

Diasporic Voices from the Peripheries – Armenian Experiences on the Edges of Community in Cyprus and Lebanon

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Abstract

Post-genocide Armenian diasporic communities are historically structured around the same diaspora institutions which act as transmitters of traditional identity. Broadly speaking these are: the Churches, schools, the political parties and their offshoots (clubs, associations, media, youth groups, cultural groups etc). These transmitters effectively create and control the infrastructure and 'public space' of the diaspora community, espousing what is often in substance a prescriptive 'Armenianness'.

The linear, fixed versions of 'Armenianness' represented and perpetuated by the leaders and elites 'from above' tend to alienate various groups of people, whose voices are marginalised and not represented in the official, hegemonic history and identity of the diaspora or the community.

This paper focusses on four distinct groups of Armenian Cypriot and Lebanese individuals (identified as the Dislocated, the Assimilated, the Outsider and the Disillusioned) and makes substantial use of ethnographic interviews in order to allow these authentic voices to be heard. The findings reveal that the voices from below or from the side-lines are gaining legitimacy and influence through dynamic dialectical encounters with the host state structures, the transnation and the homeland, being rooted and routed in alternative new spaces and possibilities carved out by the process of globalisation.

Keywords: diaspora, Cyprus, Armenians, Lebanon, identity, community, identity

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The contemporary Armenian diaspora is spread throughout the globe, with its core composed of descendants of the survivors of the atrocities and genocide carried out by the Ottoman authorities during the decline of the Ottoman Empire (1881–1922). While the Armenian communities in the Middle East have historically been the diasporic epicentre, the last thirty years have seen their

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steady decline and the ascendancy of communities in Europe and North America in particular, reflecting global emigration patterns. The diaspora communities, through organised as well as informal activities, maintain active links with each other. At the same time, the independence of the Republic of Armenia in 1991 (which most western diasporans¹ have no historic roots to) has contributed to an increasing rootedness of diasporans in their respective 'host' states (effectively their homes) and a more engaged civic participation. This, alongside an orientation towards Armenia, the 'step-homeland'² as a symbol of the 'transnation'³, acts as a revitalisation of the traditional triadic⁴ approach to diaspora (Kasbarian, 2006).

Post-genocide, Beirut became the undisputed 'centre' of the diaspora, both due to the size of the community (peaking on the eve of the Civil War to 180,000⁵), and its being recognised and actively engaged as an integral part of the burgeoning Lebanese state (Schahgaldian, 1979; Migliorino, 2008). The Armenian identity was thus protected by the state, safeguarding the distinctness of the community, while other factors encouraged integration to the wider society, sometimes making for a difficult position to negotiate (Sanjian, 2001). Before the civil war, Beirut was the headquarters of the diaspora leadership, with the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Antelias and the political parties and institutions' nuclei based there, administering their satellites throughout the diaspora. It was also the hub of cultural production and intellectual life, producing priests, teachers, artists, leaders and intellectuals which, as diasporic agents served the diaspora communities in the west.

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- 1 'Western diasporans' refers specifically to the descendants of those Armenians who hail from present-day Eastern Turkey. They are clearly distinguishable from the post-Soviet wave of Armenians from the Republic and the Former Soviet Union who constitute a distinct 'new' diaspora and are known as eastern diasporans.
 - 2 My notion of 'step-homeland' describes a situation where two entities that are not related are forced into a familial relationship by external forces, i.e. it is not a naturally occurring relationship but one that is forged. The sense of 'step'ness also carries with it connotations of difficulty and a need for adjustment by both parties (Kasbarian, 2006 and forthcoming).
 - 3 Tölölyan (2000, p. 130, n. 4) uses the term 'transnation' to mean 'all diasporic communities and the homeland; the nation-state remains important, but the permanence of dispersion is fully acknowledged and the institutions of connectedness, of which the state is one, become paramount'.
 - 4 The triadic approach (homeland–diaspora–host state) underpins traditional approaches in modern Diaspora Studies (e.g. Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1986). Since the 1990s the rise of Cultural Studies, Migration Studies, Postcolonial and Postmodern Theory has led to a broadening of the use and resonance of the term Diaspora, although the triad is still present in some form or another (e.g. Tölölyan, 1996; Knott and McLoughlin, 2010).
 - 5 It is difficult to ascertain population figures as the last Lebanese census was carried out in 1932 and demographics are highly politicised due to the consociational nature of the political system (and the common belief that Christians are far fewer than official figures show). The conservative 180,000 figure included tens of thousands of Armenians from Syria, who moved to Lebanon in the 1960s, but did not get citizenship until 1994. The current Armenian population of Lebanon is estimated to be around 80,000. I am grateful to Dr Ara Sanjian for these detailed figures and explanation (communication 31 August 2012).

Despite small numbers, the Armenian community in Cyprus has both longevity and historical and cultural significance, in and of itself, and as a pivotal diaspora microcosm (Pattie, 1997). At the peak, there were around 7,000 Armenians in Cyprus in the early 1950s but many left after the struggle for independence. At the end of 2008, there were 2,700 Armenian Cypriots, making up 0.4% of the Greek Cypriot community and 0.3% of the total population.⁶ While the Armenian community in Cyprus may seem to lack the obvious political significance of that of Lebanon, it shares several interesting characteristics. Both states' citizenship policies stem from the Ottoman *millet* system, which decrees and safeguards difference along religious grounds. Both countries are relatively new post-colonial states where competing narratives and nationalisms collide (resulting in bloody conflict in both cases). Both communities are part of a well-established and active transnational network – a dimension that has made their 'host' states sometimes question their loyalties, agendas and priorities.

The contemporary Armenian communities in both states are overwhelmingly composed of the descendants of the post-genocide wave of arrivals who gradually merged with the pre-existing local Armenian communities, who tended to greet them with distance and disdain (Pattie, 1997) – a common dynamic among multi-layered communities composed of distinct waves of arrivals. From their arrival as desperate and ravaged refugees, these disparate Armenians were transformed into a cohesive and thriving community⁷ (Pattie, 2009) which is generally middle class and considered quite affluent, although there is poverty on the edges. In Lebanon there is a greater social and economic divergence within the community, reflecting the years of conflict which resulted in an economic and brain drain all round. In Cyprus the community was affected by events on the island as were other Cypriots, from the losses of 1963⁸ and 1974, to the economic boom of the 1980–1990s and more recently, the current economic crisis. Both communities have seen regular influxes of Armenians fleeing the troubles in the Middle East, most of who subsequently immigrated to North America.⁹ The most recent and substantial wave of arrivals are from formerly Soviet lands (1990s onwards), including of course, Armenia. It is hard to estimate numbers (complicated by the fact that their official status is often unclear) but there is a clear social and economic distance between the established community which is generally well-off and secure and the latest arrivals who are struggling at a more basic level (Kasbarian, 2009b).

6 Republic of Cyprus, Demographic Report 2008, Population Statistics, Series II, Report No. 46.

7 Panossian (2006, p. 299–301) discusses the role of the Church and other institutions in transforming these disparate refugees from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds into a relatively cohesive group through the imposition of a homogenous Armenian culture and identity predicated upon the values of preservation, language and diasporic nationalism.

8 The troubles of 1963 disproportionately affected Armenians who have never been recognised or compensated for their losses (Demetriou, 2014, forthcoming).

9 This article does not extend to the events since the Arab uprisings of 2010 – present, which has resulted in continuing devastation in Syria, where the Armenian community, as all other Syrians has experienced destruction at every level, and led to thousands becoming refugees.

The Impact of Historical Legacies on Citizenship and Belonging

The concept of community, stemming directly from the Ottoman millet system has had a profound impact on the diaspora such that it is considered almost impossible to define Armenian identity without an organised community. The minorities system in Cyprus is a direct descendent of the Ottoman system in that the head of the national Church is recognised as the (figure) head of the Armenian community. The British colonial period translated the religious-based identities of the Ottoman period to ethnic identities, leading to a rigid constitution (upon independence in 1960) which only recognised two national communities – the Greeks and Turks, thereby erasing the centuries of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural life on the island, and the experiences of groups as diverse as the Linobambaki, the Jews and the Roma. Trimikliniotis and Demetriou (2012, p. 285) speak of the postcolonial frame as producing a ‘somewhat *inchoate nationhood*’, which on the one hand maintain ‘surplus ethnicities’ of the recognised minorities (Constantinou, 2009) and on the other hand, reproduces ‘different kinds of *residues of ethnicities and social, cultural and political identities* ... as contradictions to the hegemonic national homogenisation of society ...’. The constitution gave three minorities, deemed ‘religious groups’ three months ‘to decide’ which of the two communities to join. All (the Maronites, the Armenians and the Latins) opted to affiliate themselves with the Greek Cypriots. As individuals, their members have the same rights and duties as Greek Cypriots. In addition, they elect a Representative for the group who is allowed to attend meetings of the House, but has very limited participatory powers. The government is supposed to consult with him in dealing with all issues concerning the minority and as such the Representative acts as a mediator and broker on behalf of his group.

