Negotiating ethnosexual difference in the Armenian transnation

Nelli Sargsyan
University at Albany, State University of New York, nelsargsyan@yahoo.com

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd/1002

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive.
Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
NEGOTIATING ETHNOSEXUAL DIFFERENCE IN THE ARMENIAN TRANSNATION

by

Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

College of Arts & Sciences
Department of Anthropology
2013
Negotiating Ethnosexual Difference in the Armenian Transnation

by

Nelli Sargsyan-Pittman

COPYRIGHT 2013
Abstract

Since heteronormativity is an inextricable part of the ethnonationalist ideologies and discourses of Armenianness, conformity and transgression are communally policed both in the Republic of Armenia, as well as in the Armenian diaspora, albeit in different ways. In the diaspora it is through public silence regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) and queer self-identified Armenians that hetero-belonging is managed. In the Republic of Armenia, on the other hand, it is managed through hate speech promoted by public figures and through mass media. In both cases the anxiety that the issue of non-heteronormativity points to in the public outcry is that of body politic of national citizenship, ethnic morality, and by extension, belonging, all of which hinge on reproductive hetero-belonging. And even in the most progressive Armenian organizations, queer issues are never raised as Armenian issues. This dissertation decenters the single heteronormative, middle class, Orthodox Christian, Caucasian narrative of diasporic Armenianness, having already crossed various ethnonational borders through time and space with embodied linguistic and cultural difference. It focuses on the ways lesbian, gay, and queer self-identified Armenians challenge the erasure of non-heteronormativity from ethnocultural and ethnonational discourses of Armenianness in the US and the Republic of Armenia. In particular, I draw on interactional, in-depth interview data from long-term ethnographic research in upstate New York, metropolitan New York, and Yerevan, Republic of Armenia. By examining the discursive practices employed in multilingual interactions and interviews to signal intersecting subjectivities and identifications I seek to understand how queer Armenians disrupt the heteropatriarchal discourses of Armenianness by unsettling the public and collective production of Armenianness through their own re-presentation and re-representation thereof.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all my research participants who made room for me in their lives for however short or long periods of time. I am grateful for their walking with me in parks and taking the subway and cabs, giving me a place to stay, spending time talking to me, and extending generous invitations to partake of family feasts.

I would like to thank my adviser and director of my dissertation committee Dr. Jim Collins for his invaluable critique and for giving me confidence to appreciate and trust my own experiences and scholarly analysis. I would like to thank my dissertation committee members Drs. Walter Little, Jennifer Burrell, and Khachig Tölölyan for their helpful scholarly critique on this dissertation. I am also grateful to Jennifer Burrell for her advice on balancing parenting and dissertation writing. I am grateful to her and her wonderful family for opening their home to me and my daughter and taking care of my daughter while I would do my fieldwork.

I am very grateful to the Initiatives for Women at State University of New York at Albany (UAlbany) for their support in carrying out part of my research on chapter 5, as well as Graduate Student Organization at UAlbany for supporting my travel to professional conferences to present on the preliminary findings of parts of chapters 2, 4, and 5.

I would also like to thank Michael, my life partner and husband, and our fabulous almost-five-year-old daughter Nane for their loving support in my ethnographic journey. I would also like to thank Michael for his feedback on this dissertation. I would like to express gratitude for all the missed trains and buses, and NYC subway construction, as they gave me more time to take detailed and dense fieldnotes and to analyze them with...
more nuanced reflexivity and recursivity. I would like to thank my mother and mother-in-law for helping me with childcare as I was working on my dissertation.
# Table of Contents

Title page ................................................................................................................................................i

Copyright page ..........................................................................................................................................ii

Abstract .....................................................................................................................................................iii

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................................iv-v

Introduction..............................................................................................................................................1-24

Chapter 1  What’s in the Name: Armenian Diaspora .......................................................... 25-82

Chapter 2  The Breadwinners of the Church Family:
             Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop .................................................................83-131

Chapter 3  Convergences of the (In)commensurability of Ethnosexual
             Diasporic Subjectivities..................................................................................132-180

Chapter 4  Divergences of the (In)commensurability of Ethnosexual
             Diasporic Subjectivities.................................................................................181-230

Chapter 5  Queering the Nationalist Heteropatriarchy ......................................................231-294

In Conclusion...........................................................................................................................................295-299

Bibliography.............................................................................................................................................300-307

Endnotes ....................................................................................................................................................308-327
Introduction

*Diaspora* is a well-orchestrated network of material and cultural exchange transitioning from exilic to diasporic transnationalism saturated with the themes of nationalism and power (Tölölyan 2000). Inextricably intertwined with ethnicity, non-heteronormative sexualities disrupt the conventional conceptualizations of diaspora. From this starting point I interrogate two conceptualizations of diaspora: diasporas as focused on producing exilic nationalist identifications (*backward looking* in Hall’s terms) and diasporas as *progressive* in relation to their post-Socialist kin-states. I do this through examining the ways in which queer Armenians find routes to produce their Armenian identification while grappling with the historical patriarchy and heterosexism within *backward looking/progressive* diaspora and the culturally conservative kin-state. This dissertation examines the processes, agents, key discourses, and imaginaries involved in transnational and diasporic Armenian identity producing processes, as complex forms of transnational belonging, in the early 21st century in the contexts of the United States and the Republic of Armenia.¹

More specifically, this dissertation research seeks to understand how Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) and queer Armenians negotiate and find ways to inhabit—rather than fully resolve—the heteronormative social and cultural spaces of Armenian belonging in the US and transnationally. This is a significant issue, as LGBT Armenians seek to belong to their Armenian collectivities, yet they do so at the expense of various forms of strategic identity articulation, including tactically maintained silence.
about their sexuality, because the mainstream Armenian diasporic identity discourses are silent on non-normative sexualities.

Where Armenians Come From: A Brief Overview

Armenian historiographers, often in a Weberian manner, trace the still ongoing history of the Armenian diaspora to the 11th century, a period which began after the fall of the last dynasty of the Armenian Bagratuni kings. The history of the Armenia diaspora is pertinent to this project, in that the different waves of diasporization and the portability of key institutions have long contributed to the functioning of the various Armenian States as well as diasporic institutions in the absence of an Armenian State (Tölölyan 2000).

The earliest phase of Armenian dispersal was marked by the movement of merchant and artisan Armenians to the Black Sea area (now Ukraine and parts of Poland) and the clergy and nobility to the Mediterranean coastline of Turkey. The latter established an Armenian kingdom of Cilicia that lasted for three centuries (Tölölyan 2000). The next phase of diasporization (1453-1604) was marked by the new status of millet that Armenian and other non-Muslim communities were granted within the Ottoman Empire, under which the clergy had official authority over the management of civil affairs of the community (Tölölyan 2000). The third phase (1605-1784), according to Tölölyan (2000), was marked by the fact that the merchant Armenian communities flourishing in Iran, India, the Netherlands, and Java, started investing resources in the spread of nationalist viewpoints through print sources, creating the initial “diasporic public spheres” – those discursive spaces where diasporic Armenianness is articulated, debated, and contested (Werbner 1998).
In these diasporic public spheres a particular kind of Armenianness was generated which linked the Christian past (particularly as produced in literary texts) to the politically active present of the given locale – a trend still in place in the 21st century Armenian identity discourses in both the Republic of Armenia and the diaspora. This led to the fourth wave of diasporization (1784-1923), when secular institutions funded by and constituting intellectual, political, and artistic elites came to displace the Church leadership giving rise to secular nationalist leadership (Tölölyan 2000).

As can be seen from the above, albeit summary account, the Armenian transnational experience has had a long history. At times the migration to locales outside of historical homelands has been for economic reasons. In the more troubled modern period, migration of Armenians has been the result of an imminent threat or ongoing catastrophe (e.g. to the Middle East, Western Europe, and the US after the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century). Under the duress of forced or coerced migrations, identity discourses have been shaped by the experience of ethnic catastrophe. In these cases, political commitments were often tied to a sense of loss or reparations (Tölölyan 2007b). In the early 21st century, though old patterns persist, new articulations of identity are increasingly found in the discourses of transnational Armenian identity.

**The Significance of Sexuality**

During the last two and a half decades there has been a growing research interest in the work and role of the Armenian diasporic institutions as significant transnational and diasporic identity reproducing agents, given the historical discourses of what it means to be Armenian (Bakalian 1992, Tölölyan 2000, Alexander 2005,
Manjikian 2008, and so on). These discourses include, but are not limited to, depicting symbolic Armenians as heterosexual, typically gendered male, clergy, freedom fighters, politicians, architects, and literary figures, who in the overwhelming majority of cases are Armenian Apostolic Christians. Notwithstanding the Armenian preoccupation with identity sense-making in ethno-political and academic dimensions, there has been a long standing silence in the literature regarding the gendered nature of the Armenian diasporic identity production and its agents, as well as non-heterosexual agents’ articulation of Armenianness. This dissertation addresses that omission by offering a theoretically informed analysis and discussion of sexuality as a subject positioning process.

Scholars in disciplines as diverse as religion, anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies, gay/lesbian studies, linguistics, literary studies, and performance studies have been more vigorously examining counter-hegemonic voices through their specific disciplinary lenses since 1990s. Speaking in Queer Tongues (Leap and Boellstorff 2004) is one recent collection that deals with the encounter of various non-heteronormative subjectivities and desires with the global moment around the world. In the past decade, scholars have also focused on non-heteronormative citizens and diasporics (Gopinath 2005 on South East Asian queer diasporas, Brettschneider 2006 on queer Jewish identities in the US, Levon 2010 on LGBTQ Israeli citizens, to name a few). In his Global Divas, Manalansan IV (2003) notes that Filipino immigrant gay men navigate the uneven spaces of gay culture in New York City through varying positionings, both ascribed, and self-assigned. But as this dissertation demonstrates, certain negotiations of gender,
sexuality, and ethnicity fall out of various Western, feminisms of color, and other translocally situated theorizations.

This project proposes to challenge the monolithic productions of the Armenian-American diaspora as heterosexual, middle class, Christian, and Caucasian, often evoked in the literature on the Armenian diaspora (Bakalian 1991), as well as in key diasporic discourses. The research points to a much more diverse identity producing processes, differently raced and classed. I also problematize Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) proposition that \textit{closet} is a defining factor in the social lives of non-hetero self-identified agents, since my research demonstrates the limitations of this line of thought. What is significant for my research consultants, who self-identify as Armenians of different class and race backgrounds, is rather the relationship with their \textit{home, family, and community} as they claim their different belongings. Not coming out is important and nuanced by the sociocultural backgrounds as well as spatiotemporal circumstances the consultants come from and find themselves in.

One of the central aims of this research is to create a dialogic space for active non-heteronormative diasporan and transnational Armenians and the mainstream Armenians, destabilizing the assumed naturalness of the Armenian heteronormative discourses of tradition, history, and identity. In order to do so, this dissertation engages with the anthropological debates regarding tradition and gendered ethnosexual identity production and representation, and the reconfigurations thereof in light of Armenian history having been written on the move.\textsuperscript{2} The participation of non-hetero Armenians in the Armenian identity producing projects queers the heteronormative basis of such activities and allows for potential reconfigurations, where difference signals complexity,
rather than marks a barrier or a boundary (Chambers 1994). By making the public
negotiations of ethnosexual identifications part of the Armenian transnational identity
project, this research reveals the dissonance between the diasporic Armenianness as it
is publicly represented and the actually lived experiences molded by personal and
historical structural violence.

This project, then, will contribute to the anthropological and queer studies’
conversations on cultural responses to incommensurability. *Incommensurability* is “a
state of affairs where “an undistorted translation cannot be produced” between two
systems of thought, language, or culture” (Povinelli 2001:320). In other words, it points
to an impossibility of comprehending and/or articulating the non-normative ethnosexual
subjectivities in terms of ethnic identity and belonging and vice versa (Boellstorff
2007:146). I seek to understand how gender and sexuality are taken up (or not) by
Armenian identity claimants within those discursive spaces where Armenianness is being
articulated, debated, and contested.³

This research examines the globalized political economy of identity by
investigating transnational identity articulations as scale sensitive performances
(Blommaert 2005). The commitment of the research to scalar analysis or the analysis of
differing social scales is significant. The findings of this research demonstrate how larger
scale processes at particular times in particular places affect identity performances, as
well as the production of particular non-heteronormative discourses of ethnic identity. At
larger geopolitical scales actors tend to engage resources and evoke histories (and
memories) that would otherwise (at smaller scales) remain inactive and insignificant as
identity reproducing mechanisms (and vice versa).
These processes include but are not limited to (1) transported histories of trauma and loss (vis-à-vis the Armenian Genocide); (2) evoked memories of origin(s) and belonging coupled with (3) the flows of Armenians trespassing nation state boundaries as well as “expected” and “natural” gender and sexuality boundaries of Armenianness.

This project, then, is relevant to other projects of negotiating difference in differently scaled contexts where ethnodiasporic identity reproducing agents negotiate their difference within the social unevenness of the dominant mainstream cultures of their host countries (long established as their homes), in the diasporic public spheres, and in their kin-state.

**Research Design**

Throughout the dissertation I address two key questions with their sub-questions:

1. **How do organizations underwrite identity projects?** How do men and women participate in the organizational representations of Armenianness? What kinds of masculinities and femininities are being reproduced through these organizations? Do LGBT and queer Armenian-Americans participate in the public re-production of Armenianness within the Armenian-American diaspora? Do they have to grapple with the historical heterosexism within Armenian-American public discourses? If so, how?

2. **What is the nature of subversion/resistance?** What form of resistance is queering? Is the act of *queering* more possible in a post-Socialist culturally conservative Republic precisely *because* the heteronormative domination is overt in the violent public discourses? And conversely, is it harder to articulate
resistance, when heteronormative domination is managed through silences (Urciuoli 1996) within the Armenian diasporic circles in the US? How do queer Armenian activists engage with the discourses of Armenianness in the diaspora and in the Republic of Armenia? Do LGBT and queer Armenians openly challenge the mainstream Armenian discourses of identity in the diaspora and in Armenia? How do LGBT and queer Armenians contribute to the reimagining or reframing of the Armenian fe/male identities?

**Research populations:** In order to address these questions, this research was conducted among four main population groups: (1) an upstate NY Armenian Church community leaders (chapter 2); (2) active young Armenians and Armenian-Americans involved with a New York City based mainstream Armenian cultural organization (chapters three and four); (3) New York City-based Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Armenian organization affiliates and other LGBTQ Armenians (chapters three and four); and (4) a Yerevan, Armenian based women’s movement (chapter 5).

I selected my research participants from all the involved research populations based on their active engagement with the mainstream and queer Armenian diasporic circles. To offset potential limitations of this study in terms of my misrepresentation, I detail my approach to the research with self-reflexivity, awareness of my own partiality, and recursivity below. Also, I have had collaborative projects with two of the four groups involved in the research (NYC based LGBT Armenian organization and Yerevan based women’s movement) as a way of collaborative knowledge production.
In terms of the scope of the research, I have interviewed 43 research participants in locales as diverse as Yerevan, Armenia; Los Angeles, California; Boston, Massachusetts; New York City, Albany, Woodstock, New York; and Lebanon, New Jersey. And although the population of this research is a fragment of a fragment of a much larger transnationally situated diasporic community, I argue below that the patterns that emerge are generalizable to the experiences of other such populations.

Data collection: I used the following methods of data collection to better understand the negotiations of translocal ethnosexual subjectivities.

(1) Ethnographic data. As part of participant observation I placed myself in both formal and informal situations where my consultants engaged in their identity articulations, allowing me to notice how agents position themselves towards each other and me, as well as other individuals and imagined communities (Bernard 2006). I observed and aproticipated in an upstate New York Armenian Church religious and cultural celebrations, commemorations, feasts, other events, as well as volunteered in the preparation for activities associated with the aforementioned events.

I participated and observed the mainstream Armenian organizational events in New York City. This included, for example, annual Silent Auctions to raise money for schools in Armenia; professional networking forums; Armenian religious and historic event celebrations; lecture series on the Hichemyes work in Armenia, and so on. I also participated in and observed the social and public events in which the LGBT Armenians participated and organized in New York City: such as organizational meetings; March of Equality; Armenian Christmas celebration, readings, screenings of queer Armenians’ art work; and so on. I followed the route of four queer artists and activists who co/organize
and participate in readings, art interventions, and seminars on gender, sexuality, and ethnic identity with fellow Armenians in different parts of the US (Los Angeles, New York, Boston) and Yerevan, Armenia. Through participating in the events organized by religious, secular, and LGBT Armenian organizations, I was attempting to gain a better sense of what kinds of (1) Armenianesses were being produced, and (2) what kind of discourses of Armenianness were operating in these different settings, with attention to the gender and sexuality dynamics.

(2) Interviews and life-history narratives: I conducted open-ended, structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews with the research participants from all the aforementioned populations. The interviews and life-history narratives provided an instructive source of language use. In addition to these organizational sites, I followed the routes of certain key consultants in their individual efforts of public ethnosexual identity articulations and representations outside of and separately from the organizations mentioned above. I have also interviewed and collected life-history narratives of the active collaborators of my consultants in sites such as Los Angeles, CA, and Yerevan, Armenia where some of my consultants hold jointly organized events.

The semi-structured interviews allowed the consultants to discuss issues of relevance to them regarding gendered Armenian identity production. At the same time, structured interviews provided responses to specific questions on gendered Armenian identity production in the US, as well as on non-hetero Armenianness and Armenian organizations. If the semi-structured and structured interviews focus on the production of Armenian identity in the US, life-history narratives focus on my queer consultants’ coming to terms with their non-conforming sexualities within their various Armenian
social networks (from being closeted, to open and out about their sexual orientation to few, to all, and outed by others).

(3) Secondary data: Besides first-hand data, such as fieldnotes, interviews, and life-history narratives, I also analyzed organizational websites, blog entries, and a variety of flyers, brochures, and articles pertinent to the organizations and women’s movement involved in this research. The secondary data provided another window to the discourses of Armenianness, since people’s complex, overlapping, and often conflicting identifications are expressed in and against officially produced Armenianness.

In the overall set of data I looked for evidence to address my research questions through:

- References to the ethnic origin, language, history in all the material.
- Instances of intertextuality as an identity reproducing technique.
- Instances of museologized ethnonational items of emblematic value recreating the location as a spatial and temporal reference, or “going back” (Silverstein 2003).
- Instances of code switching in interviews, social, cultural, religious events to test Blommaert’s “speaking from a place” as a signal of shifting identities and centers of different scales.
- Paying close attention to when, where, and how the identity work is being performed by these agents.
- Instances of recognition of the authenticity of Armenians with different backgrounds or the lack of it as evidences of including or excluding different kinds of Armenianness.
The kind of organizations people represent and speak from as activists.

Purpose of such organizations, their ways of recruitment, and representation.

To address my research questions regarding locally sustained transnational Armenian identity as a variously gendered project, I applied the following methodological approaches:

**Data analysis:** *Discourse analysis* that examines language use as a social practice through a range of symbolic aspects of linguistic resources, allows me to identify various alignments that the consultants take in relation to each other, and other individuals, and organizations, evoking various identities and belongings (Blommaert 2005). I used discourse analysis, as a qualitative analytic tool to understand the meaning of my consultants’ interactional and behavioral choices over the various kind of data that I analyzed.

(1) *Ethnographic data analysis.* Coding the fieldnotes and the transcribed data according to a code list allowed me to identify recurrent themes in the various interactions between and among my consultants (Bernard 2006). Through the analysis of the participant observation fieldnotes on the power dynamic, internal decision making, as well as task division at the organizational meetings and various events I was able to understand how men and women negotiate their (non)conforming sexualities and ethnic identities within their social networks, whether organizationally or individually.

(2) *Informal conversations, semi-structured, structured interviews and life-history narratives.* With closer attention to the speakers’ use of different languages I further probed the differently gendered identities and positioning of my consultants, e.g.
through lexical choices, noun and pronoun uses signaling “othering” and so on. Blommaert’s (2005) approach to code-switching is most pertinent here. He argues that individuals navigate through the multiplicity of identities they inhabit (globally among other spatial configurations), “shifting places” when they thematically switch codes – employing certain languages – thus shifting identities. The semi-structured and structured interviews allowed me to receive my consultants’ insights into more pointed and specific questions probing issues of gender, sexuality, and ethnic identity perceptions; private and public articulations of identity; processes of relating to co-ethnic men and women; ethnic gender and sexuality models and their reconfigurations. The interviews and life-history narratives revealed my research consultants’ different ethnosexual identifications and subject positioning, whether they articulated their experiences in particular ways, or remarked on their perceptions of Armenian community, or switched languages, or enquoted other voices. These quoted voices are also instances of positioning towards political and ethnic categories that run throughout the entire dissertation. Hence, I italicized the quoted voices within the interview excerpts for the reader to be aware of the various voices used in the interactional positioning of my consultants. The analysis of the life-history narratives allowed me to understand: (1) the kinds of stories my consultants tell, and (2) the kinds of subjectivities they construe and communicate as active agents, some queer (Vasvari 2006:2). This is significant, as through life-history narratives agents reveal “the truth of [their] experience” (Edwards 2006:235). The narratives shed light on the research questions dealing with my consultants’ understanding of their subjectivities and identity meaning-making (Edwards 2006). They also allowed me to address the questions of
inhabiting the often irresolvable incommensurability of their ethnic and gender identity, sexualities, and belonging (Boellstorff 2007).

**Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual approach to identity as production and performance used in this study is dispersed throughout the substantive chapters of this dissertation. Foregrounding the ethnographic findings regarding ethnosexual identity practices as translocally and transnationally situated practices allowed me to notice how people consciously evoke particular memories on micro scales and history on macro scales through particular imaginaries (Appadurai 1996). Let me, here, briefly provide an overview.

I take up Blommaert’s approach to the performance of identity as “a form of socially meaningful practice” (2005:208), as “the mobilization of a whole repertoire of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment-to-moment speaking positions” (Blommaert 2005:232), as I analyze the performance of my consultants’ gendered ethnosexual identities. I employ Blommaert’s (2005) argument that identity anchorages are tied into spatial trajectories, as people always speak from a place (223, see also Little 2004a, 2004b).

Identifications are anchored in spatial trajectories. Hence, they speak from a place, when my consultant gay Armenian-Americans participate in a conference on the Armenian diaspora. They speak from a place when they present at a conference, exploring a key ethnonational symbol of “կարոտ,” loosely and uncomfortably translated as “longing,” or “nostalgia,” or “homesickness” through various art forms. They speak from a place, when they are a respondent to a presentation on the Armenian Genocide
Museum. However, it is important to realize that these subject positions are not solely about sexuality. These places that they speak from have undoubtedly been informed by their experiences as gay Armenian men. However, it is through particular higher education formations and the far-flung Armenian diaspora through which they explore the Armenian issues in these public Armenian cultural spaces.

Equipped with critical sensibility, the discussion of queer and non-queer subjectivities enriches the ethnographic research rather than doing it in the realm of comparative studies outside of a single ethnography (Boellstorff 2007). This approach would allow us to understand ethnosexuality difference, in which notions of sameness and difference are shaped by ethnodiesporic discourses, history, and power relations indexed in interactions. It is through indexicality that sociocultural order becomes part of our linguistic and communicative behavior (Blommaert 2005, also Collins 2011). As Fairclough (1992) suggests, "[w]e can see voice and ideology operating in and through polycentric and stratified systems, in which different ideologies are at play at different levels and in different ways" (173). As Brettschneider (2006) notes about the Jewish experience in the US,

not only are identities multiple, and multiply situated with respect to power, but that each politically salient aspect of our identity is mutually constituted through the development of others. This means that one is not simply a man, or a Jew, or working class, or bisexual: one is all of these and each aspect actually co-creates the others. In this view, the gender of Jewish men and Jewish women, for example, is explicitly "Jewed." [9]

In his examination of gay and lesbian subjectivities in Israel, Levon (2010) borrows Cameron and Kulick’s term “identification” to study language as a site where multiple and often contradictory social identifications are being mediated. And much like in my research participants’ case, Levon finds that sexuality might not necessarily be the most
salient feature of one’s sociolinguistic behavior for certain gay and lesbian individuals (Levon 2010:70-71). Extending this to the case of the Armenians in the US, then, this dissertation engages with “feminist, queer, class-based, and critical race theories by informing the discourse with [Armenianly] grounded theorizing” (Brettschneider 2006:9) to make sense of the incommensurability (Povinelli 2001) of the discursively produced ethnodiasporic and sexual subjectivities.

I analyze my ethnographic data using queer theory, since by rejecting dualities it proposes that there is a continuum of possibilities. By critiquing heteronormativity, queer theorists view it as “a standard not universal but created over time for the purposes of people in power” (Eaklor 2008:243). As Gopinath (2005) argues, it is not only through queer readings that different forms of structural and symbolic violences committed on the part of heteronormativity can be prevented, such readings destabilize epistemologies of “home” and diaspora that “in their elision and disavowal of the particularities of queer subjectivities – inevitably reproduce the heteronormative family as central to national identity” (Gopinath 2005:99). By queering the practices of reading, interpretation, and analysis, we give commensurability to the incommensurable and make possible what is “impossible within dominant diasporic and nationalist logic” (Gopinath 2005:187).

La Fountain-Stokes (2009) attempts to bring to the larger field of lesbian and gay and (Anglo-European) queer studies a particular disciplinary and conceptual intersectionality through Puerto Rican queer studies, “a reality located between the national and international, local and global, autochtonous and foreign, insular yet simultaneously transfronterizo; a space between the fragment and the whole” (La Fountain-Stokes 2009:xiv). Through this dissertation I demonstrate how the diverse
ethnodiasporic subjectivities and experiences of Armenians further nuance these interdisciplinary and conceptual intersectionalities by enacting realities that are contained within the local and translocal and defy them. The space between the fragment and the whole is still insufficient when describing their realities, as their realities are in all the spaces, including the fragments, parts, and whole, and all the spaces betwixt and between. The relevance of this position becomes clearer as I discuss the various configurations of ethnicity, class, race, and sexuality in chapter 4 There is a need to deontologize these binarisms, among other things, recognizing that these are not “fundamental states of the universe but frameworks of coincidence, immanent to the field of analysis and thus the field of critique as well” (Boellstorff 2007:217).

**On Terms:** With awareness that terms, as conceptual tools, need to be ontologized with care I now would like to discuss one of the terms that are, perhaps, most recurrent in this dissertation, the term *queer*. The term itself is not unproblematic. There is a long standing debate over which scholars disagree. Although a frequent critique of the term *queer* is that it is too loaded and often gendered male (Eaklor 2008:237), in my study it is mostly my women consultants that self-identify as queer. Some lesbian feminists feel their contributions are ignored or dismissed under this term. Others object to “erasing men and women as meaningful categories, and many older thinkers and doers, male and female, question whether queer is too broad and diffuse a concept to be usable politically” (Eaklor 2008:244). For some scholars queer theory focuses on the fluidity of sex and gender liberation (Eaklor 2008), challenging “the dominant tropes of racialization” (Brettschneider 2006:14). At the same time, for many engaged with identity politics, it falls short in its applicability to everyday life (Eaklor
The term *queer* can also be unsatisfactory for those who defy labels in general echoed in some of my consultants comments (also see Nagel 2000:116).

Many of my consultants use the analogy of ethnic difference and queerness, often collapsing the term *queer* and ethnic difference. Maral, an Armenian immigrant queer self-identified woman, originally from Armenia, living in New York City, summarizes similar comments of fellow queer Armenians in her below comments.

**Maral:** I am queer *because* I am Armenian. That’s not a conflict for me. If anything I am happy that I’ve come to this, that I can, you know, bash Armenians and be like, *Yo, you need to realize that.*

Interestingly, Maral, as well as Shanti in chapter 5, while collapsing ethnic difference and sexual difference, points out how one experience of difference is predicated on another. Having versed herself in gender and queer studies, Maral has been looking for spaces of belonging in the US, as well as back in the Republic of Armenia (henceforth RA). The surprising thing is that she finds queer circles within a culturally conservative hetero-patriarchal society, where various intersections of her many different sensibilities and identifications become possible.

I give centrality to the terms *queer* and *non-queer* in an effort to shift the focus of analysis, to destabilize the hetero-patriarchal normalcy. In the same vein, I keep moving among *hetero; non-hetero; queer;* and *non-queer* to disrupt any status quo, or rigidity, whether of heteronormativity or homonormativity, and to be alert to the mutability, and transient nature of these categories discursively performed and produced.

As I discuss terms such as *incommensurability* throughout the dissertation, I put the prefix *in-* of *incommensurability* in parenthesis as a way of breaking the textual
linearity that limits the visual representation of complexity. I do the same with *not* in *(not) coming out* and *non-* in *(non)hetero, (non)queer, and (non)Armenian.* In that, there are situations in which ethnодiasporic or ethnocultural and ethnosexual subjectivities are commensurable and others in which they are incommensurable. In a sense, for many of my queer consultants, “religious-familial complex” is part of the Armenian identity they inhabit (or not), making the habitation of some self-consciously incomplete Boellstorff (2007), also to be dwelt upon later in later chapters.

Throughout this dissertation I give precedence to the term *production* of identity or subjectivities over *construction.* *Production* encompasses more accurately the various features of this process: the fluidity, changeability, and the interwovenness, the potentialities, and constraints of this process to all the sociohistorical and ethnosexual circumstances within which it is occurring. I do so in agreement with Hall’s (1993) approach: “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact … we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). I frame the translocal and transnational articulations of Armenianness by the institutions of the Armenian diaspora within, what Tölölyan (2000) calls, the “transnation” of Armenia, which includes all diasporic communities and the homeland (or the kin-state), not centered around a nation-state (kin-state) any more. Instead, it is imagined as a transnation, acknowledging the permanence of its dispersion and the importance of interconnectedness (also articulated by Appadurai 1996).

**Self-reflexivity and Recursivity**

19
I embarked on this research fully aware of the limitations of my scholarly vision. (1) Aretxaga (1997), a feminist anthropologist, reminds me, that political and gendered subjects are formed “within systems of ethnic, gender, and sexual difference … configured within local places” (9) that shapes their particular ways of engaging with the translocal. (2) Any representation, as Spivak puts it, “irrespective of the shared commonalities between those engaged in the endeavor, is unavoidably a construction made from a particular political and epistemological stand” (Aretxaga 1997:14). It is significant, then, that I be aware of the partiality of my ethnographic vision and hence the partiality of my effort to accurately represent my research consultants (Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989).

Reflexivity and multi-vocality allow room for linked perspectives from which we can then re-construct and re-cognize our field encounters (Jolles 1994). Reflexivity points to the ethnographer “as a speaking subject” (Boellstorff 2012:33). Recursivity, on the other hand, as Gupta and Ferguson argue, discursively situates the “fieldsite” the ethnographer had located herself in (Boellstorff 2012:33). Like Boellstorff (2012), I employ activist listening, my own recursivity and reflexivity as hermeneutics both for my ethnography, as well as in my ethnography of the evoked discourses of ethnosexual difference, keeping in mind Nash’s (1992) ethnographic tip to dialogically and continuously test my interpretations against those of my consultants.5

Throughout my research I was, frequently, indirectly reminded by my research participants to be aware that the academic frameworks have their own geopolitics and body-politics. This awareness allowed me to avoid making Eurocentric universalizing claims combining localized ethnicities, capitalism, and colonialism and allows me to join
the movement of, what Mignolo terms, “epistemic disobedience,” aiming at pluriversality and decolonization of thinking (Tlostanova 2010:27). But let me state briefly, how it has been part of a difficult learning process.

As a young researcher I had the enthusiastic naiveté to assume that as a feminist woman of the same generation, coming from the same country with similar intellectual discontents, I would understand all the struggles of the Yerevan, Armenia-based Queering Yerevan (QY) women’s movement members. This was challenged by a sobering “othering” by the QY collective, and my own sense-making and self-reflection that I detailed elsewhere. Indeed, I fell prey to what Aretxaga (1997) calls “a pernicious kind of false consciousness, that is, to reproduce in an inverted form the imperialist illusion of an unproblematic knowing subject” (14). Acting on my assumptions that I understand and share most of the collective members’ struggles, I had termed them “democratic agents,” implicitly meaning that they were “agents of social change.” By doing so, I had rendered unproblematic the loaded term “democratic.” The very term that has been part of the collective’s queering project. I had further projected my own indifference to anything Soviet, underestimating and misrecognizing the QY members’ project of upsetting the norm, whether it is the locally imposed colonialist, Western transnational paradigms, or the nationally imposed post-Soviet paradigms. And this was only brought home to me through the collective’s returning my research gaze.

This experience, however painful, was very instructive. It taught me to be more self-reflexive and cautious about shared intuitions. It also nourished a meaningful collaboration with the QY. And Lola, one of the founding members of the collective mentioned that their defensive response to my claim of defining and understanding the
collective was motivated in part by repeated experience of erroneous descriptions of the collective by various enthusiasts (mostly journalists) and at that point in time they did not want to give anyone a chance to misrepresent them. In the end, this experience allowed me as a researcher to open a space of interpretation that was previously fragmented or erased from social representations and academic discourses (Aretxaga 1997).

With my theoretically situated ethnographic material I unpack the complexities, times, and ways that queer and non-queer Armenians engage with their diasporic subjectivities and belonging. I also analytically construct multiplex “third spaces” (Bhabha) – exploding in-betweennesses. I do so with care, engaging queer theorists, feminist anthropologists, and diaspora theorists so that the analogies and discussions do not flatten, erase, or exaggerate those complexities. In addition, I want these interpretations to form a basis of comparison for the theorization around other diasporic identifications or other diasporic queer identifications as well.

I explore the experiences and responses of my consultants, who come from different Armenian diasporic communities in the US, Armenia, and elsewhere. Their life trajectories – through a religious institution, or a secular institution, or a feminist movement, or informal social networks – represent various migratory waves of the Armenian experience in the US and the Armenian experience in Armenia. The findings of this research on such translocal, multiply displaced ethnosexual subjectivities who still construct relevant spatialities and temporalities will be useful for the exploration of other transnationally situated queer and non-queer negotiations of ethnosexual translocality and translocal subjectivities.
Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 deals with the history of the Armenian diaspora formation through different cultural and political organizations and identity claims. It also touches on the relationships of the major diaspora organizations with the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet Republics of Armenia. The chapter also discusses the discourses of immigration and diaspora in relation to the Armenian-American diaspora. This will situate the substantive chapters in the history (ies) that inform the current identity practices of Armenianness in the US and the Republic of Armenia.

Chapter 2 explores the heteronormative production of gendered diasporic Armenianness at the most traditional and socially orthodox organization, the Armenian Orthodox Church, in an Armenian-American community. In many ways, this chapter gives the readers a sense of mainstream traditional diasporic Armenian identity discourses.

Chapter 3 deals with the converging spaces, times, and ways through which queer and non-queer Armenian-Americans articulate their Armenianness in relation to the key ethno-diasporic organizational, communal, and familial spaces where the mainstream Armenianness is heteronormatively produced in relation to the mainstream US society. These identity producing processes operate on different scales. They are simultaneously part of the mainstream US society and yet more conservative on sexuality issues.

Chapter 4 focuses on the diverging “wheres, whens,” and “hows” of the production of ethnодiasporic Armenianness. If for those hetero and undifferentiated Armenians being an Armenian-American is a refuge, for those non-hetero it can be
trouble. I organized this chapter around the diverging points of the production of queer and non-queer diasporic Armenianness.

**Chapter 5** examines the most displaced and translocal queer Armenianness. This chapter explores the incommensurability of gendered cultural difference in the Republic of Armenia, where high-ranking government officials, along with mass media, and mainstream cultural workers directly attack non-heteronormativity at local and national level. I examine the project of *queering*, of upsetting the hetero norm, by a post-Soviet queer activist artist women’s movement that engages with the State and Armenian transnational networks through queer artistic projects.

In the **Brief Conclusion** I discuss how these different ways of producing ethnosexual diasporic and translocal subjectivities connect and how they contribute to the literature of anthropology of gender and performativity; queer studies; and diaspora studies.
Chapter 1

What’s in the Name: Armenian Diaspora

“Survivors carry history on themselves...a key difference between U.S. slavery and the European Holocaust is that no former slaves are alive today in the United States. This physical embodiment, a historical relation carried on self, is crucial to Vidal-Naquet’s distinction between history and memory. Thus, Vidal-Naquet worries about representations of the Holocaust once his generation is gone. But we should be careful not to push too far the distinction between various kinds of survivors” (Trouillot 1995:149).

Uh, I mean, what it means to be an Armenian woman is not what it means to be a lesbian in the way that the culture presents what it means to be an Armenian woman... So much of being an Armenian woman in my own experience, obviously it means something totally different in different places, but was, like, understanding the importance of how to make a cup of coffee for, like, your husband. And, like, seeing that clear split between, like, when you would have people over for dinner. All the women are working in the kitchen and all the men are sitting and doing nothing. So it’s very traditional... Being a lesbian didn’t seem to fit into that picture at all. (From interview with Nina)

The Armenian diasporic identity work has had various spatiotemporal encounters with the transnational moment (Tölölyan 1991). The distinction between history and memory (as per Trouillot in the first epigraph) has often been blurred in Armenian identity discourses. Yet, as Nina, a lesbian self-identified Armenian woman in her mid-twenties, originally from California, currently living in New York City, articulates in the second epigraph, what has persisted is the historically hetero-patriarchal gendering of the Armenian identity work. In fact, Nina speaks to McClintock’s (1995) argument regarding the historical institutionalization of gender difference, wherein the dominant discourses of Armenianess privilege and impose particular kinds of gendered

Albeit changing, certain historical hetero-patriarchal features of Armenianness, as Nina points out in the second epigraph (women in the kitchen, men sitting around, doing nothing [men in charge]) are persistently reproduced over time in the diasporic communities through conscious performance of identity work. The discussion of heterosexism as a separate form of oppression of both male and female non-heteronormativity (Risman 2004, also Calhoun 2000) is crucial for this research as well, in that it points to the potentially twofold (perhaps threefold) genderedness of diasporic identity work:

(1) Women’s and men’s gendered participation in the diasporic identity work: in both secular and religious Armenian organizations women are thought of as hetero mothers. At the Church women have their own organization, Women’s Guild (WG), whose main purpose is raising money for the Church and bringing the community together. And they do this through cooking and baking for Armenian festivals, bazaars, and other events raising money for the umbrella organization (the Church). At secular organizations, where community building and fundraising is still based on volunteering, women invest more time and energy than men. (2) Non-heteronormative agents’ uneven access to these identity reproducing resources, wherein (3) non-heteronormative women are doubly marked (as women and as non-heteronormative). Hence, within the hetero-reproductive ethnic identity producing discourses, a non-hetero woman appears in a limbo, or in a strange non-place, that of a non(hetero)-wife and a non(hetero)-mother.
The Armenian identity in the diaspora has been reproduced institutionally with contested ideas of homeland (Tölölyan 2007, Panossian 1998). This work is also done through communal and familial participation in the Armenian Cause related events. Indeed, Armenian identity producing organizations in the diaspora act as institutions of regulating traditional morality. And it is with this traditional hetero-patriarchal morality that non-hetero Armenians have to grapple in the negotiations of their diasporic Armenianness.

The geographical concept of scale, then, brings out the spatial and temporal distribution and hierarchical relationship of local identity performance and global processes contributing to it. Scale relations, as Collins (2011) argues, are invoked and negotiated, and thus shifting, rather than given or “natural” in the social world. The Goffmanian concept of footing or alignment vis-à-vis the presumed and constructed scale relations, on the other hand, clarifies the identity claimers’ position toward the diasporic identity work performed (Collins and Slembrouck 2009). Goffman defines footing as “the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance,” embedding one footing within another (Ribeiro 2006:52). Scale and footing are crucial in understanding: (1) how Armenianness has been construed historically; and (2) how this historicity then became consequential in the construal and representation of Armenianness in the diaspora in the present.

The scale and footing signal how the organizational elites – historically crucial in the reproduction of Armenianness— imagine their identity and their performance of it across time and space (scale) and through their agency (footing). These two concepts
are important as they allow us to see how Armenianness produced by these elites is being picked up for and by various communal reproductions in relation to various temporal and spatial places, in relation to fate and choice, thusly projecting a particular kind of Armenianness. Scale and alignment in this chapter mostly refer to political organizational alignment and in relation to broad ranging discourses of the Armenian transnation. In the chapters that follow the focus is on micro-analytic alignment.

The significance of scale and footing could be briefly illustrated by Hamik’s speech and will later be picked up in the chapters detailing my ethnographic work. Hamik, an Iranian Armenian man from Los Angeles in his mid-40s, one of the four founders of the Armenian LGBT organization in NY involved in this research, gave a speech at the organization’s 10th annual Armenian Christmas party that he and his partner of 18 years were hosting. In his speech Hamik mentioned that after he moved out of LA and moved to London and New York City he forgot he was Armenian. At this point another member of the organization interjected by saying, “Oh, was that possible?” To which Hamik responded,

Yes, it was possible and was very good. But after a while I missed it and wanted to get together with Armenians. Not just the Church, or going to Armenian stores, but people. So thanks to instant messaging and AOL at the time we found a small group of us and went to some bike place. And [one of us] had the Armenian flag in her backpack. We should be very proud. We are very rich. We come from different backgrounds. It doesn't matter. We have 3000 year old history and culture.

Hamik’s speech illustrates how the performativity of his current diasporic identity work, aware of the present here-and-now, is anchored in the past. Through strategic shifts in his footing, consciously referring to, highlighting, defining and re-defining different scalar relationships at different points. Hamik evoked a transnational scale of belonging
to and pride in an old nation with rich history and culture ("We should be very proud. We have 3000 year old history and culture"). He acknowledged the diversity that being Armenian implies. He evoked the sense of liberation that many young Armenians, and particularly queer Armenians feel when they leave the often tightly-knit and conservative Armenian families and communities, often church-affiliated, for other metropolitan areas looking for nothing Armenian to later finding themselves in need of reconnecting with other Armenians.

Religion, in this case the Armenian Apostolic Church, plays a major role as a key diasporic institution, building on and reproducing heteronormative gender standards (Alpert 1993). Hence, Hamik’s evocation of the Church itself was an acknowledgement of the particular diasporic Armenian identity production. In other words, it is through the religiocultural institution that this identity often comes to be understood.

Hamik’s speech also points to the relevance of Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouk’s (2005) discussion of the “where” of identity. Blommaert et al. (2005) argue that spaces (the “where” of the identity) are multifunctional. Hamik’s New York City apartment in Brooklyn, aside from signaling a margin of an Anglophone metropole, also signaled a space where at a given time (an Armenian Christmas party) non-heteronormative Armenian group identity work was possible. Spaces can be monologic (monolingual) or dialogic (multilingual) and have more than one center of different scales, as Blommaert et al. (2005) remind us. In this dialogic space English-Armenian alternations were possible and so was non-hetero Armenianness. Identity anchorages are tied into spatial trajectories, as Blommaert (2005) argues. “[P]eople speak from a
place” and shift places when they thematically switch codes – employ certain languages – thus shifting identities, also evoke variously scaled allegiances (Blommaert 2005:223).

The differently scaled allegiances that Hamik evoked were those of the Armenian larger diasporic community, a smaller scaled Church-affiliated community that is heteronormatively gendered male. He also evoked a symbol of nationhood, the Armenian flag as a claim to belonging to the nation, or through embodying nationalism through a hint at “commodity spectacle” and its “fetishism” in McClintock’s terms (1995:374). Hamik also mentioned a key element in the actual formation of a space for queer Armenian groups: electronic social media that made it possible, in the words of another consultant of mine, to “break the isolation.”

Hamik’s comments on his agency and mobility (being able to move from LA to London and New York City) evoke Collins and Blot’s argument that social fluidity and potential disorder call for self-constitutive capacities, wherein individuals inhabit multiple identities, favoring some over the others depending on the social situation and circumstances (see also Friedman 1994, Gee 2005). The differently scaled elements of the key circulating discourses of Armenianness presented below, that Hamik also evoked, have been historically observed in social, cultural events and gatherings, during social interactions in diasporic Armenian circles in general and in my fieldwork in particular.

(1) Those pervasive in the mainstream Armenian identity producing discourses transnationally: of shared religion (mostly unembraced by LGBTQ Armenians); history, often tied to the Armenian Genocide and its recognition; culture, which is often talked about in the abstract, with no historic specificity, referring to a past, a tradition, that
when probed further goes as deep as particular family traditions and rituals; food, music, Armenians being conservative, and hairy. It was almost all these elements that were at once activated and evoked in the short speech that Hamik gave.

(2) The other, smaller scale claims to Armenian community belonging are signaled through evocations of specific Armenian community experiences in the US. These experiences include the division of the Armenian Church along traditional Armenian political party lines. They also include awareness of public perceptions of Armenians in the US at the beginning of the 20th century and how they echo in the 21st century. As an example of the latter consider the following anecdote. An older gentleman whom I was seeing for the first time, picked up some crackers at a reception after a book reading at an Armenian Center in NYC and looking at me said with a smile, “Starving Armenians are eating crackers.” He said this, anticipating that as an Armenian woman I would recognize the chronotope he was evoking: the headlines of articles appearing in major US newspapers at the beginning of the 20th century regarding the Armenian Genocide. These titles became widely circulating within the US Armenian circles. And he evoked and creatively re-situated these Genocide related title in the present through a humorous twist of “eating crackers.” Such terms, as Silverstein (2003) argues,

invoke special, shared cultural knowledge on each occasion of use, the terms present those in the communicative act with the opportunity or anxiety of acknowledgment by a response that recognizes this fact. So such acts of usage can be groupness-affirming acts of rich, comfortable, and private meanings of belonging, of being in the performed center of a group, or they can constitute threats to “passing” for those wanting to remain in the ethnolinguistic closet. [Silverstein 2003:539]
The scales of the diasporic Armenian organizations or elites are themselves nested hierarchies that change with the shifting alignments of the elites – at given times and in certain sociopolitical circumstances. Given these shifts, the discourse of the production of Armenianness involves routinizable features, in Gumperz’s terms (Collins 2006) such as the uniqueness of the temporality of religion (Armenians first to adopt Christianity as state religion), origins, language, and culture in the Armenian transnation. This routinization of features, as Bourdieu points out (1991), allows a retrieval of social information and reproduces the habitus. This habitus is strategically employed to serve the nationalist and transnational purposes of the diasporic elites and their alignment toward each other and the perceived homeland. Scaling and setting, then, give us a space to imagine how the essentialist tropes of ethnicity nourish identity productions and performances anchored in specific histories, construing different Armenianness

To better understand the mainstream discourses of Armenianness that evoke particular spatiotemporal diasporic experiences as a laminated account of history analyzed in the ethnographic sections of this dissertation, below I briefly present the historical processes that contributed to the sociohistorical circumstances in which Armenian diasporic identity production more generally, and Armenian-American diasporic identity production, in particular, has been anchored as a cultural reality (Friedman 1994). I also discuss the relationships between the diaspora organizations and the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and later the post-Soviet Republics of Armenia in order to further foreground the sources of difference between diasporic Armenians and Armenians from the Republic of Armenia that most of my research consultants evoked,
particularly when thinking of Armenians with whom they share the fewest commonalities.

**The Diasporization of Armenians**

Perhaps in a Weberian manner, Armenian historians trace the long history of the Armenian diaspora to the 11th century, after the last dynasty of Armenian Bagratuni kings fell. As a result of this dispersal Armenians settled in two regions: (1) around the Black Sea (now Ukraine and parts of Poland), an area of merchants and artisans subject to indigenous rulers; and (2) in Cilicia (along the Mediterranean coastline of Turkey) where the clergy and nobility settled and took over the local Greek and Syriac population forming a kingdom that survived for three centuries (Tölölyan 2000). Tölölyan (2000) argues that the success of this reterritorialized Armenian state is indicative of the portability of the key homeland institutions that contribute to the functioning of the state.

According to Tölölyan (2000), the next phase of diasporization occurred in 1453-1604. This is the period when Armenian as well as other non-Muslim communities within the Ottoman Empire were granted the status of millet in 1461. Under this system, the spiritual elites of a community had official authority over the management of civil affairs of the community. Yet, they themselves were subject to the Turkish government.

Tölölyan (2000) defines the third wave of re-territorialization of Armenians as merchant diasporans (1605-1784). This is when the merchant Armenian communities started flourishing in Iran and India, as well as the Netherlands, and Java. Although, the merchants did not succeed in accumulating much capital, they invested it in spreading nationalist viewpoints in print. The first book published in Armenian was in Venice in
1511, and this was followed by the establishment of Armenian printing press in 1565. Tölölyan reports that “The first Armenian Bible was printed in Amsterdam in 1666, and the first modern political tracts were published in Madras, India, between 1772 and 1789” (2000:153). The latter created, what Pnina Werbner (1998) calls “diasporic public spheres,” those initial discursive spaces where diasporic Armenianness was articulated, debated, and contested. In these diasporic public spheres a particular kind of Armenianness was being produced, which linked the literary Christian past to the given politically active present – and, importantly, this is still active in 21st century Armenian identity discourses in the Republic of Armenia and the diaspora.

This re-territorialization period led to the fourth wave of diasporization (1784-1923), which revolves around the emergence of nationalist leadership in the diaspora. It is the time, Tölölyan (2000) notes, when secular institutions funded by and consisting of intellectual, political, and artistic elites come to displace the Church leadership and its clergy. For instance, in the Ottoman Empire, a couple of hundred wealthy Armenian men of the amira class held offices, were entitled to special political immunities, and dominated the Armenian millet.

Around this time the tension between the Armenian millet and the Turkish government was ebbing, partly, in light of the European diplomatic pressure on Turkey to initiate reforms in ethnic minority treatment. In 1856, in response to this pressure, every religious group was to map up its constitution and submit it to the government. The Armenian intellectual elites in Constantinople came up with one in 1857. Their plan went into effect in March, 1863. According to Hovannisian, “[l]aw-making power was now vested in a National Council of 140 representatives including 20 clerics and 80
laymen from Constantinople and 40 from the other major urban centers” (Alexander 2005:23). The latter shifted the power dynamic within the Armenian community, rendering the Church impotent as the sole community authority.

This claim of the Armenian secular elites to authority over the community is crucial, as their aspiration to major socio-economic transformations is an attempt to globally reposition and realign themselves in relation to the Ottoman Empire and West – the former viewed as immediately hegemonic yet potentially impotent if the latter’s (more desirably) pressure endured. The secular nationalist elites’ aspiration also tied their vision of producing an Armenian identity with a reconfigured map (Friedman 1994). Although symbolic as yet, it would materialize as a real claim to territory in the early 20th century, attempting to participate (to little avail) in the global reorganization of the economic and political map of the region. All these waves find their resonance in the current day secular and religious organizationally based production of Armenian identity in the diaspora in general and in the US Armenian diaspora, particularly as it is reflected in communities in the Northeastern United States, as the present project demonstrates.

**Armenian Political Parties and the Armenian Genocide:** The late 1880s and early 1890s witnessed the emergence of the first Armenian political parties as an attempt to reshuffle the alignment of the Armenians towards the Ottoman Empire. In 1887 the Hnchak party was founded. A few years later, in 1890 the Dashnak party came into existence. Both these parties were secretive organizations blending socialist ideology and Armenian nationalism (more on them in the section that follows). Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, also known as dashnak/tashnag party) was founded in 1890 in Tiflis, aiming at political emancipation, administrative autonomy of the
Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Bakalian (1992) claims that with its nationalistic and socialist platform ARF attracted peasants and artisans (94). Unlike ARF, Bakalian (1992) notes, the members of commercial and industrial bourgeoisie did not want to antagonize the government or put their position in the society at stake. They founded Ramkavar or Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLP) reflecting their interests in 1921.

Hovannisian mentions that the efforts of intellectual and political elites to seek political emancipation of Armenians from the ruling government met the repression of the Turkish authorities as the tension between them grew in 1890s, resulting in a Hnchak-inspired rebellion of Sassoun, leaving 3,000 Armenian casualties, as well as a Dashnak overtake of a Turkish bank in Constantinople demanding political reforms for Armenians. These efforts, Hovannisian notes, were followed by massacres of Armenians in 1895-1896. The death toll reached 100,000 and 200,000 among Armenians (Alexander 2005:27).

Given this, in 1908, when the reformist Young Turk faction of the Ottoman Empire seized power, Armenians were hopeful that better times lay ahead. Hovannisian reports that the Dashnak party collaborated with the new regime (an instance of realignment), while the Hnchaks did not demonstrate any particular enthusiasm regarding the new regime (Alexander 2005). The Armenian Constitutional Democratic, or Ramkavar, party was founded in Egypt the same year (Alexander 2005:39) to be reorganized into Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLP) in 1921 in Geneva.

The new regime, however, did not alleviate the situation of Armenians. World War I followed shortly. In a failed attempt at invading Transcaucasia and Persia, Enver (one of the Young Turks) started blaming the Armenians who served in their ranks. As a
result, Walker writes, Armenian soldiers “were stripped of their guns and put to exhaustive manual labor” (Alexander 2005:43). Surmelian points out that this was followed by mass deportation of the Armenians from the Armenian provinces. Publicly the Turkish government declared that, due “to necessities of war, Armenians living in those provinces close to the war front were to be forcefully relocated” (Alexander 2005:43). Most tragically, on April 23-25, 1915, several hundred Armenian intellectual, cultural, and political leaders living in Constantinople were “taken from their homes and shot, a scenario soon to be replicated throughout the empire” (Alexander 2005:43-44).

Various estimates call for as many as 400,000 to 500,000 Armenians surviving the long marches and refugee camps in northern Syria and Mesopotamia. The estimates of overall killings of 1915 are often placed between 1 million and 1.5 million by Armenian historians. According to some estimates, Minasian notes, in the result of this Genocide, 140,000 Armenian children were orphaned. Some of them found themselves in orphanages “while others had been forcibly adopted by Turkish families and compelled to accept a new nationality and religion as their own” (Alexander 2005:90). In the early 21st century, more and more Turkish citizens have come out with familial testimonies about their Armenian ancestry.9

**The first (pre-Soviet) Armenian Republic and Diaspora Relations:** In 1918, the Armenians, led by the Dashnak leaders, established their own republic and declared independence (along with the other two Transcaucasian ethnic groups: Georgians and Azeris). Armenians at this time were fighting against the Turks on three fronts. The aspirations of an ethnic political party for independence now materialize into an actual land and territory. In the Armenian ethnonationalist discourses of the late 20th
century and the early 21st century, the engagement of powerful countries with smaller ethnocultural collectivities and their claims to statehood is always treated with caution and distrust. This is a result of the events of the early 20th century Armenian history, along with other similar events from earlier periods of Armenian history.10

Some of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide settled in various countries of the Middle East where Armenian communities, both large and small, had previously been established. Iran hosted a sizeable, well-established community since 1604. Syria, Egypt and the US contained smaller communities. Some survivors settled in places where they themselves would establish a new diaspora, for instance in Argentina. Tölölyan (2000) points out that although different, these communities of the post-Genocide era shared a commitment to rebuilding diasporic institutions that used to exist in well-established diasporic communities. These institutions have been the vehicles for the reproduction of the Armenian diasporic identity in various diasporic communities, focusing in their reproduction and rebuilding on particular instances of Armenian history and accentuating particular features of Armenianness as key markers of identity discourses: educated, perseverant, hardworking, and so on. These traits, or markers, are also echoed in the diasporic organizational reproduction explored in this dissertation.

While the Genocide survivors were busy building new communities or integrating into existing communities and host societies, a new location for Armenian identity was being claimed: the Armenian Republic of 1918 and, later, Soviet (Eastern) Armenia. If in the diaspora the Armenian Apostolic Church was the biggest cultural organization in and through which Armenians often claimed who they were, the situation was different in Soviet Armenia. Since the late 1920s, the Armenian Church faced difficult times in the
newly Sovietized Armenian Republic. The government, in whose ideology religion had no functional part, except for often being suspected of “counter-revolutionary” activities, was turning some of the Church property into warehouses or destroying altogether. This is a significant factor, because it points to the fact that different kinds of Armenianness were being fostered in Soviet Armenia and in many communities of the diaspora. It also points to the fact that fostering different kinds of Armenianness also entailed alignment with different centers, or “unmarked” Armenianness.

According to Panossian (1998), a quarter of a million Armenians moved to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) between the 1920s and 1970s. This includes the “repatriation” that the Soviet Government had initiated in 1945. The internal diaspora reached one million by late 1980s. In other words, it was the footing of the communities in the internal diaspora towards the Armenian SSR and the scalar relationship with it and the place they lived that contributes to this particular framing of a diaspora and a non-diaspora. By late 1970s, 66% of Armenians in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) lived in the Armenian SSR, making it the most ethnically homogenous Republic of the Union. By the early 1990s there was between 1.5 and 2.5 million Armenians in the diaspora in 50 countries (Panossian 1998). In the early second decade of the 21st century, this number now reaches, by various estimates, from 5 to 6 million.

Tölöyan (2000) highlights the period of 1923-1965, as another wave of diasporization and terms it as Reconstruction. A key feature of the Armenian diaspora of this period is that, in Tölöyan’s terms, the communities stayed national-exilic in that parts of old and new diasporic elites were making efforts to establish or control the
religious, political, athletic, and other reconstructed institutions. Refugees, as well as earlier immigrants chose or had to live in territorialized enclaves dominated by diasporic organizations.

It is important to note that Soviet Armenia was not unproblematically accepted as the homeland by the diaspora. Panossian (1998) emphasizes that home for the diaspora was the Western/Ottoman Armenia not Eastern Armenia, which points to a particular positioning of the diaspora that later plays into the misunderstandings and unmet expectations resulting from Eastern Armenia and diaspora encounters. Panossian (1998) argues that post-Genocide diaspora underwent the same homogenizing process of claiming diasporic identity for people with various temporal and spatial Armenianesses. In this process the differences in diasporic experiences seemed to have been erased, or downplayed, and, as a result, aspects of diasporic Armenianness that might not necessarily be all diasporics’ experience were prioritized. Panossian (1998) identifies the knowledge of the Armenian language and support for the Armenian causes the key ingredients of these new priorities.12 Dashnak (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, ARF) vs. non-Dashnak division was viewed as a battle over the power of speaking for the Nation. The differing footing and scalar relationship that ARF and Armenian Liberal Democratic party elites and supporters engage in with the Soviet Armenia plays into their claims of authentic Armenianness and the physical and symbolic value/territory thereof.

