Path of Law, a human rights NGO for those interested in policy and law school, the Caucus Research Resource Center for those interested in political and social research, the Golden Apricot Film Festival for those interested in film, several startups for engineers and product managers, tourist initiatives and organizations such as One Armenia for those interested in marketing, and others based on individuals interests. Job placements are offered in the capital city of Yerevan and in Gyumri, the second largest city in Armenia.

For volunteers that choose to stay with a host-family, Birthright arranges this set up with local families while providing the families with a stipend. Outside of Yerevan, homestay living is mandatory. Upon arrival, Birthright arranges a volunteer or staff member to meet the new volunteer at the airport. Birthright also arranges excursions to explore Armenia as well as four hours of Armenian language classes per week. I entered the Birthright experience as an overt participant observant who was also volunteering. I began making connections and recruiting individuals from L.A. who came to Armenia to volunteer.

Photography

I relied on a third source of data involving personal and respondent submitted photographs. While in-depth interviews and fieldnotes from observations offer rich insight, viewing and comparing the visuals provided by my participants brought more clarity to the interviews and my analysis of observations. The use of both photographs and interviews "allows us to see that everyday interactions involve self-concept and identity" (Kaplan 2013: 23). Several social theories and scholarship on the Armenian community often discuss what Kaplan notes,

"how the world *is"* rather than focusing on how the members of the community actually *"see* it" (2013). My study presents an image of the evolving Armenian Diaspora. The use of a visual methodological approach strengthens the findings in the interviews and provides an updated perspective from the lens of the younger generation in the community. Additionally, relying on photographs submitted by respondents themselves, rather than only photographs I captured, offered a shift in the research hierarchy that brought power to my respondents to tell their own stories.

Becker (1974) highlighted a need for sociological theories to strengthen photography to illustrate that everyday observations are more complicated than we think. Thus, sociology acts as a tool to make sense of photographs and deeply interrogate social conditions. As a participant observer in the field, I used photographs as a route for my research journey. As I began observing themes in the field, I captured photographs that built on one another. During my own photography process, I relied on Becker's suggestions of not merely capturing photographs in the field to resemble "vacation photos" of an "unsophisticated photographer" that produce "a lot of isolated images" but instead act as "a sophisticated one" that goes after "sequences of action" (Becker 1974: 12).

My roles as both a participant observant and a researcher resulted in themes of photographs that at times were different from my research respondents as a result of actively taking images with the goal to strengthen my study. This is an important distinction to make when recognizing that even as a participant observer, my identity as a researcher drives my motivations for actions when taking photographs that are more theoretically rooted than my participants' images may be. While my interest in taking the photographs was to understand the field better, my respondents on the other hand submitted photos to help me understand them.

Qualitative sociologists have integrated the use of photograph into their ethnographic studies, particularly to research immigrant communities. As Gold (2004) notes, qualitative research benefits from the use of photography as it requires a closer connection between the researcher and the respondent and in turn, lessens the social distance between the two. Relying on photography as part of an ethnography study requires that researchers place themselves in social situations that will produce moments to capture. As a result, the researcher must attend social gatherings such as holiday celebrations, political protests and marches, or classroom settings to integrate into the research community. Due to the relationship-building and rapport that occurs by capturing images, it presents more context to the experiences of respondents than solely relying on interviews as the primary source for data analysis. As Gold (2004) explains, "the act of taking photographs encouraged me to approach, observe, and think about the social world in a much more focused and empirically based manner than would have been the case had I had not used photography" (1569).

Photovoice

Photovoice was originally a feminist participatory action research (PAR) methodology (Wang 1999) to interrogate the relationship between place and identity (see also McIntyre 2003). Photovoice research involves three goals, 1) to record and reflect one's community's strengths and concerns, 2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs, and 3) to reach policy makers (Wang 1999: 185). Photovoice asks participants to play an active role in research so "those with the camera in the study take on the role of participant observer" (Kaplan 2013: 19). Therefore, the comments that participants have about their photographs enhances my understanding of the findings in my other sources of data (see Warren 2015).

My second data source includes photographs captured by my research participants and myself as an overt observer. I utilize the photovoice approach and draw on personal photos submitted by 24 of the 55 research participants that were provided after their interview. The respondents were asked to submit three to five photos and to include personal captions responding to two questions: 1) *What does being Armenian mean to you?* and 2) *What does your local Armenian community look like?* The 24 respondents provided a collective total of 95 photos.

Research participants were introduced to this photo project and asked if they would like to participate in this second phase of the research at the end of each in-depth interview. During the introduction of the photo project, the respondents were made aware of the two questions to think about when submitting their photos and were emailed these questions at the end of the interview and during follow-ups. The research participants from the virtual phase were contacted approximately one month after an interview and requested to submit their photos. The research participants in Yerevan informed me of their last week in Armenia during our in-depth interview and I scheduled a follow-up for photos accordingly to receive a variety of photos from their experience. Lastly, the research participants in L.A. were followed up in approximately one month but due to my experience of a lack of photo responses from the first two sets of photos, I did not move forward with several follow ups as I did for the initial two sets of respondents. Several respondents did not respond to follow-ups and therefore, this analysis consists of photos associated with 24 of the 55 respondents who provided photos.

Some of the 95 photos were not used during data analysis as they did not follow the guidelines initially established. The omitted photos included 1) photos that included identifiable individuals who did not consent to this study and/or 2) photos of a time prior to when the

respondent signed a consent form to participate in this research study. Some of the participants completed an additional question on the consent form if they wished to reveal their identity wished and these participants chose to submit photos that 1) identified them and/or 2) approved the researcher using a photo of the respondent that was not captured by the participant but by another individual during fieldwork. Some photo submissions did not include thorough captions making it difficult to assign valid meaning and understand the context of the photo and therefore, did not fit the criteria for this project which relied on a reflection from the participant rather than the researcher.

Participants were asked to submit photos through their own tools including photos uploaded from their phones or cameras. Due to the ease in capturing photos on one's personal phone, respondents chose this option. Allowing respondents to use their phones rather than send photos from a camera helped make this phase of research more personal for respondents as they frequently used their phones. This process also alleviated any complications that may have developed due to a lack of experience with operating a professional camera or lack of access to a camera shop to develop film. The goal of this phase was not to strengthen respondents' photography skills. Instead, the goal of the photovoice phase was to encourage respondents to think about their ethnic identity from their own lens.

Personal Photographs from Fieldwork and Participant Observation

In addition to photovoice, I relied on my personal photos captured in Yerevan and L.A. These photos were accumulated during nine months of fieldwork and captured primarily on my personal phone as well as on a film camera. The photographs included aspects of my field that I researched beforehand and was specifically entering my field to seek out, such as museums I read about, relevant institutions such as churches, schools, or community centers, events that

were planned and showcased transnationalism, and specific areas that speak to literature and theories including those with street art or relevant neighborhoods. Additionally, during my in-depth interviews, participants suggested areas of the field for me to explore. After making note of their suggestions, I traveled to these spaces.

Scholars have previously noted that photographing immigrant communities allows researchers to establish strong relationships with community members that leads to a more honest understanding of what is going on around them and in turn, an opportunity to dispute commonly held ideas and assumptions, and contribute to literature changes (see Gold 2004). I captured photographs almost daily during moments that were not planned but rather more natural during my life as someone living in Yerevan and L.A. and observing my surroundings. After seeing something that was interesting, I captured it and later reflected on its possible use for this research study. This involved moments during my daily walks, riding public transportation, driving on major streets, attending events, at restaurants and bars, going grocery shopping, or during excursions.

Observations

Lastly, this study involved nine months of observations. As a participant-observer, I gathered field notes of thick ethnographic description to describe the environment in which my participants perform as social actors (see Geertz 2005). Observations allowed me to apply a feminist, queer lens to my research methodology. Several feminist call for researchers to situate the experiences of people and their social contexts into the data collection and analysis stages of a research project (see Martin 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Particularly, feminist and queer works that focus on "doing" individual actions (West and Zimmerman 1987; Butler 1990; West and Fenstermaker 1995) require a research methodology that allows for one to observe

such actions through participant-observation. Particularly, a queer approach aligns with diaspora studies as it focuses on the fluidity in identity and gives power to individuals to have the agency to perform differently in various settings as well as to have connections to more than one place (see Gopinath 1998; Fortier 2002; Anzaldúa 2009; Klapeer and Laskar 2018).

This study expands on feminist research approaches by globalizing the local. To do so, I rely on a transnational feminist approach to highlight that individuals are not passive to the structure that surrounds them but in fact, compose of the structure (see Freeman 2001). By adding empirical evidence from a global perspective, a transnationalism feminist approach presents an opportunity for "theory to catch up with lived realities" (Ong 1991: 279). This structure allows for the current gap in Armenian ethnographic work to be filled with new perspectives from the modern generation.

Additionally, by completing observations as a participant of Birthright Armenia and living in L.A., I rely on a global perspective to better understand the role of the city and the diversity that exists within solidarity organizations and communities. Having an expansive understanding of diaspora focusing on the sending and receiving state supports my ability to critically engage in scholarly concerns that solidarity and coalition efforts inadvertently cause harm to some members (see Mohanty 2003). Centering this reality in my research allows me to ask questions that unpack membership within diaspora organizations.

Fieldwork Phase 1

From July to October 2021, I acted as a participant observant while volunteering with Birthright Armenia. This volunteer assignment involved following all of the requirements to be a Birthrighters such as attending orientation, 30 hours per week of volunteering with two local Armenian organizations based on my education and interests, the Caucasus Research Resource

Center (CRRC) and the American University of Armenia (AUA), attending nine excursion trips outside of Yerevan to historical sites and villages on weekends, attending forums and meetings ("havaks"), and participating in various social gatherings with participants that were not formal Birthright functions at local bars, restaurants, and museums in Yerevan as well as tourist sites outside of Yerevan. During this observation period, I captured photographs and wrote several fieldnotes reflecting on important interactions.

From October to December 2021, I continued involvement in Yerevan as an observant living in the city. I maintained connections with local faculty and students at the American University of Armenia and Yerevan State University. I continued interviews and capturing photographs during this time.

Fieldwork Phase 2

Lastly, from January to April 2022, I traveled to Greater L.A. to complete fieldwork on the Armenian community in the area, specifically in the City of Glendale and Hollywood's "Little Armenia." This stage of observations involved traveling to Armenian establishments including grocery stores, restaurants, and community centers and writing fieldnotes about my observations. The observations during this phase helped me track the movement of the Armenian community in Southern California from East Hollywood to Glendale and the Valley. I relied on my in-depth interviews and research participants to guide me to specific areas where Armenians are found. I also visited the University of Southern California (USC) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) with participants who were alumni to visit their Armenian Studies departments and meet with Armenian-American scholars.

Data Analysis

After conducting my in-depth interviews, I returned to the audio-recordings to transcribe each interview by hand. The transcribing process involved two to three hours of transcription per interview. During the transcription phase, I assigned respondents with pseudonyms. Some of the respondents, due to their well-known positions in government or leadership role in an organization, permitted the release of their identity. Additionally, some respondents wished to submit photos that identified them and signed an additional question of consent. Therefore, ten of the 55 respondents were not assigned pseudonyms.

The analysis for this project involved the coding of transcripts using NVIVO software to identify thematic quotes and group respondents into various categories for analysis. Using NVIVO, I assigned my respondents with 15 attributes and organized their groupings into a classification sheet. I later transferred this classification sheet to Microsoft Excel to organize and identify the characteristics of each respondent through frequency distribution graphs and charts. These 15 attributes act as my demographic variables for analysis.

Demographic Variables

The demographic variables include an 1) interval variable of age ranging from 20 to 58 years old; 2) an ordinal variable of age including age groups of less than or equal to 21 years old, 22-25 years old, 26-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old, and greater than or equal to 50 years old; 3) a nominal variable of gender identity including cis-gender female, cis-gender male, and transgender/ nonbinary; 4) a nominal variable of sexual orientation including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer; 5) an ordinal variable of generation living in the U.S. including first, second, third, fourth, fifth generation and local (living in Armenia); 6) a nominal variable of racial and ethnic background including white, not white, Armenian-American,

Armenian, and Other; 7) a dichotomous nominal variable for knowing the Armenian language including binary yes and no responses; 8) a dichotomous nominal variable of whether the respondent was a Birthright participant including yes or no responses; 9) a nominal variable for country of birth including U.S., Armenia, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, and Kuwait; 10) a nominal variable for current location at time of interview including Los Angeles, Yerevan, DMV (Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia), San Francisco/Bay Area, Orange County, Austin, Minneapolis, and Boston; 11) a nominal variable type of city of residence including Los Angeles, Yerevan, DMV, Boston, Orange County, San Francisco/Bay Area, Minneapolis, Austin; 12) an ordinal variable for education including in undergraduate studies, bachelor's degree, in graduate studies, and post graduate degree; 13) a nominal variable type for employment including employed/out of school, employment/in school, not employed/in school, and not employed/not in school; 14) a nominal variable of if one has visited Armenia before including yes/first time with Birthright, yes/reason other than Birthright, never, or Birthright staff; and lastly, 15) an ordinal variable for level of participation measured on a scale of strongly involved, occasional involvement, was involved at some point but not anymore, never involved, or not applicable.

Out of the 55 respondents I interviewed, 24 respondents submitted a total of 95 photos. I pulled the two major themes that my photo analysis prompted me to focus on and relate to the interviews. These themes were most common and related to interviews and literature. The first theme involved food with 25 references to food as it relates to culture and Armenianness, being in Armenia, or feeling Armenian in the Diaspora. The second theme was physical space/landscape with 20 references to physical space in Yerevan and L.A. including mountains, streets, buildings, churches, community centers and halls. While these two themes represent

common submissions, they are not intended to portray one single story of the Armenian Diaspora experience.

Coding Themes

After organizing my respondents into demographic categories, I analyzed the interview data and coded significant quotes. The coding phase involved an abductive analysis involving a back-and-forth process of inductive and deductive research driven by my field data and theory (see Tavory and Timmermans 2014; see also Stuart 2017). Several codes developed from an understanding of the literature and my research questions including organizational involvement, location of residence, assimilation, genocide, and war. Other codes developed during transcription or the interview analysis as I noticed patterns within my respondents and major themes developing including racial identification, parental influence, generational trauma, existential threat, and language expectations. Much of the inductive coding process was a result of field notes during the interview and fieldwork stage when I recognized a repeating theme that was not already identified in some of my literature review. Therefore, when beginning to analyze my interviews, I utilized NVIVO's text search to find cases of when my respondents discussed certain concepts. Additionally, I used the word frequency search function to visually think about my interview data and identify the most commonly used words in my interview. I also utilized the matrix coding query to generate tables for comparison. Lastly, the hierarchy chart was beneficial in understanding which codes were commonly found in my data.

Within each of these major codes, or parent codes, were narrower codes, or sub/child codes. To provide one example of my coding process, I include a parent code of organizational involvement. Within this code are two child codes that include negative influence and positive influence. Participation was influenced by parents causing increased participation or discouraged

or nonexistent through parents causing less participation. Next, I created sub codes within each child code. For negative influence, I included sub codes of assimilation, negative memories and experiences, class status/finances, did not discuss, discouraging participation, lack of belonging, and parents never traveled to Armenia. For positive influence, I included sub codes of church, country interaction, exposure to other Armenians, family business and involvement, household family interactions, and organizational participation. At times, codes intersected with one another as evident by the sub code of organizational participation in parent influence which aligns with the parent code of organizational involvement. This was a common occurrence with my codes and allowed for me to make connections and identify patterns within the interview data.

The interview data produced a total of seven major codes I discuss in this dissertation including gender, language, location, organizational involvement, parental influence, racial identification, and war. The following chapters unpack the major findings from these codes.

CHAPTER 4: YEREVAN: TRAVEL TO THE HOMELAND

"To stop being a country that we love and care for from afar": Arriving in Armenia

My first day as a Birthright volunteer arrived a few days after landing in Yerevan in July 2021. All new volunteers attend a required orientation led by Birthright's Country Director, Sevan Kabakian. I found a map online for the metro lines that I relied on to ensure I did not get lost on my first day. I quickly understood, however, that the map was unnecessary as I rode the metro more frequently. Unlike metros I was familiar with riding in American cities such as D.C., New York City, and Chicago which all had multiple intricate lines, the Yerevan Metro is only one direct route. From Garegin Nzhdeh, I took off on the train and observed local Armenian culture.

When the train arrived at the sixth stop, Republic Square (*Hraparak*, meaning the square), I walked a few blocks to the Birthright office. After I found where I was supposed to be, I entered the air-conditioned building with relief after even a few minutes outside in Yerevan's summer and passed through the security in the lobby with a nod and a *Barev dzez* (hello). Walking up the spiraling stairs to the second floor, I saw the Birthright sign on the office's door. I rang the doorbell outside of the room and was greeted by a staffer who led me to wait on the couches where I later would run into peers sitting waiting for forums, to meet with a staffer, eating, or playing acoustic guitar (fig. 4.1). Directly in front of me was a coffee table with pamphlets including a book of goodbye notes from alumni that wrote about their time in Birthright. I skimmed through the book reading diasporans from all over the world reflect about how Birthright impacted them.

Figure 4.1. Birthright Armenia office, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

I am the first one there out of my orientation group. Eventually, the group arrived one by one. There were four of us. One female volunteer from Belgium and two male volunteers from California, one from the Bay Area and the other from Glendale. The males from California presented two different images of being Armenian. Samvel, 22, was in many ways a traditional Armenian from Glendale – he wore designer brand t-shirts, with a fade haircut, chic glasses, and white Nike Air Force Ones. The moment he began telling the group more about himself, I identified the "Glendale accent." He explained that he recently graduated from UCLA and visited Armenia before this time. I noticed his excitement to be in Armenia and have fun with

peers. Mike, 26, was quite the opposite from a Glendale stereotype. He did not "look Armenian" in the traditional way – he did not have the typical distinct brown hair, eyes, or eyebrows, and was dressed casually in a t-shirt, jeans, and low top Vans. He arrived at the office with luggage to take with him to Gyumri. In addition to Yerevan, Birthright offers host family stay options approximately four hours away from the capital in Gyumri. Samvel and Mike had different stories about their arrival in Yerevan. Samvel followed a more common trajectory. Since he recently graduated, he decided to volunteer with Birthright before starting medical school, he told the group. Samvel's best friend, also a UCLA alum, was doing Birthright at the same time. Mike had been working a job he did not enjoy and decided to quit and be the first person in his family to visit Armenia since his great grandparents fled the Genocide and migrated to Fresno, California.

After we all settled in the conference room in front of a projector screen, Sevan began the orientation with a presentation on Armenian history. We heard about the aftermath of the 1915 Genocide, the fall of the Soviet Union, the Baku-Sumgait Pogroms, and the 1988 Spitak earthquake. These tragedies created a somber mood in the room as Sevan described the history of Armenians in the region. Each slide highlighted our purpose for being in Armenia as volunteers. Sevan's mission in the orientation was to let us know that our time in the country was only the beginning of our commitment to Armenia. In my interview with Sevan, he reiterated this rhetoric.

IM: *What are your goals for this organization?*

SEVAN: *It's basically to make Armenia a real place for people who don't live here, real place means place where people want to engage with, connect some aspect of their life with, for Armenia to stop being a pure tourism*

destination, to stop being a country that we love and care for from afar but with no practical implications to it, for Armenia to become a real option for people to engage with.

It's basically a gateway to Armenia and that's why one of the major focus points of Birthright is it's not just about the 3, 6 or 10 months of volunteering, that's the beginning of going through the gate, but once you've done that, what next?

It's all about real practical engagement with Armenia and not just loving it from afar, which unfortunately is not very useful.

This trip was my first time in Armenia. Yet, for most of my research participants, including those in Birthright, their first visit to Armenia was prior to their Birthright assignment. Out of the 55 respondents in this study, 78% (n=43) first traveled to Armenia for a reason other than Birthright, while 11% (n=6) arrived in Armenia for the first time to volunteer with Birthright, and the remaining 11% (n=6) had never been to Armenia.

In July 2021, Armenia was recovering from the aftermath of the 44-day war that occurred in September 2020. Additionally, COVID-19 deterred some individuals from doing their Birthright experience in 2020. As a result, the following year, with vaccinations available, became a better alternative. Lucine is 23-year-old from La Cañada, CA and graduate of USC. Lucine and I were completing our Birthright experience together and often exchanged conversations during excursions where we typically interacted with other volunteers. Lucine first heard about Birthright from her older sister, Patil, who moved to work in Armenia the year before. Lucine explained her motivation for doing Birthright in 2021,

LUCINE: *The reason I chose to come to Birthright was probably driven by the war,*

and it felt natural after working at my job for two years, and I felt really stuck and stagnant after COVID. I wanted to be somewhere completely different and meet new people and be somewhere very far away from LA and that's why Birthright seemed like the perfect opportunity.

Another group of respondents came to Armenia in 2021 for reasons other than Birthright. The end of the war and what seemed to be the end of COVID restrictions was an opportunity for them to feel more comfortable visiting. Nareh is a 21-year-old undergraduate at Emerson College from Glendale, CA. I first met Nareh in July when several Birthright volunteers organized a meet-up before participating in the traditional Armenian festival of Vartavar. For this festival, it is common for Armenians to splash water on each other throughout the streets of Yerevan. When arriving at our meeting spot, often with some of us holding water guns ready to participate in this event at Republic Square, I introduced myself to Nareh, whom I did not recognize from Birthright excursions. She was not a Birthright participant but spending her summer in Yerevan with friends who were in Birthright in Yerevan. After our interaction, I was interested in speaking to her about what brought her to Armenia, while she was still completing her undergraduate degree. Nareh felt the end of these two events encouraged her to visit along with the encouragement from a friend,

NAREH: *Originally, I was supposed to come last summer then COVID happened, then the war happened. I planned to come so many times and my best friend from home said she's coming back this summer, and she said are you coming with me or not?*

Like Samvel, who had his best friend doing Birthright at the same time as him, Nareh's best friend was also in Armenia with her. Additionally, Lucine's sister was living in Armenia while

she was completing her Birthright. This was a common finding among the participants from the Greater L.A. area. Not only did Birthrighters from L.A. hear about Birthright from their friends and family, but some even traveled together and experienced Armenia together as roommates.

"Screw your help! If you want to help, come here!": Transnational Social Fields and Limitations in Virtual Connections

Ethnic enclaves create such social fields that Samvel, Nareh, and Lucine are all connected to, and are both global and local. For Armenians in L.A. and the surrounding neighborhoods, social networks are strong. As scholars have shown (see Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003), the larger the social networks, the more transnational a community can be. For diasporans across the world, the 44-day war in 2020 created distress, especially for those in the L.A. area. In line with the fact that several respondents had already been to Armenia before and had friends who were visiting with them, these individuals have established ties and connections to the homeland through travel and family. Much of the information of the war can be received not only from the new outlets and social media, but also through individuals that act as nodes where "information, resources, and identifies flow" (Levitt 2004: 1009) and reach those abroad. As a result, "the fact that they are part of the same transnational social field keeps them informed and connected so that they can act if events motivate them to do so" (Levitt 2004: 1009). This was apparent in Glendale.

Vahan, a 23-year-old from Northridge, was in Armenia on behalf of the AYF summer internship. Prior to the summer, he already visited Armenia before with his family when he was a teenager, and later with the AYF Youth Corps. As a result, he noted he was able to receive information about the war from more direct sources,

IM: *How did you stay involved in the recent war in Artsakh?*

VAHAN: *I am very much not involved with social media, what I did hear about the*

war was from my friends who lived here who I became friends with through Youth Corps.

Vahe, a 33-year-old was born in Tehran, Iran and lived there until he was seven, when his family emigrated to Glendale, CA. After graduating from Stanford University, Vahe moved to D.C. where he has been living for the past 10 years. In the summer of 2010, Vahe completed his Birthright volunteer assignment. During the 44-day war, his social networks to Armenia, some of whom he met during his Birthright experience, kept him informed,

VAHE: *I'm not active on Facebook but one of the main reasons I keep it is because so many of my Armenian friends or relatives in Armenia or Iran are on it so it's my one link to them. I use Telegram to follow news updates, it sort of became big in Armenia during the Velvet Revolution when people were using it for live updates so it's been very useful. During the war as well, I was on it all the time.*

As a result of seeing and hearing information about conditions abroad, while diasporans were in L.A. or D.C., the crisis ignited a desire to do more. Mihran Toumajan, who works for the AAA as their Western Region Director in Glendale, CA, further explained,

MIHRAN: *Emotionally we were all wrecks and spiritually, but at the same time, there were people calling how can we help, what we can do? Are you matching funds? How can we maximize funds to our brothers and sisters?*

Some respondents equated this reaction to a fire inside of them. References when discussing the war involved "fire" or "ignite." Anthony, a 25-year-old who currently lives in L.A. and from the Bay Area founded Miaseen, Inc. in 2020. Miaseen is an entertainment studio company combining production and event planning. Anthony explains the war not only inspired him to

create Miaseen, which translates to *together*, but for the rest of the Diaspora to become more in touch with their "Armenianness" (see Bakalian 1993).

ANTHONY: *I think the combination of pandemic and Artsakh war really did ignite a lot of Armenian identity because so many people became so introspective, and the war was an attack on our existential identity, there's been a resurgence, the Artsakh war will be the best thing to ever happen to the Armenian people because of what it did to our young generation.*

Julia, 28, was born in Beirut, Lebanon and moved to Glendale when she was 11 years old. She currently lives in North Hollywood and works for the ANCA doing community outreach. She also highlighted Anthony's assertation that the war changed people's perspective on what their role is in the diaspora,

JULIA: *For the past couple of decades, Armenians haven't put themselves…to impact their community and homeland, they changed within the last year, where they saw they can make a big impact, that empowerment is important for the community as a whole, I hope that fire never dies out, even if we are far away, make sure we are doing everything we can.*

For Vahan, this fire is attached to his long-term identity of being Armenian even before this war due to the Armenian history.

IM: *What does homeland mean to you?*

VAHAN: *Homeland means somewhere that you are always welcome, you always have a seat at the table, however, your homeland is constantly under threat, even though you feel so comfortable at home, you understand that there is crisis, which is unsettling, that unsettling feeling has historically*

been fought with our culture, our song, our dance, our will of fire to keep going, eternal struggle.

When reflecting on these statements, Sevan's call for action remains powerful. How are these transnational emotional reactions and acts of solidarity abroad, through social media, protests, and donations received in the homeland and do they impact it? For Sevan in Armenia, there is a need for more practical engagement than emotional. This rhetoric was voiced by several respondents and locals alike. During my interactions with local Armenians in the field as a Birthright volunteer at a placement organization, with local peers, or in taxi rides, I heard a similar frustration poignantly targeted at the Diaspora, and specifically, those in L.A.

It is common for taxi drivers in Armenia to initiate conversation, particularly with diasporans who surprise the driver about their presence in Armenia. For many locals, it is perplexing why anyone from the U.S. would return to Armenia. One conversation stood out to me during my time in Yerevan. Similar to ride share applications in the U.S. such as Uber and Lyft, Armenia's transportation service, GG Taxi, was one I relied on often. After I ordered a GG ride, I received a call letting me know the driver was there. Without saying much other than the fact that I am coming to the car over the phone when he told me he was here, the driver suspected I was not a local and asked me where I was from. I answered, *Amerikayits* (America). As he was asking more questions, I told him I am a getting my Ph.D. in Sociology and in Yerevan to conduct research. He asked what my sociological perspective was on Armenia's politics.

TAXI DRIVER: *Inna jan, as a sociologist, what do you think?*

I still did not feel equipped to answer this question four months into living in Armenia. He then proceeded to tell him his own concerns, particularly about the Diaspora.

TAXI DRIVER: *I know a guy who is on Facebook and has a photo with a Lamborghini and huge tattoos, he's in Los Angeles, he said "I want to help you during the war." He wanted to send money. I said, "Screw your help! If you want to help, come here, come serve, I don't need your help." When I sent him a list of all the women who lost their husbands, he disappeared.*

After discussing his frustration with the Diaspora, I asked him if he has ever visited the U.S. and he said while he had opportunities, he never has. He explained that he likes his motherland, "*moya rodina"* (in Russian). As we continued driving to my destination, he pointed at everything we passed and said,

TAXI DRIVER: *I like this street. I like that pole. I like these trees.*

This concept of physical place is similar to how respondents reflect about Khor Virap, Ararat, Lake Sevan, and other sites they have seen, but the conversation with a local reveals some difference between the Diaspora and Armenia. Not only do the historic, ancient memories of the past matter, but today's Armenia is as important for connection and identity. What does it mean to really understand the way Armenia *lives* on today through its streets and nature as the taxi driver understands so closely?

"To grieve your ancestral land that you never even got to step foot on": War, Loss, and Collective Memory

Loss is a common experience for Armenians in the Diaspora and homeland. Due to ongoing war tensions and a history of genocide, Armenians live in fear of their existence. However, for diasporans, it is possible to have a degree to separation from the reality of war while living in the U.S. For participants of Birthright and others who visit Armenia, war is felt directly through conversations with locals including Birthright staff members, political news

outlets, protests on the streets, walking in grocery stores seeing veterans with prosthetics, and memorials nearby. While war may create a fear in coming to Armenia, as some of my participants parents felt, I found from several Birthrighters that they were more encouraged to complete a Birthright assignment. In fact, by living in the Diaspora and having that separation, several respondents felt hopeless from afar and wanted to do more to help Armenia. Birthright was an opportunity to do just that as it filled the void they had of not doing enough while in their diaspora city.

The 44-day war in 2020 triggered a response among many Armenians who were already coping with generational trauma after the 1915 Armenian Genocide and wars in diaspora countries such as Iran, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Lebanon. The 44-day war presented a heightened fear of what many respondents called an existential threat to Armenian survival. At the same time, due to the war being during COVID-19 and the need to relay updates to Armenian family and friends living outside of the nation, social media was heavily utilized which led to significant problems among diasporans receiving inaccurate information.

Arthur is a 26-year-old who was born in Yerevan, raised in Glendale. Through snowball sampling, I was given Arthur's contact information from another respondent who knew him from L.A. At the time of our interview, Arthur left L.A. and was living in Boston where he was completing his medical residency. He reflected on the war.

ARTHUR: *The information war was huge and we pretty much lost that because we were outmanned, I felt like were fighting the information war.*

Arthur's comments highlight that while social media created an ease in information sharing and a more porous structure for participation in social movements and protests (see Meek 2012; Castells 2015) as a result of activism in a digital information age, a limitation exists in long-

distance mobilization as it cannot replace in-person interactions. This limitation is especially important to consider for countries where information presented from government authorities is not always transparent, as has historically been the case in Armenia and created a distrust among diasporans. This can be one push factor for participants to complete Birthright even during the aftermath of war to experience the conditions first-hand.

Lilit, a staff member of Birthright, explained that even staff members were unsure of how the war would affect participation rates. During the war, Birthright created the program, Artsakh Strong. Lilit explained that it was a shorter volunteer assignment for participants to help with aid in the region. Lilit went on to explain the surprise she felt that diasporans continued to show a sense of loyalty to the homeland.

LILIT: *When the war started, I thought, oh my god, we will lose our participants but every day I had hundreds of messages, emails, Facebook messages… everyone wanted to come and we opened another program for just people who wanted to come for 1 week.*

Lilit became emotional when explaining that serving those who were affected by the war became the top priority of Birthright during that time and it was crucial to harness the help of volunteers.

LILIT: *No excursions, we had some forums, but it was more about the war. We were harvesting food…I'm going to cry now.*

The majority of Armenians went to fight. So many fields with free vegetables, women couldn't do everything. So every weekend, we were harvesting food. We bought the food that we harvested and collected, gave the food to Art Lunch, a local Armenian organization that prepares food for the army, we prepared food for them, were cooking for the soldiers.

Everyone was working 22 hours, every volunteer, on weekends. All our nails were so dirty, no one cared.

During the war, diasporans were triggered by the moment of crisis. For some, a direct transnational involvement was showcased rather than passive involvement. As Lilit explained,

LILIT: *I see how they care about homeland, some people will be here and leave and say war? Why do I need to care about war? But some really, really care. I can't imagine how someone can be so far from Armenia, doesn't speak Armenian, doesn't know much about Armenia and someone can care about Armenia.*

While some scholars have argued that there are trends of lower levels of transnational participation the worse conditions are at home (see Guarnizo, Portes, Haller 2003), the case of Armenian-Americans presents an alternative result. Previous scholarship on ethnic whites found that political and social events impact the consciousness and degree of ethnic identity (see Waters 1990). During moments of war specifically, community members experience heightened political struggle and a collective need to protect and conserve their cultural heritage (see Bleibleh and Awad 2019). As expressed by several respondents in this study, the war ignited a fire. Transnational scholars of social movements have noted that to inspire a movement, "there must be an idea, advocates to spread the idea, and a public ready to receive it – a fire with a reserve of fuel" (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

For the case of Armenians, the 44-day war represented a newly ignited fire to the generations long fuel reserve resulting from the 1915 Genocide. The war led to a moment of crisis for the global Armenian community and a collective reaction. Organizations tapped into this emotional state of its diasporan members by encouraging participation both virtually by

posting on social media and calling members of Congress, financially by donating to aid funds, and directly through participation in organizations such as Birthright to give back. The war represented a triggering event (see Mayer 2016) that reignited memories of a traumatic history that led to at-home social movements and inspired transnational participation.

The response to wars and threats to a community in the homeland and in the Diaspora is tied to the collective memory of Armenians. As scholars have found, present day behaviors are often a result of the past. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the use of phrases such as "existential threat" among respondents is not simply a fear of the current threat to the independence of the Artsakh and border cities of Armenia. Recognizing the context and history of the Armenian people responds to scholars of collective memory recognition that "only by knowing the why behind the what will we have a full accounting for the meanings of people's memories, and thus how those recollections illuminate contemporary predicaments" (Griffin and Bollen 2009: 609). Viewing the 44-day as an existential threat is a result of the constant memory of the Armenian Genocide among Armenians.