The constitution deemed all Cypriot ethnicity apart from the Greek and Turkish as being ‘surplus’ and therefore ‘expendable’ (Constantinou, 2009). The misnomer of Cypriot minorities as ‘religious’ groups is something that European policy bodies have expressed concern about as it negates the ethnic identity of the minorities (The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 2007). Constantinou (2009, p. 366) says that the ‘the paradox of the consociational system is that though it appears to make a virtue of heterogeneity at the national level, it assumes and intensifies homogeneity at the ethnic level’. The identities of these minorities have been overridden by a dominant ethnicity that they have neither chosen nor can shed. The imposition of this identity highlights the need to ‘belong’ however forcefully and illogically to the dominant majority in order to be safeguarded. Varnava (2010) talks about how this swallowing of the minorities’ identity by the dominant Greek Cypriot one in order to strengthen the Greek–Turkish divide, creates problems of ‘internal–exclusion’ whereby these minorities are subjected to strong policies of assimilation coupled with discrimination on the everyday level, a trend that was apparent through my interviews (see below).

Perhaps the most important legacy of the colonial period in Lebanon was the French favouring of the Maronites and the subsequent 1926 constitution written to establish (or create) a

state with a Christian majority.¹⁰ That this does not reflect contemporary realities where Muslims clearly outnumber Christians is ignored as no census has been conducted since 1932. It is worth emphasising that sectarianism is fundamentally a 'modernist knowledge'; that it was a system produced in the context of Ottoman reforms, European colonialism and local nationalists (Makdisi, 2000, p. 7). The Armenians were enshrined as one of the seven main confessional communities and an intrinsic part of the state fabric. With the quota system, Armenians have six representatives in the 128 seat parliament (five Orthodox and one Catholic). In addition, because most Protestants in Lebanon are Armenian, traditionally the Protestant representative has also been an Armenian. There is always one and sometimes two Armenian ministers in government and this quota system extends to other public sector positions.

The system allows for groups like the Armenians to live in a 'parallel society' (Kymlicka, 2002) should they wish to do so, cushioned by their representatives and leaders who deal with matters of the state. For traditional community leaders the system has served Armenians well in that it has allowed them to preserve their identity – the deep seated fear in post-genocide Armenian communities the '*jermag chart*' – the white massacre – where Armenians are annihilated through assimilation rather than massacre. The emphasis on 'hard' boundaries as set out by the Lebanese consociational state is something that has also contributed to delaying the integration of Armenians, something that even traditional community leaders have recognised is not conducive to the guaranteed future of a community that is vibrant rather than stagnating.

The consociational model that both the Cypriot and Lebanese state are founded upon is a model which is supposed to protect differences and promote power-sharing between state-recognised national groups (Lijphart, 1977). However, the model also contains the seeds of its own destruction in that institutionalising communalism and reinforcing difference can neglect to foster an overarching national identity that all groups can subscribe to meaningfully and actively. Lebanon, the 'state of minorities', is indeed considered to be caught in the double-edged sword of the consociational model which seems to be the only model that can work in a state with political sectarianism at its foundation, and it seems to work quite well except when it does not, when it is disastrous. Coupled with the fact that 'personal matters' (relating to marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance) are governed by religious courts, instead of creating a common civic culture and social capital the consociational system has meant that communities have historically been vying with each other for power and influence (and prone to interference from external powers) and that the state is a distant and separate entity. Many of my interviewees complained that there had not been a sincere attempt at the national level to productively engage with differences, that each group was self-obsessed and inward-looking, oblivious to the concerns or grievance of the others. Salibi (1988, p. 234) talks about the need to 'properly sweep' the Lebanese attics as the 'house of understanding'

10 The sizable group of post-genocide Armenian refugees were granted citizenship in 1924 thereby bolstering Christian numbers.

has 'many mansions'. In the case of Cyprus, Peter Loizos has written insightfully about the 'obsessive ethnic nationalism' (1998, p. 40) among Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which negates the experiences of the Other, leading to what Papadakis (2006) following Ignatieff (1999, p. 60) calls 'ethnic autism', 'the self-obsessed reiteration of one's own pain and denial of that of others'. Bryant (2010, p. 114) more recently talks of the continuing historical silences which seem to have become 'louder' still since the borders opening in 2003.

The Ambivalence of Identity

The common perception in both states is that postcolonial legacies and the consociational system have adversely affected the development of a common civic identity that citizens of all hues can fully identify with. In Cyprus political identity has been caught in the Greek–Turkish binary, with little space for the third way, Cypriotness, which has a somewhat mythical quality about it. Anthias (2006, p. 177) suggests that the term 'Cypriot' identity is 'divested of value in and of itself; it is an apology for not being complete, and a form of self-hatred and denial is sometimes witnessed'. Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader in 1995, famously declared that the only thing that was Cypriot in Cyprus was the donkey. In Lebanon, each group has been bent on preserving, asserting and attempting to impose its vision of Lebanon (MacKey, 1991). While conflicting narratives are part of every nation, in the case of these two states, the lack of a united coherent story at the level of the nation has been a major obstacle in peace-building and in creating social capital. Anthias (2006, p. 177) talks about how 'postcolonial frames leave subject positionalities where identity politics is overstressed as a compensatory mechanism for the uncertainties and fissures in society'. Political agendas have therefore mostly supported the binary vision of Cyprus and the sectarian version of Lebanon in order to build up each group against the insecurity which lies at the very heart of the state.

In the Greek Cypriot case political orientation has shifted between the polar ends of Hellenocentrism and Cypriotism (Peristianis, 2006). Beyond the official discourses however there has been clear evidence of Cypriot identity in everyday life and at the grassroots (Argyrou, 1996; Papadakis, 1997, 2003; Mavratsas, 1997, 1999; Calotychos, 1998). Since the 1990s there has also been a bicommunal movement and brief periods of opening at the civil society level (Demetriou, 2007; Hadjipavlou, 2000, 2006). For the Turkish Cypriots, the arrival of substantial numbers of Turkish settlers since 1974 (themselves from heterogeneous backgrounds but categorised as 'Turks') has led to a more nuanced reflection on 'Turkish' identity in Cyprus and a reclaiming of the 'Cypriot' identity to distinguish themselves from the arrivals from Turkey (Navaro-Yashin, 2006). Although power relations and class differences are intrinsic to this continuing compulsion to 'otherise', 'the language of ethnic differences is still central to politics in Cyprus' (Navaro-Yashin, 2006, p. 95) and this extends to the creation of new categories of difference which may challenge or subvert the hegemonic binary. Needing to shift positions and accommodate various perceived Others at different times means that identities are located within competing and sometimes

overlapping narratives, the Self and Other constantly recreated and context-dependent.¹¹ This ambivalent Self compulsively situates Him/Herself within a binary power struggle, compulsively trying to define and assert his/her shifting Self against the fluid Other(s).

For minorities in Cyprus this compulsion and ambivalence is all the more developed in that their own identity has been negated by being formally subsumed by the dominant Greek Cypriot political identity, and their status within the Greek Cypriot community remains un-reconciled, a position of struggle. More than anything it is the fact that their story is largely unknown and untold, their Cypriotness marginalised and relegated to a few pages in the nationalist school textbooks (Varnava, 2009) and questioned on a daily basis, that is most alienating (Kasbarian, 2006). The situation is far more diluted in Lebanon where there is not one clear majority to which one situates oneself, but several. The numerically far larger Lebanese Armenian community also means that the Armenians there have been properly woven into the state fabric and not merely inserted as they have been in Cyprus.

