

HOMELAND AND DIASPORA: CONNECTION THROUGH SPACES

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Abstract: Definitions of 'diaspora' differ. However, one commonly accepted feature of the concept is that diaspora assumes return and, as emphasized in the paper, return is permanent, even if it is virtual or metaphorical. This, probably, is the main factor that distinguishes diasporas from communities who only carry ethnic heritage and traditions, without maintain connections to the homeland. Unlike cases of only ethnic communities, diasporans maintain links to the homeland on a permanent basis, aimed at preserving the national identity and preventing assimilation. Diasporas, being physically in the host country, at the same time, maintain loyalty to the homeland, and loyalty to the non-territorial transnation prevails. The relationship between diaspora and the homeland is changing over time as a result of various changes and transformations, in particular, political, such as achieving political independence and establishment of a sovereign nation-state. Many nation-states, who have diaspora abroad, are applying an inclusionary approach toward the latter, aimed at strengthening the power of the state and strengthening and promoting the national identity.

The paper discusses 'diaspora return' as the core factor for homeland's inclusionary approach toward its diaspora, within the framework of key geographic concepts of 'space' and 'place'. With space interpreted in a different form, space as place is seen vital in homeland-diaspora relations. Place-centrism is emphasized as an essential condition for transforming the homeland into a specific place of return.

Keywords: space, place, ethnicity, national identity, diaspora, transnationalism, diaspora return

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'diaspora' has been expanded over the recent decades. One of the main problems of contemporary use of 'diaspora' is that it has been inflated. Diaspora is becoming a diluted category, sometimes with broader use that covers a wider range of people, including those who just live outside the homeland of their ancestors. Probably the key criterion that differentiates diaspora from ethnic communities is the diaspora mobilization and 'return', or 'homeland orientation' (Brubaker, 2005: 5) – an understudied area though. In regards to the difference between ethnic and diasporic communities, Razmig Panossian, a notable scholar of the Armenian diaspora, specifies that diasporans make "a conscious attempt not to assimilate (...) into the host society" which is seen as a problem, an undesirable effect (Panossian, 1998: 151).

Diaspora, with all the differences, either based on demographic-social structure or geographic distribution in the world, assumes interaction with the homeland. Diasporas, unlike ethnic communities, participate in the

creation of a transnational space, which engages the homeland (country of origin) as well and imply “transnational commitment to each other” (Ben-Rafael, 2013: 845). Creation of this transnational space, as proposed, occurs through the process of permanent return.

II. HOMELAND AND DIASPORA RETURN

Diasporans always return. The concept of ‘diaspora’ itself assumes permanent return. Diaspora return can be real, virtual or imaginary. Real return is physical, with diasporans moving to the homeland, be it permanently, periodically, for a specific short or long term. The ultimate purpose of the diaspora is, certainly, physical return. It is another question whether diasporans return physically, especially when they have all the opportunities to do so and no barriers exist on their way.

Virtual return is of imaginary nature and can be expressed in various forms. For instance, a diasporan attending a church service or playing in a sport team with other members of own community virtually returns to the roots, to the homeland. A diasporan, following the news on the homeland, watching a film in the mother language or about the homeland, participating in a community’s social network, by being active in diasporic clubs or societies, returns to the homeland. The return is also participation in the homeland’s affairs, its economy or social life, transferring funds there and many other ways of ‘being present’ in the homeland.

Diasporans are in ongoing relationship with the homeland, caused by social-cultural, economic, or political motives. Diasporans themselves as historical

formations are in process and represent a “multiplicity of discourses” (Werbner, in Knott and McLoughlin, 2010: 74). It can be argued that not only diaspora assumes return, but it itself is the return. Return to the homeland/motherland should not be seen as a derivative or a condition of diaspora’s existence. Rather, return forms the diaspora, and any policy of the homeland toward its diaspora abroad is about return, be it inclusionary or exclusionary. This paper intends to further advance the understanding of diaspora, in particular, diaspora return within the complexity of homeland-diaspora relations and geographical concepts of space and place.

The whole concept of ‘return’ is romanticism-based (Skrbis, 1999: 43). For many in diaspora ‘return’ is not real, but, as Stephane Dufoix mentions in regards to African (Black) diaspora, it is “a way of keeping alive and reinventing” the historic homeland, “whose territory is the memory of dispersion itself” (Dufoix, 2008: 15). Social structure or geographic distribution in the world assumes interaction with the homeland. The idea of return is featured in almost every case of diaspora, as historian Kevin Kenny states (Kenny, 2013: 61). William Safran, a prominent scholar of diaspora, underlines the role of return as a key factor for the definition of ‘diaspora’ (Safran, in Baubock and Faist, 2010: 12).