Memory, including Armenian collective memory, is politically and emotionally constructed for strategic purposes through institutions, agents of power, and individuals. Scholars of collective memory have noted that the construction of memory is as much tied to silence as it is to public discussion, scholarship, and protests. Most commonly silence is understood within two frameworks – overt and covert (see Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010). Both types of silence can be an act of forgetting and remembering. Overt silence can include holding a moment of silence to remember those who have passed, or it can involve no discussion of an event at all to forget it. For Armenians, overt silence can be found by survivors of past atrocities, such as the Genocide, as well as its perpetrators. Savelsberg (2021) discussed that survivors may choose to

omit discussions of a traumatic past in an attempt to move on and heal through their omission of childhood stories or sharing of past photographs. At the same time, silence comes from Turkish perpetrators through their lack of official genocide recognition and denial (see Savelsberg 2021). Covert silence, on the other hand, is a result of discussing a past event but by omitting sections of it, or selective silence. It is not as easy to identify as overt silence but still just as intentional and strategic in scope.

Genocide recognition has been a long-fought battle in the U.S. with Armenian lobbying and political organizations such as the ANCA and AAA encouraging Congress and past Presidents to formally use the term "genocide" to mark their official recognition of the massacres of 1915. In the U.S., on April 24, 2021, President Joe Biden officially used the word genocide in his White House statement on the Armenian Remembrance Day. Therefore, when the 44-day war did not receive as much media attention and public outcry as Armenians hoped, this moment of silence was a trigger for Armenians. It is also resulted in what Savelsberg (2021) calls "analogical bridging" to receive more public concern as Armenians related this war as an extension of the Genocide. As a result, my respondents' discussion of the war and their state of mind being concerned with the threat of an existential crisis is expected.

The uncertainty of Armenia's future as a physical homeland and the existential threat Armenians feel to their cultural identity relates to Angela's earlier desires to visit Armenia and experience it firsthand. Between the time Angela first wanted to visit Armenia to the time I interviewed her in February 2022, land had already been lost from the last 2020 war including a territory that was part of Artsakh, Shushi, that Azerbaijan recognizes as Shusha and their own land. The change in physical land was also felt by those who had been to Armenia before, like Samvel whose first trip involved visits to Stepanakert, the capital city of Artsakh, and Shushi,

IM: *Have you been to Armenia before?*

SAM: *Yes, once. This is my second time. I came here in 2018. It was a family trip. Being honest with you, it was very almost tiring, we were here for almost a month. It was primarily going everywhere, it was not just stuck to Yerevan, we went to Tatev, Stepanakert, Shushi, unfortunately now people cannot go.*

Angela was hoping to complete her Birthright assignment in 2020 but COVID-19 changed her plans. During that same time, the accessibility that Samvel once had in 2018 to visit Stepanakert and Shushi changed within months. For Angela, it created another yearning to experience Armenia and its historic land,

ANGELA: *When the war ended, everyone was sharing their photos of Artsakh, and I had none, and I was like wow…it was that feeling of knowing that I'm never…it's grieving the loss of that I never had the opportunity to go. Even when I look at my boyfriend's photos of Artsakh, I just get so sad, and I don't think he can comprehend this particular type of sadness. He doesn't know what it's like to grieve a land that you've never visited, to grieve your ancestral land that you never even got to step foot on.*

While parts of Artsakh, including Stepanakert, are still under the independent territory of the region, the war resurfaced a constant fear and threat among those in Armenia and in the Diaspora. In turn, visiting the area was not encouraged by Birthright or the U.S. government while I was a Fulbright researcher due to the precarious circumstances at the borders.

While I interviewed Angela months after moving to L.A. from Yerevan, I felt a similar notion when I took a personal trip outside of a Birthright excursion with friends to Tatev and

Goris. These two cities in Armenia are close to the Azerbaijani border. In September 2022, Azerbaijan and Armenia exchanged fire in Goris after a ceasefire that was intended to stop combat in 2020 was once again broken. During my own grappling of what Armenia means while completing fieldwork, my time in Tatev and Goris felt the most ephemeral. Living in Yerevan allowed for myself and other Birthrighters to escape some of the reality of the tensions at the border through dancing at Bak75, group forums and volunteer assignments that provided a structure that allowed us to live the most normal, and safe, local life. Yet, my stay in Tatev and Goris challenged that safety. As an American, it was the first time I felt uncertain of my safety in relation to war. In Tatev, I was in a spacious Airbnb overlooking the mountains that stand between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It was the closest I have ever been to my own family's roots in Azerbaijan. Three generations of my family fled Baku, Azerbaijan in 1988 during the Baku-Sumgait Pogroms that resulted in the Azeri government firing Armenian people from their workplaces and forcing them to leave their homes behind.

The idea of a threat against Armenia and *being* Armenian was not mutually exclusive. For respondents, losing land was tied to losing culture even for those living in the Diaspora. Christina explained that being an ideal Armenian meant "someone who even half cares about the risks that Armenia faces." Her response to who is the ideal Armenian involved a discussion of both the physical country of Armenia as well as the idea of losing touch with ones Armenianness and not being engaged in the Diaspora as she explained being Armenian involves an action, a *being,* rather than just a noun where "after the next generation or the next two generations, there's nothing Armenian about you besides your 23 and me test."

"If you are so passionate about this situation, you should be here fighting with your gun": Disconnect Between Homeland and Diaspora

Being physically in Armenia after the war evoked a much different feeling than hearing

about it on the news or reading updates on social media while living in the U.S. Even watching live videos from government officials or those on the frontlines did not capture the feelings of being inside the impacted area. In my own experience living in Yerevan for six months, remnants of the effects of the war and the constant fear of a new scrimmage were constant. The reminders of the men who were killed and families that loss loved ones were seen on my daily walks. Several murals were painted of lost soldiers with phrases of solidarity to encourage strength and hope amongst the civilians in the country (fig. 4.2). I also recognized a debate within the local Armenian community on how to mourn the loss of the fallen soldiers which was most apparent during one event. In September, several Birthrighters and I attended an outdoor wine festival in Yerevan. While we were all catching up and enjoying our time, we quickly noticed an argument and yelling occurring a few feet away from us followed by police officers escorting individuals out of the festival. Not knowing the cause of this, several of us were confused until we were told that families who lost their sons protested the event and were upset that the city was celebrating during a somber moment in Armenian history. While the war ended officially through temporary political agreement, it never left its people.

I faced another similar encounter with the reality of war when lecturing at the American University of Armenia (AUA). While completing my Fulbright, I met faculty and had opportunities to guest lecture courses with local students who were learning in English. In several of my guest lectures, student discussions involved referencing to the war and how it impacted their friends who served. While I was guest lecturing one sociology course, we were discussing gender roles and masculinity in the Armenian community when one student raised his hand to explain how he felt as a young man and compared himself to some of his friends who were soldiers. Other students attended the school coming from outside of Yerevan and were from

border villages that were close to the warzone. As I walked around the school, passing through a hallway that included a window overlooking Mount Ararat, I felt a new emotion as an educator that I had never felt in my several semesters of teaching at Michigan State University. In a common area where students often chatted, played card games, or sang along to American music, there was a tribute honoring AUA student soldiers hanging on the wall (fig. 4.3). While songs and laughter were in the background, the firsthand encounter with trauma and tragedy was always present for local students and those, including myself, who were interacting with them in a way that presents a different reality than the emotions felt in the Diaspora.

Figure 4.2. Mural of a fallen soldier in Victory Park translating to “Armenian spirit cannot be broken,” Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

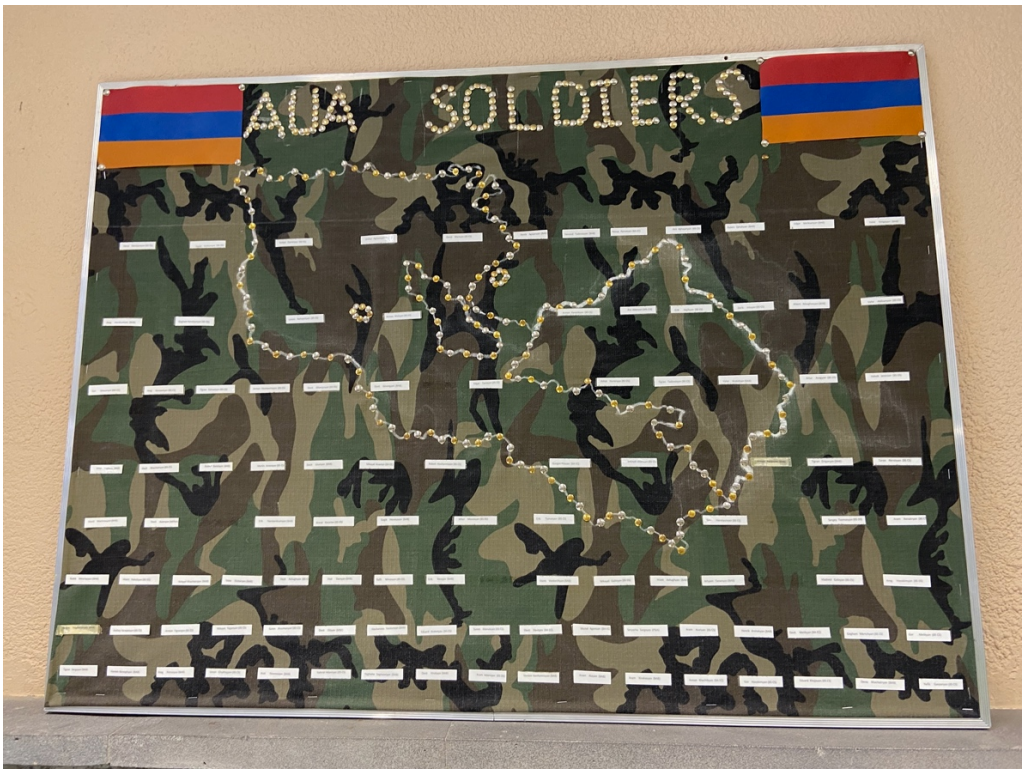

Figure 4.3. Tribute to student soldiers at the American University of Armenia (AUA), Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

The two scenarios mentioned above highlight two possible postwar sentiments – attempts to move on and frustrations when doing so. These complex emotions are not just felt in the homeland, but in the Diaspora. While locals felt upset about celebrations after the war, Mamikon Hovespyan, the Communications Director of Pink Armenia, a community-based LGBT organization in Yerevan, explained a frustration he felt when diasporans sent messages on social media.

MAMIKON: *The Diaspora is teaching us how to live. They say, "how you can party there?"*

I think, did you send that message from Starbucks? They say how you can drink wine on Saryan? The same way you drink coffee at Starbucks. They try to teach us how to live.

Others, similar to Mamikon, referenced a sense of entitlement that diasporans felt to the

homeland from afar. Daron, a 32-year-old Orange County (O.C.) native, repatriated to Yerevan after completing his Birthright experience in 2013. Daron was born in Kuwait and emigrated with his family at two years old to the U.S. eventually settling in O.C. Since early childhood, with the influence of his parents, he was heavily involved in his local Armenian community in O.C. which began through his schooling at the Ari Guiragos Minassian (AGM) Armenian School in Santa Ana, California. Around the age of 10, he recalls beginning to participate in local diaspora organizations in O.C. and L.A. including the AYF. He also became involved with the Armenian Students Association (ASA) at the University of California, Irvine where he attended. After college, he planned to go to law school but decided instead to volunteer in Armenia through Birthright and has never left, noting his parents' disappointment in this decision. Since repatriating to Armenia, he experienced a frustration with the disconnect he sees his peers back home in California have with today's Armenia. Reiterating the sentiment of Mamikon, Daron explained his feelings about what occurred in the Diaspora during the war,

DARON: *You can just go on social media and see what is being spewed out by the diaspora and what's being spewed out by locals, maybe you won't see it because you don't have the circle of locals and you're just seeing diasporans yelling at the top of their lungs and it shocks me, because like, dude, where were you? If you are so passionate about this situation, you should be here fighting with your gun you should've been on your ground, but you're sipping your Starbucks from far away and yelling about what's supposed to be done here and what decisions are supposed to be made?*

After this statement, Daron paused to collect himself before saying,

DARON: *Sorry, I'm going on a rant but it's like the entitlement that really shocks*

> *me. I've lived here for 7 years and I don't have that entitlement. I'm from the diaspora, and I'm telling you from where I started to where I am now is a different way of thinking and I'm so grateful I stepped out of my bubble to see a bigger picture of what's going on here.*

Daron and Mamikon highlight the positive and negative outcomes of the Diaspora's strong sense of ethnic identity. Some diasporans, as Lilit mentioned, did interact with the real-life conditions of Armenia during the war, while Mamikon and Daron highlight the limitations of a diaspora that experiences war from afar. These sentiments align with my conversations with the local taxi driver who reflected about seeing posts on Facebook. The qualitative nature of the interviews allows for exploration of undertones found in conversations. Both Mamikon and Daron referred to Starbucks as an example of where a diasporan may be sending messages from. This idea of a Westernized space for discussing precarious conditions far away highlights a sense of privilege that causes both respondents' contention.

For some diasporans, a strong connection to the homeland leads to direct aid and interactions with Armenia, while for others such a connection contributes to a disconnect between personal emotions and reality. Social media activism led to significant donations for Artsakh relief efforts that set fundraising records. The Armenia Fund, the largest Armenian-American grassroots charity, reported over $100 million raised in the U.S. including a $1 million donation from Kim Kardashian that she publicized on her social media platform amplifying the war to millions of followers. Yet, the war still resulted in misinformation and lack of clarity about what was happening. Even as respondents mentioned staying up at night to read updates in live time and speaking to friends and relatives in Armenia, for some locals it was felt that the Diaspora's reach still did not touch Armenia in the same way as those who, as Darron says, were

on the "ground."

"Everyone in Armenia knows Glendale": Transnational Politics

While in Armenia, the call to action to travel to Armenia was voiced frequently from organization leaders, such as Sevan and Mamikon, locals such as the taxi driver, diasporans who repatriated such as Daron, and even political officials. In September 2021, I visited the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs to speak to Zareh Sinanyan, a past Mayor of Glendale and the current High Commissioner. Located in Republic Square, the High Commissioner building included several governmental offices. After the security checked my passport and confirmed my meeting, I took the elevator up to the office, where I was greeted by Isabel, who was placed at the office to complete her volunteer hours with Birthright. Another Birthrighter from Argentina who I interacted with frequently during forums and excursions was also working in the office, who has since repatriated to live in Yerevan fulltime. After catching up with the two while waiting to begin the meeting, I was guided into Sinanyan's office which was spacious with a sofa and coffee table in the middle, where we sat. As my first interview with someone of this high governmental office title, Sinanyan immediately offered a welcoming and personable demeanor and asked if I wanted *soorj* (Armenian coffee) along with sweets. This was a very common gesture by Armenians that I also experienced when meeting with faculty at AUA.

While sitting on two different couches directly across from each other, we begin our conversation, taking sips of *soorj* when the other was speaking. Before beginning his role as High Commissioner in 2019, Sinanyan was the Mayor of Glendale from April 2014 to April 2015, and April 2018 through June 2019. Sinanyan is 47 years old and was born in Yerevan eventually emigrating to the U.S. in 1988. Sinanyan attended Burbank High School where he

explained that during his years of attendance, "Burbank didn't have an Armenian population." He was involved in the Burbank High School Armenian Club but became more heavily involved in his local Armenian community as an undergraduate at UCLA where he eventually became the ASA President from 1995-1996. During undergrad, Sinanyan also completed an AYF Summer Internship in Armenia in 1993 when he says Armenia had "no food, no water, I don't know any other 18- or 19-year-old who bought a ticket to do an internship." After graduating, Sinanyan explained a pause in Armenian involvement during his years at USC Law School which he labeled as a "time to get serious" where he focused on his studies, finding a job, getting married, and there was limited time to be active in the Armenian community. However, with time his peers encouraged him to participate again in diaspora organizations, more specifically in the ANCA Glendale Chapter,

ZAREH: *Before I knew it, I was up to my ears in ANCA stuff, Glendale ANCA, the political scene. I slowly started getting more involved in Glendale politics. Glendale politics can be in tandem to Armenian politics.*

After volunteering on several political campaigns and working in city commissions, Sinanyan was elected as Mayor of Glendale before resigning to begin his appointment in Armenia. Sinanyan's experience in Glendale and Armenia provides a helpful outlook on the transnational relationship of the two places, as he noted their politics are in "tandem" with one another. Therefore, it is not a surprise a past mayor of a diaspora city is now in a government position in the homeland. Sinanyan explained,

ZAREH: *I became a common name in Armenia. People knew me because I was and remain the only Armenia born elected official the U.S. So, in Armenia, Armenians wrote about me. I would always get contacted by the media to*

come do interviews in Armenia. Everyone in Armenia knows Glendale. It was "oh this guy, I know the school he went to, or I know someone who went to school with him."

Sinanyan's case of being strongly tied into Glendale and Armenia is common. During my stay in Armenia, L.A. was mentioned by many as a destination for where they would like to move to, where their relatives are, or simply the common understanding that it is the American-Armenian capital. As a result, Armenian politics are felt in Glendale and those outside of Armenia develop opinions for what should be done in the homeland including political allegiances to the prime minister elections and disagreements on the strategies for the war including if it should continue or end. When some diasporans were upset about the war ending, in their opinion, prematurely, they took to social media to explain their frustration with the Armenian government for losing land and soldiers. Sinanyan, as well as many others, heard these voices and explained,

ZAREH: *I tell people in the Diaspora… they complain. Let's say everything you say is true. Who is going to change it? You want to change it? I'll tell you how you can change it…come. Live. Live by example. Be part of that change.*

Living in Armenia immediately after the war highlighted a reality that was not as clear while I was living in the Diaspora. While for diasporans, the war prompted a moment of mobilization, those in Armenia felt the distance between themselves and the Armenians in the Diaspora.

"My peers would say, 'Are your family members terrorists?'": Ethnic Identity, Whiteness, and the Dispersion of the Armenian Diaspora

For some Armenian-Americans, this generational history of tragedy, trauma and violence that results in lost land and culture, including language, and simply having a different appearance than others in the U.S. leads to a complex understanding of racial and ethnic identity. The history of the Armenian Diaspora plays a strong role in how Armenians define themselves outside of the

homeland. Out of the 55 individuals I interviewed, only 20% (n=11) identified as White. The most common response when asked, *how do you identify your racial and ethnic background*? was Armenian with approximately 38% (n=21) of respondents mentioning this category. The second most common response was categorized into Other with approximately 24% (n=13) mentioning something other than only Armenian or White. Several of the responses that were categorized into Other included Middle-Eastern or Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA). One individual noted at times, she also chooses Asian. Additionally, 7% (n=4) mentioned they specifically identify themselves as Armenian-American. For three of the respondents, this question was not applicable as they were locals born in Armenia. Additionally, for the remaining three, this was a missing question.

Armenians present an anomaly case on race that can provide a new contribution to long standing race and ethnicity theoretical debates. Armenians are not religious minorities in the U.S., as are Muslim or Jewish diaspora groups which have been thoroughly studied in migration scholarship through the perspectives of Iranian (see Maghbouleh 2017), Syrian (see Gualtieri 2019), and Israeli (see Gold 2002) migrants. Additionally, Armenians are not, by common terms, considered racial or ethnic minorities, as the case with the African diaspora (Hall 1990) and Asian-American groups in the U.S. including Chinese Americans (see Louie 2004), or ethnic minorities such as Mexican Americans (see Smith 2006; see also Jimenez 2010). In many cases, these major groups have faced severe discrimination and a lack of legal, social and cultural citizenship rights. As we have seen in the last few years, xenophobia increased and attacked these three groups with a rise in anti-Mexican theoretic, racism on Black Americans leading to the raise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and Asian Pacific Islander hate crimes in our local communities (see U.S. Department of Justice 2023; FBI 2023; Lee and Ramakrishnan

2022). Additionally, since the attacks on September 11, 2001, Islamophobic claims have been on the rise. Most recently, antisemitic hate crimes on Jewish-Americans increased. Yet, where do Armenians fit in here?

Armenian-Americans seemingly represent an ideal immigrant, or model minority, for the American system as they represent a highly educated group, with several well achieving members including billionaires and investors from Alex Ohanian and Kirk Krekorian who have culturally assimilated into the institutions of the host-society and become leaders. According to the 2021 American Community Survey one-year estimates, the U.S. median household income is $69, 717 compared to Armenian median household income of $80, 843. Additionally, using the same estimates, 35% of the entire population has a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to Armenians who have 47% of their population in the U.S. with a bachelor's degree or higher. When looking at Glendale specifically, with 40% of its population being Armenian, one may argue that Armenians in total are not as successful as their non-Armenian counterparts. Yet, it is critical to note that 49% of the Glendale's total population includes those born in the U.S. compared to the entire U.S. population that has 86% born in the U.S. When analyzing Armenians, this percentage is even lower with only 20% of Armenians in Glendale born in the U.S. This provides important context on why median income and educational attainment for those in Glendale falls lower than the city's average. In Glendale, the median household income is $79, 633 while the income for Armenians is $52, 614. Additionally, in Glendale, 48% of its residents have a bachelor's degree or higher while it is 32% for Armenians. Proportionally, these statistics highlight that Armenians are successfully climbing up the social ladder.

Armenians, particularly of later generations, are also well integrated into their cities and maintain political power in their ethnic enclaves and have English speaking skills. Even an

Armenian surname, Kardashian, gained acceptance from mainstream American society and is now a global household name. Yet, why do some Armenians, as supported by my respondents, identify as Armenian, not White? In fact, even when speaking about their experiences, the respondents in this study created a direct distinction in their identity by comparing themselves to those who are White, *jermag* (White), or *odar* (outsiders).

Other scholars have explored the prevalence of white ethnic claims. In their analysis of cross-sectional data collected from the 2014 Boundaries in the American Mosaic (BAM) survey, Torkelson and Hartmann (2020) found that white ethnic claims have declined with only 8.4 percent of white claiming ethnicity. Yet, the authors warned against accepting these quantitative findings without further qualitative investigation, specifically through in-depth interviews. In their conclusion, the authors highlighted the importance in contextualizing white ethnic identification within our current political state post the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

As Torkelson and Hartmann noted, there is a "general urgent need for further investigation into other possible changes and complexities among white Americans in the current racial-political climate" (316). While their new data did not reveal this, in their previous study, the authors found a link between white ethnicity and Democratic political affiliations or residing in a Democratic area (Torkelson and Hartmann 2010) which aligns with the findings from my respondents that are majority California residents. My findings add to this scholarship by showcasing a group of individuals within a white ethnic group that strongly opposes identifying as White at all. Additionally, my findings are derived from a critical mainstream debate about race and ethnicity in the U.S. as my interviews were completed soon after protests through Black Lives Matter in 2020 when racialization around the world was prominent.

The respondents in this study also support a possible "third generation return," or a revival of ethnicity, as the third generation "could afford to remember an ancestral culture which the traumatic Americanization forced the immigration and second generations to forget" (Gans 1979: 4). Gans (1979) expressed an uncertainty on the future of this revival as he noted there was not enough attention on what happens to the fourth and fifth generations to fully support this theory. Yet, my findings address this gap by including later generation members.

I asked why a White category did not represent the experiences of the respondents who said they identified as something else. The confusion that some Armenians face when picking which racial and ethnic category they fit in is an example of their identity as diasporans, which maintains an ethnic notion of difference even with multiple generations. Additionally, respondents who feel closer to a Middle-Eastern or SWANA option highlight the history of the Armenian Diaspora. After the Genocide, several of my respondents' parents and grandparents had ties to Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq. The presence of Armenians globally maintains their larger community identification as a diaspora. For Nareh, her family has historic ties to Iran, not Armenia,

IM: *How do you identify your racial and ethnic background?*

NAREH: *Ethnically, Armenian. Iranian-Armenian. My mom's side has been there [in Iran] for centuries, pre-Genocide.*

Therefore, for some respondents, a hyphenated identity was more fitting. When discussing their racial and ethnic identity, many respondents included caveats that traced back their roots to a larger historic diaspora. For example, Sako, a 29-year-old living in L.A. was born in Beirut, Lebanon. I interviewed Sako via Zoom during COVID-19 travel restrictions. I found Sako's social media page during the 44-day war while he was posting several talking points that were

being shared widely in the Armenian community virtually. In our interview, Sako explained that his meaning-making process for his Armenian identity included considering where he was born,

SAKO: *I consider myself a Lebanese Armenian. We do speak Arabic.*

Similarly, Isabel is a 24-year-old second-generation diasporan born in New Hampshire and currently resides in the Boston area. Isabel and I completed Birthright at the same time and traveled on the excursion bus together several times. After getting to know each other, I spoke to her about her background. Isabel has family ties to Beirut, Lebanon and Baghdad, Iraq. She explained,

ISABEL: *I did notice growing up I had to say I'm Armenian-American because I grew up in an Irish Catholic town during the Iraq war, I was born in 1997, when the war started, I was about 5-6, my peers would say are your family members terrorists? I'm Armenian-American and my family in Iraq is Armenian.*

In my own family, I face having to provide a similar long-winded explanation when asked "where are you from?" when someone hears my name and recognizes I am not a traditional American. I was born in Donetsk, Ukraine, after my family escaped Baku, Azerbaijan. For generations, my family had ties to Baku. I only know one story of my family that has ties to Western Armenia which is about my grandfather who lived in Van, Turkey and escaped the 1915 Genocide. Additionally, while I am Armenian, my family roots do not include speaking the Armenian language. Instead, my great grandparents spoke Russian while knowing some Armenian. My parents do not speak any Armenian. With this migration history, I am still Armenian. Therefore, when defining one's background on forms, this complex history can cause an Armenian with such roots to pause. This is not an uncommon story for other Armenians such

as Nareh, Sako, and Isabel where cultural traditions and the Persian and Arabic language is present and at times more prominent than Armenian.

This pull to identify as something other than White or American disconnects some of my respondents from their diasporan cities and brings a connection to their cultural history, even if they never visited Armenia. This recognition of difference from other Americans, or *odars* (outsiders), creates a sense of identity that functions separate from attachments to the physical. In addition to family history, respondents noted that language, physical traits, and cultural traditions including food and dance created a tension with identifying as White. When arriving in Armenia, for some, their identity brought clarity to the complexity that exists when they are in the U.S.

Jimenez (2010) explains that shedding an ethnic identity is "not so simple as changing a piece of clothing that has gone out of fashion. Ethnic identity is far too fundamental to how individuals think of themselves in contemporary U.S. society" (2010: 153). The rise in ethnic pride movements, coupled with my respondents' collective belief that their homeland and identity is at risk of an existential threat, Armenian ethnic attachment not only complicates assimilation frameworks, but also lead respondents to agentic actions and behaviors such as participating in ethnic organization to fulfill their desires to connect their history and a homeland.

Birthright Armenia, in its name, borrows from ideas of a biological *right* to Armenia. Birthright includes a set of criteria to consider before applying to know if one is eligible including 1) nine-week minimum; 2) age must be between 21 and 32 years, and 3) heritage: "you must be of Armenian heritage (*at least one grandparent must be fully Armenian*). While according to these biological categorizations and ancestral roots, one is in fact Armenian, when speaking to my respondents, "being Armenian" meant something more. There was a common

understanding that one is Armenian through familial ancestry. However, additional social boundaries exist to decide who is seen as the most authentic Armenian. This is a common theme with other ethnic groups (see Jimenez 2010). Therefore, while Birthright accepts Armenians who fit the three requirements of heritage, some Armenians experience feeling less Armenian than others upon arrival. One key element of authentic Armenianness, and in turn a strong differentiation from being White, is language.

"If you're Armenian, you should speak Armenian!": Travel to the Homeland for Language Acquisition

Within a few months of being in Armenia, I grew closer to several Birthright participants. Several of them were not Americans. We often met for dinner at the several new restaurants that were gaining popularity around Yerevan. One night, I recall eating at an Italian restaurant called Ankyun, a few minutes away from Republic Square metro. This restaurant represented an image of an authentic small Italian café and was a small intimate setting. Therefore, conversations across tables were easily overheard. This was the case with two men who were getting up to leave and asked my friends and I, *Where are you from?* We said France and the U.S (I was the only one not from France). My friend quickly adds, *payts hye eh* (but we're Armenian). *Oh! Hay es?* (you are Armenian!) one of the men responds. Then he asked us why we were not speaking in Armenian with one another. We were communicating in English since some of us are not fluent, which was common among Birthrighters. One of the men said, "if you're in Armenian, you should speak Armenian!" This was a common response from locals. Language is not only important to maintain in the Diaspora but similar pressures to uphold language were felt in the homeland. The act of using language as a gatekeeper is one way to measure ethnic authenticity (see Jimenez 2010).

For some, preserving language is a necessity and one of the clearest forms of maintaining

their ethnic identity and combatting any existential threat. In some of my interviews, a common theme was highlighted that the next worst scenario after lost land was lost language. For some Birthright participants, such as Christina, language was the key reason to travel to Armenia and complete Birthright. I first met Christina on Halloween weekend. I was invited to attend an outdoor event put on by an establishment in Yerevan and popular diaspora hang out destination – Paparazzi. I joined a group of individuals I knew from Birthright including volunteers those from Australia, Syria, Canada, Lebanon, and the U.S. We all first gathered at an apartment before heading out together. Christina arrived with her boyfriend whom she met through Birthright, a fairly common circumstance. I introduced myself to her and explained what I was doing in Armenia. I then asked her more about herself.

IM: *How long are you staying in Armenia?*

CHRISTINA: *Until I learn the language*.

While some Birthright participants had concrete timelines for their volunteer assignment, due to plans to return home for school or employment, Christina was in a period of her life where she completed undergraduate studies and had time to live in Armenia indefinitely. Language was her motivator. After our interaction at the Halloween party, I scheduled an interview with her to talk more. A few days later, we met at a local restaurant, The Collective, and had coffee to speak more about her motivations for doing Birthright.

In addition to Birthright's mission to immerse participants into the local culture through volunteering a minimum of 30 weekly hours, another core component of the program is language acquisition. All Birthright participants were given the opportunity to receive free Armenian language tutoring every week. Birthright's website explains the importance of language for prospective volunteers writing the following:

"The language classes are NOT mandatory but we offer them to help volunteers achieve basic conversational proficiency, a requirement for the travel reimbursement. A person with basic conversational proficiency is described as the following:

- Able to understand basic questions and speech, conversations in daily life occurrences;
- Has a vocabulary large enough to communicate the basic needs, simple stories and daily experiences with an accent that is understandable to native speakers" (Birthright Armenia 2023)

For participants such as Christina, this access to language learning was a perk for participating and she believed the interaction with locals and living in Armenia were effective learning approaches.

"They speak Armenian but they shove Russian words into their Armenian": Eastern vs. Western Dialects

For others, who already spoke the language, a new challenge to their Armenianness was faced upon arrival to the homeland. Kev, a 32-year-old living in the suburbs of the Greater D.C. area, visited Armenia five times. He currently is dating a local Armenian resident and travels frequently to visit her. In my conversation with Kev, racial and ethnic identity were strongly linked to language acquisition and cultural identity. When I asked him if there were any intra-group divisions or people who were excluded in his local Armenian community in D.C., he noted,

KEV: *It's maybe changing a little, very slowly, we talk about things like language of course, I met people who are Armenian and don't speak and were hesitant to interact and introduce themselves, they felt it, in older generation, especially here, insults to people who didn't speak Armenian, like this guy is a White Boy,*

there is a little bit more acceptance, but there is still, kind of, rejection by largely the community here because of their notions oh you didn't speak Armenian why not?

Kev's responses illustrate that being White is not only a category to pick from, but an action. The act of diasporan respondents selecting to identify as something other than White highlights a conscious, agentic decision and resistance to cultural assimilation. This resistance in turn also maintains their collective identity as a diaspora even for those who are not first-generation exiles of the homeland. Therefore, the theme of race in my study responds to questions on if a diaspora is still possible today for those who are not exactly a "classic diaspora." Yet, Kev and others bring to light the suggestion of Brubaker (2017) that "diaspora is a practice, it is done." If an Armenian does not know the Armenian language, some within the community may perceive them as becoming White. Similarly, Amelia is 30 years old and was born in Vanadzor, Armenia before moving to O.C. when she was 11 years old. Her response to my question on racial and ethnic identity intersected with language as well.

IM: *How do you identify your racial and ethnic background?*

AMELIA: *Armenian. I don't put White because my first interaction with the concept White was when we moved from Vanadzor to O.C. and it's like 95% White population and it was very clear that we're different from them.*

IM: *Is that mostly because of your immigrant background or physical attributes? What made you feel different?*

AMELIA: *I think it was everything. We were definitely darker. People at school were blonde and had very light skin. It was the immigration. There wasn't a lot of immigrants. There were the economic differences. Not knowing English,*

speaking English with a very heavy accent, saving parents who spoke English with a heavy accent.

Language presented several points of conflict in this study. First, as Kev and Amelia noted, not only is language a distinction from being White and makes Armenians different from others who are "blonde and had very light skin" in their American city, but when diasporans traveled to Armenia, some of the respondent's knowledge of language created a distance from local Armenians too. When my respondents arrived in Armenia, their skills in Armenian language that they were proud of in the Diaspora, became a new point of contention.

Armenia gained independence from the Soviet Union in in 1991. Prior to this time, the Russian language was prominent and encouraged among Armenians in their schools and work. Today, this history is seen as most local Armenians speak Russian. Armenians living in Armenia today primarily speak what is known as Eastern Armenian dialect, which borrows words from the Russian language. In addition to different words, Eastern Armenian has different pronunciations for the Armenian alphabet than Western Armenian, which is known as the language Armenians in Western Armenia (modern day Eastern Turkey) spoke prior to the Genocide. The descendants of the Armenian Genocide whose family roots were in Western Armenia speak Western Armenian, this includes Armenians in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. Out of the 55 respondents I interviewed, approximately 13% (n=7) were born in Armenia. For many others, particularly the Birthright volunteers, living in Armenia challenged their typical ways of being Armenian in the Diaspora.