Panossian (1998) views Hai Ognutian Komite (HOK), later replaced by the Committee for Cultural Relations with the diaspora (established in 1964), as a Soviet propaganda tool to propagate the legitimacy of Soviet Armenia’s claim for a genuine
and only source of Armenianness, thus attempting to control the diaspora, building and sustaining scalar relationship within which the Armenian SSR was a nourishing and nurturing center of Armenianness and framing the communities as dependent on this source for the survival of Armenianness. The latter reversed the relationship paradigm of diaspora—Armenia.

For the political elites of the Armenian SSR diaspora, was an annex with no future of its own except that it needed to be culturally and linguistically nourished from the homeland. This discourse that Armenia provides the means for the survival of the diaspora started taking root in the diaspora. Dashnak party (ARF) started shifting its position on the Armenian cause in that although at odds with the sovietization of Armenia and seeing their mission to liberate Armenia from the Soviet regime, they were striving to achieve the recognition of the Genocide, focusing also on Turkish denial. The latter led to an active anti-Turkish propaganda which resulted in acts of terrorism against Turkish diplomats in 1970s and 1980s. This, some authors argue, was an attempt to bring the Genocide recognition issue to the forefront, to reinsert it into the discourse of Armenianness and into the doing of public Armenian identity work (Panossian 1998).

It is important to point out that these discourses and the kinds of construals and representations of public Armenian identity work are a result of the post-Genocide migratory experience of second and third generation diasporan Armenians. Based on the memory of a particularly traumatic migration experience, this identity work reflects a historical Armenian experience that, due to its traumatic and devastating nature, and as embodied history (Trouillot 1995), has been picked up as a defining feature of Armenian
identity work. These identity markers do not necessarily organically emerge “through collective negotiations [or] daily mundane practices of being in a community (virtual and in multiple places)” (Little 2004a). Nevertheless, they do impact the ethnocultural imaginary within Armenian communities in the diaspora in general and are not merely circulating among the organizational elites. The organizational elites are oftentimes descendants of Genocide survivors themselves who invest time and efforts in lobbying for the Armenian Cause, namely the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by US public officials, raising awareness and money for this cause.

The doing of Armenian identity work itself has different scales: Armenian transnational; national/federal (in the host country); the larger Armenian diaspora in a given country; the specific urban/suburban diasporic community, and so on. However, prioritizing specific issues as Armenian issues and causes on the agenda of the Armenian diasporic organizational elites, e.g. lobbying efforts for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the US and Turkey nationally and transnationally; lobbying efforts for the US to provide more support to Armenia than Azerbaijan; focus on the preservation of language by the Armenian Apostolic Church, other issues that Armenian men and women face in the diasporic communities, such as current immigration issues, or issues of non-hetero sexualities become insignificant or neglected.

Tölölyan (2000) points out that the post 1965 rethinking of Armenian diasporic identity was marked by the commemoration of 50th anniversary of the Genocide in Armenia and diaspora that was initiated by a large number of educated youth (in the West). Panossian (1998), also, suggests that a discursive shift occurred after 1965. This discursive shift pointed to the new direction the diasporic communities were heading.
After 1965, Genocide recognition gained primacy over the Soviet rule on the diaspora organizations’ agendas.

Since the 1960s, travel to Armenia became, in a way, a rite of passage undertaken by few diasporan Armenians. The people who travel back to Armenia do not represent a monolithic group of people who have bought into the idea of Armenia being the homeland, although their own ancestors had left different lands for the countries they now come from. However, most diasporan Armenians that do travel to Armenia for extended periods of time, through various organizations, do come from families that have been active within the active diasporic organizations, the organizational elites that represent the diaspora to the government of Armenia, and the governments of the countries where they have offices. For many, Armenia (Soviet at the time, as well as post-Soviet after the collapse of the Soviet Union) is the homeland, however detached and removed in time and space, they heard about in their families and communities where they come to understand themselves as Armenian. For some it is the homeland that they come to contribute to, again having been raised by the idea that one needs to support and give back (aligning with the homeland) across time and space (scalar relationship) to the only homeland that Armenians have.

The efforts of the Soviet Armenian government to maintain the centrality and the largest scale has been recognized by the footing of Armenian Democratic Liberal party (ADLP), yet contested by that of ARF. Moreover, given the fact that the first independent Armenian Republic of the 20th century was ARF run, at various points in the subsequent Armenian history, the latter had demanded equal footing and scalar relationship with the kin state if not larger, in a way claiming a status of powerless state
articulated in Töölöyan 2007b). These footing and scalar relationship contestations are significant, in that they challenge the claiming of territorialization of identity and control over it that is usually exercised by a nation-state with physical borders concerned to maintain them. The latter demonstrates that the legitimacy of an existing kin-state, as the nourishing source of identity, is never a given. Through this territorialization and reterritorialization of Armenianness, the ARF acts as a stateless power even when there is a kin-state, granted with priorities not coinciding with ARF’s (Töölöyan 2007b).

**Post-Soviet Republic of Armenia and Diaspora Relations:** One of my consultants, a young diasporan Armenian woman from New York who spent extended periods of time in the post-Soviet Armenia through different organizations and projects, working and teaching, queers the circulating discourses of Armenianness and homeland in the Armenian transnation in general, but particularly in the diaspora:

Dani: I guess, growing up with this sense of Armenianness means culturally preserving [1sec pause] this collective preservation is something that is activated in some ways. And then it manifests itself as its own kind of identity. Going to Armenia was confronting that idea. It was, like, *this is not what everybody said.* Like, homeland, what does that mean? When I first went to Armenia I was like, *Oh, I feel like I’m home.* It felt really comfortable, you know. I was able to find myself in a lot of ways that I wasn’t able to find myself. Finding myself I mean coming to a real sense of self-awareness. And then my second trip to Armenia was kind of, like, the continuation of cultural masturbation in a way. And then my third trip to Armenia, and it’s, like, getting your feet wet. You have all this historical baggage and this idea and you go and you’re like, *Oh, this is so great...* And the third time I was able to be so comfortable with myself and feel at ease with myself and my feelings as a human being, not a certain kind of human being. And I realized I had come to such clear understandings of what I wanted as a person, because Armenia to me represented everything that I seemed to, it was contrary to the way I was raised, my moral values, my everything. I think subconsciously, so in a way I was able to see myself so clearly, because everything around me was really, just completely not me. The third time in Armenia was, like, that realization, *Oh, now I know why I was feeling that good before, because what I didn’t realize before gave me an opportunity to counteract, you know, juxtapose myself.* And you know, you are able to see what kind of person you are in counter situations. And I started to feel angry, I
started to feel a lot of people get trapped in that nostalgia, that romanticized idea, but they don’t step back and think, *Maybe I’m feeling this great, because I have a greater sense of agency, because I know for certain this is not how I was raised. This is not the ground I am standing on that I grew up. And all of its implications.*

This queer diasporic interrogation of the spatiotemporally situated ethnic identity work ("this collective preservation is something that is activated in some ways. And then it manifests itself as its own kind of identity. Going to Armenia was confronting that idea") confronts the dominant discourses of Armenian identity, homeland, and nostalgia. This will be picked up in the ethnographic discussion later in chapter 5. The argument that Dani makes regarding the claims to Armenianness that differ both in Armenia and the diaspora (Panossian 1998) have been ongoing in the 20th and 21st centuries.

After the 1988 Karabakh movement, and Armenia’s independence from Soviet rule in 1991, the diaspora and Armenia reidentified each other as both resource and problem at the same time.\(^{14}\) ARF that had been calling for independent Armenia for decades would still oppose the post-Soviet government of Armenia, whereas the non-Dashnak faction embraced the newly formed government. Here again, we see different alignments toward a particular center (homeland/kin-state), or rejection thereof as a center or homeland contributes to different identity producing discourses.

It is also noteworthy that the diasporicity of the traditional Armenian political parties has been marked by their engagement in ethnopolitics, the focus of which and whose positionality would shift in response to the sociopolitical climate of a given time in history. However, these diasporic political parties differ from regular political parties competing for political power within a given country, as the Armenian diasporic political parties were not political actors in their host societies (Melkonyan 2005). Nonetheless,
because they were called political parties, the Armenian population of the Republic of Armenia expected them to have the skills of such actors when they became active in Armenia after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Melkonyan 2005).

There was a short period in the early years of Armenia’s independence when the diaspora–Armenia relations were collaborative. The latter manifested itself in diasporan Armenians receiving governmental appointments.\textsuperscript{15} It was also this time when a few diasporans settled in Armenia, others offered their professional skills, yet others participated in the Karabakh war. Although the contact between the diasporans and the local Armenians was an opportunity to better know each other, it also fed misconceptions.

**Ministry of Diaspora:** In 2008, the newly elected President Serge Sargsyan fulfilled one of his campaign pledges to highlight and strengthen the relationship with the Armenian diaspora. On October 8, 2008 the Ministry of Diaspora started operating by the Presidential decree. Among other things, the Ministry aims at:

- Overcoming the disagreements between the old and the new diasporas
- Training young professionals in the area of diaspora studies
- Accessing information on the issues Armenian communities face through the use of new technologies
- Bringing Armenians who do not belong to the Armenian Church and do not speak Armenian back to their roots, and so on.

The ministry emphasizes the important role of the diaspora organizations in collaborating with the Ministry (especially the more established ones). The four pillars of the preservation of Armenianness, according to the Minister of Diaspora, are: 1.
maintaining the language; 2. maintaining and spreading the Armenian culture overseas; 3. traditions of the Armenian family; 4. Armenian Church/religion (e-mail to author, November 14, 2008).

And if these pillars are the core aspects of Armenianness, this potentially excludes the diversity of Armenian identity articulation, mostly those non-heterosexual; non-Armenian speakers; not spreading Armenian culture; having different family traditions; and not belonging to the Armenian Church. Although the Minister mentions that every individual Armenian and Armenian institution of the diaspora is their partner, the mission of the Ministry seems to politically and strategically reproduce the long established discourses of Armenianness.

At the same time this becomes an avenue for the kin-State to strengthen its hegemonic power over the diaspora, on the one hand, reinserting itself as the center, to which the diasporic elites should be aligned. On the other hand, albeit with varying political and cultural circumstances, much like the economies of countries such as Mexico, Croatia, and Serbia, Armenian economy as well is dependent on remittances.16

States, as Wallerstein notes (1991), both those they want and those they intend to regulate. In the absence of an Armenian state as such, the diasporic organizations take on this aspiration. Depending upon the diasporic organizations’ positioning toward the existing Armenian state, in the event when there is a kin state (e.g. pre-soviet, Soviet Armenia, or post-Soviet Republic), and through their relational positioning towards each other, issues of authenticity become an arduous negotiation.

Positioning itself as the caretaker of its dispersed communities, the Republic of Armenia transcends transnational borders through its aspirations to re-Armenianize, and
thus re-territorialize the Armenian communities within their host countries. On the other hand, as Little (2010, personal communication) points out, “[c]onvincing [the diasporic organizational elites] to reconnect with the homeland could mean substantial amounts of money from tourism, capital investments, and remittances. Identity would be a political ploy to shore up a weak national economy.” In other words, not only do individuals and groups scale jump to signal their positioning towards particular kin states, but so do the states themselves, signaling the social territory they are trying to control and regulate even if it is in another nation-state.

Hence, looking at the diaspora organizations as identity claimants with claims to a territory or re-territorialization, as part of historical dynamics of global system (Friedman 1994), allows me to handle the diaspora history in a more meaningful way. Situated in the above discussed historical circumstances there have been many significant organizations that have played pivotal roles in producing Armenian identity transnationally, I will touch on them briefly and instead focus on a few organizations that have been active in more recent diasporic history and whose influence and resonance in the diaspora is relevant for the current project.

**Institutions of the Diaspora**

Although the efforts of the transnationally active Armenian diasporic organizations do raise transnational Armenian issues, such as the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, or support for the Armenians in Syria, many times more efforts are put into raising issues and funds for Armenia-related causes, such as lobbying for the US support for Armenia and Karabakh, raising money for various projects in Armenia. One such instance was the rallies that many diasporan organizations organized against the
August 2012 extradition by Hungarian officials of an Azerbaijani officer who had axed a sleeping Armenian officer.¹⁷ The extradition caused a social outrage around the world and many diasporic Armenian communities organized rallies in front of the Hungarian and Azerbaijani consulates/embassies around the world. Generated by global social dramas, diasporas are still locally rooted and involved in local struggles for power and recognition at various scales: within the community and within the host society. Werbner (1998) also argues that these public spheres are porous where the diasporic movements occupy their distinct niches with an attempt to influence wider public realms and centers of power, for example, lobbying for Armenian causes at the legislative branch of the host country.

Given the complicated and complex nature of what it means to belong to a diaspora, *Armenian diaspora* or *mainstream Armenian diasporic circles* in this research will be used to refer to those organizational elites that, as Silverstein (2003) points out, have heightened linguistic and cultural sensitivities (also articulated in Tölölyan 2007b) and are committed to sustaining relations with kin communities, as well as (a designated/named/imagined) homeland/kin-state (Tölölyan 2007b). Diasporas’ boundaries keep shifting both horizontally vis-à-vis other similar/different diasporic communities, as well as vertically as part of the system within which the elites define themselves as diasporic (Tölölyan 2007b) and impart on them the responsibility to consciously imagine themselves as functioning as one collective, while other diverse and dispersed non-mainstream diasporic articulations make smaller scale vibrations. It is the locally produced diasporic experience that sustains the transnational diaspora, as the global arena of identity production is informed by the interaction “between the local
practice and the dynamic of global positioning” (Friedman 1994:117). And it is the variously gendered articulations of these interactions that I will be exploring in the following four substantive chapters.

The production of a particular diasporic identity, Tölölyan (2000) claims, is marked by the organization, its political standpoint, and resources invested. The struggle over the new producers of identity is also shaped by the current Republic of Armenia. Panossian (1998) states that the Republic of Armenia and the diaspora have different priorities, however. For the former the Karabakh issue, regional peace, and economy, for the latter, Genocide recognition, anti-Turkishness, fear of assimilation, religious and cultural practices, and then the unification of Karabakh to the nation-state are the primary issues.18

Panossian (1998) recognizes different historicities with different consequences and values for the diaspora and Armenia. The sense of belonging to a very heterogeneous diaspora might result in homelands and not a homeland, he argues. Despite competing and contested identities, the sense of belonging to one nation, not spatially bound necessarily, persists, however. Panossian (1998) argues that identity reproducing diasporic institutions replace state institutions in the absence of the latter.

When the Armenian encounter with the transnational moment had been through migration for economic reasons, nostalgia became part of the daily life. When the encounter was a result of an imminent or ongoing catastrophe, the experience of the catastrophe strongly impacted the cultural identity work and political commitments involved (Tölölyan 2007b), often tied to loss and redress. Exilic nationalism coupled with diasporic transnationalism, Tölölyan argues, along with more frequently circulating
identity discourse elements, such as, language, religion, and kinship links, are instrumental in the production of particular kinds of diasporic Armenianness.

Again, much of the success of the diasporic cultural reproduction is due to the imagination through which particular memories (on an individual level) and history (on a group level) are consciously evoked: “the performance of difference, the cultivation of ideologies of identity, and the institutionalization of practices of connection to the homeland” (Tölölyan 2007b:650). Much of the project of public identity production and representation at particular scales is often a political project with historical and temporal particularities that are evoked, enacted, and reinserted in present day representations thereof. The organizationally based claims to identity in the Armenian diaspora, as we will see, have their historicity that is significantly consequential in the present. Over time, with the re-territorialized Armenianness there developed a shift to transnation, albeit at different pace in different locations (residual in Ethiopia, emerging in Sweden).

Although there are many important diasporic Armenian organizations that have been the key agents of Armenian identity producing processes, I will touch upon those that are taken up by the ethnographic work of this dissertation. According to Tölölyan (2000) “[n]early all consist of four categories of people who exist at different levels of integration into the host society: the assimilated or nearly assimilated; the comfortably ethnicized; the new migrants and refugees who still hold on to, or are in the grip of, traditional homeland identities; and the diasporic element” (91). He does not view these as stages of development, instead allows for reversals and intermediate stabilities. In the meantime, my consultants, some of whom are active in the mainstream, Armenian diasporic circles, some of whom are active in queer Armenian diasporic circles, and yet
others, who are active in US mainstream queer circles, or queers of color movement, may mobilize various features of the above four that Tölöyan (2000) proposes, hence their subjectivities, albeit shifting and stable at the same time are not so easy to pinpoint.

Tölöyan (2000) suggests that the more successful an organization is transnationally, the more successful it is locally, where new members are being recruited. The most successful activists represent themselves as rooted and routing (Clifford 1994). Transnational agendas are sustained via the global scapes. Currently the diasporic institutions of permanent Armenian transnation engage with the (1) host society, (2) homeland/kin country, and (3) the global/transnational. Little (2010, personal communication) insightfully noted that, “in order to effectively operate there is fluidity among these spheres.” The identity work of key diasporic Armenian organizations, especially religious organizations, is intertwined with sustaining the traditional patriarchal morality. And it is this kind of Armenian identity that non-heterosexual Armenians attempt to make sense of and delink or reinterpret when they claim their ethnodiasporic identities.

The Armenian Church: One such significant organization engaged in the local, as well as transnational production of Armenianness is the Armenian Apostolic Church. The head of the Armenian Apostolic Church is the Catholicos of All Armenians elected for life, presently his Holiness Garegin II. His residence is the Holy See of Echmiadzin, Republic of Armenia. The next in the Apostolic Church hierarchy is the Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia (in Lebanon), currently His Holiness Aram I. Next in importance is the Patriarch of Jerusalem, currently His Holiness Torkom Manoogian, and lastly is the
Patriarch of Constantinople, His Beatitude Archbishop Mesrob II Mutafyan (in Istanbul, Turkey).

As a transnational institution the Armenian Apostolic Church has dioceses in most Armenian communities around the world. Although all the above mentioned Catholicates and Patriarchates are part of the Armenian Apostolic Church Hierarchy, they have autonomy, though at their own scale and remaining within the hierarchy. Because of particular historical developments and disagreements along the diasporic traditional Armenian political party lines regarding who represents the Armenian people (and how), there has been a split between the Holy See of Echmiadzin and that of Cilicia: the former representing those non-Dashnak and pro-Soviet Armenia at the time, and the latter representing the Dashnaks, Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and their lack of acknowledgement of Soviet Armenia as their homeland.

In the US the Armenian Apostolic Church is represented through the Holy See of Echmiadzin and the Holy See of Cilicia. Presently, the tension between the two seems to have worn down. There are still small communities that have two churches, one supporting and supported by Dashnaks, and another by non-Dashnaks. There are, however, Armenian communities where the two churches support each other and collaborate on major Armenian events. And when this is the case, it is very strategically reiterated in the public speeches, as well as among the community members. The Church involved in this research is one such example (see chapter 2).

Besides having organizations within the Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church has affiliate organizations, summer camps, and seminaries. All serve as local sites for recruiting new members as well as micro-scale reproduction of Armenianness. Through
its center in Echmiadzin, currently in the Republic of Armenia, as well as dioceses in the Armenian communities in different countries, the Church, thus reproduces Armenianness both locally – which has different flavors in different locales—as well as transnationally, as a collective symbol of Christian Armenianness. The Church, however, is not the only diasporic organization engaged in this.

**Lobbying and Ethnocultural organizations:** The temporality and spatiality of the diasporic organizations emerge as a response to particular historical moments and global and local circumstances, wherein the diasporas engage with the States in particular ways signaling their peripheral positions and/or the centers they align toward, whether within Empires or democratic Nation States (Wallerstein 1991). This refers to the Armenian Apostolic Church with its centering role and status for Armenian communities in the absence of a nation-state, as well as in its presence. It also refers to the political parties emerging at the backdrop of the Armenian community’s economic hardships in the declining Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and the growing influence and desirability of the Western political powers, on the other. Lobbying organizations emerge from the aforementioned political parties, such as ARF founded Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA); philanthropic organizations such as Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), or others; research and educational institutions such as Zoryan Institute and the American University of Armenia (AUA).

Depending on the footing of particular diasporic organizations, whether they are aligned towards the Armenian kin-state as a center or the Armenian transnation with no particular center at a particular moment, in particular geo-sociopolitical circumstances, the traditional political parties and the organizations that they manage promote and
produce particular kinds of Armenianness. Panossian (1998) mentions the shifting and overlapping nature of diasporic and ethnic identities that have varying temporality and spatiality between and within communities.

The success of diasporic organizations in Armenia shapes their activity in the diaspora (e.g. ARF). Armenian diasporic organizations in the US financially support Armenian-American or Armenian cause sympathizing American politicians. Voluntary donations of finances and time sustain the institutions. Institutions are reworking their take on the creation of new identity discourses to relocate and maintain influence. Tölölyan (2007b) situates the production of Armenianness within the artistic/literary domain and foresees persistence of highly agile diasporic institutions.

Diasporic organizational elites involving clergy, philanthropists, smaller scale donors, volunteers, intellectuals, scholars, and artists maintain networks and links with Armenia as a homeland, as well as among different communities (e.g. an Argentinean Armenian rock band performing in Los Angeles). They do so through mobilizing members of Armenian communities in their respective locales. In their active engagement with the diasporic reproduction and representation of Armenianness, the elites, as Tölölyan (2007b) rightly notes, “draw from and intervene in the culture and debates of the homeland” (114). The heterogeneity of the Armenian diaspora and their varying footing manifest themselves in the different agendas of various organizations in terms of the ways of relating to Armenia, other communities, and their host society. The diasporic organizational elites and the Armenian community members, are, in Alexander’s terms, in symbiotic marketing relationship, where the commodity marketed is the idea of collective identity (Alexander 2005).
The Armenian diasporic communities are typically heterogeneous, especially in relation to each other and to the symbolic centers they align themselves to. The temporal and politico-economic positionality of particular communities, their scalar relationship with the existing Republic of Armenia at a given time or the absence thereof are crucial in their production of Armenianness. Although, Armenians in various diasporic communities in different countries, in general, like to pride themselves on the fact that they have done well socioeconomically, the processes of immigration are ongoing – with Armenians immigrating to different countries with varying socioeconomic and symbolic resources, from different places.

Most recent waves include Armenians from war-torn Syria and Iraq, where they also used to do fiscally well, as well as from the Republic of Armenia. Although, these different cultural backgrounds contribute to the current uneven socioeconomic circumstances that Armenians in different countries find themselves in, the collective imaginary and discourses of Armenianness that become a symbolic center for Armenians with different socioeconomic backgrounds also shift, yet almost always include the issue of the Armenian Genocide recognition, although with varying senses of urgency. The collective memory of the historical trauma is still salient, whether the identity seekers involved are rich or not, are invested in transnational Armenian organizations, or not, are Genocide survivor descendants or not. There is also a (loose) sense of Armenian culture (both high culture, as well as mundane familial everydayness).

Various diasporic communities are shaped by different sociohistorical circumstances. For example, the Lebanese Armenian diaspora shaped its identity in response to its residence in Lebanon along with the sociopolitical environment of the
times in which it was founded and existed. This identity differs in behavior as well as in
dialect from the Armenian communities living in Iran, which in their turn are also
different from the French Armenian diasporic communities. These differences do not
only manifest spatiality, but also temporality, depending whether the diasporic
community is residual, as in Ethiopia; emergent, as in Sweden and Hungary; or
dominant, as in USA and Argentina (Tölölyan 2007a).

Besides inter-community differences, Armenian diasporic communities also have
had internal cultural or political divisions as stated above. There are, however, elements
that seem to have been present in the key circulating discourses of Armenianness, some
of which were discussed earlier, across the diaspora since the early 20th century. And
the organizations that run the Armenian diasporic circles and represent their respective
communities articulate and highlight particular trends of Armenianness within the
countries they are in, transnationally, and in relation to the Republic of Armenia as
pointed out above.

In her comments below, Dani poignantly demonstrates not only her self-
reflection and awareness of the nostalgic, ahistoricized source of her sense of ethnic
subjectivity, but also her willingness to embrace these pervasive dominant discourses of
Armenianness:

Dani: So I went to Armenia last time with Birthright, another sponsorship in a
way.22 And I really loved, as stupid, or romantic, nostalgic, or whatever, I don’t
even care if they bother me to a certain extent. I really loved the moments that,
like, there were people from all over the world in the car, in the van
together….We would be in the van and a song would come on. And maybe a
Komitas song, or whatever, and everybody would know the words or tune. And
that for me was touching, you know, because here we were all these strangers
from all these cultural backgrounds: American, Argentinian, from France, another
one from the Middle East. And everybody, you know, it was really special. It’s
romantic, maybe it’s nostalgic, I don’t know. It felt really special, it’s like finding
someone, I don’t know, in the street or at the café we start talking and you
realize we read the same childhood book, the most shared, the dearest
childhood book that has really shaped you in a lot of ways. Like, your mom read,
both your moms read to you about the same yellow duck, which is something so
precious to you. It’s like the same thing.

If in her first excerpts, Dani problematizes the homogeneity of Armenian identity and its
relationship to the post-Soviet Armenia as a homeland, in the above excerpt she
uncomfortably and consciously embraces the sense of shared past. In fact, almost all of
my research consultants, queer and non-queer alike, evoke these elements of nostalgia
and ethnic commonality despite the different backgrounds.

The transnational forms of discourses circulating between elites and institutions
in cyberspace along with the local mobilizing efforts of organizations is key in connecting
and engaging various ethnodiasporic groups in different communities. The Armenian-
American lobbyists are prime example of the above. Not only have they been
successfully presenting Armenia in a favorable light to the US government since 1991
and contributed to the strengthening of the relationship between the two countries, but
they continuously rally and mobilize their base locally as well as translocally through
online social networking sites, among other channels. Panossian (1998) considers the
Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act and Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act that barred
US assistance to Azerbaijan for the blockade of Armenia and Karabakh some of the
biggest achievements of the Armenian lobby in Washington D.C. This is also coupled
with the efforts that ensure that Armenia receives a large amount of aid ($120-150
million a year). Also, as recently as January of 2007 the US House of Representatives
passed a resolution (106) on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.
The “who” of the representation of the Armenian nation is another very important issue that often becomes an apple of discord. Is the RA president the president of all Armenians no matter where they live? Should the diaspora be part of the transnation? Should it be a polity in its own right? These are some of the issues the diasporics are grappling with in their local and transnational work. Heterogeneous entities that have varying interests at heart and consequently heterogeneous identities comprise the Armenian nation. The “how” of relating to Armenia separates the Armenians in the diaspora, yet the idea of relating itself keeps them united.

Clifford points out that “[t]he centering of diasporas around an axis of origin and return overrides the specific local interactions (identifications and "dis-identifications," both constructive and defensive) necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social forms” (1994:322). Although acknowledging the permanence of the diaspora and importance of interconnectedness, the government of the Republic of Armenia, along with diaspora organizations that focus on Armenia as the source of Armenianess, thus, complicate Tölölyan’s definition of transnation and Clifford’s comment above.

These organizations share an imagining of the Armenian transnation – dispersed across nations at different times in different ways from different places – yet as transnational organizations they look up to Armenia as a reinvented homeland and source of Armenianness. On the other hand, Armenia recognizes the significant potential of the large number (3500) of diasporic Armenian organizations representing the Armenian diaspora by establishing a Ministry of Diaspora. Through the mission and objectives of the Ministry, the State of Armenia seems to be making an effort to bend
the rest of the Armenian transnation toward itself by positioning itself as the center of the transnation.

The Armenian government also works to render the lingering perspective of some diaspora identity reproducing agents (individual intellectuals, organizations) that Armenia views the diaspora as a "milking cow" as a misconception. They do so through creating new opportunities for diasporan Armenians in different spheres of life in Armenia (making room for their professional expertise), offering equal access to health care services and Armenian visas for less cost, offering scholarships for diaspora Armenian students, offering scholarships for diaspora Armenian students, and offering to publish diaspora authors, supporting artists, and training teachers. At the same time, the way Armenia seems to define the "needs" of the diaspora still indexes Armenia as its center. The mission of the Ministry of Diaspora reads as a tailored recognition of and respect for the Armenianness produced by the diaspora organizations anchored in the essentialisms (even with the use of high technologies) of land, language, and Armenian Church.

Using the electronic communication as a new electronic diasporic public sphere, through which the discourses are immediately globalized, the diasporic political parties continue rallying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, propagating Armenian language and culture, and so on. This strategic approach is channeling a particular kind of Armenianness, which at certain points overlaps with the mission of the Ministry of Diaspora and its pillars of preservation of Armenianness or attempts to re-Armenianize the diasporans. In other words, the State of Armenia recognizes the Armenianness channeled by the traditional political parties, major organizations without particular
sensitivity to any other possible Armeniannesses, defining it as proper and appropriate. The Armenian project of the US Armenian diasporic elites is caught up between a yearning for homeland triangulated, looking back to Armenia that does not exist (more desirable), or the RA that exists (relationship with which is complex), and the politico-economically possible.

With the above in mind, below I give a brief overview of the Armenian-American diaspora and how the diasporic identity reproducing agents interact with their local sociopolitical circumstances (within the US), along with the sociopolitical circumstances of their homeland(s) often evoking the historicity that has shaped it, thus engaging with various scale actors.

**The Armenian-American Diaspora**

As the above sections demonstrated, identity production is “very much part of the historical dynamics of global system” (Friedman 1994:101). And if in traditional systems, manifested in this particular case by the Ottoman Empire, identity is to be sought within the larger social network of the Empire (in the case of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire a weaker case wherein the local identity endured within the larger hierarchical system), “in modern systems it is concentrated in the body” (Friedman 1994:31). As many scholars, such as Sol Tax in the 1940s, Judith Butler in 1980s-1990s have argued, identity, thus, is no longer defined by substance, rather by social relations (Little, 2010 personal communication, also see Friedman 1994), the doing of identity work through participation in the public production thereof and/or evocations of substance. This distinction allows us to understand the contemporary identity performance evoking certain historical and spatial specificity. And the diasporic public
spheres, imaginaries, and discourses point to the representations of the scalar relationships and positions of the diasporic identity production.

The US Armenian diasporic elites have been important interlocutors in the Armenian diasporic public spheres. They have also had a tangible participation in pursuing transnational Armenian causes along with causes pertaining to the three Armenian Republics in the 20th and 21st centuries. This section details how the US Armenian active diasporic agents operationalize their pre-migration histories and the stances they take vis-à-vis the major players in issues Armenian, whether the US, as a here-and-now sociopolitical, economic center, or the Armenian Republic at a given point in time. It also demonstrates, the significance of the local production of and claim to identity as part of transnational/global scale processes, as well as part of US ethnic minority politics, which itself has been negotiated and molded in response to the global processes at certain points in the 19th and 20th centuries. All the key features of the historical Armenian experience in the US detailed in the section have been evoked by my research participants and will be illustrated in the ethnographic chapters to follow.

Bakalian (1992) notes that the social history of the emergence of the Armenian-American diasporic community, though different from other ethnic groups in certain ways, is similar to the experiences that Jews, Greeks, and Italians arriving in the US between late 1800s and in the first half of the 20th century had.25 Armenian-American diasporic community was shaped by particular waves of immigration that were themselves transnational border crossing responses to sociopolitical circumstances with particular temporality and historicity complicated by various scale processes (local, national, regional, and global).
Each of these waves touched, involved, and moved people of particular positionings within the nested social hierarchies of the locales they were coming from. Coupled with the sociopolitical circumstances of particular times the diasporic communities were taking shape, this factor contributed differently to the shifting conditions of the production of Armenianness in the new place and within the newly found nested social hierarchies of the US. Historicizing the migratory waves demonstrates how particular past experiences/memories evoked are implicated in the identity production in particular ways (e.g. shifting from more traditional and local construction of identity to more extensively transnational production).

**First wave of immigration (1800s-1960s):** In 1880s it was mainly the Armenian laborers and artisans migrating to the US. Following the 1890s massacres in the Ottoman Empire, some 12,500 Armenians immigrated into the US for the period 1891-98, followed by some 51,950 immigrants between 1899-1914 again “fleeing the massacres and political unrest” (Bakalian 1992:9). Mirak (1983) postulates that in pre-World War I years Armenian immigrants lived in a nationalist environment in which their foreign habits were looked upon with contempt.

In the times of explicit nativist, anti-immigrant, nationalist sentiment of the early 1900s, Alexander (2005) points out, that Armenian-Americans had to fight for their right to become naturalized citizens. The latter at certain points would be translated into asserting their right to self-identifying as “white.” In Fresno, Armenians, much like Asian immigrants, were prevented from purchasing properties on the basis of their “Asiatic” status (Mirak 1983). Odjanian states that the US Circuit Court of Appeals later ruled that Armenians are “Caucasians” upon the testimony of Franz Boas (Bakalian 1992). After
World War I, the Armenian Genocide survivors started to appear in the US. In 1920, according to Bakalian (1992), 10,212 Armenians immigrated to the US.

**From Race to Ethnicity:** After the quota system went into effect in 1924 the Armenian immigration was stalled. Armenian-Americans’ negotiation of their race was still continuing in the 1920s. The new immigrant population concentrated in urban areas changing the urban scapes of the US. Often marked by poverty, unemployment, and crime, as well as shifting prejudices, these ethnic pockets nurtured diverse cultural lives. In light of the *unhyphenated American* ideal of 1910s and 1920s, racism was still part of academia as well (Heinze 2003).

The pressure of “dual identity,” as Heinze (2003) points out, was also something that the immigrants of various statuses had to deal with every day. On the one hand, there was a pressure to conform to the ways of the majority and, on the other, the pressure to deal with the cultural baggage that they brought with them. Against this background, European immigrants, according to Heinze, who had decided to settle in the US, “oscillated between feelings of gratitude for the freedoms they enjoyed and feelings of nostalgia for their homelands” (2003:159).

The increased US xenophobia and fear for its ethnic future is a result of migration waves from the “wrong” countries such as China, Mexico, Korea, and Muslim nations that came to replace the earlier “wrong” countries, such as Italy, Poland, and Germany. The “wrongness” is understood from the “unmarkedness” of the white center. And if the immigrants from the earlier “wrong countries” were eventually labeled as “white,” which assisted them in accessing socioeconomic resources to improve their
situation, the later immigrants from these new “wrong” countries are having a harder
time to fit into the mainstream and the familiar “whiteness” (Bayor 2003).

According to the results of 1920 census, there were 37,647 Armenian speaking
foreign-born persons in the United States, and 52,840 Armenian-speaking persons
American and foreign-born together. By the mid-1920s the number of Armenians in the
US is estimated around 80,000 that includes the “non-Armenian-speaking descendants
of immigrants” (Alexander 2005:89). By the 1920s, the Armenians had an established
economic community (much like the Chinese in later decades) that played a pivotal role
in easing the way for the new settlers into the local Armenian community and the
American economy at the same time (Mirak 1983). The village/province-based social
networks – the traditional ethnicity transplanted to the “Modern West” – defined the life
of the Armenian-American community in the 1920s. The latter resulted in founding
compatriotic societies and associations. Many of these associations would engage in
fundraising for their respective villages and provinces, signaling the alignment toward a
homeland elsewhere that sustained their identity production locally.

In late 1920s the Armenian dimension started to become more abstract, shifting
their positioning again. Imagination becomes an important aspect of maintaining
Armenian-Americans’ sense of Armenianness, especially for the American-born
generation. After 1930s the Armenian-American politically active organizations’ efforts to
lobby for laws favoring Armenians and hindering the normalization of the relationships
with Turkey had lost their momentum and for the most part went unnoticed and
unnoticeable (Alexander 2005).
Different definitions of Armenia by Dashnaks (ARF) and non-Dashnaks, mostly Ramkavars (ADLP) called Armenian-Americans to choose sides and versions of Armenia and Armenianness. Thus, the Armenian-American media of the time, newspapers in particular, became the diasporic public sphere (in Pnina Webner’s terms) where the battles over “whats,” “whens,” and “hows” of being Armenian and positioning toward the homeland were held and shaped between Dashnaks and non-Dashnaks.

In 1933 Archbishop Tourian’s assassination by the members of Dashnak party deepened the schism between those sympathizing the ARF and those who did not, both in the diocese assembly and among community members. For Dashnaks, Tourian symbolically undermined the nationalist, revolutionary struggle for an autonomous homeland toward which they aligned themselves, given their recent state-building history through which they defined their sense of Armenianness (Alexander 2005). Along with the aspiration to liberate the homeland, ARF and pro-Dashnak Armenian-Americans have had the highest rate of Armenian language retention and have actively supported Armenian language schools. Also they are much more actively involved in Genocide commemoration events. At the same time, the number of Dashnaks or their sympathizers attending the Armenian Church is much lower than that of the non-Dashnaks (Bakalian 1992). Thus, the ARF version of Armenianness hinged on particular points in recent Armenian history, one celebratory (1918 independent Republic), one traumatic (the Genocide), along with engaging the retention of the Armenian language as a crucial marker of their ethnopolitics. ARF interest in the Church extended as far as the Church supported their political aspirations of liberating the homeland and achieving the recognition of the Genocide. In other words, their political ideology, or, in Wiesel’s
terms, their “civil religion” (although Tölölyan’s “secular religion” seems more appropriate) seemed to have replaced the actual Church as a religious institution, a significant element present in the circulating discourses on Armenian identity.

This schism albeit muted, still echoes in diasporic public spheres of the 21st century. Consider one of my consultants, Kristine, an Armenian-American woman in her late 30s, who works for a nondenominational Armenian organization.

Kristine: I am very happy that I’m living in the [Xcity] community, where there aren’t those divisions as much. I just feel lucky, when I hear about these divisions and I see it in my job, I am so thankful that I’m in this area...You have no idea how much I’ve seen this in young people too. In my family, my father was raised on the Echmiadzin side, and my mom was tashnag, hard core tashnag. It’s just when I go to [Highemyes] meetings and I have people ask, Can I invite my tashnag friends? I mean it literally happens everywhere I go. I’m like, Of course you can. They can also be on this committee. We’re not gonna say no. All you can do [is] unite people. And if you extend an invitation, the official response will be no, but then people will show up... So, I pride myself on the fact that Highemyes is open. But it’s just, it’s hard for tashnags to go over tashnag lines. At meetings sometimes people raise their hands and would go I grew up tashnag and my family wouldn’t like this and probably wouldn’t want me at this meeting.

In her comments above, Kristine reflects on the lingering consequences of this schism that she encounters in diasporic Armenian communities across the US. She also indexes the ways this issue is worked out at different scales: on the scale of an organization the schism along the traditional Armenian political party lines lingers (“if you extend an invitation, the official response will be no”), yet on the micro scale of the individual diasporics, the response is different (“but then people will show up”).

Besides the division along party lines, Bakalian (1992) observes that another kind of boundary building developed within the Armenian-American community. After World War II, Bakalian argues that Soviet Armenians became objects of jokes and stereotypes within the Armenian-American community, viewed as dishonest, “playing the system,”
oftentimes behaving in ways consistent with the former USSR (e. g. bribing public officials). Bakalian hastens to argue that crime and delinquency are byproducts of low socioeconomic situation that many immigrant groups had to face at the early stages of their settlement in the US (the Irish, Jews, Greeks, and Italians). Note that Bakalian likens the Armenian immigrant experience to the “white” minority groups that have long been destigmatized and ethnicized.

**Second Wave (1965-1980s):** The meaning of race, Guglielmo and Lewis (2003) argue, underwent a meaning shift between 1930 and 1965. If in the 1930s race meant that a number of racial and ethnic groups, such as African-Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/Latina Americans and others did not legally have the same access to various resources as the Americans considered white, it also meant that certain European groups, although generally labeled as white and with a wider access to certain resources than those non-white, faced prejudice and discrimination.

By 1965, Guglielmo and Lewis (2003) mention, there was a major shift in this racial paradigm in that there were no longer any distinctions among the European groups. Now Italians, Poles, Jews, the Irish were considered “ethnic groups.” The latter fact of ethnicization freed them from societal discrimination based on their degree of whiteness. The East Europeans, who at the beginning of the 20th century were discriminated against for not being “fully white,” ended up using whiteness instrumentally for economic and social advancement. The above reinforces Blommaert, Silverstein’s and others’ approach to the performative nature of race and ethnicity.31

Armenians started experiencing this shift of classification and paradigm on the state level in the early 1920s. By the mid-1960s they found various niches for their
economic and social success using their “whiteness” certificate or pass “issued to them” by anthropologists (“experts”) in the early 1920s. The white privilege, as I will demonstrate in the later ethnographic chapters, is taken up differently, depending on the scaling and footing through which various individuals or groups of Armenians understand their identity in relation to various temporal and spatial places, such as the country/ies of their origin, the US, the kin Armenian State, and other major players in the Armenian diasporic public spheres.

A new wave of Armenian immigrants picked up after 1965 liberalization of the quota law. This was a new wave of Armenians fleeing the political turmoil in the Middle East (civil war in Lebanon, Islamic revolution in Iran). According to the 1980 US census 65% of Iranian Armenians immigrated to the US between 1975 and 1980 as opposed to 9% prior to 1959 (Bakalian 1992). Three quarters of Iranian Armenians, according to Bakalian (1992), settled in Los Angeles. Here it is important to note that in the Middle Eastern Armenian communities there has been a history (heritage from Soviet times) of maintaining ties with Armenia (previously Soviet Armenia and now post-Soviet Republic of Armenia): visiting Armenia, sending children to Armenia for education and vacation, holding exhibitions, giving plays and concerts along with hosting cultural events with the participation of Armenian artists, actors, musicians, and so on.

Another wave of Armenian immigrants to the US in 1970s and 1980s, some 47,700 (Heitman 1986), was from Soviet Armenia, mainly descendants of the repatriated Armenians (in 1946 and 1960) unable to integrate into the Soviet society. Bakalian (1992) goes on to say that with the exception of Fresno, California, where Armenians engaged in agricultural production, Armenian immigrants of the late 19th
century and early 20th century settled in metropolitan areas on the East Coast (New York, Providence, RI, Worcester, MA, Chicago, MI, and so on). Unlike other immigrant groups, Bakalian (1992) claims, Armenians were literate; although Mirak (1983) points out that the very early Armenian immigrants were uneducated peasants, who, when and if joined by their families, made sure to send their children to public schools. It was in this institution of public schooling that the new generation of Armenians would be disciplined in the American way.

Recent Armenian immigrants, on the other hand, are no longer the poor or illiterate peasants anymore. The new immigrants are most likely to have some English, if not proficient English. The vast majority of the recent immigrants have had urban environment experience unlike the earliest Armenian immigrants. The affluent Chinese immigrant-investors, according to Ong (1999), negotiate the local-global force tension to alleviate the shock of the white natives at the status change of the racial other (103), using wealth and political alliances to reduce the racial bias. Armenians from the Middle East, on the other hand, especially those arriving in the country as seekers of political asylum, were able to successfully transfer their financial resources, and found an easier path to socioeconomic success than their predecessors (Bakalian 1992).

Bakalian (1992) divides the Armenian immigration to the US into the above two main periods based on the demographic, cultural features of the population and the socioeconomic and political situation in the US. Among the distinguishing characteristics of the first wave or pre-World War II, Bakalian points out the fact that they were mostly from Asia Minor, direct or indirect survivors of the Genocide and the massacres, uprooted, traumatized, and oppressed. In contrast to these characteristics, the second
wave cohort arriving after 1965 was younger, for whom the Genocide was already history rather than embodied memory (Trouillot 1995, Bakalian 1992).

Another noteworthy difference between the two waves was that the first wave immigrants did come from their ancestral lands, with a connection to the soil with little if any experience with industrialization, whereas later immigrants, with the exception of the Soviet Armenians, mostly came to the US from already established diasporas in the Middle East and elsewhere. This latter fact informed and shifted the socioeconomic characteristic of the Armenian immigrants to the US after the World War II. Also, the post-World War II immigrants came mostly from urbanized areas in Soviet Armenia and the diaspora. Bakalian (1992) also claims that the social climate of the US of 1970s and 1980s was more aware of ethnic difference than that of the early 20th century. If self-reliance was the first wave’s “trademark,” the second wave could somewhat count on the already established Armenian-American communities.

Bakalian (1992) claims that 90-95% of people of Armenian descent in the US trace their roots to (what Armenians refer to as) Western Armenia (which is present day Turkey), rather than Eastern Armenia, currently the Republic of Armenia. This is a crucial factor to keep in mind in terms of the places that have informed the cultural identity of Armenian-Americans. The first of the three major differences between Eastern and Western Armenians that Bakalian (1992) lists is that Eastern Armenians, unlike the Western Armenians, did not have the millet (community) experience among non-Christians. Western Armenians, on the other hand, had little if any knowledge of the Soviet government and society. On the other side of this, is the boundary making of the Armenian immigrants from post-Soviet Armenia, many of whom bring the stereotype of
a diasporan Armenian formed in Soviet times, often collapsing all Western Armenian speaking diasporan Armenians into the collective image of a “stingy diasporan,” usually perceived of as well-to-do, never really getting their hands dirty, removed from the real hardships of life.

One interviewee, Aram, demonstrates an interesting instance of othering as part of his former habitus, followed by an instance of self-reflection. Aram, a former academic in his late 20s, originally from Yerevan, Armenia, who won a US Permanent Residency Card on an annual lottery a few years before our encounter, currently lives in New York City.

In a retreat of young Armenian professionals of New York Metropolitan area, Aram was happy to be able to speak Eastern Armenian with me as in his own words he does not have many opportunities to do so. As we sat on a log watching how some of the organizers of the retreat, specifically two young US-born, English speaking Armenian-Americans were struggling with starting a fire, Aram said to me in Eastern Armenian: “Like, you are gonna be able to start a fire [speaking about the men struggling to start a fire].” I did not respond to this comment. And Aram immediately said, “I can’t believe the second I started speaking [Eastern] Armenian I slipped into the [Eastern] Armenian mentality.” He then excused himself to go see other retreat participants. And I never saw him again that night. By doing so Aram fled his positioning, the place that was habitual and chose a different positioning by socializing with Armenian-Americans.

The class structure and occupational traditions of the Eastern Armenians and Western Armenians were different. Another difference is the fact that Western
Armenians of the earlier wave of immigration experienced the Genocide and deportations first hand. This latter fact becomes crucial in the way identity production plays out.

Thus, in Friedman’s (1994, 2003) terms the Armenianness of the Eastern Armenians is fed by a place of origin, language, and history different from those feeding the ethnicity of the Western Armenians. In Silverstein’s (2003) terms, picking a symbolic item from the past around which to reconstruct identity through “pilgrimages” and “ethnicity consumption” people are still producing their selves. In Chambers’s (1994) terms, people re-read, re-present, re-member their various pasts, thus translating, interpreting, and transforming them.

The Recent Situation (1990s-present): In early 1990s, according to Bakalian (1992), the number of Armenians in the US was quoted to range from 600 thousand to 800 thousand. The Armenian-American population that is growing the fastest is the one in the greater Los Angeles area. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2005 American Community Survey, California, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Michigan account for almost 8 in 10 of all Armenian-Americans who reside in the United States. The majority of Armenian-Americans live in California.

The Los Angeles area Armenian settlement started slowly. In 1920s there were only 2,500 Armenians in the area, mostly from Turkey, some from Eastern (also referred to as Russian) Armenia, with about 40% professionals, 23.5% laborers. The area attracted more Armenians from the Middle East after 1965. Armenian immigration to the US is a project in process. Many Armenians have entered the US on student and tourist visas, and have stayed in this country much like immigrants from other socio-
economically challenged countries (Bakalian 1992). Hence the way the immigrants are inserted in the hierarchy of ethnicized and racialized contexts changes, often shifting between the two.

The way ethnic minorities engage with the State in terms of maintaining their distinction or attempting to become part of the dominant culture is an engagement with the hegemony of the State. This eager engagement of ethnic minorities with the US nationalization and assimilation launched at the beginning of the 20th century was reversed in 1970s. Friedman (2003) views this phenomenon within the context of the declining hegemony, which results in processes of horizontal polarization. One manifestation of such processes is diasporization, characterized by ethnicized migration, when the transnational ties among kin communities are reinforced. By ethnicization Friedman means producing cultural identity of collectives that hinges on the origins, language, and history, as opposed to just technical migration of populations. This, in a way, echoes Töölöyan’s discussion of diasporics and ethnics. 33

The power of whiteness opened the avenue to neo-liberal success and a new imagination of ethnicity in the US or, in Urciuoli’s terms (1996), Armenians’ position shifted from being racialized to being ethnicized, consequently through work, education, and family values they could act American in ways that mattered. In Turkey, on the other hand, the elimination of the seditious “Other” (the Armenians) was carried out through exclusion in that it was not the whiteness that was racialized but ethnicity-religion (or so it was politicized).

For the Armenians of Turkey of the 19th and early 20th centuries, in the absence of sovereignty, under the burden of religious minority taxes coupled with the presence
of socially and politically active groups ranging from those calling for fairer treatment of minorities to liberating them from the Empire, the ethnicity-religion was imagined as an inseparable part of identity and giving it up was seen as giving up their sense of who they were. In the US, on the other hand, the elimination of the perceived “Other” was carried out through “digestion” in Bauman’s terms, which for Armenians meant a different type of Christianity, not perceived of as a similar threat to who they were as was the case in Turkey.

Although racially oppressed in both Turkey and the US, the historical experience of Armenians in these two places is defined by the responses Turkey and the US gave to their perceived “Other.” The elimination through exclusion feeds the Armenian imagination of perpetuating the moment of exclusion and elimination, namely the Genocide, through politicized commemoration and lobbying efforts elsewhere. In the case of the US, the promotion toward a more privileged racial category within the state level racial hierarchy (interestingly working within the system and not breaking the system itself), being less traumatic, does not feed the desire of dwelling on the suffering experienced in the US, rather the opportunities the US had to offer.

Unlike in Armenian-American community, Hsu points out that familial ties, kin, locality-origin have been more significant in Chinese American communities than diasporic organizations. And unlike Armenians, Chinese-Americans do not necessarily organize around religion. Unlike politically active Armenian-American organizations, Chinese-Americans do not invest much effort or time in representing or lobbying for Chinese interests or causes. In other words, Chinese-Americans do not mobilize resources and groups locally or translocally for political causes. On the other hand,
Chinese-American professional and scientific organizations have been gaining more local and transnational presence within the Chinese-American diaspora representing Chinese business interests in the US rather than those of China (Zenner 1991).

Jewish-Americans, as Little (2010, personal communication) suggests, came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and initially filled niches abandoned by previous residents, or occupied those newly emerging. They pioneered in sectors such as clothing trade, department stores, mass communication. After World War II, however, Jewish-Americans could find employment in sectors of economy where they used to be discriminated against. They started being hired by multinational corporations. Now they are hired as scientists, managers, and engineers. Likewise, academia and government also started hiring many Jewish-Americans.

Much like Armenian-American diasporic elites of the early to mid-20th century, depending on the historicity and temporality that particular Jewish immigrants with exilic nationalistic interests would come from, some politically active Jewish intellectuals would retain the interest in the country they had come from rather than American politics. Another commonality that the Jewish-American diaspora has with the Armenian-American diaspora is the link to the homeland and the attempts to assist the homeland (Republic of Armenia and Israel). Zenner (1991) contends that for Jewish-Americans the latter should be seen as a compensation for the inability to assist the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust.

Unlike Armenians, Jewish-Americans were already present in the local national political scene in the US of the 19th century. Notwithstanding this, much like Armenian-Americans, they have gone through the discrimination of the early 20th century, as well
as through the phase of the eagerness to become full-fledged Americans. And again, the rootedness of Jewish-Americans in the US varies depending on the generation of migration and the cultural loyalties maintained elsewhere outside of the US. The presence and participation of Jewish-American elites (through elected officials and lobbyists alike) in both domestic and foreign policy of the US has been more consequential and significant for the Jewish-American community and the state of Israel than that of the Armenian-Americans for the Armenian-American community and the Republic of Armenia.

Starting in the mid-1920s, the representation of ethnic identity focuses more on the doing of identity work, at the same time being rooted in Friedman’s (2003) approach to ethnicization: hinging on language, origins, and culture. Nagel (2000) eloquently articulates many scholars’ perspective that “[e]thnicity is both performed – where individuals and groups engage in ethnic "presentations of self," and performative – where ethnic boundaries are constituted by day-to-day affirmations, reinforcements, and enactments of ethnic differences. Ethnicity is thus dramaturgical, situational, changeable, and emergent” (Nagel 2000:111).

The repertoire of identity production in the here and now that the diasporic elites employ has strategic nodes rooted, at various points, in the long history of Armenian diasporization, the recurrent longevity of which naturalizes and highlights the history/past in the present in particular “authentic” and “singularly true” ways. Those who are not invested in the mainstream version of Armenian identity, produce their own Armenian identities in alternative collectivities on the margins of the Armenian diaspora.

**Conclusion**
The heterogeneous Armenian diasporic identity is articulated in various diasporic public spheres at various scales: 1) local (e.g. cultural-political events, and so on); 2) national (e.g. lobbying, and mobilizing base to write letters to Congress people); 3) transnational (e.g. engaging with the RA, other Armenian communities elsewhere). It is important to recognize that the scale of diasporic organizational elites along with being nested hierarchies is also an accomplishment and has temporal sensitivity. Consider, for example, the lobbying efforts of the US Armenian diasporic organizations through the personal connections of the diasporic elites to US Congress people or Representatives at a given time; or the relationship of the diasporic elites and the government of Armenia over a particular issue at a particular time. Given that this production is time sensitive, depending on the issue at hand at a given time, the alignments also shift.

The historicity and temporality of the Armenian communities and their migratory generations, the locales of outmigration, along with sociopolitical circumstances vary from diasporic community to diasporic community. Despite these differences, however, the divisions regarding certain aspects of what, how, and when to represent Armenianness, both intra- and inter-communally, are publicly more noticeable or consequential along the Armenian traditional political party lines. As has been reiterated a number of times in the discussion above, although acknowledging the permanence of the dispersion of Armenians and the presence of the many homelands from which the diaspora members come from, the Republic of Armenia (RA) still holds primacy.

This also means that the acknowledgement of the diasporic organizations by the RA government is consequential for the organizations themselves, as well as for Armenia. For the validation of an organization’s doing of identity work the participation
of others, especially at the scale of state agents is absolutely crucial (Friedman 2003, Silverstein 2003, Gee 2005). This is an important factor, since depending on the alignment with an unmarked center of Armenianness, whether it is the diaspora with the roots of the Genocide survivors, or the Republic of Armenia that was previously part of the USSR, or a particular diasporic locale with elements of both, the marked “other” would vary, so would its understanding.

The diasporic organizational elites in the US operate on different scales with different overlapping centers and peripheries in the same location. At events within diasporic communities in the US, the USA is always referred to as “our country” and always occupies a central role, it is the main real core in the here and now (and the largest scale). After having been uprooted, people have found a new space of rootedness. On the other hand, Armenia is used as a symbolic center (a smaller scale).36 The scale shifts, however, when the organizational elites are dealing with government officials from the Republic of Armenia – the homeland – in which case Armenia is often indexed as the unmarked center. At one instance, they speak of themselves as American citizens appreciating the opportunities their country has to offer them, thus orienting toward the US as the core. At another instance, they speak of themselves as descendants of the Genocide survivors, descending from an ancient people, the first Christian nation, who came to the US not speaking English, who had lost their land. In this case, the elites are orienting toward a specific lost land other than the US, toward a specific group of people speaking a particular language. They, thus, evoke particular points in the history recent and long past, point to places that still exist, though they may have changed State hands.
Writing about Haitians, Cohen (1996) argues that it matters little where the Haitians live, or what passport and official loyalties they have, they always remain part of Haiti. Cohen points out that for Haitian migrants engage with political rituals through the use of their language and other symbols to envision themselves as “loyal citizens” of their home country. Unlike the Haitians living elsewhere, Armenian diasporics engage with the polity of the host country, albeit to lobby for an Armenian cause, very rarely if ever, on non-Armenian causes. On the other hand, the diasporic Armenian organizations, much like the Haitian diasporics elsewhere, attempt to participate in the political rituals of the homeland. They do so at different scales and through different agents: (1) by overt political engagement with the homeland politics through their local base in the homeland (thus locally in the homeland and transnationally); (2) (not necessarily overt political) engagement through charitable organizations functioning and fundraising in the diaspora and sending the resources to the homeland (raising money locally in the diaspora, as well as transnationally in different diasporic communities); (3) through individual philanthropists (transnational resources applied to the homeland locally).

Unlike the Haitians, diasporic Armenians do not necessarily envision themselves as “loyal citizens of Armenia” per se. Yet, because of the sense, imagination, if you will, of belonging to transnational Armenianness, they consciously take the responsibility to also be loyal to the homeland along with being loyal to the host country. Thus, the link with the homeland is sustained through participating in both what is and what is possible. Thence, diasporic nationalism keeps pumping blood (an intended pun twisting an essentialist trope) into the arteries of the Armenian transnation. This blood pumping
occurs through self-reproduction in response to the sociopolitical environment of the time locally, nationally (both in the host society and the acknowledged homeland), and transnationally (in various diasporic communities around the globe), whether state-centric (aligned toward the Republic of Armenia) or pan-Armenian (aligned toward the Armenian transnation).

As a micro-scale illustration of this reproduction, consider the below scenario. Some members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Armenian organizations involved in this research were participating at a recent Armenian-American writers’ reading, organized by a diasporic Armenian cultural organization and loosely associated with a larger and nationalist diasporic Armenian organization. In his introductions the moderator of the event mentioned the abbreviations of the LGBT organization and nomination for an LGBT themed award for one of the books of one of the authors. With that, he also made a point to publicly and enthusiastically mention that one of the writers is a mother of a cute little baby, indexing the importance of hetero-reproduction. And although the non-hetero abbreviations did inhabit the space of the reading, the public “unruliness” of one of the writers was privately “damage controlled” by two unidentified individuals. The writer made a point to draw parallels between the intolerant political response in Armenia (towards the fire-bombing of a gay-friendly bar in Yerevan, Armenia in May of 2012) and Azerbaijan (towards an Azerbaijani writer who wrote a book sympathetic to Armenians), two neighboring countries with a two decade-long territorial dispute.