Return does not necessarily mean return of those diasporans, who have migrated to a foreign land, but can also include many those, who have never been in the homeland, whose ancestors have left it years, even decades ago. The ‘return’, thus, is a process of going to the roots through routes. This makes return different from immigration, and, as Kenny points, should not be mixed up with it (Kenny, 2013: 72). The routes can be

understood by following a complex of factors that has shaped each and every diaspora community. The routes reflect the way each community has been formed, its origin and heritage, and conditions of interaction with the host country's political, economic, social-cultural environment.

Diaspora, as McKittrick emphasizes, "points to the question of home, nation, and location" and "lack of a stable nation space and geopolitical independence, and transnational dispersals, can shape the possible desire to establish and secure a location that can replace former geographic losses" (McKittrick, 2009: 156). Dufoix emphasizes that any diasporic nation was once "together before being dispersed" (Dufoix, 2008: 35). The connection between diaspora and the homeland is a connection over spaces. This connection, as it can be argued, occurs through the perception of an imagined identity, to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase. With such perception, diasporans return to the homeland; they also return from the homeland to the diaspora (their community) and perceive it as their particular space in the broader global diasporic space.

III. GEOGRAPHIC SPACE AND DIASPORA IDENTITY

The concept of 'diaspora' is all about space, about its dispersion over space, and the concept of 'space' is directly related to 'identity', which has a nature to transform from space to space. The imagined home(land) space is a key to understanding the concepts of national identity and, thus, of diaspora itself, as its representative abroad. Home, Myria Georgiou points, "provides the initial and emotional parameters for identity" (Georgiou, 2006: 13). Diaspora exists in its space, and the

relationship between diasporans and the homeland is that of two spaces. Diaspora as a transnational formation, as it can be argued, is not just a space that is connected to the homeland space. Rather, diasporic transnationals connect spaces by serving as a link between them.

'Space' and 'place', as fundamental concepts in geography, are amongst the most important categories forming the theoretical conceptual framework for study of 'nation' and 'diaspora'. Over time, people have developed their "practical knowledge of the spatial", as Helen Couclelis summarized (Couclelis, in Longley et al, 2005: 31). Space as a socially-produced phenomenon (Soja, 1989: 80), cannot be absolute, as stressed by Henry Lefebvre, as it is closely linked with social activity, has been "relativized and historicised" (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011: 5-6). Spatial is not always visible (Couclelis, in Longley et al, 2005: 37) and spatial can only be conceptualized together with social (Massey, in Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011: 302). Living in space, as D. Lowenthal, A. Buttimer, D. Ley, E. Relph, and Yi-Fu Tuan emphasize, is not only living "in a framework of geometric relationships but in a world of meaning" (Ibid: 6). In categorising propositions of space, Doreen Massey separates space as "the product of interrelations", as the sphere of "coexisting heterogeneity", and as "always under construction" (Massey, 2012: 9). Massey continues by arguing that spatiality is co-constitutive with identities and relations between them (Ibid: 10).

Yi-Fu Tuan stresses that there are three levels of knowing space and place: intimate (direct), knowledgeable and conceptual (indirect) (Tuan, 2011: 6). As he points, "geographers study places" (Ibid: 3), which is a "concretion of value" (Ibid: 12). How can homeland, being a conceptual space for diasporans, who have not lived there, transform into one with concretion

of value? For diasporans, with no personal experience of being in the homeland, the latter is perceived more as a mythical space, rooted by ancestry.

What is special about place is its “throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” (Massey, 2012: 140). When compared, space is seen as more abstract than place (Tuan, 2012: 183), while place is space, “to which meaning has been ascribed” (Carter, in Massey, 2012: 183). More specifically, in regards to diasporic world and the sense of place there, Doreen Massey argues that it is essential to understand that culture and identity “must always be understood in relation to geography” (Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011: 216). Understanding identity itself is a complex task, as identity is multifaceted and engages such concepts as ‘ethnicity’, ‘culture’, ‘nation’, and ‘nationalism’.