The Politics of Community

The modern Armenian diaspora community has been established around a fixed set of institutions which are present nearly everywhere there is a significant number of Armenians. The *gaghut* – the community infrastructure – is centred around the national Church, with schools and other political, cultural and social offshoots (Talai, 1989; Bjorklund, 1993; Suny, 1993; Pattie, 1997). The historical political polarisation of the Armenian diaspora has been discussed at length in academic studies (Atamian, 1955; Panossian, 1998; Libaridian, 1999; Tölölyan, 2000). Structurally, the division has served as the internal framework by which life has been organised since the birth of the post-genocide diaspora. In its simplest form, the dichotomy has taken the form of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the *Dashnaksutyun* (Dashnak) umbrella on the one side, and the non-ARF umbrella on the other. Under this is housed the opposing political party, the *Ramgavar*, the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party and the smaller Social Democrat *Hunchakian* Party (SDHP) and a range of linked institutions, of which the most venerable is the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU). Competition for control of the community has led in most places to two sets of institutions. Organised community life takes place within these structures, and socialisation between the two camps has historically been rare, though less rigid in recent years. It is important to recognise these institutional spaces as neither monolithic nor homogenous, but as sites where different actors vie for dominance. Brubaker (1996, p. 61) insightfully conceptualises a transnational community:

11 Spyrou (2002, pp. 267–268) in his study of Greek Cypriot children's 'imagining' of 'the Turk', says they are '... drawing on different voices at different times and in different social contexts. These voices are, at times, contradictory and ambiguous. The demands of the conversation may necessitate the use of different voices to explicate identity ... these voices reflect contradictory ideological positions which, at times, compete with the dominant ideology.'

‘not as a fixed entity or a unitary group but rather in terms of the field of differentiated and competitive positions or stances adopted by different organisations, parties, movements or individual political entrepreneurs, each seeking to “represent” the (community) to its own putative members, to the host state, or to the outside world, each seeking to monopolise the legitimate representation of the group.’

These traditional institutions act as transmitters of traditional diasporic identity. Broadly speaking these are: the Churches, the schools, the political parties and their offshoots (clubs, associations, media, youth groups, cultural groups, women’s groups and charities), making for a diaspora that is ‘institutionally saturated’ (Tölölyan, p. 2000). These transmitters effectively create, define and govern the infrastructure and ‘public space’ of the diaspora community, espousing what can be a prescriptive ‘Armenianness’. This top-down Armenianness revolves around community involvement and commitment to the traditional pillars of Armenian diasporic identity – language, church, endogamy, political and social commitment and ideological dedication to the Armenian cause, *Hai Tad* (broadly defined as preservation of ‘Armenianness’, political commitment to the recognition of the Genocide and the return of Armenian ancestral lands).

These gatekeepers of diasporic identity, as examples of governance, have been quite successful in that they have defined, shaped, led and maintained Armenian communities. Yet when one looks at actual numbers, involvement and vibrancy, it would appear that this framework is in crisis, that there is a definite loss of faith in these institutions and most significantly, in the version of Armenianness they espouse (Kasbarian, 2006, 2009a). In fact it is identities at the margins of these institutions, and in some cases alongside or counter to them that are proliferating and represent the most dynamic and vigorous articulations of what it means to be Armenian in a diasporic space. In the case of Cyprus and Lebanon, these voices have the additional layer of dealing with their postcolonial situations and situating themselves within wider nationalist, post-nationalist and trans-nationalist discourses.

Transgressing ‘Community’ – The Voices from the Peripheries

Cyprus and Lebanon, through their historical legacies have enshrined the principle of community in their constitutional and political makeups. This paper challenges the notion of community which is the foundation of the modern Armenian diaspora by focusing on the individuals on the margins of or outside the organised community. Whereas traditional transmitters maintain a prescriptive Armenianness which runs the danger of being essentialised and reified, peripheral voices are caught up in carving and claiming a space for themselves – a space which challenges or transgresses the established terrain. That the two tendencies exist and indeed reinforce each other cuts to the contradictory heart of diaspora studies, caught between desiring difference and embracing fluidity and hybridity. Brubaker (2005, p. 6) calls this the ‘interesting ambivalence in the literature’, saying that:

'... although boundary-maintenance and the preservation of identity are ordinarily emphasised, a strong counter-current emphasises hybridity, fluidity, creolization and syncretism ... diaspora can be seen as an alternative to the essentialisation of belonging; but it can also represent a non-territorial form of essentialised belonging.'

The linear versions of 'Armenianness' represented and perpetuated by the leaders and elites 'from above' tend to alienate those who do not subscribe to the values or ideology espoused or are excluded for other reasons. These groups and individuals are marginal in that their experience is not articulated or given centrality. Their voices are largely silent and not represented in the official history and identity of the community.¹² This paper looks specifically at articulation from individuals at the peripheries. Often they are situated directly in relation to the hegemonic in the diaspora space. As Bhabha (1994) has noted, 'counter-narratives' do not necessarily have to be radical or progressive in meaning or in form, though I would suggest that in the Armenian case, their proliferation can be interpreted as a transgressive force. This paper explores the tension between the individual and the community and the possibilities of meaningful diasporic identities unmediated by the traditional gatekeepers.

This paper focuses on four distinct movements that became apparent through the analysis of my fieldwork in Cyprus and Lebanon where I employed a snowball method to interview as many individuals as possible, cutting across age, gender, class, sexual orientation and political affiliations. My focus was on non-hegemonic sites of diasporic activity, on groups and individuals outside of the community infrastructure, those that identified as Armenian but were distanced from the organised community, intentionally or structurally. This paper focuses on these individuals and makes substantial use of ethnographic interviews in order to allow these authentic voices to be heard.¹³ These transgressive reflexive 'voices' relate to Anthias' (2006) concept of 'translocational positionality' where 'narratives of interculturality' can insightfully reveal and reflect the multi-layered and overlapping power structures and social forces that shape political identity.

DIASPORIC VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

The Disillusioned

Tanya is a new mother in her late twenties. She has lived in Lebanon all her life until the last two years which she spent in the UK where her husband was completing his PhD. Tanya herself has

12 This of course extends to the vast category of 'women' which I examine elsewhere (Kasbarian, 2006). See also Cockburn, 2004.

13 Interviews were carried out in Beirut in March 2002 and in Cyprus in February–April 2001, and March 2003. Each interview consisted of open-ended questions, and took two to three hours. A total of over 80 interviews were conducted, a sample of which were chosen to represent the four categories which evolved through analysis. All names have been changed in order to protect anonymity, apart from those individuals who spoke in their formal, public capacity.

a Masters and is considering starting a PhD. She has been finding it difficult to adjust to life back in Lebanon and specifically within the hub of the family and the community since her return, complaining about the lack of boundaries and privacy. Tanya describes her brief time in the UK as a respite from the 'pressure' of community life:

'It's such an amazing feeling to be somewhere where no one knows you and no one is interested ...'

This is felt more keenly as she was 'highly involved in Armenian community life' throughout her life, up until her departure to the UK, when she felt she 'had had enough of all of it'. Tanya is typical of an intelligent, thoughtful young Armenian who was once completely embedded in community life, underwent a 'crisis of faith' and has distanced herself from it.¹⁴ She says that she is currently rethinking everything her identity has been based on, and questioning the community discourse she had previously been a strong supporter of.

Tanya's upbringing is fairly typical of traditional and conservative families who are considered pillars of the Armenian community in Lebanon. Her schooling was exclusively Armenian and she hardly knew any Arabic until she attended the French university in Beirut. Her father was a strong Dashnak and seems to have been the dominant figure in her life until his death a few years ago. Tanya became a committed ARF member, especially active in the student association. Although she says she 'enjoyed it at the time' Tanya is clear that she is 'happy to stop taking part since she left', now thinking 'all this political noise' to be 'pointless'. Part of her disillusionment is based on what she considers the gap between the political posturing and the community realities. While she reflects on her position, Tanya has taken the decision to remove herself from community politics:

'I was so active, I gave everything I could, so from now on, I will stay Armenian, but I feel I can do more for my people when I am outside of a political party. Tashnakstouryoun was my definition of being Armenian for a long time ... it's just that the political aspect lost its interest for me.'