Hripsime is a 21-year-old from Glendale, California. She recently completed her undergraduate degree from Cal State University and arrived in Yerevan for the summer as a Birthright volunteer. We met during a Birthright excursion. Hripsime had several friends she was

living with in Yerevan when she first arrived, all of whom were also from the L.A. area. After speaking during excursions and Birthright forums, I arranged a time to meet with her at The Collective located on Pushkin Street a highly developed part of Yerevan that is currently undergoing more construction and new buildings. The menus at The Collective include an English option, similar to many restaurants in Armenia today. The Collective does not serve much traditional Armenian food and instead offers items that resemble much of what I would find in the U.S. Hripsime arrived after her working at her volunteer placement organization and ordered a coffee and pastry from Collective's café, AfroLab.

As we began speaking, Hripsime told me more about her family. Hripsime's mother was born in Yerevan and father was born in Beirut. She heard both Eastern and Western Armenian in her household as a result. Hripsime pointed out more than just a personal frustration of not being able to understand Eastern Armenian as some Western speaking Birthrighters did. To her, the mixing of the Armenian language with Russian influence represented a concern for Armenian history and culture.

IM: *Language has been brought up a lot with my other respondents. How important is maintaining the Armenian language for you?*

HRIPSIME: *Especially with the Diaspora, it's so important because I don't know who said this, but they said it's a quiet genocide if people start to forget their language, because people in Armenia, they speak Armenian but they shove Russian words into their Armenian. People back at home, if they don't learn Armenian, if they come here, they're going to have a hard time, and it will be harder to teach their kids, their kids will have a different experience with Armenia if they don't speak the language. I just feel it's*

important.

Hripsime's discussion of lost language being a "quiet genocide" and use of forceful language, such as "shove Russian words into their Armenian," presents one aspect of a binary opposing relationship between those in the Diaspora and the homeland. As a diasporan, Hripsime discusses something that bothers her about local Armenian culture. The idea of mixing Russian has been brought up by others as not being "clean" Armenian. In passing, several respondents I interacted with relayed a similar frustration regarding the use of Russian in Armenia even noting their confusion when reading products in grocery stores that had Russian labels.

Aside from the traditional difference of Western and Eastern Armenian, some respondents also noticed differences within their own way of speaking one of the dialects. This was true for those who identified as Persian or Iranian Armenian, highlighting another example of the influence of diaspora history and multiple cultures in their construction of Armenianness. Armenians from Iran identify as *Parskahye* (Parks meaning Persian, hye meaning Armenian). Natalie, a 30-year-old born and living in L.A., is one respondent with Iranian roots. Natalie is completing her Ph.D. at UCLA. I discovered who Natalie was during the 44-day war when several diasporans were posting on their social media accounts. Several of Natalie's political posts were shared among a large group of Armenians. I noticed some of these posts and reached out to her via a direct message on the platform where she was in some ways "viral" in the Armenian community.

Natalie's mother was born in Iran and father was born in the U.S. Natalie spoke Armenian in her household with a Parskahye influence.

IM: *How were you thinking about Armenia before going there and what was it like when you actually got there?*

NATALIE: *I guess the most interesting thing is that my mom's side of the family is from Iran. I was the first person to go [to Armenia]. Their understanding of Armenianness is very specific to Parskahye identity and one very specific to Jugha, the Armenia community where they're from. I learned and spoke with that dialect. I used a lot of that dialect in Armenia, and people couldn't understand me at all. It was confusing to locals. So that was a big thing. I was like yeah, I speak Armenian. I know there's Western but I speak Eastern Armenian, so that's totally fine. I won't have any issues in Armenia. But it was totally the opposite.*

The Armenian language has evolved and moved with its people. In turn, the Armenian language absorbed and was influenced by the global and political changes that impacted the country, including the influence of past Soviet and now American culture. Additionally, local institutions and tourist attractions such as museums and landmarks understand the diversity of diasporan tourists and respond to this by including signs, menus, and movies primarily in Armenian, Russian and English (fig 4.4). While some understand Armenian in one way in the Diaspora, they challenge the way it is spoken when they arrive in Armenia. This frustration identifies the ways diasporans constructed Armenia as a place that stood still with their ancestral Western dialect, or that of their family roots in Iran for Parskahye, while for those living in present-day Armenia, the culture in the country evolved, and locals absorbed the changes while diasporans abroad were less affected.

Figure 4.4. Government building sign in Armenian, Russian and English, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

"I think we kissed our image of the Armenian woman goodbye": Gender Expectations

A week after my arrival in Yerevan, I became accustomed to a Birthright Whatsapp chat that was constantly updated with messages from volunteers asking questions, sharing events, and inviting each other to parties or to explore together. In mid-July, Isabel contacted everyone in the chat asking if we wanted to attend a dance ensemble performance at the Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theatre (fig. 4.5). A group of us decided to attend and sit together – this

included a group of participants from Argentina, Canada, and the U.S. Some of the Birthrighters in attendance participated in their own Armenian dance ensembles back home in Boston and L.A. through organizations such as the non-profit educational and cultural organization, Hamazkayin, which includes chapters throughout the world.

Figure 4.5. Dance Ensemble. Armenian National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

As the show began, dancers appeared in traditional Armenian attire doing several dances that I learned throughout my years attending Armenian social events in the U.S. and watching Birthrighters replicate at bars like Bak75. One specific dance stood out to me as a feminist scholar that featured a female dancer with a group of male dancers around her, all courting her in hopes that she picks one of them. It is evident in traditional ideals, symbols, and dances how prevalent gender roles and patriarchal ideas are embedded into social culture. In this dance, a

male dancer bowed on his knee presenting an artificial flower to the female dancer while she wore a dress and appeared as a common feminine stereotype, delicate and desirable. While this was a traditional dance and a glimpse at Armenian history, these gender norms within larger society, particularly Armenian families and households, are not uncommon in the modern Armenian community.

While conducting virtual interviews, I spoke to Arthur about his upbringing and understanding of gender roles in his childhood household. Arthur, first-generation, described an image showcasing a modern desire for a traditional Armenian woman like the one I observed dancing at the Opera,

ARTHUR: *I think we kissed our image of the Armenian woman goodbye. I don't know that I'll ever find an Armenian woman that does all that my mom does. I just don't see it. Our generation is way too lazy and incompetent for that. I would have to go to Armenia to find a wife if I wanted that and I'm not going to do that.*

The idea of the "Armenian woman" is experienced and reaffirmed by all genders. Arthur's response highlights not only the larger Armenian community's ideals of gender roles, but also illustrates how those in the Diaspora create expectations of women in the homeland through saying "I would have to go to Armenia to find a wife" that would fit the traditional roles of his mother. However, this narrative eliminates the possibility, and reality, that Armenian women living in Armenia today have progressed.

By observing and interacting with local women in Armenia, I found that the younger generation do not perform similar to the generation past them. In fact, while volunteering with my placement organization through Birthright, the CRRC, the staff was predominantly women of

a higher education and studied abroad for school, working full-time, some of whom were in partnerships and others in their mid to late twenties who were single, spoke fluent English, and in many ways resembled a typical idea of a young professional woman in the U.S. When going out with friends to restaurants in Yerevan, I was faced with my own wrongful expectations of what Armenian women would be like – assuming that the narratives formed in the Diaspora, largely from older family members, were still true today, and that Armenian women would not dress or go out the way women in the U.S. do. This was quickly debunked throughout my time experiencing social life in Yerevan. These observations do not act as a generalized summary of all Armenian women, some of whom are still very much traditionalist, but it highlights a very visible generation of women that are no longer fitting past stereotypes.

While Arthur's response is a common traditional outlook on Armenian women within the community, he was the only male respondent that spoken so candidly about this mindset. While coding the transcripts, I found that all other references to less progressive ideas of women came from the female and gender non-conforming respondents who explained what they experienced firsthand on the other side of such expectations. There are some explanations for this coding pattern that rely on applying reflexivity in my data analysis. First, by interviewing Arthur virtually and not spending time with him as I did with the other respondents through being a Birthright participant with them in Yerevan, or by observing them in L.A., he may have felt more comfortable to share such ideas with me on Zoom. Others who grew to know me during my participant observation phase in the field may have altered such responses due to recognizing that there are expectations of my own ideologies, particularly in being a female sociologist. Additionally, it may also be the case that the lack of other men responding in such as way is in fact the reality that both Armenian men and women have progressed and shifted their viewpoints

on gender roles and expectations from each other as romantic partners.

Mokour aghchig: A "clean girl"

While conducting interviews, some female respondents further described how they believed they were expected to perform in the Armenian community. The participants in this study involved approximately 42% female (n=23), 53% male (n=29), and 6% transgender or nonbinary (n=3). Several respondents discussed marriage and dating. Women and queer respondents, in particular, went further into topics of stereotypes, patriarchy, and pressure in the Armenian community to fulfill gender roles. Some respondents mentioned virginity and "being clean" that developed into a sub code for analysis. Some of these respondents specifically referred to the concept of being *mokour aghchig* which translates to *clean girl*. This binary distinction women being grouped into a category of dirty or clean is dependent on ideas of how they behave, dress, speak, and date. Amelia, who has the experience of living in Yerevan and the U.S., explains that the concept of being a virgin is tied to being Armenian, yet this is more complex when in Armenia where she acknowledges non-virgins exist once again challenging stereotypical, and outdated, expectations tied to local Armenian woman,

AMELIA: *There's this whole thing of, 'oh, Armenian girls are virgins before they get married,' right? You don't really see that in Yerevan because in Armenia, even if you aren't a virgin and you get married, you're still Armenian. For me, my performance is following what's going on in Armenia, keeping up with the language. I don't care about who I marry or all these other things that have nothing to do with Armenianness.*

Following a similar theme, Arev, who is 23-years old and nonbinary, grew up and currently lives in Woodland Hills in L.A. I interviewed Arev via Zoom. Arev attended the Holy

Martyrs Armenian Elementary and Ferrahian High School, a private Armenian school in the San Fernando Valley. Arev previously traveled to Armenia once through their school during an 11th grade class trip. Arev's interactions with Armenians at school provided them a perspective on what is expected of Armenian women. They provided further clarity on how Amelia's discussion of virginity fits into the *mokour aghchig* narrative,

IM: *What are the expectations of being an Armenian woman and how does your identity fit with that?*

AREV: *I think the expectations of being the right type of Armenian…I just think of mokour aghchig, which I hate that term so much because it insinuates that if any Armenian girl even kissed or done anything with a guy, it's almost like she's a waste, like she's trash, she's dirty, she's not clean. I always hated that term.*

IM: *Where did you hear that term?*

AREV: *I heard it said in my high school, on Twitter. I heard it be said by Armenian guys. When it wasn't said by Armenian guys, it was Armenian girls mocking Armenian guys because it was absolutely ridiculous to have that mindset. It was so degrading.*

Vic is a 26-year-old living in Glendale and employee of the ARS. While attending UC-Berkeley, Vic joined ASA and enrolled in Armenian language classes. Through those interactions, Vic learned about Birthright and decided to participate after graduation. While interviewing Vic in Glendale at her office, we spoke about gender roles in the Armenian community. Vic explained the ideal Armenian woman,

IM: *So, what is the typical or ideal Armenian?*

VIC: *I feel a really traditional Armenian is an ideal Armenian, in the sense that you're quiet especially if you're a woman, you're not outspoken, you go with the flow of things, you're a good girl at home, cleaning up, staying home, I feel like those things are still very present in the community.*
I guess men too but I feel like they have a lot more freedom to step outside the ideal Armenian man but I'm sure they have the expectations, too, like they have to be the breadwinners, they can't be seen getting paid for by their girlfriend, so there's definitely a lot of gender expectations.
And that whole amot and lav aghchig stuff.

Here, Vic also reiterates that she heard Armenian terms used when referring to women mentioning *amot* meaning *shameful/bad*, and *lav aghig* meaning *good girl*. Vic also makes an important note that men are impacted by gender roles, too. As Beukian (2014) found when studying gender relations in Armenia and Artsakh post-war, gender is performed by both men and women noting "it is not an easy task to challenge these roles, which are almost marked in stone" (260). Additionally, in his ethnographic study on Mexican transnational immigrants living in New York, Smith (2006) found that gender roles were an attempt at maintaining Mexican cultural tradition.

Outside of the U.S, similar gendered expectations on immigrants occur. Tetreault (2015) highlighted how Algerian transcultural teens in France were expected to uphold traditional Algerian gender expectations. Similar to the Armenian constructions of a "good girl," Algerian community members measured the legitimacy of girls based on their gender performance. For instance, Tetreault found that outdoor spaces were restricted for men and adolescent women sitting outside on a park bench were compared to a "decrepit man who had no home at all" (119).

In this case, women alone in outdoor spaces were a danger to their purity as it can be seen as a risk for them to lose their virginity. During my own data analysis, the image from my second week in Yerevan of the female dancer continued to appear and highlight how the Diaspora reinforces traditional ideas, while in some ways, Yerevan itself recognizes that this is for show or a performance and have evolved.

My confrontation with interactions and observations in Yerevan highlight the limitations of the imaginary of the homeland that is challenged once arriving and participating in that physical space. As other scholars have noted, women perform a type of borderwork by picking and choosing which gender expectations placed on them as Armenian women are worth holding on to and which to lose. In addition to my interview data, a multi-sited ethnographic approach in Armenia and L.A. allowed for me to identify that Armenian women in both places turn to ideas of the other to renegotiate their place in the Armenian community. Women in the Diaspora feel a pressure to hold on to traditional ideas of how to perform in the household and larger society using a stereotype of a local Armenian woman today as the "ideal type" (see Clifford 1994). While the female respondents I interviewed are highly educated and have a sense of agency in pursuing careers and traveling to Armenia on their own, their responses highlight an expectation to uphold a responsibility of what it means to be Armenian, even as an Armenian-American woman. As Beukian (2014) noted in her study about local Armenian women, "a woman is first Armenian and then a woman" (262).

At the same time, women in Armenia see and borrow the social remittances that diasporan women bring with them when they visit the homeland, or through watching television, observing fashion, and listening to music to alter their role to be more like those in the U.S. As previous scholarship on social remittances has shown (see Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lambda-

Nieves 2011), migrants carry ideas from their host society into their homeland when returning as visitors and even without travel, when communicating with family members about their new lives. These social interactions involve varying degrees of influencing change to the homeland as nonimmigrants react and either absorb or resist new ideologies.

An important finding from fieldwork also involves the differences between locals in the capital city of Yerevan, that house repatriates and tourists and absorb social remittances, and those who live in the rural spaces of Armenia in areas such as Goris, where Nareh volunteered with the organization, All For Armenia and worked on a project called Made in Syunik – the region that includes Goris. Nareh, who identifies as a lesbian and was raised in Glendale, is now completing her Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts. Nareh explains how the gendered ideas of being *mokour* as a woman that were reinforced during her childhood and adolescence continue to play a role in her studies and work. Her discussion highlights a recognition, along with acceptance, that what she does is likely not accepted by some in the community back home and in Armenia.

NAREH: *I make experimental cinema and sometimes show it in galleries and promote that on social media. They aren't mokour. A lot of them explore my Armenian identity in relationship to my sexuality and it makes people uncomfortable in America, but for people outside of Yerevan, it makes me uncomfortable.*

In her explanation, Nareh highlights the diversity within being an Armenian woman not just between the local and those in the Diaspora, but those within Armenia itself who are from the city and the villages. Nareh's discussion further highlights that rigidly rooted concepts of gender do not encompass the realties and differences within the global Armenian community. As Nareh explained, she is more comfortable challenging gender roles discussed by Beukian (2014) in the

Diaspora but not in the villages of Armenia where progressive changes to gender are less visible. Nareh added her perspective of not only being a woman, but a queer diasporan woman in Armenia,

> NAREH: *In L.A., now as an adult, I feel comfortable. Here [Armenia], it's different. I was not gay in Goris and would never tell anybody. I think certain people found out and I'm truly terrified to go back. I don't think you can be both [Armenian and gay].*

Nareh's comments emphasize Hall (1990) push to recognize that diasporan identities are of diversity, difference, and hybridity rather than of "oneness." By queering the diaspora experience, scholars can unpack the differences that lie within one diaspora group and how their transnational lives change with their movement. Parallel to Nareh's experience, Gopinath (1998) provides an example of an American lesbian in Indonesia who was struggling to make sense of her Indonesian lover as she said, "at home I am a lesbian, these practices mean something very different there" (Gopinath 1998: 112). Through travel, place becomes simultaneously more concrete as social actors gain another point of reference for comparison which serves as the "other site," while their identities become more fluid as they use their agentic power to play with their sense of self by choosing which version to present based on the location they are in, as illustrated with Nareh's feelings of remaining closeted in Goris while being openly out in L.A.

Nareh's personal experience and understanding of her identity is defined by a juxtaposition of her position in the Diaspora, L.A., and in Armenia, and highlights how her identity involves a simultaneous relationship between two places. As Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) highlighted, participant observation and ethnographic interviewing captures this simultaneity within group members. The authors note that individuals who engage in

transnational social fields "can enter the social field when and if they choose to do so" (1011). The discussions on gender further highlight the complexity of diasporan identity that is constantly grappling between a back-and-forth interaction, even if not through physical travel, with the homeland.

Homophobia in Armenia

Nareh's discussion of her Armenian identity and gender also intersects with her queer identity, which was the case for approximately 17% (n=9) of my respondents. Such a scholarly representation of queerness in the Armenian community is rare due to what many of my respondents note is an existing homophobia in the community. During my participant observation and other interactions with Birthrighters and individuals I met in L.A. whom I did not interview, I had conversations with those who identified as gay and bisexual "off record" and relayed this information to me in private. I believe the few who came out to me outside of an interview highlight the remaining fear of coming out or at times, even exploring one's sexuality while in the closet as some told me they never acted on their curiosity. One respondent was a local Armenian, with the remaining 8 respondents were from the U.S. One individual did not disclose their sexual orientation. The remaining 45 respondents identified as heterosexual/straight.

According to a 2021 Human Rights Situation of LGBT People in Armenia Annual Report, there have been several instances of individuals that have come forward with human rights violations and cases of physical violence against them as LGBT people in Armenia (Pink Human Rights Defender NGO 2022). In their report, they note providing counseling to 298 LGBT people, representing 61 people in different judicial instances, and registered 35 cases of human rights violations against LGBT people. These statistics only represent those individuals

that have shared their stories and as the report states, LGBT people in Armenia avoid reporting cases of violence to law enforcement to protect themselves. The report also found instances where transgender and gay individuals were refused services at a public establishment including a grocery store and a bar. This report also highlights several domestic violence cases of parents abusing children who identify as LGBT. At the same time, hate speech against LGBT people particularly on social media platforms is ongoing. Recent developments on the legal protections against LGBT people have occurred in the form of a new criminal code that will allow for hate crimes against LGBT people to be punishable beginning in July 2022, which the Pink Armenia report identifies as "progress." According to the Human Rights Watch, LGBT people are considered part of a "propaganda" among some Armenian politicians (Human Rights Watch 2023).

The findings in the Pink Armenia report became even more evident to the public in October 2022 when social media posts highlighted a tragic story of two gay men who were in a romantic relationship and committed suicide in Armenia (fig. 4.6). The men shared a photo of their hands, each with a ring on them, with a caption translating to "Happy end." This post was shared by many in the Diaspora with calls to combat homophobia in the Armenian community.

Figure 4.6. Tweet by Pink Armenia. *Source:* Twitter.

The news upset some Armenians in Armenia and the Diaspora, but many social media posts acknowledging the tragedy of the event were coupled with a discussion of how common homophobia is in the community. In many posts, there was little shock and more anger about the status quo that this is expected due to the exclusion of LGBT people in Armenia.

While in Armenia, I closely observed my surroundings for potential photographs and fieldnotes. I especially found inspiration in several of the graffiti and writings on the wall. As I was walking to the Yerevan State University where I volunteered with the CRRC office, I entered an underground walking tunnel where there were several graffiti markings as expected near a college campus. I noticed one area showed remnants of handwritten comments with pen and a colored rainbow in marker (fig. 4.7). As I approached the wall more closely, I found that the rainbow flag was covered with hate speech against LGBT people.

Figure 4.7. LGBT hate speech on pedestrian tunnel wall, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

The realities of the difficult experience of being an LGBT Armenian were discussed by heterosexual and LGBT identifying respondents when asked about who in the Armenian community faces exclusion.

"Armenia is a homophobic country but for tourists, it's more open": In the Closet in Armenia

During my time in Armenia, I heard references to Pink Armenia, an LGBT human rights organization in Yerevan and spoke to Mamikon, a staff member there. From the beginning of wanting to conduct the interview, I recognized the fear that LGBT Armenians face in Yerevan. First, the location of the organization's office is not disclosed publicly to protect the safety of the staff and individuals who visit the office. Additionally, the office building did not have any signs or clear indication to let me know I have arrived at the proper location, which caused me to walk around the block multiple times and call Mamikon to confirm I had arrived. The lack of clarity of

finding the location is an intentional attempt to remain private as an entity, similar to the wishes of LGBT Armenians who remain closeted. Once entering the space, I immediately felt the setting resembled queer safe spaces and resource centers in the U.S. such as my university's campus LGBT resource center. The rooms included affirming posters and access to books and other resources. In one room, Mamikon informed that there was a small event and leftover refreshments were available including cheese and watermelon, two staples that comprise of an Armenian snack (fig. 4.8). Nearby, I sat with Mamikon to learn more about the organization and his role.

Mamikon, is a 39-year-old male, from Gyumri, Armenia. He moved to Yerevan in 1999 for his undergraduate studies and found an LGBT community that inspired his activism in 2002. In 2007, he started Pink Armenia noting that "we started with health programs, then it slowly grew bigger to offer more services, include advocacy work." Mamikon reflected on his courage to begin the organization noting, "When I look back, I'm so scared, I would never do it again." Mamikon explained that some of his fear is rooted in an attack his organization faced.

MAMIKON: *We were never thinking about security until 2012. We were attacked by nationalists when we organized a diversity march. They vandalized our posters and were ready to physically attack us but police were standing between us. They didn't manage to physically attack us but after that we were really scared and trying to be more careful, not to meet these guys in the street.*

After this attack, the organization continued to exist more privately while providing a safe haven for individuals whose parents did not accept them or who needed counseling services. Mamikon also explained the relationship of LGBT Armenians in Armenia and those in the Diaspora,

recognizing the difficulties that diasporans face in progressive communities back home, but noting their access to more options for visibility than in Armenia.

MAMIKON: *People [in the diaspora] email us and ask how is it? Is it dangerous? We explain that Armenia is a homophobic country but for tourists, it's more open. If you don't live here, visiting for a couple of days, especially for those for who it's [being LGBT] obvious. It will probably be more difficult for trans people but again it depends. You cannot kiss your same sex partner in public or in the club, cannot obviously show your emotions.*

Similar to references on the ability to maintain distance from the realities of the homeland during crisis and war, Mamikon highlights an ability for movement and separation for queer Armenians who are not locals. As Nareh highlighted, she can choose to remain closeted while in certain parts of Armenia only to return home to L.A. and be her authentic self. Mamikon explains that this is not an option for locals unless they leave Armenia.

MAMIKON: *If the family rejects them [those in the diaspora], then they have some possibilities to survive, to go to another place, to find themselves. In Armenia, it's harder. You depend on your family, you cannot go anywhere, they will find you. It's really hard here.*

The difficulty in living and existing as a queer Armenian is something I thought of when hearing about the news of the young gay couple who took their own lives together. After living in Armenia, I understood the news from a different context due to my exposure to several locals who chose to remain closeted and expressed their complicated sense of self while living with their families. Yet, while being in the closet is the main form of queer existence in Armenia, fragments of louder representation exist to highlight the activism of this group of Armenians who

announce their presence through a strategy that is safe for them– wall writings.

Figure 4.8. PINK Armenia office, Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

The writings on the wall": Queer Visibility in Yerevan

While anti-LGBT ideology in the household and political sphere is common in Yerevan, traveling to Yerevan exposed me to the progress that occurred in the city even amidst hate speech and homophobia. Within my first few weeks walking to the Birthright office on busy streets near Republic Square, I noticed a graffiti writing that read "transgender" (fig. 4.9). As a newly arrived diasporan in Yerevan, I was taken aback seeing this outward display of queer affirmation in Armenia and was confronted with the reality that queer activism is present in Armenia and even at times, *visible*. Months later during my last few weeks in Armenia, I visited the Mother Armenia statue. To arrive at the statue, I took the stairs of Cascade, a popular outdoor tourist destination, to the top and walked towards the street of the statue. As I was climbing these stairs, I noticed writings that read "LGBT" and "Girl in Red," a queer musical artist from the

U.S. (fig. 4.10). These writings that were in English and referenced Western/American queer figures highlight the transnational element of Yerevan and its absorption of social remittances through diasporans that repatriate or are tourists, and Western media.

Figure 4.9. Graffiti reading “transgender,” Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

Figure 4.10. Graffiti reading “Girl in Red” and “LGBT,” Yerevan. Photograph by the author.

Disruption to ideas of an Armenian family and new ideologies coming from the U.S. threaten common Armenian beliefs that argue a traditional male-female Armenian family is a necessity for maintaining Armenianness (see Beukian 2014). As a result, ideas stretching traditional gender relations, including those that challenge heteronormative relationships are rarely outwardly expressed. Yet, the wall writings highlight locals’ adaption to their existing homophobic structure while still triggering a disruption. The wall writings are a different type of visibility as they do not involve the individuals showcasing same-sex affection yet they still cause pedestrians to be confronted and engage with the presence of Armenian queer life, therefore, bringing it to the “front stage” (Goffman 1959) of public life. A multi-sited ethnographic analysis can highlight that the graffiti seen throughout this study serves as a

challenge to Americanized ideas of gay community often rooted in celebrations of being out (see Luibhéid 2004). This transnational contextualization of my findings has critical implications as ideas rooted in homophobia in Armenia and in the Diaspora continue to build on beliefs that being gay, and Armenian is not possible since such individuals are not outwardly seen. Instead, it is evident that there are diverse ways of being that call for a more nuanced understandings of identity.

CHAPTER 5: GLENDALE: LIFE IN THE DIASPORA CITY

"You can throw a paper somewhere in L.A. and it will land close to someone who is Armenian": Arriving in Los Angeles

In January 2022, a month after my return from Armenia, I moved to an L.A. neighborhood approximately 20 minutes from Glendale. During my first week, I visited the ANCA Western Region office in Glendale to speak with their Community Outreach Coordinator, Julia. Immediately during my drive to Glendale, I noticed similarities to Yerevan, specifically the mountainous landscape. I first arrived at the wrong location - another Glendale office. This presented me with an opportunity to walk around Glendale for the first time, which led me to Armenian text. Enter and exit signs for a church parking lot (fig. 5.1). Next door was a youth center with a banner that read "Free POWs" in reference to soldiers in the war in Artsakh. As I was walking, I overhead a man nearby speaking Armenian on the phone. I understood that this is what I have been hearing about when respondents mentioned Glendale resembles Armenia.

Figure 5.1. Sign in Armenian and English, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

After realizing I was at the wrong location, I made my way to ANCA's correct address. After parking, I walked towards the entry of the building and noticed a security guard outside. The security stopped me to ask, in Armenian, why I was there. I quickly remembered the Armenian I learned abroad and mentioned, that I was there to visit the ANCA. He signaled an approval and directed me inside.

As I waited in the hallway to meet with Julia, I observed the Armenian events advertised, Congressional resolutions framed, Armenian flags and sayings around me. When I introduced myself to Julia, she provided a tour of the building. The conference room included two large windows overlooking Broadway St. Immediately, I noticed the Armenian establishment, Van Bakery. Julia explained that these small businesses and Armenian centers are the fabric of the Greater L.A. and Glendale,

JULIA: *You can throw a paper somewhere in L.A. and it will land somewhere close to someone who is Armenian.*

Julia, who also lived in Boston's Armenian neighborhood, Watertown explained that Glendale stands out as an Armenia hub, largely for the opportunities it provides other Armenians.

JULIA: *As someone who lived in Watertown, I lived in a heavily Armenian populated town, the people there don't have many opportunities. Armenians invested so much in Glendale, in building these places.*

In addition to the ANCA's offices in Glendale and Washington, D.C., the third location is in Watertown which houses the Eastern Region office. Both Glendale and Watertown are historically Armenian neighborhoods, yet today, only Glendale holds a distinction for resembling Armenian way of life. As Fittante (2018) and Mirak (1983) highlight, some of the earliest migration to the U.S. from Armenia was before the 1915 Genocide to areas including Worcester, Providence, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Fresno, and Pasadena. Julia's sentiments about the decreased Armenian population in the Watertown and Boston was reiterated by others who spent time in the area. Arthur, raised in L.A., moved to Boston for medical school and expressed a desire for a strong Armenian community.

IM: *How are you involved in your local Armenian community?*

ARTHUR: *I have two communities, the one back home and the one here [Boston]. The community here I found isn't as welcoming or easy to enter. There's five Armenians in my class and I tried to start an Armenian Student Association (ASA) at the School of Medicine, there is one at Tufts in undergrad already. We had an outing where like four people showed up and then that was pretty much it. After that, I didn't really go anywhere*

because a lot of the Armenians here are much more white-washed.

In reference to his Armenian classmates in medical school, Arthur further explained that they were not very active.

ARTHUR: *They didn't really post much on Instagram. None of them speak Armenian. It's a little different. I tried to get involved with the community outside of my school. I went to church to meet Armenians but I'm not religious and I didn't grow up religious, so I just didn't belong. I had a hard time breaking into the Armenian community here.*

When discussing his political activism during the war in Artsakh, Arthur expressed that the level of participation in Boston was limited and noted that the smaller Armenian community in Boston impacted his ability to feel a sense of belonging and solidarity during this transnational moment of a crisis.

IM: *How did you stay involved in the recent war in Artsakh?*

ARTHUR: *I would go to protests every Sunday or Saturday in Boston. There would be an event and people go home after. We weren't suffering enough here. I feel like we had to be out there longer, to do something.*

Arthur's comments reflect the Armenian community's conflict with race and ethnic identity as mentioned in Chapter 4, as he explained the distinction he feels as an Armenian from others in the "White" community. While Glendale is home to new migrants, Boston and Watertown represent older settlements of Armenians post Genocide as the Northeast was home to the first known Armenian migrants (Embassy of Armenia to the United States 2023).

Isabel was raised in Massachusetts and lived in Boston for five years. She explained her experience growing up in the area as an Armenian.

ISABEL: *I grew up in the church, the community there, it's a much older Armenian community, Worcester, worked in the mills, a lot of history there, a lot of the Armenians in my church were third generation or fourth generation, whereas my family just arrived, it also felt like we never fully fit in there. Their families had been in the U.S. for so long, so rare to hear speaking clean Armenian, there was Armenian but always the slang that overtime has changed in the U.S.*

Similarly, Nareh, moved to Boston from L.A. for her undergraduate studies. After being born and raised in Glendale, Nareh discussed the sense of culture shock she experienced in Boston,

NAREH: *I didn't know any Armenians in Boston, which made me feel more Armenian than I ever have in my whole life. When you're the only Armenian in the room, you realize how freaking Armenian you are. A lot of my friends were from the Midwest, they weren't even like blonde haired and blue-eyed lineage traced back to like Poland, but it was like the Mayflower. So, there was an exotic thing about me. Specifically, they would ask, 'Where are you from?' And I tan easy but my family is so mixed in terms of shades, like my sister is in no way shape or form looks White.*

Both Arthur and Nareh were challenged to think more critically about their Armenian identity when outside of Glendale. This pattern of understanding oneself when moving away to college is not new. In her interviews with White respondents of European extraction to Roman Catholics, Waters (1990) found that "for many who had grown up in ethnically homogenous environments, leaving home was the first time they were exposed to people from other ethnic groups" (44). For

Arthur and Nareh, their conflict with Whiteness was confronted when they recognized their differences from their Boston peers. Arthur discussed the lack of Armenian language and cultural activism, while Nareh highlighted that she looked different from her "blonde haired" and "blue eyed" peers. Through comparing themselves to "white-washed" Armenians or those who are viewed as White, Nareh and Arthur expressed a greater social distance from being White and a stronger recognition, and distinction, of being Armenian.

While previously the Northeast offered a community for Armenians, current Census data and comments from participants highlight that L.A. is the center of modern Armenian activity. Today, it is estimated that approximately 40% of Glendale's population is Armenian (Fittante 2017). Similar to other ethnic enclaves, Glendale transformed since Armenians first began moving to the area in the 1970s and 1980s to resemble more aspects of "Armeniannness" (Bakalian 1993). While historically a hub for Armenians from Iran or Persian Armenians ("Parskahye") (Fittante 2017), Glendale has welcomed more Armenians from various parts of the Diaspora including Armenians from Armenia ("Hayastanci") after the fall of the Soviet Union. In the 1960s, prior to Glendale's role as an Armenian hub, Hollywood's Little Armenia was known as the central hub for Armenian social life (see Fittante 2017).

After my meeting with Julia, I walked outside to explore more of the street and found a bright plaza full of Armenian small businesses (fig. 5.2). *Armen Pharmacy*. *Ara Deli*. *Sevan Meat*. *Lilit's Flowers*. Walking in L.A. presented a constant lesson in recognizing how place consists of the past and history while simultaneously representing fluidity and movement. For example, in Hollywood, a quieter Armenian presence remains with a few Armenian grocery stores and bakeries, the St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church, and the Rose & Alex Pilibos Armenian School next door. The walls of small businesses or parking lots include Armenian

murals while homes hang the Armenian flag outside. After spending time in Glendale, the Armenian energy in Hollywood was no longer as profound as what Glendale offered. Interacting with local neighborhoods presented insight into Greater L.A's history and the mobility of its residents. Glendale today represents a lively Armenian presence, with families owning homes in the neighborhoods, cars roaming with license plates reading Armenian phrases, and the sound of Armenian language around local stores that include Armenian establishments.

Figure 5.2. Armenian businesses, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

Current Demographics

Finding accurate data on the Armenian-American population is difficult, as many do not indicate their ethnic identity by selecting the "Other" option to write in Armenian and opt for more conveniently selecting White. Organizations such as the AAA and ANCA began campaigns to educate the Armenian local communities about the importance of accurate data and representation on the Census. In 2020, local partners participated with the Census Bureau to form

the Armenian-American Complete Count Committee (AAAC) to alleviate the historical problem of Census numbers on Armenians being under-counted. As a result, the committee, based in L.A., promoted a "Hye Count" (*hye* translating to Armenian) in the local community and delivered handouts instructing Armenians on how to complete their 2020 Census (fig. 5.3). According to the ANCA's estimates, there are 1.5 million Armenians in the U.S. (Touloumian 2020).