In general, the concept of ‘diaspora’ assumes relocation. It can be argued that identity is more of geographic than psychological nature. The psychological part of the phenomenon of identity, as it is proposed, is to a large extent determined by its geographical categories, particularly, by ‘space’ and ‘place’. Inclusion of diaspora involves acts or processes directed toward transformation of perception of space and place among diasporans.

The sense of home in case of diasporans is two-fold. Edward Said stresses that most people know one culture, one home, however, “exiles are aware of at least two, and the plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that (...) is contrapuntal” (Said, 1995: 84). On the other hand, many diasporans, who have returned physically, “found themselves trapped between two cultures and at home in neither” (Kenny, 2013: 89). Many might face integration problems (Margaryan, in Sarkisian et al, 2014: 141).

When studying diaspora as a whole, the ‘routes’ cannot be sacrificed for ‘roots’, and the particular location of communities and their geography become essential and make one community different from another one. The concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘place’ are in “supposedly fixed and natural relationship” (Kenny, 2013: 108). As Gatens and Lloyd argue, the pasts of identities “have a geography” and the process is “ongoing now” (Gatens and Lloyd, 2012: 192). In this relationship, arguably, place becomes a determining factor. Home is perceived through places and for effective connection through spaces in homeland-diaspora relationship and, thus, strengthening the national identity of diasporans, the sense of home becomes central. Massey stresses that “a politics of outwardlookingness” implies “place beyond place” (Ibid).

Identity of diasporans “is not merely an extension of the homeland” and is created, consciously or not” (Panossian, 1998: 151). Diasporic space can exist in relative isolation but still is in permanent return, as diasporans can follow their life practices, traditions and norms even if they are geographically detached from the historic homeland. There are numerous examples of such communities in the world, even of some living geographically far from the homeland, such as the case of the Russian community in Bolivia. Diaspora’s connection to the homeland, especially during the contemporary technologically advanced era, makes the connection between two spaces smooth and even creates conditions for them to unite. Technology has become, as Kevin Kenny points, the most significant factor “in facilitating migration and diasporic connectivity” (Kenny, 2013: 98). Strengthening the connections between the homeland and its diaspora has a power to transform the diasporic space into a transnational space.

IV. INCLUSION OF DIASPORA IN THE HOMELAND

'Diaspora' as a category has evolutionised over the past century. With advancement of technology and increasing mobility of people, diaspora has been emerging from communities, who used to preserve national, ethnic, religious identity more or less in a passive way in the host country, to more active participants in homeland affairs. On the other hand, more home nation-states are turning toward pursuing an inclusionary approach toward its diaspora abroad. Such inclusionary stance aims at strengthening the national identity, improving economic and trade opportunities for the homeland state and is, thus, seen as a rational policy choice. Strengthening the power of the state and promoting the national identity are other strong rationales for the inclusion.

Governments of homeland nations are applying an inclusionary approach by reaching out in "new ways to their overseas populations in search of economic and political support" (Kenny, 2013: 9). They also use diasporas "to pursue agendas of nation-state-building or controlling populations abroad" (Baubock and Faist, 2010: 11). Being a powerful tool for political and cultural mobilization, diasporas are expected to play even a bigger role as diasporans "continue to forge links among themselves and with their homelands" (Kenny, 2013: 109). Inclusion assumes more active participation of the diaspora in the political and economic life of the homeland.

As glue for this two-way relationship, the inclusion by no means is an act of absorbing one party by another. Rather, it assumes understanding each other first. As in any relationship, trust and direct knowledge are vital in homeland-diaspora relationship. Diasporans are

nationals of other (host) nation-states, with traditions and culture of those hostland countries, carried over years. Khachig Tololyan argues that diasporic communities carry "a paradoxical combination of both ethnic and diasporic cultural identities and political practices" (Tololyan: 2000: 109). Development of diaspora makes it a powerful participant in the host nation, with its established institutions, political, religious, social and economic participation. They are also bound by certain obligations as nationals of their host states. Even though the diaspora world is perceived as one space, in its global sense, the 'dual orientation of diasporas' (Werbner, in Knott and McLoughlin, 2010: 74) makes the diaspora a very complex phenomenon, understanding which is a continuous process.