Tanya uses the telling phrase 'I will stay Armenian' evoking the professed *raison d'être* of organised community life – perpetuating Armenianness that is based on core principles. By shunning the community framework, Tanya behaves like a faithful believer who rejects organised religion, preferring a personal faith based on an individual interpretation. Tanya's case is typical of many

14 One of my Cyprus interviewees used the poignant phrase to explain his conscious breaking away: 'Once upon a time I used to be Armenian.' This comes from a man who speaks Armenian, attends church and keeps up to date with Armenian news. However, by pulling away from organised community structures he acknowledges (and believes that others may also interpret it so) that at some level he is no longer Armenian. The community seems to have the final judgment on 'how Armenian' one is. Another young person in Cyprus described this tendency amongst her peers: 'Many say "I was Armenian, now it gives me nothing so I am no longer Armenian."'

interviewees who disagreed with or were disillusioned with organised Armenianness. They proclaimed a strong faith in their personal convictions but did not want to participate (any longer) in a fixed, rigid, top-down, hierarchical interpretation of the 'faith', either because they found it outdated, irrelevant or because they resented the patriarchal¹⁵ authoritative streak running through organised community life.

Tanya charts her personal crisis of faith to the diaspora's ambivalent relationship with the new independent homeland, the Republic of Armenia, and specifically her personal ARF version of that.

'I think at some point we got lost because we did not know what our role was anymore. *Tepi Yergir*,¹⁶ but no one went back, and if you asked me to go to Van, I wouldn't go either because I was born in Lebanon ... in the diaspora they don't know what to do, organise the diaspora or try to send people back to Armenia – how, why?'

Tanya herself has visited Armenia several times, before and after independence, with family and as part of ARF youth camps. The experience, especially as an adult was an uncomfortable one, bringing up questions of 'home', belonging and the 'in-between' nature of being a diasporan who is taught to always be dreaming of somewhere else:¹⁷

'I had the feeling that I am a stranger in a country which is supposed to be my homeland and then I go back to Lebanon and I am a stranger there as well because I am supposed to have a homeland somewhere else; and actually that's the way I feel now too. Now I'm trying to see Armenia as a country, not the real Armenia I heard about as child, with the stories of fedayeen etc ... I went to Armenia and it's just a country with a government and people and bookshops ...'

The coping mechanism is to assign one version of the homeland to being the imagined homeland to which one can nurture feelings of longing and belonging, and assign the other version as 'just another country':

'The Armenia I have in my mind is my homeland definitely but I kind of lost touch with that Armenia a long time ago. Even western Armenia, Van, Kars etc. I'm sure are very different now from the Armenia I read about in the books. That Armenia I think was a dream. The Armenia now is just a country. I have to get used to it. It kind of feels that I don't have a homeland.'

15 One interviewee who had served for years on the local committee recounted an incident when she half-seriously said to her (male) colleague that she was looking forward to becoming a member of the Central Board, to which he replied 'never dream about that because you're a woman'.

16 Meaning 'towards homeland' a slogan of the ARF; which symbolised a reorientation towards the new Republic.

17 Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2005, p. 296) describe the 'return', i.e. visit of Jewish Russian students to Russia as a 'disruptive event'.

Similarly, Aline, a young woman who was very involved in AGBU activities until her recent self-proclaimed disillusionment, noted the same schism between what she knew she ought to feel, and what she actually felt. She compared Armenia to being her mother from whom she was separated at birth and Cyprus to being her stepmother who has taken care of her all her life. With the former there is a blood relationship but no real bond, with the latter there is an actual living ongoing commitment.

Although Tanya is disillusioned with organised community life and has distanced herself from the ARF world, she says that she is not resentful of the 'training' she received there. Her major gripe is one that is on her mind since becoming a mother – the over-emphasis placed on the genocide and the sense of burden and victimhood:

'It wasn't really fair to teach us only about this genocide thing and make us feel that we are victims of the world (sighing). That wasn't fair. I mean we're not, we have this amazing culture and spiritual history but we only learnt about Armenia in war and under Ottoman Empire, under Russian dictatorship ... this is not fair on children. Because you grow up thinking of yourself as a victim nation ... Armenian children feel that the world is a dangerous place and we always have to defend ourselves ... I don't feel that it was necessary to feed us with this as well to keep us Armenian.'

This blurred victimhood/colonisation complex can also be the reason why Armenians¹⁸ are traditionally model citizens in their host states, politically cautious and conservative and usually supportive of the existing regime, regardless of its political hue.¹⁹ On the one hand, this is interpreted by them as being a shrewd survival strategy; on the other it can reflect deep political disempowerment. The layers of domination reverberate throughout the Middle Eastern diaspora experience, starting with the family structure. In this traditional thinking, the host state is still something to be feared, obeyed and kept out as far as possible. Tanya conducted a survey of 120 young people of the community, aged 18–25 as part of her Masters dissertation. She concludes that the Lebanese Armenian identity is in crisis, trying to emancipate itself from the insular ghetto mentality of older generations, but still suffering from the hangover idea that 'being Armenian is linked to not having relationships with non-Armenians'.

'The Other is so scary for us, I think because of our history and the genocide, because we have a victim history (700 years) and it's not something a collective consciousness would forget, so the Other is always this danger ... don't get too close because you could lose your identity ...'

18 I am limiting this statement to diaspora created by the genocide and not recent arrivals from Armenia who have in some cases attracted negative attention precisely by challenging the previously untarnished reputation of Armenians, much to the dismay of the settled diasporans who are at pains to distance themselves from them.

19 'We're always the first to pay our taxes etc ... We keep our heads down and don't make trouble in the hope that they will leave us in peace.' Interview with fifty-two year old Elise, Nicosia, 5 March 2001. This was a common sentiment articulated by all my interviewees, especially the older generation.

Linked to this fear of the Other and the Outside, the community in Lebanon attempts to exert a totalising hold over its subjects, starting from the nuclear family unit. Tanya describes an experience which disciplines the individual and makes her bow to the collective will, to the extent that the Self, the Individual has no legitimate will or desire of her own, but is merged with the community will. In this interpretation, being Armenian cannot but be a burden on the young person:

'Being Armenian indirectly implies that you have to cast away everything else, there are some things you cannot do, you cannot marry a Lebanese (Arab) guy for example. If you are to assume your Armenian identity completely, you don't do this. ... You succeed ... You have duties towards your community, you have to be active. Being an Armenian is such an oppression sometimes, especially for a young person. You cannot dream basically, about going to Hawaii or anything like that, you would be a traitor. You cannot leave the Armenian community without feeling guilty ...'

At the same time, Tanya is outraged that the preoccupation with norms and codes only extends to superficial levels – that what is seen, heard and discussed is what one is judged on. This is the chasm between official and unofficial, appearance and substance that she considers typical also of the mainstream host state culture. Interestingly the young people from her survey do not tend to openly rebel against their parents' authority because 'it's mostly perceived as useless'. Instead, they simply follow their desires, just making sure that they do so covertly. Even when the situation is known, as long as it is not openly discussed and no 'dishonour' befalls, a collective blind eye is turned. In this way, the existing 'regime' can be perpetuated, as there is this space to bypass it, which has a soporific effect. On the official level though, Tanya describes a situation where one is well versed from a young age on the correct thoughts and attitudes, revealing a schism between the Self and the Self 'watching the Self', the Self and the collective:

'The message that has been transmitted is always the same while life is changing. For example my grandmother told me stories about the genocide because she lived through it. And when my teachers etc. tell me the stories and want me to really feel these things, I cannot because I was not there, I can just pretend to really be very moved by these genocide pictures – I am disgusted by these pictures if you want the truth. But at the same time I cannot say that, this kind of control, collective super ego wants to control everything, everything!'

Reasons for disillusionment by previously active community members in Cyprus were more centred around the themes of disempowerment and the 'realisation' that the activity is devoid of depth or lacks the capacity to make a difference. Several interviewees mentioned a trend of individuals 'getting hurt' or having bad experiences which resulted in them leaving the fold. Aline said the trend for intermarriage with Greek Cypriots often resulted in community disapproval, leading many such individuals to withdraw and become more assimilated into the Greek community which, in contrast 'seems to be welcoming them'.