There was no public reprimand to the writer’s reading. However, after the reading, two women, who did not introduce themselves, made a point to privately
explain to the writer that she had misquoted numbers (of displaced Azerbijanis as a result of the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and mislabeled property (in her reading she was describing a house formerly belonging to an Azerbaijani now owned by Armenians). They felt strongly that such public presentation can be interpreted as catering to the "Azerbaijani propaganda." They had engaged in the "we have finally won a war let us rejoice in it" rhetoric very popular in nationalist Armenian circles. And although the point of the writer’s reading was to present a different perspective on history and demonstrate its situatedness, the women were unwavering in their alignment with the dominant and “righteous” Armenian discourse of the singular truth that they were privately trying to restore for future public usage. This scale and footing engagement, although at times creative and innovative, feeds into the nationalist discourse that in the words of Parouir Sevak, a Soviet Armenian poet, sounds as follows:

...We are few, but we are called Armenians  
We do not put ourselves above anyone  
Simply our fortune has just been so different  
Simply we have just shed too much blood  
Simply in our lives of centuries long  
When we were many and when we were strong  
Even then we did not oppress any nation  
See, centuries have come and centuries have passed  
Yet over no one have we become tyrants  
If we have enslaved, only with our eyes  
And if we have ruled, only with our books  
If we have prevailed, only with our talents  
And if we have ever oppressed, it has only been with our wounds... 

38 39
Chapter 2
The Breadwinners of the Church Family: Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop

General Objectives and Significance

I approach identity production, as a conscious and imaginative process with the “mobilization of differences at its core” (Appadurai1996:14).

The performativity of identity, informed by the various historical scales and alignments, through which it is perceived, is crucial for understanding the structural underpinnings supporting identity production and representation. Current definitions of identity or identification (as some scholars refer to it) have been percolating and in the process of refinement since the second half of the 20th century. The gendered essentialism of ethnocultural identity production by diasporic elites points to two levels of gendered projects. Many scholars’ argument that identity is a conscious production and performance in response to the spaces people find themselves in and spaces they come from or imagine themselves coming from also points to variously gendered projects.

As an instance of my early work in a mainstream Armenian Church community, this chapter foregrounds much of what has been argued in the previous chapter regarding the mainstream production of diasporic Armenian identity. It is an illustration of traditionally expected and appropriate identity producing discourses and processes in diasporic settings. It is often these discursively produced Armeniannesses that the non-hetero diasporic Armenians embrace, struggle, and queer. In the context of this study, the following question comes to the fore: Is the identity work of the leaders and activists
of an Armenian-American community in upstate New York, as the key reproducers and distributors of identity, gendered? \textsuperscript{42} \textsuperscript{43}

Chatterjee’s comment that temporality is gendered (also articulated in McClintock 1995) allows me to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of how temporality plays into the gendered production of diasporic identity that is produced and reproduced within diasporic public spheres. McClintock’s presentation of Yuval-Davis and Anthias’s commentary on the ways women have been implicated in nationalism is relevant to my examination: (1) “as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities; [2] as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations); [3] as active transmitters and producers of the national culture; [4] as symbolic signifiers of national difference; [5] as active participants in national struggles” (355).

In this study, I observed Armenian women being implicated in the invoked Armenian cultural and historic production as biological reproducers (as mothers), reproducers of ethnonational boundaries (as mothers of the Armenian Church and nation), cultural pillars, and participants in national struggles in Yuval-Davis and Anthias’s terms (McClintock 1995), either through sermons or other public speeches, the presentation of men at cultural events, or the comments of the interviewees regarding their grandparents. Consider Fr. Saro’s comments on Advent Sunday and Saintly Women’s Day:

\textbf{Fr. Saro}: We honor our women as often as we can. We are thankful for all they do, all their efforts, all their cooking. They are the backbone of our cultural tradition. They are also the pillars of our religion.
As we can see above, Fr. Saro views women within the Armenian ethnocultural context in exactly those ways as the above authors discuss: women as the upholders of tradition, associated with the gendered space of kitchen, the past, or rather timelessness, hence are ahistorical and unchanging. Fr. Saro often goes back to the idea of "women as the pillar of our faith/religion" in his sermons. And this was also echoed in the reading on Martha and Mary that I was asked to do in Western Armenian on Saintly Women’s day. The reading concluded with a statement on how defying gender and categorization these women demonstrate what it means to be a servant and a believer.

On another occasion, in a ritual inversion, the leaders of the Church, the Parish Council members, exclusively men, served lunch to the Women’s Guild members. To the women’s confused and surprised "Why?" Fr. Saro replied, "because we love you. Without you the Church wouldn’t exist. You do the yokeman’s job," implying the extensive fundraising work that the Women’s Guild continuously carries out for the Church. As the men served the women, one of the Women’s Guild members said, "I feel like the other shoe is going to drop," signaling how unusual this situation was and how skeptical she was that something like this would happen without any consequences that include more fundraising on the part of the Women’s Guild.

Within Armenian-American diasporic secular and religious organizations on the East Coast, identity continues to be discursively produced as a sum of subjective intuition of belonging, origins and history. This is a very context-bound and space sensitive process. Since, as Blommaert (2005) argues, everyone speaks from a place, being an Armenian woman from Armenia I am aware of the place that I am speaking from as an author. Through understanding Armenian-American identity representation
by these particular community leaders my intent is to better understand the conditions of ethnocultural diasporic and translocal belonging: in religious mainstream, secular mainstream, and (secular) queer articulations.44

I examine when, where, and how the community leaders of St. Nicholas Armenian Church produce their identity (Silverstein 2003). As discussed in the previous chapter, and as will be argued throughout the dissertation, identity dynamics have to do with the localization of translocal and transnational processes, as a result of people’s translocal movement.

**Scales of Armenianness on the US East Coast**

To more accurately situate the argument of the chapter, in this section we will look at how the different scales and footings through which the activists imagine their senses of Armenianness and how particular pasts shape their doing of Armenianness. I do this through the analysis of the interviews with some of St. Nicholas Armenian Church’s community leaders. I interviewed five activists of this Armenian community as the key reproducers of Armenian identity in this community. I chose these particular leaders, given the elements of identity reproduction that are the most recurrent in the local Armenian identity discourse in the diaspora: the Armenian Church, language, food, historical memory, and culture. Fr. Babik, the former priest of the church, and Fr. Saro, the current priest of the Church, represent the Armenian Church (and language); Hranoush, a former vice-president of Women’s Guild (WG), represents one of the key Church organizations that successfully raises funds for the Church at various lunch and dinner events, festivals, bazaars, and bake sales; Roupen, member of the Capital District Genocide Committee, represents historical memory often reproduced and identified

86
with; and Mona, co-founder of NYS Museum Armenian Lecture Series, represents the culture aspect of identity reproduction.

Keeping the context of the US ethnic minority history and politics discussed in chapter one in mind, it is noteworthy that three out of five interviewees, Fr. Saro, Hranoush, and Mona, are US born descendants of Genocide survivors. Fr. Babik is a US-born son of Middle Eastern immigrants who came to the US in late 1960s. Roupen immigrated to the US in late 1970s from Istanbul, Turkey. Thus, the migration waves that the interviewees reflect are pre-World War II for Fr. Saro, Mona, and Hranoush, 1960s for Fr. Babik, and 1970s for Roupen. These waves of migration set in particular histories discussed earlier in the chapter influence the imagining of the identity work that the activists are involved with in different ways.

The ethnographic data of this chapter were conceptually framed through the engagement with various theorists’ perspectives on identity production. If for Silverstein, the defining point for identity is the shared similarity of the group members (self-identification), Appadurai, Hall, and Bhabha emphasize the difference. In other words, Silverstein defines identity from the perspective of the in-group that shares similar features, whereas Appadurai, Hall, and Bhabha define identity from without. From the perspective of Appadurai, Hall, and Bhabha, the “we” hinges on “not being them.” Jenkins (2008) argues that scholars having this perspective view similarity and difference as two different processes. He, however, argues that similarity and difference are interdependent as identification requires both of them (21), because emphasizing difference underestimates “the reality and significance of human collectivity” (2008:23). Embracing both similarity and difference, Tax and Barth claim that identity emerges as a
result of a dialectic relationship between self-identification and ascription. Little, on the other hand, claims that identity also emerges from the interactions within the group (2004b:14).

Friedman (2003) defines cultural identity as a sum of origins, language, and history (ethnicization). In an earlier work he argued that “all of this historical process [of identity re-production] is ...a deeply context-bound process in which the real continuities are present in the form of identities that are construed in relation to people’s immediate conditions and everyday existences” (1994:123). Friedman (1994) also emphasizes that the past that has an impact on the present is either constructed or reproduced in the present, or both, in an already defined world for a specific purpose: to selectively invoke a particular kind of identity. And this selection he considers fragmentation from a larger identity space. In so selecting identity becomes a matter of empowerment (Friedman 1994:117) in that the agents choose the fabric from which they want to weave their identity story. Chambers (1994) articulates the same idea stating that any reference to the past is a reference to memory and translation or interpretation of that memory, which by all means involves a degree of transformation. Hence, if identity is what people do, re-membering is part of it. By re-membering history and translating and transforming it (by anchoring it in the past) we perform our identities in the present (also articulated by Jenkins 2008).

What is the case in this particular diasporic community? For Silverstein (2003) the state is present, but he explicitly focuses on ethnolinguistic identity discourses in the shaping of which the state participates directly or indirectly. This allowed me to discover that for four out of five interviewees being Armenian is roughly what Silverstein defines
as “subjective intuition.” This, however, does not mean that it neatly fits Silverstein’s definition. The data further complicate both Silverstein’s and Friedman’s definitions.

The senses of Armenianness of the interviewees are informed by the migratory history of their own families. In the case of Fr. Saro, Hranoush, and Mona, who were born in the US, their grandparents were the first immigrants of their families into the US. In the majority of cases, the interviewees – that are Genocide survivor descendants – found out about the experience of their grandparents from their grandmothers’ stories. In general, the historical memory of the nation being passed on by women is consistent with Yuval-Davis and Anthias’s comment on the way women have been implicated in the nationalist imaginary (as active reproducers and transmitters and producers of national culture, along with passing down the traditions). Fr. Babik who highlights the role of origin and history and maintaining the ties to your origin was born in the US. His parents, however, immigrated to the US in their late twenties or early thirties. He grew up bilingual. And as it was mentioned in the earlier section of the chapter, his approach to identity maintenance is consistent with the ways identity is reproduced and maintained in the Middle Eastern Armenian communities. Fr. Babik’s approach is also informed by his current situation. He is married to an Armenian who does not speak Armenian.

Roupen is himself from Istanbul, Turkey. He immigrated to the US in his early teens in late 1970s. Now in his forties, married to an Armenian woman, who does not speak Armenian (although understands some) and whose grandparents were born in Turkey, Roupen is trying to renegotiate the role of language. At some points in the interview, Roupen states that language is important for him as an element of Armenian
identity. At a later point in the interview, however, he states that, in fact, it does not really matter. Roupen claims that “You have to openly welcome those who want to embrace Armenianness.”

Being fluid and malleable, identity, whether social, ethnic, or sexual, comprises a repertoire of overlapping and multiple positions that are imagined and practiced within a power hierarchy with varying salience. Some argue that it is strongly constructed (Butler 1991) as a mobilization of difference (Appadurai 1996, Bhabha 2008) or exclusion (Hall), others, however, contend that the core around which identity is molded is the sameness (Silverstein 2003, Alba 1991, Friedman 1994) whether imagined or symbolic. Identity is always produced and reproduced in response to the circumstances within which it is operationalized. It is significant to note that identity operationalization has temporal and spatial sensitivity, as Silverstein (2003) poignantly highlights. The past is key in the molding and presentation of identity, in that the agents actively select a particular moment in the time past, whether individually (from their memory) or collectively (from their history) to build and construct the present identity on (Jenkins 2008, Friedman 1994, Croucher 2004, Chambers 1994, Vasvari 2006). By so doing they signal their empowerment, the ability to choose and sculpt (and imagine) a self, a story. The new ways of essentialized aspects of an identity such as language, food, and artwork are being creatively consumed by the identity claimants (Silverstein 2003, Urciuoli 1996, and Fuller 2005).

The comments of the interviewees in response to the question “What makes an Armenian Armenian?” are informed not only by the key traditional features of transnational Armenianness and by the echoes of their present situation but are shaped
by the historical trajectories the lives of their families have taken before and after immigrating to the US and affected their own life trajectories.

**Hranoush:** Faith, enjoying the same food and the same dancing and the same, just being together with the same heart [makes one Armenian].

**Fr. Saro:** Wow. I think it [what makes an Armenian Armenian] can be a lot of things for a lot of people. Like, I think you have found examples in our Church community. There are people who have married an Armenian and they are involved. They are very involved. They are no less Armenian than I am.

**Roupen:** You can have a long answer and a short answer. The obvious and usual answer would be: knowing the language, the history. But I think it’s the sense of where you came from.

**Mona:** [Doesn’t matter 1% or 100%]

**Mona:** It’s the feeling in your heart.

**Roupen:** = In your heart you feel you are Armenian.45

Many of my research consultants, queer and non-queer alike, often spoke of maintaining their Armenianness in the diaspora through making Armenian food, listening to Armenian music. “When ethnicity is objectified as commodity, a performance, or items in a museum,” Urciuoli (1996) argues, the source of ethnicity for identity claimants becomes “a set of traits” (34). This is what Silverstein calls (2003) museologization of ethnolinguistic, ethnonational identity, items of emblematic value. He argues that the latter recreate the location where the identity work is being performed as a spatial and temporal reference or “going back.” People can make periodic pilgrimages to the places where they are consuming ethnicity as an act of personal reaffirmation and commensality. Ethnolinguistic identity practices are articulated under the pressure of museologization of language and culture. Cultural materials at all levels of distinction are available far away from the historical centers of outmigration. Silverstein (2003) also
maintains that on a large scale, identity has a “who” (the identity seeker), “where,” and “when.” Gee (2005) adds to this discussion of identity seeking who, when, and where, positing that to perform a particular who and to do a particular identity what, we need to be “in sync” with others at “appropriate” places at “appropriate” times.

Alba’s (1990) point that “[e]thnic identity can be a means of locating oneself and one’s family against the panorama of American history, against the backdrop of what it means to be American” (319) has often been evoked by my consultants, both queer and non-queer alike in their comments, like, “We are Armenian. We are different” or “I come from a really prominent history where we are so proud of a certain thing and we’re still fighting for who we are. If you ask a white person What’s your cultural dish? they would be like, I don’t have one,” in which the distinction is made not only between the unmarked American ethnic history and Armenian history, but ethnoracial history.

These comments echo Homi Bhabha’s argument that it would be impossible for the linear temporal continuity of the nation’s imagined community to contain the discontinuities of diasporic temporalities (Clifford 1994). For example, the Armenian diaspora, Tölölyan (2000) notes, on certain occasions, set themselves apart from the given mainstream society in an attempt at a “conscious cultural territorialization.” Tölölyan (2000) goes on to point out that this conscious effort is well thought out and orchestrated in terms of its ingredients of group identity with a purpose of maintaining certain differences and acting agentively in the production of a particular kind of identity. This allows the agents to be in control of their self-identification as opposed to an ascribed identification by the mainstream culture (Tölölyan 2000:87).
One of the ways that one of my female interviewees performs her Armenianness is through connecting to other women in the community. In other words, the way that Armenian womanhood is performed and reproduced is through connecting to other women in the community, even if you have little in common. In response to “How do you maintain your Armenian identity?” the then vice-president of the Women’s Guild said:

**Hranoush:** Outside of the Church, play music at home, cooking Armenian food, getting together with Armenian friends. There’s an old lady that I get together with. We discuss different topics, we don’t always see the same way but it’s nice to talk about Armenian things. Inside the Church Sunday school, Women’s guild. I went to Armenian school when I was younger, we had dances, ACYOA.

For Hranoush, then, the maintenance of Armenian identity is not gender neutral. If at home, on a smaller scale and micro level, it might not be as gendered (music is played and performed both by men and women, though mostly by men; the food is mostly cooked by women; getting together with friends involves heterosexual couples and families), then in a more formal setting, in the Church it is noticeably gendered, as Sunday school has only one male teacher, others are women, WG is run and attended almost exclusively by women (I say “almost” as there are 2-3 men who always attend major bake and cook events to help), the Armenian school is run by a woman, all the teachers except for the head teacher, are women. Hence, Hranoush is performing and reproducing a diasporic Armenian woman’s identity.

Fr. Saro and other interviewees, as well, are aware of the performative aspect of identity. They view being Armenian as doing Armenian, being involved in the community. Mona and Roupen in particular think that one should also be involved in the wider community as well. Hranoush also points out to a few of the “museologized
ethnonational items” that symbolize “going back,” going to Armenia: same faith, music, food. Roupen, on the other hand also cites others’ voices, the traditional discourse of being Armenian, which conforms to Friedman’s definition. His own sense of identity, however, is not as simple. Although echoing about the importance of language at other instances of the interview, Roupen tells the story of the prodigal son, whose father:

Roupen: ... didn’t say “Where have you been?” He said “Welcome.” There are several reasons why people didn’t participate in the Armenian Church. I found them now and I say “Welcome” to them. This is the open mindedness that we need to have to bring “lost Armenians” to the table.

At other instances speaking about non Armenians performing Armenianness, Roupen speaks about them as Armenians. On the other hand, it is also noteworthy how Roupen, a male interviewee, navigates and negotiates between Armenianness stemming from history (mostly gendered male) and as a feeling in your heart. He first signals his knowledge of the dominant discourse of traditional essentialist Armenian identity. He then departs from that path. In a way, he is trying to reconcile Friedman and Silverstein’s conceptualizations regarding identity and his married life. At the same time, his reproduction of Armenianness is a feeling in one’s heart that would go against the expected Western dichotomy of emotions and feelings being associated with women, and logic and reason with men. It should be noted that the discourse of Armenianness, in general, can become emotional and often builds on emotional attachments and references to emotion or feelings. Hence, perhaps this setting allows Roupen to be comfortable to be emotionally expressive not threatening his masculinity. On the other hand, Roupen as a personality could be characterized as gregarious, enthusiastic, and emotional.
Fr. Babik was the one interviewee who emphasized the significance of identity as Friedman’s “sum of origin, language, and history” throughout his interview, which also comes across through his sermons.

**Fr. Babik:** First, identifying yourself as an Armenian, then knowing where you come from originally and who you are in that regard.... So I think first is just knowing you are an Armenian before language, faith, and everything else.

In most cases, Fr. Babik downplays the role of language; however, the emphasis on origins and history – and thus the reproduction of traditional gendered identity – is always there. I emphasize the gendered identity part, given the fact that through his sermons Fr. Babik would discuss how women should be obedient to their husbands, as the Church is to the Christ. And in his sermon on women and men’s role, Fr. Babik explicitly mentioned that “We know we can’t have equality in everything.” Fr. Babik’s comments resonate with Ortner’s suggested evidence on the devaluation of women: through ideology, and social arrangements with gender specific tasks, in which men have the more prestigious positions. Interestingly, this part of Fr. Babik’s sermon on gendered inequality was in Armenian. The English part, which is usually identical to the Armenian part, was about the evils of the modern technology and saving guidance of Archangel Michael. Fr. Babik often uses the word “stubbornness” to describe the key trait that accounts for the survival of Armenians throughout the tumultuous history. And the examples that he gives of stubbornness is resisting adverse circumstances, challenging imposing authorities of other Empires, or fighting a war to regain what historically Armenians consider theirs. And all these invocations of stubbornness refer to Armenian rulers and soldiers, who have been discussed by historians as men.
The interviewees often employ a kind of intertextuality, which is one of the identity reproducing and transmitting techniques reinforcing Friedman’s claim with recurrent references to particular points in history, to origins, and so on. In fact, the identity discourses circulating in the Armenian diasporic community and in Armenia echo in the responses of all the interviewees. These are the prevalent discourses of: “a people of remarkable history that have survived empires” (Fr. Babik); “rich history and culture” (Fr. Babik, Fr. Saro, Roupen, Mona); citing an Armenian-American writer William Saroyan about bringing together two Armenians who will create new Armenia (Roupen and Fr. Saro), and “family values” (all interviewees).

At the same time, all the interviewees were unanimous in their responses on the shaping factors of their identity. Four out of five straightforwardly mentioned that the Armenian Church, family, and upbringing have shaped their Armenian-American identity (Fr. Saro, Mona, Roupen, and Hranoush). They all emphasized the importance of performing identity by way of highlighting active participation in the community-related events. Fr. Babik mentioned the Church as the most influential and important institution in maintaining the Armenian identity in the US. The public space of the Church is dominated by men literally and symbolically. The liturgy that is a very significant element that the interviewees relate to is run by male priests and deacons. The only female participants are the few choir members on the periphery and the random prepubescent little girl that holds a candle stick every now and then. In his response about the factors that shape his identity, he emphasized origins and history:

**Fr. Babik:** Shaped the identity? Well, one is being born here. One is acknowledging that your heritage and ethnic identity is Armenian. And I would think that’s pretty much it.
In their responses of ways of maintaining their identity, the interviewees made references to “museologized ethnonational items” – a recourse to Silverstein (2003). These items are usually food, dance, song, and Badarak (Western Armenian word for liturgy) or Church in general. In search of culturally emblematic material these leaders orient the others toward the diocese bookstore, which is their source of “museologized ethnonational items.”

The “when” of the identity work is also different within and outside of the Church. Within the Church it is again more structured: Sundays, Armenian religious holidays, funerals, weddings. Outside of the Church performance in many cases does coincide with the Church related events (and are scheduled), yet is not restricted to them: the annual Armenian Christmas dinner and gift giving, Lenten fasting, family dinners with friends, for children and their friends, and so on.

**Fr. Babik:** Sure. I would never (pause 1 sec) Like for example I don’t have a non-Armenian name. And I gave my children Armenian names... And of course being immersed in the community... The Church plays a very big role in the Armenian identity throughout the diaspora whether a person is a believer or not. That’s just the case. All things are tied through the Church basically: culture, social, the faith of course. But everything else is tied through the Church. And then it branches out to other organizations and things. ... Music has a big role in tradition and culture, and food, of course, that sort of the diet, language, of course. And tradition? I would also say the Church, that maintains the tradition ... And dance, that sort of cultural type of things. Music definitely is important.

As put by one of the clerics, the Armenian names have emblematic value for Fr. Babik in terms of maintaining his identity, along with the other museologized items that he shares with the other interviewees. Consider Fr. Saro, who emphasizes the role of the Armenian Church:

**Fr. Saro:** Well, just as Church is important for us, the Church is important for my family. So we try to go as often as we can. And there they hear the Badarak. They’re involved in the Armenian circles. They see the icons, the paintings on the
walls. They see the Armenian lettering. They know that’s their home, that’s their Church. And that’s the way for us to connect to our Christian Armenian identity.

Fr. Saro along mentions the “going back” aspect of identity work and also uses the Armenian word Badarak (liturgy), to signal his belonging to the community worshiping in the Armenian way. This word becomes an identity performing site “where” as well as “how” in that “going back” to partake of home, you are at home within Badarak (“where”), the liturgy, and you worship Badarak-ly (the Armenian way, the “how”).

Before further discussing how the Church and liturgy that are gendered male and considered home at the same time problematize the Western essentialized dichotomy that home is associated with women (not without a twist) I would like to point out the imagery that Fr. Saro evokes as nourishing his family’s sense of belonging. Fr. Saro mentions that hearing the liturgy (gendered male), seeing the icons (mostly male figures, the only one that has a woman on it is that of Mary holding baby Jesus, again evoking nurturing womanhood and motherhood) makes his children realize this is their home.

His children also see that if on the main floor of the Church the key figures are men, both symbolically and literally, then downstairs, in the basement, it is mostly women who are cooking and baking and setting the tables for events. Hence the children as well are being socialized into a gendered Armenian performance or into the historical institutionalization of gender difference in McClintock’s terms. At the same time, it is noteworthy that if Fr. Saro’s daughter participates in baking/cooking events with her mother in the basement, then both his son and daughter hold candlesticks during the liturgy. Also during communion they both hold a piece of cloth over which the parishioners receive their communion.
At another event, however, namely at one of the Mother’s Day Lunches organized by the Women’s Guild of the Church, where Fr. Saro and his preteen son were the only men from the Church, Fr. Saro said a few words, in which he particularly focused on gendered nurturance. He focused on selfless love, devotion, and discipline that from his perspective one expects from a mother figure. He invited everyone present (all the women, girls, and his son) to think of the Church as a mother. He mentioned that it is not ironic, as the Church is thought to be the bride of Jesus. It is there to offer her unconditional love; it is there to discipline, there to care for you. And he concluded by saying that the Church is your home and your mother.

Interestingly, in this case, the Church that is run exclusively by men becomes a symbolic female figure, one obeying God. Hence, within this heteropatriarchal frame the social or symbolic female is always subordinate to the patriarch: God in the case of the Church, and by extension the clergy, exclusively male, becoming symbolically female and obeying him; and men (in general), in the case of women in general obeying them. These instances then, point out how on different scales of identity work, the agents conform to the historical institutionalization of gender difference of the community at the same time complicating it through their occasional and non-controversial disruption of homogeneously gendered spaces within the Church as an identity reproducing organization.

Other interviewees, such as Mona and Roupen see their identity maintenance in participating in Armenian cultural institutions inside and outside of the Armenian Church.

**Mona:** Through Armenian organizations. Oh, I think so. I think, the strong values that my father and mother’ve gave me as Armenians.
Roupen: Obviously, being an Armenian, language is important to me, knowing our customs... Not just knowing them, but actually following them... [M]y involvement in the Armenian Men’s Choral Ensemble, also St. Nicholas Church choir director, music, uh, literature, food. There is so many aspects to maintaining your identity. But we gotta do it through non-judgmental ways.

In their responses the interviewees are aware of the spaces that they navigate in living in the US. They reflect a sense of dialogic spaces where they are Armenian-Americans, as well as of monologic spaces where they are Americans. However, the interviewees signaled the sense of dialogic spaces through speaking about the Church, home, concerts, Armenian cultural events, code switching to use words denoting parts of the liturgy, religious holidays, names of food and commenting on the debates around the language of the liturgy (in terms of how much of it should be in English, and how much in Armenian). The voices of my research consultants and the codes they choose have an indexical dimension. The examination of this scalar relationship allows us to gain a better understanding of how larger scale processes are sedimented in everyday identity work.

Only Fr. Saro explicitly articulated that:

Fr. Saro: ...I’m not a scholar, but any logical human being would understand that language I think is a key element of a, of a, of a culture, of a people. So in that regard it is important. But you know we are diaspora Armenians. We’re never gonna be like Armenia proper. We’re never gonna speak Armenian in everything we do because we live in a place that doesn’t encourage that.

As I mentioned earlier, the liturgy is the home for the interviewees. The liturgy is gendered male, as it is exclusively run by men. As I mentioned above there are only two female choir members that participate in the liturgy on a regular basis. Besides, the content of the liturgy is focused on Jesus, his life, and death, along with the martyrdom of male Armenian figures (historical and current), the Catholicos of all Armenians (male).
The only woman in the liturgy is Mary (Jesus’ mother). There is also one mention of women along with men, albeit both deceased. The particular verse of the liturgy calls for beseeching God so these men and women rest in peace. Also, although, addressing the congregation as the flock of God, Church, and so on, occasionally there is a mention of the word “brothers” referring to the community, not “sisters.”

Much like the liturgy, the Church itself is in general run by men. The parish council that is the most significant organization in the operation of a local Armenian Church helps run the Church locally as well as links it to the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America of which St. Nicholas Armenian Apostolic Church is part. Four out of five members, including the chairperson of the parish council at this Church are men.

The recurring comment that the Church is the home for diasporic Americans is interesting on a couple of levels. First, on a symbolic level and in the public eye a home in this diasporic community can be and is gendered male. In the meantime, the actual homes that the interviewees live in are gendered mostly female (the wives of the two of the interviewees, including Fr. Saro were stay at home mothers taking care of the children), although Rosaldo’s point that women are not only shaped by these homes or families, as the latter are actively created both by men and women, is well taken. Besides, both priests’ wives were active in organizing women’s events. They were active, again, in a gendered way, in that they organize events for women parishioners or events that have to do with nurturance.

Below is another instance of how Mona threatens to leave her Church if she is told she cannot be remarried in the Church after a divorce, since the Armenian Church,
as does the Catholic Church, still prohibits remarriage. She called the Church her “home” earlier.

**Mona:** … Thank God for Fr. Saro. When I finally told people that I was getting divorced after 18 years of marriage, being in a wheelchair, part of it. If ever I find anyone again, and if someone tells me I can't marry in the Armenian Church, I will leave my Church… The point was that yes I was faithful to my church, yes there were times I wasn't there, but now it was my turn to ask something. … And Fr. Saro was wonderful.

This anecdote is significant, as not only does Mona renegotiate her position with the priest, but with the Church as her symbolic “home” and its traditional take on personal matters such as divorce and remarriage. By doing so, she produces a particular kind of Armenian-American woman who not only contributes to her symbolic home through her performance of identity work, but demands that her “home,” the Church, perform its acknowledgement of her as one of its own by being an accepting parent. And in this case, again the symbolic “parent,” Fr. Saro not only accepts Mona’s challenge but also remarrys her later. By bending one of the rules of the symbolic “home,” Fr. Saro retains a “child” rather than opting to let her go.

Interestingly, problematizing the simplified Western public/private dichotomy, the interviewees point to the fact that there can also be a home in the public sphere (in this case the Church) and on a symbolic level, and in that case it is gendered male. Interestingly, although the Church is run primarily by men: the Board of Trustees has nine male members and three female; the priest and the deacons are always men, hence my ascribing maleness to the Church, in Fr. Saro’s imagery, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, the Church is considered to be a caring, loving, disciplining mother. This is perhaps, an interesting direction for a future study.
At the same time, the actual home where the diasporic Armenianness of the interviewees is taking place on a micro-level (built and sustained by both men and women) and is mostly gendered female. For example, both priests’ wives – being active in the public sphere that is gendered female – are the main caretakers of the children as their husbands work in the symbolic home of the diasporic Armenianness. However, Mona’s testimony that her way of maintaining her sense of Armenianness is through family traditions passed down to her through her father, as well as her challenge to the Armenian Church to remarry her there, complicate these clear cut and crude binaries.

**The Genocide as a frame for identity production:** Most of the community leaders are descendants of Armenian Genocide survivors and much of their sense of Armenianness is from their grandparents who migrated to the US from the Armenian provinces of Turkey. Since the majority of them displayed Silverstein’s “subjective intuition” of belonging, yet are rooted in different articulations of Friedman’s routing towards origins and history, I also aimed at probing their take on the issue of the Genocide recognition efforts and its role in maintaining Armenian identity in the diaspora. To account for the particular ways in which my consultants engage in identity production in general and the Genocide issue in particular, given their life trajectories and the varying backgrounds they are coming from, I use the geographical concept of scale, which brings out the spatial distribution and hierarchical relationship of local identity performance and global processes contributing to it.

Comments on the Genocide refine the tension between ethnolinguistic identity as a subjective intuition of belonging (Silverstein 2003) and identity as a sum of language, origins, and history (Friedman 1994). These comments also point to the fact that the
process of “othering” is gendered, in that the “Turkey” that is the historical “assailant” is gendered male: “those who killed.” Turkey, as a significant “other” (no pun intended), often resurfaces in the public production of Armenianness on different occasions, but primarily on the Genocide commemoration day.

For Hranoush there is a tension between extended familial history, place of origin and immediate familial present tied to larger scale processes. Her perspective is consistent with her definition of identity as a subjective sense of belonging.

_Hranoush_: I think it’s very important. I am always torn by that, because sometimes I think I’m a bad Armenian for thinking that but I think I live in the US. If the US signs the Genocide thing and Turkey gets upset and kicks us out of Turkey. Then I’m putting all the American men and women there at risk. But yet my grandparents went through so much. And they had to leave their country because of the Genocide. But then I go to the other side... My poor grandparents had suffered. So I feel really bad. I feel torn.

It is noteworthy, that the US and Turkey that Hranoush is referring to are again gendered. And although there were female leaders in the Bush administration (the time of the interview), it was predominantly male run. And the same is true about the Turkish government. It is also interesting that Hranoush mentions American men and women when referring to the US Armed Forces (again predominantly male, yet she acknowledges the fact that there are women involved as well).

_Fr. Babik_, whose parents have immigrated to the US from the Middle East, is a proponent of maintaining ties with the origins, history, and also with ties to present day Armenia. He acknowledges the importance of the Genocide efforts. But at the same time Fr. Babik enters into a dialogue with Friedman on his argument that we consciously reproduce in the present certain points from past history. Fr. Babik suggests that we should not reproduce that particular point in history over and over again, we should not
frame our relation to that point in time as a fixed substance, since there is more to the Armenians than the Genocide. Although, Fr. Babik suggests abandoning this gendered invocation of history (considering Turkey and Turks “the other,” not just genderless other, rather male, as killers, Genocide committers), I am not entirely convinced he is aware of the gendered aspect of it. Fr. Babik’s reference to history has a different scale, which becomes a defining factor in his view of the Genocide, which he views as only one point in a much longer temporality of the Armenian history:

Fr. Babik: I think there is a positive and negative to that issue…. The negative is that if it becomes so intertwined into our mindset that it becomes a basis to identify who you are. And I think that’s wrong, because we don’t identify ourselves as Armenians because of the Genocide. Our heritage goes over 2000, 3000 years. So, the Genocide was a major, focal point in our history, and it almost caused to be our extinction... But I definitely do not think or believe that Armenians should identify their sole history and identity just by the Genocide and just think and talk about the Genocide constantly... But then I do believe that as descendants of Genocide survivors we all have, each individual has a role to play.

Fr. Babik, as I mentioned earlier, often talked about the gendered “stubbornness” of Armenians. Perhaps, invoking the Genocide memory over and over with mentions of killings of Armenians, victimizing the nation, and through the victimization and passivization, feminizing the nation goes against his sense of the Armenian nation as stubborn and male.

Fr. Saro, unlike Fr. Babik, quotes a sociologist and agrees with her that the Genocide has the driving force of bringing Armenians together, as it has marked Armenians as a people. Fr. Saro has a different historical reference for the Armenians as a people, which informs his take on the Genocide differently from Fr. Babik. He also notes though that the Armenian culture is no longer in a survivor mode, as it is reproducing creatively in the Republic of Armenia.
Fr. Saro: I think, and Dr. Anny Bakalian, this is her main thesis, that Genocide brings together every element of the Armenian people: the diasporan Armenians, the Armenian Armenians, the Armenian speakers, non-Armenian speakers... Everyone relates to the Genocide. And they rally for that. So I think it’s a huge driving force for our people, a very important one. It marked who we are as a people. We have scars and wounds of it, you know. And we’ll always have them. But we’re also seeing signs now, 90 years later, of what I see as great strides of advancement of moving forward with life. Not so much in the survivor mode, but we are starting to create again. Armenian music is being created, poetry is being written, a live people, a live culture is a creative culture.

And although in Fr. Saro’s above comment it is difficult to trace any gendered identity project, his following comment touches on it more explicitly.

Fr. Saro: ...even in the times of persecution you see that our people are very creative. Like, you look at Karabakh, their archbishop. The publications they are coming up with, the theological curriculum for the students. This is all with the bombs going over their backs. It’s again those times that we revert to that inner force that pushes us as Armenians, as Armenian Christians, you know. I think it’s the Holy Spirit that pushes us, and also that innate Armenian spirit too.

Fr. Saro’s example of Armenian creativity and spirit carrying the nation through difficult times is gendered male, and with that as a religious leader and as a soldier. His “us” and “Armenian Christians” are male Armenian Christians. Hence the survivor’s spirit is male as well. And perhaps, by extension, the Genocide recognition efforts demonstrating this creativity and the Armenian spirit are also gendered male.

Roupen implicitly cites Peter Balakian in his framing of the Genocide, who in his turn recites a quote from Hitler, widely circulating in the Armenian circles concerned with the Genocide issue, which is what Hitler is believed to have said to his generals in 1939: “Who after all remembers the Genocide of the Armenians.” Roupen attributes a much larger-scale importance to the Genocide, than do other participants. He considers it a humanitarian issue. The life trajectory that Roupen is coming from is having grown up in Turkey unaware of the Genocide. He found out about it in the US.
Roupen’s identity emerges in a specific context of ethnic awareness where he accepts and redefines for himself what it means to do Armenian based on his origins, language, and newly found old history. Besides, the historical setting from which Roupen is coming from, namely that he was unaware of the Genocide as a reality, until he immigrated to the US, defines the scale through which he views and imagines his sense of Armenianness and his doing of Armenianness.

Roupen: Armenian Genocide is a humanitarian issue. One would argue it was the template of all the genocides in the 20th century and if it was dealt with in a more harsh way if the following genocides would have occurred… Hitler said to his generals “After all, who remembers the Genocide of Armenians?”

Mona’s interest in the recognition is very personal and emotional, to have her ancestors rest in peace:

Mona: We have such a rich history, such a rich culture and beautiful music, and our Badarak is beautiful and we are loyal to that. But I think what we’ve been through, that we’re trapped. Like now we wanna see, we want our families to rest in peace…We want, I wanna go to their graves in Troy and say “You can rest in peace.”

In her comments above, Mona also evokes Clifford’s discussion of Rey Chow’s three temporalities connected to the prefix “post-” in building and sustaining transnationally situated diasporic identities. The three temporalities implied by “post-” are: (1) "having gone through"; (2) "after"; (3) "a notion of time that is not linear but constant, marked by events that may be technically finished but that can only be fully understood with consideration of the devastation they left behind" (Clifford 1994:332). These temporalities are relevant to post-Genocide Armenian diasporic identity performance, in that in selecting from the past what the particular group (1) “has gone through” is inserted in the (2) “after” moment, which from the perspective of historical past is in the present. The third of these temporalities encapsulates the nature of certain diasporic
identity performances and representations hinging on a past consequential moment or moments inserted in the present performance of diasporic identity.

Thus, although, all the interviewees see the Genocide efforts as important, their motives and settings are different, so is the scale they assign to the issue: ranging from being a personal family issue (for Mona) to an issue bringing together different Armenians (for Fr. Saro), not necessarily those contesting the heteronormativity, to geopolitically significant issue for the US (Hranoush), to a humanitarian global issue (Roupen). These scaling and setting differences in framing the Genocide are significant not only because they explain the different takes the interviewees have on this historical memory of suffering, but most importantly because it informs their sense of who they are.

This then validates Friedman’s (1994) (also articulated by Croucher 2004 and Jenkins 2008) point on the local identity producing strategies responding to larger scale processes. Diasporic identity articulations being one of the many forms of transnationally situated identity performances within the matrices of global systems emerge as processes of multiple orders of disrupted chronotopicity and entangled tension (Clifford 1994).

One thing the interviewees agree on in terms of their perspectives on the Genocide recognition issues, is that the “other” is gendered male. However, to more accurately understand whether the Genocide recognition efforts themselves are gendered in particular ways would require a more gender-sensitive and specific re-interviewing. Although, at face value the Genocide section might not seem productive in terms of contributing to the identity production as a gendered project, it demonstrates
how my own assumptions about the issue and absence of explicit gender awareness had informed my inquiry and interpretation, rendering this significant issue, namely the issue of the Genocide, which many scholars of diasporic Armenian studies consider the “ethnogenesis” of the Armenian diaspora of the early 20th century, genderless. This, then, points to a new direction, or attention, in future research.

Organizational Work of Ethnic Identity: In response to the question about their role as leaders of their organizations along with the mission of the organizations I received varying responses. In their earlier comments Frs. Babik and Saro pointed out that the Armenian Church is the main “where” of the identity work. They see their role as spiritual leaders of the Church, weaving in an Armenian feast or saint day to the service where appropriate. Consider Fr. Saro:

Fr. Saro: Well the main message of the Church, any Christian church, is to bring the message of God, of Jesus to the people. So that was my main objective. And you know, once again as much as I could, using the Armenian adjective with that, the Armenian way of expressing who Jesus is. That’s important that’s how we express it. So...Well, I mean we have Armenian School...We have dance...Uh, the Badarak, yes, I think there’s elements of it that should stay. And I also think there’s elements that need to grow to reflect more where we are.

It is noteworthy that the former priest of the Church, Fr. Babik, as a proponent of maintaining ties with the origins, brings in the importance of maintaining ties with the present day Armenia through donations and trips, as a source of identity (although present day Armenia is not the Armenia his ancestors came from). Consider below what he has to say about this:

Fr. Babik: Well, the first, number one mission is to keep this as a spiritual home where their faith and spiritual life is nurtured... And then everything else comes into place: keeping the Armenian identity, the culture, and language, etc. But I would say the number one mission is being the spiritual home to each family and individual. And serving their needs...We do of course keep a tie to Armenia. ...[C]hurch raised a lot of money... That's one way. Then trips, taking pilgrimages
to Armenia and the Armenian quarter in Jerusalem. And just maintaining that tie through the Badarak and through the services and various programs that we offer... My sermon is mainly based on either the feast of the day, life of a saint, or scripture readings. I try not to go outside of those three things. And I tie it to everyday life. And I of course give the sermon in both Armenian and English.

Another tie to the origins that Fr. Babik signals is the fact that Armenians are an ancient Christian people with their own quarter in Jerusalem, and this is another key source of identity that one should go back to. This “going back” aspect echoes Silverstein’s comment on how people make periodic pilgrimages to the places where they are consuming ethnicity as an act of personal reaffirmation and commensality, which for a diasporan Armenian is another way to re-produce his or her sense of who the person is.

The way Hranoush saw her role as the leader of her organization (Women’s Guild) altered when she discovered the strong personal bonds that the members had. She took on to continue maintaining that bond through baking and cooking that the women in the guild always did, recreating the sense of home and warmth through food making.

**Hranoush:** I was the chairperson for two years. I went in with a whole new way of doing things. And as time went on I realized that these women have such a strong bond that my goal for the Women’s Guild had changed and I went back to doing what they do [cooking and baking], because I wanna have the same bond with these women that they have with each other. The purpose of the Women’s Guild is to bring the community together, to put cultural events, to help the priest. Do we do that? Yeah, but very quietly. A lot of people don’t know it.

Roupen and Mona are actively involved in several cultural organizations and they see their roles as leaders to learn and share about their cultural heritage, along with raising awareness about the Armenian Genocide, which is a big part of their activities.

**Roupen:** As the Choir Director at St. Nicholas, I am a teacher and a student, as I learn more I become humbled by it... Another organization that M and I have, M has been matron of Knights and Daughters of Vardan. A service oriented organization that helps local Armenian cultural issues or recognition of Genocide
issues, and Armenia School project...We are co-founders of the Armenian cultural series at NYS museum. 80% activities for families, 20% for adults, doing lectures, events promoting Armenian heritage and culture. We co-founded and are activists in the Capital District Armenian Genocide Committee. We basically put on annual commemorations at public places, Armenian Churches, get politicians involved to raise awareness and educate people on the first genocide of 20th century. I also sing in the Armenian Men’s Choral Ensemble...

**Mona:** Why we do it? To continue on, to recognize the Genocide. To teach non-Armenians. We’ve always given, served the community.

Interestingly, as part of his job as the president of a multicultural organization in upstate New York, Roupen has had a chance to be invited to various events organized by various diasporic ethnic organizations. And he noted with some disillusionment that the same politicians that accept the invitation to call for Turkey’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide at the Armenian Genocide commemorative events, are present at events organized by well-funded Turkish American organizations, where their speeches focus on the progressive, fair, and democratic features of the Turkish government. In other words, Roupen acknowledged that unlike his discursive practice and production, for many US politicians and congress people the discursive stances they take are inconsequential.

All the interviewees acknowledge the fact that given the time and place they live in it is difficult to recruit new members. In a way they come to support Bakalian’s claim that organizations can attract people if they are not demanding in terms of energy and time. And the way the activists see they can tackle this is to be open and flexible and welcoming. It also became clear that the “when” of identity performance within the organizations has a periodical nature, specific dates, “where” is mostly an Armenian Church, universities (mainly Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), NYS museum, a concert, a Church picnic. The “how” depends on the “where” and “when” but the audience of the
performance is mostly Armenian, with a few exceptions such as the activities at NYS museum for non-Armenians.

Probing the issue of othering, all the interviewees sounded open and welcoming to anyone who would join the community, be that an Armenian or non-Armenian. The interviewees recognize that Armenians from different countries who have migrated to the US and are part of the community share a history, culture, and ancestry. Some of them pointed out, however, that they are more comfortable with Armenians with whom they either share a language or a recent culture (Fr. Saro, Fr. Babik, and Hranoush). But they all noted that accepting someone or being accepted by someone is mostly a personality issue rather than cultural background. Mona, however, expressed frustration that some non-US born Armenians look down on the US born Armenians and consider themselves better Armenians. In fact she was responding to the process of othering by engaging in othering herself.

In their responses, the interviewees confirmed Chambers’s argument that in an encounter where one attempts to respect the other’s voice, language loses its previous sense of importance and center, enters a dialogue, in a wider framework. And one recognizes that his or her sense of center has shifted: “The culture, language, history, and tradition inherited is not destroyed, rather taken apart and reshuffled, re-written and re-routed” (Chambers 1994:24). And one of the ways in which the re-writing and new production of the inherited tradition takes place is through a shifted sense of center, in which participants recognize the complexity of their “I” and larger “we,” thus recognizing the multiple sites of their own imagining, the presence of other stories in their story, and the stranger in themselves (Chambers 1994).
Scaling, footing, and duality: Scale and footing are crucial in understanding how Armenianness is being construed in this community. The scale and setting signal how the activists imagine their identity and their doing of it. These two concepts are important as they allow us to see how Armenianness is understood in relation to various temporal and spatial places, in relation to fate and choice. In terms of shifting centers and periphery, the activists and leaders seem to be operating on different scales with different overlapping centers and peripheries in the same location. The USA is always referred to as “our country” and always occupies a central role, it is the main real core in the here and now (and the largest scale). After having been uprooted, people have found a new space of rootedness. On the other hand, Armenia is used as a symbolic center (a smaller scale).

There is a particular part in the liturgy which is a special prayer-request for both the USA and Armenia. And recently the new priest has been adding “Artsakh” as well. The USA is referred to as “our country,” Armenia on the other hand as “our home country.” The reference to Armenia as a core is through announcements on assisting its needy, and praying for their attempts to rebuild the motherland and maintain identity, whereas the reference to the USA as a core is through being grateful for being allowed to be here and abiding by the rule of law. So, leaders are switching footings with the shifting scales and references. At one instance, they speak of themselves as American citizens appreciating the opportunities their country has to offer them, thus orienting toward the US as the core, at another instance, they speak of themselves as descendants of Genocide survivors, who came to this country not speaking English, who had lost their land, an Ancient people, the first Christian nation, thus orienting
themselves toward a specific lost land, toward a specific group of people speaking a particular language other than the US.

The Armenian language is used in ritual – Church liturgy, songs – in jokingly made reprimands, in reference to food and body parts. Highlighting Armenian Christianity through the use of Armenian, on one side, and child-parent relationships (family), on the other, marks two important elements of identity for Armenians – Church and family. This ties into Goffman’s idea of framing again, in that the use of Armenian in the Armenian Church of the diaspora is more rooted and consistent and important (larger frame), whereas in the family it plays out through words signifying food or reprimands (smaller frame). Although considering oneself an Armenian in the diaspora is not necessarily tied into the knowledge of Armenia, for the Church it maintains its emblematic value (Silverstein 2005). This plays out in the Sunday liturgy of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Although liturgy is in (classical) Armenian, at certain points during the liturgy when there is a direct address to the congregation, the liturgy is done in classical Armenian and in English. The confession and atonement part is one such instance (before receiving Holy Communion). In other words, the Church, this space of the cultural memory and reproduction is largely dialogic. Being a cultural home, it is gendered male, since any public event is in overwhelming majority of cases run by men, unless it is a cooking/baking related cultural event, then Women’s Guild becomes more involved. Both priests reiterate the connection between the Armenian Church and Christian faith in their sermons, highlighting the importance of Armenian Christian tradition (also gendered male as in most cases the Christian tradition is evoked through
male figures and martyrs) through using Armenian words for words such as *liturgy*, *ointment*, *Easter*, *Good Friday*, *Resurrection*, signaling the importance of the Armenian language as part of that tradition. Also note that the Armenian words refer to Christ (male figure).

It is also noteworthy that in religious and most cultural events, language, origins, and history (especially the latter two) gain more significance as the key features of gendered identity repertoire, since origins and history references in the majority of cases (if not always) refer to male figures. While maintaining the traditional aspect of singing liturgy in Armenian, insertions of English signal the need to transmit the sense of belonging to this particular Armenian community, through meaningful expressions in languages other than Armenian, as the latter is not relevant. The liturgy book itself is bilingual with texts in Armenian (classical and Western), in English, and Armenian text transliterated in Latin alphabet. Most parishioners either read the English section or the transliterated section of liturgy.

The space of the Church is informed by the time and generations of migrations (from 1800s till 2000s). Coming from various countries with various linguistic repertoires, many Armenians have more than one lingua franca. Armenians coming from different former Soviet republics find that Russian is their common language, thus signaling their belonging to a particular common region, positioning themselves toward post-Soviet area as a core. Armenians from Bulgaria, Syria, and Turkey have Western Armenian as their common language shifting their place and affiliating themselves to each other as comers from Europe and Middle East with a common ancestral language the center of which was in the Middle East. Armenians from Armenia speak Eastern
Armenian to those speaking Western Armenian and with a few confusions largely understand each other. In this case they signal both their similarities and differences, illustrating the different places and centers people are coming from. Armenians from Europe, former Soviet republics, Middle East, and the US have English as their lingua franca. The latter illustrates the new common space and core these people are sharing.

Given their diverse multilingual backgrounds, members of the congregation in the capital district speak Turkish, Arabic, Russian, Armenian, and English. They use these languages interchangeably. Language is being used as a commodity, a means of communication, hence the use of Turkish despite the strong negative feelings for Turkey and the Turks. It also marks where people are coming from and what and who they associate themselves with at a given time during a speech act.

Given the above, in terms of scaling and footing:

- Both in the interviews and religious and cultural events the USA is always referred to as “our country” and always occupies a central role, it is the main real core in the here and now (and the largest scale). This is the main and current home people associate themselves with and this context is also shaping their Armenian-American identity, in that it allows them to freely celebrate their ethnicity.

- The Church, this space of the cultural memory and reproduction, which is the second in its significance in terms of scaling, is largely dialogic (English/Armenian). Both priests reiterated the connection between the Armenian Church and Christian faith in their sermons, highlighting the importance of Armenian Christian tradition through using Armenian words for
words such as *liturgy*, *ointment*, *Easter*, *Good Friday*, and *Resurrection*, signaling the importance of the Armenian language as part of that tradition. This echoes Silverstein’s argument on ethnicity and addresses my first three research questions.

- It is also noteworthy that in religious and most cultural events, language, origins, and history (especially the latter two) gain more significance as the key circulating discourses of identity. Thus Friedman’s approach to identity representation comes to the forefront at a larger scale. However, the smaller the scale of identity work and less structured it becomes (e.g. special luncheons, family gatherings, everyday life), the stronger Silverstein’s approach of subjective belonging becomes.

- Another noteworthy point in terms of scaling and footing is that out of the five leaders, only Roupen and Mona are involved in identity representation to a wider, potentially non-Armenian community through the NYS Museum Armenian lecture series and Capital District Genocide Committee efforts. They represent their identity largely in Friedman’s terms to the larger scale US public – the “Other” in Friedman’s terms, whereas the glance of the other interviewees is cast inwards, a smaller scale, to the members of the same group as they belong. As Croucher (2004) and other scholars (Barth, Gee among many) point out the “us vs. them” recognition is also part of the identity production.

Another way to get at how Armenianness is being represented was to look at audio-textual material that the Church and Church related organizations produced. The next section presents the analysis of audio-textual material.
Audio Textual Analysis: The Sunday sermon, Sunday-bulletin, e-bulletin, Church e-mails, website, and cultural event texts were analyzed in search for any identity markers.

At important religious holidays the sermons were given first in Armenian then in English. On all the other days the sermon was always in English. Fr. Saro would always give his sermons in English, with usual occasional Armenian word insertions, except as mentioned above on important church holidays. Fr. Babik, who was the Church priest for a short period of time, on the other hand, always started out his sermon in Armenian, and then gave the same sermon in English. Notwithstanding this difference, both priests stressed the importance of maintaining Armenian Christian traditional worship. This is important as it reflects the priests’ take on the above mentioned identity-related issues.

Fr. Babik, who focuses on Friedman’s sum of origins, history, and somewhat language, always gave his sermon in both languages (Armenian being noticeably shorter, however). Friedman’s sum of origins, language, and history, however, I think is contested by Silverstein’s proposition of “going back,” consuming ethnicity as an act of personal reaffirmation and commensality, in this case through the symbolic use of the Armenian language along with English. This dialogic space signals the priest’s alignment with two centers: (1) US as current and meaningful center, since people actually understand the message and live in the country; and (2) Armenianness as a symbolic center, as most of the people do not understand the language, and the Western Armenia that is being used in the sermon is not spoken in the country of Armenia. It is used in the churches of the diaspora and the once vibrant center of it was Istanbul,
Turkey, as a cultural-religious center of the Armenian provinces of Turkey (referred to as Western Armenia by Armenians).

Fr. Saro on the other hand, who subscribes more to Silverstein’s approach to identity production, maintenance, and representation does not attach as much importance to having the sermon in both languages for symbolic purposes, as most parishioners do not understand Armenian. It must be noted, however, that in the last two years of the research Fr. Saro has been using more Armenian than before.

In their sermons the priests translate certain phrases into Armenian and explain the etymology of the Armenian word. Occasionally they refer to the Armenian word better capturing the essence of the concept in discussion. This seems to be an attempt of revitalizing or highlighting the value of the ethnic language and proof of Silverstein’s idea of signaling ethnicity through inserting words in the ethnic language, which is now an item of “museologized emblematic value.”

Out of all the Church related textual documents the Church website, e-mails, weekly e-bulletin, Sunday bulletin are all largely monologic – in English (with insertions of Armenian words or expressions). See below a section from the weekly e-bulletin:

COMMEMORATION OF THE 98TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE, April 28: In solemn remembrance of the victims of Armenian Genocide of 1915, the communities of St. Nicholas Armenian Church and St. Lazarus Armenian Church will worship together at St. Nicholas Armenian Church (location changed from initial announcement) on Sunday, April 28. A special requiem and commemorative program will be held following Liturgy. The program will feature keynote speaker, Seminarian Tatool Babikian, and a special presentation from the St. Nicholas Sunday School & Armenian School students. Following services and the program, a madagh lunch will be served in the Mgrdoumian Auditorium prepared by the St. Lazarus Ladies Aid. There is no charge for this meal; however, individuals may make a sponsorship contribution toward the lamb. Others may contribute toward a good will offering.
This announcement signals a particular English-speaking audience, for whom Armenian is deemed irrelevant in that people do not use it. Since the above sources contain information about activities in which the parishioners are encouraged to be involved, or other relevant information, the symbolic use of Armenian fades away and thus is dismissed. This, then, challenges Friedman’s approach to ethnic identity. The liturgy book is dialogic, so was the Armenian Men’s Choral Ensemble’s Concert Program. The latter, however, was prepared by another Armenian Church in the area.

The weekly E-bulletin is in English. It presents the Bible readings of the given Sunday. It also points out in what language the Creed will be offered on a particular Sunday (it is offered in Armenian/English every other week). In a section called “Der Voghormia” (God have mercy) – among other prayer suggestions there is one for people in Armenia (referred to as “our homeland” who maintain the Armenian identity). The rest is community news as in other churches. Occasionally, Armenian words appear referring to food, prayers, and prayer responses. Recently there has been a new addition to the bulletin: Diocese news.

**2012 DIOCESAN ANNUAL APPEAL:** Each year the Diocese requests help to support the ministries of the Armenian Church of America. The Diocese has set a target of $825,000 for this year’s Appeal. Funds raised beyond that goal will help to support the Armenian Church Youth Organization of America (ACYOA). Please consider making a contribution to the 2012 Annual Appeal.

This reference to the Diocese highlights the attempt to explicitly connect to the larger organization of which this particular church is part of, along with the fact that it targets a largely English-speaking community. This particular item is very similar to any other e-bulletin of any other church or cultural organization, except for occasional Armenian words. It acknowledges the US context and is inserting Silverstein’s items of emblematic
value (Armenian words) to signal “going back” and sense of belonging to more than just a US context.

The Church website is in English with occasional Armenian words referring to special Church holidays, liturgy sections (again Silverstein surfaces).

The Kiss of Peace ~ Voghchooyn: After the transfer of the Gifts (Eucharist) on pages 23-27 in the Divine Liturgy book, when the Parish Council members pass the Kiss of Peace saying Krisdos ee mech mer Haydnetsav (Christ is revealed among us), the response from the recipient should be Orhnial he Haidnootyunn Krisdose (Blessed is the revelation of Christ).

At the beginning of this research in 2007-2008, there was no mission statement as such on the Church website. Fragments of its mission could be found in different sections of the website, such as the Parish Council, the Armenian School, Adult Bible study, Sunday school, and Women’s Guild. However, after renovating the website there is now an official mission statement. On the whole the website reads as any other non-profit cultural organization concerned with their finances and impact in the community. This is noteworthy, in that it emphasizes yet again how much the Church, as a cultural organization, is informed by the context and space it has found itself in. In other words, structurally it conforms to the structure of a US cultural institution with certain ethnic elements that flavor the institution, making Silverstein’s analysis more distinct in this ethnic identity representation business.

From this perspective the center toward which the Church, as a religious-cultural institution, irrespective of its kind, is oriented is the US, as the main context, and space provider. On a smaller, more ethnic-religious scale, as an Armenian cultural-religious institution, the center toward which the Church is oriented seems to be the Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the
Parish Council page of the Church website: “The Parish Council shall ... ensure the proper and regular performance of church services, support the schools, encourage all educational, benevolent and cultural organizations in the community, and do what is proper to coordinate with the Diocese and make timely payments to it.” The above is another illustration of the different parts the Armenian-Americanness of the community is constructed from and that it is far from being a given.