The homeland as a space of return is what keeps diasporans united, as Panossian sharply points when discussing the case of the Armenians. At the same time, the way the diaspora is included, or how is related to the homeland is what can keep diasporans separate (Panossian, 1998: 185). Often, diasporans know the homeland only conceptually and, so long as this is the case, the sense of home is not applied to the homeland. The question is whether it can be developed. What is the role of the homeland (and its government) in it?

In order to understand the process of inclusion, it is necessary to identify the reasons behind homeland's inclusionary policy toward its diaspora. Inclusion is viewed as even more beneficial in the long run and more nation-states choose to become closer to people of same ethnic, religious or cultural heritage. Reasons for inclusion of diaspora vary and are broad. They can be related to political, economic, social-cultural, sport, environmental, demographic aspects and processes. For instance, diaspora and the homeland, by being close, first

of all, empower the whole nation to be stronger in regards to negotiating power and lobbying. Jewish or Armenian lobbies are such well-known examples. This political engagement enables both parties to be united when it comes to promoting their pan-national goals, or to block undesirable outcomes or solutions on issues of importance for either party. The sense of global space for diasporans becomes more focused on the homeland when there is a threat (specifically, external) for the later or a local threat for a particular diaspora community.

From following purely economic objectives, such as implementation of joint projects or attracting foreign investments, to meeting strategically important demographic objectives such as population number increase, the engagement of diaspora strengthens the nation's political power and has a potential to improve its competitiveness abroad. Other reasons to include diaspora in homeland affairs can be restoration of wealth (property) as a result of forced expropriation, inflow of finances (with tourists, medical tourists, athletes, remittances), promotion of the homeland and its geographic regions (including regions and cities), strengthening the role of the homeland as a transit location for tourists, enriching the experience in dealing with people from difference countries, including with people of same cultural, religious or ethnic heritage.

Inclusion of diaspora into the homeland can also help the latter develop and promote its national brand and reputation abroad. At the same time, such strengthening cooperation between the diaspora and its homeland not only strengthens the unity of the nation in the international arena but can also create problems between the two parties. History knows cases of independent existence of both sides or even an exclusionary stance toward the diaspora. The exclusion

of overseas Chinese from mainland China (PRC) until the 1980s or ethnic Russians from Russia (USSR in a broader term) are such cases. Another example is the exclusion of ARF, a major Armenian diasporic organisation from Armenia in early 1990s, which affected the overall participation of diasporans in the homeland. The main justification used for such approach is protection of local (homeland's) interests from interference by the diaspora, especially, political. Interestingly, the relationship between diaspora and the homeland is changing over time as a result of political changes, such as achieving political independence and establishment of a sovereign nation-state in the homeland. Moreover, diasporas, being "wellspring of nationalism", often support establishment of sovereign nation-state in the homeland (Kenny, 2013: 52). In particular, they support nationalistic movements and, as Pnina Werbner quotes Benedict Anderson, diasporans engage in "long distance nationalism" and adds that they do so without accountability" (Werbner, in Knott and McLoughlin, 2010: 74).

Inclusion does not happen by itself and requires consistent and focused efforts. Ranging from measures such as granting citizenship and planning and implementing settlement programmes, which build long-term attachment with the homeland, to attracting business projects, including megaprojects, business trips, participation in art and industrial exhibitions, conferences and forums, student exchanges, camps and full-time formal study, such measures aim at placing the homeland in the geographic centre of diasporans. Supported by media coverage of events, whether they are organized through diaspora institutions or representatives of the homeland state, fundraising initiatives, remittances and benevolent contributions or

cultural events, even exported products from the homeland, provide a connection over spaces.

The inclusionary policy of the homeland toward its diaspora faces considerations, difficulties and barriers. Despite actual and potential benefits, inclusionary endeavour may not be effective because of a lack of continuity or if, for instance, the place-centric perception of the homeland is not seen as the target of the policy. Problems can arise when return can be spontaneous and not planned if the return is forced, in the form of refugee inflow in the homeland. Other problems that might come out of inclusionary measures can be resistance at local and hostland levels, financial limitations, lack of regulation in the homeland, possible interference in hostland's affairs, connection through geographical or geopolitical barriers (remote distance, lack of borders, hostile environment in-between the two sides), language barriers between the diaspora and the homeland and differences in understanding each other and in perception of historic homeland, lack of expertise and experience of dealing with each other, lack of understanding of the diaspora by the homeland, slow trends of relationship development.