The Assimilated

Sophie is a lawyer in her mid-twenties. She is part of a growing, largely 'silent' and under-represented group of individuals in the Armenian Cypriot community – the 'half and half'. Her mother is Armenian Cypriot and her father Greek Cypriot, a situation which has caused Sophie much soul-searching and analysis about her own identity and her choices.

Sophie and her older sister went to state schools where they encountered prejudice and bullying emanating from 'Greek bigotry'. She was most hurt by taunts that Armenians were Turks, and other racist comments; 'there was always the need to fight and justify myself', a situation which she says she still encounters in diluted forms today as an adult professional. The fact that Greek Cypriot education is nationalistic in its approach and makes little mention of the Armenians or the other minorities in its curriculum is a problem for the pupil who is not 100% Greek Cypriot (Trimikliniotis, 2004; Varnava, 2009). Sophie feels that the prejudice against Armenians was worse (in comparison to other 'half and half' experiences) because of the complicated history of the Armenians: 'it's not a clear-cut nation'. The situation became so difficult that Sophie's sister took to hiding her Armenianness and passing herself off as fully Greek Cypriot, something which Sophie never resorted to as she was 'proud' of her identity in contrast she says, to her sister who, she says, developed a complex.

Thirty-two year old media personality Zaven, whose father is Armenian and mother Arab, had a similar experience going to an Armenian school in Lebanon:²⁰

'When we were at schooling age, there was a big debate at home. My mother agreed that we should be in Armenian schools and all my education was in Armenian schools. No matter what we say Armenian schools are weak, weak because Arabic is not the first or second language, but the third language. Second is French or English. Secondly, Arabic is not taken seriously in Armenian schools, at least in my time. Armenians in their mentality feel that Arabic is inferior and this is something I used to hate.'

Although Sophie considers herself lucky to have a father who is both interested and involved in Armenian community life, his Greek Cypriot family have not been fully supportive of his wife, apparently on the grounds of her being Armenian. This impacted Sophie from a young age, with the result that she 'always wanted to protect her from them'. This situation could have led to Sophie's mother being somewhat 'ambiguous' about her own identity, something which the children picked up on. Other people I spoke to reinforced this picture – that mixed marriages were historically rare and frowned upon (by both parties) often leading to a situation where the children had to make a stark choice between one identity or the other (or have the choice made for them). Esther reports significant numbers of 'half-Armenians' visiting her bookshop in Nicosia:

20 Children usually attend the school according to their father's ethnicity, although there are exceptions.

‘... half-Armenian kids who have swung the Greek way. They come to the shop, very curious. In those days you had to make a decision to be either Greek or Armenian, there was no neutral in between which you can do now.’

Not being ‘pure’ acted as ‘a disadvantage on both sides’ for Sophie. This complaint was voiced by all the ‘half and half’ individuals I interviewed including Zaven:

‘I myself am half Armenian, half Arab and I’m very proud of that. It used to make a lot of problems for me. At school Armenians always looked down on Arabs. For me being half was a shame. I always heard “his mother is Arab”. Being half [and] half, for the Arabs you’re Armenian and for the Armenians you’re Arab, and I hate this.’

Sophie was encouraged to be involved in Armenian community activities when she was young, and was part of an AYF dance group for several years. This experience was tainted by her constant awareness of her ‘impurity’ and of attention always being drawn to her inferior status in the eyes of the community: ‘in an Armenian context being called Greek’. Although she recognises that her experience is limited to the ARF version of organised community, nonetheless Sophie found the community ‘not receptive or welcoming’ and has since become withdrawn from it. Having tried to connect at a young age, Sophie is quite resentful of the uncompromising dominant spirit she encountered infiltrating all levels of organised community life, emphasising hard boundaries and rigid standards based on essentialised versions of Armenianness. Although Sophie does attend Armenian events occasionally, her last experience, a Christmas Ball left her feeling like an ‘outcast’ with no one to sit with so she has vowed to ‘never go again’.

From this distanced position, Sophie is able to look at the community more ‘objectively’ and with more understanding. She is now able to see that the community frameworks are held in place by a hard core group who are more ‘ghetto-like’ than the vast majority of Armenians who are more integrated in mainstream society and simply do not have the time and the necessary commitment to dominate organised community life. The problem as she and others see it is that it is those with the time who become the dominant interpreters of the Armenianness in the community when in fact they are the activist minority. Sophie is aghast for example that ‘some of them still have the language problem despite being third generation’, something remarked upon by many individuals:

‘There is absolutely no excuse – you are born and live in a country and not being able to speak the language! Sometimes I am really ashamed when this happens ...’
(Silva, teacher and writer, in her late thirties)

In Lebanon the situation is more exaggerated as the stereotype of the Armenian who speaks Arabic badly prevails in the mainstream culture. Although it is still just about possible in the parallel universe of the Armenian ‘ghetto’, to conduct an exclusively Armenian life in Lebanon, this is impossible in Cyprus. Zaven has worked extensively in television and has his own talk show on Future TV²¹ which is broadcast via satellite to the Arab world. He has played on this negative

21 Zaven Kouyoumdjian, Lebanese Television Celebrity, Talk Show Host and Producer. ‘Meet Zaven Online’. Available at [<http://www.zavenonline.com>], accessed on 3 April 2013.

Armenian stereotype:

‘... People were curious, because of the stereotype of Armenians here, so there [was] this sudden attention on me to see my mistakes ... and that is one of the reasons why I quickly gained this “fame” ... I could break the stereotype, in a short time, of Armenians eating basterma and speaking broken Arabic ... From age 20 I work in TV and now people are used to me being an Armenian. For example if I’m out and somebody forgets my name they will call out “the Armenian!”’

Sophie’s community experience has not deterred her from claiming her Armenianness, and she believes ‘it is important to acknowledge being half Armenian’. This she does in her own way and through her own efforts rather than being based on any community standards. For Sophie, this role is a self-conscious individual rebellion against the pillars of Armenianness that have alienated her. They extend to playing the ‘Armenian witness’ among her non-Armenian friends, keeping alive the memory of the genocide (and supporting related political activity), an appreciation for Armenian music, dance and culture; and something she feels in her ‘deeper soul’ which is shared in her most intimate relationships. In her profession, Sophie has not kept her Armenian identity a secret but does not advertise it, saying she ‘can project Greekness, although (she) always feels half inside ... sometimes a lonely position’. She is not sure that she would pass this identity on to her children in the likely event of their father being a Greek Cypriot as she does not really think it will be relevant to them.

For Zaven, being half Armenian has meant that he has had to make a great deal of personal effort to break into the profession, working harder than other candidates partly to dispel any concerns:

‘At first they were sceptical about my Arabic, that if I were angry how would I speak, when you are cool you speak fine but ... if you are under tension you might suddenly become “an Armenian” ... Secondly, they did not know how an audience would take [to] an Armenian reporting political or social things.’

Being half Armenian may have been a personal handicap but once he broke into the profession, it gave him a certain celebrity, although he does not want to make a political issue of it:

‘It’s not a lifestyle being an Armenian ... My being an Armenian is just who I am but my character and lifestyle I build them as Zaven not as an Armenian.’

For the most part, reactions to Zaven in the mainstream Lebanese and Arab media have been positive despite his sometimes controversial, liberal views. One notable exception concerned a show he did about youth in the Arabian Gulf which referred to homosexuality. On this occasion the response from all over the Arab world was vehement and made particular reference to his Armenianness:

‘I had lots of hate mail and it all mentioned “Zaven, an Armenian Christian has no right to interfere in our (i.e. Arab) business” ... They posted messages on my website directly ... three

pages of threats that they will campaign to stop all advertisements from the Gulf, to boycott the programme ... I was astonished to see these emails, because for the first time I was referred to by so many Arab viewers as Armenian Christian ... So once there's a problem (my boldness here) it came up, my Armenianness. Maybe if I was not Armenian Christian, I don't know how they would have taken it.'

Like Sophie, Zaven is detached from the community which he sees as insular and parochial. Like other 'outsiders' he has made it 'big' on a national and regional map precisely by being distanced from the community. He also sees the dominant versions of Armenianness as hard, reified and uncompromising:

'It's either ... you're too much Armenian or you're too [far] away from Armenians, there is no middle. Either you're a Bourj Hammoudsi²² living in another universe or you're too much integrated you've forgotten everything to do with Armenians. I think both are bad. I think I'm in the middle. I know Armenian, if there's something interesting for me I go; but I don't go because it's Armenian and I have to go and at the same time I'm very much integrated in Lebanese society.'