The Armenian School section of the website states that “Parents are asked to encourage their children to attend Armenian School by explaining to them the importance of learning to speak and write Armenian and keep their faith so that they can continue to defend and preserve our Armenian values forever, as our ancestors have done for centuries.” The way the importance of the Armenian language is framed has only symbolic and abstract significance not rooted in the present or now. It is more a tribute to the memory than a practical and essential identity tool or skill – another museologized item. Yet, to do the Armenian School some justice, it should be noted that depending, again, on the life trajectories of the students involved with the Armenian school some do learn Armenian to later use it. I became aware of two instances. A graduate of the Armenian school whose father’s side of the family is from the Middle East, and thus practices Armenian at home, has become a deacon at the Church. Another graduate, used his skills to translate historical texts from Armenian into English.

Before the reorganizing the website, the Adult Bible Study section reiterated the fact that “it was faith in Jesus Christ that gave birth to the Armenian Church. It was enduring faith that kept our Church alive through the Genocide. And it will be strong ongoing faith that holds promise for the future of the Armenian Church.” This statement
ties the current religious practice to a painful historical memory, in Friedman’s terms, selects a particular point in past to reproduce it in the present. It also emphasizes one of the circulating discourses in the Armenian circles, that of the long and strong Christian faith of the Armenian people that helped them to remain who they are throughout various persecutions. This is yet another reference to Friedman’s definition of ethnic identity as a sum of origins, history (and language).

The Sunday School section of the website highlights the significance of teaching children about “…their Christian faith and Armenian heritage. While the children are learning about their faith and heritage, we also want them to learn about how we worship and express our faith. We have a rich Christian tradition.” Again, this Sunday school mission rearticulates the intertwined nature of being Armenian and Christian. This section of the website along with those presented above and to follow below echo their preference for Friedman’s approach to ethnic identity.

The main purpose of Women’s Guild is again encouraging people “… to preserve and to live the Christian faith according to the teachings of the Bible and the doctrines, traditions and heritage of the Armenian Church.” Women in this community are actively participating in cultural event preparations and initiating outreach support programs. Along with a reference to the importance of Christian heritage to Armenians in general, the latter section strikes me as, again, informed by the space (the US) and its context, consistent with Heinze’s argument (2003) presented earlier in chapter 1 (feeling grateful for the opportunities the US has presented and claiming belonging to a homeland elsewhere).
E-mail sent out by the Church often refer to Armenian food and food-making projects, such as tahin hats (tahini bread) baking, or trying to bring students of Armenian descent together to share their Christian Armenian heritage. The weekly E-bulletin presents the readings of the given Sunday, along with a list of names of the week (Armenian names along with Greek), community events; special holidays according to the Armenian Church calendar (usually based on an event in the Armenian history) – the names of these holidays are usually presented in Armenian then translated into English and explained. This use of Armenian is a manifestation of Silverstein’s “museologized emblematic item” signaling their origins. Thus, the Silverstein-Friedman negotiation appears at all levels and scales, in that emphasizing the origins and history as important elements of maintaining their Armenian identity and the increasing irrelevance of language is compensated by its Silversteinian emblematic use.

The E-bulletin also contains various donation requests, often for a needy community, or individual from Armenia. This is one link through which the Church orients itself toward Armenia as a core. And this is expressed through a call for help. Another item on e-bulletins is wedding rehearsals. Wedding rehearsal is not an Armenian tradition. The Church is accommodating its parishioners by incorporating traditional Armenian wedding and American wedding rehearsal ceremonies.

The way the Church functions is very similar to any other US-based churches irrespective of their ethnic origin, in terms of its structure, event preparation, announcements, coffee hours, and so on.\textsuperscript{59} The food served during the special brunches, lunches, and dinners is mostly what Armenians from Eastern Anatolia and Middle East traditionally make. The serving style, however, is not Armenian. Also, the Church
incorporates Armenian as well as American holidays (e.g. the Church mentioned and celebrated both Armenian and American mother’s days). And if the special meal is served elsewhere the food is not Armenian. Thus, the above comes as a confirmation of Blommaert and others’ perspective on performing identity as a moment-to-moment strategic use of certain elements in your ethnic identity repertoire, where, as Alba argues, depending on the situation, one become more salient.

One of the key museologized items that the interviewees were referring to as being significant in maintaining and representing their Armenianness was music. Below I present the music selection of Armenian Men’s Choral Ensemble (AMCE) at a concert and at the Genocide commemoration event in an attempt to identify any meaningful markers from the ethnic identity representation perspective.

*Music selection of Armenian Men’s Choral Ensemble (AMCE) concert:* Out of 16 Armenian songs 1 was the national anthem of Armenia, 1 an alternative anthem (with a mention of Armenians’ rising after many fights and wars), 2 songs were about Armenia (abstract, idyllic, symbolic power), 1 was a song of remembrance of a lost Armenia, 1 was a prayer for the health and wellbeing of the head of the Armenian Church (written originally at the time that this was the symbolic head of the Armenians, as there was no state), 1 was about Yerevan, capital of the Republic of Armenia (symbolic pride after centuries of war), 2 were prayers for guidance and guardianship, 3 songs were about nature – spring, a mountain and a valley in Armenia, 2 were war songs about how Armenians fought the Turks back, 1 described the massacres in one of the Armenian provinces in Turkey, and 1 was a tribute to all Armenians who died as martyrs.
Armenian Genocide Commemoration AMCE Concert Selection: Star-Spangled Banner; the national Anthem of the Republic of Armenia; *Groong* (Crane – is a song about a person who has left her home and garden and country behind and is now begging the crane that is flying for news from her land); followed by a love song (longing for a loved one) and a playful flirty song melody.

Children aged 3–7 sang a song called *Zeitun* (a town in modern Turkey where Armenians showed organized resistance – the song is a call for arms and active resistance as opposed to passive submission to the exploiter (i.e. Turkey). The choice of this song is crucial, as it shows what aspect of the Armenian identity is being cultivated in the children. This seems to be the onset of the cultivation of the historical memory, responding with a resistance against an oppressor that is no longer an oppressor, but from whom the descendants of Genocide survivors have specific political claims. The next song, *Silence fell* (the narrator is mourning the state of the Armenians, loss of sovereignty, death of a favorite leader Vardan Mamikonyan that fought against Persians and prevented de-Christianization of the Armenians). This was followed by a song that was a tribute to all the Armenians that died. The last piece was the Lord’s Prayer.

Based on the five concerts observed, many of the music selections are recurrent. The musical aspect of Armenian identity is linked mostly to the Genocide, survivorship, and resistance, mourning for those lost, and longing for the lost homeland. The musical selections always include the anthems of the United States and the Republic of Armenia. Through the Armenian anthem they signal an existing Armenian sovereignty, which, however, does not otherwise play out significantly in the socio-cultural life of the
community. In other words, through the musical selection the community leaders position themselves toward a symbolic core, which is the historic memory of pain, loss, yet resistance. Although many other historical events have occurred in Armenia since then, this is the center toward which people orient themselves by choice. This yet again echoes Friedman’s (1994) point that a particular point in history is chosen by the identity agents to be produced and reproduced in the present. To put in Chambers’s (1994) terms, one would argue this is making a reference to a particular memory, involving a translation and transformation. Although, there is a scale sensitive shift in the identity articulation repertoire in terms of the features evoked, at the micro scale it is not gendered masculine in such explicit terms as in the Church and public events that are run by men.

**Conclusion**

The analysis of all the material points out that the Armenian-American community leaders of this upstate New York Church construe and represent Armenianness marked and informed by museologization of particular identity symbols as a result of their own life histories, coupled with different elements of circulating dominant identity discourses of “people of rich and long history, culture, and religion.” In most cases, these “people” stand for “forefathers.” Although there is not one specific kind of Armenianness that these community leaders represent, the fact that it is mostly gendered male is noteworthy. The comments of the interviewees demonstrate that particular scaling and setting have a bearing on the production and representation of identity work. The different senses of Armenianness stem from the temporal and spatial places in which the interviewees imagine themselves in and see coming from.
For Hranoush it is the subjective intuition of belonging coupled with faith, gendered male. At the same time, Hranoush reproduces her sense of Armenianness in gendered ways by relating to other women in the community outside of church, or through the Church (participating in Women’s Guild’s events, among other things). For Fr. Babik it is the tie to the origins and history, not so much language. Fr. Babik seems consistent in his traditionalist and conservative approach to identity in terms of explicit proclamation regarding the uneven gender roles (i.e. his sermon on women’s obedience to men).

For Fr. Saro it is a subjective feeling of belonging anchored in the Church, symbolic usage of words that help remember your history and origins. So, Fr. Saro is attempting to reconcile Silverstein and Friedman’s ideas: tying the sense of belonging, anchored in the Church that he often refers to as a *mother*, which is run by men, the symbolic usage of words that help remember your history and origins, also mostly talked about in terms of forefathers (gendered male). At the same time, the performativity is still gendered male. For Mona, a female interviewee, it is the feeling in your heart and following family traditions, no matter how “watered down.” In Mona’s case her family traditions were gendered male, as she thought of her father as the source of her Armenianness. And the most important for her is participating in cultural organizations. Roupen is combining language and a feeling in one’s heart in his definition of Armenianness, thus again attempting to reconcile Friedman and Silverstein in a way that, as Croucher (2004) puts it, coupling the sense of subjective belonging and speaking an ethnic-group specific language that ties the group to its origins and history.
In the interviews, as well as in the religious and cultural events, the importance of the origins, language, history, and feeling Armenians have has been highlighted. The significance of the origins, language and history is reproduced through the circulating discourses in sermons, speeches, texts. At the same time, the significance of feeling Armenian is reproduced through encouraging people to joint various institutions irrespective of ethnic background: participation in these organization makes one Armenian.

The role of the Armenian language is limited to liturgy that most parishioners do not understand as it is in classical Armenian, to certain important church holidays, Armenian dishes, and expressions people use at home with their parents and family. Although, there is an Armenian language school, the students do not learn the language to use it. It mostly has this symbolic significance of having been spoken by the ancestors, another souvenir, as Silverstein calls it a museologized item of identity, an opportunity to respond to parents, older relatives and friends with greetings in Armenian, or become familiarized with other Armenian words that will be inserted in the ethnically informed English communication.

The role of the Church in maintaining Armenian identity is that of a cultural center that brings together Armenian-Americans to remember, commemorate, and ritualize the community connections. The musical pieces that are being chosen for concerts are highly selective and reproduce mostly the historical memory of the Genocide, along with prayer songs and songs that call for active resistance against the historical oppressor (Turkey). The identity of the Armenian-Americans of this East Coast, upstate New York Church community is tightly tied to the historical memory of the
Genocide and the selection of cultural material often rotates around that memory. The connection with present day Armenia in the Church is articulated through the liturgy, fundraising, and trip announcements. Armenia appears to be a symbolic core in those instances and the Church initiates attaching symbolic significance to the present day Armenia.

Identity is mostly marked by participating in cultural activities at different scales and in different settings (at NYS Museum, in front of Troy City Hall, Church, concerts, in their homes, and so on). At face value it might seem uniform, drawing to the dominant, traditional discourses of Armenian identity mentioned above in church services, more public events, reflecting Friedman’s approach. In the doing of identity work at a smaller scale, however, it is informed by specific, personal experiences. This also conforms to Alba’s (1990) idea of privatized identity work, where identity production is based on individually meaningful identities to be emulated. One thing all these Armeniannessess have in common, though, is the emphasis on the performative aspect of identity that various authors discuss (Cohen 1996, Collins 2006, Alba 1990, Bhabha 2008, Chambers 1994).

There are also different reconfigurations of identity in the identity work of these community leaders and in their identity discourse. And gendered as it is, with women primarily involved with Women’s Guild and its cooking and baking, and dinners, and bake-sales, and men primarily running the parish council, the impressive amount of efforts, funds, and time that active parishioners, both men and women, invest in the Church and its version of the production of Armenianness is significant. More importantly, aside from the sizeable donations from wealthy parishioners, the
organization that earns money for the Church through its products, namely dinners, cooked and baked goods, is the Women’s Guild, run by women, with women and a few men, regularly volunteering their time with the organization. Interestingly, women earn the money that men decide how to manage. With a few symbolic disruptions, then, such as Mona’s demand to be remarried in the Armenian Church; Fr. Saro’s daughter’s participation in the liturgy, most anchorages are gendered male, unless they relate to schooling, cooking and baking (as instances of extended nurturing), which are gendered female and appear supporting the male project of diasporic identity reproduction.
Chapter 3
Convergences of the (In)commensurability of Ethnosexual Diasporic Subjectivities

Although Arpik is 50% Armenian [her father is WASP], she is 80% Armenian, as the Armenian genes are much stronger. (Aram, 2010)

I am queer, because I am Armenian. (From interview with Maral)

General Objectives and Significance

The traces of pre-migration Armenian identity continue to echo throughout the public discourses on and about Armenianness in the social networks of the Armenian-American diaspora. And although LGBT and queer Armenians are covertly excluded from the production of the aforementioned Armenianness, they seek to belong to their diasporic Armenian communities at the expense of various strategic identity articulations. This chapter explores the relationship between heteronormativity and sexuality, focusing on the converging spaces, times, and ways that queer and non-queer Armenians produce their Armenianness in relation to the mainstream US society, key heteronormative Armenian ethno-diasporic organizational, communal, and familial spaces.

As has already been pointed out in chapter one, the Armenian identity in the diaspora has been long institutionally sustained with contested ideas of homeland/kin state (Tölöyan 2000), taking on the aspiration of a nation-state to territoriality and the control thereof at times when there was no Armenian state. Language and religion have long been considered the pillars of the traditional Armenian transnational identity and,
as Boellstorff notes, the “[i]mbrications of religion, sexuality, and nation are pivotal to discourses of belonging and exclusion” (2007:140).

Institutions and organizations, as Jenkins (2008) argues, are contexts that make identity production consequential, as they “are established patterns of practice, recognized as such by actors, which have force as ‘the way things are done’” (45). Having various positions and recruitment procedures, organizations become significant in classifying groups and individuals, since “the allocation of positions (names) is also the allocation of resources and penalties (consequences)” (Jenkins 2008:45). This is particularly relevant for Armenian identity production in the diaspora. Jenkins argues that organizations are systematic producers and reproducers of individual and collective identities and the latter two are implicated in each other. He conceptualizes identity as a process, arguing that “[s]ince identity is bound up with shared repertoires of intentionality (such as morality) and interactional networks of constraint and possibility, it is an important concept in our understanding of action and its outcomes, both intended and unintended” (Jenkins 2008:46). For Jenkins the institutional order is a “network of identities (positions) and of routinised practices” (46) to assign identities – which he views as positions – to individuals. For Jenkins, identification is a consequential creative process in response to the constraints and possibilities of the given context. At the same time it is a judgment implied in the classification that being allocated, or acquiring a membership, to a collectivity entails.

(Non)queer “Wheres, Whens,” and “Hows” of Armenianness

To have an insight into the kinds of Armenianness that is being nurtured and produced through active participation in mainstream Armenian-American organizations, I
chose to work with Armenorg, a significant transnational Armenian non-profit
organization and a key Armenian-American organization. Armenorg functions as a
social cultural diasporic organization with many program branches. More specifically, I
focus on one of this organization’s programs. I chose to work with a metropolitan New
York based program called Highemyes, as its aim is to preserve, as well as promote,
Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian
programs. Out of 25 Highemyes world-wide, Highemyes NY always raises the most
funds and is the most active in the Armenian community in the US.

During the program committee meetings some of the most recurrent and hot
issues were those of recruitment, structure of the program in terms of core committee
and volunteer force vs. executive committee and general membership. The members of
the committee who had been involved with the larger organization of which this
program is part through their family for generations, invested a
considerable/commendable amount of time and energy into the organizational
responsibilities with the program. These members were very vocal and adamant about
“earning one’s place at this table.” Whereas those members, primarily the few men on
the committee, who were not as invested in terms of the time and energy spent for the
organizational matters, were for a general membership, with members having the right
to come to the meetings if they so chose. For example, at their largest annual fund-
raising event this year (2012) the committee raised 25 thousand dollars for an
educational center of their umbrella organization in Armenia. This is the most that has
ever been raised by any of the 25 branches of this program worldwide. And their
fundraising has been continuously the most successful over the existence of the
program. Additionally, through their summer internship alumni reunion they raised 100 thousand dollars in July of 2012.

To explore the non-heteronormative diasporic Armenian identity articulation, I worked with LGBTArmo, a metropolitan NY based LGBT Armenian organization. The aim of LGBTArmo, articulating rather different foci, is to increase their visibility and strengthen their cultural as well as ethnic ties to the queer and Armenian communities that the members belong to through providing “a space for lesbian, gay, bi, and transgender Armenian-Americans, their partners, and their allies to come together as a community” (LGBTArmo website, accessed Dec 3, 2009).

I focus on Highemyes NY (HNY) and LGBTArmo, to test, among other things, how Armenians living in New York inhabit various social spaces in, as it is often referred to, the liberating metropolitan space – and, yet, experience these various spaces as both liberating and constraining at the same time. Given the purposes of HNY and LGBTArmo, this parallel exploration has allowed me to understand how LGBT and queer Armenian-Americans (or Armenians living in the US) complicate the organizationally and communally based heteronormative diasporic Armenianness. LGBTArmo functions more like a social club. HNY and by extension Armenorg occupy a central space in the transnational imaginary of Armenianness with its tangibly material and historic presence across the Armenian communities around the world and in the Republic of Armenia. LGBTArmo, as a social and non-heterosexual Armenian organization has only limited overlapping presence in the imaginary of Armenianness for much fewer individuals and exists only on the margins of transnational Armenian identity discourses as an alternative Armenian space.
I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with 14 individuals, 8 out of whom were on the organizing committee of the mainstream Armenian organization with man/women ratio proportionate to the number of men and women on the executive committee of the program and 6 individuals who actively attend the events organized by the organization. As to the LGBTQ Armenian organization, the organization has 35 members on their mailing list, out of which 15-20 are more or less active at most times. I have interviewed 17 queer, gay, and lesbian self-identified Armenians, 15 out of whom are loosely or closely associated with the organization. I have collected life-history narratives from 15 key participants to understand the various experiences the queer Armenians of various generations have come to inhabit their sexualities and ethnic belongings.

Since LGBTArmo is not nearly as active, or known and recognized as an entity maintaining and promoting Armenianness within the Armenian diasporic imaginary as HNY of Armenorg, its members seek other avenues to embrace, grapple with, and claim Armenian belonging in spaces not overlapping with any Armenian diasporicness. The interests of LGBT and queer Armenians are not reflected in the agenda of the Armenian State (Republic of Armenia, see chapters 1 and 5) and that of the Armenian organizations in the diaspora. Boellstorff posits (2007) that the scale of “ethnolocality” is not always commensurable with being gay or lesbian, or queer. This holds only partially true for the lesbian, gay, and queer self-identified Armenians’ engagement with various aspects of their subjectivities, as they often selectively invoke the key circulating tropes of ethnicity/nation and tradition and re-interpret them, signaling different senses of Armenianness in different contexts. For example, the LGBTArmo Armenian Christmas
party that in one of my gay self-identified consultant’s words, “has a cultural significance rather than religious, brings together queer Armenians and becomes a celebration of ethnic identity.” Much like in Indonesia, in the Republic of Armenia and the diaspora, national and ethnic belonging and heteronormativity are predicated upon each other, so those falling outside of the normative heterosexuality become failed community members (Boellstorff 2007:146). However, in diasporic Armenian circles the prominence of the talented (and non-hetero) Armenians is celebrated, focusing on their professional achievement, albeit silent about their sexualities. I will discuss the different ways silence becomes deployed in making sense of the (in)commensurability of various ethnодiasporic subjectivities later in the chapter.

Throughout the chapter I draw on the interactional data from various social and cultural events, such as Fundraising events for various Armenian causes, Young Armenian Professionals’ retreats, a Queer Armenian women’s retreat, the Gay Pride Parade; the annual Armenian Christmas party, and so on. I also draw on in-depth interviews with my consultants of various migratory generations and trajectories. Through the analysis of this material I provide an insight into the differently racialized, classed experiences of queer and non-queer Armenians. The attention to spaces and gendering, engendering the space, queering or not-queering is significant.

**Footing and the speaking subject:** It is noteworthy that the organizations that I chose to work with and the individuals constituting them have responded differently to my invitation to participate in this research. The negotiations with the mainstream Armenian organization affiliated program that is primarily run by women took six months before a consent was reached. The head of the program (overseeing
over two dozens of similar programs across the world) has been very supportive and open to the idea of my research; the NYC branch committee of the program with whom I wanted to work, on the other hand, was ambivalent and apprehensive of becoming part of my research, as they were very protective of the strategies they use to be highly successful fund-raising and young Armenian community building program. They wanted guarantees that no information will be shared or disclosed with other similar Armenian organizations. I was asked to explain in person what my research with the program entailed. When I attempted to do so, I was asked to wait to make sure that one of the committee members who also had experience with doctoral-level research was present. I was asked to give them a document with the description of my research and my signature on it.

A few times I was asked to briefly state what my research was about, usually when there were new participants at the meetings. And I usually introduced it by saying that I am originally from Armenia currently working on my Ph.D. at State University of New York at Albany. The way I summarized my research project was as follows: I am interested in how Armenian identity is being reproduced in the US through Armenian organizations and by individuals; how people negotiate their ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. And I am trying to understand: What does it mean to be an Armenian woman? What does it mean to be an Armenian man in the US Armenian diaspora?

Although over time and more regular contact the committee members became more comfortable in their social interactions among themselves in my presence, as well as with me, I was often reminded of my outsider position, when after using a swear word in the heat of the discussion, they would turn to me and apologize for the
language used. I also developed a better sense of the protectiveness of their work, which was, in a way, protectiveness of their emotional investedness as well as the investment of their time and effort. Throughout the contact that I had with the committee members, it was communicated to me overtly as well as covertly that it was important to the committee members to project a positive image of their program. In other words, there was always some organizational footing work in progress in relation to me and my research, in the interviews, as well as when I was present at various events.68

The chairwoman and the vice-chairwoman of the committee during the period of research were very helpful in terms of arranging interviews with the committee members. Also, at different events they would introduce me to Armenians who were in one way or another interested in the Armenian diaspora related issues. The chairwoman and vice-chairwoman at the time, then, were involved in maintaining the face of the larger organization that they were part of, as one claimed by all the associates, a rare Armenian diasporic organization open to all kinds of Armenians, evoking Goffman’s (1959) front stage behavior, formally performing the openness to another Armenian’s research interests.

I conducted the interviews ten months after I had been working with Highemyes, hoping that as we go on retreats together or as I participate in various events, and attend the monthly meetings the committee members will get used to me being around. Aside from the protectiveness of their success strategy that was critiqued by a committee member who himself was not an Armenian-American, most of the committee members, all hetero self-identified, tended to be more guarded and terse in their
interviews. Although all of them eventually agreed to interview when asked directly, different members had different boundary maintenance strategies in our asynchronous communication.

Two members, both men, did not respond to my inquiry about times of interview and never did the interview. Hence, once off stage, in Goffman’s terms (1959), when they were segmented from the team performance in a face-to-face interactions with me on the front stage, the individual members distanced themselves from me and my research, perhaps for two reasons. My research observation, perceived by them as assessment of their organizational work, evoked a certain power dynamic they were responding to. Also, though in their individual interviews the program members expressed openness to non-heteronormative Armenianness, these interviews also revealed how predominantly heterosexual their tightly-knit Armenian networks are and how few of them knew any LGBTQ Armenians at all. One of them did not actually know what the term LGBTQ meant. Hence, the probing of non-hetero Armenianness was fraught.

Out of those members that agreed to interview and signed the Informed Consent form, one woman never returned my calls or emails although I did email and call her at the times and days that we had previously agreed on in our face-to-face interaction. None of those members who agreed to interview and signed the Informed Consent agreed to meet face-to-face, in their own words, “due to very busy schedules.” So I conducted all the ten interviews with the committee members on the phone. Interestingly enough, the committee members positioned themselves towards my research in particular ways, attempting to reconcile the front stage convention
complying behavior and off stage unwillingness through various discursive markers. Terse yes or no would sometimes be the answers to an inquiry whether they are aware of any LGBTQ Armenians. Sometimes, “That’s all I’ll say for now” would be the response to questions regarding the change they would like to see in men’s involvement with the program (since it was mostly run by women). The committee members also positioned themselves towards my research through interactional markers, such as pointing out that the only time they could interview was when they were walking home from work in downtown Manhattan (imagine the traffic noise).

In face-to-face interactions everybody agreed to participate, mentioned times and days that would work for them. This kind of openness of the committee members is in tandem with the image that the larger organization, of which Highemyes is part, always strives to project. And that is an image of an organization that is open to any kind of Armenianness and supports educational pursuits of Armenians, among other things. The situation shifted, however, once the communication became asynchronous and non-face-to-face. The latter allowed for more comfortable avoidance by those who did not, in fact, want to participate, yet felt that they would lose face if they backed out in a direct interaction. Or if they did do the interview, they gave minimal and often very similar information to their committee co-members.

It was much easier to receive the consent of the LGBT Armenian organization. Interestingly, at all the organizational meetings, aside from one when there were women in presence, I would be the only woman present and often, if gay men that had not met me before or did not know about my project, saw me, the assumption was that I was also non-heterosexual. I will discuss this aspect of ethnosexual spatiotemporal
scheduling later in the chapter. Perhaps the most vocal expressions of this were articulated by Jerry, a gay self-identified Jewish man in his 60s, who is LGBTArmo member Nver’s long-time partner, and Avik, a gay self-identified man from San Francisco in his 40s, who has been away from anything Armenian for a long time and has recently decided to connect to hetero and non-hetero Armenians. Avik, who was attending one of the LGBTArmo meeting for the first time, asked me after the meeting, “Can I ask you a personal question?” I said, “Sure.” He asked me if I am out to my parents. I explained to him the nature of my affiliation with the organization. At a social gathering of the LGBT Armenian organization, in response to where I live I mentioned that I live with my husband and daughter in Albany, NY. To this Jerry responded surprised, “Your husband?! So you’re not gay!” After I responded in the negative he continued, “Oh. Okay. That’s okay. No one’s perfect.”

It must be noted that although it was easier to gain access to the LGBT Armenian organization and to be able to go to their meetings, the interview consent from most gay men involved with the organization took a very long time. Ara did not respond to my email, text, Facebook message, that he had given me as the options to contact him in a face-to-face meeting. Nver did not respond to my messages and in a face-to-face meeting initially declined to participate saying that he does not want to talk about his life. Then almost a year later he agreed, “Come visit us and we’ll talk,” he said.

Gapo, who agreed initially, in January of 2010, gave me his contact information, did not respond to my messages. I asked him again a month later after the initial contact, in February of 2010, he said yes in a face-to-face conversation, yet did not
respond to my messages. Almost 2 years later I went to one of his readings and asked him again, he agreed to participate and was puzzled that he hadn’t responded. We finally set up the meeting and had an interview in November of 2011. In March 2010, Anto said he would happily participate in the research. I reminded him a year later, he said he was travelling and we should try in July. I contacted him again in July of 2011, he did not respond. I contacted him again in the fall, then winter of 2011, but coincidentally he was travelling again. We decided to do the interview in January. I contacted him again. He responded after the second email. We were supposed to have the interview in early February of 2012, but Anto forgot about it and we had to reschedule it. Then he wanted to do a Skype interview, which we did.

Gomidas agreed to participate initially in January 2010. He did not respond to my messages about it. I reminded him again and asked him again in January 2012. He said he will do it. He wants to do it “when the weather is nice and we can sit outside.” We have yet to set up a date. In January of 2011 Razmig said he would do the interview. I contacted him in the summer of 2011. And we had a gathering at his place in September of 2011, to which he invited other queer and non-queer Armenians who might be interested in my project. Although I interviewed two other people who were invited to the gathering, he said he did not feel like it and wanted to do it another time. I contacted him again in January of 2012, he said that the particular week we were looking at did not look good. We have to still set up a date.

Queer women, on the other hand, were not only responsive and excited, but introduced me to other fellow queer and non-queer Armenian activist women that I had wanted to meet and embraced the project and its purpose with joy and enthusiasm.
Also, in our further collaborations or interactions they made a point to communicate to me how timely this kind of research is and how important it is.

I dwell on all these details of the different kinds of footing work different consultants did, because along with the contrast of the initial openness (or the lack thereof) between the organizations, came different positionings of avoidance or consent of different consultants. The ambivalence of the mainstream organization affiliated program committee regarding their engagement in my research spoke to the pride they take in being a successful community organizers and apprehension of becoming vulnerable as such due to the research. The positioning of individual members through various distancing mechanisms pointed to a place for my inquiry that was not on the agenda of their ethnic interests either. The LGBTQ Armenian organization’s openness spoke to the nature of the organization as a social space for bringing together different kinds of Armenianness. With that, however, the parallelism of avoidance, albeit, perhaps, still due to different reasons, is striking.

Most of the mainstream organization affiliated Armenians’ avoidance or subsequent distancing in the interviews was perhaps because of the explicit probing of non-heterosexuality and Armenianness the problematic nature of which was erased by my interviewees through dismissing the importance of singling it out as an issue, or being particularly inarticulate, along with my being an Armenian woman from Armenia. The latter does need more exploration. However, it is noteworthy that among different kinds of Armenians many mainstreamers explained, and I will illustrate it later in the chapter, that they have the least in common with Armenians from Armenia. Others, however, dismissed this difficulty, or any difficulty with different kinds of Armenians, for
that matter, stating that they get along and could relate to any kind of Armenian, irrespective of their cultural background.

Could it be that the avoidance of gay men spoke to their discomfort with thinking and verbalizing their own (in)commensurabilities? Or perhaps it was a lack of interest in my project altogether? Perhaps, it is easier to navigate through various spaces without verbalizing various processes involved as discursive articulation thereof point to a discomfort that when unarticulated remains in the flux and undefined. These are questions that require more exploration and evidence. In the meantime, footing, as Collins noted (personal communication July, 2012) is a framing issue.

Nver, mentioned above, who initially declined to interview, has been very vocal about his contribution to the promotion of Armenianness in the US diaspora. Since the beginning of this project, when he found out what it is about, he has been talking to me at various social and cultural gatherings that we have met. These events are primarily organized by the LGBT Armenian organization. However, I did go to another event regarding the arts and the projection of the Armenian Genocide, at which he was a speaker. At all the events, the way Nver frames himself in relation to me and my research is as a dedicated Armenian professional that inserts the Armenian element into his art within mainstream US circles. Initially Nver did not want to talk to me about his sexuality and ethnicity in a formal interview, saying that he does not want to talk about his life. At the same time, in a number of conversations with me, he often indicated in his recounting of various transnational Armenian encounters that he would not reveal his sexuality to fellow Armenians for fear of being misunderstood and misidentified. He has
been, however, talking to me about Armenianness and his contributions to the reproduction of diasporic Armenianness informally, off the record.

(The Burden of) Ethnic Representation: Most of my consultants, queer and non-queer alike, spoke of feeling the need to “represent Armenianness” outside of Armenian communities and circles or of unwittingly doing so. Representation, as Chambers (1994) notes, “is compelled to support the collective burden and unity of presumed representation” (38). Identity, however, as noted earlier in the chapter, is performative and socially produced and reproduced, often through particular organizational forms in van Dijk’s terms (De Fina 2006:356).

Below, Armine, a hetero self-identified Armenian woman from New Jersey currently living in NYC and a third generation actively involved member of the mainstream Armenian organization, articulates how, from her perspective, the representation of Armenian groupness is perceived in non-Armenian circles more generally:

Armine: Armenians are passionate, strong-willed, not giving up without a fight. This is generalizing, but among non-Armenian communities Armenians are known, at least East Coasters, as smart and hard-working, very honest people. .. Yesterday, one of my օտար [non-Armenian] co-workers came up to my desk, and it came out of nowhere. And she’s like, I’m very jealous of your Armenian community that you have. I don’t have that. My family is not nearly as close as yours. You talk about your friends they sound like they’re all a family. She was saying this because one of my summer interns, who happens to be Armenian was hired for a full time position at her department. With him it’s the same way. You can tell that you guys have this unspoken, you know. She didn’t know Armenians until she met us. And I think she’s spot on [in terms of Armenians’ being a tight-knit community]. And it’s something that we take for granted.

As we can see above, Armine mixes codes, hence engaging in a particular footing work, indexing diasporic Armenian community belonging through using an Armenian word designated to refer to non-Armenians and outsiders (օտար, odar), attesting to the
significance of the *community* trope, employing an in-group term. Interestingly in the attributes she enumerates that describe Armenians among non-Armenians, she specifies that this is true on the East Coast. In this comment she is evoking particular socio-historical circumstances of Armenian-American community formation on the East and West Coasts. As mentioned in chapter 1, the migratory trajectories of the Armenians in the US has been different.

The East Coast Armenian communities are much older and have had waves of Armenian migrants from geographic locations different from those on the West Coast. The West Coast Armenian communities are much younger and come primarily from the Middle East, Iran, and Armenia in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, with a much larger wave in the 1990s and thereafter after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Armenian migrants and communities on the West Coast encounter many of the same issues and racialization that other migrant populations, such as Mexican American, or Latin American communities and hence are classed and racialized unlike the representation of Armenianness on the East Coast.

Before a monthly Highemyes meeting, Armine once touched on representing Armenianness through sharing with her committee co-members her frustrations with a non-Armenian roommate, which turned out to be a shared frustration among a few of the members who themselves had consciously chosen to be roommates with their Armenian siblings or Armenian friends. Lousine, a fellow committee member added that, unlike their non-Armenian roommate, she and her sister cook all the time. They love cooking. But their room-mate never has any food to eat.

In their comments Armine and Lousine index the dominant and gendered
discourses of Armenianness and its discursive habitus, such as “being obsessive compulsive about cleanliness” as an ethnonational trait describing women who are thought to be the ones responsible for the housework, also articulated in the interviews of all the interviewees, queer and non-queer alike, with some embracing it, others not. They also speak of the othering process, through binary oppositions between what stems from the traditional ethnic absolutism, where women are concerned about cleanliness and tidiness of the house and cook, and the unwomanly non-Armenian woman. At the same time, it was significant to Armine that she and her Armenian roommate do not discursively produce Armenianness as something “other,” or “foreign,” or “not belonging to the US.” In other words, it was important for Armine that she and her Armenian room-mate do not come across as possessing a racialized cultural identity. Hence, it was important for Armine that her footing be read by her unhyphenated American roommate as American as well as Armenian.

Nver, a gay self-identified Armenian-American in his 60s, originally from Beirut who has been living in the US for over 30 years is a performing artist. At one of the social gatherings of the Armenian LGBTQ organization, he told me that he is using elements of Armenian art in his art and teaching, using images from Armenia as appropriate. To Nver, in his own words, this kind of publicity of Armenianness is the best kind as he is exposing those socially and politically important in the US mainstream and elsewhere to an Armenian [himself] as a teacher and source. “I do more than all these Armenian organizations that don’t do anything,” he told me. He views his success as an artist in mainstream US artistic circles as a success of Armenians and thinks he is the only one concerned with this. The way Nver frames his work as an Armenian...
immediately locates him within the diasporic space, at the interface of the socio-politically powerful agents and the diasporic ethnic community.

Nver, here, also evokes particular scales, attaching more significance to the production and promotion of Armenianness at a larger scale, outside of the Armenian diasporic community and in the key, prestigious US mainstream. In other words, the scalar production of Armenianness is not a horizontal endeavor, it is tiered and hierarchized: the larger the scale, and this implies alignment with the centrality and significance of the more socio-politically, culturally powerful, the US or Western elite circles, whether they be arts related or politics.

Nver echoed Gapo’s disappointment and disillusionment with the Armenian organizations’ lack of ambition or desire to insert themselves, to represent Armenianness, and claim visibility within mainstream significant arts and literary circles in the US. Nver and Gapo also expressed their disappointment that mainstream Armenian organizations are not interested in investing in talented Armenian artists or at the very least appreciating them for representing successful Armenianness outside of Armenian circles. Because of not feeling appreciated by the Armenian organizations for his work of representing Armenianness outside of the Armenian diasporic circles, Nver does not want to be associated with them, he told me he was reluctant to go the Armenian LGBT gathering at which we were having this conversation, but his non-Armenian partner insisted that they do, because although he is disappointed he still feels the need to connect. “But I am Armenian, what can I do. I can’t do anything about it. I am Armenian,” he said.
This feeling of impossibility of dis-identifying from one’s ethnodiasporic identity and its inevitability notwithstanding any traumatic experiences of racism, zenophobia, and anti-LGBTQ attitudes, has been articulated by many of my queer consultants of various generations and genders. The way their Armenianness as an unalienable essence was so fundamental to many of my consultants pointed to a discursive practice of being and doing Armenian that is in clear tension with my analytic approach to identity as production and performance.

The inalienability of ethnic essence evokes the key Armenian diasporic discourses of identity resonating with Barth’s (1969) earlier arguments about ethnicity providing “the primary ordering identities.” But Nver also indexes the spatiotemporal habitus that he comes from: born and raised in Beirut, where the influx of the Armenian Genocide survivors contributed to a strong Armenian community. In his artistic work Nver made occasional references to childhood memories of Genocide survivors, as well as to the significance of survival and rejuvenation. Coming from a habitus that was saturated with experiences of ethnic annihilation and discourses of survival shaped his sense of inalienability of his Armenianness. As Collins (2013, personal communication) reminds me, “the sense of belonging is the history forgotten in Bourdieu’s terms just as the indexical awareness.”

Tamar is a queer self-identified first generation Armenian-American woman in her mid-30s. Originally from California, she has been living in New York City for about a decade. In her below comments she articulates not only her work of representing Armenianness outside of Armenian circles, but also her discontent with the mainstream
Armenian representation and her search for alternative spaces and collectivities that would allow her to be a queer Armenian comfortably.

**Tamar:** I am proud of it [being queer Armenian] in my own comfortable circle of friends, because I get very angry when I do get myself out there and I see all the hypocrisy of the Armenian culture. And that’s when I say, *Oh, this is why you don’t go out.* But the way I met Zoulal, who’s another queer Armenian, is from a party. And that was great too. And Zoulal is this, she is so serious about finding *the next queer Armenian,* this, like, parade that she’s marching and so powerful about. And it’s really cool, ‘cause it is small. It’s like becoming this little tree. So that’s how I try to do it. But people who don’t know what Armenian is, I tell them and I do try to educate them about our history and who we are and where we are, and what kind of food we eat ‘cause they always ask, *What kind of food is that?*

In her interview, Tamar often intertwines different voices and engages in different footing work. Through en quoting her own voice through using historical present in her interview (“I get very angry when I do get myself out there and I see all the hypocrisy of the Armenian culture”), she differentiates the specific time of the interview when she is engaged in a particular footing work towards me and my research (“I am proud of it [being queer Armenian] in my own comfortable circle of friends”) from her general footing towards the Armenian diasporic circles (“I get very angry when I do get myself out there and I see all the hypocrisy of the Armenian culture”). She makes yet a third distinction: towards non-Armenians (“people who don’t know what Armenian is, I tell them and I do try to educate them about our history and who we are and where we are, and what kind of food we eat ‘cause they always ask, *What kind of food is that?’”).

Through indexicality she points not only to different spatiotemporalities, but also different scales. She also often enquotes the voices of others and provides qualifying commentary, thusly building a particular persona: one with little patience for hypocrisy in the Armenian circles, finding commensurability between her ethnicity and non-binary
sexuality in a self-selected group of like-minded people. Tamar engages with her self-imposed mission of educating non-Armenians about who Armenians are by evoking the key tropes of language, religion, history, and food at the same time.

Nune, a queer self-identified Armenian woman in her 30s, originally from San Francisco area who has been living in NYC for over 15 years, was very passionate about being Armenian and strongly identified with the dominating discourses of Armenianness. Nune often evoked the key elements of the identity discourses that widely circulate among Armenians in Armenia and in diasporic communities about what Armenians think of themselves and what others do (or should) think of them as well.\textsuperscript{73} Gapo, a NYC born gay self-identified man in his 40s, perhaps, was the only interviewee that openly challenged these ideas, arguing that it is what Armenians would like to think of themselves, yet, “on average they’re well educated than most people, but they are definitely not particularly represented in higher education or in, sort of, elite intellectual artistic circles.” I discuss Gapo and his perspective that has been shaped by his own background later in the chapter.

Nina, a high femme lesbian self-identified Armenian woman in her mid 20s, originally from LA area, currently living in NYC, on the other hand, evoked and spoke to the sentiments of many queer, non-hetero, and gay self-identified Armenians who attempted to be disengaged from their ethnodiasporic subjectivities.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Nina:} I think that I really rejected being Armenian for the vast majority of my life. And I am now, kind of, like, trying to reclaim that, because I think that it was taken away from me in a big way from white people [laughs]. You know the experiences that I had as a kid of, like, being teased in a certain way that’s, like, really reflective of not being white, or being hairy, or like facial features, or what EVER. Like, those are things that non, that cultures [who] don’t understand your culture would try to take away from you? And being told, like, being told that being Armenian means that you’re ugly is a really powerful thing for a child to
hear. So in many ways they were taken away from me. And then also they were taken away from me from Armenians by being indirectly told that if I had a certain sexuality I wasn’t a real Armenian. So as I get older I’m realizing like these things are bullshit. I AM Armenian, there’s nothing else I can ever be [laughs].

As we can see from Nina’s comments above, she has come to embrace all the ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual subjectivities that have been rendered contradictory and incommensurable through racialization and ethnosexual policing by collectivities of various scales that she has been part of. And the way Nina achieves this in her above comments is through bringing in two different voices into her comments. One is the voice of an othered non-hetero Armenian woman, stripped of her agency as non-hetero within the Armenian diasporic community (“And then also [being Armenian was] taken away from me from Armenians by being indirectly told that if I had a certain sexuality I wasn’t a real Armenian”). And the other is the voice of an othered non-white, racialized American (“You know the experiences that I had as a kid of, like, being teased in a certain way that’s, like, really reflective of not being white, or being hairy, or like facial features, or what EVER. Like, those are things that non, that cultures [who] don’t understand your culture would try to take away from you?”).

Nina, much like Nver above, speaks of the unalienable nature of her ethnic essence, of being Armenian. And interestingly, Nina, is a first generation American with immigrant parents from Beirut – the same Armenian community that Never himself comes from, where being and doing Armenian is heightened and accentuated by conscious focus on the doing Armenian, but living in an Armenian community, where Armenians often do not need to learn Arabic as all their daily dealings are with fellow Armenians. Nina’s parents then, both from Beirut, immigrated at different times to a
part of California that is also heavily populated by Armenians and where the maintenance of ethnic difference has been a conscious and daily work. On the other hand, Zoulal, a lesbian self-identified Armenian woman from NYC in her early 30s, who also seeks out queer Armenians in general, and particularly queer Armenian women, discusses her own discursive practice of representing herself as Armenian.

Zoulal: I’m pretty vocal about it [being a queer Armenian]. I definitely hang out with a lot of people of color. And I really feel, like, I really try to, like, when everybody’s speaking about their experience, their race stereotype, I try to always plug in my experience as an Armenian or growing up Armenian, or the way I find Armenian people to be. So, yeah, I find, mostly, it’s a matter of me making a point to say, connect it, or feel represented, even if compensating, or overcompensating, you know. Sometimes, I don’t know, I feel like I talk about being Armenian more than I am in real life.

As Zoulal, in particular, and others point out above, queer Armenians seem uprooted by the representation of their ethnicity, sometimes not recognized as productive representatives of Armenianness, particularly as queer Armenian women, given the fact that normative heterosexuality and ethnonational, and racial ideologies are intertwined (Nagel 2000). At the same time, however, my queer, gay, and lesbian self-identified Armenian consultants are differently rooted in these representations (Chambers 1994:34). Most importantly, in her comments Zoulal provides a self-reflexive metacommentary on her own discursive production of Armenianness (“Sometimes, I don’t know, I feel like I talk about being Armenian more than I am in real life”).

**Overlapping “wheres” and “hows:** The Armenian diasporic public spheres where queer and non-queer Armenians insert their Armenianness involves the events that the larger Armenian community celebrates and commemorates, such as April 24th Rally for Armenian Genocide recognition as well as Armenian cause driven (for social projects in Armenia or lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide) fund-
raising and social gatherings. In these overlapping spaces to be Armenian means to be heterosexual, and if in Boellstorff’s (2007) case in Indonesia, being hetero means being modern, for Armenians in the active diasporic circles, as well as in the Republic of Armenia, to be Armenian means to have an ability to reproduce and perpetuate the ancient people that, as one of the dominant identity tropes has it, has withstood the demise of many empires by the power of maintaining cultural traditions, language, and religion.

Interestingly, when probed on this oft evoked trope of “Armenian culture, values, and traditions” what many of my queer and non-queer interviewees talked about was many of those museologized items (Silverstein 2003) circulating in the dominant discourses of Armenianness transnationally, but more so in diasporic communities. These museologized items included generosity, a strong work ethic, going to Church, eating Armenian food, listening to Armenian music, or different familial traditions. I also interviewed Serine, a second generation hetero self-identified Armenian-American woman in her 30s, from Massachusetts and currently living in NYC, who has been engaged in a large-scale project on Armenian diasporic communities around the world. She sums up the sentiments of many of my interviewees, queer and non-queer alike, in her referencing the Armenian values and traditions that many capitalize when discursively producing their Armenianness:

**Serine:** [F]or me, my great grandparents were very much kind of village people. So I don’t know, I do know that a lot of my great grandmother’s superstitions were very much of her village. She would either sacrifice a chicken or bury a bone of chicken in her backyard every time she moved, which I keep up. She would throw a pomegranate out of the window at New Year for prosperity. And we definitely do that. The rabbits love it. I cook the food. For me the hospitality and the food are huge, a huge part of it. And preparing, like, making my own yogurt not buying it.... I have, when my grandmother died she had old photo
albums. And I took them. And so I’ve been trying to develop more of an idea where our family came from, what our family did. So traditions: food, hospitality, at family occasions we try and do Armenian band. At our wedding we didn’t go to the Armenian Church, but we had an Armenian band, and we had Armenian food, like appetizers. So it’s more, it’s a blend of the Armenian traditions and our current lifestyles, I guess.

Given that many second and third generation Armenians in NYC do not speak any dialect of Armenian, and might not necessarily be Armenian Orthodox Christians, or religious in general, many still practice, what Blommaert (2005) terms, *orthopraxy*, “*doing as though one shares the beliefs and ideas, performing hegemonic act without subscribing to the ideology that gives meaning to them,*” on the surface indexing and orienting to “*the authoritative attributions to which one should orient in order to have voice*” (169). Hapik, a Syrian-born, gay and atheist self-identified Canadian Armenian in his late 30s, and his husband Vartan, gay self-identified, second generation Armenian-American from an Armenian family active in Protestant Armenian circles in New Jersey in his late 30s, participate in mainstream Armenian-American events as a couple. And Hapik did mention that prayers at family functions make him uncomfortable as an atheist. As an atheist, Hapik thinks of the Armenian Church as a hate propagating institution and hence does not identify with it, indexing a different kind of Armenianness that practically never occupies any discursive space. Many gay, lesbian, and queer self-identified Armenians or Armenian-Americans, however, support Armenian causes, participate in religious events as important markers of diasporic ethnolinguistic identity, hence indexing allegiance to their ethnодiasporic Armenianness.

Interestingly, speaking Armenian (in the case of Armenian-Americans, Western Armenian) often becomes a spatiotemporal marker of a particular family history and migratory trajectory. More specifically, Armenians, both queer and non-queer who are
first and second generation Armenian-Americans from the West Coast, namely California, tend to come from Armenian speaking families and retain their knowledge of Armenian and attach importance to speaking/knowing the language as part of their Armenian subjectivity. The latter is often also true of Armenians, currently living in NYC, originally from diasporic communities in other countries or the Republic of Armenia.

These are also markers of the larger patterns of Armenian migration to the US and the US Armenian diaspora formation (see chapter 1), wherein the older diasporic communities (most on the East Coast) de-emphasize the knowledge of language and emphasize the doing Armenian more, whereas the diasporic communities on the West Coast, relatively younger than the East Coast communities, emphasize the knowledge of Armenian along with “doing Armenian.” Hence my consultants, coming from these different backgrounds evoke their embodied habitus of Armenianness, indexing different spatiotemporal Armenianness. And while some challenge certain aspects of this embodied habitus, others reproduce them. Consider Harout, a gay self-identified man in his late 30s, originally from California, residing in NYC for about 2 decades.

**Harout:** I am noticing difference between East Coast vs. West Coast Armenians. My experience is such that Armenian-Americans raised on the East Coast, um, sometimes have been here for generations and are more American. Um [5sec], so that’s different from me. I’m first generation. My parents are immigrants. Does it, so there are some things that are different, right? [5sec] Then, you know, in Los Angeles [5sec], parskahais [Iranian Armenians, uses English plural marker]. [3sec] I don’t understand parskahai (Iranian Armenian) very well. [4sec] you know what, I understand it like what 75%, but I don’t speak it. Haiastantsis [Armenians from Armenia] I have more of [a connection with] after having visited Haiastan [Armenia].

Notice also that Harout mixes codes. And the code-switching, namely using the word “parskahai” (Iranian Armenian) can be used neutrally to denote the origin of particular Armenians, but it can also be loaded with *othering* assumptions regarding Armenians.
from various countries and cultural backgrounds, as discussed in chapter 1. Harout used
the term to indicate a differentiation, rather than othering. At the same time, he did
mention that he feels more connected to “haiastantsis” (Armenians from Armenia),
again code-switching, since he understands the difference in lived experiences having
visited Armenia. Harout echoes Chambers (1994), who argues that the contact of
various identities often creates conditions of dialogue in which powers, histories, and
languages permitting “othering” are ascribed (12).

Along with the external recognition, the recognition, or identity uptake, within
the group is also significant in claiming one. See Nina’s comment below, who is a first
generation lesbian self-identified Armenian-American from southern California.

**Nina:** They all [Armenians with different cultural backgrounds], like, talk shit
about each other, you know? If we’re going to be honest I grew up being taught
that haiastantsis [Armenians from Armenia] are “gosht” [crude] or, like, you
know, like, parskahai [Iranian] Armenians are shit-talkers. I don’t know, like
stupid things that actually don’t mean anything [laughs]. So I guess some of that
background is stuck in my head. And sometimes I do think that like haiastantsi
Armenian [Armenian from Armenia] being like, like the thought of being
haiastantsi Armenian being gay is even more surprising somehow than like
Beiruts [Armenian from Beirut] ones? Beirutsis are like, *Oh, we are the modern
ones.* But I think that that’s a result of colonization straight up [laughs], you
know what I mean, like [laughs]. Like having access to like French more than
like other dialects would, these kinds of like weird cultural European attitudes
coming into play.

In a moment of self-reflection, although Nina understands the constructedness of inner
racialization among various Armenian communities (“If we’re going to be honest I grew
up being taught that haiastantsis [Armenians from Armenia] are “gosht” [crude] or, like,
you know, like, parskahai [Iranian] Armenians are shit-talkers”), she finds herself
affected and manifests the internalization of these racialization/categorizations in which
an Armenian from Armenia being queer becomes more shocking.
To put West Coast attitudes in a dialogue with those of East Coasters, consider Zoulal, lesbian self-identified Armenian-American from Brooklyn in her early 30s currently residing in NYC. Zoulal is very active among queer Armenian women in NYC area.

**Zoulal:** I went to a Genocide March in Los Angeles one year. Somebody, I don’t know what happened, somebody was wearing a hat with the Armenian flag and I was asking them *Where did you get the hat?* And this guy was being rude. And I was like, *Where did you get it?* And he’s like, *Are you Armenian?* I am like, *Yeah.* And he’s like, *You don’t look Armenian.* I’m like, *I don’t know what it looks like.* *What are you talking about?* Armenians look nothing alike. I mean, there’s a look. But also, I’ve met Armenians who, I have blonde and blue-eyed friends and friends who look like Mexican. I have had a lot of people who would come up straight off and like, *Do you speak Armenian?* is the first thing, or *You don’t look Armenian?* And I’m like, *Ok.* To me, I can’t relate to that person, because I don’t even know what they are talking about. But then, it seems to me that they have a problem with me for some reason. And I don’t know why. And then I find myself apologizing, *Oh, I know, no I don’t look Armenian, I am a quarter Russian. I look like my Russian side.*

Zoulal above articulates many East Coast Armenians’ perspective, queer and non-queer alike, commenting on the contextual and shifting nature of ethnodiasporic identities. She also points to the incommensurability of essentialist tropes of ethnic purity marked by a particular phenotype, as well as language, with performing identity, doing identity work (“And he’s like, *You don’t look Armenian.* I’m like, *I don’t know what it looks like. What are you talking about?* Armenians look nothing alike. I mean, there’s a look. But also, I’ve met Armenians who, I have blonde and blue-eyed friends and friends who look like Mexican. I have had a lot of people who would come up straight off and like, *Do you speak Armenian?* is the first thing, or *You don’t look Armenian?* And I’m like, *Ok*”).

Interestingly, third generation East Coast Armenians focus on the *doing identity work* as being Armenian rather than speaking the language. Many of my interviewees engage with their discursive practice of producing ethnosexual diasporic subjectivities through
enquoting introduced by be-like, which as Jones and Schieffelin (2009) argue, allows
the speakers to enquote their and others’ voices, dramatize moral situations and position
themselves as moral agents “endowed with vocal viewpoints” (78).

Harout, mentioned earlier, who is from California and has been living in NYC for
about two decades has been with his partner Roudy for over a decade and a half. And
they have been fathers for seven years now to their biracial adoptive daughter whom
they gave an Armenian name, Astghik. Astghik calls Harout hairik which is the Armenian
word for daddy, and calls Roudy daddy. Harout and Roudy have also been looking for an
Armenian (preferably Western, as that is the variety of Armenian that Harout speaks)
tutor for Astghik. Besides, all these instances of evocation of diasporic Armenianness,
the two fathers take their daughter to an annual concert of a famous diaspora Armenian
children’s singer at one of the Armenian churches in NYC, thus inhabiting a reproductive
hetero identified Armenian public sphere. And since, as mentioned earlier, in
mainstream Armenian diasporic circles, both secular and religious, but particularly
religious, to be Armenian means to be hetero, Harout’s attempt at performing an
Armenian parent is not without stress, as all the hetero parents attending the Church
concert related event cast strange looks at Harout and his family. My family and I joined
Harout and his family for one of such events. And Harout noticed that it was a much
more pleasant and relaxing experience than their previous experiences.

There are also coincidental times (Boellstorff 2007) and/or overlapping spaces on
the margins of the mainstream Armenian circles, such as gay and lesbian Armenians’
Christmas party, Gay Pride Parade, where. In a strikingly similar manner, much like
individual non-hetero Armenians inhabiting core, mainstream Armenian public social
spaces, a few hetero self-identified Armenians interact with their queer, gay, lesbian, and bisexual identified fellow Armenians. And, as I mentioned in the introduction, I use analogies with care so that no difference is erased or flattened or lost in the analogy. All of my hetero self-identified consultants who have close non-hetero Armenian friends and attend LGBTQ Armenian events, are those who have experienced a particular kind of difference in their life.

Some have had children with developmental issues, others have witnessed Anglo-American neighbors throwing stones at her house and shouting “Go back from where you’ve come,” yet others have always found themselves the only other in different cultural settings, be it the last name, always marked as difference, or being the only woman among male colleagues, or being the only Armenian-American among fellow Armenians in different diasporic communities. In other words, using analogy with care does allow us to understand how a particular kind of difference, whether race, ethnicity, class, gender, profession, cognition, experienced by individuals affects their awareness and sensitivity to other kinds of difference, such as sexual. Serine’s comments below summarize the common experiences of my other hetero self-identified research participants embracing non-hetero sexualities of their fellow Armenians.

**Serine:** I’m constantly exposed to different cultures. And I’m frequently the only person, the only American, or the only woman, or the only foreigner, or the only white person, I am frequently the only one of whatever identity you wanna call me around. So, that, I think, has really shaped me, because it’s impossible to not see them. A lot of these divisions are, you realize, how difficult they are... Because of my job [as a researcher] what I need to do is to blend, I need to be a fly on the wall. So a lot of times I am forced, not forced, but I have to, kind of, camp down a lot of things that make me stand out in whatever community I’m working in. It’s especially true of the Armenians, because there are definitely... There’s definitely a lot of, *So that’s how you do it in America,* you know. Whether it’s my not speaking Armenian, my not marrying an Armenian, my, there’s a lot of *Your father lets you have this job?* You know, to my father’s not credit, if he
had any say whatsoever, I would not have this job. But, but he doesn’t. And I think that in some communities that’s not so much the case. And I think one of the things is the freedom of travel away from the eyes of the family. It’s hugely free, whereas, you know, if you’re a Syrian Armenian and grow up in Aleppo, you live in this neighborhood, and the whole family lives in this neighborhood. And you go to the same places. And you can’t escape it. And there are always people watching you. And there are always people judging your decisions.

Many of my consultants’ comments point to the fact how the encounter of their Armenianness with an Armenianness of “a different creed” in Vaik’s terms, or with non-Armenianness, or non-heterosexuality, crystalizes their own difference or sameness, unhinging the centrality of the only-ness of their Armenian experience and allowing them to engage with their and others’ Armenianness with more awareness. A non-antagonistic relational construal of an identity implies that in recognizing the other we acknowledge that we are not the center of the world (Chambers 1994). This sense of displaced center brings an awareness of the complexity of the “I” that recognizes the presence of other stories in our story, echoing diasporic-ness in general in relation to the Armenian transnation and smaller scale autochthon culture; and then even smaller scale: queerness within the Armenian community. Chambers (1994) notes that, in a sense, individuals and collectivities are uprooted by their representation and at the same time rooted in them (34). In other words, “representation is compelled to support the collective burden and unity of presumed representation” (Chambers 1994:38).