The purpose of the nation-state in regards to its policy toward its diaspora is an attempt to create and maintain "ideologies of singularity – of singular loyalties, of the singularity of the national space ownership and of clear-cut borders" (Georgiou, 2006: 9). The process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation diasporans pass, as well as the multiple identities they carry, shape the context where these national ideologies are being challenged, and, in parallel with calls for loyalty by the homeland, the host nation-state expects similar attitude toward it from diasporans (Ibid). This re-territoria-

lisation is taking place in both new country and the homeland (Ibid: 11).

Existing in an increasingly globalized world, nations turn to emphasize their identity, which they try to strengthen and promote beyond borders. Avtar Brah points out that "the concept of border and diaspora together reference the theme of location" (Brah, 1996: 180). He sees 'diaspora space' as a category that brings 'dispersion' and 'staying put' together (Ibid: 181). Diasporans being dispersed over spaces but by 'staying put' maintain a sense of loyalty to the homeland. Appadurai even argues that loyalty to a non-territorial transnation is put first (Appadurai, in Karla et al, 2005: 36). According to Samuel Huntington, many diasporans, in particular those in Western countries, even remain loyal to their home-, rather than the hostland (Ibid). Ben-Rafael stresses the view that diasporic communities "belong to another world – through their close contact with their original homeland and fellow-diasporics living elsewhere" (Ben-Rafael, 2013: 854).

Giles Moran provides an interesting framework for development of diaspora and its role in transnational development. Classifying development into three – 'development in', 'development through' and 'development by' (Page and Mercer, in Knott and McLoughlin, 2010: 105), it assumes to facilitate development of diaspora where it currently lives ('in'), transnational development processes between diaspora and the world, including homeland ('though') and benefits that diaspora brings to the homeland ('by').

Inclusion of diaspora into the homeland is a multi-faceted complex task, a continuous process with long-term implications. Diasporas, being in permanent return, even of virtual or imaginary nature, can be "a force for stability" or one "that amplifies and even creates conflict"

(Cohen, 2005: 179). Having various forms, the inclusion assumes understanding the diaspora and the homeland by each side and, most importantly, of the need for that inclusion, in particular, from the strategic and national development perspectives.

There is no final answer in understanding diaspora, as it is not a homogenous space and is in process. One answer opens a new question and, despite living in one 'diaspora space', there are differences from country to country. Gabriel Sheffer underlines the crucial importance for any diaspora to have and maintain its national identity, so that diaspora communities can develop and prosper (Martirosyan, in Sarkisian et al, 2014: 117). The existence of diaspora provides an opportunity to the homeland to reach "new cultural spaces beyond the boundaries of homeland and hostland", with the focus being "on the connections migrants form abroad and the kinds of culture they produce" (Kenny, 2013: 12).

Can the homeland engage its diaspora, or problems between the two parties will limit the inclusionary ability of the homeland and the effectiveness of the inclusion. Is the connection between spaces enough for an effective inclusion? An opinion is emphasized that in the contemporary world, under the strong trends of globalization, "places are no longer the clear supports of our identity" (Morley and Robins, 1995: 87) and that "in a world that is increasingly characterised by exile, migration and diaspora, with all the consequences of unsettling and hybridisation, there can be no place for such absolutism of the pure and authentic" (Ibid: 103-104). This can be argued against in a way that both space and place shape the identity framework, and identity transforms and strengthens when space becomes

associated with places. Places, arguably, are key to understanding diaspora and its return. Places have differences and these differences come out before they enter in contact with each other (Massey, 2012: 69).

V. PLACE-CENTRISM AND DIASPORA RETURN

The abstract sense of space keeps diasporans only conceptually attached to (or knowledgeable about) the homeland. Homeland itself, especially in regards to large countries, can be perceived in an abstract way and, certainly, not as a concretion of values, as Yi-Fu Tuan would say. Homeland-diaspora relations can potentially originate the problem of contested leadership by both sides of the nation. Arguably, for diasporans, who have developed only a conceptual sense or knowledge of homeland, the claimed leadership can prevent the diasporans from being effectively included in the nation and, thus, it becomes a significant political barrier in the homeland-diaspora relations and the development of one transnational space. The problem of contested leadership that exists in homeland-diaspora relationship requires a deeper analysis. This paper, rather, is an attempt to underline the importance of place as a factor affecting the national identity, as compared to the broader and more abstract geographical concept of space. As argued, it is through the development of place-centric perception of diasporans that the inclusion process becomes effective and can strengthen the inclusion of the diaspora into the homeland, as this assumes attachment to certain places.