The solution for Zaven is the affirmation of an overarching Lebanese identity which would go beyond the sectarian divisions the state is founded on. Many of my Cypriot interviewees expressed the same hope and desire although they were less confident that it was possible. In Lebanon, sectarianism is the very foundation of the state so these issues and the many different pulls and possibilities are always at the forefront of mainstream discourse. For Zaven it is something of a personal crusade and he sees the problem lying on both sides – the Armenian community leaders' insular desire to be 'different' and 'apart'; and the Lebanese state system's reinforcement of this separation:

'I want Armenians to feel that they belong to Lebanon ... if they don't like the country, if they are not happy, they should leave. If they prefer living in Armenia, Turkey, USA, let them go. Every person should feel [a sense of] belonging to where they live. This is step one to live happily and to take advantage of what's being offered in the country – to live the country.'

Both Sophie and Zaven are emphatic that their homelands are their 'host states' without question. Sophie is typical of the more romantic half Armenian who has a desire to visit Armenia out of sentiment, one day. Most others are content to 'piece together', through art, music, stories and literature, a personal imagined 'Armenia' existing somewhere deep in their psyche.

22 Meaning a person who lives in Bourj Hammoud, a suburb in North-East Beirut, one of the original sites where the Armenian refugees settled post-genocide. It is considered the traditional nucleus of the Armenian Lebanese community and remains heavily populated by Armenians.

The Outsider

Gerard is a well-known personality in Lebanon and the Middle East. He is an actor, director and artist with a long and varied career. Although he says he is 'very attached' to his birthplace, Lebanon, he 'does not mind moving', which he does roughly every five years, citing his attachments to his projects as being more of a pull than anything else.²³ Describing himself as 'an outsider but not an outcast', Gerard sees the status as being 'a personal choice which is voluntary' and 'nothing to do with being Armenian'. On the contrary, he cultivates this status as he 'adores freedom' and being 'beyond boundaries and cultural gaps'. His expert knowledge of different cultures and several languages lend him a chameleon property, allowing him to adapt sufficiently in different situations without being pinned down to anyone. Having travelled widely, lived in different countries and continents, possessing French and Lebanese passports, Gerard says he has 'no homeland really'. Despite his relative privilege, in many ways, Gerard is quite typical of the Armenian intellectuals I interviewed, who are 'outside' the community framework by choice or design and are actively involved in creating an alternative fluid Armenian identity.

Gerard's main grievance against Lebanon is its sectarianism, as he is against 'fundamentalism and extremism of any sort and against religion being used politically'. To this aim he has become something of a celebrity, speaking out against the 'fanaticism' which he thinks threatens to destroy Lebanon. He does not accept religion as the foundation to Lebanese society and is very vocal about this, becoming a controversial figure preaching 'freedom' and something of 'an advocate for the youth, the future of the country'. Despite clearly having a thoughtful and informed personal commitment to Lebanon, Gerard is still perceived as an outsider by mainstream Lebanese, to the extent that individuals ringing up the talk show that he is appearing on, invariably have to make a point of congratulating him on speaking Arabic well, an occurrence which he 'hates'.²⁴ Indeed in the 1970s, Gerard says he was the only Armenian writing plays in Arabic and it was commonly assumed that he was 'masking someone else due to the mastery of language'. He says that going 'against the Armenian stereotype' has caused him 'serious conflict from both ends at different times'.

Gerard was 'raised outside of the Armenian ghetto' as were his parents (orphans in Danish and Italian orphanages). They spoke Armenian at home and Gerard went to French schools. Gerard is keen to cultivate a sense of himself as a free, unaffiliated artist, and seeks the universal in all his projects. When we met he had been trying to secure financial backing for a production of 'David of Sassoun', a popular Armenian tale of heroism. Gerard rejects the nationalistic reading of the story, preferring it to be interpreted as a universal tale: 'other cultures have almost identical stories'. Unfortunately, the project fell through due to lack of Armenian financial backing. The

23 Interview with Gerard Avedissian, Beirut, 14 March 2002.

24 This regularly happens to Zaven as well (see earlier section).

Lebanese government was prepared to help finance the project but wanted match funding from the AGBU who had recently decided to reorient more towards helping Armenia, a policy which Gerard agrees with. His first big Armenian production in 1971, was interpreted by the ARF as a nationalistic story, which Gerard found amusing, together with the fact that suddenly 'they thought I was integrated with the community', even inviting him to run for Armenian MP. Gerard's reply was that, if he was interested in politics, he would want to simply be a Lebanese MP, so deep is his distaste for the sectarian foundations of the state. As such he claims he 'avoids state sponsored Armenian occasions as he does not want to be categorised' and 'hates it when the Lebanese speak to him as an Armenian'.

Gerard's sense of absolute security with his Armenianness is at the core of his identity and also grounded in his relation with Armenia. He spent five years as a student in Soviet Armenia, on a generous state scholarship and 'was firmly embedded in the intellectual and artistic higher echelons of society', enjoying 'an honoured and privileged lifestyle'. He loved the experience of 'discovering Armenian culture' which was actually 'very different from the Lebanese version of it', preferring to stick to the locals as far as possible, as it was 'the only authentic way of communicating with Armenian culture ... despite some of them being very Russified'. However, in the long run, the lifestyle was no compensation for the freedom he craved, and he 'basically ran away from Soviet Armenia'. Gerard has never returned, at first 'too scared to go back' and now fears 'being disappointed' if he were to visit the new republic. Despite being invited many times, and on one occasion when they wanted to honour him, Gerard is reluctant to return, especially on the latter occasion 'as it was becoming a political statement'.

Gerard's relation to the Lebanese Armenian community has always been a detached one, but he is happy to get involved if something is of interest to him. As such, he laments what he sees as the decline of the Armenian community. Whereas there were many Armenians on the cultural scene of Lebanon in the 1970s there are few now. He does not fear for the continuing existence of the community, but does fear for its 'quality'. Even the political parties, which have traditionally played the role of providing a sense of belonging, have 'an uncertainty' since the establishment of the Republic of Armenia. Culturally, he is disappointed that the community is being dominated by the older generations, 'who are out of touch with the youth and reluctant to do things that would really attract them'. This was a common refrain among the artists I interviewed. One female international award-winning writer had this to say about the community in Cyprus:

'... they are not open-minded – don't dare to do anything different ... following the ways of the parents, so little room for change, difference, evolution etc. ... it's always the same dances, same theatre, comedy etc. It's very dated and keeps us within ourselves. Too much emphasis on preservation rather than exploration etc. leading to cultural stagnation.'

Gerard makes the distinction between the traditional largely Bourj Hammoud-based community of traders and craftsmen, and the increasing number of wealthier Armenians in west Beirut and beyond who are far more integrated into mainstream society. It is the former that are considered

the 'community' in the traditional sense. Gerard agrees with the thesis that very few individuals who are immersed in the community²⁵ 'make it big' on a national or international level, either due to real or imagined constraints. The community tends to confine one's potential, limiting dreams and opportunities.²⁶ It is those who are without these traditional boundaries of possibilities that are free to develop and make an impact beyond the community level. In Gerard's case and others, a relationship with the 'step-homeland' can allow the individual to operate easily outside the community framework, being an alternative way of being grounded in one's Armenian identity.

Haig is one such case in Cyprus. The son of Anatolian refugees, Haig is the founder and director of a cultural foundation based in Cyprus. Haig visited Armenia for the first time in 1991. Despite it being a very difficult period in Armenia, he found his visit 'an extremely stimulating experience ... so ... ended up going backwards and forwards'. As a result he has become involved in many projects related primarily to arts and culture. Haig says that he is not a 'typical Armenian Cypriot' because most of his schooling was in the UK, as a result of which he feels somewhat detached from both Armenian and mainstream Cypriot society:

'The degree to which I don't feel integrated is very much my fault because ... I wasn't educated here: my knowledge of the Greek language isn't what it should be. But I find Greek Cypriots are extremely accepting, I see no discrimination here whatsoever towards Armenians and I feel extremely grateful, if not the right word because I feel totally that I belong here, I feel totally at ease and at home. I love Cyprus; I am totally committed to Cyprus as a country and I try to contribute to it. As I speak strongly about my Armenian identity and my commitment to helping Armenia within my means and within my interests, I have exactly that feeling towards Cyprus.'