For Maral, a fellow Armenian’s knowledge of Eastern Armenian, the dialect of Armenian that she grew up speaking and that is associated with the Republic of Armenia (also Russia, Georgia, and Iran), is significant in terms of relating to them. In these sentiments she echoes one of the significant pillars of essentialist and traditional view of what it means to be Armenian: knowing the language. For her though, it is a very
particular dialect that comes with the baggage of the Soviet-post-Soviet Armenian habitus of “the correct Armenian” of the homeland that she is consciously attempting to de-center. In her comments below, Maral also differentiates herself, distances herself from Western Armenian that is associated with the post-Genocide Armenian diaspora. At the same time she also disidentifies herself from the Republic of Armenia regional Armenianness. Hence, she evokes a very specific, urban, post-Soviet Armenianness. She finds less commonality with first, second, third generation Armenian-Americans whose families’ migration stories are those of the Armenian Genocide, whether directly or through the Middle East and come from upper middle class families. On the other hand, she connects to first generation non-Armenian immigrant experience more meaningfully than upper middle class Armenian-American experience. She indexes a sense of Armenianness that is punctuated by the sociohistorical circumstances she is coming from, post-Soviet Armenia, as a first generation immigrant.

Maral: Um, I feel like Armenians who are diasporans and they’ve been diasporans for generations, it’s very rare for me to be able to connect to them on the level that I can connect to Armenians who are recent immigrants or Armenians from Armenia. But with that said there’s plenty of Armenians who are recent immigrants or Armenians from Armenia who, there’s a lot of things that I can’t connect with like other Western people. I think it depends on your worldview. A lot of times it also depends on class. People who are richer they have different priorities, you know. I feel like I’m not part of that world, especially Armenians in the United States who are of a higher class background. They become, it’s like, they hold on to their identity as Armenian and it’s just this empty holding onto it, because it’s just to say that you’re Armenian, it’s just to say that you belong to something. It’s just to say you have a homeland, when you don’t know anything about that homeland. You don’t know anything about the people, you don’t care. It doesn’t matter to you. It’s just a matter of belonging to you but there is no interest or you don’t care what that means.

To put Maral’s words into perspective and in relation to young Armenian people active in mainstream Armenian-American diasporic circles and organizations, I turn to Anna, a
young heterosexual Armenian woman in her late 20s, whose grandparents were first
generation immigrants. Anna’s perspective echoes those of many second, third
generation young heterosexual self-identified Armenian-Americans actively involved in
Armenian organizations. Anna is of Armenian descent on her father’s side and of
Croatian descent on her mother’s side. Anna is very active and at the time of the
research was the chairwoman of a committee engaged with organizing fundraising and
social Armenian events. Although coming from two different ethnic backgrounds, Anna
strongly identifies as Armenian.

Anna: I have to think twice to remember that I am also Croatian. I go to
Armenian Church, [Armenian] camp. Very much Armenian before anything else. Grew up very involved in the Church. My family was very involved in the Church.
I went to Armenian school... It gave me that bond with the community. Sunday school....My parents’ friends had children same age. We all grew up together. I
think being surrounded by friends who shared that cultural identity had a lot to
do with it.

Anna comes from the Armenian-American diasporic background that Maral and other
first generation migrants cannot relate to. For Anna and many of my mainstream
heterosexual self-identified second, and third generation Armenian-American
consultants, her Armenianness is nested in and reproduced by her family, family
structure and other Armenian families that she and her family have been friends with for
generations and in the strong involvement with the Armenian organizations and
community. By contrast, for Maral it is the queering and subversion of these hetero-
reproductive familial and communal spaces through which she redefines her
Armenianness for herself. In her interview Anna also articulated that she finds more
commonalities with Armenians who come from cultural backgrounds and histories of
migration similar to those of her family, namely Beirut Armenians. And she finds least
connected to the Armenians from Armenia, and by extension, to Maral (and the researcher).

**Anna:** It is not by any means a negative, just a different experience. Being straight from Armenia it’s a different sense of Armienianness. Having lived there, having experienced it. It’s such a strong thing that I never have in terms of culture. It’s beyond culture, it’s also nationality. I am American at the end of the day. Somebody from Armenia has that extra bond with the community that I don’t have.

To interpret Anna’s comment on her difference from Republic of Armenia Armienianness, in Hall’s terms, I would argue that in the diaspora there is “a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (Yelvington 2001:240). Hall’s suggestion that the diaspora has a potential to reject “the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of nationalist projects” through its potential foregrounding of impunity and inauthenticity (Gopinath 2005:7) is, perhaps, not taken up within mainstream Armenian-American diasporic circles, in that they accommodate ethnic and religious absolutism and various recombinations of Armienianness, like in Anna’s case.

What transforms and accommodates ethnic absolutism at the same time is the kinds of Armienianness that all my mainstream hetero and queer consultants index. It is through doing Armenian that mainstream organization affiliated hetero self-identified Armenians and their queer counterparts make claims to Armenian diasporic belonging, much like Gopinath (2005) suggests “[t]he antiessentialist notion of cultural identity ...functions alongside what Hall terms a ‘backward-looking conception of diaspora’ one that adheres to precisely those same myths of purity and origin that seamlessly lend themselves to nationalist projects” (7).
As we can see from Anna’s comments, she separates cultural identity and belonging to a nation in the diaspora (“Being straight from Armenia it’s a different sense of Armenianness... It’s such a strong thing that I never have in terms of culture... I am American at the end of the day”) and collapses both for those from the Republic of Armenia (“It’s beyond culture, it’s also nationality”). It is noteworthy that most of the fund-raisers that Anna organizes benefits her organization’s cultural and educational programs in the Republic of Armenia. It is this disconnect from the “homeland” Armenianness and the diasporic production of Armenianness which identifies with the homeland that is incommensurable for Maral. At the same time, many of my consultants, second, third generation Armenian-Americans, or Armenians from other diasporic communities (Lebanon, Syria, France) presently residing in the US, queer and non-queer alike have expressed sentiments similar to Anna’s, pointing to the difference in the Armenian experience in the diaspora and in the Republic of Armenia.

Consider also Anto, a gay self-identified first generation Armenian-American from the San Francisco area, and Vaik, a hetero self-identified man with a complex migratory trajectory, originally born in Turkey, having lived in France for 20 years, and currently living in NYC, both in their thirties.

**Anto**: It was the differences, honestly... Definitely realizing a lot of them [queer Armenians in Armenia] come from academic backgrounds. I don’t have an academic background. I am very drawn to people with academic backgrounds, because I feel they can teach me, you know... And also I guess trying to figure out what it means the queer identity mixed with Armenian identity. ...So yeah, I definitely, I went to PINK [one of the two NGOs in Armenia dealing with LGBTQ human rights’ issues] and met everybody there. [3sec] And, yeah, I did feel, *Wow, we have such different lives.* Our lives are different, you know. Yes you’re Armenian, yes you’re gay, but I have more in common, with, like, an artist living in New York than I have with you, you know. Like, a lot that I can learn from you, from them. I guess, I made a lot of assumptions, you know. And I just
stopped making assumptions. And in a way it’s sometimes hard to grasp and hard to understanding what’s going on. But it’s definitely more interesting.

**Vaik:** [I]n the Armenians here [US East Coast], they all grew up here so they are still, I mean this is the case for the Armenians for sure, except for the Armenians that are coming from Armenia. But because it’s a diaspora they have the Armenian culture, and then the culture of the country where they grew up. Well, in my case, because I grew up in Europe I have a different mentality than the ones that grew up in the US. So there are points and it happens sometimes that I disagree, I mean, I don’t understand. ...When I visited [an Armenian organization] summer internship, for example, where it’s a program where they bring 30-40 Armenians from all over the world, at the time the closer friends I was getting, they were all from Brazil, Lebanon, Turkey, Switzerland, so a very small, like minority. But those people and also myself, we didn’t get much friendship with those from California, for example. It was a totally different mentality. For me European and Middle Eastern Armenians would be more [comfortable to be around]. And also Eastern, well, Armenians from the East Coast... I am not saying that everyone is like this. Overall, that’s what I mean. I’m noticing that they are a bit brainwashed, actually about the Genocide and less open-minded. That’s what I notice.

Anna’s, Maral’s, Anto’s, and Vaik’s comments echo Gopinath (2005), who cites Stuart Hall on “a conservative diasporic imaginary [of] the experience of displacement” with a “backward glance.” In the meantime, the queer diasporic perspective takes up issues of history, memory, as well as nostalgia with a different intention. The queer diasporic view of the past comprises “contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles” (Gopinath 2005:4).

Anto and Vaik point to the complexities of different claims to Armenianness. Anto self-reflexively abandons assumptions about Armenianness embodied through his own Armenian experience in the face of marked difference, and realizes that subjectivities other than ethnosexual can be more salient in claims of belonging (“Yes you’re Armenian, yes you’re gay, but I have more in common, with, like, an artist living in New York than I have with you, you know”). Most poignant, however, in their comments, is the way they approach *difference*. If for Anto, fellow gay and queer Armenians from
Armenia are decidedly different in terms of their lived experiences and he is drawn to that difference as an enriching source, for Vaik, on the other hand, *difference* is collapsed with *othering* (“I’m noticing that they [Armenians from Armenia and the West Coast of the US] are a bit brainwashed, actually, about the Genocide and less open-minded”).

Chambers (1994) and Brettschneider (2006) point out that when we identify ourselves we are at the same time recognizing others and acknowledging our difference (Brettschneider 2006:18). Jaworski and Coupland (2006) capture these different treatments of difference as “processes of *differentiation* and processes of *othering*.” If the former establishes a distinction “between a self and a non-self,” and others (Anto), the latter (Vaik) involves judgment (Levon 2010:152). And as Mahmood (2005) reminds us the language of *othering* and *assessment* is not neutral.

Notwithstanding generational differences of self-presentation and sense of social justice of individual consultants, and the collective history of the Armenian-Americans climbing up the racial ladder in the early 20th century, many of my consultants in their 20s, 30s, and 40s are very aware and sensitive to the situatedness of their identity work. In thinking about being queer, gay or lesbian and Armenian, my consultants evoke different scales and struggles depending on their age, migratory generation, and diasporic spaces they come from. Noem commented on how the internet allowed queer Armenians to create a space where it was possible to be Armenian and queer at the same time. And Tamar indirectly referring to the difficulty of being Armenian and queer, creates the space of possibility through her verbal declarations in different settings. She also, through enquoting her own voice and those of her mother and aunts, highlighted
the significance of familial advocacy on the one hand, and withholding judgment, on the other.

In her interview, Tamar often evoked familial scales of Armenianness, as well as community scales. And the voices that she brought into her responses were those of her at a younger age, that of the community members, and that of her mother. It is her mother’s outing of her that creates a discursive space for her as a queer Armenian. And Tamar employs "like" for introducing her emotive response to her mom. Claims to belonging to the heterosexist Armenian communities by lesbian, gay, and queer Armenians in the US hinge upon friendships with fellow ethnics on a micro-scale, participation at ethnodiasporic organizational scale, as well as through transnational engagements with fellow Armenians.

Throughout their interactions and in interviews, my consultants point out that although Armenians, whether their families, friends, or co-ethnics in general, are viewed conservative, oftentimes “they just [don’t] know what to do” with queer people, how to talk about and to them. My consultants, thus, weave the polyphony of others’ voices into their voices (Bakhtin 1981) and construct a dialogue to convey evaluation of their role and that of others in present and past experiences in Bell and De Fina’s terms (De Fina et al. 2006:13). But as mentioned earlier in the dissertation, these voices have scalar and indexical dimension. Some of my consultants argue that there are certain institutions, like that of marriage, with which the Armenian community is more comfortable. And as Hapik put it in his interview, “now that LGBT Armenians are claiming these institutions as their own, there will be a change in the Armenian perception of family,” by providing the Armenian community a familiar discursive space
to make non-heterosexual Armenians part of the Armenian communal imaginary. At the same time they are attempting to overtly and publicly challenge or queer these heteronormative Armenian spaces. In other words, my consultants themselves acknowledge the significance of the discursive labor of identity performance and uptake; the links between discursive practice and orders of indexicality (Blommaert 2005).

**Homes: (belonging to) a nation; communities; and families**

*Home*, as Gopinath (2005) argues regarding South Asian contemporary nationalist and diasporic discourses “emerges as a particularly fraught site of contestation...Queer South Asian diasporic texts seek to remake the ‘space of home from within’ unlike the texts of gays and lesbians considering to leave the home behind in search of a more liberatory space” (Gopinath 2005:14). This evocation of home is also echoed in my queer Armenian-American research participants’ comments. Often queer diasporic Armenian artists work with their Armenianness and their non-normative sexualities in and through their artwork. Much like the queer diasporic texts for East Asian diasporics, queer Armenian diasporic artwork, whether visual or textual, unveils different forms of violence, possibility, and promise of “home” laying claim to both home and nation (Gopinath 2005:15).

This resignification of “home” within queer diasporic imaginary makes three crucial interventions: first, it forcefully repudiates the elision of queer subjects from national and diasporic memory; second, it denies their function as threat to family/community/nation; and third, it refuses to position queer subjects as alien, inauthentic, and perennially outside the confines of these entities. [Gopinath 2005:15]

Hence, the queer diasporic lens repudiates the impossibility and unimaginability of queer ethnodiasporic subjectivities, often produced by dominant diasporic and nationalist ideologies (Gopinath 2005).
The trope of community, a dominant figure in the Armenian diasporic imaginary was salient among non-queer active Armenian-Americans. The number of times that non-queer Armenian consultants referenced to Armenian community ranged between 4 and 31, as opposed to queer Armenians’ 0-13. The other trope, on which the reproduction and perpetuation of the Armenian tribe, as a major figure used in dominant circulating discourses of Armenianness within RA and in diasporic communities is that of family: used 0-14 times by non-queer Armenians and 0-5 by queer Armenians. However, home whether it be the immediate family, the extended family, the Armenian community, or the Armenian nation is anything but unproblematic. As Little (2004b) points out in the Mayan case, people maintain their identity through sustained social relations with people from home, trips home, and participation in public events at home (17). To extend this to the Armenians in the US, as I mentioned in chapter 1 and elsewhere, being a diasporic Armenian means doing Armenian, participating in public Armenian events of various scales.

Below, Vaik, a Turkey-born hetero self-identified Armenian man in his 30s, raised in France, and currently living in NYC, speaks to the shifting framing of ethnolinguistic identities in different nation-states that unsettles the idea of a home. He also speaks of the Armenian experience of displacement, the shifting home, the fleeting and nonexistent home, also articulated by other first generation Armenian-American consultants, with claims of ethno diasporic identity through museologized items such as food, music, and so on (Silverstein 2003). He also acknowledges the situational operationalization of identity work, which is shifting, responding to the conditions of a given “here and now.” For Vaik claims of Armenianness are tied to the knowledge of the
diaspora and the Armenian language, which he is using to refer to Western Armenian, which is primarily spoken in the Armenian diaspora.

**Vaik:** Even though I was born in Turkey, I don’t consider myself that, I don’t consider myself [a] Turkish person. But in terms of origin, definitely I am Armenian. But here [in the US], Armenian-French. But even in France it’s such a different country than the US. You do not consider yourself French, because they will say your name is not French. Where are you from? Then I say Armenian. Then they say, Ok. Wherever I go, I feel like a foreigner. I don’t have my own country. That’s the big problem. I was not born in the US, I was not born in France. So I don’t consider myself French because I was not born in France. And I don’t consider myself a citizen of Turkey, I didn’t grow up there, so... That’s why I don’t have... I would say French Armenian, depending on the situation where I am that’s how I consider myself. But I am not shy saying I am Armenian even among other French [people], so. When you are somewhere where, you know, everyone with all the French and supporting France, or something, you are definitely part of it, because you spent more than 20 years there. So I feel I belong to that group. I don’t fit in, I am different, I am Armenian, I am definitely Armenian, but I have this French background as well. And in terms of being Armenian, I’m just proud, I’m just proud of that as well. There weren’t many Armenians around me. I grew up with especially non-Armenian people. But you see, even when I go to those [US Armenian organizational] meetings I am still different than others, I am a different creed. But we still have common food, language, religion, culture. It’s something that binds everyone together.

So if Vaik collapses the language and cultural identity to fit into the essentialist trope of traditional identity claims (“we still have common food, language, religion, culture. It’s something that binds everyone together”), Gapo, a gay self-identified Armenian-American in his early 40s of Lebanese Armenian and Swiss Italian background, separates the language use and ethnodiasporic subjectivity:

**Gapo:** I mean my family is from Lebanon and we spoke French, but we, I mean we use language and we use culture not necessarily having to identify ourselves as French.... I think also, the Armenian thing is my father was Armenian, my mother wasn’t. I didn’t go to Armenian school, I didn’t speak Armenian at home. So that seems less natural to me than French.

Throughout his interview Gapo had been consistent in his allegiance to and interest in ruling elites, be it in Armenian community, US education, journalism, writers, artistic
circles or art critics, mentioning the names of the Ivy league schools he and his sibling attended, names of key public figures within various Armenian diasporic circles in the US, France, Lebanon, and so on. And in his above comment he also aligns with the language of colonization taken up by upper classes in Lebanon that had to be transported to the US, where he also attended an exclusive French school in New York City ("I mean, my family is from Lebanon and we spoke French, but we, I mean, we use language and we use culture not necessarily having to identify ourselves as French"). Hence, Gapo traverses different scales, evoking different footings towards different centers: Lebanon as the source of his Armenianness through his father, signals Switzerland, where his Italian mother was from and which is the intellectual cultural center he aligns with through the language of his French education. Yet in all the cases, whether it is mainstream US journalism, artistic circles, or education, or mainstream Armenian organizational circles, he always speaks of elites and familiarity with them.

For him these elite circles are associated with progressiveness, hence, his aspiration to see Armenians among them and disillusionment with their not being part of these progressive, well-educated elites. Gapo attributes conservatism to lack of good education. By good education he references West-centric education ("world class"): Harvard, Yale, and Oxford. In other words, for Gapo being aware of and open to diverse sexualities is associated with education and well-roundedness and progressiveness, which is in turn Euro-American-centric, classed, and racialized.

Since the diasporic public spheres with their “wheres, whens,” and “hows” (Silverstein 2003) of Armenian ethnolinguistic identity performance are heteronormatively regulated, the insertion of Armenianness of non-heteronormative
sexualities is faced with the problematic of the incommensurability of modern/postmodern sexualities and ethnolinguistic identity. Queer Armenians mobilize different subjectivities, not necessarily their sexuality when they participate in mainstream public Armenian identity production. And as Gopinath (2005) points out lesbian and, by extension, non-heteronormative subjectivities are perceived as foreign and outside of the many “homes” being communally disciplined (Gopinath 2005:18-19).

And Maral’s below comments resonate with Gopinath’s argument:

Maral: There’s, like, a little Armenia on Facebook, [much like a city where there are different ethnic neighborhoods: New York, LA] and there are all these conversations. I remember I was a part of this conversation where they were just hating on gay people and they were saying something about, *We have to save Armenia from European-American thoughts, la, la, la.* And this is what my parents say. They’re like, *That’s American, that’s a Western thing. Being gay is a Western thing.* Okay, so on another level it’s like, you’re saying that if I am gay I cannot be Armenian, I should just resign from being Armenian. Okay, sure, no problem. This term does not do anything for me. I know who I am.

Through drawing on a virtual policing of communal identity, Maral ties it to her own parents’ perception of non-normative sexualities in general and that of their daughter in particular, defining the space of community and family as reproductive and heteronormative with its connections and juxtaposition with larger scale processes (“*We have to save Armenia from European-American thoughts, la, la, la.* And this is what my parents say. They’re like, *That’s American. That’s a Western thing. Being gay is a Western thing.* Okay, so on another level it’s like, you’re saying that if I am gay I cannot be Armenian, I should just resign from being Armenian. Okay, sure, no problem”), demonstrating that as Gopinath posits “domestic space functions as a key site of globalization, one that is intimately connected to other national locations” (Gopinath 2005:23).
Another research participant, Hapik, is a gay self-identified man in his late 30s born in Syria, who grew up in Canada, and has been living in the US for over 15 years. Non-heterosexual communal spaces, as Hapik indicated, are also, homonormatively racialized, in that there are desirable or ethnicized ethnosexual backgrounds and undesirable ones. Hapik’s comfort with inserting his own difference, whether sexual or ethnic, stems, as he explains, from the environment of the Canadian policy on multiculturalism, particularly as enforced in Toronto, where his ethnocultural difference was celebrated growing up. So in his case, the analogy of difference between ethnicity and sexuality allowed him to find a space of commensurability between his ethnic and sexual subjectivities. In this construal of his persona as a gay Armenian comfortable with inserting his own difference, Hapik indexes a different spatiotemporal scale and habitus informing his version of Armenianness, shaped by the Canadian state level regulation of ethnic difference through an official policy of multiculturalism.

Collins and Blot (2003) recap Jonathan Friedman’s argument that the various collective actors differ in whether they are asserting cultural rights or calling for more basic political and economic autonomy. Do they make appeal to non-geographic and non-ethnic identities (as in gender-based identity politics)? How do they call upon and rework pre-modern traditions and customs? What these collective agents share, however, is a heightened sense of both freedom and insecurity (Collins and Blot 2003:102). Given the internal difference within the Armenian diasporic communities and lived experiences of individual Armenians in the US, many Armenians employ creative uses of cultural identity and difference. They produce their identities and subjectivities, as Little (2004b) points out, around overlapping “constellations of social relations
embedded in local, regional, national, and global spaces” (16). It is these kinds of “semi-
determined” spatiotemporal identity claims that Maral attests to:

Maral: The thing is that as much as I want to be beyond identity I am still in
real world where there are certain times that I have to identify as something in
order to get something done, or be part of something, right? So if I’m here right
now [at a queer Armenian Christmas party], like, I have to be Armenian, I have
to be queer. So when I’m here I identify just by being in this space. You know, if
I’m in an activist place, then I’m an activist. It depends on where I am, you
know. But within myself and within very close group of people who understand
me in, on their, that is beyond [laughs] we exist, you know, because I’m also
very spiritual.

In her comments Maral also, much like Vaik earlier and Hapik above, speaks of the
various spaces, or “wheres” that shift the subjectivity one produces (“there are certain
times that I have to identify as something in order to get something done, or be part of
something, right?”). And yet there is a difference, perhaps an incommensurability of the
different “wheres” that identity work unfolds, in that for Maral by inhabiting a particular
space (=where) she claims a particular belonging, or commonality that has
ethnolinguistically been scheduled for that space at that time (“So if I’m here right now
[at a queer Armenian Christmas party], like, I have to be Armenian, I have to be
queer”). On the other hand, for Hapik it is the insertion of his difference rather than
commonality that he highlights.

Conclusion

I think the assumption that we have something in common gives
us something in common. And the idea of shared kinship does
give us a shared kinship. You can go to another country and call
someone up on the basis of being Armenian and they will host
you. And you will host them when they come to your town. So
this kind of hospitality, shared history. The migration story is
different for everybody. But there are a lot of shared experiences.
You know, there’s this ... preoccupation with history, with
hospitality, food, music, all of these things that we share.
Especially history, documented history and talking about it. You
know, dealing with it, history as present day, I think is something that we all, kind of, share. Perhaps, not always. (From interview with Serine)

All of my queer, gay, and lesbian, as well as non-queer self-identified Armenian consultants recognize both the situatedness of their polyphonous identities, as well as the layeredness of their identity work. They use locatives and time expressions (chronotopic reference devices) to locate themselves in time and space and in relationship to present and absent others, times, and places. As Bell and Mishler note, agents do so through the use of constructed dialogue, meta-pragmatic descriptors, and pronouns, looking back at what happened at particularly key junctures of time through present experiences (De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2006:8). As Bell and De Fina argue, they use others’ voices to construct their own and convey evaluation of their role and that of others in present and past experiences (De Fina et al. 2006:13). By employing all these strategies, Kiesling and Moita-Lopes posit, they produce identities and subjectivities through subtle evocations of contexts that lend meaning to implicit or explicit gender, sexual, and ethnic categorization of themselves and others (De Fina et al. 2006). Indexicality, as was argued earlier in the chapter, links macro and micro level identities and subjectivities. And as Hymes and Becker suggest, we arrive at potential generalization through accumulating these different, sometimes seemingly contradictory particularities (De Fina et al. 2006).

Through the use of voicing devices: either bringing others’ voices into their speech, or shifting own footing and bringing their own different voices, en quoting “like,” occasional code-switching, and “I/we” vs. “them” and other indexicalities and positionings in their verbal interactions and discursive production of ethnosensual
subjectivities, my research participants provide a glimpse of the circulating discourses of diasporic Armenianness, evoking different places, times, and scales. Goffman (1981:126) refers to code-switching as a salient indicator of a change in footing, which may mark a shift in the definition of the situation, implying different spatial and historical dimensions – scale-relations permeating the semiotic resources brought to multilingual encounters. There is always an exchange between micro-level social verbal interaction and a large number of potential orders, involving larger scale categories of gender, ethnicity, generation, and class. As scalar entities, indexical orders allow us to grapple “with legacies and circumstances of migration” (Collins and Slembrouck 2009). Intertextuality that Gee (2005) defines as “... one spoken or written text allud[ing] to, quot[ing], or otherwise relat[ing] to another one” (21) and Blommaert (2005) refers to as citing, re-citing and recycling already available meanings is another key term that helps connect the elements of enacted identity to the theoretical aspects laid out here.

There are often otherings of various scales: gay Armenians othering lesbians in general and Armenian lesbians in particular, Armenian lesbians othering gay men and Armenian gay men, Armenian gays and lesbians othering heterosexual US culture in general, their Armenian families in particular, Armenian gays and lesbians othering Armenian heterosexual men, or Armenians from particular cultural backgrounds, and so on. In Chambers’s terms, there are different conditions of dialogue, “in which powers, histories, and languages permitting ‘othering’ are ascribed” (1994:12).

Serine’s comments in the epigraph to this conclusion, also echoed by most of my research participants, queer and non-queer, bring together some of the theorists I engage with throughout the chapters of this dissertation: Silverstein (2003) with his
focus on the museologized items of ethnolinguistic identity work, such as food and music, Chambers (1994) and Friedman (2003) on how particular histories are being evoked, re-membered, and re-remembered as pillars of identity work, as well as Povinelli’s (2001) [in]commensurability of the discourses of ethnicity and sexuality (Boellstorff 2007). The cultural baggage marked by the sense of belonging, language, and other museologized items, as Chambers (1994) notes, remain in us not as “origins but as traces, and voices (memories intertwined with other histories and encounters)” (19).

These traces, however, can be very defining in the agenda of the production of Armenianness in diasporic contexts. All my consultants, queer and non-queer alike, mentioned that the Armenian diasporic communities are conservative, although individuals can be progressive and accepting of non-hetero sexualities and odars (non-Armenians). At various cultural gatherings, many of my consultants also mentioned that along with being culturally conservative, Armenian communities and their leaders tend to support any US public figure who supports the Armenian Genocide cause and lobbies for Armenia and against Turkey and Azerbaijan (see more on this in chapter 1), irrespective of their views on social, economic, and political issues, including immigration. In other words, real issues that many recent immigrant Armenians might face in the US in their daily lives are not necessarily reflected on the agendas of mainstream Armenian diasporic organizations, hence the inconsequentiality of LGBTQ issues for them.

The agendas of mainstream Armenian organizations, then, reflect an imaginary of a particular kind of diasporic Armenianness: that of the Genocide trauma born
diasporic consciousness the key priority of which is still achieving justice for those perished in the late 19th century and early 20th century, along with lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and for Armenia.\textsuperscript{77} Given this, there is no space for LGBTQ Armenian issues among the priorities of the mainstream Armenian organizations. Although operating in the present, they are primarily engaged with a different chronotope and larger scales, engaging primarily with the governments of the current state of Armenia and the US. Hence, in this state-focused chronotope of social justice for the Genocide there is no room for different Armenian stories of social injustice and indifference of smaller scales, such as those of LGBTQ and/or immigrant Armenians from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{78}
Chapter 4

Divergences of the (In)commensurability of Ethnosexual Diasporic Subjectivities

“It is the issue of multiple sexualities in ethnosexual contact that I think brings most clearly to light contradictory tensions in the relationship between ethnicity and sexuality. Across a wide variety of ethnic groups appropriate enactments of heterosexuality... constitute [...] gender regimes that often lie at the core of ethnic cultures. Our women (often depicted as virgins, mothers, pure) v. their women (sluts, whores, soiled). Our men (virile, strong, brave) v. their men (degenerate, weak, cowardly)” (Nagel 2000:113).

While the homophobes were saying, *There's no such thing as a gay Armenian* – in the two generations after the Genocide, so much pressure was placed on survival through traditional marriage and family, that to be gay seemed a threat to the culture. (From interview with Noem)

In keeping with the overarching aim of creating and supporting a common dialogic space where queer and non-queer Armenians could discursively produce their ethnosexual subjectivities, this chapter focuses on the diverging “wheres, whens,” and “hows” in the face of the tensions between multiple sexualities and post-Genocide ethnic reproduction. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Armenians inhabit these multiple spaces shaped by and emanating from historical patriarchy and heterosexism in a variety of ways, sometimes imploding the hetero-patriarchal spaces from within, at other times creating alternative collectivities elsewhere.

Although, as I mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, in an effort to discuss the various conditions of gendered ethno-diasporic subjectivities, I worked with Armenian organizations (mainstream diasporic and LGBT) as the key spaces for
producing ethnodiasporic Armenianness, Maral’s voice, as a queer Armenian immigrant woman and her discursive practice and production of Armenianness constitute the core of this chapter to shift the discursive center for exploring ethnodiasporic Armenian experience. At the same time Maral’s voice is interwoven with the voices of other diasporic Armenian men and women who enter into a conversation, giving a glimpse of the variously polyphonic production of diasporic Armenianness.

My intention here is to demonstrate how the groups, communities, and networks that various people identify with affect their own discursive practice of ethno-diasporic Armenianness, and how they go beyond what their identity work in the group does. Spivak (and others such as Anderson, Foucault, and Chatterjee, to name a few) has theorized about the gendered nature of modern nationalism as hegemonic masculinist, idealizing women as mothers of breadwinning nationalist sons (Mann 1997). Mann (1997) goes on to argue that,

[a] corollary effect of such a singular, masculinist, heterosexist narrative of the nation is the effacement of lesbianism ... from the national-cultural script ...[that] Teresa de Lauretis describes as the "socio-sexual (in)difference" of nationalism and what Andrew Parker et al. describe as the "exclusion of all nonreproductively oriented sexualities" (de Lauretis 161, Parker 6). [Mann 1997:106]

Given the proliferation of hetero masculinist singular national narratives, the centrality of a queer immigrant woman’s voice intends to reshuffle and decenter the single narrative of what it means to be Armenian in the diaspora.

**Gendered Ethnosexual work of Armenian organizations**

Throughout the past three years of this research, there were no women present at the Armenian LGBT organization’s meetings, except for one meeting that I discuss later on in the chapter. My gay Armenian consultants present at the meetings stated
that they never knew why women did not attend their meetings. The mainstream organization affiliated program committee, on the other hand, has been chaired and dominated by women.

Gapo, one of the former presidents of the LGBT Armenian organization mentioned on two different occasions that one of the lesbian members had once contacted him asking for the contact information of all the women in the group as she had wanted to start her own group, since she does not like men. He also mentioned that he has no interest in lesbians and their gender issues, unless they are a friend, echoing the other side of Maral’s sentiment regarding gay men doubly rejecting women: firstly because of being men, then because of being gay. Gapo also mentioned that in the US gays and lesbians have their separate worlds, reiterating other gay and lesbian consultants’ perspective that gay and lesbian worlds are separate in the US. There have been, however, other perspectives on this as well.

Noem, a bisexual Armenian woman in her 40s from Massachusetts, currently residing in New York, who was formerly a co-president of the LGBT Armenian organization, as well as Zoulal and Anto mentioned that although they found their fellow queer Armenians through this organization, they do not attend the meetings because it seems to be run, attended, and dominated by men. And Anto added that many of the domineering men seemed to be acting like the “favorite sons” of their families, and some older men would behave inappropriately with younger men. Zoulal, perhaps incorporates all the different perspectives in her comments:

**Zoulal:** That’s just the gay community. That’s just gay. If you went to Pride [Gay Pride Parade] there would be mostly men. Yeah, I don’t know what it is. Lesbians like to stay home. They want to be with their people. For me, I don’t know, I don’t want to go to a whole fucking room full of fags. I love gays, I love
gay men, but unless it’s going to be mostly women, I wouldn’t go out of my way to go there..., there is always a sexual motivation to go to queer events, right? If you’re not even gonna go, They’re cute. They’re cute. That’s like, if there’s no potential that someone is cute there, even if I am in a relationship and totally happy. That’s why I wanna go to lesbian nights. I wanna see who’s cute, whatever. If there’s just gonna be guys, there’s no potential in that area. I have enough friends, don’t need any more. I don’t have that many male friends in general, because I think men have sometimes poor conversational etiquette, they take up a little too much space sometimes, they talk about themselves sometimes. Fags are, I don’t know, sometimes, fags are a little less political than lesbians are, you know. Again, these are, like, speaking broadly. But sometimes, gay guys are talking about their body, and they are fat phobic. And sometimes they are, like, ultra-rich, you know. With women, I don’t know, everybody’s different. But with girls I usually find something in common with them.

Zoulal articulates the sentiment shared by gay and lesbian Armenians that gay and lesbian worlds in the US are separate and often non-overlapping. She also critiques the male-dominated homonormativity and expresses her anti-masculinist sentiments (“I think men have sometimes poor conversational etiquette, they take up a little too much space sometimes, they talk about themselves sometimes”). Zoulal also points out that part of one’s interest in attending queer events is sexual, hence there is no potential for satisfying that interest, albeit platonically among gay men. Elsewhere in her comments she also echoes another pattern, very commonly evoked in hetero and non-hetero research participants, in that there is a shared understanding that mainstream Armenian events call for overtly hetero Armenian men and women, some of whom attend these events in search of a romantic partner. And although non-hetero Armenians also participate, most of them are not likely to meet other non-hetero Armenians there. Interestingly, non-hetero Armenian events that are organized by gay Armenians attract primarily gay men. And queer women and lesbians create their own alternative collectivities.
Zoulal and other queer self-identified Armenian women and men disidentifying themselves from heteronormatively produced diasporic Armenianness, in Muñoz’s terms, work “on, with, and against a dominant” ethnodiasporic identity production, contributing to the reconceptualization of the (Armenian) diaspora through alternative Armenian collectivities beyond the heterosexist and masculinist conceptualization of the diasporic (Gopinath 2005:30-31). At the same time, reconceptualizing diasporic Armenianness beyond heterosexism does not necessarily mean non-masculinist conceptualization. Since, Zoulal and other queer, gay, and lesbian self-identified Armenians, provide their critique of the dominant discourses of diasporic nationalism hinging on heteronormativity at the margins, contesting, as Gopinath (2005) argues, “the logic and dominance of [sexual, gendered and racial] regimes” (Gopinath 2005:28). Anna, Armine, and Kristine, who are all very active within the Armenian mainstream organization, think that non-hetero Armenian events are not targeted for those hetero. Zoulal views mainstream Armenianness as a hetero project and thus not inclusive of those queer. In other words, hetero-self identified Armenians active with the mainstream Armenian diasporic organization view non-hetero Armenian organizations exclusionary. And so do many non-hetero self-identified Armenians in regards to mainstream Armenian organizations. The grounds for exclusion, however, are different.

From the perspective of the mainstreamers’ the key diasporic Armenian organizations focus on the production of Armenianness, albeit hetero, whereas the focus of non-hetero Armenian organizations is sexuality, whereas for Zoulal the hetero Armenian circles invite hetero Armenians seeking subjects of hetero-desire, and non-hetero circles invite those seeking subjects of non-hetero desire. In other words, for
Zoulal both projects include an element of sexual desire, albeit different. To put Zoulal’s perspective in a dialogue with those involved with the mainstream Armenian organization, I discursively invite Kristine, a hetero self-identified, second generation Armenian woman from Virginia, in her late 30s, who is affiliated with the mainstream Armenian organization involved in this research. She oversees over two dozen program branches worldwide. Kristine articulates the sentiment shared by all the hetero self-identified research participants involved with the mainstream Armenian organization and/or participating in their events, pointing to its inclusivity and openness.

**Kristine:** So for me the reason why, I volunteered my time at Armenorg whether or not I worked there, because it’s one of the more, and I use this term a little bit loosely, more progressive Armenian organizations, because you’re able to meet other people.... It’s also ecumenical. We also go to each other’s things generally. It’s hard to define what a community is. But at the same time I align myself with Armenorg, because it is so inclusive.

With the discursive production of the openness and inclusivity of the aforementioned organization, however, the scheduling of mainstream Armenianness, or the whens of mainstream Armenianness is heteronormative (Silverstein 2003, Boellstorff 2007). So, although the young professionals involved in the leadership and organizational matters of the mainstream Armenian organization, highlight the purpose of the various programs of the organization as community building and bringing various Armenians together, notwithstanding political and religious affiliations, and raising money for Armenian causes, there is a covert element of reproducing heteronormativity when they think of mainstream Armenianness (of having Armenian men and women meet and potentially form Armenian families to produce Armenianness), whereas when they think of a non-heteronormative Armenian organization, the focus is on sexuality.
Anna: From my understanding, it’s [the events that lesbian and gay Armenian organization puts together] mostly directed to that community and me not being gay, I am not targeted. I don’t know. I am sure I would be welcomed. But it’s not directed to me. That’s my understanding.

Another interesting aspect of how these very different organizations are run is that, if the mainstream young professionals’ program is primarily run by women, who volunteer their time after work, the non-hetero Armenian organization which operates more loosely and becomes a space for those with more charisma to take the floor is run by gay men.80

As can be seen below, the head of all the Highemyes programs world-wide views women’s heavy involvement with Armenian organizations as a spatiotemporal issue, something that has evolved over time and is very specific to North America, namely the US and Canada. Hence she indexes a particular kind of gendered progressive diasporic Armenianness, where women have a chance to take up leadership roles because of larger scale sociohistorical structural processes in the US and Canada. With this, however, it is still women who invest more time in unpaid volunteering for the gendered organizational production of their Armenianness, or seek less prestigious leadership roles.

Kristine: Historically, in Armenian organizations women would lead the Women’s Guild, but men would lead the districts and chapters....It might be more of a North American thing. And I am so used to working with women, when I work with men, I feel like, Oh, this so nice. The majority are women. ... A lot of people stay with their churches. You have no idea how much I’ve seen this in young people too. In my family, my father was raised on the Echmiadzin side, and my mom was tashnag, hard core tashnag.81 It’s just when I go to [Highemyes] meetings and I have people ask, Can I invite my tashnag friends? I mean it literally happens everywhere I go. I’m like, Of course you can. They can also be on this committee. We’re not gonna say no. All you can do unite people. And if you extend an invitation, the official response will be no, but then people will show up. ... So, I pride myself on the fact that [Highemyes] is open. But it’s just it’s hard for tashnags to go over tashnag lines. At meetings sometimes
people raise their hands and would go *I grew up tashnag and my family wouldn’t like this and probably wouldn’t want me at this meeting.* [In Toronto Arm TV run by tashnags and/or working there]. Almost like whispering, *Although we are tashnag. I think what you are doing guys at [Armenorg] is great.* In Philly community because it’s so small people go to each other’s events. It’s almost silly. But last year John Evans, the former ambassador, he spoke at our Genocide event last year (2010), he was a great speaker, great. And he actually commenting on it, how he didn’t feel those divisions in the Philadelphia community.

In her comments, Kristine, through indexing specific spatiotemporal Armenianness, also echoes the repercussions of the schism that occurred in the Armenian Church in the US along the traditional Armenian political party lines in 1930s discussed in chapter 1 (“It’s just when I go to [Highemyes] meetings and I have people ask, *Can I invite my tashnag friends?* I mean it literally happens everywhere I go. I’m like, *Of course you can. They can also be on this committee. We’re not gonna say no*”).

This kind of organizational production of Armenianness, however, no matter how open and welcoming of various Armeniannesses, and as all the research participants involved with it asserted, is still overtly heteronormative. The openness and inclusiveness refers to ethnocultural and ethnopolitical background, without necessarily including non-heterosexuality. The latter then does not attract many Armenians that do not identify with the elements of heteronormative Armenianness constituting it. At the same time, non-heteronormative Armenians can and do participate in mainstream Armenian events, albeit not as a group, a collectivity, but rather as individuals, at best as a couple, who, although legally married, are never referred to as spouses, but partners.

When asked whether mainstream Armenian organizations should raise awareness of LGBTQ Armenians’ issues, the interviewees that are directly involved with
these organizations in leadership positions expressed a sentiment similar to Anna’s presented below:

**Anna:** I think that tolerance in general should be something and I think should be all-encompassing, rather than pointing out gay and lesbian community and how to talk to them. They are just people, you know. I don’t know. I think tolerance is something that Armenian community could stand to and learn more and more about. I have a close friend, a former committee member, a young professional who is going out with a Jewish guy. And I know that for her it was an adjustment. She comes to some of the events but not all of them. Understanding *that* is I think no different than, I think to Armenian man being married is less of an event, less of a thing than, you know, than an Armenian marrying a Jewish person because culturally it’s so different, and religiously it’s so different, you know. Something to that effect. I think that that’s a stigma to some extent. I don’t know, I feel like pointing them out and saying they are different. But the whole idea is that they aren’t very different. So by doing an event and saying it’s just for the lesbian and gay community would almost further ostracize them than, you know bring them in and welcome them.

In the middle of the above excerpt Anna demonstrates strategic inarticulacy (“Understanding *that* is I think no different than, I think to Armenian man being married is less of an event, less of a thing than, you know, than an Armenian marrying a Jewish person because culturally it’s so different, and religiously it’s so different, you know. Something to that effect”). She thus discursively engages in the work of euphemization, in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms. Through her inarticulacy Anna keeps her distance from her utterances. At the same time through the comparison between an ethnically different spouse and sexually different family member flattens the difference on a psychological level, thusly changing the meaning and saying less. And although different kinds of exclusion and difference are not the same, in Anna’s analogy of the acceptance of mixed-ethnic marriages and LGBTQ Armenians, the difference associated with the consequences of having a non-Armenian spouse and having a non-heterosexual sibling is erased. It erases the fact that while conservative Armenian communities and families
propagate ethnic absolutism in favor of in-group marriages, Armenians have been marrying non-Armenians for a long time.

The word «օտար» ("odor" = foreigner/non-Armenian/outsider) has been used to other the new family members who are non-Armenian. Although othered they have rarely (if ever) been disowned, which is a real issue a queer Armenian could potentially face. It also erases the potential incommensurability between sexuality and ethnolinguistic identity, in that accepting non-heterosexuality threatens the key (and discursive among others) trope of perpetuation of an already endangered tribe, the diasporic Armenianness. Besides these erasures, Anna also echoes her fellow mainstreamers’ perspective that we need to be accepting as individuals, then non-hetero Armenians will feel welcome, otherwise, “It makes them sound like lepers.” In other words, from many mainstreamers’ perspective there is no need for an institutional response to this issue.

In response to this, Harout, a gay self-identified man in his late 30s offers the following insight in his interview that also echoes the perspective of many other queer consultants:

**Harout:** I think the change that would help the most similar to federally mandated marriage equality in terms of the psychology of gay people would be including men and women, women included in the Church leadership. ...That would say that this is not closed. It does not have to be addressed to gay and lesbian issues necessarily but if we could open up about that, open up about who speaks the language and who doesn’t, the chasm and the hierarchy. [3sec] things like that, systemic things like that not necessarily programs. ...Although, programs would be nice, very nice. You know, Sam Mikaelian, he tried to include the gay group, the [LGBTArmo] in the Church, but[3sec] when everything else is so [set], ... So women in the choir and men upfront, you know. That’s a problem.

Interestingly, Harout points to the need for systemic changes in the structural approach to Armenianness in key diasporic circles and organizations ("I think the change that
would help the most similar to federally mandated marriage equality in terms of the psychology of gay people would be including men and women, women included in the Church leadership”). At the same time, through thoughtfulness and careful wording, he too, like Anna and other hetero Armenian consultants, de-emphasizes the need to target specifically the needs of LGBTQ Armenians (“It does not have to be addressed to gay and lesbian issues necessarily”). Like with non-heteronormative Indonesians (Boellstorff 2007), non-heteronormative Armenians do not challenge the normative, perhaps indicative of the middle class backgrounds they come from in the US, playing with the rules, yet not openly challenging them (Foley 1994). And if hetero Armenians challenge the rules by marrying a non-Armenian or not marrying at all, their attempts are safer and have been done before. If hetero Armenians challenge the rules of heteronormativity by being supportive LGBTQ allies, they, too do this as individuals not a group. While Noem and Maro, another queer Armenian artist, think that dialogue is always healthy for any community, Maral adds another layer of complexity:

**Maral**: Depends on what they do and how they are doing it [mainstream Armenian organizations bringing LGBTQ Armenian issues to the table]. If they do it in a nationalistic way that is not helping anyone...I don’t know, you know, because I mean it could be helpful to some people. I don’t know why it would have to be a particularly Armenian thing, because you know you might come to an event like that and you might not relate to somebody who is Armenian as much as somebody who is Chilean or something, you know. I don’t know if that is a particularly Armenian thing.

Here Maral speaks against ethnic absolutism and assumed shared experiences of families with gay and lesbian children and more to the commonalities based on other lived realities, such as immigration status, class, and racialized subjectivities. In other words, from Maral’s perspective the resolution and sense-making of the
incommensurability of ethnodiasporic–ethnolinguistic identities and sexualities does not have to be sought in one’s own ethnodiasporic communities.

Verzhig, a hetero self-identified first generation Armenian-American woman in her early 30s, originally from Northern California, at the time of the interview (September of 2011) was living in NYC, and has since moved back to California to be close to her family. Verzhig has many queer and non-queer Armenian friends. She comes from a family actively involved in the Armenian community, as well as Armenia. Although progressive herself, Verzhig mentioned that her family is fairly conservative. She also expressed her frustration that often when she is going out with her queer friends, her hetero self-identified friends assume that she is entering a queer space, which does not overlap with hetero spaces.

Although uncomfortable with this incommensurability and non-overlappingness, she sometimes trespasses queer and non-queer Armenian spaces by going to mainstream Armenian organization events with queer Armenian friends, yet when she is with queer Armenians she does not bring non-queer friends with her. On the other hand, she maintains a separation of these spaces and worlds, much like she approached the interview for this research. Before the interview, Verzhig expressed her uncertainty about her participation in the research given that she is not queer. As I explained to her that she does not have to be queer to participate, she agreed. Throughout the interview she was answering the questions from a perspective of a self-identified progressive, open-minded hetero Armenian woman.

Immediately following the interview, as we joined the conversation of the group of the queer Armenian women with whom we were at a retreat, she started discussing
her same-gender relationship and breakup with another Armenian woman that the other women in the room knew. She was discussing her same-gender relationship two minutes after telling me in her recorded private interview that she would ideally like to marry an Armenian man (or at least a non-Armenian who will be involved in the Armenian community and supportive of her active involvement with it) to raise their children Armenian and speak the language, and live the culture. Verzhig’s approach echoed Boellstorff’s (2007) observations and the comments of those of his Indonesian consultants, who engaged in same-gender relationships before getting heterosexually married and did not experience any discrepancy between their discursive production of themselves as heterosexual and their premarital same-gender relationships.

_Incommensurability:_ Issues of cultural timing between the individual and community are tied to what, Boellstorff (2007:159) calls, “[h]abitations of incommensurability,” borrowing the latter terms of _incommensurability_ from Povinelli (2001). In their multilingual cultural contexts voicing devices, code-switching, and pronouns such as “I/we” and “them” evoke various spatiotemporal scales, revealing the various positionings the agents take towards certain identity co-claimants and sociopolitical scales. Analyzing code-switching and other linguistic resources, such as enquoting that my consultants employ (Maral, “I never identified as a diasporan, ոչինպապահի, whatever;” Tamar, “Or there’s this, you know the word for fag “giot” or “foofoo” you know they have these awful, homophobic words in Armenian for queers or gay people. And he [my uncle] would always say things like, “She’s a, she’s a, giot e.” or «Ձու ում ինչ հագեր է»: [They’re a foofoo. What are they wearing?] They would just say these awful things”) allows me to address the questions of often
inhabiting, what Boellstorff (2007) terms, an irresolvable incommensurability of their ethnic identities, sexuality, and belonging. This also allows me to identify the linguistic means through which my consultants index their ethnocultural schemas of gender identity and sexuality (Bernard 2006).

An insightful instance of self-reflexive metacommentary on the embodiment of the heteronormative Armenian habitus is manifested in Dani’s comments. Dani is an Armenian woman from New York in her mid-20s, who has had relationships with men and women and avoids self-identifying as bisexual or queer, as she thinks that these categorizations are attempts at pigeonholing her and making her subscribe to an assumed baggage that comes with these loaded terms. She has spent extended amounts of time in the Republic of Armenia and has herself come face to face with the difference of her own Armenianness in relation to what it means to be Armenian in the Republic of Armenia. I will discuss her engagement with her own difference in the next chapter. Here, however, I would like to invite Dani as she provides an accurate metacommentary on the heteronormative habitus of being Armenian.

Dani: [L]ast time I went to visit Armenia... And I remember sitting in our mutual friend’s apartment I went with my girl-friend Paula, who’s not Armenian, there’s Mano, who said, I’m gonna invite this really cool girl that I just met, blah, blah, blah, she’s gay and she’s Armenian, a musician, you know, Tato. So Tato came and I was sitting right next to my girl-friend. And I heard Tato talking to her girl-friend Maria in Armenian and I see them kissing. And I was shocked, not because it was something scandalous for me clearly, because I was in the same position. But until that moment I hadn’t realized how much Armenian has been defined for me from where I’d come in a hetero way, because seeing this girl speak with her girl-friend in Armenian and kiss her was, like, They are Armenian lesbians. It was just something that was not in my experience and it was just really. It was kind of traumatic for me to realize, Stop being shocked. It’s completely ridiculous. But it was this realization how heteronormative the Armenian community is and has been for me in ways that I had never imagined or tried to understand, until that happened.
Although herself in a relationship with another woman at the time, Dani was shocked to see two Armenian women speaking Armenian in an open space of a queer female friend’s apartment in an otherwise heterosexist and homophobic culturally conservative country of Armenia and kissing each other in a same-gender relationship (“until that moment I hadn’t realized how much Armenian has been defined for me from where I’d come in a hetero way, because seeing this girl speak with her girl-friend in Armenian and kiss her was, like, They are Armenian lesbians. It was just something that was not in my experience and it was just really. It was kind of traumatic for me to realize, Stop being shocked. It’s completely ridiculous”). Through her self-reflexive reminiscing, Dani inhabits various voices, one that, albeit non-hetero conforming, has been shaped by a heteronormative Armenian habitus, and another voice that reflexively and critically engages her pre-conscious habitual dispositions. Hence, examining these various voices that my consultants inhabit, invoke, and enquote allows me to understand how they characterize the world and themselves in it.

There are often social events and gatherings involving people on the basis of queer, lesbian, or gay subjectivities, as discussed above. Povinelli’s “incommensurability” (Boellstorff 2007) is also present in the Armenian diaspora. The Armenian Church as the key place of identity production, implies male heterosexual belonging (see chapter 5), silent on homosexuality or if discussing it, refers to it as a “sin” thus excluding non-heteronormative diasporic Armenians. If for gay Indonesians (Boellstorff 2007:157), being gay and Muslim can co-exist in nonpublic spaces, for gay, lesbian, and queer Armenians being queer and Christian can co-exist in non-Armenian public contexts or queer Armenian contexts, where, unlike in diasporic Armenian public spheres there
could be openly atheist Armenians, Armenians interested in Eastern spirituality, and so on.

The commensurability is also possible in diasporic Armenian public spheres if those non-heteronormative represent themselves as individuals rather than a group. Hence, if in the case of gay Indonesians, Boellstorff (2007:158) argues there is no commensurability, whether they uphold or destabilize heteronormativity, in the case of some queer Armenians, their habitation of these various heteronormative spaces is orchestrated not with self-conscious incompleteness, but rather by mobilizing/operationalizing other subjectivities or identities, those of an artist, or a son, or a writer, or an IT specialist, ranging from kinship to professional subjectivities, never considering one subjectivity more important than the other. Consider Vart, a lesbian self-identified Armenian woman in her 60s, living in New Jersey and working in NYC:

Vart: I am million other things before I am gay. I don’t subscribe to Hello, I am gay idea, nor does [my partner].

Hence this is not dubbing culture in which there is a presupposed failure, in Boellstorff’s terms (2007:158). Instead, lesbian, gay, and queer self-identified Armenians signal that their sexualities are not the only, or defining, or the only defining subjectivities they have.

Yet those queer Armenians, for whom their sexuality is the defining feature of their identity, do articulate painful discontent with the incommensurability of their sexuality and gendered ethnic belonging:

Nina: Um, so now that everybody knows [that I am a lesbian], I’d say that the biggest fear is just, I mean it’s the same fear, I’m left out” of conversations. You know when I went to New Year’s dinner or something. And everyone was talking to my cousins, Oh, when you get married you’ll do this and this. I never wanted to be included in those conversations. That’s not true. I didn’t want those
conversations to take place before I came out, because I didn’t wanna lie and I
didn’t wanna be ashamed for who I was. But now that I’m out it’s like Why
wouldn’t anybody ask me if I’m dating somebody? Like, why is my love life so off
limits or so unimportant, you know? When we were having that conversation
both of my cousins were single and I had been in a relationship for a year and a
half. Why is that not considered [uttered much slower than the rest of the
conversation]? So it’s like, it’s scary to be such an outsider, you know.

As we see from Nina’s comments, she expresses a desire to belong, not to be left out,
yet be honest to herself (“But now that I’m out it’s like Why wouldn’t anybody ask me if
I’m dating somebody? Like, why is my love life so off limits or so unimportant, you
know?”). She realizes the burden of being out of the closet as a lesbian and belonging to
a conservative diasporic community in which there are particular expectations for a
woman. Nina raises the issue of recognition above, in that she reads the lack of inquiry
into her love life at the time of the recounted conversation as a lack of extended familial,
communal recognition of her as a lesbian Armenian-American. Heterosexual procreation,
then, as Lattas (1990) argues, “becomes a metaphor for social difference and for the
generative potential of all points of social conjuncture” (75).

As an illustration that Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) take on the defining role of the
closet is not necessarily applicable to the first generation Armenian-Americans’ case,
Nina also points to the silences instituted around issues of non-normative sexuality, no
matter how well known, that have a potential to destabilize the centrality of
heterosexual narrative of a minority ethnic group within the diaspora. While Boellstorff
(2007) calls for new collaboration between anthropology and queer studies to account
for “the emergence of radical worlds in the shadow of the liberal diaspora” that Povinelli
suggests (Boellstorff 2007:158-159), Nina’s and others’ comments demonstrate that the
Armenian diasporic communities and families are not liberal as collectivities, rather as atomized units.

**Racialization:** For most of my hetero (and one gay) self-identified first, second, and third generation Armenian-American consultants, Armenian-Americans’ being white was taken for granted. This, in a way, pointed to the particular migratory trajectories their families have had at particular times in the 20th century and the way Armenian-American racial history has become part of US racial politics (see chapter 1). Most of my queer, lesbian, and gay self-identified consultants (and one hetero self-identified woman) think of themselves as non-white.

Gapo, a gay self-identified first generation Armenian-American man from NYC, in his forties, living in New York, articulated his bewilderment, albeit, dramatically, that Armenians can be anything but white, or can think of themselves as being anything but white. Viewing the self-identifications of some Armenians as non-white as a political statement, Gapo, nonetheless, takes on the naturalized racial classification based on phenotype without questioning its legitimacy and assigns privilege to his own ethnicultural backgrounds, namely Armenian (on his father’s side) and Italian (on his mother’s side). Maral, on the other hand, perhaps, most passionately articulates the sentiments expressed by those of my consultants who identify as non-white.

**Maral:** I think about race all the time... you know, because this country has such a history with race that if I am willing to fit into that, because when you come to this country you have no choice. You are part of that history. You can’t say Oh, I wasn’t here 100 years ago. And I didn’t own slaves. I didn’t kill Indian people, right? ...But for me, like, because you are part of that you have to recognize the history of that... I don’t identify as white, but I always know that I have white privilege, you know... Not everywhere in the United States. And not everywhere in the world, because if we’re talking about Europe, if we’re talking about Russia, it’s a very different story there. And that’s the thing about this country...And I don’t identify as a person of color, either. So, it’s like, I don’t fit anywhere... A lot
of people don’t understand that actually in another place I am considered Black, you know ... And that’s the thing I say about how I cannot relate to the Western mentality, because that’s part of the Western mentality. It’s Black or White.

Maral and Gapo touch on many intriguing and interconnected discourses. Gapo embodies the US racial politics without questioning it or his own white privilege (in Maral’s terms), whereas Maral articulates her discontent with US racial politics and the manipulation of the Armenian Genocide at the hands of nationalist governments and other ethno-nationalist elites:

Maral: When I was in Armenia I went to the Genocide Museum... I got to the part where the US relations came into the picture. And there was this thing about, you know, because a lot of Armenians came here around that time. And there was a play called Ravished Armenia. And the billboard for it was this woman, this really pale, white woman, poor, little, white woman. She was being held under the hand of this red, redder looking, savage man, like, with a sword in his hand, okay? ... And it was Oh, poor Armenians, hungry, poor, starving Armenians, la, la, la. But the thing is they fit this thing, this history, these events that happened, into the American history, because this is a history of Southern Belt and Native Americans or Black people...

In the section above, Maral invokes particular voices and stances. Her stance towards the US racial politics (“American history, because this is a history of Southern Belt and Native Americans or Black people...It’s Black or White”) is critical, as she cannot find herself in the limiting racial binary oppositions. Ravished Armenia is gendered female, pointing to the devalued status of women and feminizing a nation, at the same time translating the Armenians vs. Turkey relationship into Anglo-Americans vs. Native Americans or any perceived “other” or “savage” at the time. Maral also invokes a critical stance towards diasporic Armenian discourses that take white privilege for granted:

Maral: And I think that I met a lot of Armenians who just take the privilege of what it means to be Armenian in this country [in the US], because in this country being Armenian means that you’re white, especially if you don’t have an accent, especially if you can pass, if you can pass basically... And there is a long history of that that a lot of Armenians don’t know anything about it and don’t care,
because they don’t have to care, because when you have white privilege you don’t need to care… But for me I’m obsessed with it, because I feel like, being Armenian, especially my own experience of it has been, especially with race, has been that I can be white if I assimilate, if I lose who I am.