Spatiality, sense of place and space are being transformed by the "globalization of image flows" (Morley and Robins, 1995: 38). Nigel Thrift categorizes four kinds of space: space as 'empirical constructions', 'unblocking space', 'image space', and 'place space', each

“undergoing continual construction” (Thrift, in Holloway et al, 2003: 96-104).

For the empirical construction of space, as Thrift emphasizes, the standardization of space and time have become important development (Ibid: 97). Through the development of technology the global diasporic space has become reachable by various communities and the homeland. National art, religion, myths and traditions, lifestyle and social norms, even though often adapted to the local environment, throughout time, have enabled communities in the diaspora to create their physical environment within the framework of their diasporic identity. Religious institutions, political associations, cultural clubs and societies, even the home environment – all become parts of the empirically constructed diasporic space.

When dealing with the diaspora, many in the homeland, including even policymakers from time to time commit a fallacy by perceiving the diaspora as a single homogenous space, but a diverse one transnational space. As “unblocking space”, the interaction between the homeland and the Diaspora creates a potential for formation of such unified transnational space. The same can be applied, to some extent, to the connection between communities. The ‘Armenian world’ and the ‘Jewish world’ are such examples. However, this seems to be weaker compared to the connection between a community and the homeland, as only the latter is seen as the ‘return target’.

The role of the ‘image space’ cannot be underestimated. People think in symbolic terms. The homeland is a symbol for homelanders, as well as for diasporans. Symbols help to strengthen the diasporic attachment to the homeland. Diasporans, especially those many who have never been in the homeland, perceive it

through symbols, to a large extent, represented by images. Symbolism is one of the strongest driving forces behind diaspora existence. They create the idealistic perception of the homeland and its history. Symbols can represent various religious, cultural, political sites and images. For instance, an image with a view on the Ararat Mountain from the Church of Khor Virab in Armenia is a symbolized image of the homeland by the Armenians in various corners of the world. This particular example is two-fold. It represents one of the core (if not the main) symbols of the Armenian identity – the Biblical Mount Ararat, and, at the same time, the religious affiliation of the nation by showing the Church, which symbolizes the origin of Christianity in Armenia. [1] Images can represent the diaspora space as well. They can become unique identifications of diaspora communities and, as such, of spaces under the whole diaspora umbrella. Images, as argued, “are a key element of space because it is so often through them that we register the spaces around us and imagine how they might turn up in the future” (Holloway et al, 2003: 100).

Thrift pays a particular attention to the last kind of space – space as place, and summarizes the geographical thought on place by indicating its embodied nature and, at the same time, by raising a question what embodiment means (Ibid: 103). Then, compared to individuals, who interact socially, he emphasizes the ability of a place to produce affects, because “it can change the composition of an encounter by changing the affective connections that are made” (Ibid: 104).

Space ‘as place’ is associated with specific locations and is “place involved with embodiment”, with place being the ‘spatial awareness’ (Ibid: 103). It is difficult to perceive it outside the body. Space as place has an emotional aspect, it is “more ‘real’ than space”, as it

routes the perception of the place through memories of places. (Ibid: 102) As emphasized above, the very concept of 'diaspora' assumes permanent return, be it real, virtual or just imaginary. Return can "be even more powerful in allegoric form" (Kenny, 2013: 84), or metaphorical return.

Thrift, in his analysis of types of spaces, talks about the recent trend of geographers seeing the edge, the limit of being in or experimenting in new kinds of space. (Holloway et al, 2003: 100). Can this work for diasporans in their permanent return? For diasporans, who live the return, the strive for reaching new spaces, as it can be argued, is being blocked by that return. Even if physical return never happens, the imaginary nature of return maintains the connections between two spaces alive. The 'real' nature of the homeland space is, thus, its nature as place, or at least a need for transforming the space into place. Attachment to particular places and making diasporans place-centric in the homeland, as proposed, creates the strongest potential for transforming the abstractly perceived homeland space into a specific place of return.

ENDNOTES

- [1] It is believed that St Gregory the Illuminator, the founder of Christianity in Armenia, being persecuted for spreading the religion in the country, was detained on the hill of Khor Virab. On that very place the above-mentioned Church was constructed in the 7th century, completed in the 17th. The site is a popular destination for pilgrims and tourists.

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