Although they considered themselves apart from the community, all the intellectuals and artists I interviewed were invariably extremely knowledgeable about community life and the hegemonic

25 Another interviewee from Beirut stressed the importance of class, education and parents' role in this: 'During the war most educated and cultured Armenians left the country. Most of those who remained are not educated or cultured. They don't read, they don't care about education and their children are going to be like them. ... Very few want their children to become better people, that's why I'm pessimistic. My parents always pushed us because they wanted us to become better people, all of us, four kids, the best schools, the best universities etc. They told me "why not go on and do your PhD". If it was someone else, they would say, "you're a girl stay at home". It depends on the parents and most of them unfortunately don't care if their kids become better people than they are ... Before the war there were two kinds of people: the educated and the rest. Now it's mostly just the rest' (interview with Elizabeth, 38, Beirut).

26 On some occasions this is proclaimed openly. For example, at a debate on 'The Future of Armenian Schools' held at the Garmirian secondary school in Beirut, featuring politicians, educators and parents on 15 March 2002, the youngest speaker, an advisor to a Lebanese MP, defended the falling standards of education in Armenian schools with this statement: 'We don't want walking encyclopaedias; we want Armenians with Armenian values' thereby suggesting that the priority is on 'creating Armenians' rather than education. Interestingly, his statement was met with appreciation from some of the older people in the audience.

standards and discourse of Armenianness, usually situating themselves in relation to this when reflecting on their identity. Haig is typical of the outsider who finds the community framework does not suit him personally, but recognises a need for the model to persist, 'collectively, if one is to maintain a minimum of Armenian diaspora life' although he (and every other 'outsider' I met) believes that 'Armenian institutions in the diaspora are in need of tremendous reform'. The intellectual's traditional role of critiquing society from a distance was something that each of my respondents fulfilled with knowledge and authority. Many of the 'outsiders' I spoke to wished to be 'active' but realised that they would have to create a new 'space' or outlet for themselves in order to do so. Also, traditional community structures are often suspicious or prejudiced against 'outsiders' or are disinterested in the individual. One female intellectual in her sixties said this:

'As I have been abroad most of my life most of the community here don't even know who I am. I am usually judged as being like my mother/father; I find this simplistic. They are not interested in you; just assume that you are like the family. Not curious in getting to know you ... (It is) received, regurgitated information by the majority ... Collective living here, so more scope for received knowledge.'

Esther who is a publisher and considers herself 'detached' from the community related her frustrating experience of trying to arrange a formal launch for a book with Armenian interest. As she found 'no neutral territory' within the community, after much negotiation, she ended up having to hand it over to a local college who hosted it with no community involvement. The community structure therefore can act as a hindrance to individuals who do not fit the mould. Alternatives have to be carved out by the individuals themselves, either through direct involvement with the step-homeland, the 'host state' or the creation of a different kind of space.

The Dislocated

A significant number of people I encountered were in transit in some way, between temporary homes, or feeling displaced in spirit or culture. For Anna, a twenty-six year old graduate recently returned from seven years in the USA, her presence in Cyprus is purely based on her parents living there. For the Abcarian brothers, recent repatriates from South Africa,²⁷ Cyprus is the unknown birthplace of their parents. For thirty-eight year old Sara and other individuals who have studied or lived abroad and regularly travel between families (homes) all over the world, there is a foreignness between them and their host state. For twenty-four year old Maral and other young people about to immigrate to North America, the 'host state' feels like a transit lounge one has made a home, uncertain of the future destination. The first language of many of these individuals

27 A significant number of Cypriots who had settled in South Africa in the 60s and 70s have returned to Cyprus in the last ten years or so, making up another dimension in the Cypriot multi-layered identity.

is English, reflecting their 'post-colonial' situation as well as the globalising nature of higher education.²⁸ Interestingly, all the women teach English at different levels in schools in Cyprus and Lebanon.

Anna was born in London to Armenian Cypriot parents and spent her childhood in the UK. The family moved back to Cyprus thirteen years ago. She was awarded scholarships to study English and Education in the USA for five years followed by two years training. She is not sure whether she will stay on in Cyprus or not. Although Anna and her younger sister were quite fluent in Armenian as children, where it was spoken in the home, she has since forgotten most of it, something she 'regrets'. Anna is fully aware of what she considers the community 'pillars' of Armenianness and the 'scale' to measure the 'Good Armenian'. Her attitude is that of the interested bystander. She 'wants to learn more' and 'feels' her identity despite being aware of not conforming to the scale. She is aware of the existence of the 'community framework' but does not feel she is 'woven in as yet' and is not sure how and whether she would choose to do so. Anna believes that a great deal of 'effort' needs to be exerted on the part of the outsider to attend community activities and gradually become active. She is torn between thinking she 'should' do so or be true to her feeling: 'it's more important to be oneself rather than others' perception of you'. Her 'fascination' for the Armenian aspect of her identity also extends to a fascination with Cyprus as her 'adopted home'. This theme was repeated by other intellectuals who had spent time examining the notion of home through their work. Cyprus, with its layers upon layers, its peculiar post-colonial flavour and its ongoing search for a coherent inclusive identity that reflects its people, is a state many diasporans said they felt a deep affinity for.

Anna is in some ways, typical of the kind of 'symbolic Armenian' described by Bakalian (1993), who prizes 'feeling' Armenian as being a valid and honest national identity. She cites food, music and memory as being the tenets of her Armenian identity. This sense of history and the collective psyche are aspects of identity that all outsiders mentioned, even though they, like Anna, may not be 'well versed in the facts'. Carrying a sense of a long and heavy history is not a burden, but a badge of honour from this detached position. This feeling is usually linked to the individual having had some personal relationship with genocide survivors. For Sara this means that future generations will lack this spirit:

'Grandparents' influence – especially the generation from the genocide is very important; you get this sense of loss from a young age; but it has to be from that generation otherwise it's not possible. First-hand experience [is] essential. When they die off I think it will be very difficult to preserve that sense of identity ...'

28 This situation is by no means restricted to Armenians. A sizable number of Greek Cypriot young people who have either lived or studied abroad; children of mixed marriages or 'repats' from the UK, South Africa and elsewhere, are in a similar situation. In the Lebanese case, the Maronites in particular claim they are more comfortable conversing in French rather than Arabic and a rising number of young people prefer French/English, either for aspirational reasons or because they have been shuttling between the west and Lebanon.

Anna's US education has also politicised her into identifying with other minorities on a political and academic level. The Abcarian brothers in South Africa also said they gravitated towards similar 'minorities' in schools – the Greeks, Spaniards and Italians – differentiating themselves from the dominant 'whites'. This sense of repeated Otherness has given these individuals a sense of 'always being foreigners' regardless of their environment.

In contrast to Anna, the Abcarian brothers are evidently delighted to be immersed in an Armenian community, having felt the uneasy duality between home life and values and that of the mainstream culture in South Africa. Their home environment was intensely Armenian, with the boys going to school not knowing any English or Afrikaans at all. Their home education extended to full knowledge of their 'story' and socialising with the ten or so other Armenian Cypriot families in the vicinity. The Armenian community in Johannesburg although tiny, was 'very tight; very close and supportive', a situation which was challenged by the recent arrivals from Armenia who reportedly had no such desire to remain apart, rapidly adapting to the mainstream South African culture, and also 'causing problems' for the established Armenians. After the troubles of South Africa, the boys seem to be relieved to have arrived in Cyprus even though it is an unknown place for them. Despite being citizens of both states, it is the Armenian culture that they feel 'most connected to' and would 'fight for'. Although they are in their early to mid-twenties, the brothers have the utmost respect for their father who seems to be both their role model and guide. For some dislocated individuals, the Armenian identity, as encapsulated in the nuclear family can become the shelter and the fabric of meaning to one's life, especially in the face of confusion and conflicting pulls of a challenging environment.

The dislocated carry with them some experience of multiple homes and possibilities and a sense of a wider diaspora. Sara, for example, has studied in the UK where she was involved in the Armenian community. She also visited Switzerland where her sister studied and has a sense of the community there. The internet has helped her to get in touch with distant relatives in South America and one of them visited her last year. Although they had 'great difficulty in communicating with them as they didn't speak any Armenian at all' the experience was a wonderful one and Sara describes them as 'feeling Armenian very strongly'. The dislocated are thus always aware of other communities and other versions of Armenianness, living in constant movement and relation to them, either through travel, communications or in the imagination.