I focus on Maral’s understanding of a racialized and gendered other, the incommensurability of whom is unsuccessfully dubbed (Boellstorff 2003) into legible and intelligible US history and politics of race of Black and White, and whiteability, much like in the Jewish case (Brettschneider 2006:22) that Gapo, coming from a privileged class background does not question, at the expense of erasure of difference that people with diasporic and immigrant subjectivities live through (Yelvington 2001). Besides, Maral echoes Namjoshi’s proposition of multifaceted in-betweenness that it is because of her own experiences with racism and anti-LGBTQ attitudes within her own family, wider ethnodiasporic community, much wider US mainstream society, then newly found alternative yet homonormative spaces where she locates herself “not within any one community but in the spaces between these different communities” (Mann 1997:101-102). Hence, through these stances Maral reworking her alignments towards various centers, creating her own space of belonging in between the many spaces that have informed her radical queer feminist of color subjectivity.

**Alternative collectivities/queer diaspora:** Within this rendering of non-productive, non-heteronormative sexualities as incommensurable with ethnodiasporic subjectivities, some of my queer Armenian consultants, who are artists, writers, and performers articulate collectivities and chosen families that challenge various nationalist absolutisms — whether ethnic or religious — and resist Western homonormativity (Gopinath 2005:20). Through their writing, photography, video art, and architecture queer, bisexual, and gay self-identified Armenian-Americans create what Gopinath
calls a “queer diasporic archive.” This *queer diasporic archive*, as Dipesh Chakravarty points out, documents the deliberate erasure of the queer agents, making it possible to imagine different potentialities of life-experiences, not forgetting historic violences (Gopinath 2005:21). Queerness or the queer(ing) perspective, then, becomes an alternative hermeneutics, as an interpretive strategy employed by those considered incommensurable (Gopinath 2005) in heteropatriarchal nationalist and diasporic discourses of Armenianess.

And while it is true that in mainstream diasporic Armenian circles the public representation of Armenianess is heterosexual, some, like Hapik, above, and his husband, also an Armenian man, insert their sexual difference as a married gay couple within these key Armenian public spheres. Others do insert their difference through their inhabiting of the space, in Maral’s terms thus also queering it. They do so as individuals, however, not a group or collectivity. If there is a non-heterosexual claim to Armenianess at times where mainstream Armenianess is scheduled to be performed (Silverstein 2003), there is unease and discomfort, hence the preferred atomized and individualized queering of hetero Armenian spaces.

While Harout, below, points to a rare effort by LGBT Armenians to raise awareness of LGBT Armenian issues, he also references another kind of scheduling of ethnodiasporic identity spaces and ways of belonging. He points to the carving of an Armenian space within the larger US LGBT movement, claiming visibility within the US mainstream society, something that is rarely done within Armenian diasporic circles. If such efforts are made, as he articulates above, they are fraught with unease and otherness.
Harout: ... I was co-president of the Armenian LGBT organization with Noem Yepratian at the time. And we went to a Happy Hour of a mainstream Armenian Organization hosted in Central Park politically to hand out leaflets about our group so that people would know about us. It was the same year when at Pride March we had leaflets and there was an Armenian family. I remember very well, the man was, there were two teenage children, the man, and woman. He was dumbfounded at the Armenian flag, because we carried the Armenian flag. I ran to give him the leaflet. And he was like dumbstruck that there could be this integration. And the Happy Hour [3sec], I don’t know if it was self-imposed but I felt, um, like outsider infiltrating. I don’t like that feeling if I’m gonna be socializing.

Harout’s memory of the Armenian father’s shock at the potential commensurability of ethnolinguistic and sexual identities through museologized items, such as the Armenian flag (Silverstein 2003) at a Gay Pride Parade speaks of the erasure of the Armenian sexual difference through silence (“I remember very well, the man was, there were two teenage children, the man, and woman. He was dumbfounded [emphasis added] at the Armenian flag, because we carried the Armenian flag”). Through his account of his experience, Harout here, and other queer, gay, or lesbian self-identified consultants elsewhere, often evoked the dominant public discourses of appropriate Armenianness and silence on inappropriate Armenianness.

Queer Armenians seem to be in tandem with the silent expectation established by the mainstream Armenian identity discourses, in that no public discussion or challenging of heteropatriarchal norms, as such, occurs. Individual queer artists do explore these issues in their work, which appear in a mainstream publication or are sold at a mainstream Armenian bookstore. This kind of queer presence is indicative of at least two things. First, it resonates with Muñoz’s observation of fleeting cultural practices as a new way of mapping the space of globalization that are easily erased from the space of heteronormativity (Gopinath 2005: 58). And second, it demonstrates that queer
communities, using Sassen’s terms, have presence yet no power (Gopinath 2005:61). Much like with the East Indian diasporas as Gopinath (2005) discusses them, “[t]he concept of diaspora ... is neither purely disruptive of normative notions of culture and community, nor is it purely “regressive” and conservative. Rather the affective ties of diaspora can be mobilized for competing and contradictory interests simultaneously” (32).

Interestingly, at a gay and lesbian Armenian Christmas party, Hapik shared with me his perspective that there seems to be a generation gap between the older gays and lesbians and the younger ones. I asked him if that's because they lived their lives closeted for a long time, perhaps. He thought so. He asked me if I've ever met a Genocide survivor. I told him I hadn't. He said, “it's like that, like there is this gap between the Genocide survivors' generation and the young generation. You respect them, you want to relate but don’t know how.” He thought that older generation people were very bitter, often nasty. This has been also articulated in a few other gay men’s interviews. At the same party, a few minutes later I joined Nver, a gay self-identified Lebanese Armenian man in his 60s, who told me that he feels bad for Mesrop, a gay self-identified man from NYC in his mid-20s, since he is single. Nver was trying to find out what Mesrop’s type is and advising him not to be too picky about age or appearance, warning that otherwise he was going to remain alone. Nver sounded like an Armenian older family member, a parent or a grandparent, or an uncle who, in heteronormative Armenian context would be concerned that the young man is not trying to get married and reproduce, albeit with a twist. This is, perhaps, one manifestation of
what Harout, Hapik, and Anto were referring to when expressing their unease with an inappropriate behavior of older gay Armenian men.

Queer women, on the other hand, create their own collectivities. Here as well, interestingly is a generational difference. At one of the gatherings of queer Armenians, I was approached by a woman in her 60s, who I saw approaching all women at the gathering and asking for their contact information. She introduced herself and asked me, “Are you Armenian?” To which I replied that I was. She then asked me “Are you lesbian?” and I replied, “No.” She said, that she was looking for Armenian lesbians and that I was welcome too. At this instance in this queer defined Armenian space I was asked to position myself, and by doing so was positioned by a fellow Armenian woman. I was not one of the women she was looking for to form an alternative collectivity with, although I was welcome to the space. If, Alla was seeking out all Armenian lesbians present at the gathering, Zoulal has a different method.

At a queer Armenian women’s retreat that Zoulal organized I told her that a queer Armenian woman has contacted me and is interested in finding out about fellow queer Armenian women in the NY area. I asked her if she would be interested in meeting her. To which Zoulal said, “Screen her out. I trust your judgment. This is not a desperate club.” In other words, if for Alla being an Armenian lesbian was enough to be part of the club, for Zoulal that was just a start but not enough. At another time Zoulal mentioned that she does feel like her queer Armenian friends are her family.

Zoulal: I would say in the past six years when I’ve made an effort to meet queer Armenian people both in Los Angeles and here [New York], I feel, like, actually, all the worlds finally came together, actually. Meeting queer Armenians who I liked, who were so cool in LA, I was like, Oh, I didn’t even know, this is every part of my personality. These are queer people who are punk rockers and into music, and they are women and they are Armenian. I didn't even think it
could happen. And then coming to New York I found a whole group of queer, Armenian, radical people, who are women. ... And I wanna have that community still, you know.

Tamar, elsewhere, and Zoulal, above, acknowledge the incommensurability of being queer and Armenian in mainstream hetero Armenian circles in the US with the focus on reproductive heterosexuality. They come to find comfort and solace, and home in a community of queer Armenian women in New York. For Maral, on the other hand, who self-identifies as a queer Armenian immigrant in the US the idea of seeking her own alternative network or collectivity has had a different trajectory. Since moving to the US in 1997 she has been back to Armenia twice: once in 2008 for a month and a half and then again for a year in 2011. Maral said that the first time she went back she could not relate to anything. And she was confused and overwhelmed and wanted to destroy everything. She was thinking “Who am I that am trying to claim anything here?” She broke off her relationship with her then girlfriend. But in 2011 she decided to go back for specifically that purpose, to reclaim her space. And she created a network of relationships and friendships, particularly queer Armenian network. So if first, second, and third generation queer identified Armenian-Americans primarily seek for queer Armenian networks and collectivities within the US metropolitan spaces, for Maral that space of belonging is the homophobic and heterosexist space of home that she left as a pre-teenager.

**Non-overlapping spaces on the margins:** Queer Armenians residing in NYC come from different urban and suburban places considering NYC a liberating metropolis. And even, seemingly liberating spaces have constraints. For example, at the LGBT Armenian Christmas parties lesbian and queer self-identified women consultants often
pointed out how the gay men at the party occupy the larger central space, that were inhabited by only a couple of small groups of women. Most of the women socialized near the kitchen and hallway area. Although in the 2012 Armenian Christmas party there were more women than the year before, in 2011 there were three hetero self-identified women and the central space seemed to be occupied by these women as they were interacting with men. In 2012, however, women, whether queer or lesbian self-identified, were mainly interacting with each other, and gay men were interacting among themselves. I found myself to be, perhaps, one of the few that were interacting with men and some women in the central part of the space. At the same party, Maral mentioned that this was not her space, “Too many gay men,” she remarked and went on to say:

Maral: [I]t’s a whole other issue with gay men... In general, because first of all you’re still a man. And sometimes being gay is this double negation of femininity or women. It’s like double hate of women, because you hate women as a man, and then you hate women as a gay. It’s, it’s, I hate saying that, but that’s how I feel, you know.

Lorig, a lesbian self-identified consultant, originally from Iran, migrated to the US with her family in the early 80s and grew up hearing from Anglo-American neighbors that she comes from a terrorist country. Looking at the gendered habitation of the party space, Lorig reminisced how growing up it was always like that: women would socialize with women and men would socialize with men. So the scheduling of this particular ethnosexual diasporic identity performance (Silverstein 2003) was targeted at non-hetero Armenians (Boellstorff 2007) on the margins of the Armenian diasporic circles. And unlike the events of the mainstream Armenian organization that take place in
downtown NYC, these social gatherings oftentimes occur in Brooklyn, Queens, or Washington Heights, geographically also on the margins of a big city.

**In-between spaces:**

I know who I am. I don’t need anybody to tell me what I can and cannot be, what different, intersecting, like, identities cannot come together, or, you know what I mean? If people don’t realize that there is all different kinds of things intersecting, that they can be wholes together, then I don’t know what to tell them. (From interview with Maral)

Noem elsewhere and Maral in this section speak of non-Armenian spaces where they attempt to find commonality around their own difference with collectivities engaged with various projects of the People of Color movement, speaking to the non-supremacy of the ethnodiasporic facet of their many subjectivities. Maral, now in her late 20s, is a first generation immigrant queer self-identified Armenian woman from the Republic of Armenia whose family made the move to the US in mid–90s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She primarily identifies with her status as an immigrant, which has brought downward social mobility to her parents, at least her father, who, previously a professional had to do odd jobs to make ends meet. Having lived in the US for most of her life, she finds herself in between worlds and finds immigrant experience to be a very powerful trope for her life, a traumatizing and shaping feature of her social life.

For Maral her queerness is shaped by her immigrant Armenian experience in what is often referred to as a liberating urban space of NYC. She echoes La Fountain-Stokes’s (2009) discussion of the social experience at the margin, as a symbolic and physical space that is marked by exile. At the same time this is the space where we can talk about Silviano Santiago’s “space in-between” and Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space.”
constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. ... [with productive capacities with colonial or postcolonial prevalence]... [I]t is the "inter"... the in-between space- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture ... And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves (Location 37-39). [Mann 1997:99]

La Fountain-Stokes (2009) posits that "[f]or all of these thinkers, the interstitial space of the outsider who negotiates the fringe as a member/nonmember is a space of possibility, knowledge, and creativity, even if it is also marked as a space of physical and emotional pain. This is also the space of knowledge at the core of queer theory’s epistemological project, the claim that sexual and gender difference can create not only otherness but also clarity and understanding that is threatened or lost by assimilation and normalization” (La Fountain-Stokes 2009:26). An artist and poet herself, Maral bridges the gap between temporal and spatial distance (La Fountain-Stokes 2009:44) through her writing and performance.

_**Maral:**_ ... [I]t’s like I mean on one level, I consider myself to be very “in-between-worlds.” So I’m in-between West and not-West, you know. ...because there are some things that people who don’t come from those kinds of backgrounds there’s something that they cannot understand in a way that they’ll support me or, um, I don’t know, it’s hard to say. It’s, okay, then there’s another thing, there are a lot of people in the West who are very active and conscious and understand a lot of things. But if their roots are in the West they can’t, there’re some things that are important to me that are important to them as well, but not to the level that it’s important to me, you know what I mean? _Oh, this is secondary. It’s not as important as these others._ To me, it’s like, _No. I need this to be a priority..._ I like to think of myself as not having an identity. Especially lately I don’t want to have any identity. Or I want to create an identity that is not anything that anyone can point to and say this is what she is, even though a lot of people do that to me, because of their own gains from it. If somebody is very into being a lesbian, they will be like, _Oh, this is my lesbian friend._ And it’s like, _Actually, I don’t identify as a lesbian, so stop._ Or if it is important to them that you are Armenian, then it’s like, _Oh, this is my Armenian friend._ That’s limiting, you know. I’m beyond that, because what does it mean to be Armenian? There’s so many things in being Armenian, you know. I don’t wanna be in a box.
In her comments above Maral struggles to articulate her position, her place within existing frameworks of thought, being generated in particular geopolitical spaces. Her inarticulacy, or inability to discursively locate herself in any specific symbolic space itself speaks to the in-betweenness she further discusses that is difficult to pinpoint.83

Through reported and imaginary voices ("If somebody is very into being a lesbian, they will be like, Oh, this is my lesbian friend. And it’s like, Actually, I don’t identify as a lesbian, so stop. Or if it is important to them that you are Armenian, then it’s like, Oh, this is my Armenian friend") that Maral enquotes (along with Tamar, Nina, Anto, and Zoulal elsewhere) she evokes what Homi Bhabha calls the Third Space and her subjectivities of in-betweenness, along evoking her sense of others’ spatiotemporally sensitive production of various subjectivities. Much like, Puerto Rican queer individuals living in New York City (La Fountain-Stokes 2009), Maral above, and Zoulal and Nina elsewhere sometimes find the queer circles in the US too superficial, white, and privileged.

Maral’s multifaceted in-betweenness expressed in her interview, social interactions, as well as through her writing, performance, and artwork underscore her commitment [much like the Indian writer Namjoshi’s] to investigating the complexities of various boundaries and “embody … interrelated, sometimes colliding sociopolitical, racial, psychosexual, and aesthetic strands, to arrive at that unstable, disruptive, liminal, but also ambivalent location of the Third Space” (Mann 1997:99). In her remarks Maral evokes the limiting one-dimensionalness of ascribing one particular identity or subjectivity and her desire to inhabit a space, or perhaps spaces, where the intersections of all the subjectivities she has are possible. So Maral looks for a space
where she will not be confined to any definition, any identity. She embraces this beyond-identity-ness in spiritual oneness of everything. And while the Third Space is useful, I would like to pluralize it so that it becomes more useful in discussing those spaces that might be contradictory to each other and incommensurable, yet enabling and nurturing of various subjectivities.

(Not)coming out/Inhabiting the incommensurability: Generational Complexities

Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) posits that for people of non-normative sexualities the closet is a defining feature of their social lives. She argues that for those gay, lesbian, and queer people who have communal support the closet is no more a defining factor. Perhaps this would have been true should we have been discussing white, mainstream Western non-heteronormative subjectivities. Among the queer, gay, and lesbian self-identified Armenians, however, it is not the closet that is a shaping presence, rather it is the relationship with the home, family, and community that my consultants have as they claim their different belongings and the (non)silences around their sexualities.

(Not)coming out to others than themselves is important and nuanced by the sociocultural backgrounds as well as spatiotemporal circumstances the consultants come from and find themselves in. Maral, perhaps, articulates this more eloquently:

Maral: Well, there’s this thing, and this is not my own thing. I learned about this through Queer theory, through Gender Studies, through People of Color, you know, there’s this thing that coming out is a very Western concept. And I didn’t really understand how it related to me, you know, because they pump that into you, You have to come out. You come out. What was your come-out story? But actually, when it comes to my family, I didn’t come out, you know. My sisters, I told them, but it wasn’t this big thing, Hey you guys, I’m gay. It was like, By the way, I’m gay. And my sisters were like, Okay, whatever. We love you.
In other words, viewing *the closet* or not coming out as *the* defining factor in non-heterosexual or queer self-identified people’s lives ignores, erases, and de-emphasizes other salient factors for them personally, familially, communally, in other words, contextually. Both Maral and Zoulal bring others’ as well as their own voices in their comments when constructing their own personas as not subscribing to the Western approach to directly, discursively projecting one’s sexuality.

Coming out also seems to be related to the patriarchal familial structures in certain ways. Queer, gay, and lesbian self-identified Armenians come out to their friends first, then siblings, then mostly mothers, then fathers. In certain cases, they do not come out to their fathers at all. Rather they let their mothers tell their fathers. Recognition in many cases is still not aloud and allowed (Collins 2013, personal communication). Often, the ethnosexual subjectivities are rendered incommensurable through different kinds of silences of those in the family and community, mostly patriarchs and matriarchs, who assume that everybody in the family and community is expected/assumed to be in a hetero relationship to reproduce more Armenianness. If not, the topic is either not raised or the same-sex partner is referred to as another *friend*, thus not acknowledging the reality and validity of the relationship:

*Zoulal:* [M]y father, actually I never officially came out to him. I have a different kind of communication with him. My mother, of course, called him immediately and told him immediately. He was already friends with my aunt [who is also a lesbian] and stuff. He was very okay. But I would say in the end he has become pretty conservative and stuff. So he calls my girl-friends my friend. It’s very irritating. I don’t really understand it. I’ve only recently been referring to people in my life as girl-friends. It’s been a year. And I’m 31. I came out when I was 17. So it took this long to somehow be really coming out. And I would be like, *This is not my friend. This is my girl-friend.* Because I do have some inner shame when it comes to my family approval.
Zoulal above speaks of the conservative retreat her father has had in relation to her sexuality. Although he had always been very accepting of Zoulal’s lesbian aunt, he is perhaps going through his own (in)commensurability of his daughter’s sexuality and ethnicity. Although very vocal and confident about her personality, sexuality and work ethic, dealing with sexism head on at her homophobic masculinist male-dominated workplace, Zoulal, a carpenter working on construction, also speaks of the significance of familial approval in various aspects of her life.

In other contexts, silence serves as a way of actually making ethnocultural and sexual subjectivities commensurable. Consider Vart, Zoulal’s aunt, a gay self-identified Armenian woman in her 60s; Tamar, a queer self-identified Armenian woman in her early 30s from LA area; currently living in NYC; and Sati, a lesbian self-identified Greek Armenian in her mid-40s, living in LA for over 20 years and their familial silences:

**Vart:** I actually never formally came out to my family. Sort of, just kept bringing the girls home and people would get the gist of it until, maybe in my 20s I had an aunt, who was working in the medical field, her husband was a physician and she was a nurse. She came to me one day and said, *You know, we can get you the best psychiatrist* [laughs], because back in the 70s it was a mental illness. And so I tried to laugh that off, *These folks don’t have any idea what’s happening.* And that was the extent of the conflict in the Armenian situation… But in my later years, living here with Marlene. We’ve been together for almost 20 years, my father adored Marlene. He called her his fifth daughter. He really really loved her. They had a really good bond together. They loved to travel to Atlantic City to go to casinos. And that’s something I really hate doing. And so, he never, ever, if he had a problem with it he never said anything. Completely treated us really well, yeah... I mean people didn’t go around announcing that they were gay in the 70s. It was, sort of, an undercover situation… [P]eople weren’t out out like these kids [Zoulal and her friends] are out.

Vart’s comments above, and Sati and Tamar elsewhere, represent different generations of non-hetero Armenians in the US. Their comments reveal how silence becomes part of rendering the incommensurability of ethnodiasporic belonging and sexuality inhabitable...
in different ways. Vart’s discursive strategies of talking about (not)coming out, also point
to the different ways non-hetero Armenians discursively produce their non-
heteronormativity. Having come to her own as a non-hetero individual in the 70s has
shaped her own discursive habitus and muted, not-naming discursive strategies of
producing her own non-heteronormativity.

Often in tandem with the silence on the part of family or community members
comes the silence of the non-heteronormative Armenians. Aware of the unease of the
family and community members around non-reproductive, non-normative sexualities
(oftentimes attributing this unease to their older generation kin and extended family and
community), queer Armenians inhabit the incommensurability of their ethnodiasporic
and sexual subjectivities. This is what Maral is speaking to below:

**Maral**: [W]hen it comes to my parents obviously it’s another issue. You know, to
this day I haven’t officially come out to them. It’s gone to the point where, it’s
like silent under the surface kind of thing, where they know now. There was one
time a confrontation between me and my mom, when she was the one
confronting me. I didn’t go up to her and say, *Hey mom, I’m gay*. She came up
to me and was like, *How could you do this?* She didn’t say anything. She was
like, *A woman is supposed to get married and have children, la, la, la*. And I was
like, *Okay, I can still do that*. But I’ve never come out. I’ve never had any kind of
conversation, confrontation with my dad, for example. With my mom it’s
different, you know. But I’m sure my dad knows. Like, if he doesn’t ask me *Oh,
how come you don’t have a boyfriend?* For so many years that already means
that he’s accepted that I don’t have a boyfriend, you know?

For other queer Armenians coming out has been very important and for different
reasons. Anto, who is very active in queer activist and artistic circles in the US,
volunteering his time with various LGBT projects, recognized that his parents would be
unprepared for the news, but wished to disclose all parts of his subjectivities. Anto, in
his own words, decided “to be the adult” and explain to his parents about his sexuality:
**Anto:** I just live with this idea of not coming out [as I do not see my older relatives very often, they live on the West Coast]...Most of my life, since I was very young, I didn’t get much emotional care from my parents. You know, like, they would take care of me, take care of us. You know, when we fought they would help us, you know. But overall there was many emotions that I was not allowed to have.... Watching for their emotions, watching them cry, trying to make them feel better, instead of the other way around...I treated coming out to them as I was the adult. I remember this, I wrote about it in my journal. I was 25 years old. *I am the adult. This is something that I had been working on, I was in therapy, you know. This is something new to them, they are like children.* I remember telling myself, *They are like children, because they have this idea of God that is very putative, that’s very childish... So I have to tell them this in a way that is not very scary, you know.* Like when you have to tell kids about cancer or something, *Mommy has to go to the hospital.* I said it with a smile, through the whole thing I did not cry. ... And they cried, and I said, *It’s okay.*

Consider also the significance of coming out to Noem, a bisexual self-identified woman in her early 40s from Massachusetts, currently residing in NYC:

**Noem:** I have to go back to my 20 year old self to remember how important it was [laughs]. [6 sec pause]. Yeah, I mean it was very important, because [4 sec pause], I feel like there was so, I think one reason why it was important was because there was so much I would have wanted from them in terms of dealing with sexuality and the side of my life that had to deal with being a partner to someone. That kind of stuff just wasn’t talked about. So I think it was important to me to broach or to break that kind of silence with them. And also that I didn’t want to feel like I that they [6 sec pause], I guess that their expectations of me didn’t quite fit with what I wanted from my life. So it was important for me to voice that, to have my own feeling that I have my own individuality, my own choices.

As can be seen above, there are different scales involved in the significance my consultants attach to their coming out. For Anto it is the scale of the gay movement and responsibility to the movement and the community. And for Noem it was personal and political in that it was important to voice her own difference with her parents as a way of breaking the discursive silence around difference in her family, in the Armenian community. At the same time it was an articulation of one’s take on individual
aspirations and intentions and responsibility as an adult child for her own life, that was different from the communal and parental expectations from own children.

In his comments on the liberating feeling of his coming out, Hapik, also, much like Maral, but from a different angle, challenges and critiques Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) proposition of closet as a defining factor in the social lives of non-hetero self-identified people.

**Hapik:** It was liberating. I think it was a little, how do you say, it was a little, you know, I think when you are in the closet often you think that everything’s gonna be fine when you come out of the closet. And things are fine but then you realize there are other things in your life that are problems that you assumed... [T]he thing is that you are assuming that it was just because you are closeted. And then after I came out and I was fine. *Oh, no, these are whole different issues.* That anxiety has nothing to do with me being closeted it has to do with this other part of my life that I never really dealt with. So I often see that people use closeted as an excuse.

Hapik points out that closeted individuals think that it is the closet that is the defining uncomfortable presence in their lives, and once they rid of it, things will take a different turn. But he notes that people often conflate non-closet related issues with being in the closet and are often disillusioned that being out of the closet, having a supportive community does not address their discomfort in other areas of their lives. The internet has been a significant source for queer Armenians to not only find each other to create queer Armenian spaces but also come out. Noem, elsewhere, and almost all of my queer consultants mentioned that they thought they were the only queer Armenians. Noem also talked about the shifting trends among queer Armenians as they are becoming parents. In her comments, Tamar spoke of utilizing social media as a way of coming out to a large number of people without necessarily having to face them. And although in her earlier comments she said she has not come out to her family, rather she has
done so indirectly by posting photos or comments on Facebook for people to indirectly understand; at a later point in the interview she mentioned that she has not hidden her sexuality. Perhaps she is herself working through her own discomfort of coming out and labels her own method as “cowardly.”

Often my consultants reported that they came out to their mothers first. And the mothers would let the fathers know, either on their own initiative or upon the request of my consultants. In cases when the consultants came out to their fathers first it was because the father was the easier person to come out to in terms of his response not being significant. Overall, based on the coming out pattern of my research participants, they choose to come out to friends first, then siblings, then to the parent who is either more relatable or easier to deal with, leaving the breaking of the news to the parent they are more anxious about for later.

Along with other non-direct coming out strategies of my consultants, such as an email, a letter, or an art show, some (in all cases women) have been outed by their mothers. My consultants do not view this as an act of symbolic violence, instead they report a closer tie to their mothers because of this, also echoing other queer Armenians’ comments on the significance of a meaningful relationship with family through full disclosure of sexuality. Consider Tamar:

Tamar: Well, like I said I came to New York. There is nobody. My family is all in California. But the first three or four years I would never talk about my personal life to my mother. Our phone conversations were nothing. And she was really getting offended that I am forgetting her and I am losing her. But I couldn’t share my private life with her, because I needed a lot of help because of, you know, you talk to your mother and you are like, I am dating somebody and it’s not working out. Or I am dating somebody and I am so in love with them, you know. I can’t share that with my mom. So everything became work conversations, or where I am travelling next or who I am hanging out with or if I have any Armenian friends. It was such a [brief pause] you could tell she was
trying to dig for answers and I was putting the wall up and giving the fraudest answers, fraudulent answers, you know, like fake. You know, whatever. And I hated it, because it kind of broke our relationship, because my mom and I are veeeeeeery close. She finally thought. I know my mother, she's neurotic, I know she was thinking I am probably a drug addict, partying, whatever. She doesn't know. This is her child and she doesn't know anything about her. So... because I remember backtracking when I was growing up my mother ... and father, my family, EVERYBODY, was homophobic, racist, homophobic, it's like these stereotypes that everybody still says. Behind closed doors, it's like, Oh, My God! It's still rampant. But my mother once said, I like gay people but if it was anyone of my daughters I would kill myself. And so then I am putting this block that, Ok, I'm never going to be gay. I mean, this whole gay thing is apparently bad if it's gonna kill my mother. I am not gonna do THAT to her. So I didn't wanna say anything. And I was just like, Maybe it's a phase too. I didn't know what the hell I was. That's why when people say, Are you gay? I am like I don't know. I really don't know. I like everyone. So once I was having a fight with my girlfriend. And she called me. My mom is very intuitive. Every time there is something wrong, she calls me. She feels it. She's such a mo:m. ...And I couldn't hold it in anymore. And then she started questioning. And she was like, Are you, mmm, is it a problem with a man? No. Is it a problem with a woman? I am like, "Yeeees." She's like Honey I knew. I know. It's okay. But years later now that we are very open and comfortable about it, I ask her now, How was your coming out? How was it dealing with your daughter being, telling you that and saying yes it is a woman? She was like, It was sooo difficult. So I didn't realize. I kept it all about myself, but she was having her own coming out transition. So I think it's gotten us soooo close.

Both Tamar here and Nina elsewhere make their comments very polyphonic through bringing in others' voices, as well as their own voices from different times, to demonstrate the struggle and the difficulty of coming out and the perceived consequences thereof. Also, they both point out their appreciation for the support of their families after their coming out. And Tamar also articulates her self-reflexive observation that the parents of non-hetero children have their own hardship and their own coming-out and dealing with the (in)commensurability of the Armenianness and sexuality of their children within themselves and in the Armenian community ("But years later now that we are very open and comfortable about it I ask her now, How was your coming out? How was it dealing with your daughter being, telling you that and saying
yes it is a woman? She was like, *It was sooo difficult.* So I didn’t realize. I kept it all about myself, but she was having her own coming out transition. So I think it’s gotten us sooo close”.

What Tamar’s comments also reveal is that at a certain point, she, as an adult child realized that her mother is not all-powerful. Elsewhere, Tamar described her mother as her powerful and passionate hero, her rock, her all-around parent who is her “mother and father in one, this beautiful person who’s tough and aggressive and also very sensitive.” Tamar and her mom, like Nina and her dad below, find common humanity in their full acceptance of each other:

**Nina:** And when I first came out my dad said that he didn’t want to meet anybody. But then I had this girl-friend who was Puerto Rican, the daughter of immigrants. And that really eased the relationship. My parents met her and that was, like, life-changing a little bit, because she was an angel. And, I mean, my dad was, like... basically he was like, *You know I am looking at you two together. And you are just like two kids who, like, like each other. And it’s not, like, hurting anybody.*

Tamar’s realization that having a queer child has its own coming-out hardship for parents triggered her full resolution with her mother. In Nina’s case, it was Nina’s then partner from a comparable cultural background that triggered her father’s recognition of the limitations of heteronormativity.

**Gendered (not)coming out:** Although all queer, lesbian, and gay self-identified consultants express coverture of their sexuality around older generation Armenians, assuming and sure that the latter will not understand it. And it will lead to an incommensurability that they rather not inhabit, it is mostly queer self-identified women and lesbians who expressed discomfort around making the other party feel uneasy, perhaps evoking the embodied female emotional habitus of being more attune
to others’ emotional needs nurtured in many Armenian households across the Armenian transnation (see chapter 1). Noem below articulates this perspective with great enthusiasm:

Noem: Sometimes I do that [come out] I just do it in writing and not in, like, person. And I, it’s this feeling that you’re protecting people. Like you don’t want to upset them and you don’t wanna. There’s that. And there’s also you don’t want their negative reaction... Even as I was talking about it and saying protecting, it felt like something rooted in family, because I think one of the problems or the fears of Armenian families with queer kids is the public scrutiny that they’ll face, that they’ll be judged and misjudged poorly. And so I think that’s kind of where it stems from. Like, Oh I don’t want to upset this group of people to have to deal with it and have to think about it, because they think of me in a certain way and I don’t want to upset their understanding of me and I don’t want to upset their world. So it’s kind of not seeing the reality and kind of basing it on what you’ve experienced in the past.

For Noem, also articulated by many of my queer consultants it is the group effect, recognizing that although individually Armenians can be more aware and open, in a group, the claims of belonging hinge on reproductive heteronormativity. In Sati’s case, also echoed by most of my consultants, queer and non-queer men and women alike, it is the generational gap.

**QY and LGBT Armo Activism: Queer Transnational Networking**

**Spaces of (im)possibility/(in)commensurability:** Much like in the Indian case that Gopinath (2005) discusses, where queer people find spaces of possibility within the most homophobic and heterosexist circumstances of home, some queer Armenians originally from Armenia and temporarily living in the US, like, Lola and Marco mentioned at two separate queer Armenian events in New York City that they feel more comfortable in Armenia, with their families, and their alternative communities within the heteronormative Armenian society notwithstanding the conservative heteropatriarchy of the Armenian society. The spaces of possibility and commensurability are often tied to
the impossibility and incommensurability that Queering Yerevan (QY) collective members (a women’s movement, consisting of a group of Armenian queer and straight women artists, writers, cultural critics, and activists) collectively or individually try to queer, thus turning the social, cultural, and artistic impossibility and incommensurability into possibility and commensurability.

Lola and Shanti, as well as Gaya, active members of QY often talked of, what Tlostanova (2010) terms as “critical border epistemology in gender sphere” disrupting the status quo on a micro-level cautious to never become co-opted by hegemonic institutions (204), be those of the State, or international funding agencies:

**Lola:** We feel that there is a mass movement here [in Yerevan and Armenia by contemporary artists] ...that they try to enter the institution [of mainstream contemporary art], always trying to get into the institution in the hopes of changing it from within. But they don’t realize that today that is impossible. They have to be completely independent.

**Shanti:** Yeah to do it independently, so that they create an institution so that the other one disappears, rather than trying to get into it [the existing institutions].

**Lola:** If they become part of that [the existing institution] it is already corrupt and there are so many bad things and mold that you can’t clean it.

**Shanti:** Listen, they can’t. They are nationalist arts. And they have to promote that. They are not interested in anything else. Or they have to put you under the banner of the national so they can give you money... You know they [mainstream contemporary artists] used to criticize us up until last year, saying *You have come together as homosexuals/non-heterosexuals, that is not interesting, it is insular, limiting, etc.* And no matter how much I tried to explain that for me the use of that word, was perhaps a political stance. In other words, they think they accept you, but remembering my own experience ...It doesn’t matter what you are, if you are non-hetero that’s how they perceive you [and all your artwork]. And as though purposefully I would emphasize that word. *Yes we have come together as homosexuals.* But I know that my work is not *only* about that, or I don’t *only* think about that. And I think that helped [the mainstream hetero self-identified artists to reevaluate their perspective].
Lola: ...Also we definitely want to have not only artistic and literary perspective, but also academic. We want to have diverse perspectives.

Shanti: That is very important and is very rare in our field. Everyone is on their own. The artists and art critics are doing their own thing; the musicians, directors, film critics are also in the field of arts but they do their own thing.

Lola: I think that is because of our subject, because after all we are queer. We want to problematize and raise the issue of sexuality. We want to show that it should not be touched upon only in the arts. We want to somehow be involved with it, so that it becomes commensurable, so it doesn’t seem appearing out of the blue/falling from the sky.

QY then attempts to critique the uniformity, insularity, and homogenization promoted by mainstream Armenian contemporary art, without becoming part of the institutionalized contemporary art saturated with nepotism and favoritism, and conformity to the status quo. As Shanti noted above, her work as an artist and that of her queer artist friends has often been reduced to their sexuality as the only shaping, informing factor in their art largely echoing wider societal attitudes. Working as a collective, not seeking funding from the State or international donor organizations, QY collective is seeking to create a space that would bring together different artistic voices, perspectives, and media, that will be viewed and appreciated based on their artistic value and not diminished to the sexuality of the artists. At the same time QY members attempt to render queerness as commensurable.

**LGBTArmo kickstarter for the QY Book:** As mentioned in the previous section the NYC based Armenian LGBT organization members and QY collaborated on the publication of a book that was the catalog of QY correspondence among founding members, with other collaborators, art interventions, and interviews. I was approached to interview some of the collective members on one of the QY art interventions as well.
Lola opened the presentation of the book at a bookstore in Washington Heights, in New York City, highlighting the significance of publishing the book at the publishing house where the book was published. It used to be the censored press for the Communist Party Central Committee. And yet this censoring space, where perhaps no books on queer topics had ever been published, opened up its doors for queer issues. She said that the staff were very professional and very involved in making the best product and would comment on technical stuff only. As to the topic, they would ask Lola, Gaya, and Shanti what it was about and why. And the QY members would say that they are artists, writers, and that’s what they do. Lola also mentioned that 2011 marked 500 years of publishing books in Armenian and it was of symbolic significance that QY book came out the same year, although, as she mentioned, it is not going to be talked about by mainstream publishers in Armenia.

Interestingly, although Noem had invited all the LGBTArmo members to this queer Armenian women’s project for which LGBTArmo had established a fundraising kickstarter, Anto, a gay Armenian visual artist active in the US artistic, as well as queer circles, and interested in collaborating with artists, queer artists, and the queer scene in Armenia in general, was the only male member of LGBTArmo present at the event. Others in attendance were all women: queer Armenian artists, progressive hetero ally artists, writers, and representatives of a Swedish NGO that QY had collaborated in the past. It is worth mentioning again, that Anto, as well as queer women who are LGBTArmo members never attend LGBTArmo meetings, arguing that the social space of the meetings seems to be run by the favorite and charismatic sons of Armenian families.
who take up too much space. In other words, they expressed their discomfort with the homonormativity and homo-patriarchy within the organization.

After the presentation, Maral, a queer Armenian immigrant woman living in New York City, who has collaborated with QY and Women’s Resource Center in Yerevan in Armenia upon her various returns to Yerevan, mentioned how she could not believe that her Yerevan had migrated to New York and that it did not feel weird. Maral commented on the translocal movement of her psychogeography of Yerevan, a practice of “rewriting the urban text in terms of a desire that snares the unexpected, the incalculable, the situation” (Chambers 1994: 106), that she has reclaimed through her queer networks in Armenia (see more on this in the previous chapter).

**DIY Firebombing:** On May 8th, 2012 DIY, a gay friendly bar in Yerevan, Armenia, frequented by progressive thinkers, intellectuals, artists, and writers, was fire-bombed by two neo-Nazi young people, on the grounds that the manager of the bar, who had performed with her feminist punk band at the Istanbul Gay Pride Parade related festivities in 2011, was pro-gay and pro-Turkey and her club was a “gay den” and that “the likes of her should not live in Armenia.” This incident caused a significant public outcry by human rights activists and NGOs, in Armenia as well as outside of it.

The situation was further aggravated when Artsvik Minasyan, a member of the Armenian parliament from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), bailed out one of the fire-bombers and referred to the assailants as “patriotic, responsible normal young people.” Although the New York-based LGBT Armenian organization released a statement, expressing their concern that ARF did not reprimand its member, there were very few other Armenian diaspora-based letters to the editor in the Armenian
diasporic/transnational press, expressing a similar sentiment. In most cases, diaspora-based as well as Armenia-based writers, themselves ARF members or supporters, would remind the readers about the origins of ARF and its long history of fighting for equal rights, and so on, thus deflating the significance of the activities of the ARF member MP.

In early July of 2012, Artsvik Minasyan was elected to ARF Executive Board. The Armenian Parliament Deputy Speaker Eduard Sharmazanov and another MP Hovhannes Sahakyan, among others, have also voiced their support for LGBT intolerance.\textsuperscript{87} 88

This firebombing brought together the New York based Armenian LGBT organization and QY. QY joined a dozen NGOs that issued a joint statement condemning this act of violence. And the NYC based Armenian LGBT (LGBTArmo) organization issued its own statement condemning the acts of violence and hate speech, promoted by public officials, members of parliament, other high ranking officials, all exclusively male.

Interestingly, the organization and its supporters were mobilized by Noem, an activist performance artist and writer who is a QY member, LGBTArmo member, and former co-president of the said organization.

The LGBTArmo meeting for which Noem had proposed to discuss issuing a statement, was the first meeting in the two and a half years of my research that had women as well as men in attendance. Usually the meetings are attended by gay men. Upon Noem’s efforts there were four women present at the meeting. Dani, who came to the meeting for the first time was asking what LGBTArmo usually does or has done and whether the organization does any kind of activism in the Armenian community in the US or Armenia. Gapo, one of the former presidents of LGBTArmo said that when he and Noem were the presidents they used to. They went to the Armenian Church, they held
readings, and talks on homophobia. And Vartan started enumerating the events that I was also told they had organized in the past when I started my research with the organization two and a half years ago.

Ara, Mesrop, and Vartan, all former presidents of the NY based Armenian LGBT organization at different times, said that they hadn’t done much activism in the Armenian community. Vartan told Dani that activism is not the purpose of the organization but if she is interested they can do it. He said that he and his husband Hapik are active in the Armenian community. To which Hapik responded that activism and being active in the community are different things. Ironically, coming together to respond to the fire-bombing of a gay-friendly bar and threats to its manager who is perceived to be a lesbian, also revealed how the purpose of LGBTArmo becomes redefined depending on who the president is.

Following the LGBTArmo meeting, on behalf of the organization Hapik initiated a petition condemning the fire-bombing and calling for equal rights for all Armenian citizens, LGBTQ citizens included. With this petition he sought for and received the signatures of many renowned diasporic Armenian cultural and intellectual figures. After the petition was signed by these renowned figures, LGBTArmo affiliates, allies, and supporters disseminated it via social media to their various communities. This is significant since the signatories of Hapik’s petition index solidarity, even if temporary, across distance. Hence, the often circulating discourses of Armenians as a group being publicly conservative is not necessarily accurate. Although, LGBTQ issues are not on the agendas of the Armenian organizations and Armenian-Americans do not see these violations of human rights happening to them, by signing the petition the renowned
Armenian-Americans recognize the issue of LGBTQ human rights violation and hate crime, albeit transnationally removed. The DIY event also highlighted that the right wing conservatives in Armenia are not divorced from LGBT Armenian issues.

For Vartan, the purpose of the organization is to support LGBT Armenians and provide a safe space. For Gapo and Noem it has also been to engage in queer activism or LGBT activism. Noem, a NY based queer Armenian-American writer, mentioned in her interview that when she wants to connect to Armenians and engage in queer activism QY is the group she does that through. And so did Maro, a Boston based queer Armenian artist, herself a QY member, has participated in some of their activist projects and is currently going back to Armenia to work for two different NGOs, including an NGO dealing with LGBT issues.

In contrast to these different perceptions of the purpose of LGBTArmo by different members, for most QY members the purpose of QY is activism, using the arts as its medium, or language as its members put it. Kristine’s comments that LGBT issues are not a priority for the diaspora organizations, unless these issues occur in Armenia, where the violations of basic human rights in general are often still egregious are accurate regarding the Armenian diasporic organizational stance to such issues. In US Armenian circles, as Kristine put it, “people at least pretend to be democratic.” What is fascinating, however, is that, as in the Indonesian case, as Boellstorff (2007) discusses it, gay Indonesians distill the national and transnational discourse of body politic (167) and belonging. In the Armenian case as well, whether in the diaspora through public silence regarding LGBT Armenians, or in Armenia through hate speech promoted by public figures and through mass media, the anxiety that the issue of non-
heteronormativity points to in the public outcry is that of body politic of national citizenship, ethnic morality, and by extension, belonging, all of which hinge on productive hetero-belonging.

**Conclusion**

"History is harvested and collected, to be assembled, made to speak, re-membered, re-read and rewritten, and language comes alive in transit, in interpretation" (Chambers 1994:3).

Although I started out the research for the previous chapter, as well as this chapter itself as an exploration of the discursive practices of ethnolinguistic and sexual subjectivities in the US Armenian diaspora, where identity production has been carried out through organizations, the organizations I started my work with were the points of intersections that led to other collectivities and experiences of Armenianness, as my consultants used them.

I employed queer theoretical reading, and destabilized the institutional production of Armenianness through frequently focusing on an immigrant queer Armenian woman’s perspective on the production of Armenianness, who dis-identified herself from her own diasporicness and re-engaged with it at the same time. By giving centrality to a queer immigrant woman’s voice, I provided a *queered* view of the production of diasporic Armenianness, which in key diasporic Armenian public spheres (Werbner 1998) is heteronormatively produced with silent and erased queer habitation. On the margins of the Armenian diasporic public spheres are alternative diasporic spheres, queer Armenian diasporic spheres, also oftentimes gendered and separate. I demonstrated that feminist epistemologies, whether mainstream Western or those of feminism of color, or theorization on incommensurability of ethnicity and sexuality, are
rooted in the Western and US racial and ethnosexual politics, and that the engagement of sexuality and ethnicity with modernity and tradition does not allow us to fully theorize about queer transnational and diasporic production of Armenianness that has been marked by other sociohistorical racialization/ethnicization processes.

In the Armenian diasporic experience of difference, factors such as migration, racialization, and class intersect and complicate the salience of sexuality in a non-linear way. The diasporic experience of difference is also often marked by points of references, or as Serine put it, “the starting points.” For most of my consultants, queer and non-queer alike, the starting points of Armenianness are rooted in history, for many of them this is rooted in the history of the Armenian Genocide. And for many, in their encounter with fellow Armenians from elsewhere, it is the starting points of difference that de-center their own narrative of Armenianness, and for most — distance them from an other Armenian experience. For a few, it is in the difference of the Armenian experience that they find commonality. In other words, they become their own other through their Armenian encounter of difference. On the other hand, the erasure of the Armenian experience of difference is often marked by its gendered conformity to the US politics of whiteable racial politics, inhabiting the gendered space of women as nurturers, upholders of the heteronormative family along with those of professionals.

Although briefly touching on and departing from organizational analysis and focusing on the discursive production of Armenianness by individuals, the intent to include organizations in this chapter identifies the affiliations and positions my research participants evoked. All my mainstream Armenian organization affiliated or sympathizing consultants mentioned that the Armenorg is one of the most progressive Armenian
organizations open to any Armenian difference, employing and involving non-hetero young people, albeit queer issues are never raised as Armenian issues.

As Collins noted (2013, personal communication), organizations depend on who inhabits them and although, as stated above, queer and LGBT issues are not raised as Armenian issues, the (temporary) acts of solidarity around queer issues as a response to the DIY fire-bombing are significant. Also significant is the resolution that LGBT and queer Armenians reach with their parents. These are significant in that they create those spaces of new possibilities and commensurabilities that many queer and LGBT Armenians consider impossible.

Remarkably, in social network analysis individuals who connect otherwise disconnected individuals and/or groups are called *bridging nodes* (Granovetter 1983). In my research the *bridging nodes* are those consultants who traverse the variously gendered, racialized, and ethnicized spaces of Armenianness. These *bridging nodes* are the hetero self-identified Armenians (mostly women) — who themselves have experienced various kinds of difference — who now navigate between hetero and non-hetero Armenian social spaces in the US. These *bridging nodes* are gay and queer self-identified Armenians who navigate between queer and non-queer Armenian and non-Armenian spaces. These bridging individuals often, as Valente and Fujimoto (2010) point out,

may be more effective at changing others, more open to change themselves... Innovations that are radically new, less compatible with cultural norms, or have the potential to change power dynamics within a community or organization may be more readily embraced by bridging individuals than leaders because leaders have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. [213]
Valente and Fujimoto (2010) insightfully capture the discursive production of one’s self and issues around the ethnosexual incommensurability of those of my consultants who would be bridging nodes. It is through them, as well as in those spaces of intersections, the third spaces, as well as those in-between spaces where queer ethnosexual diasporic subjectivities are rendered commensurable. Although, this might be the case for most second and third generation Armenians in the US, queer immigrant women from Armenia, as well as first generation queer Armenian-Americans produce the sense of insecurity and inconclusiveness in the queer Armenian female experience through the analogy among race, ethnicity and sexuality, often feeling othered in most situations. For them queer experience is like Armenian experience in the diaspora, or the experience of people of color in the US. In other words, it is an experience of difference. Being a queer immigrant woman and a first generation Armenian-American my queer consultants come from different chronotopic spaces, currently inhabiting different social spaces in NYC as well, and yet they speak of difference, differently experienced, lived, and discursively produced. We are back to the starting places again, where one’s own life history and that of the people one comes from, diverge and collide in the Third Space.
Chapter 5

Queering/Bombing the Nationalist Heteropatriarchy

"A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience: We are the colored in a white feminist movement. We are the feminists among the people of our culture. We are often the lesbians among the straight. We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983:23).

General objectives and significance

Unlike the covert exclusion of non-heteronormative Armenian issues from Armenian diasporic discourses, in the Republic of Armenia (RA) high-ranking government officials, along with mass media, and mainstream cultural workers directly attack non-heteronormativity at local and national levels. In this chapter I explore the (in)commensurability of queer subjectivities and national belonging in an almost exclusively monoethnic landlocked country that has no diplomatic relationships with two of its four neighboring nations. More specifically, on the one hand, I examine the complex linkages (uneven and contradictory) between the state and cultural discourses and policies on non-heteronormativity often calling on tradition and, on the other, queer activists’ response to these discourses (much like Blackwood in Kim-Puri 2005:144, 148).

Exploring the meaning-making of the (in)commensurability of gendered cultural difference would not merely allow us, as Kim-Puri (2005) claim, to identify similarities and differences among diverse ways of negotiating difference in various cultural settings, but instead, would complicate and point to the multiplex, often seemingly
contradictory, and uneven links existing across cultural settings (Kim-Puri 2005) that mold various kinds of engagement with the (in)commensurability of classed and racialized ethnic and sexual difference.

In the Republic of Armenia, gender and race are socially construed differently than in the US, responding to different regional and transnational pressures. The State and smaller scale agents, such as a group of Armenian queer and straight women artists, writers, cultural critics, and activists, called Queering Yerevan collective (QY), on which I focus in this chapter, localize different regional, translocal, and transnational processes differently.

**Shanti:** And that constant outside gaze, that they are always coming from the West to save you, right? There was a time they used to come a lot. They were trying to teach you. They were the ones liking or disliking you. In other words, everything depended on them. And then at some point you realize, Why? I’ve had education that wasn’t too bad in the long run. Then I’ve had self-education. I have been interested in whatever has been interesting to me. Perhaps it has been limited. But at least the good thing about that self-education is that you decide what you want to take.

It is this intersecting artistic space of the post-Soviet and post-colonial where the QY collective members operate. Shanti, an artist in her thirties is one of the founding members of the women’s movement that this chapter addresses. Above she speaks of a larger scale Western “savior,” whereas Lola, another QY founding member, speaks of local scale “hetero savior.” Lola below describes a split between a dear hetero friend that she collaborated with and herself because of the disempowering and alienating discourse of a “hetero savior.”

**Lola:** But then there comes a point when you realize that it [the collaboration or relationship] is either patronizing or tolerance. Or It would have been better if you didn’t highlight your sexuality too much. And you go, But you are projecting your own sexuality on me all the time. You can’t. When they keep trying to
present you well, or help you all the time, that’s unpleasant. You feel handicapped. Why?

Lola’s interactional discursive project above engages not only her own voice but the voice of a former friend as well pointing out how her subjectivity is a position (“And you go, *But you are projecting your own sexuality on me all the time. You can’t.* When they keep trying to present you well, or help you all the time, that’s unpleasant. You feel handicapped. Why?”). Lola’s position above is an instance of what Tsing (2000) calls "projects," which he defines as “relatively coherent bundles of ideas and practices as realized in particular times and places” (Tsing 2000: 347) through the study of the differential and dialogical negotiation, refusal, and erasure of imaginative terrains such as scales and geographies. These polyphonic voices engaging immediate audiences as well as absent others, demonstrate how, for example, Lola’s project, or indexed subjectivity, differs from that of a hetero friend whose “project” or evoked subjectivity, although with good intentions, has a different “bundle of ideas.” These differently scaled rejections of being looked at — that Lola and Shanti articulate — are space and time-sensitive projects of queering subjectivities that often index other scales (national, transnational), some through embrace, others through disidentification. Tsing’s (2000) proposed approach of “projects” allows me to conceptualize the transnational linkages of the QY collective’s locally rooted performances that implicate national and transnational linkages through indexicalities.

Through their above comments Lola and Shanti point to the contradictions among various “democratic” projects. As Lola pointed out to me in one of our discussions, QY has been very critical and suspicious of any “democratic” projects and their agendas, as this term has been used to construct “non-democratic” and hence
“barbaric” and “3-rd world” societies to justify Anglo-American and European projects of violence. Lola also pointed out that the term “democratic” has often accompanied “human rights activism” to devalue Soviet collectivism, yet the QY decision to self-identify as a collective and its self-governing methods take into account the sociohistorical and spatiotemporal reality of Sovietness in the QY members’ lives. This is significant, since through this embracing of their Soviet past QY collective acknowledges and thus validates and empowers the past, the training, and education of its members, thusly also complicating and upsetting the unproblematicness of “the democratic” as “the best and only” self-governing form (Lola, April 2010). Hence, with their awareness of the abusive employment of “the democratic” QY collective members are engaged in multivalent queering, in upsetting the norm, whether it be heteropatriarchy, or cultural conservatism, or nepotism through their queering artistic projects (Burrell 2013, personal communication).

QY engages in various forms of queer activism in different spaces, subverting Yerevan (and all the other local and translocal spaces where they find themselves) in an attempt to re-imagine the physical urban space differently from the normatively imposed topographies. QY does not make claims to queering Armenia, thusly recognizing the existence of nuances and complexities of the spaces they do not inhabit, as well as their own unfamiliarity with those.

On the one hand, I intend to understand what kind of subjectivities (and how) the collective members assert and articulate in the Armenian society that is bombarded with the hetero-patriarchal nationalist ideological messages under the guise of the culturally rich and threatened ancient Armenian identity and new nationhood
On the other hand, I also examine the crucial and transnational intersecting times, places, and ways in which NYC based LGBTArmo and QY or some of their members collaborate on activist projects, disrupting the heteronormativity of the Armenian society in Armenia.

QY members’ sensibilities are informed by the particular socio-historical circumstances in which they have come of age and find themselves, for some Armenia (Soviet and post-Soviet), for others Western Europe or North America and post-Soviet Armenia. Their sensibilities are also informed by the various transnational feminisms they come from. The collective members are rooted in their local circumstances that they tirelessly attempt to challenge. At the same time they orient towards their imagined transnational communities of feminists, women, artists, critics, and LGBT people through their use of, what Appadurai (1996) calls, techno-, media-, and ideoscapes. In so doing, the artists act as agents of social change in the local society through various activist art projects, articulating intertwined identities of queer Armenian women artists, writers, and activists problematizing variously guised normative ideologies.

I address the various layers of my research inquiry by analyzing the interactional material collected through in-depth interviews with some of the collective’s founding members, in their life-story narratives embedded in these interviews, my fieldnotes taken at social, cultural, and activist projects, as well as the discursive material that I found on the Queering Yerevan (QY) collective’s blog, called Queering Yerevan. To provide a fuller context that the QY and its members inhabit, I include the interactional material collected through the interviews with the heads and members of the key NGOs operating in Armenia dealing with LGBTQ issues and human rights. I also include articles
and other blog entries that have been written regarding and in response to QY collective, its activist events, and blog.

I situate the analysis of this material within the hetero-patriarchal discourses of gendered national belonging, with a special attention to how various regional and transnational processes have been taken up in different ways by the State and its “unruly” queering citizens. Turning to Tsing (2000) and diverging from her, I propose that these are variously scaled projects: at the scale of the nation-state, and that of a women’s movement; the former vertical, the latter horizontal. And at some point these two projects intersect.

The way the transnational and regional processes of human rights promotion have been taken up, has been with a peculiar twist in various countries of post-Soviet space, such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Russia. Many prominent Armenian public figures, almost exclusively male, have on various occasions maintained that homosexuality is “promiscuous” and a national security threat and does not reflect the Christian Armenian values. This strongly exclusionary discourse is all the more striking given that the criminal code has been modified as a result of Armenia’s joining the Council of Europe. The most recurrent trope in the discourse of the rejection of non-heterosexuality is that it is against the “traditional Armenian values.” As sociologist Aharon Adibekyan, who often makes TV appearances, noted in a 2011 press conference, traditional Armenian values are being lost. He specifically mentioned the disappearing of the Armenian women’s traditional modesty. He promotes the already established male discourse of nostalgia, decrying the social decline, evidence of proper ordering of the cultural universe, in which daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law engage in avoidance.
This is only one example of how the borders of tradition are marked on (the assumed) heterosexual women’s bodies and through policing women’s behavior. The RA airwaves are dominated by conservative discourse both religious and secular, and provide very little coverage of non-heteronormativity. If there is coverage, the focus is on gay men and what is being presented as their promiscuity, termed as “cross-dressing prostitution.”

Although under the Armenian constitution, all Armenian citizens irrespective of sexual orientation and religion among other things, have the same right to legal protection, in practice, however, LGBT people do not have any guarantee that their rights will be protected by state institutions or law enforcement agencies. Indeed, the concept of human rights is perceived by many in Armenia as a contaminating Western notion, and the closeness to Europe as threatening the institutions of ethnocultural identity and hetero-marriage (Carroll and Quinn 2009:35). Although changing, the traditional roles designated for women, those of a mother and wife, are still predominant.

In Germany, as Butler (2003) notes, the “psychological discourse” individualizing the problem of Germans’ killing of Turkish immigrants, to avoid the paralyzing guilt, seeks to “extend the hegemony of Christianity ... produc[ing] a conservative retreat to Christian discourse” given the increasing presence of the Muslim population from Turkey and elsewhere (Butler 2003:397). In the Armenian case, it is in response to the perceived sexual otherness of non-heterosexuality and the pressure from EU that the conservative homophobic discourse is renewed and cites hetero family and Church as bedrock principles of tradition. Therefore, the discussion of one’s homosexuality is a
taboo in the Armenian society. People often share information on their non-heterosexuality with very few.