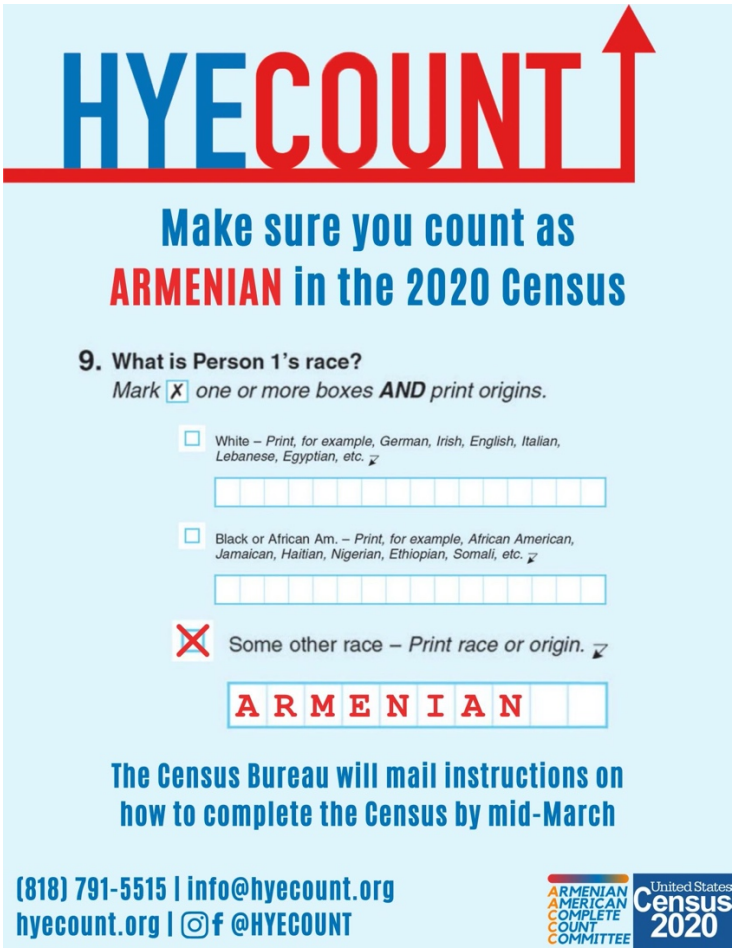

Figure 5.3. Hye Count Campaign. *Source*: ANCA, Western Region.

Against this historical background, the estimated total for the Armenian population in the U.S. found in the Census data has often been skewed. However, when referring to the 2015 ACS 5-Year Estimates, which are the most updated national statistics on Armenians, there are some findings that reflect the reality of the landscape of Armenian-Americans (table 5.1) According to

the U.S. Census, the total U.S. Armenian population is 468, 342 (.14% of the total U.S. population) with 55% of all Armenians residing in California. Out of the 55% of Armenians in California, 75% live in Los Angeles County with 41% in Los Angeles County living in the City of L.A. and 37% living in the City of Glendale. While the total population indicates that a total number of Armenians more frequently reside in the City of Los Angeles, it is important to highlight proportionally the impact of a cluster of Armenians in Glendale. While Armenians consist of only 2% of the City of Los Angeles population, Armenians consist of 37% of Glendale's total population. Therefore, the estimated Census data illustrates that proportionally, Glendale holds the most Armenians of any other city in the U.S. Additionally, proportionally, California holds the most Armenians than any other state in the U.S.

While publicly available data on Armenians in the U.S. Census system is limited in scope and includes population estimates for 2010 and 2015, the findings support the ethnographic data I acquired through interviewing individuals that grew up in Armenian enclaves such as L.A., Fresno and Boston. For example, while Fresno was once the popular destination for Armenian settlement in California due to business opportunities primarily in agricultural business prospects, today, only 2% of the Armenian population in California currently live in Fresno compared to 75% of all California Armenians that live in L.A. County. Similar findings of a once vibrant ethnic enclave now serving as a dwindling historic community are found in Massachusetts and the Boston area specifically. Only 6% of the Armenian population in Massachusetts lives in Boston today. The Armenian population in Boston comprises of only .29% of the city's total population. While the Census data on Armenians is considered widely undercounted, the data on what does exist supports my interview data that L.A. is a leader in Armenian settlement and Glendale is a unique city is home to an Armenian community unlike

any other place in the U.S. today.

Table 5.1. Demographics of Armenian Populated Locations.

Location	Total Population	Armenian Total Population	% Armenian
United States	316, 515, 021	468, 342	.14%
California	38, 421, 464	259, 430	.68%
Los Angeles County	10, 038, 388	196, 075	1.95%
Los Angeles City	3, 900, 794	82,074	2.10%
Glendale City	196, 984	72,740	37%
Fresno City	510, 451	6, 305	1.2%
Massachusetts	7, 029, 917	31, 396	.44%
Boston	650, 281	1, 909	.29%

Source: 2015 ACS 5-Year Estimates Selected Population.

When speaking to the Mayor of Glendale, Ardashes, "Ardy" Kassakhian, I received more insight on the changing dynamics of L.A.'s immigrant communities and Glendale's role as an Armenian hub. Mayor Kassakhian, who was born in Boston compared Glendale to historic Armenian communities such as Watertown, Fresno, and Hollywood.

KASSAKHIAN: *Anyone who thinks that Glendale will be a permanent solid hub of Armenian life need only look at far as Fresno or Watertown. You won't find many Armenians in Little Armenia anymore, the people who are there are lower income, haven't been able to afford to move from there. It's a totally different kind of city than the one I remember seeing when my family first moved to California, there was a lot more Armenian activity, there were*

publishing houses, bakeries, now there is just some nostalgia associated with it.

Mayor Kassakhian highlights that much of what sustains a strong ethnic community is the access to cultural connections, that are currently present in Glendale but may not always be. Mayor Kassakhian's implies that the miniscule numbers from the Census data that highlight a dwindling Armenian community in historic areas such as Watertown and Fresno may one day be numbers that represent Glendale. Similarly, L.A. City Council President, Paul Krekorian, reflected on his family's origins in the U.S. and how the Armenian community has moved to other areas in his lifetime.

KREKORIAN: *The personal interaction that comes when you're in Glendale, it's Armenians and the Armenian community, it's inescapable, but it was that way in Fresno when my grandparents, not that way so much anymore in Fresno, somewhat, but when you go back to other generation, to when my family was in Worcester MA, now you can't find an Armenian in Worcester.*

Both City Council President Krekorian and Mayor Kassakhian refer to previous hubs of Armenian life as examples of a possible future for Glendale. Thus, Glendale is not immune to inevitable structural changes that may be underway.

Today, several aspects of Glendale continue to hold it firmly as an Armenian center including opportunities to speak Armenian, immigrant replenishment, Armenian schools, cultural centers, and organizations, Armenian neighborhoods with socialization opportunities at local stores and parks, and high levels of transnational activism ultimately making Glendale an ethnic hub (fig. 5.4 and 5.5). Yet, signs of shifts are already present including rising housing costs,

closures of schools, and local residents' relocation to less centralized Armenian neighborhoods in the Valley. At the same time, a modern generation of more critical Armenians and progressive thought is impacting how those in Glendale identify their Armenianness and their desire to participate in the Armenian community due to experiences with exclusion and isolation.

How will these moving pieces impact Armenians in the coming years as a Diaspora community? As Mayor Kassakhian said in our interview, "we are an endangered species," a comment that is in parallel with how diasporans viewed their identity in relation to war and the existential threat from Armenia's neighbors. In the U.S., Armenians face a less violent entity as an adversary country, but face social threats to existence, nonetheless. New questions arise such as, what characteristics are necessary for Glendale to sustain the future of its Armenian community?

Figure 5.4. Artsakh Ave. street sign, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

Figure 5.5. Playset at Maple Park, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

"Why would you fly a flag of country, whose foundation, and land was acquired by genocide to then protest your own people going through genocide?": Tension with Being Armenian in the U.S.

During my first week in L.A., I visited the Coffee Commissary, a local coffee shop in Glendale, and observed the interactions among many Armenians who frequented this coffee shop. Commissary is located in Kenneth Village, a neighborhood in Glendale home to Armenian and non-Armenian residents. As I walked on Kenneth Rd., I noticed Armenian representation with lawn signs and an Armenian flag in front of the shop. Commissary is not an Armenian coffee shop, yet the tables were filled with young Armenians working together, catching up, and unintentionally running into someone they know. This coffee shop is where I first met Angela. After snowball sampling and recruiting her through direct messaging her on a social media platform, I investigated her social media page that included curated film images of L.A. and her

activism in the city. Knowing what she looks like from those photos, I waved to her as she walked into Commissary with short, brown curly hair, and a hip outfit, representing a fashionable energy of L.A.'s young residents that became a noticeable pattern as I frequented other neighborhoods nearby such as Echo Park, Silverlake, and Los Feliz during my fieldwork.

Angela was born and raised in Glendale, yet she does not represent a common stereotype of Glendale – she is progressive, a queer ally, and is passionate about coalition building with other communities in L.A. in her professional role as a social worker and personal activist efforts. Speaking to her as one of my first interviews in L.A. was a catalyst to understanding the changing community of Armenians through the perspective of a new modern generation of leaders and activists that are attempting to break free of past rigid ways of being Armenian.

For Angela, growing up in Glendale instilled an Armenian identity that resembled the comments from Nareh and Arthur. In Glendale, Angela feels seen. Armenians created a presence and community that even non-Armenians recognize. Angela explained that due to this strong Armenian identity and her ancestors' history, she chooses not to identify as White.

IM: *So, you mentioned Armenian identity is being erased. So even being in Glendale, you feel this?*

ANGELA: *In Glendale, I feel like we're very known, everyone knows we are ethnic people but I feel like because Armenians were forced to identify with White when they immigrated here, the first Armenians that came over were identified as White and it started this association. I feel like we don't identify as Hispanic, Black, East Asian, American Indian, I feel like by default we pick White because it feels the closest, and this developed this identity crisis within Armenians. They are trying very hard to be*

European, Armenians are closer to Lebanese and Persian people then they ever will be to France and Spain.

Respondents from Glendale offer a two-folded understanding of their ethnic and racial identity. When in Glendale, they feel non-White due to a common understanding among them and non-Armenians of their ethnic identity. Thus, these Armenians feel non-White due to the Armenian community that exists there and helps them understand who they are. On the other hand, when those such as Nareh and Arthur travel outside of Glendale, they identity as non-White when an Armenian community is nonexistent due to feeling like an outlier from those around them. Therefore, both the presence and absence of Armenians influence respondents to identify as Armenian instead of White. Location thus influences self-identity. The respondents highlight that even through the movement to different locations, they carry with them an understanding of self that is consistently within them related to Glendale. Respondents do the work of realizing how separation influences their understanding of self, as seen in Armenia as well when Nareh recognized she could be gay in L.A. but not in Armenia.

It is important to note that the respondents in this study reflect only one group within the larger Armenian Diaspora. This includes a group of a transnational young generation of Armenians who have higher education degrees, capital in the U.S., a history of participating in ethnic organizations, and travel to Armenia. As a result, their understanding of identity is fleshed out in a way that is a result of actions that have led to a grappling with self. Angela highlights that even her parents and siblings are much different than her on understanding Armenianness.

Angela noted that during the war in Artsakh, her family members wanted to highlight their dual allegiance to the U.S. and their Armenian roots.

ANGELA: *If you ask my brother and my sister, they are much more conservative. In*

> *April [Armenian Genocide Commemoration month], they had Armenian flags on the cars. I remember when the war was happening, they took out their flags. My family was making remarks saying how it's disrespectful to have an Armenian flag on both sides of the car, you're still living in America, you should have an Armenian flag on one side. And my siblings had the audacity to say the American flag should be a little higher, or it's disrespectful to the country you're living in.*
>
> *What does it do for me? We were able to build a life. It's the bare minimum…why would you fly a flag of country, whose foundation, and land was acquired by Genocide to then protest your own people going through genocide? To me it just made no sense, it's very contradictory.*

Much of Angela's commentary is reflective of the current dialogue in the U.S. particularly among the younger generation that is more critical of the state, and not only values multiculturalism but specifically is interested in anti-White categorizations that are different from earlier assimilation attempts for Whiteness by the generation. Savelsberg (2021) noted that society is experiencing the age of a "human rights hegemony" meaning dialogue is centered on correcting past atrocities. At the same time, to prevent new global tragedies from occurring, the human rights hegemony functions by analogical bridging that relates current events to examples of past cases that resulted in violence or human error, such as genocide. Angela's response indicates a micro level example of individuals impacted by genocidal history. As a result, identifying as non-White is more endorsed and encouraged than one generation ago when assimilation was still the goal.

Angela points out how then these global historic events, negatively impact her desire to

identify with Whiteness highlighting that global events and societal shifts, as Savelsberg explains, influence her understanding of self.

ANGELA: *I think the real enemy is whiteness and colonization but they made Armenians believe that they are like white people, but if you were truly white, people would give a damn about you, nobody cares about you, nobody even knows what you are, you're a little tiny country, people learn about Spain, and Italy, and Greece but no one is going to learn about Armenia, it just tells you, we aren't part of the mainstream. Because people live in Glendale, because there's so many of us, it creates the illusion we are very well known but the second you step out of LA, forget it, people think just because everyone knows what an Armenian is and there's an Armenian flag hanging outside of Commissary, oh my god people know about us, they care about us but America isn't just LA there's other areas outside.*

As recent as one generation ago, Armenians were not as welcome in L.A., specifically Glendale, as they are now. Much of the hesitation about Armenians moving into the area was tied to not understanding which racial category they fit in. The process for Armenians as a collective to be more commonly seen as White in the U.S. involves a legal and sociological discussions of racial categorization and the accumulation of capital including educational attainment, language skills, and wealth.

"They were called low class Jews, Fresno Indians, Dirty Black Armenians": Armenian Integration in L.A.

Patil is 26 years old, was born in Glendale, and currently lives in La Cañada, California. I first met Patil while living in Yerevan in the summer of 2021 when she was working for the

Human Rights Defenders office of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When I arrived in L.A., Patil also returned to finish her last year of law school at USC. During my interview with her, Patil mentioned her parents moved to L.A. as first-generation immigrants. Patil's mother was born in Tehran, Iran and father was born in Beirut, Lebanon. Her father immigrated to the U.S. in the late 60s and her mother moved in the early 80s. Patil's parents met at a party in L.A. while at USC eventually marrying and completing medical school together. Both doctors, Patil's parents faced discrimination well past the court rulings mentioned earlier.

PATIL: *My own parents faced a lot of challenges opening up their own medical practices in Glendale just because of the institutionalized discrimination in the medical field.*

IM: *Do you know what sort of discrimination happened, or growing up did your parents share some stories of why it was difficult?*

PATIL: *I think it was in the hospital when they first started practicing, the positions of leadership were occupied primarily by White Anglo-Saxon doctors and administrators and Armenians were not well represented at that time. So, they felt an undertone of discrimination as they were trying to navigate the politics of the hospital. My parents told me the Armenians aligned at that time with Cubans who were in Glendale because there is actually a decently sized Cuban refugee population, so kind of coalition building in a way.*

Also, Glendale used to be a center of the KKK in California, and there were many KKK sympathizers in the police force and my dad told me about when he was pulled over with no basis at a traffic stop because they

would target Armenians as well in the 80s and continuing into the early 90s.

Patil went on to explain that while she believes Armenians are White passing, she does not feel White due to the history of her parents' experience and far beyond.

PATIL: *I think that as Armenians we definitely benefit from white passing privilege because of our physical appearance, and I have very light skin so in terms of our physical appearance, we may appear White but our history as a people does not align with what is the mainstream White Anglo-Saxon experience in the U.S.*

When Armenians first began immigrating to California to the Central Valley, the Fresno area, the main agricultural region… Armenians started migrating in large groups in the late 1800s. In the lead up to the genocide there were other events in what is now Turkey, what at that time was the Ottoman Empire. When Armenians first started migrating in large groups, they were subjected to racially restrictive housing covenants and racial discrimination, they were called low-class Jews, Fresno Indians, Dirty Black Armenians, and this kind of discrimination continued well into the 20th century even as Armenians became well represented in Los Angeles, and Glendale specifically.

Patil's story depicts the reality of the Armenian lived experience, even with having official legal White status in the U.S. As a result of this confusion between historic categorization and a desire for assimilation, while recognizing a difference from the White, or as Patil describes it, "the Anglo-Saxon" experience, several respondents noted uncertainty on how to fill out the Census.

As Waters (1990) described, "it is through meeting someone different from themselves that people's own ethnicity becomes clearer" (45). More recent works have further explored this pattern. In her study on young Iranian Americans, Maghbouleh (2020) defined the act of comparing and separating from the dominant American white psychosomatic norm as "splitting."

While the traditional notion of Armenians being White arrives with the understanding that this may ease their experience in the U.S., those in L.A. highlight a different reality. The Armenian population size being so large in L.A. is a result of new immigrants continually emigrating to the area from Armenia as well as from Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait to name a few. Members of the diaspora community in L.A. arrived with previous affiliations such as Middle-Eastern or Soviet with different cuisines and dialects from one another. Even those who speak one kind of dialect, such as Eastern, differ in how their language was used in the previous diaspora country. For instance, from my conversations with Iranian-Armenians in L.A., it was evident that their way of speaking Armenian is different than other Eastern speaking Armenians. This will be discussed further in the below section.

One failure in assuming Armenian assimilation and eventual White status has been the lack of understanding the diversity within one diaspora community and the impact of new immigrants that continue to sustain ethnic ties. Hall (1990) clarified that diaspora is not a stable, fixed concept but instead, always in process and reproduction. Therefore, while Armenians were distinguished as on the European side, this is not an accurate representation when tracing their diasporic journeys. Neda Maghbouleh explains that "racial hinges" are apparent within some immigrants noting "the geographic, political, and pseudoscientific specter of a racially liminal group, like Iranians, can be marshaled by a variety of legal and extra-legal actors into a symbolic hinge that opens and closes the door to whiteness as necessary" (2017:5). Maghbouleh (2017)

summarizes earlier legal cases that revealed Armenians may have more access to Whiteness and can be found on the European side as they were "well positioned for American assimilation thanks to their shared Christian allegiance, juxtaposed to the non-whiteness of "fire worshipping" Iranians and other Ottoman-ruled Muslims" (2017).

Yet, the assumptions of the court rulings did not trickle down to the real experiences of the diverse group of Armenians. First, many Armenians, particularly those in L.A., came from Iran. Parskahyes (Persian Armenians) strongly relate to their Iranian culture and upbringing in Iran. In fact, some of these Armenians feel closer to their Iranian ties than Armenian or American ones. Additionally, Armenian traditions remain in L.A. with the support of the community to host traditional events that date back to Armenia's pre-Christian identity. During my fieldwork in L.A., a group held an event for "Trndez," a holiday dating back to Armenia's pagan times, that is now used as a Christian holiday to celebrate love and involves couples jumping over a fire-pit, resembling Maghbouleh's point of "fire worshipping" that some may have thought was far removed from the Armenian case (fig. 5.6). This event was a fundraiser to collect donations to aid Artsakh war relief efforts.

Figure 5.6. Social media flyer for Trndez event. *Source:* Healing Artsakh.

The various ways of identification for Armenian-Americans highlights the core of what defines a diaspora— diversity and difference. Diaspora communities illustrate that space is fluid as Armenians come and go from different parts of the world yet remain Armenian, even those who have no strong ties to Armenia. As a result, their way of categorizing their racial and ethnic identity is in turn, varied by their family's roots and history of frequent movement. As Klapeer and Laskar (2018) note, "space is fluid and porous, so are categories used to identify us."

"The music, the food, the way we talk, it's different from how other Armenians talk": Difference in Armenianness

While approximately 40% of my respondents identified as Armenian when asked about their racial and ethnic identity, 24% were classified as Other. Within this group (13 out of 55

respondents), eight respondents furthered explained what they feel fits better when deciding to pick Other. Several referenced feeling closer to a Middle-Eastern, SWANA or Middle-Eastern and/or North African (MENA). For some, this is due to both their lived in experienced in the U.S. as well as their family roots.

Similar to different language dialects that were discussed in Chapter 4, Armenians also experience a difference in their cultural experiences including traditions and foods tied to their diasporic hyphenated Armenian identity. The reality that Armenians come from different countries as opposed to one homeland already challenges notions of an ideal type of Armenian and a universal connection to today's Amenia, which includes strong post-Soviet influences. For some, a Middle-Eastern rather than Soviet connection is prominent due to their family origins. For Nareh, her parents' upbringing in Iran influenced her household in L.A.

IM: *How do you identify your racial and ethnic background?*

NAREH: *Ethnically, Armenian. Iranian-Armenian. I don't identify as White and but I'm not a person of color. It depends on who else is in the room, in a room full of WASP-y people, it's obvious I'm not White.*

Similar to Nareh, Maryam is also Iranian-Armenian, or Parskahye, and grew up in La Crescenta. Maryam is 22 years old, and I first interviewed her in Yerevan after I met her at my placement organization site where she was also volunteering. Maryam does not identify as White and connects strongly to her Iranian upbringing.

IM: *How do you identify your racial and ethnic background?*

MARYAM: *On forms, I check Middle-eastern because I don't want to check White. I don't feel like I'm White and there's no box that says from the Caucuses. I'm not White, I have white skin.*

IM: *What makes you feel not White?*

MARYAM: *Mixed culture, language, the ideals, communities, associating with a group that's been persecuted very heavily, and having that on my shoulders, doing fundraising every year. Having a unibrow in 4th grade and getting picked on. Being Persian Armenian, it's pretty important. The music, the food, the way we talk, it's different from how other Armenians talk. People say Persian Armenians sing when they talk, their words are drawn out. It's musical. People can tell you're Parskahye.*

Maryam highlights how she thinks through the question about her racial and ethnic identity in connection to not only her Armenianness but her Iranian connections, too. For Nareh and Maryam, being Parskahye is a specific subcategory of Armenianness that more accurately represents their ethnic identity than just Armenian.

In addition to Iran, Armenian communities have a presence in Beirut, Lebanon. Karine is the founder of Kooyrigs, a nonprofit organization that fundraises and supports causes in Armenia and the Diaspora. Karine's identity is tied to her family's history in Beirut. Karine is originally from Michigan and completing school in New York while splitting her time in Yerevan where she has her office headquarters.

KARINE: *I've always felt more pulled towards Middle-Eastern just because my family does have roots in Beirut so that always resonated with me personally.*

Even for some respondents whose family had ties to Armenia, they still felt closer to a Middle-Eastern category. Arman, for instance, is 22 years old and a recent graduate of UCLA. We first met when he was completing his Birthright volunteer assignment at the same time as I

was in Yerevan and later reconnected when he moved back home to L.A. Arman was born in Glendale and both of his parents moved to the U.S. from Armenia. Arman's father was born in Iran and moved to Armenia when he was four years old, while his mother was born in Armenia. Arman explained how he processed his ethnic identity.

ARMAN: *Ethnically I would say I am Armenian, racially I would just say Middle-Eastern. I could say White but I wouldn't usually say White. When I imagine White people, I imagine European. Armenia is straddling Europe and Asia, it's different. The conception of a White person in America is not what I conceive an Armenian as, it's pretty different. I guess in general I don't put much importance on racial clarification, someone who is White won't necessarily see me as White. Physically, I look different and culturally, Armenians are much closer to the Middle East. I don't see the Middle East as White.*

Similar to Arman, Angela's parents moved from Armenia to the U.S. Her self-identity resembles the comments of Maryam and Nareh.

ANGELA: *In terms of how I identify, I put SWANA on forms, I always put Other. I don't consider myself White. I'll put Other or Middle easter. Our culture is very shared.*

IM: *Why don't you consider yourself White?*

ANGELA: *I just feel like we have a certain trauma, they don't experience mass alienation, the way most Middle-Eastern have, the way ethnic moms act, immigrant moms…I'll give you an example. They have a different love language than white moms do. In White families, everything is very*

> *verbalized, very spoken, in ethnic families, it's more actions. In White families, they have their boyfriends come sleep over, they can be out in late hours of the night, no trauma aspect that makes those parents overprotective, not as much emphasis on family bonds, it's very much engrained it doesn't necessarily mean it's healthy. When I think of White people, I notice they don't visit their families as much. LA is full of transplants that come from small towns, I noticed they're totally okay with just seeing their mom and dad twice a year. For Armenians, they don't want to live 30 minutes away from their family, there's this constant assumption that your family will always come over, we always just include family.*

Angela's perspective adds context to the responses from Arman, Maryam and Nareh through her work of understanding herself in comparison to "White families." For Angela, thinking about her family and their behaviors in the household highlight differences that distance her from her White peers and in turn, influence her understanding as something other than White.

The respondents above highlight diversity in how one chooses a nonwhite category that is not only tied to physical roots in other diaspora countries such as Iran or Lebanon, but also in cultural and social understandings of identity such as language, food, music, and family. This finding highlights earlier scholarship that noted immigrants have the agency to choose various ethnic options for themselves (see Waters 1990). The respondents highlight there is difference in their larger Armenian community in L.A. rather than functioning as a monolith. This finding falls in line with scholars such as Hall who viewed the term diaspora as having diversity, difference, and hybridity, rather than "scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in

relation to some sacred homeland" (Hall: 235). All respondents have assimilated according to traditional expectations, including having English language skills, higher education, integration in their communities, and as a young generation, on the path towards financial success through their degrees and jobs. Yet, their racial and ethnic identification is much more nuanced and complex than the initial understanding in legal cases that concluded Armenians are White due to their ability to assimilate.

As a result of the large Armenian presence in Glendale, the location becomes a site for multiple ways of being Armenian that push against one form of Armenianness. Not only does Glendale highlight the possibility of being assimilated and tied to ethnic identity, it also supports diversity within the ethnic understanding of self by being home to multiple kinds of Armenian communities. In addition to personal and family ties to one's Armenianness, Glendale's diverse Armenian community makes it possible for the city to house institutional and cultural systems such as ethnic organizations, schools, stores, and restaurants to keep this ethnic identity alive. Yet, as my respondents highlighted, it is in these more fixed spaces that their diversity can become a point of exclusion and conflict rather than unity.

"By default, she passed it on to us": Growing Up in Organizations

A key factor in making sense of how Armenians of even third, fourth, and fifth generation maintain strong ethnic ties and showcase transnationalism is through a focus on their involvement in Armenian organizations. Out of the 55 respondents I interviewed, 55% (n=31) were coded as strongly involved, 13% (n=7) were coded as displaying occasional involvement, 20% (n=11) were coded as was involved at some point but not anymore, and only 6% (n=3) were coded as never being involved in Armenian organizations. Three local respondents who were

born and living in Armenia were not asked this question as they are not considered part of the Diaspora.

Out of the 55 respondents, 60% (n=33) were from L.A. and 33% (n=18) were in L.A. during the time of our interviews while others were in different states for school or in Armenia working or volunteering with Birthright. L.A. offers the largest selection of Armenian organizations, churches, and schools. As a result, accessibility has been an important topic for exploration during my fieldwork in L.A. specifically. To begin tracing respondents' organizational involvement, I asked about their earliest memory of being in any official organizational or Armenian schooling. For some, this participation began as early as elementary due to their parental influence.

Parental Influence

Several respondents noted that their parents had an impact on their Armenian identity on an organizational level. While some parents began involvement in the U.S. when they immigrated, others were already involved in their diaspora communities and brought their ties to organization to the U.S. chapters. Some respondents' parents even met at an Armenian organization's event. As a result, there was a passing of the torch with a sense of responsibility and duty to maintain activity in these organizations, schools, and churches. For instance, Aram is 27 years old from L.A. and has been highly involved in his L.A. community through the ANCA Professional Network, AYF, Holy Martyrs Ferrahian Armenian School in Encino, and the local L.A. Homenetmen chapter where he played sports with other Armenian youth. I interviewed Aram via Zoom. When he joined our Zoom, I immediately noticed an Artsakh flag hanging on the wall behind him. Aram's parents have roots in Beirut, Lebanon and Aleppo, Syria. After

listing his membership in several organizations, Aram mentioned it has been a common trend in his life to participate.

ARAM: *I always been a part of them, it's just something that is part of my life from a young age, my parents encouraged it and I stuck with it.*

Today, Aram maintains involvement that is no longer tied to his parents but his own choice.

ARAM: *When I was growing up, it was volunteer based. Everything there for me was due to someone or others who made it happen so it is a way to give back and return the favor, in whatever ways.*

IM: *Do you feel a sense of duty to do this?*

ARAM: *Yeah, it's the bare minimum that we can do.*

Similarly, Daron, now a repatriate in Yerevan, grew up in O.C. and was heavily involved in organizations in the area and in L.A. Daron explains that his parents, both born in Beirut moved to the states with him from Kuwait as a child and wanted to instill a connection to Armenian organizations in California.

IM: *How were you involved in your local Armenian community back home?*

DARON: *Both of my parents are Armenian, when they moved to America, they had priorities to keep both my brother and I Armenian. They had us go to Armenian School in Orange County, it's a community of around 20,000 to 30,000 Armenians but not very connected but there was an Armenian community with the school and Agoump which is the Armenian club.*

So, these were things I was a part. I was active in Homenetmen and AYF. I was very involved. We also had scouts which is part Homenetmen. I was part of everything. We had scouts every Saturday, we had Homenetmen

basketball tournaments and games every week. We had AYF junior meetings until you're 14-16, and then you move on to the AYF which is the older group. So, I was serving on executive boards, AYF mainly, and eventually I was on the Central Executive AYF Western Region for a year in 2011-2012.

IM: *When did you first start getting involved?*

DARON: *Probably around 10 or 11 years old.*

IM: *Was it something your parents wanted you to do?*

DARON: *My parents grew up in the Dashnagsagan community back in Lebanon so it was kind of part of their lives so in Orange County, it was something they wanted me to be a part of as well.*

Another respondent from O.C., Garo, is a fifth-generation Armenian in the U.S. and is 26 years old. I first met Garo in Yerevan where we completed our interview. Later, when moving to L.A., I saw Garo again to reconnect and learn more about his life in California. Garo was in Armenia in the summer of 2021 on behalf of the AYF Summer Internship where he was the director of the program and supervising interns. He explained how his involvement in organizations began.

GARO: *My mom was in AYF growing up. I was a big Armenian nerd right off the bat. My friends will ask was it AYF that made you are crazy Armenian? I'm like, not it was my mom. I'm like her and my grandma, it's our Hayasterootyun (patriotism).*

Similarly, Julia, who grew up in Glendale and North Hollywood after moving to California from Beirut at 11 years old was encouraged to participate in organizations through her parents who were involved in Lebanon.

Maryam's parents, both from Iran, also were previously involved.

MARYAM: *My dad was in ARF, with the Dashnags briefy and AYF, Homenetmen. My mom in L.A. was a scout in Ararat Scouts. Ararat is a little more Parskahye.*

IM: *How are you involved in your local Armenian community?*

MARYAM: *I was in Scouts and Homenetmen for five years. My parents forced me to be in it. I didn't like it. That's where they [parents] met their big Armenian community but it was not the same for me as it was for them. Times are different. People are different.*

Nareh's parents' involvement in Iran also traveled with them to L.A.

IM: *How are you involved in your local Armenian community?*

NAREH: *Almost by default. Both my parents were involved. Both of my parents were Scoutagants, they did Homenetmen. My mother continued, my mom was involved in Iran and Glendale. By default, she passed it on to us.*

Nareh highlighted she did not necessarily want to participate but was "forced." Nareh previously visited Armenia through the Paros Foundation when she was 16 to volunteer in Armenia for a month.

NAREH: *I didn't want to. My parents forced me to.*

Noushig, who is from L.A. and I first met in Yerevan, is 27 years old. Noushig was in Yerevan to complete academic research. Noushig's mother was born in Venezuela and her father was born in Lebanon. Her parents met in L.A. and first settled in Montebello, a historic Armenian community in California. Noushig explained that growing up, she attended the Holy Martyrs Ferrahian Armenian School from Pre-Kindergarten to graduation.

IM: *Did you want to go there or was it encouraged by your parents?*

NOUSHIG: *It was pushed by my parents. They really wanted me to go there.*

As evidenced by the conversations with participants, parental influence was either welcomed or in conflict with the desires while they were youth. For many, their parents had existing knowledge of organizations and were involved in their host societies and in their home countries. Yet, for others, parents were also the explanation for a lack of involvement. For some, specifically first-generation Armenians, their parents had less social and cultural capital, and did not have associations with organizations. As a result, these individuals displayed less formal involvement.

Lack of Parental Influence

A trend in my data analysis was a difference between the first-generation respondents and those of later generations. The difference between these respondents was most evident in their history of organizational involvement. For the first-generation immigrants, ties to strong diaspora organizations such as AYF or Homenetmen, two that were commonly referenced by the respondents above, were nearly nonexistent.

For some first-generation respondents, being involved in an organization was not feasible, even when living in L.A. and having social access to it. Arthur, who immigrated with his family to L.A., explains that they lacked the financial access to join organizations even when various options for membership were in close proximity in L.A.

ARTHUR: *I grew up dirt poor so I couldn't afford to go to the summer camps. My family couldn't pay $400 for me to go to a camp for a month. So I missed out on that stuff. My parents weren't in the know on*

what is AGBU, what is AYF, what is Ararat, so I never got to join those communities.

I never felt like I cared that much. I was just Armenian.

By the time it was later, with AYF, I tried to go actually, they had an orientation where all the camp counselors go and you either get selected or you don't and everyone else there was a camper from before. I was the only one that was completely new so I didn't get it. I wasn't part of that. Everyone there felt wealthy to me. They grew up in a different way.

Similar themes of lack of organizational involvement being tied to financial status was mentioned by the Mayor Ardy Kassakhian whose parents moved to the U.S. in the 1960s. Mayor Kassakhian's parents moved to Armenia to complete graduate studies at Yerevan State University where they met and later moved to L.A. in the mid 1980s where they lived in Little Armenia and Hollywood and eventually settled in Glendale. As Mayor Kassakhian's parents were adjusting to life in the U.S., Armenian organizations were not at the center of their lifestyle.