Due to the Lebanese Civil War, Maral has lived half of her life in California, all her family members going 'back and forth' regularly. She is ambivalent about her impending emigration from California to Montreal where the rest of her immediate family have settled:

'I don't know where I want to be really. It's very confusing right now ... When I use my head and be realistic I think yes, I have to go. But you have your social life, your past, childhood memories, it's hard ... but I'm definitely going ...'

Maral attended Armenian schools, clubs and associations in all three countries. She is typical of young people who have experienced several different Armenian communities by a young age and

are always carrying a sense of comparison, critique and evaluation. For Maral it led to cultivating her Lebanese identity on her return:

'When I was in California I was very involved in Armenian things, clubs etc, extremely extremely ... you know when people go the US they "lose" their Armenian identity/culture, for me it was the opposite ... When I came back (to Lebanon) I realised that this was not the right way to look at things and I'm very happy I did because you get to see things from others' perspectives. You get to be a lot more mature. Because I think in our schools our kids are being brought up thinking that this is the world, not more than that. But it's not the case – there's so much out there.'

Having this insight, Maral made a special effort to learn Arabic well and to make close Arab friends. In this regard she says she is unusual in Lebanon, where those from conservative backgrounds like hers tend to stick to their own. Combined with her self-conscious opening-up to the host state is her desire to share her culture with her Arab friends, taking them along to community events. Sometimes, she says, she seems to be the only one doing this. Sara too is fluent in Greek despite her English education and considers herself to be 'well-integrated with the Greeks'. Like Maral, her closest friends are all non-Armenians:

'I try to keep a balance with non-Armenian friends and non-Armenian life otherwise it becomes very monotonous – same people, it can get claustrophobic ... I have no close Armenian friends or friends at all for that matter; just many acquaintances on [a] good social level.'

Although she has never encountered prejudice, Sara says that she 'sometimes gets the feeling they are putting you in another category as such though no one has ever said it openly'. By being located in the nexus between host state and diasporan, Maral too feels that she has a duty to rise to the challenge of the encounter. She thinks it is the Armenians' own ill-advised failing that they are still not popularly accepted as Lebanese, because they have cultivated that impression, 'loudly proclaiming loyalties with Armenia and Armenian causes'. Still, the women's personal integration into mainstream society does not extend to political interest. The dislocated are invariably disengaged from the politics of their host state, suggesting a somewhat detached or temporary residence and commitment.

Sara does attend community events when they interest her and prefers the 'pick and choose' approach to organised activity. Maral considers that she is '... neither inside nor outside (the community). I'm definitely not outside but not inside as I should be maybe' revealing a normative standard by which she is judging herself. Both women consider the church to be very important though neither attend regularly. This is a regular theme among the dislocated – reverence for traditional pillars regardless of personal commitment. Maral makes the important point that the standard of involvement with which the community judges is an unrealistic one for the modern host state-integrated individual:

‘... everyone is complaining in all organisations that the youth are becoming too indifferent and not participating in traditional groups etc ... where is the youth? Well the youth is busy. I believe I am busy, I don’t have any time for any of these things ... things are different ... when our parents were my age they had more time, their lifestyle was different ... I mean if I had the time I would definitely be involved ... it’s not that I don’t want to be ...’

Like Anna and the Abcarian brothers, Maral has never visited Armenia. In contrast to their detached attitude, she considers it a ‘great sin’ and feels ‘very guilty’. Sara has a romantic picture of Armenia as homeland, having visited on an organised tour in 1993. She considers it ‘an experience you can’t explain’, and evidently one that moved her. There is a mythical quality to the manner in which these interviewees spoke about Armenia as their ‘homeland’. With the exception of Anna, they claimed political loyalty to the Republic and a desire to be useful to its growth. Maral and Sara expressed a tentative desire to visit or even live there for some time, but their expression was somewhat unconvincing. It seems that the ‘obstacles’ – their actual lives, their careers, their families and their rootedness (however shallow) in the host state and in the diaspora space – will keep Armenia a distant and mythical land to them; perhaps that is what they are most comfortable with. Sara has lost touch with the distant relatives she discovered there; Maral and the others have no ties at all. It would be interesting to see whether once she settles in Canada, Maral’s longing will be for Lebanon, her adopted homeland as opposed to her imaginary homeland. However dislocated the individual, there seems to be an innate desire or pressure to subscribe to the community code, to appear both rooted and committed to where they are, but also routed in some way towards the mythical homeland, because: ‘It’s our only national symbol. If we don’t have that we don’t have anything left.’

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Beyond Community – Challenging Hegemonic Diasporic Discourses

The extracts above reveal how community structures and diaspora gatekeepers are being challenged or in some cases rendered unnecessary as individuals form meaningful diasporic identities outside of the norms decreed by the latter. The four sections: the Disillusioned, the Assimilated, the Outsider and the Dislocated, each focused on a distinct movement within the diaspora space. In the first, the Disillusioned manifested a turning away from traditional political community as the difficult realities of the ‘step-homeland’ and the host state challenged their vision. The Assimilated represented the growing number who are not fully accepted by the traditional Armenian community and are becoming submerged into mainstream society, an often neglected group of individuals, each with his/her own experience and self-conscious ‘mapping’ on to the diaspora and host state discourse. The section on Outsiders investigated the fluid situations and positioning of self-consciously non-aligned diasporans for whom the ‘step-homeland’ has provided a new pivot around which to explore new possibilities. The final section, on the Dislocated, encapsulates the

trend which is perhaps most exemplified in the wider diaspora condition in the context of globalisation. These individuals are in constant movement, physically and psychologically, carrying an awareness and knowledge of multiple homes and ways of living in diaspora. Through various orientations at different times, they reveal a fluid location in the diaspora space which takes on new significance when it is freed from the pulls of a clear 'homeland' or 'host state'.

The mechanisms of Globalisation (travel, communication, mobility, social media) have empowered the diasporic individual in unprecedented ways such that s/he is in a position to experience a personalised version of Armenianness, bypassing traditional mediators, and also independent of the organised community. New versions of Armenianness are articulated from fresh positions of security, creativity and authority as the diaspora space is broadened to allow for other agents and sources of meaning-making. This paper has shown that the approach of mapping nation-building from the margins and the periphery is essential in analysing 'old' diaspora beyond the official, prescriptive, normative discourse. The findings reveal that the voices from the side-lines are gaining legitimacy and influence through dynamic encounters with the 'host state', the trans-nation and the 'step-homeland', being rooted and routed in alternative new spaces and possibilities carved out by the process of globalisation. This paper has argued for the need to liberate diaspora, as concept and practice, from the traditional parameters and confines as defined by diaspora institutions and leadership, by recognising the agency and creativity of individuals either outside or alienated from this infrastructure.

Beyond the Binary – Minority Identities and Belonging in Lebanon and Cyprus

The tension, apparent in diaspora communities, *vis-à-vis* their host states mirrors the tensions in debates on minorities and citizenship. Multiculturalism and Diversity as policies in particular have been criticised for ossifying differences by recognising and privileging them, and thereby replicating the binary mentality that earlier assimilation models were founded upon. In addition, all approaches which recognise difference, create a majority and minority, are to one extent or another guilty of seeing 'culture' and 'identity' (whether that of the 'majority' or the 'minority') as a static, homogenous and essentialised set of beliefs, lifestyles and ideologies which all group members subscribe to equally, thereby obfuscating complexities and inequalities within (Anthias, 2013). This replication of binaries has been most oppressive to individuals and groups which are not represented by dominant discourses or are very far from power structures. These are the silenced and side-lined experiences on the edges of the various boundaries being drawn and redrawn at the different levels of identity-building (community, state, nation, diaspora). This paper has argued for a more nuanced and critical understanding of differences and commonalities, and how these can be both contained and reified at the level of the official, and dynamic and flexible in practice, drawing meaning from multiple shifting sites. These hopeful 'narratives of interculturality' (Anthias, 2006) reflect the fluidity and multi-layered nature of political identity in people's lives, beyond boundaries, imagined or constructed.

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