**The Ordering of Anti-LGBT: Armenia without Queerness**

“Last time I went to visit Armenia, my girl-friend from Brazil came to visit... And I remember sitting in our mutual friend’s apartment... I heard Tato talking to her girl-friend in Armenian and I see them kissing. And I was shocked, not because it was something scandalous for me, clearly, because I was in the same position. But until that moment I hadn’t realized how much Armenian has been defined for me, from where I’d come, in a hetero way, because seeing this girl speak with her girl-friend in Armenian and kiss her was, like, *They are Armenian lesbians*... It was kind of traumatic for me to realize. But it was this realization how heteronormative the Armenian community is and has been for me in ways that I had never imagined or tried to understand, until that happened.” (From interview with Dani)

“[T]he only time I’ve seen this [the issue of LGBT Armenians] come up as something that people want to fight for, is in Armenia. Not in this country, you know what I mean? Not in this country, do you know what I mean? And again I don’t know enough about it. The fact that I lived in New York, I know that there was a sense of mobilized presence of LGBT Armenians... There’s a prejudice [in Armenia]. And violation of rights is probably more acute there. At least here [in the US] people try to pretend [laughs] to be democratic.” (From interview with Kristine)

Dani’s comments on her internalized heteronormativity in the first epigraph, also mentioned in chapter 1, are representative of many Armenians’ sense of Armenian communities and Armenianness outside and particularly inside Armenia. Armenianness publicly has always been collectively produced as un-queer and heteronormative both in Armenia and outside of it. Kristine’s statement suggests that when Armenians in the diaspora discuss or talk about LGBT human rights violation within the Armenian context these violations are always spatiotemporally dislocated in the homeland built on and represented as a conservative, hetero nation state. At the same time, there seems to
be a cognitive dissonance between the state of Armenia as a signatory to the UN and other international human rights protection documents and the state of Armenia that attempts to redirect the Armenian communities elsewhere towards Armenia, as the center of Armenianness, albeit heteronormative Armenianness, as outlined in chapter 1. This cognitive dissonance becomes particularly salient through the public declarations in support of hetero Armenianness that state officials, politicians, clergy, as well as many ordinary Armenian citizens make.

To situate the Armenian queer artists’ activism within the “queerlessness” or “unweirdness” of the culturally conservative Armenian society I am using data from my interviews with the heads of the two key NGOs involved in LGBT human rights protection, as well as a report produced by Carroll and Quinn of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association entitled *Forced Out: LGBTI People in Armenia. Report on ILGA-Europe/COC Fact-Finding Mission* (further referred to as ILGA report). I do this for two reasons:

1. Measuring the observations and research of the LGBTQ human rights advocates against the platform of human rights as defined in Western Europe and the US, makes the anxiety and unease of the RA government officials and mainstream society with many things “Western” more tangible and visible;

2. They accurately reflect not only the queer artists’ subjectivities, but the actual public discourse that is being reproduced and perpetuated through Armenian mass media that the artists are responding to and which (the articles and debates) are also locatable and verifiable on the Internet.
The QY collective members are well informed and educated professionals, utilizing strategies to artistically critique the hypocrisy and corruption of the power system and the complacency of the status quo. According to the ILGA report on Armenian LGBT people, despite the fact that Armenia has signed the relevant international treaties and conventions pertaining to gender equality, the enforcement of these policies has yet to take place. The authors of the report point out that according to United Nation Development Program (UNDP) “the gender equality agenda remains a marginal issue in Armenia” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:21). The authors of the report discuss how the societal attitudes complicate the coming out of many homosexual individuals. These include societal attitudes, which view heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of relationship and the homophobic law enforcers who frame homosexuality as an illness or a pathology.

The report points out that out of the estimated 4,000 registered NGOs in Armenia, only a few have openly campaigned for and supported the human rights of LGBT people, the Helsinki Committee of Armenia (HCA) being one of them. In 2006, the LGBT I, the first LGBT advocacy NGO was registered in Armenia (interview with WFCE president). In December 2007, a second NGO was registered, the LGBT II, that according to its president is not an LGBT NGO, since they work with the youth in general, and also carry out LGBT-related activities. The latter two organizations are the only ones that have LGBT-specific projects. However, they have their own NGO-specific LGBT-related activities and do not collaborate. Recognizing that overlap of activities is not effective, they point to different strategies they use for achieving the same aim,
along with calling it an Armenian problem that Armenian organizations do not like to collaborate, as the NGO field itself, as well as the donor pool in Armenia are small.

In their interviews with me, the presidents of both organizations highlighted the significance of collaboration and mentioned that they do collaborate with many organizations, yet not with each other. From the LGBT I perspective, they work with journalists, giving a scholarship for unbiased coverage, whereas LGBT II focuses on the most homophobic media outlets. From the perspective of LGBT I president, LGBT I sends a positive message, whereas LGBT II sends a negative message to the society. An LGBT I associate pointed out that hard-core activism is not very effective in Armenia and needs to be localized and adjusted to the local social realities. From the LGBT II president’s perspective, on the other hand, LGBT I is an insular NGO without much public visibility.

According to an LGBT I member, the QY is an instance of insular art activism that is not involved with human rights at all and does not want to be associated with any State institutions and structures. And from her perspective, the QY activism does not really bring visibility to LGBT issues. This last comment regarding the QY activism being divorced from LGBT human rights points to the different perspectives that civic activists and artist activists often have regarding activism, its methods, and purpose. This also came up at a Fall 2012 discussion among civic activists and artists after the film screening of !Women Art Revolution (!W.A.R.) on feminist art in the US. If for civic activists the purpose of activism is to directly raise awareness of the issues at hand, in this case LGBT issues or issues of gender and sexuality, for artists their language of
activism is indirect. I discuss the difference of these perspectives later in the chapter as well.

The LGBT II primarily collaborates with various Women’s organizations, and organizations such as Human Rights House Armenia that includes 12 organizations; South Caucasus Human Rights Network that includes 10 organizations in Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan; Regional Network Against Homophobia that includes organizations from 13 countries. The LGBT I, on the other hand, has its experts who are members of the Armenian Bar Association, legal experts, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) experts. The LGBT I president pointed out that their organization contributed to the RA government signing the document on eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation. The LGBT I, in its president’s words, reminds about LGBT citizens’ rights through media; media training; media monitoring: pro-governmental and oppositional media alike. They have no collaboration with anyone else in the civil society. Instead they collaborate with diplomatic missions, e.g. US embassy. They are also involved with regional organizations.

Interestingly, the LGBT I and LGBT II representatives had opposing perspectives on two significant issues, which are also reflected in their course of action: (1) the way non-heterosexuality is being projected in mass media; and (2) LGBTQ inner-community dynamics. From the perspective of the LGBT II president, mass media continue the negative portrayal of non-heteronormativity, often reducing non-heteronormativity to cross-dressed prostitution, wherein it is still gendered male. From the LGBT I representatives’ perspective, there are very few if any online media outlets that provide biased, tarnished images of non-heterosexuality, if there are any they are TV outlets.
From the LGBT II president’s perspective, there are different inner groupings and conflicting representations within the LGBTQ community; gays have conflicts with lesbians or transgender people; transgender individuals or cross-dressing prostitutes are often perceived by the mainstream society as the symbol of what it means to be gay. Many gays take issue with this, viewing it as tarnishing their reputation. At the time of the interview, the LGBT II was in the middle of conducting research to find out the societal perceptions of LGBTQ people. And the president mentioned that their objective is to develop a strategic plan in terms of deciding what to prioritize.

From the perspective of the LGBT I representatives, on the other hand, there are more internalized anti-LGBTQ attitudes in Georgia and Azerbaijan than in Armenia. The LGBT I associates think that in Armenia the gay community focuses on their issues, trans community focuses on theirs. The LGBT I associates see a dialogue and collaboration between various organizations. At the same time, the LGBT I representatives think that LGBTQ rights advocacy is stigmatized in Armenia. And their NGO focuses on civil equality as a more productive pathway towards reaching equality for LGBTQ individuals. According to the LGBT I president, unlike in Europe where there is a separation among different LGBTQ communities, in Armenia, there is no isolation at this point. In support of this unity the president of the LGBT I mentioned that the same park is a cruising place for gays, trans individuals, lesbians, and others.

In the Armenian context, many believe, and the ILGA report confirms this, the attitudes toward homosexuality stem from the Soviet belief that homosexuality is “a product of a capitalistic society's degradation” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:34) and thus alien and Western. The authors of the report argue that since Armenia’s independence
in 1991, the Armenian Apostolic Church has promoted and nurtured the already existing anti-LGBTQ attitudes by framing homosexuality as a “grave sin” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:34).

According to the head of Open Society Institute (OSI) in Armenia (Carroll and Quinn 2009), the concept of human rights is perceived by many in Armenia as a “Western notion, and that closeness with Europe means gay marriage and a raft of other social changes” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:35). Mass media often propagate this and nurture these fears, which results in circulating homophobic discourses of impending loss of cultural identity. The report points out that many international human rights organizations (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Human Rights Watch, the International Helsinki Federation, Freedom House, FIDH (International Jurists), OSCE and CoE, UNAIDS, FairFund and others) have commented on “the ill-treatment of homosexuals in Armenian institutions, particularly in the army and in prisons” (2009:37).

Authorities often turn a blind eye to human rights violations. The anti-LGBT attitudes concerned with “the threatening of the Armenian traditions and hetero family” are apparently shared by various groups of people in the current Armenian society. Notwithstanding the fact, that the Armenian State is a signatory on international documents promoting human rights, the public figures, as representatives of the State, do not defend those values, instead acquiescing with what seems to be a popular discourse of anti-LGBTQ attitudes and violence.\textsuperscript{100}

These public anti-LGBT declarations in the name of preserving what is “natural” and “traditionally Armenian” can be understood through Bourdieu’s (1991) discussion of
the social production of the “natural,” in which the authorized speaker, *auctor* has effects “by virtue of the fact that [they] state... things with authority, that is, in front of and in the name of everyone, publicly and officially, [they] save... them from their arbitrary nature, [they] sanction ... them, sanctify them, consecrate... them, making them worthy of existing, in conformity with the nature of things, and thus ‘natural’” (222). Heterosexual privilege, as Butler (1991) posits, operates through “naturalizing itself” and then rendering itself as the norm. Nagel (2000), in the meantime, adds that besides the deep social imbededness and institutionalization of heterosexuality, it also appropriates “challenges on its edges in order to strengthen itself,” in which case non-heteronormativity “provokes gender and sexual policing” that results in strengthening and naturalizing heterosexuality (Nagel 2000:117).

In the Armenian Constitution marriage is gender specific with no “provision for same-sex marriage in Armenia and to date no one has tested the law by challenging the norm in court” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:57). Although, by law, same-sex partners may will property to each other, they will not benefit from tax exemptions that apply to married couples. If there is no will, “and the law of intestacy applies, LGBT couples will not be able to inherit the other’s property because the list of heirs defined by the law does not recognize same-sex partners” (Carroll and Quinn 2009:57). The Republic of Armenia (RA) Family Code does not authorize people other than legally married couples to adopt children, which means same-sex couples will not be able to adopt a child (Carroll and Quinn 2009:57).

Pursuant to the Armenian Constitution,

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, while freedom of activity for all religious organisations in accordance with the law
shall be guaranteed in the Republic of Armenia. However, the Republic of Armenia recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church, in the spiritual life, development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia. [Carroll and Quinn 2009:59]

LGBT people may not have access to medically assisted procreation, as by law only legally married couples can avail themselves of this (Carroll and Quinn 2009). The ILGA report demonstrates that in Armenia, the family and partnership rights of Armenian LGBT couples are not addressed, nor are their medical, inheritance, tax rights, along with other socioeconomic issues.

As can be seen from the above, (1) the “unweirdness” of the society is hegemonically established by local scale actions and statements of the State agents; and (2) the undesirability and unacceptability of “homosexuality” is historically gendered “male,” depriving women of a discursive site (Butler 1991) of “non-heterosexuality.” In my experience of living in this society for over three decades and in my three years of fieldwork, the only time non-hetero women have entered the widely public discourse of non-heterosexuality, has been the speculation over the sexuality of the manager of the aforementioned firebombed DIY bar.101

This echoes Kebler’s argument that the invisibility and unnameability of Puerto Rican lesbians, much like that of Armenian non-hetero women’s, is tied to the hegemony of the hetero matrix that controls women’s gender and sexual experiences (La Fountain-Stokes 2009:xvii), in that women are conventionally imagined and expected to be heterosexual and striving to become mothers, privileging their children and family over anything else. Although in the mainstream Armenian circles in the US women are assumed to be seeking hetero marriage and motherhood, the issues of non-
heteronormativity are not discussed in most families, communities, or publicly by organizations or churches. In Armenia, on the other hand, according to the LGBT II’s recent survey, over 70% of Armenians do not condone non-heterosexuality. And based on a more recent survey conducted by Civilitas foundation, 94% of Armenians would not want to have a non-hetero neighbor.\textsuperscript{102, 103}

If in the US Armenian diaspora ethnonational subjectivities are also complicated by various discourses of racialization internal to the US, in Armenia, which is 97% ethnically Armenian, racializing discourses engage the ethnic absolutism of Armenianness, at the expense of both internal and external ethnic groups such as Kurds, Yezidis, neighboring Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and so on. If in the US diaspora, the discourses of preservation construct Armenianness against the mainstream non-Armenian culture and society, in the Republic of Armenia the discourses of preservation among both regular citizens as well as government officials, and mass media, revolve around preserving the small, newly independent nation in the face of complex international and regional geopolitics that Armenia has found itself in: between the US, EU, and Russia, and their strategic interests in the Armenia-Turkey; Armenia-Azerbaijan; and Armenia-Iran relations. In other words, there are different processes of racialization operating in the US and in Armenia. These processes are differently inflected and evoked at different scales: responding to external, regional and transnational scales in Armenia and responding to internal societal scale in the US.

\textit{Theorizing Gender and Sexuality within Post-Soviet Culturally Conservative Heteropatriarchal Nationalism}

"[G]ender, sexual, and racial identities are contested and negotiated; they highlight the cultural construction of state power
and nationalisms; they underscore the salience of political and cultural borders within and across nation-state boundaries that shape and sustain various forms of domination; and they document and theorize gendered, sexualized, and racialized aspects of nation/state violence” (Kim-Puri 2005:150).

The Republic of Armenia has been long associated with Russia, since the pre-Soviet era, as part of the Russian Empire, more specifically marking the southern borders of the Russian Empire. And although many scholars have discussed the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality, Tlostanova (2010) suggests that, “in Russia and its colonies ... the coloniality of power is wider than capitalism” (Tlostanova 2010:66). Other researchers, such as Oushakine, argue that Russia’s colonial project did not really come to fruition, unlike its imperial, class, and war projects. At the same time, he views differently scaled social agents’ (post-Soviet intellectuals and nations) efforts of revisiting Russian and Soviet history as colonialist, as an attempt to rewrite both the Soviet history, as well as to talk about themselves as post-colonial agents having overcome their own colonial past that is inconsequential in the unfolding of the present. However, Tlostanova’s (2010) focus, at least for this chapter and for me, is on the strategies of rejecting the coloniality of thought — rejecting the post-colonial inertia of categorizing and being categorized in particular ways — for which the past (colonial) experiences cannot be inconsequential.

Another important insight that Tlostanova (2010) points out are the specificities with which gender operates in the Caucasus and the multiplicity of kinds and forms of modernization projects that have occurred here leading to “conflicting subjectivities and fluid gender models... Russian imperial model work[ing] in parallel with the Afghan, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic modernization influences. The soviet radical modernity
strangled all alternatives, and allowed for only trickster forms of passive resistance” (Tlostanova 2010:188).

And although, as Tlostanova (2010) points out, the Soviet Union “was racist, Eurocentric and patriarchal in spite of its rhetoric” (193), women were not mere passive victims of this regime. Instead, women carved ways to bypass the imposed limitations on them and creatively articulated different identities and subjectivities in different social contexts. By doing so they employed what Scott (1985) terms, “weapons of the weak.” For example, at one of the meetings with QY members, the discussion was on men running the show in the Armenian government and in the society in general. And one of the QY members said to another, “But what’s that to us, right? We live in our fantasy world. And although they [men] do run the show, women do whatever they want” (pointing with her glance to a small group of women walking through the café and smoking). What she meant by this was the fact that women used not to smoke in public or walk and smoke, yet they are now and they are fine with it. She used this as a metaphor for the different ways women navigate the male-centric social spaces.

In my analysis of QY collective and their local and translocal queer activism and strategies, I keep in mind Tlostanova’s (2010) suggestion that in attempting to challenge the scheme that post-Soviet women have gone through a limited and one-dimensional and linear cultural evolution from being traditional then Soviet then Western, it is fundamental to focus on “(post)colonial gender tricksterism where the (post)Soviet and the (post)colonial merge and it becomes possible to balance on the verge of resistance and act around and beyond the power structures to avoid censorship and policing” (Tlostanova 2010:194).
This is what Lola, a founding member of QY, a queer artist, discusses in her interview when speaking about women in Armenia against the backdrop of neo-heteropatriarchal traditionalism that is publically promoted by public officials and mass media:

**Lola:** I can talk about stereotypes. And this has been promoted a lot recently and highlighted that … an Armenian woman should stay at home [and all that stuff]. But I think that women ... do whatever they want and could care less about all that. Even in the villages. Men have left as migrant workers. And women have lost all hope. They know that they [their men/husbands] have created a few families there. They [women] drive their tractors. They take care of their harvest. And that whole idea that they have to be responsible for the family is lost. They take care of themselves.

Lola above points out the discrepancy between the symbolic preservation of the nation-state’s cultural borders through culturally conservative ideas of controlling woman’s place in the society (“this has been promoted a lot recently and highlighted [by mass media and representatives of the State] that … an Armenian woman should stay at home [and all that stuff]”) and the actual lived reality of the life of many Armenian women (“Men have left as migrant workers. And women have lost all hope. They know that they [their men/husbands] have created a few families there. They [women] drive their tractors. They take care of their harvest. And that whole idea that they have to be responsible for the family is lost. They take care of themselves”). This is significant, in that Lola indexes the gendered and differently scaled projects of Armenianness in light of another significant issue, which is outmigration, the increase of women-headed households. For the State, the moral and proper Armenianness starts with the woman at home, whereas for the actual women, this is an obsolete anachronism.

When Butler (1991) famously argued that “gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original” (643), she went on to say that the identity produced is sustained by
a set of repetitions and that there is no basic, single identity underwritten. Much like Silverstein (2003) and Friedman (1994), Butler (1991) views identity production and reproduction within power hierarchy, which has the ability to explicitly or implicitly reject certain identities: empowering some (mainstream) and disenfranchising others. Explicit rejection, Butler argues, still allows a subject/identity to occupy a discursive site that has a potential articulation of reverse-discourse. To implicitly exclude, however, “is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition” (Butler 1991:642). It is this discursive visibility, presence, and recognition that QY has been cultivating.

With this in mind, I also launch on my examination with the awareness that gender is not always and in all instances an “objective” category, as Euro-American-centric feminist approaches propagate, distorting the complex ways in which power and inequality are structured in particular sociohistorical and cultural contexts. And one should not uncritically assume that it is the key “organizing principle and category of difference” (Kim-Puri 2005:141). In the Republic of Armenia, the difference can hinge on the intersection of perceived/imagined class, racialized ethnicity, gender, and often, with acute anxiety, on non-heteronormative sexualities.105

Kim-Puri (2005) points out that feminist scholars such as Alexander and Mohanty (1997); Grewal and Kaplan (1994); Grewal, Gupta, and Ong (1999); Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem (1999); Lowe and Lloyd (1997); Moallem (2001); Puri (1999, 2002) approach the study of gender and sexuality from a transnational rather than global feminist cultural studies’ perspective, originally elaborated by Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1994), drawing on Spivak’s Marxist, post-structuralist, post-colonialist, and feminist insights.
At its core, transnational feminist cultural studies highlights the asymmetries and inequalities that are inevitably produced by the flows of global capital and geopolitics and, in turn, help sustain them. It is deeply cynical of dualisms, including East and West, tradition and modernity, local and global, power and powerlessness, margin and center, and rationality and irrationality. These dualisms homogenize both the Third World and the West. [Kim-Puri 2005:142]

This transnational approach, as an interdisciplinary theoretical and political orientation:

[allows to bridge] discursive and material analyses to understand how unequal economic, political, and social relations are mediated and (re)produced through cultural representations and discourses[;] ...highlights the importance of social structures and the state. This emphasis on social structures and especially the attention to state institutions and relations is necessary to contend with empires, imperialisms, colonialism, and nationalisms that are shaped through gendered, sexualized, and racialized imageries [; and] stresses the role of empirical research for shedding light on cultural, material, structural, and historical forces, which in turn shape social relations, hierarchies, identities, and conflicts in distinct ways. [Kim-Puri 2005:143]

With this awareness, I join those scholars who argue that in different societies, including the Armenian society, gender identity often becomes utilized as a social system of perpetuating inequality, on the one hand, and who view gender as performative, on the other. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that “gender is an institutionalized system of social practices” that groups people into two different categories, men and women, and organizes social relations of inequality that hinges on that difference (510). These gender beliefs, the authors argue, “shape not only the way the individuals enact their roles but also how they evaluate each other's performance in that situation...[where] these hegemonic beliefs act as the implicit rules of the gender game in public contexts” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004:512). As I mentioned earlier, gender is not the only organizing factor of difference in the Armenian society. Nationality, class, and sexuality are some of the key aspects of various versions of intersecting difference.
It is the enactment of this gender institution that the male politicians, public figures, as well as members of mainstream society in Armenia (male and female) pursue in their public pronouncements of what an Armenian man should be like (stand up/defend his motherland), and what an Armenian woman should be like (mother first of all, then daughter and wife). And it is this kind of enactments that the QY collective is queering and subverting among other things.

Bourdieu argues that practice is inseparable from temporality and has directionality.

A player who is involved and caught up in the game adjusts not to what he sees but to what he fore-sees, sees in advance in the directly perceived present; he passes the ball not to the spot where his team-mate is but to the spot he will reach... a moment later, anticipating the anticipations of the others...and he does so ... "in the heat of the moment." [Yancey Martin 2003:351]

Gendering practice, Yancey Martin (2003) contends, becomes internalized by the body, much like riding a bicycle. (Eurocentric) nationalisms, as theorized by Benedict Anderson and George Mosse, have long favored homosociality, as a form of male bonding (Massad 1995:471). Since, as Parker et al. argue in Nationalisms and Sexualities "the same way that 'man' and 'woman' define themselves reciprocally (though never symmetrically), national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not," Massad (1995) suggests that “the important task for anti-colonial nationalists is not only to define gender roles in relation to each other (female-male), but also to define both in relation to the nationalist project, and, in so doing, to dissociate national identity from any colonial contamination” (Massad 1995:470).
Nationalist public officials in Armenia do define what it means to be an Armenian man, and what it means to be an Armenian woman in relation to the Armenian neotraditionalist nationalism with theocratic tendencies. At the same time the colonial contamination that these male public officials are dissociating national identity from is the Western European and American potentially colonial contamination of individual freedoms, along with gender and sexual equalities that destabilize the hegemony of the hetero-patriarchy. The hetero-patriarchal privilege also relies on heterosexism, as a separate form of oppression (Risman 2004, also articulated in Calhoun and Rich).

Much like in Indonesia, where, as Boellstorff (2007) suggests, Gay Pride Parades are less attractive to Southeast Asian gay men, in the Republic of Armenia very few in the various non-hetero and queer communities, including QY favor Pride Parades, as, in Silverstein’s terms (2003) in this space-time the political economy is different. Instead, much like in the queer Armenian circles in the US, they favor large indoor events, or if there are outdoor art-interventions and happenings on queer issues in Armenia they are often (not always) in a safe and accepting environment of like-minded people, as they collapse the separation of the two worlds. Boellstorff (2007) posits that gay organizations in Indonesia have no political goals and focus more on community-building. Most of the members inhabiting the LGBT Armenian organization in New York are also more interested in creating a safe communal space for queer Armenians and their allies with a few exceptions, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Most recently, I was asked by the organization to share some of my findings at a joint presentation with one of the organization’s members. The event information has been disseminated through the main media channels in the Armenian transnation.
After the fire-bombing of a progressive, gay-friendly bar DIY in May 2012, a Cultural Diversity March, usually organized under the auspices of the UN, was perceived as a Gay Pride Parade by a group of ultra-nationalist young men, who organized a counter-march. The counter-march was accompanied by patriotic songs and slogans, such as “Keep your children away from these,” “All the Fags to Baku.” These slogans evoke and collide various images of otherness: sexual others and enemies, evoking a rhetoric in which for the ultra-nationalist men all non-hetero Armenians are the same as the imagined enemies of the Armenian nation, the neighboring Azerbaijan (with its capital Baku as its symbolic head) and that such deviance can only belong with the despised enemy.

In early October of 2012, the protests of and the social pressure by Hayazn (in Armenian it means “Armenian nation/generation/tribe”) ultra-nationalist union resulted in canceling the European Union (EU) delegation and the German Embassy in Armenia screening of a movie called Parada to be held at one of the local cafes, called The Club, and State Puppet Theater.\textsuperscript{109} 110 The nationalists labeled the attempt of screening such a film at the children’s puppet theater as pedophilia. Both, progressives and nationalists have been increasingly using social media to mobilize public response. Progressives call for larger scale transnational engagement, whereas nationalists call for national scale public response to what they see as the threatening infiltration of the “invented human rights” of the Western Europe into Armenia.

Appadurai (1996) suggests that there has been a shift that builds on technological changes over the past century, in which the imagination has become a
collective, social fact. This social fact of variously scaled imagination is a significant actor in this project as well. In Appadurai’s words:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson’s sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (imaginaires) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media... the imagination has become an organized field of social practices... and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global. [1996:50]

The imagination of the RA government officials, mainstream society, and various activists, though, come from different places. As McClintock (1995) notes, the trope of family is significant in nationalism (and by extension in the imagination of the State) and in the reproduction thereof. By offering “a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning national hierarchy ... [and] a ‘natural’ trope for figuring national time [after 1859 and social Darwinism]... [t]he family became ...both the organizing figure for national history and its antithesis” (McClintock 1995:357). She further asks if the iconography of family should remain as the key figure for national unity. Within the post-Soviet Republic of Armenia, much like in Indonesia and other societies, the powerful links between heteronormative family and nation are being redeployed and reworked in new ways, sometimes leading to public conflict over proper gender/sexuality (Boellstorff 2007:52).

In a marriage based on love and choice, non-normative sexualities become problematic, since those hetero choose a spouse, but their relationship to the nation is “arranged.” The relationship of non-hetero citizens to the nation is nonexistent (Boellstorff 2007:51). Levon (2010), on the other hand, discussing citizenship,
belonging, and sexuality in Israel, suggests that “[c]itizenship in ethno-nationalist terms involves not only a political affiliation and attachment, but also a total identification with the history, culture, and values of the state” (52). The ethno-nationalist framework and discourse for which the proper belonging is heterosexual, gay and lesbian subjectivities are incommensurable with Armenian national belonging (also articulated in Levon 2010:58).

Wiegman suggests another point relevant to the RA, in that often different constructs of difference, in the Armenian case, those of gender and sexuality are used by heteropatriarchy to rework the terms of the culture itself (Robinson 1989:n205). Kim-Puri (2005), on the other hand, add that gender, sexuality, and race are contentious and often point to the ways in which state power and nationalisms are culturally constructed, bringing attention to “the salience of political and cultural borders within and across nation-state boundaries that shape and sustain various forms of domination; and they document and theorize gendered, sexualized, and racialized aspects of nation/state violence” (150). Political homophobia, as Boellstorff (2007) points out in his discussion of gay subjectivities and national belonging in Indonesia, indicates that violence is deployed “as a means of controlling who can make claims to belonging” (178). And the anxiety of heteropatriarchs and other public officials over the maintenance of the “Armenian culture and traditions” and the violent hate crimes of their protégés at the expense of excluding those non-hetero, is an attempt at clarifying who can make claims to the Armenian national belonging.

I engage Silverstein (2003) through his “wheres, whens,” as well as “hows” of ethnolinguistic recognition. The QY members are well aware of and successfully use the
“where” of their recognition (being in various publics’ ears), its “when” by using the dominant language depending on the scale and space they are operating in. See for example, the two QY blog posts below as two differently scaled projects: (1) the announcement for my “I know Who I am: On (Non)heteronormative National” presentation within the QY collective discussion series on Feminism, Art, Sexuality, and Activism to take place in Yerevan, and (2) news update on their upcoming activist projects in Yerevan. The former is addressed to local Armenian audience as the purpose of the event was to inhabit a discursive space and discuss non-heteronormative Armenianness, which one of the attendees called “revolutionary,” since “we are talking about ourselves to each other in Armenian.”111 The purpose of the news update, on the other hand, is to solicit presentations by different participants through the QY transnational networks.112

February 22, 2013

News update

Dear Friends,

The Queering Yerevan Collective is super excited (!) to announce our 2013 call for participation, soliciting proposals for our next happening, "IN AND BETWEEN THE
(RE)PUBLIC," which will take place in August 2-3, in Yerevan, Armenia. As always, we will try to provide a living space for those of you who fly in from the different parts of the globe. And if you aren't up for traveling, you may also consider sending us your proposals and participating virtually, from afar. To read more about the concept of the happening, please click here:

http://queeringyerevan.blogspot.com/2013/02/in-and-between-republics_11.html

We are also launching our first Indiegogo fundraising campaign this year, which is an experimental video project by [Gaya Hakobyan] and [Maro Tavitian] called "AREGNAZAN OR MAGICAL WORLD." This is a unique collaboration between two outstanding artists from Yerevan and Boston respectively, who reinvent Armenian writer G. Aghayan's tale, originally written in 1887, in a future-bound vernacular. You can find out more about the project here:

http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/magical-world/x/2175911

We hope to see some of you in Yerevan this summer! And please join us in supporting the AREGNAZAN project!!

Sincerely,

QY

Lastly, the QY collective pays a very close attention to the "how" as, in agreement with Silverstein (2003), they "wear" the appropriate language as an emblem of their identities. This is how, Lola and Shanti, active QY members explain the QY "how," the voice of dissent and critique:

**Lola:** We want to give this [kind of activism] as a tool for others as well, right? *Take this tool and in your locality just queer whatever you do not like.* That's what I was saying yesterday to Jemma that I want to read what is being written today. But I don't want to read something that is writing in a language that speaks of the past. I want something written in today's language [that explores] what is going on in Yerevan today. Let us talk about whatever interests us today. We can't help but realize that we look at all that from our identities and essences. That is why we sexualize stuff, but not always.

Engaging Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005) allows me to account for the scales indexed by the use of Armenian and English in the various social interactions, interviews, and blog entries that I investigate. De Certeau’s (1984) idea of
using/knowing the city of Yerevan, and also other cities or places in these different cities provides an insight into how these artists, writers, and activists use the various spaces they traverse both in the city of Yerevan as well as other cities locally and transnationally (Gyumri, Armenia; Tbilisi, Georgia; Berlin, Germany; New York, USA; and so on) and their blog to articulate or perform their diverse identities and subjectivities.

The two QY art interventions and public performances that I would like to briefly touch upon, are instances of subverting the heteropatriarchy in contemporary art on the one hand, and that of the ruling elites and society embodying the status quo, on the other. The first is a guerrilla performance queering the Republic Square in Yerevan. As one of the participants explains in her narrative, in their conceptualization of the performance, titled “Togh lini pat(k)erazm” (Let there be im(war)ge), they critique “... ideological assumptions (and silences) about experimental queer art ... in contemporary Armenian culture” through the method of defamiliarization. To its authors the concept of the performance suggests “a representation of a mechanism that is at war with itself—a self-conflicted, unsettled and unsettling image of a Foucauldian panoptic space that is constructed by the continuous gazes of disciplinary powers (such as the city mayor, the city architect, the [National Gallery] curator, the security, etc.) and the discontinuous gazes of dissident collectivities that aim to re-translate the space by queering the familiar, the normalized and the habituated construct” (Queering Yerevan, March 22, 2011). The three artists are reinventing the space from the bottom of the Singing Fountains that are turned off at the time of the performance.

Through various symbolic movements the artists problematize the “controlled ideological image of subservient artists” who always produce uniform “realist” art,
whether serving the (Communist) Party or post-Soviet nationalist authorities, and *carnivalize* “the repressive processes” of archiving the work of artists that challenge this subservient art. At the same time, one of the artists is in partial drag with painted-on moustache, “brandishing a blue dildo in [her] hand and symbolically “shooting” passers-by.” The third artist comments on war and its dehumanizing rhetoric erasing the lives of Palestinian wo/men by “[l]ying on a headscarf [almost] identical with the keffiyeh famously worn by Yasser Arafat.” The artists use this as an iconic image of war that “both contaminates and numbs the viewer” (Queering Yerevan, March 22, 2011). This performance also points to the artists’ psychogeography (Chambers 1994), thus appropriating and queering the normative use of the topographical system and the public space (de Certeau 1984:97), along with destabilizing “proper” gender representation.

The second queering attempt is an art intervention at an exhibition that the curators affiliated with the Artists’ Union of Armenia organized in November of 2010, titled “The Body: New Figurative Art in Armenia.” Three of the QY members made flowers out of the texts of all the curators, made a wreath and put it at the entrance to the Artists’ Union where the exhibition was held. The ribbon of the wreath read, “In Memory of the Bodies from the Afterlife.” The QY members’ intention was to remind the curators how having been against the officially (Communist Party) ordered art under the Soviet regime they are now serving the system of power, at some point in their struggle having gone back under the limiting concept of a *singular* “Body” that has no room for multiplicity or dialogue and debate. And although the artists have varying points of critique for nepotism and heteropatriarchy, they always find a space for a
dialogue. See below how Shanti and Lola problematize the concept of the aforementioned exhibition differently.

**Lola:** For instance, Shanti and Gaya did something together. Very intentionally they went to the art gallery and critiqued the exhibition through their work. Perhaps some view us as terrorists as we bomb with ideology and ideas, or questions.

**Shanti:** First of all their [majority of contemporary artists’ in Armenia] perceptions never change. It is the same group of people showing. It is very clan-based [there is nepotism].

**Lola:** But not just that. How can you talk about one body in this day and age when there is Derrida? They involved different artists, men and women, hetero and non-hetero and wanted to show that *we are all the same. We are together.* But that is not our issue. You can't be homogeneous.

**Shanti:** Also, in the older generation exhibition women’s works are almost non-existent.

**Lola:** But that wasn't the most important, you know. It was much deeper. This was done at the Artists’ Union, whereas before the current curators had no ties with it [they were the dissident voices against the regime]. And now this is their message of unification, of becoming one body. In other words, the alternative [progressive] thinkers should go back to the state. That is the issue. Where is the contemporary art going? We are going back.

Largely sharing the critique of the contemporary artists striving to state complacency, Lola and Shanti have different takes on the critique of the exhibition symptomatic of the mainstream contemporary art in general. For Shanti it is the lack of women’s representation along with being against the homogenizing uniformity of the conceptual framework of *One Body.* For Lola, on the other hand, it is the outdated theoretical conceptualization and digression into and conformity to mainstream ideologies that is more problematic.

I selected these interventions as they both point to the QY attempts at problematizing conformity to and complacency with hetero-patriarchy (as the elites both
in contemporary art as well as in the government are mostly men) and uniformity in art and public discourse in general (assumed heteronormativity and hetero family among other things), and the lack of openess to multiplicity of different experiences and voices, and particularly women’s voices and queer women artists’ voices in these discourses. It is worth noting that the heteronormative nationalism is not monolithic. And it has many different manifestations, combinations, and configurations in micro, as well as macro scale agents. The connecting tissue among them, however, are the anxious discourses of “threatening the reproduction of the small, tortured Armenian nation and state.”

One of the readers of this dissertation asked, “What does all this mean more broadly to the Armenian Nationalist Heteropatriarchy? It would be good to see if it is even paying attention.” But my interest is in a different question. I am interested in what the QY activities mean to the QY collective and their allies, because it is through them that grassroots social and societal change is made. And what it means is what This Bridge Called My Back meant to Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), a tool for queering, challenging, and radicalizing the status quo.

After their first artistic activist project of coming out as a collective, the QY collective members were expecting hate mail or other violent engagement from hetero-nationalists, yet nothing like that followed. After the aforementioned DIY events, however, there was a palpable anxiety before one of my collaborative projects with the collective, when I was going to give a presentation titled, “On the (Non)heteronormative National.” Yet again, only those genuinely interested in the issue attended the event. So even if hetero-nationalists do not pay attention to a queer women’s movement, others
do. Progressive women and men do. And indeed, as the epigraph to this chapter says, the QY collective members “attempt to bridge the contradictions in [their] experience ... bridging by naming [their selves and by telling [their] stories in [their] own words” (1983:23).

**QY as Activism: the Blog**

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, *Queering Yerevan* is a QY collective’s project aiming at queering the city and the self that challenges the established topographies of both the urban space and the body of the individual within that space. This is an attempt of re-imagining the physical space differently from the normatively imposed imagination of the “queerless/weirdless” by power structures. At various points in time, different QY members re-imagine their map(s) and signal various scales by referencing and blogging on: (1) local (Armenian) and international arts, artistic experimentation, writing, film, and exhibitions in general; (2) issues of interest to women and women artists; (3) various feminisms; (4) diaspora Armenian artists and writers; (5) LGBT issues (both local and translocal; both art related and general); (6) human rights (locally and regionally); and more recently, (7) collaborations between writer and visual artist members of the QY collective to bridge the chronotopic gap between contemporary literature and art in the Armenian society.

These women artists realize that the societal attitudes engrained for centuries will not change overnight with newly enforced laws. In an attempt to support each other and advocate for their rights, to have their voices heard, they decide to act as a collective (coming out among other things), reappropriating the meaning of the previously forced Soviet “collective.” Their awareness of the marginalized role of women
in general, and the lack of knowledge of or interest in queer women, in particular, informs the strategies that they employ in the articulation of their identities. Through their project they seek to foster a safer environment for queer women artists, scholars, and intellectuals in Armenia.\textsuperscript{116}

The scales of audiences that the bloggers are conversing with or addressing to correspond to the kinds of links they have listed on their website that I enumerated above. The smallest scale involves the participants themselves, who have been physically located in various countries on at least three continents at different times (Lebanon in the Middle East, Egypt in Africa, Armenia in Europe or in Asia depending on your perspective, and Canada and the US in North America). Occasionally they post letters or e-mails received by QY – regarding their collective’s projects, LGBT people in Armenia and elsewhere – for the bloggers and blog followers to comment on. The posts queering the Armenian reality on different levels have become more prevalent, whether they be posts on challenging hetero-patriarchy in Armenia, or art interventions that problematize uniformity in art.

The title of the image is a pun on two Armenian words, one meaning “of course” and the other “virgin,” as an attempt to challenge the heteropatriarchal expectation from a woman to be of course a virgin. And the image itself is full of words naturalized to

265
frequently use to describe women as mentally unstable, along with the violent language men use to talk to women.\textsuperscript{117} Consider the below presented blog post critiquing paternalism:

\textbf{no to paternalism!}

\textbf{Armenia: democracy is the measure of a people's will to be a people and not just subjects}

terrorists, azeris, lack of political, economic and social development, colonialism, thugs, drugs, fifth columns, islamists, extremisms etc etc will always be the excuses of the powerful to not allow the people to take control of their lives, and will also be the crutches of peoples who are unwilling to take responsibility for their own futures or who have an investment in the current oppressive regime.

over 400 people were martyred in egypt for their cause of public dignity with no questions asked and no regrets, 10's of thousands in Libya without asking for the guidance of a father figure and without finding excuses as to why they as a people could not afford a democracy.

there are no excuses and a people who can't stand for themselves, successfully or not, probably don't deserve democracy.\textsuperscript{118}
Consider the below satirical announcement critiquing censored contemporary art:

The image above is a satirical announcement in Russian asking the public to help the QY find the members of the contemporary anarchist-political art who are missing under unknown circumstances, so that the inspector stops crying and modern art in Armenia does not keep rotting, indexing also the censored and sanitized nature of contemporary art inherited from Soviet times.\(^{119}\) Below is a blog post critiquing nepotism:

**Nep-o-tism, noun \`ne-pa-.ti-zam\**
Whether problematizing nepotism proliferating the contemporary Armenian art scene, or politics; the QY collective attempts to unhinge and unsettle the taken for granted embodiment of the status quo: from giving the word “collective” a new meaning in their group name, to the symbolic use of a Soviet-era photo camera by one of the visual artists, to their various individual and collaborative artistic lenses. Different members actively blog at different times, yet the most active bloggers (at all times) are mostly from Armenia.

The blog is organized predominantly in two languages: Eastern Armenian and English. Most often than not posts are in both Eastern Armenian and English. Sometimes, however, they are only in Eastern Armenian or English. There are also occasional posts in French and Russian. Out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

ՍԵՐՎԱՆ ՀԱՅՐԵՆՈՎԻՃ* ՖԵՄԻՆԻԶՄԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԱՆԱՐԽԻԶՄ

 Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

 Sometimes, however, they are only in Eastern Armenian or English. There are also occasional posts in French and Russian. Out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

ՍԵՐՎԱՆ ՀԱՅՐԵՆՈՎԻՃ* ՖԵՄԻՆԻԶՄԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԱՆԱՐԽԻԶՄ

 out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

ՍԵՐՎԱՆ ՀԱՅՐԵՆՈՎԻՃ* ՖԵՄԻՆԻԶՄԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԱՆԱՐԽԻԶՄ

 out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

ՍԵՐՎԱՆ ՀԱՅՐԵՆՈՎԻՃ* ՖԵՄԻՆԻԶՄԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԱՆԱՐԽԻԶՄ

 out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.

ՍԵՐՎԱՆ ՀԱՅՐԵՆՈՎԻՃ* ՖԵՄԻՆԻԶՄԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԱՆԱՐԽԻԶՄ

 out of the 595 blog posts from its inception on May 31st, 2008, until March 10th, 2013, there are 23 posts that have over 500 views. Out of these 14 are in Armenian, one is in both Armenian and English, six are in English, and one is in Russian. These post viewed posts are on multimedia arts, LGBTQ human rights, and feminisms.

Out of these 22 posts four have received 1000 views. And all four are in Armenian. Three posts deal with feminist issues and significant feminist thinkers, such as Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler.
Կլինիկները և աշխատանքին կից մանկապարտեզները, երկրորդ ապաքաղաքական կանայք հիմնականում հրաժարվում են քաղաքական պայքարի մեջ մտնել աջերի կամ ձախերի, ռեֆորմիզմի կամ հեղափոխության պայմանների ներքո:

Սակայն կոնկրետ նախագծերի հանդերձ կանանց մտահոգությունը և նրանց ապաքաղաքական գործունեությունը չափից մեծ սպառնալիք են հանդիսանում թե՝ աջերի և թե՝ ձախերի համար, և ֆեմինիստական պատմությունը ցույց է տալիս, թե ինչպես են կանանց ուշադրությունը շեղել իրենց առաջնային խնդիրներից, օրենսդրական շերտում զինվորագրելով և կոոպտացիայի ենթարկելով պաշտոնական կուսակցությունների կողմից, և տեսականորեն՝ ձախերի կողմից: Այս զինվորագրումը հաճախ մեզ հետ է պահել հարցադրումից, թե ո՞րն է ֆեմինիզմի դիրքը: Ո՞րն է փոփոխություն բերելու լավագույն ռազմավարությունը: Առաջին իմպուլսը ուղղված կանանց ազատագրմանը տեղի ունեցավ 1840-ականներին, երբ լիբերալները աբոլիցիոնիզմին ուղղված արշավում էին: Մի խումբ պերճախոս քուեյկեր կանայք ակտիվորեն ելույթ էին ունենում ի ազատագրում Հարավի ստրատիղ համակարգի և շուտով գիտակցեցին, որ կանայք ևս չունեին այն հիմնական իրավունքները, որոնք վիճարկում էին սևերի համար: Լուսի Սթոունը և Լուկրեցիա Մոթը երկուսն էին կին աբոլիցիոնիստներից, ովքեր երբեմն կցում էին որոշ ֆեմինիստական գաղափարներ աբոլիցիոնիստական ելույթների վերջում, անսովորության աստիճան բարկացնելով իրենց լիբերալ ընկերների: Սակայն կանայք սպառնալիք չէին հանդիսանում այնքան ժամանակ, քանի դեռ գիտեին «իրենց տեղն» ու հիշում էին, թե որ գործն էր «ավելի կարևոր»:

Առաջին իմպուլսը ուղղված կանանց ազատագրմանը տեղի ունեցավ 1840-ականներին, երբ լիբերալները աբոլիցիոնիզմին ուղղված արշավում էին: Մի խումբ պերճախոս քուեյկեր կանայք ակտիվորեն ելույթ էին ունենում ի ազատագրում Հարավի ստրատիղ համակարգի և շուտով գիտակցեցին, որ կանայք ևս չունեին այն հիմնական իրավունքները, որոնք վիճարկում էին սևերի համար: Լուսի Սթոունը և Լուկրեցիա Մոթը երկուսն էին կին աբոլիցիոնիստներից, ովքեր երբեմն կցում էին որոշ ֆեմինիստական գաղափարներ աբոլիցիոնիստական ելույթների վերջում, անսովորության աստիճան բարկացնելով իրենց լիբերալ ընկերների: Սակայն կանայք սպառնալիք չէին հանդիսանում այնքան ժամանակ, քանի դեռ գիտեին «իրենց տեղն» ու հիշում էին, թե որ գործն էր «ավելի կարևոր»:
Եև դարձյալ Գերտրուդ Ստայնի մասին

webtv.am-ի ներկայացմում է պատկերված հայերենով Գերտրուդ
Ստայն՝ «ԱրտԳրականություն» ամսագրի նոր համարում . . .

http://webtv.am/haxordasharer/notebook/gertrud-stayn/123

Հրաշալները, նախապատրաստված լուրեր
Էլիս Թոմպուզ[

Թարգմանկանությունը մեր մինչև այսօր է հայկականություններն է առաջնությունների համար և նպատակների լուծումը հանսից պահ էր, որ հայկականությունը ծայրանավերվելու է բազմազանության կամ սակավածության մեջ էր. Հայոց, դառն ուժ, իրիբյուղ է բարձրադիր լուծումը: Շշունչ, կամ դավաճանության բերկրանքը Յուդիթ Բաթլեր*

Թարգմանության մեջ այսօր տեղ է հայկականությունների խախտում սակավածության և դավաճանության հարցը և նույնիսկ Վալտեր Բենյամինի համար պարզ էր, որ հավատարմությունը, իր ճշգրտությամբ կամ բառացիությամբ, թարգմանության չափերից մեկն էր, որն, ըստ նրա, փչացնում էր թարգմանությունը: 124 Նա կարծում էր, որ բացի բառացիությունից անհրաժեշտ էր ունենալ «արտություն», այսինքն «հավատարմորեն վերարտադրելու ազատությունը»։ Սակայն, արտությունը, որը խախտում է սակավածության և դավաճանության մեջ երկրպագում է թարգմանությանը, հետևաբար փչացնում է թարգմանությունը։ Այսպիսով Գերտրուդն, այնուհետև նույնիսկ այնպիսին գրելով, որ այս վիճակի հավատարմությունը կարող է կազմված լինել Հուզական թելադրանքների հետ, կարող է գրավելով հայկական միջոցներով, որպես տեքստի խախտում, և հետևաբար թարգմանությանը հանսական է բացահայտվում և դավաճանությունը կարող է միացվելու մեջ.
One of the most viewed posts (presented below) deals with the Gay Pride Parade and related festivities in Istanbul in 2011, in which an Armenian punk rock all women’s band and Armenian human rights activists participated. This is significant, since the fact that this all women’s band participated in a Gay Pride Parade related events has had consequences for the band members. I discuss these consequences in chapter 4 and in the current chapter.
I view the code switching among the posts from a few different perspectives. First, from the most technical angle: most of the members of the collective are from Armenia. Two of them were from Canada (one of whom blogged she is leaving the space and the other one does not blog often). One of the members, a local Armenian artist, does not speak English. She always blogs with images and her comments are always in Eastern Armenian. The other local Armenian bloggers blog in both English and Eastern Armenian. The diasporan Armenians living in the diaspora do blog in Armenian that has features of Eastern and Western Armenian. But they seem to be more comfortable when blogging in English. Another member living outside of Armenia mostly comments on blogs rather than blogging herself. Her comments are in English. Lola, one of the most active members of the collective had the following to say about the way QY problematizes the issue of language:

Lola: We problematize the issue of language... We don’t want to do the Queering Yerevan [project] for Yerevan alone. We keep trying to have the connection with New York City, with those speaking English, because you can’t ignore that. I would have loved to write only in Armenian. But you can’t ignore the fact that English has become a dominant language. And in order to reach different audiences you have to write in English. That is why to alleviate the burden, I try very consciously to post something in English when I notice that more material has been posted in Armenian. The same with the Armenian posts.

Shanti and Lola, both founding members of QY, think of language as a connecting tissue between the collective and their diverse audiences. I analyzed at the kinds of posts and the language that was utilized. The posts that are announcing a workshop for local writers or a local exhibition are in Eastern Armenian as they are aimed at a local Armenian audience. For example,
The posts on local activist projects on women’s rights or LGBTQ issues would be both in Armenian and in English (with comments mostly in Armenian, a few in English). This signals the rooted locality as well as routing alignment to larger scale translocal communities. The posts on the success and activities of the diasporan Armenian authors and artists would be in English. The posts that refer to links, for instance, of lesbian history archives or pride parades elsewhere (in the US, in Turkey) would be in English and in Armenian. English, in a way is the medium connecting them to the larger scale communities they imagine themselves as part of: the diasporan Armenian LGBTQ advocacy and community; and the larger transnational queer artistic communities as two routes among others.

If a blogger posts her own short stories or parts of her book, those posts are in Armenian, primarily Eastern Armenian occasionally using Western Armenian words, or using Western Armenian orthography to spell Eastern Armenian words. This indexes an identity of a local Armenian writer whose linguistic and cultural sensibilities as a writer have also been shaped by her knowledge of Western Armenian literature and her own
schooling elsewhere, outside of Armenia (at the Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia, Cyprus). For example,

On one occasion, one of the bloggers, who herself is a writer, translated parts of a diasporan Armenian writer’s award winning book into Armenian and posted them. On another, she translated a poem by an Armenian woman poet into English and posted it. In so doing, the blogger (one of the most active bloggers who keeps others informed about what is going on in the Diasporic Armenian queer women’s circles, as well as in Feminist and LGBTQ activist circles of the West and shares the material on the blog) simultaneously projects an identity of a writer, translator, and activist bridging the Armenian locality with the many transnational networks. Although QY collective members artistic, activist, and women’s transnational network, the popularity of the blog
posts in Eastern Armenian, signals the significance of the QY blog as a queering project as a locally rooted one. And although the quality of their transnational networks does not translate into blog view quantity, QY collective offline transnational collaborations are nonetheless rich and ongoing.

The issue of translation as a hegemonic disciplining tool has had frequent coverage on the blog by one of the key bloggers. Through these posts the blogger analyzes the danger of the presence of the hegemonic citizen disciplining systems through the translated piece of work, thus articulating their identity of a professional, reflexive translator, an activist contemplating the mechanisms of suppression employed by disciplining institutions in an attempt to make sense of the hegemonic structures within which inequalities take place (Risman 2004).

The collective’s attempts at subverting translation came to fruition through their latest 2010 art intervention called *Queering Translation*, which attracted women artists locally, regionally, and transnationally. The QY collective members blog in both Armenian and English, invoking scales larger than local for this enterprise as well. Of note is that in the Armenian version the names of the diasporan Armenian participants are spelled following the Western Armenian orthography, and the names of the participants from post-Soviet Armenia are spelled following the Eastern Armenian orthography, indexing variously scaled the diversity of backgrounds and locations the Armenian participants come from.\(^{128}\)
As Gaya, a visual artist, QY member, pointed out in her interview, for the poster of the art intervention (see above) the collective used a work from a series of Gaya’s works based on the works of Aitsemnik Urartu, one of very few Soviet women sculptors. The work, as Gaya mentioned, was called “Anoush’s desire-pleasure.” In this series Gaya used the archival photographs of her works and queered them using photomontage. She used two different photographs of two Anoushes. She turned this moment [of Anoush’s insanity or suffering] into a moment of desire, creating an atmosphere of intimacy. Hence, Gaya translated the preliminary meaning of the work at the same time freely interpreting it, and using the erotic lens of the photographs of the sculptures, creating a woman who can actively desire rather than be the object of a (man’s) desire. By so doing, Gaya challenges and subverts the gender institution, outside of which, as Yancey Martin argues “(if such a place can be imagined), these practices would not (could not) be viewed or interpreted or understood as gender” (Yancey Martin 2003:351).
Of particular note in regards to the aforementioned activist project is how differently various collective members perceived the ideas of “queering,” “activism” and “arts,” among other issues, depending on the socio-historical and cultural circumstances they were coming from. Perhaps, this Soviet experience of indirect, seemingly illusive critique has informed the strategies that Armenia born members of QY employ in their queer artistic activism. For Gaya, who was born in Soviet Armenia and grew up in post-Soviet Armenia, the spaces where activism and art unfold are non-overlapping. She finds the area of activism and human rights, mostly funded through Western NGOs, limiting and troubling in terms of strategies and methodologies used, often calling for unacceptable compromises. She finds more diverse perspectives and methods in the field of arts that allows more room for bringing various issues together in one space.

Gaya finds queer culture critical as it disrupts and questions “the rules in the heteronormative structures, the nationalist ideas prevailing in current Armenian reality, the structure of the hetero family, and the domination of its functions even in the field of arts.”

Noem, and Maro, also members of QY and participating in the Queering Translation intervention, on the other hand, come from North America. And their sensibilities of what it means to queer a space/work or do activist art are different than Gaya’s.

**Noem:** Because I came of age as an artist in the 90s in Los Angeles, I think an overlapping space [for activism and arts] is not only a possibility but a reality. I learned from my mentors that the personal is political, and this informed much of the autobiographical work that I have done. I find the most valuable art to be that which encourages discussion and interaction among people to consider political, cultural and social issues.... I found in 2006 people arguing in Yerevan about art as activism – that it absolutely could not be art. I think that people were threatened by the notion, since during Soviet times artists often became co-opted or used or manipulated by the government. Even when I was there in 2010, an artist was telling me that most artists were making art any way they
could to get attention and opportunities from the West, crafting their work only to fit someone else's political agenda. So that reaction is still quite strong.

**Maro:** When I began making art ... I had a couple of teachers that taught me how to appreciate a great photograph and evoke emotion through the lens, but this came more out of a modernist tradition of art. My other interest was seated in my discontent with many of the *isms* that we as humans have constructed and used against one another as tactics of control, domination, and oppression. Of course, my background of being a queer American-Armenian woman fed this discontent. A person that has come from a background of oppression or has come from a family with a background of oppression has the option of fighting against oppression or becoming absorbed in the status quo and becoming complacent and possibly even continuing the inequalities...While my photographic work from the past subtly dealt with sexuality and otherness, video and performance have been a new avenue for me to make more poignant, while not didactic, ways of connecting my politics with my art. So, in a very heavy winded explanation, I do think cultural, social and political critiques can be embedded in art ... However, for me, I think there can be a fine line between political art and activism where art can become too forceful and take away choice for the viewer. I like for art to be a democratic experience that promotes thought and dialogue for the viewer.

Both for Noem and Maro the personal is political coming from a Western critical feminist perspective that has been enriched and expanded by their own experiences as queer Armenian women coming of age in the US, as well as their own engagement and discontent with the Western theories exploring arts and activism. Hence their activism is articulated through their artistic inquiry without ever necessitating any compromises.

It is noteworthy that Noem is one of the few Armenian-Americans, perhaps the only one that I know so far who continuously talks about LGBTQ issues in various contexts both in Armenia, but more importantly in the US. Besides discussing these issues in her artwork, Noem also gives talks at various mainstream Armenian organizational events, a rarity within diasporic Armenian circles, where, as mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, the few times that LGBTQ Armenian issues have been raised they have referred to those in the spatiotemporally removed Armenia that needs
the "help" of the "more progressive diasporics." I italicize these words and put them in quotation marks to point to the frustrations often articulated by the Armenian artists, intellectuals, and activists in Armenia when speaking of the circulating discourses among some of their diasporan peers who are undertaking projects in Armenia.

Writing about Eurasian Borderland gender epistemologies, Tlostanova (2010) shares with readers her skepticism of applying Western gender categories to very complex and variously layered socio-historical and cultural contexts like the Caucasus, where various processes might be occurring and shaping not only the local understandings of gender and sexuality, but also agency and activism in general, cautious that activism and agency do not become co-opted by Western NGOs and the state. Hence, in the comments above, it is her own skepticism, discontent, and rejection of the rhetoric of the Western salvation that Gaya invokes, through a conscious decolonizing effort of her own approach, coming from, what Tlostanova (2010) terms as “an independent and critical feminism,” that has a poignant understanding of her own values and sensibilities shaped by the sociocultural and historical circumstances where she has lived (Tlostanova 2010:203).

To historicize women’s presence in the Armenian public discourse and reality in general, and the presence of queer women in particular, the bloggers post poems by a female Armenian poet of the early 20th century (that they have located as a result of their archival research) and reinterpret it through asynchronously co-writing the poem by crossing out words or phrases and adding others in parentheses, developing themes of lesbian love, in which the woman is an active agent, who has desires, and expresses them. For example,
Through their archival work of bringing out Armenian female queer artists and meetings with other queer artists, filmmakers, and writers from elsewhere, the QY members attempt not only to claim discursive space synchronically but also diachronically. For the
aforementioned project of *Queering Translation*, one of the collective members used a sculpture by a woman sculptor of Soviet era as the poster for the event.

This project of historicizing and, through it, the bloggers’ claim to a diachronic discursive space is an ongoing project. And as one of the bloggers suggests, “this is how I imagined the war. We’ll unearth/out them all, one by one: from art galleries, archives, molded boxes, Soviet history books. Let it be an epic, yet by all means a new history that no one, except for us has ever written or imagined” (*Queering Yerevan*, January 17, 2010).

These posts seem to invoke both local and transnational scales, trying to keep the collective rooted in the local and connecting it to the translocal through making a local (Soviet Armenian) woman poet part of a translocal community of queer artists and transnationally rooted feminisms, and the collective itself as part of transnational queer women’s community through film screenings and inviting writers and filmmakers from elsewhere, among other projects and blog entries.