KASSAKHIAN: *My parents were at a point in their lives where our household had to become a dual income household, so as soon as were old enough to look after each other, my mom went back to work. We lived in an apartment. My father worked. He was an environmental chemist. There were periods where we were a one income household. So my parents didn't take us to play organized sports, or to join Armenian boycotts.*

I didn't have a strong sense of identity and purpose until college at UCLA.

Arman, whose parents are first-generation, mentioned that he was not aware of various organizations in Glendale.

ARMAN: *Throughout public-school life, I had very little involvement with the Armenian community, I didn't really know much about organizations, none of my family was affiliated with that stuff, I was not necessarily that proud, even though my high school was 60% Armenian.*

Mayor Kassakhian mentioned he did not have "a strong sense of identity and purpose until college." Similarly, Arman who noted he "had very little involvement" eventually became the ASA President at UCLA. This shift from low involvement for some in childhood to a new understanding of Armenianness during college was common. While some individuals experience a decrease in involvement as they become more engulfed in classwork and living on campus, for several of my respondents, college was the pinnacle of their Armenia participation.

"I started getting into Anthropology and Linguistics, you learned about different cultures and languages, and I wanted to learn more about my culture": University Involvement

L.A. presents opportunities for university level Armenians to maintain ties with their ethnic identity at a time when leaving home and being on a college campus often conflicts with one's home connections. Instead, for several participants, involvement increased in college. One explanation for this trend is due to participation options that were no longer rooted in organizations that were tied to having parents in these organizations or being a certain type of Armenian. At the university level, students were able to combine their own interests in history, policy, and social justice efforts with their Armenian identity through classwork and research projects. When coding for Armenian organization participation in college, 21 respondents

referenced the ASA, seven referenced classes, seven referenced a political internship, three referenced making more Armenian friends, three reference Armenian Greek life, and four referenced less involvement.

I reconnected with three of my respondents, Arman, Martin, and Patil, when I moved to L.A. and visited their university campuses. Arman, 22, and Martin, 21 were recent graduates of UCLA whom I first met as Birthright volunteers in Yerevan and spoke to again in L.A. Patil was a third-year law student at USC and an undergraduate alumnus of the university. I first visited UCLA with Arman and Martin. I met up with the two of them in Glendale at Martin's house where we all gathered into his car as he drove us to the Brentwood area to UCLA's campus. This was approximately a 40-minute drive. Arman was more heavily involved in Armenian student activities at UCLA. Arman was the President of ASA his senior year and in the Armenian fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Omega. Martin was less involved due to transferring to UCLA shortly before COVID-19 began. Martin first completed his education at Glendale Community College (GCC) which was a common trajectory for students before transferring to larger California universities.

Arman and Martin formed strong bonds with their Armenian faculty. Martin was recently accepted to the UCLA Department of History PhD program where he plans to study Armenian issues, while Arman was preparing his move to New York City to begin law school at Columbia University. Both respondents can be considered having high levels of cultural and social capital in the community as second-generation migrants from Armenia.

Arman and Martin noted not being involved in Armenian organizations during their childhood. Yet, both strongly wanted to live in Armenia and do Birthright, with Arman even

extending his stay against his parents' wishes. Arman's original volunteer plan was for the summer. I spoke to him in July 2021. Yet, during our conversation, he already planned to extend.

ARMAN: *It's hard for me to leave and I'm officially extending for the second time. My mom keeps arguing with me. I feel very conflicted. I'm fascinated and interested, there's a lot of depth to it [Armenia].*

Arman did eventually return to L.A., where I saw him in February 2022. I was curious what prompted Arman and Martin to travel to Armenia and even want to repatriate when they have been raised in L.A. and were succeeding in their education and careers. While walking around UCLA's campus with both, I sensed their passion for using their education, and cultural capital, to further their understanding of their own ethnic identity as well as Armenia at large.

For Martin, who was continuing his journey at UCLA with his PhD, getting this degree was intended to benefit Armenia in the long term. When I first spoke to Martin in Armenia in November 2021, his emotional ties to Armenia were strong. Martin only visited Armenia once before when he was eight years old for a cousin's baptism. His Birthright trip was different.

MARTIN: *It's definitely very different this time. I'm on my own. I'm actually working here. I'm not just doing tourist activities, definitely strengthened my desire to come here and live here.*

The physical homeland was important to Martin's sense of self. I began to wonder if he was considering repatriating.

IM: *Do you want to repatriate?*

MARTIN: *It is not something I'm going to do immediately, something I want to do when I'm done with my higher education. I genuinely feel I can do much*

more, and I would feel much more helpful living in Armenia than I would outside.

I feel the best thing I can do for Armenia is to come here and raise my children here, pay taxes here, work here, contribute to brining the country back on its feet and taking it forward.

After the war in particular, I decided to go to law school, I felt I could do much more with a law degree in Armenia than history but now I have started reconsidering, I'm applying to history PhD programs, either way my plan is to come to Armenia use those skills to help out here

For Arman and Martin, their community in L.A. and the access to Armenians club in college instilled in them an understanding of their Armenianness that they wished to expand by using their new skills and degrees to contribute to the development of Armenia. UCLA provided an environment to enrich their ethnic identity through the presence of an active ASA and resources such as the Promise Armenian Institute and Armenian Studies courses (fig. 5.7).

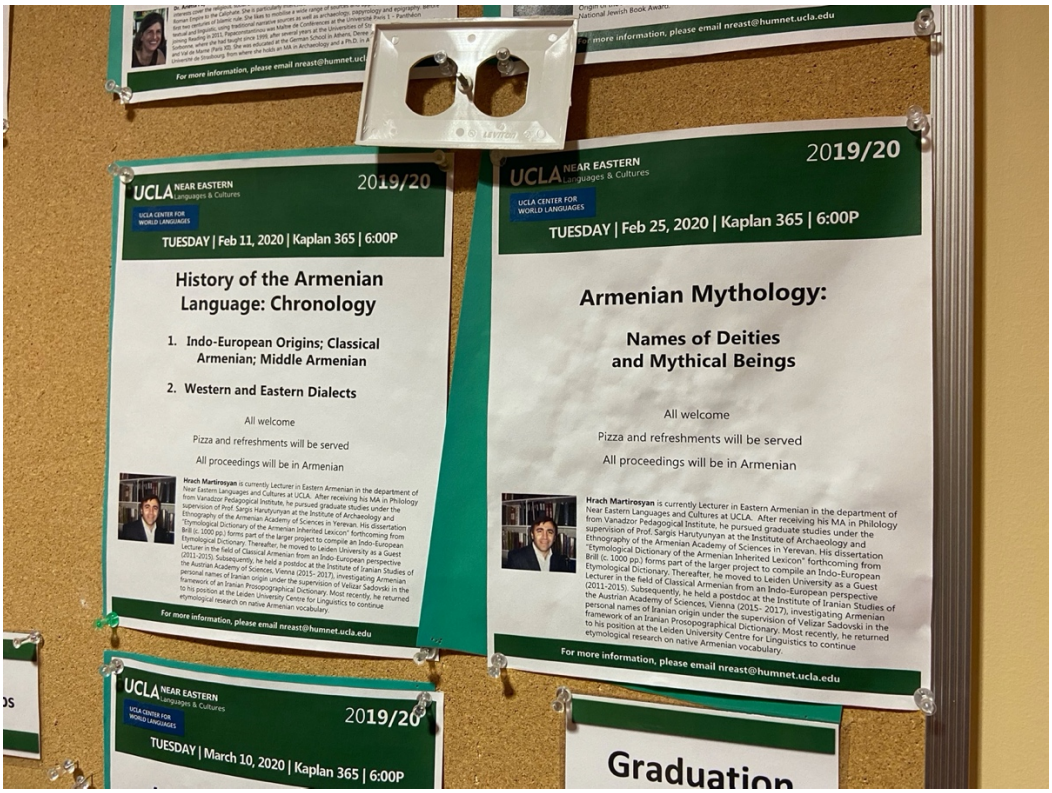

Figure 5.7. Flyers at the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, UCLA. Photograph by the author.

A few weeks after touring UCLA with Arman and Martin, I drove to USC to meet with Patil and explore her campus. Similar to UCLA, USC also offers Armenian courses and includes organizations such as the ASA. The campus also houses the USC Institute of Armenian Studies (fig. 5.8) that offers research fellowships and scholarships. Patil was heavily involved with the Institute and led me to the office to meet the director whom she knew, Dr. Shushan Karapetian. Among arrival, I immediately noticed a table in the middle of the entry that had dried fruits and nuts, reminding me of the hospitability in any Armenian office. The Institute had an event prior to my arrival and left some treats on the table. Behind the table were bookshelves with a small sign on one shelf reading “Little Armenia: Next Exit.” At the center of the office was a white board with an Armenian quote of the day written in Armenian.

Figure 5.8. USC Institute of Armenian Studies Office, USC. Photograph by the author.

In addition to the Institute and organizations such as Armenian fraternities, the ASA provides students with option to connect with their Armenianness while in the U.S. through community building and events such as protests and marches. These organizations also inform students about options for volunteering and traveling to Armenia. Through ASA meetings, students attend presentations and lectures where they learn about programs such as Birthright. Even outside of L.A., universities such as Berkeley offer Armenian classes and an ASA. Vic, who grew up in L.A. is currently living in Glendale and is an alumnus of Berkeley. Vic explained that their involvement in Armenian organizations began at their university which eventually led to moving to Armenia.

VIC: *I started taking language classes at Berkeley, and then somebody there said, you should consider the Birthright program and it was honestly the first time I heard of the program.*

Therefore, universities not only present an opportunity for Armenian involvement to increase in college, but also for direct action of traveling through their information sharing of Birthright and other opportunities for engagement in Armenia.

In addition to ASAs, the college curriculum in L.A. encourages attachment to ethnic identity for my participants. For seven of the participants that referenced Armenian involvement in college, classes were an opportunity to learn the Armenian language and history. Lara is 20 years old, was born in Hollywood, and currently living in the Sunland-Tujunga area. Lara's college experience was a turning point in their Armenianness. Lara's parents were both born in Yerevan and moved to the U.S. in the 1990s. Lara's family speaks Eastern Armenian dialect in the household. Lara has been a member of the ASA at GCC and now at UCLA after transferring. Lara mentioned they were not very proud to be Armenian before college.

IM: *So prior to college, you weren't involved in any organizations?*

LARA: *No, in high school I wasn't very proud of being Armenian and was not involved.*

IM: *Did you go to a public school?*

LARA: *Yeah, I went to a public school here.*

IM: *Oh yes, I also know there are some private Armenian schools in the area, right?*

LARA: *Yeah, those K-12 private schools are very expensive.*

IM: *So, do you want to say a little more on what you meant when you said you weren't very proud of being Armenian?*

LARA: *So, Los Angeles is a very diverse place to live in but even still, kind of like white supremacy and racism is all empowering so everyone in middle and*

high school was just overall ashamed of who they were, including Armenians. Then, I went to GCC, it was kind of a 180, everyone is Armenian there. So, I kind of started getting into it and I got a certificate in Armenian language there and started taking all these classes and got really into it.

IM: *So do you want to explain a little more about that period where you transitioned from feelings of embarrassment or feeling ashamed, to saying I'm over that and I will participate.*

LARA: *Honestly, I think it was when I started getting into Anthropology and Linguistics, you learned about different cultures and languages, and I wanted to learn more about my culture, so I took an Armenian language class in the summer after my first year.*

This conversation with Lara highlights several important themes within my interviews. First, Lara's parents were first-generation immigrants who emigrated recently in the nineties. As a result, Lara already had strong Armenian ties in the household through speaking Armenian with their parents. Additionally, similar to Arthur who pointed out financial barriers, Lara mentioned that access to Armenian private schools was difficult for them because they are "very expensive," highlighting how first-generation immigrants are still attempting to reach financial capital that later generation Armenians may have already acquired in L.A.

Lara's exposure to Armenian topics was not from traditional organizations such as AYF that other participants were aware of due to their family's involvement. Instead, similar to Arman, Martin and Patil, Lara became involved in college. Yet, Lara's involvement did not begin at ASA but in the classroom at GCC. Due to the community college being located in

Glendale, they offer Armenian languages and also enroll a high number of Armenian students. In 2019, the *LA Times* reported that 37% of GCC credit students are Armenian and 49% of non-credit students are Armenian (Campa 2019). Similar to Patil's interaction with Dr. Karapetian at the Institute of Armenian Studies, and Arman and Martin's relationships with Armenian professors, ASA, and Armenian fraternities, college life in L.A. presents a opportunity for Armenian students to grow closer to their Armenian roots challenging traditional theories that predict as capital and assimilation raises, ethnic ties decrease. The respondents above highlight the simultaneity of being transnational.

While university involvement in courses or on campus organizations was a positive shift from growing up in L.A. and not wanting to do many Armenian activities, particularly for first- and second-generation Armenians, for others, Armenian involvement was still undesirable. Some respondents mentioned that the ASA on their campus was more of a "social club" as one respondent mentioned and another respondent mentioned "I didn't get along with the people, they were very clique-y, they went to Armenian school, then community college, it wasn't my crowd." Even organizations that are separate from established structures like AYF or Armenian school were not effective in giving some respondents a strong sense of Armenian pride through an institutional structure. These comments reflect an ongoing theme of the less positive experiences of the Armenian community in L.A. and the strong emphasis on Armenian organizations. Reflections about groups being "clique-y" or more "social" reflect other respondents' comments that provide me with an understanding of what the stereotypes are of Armenians in Glendale as well as the types of Armenians that are traditionally excluded from social groups and organizations. For those who are excluded, involvement was never an option, while growing up and currently as adults.

Stereotypes and Exclusion in the Armenian Community

As discussed in Chapter 4, Armenia has historically been stereotyped as a country that is less progressive on women's rights and equality, gay rights, and diversity. In my interviews, I found that this is not only experienced in Armenia, but among those in the Diaspora as well. With Glendale being the largest Armenian-American community, traditional expectations of being the right kind of Armenian were present in the conversations I had with respondents who reflected on some negative experiences. Even in Glendale, where diversity among Armenians exists, different groups carry out expectations of appropriate behavior by policing one another's way of speaking Armenian, social networks, organizational participation, and dating. At the same time as I noticed several Armenians reference moments of feeling excluded from organizations during their youth, many of the respondents in their twenties found a path for fitting in. Diasporas, therefore, should not be viewed as communities of sameness but rather of difference (see Fortier 2002).

In my interviews, respondents showcased agency in creating a new way of being Armenian for future generations that is less reliant on social boundary making. Yet, many referenced past instances when they felt they were not Armenian enough to participate in social events or institutions offered to them. For queer respondents, participation was not only less appealing, but was met with fear and uncertainty. As Collins (2000) stated regarding group formation, "the existence of the spaces does not mean that ugliness does not occur in safe spaces." Such ugliness was especially a threat to those who were queer as a result of reinforced ideologies that did not allow for Armenianness and queerness to intersect. Homophobia, racism, and sexism were topics discussed when respondents described their Armenian community.

Through a qualitative lens, my respondents allowed for me to push further on the well-known state of queer exclusion in the Armenian community. Out of 55 respondents, 17% of my respondents identified as LGBTQ. This queer Armenian representation provides an important glimpse into expanding queer identity outside of just the Armenian community. Additionally, being in L.A. and its diverse population presented with me multidimensional Armenians including respondents who identified as Black-Armenian and Mexican-Armenian highlighting intersecting ways of being that show a future Armenian life of expansion and new possibilities rather than limitation or exclusion.

"I dealt with racism and ignorance in the Armenian community just by walking around": Race Relations, Bi-racial Armenians, and Coalition Building

One benefit in selecting a sample group of those predominantly in their twenties involved listening to conversations about a generational shift and desire to change what it means to be Armenian, straying away from what they observed to be the negative aspects of an Armenian identity. My respondents absorb the social relations around them which includes conversations in global society on race relations. While it was not a common discussion in several interviews, those who did mention racism may be more aware or academically inclined to pay attention to race relations. These responses are also a result of the group of transnationals in this study being those who are who are highly educated and politically engaged. Therefore, I do not conclude that the few respondents who mentioned racism in the community resemble the minimal or lack of racism. Additionally, while several respondents noted not feeling White, they also spoke about their larger community distancing from those traditionally of color. These findings appear contradictory but highlight the nuances within in-depth interviews.

Conversations about race relations have been more apparent in the recent decade and my fieldwork in 2021 arrived at a time when race was at the center of political dialogues. Shortly

after the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020, I began my interview process. The BLM protests also occurred shortly before the war in Artsakh leading some Armenians to make comparisons on the differences in public attention to the issues. As other groups do, Armenian protestors measured the public outcry to their issue in juxtaposition to the wider attention given to BLM months prior. For some, this caused frustration. For others, it was a call to expand the Armenian movement to include more coalition building and involvement in other issues to gain wider support. This highlighted a need for an intersectional approach to gaining momentum for Armenian issues such as the war in Artsakh and other human rights violations that occur abroad and in the Diaspora against Armenians. Conversations about race in my study presented not only an understanding of being Black and Armenian on an individual level, but a larger structural focus on the need for Armenians to work alongside Black movements to expand their own cause as well.

In each interview, I asked my respondents if there are any Armenians who they believe are excluded in the community or if there are any divisions within the Armenian community. Some respondents mentioned they believe those who are biracial or Black Armenians specifically face discrimination. Lucine openly referenced racist behaviors in the Armenian community when discussing exclusion.

LUCINE: *Armenian people are pretty racist, many of them are.*

Similarly, Lara expressed that historically Armenians have been known to be racist and there is resistance from some traditional Armenians being more inclusive.

LARA: *Armenians are racists and homophobic and sexist. So people are like we are these things, we should learn about it and stop and then you have people fighting back saying you're ruining the Armenian ways, you're*

being too Western, you're being too liberal, that's a huge problem, it's really going to halt progression.

As a result of the Armenian community at times being tied to racism, some respondents noted it turned them off from being actively involved in their local Armenian community or having Armenian friends. When Nareh visited Armenia on behalf of the Paros organization, she noted that she enjoyed her experience but "did not like the people," a theme that has been mentioned by others who chose to disengage from ASA on their college campus and other organizations.

NAREH: *I loved being in Armenia. I did not like the people in the organization…there was homophobia. Specifically, a lot of people were racist.*

Additionally, Arev provided a similar response.

AREV: *I think some of the biggest challenges today are of course, the racism, the homophobia, sexism, and domestic abuse which I know is very common in Armenia specifically against women.*

Christina also mentioned a personal anecdote of racism she witnessed.

IM: Who do you think is excluded in the Armenian community?

CHRISTINA: *Definitely other P.O.C. (people of color) mixed Armenians, especially Black Armenians, or full Armenians who have Black partners or Hispanic partners, definitely LGBTQ Armenians. One of my friends, a relative of hers married a Black guy, not one relative came to the wedding. The Armenian church was filled with this guy's family.*

To better understand the experiences of racism in the Armenian community, I reached out to an influencer who I found on social media pages. I sent a direct message to Talar, a 27-year-

old Black-Armenian who was raised and is currently living in L.A. Talar came to my attention after seeing several other accounts share her posts during the war due to her commentary and breakdown of information. Additionally, Talar contributed to a story for the social media page, Kooyrigs, about her experience being Black and Armenian. Speaking to Talar provided me with important insight on racism in the Armenian community. Specifically, I was interested in her perspective on my ongoing findings that several respondents were choosing to not identify as White.

IM: *Some Armenians I've interviewed mentioned problems with picking White, and I wonder if you have a different perspective as someone who is Black and Armenian regarding other Armenians not identifying as White?*

TALAR: *I will say that is something that has been a journey for myself. Growing up, I never really felt like Armenians were White like other White people that I saw. All Armenians are grab bag. My tatik (grandma) is pretty fair, she would burn, lighter eyes, lightish blondish hair. My papik (grandpa) is darker tan, no one would think just looking at him or my dad that they are White or my uncle. At first, I would've put Armenians more as people who are White because I dealt with racism and ignorance in the Armenian community just by walking around Glendale and seeing the way people stare. My parents didn't stay together but she had a lot of her own personal feelings about anti-Blackness within the Armenian community, even when my dad would be like no I'm not White, she would be like no you are, Armenians are White. She negated the whole idea of Armenians not being White and the ethnicness because she experienced harm.*

In Talar's biracial upbringing, the racial binary impacted her understanding of Armenian as White in opposition to Black, rather than the nuances within a White ethnic identity that the Armenians who had no experiences with Blackness in their household referenced. As a result, Talar's mother, who had firsthand lived experiences as a Black woman, distanced Talar's Armenian family from nonwhite in juxtaposition to the experience she had from them, especially as a result of what Talar explains was harm put on to her by Armenians. While other respondents viewed themselves as nonwhite due to different cultural standards in their household, traditions, food, language, for Talar's mother, nonwhite was more of a direct visual difference from others, including Talar's Armenian side of the family. Yet, it is possible for Talar and others who are strictly Armenian to fit within a larger nonwhite category that exists on a lived social spectrum rather than rigid categories that Census and other forms offer.

Talar went on to explain that her understanding of race from an Armenian lens has evolved.

> TALAR: *That's been a journey for me, my mom would reduce Armenians to Whiteness but then I heard the experiences of my family and hear the way they would talk about people, and they would be like, "Oh you know I was at this store and there was this White guy." But everyone knew what they meant. They meant like White White.*

Talar's specification of "White White" reflects the comments made by other respondents who understand they are White passing and even sometimes select White on the Census but as Nareh and Arthur experienced in Boston, they feel they are not "White White." At the same time as some Armenians distance themselves from the traditional Anglo-Saxon White individuals, racism was mentioned among them.

Talar is heavily involved in activism in L.A. not just for Armenian causes but other issues as well. She explained her experience with witnessing differences in grassroot activist strategies and highlighted an undertone of what may be a result of the racism mentioned earlier.

TALAR: *Armenians can be very selective, because there are Black people, Mexican people, Syrian people who show up every year at the Genocide march or protest. There are people who were showing up, but the issue with a lot of people in our community is that their activism is completely transactional, they don't show up for people.* W*hen everything was happening with BLM, Armenian store owners were worried about their stores, and like, "Oh, protect our stores, our stores, our stores." That's what people were focused on, property, not Black lives*.

Talar's proximity to BLM as a biracial Armenian and through her activist work highlights a potential gap in Armenian coalition building in L.A. and other cities in the U.S. that could have a direct impact on Armenia. As Talar explained, remaining insular about which causes Armenians support leads to less diverse support for Armenian causes. City Council President Paul Krekorian confirmed Talar's comments by mentioning the lack of attention that was given to Artsakh due to Armenians' focus on reaching one other on social media instead of bringing outsiders in.

KREKORIAN: *For many years, I've been expressing the concern that as long as we keep talking to ourselves about Artsakh and not going out and making the case on Artsakh's behalf to the rest of the world and to the rest of the U.S., as long as we make it about it being an Armenian issue, if we talk about genocide as an Armenian issue, all of those sort of things make it very easy to be brushed off.*

> *You look at the flurry of activity that happened as soon as the 44-day war started, massive mobilization of people, social media mobilization, and try to find anybody in any of that that wasn't Armenian. It was tragic. It was tragic to see these massive turn outs of people and everybody there was Armenian. I really can only say that's our collective fault, we haven't conditioned ourselves or made our issues known enough outside of our own community to create that kind of emotional connection that there should be.*

Therefore, by Armenians expanding their support for other groups, they not only invite more diversity for what it means to be Armenian but also can establish a coalition that will then lead to greater impact during a movement designed to bring global attention to Armenian issues. While race relations in my interviews were predominantly about the experiences of those in the U.S., the support between Talar's and City Council President Paul Krekorian's comments show a connection between increased support to aid Armenia abroad while improving internal conditions in L.A. and around the U.S.

"I am not considered as being Armenian within the Armenian community": Queer Armenian Life in the U.S.

While Chapter 4 highlighted homophobia in Armenia, such social ideas traveled for generations with Armenians to their new host countries, including in progressive areas such as L.A. While more openness to queer life exists in the U.S. and in cities such as L.A., Armenian community members still maintain traditional expectations on dating and gender identity that negatively impacted some respondents.

During the war and COVID-19, several Armenian social influencers were trending in virtual spaces. While scrolling one day at who was providing commentary on the war and Armenian events, I discovered Sako's social media page where he was openly gay as his posts provided content that intersected his sexuality and Armenian identity. After sending him a direct message, we set up a Zoom interview. Sako was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon and moved to L.A. when he was 11 years old. Sako identifies as a cisgender gay man and is currently married. During our interview, Sako was living in Hollywood but in the process of moving to Glendale and said that by living there, "I'm going to be a lot more in touch with my Armenianness."

Sako explained that until the pandemic, he was not very involved with his Armenian identity. Yet, during COVID, he began connecting to Armenian social media pages including Kooyrigs and Miaseen, Inc. Sako explained that Kooyrigs provided him with an outlet to express his intersecting Armenian identity.

SAKO: *I followed this organization called Kooyrigs, I was in disbelief, they were talking about taboo subjects no Armenian would dare to talk to, women's rights, negativity in the Armenian community. I instantly fell in love. Holy crap I am allowed to talk about these things? Kooyrigs was the straw that broke the camel's back what to do to help the Armenian community to evolve, after sitting down and making all the social media happen, I started getting more in touch with how I feel. I had a lot of resentment, even after moving to LA. I never clicked with the Armenian community, I never felt like I had a community, but after pushing for equality in*

Armenia I started making so many friends, meeting a lot of Armenians out there, that have the same views as I do, are in the same boat as I am.

For Sako, finding a virtual community helped him recognize that other Armenians are supportive of the viewpoints he holds as a gay man. Prior to his connection to these progressive pages online, Sako was distant with the Armenian community due to his sexuality.

SAKO: *It's been a wild ride, being as who I am, I am not considered as being Armenian within the Armenian community. There's a handful of people who believe no matter who you are, you are Armenian, but the majority feel like being part of the LGBT community, you're not considered Armenian. That's part of the reason I really struggled.*

While Sako reconnected with his Armenian identity and is more involved in L.A., he still struggles to accept the possibility of traveling to Armenia and feeling safe there.

IM: *Have you been to Armenia before?*

SAKO: *No, I never been. My only concern is the fact that I will not feel safe, because I have had a lot of DMs and a lot of threats thrown my way from people that claim that they're in Armenia, that if I were to ever visit, they would find me. I don't really have the same type of privileges as other Armenians, but I would love to visit. Traveling with my husband, bringing kids to Armenian you think of all the possibilities. I know so many in Yerevan in Armenia that always tell me I should visit, these are the same people that I look up to, the Kooyrigs members, Pink Armenia, they are living out there, so maybe.*

While it was difficult to find a balance in being openly gay and involved in the Armenian community in L.A., Sako expressed that he felt safe to do so in the recent years. Yet, physically traveling to Armenia still felt out of reach for him.

SAKO: *There isn't one way of being Armenian, there are hundreds of different ways to be an Armenian, that's when I started saying it's okay, you do not need to fit into a box to become this Armenian, I was being hard on myself.*

While Sako found the ability to live in his dual identities in the Diaspora, Armenia represents a challenge to his full Armenian self.

For others, coming out has been difficult or not yet a reality. Several individuals came out to me privately during my fieldwork and not recorded in my interviews. Many of them noted that they did not feel comfortable exploring dating or telling their family. Lara identifies as nonbinary and bisexual. When I asked if their parents know about their gender identity, they responded with, "hell no." Arev, who also identifies as nonbinary, noted a similar experience.

AREV: *It was very difficult for me to come out to my family. I still feel a little bit like I'm not completely out because of the fact that there is homophobia very present in my family. When I did try to come out, I would kind of mask it as a joke because I would see their very angry reaction to it. I think that really does resonate with the way that the Armenian community reacts to LGBTQ+ Armenians and that is there they are in denial about their existence.*

For such respondents, their struggle to come out or feel comfortable in the Armenian community as LGBTQ individuals is not just about their difficult experiences in their personal households,

but they often relate it to the larger experience of being Armenian. This common understanding of homophobia was not just expressed by queer respondents. Heterosexual respondents mentioned queer exclusion, too. Amelia, who identifies as a straight woman, expressed that LGBTQ Armenians are excluded in Glendale.

David, 39, is a queer second generation Armenian currently living in the Midwest and working at a local community college. I found David on social media after they, like other Armenian "influencers" were trending during COVID-19. Prior to living in the Midwest, David lived in L.A. between 2000 to 2003, at a time when queer acceptance and organizations were less prominent. David explains that while there was a queer organization that still exists today, the Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society (GALAS), with their office headquarters located in L.A.'s famous queer neighborhood West Hollywood, they did not get involved due to a reluctance of intersecting their Armenian and queer identity.

DAVID: *I couldn't even imagine that such an organization could exist. That's how homophobic and transphobic I thought the Armenian community was, that it was not even possible that there could be a nonprofit like that.*

David mentioned not only being surprised about the existence of a queer Armenian organization in L.A. in the early 2000s but also referenced existing queer organizations in Armenia and a similar feeling of this being unexpected.

DAVID: *PINK Armenia and Rightside NGO have done fantastic work, and also Queer in Yerevan Collective. It's very interesting where you feel those areas where there would be literally nothing have had the most dynamic organizations.*

David and Sako both highlight a disconnect between what may be possible for queer life in the Diaspora in contrast to Armenia. While homophobia is common in Armenia as the Pink Armenia statistics illustrated in Chapter 4, queer life still exists and includes activists such as Mamikon who lead the movement. As David mentioned however, for some queer Armenians outside of Armenia, even without ever traveling to Armenia, there exists a shared understanding that the homophobia and violence against queer existence makes it so Armenia is imagined as a place where "literally nothing" would be supportive and available. As Chapter 4 highlighted, queer expression may not be as outwardly visible through individuals but in street art and graffiti, queer voices are heard and locals in Armenia are confronted with queer existence by walking past the walls and text. While this process is not representative of a queer friendly country, it still challenges notions that such existence is unimaginable in Armenia.

At the same time, the concerns from David and Sako being openly queer are not overexaggerated. David and Sako mentioned having relationships that would be in opposition to the heteronormative life in Yerevan. Similar to Sako, David expressed concerns of not being "safe" and feeling "nervous" when considering travel to Armenia.

> DAVID: *Also, I get a little nervous...I know queer people live in Armenia, to varying degree of outness, but when I go, I want to be able to do that and not have to have a negative experience, that's partially me just guarding myself, in the sense that it would be very heartbreaking for me to go to Armenia for the first time and have a very negative experience because of my queer identity.*

David's hesitation about being out in Armenia was reinforced to me during fieldwork in Yerevan. When entering a queer friendly bar in Yerevan, I was surprised by the level of security

I underwent. The bouncers first requested I answer about who the DJ was that night, then was patted down and entered the bar where I had to put a sticker on my phone's camera to not take any photos of the inside. This procedure of secrecy and protection made me imagine what queer night life was like for the queer generation before me in the U.S. and recognized that Armenia, as several countries around the world, still function that way. At the same time, the Diaspora does not always present complete safety for queer individuals the way local Armenians may imagine, as LGBTQ rights are threatened daily through new legislation in the U.S. as well.

An intersectional analysis is necessary when comparing the responses among the LGBTQ respondents in this study (see Gamson and Moon 2004; Anzaldúa 2009; Purkayastha 2010). Nareh expressed that she was not openly gay when interacting with locals in the Goris villages highlighting her ability to maneuver between social identities based on her level of safety and comfort, a common practice for some in the queer community who can "pass" as straight. Yet, David and Sako did not mention having to pretend to be straight and instead, their responses assume that they would arrive in Armenia as openly gay men. When analyzing my demographic data, the age cohort and gender cohort are important in this finding.

First, Nareh, 21, is younger than David, 39, and Sako, 29 and identifies as a cisgender woman. Due to the patriarchal structure of the Armenian household, Armenian men may face more difficulties in passing as straight due to the rigid expectations of malehood in the Armenian community. Additionally, as two openly queer individuals who are older than Nareh, they may have faced more negative experiences due to more years of being in the closet or hiding their sexuality in the Armenian community and are at a life stage where they no longer want to repeat that if visiting Armenia. Additionally, both David and Sako are in long-term relationships, and Sako relayed to me his current plans to become a father. These life circumstances may make it

more difficult and less desirable for David and Sako to not be perceived as openly queer in Armenia.

England (2010) uncovered an asymmetry in gender change as it relates to the personal realm where men have "little incentive to transgress gender boundaries" (England 2010: 155) compared to women. For an openly lesbian woman in Armenia or the Diaspora, having relationships with women or dressing more like a man may be more accepted than if a gay man is seen holding hands with another man or dressing feminine. Women tend to receive more respect when doing male oriented activities while men suffer when doing female activities (England 2010). Without the option of passing as straight, being openly gay instills a different level of fear when considering travel to Armenia. Therefore, while Nareh, David, Sako, and Arev all identify as LGBTQ, their variation in gender identity presents different feelings and experiences.

For all the queer respondents, the concept discussed in previous chapters regarding "existential threat" to their Armenianness presented a new meaning for breaking the heteronormative expectation. As Beukian noted about Armenian women, "their reproductive capacity is the primary measure of authenticity and traditionalism in the maintenance of national identity in the face of the traumatic history of genocide and other events (2014: 253). Armenian women are therefore critical in the reproduction process of the larger Armenian nation – the population in Armenia and the Diaspora. In turn, queer existence lies in conflict with continuing Armenianness. As gender scholars have previously highlighted, gender is not just experienced as a woman issue. Men also play a role in the expectation to reproduce to maintain the Armenian population. David explained this process.

DAVID: *I want my body to be valued and to be loved, because like…there was a genocide. We need to value and love all Armenian bodies. But for the folks on "the other side" of the argument, they're so quick to say, well that's not an Armenian body because you're not producing Armenian bodies. And so for them, they're saying well you're perpetuating the Armenian genocide because you're preventing a future generation of Armenians.*

Transnational scholars argued the need to bring the experiences of those in the periphery to the center of migration and diaspora discussions (see Mohanty 1988; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Spivak 1995; Yuval-Davis 2011; White 2014). David offers a different perspective that highlights the consequence of collective trauma. While post-genocide sentiments and current war create an increase in Armenian connection globally through heightened participation in organizations such as Birthright, large donations to charities, and social media activism to spread the word on the current conflict, a rhetoric of an "existential threat" to existence also negatively impacts some who are at the margins of the community.

Still, there is no denying the ability to be out is much more of an option for Armenians living in L.A. and other cities in the U.S. Unlike Pink Armenia that operates in a more secretive manner, GALAS is public facing. GALAS began in 1998 and provides various programs and services in L.A. including social events such as picnics and hikes, educational panels, scholarship opportunities, and galas. Recently, in 2021, GALAS hosted its first "Queernissage" a play on words for Yerevan's major flea market in Republic Square, Vernissage. When scrolling through the GALAS social media pages, there are several posts dedicated to spotlight openly queer Armenians providing personal information such as their photographs, names, and professions – something that is intentionally omitted from Pink Armenia's social media pages.

Additionally, GALAS is located in L.A.'s queer community of West Hollywood in contrast to Pink Armenia which has an unknown address and lacks a gay neighborhood. As a result, being a transnational and travel to Armenia is a privilege not available to all, as scholars have noted "not all bodies move freely through border" (see Fortier 2002). Therefore, for queer and Black Armenians, their diaspora cities provide them with more opportunity for Armenian engagement.

The themes of race, gender, and sexuality among my respondents show how expansive support for diversity and inclusion in Armenian organizations and the larger Armenian community can directly benefit Armenia. In addition to progressing on ideas on race and bi-racial Armenians, in showing support for queer Armenians, the larger Armenian community can signal safety and a desire to receive their queer tourists and engage them with their homeland. A desire to travel to Armenia begins in the Diaspora by shifting the narrative of what Armenia is today and who is accepted in the Armenia community. Thus, while some respondents highlighted a call to visit Armenia, for whom is this call to action? As the respondents above highlighted, they do not feel it includes them. I turn to Fortier (2002) confrontation with discussing a traveling subject that is disembodied that causes harm in assuming a body that is "invisible, unmarked, unquestioned, unchallenged" (Fortier 2002). For queer Armenians, Armenia not only represents a site of trauma due to genocide, displacement, and war. Armenia also represents a larger social condition that has led to their gender and sexual identity to become targets.

Comparative fieldwork illustrates why some Armenians participate in organizations or travel to Armenia on behalf of Birthright more than others. Qualitative fieldwork and a positionality that recognizes the significant of a critical race, feminist, and queer perspective

provides nuance to understanding how one identifies as Armenian separate from any connection to the homeland itself.

CHAPTER 6: VISUALIZING ETHNICITY: WHAT PHOTOS SHOW OF AN ETHNIC COMMUNITY

Photography and Sociology

When considering how to best understand the experience of the Armenian Diaspora, the scholarship on diaspora studies presents a necessary stance of appreciating ambiguity. However, the recent debates on how to define a diaspora and selecting which groups fit into that category rely on academic abstractions about which social scientists "know a great deal rather than situational knowledge associated with the setting at hand, about which they know much less" (Gold 2004: 1554). Therefore, my contribution to diaspora studies is not to seek out to add more nuance to this already complex theoretical definition but to bring to the center an existing diaspora and uncover what it looks like through firsthand context. Adding visuals of the Armenian Diaspora is an attempt at clearing the muddiness of current diaspora dialogues.

Listening through Photos

At the same time as Becker (1974) encouraged the integration of photography and sociology, he also identified potential limitations of using photographs in research. However, his viewpoint of the errors from photographs was largely based on a methodology where the researcher captures images, noting that a question evolves asking, "does the sample of behavior observed and recorded accurately reflect how people ordinarily act or is it largely a response to the observer's presence and activities?" (Becker 1974: 18). Yet, this uncertainty can be alleviated by being a participant observer taking my own personal images rather than photographing my participants. Additionally, I combated this potential problem by asking that any photos about participants be captured and submitted by them with their own captions. As Becker explained, "the photographer exerts enormous control over the final image and the information and message it contains" (1974: 11) and photovoice allows for that control to be given to the research

participant. While the participants may have taken several photographs during the time frame between our initial interview and when they submitted their photos, they were asked to only submit a select number of images that encouraged them to think about their decision-making and actively analyze their photographs to offer insight about their identity and community.

Including self-represented photographs submitted by participants allows me to supplement their interviews and practice "difficult listening" (see Fairey 2018). By completing the photovoice stage after the interview, respondents were introduced to the themes behind the questions they were asked and were presented with the opportunity to actively think about their Armenian identity more closely that then may have inspired a different process for capturing photos. Therefore, photovoice methods respond to Becker's apprehension of potential risks with photography by shifting the power dynamics between the researcher and participant giving more opportunity for the latter to control their own narrative.

After completing each in-depth interview with a respondent, I presented them with an option to participate in a second phase of research through photovoice methods. Respondents were asked if they wished to submit photos that respond to two questions: 1) *What does being Armenian mean to you?* and 2) *What does your Armenian community look like?* If respondents agreed to participate in this phase, they completed a consent form. Next, I marked a calendar reminder to follow up close to the date of their last week in Armenia. Respondents that were not Birthright participants but were still living in Armenia were followed up their last week in Armenia as well. For all other respondents, I offered a month follow up. Due to COVID-19 and difficulties with scheduling a second interview, participants emailed me their photos and captions.

Out of the 55 respondents I interviewed, 24 respondents submitted a total of 95 photos.

Some photos were excluded from being used in this study due to including identifiable human subjects, but I paid close attention to the captions provided for those images. I generated two major themes that my photo analysis prompted me to analyze. These themes were most common and related to interviews and literature. The first theme involved food with 25 references to food as it relates to culture and Armenianness, being in Armenia, or feeling Armenian in the Diaspora. The second theme was physical space/landscape with 20 references to physical space in Yerevan and L.A. including mountain views, streets, buildings, churches, community centers and halls. While these two themes represent common submissions, they are not intended to portray one single story of the Armenian Diaspora experience.

In highlighting the variations of how food and land is represented, I further Hall's argument that diaspora must be discussed within the differences of the community rather than in unequivocal unity and similarity. Fairey (2018) noted that those who are unpacking participatory photo submissions must keep in mind the "visual plurality" and the unique stories behind each image. The combination of interviews and photographs allow respondent stories to be more closely understood as opposed to merely using photographs from participants without the background of the responses provided in our longer conversations from the in-depth interview. The photographs allow me to make connections between responses and understand my participants based on what they prioritized sharing with me in their submissions.

The remainder of the themes in the photographs involved representations of each participant. These photos included references to gender, religion, dance, death, or symbols around their city. The remaining photos did not align with the two major themes that consistently reappeared. While all the submitted photos signify important aspects of each respondent's understanding of self, I will provide brevity and clarity to my research focus by only addressing

the themes of food and physical land in this chapter.

Representations of Food

Scholars have explored the relationship of food and self as it relates to gender, race and ethnicity (see Huang 2020; Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco 2020; Avakian 2014; Abu-Jaber 2005; Ray 2004; Gabaccia 2000; Waters 1990). When analyzing my in-depth interviews, several respondents mentioned their understanding of their Armenianness by distancing themselves from Whiteness *vis*-à-*vis* the food they ate with their families in the household. Some respondents highlighted intragroup food distinctions if their Armenian roots were Parskahye (Persian) or Beirutsi (Lebanese). Others expressed feeling connected to their Armenianness when they had access to Armenian food and restaurants, such as those who lived near more Armenian establishments in L.A. as well as Birthrighters who were able to experience Armenian food in Armenia at local restaurants and with their host families. In the in-depth interviews, 27 out of 55 respondents made a total of 69 references to food, eating, and restaurants. When analyzing the 95 photos submitted by 24 respondents, there were 25 images related to food's relationship to Armenian culture, being in Armenia, or feeling Armenian in L.A. The photos also included 16 specific images of food or beverage, seven of them involving meat including traditional Armenian barbeque, *Khorovatz,* four Armenian bread, *lavash,* two drinking alcohol with one of an Armenian beer, *Kilikia,* one watermelon, one Armenian pumpkin dish, *ghapama,* one Armenian pastry, and one of homemade pizza with a host family.

When Armenian-American scholar Arlene Avakian reflected on her childhood and how food allowed her to understand her difference from her classmates in school, she noted, "looking at a culture through the lens of food practices brings materiality and specificity to analyses of the interactions between dominant and subordinate cultures… not seeing our food practices reflected

in the larger culture was a powerful daily reminder that I was the 'other,' (2014: 281). Food distinguishes groups from one another and as Avakian notes, the food one eats can Otherize them from mainstream culture. Even as the Armenian respondents in this study integrated into the U.S. through being high achieving degree holders from top universities and English speakers, they were reminded of their differences from their White peers since childhood. This is parallel to the experiences of many other ethnic groups and has been reaffirmed in popular culture and film. Several scenes in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* for instance set the tone of being a Greek family and their distance from American culture with multiple comedic references to traditional and often religious meals and ethnic school lunches. In the scenes revolving the main character and her new White fiancé, the film emphasizes their differences not only when discussing meals but also in their scenes that involve family dinners and the variation in how food is consumed, with the Greek family being larger, louder, while the scenes with the fiancé's family display a more intimate, quieter setting. In such social interactions around food, diasporan Armenians, too, begin to question how White they truly are.

Considering the above theoretical context, the images of food represent more than merely an image of meat, bread, or alcohol. The images of food highlight the experience that occurs when sharing food with others that leads to embodied migrant communities (see Parasecoli 2014). These images are not only more thoroughly understood by the respondent's caption, but through my experience of being a participant observant in Armenia and L.A. and sharing meals with respondents and locals. For this reason, data triangulation and a theoretical grounding is critical to fully utilize the benefits of photovoice methods. These images supplement interview data to aid in the analysis of the dual identities of Armenian-Americans in a way that also highlights food scholar's assertation that "food can provide a reliable means to understand the world in all

of its complexity" (Avakian 2014: 302).

In my own photographs during observations in the field, images of food and representations of food appeared consistently. In my photos from Armenia, I more commonly captured photographs of food such as meat, fruit, and coffee. On the other hand, several photographs from L.A. showed either Armenian restaurants I encountered or stores that sold Armenian products to prepare meals similar to the ones I ate in Armenia. Therefore, food not only relates to identity and community via the process of cooking and gathering to share a meal but also contributes to entrepreneurial efforts and community integration as Armenians establish their own stores and restaurants in their ethnic L.A. neighborhoods such as Glendale. Thus, the continuation of Armenian traditions and culture through the food they eat then creates a demand for such establishments.

In the interviews, respondents noted coming to Glendale from other neighborhoods they lived in with less Armenians specifically to purchase Armenian products. By commuting to Glendale, respondents contribute to sustaining Armenian businesses and social networks. This highlights the significance of Glendale serving as a central Armenian hub in L.A. that helps diasporans connect with their Armeninanness and maintain ties to the homeland by recreating dishes they ate in Armenia, interacting with store owners in Armenian, and seeing familiar faces at the store. As Parasecoli (2014) noted, "the crucial roles played by food and other material practices remind us that they are firmly rooted in the tangible world, visceral bodies, and definite places" (426). Therefore, diasporans do not just imagine their ethnic identity and the homeland, but actively engage with the physical by changing their host society to resemble their homeland through food establishments and consumption. Thus, these images illustrate a migrant's way of living that allows scholars to better understand that migrants do not just rely on an imagination of

the homeland to hold on to a memory of the past, but to interact with, and influence, their present-day lived experience.

As some noted, because food is a large part of their lives, then so is Glendale, even if they do not live there. As Amelia, from O.C., explained, "food is a big part of our culture." Amelia's family makes the drive to Glendale for Armenian food.

AMELIA: *Glendale is home because it's the place we go to for food which is a huge part of our lives.*

In addition to differences in food cuisines acting as a distinct factor making some of the respondents feel less White, when asked what makes Glendale important for their Armenian identity, the respondents from Glendale and neighboring L.A. areas often listed access to Armenian food as one of the main reasons it has significantly shaped their connection to being Armenian.

Arpi is 23 years old and a second-generation immigrant. Arpi lives in North Hollywood with her parents. Arpi's mother was born in Artsakh and father was born in Armenia. Arpi is one of the respondents that listed food as an important part of Glendale and North Hollywood,

APRI: *After Glendale, North Hollywood is the most Armenian, there's stores, banks, you hear the Armenian language everywhere you go, there's Armenian grocery stores on almost every other block and Armenian food, you can find within 5 minutes.*

When respondents were asked if Glendale faces any threat to its Armenian population and establishments, many listed a risk in losing restaurants as one of their main concerns highlighting that access to Armenian food is critical to sustaining culture.

Vahan is from Northridge, and we met in Armenia during his AYF Summer Internship.

Vahan offered his perspective on the risks of losing Armenian establishments,

VAHAN: *Whenever you move people out of there, you're also moving Armenian business owners, Armenian delis, Armenian grocery stores, very much part of the community that one might grow up in, if you take that away you're left with Walmart, Johns, Food 4 Less, Trader Joes, instead of Falafel Arax, Sasoun Bakery - Laghmajoon, Sahags Basturma, Raffi's Place.*

Vahan highlights how replacing Armenian establishments with chain grocery stores such as "Walmart, John's Food 4 Less, Trader Joes," is a direct loss of Armenian activity in Glendale. The Armenian case serves as an important example of how "the sense of belonging to a community may be generated by the reappropriation of lived-in place and specific localities in which preparation, distribution and consumption of familiar food play a crucial role" (Parasecoli 2014). Having access to Armenian speaking business owners and Armenian food labels allows for diasporans to feel connected to Glendale and its people. For Armenians and other ethnic communities, food businesses can act as informal community centers and contribute to social network ties (see Gabaccia 1998). Restaurants, grocery stores, and meals are not just simply food, but in the process of consumption and cooking. As Ray (2004) noted, food is a central factor in place-making practices.

Glendale is globally understood as an Armenian hub. This reputation is not only due to hearing the Armenian language there and having access to organizations. Glendale provides easy access to connect to one's Armenianness directly through buying food at Armenian grocery stores or gathering at Armenian restaurants with friends. These interactions allow Armenians to connect to their past. As Ray (2004) notes, authentic food and cooking meals of one's heritage

and culture allow migrants to integrate time and space,

> "In fact, the search for the authentic is the reversal of time. The migrant through the sheer act of abandoning the past is made more acutely aware of that betrayal. That is why she hungers to turn the present into the past. That is exactly why the migrants pours so much meaning into the rhythms of eating. That is what gives meaning – breaking up the continuum of time into intersubjectively meaningful units. Meals do that (168).

Through an attempt to connect with self and community, diasporans turn to food to reignite memories of their own, or imagine a homeland and community based from other's memories, such as their family members. In their Italian cuisine journey, Harper and Faccioli (2009) found that food evokes a sense of memory individually and collectively, noting that memory "might be embodied in recipes or experienced in tastes and smells that are connected to departed people" (80). In having certain meals connected to one's culture or family, diasporans can "transport" themselves back to moments of the past, even if they did not experience those events firsthand (Harper and Faccioli 2009: 74). Through this practice, concepts of homeland and transnational emotional ties to Armenia are created in Glendale that counteract the distance between the two places (see Parasecoli 2014).

Photovoice submissions of food

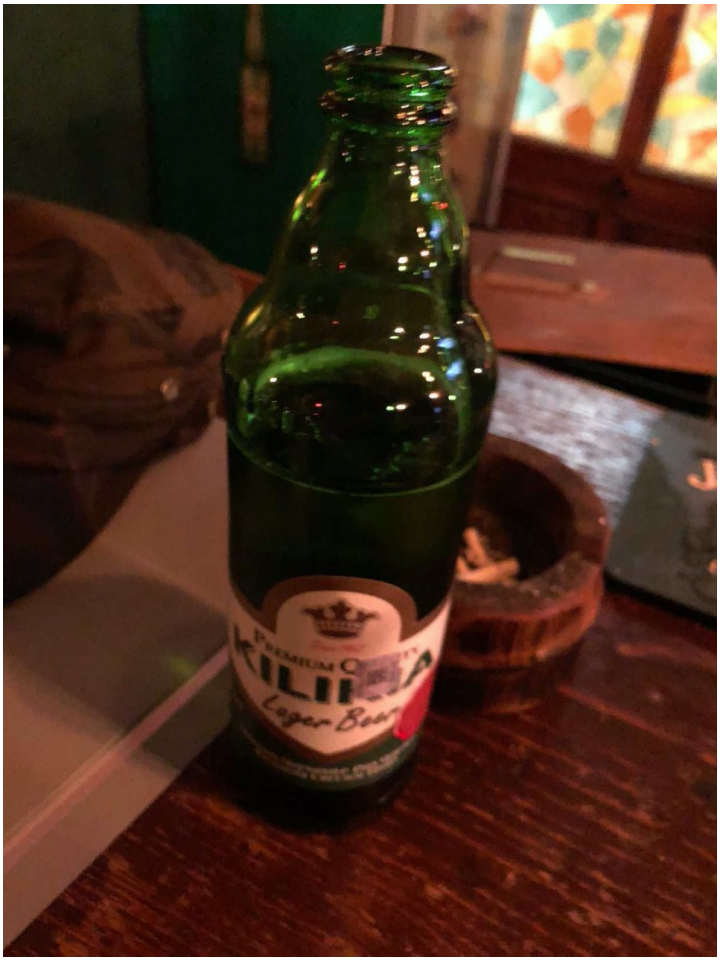

Figure 6.1. *Garejur - Kilikia is one of the most famous Armenian beers and my personal favorite. I always like to bring Kilikia to events or gatherings with non-Armenians to introduce them to something unique,* Washington, D.C. Photograph and caption by research participant, Kev.

Figure 6.2. *This was my family's first quarantine thanksgiving; this is my Armenian community back home. We grew up slightly isolated from the traditional community, but we always make an effort to keep Armenian traditions, whether it be food, dance, music. I think the Armenian community can look different to every family, but for us it's my siblings and parents and I doing our best to honor the recipes and traditions of our ancestors,* California. Photograph and caption by research participant, Christina.

Figure 6.3. *Here I have set the table with Pumpkin Bread mix I brought from Trader Joe's all the way from Los Angeles. I have also made Mamounia for the first time in my life. This is a traditional Syrian breakfast that my mom and grandmother always make back home. Anna, my friend from Lebanon, has come over and I have made both Armenian/Lebanese coffee and American coffee so that we get best of both worlds. The variety of food on the table, as well as my company, and the ritual of drinking coffee with her every time we get together represent Armenians,* Yerevan. Photograph and caption by research participant, Noushig.

Figure 6.4. *Half of my diet in Armenia is bread and cheese, but I don't think I will ever get tired of it. Yerevan's "hatsatouns" (bread bakeries) are gastronomic gems. They're often tucked into courtyards, and sometimes the only way I find them is by following the intoxicating aroma wafting onto the street. My lunch ritual is to pick up a savory pastry from the hatsatoun near my jobsite, take it to the park, and people-watch as I revel in every salty and satisfying bite,* Yerevan. Photograph and caption by research participant, Lucine.

Figure 6.5. *Easter Sunday. Looks like any other barbecue at a DC rowhouse, but it's shish kabob, hummus, mutabbal, and other fixings from the old country. This group of Armenian guys gets together once a month or so for a "joghov" ("meeting"), where we eat, drink, and ponder what it means to be a young Armenian-American in this city,* Washington, D.C. Photograph and caption by research participant, Vahe.

Participant Observant Photos of Food

During my fieldwork in L.A. and Armenia, I captured images of food that later highlighted a theme of time when conducting my photo analysis. When in Armenia, I captured traditional meals and food items that I often heard about in my household and watched my grandmother, mother and aunts make in the kitchen often telling stories about eating the specific meal they were preparing in their homeland. When I arrived in Yerevan and began eating these meals, and seeing Russian and Armenia text in the grocery store, I connected these moments to my family and began imagining what their life was like prior to emigrating. As someone with

English as a second language (ESL) speaking parents, my lack of Armenian and Russian reading skills and moments of confusion at the grocery store for the first time, allowed for me to better understand the immigration experience of my parents and others in the U.S. I imagined what their lives were like decades ago when they did encounter grocery store items that were of their ethnic background as the norm. In these moments, time became an important biproduct of interacting with food.

In L.A., I also photographed several images of food. Yet, these images were more of restaurant and bakeries that included Armenian owner's names. As someone from the Midwest, it was rare for a non-Armenian to know much about my family's cuisine and even less common for outsiders to have tried these foods. However, in neighborhoods such as Glendale, Armenians and others walked past places such as Raffi's Place and Zhengyalov Hatz. In fact, when living in Armenia and searching for a roommate in L.A., I emailed the individual, who was not Armenian, whose room I eventually rented out to provide her with details on my move. In her email confirming I was approved for the room, she also explained how she grew up in the Valley among Armenians and provided me with a list of her favorite Armenian restaurants for me to try. I immediately recognized that Armenian presence in L.A. was so apparent that even non-Armenians understood this and had experience with Armenian cuisine.

Additionally, after hearing from my respondents that Glendale housing costs were raising and there was a risk to Armenian activity, I began wondering if these restaurants and stores would remain, or if Glendale would follow the path of Hollywood's Little Armenia with remnants of Armenian life replaced by the next ethnic community's cuisine. Armenian food is political. Glendale provides an opportunity to be a transnational activist in many different spectrums of social life, including in the foodscape of grocery stores. During the war in Artsakh,

respondents noted that they protested outside of local grocery stores that were selling Turkish products. When I visited Armenian grocery stores, I also photographed their front windows that included signs that said they do not sell Turkish products. This tension regarding consumption is common among other groups. As a result of gentrification in local ethnic neighborhoods, community members protests "White" establishments replacing ethnic staples in the city (see Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco 2020). Community members tap into their ethnic identity to showcase agency and control what enters their neighborhoods. Therefore, while food may be a symbolic display of ethnicity, the politics around it result in direct transnational action.

As Joassart Marcelli and Bosco (2020) found, ethnic foodscapes may be more "valuable to investors and policy makers than its role in the social reproduction of immigrant and minority communities" (75). To sustain these stores, which are often owned by immigrants, it becomes important to continue the integration of Glendale's Armenian community with outsiders and provide access for others to frequent Armenian restaurants and grocery stores. As previously discussed, respondents mentioned the need to make Armenian issues important to those outside of the Armenian community. While in L.A., I attended one outdoor barbeque with a group of people I met while completing my Birthright assignment in Armenia. One individual catered from a local Armenian restaurant, Raffi's Place, and mentioned that when they picked up their order, they noticed several non-Armenians in the establishment. This comment was said in a way that implied a frustration.

At the same time, respondents noted that gatekeeping Armenian establishments and political issues within the community does not serve the success of their political requests or sustainability of their neighborhoods. Not only is attending non-Armenian protests helpful to encourage other coalitions to stand for Armenian issues but opening doors to non-Armenians at

ethnic restaurants can establish rapport as outsiders can find flyers in the restaurant to understand foreign political conflicts abroad and donate to Armenian charities or attend a protest. This directly responds to L.A. City Council President Krekorian's call to expand Armenian issues to other people and utilize Glendale as a resource to do so.

Figure 6.6. I met Arman, my research participant, who gave me a tour of Ararat Plaza in Glendale which included Armenian grocery stores such as the one above, Kozanyan Super Meat and Liquor, Ararat Plaza Pharmacy, Mariana Bakery, Aresh video store, Armenian International Music School, an Armenian barbershop, and an Armenian general store. In the grocery store, I noticed several food items that were in Yerevan's grocery store including a combination of Russian and Armenian labels. Arman and I bought Russian ice cream bars that were commonly found in Yerevan's outdoor coolers, and ate them outside of the store as he reminisced about growing up in Glendale. He explained that several Armenian stores in the area display signs that highlight no Turkish products like the one in this photo, Glendale. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.7. When visiting the Armenian Relief Society of Western USA, Inc. (ARS) office my first week in L.A. to conduct an interview, I passed the office's main meeting room before walking into a private, quieter room. I noticed this table with Armenian hospitality including fruit, coffee/tea, and candy along with artificial pomegranates, a symbol of Armenia. I asked my respondent if this was for a special event or a common practice. I learned that this is just how the office always looks. I later remembered this table when traveling to USC's Institute of Armenian Studies and seeing a similar display on their meeting table. While in the U.S., I always offer my friends and guests tea when they visit my apartment and think about the display of Armenian hospitality I want to embody in my own home, Glendale. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.8. While walking in Glendale, I often passed Armenian store fronts. This is a restaurant serving a popular Artsakh dish, Zhengyalov Hatz. The English translation is “forest bread” due to it being a flatbread with herbs, Glendale. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.9. On an excursion with Birthright, we were at Lake Sevan and our group was headed back to our bus to return to Yerevan when we noticed a local family doing a barbeque of Khorovats and making coffee, soorj, outside in a traditional coffee pot, jazzve. The family offered the coffee to us that we had to graciously decline to make our way back to the bus in time. They embodied Armenian hospitality by the way they embraced and greeted us through the offer of coffee, a common social gesture for Armenians. I purchased a jazzve from Yerevan's famous flea market, Vernissage, and think about Armenia whenever I make coffee in traditional Armenian process while in my home in the U.S., Lake Sevan. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.10. I traveled from Yerevan to Tatev and Goris for a weekend with friends where we went to a local butcher to buy pork in Goris and returned to learn about the process of making Khorovats from a local man at our Tatev rental house. While assembling the skewer with meat, onions, and potatoes, we listened to Armenian music, prepared our side dishes of fresh vegetables and lavash, and played with local stray kittens. The next morning, my friends and I embarked on an exploration in Tatev, taking a mountain cable car, The Wings of Tatev, to the Tatev Monastery and hiked to make our way down to the Devil's Bridge where we overlooked a waterfall before the sun went down, Tatev. Photograph and caption by the author.

Visualizing Place-Making

Place also relies on a memory to evoke emotion among diasporans. While food has been seen as a symbol representation of ethnicity by some (see Bakalian 1993), place may be understood as another factor constructing the concept of homeland. Place relies on a process of imagining the unknown and bringing past ideas into the present reality in a similar way as

diasporans recreate traditional Armenians meals in their new cities. The 24 respondents who submitted photos included 20 references to physical space in Yerevan and L.A. including mountain views, streets, buildings, churches, community centers and halls. Out of the 20 photos of land, there were seven references to ancient/historic land or older neighborhoods, three references to churches, three references to community centers in L.A., two reference to mountains, one reference to a Little Armenia street sign, one reference to graffiti in LA, one photo of steps in LA of Armenian film, one photo of a DC building that reminded them of Armenia/being Armenian, and one photo of trees.

Sociologists (Gieryn 2000), anthropologists (see Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004), geographers (see Massey 1994; Harvey 2001), transnational feminists (see Mohanty 1988, 2003; Yuval-Davis 2011; Parreñas 2015; Klapeer and Laskar 2018) and urban theorists (see Park 1984; Soja 1989; Jacobs 1992) have focused on the meaning of space and place to offer a postmodern approach to identity that influenced migration studies. A consensus exists that people, through actions, emotions, and memories, transform a space into a place with meaning (see Gieryn 2000). As a result, place is not merely a concept of an isolated physical piece of land but instead, completely reliant on social processes that construct it (see Logan and Molotch 2007).

The respondents in this study display a common trend for immigrants to make sense of various locations by comparing them to one another. Armenians in L.A. use Armenia and the expectations of how to behave there as a guidebook for how to perform social relations in L.A. through the recreation of ethnic stores, restaurants, organizations, and parks. At the same time, those in Armenia, dream about L.A. and the U.S. while imagining immigrants as living more lavishly and freely as the conversation with the taxi driver implied. Louie (2004) found similar trends in her multi-sited study on Chinese youth in San Francisco and China. Louie found that

second, third and fourth generation Chinese youth are not only still curious about their ethnic background, but that they constantly make sense of China largely due to the communities they formed outside of it – in San Francisco. Louie's participants were part of the "In Search of Roots" transnational program that encourages Chinese-American youth to visit their ancestral villages in China to learn about their "roots," which resembles the goals Birthright Armenia. When traveling to China, the San Francisco youth, who did not feel completely at home in the U.S., also did not feel fully authentic enough to be Chinese in China. To maneuver these feelings, Chinese youth make sense of their Chineseness through transnational connections that help them understand that feelings of home can be found within the in-betweenness of China and the U.S. rather than in one place. Louie's study is an example of the fluidity that other scholars argued is necessary to situate when uncovering the place-making processes within migrant communities.

During my analysis, I found that research participants in interviews and photovoice submissions displayed a fluidity in how to categorize being Armenian. Much of the fluidity in their identity is linked to their fluid understanding of home, homeland, and where they belong. For many, the answers to where is home and homeland were rarely simple or involving one specific location. As Angela, who has never been to Armenia, highlighted, homeland does need to be defined through travel. Angela and other respondents highlight that place is often a product of "culturally reproduced images" (Gieryn 2000: 473) and involves individuals having "geographical imaginations beyond their present residence" (Routledge and Leontidou 2010). As a result, diasporans who have strong ethnic connections due to their organizational involvement, family members, or exposure to Armenians in areas such as Glendale form an understanding of Armenia even when far away from it.

Considering the social imaginary of a homeland is critical for the Armenian Diaspora as later generation diasporans may not have direct connections to Armenia. The construction process involves imagining a place comprised of storytelling from elders, literature, art, and film. For such diasporans, as the case for other groups such as Palestinians, a return to the homeland is more abstract as they see their home as an "inherently romanticized place sometimes likened to a lost lover" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 10). This case of Armenians in this study further challenges scholarship that previously argued that consistent physical travel was a distinct element of transnationalism (see Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller 2003).

For Armenian diasporans, a social imaginary of a specific place to refer to as home has been critical due to the aftermath of the Genocide and the loss of historic land making the memories of a homeland more profound, yet more abstract as well. As Peter Balakian (2009) reflected in his memoir, *Black Dog of Fate,* "as long as I have known language, *Armenia* had existed; it was synonymous with the rooms of my house. *Ar. Meen. Ya. Armenia.* Like *ma-ma, da-da*" (44). As in the case of Balakian, several diaspora generations may not have any first-hand connection to Armenia other than from books and stories from teachers and elderly family members. Therefore, emotions drive the construction of a particular place.

Gieryn (2000) explained that place has three defining features: location, material form, and meaningfulness (2000: 466). The latter comes from the collection of memories and storytelling among community members that have been passed down for generations. This idea of imagining is linked to scholar's distinction of place and space. When walking around L.A.'s Armenian hubs such as Glendale and Hollywood's Little Armenia, the Armenian flag, graffiti, and establishments begin to function less as stable aspects rooted in L.A. but instead highlight movement as they are representative of Armenia. When entering the buildings of organizations

such as ANCA and ARS where I completed interviews, I noticed many framed photographs of Armenia. Specifically, one example of a social imaginary at work is the Armenian Diaspora's focus on Mount Ararat which is more about the symbolic rather than material form.

For many Armenians, there is a sense of nostalgia to the homeland that stems from stories about Mount Ararat. As Tölölyan (2000) explains, "the stereotypically nostalgic photographs of Mount Ararat in the lost homeland that adorn Armenian homes and restaurants…act as a marker of ethnodiasporic identity, as Mount Fuji does for the Japanese or as the Parthenon does for Greek identity" (126). In his memoir, Bakalian recalled a conversation with his mother as a young boy when he asked, "Why are we Christians?" to which she responded with the story of Mount Ararat, noting that "it's our [Armenia] national symbol" (2009: 44). This connection to the homeland highlights that "the [Armenian] community endures as a distinct diaspora, not because its members individually remember grandma or the village, but thanks to the collective work of memory and commemoration" (Tölölyan 2005: 50). The submission of photographs from respondents furthered strengthened this point as several included Mount Ararat or mountains in L.A. that evoked a memory of Armenia.

Since place consists of social processes and relations, then community is the core of how this occurs. Community is something people *do* (Blokland-Potters 2017: 40). The Armenian community, through transnational actions and attachments, created Glendale's reputation of being a second Armenia. The concepts of ethnoburb and ethnic enclaves serve as examples of the agency individuals display in response to globalization. Fittante (2018) illustrated how Armenian-Americans in L.A. challenge classic theories of assimilation. Fittante defined the Armenians he observed in Glendale as "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" as they participated in ethnic entrepreneurial efforts and local politics. He noted that due to the arrival of migrants in the

area, “Glendale and Monterey Park have been transformed from sleepy Anglo suburbs into multilingual, multicultural, and multiracial/multiethnic metropolitan ethnoburbs” (Fittante 2018: 1245). In this case, it is important to apply Massey’s argument that places are porous rather than bounded. As a result, “people can experience many places within one place” (Gielis 2009: 275).

Gielis (2009) argued that “every place is related to a multitude of places and social processes beyond” (276). Thus, individuals experience the simultaneous presence of everywhere in the place they are standing (Massey 1994). Through this perspective, city is never a lonesome, stable entity. Rather, a place like L.A. resembles and encompasses all the places that its resident come from, including Armenia, Central America, Asia and others. While places can be fluid and interconnected, scholars argue that this does not mean that places lose significance and meaning. In fact, some note that place matters now as much as ever. In their study of MacArthur Park in L.A, Gerardo Sandoval and Kelly Main (2014) found that Central American and Mexican immigrants transformed the space of the park to remind them of their homeland. This study focuses on how migrants practice agency in their placemaking processes and are not only victims of the structures around them.

While Armenians have been successful in establishing ethnic hubs for connections and political activism, Glendale will experience constant changes due to increasing housing costs, new communities, development, and gentrification. Several respondents expressed fears in not being able to purchase a home in Glendale like their parents have. Others expressed concern in losing essential establishments for community gathering. The centralization of Glendale and its demand for Armenian ethnic businesses presents an opportunity for new Armenian immigrants to participate in the local economy through entrepreneurship when other employment options are not available. Thus, Glendale creates survival business opportunities (see Gold 2010). The fear in

losing meaningful social spaces in Glendale relates back to the theme found throughout my interview data of an "existential threat." Losing land in Armenia and losing a diaspora community in Glendale is interrelated. Both cases of fear help explain each other – fear in losing Armenia makes Armenians in Glendale desire to become even more Armenian, while at the same time, fears in losing their community in Glendale reminds them that are living outside of Armenia and may potentially lose their reminders of their ethnic identity at any moment.