The opportunity to publish the collective’s two year correspondence exploring “queer identity, language, and culture” (*Queering Yerevan*, accessed on March 28, 2010) in Armenian and English that has become possible in the large part due to the on-line fundraising efforts of the New York based LGBT Armenian organization, discussed in the previous chapter, is yet another instance of the collective’s successful transnational networks. For example,

«Տարօրինակելով գիրքը» միջոցառման հրավեր >> Invitation to "Queering the Book" happening

Urkegut համարում ենք մեկ հրավիրում ՏԵ-ի տեղի ունենալիքին կիրակի, նոյեմբերի 27-ին, ժամը 5:00-ին, Ակումբում (Թումանյան 40)
You are cordially invited to a QY happening

on Sunday, November 27, at 5:00, at The Club (Tumanyan 40)
which includes
a presentation of the book “Queered: What’s To Be Done With XCentric Art”
a documentary video by Arpi Adamyan
and
the theatrical performance “Khovd”
created and performed by Méliné Ter Minassian and Laureline Koenig

Afterparty at DIY (Parpetsi 14)
ХОВД

в субботу, 17 декабря, 20:00
в новой галерее, на втором этаже
руставели 48, тбилиси
With various presentations on the QY book’s publication in Yerevan, Armenia, in Tbilisi, Georgia, in New York City (NYC) and Boston, US, QY attempts to take the queering beyond Yerevan, the city they originally started from. The Yerevan and Tbilisi presentations involved also performance art pieces by a diasporan Armenian artist and her collaborator who had been living in Armenia for a few years, whereas the presentation in NYC involved QY collective members from Armenia and the US. Interestingly, out of the three announcements of the presentations, the Tbilisi presentation announcement is the most artistic and includes the key members of the QY collective involved in the presentation. The Yerevan and NYC presentation announcements, on the other hand, focus on images of books, and if the Yerevan...
presentation announcement has columns of book (a book collective?), the NYC announcement focuses on three individual ones.

The blog posts about trips and their experiences would be in English or Armenian depending on the blogger. And depending on the language of the blog those who speak both Armenian and English comment in the language that the blog is posted in. Even in these kinds of posts the authors are always self-reflective. Often reflecting consciously on their fragmented identities and the impossibility of having one stable, static identity, acknowledging its fluidity, malleability, instability, and indefinability. In their thoughts on identity the bloggers often refer to Butler, Beauvoir, Bakhtin, Derrida, and more recently Ingraham. Through these scholars and their influences they transcend their own locality and the actual lived difficulties and align with a community of scholars in a discursive and metaphysical virtual site that allows them make sense of the daily. Thus, as can be seen from this collage, the posts themselves are of various scales and evoke various scales.

The three activist projects that I would like to dwell on as microcosms, sites where this collective applies its strategies, are: (1) their open letter to the ombudsperson of Armenia; (2) a public performance queering the central square in Yerevan, Armenia that is fraught with various contradictory political memories, as an instance of subverting the heteropatriarchy in contemporary art on the one hand, and that of the ruling elites and society embodying the status quo, on the other; and (3) an art intervention at a modern art exhibit. The use of strategies is significant. As de Certeau (1984) points out, unlike the tactics, strategies are utilized by those holding power, those who have a (non-corrupt creative) space to go back to. I argue that the
QY collective itself, although its members rarely find themselves physically in the same location, is the creative space that makes them strong. It is the space, which, according to one of the members, based on “dis-identification” and “dissensus” they can go back to regroup and rethink the move that will follow. It is the imagination of this groupness (Appadurai 1996) that allows the collective to “come out” to the society first and as a group.

The bloggers keep track of any article or interview that appears in local Armenian media on LGBTQ issues or the projects of their collective and post them on their blog. This is also done in both languages; at least the most important parts are translated. The bloggers engage in a discussion. They usually build their argument on famous Western scholars such as Butler, Beauvoir, Rancier, Derrida, and Bakhtin, as mentioned above. Realizing that once articulated they have little control over the interpretation of their projects also cautious not to become instrumentalized by cultural conservatives, they engage in discussions to point out what was misinterpreted and misconstrued. In so doing, they repair the interpretation for those interested from their emic perspective.

The comments to this letter, which was posted on the blog both in Armenian and in English, mostly discussed the way it should be approached and handled to better communicate a positive image of homosexuality. The comments are made mostly in Armenian except when one blogger is commenting, others respond to her comments in English, yet when they make their own comments they write in Armenian. In their crafting the open letter to the Ombudsperson of Armenia the QY collective members frame their rights as part of global human rights identified in the UN declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation that Armenia signed in December 2008.
E.g. After the government in Armenia signed the UN declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation in December 2008, we have witnessed a resurgence of hostile rhetoric against homosexuals both in official and oppositional media. Many media outlets publish professionally unqualified articles, which at best resemble neighborhood gossips. This phenomenon could have been overlooked if the danger of mass media becoming a platform to disseminate hatred and intolerance did not exist. These publications do not even demonstrate elementary journalistic professionalism and lack any kind of homework or research... [H]omosexual women have been denied of existence all together or condemned in not fitting into the image of a “proper” Armenian woman.¹³³

In other words, they are evoking a translocal scale and are aligning themselves with it and reminding the state of Armenia of its responsibility to abide by its signature. They express their key concern about the “resurgence of hostile rhetoric against homosexuals both in official and oppositional media” and support their claim by pointing out the lack of professionalism and research on the part of the journalists who author those pieces.

The QY members problematize the societal perception of (1) ascribing maleness to homosexuality and (2) viewing the latter as a threat to national security (or a pathology) by high ranking public officials. By doing this they claim a place and presence in public discourses of sexuality in Armenia. They point to specific media outlets that publish unresearched homophobic articles misrepresenting and misconstruing homosexuality that they view as potentially disseminating hatred. The QY-ers emphasize the importance of being informed and frame the above homophobic attitudes and views as reinforcing patriarchy in the Armenian society and promoting uninformed and inaccurate information.

The QY members challenge the authority of local public figures when framing the comments of the latter as uninformed. They frame their own response as supported by civic groups and individuals concerned with human rights. And lastly they urge public
officials and individuals to become familiar with the issues Armenian homosexual men and women face, as can be seen from the following excerpt from the letter:

Some of the most recent publications which disseminate hatred towards homosexuals and can potentially become a source of violence, include the article “Armenian lesbians are becoming more active” in Aravot daily (Jan. 22, 2009, http://new.aravot.am/am/articles/culture/54469/view); an interview with the rising star of the Republican Party Edward Shahmazanov in the same newspaper, in which the prominent politician claims that he is anti-gay…We believe that such statements are largely a result of illiteracy in issues of homosexuality which is reflected upon the prevalent obsession to defend the patriarchal structure of society and to present it as a national value. Nevertheless, we also realize that such statements uttered by prominent public figures and politicians could be received by mainstream society as the state official policy.  

Thus, in this letter QY frames cultural conservatives as homophobic, uninformed, and insular, disconnected from the larger scale human rights processes to which the State has claimed allegiance. Queering Yerevan also reminds them of the obligations Armenia as a nation has undertaken by signing the aforementioned UN declaration, assigning to this a transnational scale that they see themselves as part of.

**Conclusion**

Given the historical developments that have led to the formation of the Republic of Armenia and Armenianness in general, Armenia indeed offers an intriguing site for epistemological exploration of the changing ontological and contradictory productions of a particularly gendered Armenian Citizen by the State and its representatives, and the de-ontologizing efforts of queer artist activists. Cynthia Enloe reminds us of the "masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" of nationalisms (Enloe 1990:44) that depict social difference as a category of nature. In other words, the hegemonic male and, I may add, hetero male position is anything but monolithic
and stable. In fact, as Robinson (1989) argued decades ago, “its representations change in order to contain within itself questioning or radical discourses” (n 205).

The crisis in hetero-patriarchy in Armenia, then, leads male gendered subjects to react by recontaining all things and persons non-hetero in “the Gay” to maintain hetero male hegemony in Armenia. In Germany, the ethnic and religious difference, specifically Turkish Muslim immigrants, are confronted through the invocation and strengthening of a Christian ethic “as an anxious and conservative response to its loss of hegemony, to domesticate the cultural challenge of religious difference under the sign of the same” (Butler 2003:398). In Armenia, as Rampton (1995) discusses in his work on the interracial interactions among adolescents in the UK, disabling racist images of ethnic absolutism are constantly projected by the mass media (Rampton 1995:11).

The Queering Yerevan collective’s political agenda, then, is put forth through aesthetic projects. The latter allows more room for the performativity of more complex identities not privileging sexuality over gender. Among other things, this strategy allows the QY to avoid a possible erasure or reduction of the gender-bound experiences that queer women have as women (Goodloe 2009). The QY-ers act as agents of social change, as thought decolonizers on a micro-scale, whether they perform their identities as women’s rights’ advocates, or queer women’s rights’ advocates, or (queer) women artists’ rights’ advocates, or LGBT people’s rights’ advocates.

Through their activist efforts the QY attempts to challenge the assumed naturalness of heteropatriarchy, be it in contemporary art or public political discourses of nationalism. At the same time they are curving the existing discursive space of homosexuality – gendered male – by carving a space for queer women through their
own “critical border epistemology in gender sphere” (Tlostanova 2010:204). They do it through careful and independent feminist critique, uncoopted by the state or any funding agency, and unafraid, attempting to decolonize not only gender and sexuality, but in the long run, serve as models of decolonizing thinking. For QY-ers, much like for Southeast Asian queer diasporics “the equation of liberation with leaving and oppression with “staying put” cannot be upheld” (Gopinath 2005:92). Instead, they are reworking the urban spaces they inhabit through their art activism in these locales and as Mertz argues, “forge a continuing indexical connection with particular communities, social statuses and histories” (Levon 2010:60).

The QY collective members situate themselves within the translocal by the force of the imagination of belongings: belonging to a transnational community of women (sharing a history of various oppressions); belonging to a transnational community of artists and aesthetes; belonging to the transnational community of queer women. Yet at the same time, as Tsing (2000) points out, by pulling the various transnational belongings together through locally rooted projects, the QY collective signals different identities at different times.

Locally situated within a heteropatriarchal and culturally conservative society it is the force of the imagination of belongings that sustains these women, artists, Armenians, who often discuss the impossibility to pin down who they are or who they are becoming (echoing Beauvoir). Through their activist efforts the QY-ers attempt to have media participation in the raising of the public’s awareness of their issues and experiences. This is an effort to address the parallel realities that are created through the actual lives and work of these activist queer artists and the Armenian public figures.
and mass media depiction of them. Their artwork and the art interventions, along with their blog are some of the safe places where they can articulate and contemplate their frustration with their cognitive dissonance with the Armenian media and making sense of all this among other things.

The collective’s project of queering is an attempt to claim presence within the public discourses of not only gendered sexual subjectivities and gendered artistic subjectivities, through difference, but also give their queering, or their method of unafraid, uncoopted, decolonized and decolonizing, independent feminist critique as a tool for enacting social change. The QY collective activist artistic projects in many ways echo Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s approach to their anthology titled This Bridge Called My Back, as a “revolutionary tool...to radicalize others into action” (1983:xxvi). This approach allows QY collective for a representation, presence, and recognition on their own terms in their preferred circles and at their preferred scales. And the QY collective articulation of their subjectivities as queer artists makes sense in relation to the mainstream and dominant discourses of citizenship, national identity, gender, and sexuality in relation to current post-Soviet space of the Republic of Armenia, as well as in relation to those urban and cultural spaces where they unfold their artistic activism.

The QY-ers nourish their sense of a collective by local, as well as translocal experiences, evoking their transnational connectedness through their local projects (Tsing 2000). At the same time they render the local Armenian mass media depiction of non-heterosexual agents (weak, sick, promiscuous, dirty) irrational, by the articulation of their identities of intelligent, creative, talented, and strong women they project through
the discourse they develop through their artistic activist projects and their blog that have been nourished by experiences elsewhere (the US, Canada, Egypt, the Netherlands, Armenia).

QY-ers appropriate and localize various transnational feminisms projecting their creative reconfigurations of these feminisms through the discourses they develop in their art interventions and on their blog. The evocation of the term “collective” is yet another new reconfiguration and reformulation of a Soviet concept within post-Soviet reality faced with pressures of nationalism and European, Western, and transnational integration processes. Many aspects of power relations are intricately interwoven. And assuming that there is a “hierarchy of significant and insignificant forms of power,” as Abu-Lughod reminds us, would limit our ability to examine the ways “in which these forms may actually be working simultaneously, in concert or at cross-purposes” (1990:48). The historicity of the lack of place in public discourse that the collective is trying to claim, tainted with the homophobic coverage of the Armenian media and the blessing of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the representatives of which have started to discuss non-heterosexuality as sin on Armenian TV more often, complicate the constructive recognition of the collective.

There is a significant scale dissonance between the cultural conservatism propagated by mass media, society in general (that has been continuously misinformed via various mass media outlets on the issues of sexuality), and women’s and LGBT human rights’ agendas of the QY collective. The former is predominantly in Armenian aimed at local Armenian audience (albeit very similar in tenor to neo-nationalist and anti-LGBT public pronouncements in the neighboring Georgia, Azerbaijan, as well as
Russia), and the latter is dialogic and evoking larger scales, and often jumping the local Armenian scale through code switching, or engaging with transnationally known feminist and artistic discourses. Interestingly, the mainstream Armenian organizations’ agenda vis-à-vis the US state, as well as that of LGBT Armenian organizations has different strategies from the QY vis-à-vis the RA. What active Armenian mainstream diasporic organizations attempt to claim in the US, i.e. the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, is subordinated by the US geopolitical agenda, yet they can perform their transnational identity through public rallies, commemorative events, and so on.

The agenda of the LGBT Armenian organizations or their claims vis-à-vis the US state is the same as any other LGBT organization, namely recognition. And they do claim it through annual Gay Pride Parades. The mainstream Armenian diasporic organization affiliated program’s agenda vis-à-vis the RA is saturated with fundraising events for various Armenia-based programs of the larger organization. The relationship of the New York based LGBT Armenian organization to the RA on the other hand, is articulated through its occasional public statements on the state of human rights in Armenia. QY agenda vis-à-vis the State of the RA, however, is different from the agendas of both organizations mentioned above and discussed at more length in the following chapters. The QY does not engage with the state directly. Instead, their artistic activist agenda is indirect and poignant social commentary for non-state agents to take on. And most certainly, the issue of Gay Pride Parades is anything but unproblematic for QY-ers in the Armenian context.

QY members view the State and its affiliates as corrupt, corruptible, colonizing, and colonizable, whereas what they are claiming is a space that is decolonized and dis-
identified from the State, a space that allows for the nourishment of healthy critique, independent, and unafraid critique that would either foster or bring about micro-scale social change.


**In Conclusion**

As the transnationally popular Armenian joke of late 20th and early 21st century goes, a diasporan Armenian woman in her 50s-60s says to her friend, “My son is getting married.” The friend noticing that something is not right with the way her friend mentioned that otherwise exciting news, asks, “Why aren’t you happy, then?” To which her friend replies, “He’s marrying another guy.” After a minute of silence, the friend asks, “Is he Armenian at least?”

As this joke illustrates, the project of the Armenian diasporic identity production and representation at different scales is a project with historical and temporal particularities that are evoked, enacted, and reinserted in the present day representations thereof. And it is not a coincidence that the setting of the joke is the nameless, non-specific diaspora, not the Republic of Armenia, where cultural conservatives argue that *homosexuality* (typically also gendered male) is a Western contamination.

Given the assumptions around and productions of conservative Armenian *home* and *diaspora*, *queer* readings and queering perspectives, as Gopinath (2005) argues, destabilize hetero family-centric epistemologies of *home* and *diaspora*. Hence, this dissertation was conceived to make sense of the incommensurability (Povinelli 2001) of the discursively produced Armenian ethnosexual subjectivities through the decentering of the aforementioned epistemologies in order to queer them from within, to be able to account for non-hetero diasporic and translocal Armenian experiences.

Given the cultural diversity of the US Armenian diaspora – from Armenia, Turkey, Iran, the Middle East, and Latin America – the issues that LGBT and queer Armenians
face within the US Armenian communities offer potentially the best illustrations of transnational dilemmas that beset many other diasporic communities (Kulick 2000, Alpert et al. 2001, Vasvari 2006, Tölölyan 2007). This research allowed me to point to the multiplex, often seemingly contradictory, and uneven links existing across cultural settings (Kim-Puri 2005) that mold various kinds of engagement with the (in)commensurability of classed and racialized ethnic and sexual difference.

Tölölyan’s (2000) comment that although in the large body of diaspora studies diaspora has come to be imagined as antistate and cosmopolitan, offering flexible identities, diaspora is saturated with the themes of nationalism, power, and an urge for territorialization within diasporic settings, is noteworthy. It is also significant to note that not all attempts at making certain public places as distinctively their own become recognized or noticed by the larger mainstream society. For example, when using a municipal square for the public commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, inviting State Senators or local mayors, the Armenian community’s engagement is with local (smaller scale) and state officials and governments (larger scale) through their elected officials, rather than the mainstream society in general. This, then, is an instance of a where and when of diasporic ethnolinguistic scheduling (in Silverstein’s 2003 terms) that allows these collectivities to perform their ethnolinguistic identities at certain times and in certain places engaging other social actors that they view significant. The most successful organizations, Tölölyan (2000) claims, represent themselves as rooted and routing (in Clifford’s terms), shaping their activity in the diaspora based on the success of diasporic organizations in Armenia that in diasporic public spheres is referred to as homeland.\textsuperscript{137}
Diaspora, as Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005) point out, is a structural process that entails social, linguistic, and discursive reconfigurations. And often the priorities of the diaspora as articulated by its spokespeople, usually key ethnocultural, political, and lobbying organizations, may differ from the priorities of the Republic of Armenia’s government. In the Armenian diasporic experience of difference, factors such as migration, racialization, and class intersect and complicate the salience of sexuality in a non-linear way. Perhaps caught in the reproductive hetero-centric chronotope of Genocide recognition project, mainstream Armenian diasporic discourses misrecognize the salience of embracing a wider diversity of the diasporic Armenian difference as a threat rather than a potential for survival and prosperity of diasporic and translocal and transnational Armenian experience.

The agendas of the mainstream Armenian organizations in the US diaspora, whether religious or secular, are primarily engaged with a different chronotope and state-centric scales, engaging with governments primarily, when engaging with agents outside of the local Armenian communities. Hence, in this state-focused chronotope of social justice, in lieu of Armenian Genocide recognition, there is no room for different Armenian stories of social (in)justice and (in)difference of (trans)local scales, such as those of LGBTQ and/or immigrant Armenians from elsewhere. Silence over non-normative sexualities is the loudest and most tangible mechanism of negotiating the (in)commensurability of ethnosexual difference within Armenian diasporic circles. In the Republic of Armenia, though, it is through their indirect artistic projects of queering the (mostly urban) normative space, which queer artist activists engage with the State as
well as other translocal cities and communities: (non)Armenian and not always (non)queer.

This indirect language of queering, or upsetting the hetero-reproductive norm, among other things, is also significantly informed by the QY artist activists’ reinterpretation of their Soviet pasts and post-Soviet present. Most importantly, the activist project of queering, albeit indirect, is actively ongoing in the culturally conservative post-Soviet Armenia, where there is no shortage of explicit, anti-LGBTQ public sentiments. And yet, where this symbolic violence is allusive, namely in the US Armenian diasporic circles, it is also harder to actively resist, hence the very few norm-upsetting projects.

The fact that transnational belonging of various groups makes itself visible unevenly and succeeds to various degree, reflects the complex interdependences of vertical and horizontal orders of identity production transnationally. Albeit uneven and with structural limitations, the wider de-elitization of technological access within the global systems, empowers (ever so slightly) some agents connect, create, and sustain new forms and ways of belonging, trespassing the very structure (nation-state) within which they might be dis-empowered. It is the imagining of a potential participation in the transnational/glocal that nurtures and sustains local articulations of transnational identities.

This research contributes to the fields of feminist anthropology, anthropology of gender and sexuality, queer studies, and transnational studies, through a rigorous and multidisciplinary theory driven analysis of the new places and ways people with complex ethnocultural backgrounds and migratory trajectories articulate their ethnosexual
(queer) subjectivities in diasporic, translocal, and transnational settings, thus complicating what it means to be of particular ethnicity and what it means to be queer (Manalansan IV 2003, Wedgwood 2009). I tried to carefully and rigorously connect the theory to ethnographic data. Through close examination the theoretical argument of this dissertation is engaged with a range of ethnographic data. The analysis reveals how the different voices are part of the places my consultants come from and how they operate in the ethnocultural religious and secular organizations, and how the organizations function in the contemporary period.

Part of the theoretical engagement of this dissertation is to understand whether and how the theorizations apply to a range of ethnographic material. This research demonstrated the limitations or non-applicability of certain theoretical approaches to the local and translocal negotiations of ethnic and sexual difference. This exploration of ethnosexual difference that finds itself in between various feminist theorizations of difference will be useful for understanding other explorations of displaced, translocal, transnational, and/or diasporic ethnosexual subjectivities not fitting within the frameworks of Western feminist theorization, feminism of color, and so on, instead inhabiting overlapping and in-between spaces. In the end, as Chambers points out, the sense of belonging is sustained as much by the imagination as by any geographical or physical reality. "[S]o our sense of our selves is also a labor of imagination, a fiction, a particular story that makes sense" (1994:25); what varies is the conditions in which we anchor our story.
Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila

Alpert, Rebecca

Alpert, Rebecca T., with Sue Levi Elwell, and Shirley Idelson, eds.

Appadurai, Arjun

Aretxaga, Begoña

Atkinson, J. Maxwell, and John Heritage

Bakhtin, Mikhail M.

Bernard, H. Russell

Bhabha, Homi.

Blommaert, Jan
2005 Discourse: Key Topics in Sociolinguistics. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert, Jan, with James Collins, and Stef Slembrouck.
2005 Spaces of Multilingualism. Language and Communication: Multilingualism and
Boellstorff, Tom.

Boellstorff, Tom.

Boellstorff, Tom.

Bourdieu, Pierre

Brettschneider, Marla

Butler, Judith

Carroll, Aengus, and Sheila Quinn

Chambers, Iain

Clifford, James

Cohen, Robin

Collins, James
Collins, James, and Richard K. Blot

Collins, James, and Steff Slembrouk

Croucher, Sheila

De Certeau, Michel

De Fina, Anna

De Fina, Anna, with Deborah Schiffrin, and Michael Bamberg

Eaklor, Vicki Lynn.

Edwards, Derek

Fairclough, Norman

Foley, Douglas E.

Friedman, Jonathan
Friedman, Jonathan

Gee, James

Goffman, Erving

Goodloe, Amy
2009 Lesbian-Feminism and Queer Theory: Another "Battle of the Sexes"?

Gopinath, Gayatri

Granovetter, Mark

Guglielmo, Thomas A., and Earl Lewis

Heitman, Sidney
1987 The Third Soviet Emigration: Jewish, German, and Armenian Emigration from the USSR since World War II. Köln: Bundesinstitut für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien (BIOst).

Jones, Graham M., and Bambi B. Schieffelin

Kim, Hyun Sook, and Jyoti Puri, H. J. Kim-Puri

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve
Kulick, Don

La Fountain-Stokes, Lawrence M.

Lattas, Andrew

Leap, William L. and Tom Boellstorff, eds.

Levon, Erez

Little, Walter

Little, Walter

Manalansan IV, Martin F.

Mann, Harveen S.

Massad, Joseph

McClintock, Anne

304
Nagel, Joane

Nash, June

Ong, Aihwa

Panossian, Razmik

Povinelli, Elizabeth A.

Rampton, Ben

Ribeiro, Branca Telles

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Shelley J. Correll
2004 Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations. Gender and Society 18(4):510-531.

Robinson, Sally

Rosaldo, Michelle

Scott, James

Scott, Joan
1986 Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. The American Historical Review
Silverstein, Michael
2003 The Whens and Wheres — as Well as Hows — of Ethnolinguistic Recognition.

Moraga, Cherrie, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds.
1983 This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. New York:
Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press.

Tlostanova, Madina
2010 Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands Comparative Feminist Studies

Tölöyan, Khachig

Tölöyan, Khachig

Tölöyan, Khachig
2007a The Armenian Diaspora and the Karabagh Conflict Since 1988. In Diasporas in
Conflict: Peace-Makers or Peace-Wreckers? Hazel Smith and Paul Stares, eds. Pp

Tölöyan, Khachig
2007b The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies. Comparative Studies of South
Asia, Africa and the Middle East 27(3):647-699.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph

Tsing, Anna

Urciuoli, Bonnie
1996 Exposing Prejudice: Puerto Rican Experiences of Language, Race, and Class.

Valente, Tom, Kayo Fujimoto
2010 Bridging: Locating Critical Connectors in a Network. Social Networks 32(3):212-
220.

Vasvari, Louise O.
Wallerstein, Immanuel

Wedgwood, Nikki

Werbner, Pnina

Weston, Kath

Yelvington, Kevin A.

Zenner, Walter
Endnotes

Notes to pages 1–27

Introduction

1 Although, certain Armenian diasporic organizations that represent the Armenian identity in the diaspora were founded before the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century, the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide and the mass migration related to it have had a significant sociopolitical influence on how these organizations represent Armenianness. Later migration waves of the Armenians have had different temporality and spatiality (people joining the various Armenian communities come from different sociopolitical and economic circumstances). And yet it is the Armenian Genocide recognition that appears as a key priority on the agendas of key Armenian-American diasporic organizations.

2 Often people became able or encouraged or coerced to move in the periphery of strategic centers (or from the periphery to various centers), rendering areal considerations problematic.

3 Pnina Werbner (1998) calls these “diasporic public spheres.”

4 I assigned pseudonyms to all the individuals and organizations involved in this research.

5 “[A] method of being at risk in the face of the practices and discourses into which one inquires… [a] serious nonidentity that challenges previous stabilities, convictions, or ways of being… a mode of practical and theoretical attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable” (Haraway 190–91) “...the listening actively engages with the social context in question. It means listening not just to stories, but to agendas” (Boellstorff 2012:30).


Chapter 1

7 Over time the Armenian Cause has changed: in the 18th-19th century it was the state of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, whereas after the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the massacres preceding and following it, it has focused on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by major powerful countries, and current Turkey, as the descendent of the Ottoman Empire. Although after Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic in 1921, disidentifying itself from the past Turkey and the past of Turkey, his government and all the following Turkish governments have exercised a policy of denial in regards to
the systematic government efforts on the part of the Ottoman Turkish empire, as well as Young Turks to get rid of Armenians, a big minority population in Turkey.

Notes to pages 36–45

8 The first reflects the spelling and pronunciation of Eastern Armenian that the author of this dissertation speaks, as she comes from the Republic of Armenia (also referred to as Eastern Armenia). The latter reflects the spelling and pronunciation of Western Armenian spoken in the Ottoman Empire, present day Turkey, and in the Armenian diaspora around the world, except for Georgia, Iran, and Russia.


10 The role of the US and Western European Powers at the time charting the map of Armenia.

11 This term is not accurate, as Soviet Armenia was not the country that these people had left behind. However, it is being used here as it has been used for a long enough time to acquire meaning.

12 The Armenian Cause first entered the ethnopolitical discourse of Armenians in late 19th century when Mkrtich Khrimian, former Armenian patriarch “toured Europe championing the cause of limited self-rule for the Armenians and acceptance of Article 16 of San Stefano” (Alexander 2005:25). “Russo-Turkish Treaty of San Stefano (February 19, 1878) provides for protection and reforms for Armenians. The […] Congress of Berlin (June 1978) replaces the protective measures of San Stefano under Article 16 with unsatisfactory and ineffective provisions for Armenian people under Article 61, and returns Garin (Erzerum) to Turkey. Russia retains Kars and Ardahan.” http://www.littlearmenia.com/html/genocide/genocide_timeline.asp, accessed January 7, 2008. After this, the content of the Armenian cause would be used more generically to include the issue that the Armenian political, intellectual elites prioritize.

13 Aid Committee for Armenia. Panossian argues that this organization set the stage for the future diaspora–Homeland relationships.

14 Claims the secession of an ethnically Armenian enclave from Soviet Azerbaijan, a neighboring republic, to which it was annexed in 1921 by Stalin’s decree.
Notes to pages 46–50

15 (1) Jirair Libaritian, US citizen, appointed as the Director of the Department of Research and Analysis under the Republic of Armenia (RA) president in 1991. (2) Raffi Hovannisian, US citizen, appointed as the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of RA at age 32. The political machine of the RA had been attempting to minimize Hovannisian’s presence in the public sphere through various means, including stretching the granting of a RA passport to him for 14 years to prevent him from participating in presidential or parliamentary elections. (3) Sepouh Tashjian, US citizen, appointed as Minister of Energy in 1992.

16 The Ministry of Diaspora attempts to also serve as a leverage of keeping migrant Armenian laborers affiliated or close to diasporic communities, to maintain their economic interest in Armenia. The President of Armenia is attempting to gather the diasporan energies around Armenia.

17 Both officers were participating in an English language training course in Budapest, Hungary in 2004 as part of NTO Peace keeping forces. Ramil Safarov, the Azerbaijani officer was sentenced to life-imprisonment in Hungary for the first degree murder, which he had confessed to have committed as a result of a clouded judgment because of the Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and personal traumatic experiences as part of it. The Hungarian government returned the Azerbaijani officer to Azerbaijan at the end of August 2012, claiming to have done so after receiving diplomatic guarantees from the Azerbaijani government, that Safarov will be serving his sentence without any pardon. Safarov, however, was pardoned on the day of his arrival in Azerbaijan, promoted to the rank of a major and given an apartment by the government of Azerbaijan. It is also noteworthy that the extradition occurred after the government of Hungary had been promised by an Azerbaijani Oil company to buy government bonds worth $2 billion. The latter, however, did not come to fruition.

18 The autonomous Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (Mountainous Karabakh) with majority Armenian population and historically an Armenian province was annexed to Soviet Azerbaijan by Stalin’s Decree/order in 1921. In the early 1990s Armenia and Azerbaijan were in war for the territory. Currently, the republic is a de facto under Armenian control. At the same time it has declared itself as an independent state that has not been recognized by any international organization. It is noteworthy that thanks to Armenian lobbying efforts, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh has an embassy to the UN.
Notes to pages 53-64

19 It should be noted that in the US there are also Catholic and Protestant Armenian Churches. They, however, are fewer in number and only emerging in the recent history of Armenians. Not having the historical depth of the Apostolic Church, with which the overwhelming majority of Armenians associate themselves, if they associate themselves to any church, are not major sites of recruitment for the traditional political parties.

20 For example, depending on the community and their migratory trajectory, the parish and the priest himself can be Armenian speaking or not.

21 Later furthering organizationally based articulation of Armenianness in diasporic communities around the world.


23 These needs (survival of the diaspora, language, culture, recognition of the Genocide, and so on) are often articulated by ADLP members as diaspora priorities differing from the priorities of Armenia. By establishing the Ministry and including these in the mission of the Ministry Armenia is signaling its recognition of the diaspora organizations’ rendering of Armenianness.

24 The Minister of Diaspora used this term in her meeting with the ADLP officials in California, USA.

25 The earliest Armenian immigrant was a man called “Malcolm the Armenian” who arrived in Jamestown around 1618-19 (Mirak 1983).

26 According to this system immigrants from different nations were admitted by proportion of their compatriots in the 1870 US census.

27 Another instance when Armenians had to prove their whiteness occurred in the 1924-25 case of United States v. Cartozian. “The case began when the U.S. government sued to strip Tatos O. Cartozian, a rug merchant living in Oregon, of his naturalization papers on the grounds that Armenians were Asiatic rather than European and white.
In July, 1925, Federal Judge C. E. Wolverton ruled that Armenians, though geographically Asiatic, were clearly of European descent, and thus eligible for naturalization as "free white citizens." (Alexander 2005:114).

Notes to pages 64–68

28 The latter echoes the experience of Armenian-Americans. Unsurprisingly the nostalgia aspect is a token of the early 20th century and signals the permanence of the diaspora. The gratitude aspect, on the other hand, is still actively circulating at various public events rallied and organized by diasporic Armenian-American organizations.

29 The assassination took place on December 24, 1933, at the Holy Cross Armenian Apostolic Church, New York City, Archbishop Levon Tourian, who was the elected primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (under the See of Holy Echmiadzin, located in then Soviet Armenia), at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. The assassination was triggered by an event that had taken place earlier the same year. On July 1 of the same year, at the celebration of Armenian Day at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago Archbishop Tourian had ordered to remove the tricolor flag from the stage where he was expected to give his invocation. The significance of the flag was political as it was the symbol of the 1918-1920 Armenian Republic run by Dashnak party and by asking to have the flag removed (signaling allegiance to the Holy See of Echmiadzin and thus to the Soviet Armenian government) the Archbishop was perceived by the Dashnaks as a traitor.

30 The 1956 elections of the Catholicos of the See of Cilicia in Beirut institutionalized the division between Dashnaks and non-Dashnaks, when ARF supported Primate of Aleppo, Zareh Payaslian, was elected as the Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia. Although there are no theological differences between the Holy See of Echmiadzin where the Catholicos of All Armenians resides, historically, the Catholicos of the Cilician Prelacy is elected independently from that of the Holy See of Echmiadzin. Since Armenian Catholicos are elected not only by a college of bishops or other Church officials, but also by a larger number of lay delegates the election of the Catholicos is dependent on the sociopolitical environment within the community. Both heads of the Church have the title Catholicos, yet the rank of the Cilian office is lower in that the Catholicos does not carry the title "Catholicos of All Armenians" (Panossian 1998: 186-187).

31 Nagel argues that "[s]ocial constructionist models of ethnicity emerged in the social sciences, primarily in the 1970s (Barth 1969, Horowitz 1975, Yancey et al 1976),” further suggesting that “[m]uch current research on race, ethnicity, and nationalism in both the social sciences and humanities rests upon a model of ethnicity as a set of socially constructed boundaries in political, economic, cultural, social, and moral time

Notes to pages 73–82

32 In this case the Genocide. Many Eastern Armenians, along with Western Armenians identify with the Genocide and perpetuate that memory, even though it was not a firsthand experience for them or anyone in their families.

33 Tölölyan differentiates between those groups who are diasporic and ethnic. The diasporics are committed and consciously reproducing their identities, whereas ethnics have a lingering sense of Armenianness and occasionally make their symbolic “going back” by going to the Church or cultural events. Tölölyan defines diasporics as multi-local, often connecting the local and the global. Diasporics do so through actively creating and financing institutions, lobbying for the causes that they view crucial for the reproduction of the identity of the community they represent. Through cultural, social and political actions they make continuous efforts to “diasporize” the awareness and identity of their fellow ethnics (Tölölyan 2007a). In other words, if ethnics reproduce their being and belonging by inertia or occasionally consciously, their footing toward their ethnocultural identity is a private matter on a micro scale. On the other hand, their belonging to a larger group is only occasionally signaled by participation in public events of larger scales, which themselves signal even larger scale processes.

34 Although in the 1920s the first organizations were village based organizations, their effectiveness seems to have given way to culturally and politically active organizations.

35 The former as a place where many exilic nationalists migrated to the US from and still had links. The latter as an imagined, albeit contested symbolic homeland.

36 Here I mean the present day country of Armenia. But in the interviews the interviewees often referred to the Armenian provinces of Turkey as Armenia.

37 One such instance would be the fundraising campaign for the Haitian earthquake and Tsunami relief in 2010.


39 Parouir Sevak is a famous Soviet Armenian poet unpopular with the Soviet regime. He died in a car accident in early 1970s, which was widely speculated to have been set up by the KGB.
Chapter 2

40 And by “conscious and imaginative process” I mean selectively highlighting particular features of the collective history and individual memory and building on these features.

41 Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) study of the Nuer that allowed a glimpse at a situational identification, along with Barth’s investigation of ethnic identity with fluid and mutable boundaries, along many other analyses elucidate the fact that many African tribes were in fact deliberately constructed by colonialists to thus also indirectly rule them (O’Brien 1986).

42 Since the Armenian Church is one of the first places in the diaspora through which Armenians seek to affiliate to each other, an active Armenian Church in upstate New York has been chosen as a main venue for the project. St. Nicholas Armenian Church is part of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of North America. The present day St. Nicholas Armenian Apostolic Church was consecrated in 1970s. The origin of the Church goes back to late 19th century. The Church has over 200 members of various migratory generations and their descendents (late 1800s to mid 2000s) from various parts of the world (primarily from Middle East, very few from South Caucasus, Central Asia, Russia) with various linguistic backgrounds (English, Armenian, Turkish, Russian, Arabic) from different walks of life.

43 It is important to note that the passion, dedication, emotional and financial investment of the active community members is astounding.

44 I put this in parentheses because two of my queer consultants raised the issue of their spirituality and how it is lacking within the Armenian circles, whether religious or secular.

45 Transcription conventions: [ ] stand for overlapping utterances; = stands for contiguous utterances (Atkinson and Heritage 2006).

46 This is a youth organization for junior and senior high schoolers. In this particular community, they are trying to serve the wider community: organizing bake sales to raise money to donate to “Coats for Kids” project. They participate in a soup kitchen in Watervliet that serves people from the whole Capitol district.

47 Armenian School meets every Saturday morning for two hours. It has around twenty students (ages 3–17). The students learn how to read, write, and converse in Armenian. They learn Armenian songs, poems, history, and culture.
Notes to pages 112–114

48 This reminded me of a brief conversation I had with the head of another Armenian cultural organization who is herself a Lebanese Armenian, active in the Armenian community center in the same town, and is a member of another Armenian Church in the area. This woman noted to me: ... It is the Armenians from overseas that are stronger in the Armenian spirit. We won’t be exactly like the Armenia Armenians but we are at least similar to them.

49 Here I mean the present day country of Armenia. But in the interviews the interviewees often referred to the Armenian provinces of Turkey as Armenia.

50 Artsakh is the name of the province of historical Armenia that is now known as Mountainous Karabakh or Nagorno-Karabakh.

51 I use Armenian language in this chapter to refer to Western Armenian. The language of the present day Republic of Armenia is Eastern Armenian, to which the diaspora Armenians refer to as Russian Armenian. Western Armenian was and still is largely spoken in Istanbul that used to be a vibrant cultural center for Armenians, in the countries of Middle East that have Armenian communities, in Australia, Western Europe, the USA, and Canada, where people have migrated from Turkey and countries of Middle East. The Armenian that the clergy or most other community member use is mostly Western Armenian. The use of it is significant in terms of signaling a particular symbolic center that in fact is no longer existent. Istanbul historically used to be the center for Western Armenian. Its role has long been minimized. However, the Armenian words and phrases that community members use along with the Armenian excerpts of the priest’s sermon are all in Western Armenian. This hinges on historical memory and tradition that although does not have a strong organized center as such is being reproduced by the Armenian Churches in the diaspora.

52 Liturgy: the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America defines as “the main worship service of the Armenian Church. But the Badarak, as we call it in Armenian, is much more than that. It provides the most intimate encounter we can have with God in this life.” http://www.armenianchurch.net/worship/index.html, accessed February 3, 2008.

53 Classical Armenian is difficult to understand for Western or Eastern Armenian speakers. The liturgy book has a Western Armenian translation of the classical text. The liturgy, however, is always conducted in classical Armenian, in all the Armenian Churches of the world.
Notes to pages 116–129

54 Certain words have opposite meanings in these two varieties of Armenian.


59 In an Armenian Church in Armenia the structure of the Church is different. There is no parish council or church organizations such as Women’s Guild. There is no coffee hour. In general, the churches in Armenia are basically attended by anyone. You do not have to belong to a particular church to attend it. People may attend different churches, on different days of week, at different times of day. Churches are always open during the day. And given the 70 years of Soviet system, most Armenians lost touch with Church or Church community. Not many families go to Sunday services every week. People do go, yet not necessarily with their families, not necessarily every Sunday. The worship style of the Armenian Church in the Capital Region is also informed by the norms on the ground.

60 As Alexander (2005) sums it up, in 1860-1862, a localized armed conflict between the Turkish authorities and the Armenians of Zeitun, a town in Cilicia’s Taurus Mountains that was ruled by Armenian barons broke out as a result of the Turkish government efforts to expropriate Armenian land in Zeitun in order to settle Muslim Tatar refugees from the 1853-1856 Crimean War and to collect a newly imposed tax. The Zeitun uprising in particular would later circulate in the discourses on the Armenian revolutionary/national consciousness, through print media, poetry and songs often inspired by Western intellectual currents that found their place in Armenian schools and colleges through European-educated Armenians (Alexander 2005:25). The references to the persistence and courage of the Armenians in Zeitun echo into the second decade of the 21st century in the Armenian Genocide commemoration events in Armenia and in the US Armenian diaspora as key to the Armenian character.

61 There is an ongoing debate about switching to English in the liturgy at least for the 40% of the time, if not 60% or more so that people do not feel left out and understand it. However, the Eastern Diocese of the US, which operates under Holy Echmiadzin, Armenia, decided that the liturgy has to be served in Armenian.
Chapter 3

"So it [Armenian identity] is a pastime?" This is a question one of the Yerevan based queer Armenian participants asked me at a talk I gave on this chapter discussing the places and times of diasporic ethnosexual identity production. I find this significant, as yet again it points to a particular positioning. For a queer Armenian woman from Armenia "doing Armenian" with fellow diasporic Armenians seems like a pastime, since she comes from a habitual place, where being Armenian is not questioned or chosen, rather it is unalienable, if often unpleasantly so.

On a large scale identity has a who (the identity seeker), where, and when (Silverstein 2003).

The name of the organizations and individuals involved have been changed to maintain their anonymity and privacy.

He argues that other scales are often sought for to inhabit (Boellstorff 2007:143). I will problematize this later in the chapter. Boellstorff claims that "Contemporary non-normative sexualities and genders are linked more powerfully to both globalization and nationalism than ethnicity and tradition" (2007:214).

One of the things I grapple with is whether or not we need to rethink the definition of diaspora to see how the queer Armenians will or will not be part of the core diasporic spaces that often provide liberating social pockets at the margins where there is no overlap between the two.

I carry the discussion of footing/alignment and scale throughout the dissertation.

An interesting fact: this program organizers targeted young, professional Armenians living in the greater New York area, which meant that my attempts to take my daughter with me to my fieldwork never worked. Along with fundraising, these events served the purpose of social and professional networking among Armenians.

Most of the committee members had limited exposure to non-hetero Armenians.

During this research Armine was participating in an online contest for which she was generating support through her virtual (and for the large part) Armenian community. Her efforts paid off and thanks to the dissemination of her contest information throughout her various online Armenian communities generated the support she needed to win the contest. She interpreted this in terms of her perception of the Armenian
community, as being like a family and supporting each other and helping each other succeed.

Notes to pages 147–153

71 Interestingly, as recently as early October 2012, as part of a conference called “Armenians and Progressive Politics” 4th annual conference in NYC and San Francisco, sponsored by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s East and West Regions, representatives of various organizations from Armenia, Europe, South America, and the US were discussing various issues that Armenia faces at its 21st independence anniversary. One of the many panelists was the head of an Armenian NGO from Armenia dealing with LGBTQ issues in Armenia. While his presentation went uninterrupted on the East Coast, he was requested to withdraw his presentation by the organizers in San Francisco part of the conference on the grounds of personal security issues (although no clear accounts were given as to whose security was of concern). A few of other panelists boycotted this decision and along with the LGBTQ human rights presentation moved theirs to a nearby café that became an impromptu conference venue for their presentations. This is, perhaps, another instance of the various uptakes of non-heteronormativity by the same political party on the East and West Coasts. It is also of note, that the Armenian MP that paid the bail of one of the neo-Nazis who firebombed the gay-friendly bar in Yerevan, Armenia, also belonged to this political party.

72 Interestingly, most of my consultants, both queer and non-queer expressed their admiration for the character of an Armenian woman: meeting all the above described traditional expectations, alongside working as hard as men outside of home.

73 Nune: Everybody knows how amazing we are, where Armenia is, how, like, amazing we are... Oh Gagossian is Armenian? I just think we’re amazing. Um, [11 sec], I just think we’re blessed. I don’t know...The way we take care of each other. How organized we are, how we survived with 7 million people in this world. We’re one of the oldest people in this world... We’re really talented. And we have amazing, amazing writers and musicians.

74 “High Femme—Lesbian or queer gender marked by a highly stylized and aestheticized form of femme gender expression or identity. Uses exaggeration, artifice, and/or theatricality to denaturalize femininity” http://sublimefemme.wordpress.com/2008/10/27/rethinking-high-femme-part-1/, accessed May 4, 2013.

75 Nina echoes the sentiment of many of my queer consultants on this reconciliation issue.
Notes to pages 163–187

76 She makes a distinction between Yerevan, the capital city where she herself is from and the regions, through a reference to the Yerevan dialect she knows and self-identifies with and those from the regions and villages that she dis-identifies from and feels removed from or othered.

77 Tölölyan considers the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF, the Dashnak party) the second most important diasporic organization given the fact that it sustains a successful lobbying affiliate organization, the Armenian National Committee (ANC), in Washington, DC and has launched another one in Brussels to lobby the European Union. ARF functions as a form of stateless power that repositions itself towards the host government of the country it finds itself, and the government of the Republic of Armenia depending on the sensitivity and significance of the Armenian issue at hand. The issue of the recognition of the Genocide, for instance, is operationalized in particular ways through: 1) lobbying efforts as part of Real Politic engaging with the legislative branch of the given polity at the national level; 2) relevant promotional events for the Armenian communities in different locales transnationally; 3) in Armenia through their local base.

78 The latest evocation of this was the response of my research participants to the Genocide Bill criminalizing any Genocide Denial proposed by French Parliament, including the Armenian Genocide (at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish government in the early 20th century). All my hetero self-identified research participants who responded to this Bill through social media were saluting the effort, along with some of my queer and gay self-identified consultants. The individual expressions of ambivalence and disagreement with a passage of such a law, however, came from gay and queer self-identified participants and no hetero self-identified ones. The ambivalence hinged on the fact that the gay self-identified consultant was happy for the passage of the law as a descendent of a Genocide survivor, and ambivalent as someone for freedom of speech. And the queer consultant opposing the passage of the law places significant emphasis on free speech and views the law as a racist attack on Turkish communities unaware of that part of their history.

Chapter 4

79 “The process of disidentification, according to Muñoz, is never resolved but continues to inform the performative strategies he considers” (Case and Stevens Abbitt 2004:931).

80 One could perhaps argue that women are more willing to invest time into unpaid labor than men, again as an extension of patriarchal expectations of men to be the breadwinners.
Notes to pages 187–224

81 This is a reference to the two sides of the Armenian Church the division of which occurred along traditional Armenian political parties in the US in 1930s, between the Armenian Church affiliated with Echmiadzin, the headquarters of the head of the Armenian Church located in the then Soviet Union, and the tashnag (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), more nationalist political party not recognizing the Soviet Armenian affiliated Church. See chapter 1 for more details.

82 Echoing Kath Weston’s idea of "families we choose" from Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

83 She also echoes filmmaker Pratibha Parmar, whom Mann (1997) quotes as writing “[W]e are not interested in defining ourselves in relation to someone else or something else, nor are we simply articulating our cultural and sexual differences. ... We are creating a sense of ourselves and our place within different and sometimes contradictory communities, not simply in relation to... not in opposition to ... nor in reversal to ... nor as a corrective to ... but in and for ourselves” (Mann 1997:105).

84 Being pro-Turkey is popularly perceived to be against pursuing a significant Armenian cause, that of fighting for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century. In the popular imaginary, Turkey, as well as Azerbaijan, are perceived as enemies. Turkey is perceived as such due to the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century in the Ottoman Empire, and the current Turkish government’s denial of the Armenian Genocide. And Azerbaijan has developed this image for the unresolved issue over Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnically Armenian enclave that at the beginning of the 20th century was annexed to Azerbaijan by Stalin’s decree. A war broke between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh for the period of 1991-1994, with the unrest starting before the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the result of this war, Armenia gained control over Nagorno-Karabakh and some adjacent Azerbaijani territory that did not use to be part of Nagorno-Karabakh. There has been a truce since the mid-1990s. From time to time either side blames the other for breaking the truce.

85 The manager of the DIY bar left Armenia with her sister, seeking asylum in a European, in a matter of months after the incident.


Chapter 5

89 Gilroy (1991) calls this *conservative racism*.

90 Queering Yerevan is a collaborative project of Armenian queer artists, writers and curators to be realized within the framework of the QY collective. It takes as its point of departure concrete mnemonic experiences of concrete queer artists in a specific time and space: Yerevan, 2000s. The project of self-mapping is a research-based initiative that takes topography as both a material and medium, as a work of artistic symbolization and translation. Rather than offering a so-called “objective” mapping of the city space, the project of self-mapping can be imagined as a fabric woven from personal histories, half-forgotten, half-distorted memories, i.e., sites of remembering and erasure. We will explore the radical possibilities of subversion through envisioning the city - its landscape, the social dynamics, places, people, movements - differently from predefined topographies, signs and symbols that bring out the politics of prohibition and licensing, inclusion and exclusion determined by the normative mechanisms of power. The project is about queering the city/map and also queering the self.”

91 An anti-LGBT law was adopted by Saint Petersburg City parliament in March 2012. In March of 2012, members of a Russian feminist punk group called “Pussy Riot” were arrested for hooliganism, for their activist anti-autocrat regime performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, Russia, which was used as a metaphor for the ruling repressive political elites. On August 17, 2012 they were sentenced to two years of imprisonment, despite a very public transnational and translocal protests held around the world, including the support of Amnesty International. “According to a poll, only 7% of women in Russia are feminists, and 45% of men in Russia “detest” feminists. Only 3% like them. To add to the dilemma, two of the women Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina, have very young children from whom they've already been separated (Source: http://jezebel.com/5935621/pussy-riot-found-guilty-sentenced-to-two-years-in-prison-worldwide-protests-scheduled, accessed August 17, 2012). In Ukraine a similar bill was brought to the floor of the parliament in late June of 2012 to be dropped from the agenda at the last minute in early July of 2012. On the International Coming Out Day on October 11, 2012, masked nationalists attacked an LGBT-friendly nightclub in Moscow, which sent three people to hospital. http://en.ria.ru/crime/20121012/176568654.html, accessed October 12, 2012.

92 Also articulated by cultural conservatives in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, and so on.
Notes to pages 236–246

93 in Gopinath’s terms (2005) “various regimes of colonialism, nationalism, racial and religious absolutism are violently consolidated through the body and its regulation” (28).


95 Also see Jane Hill, “Today there is No Respect”: Nostalgia, “Respect” and Oppositional Discourse in Mexico (Nahuatl) Language Ideology (1991).

96 Attempting to explain why certain German individuals would kill a Turkish immigrant, looking for roots in his or her family, rather than collective public discourses of religious otherness.

97 Dani is an Armenian-American woman in her mid to late twenties, who has had same gender as well as hetero-gendered relationships and does not like to self-identify as queer or hetero, or lesbian. She has travelled to Armenia and lived there for extended periods of time and has developed friendships with both hetero and queer self-identified Armenians in Armenia.

98 Kristine is an Armenian-American woman in her late thirties, whose family and she herself have been actively involved in the US Armenian-American community in the region where she has lived in. She currently works for the mainstream Armenian-American organization and involved in this project. She holds a leadership position for one of the organization’s programs.

99 According to http://gayarmenia.blogspot.com, the first Armenian LGBT organization emerged in 1998 in Los Angeles (LA Gay and Lesbian Armenian Society (GALAS)). A similar organization (LGBTArmo France) was subsequently established in 2001. The first LGBT Armenian group to emerge in Armenia was GLAG in 2003 after the law on decriminalization of homosexuality in Armenia was passed. In December 2008 Armenia signed the UN declaration against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

100 Also researched by a survey that PINK Armenia conducted in the three biggest cities in Armenia.

101 Perhaps, one other time when non-heterosexual women became part of the public discourse was after the first QY (known as Women-Oriented-Women collective then) art-
intervention, when a journalist wrote an article about the collective, publicly outing them in his article without their consent. However, this did not receive the amount of public attention as the DIY firebombing.

Notes to pages 247–255

102 Aims at strengthening the State of Armenia and the wellbeing of its citizens through promoting and implementing innovative ideas and efforts. http://civilnet.am/%D5%B4%D5%A5%D6%80-%D5%B4%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%AB%D5%B6/, accessed June 29, 2012.


105 As Kim-Puri points out (2005), “during the past 15 years, lesbian, gay, and queer studies have vitalized feminist research on sexuality with their focus on a variety of nations and regions, including the United States, Western Europe, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, India, South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan, and Thailand, among others (Aarmo 1999; Alexander 1997; Butler 1990; Chang 1998; Freeman 2001; Morris 1994; Puar 2001, 2002; Sedgwick 1990). There is also another growing body of literature emphasizes globalizing, partially homogenizing sexual identities due to the proliferation of the U.S.-style sexual politics (Altman 1997; Champagne 1999). Yet others offer critiques of such globalizing discourse on sexuality. They note instead that the expressions of desire and sexualities, as I also demonstrate in this dissertation, are culturally situated and need to be understood contextually (Chang 1998; Manalansan IV 1994, 1995)” (141-142).

106 Also echoed in Levon (2010) in the Israeli case.


108 Later in the chapter I discuss two art-interventions that were organized as efforts to queer a socio-politically significant public space, on the one hand, and an emblematic artistic public space, on the other.

Interestingly, a week prior to the protests regarding the film screening, in the same cafe I held a discussion on one of the chapters of this dissertation research dealing with the (non)hetero national identity in the post-DIY Armenian context as part of QY event series dealing with art, activism, feminism. And although the organizers and I were anxious about the potential discourse-disruptive presence of ultra-nationalists, the discussion was attended by activists and progressive thinkers, intellectuals, and artists and no such instance was encountered.


The way the artists used parentheses in both languages would let the reader/viewer see two words: image or war.

During Perestroika era, in mid 1980s, four of the curators of this exhibition who tended towards the Western art that was considered bourgeois, capitalist art by the ruling Communist Party, created a group called “The Third Floor.” At the time the contemporary art was controlled by the Artists’ Union, generally thought of as serving the ruling government. In a 1988 performance, these anti-establishment artists had entered a Gallery dressed as the corpses of the victims of the Soviet repression and said, “Hello to the Artists’ Union from the afterlife.” The media of the time interpreted it as “The official art is dead.” A diaspora Armenian woman (Sonia Balasanian) founded Armenian Center for Contemporary Experimental Art (ACCE or NPAK in Armenian) in 1992, yet now all the artists have united under the umbrella of the Ministry of Culture and are leaving NPAK.

All the blog entries can be located on the QY website. http://queeringyerevan.blogspot.com/, accessed May 6, 2013.

“a) queer women are oppressed by both women and men in the Armenian society; b) queer women’s culture is unknown to or misunderstood by the majority of Armenians as homosexuality is normally perceived as something perverse or immoral—our goal is to demystify these myths, especially in regards to queer women; c) while homosexuality is generally stigmatized in Armenia, queer women are doubly oppressed by the burdens of women’s traditional roles of marriage and motherhood, and they have scarce means to avoid this oppression; d) coming out to their families and the society in general for queer women is inconceivable due to these traditional burdens; e) whereas the
Armenian society is somewhat familiar with the gay culture through Sergei Parajanov and other well-known gay men, queer women and their culture is yet unknown and has no place in the Armenian society—the collective intends to historicize the presence of queer women in Armenian life and to educate the public on these issues. In the long run, working towards progressive social change, the QY collective envisions a revival (by recovering queer women’s lives and histories), reinterpretation (through art) and sustenance (through collaborative effort) of the cultural heritage of past and present queer Armenian women.” http://queeringyerevan.blogspot.com/, accessed March 24, 2009.

Notes to pages 266–274


121 Eastern Armenian is spoken by Armenians in Post-Soviet Armenia, Iran, and Russia, and more recently by Armenians in Los Angeles, California that have migrated from Iran and Armenia. At the same time Western Armenian is spoken by Armenians in most of the Armenian diaspora who have migrated from Turkey and the Middle East.


Notwithstanding their different sociocultural and historical circumstances, Armenia has had its own experiences with Imperialism, and as some argue (Tlostanova 2010), colonialism and migration. And much like Armenia, “Puerto Rican society and culture offer a unique and fascinating example that simultaneously reflects development and underdevelopment; nationalism, nation-building, and statelessness; colonialism and post-colonialism; competing ethnic, racial, religious, and class identifications; heterogeneity and homogeneity; tradition and modernity” (La Fountain-Stokes 2009: xv), breaking the artificial binaries.

This reminded me of a very different employment of Tlostanova’s (2010) “critical border epistemology in gender sphere” (204), specifically, marginalized indigenous Mapuche women in Chile, for whom as Richards notes, “the human rights paradigm or feminist critiques thereof do not recognize or speak to their multiple and shifting identities as indigenous women. Gender, in the view of Mapuche women, is a particular Western feminist discourse that neither empowers them nor recognizes their cultural
and ethnic identities. Richards shows how Mapuche women instead appropriate the human rights discourse, which, in spite of its roots in the Western philosophy of liberalism and privileging of individual rights, is strategically used to assert their collective and individual rights. For them, their struggles for recognition as Mapuche and as women cannot be separated. Mapuche women's rejection of gender and feminism, as Richards shows, is also about visibility on their terms, about claiming an indigenous cultural heritage and identity that have been systematically suppressed by the Chilean national state. The discussion of Mapuche women and their struggles for individual and collective citizenship is not only about long-denied rights and exclusions but it is also about the limits of the prevailing feminist notion of gender, of human rights paradigms, and definitions of citizenship” (Kim-Puri 2005:151-152).

A note to page 296

137 It should be noted, however that the ancestors of many in the diaspora have left the Western/Ottoman Armenia not Eastern Armenia. The migration of Armenians from other Soviet Republics, as mentioned in Chapter one, resulted in a very homogeneous republic. The latter fact contributed to Armenia’s claim as “the” homeland of all Armenians wherever they were. 100,000 people repatriated in 1945, creating a new space for a different kind of Armenianness (Panossian 1998).