In Glendale, I spoke to Arno, the owner of Abril Bookstore, an establishment that sells Armenian books, souvenirs, and hosts community events. Abril Bookstore first opened in 1979 in Little Armenia and later followed the movement of Armenians to Glendale in 1998. Yet after COVID-19, due to a new landlord and lease Arno could no longer afford, the store moved again to a smaller space.

ARNO: *They [the city] built all these new things everything on Central, then the rent went up, all those older places closed, all these corporate places came like everywhere else, and even us, eventually we couldn't afford it anymore.*

Abril's new location no longer includes an attached event space and art gallery that was once an opportunity for L.A. Armenians to form social networks and strengthen their ties. The experience of Abril Bookstore is just one example of the negative impacts of a fluid place.

The future of Armenian social life in Glendale is unknown. As Mayor Kassakhian noted, this ethnic hub is likely to change as previous Armenian places have highlighting that no place is immune to structural forces.

KASSAKHIAN: *You know, we renamed the street after Artsakh, there is stuff that will*

> *leave a mark once we're gone but again if you're ever been to Belmont, Watertown, Cambridge, there's vestiges of the Armenian community that was there, in fact, at Harvard Square, there's Grendels, a famous bar next to the location of the Armenian church, there's a little plaque that says it used to be the site of the first Armenian church, you're going to have things like that Armenians in Glendale have made their mark.*

Kassakhian highlights the limitations in the agentic power of local Armenians in response to the urbanization and gentrification processes around them.

Photovoice Submissions of Place

Figure 6.11. *This Middle-Eastern looking building has always stood out in downtown DC among a bunch of generic commercial spaces and seems an odd venue for the loudest bars and clubs. I would guess that hardly anyone knows that it was designed like this almost a century ago when it housed an Armenian carpet store. I chose this photo because this place turns my head every time and being Armenian means always looking for and finding little slivers of significance amidst the noise, literally in this case,* Washington, D.C. Photograph and caption by research participant, Vahe.

Figure 6.12. *A view of our family house in Turqi Mayla (officially Artsakh) district, Gyumri. The district is similar to Kond in terms of its historical architecture and poverty. I took this right when I saw the house. On the left side is my grandpa's cobbler shop. Both my grandmother and my mother were born and grew up in this house. My grandmother's uncles built it. It made me feel more rooted: I had a physical space in Armenia that was mine, with a foundation and a roof and everything. Living here with my grandparents, who I'd never met before this trip, filled a hole in my heart I didn't know I had, as has repeatedly happened in Hayastan,* Gyumri. Photograph and caption by research participant, Arman.

Figure 6.13. *From my friend's balcony in Glendale, CA, I sometimes like to pretend that I am in Armenia as I gaze out to the mountains around us. I like to joke and believe that Armenians moved to this mountainous part of Los Angeles because it reminds them of Armenia,* Glendale. Photograph and caption by research participant, Garo.

Figure 6.14. *A new Armenian NGO has started to stage concerts in nature. A group of friends and I went to their inaugural event, which started with a hike up Aragats. I am continually struck by Armenia's vast beauty, particularly its mountains. Every time I leave Yerevan, I am reminded of the phrase "We Are Our Mountains,"* Mount Aragats. Photograph and caption by research participant, Lucine.

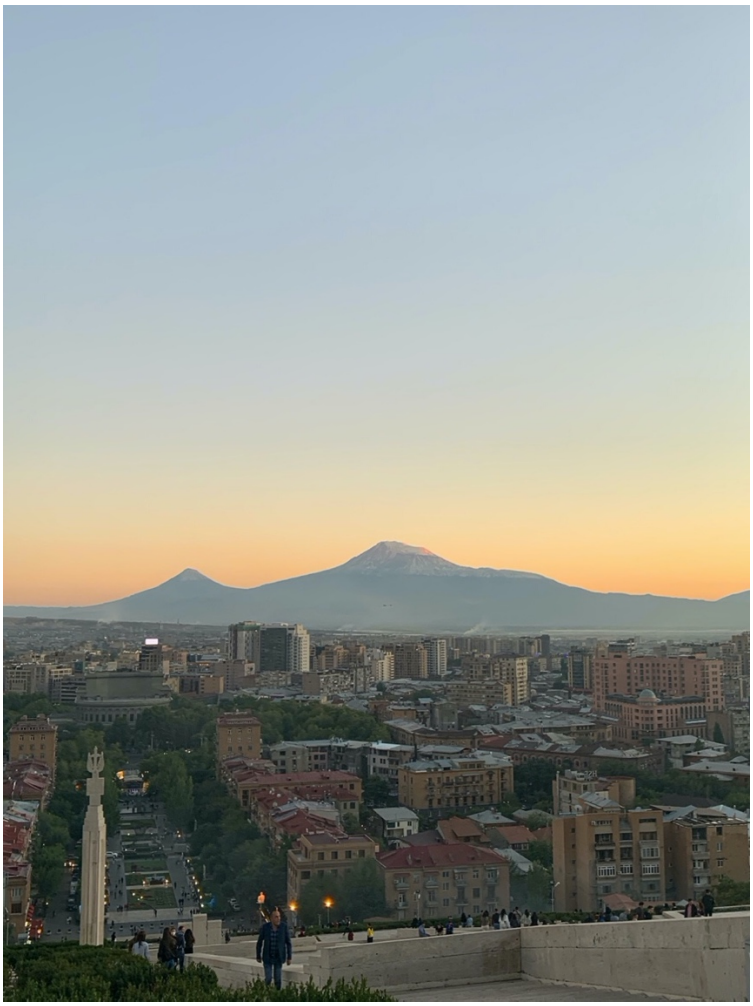

Figure 6.15. *This photo was taken at Cascade in Yerevan during the morning time. Ararat is not just a mountain for Armenians but it represents Western Armenia and is a symbol for the country. On this day countless amounts of people were taking photos with Ararat in the background as it was extremely visible. When I saw Ararat I was truly amazed by its size and felt maybe one day we will have those lands back,* Yerevan. Photograph and caption by research participant, Sam.

Participant Observant Photos of Place

Relying on photographs a source of data was especially critical to my comparative data analysis of Yerevan and L.A. As a multi-sited ethnography, my study produced data that required making sense of the relationship between two places under the trends of globalization and immigration. As Appadurai (1991) explains, it is critical to situate ethnoscapes in the process of ethnography. Ethnoscapes are "the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in

which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons" (Appadurai 1991). Appadurai asked ethnographers to "figure out a way in which the role of the imagination in social life can be describe in a new sort of ethnography that is not so resolutely localizing" (1991: 199). When analyzing photovoice submissions and my own photographs of Yerevan and L.A., the images did not merely represent a snapshot in time. The process of integrating the sending and receiving sites supports a deeper contextual understanding of how the global impacts the local (see Fitzgerald 2006). By grouping photographs together to make sense of the two locations, the images, and the moments within them became mobile and displayed the flow of global movement and its impact on the social actors impacted by migration.

I captured several photographs of gathering places in Yerevan and L.A. including coffee shops, restaurants, bars and clubs, and outdoor parks. In an image below of Wilson Mini Park, I applied a transnational lens to analyze the photo for more than just the park. The photo carries the experiences of the men in the image who are Armenian and were speaking Armenian when I took the photo, resembles a park in Armenia where men gather in a similar fashion to play chess and backgammon, and in turn highlights the recreation of past memory and what happens after migration. Therefore, while images are at times understood as pausing moments in life, analyzing multi-sited photographs create an alternative impact by allowing images to build on one another creating movement and a context that is always changing. Using such a transnational perspective "allows researchers to see transborder ties that were invisible to the assimilationist scholars of earlier generations" (Fitzgerald 2006).

This process of analyzing my photographs allowed for theories commonly grounded in abstract, postmodern thought to be understood empirically. Recognizing that the places I

photographed are more alike than different, and that each place holds individuals from the other place, blurred the relationship of Armenia and the U.S. as two separate nations and instead illustrated the ways that they rely on one another. As Brubaker (2017) noted, "diaspora is a practice," therefore it is something that is done, a verb, rather than noun. Rooted in this practice is transnationalism that is not simply political involvement or travel abroad, but the re-imaging of home as one container separate of other influences. The experience of the diasporan highlights that "home is the place you get to, not the place you came from" (Fortier 2002). Moreover, the concept of where one belongs and feels most comfortable, or "home," is not immune to changing. Home becomes a destination one is always seeking to construct and define through their own agency. This process is evident in the interactions of Armenian diasporans within Yerevan and L.A. It was then crucial that this study was multi-stied to offer a well-rounded narrative of the Armenian Diaspora.

Figure 6.16. One month into living in L.A., I scheduled an interview with Ellen, who volunteered with the Glendale Tenants Union, to learn more about the housing changes occurring in Armenian neighborhoods. Ellen requested we meet outside due to COVID-19 and suggested Wilson Mini Park, a common meeting place for elderly Armenian men (*papiks*) to socialize and play chess or backgammon (*narde*). I took a photo of a distant view of Armenian men gathered a table as I remembered the parks and courtyards in Yerevan where men gathered in a similar manner. In the middle of our interview, one of the men approached us and began speaking in Armenian as Ellen responded, Glendale. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.17. Taken from the window view of the apartment I lived in for six months while completing fieldwork in Armenia. To the left is a silhouette of Mount Ararat as the sun sets and the moon appears. In the neighborhood I lived in, Garegin Nzhdeh, mostly local working-class Armenians occupied the Soviet style apartment buildings with little new development. Most Birthrighters, on the other hand, if not living with host families, rented newer spaces in the city center like the Cascade neighboring areas which had more restaurant and night life options. As the photo shows, it was common practice to dry laundry outside and as I opened the window to do so, I would often hear children playing below hitting a soccer ball to a garage door or wall. Unlike in the U.S., I did not see many football or soccer fields giving the kids access for playing sports in large outdoor spaces. Seeing Mount Ararat, a representation of ancient Armenian history, juxtaposed with the sounds of the youth growing up in Yerevan, I imagined what their futures would look like in the country and if any of them would eventually migrate to the U.S. as my own cousins from this neighborhood did, Yerevan. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.18. This photo was taken when some of my Birthright peers and I visited the Hayravank Monastery near Lake Sevan. We explored the nearby monastery and went to eat some fish, Ishakan, a trout only found in Lake Sevan. While waiting for our food, we were sitting at a table that overlooked the lake and I immediately thought of Michigan. I felt nostalgic for my idea of home – not Armenia but Michigan. I related the view of the lake to the many memories I had seeing Lake Michigan and being "up north." My connection to Lake Sevan was not related to its historic meaning to Armenians, instead I used this physical connection to water to bring myself back to my sense of [diasporan] self, Lake Sevan. Photograph and caption by the author.

Figure 6.19. On an excursion with Birthright Armenia, our volunteers planted trees at a field with the Armenia Tree Project (ATP), a non-profit organization founded in 1994 by a diasporan philanthropist Carolyn Mugar from Greater Boston, Massachusetts. This organization is just one of many that has been founded by diasporans from the U.S. in hopes of improving Armenia and its development. While planting these trees, I recognized that this was my first moment of having "roots" in present-day Armenia, as my family were diasporans from Azerbaijan, and many other diasporans at the excursion with me did not have any remaining connections to today's Republic of Armenia. As diasporans return back as volunteers and repatriates, they are replanting their own roots in various ways through similar organizations and initiatives and giving their skills back to their ancient homeland even if they are the first in their family to have it as an actualized home, Armenia. Photograph and caption by the author.

Embodied Ways of Being

Both themes generated from photovoice and my own photographs highlight a perspective for how to live within a transnational space and perform transnationally. Through ethnographic

approaches such as observations and photovoice, I was able to locate the possibility for an embodied way of belonging to more than one place through an approach that adds nuance to possibilities of migrant life. In Chapter 4, locals and organization leaders made calls to action for travel in a way that asserted to have strong political opinions on the way of life in Armenia, diasporans should be on the ground in Armenia. Diasporans must then use their bodies and put them on the front lines metaphorically and even literally as some asked diasporans to authentic their transnational commitment. In these ways, diasporan allegiance and "real" transnationalism are measured by the physical rather than the emotional. As Sevan noted, the love from afar is not be enough for the greater mission of organizations like Birthright. Yet, the photovoice findings offer a different perspective of the physical, embodied experience of being Armenian that has not yet been seen in previous studies on Armenians.

What does it mean that food was a recurring theme in this study? It is understood that emotional ties and feelings of connection to Armenia are strengthened through the body – through cooking, gathering, and eating Armenian meals. One's emotional desires are satisfied by the taste of the homeland. While some transnational scholars argued for a different use of one's body through physical travel, my findings highlight a need to consider other possibilities for direct, physical interactions with Armenia. Rather than understanding Armenia as the physical country, diasporans, through eating, interact with the concept of the homeland and the imaginary. Armenia instead becomes an entity of fluid space, rather than a distinct place, for diasporans. This is important to consider as virtual connections and social media interactions begin to raise new questions on what is defined as "real" engagement. As several respondents noted, checking news updates on social media while living in the U.S. ignited feelings of emotional distress. While these diasporan were not directly in line with danger and putting their bodies on the war

grounds, they still experienced an embodied reaction miles away that is worthy of noting.

At the same time, imagining is at play through the photos of mountains in L.A. or visiting old villages in Armenia and attempting to picture what life was once like for ancestors and family members. Here, physical acts such as eating and interacting with landscapes takes the physical and transforms it into the emotional. This back-and-forth process of creating the self via the community and physical place one belongs to is magnified due to the qualitative nature of this study and the openness of participants to express insight into their lives and thought processes.

Yet, for some respondents, such as Ellen whom I met with at Wilson Mini Park, the act of imagining past traditions was used to recreate a sense of belonging and home in L.A. and involved an embodied experience of socializing with other Armenians in a physical place. This process of place-making to resemble the homeland soothes feelings of longing and desires for connecting to the past. Yet, such imaginations of Armenia can lead to negative physical responses. Imagining Armenia incites physical emotions of fear and anxiety. This was evident by respondents who feared the impact of war and the micro daily conditions in Armenia today, as was mentioned by the LGBTQ respondents of this study. Queer respondents' conceptualization of Armenia, built on ideas that are no longer as true such as the expectation that queer life is limited, may also create an embodied, physical experience of distress.

CHAPTER 7: THE FUTURE OF ARMENIANS: CALLS FOR INCLUSION, EXPANSION, AND NEW WAYS OF BEING

Leaving the Field

On April 24, 2022, a few weeks before completing fieldwork and leaving L.A. to return to Michigan, I attended the City of Glendale's Genocide Commemoration Event led by local city officials and community members. The event was held at the Alex Theatre located on North Brand Boulevard (fig. 7.1), a street I became familiar with after meeting research participants and completing observations throughout my three months of fieldwork in Glendale at establishments where Armenians frequently socialized. This street is also where Armenian organizations such as the AAA office can be found. North Brand exemplifies the lively community of Armenians in Glendale – Armenian language is often overheard from a passerby and research participants often would tell me of how they frequently encountered someone they know in the area. It came as no surprise at this point of fieldwork that when I parked to attend the commemoration event, the public garage included several vehicles with Armenian flags on their roofs (fig. 7.2), which was commonly seen throughout my time in Glendale, along with license plates reading Armenian words.

Figure 7.1. Alex Theatre, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

Figure 7.2. Armenian flags on car, Glendale. Photograph by the author.

Upon entering the Alex Theatre, I was introduced to Congressman Adam Schiff, who represents California's 30th district which includes Glendale. Representative Schiff and Mayor Kassakhian were among some of the speakers during the event. Both political officials centered their speeches around a theme of coming together, fighting against Turkish and Azeri attempts to dismantle the global Armenian community, and showing appreciation for efforts led by local Glendale organizations. On the front of the event's pamphlet was an image of Komitas, an Armenian composer whose music is commonly heard in Armenian households and streets signs are named after him in Yerevan. The commemorative event included dance and musical performances honoring Komitas, showcasing another effort at diasporans maintaining tradition in the present to remember Armenian achievements and sustain a future community that is

connected to their culture.

While urbanization and economic forces challenge Glendale's long-term ability to be the center of Armenian-American activity, the daily efforts by local community members, particularly young transnational leaders, actively attempt to combat the loss of the centralization of Armenian life in L.A. In addition to honoring the past, diasporans in Armenia and L.A. are attributing to the larger community's changes by creating new organizations that are designed to respond to requests by younger Armenians who desire internal change. During my time in Glendale, I found Armenian vintage stores, film societies, queer organizations, and events rooted on ideas of inclusion at an attempt to be a fresh invite to Armenians who may have previously felt excluded from Armenian social activities. I attended a few events organized by the growing L.A. organization, Miaseen, started by Anthony Abaci, a 25-year-old fourth generation Armenian raised in the Bay Area who currently resides in L.A. The Miaseen office and event space is located in Glendale. This organization was created to host social events, organize fundraisers, and create documentaries, short films, and web series including the first Armenian Dating show that took place in L.A. and gained popularity among Armenians around the country.

As Anthony explained the translation of Miaseen to me, he highlighted the rhetoric that has been the call from those in Armenia and the Diaspora through the entirety of my fieldwork – "all Armenians together." At the Miaseen event I attended, I heard one common response by many peers and research participants – that this event and the type of people attending were not the typical Glendale, which was said with a sense of relief and embrace among those who commented. This comment highlights the current attempt by some Armenians to bring diversity to organizations. This expansion of Armenian identity is evident when visiting Miaseen's webpage where young Armenians are featured in music videos, tongue and cheek interviews

about Armenian traditions, cooking episodes, and informational articles about Armenia not only rooted in current news and war updates but light-hearted cultural topics. Miaseen's social media page includes photo sharing and debates often surrounding popular topics in the community. This poses an idea of a possible direction of what existing and future Armenian organizations will look like as community members and society progresses.

This process of the retention and evolution of Armenian identity was also felt when I left Glendale. Upon returning to Michigan, I no longer had access to Armenian stores, social events, hearing the language, and activist signs and posters in Armenian on my daily walks. The sentiment of respondents, such as Nareh and Arthur, who moved to less Armenian communities from Glendale was understood more clearly as I reflected on my time in the field while completing the analysis and writing phases of this dissertation. While Metro Detroit has an Armenian community, the population size in Greater L.A. makes it stand out as a leader unlike any other city in the U.S. Two months after returning to Michigan, I attended a local Armenian Festival in the Detroit area and immediately felt the absence of the unique element of Glendale. It is not merely a community with Armenian residents.

Instead, as respondents explained, Glendale relies on the social processes of its community members to connect to Armenia through its transnational social networks, entrepreneurial endeavors, language, and the influx of new Armenian immigrants that contribute to the ethnic retention in the area. By leaving the field sites and returning back to my data for analysis, I practiced what Tavory and Timmermans (2014) identify as defamiliarization, noting that "when we move through our surroundings, we not only encounter new problem situations but find new problems in old situations" (60). While walking around the Armenia Festival in Metro Detroit, I witnessed a shrinking Armenian community with tables featuring apparel of

traditional Armenian colors, Armenian plates of food, and often older community members doing the selling. In these ways, this event did align with Bakalian's assessment of symbolic ethnicity. Yet, Glendale has been able to create an Armenia of its own in the U.S.

My departure from Armenia was also met with challenges to assumptions of the meaning of a homeland and the current state of Armenia. Before returning to the states in the middle of December 2021, I was in Yerevan for an anticipated event at Republic Square, the Opening Ceremony of Eurovision, a popular singing competition in Europe. In the weeks leading up to the event, there were two conflicting opinions. Some, including locals, repatriates and diasporans, were upset that the city was involved in a celebration during a continued period of grief and threat of war at its borders. Another group of Armenians met this celebration with excitement and joy as a moment to forget trauma and embrace Armenia being chosen to host. Several of my research participants from Birthright attended the event later showcasing photos and videos of the fireworks and decorations around Republic Square. The words of Pink Armenia's Mamikon remained in my mind during these activities. Armenia is moving forward in time and changing. This event highlights a stark difference between how one may imagine Armenia in the Diaspora, as a place of war, sadness, history, and the past, and highlights the life, resurgence of social activity, and possibilities for the future that exist in a way that may only be understood on the ground.

Upon returning from Armenia, I felt a similar wave of new energy about its future and people as I did when leaving Glendale. In the U.S., I reflected on my last days in Yerevan when I walked on popular streets such as Pushkin that had new restaurants resembling American style and cuisine while development projects and construction were constant as new buildings replaced the past Soviet architecture. In only six months of living in Armenia, I witnessed

frequent construction projects begin on popular tourist streets representing movement and forward looking (see Massey 1994). By traveling to Armenia, the homeland became much more than connecting to Mount Ararat. Armenia represented the everyday social interactions and connections that are ever-changing, rather than stagnant and a thing of the past.

The evolution of Armenia and Glendale, including their social institutions, not only intertwine with the evolution of the social actors that comprise of these places but are influenced by and reliant on them. Thus, I left my two field sites with a better understanding of how young Armenians are living today in new ways that are attempting to grow and build, while implementing major improvements through social, cultural, and structural changes. As Chicana queer scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa reflected on her own dual identity connected to the U.S. and Mexico, she highlighted this realization of a flowing and fluid identity attached to multiple places stating,

> Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process. Contained within the river is its identity, and it needs to flow, to change to stay a river—if it stopped it would be a contained body of water such as a lake or a pond. The changes in the river are external (changes in environment—river bed, weather, animal life) and internal (within the waters). A river's contents flow within its boundaries. Changes in identity likewise are external (how others perceive one and how one perceives others and the world) and internal (how one perceives oneself, self-image). People in different regions name the parts of the river/person which they see (Anzaldúa 2009).

This metaphor of identity being determined by constant structural and individual changes can be applied specifically to the transnational young Armenians in this study. Scholars have addressed a common understanding that diaspora is a *practice* (Brubaker 2017), home is a place you *get to* (Fortier 2002), and identity is an *ever-flowing river* (Anzaldúa 2009) thus highlighting that diasporas continue to be important and relevant for current and future scholarship specifically within contemporary sociology and is not a field of studies that should be left behind. Through qualitative fieldwork and a reflexive data analysis methodology I attempted to take on theoretical conclusions from scholarship and "catch up" (Ong 1991) to the lived realities.

Research Questions Revisited

This dissertation responded to three research questions. First, I asked, how do ethnic organizations shape ideas of identity, authenticity and belonging? In response to this question, I executed an ethnographic multi-sited field study that was immersed in local Armenian community and their organizations. Specifically, I conducted six months of fieldwork in Yerevan, Armenia to observe young diasporans from the lens of Birthright Armenia. To do so, I completed three months of participant-observation as a Birthright volunteer that provided me with an understanding of the structure of the organization. As an observant, I attended excursions with other volunteers and observed their social interactions such as singing Armenian songs on the bus and using Armenian and English interchangeably. I paid close attention to what kind of volunteers were common, such as those from L.A. or who were in other organizations back home, and established rapport to begin recruitment of interviews. Through in-depth interviews, I uncovered several explanations for organizational involvement.

I found that traditional diaspora organizations that Armenians had access to provided various options for transnational participation from childhood. For Vahan, Garo, Aram and

others, the AYF instilled a drive to fight for the Armenian cause at an early age and created a transnational desire among Armenians in Glendale to connect with Armenia. I also found that involvement in organizations such as AYF was generational. For diasporans who have been active in organizations from an early age, they were introduced to these organizations through their parents who participated either in the U.S. or in their country of origin and continued organizational involvement after emigrating. Such organizations encourage a passionate energy among diasporans while in their local community and provide them with an outlet to showcase their activism through political events and protests in their cities and volunteer trips to Armenia. While an organization like AYF presents many opportunities for participation, respondents who were involved expressed that it was a decision often tied to parental influence, as Nareh said they "passed it on to us," while others without such social capital and family involvement did not feel like organizations were an option for them. Instead, some respondents used their college years to become active through an ASA chapter or Armenian curriculum, highlighting the large Armenian community in L.A. that houses several universities and includes options for joining Armenian clubs or taking Armenian history and language courses.

Other organizations located outside of the local community, such as Birthright Armenia in Yerevan, encourage travel to Armenia more outwardly through volunteering abroad while being introduced to Armenians from around the world and gaining exposure to the possibility of repatriating to Armenia. Through involvement in Birthright and other organizations, such as AYF, that have volunteer opportunities in Armenia, respondents directly interact with Armenian politics, language, workforce, and locals. In this process, ideas constructed by leaders of the organizations and their respective communities influence members' understanding of expectations to fit in that can conflict with their own interests and way of life. At the same time,

organizations have limitations in their reach and influence on their members. As respondents like Daron expressed after repatriating, living in Armenia can change one's perspective on previously held ideas of how to aid the country from afar.

While participating in Birthright Armenia, there is a simultaneous process of building understanding of the past through excursions to historic landmarks and connecting volunteers with their roots and instilling a desire to prevent any future loss of land by understanding conditions in the homeland through physical interactions with it. Yet such social processes contribute to measuring one's authenticity that occurs when determining if one is *really* engaged with Armenia, as Sevan showcased by calling for "real" not "artificial" homeland engagement, or as Christina noted, measuring if one is only Armenian based on their "23 and me test." Therefore, while Birthright accepts Armenians who have at least one grandparent that is fully Armenian, the meaning-making and social work of establishing who adequately fits a traditional type of Armenian participant involves more qualifications expected by members and leaders such as speaking Armenian, being involved with organizations back home, or actively speaking out against war in Armenia.

Additionally, organizations such as the ANCA and AAA directly align with transnationalism as they instill a political interest in Armenia. Both organizations work alongside members of Congress to sponsor legislation intended to directly benefit Armenia. These organizations offer opportunities for political internships for young Armenians who can become future political leaders in the U.S. and their local Armenian community. Such organizations actively work against assimilation by creating social institutions centered on ethnic retention and a feeling of belonging in the U.S. In the process, Armenians learn about their past including

traditions and traumas, while working on creating a politically active future through opportunities for cultural capital accumulation via internships.

The findings from observations and interviews with organization members led to my response to my second question that asked, what influences participation in these organizations? As mentioned above, community members experience various expectations from others. Respondents in this study highlighted moments when they felt excluded either in an organization, Glendale, or Armenia. First-generation Armenians expressed not having exposure to organizations and therefore, not being involved due to a lack of parental influence. Additionally, respondents highlighted several expectations of speaking the Armenian language to feel included and belonging to the Armenian community at large. For instance, language has been seen as a tool to prevent an "existential threat" to Armenian existence. Yet, even when Armenians do know the language, additional internal conflicts occur based differences within the Eastern and Western dialect, as well as Soviet influences with the Russian incorporation into Armenian dialect among those in Armenia.

Another common theme contributing to feelings of exclusion was found among respondents who are queer or bi-racial. Those who identified as LGBTQ in this study expressed frustrations and fears with ethnic organizations, their local community, families, and travel to Armenia. Queer respondents highlight a group of Armenians for whom calls for more involvement and travel to the homeland may not apply so freely due to historic homophobia and a threat to safety. Similarly, Armenians who are bi-racial expressed experiencing exclusion from local community members that perpetuate racism and further alienate Armenians who are not the traditional type of participant from being involved in an organization. These groups of Armenians are a product of the intragroup conflicts that are still occurring within the Armenian

Diaspora. Yet, new organizations and ideologies are forming with the Diaspora encouraging a different way of belonging that expands the Armenian identity.

Lastly, my third research question asked, how does a strong ethnic enclave affect locals' relationship with organizations and their identity? The existence and centralization of a community such as Glendale provides the Armenian respondents in this study with many opportunities. First, interactions with other Armenians and the formation of social networks creates an understanding of Armenianness that is more than symbolic. For instance, Armenian grocery stores and restaurants allow Armenians to continue cooking traditional meals by having access to products that may be more difficult to find in other mainstream grocery stores.

In addition to sustaining an Armenian community through traditional food, Glendale also houses the offices of several ethnic organizations, Armenian schools, and community centers. These social institutions allow for the regenerating of Armenian culture within the community as parents have options for their children to maintain an active way of being through participation in these spaces. Additionally, during moments of crisis in Armenia, those in Glendale can have a more significant impact and reach during political protests in their local community due to the large number of Armenians residing in the area that can mobilize.

Lastly, expectations about performance exist among my respondents including gender roles, language skills, and at times travel to support the homeland. Such expectations stand in conflict with symbolic ethnicity which often "makes no claims or demands on individuals whatsoever" (Waters 1990: 92). Overall, a strong ethnic enclave helps maintain an active Armenian identity that involves actions of participating in organizations, creating Armenian social networks, attending Armenian schools, speaking the Armenian language, gathering at

Armenian restaurants, cooking Armenian food, and traveling to Armenia on behalf of organizations or with family.

At the same time, there are pitfalls to a strong ethnic community. Some respondents noted that the exposure to traditional Armenian ideals from an early age led to stereotypes that deterred them from being involved in the community. Additionally, those in Armenia form stereotypes about Armenians in Glendale and Greater L.A. assuming that they are more comfortable and potentially financially stable that creates distrust and disinterest in the opinions of those abroad about conditions in Armenia, particularly during war. Mamikon and Daron both spoke in a tone of displeasure regarding Armenians in L.A. who they assumed are "sipping coffee at Starbucks" while commenting about Armenian politics.

Similarly, Armenians in Glendale create assumptions about Armenia tied to traumatic feelings of war, an essentialized connection to historic sites, and gender relations. As seen by respondents who identify as LGBTQ, due to negative experiences with homophobia in Glendale and in their family households, they assumed and connected such experiences to what would occur if they traveled to Armenia. While this may be true, it is an example of maintaining Armenia in a state of being behind in progress compared to those in the Diaspora and contributes to an imbalance in backward thinking rather than Massey's call for integrating a forward-thinking reality.

Social ideas in the homeland and in the Diaspora are transnational and influence each other. The movement from Armenia to the U.S. does not deem a stark binary separation. Most recently, on June 7, 2023, some local Armenians parents gathered outside of the Glendale Unified School District building to protest recognizing June as Pride month. This protest led to another debate within the Armenian community, largely on social media, between some who

want to maintain traditional Armenian family norms and progressive Armenians who support LGBTQ community members.

Overall, Armenian organizations in the U.S. and those that encourage travel to Armenia such as Birthright Armenia interact with their local community to combat assimilation. Specifically, Armenians who are raised and live in Glendale are exposed to more resources to prevent the loss of their ethnic identity. Language, which several respondents viewed as one of the most important factors in maintaining their Armenian community, is more easily available to those in Glendale as opposed to other areas that may have less Armenian residents and institutions. Yet, those in Glendale expressed desires for improvement in their local community's and the Diaspora including a deeper understanding and interaction with Armenia as well as more inclusive practices. The present time is a critical moment for Armenian restructuring and longevity as conditions abroad are igniting a fire among transnational Armenians to tap into their ethnic identity to prevent the loss of land. At the same time, there is an unavoidable threat of a loss of community in Glendale as city officials and urban scholars alike warn of changes due to urbanization. These conditions highlight the importance in a scholarly and political interests in Armenian social practices and how this community will maintain itself in the U.S. while simultaneously influencing Armenia.

Limitations and New Questions for Future Research

There are several more areas for exploration within this study that were not discussed and can be further studied. To conclude, I offer the implications of this study and avenues for future scholarship to build on this work to better understand immigrant communities and how their members navigate their multiple locations of belonging and existence. This study challenges ideas that one's ethnic ties are symbolic in a way that involves little direct interaction with the

homeland and real-life impacts on life in the host-society. It was evident by the interviews and interactions with Armenians in L.A. for instance, that even without traveling, they are actively thinking about their identity in relation to Armenia.

For some, this connection creates positive feelings and actions while for others, ideas of Armenia and their Armenian identity represent negative past experiences and fear of future interactions. These differences highlight an important aspect of this study that centers the experiences of the migrant within the societal forces that occur around them such as immigration trends, war, social institutions, intragroup pressures and conflict, assimilation and success in the host-society, and familial dynamics. Through using Armenian organizations as one of my foci, I was intentional in not only highlighting the unity and solidarity within members, but also the "intra-organizational variations and differences in order to understand bot the creative potential and points of fracture within organizations" (Chen 2017: 47). Designing a qualitative study allowed me to simultaneously highlight the power organizations have in giving diasporans an opportunity to interact with the homeland and strengthen their Armenian identity, as well as their limitations in reaching a diverse group of Armenians and aiding Armenia.

Strong ethnic ties and connections to Armenia are helpful for diasporans to feel a desire to maintain their Armenian identity rather than participate in Anglo-conformity, as evident by many respondents' decision to not identify as White. The transnational work by the Diaspora community also pressures members to feel a responsibility to maintain their identity through holding on to Armenian language skills and giving back to the community by participating in organizations, traveling to Armenia as volunteers, and sending financial aid. These social processes ignite political reactions and an activist energy among members to call out new atrocities built on a traumatic collective memory of genocide and a desire to prevent future

similar tragedies. Long-distance reactions inspire and lead to political positioning through diasporans' desires to become local political leaders in their community such as mayors and city councilmembers, and to carry on the momentum of Armenian lobbying in their ethnic hubs through organizations such as the ANCA and AAA. The centralization of L.A., more specifically today's Armenian hub, Glendale, creates an ease in gathering and performing in transnational ways. Lastly, the trend of social media interactions allows for new ways of organizing and maintaining updates on issues abroad.

While the above impacts present positive results, several less desired consequences also occur. First, urbanization and changing dynamics of any city present a challenge for Glendale to maintain its centralized influence long term. Other Armenian hubs slowly vanished including Little Armenia in Hollywood, Fresno, and Watertown. Additionally, gentrification and rising housing costs impact Armenians causing fears of sustaining their entrepreneurial opportunities, access to ethnic stores and restaurants, and the ability to afford rent to remain in the area. This highlights that even with individual desires to maintain one's ethnic identity and strong ties to Armenia, their agentic ability to perform their Armenianness may eventually be overpowered by stronger structural variables.

Future scholarship on immigrant motivations and emotions tied to their transnationalism, or lack thereof, can benefit through various interdisciplinary approaches that consider issues such as the psychological distress from crises in the homeland that lead to emotions that can result in real physical health effects. It is known that queer individuals experience health concerns tied to the stigma of their sexual orientation and gender nonconforming identities. A sociology of medicine perspective can add insight to why the fears of travel to Armenia for queer individuals are so strong and prevent them from doing so. Others have also mentioned the impact of

generational trauma from war that should be explored more thoroughly in future works. It is apparent that Armenians living in the U.S. are experiencing mental health impacts due to their dual identities.

Lastly, my sampling process included a specific type of Armenian individual that has some history of formal organizational participation in the Armenian community or has lived in an area with a large population of Armenians such as Glendale. Additionally, the participants in this study involved mostly those of the younger generation in their twenties who were beginning their careers or still completing their degrees. These individuals hold various forms of capital that included English language skills, educational attainment, financial mobility, the ability to travel, and Armenian social networks. While I did not uncover this topic more deeply, the participants also at times highlighted their own political affiliations and perspectives about conditions in the states and abroad.

I also highlighted references to other Armenians who may be less progressive and not involved in any Armenian group, formal or informal. Future investigations can use this case study to develop comparative works that include Armenians who are less integrated in American society, from different cities, of more diverse age groups, and different political affiliations. For instance, would more conservative Armenians also view themselves as non-White? How does political stance influence one's relationship to race relations? In addition to comparing different groups of Armenians, future scholarship can use the case of the current generation of Armenians to compare to other ethnic youth in the U.S.

What's Next?

Armenians have historically lived in a mindset of always expecting what is next to come, often in a state of fear and anxiety due to genocide and war. This is evident in the common theme

of a threat to existence throughout my conversations with respondents. This mindset, while rooted in potential negative conditions, results in a positive, active transnational action. By fearing a loss of community and culture, Armenians actively prepare for the future through preservation and prevention by creating institutions that encourage new generations to connect to their ethnic identity and prevent the loss of understanding of their history. This process of organizational influence in the community encourages a desire to identify as Armenian rather than White among some of my respondents and strengthens the connection to Armenia creating a transnational way of life.

The respondents in this study were specifically recruited to be those of a younger generation who are worth following in the future to witness their influence on Armenian organizations and the greater Diaspora community. The structure of Armenian organizations and ethnic areas such as Glendale are rapidly changing due to new societal conditions as well as influences from social media that contributed to expansive transnational possibilities for all ethnic groups who desire to connect to their countries of origin. Applying fluidity in how to identify who fits as an Armenian and how to act Armenian can benefit the community. With accepting more diverse Armenians, communities and organizations can benefit from this process by growing in size and influence to be successful in their political and cultural missions further challenging theories of assimilation. Respondents in this study understand the reality and threat of assimilation. As Mayor Kassakhian expressed, "we are an endangered species." Yet, respondents are not accepting this potential without a fight.

The young transnational Armenians in Glendale and other cities who are involved in their local ethnic organizations and traveling to provide their skills to Armenia, are in fact *active* as ethnic Armenians rather than symbolic. Transnational ethnic groups like those in the Armenian

Diaspora utilize their agency while attempting to work against the powers of the structural forces around them. Relying on a case study of young Armenian transnationals presents a clear case of this process at work. While the answer to what the future of Armenians will look like remains unknown, it can be expected that several of the respondents in this study will be playing a pivotal role in leading the way.

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APPENDIX

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Armenian Assembly of America (AAA)	Armenian-American non-partisan organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. with offices in Glendale, CA and Armenia
Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA)	Armenian-American grassroots organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. with offices in Watertown, MA and Glendale, CA
Armenian Student Association (ASA)	Armenian-American college association located on various campuses to provide students with a community for educational and charitable purposes
Armenian Youth Federation (AYF)	Youth organization of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation founded in 1993 and includes chapters in the Western and Eastern Regions of the United States
Artsakh	Officially renamed by its local citizens as the Republic of Artsakh in 2017. The area also known as Nagorno Karabakh at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan
Birthright Armenia	Diaspora volunteer organization located in Yerevan, Armenia founded in 2003
Nagorno Karabakh	Conflicted territory standing at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan
Velvet Revolution	Peaceful social movement that occurred in 2018 in Yerevan, Armenia causing the resignation of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and the election of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

Frequency Distribution of Demographic Variables (N=55)

Table A.1. Frequency Distribution for Gender Identity.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Cis Male	29	52.73%
Cis Female	23	41.82%
Trans or NB	3	5.45%
Total	55	100.00%

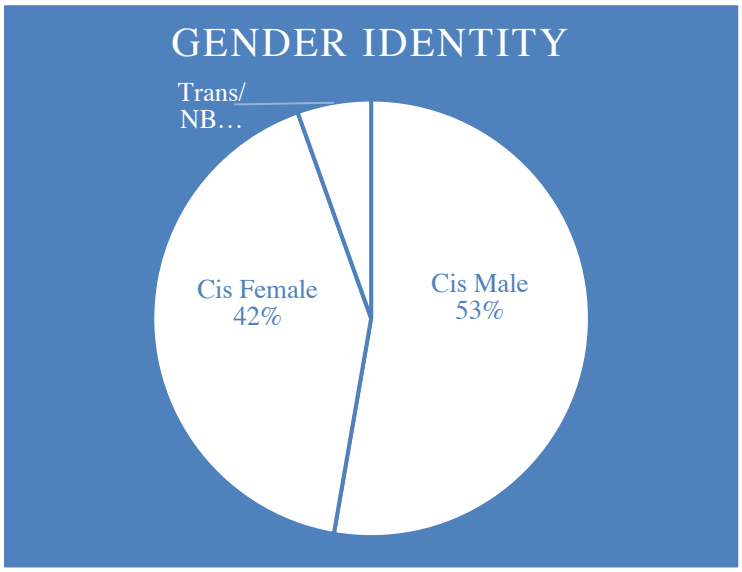

Figure A.1. Bar chart for gender identity frequency distribution.

Table A.2. Frequency Distribution for Racial and Ethnic Identification.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Armenian	21	38.18%
Other	13	23.64%
White	11	20.00 %
Armenian-American	4	7.27%
Not Applicable	3	5.45%
Missing	3	5.45%
Total	55	100.00%

Figure A.2. Bar graph for racial and ethnic identification.

Table A.3. Frequency Distribution for Education Level.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
In Undergrad	8	14.55%
BA	23	41.82%
In Graduate	7	12.73%
Post grad degree	17	30.91%
Total	55	100.00%

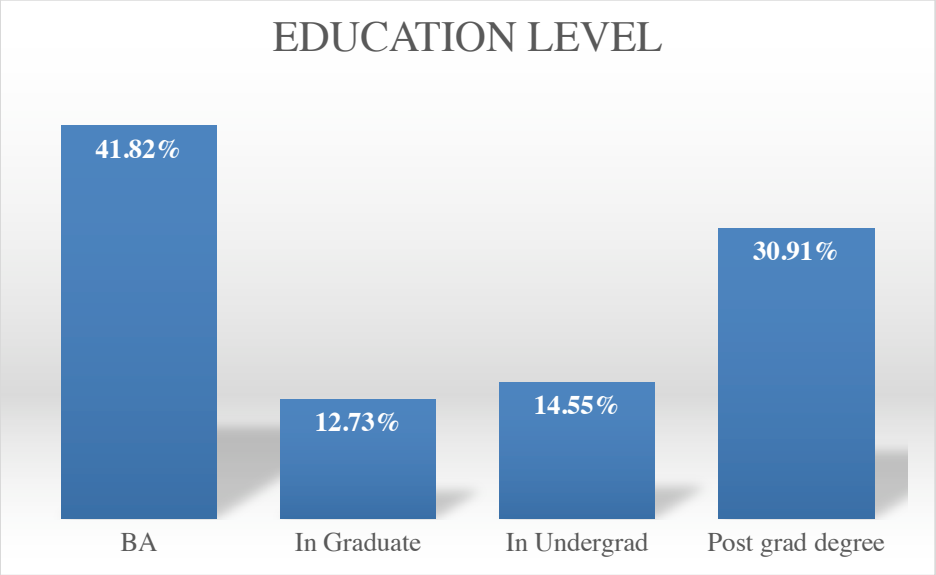

Figure A.3. Bar graph for education level.

Table A.4. Frequency Distribution for Sexual Orientation.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Heterosexual	45	81.82%
LGBQ	9	16.36%
Missing	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

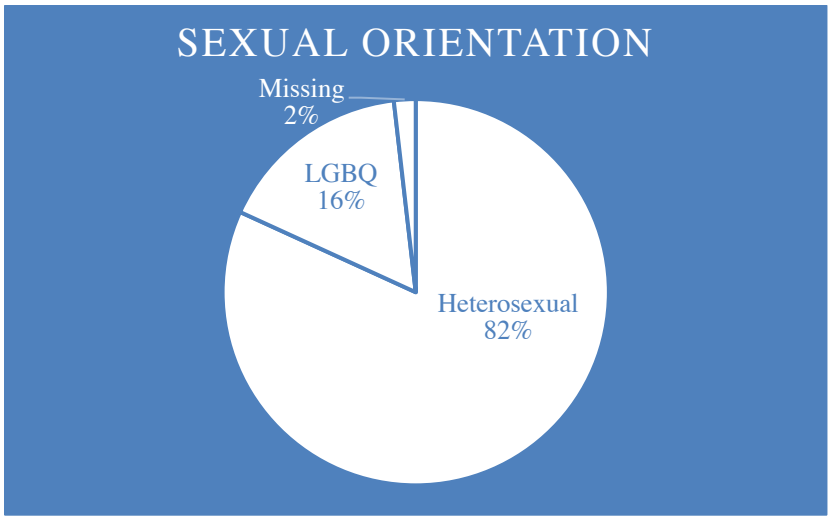

Figure A.4. Bar chart for sexual orientation.

Table A.5. Frequency Distribution of Country of Birth.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
U.S.	39	70.91%
Armenia	7	12.73%
Lebanon	5	9.09%
Iran	2	3.64%
Syria	1	1.82%
Kuwait	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

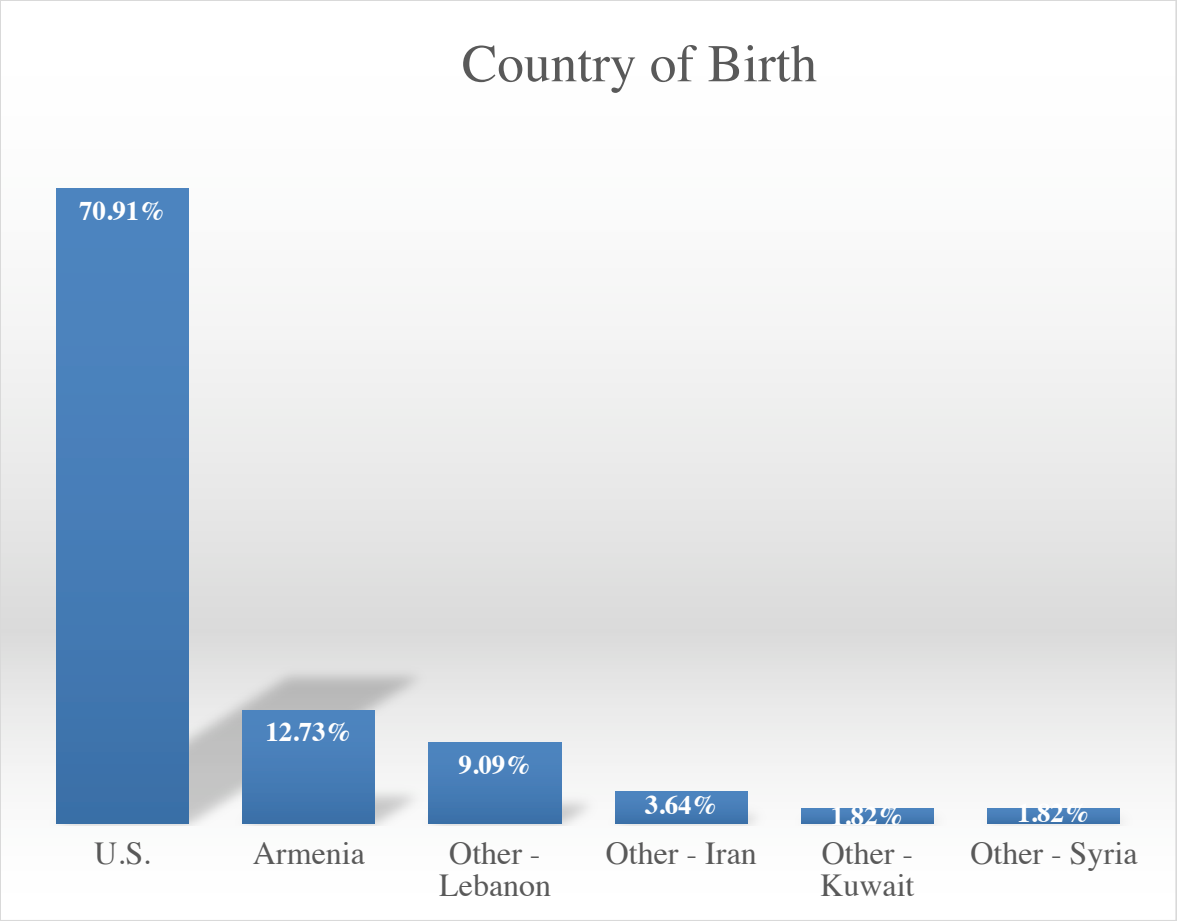

Figure A.5. Bar graph of country birth.

Table A.6. Frequency Distribution of Generation Immigrant Status.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
First	12	21.82%
Second	32	58.18%
Third	4	7.27%
Fourth	2	3.64%
Fifth	1	1.82%
Local	4	7.27%
Total	55	100.00%

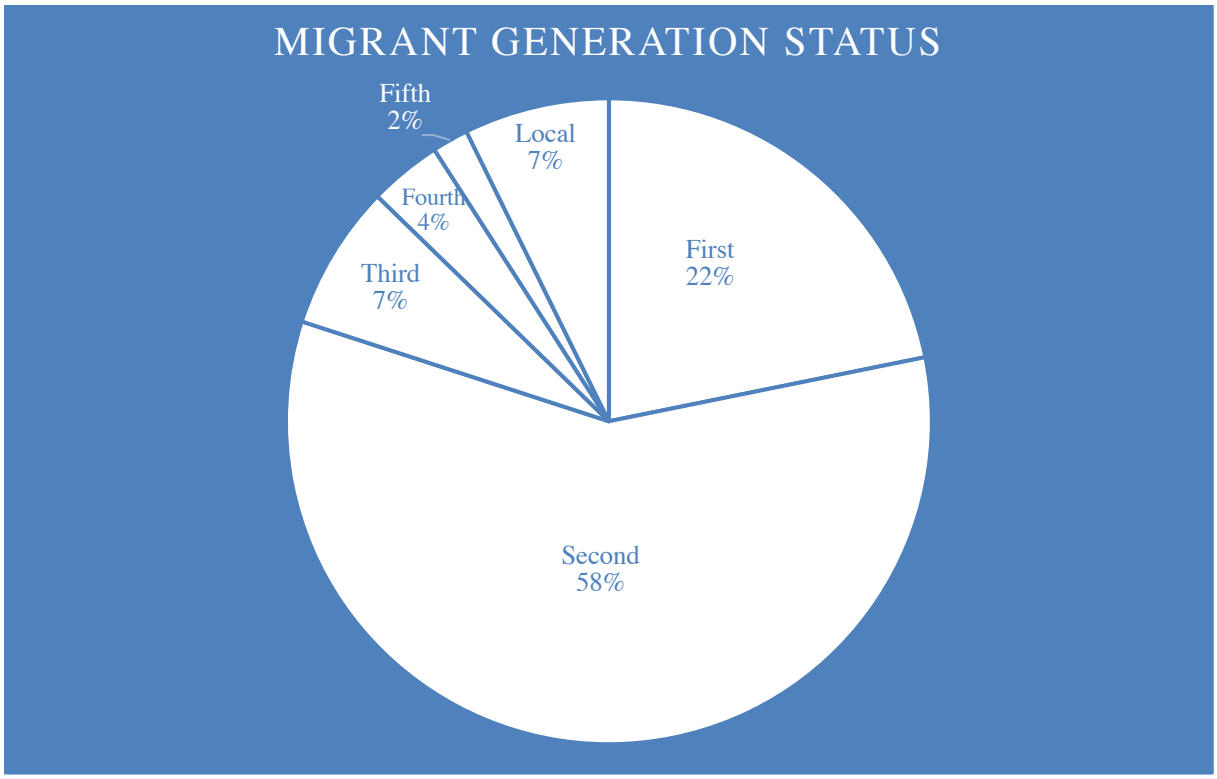

Figure A.6. Bar chart of generation immigrant status.

Table A.7. Frequency Distribution Residence of Respondents.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Los Angeles, CA	33	60.00%
Yerevan, Armenia	8	14.55%
DMV	7	12.73%
Other*	7	12.73%
Total	55	100.00%

*"Other" includes Boston, MA; New York, NY; San Francisco, CA; Orange County, CA; Austin, TX; Minneapolis, MN

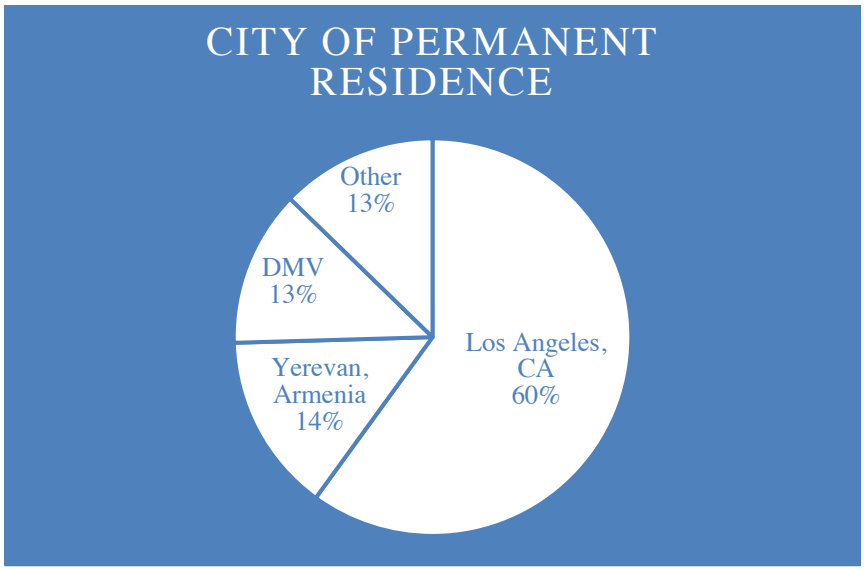

Figure A.7. Bar chart of city of residence.

Table A.8. Frequency Distribution of Employment Status.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Employed, out of school	28	50.91%
Employed, in school	8	14.55%
Not employed, not in school	11	20.00%
Not employed, in school	7	12.73%
Missing	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

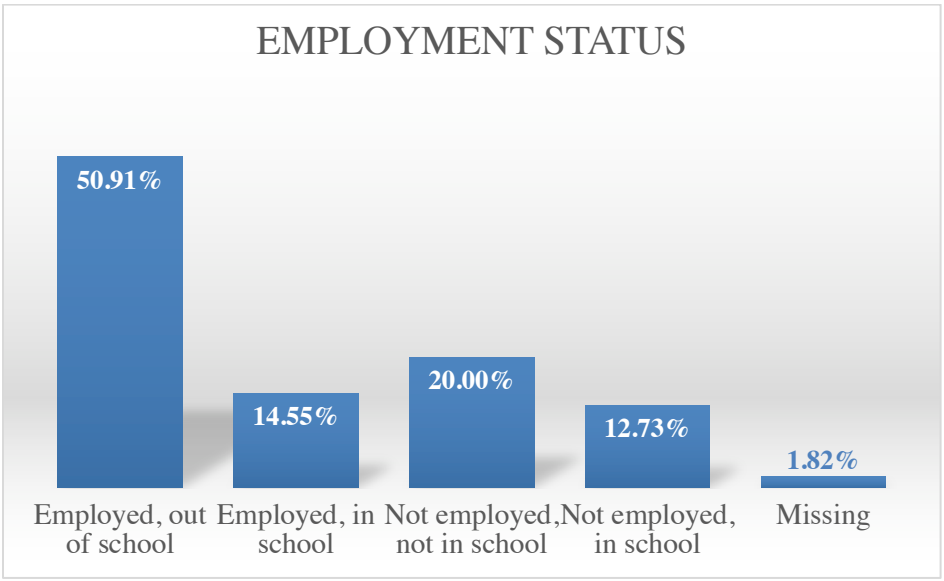

Figure A.8. Bar graph of employment status.

Table A.9. Frequency Distribution of City at Time of Interview.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yerevan, Armenia	26	47.27%
Los Angeles, CA	18	32.73%
DMV	8	14.55%
Other	3	5.45%
Total	55	100.00%

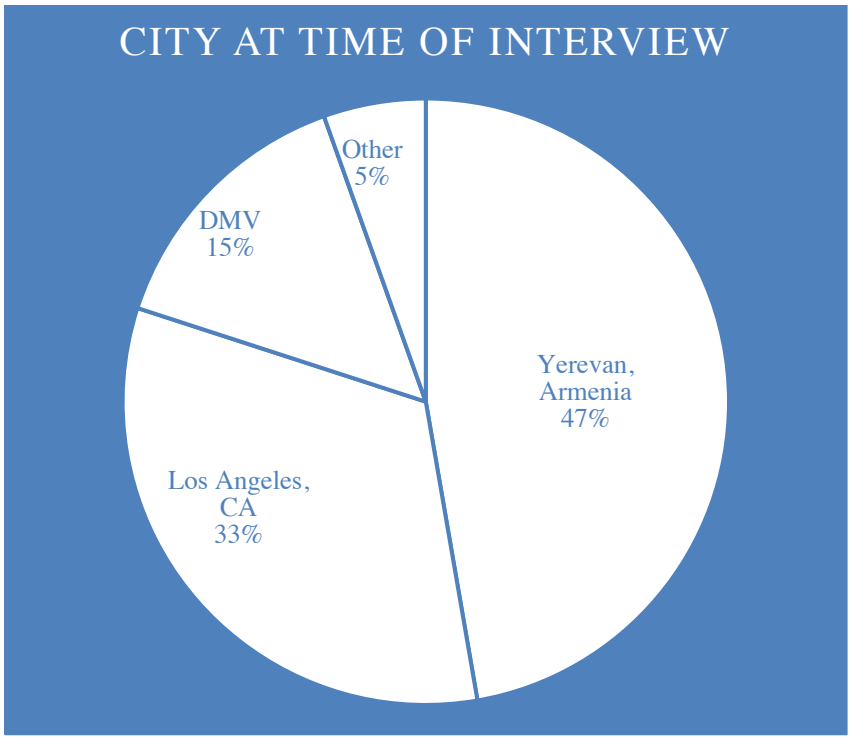

Figure A.9. Bar chart of city at time of interview.

Table A.10. Frequency Distribution of Speaking Armenian.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	42	76.36%
No	8	14.55%
Not Applicable - Native	4	7.27%
Missing	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

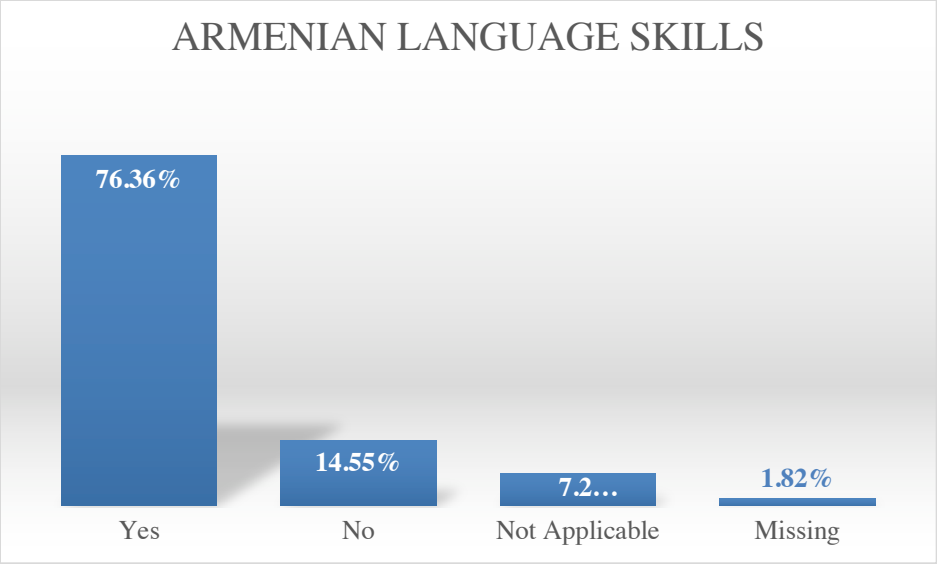

Figure A.10. Bar graph of Armenian language skills.

Table A.11. Frequency Distribution of Age Cohorts.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
≤ 21	7	12.73%
22-25	18	32.73%
26-29	14	25.45%
30-39	9	16.36%
40-49	5	9.09%
≥ 50	2	3.64%
Total	55	100.00%

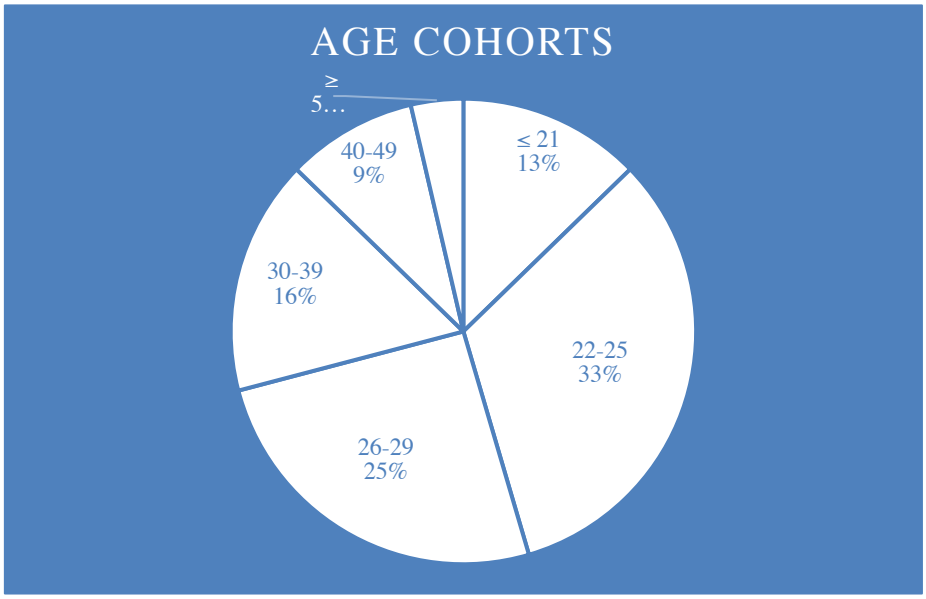

Figure A.11. Bar chart of age cohort.

Table A.12. Frequency Distribution of Previous Travel to Armenia.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes, reason other than BR	43	78.18%
Yes, first time with BR	6	10.91%
Never	6	10.91%
Total	55	100.00%

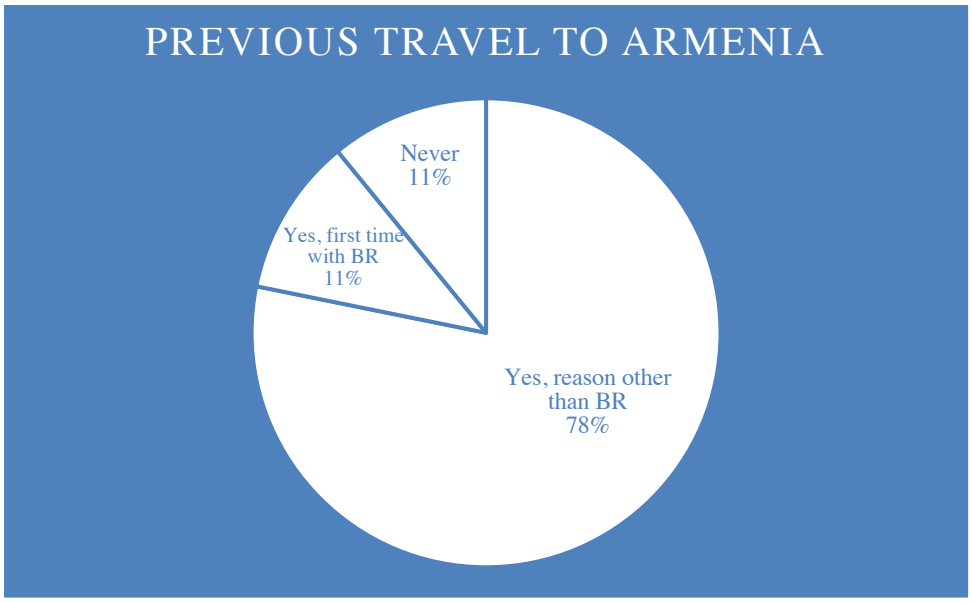

Figure A.12. Bar chart of previous travel to Armenia.

Table A.13. Frequency Distribution of Whether a B.R. Participant or Not.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
No	38	69.09%
Yes	13	23.64%
BR staff	3	5.45%
No - deferred	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

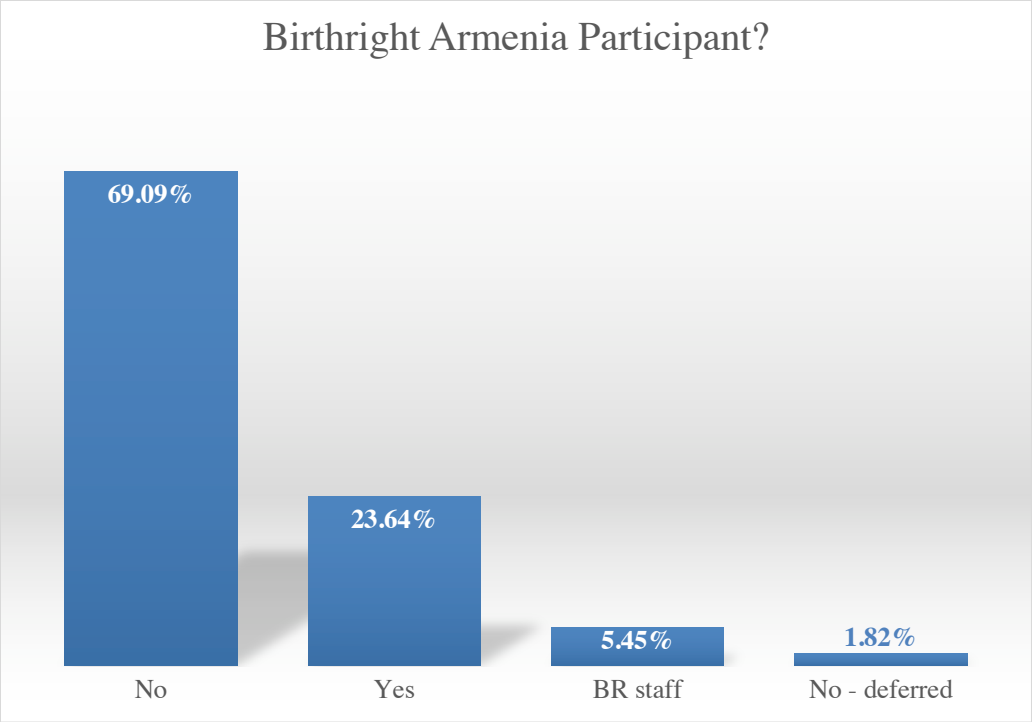

Figure A.13. Bar graph of Birthright participation.

Table A.14. Frequency Distribution of Level Involvement in the Armenian Community.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Strongly involved	31	54.72%
Occasional involvement	7	12.73%
Was involved at some point but not anymore	11	20.00%
Never involved	3	5.45%
Not applicable	3	5.45%
Total	55	100.00%

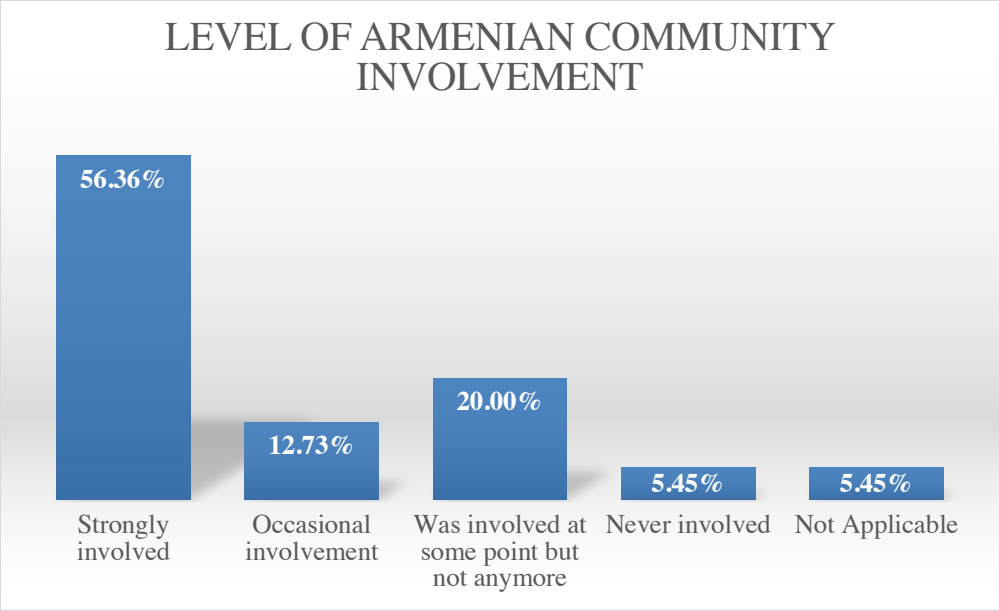

Figure A.14. Bar graph of level of involvement in the Armenian community.